

# PERRINE'S BRIDGE

Celebrating 200 Years



For two hundred years, Perrine's Covered Bridge has crossed the Wallkill River at Rifton in the Town of Esopus just four miles north of the New Paltz village. In the early nineteenth century, it was one of three bridges within a 10 miles span of the Wallkill in the Town of New Paltz, which had an area much larger than the town has now.

Perrine's Bridge is an extraordinary timber bridge and is one of the finest examples of a Burr Trussed Arch in the United States. For many years there has been confusion about when the bridge was constructed. Newspapers, magazines, and signs often stated conflicting dates—1834, 1844, 1846, late 1840s, circa 1850, among other dates.

Recent archival research has uncovered documents that date the original construction of Perrine's Bridge to 1821 with its covering a year later in 1822, thus the crossing has a 200-year history. Other dated documents reveal subsequent repairs and rebuilding that were necessary as the wooden structure aged. Major restoration took place in 1846 and 1968.

The Rosendale Township Association in September 1938 proposed a public effort to preserve "Rifton Covered Bridge" by reaching out to other groups and officials to secure support. While this was the first such public effort, no one could have foreseen the twists and turns that would take place over the next 30 years before restoration was completed.

In April 1940, the bridge was condemned

and barricaded to vehicular traffic. In the 1950s, as newspapers tell us, there were calls to remove the old bridge. The original plan in 1954 for the construction of the New York State Thruway through the Ulster County would have led to its removal, but this was overturned and the Thruway was rerouted hundreds of feet to the west. Some called for dismantling the bridge and rebuilding it in the Town of Marbletown. There were pleas even as late as 1967 to take down the bridge with some seeing the floods in the New Paltz flats caused by its presence.

The newly formed New York State Covered Bridge Society actively lobbied for and publicized the case for preserving the historic structure. Community voices also emerged "To Save Perrine's Covered Bridge." As the bridge was noticeably decaying, the rallying cry was "Restore Perrine's Bridge" that led to a major effort by Ulster County in 1968 to restore the bridge before it collapsed into the river. In January 1968, two signs were hung on the bridge: "Help Me, I'AM Falling" and "Remove Not the Old Landmarks." The initially slow, then accelerating deterioration of the exterior covering and also the underlying structure of Perrine's that led ultimately to the urgent restoration carried out in 1968 after decades of contention

On June 27, 1969, the headline in the *Poughkeepsie Journal* stated "State's Oldest Covered Bridge to be Rededicated in Rifton," an event that drew 400 attendees. The bridge

was restored and saved for future generations.

Now, after two centuries from its 1821 beginning and more than a half century after the 1968 restoration, the public is still able to visit this iconic structure, celebrate the craftsmanship that brought it to life, and contemplate the extraordinary vision of early nineteenth century citizens.

No other bridge in New York State has such a well-documented and detailed life history.

## Celebratory Events

**Wednesday, Sept. 7,** "Celebrating Perrine's Covered Bridge 200 Year History" Zoom presentation by Ron Knapp for New Paltz Historical Society. Contact info: [quikklik@hvi.net](mailto:quikklik@hvi.net) 7 pm ZOOM.

**Sat., Sun., Mon., Oct. 8-10**

The New York State Covered Bridge Society is hosting "Meet and Greet at Perrine's Covered Bridge" in Ulster County on between 9 am and 4 pm. The Displays, handouts and trinkets for sale or giveaway. Join us at NY Rt. 213, Rifton, NY 12471. This Open House event is held in conjunction with I Love New York's PATH THROUGH HISTORY program.

Story by Ron Knapp.

Painting by Albert H. Shultis from the collection of Vivian Yess Wadlin.