

Author Kathryn Burke is an accomplished historian. She has researched and penned two books on the history of the Hudson River bridges. She was the director of *Historic Bridges of the Hudson Valley*, and a long-time educator. She now works to document new stories, especially about the people who worked on the Mid-Hudson Bridge, and the events that flesh out its construction in time for the 100th anniversary of its opening in four short years. Can you help?

Mid-Hudson Bridge Historian Seeks The Story Only You Know

Help Document A More Complete Story of the Building of the Mid-Hudson Bridge

By Kathryn Burke

Anniversaries of historical events often give rebirth to an interest in that history. Our local story is meaningful for us in the Hudson Valley, but it has also been a part of the history of our country and the world.

This year marks one of the most consequential – the 250th anniversary of the creation of the United States of America with our declared independence from Great Britain on July 4, 1776. Some pivotal battles of the Revolutionary War were fought in New York State. In future articles. But for now, let's focus closer to home.

It's said that history is the story told by whomever writes it. That's likely, but it doesn't mean the story told is not mostly accurate. I believe many details of every story are not known, thus the picture presented is incomplete. As someone who has researched the history of Hudson Valley bridges, authored two *Arcadia Images of America* books, and served as the director of the organization *Historic Bridges of the Hudson Valley*, I know many details of the last 100+ years are yet to be told. It is in newly discovered details we often find clarity, richer content, and a better awareness of the total picture.

The construction of the Mid-Hudson Bridge was granted to us by the New York State government after many in the Hudson Valley requested or, some might say, beseeched the State to build it. Constructing a vehicular crossing at the midpoint



of the Hudson River at the time should have been a no-brainer. Communities on both banks of the river needed it for personal and business reasons. The increasing popularity of the small panel truck for transporting goods coupled with the growing number of people with automobiles made the need a glaring-given. Produce from the west side of the river, including areas farther west in the state were needed in New York City, and people on the west side of the river needed access to services, education, jobs, and entertainment on the east side, much as it remains today.

With the Mid-Hudson Bridge cornerstone laid in October 1925, the long task of building the bridge began. After the seemingly endless wait for approval, the construction began with the digging of the anchorages, the building of road approaches, and the preparation for sinking of the two caissons of the river piers.

While giving a talk several years ago on my first book *Images of America: Hudson River Bridges*, a woman asked about the tipping of the east caisson. That was the first I had heard of a caisson tipping. Her father had worked on the bridge construction and mentioned it to her. She asked me if it had actually happened.

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Images above from 100 years ago, courtesy of Modjeski & Masters Archive. (L) East approach.

(C) New York Central Railroad crossing. (R) East Anchorage construction. (These official engineering photographs are date and location stamped.)

I did more research and even though the official reports of construction hadn't mentioned it, I found an *Engineering News Record* publication with a report by Glenn B. Woodruff, Consulting Engineer City of New York, on the tipping and righting of the caisson in question. It was fascinating. I was able to add that story to my next book *Images of America: Bridges of the Mid-Hudson*. It was an important engineering facet of the bridge's history.

One hundred years ago, in the spring of 1926, the bridge approaches and anchorages were significant additions to the changing landscape as illustrated in the page one images. Are there more untold stories there?

Over the next few years, we plan to further develop the chronology of the construction of the bridge. To do that as completely as possible, the story needs your help. One important area with scant documentation includes the individuals of the actual workforce. If you have any photos, ephemera, documents, stories, or have relatives who helped build any aspects of the structure, please contact the publisher at 845-332-5427 or viv@abouttown.us. Scans and sources of images you provide would be appreciated.

Further, what are your or family members' memories of the Highland waterfront and the changes brought about by the bridge's completion?

What do you know about the traffic circle shown above on Route 9W that's referred to as the approach to the Mid-Hudson Bridge? Where is this relative to structures on 9W today?

The Mid-Hudson Bridge office shown below was located in Union



Photo left: West shore anchorage area from archive of Modjeski & Masters. Above: Circa 1909 postcard Lloyd rail station. Below: 1935 Postcard image. Collection of Vivian Yess Wadlin.



Photo: Union Square office of the Mid-Hudson Bridge. Courtesy of Modjeski & Masters Archive



Square in Poughkeepsie. What can you contribute to the information about this area of the city one hundred years ago? Do you recognize this area and these homes? Did your family move here to work on the bridge?

You can be extremely helpful providing content and context—so please, provide whatever information you have to help us continue to complete the story of the Mid-Hudson Bridge as we work toward its centennial on August 30, 2030.

Photo Right: East shore view from NY Central RR. Courtesy of Modjeski & Masters archive. Note buildings, do you recognize them?