

Old Mill Bridge Rehab Completed

Work has been completed to restore the Old Mill Bridge to its former glory. The bridge, which spans the Saucon Creek at the terminus of Old Mill Road, was closed to traffic by Northampton County in 1983 due to cracks in the deck beams and was acquired by the Township in 1986 from the county in order to prevent the bridge from being demolished. Since then it has been used for pedestrian and bicycle crossings. With the opening of the adjacent Saucon Rail Trail in 2011, the bridge took on added significance as a linkage from the southwest side of the Township to downtown Hellertown, the Saucon Valley School District campus and to future connections with the Bethlehem Greenway and D & L trail corridor. Although the Township was able to undertake periodic maintenance on the bridge, major repairs were needed to preserve this important historical resource.

The bridge and the surrounding area are contributing resources to the Ehrhart's Mill Historic District, which was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1987. The bridge was constructed in 1867 to allow local farmers to carry their wheat to the Ehrhart's Mill to be ground into flour. The bridge is the earliest dated iron Pratt pony truss structure known in Pennsylvania and, possibly one of the oldest metal bridges in the country with this design and its use of composite cast and wrought iron construction. The bridge was built by Charles Nathaniel Beckel at the Beckel Iron Foundry that was located at that time on Sand Island in the City of Bethlehem, and then transported to the site in two 55' sections that were fastened to the center pier. This pier was rehabilitated by the Township in 2004.

In 2010, the Township commissioned the Center for Advanced Technology for Larger Structural Systems (ATLSS) at Lehigh University to inspect the bridge and make recommendations for structural retrofitting of the bridge.

In 2012, the Township advertised for bids for the repair and replacement of the cast iron beams, chord tension rods and deck stringers, and for sandblasting and painting the entire structure. A contract was awarded to Professional Construction, Inc. of Bethlehem in the amount of \$164,253. To ensure that the correct paint color was used on the bridge, contact was made with the County Bridge Superintendent who researched their files and verified the historic shade of blue that was used by the contractor. In addition, the contractor constructed wooden replicas of the ornamental end posts and installed them in place of the steel pipes that had been put in place at some point in the past.

The Township is very pleased with the project, which adds to the beauty of the historic district and the experience of visitors passing through the area via the Saucon Rail trail, and will ensure that this valuable resource will be preserved for years to come. A re-dedication ceremony to memorialize the improvements to the bridge is planned for Spring, 2013.