

The Harrison Ave Bridge: The Life and death of a small-town icon

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Fueled by a large immigrant labour population, Scranton in the 1920s was a thriving hub of the iron and anthracite industry with a growing population, diverse in both economy and race. The Harrison Avenue Bridge connected the prosperous neighbourhood of East Scranton and the labour class neighbourhood of South Scranton during this period. Although other bridges and highways connected the two disparate parts of the city in roundabout ways, public pressure for a direct connection across the Roaring Brook gorge necessitated the construction of this bridge. At a time when social activism was making headlines in the United States, the idea that local citizens spearheaded the construction of this bridge in the early 20th century is noteworthy.

The events that lead to the rise and fall of the Harrison Avenue Bridge are more significant than the actual bridge itself, which connected the labour class to the benefits of a growing city. In comparison to other bridges designed by the chief engineer Abraham Burton Cohen, this bridge, a three-span reinforced concrete deck structure, was by no means extraordinary in its design and construction.

The crowning glory for this symbol of a progressive era was at the listing on the National Register of Historic places in 1988. Time and weather have not been kind to this local icon. Deterioration and wear, despite repairs and renovations, show through this structure. Decision to tear down and replace this historic bridge put the local community and the state of Pennsylvania on different sides of the "bridge". This paper focuses on the history, the rise and fall, the glory, the local significance and the lack of vision in saving this bridge in the setting of a city that powered America's Industrial Revolution.