



A Bridge to the Past

The Stillwater Covered Bridge is one of my favorite stopping places. I love to watch the children examine the mammoth beams and the ancient construction of the bridge. I love to listen to their happy sounds and answer questions of visitors.

The prospect of a bridge to cross Fishing Creek was an eagerly awaited event **185 years ago**. A small bridge midway between Orangeville and Benton, built for a total of \$500, would ford the stream at what today is known as "Stillwater." That bridge was used by residents of the area for 25 years until the bridge and an entire family was washed away during a flood. This storm could well have been the most severe ever recorded on Fishing Creek.

The water swept away every bridge on Fishing Creek from North Mountain to Bloomsburg, however crossing the creek was a necessity. James and Daniel McHenry took on the task in 1849 of building a replacement **168-foot wooden "Burr Arch" covered bridge** at a cost of \$1,124. The bridge was used for a hundred years before it was closed to vehicular traffic in 1949. The bridge remains open today for pedestrian use.

Visitors trek to the bridge from around the world. The "Visitor's Register" in the bridge fills rapidly with the signatures of excited children and their parents. I stopped at the bridge on a Sunday afternoon in August, propped my feet up, enjoyed a cool breeze and settled back with the visitor's log. The people who signed came from virtually every state in the union, from nearly all the provinces of Canada, and from as far away as Poland and Russia.

Some visitors chose not to write much in the log. Words and terms were used like "awesome," "beautiful," "lovely," "exceptional and picturesque," "**inspirational**," "calming," "good stuff," "educational," "sweet," "how quaint," "would love to show it to all my



friends," "cool bridge," and "historical and peaceful." Many people also enjoyed a **picnic lunch in the bridge**.

A visitor from Easthampton Township, New Jersey, wrote, "Grew up in Stillwater, New Jersey; we need a covered bridge." A couple came to the covered bridge from Stillwater, Minnesota. Readers said they loved to come and play cards on the picnic tables. A visitor wrote, "I am visiting Pennsylvania for fun!" A signer of the visitor's book was obviously a younger person, judging from his handwriting. He wrote, "Wish I could build one!" A visitor from Moscow, Russia, wrote, "Keep this tradition alive!" A couple from Atlantic, Iowa, wrote, "**I'll never forget this bridge.**" A couple from Sioux Falls, South Dakota, "loved everything, plus church," referring to the former Stillwater school house adjacent to the bridge.

A visitor from Fort Walton Beach, Florida, wrote simply, "my favorite place!" I agree! It is one of my favorite places in the upper Fishing Creek valley, too.

Not all visitors kept in focus with the bridge. A Stillwater girl wrote, "I (heart shape) Marc Velez. He is hot." She returned to the bridge a year later and wrote in the book, "I (heart shape) Kyle Keefer."

Plan a stop off Route 487 and you'll soon see why it is such a popular tourist spot.