

# 83 Janice Peaslee Bridge

Connecting Maidstone, Vermont and Stratford, New Hampshire

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The Janice Peaslee Bridge, formerly known as the Maidstone-Stratford Hollow Bridge, spans the Connecticut River and forms a connection between the towns of Maidstone in Vermont, and Stratford in New Hampshire. Construction of the Maidstone-Stratford Hollow Bridge began in 1893, making it the oldest bridge to cross the Connecticut River between New Hampshire and Vermont.

The builders of the bridge, the Berlin Iron Bridge Company, were headquartered in East Berlin, Connecticut. During its peak production, the Berlin Iron Bridge Company was likely the largest structural fabricator in New England as, in addition to bridges, they also built jail cells, roofs, and machine shops. The majority of their bridges were built for New England, but today some survive as far away as Texas. Despite being absorbed in 1900 by J.P. Morgan's American Bridge Company, a number of former Berlin Iron Bridge Company employees started the Berlin Construction Company shortly thereafter. Today, the company remains in business as the Berlin Steel Construction Company.

The Maidstone-Stratford Hollow Bridge was built partly of wrought iron instead of steel, a construction material that was gaining popularity at the time of the bridge's erection. The bridge's wrought iron construction makes it special because it's a relic of the early period of metal bridge construction. The bridge's design is a pin-connected Pratt metal truss bridge, and represents the oldest bridge of its type still in use in New Hampshire. The



Pratt truss-style includes vertical members and diagonal members that slope down towards the center and was prevalent from the 1840s through the early twentieth century.

In the 1950s, the State of New Hampshire gave up control of the bridge to the Town of Stratford. Eventually, the Town was unable to keep up with the bridge's maintenance costs and

the bridge's conditions worsened. The fate of the Maidstone-Stratford Hollow Bridge was almost sealed in the early 1970s when the Town of Stratford voted to abandon it. Unwilling to allow the bridge to be abandoned, three residents formed the Stratford Hollow-Maidstone Bridge Association and purchased the bridge from the Town for \$1.

In order to collect funds to fix the bridge, the owners set up temporary toll gates at both ends of the bridge over Labor Day holiday in September of 1974. They charged a \$1 all day and collected \$400 in tolls on that one day; that \$400, along with subsequent holiday collections helped pay for some important renovations to the bridge. However, the bridge aged and maintenance costs increased, forcing the 1990 closure due to unsafe conditions.

A renovation project for the Maidstone-Stratford Hollow Bridge was initiated in 2004, in large part due to the efforts of Janice Peaslee, a member of the Vermont House of Representatives at the time. Renovations were completed in 2005 with the installation of new concrete abutments, new floor supports and decking, a new paint job, and an extension on the Vermont-side to allow for better water flow. It was at this time that the bridge was renamed the Janice Peaslee Bridge, in honor of its devoted proponent.

Despite its eligibility, the Janice Peaslee Bridge has not been listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

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