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An Observation of the South Washington Street Bridge

Since the establishment of Binghamton in the 1800s, the town has morphed into what I perceive as a historic downtown “parlor city,” rich with culture and also a hub for student life. This past weekend, I took a trip down to Confluence Park and visited the South Washington Street Bridge; a bridge that connects the park to Conklin Ave on the other side of the Susquehanna River. Before arriving at the bridge, constructed in 1886, I took a look at historical maps before and after its construction. In a map dated prior to the construction of the bridge, there was already a covered roadway where the bridge stands today. Although the roadway was unnamed in this particular map, upon further research, I discovered the structure, a covered bridge designed to eliminate weathering, was called the White Bridge (Figure 1).

Figure 1

The White Bridge, Circa 1884



An overlooking view of what was known as “The White Bridge” around 1884, two years prior to the construction of the structured bridge with side boards and a roof that stands today (Smith, 2017).

In an 1887 map, one year after the bridge that stands today was constructed, the bridge is clearly depicted and labeled the “De Russey Bridge.” De Russey was the name of the street which was continued over the river to the south side as a result of this bridge. As the bridge aged, it called for a reconstruction and was renamed to the South Washington Street Bridge, which follows the renaming of De Russey street to Washington Street, as we know today (Figure 2).

Figure 2

The South Washington Street Bridge, Circa 1920



A photograph of the newly reconstructed South Washington Street Bridge. At the time, it had just been newly renamed from being previously known as the “De Russey Bridge”(Smith, 2017).

The current Google Map is surprisingly similar to the historical maps (Figure 3). Although the bridge was closed off to vehicular traffic, it is a historical landmark for Binghamton. The bridge's importance played a significant role when Binghamton was a developing city . In its youth, the White Bridge transported wagons, horses, people, and more

across the Susquehanna introducing a new method of access to the city and ultimately populating it. In the following decades with the reconstruction of the De Russey Bridge, it was a connector in expanding the Binghamton community. The boom of Irish immigrants settling in the area and igniting a mill industry with aid from the river's water power on both sides of the river was a true evolution of the city. The growth of the city continued after the Civil War followed by the founding of IBM nearby in Endicott.

Figure 3

Map of the Confluence and the South Washington Street Bridge, Today



A bird's eye view of the South Washington Street Bridge over the Susquehanna River in present day. This map similarly reflects earlier physical maps which included the bridge in the 1800s and 1900s (Google. (n.d.-a)).

Though its original use to further populate the southside of the river and expand the mill industry is no longer the bridge's goal today as it was in the late 19th century, it still stands today and signifies this part of expansion in Binghamton's history. This is seen a lot throughout Binghamton. The buildings, roadways, and even the rivers themselves which once gave life to the city in the past and are now either run down, historic landmarks, or problematic (as seen

with the rivers during the flood years).

The city does not have many things from the past which have continued to thrive today as they may have in the past. The landscape from a bird's eye view may remain the same, but the social environment and climate of the city has seen a decline in the past decades. However, new and upcoming economic, social, and political forces are playing a role in rekindling the prosperity the city once saw. Organizations utilizing such forces allow for the opportunity for new entrepreneurship, industry, and innovation. The Industrial Hemp Industry in Broome County is an up and coming hope for an industry boom and employment in the area which can attract not only growth for the city by population, but also investment within the city through economic growth. The Southern Tier Incubator in Downtown Binghamton is another place I see starting the revitalization of the city; its purpose to foster and help the community grow reflects the ideals the bridge, canal, and river once did back in the day. The structures stand the same, but the use and love they used to have has vanished. Though the city has such a rich history, it also has to learn from the past, adapt to this new century, and bring back the life the city once had. It is not an easy task, but with time, Binghamton will revive and arrive at its next gleam of success and vitality with the aid of learning from the past and implementing new initiatives supporting the city's current conflicts.

Figure 4

The South Washington Street Bridge, Today



The entrance from the Southside Park of South Washington Street Parabolic Bridge as it resides today. Today, the bridge is only available for use by pedestrians and bikers (Kerr, 2009).

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