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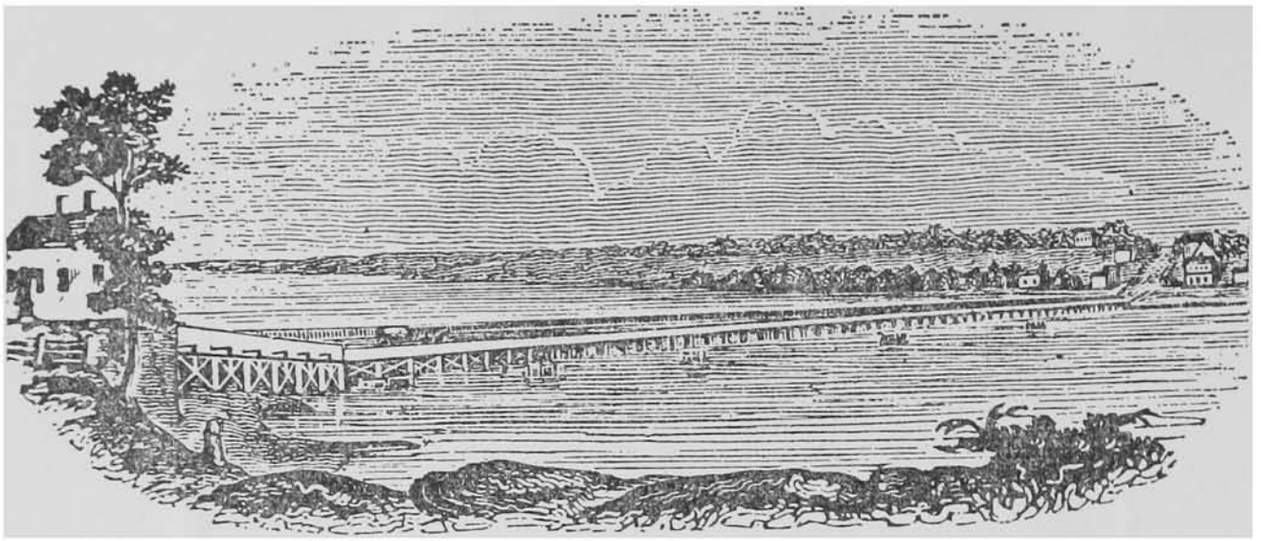
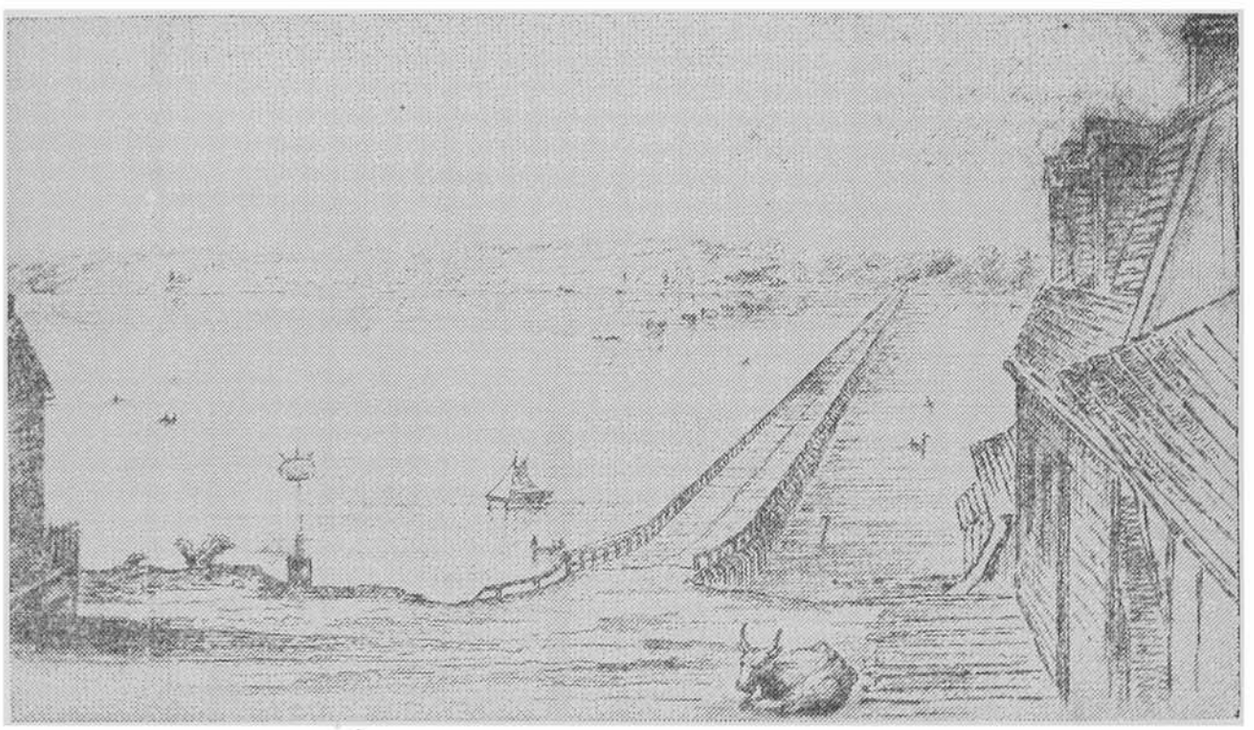
Cayuga Bridge



"The above view of Cayuga Bridge, which crosses the Cayuga Lake on the Great Western Turnpike, was taken at the western bank, and shows on the opposite side of the lake a portion of the little village of Cayuga. The large building on the right it the well-known tavern of Mr. Titus, having superior accommodations."—Barber & Howe's Historical Collections of the State of New York, 1841.



"This bridge is built across the still and beautiful Lake of Cayuga, in the State of New York. It is 1850 paces in length, and I have given it a place c mongst these etchings, from its being the longest I ever saw."—Basil Hall: Forty Etchings from Sketches Made with the Camera Lucida in North America in 1827 and 1828. London, 1829.

Cayuga Bridge

By John W. Wells

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CAYUGA BRIDGE

Until about 1785 the western part of New York state was still an undisturbed primaeval forest in almost undisputed possession of the shattered Iroquois tribes. But this virgin wilderness was soon to disappear as the Indian lands were acquired, in one way or another, for settlement by the state and by private speculative and philanthropic enterprises. In 1787 the Phelps and Gorham Purchase of 2,600,000 acres was made of the lands between Seneca Lake and the Genesee River. The Military tract of 1,680,000 acres between Seneca Lake and the Otselic River valley to the east had already been set aside for soldiers of the Revolution in 1782 and opened in 1791 by the State. The Holland Land Company purchased 3,750,000 acres of lands west of the Genesee in 1792 for about 3 cents per acre (and resold for $2 to $7 per acre). Thus, an area of some 12,000 square miles of rich land about twice the size of Connecticut was relatively suddenly opened to settlement on easy terms. It was accessible only by poorly defined Indian trails, and roads had to be opened before serious development could begin.

By 1789 the State completed a road westward from Utica to Canandaigua, the gateway to the Genesee lands, which by this time were part of the Pulteney Estate and were being energetically exploited by its agent, the redoubtable Charles Williamson. A road was cut from Owego north to Ithaca into the Military Tract by 1800, and by 1795 a road had been cleared by the State westward from the Unadilla valley to Ithaca. Williamson drove a road from Tioga Point to the Genesee River about 1792.

The pioneers came in to occupy lots purchased from the land companies or obtained by lot from the State by three routes:

1) Up the Susquehanna to Tioga Point, fanning out from there.
2) From the Hudson Valley over the hills to Unadilla.

3) Through the Mohawk Valley and on across the northern ends of the Finger Lakes.

By 1790 thousands of settlers were moving across the most important of these routes, the Mohawk-Finger Lakesway, along the Old State Road or Great Genesee Road. This was no great shakes of a road, merely a cleared track about 30 feet wide. It was finally extended to Buffalo by 1800, and for 30 years until the completion of the Erie Canal was the main artery of traffic across the state.

There was one major obstacle on this natural route to the Genesee country. This was Cayuga Lake. To the north of the lake extended the dread Montezuma marshes and other treacherous and pestilent swamps nearly to the shores of Lake Ontario. To the south of the line of the road the lake extended for forty miles into the hilly plateau, a formidable detour. In 1787 John Harris settled on the east side of the lake at Cayuga and became the proprietor of an inn and a ferry across the lake in the line of the coming road at a point where the lake was little more than a mile wide.

But ferrying across the lake was slow, uncertain, and often dangerous, and in 1797 a group of enterprising men of the region, headed by Charles Williamson and including John Harris, conceived the idea of building a bridge across the lake at the site of the ferry, to speed the flow of immigrants and mercantile traffic and also to turn the bottleneck into a profit. That year they obtained from the Legislature a charter for a bridge company, the Cayuga Bridge Company—a charter unique in New York State in that it was the only charter ever granted to a private company to operate a toll bridge. Parts of the charter are interesting:

> "Be it enacted..., That there shall be established a company of stockholders for the purpose of building a bridge over the Cayuga Lake or at the outlet thereof, ..., and to be called and known by the name of "The Cayuga Bridge Company," and so to remain for a term of twenty five years, ..., provided that the wholc of the stock and real estate of the said corporation, shall never exceed in value twenty five thousand dollars, ... That the number of shares or subscriptions constitut-

ing the stock of funds of the said corporation shall not exceed five hundred shares, and that the amount to be paid for each share or subscription shall be fifty dollars.... That in case the said bridge shall not be erected, built and compleated within three years from and after the passing of this act, the... corporation... shall be adjudged and considered as dissolved."

Note the concern of the State for the people in limiting the free enterprise of the directors of the company by fixing the maximum tolls to be charged:

"Every four wheel pleasure carriage and horses, one dollar, every two wheel pleasure carriage and horses, seventy-five cents, every waggon and horses, seventy-five cents, every sleigh and horses, fifty cents, every ox-cart and oxen, seventy-five cents, every one horse cart and horse, fifty cents, every single passenger, twelve and an half cents, every man and horse, twenty-five cents, every ox, cow or neat cattle, six cents, and every sheep or hog, two cents."

Actually, these tolls were generally regarded as exhorbitant by everyone except the company.

The charter also provided for delinquency in maintenance:

"That if the said bridge after the same shall have been compleated, shall at any time during said period... be impassable for the term of thirty days, that the said corporation shall be and the same is declared in such case to be dissolved."

But the charter also forbade the operation of any ferries or erection of any other bridges, except by the monopolizing company, within three miles of the proposed bridge, although it did allow local inhabitants to cross in their own boats and to cross the bridge on foot, free.

After some delays and an amendment to the charter in 1799 extending the monoply for 75 years (to 1874), and providing for free passage of military personnel and equipment, construction actually began in May, 1799. Colonel Aaron Burr and his crony Swartwout of New York City seem to have taken up much of the shares in the company in connection with their notorious Manhattan Company. Subsequent developments suggest that they milked all the profits. The man on the ground, however, was Charles Williamson, who pushed the project to completion.

Burr wrote to Williamson in 1799, suggesting what was in effect an overcapitualization of the company to obtain land to manipulate in connection with the new turnpike then being built along the line of the Old State Road. Williamson does not appear to have thought much of this.

The great bridge was completed and opened on September 4, 1800. Accounts differ in detail as to its cost and mode of construction. It is variously said to have cost from 20,000 to 150,000 dollars, but the first figure is probably closer; a lot of bridge could be built then for $20,000. Every account agrees that it was one mile and eight rods long (5,412 feet) and 22 feet wide. It was supported by about 225 "bends," "bents," "trustles," or "trestles" spaced about 25 feet apart, with stringers from one bent to the next, across which were simply laid planks or squared logs. The outside stringers were bolted down; those on the inside were merely notched in place. Some accounts say that the bents rested on mud sills, but David Thomas of Aurora, engineer, horticulturist, geologist and observant traveller of the time, says the uprights were driven into the marly bottom. The normal level of the lake at that time was probably about the same as its controlled level today, and the water at the site of the bridge was nowhere more than 10 feet deep, in most places not over 6. The east end of the bridge, where it rose to meet the turnpike, also served another purpose: the first Cayuga County jail was under it with a neat trapdoor in the planking above!

There are, so far as I know, no surviving pictures of the first Long Bridge, which soon vied with Trenton Falls, the Penitentiary at Auburn, the Falls of the Genesee, and Niagara Falls, as one of the wonders of upstate New York. Contemporary accounts of it are few.

John Maude, an English traveller, passed this way in July 1800, and saw the bridge just before it was completed:

> "...Cayuga has risen from the woods since two years—contains fourteen houses inhabited, though not all finished, and fourteen building; amongst them, one on the top of the Hill, first intended for an Inn, now designed for a Court-house. The Town is not very healthy; the body of water is to the S.W. the worst possible aspect.

2 p.m. Embarked in the ferry-boat; made sail with the wind on the starboard bow, to wit, a North-wester; obliged to tack for fear of running foul of the New Bridge. This bridge will be a mile and a quarter in length; the longest in America—perhaps in the world! The breadth of the Bridge is twenty-two feet within the railings; the bends are twenty-five feet apart; the Bridge is more than three parts finished—was begun fourteen months ago, and is supposed to be passable in four months more: the cost is estimated at thirty thousand dollars. The Proprietors are some adventurous spirits in New York; in a few years they will receive cent per cent for their money. In February last, from fifty to one hundred teams passed this ferry in a day, and upwards of ten thousand bushels of wheat in a week. The Lake at the Ferry has six, eight, and twelve feet of water, and twenty feet of mud and soft ground —the water is so clear, that I could see the bottom the whole passage; is forty miles long and four at the widest, where the water has not yet been fathomed, and never freezes: both ends of the lake freeze sufficiently strong to admit the passage of waggons and sleighs on the ice; well stocked with fish, as Bass, —(this is a favorite word with the Americans; they not only call trees of this name, but five or six distinct kinds of fish), Cat-fish, Eels, Pickerel, etc., etc. Catfish have been taken thirty pounds and upward, reckoned the finest fish in the Lake."

A few years later Timothy Dwight, president of Yale College, crossed the bridge in October, 1804, on his way to Niagara:

"The bridge over this lake, considering the recency of the settlements, may be justly styled a stupendous erection: and is probably the longest work of its kind in the United States: the planking being no less than a mile in length. It is built on wooden trestles, in the plainest and most ordinary manner; and exhibits nothing to strike the eye, except its length. It is said to have cost $20,000, and to be the property of a Mr. Swartwout of New York. The toll is a quarter of a dollar for man and horse; the highest, I believe, in the United States; if we consider the amount the capital, and the quantum of travelling."

The same year evoked the only well-known poetical reference to the Long Bridge from the Scottish ornithologist Alexander Wilson, who came on foot from Pennsylvania to the south end of Seneca Lake, over the hills via Ovid to Cayuga Lake, and thence down the lake from Sheldrake by skiff. I quote from his narrative poem, The Foresters, a very little bit of which goes a long ways:

"Lone Night and listening Silence seemed to sleep
On the smooth surface the glistening deep:
Save where the ducks in rising thousands soar,

* * *

Now like dull stars the lighted bridge appears,
Beneath it soon our little vessel steers,
Where, snugly, moored we passed away the night,
And weighed next morning by peep of light."

This is the only reference to the presence of lights on the bridge at night.

In July the next year, 1805, Timothy Bigelow crossed the bridge on his way to Niagara:

"To Harris's in Cayuga, to dine. We here had an excellent dinner of beefsteaks. Mr. Harris told us that they could keep beef fresh four or five days, in hot weather, by hanging it upon the trees—wrapping it in flannel—as high as was convenient. Flannel is better to wrap it in than linen.

"The village of Cayuga is small, but pleasant and lively.... The shores (of the lake) are mostly of hard land, except at the northern extremity, where there is a great deal of marsh, which is an unfavorable circumstance for the village, as it is not only disagreeable to the sight but, I think, also to the smell. There is a wooden bridge across the lake, leading from Cayuga village towards Geneva, one mile long, wanting three roods. It suffered so much by shocks of the ice last winter, that in some places it is hardly safe to pass it.... Cayuga Lake abounds in fish, of which the black bass are the most esteemed. The Seneca Lake does not afford fish in as great plenty, and they are therefore often brought to Geneva from Cayuga."

As Bigelow noted, the bridge was in poor shape at this time,

and sometime in the next few years it collapsed. Goodwin, in his Cortland County History (1856) says, incorrecty, that it went out in 1804; David Thomas says 1806; Arch Merrill, in one of his interesting but not always accurate yarns of the Finger Lakes region, says 1807; the Seneca County History says 1808; and an Assembly Document (No. 209) of 1857 says 1809. The last is clearly an error, for the Legislature had authorized a ferry to replace the collapsed bridge in April, 1808. David Thomas's account of the destruction of the bridge is short:

> "In the spring of 1806, several hundred acres of ice, loosened from the shores, moved up the lake in a strong gale from the south and returned with a force which proved irresistible, and the ferry boat was resumed."

The Seneca County History notes that

> "Some of the bends began to settle and lean to the west, and in 1808 the whole mass gave way. The plank, railings and stringers floated off down to the marsh at the foot of the lake. The bends were to be seen years afterwards lying in order on the bottom.

The possibility of loss of the bridge does not seem to have been considered by the company, which did not attempt to rebuild it, probably for lack of funds. Instead, in 1807 they built a new and much shorter bridge across the lake about two miles north of the old one, at the present Mud Lock, within the area of their charter monoply. This was the cause of much discontent to the inhabitants of the villages of East and West Cayuga that had sprung up at each end of the old bridge, who were now cut off from most of their livelihood. The company of course claimed that no ferry could be established within three miles of the new bridge, but in April, 1808, the Legislature, as already noted, after an investigation by a select committee, passed an act authorizing a ferry at the old bridge site by the company or by others if the company failed to exercise its option. The company evidentally stalled, for we find the Legislature passing another act the next year, 1809, authorizing John Harris, proprietor of the old ferry (and member of the company), to operate a ferry again for five years. He did so, and in 1814 he received an extension to operate a ferry whenever the short bridge was impass-

able. The Legislature seems to have forgotten that in the meantime a new bridge had been built on the site of the old one.

After 1807 pressure was strong for rebuilding a bridge on the original site. By 1812 there were several petitions before the Legislature for grants of lotteries to erect a bridge, all naturally opposed by the old Cayuga Bridge Company. The lottery proponents agreed to withdraw their petitions if the company proceeded to construct the bridge without delay, and in June, 1812, the charter was extended with a new capitalization of $50,000, renewing all the former privileges, but also restricting the company from making any differentials in tolls between the two bridges, and forfeiting the charter if either bridge should become impassable for more than thirty days, unless it collapsed completely, in which case the company had eighteen months to rebuild.

The reorganized Cayuga Bridge Company began work late in 1812 when the end of the lake was frozen. The work was described by the Seneca County History (1876):

> "Piles were driven from the east shore one-third of the way across, the pile-driver being worked on the ice. When the ice went out a scow was constructed and anchored at the work; on this scow the horse went round and round his weary circle, winding up the rope which drew up the hammer. The work was vigorously pressed; hands received a dollar and a half per day and paid the same amount for a week's board. Fever and ague being prevalent, a ration of a half pint of whisky daily was furnished to each man of the community."

The second Long Bridge appears to have been constructed in much the same way as the first, but it survived for over 20 years and carried an immense volume of traffic—tolls of as much as $500 were taken on some days! In 1815 the company had sufficient influence to obtain another amendment to its charter which repealed the right of free "passing of artillery wagons, carriages and stores belonging to the United States," but graciously permitting United States' agents to transport all military stores across the lake in boats or on the ice. The amendment also spelled out penalties against persons fraudently evading payment of toll.

Many travellers remarked the second bridge. One of the earliest was an English lieutenant, Francis Hall, who crossed on September 6, 1816:

"Cayuga, besides its agreeable size, is remarkable for a bridge over the head of the Cayuga lake, a mile in length; it is built on piles, and level; calculating from the time it took to pass over it, I should think it rather over-rated at a mile; three-fourths is probably about the true length."

A month or two before Lieutenant Hall, Charles-Alexandre Lesueur, the French naturalist and artist, and William Maclure, pioneer geologist and philanthropist, crossed on their way eastward. From Lesueur's pencil we have the earliest picture of the Cayuga bridges.

On August 3, 1817, E. Montule noted:

"... I slept at Cayuga, in a very poor inn where, as is customary, I was treated and attended to in proportion to the appearance of my equipage. On the lake at Cayuga, which extends in a direction from north to south, is a bridge of a mile long, built of wood, and well constructed, for the passage of which you pay a small sum, as it constitutes a part of the turnpike road."

Another English traveller, John M. Duncan, was impressed by the relative luxury of the bridge as he rattled over it in October of 1818:

"... About five in the afternoon we reached the Cayuga Lake, which is here very nearly a mile in width, and is crossed by a wooden bridge supported upon piles. The wheels of our chariot rolled along the level platform, with a smoothness to which we had long been strangers; and so luxuriant seemed the contrast, that on getting to the farther end, some of the passengers proposed that we should turn the horses and enjoy it a second time!"

In 1819 David Thomas of Aurora, then engineer for the Erie Canal west of the Genesee river, published a little volume on his travels from Aurora into the Wabash country, and remarked of the bridge:

"... an incorporated company in the summer of 1813 erected the present bridge with a hope of better success. The posts

were driven deeper, and the bents more firmly connected; but notwithstanding these precautions, and that of placing ice-breakers to the south, it was only saved from destruction the ensuing winter by the intrepidity of James Bennett, one of the proprietors. The ice in its approach had passed the piers, and was forcing the bents, when he descended singly, amidst the wash, with an axe, and going from post to post equalized the pressure till the whole field ceased to move. The railing, which before was beautifully straight, still retains marks of that violence."

Bernard, Duke of Saxe-Wiemar-Eisenach, mentions the bridge in his account of his travels in America in 1825 and 1826:

"It was just daylight as we arrived in the vicinity of Cayuga, on the lake of the same name, which is about twenty miles long, and from one to three wide. This lake empties into the Seneca river, which afterwards unites with the Mohawk. We crossed the lake not far from its mouth, on a wooden bridge, one mile in length, eighteen yards wide, and built in a rough and careless manner: the planks are loose and the chevaux-de-frise is in a bad condition. On the opposite side of the lake is a large toll-house."

The errors of fact in the above quotation point up what must be one of the main difficulties of the serious historian—the unreliability of accounts of events or things by even intelligent eye-witnesses. Note that the Duke is wrong about 1) the length of the bridge, 2) the width of the bridge, and 3) the course of the Seneca river. Errors and inconsistencies occur in nearly every account of the bridge, and there are many more than are cited here.

One of the most observant travellers of his time was Captain Basil Hall, an Englishman, who travelled across the State in June, 1827, in a private carriage with his wife, children and nurse. He was enthusiastic over the recently-developed Camera-Lucida, and by its aid sketched the scenery along the way. He made a striking sketch of the bridge from the east end. The candid comments by Basil and his wife are diverting:

"... The sheet of water (Cayuga) is not less than forty miles long; but to my shame, I confess, I never heard its name till a

week before I saw it. It is remarkable for a long bridge built across it, certainly the longest I ever saw. It took me fifteen minutes and twenty seconds, smart walking, to go from end to end, and measured 1850 paces. The toll-keeper at the eastern end informed me, that it was a mile and eight rods in length. The lake thereabouts is not deep, and the bridge, which is built of wood, stands on loose stone piers. I amused myself by making a sketch of it with the Camera-Lucida, till the sun was down, and then, as the inn was comfortable, and the people obliging, we resolved to stay for the night."

Mrs. Hall says:

"Both Basil and I felt a little sceptical as to the length (of the bridge) and fancied that our friends applied their usual habits of amplification to it, but a walk across it convinced us that they did not overshoot the mark. He measured it and I found it a much longer walk than I expected. The shores of the lake are low and have not that picturesque beauty, at least not that part we saw, but it is forty miles long, and there may be variety in the scenery we did not see.

"Cayuga has quite a country inn, but very comfortable in all save that we were on the point of being obliged to sleep on feather beds. However, we managed to get rid of them by spreading one or two thick overlids on the top of the straw palliasses, which makes a very good bed."

The Buffalo Historical Society has the ledger book of the Cayuga Bridge Company for the years 1828-1857, covering the last 29 years of the Long Bridge's existence. It is a mine of interesting facts and figures, and I am grateful to the Society for permission to make extracts from it. In 1828 the tolls were running between $100 and $150 per week, even $200 per week early in September. Total income for the year was about $10,000, of which $8,000 was paid in dividends on the stock (16 per cent!) The stage coach lines paid their toll charges quarterly and accounted for nearly $6,000 during the year.

In 1830, another English traveller, John Fowler, was not enthusiastic about the bridge:

"—a most barbarous structure, built upon piles, and conveying the idea, if not the reality, of great insecurity; as the

planks, or logs, upon which you pass, uncovered with gravel, soil, or other material, are of all shapes and sizes, heedlessly laid across from side to side, without rails or any kind of fastening whatever. In many instances I observed them scarcely resting upon the supports on each side, and the waters of the lake every where visible below: of course, as they were acted upon by the weight and motion of the coach and horses, they were perpetually jumping up and down, so that it was a matter of astonishment to me how the animals could pass over at the rate they did, a good brisk trot, without getting their feet between them: the accompanying noise and clatter, too, was anything but agreeable. An English traveller, however, must leave all his fears and prejudices at home, and be here content to dash on, over, under, or through whatever it may please the driver and his steeds to convey him."

Indeed, accidents did happen. From the ledger, April 1, 1835:

"To Allen Miller, damage for a cow which was hurt by breaking a plank and falling on the bridge, $6.50."

Still another English traveller, Henry Tudor, barrister, had an unhappy experience crossing the bridge in July, 1831:

"Here I met with a downright specimen of republican, or rather democratical equality, in the person of one of the coach-passengers; indeed, something beyond equality, with which I should not have been induced to quarrel, but actual injustice and roguery. I must inform you that there are no places or arrangements made, in American coaches, for outside passengers, except that on the box, alongside the driver. This seat the person in question had occupied from the time of our departure, in consequence of all the inside places having been previously filled; one of which I had myself taken and retained from the commencement. On reaching the village of Cayuga, prior to crossing the lake, I stepped out of our nine-inside vehicle, understanding that it was going to wait ten or fifteen minutes at the post-office for the mail-bags, in order to walk across the bridge, the better to examine its singular structure, and to have an uninterrupted view of the lake. On gaining the opposite extremity, the coach overtook me, which I did not regret, as a brisk shower of rain had com-

menced falling; when, to my astonishment, I found that the cunning democrat on the box had taken possession of my inside seat. I had not, however, the remotest suspicion that he intended to retain it; and I, therefore, politely observed to him that he had taken my place, which I should be obliged to him to restore to me. He replied, "there was a seat by the driver, and I could occupy that." On my remonstrating with him on his conduct, as being inconsistent with gentlemanly propriety, he answered "that it was in vain, my urging him to leave the inside, for that he was determined not to do it, and that I should not have left my seat; and that one man was just as good as another." I then applied to the coachman as as arbiter elegantiarum on such occasions, who flatly refused all interference to reinstate me in my rights and privileges; and gave me to understand that unless I mounted the box without delay, he should drive off and leave me on the road. I then appealed to the passengers; and though one of them at last mumbled out, in a hesitating tone of voice, that the place was certainly mine, the rest of them, either afraid to declare their sentiments, or perceiving that I was an Englishman, and therefore unwilling to do so, observed a strict silence. Disinclined to proceed to violent measures, being fully aware that I should have no assistance, and as there was no effectually resisting this mob law, I was obliged, in order to avoid the alternative presented to me by the master of the ceremonies, to bow to his supreme decision, as the representative of the sovereign people—mount the box, nolens volens, and ride in the rain for some miles without a greatcoat, til we reached Seneca Falls, where I put matters in such a train as compelled the impudent intruder to resign the seat which he had so dishonestly obtained."

As Fowler noted above, by 1830 the bridge was in poor condition, and in 1833 the company was sufficiently foresighted to build a replacement—the third long bridge—on the north side of the second one before the latter collapsed. The ledger indicates that this new structure cost about $15,000, and since the company had been distributing all its net income and had no reserves, dividends ceased for a year. In addition, the share-

holders were assessed $5.305 per share. It cost $166 for "quarrying and boating" 332 tons of stone for piers. The stone probably came from nearby Union Springs. Another entry shows a total of $5,000 spent for 630 tons of stone for abutments and other materials. Later $3,000 more was paid out, and on January 1, 1834, J. J. Willis was paid $1,795 for completing his building contract. And in the last half of that year dividends were once more being paid.

In 1840 the Company obtained permission to abandon the short bridge across the outlet of the lake, in connection with the granting of a charter to the Auburn and Rochester Railroad Company to construct a bridge, finished in 1841, across the outlet or near it. The short bridge had not been much used, and its tolls barely paid the tollkeeper's wages of $200 per year. The tolls on the Long Bridge were still holding up at about $10,000 per year. In 1839 the ledger has an entry of $5.50 for "50 pounds of iron bands put on three caps which were split at the ends by pressure of ice against posts." From year to year the ledger notes the freezing of the end of the lake about the first week in December.

The railroad soon knocked out the stage lines travelling over the bridge. Beginning in 1842 the ledger shows no more quarterly receipts of stage tolls, and the total income for the year fell to less than $4,000. The end of the Long Bridge was now in sight.

An entry in the ledger of June, 1832, is for "Work on the bridge including team work and cost of getting cattle out of the lake—$39.00."

In 1845 the income was less than $3,500 and the year's dividends were less than 2 per cent. In 1847 income fell to $3,200 and dividends were less than 1 per cent. The ledger notes an expenditure for buttonwood (sycamore) planks.

One of the last travellers to leave an account of the bridge was Alexander Mackay, a Scot who went eastward on horseback from Niagara in 1846, disdaining the Erie Canal packets and the railroads:

> "Passing around the head of the lake (Seneca) I crossed the picturesque and rich agricultural county of Seneca, lying be-

tween Lakes Seneca and Cayuga, which are about the same size, and stretch in by paralell lines in the same direction. After a drive of about three hours' duration I found myself descending upon Lake Cayuga, at a point a few miles from its northern extremity. I had scarcely begun to puzzle myself as to how I was to get across, when the means of passing the lake was gradually presented to my astonished vision. A bridge of nearly a mile in length spanned its volume at this point, the opposite end of which first came into view; nor was it until I had reached the lake, that the whole length of this stupendous viaduct was visible to me. It was constructed of wood, and laid upon a series of wooden piers, which lifted their heads in long succession but a few feet above the level of the water. It was in every way a more singular construction, In my estimation, than the long bridge over the Potomac at Washington. There was a similar structure a little to the left, over which the railroad passed; and before I had half crossed that which was in line of the common highway, the eastern train shot from an excavation in the opposite bank, and went panting over the railway bridge at unabated speed."

In the winter of 1848 business was very bad: total tolls averaged only 50 cents per day and the total for the week of February 18-24 was only half a dollar! For March 20 there is an entry, "Bridge broke by the ice," and it was not open again until April 1. Income for 1850 was only $1,385 (dividend of one and a half per cent).

One of the last contemporary accounts is that of John Delafield in his highly interesting General View and Agricultural Survey of the County of Seneca, published by the New York State Agricultural Society in 1831;

"The existing bridge cost about $16,000, and it is to be regretted that though now in good repair, and deemed secure, yet within the last year or two it has at times been impassable, giving presage of early destruction."

The year 1856 began with a deficit of $6.85, and the year's take was only $1,073, of which $450 was paid to a New York bank—the last distribution of profits! On April 16 is the entry

again, "Bridge broke by ice," but it was evidently still passable for tolls were still being entered in the ledger.

The year 1857 was the last for the Long Bridge and the Cayuga Bridge Company. On January 1 there was a balance of 6 cents. On February 20 the bridge was again "broke by the ice." On this day the last toll, $1, was taken. The last entry in the ledger is on February 26, "Six posts on North side of bridge broken." The bridge was impassable, business was next to nothing, and the company was broke! There seems to be no record of how long the old structure continued to stand.

Although now out of business, the Cayuga Bridge Company was still alive and feebly kicking. In the year of abandonment, 1857, the company petitioned the Legislature for damages sustained in consequence of the construction of the Cayuga and Seneca Canal, which had been built by the State in 1826. It would seem as if they were reaching rather far back, and part of the report of the Commission on Claims is significant in its clear statement of what must happen when public interest conflicts with private:

> "It is claimed by the company that the construction of this canal within the limits named, was a violation of their chartered rights, and that the State should idemnify them for any losses which they may have suffered in consequence. With this assumption of the company, and their distinguished counsel, your committee are compelled to differ. The State, in granting these franchises, did not and could not divest itself of the right to construct such State works of internal improvment as the public convenience and the public necessities should at any time require. That the Cayuga and Seneca canal was one of those works which the public convenience required, does not admit of question. Your committee, then, are clearly of the opinion that the company is not entitled to receive damages from the State.
>
> "Taking this view of the question, it is not necessary for your committee to enquire concerning the amount of the company's damages."

This was the end of the old Company, for by ceasing to operate a bridge they forfeited their charter. The idea was still alive,

and the next year, 1858, the Legislature incorporated a new Cayuga Bridge Company which proposed to build a new bridge a short distance north of the old one, "... a good and substantial bridge of a single track, of not less than ten feet in width with four or more turnouts, across the said lake...." If the bridge were not completed before November, 1860, the privileges were forfeit. The act provided that this new act was not to affect the earlier company's rights, if any. This bridge was never built, and from then on, people crossed between East and West Cayuga (Cayuga and Bridgeport) by a ferry authorized in 1860. The last extension of the ferry privilege was in 1881 for ten years, and I cannot find that a ferry operated after the expiration of this.

If you go to Cayuga or Bridgeport today, you will see nothing of the bridge except state historical markers where the roads come down to the shore on either side of the lake. But a very real ghost of the old bridge, so famous in its time as a marvel of backwoods engineering and as the longest bridge in the western world still haunts its site. Stumps of some of the old piles now in their 125th year (1958), still stand up from the bottom nearly to the surface. They are noted on navigational charts, and even show on aerial photographs.