

N.Y. / REGION

A Bridge to Nowhere, 19 Feet 8 Inches Over Lower Manhattan

By DAVID W. DUNLAP MARCH 10, 2017

You could look at it as a metaphor for our troubled times.

Or simply as one of those revelatory moments that occur in the dense understory of New York City when an old building is torn down and an unexpected perspective opens. (Passers-by have been marveling for months at the newly exposed west facade of Grand Central Terminal.)

In either case, there is a bridge to nowhere in Lower Manhattan.

It used to connect Trinity Church, at Broadway and Wall Street, to the 25-story parish house at 74 Trinity Place. But ever since demolition of the parish house was finished last August, the pedestrian footbridge has ended in midair. It is closed off by a gate on the churchyard side.

The 85-foot-long bridge should reopen in late 2019, when it leads from the churchyard cloister to a new \$300 million, 26-story parish building designed by Pelli Clarke Pelli Architects.

“Scripture tells us that faith is the evidence of things not seen,” the Rev. Dr. William Lupfer, Trinity’s rector, said. “The new Trinity parish hall will soon serve

this community, neighborhood, and the City of New York for a fourth century.”

For now, the bridge to the parish hall presents a remarkable spectacle, appearing from some angles to be suspended in space, 19 feet 8 inches over Trinity Place.

The lacy steel-and-iron bridge is not nearly as old as it was intentionally made to look by Lee Harris Pomeroy Architects.

The bridge was completed in 1989 to make life easier and much less risky for those working in or worshipping at Trinity. With the nearest crosswalk more than 200 feet away, at Rector Street, it was all too tempting — even for the most faithful Episcopalians — to jaywalk across Trinity Place to reach the parish hall. After a parishioner was struck by a truck in 1985, Trinity set out to build the bridge.

Among the many city agencies reviewing the project was the Landmarks Preservation Commission. Trinity Church, designed by Richard Upjohn and completed in 1846, was one of the earliest sites to receive landmark designation in the mid-1960s. Its Gothic Revival tower, once the tallest structure in New York, looms over Wall Street as a perpetual reminder that there may be something more important in this world than money.

To help make his case before the landmarks commission, Mr. Pomeroy drew from the design of a cast-iron pedestrian footbridge that was constructed in 1866 outside St. Paul’s Chapel, a few blocks north of Trinity Church but within its parish.

The current bridge weighs about 45 tons. The east end is carried on two curbside columns. The west end is carried on structural steel that was integral to the old parish hall and has been left in place to bear the load, with additional cross-bracing. New structural supports will be installed this fall. The engineers are Harold I. Shapiro Associates and Gilsanz, Murray, Steficek.

By the spring of 2018, the bridge should be tied into the emerging parish hall.

Mr. Pomeroy, who was concerned 20 years ago about how his bridge would be

“I’m rather amazed,” he said, “to see my historically informed, and inspired (contemporary) bridge being respected; and treated like a serious piece of New York and Trinity Church history.”

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