



Bridge to the Past

When architect/engineer Todd Breck signed on to restore a wrought iron bridge crossing the Brandywine, he had no idea that he would be retracing steps of Revolutionary War heroes.

■ “The Iron Bridge” is privately owned and

connects an estate directly across from Hagley Museum.

An interested group of individuals commissioned Breck, a nationally known architect,

engineer, and construction manager. ■ When E.I. duPont established his home and powder manufactory on the west bank of the Brandywine, there was little need for access to the east bank. By 1811, brother Victor set up a residence and textile mill on the east bank, directly across from the powder mills, and the



creek became an obstacle to business and social intercourse. ■ Initially a ferry was established with a pulley system. According to legend, it was from this ferry that Pierre

Samuel duPont (1739-1817) fell into the water

and from the chill contracted the pneumonia which caused his death. ■ Another legend tells of the visit of Revolutionary War icon the

Marquis de LaFayette to his old friends the duPonts. At that time the paths from the houses at Eleutherian Mills and Louviers went straight down to the creek and continued up on the other bank (where the bridge stands today.) LaFayette is said to have descended from Eleutherian Mills, crossed the ferry,

B Y G R E E R F I R E S T O N E



P H O T O S B Y E L I Z A B E T H O B E R D O R F

and puffed up the steep path to Louviers whereupon he became quite short of breath. The Victor duPont family huddled around the great General to hear any last words he might utter – he was 68 at the time. For all their sympathy, the family got the French equivalent of “that path is too

the bridge with current materials while subscribing to its historical significance. And of course we aim to ensure its longevity. It’s an exciting challenge.”

Breck’s company, The Breckstone Group, is located in Wilmington in what formally was a Friends Meeting House on West

of the company has taken them from building envelope renovation at the Washington Harbor Condominiums in D.C. to re-designing residences in Greenville and Chadds Ford.

The company was brought to The Iron Bridge because of the comprehensive nature of its functions. Breck himself views the project through three sets of eyes: the architect, looking at the historical nature of the structure, and its form and function; the engineer, safeguarding its structural integrity and the construction manager,



“The Iron Bridge”; a detail.
Previous pages: *The Louviers Estate;*
Architect Todd Breck at the site.

God-damned steep!” The demure duPont ladies were properly non-plussed.

Not until 1864 was the first bridge constructed - a wooden one which rotted after only 10 years. In 1874 the present wrought iron incarnation was constructed by renown international Wilmington ship builder, Pusey & Jones, for the DuPont Co.

The Iron Bridge endures with great historical significance as one of the few wrought iron bridges in Delaware.

Architect/engineer Breck was brought to the project by virtue of his extensive field experience with historical restoration. Breck’s undergraduate degree was in physics. That background adds to his understanding of both the connecting systems on a bridge and the change in technology of exterior coatings. “The mission,” says Breck, “is to ensure the structural integrity of

10th Street. Built in 1915, the beautiful stone building was in dire need of restoration when Breck bought it in 1990. Breck religiously adhered to photos he researched which were taken in the 1930’s. After shingling repair, roofing, stone reconstruction and painting, the edifice has been restored to its former dignity and is a showpiece for Breckstone’s historical restoration. Even the wood paneled interior was sensitively fitted with central air. A lower level drainage problem was creatively and economically resolved by a full perimeter drain with twin sump pumps so that both levels of the structure would be fully habitable.

Previous restoration jobs have taken the group to the famous Jekyll Island Club in Georgia, where Breck was the field consultant for construction management, and the Brick Hotel in Odessa, Delaware, employed by Winterthur Museum. The diversity



making sure that the project comes in on time and at project cost.

Breck hopes that “the next restoration won’t have to be until the year 2095.” After he ensures this next 100 years, his next historical project takes him to Montgomery County. There he will be working with a team of architects to restore the vast acreage and first U.S. home of naturalist and painter John James Audobon, at Mill Grove.