

LONG GROVE HISTORY

What's Special About the Bridge?

Aaron Underwood,
Long Grove Historical Society



The historical significance of the Long Grove Covered Bridge is all about the iron, not the wood. It comes as a surprise to most people that our bridge isn't an "authentic" covered bridge, but rather an iron truss bridge that had a protective covering added in the 1970's to protect that iron and integrate it into the downtown's historic theme. The cover is a beautiful copy of a famous covered bridge in Ashuelot, New Hampshire. The "irony" is that, while an authentic iron truss bridge wasn't considered historic in the 1970's – it is now. In a quest to make it appear more historic than it was, Long Grove's founding father's actually made it historic by preserving the original ironwork. Brilliant.

If you've never walked across the bridge using the crosswalk attached to the bridge, please do so – the old iron handrail is original from the bridge's 1906 creation and is gorgeous. It is one of the few pin-connected truss bridges left in Illinois, and the only one still surviving in Lake County.

As an experiment, I asked a few people what they thought was special about the bridge, expecting to get the usual acknowledgement of the covering, but secretly hoping to find a few history buffs who appreciated the historic ironwork. Since my brain is wired for history, I didn't realize the significance of using the word "special" rather than asking what was "historic". To my surprise, several of the responses had nothing to do with the bridge's history, but yet everything to do with the historic downtown. I'll paraphrase a response:

"I love how you have to stop, which suggests for you to relax, and prepare to step back in time to a less hectic world. As you ease across the bridge, the sound and feel of the bricks and timbers under you add another reminder that you're entering a special place."

Maybe it started its life as a functional necessity, and maybe it was a bit over hyped to fool tourists. Yet it seems to have transcended these historical roles into something of far greater significance – the Queen and protector of the very special place we call downtown Long Grove. Sometimes it's not about the history past



– it's about history that's in the making. I think in 50 years, historians will look back and comment – in their quest to save some of their history, Long Grove created something unique that was more significant than what they were trying to save – a quaint historic themed island in a vast ocean of suburbia.