

Long Grove History

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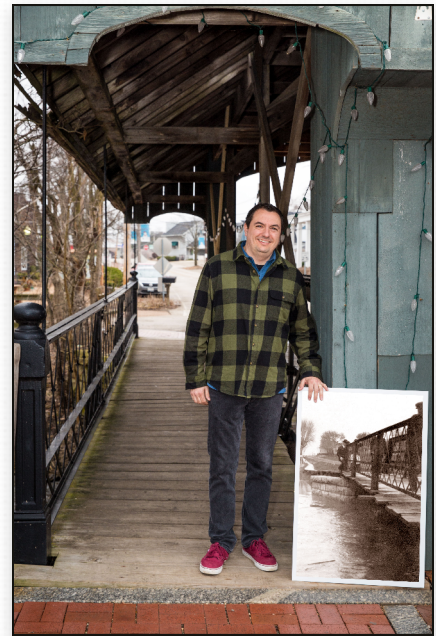
BUFFALO CREEK BRIDGE • ON TRACK FOR THE NATIONAL REGISTER

Bridge Granted *Historic* Status

By Aaron Underwood · Long Grove Historical Society

Long Grove certainly has a reputation as a historic village. Many people assume that it has some sort of official historic status, but that's not the case. As Long Grove developed into a tourist attraction in the 1970's attempts were made to get state recognition for the downtown. Only the Long Grove Community Church was accepted on the Illinois Historic Register, primarily because of its age (1847) and because it was still being used for its original purpose. While the downtown buildings are certainly historic, they generally are former residences that have been remodeled and repurposed into shops, so no longer really represent their historic purpose. In the 1990's Illinois abolished its Historic Register, so Long Grove has been without any official historic designation for the last twenty years.

That all changed in February when the symbol of Long Grove, our one lane covered bridge over Buffalo Creek was deemed eligible by the State for the National Register of Historic Places. This was an important designation, as it affords timely protection requiring reasonable efforts be made to preserve it. The State is currently going through their processes to submit the application to the National Park Service to enable our bridge to appear on the National Register of Historic Places. Protection aside, the official listing would have an obvious ongoing marketing benefit for our downtown.



TONY WEST

Youth and Family Pastor at the Long Grove Community Church, with one of the newly-discovered historical photos that helped make the case.

Why were we able to get recognition now when it had eluded us before?

New research was able to establish that the bridge was built by the Joliet Bridge and Iron Company in 1906 – previously the state was under the impression it was built in the 1920’s. In the 1970’s, steel truss bridges were not that rare. Today, at least in the Chicago metro area, they are almost non-existent. Our bridge’s dual use for both pedestrian and wheeled traffic is very rare, and that may not have been apparent in the 1970’s. There’s only one other century old steel truss bridge in Illinois that has this dual use, and it’s already on the National Historic Register. Lastly, the cover has always been somewhat controversial – it was added in the 1970’s, so it’s not a true historic covered bridge. However, what the State has now recognized was that by adding the covering, it limited the size and weight of the trucks that could use the bridge, and likely was instrumental in extending its life. In fact, the Village engineers noted that the need for refurbishment is not due to the toll of traffic, but rather the scour of the water in Buffalo Creek on the limestone abutments.

A number of newly discovered photographs were instrumental in our filing with the State. Many of them show churchgoers making their way to and from the Long Grove Community Church. The picture shows the Church’s current Youth and Family Pastor, Tony West, beside one of these old photos.

Long Grove’s Buffalo Creek Bridge would be the 40th bridge in Illinois named to the National Historic Register and the only Lake County bridge to make the list.