

Long Grove History

LONG GROVE LIVING
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What's *Special* About Our Bridge?

The covered bridge in the middle of downtown Long Grove is not actually a covered bridge — not in the historian's sense. It is a 1902 iron truss with a 1970's wooden coat. And it is exactly that mix-up that ended up making it historic.

By Aaron Underwood · Long Grove Historical Society



BUFFALO CREEK • SPRING The Long Grove covered bridge from the creek bank — cedar siding from the 1970's wrapped around iron from 1902. The cover is a faithful copy of the famous covered bridge in Ashuelot, New Hampshire.

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 to integrate the bridge into downtown's historic theme.

The irony — pun fully intended — is that, while an authentic iron-truss bridge wasn't considered historic in the 1970's, it is now. In their quest to make the bridge appear more historic than it was, Long Grove's founding fathers actually *made* it historic by preserving the original ironwork. Brilliant.

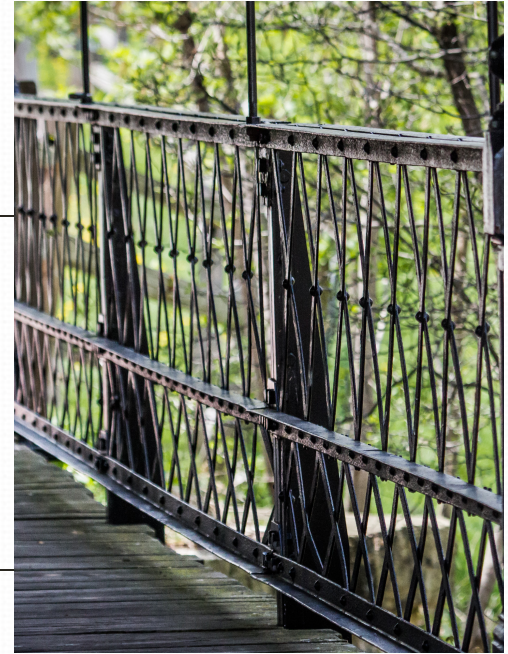


Walk it once on foot.

If you have never walked across the bridge using the crosswalk attached to it, please do so — the old iron handrail is original from the bridge's 1902 construction, and it is gorgeous. It is one of the few pin-connected truss bridges left in Illinois, and the only one still surviving in Lake County.

THE BRIDGE — IN BRIEF

ORIGINAL BUILD	1902 · iron-truss
WOOD COVER ADDED	1970's
COVER MODELED ON	Ashuelot, NH
TRUSS TYPE	Pin-connected
SURVIVORS IN ILLINOIS	Few
SURVIVORS IN LAKE COUNTY	One. This one.



THE HANDRAIL · 1902

Pin-connected iron lattice, original to the bridge's first build. One of the few like it left in Illinois, and the only surviving example in Lake County.

An experiment with the word "special."

As an experiment, I asked a few people what they thought was *special* about the bridge — expecting the usual acknowledgement of the cover, 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 *special* rather than *historic*. To my surprise, several responses had nothing to do with the bridge's history — and yet everything to do with the historic downtown:

FROM A RESIDENT

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 the 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 in the making. In fifty years, historians may well look back and say: *in their quest to save some of their history, Long Grove created something more significant than what they were trying to save* — a quaint historic-themed island in a vast ocean of suburbia.

Next time you walk her, take the crosswalk side. The iron is worth it.

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