



**1922 Rebuilding of the bridge
Harry Smith & R.C. Story**

History of the Swinging Bridge, Columbus Junction, Iowa

The bridge was originally constructed in 1886 of barrel staves and wire. It was built by Mr. Josiah Stewart and friends and its purpose was so folks on the west side of the ravine on Fourth Street could get to Third Street without going around the

deep ravine. While the first bridge served its purpose, it probably wasn't the safest footing around and in time was replaced by a wooden bridge supported by stils. It wasn't a single span, but a series of three or four steps and then a platform quite deep into the ravine.

In 1902 the bridge was condemned by the town council for safety reasons. By then the idea of a bridge had taken root and in 1904 another one was constructed in its place which was 160 feet in length and moved gracefully in the wind. That bridge did not last long and in 1920 it collapsed with Lew Tisor and his younger brother, Jesse on it, neither of whom were injured and were left standing upright when the bridge reached the bottom. Lew was born in 1905 and was 15 years old at the time of the bridge collapse. Jesse lived

in the Columbus Junction area his entire life, never married and died in 1996.

After the mishap with the bridge collapsing, Mrs. Irene. Tucker, wife of a local attorney who lived near the bridge, started efforts to raise money to replace the bridge. She started by organizing home talent plays, bake sales, rummage sales and in so doing, inspired enough others that the bridge became a whole-hearted community project.

Eventually, \$2,500 was raised and Professor Byron Lambert, head of Department of Engineering at Iowa State University, designed a new bridge, one that would stay up. Mr. G.R. Bruce, a local dentist, designed the pergola at the bridge's entrance. In the fall of 1921, four pits, four feet square and nine feet deep were dug, two at each end of the proposed span,

filled with cement to house four I-beams and allowed to “rest” until the spring of 1922. Steel cables, nearly two inches in diameter supported the two inch fir flooring of what is now a 262 foot long bridge that is 4 feet wide. A one inch cable was used as a handrail on each side and heavy wire netting screened both sides for further protection. Bill Hull strung the cables for the bridge and in doing so, broke his own equipment. Once finished, it was turned over to the town for maintenance.

Apparently time took its toll and by 1954 the bridge was in need of considerable repair and the Business and Professional Women’s Club of Columbus Junction (now called the Columbus Women’s Organization) undertook the remodeling as a community project. The club’s president at

this time was Mrs. Edith Marshall. They soon found that the city council was most cooperative and ready to foot the bill for most of the repair work. The result was new flooring on the bridge, repairing the cables and the building of a new pergola at the east entrance. It was refurbished in 1954, and has seen frequent improvements since then.

Since its restoration, the bridge has remained in very good condition and in 1968, the Jaycees and Boy Scouts cleaned dead trees out of the area. In the process, a tree accidentally fell on the pergola, destroying it. It was replaced with a wrought iron one, roofed with thick shag shingles and designed by Mrs. Twyla Gilkey Isett.

In 1981 repairs were again needed after the bridge started listing to the starboard side after a

cable snapped and it was temporarily closed. In 2001 the planks, side braces, side fencing, the roof of the pergola and the retaining wall were replaced.

No one knows exactly why this area has been known as “Lover’s Leap,” but one story has it that a young Indian maiden jumped to her death off the side of the deep 80 foot ravine when she learned her warrior sweetheart was killed in a battle. Another version is that she was frustrated after a warrior spurned her love and she decided to end it all. Since Columbus Junction was home to the Sauk and Fox Indians, either story certainly could be true.

There is even a story about a cow owned by Gerald Brenneman that got loose and walked across the bridge in either 1939 or 1940.

The Swinging Bridge is appropriately named and can

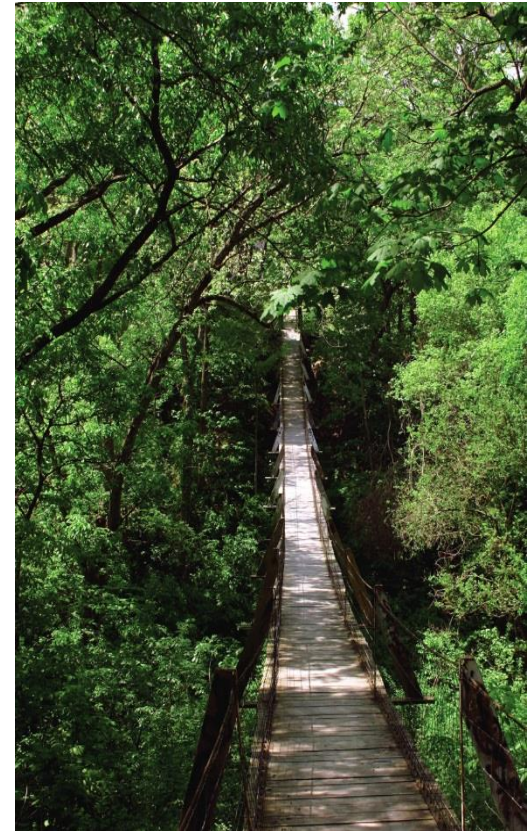
move around quite a bit. The timid will not want to be on the bridge with others that enjoy rocking it. If you walk across it and stay in the middle, holding the cables with both hands, it won't sway much, but if you walk on either side and move from side to side you can get it moving pretty well. The Swinging Bridge is one of only a few in the State of Iowa.

“Buy-a-Plank” for \$100.00 in memory of a loved one, in recognition of someone, as a family, organization, or business as a donation to the maintenance and development of the swinging bridge area. “Buy-a-Plank” forms are available by emailing tommelaniedevore@gmail.com, at Main St. Gifts & Antiques, 204 Main St., Columbus Jct., or by calling 319-325-5063 and one can be mailed to you.

Join us on the third Saturday of June for the Annual Swinging Bridge Festival. This festival focuses on the history of the area, arts & crafts, activities for the entire family, and great food!

[www.columbusjunctioniowa.com/
community/swingingbridgefestival](http://www.columbusjunctioniowa.com/community/swingingbridgefestival)

As an on-going fundraiser for the Historic Swinging Bridge you can



2014 Swinging Bridge-Spring/Summer
(Photo courtesy of Michael York)

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