

Lewiston History Mysteries

Lewiston Bridges Span History

Old Timers Remember Second Suspension Bridge

“When you rode your bike across you had to be careful not to get the tires stuck in the cracks between the wooden boards. You could see straight through to the water below,” says Ken Kenney as he reminisced about the old suspension bridge. Kenney also remembers former Seneca St. resident, Leo Murphy, doing

death-defying acrobatic stunts on the suspension wires above the gorge. “He was quite the gymnast and would walk on his hands up and down the wire.”

Lewiston Village Clerk, Anne Welch, says, “As a young child, my brother and I rode our bikes across the bridge and bought firecrackers on the other side. We used to hide them in the handlebars and stuff them in our clothes. We were just kids, so we never paid a toll or got inspected.”

The bridge remained in operation until Nov. 2, 1962 when it was scraped and replaced by today’s steel arched bridge.



(Above) It took over 30 years to replace the first suspension bridge, so there was reason to celebrate on opening day, July 21, 1899. This is what the bridge looked like on that day.

1851: Lewiston had Longest Suspension Bridge in the World



First bridge destroyed by wind storm in 1864

At the time, it was an engineering marvel and it was the longest suspension bridge in the world with the supporting stone towers on each side of the river 1040 feet apart. Above is the earliest known image of the first suspension bridge that was opened in 1851 between Lewiston (on the left) and Queenston, Ontario (on the right.) The steam powered ferry boat, Oddfellow, is seen in the middle of the river. The bridge was destroyed in a wind storm on Feb. 1, 1864.

Building a bridge between the two countries was first proposed by Francis Hall in 1824, the same man who designed Brock’s Monument. The toll was 25 cents (\$6.70 in today’s dollars.) George Prest of Lewiston was the first person to cross the bridge.

Henderson first to cross in ‘62

Weeks before it officially opened to traffic in 1962, 15 year old Lewiston resident Tim Henderson became the first person to cross the steel arched bridge in a car. He was cast in a “See the USA in a Chevrolet” commercial which aired on Bonanza, Route 66 and the Dinah Shore shows. He was paid \$100 a day and got a week off from school to do the filming. His pretend dad (seen in the above photo) was Parks Director Keith Hopkins and his sister was Jeanne Pike. Most of the filming was done by a helicopter which followed them on the bridge and along the parkways on both sides of the river.



15 Workers Saved by “Miracle” During Construction of Current Bridge



Crashing Jet Fighter in “Ball of Flames” Misses Bridge by Inches and Slams into Lewiston Gorge

On December 1, 1961, 15 workers who were building the Lewiston Queenston bridge looked up and watched a ball of fire come out of the sky and hurtle toward them. Stranded on the uncompleted arch and with no where to run, the workers thought it would be the last thing they would ever see.

But rather than hitting the bridge, the workers escaped certain death when the plane miraculously veered at the last second and flew between the arch and the vertical support structure at the gorge wall. The jet then crashed, creating a spectacular explosion shooting flames into the air near the base of the bridge. Most of the wreckage slid into the Niagara River. A large number of Lewiston residents heard the crash.

The pilot, 29 year old Lt. Edward Methot of the National Guard, had just taken off at the Niagara Falls Air Force Base when the plane caught fire. Heroically, he managed to direct the plane away from residential homes and ejected seconds before the crash, landing by parachute on top of the bridge overpass going over Lewiston Road. The jet canopy which was jettisoned landed near Upper Mountain Road.

Had the plane crashed two hours earlier, it would have hit a large creeping construction crane which has just been moved further out on the span. Men were working directly below the crane at that time. Even so, the plane missed the repositioned crane by only 18 inches.

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