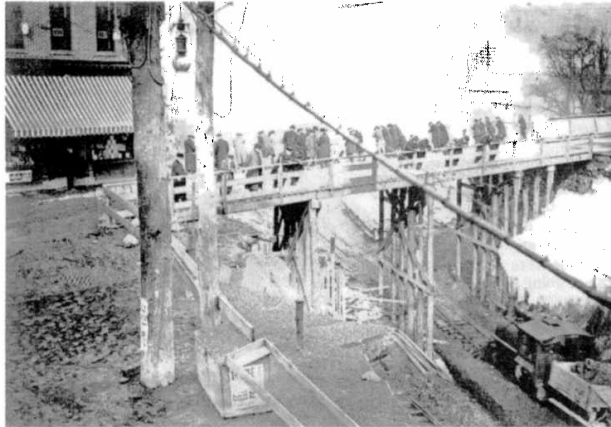


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Crews work to construct the Main Street Bridge in Fairport in this 1913 photo.



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Construction work continues on the bridge in this 1914 photo.

Fairport lift bridge is one-of-a-kind

ALAN MORRELL

Fairport's Main Street Bridge supposedly has been listed in *Ripley's Believe it or Not*.

Perinton historian Bill Poray is among those who pass along this tantalizing tidbit of information. He hasn't seen the proof, but it's a claim also made by numerous publications, businesses and organizations such as ericanal.org.

The reason behind the interest is the bridge's unique construction. Completed in 1914, the bridge has an irregular 10-sided design and crosses the Erie Canal at an angle of 32 degrees from southwest to northeast. Every angle of the bridge is unique, and there are no square corners on the bridge floor.

"It's a one-of-a-kind bridge," Poray said, noting it was designed as such to reduce the grade of the northern approach. "It's appeared (in *Ripley's*) because of the technological marvel that it is."

The bridge is not a typical "draw" bridge that opens in the middle with both sides rising into the sky, like the O'Rourke Bridge over the Genesee River that links Irondequoit to Charlotte. As a four-post lift bridge, the entire thing is raised straight up, as necessary, to let boats pass under its span.

A 1976 study by the Landmark Society of Western New York categorized the Fairport bridge as "one of the most unusual bridges in New York state." It was declared a village landmark by the Fairport Historic Preservation Commission in 2009.

The distinctive features were needed after the original fixed-position bridge built on the site in 1886 was replaced in 1914. When a decision was made in 1903 to widen the canal, bridges from the



KEITH BOAS PHOTO

The bridge is now a celebrated piece of the Fairport community.

Hudson River to Lake Erie had to be replaced. They weren't long enough to cover the newly widened waterway.

But here's the catch: The widening occurred on the south side, leaving the towpath intact on the north side. Fairport's was the only lift bridge that was part of a 1910 funding project covering 17 bridges over the canal, and outside-the-box engineering was necessary.

"There was great debate in Fairport at the time," Poray said. "A lot of people didn't want the lift bridge. But it only would have been steeper with a fixed bridge."

Residents unsuccessfully petitioned authorities to nix the lift-bridge idea, Poray said. The biggest concerns were related to motor vehicle traffic, he said, essentially about being delayed while the

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bridge was lifted. At the time, of course, "there were only a handful of cars here," Poray said.

The decision to defer to boats won out. According to ericanal.org, "Originally, canal traffic was heavy and road traffic was relatively light, so the bridge was left up and only lowered when road traffic required it." Pedestrians could and can always get across via a stairway on each end of the bridge. As auto traffic increased and canal traffic declined, the decision was made to keep the bridge in the "down" position and only raised when a boat required it.

The original wooden floor eventually was replaced by a steel grating. In the 1970s, plans were made to replace the lift bridge with a new "flyover" bridge that would span the canal and nearby sets of railroad tracks. Those plans were scrapped — thankfully, Poray said — when an alternative was worked out to build the Turk Hill Bridge, Poray said.

"That would have killed the village," he said. "That kept the lift bridge alive. Now, it's really celebrated. Fairport does a great job celebrating things."

That includes a series of events that were held in 2014 to recognize the bridge's centennial.

Morrell is a Rochester-based freelance writer.

Faithful is the mother, who studies during the day and waits tables at night to build a better life for her family.

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