

TimePieces

The Swinging Bridge over White River

by: Jill King

Jill had to have put a tremendous amount of effort into this piece. Researching history is a time consuming job and a lot of work is involved in tracking down all of the relevant articles and documents to write a piece like this.

Wednesday, October 7, 2009 Western Wayne News

Revised 11/26/2014



The Swinging Bridge as seen in 2010 looking northwesterly towards the basketball court and playground areas. If you are interested in the swinging bridge in Creitz Park, check out the chapter written by P. A. Cohen in her Commemorative Book covering the 175th Anniversary of Cambridge City. The chapter is located under the heading of [Cambridge City/175th Anniv. - 1836 to 2011/Creitz Park](#). Contact information for P. A. Cohen is in the first part of the chapter that is on the website.

The Creitz Park Swinging Bridge is certainly a favorite landmark for Western Wayne citizens and visitors, past and present. The history of the bridge, however, is hazy at best. Vague references to the bridge indicate its origins to be somewhere between 1900 and 1920. Researching the bridge becomes more confusing when the research reveals there have been at least 7, perhaps 8 or more, footbridges crossing the river in the vicinity of the current swinging bridge.

Town Council minutes indicate the Town built a footbridge, perhaps the first, across the river in 1859. According to the [Cambridge City Tribune](#), another bridge was built over the river to the small village called Vandalia (located in the east side of the park in the area of the tennis courts) in 1874:

"The Vandalia footbridge over the river is completed. "The contract, given to A. & G. Boden for \$350, included "all lumber and bolts." But this bridge didn't last long.

The [Tribune](#) of June 3, 1875 reported a storm dumped 10 inches of rain on the area: "From the sash and door factory near the toll gate on the west to the river on the east every bridge, footbridge, smoke house, stable, pig pen, or other building close to the banks of the stream were washed away, and several main buildings were so undermined that there was great danger that they would also go." The "footbridge" was one of the casualties. The [Tribune](#) of April 13, 1876 reported. "The footbridge over the river to Vandalia is being rebuilt. The citizens of V., foot the bill except an

allowance made by the Town Board." ("V" refers to the village of Vandalia.) One hundred dollars were appropriated "to aid Henry Ingerman and other citizens in the construction of a foot bridge across the river on Chestnut Street on the site of the bridge washed away by drift and high waters last summer." The end of Chestnut Street was the logical place for the footbridge as it was the shortest path for children to walk from Vandalia to the old Central School. (Henry Ingerman was the proprietor of Ingerman Brewery in Vandalia.) In 1881 the Town Marshal decreed, for an unknown reason, that a section be removed from each end of the bridge. In 1882, A. & G. Boden rebuilt the bridge for \$200. Perhaps another significant rain event destroyed this bridge as, in April of 1894, the citizens of Cambridge City, represented by Henry Ingerman, petitioned the Town Council to erect another foot bridge across the river leading to Vandalia. The following month the Council referred the matter to the Town Street Committee. The Town Council didn't rush to action on the matter, as is reflected in all editorial comment in the Cambridge City Tribune issue of December of that year, eight months after the petition was presented: "Two hundred dollars will build a foot bridge across the river for the convenience of the citizens of Vandalia. Why not build it?" But no record of the building of the bridge can be located by this writer.

The next reference to a pedestrian or foot bridge across the river is in a Cambridge City Tribune article of June 18, 1908: "Casper Shafer has his footbridge in position over the river from Vandalia, only farther south than the old one. This makes a short walk to and from town." (Casper Shafer, or Schaefer, was the proprietor of a stove shop in Vandalia.) What and where was the "old

bridge" referred to in the article? The "old bridge" was probably not the bridge at Chestnut Street, as a bridge further south would have been more distant from Vandalia. Did Casper Shafer build the bridge or did the Town have it built? Is it coincidence that this bridge was built two months after the Town acquired the land for Creitz Park? Further research has not unearthed the answers to these questions. *Despite Jill's efforts, all of the answers have not been revealed.*

It seems likely the original swinging bridge was built in the early days of Creitz Park, but many questions about its origins remain. Later history of the bridge is well documented. The swinging bridge was swept away by a flood in January of 1959 when a tree, uprooted by floodwaters, hit the bridge. The bridge broke into pieces and floated downstream. The new replacement bridge was made twelve inches wider than its predecessor to accommodate two persons walking the bridge side by side. The replacement bridge cost \$1200 and the concrete work was performed by The J. S. Sweet Company, Inc. of Cambridge City. The bridge was again severely damaged in 1997 by floodwaters. The J. S. Sweet Company repaired the bridge and it endured several more years of wild swaying and bouncing by local children until it was again destroyed by flood waters: In 2005 a new swinging bridge was unveiled, designed by Mr. Jim Sweet. *Is there a single child that grew up in Cambridge that did not jump on the bridge to put fear into any others on the bridge? I know that I did my share.*

Come to think of it, maybe Mr. Sweet knows when the original swinging bridge was built!

The text in brown was inserted by Charlie Eldridge and not part of the original article.