

Northern Kentucky Views Presents:

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# Covered Bridge Burns



from the  
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ing in Shoemaketown to come to Falmouth and vice versa and for other travelers needing to Cross the river to do so" she said.

The timing of the fire caused many problems because the Falmouth Fair was going on. The bridge fire caused many people to be marooned in the city.

Officials said that visitors would have to detour north through Butler or more than 20 miles along a road to McKinneysburg that was 'almost impassable.'

"We lived up the hill from the ferry boat crossing in the stone house, now gone, which used to be the Swope property. My brother, Joe True, was born during the time the river was frozen and my dad carried my mother to the kitchen door so she could see the ice jam on the river in January of 1927."

Mrs. Hampton says she has heard her father say the ferry was the only one in the country in 1927 run by electricity.

Information from the back issue stated that the number of people using the ferry the first day it operated was as follows: 890 passengers, 155 automobiles, 31 trucks, 20 teams, 15 buggies, and 11 horses. There was no charge to use the ferry.

J. V. Oldham and C. W. Carnes crossed the bridge at 12:00 p.m. Thursday that there was a smoldering fire in the dump, which was at a hitching post on Second Street. He immediately went to the dump and investigated. He found a small fire, about seventy-five feet from the covered bridge. There was no one on the street to assist him in getting out the fire hose, and he started to East Falmouth, where a crew of employees were engaged in street construction. It was his intention to bring the men to the dump and assist in putting out the fire.

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### **Old Covered Bridge Burned and Fell into River in September 1926**

From Falmouth Outlook

The covered bridge crossing the Main Licking River in Falmouth, burned on Thursday, September 23, 1926. After the bridge burned Mrs. Hampton said the Falmouth city officials hired her father, William N. True to go to Augusta, KY. to study the Augusta ferry. He was to make a blue print of the ferry for Falmouth, order material and hire workers to build a ferry for the city. Mr. Jesse Fields was his co-worker. "They followed through with the plans and built the ferry that made it possible for people liv-

Falmouth Fire Chief, J. A. Woodhead went to the scene and was on his way to summon help from the city's volunteer fire department as a brisk wind kicked up and a park ignited the dry siding on the bridge.

When the volunteers arrived the fire had spread to the wooden covered bridge from end to end.

The fire siren was sounded, and volunteers quickly gathered, but the bridge was already doomed. All the fire fighting equipment in the world could not have extinguished the flames.

The bridge was burning on top and underneath. The section on the Shoemaker town side of the pier began to sink. Onlookers watched breathlessly for what seemed to be an hour, but which in reality was less than five minutes.

Two lines of hose were brought into play, manned by a score of volunteer fire-fighters. The flames were extinguished sufficiently for the men to venture out about half-way to the center of the bridge, where they continued to pour water on the burning superstructure of the bridge. Suddenly a girder under their feet broke, the bridge sagged and leaned crazily, but did not fall. Some one yelled to the men to run for their lives and they dropped the hose and ran from the bridge.

The other section of the bridge was left to the fury of the flames. Bystanders waited for the second and final thrill - if such a tragedy as this can be called thrilling. The time seemed long, but it was only a matter of a minute or two, when the last section of the venerable structure gave way, and with a crash like distant thunder, dropped into the Licking River.

The abutments at either end and the pier in the middle, all built of stone masonry, were not damaged.

C. W. Carnes, of East Falmouth, said he kept time by his watch, from the instant the siren blew until the last section of the bridge crashed into the river, and it required exactly twenty-five minutes for the flames to accomplish their purpose.

Part of the difficulty in battling the blaze was that fire fighters could attack the fire from only the Falmouth end of the bridge, which was built in two sections with a center pier.

The bridge also was burning on the other end. The only way for fire fighters to get there was to cross the bridge from the Falmouth end. What they didn't know was the fire was already burning under the floor.

Several fire fighters were pulling hoses across the bridge when a girder broke and someone yelled, "She's failing."

The fire fighters got out safely, but within a few moments the bridge section on the Falmouth side collapsed with thunderous roar into the river.

Now cut off from the other section of the bridge, fire fighters could do little but watch as it burned. About 10 minutes later that section also collapsed into the river.

Telephone and light service was severed when the bridge was burned. However, H. T. Matthews, superintendent of lines for the Citizens Telephone Company, and Lewis Bell, city electrician, strung new wires across the Licking the next morning and both services were restored to the people of Shoemaker town.

As reported in the 1926 Falmouth Outlook the ancient wooden structure, which had played so important a part in the affairs of Falmouth and Pendleton County for nearly sixty years, lies in the river, a mass of wreckage, hopelessly beyond salvage. The burning of the

bridge was considered the most destructive fire Falmouth had ever experienced at that time. While the structure had no great cash value, it could not be replaced for \$100,000. The timbers in the bridge were of poplar and oak, and there remains no lumber in the forests at that time that could be used to rebuild it. It was doubtless if there were any companies then that would attempt the reconstruction of the bridge out of wood.

The Fiscal Court of Pendleton County carried no fire insurance on the structure, which made it a total loss.

It was decided at that time, the fire started in the dump from spontaneous combustion.

The following is some history about the covered bridge spanning the Main Licking in Falmouth.

The wooden covered bridge over the Main Licking River was one of the last of its kind. It was built by the county in 1870 by Brandon, Bruin, and Bowman contractors of Dayton, Ohio at a cost of \$13,800 of which \$3,000 was donated by the K. C. Railroad. The bridge was built in four months. It was erected to meet an emergency situation when the suspension bridge, which was its predecessor, fell into the river.

The present blue bridge spanning the Main Licking River was built in 1940. The contract was awarded on July 19, 1939 to Shields Construction Co. of Lexington at a total cost of \$120,000.

After the bridge burned the Falmouth Industrial Club met and decided that a free ferry would be established to operate across the Licking River.

The paper states that the expense of building a large ferry boat, which will accommodate one or more machines or trucks, buggies or wagons, will be borne by the business men of Falmouth and

public-spirited people of the county.

A subscription was started and the fund started with a donation of \$100 with more donations being made that night. A committee was established composed of: Dr. J. E. Wilson, J. M. Mason, M. D. Thomas, G. G. Parsons, and J. B. Best. They worked to raise

The committee conferred with the Fiscal Court and endeavored to enlist the Court's assistance in building a road to the river bank on the Shoemakertown side. They asked City Council to build a road from Shelby Street, east of the iron bridge to the river on the Falmouth side.

Dr. J. E. Wilson was first to suggest the emergency plan to take care of the traffic by the free ferry.

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