

Robert P. Coffin

916 Barclay Circle

Lake Forest, Illinois 60045

The Village President

The Board of Trustees

The Village of Long Grove

Lake County, Illinois

I will start by reviewing my professional background. I graduated from Yale in 1939 with a degree in Civil Engineering. I then worked for Commonwealth Edison in heavy construction, power house work, including the Chicago Subway until Pearl Harbor. I entered the Navy as a pilot in antisubmarine work and was released in 1946 returning to Edison until 1950. Then I was asked to join a new architect and engineering firm. While I was with Edison I became a registered professional engineer in Illinois and during my time with the architectural firm I passed the exam to become a registered architect in the State of Illinois. I was also licensed in seven other states. I opened my own firm in 1957 with offices in Long Grove and later in Barrington. We grew to seven architects doing residential, commercial, schools, churches, country clubs, and medical centers. I quit eleven years ago at 85 when my wife and I moved to a retirement community in Lake Forest.

Recently I was asked by Charlie Wachs to inspect the covered bridge with your village engineer. I worked with Charlie's father on the local school board and on the committee that organized the incorporation of the Village of Long Grove – he was president and I was secretary. Both of us were trustees on the first Village Board. When the president, Guy Reed, Barbara Turner's father died in office as per the State of Illinois statutes, I was elected by the trustees to succeed him as president. I was president for 22 years, and then was chairman of the Plan Commission until we moved eleven years ago.

When I inspected the bridge I climbed under it, and in my judgment it is in remarkably good shape. The trusses are in my opinion wrought iron which is nearly pure iron in contrast to steel which has more carbon and other alloys. Wrought iron is more resistant to corrosion than steel. The bridge was reported to have been built about 1900. At that time steel was less in use and wrought iron more popular. The trusses have been painted and seem in good condition. There is little corrosion. The original purpose of covering a bridge was to protect the then typically wood trusses from the weather. Our cover was put in for more aesthetic reasons at a time when the county engineer recommended we remove the bridge and replace it with a culvert. The community resisted and the Board chose to convert the bridge into a covered one - appropriate to the community self-image. It has become very popular. Tourists, wedding parties, and especially potential customers want their pictures taken by it. It

is the only covered bridge anywhere near. It has also become the logo of the Village. In my judgment, it should be saved and would be a great financial and emotional loss if removed.

The most deteriorated aspect of the bridge is the cut limestone abutments. These are fractured and some stones are missing. These must be repaired or replaced. It is hard to say if there are, or ever were footings. If the footings are present, there is no evidence they have failed and are buried in the mud. It would be possible to repair or replace the stone work. From an authentic point of view, the stone route would be preferred. If not the stone could be removed and replaced with reinforced concrete, complete with proper footings, one side at a time, supporting the bridge on temporary shoring and closing it to traffic. It would probably cost more, but would probably last longer, and make present day engineers more at ease. Repairs to the cover are easy and you have experience doing those.

One thing you can do, costs little, should have been done already is to designate the bridged as a Village Historical Landmark. It could probably be placed on the National List of Historical Places. Our old office did this on several buildings. There are offices available to help with this. It adds stature and prestige and has some legal benefits. There is a State Board who passes judgment. They might not like that the cover is more recent than the trusses. The fact that the cover is not new might not help but the fact that the trusses are old and quite unique should help.

Then finally, but of great importance, post new and more explicit signs. Put signs at McHenry Road and Route 53 that are larger and very obvious, mention historic status, load limits, height restrictions, which the present signs do not, and possible fines.

These are my suggestions. If I can be of further help, let me know.

Betty and I lived in Long Grove from 1946 to 2002 and emotionally still do.

Sincerely yours,

Bob Coffin