

Way We Were

February 8, 2017

Wooining by moonlight

Mahala Ruddell, Research coordinator

With Valentine's Day coming up soon, we're reminded that each generation has its own courting traditions. In Park City's early years, one tradition involved the "Moonlight Bridge."

The bridge was located in the lower part of town, near today's City Park and the Miners Hospital, and was a popular place for courting in the early twentieth century. It crossed over a stream of water and was quite small, perhaps only about fifteen feet according to Bessie Thompson's memories, recorded in 1993. As W.P. "Lynx" Langford recalled in an interview in 1981, "there were two rails on each side and that's where all the young fellers used to go with their girls."

The bridge was most popular during the summer, when nights were warm enough to walk through town and spend time outdoors. "We'd go down and sit on the railing and talk," Louise Snow reminisced in an oral history in 2000. The bridge's romantic name was not official, but simply what everyone called it due to the location's popularity for moonlit strolls. "You guessed it," wrote Rhea Hurley in the Park Record in 1967. "It was great fun to wait until the beautiful summer moon was at its height, get all dolled up in our prettiest clothes and stroll down to 'Moonlight Bridge.'"

Though it usually served as a meeting place during the summer, Alice Terry O'Neil told the Park Record in a 1975 interview that during winter, kids used to take sleigh rides through town to the Moonlight Bridge. "We rode to the top of Empire Canyon, at the head of Main Street and all the way down" to the bridge, she said. "That's where we all walked with our boyfriends."

It's not clear when the bridge was originally built. The first specific reference to it shows up in the Park Record in 1912, though it's apparent from the report that it had existed for some years prior. "The bridge below town" was inspected and found to be "in bad condition." The City Council advised that a new bridge be constructed as a replacement and instructed the marshal to do so.

Not every story about the bridge had to do with courtship, however. While "joy riding" in 1918, Barney McGivern, was "thrown from his cart" at the bridge. He suffered "three broken ribs and other bruises," but was reported to be "getting on nicely" a couple weeks later. While it would have been exceedingly romantic if Barney had met his beau in the hospital while getting treated after his accident, alas he did not. He met and married Katherine Nealis, of Butte, Montana, three years after the fact.

There are few left to remember the Moonlight Bridge today. It was demolished in the 1970s to make way for new buildings and a park on the lower end of town.



Photo ID: 2000.17.79

Credit: Park City Historical Society and Museum, Kendall Webb Collection

Caption: A young woman sits on the steps of the Moonlight Bridge in this photo from the early twentieth century.