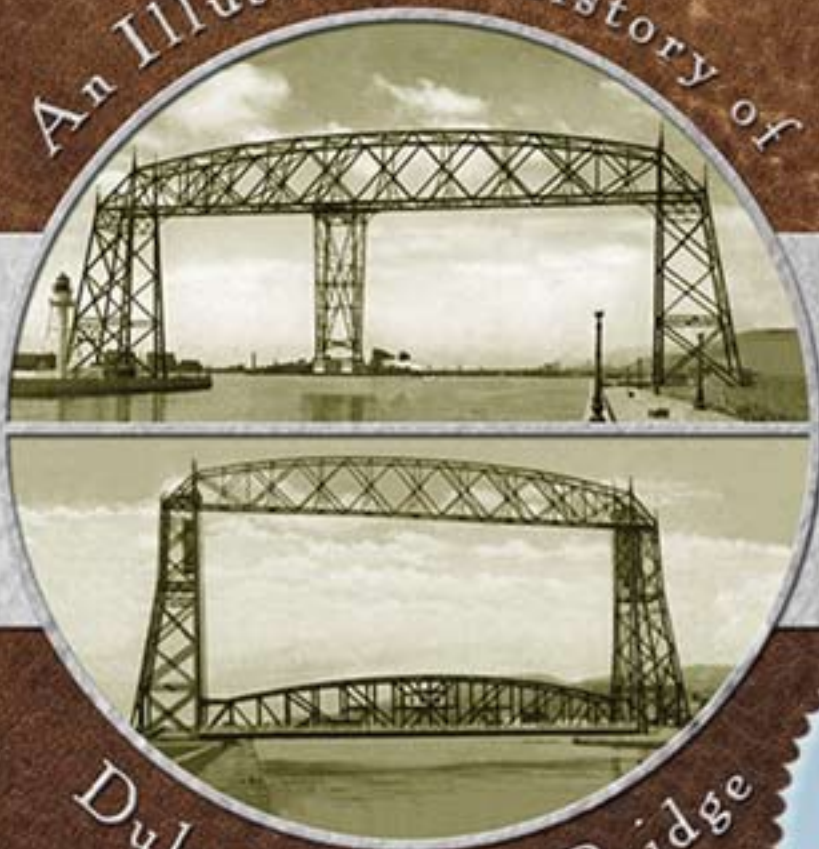


# CROSSING *THE* CANAL

An Illustrated History of



Duluth's Aerial Bridge

TONY DIERCKINS

MINNESOTA  
BOOK AWARDS

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*Crossing the canal: an illustrated history of Duluth's aerial bridge*

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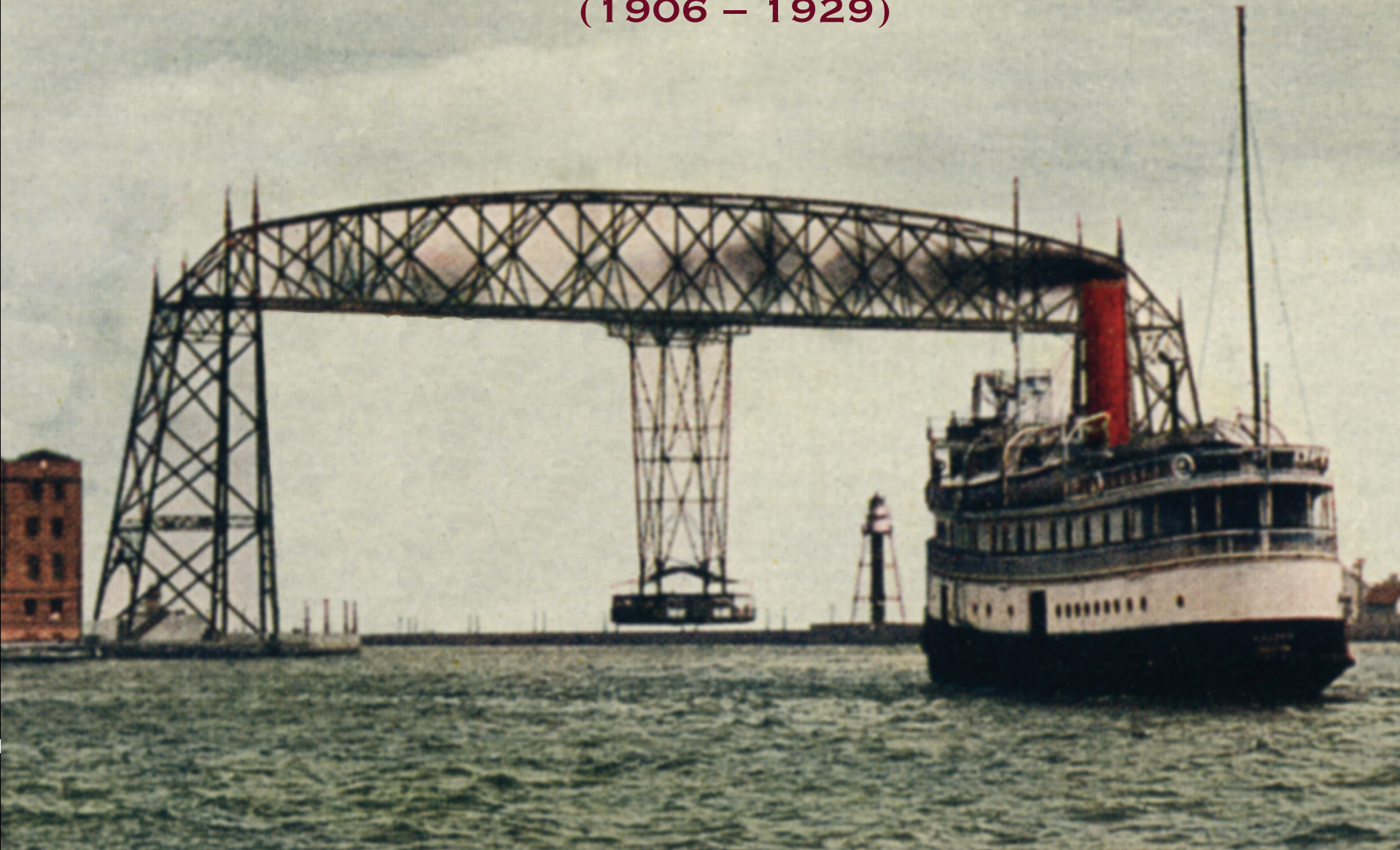
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PART III:

# THE LIFE OF THE AERIAL TRANSFER BRIDGE (1906 – 1929)







## DULUTH TAKES CONTROL OF THE BRIDGE

**M**odern Steel Structural eventually had to replace the entire overhead works of the bridge where the trucks rolled along the rails; besides the trucks operating poorly, the rail they rolled on had not been properly aligned. With a new truck system in place in early 1906, MSS had satisfied its obligation to Duluth and the bridge, and the City took complete control of the structure.

That April the City settled up with MSS, paying the company \$54,734.15—it had already paid the firm \$35,000 in September 1904 to get the job started. But the total amount came to \$90,000, more than \$10,000 less than the contract had called for. Another \$6,765.85 went directly to C. A. P. Turner. Back in April 1905, during the bridge's first month of operation, Turner had written the Common Council explaining that MSS had not met the terms of his contract with them: permitting their the use of his patents in exchange for 8 percent

of MSS's contract with the city. When the city plunked down the \$35,000 down payment in September 1904, Turner had received \$1,400, with a balance due of another \$1,400. He never received the second payment. As far as Turner was concerned, until he got that money—and another \$3,148 for other work—MSS had “forfeited its rights to the patents.” And since MSS had built the bridge using patents it had no right to, the company certainly couldn't sell the bridge to the city. By April 1906, interest and other work done by Turner brought the amount to nearly \$7,000. In a single resolution the Common Council first paid off Turner, satisfying MSS's contract with him, then MSS, who was now free to sell the bridge. The remaining \$3,500 went to the Duluth Canal Bridge Co. in August 1905, to settle once and for all the issue of who owned the bridge's foundations.

Duluth did, along with the bridge they lead to.

A 1910  
LITHOGRAPH  
OF THE TWIN  
PORTS OF DULUTH  
AND SUPERIOR BY  
HENRY WELLGE.



## 1906 – 1910: WORKING OUT THE BUGS

In March McGilvray reported that the bridge had run perfectly since February 6, handling two hundred to three hundred teams of horses and thirty thousand people a day. He estimated the cost of operating the bridge, including the \$4,000 in interest on the bond, at \$10,578.31. It may not have been as big a savings from the ferry operation as anticipated, but McGilvray's spin on the numbers illustrates the bargain that was the bridge: it

cost the city "one-fifth of one cent per passenger for operation, maintenance, interest, and power." He closed his report with a request for the city to install a telephone in the ferry car so its operator could call for help should the car break down in the middle of the canal. It was not granted.

Over the next year McGilvray continued to petition the city for improvements on the bridge, mostly for safety. A metal net was installed over the ferry car to protect passengers and teams

## The Corps of Engineers Building and Canal Park

When the federal government took over the ship canal, it also acquired two small strips of land on either side of the waterway. They dubbed the property "Canal Park" but didn't do anything to make it very park-like. Then in 1902, with work on the new ship canal piers complete, the government decided to spend \$30,000 on park improvements ("concrete walks, grass plots, and trees") and a spanking-new Neoclassical Revival office building for the Corps of Engineers, designed by Wallace Wellbanks along with architect W. T. Bray. The building would also end talks of moving the Corps' Lake Superior headquarters to Houghton or Marquette on Michigan's Upper Peninsula.

In 1971 the park received an \$82,000 facelift thanks in part to Jeno's, Inc., which purchased a portion of the park to create more employee parking. The park improved its own parking, fixed drainage issues, created a circular drive to ease traffic, added additional green spaces, planted more trees, and improved the lighting to make the area more hospitable to visitors.

The park became even more of a tourist destination in 1973 with the opening of the Lake Superior Maritime Visitor Center, which later connected directly to the Corps of Engineers Building. Oddly enough the museum developed out of a need for restroom facilities. Back in the late 1960s, the bridge's "comfort stations"—bathrooms the Corps of Engineers insisted be installed in the base of the bridge's approaches in 1929—had become so decrepit that the city removed them, turning the space into storage. Soon afterward, however, desperate tourists began relieving themselves in and around the park. So the Corps of Engineers decided to build restroom facilities adjacent to the Corps building. The original plans for the project demonstrated that the height of the addition didn't complement the existing structure, so another level was added. Someone then suggested that the extra space could house an exhibit or two about Lake Superior's shipping history, which in turn sparked more ambitious ideas. By the time the building was completed in 1973, what had started as a simple bathroom addition had become the Canal Park Marine Museum.



LEFT:  
WORKERS STOPPED  
WORK ON THE CORPS  
OF ENGINEERS BUILDING  
TO POSE FOR THIS  
PICTURE IN 1906.



RIGHT:  
A MUCH MORE RECENT  
PHOTO OF THE CORPS  
BUILDING (AND A VERY  
SMALL PORTION OF THE  
LAKE SUPERIOR MARITIME  
VISITOR CENTER).

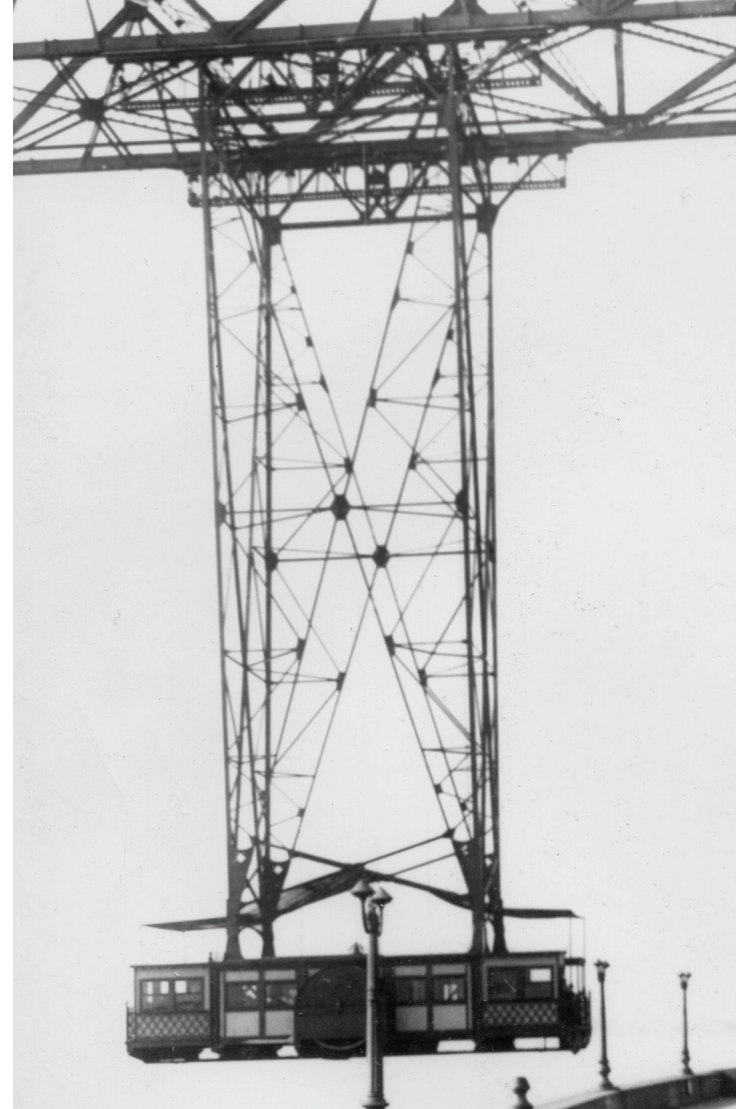
The museum, designed by architects Aguar, Jrying, Whiteman & Moser to resemble a ship's bridge (see page 154), tells the history of shipping on Lake Superior through fascinating exhibits that range from actual artifacts of maritime history to recreations of sailors' quarters aboard ore boats to scale models of a variety of vessels that once sailed the lake. C. Patrick Labadie served as the museum's first curator; at this writing, Thomas Holden mans the wheel of what has been renamed the "Lake Superior Maritime Visitor Center." By the time the aerial bridge celebrated its one hundredth year in 2005, more than 12 million people had visited the museum.



McGilvray was also a good friend of John A. Johnson, who became Minnesota's governor in 1905. In June of his first year in office, Johnson appointed McGilvray to his staff as an aide de camp and bestowed upon him the rank of Colonel (his friends would later use the title as a nickname). The new title came as a surprise to McGilvray, who knew nothing of it until he had returned from a fishing trip with his wife, Roselda, whom he called "Rosie." Mrs. McGilvray was also active in Duluth social circles, frequently making the newspaper's society page for hosting events such as a gathering at their East Second Street home to play 500, a card game much like euchre. As a member of the governor's staff, in 1908 McGilvray traveled to the Shiloh Civil War battlefield in southwestern Tennessee for the dedication of a monument to the Minnesota soldiers who died in the famous battle. On his return, McGilvray sported a button that read "John A. Johnson, Our Next President" and spoke of how everywhere the governor had gone, "people turned out by the thousands to greet him."

Not that McGilvray's duties to the government stopped him from remaining passionate about his job: When the Duluth Commercial Club—a predecessor to today's Chamber of Commerce—called the condition of Duluth's streets "deplorable" in 1908, the Engineer from Aberdeen charged the organization with slander and spat back that its report contained "mischievous and either grossly superficial or wholly biased statements." While his confirmation as City Engineer in 1897 had come with some dissent, after the bridge went up, strongly Democratic Duluth loved him. At the end of Mayor Cullum's term in 1908, newly elected Republican Mayor R. D. Haven tried to appoint another engineer to McGilvray's job, but the overwhelmingly Democratic Common Council "refused to affirm the mayor's appointment," the newspaper reported. Just two years later, Cullum defeated Haven to take his job back (Duluth mayors held two-year terms at the time) and McGilvray's position was no longer in question.

With the bridge operating apparently perfectly by 1907, its history became one of maintenance and incidents surrounding it and the canal it crossed. In November 1908 another great storm hit the western tip of Lake Superior, causing lake waters to roll so high bridge operations had to be suspended for the first time since the *Mataafa* Storm: the paper reported that "the car cannot cross the canal without being struck by waves." Considering that the bridge rested fifteen feet above the canal's waters, waves had to have been at least that high. Water easily crested over the canal's piers; a few old-timers said it was the highest they'd seen since the construction of the "ditch"—higher than the *Mataafa* Storm. After a couple of rather rough crossings, the bridge operator phoned the Board of Public Works, saying that the bridge could be damaged; certainly its electric motors, mounted beneath the car, would short out because of the water. Councilors must have finally heeded McGilvray's request for a telephone.



THE AWNING-LIKE STRUCTURE ABOVE THE FERRY CAR WAS A METAL NET INSTALLED IN 1906 TO PROTECT PASSENGERS FROM FALLING ICE.



## White City

On the last day of June 1906, Oatka Park opened on Park Point between Thirty-Ninth and Fortieth Streets. Reports claim ten to fifteen thousand people enjoyed the park on its first day even though the park had little more to offer at the time than a public dance pavilion.

Soon after, the park became White City, an amusement park operated by the Duluth Amusement Company. In 1907 the *Duluth Evening Herald* credited the aerial transfer bridge with the park's existence; the old ferry system could never have carried as many people as crowded into White City on weekends. On more than one Sunday in 1906, crowds using the aerial bridge to reach White City surpassed the record of 32,595 set the very first Sunday the bridge opened to the public.

Rides were added, including the "Mystic River" boat ride, a miniature railroad (operators claimed it had the smallest steam locomotive in the United States), and the "Fun Factory," where ticket payers lost themselves wandering on twisted paths and "[ran] up against all kinds of funny and startling adventures."

Other attractions included an automated baseball game, a Ferris wheel, a water slide, free acrobats and burlesque performers, sitting rooms (for the ladies), cafés and restaurants, bathhouses, swimming lessons, and vaudeville acts. The park also featured a corral of deer, and at one time its owners commissioned the construction of a \$7,500 gasoline-propelled airship to be named *Duluth No. 1*, although it was never built.

After a brief name change to "Joyland" in 1908, the park shut down in 1909. Part of the property on which it stood became the home of Maggie McGillis—in fact, a portion of McGillis's home, at 4010 Minnesota Avenue, is made from White City's old band shell.



The paper noted that the car had been tied up "on the Duluth side." Of course, both sides of the canal were in Duluth, but the report illustrates how even eighteen years after Park Point returned as part of Duluth, the two communities had not finished melding together in the minds of their citizens. Not all Park Pointers took the event in stride. The Board had difficulties arranging for a temporary ferry to make crossings. Eventually the tug *Pacific* was called on to act as ferry, but before that had been arranged the Board of Public Works had received an earful from angry Park Pointers. Many used their telephones to let the Board know their disgruntled state. The paper reported about one particularly angry Park Pointer who scoffed at the idea that the bridge would be unsafe in the gale and "yelled over the phone that the Board ought to get a couple of four-year-old children to run the ferry if they were afraid to do it themselves." The Board retorted that the caller would certainly get the job himself if he were to apply. The newspaper also mentioned that a woman called the paper to report that the aerial bridge's car had been "swept away and that it was riding the waves out in the middle of the lake." She was mistaken.

Temporary ferry service such as that provided by the *Pacific* was employed every twelve to eighteen months when bridge operators overhauled the structure. In the bridge's first few years, its arguably relaxed schedule allowed operators twenty minutes between trips to perform any maintenance, and with redundant equipment at hand, broken parts could be quickly swapped out and repaired at another time rather than shut the bridge down to repair the parts in place.

## THE TRANSFER BRIDGE IN MID LIFE

By 1910 the ferry made seventy-five round trips a day during operating hours, and the time between trips no longer allowed on-the-fly maintenance. Starting that year, overhauls were made annually and lasted ten days.



Except for the time when his colleague William Patton filled the role from 1900–1904, Thomas McGilvray had served as Duluth's City Engineer since 1897. But at the end of 1912, he stepped away from public office. He may have been uncomfortable with a big change to Duluth's government: the shift from an alderman-based Common Council to a commissioner-based City Council. Commissioners represented the city departments: Finance, Public Works, Public Safety, Public Utilities; the mayor acted as the Public Affairs Commissioner. (The city switched to its present Mayor/City Council form of government in 1956.) Perhaps McGilvray didn't like the idea of answering to an elected public works commissioner. At his retirement reception McGilvray's fellow city engineers presented him with a Masonic emblem, and the paper reported McGilvray delivered a "neat speech." In 1913 he rejoined Patton at his Duluth Engineering Company, where he would work until 1917 before going into private practice. McGilvray unsuccessfully ran for County Surveyor in 1918. His loss may have been due to a little bad press a few months before the election. In May, he and two companions were charged for drunkenness and disorderly conduct, and the Temperance movement was in full swing; Prohibition would go into effect the next year. The newspaper account of his arrest did not elaborate on the events surrounding it.

An incident in 1913 displayed just how disruptive a bridge closing could be—especially an unexpected one. At about 1 p.m. on September 4, as the ferry car approached the north pier with a load of passengers—no teams or automobiles were aboard—a frayed cable snapped, and the car ground to a halt. The car had not reached the end of its journey, so passengers had to descend by ladder. Captain E. D. Peck of the Corps of Engineers immediately provided the use of a government launch to ferry passengers until the city could secure the services of a steam launch.

## The North Pier Lighthouse

The great storm of 1905 proved a point the Lake Carrier's Association had been making for years: since the canal was only three hundred feet wide, the South Pier Light wasn't sufficient for mariners to guide their craft at night or in foggy weather, even with the help of the Rear Range Light. Too far south and a ship would run into the pier; too far north and it would beach on the rocky shore. The LCA made repeated pleas to the Lighthouse Board to build a light, but were turned down time after time. Frustration led the organization to place a temporary light at the end of the North Pier in 1908.

A year later, the Lighthouse Board called the Duluth Harbor "one of the worst and most dangerous on the whole chain of [Great] Lakes." The report—along with the evidence from 1905's *Mataafa* Storm (see page 68)—bolstered the LCA's argument and Congress appropriated \$4,000 to build a lighthouse.

Building began in late 1909 and finished after the opening of the 1910 shipping season. An iron tower enclosed by steel plates, the North Pier Light stands thirty-seven feet tall, measures ten-and-a-half feet in diameter at its base, and tapers to a diameter of eight feet at the top. An octagonal cast-iron lantern holds a Fifth Order Fresnel lens made in Paris in 1881, originally illuminated by a 210-candlepower incandescent electric lamp. In clear conditions the light can be seen eleven miles away. Keepers first displayed it the night of April 7, 1910. Its white light was later replaced with a more navigationally appropriate red light (so that, along with the South Breakwater Light's green lamp, skippers can more easily identify the canal's entrance).





THREE OF THE FERRY  
BRIDGE'S OPERATORS  
(INCLUDING THE  
MUSTACHIOED JOHN  
HICKEN) STOP TO POSE  
WHILE PERFORMING  
MAINTENANCE ATOP THE  
BRIDGE. THE WORK WAS  
DANGEROUS, AND AN  
ACCIDENT COST OPERATOR  
THOMAS WHITE HIS  
LIFE IN 1918.

The *Plowboy* eventually took over the job, but its cargo was limited to people. Dozens of wagons, teams, and autos were stranded on Minnesota Point until workers could complete repairs, which took two weeks as the city decided it might as well put the bridge through its annual maintenance at the same time.

Another great storm stopped bridge operation on April 28, 1914. Incoming boats were forced to turn back and ride out the storm on the open lake—the waters were too rough to navigate the canal. The newspaper reported that hundreds of people armed with “cameras and Kodaks” headed to the canal to watch and take photos of the storm, but most were forced to seek shelter in the Corps of Engineers’ building and the moored aerial bridge ferry car. Twenty-five Park Point residents spent the night in the ferry car; others were forced to find rooms in hotels.

At least one man didn’t think conditions on the canal posed that great a danger. Twenty-four-year-old laborer Sivo “Stans” Sanden, a resident of the Torvilla Hotel a few blocks north of the canal, bet a companion one dollar that he could walk the North Pier from end to end. Setting out from beneath the aerial bridge, Sanden darted from one light post to the next, hiding behind the posts as the waves crested and running to the next before another breached the canal. About halfway through his adventure, bridge operators saw Sanden hesitate long enough to throw off his timing. When the next wave hit, it swept him over the pier and into the canal’s roiling waters. He may have hit his head along the way; witnesses said he made no

attempt to swim to safety. Police and members of the life-saving station arrived quickly, having been notified by bridge operators using the ferry car’s telephone. None of the would-be rescuers could locate his body.

By the summer of 1917 city officials were once again wondering how long the bridge could keep up with demand. Mayor C. R. Magney and Finance Commissioner Phillip G. Phillips of the City Council reminded citizens that the bridge’s estimated life was twenty years, and that it would reach that mark in just six years. They dismissed the idea of replacing the bridge with a larger structure of the same kind; a recent carnival on Minnesota Point forced the bridge to transport thirty-two thousand spectators, which it did with some difficulty, proving that a ferry bridge could never handle the expected traffic in the years ahead. Only a tunnel would both handle the estimated traffic needs and be allowed by the Corps of Engineers, which controlled the canal, and a tunnel would take about the same amount of time to build. Despite the clamor Phillips and Magney created, the tunnel idea died.

The next year marked the first tragedy to occur on the bridge, the accidental death of Duluth pioneer and bridge operator Thomas White. On December 19, 1918, White—substituting for vacationing bridge supervisor Leonard Green—climbed to the top of the bridge to perform maintenance, mostly oiling the trucks and pulleys. No one witnessed how the accident occurred, but as the ferry car left the South Pier and headed across, White was somehow pulled into a pulley, crushing his chest. Some passengers waiting to board heard White scream, but the sound of the ferry in motion prevented the operator from immediately hearing his cries. It took a firefighter and two bridge operators quite some time to free White from the bridgeworks and lower him down by ropes, and he died just minutes after reaching the hospital.

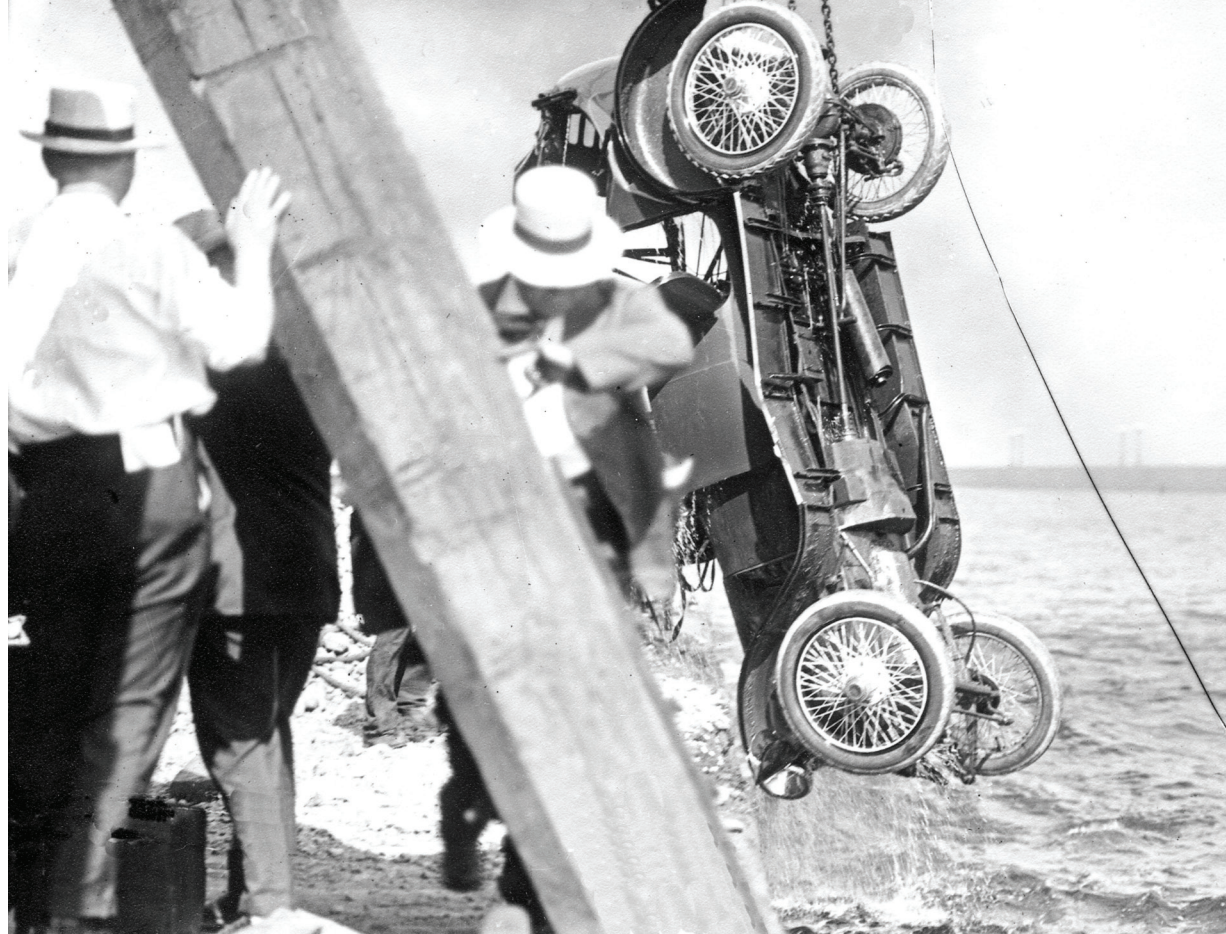


While maintaining the bridge had proved deadly to White, not a single accident involving the ferry bridge resulted in the death of a passenger. In her book, *This is Duluth*, Dora May McDonald noted only two accidents, both involving the approaches to the ferry car. In one, a driver of a team carrying beer drove his horses right off the approach and into the canal; a 1956 article in the *Duluth News-Tribune* claimed it had been a laundry team, not a brewery team, and added that the horses drowned (if it was indeed a brewery team, it likely belonged to Van Blatz Brewery of Milwaukee, which operated a distribution warehouse on Park Point). In the other incident, DM&N Chief Engineer H. L. Dresser drove his car off the approach. McDonald reported that James Ten Eyck, the Duluth Boat Club's legendary rowing coach, happened to be waiting for the ferry when the accident occurred; he removed his pants and dove into the canal, bringing Dresser to safety. Still another tale combines these two accounts into one event, with Dresser's car forcing the team overboard before following in his car. None of these accounts included a date, however, and searches in newspaper archives for contemporary accounts have turned up nothing.

Another unverified tale turns potential tragedy into humor. The story goes that a young betrothed couple began arguing as they crossed the canal in the ferry car. The disagreement caused the woman great anxiety. Distraught, when she descended the ferry car she immediately ran to the edge of the pier and, in a dramatic effort to end her own life, threw herself into the canal. Her rash act was supposedly foiled by her enormous hoop skirt: when she landed in the canal, instead of sinking to the bottom,

she popped up and bobbed like a buoy until rescuers arrived and plucked her to safety.

Not every event surrounding the bridge involved maintenance or potential tragedy. On March 18, 1918, pilot Wilber Larrabee became the first person to pilot an airplane beneath the aerial bridge (others would follow, see "Barnstorming the Bridge" on page 134). Larrabee, of Minneapolis, was in town to perform a "revue" of acrobat flying, with the dive beneath the bridge his headline maneuver. Unfortunately, a follow-up article on Larrabee did not provide any details of the stunt and only reported that it had been accomplished.



AN AUTOMOBILE BEING  
PULLED OUT OF THE SHIP  
CANAL. ITS DRIVER COULD  
WELL HAVE BEEN DM&N  
CHIEF ENGINEER H. L.  
DRESSER, WHO ONCE  
DROVE HIS CAR OFF THE  
BRIDGE APPROACH AND  
INTO THE CANAL; HE WAS  
SAVED BY DULUTH BOAT  
CLUB ROWING COACH  
JAMES TEN EYCK.



HUGH MCKENZIE  
SNAPPED THIS IMAGE OF  
A BIPLANE FLYING UNDER  
THE AERIAL BRIDGE,  
MOST LIKELY PILOTED BY  
WILBER LARRABEE IN  
1918. LARRABEE WASN'T  
THE ONLY PILOT TO FLY  
UNDER THE BRIDGE; SEE  
"BARNSTORMING THE  
BRIDGE" ON PAGE 134.

## 1920s: THE BEGINNING OF THE END

Throughout its life span, the Duluth Aerial Transfer Bridge never had an accident with a vessel navigating the canal—not that there hadn't been many close calls. Operators liked to say that sometimes the car came so close to a vessel, there would certainly have been a collision "if the boat had been covered with one more coat of paint." Hyperbole aside, the closest recorded call came November 8, 1921, when the outbound steamer *Joshua Rhodes* came within fifteen feet of the car. With about fifty passengers aboard—plus a full load of cars, trucks, and coal wagons—trouble with the trucks stopped the ferry car about two-fifths of its way south across the canal as the *Rhodes* approached. Its operators leaped into action: one rang the emergency signal on the bell—five loud clangs, the

*Duluth Evening Herald* reported—while another climbed atop the ferry car and waved his arms, trying to get the *Rhodes*' captain's attention. A nearby tug blew its whistle and waited nearby in case it was needed to help push the *Rhodes* away from the ferry car. Luckily, officers on the *Rhodes* were paying attention and were able to steer the ore boat just in time to allow it to pass safely.

A winter storm in February 1922 illustrates just how important the bridge was to Park Point's residents. A blizzard had buried the city, turning it into "a labyrinth of tunnels and narrow snow-banked lanes," according to the *Duluth News-Tribune*. The Point had been hit hard, with snowbanks as high as trolley cars. To make matters worse, a cable had snapped on the aerial bridge, cutting Park Point off completely. The town's fire chief, John Randall, worried that a fire on the Point would quickly become a tragedy. "I don't know what we can do for Park Point," he told the newspaper. "Unless a snow-shoe volunteer fire-fighting, snow-bucket brigade is organized, people must be extra careful to avoid any possible fires." Bridge boss Leonard Green explained that the gale had fouled one of the cables, which became caught up in the bridge's hangers. The problem would take only eight hours to fix, but no work could be done until the weather abated. When the weather cleared and the bridge was repaired, one of its first duties was to transport a National Guard tank to Park Point to help clear snow.

Snowstorms weren't the only problem facing Park Pointers. With more and more people using the ferry bridge, especially in summer, they were often delayed to and from work. To alleviate the problem, in June 1922 Mayor Samuel Frisbee Snively and Public Works Commissioner James A. "Bert" Ferrell introduced an ordinance to the City Council granting bridge privileges to Park Point residents: they would have precedence over other passengers queuing up for a ride "every other time it crosses from the north to the south side of the ship canal between 5:30 and



7 P.M., from June 1 until Oct. 1." The measure passed, but not without some effort by Washburn, Bailey & Mitchell, the law firm hired to represent Park Point residents.

After the measure had been introduced, City Attorney J. B. Richards gave his opinion: the ordinance violates the state constitution and discriminates against those Duluthians who did not live on Park Point. A. M. C. Washburn, on behalf of Park Point, argued the ordinance was both valid and justified in the entire city's interest both from a "traffic view and from the viewpoint of public health, safety, and morals." He added that the measure would stand up to any legal argument against it and if an arrangement with the Duluth Boat Club could be worked out, there should be no problem whatsoever.

But after both attorneys gave their opinions, the Council did not move to take any action, which infuriated Washburn. "Does

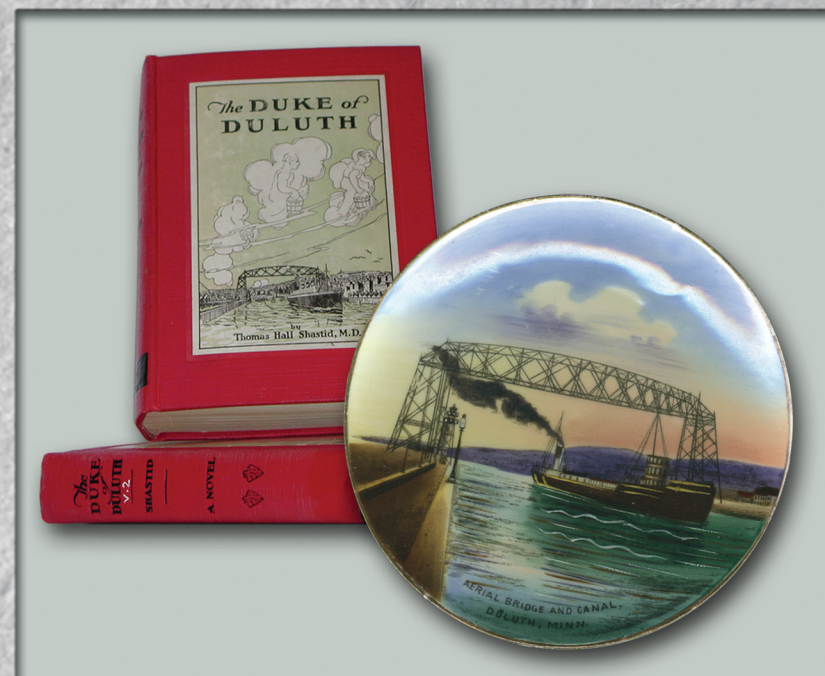
the mere filing of the city attorney's opinion automatically dispose of the ordinance?" he objected. "If it does, this council certainly is unique as a legislative body. It strikes me as a cheap way of getting out of learning the constitutionality of such a measure."

Two commissioners took exception to Washburn's remarks. Finance Commissioner Leonidas Merritt said that while he sympathized with Park Pointers, he told them he would vote for the ordinance only if the city attorney approved of it—he would not expose the city to endless lawsuits. Public Utilities Commissioner Phillips, under whose jurisdiction the bridge operated, was incensed. "Don't make any more trouble for me," he told Snively and Ferrell. "I think that you who are so anxious for this ordinance ought to take over the care of the bridge, I am not going to vote for any kind of ordinance that is going to exclude any taxpayer from the use of the bridge."

## The Aerial Bridge as Icon

It has been called "Duluth's Eiffel Tower," and, like that tower's role in Paris, today the bridge's role as Duluth's icon is taken for granted. Countless businesses use its image in some part of their logos, and one of the local radio stations even calls itself "The Bridge" for short. Mayor Don Ness helped bolster his political career by organizing his "Bridge Syndicate," which encouraged young people to get involved in the community. There is no end to the puns too many headline writers have been unable to resist. Canal Park plays host to a cottage industry centered on the bridge. You can find the bridge on just about anything that can be held down long enough to be printed on: coffee mugs, beach towels, t-shirts, etc. Canal Park candy shops even sell chocolate shaped like the bridge (and ore boats too). Hardly a book published about Duluth—whether about the bridge or not—makes it to stores without the bridge on its cover.

It's been that way since the bridge first went up over the canal back in 1905. Because it was the first of its kind in the United States, the ferry bridge had a national reputation (as does its lifting successor today). During its early years, images of the bridge were painted on fine china pitchers, vases, serving plates, lace plates, salt-and-pepper cellars, and cup-and-saucer sets. It was printed on postcards and letterheads; stamped or embossed on metal napkin rings, penholders, letter openers, spoons, and cigar boxes; and engraved on silver spoons and gold lockets. One of the first books to sport an image of the bridge was *The Duke of Duluth*, a 1926 novel by Thomas Hall Shastid, M.D., available at the Duluth Public Library.





CONDUCTORS AND A FEW PASSENGERS—AND AN AUTOMOBILE—ON THE AERIAL TRANSFER BRIDGE'S GONDOLA CAR, AWAITING MORE PASSENGERS BEFORE CROSSING. BY CREATING ACCESS TO PARK POINT, THE BRIDGE MADE MINNESOTA POINT EVEN MORE POPULAR. ADD TO THAT A DRAMATIC INCREASE IN AUTOMOBILE TRAFFIC IN DULUTH FROM 1901 TO 1925, AND THE BRIDGE WAS RENDERED INADEQUATE BY THE MID 1920S.

Washburn wasn't done. He reminded the council that the city attorney's ruling was "not infallible" and that "Mr. Richards...was for their guidance, not their master." The ordinance passed, with Merritt and Phillips casting the only "nay" votes.

The next year saw the passing of one of the engineers who helped create the bridge. William Patton, who stood in for McGilvray during Mayor T. W. Hugo's 1900–1904 administration, died on November 30 at age sixty-three. Besides being instrumental in the aerial bridge's construction and the president of the Duluth Engineering Company, Patton had been a very active Mason. He was one of four charter members of the King Solomon Temple of England—the other three were former presidents Teddy Roosevelt and William Howard Taft and General Thomas J. Shryock, a lumberman and one-time treasurer of Maryland. Patton was a past master of Duluth's Palestine Lodge No. 79 and in 1910 the grand master of the Minnesota Grand Lodge. At his death he was considered "one of the leading Masons in the world."

The bridge Patton helped build was also nearing the end of its life. Even with privileges in place for Park Point residents, the bridge simply could not keep up with the needs of the city—on either side of the canal. In 1901, when the transfer bridge idea was still an idea, just shy of 53,000 people lived in town and only one of them, B. E. Baker, owned an automobile (a single cylinder Oldsmobile runabout, although J. R. Zweifel also claimed his Locomobile steamer got there first). In 1925, the population was closing in on 100,000 and 17,340 automobiles and 2,600 trucks drove Duluth's streets. The bridge had in part created the growth that was rendering it obsolete: with a convenient mode of conveyance across the canal, Park Point and the entire southern portion of Minnesota Point had opened to more full-time residents and businesses, and it continued its role as "Duluth's Playground." With more and more of the people living, working, and playing on the Point—and getting to and from the isthmus on automobiles—soon there wouldn't be enough hours in the day for the bridge to move everyone who needed to use it.

And as it neared the end of its estimated life, city officials began to join Park Pointers in expressing their concern. In May 1925 Public Utilities Commissioner Phillips asked the City Council to take the responsibility of maintaining the bridge out of his hands. The meeting was not focused on the bridge, but on parks improvements, something very dear to Mayor S. F. Snively, who donated his own time and money to build Seven Bridges Road and complete Skyline Parkway. Phillips objected to Snively's idea that gravel used to help build a link between the Fond du Lac Road and Jay Cooke State Park be paid for with bond money. "I don't like that," Phillips told the Mayor. "What are we going to do in the future when we are faced with real bond issues, if we load ourselves down with bonds now?"

Snively replied, "Always afraid of the future..."

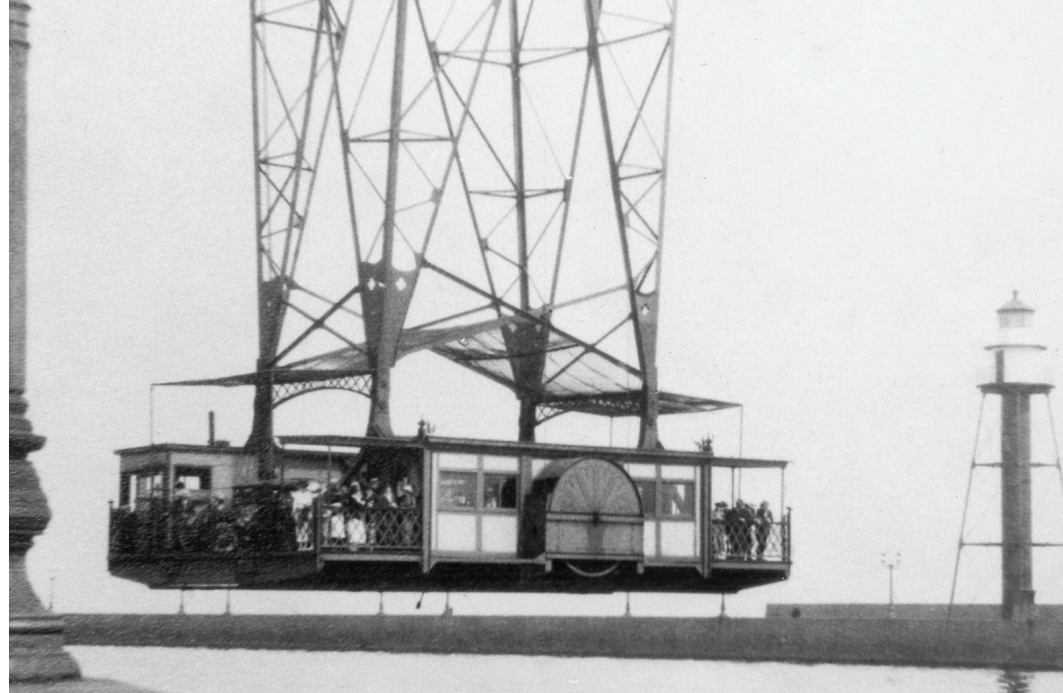


"I have a right to be," Phillips retorted. "What are we going to do in the future when the aerial bridge is declared unsafe? What will you do, if you are mayor a few years from now, and I ask you and the rest of the council to take responsibility for the bridge?"

No one replied. When asked by a reporter if the bridge was in any immediate danger, he simply replied that, "It is over twenty years old and can't be expected to last forever," before explaining that the future he was concerned with included an expense of \$4,000,000 to replace the bridge with a tunnel.

Not everything about the bridge's final years involved lawyers and City Council decisions. In July 1926 J. C. Craig sought to thrill Duluthians by diving from atop the bridge, 186 feet into the canal below. Craig's jump, sanctioned by Mayor Snively and other city officials, was intended to break the record of 133 feet set by Steve Brodie when he launched himself off the Brooklyn Bridge. Craig considered Brodie a "piker," a derogatory term in vogue at the time meaning cheapskate or a person who does things in a small way. The thirty-three-year-old Craig fancied himself no piker; indeed, the paper reported he'd been "making eyes at death so long he has earned the nickname of 'Daredevil.'" Craig announced he would not only leap from the top of the bridge, but also blindfold himself and walk across the beam backward and forward until he was ready to jump.

Craig did beat Brodie's record, but not by as much as he'd hoped. High winds made it impossible for him to reach the very top of the bridge, and he had to jump from a beam on the lower edge of the span, reducing the jump to 140 feet. But as promised he put on the blindfold, walked forward and backward, hung from his toes, and basically "frolicked about" as the newspaper reported. After his successful jump, he ended up chilled to the bone (he called the canal's waters "the coldest current in the world") and battered—but his body was not as bruised as his



ego. Despite drawing a crowd of about ten thousand onlookers, passing the hat brought him only \$65.

While the Aerial Transfer Bridge was largely known for the traffic jams it caused during its final few years, it also continued to serve Duluth as a tourist attraction and provided many memories. One man even claims to have been born on the bridge's ferry car. In 2005 Richard Sundberg told a local reporter that his parents, Albert and Rose, were caught in a stalled ferry car during the stormy night of September 6, 1927, while rushing to the hospital from their home on Park Point. Sundberg couldn't wait to get to the other side and came into the world "right there on the bucket of the bridge." But the newspapers failed to report any such birth on the bridge at the time, and some lifelong Park Pointers—those with "sand in their blood"—also have no recollection of the event. Maggie McGillis, born on the Point in 1922, said she heard no such tale growing up, but knew Sundberg to be "always kind of a smarty. He may have made this up."

THE GONDOLA CAR—  
A.K.A. "THE BUCKET OF  
THE BRIDGE"—IN MID  
TRANSPORT, LOADED WITH  
PASSENGERS. ONE MAN  
CLAIMS TO HAVE BEEN  
BORN IN THE GONDOLA  
CAR, AND A WOMAN  
NAMED "AERIAL" WAS  
SUPPOSEDLY CONCEIVED  
DURING A CROSSING.

JOHN HARRINGTON,  
ONCE A PRODIGY OF  
J. A. L. WADDELL (SEE  
PAGE 32), WAS THE  
PRINCIPAL PARTNER  
OF THE KANSAS CITY  
ENGINEERING FIRM  
HARRINGTON, HOWARD  
& ASH, WHICH WOULD  
DEVELOP THE PLANS TO  
CONVERT THE AERIAL  
TRANSFER BRIDGE INTO  
AN AERIAL LIFT BRIDGE.

Another likely apocryphal tale is of a woman who was not born on the bridge, but conceived there. Her parents named her “Aerial,” the tale goes. Of course, there is no record of such an event ever taking place on the bridge. When you consider that the ferry took about a minute to cross and was usually quite crowded and always had an operator on board, her parents would have pulled off a remarkable feat (although her father may not have wished to brag too loudly).

Despite its role as Duluth’s icon, the aerial bridge was fast becoming—like daredevil Craig—nothing more than a novelty. Operating beyond its projected lifespan, the bridge was serving more as a tourist attraction than a practical way of crossing the canal. The next few years would see a movement toward the building of a replacement bridge, but just as building the first aerial bridge was fraught with obstacles, it would be a bumpy ride before anyone crossed the canal on a new bridge.

### AN OLD IDEA RETURNS

The residents of Park Point had never held their tongues when it came to matters of crossing the canal, but by 1927 they were ready to put their money where their mouths were. On January 27, representatives of the Park Point Community Club—an organization that acted in many ways as the community’s own form of government—approached the City Council with a well-planned and well-presented proposal. After showing the inad-



equacy and rising cost of operating the ferry bridge, they proposed an idea that had already been proven successful all over the world: a vertical lift bridge, very much like the one John Alexander Low Waddell had submitted to the 1891 contest. (In 1894 Waddell’s plans for a bridge in Duluth became the first modern vertical lift bridge in the United States, Chicago’s South Halsted Street bridge; see page 32.) A lift bridge would allow continuous foot and vehicle traffic except when raised to allow vessel passage. The group had also hired the Kansas City firm of Harrington, Howard & Ash to draw up the plans presented to the councilors. Founded in 1914, HH&A was well respected in the field of bridge design. Before 1928 they had about three dozen vertical lift bridges to their credit and, in 1931, would design the lift bridge at Stillwater, Minnesota. The firm’s principal partner, John L. Harrington, was a gifted civil engineer who had earlier been partnered with Waddell.

The firm’s drawings called for a twenty-four-foot-wide roadway with two streetcar tracks and pedestrian sidewalks on either side. Harrington explained that the vertical lift was a well-known concept, so it required no cutting-edge engineering or materials. The new bridge could also incorporate much of the existing structure, saving both costs and time. As did the original aerial bridge, it fit the site well since land for the long approaches required by a traditional bridge simply did not exist. Tunneling was far too costly, and a lifting roadway would give



far quicker crossings than the old ferry car. Perhaps most importantly, the new bridge would be no more a potential hindrance to shipping than the present one.

Park Point resident Samuel Clark Dick spoke on behalf of the club, arguing the necessity of a new bridge, which the club believed could be built with minimal disruption at a reasonable cost. The group estimated the cost at \$550,000 and the Park Pointers, in a gesture of civic unselfishness, offered to pay one third of the cost—\$180,000—through special assessments on their properties. As proof of its sincerity, the group provided a petition signed by 235 Park Point property owners representing 39 percent of the owners and 49 percent of the taxed property on the Point. Dick reportedly traveled to New York City to obtain the signature of Julius Barnes, the largest land owner on the Point; at the time, Barnes, who financed the Duluth Boat Club, was serving as the president of the United States Chamber of Commerce, headquartered in New York. The Council recognized a good thing when it saw one. Council member Herbert Tischer moved to refer the petition for the construction of “a steel lift bridge” to the city assessor to look into property ownership matters. Acting at its regular meetings in February, the Council passed the necessary resolutions to get the project moving.

Building the new bridge forced the city to jump through some of the same hoops it had navigated with the original bridge’s construction. The city could not issue bonds for its



two thirds of the cost (\$370,000) without the sanction of the Minnesota State Legislature, and even then a special election would be needed to secure the approval of the city’s voters for the special bond issue. The bridge’s towers, new or old, still stood on Federal land—so Congress (both the House and Senate), the Corps of Engineers, the U.S. Army, and the Department of War all needed to sign off regarding land use. The Corps also administered the ship canal and had deeply protective feelings about possible impediments to passage through it. The Lake Carriers Association represented the interests of the shipping industry and, in the real world of politics and commerce, their approval was also necessary. Finally, of course, the city needed a contractor to actually build it.

There would be other distractions as well, such as former Park Point resident Walter R. Mathew’s idea to replace the ferry with a suspension bridge. But there were two major problems with Mr. Mathew’s idea: its estimated cost would far exceed that of the lift bridge, and the northern approach would have to begin at Superior Street, creating other traffic issues. It was quickly dismissed.

The city really didn’t have the time to entertain alternative ideas. It had to act fast: municipal elections were scheduled for April 5, 1927, and bonds to fund the bridge could only be issued by amendment to the city charter, which had to be approved by the voters. Notice of a charter amendment had to be

SAMUEL CLARK DICK OF THE PARK POINT COMMUNITY CLUB. DICK LED THE CHARGE TO CONVINCE DULUTH TO REPLACE THE TRANSFER BRIDGE. THE EFFORT INCLUDED A PETITION DRIVE, AND DICK WENT AS FAR AS TO TRAVEL TO NEW YORK CITY TO GET THE SIGNATURE OF JULIUS BARNES, BENEFACITOR OF THE DULUTH BOAT CLUB (SEE PAGE 54), WHO OWNED MORE PROPERTY ON PARK POINT THAN ANY OTHER PERSON AT THE TIME.



THE WATCH  
PRESENTED BY THE  
PARK POINT COMMUNITY  
CLUB TO ITS PRESIDENT,  
SAMUEL CLARK DICK, AS  
A GESTURE OF GRATITUDE  
FOR HIS TIRELESS EFFORT  
TO CONVINCE THE CITY  
TO REPLACE THE FERRY  
BRIDGE WITH A  
LIFT BRIDGE.

made public at least thirty days before an election, so on February 28 the Council told the City Clerk to get it done. Permission from the state arrived only a few days later. During the first week of March the State Legislature enacted its permission for Duluth to proceed. It was a largely *pro forma* action and passed unanimously with Governor Theodore Christianen signing it on March 5.

An editorial in the *Duluth Evening Herald* on March 19, 1927, titled “The Aerial Bridge Acts Up” may have helped the bond issue’s chances. The editor observed that twice already in 1927 cables on the ferry bridge had broken, stopping bridge service and forcing Park Pointers to “make a perilous boat trip across the canal through a floating field of broken ice.” It went on: “At its best, the aerial bridge, interesting though it may be to tourists as a novelty, is utterly inadequate, and is costing the city a great deal of money through the delay in traffic it steadily causes. At its worst the aerial bridge is nearing the end of its usefulness, and before long it will be dangerous.”

The editorial may not have been needed. Duluthians voiced relatively little controversy over the issue of a new bridge and approved the bonding by a vote of 16,433 to 9,326—nearly 64 percent approval. The next day the *Duluth News-Tribune* editorialized that “the old, picturesque aerial bridge which has about outlived its usefulness, will be replaced. This was a worthy proposal and the people of the city showed very good judgment in supporting it. The people living on the Point made a most generous offer...and the new bridge will benefit the entire city.”

## PURSUING APPROVAL

The next step involved getting the approval of the Lake Carriers Association, whose annual meeting was scheduled for April 21 in Cleveland, Ohio. Duluth sent City Attorney John Richards, armed with statements of support from several Duluth civic organizations, to argue its cause. John Harrington and Ernest Howard, the two consulting engineers who had designed the new bridge, accompanied Richards to explain how the bridge would work and how it would not interrupt ship traffic, the LCA’s main concern. Harrington showed, with detailed photos and charts, the operation and structure of the proposed bridge and assured his audience that no impediments to shipping would result. The LCA gave the project their blessing the same day.

Still, none of the legislation nor the LCA’s acceptance mattered one bit without the Corps of Engineers’ approval. The City met with Major R. W. Crawford, the District Engineer in Duluth and the man in charge of the canal, and laid out its plan to him. Crawford found few problems with Duluth’s proposal and forwarded it to Major Edgar Jadwin, the chief Army engineer in Washington. Jadwin and his staff seemed to have little objection and provided a lengthy set of rules and procedures for operating the new bridge. They also concluded that an act of Congress would be necessary before they could permit the work to begin; there was no avoiding the Army’s chain of command.

So in December 1927 Minnesota’s representatives in Washington introduced bills in their respective bodies of Congress. Congressman William L. Carss of Duluth introduced the House bill on December 5 and Senator Henrik Shipstead brought the same legislation to the Senate on the 15th.

In June some Duluthians started uttering disparaging words. Twenty-five Park Point property owners who had refused to sign the Community Club’s petition brought a suit against the City; even if the majority of their neighbors were for it, they did not



wish to be assessed a fee for the bridge, which would come to about \$52 per lot. Some of the land owners—whom the paper referred to as the “Park Point Insurgents”—owned multiple lots, and their share in the assessment was over \$2,000. The suit alleged that the assessments violated the city charter and that they would exceed any benefit derived by them; the bridge ought to be entirely paid for out of general tax revenues since it benefited all Duluthians, it argued. The case dragged out until October 1928, when former Duluth Mayor C. R. Magney, now a district court judge, heard the case; Magney was not concerned with the necessity of a new bridge or its design, only whether city officials had violated the charter; he decided they had not.

When Congress reconvened in January 1928, it moved on the bills introduced by Carss and Shipstead back in December. Bills legalizing local projects are usually not controversial, particularly when no federal money is involved, and the House and Senate passed them in mid-January 1928. President Calvin Coolidge dutifully signed the legislation on February 16 and it went to the Secretary of War Dwight F. Davis for the Army’s approval, the last the City needed. Permission from Davis arrived on April 16. Only two obstacles remained: finding a company to build the bridge and the money to pay them.

By August 20 Duluth had put in place provisions to begin selling bonds. Bearing 4 1/2 percent interest, the bonds would be sold in \$1,000 denominations and mature in 1943, investors being paid their principle and interest “in the gold coin of the United States of America.” While on the surface the bonds amounted to \$370,000, the bridge’s true cost to the city—principal, interest, and a State-required cushion—would come to slightly over \$530,000. Combined with the Park Point special assessment of \$180,000, the grand total of the bridge’s conversion cost came to about \$710,000.



But there was one more idea still on the table, and it could greatly affect the conversion’s cost. The City Council asked its special Bridge Committee to examine the idea of making the bridge substantial enough to carry freight trains, which in turn would revive the long-held idea that the bay side of Minnesota Point could be turned into miles of valuable dockage, industrializing the Point. The committee found that the additional costs and time to alter the plans at that stage were not only unfeasible, but would also delay construction. The report also indicated that a bigger bridge could have sunk the entire project. Park Point’s own bridge committee made vigorous objections to the alterations. If the plans were altered for heavy rail, city officials feared that Park Pointers would withdraw their offer to pay for one third of the costs. Without the Park Pointers’ support, the idea died.

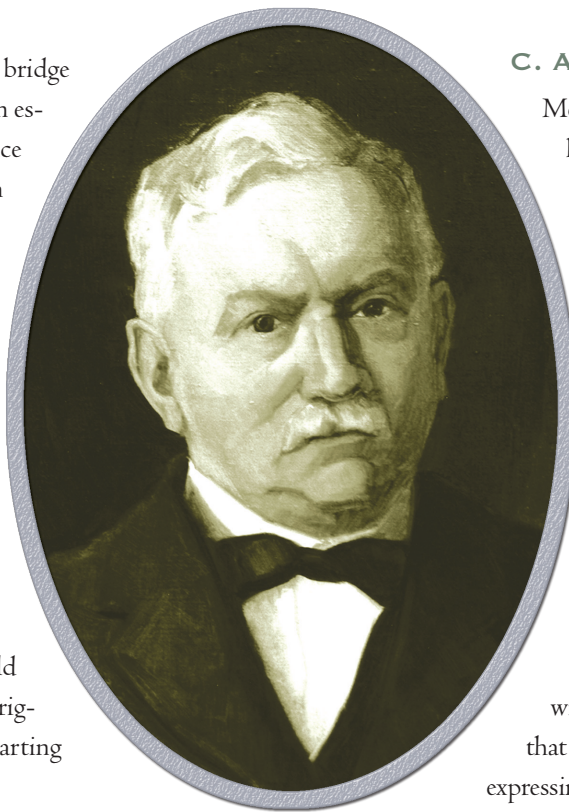
With the bond drive underway and the heavy rail idea settled, on September 17 the Council authorized advertisement

THE AERIAL TRANSFER  
BRIDGE IN THE 1920S,  
STILL AN ELEGANT PIECE  
OF ENGINEERING, BUT NO  
LONGER ABLE TO KEEP  
UP WITH THE DEMANDS  
OF TRAFFIC TO AND FROM  
MINNESOTA POINT.

SAMUEL FRISBEE  
SNIVELY, DULUTH'S  
LONGEST-SERVING MAYOR,  
PRESIDED OVER CITY  
COUNCIL DECISIONS  
REGARDING AERIAL BRIDGE  
ISSUES THROUGHOUT THE  
1920S, AS THE BRIDGE  
BECAME OBSOLETE AND  
THE CITY WAS FACED  
WITH THE PROBLEM OF  
HOW TO REPLACE IT.

for bids to construct “a steel lift type bridge across the United States ship canal at an estimated cost of \$549,000 in accordance with the plans and specifications on file in the office of the city engineer.” The city received two proposals by the deadline, but when city officials opened them on October 20, they were shocked. The American Bridge Company, C. A. P. Turner’s old employer, bid \$683,807 while Pepsard and Fulton of St. Paul, builders of Ashland’s 1916 ore dock, bid \$692,420.50. The *Duluth News-Tribune* sadly reported that the bids were \$130,000 too high and the City would have to call for new bids, dashing the original plan of constructing the bridge starting in late 1928 and opening in 1929.

Commissioner Phillips summarized the problem in a report to the Council. The original specifications called for construction after the close of the 1928 shipping season and winter work simply cost more; steel erection was more dangerous in cold weather and pouring concrete in the cold required special precautions. The issue of crossing the canal during construction also played a part: a temporary bridge had been proposed, and building it would add to the cost. These issues, Phillips explained, not only drove up the cost but also deterred some contractors from bidding at all. They would have to re-advertise for bids to do the work over the summer without a temporary bridge and revive the old ferry service for the duration of the construction work (see “Crossing During the Conversion” page 128).



## C. A. P. TURNER RETURNS

Meanwhile in Minneapolis, C. A. P. Turner had kept a watchful eye on the development of a replacement for the bridge. After all, the aerial bridge helped put Turner on the map as the architect of the first stiff-trussed aerial transfer bridge ever built and he had argued passionately for its proper construction. Turner was not about to keep his ideas about the conversion to himself. He came to Duluth in early November 1928 at the invitation of Public Utilities Commissioner Chris Evans, a fan of Turner’s who was critical of Harrington’s plans. Turner met with city officials, offering alternative plans that would cut costs by nearly \$200,000 and expressing his willingness to work with the Kansas City engineers. The essence of his idea was that the bridge’s overhead span did not need to be raised in order to accommodate the lifting roadway to the extent that HH&A had proposed. The old bridge could basically be jacked up about six feet by raising the pier foundations beneath the north and south towers; this, he maintained, would save significant money. Harrington and his associates argued that jacking up the bridge was not only unfeasible, but would not comply with federal requirements. Still, HH&A said they would certainly welcome Turner’s input—probably because they knew the government and the Lake Carriers Association would not approve of Turner’s idea. Rather than ruffle feathers, Harrington and company were likely just playing nice and showing some respect to the famous engineer. But it didn’t help things go more smoothly.



By the time the City Council met on January 14, 1929, to consider its options, things had gotten rather muddled. The Council was split over Harrington's and Turner's plans, a new round of bids had been advertised and construction firms were preparing their proposals, and the Corps' district engineer had objections to certain details.

The *Duluth News-Tribune* reported that the meeting, during which Commissioner Evans introduced a resolution to abandon Harrington's plans for Turner's, had broken down into "a heated debate between [commissioners] Evans and Phillips, in which every member of the council and Mr. Turner took part." Even City Attorney John Richards had his say, stating that he feared changing to Turner's plan would invalidate the City's agreement with Park Point residents, and then the City would have to come up with another \$180,000 on its own (apparently he ignored Turner's claims that the alternate plans would cut costs by more than that amount). Before Evans could request a vote on his resolution, Phillips, who had long championed Harrington's plans, quickly moved to adjourn. Before the adjournment vote could be taken, Evans moved to vote on his resolution. City Clerk Austin Davenport was at a loss until Mayor Snively, also a proponent of Harrington's plan, reminded him that the first issue before the council was the motion to adjourn. The vote was 3–2 in favor to adjourn; Evans had been silenced. "BRIDGE DEBATE STIRS COUNCIL," the *Duluth Evening Herald* headline announced in capital letters.

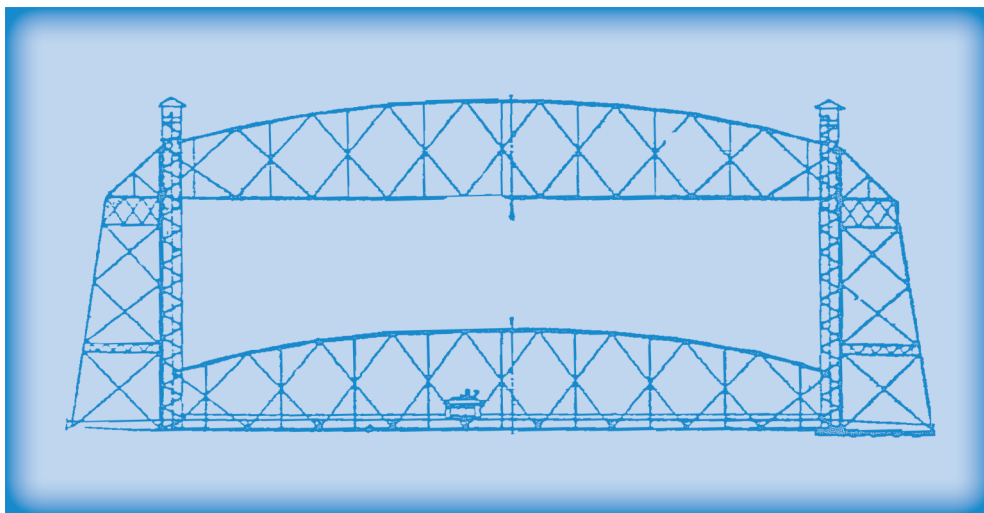


Evans came to the next meeting, on January 28, with a different approach. In order to put Turner's plan on the table, Harrington's would have to come off. So Evans took up the very argument Phillips had used against Turner's plan at the previous meeting, turned it around, and aimed it at Harrington's plans: the alterations made by HH&A in order to get more affordable bids, Evans claimed, invalidated the petition granted for the bridge's construction. After the city attorney advised commissioners on the issue, Evans introduced a lengthy proposal requiring still further changes to the Harrington plan. His strategy may have been to convolute the entire process and throw the project

back to the approval process, which would provide him and Turner an opportunity to submit a more complete set of plans—Turner's idea had also been criticized in the *Duluth News-Tribune* as "not definite enough to bid on." Whatever the reason, it didn't work. His fellow commissioners voted the idea down 3–2, with Public Safety Commissioner James E. Foubister his only ally on the council.

Prior to the city council's next meeting on February 18, the construction bids arrived and were opened by the engineering advisory committee set up to review them: Duluth & Iron Range Railway (D&IR) assistant engineer Oliver H. Dickerson, county highway engineer Sheldon B. Shepard, DM&N chief engineer H. L. Dresser, and Duluth City Engineer John Wilson. Because the work would take place in summer and a temporary bridge

DULUTH FINANCE  
COMMISSIONER PHILLIP J.  
PHILLIPS (IN A BLURRED  
1918 PHOTO), WHO,  
ALONG WITH MAYOR  
SNIVELY AND FINANCE  
COMMISSIONER W. S.  
MCCORMICK, CHAMPIONED  
A LIFT BRIDGE DESIGN BY  
JOHN HARRINGTON OF  
HARRINGTON, HOWARD  
& ASH. THEY WOULD  
STRUGGLE WITH PUBLIC  
UTILITIES COMMISSIONER  
CHRISTOPHER EVANS  
AND HIS ALLY PUBLIC  
SAFETY COMMISSIONER  
JAMES E. FOUBISTER, WHO  
TOGETHER FOUGHT FOR A  
PLAN DRAWN UP BY  
C. A. P. TURNER, THE  
MAN WHO DESIGNED  
THE ORIGINAL AERIAL  
TRANSFER BRIDGE.



C. A. P. TURNER'S  
CRUDE 1928 SKETCH OF  
HIS IDEA FOR CONVERTING  
THE AERIAL TRANSFER  
BRIDGE INTO A LIFT  
BRIDGE. TURNER FAILED  
TO PROVIDE DETAILS AS  
TO HOW THE CONCEPT  
WOULD WORK, AND HIS  
IDEA TO "JACK UP" THE  
OLD BRIDGE WITH NEW,  
TALLER FOUNDATIONS  
WOULD NEVER HAVE BEEN  
APPROVED BY THE U. S.  
CORPS OF ENGINEERS,  
WHO CONTROL THE CANAL  
PIERS ON WHICH THE  
BRIDGE'S FOUNDATIONS  
REST. STILL, TURNER'S  
IDEAS CREATED QUITE  
A STIR IN DULUTH CITY  
COUNCIL CHAMBERS.

was not included, the bids were much lower without compromising any of the Harrington plan. Five bids had been submitted this time around: \$520,000 from George Lounsberry and Sons (the only Duluth bidder and a Turner supporter), \$508,372 from Pepper & Fulton, \$475,571.69 from Wisconsin Bridge & Iron, and \$449,600.00, the lowest bid, from the Kansas City Bridge Company (no record of the other losing bid could be found). The engineering advisory committee met all morning, went through all bids in detail, and concluded that any problems with the low bid were minor and solvable. The committee unanimously recommended awarding the contract to the Kansas City Bridge Company (KCBC).

That afternoon, in anticipation of the bridge contract being approved in that day's city council meeting, an editorial in the *Duluth News-Tribune* said of the matter, "Everything seems lovely with this project, except, of course, the usual bushwhacking which Duluth does not seem able to avoid in its major project. Members of the city council who favor another engineer have set up the customary bedevilment, but that is of little consequence." The piece concluded that, "Minnesota Point and the

community are assured of a fine bridge that will be sightly, safe and practical and that will be built at a reasonable cost."

Only one obstacle remained: Engineer P. C. Bullard of the Corps of Engineers had problems with the final design, and since the bridge rested on government property Bullard's approval was necessary. The newspaper had said that it considered the problems "greatly exaggerated in publication"; it should have known, having run a headline the previous day announcing that "Bridge Plans Fail to Meet U.S. Approval." Major Bullard had three concerns, which were addressed at the city council meeting. He wanted two "comfort stations," built at either end of the bridge—bathrooms for those waiting for the bridge and for spectators watching it lift. He also thought the lifting system needed additional cables to provide more redundancy and therefore more safety. Both of these demands were considered small modifications and quickly agreed to by Harrington, Howard, and Ash.

The third issue was more serious. Bullard objected to the composition of the new roadway because, in his judgment, it was not fireproof and thus a potential danger to navigation. A concrete roadway was suggested. John Harrington responded for his firm by observing that few movable bridges used concrete roads in order to save both weight and cost. The road as designed would consist of creosote-treated planks thickly surfaced with asphalt. The planking would be laid between steel channels and on top of galvanized steel sheeting and would be more than sufficiently protected from either fire or deterioration. Bullard accepted this point and the roadway's plans remained unchanged.

Although Harrington assured commissioners that he would send a report explaining as much to the government within the week, Commissioner Evans jumped on the roadway concern and the "bedeviling issue of little consequence" again reared its head.



Citing the lack of a fireproof roadway as well as a lack of provisions in the Harrington plan to carry water and power lines over the bridge, he again called for the city to reconsider C. A. P. Turner's incomplete and likely unacceptable plans.

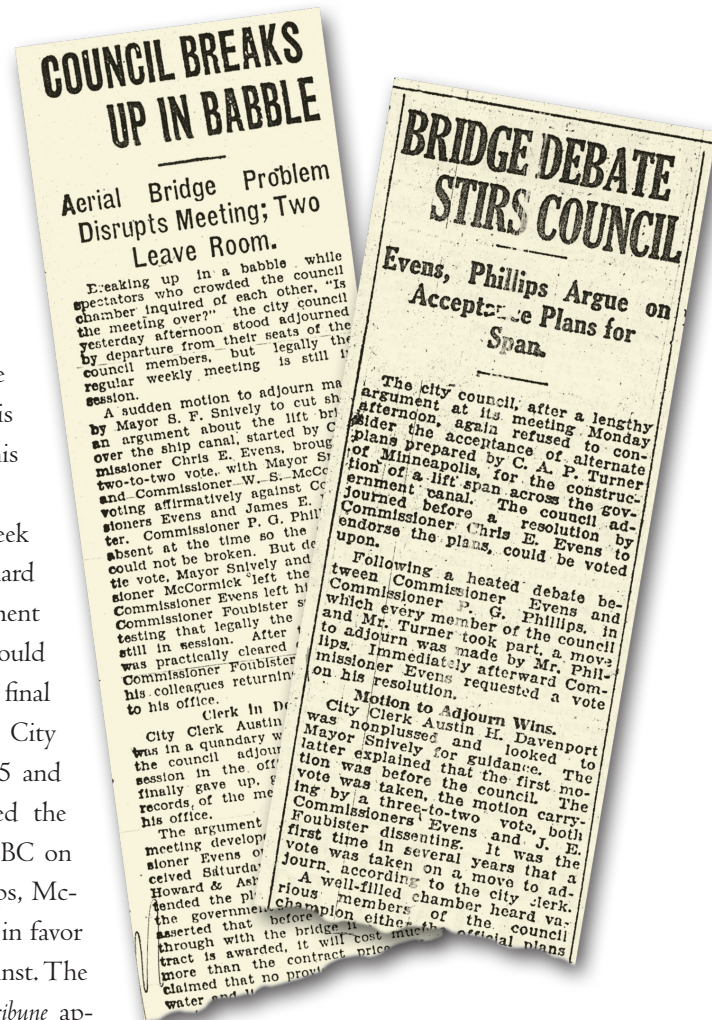
When the discussion turned into an argument, Mayor Snively moved for another sudden adjournment because Commissioner Phillips, the Harrington plan's biggest proponent and the best man to counter Evans, was absent. Only four members of the council were in attendance: Snively and Finance Commissioner W. S. McCormick, both for the Harrington plan, and Turner backers Evans and Foubister. Phillips' absence meant a 2-2 vote, with Snively and McCormick in favor of adjournment while Evans and Foubister wanted to further champion Turner's plan. With the vote hopelessly deadlocked and the meeting still in session, Snively and McCormick simply walked out.

If City Clerk Austin Davenport had been befuddled at the last meeting, it was nothing compared to the quandary he now faced. No one knew what to do, and spectators began asking each other, "Is it over?" Foubister stayed in his seat until the spectators had cleared the room, remaining even longer than Evans. Davenport merely waited out Foubister, gathering up his records and returning to his office after the commissioner finally left. The next day the headlines roared "COUNCIL BREAKS UP IN BABBLE: Aerial Bridge Problem Disrupts Meeting."

In the end, just as the *Duluth News-Tribune* had predicted, C. A. P. Turner's plans indeed had little consequence on the project, but they had made for some entertaining political displays. They had also given Turner his say in the matter of what would become of his beloved aerial transfer bridge. But what about Thomas McGilvray, who first came up with the idea to bridge the canal with an aerial ferry and saw it through its construction and first years of operation? If he had anything to say about the

new bridge, it never made the papers. Throughout the effort to push the bridge conversion through to its completion, McGilvray had been quietly working for St. Louis County overseeing the construction of drainage ditches. He publicly held his tongue until a year before his death (see page 145).

During the following week Harrington met with Bullard and convinced the government engineer that the road span would indeed be fireproof. With the final obstacle out of the way, the City Council met on February 25 and finally and officially awarded the construction contract to KCBC on an expected 3-2 vote, Phillips, McCormick, and Snively voting in favor and Evans and Foubister against. The next day the *Duluth News-Tribune* applauded the council as performing "a good act Monday when it voted to award the contract for the proposed new bridge over the canal to Park Point, without further talk, wrangling, or discussion." Later that week the paper announced that work on the bridge would begin before April 1. Word of the famous span's imminent demise spread fast: by March 10 a film crew from Fox Studios had arrived to take footage of the Duluth Aerial Transfer Bridge before it passed into history.



CLIPPINGS OF DULUTH NEWS-TRIBUNE STORIES FOLLOWING THE HEATED CITY COUNCIL DEBATES BROUGHT ABOUT BY C. A. P. TURNER'S DISRUPTIVE RETURN TO DULUTH TO PUSH HIS OWN PLAN TO CONVERT HIS AERIAL TRANSFER BRIDGE INTO A LIFT BRIDGE.



BEFORE THE TRANSFER  
BRIDGE STOPPED DAILY  
SERVICE WORKERS BEGAN  
EXCAVATING THE OLD  
FOUNDATIONS IN ORDER TO  
CREATE MORE SUBSTANTIAL  
FOUNDATIONS FOR THE  
NEW, HEAVIER BRIDGE.  
TROLLEY AND CAR SERVICE  
ENDED; PASSENGER  
SERVICE CONTINUED  
UNTIL JULY 1, 1929.

### THE FERRY BRIDGE'S FINAL CROSSING

Work on the bridge did indeed begin before April 1. On Monday, March 25, KCBC went to work under the direction of chief engineer O. A. Zimmerman and superintendent of construction Thomas Weathers. The company's first task was to excavate the old foundations and lay new ones strong enough to carry the extra weight of the new bridge. This involved tearing up the approaches, so when the work began, car and wagon service on the bridge ended. Foot traffic continued until July, and to accommodate pedestrians, a "gangplank" ramp was constructed to access the ferry car from the street.

As if to put an exclamation point on the idea that the bridge's practical life was over, it suffered another breakdown

on June 19. The dynamos in the electric motors burned out, possibly due to a lightning strike days earlier. Once again the Corps of Engineers came to the rescue, using a twenty-five-foot motorboat to ferry passengers across. Repairs were made, but the motors only needed to work eleven more days.

On the morning of July 1, 1929, the aerial transfer bridge crossed the canal for the last time. The *Duluth News-Tribune* heralded the event with a banner headline, "Noted Aerial Bridge Passes into History":

With its battered old warning bell tolling, the whistle of the Park Point street car bleating mournful accompaniment and ships tooting, the ferry car of the famous Duluth aerial

bridge made the last trip of its career of twenty-four years at 8:45 A.M. today, with city officials, pioneers and a crowd of interested citizens as passengers.

Tears stood in the eyes of James Murray, veteran bridge car operator, selected to pilot it on its last voyage, as he started it back to the mainland from Park Point. After bringing it to its final stop he removed the control lever and stepped slowly from the operator's cab to the main platform. "It was a good old car and I hate to see her go," he said to the other veteran operators who were all on hand to make the last trip.



## FERRY CAR OF AERIAL BRIDGE MAKES FINAL TRIP WITH NOTABLE PASSENGERS



THE JULY 2, 1929, *DULUTH NEWS-TRIBUNE* FEATURED THIS PHOTO SPREAD OF THE DULUTH AERIAL TRANSFER BRIDGE'S GONDOLA CAR'S LAST TRIP ACROSS THE CANAL. THE "NOTABLE PASSENGERS" MENTIONED IN THE HEADLINE DID NOT INCLUDE C. A. P. TURNER OR THOMAS MCGILVRAY, THE MEN CONSIDERED THE "FATHERS" OF THE BRIDGE.



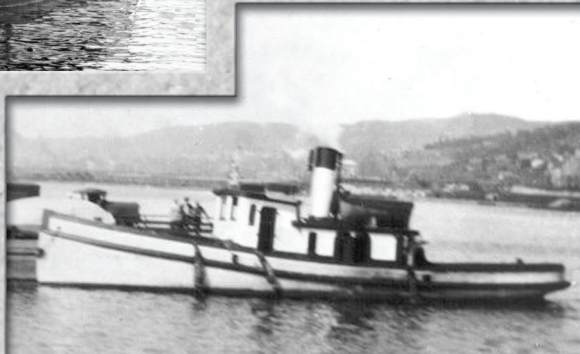
## Crossing During the Conversion

While the aerial bridge was undergoing conversion from a transfer bridge to a lift bridge, people still needed to get across the canal. Officials first considered a temporary bridge but quickly dismissed the idea as too costly. In April 1929, the Council ordered repairs to the dock at the west foot of Buchanan Street so that ferry service could be run from there to the government dock at Ninth Street on the bay side of Park Point. Duluth's Marine Iron and Shipbuilding Company won the contract to provide ferry service during daylight hours with their tugboat *Fashion* and a scow to haul vehicles. The city-owned steamer *Ellen D.*, sometimes called "The City's Navy," would carry passengers from the Morse Street dock. Emergency vehicles, vehicles carrying food and supplies for delivery, and vehicles owned by Park Point residents were granted priority use of the *Fashion*; all other vehicles were prohibited from using the ferry service for the duration of the bridge conversion and bridge superintendent Leonard Green was empowered to issue permits to drivers according to these priorities.

The *Ellen D.* was in poor condition, so during the summer special appropriations were made for repairs. Finally, in November, the U.S. steamboat inspector declared her unseaworthy and Marine Iron received additional money to spruce up the *Fashion* to carry passengers. Just before Christmas 1929, the council decided that the *Ellen D.*, now "in a badly leaking condition and in need of immediate disposal to prevent sinking," should be sold. Marine Iron offered \$250 and the City said good riddance. By the time the new lift bridge was in operation, the temporary ferry service had proved more costly and troublesome than anticipated.



LEFT:  
THE *ELLEN D.*



RIGHT:  
THE *FASHION*

Murray had pulled the lever to start the car's final journey after Commissioner Chris Evans, who had been instrumental in bringing about the bridge's conversion, gave the brief command, "Let's go." The car passed from the North Pier to the South, paused while the steamer *Charles L. Hutchinson* navigated the canal as the last craft to pass under the ferry bridge, and then returned to the North Pier. Immediately upon the last passenger's departure, workers from KCBC climbed aboard and started dismantling the ferry car, work expected to take several weeks. No account could be located as to what happened to the car or its amenities. One of the benches was rumored to have been taken home by a Park Point resident; today one is on display at the Lake Superior Maritime Visitor Center and another at the St. Louis County Historical Society, which also keeps a broken operator's handle donated in 2005 by Jack Hicken, son of ferry bridge operator John Hicken.

Murray had been joined on the final trip by fellow operators William Maynard, Urban Nehring, Frank Lampert, and Leonard Green, the first and only superintendent of the aerial transfer bridge. Other dignitaries aboard included Duluth pioneers Richard Thompson, J. D. Campbell, and Henry Van Brunt, who were part of the first test trip in February 1905; city officials Mayor Snively, commissioners Evans and Phillips, and police chief E. H. Barber; Mrs. E. H. Borth, who was the first woman to cross in the ferry bridge back in 1905; and Ann Murray, who reportedly rode the ferry bridge more times than any other person outside of an operator. Many others not named by the newspaper also took the final trip. No reports indicate that either of the bridge's "fathers," C. A. P. Turner and Thomas McGilvray, took part in the aerial transfer bridge's final crossing of the canal.