

# Introduction

**T**he village of Eagle River in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan is so historically noteworthy that much of the town has been placed on the National Register of Historic Places. When its small, 95-year-old bridge, a deck truss, was no longer able to accommodate increasing traffic loads, something had to be done, and demolition was not an option. Federal legislation mandated that Eagle River's historic status as a copper-mining town and a major port in the nineteenth century be protected. Working with both the state highway department and the federal highway administration, the small community of Eagle River was able to secure funds to build a new bridge parallel to its predecessor, allowing its historically protected bridge to continue to serve as a walkway over the gorge and waterfall it had traversed for almost a century.

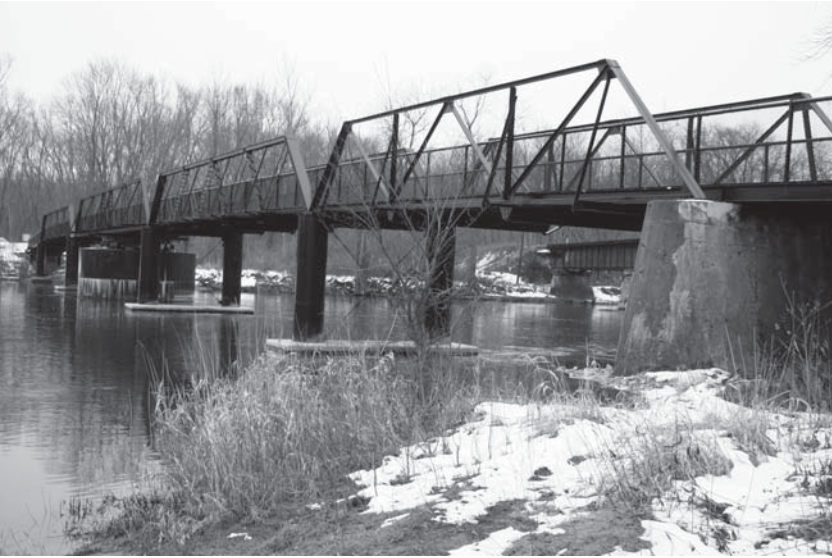
The Sterling Road Bridge in rural Hillsdale County, Michigan, was also obsolete. Because of its inherent design limitations, its rehabilitation as a highway bridge was not an option. Rerouting traffic around the bridge was also out of the question because of housing developments and protected wetlands. Complicating the matter further were budget limitations. There was enough money to tear it down but not enough to put it back up again



The Eagle River Bridge in Michigan's Upper Peninsula used to allow passage across the gorge carved out by the river before it was closed to car traffic. Copper mining helped build this early port community on Lake Superior.

at some other location. So, rather than send it to the scrap yard, it was disassembled, with instructions inscribed on each piece to make re-erection easy at a later time. It was then stored in a county road commission field for almost a year. In 2000, TEA-21 Enhancement Funding was secured to complete the project, and the bridge was brought back to life. It is now a pedestrian crossway on the Michigan–Ohio border near the town of Morenci, Michigan, 100 miles from its original stand.

It is formally listed on the National Register of Historic Places as the 57th Street Bridge over the Kalamazoo River, but most folks call it the Bingo Bridge, because the town folk of Allegan, Michigan, played bingo to help raise money for its restoration. Newspaper writers had a field day, and TV human-interest story producers rolled plenty of tape for the local evening news. The bingo crowd raised more than \$10,000 to save their old bridge. The amount was small compared with the total budget needed for the project, but the public relations impact of this clever fund-raising scheme was immeasurable.



Aaron T. Brodeur

Local citizens dedicated time, money, and their voices to the cause of saving the 57th Street Bridge in Allegan County. The county road commission took their message seriously, and the bridge was preserved for pedestrian and bike use.



Paul McMiller

This rare Thacher truss, made of wrought iron instead of steel, survived because of community intervention. Chesaning citizens fought hard to get the bridge moved to their downtown. Their tenacity paid off, adding a gem of a bridge to the historic community.



Aaron T. Brodeur

Grand Rapids is bisected by the Grand River. Numerous bridges link the east and west sides of town. The 6th Street bridge links old industrial areas undergoing revitalization. City staff keep the bridge working, recently sprucing it up using federal funds.

Less than a dozen Thacher through trusses survive in the United States, and one of them can be found in the small community of Chesaning, Michigan. Funding to preserve this century-old wrought-iron rarity came from federal grants, the city budget, corporate sponsors, individual donors, and proceeds from car washes and bake sales. The total project took three years to complete, and now the Parshallburg Bridge—or the Ditch Road Bridge, as some call it—stands as a pedestrian walkway into a city park.

Surrounded by dense urban development, the 6th Street Bridge, a 538-foot, four-span through truss over the Grand River in downtown Grand Rapids, Michigan, is the largest surviving highway through truss in Michigan. To replace this bridge with a modern span would cost a fortune. By faithfully maintaining the bridge over a long period of time, a crisis has been avoided. Today, the 6th Street Bridge keeps up with the rigors of big-city traffic as well as any. Its value has not only endured but increased.

Saving an old bridge has been done before—many times, in fact. In big and small towns, by iron craftsmen and little old ladies, with money from

federal grants and bake sales, creative ways have been found to save old iron and steel bridges. They have been moved to city parks, converted into pedestrian walkways, recommissioned for limited one-way traffic, dedicated as prime fishing stands, and stored in county sheds to be revived years later. It's a tough job, but anybody can do it.