



Covello & Covello/Special to the Sentinel

The now-defunct covered bridge watches over Huck Finn day on Branciforte Creek in 1952.

# **Covered bridge crosses the bar**

## **City crew pulls down rotting, 102-year-old structure**

By JOHN ROBINSON  
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**DELAWEAGA** — The last rotted planks of the DeLaveaga covered bridge collapsed onto the creek bank with a tug from a crane Thursday afternoon, bringing an end to the 102-year-old crossing.

The emergency demolition was ordered by the city last month after rain swollen Branciforte Creek began to undermine the bridge supports, leading to fears it would collapse and hurt someone or back up the stream and cause flooding.

"It had been neglected for a long, long time," said Sara Boutelle, a member of the city's Historic Preservation Commission. "It was a lack of money and interest, and the bridge was in very bad shape."

The demolition of the decrepit little bridge, which had been fenced off for years, passed without fanfare, despite the fact less than a dozen covered bridges are left in the state.

"We roared a little bit a few years ago, but even then we couldn't really

get our hearts into (saving) it. It was too far gone," Boutelle said. "I'm usually the one who wants to save everything, and usually get out-voted, but I didn't think this kind of thing would really work."

The history of the once stately bridge is generally unremarkable, although it did block traffic for several days when it got stuck on a curve while being moved in 1939.

The bridge was built in 1891 and for 48 years spanned Branciforte Creek at Glen Canyon Road. According to local architect Mark Primack, who worked on saving the bridge about 11 years ago, it was built from a kit, common at the time, that supplied a set of plans and iron connectors for the roof.

"In the old days you bought a patented plan and then paid for cast-iron connection pieces," Primack said. "Then you cleared the trees down to the river to get your lumber."

Covered bridges were common at the turn of the century, and the county still has the Felton and Paradise Park covered bridges.

According to a 1939 Sentinel article,

however, the bridge was slated for destruction until former county supervisor Robert Burton, who at that time was a high school science teacher, led a drive to save the crossing. He told the city he'd take responsibility for moving it to DeLaveaga Park, if they would use the \$250 set aside for demolition to pay for the relocation.

A team of men tore out the 82-foot bridge, put it on rollers and began to move it to the park.

Everything went fine until they reached a sharp turn in Branciforte Drive and the bridge got stuck. It blocked traffic for several days, until a tractor helped pull it free.

The bridge couldn't be put on the state historical register because it had once been moved. Without historical status, no state or federal money was available to fix it.

City workers are planning to save the iron connectors, which according to Primack, are the only historically valuable pieces in the bridge. It cost the city \$13,000 to remove the bridge and debris.