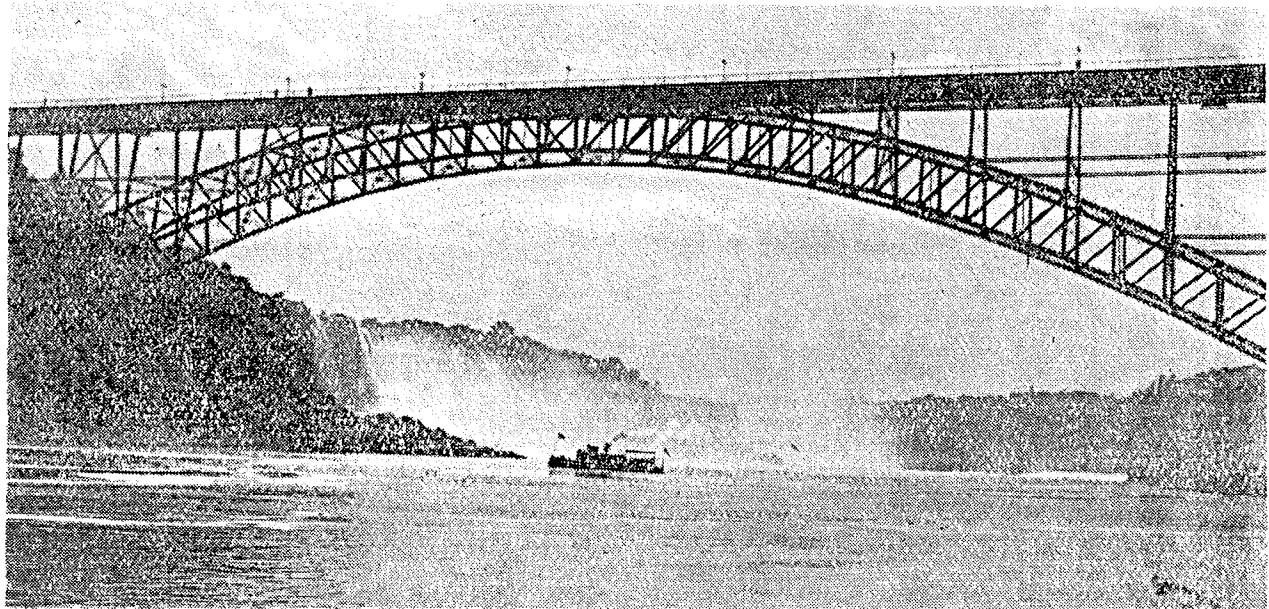


FALL OF THE HONEYMOON BRIDGE

A decision to build the Upper Steel Arch Bridge, also known as the Honeymoon Bridge and the Falls View Bridge, was made in January, 1897, by the Niagara Falls and Clifton Suspension Bridge Company. Although the original intention of the Company had been to strengthen and expand the existing Suspension Bridge, Leffert L. Buck, the engineer approached by the Bridge Company to redesign the bridge, suggested that the construction of a new bridge would be necessary.

The contract to build the steel structure of the bridge was awarded to the Pencoyd Bridge Company of Philadelphia in May, 1897, but work on the abutments had begun beforehand, to avoid further delays. The abutments were constructed 14 feet closer to the American Falls than the foundations of the Suspension Bridge were, and were only a few feet above the water level of the River. It is this proximity to the water level which would ultimately prove to be the downfall of the bridge.

The Upper Steel Arch Bridge was completed and opened to traffic on June 23, 1897, and with a span of 840 feet, it became the longest such structure in the world. The completed bridge was one floor, and had double tracks for electric trolleys, as well as room for carriages and pedestrians. The Upper Steel Arch Bridge was a beautiful and graceful structure which offered a spectacular view of the Falls.



Because of the close proximity of the abutments of the bridge to the surface of the river, they had to be constantly protected from the ice bridges which formed in the Lower Niagara River every winter. In early January, 1899, a massive ice bridge threatened to push the bridge off of its foundations. For three weeks, workers removed the ice which had piled around the abutments and into the steel girders of the bridge, and through their continued efforts, damages to the bridge were minimized.

On April 18, 1899, the International Traction Company purchased the bridge and set about assessing the damage which had been caused by the ice bridge. The bent girders of the bridge were repaired, and a 24 foot high smooth stone wall, beginning 4 feet below the surface of the river, was constructed around the abutments to protect the bridge from future ice jams. The

Company's precautions were temporarily successful, and the bridge remained open for nearly forty years.

The Upper Steel Arch Bridge had a tendency to sway under heavy loads or high winds, and as a result, it was a widely held opinion that the bridge was unstable. One well-documented instance of this instability occurred on June 8, 1925, when a crowd of people gathered on the bridge to view the fireworks at the inauguration ceremony of the illumination of the Falls, "The Festival of Lights". The spectators who filled the bridge soon realized that the bridge was swaying. Terrified, they got off of the bridge as quickly as possible. Had the bridge collapsed while filled with people, the tragedy would have been unimaginable, and therefore, although the structure of the bridge had not been damaged, it was reinforced with lateral bracing to avoid future scares.

The bridge remained open for an additional 13 years, until January, 1938, when a combination of factors resulted in the destruction of the Upper Steel Arch Bridge. Thin ice on Lake Erie, a 5-day January thaw, and 3 days of high winds, caused water and ice levels in the Lower Niagara River to rise to record heights. On January 25, 1938, nearly 100 feet of ice twisted the steel frame of the bridge, and as the structure creaked and groaned, spectators knew that it would be only a matter of time before the bridge collapsed. Reporters, locals and tourists all flocked to the Falls, hoping to witness the fall of the bridge. It was in newspaper articles of the time that reporters popularized a new name for the bridge -- the "Honeymoon Bridge."

At about 4:10 p.m. on January 27, a movement of ice on the American side pushed the bridge off of its abutment. With a huge roar, it collapsed into the gorge, forming a twisted steel "W" on the ice below. The wreckage of the bridge was cut into six sections and remained a popular tourist attraction for the duration of the winter, until the ice bridge began to break-up. On April 12, 1938, the pieces of the once-grand bridge began to sink, one by one, and the last one disappeared from view at 4:00 p.m. To provide an international crossing at the Falls, the Rainbow Bridge was built in 1941, just north of the location of the ill-fated Honeymoon Bridge.

