

## THE OLD RUSTY BRIDGE

How important is an old 1907 rusty iron bridge in an out of the way place in Burnet county?

To some it's a big part of their childhood memories. Memories of a lifestyle that produced life-long memories. Memories and recollections of family; friends; gatherings on or near the bridge. A simple time when people were eager to spend time together. A simple life of what is really important. As in the simple, peaceful life Jesus lived. A life that gives life.

Thousands of individuals have used, crossed over, fished off of, taken "ownership" and connected their lives to that old rusty Joppa bridge that crosses over the North San Gabriel River. It sits a few miles down river from where the first settlers (the Webster party) attempted to settle on a league and a labor of land in 1839, sixty-eight years prior to the bridge being built in 1907. The Webster party was prohibited from settling on their land at the time, due to 300 Comanches who were camped there.

Will the new concrete bridge, beside it, produce memories and be just as important to Burnet County residents? Or just be something to drive on to cross the river for convenience. It's needed in a practical way but the old iron bridge is needed in another way. Together, side by side, both connect the past and the present. I wish we knew all the memories and could record them. Like the near ninety-year-old county resident who as a boy, in the 1930's fished along with his Dad near the bridge. Or an individual as a young girl saw the flood waters of 1957 cover the floor of the bridge. The young senior high school girls who took photos on the bridge in their prom dresses. A young boy who put a note in a bottle, threw it off the bridge and it was found near Georgetown. Those are past, but how important is that old rusty iron bridge to a young man from Kansas who in 2022 proposed to a young Burnet County woman on that bridge? Then both families stood together and had their photo taken on that old rusty bridge. One family from Kansas and the other from Burnet County. The couple will live in Kansas and raise their family there. When telling their life story to their children it will include that "old rusty bridge" and be important to the future. When they revisit the old bridge years from now (and they will), what will they find? A pile of rusty iron or a bridge full of stories, important to all and still producing stories and fond memories of lives lived.

How important is the "old bridge"? Important enough for community volunteers to decorate it with lights for Christmas. Enough to have "Coffee on the Bridge" once a month with others from the community. Important enough for young history teachers, one from San Saba the other from Kerrville to visit both iron bridges and go back to teach what they learned. Important enough for non-residents to stop, visit and read the historic marker after discovering this out of the way bridge. Enough for a family to bring their children to it to throw rocks in the

water, look at the turtles, fish and be in a quiet, tree covered place for a little while. Enough for twenty-nine individuals to gather on the bridge recently to sing Christmas carols. Enough for a mother and her young children who sat out on the bridge under the Christmas lights to share a carton of Blue Bell ice cream. Enough for a family who took hot chocolate to enjoy under the Christmas lights on a cold, crisp, quiet night in December. Enough for a young woman in 2011 who chose to be baptized in the water below the bridge while around twenty people watched from the bridge above. Then there are those who were married on the bridge. All true stories but only a few of the hundreds that could be told. Each one important

The “old rusty iron bridge” speaks of life lived, the new concrete bridge speaks of convenience. Both needed. One important enough to become a state historic site in 2017, but then had to be closed by the county due to needed repairs.

Let’s open it, create a small out of the way Iron Bridge Park and rebound the memories and stories. Let’s take ownership and pass it on. Time along with the stories are slipping by.

If you have memories/photos of the “old bridge” you’d like to share, send them to:  
[ourjoppacommunity@outlook.com](mailto:ourjoppacommunity@outlook.com)

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Purpose for writing this:

Written to express the importance of the old bridge.

To promote life and what’s important.

To preserve history.

To create “ownership” by the people/residents.