

Laurel Street Bridge Railings

How relics of Brainerd's past were discovered on a local farm

WRITTEN BY JODIE TWEED | PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF CARL FAUST AND CROW WING COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY



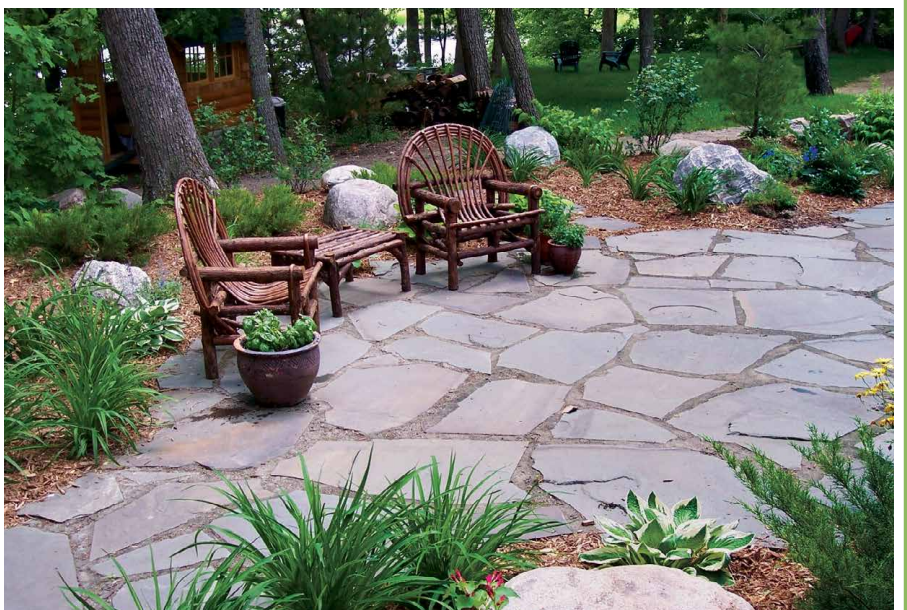
Rural Brainerd farmer Mike McMillion stands alongside his hog pen built with railings from the former Laurel Street Bridge.

CALL IT FATE. Or perhaps it was simply the power of social media. In any case, a Facebook post on the popular Share Brainerd History Facebook page led to an interesting discovery for local historians. Andy Walsh, the group's administrator, had posted three years ago a 1978 photograph of the former Laurel Street Bridge, which was torn down that year to make way for the current bridge. Those who remember the rickety old wooden bridge, built in 1898, may recall the terror involved in driving across it. The wooden boards would shake and rattle as you crossed.

Turns out, a Brainerd area farmer had recognized the distinctive cast-iron lattice railings from the photograph. Mike McMillion had purchased 66 sections of the immense railings, which weigh in at around 500 pounds each and ranged from thirteen to sixteen feet in length, from a nearby farm a few years earlier. He saw them advertised on Craigslist and thought they'd make great livestock fencing. The previous owner had salvaged them when the bridge was torn down and hadn't used them, instead they had been kept in a pile on his property.

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Brainerd historians like Carl Faust went hog wild — pun intended — over the remarkable discovery. He met with McMillion and toured his farm south of Brainerd. In the basement at Brainerd City Hall, Faust had earlier seen the four cast-iron plaques from the old bridge. Faust and others from the Crow Wing County Historical Society thought it would be a wonderful addition to the community to restore some of these bridge railings and plaques to display them. McMillion agreed to donate four of the extra sections to the city. In exchange, the city council voted to donate one of its old bridge plaques found in the basement to McMillion as a trade. This way they had four sections of the same size for displays.

McMillion delivered the massive railing sections to the city street department. An anonymous benefactor paid \$3,000 to have the railings and bridge plaques, which weigh about 110 pounds each, sandblasted and repainted by Gull Lake Sandblasting. Sue Knudson offered to hand paint the raised lettering on the signs.

Last summer city staff installed two of the railing sections next to the Laurel Street Bridge, near the Brainerd Fire Hall, along with plaques that list city council members and the company that built the bridge back in 1898. By this fall two more railings should be installed, along with an original plaque with the names of county commissioners from 1898, outside the Crow Wing County Historical Society Museum on Laurel Street. One plaque was donated to McMillion for his own display on his railings.

It seemed fitting that a part of the bridge was back on Laurel Street, says Faust. [📍](#)



A photograph of the dedication of the second Laurel Street Bridge in 1898. This bridge replaced a wooden bridge built in 1882. Pictured here, according to the late Crow Wing County historian Carl Zapffe, “are some of Brainerd’s most important men of the 19th Century. For example, at far left is the prime mover of the project, Joel Smith; fourth over is the old pioneer R. K. Whiteley; the prosperous man front and center is A.B. Farrar of the Northern Pacific Shops; next toward the right is none less than the “Father of Brainerd” Lyman P. White; and at far right we see the prominent Samuel F. Adair and Anton Mahlum.”

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