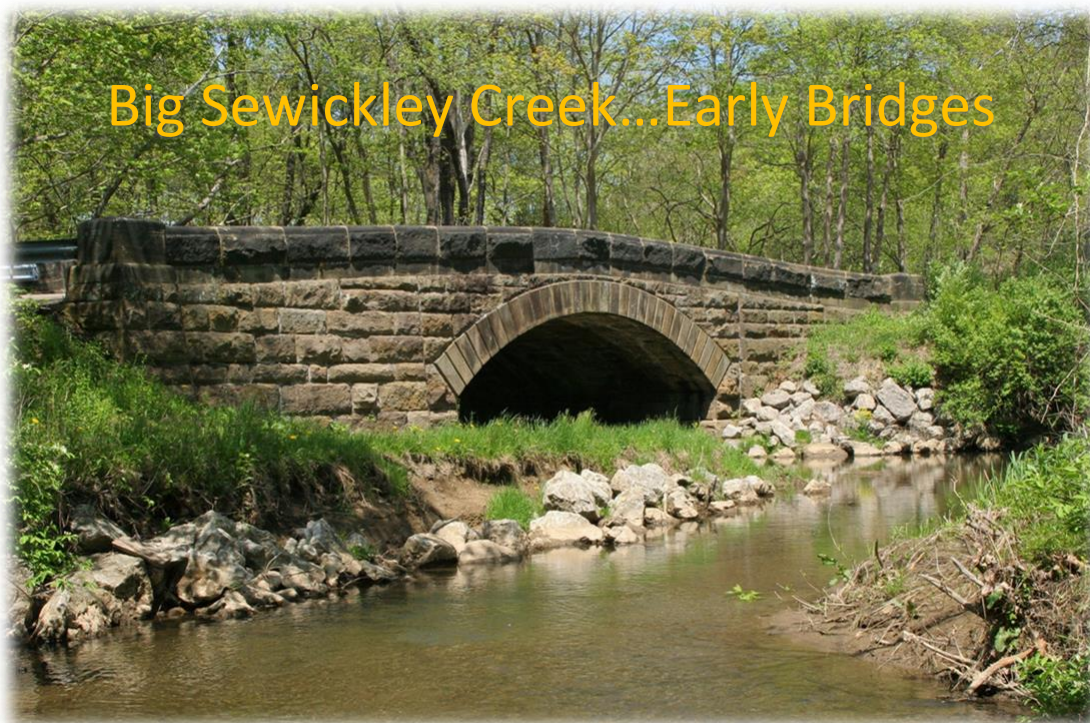


## *Back in the Country... Bell Acres Stories*

By Debby Rabold



The Brown Road Bridge, built in 1891, crosses the Big Sewickley Creek East Branch.  
(Bell Acres Photo)

Tucked into rows of vintage metal file drawers lining the walls of Allegheny County's Department of Public Works records room, are maps and photographs which document more than a century of county built roads, bridges and tunnels. Of special interest to Bell Acres are images of late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century bridges that were built to carry travelers over the Big and Little Sewickley creeks. We are fortunate to be able to look back on what once was.

A special thank you to David Wright, Allegheny County Department of Public Works.

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Pennsylvania's earliest roads were Native American paths that were part of a network covering much of Eastern North America. It was along these narrow well-worn pathways that early settlers made their way into the Western Pennsylvania wilderness.

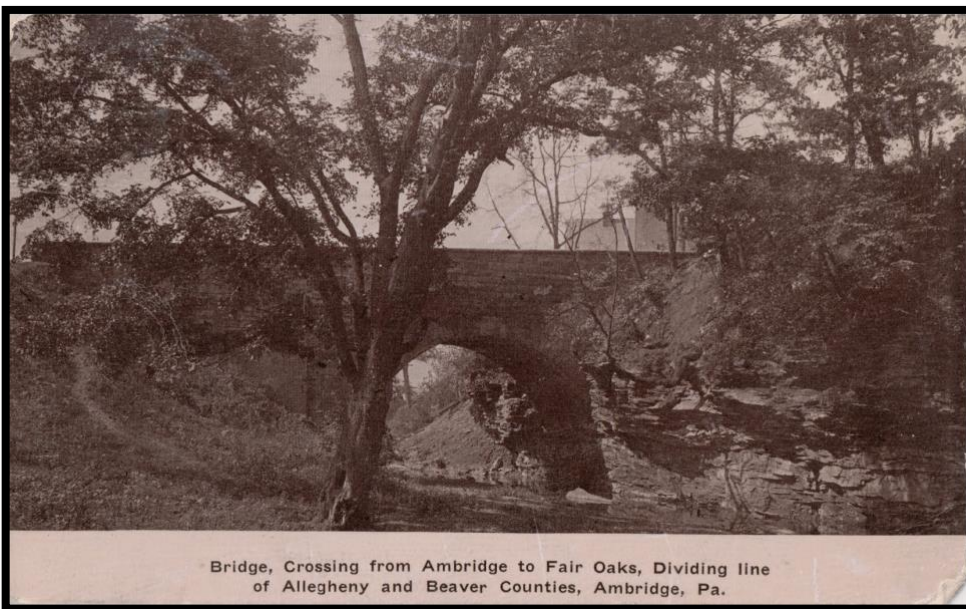
One nameless path connected the Allegheny and Ohio rivers by following the waters of Pine and Big Sewickley creeks across what is now northern Allegheny County. It met the Great Path or Trail that ran alongside the Ohio River and from where the traveler could reach Detroit in one direction or Delaware in the other. Nearby was the 18<sup>th</sup> century settlement of Logstown where native peoples and fur traders mixed with British, French and American envoys.

During the early 1800s, the old riverside path became known as the Pittsburgh-Beaver Road. As settlers pushed westward into Ohio and beyond, the Beaver Road was the main land route for travelers from Pittsburgh, which was aptly labeled Gateway to the West. As wagon traffic increased, bridges were needed to safely cross the many creeks that flowed from the surrounding hillsides. Because Big Sewickley Creek serves as the boundary between Beaver and Allegheny counties, its bridges were jointly built by both counties.

The earliest documented bridge building occurred in 1814 when Beaver and Allegheny counties erected a wooden bridge across Big Sewickley Creek. The next mention of a joint project dates from 1827 when the Big Sewickley Creek Bridge #1 was built to carry the Beaver Road across the creek between what is now Ambridge, Beaver County and Leetsdale, Allegheny County. The original stone arch bridge remained intact until 1906 when the Beaver County side was rebuilt and the entire structure was widened in 1919. Despite alterations, a portion of the original abutment remains.



The 1827 Big Sewickley Creek Bridge #1 in an 1880s-colorized photo.  
(From John M. Tate, Jr. **The Harmony Society at Economy, Penna.**)



This is a downstream view of the Big Sewickley Creek Bridge #1 on an undated postcard.  
(Courtesy of the Laughlin Memorial Library)

Bridge, Crossing from Ambridge to Fair Oaks, Dividing line  
of Allegheny and Beaver Counties, Ambridge, Pa.





In 1841, Allegheny County built stone arch bridges to carry the Beaver Road across Little Sewickley Creek and Kilbuck Run. This 1907 photo shows the Kilbuck Run bridge that once stood in Glenfield. Notice the young boy dangling his legs over the side.



This 1905 photo shows the Little Sewickley Creek Bridge #1 as it appeared before being widened in 1918. The Edgeworth bridge has carried traffic for 179 years.

(Photos courtesy of the Allegheny County Department of Public Works)





An iron truss style bridge with a seventeen-foot-wide wood road bed was built over Big Sewickley Creek next to Mitchell's Mill at the foot of Hopkins Church Road in 1883. While truss style bridges were originally constructed with wood, the use of iron became more prevalent during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The concrete replacement bridge that was built in 1940 is itself being replaced in 2020. (#1 on locator map)

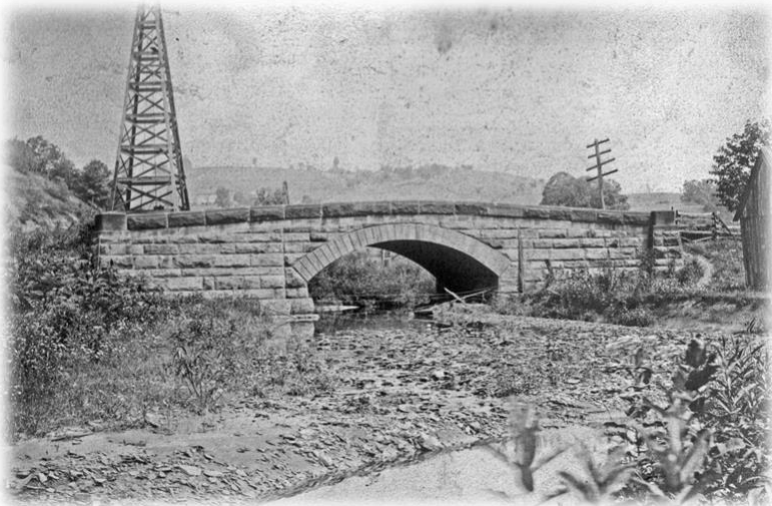


Downstream view of Big Sewickley Creek (1907).



Charles Davis served as the Allegheny County engineer from 1881 until his death in 1907. During that time, the Edgeworth resident supervised public works projects, which included the construction of Allegheny County's courthouse.

His first stone arch bridge was the Little Sewickley Creek Bridge (1889) that connects Woodland and Little Sewickley Creek roads in Edgeworth (above). At the time, the plan to build eight bridges totaling nearly \$24,000 was opposed by one of the county commissioners. He argued that using fancy dressed stone added to the cost and was unnecessary, that rough stone would suffice and the money saved could be used to build additional bridges. Despite his protest, the dressed stone bridges were approved. The Sewickley bridge cost \$6,500.



Davis' second stone arch bridge was the Big Sewickley Creek East Branch Bridge (1891) that stands in the Duff City section of Franklin Park where it carries Brown Road (left). The old Duff's Mill site stood on the opposite side of the bridge from this view. Both bridges were built with locally quarried sandstone. (#2 on locator map)

(Allegheny County photos)





The Brown Road bridge as it appeared in 2010, 119 years after construction. This county built road originally connected Big Sewickley Creek Road to the top of Hopkins Church Road before much of it was vacated. Today, Brown Road is a dead end.

(Glenn Lewis Photo)



In 1890, an iron truss bridge was built across Big Sewickley Creek by Allegheny and Beaver counties at the Bradford Farm (above). What made this bridge different from most others was it being built at an angle instead of straight across the creek. This was due to both ends of the road not being aligned. Bridges built to overcome this problem are called skew bridges.

This county photo was taken in 1907 looking downstream with Economy, Beaver County on the right and Sewickley Township (Bell Acres), Allegheny County on the left. The bridge was razed and a new bridge built when Big Sewickley Creek Road was realigned between Zassick Drive and Turkeyfoot Road.



In 1900, Big Sewickley Creek bridges #5 and #6 were built in Marshall Township. Bridge #5 (right) originally carried the old Pittsburgh-Rochester Road that was laid out in 1833 to connect McClean's Mill near Freedom, Beaver County with Perrysville on the old Franklin Road (Perry Highway) in Allegheny County. After this section of the old road was vacated, the bridge became part of a residential driveway. (#3 on locator map)

(Allegheny County Photo)



The photographer's horse and buggy appear in other images.



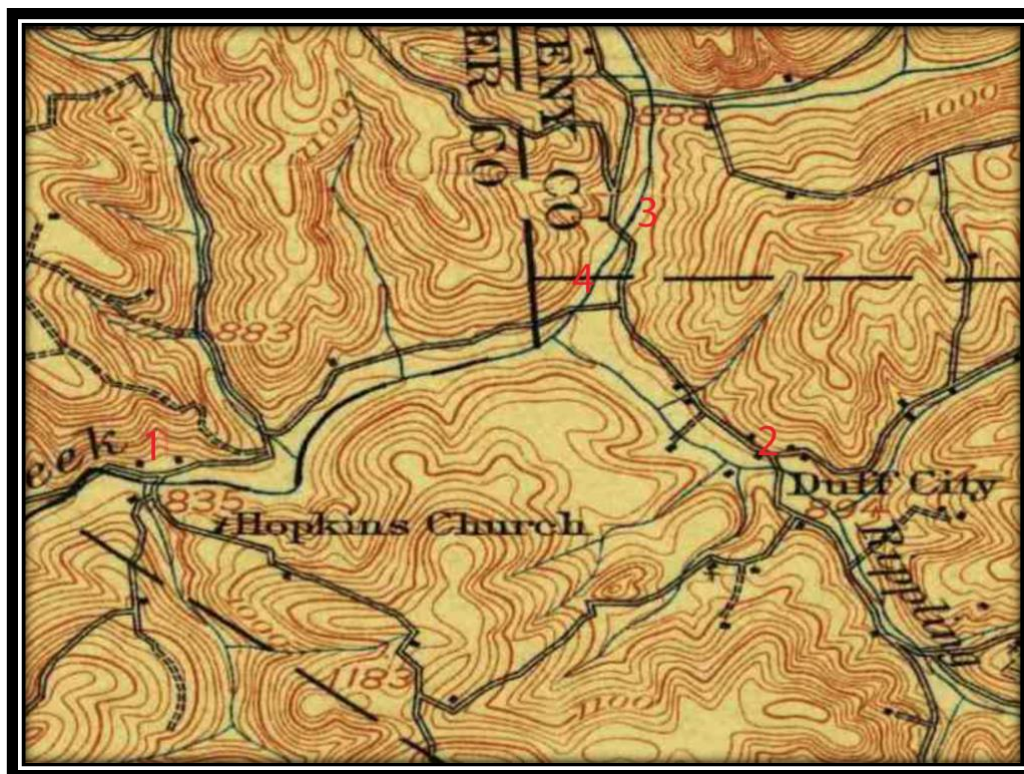
Bridge #6 was built to carry Big Sewickley Creek Road over the creek to where it connected with the old Pittsburgh-Rochester Road. Today, the steel plate girder bridge is part of a residential driveway at the intersection of Warrendale-Bayne and Big Sewickley Creek roads. (#4 on locator map)

(Photo by Glenn Lewis)



Big Sewickley Creek looking upstream from Hidden Valley Lane.  
(Bell Acres Photo)





Roads are never permanent. Over time, they may be altered, realigned or vacated. This 1908 topographical map shows early roads along Big Sewickley Creek in Economy, Franklin Park and Marshall with bridge locations marked.

#1 shows the bridge site at the foot of Hopkins Church Road.

#2 marks Franklin Park's Brown Road Bridge on the Big Sewickley Creek East Branch.

#3 shows where the Pittsburgh-Rochester Road Bridge crossed Big Sewickley Creek in Marshall Township.

#4 marks the bridge that once carried old Big Sewickley Creek Road to the Pittsburgh-Rochester Road.

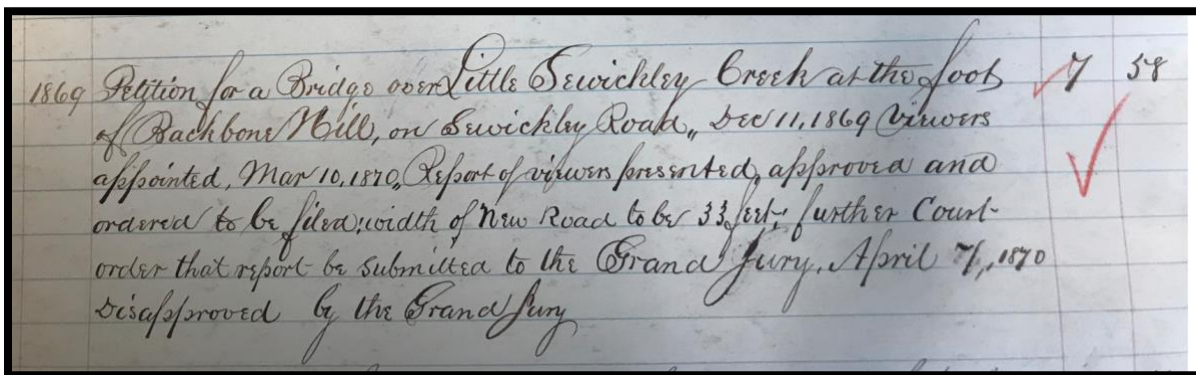


Two early twentieth century concrete arch bridges in Marshall Township remain in use. The Spang Road Bridge (left) was built in 1910 followed by the Markman Park Road Bridge (right) in 1919. Circa 1910, bridges were no longer built with stone. Instead, they were built with concrete in the style of the old stone bridges.





When asking the county to build a bridge or road, residents needed to file a petition with the court that then appointed viewers who determined if the proposed bridge or road was necessary. Once the report was received, the court decided whether or not to approve the project. It should be noted that in addition to the county, the state as well as local municipalities undertook road and bridge construction.



This ledger entry shows that an 1869 request for a bridge across Little Sewickley Creek at Backbone Road was disapproved. A second petition was presented ten years later before an iron truss bridge was built in 1883 and another in 1920 that was rebuilt in 1989.



The Pink House Bridge was built across Little Sewickley Creek in 1920, rebuilt in 1982 and is being replaced in 2020.

Little Sewickley Creek Bridge #3 on Fern Hollow Road as it appeared in 1926 (right). The current concrete bridge (below) was built in 1947. The road was originally named Oliver Road.



(Allegheny County Photo)

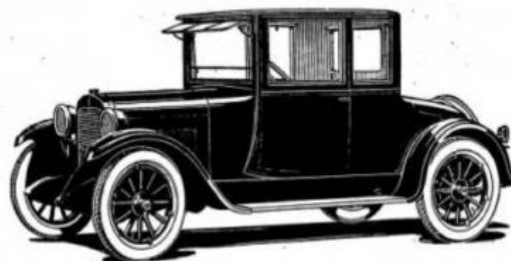




# ALLEGHENY COUNTY

## “Public Improvements Promote Progress”

As automobiles became more affordable and popular in the early 20th century, public officials had to deal with increasing demands for better roads. Motorists would no longer tolerate poorly maintained roads deep in mud and ruts. In 1924, Allegheny County commissioners committed to a massive public works program designed to create modern infrastructure. Voters approved bond issues to finance the building of roads, bridges and tunnels, including a county airport and office building, as well as North and South parks, the “poor man’s country clubs”. Allegheny County was laying the groundwork for future development.



Allegheny County undertook what at the time was the largest municipal public works program in the nation, which included 114 bridge engineers. At one time, there was also a full-time staff of photographers who fanned out across the countryside documenting the many public works projects. Unknown numbers of early images have not survived over the past century, making those that have all the more valuable for the stories they tell.

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To read more about local roads, visit:

<http://bellacresborough.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Beaver-Road.pdf>

<http://bellacresborough.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Ohio-River-Boulevard.pdf>

<http://bellacresborough.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Road-Names.png>

<http://bellacresborough.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/09.-Bell-Acres-History-The-Red-Belt.pdf>