

# Bethinking of Old Orleans

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## STEEL ARCH BRIDGE, WATERPORT



When the Waterport, Main Street bridge was dedicated on July 7, 1900 it was billed as "the longest and finest steel arch bridge in the State". A gala program and celebration occurred in which there were band concerts, speeches, bicycle and foot races across the bridge with prizes, a ball game — Waterport vs. Kent and a magnificent display of fireworks in the evening from the center of the new bridge. But perhaps the most memorable part of the dedication ceremony was a test of the bridge's strength. To prove its durability, two traction action steam engines (the kind used for threshing machines) were driven onto the bridge from opposite ends and met in the middle to prove to the public its safety for vehicular traffic.

Our photo of the bridge taken in 1900 shows the deep gorge created by Oak Orchard River. The house to the far right is still there at the end of the present bridge. In the bottom of the gorge we note a dam across Oak Orchard River. At the time, water power was used to generate electricity sup-

plied by the Albion Power Company. This generator plant and its buildings are to the far left in the lower portion of the photo.

This steel arch bridge remained here until 1920 when it was removed, having been replaced by the present concrete bridge on high piers. It was during the late teens that A.L. Swett from Medina created a new power plant and dam downstream which flooded land back for close to three miles thus creating Lake Alice.

The first bridges to cross Oak Orchard River at Waterport were down in the flats and were reached by an inclined dugway. The road led across the river to an island on one bridge and then proceeded from the island across another bridge to the opposite side where it wound up an incline to the top of the bank. The new steel arch bridge in 1900 eliminated the problem horses had in pulling heavy loads up inclines. Although this steel arch bridge was considered safe, people who remember it say it swayed in the wind. In 1920 Frank Forman purchased it for junk metal and tore it down.