

People love bridges. America's bridges vary in length, height and detail. They are designed to be functional, strong, and often beautiful. A favorite is the covered bridge, for not only does it connect us from one place to another; it connects us to the past. We love the sight of these bridges, as they evoke within us a reminder of days gone by. Many theories abound regarding the reason for covering bridges. Some thought they were built to shelter travelers and their horses during inclement weather, others believe they were meant to provide a place to court a lady and perhaps give a secretive kiss. The real reason for building a roof over the bridges was to help the wood with which it was built last longer. An uncovered wooden bridge would only last about 9 years, while a covered bridge could last up to 80 years. That's a lot of kisses!

Once Upon A Bridge

by Jennifer Breeze

In a time where covered bridges are being replaced by concrete and steel constructed bridges, we are blessed in Ashtabula County to be considered the Covered Bridge Capital of Ohio. To learn more about these romantic and historical landmarks, I had the privilege of meeting with Julie Grandbouche and Barry Bottorf (owners/curators) of Olin's Museum of Covered Bridges. The museum is a quaint transformed farmhouse on the east end of Olin's Bridge in Plymouth Township. It was there that I learned that Ashtabula County was once home to 80 covered bridges! Today we have 18. Our county is home to both the longest (613 ft) and the shortest (18 ft) covered bridges in America.

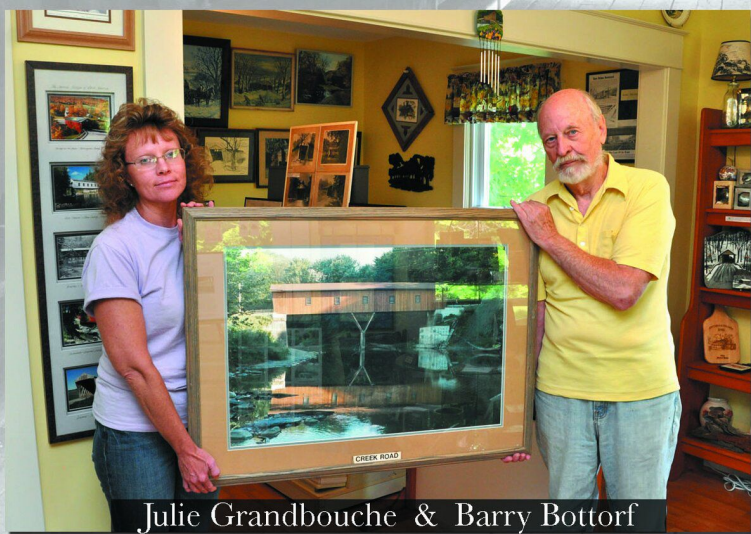


Olin's Museum of Covered Bridges is run by the family of Naomi Olin Bottorf. The Olin family had lived on the land beside the bridge since 1860-and still does today. Naomi had a lifelong love of Covered Bridges, growing up with the picturesque Dewey Road Bridge in her front yard. She was very proud of Ashtabula County, and collected a menagerie of Covered Bridge pictures and paintings, data and records, memorabilia, and handmade crafts honoring our area's covered bridges.

In 1981, funds that had been given in memory of Naomi's husband were used to give the Dewey Road Bridge a facelift. Upon completion, Dewey Road Bridge was renamed "Olin's Bridge"-making it the first of Ashtabula County's bridges to be named after a family. Naomi was such a cornerstone of covered bridge preservation and appreciation that she was appointed Grand Marshal of the very

first Covered Bridge Festival in Ashtabula County in 1983. Naomi's passing in 1995 left one very large Covered Bridge collection, and in 2003 her family was able to lovingly create a museum to display this beautiful collection. Julie and Barry share Naomi's passion for all covered bridges. My tour of the museum was an endearing experience. The family is knowledgeable, patient, joyful, and enthusiastic about their work.

The museum is the perfect starting point for anyone who wishes to explore our county's bridges. There, you will find maps and



Julie Grandbouche & Barry Bottorf

suggested tour routes, information and art, as well as a mini gift shop featuring mugs, magnets, and T-shirts. More information about this charming museum can be found on their website www.coveredbridgemuseum.org. We thank the family of Naomi Bottorf for sharing her legacy and her devotion to the preservation of covered bridges-after all, a lady still needs a place to steal a kiss!