

My name is Michael Kleen, and I'll be your guide on this tour of some of the strangest places in Illinois.



Warning

This location is difficult to find without a map or a guide, let alone in the dark. Because of its remote location, it is not recommended that you come here alone or at night. Use caution!

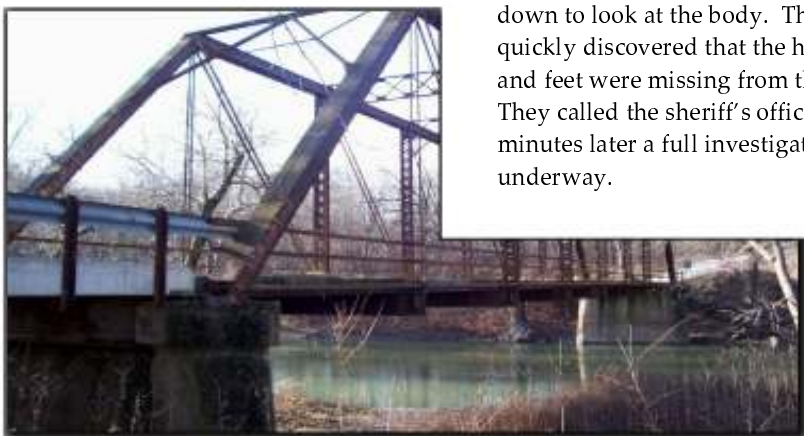
Airtight Bridge is located equidistant between Bushton and Ashmore along Rt 2 in rural Coles County, and spans the narrow Embarras River. It was built in 1914, and designed by Claude L. James. In 1981, the bridge was added to the National Register of Historical places with a historical significance of: "event, Architecture/Engineering."

Before this event, the bridge was known as a drinking spot for students from Eastern Illinois University and local teens. Otherwise, the bridge, which even 24 years ago was described as "old" and "creaky," had a pretty mundane existence.

That all changed on the pleasant Sunday morning of October 19, 1980. According to newspaper reports at the time, two men from rural Urbana spotted what looked like the body of a nude woman about 50 feet from the bridge as they drove past. A local man joined them, and they went down to look at the body. The three quickly discovered that the head, hands, and feet were missing from the cadaver. They called the sheriff's office, and 20 minutes later a full investigation was underway.



Police used scuba divers and dredged the river to find clues, but the body parts, which had been severed "fairly cleanly," were never found. There were several false leads in the case, including missing person reports, as well as a sack of clothes that was discovered north of Charleston. The cause of death, which probably lay in the head that was never found, was never determined.





Beware of rumors!

Stories about haunted bridges are common in rural areas. Throughout the Midwest, these are often called “crybaby bridges” because of the legends surrounding them.



The woman was described as being in her 20s, “rather flat-chested,” “not in the habit of shaving,” about 5’9”, weighing around 130lbs, with dark auburn hair, and had no identifying marks. Her blood type was later determined to be A-positive, which is uncommon. The torso was shipped to Springfield to be examined by pathologist Dr. Grant Johnson, but nothing conclusive was uncovered because of the advanced state of decomposition.

After an extensive investigation, one in which police didn’t even rule out bringing in a psychic, no killer was ever located and the identity of the woman remained a mystery for years. She was buried in Charleston’s largest cemetery under the name Jane Doe.

Twelve years later, on November 20, 1992, the sheriff’s department announced that the identity of the woman had been ascertained. Genetic tests determined that the victim was a 26-year-old woman from Bradley, Illinois, whose husband never reported her missing because, according to the Mattoon Journal Gazette, she had “left home on occasions before.” Her biological family separated across the country, and didn’t learn that she was gone until years later.

According to Detective Steven Coy, the officer investigating the victim’s disappearance, she did not have a driver’s license, so it was unlikely that she left Bradley on her own.

Her family planned to replace the generic headstone in Charleston’s Roselawn Cemetery, but it remains there to this day.

Because of this gruesome story, its remote location, and its precarious condition, Airtight Bridge continues to capture the local imagination. Few sounds are heard in the valley, and even vandals have largely stayed away. But, thanks to our fascination for the past, Airtight Bridge will continue to be a part of local folklore for generations to come.

