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12291
986



ew Concrete Bridge - 1917

Courtesy of Steve Miller

Dedication and Reopening 1st Street Wapsipinicon Bridge

9:30 a.m. Friday, September 26, 1986
Independence, Iowa

STATE LIBRARY OF IOWA
Historical Building
DES MOINES, IOWA 50319

UC12 1986

Bridges over the Wapsipinicon

By Ellen V. Foland

The Wapsipinicon River became the first road to Independence when Rufus B. Clarke, his Indian wife, and their sons, Seth and Mason, walked up its frozen surface from Quasqueton to Independence in March 1846.

The Wapsipinicon became a dividing line between two villages, Independence and New Haven. New Haven's growth was slow. A flouring mill, saw mill and cemetary were New Haven's only businesses. Heavy laden horse drawn wagons of wheat forded the river to reach the New Haven Mill.

The early records of bridges are incomplete. To date, records indicate this bridge is at least the fifth bridge to span the river near or at this location. Early bridges were subject to swollen streams, ice in winter and spring, plus the normal wear and tear of every day use. Bridge building became a major industry and yearly project of the first settler.

The first bridge was built in 1855, nine years after the first log cabin was built in Independence. The early businessmen of Independence, realizing the potential for growth, banded together and paid for the building of the first wooden bridge. The saw mill, owned by Samuel Sherwood, produced the lumber, and he designed and built the first bridge.

The spring floods of 1865 removed the bridge, forcing residents to devise another method of crossing the river. Sam Sherwood built a ferry that filled this transportation need. To accomodate pedestrians, a four foot wide foot-bridge was built where the Second Street bridge now stands. Ike Preble's daughter, while walking across the bridge, became dizzy watching the swirling flood waters and fell into the river. Her hooped skirt filled with air, acting as a life preserver, and kept her afloat. A.D. Guernsey, seeing her plight, swam to her aid and assisted her to land.

On occasion, desperate measures were used to hold a wooden bridge in place as swollen waters tore at the base. Independence

citizens banded together and filled the bridge full of the rocks gathered from surrounding farm fields. The weight of the rocks saved the bridge. No mention was made of where the rocks were disposed of. Could we be seeing them in the water below the present bridge?

The spring of 1873 washed the dams out at Littleton, Independence and Quasqueton. The Wapsie was said to be the "poorest dammed river in this part of Iowa."

Several years later a circus arrived from the west, complete with two elephants pulling the wagons. After being assured the wooden planks would support the weight of an elephant and heavy wagon, the caravan continued eastward. One elephant crossed safely. But as Romeo approached the eastern end of the bridge, the planks gave way, plunging the animal to the rocks below. After trashing about and trumpeting, the crazed animal was coaxed to his feet and out of the river. Years later, while performing, Romeo became wild, refusing commands, terrorizing women and children, and chasing horses and buggies in the streets of Chicago. He was caught later, and returned to his owners. No one could understand why he was standing by a wooden board sidewalk, refusing to cross it. People of Independence knew the answer!

The iron bridge of 1892 was built while the Gedney, the electric street car, and the Illinois Central depot were being completed. D.H. Young was the contractor, and the cost of this structure was \$13,000. The glacier erratic foundation stones can still be seen on the western end of the bridge.

The present bridge we are now re-dedicating was completed in 1917 at a cost of \$43,682.09. A member of the State Highway Commission stated, "It was one of the two best bridges in the State!"

Some of the men who helped construct the bridge were: Kappan, Simmons, Wackerbarth, Blamer, and "Hank" Oliver, who lead the traffic parade across the new bridge.

Program

9:30 a.m. Friday, September 26, 1986

Master of Ceremonies

Steve Elliott, President, Chamber of Commerce

Invocation

Reverend Fr. Doug Wathier

Presentation of the Colors

Veterans Group

National Anthem

Independence High School Band Members

Opening Remarks & Introduction of Guests

Steve Elliott

Presentation & Dedication of Bridge

Dave Clemens, Iowa DOT Commissioner

Acceptance of Bridge

Frank R. Brimmer, Mayor

Ribbon Cutting

William Adams, James Hughes, Larry Kane, James E. Kortenkamp, Paul Paisley, Fred Peterson, Harold Wayson, City Council Members.

Coffee and cake for invited guests will follow at the Independence Chamber of Commerce Office

1917

Board of Supervisors

Walter Thompson

E.L. Plank

F.H. Wyrick

County Engineer

R.W. Gearhart

Design by

State Highway Commission

Built By

The Widell Company

\$43,682.09

Materials Required

3240 BBL. Cement - 2160 Cu. Yd. Concrete - 127,615 Pounds of Steel

1986

Reconstruction of Wapsipinicon Bridge City of Independence

Mayor

Frank R. Brimmer

City Council

Mayor Pro-Tem

Fred Peterson

At Large

Paul Paisley

At Large

William F. Adams

2nd Ward

Harold C. Wayson

4th Ward

James E. Kortenkamp

1st Ward

James E. Hughes

3rd Ward

Larry D. Kane

5th Ward

City Attorney

Steven K. Ristvedt

City Clerk

N. Clark Madison

Dir. of Public Works

Vernon "Bud" Hall

Design by

Iowa Department of

Transportation

Contractor

North Iowa Contractor., Inc.

Ames, Iowa

\$220,956.20

Inspector

Norm Gillihan

Governor

Terry E. Branstad

Iowa Transportation Commissioners

Austin B. Turner, Chair

Corning

C. Roger Fair, Vice Chair

Davenport

Del Van Horn

Jefferson

Dave Clemens

Peosta

Molly Scott

Spencer

Robert H. Meier

Ottumwa

Doug Shull

Indianola

Iowa Transportation Director

Warren B. Dunham