

Donald Road Bridge at South Hickory Creek

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Donald Road Bridge at South Hickory Creek (# 2 on Bridge Brochure)

The Donald Road Bridge over South Hickory Creek near Krum in Denton County, Texas, was constructed in 1903. It is a fine surviving example of the pony truss steel bridges that were popular at that time for providing vital transportation connections between relatively isolated farming communities in rural Texas. Its span over South Hickory Creek is 59' 0", with a width of 17' 0", and it has a concrete roadbed, although the roadway was probably timber originally, like many bridges built early in the twentieth century.¹

Pony truss is a commonly used name for structures such as this, but technically the Donald Road Bridge is a Warren truss with vertical reinforcements. A father-and-son team from Massachusetts, Caleb and Thomas W. Pratt, patented a truss design in 1844. Four years later, Englishmen James C. Warren and Willoughby T. Monzoni began producing a variant of the Pratt truss. This design, which is known as a Warren truss, was preferred over the original Pratt design by 1900 for short spans. By that time, too, steel had replaced iron as the material of choice for bridge builders. The Donald Road Bridge is actually a modified single-panel Warren truss fabricated of steel, one of only ten such bridges in Denton County.²

The contractor who built the Donald Road Bridge is unknown, in part because the structure has no visible plates or markings. Initially, the dominant iron bridge builder in Denton County in the 1880s and 1890s was the King Iron and Bridge Company, established by Zenas King at Cleveland, Ohio, in 1871. By its second decade of

operation, this firm was the largest producer of iron bridges in the United States, having built over 5,000 by 1882 and continuing to build at a rate of 250 to 300 per year. King's nephew, George E. King, developed a branch of his uncle's company in Iowa, then became independent.

Zenas King's firm built fourteen bridges in Denton County by the end of the 1890s, and his nephew, George, built twelve more before about 1910, when his company was surpassed by a rival in Denton County. George Austin came to Dallas in 1889 as an agent of the George E. King Bridge Company of Iowa, and his brother Frank joined him in 1896. They incorporated as Austin Brothers Contractors in 1902, with a production shop in Dallas (as well as elsewhere). They made lots of Warren trusses that they sold through their catalog, but their contracts with Denton County commence about 1907. Before that time, George E. King dominated bridge-building in Denton County, and so the Donald Road Bridge is most likely one of that firm's projects.³

The Donald Road Bridge was intended to carry wagon, horse, and foot traffic over South Hickory Creek, but it later carried automobile traffic as well. It specifically linked Krum, founded by the new Gulf, Colorado, and Santa Fe Railroad Company when it crossed western Denton County in 1886, with smaller communities to the west and south that grew wheat, cotton, and other agricultural products. These could be milled or ginned in Krum, then loaded aboard railroad cars. At about the time of the construction of the Donald Road Bridge, Krum had become the center of a wheat belt in Denton County, which ranked first or second among Texas counties in wheat production from 1890 to 1920. Hundreds of carloads of wheat were being shipped from Krum each year, as well as thousands of bales of cotton.⁴

The Donald Road Bridge also carried school vehicles and facilitated the establishment of regular postal service in the northwestern portion of Denton County and the southern part of adjacent Cooke County. For example, a post office named Donald opened in 1902 near Plainview, a Denton County community west of Krum; this closed after only six months of service, but the name remained on the road where this bridge stood. The Donald family home still stands, but the Donald Road Bridge, which was never intended to support the weight of modern motor vehicles, was removed in June 2006 to its present location at the Denton County Administrative Complex, where it is intended to serve as a pedestrian structure.⁵

DOCUMENTATION:

1. *The Historical Iron Bridges of Denton County, Texas* ([Denton:] N.p., n.d.).
2. "Historic Bridges of Iowa" (<http://www.iowadot.gov/historicbridges/construction.asp> [accessed 8-25-2011]); David Guise, "The Evolution of the Warren, or Triangular, Truss" (<http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/sia/32.2/guise.html> [accessed 8-25-2011]).
3. *The Historical Iron Bridges of Denton County, Texas*; Allen King Sloan, "Discovering Zenas King" (<http://www.kingbridgeco.com/siapaper.html> [accessed 8-25-2011]); Allen King Sloan, "All in the family of Zenas King" (http://www.kingbridgeco.com/all_in_the_z_king_family.htm [accessed 8-25-2011]); "Texas/Oklahoma/Arkansas" (<http://www.kingbridgecompany.com/texas.htm> [accessed 8-25-2011]); "Austin Bridge & Road: History" (<http://www.austin-ind.com/bridge-and-road/about-austin-bridge-and-road/history> [accessed 8-25-2011]). For examples of contracts between George E. King and Denton County for bridge construction in 1903, see Denton County Commissioners Court Minutes, Sept. 1, 1902 and June 26, 1903 (Photocopies in Denton County Historical Commission Administrative Office in Denton County Courthouse-on-the-Square, Denton), pp. E-550, F-21.

4. Ruth Knox Hilliard, "KRUM, TX," *Handbook of Texas Online* (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/hlk16> [accessed 8-25-2011]); George C. Werner, "GULF, COLORADO AND SANTA FE RAILWAY," *Handbook of Texas Online* (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/egg25> [accessed 8-25-2011]); Dale Odom, *An Illustrated History of Denton County, Texas* (Denton: Privately Published, 1996), 37, 41.

5. *The Historical Iron Bridges of Denton County, Texas*; Jim Wheat, "Postmasters & Post Offices of Denton County, Texas, 1847-1930" (<http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~txpost/denton.html> [accessed 8-25-2011]); *Denton Record Chronicle*, June 9, 2006. Additional information on the Donald family home and the current location of the Donald Road Bridge provided by Beth Stribling.