

RECTOR ROAD BRIDGE

Historical Narrative researched and written by Rynell S. Novak, Ph.D. for Denton County Historical Commission(DCHC) Marker Application, Denton County. 2005

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE - RECTOR ROAD BRIDGE

History of Bridge

From the end of the Reconstruction Period until the beginning of the 21st Century, "Denton County experienced steady growth. From 7,251 people in 1870, the county grew to 28,314 people in 1900." The coming of the railroads marked the beginning of a new era for the farmers and ranchers in Denton County and "gave new importance to settlements along its tracks, both as stations and as maintenance centers." (Odom, p. 8-9)

With the railroads crossing the county, "wheat farming became prosperous and the wheat belt of western Denton County was born." (Ibid, p. 9) A picture in a 1909 publication of the Denton Chamber of Commerce shows several wagons lined up on Hickory Street south of the Denton County Courthouse square, with the cut line "Marketing One Crop of 8,000 Bushels of Wheat at Denton, July, 1909. It Brought \$1.45 a Bushel." (C of C, p. 18)

With the opening into a "larger world" (Odom, p. 9), by the early 1900s the citizens of areas around the city of Denton saw the need to be able to travel to Denton and other centers to market their farm products and do their shopping.

As a result, the citizens of "Sanger and vicinity" donated \$1,200 dollars toward the cost of building a bridge across Clear Creek on Rector Road. An additional bridge was to be built across a "slough near said Clear Creek bridge." The location was described as crossing Clear Creek, 2 ½ mi SE of Sanger." (DCCC, p. F-620)

On August 26, 1907, the Denton County Commissioners Court (DCCC) approved the building of the bridges and awarded the contract to Austin Brothers Bridge Company of Dallas, Texas, for \$1,664 and an additional \$230 for the second bridge.¹ (DCCC, p. F-620)

The record includes the wording of the bid offered by Charles R. Moore, Austin Brothers agent: "To furnish the material for and to build, paint and make complete, and have ready for use by the 26th day of December 1907 the said bridge across Clear Creek for the sum of \$1,664, and the said bridge across slough near said Clear Creek Bridge for the sum of \$230 to be paid by the Commissioners Court of Denton County upon the inspection and acceptance of said bridges by said court." (DCCC, p. F-620)

Evidently the bridge was not completed by the December 1907 date, so the work was not accepted by the court until February 19, 1908. In Book G, pages 53-54, of the DCCC Minutes, it is reported that the Commissioners found the bridges "to be built in accordance with the plans and specifications specified in the contract with the Austin Brothers of Dallas, Texas," and they approved the payment of an additional \$694 in addition to the \$1,200 already paid.

County and TxDOT Information

The bridge is listed on the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) Bridge Inventory and Inspection File as CSJ 0918-46-141. The file locates it as being 0.35 north of Nicholson Road in the Sanger area of Denton County.

The bridge is a part of the Hilltop Agreement in a bridge replacement program between a local government (Denton County) and TxDOT. The bridges listed have failed to meet certain

safety and structural requirements. Under the matching funds program, Denton County replaces one bridge and funds then are provided to replace eight other bridges. In this case, Denton County will replace the Hilltop bridge over Loving Branch in Argyle and replacements will be made for the following bridges: (1) Tom Cole at Hickory Creek, (2) Rector Road at Clear Creek, (3) Blair Road over a tributary of Hog Branch, (4) Old Stony at Denton Creek, (5) Belz Road at Duck Creek, (6) Plainview Road at North Hickory Creek, (7) Freeman Road at North Hickory Creek, and (8) Gregory Road at Duck Creek. The replacement bridge at the original site of the Rector Road bridge is expected to cost approximately \$437,700.

Denton County Public Works describes the Rector Road bridge as follows: Number of Spans: 3; Overall Length: 112 feet; Span Length: 80 feet; Width of Roadway: 11.9 feet; and Width of Deck: 11.9 feet. Since its original roadway width was less than 12 feet and did not meet the acceptable safety standards, the bridge was scheduled to be replaced.

Adoption of the Bridge

As a part of the cooperative effort between the DCCC, the County Public Works Department, and the Denton County Historical Commission (DCHC), the bridge was offered along with others for "adoption" to cities, school districts and other governmental agencies in the county.

Mrs. Mildred Hawk, then chairman of the Historic Bridges and Structures Committee of the DCHC, was in contact with the Denton Independent School District (DISD) and the officials there discussed with her the offer from the County to take the bridge. She, and they, were quite excited at the prospect of the District being able to use the bridge. Mr. Curtis Martin, Director of Construction for the school district, sent their letter of acceptance on January 6, 2004 and the bridge was officially transferred to the school district by action of the Commissioners Court on May 18, 2004. (See Att. A.)

Architectural drawings of the new school site showed the proposed location of the bridge spanning the environmentally sensitive area (ESA) of the campus. The academic building was to be placed on the West/Southwest part of the plot, in the curve of Teasley Lane (FM 2181), and the athletic facilities were to be placed in the East/Northeast portion. The drawings from VLK Architects are included in this application as Attachment C.

National Register of Historic Places

An application was made in 2003 to the Texas Historical Commission for approval of the bridge for listing on the National Register of Historic Places (NR). Part of that application reads as follows:

The Rector Road Bridge over Clear Creek is a 5-panel, pinned Pratt through-truss with an I-beam approach seated on braced metal-caisson piers and abutments with metal backing. The end posts and top-chord members were fabricated from a pair of channels, cover plate and battens riveted together. Two pairs of laced angles provide the verticals. A pair of eyebars supply each set of diagonals. An adjustable round rod serves as a counter-brace in one of the more-central panels. The trusses carry braced-A portal struts. Rolled-I floor-beams hang from the lower pins. Adjustable, round-rods provide the lower and the upper lateral braces. The floor-beams carry runs of I-beam stringers which, in turn, support the concrete riding surface. (This description was based on information derived only from pictures by Historic Bridges Expert Dr. James L. Cooper, Greencastle, IN. See Att. D.)

Approval by the Board of Review (BOR) of the Texas Historical Commission (THC) was given in May 2003. The application was sent to the National Park Service (NPS) for approval for listing on the National Register in the Fall of 2003 and was then approved on January 14, 2004. Although the bridge was approved for listing, notification was not received from the NPS or from THC, so its status was not verified for several weeks. (NR web site, Jan. 23, 2004 and Denton County listings, n.d.)

Since the bridge was to be moved, DCHC clarified with the THC that the relocation would not cancel the NR status if approval was given by the BOR before the move.

Relocation of the Bridge

In order to maintain the listing of the bridge on the NR, application was made to the BOR of the THC for approval of moving the bridge. The possibility of TxDOT needing to move the bridge by April 2004 was the catalyst for preparing the application so it could be acted upon at the January 2004 meeting of the BOR, their last scheduled meeting before the April date. Approval for moving the bridge was given by the BOR on January 17, 2004 and by the National Register on July 27, 2004. (NR web site, August 6, 2004)

Dr. Rynell Novak, member of the Historic Bridges and Structures Committee of the DCHC, attended the meeting. The members of the BOR were impressed when she reported that the bridge was to be moved to the Guyer High School site to be used on a daily basis by the students. That fact seemed to be very significant for the BOR members.

It was also important to the BOR that the bridge was to span an "environmentally sensitive area" (ESA) on the school campus which could not be used for any of the buildings for the school. The ESA runs at an angle across the campus, separating the academic and the athletic areas, and the bridge now spans that area, serving as a walkway for the students as they move back and forth across the campus.

An article in the *Denton Record Chronicle* in October of 2003 quoted Norm Sisk, the school district's Executive Director for Operations, as he commented that they were waiting on approval from the Federal Emergency Management Agency to start construction because a section of the land was in a flood plain. (Baugh, October 23, 2003)

Ms. Nita Thurman, chairman of the Archaeological Committee for the DCHC, surveyed the site and wrote a letter to the THC, reporting that there was no known archeological site or historic site within the specific area that would be damaged by placement of the bridge. She noted that the ESA included a small creek and possibly a spring. (Thurman)

By October of 2004, construction was well underway and Mr. Sisk commented that soon the district was to move the historic bridge to the Guyer campus and that it would be placed across "an 'environmentally sensitive area' connecting the campus to a field house near the athletic fields." (Baugh, October 7, 2004)

When the time came on the TxDOT schedule for the bridge to be moved, the moving date was set for March 10, 2005. After preparation of the bridge and the site over Clear Creek where the bridge had been since 1908, the bridge was lifted from its moorings by a large crane and placed on I-beams for moving. It was moved down Rector Road and parked for several days while some preliminary work was done on the structure to meet TxDOT guidelines before moving it to the school. (See Att. E.)

ATTACHMENTS

- A. Martin, Curtis. Letter to Jack B. Dyer, P.E., Denton County, Public Works Engineering Director, January 6, 2004. Minutes of the Denton County Commissioners Court, August 26, 1907, February 19, 1908, and May 18, 2004.
- B. Denton Chamber of Commerce. *Denton City and County Map, Denton, Texas*. Palestine, Texas, Richardson Advertising, 2001. Showing previous and present locations for the bridge.
- C. VLK Architects. Construction Layouts Drawings of Teasley Lane High School*, DISD, Denton, Texas, drawings L2.01 and L2.05. Arlington, Texas, n.d.
*NOTE: Drawings predated the naming of the school as John H. Guyer High School.
- D. E-mail message from Dr. James L. Cooper to Rynell S. Novak regarding technical description of various Denton County historical bridges, March 7, 2003.
- E. Ludlum, Barron. *Denton Record Chronicle, March 11, 2005*. Picture of the bridge as it was lifted from its moorings over Clear Creek on March 10, 2005.
- F. Novak pictures showing the progression of the moving of the bridge from its previous site to the high school site, Denton, Texas, self-published, 2002-2005.
- G. Proposed wording for marker on Guyer High School Campus, 7501 Teasley Lane, Denton

On March 22, 2005, the bridge was moved from its parking site on Rector Road to the new John H. Guyer High School, DISD. (See Att. B., C of C map.) The distance between the sites (approximately 15 miles) was not a major factor, but the condition of the route was significant. The first challenge was to get the 80 foot bridge around two 90-degree corners to start it on its way. Then, after maneuvering along Farm to Market roads and another series of corners, the bridge was taken two or three miles on the interstate highway, followed by more maneuvers and going down the wrong side of boulevards to be able to move the bridge under permanently located traffic lights.

The move was carried out successfully by Lemons House Movers of Whitesboro and Denton County House Movers of Denton, with the assistance of traffic controllers and utility crews with cherry pickers who lifted the utility lines along the travel route.

Then on March 22, 2005, the bridge was moved from Rector Road to the high school site for further work and completion of the refurbishing of the structure. It was finally set in place on May 10, 2005. (See Att. F.)

Dedication of the bridge and the Denton County Historical Marker is to be held after school has started in the Fall and following the official opening of the school on November 1, 2005.² (See Attachment G for text of marker)

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FOOTNOTES:

¹ Miller, Shannon *Austin Bridge Company and Associated Companies; The First 50 Years, 1918-1968*, pp. 8-9

"The Austin name first became known in the Texas bridge building field when George L. Austin came to Dallas in 1889 as agent for George E. King Bridge Company of Des Moines, Iowa. He was joined in 1894 by his brother, Frank E. Austin, and they began to advertise as 'George L. Austin and Brother, Agents of George E. King Bridge Co.' In 1896, George Austin moved to Atlanta and started contracting in Georgia. Frank Austin remained in Dallas and along in 1898, the agency name was changed to 'Austin Brothers, Southern Agents of George E. King Bridge Co.' In a few years, the brothers decided to divide the Texas and Georgia profits equally, formed a partnership, and in 1902, adopted the name 'Austin Brothers, Contractors.'

" . . . in the latter part of (the 1890s), Frank's business began to increase; he needed some help in the office, and in November 1900, he offered a job at \$40 per month to a young man down in Waco - Charles R. Moore. Mr. Moore . . . was subsequently identified as 'Traveling Agent, Contracting Agent, and Chief Engineer of the firm.'

"About 1908, connections with King Bridge Company were severed". The company is still in business today, doing business as Austin Industries.

² The text for the marker is as follows: This iron bridge, named to the National Register of Historic Places in January 2004, was located 2.5 miles SE of Sanger on Rector Road at Clear Creek until it was relocated in April 2005. It was built in 1907-08 by the Austin Bros. Bridge Co. of Dallas and the citizens of the Sanger area donated \$1,200 on the cost of \$1,664. The Pratt through truss bridge span is 80 feet.