

Sam Bass Road Bridge at Duck Creek

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The date of construction for the Sam Bass Road Bridge over Duck Creek near Sanger in Denton County, Texas, is 1908, according to a plaque that was allegedly once attached to the structure. Another plaque that is still affixed to the structure indicates that it was remodeled in 1974 by C. R. "Happy" Salmon of Argyle, but it remains a fine surviving example of the pony truss steel bridges that were once popular for providing vital transportation connections between relatively isolated farming communities in rural Texas. Its span over Duck Creek was 40' 0", with a width of 13' 0", and it had a timber roadbed during its time of service.¹

Pony truss is a commonly used name for structures such as this, but technically the Sam Bass Road Bridge is a Warren truss. A father and son 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, known as a Warren truss, became 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 Sam Bass Road Bridge is actually a one-panel simple Warren truss fabricated of steel, one of only ten Warren-style bridges in Denton County.²

Several contractors built metal bridges in Denton County just prior to and during the time of the construction of the Sam Bass Road Bridge. 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 and then became independent. Zenas King's firm built fourteen bridges in Denton County by the end of the 1890s, and King's nephew, George, built twelve more before 1910. But he had a rival in Denton County. George Austin arrived in 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. This firm had a production shop in Dallas (as well as elsewhere), and they made lots of Warren trusses that they sold through a catalog for installation throughout the United States. The Austin Brothers became the primary builder of metal frame bridges in Denton County by about 1907, and one of their earliest projects was the Sam Bass Road Bridge over Duck Creek. A plaque that apparently once was attached to the north end says that the bridge was built in 1908 by the Austin Brothers.³

The Sam Bass Road Bridge was intended to carry wagon, horse, and foot traffic over Duck Creek, but it later carried automobile traffic as well. It initially linked Sanger, 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 north that grew wheat, cotton, and other agricultural products. These could be brought to Sanger and loaded aboard railroad cars. As traffic on the railroad began to decline, a state highway was constructed north from Dallas that reached Sanger by 1920. This highway later became a federal interstate, I-35. Having originally been intended to facilitate the

transport of agricultural products to Sanger, the Sam Bass Road Bridge became a connector between I-35 and four local roads: Nance, Chisum and Lois. The bridge thus facilitated not only commerce but also regular postal service in the portion of Denton County that it served. It also carried school vehicles. Never intended to support the weight of modern motor vehicles, it was closed in the summer of 2006. It is to be moved to the Precinct 4 Government Center in Flower Mound, where it will serve as a pedestrian structure.⁴

DOCUMENTATION/NOTES

1. *The Historical Iron Bridges of Denton County, Texas* ([Denton:] N.p., n.d.); Peggy Heinkel-Wolfe, "The Bridges of Denton County," *Texas Highways* 52 (Nov. 2005): 23; "Gregory Road Bridge At Duck Creek" (<http://atlas.thc.state.tx.us/shell-county.htm> [accessed 8-25-2011]); RE [Randall English] to Rynell S. Novak, Nov. 2, 2005 (Photocopy of e-mail in Sam Bass Road Bridge file in Denton County Historical Commission administrative office in Denton County Courthouse on the Square, Denton. [Also photograph of plaque]).

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]); English to Novak, Nov. 2, 2005 [with photograph of plaque]. The Denton County Commissioners contracted for Austin Brothers to build a large bridge over Clear Creek and a smaller span over a nearby "slough," perhaps Duck Creek, in August 1907, and the company was paid for the completed work in February 1908. See Denton County Commissioners Court Minutes, Aug. 26, 1907 and Feb. 19, 1908 (Photocopies in Education Office, Denton County Courthouse Administrative Offices, Denton County Courthouse-on-the-Square, Denton), pp. F-620, g-53, G-54.

4. Eunice Sullivan Gray, "SANGER, TX," *Handbook of Texas Online* (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/hgs02> [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), 36, 41; *The Historical Iron Bridges of Denton County, Texas*; *Denton Record Chronicle*, June 9, 2006.