

Echoes From the Past

A GRAND LAKE MYSTERY, THE BRIDGE TO NOWHERE

Boaters and fishermen that ply the upper reaches of Horse Creek northeast of Bernice encounter an unfinished structure of concrete and steel that is frequently a conversation piece for speculation. Where did it come from, why is it there, and why was it not finished?

The original steel structure that is now in Horse Creek was a portion of a bridge built to replace Carey's Ferry which had been established by Thomas Carey in 1840 west of Grove Springs. The new structure was a toll bridge constructed about 1905 by a corporation formed for that purpose. Fares ranged from five cents if the traveler was on foot to 25 cents for horse drawn or "horseless carriage" vehicles. The eastern approach to the structure was along the old section line to the lake which today is West 63rd Street in Grove leading into Carey Bay. The bridge connected the west side of the river with a small community called Echo, the site of an early day store, school and post office which is now inundated by the lake near Echo Bay.

Building the new structure was not without its hazards. Records indicate that when the first of three spans being constructed was nearly complete the structure collapsed and fell into the river killing two workmen and injuring several others. However, ultimately it was completed and the bridge was maintained by the corporation until 1925 when its charter expired and the state took over using the bridge as a crossing for state highway 25. Highway 25 had been constructed east from Vinita and extended to the Missouri state line. The bridge continued to serve as a river crossing until 1938 when negotiations for clearing Grand Lake were initiated and the bridge obviously had to be dismantled. It was easily apparent that great damage would be incurred to the road systems in Delaware County District One and to a lesser extent in District Two when the Grand Lake reservoir was filled. Consequently, partial financial compensation was awarded to both districts and when the bridge was dismantled, two spans were awarded to District One and one span to District Two. In addition, \$60,000 was also awarded to District One. After the bridge was torn down, the District Two span was relocated to upper Honey Creek east of Grove and south of the Dodge community. The two spans awarded to District One were moved to the upper reaches of Horse Creek just north of where Fly Creek flows into the larger body of water from the west. The construction of the proposed Horse Creek bridge advanced to the point where the piers had been raised and the emplacement of the two spans was complete before the lake was flooded in March of 1940.

Only speculation can be offered to determine why the two sections were moved. One theory might be that there was no shorter route around the lake near Horse Creek in 1939. Vehicle traffic would have to travel much further north around the upper reaches of the creek. The current bridge across Horse Creek was not accessible. The M O & G railroad was relocated through Bernice in 1939 and the Grand River Dam Authority constructed the bridge currently used by state highway 85A. The railroad and its bridge were not closed and converted to highway travel until after 1965, thus unavailable to vehicle traffic. Therefore connecting Fly Creek Road on the west with Hickory Road on the east side of Horse Creek might have seemed to be a logical objective in 1939.

Similarly, speculation regarding why it wasn't completed is just as nebulous. Perhaps because of anxiety about the prospects of being drawn into the war in Europe, the government may have increased acquisition of appropriate building materials for national defense, creating a shortage for domestic projects. Or perhaps the depression which was still a huge economic factor in the late 1930's resulted in lack of the availability of state or county funds to complete the project. Regardless of the theories, the partially completed structure continues to be a mystery. However, there should be no mystery today concerning a resolution regarding what to do with the structure. The "Bridge to Nowhere" is not only an eyesore but has proven to be a dangerous hazard to boaters and other recreational vehicles and should be dismantled.

