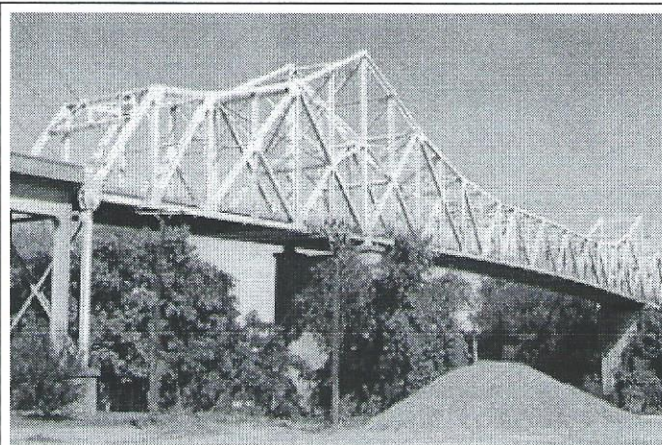


WHITE RIVER BRIDGE



Very few bridges "span" years of a colorful history, furthermore, very few bridges reflect color of any hue, whether in history or in actuality ... but Newport's White River Bridge claims both the background and the paint job! Our children do not ponder why the sky is blue, rather why is our bridge blue?

For many years there were three ferries across White River near Newport (but they were not all functioning at the same time) -- E. L. Watson's White River Crossing or White River Bridge ferry, Smalley's Point ferry and the Newport ferry. In 1885, N. M. Wilson leased the Newport ferry, and two years later, a license was granted to Louis Johnson for the White River Crossing ferry.



For several years, there had been talk of establishing a free ferry across White River at Newport to promote trade, and in 1890 the Newport Pontoon Toll Bridge Co. (C. A. Kirtley, Christian Ott and M. R. Roberts) received a charter for 20 years to establish a bridge across White River at the site of the Newport ferry. Both of these ideas persisted, but it was many years before the Newport bridge was constructed.

Following is an article by Mildred Minor Gregory appearing in the Centennial Edition of the *Newport Independent*, dated August 11, 1975, that will give you a glimpse of the story behind the White River Bridge.

Opening of Newport White River Bridge

The following story will recall two bits of Newport's past history - events important enough to the city's welfare and growth to be marked at their happening by a celebration or observance. On September 10, 11, 1930, the City of Newport staged a two-day celebration on the occasion of the Opening of the Highway 67 Toll Bridge over White River

into Newport. This celebration also commemorated the establishment of the County of Jackson and its 100th birthday of the year 1829; and its first county courts held at the home of Thomas Wideman on May 23, 1830.

The two-day program, sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce was printed:

First Day --

- 7:00 a.m. County Prayer Services, under leadership of County prayer circles.
- 9:30 a.m. Band Concert on Front Street
- 10:30 a.m. Coronation of Queen - installation on County float. Pageant parade depicting history of County. Dedication ceremonies of bridge and formal opening by American Legion. Parade proceeds to inspection field, to disband.
- 12:30 a.m. Luncheon honoring Queen
- 3:00 p.m. Program in Remmel Park. Opened by Union Religious Services. Senator T. H. Caraway of Jonesboro, principal speaker. Dwight Blackwood, Chr. Highway Commission acknowledged and other Highway dignitary.
- 8:00 p.m. Fireworks in vicinity of Bridge
- 10:00 p.m. Queen's Reception and Ball at East Side Gymnasium

Second Day --

- 9:30 a.m. Band Concert
- 10:30 a.m. Negro Parade, followed by religious services and speaking at Paul Green's Grove. Principal speaker will be pastor of Baptist Church.
- 2:00 p.m. Wedding ceremony at bridge and bridal shower
- 2:30 p.m. Program of vocal music. Other specialties. Introduction of Oldest Citizen of County and Oldest Pioneer.
- 4:00 p.m. Water Festival - featuring diving and swimming events, Willis Pool, Remmel Park.

Third Day --

- 4:00 p.m. Trades Day and Merchants Fall Opening Day.

During the first day's events, Miss Nora Armstrong was crowned Queen of Jackson County, chosen in a contest sponsored by the Retail Merchants. Customers of the stores cast ticket ballots, given for their purchases, for their favorite contestant. Miss Armstrong (Buffington) was crowned with a coronet set with rubies and pearls, which matched her lavish gold lame robe encrusted with rubies and pearls, and the scepter she carried. Riding on the County float, she led the huge pageant parade from the Missouri Pacific Park, where the coronation took place, east on Front Street, Beech to Third Street, and then westerly to proceed the length of the new bridge. Here the dedication ceremonies took place, conducted by members of the American Legion. During this ceremony airplanes flew overhead and dropped paper poppies on the bridge in memory of county veterans who fell on Flanders Field.

A lengthy program was held in the afternoon at Remmel Park with Senator Caraway as principal speaker and other notables were introduced. The day was closed with the Queen's reception tea and a ball. The tea was held at the Boyce Home Economics cottage across from the old Walnut Street School and the Ball was held at the gymnasium of the old East Newport School. The Queen's luncheon was sponsored and served by members of the Eastern Star at their club rooms over the old Leader Dept. Store.

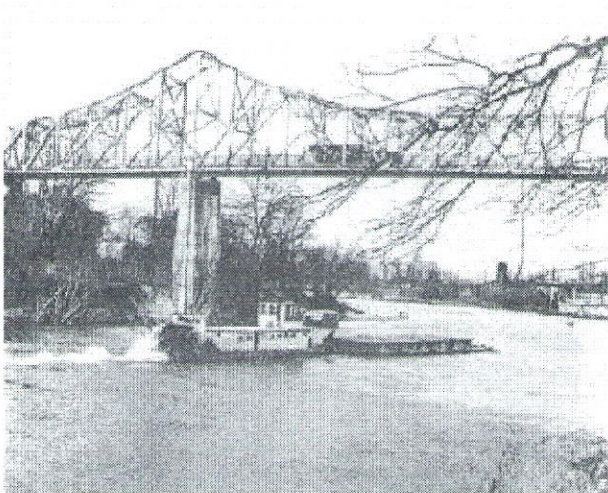
The second day, again, began with a Band Concert at the Missouri Pacific Park stage, from which location a second parade was launched by the Negro population of Newport. They used the same floats as the day before with individual innovations and costumes, etc. A Negro carnival, featuring a large mistrel show, occupied the street and vacant lots just west and south of the entrance to the Newport Bridge during the entire week. (This was the intersection of Third and Remmel Streets in front of Owen's Market.) Following the Remmel Park Willis Pool water festival, the weather changed and a downpour of steady

rain flooded the vacant lots on Garfield (Federal Housing complex today) where a huge barbeque was scheduled for the Negro population. Wooden barrels of lemonade and pounds of barbequed meat were sacrificed to the weather.

The Retail Merchants of Newport closed the celebration with "bargains galore" in their Trades Day and Merchants Fall Opening event on the third day. The late Mrs. M. A. Dorsey wrote a poem to commemorate the Bridge Opening ... and its impact on the future of the City of Newport. This grand Bridge Opening preceded the complete paving of Highway 67 from Bald Knob to Newport by eight years.

A second Bridge celebration in the history of Newport took place in early 1939, when the toll was removed from travel across all Arkansas bridges. This included Newport's bridge-twin at Augusta. Both bridges were alike except for their approaches.

It was during the administration of Gov. Carl E. Bailey when the Legislature voted to remove the tolls. Dr. H. O. Walker was Mayor of Newport and the Bridge Superintendent at Newport was John A. Hinkle. The tolls were lifted at Midnight, and on May 19, 1938 a huge parade was once again held for the "making-of-bridge-history."



Sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce, the small Toll House on the bridge was lifted and hoisted on a large truck which led the 1938 parade. Seven bands made music as the parade marched from Walnut Street to Beech, and then west to the Bridge. Gov. Bailey was guest speaker in the Missouri Pacific Park before a large crowd. A noon banquet, followed by an afternoon baseball game closed and marked the glad tidings of the removal of the toll.

The next year of 1939, the frame house at the foot of the side of the bridge, the home of each bridge superintendent for eight years, was removed to a location on Highway 67 North. This was the first building for headquarters of the Arkansas State Police at Newport, and was used until 1957.

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