

BEAVER COUNTY BRIDGE HISTORY

Beaver County owned and maintained as many as 220 bridges in the 1920's. The process was that local citizens in need of relief, in form of a bridge or stream crossing, would petition the court of common pleas in either, Beaver, Allegheny or Butler County who would send out a viewer. His report would go to a grand jury who may then recommend a bridge be constructed. That was usually so ordered by the court and implemented by the county commissioners. This process pertained to mostly less populated regions as private enterprises had, for financial gain, already constructed crossings in high traffic regions. Many of these bridges also supported the utilities of the time, electric, gas, water. Also the traction tracks of the *Beaver Valley Traction Company*, preceded by the *Peoples Electric Street Railway of Rochester*. In those days most people rode the street car and in 1898 as many as a half million riders used the Rochester Company's lines. Beginning in the late 1920's the Pennsylvania Department of Highways began to assume all future obligations for many of the county structures in the construction of its highway system. Most recent locally being the East Rochester Toll Bridge in 1973 and the New Brighton Beaver Falls Bridge in 1980.

Prior to 1960, the state had never constructed a bridge over the Ohio River in Beaver County, until the bridge at Shippingport which replaced a ferry operation. The existing bridges at that time were all privately built and owned as toll bridges or constructed and maintained by the county. The first county built bridges over the Ohio were; the Ambridge – Aliquippa and the Rochester – Monaca at Rhode Island Avenue, both in the late 20's.

ROCHESTER – MONACA SUSPENSION BRIDGE

The first Ohio River Bridge in Beaver County and the only crossing between Pittsburgh and Stubenville. (H. M. Camp) It had a total length of 2,280 feet with a channel span of 900 feet. Privately constructed in 1896 by the *Ohio River Bridge Company* and owned by W. C. Jutte, E. K. Morse, C. A. Danals, **Henry M. Camp**, J. C. Whitla, J. W. Patterson and Dan H. Stone. Mr.'s Camp, Whitla and Stone being from Beaver County and the other gentlemen from Pittsburgh. *Penn Bridge Company* was the contractor for the erection. Taken by condemnation by the county **November 13, 1905**. A settlement of damages was awarded in a Butler County Court in the amount of \$297,752.00 to the former owners. The structure was taken over by the Pennsylvania Department of Highways **June 1, 1930**.

BIG BEAVER BRIDGE

Constructed between Bridge Street, Bridgewater and West Madison Street, Rochester in 1816 and blown away by a severe wind in 1821. It was replaced in 1826 at a cost of \$20,000. This bridge was carried away by the 1884 flood as detailed in the next listing. Reconstructed in 1885 it was 627 feet in length and its deck burned when a spark from a passing train ignited the creosoted wood planks at noon on April 30, 1931.

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Privately owned and constructed by the *Big Beaver Bridge Company*, it was condemned and taken by the county **November 13, 1905** and then by the Pennsylvania Department of Highways on **June 1, 1930**. Damages were awarded in a Butler County Court in the amount of \$153,300 to the 1905 owners for the condemnation. (H. M. Camp)

FALLSTON BRIDGE

Was built by the *Fallston Bridge Company* as a toll bridge in 1836 and swept away in the flood of February 7, 1884. Then it lodged against the wooden Big Beaver Bridge carrying both into the Cleveland & Pittsburgh Railroad Bridge then the three into the Pittsburgh & Lake Erie Bridge partially demolishing that structure. It was rebuilt in 1884 as it presently exists; its length is 400 feet. Condemned and purchased by the County June 20, 1905, (see court record 44 December 1905) the company sought a damage award which was resolved June 16, 1906. A bond issued @ 4.5% interest by the county to undertake repairs was made December 8, 1909. **This bridge has been under repair by the county for over 100 years.** The new Veterans Bridge is scheduled to be let this June (2010) with construction to begin this season.

SHARON BRIDGE

Built by the *Sharon Bridge Company* in 1888 and constructed by A. J. Jolly & A. M. Jolly as a toll bridge on the site of a ferry operated by George W. Parker connecting Junction Park to North Bridgewater. The *Beaver Valley Traction Company* laid its tracks across the bridge in 1891 for the service from Beaver Falls to Beaver and then purchased the stock of the Sharon Bridge Company in 1903. That company also absorbed the Peoples Electric Street Railway of Rochester in 1901. (H. M. Camp) Condemned by the county, sold for scrap and removed in 1944. Constructed at this site will be the new Veterans Bridge in 2010. It will be the first new river crossing in Beaver County in 40 years, and again, by the county commissioners.

BRIGHTON BRIDGE

Constructed in 1815 as a toll bridge by the *Brighton Bridge Company* its contractor was Joseph Hoopes and Persifor Taylor. This structure was carried away by the flood of 1818 and replaced by the *Overgrade Bridge Company* in 1834, again as a toll bridge. The directors were; James Patterson, David Hoopes, David Townsend, John C. Hunter, John Boles, Benjamin Townsend, Edward Hoopes, Charles Whippo, Joseph Hoopes and M. F. Champlin. Many of these men represented the boards of directors on all the upper valley bridges.

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FETTERMAN BRIDGE

Constructed in 1884 by the *Beaver Falls Bridge Company* the original length was 827 feet. It was condemned and taken by the county July 2, 1904. An award of damages was made in the amount of \$37,750. This was overturned by the Court and it continued as a toll bridge for some time but the county prevailed. The state assumed all future maintenance and replaced it with the Eastvale Bridge.

LACOCK BRIDGES #1, #2 AND #3

Originally there were three bridges across Lacock Run in Rochester. The first located on the lower road to Freedom near Muller's Brick Yard at the ball park. Constructed of stone the 40 foot arch may still remain underneath Railroad Street. The second was a 100 foot long steel truss bridge connecting Case Street with High Street in East Rochester. This structure was closed and removed in 1943. The last, and still remaining in use, is the Adams Street Bridge, a concrete arch constructed in 1909 and replaced with a box culvert in 2003, after 17 years on the Twelve Year Transportation Plan.

COVERED BRIDGES

The County of Beaver had on its bridge docket, three original covered bridges all of which are long gone. A foster sister at Brush Creek Park exists but is not an original. They were as follows;

CUDDLESTONES BRIDGE

Built in 1834, spanned the Little Beaver on the Darlington – Beaver Falls Road. It was 95 feet in length.

POTTERS BRIDGE

Built in 1865, spanned the Raccoon Creek on the Potter to Frankfort Springs Road at the Potter Farm. It was a wood arch of heavy pine 135 feet in length and collapsed on August 5, 1923 at noon. It was replaced in 1924 at a cost of \$17,000.

MERRIMANS BRIDGE

Built over the Raccoon Creek, it was 108 feet in length on the Sheffield – Green Garden Road.

INDEPENDENCE BRIDGE

Built in 1867, spanned the Raccoon Creek on the Service Creek – Independence Road. It was 117 feet in length.

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These bridges were all of wood truss construction with some having iron diagonal eye bar supports. Wood truss bridges were the only construction method prior to the various iron works being established in the mid 1800's. Even stone arches are built on a wood truss system until the capstones are put into place.

THE BRUSH CREEK COVERED BRIDGE

Originally the STONES FORD BRIDGE or Woolslayer Bridge (near Red Woolslayer's) is an iron truss built in 1890 over Brush Creek. It is 75 feet in length and was covered in 1976 during the construction of Brush Creek County Park by the Beaver County Public Works Department. It is a popular attraction in the park that has and continues to host many weddings annually. The township road originally traveled from Petrie Road to Barrisfield Road across the bridge and through what is now park property. Red Woolslayer was probably one of the petitioners to the Court.

NOTABLE STRUCTURES

ALLFORDS BRIDGE

Allfords was a 78 foot stone arch over Allfours Run in Baden. Built about 1867, it included stone parapet walls, a fountain, and a drinking basin and also carried the traction lines. It was taken over by the state in 1927.

WHITE DUCK BRIDGE or Loughhead Bridge, then located just past the dog show field, which in those days was on the way to Richmond Hill Picnic Ground. Loughhead bridge was built about 1886 and spanned the Brady's Run Creek, now near the horseshow arena. The road originally traveled up over the hill to Dutch Ridge Road.

ST. CLAIR ARCH

Built in 1873 and rebuilt in 1897, this 45 foot stone arch spans Dutchman's Run in Freedom. Still existing today at J & J's Catering. It was taken over by and is maintained by the state. Freedom was at the time of its construction was named St. Clair.

POTTERY WORKS ARCH over the Blockhouse Run, taken by the state in 1930 and just replaced recently. Located on Thirteenth Street.

IRVIN'S ARCH located on Virginia Avenue in Rochester Twp, soon to be replaced by the state.

CONCLUSION

The earliest transportation, bridge and industrial projects were privately funded by stockholders who in turn received dividends for their investment. They were industrious, free of regulation and capitalists. It should be no surprise that the Harmonists at "Economie" were large investors in railroads, bridges and manufacturing. They were at their highest wealth at about 1855 of over one million dollars in assets. It may be some surprise that in the dissolution of their assets after their demise in 1903, Ambridge Bridge Company purchased 105 acres of land and the remaining, valued at two million dollars, to the Liberty Land Company.

Beaver County now only maintains 60 bridges and over half have been replaced under Act 235, since 1980. These days citizens requesting a bridge or road improvement may, through the Public Participation Panel of the Southwestern Planning Commission, request a project be added to the Transportation Plan implemented by the SPC.

This writers Great, Great Grand Father, Henry M. Camp, had interests in many bridge, transportation and utility companies locally and across the United States. He was once speculating in an island property in Florida and in his journal notes "there is no transportation, no industry, who would ever live there". He declined the opportunity for the investment. The island property was Key West.

References; Rochester 1899 Semi-Centennial, Bausman's 1904 History of Beaver County, The Harmonists, John S. Duss, Beaver County Department of Public Works and County Court records.



SECOND BIG BEAVER BRIDGE



SHARON BRIDGE



ROCHESTER SUSPENSION BRIDGE



*BRIDGE OVER RACCOON CREEK
POTTER TWP*