

Parkville in History – Waddell A Truss Bridge – Fall 2018

This newsletters' feature is from an article in The Southern Platte Press on May 29, 1998, about the Waddell A Truss Bridge. The bridge was 100 years old in 1998 and has been in English Landing Park since 1988.

In April 1985, the City's Park Board determined that a footbridge across Rush Creek was highly desirable. The question was, how to get a bridge at all, considering the Park Board's small budget. A University of Missouri-Kansas City student worked part-time for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and learned that a real bridge was available for \$1. His class used the remaining few weeks of their semester to develop a scheme for building abutments and approach ramps, study transportation and erection possibilities and cost estimates.

James Alexander Low Waddell, a bridge engineer and designer of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, came up with the A truss as a 100 foot, short span railroad bridge. The Waddell A Truss Bridge was built in 1898 on a railroad spur line to Pattonsburg, Missouri, the one at Smithville spanned the Linn Branch creek near Trimble. The rail line was abandoned in 1939, but 14 years later it was given a concrete deck and converted to highway use.

The Waddell A Truss Bridge, being one of a very few still in existence, was removed during construction of the Smithville dam. In 1980, at the request of the Corps, an inspection determined that the bridge was only one of two of its kind remaining in the United States. In 1982, the Corps dismantled the bridge. By 1987, the five years that the Corps had to keep the bridge had expired. Hannibal and Lexington, Missouri were also interested, but the City of Parkville "won" the bridge. But, it was still in pieces in Smithville.

The City needed to figure out how to move it with little or no money. Waddell was a founder of the firm that became HNTB and one of the original partners started his career as an employee of Waddell's. When the current partners heard of the City's efforts, they assigned one of their engineers to assist with the project. Not only did he organize the resources of HNTB, but he also interested much of the construction industry in helping with skilled labor, machinery, materials and services. Volunteers from Parkville and beyond also showed up every Saturday for 10 weeks and companies provided assistance of many kinds.

All 60 tons of the bridge were transported and laid out in the grass. Pilings were donated and driven, the concrete bridge abutments were formed and poured and bridge parts were sandblasted and primed. Ironworkers assembled the trusses. Rivets removed during the dismantling could not be replaced and high-strength bolts had to be substituted, but they were not available at every hardware store. A Wisconsin firm that made the bolts donated 1,500 to the project.

The big installation day was Saturday, November 12, 1987. At mid-morning, a 150-ton crane on the north side of the creek picked up the assembly and set it down on the creek bank. On the south side, a 70-ton crane hooked on. Then, in tandem, the two cranes hoisted the bridge into position and lowered it gently onto base plates on the abutments. The job was not finished, but the bridge was in place at virtually no cost to the City. Painting, approach ramps and path, new deck, hand railing, lighting and other work was deferred to spring 1988. An official "thank you" party was held on March 4, 1988, aboard the Missouri River Queen courtesy of Captain Richard Lynn.

The sign near the north approach to the bridge carries a brief history of the bridge, schematic drawings, a few construction photos and the names of all known contributors. The bridge did make the National Register of Historic Places. In 2018, the bridge is now 130 years old and has been in English Landing Park for 30 years.