

THE FIRST RAILROAD BRIDGE DID NOT GO ALL THE WAY ACROSS THE RIVER

By Barbara Mask

In the 1850s when the westward movement was occurring, the Mississippi River presented a major barrier. In order to tie the newly- expanded country out west via a 'ribbon of iron,' a bridge was needed here at the narrowest part of the River. Fulton entrepreneurs were optimistic the bridge would be built with a Fulton-Lyons connection, however, the Albany Railroad Bridge Company, incorporated in 1857, received the charter for the sole purpose of construction of the bridge and selected the location two miles south of Fulton and opposite to Clinton, IA. The railroad would connect west of Clinton with the railroad already being built in Iowa.

The first bridge arrangement was an interesting one. First piles for the piers were driven on the Illinois side on January 15, 1859. The 'plug' (connecting spur between Fulton and the bridge) was completed one year later. The first train crossed to Little Rock Island, 1400 feet from the east shore of the river, in January 1860. The east channel was spanned by seven 200 foot McCullum patent truss spans. The bridge ended on the island. Prior to the bridge construction, the steamboat Commodore carried freight and passengers between Fulton and Clinton. After the first part of the bridge was built, the Commodore continued to convey them to Clinton from the Island. During the winter when the ice was thick enough, wagons and teams used that mode of transportation. Two trains ran daily from Fulton to the Island and back again. The run took ten minutes. Transference from the train to the boat was a risky procedure and some people were drowned. In the winter of 1861, the tracks were laid across the ice and freight cars were pulled by ropes and pulleys.

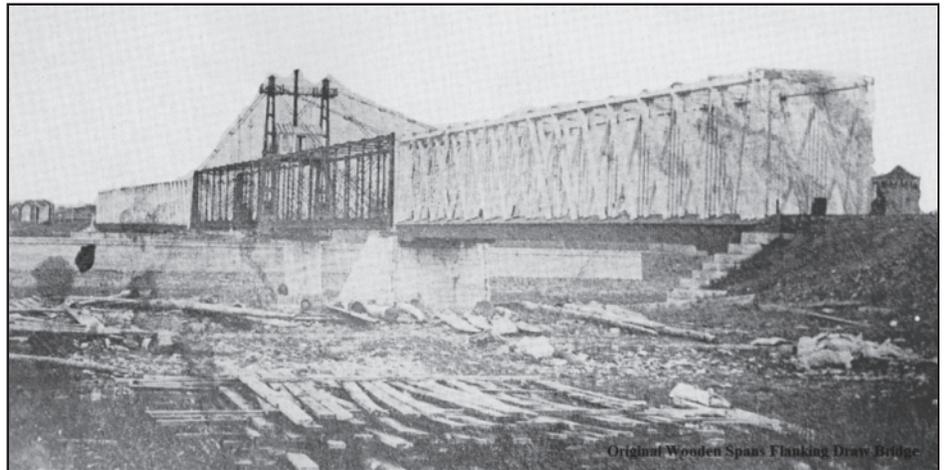
Five years later, the additional spans were erected and the railroad bridge across the width of the river opened in January 1865. Delays had occurred during the Civil War.

OPPOSITION TO THE RAILROAD BRIDGE

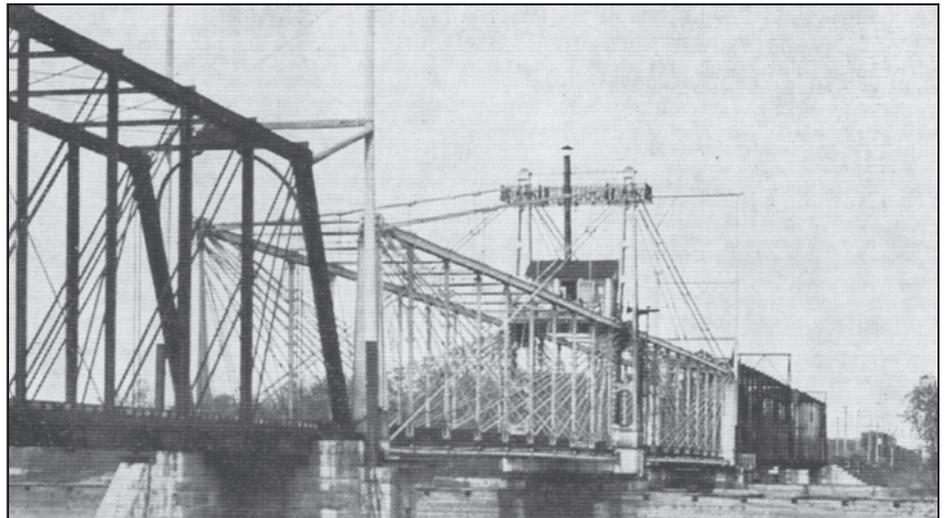
Steamboat companies were unanimous in their opposition to the construction of the bridge. They obtained an injunction which would not allow the closing of the river at Clinton, Iowa. The bridge company out-maneuvered the restraining act by building the draw lengthwise on the pier which supported it. On the day the injunction expired, the span was swung into place before further legal action could be taken.

IMPRESSIVE STATISTICS OF THE RAILROAD BRIDGE

The pier which supported the movable span was built on a crib 400 feet long and 44 feet wide at the bottom, according to records of Wayne Bastian that were donated to the Fulton (Martin House) Museum. The pier rested on a hard-sand base. The draw turned on anti-friction rollers and when opened, it made available two channels 123 feet wide. The pier west of the big pier was also built on a crib which was 100 feet of dimension stone and 600,000 cubic feet of rubble. The swing span weighed 325 tons. Bastian obtained the bridge statistics from the 1879 HISTORY OF CLINTON COUNTY.



1865 - The draw span was made of steel and flanked by two wooden trusses.



1887 - Steel span is replaced. Wooden trusses are replaced with steel ones.

CAPTAIN M. H. ESTABROOK

Captain Estabrook was in charge of the transfer boat until the bridge was completed across the river. He then was responsible for the operations of the new bridge; a position held for over fourteen years. He lived on Little Rock Island, a place known for its lawlessness, for seventeen years and prior to that, he lived in Fulton, where he was a member of the Masonic Lodge No. 189. A special railroad car took his mason-brothers to the funeral in Clinton. Estabrook was a well-known and respected steamboat captain who also earned respect in the railroad business.

ONE ENGINE DROWNED

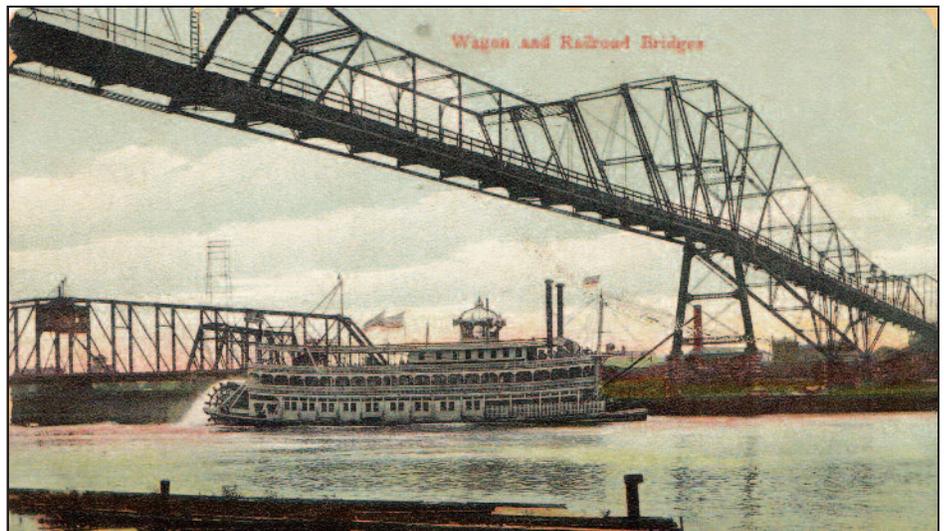
Prior to the building of the bridge across the river, the Chicago, Iowa and Nebraska line had started building its railroad tracks west of Clinton. It needed engines. One arrived in Fulton in 1856 and was hauled on skids on top of the ice. A second engine arrived and was transferred the same way, but just out of Fulton, the engine broke through the ice and sank. It was raised and hauled the rest of the way. A third engine was carried from Fulton to Clinton on the Commodore steamboat. While no more engines were hauled across the 'ice bridge,' as the frozen river was named, a lot of cargo and wagons were transferred in this manner.

REPAIRS AND REPLACEMENT OF THE FIRST BRIDGE

Because of the heavy traffic, the bridge was rebuilt and repaired frequently. The draw-span was replaced in 1887. In 1898, the pier supporting the moveable span was rebuilt. In 1907, a new bridge was started; this one with two tracks.



1909 - New double-track C&NW is completed. Single track on right was in service from 1865-1909. Left: Clinton-Illinois Wagon Bridge 1891-1954



Wagon Bridge, often referred to as the high bridge, crossed over the top of the first and second railroad bridges.