

County Line Road Bridge at Denton Creek

Historical Narrative Written and Researched by

Morgan Gieringer and Timothy Gieringer for Denton County Historical Commission

Denton County

1. CONTEXT:

The construction of roads and bridges in Denton County are hallmarks of growth and continual improvement within the county. A 1919 article stated that Highway 24 “is an important road” which traversed the entirety of Denton County.ⁱ At that time the condition of Highway 24, now U. S. 380, was said to be bad, as it was “poorly graded and poorly drained.” It was hoped that construction of a gravel surface on Highway 24 would improve conditions, although county officials predicted an increase in traffic of 300% as soon as the new construction was completed.ⁱⁱ The construction of County Line Road and Bridge coincides directly with the paving of Highway 24, which was completed in 1939. North County Line Road and County Line Bridge were built the following year in 1940.

II. OVERVIEW

The County Line Road Bridge, in its original location, was a seventy-foot-long by eighteen-foot- wide pony truss steel bridge spanning Denton Creek south of US Highway 380. Steel for the bridge came from the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company. The steel bridge bears the “CF&I” stamp of the company. It sat at the western edge of Denton County on the border of Wise County. County Line Road and Bridge were constructed in 1940 as a “feeder road on the Denton-Wise county line to give a number of communities access to the newly improved and gravel-paved Highway 24.”ⁱⁱⁱ County Line Road Bridge was built in Denton County precinct 4

(Commissioner Joe S. Boydston) by an agreement reached between Denton County and Wise County.^{iv}

The County Line Road Bridge originally sat on land that was first patented by Jefferson C. Lynch in 1861.^v Denton County purchased the Right-of- Way (ROW) to construct County Line Road from W.C. Kimbrough on August 31, 1935.^{vi}

The construction of the road and bridge coincides directly with the paving of Highway 24, which was completed in December, 1939. The long awaited completion of the highway paving between Denton and Decatur was celebrated by a caravan from Denton to Decatur and a ceremonial ribbon cutting at the county line by State Highway Commissioner Harry Hines.^{vii}

County Line Road connected the newly paved Highway 24 to Stony Road (now Old Stony Road) and would have been utilized by residents west of Stony travelling east towards Decatur. County Line Road served as a north-south feeder road connecting Highway 24 to Stony Road. Travelers headed east might have also utilized County Line Road to get to Ponder or Justin.

Stony is one of the early settlements in the area to be eventually served by County Line Road and HWY 24. Historian E, Dale Odom wrote in his book, *An Illustrated History of Denton County, Texas*, about the early settlement of the Stony Community: “Before the middle of the 1850s, almost all settlers had settled their homes in the Eastern Cross Timbers or the Blackland Prairies part of Denton County. In the latter part of the decade, as the county grew, settlers began moving into the creek bottoms of the Grand Prairie in the western part of Denton County by the end of 1850 Stony, located on Denton Creek, was one of the main villages in this area of western Denton County.” In the 1890s, Stony declined as one of four or five of the

larger communities in the area when the Gulf, Colorado and Santa Fe Railway missed the village and was built a few miles to the east, creating the new towns of Ponder, Justin and Krum. By the 1950s, Stony only had several dozen residents. All that remains of the village are the old school house, one of three schools built on the same lot, and the Stoney Methodist Church which is still serving the community.^{viii}

The Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) found steel and iron bridges unsuitable for modern heavy loads and began systematically replacing them with concrete bridges in the 1990's.^{ix} In October 1995, TxDOT placed the County Line Road Bridge on their Off Road Replacement System. Having five or six years to accept the bridge into the system, the Denton Commissioners Court approved the replacement in a letter to TxDOT in September 1999. Denton County Commissioner for Denton County Precinct Four at that time was Jim Carter.^x

The City of Denton was interested in adopting the bridge and placing it for pedestrian use in the Fred Moore Park and would relocate the bridge by August 2000. Later the city indicated to the county the city would build a new bridge at Fred Moore Park and would have no current use for the bridge. It approved the idea of storage when a home became available. In 2000, the county received the city's schedule to accomplish the bridge relocation project, beginning in March, 2000, and a completion date with Bridge Certification by August 23, 2000.^{xi}

Seneca Construction was contracted by the City Of Denton to move the bridge and on May 9, 2001 the bridge was "trucked" fourteen miles from its original location to serve as a pedestrian bridge in Denton's North Lakes' Park located in northwest Denton off Bonnie Brae Street. The bridge was placed over a small creek that feeds the south lake in the park in a location that reflects the rural area where it was first located. The city paid Seneca Construction

\$131,000 to move the 41,000 pound structure and to refurbish it for pedestrian use. Bob Tickner, Superintendent of Parks and Development with the Denton Parks and Recreation Department said at the time it would be part of a trail system.^{xii}

A celebration to dedicate the historic bridge was held in North Lakes Park on August 25, 2001. At the event Mildred Hawk said “This is history.” She had worked to find a home for the bridge since it was deemed by TxDOT as unsafe for motor vehicle traffic in 1996. The celebration included a parade that consisted of a horse-drawn carriage, a pioneer covered wagon and about twenty antique cars. Denton Mayor Euline Brock and Denton County Judge Scott Arney recognized her hard work in preserving the county’s history. A crowd of approximately 150 people attended the dedication. In an address to the crowd, Mildred Hawk said “This bridge should be able to stand up here for another hundred years and serve our children and our grandchildren.”^{xiii}

The County Line Road Bridge over Denton Creek was the first Denton County historic bridge to be relocated from its original site and repurposed for pedestrian use at North Lakes Park. Currently, the bridge is not linked with any trails other than the short trail from the lake in the park. At the end of the bridge is a picnic table and grill. Denton Parks and Recreation Department has placed a park sign at each end of the bridge. The first few lines of the sign read “This bridge resided west of Stony over Denton Creek around the turn of the century. It was originally located on North County Line Road and the feeder road FM 2622 and U.S. 380.” This follows with information about the relocation in 2001 and ends with” This is a joint project of the State of Texas, Denton County and the City of Denton.” Documentation of research showing the County Line Road was not even built until 1940 places the County Line Bridge construction date in conflict with this earlier “turn of the century” bridge construction date on the sign.

The first Denton County Historical Commission bridge brochure, “Historic Iron Bridges of Denton County Texas,” with its history of seventeen Denton County iron and steel bridges, was written and printed through efforts of Mildred Hawk. The brochure does not identify the date the County Line Road Bridge was built. It was generally believed that it was possibly built around 1910, since the narrative on the brochure said that approximately twenty iron bridges were built in Denton County by 1910. Recent research as documented in this historical narrative shows that the bridge was built in 1940 to serve on a road - County Line Road - that also was not built until 1940. The question remains could this be a recycled, restored and repurposed bridge moved from another location and placed over Denton Creek on County Line Road when the road was built in 1940, which could lead to the belief of an earlier date of construction. Research shows that the Sam Bass Bridge over Duck Creek was restored by Happy Salmon and demonstrates that bridges were possibly moved to different locations.

At the time the bridge was moved, the construction of a new concrete bridge began, which currently serves motorists crossing Denton Creek on County Line Road.^{xiv}

Denton County Historical Commission (DCHC) member Mildred McCauley Hawk (1918-2004) was instrumental in the relocation of County Line Road Bridge. The late Taylor Hawk (1923-1990) and Mildred Hawk were longtime Denton county residents who served as volunteers for the county historical commission. They were among the first and the most vocal to champion the cause of the historical bridges. Mildred was the chair of the Historic Bridges and Structures Committee in the late 1990’s during which time she “spearheaded bridge preservation projects and created the brochure featuring photos and details of the seventeen identified historic iron or steel bridges in Denton County, mostly located in the northwest part of the county.^{xv} The

County Line Road Bridge over Denton Creek is number seventeen in the brochure, which features photos of all of the bridges at original locations.

III. SIGNIFICANCE:

The County Line Road Bridge near Stony would have been welcome relief to people living along the Denton-Wise County Line. The November 2005 *Texas Highway* had an article on “The Bridges of Denton” written by Peggy Henkel-Wolfe. Moleana Mason Carson, who lived close to the old County Line Road Bridge near Stony, recalled that “there was only one low-water crossing, but all the area flooded terribly every spring.” Moleana used to walk and later rode the bus across the iron (steel) bridge every day to get to school. The bridge was the only link between Decatur and her family home, which was part of her grandparents’ ranch on the Denton-Wise County Line.”^{xvi} A bridge constructed from iron or steel was preferable to older style wooden bridges which could be washed away or damaged in heavy rains.

County Line Road Bridge was constructed during a time of increased road and bridge construction in Denton County and is representative of the many public works projects underway in the early 1940’s

The County Line Road Bridge is one of 20 historic iron or steel bridges (research by the DCHC Marker Committee has added three additional bridges to the original list of 17) that have been identified and preserved in the county. Many of these have been adopted and relocated while others remain at their original location or are on private property. Old Alton Bridge and Rector Road Bridge are listed on the National Register of Historic Places; Old Alton Bridge and Elm Fork Bridge are designated Texas Historical Commission (THC) Recorded Texas Historic

Texas Landmarks; and Rector Road, Donald Road and Gregory Road Bridges are designated Denton County Historical Commission Denton County Historic Landmarks.

Denton's historic bridges preservation efforts have brought state- wide attention to Denton County. The Denton County Commissioners Court bridge adoption program and the DCHC bridge marker project have been featured in *County* magazine, published by the Association of Texas Counties. THC also highlighted the DCHC bridge project as an example of one of the goals in the THC State Preservation Plan.

Lastly, the preservation of County Line Road Bridge is a significant accomplishment of Denton County and Denton County Historical Commission member Mildred Hawk, who had the foresight to preserve the structure through adaptive reuse in a park location and through the support and oversight of the Denton County Commissioners Court bridge adoption program. Critical to its preservation is the role that the City of Denton and the Parks and Recreation Department have assumed as the bridge's caretaker. Because of this commitment, County Line Road Bridge is one of many historic bridges in Denton County that will continue to be part of the Denton County history.

i "State Highway No. 24." Denton Record-Chronicle, August 13, 1919.

ii DRC, August 13, 1919.

iii "Plan New Road in West County," Denton Record-Chronicle, December 27, 1939.

iv DRC, December 27, 1939.

v Land Grant, Abstract #756, File #3013, Volume 32, Number 660, Texas General Land Office.

vi Right-Of-Way Deed #95096, August 31, 1935.

vii "Caravan to Form Here Friday to Celebrate Completion of Highway from Denton to Decatur," Denton Record-Chronicle, December 12, 1939.

viii E. Dale Odom, *An Illustrated History of Denton County, Texas From Peters Colony to Metroplex*, pp. 25, 45, 47, 49.

ix Heinkel-Wolfe, Peggy. "The Bridges of Denton County." *Texas Highways*, November 2005, p 24.

x Memorandum to Mildred Hawk from James Gibbs, February 23, 2001. Filed in Denton County Office of History and Culture Research Room in County Courthouse- on- the- Square.

xi Ibid.

xii : "Bridge now over park's water." Denton Record-Chronicle, May 10, 20001, Vol. 97, No. 281. p. 1.

xiii Matthew Zabel, "Old bridge finds a new home at park" Denton Record-Chronicle, August 26, 2001, p.1.

xiv Reedy, Tom. "Bridge Now Over Park's Water," Denton Record-Chronicle. May 10, 2001.

xv Carmack, Liz. "Spanning History: Denton County saves historic bridges, captures stories," County Magazine, January 23, 2014. Retrieved from web 9/21/2014

<http://www.county.org/magazine/departments/historicalhighlights/Pages/Spanning-History.aspx>

xvi Heinkel-Wolfe, Peggy. "The Bridges of Denton County." Texas Highways, November 2005, p 24.