



Stephen Brooks/News Tribune

Mabel Thompson has recorded the history of the steel-truss bridge on Walnut Acres Road for future generations. Her father-in-law helped move the bridge to its present location.

Steel-truss bridge to be taken down this week

By Michelle Brooks
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Nostalgia will make way for safety and more use at a rural Cole County crossing of the North Moreau Creek.

The 150-foot steel-truss bridge at Walnut Acres Road in the south-central part of the county will be taken down this week by Lehman Construction of California.

The historic bridge was closed by a Missouri Department of Transportation inspection in June.

The 14-foot wide bridge didn't accommodate farmers' combines or large tractors anyway. So a new 26-foot-wide bridge will allow all traffic to cross safely, after the July 15, 2009, completion date.

The bridge had been reduced from a 10-ton weight allowance to three tons after the Minnesota bridge collapse spurred another inspection, said County Engineer Eric Landwehr.

The project will cost about \$1.65 million, partly funded by the county's half-cent Capital Improvements Sales Tax. The

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Bridge has served family through four generations

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When Mabel Thompson was a 19-year-old dating a neighbor boy, she knew when to go down to open the farm gate for him when she heard the wood planks on the Walnut Acres Road steel-truss bridge rattle under the weight of his vehicle.

Thompson eventually married that boy — George Thompson — and still lives in her late husband's home, which overlooks neighbors' fields. And, beyond a grove of trees, is the bridge.

Her four sons and their families will arrive today to celebrate the holidays, but also to take one last family photo in front of the historic bridge, which is scheduled for demolition.

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Bridge: \$1.65 million project

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remainder comes from federal funds MoDOT is required to distribute among counties with deficient bridges.

Cole County receives about \$70,000 per year. Landwehr said they save those funds for when a big project like this comes around.

Of the more than 50 bridges in Cole County, only two others are categorized as "structurally deficient," Landwehr said. And two more are "functionally deficient," mostly because they are narrow.

The two other truss bridges in the county considered structurally deficient, meaning they have a weight limit, are at Moniteau Creek Road crossing the Moniteau Creek and at Hemstreet Road crossing the North Moniteau Creek.

"We expect both bridges to remain in service for several more years and have no intention to

close them unless recommended by MoDOT," Landwehr said.

A Section 106 review conducted by the State Historic Preservation Office found that the bridge was historic.

The Cole County Department of Public Works was required to advertise the bridge, seeking anyone who might want to relocate it.

"We did that. But no one came forward," Landwehr said.

It briefly was considered as a possibility for a pedestrian bridge to connect from the Millbottom area to Adrian's Island. However, the bridge's condition was too deteriorated, Landwehr said.

"I think in 10-20 years, we won't see these anymore," Landwehr said of the iconic truss bridges. "But it's a trade off for safer, wider bridges."



Submitted photo

This picture, taken at the time of the dedication of the bridge on old St. Louis Road in 1913 shows, from left, Jimmy Murphy, Aurelia Henry, Frank Gerbes, Henry LePage, Nathalia LePage, Eugene LaPage, John LePage, Joe Gerbes and John Gerbes.

Family: Bridge dedicated in 1913

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Four generations of Thompsons have used the bridge, installed through neighborly cooperation in 1921.

Mrs. Thompson's father-in-law, John Thompson, built the trailer that hauled the 150-foot bridge more than 12 miles from its original St. Louis Road location, where it was dedicated in 1913.

"It must have taken quite awhile to move," said Thompson, 83. "I don't know how they got it down there."

When Thompson first heard the bridge would come down, she began calling neighbors and anyone associated with the bridge to collect information and, surprisingly, lots of photographs, which she has compiled in a booklet.

"I wanted my kids and grandkids to remember," Thompson said. "I didn't want

it to go away forever."

Many of her neighbors are children and grandchildren of those who helped install the bridge, too.

"I found lots of interesting bits," Thompson said. "One man fell off a bluff and another was bit by a rattlesnake."

Before the bridge was moved, neighbors crossed the North Moreau Creek at the Fischer-Seidel Ford. The close-knit German-heritage farmers helped each other with threshing and other needs.

So banning together to put in the bridge was no different.

"You got to see your neighbors a lot more," Thompson said. "Everybody was interested in it, because they were doing (the work)."

One neighbor volunteered to dig the piers down to bedrock, another family hosted the bridge experts who helped them, and several donated their animals to clear

the brush and logs.

Just as the steel-truss bridge helped farmers with easier access to each other and to markets, the new 26-foot-wide bridge, due to be complete by July 15, 2009, will help them in the newest age of farming.

Width and weight limits on the old bridge prevented combines or other large tractors from crossing.

And since the old bridge was closed in June, residents have had to drive a longer, alternate route. Thompson has farmland on both sides of the bridge, which means she had to drive more than five miles out of the way to get to her Zion Road property.

"It's time for a new bridge. It was worn out," Thompson admitted. But as her booklet ends:

"Life moves forward, but we are drawn back to the past with memories of the times gone by."