

Lancaster, York connection not new

Linking of counties has long, watery past

At the present time, there are plans to extend Rock Hill's Dave Lyle Boulevard by crossing the Catawba River and connecting to U.S. 521 in Lancaster County.

The last time a new bridge was built to connect the two counties was in 1959, when the state-owned ferry across the Catawba at Van Wyck was shut down and the S.C. 5 bridge was built.

Before that, there was the Roddey Bridge, which was built in 1912 and was destroyed by the Great Flood of 1916 (that giant of all floods swept away every bridge on the Catawba from its N.C. origins to Camden, S.C.). The Roddey Bridge, which never was replaced, crossed just below the point where Sugar Creek empties into the Catawba River.

Before the Roddey Bridge, there only were ferries and railway trestles to negotiate the Catawba, which was noted for its frequent floods.

The frequent flooding made the county governments very reluctant to put money into bridge building. After the disastrous flood of 1904, it was two years before work resumed. Even then, both counties announced they planned to limit their financial contribution to repair work done by the cheap labor of chain-gang prisoners.

Still, the business community was anxious to expand its markets. Lancaster farmers considered Rock Hill to have the best

cotton market, and Rock Hill wanted to attract Lancaster farmers and persuade them to spend a considerable portion of their cotton checks in Rock Hill stores.

Even crossing Sugar Creek was not an easy task. Until the fall of 1916, every bridge over the creek, whether wood, iron or steel, was swept away by powerful floods.

Bridges generally were known by the name of a landowner whose property the road passed through. Thus, on present-day S.C. 160 from Fort Mill to U.S. 521 in Lancaster County there was a succession of bridges known as Bailes Bridge from the end of the Civil War until 1934.

The first ones were wooden, but in 1892 York and Lancaster counties agreed to build an iron bridge. It was washed out by a flood in 1901. Ironically, not a drop of water fell on the bridge, but a mighty storm upstream sent a monstrous wave that destroyed it.

A replacement bridge known as the Culp Bridge lasted three years, but it was swept away by the flood of 1904.

Before Chambers of Commerce came into the local picture, there were Commercial Clubs. Rock Hill had one, and so did Fort Mill. In 1906, the Fort Mill Commercial Club initiated a drive to build a steel replacement bridge over Sugar Creek. The new bridge was to be known as the Bailes Bridge. James P. Bailes had a large farm in Pleasant Valley on the Lancaster side of Sugar Creek. He also was one of Fort Mill's leading businessmen.

First the Fort Mill Commercial Club guaranteed a voluntary subscription of \$400. That sounds like a pittance but it was figured that a substantial steel bridge could be built for \$2,000, or \$2,500 at the most. It was agreed that each county would bear one-half of the cost.

The two counties agreed to abandon the old Culp Bridge site,

which was about 75 yards downstream. On the York County side of the new site there was a high and very rocky hill. This was looked upon as good because the slope itself was gradual.

Two steel spans of 75 feet each were ordered. At each end of the bridge long wooden approaches were built at a height believed sufficient to keep the bridge open to vehicles even in the worst of floods.

The 1906 steel bridge lasted 10 years. The Great Flood of 1916 wiped it out.

Incidentally, York County's first fatal automobile accident occurred at the Bailes Bridge. The road leading to the bridge was not paved. Old pictures of the roadway show it heavily rutted, proof of why the Model-T chassis sat high off the ground.

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