

COMMUNITY | *Days Gone By*

FRANKLIN'S HISTORIC BRIDGES ON FIRST AVENUE AND EAST MAIN STREET

BY RICK WARWICK

Have you ever wondered why Bridge Street was so named? According to Park Marshall (1855-1946), long-time mayor of Franklin and local historian, travelers from Nashville originally had to enter Franklin by way of Spencer's Creek, fording the Harpeth River near their confluence, and into town over the stone bridge at Sharp's Branch. This route would have brought the traveler to the back of the Franklin High School campus and on through Chestnut Bend subdivision. Fourth Avenue did not cross North Margin until Rest Haven Cemetery was opened in 1853 and, before that, travelers went around the north end of the Old City Cemetery and up Third Avenue North to the Public Square.

In 1805, a bridge was built at the northeast end of Bridge Street and a new road was built to Spencer's Creek running towards Nashville as it does presently. This bridge washed away in 1819 and the Williamson County Quarterly Court contracted for a replacement but in a new location midway between Bridge Street and East Main Street. This wooden covered-bridge stood until it was burned by Confederates on November 13th, 1862. Earlier, in March 1862, U.S. Major General Carlos Buell used the bridge to move his army of 20,000 through Franklin on its way to Shiloh.

After the Civil War, the Nashville-Franklin Turnpike Company built a new bridge with iron girders in the same location. Park Marshall described this bridge as being "...open-topped and was supported by light iron girders underneath resting on a middle pillar. These girders or under-trusses extended five or six feet beneath the bridge floor and were the cause of the bridge being washed away in 1901."

Thomas B. Johnson, the owner of the Nashville-Franklin Turnpike Company, had the next bridge built of steel in a single span

without a middle pier. A pedestrian walkway ran along one side of the bridge to separate walkers from automobiles, which were just becoming popular. A limestone wing-wall was built on the town side entrance to guard against anyone running off into the river and may still be seen today. The bridge, in this location, created a dogleg-turn from First Avenue to East Main Street. This problem was solved when the county purchased the turnpike and the state built the Jackson Highway in 1929, relocating the new bridge in alignment with East Main Street.

The new bridge over the Harpeth River on East Main Street was originally named Memorial Bridge in honor of those local soldiers killed in World War I. In 2011, the bridge was rededicated to honor WO1 Judson E. Mount, who died in Operation Iraqi



Franklin children at bridge ca. 1895



Nashville Pike Bridge over Harpeth ca. 1900

Freedom in 2009. Contractor Jesse Andrews with Lebanon Bridge Company of Adams, Tennessee built this bridge in 1929 for \$50,000. The Review-Appeal reported that the bridge was the first in the state to have electric lampposts, of which two still survive.

A few old timers in Franklin may remember when BGA had the tug-of-war just beside the Memorial Bridge. After seeing the accompanying 1944 photograph, it appears the riverbank near the bridge was an excellent choice for this fabled contest. Today, the steep banks, with overgrown trees and vegetation, would make the popular contest difficult.



Also, without the large amount of fill-dirt added on both sides of the bridge entrance in the mid-20th century, Andy Marshall's Boathouse on the left and Preston Ingram's new development on the right could not exist.

Next time you cross the Memorial Bridge, remember it will soon be celebrating its ninetieth birthday.

However, take heart, it has withstood the great floods of 1929, 1948, 1975 and 2011.



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