

History

During the late 1930's, Chester civic leaders and businessmen conceived an idea to construct a bridge across the Mississippi River connecting the States of Illinois and Missouri with a highway system. The project was a complicated one. A permit had to be obtained from the Federal Government to cross a federal waterway.

United State Senators C.W. "Runt" Bishop and Scott Lucas played an integral part in obtaining the permit, as well as being liaison between the City of Chester and Washington, D.C.

An engineering firm was contacted to supervise the construction; therefore, the firm of Sverdrup and Parcel and Associates, Inc. of St. Louis, Missouri was contracted and remained Consulting Engineers for the bridge. The Mayor of Chester during this time of planning was E.J. "Dutch" Uffelmann but during the actual construction which began in 1941, Charles Oetting was the city's Mayor.

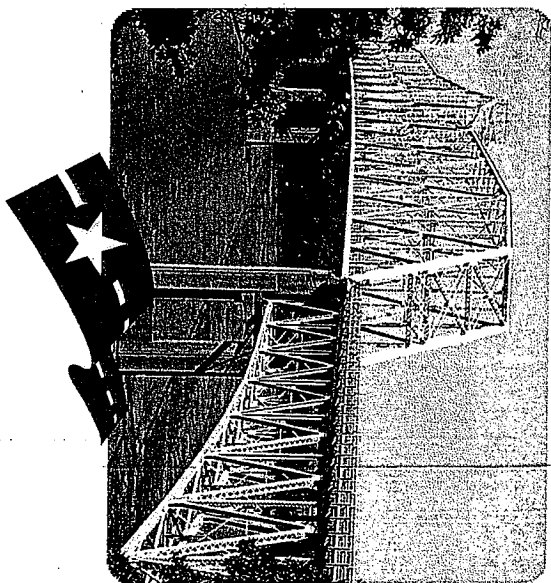
A Bridge Commission was established to govern the operations of the toll facility. The Commission appointed Charles Scott as the first Bridge Manager and issued a contract to the Massman Construction Company of Kansas City, Missouri to begin construction.

Bridge Facts

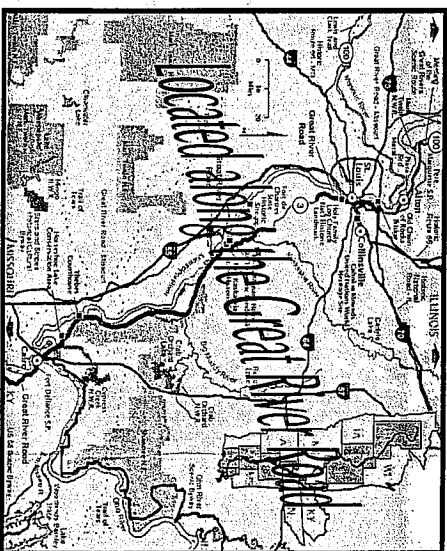
- Location: River Mile 109.9
- River Elevation: 338 Feet
- Daily Traffic Count: 7,258 (2004)
- Bridge Type: Steel through Truss, Two Deck Truss Approach Spans
- Length: 2,826 Feet, 670 Foot Main Span Width: 22 Feet, 2 Traffic Lanes Height above water: 104 Feet
- Navigation channel width: 650 Feet
- August 23, 1942, the City of Chester held the Grand Opening of the newest bridge to span the *Father of Waters*
- Estimated cost to build: \$1,385,000
- The state line runs along the center of the channel therefore the north end of the bridge is designated IL-150, and the south end of the bridge is MO-51
- The only bridge between St. Louis and Cape Girardeau, Missouri

The Chester Municipal Bridge

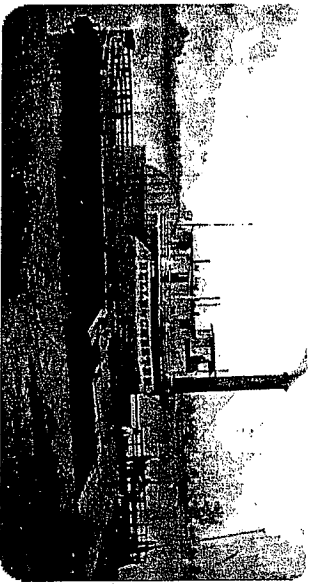
Spanning the Mississippi River



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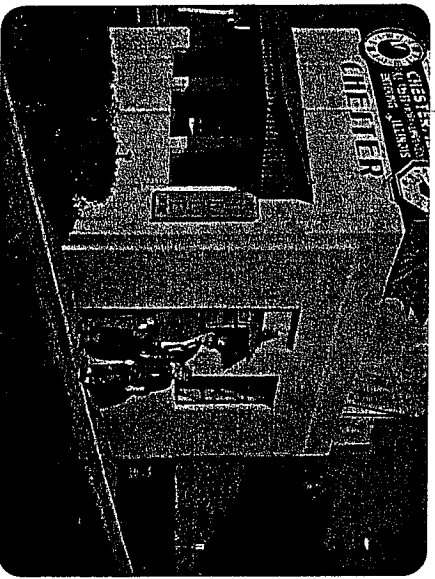


Prior to the Bridge: The Belle of Chester



The Belle of Chester served as the first means of public transportation across the Mississippi River at Chester. The ferry was built in Grafton, IL in 1878 and served the Chester area until the Chester Bridge provided a roadway across the river. The ferry was sunk near the bank just south of the bridge on the Missouri side. During very low river level, remnants of the ferry can be seen.

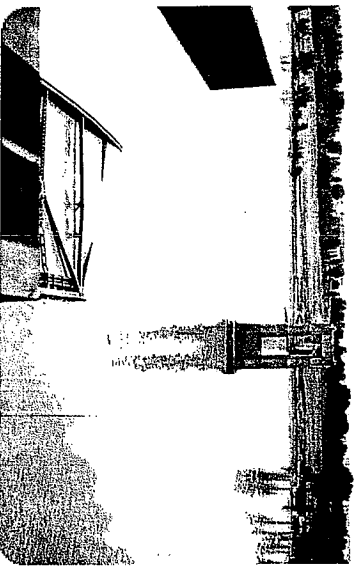
The Chester Bridge charged a toll until Dec. 31, 1988



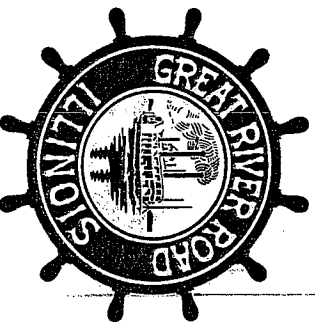
CHESTER BRIDGE DESTROYED

On July 29, 1944, a few minutes after 9:00 PM, 650 feet of the bridge toppled into the river after being struck by a tornado.

Two center spans were torn from the piers. From first-hand eye witness reports, the wind lifted the bridge from the west pier first and then pulled the whole structure, except the approaches, into the river. It took two years to rebuild the bridge and it was reopened in 1946.



The Chester Bridge pictured with the two sections in the river after high winds destroyed the bridge



I Remember ... Early Memories of

Chester by Jessie Lee Huffstutler (p. 16)

... a tornado came roaring down the river, hit the bluff, and veered toward the Missouri shore and destroyed our beautiful bridge. The two central spans were torn from the piers and dropped on their side into the river. When the electric cable broke, flames shot into the air, making possible the sight of just what happened to two people who were nearby and watching at the proper time. Mrs. Gertrude Burklow was on her porch, awaiting her husband's return from work at the Security Hospital. Jack Sutt, who worked at the light and ice plant, was also watching and saw it. He called the toll gate on the bridge and informed the keeper who was Fonrose Jones. All of Chester was in complete darkness for some time.

Trivia

The bridge was used in a scene of the movie *In the Heat of the Night*, during which a prisoner is seen being chased from Mississippi into Arkansas. The movie is set in the town of Sparta, MS but was filmed in Sparta, IL. Sidney Poitier would not agree to star in the movie if it was filmed south of the Mason-Dixon Line, because of the racial tensions in the south in 1967.

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