



When the Big Bridge Was Built

EDITORS NOTE:

This picture and very interesting story came to us and we thought our readers would enjoy sharing it with us:

As I sat looking over some of my pictures of long time ago I wondered if many of us older folks remembered when this railroad bridge was built west of Madrid.

They started to build the big fill on the east side of the river in the summer of 1911. The abutments were made in early 1912. By summer the steel began to go up on the west side of the river.

One terribly windy day they started out with the derrick hooked to a large girder that was to span across the river. About half way out, the girder began to sway back and forth. The derrick went over on its side but luckily the hook let loose of the girder and it plunged into the river.

My husband Robert Barrow was the man that handled the hook that held that girder. As the derrick was turning over the men jumped. No one was hurt. Next day they tried to locate the girder in the river but it had driven deep into the river bottom and is still there.

In the spring the ice and high water were bad. They had a temporary bridge built down under the big bridge to haul supplies across to the west side of the river. My father Elmer Brokaw of Perry, was the engineer on the work train and as they crossed this bridge he heard a cracking noise, so he opened up the throttle of the engine and got off just as the bridge went out.

There were just these two accidents but no one was seriously hurt.

This picture, taken by Alice and Ruth Peelstrom's father in 1913, shows them just before they set the last girder connecting the west with the east side.

The boy that is marked mascot was their water boy, Stirley Wheeler of Madrid. The man just below that bucket is Robert Barrow of Madrid. The other 5 men to the right of picture were the bosses. The rest are steel workers and train crew.

When the bridge was completed in 1913 it was the longest and highest double-track bridge in the United States. During World War II half of the girders and rails were torn out as the government needed the steel. So now it is single track.

As our world turns each day I wonder what is the future for this beautiful structure. Sometime drive down the river hill on No. 89 and take a good look at this bridge and you too will see the beauty of it. It brings back many memories to me, because it railroaded me to a happy married life. I met my husband — down by the Old Moines Stream.

Mrs. Louise Barr