



# PSST! HEY BUDDY WANNA BUY RIDDLE BRIDGE

BY MIKE STOFFREGEN

Pssst! Hey, Buddy, wanna buy a bridge?

That old huckster's line may not be too far from the truth when it comes to Riddle Bridge in northeast Pulaski County. The old bridge connects Y Highway and O Highway between St. Robert and Dixon. Recently, the Pulaski County Commission has learned that if it wants to replace the rickety old bridge, the commission is going to have to find some way to preserve it.

Riddle Bridge was built across the Gasconade River during the years of 1910 and 1911 by the Macon Bridge Company of Macon, Ohio. The bridge was named after the Riddle family that lived in the area during the 1830's. Elias Riddle owned the property the bridge was built upon. Elias died in 1891, almost twenty years before the bridge bearing his family's name was built.

The bridge was welcomed by the residents of the area since they could cross the Gasconade without having to worry if the river was up or not. But the bridge that was once a convenience has become an inconvenience with time.

If you haven't seen Riddle Bridge, you should. The long, span bridge is red with rust. It creaks and groans when cars or trucks travel across it. Old oak planks make the floor of the bridge. Most of them are loose and rattle as a car drives across it.

The bridge is unsafe for heavy traffic and has fallen through several times. The last time was in 1979 when a young man was driving a truckload of wood across the bridge. The truck fell through the south side of the bridge, stopping just short of hitting the water. The driver was not injured. The bridge was repaired, and the weight limit on the bridge dropped from four tons to three tons.

For years, people who have children in the Dixon School District living along Highway Y have to get their children up early for school.

The children must catch an early bus that takes them back through Waynesville School District and down Highway 28 to Dixon. The round trip was more than forty miles out of the way. It is an inconvenience for the parents, and it is an added expense for the Dixon School District.

In 1984, the Pulaski County Commission applied for a grant from the state to replace the rickety Riddle Bridge. The \$100,000 grant was approved by the Missouri Department of Community and Economic Development. That money would be used to get federal money to help build the bridge. Ninety percent of the money would come from the federal government, and the county would pay the other ten percent of the cost of replacing the bridge. The grant set in motion a process that is still in the works.

Surveys were done, easements signed and plans drawn. Work on the new Riddle Bridge was originally set to begin in the spring of 1985, but delays set in. An archeological impact study had to be done because Indian artifacts were found near the proposed bridge construction site. Eastern District Judge Ernie Carlton called the whole process frustrating. He said it was very difficult to coordinate the three levels of government involved in the project.

This spring, another wrench was thrown into the work. The bridge was ready to be let out for contracts. Then the Missouri Department of Natural Resources nominated Riddle Bridge to be placed on the National Historic Register. The bridge's rich history and historical significance makes it a certainty to be accepted.

The nomination to the National Historic Register temporarily held up the bidding on the bridge. Missouri Highway and Transportation Department District Liaison Engineer Frank Snider said the Department seldom likes to begin a project involving a structure on the register

unless the historic structure is preserved in some way. Snider said earlier this year that unless the County Commission found some way to preserve the old bridge, work on the new bridge could not begin.

That lasted for less than a month. In May of this year the Highway and Transportation Department announced that the bids for new Riddle Bridge would be let out July 23rd. The new bridge will cost about \$900,000 to complete.

Although replacing the Riddle Bridge is now underway, the Pulaski County Commission is asking people for help in handling the bridge. The county must in some way preserve old Riddle Bridge. Presiding County Commissioner George Berry says the Commission has to find some group interested in helping to preserve the historic Riddle Bridge.

Berry said it is possible that the bridge could be moved. The parts of the bridge would have to be match-marked and the bridge taken apart. Then, it would have to be reassembled or stored somewhere. The Commission has never taken a bridge apart before, so it is difficult to estimate the cost. State Engineer Snider said it is possible that the Engineers on Ft. Leonard Wood may be interested in helping move the bridge.

Another option that has been ruled out is leaving the bridge where it is. The supports underneath the old Riddle Bridge are wearing down, and a good flood could tear the bridge down, carry it down stream and into the new bridge.

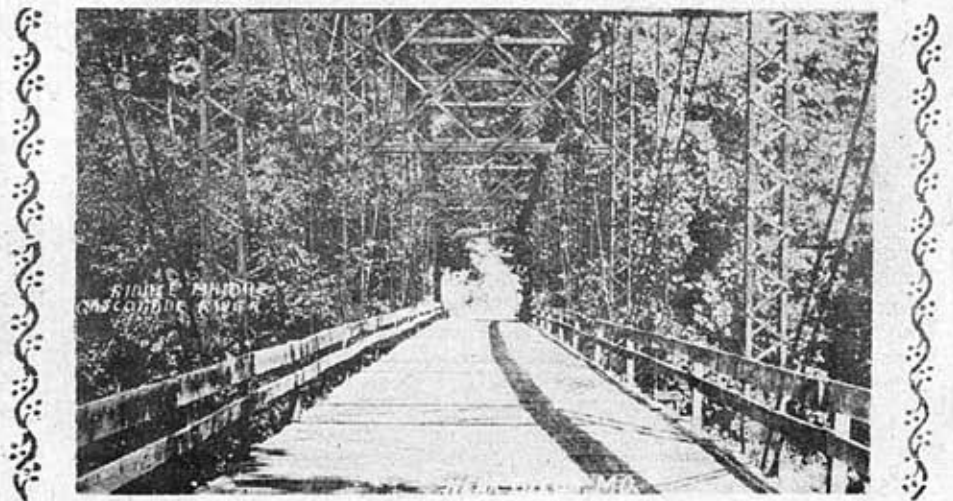
The County Commission says that leaving the bridge where it is right now is too big of a risk, and it would endanger the new bridge.

Construction on the new Riddle Bridge is set to begin soon. The exact date will depend on the signing of contracts with the company that wins the bidding for the project. That's good news for people wanting to safely travel across the

Gasconade, however, the County Commission still must find some person or group to help preserve

historic Riddle Bridge. It is a headache for the Pulaski County Commission, but it assures that a piece of

Pulaski County's past will be around for us to enjoy for many years to come.



Riddle Bridge in the 1920's.

(Photo courtesy of Earl and Anna Roberts)

**WELCOME TO**  
**RIDDLE BRIDGE**  
**GASCONADE RIVER**  
**PUBLIC FISHING ACCESS**  
**MISSOURI CONSERVATION DEPARTMENT**

**EXCLUSIVE**  
**PLANS FOR THE "NEW"**  
**RIDDLE BRIDGE!**

MISSOURI HIGHWAY AND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

**Side view of the "NEW RIDDLE BRIDGE"**

**Overhead view of the floor of the proposed Riddle Bridge project.**

Plans provided by the office of the Pulaski County Clerk  
with assistance of Ernie Carlton.