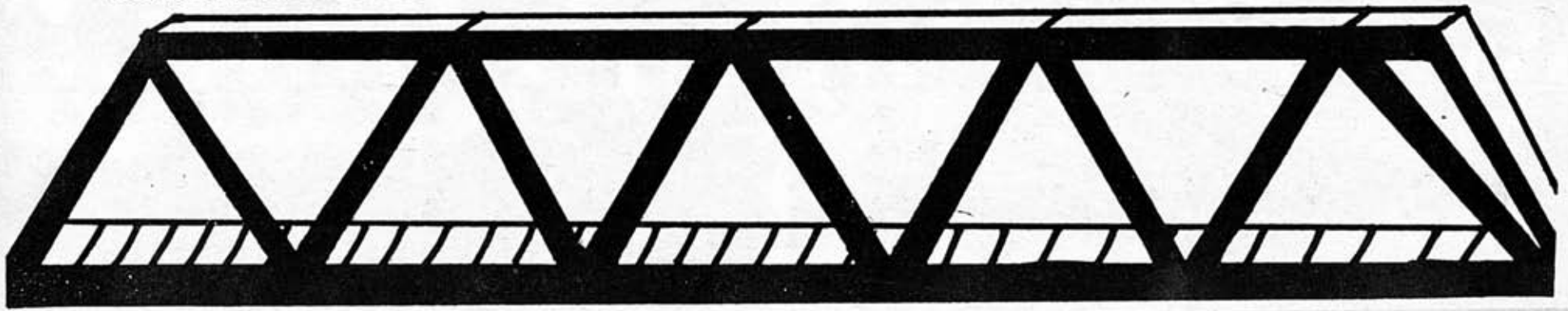


# RIDDLE BRIDGE:

# A NEW BEGINNING

By Van Beydler

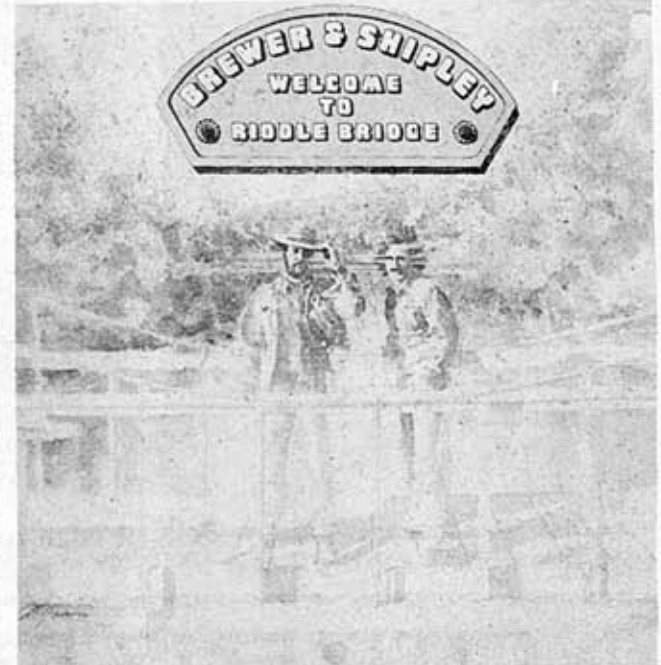


For 76 years, residents of Pulaski County have crossed the Gasconade River on the historic Riddle Bridge. It looks like Riddle Bridge will live on but in a different state. With the opening of the new "Riddle Bridge," an \$871,575 modern structure built by Huffman Bridge and Grading Incorporated of West Plains, Missouri, the old bridge is being dismantled piece by piece and marked to be reconstructed as a scenic footbridge in Nebraska City, Nebraska. According to Mark Kross, Highway Department Archeologist, Riddle Bridge is unique in Missouri. The original 216 foot bridge's uniqueness is based on the way that its steel members are put together. "The Riddle Bridge is the only one of its kind that has been built in Missouri and the only one that we're aware of that has survived," Kross said. The bridge's narrow width and physical condition doomed it. State and federal officials advertised the bridge in national magazines and there were 22 responses from coast to coast. Kross was surprised at the number of requests that he received about the bridge that included inquiries from the Los

Angeles area in California as well as some in Vermont, Virginia, Delaware, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Michigan, Mississippi, Indiana, Nebraska and Missouri. "We sent packages to most of those individuals. They varied from private individuals interested in using the bridge in setting up a housing division to span a creek to private or public historical groups that wanted the bridge for a footbridge in a park." Only the Vermont and Nebraska groups met the April 17th, 1987 deadline for submitting their proposals. Federal and Missouri highway officials reviewed them along with officials of the Missouri Office of Historic Preservation. A meeting was held in the Pulaski County Courthouse to see if there was interest in keeping the bridge in the county on May 4th, 1987. Around thirty people listened to 143rd District State Representative Jim Mitchell tell of efforts taken and what might be done to save the bridge. A committee was formed to seek a home for Riddle Bridge in Pulaski County other than its present location between Waynesville and Dixon. The old bridge could not

remain where it was because the supports were deteriorating badly and a flood could wash it away and right into the new bridge being built right next to the old one. The highway department agreed to give the committee a little time to see if a new home could be found but by May 12th, 1987, time was up. According to Luther Riddle, a member of the "Save the Bridge" committee and a direct descendant of Elias Riddle for whom Riddle Bridge is named, "A lot of efforts were made and people contacted to try to get them interested in it. It seemed like to no avail and it looks like we exhausted all of our efforts and time ran out on us." The committee had tried to locate the bridge across the Roubidoux in Waynesville but could only use half of the bridge. Since the old bridge is under historic protection, it had to be used in its entirety. An effort was even made to contact Silver Dollar City and they were interested but due to the timing of their season, the tourist attraction could not develop a plan to acquire the bridge or spare the manpower to reconstruct it in so short a time. Two years ago, in the 1985

edition of the "Old Settler's Gazette," we featured the history of Riddle Bridge and since that time we have discovered some new information about it. The old iron bridge was built for less than \$5,000 during 1910 and 1911 by the Canton Bridge Company of Canton, Ohio. The structure accommodates one vehicle at a time, has steel trusses and a wood deck. A gin pole was used to raise the bridge named for the Riddle family that settled here in the early 1830's when John and Sarah Riddle brought their six children. Their son Jesse had a son named Elias who homesteaded the property. Elias shipped cattle by the trainload to St. Louis and hid his gold in iron pots buried in the ground and in caves along the river near his farm. The moving of the Riddle Bridge is the first since 1985. At a Hermann winery's request, the 100 foot long American Mill Bridge was dismantled and moved from Jasper County to Gasconade County. I'm sorry to see the Riddle Bridge move as I am Elias Riddle's great-great grandson, but the good thing about moving the Riddle Bridge is it will have a new beginning. The bridge will be recon-

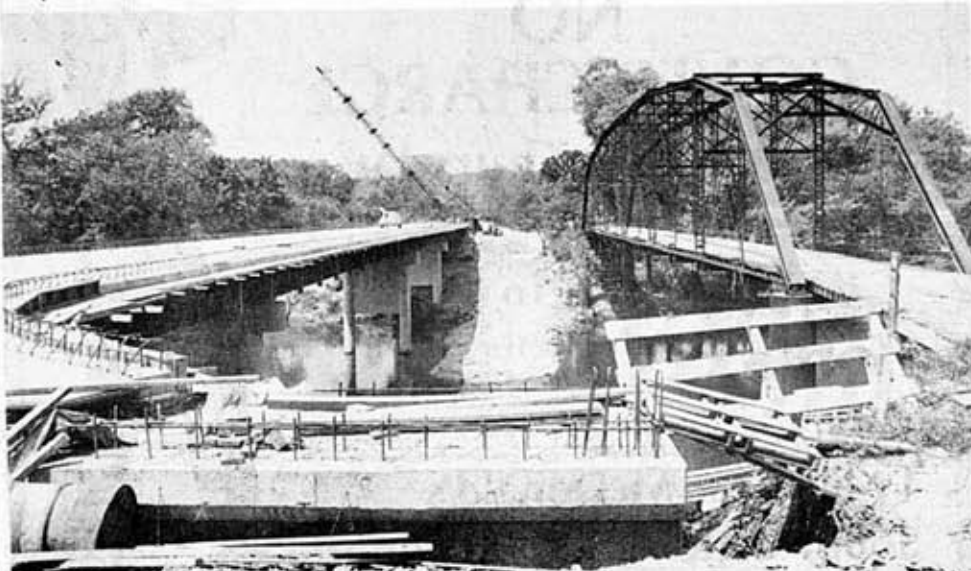


Cover art for the 1977 album,  
**WELCOME TO RIDDLE BRIDGE,**  
by Brewer and Shipley!

Courtesy of Capitol Records

structed and an historical marker will tell the history of the bridge and what it meant to this area by the National Arbor Day Foundation, a non-profit organization in Lincoln, Nebraska. The bridge will be placed in the J. Sterling Morton Orchard and Tree Farm, a national historic landmark, which is part of the original estate of J.

Sterling Morton who is the founder of Arbor Day. The foundation will also feature the bridge in their brochures for distribution to visitors that come to the farm. The bridge will span a small drainage to connect two separate parts of the orchard and will be used as a pedestrian bridge on a portion of their tour road.



While the new Riddle Bridge is being completed on the left, the old Riddle Bridge is still in use on the right. Soon the old bridge will be dismantled and shipped to Nebraska. (PHOTO BY VAN BEYDLER)



View of the two Riddle Bridges taken from the  
Waynesville Side.