

## The Battles of the Mooringsport Bridge



Anything that is 100 years old usually has at least two histories; one about its origin and another about its survival. Take, for example, the Caddo Lake “Vertical Lift” Drawbridge in Mooringsport, a dozen miles north of Shreveport.

In 1914 the bridge opened to replace a ferry service. As constructed by the Midland Bridge Company of Kansas City, Mo., under the authority of the Caddo Parish Police Jury, the vehicular bridge featured an unusual vertical lift in the center to allow oil

equipment, especially Gulf Oil Company’s pile drivers, to pass through. The design, by architect James Waddell – whose firm was well known for its creative bridges – had first been used successfully in Chicago in 1893.

That was the beginning.

Then came the salvation. By the 1970s, the narrow bridge was deemed too outdated to allow for modern traffic flow. In 1989, the state received federal funding to build a new bridge. But then came resistance from citizen groups that wanted to save the old crossing. What followed was a long, tangled tale that hit its high mark in 1991, when an agency of the U.S. Department of the Interior declared that the span was nationally significant in its design. The bridge, it was learned, was eligible to be listed in the National Register of Historic Places. That officially happened in 1996. The action saved the bridge. Traffic has since been diverted and the structure now serves as a pedestrian crossing and a tourist curiosity.

This year is the centennial of the Mooringsport Bridge, the last of its type in the state. If bridges had memories, this one might recall the summer of 1941 when military maneuvers were held in the vicinity. During the World War to follow, there would be many instances of troops sent out to capture bridges, so the training was no doubt useful when practice battles were held to capture the Mooringsport Bridge. The combatants were divided into the Red and Blue armies. Leading them were two rising star generals: George S. Patton and Dwight Eisenhower. The bridge was bombed with sacks of flour.

As the bridge stands nobly for its centennial, its boosters can appreciate their own capture of the bridge when funds that had been earmarked to replace the bridge were eventually diverted to repair and save it.

Curiously, as president, Dwight Eisenhower would one day champion an interstate highway system that would take much of the pressure off old roads, such as Louisiana Highway 538, the bridge's former artery. Now pedestrians can stare down from the railings in peace. The troubled waters have long been tamed

*This article appears in the May-June 2014 issue of Louisiana Life*

---