



## Historic Bridge Foundation Facebook Archives

### Focus Bridge: Dodd Ford Bridge

August 2014

Built in 1901, the Dodd Ford Bridge (Bridge No. 1461) is a single-span, steel, pin-connected Pratt through truss in a camelback configuration with five upper chord slopes. Located on County Road 147 over the Blue Earth River, approximately one mile southwest of Amboy, Minnesota, the bridge is significant in its association with Lawrence Henry Johnson, a prominent Minnesota bridge builder of the late 19th century and early 20th century, and a former Speaker of the Minnesota House. The Dodd Ford Bridge remains one of only two authenticated examples of Johnson's work. The bridge was listed on the National Register of Historic Places on December 9, 2009 for transportation and engineering as one of Minnesota's earliest remaining examples of the overhead Pratt.

Dodd Ford Bridge was originally in Shelby Township, which was organized in 1858. By 1860, Shelby Township was among the most populous in Blue Earth County. By 1875, Shelby Township was an established agricultural area, known for its grain and livestock, and sustained a small village known as Shelbyville, two miles southeast from the future site of the Dodd Ford Bridge. In 1879 the St. Paul and Sioux City Railway built a north-south line through Blue Earth County. Many townships along the route offered financial incentives to the railroad to build a depot in their vicinity, but Shelbyville failed to do so. However, a group of farmers two miles north of Shelbyville made an offer to the railroad to develop a new town and provide a depot for the St. Paul and Sioux City Railway. This action resulted in the demise of Shelbyville and the creation of Amboy, which was incorporated in 1887.

Amboy developed as a trade center and this necessitated improvements to the local road system because there was no highway system in its immediate vicinity. The city stood about one-half mile east from the Blue Earth River and, while a road did enter Amboy from the west, this road crossed the river at a shallows known as Dodd Ford. In the fall of 1900, the Blue Earth County Board of Commissioners determined a need for a bridge to accommodate crossing the river during high water and to accommodate increased travel. A contract was awarded for the superstructure of 150 feet and was awarded to L. H. Johnson for \$4,948. The local contracting firm of Carlstrom Brothers was awarded a contract of \$1,975 to build two stone piers. The Dodd Ford Bridge was constructed in 1901. The roadway and bridge from the west were the main connection to Amboy's railroad depot until larger roads and bridges were built a few miles north and south to accommodate larger equipment.

Blue Earth County proposed demolition and replacement of the bridge in 2007. Under the guide of the Amboy Area Community Club, the Dodd Ford Bridge Preservation Society (DFBPS) was developed to

support the retention of the historic structure and its story as part of the Amboy community. DFBPS worked alongside the Minnesota State Office for Historic Preservation, the Minnesota Department of Transportation, the Minnesota Federal Highway Administration, and the Historic Bridge Foundation, through the federally mandated Section 106 and Section 4(f) processes to assess the purpose and need for a new bridge and to evaluate alternatives to demolition. In 2009, the FHWA ruled that "rehabilitation without affecting the integrity of the historic structure of the Dodd Ford Bridge is feasible and prudent alternative to replacement." However, Blue Earth County turned down federal funding and in May 2009, the bridge was closed by Blue Earth County.

In 2010, Blue Earth County passed a resolution to retain ownership of the bridge and to preserve the bridge for recreational use only. The Dodd Ford Bridge Preservation Society, in cooperation with Blue Earth County, acquired grants from the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the Minnesota Heritage and Cultural Funds to complete an engineering study and detailed engineering plans so that the project would be "shovel ready" to be rehabilitated for non-vehicular use. In 2013, however Blue Earth County began to investigate the idea of applying for state funds that could be used to restore the bridge to vehicular use. In this plan, steel beams would be placed under the bridge and a new concrete deck would be put in place. This plan will allow the bridge to carry heavy loads and return the bridge to vehicular use. While the truss will no longer be load bearing, the plan was seen as a win-win by the county and the local preservation group. In June 2014, the county announced that the plan had received funding from state local bond funds. Work on the Dodd Ford Bridge was expected to begin in late August, with an expected completion date of December 2014. However, bids came in higher than expected, and the county rejected all bids, planning now to try putting the project out for bid again in February 2015 with the hope of having more affordable bids come in, or having additional state funds to assist with the higher bids.



Dodd Ford Bridge Elevation, View In Spring.





Oblique View in Winter.



Dodd Ford Bridge Elevation, View In Winter.



Dodd Ford Bridge Elevation, View In Summer.





Dodd Ford Bridge Portal View.



Dodd Ford Bridge Oblique View.





Carnegie brand on Dodd Ford Bridge.



Dodd Ford Bridge Top Chord Connection





Dodd Ford Bridge Bottom Chord Connection



Elevation

*Photograph courtesy of Arthur Sidner*