

Historic bridge comes down

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ONCE a span used by horse-drawn wagons, cars, streetcars, tractor-trailers and bicycles, the Bridgeport Bridge is no more.

Standing since 1893, the old span was demolished this morning. Preparations for its removal have been under way for weeks, and workers were still on the site during the weekend.

A more serviceable bridge - not having outstanding decorative finials atop it - has been used by motorists and pedestrians since its completion in 1997. The Military Order of the Purple Heart Bridge was built alongside its predecessor to span the back channel of the Ohio River.

The Bridgeport Bridge will be demolished by the Joseph B. Fay Co. of Tarentum, Pa., whose winning bid was \$672,222.

Once known as the Wheeling and Belmont Bridge, the span once was a toll bridge. It cost \$65,974.04 to construct, quite a bit less than the cost to destroy it.

The bridge was built to replace a long covered bridge built by the Zane brothers between Bridgeport and Wheeling Island.

Work on the covered bridge began in 1836, and it was completed two years later. Its cornerstone was laid Feb. 28, 1838.

According to the "History of Belmont and Jefferson Counties" by J.A. Caldwell, "William Lee Barron had the original contract at \$68,500 (to construct the covered bridge). The job was given up by Barron before it was half completed. He had contracted for its erection at figures by which he would lose money. The Zanes took it off his hands and finished it."

After the covered bridge was built, the village which originally had been called Canton was changed to Bridgeport.

Contractor for the bridge being demolished was the Wrought Iron Bridge Co., Canton.

Its parts weren't ordered from Sears catalog, it represented one type of bridge that could be ordered from catalogs at the end of the 19th century.

"Except for the replacement of the partially wooden roadway surface with steel grating in 1950, the bridge remained basically unchanged. Because the floor beams had become structurally unsound, a new self-supporting, loading bearing deck structure was installed inside the trusses of the Bridgeport Bridge in 1987," according to the Historic American Engineering Record Web site.

That structure was designed as a temporary means of carrying traffic until the construction of a new vehicular bridge. The deck installed was prefabricated in England and is a modern-day successor to the Bailey bridge type, according to the Web site.

Although the Bridgeport Bridge is becoming a span of the past, Bridgeport still has the Military Order of the Purple Heart Bridge and the Aetnaville Bridge although the latter was closed to vehicles in the late 1980s.

Also still remaining in the Bridgeport area although it doesn't cross the Ohio River is the "granddaddy" of all the area spans - the Blaine Bridge. That S-shaped span, completed in 1828, is the oldest documented standing bridge in Ohio and was selected as the official Bicentennial Bridge in Ohio.

It carried traffic on the National Road as did the the Bridgeport Bridge, which becomes part of our history.

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