

THE BARING CROSS BRIDGES

by W. M. "Mike" Adams

With the present rebuilding of the Missouri Pacific's Baring Cross Bridge to satisfy navigation requirements on the Arkansas River, a word of history on this river crossing seems to be in order.

On January 12, 1853, Judge Edward Cross, Roswell Beebe and others incorporated the Cairo and Fulton Railroad in Arkansas with a capital stock of \$1,500,000. Roswell Beebe was elected President and served until he died in 1856 at which time Judge Cross was elected. By act of Congress February 9, 1853, a land grant was awarded the State of Arkansas for the purpose of building a "railroad from the Mississippi River opposite the mouth of the Ohio River, via Little Rock, to the Texas boundary near Fulton, in Arkansas, with branches to Fort Smith and the Mississippi River". This grant was in turn awarded to the Cairo and Fulton. There was a companion land grant and charter in Missouri but it was to be many years before construction began. The route to be transversed was surveyed in 1850 by Captain Josiah Barney of the U. S. Topographical Engineers and was practically all through a dense forest. The only settlements were on or near the navigable streams - the land just did not sell, money was too scarce. In 1868 one Thomas Allen was elected President of the St. Louis and Iron Mountain Railroad. At this time this line extended from St. Louis to Belmont, Missouri. Allen secured the Missouri portion of the C & F Charter and reorganized it as the Arkansas Branch of the St. Louis and Iron Mountain and dedicated himself to building the railroad to Texas.

Contrary to what I would imagine to be popular belief, the C & F did not build into Little Rock from the north. Rather it was built out of what is now North Little Rock northward to the south bank of the Little Red River opposite Judsonia where it eventually joined up with the segment being built southward from Missouri. This was apparently done to satisfy some time limitations in the land grant and also to take advantage of easy transportation of track material, etc., on the Arkansas River. The Memphis and Little Rock Railroad (now the Rock Island) was built from Devalls Bluff to what was then known as Huntersville, on the north bank of the Arkansas River opposite Little Rock and started operations on February 20, 1862. Just west of Huntersville and centered around the Hotel Argenta was another community that came to be known as Argenta. Grading on the C & F started at Argenta May 28, 1870 under the direction of Chief Engineer J. H. Morley and was completed to Little Red River in December of that year.

In December 1870 the McKay locomotive Works of Paterson, New Jersey completed the first three locomotives for the C & F. These were No. 1, named "Roswell Beebe", No. 2, the "Cairo", and No. 3, the "Fulton". These locomotives were brought by ocean vessel to New Orleans and there loaded on a barge for movement up the Mississippi and Arkansas Rivers to Little Rock. Upon arrival at the mouth of the Arkansas River it was found to be too low for navigation and the barge was then towed to White River and thence to Devalls Bluff.

Here it was planned to run the locomotives to Huntersville on the M & LR. Unfortunately it was discovered that no one had notified the builder that the C&F was to be 5-foot gauge and the locomotives were built to what is now commonly known as standard gauge or 4 foot 8½ inches. The M&LR was 5-foot gauge! It was necessary to load the engines on flat cars for the trip to Huntersville. The locomotives were unloaded at Huntersville and delivered February 15, 1871. Track laying started February 25, 1871.

Due to the oversight in the matter of locomotive gauge the road was initially constructed to standard or 4 foot 8½ inch gauge. By January 1872 the road was complete to the Little Red River and scheduled passenger service was inaugurated February 1, 1872. Through passenger service from St. Louis to Little Rock was advertised February 6, 1873. This involved transferring by ferry across the White and Little Red Rivers. During the summer of 1873 the bridges over the White River near Newport and the Little Red River at Judsonia were completed and the 50½ mile section to Argenta was widened to 5 foot gauge. The three original locomotives were stored near the roundhouse at what became known as Baring Cross and remained there until the entire road was again changed in gauge, this time back to 4 foot 8½ inches, in June 1879.

Ground had been broken on the southern division out of Little Rock on May 5, 1872 and track laying started May 21, 1873. Passengers to and from Little Rock were transferred from Argenta on an omnibus and a sturdy sidewheel ferry boat owned by the C&F, the "Nellie Thomas". This boat operated out of a landing at the foot of Rock Street, over a mile east of the depot which was located at the site of the present Missouri Paci-

fic station. On July 1, 1870 a charter was issued to the Citizens Bridge Company to span the river. The Cairo and Fulton obtained this charter but had no funds to begin construction. In February 1873, fate, in the form of an Englishman, scion of the famous Baring banking family, intervened. Alexander Baring arrived in Little Rock and took an immediate dislike to the primitive ferry boat and avowed that for the sum of \$300,000 he would construct a bridge across the river. On April 8, 1873 the Baring Cross Bridge Company was incorporated and the charter transferred to them.

The American Bridge Company of Chicago, no connection with the present company of the same name, performed the actual construction which was completed December 20, 1873. At 2:00 P.M. December 21, 1873 the draw span was swung into position. According to the Arkansas Gazette a woman, wife of one of the bridge workers, ran out on the span and crossed to the north bank. She thus became the first person to cross the Arkansas River on a bridge. On December 22, 1873 Engineer Charles Seymour at the throttle of Engine No. 20, the "Jesse Lyon", pulled a train of empty freight cars over the bridge to test it and thus gained a measure of immortality. He then made a return trip to the north bank and thus had the honor of making the first two trips across the bridge. The first regular train to cross, Number 1, with Engineer McNally, arrived from St. Louis at 6:00 P.M. that day and a long and useful life began for the bridge.

On May 4, 1874 the Cairo and Fulton was absorbed by the St. Louis and Iron Mountain and the name changed to St. Louis, Iron Mountain and Southern. For the next forty-three years this romantic identity existed until, on May 17, 1917, the Missouri Pacific Railroad Company engulfed the Iron



PREVIOUS PAGE

Three stages in the history of the first Baring Cross Bridge are shown here. The view from the Little Rock side (top) was apparently taken sometime prior to the installation of the roadway for wagon traffic in 1877. This highway deck appears atop the bridge in the 1890 photo (center). when decayed wooden chords were replaced with steel. The end came for the first bridge at 4:10 A.M., April 21, 1927. The photo (bottom) from the roof of the Missouri Pacific Hospital was made the same day. Note the lone coal car hanging at the end of the remaining spans. (Three photos from the collection of Earl Saunders.)

The second Baring Cross bridge is shown at right. Beyond it can be seen part of the bypass bridge used while the Baring Cross Bridge was being rebuilt to the structure shown below. (Two photos shown by John M. Martin, Jr.)



Mountain. The name Baring Cross, ascribed by legend to be the name of a village in England from whence Alexander Baring hailed, has become a historic name in Central Arkansas. I personally believe the name is from the two principal founders of the bridge company, Alexander Baring and Judge Edward Cross. It is known that Judge Cross, from whom Cross Street took its name, owned most of the land on the south bank of the Arkansas River and the Rose Creek bottoms where the present Missouri Pacific station is located. Be that as it may, the name was used not only for the bridge but for the settlement that sprang up on the north bank of the Arkansas still further west of Argenta where the Iron Mountain shops were located. The present heavy diesel shop of the Missouri Pacific is located and in fact occupies part of the original buildings of the Baring Cross Shops of the Iron Mountain. To further perpetuate this name we have the Baring Cross Baptist Church and the Baring Cross School. An Iron Mountain directory for 1903 refers to the yards where the present railweld plant is located as the Baring Cross Yards.

The first Baring Cross bridge was a toll bridge and was designed to have a highway on top of the truss spans. This roadway was installed in 1877 and served as such until 1890 when the flooring was removed and the track level was floored. The Cairo and Fulton paid \$2.00 for each car and locomotive moving over the bridge. Wagons and teams were charged 50 cents, buggies 25 cents, livestock 10 cents, and pedestrians 5 cents. The bridge was originally constructed to handle locomotives weighing fifty tons. Over the years it was strengthened and rebuilt until by 1924 a locomotive weighing 138 tons could be handled. In 1926 plans were formulated for construction of a double track

lift span bridge to be started in 1929. Mother Nature then entered the picture. In April, 1927 the entire Mississippi Valley had been deluged with days and weeks of rain. At 4:10 A.M. April 21st the draw span and one 178 foot truss span of the Baring Cross Bridge collapsed. At the time of the collapse the river had crested at 34.4 feet. Flood stage at the bridge was 24.5 feet. On the 20th the bridge had been closed to traffic and fifteen cars of coal were shoved out on the structure in the hopes it would resist the enormous pressure of the water and prevent the bridge from falling. The tremendous force of the rushing water carried the draw span some 250 feet downstream and one of the coal cars was found one-half mile below the Rock Island Bridge - over two miles from Baring Cross! With the closing of the bridge all traffic was handled over the Junction Bridge. To facilitate this traffic it was necessary to construct a second main track between the Broadway Bridge and the Union Station.

Immediate plans were made for reconstruction of the bridge but complications arose in settling with the Baring Cross Bridge Company. Finally, in 1928 the property of the Baring Cross Bridge Company was transferred to the Missouri Pacific and the bridge company was dissolved by resolution of the stockholders on February 28, 1928. On March 6th the War Department granted approval of the bridge plans and on March 12th the contract for the foundation was let to the Missouri Valley Bridge Company. The American Bridge Company was awarded the contract for the steelwork and superstructure. The total cost of the new structure and allied track changes and construction was \$1,600,000 or 100,000 dollars more than the original capital stock of the Cairo and Fulton. The new bridge was designed to carry two

250-ton locomotives coupled. Many difficulties were encountered in sinking the piers. One was due to the many tons of rip-rap that had been placed around the old piers over the years. Another was the problem of removing some 250 tons of submerged steel and nine coal cars from the river bed.

Before the lift span was completed and when only one track was laid, the bridge was opened for service. On February 2, 1929, the bridge was dedicated by Missouri Pacific President L. W. Baldwin. His son, Lewis Warrington Baldwin, Jr., christened the bridge as "The New Baring Cross Bridge" with a bottle of Mountain Valley Mineral Water. The honor of running the first train over the new bridge went again to that gallant veteran Charles Seymour. Mr. Seymour had retired in 1924 after fifty-four years of service. He was noted for being a first class engineer and gentleman and at the special request of President Baldwin came out of retirement for the occasion. At 2:52 P.M., at the throttle of Engine 6611, Seymour eased Train 8, "The Southerner", across the bridge. Conductor R. L. Brandon, oldest in years of service on the Arkansas Division, officiated as conductor.

Chief Engineer Hadley of the Missouri Pacific in his dedicatory

remarks predicted, "assuming that we have builded as well as our predecessors, this new bridge should continue to carry any traffic that may be imposed upon it for at least the next fifty years." But for the necessity for relocating the navigation channels of the river, I am quite sure he would have been correct. The weight of present day locomotives is much less than the bridge was designed to carry and the well-thought out clearances have proved, even in this day of tri-level piggybacks, to be adequate. But, in the name of progress, this fine bridge, host to an uncounted multitude of trains these past 42 years, is bowing out. Soon we will be witness to a third dedication of the "Baring Cross Bridge".

IMPORTANT QUESTIONS TO BE VOTED AT OCTOBER 10 MEETING

There are still some details regarding by-laws and directors that need to be formally decided by the membership. All members are urged to attend the October 10 meeting.

President Jim Wilson will provide the program with a report on Southern Railway steam specials during the past summer.

Meeting time is Sunday afternoon at 2:00 P.M. in Room 305, Missouri Pacific Union Station.