

# The Bridges of Pulaski County

by Terry Primas

Imagine trying to get around Pulaski County without any bridges. The county has three large streams: the Gasconade River, the Big Piney River, and Roubidoux Creek. There are also innumerable smaller creeks, spring branches, and wet weather ditches that swell with heavy rain. In the early part of the 20th century, swollen streams were a major inconvenience. When the large streams went on a rampage, commerce came to a halt and the mail could not be delivered. Parts of the county, particularly Piney Township in the southeast, were isolated.

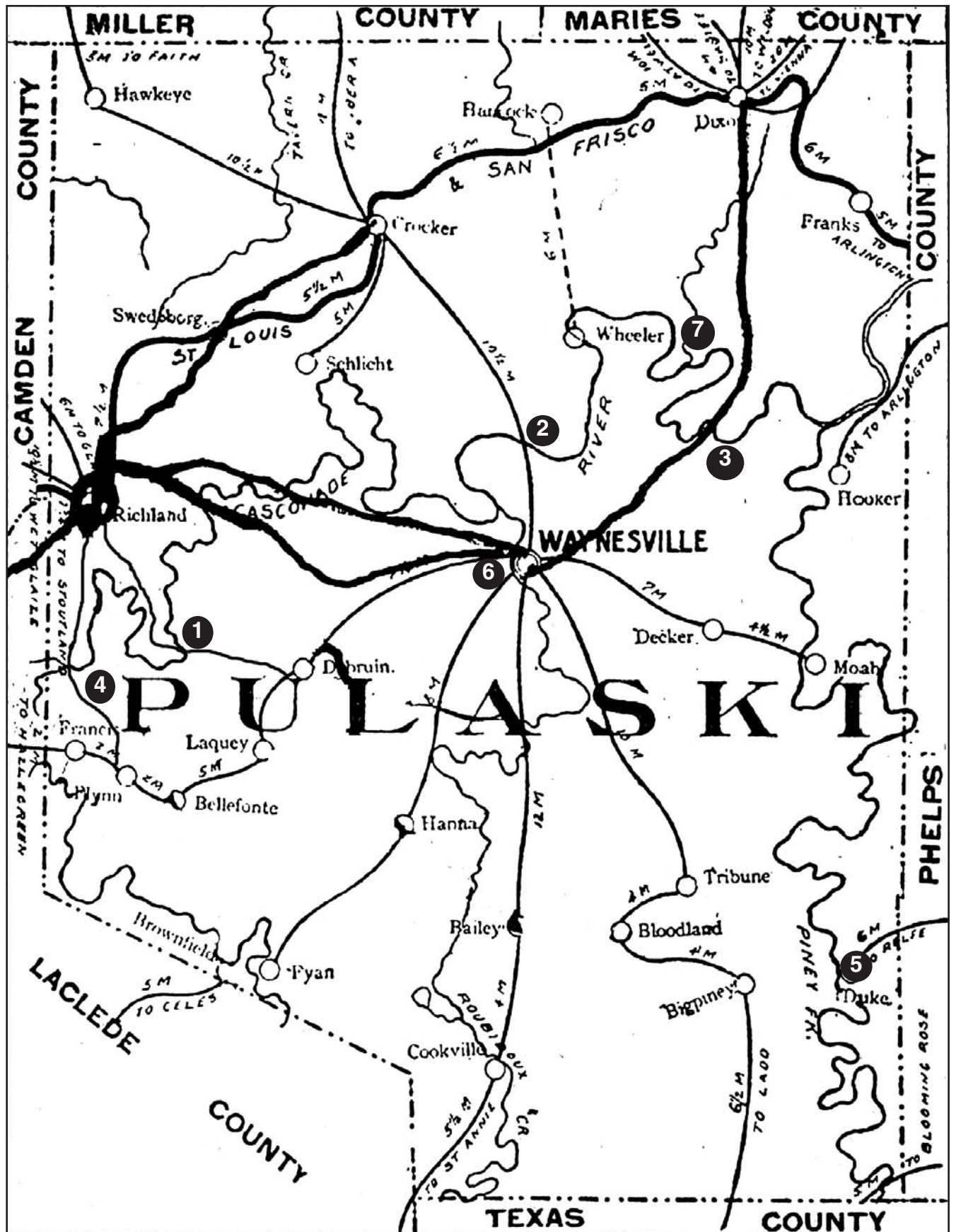
Road improvement was a major concern in 1908 and would soon become a major responsibility of county government. The good roads movement was gaining momentum and, although no state money was allocated to local roads, the legislature would in a few years begin passing legislation with the intent to upgrade the thoroughfares. Citizens wanted their country road to pass federal scrutiny for Rural Free Delivery. Maintenance and improvement of the road were the responsibility of those who lived alongside.

Bridges were certainly important to general road improvement in the county. These could not be constructed by a group of local farmers. At the beginning of 1908, Pulaski had three substantial bridges. One was McCain Bridge, southeast of Richland (see map at right, Number 1.) Three miles north of Waynesville on the Crocker Road was Skaggs Bridge (2). The third was on the road to Dixon, named Fishdam Bridge (3). All three bridges spanned the Gasconade River.

Of these three earliest bridges, only the construction date for Skaggs is known. It was erected in 1894 by the Chicago Bridge Company. Chances are it was the first constructed, providing the closest access for the county seat at Waynesville to the railroad at Crocker. The other two were built at least by 1906, as they appear on a county map of that year.

The County Court was petitioned by groups of citizens to construct bridges in their neighborhood. The *Pulaski County Democrat* (May 15, 1908) reported one such entreaty: "Quite a delegation were here from Richland last Thursday praying the County Court to help them build across the Gasconade River, they offering to put up one

The approach to the Lundstrum Ford Bridge on Highway T. It was originally the Waynesville Bridge. Courtesy of Bob and Geneva Goodrich.



The bridges that were present in the first two decades of the 20th century are shown on the map above: McCain Bridge (1), Skaggs Bridge (2), Fish Dam Bridge (3), Richland Bridge (4), Ross Bridge (5), Waynesville or Roubidoux Bridge (6), and Riddle Bridge (7). Due to few newspapers surviving prior to 1902 and no County Court minutes prior to 1904 (destroyed by fire), only the date of Skaggs Bridge (1894) is known for the first three. All of these bridges have now been replaced by new construction. Not shown on this map but of early vintage is the bridge at Devil's Elbow (1923), which is still in use.

third of the cost if the court would make the rest."

In an unusually speedy deliberation, the County Court ordered that two bridges be built. To satisfy the Richland contingent, a bridge would be built across the Gasconade at the mouth of Bear Creek. The second bridge would span the Big Piney River in southeast Piney Township, between the communities of Duke and Big Piney. The editor of the *Democrat* gave partisan kudos to the Court in saying "the County has been to heavy expenses in rebuilding the Court House and a special election was held last year etc., but it is in splendid financial condition. This is a result of an economical court, and the splendid management of democratic officials in county affairs."

There is no mention of a delegation from the town of Big Piney or its environs. Big Piney was a bustling crossroads community with a new two-story hotel, roller mill, and several other businesses. The new bridge was known as Ross Bridge. Its eastern approach

was at the base of Ross Bluff, previously owned by James Ross, a former State Legislator (and earlier owner of the Old Stagecoach Stop.) The other bridge on the county road to Richland came to be known by locals as the Richland Bridge at the Honzinger Place, referring to a family who owned land on both sides of the river.

When construction began and exactly when it was completed is not known. The next several issues of the *Democrat* have not survived and no mention is made of the bridges during the rest of the year. However, a reading of the County Court minutes for 1909 revealed this entry for May 6: "Canton Bridge Company; The Account of the Canton Bridge Company for erecting bridges over the Big Piney and Gasconade River the sum of \$2237.50 is due the company and paid for from the County Revenue fund." The sum of \$1118.75 per bridge is not a bad price. (Taking into account inflation, it is a meager \$52,000 for both bridges.)

The first bridges built were those approaching Crocker, Dixon, and two in the Richland vicinity. Those three were railroad towns and moving goods to and from the railroad was important to the southern part of the county, including Waynesville. The odd thing is that a bridge in Waynesville across the Roubidoux, the county seat (and referred to by Waynesvilleites as "The Hub" or center of things), was not among the first bridges constructed. When the Roubidoux went on a rampage, one couldn't get from one side of the town to the other.

With a bridge now completed in Piney Township, as rural as any in the county, it didn't take long for a bridge to be proposed over the Roubidoux in Waynesville. After the bill was paid in May for the two new 1908 bridges, a proposition was advanced in June to build a bridge across the Roubidoux. It was carried over to the August term of Court, meanwhile the cost and location would be considered. The editor of the *Democrat* offered "We have been

reliably informed that there is plenty of money in the funds for road and bridge purposes to build the bridge and to spare."

The news of consideration of another bridge brought a delegation to the August term of Court to present a petition for a bridge at the Riddle Ford on the Gasconade. As prompt an answer as was given the Richland proposal the year before was not forthcoming, but the citizens were assured by the Court that their petition "would be given a fair and impartial consideration later on."

A year later, August 1910, bids were called for a span over the Roubidoux at Waynesville. The Court was committed to infrastructure improvement. The Roubidoux was to be bridged at the Wire Road crossing and Riddle Ford would be next.

#### Sources

*Minutes of the Pulaski County Court, 1908-1911; Pulaski County Democrat*, conversations with Brandon Bales, Benny Doolin, Larry Lercher, Louie Parker, and Everal Rose.

Wyatt Excavating

Waynesville Vision  
Center

Gasconade Hills  
Resort

**Old Postcards**  
**Buy, Sell, Trade**

**573-308-1258**

Bill Farnham

Newcomb Hardware



One of the first steel bridges built in Pulaski County, Skaggs Bridge was built in 1911. It crossed the Gasconade from Shockley Bottom on the south onto the Skaggs farm on the north side of the river. Courtesy of Jan and Terry Primas.



Fish Dam Bridge spanned the Gasconade south of Dixon and was another of the first trio of steel structures crossing county streams. The county road leading from Hooker to Dixon was called Fish Dam Road. Courtesy of Michael Roark.



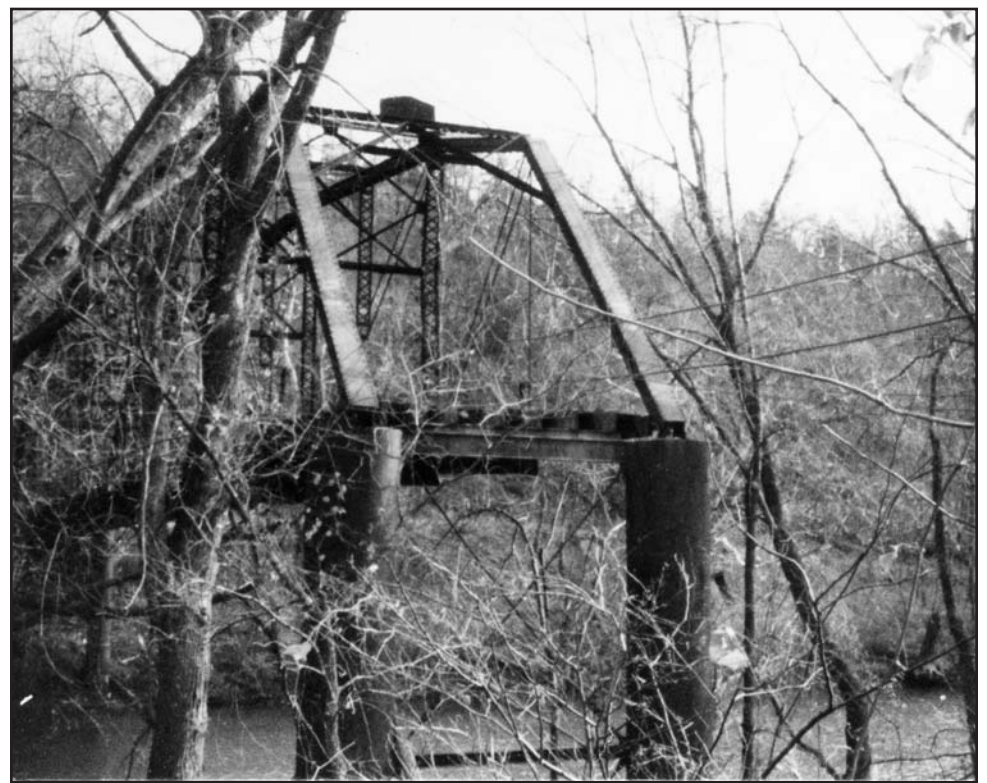
There were two bridges crossing the Gasconade and providing access to Richland. McCain Bridge was the earlier of the two and the bridge at the mouth of Bell Creek was built in 1908. This picture is captioned as an approach to one of those bridges but which one is not known to the author. Courtesy of John Bradbury.



The county also has a number of low water bridges, mostly unnamed, such as this one at Mays Ford at Ozark Springs resort. It is of more recent construction than the others pictured on these pages. Courtesy of John Bradbury.



Spanning what looks like a large gravel pit is the Waynesville steel bridge over Roubidoux Creek, constructed in 1911. This was the sixth bridge to be constructed in Pulaski County. Remnants of the pilings can be seen at the west end of North Street and in the city's RV park. It was replaced in 1923 by the Highway 14 concrete arch bridge, which three years later became Route 66, and is still being used. The steel bridge was dismantled and moved to Lundstrum Ford on the Gasconade at Highway T (see top right on page 44.) A truck went through the wooden floor in 1959 and it was razed in the summer of 1961.



## Riddle Bridge

Top left photo courtesy of Pulaski County Historical Society. Top right courtesy of Brian Brown. Lower left courtesy of the Western Historical Manuscript Collection - Rolla Branch.

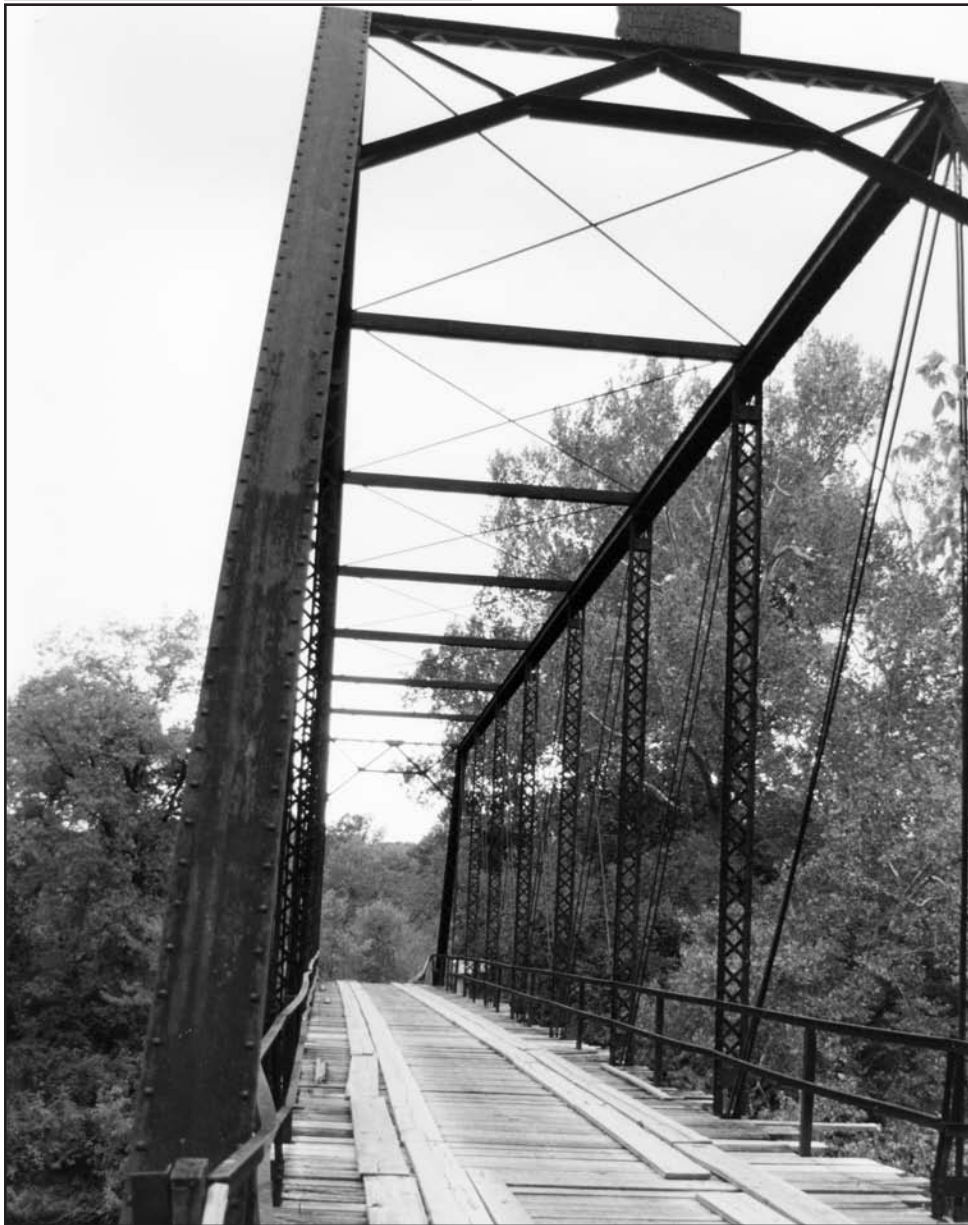
Riddle Bridge, ca 1911, was built upon petition by local residents and was the seventh county bridge. It crossed the Gasconade at Riddle Ford, named for the Riddle family on the east side of the river. The county road on the east side was built on a rock ledge above the river. The bridge approach on the west side was in the low lying floodplain and required some buildup and a long wooden approach (see lower left.) In 1979 or 1980, a truck hauling firewood crashed through the wooden approach, the rest of which was removed (above.) The approach was soon rebuilt but Riddle Bridge's day were numbered. It was replaced a decade or so later.

Walmart

St. John's

### Ross Bridge

Ross Bridge was one of two bridges built in 1908 in Pulaski County. The other was at the mouth of Bear Creek across the Gasconade, today near Highway 133. It served the communities of Duke, on the east side of the river, and Big Piney, on the west, well for one hundred years. It was the only bridge on the Big Piney until the Devil's Elbow bridge was built in 1923. It was replaced by a preformed concrete bridge a few hundred yards upstream. Local residents wanted the historic bridge preserved as a pedestrian walkway. However, the County Commission at the time was not interested in preservation and gave the Army some demolition practice. Photos by Terry Primas.



Looking to the west through Ross Bridge from the base of Ross Bluff. The wooden floor boards made a racket when cars crossed.



Above, looking south up Bridge Eddy. The stark profile of Ross Bridge, which stood for ninety years, was blasted into oblivion in 1998. A short piece of piling is the only clue that it ever existed.



In the montage above, an Army demolition expert (top) ties on plastic explosives. Center, the bridge is engulfed in red/yellow flame (bright white in the b/w photo.) Lower right, the superstructure has been blown off its piers and sits on the river bottom.

