

# DE PERE HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Pillars of the future,  
built on the foundations of the past.

**White Pillars Museum • 403 North Broadway • De Pere, WI 54115**  
**Open Monday – Friday • Noon to 4:00 PM**  
**Other times by appointment: 920-336-3877**  
**[www.deperehistoricalsociety.org](http://www.deperehistoricalsociety.org)**

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## **De Pere Historical Society Board Members**

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## *The Bridges of De Pere*

On October 6, 2007 De Pere will celebrate the opening of the fifth major bridge in her history. This newsletter is dedicated to the past, present and future bridges that have connected our community for generations.



The new bridge (top) is nearing completion. Located just south of the dam and Claude Allouez bridge, which was built between 1932-33, the new bridge is scheduled to open this fall.  
(Photo courtesy of the City of De Pere)

# The First Bridges

*Reprinted from "De Pere of Yesteryear" by Mary Kay and Dan Milquet*

Before a bridge spanned the waters of the Fox River in De Pere, the swift and shallow waters were traversed only by small boats and canoes.

Robert D. Stewart, first permanent west side settler, offered ferry service by shuttling the few inhabitants back and forth across the river. Of course, in winter, when the river froze; there was no need for a bridge or ferry and the river was crossed on foot or in sleighs.

When the Fox River Hydraulic Company was incorporated in 1836, one of their main goals was to dam the river to utilize the powerful water of the rapids. The dam would bridge the gap between west side and east, creating a somewhat stable way to cross the river.

In 1839, the Wisconsin State Legislature granted a charter for a bridge at De Pere. A stock company was formed by local residents who offered stock payments in cash, labor or materials to complete the project. A toll was also established; Pedestrians - 5¢, One-horse vehicles - 15¢, and Two-horse vehicles - 25¢.

The earliest bridges were little more than a series of connections between dam cribs. The structures were cheaply built and generally of poor construction. Repairs were needed constantly, due to the effects of the water current on untreated wood. In 1852, high water swept portions of the bridge away as far as what is now the foot of Stewart Street on the west side. Joseph Stewart, who lived near there, collected the debris and built a dock for himself.

As the businesses dependant on water power along the river grew and prospered, the bridge between the east and west became a small maze of roadways, pathways and dock extensions.

The Hydraulic Company sold their interest to Joshua F. Cox, who repaired and rebuilt the bridge in 1850. Ownership of the bridge then passed to Joseph G. Lawton and his associates in the De Pere Company and they had the bridge rebuilt. Stone filled log cribs were added to shore up timber trusses that supported the structure. The bridge remained a toll bridge until 1870, when it was leased to the Village of De Pere and the Town of Lawrence for a term of 90 years. The lease cost the communities \$200 for the first four years and four dollars each year until the term expired. The bridge at that time was more of a series of small bridges linking the different mills across the water.



***Sawmills, gristmills and other business that harnessed the waterpower of the dam, lined the bridge that spanned the river in the 1870s.***



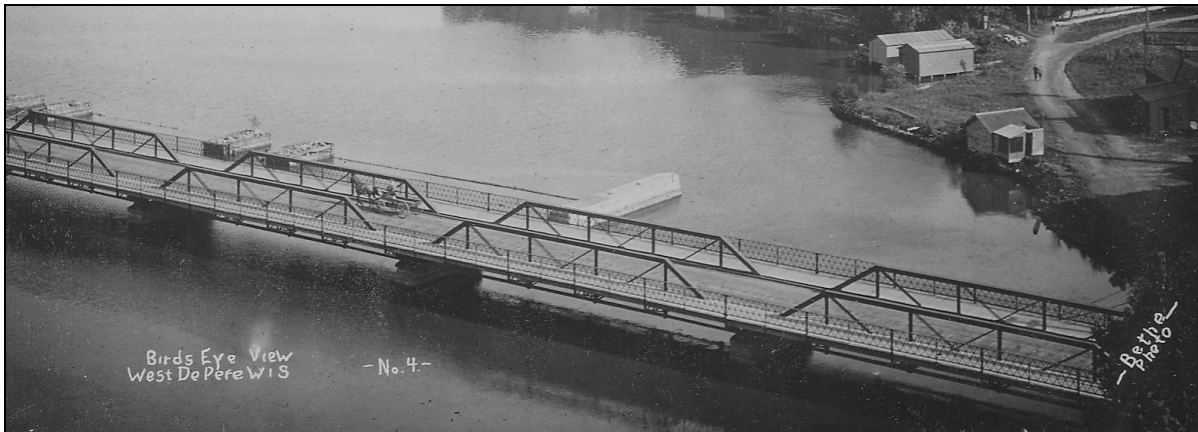
***Crib dams were wooden structures filled with rocks. The force of the water as it rushed through the sluice or openings between the cribs created the waterpower used by the mills along the river.***

Waste and byproducts of the mills and factories along the bridge were used to shore up the land surrounding a mill and often small islands were created as a result.

To allow boats to pass through, a swing bridge was added in 1867. The project was led by Appleton contractor Leonard Williams for \$1,800. A hand crank was used to swing the span open.

By the late 1870s the bridge was in desperate need of replacement. In 1881, another bridge was commissioned for an estimated \$10,000. It would be the first bridge to span the river at a height of 6 or 7 feet above the water level.

This would be an iron frame structure with wood decking.



***West side span of the bridge that was built in the early 1880s.***

The wooden sidewalks and roadway on the iron bridge caused many problems. The wood would rot or catch fire, often caused by a careless cigar smoker.

By the end of the 1880s the condition of the bridge and plans for a new one were the talk of the town.

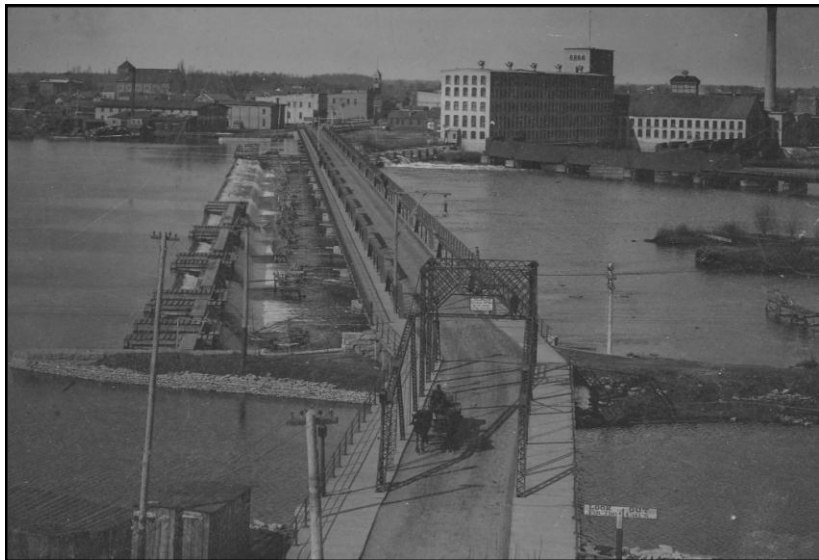
In the March 31, 1889 issue of the Brown County Democrat, three options for the next bridge, which would become the third bridge, were suggested:

The first option was to “build rough (fancy ones would be too expensive) arches of stone, wide enough for the passage of teams to and fro, say about 18 feet, level at the top with debris and clay covered with gravel-thus making a gravel road across the river, and place iron supporters on both sides upon which wooden sidewalks could be built, the projection of which would, in measure, hide the course and comparatively cheap stonework beneath. Such a bridge could be built by piecemeal and would in consequence be the best plan to adopt.”

The second option proposed would cost more in the end than the first and would not be as durable. It consisted of “stone abutments at a considerable distance, place thereon iron stringers and bridge over with planks.”



*A crowd gathers to watch work on the wooden planking of the bridge deck in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.*



*A horse drawn wagon crosses the swing bridge over the lock.*

The third plan and the cheapest for the present (but not in the long run) would be “to build light abutments quite close together, connected with wooden stringers covered with plank. The latter could also be built in sections.”

Another local newspaper at the time, “The De Pere News” favored the first stone bridge option as well.

Two and a half years would pass, before the final decision was made on the design of the bridge. It was to be constructed of iron or steel with an estimated price tag of \$35,000-\$40,000. The favored plan of a stone bridge would cost around \$100,000, so the more economical plan was adopted.

In addition to the dilapidated condition of the current bridge, the construction of

the new Shattuck & Babcock paper mill made a new sturdy bridge a necessity.

Building commenced in 1891. During the winter of 1892, the west end of the bridge was removed to make way for the new construction. Communication between the east and west sides of town were made over the ice, but as spring approached and the ice melted, the effort to finish the west end was quickened. Parts and material from the old bridge were sold off in pieces. During an auction in March of 1892, Max Scheuring bought what remained of the east end of the bridge for \$50 and William Nelson bought what was left of the west part for \$12.

In November of 1893, the final changes were completed on the main bridge leaving only the drawbridge needing to be replaced. Peter S Loy and sub-contractors, Aerts & Van Gemert, rebuilt the old drawbridge and added it to the new bridge, completing the work in April of 1894.

The 1890s bridge served the community for over 35 years before it was replaced with the Claude Allouez Bridge, which was completed in 1933.

To say that the bridge under construction in 2006-2007, is the fifth, sixth or even seventh bridge to cross the river is hard to judge. The earliest spans that crossed the river seemed to be in a state of almost constant change due to repairs and business needs.



*Construction of the Claude Allouez bridge in 1932.*

The Claude Allouez Bridge built in 1933 is considered the fourth major bridge to span the Fox River, yet it underwent extensive repairs and renovations in the 1970s, but that work did not change its status as the fourth bridge.

Records of complete new structures, generally built alongside an existing bridge, tend to lend credence to the fact that the bridge of 2007 will be the fifth major bridge to cross the Fox River at De Pere.



*Until the 1970s, George Street connected to Front Street on both sides of the bridge.*



Artist's rendition of the new De Pere bridge scheduled to open in the fall of 2007.  
(Photo courtesy of the City of De Pere.)

## *A Message From the New Bridge Celebration Committee*

August 2007

Dear Friends,

We will dedicate our new bridge in De Pere, Saturday, October 6, 2007.

This is our bridge. We've all been a part of its building in some way, whether we took part in the discussions and planning, ran our businesses to the noise and vibrations of cranes and backhoes or became expert slalom driver navigating detours and a two lane roundabout.

Again, De Pere is making history, just as we did when the Claude Allouez Bridge was dedicated 74 years ago. Attached is a page from the program used in 1933, now considered a valued historic document, a snapshot of our community during that time.

I invite you to join in the celebration by including the name of your family or business in the 2007 program. Perhaps you could honor the memory of a relative or friend. Your inscription will become a part of De Pere's recorded history. For a donation of \$50.00, the words of your choice will be listed in this keepsake program. Each listing will be up to two lines, 30 characters per line.

Proceeds will help make this celebration remembered for generations to come. Please contact a member of the bridge committee for more details by September 14, 2007.

Sincerely,

Joe Seroogy  
The New Bridge Celebration Committee

A page from the  
Claude Allouez  
Bridge Dedication  
Program in 1933

DEDICATORY PROGRAM — SUNDAY, JULY 2nd, 1933

1:15 P. M.

Formation Military Parade on North Broadway.

1:30 P. M.

Military Parade. Route: Broadway to Lewis; Lewis to Huron; Huron to George; George to East Bridge Approach.

1:45 P. M.

Dedication at Bridge by Governor A. G. Schmedeman, assisted by the Misses Carolyn Reblitz and Martha Danishek, Maids of Honor, and Miss Marguerite Hughes, Sponsor.

2:00 P. M.

Cutting of Ribbon.

2:00 P. M.

Military Parade continues across bridge to Main Avenue; Main Avenue to Fifth; Fifth to Grant; Grant to Third; Third to Main Avenue where parade disbands for exercises in Nicolet Auditorium.

2:30 P. M.

Exercises in Nicolet Auditorium.

Opening March . . . . . Nicolet High Orchestra

America . . . . . Nicolet High Orchestra

Opening Address . . . . . D. A. Wishart, Program Chairman

Welcome . . . . . Hon. Rudolph Rupiper, Mayor

Introduction of Guests . . . . . Hon. James Hughes, Congressman

Henry Vieau, Surviving Member of G. A. R.

John Diener, Mayor of Green Bay.

Lewis Knuth, Chairman Brown County Board.

C. H. Kirch, State Bridge Engineer.

James Grann, Bridge Engineer.

Henry Sparby, Bridge Inspector.

D. F. Culbertson, State Division Engineer.

F. M. Balsley, Unemployment Relief Engineer.

Historical Talk . . . . . Miss Sophie Beaumont

Securing a Bridge { Hon. John Cashman, State Senator  
John T. Donaghey, State Highway Engineer  
George Cormier, Brown County Highway Commissioner

Presentation of Bridge . . . . . F. W. Johnson, C. R. Meyer & Sons Co.

Acceptance Thereof { W. E. O'Brien, Chairman Wis. Highway Com.  
Joseph M. Conway, Vice-Chairman,  
Wisconsin Unemployed Relief Commission  
Frank Mohr, Chairman Brown Co. Highway Com.  
Ray Dillon, Chairman De Pere Highway Com.

Selections—"Aspiration," Cox; "By the Water of Minnetonka," Lieurance . . . . . Miss Janet Merrill

Accompanied by Mrs. John Whitney

Address . . . . . Hon. A. G. Schmedeman, Governor

Closing March . . . . . Nicolet High Orchestra

De Pere Historical Society  
403 N. Broadway  
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## *Membership Application Form*

To have your name, your family's name, included in the sesquicentennial time capsule, which will be buried in the spring of 2007, fill out a membership application, today.

All members will receive the newsletters regarding families and events in De Pere history and Historical Society news.

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**Please check one:**

- \$20
- \$50
- \$100
- \$200
- Other

**This membership is for...**

Recipients Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Street/Apt \_\_\_\_\_  
City, State, Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
Circle one: Birthday / Christmas / Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**Mail To:**

De Pere Historical Society  
403 N. Broadway  
De Pere, WI 54115  
(920) 336-3877

**If this is a gift membership, this gift is from...**

Your Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Street/Apt \_\_\_\_\_  
City, State, Zip \_\_\_\_\_

\*A special gift notice will be mailed to them with your name on it.

**Membership Expires: December 31, 2007**