

# HEADLINES



October 20, 2005

## Ceremony Commemorates Transfer of Centennial Bridge

Mayor Mark Schwiebert hosted a plaque dedication ceremony on October 19<sup>th</sup> commemorating the transfer of the Centennial Bridge by the City of Rock Island to the Illinois and Iowa Departments of Transportation.

Mayor Schwiebert commented, "As you know, the process in getting to this point has been a lengthy one, but has now come to a successful conclusion. On such an occasion, it's well that we should celebrate those whose foresight over 65 years ago resulted in the construction of the Centennial Bridge; as well as those who, in more recent years, collaborated to make the bridge toll free, thus enhancing use of this historic link between Rock Island and Davenport."



### Centennial Bridge Project

The Quad Cities Mississippi River Crossing Study, completed for the Iowa and Illinois Departments of Transportation in 1998, concluded that the Centennial Bridge was underutilized because it was the only toll bridge in the Quad City area. The study recommended removal of the tolls and projected that after the tolls were removed the usage would increase from approximately 16,000 vehicles per day to approximately 35,000 vehicles per day.

In December of 2001, an agreement was signed between the Illinois Department of Transportation, the Iowa Department of Transportation, the City of Rock Island, and the City of Davenport. This agreement stipulated that the bridge would become toll free and then transferred to the Illinois Department of Transportation with the Iowa Department of Transportation sharing in the future maintenance cost. The agreement also listed improvements to the bridge that were deemed to be necessary before the transfer could occur.

The Rock Island Centennial Bridge Commission, the governing body of the Bridge, managed the project which consisted of revisions to the on-ramps and off-ramps in Rock Island and Davenport, new traffic signal lights in both cities, landscaping improvements in both cities, toll booth removal on the bridge, and structural upgrades to the bridge.

The total project cost was \$11,187,248.62 and funding was provided by the Centennial Bridge fund. Shortly after the project's completion, the bridge was transferred to the Illinois Department of Transportation and Iowa Department of Transportation on July 13, 2005. Recent traffic counts on the bridge show 31,000 cars per day cross the bridge.

### History

The Centennial Bridge was completed in July 1940 at a cost of \$1.75 million. It was designed by Edward Ashton of the Kansas City engineering firm of Ash, Howard, Needles and Tammen. The five span bridge was fabricated by the American Bridge Company of New York and McCarthy Improvements Company, Davenport, constructed the substructure. The length of each span is 540

feet, with a total bridge length of 4,447 feet. It was the first tied-arch span and the first four-lane bridge across the Mississippi River.

The superstructure of the bridge is steel, rigid-connected through tied arch trusses with plate girder approach spans. The superstructure rests on six concrete piers, steel H-piles, and concrete approach beams. The bridge deck is concrete over steel stringers. There is 9,750 tons of steel in the bridge.

Shortly after being elected mayor of Rock Island in 1937, Robert P. Galbraith announced plans for construction of a four-lane bridge across the Mississippi River between Rock Island and Davenport. Galbraith relentlessly pursued construction of the bridge and its completion is largely credited to him personally. In the span of one year, it is reported that he made over sixty trips to Chicago and Washington, D.C. to secure permission from the federal government to build the bridge and then to finance it. No government funds were used and the bridge was financed by toll revenue bonds, with large local bond purchasers being Royal Neighbors of America and Modern Woodmen of America. Permission to build the bridge had to be granted by the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate, and a bill was signed to that effect by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

On March 13, 1939 work began on both sides of the bridge, and was dignified by a ceremony. On June 5, the first thirty community leaders rolled over the bridge, but the official dedication of the bridge did not take place until July 13, 1940. Fifty-seven thousand automobiles and 20,000 pedestrians crossed the bridge in its first eight hours of operation.

Just before the bridge was completed Mayor Galbraith asked that the bridge name be changed from Galbraith Bridge to the Rock Island Centennial Bridge. This request was approved by City Council on May 13, 1940.

The original bridge toll was 10 cents for automobiles and 5 cents for pedestrians. In 1979, the toll was raised to 15 cents, in 1981 to 25 cents, and to 50 cents in 1991. The bridge went toll-free at the close of business on May 2, 2003 and was celebrated with a joint party between Rock Island and Davenport. Dohrn Transfer, of Rock Island, was the first official toll-paying vehicle to cross the bridge in 1949 and was the last official patron of the bridge.

Decorative lighting to emphasize the bridge arches was added in 1989.