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12th St. Bridge's history long

(Editor's note: This is the 15th in a series of "then and now" articles on places and things of interest in Kansas City, Kan., compiled by area historian Margaret Landis in observance of the 100th birthday of KCK in 1986. Much of the information has appeared in past editions of The Kansan.)

(Transcriptions are presented without changes except to improve readability.)

"The 12th Street Bridge has had one of the stormiest careers of the many spans across the Kaw River" -- (The Kansan, April 16, 1940, following a disastrous fire that destroyed the bridge).

For the next 35 years, the bridge enjoyed relative calm until Nov. 18, 1975 when it was closed for a year. The structure was completely refurbished and the deck replaced. The county used more than \$1 million in revenue sharing funds for the repair job. Since then, the bridge has undergone nothing more than routine maintenance.

For years the 12th Street Bridge was the connection between Argentine (and Armourdale) and Kansas City, Kan., north of the river. In 1935, when 7th Street Trafficway was opened, a cut-off south of the river to Metropolitan Avenue opened another access. Then the 18th Street Trafficway was built in the 1950s and more recently the Interstate 635 bridge.

The 12th Street Bridge was an iron bridge in its early days. In the 1903 flood it was among 16 Wyandotte county bridges to be swept away. The special "flood Session" of the Kansas Legislature in 1903 passed legislation for its rebuilding and eight others in the county. The Board of Commissioners was authorized to issue bonds for the payment of the cost of the bridges. The cost of replacing the 12th Street Bridge was \$75,000.

In August 1919 the Kaw Valley Drainage Board, in trying to clear the river of obstructions, condemned the north approach to the bridge and ordered it removed. In January 1920 the drainage board recalled the order and condemned the entire structure as a flood menace and ordered it rebuilt. After many delays, law suits, including suits by the Kansas City Railway Company, and appeals, Judge John C. Pollock (Oct. 9, 1922) declared the bridge unsafe for traffic and limited the loads that could pass over the span.



The 12th Street Bridge (top photo) is shown on a postcard as it looked in 1909. Bottom photo shows the bridge as it appears today. (*Kansan* photo by Craig Murray.) Both views are looking toward the northwest.

He ordered the bridge to be rebuilt Feb. 10, 1923. Plans were drawn and construction of the new \$572, 450 span began Oct. 20, 1924. The 1,500-foot bridge was divided in the center for street car tracks and motor traffic used the outside lanes. The bridge of steel construction was paved with wooden blocks, covered with an asphalt compound to cover the cracks and sand was put on the surface. The bridge opened for traffic April 22, 1926.

Fourteen years later, at 10:35 a.m. April 16, 1940, a fire of undetermined origin was reported and by noon the intense heat from the burning asphalt-covered blocks caused the center span to buckle - letting the wooden floor fall into the river. In the aftermath, Argentine was left without street car service and about 1,700 telephones were cut off. Water and light services were maintained, however. Buses were put in service that would follow the street car routes via the 7th Street Bridge.

The drainage board ordered the immediate rebuilding of the bridge and county commissioners approved the resolution. In about a year, it reopened, sturdy enough to survive the 1951 flood to the present with the help of major renovation in 1975.