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Bridge opened 50 years ago Tuesday

(This is the third in a series of "then and now" articles on places of interest in Kansas City, Kan., compiled by area historian Margaret Landis in observance of the 100th birthday of KCK to be celebrated in 1986. Much of the information has appeared in The Kansan.)



This view of the 7th Street Bridge shows the Santa Fe Railroad tracks, the Kaw River and the structural work of the bridge.

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

The 50th anniversary of the opening of the 7th Street Trafficway will be Tuesday.

Upon completion of Turkey Creek Viaduct over the Katy and Frisco railroad tracks and the approaches, 7th Street Trafficway opened for traffic on Southwest Boulevard April 23, 1935.

The cross-town trafficway is 10 miles long extending from the northern to the southern city limits. It links Wyandotte County to Johnson County on the south and Platte County in Missouri on the north. The trafficway carries U.S. 69 and connects with U.S. 56 on the south.

It spans the Kaw river with the 7th Street bridge and the Missouri river with the Fairfax Bridge. There are six railroad viaducts and the Shawnee Road overpass along its length. Railroad viaducts are Union Pacific, Kansas City Southern, Kansas City Terminal, Santa Fe, Katy and Burlington Northern.

Built during the depression of the 1930s, the trafficway cost \$5 million. The prime reason for its construction was the need for a direct route to Rosedale.

An agreement in the annexation of Rosedale to KCK included a stipulation that a trafficway would be provided. Cooperating in the construction were the federal government, Kansas and Missouri, Wyandotte County, KCK, and Platte County, Mo.

Wyandotte, Kansas City, Armourdale, Argentine and Rosedale consolidated to form KCK. Traveling from east to west presented no difficulties but north and south traffic was impossible because of the Kaw River high bluffs and deep valleys.

L.H. Rose in 1911 was president of the Wyandotte County Trafficway Commission whose objective was to build a united and greater Kansas City. In 1912 he was president of the Cross-Town Trafficway. A real estate dealer in Rosedale, Rose was secretary of The Kansas Building and Loan Association and a son-in-law of Dr. Simeon B. Bell.

Also spearheading the project was Frank A. Davis, a Rosedale resident and member of the Kansas Legislature and secretary of the Greater Kansas City Regional Plan Association.

He secured passage of a bill in the Legislature providing that "certain streets and avenues shall be established and designated as main arterial highways...that one-half of the cost...shall be paid by the city at large out of the general improvement fund...and the remaining one-half to be paid for by the benefit district."

With this enabling law, KCK commissioners authorized establishment of the 7th Street Trafficway May 7, 1929. This was replaced by another ordinance passed April 11, 1933, which designated five sections of the trafficway.

The way through Turkey Creek Valley was first an Indian trace. Turkey Creek Expressway follows the old Fitzgerald Road on the north bank of Turkey Creek and is part of I-35 interchange at 7th. The multi-million dollar interstate route opened to the Missouri line in 1970.

Frank Rushton and Davis of the Rosedale Civic Club were active in the club's drive to construct Turkey Creek Viaduct. The 7th Street Trafficway in Rosedale was envisioned in part in 1868 by Major Joseph K. Hudson and Mathais Marty who, with 15 other residents, petitioned county commissioners for a direct route.

The 7th street cutoff opened July 1, 1955, eliminating a jog from 7th and Southwest to Rainbow Boulevard on Southwest which had created a traffic bottleneck for 20 years.

Davis was secretary and manager of the Regional Bridge Company formed Feb. 18, 1930 to construct the Fairfax Bridge. The cost was \$600,000 and ground was broken April 21, 1931. The bridge was completed Sept. 27, 1934.

Kansas City Bridge Co. had the contract. The design was by Sverdup & Parcel, consulting engineers, and steel was furnished by the Kansas City Structural Steel Co. The bridge, at the northernmost end of the trafficway, is 2,486 1/2 feet long. It is 55 feet above the water and its 13 spans rest on 14 piers.

After the 1903 flood, when the 5th Street Bridge and the 12th Street Bridge were rebuilt there were numerous attempts to obtain a bridge at 7th Street. However, it was not until the Emergency Act of 1932 that action was taken. The State Highway Commission required that the city furnish plans and that the railroads build approaches over their tracks.

Nov. 24, 1932, the War Department approved plans and the State Highway Commission was authorized to build the approaches. The Kansas City Bridge Company was awarded the \$445,084 contract.

In the fall of 1970, the 7th Street Bridge was closed for reconstruction. It was widened to four lanes and reopened July 27, 1971. The reconstruction cost was 1.2 million

In 1975, Rainbow Bouelevard improvements were started. The reconstruction ran from 36th street to Southwest Boulevard. The street was widened with islands and left-turn bays installed. Also new traffic lights were added. The reconstruction was completed in 1976.