



McHenry County Division of Transportation

Celebrating 100 Years, 1913-2013

Each month this year, a new article celebrating the 100 year anniversary of the McHenry County Division of Transportation will be featured in the Northwest Herald. The tenth article, printed on October 25th, talked about the long history of fixing bridges in McHenry County. Watch for the next article on road names to be published at the end of November.

Fixing Bridges – Then and Now

Bridge closed! – Emergency services rerouted! – Finding new travel routes difficult! – Utility service disruption widespread!

No doubt that anyone who reads these statements could easily see them as being pulled from the headlines of the local newspaper this past year, or from Colorado just last month as torrential rains washed away many roads. If you watch the videos from Colorado, the damage water can do is often devastating. Over the course of the McHenry County Division of Transportation's (MCDOT) 100 years of existence, these are not new events, but rather reoccurring ones. There have been some that are recalled with far more anguish to McHenry County due to their severe intensity and devastation caused.

One such cataclysmic event occurred on July 1, 1938, a torrential rain storm brought on flooding in McHenry County to such an extent that "...C.L. Tryon, the County Engineer, made a tour of the County Friday and discovered that thirteen bridges had been either completely demolished or seriously damaged. Greenwood (Township) was highest with the number of four (bridges). Alden, Hebron, and Burton townships each had two (bridges) and McHenry and Dunham (Townships) one each..." – *The McHenry Plaindealer* Volume 64 Thursday, July 7, 1938.

The article also noted that the newly constructed dam of that engineering feat of Wonder Lake was almost lost had it not been for the heroic residents of the area volunteering their time and muscles to reinforce it as the flood waters rolled closer. There were also large personal losses of crops and goods as the rains devastated McHenry County.

All of the bridges involving County or Township jurisdictions fell to the MCDOT to fix. The process started immediately and took three years to complete. This was a phenomenal accomplishment for the time, especially considering the state of equipment, and the fact that the country was in the midst of the Great Depression.

When the Blivin Street Bridge in Spring Grove needed to be replaced after the 1938 flood, the bridge needed to be brought up to current standards of the day. To accomplish this, additional right-of-way was needed. To help fast track the project, the Village of Spring Grove themselves stepped in and on July 12, 1938, just 11 days after the flood, the Village had secured the land for the County to rebuild the bridge.

Fast forward to today, that same Blivin Street Bridge in Spring Grove was just rebuilt this past year due to its age related deterioration. With the County needing to replace the Blivin Street Bridge, the Village of Spring Grove also needed to replace the Winn Road Bridge just a half mile to the west. However, replacing both at the same time in 2012 would severely cut off local traffic. To avoid this problem, the MCDOT put the Blivin Street Bridge project on the fast track. Looking back to 1938, the efforts to expedite the right-of-way acquisition process enabled the MCDOT to expedite the Blivin Street Bridge replacement of 2012.

This year, the County replaced the Lawrence Road Bridge, northwest of Harvard, and the Hill Road Bridge, just east of Richmond. These bridges are vital links to our transportation network whether for emergency services, transporting goods and crops, or simply just getting to the grocery store.

The sign telling us that "Bridges Freeze First" also tells us that bridges are exposed more to the harsh elements from above and below causing them to deteriorate quicker than the road leading up to them. Because of this, the MCDOT has an extensive inspection program to monitor the bridges ensuring that they are safe for travel. This vigilance helps the County plan for any needed maintenance, repairs, or eventual replacement. While dealing with a closed bridge is very inconvenient, continual inspections and maintenance assists in avoiding costly replacement.

As you travel a detour for a few months to allow some bridge to be worked on, to make it safer and longer lasting for you and the rest of the motoring public, try to find consolation in the fact that your safety is the first and foremost concern on the part of the MCDOT. Happy and Safe Travels!

