

# Preservation of bridges continues

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Staff Writer

LYNDON Teddy Roosevelt may have crossed a Whiteside County bridge on his way to Arsenal Island in Rock Island

Lyndon folklore says Roosevelt and his Rough Riders crossed the Lyndon Bridge in 1898 on their way to ammunition dumps in Rock Island during the Spanish-American War. Whether that legend is true or not, residents of Lyndon say the more than 100-year-old bridge is an important part of their history and they want to preserve it.

The Lyndon Bridge is one of the few remaining wagon bridges on the Rock River. Lee Erdmann and his wife Vickie are part of a group of area residents working to keep the bridge intact. The Erdmanns moved to Lyndon seven years ago and can see the bridge from their home. They became interested in the old bridge right away.

"I'd say the day we closed on the house," Lee Erdmann said.

He was impressed by the size of the bridge and the width of the river it spans between Lyndon and Prophetstown.

Records have conflicting completion dates for the bridge, but Erdmann said work began in approximately 1888. The steel bridge has two support piers in the middle of the river channel, going down into the rock bed 80 to 90 feet, Erdmann said. The bridge is about 700 feet long, with 702 planks.

Originally built for wagon traffic, the bridge was flat, with railings along the sides. Pictures from during the bridge's construction show Indian encampments along the river, Erdmann said.

"It's kind of fascinating to think about that," he said.

Overhead suspension was added later to help handle heavier traffic. The bridge now has three circular support structures as it crosses the river.

Erdmann said the architecture and construction of the bridge are very advanced for the late 1890s. A structural engineer checked the bridge out a few years back and said the bridge is very solid for its age, sturdier than some bridges built today, Erdmann said.

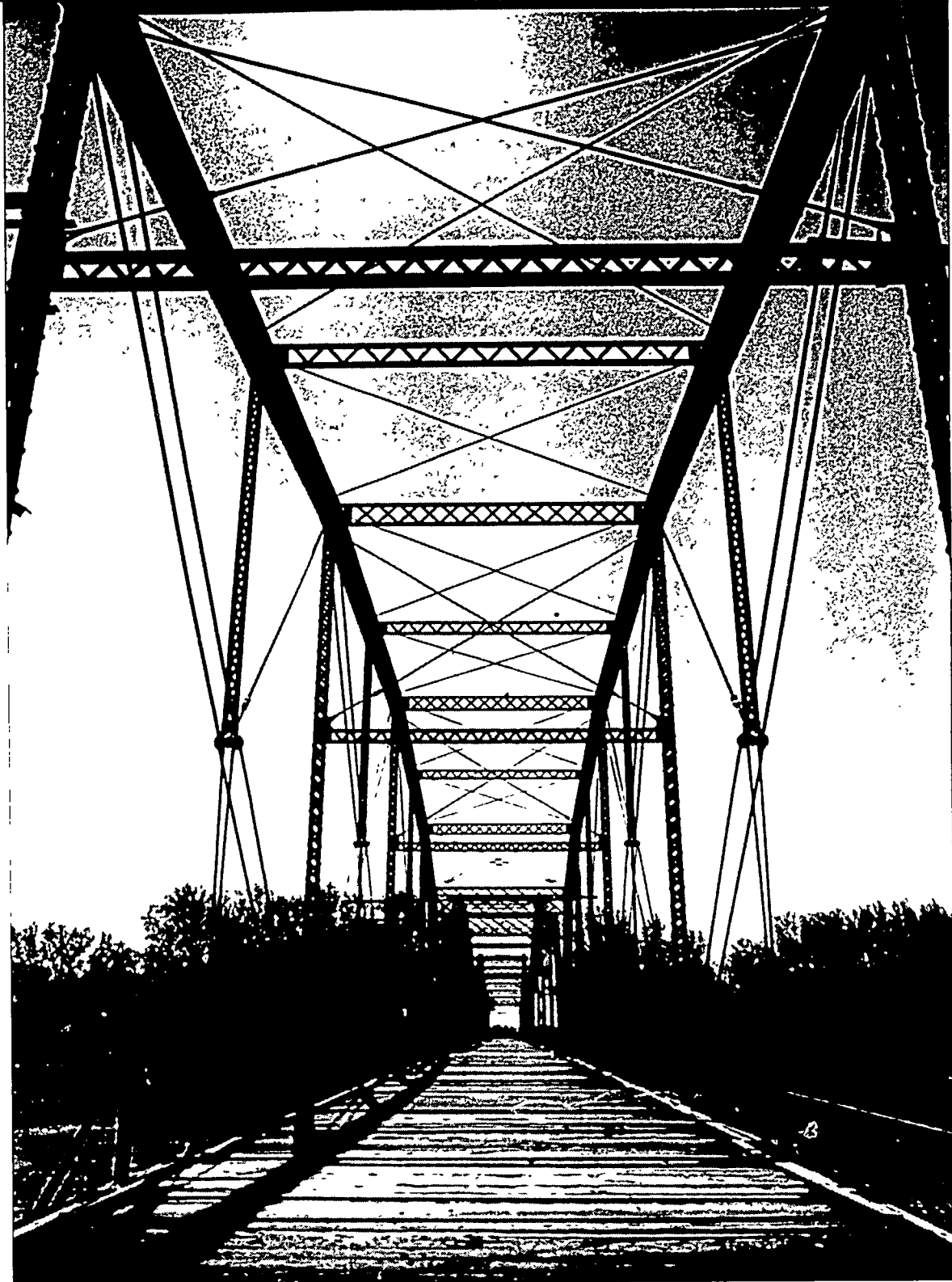
"The piers supported a series of rollers, which the bridge section moved back and forth on. That way, the bridge could contract and expand with the temperature changes of the seasons," Erdmann said in a 1996 Daily Gazette interview. "If I was a civil engineer today, I'd look at that bridge and marvel at it."

As automobile traffic became common over the bridge, everybody knew when somebody was crossing the bridge because the loose boards flapped and the bridge hummed, he said.

"A lot of older people talked about how it would put them asleep," Erdmann said.

A restoration effort began in 1967 but didn't take off. The effort started again in July 1996 after the bridge was closed by Lyndon Township and the Illinois Department of Transportation.

To date, more than \$10,000 has been put into the bridge's restoration through sale of planks and picture postcards. Many individuals and the Moore



SUBMITTED PHOTO

## A piece of history prevails ...

The Lyndon Bridge was in very poor condition before the town's residents began a preservation campaign to save it. The bridge was constructed in 1888 and is one of the few remaining wagon bridges left across the Rock River.

Foundation have contributed, Erdmann said.

Anyone can buy a plank for \$75. Planks are 3-inches-by-12-inches wide by 18 feet long. The purchaser's name is engraved on the plank and a plaque. Planks have been purchased from all over Illinois and at least 10 other states, Erdmann said. In 1996, a new cement approach was put on the Lyndon side of the bridge.

To date, a couple of hundred planks have been replaced, but the hope is to replace all 702 planks to keep the bridge even and in good repair.

The bridge is open again to pedestrian and bicycle traffic.

"My wife Vickie and I probably walk across about once a week. We take a morning walk and walk

through the farmland over there and walk back again," Erdmann said.

Someday, the bridge may provide a link between area bike paths.

The community has been very supportive of the restoration effort, Erdmann said.

"Deep down, the hopes are to sustain and make sure it's there and a piece of Lyndon forever," Erdmann said.

To buy a plank, write Village of Lyndon, Bridge Fund, P.O. Box 217, Lyndon, Ill. 61261. Erdmann said the \$75 plank buys more than a piece of the bridge.

"You are essentially buying a piece of history from Lyndon."