

DIARY OF MCKEE BRIDGE

Dear reader,

I am the historic McKee Covered Bridge letting you read what I've written in my diary these many years. I'm not a skilled writer and you are not a covered bridge, so no doubt it will get boring along the way. I don't care. The early history here in southern Oregon and my future is the most important thing. It's impossible to list all the names of my wonderful supporters which would fill every page in this diary.

MY BEGINNING

I was born in 1917, to parents Mr. and Mrs. Jackson County. They had hired a professional bridge builder, Jason (or Jaston) Hartman, who with his two sons delivered me as well as over 200 more bridges of all sizes and kinds in the county.

I was named McKee because Mr. Adelbert (Deb) McKee donated the land for me. I wondered who this man was to let me live here, so I searched to find more about him. His McKee name started in Scotland and was spelled McKie. It changed later, perhaps when descendant were later in northern Ireland. Then in America it was found in Virginia, Ohio, and Sullivan Co. Missouri, where Deb was born in 1852 to parents John and Maryum McKee. That same year the family left with Deb and his older sister, as well as other relatives in covered wagons for the long trip to Oregon, arriving here in August 1853. They camped below a small mountain later called Roxy Ann (in Medford). That was the name of John McKee's aunt who was with them.

John was a blacksmith and found work in Jacksonville's booming gold mines near by. However, he soon moved to gold mines at Log town (now halfway from Jacksonville to Ruch). That is where he and his family stayed for many years. When the miners ran out of picks, John invented a Strap Eye one that the miners liked better. Maryum had brought a cherished rose with her from Missouri and planted it in their front yard. It now is seen along the highway, the only thing left from Logtown. She had also given birth to twelve more children there. Deb grew up mining with his father and brothers until he had enough money to buy this farm where he and his wife resided.

They boarded the school teachers and operated an overnight stage stop when the East Side road was built in 1907. Sadly, on New Years Day, that year, they had lost a son, Arthur "Burt" age 27, badly crushed in the Blue Ledge mine. He was one of 13. Then they lost their stage stop and residence with a fire on June 10, 1909. They rebuilt a larger house and continued their stage stop. Fortunately, the Hartman's in 1917 had a good place to stay and leave their equipment. The most interesting was a wheel wrench, at least ten feet tall. It took four or five men to turn it in which to tighten nuts and large steel rods. It had been used by Jason's father in the 1890's.

The local people kept coming to see my progress and admired what they saw, as they had never seen a covered bridge before. The equipment the Hartman's were using was fascinating and some offered to help. Little did they know, at that time I would someday become a "jewel" in their neighborhood.

An interesting tale told by the two Hartman sons was about having an old horse named Topsy who was trained to walk out over the water on two 2' by 12's in order to bring a beam into place. Sadly, after breaking his leg, they had to shoot him. Thank goodness, it wasn't here.

I have a 112 ft. span, and live 45 feet above the Applegate River, the highest for a covered bridge here in Oregon, and the second most visited and photographed. I enjoy having these statistics to brag about, but wonder who is first with visitations and photographed?

I don't think there was a dedication ceremony for me or my sibling, the Cameron bridge, built the

same year down river about four from me. It was replaced years later and some of its lumber was used to build a low water bridge a few miles down stream. It didn't last long because one severe winter storm swept it away.

At one time there were over 600 of us in Oregon, but during the 1920's there were only 350 left and by 1937 it dropped to 80. Now there are only three of us in Jackson County, Lost Creek. Antelope, and me. I grieved for Wimer, but there's a great reproduction in its place.

THE BLUE LEDGE COPPER MINE AND EARLY HISTORY

(1904-06-07-08)

Before me, the Blue Ledge Copper Mine was in the upper Applegate area near the California border. It encompassed more than 2,000 square miles, where the 4,000 ft. elevation ledge of copper was discovered in 1889 by three gold seekers. Fifteen years later, in 1904, it was owned by the Mexican Refining Company in Tacoma, Washington, and big operations started at the Blue Ledge in 1906. By 1908, the mine's development had reached almost one-half million dollars, and the population grew to about 1,000 with many additional commuters. There were many tents, houses, a school, church, and a main office with an assay building, also a boarding house for the miners.

The superintendent had a telephone line installed from Jacksonville to his office, which was the talk of the neighborhood, it being so unusual in such a remote area, at that time. The line was attached to the many trees along the way for over twenty miles.

Before the Blue Ledge Mine began, there was a community of gold miners, living at Joe Bar, with a boarding house, saloon, post office, and mining supplies. (Some people are still living there, but with none of those facilities) A road was made from there, up the steep mountain, to the Blue Ledge. When operations began, the superintendent did not allow any alcohol, so the Joe Bar saloon prospered. That later changed somewhat, when a hotel was built about one forth mile up from Joe Bar, and the owner, Mr. Reddy, served alcohol.

When a county road was finally started, from Ruch to the upper Applegate, it was on the east side of the Applegate river, and went several miles upstream, crossed the Little Applegate, then continued a few more miles for the first Applegate River crossing to the west side (now Cameron Bridge). Then it continued another five miles where it crossed the small Palmer Creek, continuing another mile, and ended at the second crossing. In the early 1877's, the settlers and gold miners had crossed there to the east side near Mule Hill and used trails on up over the mountains, to their mines and homes. Years later, the county extended the road from the crossing, to a homestead on Squaw Creek, now under the Applegate Lake.

Nichols (Nick) Wright owned much land at this second river crossing. He had a miner's supply store, and let the community build a dance hall and baseball field, for their entertainment. Also, the Nelson Fursel family, had a much needed saw mill there.

In 1906, when the Blue Ledge Mine started production, the thirty-five mile road trip to Medford, for shipping the ore by train to Tacoma, Washington, was of great concern. The Mine had a very bad road conditions down the steep mountain to Joe Bar, then the rest of the narrow, twisty, winding road was not much better. When they reached the first river crossing at Nick Wright's, they had to unload their ore into freight wagons. There was a crew housed there in which to do this. It was not done at the other river crossing.

The road conditions caused the mine to lose much money, and they kept hounding my parents about it, so in late 1907, a road was built on the east side, some four miles downstream from the first river crossing, and on a very steep mountain (where I am now). It was just another one-way treacherous road, and soon became known as "Dead Horse Hill," because a horse and wagon had fallen over the side and landed in the river far below. Evidently the driver escaped. Later, a stage to the Blue Ledge also went over and rolled about 125 ft. None of the passengers were hurt, but the horses were badly crippled. Another ore wagon driver had bells secured to his horses' bridles which could be heard for a long distance, hoping a driver at the other end could hear it and wait at the other end.

MINE ENDINGS AND ME (1917-19-27-30)

When my sibling and I were built in 1917, it ended the bad situation on Dead Horse Hill. We were so honored in hearing all the good praises we received. However, some of the horses with wagons, or buggies, had problems in getting accustomed to us. My wooden floor and dark interior caused them to be terrified, and they raced through like bolts of lightning, while others were led with a covering over their eyes. I didn't mind the horses as much as the farmer's cattle, when being taken to the higher ranges in the early spring, they left my floors with cow pies, and then wheels from the traffic splattered it all over. The rainy season added mud, and the dust in summer, made my sinuses and lungs miserable, especially when the wind storms started blowing it around.

I endured this year after year, but there were many good things, such as the school teacher and children, being able to use me instead of the trolley. I can still hear those joyful children shouting for echoes, and their foot racing to get out of my dark interior. Some rode a horse to school which they were unable to do before as there were not easy crossings.

During the first World war, many young men had left to serve, some leaving the mine and hoping to return. In 1918, the mine started struggling due to many other factors, one being the death of the owner, and some other copper mines elsewhere were found to be more profitable, so the Blue Ledge eventually closed in 1919, when I was only two years old.

However, the people were so grateful in having me, and I continued for many years to be in good health, until the winter of 1927 when I was badly injured by a terrible snowstorm, and the flooding river with huge logs and debris, rushed down with such force, it tore out much of my south side, and nearly knocked me off my piers. I was in great agony, and so shocked to see my west approach completely swept away. Many bridges have been lost in such floods, and I would have suffered that fate also, if I had not been at such a high elevation. Even with my pain, I thought about the people, now being unable to use me. There was no way for the children on the west side to get to the new Beaver Creek school house, about a mile up on the east side.

Then I awoke early one morning to much noise going on at my west entrance, where some men were putting up a ladder for the children to climb and go on to school. I was so grateful and happy for them, and soon after that, my approach was rebuilt, and the gaps in my south side were replaced.

To my great surprise, the traffic increased from the Blue Ledge Mine, when it re-opened in 1929. Soon there would be trucks filled with copper ore again. I heard the following from Mrs. Blossom Flury. She and her first husband worked there, he a pipe fitter and she, a cook. There were just a few buildings left and about 25 to 30 men were employed. Most of them stayed in the bunkhouse. During the hard winter, those miners called themselves the "Chain Gang," a phrase used by prisoners. Those miners would heat the snow with a chain, as they climbed the mountain to go to work. By the time the last man came along, the trail had been beaten down several feet.

Now, with so much noise from the many ore trucks rumbling across me, I was afraid of losing my hearing. That would be bad because I so enjoyed hearing the river and the school children running to get inside out of the rain. However, I was very saddened when the Blue Ledge trucks quit coming, sometime in the early 30's, and I knew the old Blue Ledge Mine was definitely finished. Everyone left, the tunnels were closed off for safety measures, and the old buildings gradually rotted away. The local farmers received the mine's telephone line. Now, that was a blessing, for they could now talk to family, friends and make long distance calls.

MY NEW NEIGHBORS (1935-36)

In 1935 I watched while there was a lot of work being done on the government land next to me. The CCC boys from Camp Carberry, were making a park for camping and picnicking. Iron stoves with

rock structures were built, and log tables with benches were made for an open log-styled outdoor kitchen, with stoves to cook on. Then a slide and some swings were added to a nearby children's play area. A well was also dug, and rocked up to hold a pitcher pump near the structure. Also, steps going down to the river were cemented with stepping stones, where swimmers could enjoy the swimming hole with a diving board. I enjoyed seeing the many of them, some even jumping off from the old Dead Horse Hill side, making a big splash. A nearby barbecue pit, with a very high half-circled stone wall and long bench, was added. Above that, next to the farmers ditch, which ran through the park, was a small building for changing swim clothes.

Those summers were very exciting for me because so many came to picnic, swim, and to stay overnight in tents. I enjoyed hearing them and their music, which sometimes ended very late at night. While this was all going on, another big thing was happening next to the park. The newly organized Upper Applegate Grange, began building their log stockade style Grange hall in 1936. Some of the CCC boys, went over at times, to help the main carpenter, Wallace Haskins, with the heavy logs. Every grange man, who was able, was asked to furnish two large logs, all the same size, and peeled. A grange member, Lewis Culy, drove a logging truck, taking the logs to the site. After the building was finished, the CCC boys presented the Grange with a large professional sign, (UPPER APPLGATE GRANGE), and placed it above the front entrance. It was greatly appreciated.

The CCC's often invited the Grange members, on Sunday afternoons, at their Carberry camp, now near the Applegate Lake and had friendly baseball games against one another. Also, they were invited several times, for old black and white movies on Saturday nights. Some of the older grangers had never seen movies before, so it was a great treat for them after a quick business meeting at their hall. I enjoyed hearing the music from the Grange dances, twice a month on Saturday nights, but had a hard time sleeping, when it sometimes went past midnight. No doubt, the campers were also kept awake. In 1939, a small grocery store was built by Harold and Helen Reed, across from the Grange hall. It was great for the neighborhood and campers in the park. Since there was no electricity in the area, the store had a large ice chest, in which to keep their perishable items. The park people, and the county kids, who would walk three or four miles, could now get their desired bottle of soda pop.

NEW OPERATIONS

(1941)

Inspections on me, from time to time, found I was doing quite well, until one morning in 1941, I awoke with a terrible headache, and thought it was because I had been unable to sleep, from my sometimes aching back. Then I saw a bunch of men coming towards me with saws, hammers, crowbars, and large timbers. I feared the worst, and they wasted no time in starting to operate, while I helplessly endured the pain in having all seven of my floor beams replaced, and the reinforcement of my joists. My headache was actually caused by holes in my old roof, so it was replaced with new shingles. As days went on, my pain continued with the addition of a new floor, which now, at least, relieved some of my sinus condition. I was so glad the operations were over and I could finally get back to a good night's sleep. However, that didn't last long, because early one morning I heard loud rumbling noises, which I had not heard before. It kept getting louder and louder, then there was a rumble in my interior. It was a large truck with many huge logs stacked on top, and just low enough to not whack my openings. It almost caused me to become tone deaf, as the driver honked a horn when passing through. Instead of the Blue Ledge Mine activity, it now became the logging industry. The many trucks rumbled across me like they enjoyed it and again I had to deal with their noise and dust, leaving me coughing and sneezing, while covering my ears. Since this was going to continue, I soon realized that I could do nothing about it. I was expected to be of service for every one. The drivers had families to support, and I actually found them to be very nice, so there was a reconciliation. There was a great need for lumber from those logs. I would just go on, coughing and sneezing, and praying for their safety.

I don't remember when the Upper Applegate road got paved, but it must have been shortly after the increase in logging. My floors received the same treatment of asphalt, which then added to my weight problems later.

I think it was around 1943 when electricity first serviced the country folk from Ruch to the Star Ranger station and maybe in 1945 it went as far as the Grange hall and store. They enjoyed more lights, a new stove and refrigerator as well as flush toilets.

It was now 1943, when a careless driver came racing through me, and had a collision. My pain did not seem to bother him at all. He only thought about his vehicle, and got it towed away without apologizing or telling my parents. They were really upset, because it was costing money, which was not budgeted. My truss and end posts had to be replaced, and I suffered un-necessary pain caused by that stupid driver. He should have paid for my expense.

After this mishap, I hoped to have more peace now, and kept enjoying all the many people in the park and the lively Grange happenings. One time they had an Easter service, down by the barbecue pit, at the river. Then they went back up to the hall to have an Easter breakfast.

There were many others using the pit, with late barbecues and playing music. Hearing the river and the music was so enjoyable, and I was so happy and all was well until 1945. That's when, after an inspection, I was diagnosed with worms! They were causing an infection which justified a painful reconstruction of all of my six westerly approach spans. My parents were now very concerned about my age. Even though I was only 28 years old, I didn't know that covered bridges were not expected to last past 30 years. No one had ever told me that! Was I going to fall in the river, or be ripped apart and burned? I was in such a state of shock and worry, my mind went into a so called "shut off," trying to save my sanity. I didn't know what was going to be done about those dang worms.

My parents must have decided to let me go on as best I could, for what time I had on this earth. So, even though depressed about the "worms bit," I continued welcoming park visitors and thanked the lord for the warm sun, bright moon, gentle rains, rippling Applegate River, and the glorious mountains where I was born. One has to eventually accept their destiny graciously for what time they have.

SOME VERY GOOD NEWS AND SOME VERY BAD
(1947-55-56)

People were trying to get back to normal after WWII was over. Uniforms were put away and jobs were available, in which to buy new homes, cars, and appliances. Many of those young people were coming back to the park, where they had once enjoyed themselves. I recognized a few, and was so glad to see them again.

Then in 1947, I nearly fainted when I heard a collision, in my dark interior, between a car and truck. It was then decided, that my interior was too dark and could cause another accident, so now I had to have surgery again! Two windows openings were painfully cut out on my south side. After my recovery, I realized that my painful ordeal brought something really good, because everyone raved about having more light, and being able to see the river, and I found I could also breathe much better.

After eight years had passed, I couldn't believe how well I was feeling for my aging bit. There had been no health issues or any thing had happened in the neighborhood until, in the middle of the night, on Sept. 7, 1955, I saw flames coming from the roof of the Grange hall, and helplessly watched it burn down. Some people came running and others in cars, but too late to save it. There had been some grangers there that day, preparing for a county Grange meeting the next day. They had cleaned the hall and kitchen, placing their new large coffee urn beside an old one, to be turned on the next morning.

When the fire inspector reported finding no cause for the fire, the Grangers said that a brand new

coffee urn had been placed next to their older one. The members found the old one, but not the new one, so they believed a thief came in and stole things, then set the Grange hall on fire. I kept having inspections, being so relaxed each time in having such good reports but in 1956 my parents were told that my main span was in poor condition, and several primary members were marginally unsafe, to support even pedestrian traffic. I now know that my life was in danger. Those dang worms! They finally won!

I cried all night thinking about my friend, the Grange hall's demise and now me. (However, the Grange later built a new one down river, between the Little Applegar River, and the Cameron Bridge). Meanwhile, my parents had been given an option to leave me, and make no repairs. Within four to eight years I would collapse under my own weight. A second option for them, was to make minimum repairs to reinforce and replace decayed members which would allow pedestrian traffic. Thank goodness, my parents took the second option! They informed me that I would be taken care of, for awhile, until a new bridge was built one fourth mile upstream.

Being taken care of for a while, was a frightening alternative, for me and my parents. I understood their position, but it gave me little comfort, and I truly resented the "new me" up stream, being built with ugly concrete and no top. Also having to look at it all the time increased my anger. I could hear the many days of construction going on and I wept in silence. The traffic was still using me and the day came when I was officially closed in 1956!

RETIREMENT AND THEN THE END?

(1960-64)

It took me quite a long time, before I could accept the "new me" up stream and it really surprised me that I actually began to somewhat enjoy my retirement. There were so many people coming to see me, even from far away places, since covered bridges are getting to be so rare. The foot traffic was so much better than the vehicles, and I enjoyed the many praises I received. I never thought I would ever say that old age was not so bad after all. I was less depressed, and enjoyed welcoming everyone for many days and years.

Then in 1960, while taking a nap, I awakened feeling very hot and realized I was on fire. "Help, I'm on fire!" A nearby neighbor, Dave Wingham, and his two teenage sons, John and Jerry, came running with buckets, and began getting water from the farmer's irrigation ditch, beneath my approach. They had a bucket brigade going, until the fire crew from Star Kanger Station came with a pump, but they couldn't get the motor started, so the bucket brigade continued, and saved me. No one knows who started the fire, and I hope it doesn't happen again. I do thank the Wingham's.

More years went by quite peacefully until late in December 1964, there was a heavy snowstorm, and I suddenly got the most splitting headache I had ever endured! I saw my roof was on the floor, covered with deep snow. I helplessly waited days for help, while enduring the terrible pain and cold.

A large group of people and newspaper reporters finally came, with such sad faces. I think there was a doctor and a coroner, discussing my condition with my poor parents, who looked so helpless. They were probably going to make arrangements for my funeral. I had to do something now, more than ever before. So I put on quite a show, when I started moaning and groaning, as best I could, causing tears to run down the viewers checks. I kept this up until they left. It resulted in lots of newspaper articles, and TV stations, showing my pathetic condition.

Then, heavy rains in January, caused terrible flooding, and everyone was back to see me, maybe being swept away. Thank God, it didn't happen, but I was a nervous wreck and went into a very deep depression. There was absolutely no help for me now. My head ached, it still being on the floor, and I could hardly breathe, while the rest of me suffered, from being so cold and wet all the time. The hereafter had to be better than this!

ANOTHER RECOVERY AND DEDICATION

(1965)

Days went endlessly by, as I continued with my decay and suffering. Then in April, much to my

The Locals saved me! On October, 26, 1987, forty-two people came to a meeting, arranged by Ranger, Dick Martega, at the Star Ranger Station, to form a "Save The McKee Bridge" committee. (I think it later became the McKee Bridge Preservation). Cindy Kahoun was the general chairman. All the problems about me were read, and Morris Byrne, (Deb McKee's grand-nephew) donated \$500, for my roof repair and Dave Wingham, who had saved me from a fire once, said he would help save me again.

The committee had many meetings and put together all kinds of events to raise money. A day was arranged to split the needed shakes of donated cedar trees, and a logger, Jerry Wingham, (Dave's son) donated hauling them near my entrance.

John Iff, was chairman for the shake splitting crew. The Gold Hill Lions, McKee Bridge Lions,

(1987-90)
 LOCALS RESCUE AND ANOTHER DEDICATION

By now, my life had gone on with no problems for twenty years, which was so unusual for one like me, but now in 1985, I overheard my parents were investing another \$43,000 in me. I never found out what my problem was. However, it would be the last time they would pay for my care, and I now had about five more years to live.

By this time, I was getting dang tired of hearing about my endings, and just decided to take the good times, and forget the bad. It wasn't easy, but I managed to enjoy the visitors, and the beauty around me. But after only two years, I was diagnosed with a rotted lower beam, a leaking roof (which I knew) and an undetermined concrete piling. My beam had already sunk four inches into the rotted cord and was causing the truss to bow. Dam those worms again! Was this really going to be the end now? \$105,000 was needed to save me! I gave up all hope and my temperament was the worst I had ever had. It was like being a mad dog, and I growled at everyone who came near me.

I needed that angel again. She must have been watching my behavior, because she came in my dream one night, and told me she would help me with my attitude, and the fear of death. That was comforting, and I managed to be more civil, but the scary feeling of falling in the river never left me. I noticed more of the local people seemed to be coming, because I was their dear bridge. Some had been the former children I had welcomed, on their way to school.

That's when a second performance, of moans and groans, excelled, and I added much more crying and shouting, "Help", "Save Me"! "This went on for two years, and it got so I could hardly speak, or even cry. My angel kept appearing, and telling me, there was always hope, but I began to doubt it, and was constantly fearing that fatal jump into the river!

(1985-87)
 SO TIRED OF THIS HELPI HELPI

When a bridge crew came to repair my approach, and then tighten and straighten me, I was overcome with gratitude. I was able to have my first good nights sleep, since that terrible December's storm. I know there will always be ups and downs for me, but I was really enjoying the ups for now.

I soon found out, who was mainly financially responsible for my recovery. It was the Medford Talisman Lodge, Knights of Pythias, and the Upper Applegate Grange. Of course, there were many other groups and individuals who generously donated.

On October 17, 1965 I was given a McKee Bridge Dedication to an estimated crowd of 175 well wishers. Jackson County Judge, Earl Miller, was guest speaker.

surprise, an angel appeared in a dream and told me I was going to live. I knew it was only a dream, but some do come true, and it did, when men came to remove my old dilapidated roof. Contacts were made a special run on a Saturday, to cut the planks for my scaffolding. Donations of money and materials kept coming in from other businesses. I just couldn't believe all of this was happening.

Medford Lions and Jacksonville Lions, all came for the shake splitting day. I watched those men skillfully handle their shake making tools, while many a brow, dripped with beads of sweat. Bless them, baked beans, and Cole slaw, was available at the Park kitchen. They later made money with Bingo games in the evenings there.

A month later, a dinner/auktion was held at the Red Lion Inn, in Medford. The event was well attended and quite profitable. A quilt had been designed by Evelyn Williams, Pearl McKee Byrne's daughter. They did the hand work while Bonnie Connally embroidered the large McKee Bridge banner and the quilt was finished with Pearl's quilting. Names, requested by donors, were embroidered, starting at \$100. A name embroidered on a small banner at the top of each block was \$500. The other appliqued blocks, with a banner at top, was \$1,000. A contest, for a poem, to be embroidered on the quilt, went to Shirley Nelson, from Medford.

My parents informed the committee, that four to five tons of road asphalt, on my floor, had to be removed because the weight was causing much concern. To my amazement, Barbara Mumblo, a botanist, from the Kanger Station, and a committee member, started coming for weeks after work, to chip at the asphalt, and haul it away in a wheelbarrow. I couldn't believe, how a woman could do that. She later found help from a crew of boys from the Star Kanger Ranch. Also, a rental place in Medford, donated the use of a rotary drill hammer, which was used, along with spud bars, and mauls, to break up the asphalt. About fifteen different people showed up on various days to help. Barbara later received my parent's "Community Service Award, for the month of July, for her work and I so appreciated what she did for me.

The committee was also grateful for the donations from the New York State Covered Bridge Society, Upper Applegate Grange, Medford Knights of Pythias, Southern Oregon Historical, First Interstate Bank of Oregon, Pacific Power and Light, and the local McKee Bridge Lions, and Lionsess, as well as many other individuals. \$50,000 would come from the State after matching funds were met. My parents had their Board of Commissioners appoint a committee to manage the \$50,000 maintenance fund for me. They were Cindy Kaloun, Wil Stimpfinger, Evelyn Williams, Phyllis Haseltine, Barbara Mumblo and John III. The group became the McKee Preservation Committee and John III was the chairman.

I was so happy again! I had been saved, and looked forward to another dedication celebration! It was arranged for me on May 19, 1990. It was rather cool, and rain threatened that day but the ceremony made it through without spoiling the event. There was an Artists of the Applegate Art show, at 2:00, then, at 3:00, the Re-dedication of me. The Reverend, Keith Johnson, gave the invocation, and Jackson County Commissioner, Jeff Golden was the guest speaker and 95 year old, Pearl McKee Byrne, cut my ribbon. At 4:00 to 8:00, there was a "Rocky Mountain Oyster Feed by the McKee Bridge Lions, which was enjoyed by many people.

MORE MAJOR PROBLEMS FOR THE NEW COMMITTEE

(1991-93)

County Engineer, Dale Petrasek, met with the committee quite often and recommended having me inspected every two years. After an inspection in 1991, there was concern about me, again. Six floor beams, on my east approach, extended out where they were showing some deteriorations, from water damage. Some brown colored, metal caps, were made to cover them and by 1993, I had to have inspections done by specialists, the Oregon Bridge Engineering Company. (OBE) from Eugene, Oregon. They would review existing studies, drawings, records, and any other information pertinent to the design, construction, and conditions of my existing structure, and participate in a meeting with my parents to determine applicable loadings and requirements for the work. Also, conduct site reconnaissance, verify measure and record existing structure conditions and layout. There would be Catalog data showing size, location, condition, and damage to structural elements, also drill and plug

timber elements as required to determine the damage to structural elements, drill and plug timber elements as required to determine the extent of wet and dry rot, soft shells, and other conditions which affect the strength of the members. Total inspection fee was not to exceed \$9,384. The estimated cost of repairs was \$53,800. Engineering cost, \$31,000. Total, \$84,800. (The State would pay \$39,233). This blew my mind! It was getting so expensive and I worried again about my future. The new committee only had \$40,000 after paying OBEC's inspection, but was told the work would not start until sometime in 1994 which would give time for getting the funds. More worry, worry, for me and them. It never stops!

The only good thing in 1993 was my quilt being on display for several months in the Main Foyer of the State Capitol Building in Salem. I can't help bragging about that. How many other bridges have quilts?

ALMOST A COMPLETE RE-DOING, AND ANOTHER DEDICATION

(1995)

By now, four years had gone by, and I knew there probably was no hope of my being saved, again! People kept coming, but I found no joy in greeting them any more. Maybe the committee had also given up. I was just too tired, to do any of my past performances of crises for help. It was, just good bye, everyone, and thanks for your help, but I was just going to "rot away" until the final drop in the river. I've even had dreams about it. So, when I suddenly woke up one morning, coughing like crazy, I knew I was going to fall in the river. Then I saw some men testing a chemical fumigation, which I was breathing and wondered what was going on. They now came inside, and started drilling holes, in which to pour that chemical in, which turned the liquid to a gas, and permeated my wood to kill the bugs, worms, fungus and etc. I was in severe pain, but those damn bugs and worms got what was due to them. I really smelled bad, but I was finally getting help again. I had to endure the pain! Other work went on, for several weeks, removing decayed splice blocks and wood from a center chord member. Installed was a new treated splice blocks and filled chord void with an approved wood resin. The workers loosened steel tension rods in truss corners and jacked up cantilevered upper chord ends of truss, installed 2" x 6" x 3' 4" bridge rail posts, centered between panel points to stiffen and straighten sagging railings. Eight posts per side was required. There was a braced railing at U4 and right with 2" x 6" strut attached to rail post and other things to mention here, and I thought the worst was over. But, it wasn't!

Early one morning, I almost fainted. "Holey Moley", I yelled! My siding was being ripped off, and I screamed with the pain, and was so upset in seeing all those names, carved and written by the school children and others being destroyed! I continued to scream and holler, but no one listened to me. Where were my parents and the new committee? I did not see one of them, and felt totally abandoned. I was left stark naked, nothing but a skeleton, so cold, and very embarrassed.

Many days went by in that situation. Then a truck came with what appeared to be my new clothing of western red cedar siding. I heard it was going to last longer with the CWF wood treatment approved by the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office. That made me feel somewhat better but more glad in getting clothes back on.

I did enjoyed having, the four large windows openings on my south side, with eaves built over them to protect my interior from the elements. Now, it would give a much larger view of the river for people to enjoy when they came to visit me.

The Bridge Committee placed appropriate looking boards on my interior walls for signatures. They wanted to keep my new siding free from graffiti. Even though my old boards had names and carvings, it was not considered graffiti then, but now it would be. One large "carving board was also added, but became a problem because of the use of knives, so it was removed.

One day, I was really mad when I saw some boys climbing up my wall, by using the large white painted steel rods, to get to my top, where they wrote on the white iron plates. They also left their shoe prints on my new wall. The Committee cleaned the wall and painted the steel rods black and put some grease on them. That took care of the climbers.

I had been closed from visitation for almost six months, during my re-doing period, so everyone was excited when they heard I was ready to have, what I called a re-re-re-dedication on May 21, 1995. It drew another nice crowd for the ceremony.

The McKee Bridge quilt and cards were on display and paintings of me on my old boards, were for sale. County representative Joe Strahl, and John Ifft, Bridge Committee Chairman, were the speakers. Others in the crowd told about their time there in earlier years and how I was being saved by being "Historic"! Pearl McKee Byrne, age 96, cut the ribbon again! Bless Her.

The ceremony ended with western music by Connie Fowler and her band, playing like it was for the President of the United States. If I had legs, I would have started dancing!

After the great dedication in May, the inspectors, in October, said the trees near me, needed trimming in helping me breath. Chris Logan, who had the necessary equipment, came for several days, and about five McKee Bridge members were there to help.

Later, Chairman John Ifft, who had a helicopter friend, offered to fly over the bridge to blow leafs off. It created much excitement there but I was really terrified because I didn't know what was going on.

PRESERVATION COMMITTEE GONE AND THE FIRST MCKEE BRIDGE DAY (1998-99)

Since 1991, the McKee Bridge Preservation Committee, with only six members, had done such a good job in taking care of me, which I greatly appreciated. I enjoyed being in such good shape for seven years, when very bad news came that they were without necessary funds for my up-keep. So, here I was again, having to deal with who was going to save me. Even though I was in good shape, I could not stop worrying.

The committee considered trying to form a Society instead of being a committee group. Information on how to proceed was needed, so Huncom Historical Society's president, Reeve Hennion, was contacted, as he had been successful in that society's formation.

The Committee invited him, when they met November 18, 1998, and I waited and waited, without any news on how it turned out. The cold December rain chilled my weary bones, and my thoughts were not pleasant. Perhaps this would be my last winter, especially if a heavy snow storm came, causing more weight on my weaken body.

I made it through that winter quite well, and the Committee was still coming to replace signature boards, one time painting my railings and keeping my floors clean. I actually felt quite well and enjoyed my visitors, especially the summer ones, who came to picnic and swim.

It was unusual to not hear anything about my future for a whole year. Then on January 7, 1999 a meeting was held and voted to apply for organizing a McKee Bridge Historical Society. Five board members, were later elected at a meeting on January 29. The By-lays and Articles of Incorporation were read, approved and filed with the secretary of State on February 22, 1999, with notification soon coming back favorable! The Committee was so thankful and happy and I cried tears of joy!

Everyone was so happy about the news, and 94 new memberships came forth, in a short period of time. Excitement grew when an old 1930 photograph, belonging to Gladys Williams (another daughter of Pearl McKee Byrne), was found among her other photos. It showed a white painted circle with 1917 in the middle, high above my front portal, on the east side. (Sometime later, the bridge portals had been painted white). The Society wanted the circle with 1917 back on, so Bob Jackson's daughter, Tammy, made a pattern and it was soon painted on my portal for everyone to see. There is no photo of any other county covered bridges with similar additions, so that makes me really proud and eager to show it on the very first McKee Bridge Day.

It happened on June 20, 1999 and was held in the park. Invitations had gone for people to come costumed for an old day summer event. The best costume would win a prize while in a parade led by boy scouts and children. The younger children would have buckets and wooden spoons (instead of drums). They lined up in front of me and marched through the park. One lady rode a stick horse, which made

everyone laugh.

There were arts and crafts, raffles, a silent auction, door prizes, music, and a noon barbecue consisting of chicken teriyaki, baked beans, corn on the cob and slaw. The cook was Linda Hultz who had the McKee Bridge Store and restaurant. This store was mentioned before about being across from the Grange hall and called the Upper Applejuice Store. Then there were at least five different owners before Linda, and she changed the name to McKee Bridge Store.

I could hear the men playing horseshoes and enjoyed the many tours of me. A cribbage tournament was later held in my interior where card tables were placed for the players. They were having so much fun and the winner left with a great smile hoping there would be more games like that.

A CHANGE OF PARENTS AND A REPLICA

(2000-01-02)

How often during these many years I've had such happiness, like last year's wonderful celebration and everything kept going so well. I knew it would not last, but I was not prepared for it to happen so soon after the celebration. I was told that my parents had decided they could no longer financially support me. I did not believe it. There must be some mistake, as no parent would do such a thing. The newly formed Society had just gotten organized with less than 100 members, and they depended on my parents support. I was devastated and knew this was really the beginning of my end. At last, all of my other worries and despair through those many years were minimal to what I had to go through now. I cried myself to sleep that night, hoping to never wake up.

Then early the next morning, I heard, "Wake up, wake up, there's good news. I groused thinking it was a dream, until I saw some society members standing on my approach with smiles on their faces, and I wondered why they were so happy. "We've adopted you," they said. I nearly fainted and they repeated it, but I still could not believe what I was hearing. They said my parents still loved me but could no longer use their tax money to support me, but would always belong to them as long as I lived. That

was some comfort, but how could the Society do it alone? They had to pay for my yearly inspections and repairs which was impossible.

The Society seemed in such good spirits and right away, they started making plans to build a small museum building near me to house their quilt, my bridge history and artifacts. Dorothy Livingston, a society member and nearby neighbor, offered to donate a small building from her property for the museum. A problem arose about there not being enough available land for it so this gave way for the decision to build a small portable museum, a replica of me, on wheels.

The Society contacted a member, Bob Ziegler, a welder, whose business was in Medford to build a metal framed replica structure of the bridge on wheels, which he brought to the park for everyone to see for the 2002 McKee Bridge Day. I thought it was great and so did everyone else. The day ended having had the usual vendors, food and music, but there was much excitement about a donated 1986 vehicle raffle. The winner was a society member, Warren Mertz. I don't remember how much was made from it.

THE TRAVELING REPLICA

(2003-04)

Everyone could hardly wait for the little museum replica to get finished. A Society member, Clarence Williams and Richard McKee (a grand nephew of Deb) did the roof with donated shingles and installed a donated shy light. Clarence Williams finished the replica with donated siding material for the outside and inside. Both portal ends were painted to look like my interior. Bob Jackson, a Society member, made and installed a sign for the roof with MCKEE BRIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY on it. Another Society member, Dan Sathre, installed electrical plugs and a ceiling light. The total cost for my replica was \$2,933.97.

It was all ready for the 2003 McKee Bridge Day. The quilt was hung for viewing and I think there were McKee Bridge cups and cups for sale. Now, the Society was pleased to see so many coming to see my replica and it would be taken to other events during the year, and parked near me on some summer week ends with sale items.

Then in 2004, a dreaded OBEC inspection had to be made and I knew I would have trouble of some kind. Age is not kind to oldsters like me. This time, my adopted parents knew the inspection would be more expensive, as well as my restoration. OBEC sent a letter with information that a two man team would be coming from Eugene for a two-day inspection. A long list of special attention was given to my roofing, siding and the support system, top chords, diagonal member and the rods. My approach spans and supporting piling would also be evaluated. "Heaven forbid," they would inspect my entire structure again! Any suspect timber would be bored for condition. My fellow guards prevented my deck planks from being lifted out. Therefore, they recommended cutting my timber deck planks (3in each) directly above my (7) floor beams. "Oh dear, I knew this was coming, but there is no alternative!" Once the inspection was complete, the beams would be removed and lag screwed back in place. Also my decking at both ends of the truss above L O and L 8 needed replacing. (Whatever that is?) I got very tired in hearing the rest of the report, since there was so much more of it. The Society said they were giving much thought to have a "rigging" structure with cables and hanging under the first to do the inspection work for two layer of decking. (That did not happen on this inspection). I waited in agony for all the procedure to begin. If I wanted to live longer, there was no other choice and I hoped the Society could afford it. The cost was going to be \$13,200 to \$19,000.

Meanwhile, the museum was taken to the Southern Oregon Historical Society's Hanley Farm for a Jackson County History Museum Association's Family Heritage Festival on August 21, 2004. It was a great day with all kinds of activities and entertainment. Bob Jackson had a miniature train to take children for rides. (However he had many flat tires because of the puncture weeds there). The museum had new McKee Bridge brochures along with photos of the Blue Ledge Mine. Other societies had many nice things to see and buy while they all enjoyed the good music. On December 03, the museum was taken to participate in Jacksonville's Victorian Christmas parade. The museum had garlands of greenery with red bows hung along the sides and some of our Society members were dressed in costumes and marched beside the museum. They received many cheers from the people.

SOME MORE MCKEE BRIDGE DAYS
(2005-06-07)

The museum was still being taken here by the Williams on summer weekends. I enjoyed seeing them come and hope they were making money for my upcoming operations. I do get a lot of visitors and the 2005 guest book showed there were 375 who signed. There is hardly a day, even in bad weather, that someone comes to see me. The 2005 McKee Bridge Day, June 11 had the usual activities with an auction given by the Upper Applegate Grange. All proceeds of \$2,700 went to the Society. Other sales were \$ 878 which included baked goods for the first time. That was the most income of any other McKee Bridge Day, even though there was a smaller crowd, probably due to the cool weather, regrettably, the Applegate Farms, the food servers, had a lot left over. During the event, I had a real itchy problem and told a society member about it. He noticed there were carpenter ants having a picnic on me, so the next day, on a Sunday afternoon, an exterminator company from Grants Pass came to put a stop to it. Oh, what a relief that was, and the company did not charge for it. They received a great THANK YOU! from me and the Society.

There was now great concern about the erosion at the base of my west bridge pillar from the leaking farmer's ditch. That was soon repaired by a considerate farmer. I also needed to have my west bridge pillar replaced when funds were available. Always something! And I needed a new approach

again in 2006. Being out in the weather takes its toll and some alder trees had to be cut down on my west side and the ever growing brush beneath my approach was removed. Then some of my roof was repaired by a local roofer. I think he did it for free.
Thanks to Society board member, Sirb Schussman, who made a crime proof donation container and installed it on my approach and it receives some good income. Also some no smoking signs were added at my entrance.

The 2006 McKee Bridge Day was a little different. Rosemarie Leever, a Society member, set up her collection of Second Hand Treasures (not a flea market) in my interior and donated the proceeds. There were vendors in the park again. It is interesting the Society's ice cream and root beer floats would do so well one year and not the next. One of the best was on a cold rainy day. Go figure!
The museum was taken again to the Jacksonvillie Victorian Parade in December. This time the roof was covered with cotton batting which came loose in places and repaired before the parade. On the way home it came completely off and was scattered for many miles along the way. That was the last time it was taken for the parade.

In 2007 my approach was replaced but the new posts and railings were not painted white this time. The society board members and I, liked the rustic look so there was a preservative sealer applied instead of the paint. The other posts and railings in my interior have always been white, an historic feature, are being washed and repainted every few years. Calling on my bridge flashing timbers were also taken care of.
McKee Bridge Day, on June 9, 2007 had the largest estimated attendance of over 300. The oldest person attending would receive a bottle of wine and have their picture taken on my approach. The winner was a nice 100 year-old gentleman from Fresno, California, who had recently moved here where his daughter, Marilyn and husband, Bob Van Huler lived. Some other contestants in their nineties were welcomed and congratulated.
Several bands played throughout the day and there was some dancing on my approach. I really enjoyed that and the music. Also some small animals from a local sanctuary were enjoyed by the children. Again, the people had a wonderful day and I had a good nights sleep.

MORE MCKEE BRIDGE DAYS AND A SPECIAL EVENT

(2008-09-10)

I was being well taken care of and having many happy days with so many visitors coming to see me. I've always waited in happiness for McKee Bridge Day's. This one in 2008 had gold mining items and equipment belonging to society member and teacher, Vern Arnold. He was from a gold mining family in the upper Applegate and had much history to share, as well as some real gold nuggets. It almost gave me gold fever and start digging for it, which I can't do, but I remember many of those old gold miners who traveled through my interior to or from their gold mines. Some were Vern's ancestors. The Society has a meeting once a year for it's membership and they usually meet here in my interior. This time my north wall had a display of 1890 Indian photographs, copied from glass negatives. The photographer had been an Indian Agency physician from the Colville Reservation in Washington State. Vern Arnold had another display of his ancestors and told many interesting stories about them.
The 2009 McKee Bridge Day had to deal and cooperate with the Forest Service's renovation of their park. There were small mounds of dirt and rock left near the kitchen's north side where tables had formerly been placed for the Applegate Lions barbecue. The only available place was near the smelly restrooms and the musicians, Connie Fowler's Band had to play there. Fortunately I was far away. Most people were leaving to find a another place in which to eat.
The Forest Service has never charged the Society for its use which is greatly appreciated, so all is forgiven. We now make sure the restroom is cleaned.
This also was the least attended Bridge Day which could have been due to Jacksonvillie's parade and Oregon's 150th celebration in Medford.
I've not mention this before, but the Jackson County Heritage Society has a business meeting

once a month at some Historical Society place. They meet here in my interior every August. This one in 2008 had a guest speaker, Jeff LaLande, a Forest Service archaeologist and historian and took the audience on an inspirational worded tour back to the beginning of our Upper Applegate Valley. After that, in September, there was the usual membership meeting. The Society needed to get me inspected by October after they paid \$750 for a design of special cable structure to be made in order to inspect everything beneath me, which had been impossible before. Estimated cost of the structure with cables was \$3,500 to \$5,000. The Society felt it was necessary and would be stored for future inspections. Now, I worried about what would be found underneath me. More worry!

ANOTHER MCKEE BRIDGE DAY AND SOME BAD NEWS (2011)

This McKee Bridge Day June 11, 2011 had a new feature of story telling for the children in my interior and I enjoyed it so much. They are our future and should hear about me and others to become involved with preservation.

The park had the usual vendors, music, barbecue, baked foods, the ice cream and etc. However, a new addition this year was a matching fund arranged by Society member, Janeen Sathre (Pearl McKee Byrne's granddaughter). Janeen, a hiking trail guide, and her hikers had donated before the hike to the Blue Ledge Mine, early that morning. The weather was especially nice that day and their contribution was greatly appreciated.

The September 10, 2011 for the McKee Bridge Historical Society membership had keynote speaker, a trustee of the Southern Oregon Historical Society. His topic was "History of Government Support." He also showed some interesting photos.

Several of my Society members brought small personal treasures to show and tell about. One was a handmade relic in which no one could guess what it was. The item was used to clean a smoker's pipe and other pipe needs. Another member had a iron candle holder with a sharp pointed end for sticking into the side of a mining tunnel for some light.

Some of my worst fears came on October 11, when my underneath was thoroughly inspected with the new apparatus, and some serious trouble was found. I was closed October 24 and a high wire fence with locked gates was installed at both entrances. I felt and looked so terrible, like a prisoner in prison.

ANOTHER MCKEE BRIDGE DAY AND MY FUTURE

(2012-13)

The weather for the 2012 McKee Bridge Day was rather cool with some rain showers, which no doubt kept many people away, but the hiking group from last years was there with their guide, Janeen Sathre. This time they did the Gim Lin trail. The Society appreciated their contribution again.

The lack of attendance this year was disappointing because I needed to have surgeries and replacements as soon as possible and the Society needed more money for this.

The yearly MBHS membership meeting in September this year had to be in the park kitchen because of my PRISON! There was a small attendance, but the hikers attended with their guide and she told about the interesting trails in our Applegate Valley. If I had legs, I would have gone with her. Ha! Society Board member, Strb Schussman was thanked again for making the crime free donation box on my bridge approach where people were contributing more, especially after they faced my wire fence and I did my "stressed out" prison performances.

My parents were awarded a grant in August 2012 to repair my structural problems. It was \$547,000 with a requirement of \$56,000 in matching funds. The Society has raised over \$13,000 but needs \$43,000 more. I shuddered at the price and wondered again about my future.

On May 16, 2013 a letter was sent to Members and Friends of the McKee Bridge Historical Society by the President and Secretary, Bob and Marilyn Heut. They said McKee Bridge Day, June 8,

would have an interesting array of raffle items to add to our usual vendors, baked goods, music, food and displays.

The museum would start arriving weekends from 1 to 4 pm at their usual spot near me after school is out. It would also be at Applegate Valley Day at Cantrall-Buckley Park on June 22, from 10am to 5 pm.

They listed the names of their board of directors at the end of their letter which may be of interest because two of them has been involved at the very beginning of my first restoration meeting in 1987 at the Star Ranger Station. Since then, they have been on a committee, a secretary, or board member of all my bridge savers group. Guess which ones. President; Bob Van Heuit, Treasurer; Strib Schussman, Secretary; Marilyn Van Heuit, Director at large; Bob Jackson, Barbara Mumblo, Dale Petrusek, Sharon Schussman, and Paul Tipton. Honorary Director, Evelyn Williams. (Barbara Mumblo and Evelyn Williams are the ones).

MCKEE BRIDGE HAS A BETTER ATTITUDE

(2014-15-16)

In 2014 work was still going on that year for my surgeries and replacements. OPEC is welding two support beams now, which will be supported by abutments 125' long and will move them on to me one at a time, and roll out on rollers part way and then pull to the other side. These will support the north side first so the north side work will occur first. The rotted area will be fixed where and old splice was done. Epoxy will be injected in all the cracks, smoothed, and textured (helps preserve strenght of the member). They are working four 10 hour days so not there on Fridays. By the middle of the first week (Now 20th) all work should be done on the north truss. Palnning to replace the roof in December won't work during had weather. All of my roof will be covered with plastic while working on it.

(McKee Bridge Day in 2014 was canceled because so much was going on elsewhere and I think the Society needed a break. They did participate in Applegate Valley Days, April 15, at Cantrall Buckley Park and had a raffle, ice cream, root beer floats and baked goods).

My restoration was completed in February 2015, and told I was stronger now then when I was built 88 years ago. That is the best news I'd had in a long time and so thankful the cement bridge up stream, took my place, which saved me from being destroyed.

People had been invited to come see my restoration on McKee Bridge Day June 13, 1915. It started with a ribbon cutting at 11 am to celebrate my restoration. A wonderful display of quilts were shown in my interior and there were children crafting miniature paper boats in which to race down the farmer's ditch. There was 50/50 raffle music by Don Doshier and Off the Wall music and more! Everyone enjoyed the food, baked sale, craft sale and etc. The Society reported it was the best McKee Bridge Day so far, and I agree! (They decided to not have one in 1916 as it was so much work).

An August 11 meeting of the Heritage Association was here and the McKee Bridge Annual membership meeting was at noon, Sept. 10, 2016. I enjoy having a place for the meetings and hear what's going on in this wonderful Applegate Valley.

MCKEE BRIDGE DAY AND CELEBRATION

(2017)

I was 100 years old in 2017 and my Society had a wonderful Centennial Celebration for me, June 10 from 10 to 3. (That's why they didn't have one in 1916, so I was surprised!) Everyone was urged to come dressed in period clothing fitting for 100 years ago and there were prizes awards during the event for those chosen as the best ones.

There was wonderful music by the Old Time Fiddlers playing from 11 to 1, then cowboy poet and balladcer, Butch Martin and singer/songwriter Christina Lynn Martin performed original songs about me and the early day mining area. Cowboy hillbilly poet, Merle Ming, did his bit on stage from 1 to 2 with his local wit.

The local antique engine club brought their variety of engines for display again and the Stray

Cats Club from Jacksonville, was invited to show their classic cars as well as the local Porsche club who would end their poker run here.

There was a large group of selected artists and vendors, as well as raffle items and auction choices up to \$200, and a standard 50/50 raffle.

The Applegate Lions, who has been doing the food bit for many years, was there again with their tri-tip sandwiches. My adopted parents did the usual ice cream root beer floats, salad and baked foods. There were McKee Bridge Centennial Tee shirts and other items for sale at our museum.

To me, the most important and special friend in attendance, was Bill Cockrell. He and his son came all the way from Salem, Oregon. Bill is a photographer and historian who has researched more than 600 historic covered bridges in the state. He co-founded the Covered Bridge Society of Oregon in 1978, and was president of the society and editor of the quarterly magazine (The Bridge Tender) for over 25 years. He and his brother have written two Oregon covered bridge books and he wrote another one in 2008. All of these books and magazine are filled with photos and information about each one.

As I said in the very beginning of this diary, I don't care what you think about my writings. It is ending now. If you really want me to live on for future generations, please become a member of the McKee Bridge Historical Society or donate a generous amount. In doing that, I could be around to celebrate my 200th.

Your truly,
McKee Bridge
Box 854, Jacksonville, Oregon 97530