

ROSEMAN BRIDGE
(Oak Grove Bridge)
Spanning Middle River at bypassed section of Webster Township
Road
Winterset vicinity
Madison County
Iowa

HAER IA-95
IA-95

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

ROSEMAN BRIDGE (Oak Grove Bridge)

HAER No. IA-95

LOCATION: Spanning Middle River at Webster Township Road (now bypassed),
Winterset vicinity, Madison County, Iowa
UTM: 15.403725.4571927 Pitzer, Iowa Quadrangle

STRUCTURAL
TYPE: Town lattice through truss covered bridge

DATE OF
CONSTRUCTION: 1883

DESIGNER/
BUILDER: H.P. Jones and G.K. Foster

OWNER: Madison County, Iowa

PREVIOUS USE: Vehicular bridge

PRESENT USE: Historic landmark and tourist attraction

SIGNIFICANCE: Roseman Bridge is one of nineteen covered bridges built in Madison
County, Iowa, in the late nineteenth century, and one of five that survive.

HISTORIAN: Researched and written by Lola Bennett, summer 2002

PROJECT
INFORMATION: The National Covered Bridges Recording Project is part of the Historic
American Engineering Record (HAER), a long-range program to
document historically significant engineering and industrial works in the
United States. HAER is administered by the Historic American Buildings
Survey/Historic American Engineering Record, a division of the National
Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. The Federal Highway
Administration funded the project.

RELATED
DOCUMENTATION: HAER No. IA-64, Holliwell Bridge; HAER No. IA-92, Cutler
Bridge; HAER No. IA-93, Hogback Bridge; HAER No. IA-94, Imes Bridge

Chronology

- 1805 America's first covered bridge built at Philadelphia.
- 1820 Ithiel Town patents the Town lattice truss.
- 1844 G.B. Clark erects Iowa's first covered bridge at Fort Des Moines.
- 1846 Iowa becomes the twenty-ninth state admitted to the Union.
- 1849 Madison County created.
- 1868 Eli Cox builds Madison County's first covered bridge near his farm.
- 1870 Madison County adopts Town Lattice plan for bridges.
- 1872 Madison County erects first iron bridge over Middle River at Compton's Mill.
- 1883 Roseman Bridge erected.
- 1884 Madison County stops building covered bridges.
- 1933 Madison County Historical Society begins campaign to save covered bridges.
- 1950 Madison County Board of Supervisors votes in favor of preserving covered bridges.
- 1970 Madison County Covered Bridge Festival organized.
- 1985 Roseman Bridge bypassed.
- 1992 Roseman Bridge rehabilitated at a cost of \$152,515.
- 1995 Roseman Bridge featured in movie adaptation of *The Bridges of Madison County*.
- 2002 Roseman Bridge recorded by the Historic American Engineering Record.

Introduction

Between 1868 and 1884, Madison County erected nineteen wooden covered bridges. Over time, all but five of these structures were lost to floods, fires, progress or willful destruction. In 1933, the Madison County Historical Society began campaigning to preserve the county's ten surviving covered bridges, but they faced strong opposition from progress-minded citizens and local farmers, who desired modern open spans. Controversy continued for nearly two decades, and during that time, several more covered bridges were lost.

In 1950, the Madison County Board of Supervisors finally agreed to maintain the county's seven surviving covered bridges as tourist attractions. One by one, the bridges were moved or bypassed over the next three decades, but the county upheld its commitment to preserve them. In 1970, the county held the first annual Madison County Covered Bridge Festival, a time-honored event that now draws thousands of visitors each year. Tourism increased dramatically in the 1990s following the publication and subsequent movie adaptation of Robert James Waller's novel, *The Bridges of Madison County*.

Unfortunately, the covered bridges are still threatened by vandalism and arson. McBride Bridge was burned in 1983, Cedar Bridge was burned in 2002 (and rebuilt in 2004), and there were subsequent arson attempts on Hogback and Roseman bridges. In cooperation with the Coalition for Advanced Wood Structures (USDA Forest Service Forest Products Laboratory and Iowa State University Bridge Engineering Center), Madison County is currently testing a remote-monitoring system to identify and mitigate potentially destructive activities at covered bridges. The ultimate goal is to develop tools for long-term preservation of historic timber bridges across the country.¹

Description

Roseman Bridge is a 107', single-span Town lattice truss covered bridge with an auxiliary queenpost truss. The bridge has a flat roof and is covered with vertical plank siding. The structure is supported on iron cylinder piers.

History

In 1877, the Madison County Board of Supervisors voted to build a bridge near this site on Middle River, but for reasons unknown, five years passed before any action was taken in the matter. County crews erected this bridge under the supervision of Harvey P. Jones in 1883.

¹ Coalition for Advanced Wood Structures, "Remote Monitoring of Historic Covered Timber Bridges in Madison County for the Prevention of Arson and Vandalism," *Research in Progress*, 2003.

The bridge carried traffic for nearly a century, until it was bypassed in 1981. It was rehabilitated in 1992 at a cost of \$152,515. In 1995, the bridge featured prominently in the movie adaptation of Robert James Waller's novel, *The Bridges of Madison County*.

According to local legend, a county jail escapee who mysteriously eluded capture here in 1892 haunts Roseman Bridge.

Builders

Harvey P. Jones (b. 1825) emigrated from Ohio to Madison County, Iowa, in 1845.² Jones was foreman of the county bridge crew from 1878 to 1886 and is considered the builder of record for at least fifteen bridges, both timber and iron spans.³ Jones left Madison County sometime around 1890, when he sold his farm.

Jones's name often appears in county records in association with George K. Foster (1831-1886).⁴ Born in Ohio in 1831, Foster lived in California before moving to Madison County in 1867. From 1877 until his death in 1886, Foster was in charge of the substructure work for bridges in Madison County.⁵

Design

Ithiel Town (1784-1844) was an architect from New Haven, Connecticut. He is remembered today for his role in developing the Greek Revival style of architecture, along with his partner, Alexander Jackson Davis. Town designed a number of churches, state capitols and other public buildings that still stand today. He also designed one of the most widely used wooden bridge trusses, for which he received patents in 1820 and 1835.

The Town truss was a lattice of sawn planks that eliminated the need for an arch or large hewn timbers. Rather than having notched joints, the lattice intersections were fastened with large wooden pegs, or treenails (trunnels). The truss functioned as a series of overlapping triangles, so that the load in any one triangle affected distribution of stress in all other triangles. The web members could handle both tension and compression and spread loads over a wide area.

Ithiel Town built only a few bridges himself, but used this same type of truss in the roofs of several important buildings he designed, and he received royalties of a dollar per foot of truss

² A.T. Andreas, *Illustrated Historical Atlas of the State of Iowa*, 1875. Jones is listed in the 1880 Federal Census as a carpenter.

³ The bridges of Madison County are often erroneously attributed to Benton Jones, who worked on county bridges from about 1887 until 1902. According to county records, Benton Jones repaired covered bridges, but there are no indications that he built them.

⁴ The two men built at least five covered bridges, and worked on many other county bridges, between 1878 and 1886.

⁵ G.K. Foster obituary, *Winterset Madisionian* (Winterset, Iowa), January 28, 1886: 4.

from bridge builders who used his patent. Town lattice truss bridges were built in large numbers in New England, New York and the South throughout the nineteenth century. Seeking Ithiel Town's own objective of "simple, permanent and economical" bridge design, in 1870, the Madison County Board of Supervisors issued a directive that all spans over 40' should be lattice truss covered bridges.⁶ The local newspaper summarized their decision as follows:

There has been much complaint about the erection of county bridges, as to their stability and make. The plan by the Board does away with the stone abutments, thus saving such expense and enabling the county to build a number more bridges. It is claimed that timber can be readily replaced, and that ice will affect it less than stone. They also require that bridges shall be covered. The expense of the roof is more than made up by the permanency of the bridge. Instead of the old style framing for the support of the bent, they have adopted the lattice work frame, like that used to support the ceiling of our court room.⁷

⁶ Ithiel Town, *A Description of Ithiel Town's Improvement in the Construction of Wood and Iron Bridges* (New Haven: S. Converse, 1821).

⁷ *Winterset Madisionian* (Winterset, Iowa), 12 January 1870: 1.

Appendix A: Madison County Covered Bridges

	Cox	1868	Eli Cox		Replaced 1913
	Callison	1868	Eli Cox		
	Kellogg	1869			
	Brown (Walker/Fletcher)	1871	J.P. Clark	Town lattice truss; pitch roof	
WG #15-61-06	Imes (Wilkins Mill)	1871	J.P. Clark	Town lattice truss; pitch roof	Moved 1887, 1977
	Wiggins (McBride)	1871	J.P. Clark	Town lattice truss; flat roof	Burned 1983
WG #15-61-02	Cutler (Donahoe)	1871	Eli Cox	Town lattice truss; pitch roof	Moved 1970
	Rose (Dunmire)	1871		Town lattice truss; pitch roof	Replaced c1910
	Afton (Reed's Crossing)	1872	Eli Cox	Town lattice truss	Destroyed by ice 1895
	Rhyno's Ford	1872	S.W. Winkley	Town lattice truss	
	Klingensmith (Bennett)	c1875	J.P. Clark H.P. Jones	Town lattice truss; flat roof	Replaced 1934
	Coopers Ford	1877	Eli Cox	Town lattice truss	Destroyed by flood 1898
	Cottonwood Ford	1878	Eli Cox	Town lattice truss	
	Badger (Welch)	1878	J.P. Clark	Town lattice truss; pitch roof	Replaced late 1920s
	Backbone	1878	H.P. Jones G.K. Foster	Town lattice truss; flat roof	Burned 1914
WG #15-61-05	Holliwell	1880	H.P. Jones G.K. Foster	Town lattice truss; flat roof	Bypassed 1986 Rehabilitated 1997
WG #15-61-07	Roseman (Oak Grove)	1883	H.P. Jones G.K. Foster	Town lattice truss; flat roof	Bypassed 1981
	Cedar (Casper)	1883	H.P. Jones G.K. Foster	Town lattice truss; flat roof	Moved 1921; Bypassed 1964; Burned 2002
WG #15-61-04	Hogback	1884	H.P. Jones G.K. Foster	Town lattice truss; flat roof	Bypassed 1993

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ADDENDUM TO:
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(Oak Grove Bridge)
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