

## Allman Avenue Bridge Stories

There was not always a bridge across the Black River on what is now known as Allman Avenue. Settlers in the area wanted easy access from the east to the west sides of the river. Dr. T. M. Miller owned land east and west of the river. He had donated land for Medford's earliest canning factory that was located about where Reliable Recycling is today. Farmers needed to be able to reach the factory with their produce. Dr. Conrad Nystrum briefly owned the land just north of the river. Probably both doctors felt that a bridge in that location would be a convenience when they were traveling to visit patients. Sam Harris owned land west of the river and had a large experimental orchard there. In winter, lumber companies filled "ice wagons" that were sleighs with water tanks on them, with water from the river so they could ice the ruts in their logging roads to make the heavy loads of logs move more easily on their way to the mills in Medford. These and many other people wanted a way to cross the river on Medford's north side, but the Town of Medford had been reluctant to allocate the money for a bridge.



Map from Taylor County Plat Book – c.1901

Local citizens tried to promote the building of such a bridge. Drs. T.M. Miller and C. E. Nystrum worked to get the process started. An article in the newspaper stated the following:

Taylor County Star and News. April 22, 1899. Star. Vol. XXIII, No. 50, News. No. 1195.

Drs. T. M. Miller and C. E. Nystrum have finally secured the co-operation of the authorities in the town of Medford in the work of extending the highway from the railroad north of the city to the corner at Billings' farm, across Black River. The doctors assisted by farmers in that vicinity will construct a durable bridge across the river without any expense to the taxpayers of the town, and a great convenience to the people of that locality will result when connections are completed. Work has already been commenced.

What did this wooden bridge that cost nothing for the taxpayers look like? Marilyn Boeckler Schwartz has in her possession a photo of her Boeckler ancestor's sewing class. The photo was taken showing women sitting on a wooden bridge. Could this be the first Allman Street bridge? Since some of the Boeckler relatives once lived on the land that is near the bridge, is it possible that the group photo of the sewing class could have been taken there?



**Grandma Boeckler's Sewing Class**

One of the early farmers living northwest of the area, S. F. Harris, wrote an article about the work done on the bridge to the editor of the newspaper.

Taylor County Star and News. March 24, 1900. Star. Vol. XXIV, No. 46, News. No. 1243. Voice of the People.

Certain parties thought that a bridge was needed there. The town board did not feel disposed to order one built. The parties proposed to the board that if it would open the road and put in the approaches, they would build the bridge and donate it to the public. The proposition was accepted, the bridge was built, was inspected and accepted by the board, hence must at that time, have been in good condition and satisfactory to the board.

The river was used to send logs to the mill and so it was possible that such logs might damage the bridge. S. F. Harris was concerned about what might happen to the new bridge if a barrier to protect it was not put in and so he continued by writing the following.

The parties who built and donated the bridge did not engage to put in a boom but assumed that the town would protect its own property. .... To sum up, the parties who built the bridge did all they agreed to do, turned it over to the board, it was accepted, and now caring for and protecting it is the town's affair, not ours. S. F. Harris.

Dr Miller also shared his opinion in the newspaper.

Taylor County Star and News. March 24, 1900. Star. Vol. XXIV, No. 46, News. No. 1243.

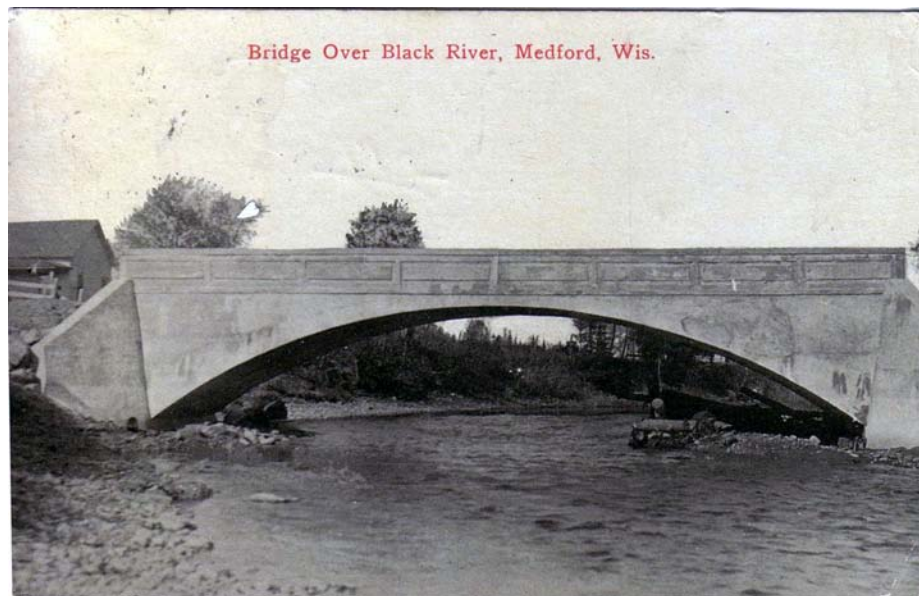
The bridge is the best wooden one in Taylor County and did not cost the county a cent. It was built by a few having an interest in opening up that part of the city and town and built under an agreement with the town of Medford, that said town of Medford would build the road from the railroad to the bridge.

Apparently, the town finally built the road that extended over the railroad, across the bridge, and to the corner of the Billings farm. A logging road or trail also went west past the Harris farm and on to some of the lumber camps. In many spots, that was a "corduroy" road with logs laid crossways to fill in wet and swampy spots. Heavy loads of logs pulled by horses and oxen going to the sawmill or loads of hemlock bark going to the tannery were hauled along that road.

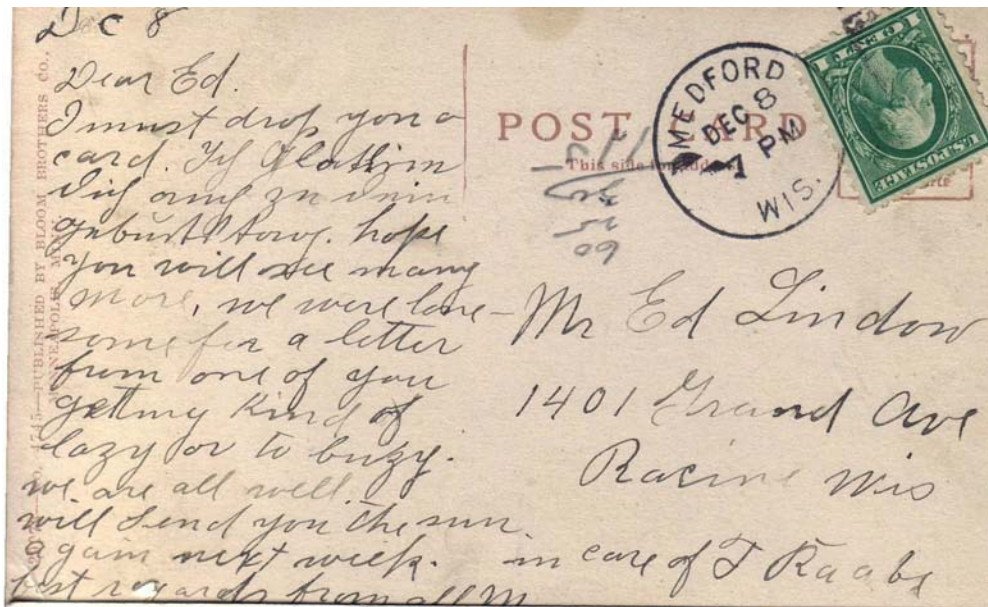
The wooden bridge apparently lasted until it was replaced by a concrete structure in 1911. An article in the newspaper described the new bridge.

The concrete work on the new bridge just north of town near the canning factory is finished and when the filling is done this will be one of the best bridges in Taylor county. It is a concrete span about 70 feet long with filled approaches. It was built by the town and city of Medford.

Post cards printed and sent at that time showed how proud the people were of the new bridge. A birthday greeting was sent to Mr. Ed Lindow on such a post card.







Post Card from the Collection of Bernice McCumber

Apparently, logs continued to be floated down the Black River. A post card in a collection held by the Taylor County Historical Society shows the bridge and logs in the river.



The land just north of the bridge was owned by Medford's Mayor Perkins and his son, then by Dr. Conrad and Maria Nystrum, Peter B. Olson and later by Joseph and Phoebe Latton. According to the newspaper, Latton apparently

rented the property to others. The woods in the area was known as "Latton's Woods". Then the land was purchased in 1912 by Dr. Karl DeSombre, a Medford doctor who had married Agnes Latton in 1910. Dr. DeSombre had his office in his home located on the land. It is not certain who built the house and barn on the farm. The new bridge was known by local people as DeSombre's bridge. After Dr. DeSombre no longer practiced in Medford, the farm was rented to a series of tenants, including Mrs. Andrew Kleiber and her son Dan. In March of 1940, the Kleibers moved and the farm was purchased from the DeSombres by Mr. and Mrs. Nick Gengler and family. They continued to farm it. The bridge was then known by some people as "Gengler's Bridge."

There were times when this bridge was challenged not only by logs being sent to the mill, but by the waters of the river itself, but it withstood those assaults. The diary of Eleonore Bolz Kuse described a flood in August, 1941.

Aug 31 "Furchtbar Regen letzte Nacht und vorige Nacht der River bei Genglers ist hoch über schwemmt Die Road nicht ganz bis Neumans (in der Stadt war große überschwemmung) war hatten tüchtig gewitterregen mit wenig Hagel das schlimmste ging Nord herum"

*(There was a terrible rain last night and the previous night near Genglers there was flooding. The road all the way to the Neuman's place was flooded. There was much flooding in the city. We had a big thunderstorm and a little hail. The worst went around to the north.)*

Amanda Kuse used her small Kodak camera and took a photo of the flood.



**August 31, 1941 – Flood – Black River  
Photo by Amanda Kuse**

Many people enjoyed fishing up and down stream from the bridge. Many walked or drove over that bridge and took photographs from it. Walter Kuse sketched and painted pictures of the river and the stately American Elms that once grew near the bridge. Children in the early nineteen hundreds skated up the river to the bridge during the winter.





**Gengler Farm in Summer Near the Allman Avenue Bridge  
Photo by Hildegard Kuse**



**Gengler Farm in November 1962 Near the Allman Avenue Bridge  
Photo by Hildegard Kuse**



**Allman Street Bridge**  
Photo by Hildegard Kuse

The rather narrow concrete bridge built in 1911 had been very useful for horse and wagon and early auto traffic, but did not meet the needs of increased truck and other traffic, especially when a recycling firm located its business near it.

It was replaced in 1971. The July 15, 1971 *Star News* had a photo of the old bridge being torn down and the article stated the following:

“THE PICTURESQUE ARCHED concrete bridge, a one-lane span having outlived its usefulness, is being replaced by a new structure over the Black river on Allman street on Medford’s north side. The new bridge will have a span of 60 feet, 6 inches with wood piling capped with concrete for the bases, a completed base pictured at right. Larson Construction Co., Eau Claire, builder of the new bridge over the Black river on county trunk O, was awarded the contract. Sharing in the cost of construction are Taylor county and the town of Medford.”

The August 12, 1971 *Star News* had a photo of the completed bridge with the following caption under it.

“NEW ALLMAN ST. BRIDGE – A new span across the Black river has been completed on Allman street on Medford’s north side, the new bridge replacing an old concrete structure built in 1911. Constructed at a cost of \$31,000-plus, the bridge project was shared by the town of Medford and Taylor county. Larson Construction Co., Eau Claire erected the 60 1/2 foot span with wood piling capped with concrete and concrete and steel decking.”





**Bridge built in 1971**  
**Photo by Loretta Kuse**

In July of 1984, after the Gengler land had been sold to Jim Metz and Mark Frey, the house and barn on the property near the bridge were intentionally razed by burning. In October of 1984, construction for a mobile home park was begun. Applications for occupancy in the new Riverside Terrace Mobile Home Park were accepted beginning May 1, 1985.



**Razing of Buildings on the Gengler Farm in 1984**  
**Photo by Loretta Kuse**





**Riverside Terrace Mobile Home Park**  
**Photo by Loretta Kuse**

Much heavy traffic crossed the bridge and the structure built in 1971 did not hold up under the stress.

In 2007, plans were begun to replace that bridge. The project received Federal funding of \$657,758. The project was completed in 2009.



**17 November 2012**  
**Photo by Loretta Kuse**

What stories and memories will people have about traveling over this bridge or living nearby?

## Sources

### Interviews

Marilyn Boeckler Schwartz

Taylor County Highway Department Personnel

Margaret Gengler Thums-- December 27, 2012

Register of Deeds for Property Information – Sara Nuernberger

### Photo and Map Collections

Amanda Kuse, Hildegard Kuse, Loretta Kuse, Bernice McCumber, Marilyn Boeckler Schwartz and Taylor County Historical Society.

Taylor County Plat Book – c. 1890's

### Newspapers

*Taylor County Star and News*. April 22, 1899. Star. Vol. XXIII, No. 50, News. No. 1195.

*Taylor County Star and News*. March 24, 1900. Star. Vol. XXIV, No. 46, News. No. 1243.

*Star News*, July 15, 1971

*Star News*, August 12, 1971

*Star News*, October 17, 1984, Volume 109, No. 31.

*Star News*, April 3, 1985, Volume 110, No. 3.

### Diaries and Other Written Material

Diary of Eleonore Bolz Kuse – 1903-1952

Post Card written to Ed Lindow

### Internet Resources

<http://recovery-and-reinvestment-act.theblaze.com/1/172898/ALLMAN-STREET-CITY-OF-MEDFORD>

THE BLAZE»AMERICAN RECOVER & REINVESTMENT ACT»ALLMAN STREET, CITY OF MEDFORD (accessed December 27, 2012)

### Questions to Think About or Explore

- What was life in the area like before any of the bridges were built?
- Why was the Black River considered to be a transportation route?
- Why did logging companies send logs down the river?
- Sam Harris suggested in a letter to the newspaper that the Town of Medford should protect the bridge by putting in a “boom”. What was the meaning of that word and what how would a log boom have protected the bridge?
- Why was an “ice wagon” filled near the bridge?
- Who remembers fishing near the bridges?
- Early pictures of the bridge show many American Elm trees growing nearby. Why are the elm trees that once grew next to the river no longer there?
- Why was it called DeSombre’s bridge? Gengler’s Bridge?
- Why was the 1971 bridge replaced?
- How many years did each bridge last?
- How much did each bridge cost? Where were funds obtained in each time period for building the bridges? How can the differences in costs be explained?

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