



MILITARY HISTORY

- 1775 George Washington takes command of the Continental Army.
- 1788 The United States Constitution was ratified.
- 1863 The Battle of Gettysburg begins.
- 1918 Americans halt the German advancement at the River Marne.
- 1943 Allied invasion of Italy begins.
- 1944 Desegregation of military training facilities begins in the U.S.
- 1945 The atomic bomb is delivered to U.S. forces on Tinian Island.
- 1953 The Korean War enters a state of armistice.
- 1988 Iranian Air Flight 655 is shot down in the Persian Gulf.
- 1994 Germany's Army is allowed to participate in NATO missions for the first time.

DID YOU KNOW?

The national cemetery at Rock Island includes remains from multiple cemeteries. Rock Island itself has had several cemeteries. These included the Fort Armstrong cemetery and a Union cemetery. When BG Rodman was built the arsenal at Rock Island, he consolidated the post and Union cemetery into the current National Cemetery. Remains of Union Soldiers were also transferred from local cemeteries. The Confederate cemetery was moved to its current site in 1864.

TRIVIA

- 1 In what year was Army Materiel Command (AMC) stood up?
- 2 Which Rock Island Arsenal building originally housed the museum?
- 3 When was the only time in history that the Rock Island Arsenal produced artillery or ammunition?

Last Month's Answers:

- 1 In what year did the role of "close air support" become formally assigned to an aircraft?
1916
- 2 How many complete rail bridges have spanned Rock Island since the first in 1856?
4 (including the 1856 bridge)
- 3 Who was the commanding general when ASC was stood up in 2006?
MG Jerome Johnson

Answers to trivia and more are available on the ASC History Office's SharePoint page.



The Government Bridge

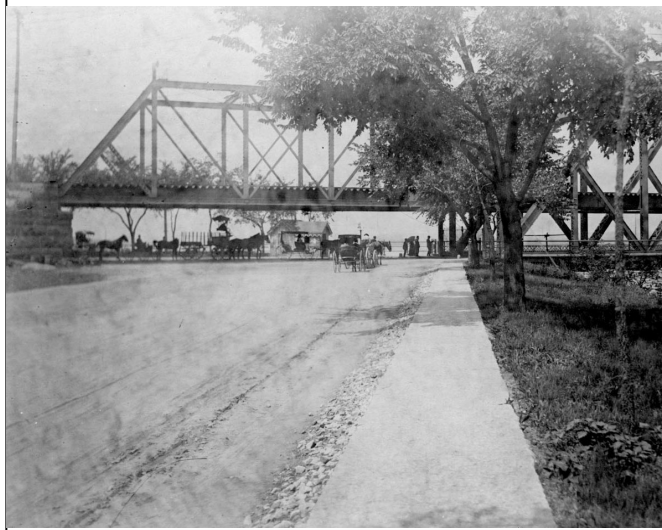
The story of the bridges across Rock Island Arsenal could easily fill several chapters in detail as well as serve to chronicle the island's history and the progress of American geographic growth. The culmination of this history in the 19th century lies with a bridge we all know as the Government Bridge. It is the fourth bridge to cross use Arsenal Island as a stepping stone to connecting East to West across the Mississippi River. This final bridge was designed by Ralph Modjeski and completed in 1896 replacing the previous bridge built in 1872. The 1872 bridge was the first bridge across the island that was made solely of iron. However the design was just not strong enough to withstand the weight and volume of rail traffic across the island. It was obsolete almost as soon as it was completed and plans were begun for a new, stronger bridge.

Utilizing the same piers, the new Pratt/Baltimore truss bridge was designed with a redundant steel frame. It was constructed by the Phoenix Bridge Company under contract by the U.S. Army. The new 1896 bridge was truly an engineering marvel and was built to last. It has served stood 123 years without any major modification to the original design and using about 35% of its life span. It was similar to the 1872 bridge in that it used a double deck design with the rail traffic on the top deck. This was done to avoid scaring the horses that were still crossing the bridge as part of the pedestrian traffic. Volume was increased by adding a second rail line on the top span. Additionally it is unique in that the swing span can rotate 360 degrees to accommodate river traffic. The swing span is so well balanced that on a windy day the span will spin without using the drive motor.

The design was later updated to also include street car tracks on the lower deck to ease the wagon and foot

traffic across the bridge.

The 1896 bridge would be Ralph Modjeski first bridge design but he would go on to design at least 17 other bridges. The most notable are the San Francisco Bay bridge and our very own I-74 "Bettendorf Veterans Memorial Bridge" completed in 1933. Another feature of the bridge is that the U.S. Army paid for the construction of the bridge and its one of the few public bridges still maintained by the U.S. Army.



An early traffic jam waiting to cross the bridge in 1898.

The Hunt for the 1856 Bridge

On 21 April 1856, history was made as the first trains crossed the Mississippi River between Rock Island, Illinois and Davenport, Iowa. With the successful crossing came the connection of the East and West. And the linking of the American coasts. By 1865, however, with the approval of the new national arsenal at Rock Island, it was decided that the bridge be moved by 1872 to its current location. Upon completion of the new bridge, MAJ Flagler began work to remove the old piers on the south side of the island in Sylvan Slough. While a memorial pier and abutment of the original bridge remain on the Northern crossing, nothing remains visible on the section crossing the Slough.

Recently, equipped with side-scanning SONAR, a boat, and the navigation charts of the river from the 1870s, the ASC history office, supported by the Rock Island Arsenal Fire Department, went on a search for any remaining pieces of the piers and abutments in the Slough channel that had been removed by 1875 to just below the low water level.

At least six points were identified as potential remnants of the bridge piers. Varying in depth from twelve to sixteen feet all six were aligned on the approximate route of where the original bridge would have crossed. This original route would have taken the bridge across Sylvan Slough from just upstream from the current rail line from Illinois to the Island. The 1856 bridge would have bisected the current slough rail crossing at about a 45-degree angle and proceed to land

near a current-day clearing on the Arsenal Island shore. From there, it would cross Arsenal Island along what is currently Sylvan Drive.

Local rail and history groups are now working with the Garrison to mark the crossing point. The intent will be to place a marker on both Arsenal Island and the Rock Island mainland to mark the crossing of the bridge. This is similar to what was done on the northern channel, where a light shines from the Iowa side to the pier memorial on the Arsenal Island side. These beacons will mark the location where the West first became open to the East.



If you want to understand today, you have to search through yesterday.