

# The Reporter

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**BRIDGE DEDICATED** – The ribbon was cut by the Tom and John Vaughan and Mary Ellen (Vaughan) Schmacher to official re-open the Kirby-Flynn Bridge to traffic last Tuesday morning. The 1883 Pratt high truss bridge was rehabilitated this winter after being severely damaged by a fire in 2006.

The Palo Alto County Supervisors, along with area residents and members of the Palo Alto County Engineer's staff and the bridge contractor were on hand for the ceremonial ribbon cutting.

– Dan Voigt photo

## Bridge Dedicated With Ribbon Cutting

by Dan Voigt

It sat damaged for many years, but withstood the efforts of man and nature to bring it down. But, as the old saying goes, you can't keep a good man, or bridge, for that fact, down. Last week, the last surviving high-truss bridge in Palo Alto County was officially re-opened for use with a ribbon cutting ceremony.

The Kirby-Flynn Bridge, located in Section 21 of Nevada Township southeast of Emmetsburg, is the last of its kind, a pin-connected Pratt high-truss bridge that dates back to 1881, when a petition was filed by several residents of Ellington, Nevada and West Bend Townships, asking the county's Board of Supervisors to construct a bridge to cross the west fork of the Des Moines River in Section 28 of Nevada Township. The supervisors acted upon the petition, signed by a John M. Wening, and 33 other landowners in the area, in December of 1881 and A.A. Wells constructed the bridge for the grand sum of \$1,546. The final payment for the bridge was made to A.A. Wells in February of 1883.

But, as it was constructed, the bridge

was originally located further south and east of its current location. In the early 1900's, the west fork of the Des Moines River was dredged and channelized, and the bridge was moved to Section 21 in either 1918 or 1919 to its present location. Records at the Palo Alto County Engineer's Office show that a John Dooley was paid \$900 in 1919 to erect a 120' long steel bridge on the site. However, a mystery has arisen, since the original orders for the bridge called for a 100-foot long structure. As there are some differences in styles and types of material in the bridge, it is thought by officials that an additional 20 feet of length were added to the center truss of the structure when it was moved to its current location.

After being moved in 1918 or 1919, the bridge was updated in 1932 to receive a new wooden plank deck. The original tube supports were replaced with steel pilings during its lifetime.

The bridge was rated at eight tons in 1976 and then de-rated to three tons in 1992 and in 1997, the bridge was closed to traffic. But in 2006, a fire, believed to have been caused by fireworks, destroyed most of the northern

approach of the bridge, as well as a majority of the deck and stringers. With the bridge damaged, a decision had to be made as to remove it or to repair and give the historic structure another lease on life. In 2009, Palo Alto County received a federal grant to rehabilitate the structure, and Cramer Construction of Des Moines began work on the bridge late in 2009. Workers toiled through the winter to rebuild the deck and approaches, as well as place side rails on the structure. The work was completed in March of this year, leading to the ribbon cutting on Tuesday.

Currently, the bridge is open to vehicular traffic of no more than eight tons and is restricted to vehicles no more than 10 feet in height.

During the ribbon cutting, Mary Ellen Schumacher, John G. Vaughan and Tom Vaughan all helped cut the ribbon for the structure, along with Jim Moser, Jerry Fuerstenau and Dennis Schumacher. Also on hand for the event were Robert Cramer, contractor for the project, Joe Stanisiz, consulting

**BRIDGE DEDICATION**  
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