

Dan's Archives

Ninety-five years ago, in an effort to bring together the hill areas of Monessen, the borough council, acting on a suggestion by the Board of Trade, decided to build a viaduct that would span Third Street at Reed Avenue. It was a natural choice, as many of the newer churches were located in that area, as well as the high school. The Borough fathers also lived in the vicinity, mostly on McKee Avenue.

In the spring of 1912, a contract was given to the Nicola Building Company, of Pittsburgh, to build a 93 ft. high viaduct for \$55,000. By mid May, a special train arrived carrying the machines and supplies to commence building. After 40 cars of lumber had been hauled to the scene, the Nicola Company found itself struggling to find places to store the building materials. All the vacant lots and portions of the street were being used. The remaining lots were at a premium. One property owner refused \$50.00 to use his land as temporary storage.

The bridge was considered an engineering marvel in its day. It took months to build, as the concrete was mixed on-site and hauled by wheelbarrows.

A year after the contract was first signed, the viaduct was nearly finished. In late May of 1913, the Monessen ministerial associations petitioned the construction company, borough council, the burgess and the police department to allow the early use of the bridge for a special evangelical service to be conducted by Dr. Hamilton. On May 27, 1913, the Viaduct was opened to foot traffic only from the hours of 7 PM until 10:30 PM.

A little over a week later, on June 5, 1913, the span was officially opened with no special ceremonies. Four cars crossed the bridge to the other side. Councilman, Dr. W. D. Hunter's Cadillac was the first vehicle. Riding inside were his 2 children, G. F. Wright, Mary Bindley, Clark Bear and Superintendent McCullough of the Nicola Construction Company. The next 2 vehicles carried C. S. Duval, A. J. Johns, the Borough engineer, Harry R. Pore, Dr. H. W. Day and William Frantz. The last car, a Maxwell, was driven by Mrs. George T. Barben with Mrs. W. D. Cowan and Mrs. Harry R. Pore as passengers. The newspaper called it the greatest improvement the borough ever made.

An early restriction on the bridge was that children had to be accompanied by an adult in order to cross. Soon however, complaints by the residents of Third Street forced the borough to station a policeman at the bridge. Third Street residents had complained about people loitering, loafing and lounging around the structure. They were throwing stones or spitting off the span.

By 1975, the Viaduct was crumbling from use, the weather and neglect, and it was decided to tear it down and build a new bridge. Frank L. Irey, Jr. was awarded the demolition contract at a cost of \$148,000. Irey was also the low bidder on constructing the new Viaduct at a cost of \$1.43 million. The new span would lack the ornamental architecture of the original.



Do you have photos of downtown Monessen during the Christmas season that you would be willing to share? The Heritage Museum is looking for holiday photos of the downtown business district showing the interior and exterior of the stores as well as the street decorations and shop windows to use later this year in the newsletter. Please bring them to the Museum for scanning.