

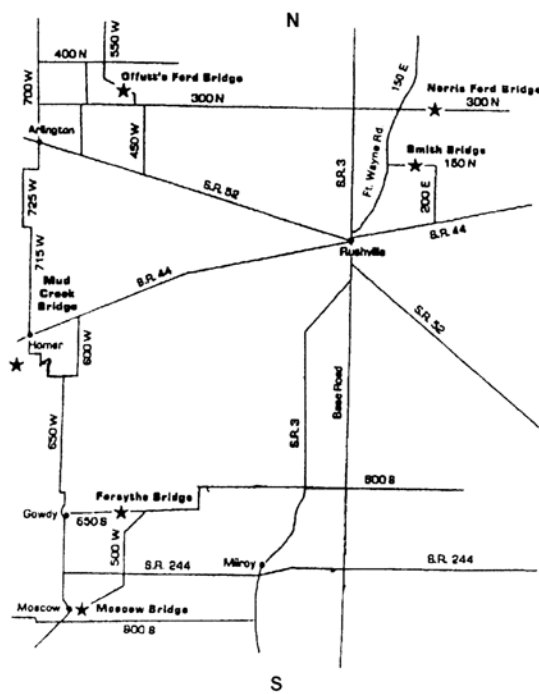
MAP OF EXISTING BRIDGES
1998

THE
KENNEDY COVERED BRIDGES
IN
RUSH COUNTY
INDIANA



Moscow Covered Bridge

Rush County Heritage, Inc.
2001



This brochure was produced by Rush County Heritage, Inc. in 2001. RCHI was formed in 1986 to preserve the six remaining Kennedy covered bridges that were on the public highway system, four of which had been targeted for removal. We have developed membership of over 800 since that time who believe that these historic structures should be restored and maintained in the county highway system. Single membership is \$5.00 per year; family membership \$10.00. If you would like to be part of this award-winning preservation group or assist in a monetary way, send contributions to:

Rush County Heritage, Inc.
6352 W 650 S (Gowdy)
Rushville, Indiana 46173
(765) 629-2892

THE SMITH BRIDGE

The Smith Bridge in Rushville Township was built by A.M. Kennedy and Sons in 1877 across the Big Flatrock River. It is northeast of Rushville on County Road 150 North, between County Roads 100 and 200 East. The structure length is 121 feet, with a vertical clearance 14 feet and a deck width of 16 feet, 9 inches.

The bridge derives its name from Dr. William H. Smith, a prominent adjacent land owner who was a Civil War veteran and had served as a captain on a canal boat on the Whitewater Canal in his youth.

The bridge, which was closed to traffic in 1986, was reopened in 1996. Thru the help of RCHI and Historical Landmarks of Indiana, the County Commissioners were able to obtain matching funds from a newly-formed government program. The bridge has been completely restored to a 11-ton load limit.

The bridge is a favorite of the youth of Rushville because of its short distance from the town.

THE NORRIS FORD BRIDGE

The Norris Ford Bridge was the last Kennedy covered bridge built in Rush County. It was erected in 1916 by E.L. Kennedy and Sons to replace a ford across the Big Flatrock River in Jackson Township on County Road 300 North, between 125 and 240 East, and northeast of Rushville. Although the Norris Ford was the second to last bridge ever built by the Kennedys, the techniques were almost identical to those used forty years before. It does not have the customary scroll brackets, but the original stencil put up by the builders on the inside proclaim it as a Kennedy bridge.

This is now the only Kennedy bridge built in the 20th century which is still standing. It is named for the O.C. Norris family who owned extensive adjacent acreage. It was restored in 1989.

THE FERREE BRIDGE

The Ferree Bridge in Anderson Township was the first Kennedy bridge built in Rush County. It was constructed by Archibald M. Kennedy in 1873 over the Little Flatrock River on Base Road between County Road 600 South and State Road 244. It was 83 feet long, 15 feet wide, and 13 1/3 feet high. This bridge was destroyed by arson on a heavily-foggy night on February 13, 1989. A reward is still being offered for information leading to the arrest and conviction of those involved.

Artwork by Opal Boring

THE KENNEDYS AND THEIR BRIDGES

The Kennedy family of bridge builders lived, died and are buried in Rush County, Indiana. Their descendants still live here, and Rush County is proud of the Kennedys and the six remaining covered bridges.

The patriarch of the family, Archibald Kennedy, was born in North Carolina in 1818 and came to Indiana as a child, eventually settling in Rush County. He purchased a farm, built a home, and made his living as a carpenter. The bridge building tradition began when he was hired to build a two-span bridge near Dunlapville in Union County in 1870. Archibald was later joined by his sons, Emmett and Charles, and they became noted builders of bridges in southeastern Indiana.

The Kennedy family constructed at least 58 covered bridges, only 13 of which are still standing. Rush County at one time had 19 Kennedy bridges, six of which are still standing in 1998. The Kennedy bridges are similar in appearance and are especially admired on account of their ornamentation. The basic construction was finely crafted. One winter Emmett Kennedy whittled an exact duplicate of the bridges to scale. A jeweler fashioned tiny bolts with which he put together a 42 inch model, containing the exact number of timbers, braces, and struts of the actual bridges. He would take the model with him when selling a bridge to the county commissioners, place it on two chairs, and stand on it to demonstrate the strength in the construction. As he was a very large man, this was an impressive feat. The model is now in the Rush County Historical Museum.

DESCRIPTION OF THE BRIDGES

All Rush County bridges, with the exception of the one at Homer, were constructed with the Burr arch truss system, in which a large wooden arch rested on the abutments of the bridge. This stabilized the bridge when live loads went across. A hallmark of the Kennedy bridges was their ornamentation. The ends were beautifully arched and finished with a molding. The corner boards were constructed with moldings resembling columns, and decorative scroll work was frequently placed on each side of the arches. Carved brackets supported the gable ends, and horizontal siding added extra strength and provided protection for the wood.

During building years, the Kennedys operated a large bridge timber yard in Rushville. Here the timber was cut and shaped and the arches constructed. Then the timbers were taken to the bridge site where an erection crew of 3 or 4 key men supervised 15 to 25 workmen in putting the bridge together. Their last bridge was erected in 1918.

THE FORSYTHE BRIDGE

The Forsythe Bridge was built by E.L. Kennedy across the Big Flatrock River in Orange Township on County Road 650 South, east of Gowdy. It was named for Asa Forsythe, owner and operator of a nearby grist mill. Running 186 feet long and 16 feet wide, the structure is 15 1/2 feet high. It features the Burr arch construction and the carved brackets found on other Kennedy bridges. Stone steps at the corners are a distinctive feature of this structure, which was completed in 1888 at a cost of \$3,700. It is the longest one-span covered bridge in Rush County.

The Roth Round Barn, built in 1912, stood near the bridge on 450 West. The two structures, as well as the road running south known as Historic Mile, were scenic tourist attractions for many years. The barn was destroyed by fire in the early 1980's.

After being closed for over one year, the bridge had extensive restoration done in 1984, and is faithfully watched over by the residents of the Big Flatrock neighborhood. Vandalism and graffiti efforts are repaired by the local residents in short order.

The nearby Big Flatrock Christian Church had as a charter member Knowles Shaw, who went on to world fame as an evangelist and song writer in the nineteenth century. Each year the church honors Shaw, writer of "Bringing in the Sheaves," at their Knowles Shaw/Homecoming Day in October.



Forsythe Covered Bridge & Roth Round Barn

THE MUD CREEK BRIDGE BARN

The Mud Creek Bridge was built by A.M. Kennedy and Sons in 1861 and remained at its site on the west side of Homer in Walker Township until 1892 when it was washed off its foundation and came to rest at its current location. Although it has since been used as a barn, it still has retained its covered bridge look. It is located on the private property on the Francis Houston farm.

This is the only Kennedy bridge in Rush County that does not have the Burr arch structure. It is 65 feet in length and constructed with multiple King Post design.

THE MOSCOW BRIDGE

The Moscow Bridge was built by E.L. Kennedy at the east edge of Moscow over the Big Flatrock River in Orange Township. Moscow is on County Road 650 West, south of State Road 244. This was the second bridge constructed at this site and was completed in November 1886.

The bridge is one of the longest two-span covered bridges in existence, measuring 330 feet, plus 8 feet of overhang at each end. It has the characteristic ornamentation of the Kennedy bridges and is the only one with lattice ventilators. It is 15 feet, 6 inches wide, and the height at the arch is 13 feet, 6 inches.

On June 19, 1986, following a weekend festival celebrating the 100th birthday of the Moscow Bridge, there was a rededication to its second century of usefulness to the community. This festival has continued annually on the last full weekend of June and has become one of the finest festivals in the state of Indiana.

Norman Selby, known professionally as Kid McCoy, the World's Light Weight and Fly Weight Boxing Champion of the late 1800's and early 1900's, came from the village of Moscow.

The Moscow Bridge was restored in 1990 and is a truly magnificent example of the covered bridges in Rush County and is watched over zealously by nearby residents, including a great-grandson of the bridge builder who lives a few feet from the structure.

THE OFFUTT'S FORD BRIDGE

The Offutt's Ford Bridge crosses Little Blue River northeast of Arlington in Posey Township. It is a single-span structure, erected in 1884 by Emmett and Charles Kennedy. It is 85 feet long, supported by stone abutments. The enclosure is 16 feet longer than the deck to provide a protective overhang. It is located on Offutt's Bridge Road between 300 and 400 North.

This bridge, which was closed to traffic in 1986, was restored and reopened in 1990. The bridge now sits in a park-like atmosphere, thanks to the loving care of a neighbor who cuts the weeds, trims the trees, and has provided picnic tables in the area near the bridge.

The bridge is named for the Offutt family who were early settlers in the region. In a nearby cemetery is the grave of Sabert Offutt who cleared the land in 1830. The bridge is particularly attractive because of its small size and fine natural setting. It has all the Kennedy details of ornamentation and is a charming example of their work.