

## The Bridges of Jackson County 1928-2003

The bridge over the East Pascagoula, the final link necessary for a ferryless ride from Mobile to New Orleans, should have been finished in late 1927. The contract for the concrete portion of the bridge over the East Pascagoula, together with the concrete portion of a similar shorter bridge over the Escatawpa River at Moss Point to connect to the Lucedale road, had been let to A. M. Blodgett, Inc., on October 4, 1926. By the terms of the contract, work was to commence on November 20, 1926, and be completed in 265 working days. On May 6, 1927, Jackson County Engineer Franklyn H. McGowen reported that 47 percent of the time had elapsed with only 19 percent of the work done. The Jackson County Board of Supervisors terminated the contract with Blodgett and gave the job to G. F. Lytle. By Christmas 1927, Lytle had nearly finished the concrete work on both bridges, but the steel draw spans, ordered from the Vincennes (Indiana) Bridge Company six months previously, had not arrived. These spans did not arrive until April 1928.

On June 8, as the workers rushed to complete the East Pascagoula River Bridge, 440 feet of the old timber trestle bridge over the West Pascagoula River washed out. Two ferries were put in service there as supervisor Hermes Gautier and engineer Franklyn McGowen worked to repair the bridge. They reopened the West Pascagoula Bridge on July 23.

On Thursday, August 14, 1928, the mayor of Pascagoula declared a half-holiday to mark the dedication of the bridge over the Escatawpa River and the bridge over the East Pascagoula. The dignitaries present were Mississippi Lieutenant Governor Bidwell Adam of Pass Christian, who was standing in for Governor Theodore G. Bilbo; Mobile Mayor Leon Schwartz; and Old Spanish Trail Highway Association Managing Director Harral B. Ayers.

An estimated 2,000 people attended the two ceremonies. The dignitaries sailed aboard two U. S. Coast Guard cutters to Moss Point for the dedication of the Escatawpa Bridge, while hundreds of citizens traveled to the bridge in automobiles. There at 1 p.m., Misses Virginia Eley and Lillian Nelson cut the ribbon, and Miss Eley broke a bottle labeled "champagne" [National prohibition forbade the real stuff] on the bridge railing. The Southern Paper Company Band seated on the deck of one of the cutters struck up the bittersweet strains of *Dixie* as the government boat headed down river to Pascagoula.

The dignitaries and the crowd reassembled on the East Pascagoula Bridge at 5 p.m. For Harral B. Ayers this dedication marked the fruition of years of hard work. In his speech, Ayers recounted the difficulties of building the Old Spanish Trail Highway. He praised the people of Jackson County for their 1921 decision to construct a concrete highway across the country. That highway according to Ayers lacked only the three miles across the marsh road to the West Pascagoula Bridge to reach completion. He further stated that this day marked not only the first ferryless ride from New Orleans to Mobile but likewise the first such from Jacksonville, Florida, to the Mississippi River. In fact, he said only two ferries still operated in the whole length of the Old Spanish Trail from Jacksonville to San Diego—the Mississippi River and the