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# Kenova railroad bridge turns 100

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The Herald-Dispatch

KENOVA -- A piece of railroad history turns 100 years old today -- the bridge crossing the Ohio River from Kenova to South Point, Ohio.

A critical link in Norfolk Southern's freight railway infrastructure, the bridge is part of Norfolk Southern's Pocahontas Division main line and plays a key role in supporting economic development in the region, said Mickey Runyon, Bluefield, W.Va., Norfolk Southern's assistant division superintendent.

It carries grain, coal and general merchandise and, "With some 35 trains a day, and double-stack clearance, it's a workhorse," Runyon said in a press release, adding that it's a key component of the Heartland Corridor, which carries double-stacked trains from the Virginia coast to Midwestern markets.

It's also quite a sight, said Tim Hensley of Kenova, a railway historian.

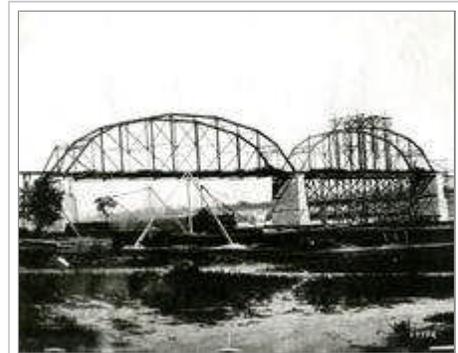
"Today, the Kenova bridge is an integral part of the landscape -- a beautiful, historic and key part of our national rail system," he said. "I see it as a link from the past to the future."

At nearly 4,000 feet long and 82 feet above normal water level, the bridge's history actually goes back to the 1800s.

It was originally designed with a single track in 1892 by Norfolk Southern's predecessor, Norfolk and Western Railway.

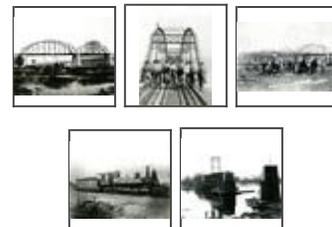
Increasing demand for coal over the years caused wear and tear, so N&W rebuilt the bridge with a double-track and stronger overall structure. Pier modifications and new trusses were completed around the existing structure to allow train traffic to continue during construction.

On March 4, 1913, crews met in the middle to connect the ends of the main channel truss, and that is what is being celebrated today. The first train crossed the newly completed double-track on June 9, 1913.



**Submitted photo**

Construction of the rail bridge over the Ohio River from Kenova to South Point, Ohio. (undated)



"Overall, it was a remarkable achievement under traffic," Jim Carter, Norfolk Southern's chief engineer, said in the release. "To read the accounts is a humbling experience."

The bridge was the longest structure on the railroad, taking 21.6 million pounds of steel and \$1 million to upgrade.

Hensley says it was such a key player in the national economy that it was marked during war times. As the rail company's gateway to the West, the bridge was said to have been one of the Germans' targets on American soil during both World Wars, he said. During WWII, saboteurs were caught nearby, and a Coast Guard unit was detailed to protect it.

"Had any of these dastardly efforts come to fruition, it would have impeded the movement of coal, vital war materials and soldiers traveling to military and manufacturing installations," Hensley said.

Now 100 years later, its durability remains unquestioned because of continuous upgrades, the company reports.

"Like everything on the railroad, it is well-designed and systematically well-maintained," Carter said. "We fully expect it to be serviceable for another 100 years."

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