

## LOCAL HISTORY FEATURE

# Kennedy Bridge



Kennedy Bridge,  
Bundaberg,  
looking to the west.  
31 Oct 2010  
Photo: P. Browne

The Kennedy Bridge, in some form, has been part of Bundaberg's landscape since 1878. It's difficult to think now of the inconvenience of not having that link between east and west. The pioneers of Bundaberg knew all about the inconvenience however, which is why they were so keen to see a bridge over Saltwater Creek. It was an exercise in waiting patiently, but eventually the citizens of Bundaberg and Woongarra could traverse between the two localities with a great deal more ease.

### First Kennedy Bridge - 1878

In December 1876 the people of Bundaberg learned that the Government had allocated £2000 for the building of a bridge over Saltwater Creek.<sup>1</sup> By the end of January 1877 they were keenly awaiting further news on when construction would start. Bundabergians were looking forward to "...ready contact with Manchester and Co.'s sawmills, the outlying farms in the Wongarra [sic] Scrub, the Pilot-station, and the sea-beach."<sup>2</sup>

### Where to site the bridge?

For what was initially known as the "Bourbon-street"<sup>3</sup> or "Saltwater Creek"<sup>3</sup> bridge, there was some argument as to where to place the structure<sup>4,5</sup>. Some apparently wanted it to go "...higher up the creek"<sup>4</sup>. However, the most popular site was at the end of Bourbong Street where it currently stands.<sup>5</sup>

Confirmation was received in early May 1877 that the bridge would be sited at the "...foot of Bourbon-street".<sup>6</sup> Once the site of the bridge had been established, there was then drama over how the bridge would be oriented.

*It is a thousand pities that this fine structure is not intended to go straight across the creek, instead of in a slanting direction; it is evidently a mistake and will quite spoil the appearance, besides being very awkward for traffic. The road on the eastern side being only one chain wide has probably caused the divergence, but this could easily have been remedied by slightly altering the survey of the road through Kendall's farm.<sup>7</sup>*

A request was sent to the Minister for Works to have him reassess the bridge's orientation.<sup>7</sup>

A deputation appointed by the Progress Committee met with Mr S. Bragg, District Roads Inspector<sup>8</sup>, on Monday 20 August 1877 to discuss the situation.<sup>9</sup> The bridge had been planned to sit at "...right angles to the creek and in a slanting direction from the centre of the road...".<sup>9</sup> Mr Bragg at first said that he doubted the Minister for Works would consent to altering the plans because they had been available to the public for so long without any complaint being made, and especially as work on the bridge had now commenced. The deputation responded with the fact that "...until the scrub was cleared and the pegs put in no one surmised the bridge to be crooked."<sup>9</sup> An agreement to alter the orientation of the bridge was eventually reached dependent upon whether Mr Kendall was willing to exchange the portion of his land currently reclaimed for a more suitable portion.<sup>9</sup>

### Building the bridge

At the end of June 1877 the residents of Bundaberg learnt that in about a fortnight's time the surveyor Mr D.J. Byrne would arrive to place pegs around the site. They also learnt that the Government would use their own staff to construct the bridge, and not put it out to tender as first thought.<sup>10</sup> Excitement in the town was quite high. Not only would the bridge provide easy access between east and west it would also increase property values and assist new and existing businesses.<sup>10</sup> Mr Lapham, Overseer, arrived in Bundaberg by 12 July 1877 and tenders were immediately called for the supply of bridge materials.<sup>3</sup>

Mr W.W. Lapham supervised the driving in of the first bridge pile on Wednesday 15 August 1877.<sup>7</sup> However, despite this visible sign of progress, there were still some concerns. Having seen the plans the newspaper expressed its worry that the iron work underneath the bridge would be "...very apt to catch all the timber and debris during flood time."<sup>7</sup>

By 7 September 1877 six bridge piles had been positioned. It was time-consuming work as each pile had to be shaped into an octagon and driven 33 feet into the ground.<sup>11</sup> Work proceeded quite quickly after this and the bridge was expected to be completed by the end of January 1878.<sup>12</sup> But it was not to be. The people of Bundaberg would have to wait a bit longer for their bridge. The arrival of the ironwork for the bridge was delayed and Mr Lapham

was unable to continue work until the material arrived.<sup>13</sup> The *Lady Young* finally delivered the ironwork on 1st March 1878.<sup>14</sup>



The new (1899) Kennedy Bridge and the old (1878) Kennedy Bridge, side-by-side, 1899.

Picture Bundaberg Collection  
bun: 07074

## Opening the bridge

By mid-March there were calls for an opening ceremony to celebrate the new bridge.<sup>15</sup> It had already been announced that the Governor of Queensland, Sir Arthur Kennedy, would be visiting the area in March<sup>16</sup>, and a letter to the *Bundaberg & Mount Perry Mail...* from 'No Red Tape' strongly suggested the town give him a grand welcome. 'No Red Tape' also suggested that as the bridge was nearly completed Bundaberg should take the opportunity to ask the Governor to officially open it.<sup>15</sup> Bundaberg's civic pride was at stake, not to mention needing to outdo traditional rival Maryborough...

*Don't let it be said by our southern neighbours that Bundaberg had not patriotism nor energy enough to entertain our distinguished visitors in quite as good style and manners as that pampered child Maryborough.*<sup>15</sup>

Public meetings were arranged and various tasks handed out to volunteering citizens. The official opening would take place on Tuesday 26 March 1878.<sup>17</sup> As the Governor would be arriving by boat the wharf and approach to town would be decorated with a focus on showcasing the products of the district. All school children were invited to be at the welcoming and a special luncheon was arranged. Governor Kennedy arrived by the steamer *Kate* and anchored in the river until closer to the official landing time of 10am. There was much ceremony and celebration upon his landing, as well as a tour down Bourbong Street. When he got to the new bridge

*His Excellency drove across the bridge and returned midway to the arch, where he asked Mr. Lapham what name the people wished him to give the Bridge. On being informed, he said, "I declare this bridge opened from this day, under the name of 'The Kennedy Bridge'."*<sup>17</sup>

## Current Kennedy Bridge - 1899

Heavy traffic had weakened the first wooden Kennedy Bridge<sup>18,19</sup> and made it unsafe.<sup>19</sup> Plans were thus made to replace the bridge with a more permanent structure which would adequately handle the heavy traffic flow.<sup>19</sup>

The bridge was designed by Mr Alfred Barton Brady (1856-1932), Chief Engineer for Bridges, Queensland Public Works Department.<sup>19,20</sup> It was designed and built in conjunction with the Burnett Traffic Bridge (which opened 24 August 1900<sup>19</sup>), and was also modelled on the old Victoria Bridge which spanned the Brisbane River from 1897 until it was demolished in the 1960s.<sup>21</sup>

## Bridge material lost in shipwreck

Bundaberg was to have no better luck with getting this bridge finished on time than it had with the first Kennedy Bridge.

The barque the *Loch Fergus* was carrying steel material for the Kennedy Bridge and the Burnett Traffic Bridge<sup>22</sup> when it was wrecked on the shore at Killiney, south of Dublin, Ireland. The ship was en route from Glasgow, Scotland to Brisbane<sup>23</sup> when it apparently struck a gale and ran aground.<sup>24</sup>



*Construction of Kennedy Bridge, Bundaberg, 1898.  
Picture Bundaberg Collection: bun01087*

The bridge contractors, Messrs. J. McCormick and Sons, immediately requested replacement materials be sent.<sup>22</sup> However, a delay in the completion of the bridge was inevitable and the locals weren't happy.

The contractors applied for an extension of time on the contract due to the shipwreck. They asked for a 6-month extension but were granted only three more months to finish the work.<sup>25</sup> Apart from the inconvenience to all Bundaberg residents there was great concern over not having the bridge finished in time for the sugar crushing season.<sup>22</sup>

The Woongarra Divisional Board (Council) wished to write to the Minister of Works and have him overturn the decision to grant an extension of time to the contractors.<sup>25</sup> They *...considered that the Minister of Works and the Chief Engineer for Bridges had treated the Municipal Council and the Woongarra Board as cavalierly as they could. In fact they had treated the local authorities with contempt. They had not told the Council or the Board anything at all about the concession... Why [the extension] had been given [they] could not make out.*<sup>25</sup>

Although a shipwreck was certainly not the fault of the contractors, the anger of the Municipal (Bundaberg) Council and the Woongarra Board seemed to centre around the fact that the contractors were behind schedule anyway. It was maintained that even if the *Loch Fergus* hadn't wrecked it would not have made Australia until the end of June, and the bridge was due to be finished by the end of July -

*Mr McCormick had now been five months on the new bridge, and had not completed two months work...It was a perfect farce the way the contractor was carrying out his work...*<sup>25</sup>

### Funding the bridge

The bridge was equally funded by three bodies - the State Government, Bundaberg Municipal Council and Woongarra Divisional Board. The money was loaned to the local governments who had to pay it back in 40 years by annual instalments, with an interest rate of 5% on the capital. The loan was courtesy of the Works Loan Act 1880.<sup>19</sup>

The Kennedy Bridge and its approaches cost £6,999 5s to construct.<sup>19</sup>



1942 floods -  
Kennedy Bridge.

Picture Bundaberg  
Collection  
bun: 00703



## Official opening

At 11am on Saturday 25 November 1899 the current Kennedy Bridge was officially opened. The honour went to Mr John Murray, the Minister for Works. The western end of the bridge had been decorated with red, white and blue ribbons which would be cut by Mr Murray to mark the official opening. At 11am Mr Fred Colman, President of the Kennedy Bridge Board, introduced Mr Murray who made a short speech before cutting the ribbons and formally opening the bridge.<sup>26</sup>

The people of Bundaberg wasted no time in making use of the bridge with a large volume of traffic flowing across in either direction very shortly after the official opening.<sup>26</sup>

## The bridge today

When the bridge was being constructed the newspaper declared that it "...should prove sufficient for the requirements of traffic for the next three or four decades."<sup>27</sup> Over 100 years later, and with the necessary maintenance, the bridge stands today, and still provides the same convenient and necessary link between east and west.

It is registered on both the Queensland Heritage Register<sup>21</sup> and the Register of the National Estate.<sup>28</sup>

## Peta Browne Bundaberg Library

### References

- <sup>1</sup> *Bundaberg & Mount Perry Mail & General Advertiser*, Thu 14 Dec 1876, p2.
- <sup>2</sup> *Bundaberg & Mount Perry Mail & General Advertiser*, Thu 25 Jan 1877, p2.
- <sup>3</sup> *Bundaberg & Mount Perry Mail & General Advertiser*, Thu 12 Jul 1877, p2.
- <sup>4</sup> *Bundaberg & Mount Perry Mail & General Advertiser*, Thu 26 Apr 1877, p2.
- <sup>5</sup> *The Queenslander*, Sat 12 May 1877, p6. (<http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/home>).
- <sup>6</sup> *Bundaberg & Mount Perry Mail & General Advertiser*, Thu 10 May 1877, p2.
- <sup>7</sup> *Bundaberg & Mount Perry Mail & General Advertiser*, Fri 17 Aug 1877, p2.
- <sup>8</sup> *Bundaberg & Mount Perry Mail & General Advertiser*, Fri 9 Nov 1877, p2.
- <sup>9</sup> *Bundaberg & Mount Perry Mail & General Advertiser*, Fri 24 Aug 1877, p2.
- <sup>10</sup> *Bundaberg & Mount Perry Mail & General Advertiser*, Thu 28 Jun 1877, p2.
- <sup>11</sup> *Bundaberg & Mount Perry Mail & General Advertiser*, Fri 7 Sep 1877, p2.
- <sup>12</sup> *Bundaberg & Mount Perry Mail & General Advertiser*, Fri 23 Nov 1877, p2.
- <sup>13</sup> *Bundaberg & Mount Perry Mail & General Advertiser*, Fri 22 Feb 1878, p2.
- <sup>14</sup> *Bundaberg & Mount Perry Mail & General Advertiser*, Fri 1 Mar 1878, p2.
- <sup>15</sup> *Bundaberg & Mount Perry Mail & General Advertiser*, Fri 15 Mar 1878, p2.
- <sup>16</sup> *Bundaberg & Mount Perry Mail & General Advertiser*, Fri 8 Feb 1878, p2.
- <sup>17</sup> *Bundaberg & Mount Perry Mail & General Advertiser*, Fri 29 Mar 1878, p2.
- <sup>18</sup> Nolan, Janette. 1978. *Bundaberg: history & people*. UQ Press, St Lucia.
- <sup>19</sup> Goldsmith, Alfred Joseph. 1903. *The Burnett and Kennedy Bridges, Bundaberg, Queensland*. Institution of Civil Engineers, London. (Excerpt from the Minutes of proceedings of the Institution of Civil Engineers, London, vol. 153, session 1902-1903, pt. 3.)
- <sup>20</sup> Australian Dictionary of Biography Online (<http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A070394b.htm>)
- <sup>21</sup> *Queensland Heritage Register*, Dept of Environment and Resource Management, Queensland Government. (<http://www.epa.qld.gov.au/chims/basicSearch.html>).
- <sup>22</sup> *Bundaberg Mail & Burnett Advertiser*, Mon 24 Apr 1899, p2.
- <sup>23</sup> *The Argus (Melbourne)*, Thu 9 Feb 1899, p5. (<http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/home>).
- <sup>24</sup> Wreck Site, 'Loch Fergus' (<http://www.wrecksite.eu/wreck.aspx?66748>).
- <sup>25</sup> *Bundaberg Mail & Burnett Advertiser*, Wed 3 May 1899, p3.
- <sup>26</sup> *Bundaberg Mail & Burnett Advertiser*, Mon 27 Nov 1899, p2.
- <sup>27</sup> *Bundaberg Mail & Burnett Advertiser*, Fri 29 Sep 1899, p2.
- <sup>28</sup> *Australian Heritage Database*, Dept of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities, Australian Government. (<http://www.environment.gov.au/cgi-bin/ahdb/search.pl>).