

SOCIETY FOR INDUSTRIAL ARCHEOLOGY

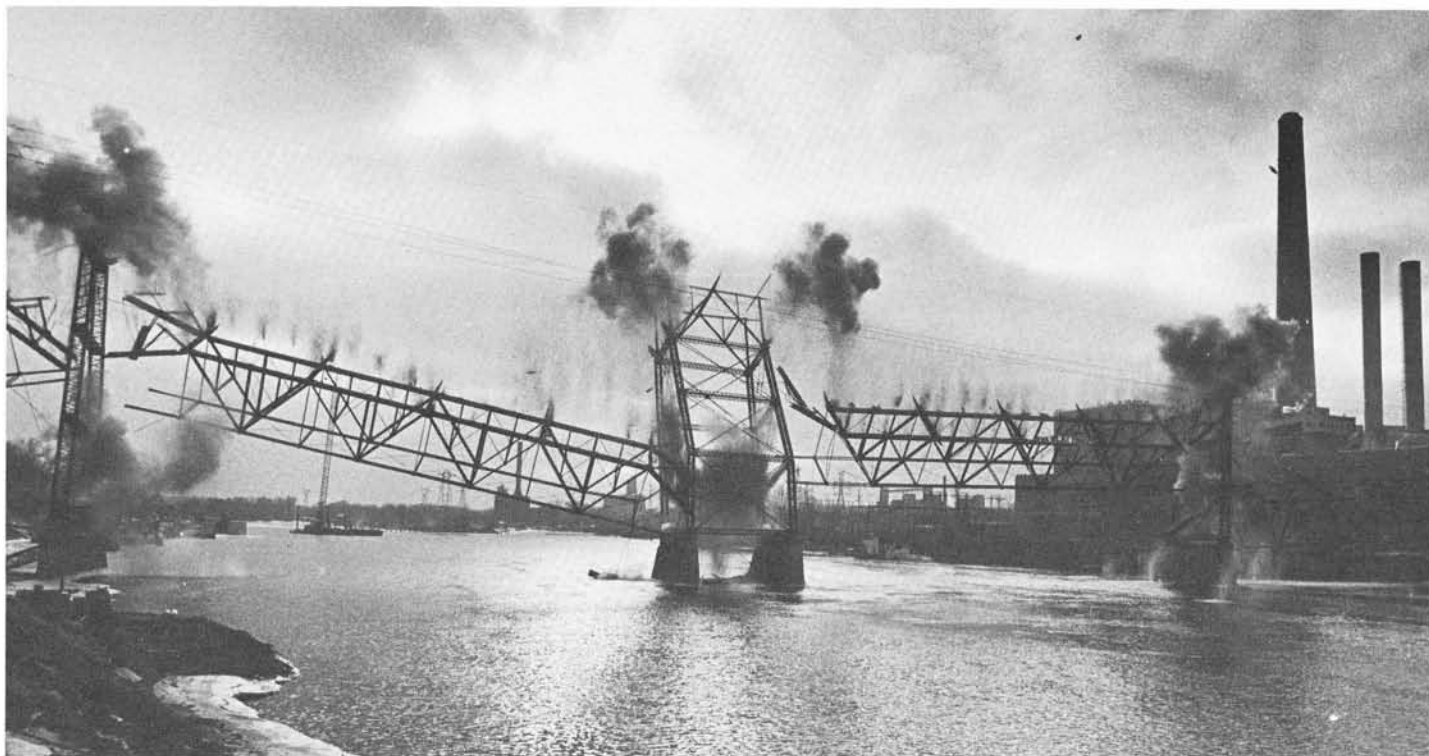
NEWSLETTER

Volume 14

1985

Number 1

DYNAMITE, MURKY DEALS CLAIM BIG BRIDGES IN MN, NY



Smith Avenue High Bridge spans are blasted into the Mississippi River at St. Paul, Minn. *Steve Schluter photograph for the Minneapolis Star & Tribune.*

ST. PAUL. With the sequential detonation of some 76 lbs. of explosives, the river spans of the 1889 Smith Ave. High Bridge [NR; viewed from riverboat during 1983 Annual Conf.] were dropped into the Mississippi. Moments later, the Feb. 25th demolition toppled the supporting towers, leaving the lesser approach spans to be dismantled later by crane. At 2,770 ft., the largely wrought-iron, modified Warren, pin-connected deck truss was the Twin Cities' longest extant 19th-C bridge. Built across the river's flood plain, it rose at a 4% grade from 80 ft. above the river at its north (downtown) end to a towering 182 ft. at the south bluff. It was designed by the St. Paul city engineering dept., fabricated by the Keystone Bridge Co., and erected by Horace E. Horton, a Rochester, Minn. native who went on to head Chicago Bridge & Iron.

In 1904 a severe wind storm destroyed the south spans, which then were rebuilt in steel. By the 1970s, these steel spans were increasingly deteriorated while the original wrought-iron remained in relatively good condition. Over the past few years plans moved ahead on replacement and a modest recording project [HAER standards] was begun. Suddenly last summer, however, the bridge was closed by MNDOT, which expressed great concern for its structural condition. Important access to neighborhoods was cut off, and residents and merchants alike were outraged, having been promised the

use of the old bridge until a new one was completed several years hence. It was clear that there would be no new bridge for some time, as the original replacement date was in the late 1980s. Those affected lobbied for new construction speedup, and funding now has moved faster than would otherwise have been the case. Residents on the city end, less dependent on the bridge for economic life, had never wanted the demolition, but finally settled for input on the new design, now to be a steel arch instead of the economical concrete box girder first requested by the state.

The closing also hurried demolition plans, of course, resulting in the Feb. razing. Long a landmark to St. Paulites, the bridge's last gasp drew some 25,000 witnesses, most aiming cameras in a seemingly compulsive urge to record the event, which was over in seconds. Two TV helicopters were stationed just upstream. Later, salvage crews fishing the tangled iron from the water reportedly found the huge connecting pins, subject of much DOT concern, to be in excellent shape.

POUGHKEEPSIE. The great double-track RR cantilever truss across the Hudson River at Poughkeepsie, N.Y. [NR], has become snarled in political and legal complexities while continuing to evade

Continued on next page