The ferry boat G.W. Bolton rests at its floating landing on the Alexandria side of Red River in this photograph taken shortly after the turn of the century. The ferry made its last run between Alexandria and Pineville just before the ferry boat G.W. Bolton rests at its floating landing on Murray Street bridge was opened to traffic on April 12, 1902. The first ferry boat run between the two cities was made in the 1850s. (Photo courtesy of Rapides Bank and Trust Co.)

Twin Cities Bridged Gap in 1902

By Ethel Holloman
(Town Talk Staff Writer)

Editor's Note: The Murray Street bridge here will be 73 years old next month. It is probable that its successor will be well underway before it reaches 75. This is the first in a series on the history of the Murray Street structure, a facility which spurred the growth of Alexandria-Pineville.

Alexandria-Pineville leaders speak with interest today about a new downtown bridge over Red River.

But their enthusiasm doesn't compare with the ribbons flying, cannons booming, ferry boats whistling and trains steaming in that heralded opening of the present Murray Street bridge.

The year was 1902 — Alexandria had a population of 5,648, Pineville 617.

Most of downtown Alexandria's stores were on Front St. (later taken in by construction of the levee). It was one of the widest streets downtown and the center of the business district.
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bridge project underway, the Town Talk later reported.

He saw the necessity of a bridge and contacted J.B. Marsh, consulting engineer for George E. King Bridge Co. of Des Moines, Iowa. Marsh urged Erion to get Ira W. Sylvester, a civil engineer, to make soundings and work up tentative bridge plans.

The Alexandria-Pineville Bridge Co. was chartered March 31, 1900. George W. Bolton, whose Rapides Bank was one of the growing businesses in town, was elected president. Other officers were Ben Turner, vice president; Mayor F.M. Welch, secretary; and C.A. Schnack, a jeweler, treasurer. Directors were Stephen Barrett, E.J. Hardtner, and Robert P. Hunter.


The company issue a thousand shares of stock at $100 a share. There was an additional provision that, if two-thirds of the stockholders agreed, additional stock could be issued to build and operate a street railway across the bridge.

Alexandria was indeed thinking big.

Sylvester made his soundings and in July, 1900, Marsh arrived to inspect the project. Congress had approved the bridge in April, providing it be located between Washington and Murray streets. The Corps of Engineers suggested moving upstream to Fisk St., but Sylvester advised the stockholders would never agree. And so Murray St. was selected.

In April, 1901, F.M. Roush of Beatrice, Nebr., arrived to oversee construction. In a few days, he had a force of men working on Cane River near Natchitoches excavating rock to be used in making concrete for the pier. Sylvester was resident engineer.

Then came the spring high water. Work was delayed and tempers grew short. Despite the problems, the crews made amazing speed. The first excavation for the abutment on the Pineville side began May 15. The first caissons for a pier, also on the Pineville side, began July 1.

The piers rest on a natural stone formation 22 feet below the low water point. The pivot pier is solid cement, resting on 90 longleaf pine pilings driven 20 feet into the soft stone formation and sawed off below the low water mark.

The pivot pier is 28 feet in diameter at the bottom, tapering to 25 feet at the top. The other piers are eight feet in diameter at the bottom, tapering to six feet at the top. The shore piers are five feet wide all the way down.

Two thousand cubic yards of concrete were used in making the piers. The natural cement was one of the exciting new building materials of the time, one which is unobtainable today. It was chosen for its quality.

The fixed spans of the bridge are each 200 feet long. The pivot span is 300 feet long and balanced as delicately as a watch on its center pier.

Finally, the bridge was finished. Both communities had long been planning the celebration.