

Fair Oaks Bridge

Coordinates: 38.636271°N 121.265109°W^[1]

Fair Oaks Bridge	
Pratt Truss bridge	
	
Official name: Fair Oaks Bridge	
Name origin: Fair Oaks, California	
Country	United States
State	California
County	Sacramento
Municipalities	Sacramento,, Sacramento
Crosses	American River
Coordinates	38.636271°N 121.265109°W^[1]
Builder	Western Bridge and Construction Company
Design	Truss bridge
Material	Steel
Built	1907-09
Maintained by	? County
NBI Number	[2]
Location of the Fair Oaks Bridge in California	

The **Fair Oaks Bridge** is a truss bridge over the lower banks of the American River, connecting Fair Oaks to the greater Sacramento, California region. The current bridge, built 1907-1909, is the third bridge at this location.

The first bridge, which opened in 1901, helped to transform the small semi-rural community into a turn-of-the-century agricultural powerhouse. The present bridge, built 1907-1909, helped to transform the citrus colony into one of the leading bedroom communities of Sacramento by the 1940s. It is now a pedestrian and bicycle-only bridge.

History

19th century background

Brevet Brigadier General Charles Henry Howard and James W. Wilson of the Howard-Wilson Publishing Company of Chicago acquired rights to sell land from California Senator Frederick K. Cox and businessman Crawford W. Clarke in 1895. The Howard-Wilson Company had the land surveyed and mapped and began to promote Fair Oaks as one of their "Sunset Colonies." The Howard-Wilson Company advertised Fair Oaks as an innovative and growing citrus colony after destructive freezes in Southern California and Florida and a national depression hitting in 1893. Many of the purchasers were professionals and other friends of the investors. Thus, the Fair Oaks community became initially composed of mostly businessmen and other professionals, including bankers and engineers.

Three hundred permanent settlers resided in Fair Oaks by 1897 and bought land in 5, 10, and 20-acre (81,000 m²) tracts at an average of \$30 per acre. These pioneers planned to sustain themselves by planting and cultivating fruit orchards although the majority of them had little experience with farming. Promises of a bridge being built over the American River to better transport the new colony's fruit to the booming markets in Sacramento and beyond further sustained this hope. The following year, however, investment began to diminish and the Howard-Wilson Company withdrew from the colony and with it went unfulfilled promises of a bridge over the American River and railroad service from Sacramento.

Businessmen in Chicago and Sacramento who had an investment (land or fruit) in the newborn colony and Orangevale formed the Chicago-Fair Oaks Club in 1899. Local businessmen, including Valentine S. McClatchy (the co-owner of the *Sacramento Bee*), incorporated the Fair Oaks Development Company in 1900. These boosters shamelessly proclaimed Fair Oaks to be the "crown of the [Sacramento] valley," in the "heart of California." Together, in 1901, these two groups convinced the County of Sacramento's Chamber of Commerce, which McClatchy's business partners from Orangevale created and chaired, to build a bridge across the American River at Fair Oaks and persuaded the Southern Pacific Rail Road Company to build a railroad spur to the bridge. In the Summer of 1901 the spur and railroad station were built. The station was named Fair Oaks Bridge Depot. The spur to the main line of the Southern Pacific Railroad Co. helped Fair Oaks farmers and fruit companies to prosper by enabling growers to distribute fresh fruit to a vast market.

Three Bridges

Fair Oaks grew rapidly with the completion of the Fair Oaks Bridge and the railroad line. This first Fair Oaks Bridge, however, was washed out in a high water flood in March 1907. An 850-foot steel cable was then borrowed from the Folsom Development Company to use with a ferry boat across the river. The Sacramento County Board of Supervisors also authorized the construction of a temporary bridge. Actually, Myrtle Shaw Lord, in his officially sanctioned history of the Chamber of Commerce, *A Sacramento Saga: Fifty Years of Achievement—Chamber of Commerce Leadership*, writes that after the flooding of 1906 and 1907 that the Sacramento Chamber of Commerce committed itself to dealing with the problems of flooding in Sacramento generally and sponsored the rebuilding of a bridge at Fair Oaks: "With destruction as a teacher, Sacramento learned an expensive lesson and determined there should be no repetition." By the end of the year the Western Bridge and Construction Company of Omaha, Nebraska began the double truss bridge that still survives and services the community today. In fact, because of its historical and architectural significance, it was placed on the National Register of Historical Places in September 2006.[3]

The Fair Oaks Bridge's usefulness, however, diminished with the construction of bridges at Watt Avenue (to the west) in 1959 and Hazel Avenue (to the east) in 1967, as well the widening of the Sunrise Bridge (less than half a mile west) in 1968. The Fair Oaks Bridge was closed to traffic in 1967 and became the property of the Sacramento County Parks and Recreation Department after serving more than fifty years as the major crossing over the lower American River. Parks and Recreation re-decked and painted the bridge in 1973 and opened it as a pedestrian and bicycle crossing that currently connects to the American Parkway Trail along the lower banks of the American

River.

For more history of Fair Oaks, including the bridge, see the Fair Oaks Historical Society's ^[4] elaborate Web site.

Bridge Structure

The Fair Oaks Bridge is an excellent example of bridge construction and technology advancement in the mid-to-late 19th century. It is a Pennsylvania Petit through Pratt truss bridge that extends nearly 500 feet (150 m) across a wide bend in the American River and is the second oldest out of ten surviving bridges of this type in the state of California (behind the historic truss bridge in Folsom that connects to Orangevale, built in 1893). The Sacramento County Surveyor hoped to minimize the number of piers in this dangerous current that necessitated very long main spans. The Pennsylvania Petit specifically addressed such applications. The two 200' spans were quite daring for their time. The bridge is also a rare example of the Western Bridge and Construction Company of Omaha that built truss bridges throughout the West but only rarely in California.

Truss bridge

A truss bridge is any bridge whose individual members are connected in a triangular pattern. Truss bridges date back to at least the 16th century, although the metal truss bridge, such as the Fair Oaks Bridge, dates only to the 1840s. These metal truss bridges, especially the Pratt and Warren trusses, facilitated the enormous expansion of railroad lines in the late 19th century and were instrumental in turn-of-the-century highway construction as well. The trusses form vertical sides to the bridge, connected to one another by traverse beams, and by stingers and other members which support the deck. Each truss always includes a top and bottom chord, the major beams which resist the bending induced by stresses on the bridge. The top and bottom are connected by some combination of vertical and/or diagonal members, usually both, as well as by major beams at each end, called endposts.

Pratt truss forms

The Pratt truss form, invented in 1844 by Thomas and Caleb Pratt, is the most common truss form in California and the United States. This form first appeared as a "combination truss" built in wood and iron with wooden vertical members, chords, and endposts, and iron tension diagonals. The basic form changed to all-metal construction by the 1880s.

It retained the light metal diagonals but substituted heavier metal beams, posts, and chords for the wooden members. The most common Pratt type is the through truss in which the deck is carried on the lower chord, with overhead lateral supports connecting the top chords. Finally, the Pennsylvania Petit is a Pratt truss with a polygonal top chord and includes reinforcing sub-struts and sub-ties. These half-length members reinforced the diagonals and helped resist stresses.

Summary

The current Fair Oaks Bridge is the third manifestation of an overpass over the American River and connects Fair Oaks to the greater Sacramento region. Once a major crossing over the American River, it has been bypassed by the construction of bridges at Sunrise and Hazel in the 1950s and 1960s. The bridge, however, continues to serve as a pedestrian and bicycle crossing and remains a cultural icon for the local community. On September 25, 2006, the Keeper of the National Register of Historic Places listed the Old Fair Oaks Bridge as a National Historic Site. The bridge successfully listed under the Register's criterion A (associative history) and C (architectural significance).

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External links

- [Photos of Old Fair Oaks Bridge](#) ^[5]

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