

Holden Bridge Recovers After Gear Box Removed

BY TERRY POPE

In its old age, the Holden Beach drawbridge has suffered from a variety of problems, but the worst may soon be over for the gray lady.

Workers were scheduled this week to replace the bridge's reduction gear box, which was removed last Monday for repairs after a crack was discovered. Since last month, it has taken two men to operate the bridge—one to turn the wedges from inside the bridgetender's office, and another man down below to operate the wench that actually turns the bridge sideways to allow boats to pass.

"It's a job," said Richard G. Baker, bridge maintenance worker with the N.C. Department of Transportation. Baker is one of nine men who now work regular shifts and must run out on the bridge pilings every hour to operate the wench.

"If I don't do it, the people won't get through," Baker added. "And if the people don't get through, all hell will break loose."

A temporary wench was installed on the bridge pilings last month after the bridge kept jamming while in the process of opening and closing. Bridgetender Marvin Watts believes the problem was "the dual gears were worn out, that's what it was."

Opening and closing the bridge with the wench rather than using the gears "don't slow it down any," Watts said. "It'll open that way quicker than it will without the bridge."

After Watts stops all traffic and pulls the wedges free, Baker must run out onto the "boardwalk" that has been constructed on the pilings

and crank the wench.

"If that don't work, nothing will work," Baker said. When the gear box is replaced this week, the wench

will not be needed.

"When we get that back, she'll be running smoothly again, hopefully," Watts said. They were expecting the

gear box back from a Wilmington machine shop sometime late this week. A portion of the pavement was removed from the bridge in order to

examine the problem. When the crack was discovered, the gear box was lifted from the structure.

"That's how they have to take that reduction gear box out, up through the road," Baker said. "They have to cut steel and then use a crane to lift it up."

When the gear box is installed this week, it will not affect traffic because only one lane at a time will be closed on the bridge. Until then, Baker said he must be careful when operating the wench, because "it's a lot of steel out there moving around."

"It's just an old bridge, you know, and it needs a lot of maintenance," Baker said. Age is its main problem, he said.

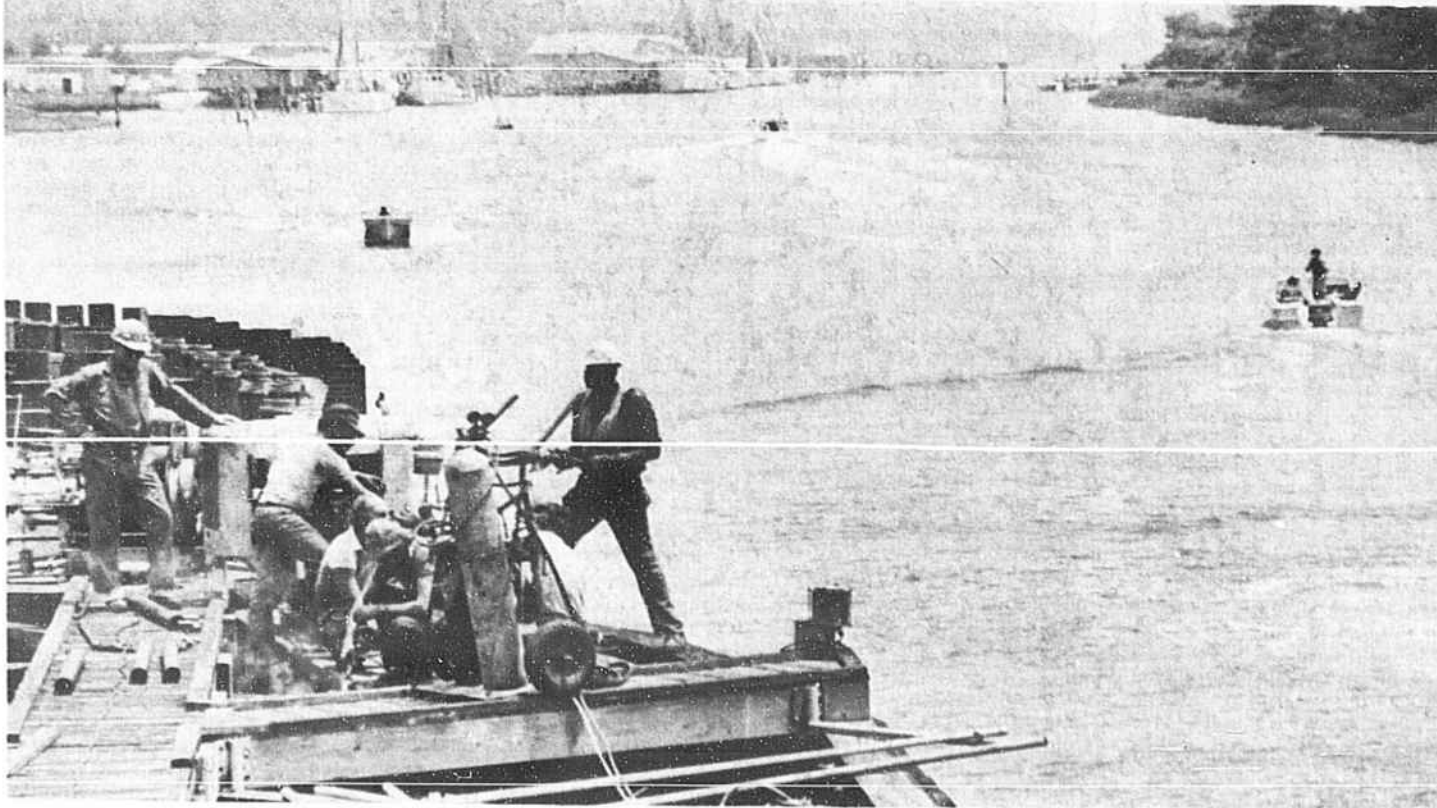
Age has also taken its toll on the Ocean Isle Beach bridge, but in the past its gear box has not caused problems, Baker said.

"I don't think they've ever had to move a wench down there," Watts added.

"They haven't been having too many problems that we have to go down and stay overnight with," Baker said. "That bridge has not been as bad. You still have to keep the maintenance up."

Watts said the Sunset Beach bridge has always operated on a wench system in order to pull the pontoon-style barge around while opening and closing.

"If it wasn't for wench, that bridge wouldn't operate at all," he added.



WORKERS installed a temporary wench to help open and close the Holden Beach bridge last month, but it should be removed this week when the bridge's gear box is replaced.

STAFF PHOTO BY BILL MCGOWAN

Calabash Tables Business, Talks Garbage Collection

BY SUSAN USHER

Calabash town council members tabled most items on their agenda Monday morning until their next meeting.

Much of the meeting was spent in continued discussion of problems relating to garbage collection.

The delayed items included a proposed water system feasibility study, traffic and maintenance easements for a street, and a proposal from the state for Calabash to begin issuing its own minor CMAA permits.

The permits are currently handled by the Wilmington office of the N.C. Department of Natural Resources and Community Development.

Patricia E. Govert, minor permits coordinator for the Division of Coastal Management, wrote the town. "As you might well imagine, it is difficult, time consuming and costly to process permits at such a distance."

The state would pay the Town of Calabash \$95 per permit issued and \$25 per exemption granted, plus reimburse the town up to \$150 for sending its permit officer for training. They suggested the building inspector or some other employee could take on the task.

But town officials were hesitant to commit to training someone for the job, noting the town might well find itself changing building inspectors every two years. That's the only way the town could avoid having to help its inspector obtain certification.

Mayor Stevens said that as soon as the town would pay to have someone trained, the person would move on to another job.

"I'd just as soon let the state do it," said Mayor Pro Tem Robert Simmons. "It's their department."

Consideration of proposals to conduct a preliminary study for a town water distribution system were laid aside until additional information could be obtained to make the two proposals in hand cover the same services.

On Jan. 2, the board voted to hire the Shallotte firm of Jerry Lewis & Associates to do the study on the condition that the town's existing contract with Peirson & Whitman of Raleigh could be broken. Lewis planned to charge \$2,000 for a preliminary engineering report and no more than \$5,000 for a field study, including preparation of a topological map.

Since January, said Town Clerk Janet Thomas, another firm has expressed interest in the project. W. Leslie Hall Jr. of McKim & Creed Engineers of Wilmington has offered to do a water distribution system feasibility study for \$950. But according to his letter, much of the information he proposes to provide is already available from Brunswick County.

The board agreed with Mayor Sonia Stevens' suggestion to check with Hall and see if a topological map was included in his proposal, and if not, what the charge would be.

The firms expressed interest in combined water and sewer studies, but the mayor said the town was interested in only water service at the present, because of the cost involved.

Council members also tabled action on Somerset Drive until the town's attorney can check an easement offered by the current owner of the Calabash Motel. A former owner of the land on which the road sits had claimed the road was dedicated to the town, but there were no documents to support that claim. The prior owners of the motel had claimed the land under the street, at one

point blockading access of several property owners to their property along the street.

So that the motel could be sold, the new owner agreed to guarantee public access to the street if the town would provide speed bumps at either end of the paved road, two 6,000-lb. weight limit signs and speed limit signs posted at 10 mph.

"We agreed to it to keep down conflict," recalled the mayor.

On Monday, council members questioned whether the new owner had the legal right to offer the easement, since there is a mortgage against the property.

Garbage Collection

Council members didn't argue Monday when Mayor Stevens declared, "It's going to cost us. You can look for breakdowns every summer like we've been getting. Most towns don't run their trucks seven days a week like we do in the summer."

The town's used garbage truck had broke down again—several times. At the mechanic's suggestion the town is getting prices on a drop axle.

"He said that truck is dangerous. He said it is overloaded even without

the garbage on it."

Town Clerk Janet Thomas is to collect maintenance records for the truck to determine the exact cost of garbage collection for the town.

If the town could find a dependable firm with reasonable fees, council members agreed, it might be worthwhile to investigate contracting the service to a private firm.

"I know it could save us money if we could get someone dependable," said the mayor.

Clerk Thomas said that in past years at least, the town had provided the service more cheaply than it could have through contracting.

During months in which no repairs are required, it costs the town about \$800 in salary and the like to operate

the service. The cost soars, however, with major repair bills.

"That garbage truck has dolled us to death," the mayor declared.

Other Business

In other business, the board appointed Pati Lewellyn to the planning board. They delayed consideration of appointments from the extra-territorial area, still waiting to hear if those already serving are interested in reappointment.

•Voted to rezone one Oak Street lot in Riverview from R-15 to R-8 at the request of the property owner.

•Learned that specifications for a 30 foot by 50 foot town hall would be prepared by Rooks before the board's next meeting. They were to have been ready Monday.

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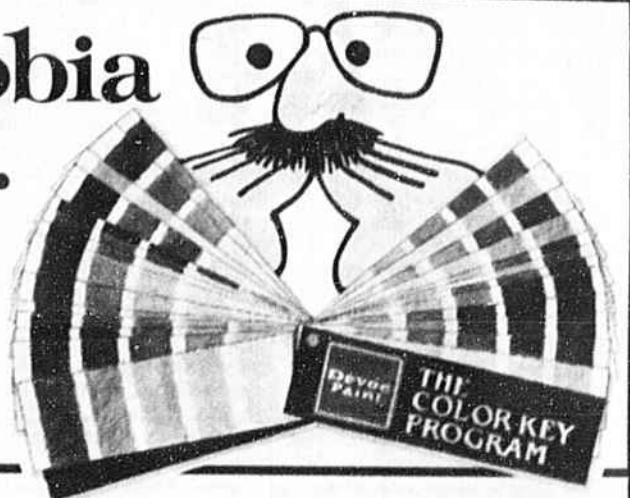
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