

18-42



*The Story of Minisa Bridge*

chita State Univers  
Special Collections

*Ethel Crawford Parker*



To Dean and Mrs. Thurlow Lurance  
from

Mrs. Ethel C. Parker

Wichita State University  
Special Collections

**THE STORY OF MINISA BRIDGE**

Wichita State University  
Special Collections

**Ethel Crawford Parker**

**THE STORY OF MINISA BRIDGE**

**AS TOLD BY**

**Ethel Crawford Parker**

who originated the idea of having  
the architecture of the bridge  
harmonize with that of near-by  
Wichita High School North.

**Wichita, Kansas  
1957**

Copyright 1957, Ethel Crawford Parker

## FOREWORD

At the time Minisa Bridge was finished, members of the Wichita Art Association said that the bridge was not artistic and that the motifs appeared to be put on as an afterthought and did not blend as a part of the structure.

Nothing truer was ever said; for it took so long to get the idea accepted by school officials, who believed the idea fanciful and impossible of being carried out, that workmen had the bridge under-structure up to the floor before plans for harmonizing decorations were accepted.

After that, the architect did the best possible under the circumstances. As soon as the plan actually got before the city commission, the upper structure of the bridge moved forward rapidly.

## THE STORY OF MINISA BRIDGE

The following is an informal account, simply told in first person, familiar style, of the way the bridge, as it is, came to be.

The idea came to me in the spring of 1931 at the annual Water Festival at High School North. At that time the student body was small in numbers compared with that of later years. There was a feeling of fellowship common in small bodies and the Water Festival was a sort of family gathering.

The backyard that year was a green lawn sloping down to Little River, and large trees here and there gave ample shade. Mr. Woodin's tall bird-apartment house was full of song and all apartments were occupied. There were no annexes to mar the view and the scene was one of beauty.

Since we were, comparatively speaking, a small family, most of us brought our evening meal and, after the canoe races were over, picnicked in small groups on the lawn while the school band entertained us with their evening concert.

After lunch was over and the others of my group had scattered, I sat alone enjoying the scene. While glancing around, I caught sight of the rusty steel beams of the old bridge spanning Little River at

Thirteenth. They spoiled the view in that direction.

Then the idea came to me -- "Why not have a bridge with architecture and motifs like those of the school building!"

Fearing that the idea might be considered fanciful and too expensive, I said nothing about it at that time.

The busy, closing days of school so occupied my time that I did nothing about my idea, but all through the summer vacation I thought the plan over and hugged it to myself. Late in the summer I learned that money had been voted for a new bridge at Thirteenth.

"Now," I thought, "is the time to speak up."

When school opened in September, I hurried to the principal's office with my bridge idea. Mr. Grover C. Dotzour and his vice-principal, Mr. J. C. Woodin, thought I had really lost my mind. They said the thing was impossible and that they were too busy getting the machinery of school underway to do anything about such an idea.

I felt discouraged. The next day I made another try, but they still would have nothing to do with my idea. For a moment I was ready to drop the whole project. Then the thought came to me that many ideas had been carried out by the persistent driving ahead of some one person.

As I contacted different persons, I could find no one who believed that my idea was sound. Even my good friend, Dr. T. W. Weaver, then president of the board of education, laughed at me and said I was wasting my time for it just couldn't be done. And all the time, workmen were pounding away at the understructure of the bridge. If anything was to be done, it must be done at once.

Next I went to Mr. L. W. Brooks, then director of secondary education, who gave me my first encouragement. He thought I had a fine idea and told me to talk to Mr. L. W. Clapp, a member of the park board, and that if I could get his endorsement, the idea would get notice. Mr. L. W. Mayberry, superintendent of schools, when contacted heartily approved the idea.

I shall not forget the evening I went to see Mr. Clapp. Two of my teen-age friends dropped me off at the Clapp residence. It was already dark and that part of the city was not then well lighted. The place was unfamiliar to me, but after stumbling around and narrowly escaping a bath in the fish pool, I found the front steps and rang the bell. It was one of those warm autumn evenings so common in Kansas. I can yet see Mr. Clapp as he opened the door. He had taken off his top shirt, and with galluses hanging, was trying to keep cool.

I introduced myself as a North High teacher who had an idea I would like to talk to him about. Mr. Clapp, who was a prince among men, was cordial and friendly. He thought the idea was wonderful and could be carried out. He wondered why no one had ever thought of it before. He said the park board would stand with me in every way and since the money for the bridge was already voted, there would be no question of finance. When I asked for advice as to how to proceed, he said,

"Go to your school tomorrow and get your student council to back the idea; appoint a committee of the members to go before the city commission this week end. If you can make the commission believe the students thought of this idea themselves, the idea will be on its way; for the commission members will do anything for the young people."

When I went to the North High officials the next morning with Mr. Clapp's advice, they were ready at once to help. Vice-principal Woodin, head sponsor of the student council, called a meeting of that body. They were enthusiastic over the proposition and the following committee was appointed to go before the city commission: Gilbert Burgerhoff, Cramer Reed, Mary Ruth Pyle, Jane Jackson, Ed Ash, Phyllis Barber, and Cecil Stone.

These students accompanied by Mr. Woodin and Mrs. Parker, sponsor and associate sponsor, of the student council, met with the city commission the following Friday evening. Mr. Woodin presented the group to the commission. Gilbert Burgerhoff made the talk for the students. This was received very cordially and the group was asked to return at the next meeting for the commission's decision.

Unfortunately none of the students could be present at the next meeting, and I went alone. But the commission would have none of me, saying,

"We want that group of young folks who were here last time."

Then I realized how sound Mr. Clapp's advice had been!

At a later meeting, the commission decided favorably and the students were sent to City Manager Bert Wells, who gave them a blue print of the bridge and sent them to the city architect. Since Glen Thomas was absent from the city, his assistant, Lawrence Byers, drew two sets of plans for the bridge. One carried out the pioneer theme and the other the Indian motifs. The students chose the latter.

I have often heard it stated that I designed the decorations on the bridge. This is a mistake. I am not an artist and had nothing to do with the designs. My only part was to suggest that they follow

and harmonize with those on the school building.

Now the work on the bridge went forward with a purpose. The school hoped the bridge could be dedicated at the Water Festival in the spring of 1932, but the work could not be finished by that time.

As we waited for the completion of the bridge, rumors were afloat that an outside group was preparing a program for the dedication. The students were excited over this and called City Manager Bert Wells. He assured them that when the bridge was dedicated, North High would do it and, too, he said that North High students were to name the bridge, the name to be approved by the city manager and the city commission. Then began the search for a name.

I was asked by Mr. Dotzour to find a list of Indian names from which students might make a choice. When I consulted Victor Murdock, he told me to see Mr. Dave Leahy, who knew personally and authentically Wichita history.

At this time Mr. Leahy was invalided at home, but he very graciously consented to tell of early days here. He told me of several characters who lived here during Indian days --- of Juan Padilla (Hoo-an Pa-dill-ya) a missionary who came here with Coronado and stayed when Coronado went back. He was the first permanent

white resident, a missionary to the Quivera Indians who were the same as the Wichitas, Quivera being an earlier name.

Padilla was the first Christian martyr in this part of the country being killed by one of his Indian friends when Padilla was about to go to another tribe. He was killed near Council Grove, Kansas, where a monument now stands to his memory.

Next Mr. Leahy told of Towacanie (To-wá-ca-nie) chief of the Wichitas in the Wichita village at the junction of the Big and the Little Arkansas Rivers during and after the War Between the States. He was the recognized spokesman of the Wichita tribe at the time they left here. Mr. Leahy believed that, had the chief been a white man, he would certainly have become prominent.

Then there was Owahe (O-wá-he) chief of the Wichitas before Towacanie. This was before the War Between the States. He died during a cholera epidemic and was buried some place in the neighborhood of where North High now stands. He was known and recognized by Kit Carson as a fine Indian.

"Any of these names," said Mr. Leahy, "would be a suitable name for the bridge."

I next talked to Dean Thurlow Lieurance about Indian names and he generously had his secretary send me a list of forty names with their Indian mean-

ings. Among these was Minisa, meaning red water at sunset.

From all these names, a committee of faculty members and students, after much discussion, selected three for consideration by the student body. These were Minisa, Towacanie, and Owahe.

Wishing to get the feeling of the citizens of Wichita as to a name for the bridge, Mr. Grover C. Dotzour, the principal at North High, asked me to interview a number of prominent citizens, whose names he gave me. I did the interviewing by telephone with the following results:

Mr. Bert Wells said that the name Minisa or the name of an Indian chief would be equally good; that the commission expected an Indian name and wanted several in order of student preference.

Mr. Henry Allen was out of the city and could not be consulted.

Judge Grover Pierpont favored Minisa or the name of an Indian chief. The latter should be easy to pronounce and to remember. He thought Minisa was well known and significant to the people here.

Judge J. E. Alexander favored an Indian chief's name as his choice.

Judge W. P. Campbell first favored an Indian chief's name but later thought some local pioneer should be honored.

Judge Richard Bird chose Minisa, for he believed that composition to be a perma-

nent contribution to the community; but most certainly the name should be of Indian origin.

Mr. Charles Lawrence gave as his first choice the name of a prominent person of Indian origin. His second choice was Minisa.

Mr. L. W. Clapp favored Minisa; he thought it very appropriate and better than any individual's name.

Mr. Victor Murdock thought the bridge should be named for an Indian chief connected with Wichita history. He, however, was very favorable to the name Minisa.

All these gentlemen gave good interviews and were especially interested in the project. All but one favored an Indian name and not the name of a local individual.

After these interviews were reported, the school placed ballot boxes in the halls, and students were asked to vote for their choice of the three names -- Minisa; Towacanie; Owahe. A committee of faculty members and students sorted the votes and, finding not enough ballots to be representative, decided to submit the three names to the whole student body in an assembly. The vote by acclamation chose Minisa as first choice, Towacanie as second, and Owahe as third. Minisa was taken from Dean Thurlow Lieurance's symphonic poem, Minisa. The name was chosen for its euphony, its ease of spelling,

and for its beautiful meaning --- red water at sunset.

This result was sent to the city commission who approved the selection of Minisa as the name.

Work on the bridge was going forward and the students still hoped it would be ready for dedication at the time of the Annual Water Festival in the spring of 1932. But City Manager Bert Wells said it would not be ready for dedication before September, 1932.

The cost of the bridge was set at \$45,000. There were to be four highly ornamental end-pieces to be placed at each of the four corners of the bridge at the point where it joins the pavement. These were to cost about \$500 each. The design was to be in keeping with the ornamental designs on the North High building, making the bridge fit definitely into the architectural features of that building.

At length September came, and the dedication was held on the twenty-third of that month at six-thirty in the evening. The ceremony took place on the bridge where a speaker's stand was constructed and microphones were installed to carry every word to the thousands who witnessed the dedication. As the crowd gathered, it was serenaded by the red-coated band of North High.

Guests of honor invited to sit on the platform were Mr. Dave Leahy, historian and dean of Kansas newspaper men; members of the city commission and City Manager Bert Wells; Mr. P. L. Brockway, city engineer; Mr. Glen Thomas, architect, and his assistant, Mr. Lawrence Byers; Mr. Bruce Moore, Wichita sculptor, who executed the Indian figures in miniature; Dr. T. Walker Weaver, president of the board of education; Mr. L. W. Mayberry, superintendent of schools; a group of Indians from the American Indian Institute in Wichita; Dean Thurlow Lieurance, composer of Minisa; the speaker of the evening, Mr. Victor Murdock, editor-in-chief of the Wichita Eagle; Olive Sayles, North High sophomore and great-granddaughter of Amy Sayles, whose family in early day homesteaded the land near the bridge; Gilbert Burgerhoff, spokesman for the student body; and Mrs. Ethel Crawford Parker, who originated the idea that the decorative motifs on the bridge should be in keeping with those of the near-by high school.

Mr. Grover C. Dotzour, principal of North High, opened the ceremonies and in a brilliant manner gave the following address:

"For months we have watched with interest the progress of the work on the structure on which we now stand. We have

gathered here this evening to celebrate its completion. This bridge stands as a composite product of a forward looking citizenry. Into it has gone superb engineering skill, a unique architectural art and idealism, and a name which itself will ever constitute a bridge linking the yesterdays with the todays.

'Here once the redman's bow was  
strung;  
Here once the red maid danced  
and sung;  
Here once the bison watched her  
young;  
Here once the grass grew lush  
and tall,  
And wild thing unto wild did call  
While Nature, cosmic mother  
brooded over all.

'Here once across the burning sand  
Came knightly Coronado and his band  
In eager quest of fabled fairy land;  
Here, though winds were bleak and  
skies were drear,  
Came the sturdy and dauntless  
pioneer  
And mightily strove through the  
changing year. '

From A Song for Kansas  
Author Unknown

"The imaginative genius of Glen Thomas put into enduring form a monument to the Indian and the pioneer in yonder High School North. The artist mind and fingers of Bruce Moore fashioned the miniature models of the buffalo, the Indian scout, the Indian buffalo hunt, and the pioneer, the enlarged replicas of which so boldly challenge the imagination of the visitor to that building.

"But it remained for Mrs. Ethel C. Parker, a teacher of the school, to conceive with far-seeing vision the idea of harmonizing the architecture of the bridge with that of the school. But for Mrs. Parker, Minisa Bridge would have gone into use and into history as only another bridge among the thousands that span the streams of the world, instead of a structure unique and distinctive in beauty and historic association.

"City Manager Wells and the city commissioners graciously received the student committee, headed by Gilbert Burgerhoff, and acceded to their petition that the decorative features be incorporated into the new bridge. This accordingly was accomplished through the fine cooperation of City Engineer P. L. Brockway and his assistant L. K. White; the architect, Glen Thomas, and his assistant, Lawrence Byers; and the builder, O. T. Tyler.

"The commissioners furthermore delegated to the student body of High School

North the privilege of choosing a name for the new bridge. A name was sought that would have significance in relation to the Indian or to the pioneer motif. Minisa was chosen because of its euphony, because of its Indian origin, and because of the meaning of the word --- red water at sunset --- and because in Wichita, Minisa has come to be associated with Indian lore through the life and works of Wichita's own musical composer, Thurlow Lieurance. "\*

Mr. Dotzour then introduced the principal honor guests on the platform after which Gilbert Burgerhoff, representative from High School North, spoke to the audience in behalf of the student body. Gilbert said,

"I want you to realize that we as a school do appreciate what you have done for us, and not only for us but for all Wichita in constructing this beautiful bridge.

"To us the bridge means a going forward --- a going forward with all our enthusiasm toward the goal of a better city and a stronger nation. It symbolizes the overcoming of obstacles --- the overcoming of obstacles until we are the courageous men and women to whom you will want to entrust the future of our city and our nation. And, too, it stands to us for the brotherhood of mankind --- a

\*Mr. Dotzour's address first printed in The North Star, September 27, 1932, and is used here by permission.

brotherhood that builds not alone for the present but for those who will come this way in the future.

"We intend to put our appreciation not only into words, but we are going to put it into our lives and actions. And to this purpose are dedicated the efforts of our school. The strongest purpose of its faculty and the highest ideal of its student body is to lead the way to a higher civilization and a stronger citizenship.

Minisa Bridge, as we look across your red waters at sunset and at your Indian faces looking solemnly into the past and steadfastly into the future, we renew our pledge of faithfulness to the ideals that you inspire." \*

After this Mr. L. W. Mayberry, superintendent of schools, in a short address, mentioned the finer qualities of life and dwelt upon the fact that one could see North High and Minisa Bridge, and note far more than the mere educational side of the matter. His address, concise and rich in thought, held the crowd enthralled as he brought out his points.

Mr. Dotzour then introduced Victor Murdock, speaker of the evening.

Mr. Murdock said that of all the bridges he had seen, and that included

\*Gilbert Burgerhoff's address first printed in The North Star, September 27, 1932, and is used here by permission.

the most famous in all parts of the world, Minisa is the most unique and the most beautiful. He paid tribute to those who conceived it, those who ornamented it, and those who named it, saying that they are to be congratulated; for they have mingled with their skill the fine quality of inspiration that Thurlow Lieurance and Bruce Moore had put into their artistic productions.

Following Mr. Murdock's address, Beatrice Sanford, violinist, garbed in Indian costume, played The Lament from Minisa and By the Waters of Minnetonka, both compositions of Mr. Lieurance.

Then Olive Sayles, sophomore of North High, christened the bridge with a bottle of water from the Little Arkansas River --- water that is red at sunset. Olive was chosen for this because her great-grandmother, Amy Sayles, was one of the first half-dozen settlers in the valley of the Little Arkansas and in 1869 homesteaded just west of Little River at Thirteenth Street. The ford now spanned by Minisa Bridge was then called Sayles Ford. Mrs. Amy Sayles was a charter member of the First Presbyterian Church of Wichita and the first elected superintendent of public instruction here.

A group of native Americans from the American Indian Institute, in their native costumes, closed the dedication cere-

monies by giving tribal dances and songs. And thus the dream became a reality!

North High students at that time had a deep feeling for Minisa Bridge; for as Gilbert said in his talk for the students, it stood to them for sacred memories and for future ambitions and ideals. I have tried, by giving this account, to keep alive that reverence and gratitude to those pioneers who worked and built that the ones coming after them might profit.

The tides of life have ebbed and flowed about us for a quarter century since that September evening when we gathered to dedicate Minisa Bridge. Many of those who helped to make the bridge an actual thing instead of only a dream have passed to their fathers and we know them no more.

Thousands of feet daily cross and recross Minisa Bridge but theirs have completed their journey. But in our minds and our hearts, we revere their memory and remember their constant helpfulness and how they held up our hands when the battle was hard. We remember L. W. Clapp, Dave Leahy, L. W. Mayberry, Victor Murdock, L. W. Brooks, Bert Wells --- all gone on.

Of the citizens who were interviewed as to naming the bridge, all but one have gone from us. Only Judge J. E. Alexander remains. Judge W. P. Campbell, Judge

Richard Bird, Charlie Lawrence, L. W. Clapp, Victor Murdock, Bert Wells, Henry Allen, Judge Grover Pierpont, and Gilbert Burgerhoff, the student speaker that night, have gone to rest

"----beneath the low green tent  
Whose curtain never outward  
swings".

This is the story of Minisa Bridge with its red water at sunset and its Indian faces looking solemnly into the past and steadfastly into the future.

Wichita State University  
Special Collections



chita State Univers

Special Collections