



# THE VIADUCT: HISTORY & FACTS

(LOCALLY NAMED THE TULIP TRESTLE)

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The Viaduct has had three owners. The first was the *Indianapolis-Southern RR*, which was incorporated Sept. 15, 1899. Construction of this railroad began in early 1903. The *ISRR* had "quiet", if not secret, financial support from the *Illinois Central Railroad* and on May 6, 1911 the *ISRR* was totally and finally absorbed by the *ICRR*. The *ICRR* operated this particular branch until March 1986, when it was purchased by the current owner, *The Indiana Railroad*.

This particular branch was and is still currently known as the "HI & DRY", as during the original construction, minimum track was built on fills.

Wooden trestles and bridges were used and basically built on stilts. Eventually these trestles were covered where they stood with fill, between 1908 and 1918. (The fill for the railroad, on the east side of Solsberry, was once a trestle and then filled in at some point. I have a fair photo showing the trestle in the background before it was covered with dirt about 1/4 mile long.) There is one remaining typical wooden trestle in the area. This is on the sub-branch line formerly known as the *Bloomington South*. This rail has been abandoned and taken up on the south side of the main in Bloomington, just west of the intersection of West Kirkwood and Adams Street. The line went south through Bloomington, which is now Patterson Drive, to the now-closed RCA plant. From there it continued south, connecting with the now-abandoned and removed *McDoel Yards* of the former *Monon-L&N-CSX Railroad* at "Skeeter Junction". It then continued south, paralleling Rockport Road. This remaining structure is known as the Victor Trestle.

Let's get back on track; no pun intended . . . . .

This Illinois Central Line was officially opened to traffic on Dec. 21, 1906 with a train originating somewhere in Illinois and bound for Indianapolis. This was the very day the viaduct was finally completed. The structure is 2295 feet long and 157 feet high over Richland Creek and the valley floor below. There are thirty-eight 15-foot, long-deck plate girders alternating with eighteen 40-foot long deck plate girders plus two 20-foot spans on the west end (RR terms would be the South end) and two 20-foot and two 45-foot spans on the east end (RR North end). These all rest atop 38 upright steel structures, mostly in pairs, with a few independent uprights at each end. These upright steel structures sit on concrete piers at random elevations across the valley floor. There is no walkway across at rail level, however, directly under the track, is a single-board width walkway used for tie and superstructure inspections.

Terrain clearing began in the summer of 1905 and concrete pier and abutment work was completed May 12, 1906. Structure materials were brought to the site by rail from the Bloomfield end (RR South) and deposited in the area from May through August 1906.

Steel erection **began on Saturday, Sept. 8, 1906** from the Bloomfield end (RR South) and work progressed toward the Solsberry end (RR North) until **completed on Nov. 22, 1906**. From this date

until Dec. 21, 1906, additional ties and rails were installed, the barrel stands were built, and other finishing touches were applied.

The Collier Bridge Co. handled the concrete work, the American Bridge Co. handled the steel fabrication, and the Strobel Steel Construction Co. erected the steel. (I could not ascertain the home base(s) of these companies.) Mostly immigrant Italian laborers, paid 30 cents per hour, were used on the steel erection. Common laborers were paid 13 cents per hour. "Several" workers were killed in accidents during construction. (I was never able to define "several" other than to see "*a sizable number were killed*" wording was used in some articles. Probably no records of injuries or death were kept.)

The original cost was \$246,504; in today's dollars, about \$20 Million.

There are 2,856 tons of steel in the structure. Occasionally, no steel was erected due to problems encountered with the elevations of the concrete piers, most usually because they were too high and had to be ground down to the proper elevation. At the Solsberry end (RR North), the rail elevation is 673 feet above sea level and the Bloomfield end (RR South) is 657 feet above sea level, so the Bloomfield end is sixteen feet lower than the Solsberry end. A siding existed on the Bloomfield end with track running to the south, which rail cars bearing steel and other materials, as well as crew housing rail cars were parked. This siding was removed upon completion of the viaduct, but the roadbed for this siding is still evident today.

At the time of construction, this was the largest railroad trestle or viaduct in the United States. Today, it has cousins throughout the world. In the Friday, Oct. 13th, 2006 edition of *The Greene County Daily World* (newspaper published in Linton), *Nick Schneider*, Assignments Editor, published excerpts from Christopher Rund's *Indiana University Press* publication, "The Indiana Rail Road Company: America's New Regional Railroad", which lists the names and locations of the other notable trestles and viaducts.

The barrel stands, once used to set 55 gallon barrels on to hold water for use in extinguishing possible fires on the ties caused by steam locomotives, were removed by current owner as the stands were deteriorating and no longer needed.

In the very early days of the trestle's history, the valley below was an extremely popular place for the "locals" to gather for picnics and play baseball on the ball-field that existed there for "several" years. Picture this... On a beautiful summer Sunday afternoon picnic, the folks there witnessed a horrible sight, a body falling from atop the structure almost into the midst of the group gathered there. Some playful boys had secretly carried a dummy to the top and when the time was right, tossed it over the edge. These boys were "well attended to" by their parents.

Folklore also has it that, during construction, one of the workers had purchased new rubber boots and was wearing them when working atop the structure. He fell off, lit on his feet, bounced right back up to the top, then back to the ground. This continued all day and the foreman decided he would have to shoot this guy to keep him from starving to death, as the bouncing never decreased!

A couple of verified, true stories -- Before the use of radios on trains, one night a train stopped for some unknown reason. The flagman in the caboose, an IC employee named Joe Young, whose job it was to protect the rear of the train by using a red flag or red lantern anytime it stopped, proceeded to depart the train from the rear step of the caboose. Just as he was about to start down the steps, he flipped his expended, still lit cigarette from his fingers expecting it to hit the ground. It did; only it fell some 150+ feet before it did! He stopped, figuring out immediately that the caboose had stopped on the viaduct. *This is probably the only instance where smoking cigarettes had saved someone's life.*

Another incident on another IC RR freight train, north bound, an air hose ruptured, putting the train into an emergency stop. Terry McDaniel, the brakeman, had to crawl on top of freight cars about 1/2 way across the viaduct to install a new air hose so the train could proceed on its journey to Indianapolis. This occurred just before sunset and by the time he had completed the repairs, it was dark and thus, his return across the top of the cars was in the dark!

Vaughn Rich, another IC brakeman, had his encounter with a ruptured air line in the daylight on the viaduct. This repair trip began at the caboose, then alongside the train, and then up to the top of the last car on the ground, in order to walk across the cars on the viaduct to get to the problem car. (*I personally*

wouldn't want to do either, but my thoughts are that the daylight trick might be worse than the night one because you certainly could easily see just how high you were off the ground!)

On Jan. 3, 1975, IC RR Track Inspector, Russell Harshman, found what turned out to be a bomb planted on the viaduct near the Bloomfield end. NWSC Crane ordinance disposal personnel were called to disarm and remove the device, which they did without problems. (*Only a couple of suspects were developed in this case, neither of which was arrested.*) On the very next trip out of Palestine headed for Indianapolis, Flagman, Bill Bates, knew Conductor, John Rodgers, was extremely nervous about crossing the viaduct, with the recent bomb scare. Railroaders, being the fun-loving fellows they are, decided to act. Bates lit a "cherry bomb" (a large firecracker) in the caboose just as it started across the viaduct and threw it towards Rodgers area without Roger's knowledge. After Rodgers gathered his senses from the "explosion", he then proceeded to "choke the livin' sh\_\_" out of Bates.

I guess the next major item of importance; in my mind at least, is the *Indiana Transportation Museum* and the "Friends of The 587" who sponsored the restored Nickel Plate 587 Steam train excursion with the blessing and help from *INRR* owner, *Thomas Hoback*, occurring Oct. 28, 1988. I never, ever thought I would see a steam engine return to these rails, let alone a steam engine pulling a passenger train through my small hometown of Solsberry on "the high and dry line" across the Viaduct/Tulip Trestle/Big Bridge (five miles west of Solsberry, Indiana).

I would be remiss in not giving a "Thank You" to all who assisted me in compiling this information, providing corrections to the first draft, the names of those Railroaders involved, and other facts used here. Omission is worse than error, so as not to offend anyone, I will refrain from naming those people, instead offering a Thank You!

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