

K & I BRIDGE

Getting back and forth across the Ohio River was one of the first problems that faced early New Albany settlers. The first ferry boats were little more than skiffs rowed across the river. The Scribners built a larger ferry operated by a horse on a treadmill, and then came the steam ferry boats. But the real solution to the problem was the K & I Bridge which was built during the 1800s and which is still New Albany's only link to Louisville . . .

"There she comes, and she's a daisy."

That might have been the shout from the crowd when the first passenger train steamed across the new K & I Bridge back on October 16, 1886. At least that's one of the stories told about the naming of the Daisy trains that operated between New Albany and Louisville. Another story says the trains were named because the cars were painted a bright yellow – the color of daisies.

However the trains were named, the Daisy line has been operating ever since – first with tiny locomotives pulling the brightly-painted cars, then with electric trolleys, and now busses that carry on the tradition with a yellow daisy painted on the side. The Daisy Depot has been an important place to four generations of New Albany residents.

When the huge span of the K & I Bridge was completed, the river was no longer a barrier between New Albany and Louisville. The bridge meant the end of the busy little ferry boats that had scurried back and forth since New Albany's earliest days.

The ferries were colorful, but they were slow, and they were small. The new industrial age demanded something better.

The K & I Bridge was something better. It was New Albany's first direct link with Louisville. Trains into New Albany no longer had to stop on the north side of the river while passengers scrambled to get to Louisville as best they could. With the bridge completed, New Albany's railroads could send freight to railroads all through the South. Without the bridge New Albany would have stopped growing.

The new bridge meant closer ties with Louisville. The Daisy trains shuttled back and forth all day and carried hundreds of passengers to downtown Louisville. Louisville residents flocked to New Albany on Sundays to ride the trolley up Silver Hills and many liked the city so well they moved to the north side of the river.

The Daisy Line hauled its largest single load in 1908 when William Jennings Bryan, the famed "Silver-tongued orator," spoke in Louisville during his campaign to be elected president of the United States. Ten cars were coupled into one train and carried over 800 persons.

The first Daisy trains had entered Louisville along the bank of the Portland Canal and ended their run on the elevated track at Louisville's waterfront. The electric cars which replaced the steam trains followed the same route at first, and many New Albany residents can still remember the elevated station at First Street in Louisville and steps that led down to the sidewalk. In 1908 the cars were taken through Louisville streets into the heart of the downtown area. The electric cars also operated through downtown New Albany for a short while.

Traffic on the bridge increased so rapidly that the dreams of its builders were soon surpassed. By 1912 a new and larger bridge was needed – the

bridge that is still used daily by thousands of cars and trucks and by four different railroads.

In the early days New Albany and Louisville had been rival cities with the river as a dividing line. The K & I Bridge helped turn the river into a center around which the Falls Cities could grow and prosper together. New Albany and Louisville are still prospering and growing so rapidly that one bridge is not enough. Sometime in the next few years a new modern bridge will weld them even closer together than that first Daisy train which rumbled high over the river over 70 years ago.

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