

Cobblestone Street Interpretive Park Boonville, Missouri

Setting

Boonville, Missouri lies along the south bank of the Missouri River about 90 miles east of Kansas City. The Missouri Department of Transportation (MoDOT) was planning the construction of a new bridge over the Missouri River to carry traffic using U.S. Route 40.

As part of the site investigations and planning, a cobblestone street in Boonville was re-discovered. The street was believed to be the first paved street west of St. Louis. Its construction consisted of cut limestone curbs set about 50 feet apart with unmortared limestone cobbles of various sizes, Cobblestone drainage ditches extended the length of the street.

The cobblestone street represented a precious link to the days of steamboat traffic. From the 1830s to early 1860s, hundreds of steamboats docked at the Boonville wharf each year. Mulecarts and horse-drawn wagons carried freight up the steep slope of the river bank to the businesses at the top of the wharf. Boonville was a regional center of trade; with farmers and merchants shipping pork, flour, tobacco, and other products down river to St. Louis.

After the Civil War, railroads began to replace steamboats. The first railroad reached Boonville in 1869; busy steamboat traffic ended shortly thereafter.

Through the intervening years, the cobblestone street entered into disuse. Three to 4 feet of soil accumulated gradually over the northern block of the street. The southern block remained untouched until construction of the 1924 Old Trails National Highway Bridge.

In 1989, as MnDOT began planning efforts for the new bridge, the Director of Friends of Historic Boonville called MoDOT's attention to the wharf area and street. Wharf Hill had recently been placed in the National Register of Historic Places, and the Director wanted assurances that the historic property would be preserved and/or protected during bridge construction.



Problem to be Solved

The problem was essentially to investigate the site and determine what measures would be needed to preserve the cobblestone street and other elements of the historic site.

Stakeholders

- Missouri Department of Transportation
- City of Boonville
- Friends of Historic Boonville
- Missouri Department of Natural Resources
- Missouri Historic Preservation Program Office
- Advisory Council for Historic Preservation
- Americans with Disabilities Act Project of Columbia

CSD/CSS Approach

The CSD/CSS approach combined active discussions among the stakeholders



involving field investigations, negotiations, and the development of a plan to not only preserve, but indeed enhance the historic resource.

Archaeological investigations of the street showed that much of it was disturbed through portions, but other portions remained undamaged. There were difficulties in fully investigating the status of the street as an existing railroad bed crossed over the street.



Stakeholders (MoDOT and the Friends of Historic Boonville) agreed upon a plan wherein preservation of the street would be accomplished through development of an interpretative park. Preliminary design plans were developed and approved by the Department of Natural Resources and other state offices. It was agreed that upon completion of the park the City of Boonville would retain ownership.



Construction of the park required careful planning. Special rubber-tired equipment was used in removing the overburden to minimize possible damage to the cobblestones. Some areas were repaired, with cobbles and cut limestone curbing salvaged from damaged locations and replaced to resemble the original 1830s paving.

The design of the park itself involved collaboration among the many stakeholders. The park was designed to be ADA-accessible. Other objectives in planning the park included preservation of the street in its original location, incorporation of the Old Trails National Highway Bridge elements into the park, provision for interpretive stations to inform visitors of the history and importance of the site, and pleasing landscaping.

Eleven years after being informed of the cobblestone street, the interpretive park was completed and opened for all to enjoy. It has become a local landmark, and a source of pride within not only Boonville, but also the Missouri Department of Transportation.



Lessons Learned

Local stakeholders are the key to identifying and preserving local historic and other cultural resources. A commitment to work with them can yield projects of great value and pride.

This project also illustrates that the job of a DOT goes beyond the mere provision of safe and efficient transportation. Seizing opportunities to preserve and enhance a community are what CSD/CSS is all about.

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