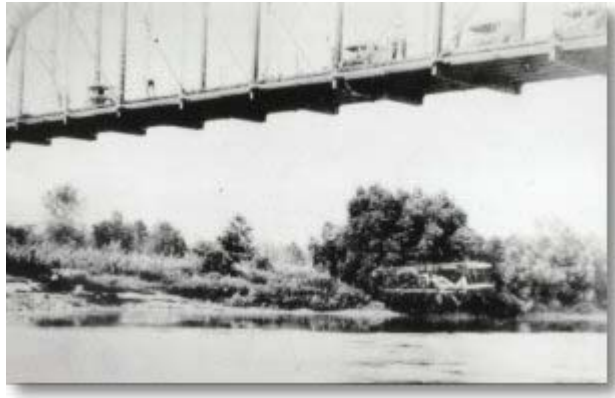


## Episode 2



*The photo of Buster Boyd Bridge taken on the opening day in August of 1923.*

The details are a little foggy, but retired farmer Tom Neely remembers well the day in 1923 that thousands gathered on the new concrete bridge and the banks of the Catawba River for the big event. It was a warm August day, and on the SC-NC state line there was great anticipation. The governors of both states were there. Col. Elliott White Springs, World War I flying ace and local hero from Fort Mill, was about to show his stuff. In a two-seater biplane, Springs "came down the river, went under the bridge and when he began to rise up, his tail hit the water and made a big splash," recalls Neely, 76, who was 13 that day. "The cheers rose up from the people along the banks and all along the bridge. Everyone was very pleased with the feat." Thus ended the opening celebration for the first 1,378-foot Buster Boyd Bridge, which spanned the Catawba, connecting York County with Mecklenburg County, NC, along SC and NC 49.

It was named for William Monroe "Buster" Boyd, a Mecklenburg County dirt farmer who owned the access land on the NC side. Boyd, who died in 1962 at age 79, was an influential Steele Creek Democrat and the driving force behind getting the bridge built, his widow, 96 year old Gussie Boyd, said in 1986. "He went before the (Mecklenburg) County Commissioners and asked for a hard-surfaced road from Charlotte to the Catawba," she said. "After he got that pushed through, he went to work for the bridge."

"Its construction meant western York County residents don't have to drive to Gastonia to get to Charlotte," said Winthrop College faculty member and SC history buff Louise Pettus. "It cut out about 35 miles of traveling that was required before the bridge was built," Pettus said. The third Buster Boyd Bridge is a landmark and is well-traveled by hundreds of residents who live in communities alongside Lake Wylie, near the bridge in both directions.

The first bridge officially opened January 9, 1923, and was a joint venture for both counties, Pettus said. Estimated cost, she said, was \$120,000 and Mecklenburg agreed to pay two-thirds. The bridge was supposed to take six months to build. It didn't. Bad weather and unexpected quicksand on the river bottom delayed builders. York County had to raise more money, but refused to levy additional taxes. As construction neared completion, York County had built only three miles of a sand-clay road from its side of the bridge toward Rock Hill. It would be the following spring before plans were made to pave a road from the bridge to York. But that didn't stop the big celebration in August 1923. More than 12,000 people lined the bridge and banks as former NC Governor Cameron Morrison of Charlotte told the crowd how good roads would lead to important progress in both states. Local farmers made barbeque, and highway commissioners from both states and county officials also spoke to the gathering. Most of the crowd came by automobile. Cars lined the road for miles in both directions. Forty nearby acres were cleared for parking. "It was a big day, a real big day," Gussie Boyd said. "People ate and were very excited. We had never had a bridge there before." The event was filmed by motion picture companies for nationwide distribution. And before Springs made his legendary flight, two Charlotte men, P.R. Redfern and B.F. Withers Jr., flew a Curtiss plane beneath the bridge, Pettus said. Springs' flight, though, apparently was more perfect, eyewitnesses reported.

The original bridge was closed in September 1961, when a truck hit it, causing a sag of about 18 inches at one end. But by that time, a new \$700,000 bridge was being built. No repairs were made to the old bridge. Traffic was rerouted until the new bridge opened in October 1961.

**NOTE:** Lake Wylie in 1923 (which was Lake Catawba at the time) was much smaller than it is today. The original dam was raised to create the lake we know today as Lake Wylie. That's why there was enough room under the bridge to fly an airplane on that August day in 1923. *That's the rest of the story.....*