

This Day in History... April 18, 1968

London Bridge Moves... to Arizona

On April 18, 1968, American entrepreneur Robert P. McCulloch purchased Britain's famed London Bridge and relocated it to Arizona. Though it was dubbed "McCulloch's Folly," it turned out to be a successful gamble and became one of Arizona's most popular attractions.

Several bridges have stretched across the River Thames between the City of London and Southwark in Central London for centuries. A variety of wooden bridges were built between 50 AD and 1176. In the 1170s, King Henry II called for a new stone bridge to be built. Work on it began in 1176 and was completed in 1209. The bridge was about 26 feet wide and between 800 and 900 feet long. Over time, shops and buildings were constructed on the bridge – up to 200 at one point. This put a lot of stress on the bridge and its irregularly-spaced arches. There were several arch collapses over the years, and each time they had to be rebuilt. By the late 1700s, the bridge needed constant, expensive repairs and Londoners began calling for a new bridge.

Engineers were invited to submit their plans for a replacement bridge. John Rennie's design was selected, work began in 1824, and it opened on August 1, 1831. By the end of the century, the bridge was the busiest spot in London, with 8,000 people and 900 vehicles crossing every hour. However, in the early 1900s, it was discovered the bridge was sinking about an inch every eight years. It was too costly to repair, so they needed to replace it.

The City of London expected the bridge would be dismantled and left in a junkyard. But city councilor Ivan Luckin believed someone in America might be willing to buy it. He traveled to the US in 1968 and promoted the idea publicly, saying, "London Bridge is not just a bridge. It is the heir to 2,000 years of history going back to the first century AD, to the time of Roman Londinium."

In 2018, Lake Havasu held a traditional English sheep crossing to mark the bridge's 50th anniversary.



While the proposal left many uncertain, wealthy businessman Robert McCulloch was intrigued. He had made his fortune selling oil, motors, and chainsaws, but was attracted to unusual business ideas. A few years earlier, he purchased thousands of acres near Arizona's Lake Havasu and hoped to transform it into a tourist attraction. He immediately felt the bridge was his answer. McCulloch entered negotiations with the City of London and finalized his purchase on April 18, 1968. The final cost would be \$2.46 million.

McCulloch then oversaw the painstaking process of moving the bridge to America. Workers labeled every individual brick with arch span, row number, and position. The bridge was taken apart brick by brick and packed in crates. It traveled by ship through the Panama Canal to Long Beach, California, where it was driven to Lake Havasu. Aware that the bridge wasn't capable of handling modern traffic, the crew built a steel-reinforced concrete bridge over which the 10,000 tons of original granite was placed. The bridge was built over a piece of land, but a channel was cut so that water could run underneath it. After three years of work, the total cost of shipping, assembly, and dredging was \$7 million.

London Bridge is the second largest tourist attraction in Arizona, after the Grand Canyon.



The bridge officially opened on October 10, 1971. The opening ceremonies included skydivers, fireworks, marching bands, hot air balloons, and a dinner banquet. Reporters mocked the idea and called it "McCulloch's Folly," but it turned out to be a success. Lake Havasu's population grew from a few hundred people in the early 1960s to over 10,000 in 1974. That same year the bridge reportedly attracted two million visitors. An "English Village" with British-styled storefronts was also constructed at one end of the bridge, though it suffered financially and was largely replaced by newer buildings. Today, Arizona's London Bridge is the state's second largest tourist attraction, after the Grand Canyon.



The bridge was transported over 5,400 miles to Arizona.



The bridge traveled through the Panama Canal on its journey to Arizona.



The bridge once hosted a traditional English Village filled with shops and eateries.

This Day in History... April 18, 1968

London Bridge Moves... to Arizona

On April 18, 1968, American entrepreneur Robert P. McCulloch purchased Britain's famed London Bridge and relocated it to Arizona. Though it was dubbed "McCulloch's Folly," it turned out to be a successful gamble and became one of Arizona's most popular attractions.

Several bridges have stretched across the River Thames between the City of London and Southwark in Central London for centuries. A variety of wooden bridges were built between 50 AD and 1176. In the 1170s, King Henry II called for a new stone bridge to be built. Work on it began in 1176 and was completed in 1209. The bridge was about 26 feet wide and between 800 and 900 feet long. Over time, shops and buildings were constructed on the bridge – up to 200 at one point. This put a lot of stress on the bridge and its irregularly-spaced arches. There were several arch collapses over the years, and each time they had to be rebuilt. By the late 1700s, the bridge needed constant, expensive repairs and Londoners began calling for a new bridge.

Engineers were invited to submit their plans for a replacement bridge. John Rennie's design was selected, work began in 1824, and it opened on August 1, 1831. By the end of the century, the bridge was the busiest spot in London, with 8,000 people and 900 vehicles crossing every hour. However, in the early 1900s, it was discovered the bridge was sinking about an inch every eight years. It was too costly to repair, so they needed to replace it.

The City of London expected the bridge would be dismantled and left in a junkyard. But city councilor Ivan Luckin believed someone in America might be willing to buy it. He traveled to the US in 1968 and promoted the idea publicly, saying, "London Bridge is not just a bridge. It is the heir to 2,000 years of history going back to the first century AD, to the time of Roman Londinium."

While the proposal left many uncertain, wealthy businessman Robert McCulloch was intrigued. He had made his fortune selling oil, motors, and chainsaws, but was attracted to unusual business ideas. A few years earlier, he purchased thousands of acres near Arizona's Lake Havasu and hoped to

transform it into a tourist attraction. He immediately felt the bridge was his answer. McCulloch entered negotiations with the City of London and finalized his purchase on April 18, 1968. The final cost would be \$2.46 million.

McCulloch then oversaw the painstaking process of moving the bridge to America. Workers labeled every individual brick with arch span, row number, and position. The bridge was taken apart brick by brick and packed in crates. It traveled by ship through the Panama Canal to Long Beach, California, where it was driven to Lake Havasu. Aware that the bridge wasn't capable of handling modern traffic, the crew built a steel-reinforced concrete bridge over which the 10,000 tons of original granite was placed. The bridge was built over a piece of land, but a channel was cut so that water could run underneath it. After three years of work, the total cost of shipping, assembly, and dredging was \$7 million.

The bridge officially opened on October 10, 1971. The opening ceremonies included skydivers, fireworks, marching bands, hot air balloons, and a dinner banquet. Reporters mocked the idea and called it "McCulloch's Folly," but it turned out to be a success. Lake Havasu's population grew from a few hundred people in the early 1960s to over 10,000 in 1974. That same year the bridge reportedly attracted two million visitors. An "English Village" with British-styled storefronts was also constructed at one end of the bridge, though it suffered financially and was largely replaced by newer buildings. Today, Arizona's London Bridge is the state's second largest tourist attraction, after the Grand Canyon.



The bridge was transported over 5,400 miles to Arizona.



In 2018, Lake Havasu held a traditional English sheep crossing to mark the bridge's 50th anniversary.



The bridge traveled through the Panama Canal on its journey to Arizona.



London Bridge is the second largest tourist attraction in Arizona, after the Grand Canyon.



The bridge once hosted a traditional English Village filled with shops and eateries.