Early Collisions with the Railroad Bridge:

In 1856, construction was completed on the Railroad Bridge, which connected Davenport, Iowa, and the city of Rock Island, Illinois. This bridge was the first of its kind to span the Mississippi, and right from the start several riverboat captains had trouble getting used to the innovation:

1856—The steamboat *Effie Afton* hits a piling and sinks, causing the steamboat company to sue the railroad for obstructing the river. The railroad company hires Springfield, Illinois, lawyer Abraham Lincoln. In 1862, the Supreme Court ruled in "Hurd vs. the Railroad Bridge Company" that if a bridge is for public use and enough room if left for navigation, it is not an obstruction.

September 28, 1858—The steamer *Fannie Harris* collides with a pier and sunk. Two firemen (steamer firemen take care of the boat’s boiler) were knocked overboard and killed.

March 20, 1859—The steamer *Aunt Letty* is blown into a pier and forty feet of her hull is stove in.

May 10, 1861-- The steamer *Gray Eagle* hit a pier and sunk. The total loss of boat and cargo was estimated at $50,000

The weather had also always had its own way with the Mississippi, and it wasn’t going to back off from one little bridge:

February 12, 1868—an ice gorge slams into the Bridge, moving a span off the pier. Five steamboats and barges are wrecked and the Mississippi rose 8 feet in 2 hours.

March 16, 1868—A tornado hits the river, destroying the Railroad Bridge draw.

Source:
Downer, Harry E. *History of Davenport and Scott County Iowa.* (Chicago: S. J. Clarke), 1910.