

HACERSTOWN ROAD BRIDGE

Spanning Little Catoctin Creek at Old Hagerstown Road,
0.26 mile north of Alternate U.S. 40

Middletown Vicinity
Frederick County
Maryland

HAER No. MD-89

HAER
MD
11-MIDTOWN,
2-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD
National Park Service
Northeast Region
U.S. Custom House
200 Chestnut Street
Philadelphia, PA 19106

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

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Location: Spanning Little Catoctin Creek at Old Hagerstown Road, 0.26 miles north of Alternate U.S. 40, Middletown vicinity, Frederick County, Maryland

USGS: Middletown quadrangle
UTM Coordinates: 18 279680 4370040

**Engineer/Architect/
Builder/Fabricator:** Attributed to the York Bridge Company, York, Pennsylvania

Date of Construction: 1920

Present Owner: The Board of County Commissioners of Frederick County, Maryland
Frederick County Courthouse
Frederick, Maryland 21701

Present Use: vehicular bridge

Significance: The Hagerstown Road Bridge is one of 26 metal truss bridges remaining in Frederick County. In 1978, there were approximately 40, but increased traffic has led to removal of many bridges. The bridge is structurally unusual for its low placement of the lower chord bolt connection. It is otherwise typical of 1920 steel pony truss bridge construction of the Pratt type. The road and crossing are significant as the main 18th century road west from Frederick to Hagerstown, until replaced by the National Pike in the early 19th century.

Project Information: This documentation was undertaken in April, 1993 in accordance with a Memorandum of Agreement among the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, the Maryland State Historic Preservation Officer and the Army Corps of Engineers, as a mitigative measure prior to the replacement of the bridge. The steel truss bridge will be relocated to a golf course on the east side of Middletown.

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Setting

The Hagerstown Road Bridge is a steel pony truss structure of Pratt design crossing Little Catoctin Creek, about one mile northwest of Middletown in Frederick County, Maryland. It is situated on a curving section of road in a cluster of 18th and 19th century houses. Just upstream from the bridge are remnants of a low stone wall. Eighteenth and early 19th century maps show a mill at this site.

Bridge Description

The bridge is a five bay Pratt steel pony truss structure with stone abutments parged with concrete. The bridge has a single span 68 feet, 10 inches long. The truss system is five bays in length with each bay being 13 feet, 8 inches wide and 8 feet, 6 inches high. The deck is 13 feet, 3 inches wide and consists of wooden planks, 3 inches thick by 9½ inches wide. The bridge deck is supported by six large steel transverse beams, 1 foot, 4¼ inches wide. Resting on the transverse beams are eight 8-inch steel beams spanning the creek, north to south. Three by 8-inch nailers are adjacent to these beams to which are attached the deck planks.

Between the vertical members of the truss are diagonal rods or webbing 1¼ inches in diameter. They cross to form an X in the center bay. Single diagonal rods are attached on either side of the central bay. The upper chord is made of four pieces of steel bolted together to form a hollow squared piece. The vertical supports are attached on either side of the upper chords and infilled with flat webbing. A horizontal band of crossed webbing forms a rail across each truss.

On either side of the span are stone abutments and wing walls. They have been covered with a thin coat of concrete. They extend approximately 22 feet outward from the bridge and are about 20 inches wide.

According to Frederick County Roads Department records, the bridge had wooden stringers in 1942 which were replaced with steel I beams in 1945. In 1975, seven 8-inch beams were replaced and new flooring and nailers were installed.

Due to increasing traffic, this bridge is scheduled for replacement. The Hagerstown Road Bridge is to be moved to a privately developed golf course just off Alternate U.S. 40, east of Middletown.

Historical Background

Construction of the Hagerstown Road Bridge is attributed to the York Bridge Company of York, Pennsylvania, because the structure appears similar to others built by that company. There is no identification plaque on the bridge. However, both the Maryland Historical Trust State Historic Sites

Survey form and the Frederick County Engineering Department's inspection records list the date of construction as 1920. It is among the later steel truss bridges in the county and follows the Pratt design, one of the more common bridge truss types. The Hagerstown Road Bridge is one of 26 steel truss bridges remaining in Frederick County, a number which has decreased from 40 since 1978.

The Old Hagerstown Road has been known by that name at least since 1858 when it was identified by that name on Isaac Bond's Map of Frederick County. This road was probably known as "old" after the system of turnpikes was developed in the early 19th century that eventually became the National Pike and later Alternate U.S. 40. Dennis Griffith's Map of the State of Maryland, 1794, shows the Old Hagerstown Road as the only route from Frederick to Hagerstown and points west. However, when Charles Varlé's Map of Frederick and Washington Counties was published in 1808, the main stage road from Baltimore west through Frederick to Hagerstown followed the present route of Alternate U.S. 40 causing the earlier route to become the "Old" Hagerstown Road.

The creek now known as Little Catoctin was labeled Mill Creek on the 1808 map. One of the three grist or merchant mills located along its length was located just east of the crossing, identified as "Sweringen's." All that can be seen of the mill's site are the remains of a stone wall on the south side of the creek just east of the bridge. The crossing has characteristics of a typical mill village with a cluster of houses dating from the late 18th through the mid 19th centuries. Along the road as it leads northwestward from Middletown toward Hagerstown are other farmsteads which appear to date from the 18th century attesting to the early development of this route.

Just prior to the Battle of South Mountain which occurred on September 14, 1862, the U.S. Army's First Corps under General Hooker may have occupied this road, or nearby Tabor Road as they advanced on South Mountain. According to Dennis Frye, Chief Historian at Harpers Ferry National Park, Civil War historians still debate which of the two roads were used by General Hooker's army. Since his command contained about 12,000 men, perhaps both were used.

The present bridge, constructed in 1920, apparently replaced an earlier bridge of unknown design.

A search was undertaken for historic photographs of this bridge through consultation with the following sources: the Frederick County Historic Sites Survey Consultant; local historians with the Frederick County Library's local history section; published postcard albums and photographic histories of the county; and historic sites survey documentation. The Frederick County Department of Public Works' file on this bridge contains photographs as early as the 1960s. No earlier photographs have been located.

Bibliography

- Bond, Isaac. Map of Frederick County, Maryland. Baltimore, Maryland, 1858.
Frederick County Department of Public Works, bridge inspection records.
- Frye, Dennis E. Chief Historian, Harpers Ferry National Park. Interview,
April 26, 1993.
- Griffith, Dennis. Map of the State of Maryland, 1794, published in Atlas of Historical Maps of Maryland, 1608-1908. Edward C. Papenfuse and Joseph M. Coale, III, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982.
- Varlé, Charles. A Map of Frederick and Washington Counties, 1808, published in Atlas of Historical Maps of Maryland, 1608-1908. Edward C. Papenfuse and Joseph M. Coale, III, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982.
- Widell, Cherilyn. "Old Hagerstown Road Bridge," inventory form for State Historic Sites Survey, Maryland Historical Trust, c. 1978.
- Photocopy of drawing of plan and elevation by Kennedy, Bode & Porter, Inc., 1981 (photocopy from Frederick County Department of Public Works files).