

Confederate Avenue Bridge  
Vicksburg National Military Park  
Vicksburg  
Warren County  
Mississippi

HAER No. MS-12

HAER  
MISS,  
75-VICK,  
19-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

HAER  
MISS  
75-VICK,  
19-

CONFEDERATE AVENUE BRIDGE

HAER No. MS-12

Location: Vicksburg National Military Park  
Vicksburg, Warren County, Mississippi

Date of Erection: 1903

Present Owner: Vicksburg National Military Park  
National Park Service  
U. S. Department of the Interior  
P.O. Box 349  
Vicksburg, Mississippi 39180

Present Use: No longer in use.

Significance: The Confederate Avenue Bridge is the only steel-arched span extant in Mississippi. The three-hinged deck arch was constructed by the Virginia Bridge and Iron Company, Roanoke, Virginia, in 1903. A document of that year states: "The three viaducts of the Confederate Avenue Bridge will be completed by August 31 . . . at an aggregate cost, exclusive of superintendence, of \$46,559."

Transmitter: Marion K. Schlefer, Historic American Engineering Record, 1985

STEEL BRIDGE  
(Confederate Avenue Bridge)  
Vicksburg National Military Park  
Spanning Jackson Rd. at Confederate Ave.  
Vicksburg ~~vicinity~~  
Warren County  
Mississippi

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ADDENDUM TO  
CONFEDERATE AVENUE BRIDGE  
Spanning Jackson Rd. at Confederate Ave.  
Vicksburg ~~vicinity~~  
Warren County  
Mississippi

BLACK AND WHITE PHOTOGRAPHS  
ELECTROSTATIC COPIES OF COLOR TRANSPARENCIES  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA  
REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
1849 C St., NW  
Washington, DC ~~20013-7127~~  
20240

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STEEL BRIDGE  
ADDENDUM TO  
Confederate Avenue Bridge  
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The new record name reflects the historic name of the structure.

**Location:** Spanning Jackson Road and the south fork of Glass Bayou on Confederate Avenue, in Vicksburg National Military Park, Warren County, Mississippi.

**Date of construction:** 1903

**Engineer:** Unknown

**Contractor:** Penn Bridge Company

**Structure Type:** Arch Truss Bridge

**FHWA Structure No.:** 5600-009T

**Owner:** United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Vicksburg National Military Park

**Significance:** The steel arch bridge on Confederate Avenue in Vicksburg National Military Park is significant for its design. It is the only extant steel arch bridge in the State of Mississippi. The structure was included among a number of the state's historic bridges nominated for the National Register of Historic Places in 1987.

**Project Information:** The Vicksburg National Park Roads and Bridges Recording Project was conducted in 1997 by the Historic American Engineering Record. The project team consisted of Todd Croteau, project supervisor; Tim Davis, supervisory historian; Pete Brooks, field supervisor and architect; Deborah James, landscape architect; Gregory Seale, architect; and Courtney Jones, historian. This is one in a series of reports prepared for the project. See also HAER Nos. MS-14, MS-14A, MS-14B and MS-14C.

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The topography of Vicksburg National Military Park consists of a series of narrow ridges fronted and intersected by steep ravines, many of which are caused by small, intermittent streams. To achieve the desired effect of a continuous park roadway providing easy access to points of interest, it was necessary to cross many of these narrow cuts. The Steel Bridge spans an especially wide and deep gorge at Jackson Road and the south fork of Glass Bayou. Constructed in 1903 by the Penn Bridge Company, the bridge is composed of a single steel deck arch, 270' in length. The superstructure consists of a 150' arch deck truss, bordered on each end by a 60' deck truss. This bridge is of historical interest because it is the only extant example of a steel arch structure in the state of Mississippi, designed especially for spanning deep gorges.

In 1972, a new bridge was built alongside the existing structure, because the old bridge was not wide enough to accommodate large vehicles, such as tour busses and recreational vehicles. Having outlived its usefulness, the steel arch bridge was to be removed. On 10 February an article appeared in the *Vicksburg Evening Post*, opposing the destruction of the bridge, citing its significance as the only structure of its kind in the state. This article by Gordon Cotton, historian at the Old Courthouse Museum, also suggested the possibility that this bridge may have been "dismantled in a Northern state and shipped to Vicksburg,"<sup>1</sup> although there is no

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<sup>1</sup> Cotton, Gordon, "Old Park Bridge Is Only One Of Its Kind In State," *Vicksburg Evening Post*, 10 February 1972.

documented evidence to substantiate this rumor. The contractor for the new bridge was said to have stated that he was not certain why the bridge was to be removed, as it was structurally sound as well as visually appealing. Even as late as 1978, the Federal Highway Administration's Safety Inspection Report rated the bridge as being in "good condition-- no repairs necessary."<sup>2</sup> Cotton's article sparked local opposition from historical societies and engineering groups, eager to see the bridge preserved for its architectural significance.

In February 1972, Superintendent Daniel E. Lee responded to this controversy stating that "this old bridge is picturesque and may very well qualify as an engineering landmark. However, it does not promote the history of the battlefield."<sup>3</sup> Lee went on to explain that, since the removal of the three observation towers in 1966, the park no longer contained extraneous structures not related in some direct way to the commemoration of the battle. Other reasons cited by Lee for the removal of the bridge were the cost of reconditioning the bridge and landscaping the surrounding area, as well as the safety hazard posed if the structure were to be used as a pedestrian crossing.

Historical interests won out and the bridge was preserved as a pedestrian trail and overlook. The bridge has deteriorated to the extent that it was closed to pedestrians in the mid

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<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Transportation, Bridge Safety Inspection Report, 5600-009T, Federal Highway Administration, Region 15, (Arlington, Virginia, 23 March 1978), 4.

<sup>3</sup> Superintendent Daniel E. Lee to Superintendent of Natchez Trace Parkway, Memorandum, 15 February 1972.

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1990s. Current park officials share the views of Superintendent Lee and would be glad to remove such a liability, as funding is not available to repair and preserve it. The bridge was nominated for the National Register of Historic Places in 1986.

SOURCES CONSULTED:

Vicksburg National Military Park documents:

Annual Report of the Resident Commissioner, William T. Rigby, 19 July 1901, VICK Library.

Annual Report of the Vicksburg National Military Park Commission, 30 September 1899, VICK Library.

Official records:

U.S. Department of Transportation, Bridge Safety Inspection Report, 5600-009T, Federal Highway Administration, Region 15, (Arlington, Virginia, 23 March 1978).

Correspondence:

Draft of circular letter submitted to Chief Clerk of War Department, John C. Schofield, by William T. Rigby, 24 April 1901, RG-79, Box 1, Vol. 4, Federal Records Center (hereafter noted as FRC), East Point, Georgia.

Memorandum, Superintendent Daniel E. Lee to Superintendent of Natchez Trace Parkway, 15 February 1972.

Rigby, William T. to Penn Bridge Company, 28 May 1903, RG-79, Box 3, Vol. 15, FRC, East Point, Georgia.

White, S. P., President of Vicksburg National Military Park Commission, to Penn Bridge Company, 6 August 1903, RG-79, Box 5, "Letters Received, 6/17- 9/30 1903," FRC, East Point, Georgia.

Newspaper articles

Cotton, Gordon, "Old Park Bridge Is Only One Of Its Kind In State," *Vicksburg Evening Post*, 10 February 1972.