

BRIDGES OF PENNSYLVANIA

By Henry C. Falk (Spring, 1988)

There is very little information available in the entire area of southeastern PA and Delaware County follows this trend. And yet I have found the sites of 39 bridges. I do not have the names of some of these as this information just does not seem to be available. And then also I found two bridges with the same name which I was never able to figure out. But I have seen pictures of all these bridges many years ago. I have, in the last 30 years, been able to acquire pictures of a number of them. The only identification is the location, some times. All of the bridges were Burr arch truss types except where indicated in the text.

Most of these bridges were torn down in the early 1920's Delaware County, up until that time, was a rural area. After the First World War one community after another sprung up and most of them were considered suburbs of Philadelphia. By late in 1922 most of the covered bridges were gone. There is one between Delaware and Chester County's still standing and the last one to be torn down was in 1932. Most of the longer bridges were the Burr arch type and most of the rest were queen and kingpost types. Again, as in Lancaster County, it seems that the great arch bridges of Philadelphia had an influence on the bridge builders of Delaware County. Of course, Delaware County is adjacent to Philadelphia County to the east. Now for a listing of the bridges which I have records of. First, we will write of the one still standing. This is the Bartram's CB (38-15-17, -23-02) between Chester and Delaware Counties. It crosses Crum Creek off Goshen Road and LR 15098 in Willistown Township in Chester County and LR 23034 in Newtown Township in Delaware County. It is by-passed and has not been used since 1940. It was formerly Chester County Bridge #159 but must have been Delaware County Bridge #173 for this number was found on it. It was built in 1860 by Ferdinand Wood at a cost of \$1,133. It is a Burr arch type and is 80 ft. 5 in. (24.8 m) long with a span of 62 ft. 3 in. (19.0 m) and is 13 ft. 7 in. (4.1 m) wide. It is painted red and has been since before 1953. It has a strange portal as the sheathing runs on a diagonal instead of either vertical or horizontal. It is owned and maintained by the Marple-Newtown Historical Society. When they took it over they installed iron grates from floor to roof so that now it is impossible to even walk through it. When they took it over they installed iron grates from floor to roof so that now it is impossible to even walk through it. When you could still walk through, you could see, by looking hard, written on one arch: "Lincoln-Save the Union and Congress." It was probably written in black soon after the bridge was finished. The grate was installed to cut down the possibility of arson. The bridge is supposed to be named for an Isaac Bartram who owned land on the Chester county side. However, I have found another Bartram's Bridge

downstream. #173 also went by the name Stager's CB in earlier times. It replaced an earlier bridge but I was never able to find if it was also covered.

There is a small covered bridge at the former site of Smith's Sawmill (38-23-a) off Route 3 at Darby Circle. There was a big celebration when it was built in 1952 because it was the first new covered bridge built in Pa for a number of years. The President of NSPCB, Mr. Leo Litwin was present at the dedication. But the sawmill and the bridge are pretty much in ruins now and I would hate to see anyone drive a distance to find it.

Now to my old records of the other covered bridges which once stood in Delaware County:

#1. Cobb's Creek – A bridge was found between the Borough of Yeadon and the city of Philadelphia on Church Lane below Mt. Moriah Cemetery. It was Co. Bridge #150 with nicely rounded portals and stone abutments. The bridge was of medium length.

#2. Darby Cr. Tyrone Lewis CB on Sawmill Road at Radnor. Co. Bridge #117 had a span of 54 ft. (16 m). It sat low to the water with stone abutments with stone on end on top of the parapets.

#3. Darby Cr. The Cassin CB on State Road between Upper Darby and Springfield Townships. This is a Town lattice truss type with stone abutments with mortar on top. It was fairly long, probably about 80 to 100 ft. (24 to 30 m).

#4. Darby Cr. Hilldale CB on Providence Road between Upper Darby Township and Yeadon Borough.

#5. Darby Cr. Heyville CB between Upper Darby and Springfield Townships at Addingham. This bridge had portals decorated with boards having scallops. This bridge was only 0.5 miles (0.8 km) from my previous home, but was decorated with boards having scallops. This bridge was only 0.5 miles (0.8 km) from my previous home, but was gone long before I moved there 40 years ago. It was of medium length, about 80 ft. (24 m).

#6. Darby Cr. Brookthorpe CB on Darby Road between Haverford and Marple Townships. Of medium length with stone abutments with stone on edge on the parapets. The portal was attractive with much molding used.

#7. Darby Cr. on Chester, Radnor Road between Haverford and Marple Townships. It was wider than most.

#8. Ithan Cr. on Coopertown Road. A Town lattice truss of short length. This was the last covered bridge standing in the county. It was torn down in 1932. There was no metal used in its construction and had oak timbers. This is according to the Philadelphia Evening Bulletin when it was torn down. The same could be said about a lot of the others also. It was Co. Bridge #109 and was found in the northeast corner of Haverford Township.

#9. Crum Cr. Leiper Quarry CB was beside railroad tracks a short distance east of the present Rte. 320. At one time it was a double barreled bridge with railroad tracks on one side and the road on the other. The railroad side was torn down making a lopsided portal arrangement. In Richard Sanders Allen's book *Covered Bridges of the Middle Atlantic States* a photograph of this bridge appears on P. 60. The bridge was Co. Bridge #96 and was found between Nether Providence and Springfield Townships. The original railroad tracks were built by the quarry. They were some of the very first tracks laid in the U.S. as the quarry railroad was the second railroad in the country. The original tracks were bolted to large flat stones instead of wooden ties. It was possible to find some of these 25 years ago. At the bridge there were wooden ties. When heavier engines were used the bridge was not strong enough so that half was torn down. Now the tracks use a trestle. The bridge sat low to the water because of the grade of the railroad.

#10. Crum Cr. Palmer's CB. Found on Palmer's Mill Rd. between Marple and Upper Providence Townships. It was Co. Bridge #46. It had stone abutments capped with wood.

#11. Crum Cr. Beatty's Hollow CB in Beatty's Hollow between Springfield and Nether Providence Townships. Co. Bridge #126 was found on the road between Baltimore Pike and the Springfield Water Works in former times.

#12. Stager's or Bartram's CB. See above.

#13. Crum Cr. Bridge on Gradyville Road between Upper Providence and Newton Townships. It was Co. Bridge #29 and had a Burr arch truss which in later years had 6 bents underneath for support.

#14. Crum Cr. Bartram's CB. (Not the Bartram's of #12). It was found between Marple and Upper Providence Townships. It had stone abutments capped with stone on one side and plastered over capped wood on the other and long windows the full length of the bridge. It was Co. #45. Was this bridge called Bartram's in Delaware County and the other called Bartram's in Chester County and Stager's in Delaware County in former times? I wish I knew.

#15. Crum Cr. Holland CB. Between Marple and Upper Providence Townships just outside of Media. It was Co. Bridge #49 and was just 100 years old when torn down in 1923. It had stone abutments capped with wood. There was a sign hung over the portal. All I could make out was "Notice" with much smaller print underneath.

#16. Crum Cr. Castle Rock CB was found on W. Chester Pike between Edgmont and Newtown Townships. This bridge had a bit of an odd arrangement of trusses. There was a queen post truss with a king post under the queen. It had stone abutments with parapets of stone on end. As West Chester Pike was the first road in the county and was originally a corduroy road I wonder just when this bridge was built. Was it the first covered bridge built in the county?

#17. Crum Cr. Matlack CB. Between Newtown and Upper Providence Townships. It had a window the entire length on one side. It had a low Burr arch truss with stone abutments capped with wood.

#18. Crum Cr. Plush Mill CB. On Baltimore Pike between Springfield and Nether Providence Townships. It had a very high Burr arch truss and had extra fancy portals. It had stone abutments with parapets of stones on end. This bridge collapsed from the weight of a large truck in either 1920 or '21. I saw a picture of the badly shattered and splintered bridge lying in the creek.

#19. Ridley Cr. On Gradyville Road. In Edgmont Township there was a short kingpost type with stone abutments capped with wood.

#20. Ridley Cr. Sycamore Mill CB between Upper Providence and Middletown Townships. It was a queen post truss bridge with sloping portals. It had stone abutments capped with wood. It originally had horizontal siding solid over the entire side but was later repaired and then had wide windows the entire length of the bridge on both sides. It can easily be seen why this was done from the appearance of the roads leading to this bridge. It was Co. Bridge #54.

#21. Ridley Cr. Shoemaker CB. Between Nether Providence Township and the city of Chester. This was probably a Burr arch truss type with stone abutments and the parapets of stone on end. It was a nice looking bridge with a question of when it was built. It is possible that this was the second bridge at the site. The first was built in 1843-44 and the second in 1893. This is on a flood plain and it could easily be that the first bridge was washed away. However I could never certify this.

#22. Ridley Cr. Fox Bank CB. On Fox Road from Moylan between Upper Providence and Middletown Townships. This may have been a covered truss bridge with no roof. I am not positive about this. It was also possible that it lost its roof a short time before being torn down. It did have rafters between the trusses at the roof line making me think that it did have a roof at one time.

#23. Ridley Cr. Ridley Cr. or Media CB. A Fairly long Burr arch truss bridge. It had stone abutments capped with wood. It was torn down in 1918.

#24. Ridley Cr. Red CB. It had a kingpost truss with high stone abutments capped with wood.

#25. Chester Cr. Upland CB. It was probably a Burr arch truss type with stone abutments which were plastered over.

#26. Chester Cr. Co. Bridges #182 between Upland Borough and Chester Township. It was found on a road connecting Creek Road and Concord Road and was sometimes called the Bridgewater CB. It had stone abutments which were plaster and a low Burr arch. It had windows almost the full length of the bridge. It was a fairly long bridge, probably close to 125 ft. (38 m).

#27. Chester Cr. Dutton's Mill CB. Found at Morgan Station between Ashton Township and Brookhaven Borough. It was Co. Bridge #179 and had an arch that was higher than Bridgewater CB but looked very similar. It had plastered stone abutments which were capped with wood.

#28. Chester Cr. Victoria CB. At Lenni between Middletown and Ashton Townships. It had portals similar to Dutton's Mill CB except that it had a big notice sign fastened to the right side. It had plastered stone abutments with parapets of stone on end.

I have often heard it said about covered bridges that if you saw one you saw them all. I think this is a rather wild statement to make because, even by just examining pictures of the bridges as I did with all of these, there are many features to look for. Look at the portals. They are often similar, but differences can be found. Look at the trusses. There are many truss types and then many different versions of the same type. Take the Burr arch truss for instance. Is it a high arch or is it low? Is it single or is it double? Is it made of a solid timber or is it several timbers bolted together? What is the size of the timbers? The reader will notice that I often make reference to the abutments and their structure. In this discourse the abutments include the wing walls. In most eastern PA bridges there are fairly long wing walls. Then since I did not want to bore the reader too much, in this list I refrained from giving the direction of the boards on the sides and portals. And yet in my original study of these pictures about 30 years ago, I did include that fact in my notes. As I only had access to these photos one day and there were 39 bridges involved, I feel that my efforts were worthwhile.

With these notes, I have several times located a photograph of a single Delaware County bridge which was unknown. Delaware County is one of the smaller counties in land area so that this number of 39 bridges was concentrated in a small area. Almost all road crossings of streams in the county were wooden covered bridges at one time. Of course, after seeing the pictures there was still much research to be done. I tried in vain to find the names of the builders, the date built and the cost. I did go to most of the sites and examined them. Much can sometimes be learned from these sites. Sometimes the original abutments are still standing with a newer concrete bridge built using them. This often gives an idea of the length and width of the bridge. Yes, there is much research to do but this is all part of the fun of looking for covered bridges. Then there is also the possibility of finding a covered bridge site on what is now a busy 4 or 6 lane highway. I feel while I have gotten away from the list for a few minutes, I should also mention that these photographs were 8 x 10 black and whites taken by a John W. Eckfeldt during March and April of 1918. Whether this was complete list, I was never able to find out, although I did hear once that the total should include 41 bridges.

A few notes on the area are that Delaware County was originally a part of Chester County. It broke away in 1789. All the streams run in a north to south direction and empty into the Delaware River, which is the boundary on the southeast side of the county. These streams are not large bodies of water and drain a comparatively small land area. There never were any bridges across this stretch of the river as it is deep and wide and there never were any large cities on either side. Then too, the river was travelled by large ships as far as Philadelphia so any bridge would have to be either a draw type or high above the water. There was a ferry which ran between the city of Chester and the town of Bridgeport, NJ. This was put out of business in the 1960's by the largest cantilever bridge in the United States. Well, I suppose it is time to get back to the list.

#29. Chester Cr. Mt. Alverno Rd. CB. Between Middletown and Ashton Townships. It is found at Mount Alverno Station. It was Co. Bridge #9 with a window on one side. It had plastered stone abutments.

#30. Chester Cr. Glen Mills CB. Found at Glen Mills Station on Forge Road between Middletown and Thornbury Townships. It was also a Burr arch truss type but with two different portals. The east portal was nicely rounded and the west one had angles instead of curves. The west end also had windows on both sides. It was Co. Bridge #174 and had stone abutments capped with wood.

#31. Chester Cr. Crozierville CB at Lenni Station between Ashton and Middletown Townships. It was Co. Bridge #7. It had lights on the portals and had stone abutments with pointed stones on end on the parapets.

#32. West Branch of Chester Cr. Either a covered bridge or a covered truss bridge at Lenni in Gobler's Knob. Probably southeast of Crozierville CB. I have no further information on this.

#33. West Branch of Chester Cr. Llewellyn CB. In Ashton Township. It had an almost flat roof and stone abutments with pointed stone on end on the parapets.

#34. West Branch of Chester Cr. Peter's CB. This was also in Ashton Township. I could never locate the site of this or the Llewellyn CB. There are only two possibilities but I don't know which is which. One is Birney Highway and the other is at the junction of New Road, Mount road, Creek, Road, and Crozierville Road. Both of these bridges had portals similar to the Mt. Alverno CB which was nearby and I feel that they were built about the same time and by the same builder.

#35. Brandywine Cr. The bridge at Chadd's Ford was found on Rt. 1 between Pennsbury Township, Chester County and Birmingham Township, Delaware County. Because this bridge came under the jurisdiction of Chester County there are excellent records on it. The first bridge at the site was built in 1828 after being recommended by a jury on July 3, 1807 and was torn down in 1860. A new bridge was built in 1860 and lasted until 1920. This bridge was of Burr arch type as was its replacement.

The second bridge had a span of 151 ft. (46m) and a total length of 176 ft. (54 m) with a 22 ft. (7m) wide roadway. It was probably built by William Gamble and Nathan Y. Jester at a cost of \$5,490. This site has by now had four bridges as the one that replaced the second was in turn replaced in 1938. This last bridge had an entirely new deck just a couple of years ago, so it can be seen that even the bridge which replaces a covered bridge many times doesn't last too long. The second Chadd's Ford covered bridge made a very nice appearance. It had three long narrow windows at each end and shorter narrow windows at the center.

#36 and #37. Brandywine Cr. The Twin Bridges. They are known best as the Pyle's twin bridges but were also known in Delaware County as the Barney twin bridges. They were found on Rt. 100 between Birmingham Township, Delaware County and Pennsbury Township, Chester County, and just a short distance downstream from Chadd's Ford CB. A further means of identification is that they were found at Brookfield Station. To be technical only one was intercounty but they were both considered such by the counties. The westernmost one crossed the creek and the other was on a floodplain of the creek which frequently did flood in this area.

They were both built with a Burr arch plan but were not actually exact twins. They looked and were built very similarly but the western one had a 180 ft. (55 M) span and the eastern one had a 140 ft. (43 m) span. Each bridge actually had a double arch. They were built between 1854 and 1856 by Wi Gamble and Jester. The western one was built first at a cost of \$5,490 and the eastern one for \$5,290. This was being erected in 1855 when there was a flood which damaged the woodwork and stonework so that there had to be much rebuilding done, at a cost of \$1,360. The bridges had a 20 ft. (6 m) wide roadway and were 18ft. (5.5 m) above normal water level.

They looked very much alike in all but the length. The portals were all the same and there were long narrow windows with wooden awnings in the center of each. All abutments were similar also, as they had wood capped stone as the material. There was a small island of about 25 ft. (8 m) length between them. The Pyle name comes from the land on the Chester County side of the creek. In 1918, \$11,000 was spent on them. However, the main timbers were bad and just a couple of years later they were gone. I have information that they were closed on October 31, 1921. I have other information that they were closed in 1924. In any case, a new concrete bridge covering the entire distance was built at a cost of \$119,500. This bridge is still carrying traffic over the creek.

#38. I have very little information about this bridge. With the picture of it was information which said that it crossed Chichester Cr. which was a branch of Naaman's Cr. I have a number of Delaware County maps which helped me a lot in the location of sites but gave no help on this one. Every map has 3 branches to

Naaman's Cr. an east, a west, and a main branch, but none of them mention a Chichester Branch. The bridge was in Lower Chichester Township which narrows down the possibilities but there are three sites where it could have been situated. It was a nice looking bridge and had stone abutments capped with wood.

#39. Ridley Cr. Johnson's CB found on Delchester Road and at different times went by a number of names, Ashbridge, Gradyville Road CB, and Delchester CB. It was listed as Chester county Bridge #`54. It was an intercounty bridge found between Willistown Township, Chester County and Edgmont Township, Delaware County. I feel it was known best in Chester County as Johnson's CB and in Delaware County as Delchester CB. I get this feeling from studying records of both counties. It had a king post type of truss and was built in 1858 by Joseph Hood and Azariah L. Williamstown at a cost of \$610. It was a small bridge with a span of 34 ft. (10 m).

This is the end of my Delaware County list and it is meant in no way to be complete. I read a number of years ago that there were 41 covered bridges in the county, but I could never get further information about any other covered bridges even though I have searched for over 30 years. From looking at some of the bridge pictures, the roads in those days were very bad and travel by automobile must have been rough to say the least. However, when I studied the map of Delaware County, it became apparent that covered bridges were the main type of bridge construction in the county in the late 1800's and early 1900's. I feel I should mention one thing now. All of these bridges had wing walls leading from the abutments. The majority of the wing walls were rather long. Some were almost as long as the bridge. For the sake of brevity I did not mention them each time, but only their parapets.