

Tennessee's  
SURVEY REPORT  
for Historic  
Highway  
Bridges

Pre-1946 Masonry Arch,  
Timber Truss, Metal Truss,  
Concrete Arch, Metal Arch,  
and Suspension Bridges

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Bridges, from simple slabs to elaborate engineering marvels, have been both impediments and boons to mankind since ancient times. These fascinating structures allow us to criss-cross the country, yet we often take bridges for granted as we travel.

What types of bridges exist in Tennessee? What is their history? Which bridge companies practiced in Tennessee? What is the significance of bridges around the state?

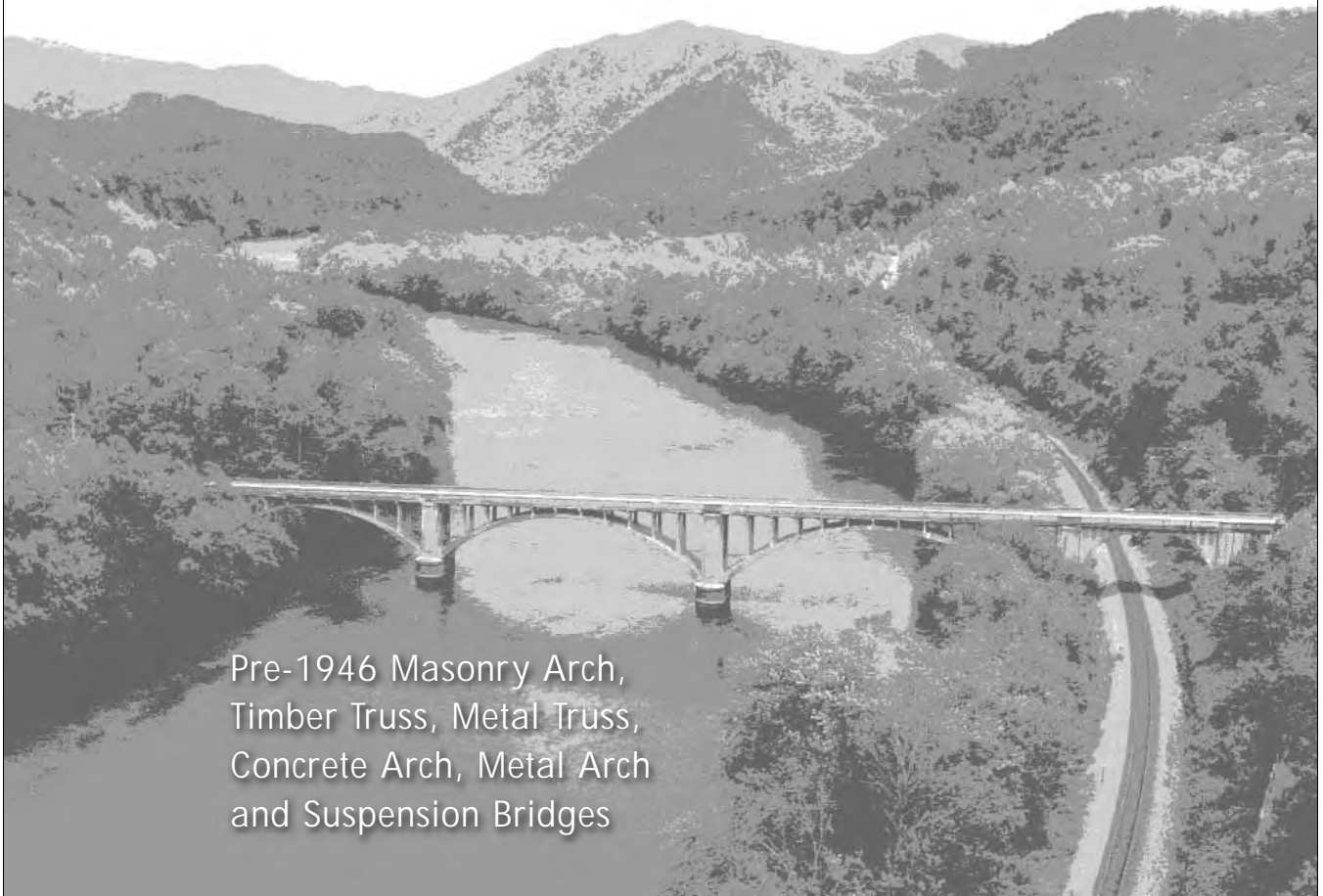
In this publication, with historical context, narrative history, images, and drawings, Martha Carver, a historian with the Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT), addresses those issues and explores an overall bridge history in Tennessee, up to the end of World War II. This publication details TDOT's state-wide survey of vehicular metal truss, timber truss, masonry arch, concrete arch, metal arch, and suspension bridges that have been or are currently located on highways. It discusses the survey's findings, including:

- Historical context of road and bridge construction
- Bridge companies that practiced in Tennessee
- An engineering context
- Information on each bridge that has been determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places

The survey reveals the existence of a surprising number of significant historic bridges and provides a foundation for their preservation. It also provides a detailed context of bridge history in Tennessee that will appeal to not only historians, but also to anyone who has wondered about the history of a bridge in their community.

Front cover photograph: The Wolf Creek Bridge on State Route 9 (US70) in Cocke County, photograph by George Hornal.

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Prepared by Martha Carver  
Historic Preservation Specialist Manager  
Tennessee Department of Transportation, 2008

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Bridges are a natural focal point to travelers. On oft-traveled roads, they serve as mile-markers and seem like friends. Many of us have memories, as we learned to drive, of holding our breath as we met huge trucks always as we crossed a narrow two-lane truss bridge. Other memories include planks rattling as we drove across an old bridge and in my case of walking across dilapidated bridges as the school bus driver took the bus across empty. Bridges evoke images of summer days, wading in the creek and slipping on slate rocks, and swimming holes below the bridge.

However, for many years, most historians did not consider bridges historic resources, except for a few large landmark bridges or covered bridges. With the rapid disappearance of many of the country's older bridges, historians have come to see even small-scale old bridges as increasingly precious. When they are gone, we often feel a sense of loss and betrayal because it feels as if a friend has left us.

In recent years, as bridges became increasingly recognized as a historical resource, the Surface Transportation Act allocated funding through the Federal Highway Administration, matched at an eighty-twenty percent ratio with state money, to be used for historic bridge inventories. Beginning in 1980, the Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT) initiated such a survey. I, a Historic Preservation Specialist with TDOT, was fortunate enough to be selected to conduct the survey.

Though I was primarily responsible for the coordination of the survey and the survey report, other persons in TDOT's Environmental Planning and Permits Division, principally archaeologists and historians, assisted with the fieldwork. These people included Glyn DuVall, Janice Nolen, Rick Ward, Ray Brisson, Margaret Slater, Jeff Durbin, Leo Goodsell, Lea Lewis, Missy McLeod, Tammy Allison, Holly Barnett, and Kristen Broussard. Several people in TDOT's Structures Office assisted, including Joe Scott and his staff, Charlie Hunter, Hollis Tackett, Ed Wasserman, and Clellon Loveall. Wright Aldridge at the Federal Highway Administration and Jim Bryson, while at the Federal Highway Administration and while at TDOT, assisted by frequently reminding me that I needed to complete the survey. George Hornal of TDOT's Aerial Survey Office generously copied historic postcards and other historic images and tried to duplicate them with temporary photographs, often while hanging on the runner of the state's plane in fickle winds. Most of the wonderful photographs in this book are his while all of the mediocre shots are mine.

The State Historic Preservation Office worked with us to identify bridges through its county surveys and frequent consultations. I thank Herbert Harper, Steve Rogers, Ann Toplovich, Richard Tune, Claudette Stager, Elizabeth Straw, and Joe Garrison for their assistance.

I have found that others within state highway departments, at the National Register office, the Historic American Engineering Record, or preservation professionals who deal with historic

bridges form a small but dedicated group of people who are not only willing, but sometimes need, to talk in detail with kindred spirits. I appreciate all those who have shared their opinions, research, and frustrations with me.

The entire staff of the Tennessee State Library and Archives has helped me extensively throughout this survey, and I am profoundly grateful to them. I also want to thank the numerous county historians and local librarians who have assisted.

I have imposed on several individuals to proof and edit. For this I am indebted to Richard Tune, Claudette Stager, Clayton Knowles, Melissa Phillips, and particularly to Dr. C. Van West of the Center for Historic Preservation at Middle Tennessee State University for their assistance.

Linda Gleaves has patiently typed several versions of this publication, beginning on a typewriter and ending on a computer as she approached retirement. I often wonder how much of a factor this project was in her decision to retire. I sincerely thank her.

I, of course, am solely responsible for any mistakes or errors found in this publication.

Martha Carver

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