

FREEDOM BRIDGE  
(Owen County Bridge No. 99)  
Spanning White River, West Fork at  
County Road 590 South  
Freedom Vicinity  
Owen County  
Indiana

HAER No. IN-73

HAER  
IND  
60-FREE.V,  
1-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD  
Northeast Field Area  
Chesapeake/Allegheny System Support Office  
National Park Service  
U.S. Custom House  
200 Chestnut Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19106

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

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(Owen County Bridge No. 99)

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**Location:** The bridge, located on County Road 590 South spanning West Fork, White River, is approximately 0.2 mile west of the town of Freedom, Owen County, Indiana.

**UTM:** 16.551580.4339350  
**Quad:** Freedom Quadrangle  
Indiana - Owen County

**Builder:** Joseph J. Daniels of Rockville, Indiana (original covered bridge). Lafayette Bridge Company of Lafayette, Indiana (eastern iron structure).

**Date of Construction:** Construction of the original covered bridge was completed in 1882. The iron structure (eastern portion) was constructed in 1898.

**Project Owner:** Board of Owen County Commissioners  
Courthouse  
Spencer, Indiana 47460

**Present Use:** Vehicular Bridge

**Significance:** The Freedom Bridge (Owen County Bridge No. 99) is the only remaining Pennsylvania through truss bridge built by the once prolific firm, the Lafayette Bridge Company of Lafayette, Indiana. The structure is unusual for the extension of the twelve-panel pattern to sixteen panels with extra side sections. The through truss retains its original members, including curved portal braces and decoratively latticed portals and guardrail<sup>(5)</sup>. This description applies only to the eastern portion of the bridge as will be discussed. The bridge is of local significance.

**Information:** This documentation was undertaken in accordance with the Memorandum of Agreement between the Owen County Commissioners, the Indiana Department of Transportation, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, the Federal Highway Administration, and the Indiana State Historic Preservation Officer as mitigation prior to the demolition and replacement of Freedom Bridge.

Mr. Joshua C. Goode  
Mr. Jeffrey A. Vlach  
Beam, Longest & Neff, Inc.  
8126 Castleton Road  
Indianapolis, Indiana 46250

**Description:**

The Freedom Bridge is located immediately east of the town of Freedom, Indiana in south-central Owen County. The bridge carries County Road 550 South over the West Fork of the White River. The bridge can be located on the 7.5 minute U.S.G.S. quadrangle for Freedom, Indiana in Section 21, Township 9 South, Range 4 West. The Freedom Bridge carries County Road 550 South across the West Fork of the White River in an east-west direction. The bridge spans the west side of the river's floodplain and bisects the river at approximately a 90° angle. Land use in the immediate area of the crossing is agricultural with an abandoned fishing cabin in the southeast quadrant and tree-lined stream banks in all quadrants except the southwest, where an agricultural field meets the shoreline. To the west is the town of Freedom. The Freedom Bridge allowed direct vehicular access to the town of Freedom and U.S. 31/S.R. 67 from the east side of the West Fork of the White River.

The existing bridge is actually a combination of two separately built structures. From the western abutment the bridge deck stretches approximately 300 feet on two piers which originally served as the foundation to the original covered "Freedom Bridge." A four-span covered bridge spanned the entire watercourse until the eastern section (approximately 300 feet) was replaced by the existing Pennsylvania through truss. The remaining western (covered) section has since been replaced with a bituminous deck leaving only the western abutment and piers from the original structure. The following discussions are divided into western and eastern sections.

**Western Section:**

From 1871 to 1882 only two bridges spanned the White River in Owen County. On March 24, 1882 the Owen County Commissioners entered into an agreement with B. Schweitzer and James Spence to span the White River at Freedom, Indiana. The railroad had already been constructed through Freedom, however the Freedom Bridge was very instrumental in drawing increased trade from Greene County.<sup>(2)</sup>

The Freedom Bridge over the West Fork of the White River was built as a four-span (150 feet each) structure in 1882. Designed by Joseph J. Daniels as a covered Burr Arch, the wooden structure was assembled with yellow poplar and white oak, hand-hewn with a broad ax by "Whip Army",<sup>(7)</sup> and built upon limestone abutments. This was the bridge until 1898, and the western section remained as such until 1966.

The original total bridge length was 615 feet due to overhangs

at each end. In 1898 a government dredging operation caused damage to the center pier of the two eastern spans. The bridge is said to have collapsed on the east end; however, there is no evidence that this collapse occurred. Local residents have also alleged that there were no eastern spans until the dredging operation formed a new channel to the east, thus requiring an extension of the original bridge.<sup>(6)</sup> Research of county commissioner meeting minutes shows this allegation of a new channel requiring a new bridge to be untrue.

The two eastern spans were replaced with the iron structure after the eastern pier was crippled. Stone from the crippled pier was utilized along with oak timber piles to protect the center pier and the east abutment.<sup>(8)</sup>

The two covered spans remaining in the western half of the bridge existed until 1966 at which time the bridge had to be closed to heavy vehicles. School buses at the time were prohibited from crossing the bridge, thereby requiring school children to walk across the bridge to meet the bus on the other side.<sup>(4)</sup> Removal of this western section was ordered by the county commissioners in 1965, and work began in January of 1966. No historical documentation was required for the covered bridge at that time. Indiana University officials took possession of at least one covered span and took it to the old Indiana University Field House in Bloomington. The bridge was transported and stored in individually labeled pieces with the intention to reassemble the bridge and either span the Jordan River (only a few feet wide) or alternately utilize it as part of an outdoor historical museum at Brown County State Park. The field house was torn down, and the bridge pieces were moved to Matlock Farm where it is presumed they have deteriorated.<sup>(1)(4)</sup> While Joseph J. Daniels was Indiana's most prolific bridge builder, and this was a covered bridge, the primary focus of this documentation is the remaining iron structure on the eastern side of the bridge. This is the only portion of the bridge considered eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, since the covered portion of the bridge has long since been removed.

#### Eastern Section:

As previously stated, this portion of the Freedom Bridge is a 304-foot iron Pennsylvania through truss constructed in 1898 by the Lafayette Bridge Company of Lafayette, Indiana. The Owen County Commissioners voted on July 9, 1898 to award contract to the once prolific Indiana firm. Plan "C" of the proposals submitted was the "best bridge for the money."<sup>(5)</sup>

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The Lafayette Bridge Company was contracted to build the iron span for \$5,810.00. Prior to its construction, and as part of a separate contract, the remaining center pier and east abutment were "protected" utilizing stone from the crippled pier and oak timber piles. The eastern end of the iron structure rests on the original limestone abutment while the western end of the iron structure rests on the original center pier.

The typical bridge cross-section has interior dimensions of 16.5 feet in width on the iron structure. The width increases to a 27 foot wide clear roadway on the newer I-beam to the west. The 16.5 foot section serves as the single driving lane. The deck is wood (only on the iron structure).

The following description is taken from Dr. James L. Cooper's HAER-IN inventory card: "Alternating verticals of laced channels and laced double angles divide the through span into sixteen panels. A two-panel side section has been added to [the] standard twelve-panel pattern. The four-panel central section contains a member fabricated of laced double angles which is placed parallel to and midway between the chords in the two most central panels and uses double-intersecting diagonals and counters (with adjustable sub-ties). Each of the two double-panel side sections has double-intersecting diagonals and adjustable sub-ties, too. The side section closest to center also contains the added horizontal member between the chords. Double dye-forged eyebars provide all the diagonals. Riveted to pin-plates, the I-floor beams carry the concrete deck\* with its 16 foot roadway and 13 foot, 6 inches of vertical clearance."<sup>(1)</sup>.

There is no further recorded history of the Freedom Bridge (Owen County Bridge No. 99) over West Fork, White River. A diligent effort was made to determine the historical significance of the bridge. A detailed listing of the references which were researched is provided.

\*Field inspection revealed that the deck has been worn down to bare wooden planks.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Bibliography

1. Allen, Richard Sanders. Covered Bridges of the Middle West. The Stephen Greene Press, Brattleboro, Vermont. 1970.
2. Author Unknown: "Tales of Pioneers, Volume 1." History of Owen County. Owen Litho Service, Inc., Spencer, Indiana, 1962.
3. Cooper, James L., Iron Monuments to Distant Posterity, Indiana's Metal Bridges, 1970-1930. 1984.
4. Gould, George F. Indiana Covered Bridges through the Years. Indiana Covered Bridge Society, Inc., Indianapolis, IN. 1977.
5. HABS/HAER inventory survey card provided by the Indiana Department of Natural Resources, Division of Historic Preservation and Archaeology. 1984.
6. Ketcham, Bryan E. Covered Bridges on the Byways of Indiana.
7. Kline, Dixie. Fact and Folklore of Owen County. Spencer, Indiana. 1976.
8. Owen County Board of Commissioners' Meeting Minutes for years 1882, 1898, 1904, and 1905 which were prepared and maintained in the Owen County Auditor's Office.

B. Libraries

1. Indiana State Library  
Indiana Division  
140 North Senate Avenue  
Indianapolis, Indiana 46204

Topics reviewed included Brides, Covered Bridges, Iron Bridges, Indiana Floods, Freedom, Indiana, White River, Owen County Bridges, Indiana Monuments, and Indiana Historical Bridges.

2. Indiana Historical Library  
315 West Ohio Street  
Indianapolis, Indiana 46202

Topics reviewed included Covered Timber Bridges, Covered Bridges, American Heritage, Outdoor Indiana, and various issues of the Indianapolis Star Magazine.

C. Organizations and Institutions

1. Professor Andrew Seager, Director  
Drawings and Documents Archive  
College of Architecture and Planning  
Ball State University  
Muncie, Indiana 47306
2. Professor James Cooper  
History Department  
DePauw University  
Greencastle, Indiana 46135
3. Mr. Patrick Ralston  
State Historic Preservation Officer  
Division of Historic Preservation and  
Archaeology  
Indiana Department of Natural Resources  
402 West Washington Street, Room 274  
Indianapolis, Indiana 46204
4. Ms. Susan Sutton  
Indiana Historical Society  
315 West Ohio Street  
Indianapolis, Indiana 46202
5. Mr. John Sechrist  
Treasurer-Historian  
Indiana Covered Bridge Society  
725 Sanders Street  
Indianapolis, Indiana 46203
6. Mr. T.B. Warner  
PTW Industries, Inc.  
Indiana Bridge Division  
1810 South Macedonia Avenue  
Muncie, Indiana 47307

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