HAER No. MD-85

~~HAER MD-~~ ~~MD-85~~

HAER
MD
17-BOWI,
3-

GOVERNOR'S BRIDGE
(Patuxent Bridge)
Governor's Bridge Road, across
Patuxent River
Bowie
Prince George's County
Maryland

PHOTOGRAPH

WRITTEN HISTORIC AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
P.O. Box 37127
Washington, DC 20013-7127

HAER MD 17-BOWI, 3-

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

GOVERNOR'S BRIDGE
(Patuxent Bridge)

HAER NO. MD-85

Location: Governor's Bridge Road, crossing the Patuxent River (the border between Prine George's County and Anne Arundel County), Bowie, Prince George's County, Maryland.

Significance: Governor's Bridge is one of only two surviving truss bridges in the county. It also marks the site of a river crossing since colonial times. The name Governor's Bridge is derived from the use of this crossing by two eighteenth century Maryland governors who lived at nearby "Belair".

Description: This is a steel, single-span Pratt through-truss bridge, composed of four panels measuring approximately 105-1/2' in total length and 13'-7" in width. Heavy steel beams, joined by riveted bracing, form the compression members--the basic structure of the bridge--with thin diagonal eyebars in tension. Large I-beams for the inclined end posts and there is a flat-arched portal in a lattice pattern. Sway bracing in an X pattern appears between each panel. The decking is of wire mesh. The bridge is supported by two poured concrete abutments.

History: The metal truss bridge was by far the most common bridge type erected nationwide between 1850 and 1925. A truss bridge is made up of many, relatively small iron or steel members which work together to form interconnecting structural triangles. In resisting or carrying loads, each member within the structure is put in either tension (pulling apart) or compression (pushing together). The stiff struts or posts, which act as the main members, are capable of acting in tension or compression. The thin rods or bars withstand tension only. The use of these various members determine the specific truss form. All-metal Pratt and Warren Trusses, both developed in the 1840s, became the most commonly used bridge forms by the early twentieth century, due to their durability and versatility. The basic Pratt truss was patented in 1844 by Thomas and Caleb Pratt and is distinguished by heavy vertical beams or members acting in compression and thin diagonal eyebars acting in tension. The through truss, as seen here, carries its load level with the bottom cords (as opposed to a deck truss where the trusses

appear below the road bed), and employs lateral bracing between the top chords.

Although a common bridge type, Governor's Bridge is one of only two surviving truss bridges in the county. The other, the 1907 Duvall Bridge which crossed the Patuxent River on the lands of the patuxent Wildlife Research Center, is no longer open to traffic. The current bridge was erected in 1912; the manufacturer is unknown. This has been the site of a river crossing, however, since colonial times. The bridge joins Prince George's with Anne Arundel County. The name, "Governor's Bridge," is derived from the use of this crossing by two Maryland governors who lived at nearby "Belair", namely, Samuel Ogle (1731-32, 1733-42, 1747-52), and his son, Benjamin Ogle (1798-1801). They undoubtedly encountered this crossing while en route to the capital in Annapolis.

Sources:

Comp, Allen T. & Donald Jackson. Technical Leaflet 95-Bridge Truss Types: a guide to dating and identifying, History News, Vol. 32, No. 5, May 1977, published by the American Association for State & Local History.

Virta, Alan. Prince George's County; a pictorial history, Norfolk: Donning Publishing Company, 1984.

Ware, Donna. Marlyand Historical Trust Historic Sites Inventory Form, Governor's Bridge (Patuxent Bridge), prepared October 1983.

Historian: Catherine C. Lavoie, HABS, May 1992.