

FAYETTE STATION BRIDGE
(Bridge No. 1776)
County Route 82 spanning the New River
Fayette Station
Fayette County
West Virginia

HAER No. WV-60

HAER
WVA
10-FAYST,
1-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD
National Park Service
Northeast Region
Philadelphia Support Office
U.S. Custom House
200 Chestnut Street
Philadelphia, P.A. 19106

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Location: County Route 82 spanning the New River
Fayette Station
Fayette County, West Virginia

UTM: 17.493230.4212780
Quad: Fayetteville, West Virginia

Date of Construction: 1889

Engineer: Wrought Iron Bridge Company and Virginia Bridge
and Iron Company

Present Owner: West Virginia Department of Transportation
Division of Highways
Capitol Complex, Building 5
Charleston, West Virginia 25305

Present Use: Closed

Significance: Fayette Station Bridge was the first bridge to cross
the New River in Fayette County, West Virginia. The
bridge was a result of the road building process when
it was a local issue instead of the jurisdiction of the
state and federal levels of government. The bridge
eliminated the necessity for travelers to cross the
dangerous New River in the gorge.

Project Information: The project places on-site a reconstructed one-lane
bridge with a 4.4 m (14.5 ft) wide roadway and a 1.5
m (5 ft) wide sidewalk on each side of the structure.
All efforts will be made to save as many original
members of the existing structure as deemed
feasible. The new bridge will resemble the existing
bridge as much as possible.
Karen A. Ebert, Historian
West Virginia Division of Highways
1900 Kanawha Boulevard, East
Charleston, West Virginia 25305

Bridge Description

The Fayette Station Bridge was constructed in 1889 by the Virginia Bridge and Iron Company of Roanoke, Virginia. The existing bridge closed by Commissioner's order dated March 23, 1978 and was the first bridge to cross the New River in the vast New River gorge. It was constructed from wrought iron and consists of one main Pennsylvania Petit truss span with a length of 84.9 m (278 ft 8 in). Two approach spans flank the main spans with lengths of 17.8 m (58 ft 5in) and 24.5 m (80 ft 4 in) respectively. The substructure consists of full height stone abutments and two stone piers. The laminated wood deck has a 4.7 m (15 ft 5 in) clear width. The structure is in very poor condition and has barricades placed on both sides preventing access to the bridge. The bridge has an approximate 14.9 m (49 ft) clearance over the normal water elevation. The original color of the bridge is unknown.

The Pennsylvania Petit was a common bridge truss type at the end of the nineteenth century. The introduction of iron bridge technology in the mid nineteenth century added a new dimension to bridge building in America. They were practical and could carry more weight. Fayette County contracted bridge companies to construct the Fayette Station Bridge. The most frequently cited builder is the Virginia Bridge and Iron Company of Roanoke, Virginia, which was probably contracted to fabricate the bridge. However, the bridge plate (which has long been absent) shown in a historic photograph of the bridge suggests that the Wrought Iron Bridge Company of Canton, Ohio may have been the builder. It was common practice for bridge companies to purchase the components, size them in a local shop, and contract with a builder to assemble the bridge on site.¹ Both of these companies were prolific out of state bridge companies which contributed to the bridgescape of West Virginia. It was not until the creation of the State Road Commission in 1933 that the bridge became the property of the state of West Virginia.

Initial Development

Located in south-central West Virginia, Fayette County was formed in 1831 from parts of Kanawha, Greenbrier, Nicholas, and Logan counties. At the time of the county's formation, Fayette was in the domain of the state of Virginia. The county was one of the leading bituminous coal producing entities in the state due to its location in the New River coalfield and its superior quality smokeless coal.

Initially, development of the New River area was thought to be linked to river travel which would internally improve the nature of transportation in America.² Virginia had grandiose dreams of devising a canal which would establish trade by linking the ports of Chesapeake Bay with the Ohio River. The Allegheny Plateau created grave problems to the statesman of the Old Dominion when the New River proved to be unavigable and their plans eventually were abandoned. Years later, the realization of their dream materialized when the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad connected the Chesapeake Bay and the Ohio River. The natural resources laid untapped prior to the completion of the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad.³ Instantaneously, many small towns appeared along the tracks of the Chesapeake and Ohio which ultimately opened the county to industrial exploitation.

Introduction of Transportation Modes Into The New River Gorge

Railroads

Transportation improvements began to influence the growth of the New River Gorge when the Chesapeake and Ohio Railway trunk line joined in January of 1873 at Hawks Nest.⁴ The Chesapeake and Ohio constructed the second trunk line through West Virginia. The Chesapeake and Ohio Railway tracks cross Fayette County in a northeast-southwest direction with a total length of 57 miles.⁵ The introduction of the railroad supplied a solution to the transportation difficulties that opened the way for industrial, social, and economic development in the middle New River Valley. Within several months, the growth was self-evident in the built environment. Coal mines and sawmills, and ultimately, small communities, that have come to characterize life in The Mountain State, blossomed along the edge of the tracks. The New River gorge, the coal industry, and the Chesapeake and Ohio Railway represent integral parts to the whole history of the region.

The Chesapeake and Ohio Railway developed as a result of the consolidation of the Virginia Central Railway with the Covington and Ohio Railroad. Prior to the Civil War, Virginia established its Board of Public Works, which was primarily responsible for improving transportation within the state and incorporated under the title of Covington and Ohio Railroad Company.⁶ After the commencement of the war, West Virginia seceded from the state of Virginia. Since the state had divided, the Board of Public Works naturally divided. The landholdings within their respective boundaries split, therefore, work on the

Covington and Ohio ceased in 1861. In order to resume work on the railroad, the Virginia General Assembly and West Virginia Legislature chartered for the consolidation of the separate corporations under the title Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad Company in 1868.⁷ The Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad and an eleven man syndicate headed by Collis P. Huntington took control. The Virginia Central Railway Company entered into contract to undertake construction since they previously completed 192 miles of track from Richmond to Covington.⁸ In 1866, construction started again in hopes of connecting the eastern Virginia ports to the Ohio River at Huntington. Subsequently, the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad Company sold under foreclosure and reorganized as the Chesapeake and Ohio Railway in 1878.⁹

The preferred alternative for the route for the railroad was simple because of the severe topographic barriers found in the New River gorge. The only feasible location was along the banks of the New River. After finalizing the route, the Chesapeake and Ohio began purchasing right-of-way through the properties.

Fayette Station Road and Bridge

As early as 1790, Virginia constructed a road for wagon travel to the Kanawha River that passed through the gorge. The old road crossed the gorge south of Manns Creek and continued up the western slope of the gorge. A forward thinking man, Peter Bowyer, established a ferry service at this point which is presently the town of Sewell. In 1806, the Virginia General Assembly granted Bowyer the opportunity to operate the ferry, thus becoming the first business in Fayette County. This service became a vital link to transportation networks that intersected with the New River Gorge. This was the first documented settlement within the gorge and became known as Bowyers Ferry. With this exception, human impact was almost non-existent prior to the completion of the railroad into the valley and settlement seemed to instantaneously grow with improved transportation.¹⁰

At the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the railroad was the king and the foundation of transportation systems in the United States.¹¹ However, many early politicians believed the building of roads was the realization of internally improving transportation. But to the early statesmen's dismay, enthusiasm for the railroad as the national transportation mode outweighed the desire for highway building. Support eventually switched to road building as the primary focus for improving transportation challenging the status of the railroad in the 1880's.¹²

FAYETTE STATION BRIDGE (Bridge No. 1776)
HAER WV-60 (Page 5)

The road building process in the mid-nineteenth century resembles the process used today. Initially, West Virginia adopted Virginia's road laws without virtually any change. In 1881, West Virginia enacted statutes enabling the county courts to appoint a road surveyor in order to construct and maintain new roads.¹³ Each county was divided into precincts with the exception of incorporated towns. Taxpayers could pay two-thirds of their road taxes by working on the roads. The law also required every man over twenty-five and under fifty years of age to work at least two days on the road between April and September. This act of legislation led to the basic infrastructure of the West Virginia Division of Highways, although power shifted from a purely local issue to the state and federal levels of government.

Fayette Station Road was an early effort in the improvement of the county which was naturally divided by the deep and narrow New River Gorge. Fayette, the town for which the road gets its name, sat on the banks of the New River. Martin Blume, a local landowner, founded the town when he established the Fayette Coal and Coke Company early in the development of the coalfield.¹⁴ The community began as a mining camp and eventually developed into a significant mining operation. Blume took advantage of the access the railroad provided to coal markets after the Chesapeake and Ohio bought right-of-way through Blume's property and completed the main line. Like most coal companies in the West Virginia, a town grew around the mine which was necessary to viably support the miners due to the isolation dictated by the nature of the steep and rocky gorge. A post office opened at Fayette in 1875. The Chesapeake and Ohio built a depot and Fayette Station became a flag stop on the mainline which served fourteen passenger trains per day.¹⁵ Located across the river was Fayette's sister town, South Fayette, which was also a mining camp that provided auxiliary needs to Fayette. South Fayette reaped many of the same benefits as Fayette and over the years many coal operators occupied the sites of Fayette and South Fayette.

Building roads in the New River Gorge was an extremely labor intensive undertaking for Fayette County during the last portion of the nineteenth century. The steep slopes were difficult to work, but Fayette Station Road managed to meander its way into the bottom of the gorge no later than 1889.¹⁶ The first portion of the road was constructed on the south side of the gorge terminating at South Fayette and primarily consisted of a switchback trail.¹⁷ Originally, the road was designed to connect the residents of Fayetteville, the county seat of Fayette County, to the outside world via the Chesapeake and Ohio mainline.¹⁸ The lack of spur line access connecting the Chesapeake and Ohio trunk line to

FAYETTE STATION BRIDGE (Bridge No. 1776)

HAER WV-60 (Page 6)

Fayetteville and the limited road systems caused great difficulty to travelers. Many people who had business in Fayetteville, which were from other places, took the Chesapeake and Ohio local train to Fayette Station, and then traveled the road to the county seat. On each side of the river, the tracks traveled in separate directions. The Fayette Station side (the eastern bank) traveled in a northeastern direction, whereas the South Fayette side (the western bank) traveled in a southwestern direction. Since the road terminated at South Fayette, the residents of Fayette Station were burdened with crossing the river to get to the road. The demand for easier access to the county seat led to the contract of the construction of the Fayette Station Bridge in 1889¹⁹. This was the first bridged crossing of the New River and for approximately ten years was the only crossing between Cotton Hill and Thurmond. For the residents of Fayette Station and the passengers of the Chesapeake and Ohio, this provided access to the county seat without the time-consuming and potentially dangerous crossing of the New River and connected the towns which grew on opposite banks. Sometime after the construction of the bridge, the second portion of Fayette Station road climbed its way out of the gorge on the eastern slope in the same switchback fashion. When the State Road Commission was created in 1933, all roads in the state were taken under its control and given a route number. Fayette Station Road became known as County Route 82 and was paved in 1928 making it an all-weather road.²⁰

Today, only remnants are left to attest to the once thriving town with the exception of the bridge. In 1977, the bridge was closed to vehicular and pedestrian traffic due to the completion of the New River Gorge bridge on U.S. 19.

On November 10, 1978 legislation was passed enacting the establishment of the New River Gorge National River. The legislation stated that the park was set aside ". . . for the purpose of conserving and interpreting outstanding natural, scenic, and historic values and objects in and around the New River Gorge and preserving as a free-flowing stream an important segment of the New River for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations."²¹

ENDNOTES

¹Ohio Department of Transportation, The Ohio Historic bridge Inventory, Evaluation, and Preservation Plan (Columbus: Ohio Department of Transportation, 1983), 49.

²Paul Marshall and David Fuerst, "New River Symposium: Inventorying the New River", National Park Service. 1982, 61.

³Paul Marshall, "A Cultural Resource Project: New River Gorge National Park", National Park Service. 1981, 170.

⁴Paul Marshall, 170.

⁵Ray Hennen, D.P. Teets, R.C. Tucker, "West Virginia Geological Survey Fayette County Report," (Wheeling, WV: Wheeling New Litho Company, 1919), 9.

⁶Fisk and Hatch, "Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad Financial Resources," Charleston, WV, 1871), 13.

⁷Chesapeake and Ohio Railway Company Official Industrial Guide and Shippers' Directory. Issued by the General Freight Department, circa 1906, 9.

⁸Fisk and Hatch, 14.

⁹Chesapeake and Ohio Railway Official Industrial Guide and Shippers' Directory, 9.

¹⁰Paul Marshall and David Fuerst , 66.

¹¹Bruce Seely, Building the American Highway System (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), 8.

¹²Bruce Seely, 8.

¹³"The State Road Commission of West Virginia, July 1, 1936 to June 30, 1937" (Charleston, WV: Tribune Printing Company, 1937), 14.

¹⁴Melody Bragg, Thurmond and Ghost Towns of the New River Gorge (Glen Jean, WV: Gem Publications), 66.

FAYETTE STATION BRIDGE (Bridge No. 1776)
HAER No. WV-60 (Page 8)

¹⁵Fayette County Chamber of Commerce, History of Fayette County, West Virginia (Oak Hill, WV: Fayette County Chamber of Commerce, 1993), 32.

¹⁶Paul Marshall, 161.

¹⁷Fayette County Chamber of Commerce, 32.

¹⁸Fayette County Chamber of commerce, 32.

¹⁹Melody Bragg, 67.

²⁰National Park Service, "Environmental assessment for Fayette Station: Design for Parking Area and Comfort Stations," (Glean Jean, WV: New River Gorge National River/National Park Service, nd), 33.

²¹National Park Service, 1.

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B. Historic Views

Various photographs taken at various times. The photographs were taken by
the West Virginia State Road Commission and the National Park Service
after construction of the Fayette Station Bridge. All of the photographs are
in a 3 1/2" X 5 1/2" black-and-white format. The State Road Commission
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Park Service photographs are located in the Photograph Inventory Files,
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C. Maps

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Map of the New River Coal Field found in The Smokeless Coalfields of West
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United State Geological Survey. Fayetteville, WV 15' Quadrangle, 1928.
Located at the West Virginia Division of Highways.

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HAER No. WV-60 (Page 10)

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HAER No. WV-60 (Page 11)

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