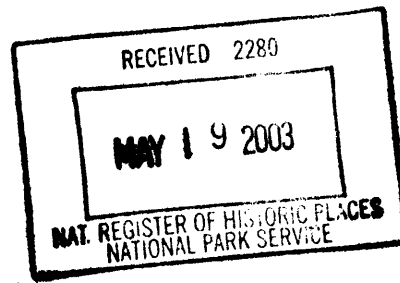


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service



581

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Connecticut Avenue Bridge
other names Taft, William Howard Memorial Bridge

2. Location

street & number Connecticut Avenue, NW above Rock Creek not for publication
city or town Washington, D.C. vicinity
state District of Columbia code DC county _____ code 001 zip code 20008

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments).

Shirley M. Buchanan / DC SHPO 5/13/03
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

DC Historic Preservation Office
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments).

Shirley M. Buchanan / DC SHPO 5/13/03
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

DC Historic Preservation Office
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register.
 See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register.
 See continuation sheet.
- Determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register.
- other (explain): _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

Patricia Andrews 7/3/2003

Connecticut Avenue (Taft) Bridge
Name of Property

Washington, D.C.
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
0	0	buildings
0	0	sites
1	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	Total

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)
N/A

number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register
0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

TRANSPORTATION: Road-related

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

TRANSPORTATION: Road-related

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

LATE 19th and 20th CENTURY REVIVALS:
Classical Revival

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete
walls Concrete

roof _____
other Cast iron lampposts
Concrete sculpture

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad pattern of our history.
- B** Property associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets)

Area of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

ENGINEERING

Period of Significance

1897-1907

Significant Dates

1897; 1907; 1936

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)
N/A

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Morison, George A.
Casey, Edward Pearce

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets)

Previous documentation on files (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

Name of Property _____

County and State _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of Property _____

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

1	1 8 Zone	3 2 2 2 4 0 Easting	4 3 0 9 8 1 0 Northing	3			
2				4			

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Betty Bird
Organization Betty Bird Associates date 11/1991; updated 4/2003
street & number 2607 24th Street, N.W. telephone 202 463-2033
city or town Washington, D.C. state _____ zip code _____

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

- X A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

- X Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional Items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO)

name _____
street & number _____ telephone _____
city or town _____ state _____ zip code _____

Paperwork Reduction Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et. seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Connecticut Avenue (Taft) Bridge

Name of Property

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Description Summary:

The Connecticut Avenue Bridge, constructed from 1897 to 1907, is a 1341-foot long, 128-foot tall monolithic concrete arched structure spanning Rock Creek gorge at Connecticut Avenue. The 52-foot wide bridge features sculpted lions molded of concrete and decorative cast iron lampposts embellished with eagles. Although the roadway was widened and the walkways diminished in 1936, this change has not affected the overall form and appearance of the bridge. +

General Description:

The Connecticut Avenue Bridge is a viaduct extending Connecticut Avenue across the Rock Creek valley. Its roadway is level with Connecticut Avenue, one of the diagonals in Washington's street plan running approximately NNW to SSW through the northwest quadrant of the city into Maryland. Although the bridge itself is located in Rock Creek Park, other roads extend under the bridge. Cathedral Avenue swings under one arch and Beach Drive under another; Rock Creek runs under a third.

The Connecticut Avenue Bridge is composed of seven semi-circular barrel arches, five of which extend over the Rock Creek gorge. The five central arches are 150-feet wide; the two abutment arches at either end of the bridge are 82 feet wide. The mass within the haunches of the five central arches is reduced by three stilted arches springing from the voussoirs at either side of the arch.

Decorative elements are secondary to structural expression. The bridge deck is articulated as a projecting parapet above the arches. A simple rectangular coping is embellished by dentils and corbelled brackets supporting a concrete balustrade. A metal rail extends between the balusters, which are spaced 16 feet apart. Attached piers with quoins separate the arches. Piers between the central arches and the abutment arches are doubled in width. The piers extend above the deck to form bases for ten-foot high T-shaped, cast iron lampposts surmounted by eagles. Four recumbent 12-foot long sculpted concrete lions rest on pedestals flanking the ends of the bridge.

The surface appearance of the bridge stems from the aggregate sand used in its construction. The main face work in an ocher color while the cast stone blocks forming the quoins, keystones, voussoirs, balusters and other decorative elements are a gray granite color. Cast blocks forming these elements utilized granite gneiss quarried nearby. All of the pre-cast trim elements have a bush-hammered finish so that the blocks resemble cut stone. +

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Summary Statement of Significance:

The William Howard Taft Bridge, constructed from 18987 to 1907, represents the culmination of 19th-century bridge design, exemplifying the transition from utilitarian structures to artistic monuments. Originally known as the Connecticut Avenue Bridge since it carries Connecticut Avenue over the Rock Creek valley, the bridge was renamed in memory of William Howard Taft after his death in 1930. The only masonry bridge designed by noted engineer George S. Morison, the Taft Bridge was the largest monolithic concrete bridge of its time. Edward Pearce Casey was the supervising architect. The bridge incorporates innovative concrete sculpture by Roland Hinton Perry, designer of the Neptune Fountain at the Library of congress, and cast iron lampposts designed by Ernest C. Bairstow. The Taft Bridge meets National Register Criterion C because it represents Morison's work in concrete and because it is an excellent example of a monolithic concrete bridge. Because of its influence on subsequent bridge construction in the District of Columbia and its role in the aesthetic development of bridge design, it also meets Criterion C as an embodiment of high artistic values. The period of significance for the bridge is restricted to its years of construction, 1897-1907. +

Resource History and Historic Context:

The engineering significance of the Taft Bridge is as great as its design influence. At the time it was constructed, it was considered to be the largest concrete bridge in the world.¹ The Taft Bridge has long been esteemed as one of the finest concrete bridges in North America. William Watson wrote the following assessment in 1927: "Considered either from the viewpoint of the engineer or the architect, this work must be conceded to be one of the finest if not the best executed concrete bridge yet built."² David Plowden, writing in 1974, regarded the Taft Bridge and the Walnut Lane Bridge in Philadelphia, completed in 1908, as the two outstanding examples of concrete bridge design in the early 20th century.

Unlike most concrete bridges of the period, which utilized the Melan arch, the Taft Bridge was constructed entirely of concrete with no metal reinforcement. The Melan arch, developed in Austria around 1892, consisted of structurally independent steel I-beams encased within concrete along the intrados of the arch. The method was widely used in concrete bridge construction at the turn of the century.³ The Melan system "heralded a new and unimaginative era of bridge design" since Melan arch bridges for the most part simply copied the conventions of masonry

¹ Zach Spratt, "Rock Creek's Bridges," p. 123 and Waldon Fawcett, "The Largest Concrete Bridge in the World," p. 87.

² William Watson, *Bridge Architecture*, p. 201.

³ Spratt, 119.

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design.⁴ The Taft Bridge provided a model for the structural expression of monolithic concrete construction. While full-centered arches were considered the most appropriate arch for monumental bridge construction, the weight of masonry in the haunches does not correspond with the curve of the arch. Spandrels consisting of walls supporting small arches that eliminate part of the weight solve this problem. The Taft Bridge prototype of smaller arches within haunches reappears locally in the Key Bridge (1923) and in the Walnut Lane Bridge (1908), Tunkhannock Viaduct (1915), and Westinghouse Memorial Bridge (1931) in Pennsylvania.

Because the time and expense of masonry construction did not recommend itself to public spending, Morison's innovative design for the Taft Bridge won out over alternatives incorporating the Melan arch. In 1897 Congress invited three eminent engineers to present proposals for a bridge over Rock Creek at Connecticut Avenue. Five designs were submitted. W. H. Breithaupt and L.L. Buck presented proposals for Melan arch bridges; Morison proposed the masonry arch, which won first prize.⁵

The principal considerations leading to this decision were that the proposed bridge, being so inconspicuously located on a fine residence avenue, and in full view of a large area, within which was the National Zoological park, should be of a monumental character, and the masonry type, above all others, fulfilled this condition... The history of metallic viaducts is one of continual outlay for maintenance and repair, with a frequent ending by the replacement of the structure by one of masonry. The advantage of economy of first cost in the metallic structure is thus largely offset by the necessary annual outlay for its proper preservation, and where the cost of masonry and metallic viaduct can be brought within the same class of figures, as in this case, the decision in favor of the more substantial construction is easily justified.

Two minor changes were made to the competition design. Instead of nine masonry arches, only seven span Rock Creek. In addition, as an economy measure, molded concrete blocks were substituted for the granite originally proposed. While work on the foundations began shortly after Morison won the competition, construction proceeded slowly because of the congressional appropriations process. The arches were not constructed until 1904, one year after Morison's death. Concrete work for the bridge took place entirely on site. Stone quarried in the vicinity was crushed to form the aggregate for cast stone facing on the arches, quoins, moldings and railing. These blocks were then used as forms and infilled with concrete. Ernest C. Bairstow, who was responsible for the stonework at the Lincoln Memorial, designed cast iron lampposts.⁶ In addition to its innovative construction, the Taft Bridge incorporated new methods of sculpture

⁴ Plowden, 298.

⁵ Clayton B. Fraser, "Behemoths: The Great River Bridges of George S. Morison," 389.

⁶ James Goode, *The Outdoor Sculpture of Washington, D.C.*, 109-110.

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as well. Roland Hinton Perry, designer of the Neptune Fountain at the Library of Congress, used pre-cast concrete to sculpt the lions at either end of the bridge.

George S. Morison (1842-1903) was one of the foremost American engineers of the late 19th century. He designed virtually all the railroad bridges over the Missouri River, making westward expansion of the railroads possible, and engineered the longest steel structure in the world and the longest cantilevered span in America. Morison developed a prototype railroad bridge comprised of high fixed span trusses supported by pneumatically founded piers that became the standard for westward railroad expansion across the Missouri River.⁷ Considered the father of consulting engineers, he virtually single-handedly shifted opinion in favor of the Panama location for the Isthmian Canal.

The son of a New England Unitarian minister, Morison was educated at Exeter, Harvard and Harvard Law School. He was a Phi Beta Kappa and won the Bowdoin Prize for the best legal dissertation. Less than a year after he began practicing law, Morison resigned from a New York law firm to become a civil engineer, a career for which he was prepared only by general mathematical training and mechanical aptitude. In 1867 Morison went to work for the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad under the French émigré engineer, Octave Chanute. The railroad was then constructing the first bridge across the Missouri River; a river so turbulent that many thought it could not be bridged. Morison supplemented his practical training with a rigorous program of self-education comprised of studying journals, reports and construction drawings, and conducting field observation. By 1871, Morison was Chief Engineer for the Detroit, Eel River, and Illinois Railroad. In 1873, he became Resident Engineer for the eastern Division of the Erie Railway where he designed his first bridge. This bridge, a replacement for the Portage Viaduct over the Genesee River in Portageville, New York, represents the culmination of metal viaduct design and is often called the “exemplar of this characteristically American form.”⁸ From 1875 to 1885, Morison was a management consultant, advising clients about railroad operations and management. A man of strong convictions, Morison grew dissatisfied with his operations consulting and construction practice and resolved to devote himself exclusively to engineering design. He subsequently designed the Bellefontaine and Leavenworth bridges over the Missouri River and the Burlington, Alton and Memphis Bridges over the Mississippi. Morison served as trustee of the Western Society of Civil Engineers and president of the American Society of Civil Engineers. He was chairman of the Board at Phillips Exeter and endowed a Morison Professorship of Latin. He was also a member of various advisory boards including the Manhattan Bridge Commission, the Board of Engineers for the New York and New Jersey Bridge Board, and the Isthmian Canal Commission.

⁷ Fraser, “Nebraska City Bridge,” 358.

⁸ Plowden, 71.

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Morison exhibited the tension between professionalism and commercial practice inherent in the developing engineering profession during the late 19th and early 20th century. His temperament and humanist background enabled him to articulate these concerns. As a young man, Morison wrote in his journal that he “wish[ed] to make the profession of an engineer truly a liberal profession and through it to rise to science and philosophy, raising it with me, rather than to prostitute my life to mere money making, and to look upon professional advancement simply as the readiest means of acquiring wealth.”⁹ The Taft Bridge represents Morison’s professionalism at its best because his solution expanded not only the vocabulary for monumental bridges, but also the possibilities of concrete as a material.

In contrast with Morison’s wide-ranging activity, the career of Edward Pearce Casey (1864-1940) centered on Washington and government architecture. Casey was the son of General Thomas L. Casey and the grandson of General Silas Casey, head of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. After graduating from Columbia with a degree in Civil Engineering, Casey studied architecture for three years at the Ecole des Beaux Arts. Although he maintained a practice in New York, he is best known for his work in Washington. He was appointed supervising architect to oversee the completion of the Library of Congress and oversaw the interior work for five years. In conjunction with William Burr of Columbia University, Casey won the 1900 competition for the Memorial Bridge. Although their scheme was never built, it served as a mode for subsequent memorial bridges throughout the country. Casey was the architect for several civil war memorials including the Grant Memorial (1905) and Commander Barry Monument (1910) in Washington, and the New York State monuments at Antietam (1920) and Gettysburg (1924). He also designed Continental Memorial Hall for the Daughters of the American Revolution Building (1904) in Washington.

Casey’s role in the design of the Taft Bridge is not entirely clear. Although he is listed as the architect for the bridge, sources contemporary with the bridge’s construction list him in the same sentence with the job foreman and the Engineer Commissioner of the District of Columbia.¹⁰ Given Casey’s role in supervising and completing projects conceived by others at the Library of Congress as well as his engineering degree, he would have been the ideal person to oversee the Taft Bridge after Morison’s death.

The Taft Bridge exemplifies both Morison’s and Casey’s ideas about concrete and about artistic bridges. As the 19th century drew to a close, interest in reaching beyond the utilitarian in bridge design grew. In his 1898 paper, entitled “Masonry” Morison discussed concrete, which as then widely used in Europe. Morison maintained that masonry provided the only material and structural system appropriate for memorial bridges.

⁹ Fraser, 7.

¹⁰ “Connecticut Avenue Bridge,” *Engineering News*, March 26, 1908, 327-328.

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It is one material which is available for really permanent work. It should be massive and it must be well done. It is the most expensive form of good construction; it belongs to the class of works which are commonly associated with architecture rather than engineering. It is the business of the engineer to build tools to produce practical results; he will, therefore, often select some lighter and cheaper form of construction which will give more immediate return. The one material adapted to monumental work is masonry; honest substantial masonry; not a veneering of cut stone which covers a skeleton and gives a massive external appearance...an external shell which is simply a false covering, however convenient it may be in a tool, does not belong to a monument...A piece of monumental masonry which does not appear to be in a state of rest will sooner or later cry in its trial and then everybody will see what is wrong...decoration and ornamentation must follow, not precede.¹¹

Masonry, therefore, the most permanent form of construction which man can make, the only material suitable for those works which passing beyond the requirement of tools, assume a monumental character, and enduring from one epoch to another, transmit to future ages the actual work of today; masonry respected for its antiquity, admired for its enduring futurity, is the subject...¹²

Steel did not offer the permanence or expressive structure required for monumental work. Morison cited the survival of Roman bridges as models of endurance. Concrete embodied most of the advantages of masonry construction while overcoming several of its drawbacks. Masonry construction was expensive and labor intensive. Furthermore, each element of a masonry bridge was subject to distinct internal stress. If one failed, the entire structure was endangered. Concrete, however, was inexpensive and the monolithic nature of concrete construction made the bridge one structural unit, equivalent to an object sculpted from a single piece of stone.

Casey was also a proponent of concrete construction, as much for its practical aspects as for its philosophical appropriateness. In an article headed by a photograph of Taft Bridge, Casey wrote about masonry bridge design in 1913 in *The American Architect*. He states,

Three important elements of design, that is the curve of the arches, the number of arches and the symmetry of the abutments, having been determined properly, the design will already be good in an architectural sense; but there are many other features which must often be determined, such as the treatment of the rings, or other faces of the arches, the treatment of the spandrels, imposts, piers, cornices, rails, etc.; but any treatment of these features may often with propriety be omitted, and the bridge left absolutely plain.¹³

¹¹ George S. Morison, *Masonry*, 1309.

¹² Morison, 1281.

¹³ "Some Recent American Masonry Bridges," *American Architect*, September 24, 1913, 119.

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Casey recommended concrete because of its economy, permanence and monolithic quality. He argued against introducing any imitation of masonry joints, recommending instead that exposed surfaces be bush-hammered.

The Connecticut Avenue Bridge in Washington, D.C. is probably the most conspicuous, if not the only example, of a combination of both block and monolithic concrete used in bridge construction...here the main mass of the structure is monolithic without reinforcement. The mass concrete is of a decided buff tone, due to the color of the sand used in its composition, and where it is exposed on the plain surfaces of the piers, spandrels, abutments, and arch soffits, forms a very pleasing contrast to the gray color of the masonry, caused by the use of powdered gneiss instead of sand.¹⁴

Along with the 1900 competition for the Memorial Bridge across the Potomac, the Taft Bridge established the artistic standard for bridge construction in the District of Columbia. Because of technology developed for railroad bridges, steel truss bridges could be constructed quickly and economically. These utilitarian structures could not satisfy the civic aspirations of the City Beautiful movement. Surviving Roman aqueducts and bridges illustrated that masonry structures had a permanence that more utilitarian steel spans, subject to rust and corrosion, could never achieve. As Appleton P. Clark stated,"

While from ancient times bridges have been the object of architectural and sculptural adornment, still it was only recently that those about Washington have received any attention of this nature. Heretofore, only engineering requirements had been considered.¹⁵

Because of the success of the Taft Bridge, arched masonry structures became the established model for bridges in Rock Creek Park.

The appearance of the Taft Bridge has changed little over the years. Only two alterations have taken place, neither of which affects the essential form and integrity of the bridge. In 1936 the roadway was widened, diminishing the width of the walkways crossing the bridge. In 1965, the District Bridge Commission and Fine Arts Commission hired sculptor Renato Luchetti to restore and weatherproof the concrete lions at either end of the bridge. The weatherproofing, however, did not prevent further deterioration and in 1994, the lions were removed from the bridge and placed in storage for safekeeping. The city hired Professional Restoration, Inc. to reconstruct the four lion sculptures and re-install them on the approaches to the bridge. The reconstruction

¹⁴ Ibid, 121.

¹⁵ Appleton P. Clark, "History of Architecture in Washington," 513.

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process took several years, but the reconstructed lions were finally returned to their pedestals in July and August of 2000.

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Verbal Boundary Description:

The bridge runs north-south on Connecticut Avenue N.W., approximately 250 feet south of the intersection of Calvert Street and Connecticut Avenue. The boundary is the bridge structure itself.+

Boundary Justification:

The boundaries have been drawn to encompass the bridge structure only.+

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number _____ Page _____

SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD

NRIS Reference Number: 03000584

Date Listed: 7/3/2003

Property Name: Connecticut Avenue Bridge

County: State: DC

Multiple Name

This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.

Patide Andrus

for Signature of the Keeper

7/3/2003

Date of Action

=====
Amended Items in Nomination:

Section 10 of the registration form does not provide an acreage figure for the nominated bridge. The nominated bridge includes 1.6 acres. The form is amended to add this information.

DISTRIBUTION:

- National Register property file**
- Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)**