

7. Description

Condition

excellent
 good
 fair

deteriorated
 ruins
 unexposed

Check one

unaltered
 altered

Check one

original site
 moved date _____

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Spencerville Covered Bridge, erected in 1873, spans the St. Joseph River on a minor road in DeKalb County. The bridge stands in a broad flood plain which requires the roadway approaches to be constructed of earth embankments and piers. In 1916 the original wood piers near the west abutment were replaced with poured concrete piers. In 1920 the concrete approach and additional waterway were installed on the west end. The original wood piers on the east end were replaced with concrete in 1922.

The bridge itself is a Smith Type 4 truss. The Smith truss, a variation on the Howe truss, was patented by Robert W. Smith of the Smith Bridge Company in Toledo, Ohio. The Smith truss rarely had vertical posts. The timbers between the two chords were braces set at a 45 degree angle and counterbraces set a 65 degree angle. Type 4 was the strongest, as it had further reinforcements of both double and single sets of diagonals. The Spencerville bridge has additional vertical metal rods.

The bridge is 146 feet long, according to the minutes from the September 1, 1873 session of the DeKalb County Commissioners. It is constructed of Michigan White Pine, as were most Smith bridges. Smith bridges were frequently precut, framed or assembled loosely, disassembled, and then shipped to the site for assembly.

The board and batten siding of the Spencerville Bridge is painted red. Openings in the sides near the east end enable a driver going east to see approaching traffic on the road. The side openings are protected by wood awnings. The siding stops short of the upper chord, allowing light and ventilation into the structure. The bridge is sheltered by a gabled roof, which was covered with new cedar shingles in 1970.

The gabled roof projects beyond the ends of the bridge, supported by knee bracing, and sheltering the entrances. This bracing is sheathed in board and batten siding, which continues a short distance inside the bridge, protecting the end panels from the elements. A sign above each rectangular opening says, "Spencerville 1873."

In 1954 the sills and flooring were replaced. The Spencerville Covered Bridge has been well maintained over the years, and is in good repair.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400–1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500–1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600–1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700–1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900–	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

Specific dates 1873 **Builder/Architect** John McKay

Statement of Significance [REDACTED]

The Spencerville Covered Bridge is significant as the only surviving covered bridge in northeastern Indiana, and is one of only six remaining Smith trusses in the state.

From 1820 to 1922, some 600 covered bridges were constructed in Indiana, of which only 98 remain. The Smith truss was one of the less common types, with only twenty of them ever constructed in Indiana. The most common were the Howe and Burr trusses.

The Smith truss, a variation of the Howe, was patented by Robert W. Smith of the Smith Bridge Company (Toledo, Ohio) in 1867, and again with improvements in 1869. It is said that none of the bridges followed his patents exactly, as he continued to make improvements with each job. Bridges with the Smith truss were built in Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Oregon. Although Smith trusses are considered to be weaker than some others, the Spencerville bridge has survived continued use and several floods.

Spencerville was an important commercial center for the southeastern part of the county. The Spencerville grist and sawmills were located on the west side of the river. An 1863 map indicates that a bridge was located at the site of the present bridge, suggesting that this was a strategic location providing access to the grist and sawmills. The first legal notice for the Spencerville Covered Bridge appeared in the July 10, 1873 Waterloo Press. The contract was awarded to John A. McKay, who was one of the agents for the Smith Bridge Company. McKay had worked with Alpheus Wheelock on constructing the DeKalb County Courthouse ten years earlier, and on the Dills Covered Bridge, also a Smith truss, two miles upstream in 1868. The Spencerville bridge was essentially completed in December of 1873. This bridge, like many of the bridges from the Smith Bridge Company, was probably assembled from parts that were cut in Toledo and shipped.

The Spencerville Covered Bridge is in good repair, and is still in use. As the only covered bridge surviving in this part of the state, it is a significant resource.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Commissioners and Court Records
 Gould, George E. Indiana Covered Bridges Thru the Years. Indianapolis: Indiana Covered Bridge Society, 1977.
 History of DeKalb County Indiana. Chicago: Interstate Publishing Co., 1885.
 Smith, Barbara Clark Covered Bridge Centennial. Auburn: Vanguard Publishing Co., 1973.

10. Geographical Data

~~UTM NOT VERIFIED~~ O'Neal 9/12/82

Acreege of nominated property Less than one acre
 Quadrangle name Saint Joe, IN

~~ACREAGE NOT VERIFIED~~
 Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UMT References

A	1 6	6 7 4 6 10	4 5 7 1 8 10	B			
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
C				D			
E				F			
G				H			

Handwritten notes: '8' above '6 7 4 6 10' and '8 OK' above '4 5 7 1 8 10'. 'O'Neal' written across the grid.

Verbal boundary description and justification

See Continuation Sheet

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	code	county	code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Mary Pifer Mountz and John Martin Smith

organization _____ date December 1, 1979

street & number 507 E. Houston and P.O. Box 666 telephone (219) 357-4220 & 925-4560

city or town Garrett and Auburn state Indiana

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature [Signature]
 title State Historic Preservation Officer date February 4, 1981

For HCERS use only	
I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register	
<u>Lynn A. Keebe</u>	date <u>2/2/1981</u>
Keeper of the National Register	
Attest: <u>Linda Hunt McCallister</u>	date <u>3/23/81</u>
Chief of Registration	

**United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For HCERS use only
received
date entered

Continuation sheet

Item number 9

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Auburn DeKalb Vanguard, July, 1973. Special edition commemorating Spencerville Covered Bridge Centennial.
Vanguard Publishing Company, Auburn, Indiana

United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

For HCRS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet

Item number 10

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LEGAL DESCRIPTION

SPENCERVILLE COVERED BRIDGE

DEKALB COUNTY, INDIANA

Part of the North one-half (1/2) of Section Thirty-three (33), Township Thirty-three (33) North, Range Fourteen (14) East described as follows:

Beginning at the intersection of the North right of way line of DeKalb County Road 68 and the East low water mark of the St. Joseph River, thence East along the North right of way line of DeKalb County Road 68 a distance of fifty (50) feet, thence South sixty (60) feet to the South right of way line of DeKalb County Road 68, thence West along the South right of way line of DeKalb County Road 68 to a point fifty (50) feet west of the West low water mark of the St. Joseph River, thence North sixty (60) feet to the North right of way line of DeKalb County Road 68, thence East along the North right of way line of DeKalb County Road 68 to the place of beginning.