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United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

JAN 04 1994

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form

NATIONAL  
REGISTER

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 an 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 Bedens Brook Bridge

other names/site number Opossum Road Bridge; County Bridge #E-02-01

2. Location

street & number Opossum Road, 0.1 mile south of Orchard Road  N/A not for publication

city or town Montgomery Township  vicinity

state New Jersey code 034 county Somerset code 035 zip code 08553

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, 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.)

[Signature]  
Signature of certifying official/Title

12/20/93  
Date

Assistant Commissioner for Natural & Historic Resources/DSHPO

State of Federal agency and bureau

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

[Signature]  
Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the 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

Patrick Ardens

2/17/94

Bedens Brook Bridge  
Name of Property

Somerset County, NJ  
County and State

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
(Check as many boxes as apply)

**Category of Property**  
(Check only one box)

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

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

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

Contributing	Noncontributing	
		buildings
		sites
<u>1</u>		structures
		objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

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

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

Early Stone Arch Bridges of Somerset County, NJ

N/A

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Transportation: road-related (vehicular)

Transportation: road-related (vehicular)

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Other: stone arch bridge

foundation Stone

walls Stone

roof N/A

other Stone

**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 patterns of our history.
- B Property is 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 N/A  
(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.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Engineering

Period of Significance

1822

Significant Dates

1822

Significant Person

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

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Rowland, John (probable mason)

Narrative Statement of Significance

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

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 file (NPS): N/A

- 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:

Bedens Brook Bridge  
Name of Property

Somerset County, NJ  
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of Property less than one acre

Rocky Hill Quad

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 

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Zone Easting Northing

3 

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Zone Easting Northing

4 

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 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 Marvin A. Brown

organization Cultural Resource Consulting Group date 7/23/92

street & number 54 Woodbridge Avenue telephone (908) 985-4380

city or town Highland Park state NJ zip code 08904

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

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

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 County of Somerset

street & number County Administration Building telephone \_\_\_\_\_

city or town Somerville state NJ zip code 08876

**Paperwork Reduction Act 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 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 Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

(Jan. 1987)

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## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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*Bedens Brook Bridge, Somerset County, New Jersey*

### DESCRIPTION

The Opossum Road Bridge is a double-arched, camelbacked, random rubble bridge, approximately 54 feet long and 15 feet wide, which was built across Bedens Brook in 1822. Its stonework, parapets, arches, and approaches are intact and its few alterations are part of the continuous maintenance of a structure that still functions as a bridge. It therefore retains its integrity of design, materials, and workmanship. It further retains its integrity of location, setting, feeling, and association. It has not been moved, closed to traffic, or replaced. Its setting is still wooded and rural, and it continues to provide a dry roadway over a small stream for foot traffic and for conveyances, one at a time.

The bridge's irregular-sized stones are of local argillaceous stone. They are joined by mortar, some of which has been replaced by or covered with modern cement. The main body of the structure, which is about 54 feet long, rises to a camelback shape at its center. From outside wall to outside wall the bridge is about 15 feet wide. Its asphalt roadway is about three feet narrower, however, for its parapet walls are each about 18 inches wide.

The bridge's wing walls angle out from its main body. The southwest wing wall is about 17 feet long; the southeast wing wall is about 15 feet long. The parapet walls at the termination of these wing walls are about 22 inches wide. The width of the bridge at the widest point between the outside edges of these wing walls is about 27 feet. At its northwest, the bridge has a wing wall about 23 feet in length; at its northeast the wing wall is about 21 feet long. The out to out measurement at the ends of these wing walls is about 31 feet, the width of the parapet walls about 24 inches. At three of the four approaches to the bridge there are modern guardrails which terminate at the start of the wing walls. There is no guardrail at the southeast; rather there is an asphalted surface unto which a car can pull completely off the road.

The height of the bridge at the crest of its hump is about 18 feet above the bed of Bedens Brook. The two arches are about 9 1/2 feet high and about 20 feet wide. Their barrels appear to have been plastered over at one point, most of the plaster having fallen away. Their rectangular voussoirs are between 16 and 18 inches long. The pier between the arches is about five feet wide, as are the abutments to either side. There are no cutwaters at the pier. Four iron rings are affixed to the bridge's east side, approximately three to four feet above the water. One ring is set in each abutment and two are set next to each other at the pier. At the west side there are two square C-shaped brackets, also set about three to four feet up. One is at the north abutment, the other at the pier. The location of a third bracket, at the south pier, may be

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*Bedens Brook Bridge, Somerset County, New Jersey*

marked by a brick mortared into the stone. The function of these rings and brackets is not known, but they have been used to tie up boats.

A badly weathered rectangular datestone, set vertically midway on the inside face of the west parapet, reads "BEDENS BROOK/5 M To P/1822/JWR/AHK." Because of deterioration, this entire message is no longer legible, although it is clearly readable in earlier photographs (Brecknell 1972:29). Bedens Brook is the name of the watercourse the bridge crosses. "5 M To P" is shorthand for "5 Miles To Princeton," which community is approximately that distance to the south. The middle line of the marker is the date the bridge was built. Its last line appears to be a maker's mark, probably of the man who carved the stone; it is a small, stylized set of initials, the uprights of the "H" shared by the "A" and the "K." JWR is carved in larger letters. It probably stands for John Rowland. At the Cat Tail Brook Bridge a stone marker dated 1825 identifies the masons as John Rowland, Jr. and Thomas Stout. The bridges appear quite similar in construction and are not far from each other; the Cat Tail Brook Bridge stands approximately 4 1/2 miles to the northwest, in Hillsborough Township just over the Montgomery Township line. John Rowland probably worked on both.

The bridge has bulged and cracked in places. Modern mortar used to patch it is white and cement based. Asphalt now covers its roadway. The structure retains its integrity, however, having been relatively little altered over time beyond necessary maintenance.

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*Bedens Brook Bridge, Somerset County, New Jersey*

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Opossum Road Bridge is significant for its engineering under Register Criterion C, for it embodies a type, period, and method of construction. Built in 1822, it is the second earliest dated bridge surviving in the county and is one of the few surviving stone arch bridges known to have been built in Somerset County, and the state, during the late 18th and early 19th centuries. It is part of the initial major stage of growth of an established and reliable transportation network in the county, the construction of roads with solid watercourse crossings. Its arched form, method of construction, and materials are representative of the earliest surviving stone arched bridges in the county; they are similar to those of other early surviving stone bridges in the county, particularly the Kingston, Cat Tail, and Bridgepoint bridges. Like those bridges, the Opossum Road Bridge retains its parapet walls and its central hump. The bridge was almost certainly built by a local mason (with the initials JWR) who would have served as its engineer as well. Built of local stone, its adornment provided by its neatly laid voussoirs, it is a good example not only of local bridge building methods, but of stone construction in general in the county. Indeed, it is one of the most imposing and intact of the few early stone structures of any type that survive in the county.

The bridge was built in 1822, according to a stone marker set in the inside surface of its west wall. It is the second oldest dated bridge in the county; the Kingston Bridge at the Lincoln Highway was built in 1798. It is notable in having a combination datestone/mile marker, and the initial JWR at the bottom probably identifies its builder, possibly John Rowland, who is known to have constructed a similar bridge nearby in 1825.

No documentary evidence has been located that is known with certainty to refer to the construction of the bridge or its builder. In 1822, high water and ice caused an estimated \$4,740 to county bridges (Kudless and Kudless 1977:314). This may have led to a freeholder directive in August of that year for the rebuilding "by Stone Arch" of a damaged bridge in Montgomery (Kudless and Kudless 1977:314)." Whether that bridge was the Opossum Road Bridge, however, cannot be determined.

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*Bedens Brook Bridge, Somerset County, New Jersey*

## MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES

Beers, F. W.

- 1873 *Atlas of Somerset County, New Jersey*. New York: Beers, Comstock, and Cline. On file at Rutgers University, Alexander Library, Department of Special Collections and Archives.

Brecknell, Ursula

- 1972 *Montgomery Township: An Historic Community, 1702-1972*. Published by the Montgomery Township, New Jersey, Bicentennial Committee. Pamphlet in files of Cultural & Heritage Commission of the County of Somerset, Somerville, New Jersey.

Craig, Robert W.

- 1982 National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form - Kingston Mill Historic District [Princeton, South Brunswick, and Franklin Townships, Mercer, Middlesex, and Hunterdon Counties, New Jersey]. On file at the Office of New Jersey Heritage, Trenton.

Karschner, Terry

- 1974 National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form - Bridgepoint Historic District [Montgomery Township, Somerset County, New Jersey]. On file at the Office of New Jersey Heritage, Trenton.

Kudless, Carol Ann and Joseph C. Kudless

- 1977 *Minutes of the Meetings of the Justices and Chosen Freeholders for the County of Somerset*. Somerville, N.J: Somerset County.

McCabe, Wayne T.

- 1976 National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form - Cat Tail Brook Bridge [Hillsborough Township, Somerset County, New Jersey]. Revised by Terry Karschner, Office of Historic Preservation. On file at the Office of New Jersey Heritage, Trenton.

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*Bedens Brook Bridge, Somerset County, New Jersey*

Otley, J. W. and J. Keily

1850 Map of Somerset County, New Jersey. Camden: Lloyd Vanderveer. On File at Rutgers University, Alexander Library, Department of Special Collections and Archives.

## Research & Archaeological Management

1989a Somerset County Cultural Resource Survey: Phase I Report. Prepared for the Somerset County Cultural and Heritage Commission, Somerville, New Jersey. On file at the Office of New Jersey Heritage, Trenton.

1989b Somerset County Cultural Resource Survey: Phase II Report. Prepared for the Somerset County Cultural and Heritage Commission, Somerville, New Jersey. On file at the Office of New Jersey Heritage, Trenton.

1989c Somerset County Cultural Resource Survey: Summary Report. Prepared for the Somerset County Cultural and Heritage Commission, Somerville, New Jersey. On file at the Office of New Jersey Heritage, Trenton.

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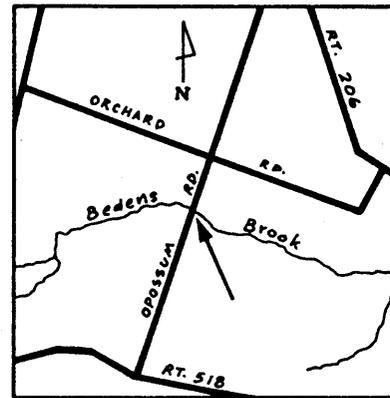
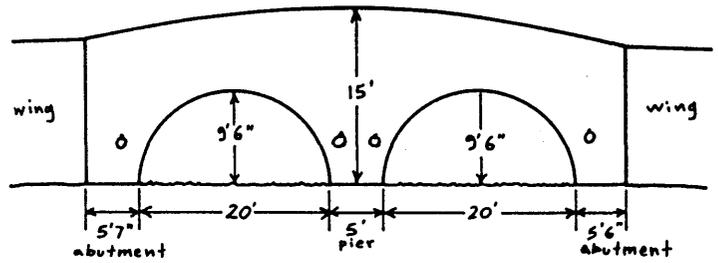
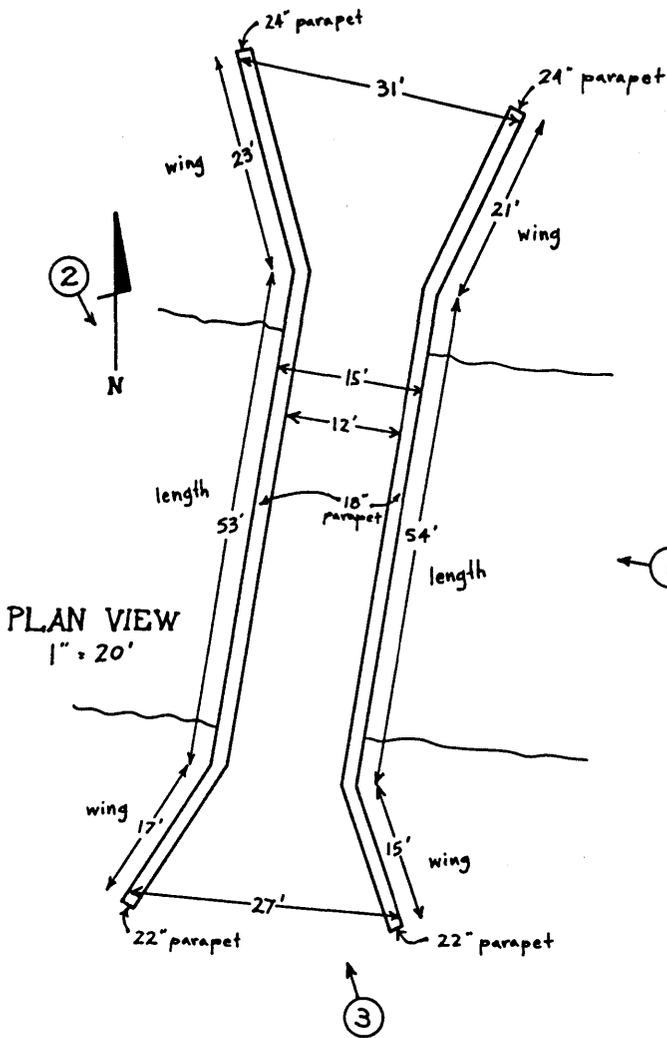
*Bedens Brook Bridge, Somerset County, New Jersey*

## VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The nominated resource occupies the property upon which the main body of the bridge and its wing walls and abutments stand.

## BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The boundaries of the nominated resource are the same as the boundaries of the property owned by Somerset County. The county owns the bridge and the property upon which it stands; there is no deed which records the boundaries of that property.



• OPOSSUM ROAD BRIDGE •  
MONTGOMERY TOWNSHIP, SOMERSET COUNTY, N.J.  
OCTOBER 1990