

NATIONAL  
REGISTER  
**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in "Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms" (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

**1. Name of Property**

historic name      Watson Mill Covered Bridge and Mill Historic District  
other names/site number      Broad River Covered Bridge

**2. Location**

street & number      Watson Mill State Park  
city, town      Comer      (x) vicinity of  
county      Oglethorpe & Madison      code      GA 221 & GA 195  
state      Georgia      code      GA      zip code      30629

( ) not for publication

**3. Classification**

**Ownership of Property:**

- ( ) private
- ( ) public-local
- (x) public-state
- ( ) public-federal

**Category of Property**

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

**Number of Resources within Property:**

	<u>Contributing</u>	<u>Noncontributing</u>
buildings	0	1
sites	8	0
structures	3	2
objects	0	0
total	11	3

Contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 0

Name of related multiple property listing: n/a



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## **6. Function or Use**

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### **Historic Functions:**

INDUSTRY:mill

TRANSPORTATION:road-related

### **Current Functions:**

TRANSPORTATION:road-related

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## **7. Description**

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### **Architectural Classification:**

NO STYLE

### **Materials:**

<b>foundation</b>	Stone/Concrete
<b>walls</b>	wood
<b>roof</b>	wood
<b>other</b>	

### **Description of present and historic physical appearance:**

The Watson Mill Covered Bridge and Mill Historic District is located in Watson Mill State Park, five miles southeast of Comer, Oglethorpe and Madison Counties, in northeast Georgia. The district includes the 1885 wooden covered bridge, the site of a mill complex, an early 20th-century dam, and ruins of a power plant. Parts of the historic 1800-foot raceway also survive as does the Watson homesite, and possibly the site of a blacksmith's shop, and a community store. The district is in a very rural setting along the South Fork of the Broad River within a much larger state park. The road crossing the bridge is a public road.

The covered bridge crosses the South Fork of the Broad River. It is 19' wide, 19' high from the floor to the ridge line, and 229 ft. long. Made of rough sawn heart pine, the bridge is built using the Town lattice truss design and rests on four piers, three of which are local stone and one of concrete. The sides are covered with pine boards and battens. The floor is covered with 3" x 8" timbers, and there are longitudinal runners of the same size timbers that provide a smooth surface for traffic and minimize wear on the floor. The sills are made of 6" x 12" timbers and the floor joists are 4" x 8" in size. The roof is split wooden shingles. There is a one foot overhang on the sides and ends of the bridge (photographs 1-5).

The Watson Mill Covered Bridge is the longest of the 16 covered bridges remaining in Georgia and is listed as No. 10-109-02 in the "World Guide to Covered Bridges," published by the National Society for the Preservation of Covered Bridges, Inc., 1972 edition. The bridge is still in use with clearance restricted to passenger cars and light trucks.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
**Continuation Sheet**

Section 7

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The site of a former mill complex is located south of the bridge on the south side of the river. Former milling operations included a grist mill (which also contained a wool carding factory), a sawmill, a blacksmith's shop, and a cotton gin. The mill complex was either destroyed or dismantled with the development of the early 20th-century power plant project. A few grist mill pier supports remain. The exact location of the cotton gin, sawmill, and blacksmith's shop, as well as a related community store have not been documented at this time, although their general locations are indicated by informants and available historical records.

The Watson house was located on a high hill just behind and south of a current park office. The house and supposedly the community store burned in 1904. In 1990, archaeological testing of the Watson house and well site recovered a small percentage of mostly turn-of-the-century artifacts including, charred wood, alkaline glazed stoneware, wire nails, glass, and plain whiteware. The overall artifact count was fairly low suggesting that either the Watson house remains were not directly intersected, or that later alterations to the landscape such as road or power plant construction may have obliterated most of the remains.

During c. 1906-1907, a power plant, raceway, and concrete dam were built to produce electric power for a cotton mill 12 miles away in Crawford. A c. 1906 stone dam crosses the river about 30 feet downstream from the bridge. The dam was reinforced with metal in the 1980s (photograph 6,7).

The raceway is made out of stone and earth. It starts on the south side of the river, adjacent to the dam, and runs in the direction of the river downstream for over 600 yards to the power plant. The mill race has been coated with gunnite below the water level to preserve it (photograph 8). There are rock steps which lead from the raceway level down to the first level of the power plant. A historic roadbed runs alongside the raceway.

The power plant (now ruins) had been built from stone and brick and measures 20 x 40 feet. Some masonry building materials may have come from the ruins of the grist mill. The power plant ceased operation in 1954 and was eventually dismantled. All that remains of it is a portion of brick footing, concrete walls, and a large penstock (photographs 9-11).

The historic district is located within irregular river valley setting with a steep hill to the south and more gradual sloping to the north of the bridge. Much of the surrounding land is located within the Watson Mill State Park which includes hiking trails, campsites and undeveloped river land.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

**Section 7**

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Three noncontributing resources are located within the historic district--a park office building, and two foot bridges--and could not be drawn out of the district.

**8. Statement of Significance**

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally     statewide     locally

**Applicable National Register Criteria:**

A     B     C     D

**Criteria Considerations (Exceptions):**     N/A

A     B     C     D     E     F     G

**Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions):**

Archaeology-Historic  
Engineering  
Industry  
Transportation

**Period of Significance:**

1868-1907

**Significant Dates:**

1868-1896 - operation/construction of the mill complex, Watson's house  
1885 - construction of the bridge  
c. 1906-1907 - construction of the dam, raceway, power plant

**Significant Person(s):**

n/a

**Cultural Affiliation:**

n/a

**Architect(s)/Builder(s):**

W. W. King - built covered bridge

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section 8

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**Significance of property, justification of criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above:**

**Narrative statement of significance (areas of significance)**

The Watson Mill complex is significant in archaeology-historic/non-aboriginal and industry because it has the potential to yield information through further archaeological investigation that could answer questions about the industrial history of the property. These unanswered questions include finding the exact location of the sawmill, blacksmith's shop, cotton gin, and community store, and investigating the known sites of the grist mill, power plant, and the Watson house. The location of these known sites are suggested through physical features, i.e. foundations, historical records, and informants; however, the design and function of these structures are not fully documented. This information could help explain what size and extent were these milling operations, when they were constructed, and when and how they were destroyed. Archaeological investigation could also reveal how the entire mill complex was interrelated functionally and physically. The potential for further archaeological information is evident from the artifacts already retrieved from the area reputed to be the location of the Watson house and well. Archaeological testing recovered samples of charred wood, alkaline glazed stoneware, wire nails, glass, and whiteware. Further archaeological investigation would be useful in understanding the history and development of the entire district, and the activities associated with it. It would also document the change from water power to hydroelectricity. This research would help in our understanding of Georgia's historic rural mill complexes, most of which are now represented only by historical documentation and the archaeological record (few intact complexes, compared to how many there use to be), and few of which have been fully investigated. All of these sites have the potential to yield information related to the history of the late 19th-century milling operations in Georgia and to early 20th-century electrification. However, the overall archaeological potential of the entire district maybe compromised to some degree, by the early 20th-century power plant construction, agricultural cultivation, and by county and state park road construction.

Note: An early 20th-century aerial photograph of the property shows various buildings located near the covered bridge. These structures were probably associated with the power plant and have since been destroyed. These buildings might yield further information about early 20th-century hydro-power operations. However, we were unable to fully document this information at this time, and no formal archaeology has been done in this area.

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section 8

---

The district is significant in engineering because it contains the covered bridge, the ruins of the historic mill complex, operated from 1868 to 1904 by Gabriel Watson, the c. 1906-1907 dam and power plant ruins, and the connecting raceway. The covered bridge is an excellent example of the patented Town lattice truss design, one of only a few covered bridge forms used in the United States. The bridge was constructed by a Georgia-born builder, W. W. King, son of a freed-slave. The bridge is 19' wide, 19' high at the center of the roof ridge, and 229' long. The truss design creates a lattice pattern of planks crisscrossed at an angle of 45 to 60 degrees, fastened together with wooden pins at each intersection. The sills are 6" x 12" timbers on masonry piers, floor joists are 4" x 8" in size. The exterior is covered with board and batten siding, and a wood shingle roof. This system of bridge building could be quickly built by carpenters and was structurally sound in order to support horse-drawn and later motorized traffic. The Watson Mill Covered Bridge is the longest of the 16 covered bridges remaining in Georgia. Of the remaining bridges, eleven use the Town lattice truss design.

The district also contains an intact dam, raceway, and ruins of a power plant which illustrate early 20th-century water-power engineering. These structures are characteristic of turn-of-the-century, small-scale rural efforts to tap water power for generation of electricity. The power plant was documented by Historic Engineering Record Survey in 1974.

The complex is significant in transportation because it features a rare surviving element of Georgia's early system of roads and bridges: the covered bridge. Built by W. W. King and funded by the county in 1885, the bridge has survived a century with only minor repairs and restoration efforts. Covered bridges were built almost entirely of wood (some with masonry piers, metal roofs) and covered in order to protect the wood from the elements. The covered bridge was a 19th-century phenomenon used until the turn-of-the-century, after which steel and iron became the primary building material. The bridge is significant at the state level because it is one of only 16 remaining covered bridges in Georgia.



National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section 8

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**National Register Criteria**

These areas of significance support this district's eligibility under National Register Criteria A, C, and D.

Criteria A

Watson Mill Covered Bridge and Mill Historic District meets Criteria A because it is associated with the events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history. The site of the mill complex and power plant ruins represents early industrial development in Oglethorpe and Madison Counties. The 1868-1904 milling site was an active grain, wool, and cotton ginning complex operated by Gabriel Watson. The c. 1906-1907 power plant ruins, raceway, and dam illustrates a once active power generating facility that supplied electrical power to a nearby cotton mill in Crawford. The power plant operated until after the late 1940s. The district is also associated with 19th-century transportation history of the state, exemplified by the covered bridge.

Criteria C

The district meets Criteria C for the Watson Mill Covered Bridge that represents the type of engineering and bridge design commonly used during the late 19th century. The 1885 bridge was built by W. W. King, using the Town lattice truss design. The truss design was patented in 1820 by Ithiel Town a Connecticut architect. The pattern was Town's first truly American design. The bridge design consists of a web of light planks crisscrossed at an angle of 45 to 60 degrees, forming a lattice, and fastened together with wooden pins or trunnels at each intersection. It is the most popular design for covered bridges and one that could be quickly built by carpenters. The Watson Mill Covered Bridge is one of only 16 remaining covered bridges in Georgia. The district also represents the surviving elements of a dam, a raceway, and a power plant which are historic engineering works associated with water power.

Criteria D

The property meets Criteria D because the surrounding area contains archaeological potential from the historic/non-aboriginal time period. The proposed historic district contains ruins of a historic mill complex, and community store which operated from 1868 - 1904. The Watson homeplace, and sawmill were also built during this timeperiod. A c. 1906-1907 power plant ruins, raceway, and dam are located within the district boundaries. These sites have the potential to provide

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section 8

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information concerning late 19th-century and early 20th-century industrial operations found in northeast Georgia.

**Period of significance (justification, if applicable)**

1868-1904 - operation/construction of the mill complex  
1885 - construction of the bridge  
1886 - construction of Watson's house  
c. 1906-1907 - construction of the dam, power plant, raceway

**Contributing/Noncontributing Resources (explanation, if applicable)**

Contributing

3 - structures (covered bridge, raceway, dam)  
8 - sites (former grist mill, cotton gin, sawmill, blacksmith's shop, community store, Watson's house and well, roadway, power plant)

Noncontributing

1 - building (park office)  
2 - structures (foot bridges)

**Developmental history/historic context (if applicable)**

County deed records indicate that a mill complex already existed at the South Fork of the Broad River shoals when Gabriel Watson purchased the property. The deed transaction shows that Everett and Watson (no first names listed) purchased the property from Robert A. Fleming of Augusta in 1868. Both Watson and Everett were residents of Oglethorpe County and partners in the purchase of the mill site. The deed was not recorded until November 14, 1871. The deed describes the property as having "fine water power, one fine grist mill for wheat and corn, mill house contain gin three and a half stores--two setts of...stones, one wool machine in the same building, one two story water gin all in good repair with store house...".

A second deed transaction dated November 1871 suggests that William Everett died sometime after September 1868 but before October 1870. Legal complaints were brought against the Everett estate and in order to satisfy debts of the estate, lands owned jointly by Everett and Watson were to be sold. This included the "Mill Tract," as it is referred to in the deeds, on the South Fork of the Broad River. Apparently, Gabriel Watson reacquired or retained the "Mill Tract," although the deed records showing this were not located.

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section 8

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The 1880 manufacturing schedule (U.S. Census Bureau) listed a flour and grist mill at Watson Mills. Corn and wheat were ground at the mill, which had an invested capital of \$6000. The mill, which employed three men, was powered by a 18 ft. wooden water wheel with a 20 hp. capacity. Two hundred barrels of wheat flour, 432,000 pounds of corn meal, and 30,000 pounds of feed were produced annually at the mill.

The 1880 population schedule (U.S. Census Bureau) for Oglethorpe County in the Pleasant Hill District listed Gabe Watson, age 56 and his wife Victoria, age 40. They had nine children, ages six months to 19 years old, in their household.

The 1894 Moss Map of Oglethorpe County shows a building marked "Watson Shoals" at the shoals near the bridge, and marked "G. Watson" at the location of the mill immediately south of the bridge.

A newspaper interview with Mrs. Bert Watson Sanders, the youngest surviving child of Gabriel and Victoria Watson, appeared in the Daily News of Athens on April 19, 1968. In this interview, Mrs. Sanders indicated that the mill was a wooden framed structure standing four and one-half stories tall (counting the basement). The basement was used for making furniture while the east side of the mill was for carding wool. A cotton gin was located several yards downstream and a sawmill was in front (waterside) of the mill. All milling activities were water powered. She remembered that a blacksmith shop was located on the hill in front of the mill, although the exact location is uncertain. Mrs. Sander's description indicates that the mill structure, gin, and sawmill were close to each other, suggesting that the head race and tail race were both somewhat short. She stated that the Watson home (three stories tall, including the basement) was located "across the croquet grounds" and surrounded by oak, pine, and hickory. A large community store stood "directly in front of the house." Mrs. Sanders said that fire broke out in December of 1904 destroying the Watson house and "the nearby" (presumably the community store).

Apparently the mill building and gin did not burn as a 1905 plat shows the mill and gin still present on the site. The property at Watson Mill was purchased in 1905 by L. Frank Edwards of Athens who had built a cotton mill 12 miles away in Crawford. Edwards built a dam at the head of the falls, a raceway, and a power generating plant to produce electricity for his cotton mill. At that time the grist mill and cotton gin may have been torn down, and masonry materials reused for the raceway and power plant. The mill race extended about 600 yards downstream to the electric power generating plant. The plant ceased operation in 1954 and was eventually dismantled.

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section 8

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A 1942 Soil Conservation Service aerial photograph shows the area surrounding the Watson Mill Bridge to be in cultivation. Prominent terraces are evident on the hillside southwest of the bridge. Several structures are evident close to the bridge. These probably were associated with the power plant and perhaps destroyed by later road or state park parking lot construction.

The Watson Mill Bridge was constructed in 1885 by W. W. King for the sum of \$3,228. W. W. King, and his father, Horace King, a former slave, built a number of covered bridges in Georgia. The bridge straddles two counties, as the county line officially runs down the middle of the South Fork of the Broad River.

The bridge is designed in a Town lattice truss design. This design was created and patented in 1820 by Ithiel Town, a Connecticut architect. The bridge design consists of a web of light planks crisscrossed at a 45 to 60 angle, in a lattice pattern and fastened together with wooden pins or trunnels at each intersection (Exhibit A). The truss design, "could be built by the mile and cut off by the yard." It was the most popular design used for covered bridges.

In the minutes of an Oglethorpe County Commissioners meeting, May 5, 1885, the inspection of the new bridge is recorded. The Commissioners found it to have been "completed in accordance with the original plan and specifications, and some respects better considerably than specifications called for. We further find said bridge 28 1/2 feet longer than originally contracted for. We also find upward of 90 bench feet of rock and masonry more than was originally contracted for. We also find the weatherboarding on said bridge dressed which was not required by the original contract. We also find the approach to said bridge is on a new and improved plan which was not embraced in the original contract. All of the above named work we find to have been absolutely necessary to complete the bridge upon the plans originally contemplated and add greatly to the value of said bridge."

In 1970, the Georgia Department of Natural Resources acquired the area along with 140 acres of land and established Watson Mill Covered Bridge State Park in an effort to preserve the bridge and interpret milling history.

The bridge was restored in 1972 by the State Highway Department at a cost of \$86,000. This work included replacement of weak or rotted timbers with treated pine, new siding, and a new roof. The former roof was metal which had replaced the original wooden shingle roof.

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

**Section 8**

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Originally, the length of the bridge was 236 feet and was reduced to 229 feet during restoration.

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**9. Major Bibliographic References**

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Agnew, David T. and Bogle, James G. "Watson Mill Covered Bridge and Mill Site." Historic Property Information Form, 1976. On file at the Georgia Dept. of Natural Resources, Historic Preservation Section.

Rhodes, Thomas J. "Watson Mill Covered Bridge." Historic Property Information Form, 1983. On file at the Georgia Dept. of Natural Resources, Historic Preservation Section.

Wood, Karen G. "Archeological Investigations at the Watson Mill Bridge State Park, Oglethorpe County, Georgia." 1990. On file at the Georgia Dept. of Natural Resources, Historic Preservation Section.

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 #
- (x) recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #17.30933.376677

Primary location of additional data:

- (x) State historic preservation office
- ( ) Other State Agency
- ( ) Federal agency
- ( ) Local government
- ( ) University
- ( ) Other, Specify Repository:

Georgia Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):

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**10. Geographical Data**

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**Acreage of Property** approx. 23 acres

**UTM References**

- A) Zone 17 Easting 308380 Northing 3766690
- B) Zone 17 Easting 308340 Northing 3766940
- C) Zone 17 Easting 308820 Northing 3766920
- D) Zone 17 Easting 308860 Northing 3766640

**Verbal Boundary Description**

The nominated property is just that part of the state-owned park property which includes the known historic and archaeological features associated with the covered bridge, the adjacent mill operation complex, the raceway and power plant ruins, and the Watson homesite. The district begins from a point east of the power plant, follows the northern edge of the river, past the dam and covered bridge (with allowance to include the north end of the bridge and abutment), continues along the west edge of the river, to a point south of the state park entrance road, follows the park road to a point east of the park office, to a point southwest of the power plant, and ends at the power plant. The district does not include the entire park. The boundaries are shown by a solid black line drawn to scale on the attached boundary map. This map is the largest scale (1"-400') map available for National Register purposes.

**Boundary Justification**

The boundary includes all that remains of the historic mill complex, the Watson homesite and the covered bridge. The boundaries are indicated by a solid black line on the district map.

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**11. Form Prepared By**

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**name/title** Lisa Raflo, National Register Specialist  
**organization** Historic Preservation Section, Georgia Department of Natural Resources  
**street & number** 205 Butler Street, S.E., Suite 1462  
**city or town** Atlanta **state** Georgia **zip code** 30334  
**telephone** 404-656-2840 **date** 5/16/91

(HPS form version 11-02-90)

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National Register of Historic Places  
**Continuation Sheet**

Photographs

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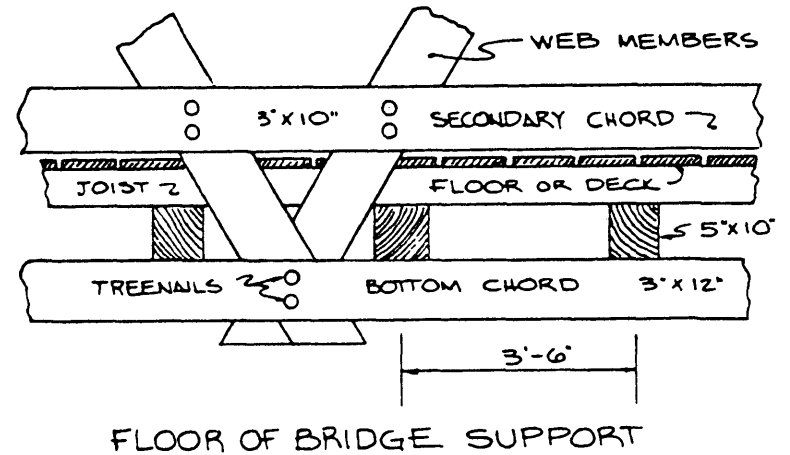
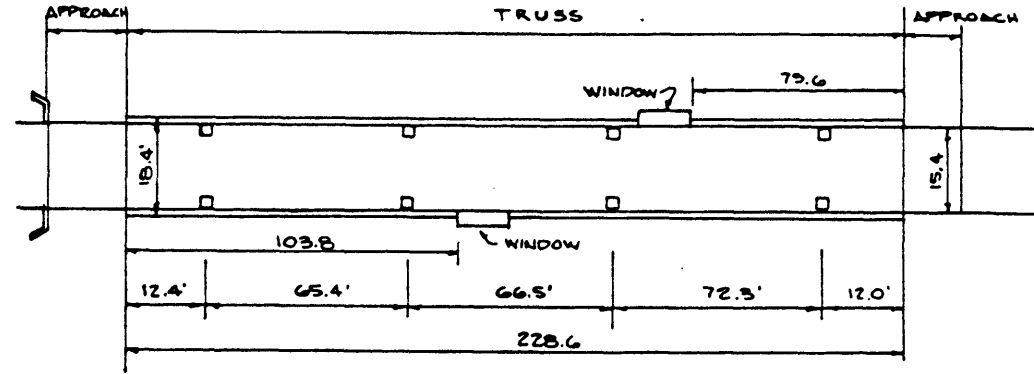
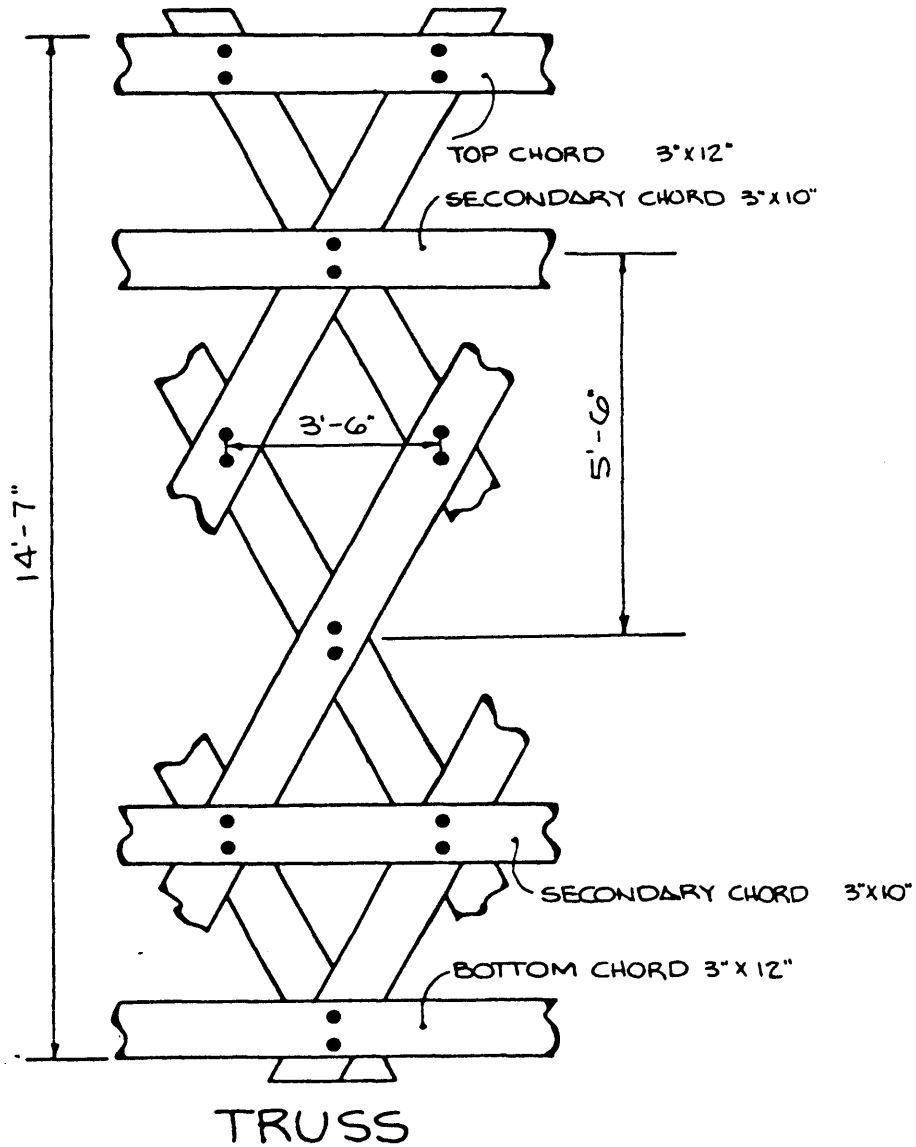
**Name of Property:** Watson Mill Covered Bridge and Mill Historic District  
**City or Vicinity:** Vicinity of Comer  
**County:** Oglethorpe and Madison Counties  
**State:** Georgia  
**Photographer:** James R. Lockhart  
**Negative Filed:** Georgia Department of Natural Resources  
**Date Photographed:** July 1990

**Description of Photograph(s):**

- 1 of 11: View of Watson Mill Covered Bridge, built 1885; photographer facing south.
- 2 of 11: Inside truss system of covered bridge; photographer facing south.
- 3 of 11: Exterior view of covered bridge; photographer facing southeast.
- 4 of 11: Exterior weatherboarding; stone and concrete piers of covered bridge; photographer facing southeast.
- 5 of 11: Underside of the covered bridge; photographer facing south.
- 6 of 11: View of bridge, mill race pond on left; photographer facing northwest.
- 7 of 11: View of bridge, dam; photographer facing west.
- 8 of 11: View of raceway; photographer facing east.
- 9 of 11: View of power plant ruins; photographer facing northwest.
- 10 of 11: View of power plant wall, foundation; photographer facing north.
- 11 of 11: View of power plant wall, penstock, and raceway; photographer facing northeast.



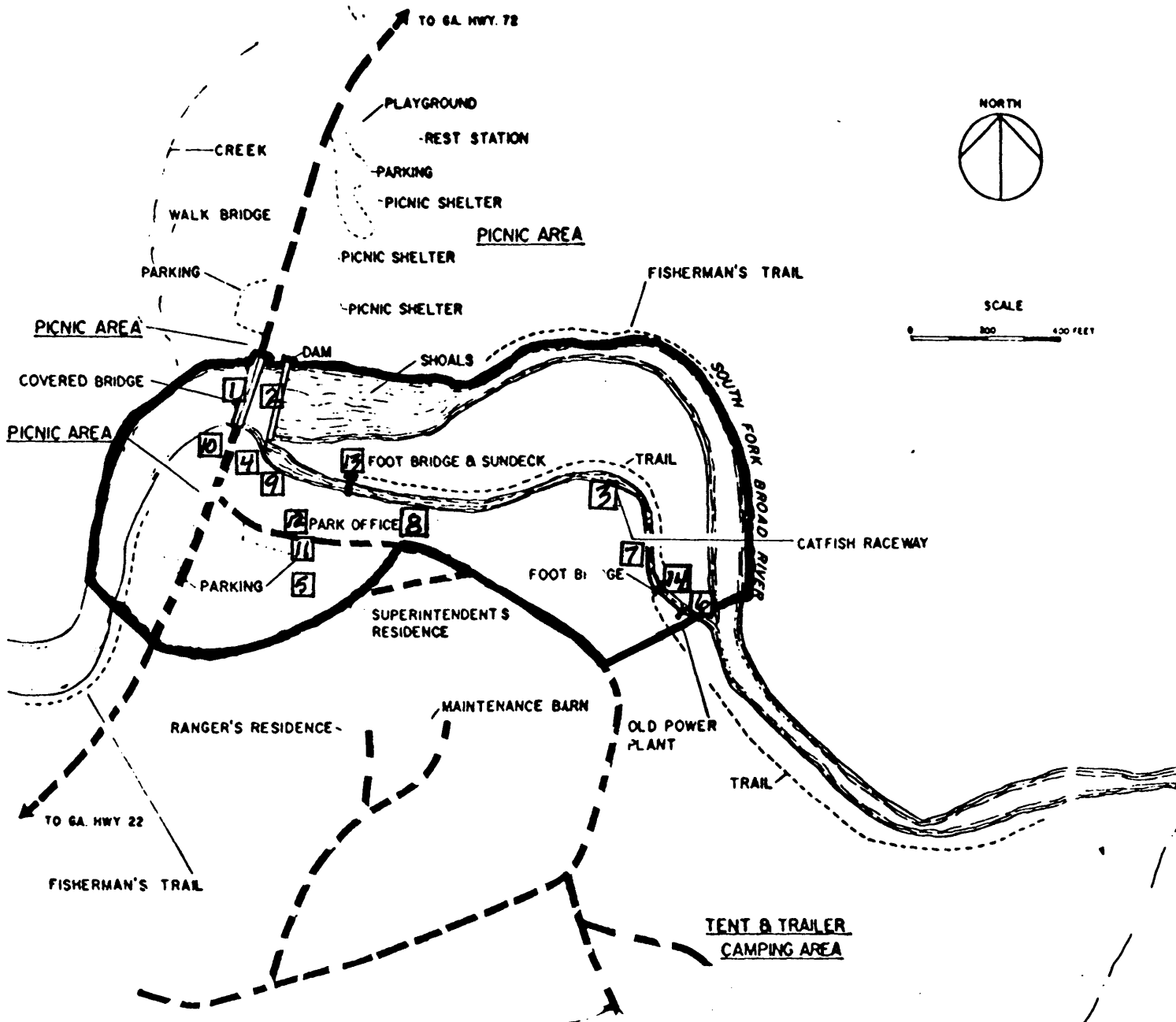
EXHIBIT "A"



**Watson Mill Bridge**

Comer, Oglethorpe and Madison Counties, Georgia





- #1 - Covered Bridge (contributing structure)
- #2 - Dam (contributing structure)
- #3 - Raceway (contributing structure)
- #4 - Grist Mill (contributing site)
- #5 - Watson's house & well (contributing site)
- #6 - Power plant (contributing site)
- #7 - Roadway (contributing site)
- #8 - Gin (contributing site as reported by an informant)
- #9 - Sawmill (contributing site as reported by an informant)
- #10 - Blacksmith's shop (contributing site as reported by an informant)
- #11 - Community store (contributing site as reported by an informant)
- #12 - Park Office (noncontributing)
- #13 - Foot bridge (noncontributing)
- #14 - Foot bridge (noncontributing)

Watson Mill Covered Bridge and Mill Site  
 Comer, Oglethorpe and Madison Counties,  
 Georgia

Resource Map

BIG CLOUDS CREEK