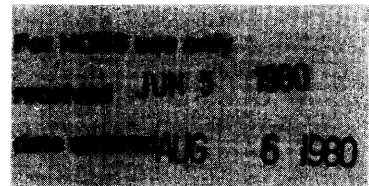


**United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

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



See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Fort Benton Bridge

and/or common Old Bridge

2. Location

Spans Missouri River

(St. John's)

street & number Enters Front St. from Levee at corner of 15th St. not for publication

city, town Fort Benton vicinity of congressional district 2nd

state Montana code 30 county Choteau code 015

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture <input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial <input type="checkbox"/> park
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational <input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment <input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government <input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial <input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: Abandoned

4. Owner of Property

name Choteau County

street & number 1308 Franklin St.

city, town Fort Benton vicinity of state Montana

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Choteau County Courthouse

street & number 1308 Franklin Street

city, town Fort Benton state Montana

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

State Inventory
title Historic Dist. of Fort Benton has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date 1968 and 1972 federal state county local

depository for survey records Montana Historical Society, 225 N. Roberts

city, town Helena state Montana

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The three center spans are 175 feet in length and are Baltimore through trusses. The short span on the far bank is 75 feet long and is a Pratt through truss. The original span on the Fort Benton bank was a swing span with each cantilever being 104 feet and the central pivot structure being 17 feet for a total of 225 feet. When the 1908 flood destroyed the turning span and its central pier, it was replaced by the present 225 foot Camelback through truss, built by O.E. Peppard for \$5,000. All spans are 18 feet wide and decked with 4 x 12 plank. All trusses are pin connected.

The three 175 foot spans are comprised as follows: the bottom cord is eyebars; verticals are two laced channel sections and the vertical subties are four laced angle sections; diagonals are either eyebars or turnbuckles except the diagonals that intersect the inclined and posts which are two laced channel section; the top cord is a continuous steel plate riveted atop two channel sections with lacing bars riveted to their bottom layers. Steel I-beam stringers sit on the top flange of steel I-beam floor beams with one attached to the superstructure plates that are riveted to the floor beams.

The 225 foot camelback span is comprised as follows: the bottom cord is eyebars; verticals are two laced channel sections; diagonals are eyebars or turnbuckles; the top cord is a continuous steel plate riveted atop two channel sections with lacing bars riveted to their lower flanges. Steel I-beams stringers sit on the top flange of I-beams which are riveted to the superstructure.

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 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input 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 1888 **Builder/Architect** Milwaukee Bridge and Iron Works

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

This bridge was the first to span the Missouri River in Montana, and is a rather special structure in that it began as a private toll bridge constructed by a group of Fort Benton merchants calling themselves the Benton Bridge Company. The construction cost of \$40,000 was privately raised with the help of a generous concession in freight reduction on transportation of the steel from the Manitoba Railway Company. The contract was let in January of 1888 to Ryane and Henry to build the piers and approaches. The Milwaukee Bridge and Iron Works contracted to furnish and erect the steel structure. Later estimates raised the cost to \$60,000.

By March work had started and in November almost all was complete except for the decking. It was completed on December 12, 1888 and John Green, a local rancher and hotel owner, was the first to drive a buggy across. A toll house was built on the Fort Benton approach which remained until the concrete approaches replaced the wooden ones. The private company in 1892 finally had enough return on their money to sell the bridge to the county. The people petitioned the county to purchase the bridge for \$10,000 but it wasn't officially sold until 1896 when the county paid \$9999 for it, an amount of money which need not be presented to the voters in a bond issue.

The only steamboat to travel through the swinging span upriver was the steamboat O.K. in 1908. The boat moved up the river to dock at the Grand Union Hotel early that spring before the flood. On the way back down it hit the pier supporting the center of the swing span; there appeared to be no damage to the bridge but the O.K. was beached on the levee for repair. In early June of 1908 a flood hit Fort Benton putting water into the town the only time in its history. The flood took out the swinging span and ice breakers at the same time. Water was high on the piers and the center round pier of the swing span started to sink along its front edge until it lowered the decking at an angle into the water; the force of the current then broke the span into pieces, completely destroying the entire span.

Permission was granted by the Corps of Engineers to replace the swinging span with a permanent span as it would impede upriver traffic beyond this point. The last commercial steamboat reach Fort Benton in the spring of 1890, so the upper levee had not been used for over fifteen years making a swinging span no longer necessary. Work started in July on replacing the span. A cable footbridge was used through the summer and by November of 1908 the new span was open to wheel traffic.

The bridge remained in service until 1963 when the decking and railings began to deteriorate. The new Choteau County Memorial Bridge was completed one-quarter mile upstream and since that time the Old Bridge has been closed to all traffic.

9. Major Bibliographical References

"River Press" - 1888
 Choteau County Clerk's Records

10. Geographical Data

UTM NOT VERIFIED

Acreeage of nominated property less than one acre
 Quadrangle name Fort Benton **ACREEAGE NOT VERIFIED** Scale 1:24000

UMT References (refers to the two approaches to the bridge)

A (west approach)			B (east approach)		
Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1 2	5 2 1 5 4 2 1 0	5 1 2 9 1 5 8 1 2 1 0	1 2	5 2 1 5 6 1 8 1 0	5 1 2 9 1 5 7 1 4 1 5
C			D		
E			F		
G			H		

Verbal boundary description and justification

One steel bridge with approach at 15th St. where it intersects Front St. on the west bank of the Missouri River in the original townsite of Fort Benton, crossing the Missouri River at right angles to the bank, to the east bank of the river.

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

state	code	county	code
NONE			
state	code	county	code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title John G. Lepley, Curator
 organization Fort Benton Museum date 4/1/80
 street & number 817 Main St. telephone 406-622-3278
 city or town Fort Benton state Montana

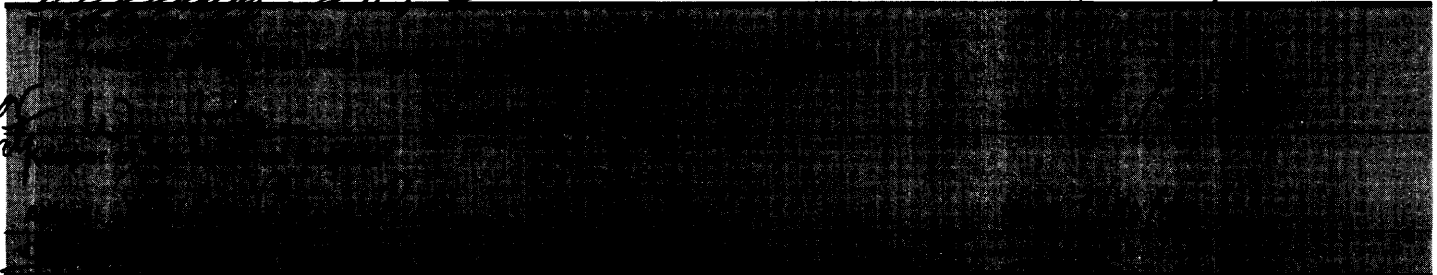
12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

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 Assistant S.H.P.O. date 5-29-80



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

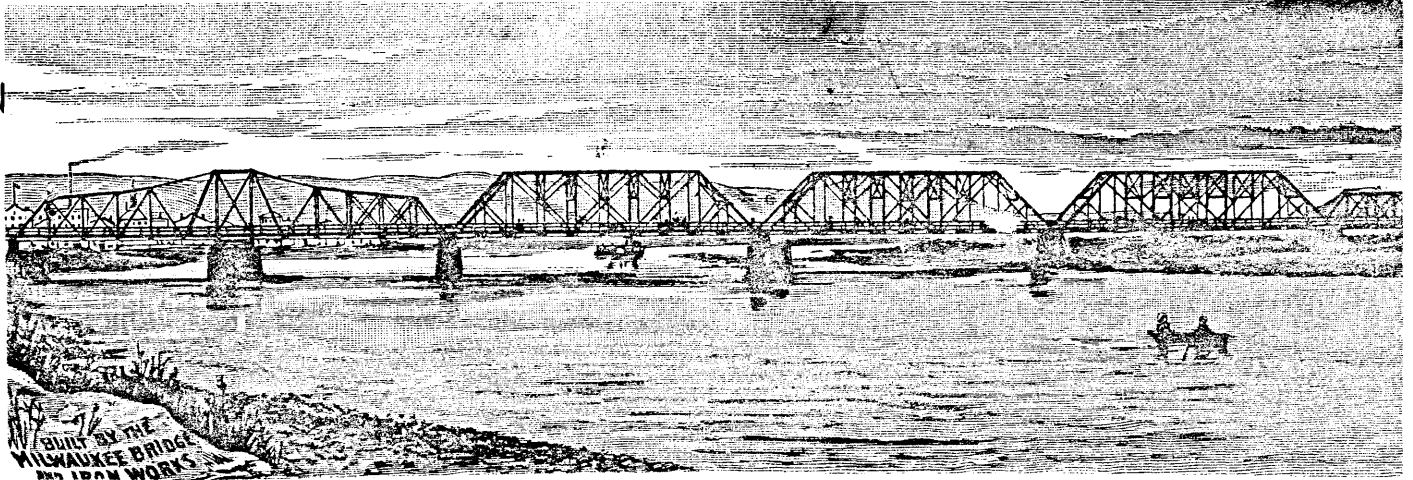
**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**



Continuation sheet

Item number **7**

Page **1**



FOR HCRS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED	JUN 5 1980
DATE ENTERED	AUG 6 1980

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

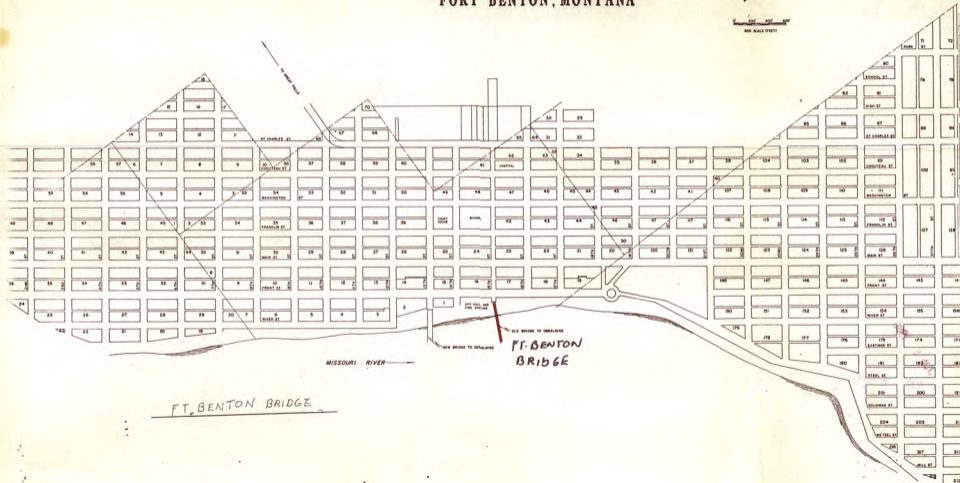
CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 2

Fort Benton's significance in the early settlement of Montana is immeasurable. No other town played such a prominent role in the opening of the Northwest from 1860 to 1887. Until the transcontinental railroads (the Northern Pacific, the Canadian Pacific and the Great Northern) crossed this country, Fort Benton's role as the greatest trade center and jumping off point was unchallenged. Three-quarters of all freight which entered the mining regions of Montana and Idaho came up the Missouri River from St. Louis, Sioux City, Omaha and Bismarck, and was unloaded on the levee at Fort Benton. There all of the Merchant Princes of the region had their headquarters and lived. Most entered other enterprises in later years and became the cattlemen, bankers and politicians of Montana. Some of them were Matt Carroll, T.C. Power, John Power, I.G. Baker, W.G. Conrad, C.E. Conrad, Kleinschmidt, W.S. Wetzel and John T. Murphy. The happenings in Fort Benton were closely tied to Virginia City, Helena and the other lesser early-day communities, so much so that the entire area was dependent upon the freight leaving Fort Benton. The vast majority of the people arrived and spent their first days in Fort Benton before heading to the gold fields or other endeavors in the wilderness. All major roads in the area had their terminal in Fort Benton. The first U.S. Government-built road (the Mullan Road) in the West left Fort Benton to Fort Walla Walla on the Columbia, forming a transcontinental route via the two rivers and the road.

Fort Benton also played a most important part in the settlement of the Canadian West. Most freight and supplies from Edmonton south came up the river and were transported from Fort Benton up the Whoop-Up Trail. The Northwest Mounted Police received their supplies by that same route; even their payroll was entrusted to Benton merchants for delivery. So all of Fort Benton's businesses played a significant role in the settlement of this part of the West. The large companies acted over a widely spread area, but surely the small businesses were of local significance in that booming freight town which was called the "Chicago of the Plains" during its twenty-seven years as the Northwest's greatest trade center.

FORT BENTON, MONTANA



MISSOURI RIVER

NEW BRIDGE TO BE BUILT
OLD BRIDGE TO BE ABANDONED
**FT. BENTON
BRIDGE**

FT. BENTON BRIDGE