

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

For HCRS use only

received MAR 24 1980

date entered FEB 23 1981

**1. Name** Berks County Covered Bridges Thematic Resource

historic COVERED BRIDGES OF BERKS COUNTY

and/or common

## 2. Location

street & number

not for publication

city, town

vicinity of

congressional district

state Pennsylvania

code 42

county Berks

code 011

## 3. Classification

### Category

☐ district  
☐ building(s)  
☐ structure  
☐ site  
☐ object  
☒ thematic

### Ownership

☒ public  
☒ private  
☐ both  
**Public Acquisition**  
☐ in process  
☐ being considered

### Status

☐ occupied  
☐ unoccupied  
☐ work in progress  
**Accessible**  
☐ yes: restricted  
☒ yes: unrestricted  
☐ no

### Present Use

☐ agriculture  
☐ commercial  
☐ educational  
☐ entertainment  
☐ government  
☐ industrial  
☐ military  
☐ museum  
☒ park  
☐ private residence  
☐ religious  
☐ scientific  
☒ transportation  
☐ other:

## 4. Owner of Property

name Multiple

street & number

city, town

vicinity of

state

## 5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Berks County Courthouse

street & number Sixth and Court Street

city, town Reading

state Pennsylvania

## 6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Pennsylvania Inventory  
of Historic Places

has this property been determined eligible? ☐ yes ☐ no

date

☐ federal ☒ state ☐ county ☐ local

depository for survey records Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission

city, town Harrisburg

state Pennsylvania

## 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**

There are only five covered bridges remaining today in Berks County. All use the Burr arch trussing system and date from the 1850 to 1870 period. Berks County bridges portray some unique regional characteristics; all possess horizontal siding and three have unusual stepped portals.

<u>Bridge Name &amp; Number</u>	<u>Truss</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>Length</u>
Pleasantville 36-06-01	Burr	1852, 1856	126'
Greisemer's Mill 36-06-03	Burr	1868	124'
Kutz's Mill 36-06-05	Burr	1854	93'
*Wertz's 36-06-06	Burr	1867	165'
Dreibelbis Station 36-06-07	Burr	1869	172'

\* Listed on National Register on 11-17-78.

The Pleasantville bridge has the unusual distinction of being built in two stages because of the shortage of lumber following the Great Flood of 1850.

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The covered bridge is an important and significant historic structure in the Commonwealth of Pa. Not only does Pa. have the most extant covered bridges today, it probably had the most during the height of the covered bridge period 1830 to 1875. Estimates have been made that Pa. once had at least 1500 covered bridges. (Allen, 1959: 51). Not only is the sheer number important but Pa. had the first known U.S. covered bridge, as well as the prototypes for most of the major truss types.

The first US covered bridge was located in Philadelphia over the Schuylkill, built in 1800 by Timothy Palmer, a master carpenter from Newburyport, Massachusetts. From the completion of this first bridge, the age of the covered bridge was upon Pa. Not only was the truss types of Burr and others first tried out in Pa. but the covered bridge spread as the local carpenter adapted it to the local problem of crossing the numerous small streams and creeks throughout Pa. The covered bridge is also important in the history of bridge building. The early stone arch bridges were really only practical on smaller streams and then in areas with an abundance of good building stone. The peak of the stone bridge in Pa. can be seen in the Rockville Bridge over the Susquehanna River built by the Pa. Railroad and contains a quarter of a million tons of stone. The covered bridge was the transition from the stone to the cast-iron in most places.

Since the heyday of the covered bridge they have been rapidly disappearing through neglect, flood, arson and progress. Prior to the Agnes Flood of 1972, Pa. had 271 covered bridges, spread across 41 of its 67 counties. Since that time the number has been decreasing at a fast rate. Because of their importance, the state level National Register Review Committee as well as the Office of Historic Preservation have embarked on a covered bridge survey and registration project. A survey form and inquiry letter were developed and mailed to county bridge engineers, historical societies, members of the Society of Industrial Archaeologists, the Theodore Burr Covered Bridge Society and numerous others. To date we have information on approx. 3/4 of the 41 counties containing covered bridges. Our results to date show that the number of covered bridges is down about a third from the 1972 figure of 271. Just since beginning our survey, two bridges have been destroyed by arson and one by an overloaded truck. It is because of

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this rapid disappearance rate, as well as their significance to Pa. in the history of transportation that we intend to nominate as many as possible to the National Register of Historic Places. Because of time and the immensity of the task a thematic nomination covering the whole state is impossible. We are therefore nominating these structures on a county or two county basis. All bridges constructed after 1930 have been excluded unless the bridge has a significance of its own. Bridge construction dates and builders are not always readily available, therefore after exhausting the files of the bridge engineers, historical societies and the archives, we have been lenient with the bridges for which we could find no dates, mainly on the view that very few have been built in the last 50 years and that the registration of all of these fast disappearing resource is valuable. Moved structures have been included in our nominations for several reasons; firstly in all cases if these structures had not been moved they would have been destroyed, secondly they still retain their significance as examples of trussing types and while they have lost their location they still retain an integrity of location in a rural setting. Therefore we have tended to nominate every eligible covered bridge in each county.

## 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 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

Builder/Architect

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Covered Bridges of Berks County are rare survivals of a type of bridge technology which was once common in this county. Thirty-seven covered bridges were built in Berks County between 1818 and 1887, today only 5 remain. These remaining 5 portray some interesting regional portal designs, it is unfortunate not to be able to examine the designs of the original 37 bridges to trace how wide spread these regional differences actually were.

One of the original 37 bridges over the Schuylkill River, known as the Stroud's Ferry bridge had the problem of serving a highway and carrying two canal towpaths. It was able to do this with an ingenious system which was the forerunner of the cloverleaf of todays highways. This bridge also had the honor of being the worlds longest covered bridge at 238'. It was neglect that finally did in this unusual structure on September 12, 1948. Neglect of these fine examples of wooden technology could well decrease Berks County's remaining 5 bridges as well as Pennsylvania's other coverd bridges.

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

See Continuation Sheet

## 10. Geographical Data

UTM NOT VERIFIED

ACREAGE NOT VERIFIED

Acreage of nominated property .33

Quadrangle name See Continuation Sheet Quadrangle scale 1: 24,000

UMT References

A 

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Zone Easting Northing

B 

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Zone Easting Northing

C 

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D 

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E 

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F 

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G 

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H 

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Verbal boundary description and justification

See Continuation Sheet

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

state	code	county	code
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state	code	county	code
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## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Susan M. Zacher

organization PHMC/Berks County Conservancy date

street & number Box 1026 / 960 Old Mill Road telephone

city or town Harrisburg/Wyomissing state Pennsylvania 17120/19610

## 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

ED WEINTRAUB, Director  
title Office of Historic Preservation

date 3/10/80

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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

*Lynn A. Berke*  
Keeper of the National Register

date Feb. 23, 1981

Attest: *Carol Donahue*  
Chief of Registration

date 2/2/81

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County Bridge Records

World Guide to Covered Bridges, National Society for Covered Bridges,  
Inc. 1972, p. 59

Fred J. Moll, Personal Communication (letter), 11-4-79

George M. Meiser IX, Personal Communication 10-24-79

Additional information on the triple set of arches used in the  
Pleasantville Bridge can be found in the Winter (1979-1980) issue  
of the Berks County Historical Review