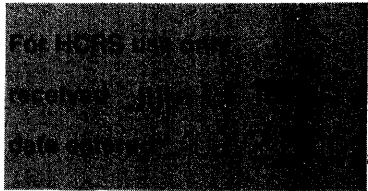


**United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**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 Blount County Covered Bridges Thematic Resources Group

and/or common

2. Location

street & number see individual inventory sheets ___ not for publication

city, town ___ vicinity of congressional district 4

state Alabama code 01 county Blount code 009

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Blount County Commission

street & number P. O. Box 549, 1st Avenue East

city, town Oneonta ___ vicinity of state Alabama

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Blount County Courthouse

street & number 1st Avenue East

city, town Oneonta state Alabama

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Alabama Inventory has this property been determined eligible? ___ yes no

date 1970-present ___ federal state ___ county ___ local

depository for survey records Alabama Historical Commission

city, town Montgomery state Alabama

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

Blount County is located in mineral-rich North-central Alabama where the Appalachian mountain chain terminates. The county has an area of 646 square miles, of which approximately 460 are coal fields and iron ore deposits. The land is hilly and the topography consists of parallel ridges varying in width from four to twelve miles. They vary in elevation from 600 feet to 1,400 feet above sea level. The valley's separating the ridges range from fifty feet to 400 feet lower. There are two major drainage systems. One is formed by the Locust and Mulberry forks of the Black Warrior River, which flows in a southeasterly direction. It is this system that the remaining covered bridges span.

The four bridges included in this thematic group (one of which is already listed on the National Register) are all Town-truss bridges constructed of local oak and pine, with stone or concrete piers and abutments. All hardware on the bridges came from Vann and Young Supply Company in Birmingham. All bridges are in sound condition and are on their original locations.

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 type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900–	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

Specific dates see individual forms **Bullder/Architect** see individual forms

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Covered Bridges of Blount County Thematic Group nomination consists of four of the thirteen remaining covered bridges in Alabama, the largest county-wide concentration of these bridges in the state. All four are Town truss bridges constructed in the 1920s and 1930s by the Blount County Commission as solutions to local transportation needs, and all four still carry local traffic. Of the other covered bridges in the state, only six are in their original locations, and only two of those are still used for local traffic. The remainder are used for recreation.

Although three of the four are not yet 50 years of age – Swann, Nectar and Horton Mill (NRHP 1970), they are the last products of a long tradition of wooden-truss bridge construction in Alabama and represent the persistence of engineering solutions which utilized locally-trained craftsmen and locally-available materials. Additionally, the younger three bridges are the work of one man trained in craft by his uncle. The oldest of the four bridges, Easley (c. 1925–26) was constructed by Forrest Tidwell, while the other three were constructed by his nephew, Zelma C. Tidwell, who had assisted the elder Tidwell in the construction of the Easley Bridge.

TRANSPORTATION: The bridges are significant in the transportation history of Alabama and Blount County as the last remaining examples of the major 19th-century solution to bridging streams and rivers in the state -- the covered bridge. Although by the turn of the century, metal truss bridges had replaced the wooden bridge in most parts of the state, Blount County continued to construct covered bridges until 1935. At least 12 covered bridges were constructed in the county during the 20th century, 6 of which were constructed in the 1930s. The bridges served to increase trade and communications between the numerous small communities of Blount County.

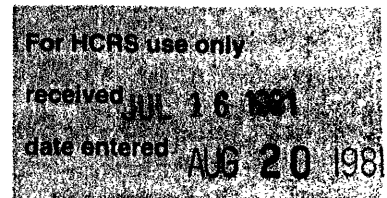
ENGINEERING: The bridges are late examples of American wooden-truss engineering. Two of the bridges --- Nectar (385') and Swann (320') -- are the longest covered bridges remaining in the South and are testaments of the durability, strength and popularity of the Town-truss bridge.

* * * * *

Although the concept of covering wooden bridges to prolong the life of the major structural components originated in Europe, it was in North America that the form reached its fullest expression and covered bridges are considered to be an American phenomenon. Covered bridges served as the major bridge type in the United States until the introduction of metal truss technologies after the Civil War. Wooden-truss bridges capable of spanning wide rivers were perfected by New England carpenters and spread throughout the southeast during the early years of the 19th century. In Alabama the wooden-truss bridge was particularly popular and persistent in the hilly counties of north-central Alabama where the Appalachian Mountain chain terminates. There numerous streams with steep embankments form barriers to transportation, and wood was plentiful and cheap. In the early years of the 20th century, covered bridges were

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Continuation sheet

Item number 8

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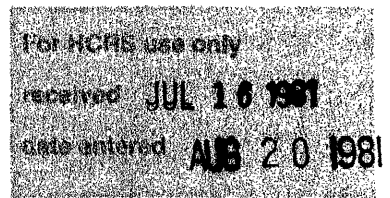
supplanted statewide by metal-truss and concrete-arch bridges, but continued to be built in this section of the state, particularly in Blount County where the county commission persisted in seeing covered bridges as economical solutions for the county's transportation needs well into the 1930s.

According to Richard Allen, in Covered Bridges of the South, the majority of the wooden-truss bridges in Alabama and Georgia were Town, or lattice, bridges. The Town truss, which consists of a lattice of planks forming a webbing, was patented in the 1820s by Ithiel Town, a Connecticut architect and promoter. The earliest known Town bridge in Alabama was over the Black Warrior River at Tuscaloosa, and was mentioned by Town in one of his promotional brochures. The Town bridge was simple to build and particularly suitable for long spans; this no doubt accounted for its widespread use in Alabama. Allen, however, also attributes its popularity in these two southern states to its use by Horace King, Alabama and Georgia's most noted antebellum bridge builder, and to the resistance of subsequent generations of bridge contractors to the substitution of other forms of wooden trusses. In an interview, Zelma Tidwell, foreman for the construction of Swann, Nectar and Horton Mill bridges, stated that he used the Town truss because "it was the strongest bridge construction" and "it had always been used for Blount County Bridges."

Zelma Tidwell was born in 1902 in Locust Fork and continues to live there. Initially, he hired out to the county as a bridge painter, but soon went to work with his uncle, Forrest Tidwell, foreman of the Blount County bridge construction crew. He learned the trade from his uncle and assisted him in the construction of the Easley Bridge as well as several others. In 1930, he took over as foreman of the county bridge construction crew and in the following six years built the Swann, Nectar, Horton Mill, Vaughn, Locust Fork and Tyre Green bridges. The last three are no longer standing. In 1936 he quit to join the Alabama Highway Patrol. No other covered bridges were constructed in the county.

The bridges have been continually maintained by the county, which made major repairs in the past two years.

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Continuation sheet

Item number 9

Page 1

Allen, Richard S. Covered Bridges of the South. Bonanza Books: New York, 1970

Atkinson, Jesse L. "General Topography of Blount County" unpublished manuscript in W.P.A. files, Blount County, Alabama Department of Archives and History. 1935.

Birmingham Post-Herald. "Interesting Facts Uncovered about Blount County Bridges" August 8, 1970.

Blount County Commission Minute Book #5, page 26, June 1934

Interview: Zelma Tidwell, bridge foreman, by Warren Weaver, Blount County Historian, Summer 1980.

E. L. Johnson, retired county engineer, by Warren Weaver, Blount County Historian, May 1981.

The Southern Democrat. November 16, 1933.

Multiple Resource Area
Thematic Group

dnr-11

Name Blount County Covered Bridges Thematic Resources
State Alabama

Nomination	Type of Review	Decision
1. Swann Covered Bridge	Substantive Review	<u>Accept - W.H. Abraham 8.20.81</u>
2. Nectar Covered Bridge	Substantive Review	<u>Accept W.H. Abraham 8.20.81</u>
3. Easley Covered Bridge	Entered in the National Register	<u>Accept W.H. Abraham 8.20.81</u> <i>Delores Byers 8/24/81</i>
4. Horton Mill Covered Bridge	-	<u>Previously listed 12-29-70</u>
5.	-	
6.	-	
7.	-	
8.	-	
9.	-	
10.	-	
11.	-	
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15.	-	
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21.	-	
22.	-	
23.	-	
24.	-	