

GEORGIA DOT BRIDGE NO. 047-00820F-00347E
(Government Bridge)
County Road 382 Spanning Chickamauga Creek
Ringgold
Catoosa County
Georgia

HAER No. GA-89

HAER
GA
24-RINGG,
1-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C St. NW
Washington, DC 20240

HAER
GA
24-RINGG,
1-

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

GEORGIA DOT BRIDGE #047-00820F-00347E,
(Government Bridge) HAER No. GA-2906

Location: County Road 382 spanning South Chickamauga Creek
Southwest city limits of Ringgold
Catoosa County, Georgia

Date of Construction: 1935.

Present Owner: Georgia Department of Transportation
#2 Capitol Square, S.W.
Atlanta, Georgia 30334-1002

Present Use: Vehicular bridge
To be demolished 1995

Significance: The Georgia DOT Bridge #047-00820F-00347E, or commonly known as Government Bridge, is important to the local history of the community of Ringgold. It was originally part of the approach road system to the Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park. Catoosa County agreed to take over the jurisdiction of the road and the bridge from the National Park Service, if the Park improved the road. Road improvements included the construction of the bridge. Structurally, the rubble masonry substructure and masonry abutments are unique for the local area. Historically, the bridge is one of the few built in Georgia in 1935 since state politics put little emphasis on transportation improvements.

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Date: April 1995

PHYSICAL CONTEXT:

Catoosa County is located in northwest Georgia and borders Tennessee. The topography of northwest Georgia is mountainous and; therefore, the development of transportation systems were difficult. Government Bridge, in Catoosa County, Georgia is located in the southwest city limits of Ringgold. It is a 1935 steel stringer bridge and is located on County Road 382 spanning South Chickamauga Creek where it meets East Chickamauga Creek. The area immediately surrounding the bridge consists of scattered single family residences and forest.

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:

Government Bridge is 19.8 feet wide and 136 feet in length. It has a steel or multi beam girder, a concrete deck, masonry substructure, decorative stone abutments and concrete balustrade. It has two spans with a maximum span length of 68 feet. It rises approximately 18 feet above South Chickamauga Creek.²

HISTORICAL CONTEXT:

The history associated with this bridge begins before its construction with the establishment of the Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park in 1890. The enabling legislation called for U.S. Government ownership of approaches from all directions upon cession by the states of Georgia and Tennessee.

Section 1 of the Act states that:

Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park was established for the purpose of preserving and suitable marking for historical and professional military study of the fields of some of the most remarkable maneuvers and most brilliant fighting in the war of rebellion, and upon ceding of jurisdiction to the United States by the States of Tennessee and Georgia, the report of the Attorney General that the title to the lands thus ceded is perfect.³

Eight approach roads were cited in the Act, one of which was the road from Ringgold to the entrance of the park. Government Bridge is located on this road. A reduced (50%) photocopy of a 1891 plat map of the Ringgold approach road can be found on Page 9 (not for reproduction). The original plat map is housed at the Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park and permission is required to reproduce it.⁴

In 1901, in the Annual Report of the Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park Commission to the Secretary of War, the superintendent, Mr. Bonyton describes the approach road to Ringgold as significant to the Battle of Chickamauga. He states that the Ringgold field was the site of the final battle of the Union campaign for Chattanooga.⁵

With the increased costs of maintaining the approach roads, the Department of War wanted to decrease the expense of regular park maintenance. In 1925 the following Act was passed:

The Secretary of War is authorized to convey by proper quit claim deed to any State, county, municipality, or proper agency thereof, all the right, title, and interest of the United States in and to any Government owned or controlled approach road to any national cemetery or national military park. Prior to this conveyance the agency receiving the road shall notify to the Secretary of War in writing of their willingness to accept and maintain the road or roads.⁶

In 1928 and 1929, in accordance with this legislation, Congress appropriated \$370,500 for paving Dry Valley, Ringgold, and Lafayette Extension roads, to place them in such condition as to induce the State of Georgia to accept jurisdiction over them. Georgia soon took over the Dry Valley Road, but could not financially afford to meet terms (matching funds) of the federal legislation regarding the other two.

In 1931 plans were prepared for concreting all primary roads for the park which included the Ringgold Road. In 1932 the local residents petitioned the park authorities to oil the road. The park superintendent, Mr. Randolph, agreed with the residents and pointed out to army officials that the gravel road handled very heavy traffic consisting of trucks, buses, automobiles, and horse drawn transportation. He further stated that the road was used extensively by troops at Fort Oglethorpe traveling to and from the shooting range just southeast of Ringgold. The War Department agreed to recommend to Congress an extension of the Ringgold Road appropriation of \$117,000 which had previously

reverted to the Treasury after Georgia had failed to match the sum for improving the road.⁷

The Superintendent's Report dated July 1934 states that the reconstruction of Ringgold Road would be completed under a Public Works allotment. Furthermore, under the terms of an agreement executed on July 28, 1934, the County of Catoosa, Georgia was to take the road over after its reconstruction. A copy of a letter from Mr. S.B. Wood, Chairman of the Board of Commissioners of Roads and Revenues of Catoosa County confirms the statement.⁸

In July of 1935, the Superintendent's monthly report to the Secretary of the Interior included a brief message stating that the Ringgold Bridge Project, entailing construction of a new bridge over East Chickamauga Creek, Contract No. I-lp-3759, with the George A. Thomson Company of Greenville, South Carolina had been completed except miscellaneous finishing.⁹

The 1935-36 Superintendent's Annual Report for the Park reports:

The Ringgold Road from the Chickamauga Park boundary to US Route 41 E in Ringgold, Georgia was improved with a bituminous Road mix on a chert base course by the R.B. Tyler Company, Inc., of Louisville, Kentucky. This project consisted of 7.63 miles of regrading and chert surfacing, commenced November 2, 1934 and completed August 28, 1935 at a cost of \$95,031.19.

The improvement of this road called for the removal of a 135 foot steel truss superstructure of the Ringgold Bridge spanning East Chickamauga Creek, widening the existing abutments, the construction of a new center pier, and a new superstructure consisting of two I-beam spans with concrete floor and railing. This work was done by the George A. Thomson Company of Greenwood, South Carolina, beginning operation on March 25, 1935 and completing the project on July 3, 1936 for \$17,399.64.¹⁰

Without construction plans the exact construction of the bridge can not be determined. However, contractors often followed the American Association of State Highway Officials (AASHO) manual, the predecessor of today's American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO), which gave general construction methods and guidelines. For example, a chart was provided which gave different mixtures of concrete (how many gallons of water to mix with aggregate) depending on the use of the concrete.

The defining characteristic of the bridge is the stone masonry work. The 1935 edition of AASHO Standard Specifications for Highway Bridges defines ashlar masonry as first class cut stone masonry laid in regular courses, as distinguished from rubble masonry. The individual stones are tooled to exact dimensions. More detail is given to the size and finish of the stones. For example, the stones should not be less than 12 or more than 30 inches in thickness. Also, the surface finishes of the stone are defined as: smooth finish - having surface in which the variations from the pitch line do not exceed 1/16 inch; fine

finish - 1/4 inch; rough finish - 1/2 inch; scabbled - 3/4 inch; and rock faced - an irregular projecting face without indications of tool marks.¹¹ On Page 10 a photocopy of a photograph taken during construction by an unknown photographer shows the detail of the stone abutment. The original photograph is housed at the Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park and permission is required to reproduce the photograph.¹²

The construction of the stone piers were either solid stone or concrete with stone facing. If the piers are solid stone, the AASHO manual specifies that at least one-half of the stones in the backing shall be of the same size and character as the face stone and with parallel ends.¹³

The following information was obtained through interviews with several citizens from Ringgold:

Mr. B.R. Harris said he was fifteen years old when the bridge was constructed in the mid 1930's. He recalled one day driving to Chattanooga in his father's truck. When he returned, his father was waiting for him to use the truck to haul gravel to the construction site of the bridge. Before Government Bridge was constructed, a single lane truss bridge spanned South Chickamauga Creek. The bridge flooded quite often and a replacement was necessary. However, the topography surrounding the bridge was too low, therefore, the approaching roadway needed to be built up. The gravel was used to build up the road.¹⁴

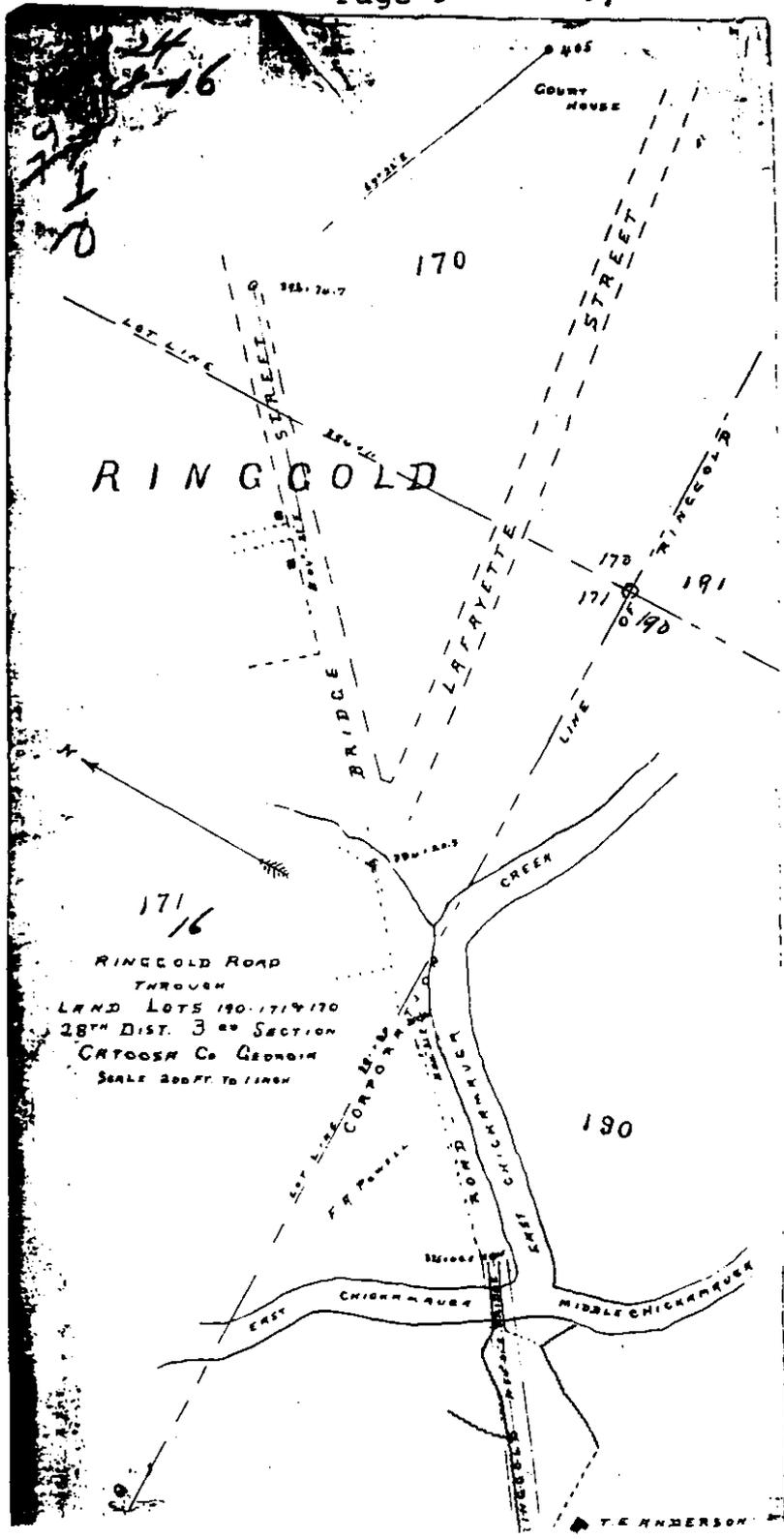
B.R. Harris's wife, Mary Francis, lived in a house adjacent to the bridge. She also recalled the need to build up the approaching roadway.¹⁵

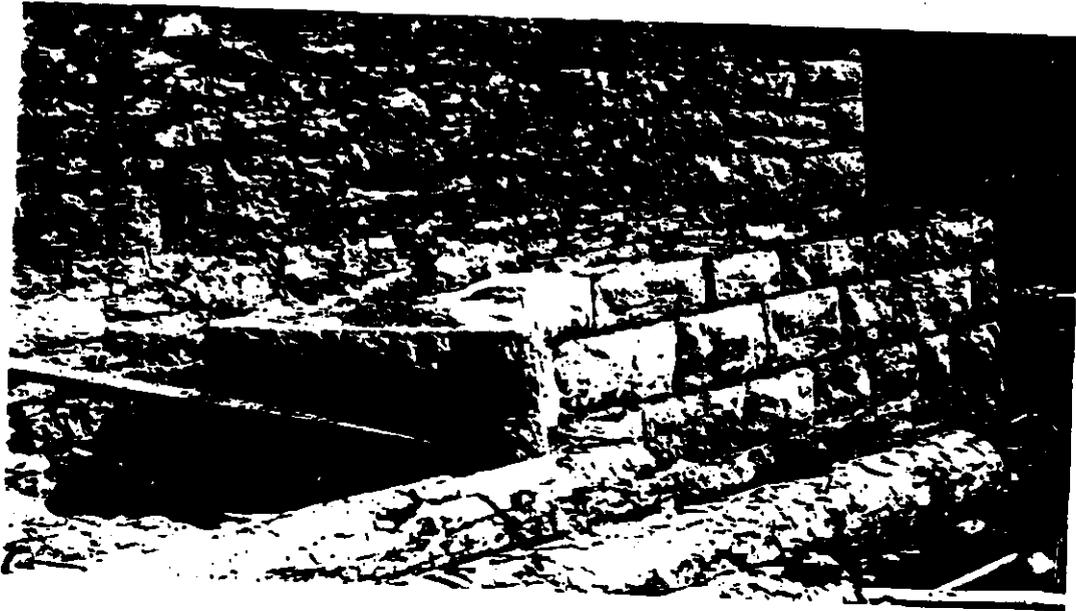
Mr. Louis Baxter worked as a laborer during the construction of the bridge. He recalled mainly hauling two by four's and mixing cement. He was in high school and only worked part time.¹⁶

Mr. Baxter's sister, Louise Baxter, remembered quite a bit about the construction of the bridge. She said dirt was dug from her family's property to build up the roadway. The slopes were held in place by rocks. She said the road was elevated about ten feet. She said that the bridge often flooded and that the roadway was elevated so a higher bridge could be constructed. Ms. Baxter also remembered the workers stacked sand bags in the creek in order to build the stone substructure.

She had childhood memories of soldiers from the 6th Cavalry posted at Fort Oglethorpe riding over the bridge to reach the Catoosa Firing Range. She remembered the horses would get loose and would run back across the bridge towards Fort Oglethorpe. Ms. Baxter recollected that on any given summer day 50 to 75 children would play in the creek. At the location of the bridge, the Little Chickamauga Creek would merge with South Chickamauga Creek. This made for a popular swimming hole. There were ropes for children to swing on, and the area was considered the "public swimming pool."

Ms. Baxter said that it was also a place where many Baptisms took place. She was baptized in the creek as was Mary Francis Harris.¹⁷





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BINGOLD BRIDGE - view
showing side elevation
of North abutment during
construction

Endnotes

¹A.G. Lichenstein and Associates, Inc., "Georgia Historic Bridge Inventory," Georgia Department of Transportation.

²Georgia Department of Transportation, Bridge Maintenance Files.

³Department of the Interior, Management Objectives Workshop: August 9 & 10, 1994 Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park, 11.

⁴Photocopy of map (original plat map dated 1891) located at the Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park.

⁵"Annual Report of the Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park Commission to the Secretary of War, 1901," in Report of the Secretary of War, 1901, 353.

⁶Management Objectives Workshop, 15.

⁷Department of the Interior, Administrative History of Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park, 77-79.

⁸"Monthly Report of the Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park to the Secretary of the Interior, July 1934," in Report of the Secretary of the Interior, 4.

⁹"Monthly Report of the Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park to the Secretary of the Interior, July 1935," in Report of the Secretary of the Interior, 2.

¹⁰"Annual Report of the Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park to the Secretary of the Interior, July 1935-1936," in Report of the Secretary of the Interior, 2-4.

¹¹AASHO Standard Specifications for Highway Bridges, 2nd Edition, 1935, 98-99.

¹²Photocopy of photograph by unknown photographer, original at Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park.

¹³ASSHO Standard Specifications, 99-101.

¹⁴Mr. B. R. Harris, interview by Rebecca A. Kermes, 2 March 1995, telephone conversation, Atlanta.

¹⁵Mrs. Mary Francis Harris, interview by Rebecca A. Kermes, 2 March 1995, telephone conversation, Atlanta.

¹⁶Mr. Louis Baxter, interview by Rebecca A. Kermes, 7 March 1995, telephone conversation, Atlanta.

¹⁷Ms. Louise Baxter, interview by Rebecca A. Kermes, 7 March 1995, telephone conversation Atlanta.