

TIMBER BRIDGES

Covered and Uncovered

Harford County's Rural Heritage

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Introduction

When settlers began to arrive in what is present-day Harford County, they colonized the shores of the Chesapeake Bay and its navigable tributaries. Transportation was by water and this facilitated trade with ships from the mother country and other arriving vessels.

By 1690, as the shore land was taken up, new comers were moving inland and paths to navigable water became important. Preferred were trails that had been opened by migrating animals or Native Americans, but these were only wide enough for pack animals – wheeled vehicles would have to await road building. Maryland's first road legislation was enacted in 1666 and authorized local courts to assign responsibility of road upkeep to specific individuals. From the court records the appointment of "Overseers of Roads" information can be gleaned about early bridges.

Timber was ubiquitous in Harford County and became the material of dwellings, barns, tobacco houses, stables, and bridges. In low lying sandy areas, pile were driven into the ground for support of bridges while spanning wide streams in rocky terrain timber trusses were used. The reasons why timber bridges were covered can be found in Chapter 3.

For many years, fords were used to cross over streams such as Priest's Ford over Deer Creek. The only remaining public ford in Harford County is Tabernacle Road over Deep Run.

One of the reasons that over time bridges gradually replaced fords is humorously illustrated below by an image from an old postcard titled "A Heavy Load."



Preface

This book began as single comprehensive volume with the ambitious title of *Bridges – Timber to Wrought Iron to Steel & Concrete: Harford County's Rural Heritage*. To be included was the early history of county bridge building together with those crossings over long-gone canals along with railroad bridges and trestles of yesteryear and those existing today.

As the research unfolded, however, the outline was revised about 20 times with the number of pages increasing to the point it became apparent the book was exceeding a practical size to be reasonably priced. At that point, this first volume *Timber Bridges – Covered and Uncovered* was carved out for printing. Other future volumes will deal with wrought iron, steel, and steel & concrete bridges, and railroad bridges.

Bridges can be considered short, rather expensive, and sometimes beautiful sections of roads; therefore, the history of the county's early transportation infrastructure is initially examined. Included therein are crossing over streams and man-made canals and this is presented in Chapters 1 and 2.

Chapter 3 addresses how bridge builders transitioned the design of rectangular timber-framed structure to the rather narrow and long bridge structures. As rigidity problems came to light these were, for the most part, mitigated by the Burr arch that found favor with most Harford County bridge builders. This arch was used on the county's sole remaining covered bridge on Jericho Road near Jerusalem Mill Village.

The last part of Chapter 3, as well as Chapters 4 and 5, address the four-dozen covered bridges that are believed to have existed in the county. In a few cases the evidence is circumstantial but for the most part convincing primary sources can be cited and in a more than a dozen cases a photograph is provided.

Covered bridges were the large structures that conjure in the minds of many a charming and romantic image of the past, but many uncovered timber crossings were strictly for pedestrians and a handful of these are covered in Chapter 6.

It is somewhat surprising to examine the extent of timber crossings that still exist today throughout the county. Some accommodate single-lane vehicular traffic but most are for pedestrians only. These are found in Chapter 7.

Those men who improved the county's transportation infrastructure are recognized in Chapter 8, "A Digest of Early Harford County Road and Bridge Builders, Overseers, and Repairmen, 1694 – 1904." These rugged individuals facilitated the movement of people and goods making travel easier for others.

Lastly, a comprehensive Index leads the reader to specific subjects and individuals.