There is something nostalgic about covered bridges. They invite us to travel back in time. A time when life was less hectic. A time when horses pulled wagons loaded with grain to the local grist mill. A time when a couple in a buggy could sneak a kiss while crossing over a bridge.

This guide will help you take a journey back to relive in part those wonderful times.

Harold Rau
Author and Photographer
Introduction

Parke County, Indiana, is one of the most unique destinations in the United States. The area is home to thirty-one historic covered bridges, several dating back to 1856. To explore them is to take a journey through history.

Some years ago, I visited Parke County on a mission to photograph and learn the history of these covered bridges. Some bridges were easily found using maps and route marker signs, but others were tucked away on county roads, making them difficult to locate. Finding GPS coordinates made traveling to each bridge easy. After visiting the bridges and reading about them in the Parke County materials, the idea was born to compile all the information I had gathered into this user-friendly guidebook.

As you visit a bridge, stop and learn how it got its name, when it was built, who built it and interesting facts about it. Then, admire these living testimonies to the ingenuity and skills of the 19th and early 20th century American craftsmen who built them.

Let’s journey together from bridge to bridge, past the farm fields, woodlands, hills, valleys, streams and waterways. When you pass through the villages and towns such as Mecca, Tangiers, Annapolis, Marshall, Mansfield, Bridgeton, Rosedale, Bloomington and Rockville, pause along the way to meet the many wonderful people who live here, as you are truly in the heartland of America!

Acknowledgements

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Cover design by Harold Rau, Karen Higgins and Chris Roth.

Bridge specifications and history courtesy of Parke County, Incorporated. Used with permission.

Map courtesy of Parke County Convention and Visitors Commission. Used with permission.


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Using This Guide

The aids included in this guide will provide easy access to each of the historic covered bridges in Parke County, Indiana:

- A map showing principle cities, designated routes and locations of the bridges (Larger maps and Driving Routes are available at the Visitor’s Center in Rockville and at businesses throughout Parke County.)
- GPS coordinates, which provide ease of navigation from one bridge to another
- Alphabetical listing of the bridges with specifications, history and photographs
- Route designation of bridges on designated color route(s)
- Coordinated Map Reference Numbers between this guide and area maps
- Designation if bridge is open to vehicles or only pedestrians and bicycles

Parke County Covered Bridges by Driving Route

The routes designated below are marked with colored arrow signs along the route and indicated on printed maps published by Parke County, Inc., and in the Parke County Guide. They are easily found using the GPS decimal degree (DD) coordinates.

**Red Route** - Five bridges - 33 miles paved roads
- McAllister’s Bridge #11 vehicles 7 ton N 39.70943 W 087.19133
- Neet Bridge #10 pedestrians N 39.70170 W 087.19797
- Bridgeton Bridge # 8 pedestrians N 39.64958 W 087.1761
- Roseville Bridge #18 vehicles 5 ton N 39.65238 W 087.29369
- Mecca Bridge #21 pedestrians N 39.72916 W 087.32480

**Brown Route** - Four bridges - 24 miles paved roads
- Mecca Bridge #21 pedestrians N 39.72916 W 087.32480
- Phillips Bridge #22 vehicles 6 ton N 39.77229 W 087.32242
- Sim Smith Bridge #23 vehicles 8 ton N 39.77351 W 087.33115
- Melcher Bridge #24 vehicles 6 ton N 39.78910 W 087.33515

**Yellow Route** - Five bridges - 30 miles paved, 3 gravel roads
- West Union Bridge #26 pedestrians N 39.85517 W 087.33595
- Marshall Bridge #29 vehicles 5 ton N 39.88339 W 087.32624
- Rush Creek Bridge #30 vehicles 4 ton N 39.89876 W 087.31466
- Jackson Bridge #28 vehicles 5 ton N 39.87998 W 087.28237
- Catlin Bridge #13 pedestrians N 39.79173 W 087.23826

**Black Route** - Five bridges - 33 miles paved roads
- McAllister’s Bridge #11 vehicles 7 ton N 39.70943 W 087.19133
- Neet Bridge #10 pedestrians N 39.70170 W 087.19797
- Bridgeton Bridge # 8 pedestrians N 39.64958 W 087.1761
- Mansfield Bridge # 5 vehicles 5 ton N 39.67553 W 087.10150
- Big Rocky Fork Bridge # 6 pedestrians N 39.66288 W 087.08067

**Blue Route** - Five bridges - 33 miles paved, 3 gravel roads
- Narrows Bridge #37 pedestrians N 39.89104 W 087.18571
- Cox Ford Bridge #36 vehicles 5 ton N 39.88531 W 087.22363
- Wilkins Mill Bridge #35 vehicles 5 ton N 39.89828 W 087.23308
- Jackson Bridge #28 vehicles 5 ton N 39.87998 W 087.28237
- Catlin Bridge #13 pedestrians N 39.79173 W 087.23826

Did you know? The Tourist Information Center located at 401 East Ohio Street (US 36) in Rockville is the number one source for information about what to do and see in Parke County. Stop by or phone 765-567-3526.
Covered Bridge History and Design

In the 1800s, covered bridges were wooden, due to the abundance of virgin timber. Most of the bridges in Parke County are made of yellow poplar, with the exception of the Big Rocky Fork and Conley’s Ford Bridges that are made of white pine. Bridges were covered to protect the supporting structure and floorboards. If a bridge sat on a winding approach, windows were placed near the ends of the bridge in order to see oncoming traffic. The covered bridges in Parke County were built using two main truss designs.

**Burr-arch Truss** - One of the earliest and most prominent bridge builders in our country was Theodore Burr from Torrington, Connecticut. His career began in New York, where he built a bridge spanning the Hudson River in 1804. He patented its design in 1820 and became known as the Father of American Bridge Building. Burr’s truss design soon became one of the more frequently used systems. The Burr-arch Truss (illustration below), as the design became known, has two long arches resting on the abutments on either end that are typically bolted to a multiple kingpost structure. This combined arch and kingpost structure on each side of the bridge support the cross beams, which in turn support the floor of the bridge.

The photo below shows the double Burr-arch trusses in the Harry Evans Bridge. Some of the Burr-arch Truss bridges employ a single heavy arch, rather than two.

The arches provide the main support for the bridge structure and are wedged against the abutments, rather than resting on them (photo right). This provides the strongest possible structural support. The load limit is determined by the combined strength of the arches, multiple king posts and floor beams. Prior to 1900, bridge abutments were made of Mansfield sandstone blocks. After 1900, they often were made of concrete.

**Burr-arch Truss**

An underside view of the Mecca Bridge (photo right) shows the amount of timber structure needed to support the weight of vehicles. The inscription, “Cross This Bridge At A Walk,” dates back to the horse-and-buggy days and was placed on the portals at both ends of the bridge. The rhythm of horses’ hooves could do more structural damage to the bridge than the weight of a modern-day truck.

At one time, Parke County had a total of 52 1/2 bridges. The half bridge was owned in cooperation with Vermilion County, as it sat half in each county crossing the Wabash River. Thirty-one bridges remain, with ten retired from vehicular traffic. The longevity of these bridges gives testimony to the design and masterful craftsmanship of the original builders. All of the covered bridges in Parke County are on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), except for the Bridgeton Bridge, built in 2006.

**Multiple Kingpost Truss** - The Multiple Kingpost Truss design (photo right) was developed to span distances up to 100 feet. Kingposts are vertical center posts and have diagonal posts leaning toward them on both sides (illustrations below). The Phillips Bridge is the only bridge built with this Multiple Kingpost Truss structure still remaining in Parke County.

**Multiple Kingpost Truss**

The photo below shows the double Burr-arch trusses in the Harry Evans Bridge. Some of the Burr-arch Truss bridges employ a single heavy arch, rather than two.

The entrances to covered bridges are called portals, a term also applied to tunnels. It is a fitting term, as a covered bridge is much like a tunnel. However, instead of being hewn through rock, a covered bridge is a wooden tunnel spanning a river or creek. Portals on covered bridges usually contain some very important information. The date the bridge was constructed is at the peak of the portal. Below that is the name of the bridge builder or builders, followed by the name of the bridge.

Several bridge builders had distinctive portal styles. J.J. Daniels used an arch over the entrance of his bridges, while J.A. Britton used beveled corners. One used to be able to identify the bridge builder by his respective portal style. However, after many years of modifications, some of the bridges’ portals were changed, making that identification more difficult.

**Bridge Portals**

**Bridge Length Measurements** - Bridge measurements in this guide note the length of the bridge between abutments, e.g., Length: 72 feet. This measurement does not include extensions from the abutments to the end of the portals.

Illustrations courtesy of The Theodore Burr Covered Bridge Society of Pennsylvania.
Bridge Builders

Stress and strain engineering is a relative modern science. Without it, covered bridge builders of the 19th and early 20th century used common sense and their skills as carpenters, as well as the generous use of materials to build utilitarian structures that have lasted for more than a century. The longevity of these bridges is a living testimony and tribute to their craftsmanship and ingenuity.

**Joseph Albert Britton (1839–1929)** was born in a log cabin three miles east of Rockville and spent most of his life in Parke County. He learned the carpenter’s trade from his father, whose skilled workmanship was widely known before his son started the bridge-building business. Although young Britton was naturally studious, he probably attended school less than six months over a three-year period. His lack of schooling, however, was partly compensated by his wide reading and study of classical literature.

In 1862, Britton enlisted in the local infantry and was rushed to Kentucky, with little training and no uniform. There, he and his company, surrounded in their first skirmish, became prisoners of war. After the war, Britton read law and was admitted to the bar in Indiana and Kansas. However, the life of an attorney did not appeal to him; consequently, he returned to Rockville in 1870, where he took up carpentry again. With a number of houses to his credit, in 1879 he became a carpenter on bridge-building projects. In 1882, he obtained his first contract, the building of the scenic Narrows Bridge. This marked the beginning of his career, which was to continue through four decades.

J.A. Britton had eight sons and four daughters. Several sons were involved in bridge building: son, Edgar, worked on one; son, Lawrence, assisted with three; and son, Charlton, assisted on several. Eugene Britton was active with his father and, in 1915, he contracted solely to construct the Bowsher Ford Bridge. The Brittons contracted to build the Cox Ford Bridge in 1913, with the provision that they use the arches and timbers of the Armiesburg Bridge that had washed out earlier that same year.

**Joseph J. Daniels (1826–1916),** most commonly known as J.J. Daniels, was born in Maretta, Ohio, the son of bridge builder, Stephan Daniels. The elder Daniels was an agent for Stephan Long and built many Long-truss covered bridges across southern Ohio in the 1830s and 1840s. Many of these bridges were for railroads. Young Daniels assisted his father in the 1840s, then started in the bridge business for himself. At the age of 24, he completed his first bridge in Indiana on the Rising Sun to Versailles Pike Road. The following year (1851), Daniels was called to the opposite side of the State to build a bridge in Union Township in Parke County. Records indicate that Daniels built twenty bridges in Parke County and many more in surrounding counties.

Daniels was always experimenting with new ideas. For example, he used metal brace holders, or “shoes,” which required less carpentry work to place the braces. The arches of Daniel’s bridges were perfect symmetrical curves, and their height was determined by the length of the span. Daniels most often set an iron plate between the masonry abutment and the lower end of the wooden arch. This prevented the wood from absorbing moisture from the abutment, thus increasing the life of the arch.

Daniels’ political affiliations surfaced when he built a bridge across Sugar Creek. A strong Unionist and admirer of Andrew Jackson, he named one of the bridges he built in 1861 to honor Old Hickory. The Jackson Bridge is an exception to the custom of naming a bridge either for a nearby community, creek or landowner at the time of construction.

As shown above, the Jackson Bridge, under construction in 1861, is 207 feet long and a single span, double Burr-arch bridge. For added strength, Daniels doubled the Burr arches and the trusses in this span, using eight instead of four. In addition, he selected extra heavy timber for framing the structure. This span is still in use. The West Union Covered Bridge also features the double truss design element.

Daniels built his last bridge, the Neet Bridge, in 1904 when he was 78 years old. He died in 1916 and is buried in Parke County. He and his wife raised three sons, Parke, Henry and Edward. They were educated as attorneys. Their two daughters died in childhood.

**Henry Wolf** is credited with constructing four covered wooden spans in Parke County. Only two remain, the Crooks Bridge and the rebuilt Portland Mills Bridge, and both cross Little Raccoon Creek. He is believed to be the son of Aaron Wolf, who built two bridges in Putnam County in 1838. Nothing in the records indicates which name refers to the father or son. Burr-arches were used in all the bridges built by the Wolfs.

**Jefferson P. Van Fossen and J. Lawrence Van Fossen,** brothers associated with the Parke County Road Department, are credited with building four or more covered bridges and foundations in Parke County. After an arson fire destroyed the second bridge at the Roseville/Coxville Bridge site, Jefferson P. Van Fossen received the contract in 1910 to replace that structure. He also bid to build a bridge in the community of Jessup.

Only the names of three other bridge builders surfaced in old records. **Clark McDaniel** is credited with building the Catlin Bridge in 1907. **D.M. Brown** built the Mill Creek Bridge that same year, and the Rush Creek Bridge was constructed by **William Hendricks in 1904.** No additional information is known about these builders.

 Portions of the above were copied from Indiana Covered Bridges Thru the Years by George E. Gould. Used by permission, The Indiana Covered Bridge Society, Inc. Photo: INDIANA HISTORICAL SOCIETY (cropped).
Beeson Bridge

Built: 1906
Builder: Frankfort Construction Company
Creek: Williams Creek, originally on Roaring Creek
Current Location: In Billie Creek Village, US 36 east of Rockville
Original Location: On County Road 216, 1 mile northwest of Marshall
GPS: DD: N 39.76321 W 87.20639 DMS: 39° 45' 47.5632" N 87° 12' 23.0364" W
Map Reference Number: #38 (pedestrian traffic only)
National Society for the Preservation of Covered Bridges Number: 14-61-24
Length: 55 feet
Type: Burr-arch Truss, single span
Foundation: Concrete
Original Cost: Unknown

Bridge History: The Beeson Covered Bridge is a single span, Burr-arch Truss structure that was built by the Frankfort Construction Company in 1906. Today, the Beeson Bridge is the pedestrian entrance to the Billie Creek Village on US 36, just east of Rockville.

In 1969, the Beeson Bridge was closed after the abutments were declared unsafe. In turn, the major route to Turkey Run High School and Turkey Run State Park was also closed.

The Beeson Bridge has survived two arson attempts. The first occurred on August 9, 1979, and a second on August 15, 1979. Fortunately, although damaged, the bridge survived both arson attempts. Upon close inspection, burn marks from these attempts can still be seen on the beams towards the bridge's ends.

Buchta Trucking began moving the Beeson Bridge on December 4, 1979. They removed the roofing and siding before transporting the bridge. The covered bridge replaced the entrance footbridge at Billie Creek Village. The $20,000 - $38,000 moving cost was shared by Billie Creek Village and Parke County, Incorporated.

Originally, the Beeson Bridge was located near land owned for more than 100 years by the Beeson family. William H. Beeson, born in 1879, owned 53 acres by the bridge in 1920. The Beeson Log Cabin (photo right), built in 1835, was located nearby. It was moved to Billie Creek Village in 1969 and preserved. The Beeson Bridge was also moved back into proximity to the cabin 11 years later.

Did you know? Billie Creek Village is an 1850s living history museum. It contains a bakery, blacksmith shop, general store, candle shop, potter shop, farming barn, one-room school house and two churches, Gov. Joseph Wright's house and more. Open seasonally. See Billie Creek Village Facebook page for up-to-date information. Call 765-247-9658 for private tours.

Date visited:
Notes:
Big Rocky Fork Bridge

Built: 1900
Builder: Joseph J. Daniels
Creek: Big Rocky Fork (was Rocky Fork)
Location: On Greencastle Road, 1 mile southeast of Mansfield, near Fallen Rock Park
Driving Route: Black
GPS: DD N 39.66288  W -87.08067  DMS 39°39'47.1"N  87°04'50.2"W
Map Reference Number: #6 (pedestrian traffic only)
National Society for the Preservation of Covered Bridges Number: 14-61-01
Length: 72 feet
Type: Burr-arch Truss, single span
Foundation: Hewn limestone block
Original Cost: $1,475.50

Bridge History: The Big Rocky Fork Bridge, also known as Murphy Bridge, is a single span, Burr-arch Truss structure built by J.J. Daniels in 1900 and named for the creek it crosses. A Wikipedia article on the Big Rocky Ford Bridge includes a note that the area around this bridge was known to be a favorite hideout for the infamous bank robber, John Dillinger. The bridge was bypassed in 1987.

Since the bridge was bypassed, maintenance responsibility has passed from the Parke County Highway Department to the Parke County Park Department. Due to very limited funds, very little maintenance has been performed. On July 13, 1991, a local group began to clean up the bridge site in response to the Adopt-A-Bridge program.

Nearby Places of Interest: Fallen Rock Park was named for a smokehouse-size sandstone rock that fell into the creek. The park offers cabins, RV and tent camping spaces, wooded hiking trails, scenic rock ledges and fishing.

Also, close to Big Rocky Fork Bridge and Fallen Rock Park is one of Parke County’s mysterious rock graves. Hidden on the side of a 100-foot high cliff, it is not visible from below or above. However, a streamlet seems to be a poorly defined trail up the cliff. The grave is 9 feet long by 30 inches deep and 20 inches wide. The path seems to step directly into the foot of the grave. A stone pillow is cut into the head end. There are three divergent stories to explain its origin. The first account attributes the grave to the Indians, prior to the 1820s settlement of the area. A second account in the late 1800s attributes the excavation to a group of campers from nearby Fallen Rock Park. The third account attributes the grave to a local farmer, Mr. Israel Asbury. This account indicated that he dug it so his family could take him there. Or, they wondered if he intended to go there to die. Instead, he was killed while sitting on a railroad tie, oblivious to the oncoming train whistle. He was buried in an ordinary cemetery, and the grave was neither finished nor occupied.
Billie Creek Bridge

Built: 1895
Builder: Joseph J. Daniels
Creek: Williams Creek
Location: On Old 36, east of Rockville, in Billie Creek Village
GPS: DD N 39.76162° W 87.20717° DMS 39° 45' 41.166'' N 87° 12' 23.4396'' W
Map Reference Number: #39 (open to vehicles - 3 ton limit)
National Society for the Preservation of Covered Bridges Number: 14-61-19
Length: 62 feet
Type: Burr-arch Truss, single span
Foundation: Cut sandstone, built by J.L. Van Fossen
Original Cost: $820

Bridge History: The Billie Creek Bridge is a single span, Burr-arch Truss structure that was built by Joseph J. Daniels in 1895. The nickname for Williams Creek is Billie Creek; hence, the name Billie Creek Bridge. This bridge replaced an earlier one constructed by J.A. Britton in 1880. That bridge is thought to have been an open bridge, so it deteriorated rapidly because the structure was exposed to the elements.

There were two bids for the superstructure: J.J. Daniels, $820; and J.A. Britton, $845. The abutments were handled separately from the bridge contract. They were constructed out of cut sandstone by J.L. Van Fossen. The sandstone was cut and hauled from A.E. Fuel's quarry, located less than a mile away.

The Daniels Van Fossen Association continued with the construction of the replacement Roseville Covered Bridge in 1910. J.P. Van Fossen was the contractor, while J.J. Daniels was purported to be the on-site foreman. All three of the Van Fossen Bridges closely resemble the J.J. Daniels bridge patterns, including the Daniels Arched Portal. However, after repairs over time, the Billie Creek Bridge no longer has the Daniels Portals.

The Billie Creek Bridge was on the Pikes Peak Ocean-to-Ocean Highway that later became US 36. Sections of it were known as a plank roads, as wooden planks were laid across the muddy spots so vehicles could travel over them. Like the Sim Smith Bridge, the Billie Creek Bridge was saved by rerouting the highway and was not destroyed, as were the Howard and Hollandsburg Bridges.

Did you know? The Billie Creek Bridge is adjacent to the Billie Creek Village. See page 11 for village and contact information.

See page 60 for more about the Pikes Peak Ocean-to-Ocean Highway.