

INDIVIDUAL PROPERTY FORM FOR

Historic Resources of Morganton

MULTIPLE RESOURCE OR THEMATIC NOMINATION

1. NAME

HISTORIC

Hunting Creek Railroad Bridge

AND/OR COMMON

2. LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER spanning Hunting Creek just north of Highway 64-70 between its intersections with Stonebridge Rd. and E. Union St. NA NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Morganton

NA VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

STATE

North Carolina

CODE

037

COUNTY

Burke

CODE

023

3. CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	PUBLIC ACQUISITION	ACCESSIBLE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT
	NA	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL
			<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER abandoned

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Southern Railroad % Mr. L. E. Wetsel, Superintendent, Southern Railroad

STREET & NUMBER

33 Meadow Road

CITY, TOWN

Asheville

NA VICINITY OF

STATE

North Carolina 28813

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,

REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC

Burke County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

South Green Street

CITY, TOWN

Morganton

STATE

North Carolina 28655

6. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Suzanne Pickens Wylie

ORGANIZATION

Preservation Consultant

DATE

July 31, 1986

STREET & NUMBER

3301-T Park Road

TELEPHONE

(704) 527-1610

CITY OR TOWN

Charlotte

STATE

North Carolina 28209

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Hunting Creek Railroad Bridge was constructed ca. 1860 during the period when preparations were being made to lay track for the Western North Carolina Railroad from Salisbury to Morganton and then across the Blue Ridge to Asheville. Although the line did not reach Morganton until after the Civil War, ca. 1868, the bridge is believed to have been complete before the war. Other than the fact that the track has been removed from the bridge, the structure is completely intact and is a very rare and unusual resource associated with this early period in the history of the railroad in western North Carolina. In addition the bridge is a rare example of antebellum, stone bridge construction in the state.

The bridge is located across Hunting Creek just north of Highway 64-70, between its intersections with East Union Street and Stonebridge Drive. The bridge is almost directly underneath the present 1910 metal railroad bridge and was abandoned when locomotives became too heavy for the stone span to support. A second bridge was constructed directly in the path of the present bridge, pilings from that structure still remain. The grade was raised about 1910, when the metal structure was constructed. Although located only a short distance from a major highway, the bridge is relatively inaccessible. The bridge itself is clear of overgrowth; however, the area around the structure has dense underbrush and sparse trees.

The Hunting Creek Railroad Bridge is a two-span, arched stone bridge with an eight-foot wide, flat, stone bed. It is 130 feet long and stands about 24 feet above the creek. Each of the arches rises about fourteen feet and the center support is seven feet wide. The faces of the stones are rusticated but the edges are cut to fit snugly together. The arches are formed by stone voussoirs. Although simple and functional, the design of the bridge exhibits outstanding craftsmanship and it appears as solid as the day it was completed. A local railroad official speculated that it was probably still capable of supporting a small locomotive.

It is believed that the bridge may be the work of William Murdoch, a contractor who worked in North and South Carolina. Murdoch is known to have constructed a similar, but much larger, bridge near Salisbury and he is known to have worked on this section of the Western North Carolina Railroad. Railroad records, which usually contain detailed information for structures such as this, do not include information on this bridge aside from the fact that it was under construction in 1860. Possibly the beginning of the Civil War and the comparatively small size of this project account for the omission.

Resources Count: 1 Structure

8 SIGNIFICANCE

_____ NATIONAL X STATE _____ LOCAL

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 ca. 1860 - ca. 1890 BUILDER/ARCHITECT Unknown

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Hunting Creek Railroad Bridge was constructed ca. 1860 over Hunting Creek as the Western North Carolina Railroad was extended across Burke County. Although the bridge is believed to have been completed in 1860, trains did not actually use it until ca. 1868 when track was laid into Morganton. The bridge is located almost directly below the present metal bridge, eight to ten feet lower than the present grade. Although the grade was raised about 1910 when the present bridge was constructed, the path of the tracks remains virtually unchanged. The bridge is a two-span, arched bridge of coursed, rough-faced ashlar. It is a rare surviving example of a stone railroad bridge and is among the oldest extant railroad structures in the state. The Hunting Creek Bridge may be the work of contractor William Murdoch, who constructed a similar but much larger bridge near Salisbury. Murdoch's name is mentioned in connection with construction on this section of the rail line; however, the Hunting Bridge is not identified specifically as his work. Whether or not Murdoch is responsible for the bridge, it remains significant in engineering for its construction technique. It is also important as a reminder of the extension of the Western North Carolina Railroad into Western North Carolina and is believed to be the earliest surviving resource associated with that project.

CRITERIA ASSESSMENT

- A. The Hunting Creek Railroad Bridge is significant for its association with the extension of the Western North Carolina Railroad into western North Carolina. The coming of the railroad was of critical importance as it opened the western Piedmont and mountains to commerce, industry, and tourism. The bridge was superseded by a new adjacent bridge ca. 1890.
- C. The Hunting Creek Railroad Bridge is significant in the area of engineering as a rare surviving example of a stone railroad bridge. The bridge may be the work of William Murdoch, a well known construction engineer, who worked in North and South Carolina.

Construction of the Hunting Creek Railroad Bridge is known to have begun ca. 1860 and was probably completed before work halted on the line, ca. 1861. The bridge is the earliest and most intact resource associated with the coming of the railroad to western North Carolina. In addition, the bridge is a rare surviving example of a nineteenth century railroad bridge and is significant in engineering for its form of construction.

In 1858 plans were made by the Western North Carolina Railroad to extend service to Morganton and on into the Blue Ridge Mountains to Asheville. The project was massive, if only in terms of logistics, but officers and stockholders embraced the plan enthusiastically. Railroad service would make the west more accessible to tourists and settlers and would make shipment of goods and raw materials in and out of the region far less arduous.

The annual stockholders meeting was held in Morganton in 1858. A number of prominent Morganton citizens were involved either as officers or major stockholders including Samuel McDowell Tate, E. J. Erwin, Tod R. Caldwell, John C. McDowell, and R. C. Pearson.

The rail line was scheduled to be completed to a spot near Morganton by 1861. Survey of the line had already begun in 1858. By 1860 the line was complete as far as three miles east of Morganton. It was also reported that construction had begun on the Hunting Creek bridge in preparation for completion into town. The bridge may be the work of William Murdoch, the contractor known to be responsible for a much larger, but similar bridge near Salisbury. Murdoch did work on this section of the line but is not specifically mentioned in connection with this bridge.¹²⁴

The coming of the Civil War halted progress on the rail line and work did not resume until the late 1860s. After the war much of the rail line that had been laid had to be repaired. It is possible that the bridge was completed during this time if it had not been finished before.

Although the beginning of rail service for Morganton about 1868 did not work miracles for the town's severely depressed economy, it did make a great deal of difference when the town began to revive. Certainly rail service was a major consideration in locating the state mental hospital in Morganton.

(See continuation sheet)

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

See Cover Form, Section 9.

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY approximately .03 acres

UTM REFERENCES

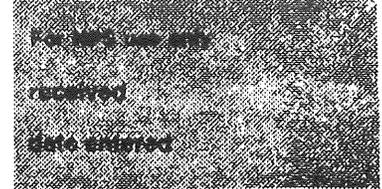
A	1, 7	4, 4, 0 4, 6, 0	3, 9 5, 6 3, 8, 0	B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The boundary for the Hunting Creek Railroad Bridge National Register nomination is shown as the red line on the accompanying Burke County Tax Map #44-54 drawn on a scale of 100 feet to the inch. The boundary includes the bridge and approximately three feet of property to each side of the structure. The boundary excludes the adjacent railroad tracks and present bridge.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**



Hunting Creek Railroad Bridge:

Continuation sheet

Historical Background

Item number 8

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The Hunting Creek Bridge was replaced by another bridge by at least 1890. That bridge, for which pilings are still visible, was at the same low grade as the stone bridge. The present iron bridge was constructed in 1910, probably at the time the grade level was raised. The stone bridge is located almost directly under the present bridge, indicating that the road bed has remained virtually unchanged.

The Hunting Creek Railroad Bridge is a small, low-arched span constructed of rough-faced ashlar. It appears as solid today as the day it was constructed, a testament to the skill and craftsmanship of the engineers and workmen who planned and built the Western North Carolina Railroad.

(For footnotes, see Cover Form, Item 9.)

