

## The Covered Bridge Numbering System

*[Editor's note: This document is a revised version of the origin of the numbering system published in the Spring 1998 issue of Bridges & Byways, the publication of the Ohio Historic Bridge Association. That article was also published in the Winter 1999 issue of Covered Bridge Topics. The suffix system was first devised for the 1985 NSPCB covered bridge safari in western Ohio and eastern Indiana by Dr. James E. Reinoehl. Bill Caswell updated the text to reflect changes made in the 2009 and 2021 World Guide to Covered Bridges.]*

The covered bridge numbering system was devised by John Diehl of Cincinnati, Ohio, while he was chairman of the former Ohio Covered Bridge Committee. The Ohio Historical Society used this system in 1953 with the publication of its first Ohio Covered Bridge List.

The system uses three numbers separated by hyphens. The first number represents the number of the US state in alphabetical order; for example, Ohio is number 35, Alabama is 01, and Wyoming is 50. The second number represents the county in that state. Thus, 35-01 represents Adams County in Ohio. Each bridge in that county can then be sequentially numbered as additional bridges are discovered or built. For example, the Harshaville Covered Bridge in Adams County, Ohio, is given the number 35-01-02. All known covered bridges in Ohio (past and present) have been assigned a number using this system.

When the National Society for the Preservation of Covered Bridges (NSPCB) published its first *World Guide to Covered Bridges* in 1959, it adopted the same system and expanded it to include additional numbers for Canadian Provinces. Thus, New Brunswick is number 55, Ontario is 59 and Quebec is 61.

As covered bridges were "discovered" in countries outside northern North America, they were identified with a letter abbreviation for the country, followed by a number signifying the administrative unit of the country and a sequential number for the bridge. For example, "MX" was used for Mexico, "A" for Austria. "S" for Switzerland, etc. As time went on, some bridges had letter abbreviations which no longer reflect the current name of the country. For example, German bridges were still designated "WG" for West Germany and a Slovenian bridge had the prefix "Y" for Yugoslavia. In the 2009 edition of the *World Guide*, the country identifier for structures outside of the United States and Canada was standardized on the country's two-character ISO 3166-1 alpha-2 codes.<sup>1</sup>

As new covered bridges were "discovered" in northern North America, many were given numbers even though they were constructed in recent years without the original purpose for covering bridges; namely, to protect the mostly wooden truss from rotting. Indeed, most of these new bridges did not even have a truss! A committee was formed by the NSPCB to address this situation, and it was decided to try to separate these new roofed structures from "authentic" old covered bridges by giving them a letter designation. Foot bridges would be identified with a lower-case letter and bridges large enough to handle vehicles would be given a capital letter. The 1989 edition of the *World Guide* attempted to include only "authentic" covered bridges with numbers, while a companion volume entitled *Romantic Shelters* was published to include all lettered structures. The roofed bridge in Mohican State Park in Ashland County, Ohio, was designated 35-03-A because its truss consists of weathering steel. Only bridges with wood as an integral part of the truss would receive a number designation; all other "stringers" would receive letters.

Over the years, many old covered bridges have been modified by repairs to keep them in service a while longer. Sometimes they have piers or bents added for support, while other times I-beams are put under them to carry most of the load. The Belle Hall Covered Bridge in Licking County (35-45-01) was badly damaged by a truck, whose insurance company paid for "repairs" which consisted of adding I-beams and removing most of the old wood truss! Other old covered bridges are almost completely destroyed by fire or flood but then are rebuilt to closely resemble the old bridge. When this happens, a

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<sup>1</sup> ISO 3166-1 alpha-2 codes are two-letter country codes defined in ISO 3166-1, part of the ISO 3166 standard published by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), to represent countries, dependent territories, and special areas of geographical interest.

suffix "#2" is added to the bridge number to distinguish the new bridge from the old one. Older reference materials may also use a suffix of "G" for "gone" for bridges which were lost before the numbering system was developed. The Covered Spans of Yesteryear project - [www.lostbridges.org](http://www.lostbridges.org) – has assigned numbers to all of these past bridges so they can be more easily referenced.

There have been suggestions to include a system of suffixes to include every condition which is perceived by some as a deviation from authenticity. Then only "authentic" old covered bridges would have the simple old numbering system and all other covered structures would have suffixes. For example, the suffix "B" could be used for bypassed bridges and "M" might indicate that the bridge has been moved from its original location. Similarly, a "T" might indicate that the truss has been modified; "R" could signify that the roof is not wooden shingles; "I" could tell of added I-beams; "^" could signify added pier(s) or bent(s) for added support; and "-" could be used on shortened bridges. Other suffixes could be used to tell of modern roof trusses replacing the original cross bracing system and sheet metal siding used in place of side boards. Also, a suffix "N" could be added to signify that the bridge has been built or rebuilt in recent years, say after 1920. This system of suffixes has been tested on occasion. Of course, the suffixes are subject to change each time the bridge is repaired.

Some additional information could also be provided for "romantic shelters" to distinguish those which are readily accessible to the public from those which are located on private property. Perhaps a suffix "\$" could be used to indicate locations with an entrance fee and a suffix "~" could signify bridges on private property that can be examined only by trespassing. A "romantic shelter" with only a letter then would be accessible in a public park or adjacent to a public road, while those with a suffix would require paying for or asking for permission to see them.

To show examples of actual usage, this table was included in the Winter 1999 *Covered Bridge Topics*.

Number	Name	Number	Name
01-22-12-MR^W~	Lidy Walker	35-29-15-IRT^	Stevenson Rd
01-41-04	Salem-Shotwell	35-29-16-RTX^	Charlton Mill Rd
14-15-01#2MIT	Guilford	35-45-01-IRT	Belle Hall
14-21-01-MR^P	Longwood	35-45-17-M1TPQ	McLain
14-24-11-R	Whitewater Canal Aqueduct	35-55-01-BRI	Eldean
14-70-07-R	Moscow	35-57-01-MP	Germantown
15-61-07-BR	Roseman	35-57-03-MT	Carillon Park
22-34-01	Whites	35-60-31-BR	Salt Creek
22-41-01#2BT	Bradfield (Ada)	35-61-57-G	Huffman Wood
22-82-01-M\$P	Ackley	35-65-15-M~W	Valentine
25-69-02	Union	35-68-04-MQR	Dixon Branch
29-02-05-BR^	Swift River	35-68-13	Geeting
29-02-06-RI	Albany	35-84-20-MM	Schwendeman
32-55-01-T	Newfield	38-18-01-R^	Logan Mills
33-18-01-BRW	Bunker Hill	38-51-01-WP	Thomas Mill
35-09-02-MMIB^	Gov. Bebb Park	42-10-01-R	Elizabethton
35-21-04-ITR^	Chambers Rd	45-14-10-R	Best
35-29-01-MR)(	Glen Helen	46-35-02-BR	Link Farm
35-29-03-MBRT^	West Engle Mill Rd.	48-06-01-TA	Sink's Mill