

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A.) Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a) Use a typewriter, word processor or computer to complete all items.

1 Name of Property

historic name: Natural Bridge
other names/site number: 081-0414 415

2. Location

street & number: P.O. Box 57 or Intersection Rt. 11 & Rt. 130
city, town: Natural Bridge
state: Virginia code: VA county: Rockbridge code: 163 tip code: 24578
N/A not for publication vicinity

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally (See continuation sheet for additional comments).

Signature of certifying official *Walter S. ...* Date 10/6/97

State or Federal agency and bureau Virginia Department of Historic Resources.

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:
 entered in the National Register. Signature of the Keeper Date
 See continuation sheet.
 determined eligible for the National Register. See continuation sheet
 determined not eligible for the National Register.
 removed from the National Register.
 other, (explain:)

NATURAL BRIDGE

Name of Property

ROCKBRIDGE COUNTY, VA

County and State

5. Classification**Ownership of Property**
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
 public-local
 public-State
 public-Federal

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

- building(s)
 district
 site
 structure
 object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Non contributing	
site 1	2	buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects

Total 1 2

Name of related multiple property listing
 previously N/A
 (Enter N/A if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

Number of contributing resources
 previously listed in the Natl Register
 0

6. Function or Use**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

1. Landscape / Natural Feature
2. Recreation & Culture / Outdoor Recreation

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

- same
 same

7. Description**Architectural Classification**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Other - natural rock bridge

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation
 walls

roof
 other : limestone

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

X See continuation sheet

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria
(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic value, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history

- Areas of Significance**
(Enter categories from instructions)
1. Art
 2. Entertainment/Recreation
 3. Ethnic Heritage/Native American
 4. Philosophy
 5. Transportation

Period of Significance
c.1700 to 1946

Significant Dates
1774 title granted to Thomas Jefferson

Significant Person
(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)
Jefferson, Thomas

Cultural Affiliation
N/A

Architect/Builder
N/A

Criteria Consideration
(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B** removed from its original location
- C** a birthplace or grave
- D** a cemetery
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F** a commemorative property
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years

Narrative Statement of Significance
(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

___ See continuation sheet

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

- Previous documentation of file (NPS):**
- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
 - previously listed in the National Register
 - previously determined eligible by the National Register
 - designated a National Historic Landmark
 - recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
 - recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

- Primary location of additional data:**
- State historic preservation office
 - Other State agency
 - Federal agency
 - Local government
 - University
 - Other
- Specify repository: James G. Leyburn Library,
Washington & Lee University, Lexington,
Virginia 24450

NATURAL BRIDGE
Name of Property

ROCKBRIDGE COUNTY, VA
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property:

5.86 acres

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

Center of bridge: 17 628380 4165280

___ See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Rockbridge County (Virginia) Tax Parcel # 105-11-0

___ See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

Bridge itself and most important viewsheds.

___ See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title	Sara S. Hollberg	date	1/22/97
organization	Frazier Associates	telephone	(510) 886-6230
street and number	213 N. Augusta Street	state	VA
city or town	Staunton	zip code	24401

Additional Information

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location

A Sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.
1996 survey and old plat included

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional Items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name **Natural Bridge of Virginia, Inc. / David Parker (contact)**

street and number **P.O. Box 57**

telephone **(540) 291-2121**

city or town **Natural Bridge**

state **VA** zip code **24578**

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Preservation Act as amended. (16 U.S.C. 470 et. seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this information is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and manufacturing data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, D.C. 20013-7127; and the Office of Management And Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, D.C. 20503.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 1
NATURAL BRIDGE
Rockbridge County, VA

NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

Natural Bridge, located in southern Rockbridge County, is a bridge of limestone carved by natural forces. The nomination covers 5.86 acres containing the bridge itself and viewsheds to the southeast and to the north. The historic condition of the bridge is unchanged, except that a variety of paths, railings, benches, markers, and other site improvements have been placed on the site to serve the needs of visitors. In addition, official markers have been placed at the bottom (geodetic survey) and at the top (U.S. Geological Survey bench mark) of the bridge. Although there are substantial structures nearby, such as the visitors center, hotel, and museum, the only buildings on the site are two small noncontributing utility buildings out of sight on the top of the bridge.

The features of the bridge will be described in general, then by the experience of viewing the bridge from below and walking through it, and finally by noting the site features on the top of the bridge, which is not open to the public.

The bridge is a block of solid limestone spanning the chasm between two steep slopes. Cedar Creek runs under the bridge; it was the gradual erosion from this creek that formed the structure. The bridge forms a semi-elliptical arch. Because of the irregularity of its shape, many different measurements have been quoted. Dimensions commonly are given as a height of approximately 200 feet high (198.5 feet by a 1927 measurement¹; 205 to 270 feet according to Thomas Jefferson²; and 215 feet according to measurements made by French engineers during the American Revolution³), a width

¹Chester A. Reeds, *Natural Bridge and Its Environs* (Lynchburg, Virginia: Brown-Morrison Co., Inc., 1927), 22.

²Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, ed. William Peden (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1955), 24.

³(no author), *The Story of Natural Bridge* (Natural Bridge, Virginia: Natural Bridge of Virginia, Inc., 1947), 6.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 2
NATURAL BRIDGE
Rockbridge County, VA

varying from 150 feet at one end to 50 feet at the other, and a thickness (height) of the rock of approximately 50 feet. The unbroken span has dimensions of approximately 90 feet long, 100 feet wide, and 50 feet deep.⁴

The eastern boundary of the site lies approximately where the path from the visitors' center opens to a stunning first view of the bridge. This point is reached by a concrete pedestrian walkway that follows the curve of the east wall of the canyon. The pathway continues under the bridge, where it crosses Cedar Creek, and on the north side of the bridge runs along the west canyon wall. A low two-foot-high mortared stone wall flanks the creek side of the path, while a taller wall of similar construction forms a boundary along some portions of the slope side. Green aluminum and wood benches face the bridge in a single row on the southeastern approach and in two parallel rows on the north side. Where the path crosses Cedar Creek under the bridge itself, low guardrails have been placed on both sides, consisting of stone pillars approximately two feet tall joined by two treated wood railings approximately four inches square and eight feet long. There are two markers on the path. Almost directly under the bridge a sign marks a rock in which a National Geodetic Survey vertical control mark has been embedded (Monument #2 on the 1996 survey). The inscription reads "G.W. 1750 / 1984." This apparently is the same stone uncovered in 1927 bearing the initials "G.W." and a surveyor's cross, a photograph of which appears in the Reeds book.⁵ The sign also brings to the visitor's notice a carving in the far bridge face which is advertised as the handiwork of George Washington. Outlined in a white box are the initials "G.W." carved in a spot 23 feet high. The other sign, on the north side of the bridge, describes attractions farther down the path (and outside of the project area).

The boundaries of the bridge are closed to maintain security. A green, solid-board fence approximately eight to ten feet tall runs along the sides and top of the bridge. At the far south ends and at the northeast end, the fencing

⁴Reeds, 22.

⁵Reeds, 59 (Figure 80).

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 3
NATURAL BRIDGE
Rockbridge County, VA

material switches to equally tall chain link. Several locked gates provide access to either side of the top of the bridge and to small utility buildings.

The top of the bridge serves U.S. Route 11. This two-lane highway sits within a right of way that normally is 80 feet wide; however, the bridge is narrower than this in places and as noted on the survey, the State retains only the surface reservation (not fee simple ownership) necessary to use the bridge, which in some cases is little more than the width of pavement for the two lanes. At the top of the bridge, the shoulder is approximately four feet between the road way and the fence. Marked on the survey as Monument #1 is a U.S. Geological Survey bench mark that was set on the top of the bridge in 1905 and bears the inscription "1,150 feet above sea level" (although it apparently is approximately 10 feet from the very highest level).⁶ A billboard advertising the site sits atop the fence beside the road as it crosses the southeast corner of the bridge.

The top and sides of the bridge are covered with scrub forest, mostly maples and other deciduous species as well as a few cedars and pines. None of the trees are very tall and the area is rocky, with numerous outcrops.

Conduit pipes for electrical wires run along the top of the bridge on both sides, serving speakers and lights. Two noncontributing utility buildings (each less than 10 feet square) in unobtrusive locations on each side of the top of the bridge also serve these electrical needs.

Attached are a 1996 survey of the site, a 1927 sketch map, and the U.S.G.S. map.

⁶Reeds, 22.

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 7 Page 1
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Rockbridge County, VA

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 7 Page 2
NATURAL BRIDGE
Rockbridge County, VA

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 7 Page 3
NATURAL BRIDGE
Rockbridge County, VA

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 8 Page 4
NATURAL BRIDGE
Rockbridge County, VA

NARRATIVE STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Since the settling of America, Natural Bridge has served as one of the nation's most recognizable icons of the wonders of nature. Its image was popularized by artists throughout the centuries and by a stream of illustrious visitors who waxed eloquent on its inspiring characteristics. The bridge so captured the attention of Thomas Jefferson that he purchased the site, obtaining a grant from George III in 1774, and later wrote that he considered the bridge a public trust and would not allow it to be injured, defaced, or masked from public view. Indeed, Natural Bridge and Niagara Falls in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries occupied the top tier as the most impressive natural wonders in the New World. These wonders were very important to Europeans as well as Americans, for the vast wilderness of America presented new horizons in man's quest to understand his place in the world. Natural Bridge inspired both reflection on God's supreme power and curiosity about the science of nature. In its beautiful setting, one that became increasingly accessible as civilization expanded westward, the bridge inspired countless renderings that provide not just pictures of a bridge but the frame of reference for each artist. Taken as a continuum, these renderings are fascinating glimpses into the philosophy, art, technology, and culture of each time period. Likewise, because the bridge has attracted visitors from its "discovery" through today, its long history as a tourist site provides a similar record of the tastes and trends and technology of the day. As a sacred site to the Monacan Indians, a setting associated by popular tradition with George Washington's exploits, a favored property of Thomas Jefferson, a functioning bridge along the main north-south route through western Virginia, a tourist destination, and an ever-popular artists' subject, the bridge has always held a unique place in the national consciousness. It is a National Natural Landmark listed by the U.S. Department of the Interior.

Natural Bridge meets both the A and B criteria, as it has made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history, from the period of Native American Euro-American contact to the early twentieth century, and is associated with the life of Thomas Jefferson, certainly a person significant in

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 8 Page 5
NATURAL BRIDGE
Rockbridge County, VA

our past as the principal intellectual spokesperson of the American Revolution and the nation's third president. The date he was granted title to the bridge (1774) is a significant date. None of the criteria considerations apply to this property nor does the site reflect important cultural affiliations. The bridge is significant in the areas of Philosophy, Art, Entertainment/Recreation, Ethnic Heritage (Native American), and Transportation.

Chronological History Of The Property

Probably the first Euro-American to see the bridge was John Peter Sallings, who arrived in the area as early as 1730. His diary entry on the bridge in 1742 (no longer extant) was the first documentation of the bridge, although he may have viewed it as early as 1734.⁷ Reeds, in his guide to the bridge, notes that "the earliest mention of the Bridge is by Burnaby, in 1759."⁸

At the time of Euro-American settlement, Native Americans used the Valley as a common hunting ground among tribes. The area was not permanently inhabited. Natural Bridge lies along a trail the Indians used, which the Euro-Americans believed them to call the "Great Path,"⁹ and it apparently served as a bridge then as it has throughout history.

George Washington is said to have surveyed the bridge about 1750 while he was working in western Virginia for Lord Fairfax,¹⁰ but this is unlikely as Lord Fairfax did not own property this far south.¹¹ Thomas Jefferson probably viewed the bridge for the first time in August 1767, when he made notes in his Memorandum Book that became the basis for his description in *Notes on Virginia*.¹² He obtained 157 acres containing Natural Bridge in a grant from

⁷E.P. Tompkins and J. Lee Davis, *The Natural Bridge and Its Historical Surroundings* (Natural Bridge, Virginia: Natural Bridge of Virginia, Inc., 1939), 1 and 112.

⁸Reeds, 57.

⁹Tompkins, 2.

¹⁰Reeds, 58.

¹¹S. Allen Chambers, Jr., notes received April 1997.

¹²Monticello Research Department, notes made April 5, 1995, and delivered to David Coffey.

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 8 Page 6
NATURAL BRIDGE
Rockbridge County, VA

King George III dated July 5, 1774, and signed by Virginia Governor Dunmore.¹³ In 1778, Rockbridge County was formed, so named because of the Natural Bridge within its boundaries.

Jefferson made at least three more recorded visits to the site.¹⁴ According to Reeds, Jefferson not only surveyed the site himself in 1802 and made a map but the next year had a two-room log cabin built, one room of which was to be kept open for visitors.¹⁵ A book left there "for sentiments" recorded such names as Marshall, Monroe, Clay, Benton, Jackson, Van Buren, and Sam Houston.¹⁶ After financial difficulties in 1809, Jefferson tried to sell the land and for a time leased it for saltpeter mining and use as a shot tower.¹⁷ In 1817, he agreed for a local freeman named Patrick Henry to live at Natural Bridge as a custodian of the property.¹⁸

Natural Bridge passed out of Jefferson family possession in 1835. Thereafter, tourism facilities were expanded and over the years Natural Bridge became a popular destination for the general public arriving not just by horseback but later by train and by car.

The bridge has changed hands numerous times, always remaining in private hands but apparently not always solvent. Title to the 157 acres containing the bridge was granted to Thomas Jefferson in 1774.¹⁹ He died in 1826, and in 1835 his heirs Martha Randolph and Thomas Jefferson Randolph sold the property to Joel Lackland for \$1,500.²⁰ As Jefferson had devised the land "subject to the payment of his debts"²¹, it may not have been free and clear at

¹³Reeds, 58.

¹⁴Monticello Research Department, notes made April 5, 1995, and delivered to David Coffey.

¹⁵Reeds, 59.

¹⁶Reeds, 59.

¹⁷Monticello Research Department, notes made April 5, 1995 and delivered to David Coffey.

¹⁸Monticello Research Department, notes made July 1995 and delivered to David Coffey.

¹⁹Reeds, 58.

²⁰Deed Book T, 476.

²¹Deed Book T, 476.

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 8 Page 7
NATURAL BRIDGE
Rockbridge County, VA

his death. In 1846, Lackland sold the property, then consisting of the 157 acres plus additional tracts of seven and one acres, for \$10,000 to Walter K. Cole.²² This 165-acre block remained intact through many exchanges. Cole sold one-third interest to Jesse Wootten and Wootten acquired the remaining two-thirds in 1848 in a chancery suit involving Cole, Wootten, and David G. Houston.²³ In 1859, the property passed to John B. Luster, Wootten's creditor, apparently after Wootten defaulted on his payments.²⁴ In turn, Luster failed to pay the bond made in 1862 to pay \$10,000 within three years and in 1868, a trustee conveyed the bridge property to Lewis Harman, who was the winning bidder at auction for \$9,355.²⁵ He did not keep the bridge long either. Two years later, he and his wife Ellen sold the property to Michael G. Harman, who sold it the next day to John W. Garrett of Baltimore for \$10,000.²⁶ But in July 1872, Garrett and his wife sold the property back to Michael G. Harman.²⁷ The next exchange was in 1876, when Michael Harman and his wife Caroline sold the bridge tract and other properties to A.W. Harman, Jr., for \$14,000.²⁸ Financial troubles again prompted a sale, when an 1881 settlement involving the National Valley Bank in Staunton as the plaintiff and A.W. Harman, Jr., and others as defendants, accepted the proposition of H.C. Parsons "for the purchase of the land embraced in the Natural Bridge property in the bill and proceedings mentioned, at the price of \$14,000."²⁹ Parsons greatly increased the scope of the tourist site he had acquired. Parsons and his wife Nellie in 1884 transferred the Harman purchase and other land totaling approximately 2,000 acres to the Natural Bridge Forest Company for \$100,000.³⁰ Financing appears to have been through New York financial circles, as the Knickerbocker Trust Company and

²²Deed Book Z, 147.

²³Deed Book CC, 85.

²⁴Deed Book II, 120.

²⁵Deed Book JJ, 673.

²⁶Deed Book KK, 466 and Deed Book MM, 13.

²⁷Deed Book MM, 356.

²⁸Deed Book OO, 544.

²⁹Deed Book SS, 240.

³⁰Deed Book WW, 342.

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 8 Page 8
NATURAL BRIDGE
Rockbridge County, VA

the Manhattan Trust Company held deeds of trust in this period. In 1900, a total of 425 acres including the bridge was sold by the Natural Bridge Forest Company (and Nellie L. Parsons who conveyed interest in an adjoining tract) to the Natural Bridge Development Company.³¹ This same 425 acres, along with an adjacent 1,060 acres including the hotel, pavilions, and other improvements, was sold to Natural Bridge of Virginia, Inc. in 1925.³² It remains in the same corporate ownership today, although there have been different shareholders of the company. The separate 5.86-acre tax parcel designated in this nomination to contain just the bridge and its principal public viewsheds was recorded in August 1996.

Significance In Area Of Philosophy

Natural Bridge functioned as a gauge of man's place in the universe. Because it was so notable a natural wonder, changing views of it reflected changing views of nature and advances in science. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the bridge aroused emotions of both terror and delight; its attraction reflected the aesthetic ideal of that time. The bridge also symbolized how the new American wilderness was viewed as much more sublime than the wonders of Europe. The bridge was doubly mysterious and awesome because early visitors did not have a scientific explanation for its formation. The bridge also represented God's hand on earth. The "new Eden" of America was thought to have more direct and dramatic examples of God's work. As the 1800s wore on, the bridge became an artistic subject just as delightful as before but without the horror. Paintings became more realistic and then more picturesque.³³

Thomas Jefferson himself epitomized the dual fascination engendered by Natural Bridge as both a scientific phenomenon and an awe-inspiring icon.

³¹Deed Book 90, 355.

³²Deed Book, 142, 306.

³³Pamela H. Simpson, *So Beautiful an Arch: Images of the Natural Bridge 1787-1890* (Lexington, Virginia: Washington and Lee University, 1982), 3-5.

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 8 Page 9
NATURAL BRIDGE
Rockbridge County, VA

His description in the 1785 *Notes on Virginia* veers from detailed measurements and a literal description of the site to an ecstatic and enthusiastic detailing of the almost religious experience its viewing inspired.³⁴

At first some (including Jefferson) thought the bridge had to be the result of a cataclysmic event. Later geologists put the cause as the gradual forces of erosion. One of the first of these was Francis William Gilmer, a geologist who visited the bridge with Jefferson in 1815 and then delivered a brief treatise "On the Natural Bridge of Virginia" to the American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia. Gilmer discounted the theory of the bridge being formed by a "sudden convulsion, or an extraordinary deviation from the ordinary laws of nature," suggesting instead that it had been "produced by the very slow operation of causes which have always and must ever continue to act in the same manner."³⁵

Even more than as a natural phenomenon, the bridge was viewed as a work of God through nature. From the Native Americans forward, the bridge was seen as a demonstration of God's work. Even those who realized it was created by understandable natural forces still attributed awe-inspiring power to it. In fact, almost all early accounts of visitors use such words as "fear," "wonder," "awful," and "awe." The state of mind of early viewers of the bridge, as recounted in various sources, is almost always one of awe, with quite a bit of fear mixed in for those looking down from the top. Some of these are quoted below:

Jefferson in his *Notes on the State of Virginia* gives an entire page to Natural Bridge, calling it "the most sublime of Nature's works....few men have resolution to...look over into the abyss. You involuntarily fall on your hands and feet, creep to the parapet and peep over it. Looking down from this height about a

³⁴Jefferson, *Notes*, ed. by Peden, 25 and 263-4 .

³⁵Reeds, 60-61.

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 8 Page 10
NATURAL BRIDGE
Rockbridge County, VA

minute, gave me a violent head ach (sic)... descending then to the valley below, the sensation becomes delightful in the extreme. It is impossible for the emotions, arising from the sublime, to be felt beyond what they are here: so beautiful an arch, so elevated, so light, and springing, as it were, up to heaven, the rapture of the Spectator is really indiscribable (sic)!"³⁶

The New York Christian Herald in 1826 noted that "[t]his great work of Nature is considered by many as the second great curiosity of our country, Niagara Falls being the first. This natural bridge is entirely the work of God. It is of solid limestone, and connects two mountains together by a most beautiful arch, over which there is a great wagon road...the awful rocks...none but the Almighty God could build a bridge like this. . . The view from below is pleasing, as the top is awful."³⁷

Henry Howe in his 1845 discussion of the bridge further discusses how the nation's top two natural landmarks differ. He notes that Natural Bridge is higher than Niagara Falls and is "a greater curiosity and more an object of wonder...the Natural Bridge is nature like art." In his view, Niagara Falls has great magnitude, but Natural Bridge is the more compelling because it is not so understandable.³⁸

Henry Clay described Natural Bridge as "the Bridge not made with hands, that spans a river, carries a highway, and makes two mountains one."³⁹

³⁶Jefferson, *Notes*, ed. by Peden, 24-5.

³⁷Tompkins, 33-34.

³⁸Tompkins, 11 (quoting from p. 457 of Howe's "Historical Collections of Virginia").

³⁹Tompkins, 49 (quoting Albert F. Gilmore).

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 8 Page 11
NATURAL BRIDGE
Rockbridge County, VA

Significance In Area of Art

Natural Bridge has from the beginning of the nation been part of the public imagination. From *Moby Dick* to travel publications to paintings of the Peaceable Kingdom, the Natural Bridge of Virginia was used as a symbol of the ultimate natural wonder. The 1982 exhibit by Washington and Lee University entitled "So Beautiful an Arch: Images of the Natural Bridge 1787-1890" is an invaluable record of these many views, both literal and figurative, of the bridge. Natural Bridge was one of the most drawn and photographed spots in America judging by the wide range of publications in which its image appeared. Varied interpretations of the bridge by artists over three centuries not only represent distinct schools of art, but also reflect a progression of ideas about nature and provide revealing glimpses of society and even technology. Artistic renderings were made of the bridge by a stream of artists from not only the United States but also western Europe and even Russia. Some of the more famous or distinctive of these images are described below, with notes from the exhibit book written by Washington and Lee University art history professor Pamela Simpson.

The first prominent advertisement of Natural Bridge was in *The Travels of Marquis de Chastellux in North America in 1780-82*. Chastellux had been in the party of forty members of the French Academy serving under the Count de Rochambeau. During the American Revolution, the French made two expeditions to the bridge and their measurements and diagrams were widely circulated in Europe and America for many years.⁴⁰ The earliest published images of the bridge apparently were three drawings done for Chastellux by the Baron de Turpin of the (French) Royal Corps of Engineers in 1786 (English edition published in 1787.)⁴¹ (EXHIBIT PHOTO 1)

⁴⁰Reeds, 59.

⁴¹Pamela H. Simpson, *So Beautiful an Arch: Images of the Natural Bridge 1787-1890* (Lexington, Virginia: Washington and Lee University, 1982), 4 and 6.

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 8 Page 12
NATURAL BRIDGE
Rockbridge County, VA

Isaac Weld, an English topographical artist and writer, traveled in the United States from 1795 to 1797. His published account of his journeys, including an engraving labeled "View of the Rock Bridge," was a popular book and went through three editions in London between 1798 and 1800⁴² (EXHIBIT PHOTO 2). Other renderings from the early 1800s by British, Russian, Italian, and French artists are included in the exhibit. Quite clearly, Natural Bridge was one of the premier sites in the new nation to visit, and to make images of for popular distribution.

Two other early renderings (EXHIBIT PHOTOS 3 & 4), both done in 1820, show unique details. Drayton's aquatint shows a covered wagon crossing the bridge, which would have been a familiar sight at that time. Not so the "Alps" which embellish the background of the work by the Italian Ferrario, who added mountains unmistakably more like those of his home county than those in Virginia.⁴³

Edward Hicks, one of America's foremost folk artists, used the Natural Bridge in his oil painting of about 1825-30, one of at least six Peaceable Kingdoms that used Natural Bridge (EXHIBIT PHOTO 5). Simpson notes that Hicks "used the Bridge as a symbol of unity between God's work and man's, suggesting that heaven's peace could exist on earth."⁴⁴ The text around the painting refers to "grim carnivorous nature" and "savage beasts," suggesting that it is the fearful nature embodied by the bridge that is overcome by God's grace.

Other images, such as those by Milbert circa 1828-29 (EXHIBIT PHOTO 6) and Goodacre in 1832 (EXHIBIT PHOTO 7), show Indians at the bridge, reinforcing its early image as a wild, natural, frontier site.

Natural Bridge played the same role in literature of this period. Noted in *Rockbridge County Artists and Artisans* is the revealing esoterica that

⁴²Simpson, 8.

⁴³Simpson, 14-15.

⁴⁴Simpson, 17.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 13
NATURAL BRIDGE
Rockbridge County, VA

Herman Melville used the image of Natural Bridge in his 1851 book *Moby Dick*, confident that the reference would be understood: "[and] Moby Dick moved on, still withholding from sight the full terrors of his submerged trunk, entirely hiding the wretched hideousness of his jaw. But soon the fore part of him slowly rose from the water; for an instant his whole marbled body formed a high arch, like Virginia's Natural Bridge, and warningly waving his bannered flukes in the air, the grand god revealed himself, sounded, and went out of sight."⁴⁵ It was the terror aspect and the dark forces of Nature that this depiction of the bridge clearly draws from.

Famous artists came to paint the bridge, including Frederick Edwin Church of the Hudson River School in 1852 and David Johnson, a second-generation Hudson River School artist, in 1860 (EXHIBIT PHOTO 8). These paintings emphasize the beauty of the landscape and texture of the rocks.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, the bridge is more often rendered as a backdrop to human activity. A Currier and Ives print (EXHIBIT PHOTO 9), circa 1860, helped the common man to "celebrate the scenic splendors of America," in this case by showing a man fishing in the idyllic setting of the bridge.⁴⁶ Currier and Ives prints were widely available among the general population in the last half of the nineteenth century and this print would have been instrumental in popularizing the bridge and increasing tourist visitation.

Other publications also printed pictures that helped increase public awareness of Natural Bridge. By 1872, the bridge was presented in an even more picturesque way. Featured in the *Picturesque America* serial are drawings by Harry Fenn that seem almost storybook and leisurely. One shows a man sketching above the bridge, with servants waiting in the wings (EXHIBIT

⁴⁵Barbara Crawford and Royster Lyle, Jr., *Rockbridge County Artists & Artisans* (Charlottesville, Virginia: University Press of Virginia, 1995), 34 (quoting from Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, p. 448 of the 1967 edition published by W.W. Norton, New York).

⁴⁶Simpson, 37.

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 8 Page 14
NATURAL BRIDGE
Rockbridge County, VA

PHOTO 10). Even stronger in this theme is the 1888 print by W.P. Snyder published in *Harper's Weekly*, which shows a well-dressed party of men and women picnicking at the bridge (EXHIBIT PHOTO 11).

The last item in the exhibit, a watercolor circa 1880-90 (EXHIBIT PHOTO 12), shows an entirely different scale and atmosphere. This view of the bridge looks and feels like the American west, down to the horses in foreground.

Significance In Area Of Entertainment/Recreation

Jefferson himself wrote often of Natural Bridge and encouraged many to visit the site, including his widespread contacts in Europe. Local historian Royster Lyle notes that there was a steady procession of these visitors from Monticello to Natural Bridge. This might in part explain the widespread knowledge of the bridge and its high estimation in European as well as American consciousness. Jefferson resolved that the bridge should never be closed from public view, and while it has always remained in private hands, it has always been open for tourists.

In the 1800s the Bridge ranked with Niagara Falls as the most impressive natural sites to see in the America.⁴⁷ It was widely illustrated in national and foreign publications. Natural Bridge has had many famous visitors, some of whom, as quoted earlier, gave their own descriptions of the bridge. Numerous presidents have visited the site.

In early times, expeditions to see the bridge would by necessity have been extended affairs to a fairly remote site. For example, one early note has visitors retiring to Rockbridge Alum Springs after viewing the bridge.⁴⁸ Joel Lackland, who acquired the property from the Jefferson estate in the 1830s, was the first to operate a commercial tavern/inn there.⁴⁹ By 1849, there was a

⁴⁷Simpson, 42.

⁴⁸Tompkins, 41.

⁴⁹David Coffey, local historian, interview.

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 8 Page 15
NATURAL BRIDGE
Rockbridge County, VA

"fine Hotel and outhouses" where there had not been in 1831.⁵⁰ As the century wore on, tourism facilities were expanded and the bridge became much more accessible to the general public and not just to the expeditioners. When Colonel Henry Chester Parsons purchased the property in 1881, there was a very small hotel and admission was 50 cents. Parsons enlarged the hotel, built another sizable one (named the Appledore), moved and enlarged the stables, and located a country store on the site. He initially did not charge admission, but after a few years reinstated it because of maintenance costs.⁵¹ The completion of a major Steel Rail Era line provided rail access to the area in the 1880s, with great impact on Natural Bridge. In the heyday of this era of tourism, railroads ran excursion trains to bring people by the hundreds to see the bridge.⁵² Railroad development brought northern capital (as shown in the deed research) as well as more tourists, and it was in this period that the bridge property became much more valuable and was transferred to corporate ownership.

The third decade of the new century brought paved roads and automobile travel. On May 21, 1927, the formal inauguration of the electrical illumination of the bridge at night was held, with Governor Byrd of Virginia in attendance.⁵³ These light shows are still held regularly. A 1947 promotional booklet demonstrates Natural Bridge's evolution into a full-service resort to serve the modern traveler. It has an entire chapter on what famous people have said about Natural Bridge, including cowboy-humorist Will Rogers who visited the Bridge in 1927 and then wrote a column about it and radio commentator Lowell Thomas who spent five nights at the bridge in 1934 and made his nationwide broadcasts from there. These and other visitors mention George Washington's initials and the bridge's billing as one of the Seven Natural Wonders of the Modern World and one of the Seven Natural Wonders of the New World. The visitor of this era is offered music

⁵⁰Simpson, 29 (quoting Lewis Miller's journal of the time).

⁵¹Tompkins, 47.

⁵²Tompkins, 48.

⁵³Reeds, 54.

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 8 Page 16
NATURAL BRIDGE
Rockbridge County, VA

and light shows to enhance the viewing of the bridge. A full range of accommodations, from the hotel to cottages, is offered, with additional amenities such as swimming pool, golf course, and tennis courts.

Significance In The Area Of Ethnic Heritage/Native American

As noted above, Natural Bridge lies along a trail the Indians used, which the Euro-Americans believed them to call the "Great Path."⁵⁴ The Monacan tribe, today, as it was historically, is centered in Amherst County, less than 30 miles from Natural Bridge. According to Kenneth Branham, the current chief of the Monacan tribe, oral tradition holds that the bridge also was a sacred site.⁵⁵ The legend as he has heard it states that the Monacans were fighting an enemy tribe⁵⁶ and were passing through the mountains when they came upon a great ditch with nowhere to go. They prayed, asking the Creator to save them. Miraculously, a bridge appeared. The Monacans crossed. When the attacking force came, however, they did not see the bridge (or it was not there for them to see). The Monacan braves went back and forced the attacking tribe to retreat. Ever after the Monacans considered the place very sacred and went there to worship the Creator for the miracle of the bridge. Non-Native Americans have perpetuated a similar version. For example, a late-nineteenth-century article states that the Monacans were fleeing from Shawnees and Powhatans.⁵⁷ At the time of European contact, the Monacan

⁵⁴Tompkins, 2.

⁵⁵Monacan Chief Kenneth Branham, telephone interview, January 20, 1997.

⁵⁶According to Branham, there is no date on the legend or naming of the enemy tribe, but it probably was before European contact, in which case the enemy tribe was perhaps the Iroquois, the most warlike tribe on the East Coast. The only tribe he knows that the Monacans fought for certain were the Powhatans, but this would not have been until around the time of European settlement.

⁵⁷ Reeds, p. 57, quotes an article by Katherine Parsons in the July 1891 *New England Magazine* that describes an oral tradition handed down among the Monacan Indians. The Monacans were fleeing from Shawnees and Powhatans and came upon a chasm of incredible depth and extending miles to east and west. They fell to the ground and called on the Great Spirit. When they arose "behold a bridge spanned the abyss!" Ever after the Monacans called it the Bridge

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 8 Page 17
NATURAL BRIDGE
Rockbridge County, VA

tribe's domain extended west from the fall line up the James River. The Monacans, as an eastern subtribe of the Sioux, were natural enemies of the Powhatans, who inhabited eastern Virginia.⁵⁸ According to a highway marker erected in 1940 by the Virginia Conservation Commission, "Legend says the Monacan Indians called it 'the Bridge of God' and worshipped it." Chief Branham has never heard it called the "Bridge of God" and clarifies that the bridge is believed to have been a place that the Monacans went to worship, but they went there to worship the Creator, not the bridge itself.⁵⁹

Significance In The Area Of Transportation

Natural Bridge has served as bridge throughout the time that man has been in the area. It was on the "Great Path" used by the Indians and later on the Great Wagon Road that transported settlers south and west through the Valley from Pennsylvania to the Carolina backcountry. Later versions of this major north-south route also crossed the bridge, leading many to cross it during Civil War troop movements. Modern paved roads also use the bridge, including the current U.S. Route 11. Unfortunately, much of the top of the bridge was shaved off in the early twentieth century to make way for Rt. 11.⁶⁰

Relation To Significant Persons

Natural Bridge gains additional significance because of its importance to Thomas Jefferson. To a lesser degree there also are links to George Washington, which are unlikely to be true but which have persisted as legend.

of God. On the same page, Reeds notes that a "bloody Indian fight occurred near here about 1770. Arrow-heads, fragments of pottery, pipes, etc. are frequently found." (This date is disputed as too late by both Branham and local historian Coffey.)

⁵⁸Coffey, interview.

⁵⁹Branham, interview.

⁶⁰S. Allen Chambers, Jr., notes received April 1997.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 18
NATURAL BRIDGE
Rockbridge County, VA

Thomas Jefferson probably viewed the bridge for the first time in August 1767, when he made notes for his famous description in *Notes on Virginia*.⁶¹ In 1774, he obtained a royal land grant for Natural Bridge: "[I]n Consideration of the sum of Twenty Shillings of good and lawful money...[the grant] confirm[s] unto Thomas Jefferson, one certain Tract or parcel of land, containing 157 acres, lying and being in the County of Botetourt, including the Natural Bridge on Cedar Creek, a branch of James River."⁶² This grant cites surveyed points, which may have been from an earlier survey or else a new survey specifically for the Jefferson purchase. A copy of a plat (attached) of Jefferson's land was found in the back of a store ledger kept by William Douthat near Natural Bridge in the late 1820s.⁶³

Jefferson's fondness for Natural Bridge is apparent in his writing and his actions. He wrote of it on numerous occasions. In a 1786 letter to William Carmichael he wrote that he often thought of building there "a little hermitage" where he might spend part of every year⁶⁴ and in 1817 he expressed the plan to be there about September of every year, as it was not far from Poplar Forest, his place in Bedford County.⁶⁵ It was from there that he made all of his visits to the bridge after about 1809, including one in which he took his granddaughters, who left accounts of the trip.⁶⁶

Financial troubles caused him to try to sell the land in 1809 and he leased it for a time for saltpeter mining and use as a shot tower. This 1814 lease to Philip Thornton is perhaps America's first scenic easement, as Jefferson wrote this:⁶⁷

⁶¹Monticello Research Department, notes made April 5, 1995 and delivered to David Coffey.

⁶²Reeds, 58.

⁶³Copy provided by David Coffey; the original is in the Virginia Historical Society as part of the Douthat Family Papers (Mss5:D7495:1).

⁶⁴Monticello Research Department, notes made April 5, 1995, and delivered to David Coffey.

⁶⁵Thomas Jefferson to William Caruthers, June 11, 1817 (Monticello Research Department, notes made July 1995 and sent to David Coffey.)

⁶⁶S. Allen Chambers, Jr., notes received April 1997.

⁶⁷S. Allen Chambers, Jr., notes received April 1997.

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 8 Page 19
NATURAL BRIDGE
Rockbridge County, VA

The said Philip covenants on his part that he...will make no erection nor do any other thing which shall disfigure the said bridge as a natural curiosity; that he will commit no waste or destruction on the said bridge or lands... but that he will to the best of his power preserve the said bridge in its perfect natural and uninjured form.

By 1815 Jefferson had "no idea of selling the land. I view it in some degree as a public trust, and would on no consideration permit the bridge to be injured, defaced or masked from public view."⁶⁸

According to Reeds, Jefferson not only surveyed the site himself in 1802 and made a map but the next year had a two-room log cabin built, one room of which was to be kept open for visitors.⁶⁹ The cabin reportedly received visits from three presidents, Monroe, Jackson, and Van Buren, and from other notables such as John Marshall, Henry Clay, and Sam Houston.⁷⁰

In 1817, Jefferson arranged for Patrick Henry, a "freeman of colour" recommended by William Caruthers of Lexington, to live at Natural Bridge to cultivate what land he could in return for paying taxes and preventing trespass. Patrick Henry's brother John wrote a letter to Jefferson in 1819 that refers to the house [Patrick] built within a hundred and fifty yards of the bridge.⁷¹ (Reeds and others mistakenly referred to Patrick Henry as Jefferson's slave.) An 1821 note in Jefferson's Memorandum Books refers to paying Patrick Henry for entertainment services and laborers.⁷² The fate of this cabin

⁶⁸Thomas Jefferson to William Caruthers, March 15, 1815 (Monticello Research Department, notes made April 5, 1995, and sent to David Coffey).

⁶⁹Reeds, 59.

⁷⁰Reeds, 59.

⁷¹Monticello Research Department, notes made July 1995 and delivered to David Coffey.

⁷²Thomas Jefferson's Memorandum Book entry on November 18, 1821 (Monticello Research Department, notes made June 1995 and delivered to David Coffey).

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 8 Page 20
NATURAL BRIDGE
Rockbridge County, VA

is not known.⁷³ After Jefferson's death, the property eventually passed from his estate to Joel Lackland in 1835.

George Washington is claimed to have surveyed the bridge about 1750 while working for Lord Fairfax. The Reeds guide written in 1927 describes early survey markers which are ascribed to Washington. The current Monument #2 on the survey, the stone which now also contains a National Geodetic Survey vertical control mark, was discovered in 1927 during a trail widening. At that time, as pictured in the Reeds guide, it was a large stone with the initials "G.W." and a surveyor's cross.⁷⁴ Also pictured in the guide is a photograph of a stone some distance away with "R 40" carved in it.⁷⁵ Reeds hypothesized, in support of the Washington survey theory, that a plumb bob dropped from the top of the bridge to the surveyor's cross on the rock would have given the height of the bridge and from the same position on top of the bridge the field marker "R 40" would have been visible. The location of the latter stone is not known although it is pictured in the Reeds book. One final marker pictured in the Reeds guide is a monument erected in 1926 by the Natural Bridge Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution that "commemorates the fact that the Natural Bridge patent was surveyed by George Washington about 1750 A.D. and was granted to Thomas Jefferson July 5, 1774 A.D."⁷⁶

Despite the monument's assertion, it is highly unlikely that George Washington surveyed the bridge. It should be noted that the bridge is not among the sites listed in *The George Washington Atlas*, which provides plats

⁷³Whether there were one or two cabins built in Jefferson's time, a later structure built on this site by subsequent owners was called Jefferson cottage. In spite of notes while the later cottage was still standing that it contained parts of the original structure or its ruins, when it was torn down (approximately 1980, according to local historian Royster Lyle), no traces were found of an earlier building. In any case, these buildings probably were not on the current parcel of land.

⁷⁴Reeds, 59 (Figure 80).

⁷⁵Reeds, 57 (Figure 79).

⁷⁶Reeds, 62 (Figure 85).

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 8 Page 21
NATURAL BRIDGE
Rockbridge County, VA

of places known to have been surveyed by the future president.⁷⁷ It also is not described in Washington's diaries, and most importantly, the bridge is at least 100 miles south of the Fairfax land which it was his job to survey.⁷⁸

Two further legends linking George Washington to Natural Bridge are used as demonstration of his physical prowess. The initials "GW" carved at a spot approximately 23 feet high on the side of the bridge are attributed to Washington and held up as an example of his superhuman strength and agility in climbing so high. Washington also is said to have "boasted that he had once thrown a stone up to the Natural Bridge."⁷⁹ Whether or not these stories are true, they are interesting for their use of the bridge, a distinctive natural wonder that would have been familiar throughout the nation, as a prop for demonstrating the legendary strength of America's even more famous first president.

Conclusion

As described above, Natural Bridge is significant for its contributions to the nation's history in terms of philosophy, art, and entertainment and recreation; for its importance to Native American ethnic heritage; and for its associations with famous Americans. To this day, the bridge continues to be visited and to be marketed as an important tourist destination.

⁷⁷*The George Washington Atlas*, edited by Lawrence Martin, Chief, Division of Maps, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.: 1932 and reproduced by the Virginia Surveyors Foundation in 1995.

⁷⁸S. Allen Chambers, Jr., notes received April 1997.

⁷⁹Richard Brookhiser. *Founding Father: Rediscovering George Washington*. (New York: The Free Press, Div. of Simon and Schuster, Inc, 1996), 110.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 9 Page 22

NATURAL BRIDGE
Rockbridge County, VA

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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 9 Page 23

NATURAL BRIDGE
Rockbridge County, VA

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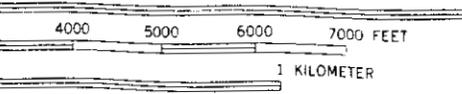
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VALLEY SE 24 000 28 32'30" 29 30 32000E

● INTERIOR—GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, RESTON, VIRGINIA—1978
GLASGOW 4 M:
30 M TO US 29



SCALE 40 FEET
VERTICAL DATUM OF 1929

NATURAL BRIDGE
Rockbridge County, VA
UTM Reference
1. 17/602300/4165200

ROAD CLASSIFICATION

Heavy-duty		Light-duty	
Medium-duty		Unimproved dirt	
Interstate Route		U. S. Route	
		State	



NATURAL BRIDGE,

N3737.5—W7930/7.5

1961
PHOTOREVISED 1978
AMS 5059 II NE—SERIES V8:

NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS
GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, RESTON, VIRGINIA 22092
FOR COORDINATE VALUES. CHARLOTTESVILLE, VIRGINIA 22903
A LIST OF MAP SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST