

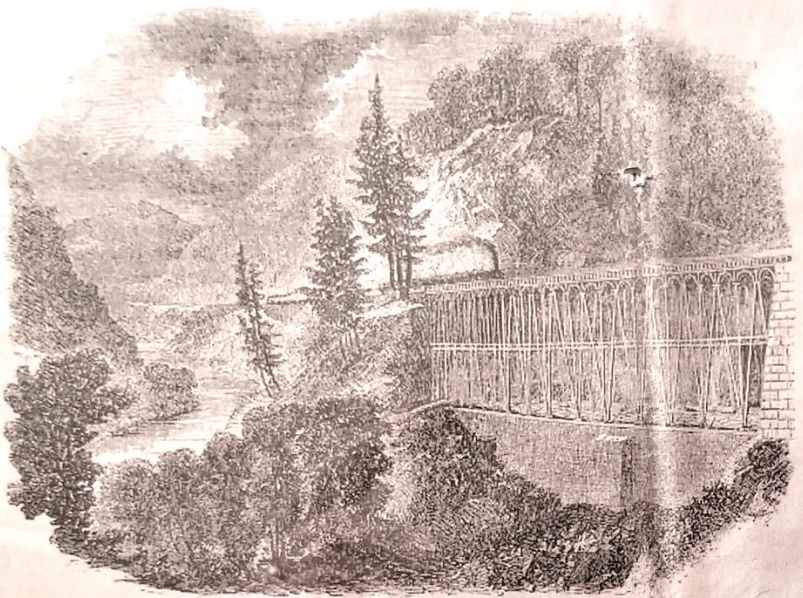
# Innovative Cheat Canyon rail trestle earned spot on state seal

By Rick Steelhammer  
Staff writer

For the same reason the New River Gorge Bridge was chosen to grace the "tails" side of the West Virginia quarter, a railroad bridge that was an engineering marvel of its time 150 years ago was selected to adorn the reverse side of the West Virginia state seal.

The Tray Run Viaduct, built in 1853 over the mouth of a Cheat River tributary in a rugged stretch of canyon near Rowlesburg, "was one of the most notable structures on the B&O Railroad between Baltimore and Wheeling," according to Dr. Emory Kemp, professor emeritus of engineering at WVU, and an international expert on historic bridges.

In a narrative that accompanied its listing as a World Heritage Bridge by the International Council on Monuments and Sites, the Tray Run span was cited for being "the first viaduct of iron in the USA. It was a series of inclined cast-iron columns resting on



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This drawing of the Tray Run Viaduct appeared in Harper's magazine.

"[I]t is usual when the train arrives at the west end of this viaduct to stop for a short time, so that the passengers may alight and gaze for a few minutes at the remarkable scenery surrounding them."

ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS  
May 18, 1861, article

stone pedestals connected at the top by cast-iron arches. The whole system was braced by wrought-iron ties."

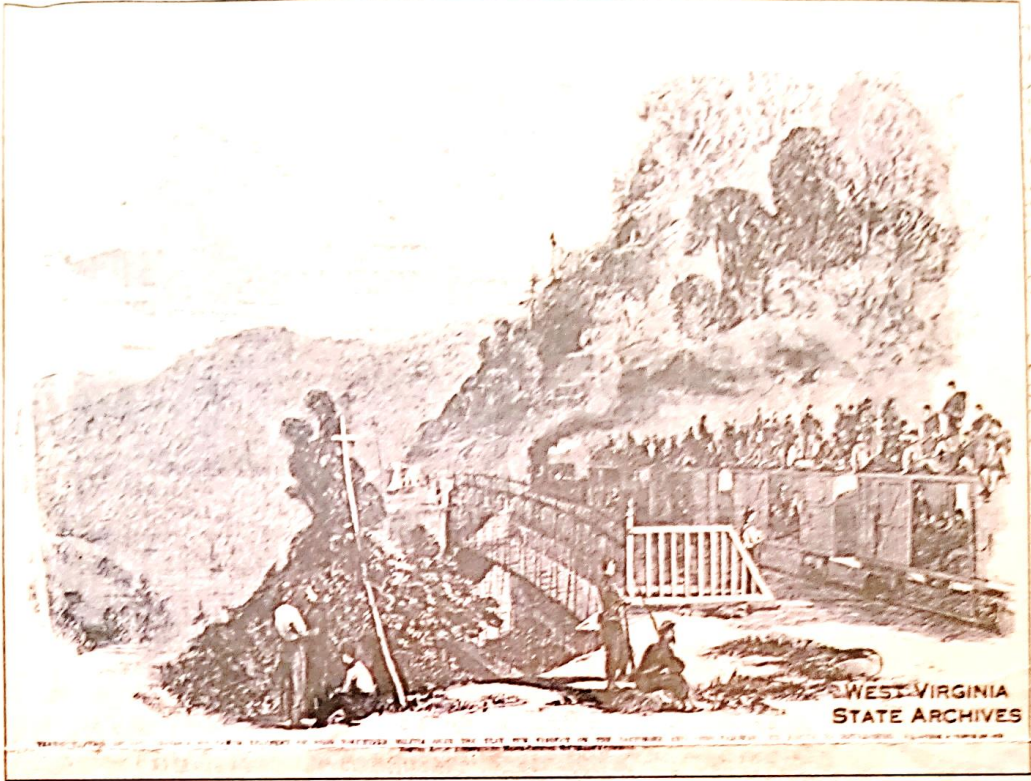
According to a May 18, 1861, article on the B&O line that appeared in the Illustrated London News, the 450-foot-long, 160-foot-high bridge was "remarkably light in appearance, and is rendered more strikingly so by being surrounded by masses of rock of colossal dimensions towering above it at each end."

Seen from a distance, the article continued, the iron bridge "appears to be mere wirework, and to the uninitiated, dangerous in the extreme, although when closely examined, its parts are found to be of ample dimensions."

Since the view surrounding the trestle "is equal to anything in the world, combining the choicest materials of mountain, forest and river, it is usual when the train arrives at the west end of this viaduct to stop for a short time, so that the passengers may alight and gaze for a few minutes at the remarkable scenery surrounding them."

"All of the iron used in building the viaduct was cast in Baltimore and brought to the construction site on the railroad," Kemp said. "During the Civil War, it was feared that the Confederates would blow the viaduct down,

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Union soldiers guard the viaduct that helped link Chesapeake Bay with the Ohio River.

## VIADUCT

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so Union soldiers built log stockades and were garrisoned there to protect it."

The iron span that helped link Chesapeake Bay with the Ohio River drew the attention of military leaders on both sides. In June 1861, acting on orders by Confederate President Jefferson Davis, a cavalry troop led by Col. Angus McDonald was sent on the first of several unsuccessful missions to destroy the bridge.

The following month, Robert E. Lee wrote that "the rupture of the railroad at Cheat River would

be worth to us an army," since the B&O line between Wheeling and Baltimore had already proven invaluable for moving the men and material needed to defend Washington, D.C.

The iron viaduct was targeted again during the spring of 1863, as part of the Confederates' daring, 700-mile-long Jones-Imboden Raid, which damaged West Virginia train tracks, bridges and oil derricks from Moorefield to the Ohio River.

An illustration of the viaduct as it was being traversed by a B&O train carrying members of the 16th Ohio Volunteer Militia to Rowlesburg and points east, was featured in the Aug. 3, 1861, issue of Frank Leslie's Il-

lustrated Newspaper.

"I don't think the Tray Run bridge was ever damaged during the war," Kemp said. "It was replaced after the war to accommodate heavier locomotive weights. The original stonework can still be seen."

The original trestle, with its viewing platforms and lattice-work of iron beams, was replaced first in 1887, and again in 1907.

A historical marker placed along W.Va. 72 about one mile north of Rowlesburg carries a brief account of the Tray Run Viaduct, and its nearby cousin, the Buckeye Run Viaduct.

Reach Rick Steelhammer at [rsteelhammer@wvgazette.com](mailto:rsteelhammer@wvgazette.com) or 304-348-5169.