

10. NAME(S) OF STRUCTURE
State Bridge Number 404S

11. PHOTOS (W/ FILM ROLL & FRAME NO.) AND SKETCH MAP OF LOCATION
4B:19-35



4B:29A

Mack, Warren W. "A History of Motor Highways in Delaware", in Reed, Henry Clay, Delaware: A History of the First State, vol.2, pp.535-550 (NY: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., 1947).

Delaware State Program. Delaware State Highways; The Story of Roads in Delaware.... [Newark, Delaware: Press of Kells, 1919].

Federal Writers Project. Delaware: A Guide to the First State. (New York: Viking Press, 1938).

Carter, Dick. The History of Sussex County. Georgetown, Delaware: Community Newspaper Corp., 1976.

Hancock, Harold Bell. The History of Sussex County, Delaware. [s.l. : s.n.] 1976.

Rae, John B. "Coleman duPont and His Road," Delaware History, vol. 16 (3), pp.171-183 (Spring-Summer, 1975).

Delaware State Archives. Sussex County Road Papers 1875-1940.

Delaware DOT records: contract files.

Plans on file at Delaware DOT: Contract #DuPont 145

13. INVENTORIED BY: P.A.C. Spero & Company with Kidde Consultants for Delaware DOT

AFFILIATION

DATE

April-November 1988

HABS/HAER INVENTORY

See "HABS/HAER Inventory Guidelines" before filling out this card.

1. NAME(S) OF STRUCTURE

State Bridge Number 404S

2. LOCATION

Route 113 over Polly Prong
Selbyville, Sussex County, Delaware

3. DATE(S) OF CONSTRUCTION

1915/1930

4. USE (ORIGINAL/CURRENT)

Vehicular

5. RATING

SG & CS

6. CONDITION

Good

State Highway Bridge Number 404S comprises two types of construction within a single 15-foot span. As originally constructed, the southbound road was carried on a girder bridge, with eight 12" x 18" concrete encased steel beams spaced at four-foot intervals. The west elevation was extended 9'-6" with slab construction, similar to the northbound bridge. The superstructure is supported on concrete abutments with flared wing walls. Both elevations have a simple concrete parapet embellished with two incised rectangles on both inner and outer surfaces.

Delaware Department of Transportation records indicate that Bridge 404S was constructed in 1915 and rehabilitated in 1930. The girder span represents the original construction, and the slab sections were added when the road was widened. The girder bridge was built for the first section of the DuPont Highway, completed in 1917 from Selbyville to Millsboro. The DuPont Highway was conceived and financed by Coleman T. du Pont, who offered in 1908 to organize a corporation authorized by the state to acquire right-of-way, and to construct a visionary superhighway within it. Du Pont, an 1885 graduate of M.I.T., and vocal proponent for good roads, proposed to build a futuristic superhighway from Wilmington to the Maryland border; his monument would provide all weather roads for the agricultural lower counties, facilitating transportation to the industrial, more developed New Castle County system. He envisioned a highway of grand scale, "the straightest, widest, and best road in the country". Initial plans called for a multi-modal layout, with central lanes for high-speed automobiles, and flanking lanes for trolleys, heavy motor freight, horses and horse-drawn vehicles, and pedestrians. Airfields were to be located at intervals within the median strip, agricultural experiment stations would be spaced along the way, and electrical conduits were to run underground. Unused land within the broad 200-foot right-of-way was to be leased to utilities and other enterprises, including farming, to enable the highway to be self-supporting. DuPont would bear all costs of construction, and turn the road over to the state upon completion. The Boulevard Corporation Act was passed by the General Assembly in 1911, authorizing the corporation, known as Coleman duPont Road, Inc., to construct a highway the length of the state. As each section of ten miles was completed, it was to be conveyed to the state free of charge. With existing roads which were practically impassible in bad weather, construction began in 1911 on the southernmost section in Sussex County September 18, 1911. Litigation interrupted construction from 1912 to 1915, but the first 20 miles of the road, from the Maryland Line near Selbyville to six miles south of Milford, was completed and presented to the State on May 24, 1917. In September of that year, DuPont, who had been appointed to the Highway Commission which supervised the newly formed State Highway Department, saw a possible conflict of interest in continued involvement in acquisition and planning the rest of the Highway. He turned over control for the completion of the road to the Department, but continued to underwrite the costs of finishing it, up to \$44,000 per mile. The completion of the Du Pont Highway was marked by a celebration in Dover on September 2, 1924. By the time of its dedication in 1924, Du Pont had contributed a total of \$3,917,004 toward the construction of this visionary highway project. The 1930 widening of State Bridge No. 404S does not detract significantly from its importance; rather, in reflecting the increase in road traffic that took place in the decade after the completion of the DuPont Highway, this alteration underscores the visionary nature of duPont's original conception.

Bridge 404S, a typical concrete encased steel girder bridge of standardized design, was one of the first structures built on the DuPont Highway. It derives its significance from its association with the initial phases of constructing that highway, a private roadbuilding initiative undertaken as a visionary response to the increasing importance of automobile transport in the early twentieth century. Alterations made in 1930 do not detract from the significance of this structure; rather, in reflecting the increase in road traffic that took place in the period after the completion of the DuPont Highway, these alterations underscore the importance of Du Pont's concept. Although not executed as envisioned by Du Pont, the highway was still an example of modern highway design in a state which previously had only 8% improved roadways.