

uses steel beam chords and angle bars, strengthened with stay plates, for the verticals. At only 19 feet wide, the roadway carries only one lane of traffic in one direction at a time.

Sarasota County built this bridge as part of an effort to spur development and tourism on the Gulf Beaches. For the sum of \$22,890 in 1925, the Champion Bridge Company supplied Sarasota County with one of its typical swing bridge designs. A second Champion bridge (now demolished) crossed Little Sarasota Bay north of the Blackburn Point Bridge.

The Blackburn Point Bridge represents one of seven remaining pony truss swing bridges in the state. It is one of two single-lane swing bridges in Florida. Repairs include the replacement of the majority of its structural steel truss members and its entire fender system. The mechanical and electrical components also have been repaired. Despite its many repairs and alterations over the years, the Blackburn Point Bridge remains in good condition and retains its historic physical integrity. This bridge was listed in the NRHP in 2001 under Criterion A in the area of Transportation and Criterion C in the area of Engineering.<sup>122</sup>

### **St. Mary's River Swing Bridge**

Nassau County  
FDOT #740008, 8NA0240

The 1927 St. Mary's River Bridge carries US-17, also known as the Atlantic Coastal Highway, across the border of Florida and Georgia. When constructed, US-17 was the principal federal highway providing northern access into Florida. A 563-foot-long structure consisting of six concrete girder approach spans and three steel trusses, this bridge helped open Florida to travelers from the northeastern part of the nation.



**Photo 5-57. St. Mary's River Swing Bridge, Nassau County  
(No. 740008)**

Also a part of the Dixie Highway, this unusual structure reputedly made possible the "only ferry-less route to Florida," by replacing an undependable ferry at what was called Wilds Landing.

Although partially owned by Georgia, the State of Florida, with federal aid, constructed the St. Mary's River Bridge and continues to maintain the bridge. The St. Mary's River Bridge was constructed by the Pensacola Shipbuilding Company. Acting as subcontractors, A. Bentley and Sons of Ohio built the substructure and approaches, and the Virginia Bridge and Iron Company of Roanoke fabricated and erected the trusses. The bridge opened to traffic in February 1927 after approximately 11 months of construction. Both states conducted ceremonies to mark its opening. For several years after its construction, Florida State Road Department publications featured this bridge in its publications for its engineering and because it opened the border between the two states.

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<sup>122</sup> Spain Schwarz, Rebecca and Robert Jones. Blackburn Point Bridge, National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, 2001.

The structure is unusual within Florida for its combination of a Warren through truss span (202-foot) with a polygonal top chord and pony truss secondary spans. Another distinctive feature is the camelback design used on the pony trusses. The camelback derives from the curvature found in the top chord resulting from changing the inclination of the chord in each panel. The bridge used a channel bar for the chords, beams for the vertical posts, and angle bar in the struts, sway braces and diagonals. The center-bearing pivot mechanism is manually operated, but rarely, if ever, used. A solid concrete railing, with rectangular panels cast in for detail, runs along the approaches.

A significant structure for both engineering and historical reasons, the St. Mary's River Bridge played a crucial part in opening Florida to tourists and settlers from northern areas and enabled Jacksonville to become a gateway to Florida's Atlantic Coast. Furthermore, it is one of only two bridges remaining that the Virginia Bridge and Iron Company constructed, both of which are manually operated structures (the other one being the Belle Glade Swing Bridge in Palm Beach County). The distinctive technical features of the bridge and its combination of truss styles make it an interesting example of truss building and swing span design from the 1920s.

The St. Mary's swing bridge retains a high level of historic physical integrity. This bridge was determined NRHP-eligible during the 2000 survey under Criterion A in the areas of Community Planning and Development and Transportation and under Criterion C in the area of Engineering as a rare example of a center-bearing pivot swing bridge with unique camelback pony trusses and with historical associations to the Virginia Bridge and Iron Company.



**Photo 5-58. Belle Glade Swing Bridge, Palm Beach County  
(No. 930072)**

**Belle Glade Swing Bridge**

Palm Beach County

FDOT #930072, 8PB0212

The Belle Glade Swing Bridge crosses the Okeechobee Rim Canal at Point Chosen. It provides access from Belle Glade on the mainland to Torry Island, located on the southeastern edge of Lake Okeechobee. Constructed in 1916, this bridge is one of only two structures remaining in the state built by the Virginia Bridge and Iron Company. The project was completed by the W. S. Lockman Company. The bridge originally stood over the St. Lucie River at Stuart and was reconstructed at its present site in 1935. At that time, a new concrete pivot pier and timber approach spans were added.

The 446-foot Belle Glade Bridge consists of 9 approach spans and a 154-foot-long, center-bearing main swing span. What appears to be essentially a Pratt truss has been set at approximately three-quarter level with the roadway, leaving the top chord about 3 feet above the deck. Channel bars are used in the top and bottom chords and in the parallel end posts, and angles compose the diagonals and counterbraces. In a technique rarely found, lacing bars on the exterior sides of the members reinforce the verticals. Such reinforcement is typically located on the interior. The single lane bridge still has a timber plank deck and