Merritt Parkway, East Rocks Road Bridge
Spanning the Merritt Parkway at the 18.56 mile mark
Norwalk
Fairfield County
Connecticut

HAER No. CT-95

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
P.O. Box 37127
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HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

Merritt Parkway, East Rocks Road Bridge

HAER No. CT-95

Location:	Spanning the Merritt Parkway at the 18.56 mile mark in Norwalk, Fairfield County, Connecticut UTM: 18.633285.4556290 Quad: Norwalk North, Connecticut
Construction Date:	1938
Engineer:	Connecticut Highway Department
Architect:	George L. Dunkelberger, of the Connecticut Highway Department, acted as head architect for all Merritt Parkway bridges.
Contractor:	Mariani Construction Company New Haven, Connecticut
Present Owner:	Connecticut Department of Transportation Wethersfield, Connecticut
Present Use:	Used by traffic on East Rocks Road to cross the Merritt Parkway
Significance:	The bridges of the Merritt Parkway were predominately inspired by the Art Deco and Art Moderne architectural styles of the 1930s. Experimental forming techniques were employed to create the ornamental characteristics of the bridges. This, combined with the philosophy of incorporating architecture into bridge design and the individuality of each structure, makes them distinctive.
Historians:	Todd Thibodeau, HABS/HAER Historian Corinne Smith, HAER Engineer August 1992

For more detailed information on the Merritt Parkway, refer to the Merritt Parkway History Report, HAER No. CT-63.

LOCAL HISTORY

In 1640, Roger Ludlow acquired land along the east side of the Norwalk River from the Long Island Sound to twelve miles inland. A couple of months later Daniel Patrick, a friend of Ludlow, purchased a similar amount of acreage on the west side of the river. These two acquisitions encompassed all of present-day Norwalk.[1]

Ten years passed between these purchases and settlement of the region. In 1650, Ludlow sold his land to residents of the Hartford Colony. That same year, these new owners moved to what is now East Norwalk, under the leadership of two surveyors, Richard Olmstead and Richard Webb. In 1651, Norwalk formed a town. The community gradually expanded as an agricultural and shipping center. At one point Norwalk included parts of Wilton, New Canaan, and Westport. By the beginning of the American Revolution, Norwalk included the districts of Norwalk, South Norwalk, East Norwalk, West Norwalk, Broad River, Silvermine, Winnipauk, and Cranbury.[2]

In summer 1779 the British burned more than 300 structures in the town. The community took several years to rebound from this loss, but by the early 1800s, Norwalk was again an expanding agricultural and shipping community. Larger scale industrial development commenced in 1848, when the New York, New Haven, and Hartford Railroad reached the Norwalk River. Norwalk became a hat-making center. The Volk Hat Company employed more than 500 workers. Other substantial enterprises developed, including the Norwalk Lock Company, Norwalk Iron Works, and Roth and Goldschmidt

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[1]-------, This Is Norwalk (Norwalk: League of Women Voters, 1963), 5.

[2]Samuel Richard Weed, Norwalk After Two Hundred and Fifty Years (South Norwalk: C. A. Freeman Publishers, 1901), 18-19.

Corset Company. Fueling this development was the arrival of large numbers of Irish and German immigrants.[3]

Following World War I, Norwalk experienced another population boom, as many New Yorkers who had vacationed in Norwalk for years settled permanently and began to commute. These new arrivals eagerly awaited completion of the Merritt Parkway. After it was finished, the parkway helped to accelerate the residential development of the western sections of the community, especially Winnipauk and Cranbury. During World War II watchtowers were established on the Merritt to spot airplanes and relay the information to Mitchell Field on Long Island.[4]

BRIDGE CONSTRUCTION HISTORY

East Rocks Road originates in downtown Norwalk and ends just north of the parkway at Bayne Street. The Arute Brothers Construction Company of New Britain, Connecticut, received the contract to grade the Merritt Parkway from West Rocks Road, in Norwalk, to the Newtown Turnpike, in Westport (ConnDot project #180-54). While the East Rocks Road Bridge is within this section of the Merritt, the grade separation and bridge contract went to the Mariani Construction Company of New Haven, Connecticut (ConnDot project #180-67).[5] The bridge cost $27,453 and was completed in 1938. The

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[3]This Is Norwalk, 5-6.

[4]Deborah Wing Ray and Gloria P. Stewart, Norwalk Being an Historical Account of That Connecticut Town, (Canaan, NH: Phoenix Publishing, 1979), 194, 200.
This Is Norwalk, 6.
"3000 Attend Merritt Parkway Opening; Hear Cross Voice Hope For Extension," Norwalk Hour, 30 June 1938, p. 1.

[5]Contract Card File, Map File and Engineering Records Department, Connecticut Department of Transportation, Wethersfield, CT.

paving work for this region of the Merritt also extended from West Rocks Road to the Newtown Turnpike. This contract was awarded to the New Haven Construction Company of New Haven, Connecticut (ConnDot project# 180-96). The East Rocks Road Bridge has received little maintenance since it was built.[6]

BRIDGE DESCRIPTION

The East Rocks Road Bridge is a single-span, reinforced- concrete, barrel-type rigid-frame bridge with a clear roadway 30' wide. The Merritt Parkway travels under the 67'-10" long span at a skew of 23°-55'. Parallel wing walls of varying length form the approach for the underpass.

The rigid-frame design allows the engineer to decrease the structural material at the center of the span, thus forming an arched opening. (See the Merritt Parkway History Report, HAER No. CT-63, for a more detailed description of the rigid-frame.) The intrados of the span rises 3'-4" from the springline to the crown, while the extrados remains horizontal from knee to knee. The frame thickness at the crown is 20-1/2". The frame leg thickness increases from 3'-3" at the base to 5'-1-1/2" at the knee. The exposed faces of the legs remain vertical, and the hidden face slopes away from the roadway. The minimum clearance provided is 12'-2" at a distance 30' perpendicular to the center of the roadway.

Similar in design to the Black Rock Turnpike Bridge in Fairfield, the Art Deco detailing of this bridge is a result of reverse molds in the formwork. The pylons are fluted full height, with a ziggurat shape filling the bottom half. The notched corners contain a chevron pattern. A scalloped band runs

[6]East Rocks Road Bridge, DOT #723; Bridge Maintenance File, Engineering Department, Connecticut Department of Transportation, Newington, CT.

below the railing across the spandrel and wing walls. The Connecticut coat of arms is at the crown of the arch. Recessed panels are formed on the frame legs and wing walls.

Presently, the concrete is spalling underneath the frame. A chain link fence has been added inside the railing on the west side of the bridge.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ray, Deborah Wing, and Gloria P. Stewart. Norwalk Being an Historical Account of That Connecticut Town. Canaan, NH: Phoenix Publishing, 1979.

Weed, Samuel Richard. Norwalk After Two Hundred and Fifty Years, An Account of the Celebration of the 250th Anniversary of the Charter of the Town. South Norwalk: C. A. Freeman Publishers, 1901.

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———. Contract Card File. Map File and Engineering Records Department, Connecticut Department of Transportation: Wethersfield, CT. This includes construction drawings, copies of which are in the HAER field records.

———. Bridge Maintenance File. Engineering Department, Connecticut Department of Transportation: Newington, CT.

PROJECT INFORMATION

This recording project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey and the Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER) Division of the National Park Service, Robert J. Kapsch, Chief. The Merritt Parkway recording project was sponsored and funded by the Connecticut Department of Transportation (ConnDot) and the Federal Highway Administration.

The fieldwork, measured drawings, historical reports and photographs were prepared under the general direction of Eric N. DeLony, HAER Chief, and Sara Amy Leach, HABS Historian.

The recording team consisted of Jacqueline A. Salame (Columbia University), architect and field supervisor; Mary Elizabeth Clark (Pratt Institute) and B. Devon Perkins (Yale University), architectural technicians; Joanne McAllister-Hewlings (US/ICOMOS-Great Britain, University of Sheffield), landscape architect; Corinne Smith (Cornell University), engineer; Gabrielle M. Esperdy (City University of New York) and Todd Thibodeau (Arizona State University), historians; and Jet Lowe, HAER photographer.