

Merritt Parkway, Park Avenue Bridge
Spanning the Merritt Parkway at the 29.36 mile mark
Trumbull
Fairfield County
Connecticut

HAER No. CT-115

HAER
CONN,
1-TRUM,
8-

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

HAER
CONN,
1-TRUMB,
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(20001)

Merritt Parkway, Park Avenue Bridge

HAER No. CT-115

Location: Spanning the Merritt Parkway at the 29.36 mile mark in Trumbull, Fairfield County, Connecticut at exit 47

UTM: 18.647020.4565340
Quad: Bridgeport, Connecticut

Construction Date: July 1940

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 Park Avenue 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 1668, there were only five settlers living beyond the two- mile limit of the Stratford meeting house. Shortly after this date, the land north of Stratford was surveyed, laid out and assigned to individuals. It is unknown if anyone settled there before Abraham Nichols and his family arrived from Stratford in 1690. Other families soon followed, creating a district known as Nichols Farms.¹

As the population increased, the desire for a local church and government became evident. In 1725, Nichols Farms residents petitioned the General Court for village privileges and a committee was named to view their case. The General Assembly acted in favor of their petition and in October 1725 the Assembly granted the residents of Nichols Farms the "liberty of village privileges," as the Society of Unity. Unity was still a part of Stratford, but could maintain its own meeting house and school, through a local tax.²

At the same time, residents from Fairfield were clearing lands west of Unity. This area came to be known as the Long Hill region and faced many of the same problems as Nichols Farms. These settlers were forced to pay for a church and school that were too far away for them to use.³

In 1740 the General Assembly granted the Long Hill region an exemption from paying taxes for the school and meeting house in Stratfield, between December and mid March. Furthermore, Long Hill was allowed to develop its own meeting house during these months. Thus, the Winter Society of Long

In 1744, the parishes of Unity and Long Hill, only five miles apart, were consolidated into the Society of North Stratford. The new society functioned in virtually the same manor as the Unity parish. As they were now allowed to manage their own religious and educational affairs, residents became anxious to obtain complete independence from Stratford. For more than fifty years North Stratford sought to become an individual township. In October 1797, the General Assembly passed the "Trumbull Bill" establishing the Society of North Stratford as the town of Trumbull.⁴

The Boston Post Road and the main line of the railroad both passed to the south of Trumbull, isolating the community as a rural farming region until the completion of the Merritt Parkway in 1940. Trumbull was the location the Connecticut Highway Department's main field office during the construction of the Merritt Parkway.

BRIDGE CONSTRUCTION HISTORY

Park Avenue begins at Seaside Park on the Long Island Sound and proceeds north to the Easton town line where the continuing road is called South Park Avenue. Park Avenue functions as the boundary line between Fairfield and Trumbull, and makes up a majority of the town line between Fairfield and Bridgeport.

The Osborn-Barnes Construction Company of Danbury, CT, received the contract to grade the Merritt Parkway from the Black Rock Turnpike, in Fairfield, to Main Street/Route 25, in Trumbull (ConnDot project #180-52). While the Park Avenue Bridge is located within this section of the Merritt, the grade separation and bridge contract went to the Mariani Construction Company of New Haven, CT

⁴History of Trumbull: Dodrasquicentennial, 28.

(ConnDot project #180-85).⁵ The bridge cost \$35,694 and was under construction from November 3, 1939, to July 12, 1940. The paving work for this region of the Merritt also extended from the Black Rock Turnpike to Main Street/Route 25. This contract was awarded to the New Haven Construction Company of New Haven, CT (ConnDot project #180-102). The Park Avenue Bridge has received little maintenance since it was built. In October of 1940 ramps were added to the interchange.⁶

BRIDGE DESCRIPTION

The Park Avenue Bridge is a 90'-long, reinforced-concrete arch with parallel wing walls over the Merritt Parkway. Park Avenue travels on a 30' wide roadway at a 3.4 percent grade and a skew of 30°-56'-45" to the parkway. The arch rises from the abutment to a height of 14' above the springline. The extrados curves to thicken the arch from 2'-6" at the crown to approximately 6' at the springline. The thrust of the arch is counteracted by the weight of the abutment and the wing walls.

The structural drawings suggest a sequence for pouring the concrete based on the design of the bridge. The footings for the arch and wing walls are poured first. The entire arch is then poured in three sections separated by stepped construction joints. Then the arch faces are poured monolithically with the pylons. The spandrel walls and railing between the pylons follow, and then the wing walls and railing are poured monolithically.

The decoration of the bridge is a result of reverse molds in the concrete formwork. The centerpiece is a bracket supported by a foliated corbel at the crown. This bracket is also the point for

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

⁶Park Avenue Bridge, DOT # 745; Bridge Maintenance File, Engineering Department, Connecticut Department of Transportation, Newington, CT.

an upside-down 'V' shaped ledge that runs across the spandrel and is continued on the wing walls. Drip spouts on the ledge are located under the expansion joints in the solid railing. In elevation, these joints are beveled in a shape that resembles a funnel in elevation. The pylons at the lower end of the bridge have triangular brackets at the top. The pylons at the higher end of the bridge are larger and feature a cartouche on a bracket and corbel similar to the centerpiece. The cartouche has a seal for the Town of Trumbull, noting the date 1797, with a Colonial male figure.

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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.