

Fountain Island Bridge
Spanning the channel between Promen Drive
and Fountain Island
Lakeside Park
Fond du Lac
Fond du Lac County
Wisconsin

HAER No. WI-23

HAER
WIS,
20-FONDU,
2-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record
National Park Service
U. S. Department of the Interior
P. O. Box 37127
Washington, D. C. 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

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Fountain Island Bridge

HAER No. WI-23

Location: Spanning the channel between Promen Drive and Fountain Island, directly south of the bandstand in Lakeside Park, Fond du Lac, Fond du Lac County, Wisconsin

Date of Construction: c. 1870 - constructed over Fond du Lac River
c. 1926 - moved to present location

Present Owner: City of Fond du Lac, Wisconsin

Original Use: Public vehicular bridge

Present Use: Public pedestrian bridge

Significance: The Fountain Island Bridge is one of seven remaining bowstring truss bridges in the State of Wisconsin

Historian: Lola Bennett
Wisconsin Historic Bridge Recording Project
July 1987

LAKESIDE PARK

In 1889, the land that is now Lakeside Park was a huge marsh. It was a fact that disturbed the citizens of Fond du Lac, because their only access to Lake Winnebago, on whose shores the city was built, was through the marsh. One editorial account stated, "The result is, that only those who have horses and those who can wade the marsh, visit the lake."¹ Suggestions were made to the town to build a road at public expense across the marsh. The Common Council appointed a committee to solicit subscriptions for a park and improvements to the waterfront, and with four days, they had collected \$2,000 from local citizens.² That year, Main Street was extended to the lake. In the years that followed, the city put considerable effort into the creation of Lakeside Park. Nearly every year, well into the twentieth century, newspaper headlines announced that improvements were being made to the park and to the waterfront.³

By the turn of the century, a natural lagoon had been filled by dredging soil out of the marsh. This infill formed five small islands, separated by narrow channels for boats. As time went on, these islands were interconnected by a series of walkways and bridges. Today, there is a total of twelve bridges in Lakeside Park.

The earliest of these bridges was a wooden bridge which spanned the channel between the pavilion on the north side of the park and a small island directly to the south, where the boat livery was located.⁴ This wooden bridge appears in photographs taken in the early 1920s. One Fond du Lac resident recalls riding over the wooden bridge on his bicycle as a boy, and mooring his skiff underneath it. A photograph that he took in 1926 shows the present bridge, a small bowstring truss, in the same spot as that earlier wooden span.⁵

HISTORY OF THE BRIDGE

The history of the Fountain Island Bridge is sketchy at best. It can be surmised from stylistic evidence that the bridge was constructed about 1870, but since the bridge was moved to its present location many years ago, and since there is no builder's plate on the bridge, it is difficult to trace its original location, manufacturer, or date of construction. City Council Proceedings for the year the bridge was constructed or the year it was moved may contain the answer, but going through years of records, when a specific date is not known, could prove to be extremely time-consuming. Likewise, it is a tedious task to read through years of newspaper headlines, particularly when no index is available. The park office has no records for the bridges. An interview with a long-time resident of Fond du Lac suggested that the bridge originally spanned the east branch of the Fond du Lac River in town.⁶ The east branch of the Fond du Lac River, however, runs through the center of town and is spanned by a dozen or more bridges. City Council Proceedings from the mid-1920s indicate that a number of new bridges were constructed over the Fond du Lac River at that time, but fail to mention whether or not they replaced older bridges, and if any of the bridges being replaced were moved to

new locations.⁷ A newspaper article in 1922, however, indicated that a bridge originally spanning the river at Western Avenue was moved to the park to span the inlet known as "the big hole," when a new bridge was constructed in its place.⁸ This suggests that some of the city's other bridges may have been recycled in the same way, including the Fountain Island Bridge.

DESCRIPTION

The bridge is a single span, arched parabolic truss with pinned connections and a concrete replacement deck. It is 67 feet 4 inches long, 10 feet 11 inches wide, and 8 feet 7 inches high. The three-section, parabolic top chords are two upright, curved, iron channels connected with riveted stay plates and cover plates. The bottom chords are two upright iron channels connected with riveted cover plates, supported by iron I-beams. Diagonal bracing consisted of cylindrical eyebars which pass through the top chord and are secured with cast iron skewbacks and hex nuts. The bridge is divided into ten panels by a series of iron verticals, laced with short, horizontal and diagonal members. These verticals are similar in configuration to the verticals on an 1877 Pratt through truss, built by Milwaukee Bridge and Iron Works in Burlington, Wisconsin.⁹ The ends of the upper chords are riveted to the ends of the lower chords, which were riveted to steel-bearing pads resting on concrete abutments.

SIGNIFICANCE

The Fountain Island Bridge is one of seven remaining bowstring trusses in the State of Wisconsin. The bowstring truss was patented by Squire Whipple in 1840, and was thus one of the early types of metal truss bridges.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 Daily Commonwealth, May 9, 1889 (Fond du Lac, Wisconsin)
- 2 Ibid., August 2, 1889.
- 3 Daily Commonwealth, Daily Reporter, Commonwealth Reporter, 1889-1930
(Fond du Lac, Wisconsin).
- 4 "New Park Will Be Beauty Spot," Daily Commonwealth, May 20, 1911.
(Includes 1910 map of Lakeside Park.)
Photograph of bridge, in Lakeside Park: Past, Present, Future.
(Fond du Lac: League of Women Voters, 1976), p. 3.
- 5 Langdon Divers, interview with Lola Bennett, project historian,
July 6, 1987.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 City Council Proceedings, 1922-1933 (Fond du Lac, Wisconsin).
- 8 "Bridge Across Big Hole Provided," Daily Reporter, November 2, 1922.
- 9 See HAER Report No. WI-16, White River Bridge, Burlington, Wisconsin.

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