

Merritt Parkway, Glenville Water Company
and Brook Bridge

HAER No. CT-66

Spanning the Glenville Water Company property and
the brook at the 2.32 mile mark on the Merritt
Parkway
Greenwich
Fairfield County
Connecticut

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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, Glenville Water Company and Brook Bridge

HAER No. CT-66

Location: Spanning the Glenville Water Company property and brook at the 2.32 mile mark on the Merritt Parkway in Greenwich, Fairfield County, Connecticut

UTM: 18.611680.4546925
Quad: Glenville, Connecticut

Construction Date: 1935

Engineer: Connecticut Highway Department

Architect: George L. Dunkelberger, of the Connecticut Highway Department, acted as head architect for all Merritt Parkway bridges.

Contractor: Peter Mitchell Construction Company
Greenwich, Connecticut

Present Owner: Connecticut Department of Transportation
Wethersfield, Connecticut

Present Use: Used by traffic on the Merritt Parkway to cross the Glenville Water Company property

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 July 1640, Daniel Patrick and Robert Feake, as agents of the New Haven Colony, purchased all lands between the Assmick and Potommuck brooks from local Indians. To protect their settlement Patrick and Feake signed allegiance to the Dutch at New Amsterdam, in 1642. Two years later, the Dutch raised a 130-man army and defeated the Petuquapean Indians at the site of the present village of Cos Cob in Greenwich.¹

In 1650, a treaty was signed that defined the boundary line between Connecticut and New Amsterdam, removing Greenwich from Dutch control. Six years later, Greenwich again came under the jurisdiction of the New Haven Colony and started to prosper. In the next century, farmers settled throughout the almost fifty square miles of Greenwich. By 1756, there were nine districts in the town: Greenwich, Old Town, Horseneck, Cos Cob, North Street, Pecksland, Round Hill, Quaker Ridge, Stanwich, and Glenville. Trade with New York City prospered as ports developed at Cos Cob and the mouth of the Mianus River. The shoe-making industry developed at Banksville and Stanwich.²

With the arrival of the railroad in 1848, Greenwich commenced to change. The train reduced the time required to get to New York City. The town flourished as more and more New Yorkers traveled to Connecticut, seeking a haven from the noise and pollution of the city. By the 1920s, Greenwich was a well-established commuter suburb.³

¹"Development of Old Greenwich." Greenwich Press, 17 October 1935, p. 27.

²William E. Finch, "Greenwich--The History of a Border Town," (Manuscript, Greenwich Public Library Vertical File), 1-2.

³Finch, 6.

As farms gave way to residential homes, traffic continued to increase on the Post Road/U.S. Route 1. Local residents soon sought an alternative to the dangerous old highway. When Commissioner Macdonald suggested building an alternative road, Greenwich's residents quickly adhered to the idea. But conflicts developed as it came time to determine a specific route.

Originally eight different plans were put forth. This eventually became a contest between two routes. Macdonald wanted a northern route going through Round Hill, North Street, and Stanwich (this became known as the Greenwich Loop). Local residents, including Highway Superintendent P. L. Minor, wanted a more southerly route through Pecksland. They felt this route would be more convenient, less expensive to build and necessary in the near future. Furthermore, local leaders preferred destroying the lower valued properties along the Pecksland route than disrupting wealthy estates to the north. Macdonald threatened to start construction at the east end of the parkway to gain support for his plan. With this obstacle out of the way, work began at the New York state line on June 1, 1934.⁴

BRIDGE CONSTRUCTION HISTORY

Originally, a bridle path and Boy Scout camp were located at the site of the present bridge in the Riversville section of Greenwich. Both of these features are still extant. The Peter Mitchell Construction Company of Greenwich, CT, received the contract to grade the Merritt Parkway from

⁴"Macdonald Sees No Road Solution," Greenwich Press, 10 September 1931, p. 1.

"Highway Superintendent Minor Proposes Southern Route," Greenwich Press, 10 March 1932, p. 1.

"Proposed Routes For the Merritt Highway," Greenwich Press, 10 March 1932, p. 8.

"Route Goes Through Round Hill, Residents Upset," Greenwich Press, 24 March 1932, p. 1.

"400 Hear Cross and Macdonald Discuss Highway," Greenwich Press, 16 November 1933, p.

the New York state line to Round Hill Road, in Greenwich (ConnDot project #180-13). The contract for the Glenville Water Company and Brook Bridge also went to the Peter Mitchell Construction Company of Greenwich, CT (ConnDot project #180-13).⁵ The bridge cost \$49,796 and was completed in 1935.⁶ The paving work for this region of the Merritt extended from the state line to Round Hill Road. This contract was awarded to the A. I. Savin Company of East Hartford, CT (ConnDot project #180-90).

In 1974 the Glenville Water Company and Brook Bridge had all loose and spalling concrete removed, it was then patched, sealed and painted. One section of the balustrade on the south side was replaced with a solid panel at this time (ConnDot project #56-104).⁷

BRIDGE DESCRIPTION

The Glenville Water Company and Brook Bridge is a single-span, reinforced-concrete, barrel-type rigid-frame, spanning 52' over a 38'-wide roadway and a 9'-5"-wide stream bed. Parallel wing walls form the approach for the overpass. The Merritt Parkway travels over the bridge on a 61'-wide clear roadway at a 1 percent grade.

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 arch of this bridge is elliptical. From

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

⁶Glenville Water Company and Brook Bridge, DOT #693; Bridge Maintenance File, Engineering Department, Connecticut Department of Transportation, Newington, CT.

⁷Glenville Water Company and Brook Bridge, DOT #693; Bridge Maintenance File.

the springline the arch rises almost 90° in a 3' radius. Then the intrados of the span rises just 2' during the next 23' to the crown. The extrados remains horizontal from the knee to the crown. The frame thickness at the crown is 18". The frame leg thickness increases from 26-1/2" at the base to 48" at the knee. The exposed face of the legs remains vertical, and the hidden face slopes away from the roadway. A minimum clearance of 14' is provided.

The vertical emphasis of the bridge is manifested in each tall thin pylon, with its chamfered corners and deep vertical groove. The rail posts also form strong vertical elements by extending below the coping band along the top of the bridge.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Hurd, D. Hamilton. History of Fairfield County, Connecticut. Philadelphia: J. W. Lewis and Company, 1881.

Finch, William E. "Greenwich--The History of a Border Town." Manuscript, Greenwich Public Library Vertical File.

Greenwich Press. 1931-1935.

----- . Contract Card File. Map File and Engineering 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.

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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.