

Seventh Street Bridge
(Bartholomew County Bridge No. 289)
On Seventh Street over Haw Creek
Columbus
Bartholomew County
Indiana

HAER NO. IN-92 *HAER*
IND
3-COLU,
4-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record
National Park Service
Great Lakes System Support Office
1709 Jackson Street
Omaha Nebraska 68102

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

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Location: On Seventh Street over Haw Creek
Columbus
Bartholomew County
Indiana
UTM: 16.593700.4339100
QUAD: Columbus, Indiana

Date of Construction: 1913/1928 remodelling

Engineer: Edward Hughes

Present Owner: Bartholomew County, Indiana

Present Use: Vehicular/Pedestrian Bridge.

Significance: This three-span, concrete bridge is eligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places. The structure is a good example of early 20th century reinforced concrete bridge design and construction.

Project Information: The bridge will be replaced with a new, wider bridge, as part of a larger improvement project to widen Seventh Street.

The bridge was recorded in 1996 by Camille B. Fife and Thomas W. Salmon II of The Westerly Group, Inc., 556 W. 1175 N. Rd., Farmersburg IN 47850.

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Description:

The Seventh Street Bridge in Columbus, Indiana is adjacent to the intersection of Haw Creek Boulevard and Seventh Street. The structure is comprised of three spans of reinforced concrete arches and abutments, producing a total length of 167 feet. The roadway is approximately 50 feet wide with flanking sidewalks. Currently, the bridge has solid, exposed aggregate parapets. The road surface is asphalt. The "U"-type abutments of the structure have triangular sides and are inclined with a plain coping.

The piers are also of reinforced concrete. Both the up and down stream ends are sheared, as is the starting or pier foundation. These two piers are battered to approximately one inch per foot. There is a concrete band at the outboard arch spring lines.

An interesting feature of the bridge is the fact that the sidewalk area has been cantilevered out from the face of the bridge piers, supported by tapered brackets with squared off ends. The brackets are regularly spaced along the length of the bridge deck except above the piers where they are clustered in a group of three.

Originally this bridge was built with an open balustrade. This balustrade was attacked by vandals over the years and was replaced with a new rail in 1928. The new work was solid exposed aggregate formed concrete. The railing in each of the three arch spans contained four panelled segments separated by a large coffered casting which was slightly raised above the railing level with a projecting coping (the intermediate separators were plain). The rail terminates in a parapet with a similar detail and a gently sloped segment, containing similar coping and panelling. These parapets contain, at opposite ends of the bridge, two bronze dedicatory plates and at opposing opposites, two legends formed into the concrete panel, with the words "Haw Creek" in slight relief. Additionally, on the down stream side, one of the plain panel dividers contains the legend: "V. S. Marlin - May 9, 1928" and a downward arrow.

Four utility conduits have been suspended to the underside of the bridge, below the brackets and free of the spandrels. The down stream side carries a four inch water main and a twelve inch sanitary sewer line. The up stream side carries two conduits, one for gas and the other for telephone cables. The iron hangers for these pipes have been inserted into the soffits between brackets. They have been secured with oversized washers and nuts within the sidewalk castings. It is possible

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that these walks were re-laid with the new parapets in 1928, or at a later time.

In general, the bridge is an elegant structure. An archetypical example of reinforced concrete structures, it displays the importance of rapport between the engineer and contractor. It's siting is somewhat unusual for an urban bridge, partially because the bridge, which carries very heavy traffic, is located within the environment of Haw Creek. The riparian bank, a park-like band between the creek and Haw Creek Boulevard, narrows at Seventh Street to approximately two hundred feet. Down stream, these embankments swell to include a small informal park (on the east side), owned by a local manufacturing company. On the west side, the greensward forms a buffer to the curve of Haw Creek Boulevard. Up stream, the littoral is surrounded by lush native vegetation and mowed lawn.

History:

The Seventh Street Bridge in Columbus, Indiana was beset by troubles even while it was still under construction. But in 1912, when the Bartholomew County Commissioners engaged the Hackedorn Construction Company of Indianapolis to design and build the bridge enthusiasm was high. The esteemed commissioners anticipated an addition to the landscape which would be "one of the most artistic bridges in the county."¹

The Indianapolis company, which was located, in 1912, in suites 608-614 of the Rauh Building at 122 East Ohio, touted themselves as engineers in reinforced concrete, the preferred medium for bridge-building during this era. Edward Hughes, was Chief Engineer for the company whose president and secretary was H. F. and M. M. Hackedorn, respectively. Mr. Everett Wagner served as Vice President & Treasurer.² According to a plaque on the Seventh Street Bridge, Mr. Hughes was the designer of the structure which featured three spans, two piers and several decorative details.

During the first decade of the twentieth century, the city of Columbus, in south central Indiana, was proud of its striking, Second Empire Courthouse and the many businesses and industries within its

¹ *Columbus Evening Republican*, November 22, 1912.

² R. L. Polk & Co., Indianapolis City Directory, Vol LVIII, 1912, p. 689.

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boundaries. Enterprising citizens sought to expand those limits and many avenues of development were explored. Then, as now, the city was nestled between two graceful streams, the Flatrock River and Haw Creek which meander in a north-south direction flanking the central business district. South of town, in rural Bartholomew County, the two estuaries join to form the East Fork of the White River. This waterway, in turn, follows a tortuous journey south and west through Hoosier hill country, eventually joining the Wabash on its way to meet the mighty Ohio at the southwestern tip of the state.

Haw Creek, Columbus' eastern watercourse, forms a natural divider between the central city and East Columbus - once a separate city, but now part of the incorporated area. The Seventh Street Bridge was seen as a welcome conduit to join the hub of the city with burgeoning suburbs to the east. In November of 1912, a new residential district, just east of the proposed bridge, had recently been platted by an enterprising gentleman of the town, Mr. Frank Clevenger. According to a contemporary newspaper article, three hundred and fifty lots had been purchased and some new homes already built, even before the span was complete. Streets in the area were said to have been graded above the high water mark, sidewalks laid and shade trees planted. The developer's ambitious plans included "artistic boulevards in the addition" and (sometime in the future) a park along the banks of Haw Creek. ³

In November of 1912, progress on the new bridge appeared slow and it seemed that winter would set in before it would be completed. Only the form for the west arch and the concrete work on the west abutment had been completed. The contractors were still driving piles for the east abutment. ⁴

Nature took a hand in the next episode for the Seventh Street Bridge. In March of 1913, it rained continuously for twenty-four hours, leaving seven inches of rainfall. By Tuesday, March 25th, Columbus was in the grips of the worst flood "since the famous 'McKinley flood' of 1898", according to a local newspaper account. The city was completely isolated by washouts on the railroad and traction lines entering town. East Columbus was "as completely cut off as if a wall had been built between". Along Haw Creek, flooding had been intense during the previous night and a bridge

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

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along Tenth Street was washed out.⁵ Among the many disasters, was damage to the new Seventh Street bridge, which was still under construction in the spring. (Work was undoubtedly halted during the winter, since concrete could not be poured in cold temperatures.)

Accounts of the disaster reveal details of the contractor's methods. Hackedorn probably set up a field concrete plant at the site, since an "engine" was washed away by the flood, along with the "tall smoke stack at the contractor's power plant". Wood forms were also washed away and structural iron work (reinforcing) was displaced. A store house which had been built on the west side of the bank, containing two car loads of cement was half under water, ruining the stored materials. Damage along Haw Creek was extensive.⁶

Later in the week, news from around the state revealed that Columbus had suffered less than many other communities. The flood of 1913 would eventually be etched in the minds of Hoosier citizens as one of the worst on record, second only to the great flood of 1937, still to come. On Saturday, March 29th, Mayor Barnaby of Columbus stated that "all able bodied men who were habitual loafers in this city would either have to go to work now or be arrested." The high demand for workers, especially by the railroads, dictated such drastic measures. The railroads were paying 25 cents per hour for all able bodied men. (Loafers who had independent means of support were exempted from the Mayor's directive.)⁷

By the 29th of March, the *Indianapolis Star* was able to report that the first mail had arrived in Columbus, via boats across the breach in the Pennsylvania railroad track. Damage to roads and bridges in the city was estimated at \$100,000, although the Indianapolis newspaper may have exaggerated just a bit. By April 7th, the Bartholomew County Council had appropriated \$45,000 for repairs, following several emergency meetings of the County Commissioners. The funds were to be used as

⁵ *The Evening Republican*, Tuesday, March 25, 1913, p. 3

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ *The Evening Republican*, March 29, 1913, p. 6, col. 3

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follows: \$25,000 for bridge repairs, \$5,000 for a new bridge in the county and \$10,000 for gravel roads. ⁸

In spite of the disaster, the Hackedorn Company was able to finish the new bridge, seemingly without further incident. To commemorate the event, two bronze plaques were made for the bridge. They proudly proclaimed that the structure had been erected in 1913, that Charles F. Boyer, Jacob Stucker and Henry M. Schulz were the County Commissioners of record. Mr. Philip J. Sater (County Auditor) and H. C. Deist (County Surveyor) were also listed. The last three lines credited Edward Hughes (of the Hackedorn Company) as the designer and stated: "built by the Hackedorn Contracting Co., Indianapolis." ⁹ Surely, the plaques were installed with great relief.

The Seventh Street Bridge served the community well for many years, providing ready access between Columbus and East Columbus. By 1927, the bridge was in need of repair. The City of Columbus had grown, and Haw Creek now formed the boundary between City and County. Therefore, it was Mayor Cooper of Columbus, along with another citizen, who acted as a committee, appearing before the County Commissioners during their August term, to recommend a joint effort to repair the bridge (along with another with a shared City/County boundary.) The County Commissioners readily agreed and appointed Hadley Thomas, the County Surveyor and John E. Jolliff, the City Engineer to supervise the work. ¹⁰

By the end of the following April, work had begun on the repairs. The County Highway Superintendent had been put in charge of the project, the funding for which would be equally shared by the City and County. Although the bridge itself was in good shape, according to a local newspaper account, vandalism had endangered the balustrades. As it was reported: "Many of the small concrete posts which supported the railings had been pushed off into the stream by vandals and this gave the structure a most unimpressive appearance and also made travel over it rather dangerous." It was noted that future such efforts were likely to

⁸ *The Evening Republican*, April 7, 1913, p. 6.

⁹ Information from the plaques, presently located on the northeast and southwest corners of the bridge.

¹⁰ Bartholomew County Commissioners Record, August Term, 1927, Volume U, 1919 - 1933, p. 355.

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be frustrated, since the new sides of the bridge were to be constructed of solid concrete with "... a panel effect to be used for ornamentation instead of the small concrete posts and railing as were used originally." The entire job was thought to take only two weeks. ¹¹

Only ten days had elapsed when tragedy struck the Seventh Street Bridge again. On May 9th, a sixty-year old workman, V.S. Marlin was seriously injured by a fall off the bridge onto the ground below. Mr. Marlin was carried from the bridge to the home of his daughter, in the nearby Smith addition of East Columbus, where he had been living. Later he was taken to the county hospital where he died of complications from his injuries. Vivion S. Marlin, a retired farmer, had only recently returned from a winter visit with relatives in California. He had seemingly been in good health when he took a job with the bridge project as a carpenter. ¹² Active in the community, he must have been well-liked by his co-workers and the job foremen, since an unusual concrete memorial to him was cast on the outer side of the southern railing. It contained his name, the date of his fall, and an arrow pointing downward. This interesting inscription still marks the bridge today.

In June of 1992, a local newspaper columnist became interested in the unusual memorial, and interviewed the granddaughter of Vivion Marlin, who was only four years old at the time. She recalled the accident and the procession of workers who brought her grandfather back to their house. She remembered that the county had refused compensation for the family on the grounds that his wife had died and his children were grown. But she also remembered that her grandfather's fellow workers were deeply affected by the incident, thus the memorial. In 1996, two other articles were published about the Seventh Street Bridge, as it became known that it would be replaced. One expressed the news that the Marlin memorial would be cut out of the old bridge, and hopefully, incorporated into the new structure. Thus a local citizen and worker would continue to be honored, long after commissioners, designers, contractors and even the original bridge had left the scene.¹³

¹¹ *The Evening Republican*, Monday, April 30, 1928.

¹² *The Evening Republican*, May 9, & May 11, 1928.

¹³ Harry McCauley, "Opinion - Inscription notes '28 bridge tragedy", *The Evening Republican*, June 18, 1992; "Bridge holds more than people, traffic" August 8, 1996; and "Bridge will go down - in history" November 19, 1996.

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Newspapers in the collection of the Bartholomew County Public Library and the Newspaper section of the Indiana State Library. We are very grateful to the staff of the Bartholomew County Archives room for their assistance with County Commissioners records and other sources.