

ADELAIDE AVENUE PEDESTRIAN BRIDGE
Adelaide Avenue over New Haven Railroad
Providence
Providence County
Rhode Island

HAER No. RI-50

HAER
RI,
4-PROV.
203-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD
National Park Service
U.S. Custom House
200 Chestnut Street
Philadelphia, PA 19106

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

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Location: Adalaide Avenua ovar Naw Haven Railroad
Providence
Providanca County, Rhode Island

USGS Quedrangle: Providanca, RI UTM: 19.298330.4629700

Engineer/Architect: not applicabla

Fabrlcator: unknown

Dete of Construction: 1903

Present Owner: orphan bridga

Prasant Usa: not in sarvica

Signflcence: Erected in 1903, the Adelaide Avenue Padedstrian Bridge ia significant for its association with the Gorham Manufacturing Company, e lerge ornamental metel manufacturer. This formar employae footbridga is e relatively early axample of a ataal girder bridge es well as an unusual surviving example of a railroed footbridga.

Project Information: Tha National Railroad Passangar Corporation (Amtrak), in associetion with tha Fadaral Railroad Administration (FRA), is proposing a numbar of Infraastructura projects to upgrada tha Northaast Corridor Railroad right-of-way In Connecticut, Rhoda Island, and Massachusatts. In consultation with the Stata Historic Prasarvation Officers (SHPOs), Amtrak and FRA have determined that tha proposad "Northaast Corridor Improvament Project- Electrification: New Haven, Connecticut to Boston, Massachusetts" project will have advaraa impacts on significant hiatoric propertlas. Thrae Memoranda of Agraament outlining stipuletions to eliminata, minimize, or mitigata edverse project impacts have baan drefted by Amtrak, tha FRA, and the raspective SHPOs, end have been acceptad by the Advisory Council on Historic Prasarvation. The stipulations include the recordation of tha Adalaida Avenua Padastrian Bridge to Historic Americen Engineering Racord standerds.

The proposed project will nacassitate demolition of the Adelaide Avenua Pedastrien Bridga. The Bridge is aligibla for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places es e raletively aarly example of a steel girder bridga, en unusual surviving railroad footbridge, and for its essocietion with tha Gorham Manufacturing Compeny, which is considarad aligible for listing to tha National Ragister of Historic Places by the Rhode Island Historic Preservation Commission (SHPO).

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The Public Archeology Laboratory, Inc. (PAL Inc.) of Pawtucket, Rhode Island was retained by ABB Environmental Services, Inc. on behalf of Amtrak and FRA to prepare HAER documentation for the Adelaide Avenue Pedestrian Bridge. The report was compiled in April 1996 by the PAL Inc. project team including Virginia H. Adams, Senior Architectural Historian; Matthew A. Kierstead, Industrial Historian; and Joshua Seftie, Architectural Assistant. The large format photography was completed in April 1996 by Robert Brewster of Warren Jagger Photography, Inc. of Providence, Rhode Island.

Preparers:

**Virginia H. Adams, Senior Architectural Historian
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PART I DESCRIPTIVE INFORMATION

The Adelaide Avenue Pedestrian Bridge is located south of downtown Providence, Rhode Island, immediately east of Meahapaug Pond. The bridge spans the Amtrak Northeast Corridor main line at Milepost 1B1.72 and connects Adelaide Avenue with Reservoir Avenue. The immediate area is densely developed with mixed nineteenth- and twentieth-century commercial, industrial, and residential buildings.

The Adelaide Avenue Pedestrian Bridge is a single-span, 21-panel, riveted steel, pony girder bridge. The bridge has a 75.5 foot span and a 4-degree skew. The upper end corners of the pony girders are radiused. There is 17 feet 7 inches of clearance between the bottom of the girders and the railroad track rail head. As originally constructed the bridge was approximately 58 feet wide, with a 34-foot-wide roadway and a 12-foot-wide, attached, cantilevered pedestrian walkway on the north and south sides of the span. The girder span is of steel floor beam and timber stringer construction with a datarloratad wood plank deck. The deck width has been narrowed to 12 feet 4 inches, and the original walkway brackets, deck, and ornate wire and cast iron railing have been removed, as has the diagonal bracing at the bottom of the span. The bridge is supported by rough-cut, quarry-faced granite abutments with 6B feet 3 inches of horizontal clearance between them. The west abutment, constructed in 1872, is parallel to the tracks, and its north wing wall is angled back slightly from the tracks. This abutment was cut back on the south side when the deck was narrowed. The east abutment, constructed in 1903, was extended to the south to form a continuous retaining wall between the Adelaide Avenue Pedestrian Bridge and the Reservoir Avenue Bridge.

PART II HISTORICAL INFORMATION

The Adelaide Avenue Pedestrian Bridge spans the National Railroad Passenger Corporation (Amtrak) Northeast Corridor, a high-speed passenger rail line that connects Boston, Massachusetts to New York City, New York; Baltimore, Maryland; and Washington, D.C. This route originally consisted of several passenger and freight railroads with end-to-end connections, which were consolidated into the Amtrak system in 1971. The segment of the Northeast Corridor that includes the Adelaide Avenue Pedestrian Bridge was originally chartered in 1832 as the Providence and Stonington Railroad. Construction began in 1832, and in 1833 the railroad merged with several new Connecticut and Massachusetts railroads to form the New York, Providence and Boston, or the "Stonington Road". This railroad, along with the Boston and Maine and the Boeton and Worcester was one of the first three major railroads in New England. The Providence to Stonington segment that includes the Adelaide Avenue Pedestrian Bridge was surveyed by Major George W. Whistler, noted railroad surveyor and father of the painter James McNeill Whistler. In 1892 the Boston to New York line was included in the growing New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad (New Haven) system. Through rail connection to New York City was not realized until the Thames River at Groton, Connecticut was finally bridged in 1889 (Karr 1995:124-126).

The Adelaide Avenue Pedestrian Bridge is associated with the Gorham Manufacturing Company, located immediately to the west. Jabez Gorham, a jewelry maker, started operations in a one-room shop in 1818. By 1863, when Gorham incorporated, it had become a large complex of over 20 workshops on North Main Street in Providence and had achieved international recognition for its products. In 1890 Gorham constructed the present facilities along the New Haven Railroad tracks at 333 Adelaide Avenue. This massive three-story brick complex was once one of the largest foundries in the world for the

production of jewelry, statues, and tableware. Gorham was known as a progressive employer and provided pleasant dining and recreation facilities for its workers.

The Adelaide Avenue Pedestrian Bridge was constructed in 1903 as part of an improvement program funded jointly by the New Haven Railroad, the Gorham Manufacturing Company and the City of Providence. The goal of the project was to close a dangerous, informal, Gorham employee grade crossing at Elmwood Station, located north of Adelaide Avenue at Earle Street, where a steel trestle was constructed over the tracks. The Adelaide Avenue Pedestrian Bridge was erected to provide workers with direct access to Reservoir Avenue, a main thoroughfare to the east of the factory complex (Commissioners 1903:11). The 1903 bridge was built on the site of a shorter timber bridge erected in 1881 to open the then single-track railroad line. The west abutment was dismantled by the railroad and moved west to accommodate a second track in 1872; however, the bridge was not replaced until the Gorham Manufacturing Company erected the existing bridge in 1903. The Adelaide Avenue Pedestrian Bridge was built as a two-lane vehicular bridge with a separate, wide pedestrian walkway on both sides of the structure (Commissioners 1903: frontispiece photo). In 1936 the bridge was referred to specifically as a footbridge, and maintenance was transferred to the City of Providence (Commissioners 1983: 161). At this time the adjacent Reservoir Avenue Bridge was rebuilt, and the east abutment of the Adelaide Avenue Pedestrian Bridge was extended to the south. The Adelaide Avenue Pedestrian Bridge was structurally narrowed and renamed the Reservoir Avenue Walkway. In 1940 the Earle Street Bridge was closed leaving Adelaide Avenue the only pedestrian access over the New Haven Tracks. Gorham vacated the Adelaide Avenue plant in 1972. Due to conflicts over ownership and maintenance responsibility, the bridge has fallen into disrepair and is blocked to pedestrian traffic.

The Adelaide Avenue Pedestrian Bridge is a relatively early example of steel girder construction and a surviving feature of a collaborative civic improvement project. In response to growing turn-of-the-century conflicts between railroads and expanding cities, railroads often elevated or deepened their rights-of-way, smoothing flow and improving safety for pedestrian and vehicular traffic. This type of collaborative transportation project was typical of Progressive Era civic improvements, an example being the 1915 Central Avenue Pedestrian Bridge (HAER RI-51), also slated for demolition for the Northeast Corridor electrification project.

PART III SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Plans and Drawings

National Railroad Passenger Corporation Design Department, 30th Street Station, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

B. Historic Views

Rhode Island State Library. Completed Construction Photograph, 1903. Report of Railroad Commissioners of Rhode Island. 1903.

C. Bibliography

Karr, Ronelc Dele. The Rail Lines of Southern New England: A Handbook of Railroad History. Pepperell, Massachusetts: Branch Line Press, 1995.

Report of the Railroad Commissioners of Rhode Island for 1903. Providence, Rhode Island: E. L. Freeman & Sons, 1904.

Report of the Railroad Commissioners of Rhode Island for 1936. Providence, Rhode Island: E. L. Freeman & Sons, 1937.

D. Interviews

None conducted



Source: USGS Quad: Providence, RI