

Merritt Parkway, Reservoir Road Bridge
Spanning Reservoir Road at the 32.04 mile mark
on the Merritt Parkway
Trumbull
Fairfield County
Connecticut

HAER No. CT-120

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record
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HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

Merritt Parkway, Reservoir Road Bridge

HAER No. CT-120

Location: Spanning Reservoir Road at the 32.04 mile mark on the Merritt Parkway in Trumbull, Fairfield County, Connecticut

UTM: 18.651160.4566195
Quad: Bridgeport, Connecticut

Construction Date: 1939

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 the Merritt Parkway to cross Reservoir Road

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 Hill was created; this arrangement continued for four years.

¹History of Trumbull: Dodrasquicentennial, 1797-1972, (Trumbull: Trumbull Historical Society, Inc., 1972), 25.

²History of Trumbull: Dodrasquicentennial, 26.

³David A. Cronin, "History of Trumbull, Connecticut," Historical Sketches of Trumbull, Connecticut: Tercentury Celebration, (Trumbull: The Trumbull Historical Committee, 1935), 5.

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

Reservoir Road commences north of the parkway at White Plains Road and proceeds south to Route 8 and 25. The D. V. Frione Construction Company, received the contract to grade the Merritt Parkway from Main Street/Route 25 to the Huntington Turnpike, in Trumbull (ConnDot project #180-02). While the Reservoir Road 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 (ConnDot project #180-109).⁵ The bridge cost \$34,538 and was completed in 1939.⁶ The paving work for this region of the

⁴History of Trumbull: Dodrasquicentennial, 28.

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

⁶Reservoir Road Bridge, DOT #750; Bridge Maintenance File, Engineering Department, Connecticut Department of Transportation, Newington, CT.

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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).

Since it was built, the Reservoir Road Bridge has had sections of spalling concrete removed and replaced. In 1983, the underside deck stringers were replaced, five years later the deck's center support beam had to be replaced.⁷

BRIDGE DESCRIPTION

The Reservoir Road Bridge is a single-span bridge composed of two 32'-wide reinforced-concrete rigid frames divided by a 26'-wide median extension made of steel beams and open-mesh decking. The bridge spans 52'-5-5/8" at a skew angle of 7°-40'-30" and a grade of 2.76 percent. Parallel reinforced-concrete wing walls form the approach for the overpass by the Merritt Parkway.

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 intrados of the span rises 3'-3-1/4" from the springline to the crown, while the extrados rises only a few inches from the knee to the crown. The frame thickness at the crown is 18-1/2". The outside of the knee is squared with a notch, and the inside of the knee is a corner with an obtuse angle. The frame leg thickness increases from 33" at the base to 57-3/4" at the knee. The exposed face of the legs remains vertical, and the hidden face slopes away from the roadway. The legs of the two frames are continuous across the entire width of the bridge, so they form a ledge to support the four steel wide-flange beams under the median. A metal W-rail (guardrail), attached to the deck, runs down the middle of the parkway at the median.

⁷Reservoir Road Bridge, DOT #750; Bridge Maintenance File.

The architectural detailing of the Reservoir Road Bridge differs from the typical concrete bridge on the Merritt Parkway because it does not have pylons decorating the rigid-frame piers. The simple balustrade does have large posts at both ends of the wing walls where pylons usually occur. The face of the wing walls and the railing are offset from the rigid frame. A band of meander is continuous across the bridge below the railing.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Beach, E. Merrill. Trumbull: Church and Town. A History of the Colonial Town of Trumbull and of its Church. Trumbull: The Trumbull Historical Society, Inc., 1972.
- Cronin, David A. "History of Trumbull, Connecticut." Historical Sketches of Trumbull, Connecticut: Tercentury Celebration. Trumbull: Trumbull Historical Committee, 1935.
- . History of Trumbull: Dodrasquicentennial, 1797-1972. Trumbull: The Trumbull Historical Society, Inc., 1972.
- . 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.