

WATERSIDE STREET BRIDGE
Arkansas Bridges 2005
Spanning Lake 1 Tributary at Waterside Street
North Little Rock
Pulaski County
Arkansas

HAER AR-72
AR-72

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
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WATERSIDE STREET BRIDGE

HAER No. AR-72

LOCATION: Spanning Lake 1 Tributary at Waterside Street (originally Sunset Drive), North Little Rock, Pulaski County, Arkansas
UTM: 15.568960.3849268, McAlmont, Arkansas Quad.

STRUCTURAL TYPE: Reinforced concrete slab

DATE OF CONSTRUCTION: ca. 1932

DESIGNER/BUILDER: Frank M. Carmean, Justin Matthews Company

ORIGINAL OWNER: Metropolitan Trust Company

PRESENT OWNER: City of North Little Rock, Arkansas

USE: Vehicular bridge

SIGNIFICANCE: Waterside Street Bridge is one of four stone-faced bridges in North Little Rock's historic Lakewood subdivision, developed in the 1930s by local real estate tycoon Justin Matthews. An addition to the more formal 1920s subdivision of Park Hill, Lakewood was laid out around a series of recreational parks and man-made lakes that provided an engaging natural backdrop for landscape features like bridges. Waterside Street Bridge is historically significant for its association with the development of one of Arkansas' early suburbs and of architectural interest for its rustic design.

HISTORIAN: Researched and written by Lola Bennett, Summer 2005

PROJECT INFORMATION: The Arkansas Historic Bridges Recording Project is part of the Historic American Engineering Record (HAER), a long-range program that documents and interprets historically significant engineering sites and structures in the United States. HAER is administered by the Heritage Documentation Programs Division of the National Park Service, United States Department of the Interior. The Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department cosponsored and funded the project.

Chronology

- 1866 Town of Argenta surveyed and platted
- 1876 Justin Matthews born at Monticello, Arkansas
- 1901 Justin Matthews marries and moves to Central Arkansas
- 1902 Justin Matthews establishes Rose City Cotton Oil Mill at North Little Rock
- 1904 City of North Little Rock incorporated
- 1908 Justin Matthews forms Metropolitan Trust Company
- 1910 Justin Matthews builds the Matthews Block in North Little Rock
- 1913 Justin Matthews persuades North Little Rock City Council to pave city streets
- 1914 Justin Matthews heads North Little Rock sewer district commission
- 1917 Justin Matthews appointed to Broadway-Main Street Bridge Commission
- 1922 Justin Matthews announces opening of Park Hill subdivision
- 1927 Justin Matthews appointed to Arkansas State Highway Commission
- 1931 Lakewood dams constructed
- 1932 Justin Matthews announces opening of Lakewood subdivision
- 1946 North Little Rock annexes Park Hill
- 1952 North Little Rock annexes Lakewood
- 1955 Justin Matthews dies at North Little Rock
- 1990 Waterside Street Bridge listed on the National Register of Historic Places
- 2001 Waterside Street Bridge repaired
- 2005 Waterside Street Bridge recorded by the Historic American Engineering Record

Introduction

In the 1910s and 1920s, the proliferation of the automobile, mass production and increasing affluence gave rise to a growing middle class with mobility, leisure time and dreams of country life. Increasing numbers of middle-class professionals began to settle the outer fringes of cities in residential neighborhoods known collectively as “the suburbs.”

Description

Waterside Street Bridge carries Waterside Street (originally Sunset Drive) over a small tributary on the south side of Lake 1, a 55-acre lake in North Little Rock. The bridge is a reinforced concrete slab structure faced with random rubble fieldstone. The bridge is highly asymmetrical, skewed and built on a curve. It is 38’ long on the north side and 27’ long on the south side, and has a 7’ clear span. The walls are approximately 7’-6” high at the channel opening, with 26” high parapets. The bridge is approximately 30’ wide between the parapets. Cut stone voussoirs embellish the channel opening.

History

North Little Rock was a rough-and-tumble railroad town (then known as Argenta) when Justin Matthews (1876-1955) arrived in 1901. Born and raised in Monticello, Arkansas, Matthews had a graduate degree in pharmacy but soon discovered he had an interest in real estate. After amassing a small fortune in cotton-oil mills, Matthews began buying tracts of land in and around North Little Rock. In 1908, Matthews formed the Metropolitan Trust Company to hold title and develop his properties, which, by that time, included a number of commercial buildings. Matthews soon became involved in civic improvements, including paved streets, sewers and bridges.

In the spring of 1922, Matthews announced the opening of Park Hill, a residential subdivision, one mile north of the city limits. The newspaper reported, “*Streets are being laid out and arc lights are to be installed. ...In a few weeks, Park Hill will have all modern conveniences of a regular suburb.*”¹ Within a year, the Park Hill Land Company had built thirty houses and had six more underway. By 1925, Park Hill boasted more than 200 residences.

In 1931, Justin Matthews began development of a 600-acre addition northeast of Park Hill. In contrast to the more formal arrangement of Park Hill, the “*revolutionary*” subdivision of Lakewood featured wooded house sites with scenic views, picturesque roads on curvilinear alignments, and a series of parks and man-made lakes.²

¹ *Arkansas Gazette*, April 15 1922.

² “Announcing the Formal Opening of Lakewood,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 1 May 1932, 7.

Construction began in 1931 with the construction of a series of dams. Roads were laid out in 1932 and appear in aerial photographs and on maps of the mid-1930s.³ Although no primary construction documents have been found to date, secondary sources suggest that the Lakewood bridges were designed and built c.1932 as part of the construction of roads along the south shore of Lake No. 1 and the perimeter of Lake No. 3.

PU3309	HAER AR-72	Waterside Street Bridge	Waterside Street / Lake No. 1 tributary	c1932	concrete slab, 7' span	F. Carmean
19407	HAER AR-39	Avondale Road Bridge	Avondale Road / Lake No. 1	c1932	concrete arch 18' span	F. Carmean
19409	HAER AR-40	Edgemere Drive Bridge	Edgemere Drive / Lake No. 3	c1932	concrete arch, 18' span	F. Carmean
PU2028	HAER AR-52	Lakeshore Drive Bridge	Lakeshore Drive / ravine at Lake No. 3	c1932	concrete arch, 20' span	F. Carmean

A full-page ad in the *Arkansas Gazette* of May 1, 1932, announced the opening of Lakewood:

*This highly developed jointly owned park with its chain of hill-land lakes, gives the subdivision all the advantages of an exclusive resort together with those of a highly restricted residential district. ...Seven lakes are practically completed, miles of roads are finished and several of the stone pools and other ornamental features are already installed. Construction work has moved rapidly this winter and there is little wonder that Lakewood is receiving the awe-inspiring admiration of every observer.*⁴

Though set back by the Depression, the Metropolitan Trust Company continued development of Lakewood in the early 1930s, including construction of Old Mill Park in 1933.⁵ After World War II, Justin Matthews gradually began relinquishing control of the company to his children, Justin Jr., John, Thomas and Anne. Shortly before Justin Matthews' death in 1955, John Matthews left the Metropolitan Trust Company to form the Matthews Company (later, General Properties, Inc.) and went on to complete the residential development of Lakewood in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

³ "Airplane View of Lakewood Showing Its Graceful General Plan," *Arkansas Gazette*, 1 May 1932, 7.

⁴ "Announcing the Formal Opening of Lakewood," *Arkansas Gazette*, 1 May 1932, 7.

⁵ National Register of Historic Places Registration Form: "T.R. Pugh Memorial Park," Pulaski County, Arkansas, 1986.

Design

In 1889, Ernest Ransom (1844-1917) designed America's first reinforced concrete bridge, the Alvord Lake Bridge, at San Francisco.⁶ By reinforcing concrete, which is strong in compression, with steel mesh or rods, builders could improve a structure's tensile strength and make better use of materials. The simplest form of a reinforced concrete bridge is a concrete slab with reinforcing rods in the lower part of the concrete. Reinforced concrete slab bridges are practical and economical for spans of less than 20'.⁷

Waterside Street Bridge is similar to Rustic-style park bridges of the 1930s in that native stone disguises the reinforced concrete structure. Its design, however, has a whimsical quality that seems more in keeping with the nineteenth-century English garden style, in which man-made elements were introduced to embellish the natural landscape, rather than to harmonize with it. The Avondale Road Bridge at the end of Lake No. 1 incorporates the same type of fieldstones. Waterside Street Bridge is the smallest of the four Lakewood bridges, and the only one utilizing slab (rather than arch) construction.

Builder

The Justin Matthews Company had a staff of about 200 employees, including road engineer Robert Massey, landscape architect Oscar Wilhelm and architect/builder Frank Carmean. Carmean (1880-1955), a specialist in masonry, stucco and concrete, moved to North Little Rock in 1927 to design and build Period Revival homes for Matthews' company.⁸ At least twelve Park Hill residences attributed to Carmean are listed on the National Register of Historic Places.⁹ Carmean is also credited with the design and construction of the four Lakewood bridges and Old Mill (1933) in Pugh Memorial Park, which appeared in the opening scene of the 1939 movie adaptation of "Gone with the Wind."¹⁰

⁶ See HAER No. CA-33, Alvord Lake Bridge.

⁷ Charles H. Hoyt and William H. Burr, *Highway Bridges and Culverts* (Washington: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of Public Roads, 1911), 14.

⁸ Sandra Taylor Smith, *The Park Hill Historic District, North Little Rock* (Little Rock: Arkansas Historic Preservation Program, 2000), 9.

⁹ See Pulaski County, Arkansas, listings: <http://www.nationalregisterofhistoricplaces.com>.

¹⁰ National Register of Historic Places Registration Form: "T.R. Pugh Memorial Park," Pulaski County, Arkansas, 1986.

Appendix A: Field Photographs



Elevation of bridge. Field photograph by Lola Bennett.

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