

10. NAME(S) OF STRUCTURE

State Bridge Number 258

11. PHOTOS (W/ FILM ROLL & FRAME NO.) AND SKETCH MAP OF LOCATION

10A:21-31



10A:23

Mack, Warren W. "A History of Motor Highways in Delaware", in Reed, Henry Clay, Delaware: A History of the First State, vol.2, pp.535-550 (NY: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., 1947).

Delaware State Program. Delaware State Highways; The Story of Roads in Delaware... [Newark, Delaware: Press of Kells, 1919].

Federal Writers Project. Delaware: A Guide to the First State. (New York: Viking Press, 1938).

Carter, Dick. The History of Sussex County. Georgetown, Delaware: Community Newspaper Corp., 1976.

Hancock, Harold Bell. The History of Sussex County, Delaware. [s.l. : s.n.] 1976.

Stilgoe, John R. Metropolitan Corridor. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983).

Delaware State Archives. Sussex County Road Papers 1875-1940. ms. State Archives, Dover, Delaware.

Delaware DOT records: Annual Reports; contract files.

Plans on file at Delaware DOT: Contract # 699

13. INVENTORIED BY:

AFFILIATION

DATE

P.A.C. Spero & Company with Kidde Consultants for Delaware DOT

April-November 1988

HABS/HAER INVENTORY

See "HABS/HAER Inventory Guidelines" before filling out this card.

1. NAME(S) OF STRUCTURE

State Bridge Number 258

2. LOCATION

Route 536 over Conrail
Seaford, Sussex County, Delaware

3. DATE(S) OF CONSTRUCTION

1941

4. USE (ORIGINAL/CURRENT)

Vehicular

5. RATING

CS

6. CONDITION

Fair: Expansion is paved over, some spalling at abutments and crown of main span, railings need painting, heavy graffiti. Lights in railing posts are broken.

State Highway Bridge Number 258, "High Street Bridge", is a three-span continuous concrete slab bridge with an overall length of 100'-0". The center span over the Conrail tracks measures 52 feet; it is flanked by 24'-0" long spans. The roadway measures 42'-0" curb-to-curb, has 5'-0" sidewalks on each side, and has an asphalt wearing surface. The bridge is built at a slight skew. It exhibits a high level of architectural elaboration. The underside of the spans follow gentle low-rise arches, and the outside edge of the deck is corbeled with a coved bed mold. The piers and wing walls feature stepped forms and vertical bands reflecting Art Moderne influence. The parapet comprises panels which consist of paired concrete posts with an iron balustrade between them. The balustrade incorporates square-section balusters and a row of diamond forms below the handrail, evoking Delaware's motto, the "Diamond State". The ends of the parapets are rounded and have vertical striations. The concrete posts house street-level lighting. Stairs with an iron pipe railing are located at the South-east corner of the bridge leading to a train platform below.

Delaware Department of Transportation records indicate that Bridge Number 258 was constructed in 1941-42, under state contract number 699 (Federal Aid Project F.A.G.M. 181), to replace a functionally obsolete timber bridge which provided a grade separation at the same location on High Street over the Pennsylvania Railroad tracks. The replacement bridge, designed to carry an H-20 live load, was approved by the Pennsylvania Railroad and the State of Delaware, as indicated on the original drawings dated April 1941. Drawing notes chronicle the construction process in detail. A temporary timber pedestrian bridge was provided during construction. These drawings also show the design for the substructure, consisting of concrete footings and battered cast-in-place concrete piles, and the elaborate "Art Moderne" parapet and wing wall ornamentation. Drawings of the metal balustrade, which were fabricated by Charles G. Kemp of Philadelphia, are also included on a sheet labeled "Delaware State Highway Department, Balustrades/Metal Type" dated December 1946. Contract correspondence indicates that a raised dividing strip was initially contemplated to separate the two opposing traffic lanes, but this detail was not incorporated in the final design. The aesthetic effect of the structure impressed the inspecting engineer for the Public Roads Administration, who declared "the lines on the bridge curb and posts are the best on any major structure built in Delaware this past season". Grade crossings posed a dangerous junction between railroad and highway traffic, accounting for thousands of fatalities in the United States in the first quarter of the twentieth century; in 1926, the Delaware State Highway Department began a systematic program of eliminating these hazardous crossings. The railroad companies acted in cooperation with the Highway Department to replace grade intersections with separated crossings. In some cases, grade crossings could be eliminated by relocating the road or the railroad tracks, or both, but this program generally involved the construction of over- or underpasses. About 1940, the federal government began to offer assistance for this type of construction through the Federal Aid highway program of the Public Roads Administration. In the federally-assisted grade separation projects of the period, the cost of construction was borne by the federal government, with the State and the railroad company sharing responsibility for right-of-way acquisition expenses. The contract price for Bridge 258 was \$79,719.00. The contractor, J. A. Bader & Company of Wilmington, started work on October 13, 1941; construction was delayed from the outset by difficulties in obtaining critical materials related to the war effort. Important projects, such as federally-assisted grade crossing elimination structures, were awarded priority ratings by the Public Roads Administration to prevent problems in receipt of materials, but these ratings often proved difficult to obtain, and the application process itself introduced delays. It took two months before Bridge 258 received Preference Rating A-7 from the Office of Production Management; the Public Roads Administration acknowledged the effect of this lag in recommending that the contractor not be held liable for damages despite completing the structure far behind schedule. All work was reported complete on May 20, 1942, and the bridge was opened to traffic the following July.

State Bridge No. 258 is an unusually embellished concrete slab bridge. Significant for its Art Moderne-influenced architectural detailing which is uncommon among Sussex County bridges of the period, it derives additional significance from its association with the grade separation program. That program involved the federal government, states, and private railroad companies working in cooperation to eliminate at-grade railroad crossings, recognized as dangerous and the cause of numerous deaths.