

CT Trust Resource ID: 2258

HISTORIC RESOURCE INVENTORY – BUILDING AND STRUCTURES

State Historic Preservation Office, DECD, One Constitution Plaza, 2nd Floor, Hartford, CT 06103

*Note: Please attach any additional or expanded information on a separate sheet.

Inventory form modified for the Creative Places - Arts & Letters Project

GENERAL INFORMATION

Building Name (Common): Merritt Parkway Comstock Hill Avenue BridgeOther Name(s) (Historic): Merritt Parkway Comstock Hill Avenue BridgeStreet Address or Location: 0 Comstock Hill Ave. NorwalkTown/City: Norwalk

Village:

County: FairfieldDesignation(s): NRHDOwner(s): State of ConnecticutPublic/Private: PublicLatitude: 41.1452 Longitude: -73.4515

PROPERTY INFORMATION

Present Use: BridgeHistoric Use: BridgeAccessibility to public: Yes Exterior visible from public road? YesInterior accessible? If yes, explain: NAStyle of building: Art Moderne bridge Date of Construction: 1938Material(s) (Indicate use or location when appropriate) ConcreteStructural Systems(s): Load bearing masonry

Roof(Type): (Material):

Number of Stories: n/a Approximate Dimensions: 60' wide (arch opening)Structural Condition ExcellentExterior Condition: ExcellentLocational Integrity: On original site Moved, When: NAAlterations?: No If yes, explain: NA

Related outbuildings or landscape features:

Surrounding Environment: Woodland, Woodland, Woodland

Interrelationship of building and surroundings: Norwalk is a town located in Fairfield County, near the New York State border. The Merritt Parkway runs through the north section of Norwalk, parallel with Interstate-95 which runs through the south section of the town. The Comstock Hill Avenue Bridge is approximately one mile to the northeast of the border of the town of New Canaan, and is located in the west section of Norwalk. The entirety of the Merritt Parkway is listed as a district on the National Register of Historic Places (ID# 91000410), of which, this bridge is a contributing resource. Silvermine Center National Register Historic District is just to the northeast of the bridge. The center of Norwalk is located approximately 2.5 miles to the southeast of the Comstock Hill Avenue Bridge.

Other notable features of building or site: This bridge runs northwest to southeast, and is approximately 25' wide on top (from southwest to northeast). There are two reliefs on the bridge, a Native American on the northwest side and a Pilgrim on the southeast side. The National Register of Historic Places nomination for the Merritt Parkway describes the bridge as follows:

Underpass, Comstock Hill Rd. [sic] (DOT # 716).

Construction: In progress, FY 1936-37 and 1937-38. Contractor: M. A. Gammino Construction Co.

Description: Moderne. Concrete rigid frame bridge with cast-concrete ornament. Single span, segmental arch on piers, 60'. Abutments have inset bas-relief panels depicting a Puritan and an Indian. Parapet of simple posts and panels. Recently repaired.

The Native American bas-relief includes a shield, arrows, and what appears to be tobacco leaves. He has a Mohawk with feathers in his hair and is wearing a cloth cape. The pilgrim is dressed in a long coat with numerous buttons, wide brimmed hat with a buckle, and a high collar. A book, candle stick, oak tree leaves, and an olive branch are also included in this relief. The sculptures were created in the 'waste-mold'

technique which was typically used on buildings during this time. According to Larry Larned in Images of America: Traveling the Merritt Parkway, 'the waste-mold technique required great care by skilled workers who had to avoid chipping the concrete relief while the plaster waste mold was being removed one chunk at a time using hammer and chisel' (Larned, pg. 69).

Architect: George Dunkelberger, Edward Ferrari Builder/Maker: M. A. Gammino Construction Co., Decorative Stone

Historical or Architectural importance:

Edward Ferrari, the sculptor of the ornamentation on most of the bridges on the Merritt Parkway, was born in New York in 1903. By 1920, according to the Census Records of New Haven County, Edward and his parents were living in Connecticut. Edward Ferrari was the son of sculptor Febo Ferrari (1865-1949), and followed in his father's footsteps, becoming a sculptor. He attended Yale School of Fine Arts from 1923-1928. During the construction of the Merritt Parkway, Ferrari bid on each bridge project, and won all but one. For each bridge, Dunkelberger would provide Ferrari with sketches of the ornamentation, and Ferrari would create the three dimensional models. The models were then sent to either Malleable Iron Works (for metal ornamentations) and to Decorative Stone in New Haven for casting in concrete. For the Comstock Hill Avenue Bridge, Dunkelberger suggested Ferrari design the ornamentation as well as sculpt it. For weeks Ferrari sketched a Native American and a Pilgrim to be placed on either side of the bridge. He chose to create a Native American and a Pilgrim, as the earliest residents/settlers of the New England area. Febo Ferrari offered to create the mold of the Native American sculpture, leaving Edward to create the mold of the Pilgrim.

Sometime after the Merritt Parkway project ended, Edward Ferrari began working in the prototype department of General Electrics, designing house ware items. In his later years he resided in Milford, where he died in 2001. In addition to the sculpted ornamentation found on the bridges of the Merritt Parkway, Ferrari sculpted architectural ornamentation for buildings in New York and Connecticut.

Sources:

Larned, Larry; Images of America: Traveling The Merritt Parkway; Arcadia Publishing, Charleston SC, Chicago IL, Portsmouth NH, San Francisco CA, 1998; Lynn, Catherine; Edward Ferrari's Sculpture on the Merritt Parkway, Connecticut Preservation News, Volume XIV, No. 5; Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation, 1991; Lynn, Catherine and Wigren, Christopher; Merritt Parkway; National Register of Historic Places Nomination No. 91000410; National Park Service, 1991; Thibodeau, Todd and Smith, Corinne; Merritt Parkway, Comstock Hill Road Bridge, Historic American Engineering Record, HAER No. CT-88; National Park Service, 1992.

Photographer: Kristen Nietering **Date:** 3/27/2014

View:

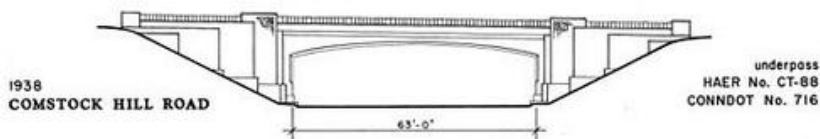
Organization: Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation

Address: 940 Whitney Avenue, Hamden CT 06517-4002

Form completed by: Kristen Nietering **Printed On:** December 21, 2015

Threats: None known

Subsequent field evaluations:



Merritt Parkway Comstock Hill Avenue Bridge (wikipedia)

FOR OFFICE USE:

Town # _____ **Site#** _____ **UTM** _____

District ☐S ☐NR **If NR, specify:** ☐Actual ☐Potential