

# DATA SHEET

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

PH 0695475

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| FOR NPS USE ONLY |             |
| RECEIVED         | JAN 24 1979 |
| DATE ENTERED     | APR 19 1979 |

## NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

### 1 NAME

HISTORIC Willimantic Footbridge

AND/OR COMMON

### 2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER Railroad Street

--- NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Willimantic --- VICINITY OF 2nd - Christopher J. Dodd

STATE Connecticut CODE 09 COUNTY Windham CODE 015

### 3 CLASSIFICATION

| CATEGORY                                      | OWNERSHIP                                  | STATUS  | PRESENT USE  |
|---|--|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT             | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC | <input type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED                     | <input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)          | <input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE           | <input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED                   | <input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input type="checkbox"/> PARK                      |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE | <input type="checkbox"/> BOTH              | <input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS             | <input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> SITE                 | <b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>                  | <b>ACCESSIBLE</b>                                     | <input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT               | <input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS        | <input type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED              | <input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC                |
|   | <input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED | <input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION |
|   |  | <input type="checkbox"/> NO                           | <input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:                      |

### 4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME City of Willimantic ✓

STREET & NUMBER 979 Main Street

CITY, TOWN Willimantic --- VICINITY OF STATE CT 06226

### 5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Willimantic City Clerk

STREET & NUMBER 979 Main Street

CITY, TOWN Willimantic STATE CT

### 6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE State Register of Historic Places

DATE 1978 --- FEDERAL  STATE --- COUNTY --- LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS Connecticut Historical Commission

CITY, TOWN Hartford STATE CT

# 7 DESCRIPTION

| CONDITION                                |                                       | CHECK ONE                                     | CHECK ONE   |
|--|---------------------------------------|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT       | <input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOOD | <input type="checkbox"/> RUINS        | <input type="checkbox"/> ALTERED              | <input type="checkbox"/> MOVED      DATE _____    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> FAIR            | <input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED    |   |   |

## DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Willimantic footbridge is a 600-foot long structure built in 1906 to connect the commercial core of the city with a residential area to the south. It carries pedestrian traffic only over the Willimantic River and the freight yard and tracks of two rail lines. The immediate environment of the bridge has changed since it was first opened: the north end is flanked by a municipal parking lot and vacant redevelopment parcel where once commercial buildings stood, and the southern approach, while still nestled in the woods along the river bank, has as one of its neighbors a Corps of Engineers building. Nevertheless, the overall surroundings continue to reflect the functional zones - commercial, residential, and industrial - which historically provided the raison d'etre of the bridge.

All five spans of the bridge, built by the Owego Bridge Company, are steel through trusses and all have their members bolted together using gusset plates. The bridge does not run in a straight line but turns 10° between the second and third spans (counting from the north end) and 5° between the third and fourth. Leading directly from the Main Street sidewalk is the north abutment of granite ashlar, which forms an approach ramp rising at an angle of about 10°. The first span, a light three-panel Pratt truss constructed of angle iron, continues the ascent to the level of the other trusses. The second truss, a triangular or Warren truss with verticals (nonequilateral triangles), also made of angle iron, carries the traffic over the tracks of the Providence and Worcester Railroad. The third span, over Central Vermont's tracks, is a much larger and heavier eight-panel Pratt truss. The top chord and inclined end posts are box girders, the uprights are lattice girders, and the diagonals, struts, sway bracing and top lateral bracing are of angle iron. The fourth span is identical to the second, and the final span over the river is a heavy truss like the third. There are four piers between the five trusses: the first, second and fourth are steel trestles of lattice girders and angle iron bracing, while the third is a pier of granite rubble. The south abutment is of similar masonry.

The substructure of all five trusses is similar and consists of channel stringers, I-beam crossbeams, angle iron lateral bracing, and floorboards of pre-cast concrete. There is a guard rail on both sides formed of chain-link fencing and angle iron rails. Approach railings at either end are the tubular type. With the possible exception of the concrete flooring, the electric lighting, and the present black paint scheme (the first color was green), the bridge has changed very little since it was first erected. Although there are some cracks in the top of the masonry pier, the structural condition of the bridge appears sound.

### DIMENSIONS (In Feet)

| TRUSS | LENGTH | CLEAR WIDTH | HEIGHT | DISTANCE ABOVE FEATURE SPANNED | TYPE        |
|-------|--------|-------------|--------|--------------------------------|-------------|
| 1     | 72     | 8           | 8.5    | inclined                       | Small Pratt |
| 2     | 124.8  | 8           | 8.5    | c. 24 above P&W tracks         | Triangular  |
| 3     | 156    | 8           | 15.6   | c. 24 above CV tracks          | Heavy Pratt |
| 4     | 124.8  | 8           | 8.5    | c. 40 above bank               | Triangular  |
| 5     | 156    | 8           | 15.6   | c. 45 above River              | Heavy Pratt |

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

| PERIOD                                    | AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW |   |   |  |
|---|--|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC      | <input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC  | <input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING     | <input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE | <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499        | <input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC     | <input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION           | <input type="checkbox"/> LAW                    | <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599        | <input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE             | <input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS              | <input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE             | <input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699        | <input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE            | <input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION              | <input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY               | <input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799        | <input type="checkbox"/> ART                     | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING | <input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC                  | <input type="checkbox"/> THEATER                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899        | <input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE                | <input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT | <input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY             | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900- | <input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS          | <input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY               | <input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT    | <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)           |
|   |  | <input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION              |   |  |

## CRITERIA: A, C

SPECIFIC DATES 1906 - erected

BUILDER/ARCHITECT Owego Bridge Company,  
C.W. Higley, Engineer

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Willimantic Footbridge is of great local significance because of its status as a landmark: for more than seven decades it has been one of the most prominent features of the downtown area, as well as a vital avenue for pedestrian traffic. Its impressive length, its central location, its visibility, and its continued usefulness in linking the Main Street shopping area with the residential area to the south combine to make it a familiar and essential part of Willimantic's cityscape. The footbridge is also significant as an historical resource which illustrates early twentieth-century urban values, and as a typical example of the period's bridge-building.

Although a footbridge across the river and railroad tracks was proposed as early as 1877, the plan did not become reality until the city erected this bridge in 1906. The first decades of this century were a time of great interest in civic improvements, including those which would make the city more liveable and enjoyable for pedestrians. More and better sidewalks, removal of railroad grade crossings, and scenic parks were some of the ideas then current, and the footbridge movement in Willimantic was another example of concern for the quality of city life. Interestingly, shortly after the footbridge was approved, the local newspaper suggested that it be part of a system of scenic riverside parks, an idea again recommended in 1976.<sup>1</sup> Although other footbridges are mentioned in governmental reports of the period, it seems that few of this scale have endured.<sup>2</sup> The Willimantic footbridge is apparently a rare specimen of this facet of Progressive-era city improvement.

The bridge is typical of the construction techniques of the period. By 1900 steel was the accepted material, truss designs had been reduced to a few standards, and pinned joints had given way to rivetted construction. Like many small spans, the footbridge was put together with bolts instead of rivets. The reason given at the time was that this would facilitate removal of the bridge if the tracks were raised, but one suspects that field rivetting was simply more expensive than bolting the parts together.

The bridge was erected by the Owego Bridge Company of Owego, N.Y., one of a number of small fabricators active at that time. The specifications were drawn up by Robert E. Mitchell, a local engineer under contract to the city, modified by the railroads, which wanted a heavier truss over their tracks, and implemented by C.W. Higley of Owego Bridge. Stonework was done by Charles Larrabee, a Willimantic mason and contractor. The total cost was about \$13,000.

<sup>1</sup>Windham Regional Planning Agency, City Rivers Report, 1976.

<sup>2</sup>Opinion given to Willimantic Community Development Agency by Donald Jackson of the Historic American Engineering Record.



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Williamntic Footbridge  
Willimantic, CT

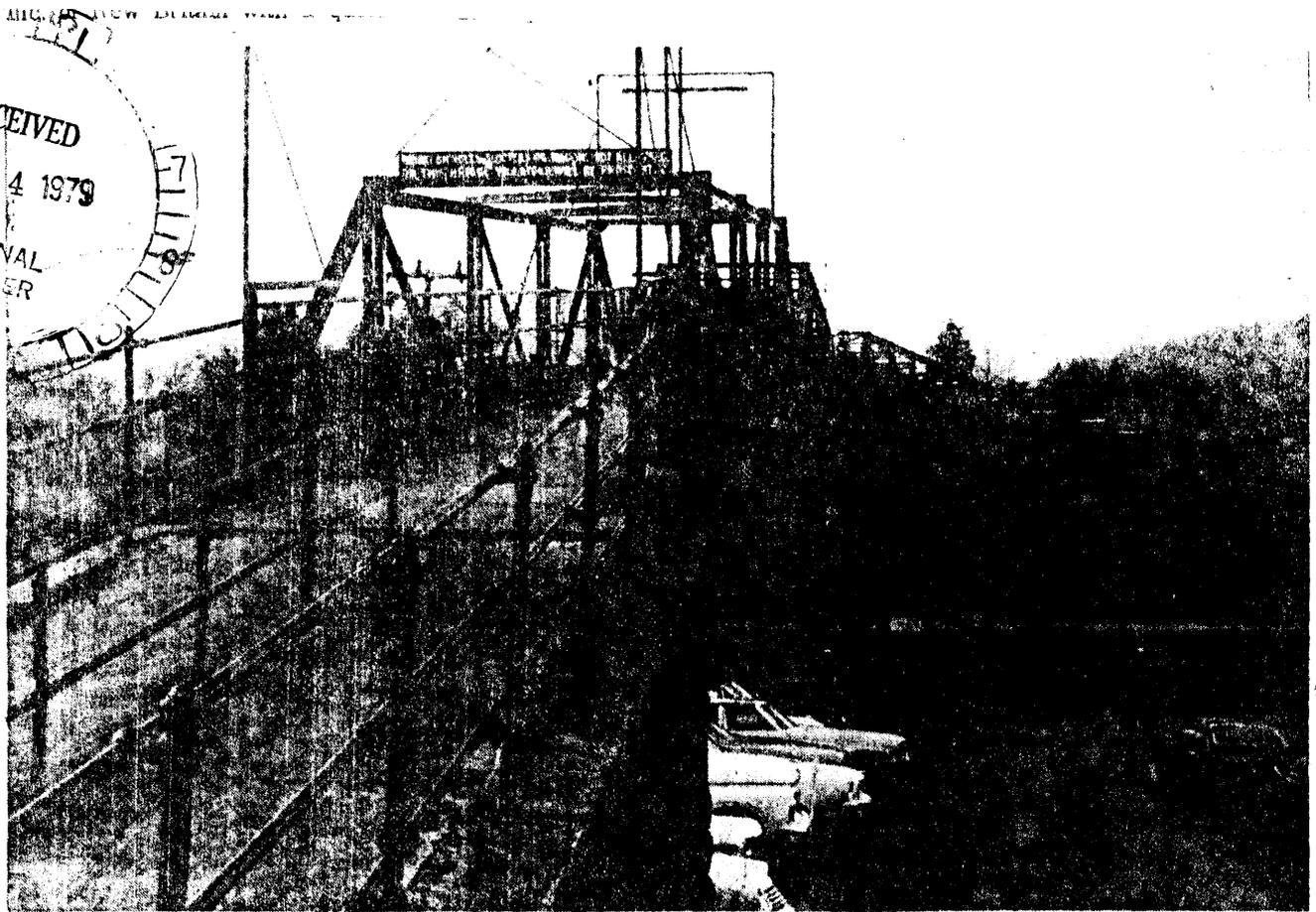
CONTINUATION SHEET

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BIBLIOGRAPHY (continued):

Willimantic City Engineer, Footbridge File. Contains set of original plans.

Willimantic, City of. Annual Statement of the Mayor, 1905-1907.



Bulletin Photo by Frank J. Poirot

Historic Willimantic Footbridge

# Historic Footbridge Nominated For National Register Listing

By FRANK J. POIROT  
Bulletin Staff Writer

**WILLIMANTIC** — The Willimantic Footbridge has been nominated for possible listing on the National Register of Historical Places.

The request for nomination was submitted by Francis Aharn of Prospect Street and approved Thursday by the state Review Board for the National Register program.

"There aren't that many footbridges of this kind left in the state" National Register Specialist John Herzan said Friday. He added that it's rarity was the major reason behind approving the structure for a nomination.

The footbridge depicts "early 20th century urban values," he said, adding that it is a "familiar local landmark" and a "sign of local history."

The National Register program is a joint effort between state and federal officials.

In Washington, D.C., the program is administered through the Heritage, Conservation and Recreation Service, an agency within the Department of the Interior. On the state level, it is administered through the State Historical Commission.

The footbridge nomination is expected to take between six and eight months before it is acted on by the HCRS.

If it is approved, the city could become eligible to receive a restoration grant for the structure from the Department of the Interior.

The program was established in 1966. Since then over 5,000 historical structures and sites in Connecticut have been entered on the Register out of over 70,000 applications.

For over 70 years the bridge has been "a vital link for pedestrian traffic," wrote the commission consultant who

reviewed the city's application for a nomination.

The bridge connects Main Street with the west side of the city and spans the Willimantic River and several sets of railroad tracks.

Three other structures in the city were approved by the review board for additional study to determine their eligibility for a nomination. The buildings are the Brett Building, on Main Street, the Brown Building at the corner of Bridge and Main Streets and the railroad freight office and shed near Bridge Street.

Norman said the state office currently has a "two-year backlog" of research work for it's consultants. But, he said, if the city contracts with a private consultant to research the buildings' history, the review process could take a year to complete.

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# City officials apply for historic designation

## For old railroad footbridge

By JEFFREY ALLEN  
Staff Writer

City officials plan to file a pre-application with the state Historical Commission to consider the Willimantic footbridge as an historical landmark.

Frank Olin, a rehabilitation specialist with the Community Development Agency (CDA), said Tuesday the agency is considering filing the pre-application, the first step in consideration of the 655-foot-long bridge for placement under the National Register of Historic Places.

Olin explained that should the footbridge be given national historic significance, the city could receive federal funds needed to rehabilitate it.

The initial step in getting the possible national historical status, Olin said, is filing the pre-application with the state Historical Commission.

Since the state group meets quarterly, Olin said, the form must be submitted by Aug. 7. The state group meets Sept. 7.

Olin said the agency will require a qualified historian to fill out the pre-application, and one individual has given verbal consent to do the work.

It will require historical research, photography, and map work.

Olin declined to identify the person who indicated verbal interest. It is, however, Bruce Clouette, a partner in Historic Resources Consultants, Mansfield Center.

CDA commissioners have yet to be presented with the proposal.

Olin indicated the footbridge, built from 1905 to 1906, may be qualified for the National Register. He quoted the Historical American Engineering Record (HAER) as indicating most of the footbridges in New England are gone.

"To their (HAER) knowledge, they were torn down or just vanished," Olin said. "Most of them were run by the railroads to begin with."

Olin said that to the best of his knowledge, the Willimantic footbridge, spanning from Main to Pleasant Streets across the Willimantic River, is one of the longest and continually-used footbridges in this part of the country.

According to Olin, the city has already submitted a request for \$19,000 to replank the footbridge. CDA officials are hoping to receive the funds as part of its 1978-1979 entitlement program.

Ideally, the city would like to rehabilitate the entire structure to include lights similar to those which illuminated city streets at the turn-of-the-century.

Olin said the William Jillson House on Main Street has already received National Register status, and its historical significance helped bring in the funds for its restoration.

Clouette, a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Connecticut, has already begun tracing the footbridge's history.

According to the historian, the first proposal for a Willimantic footbridge was in 1877 when 55 residents petitioned city officials.

"At that time," Clouette said, "there was a great deal of opposition (to the bridge) because it was seen as an extravagance."

Clouette noted there was also a counter proposal to make the bridge larger and wider to accommodate trolleys and wagons.

The counter proposal was eventually rejected, however.

The present bridge was approved by the Council in January, 1905, Clouette reported, although the bridge was not actually started until 1906. Voters accepted it the same year.

The construction cost of the bridge was a total \$12,000, \$2,100 paid to a local mason for a stone abutment, and the rest to the Owego Bridge Co., Owego, N.Y.

"There was a cost overrun of a couple hundred bucks," Clouette indicated, "but the basic cost was \$12,000."

Clouette said he suspects the structure is an "off-the-shelf" bridge, or pre-fabricated. He said one pair of trusses is identical, and another pair identical, but another span doesn't match the other two.

"Instead of being like the Brooklyn Bridge where the design plan is unique for the spot, the Bridge Committee specifically asked for what it wanted," Clouette said.

Clouette noted there are other bridges of historical importance in the area. He cited the Pucker Street bridge over the Hop River between Columbia and Coventry, a

wrought-iron structure with pin construction, and the two masonry arch bridges across the Willimantic River.

Clouette also said the National Register attaches not only national historical significance to structures, but also local historical significance.

"I think the footbridge has great local historical significance," Clouette said. "It has been a landmark since the beginning of the century."

# Bridge Listing Sought

**WILLIMANTIC —** The Connecticut Review Board Sept. 7 will discuss the city's proposal to designate its railroad footbridge as a national historic monument.

The black steel bridge, built in 1906, spans the Willimantic River and railroad tracks.

The city hopes to have the bridge listed on the National Register of Historic Places which would make it eligible for a number of federal funding programs.

Nominations are made by the review board, a group of architectural historians, planners and preservationists appointed by Gov. Grasso.

At its September meeting, the board will decide if the footbridge is worthy of further study for a nomination. A request for a full nomination would be considered at a later meeting after the proposal is drafted by the city or the state Historical Commission.

John Herzan, a national register specialist with the commission said the footbridge is a "unique structure in the state."

The review board will meet at 9:30 a.m. in the Bryant room of South Congregational Church, 277 Main St., Hartford.

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