

1844

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NATIONAL REGISTER

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Bridge No. I-4646
other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number Sixth Street over Spring Brook N/A not for publication
city, town Beaver Creek N/A vicinity
state Minnesota code MN county Rock code 133 zip code 56116

3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	Contributing	Noncontributing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	_____	_____ buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	_____	_____ sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> structure	<u>1</u>	_____ structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	_____	_____ objects
		<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing: Reinforced-Concrete Highway Bridges in Minn., 1900-1945 Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.
Nina Archabal 9/22/89
Signature of certifying official Nina M. Archabal Date
State Historic Preservation Officer
State or Federal agency and bureau Minnesota Historical Society

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.
Signature of commenting or other official _____ Date _____
State or Federal agency and bureau _____

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:
 entered in the National Register. See continuation sheet.
 determined eligible for the National Register. See continuation sheet.
 determined not eligible for the National Register.
 removed from the National Register.
 other, (explain:) _____
Delores Egan 11/16/89
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Transportation, road-related

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Transportation, road-related

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

Other: Reinforced-concrete bridge

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation

walls

roof

other reinforced concrete

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

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BRIDGE NO. L-4646

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7. DESCRIPTION

Bridge No. L-4646 is located at the northeast corner of the city of Beaver Creek, Beaver Creek Township, Rock County, Minnesota. Rock County marks the southwestern corner of the state, bordering on South Dakota along the west and Iowa along the south. The bridge carries gravel-surfaced Sixth Street (Municipal Route 11) over Spring Brook. Although the bridge is located within the city limits, the environment is essentially rural pasture land, not unlike most of this prairie county, which provides some of the best farm land in Minnesota.¹

Aligned on a northeast-southwest axis, Bridge L-4646 is a single-span, reinforced-concrete, filled-spandrel, barrel-vaulted, low-rise, arch bridge, with slightly flared wing-wall abutments. Overall structure length is 38 feet and the span length is 32.1 feet. The out-out deck width is 18.7 feet, carrying a 15.6-foot roadway and no sidewalks.

A straight and level concrete coping is continuous across the floor line and wing walls. The railings are straight, flat slabs, across the span only; there is no railing on the wing walls. Each railing terminates in a cylindrical concrete post, and railing and post carry a continuous, flat coping. A cast molding follows the underside of each coping.

On the top center of the east railing, scribed (not pressed) in the concrete, are the name of the contractor (P.N. Gillham), the date (1911), the names of the Beaver Creek Township Board members, and the names of the two county commissioners appointed to the joint township-county committee established to oversee this particular bridge project. The printing of letters is irregular, with the letter "S" reversed. Some words are misspelled: "CONTRACTER," "TOWNSHIP BORD."

Stylistically, the bridge exhibits Classical Revival elements, including the coping, molding, and end posts. These particular features are found on all bridges identified as being constructed by P.N. Gillham.

The bridge has not been altered and the vulnerable (to road graders and snowplows) end posts have not been damaged.

1. See "Area Description" in "Historic Resources of Rock County," unpublished typescript in Minnesota State Historic Preservation Office, undated.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Engineering

Period of Significance

1911

Significant Dates

1911

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Bldr.: Gillham, Perley N.

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

See continuation sheet

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8. SIGNIFICANCE

Bridge No. L-4646, spanning Spring Brook in the city of Beaver Creek, Beaver Creek Township, Rock County, Minnesota, is significant in the area of engineering under Criterion C in the context of "Minnesota Reinforced-Concrete Highway Bridges, 1900-1945." It is an excellent, unaltered, example of a regional, vernacular variation on the small, rural, early reinforced-concrete vehicular bridge, particularly that variety of reinforced-concrete arch bridge built by, or attributed to, Perley N. Gillham of Luverne, Rock County, Minnesota. This is a very large collection of similarly designed, aesthetically outstanding, early reinforced-concrete bridges, located almost entirely within a single county.

This bridge is one of at least 12 strikingly similar bridges in Rock County and one in neighboring Nobles County that have the identification "P.N. Gillham" scribed in the concrete.¹ There are at least 16 additional bridges in the county that do not bear Gillham's name (although one bears a date) and have design elements so similar to the confirmed Gillham bridges as to allow attribution to him.² Confirmed dates (as indicated on the bridge itself) of Gillham bridges range from 1908 to 1913; attributed bridges have unconfirmed dates ranging from 1901 to 1920.

The Gillham reinforced-concrete arch bridges share the following characteristics, with minor variations: low-rise, single-span, elliptical arch, usually 20- to 30-foot span, with a scribed line in the arch-ring edge; filled spandrel; barrel arch; wing-wall abutments, almost U-type, with continuous coping; distinctive slab railing, over arch only, with cylindrical end posts and continuous coping; distinctive, decorative, concrete molding found along the lower edge of all coping; names and dates related to construction are scribed or pressed into the top surface of the railing coping. Variations include: bridge floors may be arched over the span arch or may be straight; railings and copings may also be arched or straight; end posts may be centered on the railing slab or flush with the inside of the slab; end posts may terminate at the floor coping or may continue below, marking the abutment line. Most of these characteristics, particularly the railing, coping, and molding details, have not been observed in other Minnesota bridges.

Despite a considerable amount of research in state and county sources, very little has been discovered about Gillham and his bridges. Perley N. Gillham arrived in Luverne, the county seat, in 1875, following his brother Edwin, who had come to the community in 1868 as a stage driver. Edwin was born in Illinois in 1845; the birth date and location for Perley is not known. He first appears in the county commissioners' records for plastering work in 1875,³ and periodically is mentioned in connection with various contracting work. His name is first associated with a bridge, but only for repairs, in 1883.⁴ In 1887 he was appointed superintendent of construction for the new county courthouse,⁵ and in 1900 was awarded the contract for construction of a new county jail.⁶ From the 1890s onward, his name appears regularly for miscellaneous county work, including building, bridge, and road contracts. Unfortunately, the county commissioners' minutes rarely discuss bridge work in any detail, and usually do not mention the bridge type or the con-

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tractor's name. A 1934 county history referred to Gillham as "our first contractor and builder," noting that "many of the prominent buildings of the city at the present time were built by him."⁷ Even his date of death is a mystery. Newspaper records suggest that he was alive in Luverne at least as late as 1933 or 1934, but state records have located no death certificate for Gillham between 1930 and 1950.⁸

Where did such an obscure plasterer and general builder and contractor, living and working in what is among the state's most remote counties even today, learn to design and build reinforced-concrete arch bridges during the earliest years of reinforced-concrete bridge construction? Other early Minnesota reinforced-concrete arch bridges, such as those built around 1900-05 for the Twin Cities Rapid Transit Company, are clearly different from Gillham's designs. The only hint of an outside influence on Gillham is found in the Fritz von Emperger-designed small, Melan-arch concrete bridge, which was built near Rock Rapids, Iowa, in 1894. Rock Rapids is only a mile south of the Minnesota state line, and less than three miles due south from Luverne. The only published photograph shows a bridge whose proportions are almost identical to Gillham's designs, and even the reported dimensions (either 30- or 36-foot span, depending on the source; it may be a 36-foot structure with a 30-foot clear span; and a low rise of 6.5 feet) are similar to Gillham's. Unlike Rock County bridges, the Iowa bridge has a pipe railing and no abutment walls. Adding to the possible connection is the reported name of the contractor, Minneapolis bridge builder William S. Hewett, who would become significant for his pioneering work in reinforced concrete. One source states that Hewett "had a blanket contract for building all county bridges in two or three counties in Iowa for the year 1894. It is known that, at the time, William was the agent and a joint proprietor with his uncle Seth in S.M. Hewett & Company, bridge builders. Seth M. Hewett had started out as lumberman and wooden-bridge builder in Hamburg, Iowa (due south of Rock Rapids, but at the Missouri line), and in the 1880s appears in the Rock County commissioners' minutes for bridge work. In fact, Hewett received the 1884 contract to replace the same Ash Creek bridge that Gillham had repaired a year earlier, suggesting that there were opportunities for Gillham to meet the Hewetts and, perhaps, establish a relationship that later led to an exchange of information about reinforced-concrete and the Iowa bridge."⁹

While very intriguing and suggestive, the evidence that P.N. Gillham's bridges are vernacular descendants of America's first Melan-type bridge remains circumstantial and awaits further research. Nevertheless, it is clear that P.N. Gillham's reinforced-concrete arch bridges constitute a substantial and significant body of vernacular work. Spring Brook Bridge is an excellent and documented example of Gillham's bridges.

1. Bridges having "P.N. Gillham" inscribed in concrete on bridge: Rock County: L-2162, L-2199, L-2212, L-2214, L-2215, L-2266, L-2263, L-2273, L-2318, L-2350, L-4646; Nobles County: L-3454. There may be additional examples among those not surveyed during 1987-88 project.
2. Bridges without Gillham's name on bridge, but attributed to Gillham because of engineering and stylistic similarities (all in Rock County): L-2166, L-2182, L-2197, L-2198, L-2201, L-2208, L-2209, L-2210, L-2240, L-2241, L-2246, L-2250, L-2264, L-2292, L-2315, L-2316. There may be additional examples among those not surveyed during 1987-88 project.

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3. Rock County Commissioners Minutes, October 16, 1875.
 4. See Rock County Commissioners Minutes, March 20, 1883, regarding Ash Creek Bridge.
 5. Rock County Commissioners Minutes, August 23, 1887.
 6. Rock County Commissioners Minutes, May 4, 1900.
 7. E.A. Brown, "Early History of Luverne," Rock County Herald, March 23, 1934.
 8. E.A. Brown's 1934 history of Luverne suggests that Gillham was alive at that time; Gillham's last noted listing on the county property tax rolls was for 1932, as printed in the Rock County Herald. Death certificate records were checked at the Minnesota Department of Health, Section of Vital Statistics Registration, Minneapolis.
 9. The Rock Rapids, Iowa, bridge project is recounted, and a photograph included, in William Mueser, "The Development of Reinforced Concrete Bridge Construction," in The Cornell Civil Engineer, 33 (May 1925): 162-63. The Hewetts' background is discussed in Fredric L. Quivik, "Montana's Minneapolis Bridge Builders," IA: The Journal of the Society for Industrial Archeology 10 (1984): 35-54. On the possibility that Gillham and Hewett met in the 1880s, see statements on the Ash Creek bridge in the Rock County Commissioners Minutes for March 29, 1883, and December 26, 1884.

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UTM References

A Zone: 15
Easting: 713075
Northing: 4832320