The Freeman H. Horton Bridges over Wares Creek, Manatee County

Three bridges over Ware's Creek in Manatee County were constructed by the City of Bradenton Public Works Department in 1938, 1945, and 1949 as replacements for previous iron and wooden structures. These replacement bridges were likely built using federal relief funds. All three bridges are situated within a NRHP-eligible historic neighborhood, which developed over the first half of the twentieth century. As a group, the three bridges helped maintain the integration of the neighborhood as a whole community. In addition, they continued to support the growth of the neighborhood by accommodating the increased automobile traffic following World War II. However, the most notably significant historical association is with the bridge designer, Freeman H. Horton.

Civil engineer Freeman H. Horton was the first Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) graduate from Manatee County. Upon graduation from college, Mr. Horton operated his own office, Horton Company Inc., in Manatee County. Following a brief period of work in Cincinnati during the early part of the Depression, he returned to Manatee County in 1933. In order to qualify for WPA and other federally funded projects, Horton partnered with George and Ralph Bail to create Bail and Horton Associates. During World War II, Horton designed every Army Air Corps Training Field in Florida, including Avon Park, Drew Field, and what is now Sarasota-Bradenton Airport. After the Bail and Horton partnership ended in 1955, he began Horton and Associates with his son and son-in-law, which continued until 1970.

A few of Horton's projects have been noted around the world such as his Tampa Bay Hyde Park Seawall. Leiden University in Holland uses this seawall as part of their engineering curriculum due to Horton's innovative adaptation of a Dutch engineering strategy in creating stable foundations for structures in water. Other noteworthy projects by Horton include the Sarasota Civic Center, the Manatee County Memorial Hospital, the Railroad Vertical Lift Bridge in Jacksonville, and an original design for the Sunshine Skyway. Horton also worked internationally, and at one point, had offices in Cuba and Haiti. His work was influential enough that he was once offered the position of Chief of Engineering in the Philippines; however, he declined the offer to remain in Florida. Recently, Freeman H. Horton was listed as one of the twenty most influential people in the history of Manatee County. Despite being known for his bigger projects, Horton would frequently do smaller bridge and highway work for the Department of Transportation. This work included the Seventh, Ninth, and Twelfth Avenue Bridges over Wares Creek.[148] Horton used concrete in the design of these bridges, but insisted that no Florida limestone be used as aggregate. He felt that it was too porous and weak for use in highways and bridges and favored the limestone or granite from Georgia or further north.

The **Twelfth Avenue Bridge over Ware's Creek** (No. 135252; **Photo 6-15**) is a simple and small, 28-foot long concrete tee-beam bridge built in 1938. Poured concrete abutments support the bridge, both of which have drainage culverts at their base. The superstructure is poured concrete, and the deck is covered in asphalt. Horton chose to give its railings a Neo-Classical feel by incorporating a balustrade (**Photo 6-16**), a somewhat common aesthetic treatment on bridges from the 1920s and 1930s. Horton both designed the structure and supervised its construction, perhaps with federal relief assistance. The earliest of the three Ware's Creek bridges, the Twelfth Avenue Bridge was determined eligible for listing in the NRHP by the SHPO in 2007. It is located within the Wares Creek Historic District.

[148] Archaeological Consultants, Inc., Section 106 Consultation Case Study Report for the 9th Avenue West Bridge Replacement at Wares Creek, Manatee County, Florida. Evaluation of Effects to the 9th Avenue West Bridge at Wares Creek and a Wares Creek Historic District, 2009.

Photo 6-15. North Guardrail and Deck of the Twelfth Avenue Bridge (No. 135252)

Photo 6-16. South elevation of the Twelfth Avenue Bridge, Looking Northwest.

The **Ninth Avenue Bridge over Ware's Creek** (No. 135251; **Photo 6-17**), a 1945 concrete arch deck, was the second Horton-designed bridge constructed over Wares Creek. Its 1945 construction date makes it a relatively late example of the use of an arch deck bridge. The 36-foot long structure is supported by two abutments of poured concrete faced with solid concrete panels with a horizontal ribbed pattern. The superstructure of the bridge is poured concrete while the deck is asphalt. This bridge features deck railings that contain a "w" or "zig zag" pattern (**Photo 6-18**), found only on one other Florida bridge, the Seventh Avenue Bridge over Ware's Creek. In 2009, the SHPO determined the Ninth Avenue Bridge eligible for the NRHP under Criterion B for its association with Bradenton engineer, Freeman Horton, and under Criterion C in the area of Engineering.

Photo 6-17. The Ninth Avenue Bridge (No. 135251), Looking Southwest.

Photo 6-18. Zigzag Railing Detail on the Ninth Avenue Bridge.

The third Horton-designed bridge is the **Seventh Avenue Bridge over Wares Creek** (No. 135250), a steel girder bridge constructed in 1949. It consists of three spans, for a total length of 63 feet. The concrete rails of this bridge are similar to those on the 9th Avenue West Bridge. This Ware's Creek Bridge also was determined NRHP-eligible by the SHPO in 2009.