

New Deal Era Bridges and Culverts: Statewide

The Great Depression of the 1930s was an economic storm that paralyzed the industrialized countries of the western world and, most of all the United States. In Florida, the economic problems were compounded by the collapse of the state's 1920s Land Boom. In response, the federal government, under the leadership of President Franklin Roosevelt, launched a number of government relief programs under the name "New Deal." They included programs for the construction of bridges, parks, and roads and helped revive U.S. productivity by providing employment for the jobless and infusing capital into the American economy.

The Works Progress Administration (WPA) and the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) were two major components of Roosevelt's program, and they included road building programs that produced several bridges across the state. These efforts to stimulate the national economy through government programs represent one of the major historical trends of the twentieth century. Between 1935 and 1943, the WPA constructed 78,000 new bridges and viaducts and improved more than 46,000 others. In the later years of the program, timber and masonry were often used in bridge construction in order to conserve critical materials. Many of the bridges were small, replacement structures, typically consisting of two-lane bridges built to replace one-lane bridges.¹⁴⁹ In Florida, the WPA built and improved 1,483 bridges and viaducts plus 7,049 culverts through the period ending June 30, 1943.¹⁵⁰

The bridges and culverts included in this group share two important features: they were all built during the Great Depression, and they all have stone or rubble facades. In every case, the stone or rubble is of local origin, which is a feature seen in many WPA and CCC undertakings nationwide. The Blackwater Creek Overflow Bridge was determined eligible by the SHPO in 1993; the other four were determined NRHP-eligible during the 2000 survey. These bridges generally are eligible for listing in the NRHP under Criterion A in the area of Government and under Criterion C in the area of Engineering. The five New Deal era bridges and culverts listed in **Table 6-5** are discussed below.

Table 6-5. Stone or Rubble-Façade New Deal Bridges and Culverts.

FDOT No.	FMSF No.	Year Built	County / District	Route Carried / Feature Intersected
n/a	8LI338	1940	Liberty / 3	Torreya Stone Arch Bridge over Rock Creek
100647 (formerly 100037)	8HI5042	c.1936	Hillsborough / 1	SR-39 over Blackwater Creek Relief
364150	8MR3603	1940	Marion / 3	NE 145 th Avenue over Unnamed Canal
364120	8MR3602	1940	Marion / 3	SE 137 th Avenue over Unnamed Creek
364060	8MR3601	1940	Marion / 3	NE 105 th Street over Daisy Creek

The **Torreya Stone Arch Bridge** spans Rock Creek in Torreya State Park in Liberty County. The CCC erected the bridge in 1940 as part of the development of the park. Originally, this bridge carried the park entrance drive over the small creek, but the entrance has been reoriented and the bridge now serves as part of the park's trail system. The bridge consists of a concrete structure with limestone facing and a concrete curb. The limestone façade gives the bridge a rustic appearance that harmonizes with the rural park setting.

In Hillsborough County, a steel arch culvert carries SR-39 over the Blackwater Creek Relief. The **Blackwater Creek Overflow Bridge** (No. 100647, formerly 100037) is described and illustrated in Chapter 5 (see page 5-34).

Marion County provides three examples of WPA construction. The **Southeast 137th Avenue culvert** over an unnamed creek (No. 364120; **Photo 6-19**) has three spans and extends a total length of 44 feet. The **NE**

¹⁴⁹ United States Federal Works Agency, *Final report on the WPA Program, 1935-43* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1947), 53.

¹⁵⁰ United States Federal Works Agency, 1947, 135.

105th Street culvert over Daisy Creek (No. 364060; **Photo 6-20**) is the largest, with five spans and a length of 109 feet. The smallest of the three is the two-span, 34-foot, **NE 145th Avenue culvert** over an unnamed canal (No. 364150). These three structures are all stone-faced, and each possesses an engraving of the initials "WPA" following "Marion County" and "1940" on the interior surfaces of their bridge railings. They are the only bridges identified in the state on which the WPA left such a marking.



Photo 6-19. SE 137th Avenue Creek Culvert, Marion County (No. 364120)



Photo 6-20. NE 105th Street Culvert over Daisy Creek, Marion County (No. 364060)

In addition to the New Deal-era arched bridges and culverts, other similar resources constructed in the 1930s and 1940s were identified. These concrete and steel arch culverts exhibit uncommon design trends for their type during this time. The Bauhaus and International style influences and cost-constraints of the Great Depression meant an end to high-style, ornate structures seen throughout America's built environment. Beginning in the 1930s, adorned structures became increasingly rare. For concrete culverts, this was exhibited as a shift from an arched to a boxed form and from a stone-faced to an unadorned façade. As concrete gained further acceptance as a bridge building material, cast-in-place, unadorned concrete box culverts emerged in the 1930s as the dominant culvert type; box culverts have been the prevalent form ever since.

Seven corrugated steel arch culverts located in Bradford and Suwannee Counties (**Table 6-6**) exhibit the changing design trends that mark the end of an era. Due to their integrity, increasing rarity, and at-risk condition, with the exception of No. 374002, the culverts are newly recommended NRHP-eligible under Criterion C in the area of Engineering. They are considered high integrity examples of a dwindling resource type. Further in-depth research, beyond the scope of this inventory survey, may reveal that the 1940s stone-faced arched culverts are associated with the WPA, CCC, or other New Deal-era road building programs. Both the **Braggs Branch culvert** (No. 280036) and the **Gum Creek culvert** (No. 280037) are described and illustrated in Chapter 5 (See page 5-33).