The background of the image is a detailed architectural drawing of a bridge's truss structure. It features a series of vertical posts connected by diagonal members, forming a series of triangles. A horizontal line runs across the middle of the structure. The drawing is rendered in a light blue and grey color scheme. Overlaid on this drawing is the text for the exhibit.

OFFICE OF THE CITY CLERK
MUNICIPAL RECORDS FACILITY ARCHIVES

PRESENTS:

ONLINE EXHIBIT - HISTORIC BRIDGES OF SAN ANTONIO

— General Elevation —

EARLY SAN ANTONIO BRIDGES

The earliest reference of a bridge spanning the San Antonio River dates to 1736 when a priest at the Mission San Antonio de Valero requested that six wooden beams be placed across the river just south of the colony of La Villita. The makeshift bridge was erected at what is now thought to be the Commerce Street Bridge, allowing soldiers from the local presidio and newly arrived Canary Islanders access to church services at the mission. But soon thereafter, the bridge's beams were removed to construct a new mission church. The bridge's removal was due, in part, to claims by the priest at Mission San Antonio de Valero, asserting that soldiers from the military presidio were molesting Native American women at the mission. Eventually the Spanish military governor of Texas ordered a new bridge built in the same location, much to the dismay of the mission priest.



Steel engraving print of San Antonio from Meyer's *Universal*, ca. 1850s (Courtesy of the Star of the Republic Museum).



Early survey of the San Antonio River; ca. 1830s (Courtesy of the Texas General Land Office).

The bridge would subsequently become a symbol of the power struggle between military and religious factions within San Antonio. Once again the mission priest ordered the bridge dismantled. In retaliation, the Spanish governor commanded a group of Native Americans from the mission, ordering them to rebuild the bridge as it stood before. The padre, in a final reprisal, placed Native American sentries at the entrance to the bridge, thereby preventing its use by the military garrison. The episode would be a prescient example of the significance bridges would play in San Antonio's development over the next two hundred and fifty years.

SIX TIMBER QUOTA

Poor construction, frequent flooding, and the rapid deterioration of wooden beams all helped to contribute to bridges continuing to attract attention by city officials. During the Spanish colonial period, the maintenance of bridges, like other public works projects, was the responsibility of the entire community. As the following excerpt suggests, San Antonians were often times conscripted to build bridges under the threat of penalty or prison.

Minutes from the City of San Antonio ayuntamiento, December, 1-10 1818:

“En 1º de Diciembre de 1818, se juntaron a Cavildo extraordinario los señores que lo componen presidido del Alcalde de 1º voto, Dn. José María Sambrano, colocados por su orden según estilo, se leyó un oficio del Sr. Gov. en la que encarga a los señores Alcaldes hagan presente a el Cuerpo Capitulár su contenido; y su deseo sobre reconvección para que haga el puente por donde se comunique la mayor parte del Pueblo con el barrio del Alamo, y con o el aso y limpieza de calles y el desuido que atribuye a la falta de su obligación justa a este cuerpo como a su Sindico procurador y Alcaldes de Barrio. Se dispuso que inmediatamente se tomaran las providencias necesarias para dar cumplimiento a lo prevenido por dicho Sr. Gov. pidiéndole al mismo tiempo la asistencia de las tropas para que con su ayuda podrán los vecinos reedificar la obra de que se trata y al Procurador Sindico y Alcalde de Barrio en que velan y vigilen. Sobre el aso y la buena orden y quanto demanda observar por los bandos de buen gobierno [...]

[Diciembre 10º] se trató sobre el estado actual de la recomposición de puente estando presente el Comisionado Dn. Vicente Gortari quien dijo que se necesitaban para su cabal compostura tres horsones y doscientos vigas de cedro y al efecto se dispuso que se instituyese un reconocimiento por los Alcaldes del Barrio de las Carretas que había útiles entre el vecindario para que vayan a traer la madera que se necesite con el bien entendido de que el que puliere de los vecinos hacer esta fatiga y se negase a ella baxo [bajo] algún pretexto que no sea justo se le impone por la falta nueve pesos de multa por haberse regulado que es el precio de las sis mosillas que a cada uno le corresponde aguantar habiéndose dispuesto al mismo tiempo que indistintamente debía de llevar cada carreta un cortador de madera que por separado hará su fatiga [...]

[English translation]

“On December 1st, 1818, there met in Special Council the gentlemen who form it, presiding the First Alcalde Don José María Sambrano, and placed by precedence as usual, there was read a communication from the Governor, in which he charges the Alcaldes to call its contents to the attention of this Body, and to his repeated insistence that the bridge be built where the majority of the people go back and forth to the Alamo quarter; and also to the neatness and cleaning of the streets and carelessness that he blames upon a disregard for their just obligation by this Body as also by its Procurator and the suburban Alcaldes. It was resolved that the necessary measures would be taken at once to carry into effect what the aforesaid Governor ordered; at the same time requesting of him the help of the troops so that with their aid, the citizens will be able to reconstruct the work under discussion; and (requesting) the Procurator (to co-operate) and the suburban Alcaldes (in the quarters) in which they keep watch and ward. Also (the steps taken to ensure) neatness (of the streets) and good order and all is ordered to be done, by the proclamations of good government [...]

[December 10th] There was a discussion of the actual state of repairs to the bridge; being present Don Vicente Gortari, commissioned to do the work, who said that for its complete repair there were needed three piles and two hundred cedar beams and it was ordered, for the purpose, that there be instituted an investigation by the suburban Alcaldes of the usable carts there were among residents so the ym aygo to bring in the needed timbers, it being thoroughly understood that those among the citizens who may be able to do this task and who refuse to do, for any reason that is not legitimate, shall be fined nine pesos for his fault, because it has been ruled that it is the price of the six timber that is the quota for each one to carry; it having been resolved at the same time that without distinction each cart must carry a wood-cutter who will do the work that correspond to him independently.”

BRIDGES DURING THE ANTEBELLUM PERIOD

“San Antonio today with many ornamental bridges across its beautiful river was once a city without a single span. As the river weaved its tortuous way through the center of the city, it was the dividing line of the two distinct settlements, San Fernando de Bexar on the west side, centered around what is now San Fernando cathedral, and San Antonio de Valero on the east side with the Alamo in the center. The only means of communication between these two points was a ford across the river at what has been known for many years as Mill bridge, on Navarro street, for here the river was wide and shallow. At all other points it was deep and narrow. [...] Such was the crude means of crossing the river from the Alamo to San Fernando until the first combination foot and wagon bridge was built. That was a crude wooden structure consisting of stringers thrown across the stream supported by heavy timber set up right in the middle of the river and along the banks of both sides to serve as abutments. Crosspieces were placed over these stringers as they were hewn to the desired size and shape to serve as a flooring as smooth and even as was possible with the limited facilities for bridge building that those days and times afforded.”

— Reminiscences of Fred Mosbach, typesetter for the *San Antonio Light*, August 23, 1936



Painting depicting the Commerce Street Bridge, ca. 1850s (Courtesy of the San Antonio Public Library, Texas and Genealogy Department)

BRIDGES DURING THE ANTEBELLUM PERIOD

The problem associated with bridge construction and repair in San Antonio would be chronic throughout much of the 19th century, with petitions periodically submitted to the city council decrying the paltry state of various bridges throughout the city. In 1841, San Antonio Mayor Jan Seguin beseeched the city council to “take into consideration the State of Ruin in which the Bridges of the River are found in and consequently he begged that on the next Thursday they would present a project to raise a tax on such of repeated taxes to cover the compromise into which the Builder of a good & permanent Bridge to afford the passage of her citizens & travelers.” This eventually led to the construction of several bridges across the San Antonio River in the 1840s, including a stone footbridge by Roderick F. Higginbotham at the river crossing at Mission Concepción, and a wooden bridge at the site of present-day Commerce Street. San Antonio’s large number of bridges, combined with the constant threat of flooding, meant that citizens were responsible for footbridges along the lesser irrigation ditches and the many crossings along San Pedro Creek. These crossings were usually primitive in construction, consisting of barrels laid across the bed of the river, with a series of planks placed on top for foot travel. These hand-crafted bridges were generally of two types, single barrel for shorter crossings and double barrels for longer spans.

“These bridges were called single and double bridges. A double bridge was where the stakes were placed in the middle of the river as well as on each side of the river. In the double bridges, a bridge was brought from each side of the river to stakes in the center. When high water came, the bridge, coming from each side, was loosened from the stakes in the center and each half of the bridge swung towards its own banks, thus saving and protecting the bridge. The single bridge, wherever it was placed, went directly across the river and when high water came one end was unfastened from its back and the entire bridge thus swung close to the other bank. All of the bridges, both single and double, were on barrels. There was a single bridge on Commerce Street right where it is now; and there was another single bridge behind the courthouse— where French’s Place is now— which went to Bowen’s island where Wolfram’s Garden used to be, and where the Volkfest were held.”

— Miss Friedrich, reminiscing about pre-Civil War San Antonio, 1939 interview

(right) Jan N. Seguin, Mayor of San Antonio, 1841-1842. He would eventually resign his position as mayor; due to “the disorderly state in which our unfortunate county is actually placed.” (Photograph courtesy of Texas State Library and Archives).



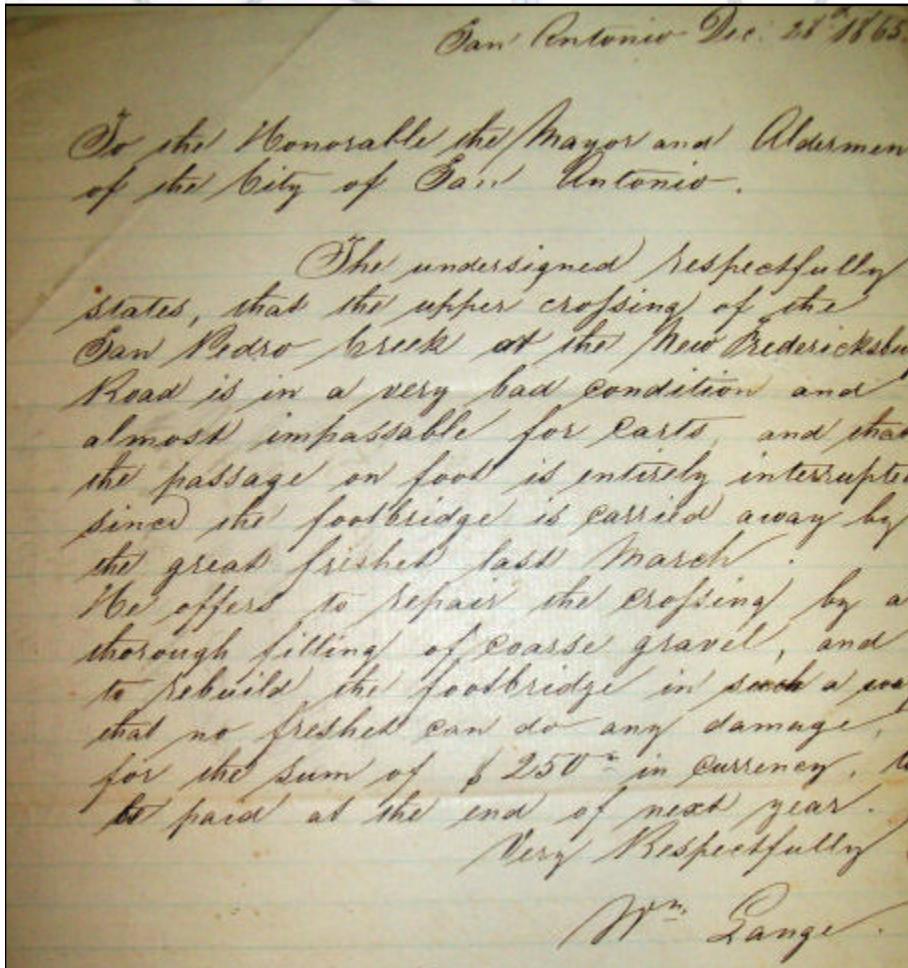
Single bridges were attached to one side of the riverbank and could be easily furled in the case of flooding, while double bridges were just two single bridges conjoined at a single point in the middle of the riverbed. Like the single bridge, each half of the double bridge could be quickly drawn to the riverbank in the case of flooding. Since many of these footbridges, both single and double barreled, were the work of laypersons, footbridges were often built as simply and economically as possible. The city could only afford to fund the construction of bridges at major river crossings, but street commissioners still maintained the authority to repair dilapidated bridges across the city, sometimes charging individual citizens for the upkeep of smaller footbridges.

THE PROBLEM OF FLOODING

Though the city council sought to improve the condition of bridges along the river in the 1840s, bridges were consistently swept away by rain and flood. The Commerce Street Bridge was once again damaged in the flood of 1852, presenting a "very unbecoming appearance; the timber is rotting fast, the banisters are broken, and in fact it is giving way in every part. Once or twice it has been so out of fix that carriages and waggons could not pass." It would not be until 1860 that funds could be secured for the construction of a new wooden bridge across Commerce Street. The bridge's reconstruction was spurred in large part by litigation brought against the city in 1856 following the death of nine-year-old Gottlieb Glaeser, after he fell through a rotten plank in the bridge. But as long as a majority of the city's bridges were constructed of wood the city would continue to have to provide

funds for their maintenance and upkeep. On average, wooden bridges had a maximum lifespan of twenty years before they needed to be replaced. But with frequent flooding along both San Pedro Creek and the San Antonio River, a majority of the city's bridges were replaced much more frequently, with most bridges requiring at least some type of maintenance on a yearly basis. Even the simplest bridge repairs were a considerable expense to the city and taxpayers, and with nineteen bridges across the San Antonio River and San Pedro Creek by 1873, even a single flood could prove to be costly.

(right) Schleicher, Giraud, and Considerant's report to the San Antonio City Council concerning the flooding of the San Antonio River; April 31, 1865



San Antonio Dec. 28 1865

To the Honorable the Mayor and Aldermen of the City of San Antonio.

The undersigned respectfully states, that the upper crossing of the San Pedro Creek at the New Fredericksburg Road is in a very bad condition and almost impassable for carts, and that the passage on foot is entirely interrupted since the footbridge is carried away by the great freshet last March. He offers to repair the crossing by a thorough filling of coarse gravel, and to rebuild the footbridge in such a way that no freshet can do any damage, for the sum of \$250⁰⁰ in currency, to be paid at the end of next year.

Very Respectfully,
Wm. Lange

(left) Letter from William Lange to the City of San Antonio City Council, offering to repair a footbridge across San Pedro Creek, December 28, 1865

REPORT.
SAN ANTONIO, April 31, 1865.
To His Honor the Mayor and the City Council of San Antonio.

The undersigned have been by you invited, to lay before the City Council their views as to the causes of the disasters in this City by the freshet of the 26th of March, and as to the best means, in the power of the Council, to prevent their recurrence in future.

We are aware of the deep feeling, produced in this community by these late disasters. Many families have lost their homes, merchants have lost their goods, property of all descriptions has been lost or injured, even in localities always considered safe heretofore, and last and saddest, human life has been destroyed.

The late freshet has been an extraordinary one, and it is beyond human power to avoid all the effects of such rises. It has caused destruction in other localities. Some inconvenience and loss must periodically be expected by such floods. But it becomes a serious question whether the effects of these floods have not been increased by a want of foresight and by causes which might have been avoided, and if so, it is the imperative duty of the community to remove such existing causes, and for the future, by taking all possible precautions, such as long experience has dictated in other localities, similarly situated, to prevent their repetition.

Every obstruction placed into the river, so as to interfere with the free, clear passage of the water, has a tendency to add to the rise of water in a freshet. The effect which would be small in a quiet flow of water, is multiplied by the sudden rush of the flood, the channel becomes choked and the water is forced out of its bed, to seek new channels and destroy what is in its way. This effect is direct and immediate above the obstruction, but it is an error to suppose, that it has no effect below it. The mass of water, backed up and retarded by the obstructions, will rush with accumulated volume and increased power into the river below. A few feet added by such obstructions to a rise of this kind, may make an immense addition to the danger and loss. A few feet less in the late rise would have saved very great loss. We express our conviction with confidence, that there are in our river at present obstructions to the free passage of the water in a freshet, which have caused the water to rise considerably higher than it would have otherwise risen and which thereby have caused much loss and damage.

“A MURDEROUS CONDITION”

Despite the fact that many single bridges could be rolled back to the shore in the case of floods, oftentimes double bridges, used for both foot and wagon traffic, were destroyed by the combination of inflexibility and weakness in the face of any substantial increase in water flow. Even though bridges proved to be a severe financial burden to the city, some citizens still believed that city commissioners and engineers failed to keep up with the demand for bridge repairs. As the following editorial suggests, this sometimes placed city officials in an untenable position.

“The City Council and the Bridge Question” from the *San Antonio Daily Express* on July 11, 1878:

“Our city council is again discussing a bridge question. The discussion involves the construction of three bridges, all in one bend of the river; to wit: Over the river at the Groosalley, the Lewis mill and a new bridge at the Commerce street crossing. The expense of constructing these bridges would not fall far short of \$50,000 or the full sum of the last bond issue. That the Commerce Street Bridge is unsafe, all who have examined it agree. The reports of engineers, accepted as correct by the Council at Tuesday’s meeting, pronounce the timbers bearing the weight of the structure to be decayed and liable to yield under heavy pressure at any time. In accordance, with these reports, the council passed a resolution declaring the bridge unsafe for heavy vehicles, which will hereafter cross it at their own peril. But the same aldermen who voted the passage of a resolution to the above effect, refused to replace the old bridge by a new and substantial structure. The Council also refused to concede to a proposition to build a bridge over the river at the Groosalley. The same action followed when it was suggested that a bridge at the Lewis mill should be built. What sort of a legislation is this? Is it consistent? A few weeks ago, a majority of the Council, in favor of, judging from their sentiments, the erection two new iron bridges. A majority condemned Commerce Street Bridge as an unsafe structure.

All conceded to the great necessity of affording the most free access to Commerce street in the interest of the business transactions of that thoroughfare. But the identical men who join in this immediately face about, prohibit heavy vehicles from crossing the bridge, and so actually create what they professed to be endeavoring to avert a depression of the trade of the thoroughfare. To a “looker-on in Venice” the proceedings of the Council on this question can but be characterized as little better than child’s play. There is no point to them, nor is there a particle of consistency about them. That a new bridge is needed on Commerce Street, is certainly a fact. The clumsy, tottering structure, now in use, is a disgrace to the city. Had it been done a year ago, the move would have been sustained as judicious. When a bridge is unsafe, no one can say exactly the day or the hour that it may fall. Had the vast concourse of people [...] Would it not have been possible that four or five hundred of our best citizens, and perhaps our worthy representative himself, might have been hurled head long a living mass into the river at the mercy of the water, the crushing timbers and one another’s weight? We might have had a catastrophe so shocking that even to imagine its possibility almost un-[] one’s nerves. The matter is one of importance to the city and to her people, looked to for judgments in damage suits, under no circumstances, are not inclined to regard the question with that degree of levity which characterized the action our City Council when the proposition to replace the old bridge with a substantial one came directly before it.”

— General Elevation —

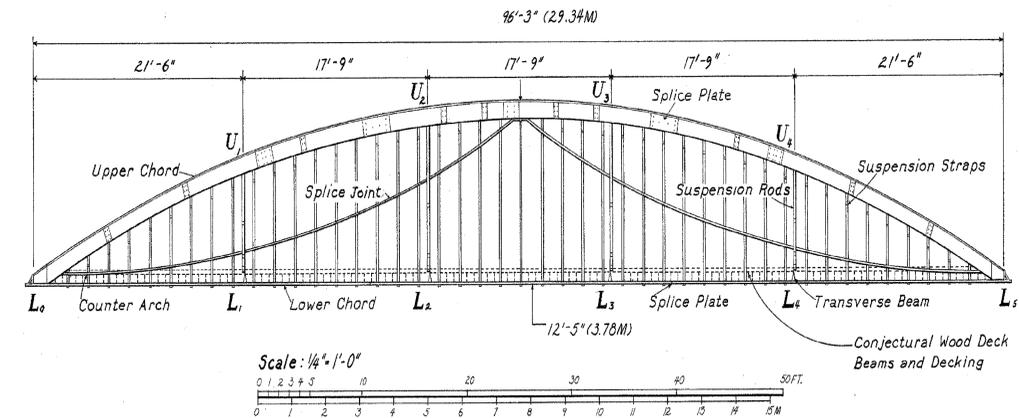
SAN ANTONIO'S IRON BRIDGES

Beginning in 1868, San Antonio slowly began to replace its wooden bridges with a symbol of the burgeoning industrial revolution—the iron bridge. Prior to the Civil War, San Antonio was still largely considered a border town on the fringe of both the American and Mexican frontiers. Even though San Antonio was the largest city in Texas and considered, along with Galveston, to be the economic center of Texas, both were only marginally integrated into the nation's economy until the 1880s. Townspeople hoped that with western expansion would come economic prosperity and modernization. Soon after the Civil War, San Antonio quickly became a primary hub for westward expansion, bolstering its population, commercial interests, and eventually creating a need for more reliable public infrastructure.



Photograph of a Moseley arch truss bridge (now located on the campus of Merrimack College) similar in design to San Antonio's first iron footbridge (Photograph courtesy of the Historic American Engineering Record Library of Congress, Prints and Photograph Division, Washington, D.C. USA).

UPPER PACIFIC MILLS BRIDGE LAWRENCE, MASSACHUSETTS · 1864

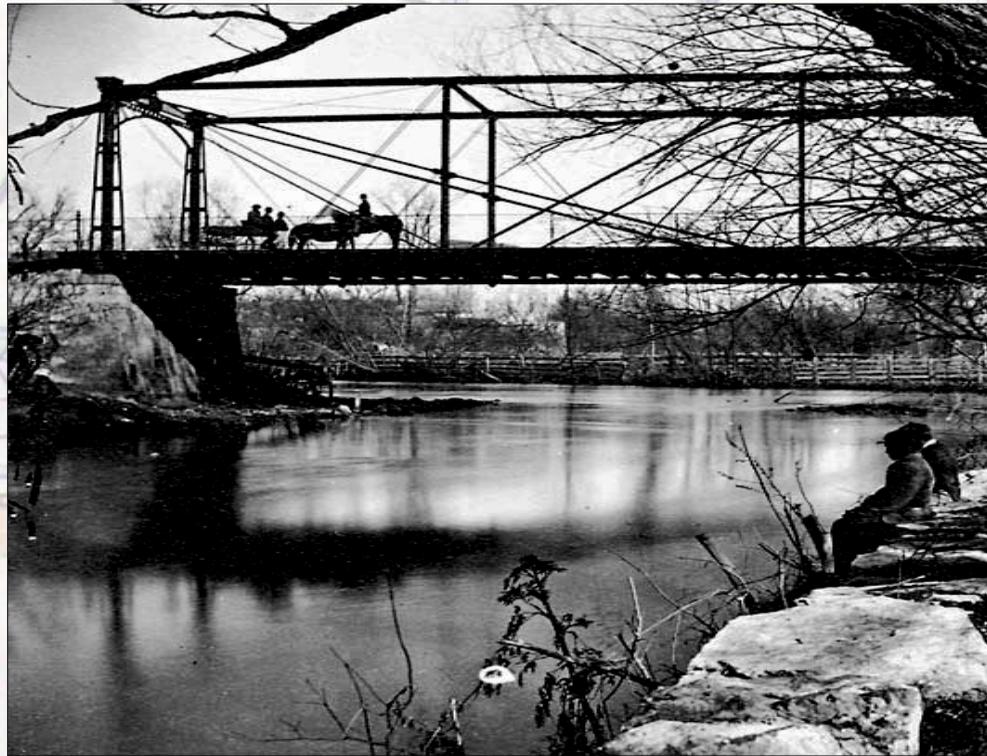


Blueprint of the Moseley arch truss bridge similar to the first iron footbridge in San Antonio (Courtesy of the Historic American Engineering Record Library of Congress, Prints and Photograph Division, Washington, D.C. USA).

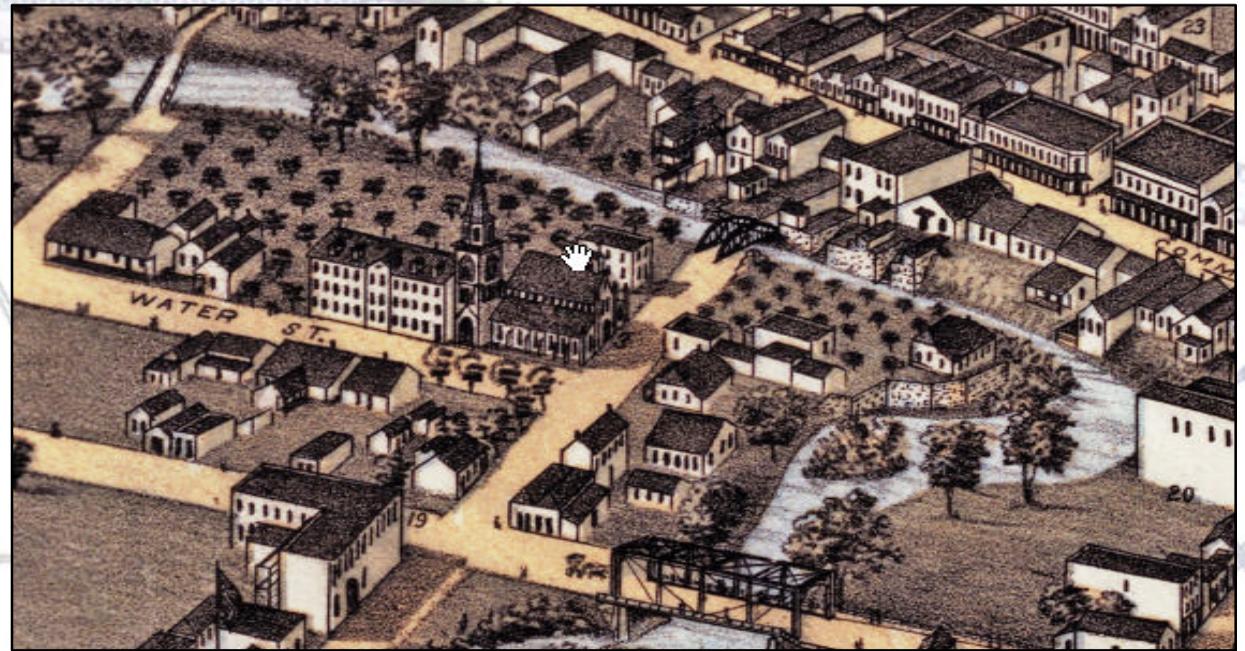
Given San Antonio's historic problem of flooding along the San Antonio River and its desire to attract the southern expansion of the transcontinental railroad, the city decided to invest its newfound prosperity in bridge construction. The city's first iron bridge was a footbridge built by the Boston firm of Moseley Ironworks and placed over the San Antonio River at St. Mary's Street in 1868. The pedestrian bridge employed a Moseley truss extending 82 feet over the river, its design a slightly variation of the more typical arch-truss bridge, but with vertical suspension rods built for added support. The bridge would serve as San Antonio's only iron bridge until three years later in 1871, when the city officials decided to outfit multiple river crossings with larger iron bridges to accommodate pedestrians, wagons, and cargo.

SAN ANTONIO'S IRON BRIDGES

The city's original 1871 plan called for four iron bridges to be built at river crossings along Arsenal, Commerce, Navarro, and Convent streets, but due to budgetary constraints, only a single iron bridge was built across the San Antonio River at Houston Street. The bridge was most likely constructed by King Iron Bridge Works in Cleveland, Ohio, then transported by rail to New Orleans and shipped by boat to Indiole, Texas, where it was eventually loaded onto fourteen wagons bound for San Antonio. Once in San Antonio, the bridge was installed by Gustav Scheicher, a San Antonio civil engineer who later went on to serve as a State Senator and representative to Congress.



Photograph of the Houston Street Bridge, ca. 1873 (Courtesy of the Institute of Texan Cultures).



San Antonio's first iron bridges at St. Mary's Street (upper) and Houston Street (lower). From Augustus Koch's *Bird's Eye View of the City of San Antonio*, 1873 (Courtesy of Amon Carter Museum).

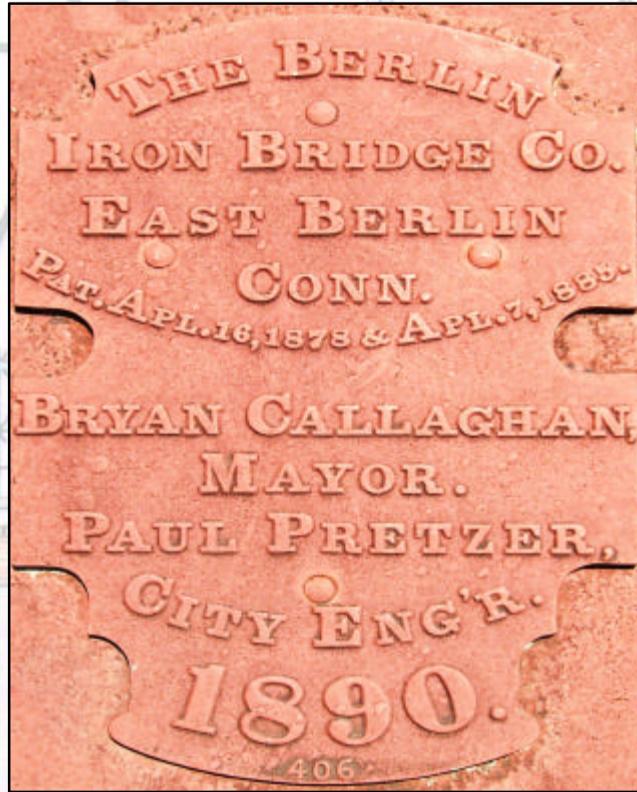
The bridge was a suspension truss known as a short span Fink truss, a rectilinear bridge with an overlapping latticework of suspension cables designed to support the bridge's deck. The bridge would remain at Houston Street for only twelve years, eventually moving to Grand Avenue to support a new trolley line in 1885, until it was finally moved to Hildebrand Street in 1927. But the Houston and St. Mary's Street bridges were only the first of many iron bridges purchased by the city during the latter half of the nineteenth century, until reinforced concrete became the preferred construction material for bridges in the 1910s. Iron bridges made by both the Z. King Iron Bridge Company and the Berlin Iron Bridge Company would eventually be added at several other places along the San Antonio River, including bridges at Groos Alley (Commerce St.) in 1880 and the Mill Bridge (Navarro St.) in 1881.

SAN ANTONIO'S IRON BRIDGES

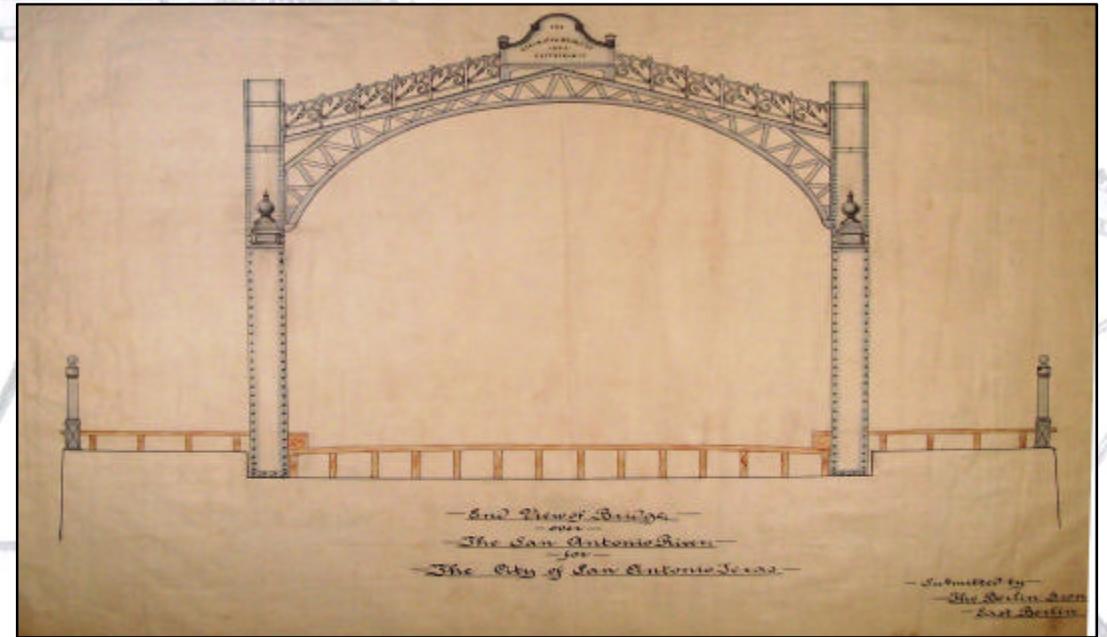
Most of iron bridges that still span the San Antonio River are the result of the city's purchase of five iron bridges in 1890 from the Berlin Iron Bridge Company, a Connecticut firm specializing in lenticular (parabolic) truss bridges. The city commissioned the five bridges to be built for river crossing at Crockett, Market, Augusta (née Convent), South Presa, and St. Mary's streets for a price of \$37,929, which today would equal roughly \$850,341. Of the original five bridges, only three still survive in their original locations at Crockett, Augusta, and South Presa streets, while a fourth bridge, originally installed at N. St. Mary's Street, was eventually moved to its present location in Brackenridge Park in 1937.



Monogram of the Berlin Iron Bridge Company on a column of the Augusta Street Bridge, 1890



Inaugural plaque of the Augusta Street Bridge, 1890.



Berlin Iron Bridge Company's original drawing of the N. St. Mary's Street Bridge, later moved to Brackenridge Park, ca. 1890

Three of the bridges at Crockett, Augusta, and Presa streets were made of cast iron with a Pennsylvania-petit, arched-truss design. Each bridge was built with latticed wrought iron railings, which still adorn the bridges at Crockett, Market, and South Presa streets. The bridges at Augusta street and Brackenridge Park both have distinctive designs with wrought iron columns encasing each end of the bridge, while the bridge at Brackenridge Park is only one of the five built with a lenticular truss, a parabolic-shaped truss that runs along the middle length of the bridge providing extra support for heavy cargo. The Brackenridge Park bridge is also the only one of the five built with a decorative arch portal containing the bridge's inaugural plaque.

COMMERCE ST.—SAN ANTONIO'S LITERARY BRIDGE

Of all of San Antonio's bridges, none possibly have a more storied past than the Commerce Street Bridge located at the corner of E. Commerce and Loyosa streets. Though not the oldest bridge in San Antonio, its location in the heart of the city and its proximity to the Mission de Valero have made it one of the most historically significant river crossings along the San Antonio River. The bridge was the site of one of the first river crossings along the San Antonio River, and it was also used by Santa Anna's troops to lay siege to the Alamo. The bridge is first mentioned in the minutes of the city council in 1841, when Mayor John W. Smith commissioned Roderick F. Higginbotham to "raise a Bridge across the River in the Commerce St. which runs to the Alamo."



Commerce Street Bridge from 1880 to 1914, when it was moved to its current location at Johnson Street. The bridge was commonly referred to as 'O. Henry's Bridge' (Photograph courtesy of the **Historic American Engineering Record Library of Congress, Prints and Photograph Division**).

The Commerce Street Bridge was also the favorite location of a author Sidney Lanier, who visited San Antonio during the winter of 1872-73 with the hope that San Antonio's dry air would help to alleviate his tuberculosis. The bridge was the site of Lanier's often cited passage on the unique character of San Antonio:

"At the Commerce St. Bridge over the San Antonio River, stand a post supporting a large sign board upon which appears the following three legends

Walk your horse over this bridge or you will be fined.

Schuelles Reiten über diese Brücke ist verboten.

Anda des pacio con sucaballo, ò teme la ley.

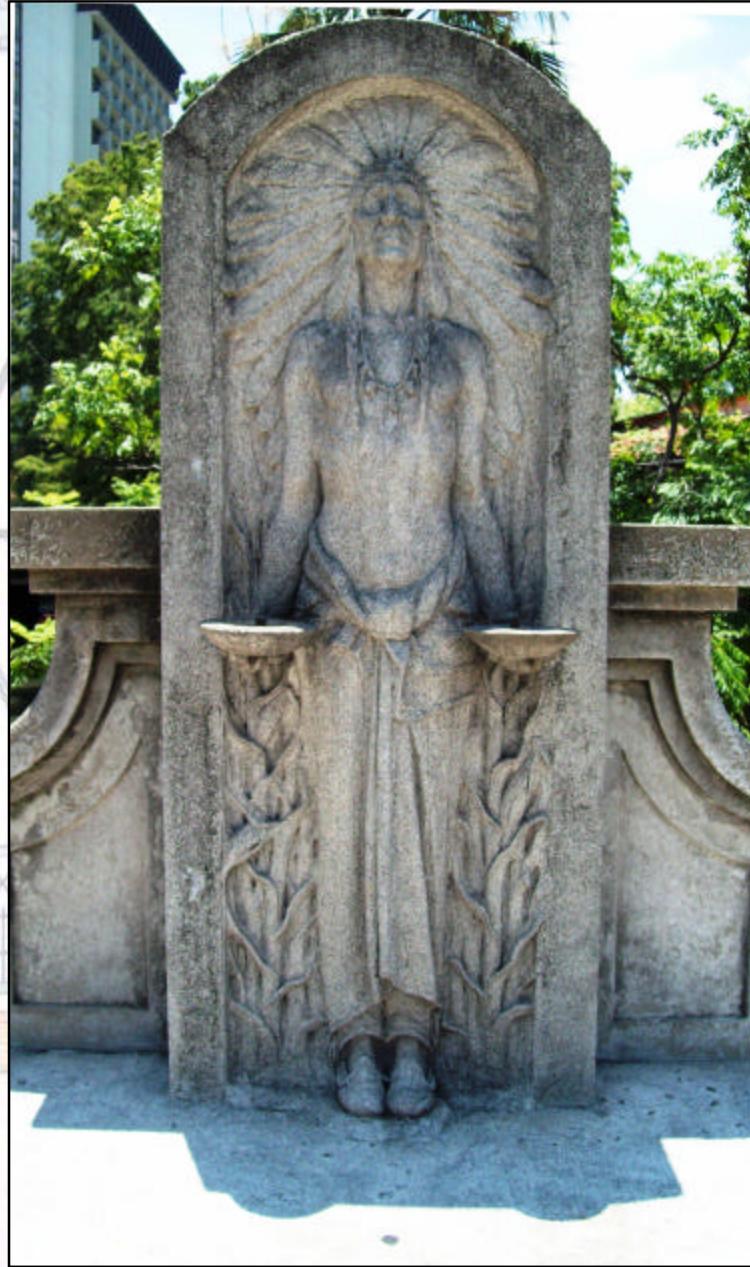
To the meditative stroller across this bridge, — and on a soft day when the Gulf breeze and sunshine are king and queen, any stranger may be safely defied to cross this bridge without becoming meditative — there is a fine satire in the varying tone of these inscriptions — for they are no means faithful translations of each other; a satire all the keener in that it must have been wholly unconscious. For mark, "walk your horse etc., or you will be fined. This is an American's swarming: the alternative is a money consideration, and the appeal is solely to the pocket. But now the German is simply informed that *Schuelles Reiten* over this bridge *ist verboten* — is forbidden; as who should say: 'So, thou quiet, law-abiding Teuton, enough for thee to know that it is forbidden simply.' And lastly, the Mexican direction takes a wholly a different turn from either. Slow there with your horse, Mexicano, *ò teme la ley* — or fear the law!"

But the Commerce Street Bridge probably gained most of its present day notoriety by the numerous literary descriptions of it in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Frederick Law Olmsted, designer of New York City's Central Park, described the bridge during his travels through Texas in 1856-1857, remarking that "the principal part of the town lies within a sweep of the river upon the other side. We descend to the bridge, which is close down upon the water, as the river, owing to its peculiar source, never varies in height or temperature. We irresistibly stop to examine it, we are so struck with its beauty. It is of a rich blue and pure as crystal, flowing rapidly but noiselessly over pebbles and between reedy banks. One could lean for hours over the bridge-rail. From the bridge we enter Commerce St. the narrow principle thoroughfare."

COMMERCE ST.—SAN ANTONIO'S LITERARY BRIDGE

After repeated flooding in 1847, 1852, and 1865, the wooden bridge of Old San Antonio was replaced by an iron truss bridge in 1880. The new iron bridge was described in several O. Henry short stories, most notably "A Fog in San Antonio," in which a suicidal tuberculosis patient stands upon "a little iron bridge, one of a score or more in the heart of the city, under which the small tortuous river flows." The bridge would eventually come to be called "O. Henry's bridge," with a small plaque designating its more colloquial name. But in 1914, the iron bridge was again replaced to make way for the widening of Commerce Street, and "O. Henry's bridge" was moved to its current location as a pedestrian crossing at Johnson Street in the King William District.

The current Commerce Street Bridge is a three-span, T-beam concrete structure, with concrete railings of tessellated lattice-work and stars. When the bridge was originally completed in 1914, it was domed with four columns, each with a stoic face of a Native American in profile, two water fountains, along with Waldine Tauch's sculpture "The First Inhabitant." Tauch, a student of *Alamo Cenotaph* sculptor Pompeo Coppini, was commissioned to make the sculpture for the new bridge by the *San Antonio Express* for the amount of \$1,000. Eventually, the columns were removed and the water fountains disconnected, leaving Tauch's original sculpture as the bridge's primary centerpiece.



Waldine Tauch's "The First Inhabitant" The *San Antonio Express* commissioned Tauch to create the artwork for the opening of the Commerce Street Bridge in 1914 for \$1,000.

From **Commerce Street Bridge** by Margaret Cousins

Once there was only a footpath here,
Where the river slips by—
A scattering of stepping stones
For the stealthy, moonlit foot.
How far back in time this crossing goes
Nobody seem to know—
When the white-tailed deer
Came here to drink,
The spotted bobcat and the great grey wolf.
But some time after that, there was a ford,
With men and horses splashing through
And lanterns to warn them after nightfall.

Then finally they built a footbridge,
Swaying high above the April floods
In the capricious, changing winds of springtime.
It was only after the women came
That there had to be a proper bridge—
A wooden bridge, with railings,
To tame the wild crossing.
Women and children had to have
Safe passage—something steady underfoot,
Something to cling to in the wilderness—
As they trudged to Mass, so far away from home [...]

This weary, old, concrete affair
With its gross ornamentation, chipped curbs
And battered sidewalks was built in our time.
Ugly but durable—given to gasoline engines
And traffic jams and the tired feet of tourists—
No Left Turn! No Parking Here! No Right Turn!
No stopping here for any reason! Move on!
No loitering on the bridge. No! No! No!
We need a new bridge—
a late twentieth century span
To leap across the imperturbable River,
Which has always known that bridge come and go
Oh, well—we need a lot of things [...]

HISTORIC BRIDGES ALONG THE GREAT BEND OF THE SAN ANTONIO RIVER



AUGUSTA ST. BRIDGE
STRUCTURE: BOWSTRING ARCH-TRUSS BRIDGE WITH CAST-IRON COLUMNS
DATE: 1890
ARCHITECT/BUILDER: BERLIN IRON BRIDGE CO.



TRAVIS ST. BRIDGE
STRUCTURE: FLAT DECK, REINFORCED CONCRETE BRIDGE WITH ORNAMENTAL BALUSTRADES
DATE: 1929
ARCHITECT/BUILDER: BART MOORE



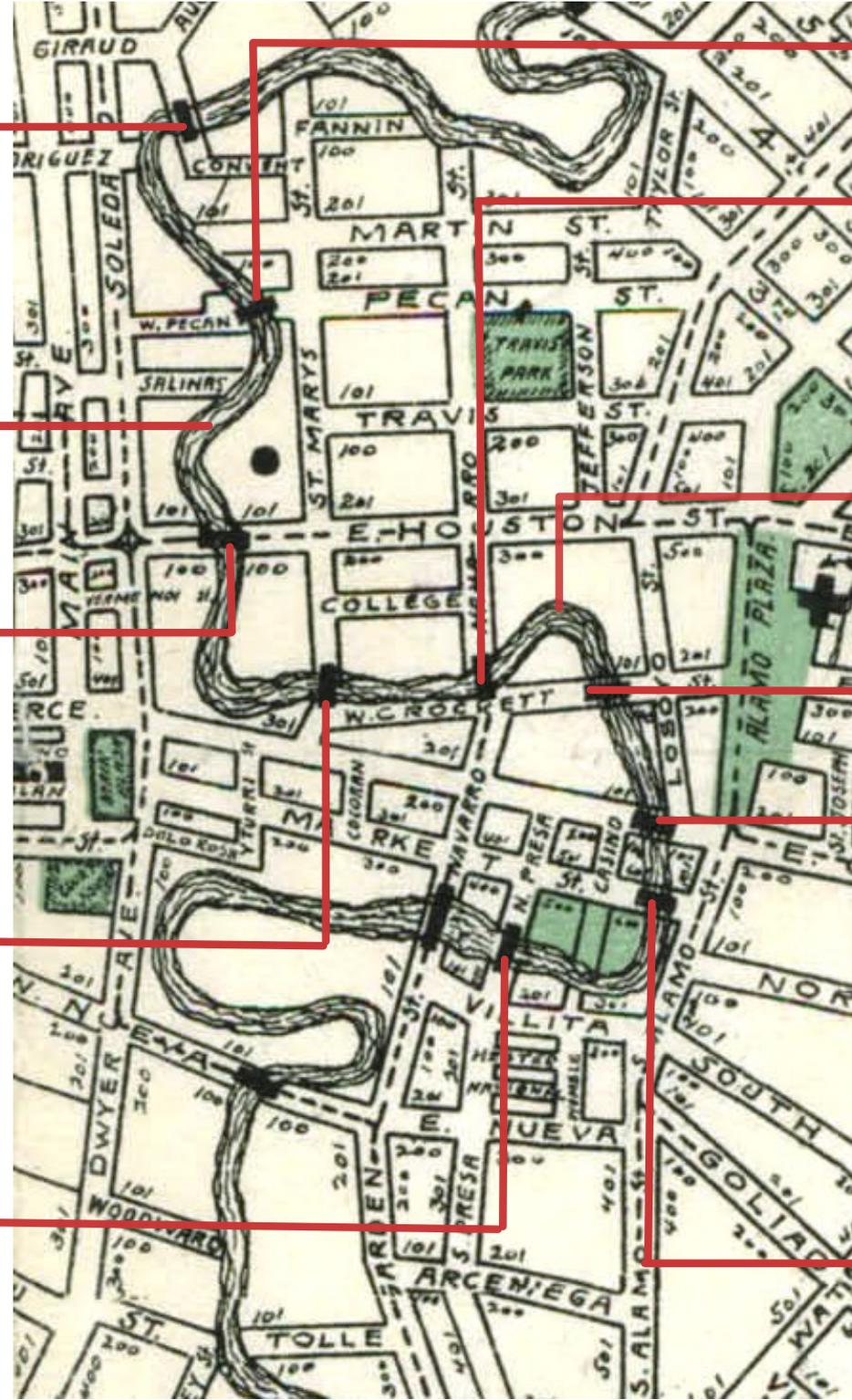
E. HOUSTON ST. BRIDGE
STRUCTURE: TWO SPAN CONCRETE BRIDGE
DATE: 1914
ARCHITECT/BUILDER: JONES & DAY



ST. MARY'S ST. BRIDGE
STRUCTURE: REINFORCED CONCRETE BRIDGE WITH SPINDLE RAILINGS
DATE: 1925
ARCHITECT/BUILDER: TERRELL BARTLETT ENGINEERS, INC.



S. PRESA ST. BRIDGE
STRUCTURE: BOWSTRING ARCH-TRUSS IRON BRIDGE WITH CAST-IRON RAILINGS
DATE: 1891
ARCHITECT/BUILDER: BERLIN IRON BRIDGE CO.



PECAN ST. BRIDGE
STRUCTURE: CONCRETE TWO SPAN BRIDGE WITH TESSELATED RAILINGS
DATE: 1927
ARCHITECT/BUILDER: PRYOR & JEFFREY



NAVARRO ST. BRIDGE
STRUCTURE: WARREN TRUSS IRON BRIDGE WITH CONCRETE RAILINGS
DATE: 1922
ARCHITECT/BUILDER: ELDER CONSTRUCTION (CONCRETE) / VIRGINIA BRIDGE AND IRON CO / TERRELL BARTLETT, INC. (STEEL DESIGN)



N. PRESA ST. BRIDGE
STRUCTURE: PENNSYLVANIA-PETTIT IRON TRUSS / CONCRETE BRIDGE
DATE: 1925
ARCHITECT/BUILDER: MCKENZIE CONSTRUCTION CO.



CROCKETT ST. BRIDGE
STRUCTURE: PENNSYLVANIA-PETTIT IRON TRUSS BRIDGE
DATE: 1891
ARCHITECT/BUILDER: BERLIN IRON BRIDGE CO.



COMMERCE ST. BRIDGE
STRUCTURE: DUE TO THE WIDENING OF COMMERCE ST., ORIGINAL IRON TRUSS BRIDGE WAS MOVED TO JOHNSON ST. AND REPLACED WITH THE PRESENT CONCRETE BRIDGE. NOTED FOR ITS SCULPTURE, "THE FIRST INHABITANT," BY ARTIST WALDINE TAUSCH
DATE: 1914
ARCHITECT/BUILDER: A. K. NICOLAYSON, ENGINEER



MARKET ST. BRIDGE
STRUCTURE: FLAT DECK, REINFORCED CONCRETE BRIDGE WITH ORNAMENTAL BALUSTRADES
DATE: 1926
ARCHITECT/BUILDER: PRYOR & JEFFREY

