

Black Bay Bridge
Arundel and Lyon Boulevard



Year Built: 1911-12

Architect: Joachim Antonisen

Notable Features: Use of non-traditional building material; reinforced concrete
Aesthetic design and unadorned functionalism

Designation Date: December 18th, 1989

By-Law No.: 263 – 1989

Description:

The Black Bay Bridge is unique in that the method of construction used to erect the span was quite innovative at the time. Two previous wooden bridges had crossed Current River where the Black Bay Bridge now stands, and it was agreed upon that a more permanent structure was needed. The designers, Mr. Joachim Antonisen and Mr. L.M. Jones, decided upon reinforced concrete, despite the skepticism of other communities. However, the contractors and builders of the Lakehead had gained considerable experience with the medium due to the fact that the grain elevators of the city were constructed of reinforced concrete.

The building style and material proved to be an apt choice, as the “bridge is in harmony with the beauty and grandeur of the landscape.” It is certainly true that the landscape surrounding Black Bay Bridge is beautiful, for it spans over Current River, which leads directly in Boulevard Lake. Centennial Park lies to the North of the bridge, ensuring that the Bridge is surrounded by forest.

An addition was made to Black Bay Bridge in 1963, which doubled the span in width. The addition was constructed to be sympathetic to the original design, retaining the open spandrels.

Architecture:

The Black Bay Bridge was designed in 1910 by Joachim Antonisen, City Engineer and Commissioner of Public Utilities; the construction plans were drawn by L.M. Jones, City Engineer in 1911. Construction was handled by Seaman and Penniman,

a local engineering and contracting firm who also build the Ruttan Block on South Court Street and the Bank of Montreal on Cumberland. This single span reinforced concrete bridge is characterized by arch ribs. Transverse struts between the ribs ensure lateral stability, and columns, spaced at 10 foot intervals on each rib, support the beam-and-slab deck of the bridge.

The original sidewalks paralleling the road deck were cantilevered, a technique made possible by the use of reinforced concrete. The arches form a parabolic curve 130 feet in length with a height of 33 feet above the bed of the Current River. In addition to the arch ribs, the open spandrels between the arches and the abutment piers are unusual for this date. In 1912, other concrete bridges had filled spandrels, multiple spans or applied sculptural ornament. The Black Bay Bridge is unique because of its construction method, its aesthetic design, its unadorned functionalism and its early date.

Allen G. Seaman; Constructor

A person of particular local interest is Allen G. Seaman, whose engineering and contracting firm was awarded the construction contract for Black Bay Bridge. Allen Seaman's father ran a sawmill in Grey County, Ontario when Allen was a child. The business was turned over to him at the young age of 16, and he flourished. He arrived in Port Arthur 1899 because he had a large contract with the Canadian Northern Railway handling the supplies. The contract lasted three years, after which Seaman decided to remain in Port Arthur.

He was a successful businessman and important member of the community. Seaman carried out construction contracts for many notable buildings in the area, including the Ruttan Block, the Bank of Montreal and the Orpheum Theatre. At times, he employed more than 2,000 men and ran five sawmills. Seaman was also involved with the medical community, serving for 12 consecutive years as the chairman of the Port Arthur Board of Health. This was at a time when smallpox and diphtheria were the "dreaded diseases of the community." Seaman worked to ensure comfortable and appropriate quarantine for those suffering from the illnesses.

Allen Seaman died at the age of 89. He attributed the longevity of his life to activity. Apparently he wasn't one for being idle; claiming that "if I play a hand of cards at the club, I must get up and walk before I play the next." He was, according to his granddaughter, most proud of his work on the Black Bay Bridge, and would often have his son drive him around Boulevard Lake and over bridge.

