

# MINNESOTA HISTORIC PROPERTY RECORD

## PART I. PROPERTY IDENTIFICATION AND GENERAL INFORMATION

**Common Name:** 3589  
**Bridge Number:** 3589  
**Identification Number:** LA-SVC-074

### Location:

Feature Carried: TH 61  
Feature Crossed: Stewart River  
Descriptive Location: 2.2 Miles Northeast of Jct. CSAH 2  
Town, Range, Section: 53N-10W-15  
Town or City: Silver Creek Township  
County: Lake

### UTM:

Zone: 15  
Easting: 604010  
Northing: 5211390

### Quad:

Two Harbors  
7.5 Minute Series  
1927

### Present Owner:

State

### Present Use:

Mainline

### Significance Statement:

Overlooking Lake Superior on the east, Bridge No. 3589 carries Minnesota Trunk Highway 61 (formerly Trunk Highway 1) over the Stewart River in a rural area just north of Two Harbors. In 1924, the Minnesota Highway Department erected at this site a 70-foot, spandrel-filled, reinforced-concrete arch detailed in the Classical Revival Style. On each side, monumental pilasters, decorated with a recessed, rectilinear panel, framed the arch opening, which was further ornamented by a pronounced archivolt. To set off the architectural detailing, the concrete work displayed two types of finish: coarse on the abutment walls, pilaster panels, and spandrel walls; smooth on the pilaster surrounds and archivolt. The bridge's concrete railings, also smoothly finished, were of the open-balustrade type, except for solid-parapet sections over the abutment walls. These sections displayed recessed panels accented with a coarse finish. The original roadway width was 19 feet. In 1939, the Minnesota Highway Department widened the arch by pouring a new section on the east side, so that the bridge could accommodate a 30-foot roadway and a single sidewalk, located on the east. In its architectural detailing and finish, the new east side reiterated the original construction of the abutment walls, pilasters, spandrel walls, and

archivolt. As part of the remodeling, the state also replaced the original railings on both sides. The new concrete railings eliminated the solid-parapet sections over the abutment walls in favor of an extended, open-balustrade treatment for the entire crossing. Although plainer in detailing, the new railings were compatible with the bridge's Classical Revival Style. Bridge No. 3589 retains its historical integrity.

In 1921, Minnesota inaugurated a state trunk highway system that was intended to connect all county seats with a state-owned network of well-engineered and well-maintained arterial roads. One of the longest routes, and the most heavily traveled during the system's first decade, was Trunk Highway No. 1 (later redesignated as Trunk Highway 61). Stretching from Iowa to Canada, by way of Albert Lea, Minneapolis, Duluth, Two Harbors, and Grand Portage, Trunk Highway 1 was a crucial conduit for the state's economic life, equally serving southern Minnesota farmers, Twin Cities manufacturers, and Lake Superior resort owners. For Midwestern motorists, the route was most famous for its northern reaches, which skirted the edge of Lake Superior on a rocky ledge cut by cascading streams. To quote one of the many travel writers who extolled the highway in the 1920s:

"Beyond argument, the drive on this northern shore of Lake Superior between Duluth and Port Arthur [Canada] is a natural classic. This is the land of the sky-blue water and the cathedral red rocks, where the prophetic Indian voice of Gitchie Manitou booms to the joyous loneliness amid the million sea gulls flying like snow. A most satisfying road clings to the shore, now streaming with light, now cut through somber jungle of blue-black trees."

By 1931, Trunk Highway 1 boasted 300 miles of continuous pavement from Albert Lea to Two Harbors, providing the smoothest, longest ride in the state system. This achievement cost considerable exertion on the part of the Minnesota Highway Department, especially on the lake-shore portion of the route where existing roadways and bridges required widening or replacement to conform to the department's safety standards. With its rock-rimmed river gorges, the area was one of the few regions in the state that favored concrete-arch bridges, which reduced substructure costs by springing directly from exposed bedrock. In 1924, the state highway department prepared a concrete-arch design, with a 70-foot span and a 19-foot roadway, to replace an older crossing of the Stewart River in a rural area just north of Two Harbors. On a bid of \$9,285, Adams Construction Company of Minneapolis secured the contract for the project, and a photograph of the new crossing appeared in the state highway department's biennial report for 1923-24. The agency's pride in Bridge No. 3589 was understandable, as its sedate Classical Revival design was the most aesthetically accomplished statement yet produced by the state trunk highway program.

As a general rule, the highway department reserved architectural detailing for urban bridges areas, and then focused the treatment on railing design. Bridges in rural areas were considered utilitarian engineering structures. As a spokesman for the highway department later explained:

"The engineer in general and the bridge engineer in particular have been very frequently criticized for the lack of beauty or aesthetics in their structural work. Nevertheless it is a debatable question as to what extent this practice of beautification should be carried in the case of the many so-called 'country' bridges. In public undertakings of this kind, the economical aspects usually tend to outweigh the item of aesthetics, and in numerous instances, quite properly so."

Bridge No. 3589 was a stand-out exception, featuring not only well-detailed, open-balustrade railings, but also an emphatic archivolt and monumental pilasters with recessed panels accented by contrasting concrete finishes. Evidently, the bridge's scenic location on a popular tourist route made the Stewart River crossing a worthy candidate for full architectural treatment. The lake shore drive was so heavily traveled that in 1934 the highway department prepared a preliminary

plan for widening the bridge's roadway. Implementation of the project, however, was postponed until 1939, when federal funds finally became available for the purpose. Completed at a cost of \$12,793 by contractor August Laine of Kettle River, Minnesota, the bridge's widening respected the structure's original design, so that Bridge No. 3589 remains a striking ornament of the state's trunk highway system.

Bridge No. 3589 is eligible for the National Register under Criterion C for its architectural design, within the historic context of "Reinforced-Concrete Highway Bridges in Minnesota, 1900-1945." The Multiple Property Documentation Form associated with this context states that a concrete highway bridge may be eligible under Criterion C if it displays notable aesthetics.

Bridge No. 3589 is also eligible under Criterion A in the area of transportation for its association with the state trunk highway system, within the historic context of "Northern Minnesota Resort Industry."

## **PART II. HISTORICAL INFORMATION**

### **Date of Construction:**

1924

### **Contractor and/or Designer (if known):**

Contractor: Adams Construction Company, Minneapolis, Minnesota; August Laine,  
Kettle River, Minnesota

Designer: Minnesota Highway Department

### **Historic Context:**

Northern Minnesota Resort Industry  
Reinforced-Concrete Highway Bridges in Minnesota

### **National Register Criterion:**

A, C

### **PART III. DESCRIPTIVE INFORMATION**

#### **Descriptive Information:**

single-span, reinforced-concrete arch  
concrete abutments  
earth fill on arch supports roadway with sidewalk on east  
open-baluster concrete railings

## **PART IV. SOURCES OF INFORMATION**

### **References:**

Minnesota Department of Transportation Bridge Database; Bridge No. 3589 File, in Minnesota Department of Transportation, Waters Edge Building, St. Paul; Bridge No. 3589 Storage File, in Minnesota Department of Transportation Records Center, St. Paul; Bridge No. 3589 File, in Minnesota Department of Transportation District Office 1, Duluth, Minnesota; "Odd Map Pictures Disbursements and Traffic Flow on Minnesota Highways," Western Magazine 27 (April 1926): 103; "The Rimland of Unsalted Seas," Western Magazine 31 (August 1928): 126-128; "Paving Is Now Complete on Nine Highways," Mantorville Express, 3 December 1931; Minnesota Highway Department, Biennial Report, 1923-1924, 31; M.J. Hoffman, "Minnesota Trunk Highway Bridge Construction," Bulletin of the Minnesota Federation of Architectural and Engineering Societies 26 (April 1931): 18; Robert M. Frame, "Reinforced-Concrete Highway Bridges in Minnesota," National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form, Sec. F, 8, in State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul; "Historic Context: Northern Minnesota Resort Industry," in Minnesota History in Sites and Structures: A comprehensive Preservation Planning Process. Historic Context Outlines: The Post-Contact Period Contexts (St. Paul: State Historic Preservation Office, Minnesota Historical Society, n.d), 19-21; field inspection by Jeffrey A. Hess, 27 October 1995.

## **PART V. PROJECT INFORMATION**

### **Historians:**

Jeffrey A. Hess

### **Form Preparer:**

Mead & Hunt, 2006

**MHPR NO.** LA-SVC-074