

**FERGUS FALLS HERITAGE PRESERVATION COMMISSION
ARCHITECTURE-HISTORY INVENTORY FORM**

OT-FFC-087

Historic Name Other Name Location	Bridge 5453 (over GN RR) Union Ave. Bridge Over OTVRR ca. 220 Union Ave N	SHPO Review # PIN#	
City/Township County Twp Rng Sec	Fergus Falls Otter Tail 133N 43W, NW1/4 of SE1/4 Sec 34	NR Elig HPC Elig	Eligible
USGS Quad UTM	Fergus Falls NAD 83 Z14 E725086 N5130038	Resource Type Present Use	Bridge Bridge
Legal Descript		Foundation Frame Prima Exterior Second Exterior	poured conc poured conc poured conc
Original Owner Architect Contractor	Minn Dept of Highways L. M. Feller Co.	Style	Neoclassical Reviv
Associated Historic Context	Building Fergus Falls c1857-1969: Early Transportation Concrete Highway Bridges in MN, 1900-1945 Railroads and Agricultural Development, 1870-1940		
Associated Survey Report	Granger, Susan, and Scott Kelly. Final Report: Historic Properties Survey of Southwestern Fergus Falls. Submitted to the City of Fergus Falls by Gemini Research, June 2011.		
		Photo ID	

Surveyor Ref #
FER-189

Fieldwork Date
10/2010

Prep By / Date
Gemini Research 03/2011

■ **DESCRIPTION**

Bridge 5453, built in 1939, carries Union Avenue over the Great Northern (now Otter Tail Valley Railroad) near the southwest corner of Lake Alice. It stands in a residential neighborhood. The trackbed is located in a cut at this location within a fringe of deciduous trees and shrubs. The cut and trackbed make a graceful curve west of Union Avenue. The railroad retains tracks, ties, and ballast and is in use. The railroad itself was inventoried separately – see “Great Northern Railroad, SW Fergus Falls Segment.” (See also a similar bridge of the same age (Bridge 5452) at Circa 500 S. Court St.; it carries Court Street over the former Northern Pacific tracks.)

~~Bridge 5453 is skewed (i.e., not built perpendicular to the trackline). It is also three-pronged so that it accommodates both Union Avenue, which is aligned north-south, and Church Street, which intersects with Union Avenue at the northeastern corner of the bridge. This configuration makes the western side of the bridge straight (north-south), and the eastern side of the bridge curved (see photos).~~

Bridge 5453 is built of reinforced poured concrete and is Neoclassical Revival in style. It is a 5-span concrete slab structure that is about 124' long and 55' wide. Bridge historian Jeffrey Hess writes: “Oriented on a skewed east-west alignment, the crossing consists of five concrete-slab spans on a concrete substructure. The ends spans are 19' in length; the three central spans, 29'” (Hess 1995, attached). The bridge has ornamental concrete railings with a shallow arched design. The top of the concrete railings or balustrades is formed as a shallow triangle. The balustrade sections are inserted into short concrete piers that have recessed panel detailing. Other parts of the bridge have neoclassical detailing as well. In 1995 the bridge still retained four ornamental concrete light standards with glass globes. They have been removed, and today the four bridge endposts have steel plates covering holes where the light standards were attached.

The bridge carries a two-lane bituminous-paved street and two poured concrete sidewalks. The bridge plates read: “Minnesota Highway Dept. Bridge No. 5453, 1938” and “Federal Aid Project No-39-A.” (Despite the fact that the plate reads “1938,” Hess reports the date built as 1939.)

Under the bridge are the remnants of dry-laid, dark-gray granite riprapping that consists of stones carefully fit together to slow erosion and retain the steep bank. The slopes are also retained by horizontal timbers held in place by short pieces of salvaged rail installed vertically.

■ **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND NOTES**

Bridge 5453 replaced a previous bridge at this location. It was built by the Minnesota Department of Highways in cooperation with the Great Northern Railroad. Union Avenue was part of a state highway, Minnesota Highway 52, at the time (later it was part of Hwy. 59).

The bridge was designed by the Minnesota Department of Highways and built by L. M. Feller Company of Rochester. The bridge was funded as part of a nationwide, federal program to improve safety at railroad-highway crossings (see Hess 1995).

■ **SIGNIFICANCE NOTES**

Bridge 5453 was included within Mn/DOT's statewide historic bridge inventory, conducted in 1995. The bridge was determined to be Eligible for the National Register within the context of other state highway department-built bridges statewide. Jeff Hess writes, “During the late 1920s the Minnesota Department of Highways developed a basic design concept for urban trunk highway bridges, whether steel or concrete. The plan called for relatively

wide roadways, pedestrian sidewalks, ornamental railings, and (if the host city agreed to pay future electricity costs) ornamental light standards. From about 1928 to 1942 the state supervised the construction of several dozen trunk highway crossings embodying this plan. Despite this fact, it is now rare to find good surviving examples of the design. In the postwar decades, road-widening projects eliminated sidewalks and railings, obsolescence (and vandalism) claimed light fixtures, and bridge-replacement projects did away with entire crossings. Bridge No. 5453 on US TH 59 (originally Minnesota Trunk Highway 52) in Fergus Falls is one of the few surviving, intact examples of the design" (Hess 1995).

Hess continues: "Engineered as a skewed five-span concrete slab with a maximum opening of 29', the new crossing did not present any significant technical challenges in design or construction. However, with its Classical Revival concrete railings and ornamental light standards, the bridge [is] an excellent example of the state highway department's design concept for urban, trunk highway structures. Bridge 5453 is eligible for the National Register for its architectural design under National Register Criterion C within the [statewide] historical context of "Reinforced-Concrete Highway Bridges of Minnesota, 1900-1945" (Hess 1995).

In addition to its architectural or engineering significance, the bridge is eligible for the National Register as part of the Great Northern Railroad. The Great Northern Railroad through Fergus Falls has been determined to be eligible for the National Register by the State Historic Preservation Office. Bridge 5453 is a "Contributing" structure within that historic property because it was built during the railroad property's "period of significance." This period has not been officially defined by the State Historic Preservation Office, but likely extends from circa 1867 through at least the 1930s. See also the inventory of the "Great Northern Railroad, SW Fergus Falls Segment."

■ **REFERENCES**

Hess, Jeffrey A. "Bridge 005453." Minnesota Historic Bridge Inventory form. Prepared by Hess, Roise, and Co., 1995. Copy at State Historic Preservation Office.







