

HILL YES!
A look back at Mt Adams
Jim Steiner

I use the Ida Street Bridge almost every day. It's been open since 1931 and is a Hill landmark. How did it end up where it is, who is responsible for it's unique design and how did the street it crossed get it's current name? It's an interesting story with some wacky word of mouth folk lore supplied by some longtime Mt Adams citizens.

It all started somewhere between 1879 and 1882 when George Kerper, the President of the Mt Adams and Eden Park Inclined Plane Railway Company, founded in 1876, began lobbying City Council for a trestle over the ravine that was the right of way for Court Street, now known as Wareham. Once people came up the incline, they walked to Eden Park and Walnut Hills. If there were a trestle over the Court St. ravine, a horse drawn street car line could be constructed to transport passengers to points north and make a little cash for the Company in the process.

Kerper was a man of action. The Ida Street Trestle, was completed circa 1882 and the horse drawn line commenced operations from the top of the Mt Adams Incline along Ida Street, the Hill's only level street, to the Art Museum and Eden Park. The line was eventually converted to electric powered street cars and the trestle was also opened to pedestrian traffic.

On March 12, 1886, City Council passed an ordinance that obligated the City to buy the trestle at the Company's request. Twenty four years later in 1910 the company asked the city to honor the contract and purchase the trestle, remove it and build a new bridge. That's some major hutzpah but eventually the city got off the dime and a plan began to take shape in 1930.

One of the moving forces behind the plan was the Mt Adams Welfare Association, formed in 1926 by MtAdams business men, to deal with the City's inertia in regards to issues affecting Mt Adams. The association represented our community well and was able to get steps repaired, tennis courts built, Carny Street extended and their center piece achievement, the new Ida Street Bridge designed, funded and built. That's classic grass roots politics.

Considerable thought was given to the design by many individuals including John D. Wareham, an artist and Vice President of Rookwood Pottery, who investigated bridge design in this country and abroad. J. R. Biedinger, structural engineer, drew the plans and oversaw the technical work. The bridge, in an Art Deco motif, was completed and opened for street car, automobile and pedestrian traffic in 1931.

A gala dedication celebration occurred on September 12, 1931 and included a parade, fireworks, dancing on the bridge to the soothing sounds of the ever popular Esberger Band and of course speeches by the Mayor, Vice Mayor and the President of the Mt Adams Welfare Association, John J. Wehrman.

Time marched on and in 1968, Towne Properties built The Shadows, an apartment building, under the bridge. It was located on Court Street which no longer ran from the court house downtown uninterrupted all the way up the Hill. It had been bisected by the construction of I 71 and 471. Neil Bortz, a fledgling developer at the time, wanted to give the street a new name and tie it in to Mt Adams history. He suggested Wareham to City Council to recognize John D. Wareham of Rookwood fame and a contributor to the final design of the bridge. The Enquirer ran an article on the proposed name change and piqued the ire of J R Biedinger, the structural engineer for the project, who was still alive, 81 years old and reading newspapers. Biedinger maintained that Wareham had nothing to do with the bridge and it was he that designed and planned the structure. His objection was duly noted and Council went on to name the street Wareham. Go figure.

Now for some local folklore. The new bridge had utility poles down it's middle to accommodate the electrical lines needed to power streetcars. Since the bridge was open to automobile traffic, people began to weave their cars in and out of the poles ala slalom skiing. Some also combined locally plentiful spirits with this activity and you guessed it, collided with a pole from time to time, often disrupting street car service. Not a good way to win friends and influence people. Fortunately, the poles were removed when the incline closed in 1948 and street cars ceased running. The pole slalom event faded into history.

A final footnote to the story. In 1981, the bridge received needed repairs and a general facelift. The original cost of the bridge in 1931 was \$100,000. The repair 50 years later was \$420,000. Wonder what the next rehab will cost?

Thanks to Neil Bortz for information on the street name change, the Cincinnati Historical Society Library for newspaper articles and the 1931 program for the dedication of the current Ida Street Bridge for background information.

If you would like to schedule a walking tour of Mt Adams, call me at 513 684 0101 or email me at jamessteiner@hotmail.com