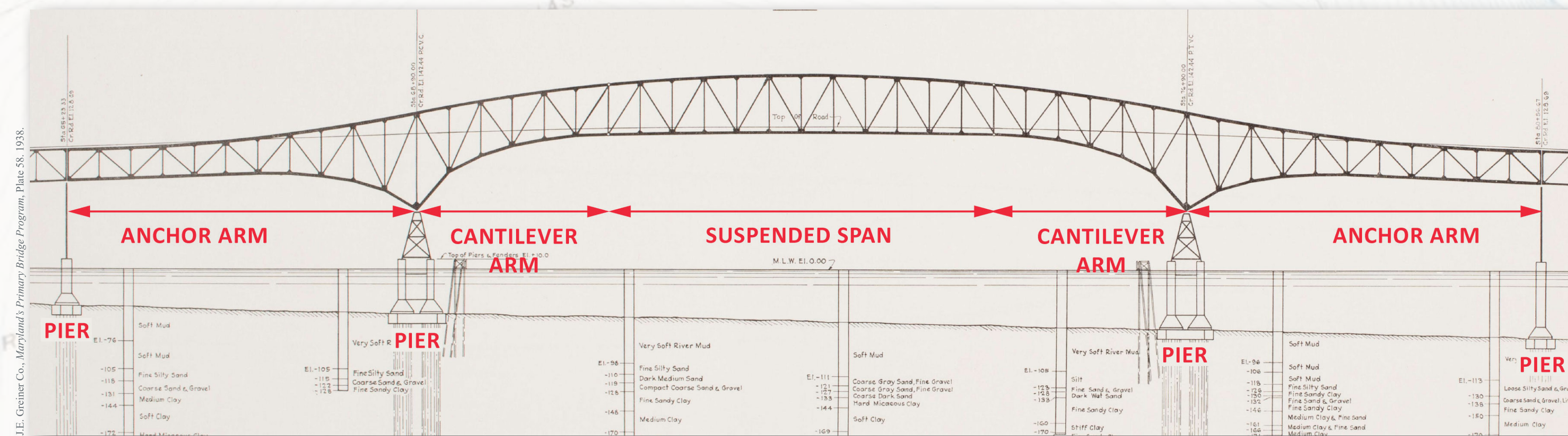


HISTORY OF THE POTOMAC RIVER BRIDGE

The bridge, later renamed the Governor Harry W. Nice Memorial/Senator Thomas “Mac” Middleton Bridge, was completed in 1940 and served motorists for over 90 years.



The Potomac River Bridge was the first to span the river between Charles County, Maryland, and King George County, Virginia.

Prior to 1940, the only way to cross the river was by ferry. The bridge was part of a Maryland State Roads Commission program to build bridges and tunnels across the state’s major waterways and create a unified highway system.

The 1940 bridge was designed by the Baltimore Civil Engineering Firm J.E. Greiner and was the only metal cantilever truss bridge in Maryland. In a cantilever truss bridge, two cantilever arms project horizontally from either end to meet in the middle. The cantilever on this bridge type is supported by trusses under the deck and allowed a wider center span for shipping traffic along the Potomac River.



The bridge was opened on December 14, 1940.

The new bridge connected to the Crain Highway (US 301) in Maryland and provided an alternate route through Virginia and Maryland that bypassed the traffic of Washington, DC. Traffic on the bridge quickly exceeded expectation. When it opened, cars were charged \$.75 per vehicle and an additional \$.15 per passenger. The first bridge superintendent organized special services for toll-paying travelers which included changing flat tires, putting water in radiators, heating milk for babies, and driving cars across the bridge for anyone afraid of its height.



Charles County soon became a tourist destination.

Tourism skyrocketed after 1949, when the county legalized slot machines. Motels, restaurants, and nightclubs sprang up along the US 301, and the corridor became known as “Little Las Vegas” or “Las Vegas of the East.” Casino owners made the area a family destination by also offering amusement parks and water parks. This boom along US 301 ended in the 1960s when Maryland outlawed gambling, and I-95 was completed in Maryland and Virginia.



The Potomac River Bridge served travelers for over 90 years.

In 2006, the state determined that the bridge’s capacity was insufficient for modern traffic volumes, and the effort to replace it began. The new bridge was completed in 2022, and the cantilever bridge was demolished.



Learn more! Access a Story Map on the history of the Potomac River Bridge and learn about other MDTA historic properties at https://mdta.maryland.gov/Cultural_Resources