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CHICAGO RIVER BASCULE BRIDGE,
WASHINGTON STREET
I&M Canal National Heritage Corridor
West Washington Street crossing the Chicago River
Chicago
Cook County
Illinois

HARR No. IL-38

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
P.O. Box 37127
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD
CHICAGO RIVER BASCULE BRIDGE, WASHINGTON STREET
I&M Canal National Heritage Corridor

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Location: I & M Canal National Heritage Corridor
Washington Street crossing the Chicago
River (South Branch) Chicago, Cook
County, Illinois

UTM: 16 E.447060 N.4636800
Quad: Chicago Loop

Date of Construction: 1913

Designing Engineer: Bureau of Engineering, Chicago
Department of Public Works

Present Owner: City of Chicago

Present Use: Vehicular Bridge

Significance: The development of the Chicago trunion
bascule bridge occurred during the first
three decades of the twentieth century.
Despite the controversy over patent
infringement -- Joseph E. Strauss
charged the City of Chicago engineers
with infringing on his patented Strauss-
Trunion bascule bridge -- the Chicago
bascule received great acclaim within
the civil engineering profession.

Project Information: The Illinois and Michigan Canal was
designated a National Heritage Corridor
in 1984. The following year HABS/HAER
embarked on an extensive inventory and
documentation project of the 100 mile-
long corridor. Field work for this
project was concluded in 1988. Final
editing of the documentation was
completed in 1992.

Historians: Charles Scott, Frances Alexander, and
John Nicolay, 1986; Gray Fitzsimons,
1987, Carolyn Brucken, 1992.

The Washington Street Bridge was built during Chicago's "Improvement Period" of bridge building when the city became increasingly conscious of both mechanical innovations and the aesthetic appearance of its bridges. Following a bond issue in 1911, five double-leaf bascule bridges and a single-leaf bascule bridge were built in Chicago in rapid succession. Of the city's many double-leaf bascule spans, the Washington Street Bridge is one of the most ornate. It is a single-deck, double-leaf, trunnion bascule bridge. The bridge has a clear span of 170'-6" and measures 197'-4" between trunnions. The superstructure contains a riveted steel pony truss and has a width of 57'-4". The two bridge tenders' houses have been greatly altered. The houses contain a single one-over-one-light window and have been recently sided with wooden panels. Each house contains a hipped roof covered with tin. To the west, a riveted Warren through truss span carries Washington Street over the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railroad; this span measures approximately 80'-0" in length and 40'-0" in width.

SOURCES:

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"Chicago Bascule Bridge-Design and Operating Features," Engineering News Record, v. 85 (September 9, 1920): 508-514.

"Chicago Settles with Strauss for Infringing Bridge Patent," Engineering News-Record, v. 85 (December 9, 1920), 1158-59.

Donald N. Becker, "Development of the Chicago Type Bascule Bridge," Transactions of the American Society of Civil Engineering, v. 109 (1944): 995-1046.

Donald N. Becker, "The Story of Chicago's Bridges," Midwest Engineer, v. 2 (January 1950): 3-9.

Chicago Department of Public Works, Chicago Public Works: A History (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1973).

"The Chicago Type of Bascule Bridge," Engineering Record, v. 42 (July 21, 1900): 50-52

"The Lift or Bascule Type of Movable Bridges," Engineering Record, v. 42 (July 28, 1900): 73.

J. A. L. Waddell, Bridge Engineering (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1925).