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Chicago River Bridges



Synopsis

Chicago River Bridges presents the untold history and development of Chicago's iconic bridges, from the first wood footbridge built by a tavern owner in 1832 to the fantastic marvels of steel, concrete, and machinery of today. It is the story of Chicago as seen through its bridges, for it has been the bridges that proved critical in connecting and reconnecting the people, industry, and neighborhoods of a city that is constantly remaking itself. In this book, author Patrick T. McBriarty shows how generations of Chicagoans built (and rebuilt) the thriving city trisected by the Chicago River and linked by its many crossings. This comprehensive guidebook chronicles more than 175 bridges spanning 55 locations along the Main Channel, South Branch, and North Branch of the Chicago River. With new full-color photography of existing bridges and more than one hundred black and white images of bridges past, the book unearths the rich history of Chicago's downtown bridges from the Michigan Avenue Bridge to the often forgotten bridges that once connected thoroughfares such as Rush, Erie, Taylor, and Polk Streets. Throughout, McBriarty delivers new research into the bridges' architectural designs, engineering innovations, and their impact on Chicagoans' daily lives, explaining how the dominance of the "Chicago-style" bascule drawbridge influenced the style and mechanics of bridges worldwide. Interspersed throughout are the human dramas that played out on and around the bridges, such as the floods of 1849 and 1992, the cattle crossing collapse of the Rush Street Bridge, or Vincent "The Schemer" Drucci's Michigan Avenue Bridge jump. A confluence of Chicago history, urban design, and engineering lore, Chicago River Bridges illustrates Chicago's significant contribution to drawbridge innovation and the city's emergence as the drawbridge capital of the world.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

A glance at this book might make you think it is "coffee table" material--and it is. It is not, however, just another pretty face. Old and new photographs and illustrations complement Patrick McBriarty's well researched and well written history of the bridge system that currently serves Chicago. The Chicago River makes a peninsula of the city center. The river has been a means of transport of goods and people, a dump for sewage, and a tourist attraction. But, without its bridges, it is an impediment to commerce and travel from the city center to the land to the west and the north. Chicagoans, ever interested in growth, devised ways to cross the river and yet allow ship traffic to bring necessary commodities through the city from Lake Michigan. In "Chicago River Bridges" McBriarty chronicles the development from Chicago's beginnings to the present of the ferries, swing bridges, vertical lift bridges, and bascule bridges that provide for essential movement of people and vehicles across the river. He recounts the anecdotes and legends, and explains the mechanics. He conveys the grit and spirit that have made Chicago the drawbridge capital of the world. Read it--but don't mess it up. You will want to put it on the coffee table when you have finished.

As a native Chicagoan, I was drawn to this book instantly. I was not disappointed. McBriarty walks you through the bridges that we see daily, but never really notice. This is a beautiful book that will make a fantastic gift for anyone who knows Chicago. It's a must read for natives and a must have for anyone that has ever visited the Windy City!

I am a bridge-nut and have read 100's of bridge books. Those that include "every bridge on the river" are usually boring and always redundant. In "Chicago River Bridges" the author describes 175 bridges which are basically of only 3 or 4 types, but remarkably, he does it in a manner which kept this reader interested throughout. His interjections of local anecdotal history liven the text and will make for entertaining reading even if you aren't a bridge-nut.

I grew up in Chicago during the 1950s and 1960s when there was still a fair amount of shipping on the Chicago River and its branches, and also the Calumet River. (I've been tied up in traffic downtown due to the Medusa Challenger.) I was (and still am) fascinated by the movable bridges. This book provides a comprehensive and interesting history of these bridges that I have never seen

elsewhere. If you are interested in the history of the Chicago area, this book is a "must read"!

We used this book with a k-nex bridge building demo in middle school classrooms. The kids LOVED seeing that the kind of bridges they were building with "toys" operated like the real thing. While I enjoyed reading the history and about the river, the kids loved looking at the pictures, which are beautiful. This is NOT just a coffee-table book for grown-ups; it's also a cool-see-how-they-work book for young engineers.

McBriarty did a fantastic job extensively researching Chicago's bridges. I'm sure it was no light task, as the book is chock-full of bridge statistics, early drawings and some beautiful, large photographs. It's a handsome coffee table book with A LOT of information inside.

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