



Historic Bridge Foundation Facebook Archives

Did You Know: Did You Know: Iron and Steel Mills

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Did You Know...

...Bridge builders used steel and iron from many different steel mills that often rolled their names into the beams they produced? Look carefully on a historic steel or wrought iron bridge and you may find the names of one or more steel mill. If you find one name, do not make the mistake of assuming that was the only mill that the iron or steel on the bridge was sourced from. It is not uncommon to find two or more mill names on the metal of a bridge. Different mills might have specialized in certain types and sizes or beam, or perhaps differences in prices may explain why one bridge company purchased from multiple mills.

In some cases, finding the mill names on a bridge can assist in narrowing down the construction date of a bridge for which the construction date is not known, or they can also assist in identifying parts that are not original to a bridge by way of finding a mill name that didn't exist when the bridge was originally built. Some companies appear to have changed the font and/or wording of the names on their rolled beams, while some other companies may have only been in operation during certain years, or their names may have changed at certain dates. This process of using mill names to assist with dating a bridge is not an exact science, but merely a guide that works on some bridges. A few examples follow:

Steel with the names "BSCO" and "Cambria" indicates that the steel was rolled in the Cambria Iron Works by Bethlehem Steel. Bethlehem purchased the Cambria Steel Works in 1923. Thus, steel bearing this name would date after 1923. Researchers should, however, be cautious in assuming the reverse to be true. While it might be tempting to conclude that steel reading "Cambria" implies steel made before 1916 when the Cambria Iron Company still existed and ran the Cambria Iron Works, some companies continued rolling steel bearing the names of the former companies.

The famous Carnegie name found its way onto steel for many years, often in a format that changed over the years enabling some hints as the age of steel. Older iron/steel has a simple font with only "CARNEGIE" on the iron or steel. Sometime in the 1890s, however, the font was changed to an italicized

font with a stylized “N” in the middle. Although the Carnegie steel mills were bought up by United States Steel in 1900, USS continued to roll steel bearing the old names of the steel mills for many years after the purchases. Indeed, it was 40-50 years before the iconic United States Steel “USS” logo would appear on rolled steel for bridges. This use of the old mill names can help researchers today, since it reveals which mill rolled the steel, whereas if they had rolled all steel bearing simply “USS” it would not be as easy to know which mill supplied the steel.

Under United States Steel ownership, the names appearing on steel sometimes included an extra letter that appears to indicate the mill that rolled the steel. For example, starting in the 1920s, many steel beams bearing the Carnegie name included a tiny “H” placed inside the last “E” in Carnegie. It is likely this refers to steel rolled at the Homestead Works of the former Carnegie Steel Company. Similarly, mills operated in the Illinois and Indiana area, where the Illinois Steel Company previously existed prior to ownership by USS, appear to be noted on steel. Steel beams rolled with the name “Illinois” often are followed by either a “G” or an “S.” It is assumed these refer to the Gary Works mill and the South Chicago mill respectively.

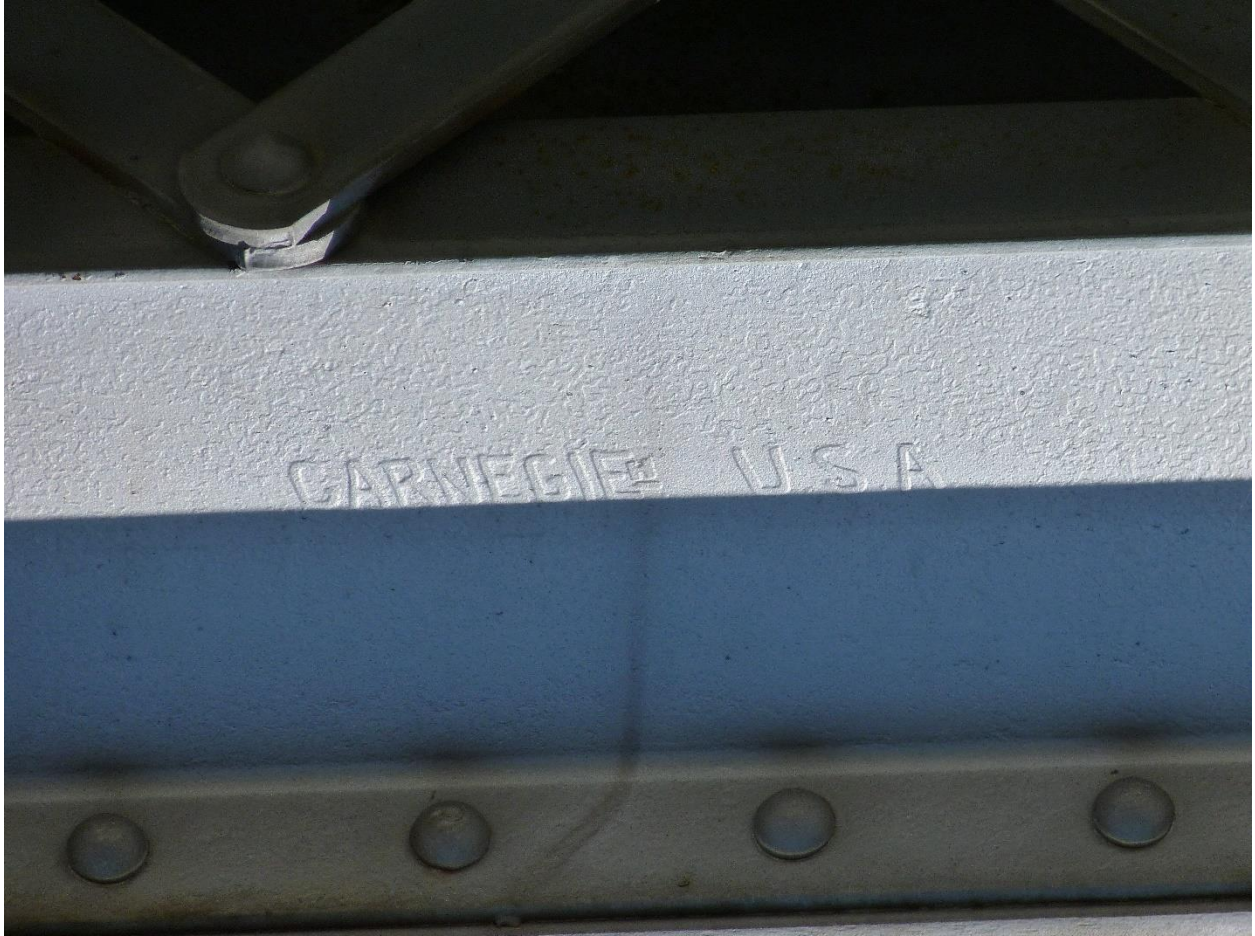
The Jones and Laughlins Steel Company of Pittsburgh’s business history resulted in a way to help date steel on bridges. Prior to 1902, the company was known as Jones and Laughlins Limited. In 1902, that company was dissolved and the property and assets were transferred to a new corporation called Jones and Laughlin Steel Company. The loss of the “s” in “Laughlins” was also applied not only to the corporation name, but also to the actual steel being rolled by the mill.



JONES & LAUGHLINS



ILLINOIS - G - U.S.A.



CAENEGIE USA (With H inside the last E)



CAMBRIA BSCO



CARNEGIE



ILLINOIS - U.S.A. - S



JONES & LAUGHLIN