Historic Bridge Foundation Facebook Archives

Did You Know… That once a year, Union Pacific Railroad lowers the historic Kinzie Street Railroad Bridge in Chicago for the sole purpose of preventing the bridge from being truly abandoned?

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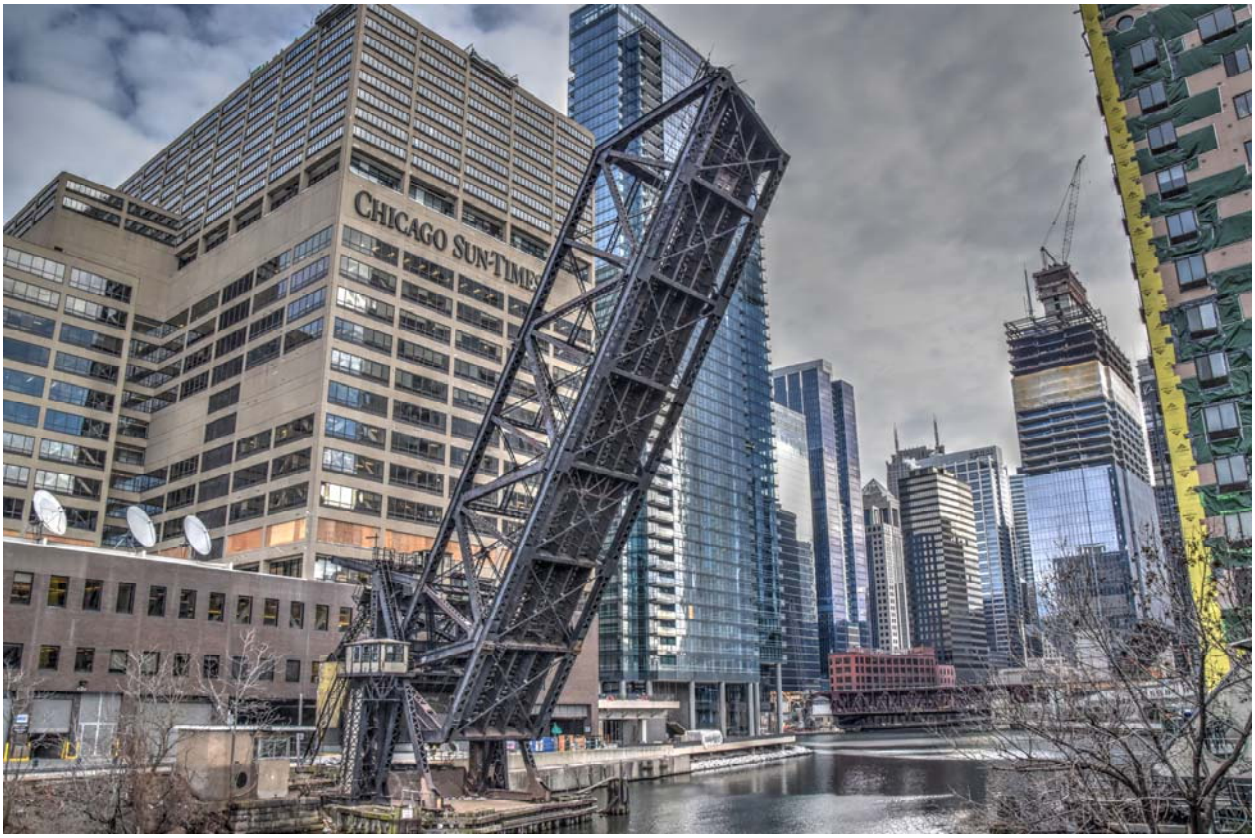
Although this movable bascule bridge has not been used for train traffic for many years, Union Pacific continues to own this designated Chicago Landmark. It normally is left in the raised position. However, once a year, the bridge is lowered by Union Pacific and a company truck is driven over the bridge, which allows the bridge to officially remain in an “active status.” Additionally, at this time, any repairs needed to ensure the continued ability of the bridge to perform this meager duty are also performed by the crew.

It is not known on what (if any) schedule this annual bridge lowering occurs. As such, this rare event is like a historic bridge lottery! The chance that you will randomly happen to visit this bridge at just the right time to witness this event is very unlikely indeed. However, Royce and Bobette Haley won this "lottery" and have been kind enough to share some photos of the bridge in the rarely-seen lowered position.

The bridge was built in 1907, with its truss bascule superstructure design being provided by Joseph Strauss. Strauss was one of the foremost inventors and designers of bascule bridge designs in the early 20th Century. This bridge is a prototypical design, which in later bridges evolved into Strauss’ distinctive, patented heel-trunnion type of bascule. This bascule set records when it was built. At the time of its completion, this railroad bridge was the heaviest as well as the longest bascule leaf in the world!

The site of this bridge is a historical crossing for railroads. It is the location of the first railroad bridge in Chicago, dating to 1852. Later, one of the two first all-steel railroad bridges in the country was built here as well in 1879. The 1879 bridge was replaced with a lattice through truss swing bridge in 1898. This bridge had a very short life, testimony to the rapidly changing needs of boats and trains during this period of history. By 1907, the bascule bridge seen today had replaced this bridge.



The bridge in the raised position.

Next to the bridge stone abutments from the previous bridge can be seen as shown here.

The bridge in the raised position.

The bridge in the raised position.

The bridge in the raised position.

The bridge in the raised position.

Photo Credit: Royce and Bobette Haley. The bridge shown partially lowered.

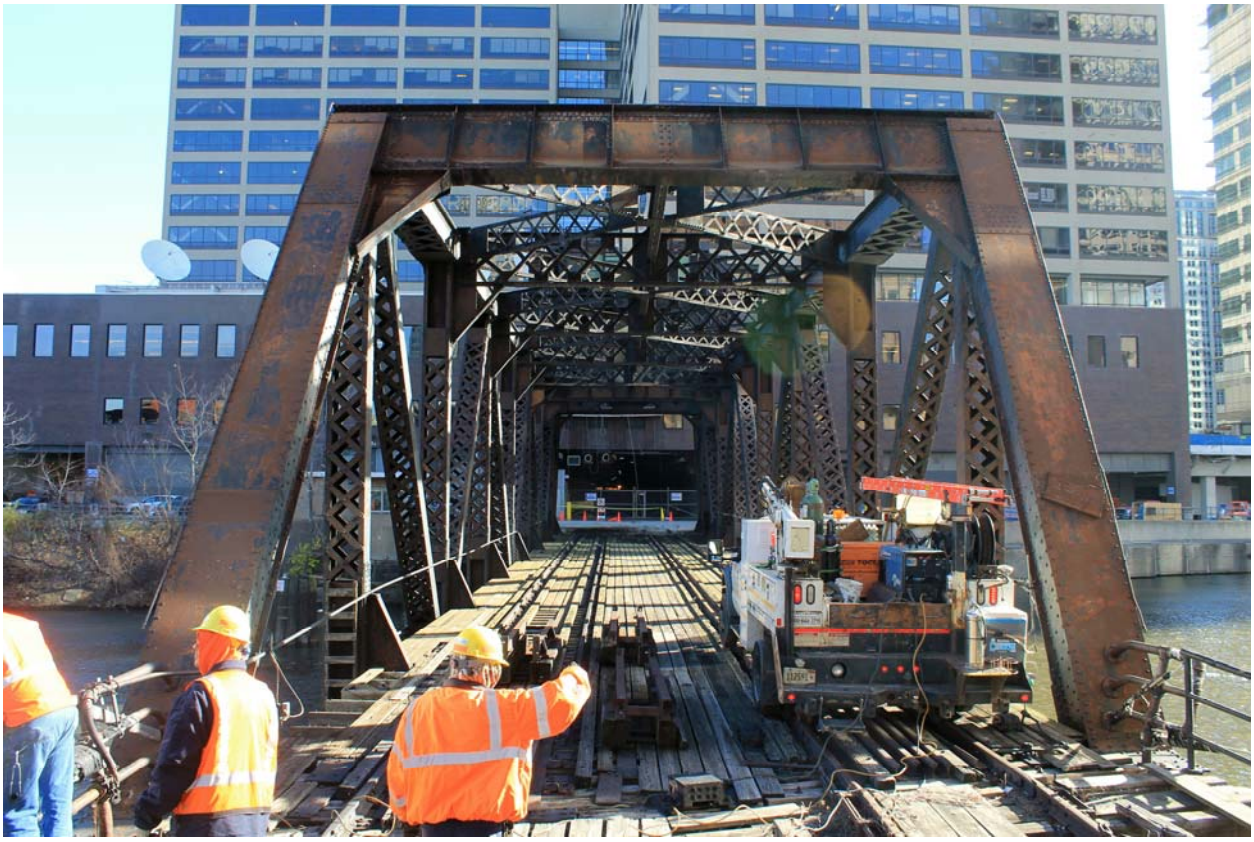
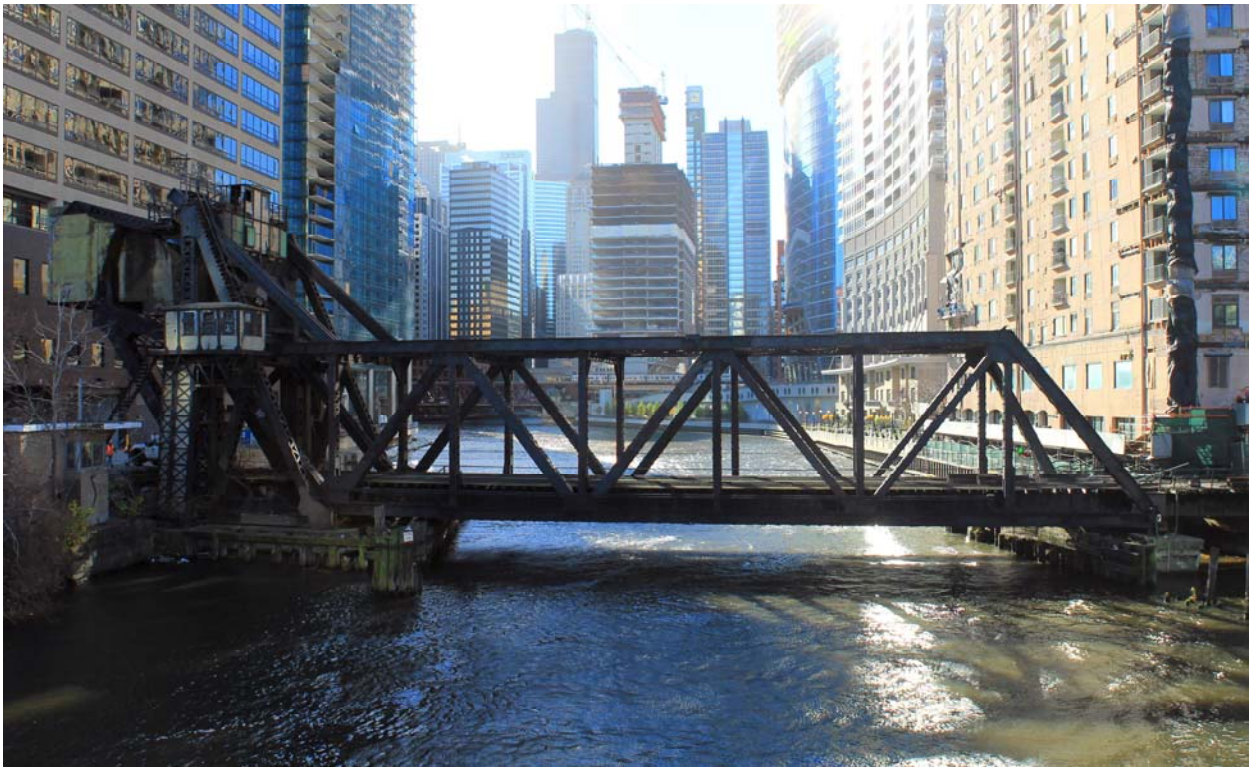


Photo Credit: Royce and Bobette Haley. The bridge shown fully lowered, with Union Pacific crews working on the bridge. Also shown is the truck that is driven on the bridge to make the bridge and railroad line "officially" active.



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