



Historic Bridge Foundation Facebook Archives

Did You Know...

...that Chicago's movable bridges can be used for crowd control? The three branches of the Chicago River that flow through the downtown Loop area have long defined Chicago. The river was traditionally important for marine navigation, which necessitated that any bridges constructed over the river be movable in order to allow the passage of boats. Today, almost all the bridges near the downtown area are old enough to be considered historic bridges, giving the Chicago the distinction of having the most distinguished collection of historic movable bridges in the world. The bascule bridges near the Loop on the Main Branch and South Branch of the Chicago River, which essentially surround most of the Loop, remain operable for boats today. The bridges do not operate with the frequency that they did in decades past. Instead they are normally only operated seasonally in the spring and fall to allow owners of sailboats to move the boats in and out of storage to docks on Lake Michigan. During these operations, a team of bridgetenders opens no more than two or three bridges at a time as the boats work their way along the river to or from Lake Michigan.

As it turns out, the bascule bridges of Chicago have a use that the planners of the city may not have originally thought of. If all of the bridges are raised at the same time, the bridges can be used to isolate entire sections of the downtown area. Hollywood came up with the idea when they used Chicago as a filming location to depict Gotham City in the 2005 movie "Batman Begins." In that film, Gotham City is depicted, like Chicago, as a city separated by a river with movable bridges on it. Toward the end of the film, the bridges are all raised at once to separate Gotham City when everyone in the city goes insane due to a fear-inducing hallucinogen.

Fast forward to August 2020—Chicago did the same thing to contain and control riots and looting in the city following an officer-involved shooting. Just like the fictional Gotham City, the real world Chicago made use of its unique collection of movable bridges to help control and contain the violence and protect the city. In this sense, the bridges provided the city with a unique opportunity to perform the same function as a roadblock without having to deploy police resources.

Additional photos of the bridges raised in August can be seen on Instagram:

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CDzBaC1IraJ/?igshid=1rxkvz802n14i>



1: An overview of the bridges along the main branch of the Chicago River.



2: A screenshot of "Batman Begins." In this shot, Chicago's raised bascule bridges were filmed to depict Gotham City. To the right the city buildings of Chicago are essentially unaltered. To the left, the city of Chicago has been replaced with a computer generated Gotham City fitting the plot of the movie. Also visible in the shot is the computer generated towers for the Gotham city train which played a central role in the plot of the movie, but is not present in Chicago.



3: A view of the bridges raised on August 10th