

## Chicago River Bridges

By Patrick T McBriarty

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The best non-fiction books come from authors who have a strong, potentially obsessive passion for their subject matter. Often the genesis of the publication can be traced back to a desire to know more about the subject, frustration at not being able to find it, and a determination to dig this information up and share it with others.

I suspect many other publishing proposals fall by the wayside for lack of such a character to drive the process on, but generally the ones that make it into print are a delight; Patrick McBriarty's book on Chicago River Bridges is no exception.

McBriarty explains in the preface to this large-format, beautifully-designed and laid out hardback book, that its genesis can be traced to his appreciation for manufacturing engineering and industrial landscapes. 'It was clear to me upon discovering Chicago's drawbridges that they held an inherent beauty that should be shared with a wider audience,' he says.

It took him 12 years to reach that goal, from the time the seed was first planted in his head as he took photographs of some

of the city's bridges. He soon realised that there were so many bridges in the city he could not possibly cover all of them, and decided to restrict his book - or maybe we should call it his first volume? - to the bridges of the three main channels of the Chicago River. Even with its scope narrowed in this way, the book chronicles more than 175 bridges which stand, or have stood, at 55 locations on Main Channel, South Branch and North Branch of the Chicago River.

It opens by introducing Chicago itself, the history of its development and how it came to be a bridge mecca. The reason that drawbridges were so common in the city is explored, along with an analysis of the city's major contribution to the development of movable bridge technology.

The main part of the publication charts the bridges - both existing and former structures - on the three main channels. As well as a potted history of the site, bridge details include date, type, construction cost, and the names of the designers and the contractors responsible for building them, along with the status of the bridge. McBriarty is generous in his use of photographs - historical as well as contemporary - diagrams and maps. His writing style is clear and lively and the layout of the book is easy on the eye, so reading it is a joy. It cannot fail to fascinate bridge engineers, but most likely would also be appreciated by a much wider audience.

Helena Russell

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