

Laurel Street Bridge
Hillsborough County
FDOT #105503, 8HI6671

The Laurel Street Bridge (originally Fortune Street Bridge) is a unique, imposing, and historically important single-leaf trunnion bascule bridge across the Hillsborough River in Tampa. The City of Tampa constructed this bridge during 1927 after receiving voter approval in 1924 to issue bonds for several new Hillsborough River bridges. The contract went to the United Gas Improvement Company's construction division, the UGI Contracting Company of Philadelphia. Its unusual name led the company to write city officials explaining that it had built dams, power plants, factories, and defense installations during World War I, thus attesting to its ability to do this job. The Strauss Bascule Bridge Company of Chicago designed the movable span. The project cost was \$401,343.



**Photo 5-81. Laurel Street Bridge, Hillsborough County
(No. 105503)**

Its most distinguishing characteristic is its 99-foot-long main span, a Warren pony truss with verticals that comprises the single leaf of an unusual overhead counterweight, Strauss trunnion bascule bridge. With 10 concrete girder approach spans, the bridge measures 368 feet in length. While the single-leaf design has the advantage of only one set of lifting machinery, the length of the span in this case seemed to require the truss as a strengthening element, along with the use of three bowed members (two together at the west end) that arch over the leaf to give torsional support. Choosing not to build a counterweight pit, designers put the huge counterweight above the deck in a framed steel tower that guides the weight up and down during an opening cycle.

The Laurel Street Bridge underwent major alterations in 1969. The two original wooden bridge tender stations were replaced by a modernistic, glass enclosed tower that sits on a new concrete addition above the original abutment, which holds the operating mechanism. The new girder spans have plain concrete parapets topped by a pair of steel tubular handrails.

Despite the alterations to the bridge's tender stations and railings, the character-defining elements of this bridge, especially the Warren pony truss and the overhead counterweight, remain and the bridge retains its historic physical integrity. It was determined NRHP-eligible during the 2000 survey under Criterion A in the areas of Transportation and Community Planning and Development and under Criterion C in the area of Engineering as a rare example of an early trunnion bascule bridge with a Warren pony truss bascule span and an overhead counterweight.