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ILLINOIS CENTRAL RAILROAD,
ILLINOIS RIVER BRIDGE
I&M Canal National Heritage Corridor
Crossing the Illinois River
LaSalle
LaSalle County
Illinois

HAER No. IL-49

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
P.O. Box 37127
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD
ILLINOIS CENTRAL RAILROAD, ILLINOIS RIVER BRIDGE
I&M Canal National Heritage Corridor

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HAER No. IL-49

Location: I & M Canal National Heritage Corridor
Illinois Central Railroad crossing the
Illinois River
LaSalle, LaSalle County, Illinois

UTM: 16 E.32568 N.4576420
Quad: LaSalle

Date of Construction: 1855; rebuilt 1893, 1932

Builder: McClintic Marshall Corporation

Present Owner: Illinois Central Gulf Railroad

Present Use: Retired from service

Significance: In 1855 the spanning of the Illinois
River by the Illinois Central Railroad
Bridge was a major engineering
achievement; although reconstructed in
1893, the bridge was used from 1855
until it was abandoned in the late
1970s.

Project Information: The Illinois and Michigan Canal was
designated a National Heritage Corridor
in 1984. The following year HABS/HAER
embarked on an extensive inventory and
documentation project of the 100 mile-
long corridor. Field work for this
project was concluded in 1988. Final
editing of the documentation was
completed in 1992.

Historian: Gray Fitzsimons, 1985.

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The Illinois Central Railroad's crossing of the Illinois River at LaSalle dates from 1853-55 when the first continuous north-south rail line through Illinois was under construction. The original bridge consisted of a series of cast and wrought iron, Howe deck trusses resting on ashlar sandstone piers. One of the bridge's northernmost spans crossed the I & M Canal and the Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific Railroad. During the bridge's construction in the 1850s, labor unrest, social tensions between Irish Catholic immigrants and native-born Americans, and cholera epidemics overshadowed the engineering achievement of spanning the Illinois River. Following its completion in 1855 the bridge served the Illinois Central for nearly forty years. In 1893 the superstructure of the bridge was fully reconstructed with pin-connected, steel Pratt deck trusses. Rail service remained uninterrupted during the reconstruction. With the advent of the Illinois Waterway in 1932, two deck trusses were replaced with a single through truss span. The single-tracked bridge served rail traffic through the 1970s. Recently, the Illinois Central Gulf Railroad abandoned this section of the line and retired the bridge from service.

The railroad bridge is a multi-span bridge; sixteen of the spans are steel, Pratt deck trusses built in 1893, measuring approximately 150' in length, and containing pin connections. The main span is a Parker through truss erected in 1932 by McClintic Marshall Corporation of Pottstown, Pennsylvania, and measures approximately 300' in length. The bridge contains riveted, gusset-plate connections. In addition, three steel plate girder spans, built in 1920, are adjacent to the main span. Each girder measures 60' in length. The south approach consists of a large earth-filled embankment. The deck trusses are supported on ashlar sandstone piers, built 1853-5; the through truss is supported on reinforced concrete piers (built in 1932). The bridge carries a single track.

SOURCES:

LaSalle Centennial Committee, LaSalle, Illinois: An Historical Sketch (LaSalle, IL: n.p., 1952): 35-7.

Mark Wyman, Immigrants in the Valley: Irish, Germans, and Americans in the Upper Mississippi Country, 1830-1860 (Chicago: Nelson Hall, 1984): 177-80.

Carlton J. Corliss, Trails to Rails: A Story of Transportation Progress in Illinois (Chicago: n.p., 1934): 34-7.