ELEVATION LOOKING SOUTH

Since the first segment of Lake Shore Drive was constructed by the Lincoln Park Commission in 1869, Chicago's Lake Michigan shoreline has served double duty as a recreation area and a transportation corridor. The Chicago Park District, consolidated from twenty-two smaller park districts in 1934, continued their efforts to construct a continuous, limited-access highway on the lake front. In response to real estate interests' concerns about the appearance of "ramp-type footbridges," the Park District called the structures "passerelles," a French term intended to add elegance.

More importantly, architects hired under U.S. Works Progress Administration (WPA) sponsorship collaborated with engineers to produce aesthetically pleasing designs. Although the WPA is better known for bridges designed in a rustic mode and built with manual labor, WPA architects in Chicago produced strikingly modern welded steel bridges. The Lincoln Park passerelle gained national recognition in the Museum of Modern Art's exhibition, "Built in USA, 1932-44."

The passerelle's curved shapes and clean lines were made possible by electric arc welding, then a relatively new technology in bridge construction. The welded arch rib (stiffened by diagonal plates hidden inside) and railings sweep over the roadway in continuous arcs uninterrupted by fasteners. The arch's three-hinged design has allowed it to tolerate large settlements in its abutments. A 1991 rehabilitation added foundation ties to slow settlement, and diagonal bracing to stiffen the arch.


The Chicago Bridges Recording Project is part of the Historic American Engineering Record (HAER), a long-range program to document historically significant engineering and industrial works in the United States. The HAER program is administered by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER) Division of the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. E. Blaine Cliver, Chief. The project was sponsored during the summer of 1999 by the City of Chicago, Richard M. Daley, Mayor; and the Chicago Department of Transportation, Thomas R. Walker, Commissioner, and S. L. Kaderbak, Chief Engineer, Bureau of Bridges and Transit.

The field work, measured drawings, historical reports, and photographs were prepared under the direction of Eric N. Delony, Chief of HAER. The recording team consisted of Architectural Field Supervisor James P. Henley (Peoria, IL); Engineering Field Supervisor Justin M. Spirey (HAER); Architects Susan H. Gordon (University of Virginia), Karen L. Hassey (University of Virginia), Julia M. Keslow (University of Notre Dame), and Damjano Kranjec (ICOMOS, University of Zagreb, Croatia); and Historians Jeffrey A. Hess (Minneapolis, MN) and Matthew T. Sneddon (University of Washington). Large-format photographs were taken by Jet Lowe (HAER). Bureau of Bridges and Transit Assistant Chief Engineer Christopher Holt served as department liaison.