



The world's great bridges do much more than connect us from one place to another. When seen through larger eyes, their architectural strength, beauty and symbolism inspire us to overcome obstacles, "go to the other side" and unite what might otherwise divide us.

With that in mind, one doesn't have to travel far to find plenty of inspiration in Pittsburgh. We know how to make the most of a stream, tributary or river around here—so much so that we claim the privileged status of the City of Bridges—even outpacing Manhattan, Paris and (second place titleholder) Venice, Italy. The city proper touts a total of 446 bridges, about 40 of which cross our three main rivers. When considering all of Allegheny County, the number jumps to more than 1,900 bridges.

Aside from playing a pivotal role in our city's transportation, our bridges add to Pittsburgh's allure and legend. Here are just a few of the 446 that dot our topography.

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PITTSBURGH BRIDGE

By Gina A. Mazza © 1987, originally appeared in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*

The eloquent Smithfield Street Bridge (1883) was one of the first major bridges in the United States built primarily of steel, and the first to incorporate a lenticular (lens-shaped) truss design. It remains the oldest river bridge in Allegheny County. Here is an ode to it.

Many nights in my youth I walked this arc
suspended above the Mon,
wondering where life's current
would deliver me.

I wished to flow away like the river,
alive and unapologetic
of its power.

Back then it was easy to feel
so far away.

Years fuse and drift forward.
A faithful longing calls across the distance.
I listen, wanting to be unburdened.
Life circles like a whirl
and suddenly
I am home again.

I find a fresh skyline,
faces that reflect me,
and this bridge,
welcoming as a mother's arms.

I know this silent totem remembers
the words I spoke to it long ago,
yet I couldn't know then
the strength of its steel beams
to beckon me back.

Tonight I walk the arc, amused as the wind
lifts and whips my winter scarf.
Memories rise from quiet waters below,
memories forged from
an urgent fire and
a restless heart.

I shall remain,
so long as this river sings in me.

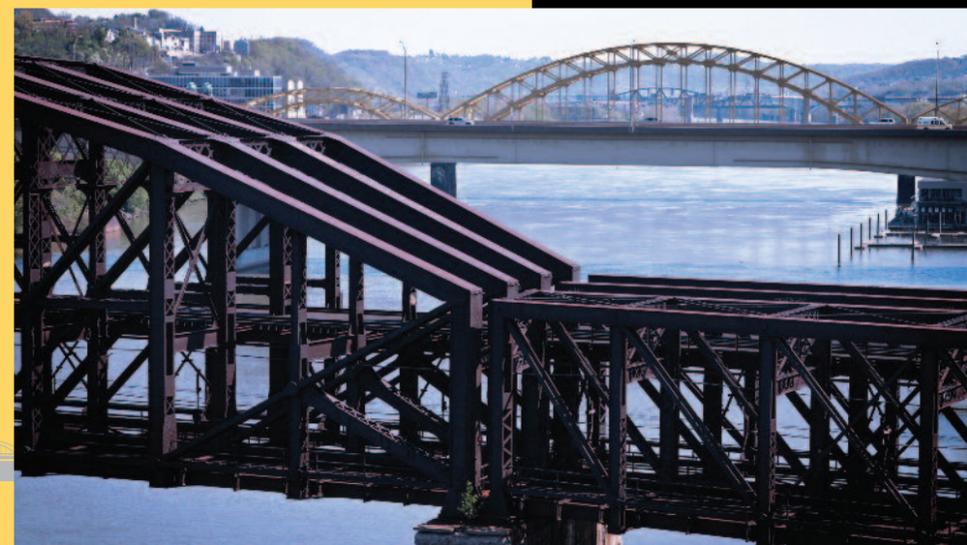


BRIDGE WITH A VIEW

Arguably, the **Fort Pitt Bridge** is one bridge that gets much of the glory. Visitors from around the globe who find themselves traveling west on I-279 through the Fort Pitt Tunnels may be astonished by the view before them as they emerge from the mountainous portal: the Golden Triangle bursts forth, seemingly from out of nowhere, framed by the bridge's yellow bowstring arch. The Fort Pitt Bridge has been featured in ad campaigns for Pittsburgh-headquartered corporations, and movie casts (including the 2012 release, *The Dark Knight Rises*) have shot from its double-decked expanse. Even the *New York Times* has called Pittsburgh "the only city in America with an entrance", and the confluence of the Monongahela and Allegheny Rivers below make it all the more magnificent.

MONONGAHELA RIVER BRIDGES

Along the Monongahela River, several bridges embellish the landscape between Station Square and the South Side. The historic **Smithfield Street Bridge**, built in 1881, is the oldest surviving lenticular steel truss in the United States. A National Historic Civil Engineering landmark, downtown workers can be seen walking across the "Mon" on this



bridge every day after parking their cars near Station Square along East Carson Street.

The **Monongahela River Bridge**, or "Panhandle Railroad Bridge", was built in 1903 as a rail line for the Pittsburgh and Steubenville Railroad Company; it ran west to Steubenville, Ohio, crossing the panhandle of West Virginia. After several alterations to the bridge over the years, the bridge is now used as part of the Port Authority of Allegheny County's "T" light rail system.

Anyone who lives or works in the South Hills knows the **Liberty Bridge** intimately. Constructed in 1928, it connects the boroughs and townships south of the city through Mt. Washington and the Liberty Tubes.

The **10th Street Bridge**, built in 1921, boasts the longest span over the Mon River. Have you noticed the animal figures on the top of the bridge's south tower? Each figure, painted by an unnamed artist, is about six feet tall and can be seen from the north shore of the Mon River.

The **Birmingham Bridge's** 1,700-foot, six-lane highway can be traversed at East Carson Street between 22nd and 23rd Streets. Originally

planned as part of a highway system that would connect the Mon Valley and Route 28 in the Allegheny Valley, plans were revised and in 1977, the current bridge was constructed. On the north end at the junction of Uptown, the Hill District and South Oakland, ramps at the main span deck level link to Fifth Avenue (which is one way into downtown). Ramps from Forbes Avenue (one way leaving downtown) angle upward to meet the deck. Access to the bridge isn't exactly a straight shot for travelers on either Parkways, and the streets leading below it to Second Avenue are somewhat challenging to navigate, especially for out-of-towners.

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Less than a mile upstream from the Birmingham Bridge, the history of the **Monongahela Connecting Railroad Bridge** and **Hot Metal Bridge** dates back to the mid-1800s and is closely linked to the rise and fall of the iron and steel industries in the region. Both bridges reemerged at the turn of the 21st Century with new purpose. After a \$12 million renovation and conversion to a two-lane bridge for motor vehicles, the “Mon Con” Bridge reopened in 2000 as an easy connection between the South Side and South Oakland. (It somewhat solved the maze of the Birmingham Street Bridge access because of its proximity to the Bates Street interchange of the Parkway and Second Avenue.) As the downstream side structure of the Mon Con Bridge, the Hot Metal Bridge enjoyed a \$10 million renovation in 2007, when it was reopened to bicyclists and pedestrians.

ALLEGHENY RIVER BRIDGES

Connecting Pittsburgh to the North Shore are the “Sister Bridges”, three parallel, self-anchored suspension bridges built in the 1920s that cross the Allegheny River at Sixth, Seventh and Ninth Streets. Pittsburgh has kept it all in the family by renaming these three siblings after famed Pittsburgh residents. Now batting at Sixth Street is the **Roberto Clemente**

Bridge, renamed in 1998 as part of a compromise after the Pittsburgh Pirates sold the naming rights to PNC Park to PNC Financial Services. (A groundswell of enthusiasm by residents had taken root for naming the park after Clemente.) The Seventh Street Bridge was rechristened the **Andy Warhol Bridge** in 2005 as part of the 10th anniversary of the Andy Warhol Museum on nearby Sandusky Street. And it seemed only natural to rename the Ninth Street Bridge after **Rachel Carson** on Earth Day in 2006. (Carson’s farmhouse birthplace is 18 miles up the Allegheny River, now called the Rachel Carson Homestead.) The bridges are noteworthy in that they are the only trio of nearly identical bridges—as well as the first



self-anchored suspension spans— built in the United States. All three replaced former bridges; in fact, the original Sixth Street Bridge burned in the late 1800s because the bird’s nests in its beams caught fire from the smoke stacks of passing steamboats.

The bridges that cross the Allegheny River near downtown Pittsburgh and the Point include the **Ft. Duquesne Bridge**. Constructed in 1969, it gained notoriety as “The Bridge To Nowhere” due to delays in construction, which left the northern end of the span hanging in midair until it was connected with the North Shore Expressway in 1986. The **Fort Wayne Railroad Bridge** near the D. L. Lawrence Convention Center was built 1904. After various renovations and extensions, the bridge now serves Conrail freight traffic, as well as Amtrak passengers embarking at Union Station, located at Liberty Avenue and 11th Street. A relative newcomer to the Pittsburgh landscape is the 1,050-foot, eight-lane **Veteran’s Bridge**, which opened in 1987 as the final missing link of Interstate 579/Crosstown Boulevard. The **16th Street Bridge**, built in 1923, is distinguishable by its bronze-winged seahorses, armillary spheres and “fish” frieze designed by New York sculptor Leo Lentilli. The 62-foot-high pylon sculptures are based on a fountain on Avenue de l’Observatoire, bringing a bit of Paris to Pittsburgh. The bridge includes a pedestrian walkway. If you walk the bridge, look for stone carvings of Poseidon/Neptune and a woman on each end of the bridge. And finally, the **West End Bridge**, which crosses the



Allegheny, was the first bridge on the Ohio River heading toward the Mississippi River. Built in 1932 about a mile below the confluence of the Allegheny and Mon Rivers, it connects the West End to the North Side. While the bridge has undergone massive change over the years, it remains an important part of Pittsburgh’s legacy.

BRIDGES NEAR AND FAR

Beyond the 412, Pittsburgh has had great influence on bridges built elsewhere in the world. Pittsburgh natives and others who came here and dedicated their work to the design, engineering and construction of bridges eventually went on to design other famous expanses. German-born John Augustus Roebling, for example, who designed the Brooklyn Bridge and Niagara Falls Suspension Bridge, spent years working in Pittsburgh, with

operations based in Saxonburg. Illinois native George Washington Gale Ferris, Jr., best known for his invention of the Ferris Wheel, lived on the North Side and founded G.W.G. Ferris & Co. in Pittsburgh. To this day, major bridge conventions are held here, with engineers attending from around the globe to see the bridge works in our fair city.

Pittsburgh has come a long way since the early 1800s when its river bridges were made mostly of wood. Since then, nearly every type of bridge—arches, cantilever, suspension—has risen above the terrain, most built from locally produced steel. Only one thing could make our bridges even more home grown than that. You guessed it: painting them in the ‘Burgh’s official colors of black and gold. |DHL

