

Kennedy Boulevard Bridge

Hillsborough County
FDOT #100100, 8HI0640

One of Florida's premier historic bridges, the 1913 steel bascule Kennedy Boulevard Bridge (originally the Lafayette Street Bridge) crosses the Hillsborough River in downtown Tampa. It was the third bridge built on the site, having replaced a narrow swing span that replaced an earlier 1888 structure. The bridge consists of a patented, double-leaf, Scherzer rolling lift main span and two reinforced concrete arch deck approach spans.



Photo 5-77. Kennedy Boulevard Bridge, Hillsborough County (No. 100100)

The Kennedy Boulevard Bridge is the oldest bascule span in Florida. An architectural centerpiece of downtown Tampa, the bridge exhibits Neoclassical Revival styling, which was popular from the late 19th to mid-20th centuries. The Neoclassical Revival style was an eclectic renewal of Georgian, Adam, Early Classical Revival and Greek Revival architecture, and its academic approach was related to the Beaux Arts tradition. This style was commonly used as part of the City Beautiful Movement to improve the aesthetic quality of metropolitan areas. The effort at beautification shows in the sculpted, urn-shaped balusters in the concrete railings, the handsome steel railing on the bascule span, and particularly in the tender stations. Each house has a terra cotta roof and sits in a curved bay at the entrances to the bridge. Efforts to retain the original appearance have succeeded. The most noticeable changes have occurred in the removal of light fixtures from the railings and the metal frames that held wires for the streetcars.

The bridge's attractiveness may be due to Alexander Twombly of New York City who, associated with engineers Bolles, Hodges and Baird, selected plans for the structure. He seems to have purchased patents and design rights from the Luten Bridge Company, a dominant influence on Florida concrete bridges at the time. Building the project, however, went to the Edwards Construction Company of Tampa, a well-respected and active firm in the city. The Pennsylvania Steel Company fabricated the bascule spans at their Steelton plant from designs supplied by the Scherzer Rolling Lift Bridge Company of Chicago. The project began in 1912, ended in 1913, and cost \$240,000. The Tampa Electric Company shared in the expense in order to run streetcars across the structure. During the 1920s, the increasing demands of traffic led to the construction of four additional bridges in proximity to Lafayette Street.

The Kennedy Boulevard Bridge was determined NRHP-eligible by the SHPO in 1987. It is significant under Criterion A in the areas of Transportation and Community Planning and Development. Like the other bridges over the Hillsborough River in downtown Tampa, it served to strengthen the connection between the east and west sides of the Hillsborough River as Tampa developed, particularly around the Land Boom years.¹³⁶ It is also eligible under Criterion C in the areas of Architecture and Engineering as the earliest example of a bascule bridge in the state.

¹³⁶ City of Tampa, Historic Bridges on the Hillsborough River, Local Multiple Properties Landmark Designation Report, Tampa, 2006.

In 1995, FDOT rehabilitated the bridge, including much of the operating machinery, and restored its historic appearance. Consequently, the bridge maintains its historic physical integrity and continues to represent a structure of distinctive quality and high historical importance.

The Platt Street Bridge

Hillsborough County
FDOT #105500, 8HI0862

The 1926 Platt Street Bridge over the Hillsborough River was designed by the Strauss Bascule Bridge Company of Chicago. The City of Tampa Engineer, R.D. Martin, prepared the specifications, and the bridge was constructed by Tibbets, Pleasant, Green and



Photo 5-78. Platt Street Bridge, Hillsborough County (No. 105500)

Beckman, general contractors of Oklahoma City. This firm also constructed the upriver Cass Street Bridge, almost identical in design, and these are likely their only structures in Florida. The Lakeside Bridge and Steel Company of Milwaukee fabricated the spans.

The original bridge structure, which extended 518 feet, consisted of 10 arched concrete tee-beam girder approach spans joined to a double-leaf Strauss trunnion bascule main span, 103 feet in length. In 1990, when the adjacent Tampa Convention Center was under construction, the railings on the south side and the bridge approach spans were removed. “Additionally, it appears that the easternmost 4 approach spans that were located over land are no longer extant or have been filled in so they are not readily visible.”¹³⁷ As a result, the bridge currently extends 336 feet, and is composed of eight spans. The main bascule span is 82.5 feet in length.



Photo 5-79. Detail of Eight-Point Star Railing Decoration.

A distinctive concrete railing featuring a geometric pattern that resembles an eight-point star (**Photo 5-80**) continues to the seawall and balustrade along Bayshore Boulevard, which intersects Platt Street near the west end of the bridge, and Tony Jannus Park, located on the northwest side of the bridge. The same design appears on the metal railing along the bascule span. The Bayshore Boulevard sidewalk continues as a pedestrian walkway under the western end of the bridge. The Mediterranean Revival style influences

found on the bridge reflect Florida's fascination with that architectural theme during the Land Boom period of the 1920s. The style is reflected in the two octagonally-shaped and stuccoed tender stations, which feature hipped roofs clad in metal shingles with highly ornate metal trim including projecting acanthus

¹³⁷ Janus Research, FMSF form for 8HI862 (update), September 27, 2004.