

How to Get the



Blog #111: Reframing History



Every city has historic images that capture your imagination, taking you back in time as they capture your eyes. As I drove past the Canal Street Bridge in Chicago, I had that sense of stepping back in time. Here was a bridge house perched upon a vertical-lift bridge. The metal bridge supports were worn with age. To the left and right of the bridge the structure rose 185 feet into the air. Above its right shoulder stood the city of the future – Chicago’s downtown skyscrapers. Towering giants rising to the sky, glass reflecting a shimmering day. The glimmering downtown cluster structure felt like a time-warp.

The Canal Street Bridge was a marvel in its day. Built in 1916 by Waddell & Harrington, the two 185 foot towers enabling the bridge house to rise 130 feet above the river. Railroad tracks across its base allowed 300 trains to cross daily and the bridge was raised 75 times a day to accommodate river traffic on the Chicago River.

From a photography point of view, the question of what to capture made for an interesting discussion. A close up of the bridge house told the story of a worn house from an earlier time. Pulling back enough to capture one of the mammoth support arms conveyed a historic engineering marvel, standing tall in the presence of modern architecture. Pulling back even further revealed the full bridge mechanism with the bridge house dwarfed by the 185 foot columns that elevated the bridge house skyward.



The Importance of Cropping -- Four Views of Chicago's Canal Street Bridge

TAKEAWAYS

1. How you see the image tells the story you choose to convey.
2. Take the time to back up and take in the full view, or to move in and see the story conveyed by the details. Capture both with your camera. You may be surprised when you edit the photos the details that might have gone unnoticed when you were photographing the scene.
3. If there are other images that can be included move around to see if you can "place" them by where you place the camera and the angles that bring secondary images into our attention.
4. Consider returning to the site to capture the same image at other times of day. Is there a schedule when the bridges are raised or lowered? Is there a dramatic sunrise or sunset on the horizon? Is there a time when a train could be going over the train tracks, adding another element of drama to the photograph?