

APPENDIX B

THE AMERICAN BRIDGE COMPANY OF 1870

This Chicago company was one of the largest of its period, comparable in size to Keystone Bridge Company and Clarke, Reeves and Company, both of which started about the same time. Its contracts ranged from Texas, through the Midwest, to New England, where a two-level railroad and highway bridge was built at Fall River, Massachusetts. In addition to the usual structures the company built the Point Bridge at Pittsburgh, an 800-foot suspension bridge supported by trussed eyebars, and part of the Ninth Avenue El in New York City.

It was organized in 1870 by Lucius B. Boomer with some of his former associates. Boomer had formed L.B. Boomer and Company in 1849 after coming to Chicago from Massachusetts. Two years later he was joined by his brother-in-law Andros B. Stone and they operated as Stone and Boomer. Stone's brother, Amasa Stone, Jr., was the brother-in-law of William Howe who had developed the widely used Howe truss, and both the Stones had built Howe's patented bridges in the Springfield, Massachusetts area as had Boomer. Stone and Boomer constructed the first railroad bridge across the Mississippi at Rock Island and built many others throughout the Midwest, some of them for Amasa Stone, Jr., who had moved to Cleveland and become a railroad contractor. After their shop was destroyed by fire in 1857, Stone moved to Cleveland, but Boomer stayed and operated the Boomer Bridge Works.

American Bridge's general agent was L.C. Boyington who had worked on the Rock Island bridge and had been Boomer's partner for a brief period. H.A. Rust, a former employee of Boomer and later a partner of Boyington, was vice president, and Moritz Lassig, also employed at Rock Island, was general superintendent. An 1875 advertisement showed several changes. Boyington no longer was listed. Boomer had retired and his former partner, A.B. Stone, was president although living in New York City. Lassig had left after one year to form his own company. Rust still was vice president and had added the duties of general superintendent. A new name was that of W.G. Coolidge, engineer and secretary. The plant had about three acres under roof on a thirty-two acre site and included besides the usual shops a foundry with a daily melting capacity of fifty tons. The equipment also included floating pile drivers and barges as the firm's contracts sometimes included the bridge foundations.

A railroad bridge across the Hudson at Poughkeepsie, New York had been discussed for years. The State finally approved the idea in 1871, but financial problems halted the first attempt after a contract had been signed with Keystone Bridge Company. In 1876 the promoting company received new proposals that included not only foundations and superstructure but also assistance in raising funds or accepting partial payment in stock. American Bridge received the contract and as part of the agreement A.B. Stone became head of the Poughkeepsie Bridge Company so that he was both customer and supplier. Even this arrangement did not save American Bridge. The cofferdam for pier #2 failed in 1877 and this, combined with troubles on other contracts and general business conditions, forced the company into liquidation the following year.

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Rust and Coolidge, formerly vice president and secretary, began operating the plant in 1878 and continued until Chicago Forge and Bolt Company leased it in 1885 and bought it soon afterwards. In both instances the new operators used their own names, and the American Bridge Company name disappeared after nine years. When that name reappeared it was borne by a completely new concern. In 1891 a new company, the American Bridge Works, was organized and leased the shop from Chicago Forge. They purchased it in 1895, and five years later sold the business to J.P. Morgan's just organized American Bridge Company.