

BY PAUL DORPAT



The spectacular 1932 dedication of the George Washington Memorial Bridge culminated with the opening of the span to the 20,000 people attending the ceremonies. This view looks north.

A Dedicated Span

ONE OF THE GREAT spectacles staged here occurred when the the George Washington Memorial Bridge was dedicated on the sunlit winter afternoon of Feb. 22, 1932, the 200th anniversary of our first president's birthday. The dedication is still remembered by many locals for what is shown here: a throng of 20,000 crowding what one speaker described as "another link in the Pacific Coast Highway, the concrete chain between Canada and Mexico."

The dedication program included a few surprises. There were, of course, bands, choruses, booming cannons, speakers and, as if on cue, a roaring crowd. That the day's final speaker was the state's governor, Roland H. Hartley, was doubly ironic. First, Hartley had never been an advocate of the bridge and had once described paved highways as "hard-surfaced joy rides."

The second irony occurred when the long-winded governor was interrupted midsentence by President Hoover. The interruption seemed fitting, since Hartley was then heralding George Washington's "avoidance of foreign entanglements," even though the new bridge was designed in part to promote better "entanglement" of Canada, Mexico and the U.S. Hoover was motivated not by political nicety, however, but by a strict schedule that called for him to dedicate the bridge at 2:57 p.m. — which is



When it was completed with six lanes, the bridge was considered the very emblem of super-highway modernity. In the 70 years since, the span has become known almost exclusively as the Aurora Bridge and often seems cramped.

exactly when he pressed a golden telegraph key in his White House office.

Almost instantly, field artillery on Queen Anne Hill roared, trumpets blared, the fireboat Alki in the canal directly below shot water high into the bridge arch, an oversized American flag unfurled at the south end of the bridge, and the governor regrouped to shout into his microphone, "The president has just pressed the key!" Then thousands rushed from both ends of the bridge to its center. P

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