



COURTESY OF WASHINGTON STATE ARCHIVE

THEN: After 20 years of debate about whether to build it and where and how, the first bridge across Lake Washington took 18 months and a few days from groundbreaking to accepting its first tolls from drivers happy for the shortcut.

A Bridge to Progress

IN THE TOUGH times of the late 1930s, 3,000 men got jobs building the Lacey V. Murrow bridge, aka the Lake Washington floating bridge. Federal money and tolls paid for the work. The bridge was formally dedicated and opened on a sunlit July 2, 1940.

About 2,000 people watched from the tunnel plaza area here on the bridge's Seattle side, and hundreds more gathered around the toll booths at the bridge's Mercer Island end to attend the christening, which was broadcast by radio nationwide. After cutting the red ribbon, Kate Stevens Bates, daughter of Washington Territory's first governor, Isaac Stevens, let swing and crash against the concrete bridge a yellow urn in which were mixed the waters of 58 of the state's waterways: lakes, bays and rivers.


With a smile about as wide as the grillwork of his inaugural chariot, a 1940 Lincoln convertible, Gov. Clarence Martin rode twice across the new bridge. He was the first to pay the toll.

We could compare the public effort required to build what was touted as "the largest floating structure in the world" with our recent struggle to replace the feeble Alaskan Way Viaduct with a deep-bore tunnel, except it would take too long. Instead, we suggest that readers consult Genevieve McCoy's fine chapter on the state's bridges, which is part of our book, "Building Washington." You can read it for free on the blog noted here below.



JEAN SHERRARD

NOW: For his repeat, Jean Sherrard got within a few feet of the original prospect (now hidden behind bushes) taken by a Port of Seattle photographer at the bridge's dedication.

One more toot: This "now-then" comparison is one of about 100 in an exhibit of "repeat photography" opening April 9 at the Museum of History & Industry. Most of the exhibit's Seattle examples were first published in this magazine. The exhibit — most likely the last one for MOHAI in its old Montlake quarters — also includes examples from Washington state and even from Paris. 

Check out Paul Dorpat and Jean Sherrard's blog at www.pauldorpat.com.

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