

## **Dan Lee**

**Former bridge worker and son of Warren Lee, Lake Champlain Bridge electrician from 1928 - 1983**

**Interviewed by Mountain Lake PBS on August 20, 2011**

“My father [Warren Lee] was associated with the bridge for longer than anybody else. He was there when the very first work was done because he did it. He ran the temporary electrical service, so the carpenters would have electricity to build barracks. Apparently some of the workers at that time would just stay right on the site. That was in February of [19]28. Apparently, according to his testimony, it was a fairly mild winter so they could get started early with the outside work. Alvin Bennett was the contractor, the electrical contractor, and for some reason he went bankrupt apparently and Dad just assumed his place with no fanfare, and from then on he was involved with all of the electrical work that was done through 1983. So he had a year or so off there with the, what was it, with the eye problems, and he also broke a hip in there in the '60's. But, out of those years, he was with the bridge for 52 of them.

As a student and later on as a teacher, I had school vacations so starting in '54 when I was 16 I went to work with him and worked most vacations for the next several years. That was 1954 and I was there most vacations through I don't know, around 1960 or 1961.

### **Maintaining the lights**

We did several types of things. He sometimes filled in potholes in the spring. I worked on that during Easter vacations once or twice. But mainly he did electrical maintenance and that involved replacing materials. The bridge system had a 2,300-volt electrical system lighting the streetlights and each light of course had a transformer; it wasn't 2,300 volts. So at each of these stations near the lights and also down in the approaches where the lights were, we would have to open the boxes and take the wires apart. We would take the wire apart between two boxes, find out if there was any dampness in it and we used a little electrical device that you cranked called a megger and it checked the ohms to see if there was any resistance from moisture mainly. If there was, we would pull the wire out and...the wire was in the sidewalks so we'd have to - - in small conduits so we would have to use the truck to pull these wires out. And Dad got the notion that when you pulled one out, you would probably want to tie one on and pull the new one in because it would have been a bear to do it from scratch. So he had worked that out many, many years ago. So we replaced a section here and there, which would be between two lights, two poles. So that was one of the things that we did.

We also dug out old fence posts and replaced them. I remember doing that on the Vermont site. Before my time, when these wires were taken apart and put back together, the splices were covered with lead. I never got to see this, but they called it wiping lead where the whole splice was just covered with a molten lead. You used those soldering irons I suppose and a stick of lead or...and repaired the old cable with that. That would be the buried cable. I never got to see that, I am sorry to say. That was old

school.

### **“a sweet old gal”**

Well, we were three children; two sisters and myself and we were, for one thing, we considered ourselves put through college mainly with money from the bridge. But at the kitchen table we spoke of it as the bridge, not the Crown Point Bridge or anything else, but *the bridge* and it was almost like saying our bridge because it truly was a member of our family. It was just something that was a part of all our lives.

I don't know if I should say this in public. I was very angry with the State of New York and I had several cogent reasons for being angry. One that they took the toll off so there was no longer any income coming in to do the maintenance with, and in regard to that same toll of course, that maintained many jobs. Not just the maintenance jobs but the regular jobs of the guys who came everyday to take care of the grounds and of course to take the toll. So it seemed to me that the bridge was self-sustaining and that New York in 1987 abandoned it. I'll never forgive them for that.

[on attending the bridge demolition?] I considered it. I don't care much for crowds, but it didn't matter that morning because it was the - - I don't know if you remember but it was snowing and rainy and you couldn't see it from Port Henry. I would have watched over here with the other people. I would've, wouldn't have even thought of this place [Iron Center]. But because it was so foggy, I was happy to watch on TV. I keep thinking of the Harry Potter movie where the old guy who was starting the races was going bang, one, two, three with the cannon because they got all set to wait two minutes and bang and then we waited two minutes. But yes, I watched it on television.

[on the need to demolish bridge] I think he [my Dad] would have been angry and I think in the same way that I am still angry. I don't know. I just believe it didn't have to be that way. We have Brooklyn Bridge is still up and that's been there since the 1880's or 1890's and all of those big New York bridges. They don't build bridges to die in 80 years, not if they know what they're doing. I think a lot of people took it for granted until it was gone of course and then they realized what a sweet old gal she was.

[on participating in public meetings] I simply popped into that one meeting, which was in recess so I took the material...if I remember right, it was a very warm day and there was a bunch of people in there elbow to elbow and I simply made sure I had all of the appropriate material and took it home and looked at it. I didn't participate, not at all in that sense.

[on the new bridge] I don't see how they could have really done it any better. I think that a more or less local person actually designed it I believe. So...and it resembles the old bridge just enough to please people I think. Not just me, but everybody seems pleased with it. It's a beauty.

[on doing this interview] I think the important thing was to get a little bit of record for

my father. That makes me happy.

I found one thing from having grown up with that, whenever I'm in New York or other places, I always try to get a look at the bridges either from one to the next went over like the Throgs Neck to the White Stone, etcetera, etcetera, and just admire them. I do love bridges."