

June Tur

Attended 1929 opening day ceremony

Interviewed by Mountain Lake PBS on August 22, 2011

Opening Day, 1929

"I remember I was staying with my aunt down on Convent Hill and my grandfather came down and two of my aunts, my grandfather, my uncle and myself. And my uncle rowed us over in the, we went over in the row boat. We walked down to the beach and we rowed across and I remember coming back after dark. I don't know what time it was but it was really dark and coming back at night, you know. And I remember my uncle saying that there used to be spiles down in the bay and he'd say, he kept saying something like wouldn't be awful if we ran into those. Of course, he was teasing me, but it upset me enough that my aunt finally said, you better stop because I was on the verge of tears. But I remember you know, it just seemed like a lot of excitement and I remember, I probably didn't realize what a Governor was but I remember them talking about the Governors meeting on the bridge and then we went inside one of the forts and that was a first time I ever seen a parade, I guess. And I remember the band with the bagpipers and the kilts and that really impressed me. And well of course, there were a lot of different bands and different things going on, you know. And as I say, I was only six so I hadn't been around too much or seen an awful lot, you know.

And I remember how excited I was when my mother came back a few days after to tell her about it, you know. Because it was something very different, you know. I remember after that going to the Labor Day parades in Port Henry, but I'm sure that was the first time I had ever really seen a parade and of course there were a lot of bands and a lot of music and...

I thought it was a lot at that time and I'm sure it was, you know, there were a lot of people for that time because I remember the forts being you know full and them stopping to talk to people that they [my relatives] knew and it just seemed to me that there were a lot of people. I have no idea, they probably have records of how many people were there, you know. Well it seemed like a lot of people to me. I don't think I'd had ever read how many people were there.

There were floats. What I remember mostly seems to be the bands and the music. It must have made quite an impression on me. And I remember there were floats, I don't remember what any of them were or anything, you know...just that they were colorful. And I knew there were a lot of important people there but that was from hearing my uncle and my aunts and them talking about it.

And that was something you didn't see a lot and I remember the car that the two Governors rode in, which I think they used to call touring cars and with the top down and these two very important men waving at people, you know.

I know we went over in the morning and we were there. We had taken our lunch and we ate lunch before, I think it was before any of the things started over there. We stayed down on the beach where he left the boat and had lunch first and then went up and walked around by the pavilions and things until things started happening.

Going over the bridge

I remember the first time, I may have been over it [the bridge] before, but the first time I remember going over, I was with one of my uncles and he stopped right out on the very top you know and well there was a sidewalk on one side at that time and we stood on the sidewalk and he pointed out Port Henry to me and going up toward Westport and different things and as a matter of fact, they lived on a farm south just going out of Port Henry to the south and he pointed out you know where they lived and the Morningside Farm and different things, you know that I knew.

I probably hadn't been on a bridge before that because you didn't go very far in those days. And my parents didn't have a car, a couple of my uncles did but once in a while you'd go someplace like that, but I don't....I'm sure that was the first bridge I'd ever been on and I probably hadn't been on another for until probably I was in my, a teenager. And I remember going up and going over the big bridge at Massena, going over into Canada. But we had relatives that lived up there and we had gone up to visit and went over into Canada. But for the most part, that was probably the only fairly good size bridge that I was on for many years.

Well, I think it was you know, very different. The fact that they built it there and that was a big deal and it was aesthetically pleasing to the eye really, very. And you know, as I said, my aunt lived down on Convent Hill and from her back porch you were looking right over straight at the bridge and I used to spend a lot of time there, you know. So I think the bridge was always there and you were aware that it was there all the time, you know. When we used to go over to the forts on picnics and stuff and go down to the Port Henry beach a lot and there you're looking right over at it all the time.

A place for families, swimming

But actually, I used to take my kids near the bridge over by the dock over there and we used to swim down, you know, it was down sort of to the left of the bridge as you went over. And that's where, well for one thing it was a good beach at that time and you didn't have to you know, they could walk out quite a while before they would come in up to their knees so it wasn't like you were afraid of them falling and being under the water or something.

That was always one of the places. Usually two or three times in the summer, relatives from away would come and we would have a family reunion or get-togethers over there and that was usually one of the places we went and you know,

my kids learned to swim over there, my grandchildren did. Not my great grandchildren because they don't live around here but the bridge is, was, as I say, with Anthony [great grandson] he was always saying that was his bridge and it still is but he'd always say to his, he has a younger sister, two younger sisters and when we'd be coming from New Hampshire or going them over, he'd say, you know, that's my bridge. And of course you know after a while it was just sort of a teasing thing. He knew better but I think for a while he really did think that was his bridge.

The first time I remember, I don't know, he must have been somewhere around two and probably the summer after he was two and we had gone to New Hampshire and we had brought him and his mother came back to stay for a week and he, you know, we were saying we were going to come to a big bridge and he was just so excited about it and then after that, that was always his bridge, you know. And as I said, I think he really thought it was for a while but he'd get very excited. Then when the ferries started and they were going to come, even at that point which was just a couple of years ago, he was kind of excited about coming on the ferry and seeing where the bridge was. But he was devastated when he knew they took the bridge down, you know that it wasn't going to be there anymore. Of course, now he's 14 and he's been here often enough that he's been seeing the bridge being built and when he was here last week, we went down to see the new span and he was talking to somebody down there. They were saying how they were going to take and thought they'd take it across on the two barges and stuff and we went down on the day they sank the barges and we were there part of the time. We went down several times last week but that's still his bridge.

A fixture of our lives

That was pretty devastating to most people around you know, when they thought that there might not be a bridge there anymore. Because for a while there, we weren't sure if they were going to build a new one and the old one was getting so bad that it was considered dangerous. But it really, not only made people wonder, you know, how will we get to Vermont, it was just a fixture of all of our lives around here. So people were really upset when they thought there really might not be one and very happy when they found out that they were going to build a new one. But the bridge does have, of course now, a lot of people go to Burlington and Middlebury for doctor's appointments and all kinds of things. Years ago, you used to go on the ferry. I can remember going over with my aunt on the ferry and going over to Burlington and they'd let you off and you'd spend the day and then you'd come back late in the afternoon. You'd get on the ferry, come back and go home again. But that's not something you could do just any time you decided you'd like to run to Burlington for something. I mean obviously there weren't as many cars as there are now. A lot of people didn't have cars but there was a lot of use of the bridge. It [the tolls] was a lot of money to a lot of people, you know. So you thought twice about even going over.

Well, you know, the old bridge was the first one there. And it had such an impact on our lives. But I remember as a little kid, hearing my aunt, when she first taught. She lived in Moriah. When she was 18, she went over to teach in Vermont and her father used to bring her down on the wagon and they had a small row boat and he would row her across to the other side and she would walk from there to where she boarded and where the school was. Then on Friday night he would go over and she would meet him over there and he'd bring her home. But I remember her telling me like in the wintertime when the ice was frozen, that he or someone would come across with a cutter and the horses and bring her back. Of course, when the lake wasn't frozen that was, she didn't come home a lot of time because she didn't know about getting over and then getting back and didn't know whether the lake would be open and if there would be ice or whatever.

So I think hearing stories like that, and we had a lot of people who had relatives in Vermont, and they talk about going over in the boat, you know, taking the row boat over and then rowing back. Then to have the bridge there made such an impact on people although as I said, probably a lot of them had trouble coming up with the money to go across and come back, especially during the Depression and money was pretty scarce and hard to come by. But it seemed as if it always had a really big impact on our lives, on the lives of most people in this area.

Bridge demolition

I didn't want to see that. I had thought about going, but I didn't. And I think a lot of people felt like I did too, you know. You kind of wanted to but then I just figured, I'd rather not see it fall. But I remember, my grandson Anthony, as I said, they live near Concord in New Hampshire and them seeing it on television and seeing pictures in the paper and then there was a picture of the area without the bridge there. That was devastating to him to think the bridge wasn't there. He was very happy when I told him that they were going to build a new bridge.

Aesthetically, it was really a beautiful bridge and when it was new, there weren't so many big bridges and you didn't have television. You didn't see pictures of things like that. So, it was unique really to this area and it figured very largely in people's lives.

I think, there's no question about that, it was a big loss and that was the topic of conversation you know, at that time when they were talking about, were they going to take it down? Were they going to just try and repair it? Then when we knew they were going to blow it up...that was *the* topic of conversation, probably in Vermont too, not just here.

Well, in a way, I know it [the new bridge] can't be the same, you know, and basically, it still has the arch and it's a much plainer design I think and I'm happy with it in generally, you know, and I think people think at least it's going to resemble the old one a little, so that makes them feel a little bit better about losing the old one.

Rite of passage

It was like a rite of passage I think for most boys, teenagers, young men in this area, you know that they would jump off the bridge. And I think when my brother did it, I think he was maybe 18 or so, and it seems to me he was working over there that summer. I'm not sure of that, but I remember him telling me that he jumped off and don't...I'll tell you something if you don't tell Ma and Dad and because, it was high and I know the water's deep under there but I would not have wanted to know he was going to do it ahead of time. And I never did tell them either but that was just something you know, and I know different times when they worked on the bridge in the summertime, that was one of the things that everybody had to jump off into the deep water underneath."