



Introduction

This book was commissioned by the Buffalo and Fort Erie Public Bridge Authority to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the opening of the Peace Bridge.

The bridge is a conduit, a link between people, communities, nations, a concrete and steel expression of humanity's wanderlust and desire for freedom from the constraints imposed by geography.

Every year, \$40 billion worth of trade crosses the Niagara River between Buffalo, New York, and Fort Erie, Ontario. Millions of vehicles carrying millions more people travel conveniently and safely.

The Peace Bridge evolved from a structure that simply allowed people to get "over there" into a key component of the national, regional and local social and economic infrastructure on both sides of the international border.

Histories of the bridge had been written, and they were to provide background, a context, to examine how the bridge affects the society it serves today.

However, accounts of the bridge's history included unsupported statements, ambiguities, errors and unanswered questions. It would not have been possible build upon a fractured foundation.

This book clarifies ambiguities, corrects errors and answers some questions. In one volume, it provides a glimpse into the lives of the key men responsible for bringing the Peace Bridge into existence. It tracks conflicts between communities and business interests as efforts progressed. It clarifies key events, such as the financing, the Depression-era transition from a private company to a public authority, and a further transition in which governments on both sides of the border became equally and directly represented.

There are recent milestones as well — the famous Battle of

the Barge incident, the discovery and documentation of relics from an ancient civilization that lived in the area, and the efforts to expand the bridge's capacity.

The primary source of information for this book was first-hand reports in Buffalo and Fort Erie newspapers written at the time. They are contained in microfilm and clipping files at the Buffalo and Erie County Public Library, the Fort Erie Public Library and the archives of the Peace Bridge Authority. Photographs and other artwork were culled from the Peace Bridge collection unless otherwise noted. The Fort Erie Museum was also a rich source of visual material.

The PBA deserves much credit for having collected and archived volumes of newspaper clippings and photographs over the 80 years of its existence. Not many businesses or agencies would spend the time or expend the resources to preserve their documented histories. Considering that there were as many as four daily newspapers publishing concurrently in Buffalo, the prospect of plowing through 80 years worth of material was daunting.

The material presented is a matter of public record and available at libraries. Access to internal documents was not sought.

Acknowledgments are due to the staff of the Grosvenor Room of the Buffalo and Erie County Public Library for their kind assistance and insight, the staff of the Fort Erie Museum, and Niagara College student Matt Day for his research assistance. Thanks are due, as well, to Peace Bridge employees for their insights, enthusiasm and transportation across the bridge.

Source material has been handed over to the Fort Erie Museum for inclusion in its local history archives.

Mike Cloutier
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