



Friends Of The South End

Neighborhood Association Newsletter

Autumn 2009

The Memorial Bridge - Connecting the Portsmouth and Kittery Communities for 86 Years

By Cara Waters

The Memorial Bridge spanning the Piscataqua River between Portsmouth, New Hampshire and Kittery, Maine, opened on August 17, 1923. The Portsmouth Herald account of the opening read: "Just as the clock struck 12 the draw was dropped by Mr. Stack, the man in charge for the American Bridge Company and the gates opened to allow the governors of the two states and other officials to pass through." They met in the middle of the bridge and Helen Dondero, a five-year-old, cut the pink ribbon. The draw was raised and lowered for photos. At 12:15 the gates opened to the public, and 1,000 boys from Portsmouth ran across to the Kittery side; autos and boats honked horns and whistles and sirens sounded off. Cars were lined up over 2 miles on the Maine side waiting to cross. US Navy officials were also on hand. In the first week 152,495 passengers and 46,450 cars crossed the bridge from almost every state in the nation and some Canadian provinces as well.



photo by Jan Marx

Now, 86 years later, the bridge has been placed on the National Trust for Historic Preservation's list of one of America's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places, and the future of the deteriorating bridge remains unknown.

Building the Bridge

Discussions to build the Memorial Bridge as a replacement for the pre-existing toll bridge began back in 1917. At the time passenger cars were being charged 15 cents per car. The new bridge was to be a "free" bridge, and has been for most of its history; but a local Portsmouth resident says they remember a time in the 1940's and 1950's when a 10 cent per car toll was in effect. Original plans included a provision to lay street railway tracks to connect Portsmouth Electric with Portsmouth, Dover & York St. (PD&Y) Railway. However, when PD&Y was abandoned in March 1923, and with the motorization of Portsmouth Electric's route two years later, the electric streetcar rail system across the bridge was never implemented.

Construction of the bridge's piers began in 1921, led by the Holbrook, Cabot and Rollins Company. The south pier was formed with 600 cubic yards of concrete set 17-18' below the river bottom in bedrock. The other concrete piers are 90 ft. or more high and required granite blocking on the bottom. Steelwork for the bridge's three spans were manufactured and assembled elsewhere by the American Bridge Co., then shipped here by railroad and put into place by barges on the river.

The port of Portsmouth was closed for 15 days from Dec. 19 – Jan. 1 for the first time in decades, while the central draw was being placed. A local paper described the installation on December 20, 1922:

"The draw-span, last of the Memorial bridge connecting Portsmouth and Kittery, left the docks where it was constructed at 1:20 o'clock this afternoon and a half hour afterwards was in place...During the morning, at low tide, the barges Ross R. and Laura R., were eased under the span and the supports and uprights placed. A crew went to work immediately to secure the barges against possible mishap and by 11.30 o'clock, the span was floating free of its previous support."

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Friends of the South End Neighborhood Association

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FOSE Membership Renewal 2009

Membership Renewal Letters were mailed on July 1st to all **current** members.

Second Notices were sent out on Sept. 1. Our thanks go to all those who have paid.

If you know any potential **new** members, please share this newsletter with them and encourage them to email us at fose.messages@gmail.com.

The Memorial Bridge, cont. from page 1

The first vessel to pass through the bridge after the port reopened was the Steamship NJ Tracy of New York with 4500 tons of soft coal for the Consolidation Coal Co. on January 15, 1923. The first time the tugs went out to bring her in to the bridge, no one was there to open the draw, so the ship had to return to its anchorage. Later in the evening they went to get her again and the bridge draw was opened.

Homeowners Displaced for Bridge Approaches

In the Spring of 1922 the Shattuck Construction Company began building the bridge approach on the Portsmouth side. Land on either shore of the bridge, in both Kittery and Portsmouth, was appropriated by the government to make way for the bridge approaches and small park areas. Settlements were made with the owners of the land and buildings. Some homeowners of wooden homes were paid for the land only and were able to keep their houses and move them to another location. The brick buildings were demolished for wood and brick materials. The towns auctioned off the other remaining structures.

In the summer they began filling the approach site with gravel using horse-drawn carts, but progress was too slow, so they soon replaced them with auto trucks. The Portsmouth approach was completed first, as was the topping of the bridge surface on the New Hampshire side up to Badger's Island. Maine residents were disgruntled with the slow progress on their side of the bridge and delays on the Maine side with both the approach and bridge finishing construction postponed the opening of the bridge to traffic from the originally scheduled Memorial Day weekend, to August of 1923.

Memorial Bridge Dedicated to World War Veterans

A special committee was formed to select the New Hampshire bridge-side memorial. In May of 1923 they, "...definitely decided that they will have a bronze tablet on the top of the entrance span on this side which will give its name and the fact that it is a memorial to the World War Veterans." They also had plans for a tablet naming all of those lost in the World War but hadn't yet decided on a location. Governor Baxter in Maine also declared their state's intent in dedicating a plaque on their side to World War soldiers and sailors. This dedication was not without controversy, however, as patriots from both the Civil War and Spanish-American War requested that a memorial be erected in their honor as well. While the plaques on the bridge entrances were dedicated to World War veterans in the end, the list of names of those who perished in the World War, in addition to memorials to vets of the Spanish-American and Civil Wars, amongst others, now reside in Goodwin Park on Islington Street in Portsmouth.

The Bridge's Future

While state governments on both sides have agreed that the bridge has badly deteriorated and is in need of major repair, or face closure, finding a balance between preserving the historic aspects of the bridge and the cost-effectiveness of doing so has been a major point of contention between the two states. Now a second comprehensive study is underway which is evaluating all three bridges between Maine and New Hampshire - Highway 95, Sarah Mildred Long Bridge and the Memorial

Fairy House Tour 2009

By Jenny Marshall

The Fairy House Tour committee and FOSE did it again – they brought thousands of people to the South End, raised thousands of dollars for good causes, and created one of the most genuinely *happy* weekends of the year. For two glorious days in mid-September the sun shone, the bubbles flew, and fairies were to be seen in every direction – children dressed in fairy wings, the occasional adult in full fairy costume, the sparkling “crossing fairy” on Mechanic Street. But the greatest miracle of all, fairy houses of every conceivable shape and size, had sprung up overnight beneath trees, in branches, beside flower beds, nestling in low shrubberies.

As ever, the fairy houses ranged from small to large, simple to intricate, and their creators came from near and far – delightful little houses designed and built by students from Little Harbour Elementary school adorned the Victory Garden and Wentworth Gardner House; community members and local artists had built fantastic structures through Prescott Park, none more extraordinary than the wonderfully intricate multi-roomed palace by Joi Smith of Ambrosia Gardens that attracted steady crowds to the tree at the mainland end of the Peirce Island bridge; Tracy Kane’s incredible creations in the orchard were simply exquisite, and the entrance to the Festival of Trees was marked by the magical Christmas Tree house, which truly lived up to its name. But of all the creations large and small, my special favorite was found halfway down the rose walk at the Governor John Langdon House – a small and simple creation of shells and seaglass built by “Emily” from Nature’s Wonders.

Although Business Sponsorships were slightly down – unsurprising in the current economic climate – ticket sales were actually up, which is a huge accolade for the event. Over the two days almost \$27,000 were raised, which will be divided amongst local non-profits and projects – a full list will appear in the next FOSE newsletter.

Last but not least praise and thanks go to the Fairy House Tour committee, all the volunteers who made the two days possible, and especially to Hilary O’Neil who, yet again, dedicated apparently endless hours and boundless energy, and without whom none of it would have happened.



Photo by Barry Kane



Photo by Barry Kane



Photo by Barry Kane

Bricks and Mortar Update *By Tom Hindle*



Photo by Jan Marx

Mother Nature is well on her way painting our leaves the orange, red and yellow that we all love at this time of year. I hope summer provided you with lots of good times and memories. As you might recall, we spent much of June and most of July underwater. This proved to be a formidable challenge for the road works which were scheduled for our “construction season”.

Construction:

A big round of both applause and thanks should be extended to Tom Richter, Engineering Technician at Portsmouth’s Public Works Department; Jim Tow and his able crew from Gove Construction; as well as the team of brick layers from Salmon Falls Nursery; and the crew from Tri-State Curbsetters. I’m sure that everyone has had an opportunity to see the fantastic job that these teams accomplished on Gates, Hancock, Howard and Washington streets since the last newsletter. For those of us who live in the immediate area, all of the noise, dust and access issues have certainly been well worth any inconveniences that we had to endure. Hopefully, we’ll see the whole of the South End addressed sooner than later.

Planning is underway to rebuild and improve the South Mill Street Sea Wall (Project #14). The budget for this work is \$150,000 and it has an estimated completion time of 60 days. The plan will include the installation of a concrete wall, which will be faced with the existing granite blocks along with some blocks that were recovered during the Newcastle Avenue project. Although the City had hoped to start this project during this past summer, it is unlikely that the project will be initiated until the Spring and work will continue through Fall of 2010 window to do permitting approvals.

Parking:

A motion was initially approved by City Council to delineate “No Parking” on Washington Street between Hancock and Howard Streets on October the 5th. There will be two more opportunities for individuals to weigh in on this proposal prior to it being approved and put into effect. The street is very narrow through this stretch which became even more apparent during the recent road works.

Land Use:

The Mark Wentworth Home has sold four lots of property at public auction this August. The two corner lots on pleasant and Howard along with lots on Wentworth and Melcher Streets fetched a total of \$1.5 million dollars.

Renovations Underway at South Meeting House *By Dave Anderson*

Along with the first cool nights and other early signs of autumn, September ushered in the long-awaited start of renovations to the South Meeting House. This first set of renovations is focusing exclusively on the exterior of the building. In mid-September, the City’s contractors began work on replacing the slate roof and also weather proofing and repairing the bell tower. By late September, the City completed stripping of the old slate roof and installed a weather proof membrane to protect the building during repairs. The City at this point anticipated that it would take approximately two weeks to install the new slate roof. In the course of repair work on the bell tower, the City discovered that the bell tower corner posts required replacement. Accordingly, work in early October was expected to involve a crane to remove the posts and stabilize the structure during repairs. The City was confident that the clock faces would not be affected by this work.

After structural repairs and the new roof are completed, the City is planning on repairing the trim and siding on the building and then painting the entire exterior. This second phase of the project was expected to take approximately three weeks, with a late October/early November completion date anticipated.

The Friends of the South End wish to thank the City Council for appropriating the funds to complete this exterior restoration work. We also wish to thank John Bohenko, Nancy Carmer and Dan Hartrey for their work in keeping the restoration on track. FOSE also thanks the neighbors who have had to change their parking routines to accommodate the work.

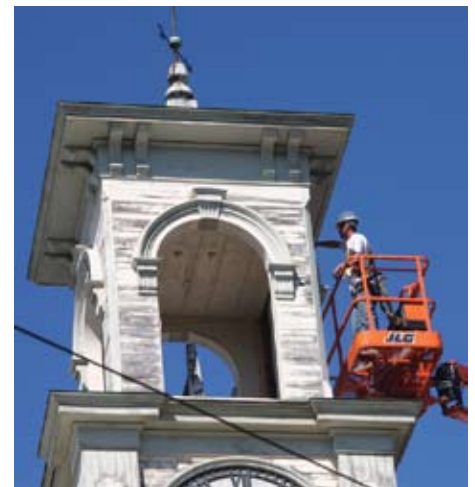


Photo by Lockwood Barr

*Memorial Bridge,
cont. from page 2*

Bridge. This study is due to be completed in June 2010. In the meantime, area residents determined to preserve this skyline landmark between our two towns, continue to promote preservation over replacement. In May of this year over 250 people joined in a 'Save Our Bridges' walk from Portsmouth to Kittery in a rally for bridge support. It is hoped that with the bridge's designation as an endangered historic place and continued public support, combined with potential funding from federal sources, that this historic Memorial Bridge will be saved and continue to stand tall at the entryway to our harbor in honor of our World War veterans and as the connecting link between our two Piscataqua shore communities.

Resources

Portsmouth Herald and other local newspaper articles, Portsmouth Athenaeum collection.



Photo courtesy of Portsmouth Athenaeum

Friends of the South End
Neighborhood Association
presents

Candidates' Night

A moderated forum for City Council candidates

Portsmouth Public Library
Tuesday, October 27, 2009, 7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m
Refreshments available beginning at 6:30 p.m

Candidates have been asked to submit a short, written description of their goals and priorities and copies of the candidates' written responses will be available that night. In addition, residents who attend will be encouraged to submit questions to the candidates on 3x5 cards. We hope to host a lively, informative and entertaining discussion of the issues facing our city and we look forward to seeing you there!

Looking Forward to the 2010 Social Season: FOSE Annual Meeting Scheduled for January 17

The 2010 season will kick off with our Annual Meeting on Sunday, January 17 at 4 pm at the Tyco Center, Strawberry Banke. The meeting will include reports from FOSE officers; refreshments will be served.

Looking forward to the year ahead, our Social Events Coordinator is busy lining up the schedule of events for the season. On the roster is the annual fundraiser at Flatbread Pizza. And, when warm weather returns (and it will!) South Enders will again dine on the deck at Geno's to enjoy a delicious evening with friends and raise funds for the South End.

A special event this year is a gala theater night for FOSE members at Players' Ring. Date and details will be announced in a FOSE Alert.

We will continue to support our regular FOSE events – Clean-Up Day when spring returns; National Night Out on a summer eve; and the Fairy House Tour when autumn is again in the air. If you have any suggestions for a FOSE membership event, please contact us at fose.messages@gmail.com

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Photo by Lee-Ann McQuilken

When you visit Prescott Park, enjoy "Reflection" by South End artist Linda McVay