

Michigan Every Day

By Patrick Sullivan and Carole Eberly

Nov. 11, 1929
Opening of Ambassador Bridge

For decades, steamship owners were able to block attempts to build a bridge across the Detroit River. They argued that a bridge would be a hazard to navigation. It also happened that a bridge threatened their hold on commerce crossing between Detroit and Windsor. In the boom times of the 1920s, however, it was clear that the river needed to be crossed by something other than ferries. Two projects emerged – the Ambassador Bridge and the Detroit Windsor Tunnel – and they raced to become the first to cross over or under the river. Despite a flaw in the steel wires of the bridge that caused a delay, the bridge opened nine months ahead of schedule and a year before the tunnel. On the day the bridge opened, Nov. 11, 1929, it caused excitement on both sides of the river. Approximately 60,000 people showed up to mark the opening of the bridge, which was dedicated by Governor Fred W. Green.

The stock market had crashed just a couple of weeks earlier, sending a panic and a dark cloud over the nation but the people of Detroit and Windsor were ready to celebrate when the bridge opened. At the time, it was the longest suspension span in the world. The man who put together the private deal to build the bridge, Joseph Bower, rejected two names for the bridge (the Detroit River Bridge or the Bower Bridge) in favor of the Ambassador Bridge, a name that symbolized the friendship between the two nations the span connected.