

San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge

Few structures in the United States so represent the personal of America as San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge. For millions of immigrants, it has been the western gateway into to America; for hundreds of thousands of sailors, it has meant home port; for countless tourists it has always been a major attraction.

The concept of bridging the vast Golden Gate Strait was proposed as early as 1872, bit it wasn't revived until 1916. It was then that San Francisco newspaper editor James Wilkins began an editorial campaign for such a bridge. And so it was that Joseph Strauss, a designer of nearly 400 spans, submitted his plans and a cost estimate of \$27 million to San Francisco city engineer Michael O'Shaughnessy. Strauss then embarked on a personal crusade to organize the political, financial, and promotional efforts to actually build it.

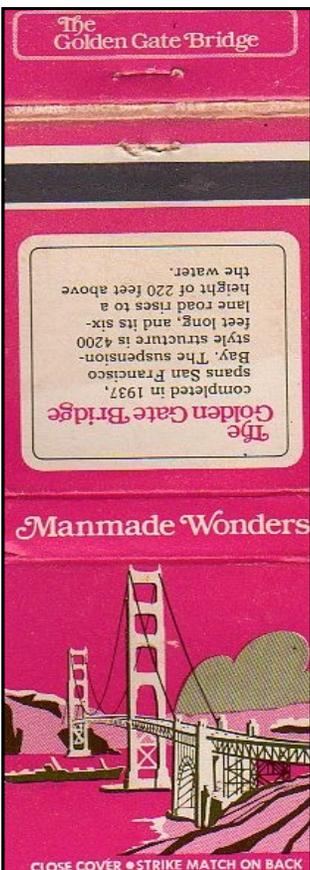
It wasn't easy. There was strong opposition from well-finances special interest groups, especially the ferry companies. There was also no federal or state funding available, since those funds had already been allocated to the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge, which was being promoted at the same time. Still, the efforts of the bridge proponents went forward.

In the spring of 1924, with the preliminary leg work completed, Marin and San Francisco counties made a joint application for a bridge-building permit to, oddly enough, the War Department. The War Department had final say over any harbor construction which might affect shipping traffic or military logistics. A provisional permit was granted in December of the same year.

Four years later, almost to the day, the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District was formed. It held its first meeting on January 23, 1929. Strauss was appointed the Chief Engineer, and the War Department issued its final permit in August, 1930, for a 4200-foot main span with a clearance of 220 feet at mid-span. A \$35 million bond issue was passed by an almost 4-1 margin in November. Construction began on January 5, 1933.

Strauss insisted on the most rigorous safety precautions in the history of bridge building. Protective headgear, a prototype of the hard hat, was worn for the first time ever, along with glare-free goggles. Special hand and face cream protected against the wind, while special diets helped fight dizziness. The most conspicuous precaution was the safety net, suspended under the floor of the bridge from end to end. During construction, it saved the lives of nineteen men...who became known as the "Half-Way-to-Hell Club." Until February, 1937, there had been only one fatality, setting a new all-time record in an industry which was renown for its construction deaths. On February 17, however, ten men were killed when a section of scaffold fell through the safety net.

The Golden Gate was completed and opened to pedestrian traffic on May 27, 1937. It opened to cars the following day. The last of the construction bonds were retired in 1971, with \$35 million in principal and nearly \$39 million in interest being financed entirely from bridge tolls.



Bridge tolls

March, 1937.....	50 cents
July, 1950.....	40 cents
Feb., 1955.....	30 cents
Oct., 1955.....	25 cents
Oct., 1968.....	50cents
March, 1974.....	75 cents
Nov., 1977.....	\$1.00
March, 1981.....	\$1.25
Jan., 1989.....	\$2.00
July, 1991.....	\$3.00
March 2013.....	\$6.00