A T A L E O F T H R E E B R I D G E S

1940

“Galloping Gertie” The First Narrows Bridge
It’s been more than six decades since the first Narrows Bridge opened to traffic and then, four months later, collapsed violently into Puget Sound. Come summer 2005, the bridge that now lies as wreckage on the Narrows seabed will commemorate its 65th anniversary.

When it opened July 1, 1940, the elegant and graceful span stretched like a steel ribbon across Puget Sound. It boasted the distinction of being the world’s third largest suspension bridge. Its completion marked a turning point in the history of Peninsula residents by ending decades of isolation and fueling economic growth.

Around the world, people know the tale of Galloping Gertie. It stood for four short months, its deck flexing and rolling before tearing apart in a windstorm.

“A Tale of Two Bridges”
Paraphrased from the Gig Harbor Museum’s exhibit, About the Content:

Temporarily catwalks were placed on site and affixed to an anchorage built on land at each end. Two suspension cables were spun from wire spools. The wire was unreeled to build the towers. It advanced upward as workers completed four lanes of traffic instead of two.

Standing like sentries in the Narrows was the First Narrows Bridge and Lady Gertie. The Narrows and Lady Gertie.

1950

“Sturdy Gertie” The Second Narrows Bridge
At one mile in length, the existing 1950 bridge is the fifth longest in the United States and represents the best of suspension bridge design, stability and engineering.

Following Gertie’s demise, World War II delayed construction of Tacoma Narrows Bridge II for a full eight years. Shortages of steel and wire made such materials valuable commodities. Washington sold bridge steel as surplus, and the remains of the 1940 bridge cables and span were scrapped.

The state financed the second bridge through a $34,000,000 bond issue. When the bridge opened in 1950, tolls were almost the same as for Gertie. The bridge remained a toll facility until the bonds were retired in May 2005, thirteen years ahead of schedule.

2007

The New Tacoma Narrows Bridge
NEW PARALLEL BRIDGE COMPLETED BY 2007
520 BRIDGE (RENTAL) COMPLETED BY 2008

In September 2002, the Washington State Department of Transportation began constructing Tacoma Narrows Bridge III. Two years later, the project was nearly half complete.

By September 2004, bridge builder Tacoma Narrows Constructors had finished the two bridge caissons, at tower foundations, in the water. On land, they were paving new roadways, building the east and west anchorages and numerous retaining walls, and installing drainage facilities. They had completed two half-diamond interchanges and a highway underpass, and had started building the toll facility. Along the way, the project remained right on schedule.

Tacoma Narrows Bridge III is the largest suspension bridge built in the United States since 1964. Its foundations stand a mere 60 feet south of the current bridge’s foundations. This $468 million project will also improve 2.4 miles of State Route 16, and will renovate the existing bridge with seismic upgrades and a new deck.

“Toll Bridge Authority. The final construction cost estimate, $1.19 billion, was one-third more than the $11.2 million estimated by the Washington State Department of Transportation. Opening day celebrations capped the long process to build the new bridge.

Spring 2003

Summer 2003

Fall 2003

Fall 2004

Spring 2005

Summertime scenes on the Narrows caisson.