



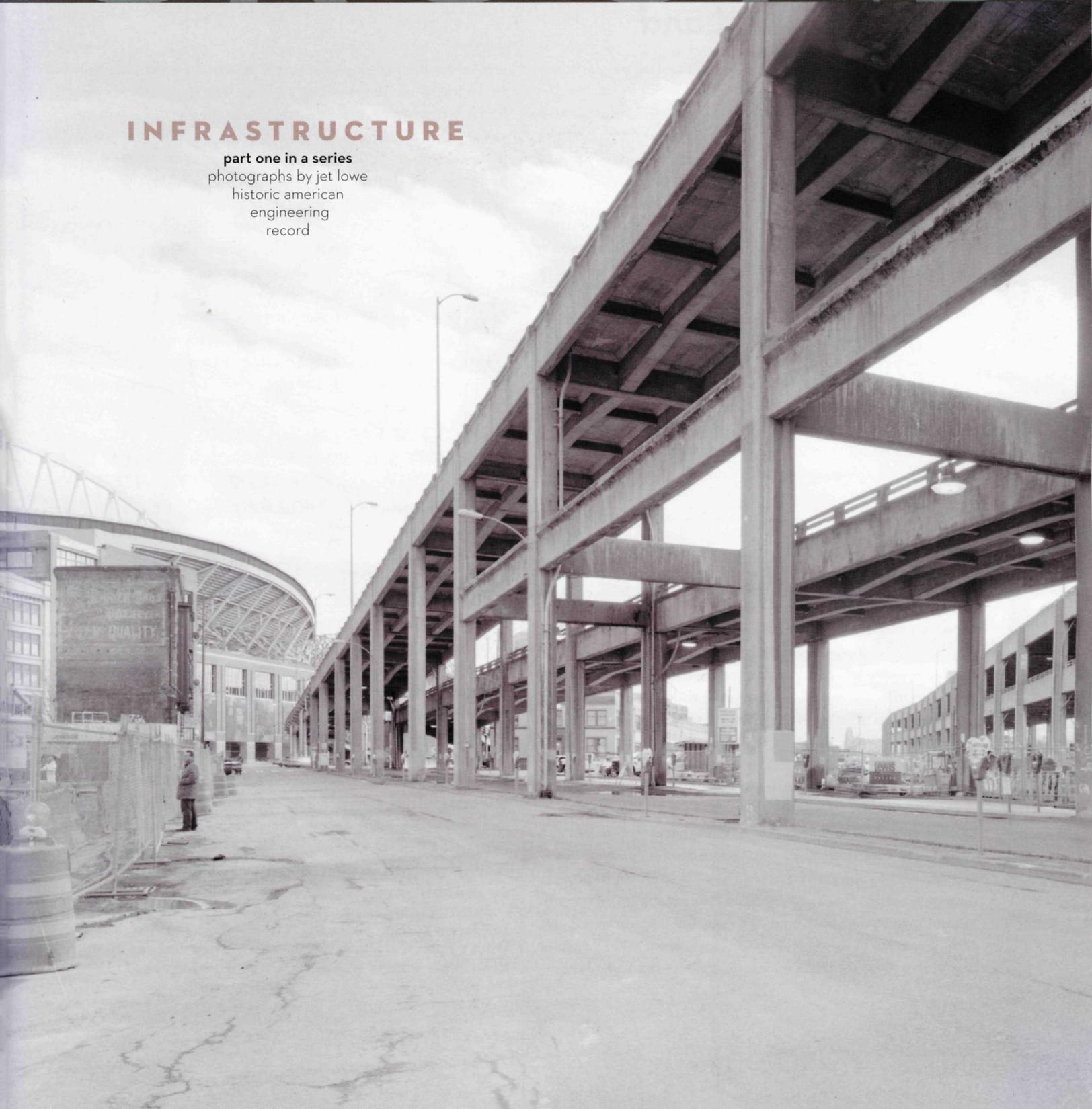
COMMON

PRESERVING OUR NATION'S HERITAGE WINTER 2010

GROUND

INFRASTRUCTURE

part one in a series
photographs by jet lowe
historic american
engineering
record



FIRST WORD

BY JON JARVIS

Lightly on the Land

TAKEN BY THE SIGHTS BEFORE THEM, visitors to the national parks are often unaware of how they arrived. Most do not know that the road to the canyon, the overlook, or the battlefield is as much a product of preservation as the park itself. Roads play a primary role in the national park experience. They lead visitors through America's most treasured landscapes, along choreographed routes of scenic beauty and historic interest. Many are masterworks in their own right. Today, subjected to extremes of weather and geography, they face unusual challenges. **FROM ITS FOUNDING IN 1916**, the National Park Service has understood that the great park experiment hinges on balancing preservation and access. Determining the best approach to caring for our roads can often be difficult. On one hand, there is a desire to adopt modern safety and engineering standards, which did not exist when the roadways were built. On the other is the fact that the roads themselves are historic, meaning we must retain their character. **FLEXIBILITY IS ESSENTIAL IN PRESERVING** cultural artifacts that serve a practical function. With roads, the measures range from general guidance to site-specific approaches, to what is sometimes the boldest idea of all: leaving things largely as they are, even if it means reducing or otherwise managing the traffic. **IN THE 1920S, EMBRACING THE AUTOMOBILE AS A WAY TO** introduce the public to its parks, the National Park Service joined forces with the U. S. Bureau of Public Roads. The design expertise of one agency served as the perfect complement to the technical prowess of the other. Together, they started a road network that not only recedes into the landscape, but presents it to the viewer—celebrating it, accentuating it, putting it on display. These roads lie lightly on the land, camouflaged by natural materials and meticulously chosen routes. Turns, ascents, and overlooks were carefully situated to maximize the visual power of a park's most remarkable qualities. **IT WAS THE GOLDEN AGE OF PARK ROADS.** Places like Glacier National Park's Going-to-the-Sun Road, threading its way over the alpine heights of the Continental Divide; the Zion-Mt. Carmel Tunnel, whose passage through rock is punctuated with galleries that gather in light and air; and the Blue Ridge Parkway, whose discrete passage offers endless vistas of the eastern woodlands. These creations possess their own distinct aesthetic, designed for maximum effect with minimum intrusion, with stunning turnouts at scenic overlooks, sinuous curves to accommodate the topography, and a restraint that makes them seem like nature itself. More than a few are es-

teemed for their engineering alone. **TODAY, THESE ROADS ARE SHOWING THE EFFECTS OF AGE**, the elements, and use. The National Park Service, by virtue of its experience, has a reputation as a leader in their stewardship, and now evidences the same innovation that was key in their creation. A years-long project to rehabilitate Going-to-the-Sun Road, largely finished, recalls the heroic scale of the original construction amidst the rugged terrain. Reinforced guard walls were faced with native stone, just one of many similar improvements that honor the road's iconic presence. The job of reconstructing historic masonry shows how much—or little—these roads can be altered without compromising their character. The park also instituted limits on the size of vehicles. Much of this work has been with the assistance of the Federal Highway Administration, descendant of the public roads bureau, whose expertise is critical to the collaboration. **IN THIS ISSUE OF COMMON GROUND**, readers will find a story on the Blue Ridge Parkway, a perfect example of a park road crafted as a piece of natural theater. They will also find the story of a very different kind of road—Seattle's Alaskan Way Viaduct, an urban freeway—and the very different concerns that attended the growth of our interstate system. Both articles are instructive in their own way of the challenges we face in preserving the heritage of our nation. **PARK ROADS, UNDERTAKEN AS ACTS OF REVERENCE** for their surroundings, are a powerful experience in themselves when one ponders the care and the artistry that went into their construction. This is what Ken Burns discovered when filming *The National Parks: America's Best Idea*. After pulling off the road to scout for the best shot, he and his crew often found themselves back where they started—at the turnoff. Here, the view was unparalleled, though not by coincidence. Seemingly random and rustic, park roads were designed for impact, while giving the impression that they were not designed at all. That is the magic Burns discovered, and what the National Park Service preserves for all Americans.

THE JOB OF RECONSTRUCTING HISTORIC MASONRY SHOWS HOW MUCH—OR LITTLE—THESE ROADS CAN BE ALTERED WITHOUT COMPROMISING THEIR CHARACTER.

Jon Jarvis is Director of the National Park Service. Adapted from a speech given at the Biennial Preserving the Historic Road Conference in Washington, DC, September 2010.



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Above: The Blue Ridge Parkway, lying lightly on the land at Belcher's Curve. *Front:* Seattle's Alaskan Way Viaduct. *Back:* The city of the future at the 1939 New York World's Fair.

WINTER **2010**

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Artifacts of Survival

Web Exhibit Spotlights Objects of Perseverance at Manzanar National Historic Site

“A very happy place and a pleasant place . . .” is how one early resident recalled Manzanar, a tiny town in California’s remote Owens Valley that once promised “fortunes in apples.” Today it is infamously known as the site of the Manzanar War Relocation Center—where over 10,000 Japanese Americans were confined during World War II.

A new web exhibit brings to light Manzanar’s entire history—from its earliest days as the tribal land of the Paiute to its current role as a place of remembrance—through historical images, oral histories, a virtual tour, and more than 200 objects, most of them never seen before by the public. The exhibit, co-produced with the National Park Service Museum Management Program, “is really a great way for people to view what we have,” says Alisa Lynch, chief of interpretation at Manzanar National Historic Site, noting its shortage of space. The occupation of the area, shadowed by the Sierra Nevada and Inyo Moun-



Many photos show smiling, seemingly happy people—a contrast to the five-strand barbed wire fences and eight watchtowers, occupied by gun-wielding military police.

tains, dates back more than 1,500 years before Europeans arrived, when the nomadic Paiute roamed its snow-fed Sierra waterways, which they tapped with their ingenious irrigation systems. In the 1860s, the Paiute way of life was nearly destroyed when they were herded out by farmers and ranchers who followed prospectors flooding the area in search of silver and gold. In 1863, more than 1,000 Paiute were sent off to Fort Tejon, 175 miles away. Eventually, some did return and, as the exhibit notes, “by 1866 they were indispensable to the Owens Valley agricultural economy.” Many worked for homesteader John Shepherd, who, by the late 1880s, owned 1,300 acres.

Mining petered out by the 1880s, but agriculture thrived with the expansion of the railroad. In 1905, a decision was made to pipe water from the valley to Los Angeles, via a 230-mile-long aqueduct. Developer George Chaffey turned Shepherd’s ranch into an orchard for apples, peaches, pears, prunes, and grapes. Several dozen families, lured by the agricultural dream, moved to the newly named Manzanar—Spanish for “apple orchard.”

ABOVE: *Girls against tarpaper from Ansel Adams’ portfolio of the camp.*
RIGHT: *Illustration with poem on the beauty of the snowcapped Sierras.*

contact points web NPS Online Exhibit and Teaching with Museum Collections Lesson Plan www.nps.gov/history/museum/exhibits/manz/index.html
Manzanar National Historic Site www.nps.gov/manz/index.htm

L.A.’s thirst led to more land purchases and Chaffey sold his orchard to the city in 1924. Slowly, Manzanar was abandoned, until March 1942. From the time the bombs fell on Pearl Harbor, it took just 10 weeks for President Roosevelt to sign Executive Order 9066—the authorization to shuttle 110,000 Japanese to detention centers. Over 60 percent were American born. In the West, racism had been rampant for years, evidenced by a historic sign in the exhibit: “Jap Hunting License. Open Season. No Limit.” Pearl Harbor was just the spark that started the fire.

The relocation was managed by the War Relocation Authority, created in March 1942. Director Milton S. Eisenhower (brother of the future president) rightly predicted that someday America would “regret the unavoidable injustices that we may have done.” First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt opposed the camps, but couldn’t change her husband’s mind.

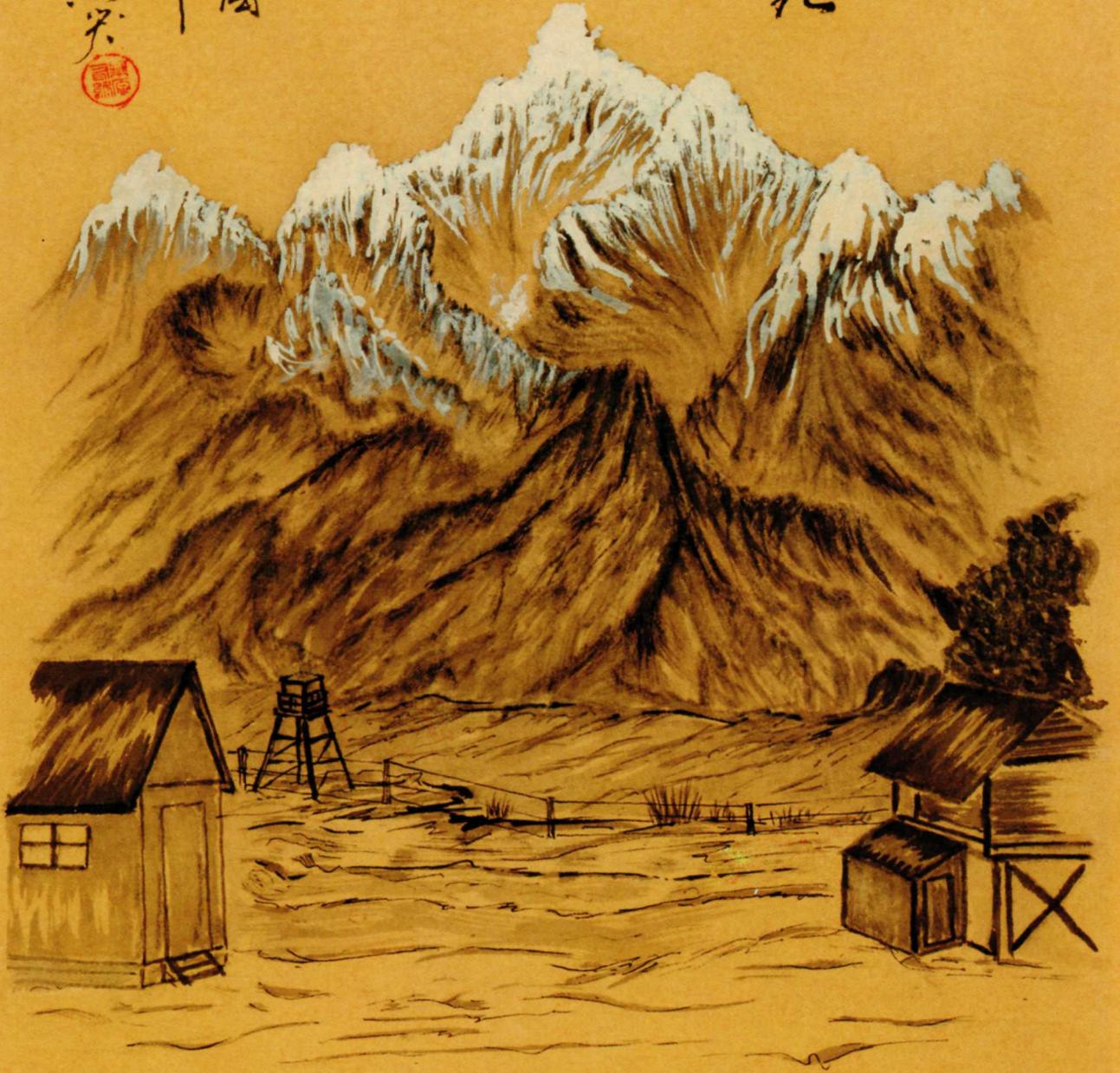
Manzanar was the first of 10, built mostly in remote “sand-and-cactus” areas. Internees lived in 36 residential blocks—each containing tarpaper barracks, mess hall, laundry room, recreation hall, ironing room, and heating-oil storage tank—and did construction on many buildings added later. Families lived in 20-foot by 25-foot rooms with only temporary partitions. The bathrooms had no partitions at all. There was virtually no privacy anywhere, “one of the hardest things to endure,” according to former internee Rosie Kakuuchi. With

山岳香墨圍死在
混沌世俗去怨々
名香體々埋山頂
雲峯出思走鄉關

西曆九百四十年三月廿五日於東京

松梅生記收容所

木真庵題





its ferocious sand storms, freezing winters, and summer temperatures upwards of 110 degrees, Owens Valley has never been an easy place to live, but emotionally it must have been a shock. “The first morning in Manzanar when I woke up and saw what Manzanar looked like, I just cried,” recalled internee Haruko Niwa.

If one thing is evident in the exhibit, it is that sadness did not stop internees from continuing with life. Manzanar soon became a small city where internees earned \$12 to \$19 a month in jobs ranging from police officers and doctors to farmers and gardeners. Kids went to school, and there were sports and games, especially the national pastime, baseball. Some of the most impressive exhibit objects are the exquisitely detailed crafts internees created from whatever they could find. On view are jewelry pieces including a beautiful red hand-painted and glazed corsage crafted from mollusk shells, wire, and cotton string; intricate floral brooches; and several bird pins made from wooden egg crates, wire, and twigs. “The things they made from scrap and found materials are testaments to their perseverance, their resourcefulness, their spirit and humanity,” writes Delphine Hirasuna in *The Art of Gaman: Arts and Crafts from the Japanese American Internment Camps 1942-1946*.

Artists such as C.T. Hibino—photographed by Ansel Adams for his portfolio of the camp—taught skills such as knitting, paper flower-making, and calligraphy. Beautifying the barren environment was important, and the internees did whatever they could to make life

The things they made from scrap and found materials are testaments to their perseverance, their resourcefulness, their spirit and humanity. —DELPHINE HIRASUNA, *THE ART OF GAMAN: ARTS AND CRAFTS FROM THE JAPANESE AMERICAN INTERNMENT CAMPS 1942-1946*

comfortable. With pooled earnings, they started a canteen, general store, beauty parlor, barbershop, and bank. A 16-building hospital, mostly staffed by Japanese Americans, provided free medical care. *The Manzanar Free Press*, started as a simple newspaper, became a journal featuring not just camp news but also national and international news, sports, editorials, and gossip, with 3,700 readers throughout the country. “I wouldn’t say the camp became livable, but more livable,” Lynch says, noting that it was always very much a prison. The camp publications give a sense of what it was like. Scrawled across a yellowed copy of the high school paper is the sentiment, “I would not want to be a leader here. It’s just sticking your neck out for trouble.”

Nearly all internees maintained a sense of Americanism. Children pledged allegiance to the flag, many adults enrolled in the Americanization program, and others wove camouflage nets for the U.S. Army. Scientists, horticulturists, and laborers conducted research on how rubber could be extracted from guayule, a desert plant found in the area, after Japan cut off the nation’s supply. “Forward! Forward! Forward for America,” was part of the Manzanar School Song.



ABOVE: *The nation's pastime in a watercolor by internee Charles Isamu Morimoto.*
FAR LEFT: Rawlings mitt from Manzanar.
LEFT TOP: Ansel Adams shot of the camp.
LEFT BELOW: Photographer Toyo Miyatake in an Adams portrait.

Many photos show smiling, seemingly happy people—a contrast to the five-strand barbed wire fences and eight watchtowers, occupied by gun-wielding military police. The lack of resistance was perhaps due to the Japanese ideal of *gaman*—to “accept what is with patience and dignity,” according to Hirasuna, and patience and dignity were certainly tested by the experience. Although the crime rate was very low, the jailing of Harry Ueno—who stood up against alleged corruption in the camp’s administration—provoked a riot where military police killed two internees and wounded ten others.

The peak population was just over 10,000 in 1942 but by 1944 had dropped to 6,000. Many were gradually released. Manzanar closed on

November 21, 1945. Some resettled in the Midwest and along the East Coast, often with very few of their belongings from before the war. Others, having no place else to go, did not want to leave. They were evicted.

For many years, the site seemed forgotten, until former, mostly younger, internees started the first pilgrimage in 1969, wanting to shatter “their elders’ silence and shame about the camps.” The pilgrimages continue today. Thousands visit the site each year to pay their respects. The exhibit features several of their offerings, “tangible expressions of the ongoing, unspoken conversations about America’s past and its future” including jewelry, paper origami cranes, religious items, and personal mementoes.

With its ferocious sand storms, freezing winters, and summer temperatures upwards of 110 degrees, Owens Valley has never been an easy place to live, but emotionally it must have been a shock.



LEFT: C.T. Hibino—one of several interned artists—photographed by Ansel Adams for his portfolio of the camp. BELOW: Mt. Williamson and the barracks, painted by internee F.M. Kumano.

A cemetery with a memorial tower, built in 1943, is one of the few structures left; mostly all that remains are the foundations where buildings once stood. Since becoming a national historic site in 1992, a replicated guard tower has been built and structures such as a mess hall moved to the property, giving visitors a clearer vision of what the place once looked like. Almost 85,000 visit each year, including many who know little about the dark history. There is a lot of learning yet to be done about Manzanar, with the web exhibit a much-needed window for those who will never make the trip. “I hope people can take away a sense of connection to their fellow Americans,” Lynch says. “The internees at Manzanar weren’t POWs but there only because of their ancestry—there was no trial or jury.”

LEFT ANSEL ADAMS/LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, BELOW F.M. KUMANO, MANZ 757B





FAR LEFT WEIMER PURSELL/LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, ABOVE AND RIGHT SPECIAL COLLECTIONS RESEARCH CENTER, UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO LIBRARY

Exhibit Shows How World's Fairs Paved the Way to Today

DESIGNING TOMORROW

From iPhones to Kindles, today's world bombards us with information on all the latest gadgets and gizmos. But before TV and the web delivered the news from the future, people went to the world's fairs. That's the focus of *Designing Tomorrow: America's World's Fairs of the 1930s*, a 200-artifact exhibit just opened at the National Building Museum in Washington, DC. The show looks at the fairs as mirrors of their age, and precursors to our own. "There's been a lot of focus on them as cultural or regional events, but we wanted to do something more interdisciplinary," says co-curator Deborah Sorensen. "They were really a perfect storm of design."

With turmoil brewing in Europe and a shattered economy at home, "the world seemed to be spinning off in ways that were quite scary."

—ROBERT RYDELL, *WORLD OF FAIRS: THE CENTURY-OF-PROGRESS EXPOSITIONS*

One might think that pricey goods would have no appeal to a cash-starved audience, but that wasn't the case. With turmoil brewing in Europe and a shattered economy at home, "the world seemed to be spinning off in ways that were quite scary," says Robert Rydell, author of *World of Fairs: The Century-of-Progress Expositions*. "The genius of expo planners and government officials was to get people's minds off the present and towards a vision of the future."

Six fairs were held: A Century of Progress International Exposition (Chicago, 1933-34), the California Pacific International Exposition (San Diego, 1935-36), the Texas Centennial Exposition (Dallas, 1936), the Great Lakes Exposition (Cleveland, 1936-37), the Golden Gate International Exposition (San Francisco, 1939-40), and the New York World's Fair (1939-40). The nation fell in love with all of them. "Dear Mrs. Austin, You really should be back here in your home state now. The Fair is wonderful beyond description," scribbled one

happy fairgoer on a postcard sent from the Century of Progress Exposition. Tens of millions attended and even those that didn't were transported to a world of wonder via an unprecedented outpouring of articles and advertisements.

The architecture caught your eye first. Gone was the heavy ornamentation of fairs past. The pavilions were simple, streamlined, windowless—a stark contrast to previous designs such as Chicago's neoclassical World's Columbian Exposition of 1893. In the midst of the Depression, it was too expensive to build in the Beaux Arts style, anyway. In pursuit of a shrinking customer base, designers and

clients embraced creativity. "The most playful structures at the fairs were those that took literally the modern notion that a building should 'speak' its purpose," notes co-curator Laura Burd Schiavo in the exhibit catalog. Industrial designer Walter Dorwin Teague created a giant building that looked like his earlier design for a cash register. The Wonder Bread pavilion, by Louis Skidmore and Nathaniel Owings, sported the same colorful dots as the bread package. Since the fairs were meant to be short-lived—perhaps presaging the idea of planned obsolescence—designers experimented freely. Their creations did double-duty marketing new materials such as gypsum board, plywood, and masonite, medium as message.

contact point web National Building Museum www.nbm.org

LEFT: The Joseph Urban-designed Hall of Science at Chicago's Century of Progress International Exposition. ABOVE LEFT: Exposition poster. ABOVE MIDDLE: The exhibit buildings. ABOVE RIGHT: Cover of pamphlet promoting electricity at the exposition.

SPECIAL COLLECTIONS RESEARCH CENTER, UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO LIBRARY

The futuristic touch wasn't just in the architecture—it was everywhere. The point was to show a better tomorrow, filled with modern conveniences. “In the future, fairgoers were assured they would work less, relax more, and live better,” notes the exhibit brochure.

Transportation was a big draw. As designer Norman Bel Geddes put it, “Today speed is the cry of our era, and greater speed one of the goals of tomorrow.” From Pan Am’s flying clippers to the new streamlined Burlington Zephyr train, fairgoers were treated to all modes of futuristic travel. The auto industry spared no expense, erecting extravagant pavilions to entice the crowds. The Albert Kahn-designed General Motors building, in Chicago, housed an entire assembly line,

pered voice spoke of the wonder of the neo-Corbusian vision made possible by high-speed roads. The exhibit is still noted as one of the most remarkable of all time, an “optimal blend of motion, simplicity, spectacularity, and visitor participation,” writes Dennis P. Doordan in *Design History: An Anthology*. No one wanted it to end—least of all Bel Geddes, who tried in vain to preserve it. General Motors did build another Futurama for the 1964-65 New York World’s Fair, and the idea lives on at Disney World’s Epcot Center in Florida.

Before the 1930s, fair exhibits were mostly stationary displays. Now they were alive, animated with the tools of industrial processing. From bacon slicing to caramel wrapping, you saw how it was

done, the miracles of mass production on view step by step. You could walk into a prefab home, feel the futuristic furniture, and imagine yourself living there. “You could actually touch the designs—not just see them in magazines and newsreels,” Sorensen says. And while much, if not most, of mainstream America could not afford the novelties that were on display, there was at least the sense that someday they would be standard. “The exhibits amazed fairgoers,” Rydell explains. “They



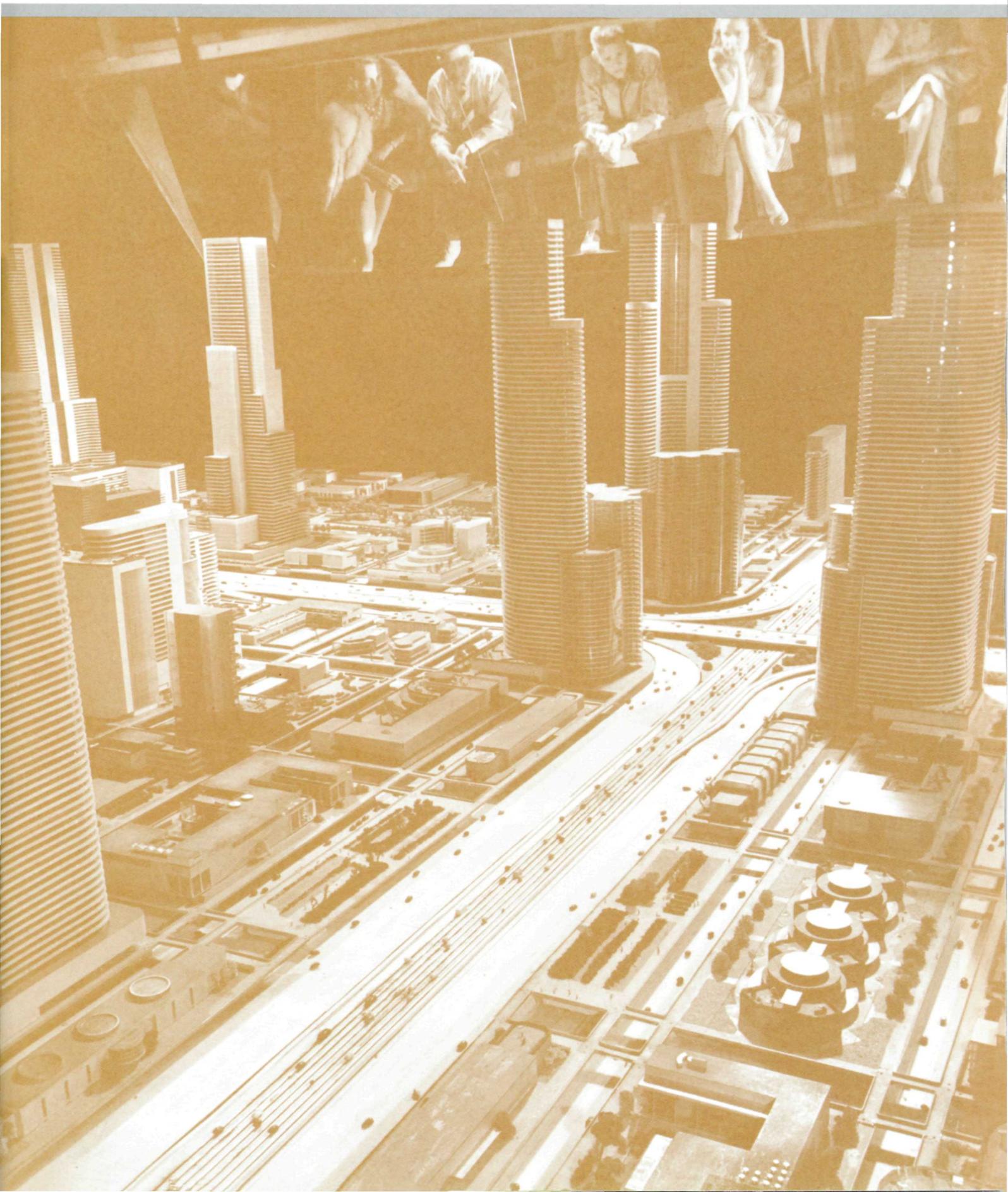
Today speed is *the cry of our era, and greater speed one of the goals of tomorrow.* —WORLD'S FAIR DESIGNER NORMAN BEL GEDDES

where visitors watched in awe as Chevrolets literally came to life. The Chrysler exhibit boasted a quarter-mile test track, where pioneer racer Barney Oldfield showed that a Plymouth could indeed be driven on a 45-degree angle at 50 miles an hour. At Ford’s Road of Tomorrow, fairgoers themselves rode in test cars, on a spiral ramp inside the company’s 900-foot-long pavilion.

Especially popular was Bel Geddes’ Futurama exhibit for the New York’s World Fair. It focused on highways, not cars, and not just regular ones but “super” ones. Convinced that the lack of good roads—which frustrated drivers of the ’30s—was thwarting car industry growth, Bel Geddes’ aimed to persuade fairgoers that future highways would be ones of “restful comfort.” General Motors paid him \$200,000 to do the persuading. Ensnared in comfortable “sound chairs,” synchronized to an audio system, 27 million people were transported to the world of the future as they looked down like a “low-flying airplane” on the landscape of the 1960s. As their chairs shuttled from one diorama to the next—moved by mechanical magic—a soft, almost whis-

ABOVE LEFT: Aviation building at the New York World’s Fair. **ABOVE:** Fair poster. **RIGHT:** Spectators marvel at Norman Bel Geddes’ Futurama exhibit.

ABOVE LEFT MARK FREEMAN, WORLD’S FAIR AVIATION BUILDING, 1939, GRAPHITE AND WATER COLOR ON PAPER, THE WOLFSONIAN-FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY, XX1990.3531; ABOVE NEMBHARD N. CULIN/LIBRARY OF CONGRESS; RIGHT MARGARET BOURQUE-WHITE/HARRY RANSOM HUMANITIES RESEARCH CENTER, UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN





transported them visually to another place called the future.” Adds Sorensen, “From what you wore on your back to the home you lived in, the shows were a survey of American life and how design touched all those aspects.”

Just as people witnessed new ways of getting around, they also saw new ways of living, such as facing the living room to the back of the house or using the kitchen as an informal gathering space. A range of appliances promised women freedom from the chore of cooking. Companies like RCA and General Electric showcased almost unheard-of inventions such as air conditioning and television.

Chicago’s Hall of Science, *perhaps reflecting the Social Darwinism debates of the era, featured a eugenics booth promoting society’s responsibility to rid the population of disease, mental illness, and physical traits deemed defective or inferior.*

In many ways the fairs mirrored their times. African Americans were continuously reminded of their second-class status; of the hundreds of jobs created by the Chicago exposition, only 75 went to African Americans, and most were for bathroom cleaners. Many venues would not serve them. Dallas offered a more mixed picture. Local leaders—looking to foster African American patriotism in light of a looming war—convinced planners to include a Hall of Negro Life. Though the hall was not designed by African Americans, by all accounts the black community saw it as a great success, with integrated restrooms and an Aaron Douglas mural depicting African Americans as “robust agents of American Progress.” However, some white fairgoers doubted a black artist capable of such a masterwork.

Native peoples were often portrayed as anthropological or colonial specimens at the fairs. Chicago’s Hall of Science, perhaps reflecting the Social Darwinism debates of the era, featured a eugenics booth promoting society’s responsibility to rid the population of disease, mental illness, and physical traits deemed defective or inferior. Designers illustrated the ideal woman, promising that someday the female gender would be “the result of formulae—the tilt of her eyes, the curve of her chin, the shade of her hair ordered like crackers from the grocer.”

Despite their extraordinary rhetorical power, the fairs were ephemeral events, here and gone. Few sites, such as Fair Park in Dallas with its treasured Art Deco buildings from the Texas exposition—today a national historic landmark—remain. For the most part the experience lives on in film, photographs, postcards, and memories. Gone is the sight of the steel-framed, plaster-board Trylon and Perisphere, the iconic “Theme Center” of the New York World’s Fair.

Gone is the Sky Ride, one of only two transporter bridges ever built in America, featuring two 628-foot-high towers and 12 “rocket cars” where patrons at Chicago’s Century of Progress Exposition got an unmatched view of both the fairgrounds and the scenery in every direction. Torn down just like that.

Yet the potential for excitement—and innovation—lives on. The most recent fair, in Shanghai last year, broke the attendance record with over 70 million visitors. America hasn’t seen a fair since the Louisiana World Exposition of 1984, but several cities might like to sponsor one. California Governor Schwarzenegger made a recent pro-

COLLECTION OF THE NATIONAL BUILDING MUSEUM



posal for a 2020 expo in the San Francisco Bay area. Mounting a fair might be difficult, given that the United States withdrew from the 157-nation Bureau International des Expositions in 2001. Yet, in the midst of recession, it’s easy to dream what a series of fairs might do today in terms of generating tourist dollars and bringing new infrastructure, and ideas, to our cities. “They have immense potential,” Rydell says.

Designing Tomorrow: America’s World’s Fairs of the 1930s will be on view at the National Building Museum until July 10 before beginning its national tour. Go to www.nbm.org for the latest itinerary.

FAR LEFT: Aspiration, a mural by African American artist Aaron Douglas at the Hall of Negro Life in Dallas. NEAR LEFT: Cover of the exposition guide.

CREDIT FOR AARON DOUGLAS MURAL, GRANTED COURTESY OF THE AARON AND ALTA SAWYER DOUGLAS FOUNDATION: AARON DOUGLAS (AMERICAN, 1899-1979), ASPIRATION, 1936, OIL ON CANVAS, 152.4 X 152.4 CM (60 X 60 IN.). FINE ARTS MUSEUMS OF SAN FRANCISCO, MUSEUM PURCHASE, THE ESTATE OF THURLOW E. TIBBS JR., THE MUSEUM SOCIETY AUXILIARY, AMERICAN ART TRUST FUND, UNRESTRICTED ART TRUST FUND, PARTIAL GIFT OF DR. ERNEST A. BATES, SHARON BELL, JO-ANN BEVERLY, BARBARA CARLETON, DR. AND MRS. ARTHUR H. COLEMAN, DR. AND MRS. COYNESS ENNIX, JR., NICOLE Y. ENNIX, MR. AND MRS. GARY FRANCOIS, DENNIS L. FRANKLIN, MR. AND MRS. MAXWELL C. GILLETTE, MR. AND MRS. RICHARD GOODYEAR, ZURETTI L. GOOSBY, MARION E. GREENE, MRS. VIVIAN S. W. HAMBRICK, LAURIE GIBBS HARRIS, ARLENE HOLLIS, LOUIS A. AND LETHA JEANPIERRE, DANIEL AND JACKIE JOHNSON, JR., STEPHEN L. JOHNSON, MR. AND MRS. ARTHUR LATHAN, LEWIS & RIBBS MORTUARY GARDEN CHAPEL, MR. AND MRS. GARY LOVE, GLENN R. NANCE, MR. AND MRS. HARRY S. PARKER III, MR. AND MRS. CARR T. PRESTON, FANNIE PRESTON, PAMELA R. RANSOM, DR. AND MRS. BENJAMIN F. REED, SAN FRANCISCO BLACK CHAMBER OF COMMERCE, SAN FRANCISCO CHAPTER OF LINKS, INC., SAN FRANCISCO CHAPTER OF THE N.A.A.C.P., SIGMA PI PHI FRATERNITY, DR. ELLA MAE SIMMONS, MR. CALVIN R. SWINSON, JOSEPH B. WILLIAMS, MR. AND MRS. ALFRED S. WILSEY, AND THE PEOPLE OF THE BAY AREA, 1997/84

ridgetop *ramble*

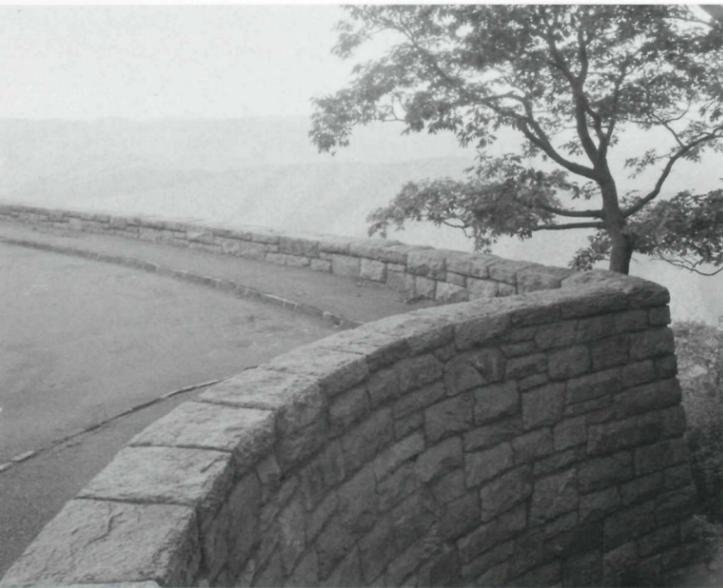
by meghan hogan *photographed by david baas for the historic american engineering record*

E N G I N E E R E D D E L I G H T A L O N G T H E B L U E R I D G E P A R K W A Y

ALL PHOTOS DAVID HAAS/NPS/HAER



WHAT'S MORE AMERICAN THAN THE DRIVE-THROUGH? THE CONCEPT OF ORDERING service right from the window of your car is as strong today as when it was invented in 1948. For a culture always on the go, perhaps that explains, in part, the gangbuster popularity of the Blue Ridge Parkway, the most visited place in the entire National Park System. "Since so many people experience parks from the car, it makes sense in a way to build a park for and around it," says Matthew Coolidge, director of the L.A.-



based Center for Land Use Interpretation, which mounted an exhibition on the parkway in 2007. Stretching from the southern end of Skyline Drive in Virginia's Shenandoah National Park to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park entrance in Cherokee, North Carolina, the parkway affords tourists an alluring blend of gorgeous scenery and historical sights combined with the thrill of experiencing it all from behind the wheel. And for those who do want to leave the car, there is a plethora of scenic overlooks, hiking trails, campgrounds, and visitor attractions. Simply put, from history buffs to day-trippers to those wanting a week out in the country, the parkway offers something for everyone.

Having just celebrated its 75th anniversary, it has a history almost as long and winding as its 469 miles. "It would never be built today," says National Park Service senior historian Tim Davis. It was dreamt up when driving was still fairly new and motoring to the country a popular pastime, and there was less concern about the environmental impact.

The first modern parkway with multi-lanes and limited access, the 15.5-mile Bronx River Parkway in Westchester County, New York, was finished just eight years earlier, influenced by the scenic drives of Central Park, created by Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux as a homage to the European tradition of landscaped roadways. Planners provided vistas of the Bronx River and the surrounding parklands, seen at limited speeds. The design was so popular that three other Westchester parkways soon

followed: the Hutchinson River Parkway in 1928, Saw Mill River Parkway in 1929, and Cross County Parkway in 1931. "The purpose of the parkways was not to provide the faster or most direct route between origin and destination," notes a scenic byways guide published by the Federal Highway Administration, but were instead "designed for moderate driving speeds to permit the fullest enjoyment of the scenery."

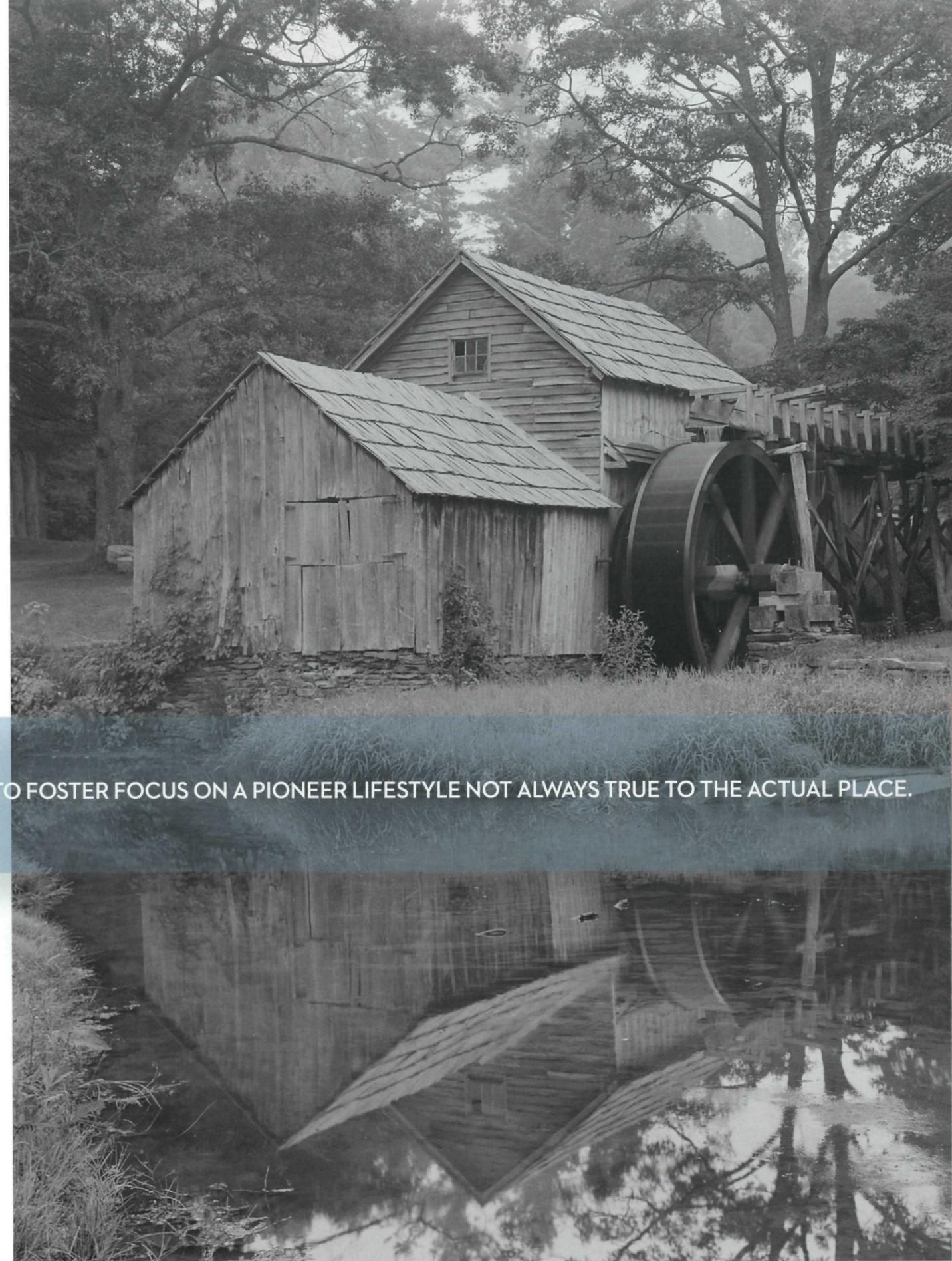
The Blue Ridge Parkway was conceived during President Roosevelt's tour of the newly opened Skyline Drive. Someone—possibly Virginia Senator Harry F. Byrd—suggested that it would be wonderful if the majesty just kept on going. Roosevelt thought it a fine idea, as did Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes, and just two months later, \$4 million was approved under the Public Works Administration.

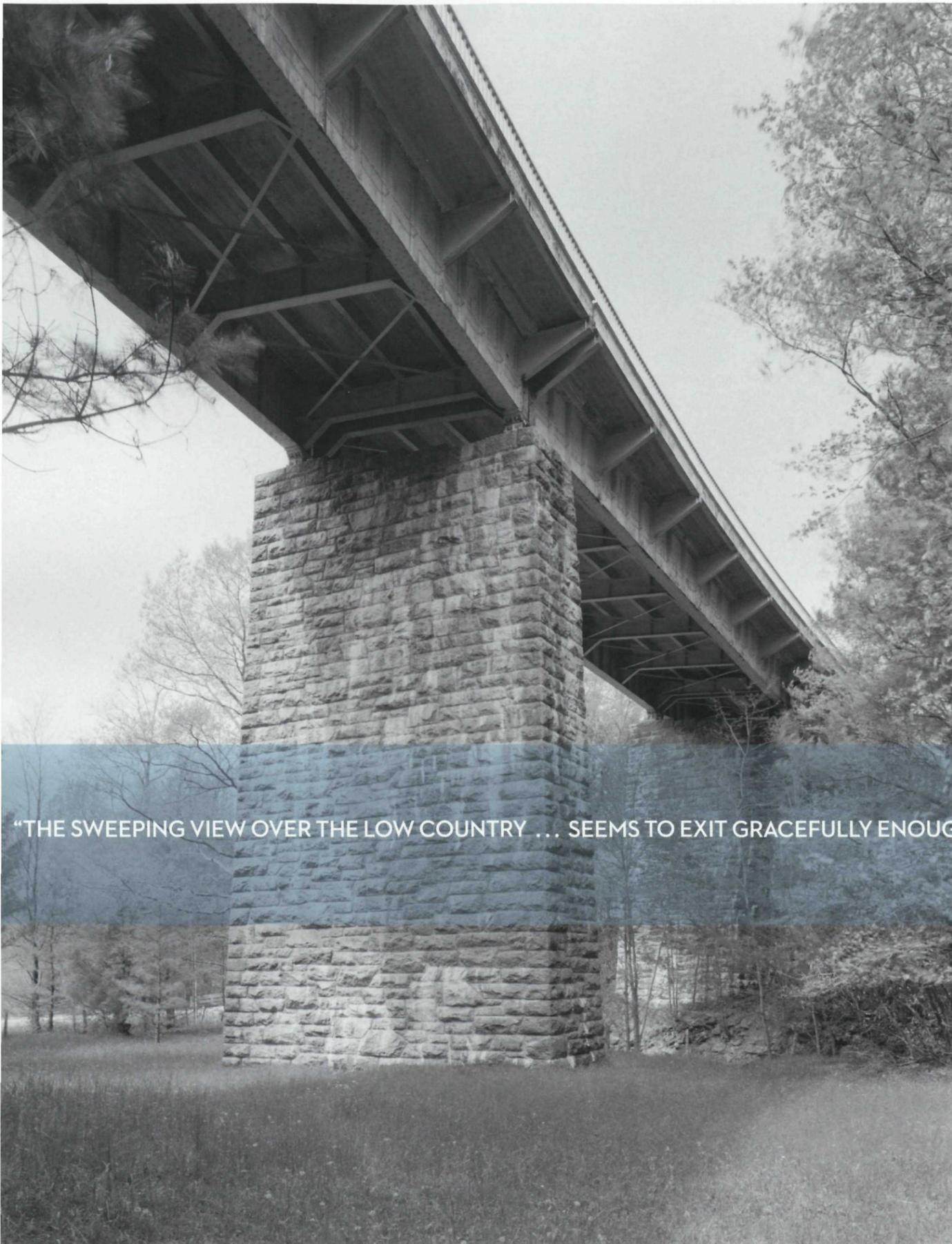
The parkway was not the first park-connecting road proposed for the region. In 1928, Kentucky Congressman Maurice H. Thatcher initiated a plan for an eastern park-to-park highway similar to an auto trail that looped 12 parks in 11 western states. Thatcher's idea, to connect three parks and several historic sites, met wide enthusiasm but died due to Depression-slashed budgets.

Highways were still a bit of an anomaly in the 1930s. The country's first transcontinental one, the Lincoln Highway, was finished in the early 1920s, when most roads outside cities were not much more than dirt trails from the days of wagons and stagecoaches. After the U.S. Highway System was created in 1926, it became increasingly apparent that the building of a uniform network of roads was absolutely necessary for the car to become a realistic means of nationwide travel.

HISTORIC STRUCTURES WERE OFTEN DEMOLISHED TO FOSTER FOCUS ON A PIONEER LIFESTYLE NOT ALWAYS TRUE TO THE ACTUAL PLACE.

PREVIOUS PAGES: Open vista along the parkway just north of Roanoke. **ABOVE:** Raven's Roost Overlook with its rusticated stone retaining wall and curbing. **RIGHT:** Mabry Mill, the parkway's most photographed attraction; historic structures of other eras were often eliminated to sharpen focus on pioneer places like this one.





“THE SWEEPING VIEW OVER THE LOW COUNTRY ... SEEMS TO EXIT GRACEFULLY ENOUGH WHEN THE PARKWAY LEAVES THE RIDGE FOR THE MORE GENTLE SLOPES OF THE DEEPER FORESTS.”

—ROAD ARCHITECT STANLEY ABBOTT

THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE WAS IN SOME WAYS AHEAD OF THE GAME. THE 1920S AND '30s were the golden age of park roads, a monumental era of construction to welcome the wave of well-to-do motorists who “regaled each other with tales of their automotive adventures.” With help from the U.S. Bureau of Public Roads, the National Park Service built some of its most impressive roads during the period, including Sequoia National Park’s General Highway in 1926, Zion National Park’s Zion-Mt. Carmel Highway and Tunnel in 1930, and both Rocky Mountain National Park’s Trail Ridge Road and Glacier National Park’s Going-to-the-Sun Road in 1933.

The Blue Ridge Parkway had the distinction of not being a park at the time of its conception. The National Park Service was at first only a partner with North Carolina, Virginia, the Bureau of Public Roads, and the Public Works Administration, assuming full management in 1936. Even before, the parkway was not intended to be just another road. That was clear from the get-go. With a leisurely speed limit of 45 mph, “it was intended to be a ‘ride-a-while, stop-a-while’ experience complete with scenic pullouts, recreation areas, and visitor contact stations,” notes *America’s National Park Roads and Parkways: Drawings from the Historic American Engineering Record*. Nor would it be open to commercial traffic, or have any

towns along its route. It would also, much like Skyline, be a New Deal effort to provide jobs for impoverished Appalachian communities. What wasn’t clear was its route after leaving Virginia. Sensing the revenue the parkway would generate, the tourism industries in North Carolina and Tennessee both vied for a slice of the pie. In the end though, after months of intense debate with crowds of supporters from both states at the hearings, the higher path through North Carolina won out, largely since Tennessee already had the chief entrance to Great Smoky Mountains National Park, and was getting an economic boost from the Tennessee Valley Authority. “Hailed as Great Victory By Entire State” was the headline in the *Asheville Citizen*.

The road starts at the end of Skyline Drive, at Rockfish Gap near Waynesboro, Virginia, following the Blue Ridge for 355 miles before ending at Great Smoky Mountains National Park. While closely brushing a few populated towns such as Roanoke, Virginia, and Asheville, North Carolina, much of its terrain is mountainous and relatively undeveloped. And, unlike Skyline Drive, which deliberately hugs the mountain crests, the road isn’t just skytop vistas, but also valleys, lowlands, and streams. Landscape architect Stanley W. Abbott, who came on board

in 1933, planned it that way, having found the drive through the Shenandoahs “monotonous.” Abbott compared the unfolding landscapes to the work of “the movie cameraman, who shoots his subjects from many angles to heighten the drama of his film,” notes the *Historic American Engineering Record* history of the road, completed after its documentation of the parkway in 1997. “The sweeping view over the low country often holds the center of the stage,” Abbott said, “but seems to exit gracefully enough when the Parkway leaves the ridge for the more gentle slopes of the deeper forests.”

It was planned using very detailed hand drawings. “It’s an intensely designed landscape,” says Gary W. Johnson, chief landscape architect today.

“Everything was geared to what the road was about.” The back-breaking construction—done in 10 to 15 mile stretches—started in September 1935 but didn’t conclude until 1987, including 160 bridges and 26 tunnels, many built by Italian and Spanish migrant masons. Construction faced several roadblocks, the major one World War II, which halted work for five years as funds and equipment went elsewhere. The building resumed afterwards but at a slower pace due to stagnant funding. Mission 66, a 10-year program that financed a variety of National Park Service infrastructure projects including several parkways



LEFT: The Goshen Creek Viaduct, with its stone-faced concrete-reinforced piers. ABOVE: Wilson Creek Bridge #3, partially poured right on a rock slide.

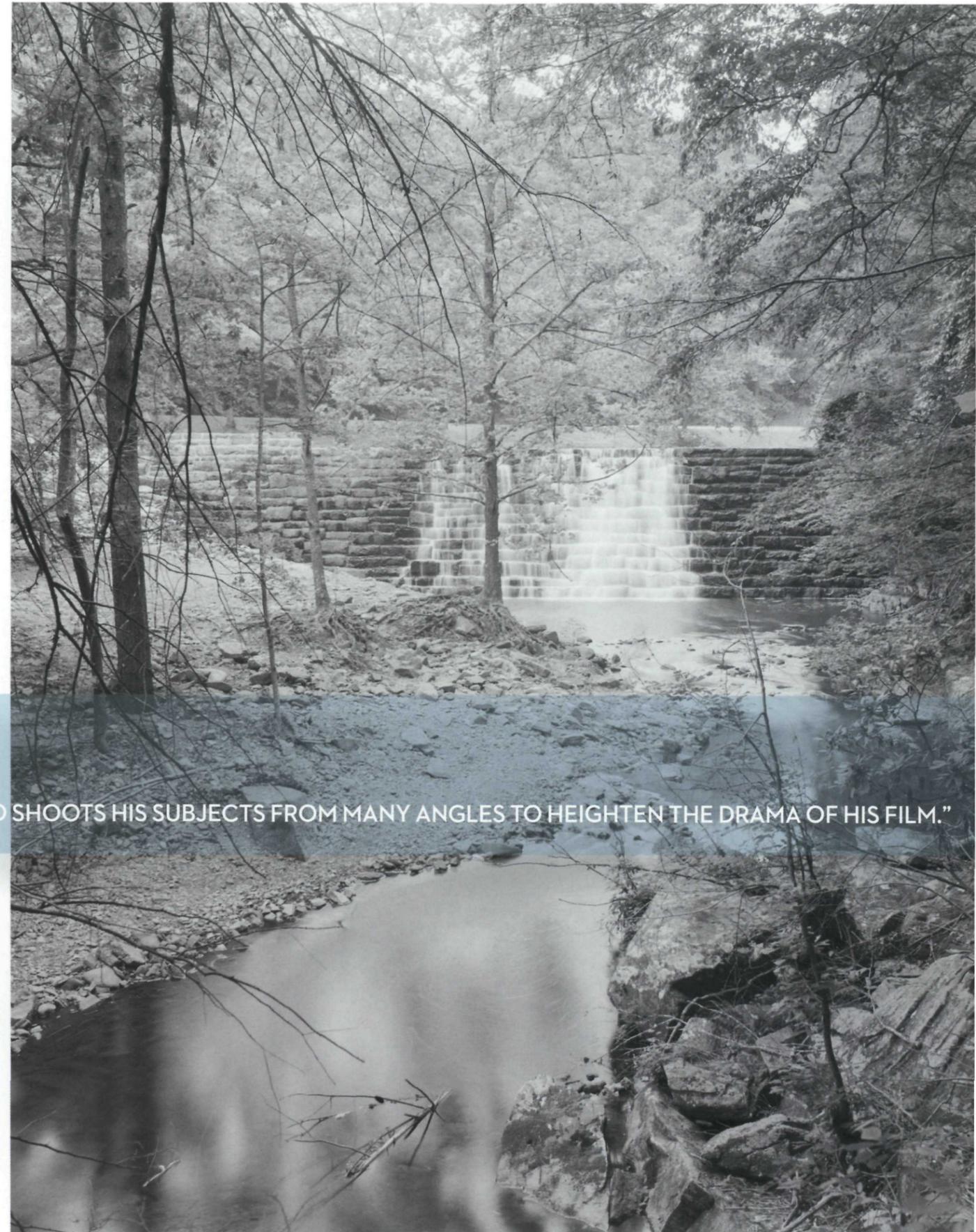
WHILE ENGINEERS WERE WRONG IN ESTIMATING A TWO-YEAR TIME FRAME FOR construction, they hit the mark in achieving what they envisioned. “A misplaced bit of Europe,” is what the Center for Land Use Interpretation called it in an article accompanying its 2007 exhibit. “Once your mind becomes accustomed to this sensation of driving ease, and you learn to trust the road at this relaxed rate, it begins to feel like the road and the car and the driver become conjoined. Even a jalopy feels like a sports car at this slow pace.”

Anne Mitchell Whisnant, author of *Super-Scenic Motorway: A Blue Ridge Parkway History* and a board member of Blue Ridge Parkway 75, Inc., says “there’s something wonderful when you drive down the road and see the care that was taken with it. The experience is magical.”

The road does have its faults. Many landowners gave up scenic easement rights without realizing the parkway would not provide access to their properties. Others had their land forcibly taken. Historic structures were often demolished to foster focus on a pioneer lifestyle not always true to the actual place. Sometimes sites were replaced with reconstructions, such as the 1890s farmstead at the Humpback Rocks Visitor Center and Pioneer Farm. “The parkway caused a lot of conflict and disruption for an entire region,” Whisnant says, adding though that its history offers a lesson on ways of looking at the past. “It’s important for us to realize that these things don’t just come into being and that times weren’t automatically simpler 50 years ago.”

Despite the exaggerated showcasing of pioneer sites, the road is truly a cross-cultural journey through the past in all its phases. The earliest occupants of the Blue Ridge were Native Americans, who still live in places like the Cherokee Indian Reservation at Milepost 457.7. European American homesteads such as the Johnson Farm, Brinegar Cabin, and Jesse Brown Farmstead scatter the parkway. Signs of early industrial development are evident at sites such as the picturesque water-powered Mabry Mill (the parkway’s most photographed attraction) and a short reconstructed stretch of what was once the Irish Creek Railway, on display at

BELOW: Otter Lake. RIGHT: Downstream of Otter Lake Dam.

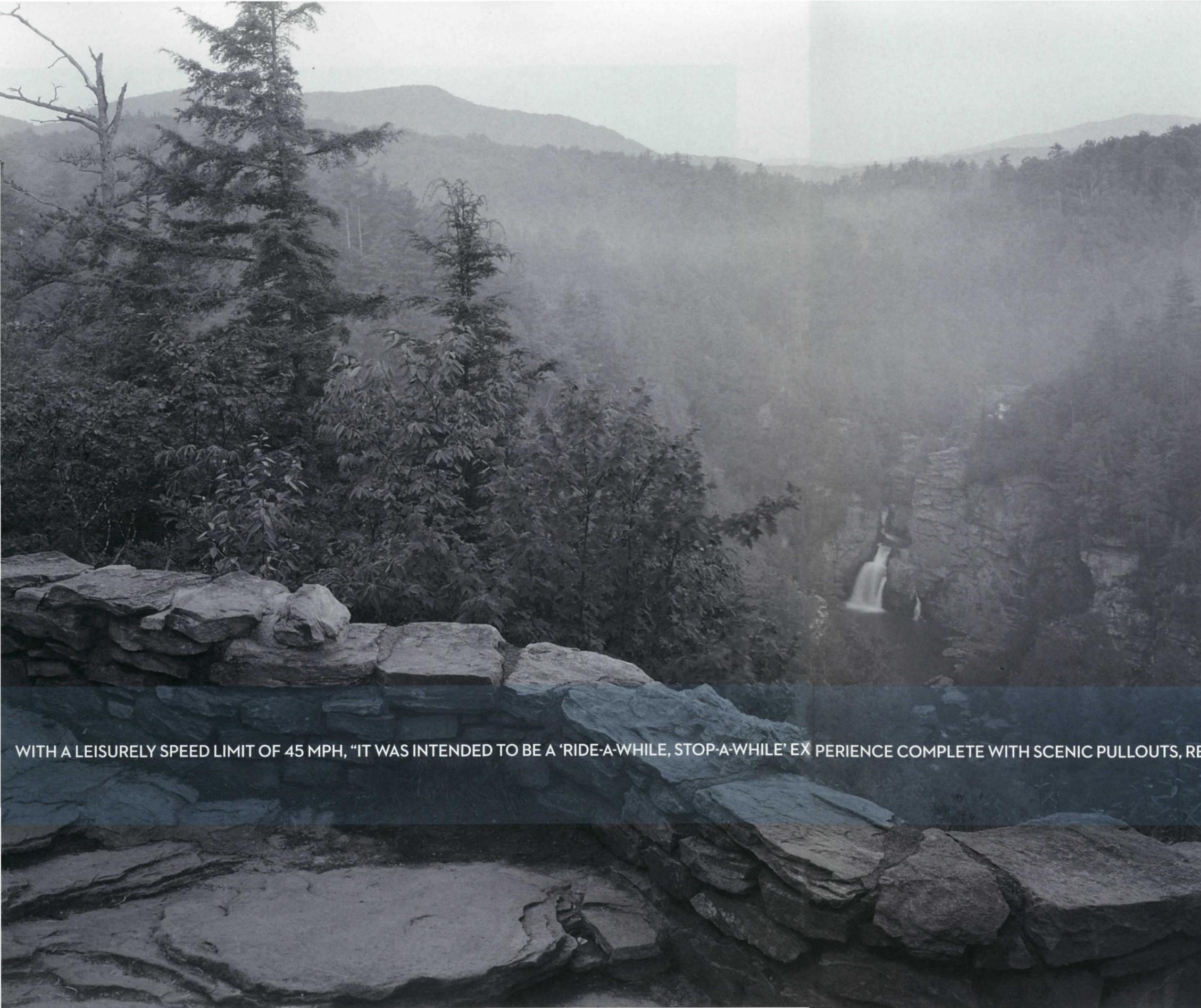


ABBOTT COMPARED THE UNFOLDING LANDSCAPE TO THE WORK OF “THE MOVIE CAMERAMAN, WHO SHOOTS HIS SUBJECTS FROM MANY ANGLES TO HEIGHTEN THE DRAMA OF HIS FILM.”

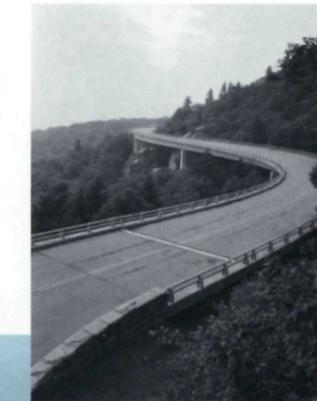
such as the Foothills Parkway, Natchez Trace, and Colonial, breathed new life into the road though with the awarding of \$32 million in 1956. By 1966, all but a mere 7.7 miles, “the missing link,” was finished. The main problem with that last stretch of road was how to cross Grandfather Mountain—one of North Carolina’s highest peaks and a privately owned nature preserve—without carving into it, at an elevation of 4,100 feet. The solution was the award-winning Linn Cove Viaduct, which wraps gracefully around the southern slope. One of the world’s most complex concrete bridges, it was built with 153 50-ton pre-cast segments, each one of a kind.

With the viaduct’s completion, it was official. America’s longest planned single road, a designated national historic civil engineering landmark, was entirely open—half a century after its start—having brought with it employment for thousands and a flood of tourists. “The National Park Service expanded the parkway concept to an unprecedented scale,” Davis says, pointing out that earlier ones were no longer than “around 30 miles tops.”

the Yankee Horse Ridge parking area. Properties such as the 23-room Moses Cone Manor and Asheville’s nearby 135,000-square-foot Biltmore Estate illustrate the Blue Ridge as a popular 20th-century retreat location for the wealthy. Some of the most popular destinations along the route are the Blue Ridge Music Center at Milepost 213, featuring an interpretive center and outdoor amphitheater for performances of ancient fiddle and banjo music, and the Folk Art Center at Milepost 382, which is a showcase of traditional and contemporary crafts handmade by regional artists. The National Park Service highlights these assets with features such as rustic signs offering brief descriptions of sites such as Rockfish Gap and 20-Minute Cliff, more than 100 roadside exhibits, and visitor centers themed to highlight elements of the parkway’s history and biology.



NOW MORE THAN THREE FOURTHS OF A CENTURY OLD, THERE'S A QUESTION OF WHAT the parkway will look like in another 75 years. Historic roads are increasingly endangered. Threats such as traffic volume, road widening, and development jeopardize character-defining features such as arch bridges, concrete culverts, ornate lighting, brick pavement, and rough tunnels hewn through rock. With the parkway, add to that lack of funding to hire needed staff, boundary trespassing, and poaching of its botanical species which, according to Johnson, are more diverse than Yellowstone's. While the road is somewhat protected by easements (not owning most of the scenery within a mile of each side), development is a concern as farmland abutting rights-of-way is turned into subdivisions and resort properties. One proposed project, Blue Ridge America—featuring luxury hotels, shops, and a golf course—has been called “a national park on steroids” by its developer. If the view is compromised, surveys say, those who enjoy the drive will not be back. The good news is that a partnership of land trusts, led by the Conservation Trust for North Carolina, is trying to curb growth, protecting more than 30,000 acres and asking Congress for \$75 million over five years to purchase tracts and work out conservation easements. “There is increasing advocacy and awareness,” says Christopher Marston, HAER architect and chair of the 2010 Biennial Preserving the Historic Road Conference. “Some places are becoming vigilant in not letting developers go crazy.”



Still, questions remain about how the National Park Service should manage the parts it does control. Design-sensitive alterations such as steel-backed guardrails have been made, but other modifications are thornier. None of the campgrounds have the modern amenities that might attract more visitors, such as showers and electrical hook-ups, an economic fact that hurts some concessioners. There are a lot of issues in balancing the needs of today's

WITH A LEISURELY SPEED LIMIT OF 45 MPH, “IT WAS INTENDED TO BE A ‘RIDE-A-WHILE, STOP-A-WHILE’ EXPERIENCE COMPLETE WITH SCENIC PULLOUTS, RECREATION AREAS, AND VISITOR CONTACT STATIONS.”

—AMERICA'S NATIONAL PARK ROADS AND PARKWAYS

drivers without destroying what makes the road special, but for perhaps most of the 20 million who travel the parkway each year, it is a discussion worth having. “You don't really learn anything on a modern interstate,” Marston points out. Roads like the parkway, with their time-worn paths through early-developed areas, historic districts, countrysides, and other places we wouldn't normally see, “help us learn where we've come from,” he says. “The journey is sometimes the destination.”

contact points **web** *Blue Ridge Parkway* www.nps.gov/blri/index.htm *Blue Ridge Parkway 75* <http://blueridgeparkway75.org/> *HAER Documentation of the Blue Ridge Parkway* www.loc.gov/pictures/item/NC0478/ *Center for Land Use Interpretation* www.clui.org/

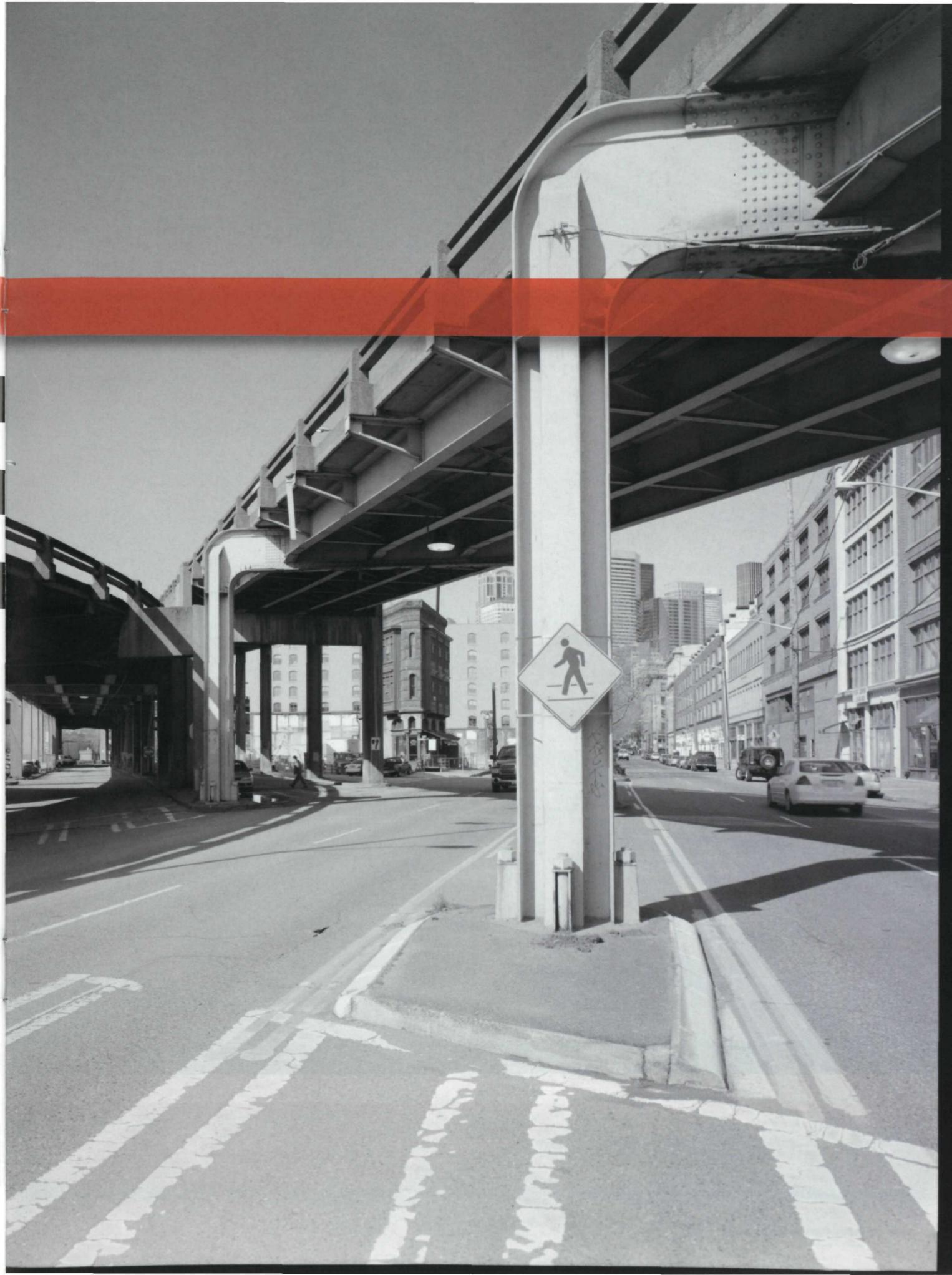
LEFT: Linville Falls. **ABOVE:** The Linn Cove Viaduct, winner of 11 design awards.

PART ONE IN A SERIES INFRASTRUCTURE

FREE WAY

Seattle's Alaskan Way Viaduct

*by joe flanagan
photographs by jet lowe
historic american
engineering
record*



ALL PHOTOS JET LOWE/NPS/HAER



IT IS PERHAPS ONE OF THE CITY'S FINEST PROFILES. SEATTLE, SEEN FROM ELLIOTT BAY, sleek, graceful, exuberant, a complement to its reputation as a progressive city. From a distance, it all looks like the future until the eye is drawn to a long elevated highway perched at the very edge of the waterfront, jarring in its unapologetic plainness. The Alaskan Way Viaduct is very much a product of the past, a heroic feat of construction designed as an offering to Seattle's future as it was envisioned more than five decades ago. Today, the viaduct looms over the waterfront like an argument about the nature of progress, both literal and figurative. But in the early 1950s, it was the solution for a city choking on its own traffic. Now some see it as an eyesore, an off-putting presence on the waterfront. A more pressing concern is vulnerability to earthquakes. It took \$14.5 million to repair the road after the Nisqually earthquake of 2001, and there are plans to replace it with a four-lane tunnel.

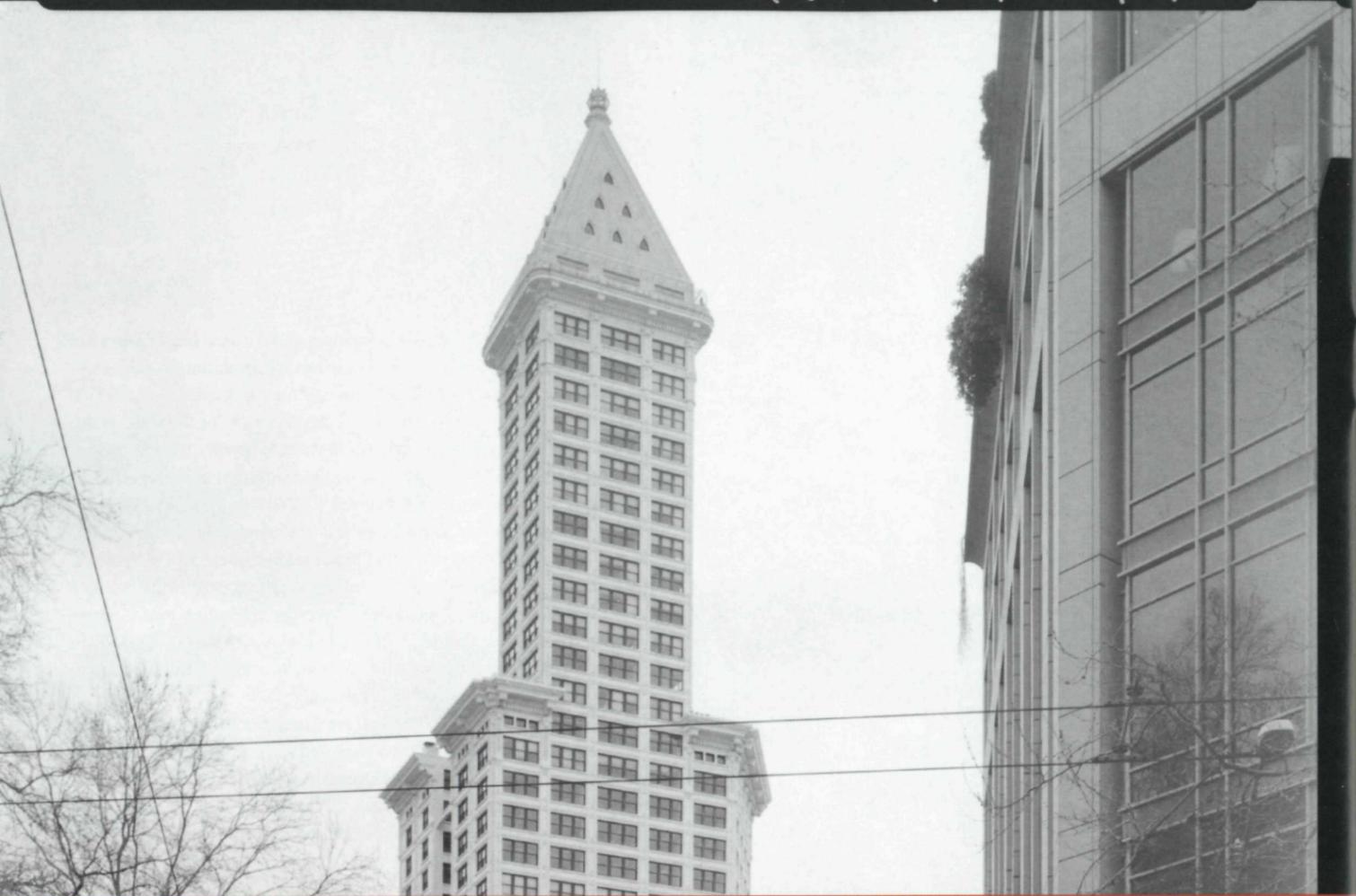
In 2008, members of the NPS Historic American Engineering Record documented the viaduct and the associated Battery Street Tunnel, capturing in large-format photographs and measured drawings this specimen of early highway engineering. In its time, it was an innovative solution to moving traffic through downtown Seattle. Because of its geography—an hourglass-shaped landform hemmed in by water on two sides—the city developed into a dense grid. In the postwar years, it grew rapidly, the viaduct and its tunnel the answer to ever-worsening congestion. Over time, the highway played an important role not only in the development of Seattle, but of the entire Northwest.

PREVIOUS SPREAD, LEFT: *The Alaskan Way Viaduct, up close and from above. Intended to fit in the narrow edge between Seattle and the sea, it was an innovative way to move traffic through the only corridor available: along a congested waterfront. To conserve space, it was designed in a double-decker configuration, with open area below for parking and access to waterfront businesses.*

AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY, THE NATION'S ROADS WERE, FOR THE MOST PART, primitive. There was nothing resembling a system, and the appearance of the automobile only served to highlight this fact. The car was the catalyst of a nationwide improvement campaign. Planners envisioned a country connected by drivable roads, a modest version of the super-highways that would proliferate in Eisenhower's America.

In Washington state, the governor signed the Permanent Highway Act, which levied a tax to pay for the highways and established standards for how they should be built. Better roads were viewed not only as a way to move people but goods as well. Authorities stipulated that the roads should run between trade centers. A 1912 report to the legislature claimed, "Many counties . . . are for the first time securing hard surfaced roads—dustless in summer and mudless in winter." The Pacific Highway—part of the national vision of roadways—would be the West Coast's major artery, running 1,600 miles from Canada to Mexico.

Today, the viaduct looms over the waterfront like an argument about the nature of progress, both literal and figurative.



BUILDING IT WAS A LONG AND ARDUOUS PROCESS. BY THE 1920S, IN MOST PLACES, THE highway ran freely except in cities. Seattle was a case in point. The logical route was on the edge of the bay, along the railroad corridor and the piers. The waterfront was not only the lifeblood of the city but crucial to the region. An abundance of produce, lumber, and other goods arrived where the railroad met the piers. A small city of warehouses lined the water. The main road, called Primary State Highway No. 1, mingled with the rails and pier traffic. Drivers were challenged getting past the bottleneck and continuing north through a downtown maze of streets crowded with pedestrians, trolley cars, and horses. A 1927 article in the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, commenting on the waterfront scene, said that “no one should travel there, a place for colossal commercialism and not for one little Ford, where freight trains move heavily between boats and commission houses and the last of the horses move with ponderous cargoes.”

A solution was not far away. In the 1930s, American planners saw the future in Germany’s “autobahn”—a system designed, in part, to speed tanks and other

proposed a surface road with an elevated highway to be built later. The mayor and the city engineer said it would be inadequate for the ever-growing city, which in any case couldn’t afford it.

The Depression and World War II forestalled attempts to facilitate passage through downtown. Railroad Avenue—renamed the Alaskan Way to honor the Gold Rush, when it was the departure point for expeditions in search of fortune—now carried more traffic than any other street. With war on the horizon, the number of vehicles spiked as production boomed at the shipyards and Boeing. Although the work drew people from all

over the country, congestion ebbed when gas and tires were rationed and much of the waterfront was sealed off for security. After the war the downtown bypass became top priority. The federal government was investing heavily in a highway system. Limited access roads were the new idea—with few points to enter and leave (which sped traffic) and landscaping to enhance the experience. Seattle’s suburbs were growing rapidly. The need to facilitate passage through the city was more pressing than ever.



LEFT: Pioneer Square, which has undergone a renaissance in the shadow of the viaduct. **ABOVE:** View from ground level where the viaduct passes a stadium.

Because of its geography—an hourglass-shaped landform hemmed in by water on two sides—the city developed into a dense grid.



war matériel from point to point. And at the 1939 World’s Fair, designer Norman Bel Geddes’ Futurama exhibit dramatically displayed how Americans would one day streak along on “superhighways.”

In Seattle, Aurora Avenue—a major thoroughfare—was widened to create a limited access “speedway,” which improved travel on the north side. The improvements foreshadowed the hard choices of later decades, manifesting the tension between progress and quality of life. A fight broke out over the avenue’s planned path through a 200-acre urban wilderness. Public outcry and a hostile reception in the papers forced a referendum, but it was defeated and the road went through.

While north Seattle now had an open route, the waterfront was ever more difficult to navigate. In the mid ’20s, a city engineer suggested an elevated highway to mayor Bertha Landes, perhaps inspired by Chicago’s Wacker Drive, completed in 1926. Built along the Chicago River, its lower level carried local traffic while the upper was for sight-seeing and vehicles just passing through. In Seattle, the lower level would also accommodate waterfront businesses, with space beneath for much-needed parking—an unforeseen implication of the auto age. Merchants were struggling with the road bogged down in truck traffic and refrigerated rail cars serving the produce warehouses. Everyone wanted an open connection to the Pacific Highway and the plan was heartily endorsed. An early version, called the Armory Way Bypass,

The first drivers were “entranced by the breathtaking view and the quick trip around downtown.” —OFFICIAL REPORT

IN 1947, MAYOR WILLIAM DEVIN ANNOUNCED PLANS FOR A TWO-LEVEL VIADUCT THAT would run along Alaskan Way, turn abruptly to go underground, then emerge on Aurora Avenue. Shoehorned into the space between the bay and the city, it would be massive—in some places mere feet from 19th-century buildings—six lanes and two decks of concrete and steel. “The viaduct will be an attraction . . . on a par with some of the other justifiably famous marine drives of the City,” one engineer wrote. Construction started in 1949. One of the main concerns was minimizing disruption to waterfront commerce. The project was in three phases, each section useable as it was finished.

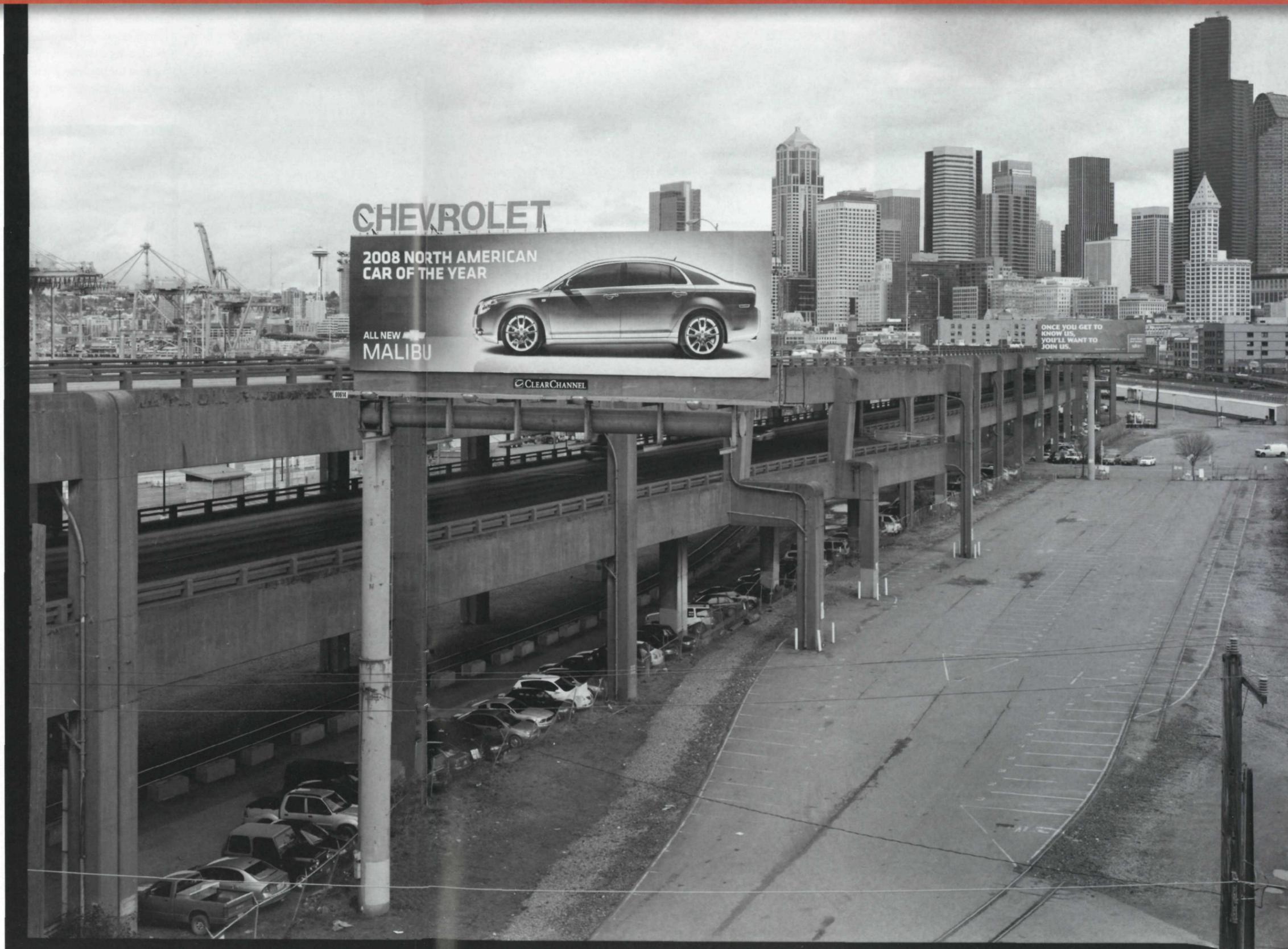
The vertical supports occupy relatively little space, opening the area beneath for parking. The viaduct runs alongside the city for about three-and-a-half miles, most of it elevated. At the southern end, it starts on the surface then transitions to raised decks just before the baseball and football stadiums. This approach is the most dramatic, with views of the city to the right and the bay to the left. The viaduct then runs past the piers, swings in close to downtown (and notched, in one case, for the 1913 Empire Laundry Building), passes Pike Place Market, reverts to side-by-side lanes again, and goes underground at the Battery Street Tunnel. Property owners were paid for the highway’s effect on access, air, light, and view. The OK Hotel received the largest payout: \$13,200.

RIGHT: A product of the auto age, the viaduct’s prominence makes it a part of Seattle’s cityscape. Today, waterfront commerce and railroad traffic—which it was built to accommodate—have moved elsewhere, and it seems stranded in a tide of revitalization. Supplanted as the main north-south route by Interstate 5 a few miles to the east, the viaduct still carries about 100,000 vehicles a day.

The tunnel was the critical piece in the puzzle—cheaper than buying property to extend the viaduct—its connection to Aurora Avenue ending the tortuous voyage through downtown. Designed by the city’s engineering department, which had not done a tunnel before, it was innovative in a number of ways. Carbon monoxide sensors activated a ventilation system as needed, with a heat-activated sprinkler system in addition to fire extinguishers, hose connections, and escape doors at regular intervals. It was featured in a 1952 issue of *Civil Engineering*.

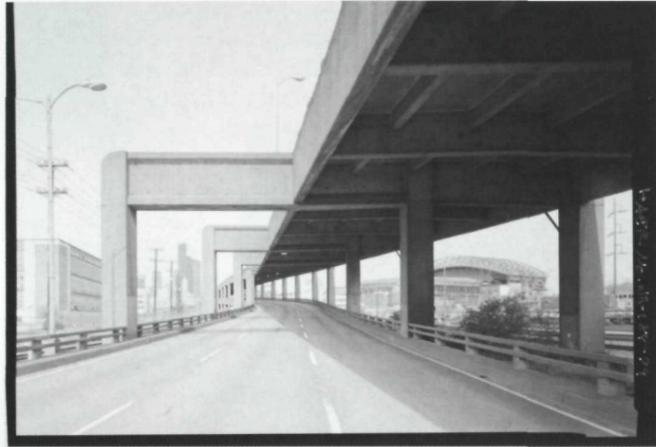
The project’s total cost was \$10 million, with the state and federal governments paying half. According to one official report, the first drivers were “entranced by the breathtaking view and the quick trip around downtown.” The mayor called it “the biggest finest improvement Seattle has put forward in years.” There were articles in *Business Week*, *American City*, and *Public Works* as well as the major newspapers.

The interstate highway system, hailed as “a triumph over nature” when authorized in 1956, was seen as a social and technological breakthrough. But it wasn’t long before dissent was heard. A new decade saw challenges to many long-held conventions of American life. As many neighborhoods were destroyed in the name of progress, the emerging environmental and preservation movements found common cause in halting the unbridled development and pollution. Writes Tom Lewis in his book, *Divided Highways*, “[The interstate system] enabled us to speed across the land into vast stretches of wilderness; yet it distanced us from the very land we



viaduct remains an important commuter route. It carries a great deal of freight traffic, serving port and industrial areas north and south along with the new stadiums for baseball and football. With most of the shipping gone, however, the city began to see the waterfront as an aesthetic asset, sparking revitalization in the '70s with a public park and an aquarium. Pike Place Market underwent extensive restoration, and is today one of Seattle's prime tourist attractions. Many of the old warehouses are now stores, offices, and residential space. Historic neighborhoods next to the viaduct saw new investment as vintage trolley cars connected the waterfront to the rest of the city.

Like many highways of its time, the viaduct was a product of practicality and hustle, an ultimate convenience that did no harm to a gritty working waterfront. But in a gentrifying city, it is seen as a problem. The People's Waterfront Coalition, which advocates demolition, reflects the city's strong environmental bent and progressive approach toward sensitive development. Some believe that severing Seattle from the sea has also severed it from its past and identity. In 1989, the Loma Prieta earthquake cast the debate in a different light, collapsing Oakland's Cypress Street Viaduct and killing 42 people. Three years later, the Nisqually earthquake inflicted major damage on the Alaskan Way; engineers say it cannot withstand an earthquake higher than 7.5 on the Richter scale. Last year, the mayor and local authorities signed an agreement to replace the viaduct with a tunnel. Upgraded transit and street improvements are part of the plan. The cost is estimated at about \$4.24 billion. A proposed 1 percent car tax would help pay for it, as would federal economic recovery funds. Proponents point to San Francisco's experience with the Embarcadero Free-



Property owners were paid for the road's effect on access, air, light, and view. The OK Hotel got the largest payout: \$13,200.

sought. It added new words to our vocabulary, like 'beltway,' and 'drive time,' and it lent new meaning to old ones like 'smog' and 'pollution.'"

When the viaduct was built, says the HAER report, the waterfront was seen as an industrial area. The aesthetic impact was downplayed. In the '40s and '50s, when the highway was envisioned, the public had little to no input in planning. While the road had the enthusiastic support of the business community and the newspapers, "there appears to have been very little public discussion," says the report.

The highway effectively severed Seattle from the waterfront, "a horrible thing to do to the city," in the words of architect Paul Thiry, interviewed for the Smithsonian's Archives of American History. He said that he had "never seen an overhead construction in a city that didn't create slum conditions all around it." It is worth noting, however, that urban highways of the era were at times welcome barriers to the noise, smell, and unsightliness of working waterfronts.

Before the '60s were over, there were calls to demolish the viaduct. Now seen as an eyesore, it was becoming outdated, too. Shipping had evolved; goods were packed in containers for direct loading on semis. The industry, needing more room and bigger piers, moved with the warehouses to a less congested area. The need for an elevated highway was gone.

Since the viaduct's opening in 1953, Seattle's traffic has soared. Originally intended for 60,000 vehicles a day, it now carries over 100,000. Still, Interstate 5—built parallel to the Alaskan Way a few miles to the east—has supplanted it as the main north-south thoroughfare. But the

way. As in Seattle, San Franciscans felt they had mortgaged their waterfront to development, and like Seattle had a vocal and aesthetically minded faction, which, according to the *San Francisco Chronicle*, had "honed obstructionism to an art form." The Loma Prieta earthquake, however, settled the argument; the Embarcadero Freeway was so badly damaged the city opted to destroy it. As a result, instead of "a shoreline cloaked in concrete," there is a "freed" waterfront, says the *Chronicle*, the blight, noise, and congestion replaced with a wide boulevard that encourages access to the water as well as walking, biking, and mass transit.

LEFT ABOVE: Southbound, where the viaduct makes a transition from a double-deck highway to parallel lanes. RIGHT: Seismic stabilization. The viaduct was badly damaged in a 2001 earthquake.



The new interstate system “added new words to our vocabulary, like ‘beltway,’ and ‘drive time.’” —TOM LEWIS, DIVIDED HIGHWAYS

YET SOME SEE A GRITTY CHARM IN THE ELEVATED SYSTEMS OF OUR URBAN CENTERS. Imagine Chicago without the L. When Boston's Southeast Expressway went underground, an elemental part of the city itself disappeared. “It was a great kinetic experience,” says National Park Service senior historian Tim Davis, “a great way to see the city.” Speeding along the rutted asphalt surface, one could practically see inside the windows of the old brick buildings that loomed so close. In the 1980s, a harbinger of the city's future—gentrification—could be seen in a sign on a renovated mercantile building that faced the expressway: “If You Lived Here, You'd Be Home By Now.”

Though it shares strains of Brutalism with nearby Freeway Park—which straddles Interstate 5—the viaduct lacks that site's vocal constituency. Designed by renowned landscape architect Lawrence Halprin, Freeway Park is considered a modernist masterpiece, though not everyone sees its beauty, and it is a magnet for crime.

The idea of preserving a superhighway is a vexing one. Many, while undoubtedly historic, are not considered as such. “They are difficult to deal with because they are functioning, engineered systems,” preservationist Lynne Sebastian writes in the spring 2003 *Common Ground*.

RIGHT: View of the viaduct's support structure. While some see an eyesore and a barrier between the city and the waterfront, others find a gritty appeal in the places beneath, a fading urban underworld that is part of Seattle's character.

“They are not the kinds of properties that were envisioned when the National Register of Historic Places was created . . . which means that we have no body of experience to draw on when we begin to evaluate them.” Icons such as Route 66 have been preserved in parts where they wind through lonely, bypassed areas. But the concrete titans of the Eisenhower years have not. “The interstate highway system is unique,” writes Sebastian. “It is not only national in its level of significance, it is national in scale. There is nothing else I can think of that is like it.”

Those who feel an affection for the Alaskan Way see a connection to Seattle's working past, to a time when timber and fish and other goods were the lifeblood of the waterfront, and of the city itself. Others claim that its removal would connect the city more intimately with its true heritage—the vast bay—and reestablish the tie to the natural geography.

The Alaskan Way Viaduct is emblematic of the postwar approach to urban mobility, a resourceful and determined shoehorning of a highway through a crowded urban center. It represents a very '50s approach to problem-solving, practicality over aesthetics and sentiment. The HAER documentation captures this character of the road—as not only a product of its time, but of a nationwide phenomenon. In doing so, it has brought to light the question of how modern cities grapple with the artifacts of another era's progress.

contact points **web** HAER Documentation of the Alaskan Way Viaduct www.loc.gov/pictures/item/WAO830/ Seattle Department of Transportation www.cityofseattle.net/trans/aww.htm



ARTI FACT

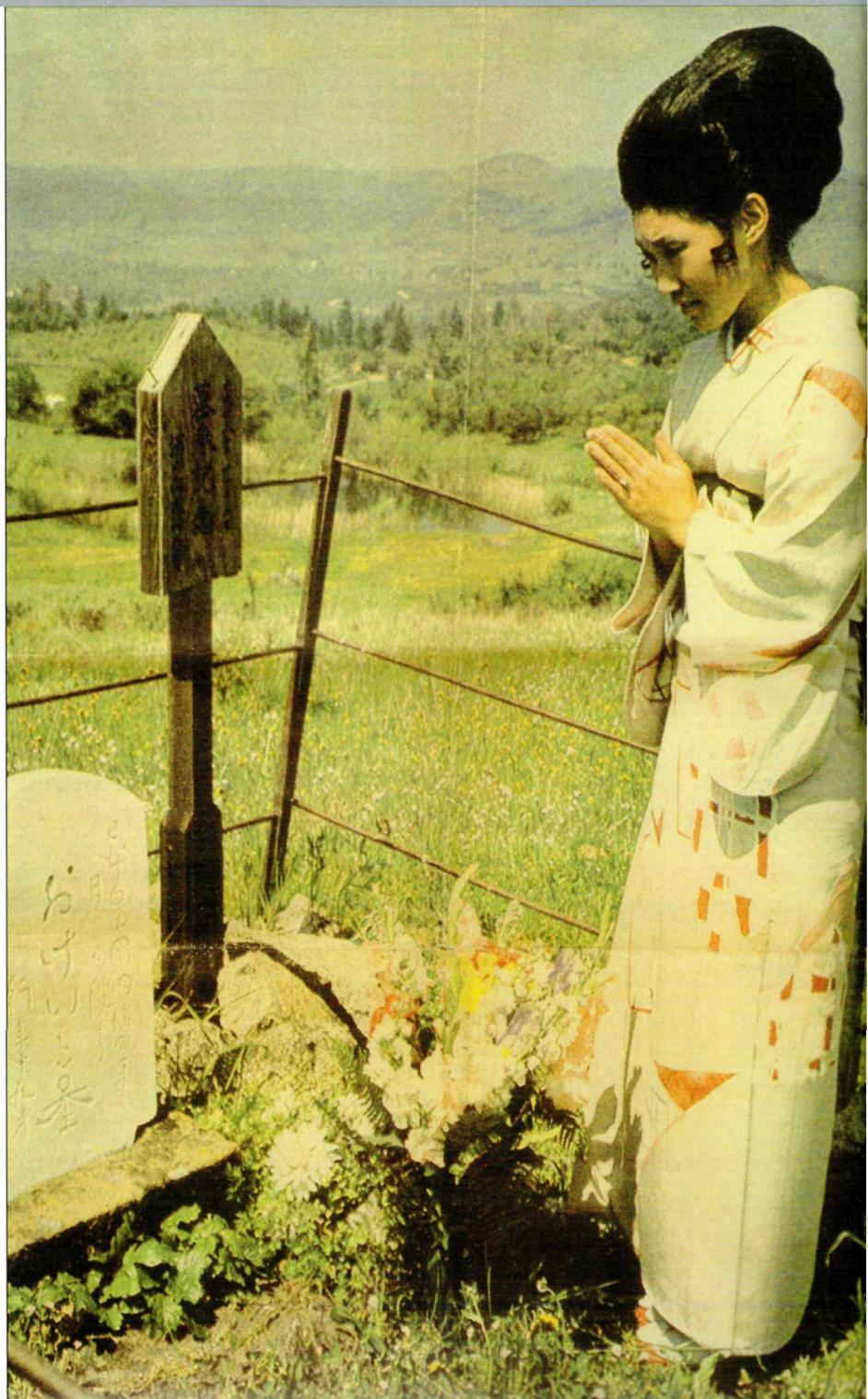
Place of Refuge

"IN MEMORY OF OKEI, DIED IN 1871, AGED 18, A JAPANESE GIRL."

That is the inscription on the headstone, and exactly a century later this local woman came to pay her respects, photographed by a reporter with the *Sacramento Union*. Okei, said to be the first Japanese person to die on American soil, lived and worked at the Wakamatsu Tea and Silk Colony Farm, established by her countrymen in 1869. Although it lasted only two years, it was one of the oldest Japanese settlements in the United States, recently memorialized in the National Register of Historic Places.

THEY CAME TO SAN FRANCISCO IN THE SPRING OF 1869, via paddle-wheel steamer, fleeing civil war. They carried mulberry trees for silk production, tea plants, bamboo, and other plant stock. They were brought over by John Henry Schnell, a German soldier-of-fortune who developed a loyalty to an embattled feudal lord, Matsudaira Katamori. The colony was a refuge should Katamori and his followers need to flee. **THE 100-ACRE SETTLEMENT DID WELL AT FIRST,** tended by 22 families who grew tea, silk, and rice and also operated a fishery. It was 40 miles west of Sacramento, in gold-mining country, and the farm was seen as a welcome addition to the local economy, the first to introduce Japanese horticulture to California. At the 1869 state agricultural fair, the growers exhibited silkworm cocoons and tea and oil plants.

IN 1871, A DROUGHT HIT THE COLONY HARD. Schnell, while outwardly confident in the experiment, knew little about farming or the local climate. As prospects dwindled, he left for Japan to bring help but never returned. The colonists dispersed and the settlement collapsed. **OVER THE YEARS, THE FARM HAS TAKEN ON** the quality of myth, inspiring books, songs, and film, even though little is known about the people who lived there. The American River Conservancy and the Japanese American Citizens League launched a successful campaign to buy the site, whose significance has been compared with that of Jamestown and Plymouth. Aside from the grave of Okei, it includes a farmhouse and barn situated in rolling countryside with streams and wetlands.



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