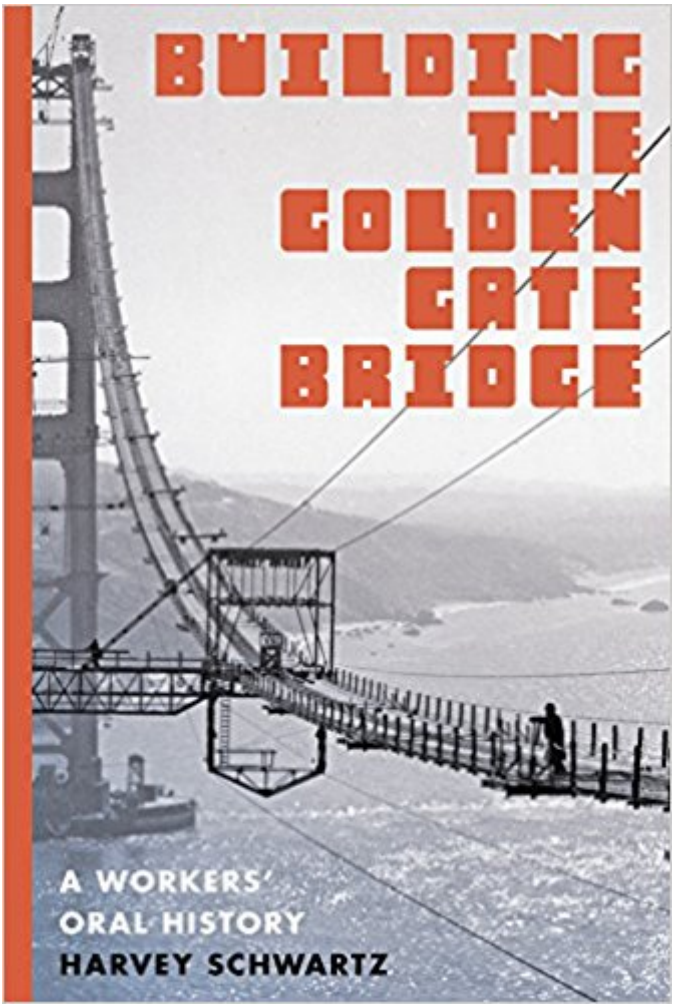
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Building The Golden Gate Bridge: A Workers' Oral History



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Synopsis

Moving beyond the familiar accounts of politics and the achievements of celebrity engineers and designers, Building the Golden Gate Bridge is the first book to primarily feature the voices of the workers themselves. This is the story of survivors who vividly recall the hardships, hazards, and victories of constructing the landmark span during the Great Depression.Labor historian Harvey Schwartz has compiled oral histories of nine workers who helped build the celebrated bridge. Their powerful recollections chronicle the technical details of construction, the grueling physical conditions they endured, the small pleasures they enjoyed, and the gruesome accidents some workers suffered. The result is an evocation of working-class life and culture in a bygone era.Most of the bridge builders were men of European descent, many of them the sons of immigrants. Schwartz also interviewed women: two nurses who cared for the injured and tolerated their antics, the wife of one 1930s builder, and an African American ironworker who toiled on the bridge in later years. These powerful stories are accompanied by stunning photographs of the bridge under construction. An homage to both the American worker and the quintessential San Francisco landmark, Building the Golden Gate Bridge expands our understanding of Depression-era labor and California history and makes a unique contribution to the literature of this iconic span.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

["Building the Golden Gate Bridge"] brings together the gripping first-person accounts of the backbreaking work, terrifying physical conditions, tragedies and triumphs that bridge workers

experienced as the Golden Gate went up.--Georgia Rowe"San Jose Mercury News" (01/01/2015)[F]ascinating.... this book paints a vivid portrait of those who were faced with the prospect of abject poverty during the Great Depression, and dipped into personal reserves of strength and character in order to survive.... [T]hanks to the diligent and painstaking work of Harvey Schwartz... their personal stories remain with us, inspire us, and remind us that after all the rhetoric, grand visions become a reality when very ordinary people work hard to accomplish the extraordinary.--Bill Hohlfeld"LaborPress" (01/01/2016)[Building the Golden Gate Bridge] brings together the gripping first-person accounts of the backbreaking work, terrifying physical conditions, tragedies and triumphs that bridge workers experienced as the Golden Gate went up.--Georgia Rowe"San Jose Mercury News" (01/01/2015)[F]ascinating.... this book paints a vivid portrait of those who were faced with the prospect of abject poverty during the Great Depression, and dipped into personal reserves of strength and character in order to survive.... [T]hanks to the diligent and painstaking work of Harvey Schwartz... their personal stories remain with us, inspire us, and remind us that after all the rhetoric, grand visions become a reality when very ordinary people work hard to accomplish the extraordinary.--Bill Hohlfeld"LaborPress" (01/01/2016)[Building the Golden Gate Bridge] brings together the gripping first-person accounts of the backbreaking work, terrifying physical conditions, tragedies and triumphs that bridge workers experienced as the Golden Gate went up.--Georgia Rowe"San Jose Mercury News" (01/01/2015)[F]ascinating. . . . this book paints a vivid portrait of those who were faced with the prospect of abject poverty during the Great Depression, and dipped into personal reserves of strength and character in order to survive. . . . [T]hanks to the diligent and painstaking work of Harvey Schwartz. . . their personal stories remain with us, inspire us, and remind us that after all the rhetoric, grand visions become a reality when very ordinary people work hard to accomplish the extraordinary.--Bill Hohlfeld"LaborPress" (01/01/2016)Gripping from beginning to end. . . . Schwartz has again succeeded in producing a powerful story of work and workers on the Pacific Coast. The book will be of immense value to social historians, labor historians, and California historians and is ideal for use in the classroom. Whatever your reason for picking up this book, you will be moved while reading. And, when finished, you will see the Gate in a new way.--Steven C. Beda"Pacific Northwest Quarterly" (01/01/2016)

"This fascinating book captures the story of a big construction project through the eyes of the people who actually did the work and describes the immigrant experience in the early 20th century and the difficulty of finding work during the Great Depression."Ã¢â ¬â ¢Andrew Dunar, professor of history, University of Alabama, Huntsville"Harvey Schwartz follows the example of Studs Terkel by allowing

workers to speak for themselves. Building the Golden Gate Bridge comes at a time when we Americans are asking ourselves, are we finished as a working nationÃ¢â ¬â ¢if and when work is defined as highly skilled, demanding, dangerous, intricate performance by ordinary workers operating at the top of their game? This book, the voices of these workers, and the Golden Gate Bridge itself gives us the confidence to assert that labor in America is far from finished. It has got a long way to goÃ¢â ¬â ¢and the Golden Gate Bridge has set the standards for that journey."Ã¢â ¬â ¢Kevin Starr, University of Southern California"In this superbly edited oral history collection, Harvey Schwartz brings to life the heretofore uncelebrated stories of workers who constructed and maintained the iconic Golden Gate Bridge. Here the voices of cable spinners, ironworkers, engineers, and nurses who tended the injured describe accidents, company safety innovations, worker ingenuity, racism, and the cold, wet, and dangerous conditions of the San Francisco Bay. These stories evoke the daily heroic feats of workers in an era when the nation supported infrastructure and jobs projects."Ã¢â ¬â ¢Laurie Mercier, author of Speaking History: Oral Histories of the American Past"Harvey Schwartz masterfully guides the reader through the exclusive, real life stories of the overlooked 'greatest generation' workers who built the Golden Gate Bridge in perilous hardscrabble working conditions that would challenge them every day. After reading these riveting stories from a time when as ironworker 'Ace' Al Zampa says, 'You could go all over San Francisco for a nickel' your next trip over the Golden Gate Bridge will never be the same."Ã¢â ¬â ¢Art Agnos, former mayor of San Francisco

Loved this story!

The book provided an interesting perspective on the Gate and the people who built it.

Great, the building crew's own stories.

This relatively brief book has everything you could want from a piece of history. The workers' voices, based on interviews the author conducted, come through with their individuality and and uniqueness intact, making the reading experience like time travel back to the 1930s.You'll see with new eyes, the magnitude of the project, the uncertain odds of success, and most of all, the sheer danger of working on those towers, cables and scaffolds suspended hundreds of feet above a churning passage to the sea. Many of the men had also worked on the Bay Bridge, where an accidental death every two months was simply expected, so they uniformly appreciated that the Gate was the

first major project in the US to have a safety net below the work area and to require that hard hats be worn. Nonetheless, roughly a dozen still lost their lives.It’s also clear to each one how lucky they were to have jobs, and good-paying jobs at that, when so many others didn’t. Yet almost to a person, none of them thought at first that the bridge was anything more than a boondoggle, and assumed it could never actually be built, yet work was work, and badly needed.The remarkable technology involved comes through beautifully as well, though it helps a great deal with that to read the chapters in order. At one voice per chapter, it may seem tempting to skip around and find the most colorful characters, but don’t. The author has cleverly sequenced the material to tell the story on several levels at the same time, so just give yourself over to the experience. If you’ve ever driven across the Golden Gate, or walked across, or merely admired it from a distance or in photos, this book is a must-read.

Great stories from the men who built the Golden Gate Bridge. How they learned to master the heights and sway while on the bridge.

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