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Historic Book about the Caldecott Tunnel is Anything But 'Boring'

By Cathy Dausman



Kennedy Tunnel western entrance, 1924

Photos courtesy Lafayette Historical Society

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When two authors – one with a degree in science, the other in English – collaborated on their latest book, it took two years, start to finish. But in a larger sense, the project was more than a century in the making. As Mary McCosker, the English major, joked, “We wrote about a ‘boring’ topic,” specifically, the building of the Caldecott Tunnel, from its humble, single-bore beginning when it was variously known as the Inter-county, Kennedy or Broadway tunnel in 1903 to the completion and opening of the fourth bore in 2013 and all things tunnel in between.

McCosker and Mary Solon, the science major, both members of the Lafayette Historical Society, previously co-authored a book about Lafayette. Solon said this year’s book, “Images of America: Building the Caldecott Tunnel” (Arcadia Publishing), was “a lark” to work on, but warned it was the duo’s last publication.

“It’s a bit like childbirth,” McCosker explained, alluding to the pain sometimes forgotten until the next baby rolls around. The books likely won’t make it onto any bestseller lists – “I think its rated 800,000 [in popularity] on Amazon,” joked Solon, but it should do a reasonable business in Contra Costa County, where nearly every driver has had occasion to drive under the Berkeley hills.

“We think this book will have legs,” Solon said. “We’re women, we’re not engineers, but we got into it,” Solon explained.

The 127-page soft-cover book is chalk full of black and white photos and illustrations, mostly two to a page, assembled by the authors which document the century-long progression of the Caldecott Tunnel, from the “Trails and Roads” era of the Kennedy Tunnel opening in 1903 to the Fourth Bore dedication Nov. 15, 2013.

The photos were culled from a variety of sources, including private collections, area libraries, newspapers, historical societies, museums and the California Department of Transportation. While too small to be considered a coffee table book, it is nevertheless jammed with facts, figures and history lessons befitting

Solon and McCosker’s associations with the Lafayette Historical Society.

As the authors explained in the book: “For centuries, the natural barrier provided by geography divided the California counties on either side of the Oakland/Berkeley hills.” Even the “often inadequate” first tunnel “conveniently linked the two counties of the East Bay ... and provided the farmers of those towns with safer access to the markets of Alameda County and San Francisco.”

Solon and McCosker were pleased to learn a woman, Cristina Ferraz, helped conceive the idea of a public medallion competition during the design of the Fourth Bore in 2008. The authors were also impressed that the safety record for building tunnels improved over time. Solon said one

person died in 1936 during construction of the first bore; three died during a cave in when the second bore was built and there wasn’t so much as one lost work day during the fourth bore construction.

Solon described feeling “higher than a kite” to be included in the official Fourth Bore dedication ceremonies at the invitation of Ivy Morrison, public information officer for the Caldecott Fourth Bore Project. “It was exciting to be there with all the luminaries,” McCosker added.

The book is available at local bookstores as well as at the Lafayette Historical Society. All proceeds from the sales of both books – “Building the Caldecott Tunnel” and the pair’s earlier publication, “Lafayette” – benefit the Lafayette Historical Society.



The Broadway Low Level Tunnel. “The first phase of construction involved clearing the hillside and grading (shown here on the Oakland side). The Kennedy Tunnel and the original roads leading to it are visible in the upper part of the photograph. The lower location of the new tunnel meant a shorter climb but a greater distance for construction workers to bore.”

“Images of America: Building the Caldecott Tunnel,” page 36



Eastern entrance of the Kennedy Tunnel in 1918.



Cars at the Kennedy Tunnel Eastern Entrance, 1918