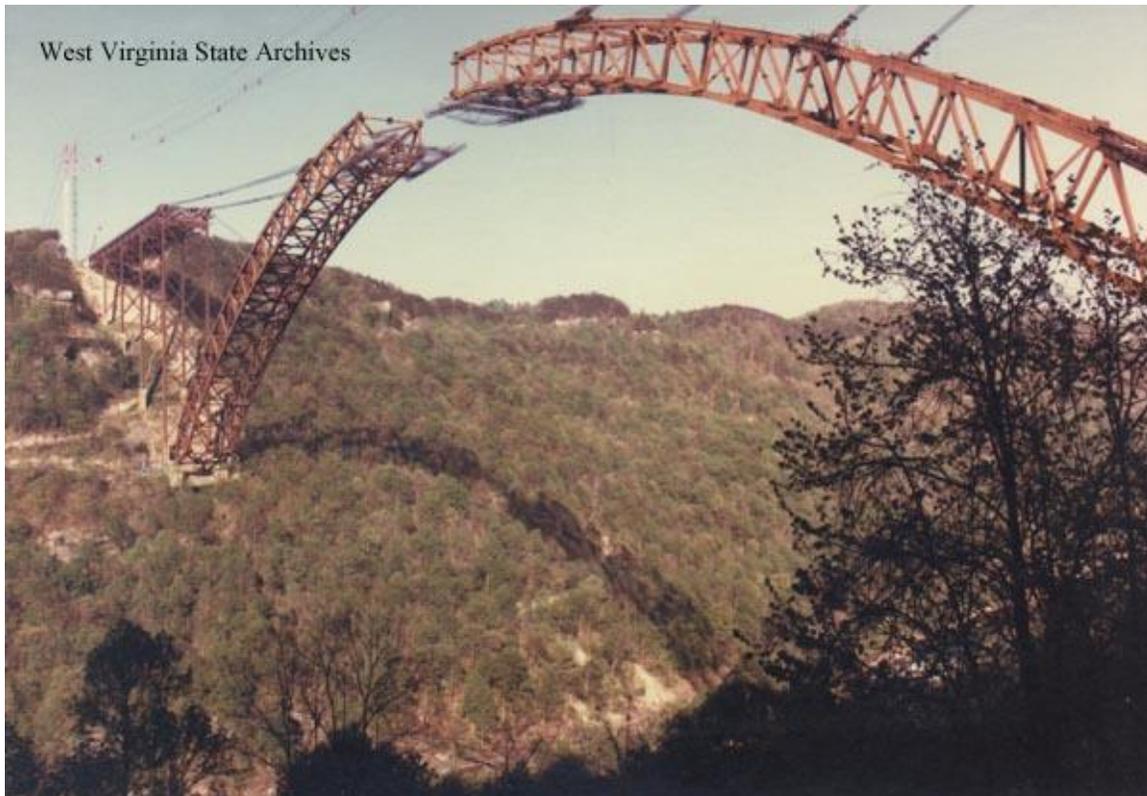


ON THIS DAY IN WEST VIRGINIA HISTORY OCTOBER 22



Construction of the New River Gorge Bridge

The New River Gorge Bridge was dedicated on October 22, 1977.

CSO: SS.8.8, SS.8.11, ELA.8.1

Investigate the Document: (Jennings Randolph Collection Ms2017-016)

1. How high above the waters of the New River does the New River Gorge Bridge sit?
2. As a result of the Appalachian Regional Development Act, how much money was invested in the Appalachian Highway system?
3. According to the Federal Highway Administration, how many bridges nationwide were estimated to be deficient at the time of the New River Gorge dedication in 1977?

Think Critically: How did the New River Gorge impact the social and economic well-being of West Virginia? What form of commerce arose from the New River Gorge's location high-above the New River Gorge? What unique annual one-day festival takes place on the third Saturday in October at the New River Gorge Bridge?



*From the office of
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REMARKS BY SENATOR JENNINGS RANDOLPH
NEW RIVER GORGE BRIDGE DEDICATION
FAYETTEVILLE, WEST VIRGINIA
OCTOBER 22, 1977

Seventeen months ago I stood, as I do today, on the banks of the ancient New River. On that spring day, West Virginians were celebrating the joining of the main arch of the magnificent structure we are here this morning to dedicate. The opening of the New River Gorge Bridge has special significance for all West Virginians. It represents an investment of \$37 million of which \$26.4 million are Federal funds. It is not only the most expensive project ever undertaken by the West Virginia Department of Highways, but also the largest activity in the Appalachian Development Highway Program.

This span symbolizes more than impressive statistics. The New River Gorge Bridge is a link -- an invaluable connector joining the steep banks of the second oldest river in the world 876 feet above the water. The Gorge is a beautiful sight -- outstanding even within the scenic West Virginia hills. It is an awesome natural barrier which we have now overcome with an equally breathtaking manmade structure. I congratulate those talented individuals who designed, engineered, and constructed the bridge.

Promoting the social and economic well-being of West Virginia has been our goal.

In 1965, we passed the Appalachian Regional Development Act.* As a result of that legislation \$716 million, including \$418 million in Federal funds, have been invested in the Appalachian highway system in our state. The New River Gorge Bridge is a vital part of Appalachian Corridor L which will very soon cover 67 miles

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from Beckley to Sutton. Corridor L is one of a number of highways being constructed throughout the region to link our rugged, yet graceful terrain, to the rest of the eastern United States.

The Appalachian highway network already provides ready access to some of the most geographically isolated counties in our state. Trucks carrying our valuable coal to the rest of the country, nature lovers coming to revel in our glorious countryside, and West Virginians travelling from home to church, all take advantage of these modern, sophisticated roadways.

The Appalachian Program is a fine example of how well-designed highways can successfully promote economic growth and development. Without the program, essential links like the New River Bridge might never have been possible. Our state is blessed with thousands of miles of winding rivers and creeks. Consequently, bridges play a prominent part in the daily lives of West Virginians. The Federal Highway Administration, however, estimates that there are over 100,000 deficient bridges in the United States. This startling situation exists because three out of four of the Nation's 564,000 bridges were erected before 1935.

In 1970, legislation created a special bridge replacement program under which West Virginia has received nearly \$29 million. But that is not enough. Senators Clark and Culver of Iowa and I introduced a bill this year which would triple the number of Federal dollars going into the bridge program. The measure would allow Federal bridge funds to be used for major repair work as well as costly replacement.

In 1916, when the pioneer Federal-Aid Road Act was passed, virtually no surfaced roads existed. Today we have the most sophisticated highway system in the world, and this bridge is now a major part of it. Our country is connected from one corner to another just as the banks of New River Gorge are now joined. We are no longer isolated -- cut-off by nature's awe-inspiring boundaries. Trade and commerce flourish; and Americans are the most mobile people in the world.