

Michigan:
A State Divided No More

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Junior Division
Individual Performance

On vacation every year, when my sisters and I were younger, we would always fight for the seats in the car for the first glimpse of the Mackinac Bridge towers. Once we reached the bridge, we would stop at a small beach near the foot of the bridge, take pictures and gaze at the incredible beauty of the structure. This forty-three year old engineering marvel has forever changed life in Michigan. It was while visiting the Mackinaw City Bridge Museum that I began to consider preparing my project on this structure for it has certainly proved to be a turning point in history.

I purchased three videos that were key secondary sources for my project. These three sources helped me to understand what life was like in the two peninsulas before the bridge, and how that way of life was altered by the construction of the Mackinac Bridge. Additional secondary sources were found on the Internet, at Washington Pennsylvania's library, the Washington and Jefferson College Library, and the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh.

Through my efforts, I located my most important primary source, Lawrence A. Rubin, the original Executive Secretary of the Mackinac Bridge Authority. Mr. Rubin is the foremost, living authority on the Mackinac Bridge, and he helped me understand the many turning points that the bridge facilitated, such as better medical services and education for the Upper Peninsula. Numerous articles and books dealing with the Mackinac Bridge and written by its designer, David B. Steinman, were extremely helpful. They provided me with insights into the aerodynamic stability of the bridge and turning points that bridges have brought about. Additionally, I visited the State Library of Michigan for many more important primary sources.

I chose to present my findings in the form of a performance because I love to act. In my drama, I portray a man waiting for the ferries, in order to catch a glimpse of what life was like before the bridge and to assess the event that was a turning point in history. I then portray Dr. Steinman to examine his revolutionary ideas in bridge building design. Finally, I depict Mr. Lawrence A. Rubin to analyze the numerous benefits for the Upper Peninsula and the people that were crucial to the building of the Mackinac Bridge.

The completion of the Mackinac Bridge clearly is an important turning point in history. This structure provided the first permanent connection of the two peninsulas of Michigan. The residents of the Upper Peninsula will never again feel isolated and their quality of life is improved. Trade, travel, and tourism have boomed, thanks to the bridge. From an engineering viewpoint, this was the first suspension bridge in the world to be aerodynamically "perfect." Through its design, other suspension bridges have become safer and longer. In reflecting on the potential impact of his achievements, David B. Steinman stated, "In human hearts was born the plan: a bridge of peace, uniting man. Our sons will have the span we wrought; the world the dream for which we fought."