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THE ROMANCE OF THE ROEBLINGS

The George Washington Bridge

Whenever we think of suspension bridges, such as the George Washington Bridge and the great bridge which stretches across the Golden Gate at San Francisco, we think of the huge cables that have made these bridges possible. And when we think of these cables we think of Roebling. Bridges, cables, and Roebling are as closely bound together as the wires in the great cables that were made possible by the genius of a young engineer, who, in a small factory in Trenton, N. J., developed an industry that has changed the history of transportation.

However, Roebling was not the first man to conceive or build suspension bridges. They were used in remote times in China, Japan, India and Tibet. The Aztecs of Mexico and the natives of Peru used this device for crossing chasms, or swirling river currents. They used twisted vines or straps of hide fastened securely to strong trees or boulders to support the hanging foot bridges. The method is still employed in remote parts of the world; but these bridges are comparatively short and not intended to carry great weight.

The first bridge hung on wire cables was over the Schuylkill River at Fairmount, Philadelphia, built in 1816 by Joseph White and Erskine Hazard, who owned a wire mill. The span was 408 feet and provided a passageway of only 18 inches. With the first accumulation of ice and snow, the structure collapsed. In 1842 another hanging bridge over the Schuylkill was more successful. It remained in operation until 1872. But these bridges were mere toys in comparison to Roebling's projects. By spinning wire into heavy cable he was the first one to suspend, successfully, bridges of a thousand feet or more in span.