



# Bridging the Chesapeake: A 'Fool Idea' That Unified Maryland

*David W Guth*

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## **Bridging the Chesapeake: A 'Fool Idea' That Unified Maryland** David W Guth

Bridging the Chesapeake: A 'Fool Idea' That Unified Maryland is the story of two Marylands, one on each side the Chesapeake. Maryland was confederation of two shores, each traveling along its own path. From the days of the first English settlements in the 17th century, much of the state's history centers on this intersectional rivalry. In the beginning, the state was governed by a tenuous power-sharing arrangement. However, as the population and economic clout in the west outpaced that of the Eastern Shore, the power shifted to Baltimore. That, in turn, created resentment on the peninsula. For nearly 100 years, Marylanders debated the value of building bridges across Chesapeake Bay. More than an engineering problem, such a bridge posed political, cultural and environmental challenges. To many Eastern Shore residents, a bridge was seen as a threat to their lifestyle. However, there were Baltimore business interests who saw the economic potential of the Eastern Shore's considerable resources being diverted toward Philadelphia. As a political issue, the proposed bay bridge became a lightning rod where self-interest and public good were often in conflict. In many respects, the Chesapeake Bay Bridge saga mirrors the story of America. It is a story of visionary leaders willing to sacrifice their self-interests and of narrow-minded minions willing to put their needs above all others. It is a story of humanity's ability to overcome a great physical barrier, and then being forced to deal with the unintended consequences. The first Bay Bridge was built at a time of American optimism. The second span opened under a cloud of controversy that would ultimately result in the resignation of the Vice President of the United States. The contemporary debate concerning the construction of a third bridge mirrors the national concern over the economic, social and ecological price of progress. Ultimately, it is a story of who we are and how we came to be where we are today.

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