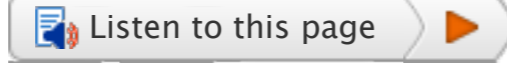


Today in History - May 27

< **May 27** >

Select date

Today's Stories: [Opening Of The Golden Gate Bridge](#) | [Wild Bill Hickok](#)



Opening Of The Golden Gate Bridge

On **May 27, 1937**, [San Francisco's](#) Golden Gate Bridge was opened to the public for the first time for "Pedestrian Day," marking the start of the weeklong "Golden Gate Bridge Fiesta" held to celebrate its completion. More than 200,000 people paid twenty-five cents each to walk the bridge. The following day at noon President [Franklin Roosevelt](#), from across the continent at the White House, pressed a telegraph key and the Golden Gate Bridge was officially opened for vehicular use. A compilation of [raw film footage](#) of both day's events is available as part of the [Prelinger Archives](#), acquired by the Library of Congress in 2002.



General View, Looking North, Showing the "Bay" Side of the Structure. Jet Lowe, photographer, 1984. Golden Gate Bridge, San Francisco, California. Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record/Historic American Landscapes Survey. Prints & Photographs Division

Completed just six months after its neighbor, the [San Francisco Oakland Bay Bridge](#), the Golden Gate Bridge is [painted a striking hue](#) known as international orange, a reddish color that was chosen to compliment the bridge's natural surroundings. Like the [George Washington](#), [Brooklyn](#), and [Williamsburg](#) bridges in New York City, the Golden Gate is a suspension bridge, held up by massive steel cables-narrows between towers. Its central span, at 4,200 feet, remained the longest in the world until 1964 when the [Verrazano-Narrows Bridge](#), also in New York, was completed. (Completed in 1998, the Akashi-Kaikyo Bridge in Japan, at 1,991 meters—about 6,532 feet—has the longest single span of any suspension bridge.)

The area known as the [Golden Gate](#) is the narrow channel formed at the mouth of San Francisco Bay, where a gap in the line of low mountains opens to meet the Pacific Ocean. Although topographical engineer [John C. Frémont](#) first named these rocky straits the "Chrysopylae or Golden Gate" in his report to Congress in 1848, evidence suggests that the term was in use at least a few years earlier. Fremont's designation, which also appeared on his [accompanying map](#) of the region, caught the popular imagination when [gold was discovered in California](#) soon after.



Birdseye View of San Francisco and Surrounding Country. Drawn by G. H. Goddard; Britton, Rey & Co, lith; San Francisco: Snow & May, c1876. Panoramic Maps. Geography & Map Division

The idea of bridging the mile-wide Golden Gate channel was proposed as early as the 1870s, but it was not until the [San Francisco Call and Post](#) began an editorial campaign in 1916 that the plan received popular backing. Rocky terrain and difficult weather conditions made the task appear impossible. Following feasibility studies, however, in 1923 the California legislature passed the Golden Gate Bridge and Highway District Act; the District itself was formed six years later. Voters, despite financial uncertainty following the 1929 stock market crash, approved a \$35 million construction bond in November 1930.

Bridge designer Joseph Baermann Strauss, a long-time advocate for the project, was selected as the Golden Gate's chief engineer. Important design contributions were made by engineers Charles Ellis and Leon Moisseiff and by architect Irving Foster Morrow. Construction began on January 15, 1933. Strauss instituted unprecedented safety measures including an early version of the hard hat and a safety net that stretched end-to-end under the bridge. While eleven workers died during the course of the project, nineteen others whose falls were broken by the net became known as the "Half-Way-to-Hell Club."



Detail View Showing Connection of Suspender to Floorbeam. Jet Lowe, photographer, 1984. Golden Gate Bridge, San Francisco, California. Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record/Historic American Landscapes Survey. Prints & Photographs Division

The Golden Gate Bridge links San Francisco to the south with Marin County to the north. It connects a host of natural wonders ranging from [Seal Rocks](#) to [Mt. Tamalpais](#) and the Muir Woods old growth forest; and to architectural achievements from San Francisco's early modern [Hallidie Building](#) to Marin County's [Civic Center](#) designed by [Frank Lloyd Wright](#).

Like New York Harbor's [Statue of Liberty](#), San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge has become an icon for its setting and its city. In May 1987, to celebrate the bridge's fiftieth anniversary, some 300,000 individuals walked the bridge in an event dubbed "Bridgewalk '87." Two years later, on October 17, 1989, the gracefully suspended bridge withstood the 7.1-magnitude [Loma Prieta earthquake](#) without incident.

Learn More

- San Francisco and Marin Counties lie along the San Andreas Fault and have experienced many earthquakes, the most seismographically powerful occurring in 1838, 1865, 1906, and 1989. The [Before and After the Great Earthquake and Fire: Early Films of San Francisco, 1897 to 1916](#) collection includes motion pictures of San Francisco prior to and just after the 1906 earthquake.
- Learn about the Golden Gate before there was a bridge. View the early film [Panoramic View of the Golden Gate](#) and read about San Francisco by the Sea. Search the collection ["California as I Saw It": First-Person Narratives of California's Early Years, 1849 to 1900](#) on [Golden Gate](#) for descriptions and stories and to understand the area's importance to early Californians.
- Search on [Seal Rocks](#) in [Evolution of the Conservation Movement, 1850-1920](#) to learn about Congressional legislation of the mid-1880s "to grant certain Seal Rocks to the city and county of San Francisco...in trust for the people of the United States." It was intended to "keep said rocks free from encroachment by man, and...preserve from molestation the seals and other animals now accustomed to resort there" and is an early example of Congressional wildlife protection accomplished by means of a grant to a local authority.
- [HABS/HAER Highlights](#) is a sampling of the records in the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) and the Historic American Engineering Record (HAER) collections, among the largest and most heavily-used in the Library of Congress [Prints and Photographs Division](#). Explore this preview, designed to represent the depth and breadth of the collections, or search the full online collection titled [Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record/Historic American Landscapes Survey](#). Browse the collection by place to find other [San Francisco](#) structures or search on the term [bridge](#) to see many different types of bridges from across the United States.

Wild Bill Hickok

Frontiersman, lawman, army scout, gambler, and legendary marksman [James Butler "Wild Bill" Hickok](#) was born on **May 27, 1837**, in Troy Grove, Illinois.



Deadwood. From Mt.Moriah. John C.H. Grabill, 1888. Grabill Collection. Prints & Photographs Division

As a youth, Hickok became acquainted with the risks incurred by those willing to take a stand against slavery. His father frequently assisted escaped slaves as they made their way north through Illinois, and young Hickok joined in the endeavor. Hickok left home in 1856, moved to [Kansas](#) to farm, and became involved in the Free State movement.

In July 1861, near the outset of the [Civil War](#), Hickok crossed paths with Southern sympathizer David McCanles at Rock Creek, Nebraska Territory. In a 1938 interview conducted in Wilbur, Nebraska, the Hickok-McCanles encounter was recounted by F. J. Elliot (based on an earlier 1882 history of the event). As Elliot told the tale, McCanles "came to Wild Bill and tried to persuade him to join" a company he was raising to assist the South. He also tried to force Hickok to turn over the stock he was tending for his employer, the Ben Holiday State Company at Rock Creek station. "On [Hickok's] refusal," Elliot continued:

McCanles threatened to kill him and take the stock. That afternoon McCanles returned with three other men and started to enter the house. Wild Bill shot him. Two of the other men were killed, one got away. At Wild Bill's trial, which was held in Beatrice, no one appeared against him. His plea was self-defence [sic] and he was cleared.

"F. J. Elliott." George Hartman, interviewer; Wilbur, Nebraska, November 26, 1938. [American Life Histories: Manuscripts from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1940](#). Manuscript Division

His reputation as a marksman was assured after the McCanles incident, and Hickok remained loyal to the North, working as a teamster, scout, and spy for the Union.

Hickok next held a number of positions; in law enforcement: as village constable in Monticello, Kansas; a deputy U.S. marshal; sheriff of Hays City (1869); and marshal of Abilene (1871).

"[Wild Bill](#)" Hickok was shot and killed by a drunken stranger at a poker table in Nuttall & Mann's Saloon No. 10 in Deadwood on August 2, 1876. Hickok had come to the Black Hills to explore the gold fields there, leaving his wife in Cincinnati. The story of his death is recounted in the [American Life Histories](#) interview, "[Ed Grantham](#)."

Buffalo Bill's Wild West Parade

Parade of Buffalo Bill's Wild West



[Buffalo Bill's Wild West Parade](#). F.S. Armitage, camera; United States: American Mutoscope and Biograph Company, 1902. [The Life of a City: Early Films of New York, 1898 to 1906](#). Motion Picture, Broadcasting & Recorded Sound Division

Learn More

- After Abilene, Hickok travelled with William Frederick "Buffalo Bill" Cody and his company from 1873-74. After Cody created his touring [Buffalo Bill's Wild West show](#) in 1883, other actors played Hickok in stage roles for the show. While Hickok did not live to see the dawn of the film industry, members of the show's cast did and were recorded by Edison and Biograph Company cameramen. A search for [Buffalo Bill in the Film and Video](#) collection features elements of Bill Cody's Wild West show including Native American Indian dancers, in scenes that constitute the American Indian's first appearance before a motion-picture camera.
- To read more stories about the legendary Hickok, search on [Wild Bill Hickok in American Life Histories: Manuscripts from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1940](#).
- See the Today in History feature on author [Owen Wister](#), whose novel [The Virginian](#) helped establish the American cowboy as a mythic and heroic figure. Search [Today in History](#) using the term [cowboy](#) for additional features.
- The collection [Buckaroos in Paradise: Ranching Culture in Northern Nevada, 1945 to 1982](#) provides a look at U.S. cattle ranching and its traditions. See the Special Presentation [Buckaroo: Views of a Western Way of Life](#), an essay by Howard W. Marshall, to learn more about the working life of the modern cowboy. Also, search using the terms [Native American](#) or [Paiute](#) to find more about Northern Paiute Indians from the Fort McDermitt Reservation who have worked the ranch from their earliest days.

< **May 27** >

Select date