

Grafton Bridge 75th Anniversary Celebration 22 July 2007

Cr Adams, Clarence Valley Council Deputy Mayor, OAM, Chair Bridge celebration committee, Committee members, Hon Ian Causley Member of Page, Hon Steve Cansdell Member for Clarence, Councillor Colleagues, other distinguished guests, ladies, gentlemen, boys and girls.

Thank you Irene Daley for your welcome to country.

I acknowledge the traditional custodians of these lands the Yaegl, Gumbadgir and Bungelung peoples and pay respect to their elders past and present.

This diamond jubilee celebration of Grafton Bridge is a wonderful, landmark occasion in the life of our City of Grafton and the Clarence region.

The first sod was turned on Wilson's Hill in 1911, but construction did not begin until August 1927 and then on 19th July 1932, the official opening took place - an event of great local and national significance, as this double-decker, 457 metres long, entirely Australian made, road/rail bridge structure, finally joined Grafton and South Grafton, and the last gap in the Sydney to Brisbane rail link was completed.

On that historic day 75 years ago Grafton City scored a great coup. The principal dignitary was the extraordinarily distinguished Sir Isaac Issacs, with arguably a better C V than any other Australian ever.

At age 37 this man entered Victoria's Parliament in 1892. He was then elected to the first Federal Parliament led by Edmond Barton in 1901 and in 1905 became Attorney General in the government of Alfred Deakin.

Regarded as the nation's foremost legal expert, he was sworn in as a Justice of the High court in 1906, where he served for 24 years and became Chief Justice in 1930. In the following year, 1931, he became the first Australian born Governor General.

It is recorded that Sir Isaac was disappointed that NSW Premier Jack Lang and not he, opened the Sydney Harbour Bridge four months earlier, but 19th July 1932 was to be his day to launch this great lady.

Another noted attending dignitary, was Dr Earl Page the Federal Member for Cowper and later to become briefly an Australian Prime Minister.

In the middle of the Great Depression, 14000 to 16000 people attended the grand occasion, there was a massive procession, mounted police, light horsemen, bands, school children and many floats.

At midday all those years ago Sir Isaac Issacs opened the bridge on the south side, by cutting a ribbon with gold scissors. At the conclusion of the ceremony the bascule span was lifted and the Southern Cross, that famous aeroplane was piloted by Sir Charles Kingsford Smith through the passage, a masterly feat indeed.

His Majesty, King George 5th's representative, the Governor General Sir Isaac Issacs, said 75 years ago quote:- “ Clarence River bridge is of outstanding importance, whether it be regarded as a notable feat of engineering, or as an event in the life history of a great progressive people”. He then said “no person who looks attentively at the bridge could fail to be impressed with its design, its magnitude, its beauty, its stability and its strength”.

75 years later, those memorable words of the Governor General still ring true as this mighty State heritage listed ‘bendy bridge’ structure, the only one of its kind in Australia, continues to faithfully serve today’s Australians.

Please have a thoroughly enjoyable day as we today complete the celebration of three quarters of a century of this magnificent Australian landmark.

Ian Tiley
Mayor
22nd July 2007.