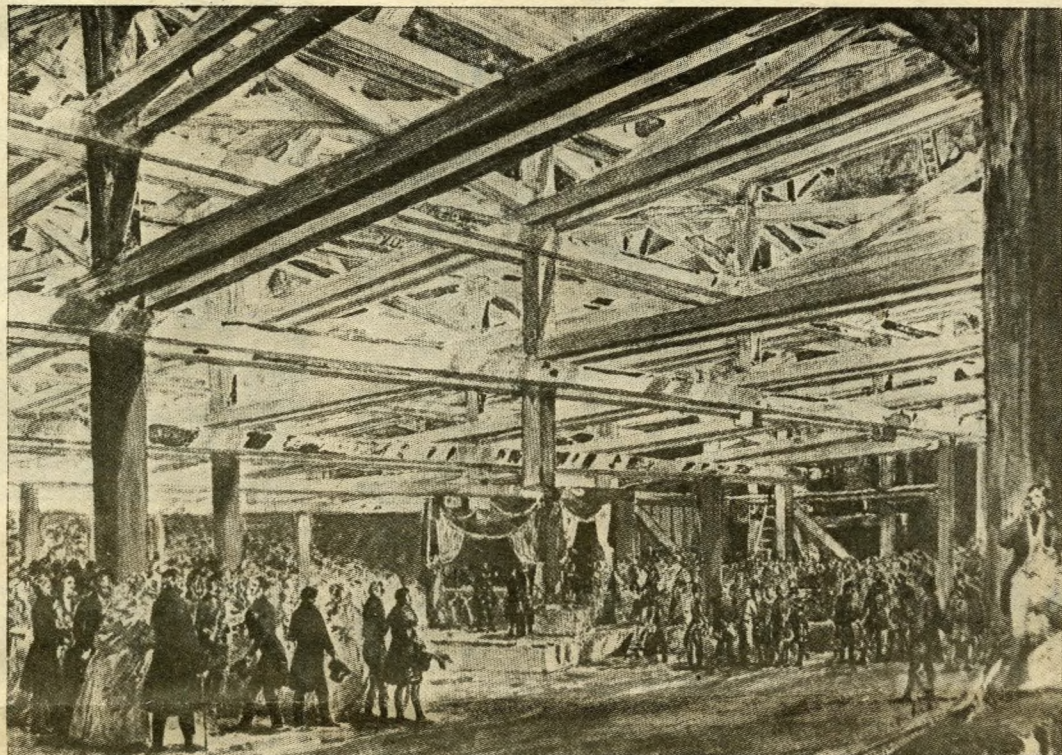


THE SATURDAY PAGE



The festive occasion on 24 August 1842, when the foundation stone was laid. Water colour by Miklós Barabás, a Hungarian painter



The Chain Bridge, with rows of houses on the Pest embankment, and life on the Buda bridgehead, as seen by French artists Breton and Trichon in 1851

Some Hungarian eulogists have gone to the length of calling it "the eighth wonder of the world". But all who have seen it concurred that Budapest's Chain Bridge, gracefully spanning the River Danube intersecting this city, is not only a boldly designed cast and wrought iron suspension bridge, but also a thing of beauty that has become a symbol of Budapest.

Technically speaking, it is a suspension bridge whose

two-lane roadway is suspended by cables anchored to two piers, massive architectural pieces deeply embedded in the soil under the Danube.

This fine bridge was the first permanent bridge to span the Danube. It never lost its peculiar attraction with the building of other graceful bridges, connecting right-bank Buda with left-bank Pest. It can well be said that every Hungarian has a "soft spot" in his heart for this bridge, and

ENGINEERING STRUCTURE WITH LINE OF GRACE

Budapest's Chain Bridge admired since 1849

for the history that goes with it.

The bridge is at a "natural" spot for traffic between the two banks of the river. For centuries before it became operational around the middle of the last century, a pontoon bridge served the purposes of traffic between the two banks—apart from winter periods, when the river froze up and people just walked across—at their own risk, of course. For centuries, the idea of constructing a permanent bridge was considered, but never carried out.

The execution of this major task was left to Count István Széchenyi, the outstanding leader of the Age of Reforms in early 19th-century Hungary. He set up a Bridge Association in 1832, to handle technical, administrative, financial, and organizational tasks. When a competition for the construction of the bridge was unsuccessful here, Széchenyi decided to cast about and try abroad. He went to England in 1832 to study bridge-building and, having admired the suspen-

sion bridge at Marlow, a residential town on the Thames, he got in touch with its constructor, William Tierney Clark, and invited him to take charge of the Budapest project. A namesake, Adam Clark, became the master builder, and moved here in 1834 (in fact he stayed here all his life, having married a Hungarian girl and settled here).

Groundwork for the construction began in 1839. The foundation stone was laid on 24 August 1842 (see illustration). At the proposal of Louis Kossuth, the political leader of the Age of Reforms and of the succeeding War of Independence 1848-49, the bridge was named after Széchenyi. The cast iron for the original bridge was delivered by English firms, while Hungarian foundry and machine shops produced the structural iron units.

The events of 1848, and the Austrian occupation of Buda in 1849, hindered the progress of work. Austrian General Hentzi gave orders to blast the Buda stretch of the bridge if need be. An explosion did occur in May 1849, when Hungar-

ian troops reconquered Buda, yet the bridge remained intact. The completed bridge was finally commissioned on November 1849. The bridge as a major traffic carrier further increased its use when a tunnel through the Castle Hill was built by Adam Clark in succeeding years.

For 25 years, the Chain Bridge was the only permanent bridge of Budapest.

In 1902, the structural iron units were replaced, owing to wear and tear. That bridge stood until 18 January 1945, when German troops, forming a "hedgehog position" in Buda, blew up all bridges spanning the river.

When Chain Bridge was rebuilt after World War II liberation, all Budapest turned out on 21 November 1949 to celebrate the reopening of the bridge on the centenary of its original completion.

Foreign artists have often been inspired, on visiting Budapest, to draw the Chain Bridge as a thing presenting lines of grace and elegance (see illustrations).

The Chain Bridge, complete with its famous lion figures (by János Marschalkó), and the Buda Castle skyline beyond, drawn by the German artist Ludwig Rohbock in 1857

