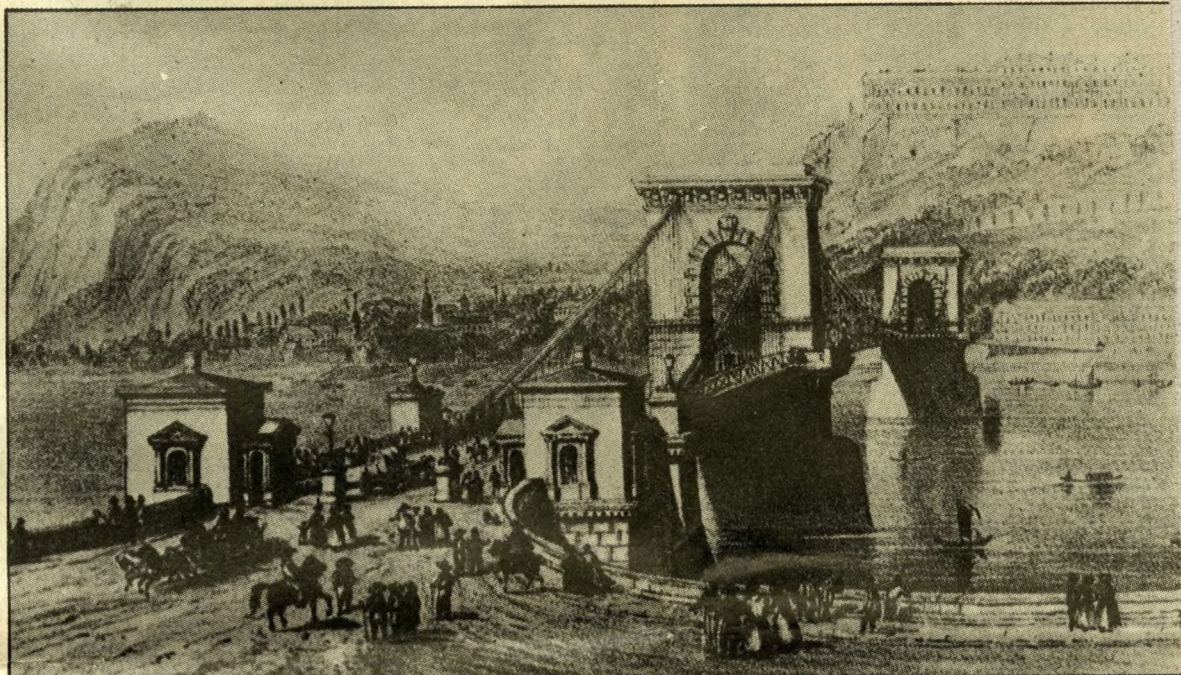


Lánchíd's double birth anniversary



W. T. Clark's 1839 design of the projected Lánchíd. Lithograph by G. Hawkins

Lánchíd or Chain Bridge, the first Danube bridge between Buda and Pest, was opened to traffic 130 years ago, on November 20, 1849. This traffic link of major importance was the first step in a process that in two decades and a half led to the administrative merger of the two separate townships (and a third—Óbuda) in Budapest, the capital of Hungary which now has a two million population.

The idea of building the bridge was raised by Count István Széchenyi (1791-1860), a great reformer who launched numerous major projects intended to bring his native Hungary into the modern age. Among other things, Count Széchenyi was responsible for the founding of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and for establishing the first shipyards in this country—the Óbuda Shipyards, and he was the man who in 1832 founded the Bridge Society for a construction of Lánchíd.

The same year Széchenyi went to England to study modern bridge building. There he met the British engineer William Tierney Clark, whose suspension bridge at Marlow he admired. Count Széchenyi had to wait until 1836 for King Ferdinand V to give his assent to a law on "the establishment of a permanent bridge between Buda and Pest".

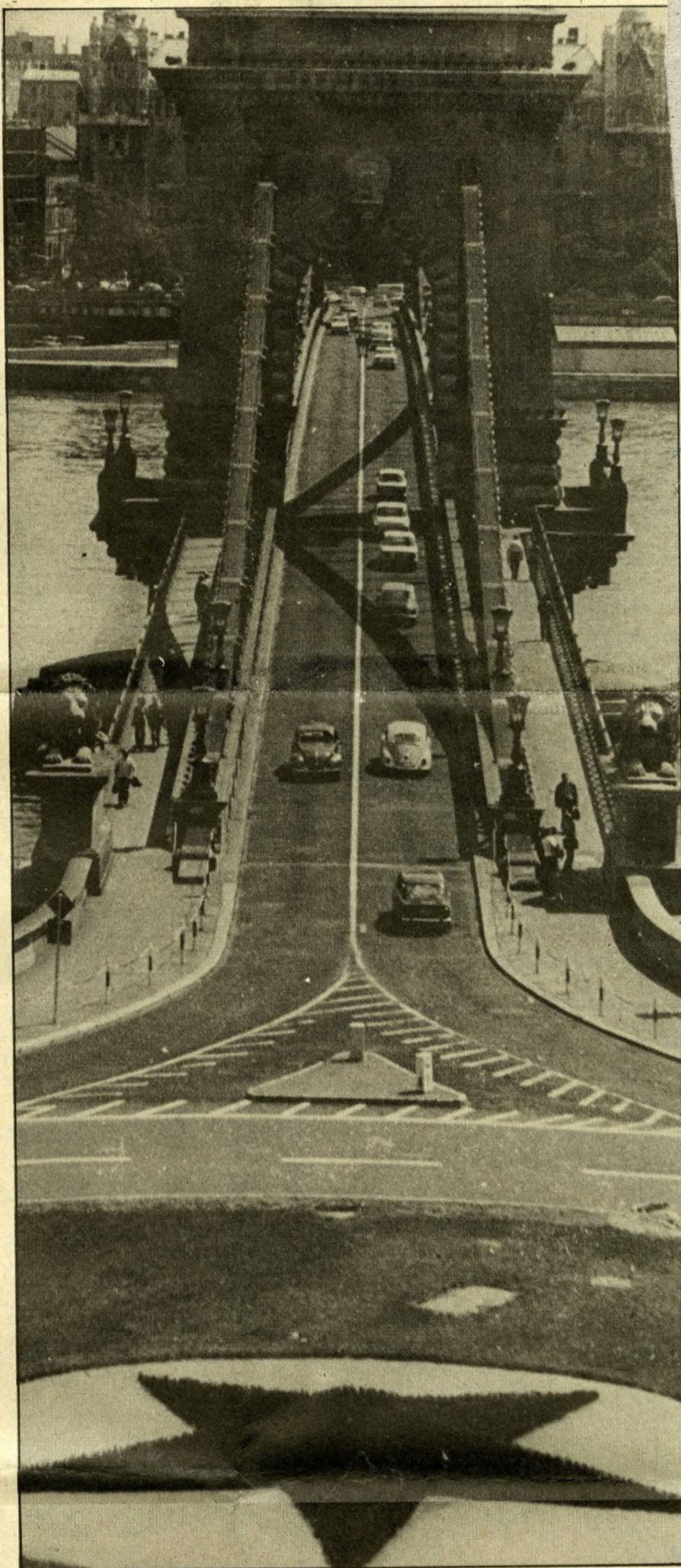
W. T. Clark (1783-1852) was commissioned with the designing of the bridge, and another Englishman, Adam Clark (1811-1866), with the construction works. Adam Clark had come to Hungary at Széchenyi's invitation to direct the regulation of the lower reaches of the Danube, another major Széchenyi project.

The foundation stone was laid in August 1842 and then construction was begun of one of Europe's magnificent structures. Lánchíd is a suspension bridge, the roadway suspended from cables (or chains) that are supported by two towers and firmly anchored at both ends.

A few days before the completion of the construction, during Hungary's War of Independence against imperial Austria, the bridge had a moment of crisis: In those days the Hungarian freedom army had recaptured Buda Castle from the imperial troops, and the Austrians wanted to blow up the bridge, which had been mined. However, the attempt misfired—the explosion blew up the Austrian colonel who had ordered the destruction but did not harm the bridge itself.

Chain Bridge was inaugurated on November 20, 1849. (The stone lions decorating the abutments were created by Hungarian sculptor János Marschalko in 1852). However, it became fully valuable as a transport link only in 1856, when the tunnel under Castle Hill on the right bank had been completed.

Lánchíd, like all the other Budapest bridges, was blown up by the retreating German troops on January 18, 1945. It was reconstructed according to the designs of the Hungarian bridge engineer Pál Sávolý (1893-1968) and reopened on the centenary of its inauguration.



PHOTOS ANDRÁS LEVAI

Chain Bridge today, as seen from Castle Hill on the right bank