

TOWN

By BILL LITTLE

What was the spark that set off Peoria's great rush forward to a \$50 million rebuilding program downtown?

Somebody asked that question the other day & a lot of answers were given but nobody mentioned the bridge. I think, as much as anything it was Murray Baker bridge that started the whole thing going.

Any way you look at it, Murray Baker bridge is one of the greatest marvels of the Peoria renaissance.

Four years in the making (Nov. 12, 1954, to opening day Dec. 12, 1958), the bridge:

— Was hailed as a "new east-west gateway to a vast Midwest empire."

— Is a link today between Cincinnati & Iowa, but eventually (1972) will be part of a non-stop (not one traffic light) coast to coast route.

— Cost \$9½ million itself, but many more millions in approachways.

— Contains enough steel to build 5,200 automobiles.

— Is not the city's longest in its 3,114 feet (McCaugage is 4,659) but is the city's widest with its 58 feet in four lanes of traffic.

— Is 148 feet from the top of its truss to the water level.

MOST OBSERVERS agree that the bridge cemented Peoria's place at the leading commercial, financial & industrial center in Central Illinois.

The ease of accessibility and freedom from traffic jams that it gave to the downtown cannot be ignored in any appraisal of city development.

Nor can the increased potential it gave the city as a distribution point be overlooked. Peoria used to serve a 150 mile area but now has expanded this area to include neighboring states.

There can be little doubt that the image of Peoria shines a little brighter in the eyes of travellers who drive through the heart of the city so easily & in such attractive setting go over the river.

Nor did visitors ever get a better view of Peoria's skyline than they do when they approach from the east over the Baker bridge. Peoria, seen from this vantage point, appears at its best. The bridge, in a word, helped Peoria put its best foot forward.

Perhaps, like its namesake, the bridge will turn out to be one of the best things that ever hit

Bridges
1
V.F. 120