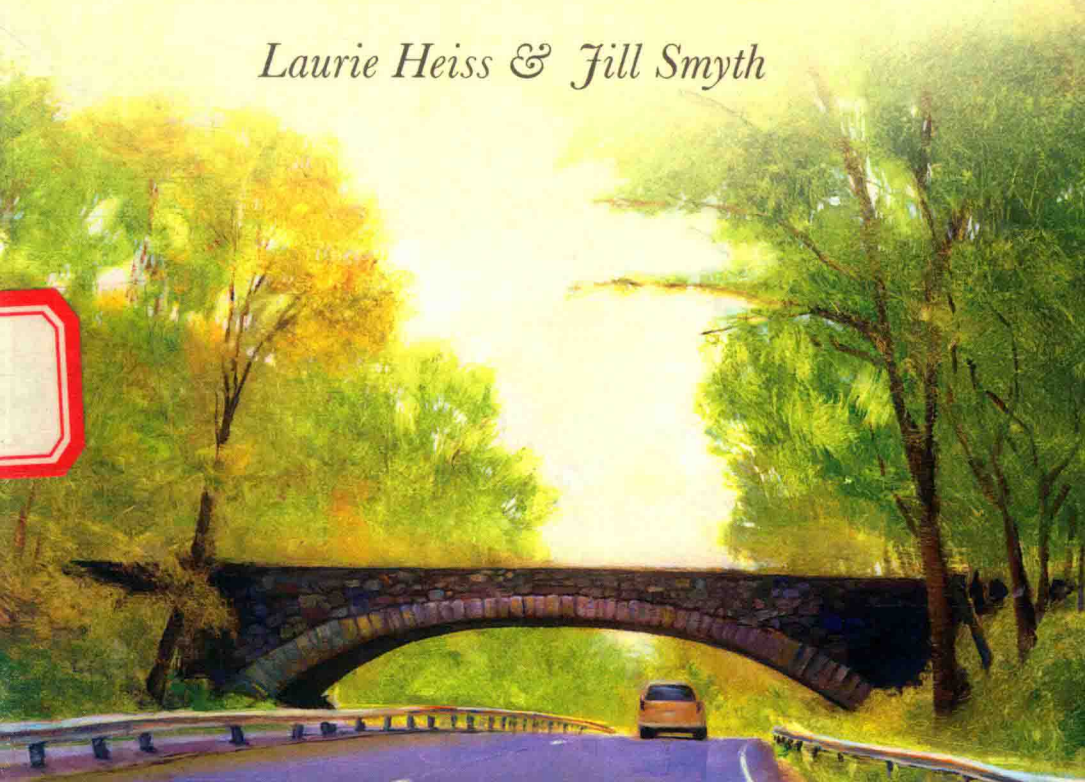


THE MERRITT PARKWAY

THE ROAD
THAT SHAPED A REGION

Laurie Heiss & Jill Smyth



THE
MERRITT
PARKWAY

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THE
**MERRITT
PARKWAY**

Dedicated to the thousands of people who have stood up or cheered for the Merritt Parkway for nearly a century. Thank you. It is you who shaped this region we call home.

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PREFACE

In writing this book about a historic roadway, we have tried to demonstrate that any part of our cultural heritage worth preserving has more than utility; it has something else. The Merritt Parkway is entwined with the history of its people and vice versa. The tension between special status and utility has created conflict regarding this parkway. Utility or charm? Transit artery or historic resource? We believe it can be both.

In this book, we hope to show the reader why the Merritt is a different road, still beloved as it approaches its seventy-fifth anniversary. The parkway is a precious collection of diversely styled bridges with a touch of whimsy; they represent monumental public architecture. In addition, an unknown but well-trained landscape architect designed a unique driving experience with trees and shrubs, one of the earliest examples of context-sensitive development, years before its time. And the roadway designers worked with the topography to design curves and views that are a delight for drivers. We owe them thanks, for it could have resembled the speedy but sleep-inducing Pennsylvania Turnpike.

Both of us have worked as executive director of the Merritt Parkway Conservancy, which has afforded us an inside view of the Department of Transportation. We appreciate its challenges in balancing utility with preservation. We have also worked with many fine people who care deeply about the fabric of the region and southwestern Connecticut—Fairfield County, in particular. They care about aesthetics, and they know there is real value in preserving pieces of our cultural heritage.

PREFACE

We want to engage a next generation to discover the differences between homogenized surroundings and special places. We have tried to make the story about the people and the place. We have thought about what cars people would be getting into as they drove off and merged onto the Merritt over the decades and what songs they were singing along to as they drove under a delightfully detailed bridge or alongside a flashy orange maple tree nestled among mountain laurels. So start each decade by putting yourself in that car and singing that song—go find the YouTube videos if you don't know these tunes! For more information and to understand the stories behind the featured cars and the songs, please visit us on Facebook at Merritt Parkway Authors the Road That Shaped a Region. For amazing photos and history of the parkway, please also see the Library of Congress, www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/hh/, including the entire documentation written by the National Park Service in 1992.

LAURIE HEISS & JILL SMYTH

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We are grateful to individuals who loaned or contributed material to us and who provided interviews: Maryanne Guitar; Victor DeMasi; Jim Vose; Henry (Buzz) Merritt; Jim Snedeker; Herb Newman; the DeLuca family; the Wise family; and photographers Tod Bryant, Nate Gibbons and Eric Seplowitz. We thank Cynthia Mullins for her enduring interest in capturing the Merritt Parkway in her many lovely paintings and appreciate her consent to use two of those images on our cover. We also appreciate materials lent or received from Mrs. Larry Larned, Marguerite Shuck, Mary Baier and Catherine Lynn. A special thank-you goes to the founders—including Emil Frankel and particularly Dee Winokur and Peter Malkin—for their leadership and support of the Merritt Parkway Conservancy, and thanks to our dedicated board members. A special thanks to Robert and Catherine Sbriglio for their lobby space in a museum dedicated to “all things Merritt Parkway,” for photographs and for their support of many parkway