

The Classic Merritt Parkway

By Patricia Villers
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*Editors note: The Merritt Parkway seems a different sort of subject for the Valley-Voice CT. Yet, it is undeniable that the Valley we know today would be much different without reverse commuters from lower Fairfield county who moved 'up here'. So to learn more, we attended a presentation about The [Road That Shaped a Region](#).
Ralph Villers*

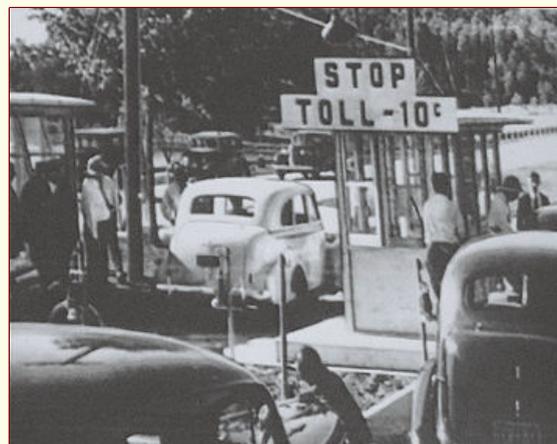


SEYMOUR - Residents of Connecticut - especially those who live in, work in or travel through Fairfield County - are extremely familiar with the historic parkway that runs from Greenwich to Stratford.

The Seymour Historical Society recently hosted a presentation by Jill Smyth, Merritt Parkway Conservancy executive director.

The nonprofit was founded in 2002 and she has been its executive director since 2007.

More than 60 people attended the presentation, and historical society president Loreen Coe said 20 people were turned away.



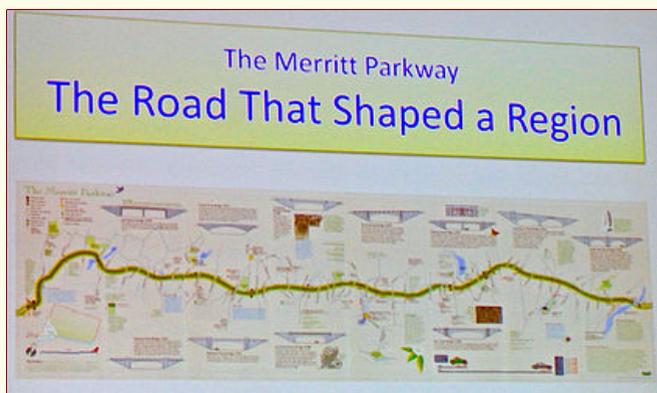
Smyth talked about the development of the 37.5-mile roadway that is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The parkway is named after Republican state Rep. Schuyler Merritt of Stamford, who died at age 99 in 1953. Merritt was a lawyer and an advocate for the construction of a parkway to run parallel to U.S. Route 1.

Smyth said in the early years of automobile travel, people used cars for "recreational activity on weekends."

In Fairfield County, Smyth said, "residents would sit and watch the cars" along U.S. Route 1 headed to football games at the Yale Bowl in New Haven.

Smyth said elected officials as well as conservationists wanted to preserve "the look and feel of Fairfield County" when the parkway was being developed in the late 1930s.



A Fairfield County Planning Association was formed, and each town had an opportunity to "weigh in" on the parkway plans, Smyth said. "Wilton and Weston didn't want it, and neither did Greenfield Hill (Fairfield) residents," she said.

However, Smyth said, "Bridgeport and Norwalk wanted it to go into the center city."

The parkway's first section from Greenwich to Norwalk opened in 1938, and the stretch that ends at the bridge over the Housatonic River in Stratford opened in 1940.

Smyth said the Merritt was built with "sweeping curves to slow down traffic."

Bridges that cross over the parkway were designed in the 1930s by architect George L. Dunkleberger. Their styles include art deco, gothic, classical, and renaissance.

"Every bridge was individually designed," Smyth said, but not everyone was a fan of the spans.

The staff at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City criticized the ornamentation on the bridges, she said.

The nature-themed ornamentations - including flowers and butterfly and spider designs - were manufactured in Bridgeport and affixed to the spans.



To find out more about the book, visit the [website](#)

Learn about the Seymour Historical Society [Here](#)