

Huron Road Crossroads at Bechtel's Ford

The Grand River: A Canadian Heritage River

The Grand River provides a common thread that links natural and cultural features and landscapes throughout the 250 kilometre watershed. The natural and cultural landscapes that surround this particular site portray part of the rich history associated with the river, which provided the foundation for its national status as a Canadian Heritage River declared in 1994.

Canadian Heritage Rivers System



Le Réseau des rivières du patrimoine canadien

Original Settlers

This area has been inhabited for over 10,000 years. In the early 1800s, the first settlers of European background arrived. Among these were four Mennonite families from Pennsylvania who farmed near this crossroads: Cressman, Biehn (Bean), Bechtel and Kinzie. These and other founding families are honoured by the nearby Pioneer Tower built in 1925-26.

Bechtel's Ford

Soon after 1800, Bechtel's Ford was established allowing an east-west road to cross the Grand River. The river bank on the west side was so steep that the road had to be built on a gradual incline from south to north up the bank.

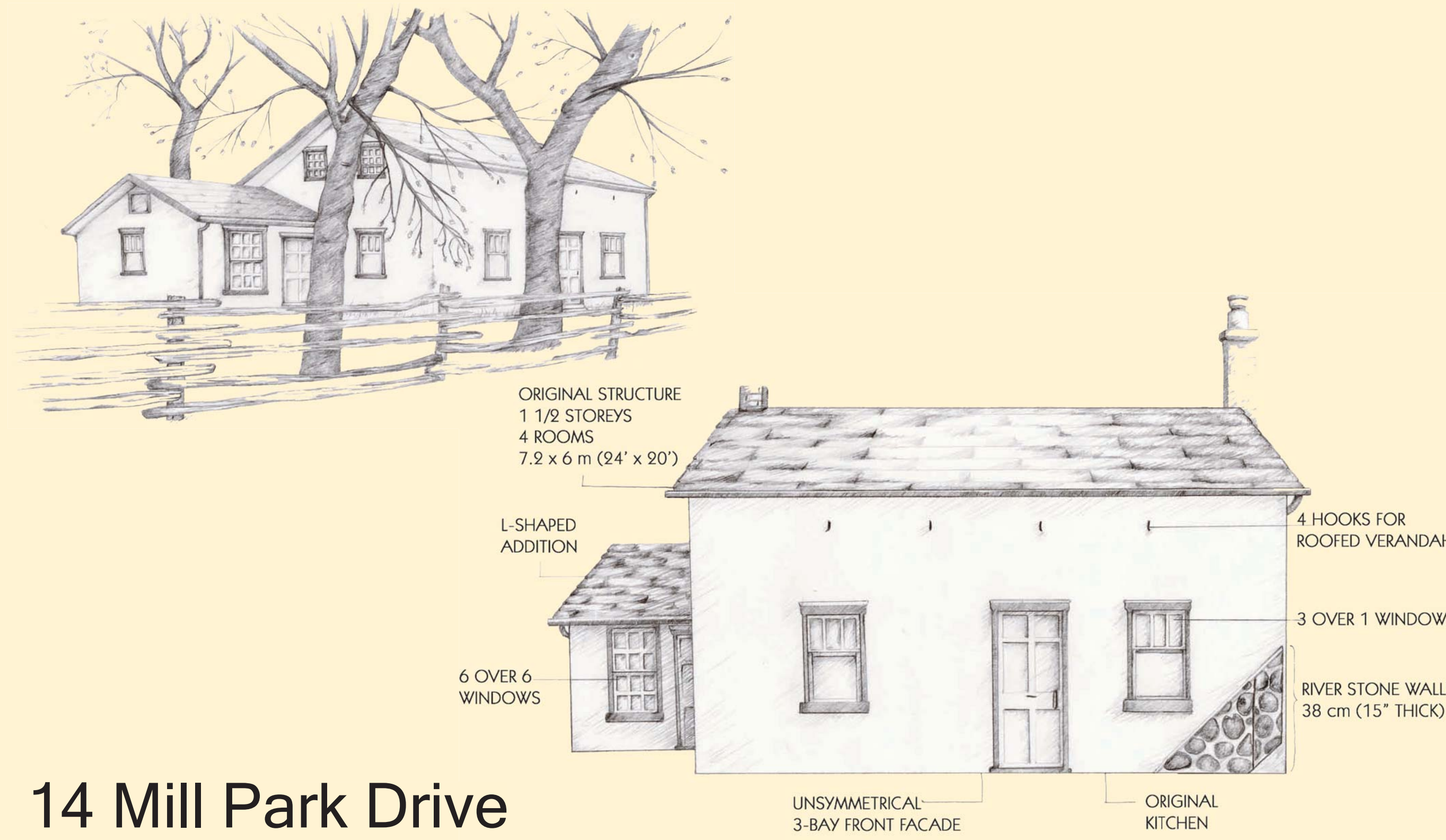
A ford is a shallow area in a river that can be maintained as a safe location to cross on foot, horseback or by wagon for most of the year.

In 1836, a bridge replaced the ford to accommodate traffic flow along the Huron Road. This bridge lasted until 1857 when it was washed away in a spring flood. The bridge was never replaced. The Huron Road crossing was moved four kilometres south near Blair and the ford returned to local use.

The Bush Inn

The Bush Inn was built at this crossroads in the winter of 1853-54, by Henry Hilborn. Inns, such as the Bush Inn, appeared along the Huron Road providing rest stops for travellers in the days when stagecoach services plied the primitive road.

In 1867, the Bush Inn burned down and was not rebuilt. The introduction of the railway in 1857 changed transportation patterns, causing the eventual demise of many small stagecoach inns.



14 Mill Park Drive

For nearly 150 years (1856-2005) a small stone house stood on this site. In 1856, John Wolff, a labourer living at the Bush Inn bought the 1 acre site from Abraham Cressman and built a one and a half storey, four room structure. The walls were 38 cm (15") thick and made of rounded stones from the river. The exterior stones were covered with stucco and then scored to look like ashlar stone blocks. In 1860, Wolff ran a tailor's shop out of the house. In 1864 he purchased the adjacent property that housed the Bush Inn and a barn.

In 1870, an L-shaped addition was constructed, wrapping around the back and the left hand side of the building. At one time there was a roofed verandah across the front of the house. The outline of the house is shown by the layout of the large stones you see in front of you.



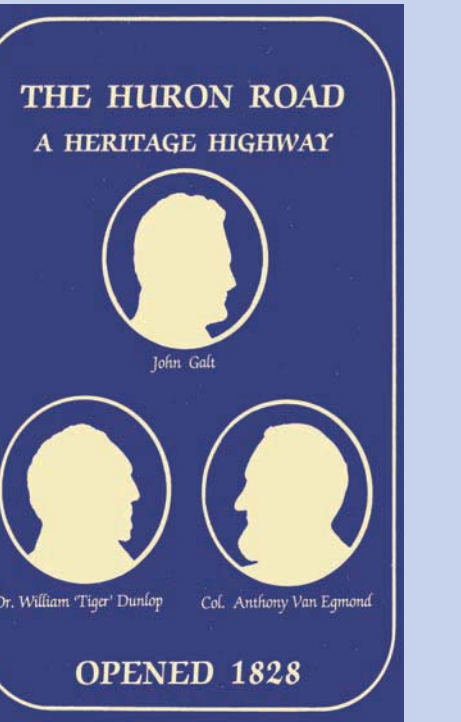
Source: Art Gallery of Hamilton - Gift of the Women's Committee, 1967

"On the Old Stage Road, November Night 1881"
Artist: Homer Ransford Watson

The Huron Road

The Huron Road was part of one of the largest land development strategies in Upper Canada and became a vital communication link. In 1826, nearly one million acres of land called the Huron Tract was purchased by the Canada Company which hoped to attract thousands of settlers to Upper Canada's western territory.

In 1827, under the leadership of John Galt, Dr. William "Tiger" Dunlop and Col. Anthony Van Egmond a massive road clearing operation began from Guelph through the future counties of Waterloo, Perth and Huron to Goderich, the deepest harbour on the Canadian side of Lake Huron.



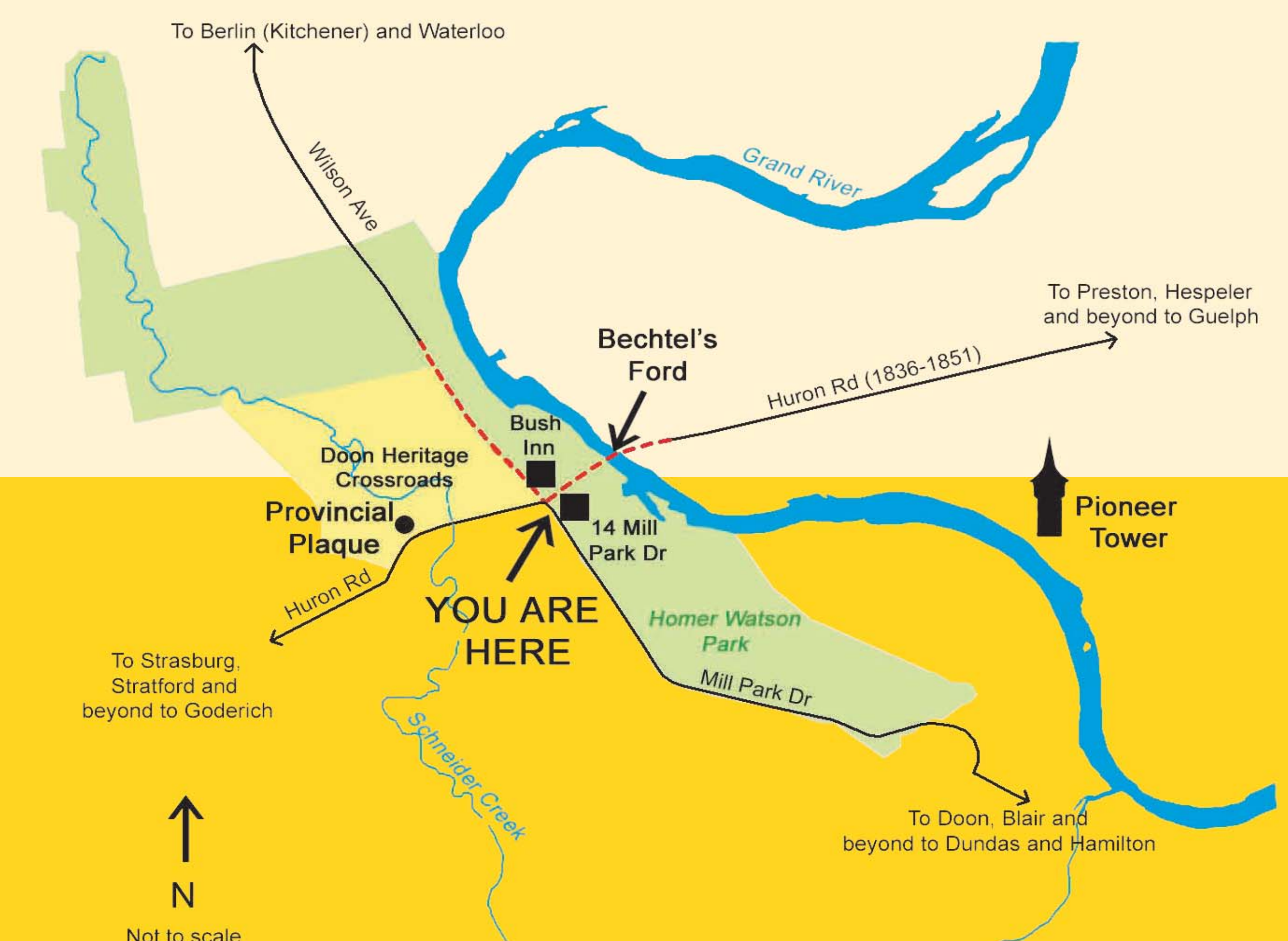
Huron Road Crossroads

Where you are standing was once a busy crossroads. Mill Park Drive formerly known as Cressman's Road, Bush Road and Wilson Avenue was part of an early road that linked Berlin (Kitchener) to Preston, Galt and Paris. In 1835, a triweekly stagecoach and mail service used this road on its way from Waterloo through Berlin to Preston.

The Huron Road crossed the Grand River from the east just below this site, came up the slope and continued west toward Stratford and on to Goderich. In 1831, mail was carried from Guelph to Goderich every two weeks and many stagecoaches travelled this road stopping at the numerous taverns and inns.

Homer Watson

Homer Watson (1855-1936), the Canadian artist of international importance lived and painted around the Doon area. His painting shown to your left, although painted after the Bush Inn burned, suggests what the inn looked like, as does Watson's 1890 recollection "The old Inn had a charm for me. Its long sloping roof, built to carry off the rain and three dormer windows broke the skyline..."



Historic Timeline

c 1800 First white settlers arrived

early 1800s Bechtel's Ford established

1800s Huron Road construction began

1827 Bridge constructed over Grand River

1836 Bush Inn built

1854 House built at 14 Mill Park Drive

1856 Bridge destroyed by flood

1857 House used as a tailor's shop

1860 Bush Inn burned down

1867 House addition constructed

1870

