

Main Street Bridge

Wooden bridges 1819, 1832, 1834, 1840, 1854, 1857, 1867
 Steel bridge 1878
 Concrete bowstring arch bridge 1931
 Restoration 2008

Spanning the Generations

Since the early days of settlement along the banks of the Grand River and its tributaries, bridges have been important focal points for communities. Our significant heritage bridges have become distinctive landmarks that contribute to a strong sense of place. These links to our past span the generations as well as our waterways.

The future of our bridges cannot be taken for granted as the ravages of time take their toll. The challenge for our generation is to maintain their symbolic as well as their functional integrity.

"Standing on the hillside, overlooking the gently sloping, oval-shaped valley, both Dickson and Shade were struck by the natural beauty of the site. The creek appeared to have ample power to run a grist and saw mill to serve the needs of the settlers whom they hoped to attract... Within a few years the village of Shade's Mills, as Galt was called, began to rise from out of the wilderness."
 Kenneth McLaughlin, 1987



"View of Galt" a lithograph from 1858, which depicts the view from the hill on the east side of Galt.

Although the earliest bridges have disappeared, their replacements have become important community landmarks.



The Steel Bridge (1878-1931).

Bridge Design

The Main Street Bridge is a two-span concrete bowstring bridge. The 58.22 metre bridge is a reinforced concrete version of a contoured steel truss bridge. The bridge abutments and pier are built solidly on limestone bedrock. This type of bridge was designed to carry heavy traffic and became more common with the increasing popularity of the automobile.

Bridge History

The Main Street Bridge was built in 1931 during the Great Depression. The Provincial government encouraged public works programs during this period, paying two-thirds of the total cost of the bridge. The design was provided to the City of Galt at no cost by Archie B. Crealock who was the bridge engineer for the Province of Ontario during the 1920s. In addition to the Main Street Bridge, Crealock designed other bridges in the Waterloo Region including the Parkhill and Freeport Bridges. To pay its share, the City borrowed by selling municipal debentures and passed by-laws to cover the remaining cost of the bridge. In addition, Albert Brown, a local jeweller, helped to raise funds by selling tickets to "buy a brick" for the new bridge.

The W. H. Yates Construction Co. Ltd's tender was accepted to build the bridge at a cost of \$52,000. It was the lowest of the 14 tenders received. The workmen were paid 40 cents an hour. The bridge was opened in December of 1931, due in part to the local merchants who petitioned the City to open the bridge early for the Christmas trade.

Restoration

The bridge has been resurfaced and repaired since 1931, but without significant modifications. In 2008 and 2009, major work was undertaken to replace the entire bridge deck and railings, and refurbish the concrete arches at a cost of \$1.9 million.



Banker's Corner during the Great War.

Banker's Corner was the location of the Imperial Bank of Canada (1893), Bank of Toronto (1912), Bank of Montreal (1918), and Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce (1850).



Construction underway on the 1931 concrete bowstring arch bridge.



A postcard from the mid 1930s showing Main Street Bridge from Queen's Square.

On May 17, 1974, heavy rains resulted in significant flooding in the Grand River watershed. In Galt, flood waters peaked at 18 feet – well above the normal river depth of 2 feet. The "Great Flood" left close to 1,000 people homeless and destroyed many businesses.



The Corporation of the City of Cambridge

The Main Street Bridge was designated under the Ontario Heritage Act on July 19, 1982, by the City of Cambridge. It was ranked third out of 100 bridges studied by the Region's Heritage Planning Advisory Committee. The Grand River was the first Canadian Heritage River located in a highly settled area and the heritage bridges were an important element in the 1994 designation.

The Main Street Bridge Crossing

This location is one of the oldest Grand River crossings in Waterloo Region. The first bridge was a wooden structure built in 1819 by Absalom Shade beside his store on Water Street. The bridge was called Dickson's Bridge after William Dickson who had contributed £800 towards the £2,000 cost of construction. The bridge contributed to the early development of Shade's Mill (later Galt and now Cambridge) by linking the east and west sides of the river.

Floods, Floods and More Floods

Floods plagued the Grand River. The first bridge was washed out in 1832 and was replaced with another wooden bridge that was washed out in 1834. Additional replacement bridges were required in 1840, 1854 and 1857. In 1866, the west end of the bridge began to sag and the "unstable" bridge was replaced in 1867 at a cost of \$1,300, only to be washed out again in 1878.

On Dec. 31, 1878, a new steel bridge built by the Hamilton Bridge and Tool Company for \$4,370 was officially opened. The bridge was damaged by floods in 1898 and 1918, but remained standing. This strong but "not particularly handsome" bridge was replaced with the current bridge in 1931. The concrete arch bridge withstood Hurricane Hazel in 1954 and a severe flood in 1974. In 1978, the Living Levee, a combination of riverbank walkways and concrete flood walls, was constructed to help protect against future floods.

Linking East and West

The Main Street Bridge has long been the link between the historic commercial district located on the east side of the river and the many community landmarks on the west side of the river.

On the east side stands the former Banker's Corner (also known as Four Banks Corner), Carnegie Library (1903) and Galt Post Office (1885). On the west side is Queen's Square, which was laid out as a community focal point by William Dickson in 1835. There are several churches and monuments located at Queen's Square, including the Crimean War cannon, Cenotaph, Wrens monument and Portuguese monument. This area was the former location of the King's Arms Hotel (1835), YMCA (1913), Galt Curling Club (1887) and Scott's Opera House (1899).



Heritage Bridges of Waterloo Region

The Heritage Bridges Program is sponsored by the Heritage Planning Advisory Committee. Visit www.region.waterloo.on.ca

Concrete Bowstring Arch Bridge 1931
Designer: Archie B. Crealock
Construction: W. H. Yates Construction Co. Ltd.
Total cost of the bridge: \$52,000

