

West Montrose Covered Bridge

Covered Bridge Construction 1881
 Restoration & Installation of Steel Bailey Trusses 1959
 Recognized as a Provincial Historic Site 1960
 Acquired by the Region of Waterloo 1998
 Ontario Heritage Act Designation (Part IV) 2007

Spanning the Generations

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

Their future 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.

Bridge Design

The West Montrose Covered Bridge is a two-span hybrid Howe truss covered bridge. The bridge has the rare addition of needle beams (elongated floor beams) used for lateral stability of the frame. Originally constructed entirely of wood, it is 62 metres (205 feet) long and five metres (17 feet) wide and clad with red-painted white pine panelling and a cedar shingle gable roof.

Covered bridges became popular in North America in the 1800s. Bridges were covered to protect the structures from damage caused by the weather and were expected to last up to 80 years, compared to a 10-to 15-year lifespan for uncovered bridges. The West Montrose Covered Bridge has far exceeded that standard. The bridge is currently composed of a combination of steel, wood, concrete, asphalt and stone and despite many upgrades, retains its original form and location.

Maintenance and Restoration

The Grand River in West Montrose is prone to ice jams that can cause sudden increases in water levels and flooding. The covered bridge has survived over a century's worth of spring break-ups due to the use of strong building materials, proactive rehabilitation efforts, and ice and flood management by the Grand River Conservation Authority (GRCA).

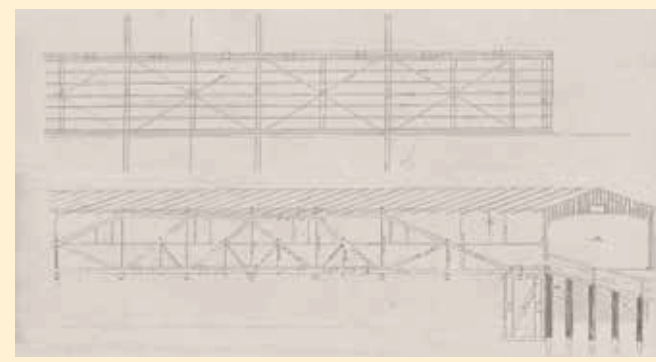
A number of restoration efforts have taken place over the years. The bridge escaped the threat of demolition in 1942 due to its picturesque appearance and sound condition. However, by 1954 there was need for restoration of the deck, beams, windows and piers. In 1959, reinforcing steel Bailey trusses were added beneath the wood panelling and deck. At the same time, a new bridge was built upstream that diverted highway traffic around the village of West Montrose.



Tender notice for the construction of the West Montrose Covered Bridge, 1880.

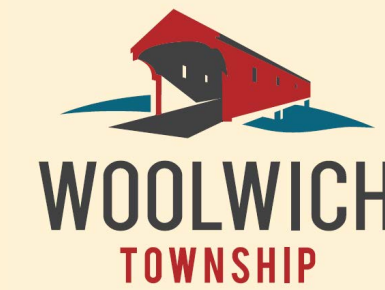


Aerial view of the settlement of West Montrose.



John Bear's plan for the West Montrose Covered Bridge.

The West Montrose Covered Bridge, one of the Region's most iconic symbols, is located in the Township of Woolwich and was designated in 2007 under Part IV of the Ontario Heritage Act. It ranked second out of 100 heritage bridges studied by the Region's Heritage Planning Advisory Committee. Heritage bridges were an important factor in the 1994 designation of the Grand River as a Canadian Heritage River.



Bridge History

In 1881, Woolwich Council accepted the tender of \$3,197.50 from John and Benjamin Bear to build a covered bridge to replace the existing open wooden bridge in West Montrose. John, who later became a well-known bridge builder, had experience in the construction of barns but the design for West Montrose was his first bridge project.

Buggies on the Bridge

In the late 1800s the primary means of transportation was horse-drawn vehicles. Covered bridges were less disturbing to horses crossing waterways, posing an advantage for local drivers. Once the winter snow came, buggy wheels were replaced with sleigh runners, and a local resident was hired to shovel snow onto the bridge letting sleighs cross without damaging the oak planked deck.

Safe travel was also a consideration when, in 1885, Council instructed Daniel S. Snyder to obtain coal oil lamps that were lit inside the bridge from dark until daylight. A long pole, equipped with a hook, was used to hoist each light onto a beam 13 feet above the bridge floor. The lamps remained until 1950 when three 100-watt bulbs were suspended from the ceiling to replace them. These bulbs were regularly broken by tall trucks, and in 1954 the County paid for the addition of electric lanterns.

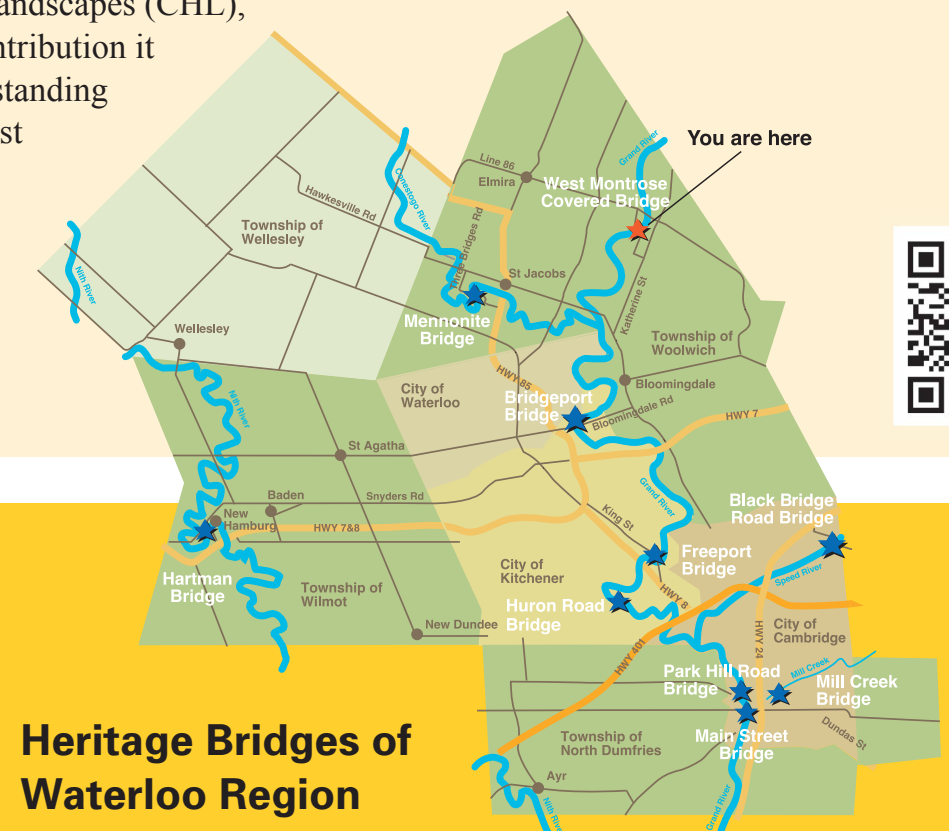
Village Life and the Covered Bridge

The Covered Bridge is, and has always been, a focal point of community activity. In addition to connecting both sides of the village and providing safe passage from Elmira to Guelph it has been a convenient, dry place for festivals, public speakers, merchant advertisements, and even carol singing at Christmas.

Local groups have always been actively involved in the bridge's preservation. When it was reopened after extensive repairs in 1954, the local Women's Institute was responsible for the opening ceremonies. The BridgeKeepers, a non-profit group of concerned citizens "committed to preserving the heritage, culture, quality of life and unique appeal of this special place..." was established in 2008 to keep a watchful eye over the covered bridge.

An Iconic Landscape

This colourful wooden bridge spans the Grand River and forms an iconic landmark in the settlement of West Montrose. The surrounding landscape, one of Ontario's first recognized Cultural Heritage Landscapes (CHL), is valued for the contribution it makes to our understanding of the history of West Montrose and the distinctive character and cultural importance of the community.



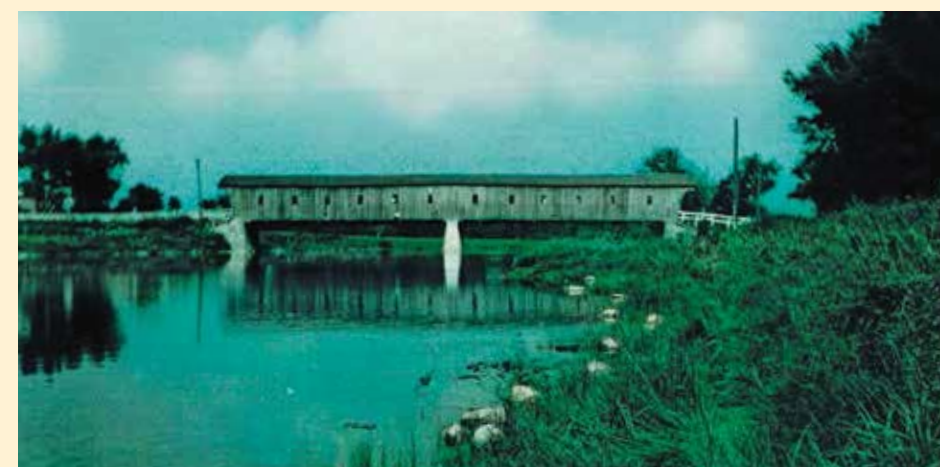
Elmira District High School students unloading and stopping traffic to let the empty school bus cross the bridge with a two-tonne load limit in 1952.



Bailey trusses, a type of portable prefabricated bridge, were added to the structure in 1959.



Ice jamming at the bridge during spring break up in 1981.



Postcard of the unpainted bridge from the 1930s.

Since it was first built, the West Montrose Covered Bridge has been referred to as the "Kissing Bridge," a name common to most covered bridges due to the traditional toll of a kiss. Of the many covered bridges built in Ontario in the 1800s, the West Montrose bridge is the sole survivor. It is the second oldest surviving bridge in the Region of Waterloo, and the eighth oldest covered bridge in Canada.

Hybrid Howe Truss Configuration, Covered Bridge 1881
Designer/Engineer: John Bear (Baer)
Bridge Supervisors: Daniel Snyder & Joseph S. Snyder
Construction: John & Benjamin Bear
Total cost of the bridge: \$3,557.65 (including extra work)



Heritage Bridges of Waterloo Region
 The Heritage Bridges Program is sponsored by the Heritage Planning Advisory Committee.
 Visit www.regionofwaterloo.ca