

Mill Creek Bridge

Vernacular stone bridge 1837
 Jackson Park 1905
 Soper Park 1920
 Restoration 2004

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, however, 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/Style

The Mill Creek Bridge is a single-span stone masonry arch. It is the Region's oldest remaining bridge structure and one of two stone masonry arch bridges in the Region.

Materials

The Mill Creek Bridge was constructed in 1837 by unknown skilled stone masons. Stone was a popular building material in Scotland, and most of the inhabitants of Galt were of Scottish descent. Although expensive, stone was chosen as the material of choice for its durability and fire resistance.

Restoration

The Mill Creek Bridge has been modified several times since its original construction. It is no longer technically an arch as the interlocking stones have been altered and the keystone is missing. The initial timber beams and tie rods were replaced, the arch received concrete fill, the roadway was widened and paved, and pedestrian sidewalks with steel handrails were added underneath the bridge.

The restoration of 2004 replaced the existing arch and retaining walls with a reinforced concrete arch and retaining walls with a stone masonry facing. Stones from the existing structure were cut to size and used in the new facing.

The Macadamized Road

Thousands of pioneers crossed over the Mill Creek Bridge travelling from Galt to Dundas (Hamilton) on the Macadamized Toll Road now known as Dundas Street. This strong free-draining crushed stone road was built by the Provincial Government in 1836 under the chairmanship of Adam Ainslie. It was called the Macadamized Road after the Scottish engineer who invented and patented the road construction method in 1833, Mr. John Loudon McAdam.

Stone Masonry Arch Bridge 1837
Bridge Designer/Engineer: James Kerr
Bridge Supervisor: Unknown
Construction: Unknown
Total cost of the bridge: Unknown

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

"The rumour that four men who died of the cholera (1834) were buried in one grave, near the eastern end of the stone bridge on the Macadamized Road north of town is perfectly true." James Young 1880



In the 1830s the Macadamized Road was constructed over Mill Creek.



"A Historic Bridge, falling into ruins, in Jackson Park, Galt, Ont." Postcard Caption



Mill Creek flowing through Jackson's Field



"Building the Macadamized Road and bridge afforded employment to a large number of men, and its completion gave the quietus forever to the terrors of the Beverley swamp, and greatly advanced the prosperity of the entire district."

James Young 1880



The Mill Creek Bridge is located in The City of Cambridge. It was ranked number 5 out of the Top 10 Heritage Bridges in Waterloo Region.



"The bridge is exceedingly artistic and picturesque, in fact I have not seen anywhere in Canada an old stone bridge which compares to it." F.G. Todd Architech



Summer in the 1930s. The Lawn Bowling Club is on the right.



A "winter wonderland" looking west towards Preston

1830s Galt

In its early days, Galt (now part of Cambridge) was a thriving agricultural community. By the late 1830s, the village had grown into a strong industrial centre producing high quality products. Galt became known nationally as "The Manchester of Canada" with locally manufactured goods being sold world wide.

The Mill Creek Bridge played an integral role in the design and development of Jackson Park (1905), later redesigned and renamed Soper Park (1920).

Jackson Park

In 1902, Galt acquired 10 acres of Jackson's Field from William Jackson. The area was a favoured spot for swimming and sports and was often used by travelling circuses in the summer. A year later, an additional 42 adjacent acres were purchased. By 1905, 35.5 of these acres were passed on to the jurisdiction of the new Galt Parks Commission. Frederick G. Todd, Landscape Architect, designed the improvements to the public park lands which involved planting trees and shrubs, adding two pavilions, preserving the creek, providing immediate and careful attention to the bridge, and adding carriage driveways and walkways throughout the park. Development of the park continued until 1910 when lack of funds and the commencement of the First World War inhibited further progress.

Soper Park

After the First World War, a neighbouring landowner, Dr. Augustus Soper, created new plans for Jackson Park. He proposed filling the "frog pond" and creating the largest lawn bowling green in Southwestern Ontario. He also planned on lining the banks of Mill Creek with stone, converting the three dams into swimming pools, draining the swampy cedar grove, building sidewalks underneath the Mill Creek Bridge, planting various tree species, and placing granite pillars at all of the park entrances. To honour his contributions Jackson Park was renamed Soper Park on November 23, 1920. Over the years, people flocked to the park to swim, lawn bowl, picnic, and see the five acres of gardens that bloomed each June with more than 24 different varieties of peonies. In 1996, Soper Park received another facelift that naturalized the stream by removing the dams and ponds, introduced a wetland area, improved trails and added new pedestrian and vehicular bridges.



Heritage Bridges of Waterloo Region

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

