Freeport Bridge

Wooden bridge 1820
Wooden bridge 1865
Steel bridge 1880
Concrete bridge 1926
Restoration 2003

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 Freeport Bridge is a seven span, bowstring, concrete truss bridge with a concrete deck and asphalt pavement. It is an excellent example of the type of bridge built during the early 1900's. This time period saw a move away from steel truss bridges to concrete truss bridges.

Materials

The Freeport Bridge is constructed of reinforced concrete, a popular building material of the time. Concrete construction began to replace steel as it required less maintenance. Steel was prone to corrosion and needed frequent painting. Waterloo County had good local supplies of aggregates for use in construction. It was estimated at the time that approximately 3,000 yards of concrete were poured, which required 150 tons of reinforcing steel and 4,500 barrels of cement.

Innovation

The six-foot wide sidewalk on the west side of the bridge was a new innovation first applied at Freeport. The same sidewalk design was repeated on the later Bridgeport Bridge. The sidewalk was, according to an article in the *Canadian Engineer*, "a new feature in rural bridge design".

Restoration

Seventy years after its construction, the Freeport Bridge had badly deteriorated. The Region of Waterloo decided to rehabilitate, rather than replace, the bridge. The rehabilitation included complete replacement of the bridge deck, handrails, sidewalk and parts of the arch sections and repairs to the piers and girders. The total cost of the restoration was approximately $3,500,000. It was completed in 2003.

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

Waterloo Historical Society

Waterloo County's first steel bridge - Freeport 1880

The Freeport Bridge provides a unique gateway to Kitchener for those who use King Street (old Highway 8).

UW Library, Scharfe Russel Collection

The old Highway 8 from Preston passed by The Freeport Academy, the Post Office and the UB Church. The railway bridge, shown above, ran behind the village.

Waterloo Historical Society

The annual spring runoff of ice floes was a constant threat to the first wooden bridge. In 1865 it collapsed and was replaced by a second wooden bridge.

Campbell-McGregor Collection, Doon Heritage Crossroads, Region of Waterloo

Construction underway on the 1925/26 seven span Freeport Bridge.

Freeport Bridge is one of a group of three bowstring concrete truss bridges built in Waterloo County early in the 20th century. The others are Bridgeport Bridge in Kitchener and Main Street Bridge in Cambridge.

KITCHENER

The Freeport Bridge is located in the City of Kitchener.

Doon Heritage Crossroads, Region of Waterloo

1925 - Engineering team

Doon Heritage Crossroads, Region of Waterloo

1925 - Construction crew

The heritage significance of the Freeport Bridge has been recognized by both the City of Kitchener and the Region of Waterloo. It was designated under the Ontario Heritage Act in 2001 by the City of Kitchener.

It was also ranked number 1 out of 100 bridges studied by the Region's Heritage Planning Advisory Committee.

Doon Heritage Crossroads, Region of Waterloo

This bridge remains essentially as it was at the end of construction in 1926.

The 1926 Freeport Bridge

The Freeport Bridge is important historically because it is a part of the provincial highway upgrading which was undertaken after the Great War, in order to accommodate the rising popularity of the automobile. It represents an era which saw a dramatic increase in personal and leisure travel in the county. The present bridge is slightly downstream from the original fording place and is the fourth successive bridge in that approximate location.

The Four Bridges

The Freeport area has long been an important crossing point over the Grand River. In 1820, the first bridge, a wooden structure, was erected to enable crossing when the water was too high to ford. It collapsed under the impact of ice floes in 1865. A second wooden bridge replaced it at a cost of $1,064. This bridge remained in use until 1880. It collapsed under a heavy load of flour. It was replaced in 1880 by the first steel bridge in Waterloo County which the Hamilton Bridge Company built for $8,995. The steel bridge was replaced by the present concrete bridge in 1926.

Remembering

Charlie Gottfried, who lived in the small house on the southeast bank of the river, remembered the building of the bridge. The traffic on Highway 8, now King Street, passed in front of the house. The rail traffic passed behind the house. He recalled how he had made 50 cents per week selling water to labourers who worked on the bridge. Some of the labourers were Polish immigrants. Lacking other accommodation, they dug caves in the riverbank and slept there, wrapped in burlap.

Location: Past and Present

In the 19th century, there was a significant settlement in the area of the Freeport Bridge. The community included the Freeport Academy, the Post Office and the Freeport United Brethren Church, as well as a few houses. Little remains today apart from the older house on the southeast bank.

Heritage Bridges of Waterloo Region

Concrete Bridge 1926
Bridge Designer /Engineer: A.B. Crealock,
Bridge Engineer, Province of Ontario
Bridge Supervisor: G.A. Downey
Construction: Campbell and Lattimore, Toronto (Gzowski)
Total cost of the bridge: $85,000

Region of Waterloo

The Heritage Bridges Program is is sponsored by Heritage Planning Advisory Committee.
For further information about contact The Region of Waterloo.