

Allan's Bridge Notes

-P. Brian Skerrett, Feb 28th 2025

City of Guelph Heritage Register 2025

Row	Address;	Historic Name	Year Built	Cultural Heritage Status
954	Macdonell St	Allan Bridge (sic)	c. 1930	Listed

City of Guelph Heritage Register 2022


<p>MacDonell St - Bridge</p> <p>Built c. 1930</p> <p>Bridge - Steel multi-beam bridge with paired reinforced concrete deck with integral decorated balustrade piers supporting ornamental metal balustrades, 2 spans cradled in viaduct and spillway.</p>	
--	---

Figure 1 City of Guelph Heritage Register 2022

2012 Heritage Resources Centre Evaluation

Evaluation Form	Check
Design/Physical Value	
I. Is a rare, unique, representative or early example of a style, type, expression, material or construction method	✓
II. Displays a high degree of craftsmanship or artistic merit	✓
III. Demonstrates a high degree of technical or scientific achievement	
Historic/Associative Value	
I. Has direct association with a theme, event, belief, person, activity, organization, or institution that is significant to the community	✓
II. Yields, or has the potential to yield, information that contributes to an understanding of the community or culture	✓
III. Demonstrates or reflects the work or ideas of an architect, artist, engineer, builder, designer or theorist who is significant to a community	
Contextual Value	
I. Is important in defining, maintaining or supporting the character of an area	✓
II. Is physically, functionally, visually or historically linked to its surroundings	✓
III. Is a landmark	

Figure 2 excerpt from Arch, Truss and Beam: The Grand River Watershed Heritage Bridge Inventory, 2013 NB: Missing landmark status.

1827

On one of Guelph's earliest maps, the 1827 Tiffany map, a bridge at the location of what would become Allan's Mill was noted, even though it wouldn't be built until the following year.

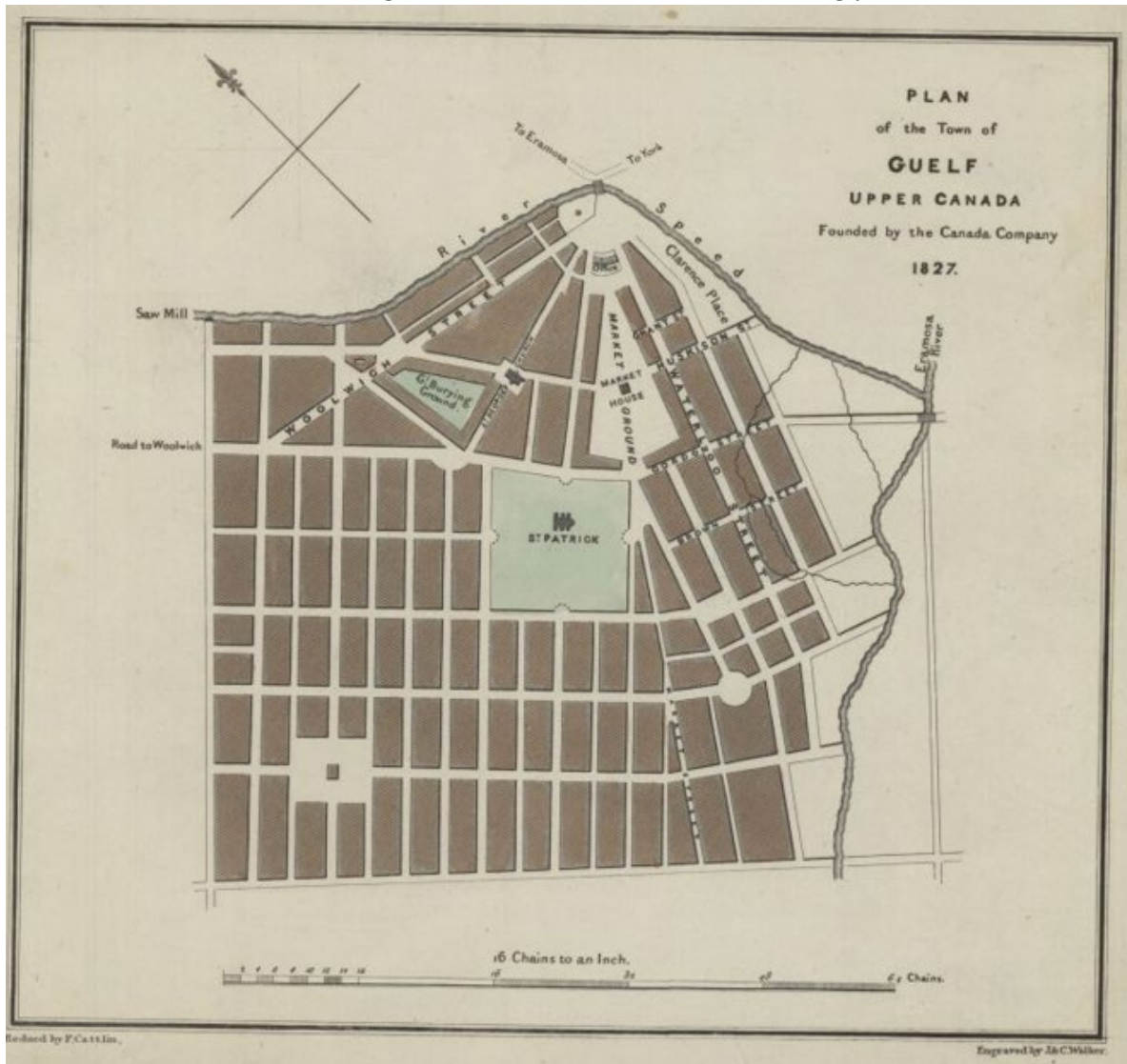


Figure 3 1827 Tiffany Map of Guelph reproduced Bouchette 1830

1830

An image of the first bridge in Guelph built in 1828 by Mr. John Clark (*Guelph Evening Mercury* July 20 1927) under the supervision of Major Samuel Strickland (*Annals of the Town of Guelph* 1877). Note the Priory in the top right. This was one of two bridges built that year each vying for the title of “First Bridge in Guelph.”



Figure 4 Detail of engraving H. Childs Fraser's Magazine 1830

From *Annals of the Town of Guelph*, C. Acton Burrows, 1877

For the remainder of the summer he (Major Strickland) was employed in superintending the erection of several houses, and in building two bridges, one over the Speed, and the other over the Eramosa branch. That over the Speed, where Allan's bridge now is, appears from a painting executed in the fall of 1828, to have been a very substantial and not inelegant structure, built on piles, the superstructure being partly of squared timbers. This was a great convenience to the settlers, as a good number of farms had been cleared on the other side of the river, and the farmers had hitherto been compelled to cross on a rude ferry, consisting of a raft of logs lashed together;

It is worth noting that Major Strickland was also the author of *Twenty-Seven Years in Canada West*, and was the brother of Susanah Moodie (*Roughing It In The Bush*, 1852) and Catherine Parr Traill (*The Female Emmigrant's Guide*, 1855)

1829

The 1828-29 Plan of Guelph similarly features what would become known as “Allan’s Bridge”.



Figure 5 Detail of 1828-29 Map of Guelph -Toronto Reference Library Archives

1842

The 1842 District Map of Wellington County puts into perspective the importance of the bridge; in 1828 it was the sole cross-river link to the York Road, the road to Toronto.



Figure 6 1842 District Map Wellington County

1843

In 1843, Richard Fowler Budd, Guelph District Clerk, wrote to the Canada Company Commissioner Frederick Widder, about Allan's Bridge. He noted that an early bridge had been "carried away about 7 years since", so about 1836. That would logically have been Major Strickland's bridge. He also indicated the new one was already becoming dilapidated and a new bridge was intended to be built that year.

The bridge didn't get constructed until 1844. According to another exchange documented in Guelph Historical Society publications Vol II No 8 by Mrs. A.E. Hinds, David Allan was given a contract to build a new bridge at a cost of 150 pounds. This is likely the bridge illustrated below in the David Kennedy watercolours.

Mr. Allan
Guelph Mills
District of Wellington Guelph Aug^t 20th 1844

Sir

I have the honor to transmit you the following Resolution passed at the late session of the Council, being the Eleventh Session, Aug^t 14th.

Resolved that the Clerk of the Council be instructed to give an order on the Treasurer for the amount to one Mr. Allan of Guelph being £ 150..0..0 for Erecting a Bridge over the Speed at the Guelph Mills as soon as the District Surveyor gives a Certificate that the work is finished according to Contract.

I have the honor to be
Sir, your most ob^t/: Servant
Richard Fowler Budd
District Clerk

Source: Letter Book of
Richard Fowler Budd

Figure 7 Excerpt from Guelph Historical Society Publications Vol II No 8



Figure 8 Detail # 1 David Kennedy Watercolour Allan's Bridge 1845 -Wellington County Museum and Archives



Figure 9 Detail # 2 David Kennedy Watercolour Allan's Bridge 1845 -Wellington County Museum and Archives

Note the presence of a foot bridge south of primary bridge and the long abutments to the bridge

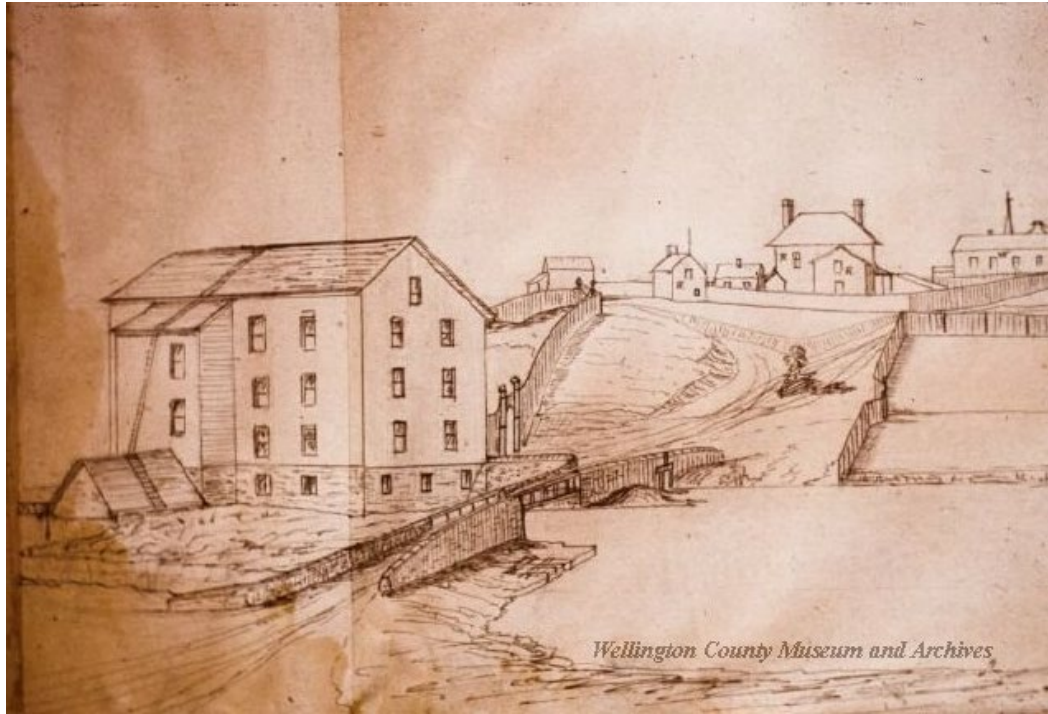


Figure 10 Detail of David Kennedy Sketch 1853 -Wellington County Museum and Archives

1853

In 1853, the planning for a future rail viaduct over the existing Allan's bridge was apparent. The general reference to Allan's Bridge speaks to its presence in the city as a landmark.

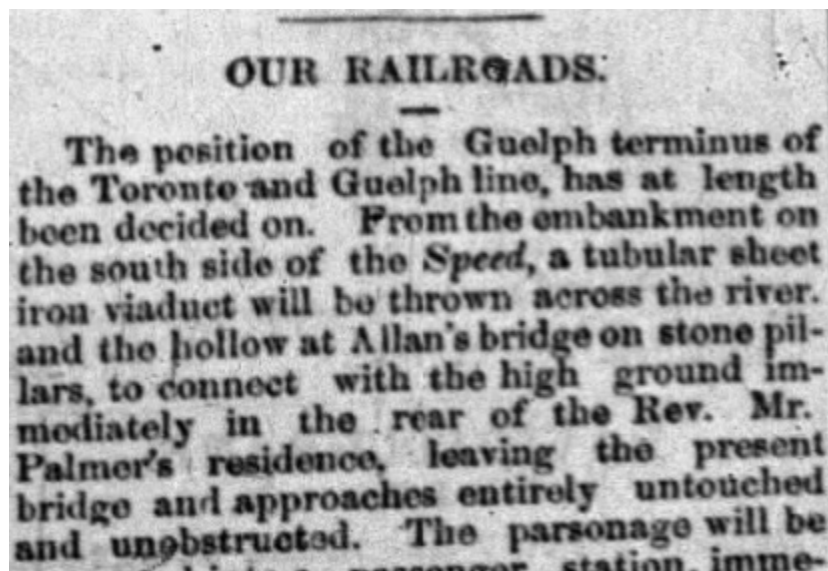


Figure 11 1853 Hamilton Gazette and General Advertiser

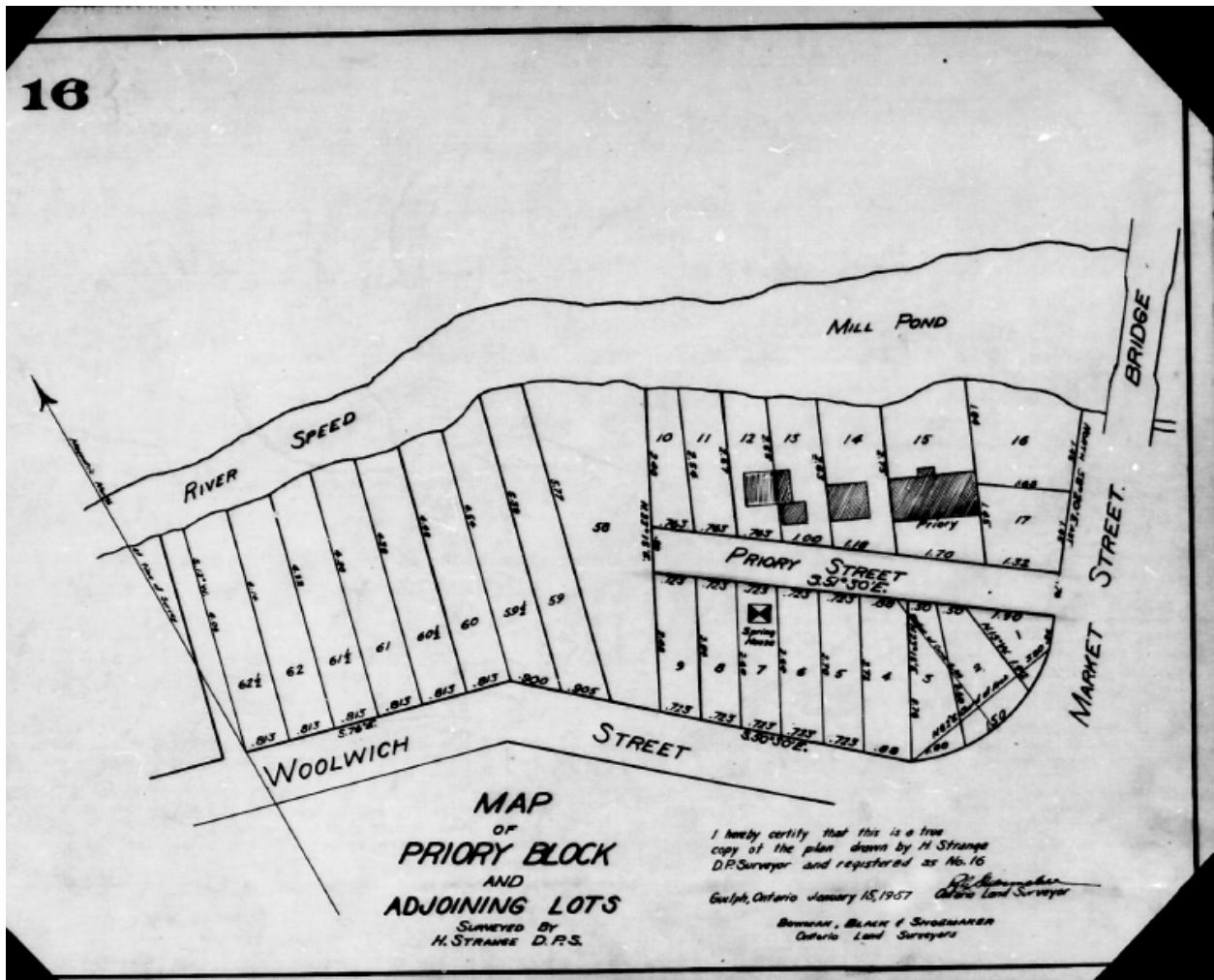


Figure 12 Plan 16 c 1847

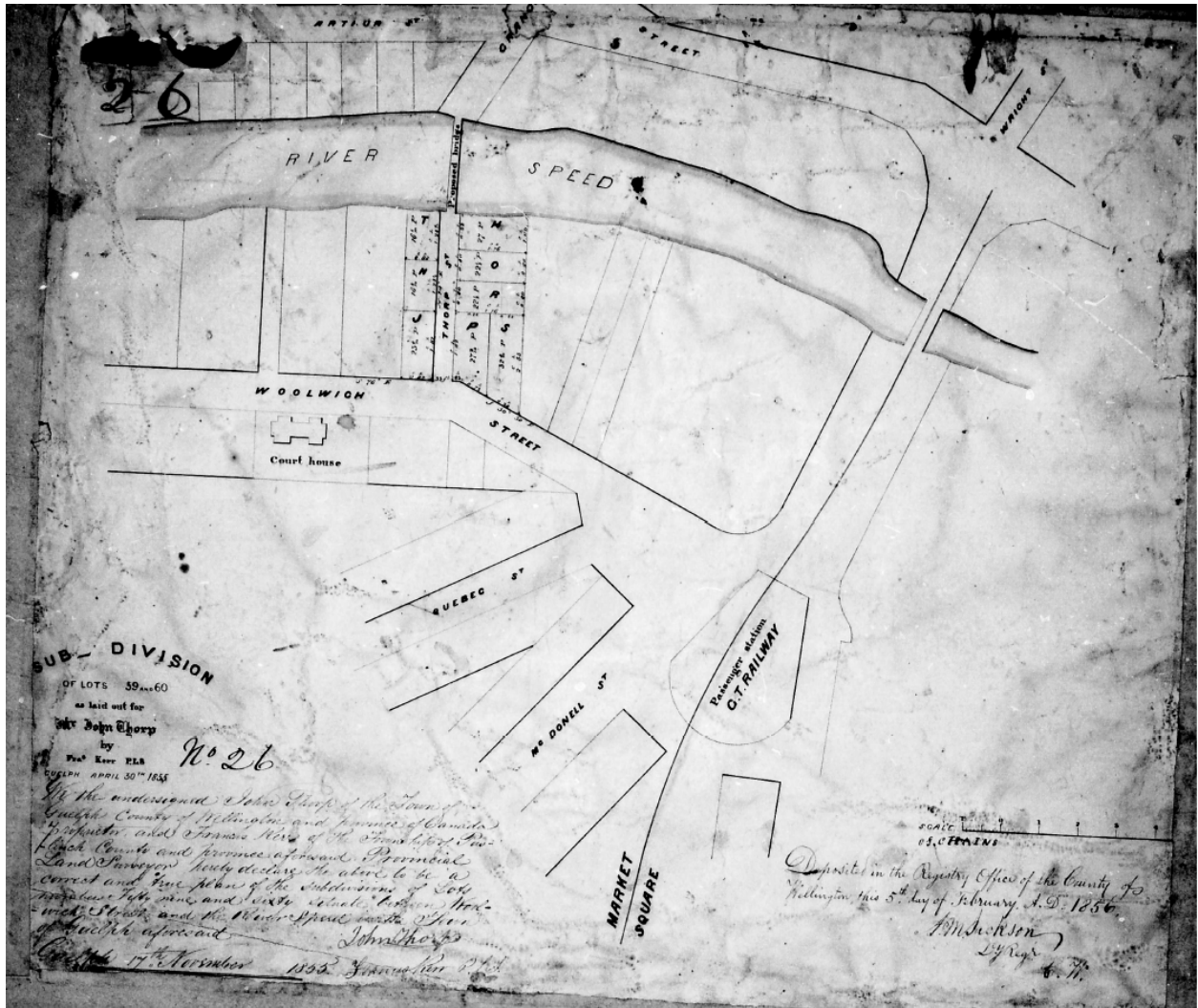


Figure 13 Plan 26 1855



Figure 14 Detail of David Kennedy Watercolour 1861 - Wellington County Museum and Archives

1867

According to notes from Guelph historian, artist, and president of the Local Architectural Advisory Committee, Gordon Couling, the wood girders on the Grand Trunk Railroad bridge that ran above Allan's Bridge were replaced with iron ones. This is repeated in David Allan's journal from 1867.

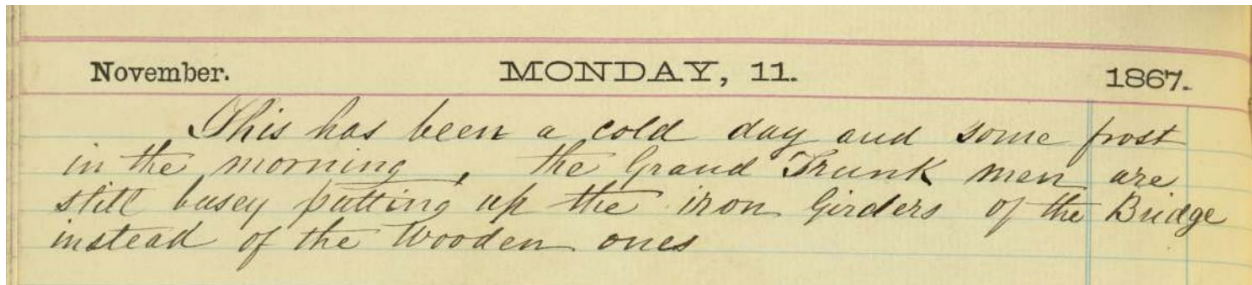


Figure 15 1867 Nov 11, David Allan's Journal -Rural Diarty Archives University of Guelph. "the Grand Trunk men are still busey putting up the iron Girders of the bridge instead of the wooden ones"

It is worth comparing the image above with enormous braces supporting the girders in figure 14, with Figure 17, which still illustrates a wooden bridge below the viaduct, but with iron girders and no angled braces on the viaduct. Also note the abutments filling in the gap between the piers of the viaduct. This allowed a much shorter span of timbers for the bridge.

Further demonstrating its position as the gateway to Guelph, we see in this 1865-66 Mitchell's Canada Classified Directory, the address of the Distillery is 9 and 11 York Road. As in Figure 4, crossing the bridge from west to east, put one on the road to York.

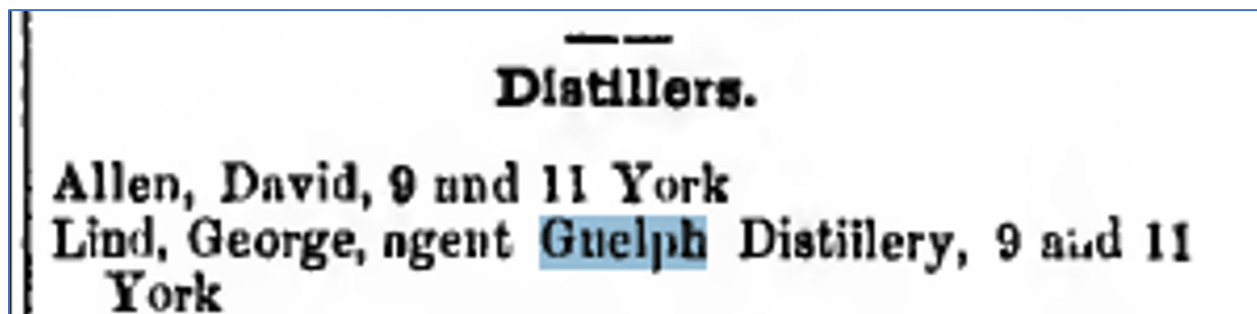


Figure 16 1865-66 Mitchell's Canada Classified Directory. Note that York Road, literally the road to York, is the address immediately on crossing the river.

1856-1867



Figure 17 Image is labelled 1869 Aug. As it appeared prior to removal. This may be inaccurate since the wooden railway girders and braces were replaced in 1867. Note also the stone fill used for the abutments and what appears to be erosion of the west side abutment. The bridge is supported by a temporary posts on the west and cribbing on the east. This would be consistent the 1869 flood... more research is needed to establish the date with certainty.



Figure 18 North side of Allan's Dam and Bridge between 1856 and 1867. Note Yankee Cottage at top left. See notes re date in figure 17.

1869

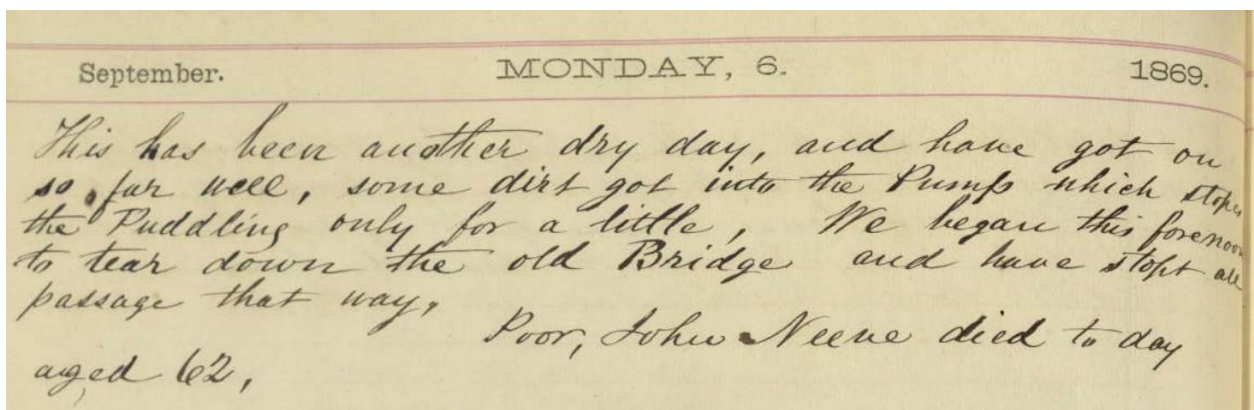


Figure 19 1869 Aug 31 David Allan's journal - Rural Diary Archives, University of Guelph "We began this forenoon to tear down the old Bridge and have stopt passage that way"

1872



Figure 20 Detail of 1872 H. Brosius Bird's Eye View of Guelph Map -Wellington County Museum and Archives



Figure 21 Detail of Cooper Map c. 1874- P. Brian Skerrett. Note the river is still narrowed between the two viaduct piers, suggesting abutments that reduce the bridge span.

1890

This Guelph museums image is dated to 1890 which would seem pretty accurate. The Guelph Junction Railway line was built in 1887, and this is clearly a wooden bridge structure that was eventually replaced in 1892 by a steel bridge contracted by the Stratford Bridge and Iron Works.

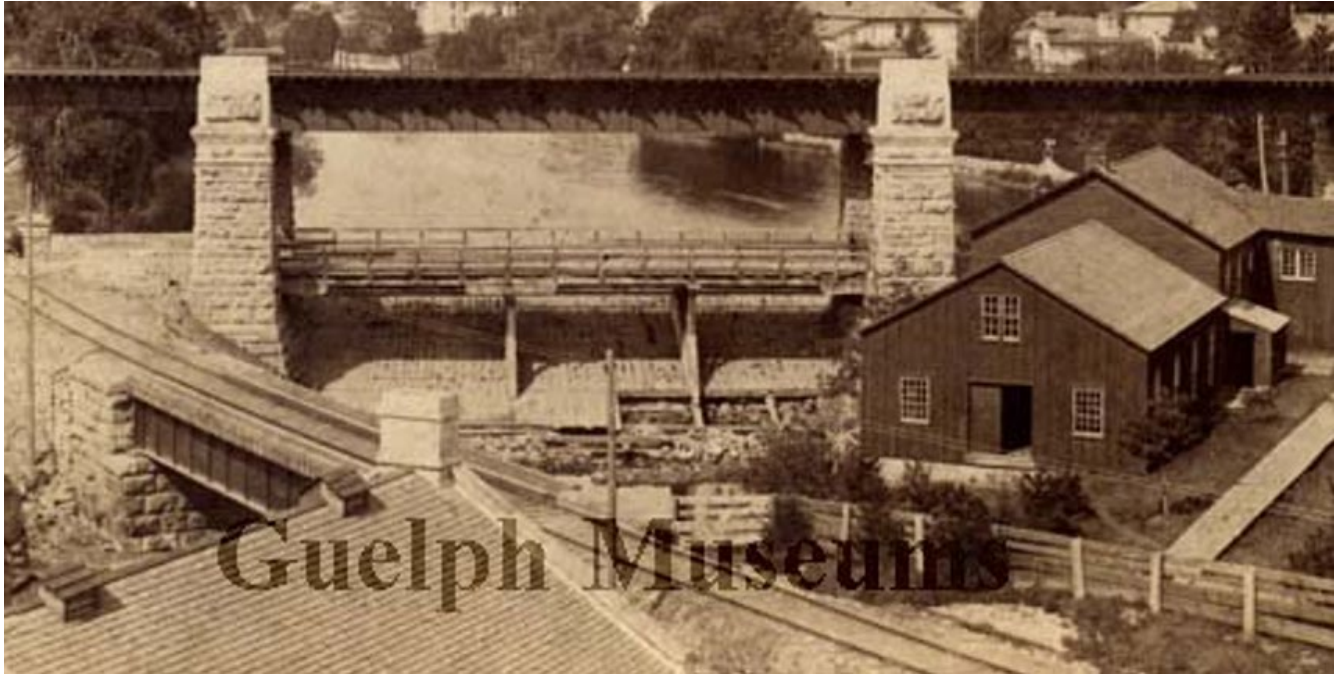


Figure 22 Allan's Bridge circa 1890 -Guelph Museums. This image illustrates the newer bridge built by David Allan with a much longer span. The fill formerly used between the piers is gone, the span is longer and there are now two bents underneath the span.

1892

The Belleville contract for the bridge was 80 lbs to the square foot and 75 lbs for the footbridge ; the Stratford Bridge Co. for traffic bridge 90 lbs to the square foot and footbridge 100 lbs. Between the two bridges there was two tons of steel more in favor of the Stratford, which would make over \$200 difference and still make the Stratford bridge the cheapest. Some of the members of the committee consider.

Figure 23 Excerpt Guelph Daily Mercury May 17 1892

CURRENT COMMENT

Stratford Firm Built 1892 Allan Bridge, Cost \$1,850

4 Sept 63

By VERNE McILWRAITH

Thanks are extended to those people who called in connection with a request for information concerning the history of the old traffic bridge at Allan dam. While none was able to provide the desired information, some interesting historic information was obtained and it will be used at a later date.

We were successful in finding information about the bridge however, in the most logical place one would expect it to be recorded. While no bylaws were passed concerning the bridge, we did find the original copy of the construction contract in the files. We are indebted to Deputy City Clerk Gordon Hall for allowing us to scan it.

The substantial bridge, that will soon be replaced by a wider and modern structure, was actually built in 1892 by a Stratford bridge building firm. It was called the Stratford Bridge and Iron Works Company and its two main officials were William Wesley Cowan and Thomas Holiday, "the younger".

SLEEMAN MAYOR

Despite the similarity of these two names with prominent Guelph citizens about that time, it is not believed they had any relationship to Guelph residents. Signing the agreement on behalf of the city of Guelph, were Mayor George Sleeman, and City Clerk Richard Mitchell. Donald Guthrie was city solicitor and drew up the agreement.

George Sleeman had served as mayor of Guelph from 1880 to 1882 and after being out of council for several years, returned in 1892 to finish out the tenure of office of the elected mayor for that year, Thomas Goldie. Mr. Goldie had been mayor in 1891 and died in February of 1892, with Mr. Sleeman being elected to fill the vacancy.

Richard Mitchell, was clerk of the city from 1884, in which year the offices of clerk and treasurer were separated, until 1908. Mr. Mitchell had been mayor of Guelph in 1871-2 after serving as deputy reeve in 1868 and reeve in 1869-70. He resigned as clerk on his appointment to police court clerk in 1908, to be replaced by Thomas J. Moore as clerk.

\$1,850 for "one steel highway bridge, with not less than 19 feet roadway and one steel footbridge six-feet wide, to be built on site of a wooden structure, known as Allan bridge."

It was to be placed on existing abutments, built up to required level, with stone work to be of such dimensions, as required by the engineer, and laid in Portland cement mortar. The one-walk footbridge was to be built upon abutments prepared by the company of a height and shape and material as required by the engineer.

The bridge was to be 181 foot six inches in length and 19 feet wide and "capable of sustaining a moving load equal to 90 pounds per square foot of roadway. The footbridge, capable of sustaining a moving load of 100 pounds per square foot.

FOOTBRIDGE FIRST

The footbridge, "with all its approaches thereto shall be first completed before the company takes away or renders unfit for travel the present bridge." The company was to construct two wooden approaches for the footbridge, where necessary, and build the walk on cedar or pine posts more than eight inches in diameter, six-feet apart and more than three-feet deep.

Six by six-inch pine cross beams were to connect the posts and on these were to be placed three seven by two-inch pine joists to lap and spiked to each other to carry the flooring. The footbridge floor was to be of two-inch pine and the hand-rail three-feet high, where necessary.

The company was to find all stone for the bridge. Material from the old bridge, not needed

on the new bridge approaches was to be salvaged for use elsewhere by the city.

The company was bound to pay \$10 for each day delay beyond the contract date of completion, which was October 1, 1892. So far as can be learned the bridge was completed on time.

The agreement added that "decisions regarding work or material will be binding of W. Hill Tout, the city engineer, or any other engineer acting.

This bridge, that is still substantial today except for its width and location, is believed to have replaced the original wooden bridge that was constructed by early settlers in the

community, shortly after its founding by John Galt on April 23, 1827.

Make safety a habit.

Figure 24 Guelph Mercury 1963 Reporting on Bridge Construction from 1892

ALLAN'S BRIDGE.—Mr. W. W. Cowan, representing the Stratford Bridge Co., is in the city today. He and engineer Tout made an examination of the bridge, and discussed matters in connection with its erection. Everything seemed to be satisfactory and the contract will be signed today. The work of erecting the traffic bridge and the foot bridge will commenced almost immediately and the work pushed forward as speedily as possible.

Figure 25 May 21 1892 Guelph Mercury

1903



Figure 26 1903 Photo -Iron bridge as constructed (1892), Iron girders under viaduct (1867), and Guelph Junction Railway Bridge (1887) Note absence of centre support.

1903



Figure 27 Detail of 1905 photo showing north side of bridge where the pedestrian bridge was. -Library and Archives Canada

1908

According to notes from Guelph Historian Gordon Couling, the deck of Allan's Bridge needed to be replaced in 1908.

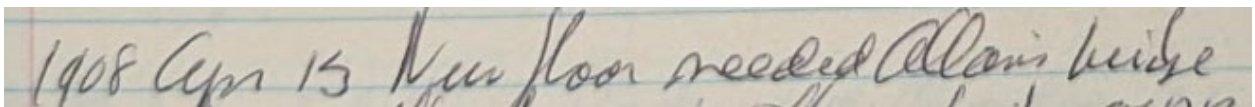


Figure 28 Gordon Couling notes -Wellington County Museum and Archives

1929 Flood

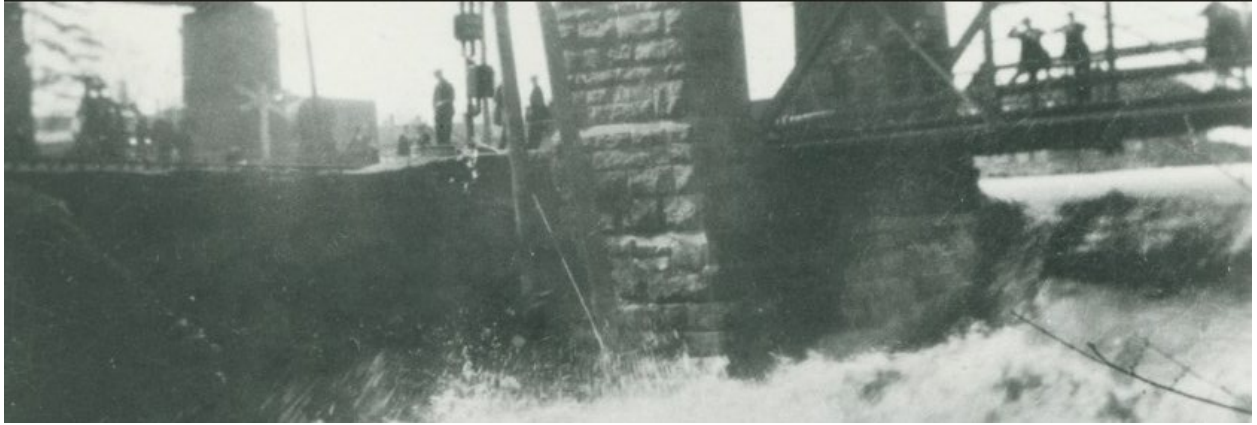


Figure 29 Detail of photograph of 1929 Flood under Allan's Bridge. Steel superstructure is still in place.

1930's

According to HistoricBridges.org, Allan's Bridge "uses a railing panel design that was used often in Ontario. However, in neighboring Michigan a suspiciously similar railing panel design was also used, suggesting that Michigan and Ontario perhaps got ideas for bridge railing design from one another. This bridge is unusual however because its concrete railing posts have a different inset design in them from most Ontario bridges with this railing panel design. Interestingly however, the railing posts on this bridge are similar to the earliest railing posts coupled with this railing panel design found on Michigan bridges built between 1932 and 1939. The big mystery is who invented the railing design first, Ontario or Michigan?"

"If it can be proven that this bridge was built before 1932, it would suggest that Ontario came up with the railing design first. In regards to Ontario's use of the railing design, this bridge's metal panels differ slightly from the design of the later bridges using this railing design in that the top of the metal panels is composed of pipe, rather than a custom-shaped design found on later bridges."

The railings on Allan's Bridge bear a strong resemblance to Michigan's R4 Railings. HistoricBridges.org says:

The first generation R4 railings, used in the 1930s bear specific mention because during this period a specific architectural detailing was used for the concrete railing posts during this period. This detailing was only used for this first decade and was not used at all after this period. In addition, the other architectural details which would be used on the concrete posts in later years do not appear to have been created yet during this period. The design of the concrete posts from this period have an Art Deco styling to them, with the top of the posts being slightly

stepped, and the face of the posts having an inset design consisting of a center vertical line flanked by a single shorter vertical line on either side.



Figure 30 Michigan R4 Railing-first Generation Post



Figure 31 Michigan R4 Railing



Figure 32 Feb 2025 Note rail pattern and posts similar to Michigan R4

The Brantford Expositor article below indicates that in 1938 immediate construction was to begin "to widen and improve Allan's Bridge. This corresponds exactly to the era of the first generation of the Michigan R4 Railing, 1930 – 1940.

GUELPH WOULD GET BACK BUSES

Street Cars Eliminated and City Would Take Over Control

GUELPH, Sept. 7—Steps toward the city's regaining control and management of the Guelph Street Railway operated by the Ontario Hydro-Electric Commission since 1921, were approved by City Council last night. Meeting for the first time since the summer recess, Council authorized a special committee to negotiate with Hydro for the transfer which includes provision for taking over three hundred thousand dollars in bonds guaranteed by the city at the time the road was taken over by the Hydro Commission.

Street cars were replaced by buses on the railway several months ago and the Councillors are of opinion arrangements can be made to operate the line at a financial advantage to the city under the new management.

Approval was given of a five thousand dollar expenditure to widen and improve Allans Bridge, work on which will be started immediately.

Figure 33 Sept 7 1938 Brantford Expositor

1950

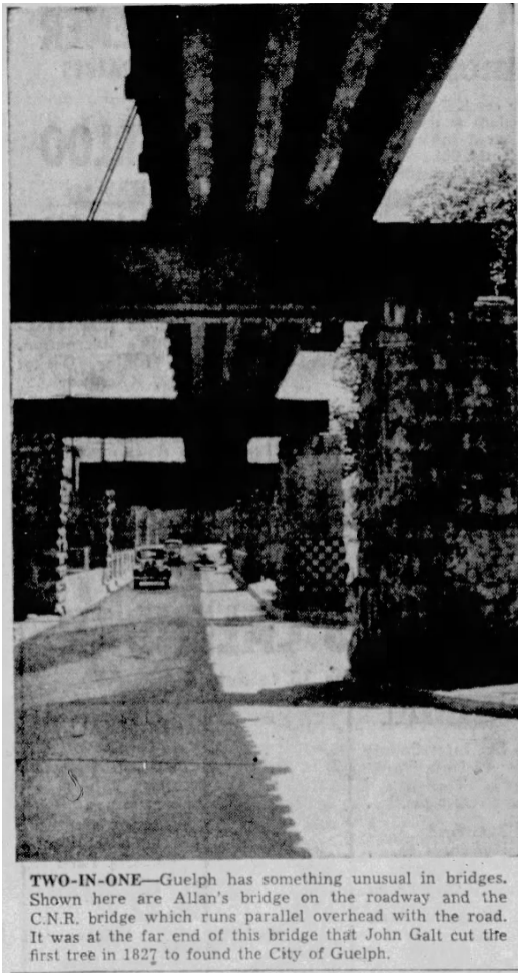


Figure 34 1950 June 30 Waterloo Region Record

1962



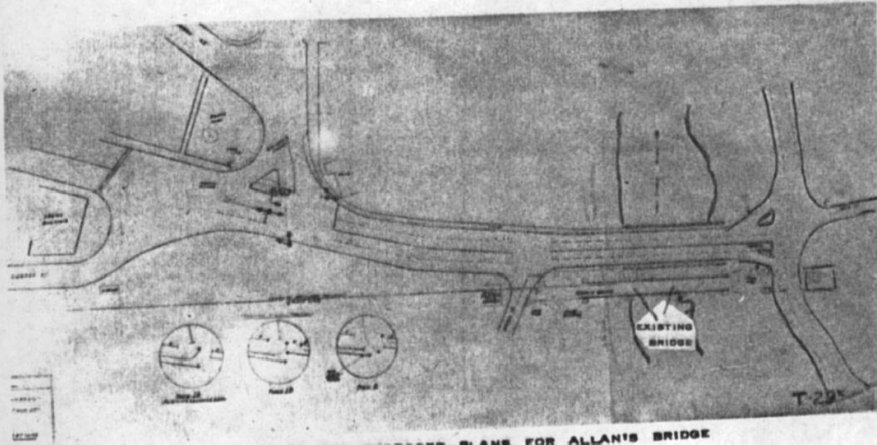
Figure 35 1962 Guelph Mercury before MacDonell St Bridge



Figure 36 March 30 1962 -Guelph Mercury fonds Guelph Public Library

BRIDGES

Propose New Bridge For Allan's Dam Area



SKETCH OF THE PROPOSED PLANS FOR ALLAN'S BRIDGE

Long-needed elimination of Guelph's most serious traffic bottleneck will be effected if the city council approves of plans proposed for the Allan's dam area. Inspector Gordon Whetstone, Traffic Co-Ordinator for the city of Guelph, has outlined a carefully considered alteration of traffic lanes over the Speed River crossing at the point mentioned. Part of the proposal stems from ideas suggested by the city planning board several years ago, but this has been given a wider scope by the line-drawing of the over-all scheme, which Inspector Whetstone presents in this issue of The Guardian. Major facet of the plan is the construction of a bridge over the river, parallel to the present bridge. The new bridge would be located immediately north of the rather old and out-moded bridge now being used. It would be a four-lane

crossing and would actually serve as an extension of the present easterly end of Macdonnell Street, taking the vehicular and pedestrian traffic in a straight line across the CPR tracks and the river, to a point where Arthur Street begins. Here there would be a traffic island, with traffic signals. These would indicate the left-hand jog on to Arthur Street, or to the right, toward Queen and Elizabeth Streets. Traffic coming north, from the two streets mentioned, would, by signal light direction, be turned toward or from the easterly entrance of the new bridge. From the eastern end of the proposed new bridge, Arthur Street, since last year, has been a four-lane artery and this would serve, capably, the proposed traffic plan. Queen Street, from the east end of Arthur, upward, isn't geographically conducive to any widening plan but would, how-

ever, be of invaluable aid in taking some of the heavy traffic from nearby Arthur Street. Turning back, there would, at the extreme, lower end of Woolwich Street, at the existing traffic island, be signal lights to control traffic, from and to lower Woolwich Street and the combined traffic from Macdonnell and Carden Streets. One-time proposals to construct an overpass high above the CPR level crossing at Allan's dam, appear to have been discarded for the reason that whereas the beginning of such a high level bridge might well commence at the extreme easterly end of Woolwich Street, and continue high easterly over railway tracks and river, its finish would be somewhere in the neighborhood of Duke and Grove Streets, a most unlikely terminus for any further throughway traffic.

Figure 37 1962 Guelph Guardian -Guelph Public Library

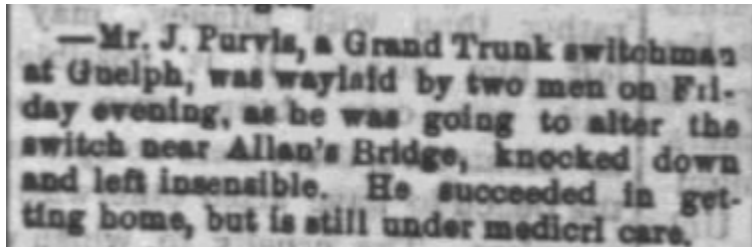
1963



Figure 38 1963 MacDonnell St Bridge under construction

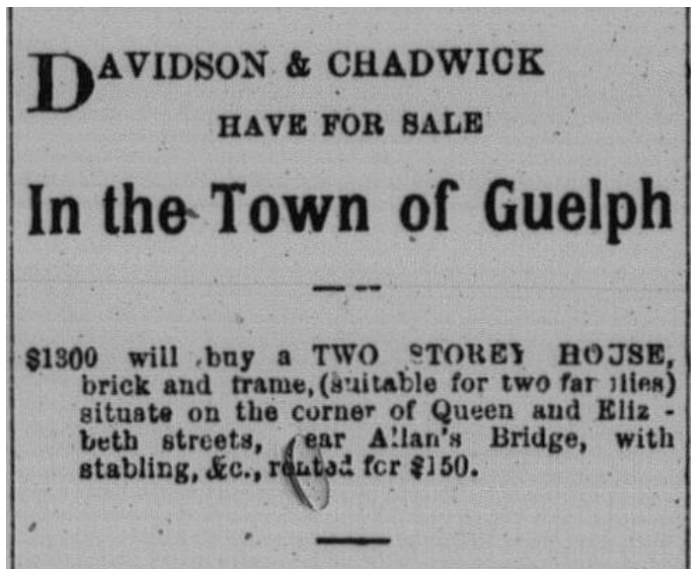
Landmark Status

Below is a selection of miscellaneous news clippings or excerpts that illustrate Allan's Bridge status as a Landmark. In each clipping, no further information is given regarding the location of the event. The Bridge itself was significant enough to convey the information required.



—Mr. J. Purvis, a Grand Trunk switchman at Guelph, was waylaid by two men on Friday evening, as he was going to alter the switch near Allan's Bridge, knocked down and left insensible. He succeeded in getting home, but is still under medical care.

Figure 39 Hamilton Spectator Oct 20, 1868



DAVIDSON & CHADWICK
HAVE FOR SALE
In the Town of Guelph

— — —

\$1300 will buy a TWO STOREY HOUSE, brick and frame, (suitable for two families) situate on the corner of Queen and Elizabeth streets, near Allan's Bridge, with stabling, &c., rented for \$150.

— — —

Figure 40 Guelph Mercury Real Estate Ad Feb 2 1872

HIGHWAY ROBBERY IN GUELPH.—
As Mr. Richard Evans, a fruit dealer of Guelph, was crossing Allan's Bridge in that town on Saturday night, he was way-laid by robbers who, according to *The Herald*, relieved him of \$52. In the tussel with the robbers, Mr. Evans was roughly treated. Guelph has recently been the scene of several daring burglaries and robberies.

Figure 41 Orangeville Sun Mar 12, 1874

LOST — Between Allan's Bridge and the Market Square, a Carved Jet Ear Pendant (gold setting.) A reward will be given by leaving it at this office. It

Figure 42 Guelph Mercury April 9th 1874

unhurt. On the same afternoon Mr. Timothy O'Connor, of Guelph Township, was driving under Allan's bridge, when the horses took frighth from a passing train overhead, and ran away, but fortunately Mr. O'Connor was able to bring them to a stop before any serious damage was done.—*Herald*.

Figure 43 Orangeville Sun Apr 6, 1876

It is a poor day when a runaway don't occur at Allan's bridge, where the roadway passes under the railway.

Figure 44 Hamilton Spectator June 17, 1881

Factory Managers Large Stock and Up-to-date Plant
enables us to supply
Good Goods at RIGHT prices.

Guelph Lumber Company

JAMES HARRISON, Manager. Phone 1068

Plant Close to "Allan's" Bridge

Figure 45 Figure 10 Guelph Mercury Ad July 22 1916

INDUSTRIAL DEPT.

POSSESSION

OF approximately 17,000 sq. ft. Available immediately, balance of bldg. now leased. Bldgs. are brick and stone, being offered for sale. Asking \$80,000. For permanent investment here is one of Guelph's best known locations. Allan's Bridge area. Suitable for office bldg. or light manufacturing. Canada Trust Real Estate Dept., Guelph Branch, TA. 4-1262.

Figure 46 July 7 1960

John Sanvido, manager of the Guelph pollution control plant, said 25 people worked at the scene for about 20 hours. He said about 200 gallons of oil ended up in the river and most of it was contained by booms at Allen's Bridge.

Figure 47 1978 May 23 Waterloo Region Record -excerpt

□ Repairs to Allan's Bridge (\$116,500) and to the historic but deteriorated Blacksmith Fountain (\$10,000).

Figure 48 1988 March 1 Waterloo Region Record excerpt

Though the River Run doesn't suffer from any lack of concrete, it is a remarkably transparent complex. The vast expanse of curved windows echoes the proscenium inside. In this way, the audience is turned into performers and passersby are co-opted as viewers and, indirectly, as participants.

The windows, which look south-east, face the spot where Guelph was founded. But except for a plaque of

the side of nearby Allan's Bridge, that is an event that appears to have been entirely forgotten.

But, of course, the important thing for a performing arts centre is what's inside. In this respect, Guelph should be relieved that it didn't attend to its cultural needs sooner than it did. Had it built in the 1960s or '70s, the results would have been quite different — and probably much less happy.

Figure 49 1998 Jan 17 Toronto Star -excerpt on opening of River Run Centre by David Hume

At the same time, the city should reconsider the installation of yellow pylons at the Allan's Bridge site. Again, this is slowing down traffic flow, creating lengthy lines and, therefore, increased stop/starts.

Figure 50 2006 Jan 23 Guelph Mercury -excerpt of Letter to the Editor

The river's importance has been evident since the founding of the city in the 1820s by renowned Canada Company explorer John Galt. In fact, the scene of that legendary founding in the vicinity of the historic former W.C. Wood plant and Allan's Bridge in the city's core is a short walk from the Boathouse.

Figure 51 2011 July 21 Guelph Mercury -excerpt

