



Cedar bridge on Opeongo Road

by Harry Hinchley

The old cedar bridge for more than half a century used to carry the Opeongo Road across the gully of Smith's Creek. It was made by building hundreds of big cedar logs into a huge cribwork 195 feet long and 50 feet high. At the base it was 50 feet wide but it tapered to a narrow road at the top.

After crossing the bridge the old road used to swing to the south to get around the big rock at the top of the hill. Traces of this road may still be seen. Later on a cut was blasted through the rock to open the route it takes today.

For many years the Opeongo was one of Renfrew County's busiest roads. Goods and supplies for the farming settlements and for the lumber camps up the Madawaska and Bonnechere rivers were hauled by teams over this road. Often as many as 100 teams might go up and down the road in a day.

There were taverns or stopping places every few miles. The

first one out of Renfrew was at Fergus Lea and at Shamrock there was a big hotel made of brick. There were two hotels at Dacre and so all the way up the Line. At many of these hotels there would often be 25 or more men and teams stopping over night.

Traffic fell off after the opening of the railway and after Lisgar Street was opened at Renfrew it almost stopped. Motorists did not like the plank runners on the cedar bridge and further on the road was neglected. Finally about 1960 the old bridge was taken out and replaced with a steel culvert and fill.

Next Saturday the old Opeongo out of Renfrew is to be travelled once more. A bus tour up the historic old road is being sponsored by Heritage Renfrew when the leaves will be in full color. This is a chance to ride over the old pioneer road. There will be commentaries on many of the old buildings and stops are to be made at many of the historic places.