

Bridging past

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Men, machines disturb idyllic spot

By PAT MOAURO
of The Free Press

BIRR — The old swimming hole in Medway Creek just east of here won't be the same again.

Generations of youngsters — and adults — have spent many happy hours cavorting in the creek. They swam and fished from the old one-lane steel-trussed bridge on Concession 13, London Township.

The old bridge and two big willow trees that drooped their protective, shady boughs over the swimming hole are gone.

Men and machines have moved onto the site, altering some of its former quaintness and disrupting the tranquility of the idyllic spot.

A concrete two-lane, 53-foot long bridge is

being built across the creek to replace the 75-year-old span.

For at least four years, area residents have been expecting the new bridge, which they realize is needed. But the loss of the swimming hole's former unspoiled beauty still has come as somewhat of a shock to the nostalgic-minded.

Ron White, owner of Brook-N-Hill farm on the south side of the bridge site, concedes "a little sentimentality" is involved.

"It was kind of a pretty spot down there," he said. "On hot, sultry Sunday afternoons, cars from all over were down there."

About 40 huge willows on both sides of the creek and on the north and south sides of Concession 13, still provide cool, shaded areas.

Residents said as many as 30 or 40 persons

have gathered in and around the old swimming hole on some days to swim, fish and picnic.

Mr. White's wife, Anne, said she's sorry to see the old spot altered "because I'm sentimental. I can remember very enjoyable times the children and their friends have had."

Mr. White, 50, who has lived on Concession 13 all his life, recalled diving off the old bridge with friends when he was a teen-ager.

Three of the Whites' children, Patty, 16, Lynda, 21, and Nancy, 19, haven't used the swimming hole for about four years, but a fourth child, Steve, 11, has played there recently with his raft.

The raft bobs gently in the creek next to the workmen and a gasoline-powered pump syphoning water from an excavation for the bridge footings.

Jack Legg, 27, operator of a variety store and gas bar in Birr, reminisced about his childhood experiences in the old swimming hole.

He recalls the raft he and his friends made as they played out their childhood fantasies, perhaps best illustrated by Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn.

"It was out of Huck Finn," he said, recalling the rope on a tree, fishing and camping and the friends who rode a horse and bicycles into the water.

"It was almost like a nature retreat," he said, recalling Baltimore orioles in the willows, barn swallows under the bridge and painted turtles and big carp in the creek.

Mr. Legg also laments that Medway Creek is gradually dying. He said the water isn't moving fast enough and the creek isn't being maintained.

"The bridge had to go in there," he said. "But I hope the township will preserve it (the swimming hole area) for fishing, overnight hikes, on a low-key level, not like a national park."

Ted Goddard, London Township road superintendent, said he realizes that some residents will miss the old setting, but they knew the bridge was coming.

"We took down just two trees," he said. "We don't want to spoil the natural setting. But we can't supply them with another pool."

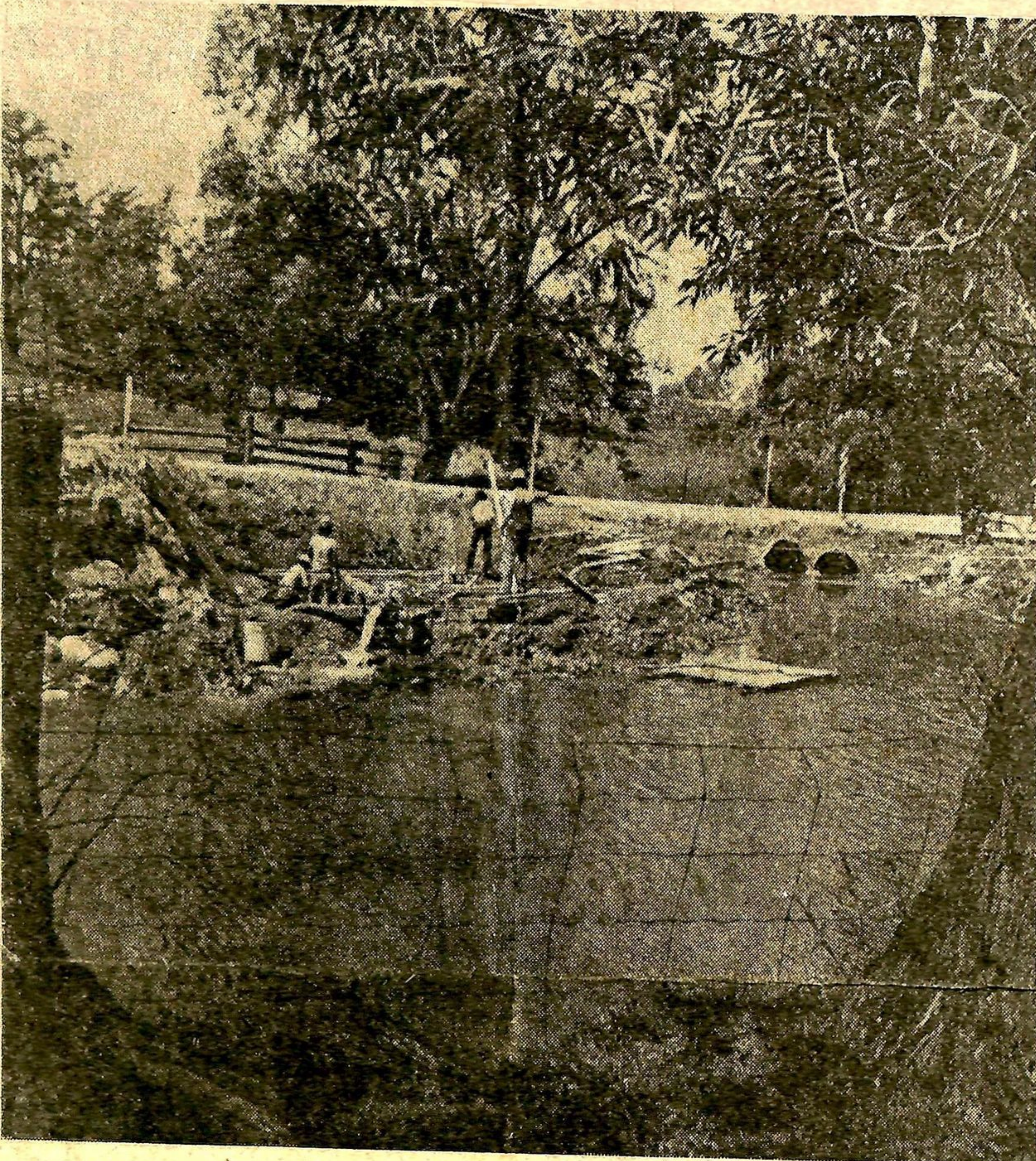
The \$84,000 bridge, being built by Facca Construction Co. Ltd. of Maidstone, is expected to be completed by August, Mr. Goddard said. He said it's too dangerous for anyone to swim in the bridge area during construction.

By next summer, the new swimming hole "will be as good or better" than the old one. At least, the new one will be cleaner, he said.

Now, "it's just a mud hole," said Tom Nunns, who lives on Highway 4, just north of Concession 13. He took his five children to the swimming hole last weekend, but it just wasn't the same.

Reminded that the new bridge is the price of progress, Mr. Nunns asked, "What's progress?"

Somehow, residents feel something more valuable has been lost. Those halcyon days of childhood and youth just can't be recaptured, at least at this swimming hole.



By Ed Heal o

The old swimming hole just east of Birr on Concession 13, London Township, is starting to take on a modern image. A two-lane concrete bridge is replacing the former 75-

year-old one-lane span. The new \$85,000 bridge, being built by Facca Construction Co. Ltd. of Maidstone, is to be completed by August.