

Bridge in Bloomsburg may soon be doomed

By DAVID JUDD
Expositor Staff Writer

BLOOMSBURG — The Bloomsburg bridge is falling down.

The stones of the rare arched structure are toppling one by one into the creek which they have spanned since late pioneer times.

Except for the occasional resident out for a stroll, the bridge doesn't carry much traffic these days.

Built barely wide enough for a team and wagon to pass over, it's been out of service on the road between Simcoe and Waterford since a modern-sized replacement was put up next to it in the early 1920s.

For some residents, however, the old bridge serves a purpose by linking them with Bloomsburg's historic past as a bustling little place on the area's main road.

"An arched stone bridge is a real rarity," says Scotty Robb, a retired Norfolk County policeman, who's made his home in Bloomsburg for the last 37 years.

Mr. Robb fears the bridge may not stand another winter.

Its footings have been undermined by vandals who have removed many of the larger stones along the water's edge.

On top of the bridge, two Manitoba maples have pushed their roots deep and there is a hole where motorbikes have vibrated the structure.

"Another winter could be disastrous," Mr. Robb says. "If we get a lot of freezing and thawing, it's going to come down."

It took expert stone masons to fit together the arches of the bridge, perhaps the same craftsmen who constructed the stone houses north of Waterford and in the Oakland area during the 1850s.

Bloomsburg dates back another 50 years or more to when its first settlers arrived from the vicinity of Bloomsburg, Pa.

The road itself is older yet. It took its route from an Indian trail that ran from Turkey Point on Lake Erie to Brant's ford on the Grand.

Although nothing definite is known about the origin of the Bloomsburg bridge, the best guess is that it was erected about 1853 by the Waterford and Simcoe Plank Road Company.

Two businessmen spent \$16,900 improving the road, including five or six bridges, in an effort to aid the travelling public, especially those wishing easy access to saw and grist mills in Waterford.

The road was intended to pay for itself through the collection of tolls at the rate of two cents a mile.

The project apparently helped Bloomsburg. By 1870, the hamlet boasted a church, store, school, woolen mill, post office, tannery, and a boot and shoe-maker.

Unfortunately for the plank road company's owners, the road was not much of a money-maker and they soon gave up regular repairs.

March 14, 1879, the Bloomsburg correspondent of the Waterford Star complained:

"This week the road is in its usual spring style and the collection of tolls thereon is simply a mild form of highway robbery (and not very mild either.)"

"That the Directors of this road have no principle is an acknowledged fact; and if they have a conscience, it must be so small that if it was put in a hummingbird's quill and blown into the eye of a mosquito, it would not make the little fellow wink."

By 1885, residents had had enough of the road's poor conditions.



Long-time resident Scotty Robb fears time is running out for the hamlet's stone-arched bridge. Time has taken a heavy toll on the rare structure which dates back to the 1850s.

The town of Simcoe and the townships of Townsend and Windham bought the road and dismantled the despised toll booths, including the one at Bloomsburg.

The Bloomsburg bridge continued in service until about 1923 when Norfolk County council ordered the road straightened and a new bridge installed.

Mr. Robb recalls a conversation with Guy Marston, the county's road engineer, who

fought to leave the old bridge standing.

"Marston didn't have the heart to knock it down. He recognized the skill that went into it."

Since then, the bridge has been patched a few times but mostly it's been permitted to deteriorate to the point of collapse.

Haldimand-Norfolk Region, which inherited the bridge from Norfolk County, this month re-

jected a suggestion to renovate the bridge.

Roads engineer Eric D'Hondt reported that its footings are too deteriorated to repair safely.

Taking the bridge apart stone by stone then re-assembling it would take great skill and be expensive.

The City of Nanticoke's architectural conservation committee is interested but has no authority to order repairs.