

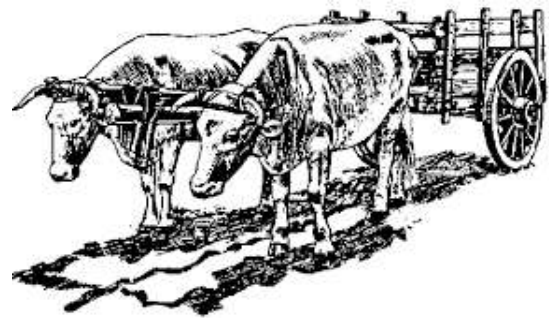
# BARBARIC RELICS

## Lanark County's Toll-Roads

In May 1903, Ontario Lieutenant Governor William Mortimer Clark (1836-1915) granted royal assent to a Lanark County debenture issue to fund purchase of the last four toll-roads leading to the Town of Perth, thus, in the words of the local newspaper, "*consigning the system to a storehouse of barbaric relics*"<sup>1</sup>.

For a half-century road journeys to Perth, from four of its seven approaches<sup>2</sup>, had demanded payment of tolls, a loathed and detested regime that by the turn of the 20th century had long outlived its usefulness.

When settlers first reached the Perth Military Settlement in April 1816 there were no roads of any kind. The closest thing to a road was a winding, narrow, muddy track, of about 1 ½ miles (2.4 Kms), connecting Rideau Lake, from the head of Beveridges Bay, with the Tay River at Fishing Falls (near Port Elmsley), over which only ox-drawn 'jumper' sleds and foot traffic could pass. Having been floated down the lake by barge from present-day Portland, the first immigrants plodded over that trail and then resumed their voyage by barge up the Tay River to Cockburn Island. As incomers continued to arrive that summer, a track was cut through the forest from the emerging site of Perth to the 'Rideau Narrows' (Rideau Ferry), and that fall was extended (through present-day Leeds County) to connect with an existing trail at Forthton that led to the St. Lawrence River at Brockville.



The track at Beveridges Bay, the seven mile (11 Km) trail connecting Perth to the Rideau narrows, and a 12 mile (19 Km) track cleared in 1820 connecting Perth to Lanark Village<sup>3</sup>, the first roads of any kind in what would become Lanark County, were opened at government (British Army) expense. Thereafter pioneers taking up land grants in the townships surrounding Perth were responsible for constructing their own roads at their own expense.

In the earliest years of the settlement there were not even footpaths leading into the surrounding townships. New arrivals were sent to find their lots by following surveyor blaze marks on the trees and a good many spent several days lost in the cedar swamps before finding their location. Settlement duties, by which immigrants qualified for ownership of their land allocations, included a requirement to clear a 66 foot (20 meter) wide road allowance across the front of each lot. In theory, that arrangement would produce a road grid servicing the rural settlement, but it was undermined and often defeated by the reality of Upper Canada's topography and economy.

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<sup>1</sup> *Perth Courier*, May 19, 1903.

<sup>2</sup> The Tay Canal represented an eight approach, but that too required paying fares and tolls.

<sup>3</sup> To provide access for the 'Society Settlers' of 1820-1821 to the second tier townships of North Sherbrooke, Dalhousie, Lanark and Ramsay.

First, the plan did not account for lots that were never occupied because they lay in swamps or lakes or were so rocky they were uninhabitable. Secondly the settlers were extremely poor and there was no government funding for construction of the culverts and bridges required to make township roads serviceable. As a result, surveyed road allowances were often never cleared at all, while unplanned 'roads' soon departed from the surveyor's map grid and, following a course of least resistance over the high ground, along First Nations trails and deer paths, wound their way through forest and clearings across both private and public lands.

Thirdly, in every concession eight of the 200 acre lots were reserved for lease or sale to support the Crown and Clergy. In a regime where the remaining 19 lots were granted free of charge<sup>4</sup>, most of the Crown and Clergy land remained unoccupied, and the associated road allowances undeveloped, until the reserve system led to rebellion in 1837-1838 and their final dissolution in 1854.<sup>5</sup>

Maintenance and repair of such roads as were eventually cut through the bush was initially placed in the hands of 'Path-Masters' appointed by the colonial government under an Act of 1793 that created a system of 'statutory labor'. That law delegated Path-Masters to ensure land-owners maintained the road fronting their property and that every man aged 21 to 60, furnishing their own tools and oxen or horses, provided three to 12 days work annually on construction and maintenance of township roads and bridges. In time, the number of workdays required came to be levied on the basis of property value and landowners were permitted to send a substitute or pay the township to hire someone in their place<sup>6</sup>. Nevertheless, statutory labor remained so deeply unpopular that refusal to perform or pay for statute labor was made punishable by fines or up to six days in jail.<sup>7</sup>

Work gangs turning out to perform statute labor had only their hand tools, draft animals, farm carts, and strong backs, while the Path-Master was seldom if ever a civil engineer, and government still provided very little funding for other inputs. Roads could only be built and repaired using the skills and materials found immediately at hand. On high ground that meant levelling and ditching using pick and shovel, or perhaps a horse-drawn scraper, and filling holes with stone broken by sledgehammer. On low ground, across swamps and bogs, it meant construction of the ubiquitous corduroy road.

By placing logs, often split lengthwise and laid flat side down, perpendicular to the direction of the road, a surface was created that could carry man and beast across low and soggy ground. Because of their strength and resistance to decay, tamarack, hemlock, black ash and cedar, if available, were considered the best material for the job, but work gangs laid in anything and everything, large and small, that could be cut in close proximity and dragged to the road bed. The result, even when ballasted with a thin top-coat of soil, was that mismatched logs, sinking and rotting at different rates, produced a bone-rattling, wheel-destroying ride. In many places horses balked and shied away in fear of breaking their legs in the gaps between crooked unstable logs.

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<sup>4</sup> And more free land became available as settlement expanded westward across Upper Canada.

<sup>5</sup> See *Few Places More Disadvantaged* elsewhere on this website.

<sup>6</sup> In November 1901 Drummond Township commuted statute labor to a cash tax of 1 5/10 mill per dollar on property assessment; the Road Supervisor to call out men when needed and pay 12 cents per hour, 15 cents per hour for the supervisor.

<sup>7</sup> The last vestiges of the Ontario Statute Labor Act were not abolished until July 1, 2021.



*Corduoy Road*

For three decades, from the 1820's into the 1850s, even the most important rural roads were impassable quagmires in spring and fall, and little better in high summer (when farmers were too busy for travel in any case). The only time rural residents could be sure of reaching Perth market, or a traveller might expect a reasonably quick and comfortable journey across the hinterland of Lanark County, was in the depth of winter. When the muddy roads and swamp corduroy froze, and sleighs packed a smooth coat of snow and ice over their grossest imperfections, only then was the countryside considered 'open'. For little more than a dozen weeks each year farmers hauled heavy loads of produce to market (grain, logs, and firewood) and merchants transported stock replenishment to rural village stores. Travelling by horse and cutter farm women traded in the shops of Perth and families visited relatives and friends they had not seen for nearly a year. With each spring break-up, however, commerce and social interaction came to a muddy standstill.

The first local municipal governments, in the form of District Councils,<sup>8</sup> were created shortly after the union of Upper and Lower Canada in 1841. These councils were given responsibility for local roads, but limitations on their fund-raising authority meant very little actual improvement to rural infrastructure resulted.

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<sup>8</sup> See *Mecklenburg to Lanark* elsewhere on this website.

The Baldwin Act of 1849, expanded local government by establishing a multi-level administration.<sup>9</sup> The District of Bathurst, first created in 1822, was replaced by the United Counties of Lanark & Renfrew<sup>10</sup>, composed of towns, villages and townships, each with its own elected local council. These municipal councils were delegated authority to levy property taxes and enact by-laws, but in the rural townships of counties like Lanark, the tax base was too small and too poor to generate the kind of revenue necessary to put right decades of neglect of transport infrastructure. Counties were also authorized to assume as a county road any highway in their townships, but the same funding constraints meant that over the next 50 years only Hastings and Wellington Counties ever did so. However, recognizing the financial realities, the Baldwin Act also provided that private companies willing to invest in building roads or bridges, could do so and charge the public a toll for their use.

A minimum of five people could form a joint stock road company that, in turn, sold additional shares at the equivalent value of between \$5 to \$50. Each company had to build a minimum of two miles of road. Income from tolls was split between the cost of maintaining the roads and profits for the shareholders, although initially the legislation capped profits at 10%, with all additional income payable to the Provincial Government. Toll-gates were limited to one every five miles and tolls could be levied on the road for no longer than 21 years after construction had been completed (although the time limitation was later extended, and the number of allowable toll booths increased).

Charging tolls to pay for the upkeep of roads has a long history. In the seventh century BCE travellers were paying tolls to use the Susa-Babylon highway. Tolls are mentioned in Greek mythology<sup>11</sup> and the Arthashastra<sup>12</sup> notes the use of tolls in India prior to the fourth century BCE. Tolls were also common on stretches of privately maintained roads in the Roman Empire. Beginning in 1706 private roads, known as turnpikes, were built in Britain and by the 1830s there were over 30,000 miles (48,000 km) of toll-roads in England and Wales. In Canada, toll-roads date from 1805 and the first toll-road act in what later became Ontario was passed in 1829.

The Baldwin Act led to an immediate flurry of private road building. The legislation mentioned “*gravelling, macadamizing and planking*” roads but did not provide a great deal of technical detail on acceptable minimum standards. In most cases Lanark County investors initially opted for the construction of plank roads, a technique introduced to Canada from Russia in 1840 by Upper Canada Lieutenant Governor Lord Sydenham (1799-1841)<sup>13</sup> who had lived and travelled widely in the Russian Empire as a young man. A plank road was also the natural choice where, in the 1850s, the local supply of cheap timber seemed infinite. Simplicity of design made plank roads even more attractive. Road builders put down two parallel lines of timbers four or five feet apart, which formed the ‘foundation’ of the road. They then laid, at right angles, planks that were about eight feet long and three or four inches thick, secured to the foundation logs only by their own weight. In most cases ditches were dug on each side of the road to insure drainage.

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<sup>9</sup> A regime that would remain largely in place for the next 150 years until changes introduced by the Conservative Party government of Mike Harris' through the Municipal Act of 2001.

<sup>10</sup> Lanark & Renfrew were divided into separate counties in 1866.

<sup>11</sup> The ferryman Charon charged a toll to transport souls of the deceased across the Rivers Styx and Acheron.

<sup>12</sup> An ancient Indian Sanskrit treatise on statecraft, economic policy, and military strategy.

<sup>13</sup> Charles Poulett Thomson, 1st Baron Sydenham, was the son of John Buncombe Poulett Thomson, head of 'J. Thomson, T. Bonar and Company', a principal merchant house in the Russian-Baltic trade with dealings in Saint Petersburg.

Charles Rice (1822-1901), editor of the *Perth Courier*, and later Clerk of the County Court, was the first to advocate the construction of plank roads in the County of Lanark, proposing a 12 mile road from Perth to Lanark Village at an estimated cost of £3,600<sup>14</sup> for sleepers, planks, and labor, with the sawmills of lumberman John Gillies (1811-1888) supplying three-inch planks at \$12 per 1,000 board feet. By the mid-1860s six joint stock companies had taken up the challenge and completed construction of 37 miles (60 Kms) of toll-roads leading to Perth.

In 1853 the Drummond & Bathurst Road Company constructed six miles (9.7 Km) of plank road from Perth to Balderson's Corners with toll-gates at Perth, Armstrong's Corners and Balderson's Corners.

In the same year, the Balderson & Lanark Road Company completed Perth's connection to Lanark Village by constructing another six miles (9.7 Km.) of plank road, governed by three toll-gates, from Balderson's Corners to Lanark. This road was later purchased by Perth businessman George Kerr (1814-1886) and then inherited by his son John A. Kerr (1851-1940).

In 1857 a third project, by the Bathurst & Mississippi River Road Company, laid 4 ½ miles (7.2 Km) of plank road from Balderson's Corners to Fallbrook and a short time later added another 1 ¼ miles (2 Km) of 'stone road' to Playfairville on the Mississippi River. That road was also controlled by three toll-gates.

In the mid-1850s the Scotch Line Road Company established a toll-road from Perth westward along eight miles (12.9 Km) of Bathurst Concession-1, the town line between the Townships of Bathurst and North Burgess. The Scotch Line toll-road later came under the sole proprietorship of Brockville businessman John Wardrope (1816-1893).<sup>15</sup>

In 1854 the Perth & Pike Falls Road Company, organized by James Shaw (1798-1878), then the local member of parliament, built a seven mile (11.3 Km) plank road from Perth to Pike Falls (Port Elmsley) managed by toll-gates at each end. This company also constructed a few miles of plank toll-road from the intersection of Gore and South Streets westward along Bathurst Concession-1, described as "*part of the Kingston and Perth Road*"<sup>16</sup>, a project later taken over by the Scotch Line Road Company.

A late-comer to the toll-road business, the Bathurst & Tay River Macadam Road Company was chartered in 1867 to build five-miles of road westward from the Perth town limit along Bathurst Concession-3. Financial constraints, however, limited the project to completing only the first 2 ¾ miles (4.4 Km) from Perth to Glen Tay. Nevertheless, in 1873 an amendment to the charter authorized operation of the truncated road with a toll-gate at each end<sup>17</sup>. By the turn of the century the Bathurst & Tay River toll-road had been extended another mile (1.6 Km) to Manion Post Office<sup>18</sup> and come under ownership of the Drummond & Bathurst Road Company.

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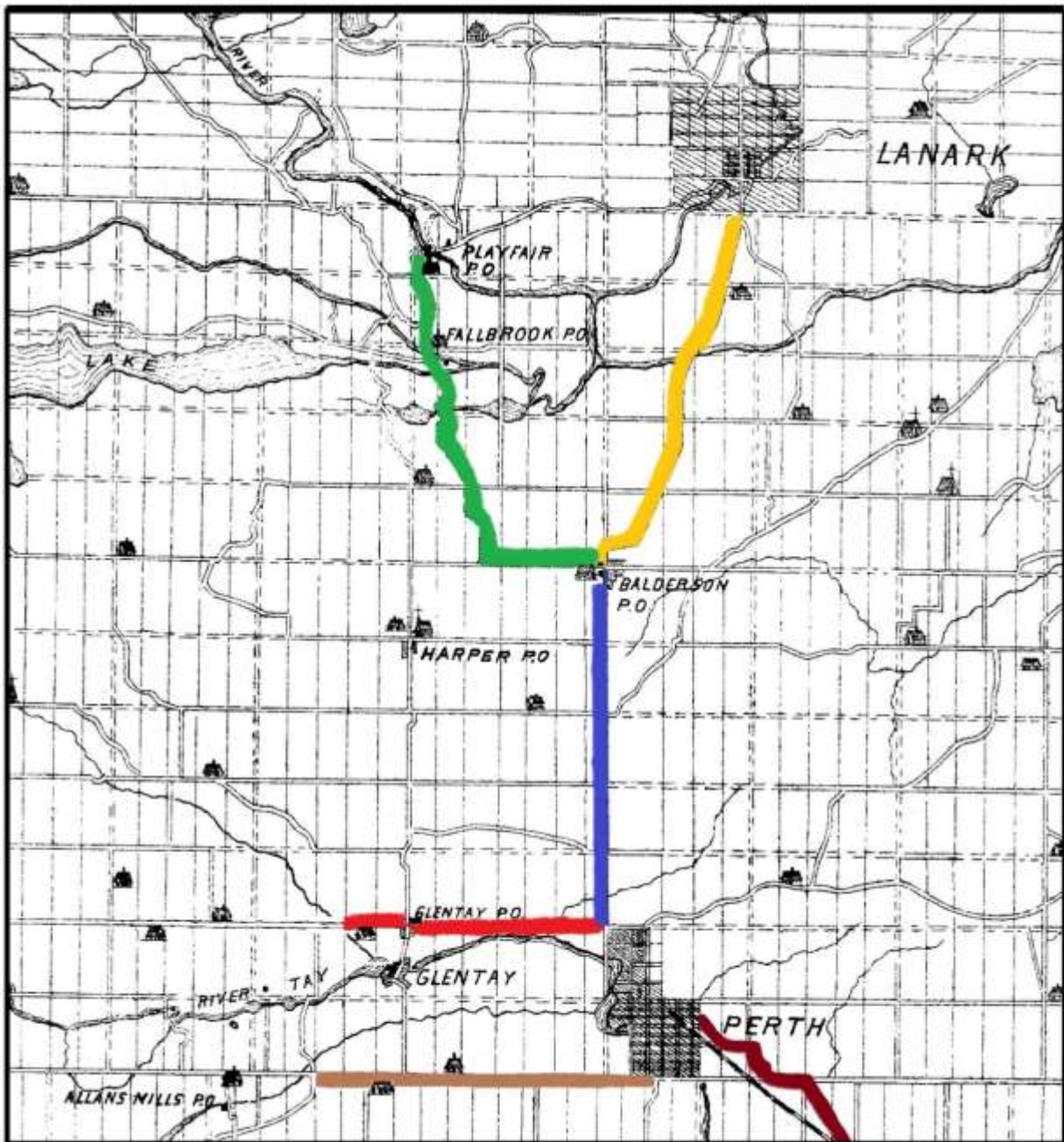
<sup>14</sup> In 2020 about £488,250 or \$833,450 CDN.

<sup>15</sup> Wardrope had other interests in the local area including a lease on the Sherwood Grist & Sawmill at Port Elmsley in the 1890s.

<sup>16</sup> *North Elmsley Township: Doorway to the Past*, by Shirley Jones-Wellman, Michael McEwen, M. E. Irene Spence & Jim Winton, see page-107, Court of Chancery order, *North Elmsley Land Records*, Doc #110.

<sup>17</sup> See Statutes of the Province of Ontario, CAP. CXXIV, March 29, 1873.

<sup>18</sup> At the intersection of Bathurst C-3 and Perkins Road, described in the 1873 amendment as terminating "*near the sideline between lots thirteen and fourteen in the said third concession of Bathurst*".



From about 1855, only three approaches to Perth were free of toll-gates: Drummond concessions two and three<sup>19</sup> from the east and the road from Oliver's Ferry (Rideau Ferry) to the south. These remain public highways, although a fare had to be paid for ferry passage at the Rideau Lake narrows until a bridge was completed in 1874. From the ferry southward, the road remained unencumbered by tolls until it reached Frankville in the United County of Leeds & Grenville where it intersected a toll-road running between Brockville and Smiths Falls (approximately the present route of Highway #29).

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<sup>19</sup> More accurately, the Tennyson Road.

Except for those arriving from Oliver's Ferry or Drummond concessions two and three, everyone travelling to Perth, afoot, or with horses, oxen, wagons, carts, or carriages, or driving cattle, swine, or sheep, had to pay a toll. In 1855 charges were;

- One penny, per mile, per horse and vehicle, with a half penny extra for every additional animal.
- A half penny for every score (20) of sheep, cattle, or swine per mile.
- Heavy vehicles loaded with masts, spars or hewn or round timbers exceeding two tons in weight, were charged two shillings six pence. The wheels of such vehicles had to have five-inch rims to prevent the destruction of the roads.

Exceptions were made, however, for,

*... all persons going or returning from Divine Service on any Sunday or obligatory holiday in or upon and with their own carriages, horses or other beasts of draught and families and servants shall pass toll free through every turnpike toll.*

The same free passage was allowed for,

*Officers and Non-commissioned Officers and men of the Volunteers [Militia], being in proper staff or regimental uniform, dress or undress, and their horses.<sup>20</sup>*

Any person refusing to hand-over the necessary toll could have his/her horse, oxen, carriage, or other beasts seized together with bridles, saddles, harness, and other accouterments.



*Plank Road*

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<sup>20</sup> Ontario Government decree of 1870.

Plank toll-roads were initially a welcomed innovation, but their popularity with the travelling public quickly faded. The 12 pence charge to drive an ordinary farm wagon over the dozen miles between Lanark and Perth was, perhaps, not exorbitant, but the expense of delivering heavy sleigh-loads of saw logs or firewood was more substantial. Even that cost might be grudgingly paid so long as the road was in good repair, but the best quality planks soon wore out and quickly rotted<sup>21</sup>, and road companies were too often slow to make repairs. Plank roads rapidly deteriorated to the point where they were punishing teamster, passenger, and cargo as harshly as the corduroy roads ever did.

On cold winter days even the petty annoyance of having to remove one's mitts every five miles, to dig coins from an inner pocket to pay for passage over a poorly maintained road, led to grumbling resentment. Further, the law provided that change did not have to be given for any amount larger than five shillings, thus imposing upon road-users the aggravation of finding as close to exact change as possible in a day when coinage was in short supply.



*Toll-booth on the Perth-Lanark Road, located about one-half mile south of Lanark Village*<sup>22</sup>

As early as 1856, when the plank roads were less than five years old, people were being hauled before the magistrates for refusing to pay toll charges. They complained the roads were *"next thing to impassable ..."*, pleading that *"... to pay toll on a good road, very few people object; but to be compelled to pay on a very bad road, is rather a hard case."*<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> An 1850 study of plank roads in the Toronto area by American engineer George Geddes (1809-1883), published in *Scientific American*, concluded that surfacing planks might last eight years.

<sup>22</sup> Library and Archives Canada, Neg. # C-25994.

<sup>23</sup> *Mississippi Valley Conservation Report 1970 – History*.



Those inclined to take out their frustrations on a toll-gate or the road itself were dealt with under an 1855 law making it illegal to,

- *Damage any lamp or lamp post placed near the side of the road by a toll-house or willfully extinguish the lamp that marked the toll-gate*
- *Pull down or deface any table of tolls fixed at the check-gates or on any sign-board erected by the road company.*<sup>24</sup>

Offenders faced a maximum fine of 50 shillings plus the cost of damage repair.

In winter when the ground froze, grievances led to bush road ‘detours’ around the toll-gates. Toll-roads came to be held in such contempt that the *Lanark Era* newspaper was even known to publish the location of clandestine trails for the benefit of teamsters. Toll-jumping deprived the road companies of income, especially through the winter months when roads were in heaviest use. Investment in maintenance was undermined, which, in turn, prompted more resistance on the part of road-users.

It also transpired that construction of the plank toll-roads serving Perth had hardly been completed when the Brockville & Ontario (B&O) Railway reached the town, via Smiths Falls, in 1859. The rail connection was extended to Sand Point via Carleton Place, Almonte and Arnprior in 1864, and then on to Ottawa via the Canada Central Railway (CCR) in 1870. Opportunities presented by this new development in transport and communication re-directed investment from road to rail.



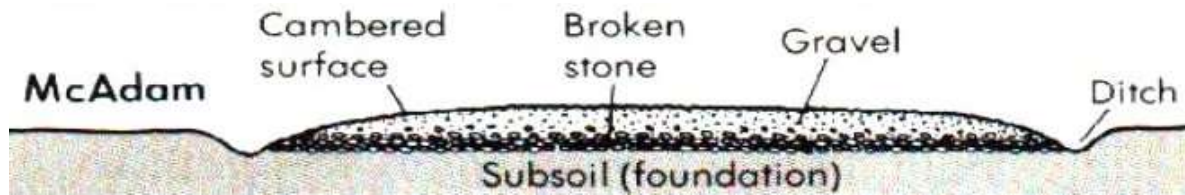
*Twenty-first century vestiges of the plank toll-road era in Drummond Township*

As the plank toll-roads rotted, the price of lumber rose, making them economically unrepairable. Year after year, in a downward spiral, the plank toll-roads paid smaller and smaller dividends to their owners, thus deteriorating further from lack of investment in maintenance, and breeding ever more hostility from their users.

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<sup>24</sup> *Municipal Manual – 1855.*

In the mid 1860s companies began replacing their plank roads with 'macadamized' roads<sup>25</sup>, a form of construction pioneered by Scottish engineer John Loudon McAdam (1756-1836)<sup>26</sup> in the 1820s. A well-built macadam road was composed of a compacted subgrade of crushed granite or greenstone designed to support the load, covered by a cambered surface of light stone to absorb wear-and-tear, and shed water to the drainage ditches.



Although not always built to a standard John McAdam might have recognized, in many ways the local macadamized roads were a significant improvement over the rotting plank roads, but a macadamized road still demanded regular maintenance it did not always receive. Letters to the editor published in the *Perth Courier* frequently complained of paying tolls on macadam roads that were as rough and risky as the corduroy roads of a generation earlier.

The Perth & Pike Falls Company was the first of the toll-road companies to collapse. It was forced into bankruptcy in 1859 by one of its founding shareholders, Hamilton Nelson Sherwood (1808-1878), who then purchased it outright at Sheriff's auction, borrowed heavily against it, and lost ownership to mortgage holder John Wardrope (1816-1893) of Brockville in 1869. In about 1874 the road was abandoned, driven out of business partly by toll jumpers and partly by completion from the B&O Railway.

The Scotch Line Road Company, which had also come under the ownership of John Wardrope, was the next to succumb. Shortly before his death in 1893 Wardrope offered to sell the company for \$1,500 to the Town of Perth and the Townships of Bathurst and Burgess. However, despite a well attended public meeting called to consider the offer, the municipalities declined. The company struggled on until 1901 when it too became insolvent.

The bankrupt companies simply abandoned their roads, turning them into public highways with maintenance left to the mercy of statute labor from the cash-strapped townships of North Elmsley, Drummond, Bathurst, and Burgess. The roads crumbled into even greater disrepair.

In 1874, provincial legislation had authorized County Councils in Ontario to take over township roads and collect tolls to defray the expense of construction and repair. In 1889 further legislation was passed facilitating county purchases of roads where tolls would be abolished, and the roads maintained from county revenue. Wary of the unpopular tax increases required, Lanark County took up neither of these options and four of the seven roads connecting Perth to its hinterland remained in the hands of private toll-road companies.

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<sup>25</sup> The Bathurst & Tay River Road was of macadam construction from the outset as, for all intent and purpose, was the Fallbrook-Playfairville 'Stone' Road.

<sup>26</sup> While its inventor's name is generally spelled 'McAdam' the road design he created is generally spelled 'macadam'.

Change began in 1894 when a consortium of farm organizations, businessmen, industrialists, the Canadian Wheelman's Association<sup>27</sup>, politicians, newspapermen, and others, came together as the Ontario Good Roads Association (OGRA)<sup>28</sup> to lobby for highway improvements. The OGRA called for the construction and maintenance of good public roads, from farm gate to market, to reduce transport costs and lower consumer prices. The OGRA gospel fell on receptive ears. Within just five years the organization had so mobilized public and voter opinion that in 1901 the Provincial Government passed and funded the 'Highway Improvement Act' to subsidize county roads.<sup>29</sup>

The act stipulated that, out of a \$1,000,000 appropriation<sup>30</sup>, the Province would provide up to one third of the cost of roadwork on a county road system provided that statute labor liable on the improved road was commuted and applied to improvement of other roads in the municipalities. Funds could also be spent on the purchase of approved road-making machinery. Above all the Act permitted use of the Provincial subsidy to purchase toll-roads and convert them to public highways.

In that summer of 1901 Herbert Bronson Cowan (1877-1971), Secretary of the Eastern Ontario chapter of the OGRA and editor of the *Ottawa Journal*, launched a public education campaign that sent a train across 10 counties surrounding Ottawa to show small towns and farmers (the ratepayers called upon to help fund a county road system) the practical benefits of better roads. The 'Good Roads Train', furnished free of charge by the Canada Atlantic, the Canadian Pacific, the Grand Trunk and the Ottawa & New York Railway companies, carried \$6,000 worth of road building equipment donated by the Sawyer-Massey Co. Ltd. of Hamilton, while the Canadian Portland Cement Co. contributed 200 barrels of cement worth \$600 delivered wherever it was needed. The train carried engineers and workers, and at each stop they offered to build a mile of free road wherever the local authorities wanted it to showcase modern road building equipment and techniques. Lanark County's mile of model road was built between Lots 20 & 21 in the 8th Concession of Ramsay Township.

Because it meant the County of Lanark had to borrow a large sum of money, enthusiasm for the good roads scheme was not universal. Some township councils did not see the benefits outweighing the cost and there were squabbles over which townships would benefit most from the creation of county roads. Lanark Village held out against the plan to the bitter end and the Town of Smiths Falls added the cost of a county road system to a list of existing grievances and succeeded from Lanark County altogether.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, in July 1902 the *Perth Courier* reported that,

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<sup>27</sup> During the 1890s the cycling craze was at its peak and bicycle clubs played a significant roll in pressing for improved rural roads.

<sup>28</sup> The idea of a 'Good Roads Association' was also an American import.

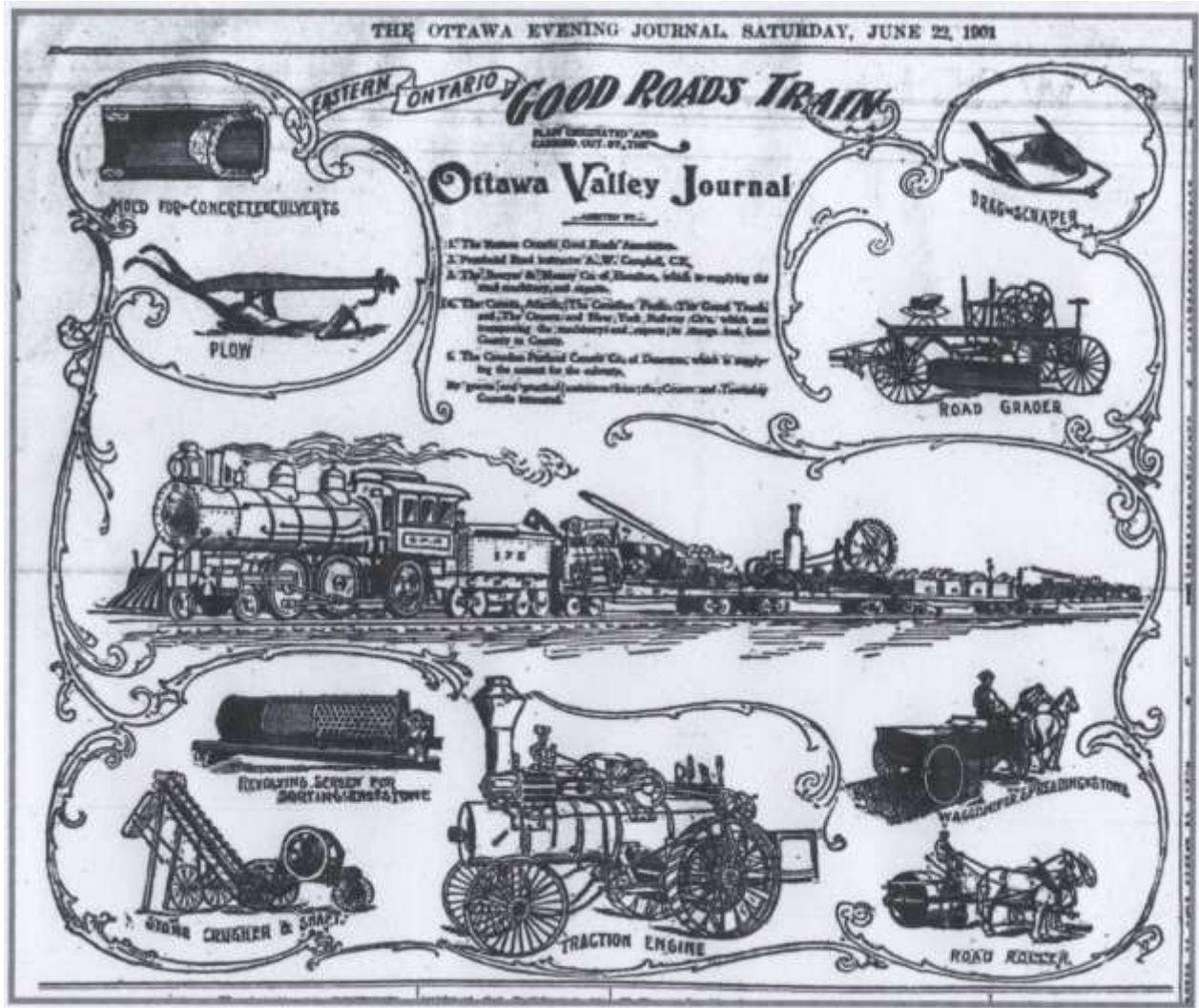
<sup>29</sup> The OGRA remains active today, headquartered at St. Thomas, Ontario.

<sup>30</sup> The provision of \$1,000,000 in 1901 was intended to be a one-time appropriation, but it was the being of much broader provincial government funding to transport infrastructure.

<sup>31</sup> In April 1902, Smiths Falls Mayor J. S. Gould informed the County of Lanark that it had been "*Unanimously resolved that immediate steps be taken to separate the town from the county*" and that "*this town will not hereafter be held liable for any debts which [the county] might contract or incur*". – *Perth Courier* April 4, 1902. Smiths Falls never rejoined the County of Lanark.

The Lanark County Council have passed their bylaw to raise \$65,000 in buying up toll-roads and in constructing good roads throughout the county. The proportion coming to this county out of the [Provincial] grant amounts to \$34,000 and above and beyond this the county has to raise and spend \$65,000, the payment of which, spread over 20 years. Final vote on the Good Roads Bylaw passed by vote of 10 to 3.

In the end the Townships of Bathurst, Dalhousie/North Sherbrooke<sup>32</sup>, Darling, Drummond, Burgess, Lanark, Montague, North Elmsley, Ramsay, and South Sherbrooke voted in favor. Those opposing the initiative were the Townships of Beckwith, Lavant, and Pakenham.



The man who led the campaign to have Lanark County join the 'Good Roads' movement and take advantage of grants offered through the Highway Improvement Act, was the Councilman from Perth, Joseph McKenzie Rogers (1860-1908).

<sup>32</sup> In 1903 the Townships of Dalhousie and North Sherbrooke combined to send a single representative to Lanark County Council.

*The principal credit for this good work is, no doubt, due to Mr. J. M. Rogers of this town, commissioner representing Perth.*<sup>33</sup> *Although the opposition at first was strong, the council being almost unanimously opposed to it, Mr. Rogers succeeded eventually in convincing the majority of the members that his plan was the best for the County.*<sup>34</sup> *He took upon himself the origin of the local scheme pushing it though – smoothing out obstructions and difficulties. His efforts were ably seconded by Councillors [Robert] Smith [1839-1918], of Elmsley; [William] Pattie [1842-1933], of Carleton Place; [Joseph] Cram [1840-1919] of Beckwith; and Warden [John] Cameron [1851-1934], of Bathurst.*<sup>35</sup>

Joseph M. Rogers was a local lawyer, had been Mayor of Perth in 1895-1896 and was elected Lanark County Warden in 1904, the year after he coaxed and cajoled his fellow County Councillors to purchase the toll-roads and create a county roads system.

A month later the *Courier* further announced that Lanark County Council had completed purchase of the four remaining toll-roads at a total cost of \$19,246.

The six miles (9.7 Km) of toll-road from Perth to Balderson's Corners, built by the Drummond & Bathurst Road Company as a plank road and reconstructed in 1864 as a macadam road, plus the four miles (6.4 Km) of toll-road from Perth to Manion Post Office formerly owned by the Bathurst & Tay River Macadamized Toll Road, were acquired from the Drummond & Bathurst Road Company, represented by its president Perth lawyer Edward George Malloch (1842-1915), for the sum of \$12,614.

Six miles (9.7 Km) of toll-road from Balderson's Corners to Lanark Village, constructed as a plank road in 1853 by the Balderson & Lanark Road Company and rebuilt as a macadam road after it was purchased by businessman George Kerr in 1862, was acquired from his son John Andrew Kerr<sup>36</sup> at a price of \$4,000.

The fourth "*barbaric relic*", running six miles (9.7 Km) from the road junction at Balderson's Corners to Playfairville, was purchased for \$2,632. Built in 1857 by the Bathurst & Mississippi River Road Company, its manager in 1903 was Arthur Bruce Lees (1871-1916).

The balance of \$79,754, from the \$99,000 earmarked for roads in the July 1902 bylaw, was allocated to the repair of former toll-roads and construction or upgrading of the first 100 miles of the Lanark County road network we know today. This included \$4,400 for purchase of the county's first road machinery; a stone crusher, \$1,100, a road grader, \$250, two dump wagons, \$350, and a steam roller, \$2,700.

While praising County Council's consignment of the toll-road system "*to a storehouse of barbaric relics*", the *Perth Courier* conceded that,

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<sup>33</sup> *Perth Courier*, July 4, 1902.

<sup>34</sup> *Perth Expositor*, August 1903, as quoted in *The Heritage Transportation Project Phaes-1*, Lanark Tourism Association 1995, by Hazel Murphy, Rob Rivington, Tom VanAlstine, Sherry Tysick-Paul.

<sup>35</sup> *Perth Courier*, September 4, 1903

<sup>36</sup> John Andrew Kerr was Perth's Town Clerk 1892-1932.

*The toll-road companies, no doubt, are deserving of eulogy for their efforts to keep the leading roads of the county in passable condition. They jumped into the breach, and their work is not overlooked by the Townships in which their roads ran. Times, however, have changed, and the feeling grew that the country should assume control.*<sup>37</sup>

On Monday, August 21, 1903, the toll-gates were raised and all roads leading to Perth declared free to all for the first time in a half century. According to the *Perth Expositor*, the economic impact was immediately discernible.



*Already the benefits of free roads have been noticed in Perth, for last Tuesday farmers from Bathurst and Drummond, along the line of the old toll-roads, were in Perth by the dozens, and quite a few strange faces were seen in our stores the first time in years. The bargains, range of goods, the quality of the articles and the keen competition for the trade impressed the new purchasers, and they went home well pleased with their purchases and carried a favourable impression of our merchants and their method of doing business. The toll-roads are now a thing of the past and farmers living at a distance along the old toll-roads will quickly see the advantages of coming to Perth to do their buying and selling.*<sup>38</sup>

As the 1901 Highway Improvement Act and its subsequent amendments took effect province-wide, by the mid-1920s most toll-roads had disappeared from the Ontario landscape. A toll was still charged on a section of Highway #11 into the 1950s<sup>39</sup>, and some major bridges continued to levy tolls, but with few exceptions Ontario's roads became public highways, financed by tax revenue, until 1999 when the Provincial Government re-introduced toll-roads. That year the Conservative Party government of Premier Michael Harris created Highway 407, comprised of a 43 km (27 mile) publicly owned segment, and a 108.0 km (67 mile) segment leased for 99 years to a private company<sup>40</sup>, spanning the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) from Orono to Burlington. The Highway 407 toll-road has proven to be just as unpopular as the toll-roads of the 19th century.

- Ron W. Shaw & David Taylor (2020)

<sup>37</sup> *Perth Courier*, September 4, 1903.

<sup>38</sup> *Perth Expositor*, August 1903, as quoted in *The Heritage Transportation Project Phaes-1*, Lanark Tourism Association 1995, by Hazel Murphy, Rob Rivington, Tom VanAlstine, Sherry Tysick-Paul.

<sup>39</sup> Near North Bay.

<sup>40</sup> '407 International Inc.', a consortium of Canadian and Spanish investors.