

WATERLOO HISTORICAL SOCIETY REPORTS
112th Annual General Meeting (2023 - 2024)
Tuesday November 5th, 2024 7:00 PM
Victoria Park Pavilion Kitchener, Ontario

Treasurer's Report for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2024

The financial statements have been prepared for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2024. I would like to quickly review some of the major highlights.

- WHS had \$26,660 in revenues. This was approximately \$5,000 more than the previous year, mainly from increased donations, increased book table sales, and GIC interest.
 - Donations were \$16,002. This included an unexpected \$2,000 donation from a non-member who had not previously donated.
 - Membership fees were \$4,896.
 - Book table sales and other revenues were \$2,706.
 - Accrued GIC interest was \$1,897 (\$50,000 GIC from TD Bank, 5.15%, matures Jan. 2025).
 - An Ontario government HODG (Heritage Organization Development Grant) grant of \$1,159.
- Expenses were \$31,579 vs. 24,056 the previous year. The increase was due to a major project that is nearing completion: the Idylwild Park interpretive plaque (design, production and installation costs). I would like to acknowledge our Plaques Committee who has done a great job in keeping the project moving forward. WHS also paid higher storage locker rent this year. The Cober printing invoice has not been received yet but an amount has been accrued for this year as the annual volume will be ready soon.
- WHS had a loss of \$4,920 this year vs. a loss of \$2,350 the previous year.
- WHS has assets of approximately \$84,000 and equity of \$61,000.
- Over the last three years, WHS received grants from the Ontario Government's Heritage Organization Development Grant (\$1,159 per year), but has not received grants from the Waterloo Regional Heritage Foundation (previously WHS received \$5,000 per year), as the WRHF undertakes an internal strategic review of its grant program.
- WHS received donations from 61 annual volume patrons this year, vs. 58 in each of the two previous years. I would like to thank our patrons for their generosity each year.
- Other activities:
 - the annual charitable return was filed with Canada Revenue Agency before the deadline. This is necessary in order for WHS to be allowed to issue donation receipts.
 - the Ontario government's online business registry was updated.
 - charitable donation receipts were mailed out to donors in late January or early February.
 - the Ontario government's Heritage Organization Development Grant (HODG) application was submitted before the deadline.

- semiannual HST rebate claims were submitted to Canada Revenue Agency.
 - an information form is sent to The Ontario Historical Society, annually. This is necessary in order to remain affiliated with OHS (which is required for the HODG and the director and officer insurance policy).
- I have reviewed the procedures and practices I use as WHS treasurer with another accountant, Dan Cardy, CPA, CA, who retired from public accounting in 2020.
- Dan simply provided a “second set of eyes” on the work I performed in order to prepare the financial statements being presented at this AGM.
- Dan has no concerns with the accounting and bookkeeping and financial statement information I am presenting to the members."

Thank-you.

Jeff Shank, Treasurer

10/09/24

Waterloo Historical Society
Profit and Loss YTD
 October 2023 through September 2024

	<u>Oct '23 - Sep '24</u>	<u>Oct '22 - Sep '23</u>
Ordinary Income/Expense		
Income		
Donations	16,002	13,703
Grants		
Ont. HODG	1,159	1,159
Total Grants	1,159	1,159
Interest	1,897	0
Membership Fees	4,896	5,028
Sales		
Annual Volume	957	950
Centennial Supplements	0	8
Slip Cases	0	16
Township Books	45	111
Township Maps	0	1
Bus Trip Booklets	0	13
Sales - Other	1,629	717
Total Sales	2,631	1,816
Other Revenue	75	0
Total Income	26,660	21,706
Expense		
Administrative		
Internet	391	391
Insurance	1,719	1,632
Newsletter Printing	155	131
Administrative - Other	269	326
Total Administrative	2,534	2,480
Archives		
Storage Locker Rent	6,181	5,606
Archives - Other	49	92
Total Archives	6,230	5,698
Bank Charges	0	1
Education	6,137	30
Honourarium/Donations	1,500	1,200
Meeting Costs	187	110
Postage and Mailing		
Annual Volumes & Books	208	44
Newsletters	93	160
Postage and Mailing - Other	191	96

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Waterloo Historical Society
Profit and Loss YTD
October 2023 through September 2024

	<u>Oct '23 - Sep '24</u>	<u>Oct '22 - Sep '23</u>
Total Postage and Mailing	492	299
Publishing		
Annual Volumes	<u>14,500</u>	<u>14,238</u>
Total Publishing	<u>14,500</u>	<u>14,238</u>
Total Expense	<u>31,579</u>	<u>24,056</u>
Net Ordinary Income	<u>-4,920</u>	<u>-2,350</u>
Net Income	<u>-4,920</u>	<u>-2,350</u>

10/09/24

Waterloo Historical Society
Balance Sheet
As of September 30, 2024

	Sep 30, '24	Sep 30, '23
ASSETS		
Current Assets		
Chequing/Savings		
Book Table Float	75	75
Archive Purchase Fund	500	500
General Fund		
WHS / GSR Cataloguing	775	775
General Fund - Remainder	28,512	83,810
Total General Fund	29,287	84,585
GIC's		
General Fund GIC's	50,000	0
Total GIC's	50,000	0
Total Chequing/Savings	79,862	85,160
Other Current Assets		
Federal HST Recoverable	158	85
Ontario HST Recoverable	407	212
Other Receivable		
General - Accrued Interest	1,897	0
Total Other Receivable	1,897	0
Prepaid Expenses	1,765	1,606
Total Other Current Assets	4,226	1,904
Total Current Assets	84,088	87,063
TOTAL ASSETS	84,088	87,063
LIABILITIES & EQUITY		
Liabilities		
Current Liabilities		
Other Current Liabilities		
Accrued liabilities	17,568	14,238
Unearned Revenue		
Donations	5,100	5,100
Memberships		
2024 Memberships	0	591
2025 Memberships	175	0
Total Memberships	175	591
Volume Patrons		
May 24 Patrons	0	1,170
May 25 Patrons	200	0
Total Volume Patrons	200	1,170
Total Unearned Revenue	5,475	6,861
Total Other Current Liabilities	23,043	21,099
Total Current Liabilities	23,043	21,099

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Waterloo Historical Society
Balance Sheet
As of September 30, 2024

	Sep 30, '24	Sep 30, '23
Total Liabilities	23,043	21,099
Equity		
Opening Bal Equity	47,417	47,417
Retained Earnings	18,547	20,897
Net Income	-4,920	-2,350
Total Equity	61,045	65,964
TOTAL LIABILITIES & EQUITY	84,088	87,063

Membership Report Mary Anne Banks, Chair

We currently have 169 members and would like to welcome our new members and thank our returning members for their continued support. Our membership year runs from Oct 1 to Sept 30, and we are continuing to receive renewals for the year beginning Oct 1, 2024.

Just a reminder to current members as well as those considering membership, Waterloo Historical Society membership entitles you to participate in all of the activities of the society; voting rights at the annual general meeting; 10% off the price of most used books from the book table at meetings; 25% off admission to the Waterloo Region Museum; access to our public meetings each year featuring guest speakers; a subscription to the society newsletter; a copy of the society's award winning annual volume; and a chance to network with like-minded local history enthusiasts. An adult membership is \$30, and a student membership is \$15.

On an administrative note, this year we have created a fillable membership form which is posted on our website along with the standard print-and-fill form. This new form will allow for prospective members and those renewing to complete the form electronically and email it without the need to print or scan.

Communications Committee Report Lesley Webb, Chair

The Communications Committee promotes WHS and its activities. News releases for our June and September meetings were sent out to local newspapers and details were posted to social media. Thank you to rych mills for often including meeting details in his Flash From the Past Waterloo Region Record column.

There was a renewed interest in using Instagram to promote WHS. You can follow us along with 566 others at www.instagram.com/waterloohistoricalsociety. Facebook is still our most popular engagement tool with 1,600 followers, like us at <https://www.facebook.com/waterloohs>.

There is now a cost to post an event that will appear in the Waterloo Region Record in hardcopy and online. Many of the traditional community calendars have been discontinued or are cumbersome to use. As an alternative, we have started to share meeting details with the TL;DR (too long, didn't read) for Waterloo Region known as TL;WR which is a weekly list of what to do - events, music, food and more. You can subscribe to the weekly Monday morning newsletter at <https://tlwr.ca>. Along with the WHS newsletter and website, there are plenty of ways to stay up-to-date on WHS activities and events.

Newsletter Report Sophia Grande-Lawlor, Editor

This year Marion Roes has "retired" from her position as newsletter editor. Thank you to Marion for creating such an informative, interesting, and enjoyable newsletter to read for so many years.

I will be taking over for Marion as editor, and Sandy Parks, Jon Fear, and I are currently the newsletter committee. We would welcome any news updates, article ideas, and photographs members wish to share for the newsletter.

There was one newsletter released for 2024, we plan to publish the first newsletter for 2025 in February.

Thank you to Marion for her patience in delivering training and advice, and thank you to our fellow members for their support as we gear up to release the next issue.

Ad Hoc Annual Volume Indexing Committee John Glass, Acting Chair

I have taken over as the active chair for this committee. Individual indices from volume #1 (dated 1913) to volume #103 (2015) are available on our website WHS.ca. With the release of 2023's volume #11 in November 2024, we have a backlog of 8 volumes to go through the indexing process. To complete this, we will need to re-engage the person who indexed the first 103 volumes or, likely, engage a new contractor to do this work. Aside from completing the indices, we want to integrate all these individual indices into a single document.

All work has been put on hold until we can find some additional time to manage this project or find another board member who can drive it.

Programs John Glass, Acting Chair

This past year, WHS board member Eric Uhlmann was chair of our Program Committee. Eric, along with several board members were responsible for organizing our presentations. On June 11, 50 attendees were present in this space (Victoria Park Pavillion) to hear rych mills give an account of early aviation in our Region, covering lighter, and heavier than aircrafts. Special thanks go to rych mills and Warren Stauch who were instrumental in organizing our initial Ayr event, but a big thumbs down goes to Environment Canada for bringing us an EF2 tornado on August 17, 2024.

On September 19, we held a joint meeting with the North Dumfries Historical Preservation Society at the Ayr Curling Club. 80+ attendees were on hand to hear our two guest speakers. Rachel Redshaw presented a history of the host community with her talk entitled "Wh'Ayr it all Began". The second part of the program was a presentation by Ken Seiling who told us many stories from his pre-Regional Chair career in his talk "Museums in the Community". This joint event was well attended and even better received by the audience. This was such a success that I'd like to see these two organizations get together again to do a joint meeting.

One of the goals for next year will be to try and increase the number of meetings and perhaps to explore some new locations to hold these public meetings.

Web Site John Glass, Chair

The WHS website can be found at WHS.ca. The site's landing page is updated to provide information about upcoming events. WHS.ca is also a source of information

about our history, current board and council members, annual volumes and indices, membership information and much more.

No major changes were made to the site this past year. Thankfully, no major, or minor security issues or outages were encountered. Our site is hosted by PeaceWorks Technology Solutions in Waterloo. Peaceworks has a track record of working with not-for-profit organizations to host and maintain their websites.

The website has maintained the same look and feel for well over 10 years, and it would be nice to get a bit of a refresh. We are always looking for volunteers to help us manage the content and potentially help us freshen its look and feel. The site runs on WordPress, which is a content management system that allows users to easily maintain and publish their content to the web. If you can use a simple document editor like MS Word or Google Docs, and if you can drag and drop files, you can use WordPress. Please reach out to me if you would like to help.

Ontario Volunteer Service Awards Report Sandra Parks

The Ontario Volunteer Service Awards recognize volunteers for providing committed and dedicated service to an organization, with nominees recognized by the length of time they've volunteered, ranging from five to 65 years of continuous service.

Thank you to Marion Roes for nominating members for this honour for more than 15 years.

The Waterloo Historical Society nominated five of its members for the Awards in 2024:

- Patty Clarke - 10 years' service
- David Emberly - five years' service
- Mary Lapp - five years' service
- Marion Roes - 20 years' service
- Warren Stauch - 15 years' service

Recipients received a personalized certificate and lapel pin acknowledging their years of service. In total, the Ontario government recognized over 6,000 community leaders in 2024, from organizations such as non-profits, schools, community centres, hospitals, libraries and community associations.

Congratulations and thank you to all of our recipients.

WATERLOO HISTORICAL SOCIETY ARCHIVES Karen Ball-Pyatt, Archivist

I am pleased to present this annual report on the Waterloo Historical Society archives in the Grace Schmidt Room of Local History, at the Kitchener Public Library. As the repository for the Society's archival collection, we support the WHS mission to foster the recognition of our region's unique heritage and encourage its preservation.

Last month, we celebrated the 40th anniversary of the Grace Schmidt Room, a partnership between the Library, the Waterloo Historical Society, and the Waterloo-Wellington Branch of the Ontario Genealogical Society. We were honoured to have had

several WHS Board members join us on 16 October 2024 for the celebration, including Susan Hoffman, the previous WHS archivist and someone who I am honoured to call my friend and mentor. I want to thank the WHS board members for their support and John Glass for his kind words at the event. We were also joined by several former GSR staff members, many of whom fondly remember working with WHS members and on WHS collections. Current staff have assembled a delightful display of 40 things to love about the GSR that will remain in our window for some time to come. If you are at the Central Library, please do come to see it.

Another heartfelt thank you goes to the WHS Board for their support of the Library's Genealogy Fair, which was held on November 4, 2023. We look forward to holding this event again in late fall 2025.

I would like to thank Lauren, Bridget, Trevor, Ingrid and Valerie who support Grace Schmidt Room in so many ways. We are a small but mighty team that will continue to evolve and grow. It's been a year of change for us at KPL, new working relationships and new CEO, but we are focused on making the collection accessible to all through innovative programming, new services, and diverse ways to access and connect with the collection.

Among the many highlights of our donations during 2024, there are the following:

- Ongoing accruals to the Ron Welker 2SLGBTQ+ collection;
- Calendars from Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church and H. Schilling and Sons general store in Breslau;
- Dreisinger Family History Collection;
- Photographs and clippings about the Laf-Lot Klub;
- Idessa Zimmerman correspondence; and
- FWIO (Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario) Waterloo District minutes.

The annual call for inactive corporate records will be made at the upcoming Waterloo Historical Society Board meeting.

Submitted respectfully,

AD HOC NEWSPAPER STORAGE COMMITTEE Karen Ball-Pyatt, Chair

The Committee, composed of myself, rych mills and Past President Lesley Webb, did not meet during 2023-2024. We continue to monitor developments and digital initiatives undertaken by area archives and libraries and welcome the opportunity to assist with digitization projects and programs.

Currently, the WHS collects the following newspapers in paper form: Woolwich Observer and the Ayr News. All paper editions, with the exception of current year issues, are kept at the WHS off-site storage facility.

In late 2023, we learned that the Waterloo Region Record, and its antecedents, had been digitized by Newspapers.com, a subsidiary of Ancestry, in an agreement with the

TorStar newspaper organization. Access to digitized content is available by subscription to Newspapers.com. However, microfilms of the Record are still available for viewing in the Grace Schmidt Room, free of charge. GSR staff can assist with finding references to Record newspaper content.

We will continue to explore options for the storage of the WHS newspaper collection and will keep the Board apprised of our findings.

Submitted respectfully,

Book Table Report rych mills, Coordinator

The WHS Book Table continues to be popular at meetings. Sales were down this past year because we missed setting up at one of our meetings due to the cancellation of the original History under the Trees in Ayr. That tornado-ed-out outdoor event then replaced the usual September meeting when the North Dumfries Historical Preservation Society invited us to become part of their meeting in September.

We continue to receive donations of used books from members and continue to inventory them.

There was one Book Table *on-site* sale over the past year and we hope to do another soon ... it is impossible to bring all books out to a meeting! Our plan to have them all on the website is still a work-in-progress. Mary Anne Banks has us on the cusp of having an updated list mounted ... of course with every sale or donation, the list needs updating. The Book Table is also where past issues of the annual volume as well as the WHS County and Township books can be purchased.

I'd like to thank Mary Anne, along with Todd Bowman who assisted last year, and tonight Sherwood Hagey who has been back at his old stand behind the table handling sales. We could use another person to assist with setting up and tearing down Book Table items.

Publications rych mills, Editor

The main task of the Publications Committee, and me as chair, is to get the WHS Annual Volume edited and published. In that task the committee members did a fine job ... I did not, and I offer no excuses for the lateness of the 2023 edition. Yes 2023!! Traditionally, the volume issued within a given year bears the date of the previous year. This year we just barely made it with 2023's release tonight.

I vowed at the last AGM to fix the situation and get back on a mid-year release date. I failed and again apologize. Steps have already been taken to insure that the volume, #112 dated 2024 will be issued some 6 months from now to get back on schedule. There are several papers already submitted and 2 more promised. The adjusted deadline is now February 15 so if you have anything close to being ready, please contact me and we'll work together to get it into the next volume. For now, my thanks as chair and editor to Rosanne Atwater –Hallatt, Marj Kohli, Susan Mavor and Jon Fear for their great help over the past 12 months. I hope this year's issue will provide hours of good local history

reading for you. I'll have more to say about the volume towards the end of this evening's AGM

Storage rych mills, Coordinator

The WHS storage unit is full of back issues of the volume, boxes of Elizabeth Bloomfield's Township history and our dwindling stock of Geoff Hayes' County book. Storage also hosts the Book Table stock; hundreds of bound volumes of late 19th- and 20th-century area newspapers, plus numerous other WHS holdings.

It also has boxes of donated collections containing documents, photographs, letters, etc which we have begun, with Karen Ball-Pyatt's oversight, to create a detailed finding guide to. Sophia Grande-Lawlor has started with the several boxes of documents from the founding days of the K-W Granite club which WHS was given a number of years ago. This will continue until the other collections have been outlined.

Otherwise, storage doesn't do much except store. About the only things that change from week to week in the room is the temperature and humidity gauge.

President Report John Glass, President

2024 has been another busy year for the Waterloo Historical Society. I feel proud to be part of this organization and be involved in our activities. We've had some great accomplishments in our 112th year. We've received the 111th issue of our volume this evening – the volumes are published the year following our operational year.

We've been active with public meetings and have made several other public appearances. Several of our members were at Wilmot Heritage Day on February 17. David Emberly and I represented WHS at St. Mark's Lutheran Church in Kitchener on September 21 for Doors Open Waterloo Region.

On October 16, I had the pleasure, and honour of representing WHS at Kitchener Public Library's 40th Anniversary of the Grace Schmidt Room. Several GSR employees were on hand as were WHS members. We were happy to see former WHS President Susan Hoffman in attendance as well. KPL is a long-time partner of WHS. They help us curate our collection and bring new items into the collection. Most importantly, they enable WHS to share our collection with the public.

I'd like to thank all our volunteers, several of whom were singled out this evening for service awards. While we often think of board and council members as our main volunteers, we are also grateful for the help we receive from our members, guests and friends. People help set up and tear down our meeting venues. They drive guests to and from our public meetings. Volunteers bring snacks, serve them and clean up. We have a large number of people who help us deliver our annual volumes.

Of course, all the work that the board and council do is volunteer work. The Plaque Committee has put in an enormous amount of time getting ready to erect our Idylwild Park plaque. As always, the Annual Volume Committed spends countless hours putting

together this high-quality production. The work continues as we deliver the volumes to those who are unable to pick things up.

Another group that contributes to our well being are those individuals, organizations and trusts that contribute money towards our volume, special projects and for other discretionary expenses bourn by the Society. The majority of your annual dues go towards the printing of the annual volume that you receive as being a member. We thank all of you who make donations to the Society – be they large, small, regularly or infrequently, we grateful for your help.

Please feel free to reach out to me any time if you have any questions, ideas (speakers, events, locations, etc.) or even complaints about WHS. Even better, if you'd like to help out, please talk to me or any other board or council members.

I'd like to thank everyone who has come out tonight. I hope that you enjoy this, the 111th edition of the Annual Volume. We all hope to see you at our public meetings in 2025. Remember, all our public meetings are free and open to anyone – not just members. One way you can help is to invite or bring a friend to one of our public meetings or events. We are always happy to share our history with new people and potential new members.

Annual Volume Report rych mills, Editor

111 years ago, the original members of Waterloo Historical Society received the very first annual report (which was its name for many decades). I do not know if they had a special meeting ... or just mailed them out ... or people picked them up at the library. In any case the same thing has happened about 100 times since then (not 110! several times in the 20s and 30s there were double issues with one report a year late.)

Speaking of late, that is the elephant in the room again this year and I am the failed big-game shooter who missed that elephant. Due to some family, some physical and indeed some mental issues I was unable (or unwilling) to work at the pace I should have. As a result here we are, over five months late.

But you have the volume in your hands now and I hope you will get enough enjoyment and information from it to overlook my 2024 lethargy. The publication committee was not at fault at all; their work depended on my work. When they were asked to read thru articles, 2, 3, sometimes 4 times with a close eye and make suggestions, they were always there and I owe big thanks to Marj Kohli, Susan Mavor and Jon Fear, completing his first year on the Pub Comm.

As throughout my tenure as editor Rosanne Atwater-Hallatt was an immense help and I think she should be titled Assistant-And-Really-Big-Helper-To-The-Editor. In addition to creating two articles for this issue she eagle-eyed every sentence, every word that came to the Pub Comm's way, always providing detailed oversight.

We had three outside, (i.e. non-WHS authors this time). Jeffrey Shallit had spent his career teaching and researching mathematics: in retirement was able to flesh out a favourite math character whose story he had come across ... luckily this character spent

a few long-ago days in Kitchener and that provided the link so we could publish the take of the “wrongest mathematician” ever. You’ll enjoy testing your own math skills!! At one time, the Whaley family of pediatricians, father and son, had a hand (so to speak) in bringing a large percentage of the Twin Cities’ births successfully thru babyhood, thru childhood and through teenhood. Along with Werner Stein, an escapee from Nazi Germany, David and John Whaley made K-W babies among the healthiest in the province. John’s son Jim has researched the stories of all three for the annual volume. I bet there are some in this audience who grew healthy under a Whaley or a Stein.

Sandy Parks did what I have long urged members to do ... examine your own house for its history: now granted, Sandy’s house was once a factory with a long and intriguing story. You’ll read, and *enjoy reading about*, her own little “mansion” on Mansion Street. I mentioned Rosanne providing two stories for us: one involves a lonesome church over 150 years old which survives today thru the efforts of one man. Her story is a closeup look at St John’s Lutheran in the wilds of Wellesley Township.

Rosanne also came across a detailed diary / memoir written a half-century ago by a woman whose **forefathers** and **foremothers** were among the earliest settlers around the present village of Heidelberg. Ludwig **Foerster** and wife Maria, each under 25, left the Duchy of Baden in 1835 and found a home in Wellesley Township. The Foerster family grew far and wide.

Speaking of old world folks heading for the New World, but a century later, my contribution to this volume was to edit, extract and provide context for another immigrant family, the Papperts. In the last few years of his life, Kitchener’s Matt Pappert wrote up everything he could remember his father Michael Pappert had told him decades earlier about the family’s origins in Romania. It is the first of 2 or 3 extracts we’ll run over the next few issues.

Opening Volume #111 is a fond remembrance of our 2001-2002 WHS president Paul Karrow.

The current president, hale and hearty, John Glass provides a look back at the 2023 WHS year.

The cover this year is a bit quirky and I credit our partner at Cober Printing, Chris Boyle with creating a striking montage.

We have several other partners as well:

- of course our long-standing hand-in-hand local history partnership with Kitchener Public Library is something we are ever grateful for ... and proud of.
- The Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Multiculturalism provided a grant to help publish the book.
- But, if I had a pair of those giant hands one sees people using during NFL games, I’d be clapping them together right now in honor of our Page One people ... many of whom are sitting in front of me now... we title them Friends, Partners

and Benefactors but collectively they are the Patrons who make this book possible ... people who find the nickels and dimes and multi-hundred-dollar checks to allow the WHS annual volume to continue as among the best-produced volunteer historical society publication in Ontario. WHS owes all of them that giant hand.

Volunteer is the key word here: no one in WHS gets paid for any of their tasks. Before wrapping up, I want to thank the president, John Glass, for his continual support over this past year during my labours.

One more harp: please write something for upcoming annual volumes. We are all here because we have some interest in the story of Waterloo Region, its townships, towns, villages, cities, people, industries, institutions, events, landscape, etc .

Please contact me even if you are still just in the idea stage. It's one great way you can contribute to the ongoing history of Waterloo Historical Society.

Plaques Committee Warren Stauch, Chair

Idylwild Park, on the Speed River in what is now Cambridge, attracted people from across Southwestern Ontario, via the Grand Trunk Railway and the Galt, Preston & Hespeler (GP&H) electric railway. It was located in what was then Waterloo Township, just north of where the MacDonald-Cartier (401) Highway crosses the river today.

The GP&H, "followed a course very close to the banks of the Speed River, entering a wooded area with tall elms, maples and evergreens - a perfect setting for one of, if not the most popular playground, picnic and recreational area in the district," wrote Oliver Kummer in the 1970 Waterloo Historical Society annual volume. In dissecting the park's name, he concluded it was a "poem in the wilds."

The 10-acre Idylwild lasted for just 20 years, and then it was gone, a victim of the Great War, and the rise in popularity of the automobile and other more urban parks.

History

By 1896, the GP&H carried up to 35,000 passengers and 1,000 tons of freight each month, more than enough to pay operating costs. Like every other electric interurban railway, it had a park along its lines that could only be reached by its passengers, a way to stimulate weekend rail travel.

Idylwild Park opened in 1895, accessed every 15 to 30 minutes during operating hours. Park-goers were given ribbons that identified them as patrons, just 5¢ from Preston and 10¢ from Galt.

The Park catered to families, private parties and annual group picnics. "It was not at all uncommon for the railway to shunt in from Preston junction a train load of picnickers

from as far away as Hamilton bringing hundreds to enjoy the great out-of-doors in the wilds of Idylwild,” explained Kummer.

Amenities

Idylwild encompassed lands on both banks of the Speed, as well as a large island in between. Two wooden footbridges accessed the island, plus one across the river itself.

The larger of the two dance pavilions, 50’ by 50’, could hold 100 dancers or more. As evening approached, “myriads of colored electric lights burst here and there through the deep shadows of the trees and frame the pavilion.”

The Park featured a refreshment booth and store where one could get soft drinks, ice cream and “free hot water.” “No doubt some did bring along something stronger than pop,” recalled Kummer.

Natural pathways allowed strolls through the woods. Boardwalks, horseshoe pits, tree swings, a dock and boats were among the amenities. East of the picnic grounds was a five-acre athletic field for ball games, tennis, races and other sports.

“The Speed River at that period was still clean and offered wading for the kiddies,” advised Kummer, “and those who cared to try their luck at fishing.”

Though parents didn’t have to worry about poison ivy, Idylwild was nicknamed ‘Mosquito Park’ as that insect thrived in the surrounding wetlands.

Electric Railway

Hydroelectric power from Niagara made street railways viable from the 1890s. One of the earliest interurban electric trains in Canada, the Galt & Preston Street Railway, became operational July 26, 1894, with Hespeler added in 1896.

As demand for holiday excursions grew, the electric railway was instrumental in the growth of the tourist trade in Preston, where mineral springs offered supposed health benefits, and resort hotels such as the Kress and Del Monte provided luxurious accommodation.

The streetcars themselves were described by the local newspaper, “after the most modern style. . . The seats are finely upholstered; beveled glass windows decorate the ends and the car contains four electric heaters. . .incandescent electric lights, with very pretty globes, hang from the ceiling, and the car has a seating capacity for about 30 passengers.”

The GP&H merged with the Preston & Berlin Street Railway in 1908 and in 1914 was incorporated as the Grand River Railway.

Demise of the Park

In 1916, Idylwild Park was closed permanently, several factors leading to its demise: growing popularity of the automobile; First World War took staff for more important duties; and establishment of Riverside Park in nearby Preston.

Most of the Hespeler branch tracks were moved away from the river in 1918 due to spring flooding. The land continued to be used for picnics into the 1940s, just a short hike from Speedsville Road.

Present day

Today, much of what was once provided by the private sector is now part of municipal infrastructure. Part of the site, along the southern bank of the Speed River, is now Grand River Conservation Authority lands. The City of Cambridge's Mill Run Trail passes through, making use of the dismantled rail-bed.

The landscape of the site has since either grown over, eroded or been developed. The gates, pavilions, bridges and other structures are no longer present. The mosquitos, however, remain.