Hastings County Historical Society

HCHS

Stroll of Discovery Riverfront Trail
Belleville, Ontario

Community Archives
of Belleville and Hastings County

Belleville's Historic Riverfront

Archeological remains show us that the river flowing through the City of Belleville has been a focus of human activity since the last Ice Age. To the Anishinaabe people, it was the Sagonaska, while Europeans have called it Singleton's Creek, Meyers' Creek and the Moira.

The river has been a focus for industry, for powering the grist and lumber mills, and as a mode of transportation for the vast quantities of timber felled in its watershed in the 1800s. Its fish and its waters have supported human life, while its ice and floods have threatened it.

This short guide highlights the history of this stretch of river and the buildings that surround it.
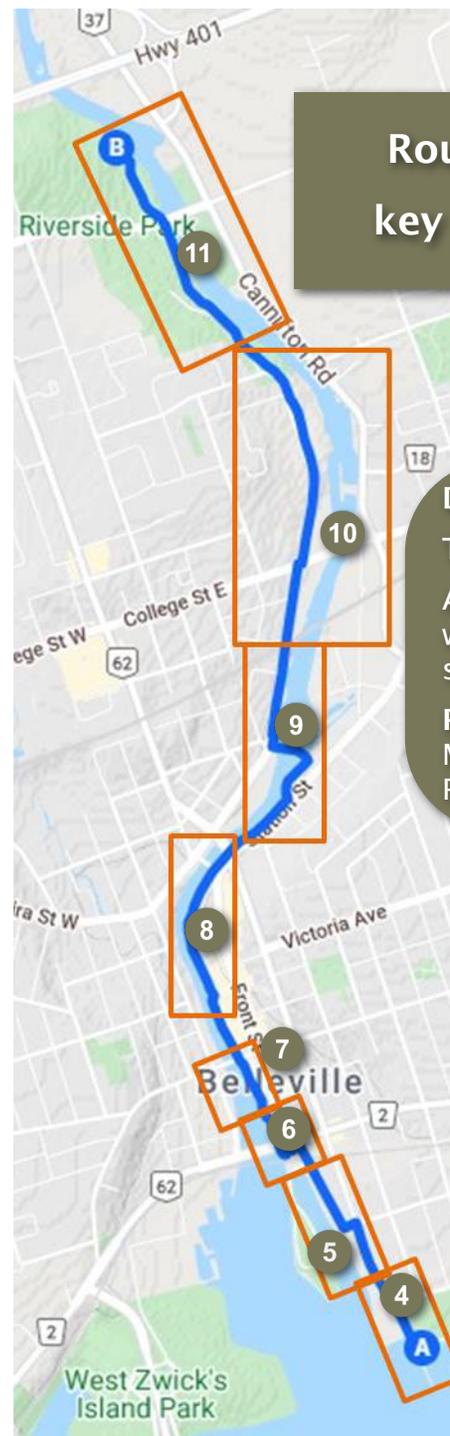
It was produced by the Hastings County Historical Society and the Community Archives of Belleville and Hastings County.

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Contemporary photographs by Gerry Fraiberg

Historic photos from the collections of the Community Archives of Belleville and Hastings County

Route overview and key to page numbers

Distance: from **A** to **B** 5 km

Time: around 1 hour

Accessibility: Suitable for wheelchairs, cycles, and strollers

Parking: available at Meyers' Pier **A** and Riverside Park **B**

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#RiverfrontStroll

1. Meyers' Pier

Originally the government wharf and warehouse and Belleville's port of entry. In 1983 the City assumed ownership and by 2007 had transformed the area into the recreational focal point of a newly revitalized waterfront.

2. The Norris Whitney Bridge

This single arch bridge was built in 1980–1982 and was named for Norris Whitney MPP, who was instrumental in its construction. The first bridge to span the Bay of Quinte was completed in 1891 and included a swing bridge section.

3. The Thurlow Purchase

In 1816 the Mississauga First Nation surrendered a 428–acre parcel of land. The area had originally been set aside as a native burial ground in 1783. Compensation was agreed upon in 2010 with the Alderville First Nation in relation to this purchase.

4. Jane Forrester Park

Jane Forrester was Belleville's first woman Mayor (1956–1957). This park symbolizes the reclamation of industrial sites along the waterfront, a cause that Jane Forrester had championed in the 1980s. The park was dedicated to her in November, 2001.

5. 16 South Front Street

Now the Royal Canadian Sea Cadet building, this property was formerly the home of the South End Athletic Club, founded in 1933 as an offshoot of the Wharf Street Debating Club to encourage interest in sports in Belleville.

6. Sir Mackenzie Bowell Monument

Mackenzie Bowell (1823–1917) arrived in Belleville as a youth in 1832. He started out as an apprentice at *The Intelligencer* newspaper and went on to own the firm. He entered federal politics in 1867 and served as Prime Minister of Canada from 1894 to 1896.

7. Wharf Street Debating Club Plaque

This plaque marks the location of a converted wooden boathouse that once hosted colourful "bun feeds" for City Council candidates. After nearly a century, the club moved to the Foster Ward Hall and the old building was demolished.

8. 45–47 South Front Street (McIntosh–Ridley House)

This property was built in 1817 and is one of the few early harbour settlement buildings standing. It was owned by Martha McIntosh, daughter of a United Empire Loyalist and later by Dr. George Ridley. It received a heritage designation in 1983.

9. Turn left for a detour to Victoria Park

A public park since the late 1800s, this former island was the site of the Rathbun Company sawmill until 1876, when the city took it over. The Bay of Quinte Yacht Club is located on the southern tip of the park.

10. Belleville Plaque in Victoria Park

This Ontario Heritage Trust plaque outlines a brief history of Belleville from its foundation around 1790 as a milling and shipping centre, to its growth as a railway town and its incorporation as a city in 1877.

11. Parrott Riverfront Trail

This scenic trail runs for 1.6 km (1 mile) along the east and west banks of the Moira River, through the historic downtown section of the City of Belleville. It was named after local philanthropists John and Bernice Parrott in 2005.

12. Wilbur C. Purcell Bridge

The Dundas Street bridge was built in 1970 to carry Highway 2 across the Moira River. It was dedicated to honour Wilbur C. Purcell (1925–2000), the former City Engineer and City Manager for Belleville, in October, 2003.

13. United Empire Loyalist Monument

This monument was designed by J. Arnold Thompson and built by George A. Bennett in 1924 to commemorate the 140th anniversary of the landing of UEL settlers in 1784. It was moved across the street in 2004 and rededicated in 2005

14. Simpson's Tavern plaque

Margaret Simpson operated a tavern in this area from 1797 until 1825, an early community hub for the settlement of Meyers' Creek. She built a frame inn in 1820, which stood on the northeast corner of the intersection until it was demolished in 1978.

15. Moira River

The Moira is one of the largest river systems in Hastings County. It flows from Tudor Township for 98 km (61 miles) into the Bay of Quinte with a watershed of over 713,000 acres. Its former names included the Sagonaska, Singleton's Creek and Meyers' Creek. It was named after the Earl of Moira in 1807.

16. 160 Front Street

Only the facade of the three–storey Bogart–Carman building remains. It was built by John Forin in 1872–1873 and housed *The Daily Ontario* and later *The Intelligencer* newspaper for many years. It collapsed during renovation work in 1990.

17. 169 Front Street (City Hall)

Built in 1872–1873, the imposing City Hall is an example of High Victorian architecture. It was designed by John Evans and built by John Forin. In 1987–1988 the interior was substantially renovated to accommodate two additional floors.

18. Billa Flint House (across river)

The house at 180 Coleman Street was built in 1835 for prominent Bellevillian Billa Flint (1805–1894). He was a prosperous lumberman and merchant who served as Mayor of Belleville, Warden of Hastings, and in the Provincial Legislature. He was appointed a senator in 1867.
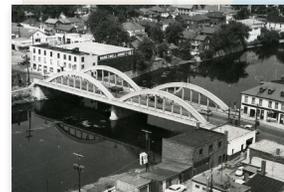
19. Quinte Consolidated Courthouse (across river)

The courthouse was opened in 2013 and brought the various courts in Belleville together under one roof. The structure cost $12.8 million and houses 11 courtrooms.

20. Belleville Bridge

This is the site of the first bridge across the Moira River, built in 1806–1807. The twin concrete double–spanned bowstring arches on this and the Moira Bridge were built in 1930 as an employment relief project during the Great Depression.

21. J. B. (Ben) Corke Footbridge

There has been a pedestrian bridge at this location since the 1870s. The original steel suspension bridge was damaged by floods and replaced by a concrete structure in the 1940s. It was named for former Mayor Ben Corke in 2003.

22. 257 Coleman Street

This three-storey building with decorative brick crenellations was constructed for the Deacon Shirt Company after a fire destroyed their original building on this site in 1911. It housed an optical company from 1924 to 1948 and has been the home of Lanning Headwear since 1949.

23. Moira Bridge

The second concrete double-span bowstring bridge to cross the Moira was, like the Belleville Bridge, constructed in 1930 as part of a federal government work relief program to provide employment during the Great Depression.

24. Sagonaska Bridge

This six-lane, two-span concrete structure opened in 1978 to connect Pinnacle Street to the west bank of the Moira River. The name comes from the original Anishinaabe name for the river.

25. Cross bridge for 5 Moira St. East

The Belleville Chamber of Commerce has its headquarters in the rustic log cabin in the Sagonaska Parkette. The cabin was brought to Belleville from Haley's Station in the Ottawa Valley in 1978. It also serves as a tourist information centre.

26. 54 Station Street

This area was purchased by John Walden Meyers for a grist mill in 1789. This limestone structure was built in 1879 by Ellis Burrell, who operated an axe factory on the site. It was rescued from demoliton in 1978 by the Hastings County Historical Society.

27. Captain John Walden Meyers Plaque

This Ontario Heritage Trust plaque commemorates John Walden Meyers (1745–1821), an early United Empire Loyalist settler in Belleville. His mills formed the nucleus of the pioneer community of Meyers Creek, which was renamed Belleville in 1816.

28. Lions Park

This park was established with support from the Lions Club of Belleville, which received its charter in 1958. It features a Lions Club Friendship Arch, symbolizing friendship between neighbouring nations.

29. Lott Dam

The Lott Dam was rebuilt in 1978–1979 as part of the Moira River Conservation Authority flood control strategy. Above the dam is the Kay Manderville Pedestrian Bridge, dedicated to the former city councillor in October 2020.

30. Turn right for detour to Memorial Park

Memorial Park at 130 Station Street has been home to Belleville's cenotaph since 1932. The original structure was removed in 2001 and the park was redesigned and reconfigured to include the Thurlow War Memorial. Thurlow Township became part of the City of Belleville in 1998.

31. Canadian National Railway Bridge

There has been a bridge at this location since 1856 when the Grand Trunk Railway arrived in Belleville. The town became a major railway centre and by 1903 the bridge had been widened to hold a second line.

32. College Street Bridge

This concrete bridge was constructed in 1966 and replaced an earlier steel truss bridge. College Street was named for Albert College, which used to be on the north side of the street until it burned down in 1917 and moved to Dundas Street West.

33. Riverside Park West

This park comprises land originally acquired by the Moira River Conservation Authority on the west bank of the river in 1975. It hosts a number of playground complexes and serves as a recreational focal point for the city.

34. J. H. McLeod Dam

This dam was completed in 1979 and was the second of two ice-control dams built by the Moira River Conservation Authority to reduce the chances of springtime flooding in Belleville. Named for James H. McLeod, the dam produces hydroelectricity.

35. Lazier's Dam ruins

Lazier's Dam was formerly used to power the Lazier Paper Mill, which ceased operations in the 1920s. Since the time of Meyers' mills, six or more dams have been used to provide power to various industries in Belleville.

36. Belleville Kiwanis Skate Park

This park opened in the fall of 2008 and provides local youth with a purpose-built skateboarding and BMX biking facility for multiple age groups. The Kiwanis Club of Belleville donated $100,000 towards the project.

37. Belleville Yardmen Dam

This ice control dam was dedicated in 1987. The dam was named in recognition of the role that the Belleville Yardmen Benefit Fund played in helping build the Quinte Sports Centre. The Yardmen were employees of the Canadian National Railway.

38. Quinte Sports & Wellness Centre

There has been a sports facility on this site since 1978 when the Yardmen Arena was built. In 2012 the complex was expanded with a swimming pool, additional ice pads, fitness studios and a walking track. In 2017 the centre became home to Belleville Senators of the American Hockey League.

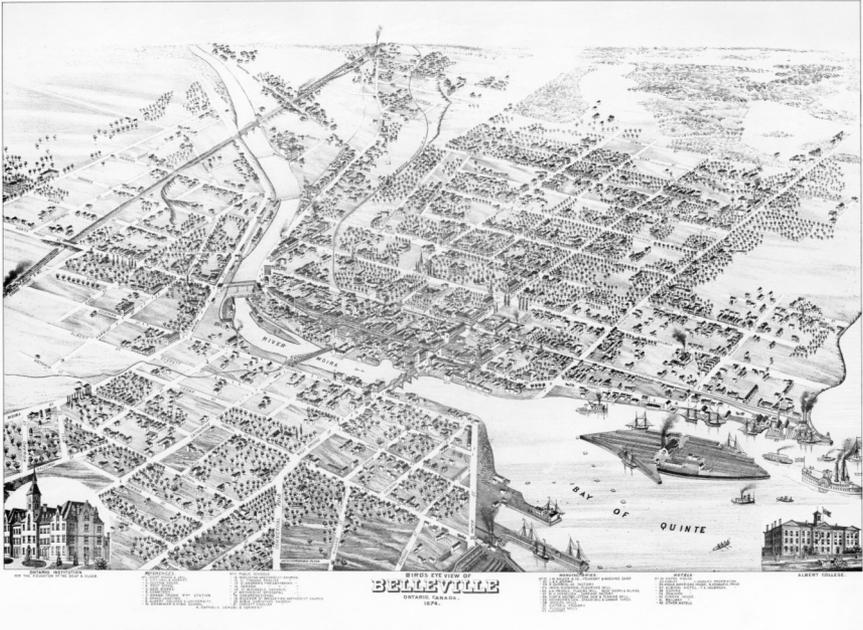### 39. Rick Meagher Rotary Play Park

This park includes the Lady Nicole Pirate Ship and West Riverside Splash Pad. Rick Meagher is a former professional hockey player who founded a charity golf tournament to support the needs of physically challenged children and their families in the Quinte region.

40. Harry Mulhall Dam

This dam was dedicated to long-time *Intelligencer* reporter Henry A. J. Mulhall, better known as Harry, in October 1989. Harry started with *The Intell* in 1962 and eventually became city editor for the newspaper. He passed away in 1987 at the age of 53.

BIRDS EYE VIEW OF
BELLEVILLE
ONTARIO, CANADA.
1874.

This bird's-eye view of Belleville was drawn by Herman Brosius (1851–1917) and printed by Charles Sober & Co. of Chicago in 1874. Brosius accurately depicted all the buildings existing in the town at the time.

For more information on the history of Belleville and its river, visit:

Hastings County Historical Society – hastingshistory.ca

Hastings Historical Plaques – hastingshistoricalplaques.ca

Community Archives of Belleville and Hastings County – cabhc.ca

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