



**W**E BEGIN the walk with the **Old Town Hall**, located at 14 Bridge Street on the south bank of the Mississippi River. This imposing stone structure was built on the site of a lumber yard established in 1821 by Daniel Shipman, one of the earliest settlers to this area. In its day the Town Hall, with its Council Chambers, auditorium, library, lock-up and municipal offices, marked the growing affluence and stature of a small town during the early period of Eastern Ontario's industrialization.



The structure, completed in 1885, was built in the German Romanesque Revival style by George Willoughby, a local builder. Some local residents affectionately call the style Scottish Gothic. Note the dark ashlar



quoins (corner blocks) and similarly coloured stone coursing between the first and second storeys. The windows reflect different styles, from Gothic to plain rectangular. The original wooden steps led to a central double-paneled, Gothic-style door with a fanlight topped by stone voussoirs. The steps and central door were replaced in 1966.

Proceed south on Bridge Street toward Mill Street, the town's main commercial area. Along the way note the **war memorial** called *The Volunteer* sculpted by the renowned Dr. R. Tait Mackenzie, an Almonte native. When you cross the railway tracks, pause for a moment to envisage what would have been a busy part of the town. About 100 metres to the southeast was the town's **train station** (the public library now occupies the site). The Brockville and Ottawa Railway, which reached Almonte in 1859, was key to the town's growth.

Travelers disembarking at the train station could head to the **Almonte House**, the three-storey stone building a few metres back from the railway tracks. Built after the completion of the railway, its back butts up against the 2½-storey **Shipman House**, the residence of Daniel Shipman and family. Situated on the northwest corner of Bridge and Mill Streets, the house dates from 1835 and reflects a United Empire Loyalist style. The town's oldest stone building, it originally faced the river and overlooked the lumber yard



but was reoriented to face Mill Street after the railway line and Almonte House were built.

Across Mill Street on the southwest corner is another of the town's early stone buildings. It was built in 1868 as a dry goods store by **Brown and MacArthur**. Like the Town Hall, two types of stone from nearby quarries were used, allowing for attractive contrasting quoins.

Turn right and head down Mill Street. From here, one would have been struck in the latter 19th century by the styles of the buildings and their variety—commercial establishments, residences, offices and, of course, the mills. Much remains of the original streetscape. As you walk down the street toward the former Post Office and Inland Customs Revenue Building, look up to

the second and third storeys of the buildings on either side to see some of the intricate details of the verandahs, windows, mouldings and cornices. Fine examples can be seen at Nos. 94-96, 88-90, 64-66 and 74-78.



From the corner of Mill Street and Little Bridge Street, you can view several buildings of note. The most prominent and colourful is the **Old Post Office**, completed in 1890. Designed by Thomas J. Fuller, Dominion architect from 1881-1897 and designer of the original Centre Block of the Parliament buildings, it stands as a remarkable example of the Romanesque-influenced public buildings that were

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CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Almonte's former train station; the Old Town Hall; Mill Street from Bridge Street (c. 1915); the Old Post Office.





being erected in the still young Dominion of Canada. The textured, polychromatic walls are a combination of limestone, variegated local sandstone and imported red Nova Scotia sandstone. Examine this building from several vantage points to appreciate its overall symmetry and many fine details and the clock tower that was added in 1913.

Across the street is the **Bank of Montreal**. A solid stone structure built in 1906, it stands at the end of the long row of buildings on the south side of Mill Street. With the stone building at the top of the street, it provides a certain symmetry and solidity to the street profile.

Turning around to view Little Bridge Street, two buildings hold an important place in Almonte's history. The first is No. 77, built in the mid-1880s.



In its day, this was the only purely residential building in the downtown area. This simple yet attractive house has Italianate influences such as the heavy eaves and cornice brackets, rounded windows and verandah. The other building of note is the **Thoburn Mill**, the 2-storey red brick edifice by the railway bridge. A working mill was located at this site from 1880 to 1956. Recently renovated, it is now a multi-use building for condominiums, offices, and retail outlets.

Continuing down Mill Street, two 3-storey red brick buildings on the north side stand out. Facing the façade, to the right of the vaulted arch, is the **Forgie Building**, erected in the early 1870s as a shop and dwelling for the Forgie family. At one time a verandah ran the length of the second storey. The adjacent office building, the **MacArthur Block**,

dates from 1885. The arched passageway was not uncommon in its day. The *Almonte Gazette* was a long-time tenant, starting in 1892, and the *Independent Order of Odd Fellows* used the third floor as a meeting hall.

While walking along the north side, note the building across the street (Nos. 34 to 38). Built in the 1850s as a hotel, it was converted in 1878 into three stores on the ground floor with dwellings above. The Kelly Hotel was erected next to this in 1886 but was lost to fire in 1906, leaving a vacant area and large brick wall that was then used for advertisements that have been retained and repainted.

At the end of the street, one of the earliest mills, a 3-½ storey stone building—the **Victoria Woolen Mill**—was erected in the mid-1850s by James Rosamond. A few years later, in 1862, Rosamond added a 3-storey building at the western end of the site. Another two storeys were added later. The irregular shape of this five-sided structure was dictated by lot constraints and a timber slide by the falls. This is the only one of the Mill Street mills to have survived. In 1910 the older building burned and was demolished. In 1919, the newer building became a shoddy mill for the recycling of woolen fabrics. Like the Thoburn Mill, it has been renovated and expanded to



house condominium apartments, offices and commercial space.

In recognition of the rich history of the downtown area, the *Town of Mississippi Mills* has identified many of the buildings noted on the tour as having heritage value so that we and future generations will be able to continue to appreciate the community's past.

While this concludes the walking tour, the *Riverwalk* begins where this tour ends extending back to the Old Town Hall. Simply follow the signs! 1



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Mill Street; Almonte Citizens Band at the lower end of Mill Street (c. 1910); looking down Mill Street (c. 1900); partial façade of Nos. 34-38 Mill Street.