

GODERICH HISTORICAL AUDIO TOURS

By Paul Ciufu

MENESETUNG BRIDGE, AND TIGER DUNLOP'S TOMB

On North Harbour Road West find the access to the Goderich to Auburn Rail Trail. There's a huge rock at the entrance.

Head north on the trail a short distance to reach spectacular views of the harbour, the Maitland River, and the river valley from the Menesetung Bridge. Once you see the bridge you can begin the tour.

Construction of the Menesetng Bridge began in 1906 and it was the longest bridge in Ontario at that time. It is fine example of a Canadian Pacific Rail bridge. The seven spans each measure 104 feet in length and 12 feet in width, creating a total length of 750 feet. The bridge is held about 60 metres above the Maitland River by two abutments and six concrete piers. The embankments were reinforced with millions of tons of earth (that you just walked up), which also reduced the grade from the Township of Colborne into the Goderich Harbour. Construction was delayed multiple times due to disputes with the rival Grand Trunk Railway, but official opening ceremonies finally took place on September 19, 1907.

The Menesetung Bridge was vital to the development of Goderich as a thriving port town. The train service which crossed the Maitland River via the bridge on the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) Guelph to Goderich Line brought business and visitors to the harbour town.

The rail bridge served the community well for over 80 years, but in 1988 the final CPR train stopped on the bridge and blew its whistle for the last time. In the early 1990s the bridge was threatened, but the local community rallied to save the structure and convert it to a pedestrian bridge.

From the bridge try to spot a large, white mansion on the shore of the Maitland River.

Known as Ridgewood Park, only a handful of families have owned the residence. Of these, the Attrills of Baltimore, Maryland were perhaps the most visionary yet eccentric. Henry Yarwood Attrill, the family patriarch, was born in 1823. Henry claimed at various times to be born in either Canada or England. He married Helen Forrester Blackburn and they had three sons and three daughters.

Henry found prosperity in Baltimore as a promoter of natural gas for lighting and heating. He was Vice-President of the People's Gas Company which helped Baltimore become the first city in North America illuminated by gas light. Newly wealthy, Attrill bought Ridgewood Park in 1873

as a family summer residence. He purchased the property from descendants of John Galt, co-founder of Goderich. Attrill built a palatial two and a half story frame addition on the north side of the existing cottage. He built a tower on the house's west side, providing a majestic view of the lake and countryside.

Attrill operated a successful farm, with thriving dairy and pork operations. He was famous for his purebred Durham and Princess cattle, and his sheep and horses. A 500-vine grape orchard was planted on the river slope. In one season alone, his apple orchard produced over 10,000 barrels of fruit. However, Attrill was criticized for using the cheap labour of former slaves. It was thought the workers were brought up from Attrill's southern plantation to work the estate. If Attrill's labour practices were suspect, his business dealings were downright fraudulent. Attrill faced a litany of lawsuits in which he was found guilty of making false representations to lure investors into buying stocks in insolvent companies.

In 1876 Attrill attempted the first salt mine in Canada. He used a diamond drill – a first, in Canada -- to bore into the salt bed at the mouth of the Maitland River on what is now called Attrill's Point. At 250 feet, miners struck a mineral spring which flooded the shaft. Despite the best efforts of European mining engineers, the flooding could not be stopped, and Attrill abandoned the mine.

Salt mining did eventually become a major industry in Goderich after petroleum exploration crews found a massive ancient salt deposit beneath Goderich Harbour. The mine would extend out under Lake Huron and become the largest underground salt mine in the world. The salt mine is still in operation and you can see it from this bridge. It's those buildings in the distance toward the lake.

When Attrill died in 1892, his widow Helen took up permanent residence at Ridgewood Park with several of her children. She died in February 1900 and was mourned as a highly respected lady. Three glass windows in St. George's Anglican Church commemorate the Attrill family. For more information about St. George's, listen to the "North Street" audio tour.

Once you have crossed the bridge to the north side of the river, consider heading west (left) off the main trail to visit to the Great Red Oak.

This trail is a little trickier than the Goderich to Auburn Trail. If you have trouble with mobility consider just listening to this section as you continue on the main trail.

Affectionately known as the "Tiger Dunlop Tree", you will find the oak on the north side of the Sifto Trail Loop, halfway between the bridge and Lake Huron.

At nearly 250 years old, the tree is 30 metres tall and three metres in circumference. It is a wonder that the tree still stands; few survived European settlement since the first task of every pioneer family was to build a shelter and clear the land for farming. A settler in the area in 1830

named Moffatt marveled that the trees were so tall and the foliage so thick that they worked in eternal darkness. John Galt recalled seeing another giant tree that he dubbed the Beverley Oak. He described it as the most stupendous tree that he had ever seen, with a girth of 33 feet, and a trunk that rose 80 feet before branching; even this Goliath was converted into fence-rails.

There may be older trees in the county, but none is as well placed as the Great Red Oak to have witnessed so much of Goderich history. The Red Oak was in the ideal place to see the revolution in transportation from paddle canoe to sailing ships to steam freighters; and from horse drawn wagons to trains and trucks hauling salt and grain. Military, commercial and recreational aircraft have flown over it. From the north shore of the Maitland River, it has watched Goderich grow from a clearing in the forest to Canada's Prettiest Town.

From the Red Oak, retrace your steps to the Menesetung Bridge. Head north along the main trail. A ten-minute walk will bring you to the tomb of the co-founder of Goderich, Dr. William "Tiger" Dunlop.

He stood 6'3" in his stockings. His head was topped with a wild mane of red hair. He drank whiskey by the gallon and took snuff by the fistful. Stories of his sense of humour and hospitality are told to this day. No other name is as closely linked with the founding of the Huron Tract and Goderich as Tiger Dunlop.

Born in Scotland in 1792, William was the third son of Alexander and Janet Graham Dunlop. His father's banking success guaranteed his children a comfortable income for the rest of their lives. Dunlop studied medicine at the University of Glasgow and finished his medical training in London in 1812.

He volunteered for the British army and was commissioned as an Assistant Surgeon for the 89th Regiment of Foot on its way to Upper Canada. He served at Niagara during the War of 1812, treating the wounded at the battles of Chrysler's Farm and Lundy's Lane. His skills as a surgeon were in great demand as at Lundy's Lane where he cared for 220 casualties. He cared for all wounded regardless of nationality.

In August 1814 Dunlop traded his scalpel for a sword and helped lead the attack on Fort Erie. The assault troops easily swept over the fort's walls but when the Americans blew up the powder magazine, the attacking force suffered heavy losses. The American counterattack retook the fort.

A witness said that Dunlop rescued at least a dozen wounded men. Dunlop's tall figure walking calmly amidst shot and shell was credited with rallying the survivors.

In 1817, Dunlop sailed for Calcutta, India where he tried his hand at journalism. It was in India where he earned his famous nickname. On Saugor Island in the Bay of Bengal, Dunlop claimed that he killed not one, but two tigers after blowing snuff in their faces. He shot one and

dispatched the other with a sword. This feat, no doubt greatly exaggerated, led to his nickname, Tiger. He was invalided home in 1820 after contracting so-called jungle fever.

Returning to Scotland, Dunlop devoted the next six years to literary pursuits. He was a regular contributor to several journals. His writings mixed politics with satire which appealed to the well-read upper middle-class.

In 1823, he left for London and edited a daily newspaper "The British Press". He founded his own paper "The Telescope" which ran only nine months ending in December 1825. Although he could count literary celebrities Sir Walter Scott and Thomas Carlyle amongst his friends, living a quiet sedentary life bored him. An advertisement for a new settlement venture called the Canada Company was carried in "The Telescope" and Tiger jumped at it. Returning to the Canadas (Upper and Lower Canada as they were then called) appealed to his sense of adventure. Tiger contacted fellow Scot, John Galt, Superintendent of the Canada Company, and in 1826, Tiger accepted the grandiose title of "Warden of the Woods and Forests". With the pay of an army captain, Dunlop left to scout out the Huron Tract.

In May 1827, Dunlop departed from Guelph for a dive in the woods, to cut a line through thick forest to Lake Huron, a distance of over 70 miles. While Dunlop went by land, John Galt went by water, on the royal navy gunboat HMS Bee. Both were looking for the perfect port.

Dunlop had with him two surveyors, axemen, and several members of the Ojibwe First Nation. As the small expedition cut their way through the wilderness, the Ojibwe kept the party fed with fresh game. After two weeks they arrived at the mouth of a river named by the Ojibwe Menesetunk, meaning large, open harbour. Eventually, the long winding river which meandered through the Huron Tract would be named the Maitland River after Upper Canada's Lieutenant Governor Sir Peregrine Maitland.

Dunlop selected an elevated spot on the south bank of the river to erect a log house. The shanty became known as The Castle in what is now Lions Harbour Park. The Castle had a magnificent view of the lake, harbour basin, and river valley.

In late June, aboard the HMS Bee on Lake Huron, John Galt saw a river mouth that intrigued him. Thinking it would make the perfect port he was looking for, he got in a small boat and rowed ashore. To his surprise, he spotted a log cabin high on the south riverbank with smoke rising from it. When Galt got to shore, Tiger Dunlop was waiting for him.

Together, in The Castle, Galt and Dunlop formally established Goderich on June 29, 1827. They toasted with a bottle of champagne Tiger had dragged through the wilderness for just such an occasion. The settlement was called Goderich, after British politician Viscount Goderich, Secretary of State for War and the Colonies, and soon to be Prime Minister of the United Kingdom.

In the early years, Dunlop provided settlers with guidance and a steady presence. When his brother arrived, Captain Robert Dunlop, in 1833, the brothers negotiated with the Canada

Company for a large property on the north side of the Maitland River. They built a residence to share there and called the place Gairbraid; that's where their graves are today.

Life at the Gairbraid estate featured heavy drinking and endless practical jokes. Hardly a stranger passed by without the Tiger standing on the veranda asking "Hae ye your supper yet?" After dinner, an enormous cart was rolled out carrying the Twelve Apostles, 12 one-gallon jugs containing the evening's whiskey. One bottle contained water; Tiger called that one: Judas. Tiger inhaled handfuls of snuff from a half-bushel box called The Coffin.

Although a Presbyterian, Dunlop said at a meeting in 1840 that he avoided church since he never liked singing without drinking. However, his Christian charity was well-known.

Dunlop's politics were decidedly Tory. He dismissed responsible government as a trap set by knaves to catch fools. When rebellion broke out in 1837, Tiger led the local loyalist militia known as The Bloody Useless on its unsuccessful campaign. Dunlop resigned from the Canada Company over their poor treatment of the militia.

In 1841, Tiger Dunlop ran for the seat in Parliament vacated by his brother's death. Dunlop won by a nose after a recount vote. He held the seat until 1846 when he became Superintendent of Quebec's Lachine Canal. He died there on June 29, 1848, on the 21st anniversary of the founding of Goderich. His sister-in-law, Louisa McColl Dunlop, retrieved the body for burial with full Masonic honours at his brother's side at Gairbraid, overlooking Goderich, the town Tiger created.

For more Goderich history, listen to other tours in this series such as "West Street to Lake Huron" and the "Harbour" tour.