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## West Montrose may get historic protection

**TERRY PENDER**  
RECORD STAFF

WEST MONTROSE

The famous covered bridge over the rippling waters of the Grand River is at the heart of a proposed cultural heritage landscape.

The designation would help protect the rural landscape and historic buildings around the West Montrose landmark known locally as "The Kissing Bridge."

"If this isn't a candidate, then what else is? It is iconic," said Robert Shipley, head of the University of Waterloo Heritage Resources Centre.

The survival of the covered bridge, built more than 125 years ago, and its past as an important crossing, make it significant, he said.

"The setting around it is also considered significant by many people," said Shipley.

Before a designation is granted, people have to prove they care about the area. So Shipley and other researchers at the University of Waterloo are conducting an online survey to determine how people feel about the bridge, vistas and some of the town's old buildings.

Anyone can take the survey on the website for the Heritage Resources Centre at the University of Waterloo at <http://www.fes.uwaterloo.ca/research/hrc/>

The researchers are collecting comments until Oct. 5.

The heritage preservation movement has long protected individual buildings and sites with official designations under the Ontario Heritage Act.

Later, whole neighbourhoods and groups of buildings could be designated as Historic Conservation Districts.

The designation of a cultural heritage landscape protects the context and surroundings of historic sites and buildings. While municipal councils have had power to designate landscapes since 1995, few have been created, compared with the number of designated properties and neighbourhoods.

In Waterloo Region, there is only one designated landscape -- Sim's Estate, the ruins of a house of a prominent Kitchener family along the Grand River in South Kitchener.

The landscape will soon be surrounded by a posh subdivision, and there is no public access to the site.

But thousands of people visit the West Montrose covered bridge every year. Built in 1881 by John Bear, the structure is known as The Kissing Bridge because its walls shielded young couples from watchful adults in the village.

In the spring of 2007, university researchers held focus groups with people living in and near West Montrose.

"Well it's kind of a unique village," said participant Merlyn Martin, who's lived in the area for nearly 50 years. "And I would think it's good to keep the cultural thing going if we could.

"There is no other place in Ontario that has a covered bridge."

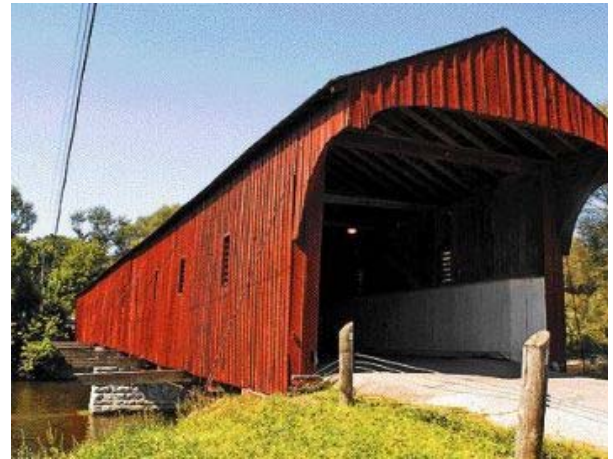
The blacksmith shop, train station, post office, limestone mill and sawmill are long gone from West Montrose. But the covered bridge remains, as does the United Church, some historic homes and the general store.

Shipley expects to make a report to Woolwich council before the end of the year on the proposal for a cultural heritage landscape. If councillors support the move, they must approve a list of the specific features to be protected.

Dan Kennaley, the director of engineering and planning services for Woolwich Township, said he supports such a move.

"Personally, I think these cultural heritage resources are wonderful and extremely important to understanding where we have come from," he said.

He's supported by Doreen Snyder, who has lived in the area for 46 years.



IAN WILLMS, RECORD STAFF

"The bridge is the main focus point," she said.

The push for the study of West Montrose as a cultural heritage landscape came from Waterloo Region's heritage public advisory committee. That group hired consultants a few years ago to identify possible landscapes for designation. The consultants' list includes West Montrose, Maryhill, Doon Village, the centres of Galt, Hespeler and Preston, the warehouse district in Kitchener, the Schoerg and Betzner farms and Pioneer Tower in South Kitchener, among others.

Because of the area's profile and history, preservationists believe it should be relatively easy to get the designation.

To qualify as a cultural heritage landscape, an area must have been modified by human activity, have heritage significance and be valued by the community. Specific features of the landscape are identified and listed for protection when an area is designated. These features can include fence lines, vistas, trees, rivers, roads and buildings.

Work on the West Montrose landscape comes at the same time as applications to expand a gravel pit and erect a communications tower in the area.

Shipleigh said the impact of proposed developments would likely be assessed, and councillors could demand changes to reduce the negative effects on the landscape.

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