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By John Toler

The Famous Stone Bridge on Broad Run

Eastern Loudoun: More Than Meets the Eye

“Stone Bridge” was the name given to a high school that opened in Ashburn in 2000, but the name—unique to eastern Loudoun—goes back many years before it was proudly adopted by the SBHS Bulldogs.

The original Stone Bridge was a massive structure dating from 1820 that carried traffic across Broad Run at Route 7 east of Ashburn. It was part of the Leesburg Turnpike, which ran 20 miles from Leesburg to Dranesville. According to Eugene M. Scheel in his book, “Eastern Loudoun: ‘Goin’ Down the Country,’” construction of the turnpike was authorized in 1809, when the Virginia Legislature appropriated \$41,450 to build the road. The following year, the legislature authorized the sale of 1,000 shares of stock at \$150 a share in the Leesburg Turnpike Company to build the road.

In 1810, Levi Whaley purchased 51 acres on both sides of the turnpike at Broad Run, and “...established a store, built a mill and in 1817 became postmaster of a short-lived post office called Whaley’s Store that closed in 1817,” according to Scheel.

The Stone Bridge over Broad Run and its tollhouse were completed three years later. The bridge had a double span of arches supported by a central pier, which were anchored by large stone abutments on each bank. Cone-shaped buttresses flanked the arches, and squared-off buttresses supported the low, parapet walls along the sides of the bridge. The asphalt-covered roadway rose to a high point at the middle of the bridge, creating a mild “humpback.”

The massive stones used in the construction were hauled from quarries in the Blue Ridge Mountains. The tollhouse at the western end of the bridge was a one-story, three-bay structure, which was later enlarged by three wings.

The Leesburg Turnpike Company ultimately failed, the victim of disastrous floods, competition from canals and railroads, and Civil War. By 1866, “Leesburg Pike was a rough, 14-foot wide cobblestone affair, its holes filled with sawdust from the many lumber mills,” according to Scheel. No longer maintained, it was basically abandoned.



Tollhouse in 1953

The bridge and its tollhouse remained intact, and tolls were collected from the people who crossed the bridge. In 1911, the turnpike was operated by a private concern, until 1924, when it was taken over by the Virginia Highway Department became a public road. The road was paved

in 1929, and at the end of World War II, the highway department announced that the old bridge would be demolished, and a new, modern bridge built at the site.

“Properly incensed, the Leesburg Garden Club protested, and for its efforts to preserve the bridge was awarded the Massie Medal, the highest honor bestowed by the Virginia Garden club,” wrote Scheel. And so the new concrete-and-steel bridge, its plaque bearing the date 1948, was built a few feet to the north.”

Scheel adds that while the Stone Bridge had been initially saved, the Garden Club was not aware that the structure needed about \$5,000 in repairs, bracing and repointing necessary to withstand a serious flood. Later, when Route 7 was four-laned, a new eastbound span was built over Broad Run in the tight space between the 1948 bridge and the Stone Bridge, further compromising the historic integrity of the site.

When Hurricane Agnes struck the region in June 1972, the rushing Broad Run severely damaged the west span of the old bridge. Still standing but weakened, the east span collapsed on February 19, 1976. Today, only traces of the abutments remain, along with a massive pile of stones in and along Broad Run. Traffic on Route 7 roars by overhead, most drivers oblivious of the historic site they are passing through.

Remarkably, the tollhouse still stands, although in poor condition. For many years it was used as a private residence. According to the Loudoun County Assessor’s Office, the .85-acre parcel and its 1,946 square foot structure (including additions) was appraised at \$568,500 in 2002, and purchased by a private owner that year for \$280,000. It was sold most recently on Aug. 24, 2007 for \$100,000 to East Oaks LLC, c/o Mortgage Trustees LLC, of Annandale. At that time, the property was appraised for \$297,000.



The Stone Bridge Tollhouse in 2009.

Although the building is on the National Register of Historic Places and the Virginia Landmarks Register, the old tollhouse currently sits amid junk and debris in a blighted condition, its windows boarded over. It sits across Broad Run from the proposed Kincora project, currently under review by Loudoun County; Kincora management reportedly has a contract to buy the property. Since the tollhouse is located in a County Historic Site District and protected by a zoning overlay, the Board of Supervisors’ Historic District Review Committee must approve any changes to the property.

While the future of the tollhouse and ruins of the bridge is unclear, it has been suggested that the county acquire the property and create a park and trailhead on the site, which could be linked with other county-owned property on Broad Run further downstream near the University Center.

This would create a linear park in the stream corridor, which would preserve the site of the old Stone Bridge—and make it accessible to those who want to see more than just the rooftop of the tollhouse as they pass by.