

HERITAGE HIKE

CENTRAL MITCHELL LOOP



CC. 4048

MUNICIPALITY OF WEST PERTH

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WEST PERTH HERITAGE & CULTURE COMMITTEE
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MUNICIPALITY OF WEST PERTH



Distance: 3.5km

Time: 30-45 min

Please follow all road safety rules when completing this walk!

HERITAGE HIKE - CENTRAL MITCHELL LOOP



CC. 3009

NAVIGATION

West Perth Public Library

North on St. Andrew St.

East on Hwy 8/ Ontario Rd.

North on Wellington St.

West to Municipal Office

North on St. David St.

West on Legion St.

North on St. Andrew St.

West on Rowland St.

North on St. George St.

West on Henry St.

Walking path West of Henry St. Bridge

East on Blanchard St.

Follow trail through park

East onto Hwy 8/ Ontario Rd.

OUR HERITAGE



LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Municipality of West Perth is situated on treaty land of the Anishinaabeg. In 2019 the work began to create a current and comprehensive land acknowledgment. We continue to work on our land acknowledgment collaboratively with the original people, the First Nations.

We recognize that the photographic record's focus is skewed primarily on the colonial perspective of our community. We have been intentional about including diverse heritage information, as possible. We continue to work to highlight the voices and stories of all members of West Perth, both current and historic.

In conjunction with the West Perth Heritage & Culture Committee, and Stratford-Perth Archives we at the West Perth Public Library offer you a hike through history as you explore the physical space, architecture, and photographs of West Perth over time.

If you are interested in learning more about the architectural history of West Perth, request a copy of the Mitchell Architecture Walking Tour. This was a previous project of the West Perth Heritage Committee and photocopies are available at the library.

westperth.com/heritage-culture

1. WEST PERTH PUBLIC LIBRARY

105 St. Andrew Street

The West Perth Public Library combines Historic architecture with modern community space. The collection that was established as the Mitchell Mechanics Institute in the mid-1800s, in the Royal Hotel, at the corner of Ontario Rd and St Andrew St, became the Mitchell Library Association in 1849, and then the Mitchell Public Library in 1895.

The original Mitchell Public Library building was made possible after the Mitchell Library Board received \$5,000.00 from the fund created by Andrew Carnegie allowing the building to be built in 1910. With amalgamation in 1998, the library was re-named the West Perth Public Library. The addition was added in 2008 making this historic building modern and accessible.



CARNEGIE LIBRARY, MITCHELL, ONT.



For a complete list of resources in this guide, scan this code:



2. TOWN SQUARE

As you start your hike, head North on St. Andrew St. Compare these photos from the Campbell Collection to present day. The photo on the right shows the old Town Square, where the cenotaph, built in 1919, still stands. Our cenotaph honours sixty-seven people who lost their lives in the Great War (WWI) and twenty-eight more who passed during WWII. It also depicts the Royal Hotel at the North West Corner of Ontario Rd and St Andrew St.

Turn right onto Ontario Rd, where you currently see Floral Treasures and Dick's Barber Shop. This block formerly held businesses like Clegg's and J. Rodgers Barber Shop.



CC. 1045



CC. 1033

3. 153 ONTARIO ROAD

Continue East on Ontario Rd, and view the beautiful architecture of this 1883 Queen Revival style home. It was originally built for George Matheson, brother of Mitchell's first mayor. If you are interested more about the architectural history of West Perth, you may enjoy a copy of the **Mitchell Architecture Walking Tour**, a previous project of the West Perth Heritage Committee. Tour pamphlets are available at the library upon request.



4. ONTARIO RD. & WELLINGTON ST.

As you walk along Ontario Rd heading East, you are walking part of the Huron Trail. The cultural history of this area predates this road by thousands of years. An Indigenous arrowhead dating between 200 B.C. to 50 A.D. was recently found just off the Huron Trail. In 1827, John Brant (Ahyonwaeghs), son of Mohawk Leader Joseph Brant (Thayendanega) and Dr. William "Tiger" Dunlop, came together with a group of Mohawk and European surveyors. They traveled through Anishanabek Territory to mark the path that would become the Huron Trail and Highway 8.

ON THE HURON
TRAIL, THE ROAD
SLIGHTLY EAST OF
WHERE YOU ARE
STANDING, AT THE
INTERSECTION OF
ARTHUR ST. AND
ONTARIO RD.

CC. 0006



5. WHAT'S IN OUR NAME?

As with many colonial societies, our historic record can hold a skewed history, and frequently, scant information about the lives of women, First Nations People and Black communities. The collection of diverse historical sources is an important part of ensuring a deeper understanding of our communal history.

Some of the earliest West Perth stories tell of our first non-First Nations resident, who was said to be a black man named Mitchell. It is told that he lived in a shanty along the Thames River, where travelers were able to rest. Confirmation of this in the written record has not been found. We do know that settlements comprised of black settlers, many who were fleeing the United States, settled in the "Queen's Bush", both in Lucan and Northern Waterloo County between 1829 and 1832, around the time our first resident is said to have settled here.

6. KETERSON PARK

ONE OF THE FAIR'S HIGHLIGHTS IS VIEWING THE EXHIBITS IN THE CRYSTAL PALACE.

Turning North on Wellington St, you will pass homes built at varying points over the past dozen decades. In the last 200 years, a rich history of agriculturalism has been recorded and photographed in West Perth, now donning the circular building to your right, called the Crystal Palace.

Arriving at the stone gate posts that flank the entrances to Keterson Park, plaques indicate they were placed "In honour of the founders and promoters of the Agricultural Society from Mitchell and the townships of Fullarton, Logan and Hibbert". The plaques recognize the Mitchell Agricultural Society's 100 years of service from 1854 to 1954.



CC. 3027



CC. 3024



Keterson Park was named after Joseph Keterson, a former Mitchell resident who owned the land. He gifted it to the Town of Mitchell to be used as a public park site for the agricultural society in perpetuity.

The new pavilion in Keterson Park was built in 2023 with accessible washrooms, multi-use courts, a commercial kitchen, beverage service, and storage for the many clubs using the space. Keterson Park is still a community hub hosting not only the Fair, but public events, baseball tournaments, children's programs and more.

7. ARENA

Within the Keterson Park and fairgrounds space, you will also find the Mitchell Arena and Community Centre. Mitchell is well known for being the home of Howie Morenz. He didn't skate in this space. Howie skated and played hockey, on homemade rinks on the Thames and Whirl Creek. The photo shows the Western Ontario Juvenile hockey champs from 1916-1917, from Mitchell. Howie Morenz is seated bottom left. The structure pictured was located at the Southeast corner of Huron St and Blanshard St, along the Thames River. This, Mitchell's first indoor arena was deemed unsafe around 1950 and torn down. In 1952 another structure was purchased and transported to the Keterson Park location, from Orillia. This marked the first artificial ice in Mitchell.



CC. 6516

The current arena regularly books ice time for 9 private groups, Ringette, Minor Hockey, the Mitchell Skating Club, the Mitchell Hawks, Mitchell Curling Club, schools, as well as public skates for all ages. The history of hockey in West Perth, among other sports, is still going strong. The image below shows the U-18 Women who won the title of Provincial Championships 2023.



CC. 3020



8. MUNICIPAL CAMPUS



CC. 1038

MUNICIPAL OFFICE

Built 2022

Continue across the street to 160 and 170 Wellington St. The Municipal Campus is the operational centre of our community. The new Municipal Office Building is fully accessible and has multiple community rooms, making it a hub for local service groups and clubs to meet. The Municipal offices have moved several times, originating downtown where the current Post Office stands, moving to the lower level of the library building, and most recently living in the previous Mitchell District Highschool building in 1956. The photo of town square was taken looking south on St. Andrew St. The buildings to the right of this image are the original town hall and fire hall, the modern buildings ironically in the same orientation to the originals.



CC. 1076

WEST PERTH FIRE HALL

Built 2020

The first fire brigade in Mitchell formed in 1875 after the creation of the waterworks (1873) and the installation of hydrants (1874) undoubtedly spurred by the 1872 fire that engulfed the North side of Ontario Rd between St Andrew St and St George St. In the early 1960's the Fire Hall was located at 46 Ontario Rd as seen here.



CC. 3023

The original and modern Fire Hall's towers facilitate drying of fire hoses. The current Fire Hall tower houses a clock and accompanying bell originally cast in England, shipped to Mitchell in 1912. The bell was preserved after the original post office was torn down in 1974. It now rings out at the top of every hour.



CC. 4053

Travelling between these two modern buildings and you will pass through the former location of the Mitchell High School building, opened in 1924. The building was demolished in 2024. Turn North on St. David St. and travel towards Legion St.

9. ROYAL CANADIAN LEGION

Turning West onto Legion St you will approach the Royal Canadian Legion Branch 128 at the corner with St Andrew St. While the Royal Canadian Legion supports veterans and those who have served Canada in the military, the Mitchell branch also serves the local community by providing a space for volunteers to socialize and fundraise.

Legion Members maintain the cenotaph downtown, erected and dedicated in 1919. During the First World War, several West Perth Women joined the Allies as nursing assistants. Minnie Lester, Kate Walker and Ada Parrish were among them. Many local men volunteered in the armed forces and as reservists.



CC. 7003

10. MITCHELL PUBLIC SCHOOL

As you turn North on St Andrew St, you will approach the building pictured here. This building was purchased and repurposed by the Upper Thames Missionary Church in 2011 and is now used for worship and community programs.

In 1866, a wooden frame elementary school structure was built on this site, eventually replaced by the current building in 1914. Additions and alterations were made over the next 80 years. Mitchell Public School officially merged with Upper Thames Elementary School in 2010.



CC. 4038

11. HENRY STREET BRIDGE

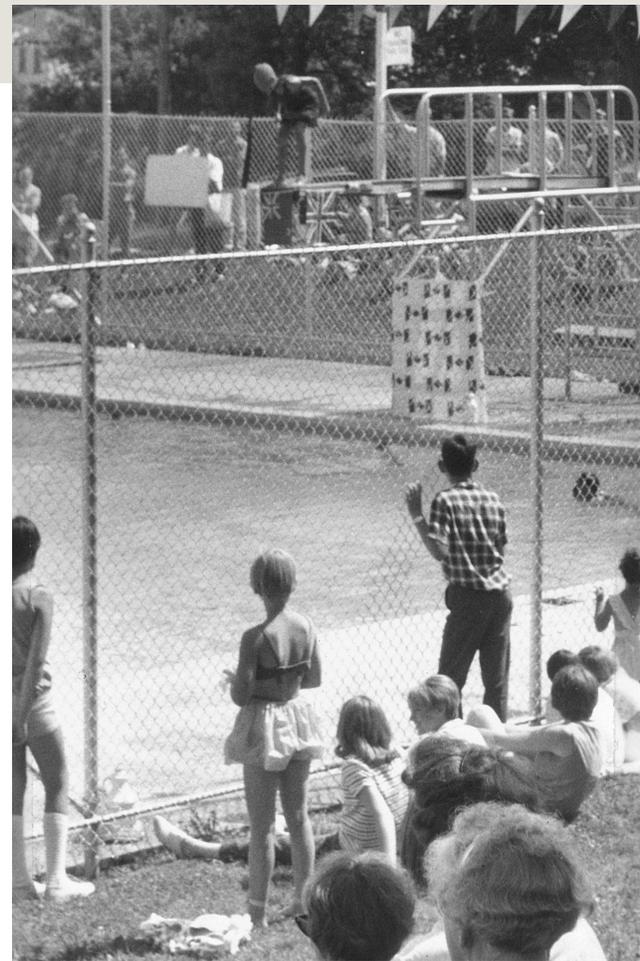
Turning West on Henry St, you will see some of the newest buildings in Mitchell on your right. Crossing the Henry St bridge, officially opened October 23, 2021, compare it to this view of the "mill pond" from the spring of 1908 (CC.0002). In the background of this photo, you can see the power station and woolen mills that once stood there. Turn left after the bridge onto the walking path that leads to the Lions Park. As you emerge from the path, turn left and head toward the Thames River.



CC. 0002



CC. 1510



CC. 6550

12. LIONS PARK

At the bottom of the hill you will see Lions Club Animal Barn. It is one aspect of the park that links the history of service clubs to present era. The Lions purchased the land on Blenheim St to build a community pool in 1948. The photos show the Lions Club cleaning in preparation for the pool, and the pool in 1967.

Continue through the park, look to your right; the community pool and the more recently added splash pad is an important feature of the park. Within the park limits, sense of community service clubs is evident, Mitchell Optimist Club has fundraised for several pieces of equipment to be added to the accessible playground.

13. CENTENNIAL PARK

As you leave Lions Park, turn slightly and follow Blanchard St. to Centennial Park, you can see the Welcome Centre, and to your left, the Mitchell Dam. Elsewhere in Mitchell in 1871, William Forrester had a flax pulling plant on the Thames and Whirl Creek. The photo of the Mitchell Dam and Centennial Park is from 1967.

In 1941, The Hesky family moved their flax pulling plant to the woolen mills that you could see in the mill pond when you crossed the Henry St Bridge. The new mills were located on the North side of Huron Rd just west of the Thames River bridge, where you now stand.



CC. 1054



Barr Family Collection

During the time of the First World War, employees in flax harvest were a mixture of migrant workers from First Nations communities who stayed in Mitchell for the harvest; and locals from West Perth, including women and children. The photo to the right depicts Flax harvesters in a field on Perth Line 16, near Motherwell in the early 1900s.

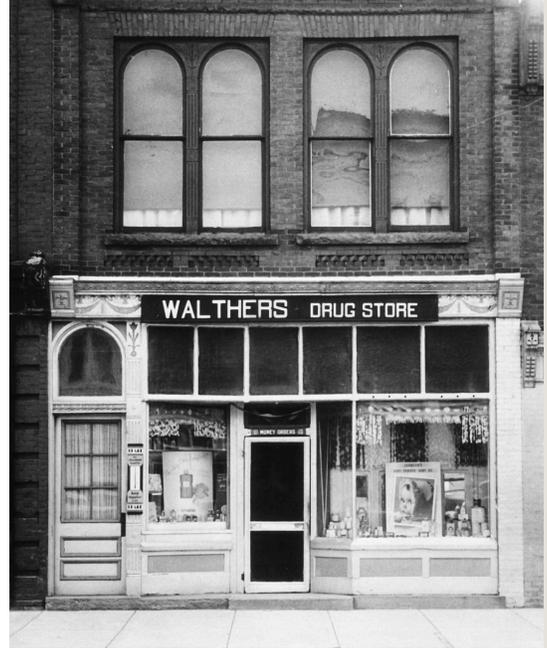
The park currently hosts the Huron Tract Commemorative Cairn originally placed at the southeast corner of St George St and Ontario Rd in 1928. This cairn commemorated the 100th anniversary of the Huron Tract, erected to the first European settlers of Mitchell, John and Elizabeth Hicks. As you continue East across the river, you will approach the current and historic downtown of Mitchell.



CC. 3047

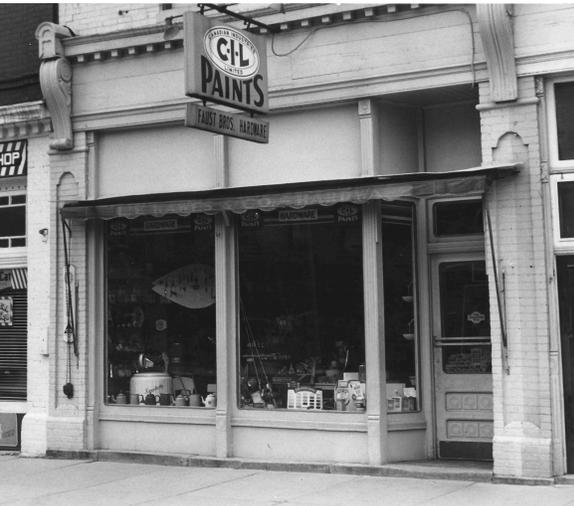
14. DOWNTOWN

As you cross St George St, take note of the Hicks House Building approaching on your left. John Hicks purchased his first lot in Mitchell in 1836. The Hicks House is the third hotel that was built by the family after losing their second to fire in the town altering fire of 1872. The Bar, from Hick's House Hotel, shone in the building through life as a hotel and in recent history a Computer Store and a Café. During the most recent renovations, it was relocated down the block into Faust's Home Hardware.



CC. 1074

Pop in and ask Elliott Faust to see what he has done with the Hicks House bar since relocation. Down the block, on the corner of St Andrew St and Ontario Rd, The Royal Hotel building, (Image 1045) had been home to countless Mitchell landmarks over the years including The Mechanics Institute, Walther's Drug Store (seen in its current location on Ontario St where it moved in the 1940's) and is currently home to The Sugar Maple Restaurant, Mia's Nails and West Perth Youth Centre.



THE FAUST BROS. HARDWARE STORE APPEARS HERE IN 1950. STILL OWNED BY THE FAUST FAMILY, THE BUILDING SECTION CONTAINING FAUST HOME HARDWARE HAS WONDERFUL HERITAGE PIECES.

CC. 1070



CC. 1007



CC. 1006



CC. 0024



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