

Report on the Heritage Value of the “Millworkers’ Sidewalk”

I. Property Identification

Location: An unopened road allowance originally identified as Bank Street (Town of Almonte, Plan 6262)

Owner: The Corporation of the Town of Mississippi Mills

Type of Property: Public sidewalk

Photographs

Maps

II. Physical Aspects of the Property

Design Value

Not applicable.

Historical/Associative Value

This sidewalk was built in order to provide a more direct route for millworkers to get to the Rosamond No. 1 mill located on Coleman’s Island. This “millworkers’ sidewalk” ran from Union Street to the easement for the railway tracks. At present the exposed part of the sidewalk is at the end closest to the embankment. (See photo number 1.) At the top of the embankment, workers would have had to cross the railway tracks and descend the slope in order to cross over the two dams on the north channel of the Mississippi River before reaching Embankment Street and the gate into the mill. At some point, perhaps at the same time that the sidewalk was put in, a set of stairs (or steps as local people usually call them) was built down the embankment to allow a safer and more convenient path. (See photo number 2.)



Photo #1



Photo #2

The date of construction of the sidewalk has not been determined. Concrete was not available until the late 1800s, with the first concrete sidewalk in North America laid in Ohio in 1891. It would presumably have been a fair time later that concrete was first used in Almonte. Long-time residents of Almonte have only been able to say that the sidewalk and steps were there for as long as they can remember. As a rough guess, the sidewalk might have been built sometime around the end of the First World War or in the 1920s. It may be relevant, or simply coincidental that in 1919 the Rosamond Woolen Company bought the four lots on the south side of Bank Street, the same side that the sidewalk is situated.

People who lived adjacent to the millworkers' sidewalk and steps remember some workers using them in the mid to latter 1960s. The steps, though, were in bad repair as the new owners of the mill (which had been renamed Zephyr Mills) did not maintain them as before and they were also being vandalized.

Contextual Value

The sidewalk would have given workers who lived east of Union Street (in the area known locally as Irish Town) a quicker walk to and from work. This may not appear to have been significant, but it did reduce the walk by about 10 minutes each way as workers otherwise would have had to cross the North Channel by the Main Street bridge. As millworkers generally went home for their mid-day meal (dinner) from 12:00 p.m. to 1:00 p.m., the sidewalk and steps would have given them extra time for their meal and cutting their total travelling time to and from work by some 40 minutes per day. Their day at the mill was long, starting at 7:00 a.m. and finishing at 5:00 p.m., so an additional 40 minutes was important.

The building of the sidewalk (presumably by the town) and the construction of the steps (undoubtedly by the Rosamond Woolen Mill as it was situated on company land) illustrates how the town and the Mill might have cooperated on a project that would assist the millworkers. That the sidewalk was still being used by some millworkers in the latter part of the 1960s attests to its long-term value.

The sidewalk acts as a physical reminder of Almonte as a millworkers' town, and connects an area of the town where many of the workers and their families lived with the Rosamond Mill, the town's largest employer for over a century. It gives people of today an opportunity to reflect on one aspect of the routine life of a millworker in the first half of the 20th century.

Present Status of Property

The sidewalk, located on property owned by the Corporation of the Town of Mississippi Mills, remains an unopened road allowance. The part closest to Union Street is being used as an entrance driveway for the two houses located on either side of the allowance (102 and 114 Union Street North). The sidewalk that is visible is generally in good shape. It is, however, in danger of being forgotten as there are no markers or indicators of its historic nature.

Recording Information

Sources: Records from the office of the Lanark County Land Registry

Almonte: Faces and Places 1880-1980, Corporation of the Town of Almonte, 1980.
 Archival records of the Mississippi Valley Textile Museum (MVTM)
 Conversations with Michael Rikley-Lancaster, Curator, MVTM; Des Houston, former Clerk,
 Town of Almonte; John Willard, owner of the property known as Pinehurst Lodge; and Mary
 Lawson, owner of the property at 102 Union Street North.

Name of Recorder: John Hannigan

Date evaluation completed and submitted to the Heritage Committee: May 19, 2010

