





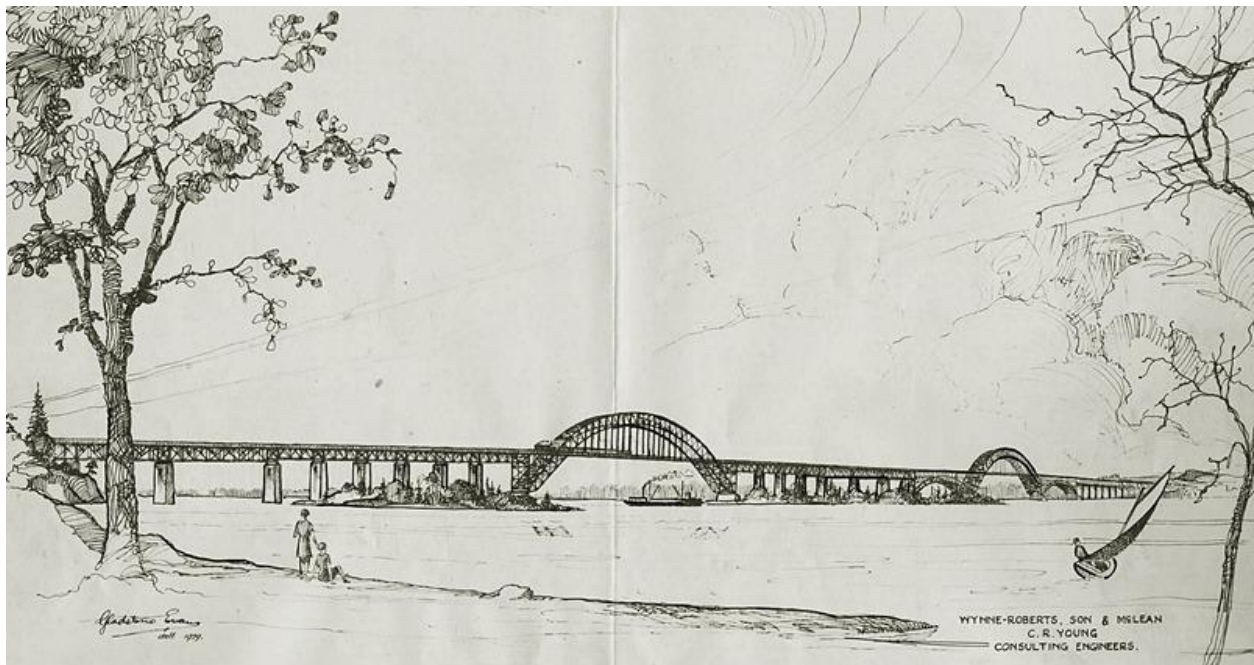
**A bridge promoter stands atop the limestone bridge support built on McNair Island in 1897.**

These limestone ghosts are visible proof of an ambitious plan in the 1890s to build a railroad bridge across the St. Lawrence River. Had it succeeded, the railway bridge would have significantly altered Brockville's landscape and the estate of its richest entrepreneur, changed Morristown into a boomtown, or perhaps eliminated beach parks on either side of the river.

Imagine Morristown as a North Country railroad hub filled with warehouses and a maze of railroad tracks. Think of Brockville as a Canadian clearinghouse for shipping to the United States. The populations and supporting businesses of both towns would have swelled. This was 40 years before the Thousands Islands Bridge near Alexandria Bay and 60-plus years before the Ogdensburg-Prescott International Bridge.

It's difficult to determine exactly why the bridge never succeeded 125 years ago. Local politics seems the safest bet.

The origin of bridge planning started on the Canadian shore. An account in the Brockville Recorder from 1852 indicated the bridge was being considered. By the 1890s, entrepreneurs had developed railways linking the vast timber resources in the north to the river's shore. Ferry service to the United States, however, was slow and shipping space was limited. Timber and railway executives wanted an efficient link to lucrative American markets such as Rochester, Syracuse, Utica, Albany and the eastern seaboard. The closest rail link was a suspension bridge near Niagara Falls.



**A drawing looking from the Canadian side of a planned bridge over Smith and Refugee islands to the U.S. shore near the current site of Jacques Cartier State Park.**

Building a bridge was more complicated than simple assembly. The developers had to sell their plan to the Canadian legislature so a bridge authority could be created in 1886, then extend the power of that authority until 1892. They had to form an alliance between the timber interests, railroads and investors. The American promoters, primarily New York investment bankers, sought and were granted an authority from the New York legislature, and court investors and railroads. They needed to tap the science of the day to figure out where to locate pilings in the mud and



bedrock of the river bottom. Everything was in place and the Canadian authority was extended until 1898.

The Canadians had been busy. The *Brockville Recorder* reported on Feb. 2, 1890 that two businessmen, politician Wilton H. Cole and promoter Robert G. Hervey – representing the Brockville and New York Bridge Company -- were bound for England to raise capital for a bridge company. By September 1892, the newspaper reported engineers were looking at land and taking measurements just west of Brockville, near the present site of St. Lawrence Park. The plan was to build southward from Smith to Refugee Island to Delack Point on the American side, the site of Jacques Cartier Park.

Within two years, the preferred route had shifted. The engineering team was scouting the Three Sisters, just east of Brockville. They planned a span from the Canadian shore to McNair Island, then Murray Island and Bogardus (formerly Glegg) Island and onto the American shore just downriver from Morristown bay, in the vicinity of Wright's Marina.

By August 1895, docks had been built on McNair Island and a month later stone was delivered. By January, engineers were waiting for sufficient ice that would support heavy drilling tools so they could assess the mud on the river bottom.



The bridge wasn't planned only for trains. The charter contained provisions for a separate level to carry pedestrians, carriages and horses, and prohibited it from obstructing navigation on the river.

The limestone bridge abutments were assembled by 1897, then the work stopped. No citizen outcry was reported nor hints in the Brockville newspaper. But the best guess remains the emergence of druggist-turned-millionaire George Taylor Fulford.



The local politician ran a downtown drug store. He amassed a fortune manufacturing and selling “Dr. Williams Pink Pills for Pale People.” Fulford mastered the art of testimonial advertising throughout magazines and newspapers to promote his pills, a patent medicine that mostly contained iron. They combatted a common malady of the day – anemia.

Fulford had emerged from aldermen into Brockville’s richest man, and was eager to assert himself in Canadian society. Entertaining at a riverside estate would provide access to Canada’s most powerful men and

wealthy Americans who visited the region. In 1895, he purchased Edgar Place, the substantial retirement home and 10-acre estate of William J. Christie just east of Brockville along the river. With the deed signed, Fulford immediately tore it down.

The next year, 1896, he brought in the heavy hitters. America’s most prominent landscape architects, Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. and John Charles Olmsted, designers of New York’s Central Park and the White House grounds in Washington, made plans for an Italianate garden.

He hired Albany architect Albert W. Fuller to design a Beaux-Arts style mansion of 35 rooms covering 20,000 square feet of living space with a grand hall, dining room for 30 guests, and drawing and smoking rooms. He had marble from Gouverneur, dragged across the ice in winter, incorporated into the floors.



**Fulford Place's 35 rooms and 20,000 square feet of living space open became a museum.**

Boaters will recognize the stately home with veranda overlooking the Three Sisters islands.

That's where the bridge plans and Fulford's estate plans conflicted. The bridge authority had planned to construct an entrance on Fulford's estate. Undoubtedly, Fulford consulted his friends in Brockville and Ottawa. The bridge essentially was dead. The authority's charter lapsed with little fanfare in 1898; Fulford began building his mansion the next year.

The epilogue to this affair was a sad one.

McNair Island, once lush with white pines, became a nesting refuge for cormorants. Their waste stripped the island of its vegetation. Its bleak appearance resembles a scene from a Tim Burton movie.





**McNair Island, on the edge of the Seaway shipping channel, has lost its vegetation.**

A bridge to the United States would have to wait until August 1938 when the Thousand Islands Bridge opened. Brockville evolved as a small city of 20,000-plus residents; Morristown a bedroom community of 400. Fulford's mansion, now listed in Canada's National Historic Sites, was completed in 1901.

Fulford never got to enjoy it much. He was appointed to the Senate in January 1900 and began to travel extensively with his wife, Mary, using the home as a summer place. Fulford became the first Canadian to die in a traffic accident when his chauffeured open roadster struck the side of a streetcar at a blind intersection in Newton, Mass. He died five days later from his injuries at age 53.

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