

HEIRS

JOURNAL OF THE HARROW EARLY IMMIGRANT RESEARCH SOCIETY



THE CANADIANS ARRIVE ON SALISBURY PLAIN.

TUCK'S POST CARD
CARTÉ POSTALE.

By Appointment.
The Canadians arrive on Salisbury Plain.

Nothing like the Canadian Contingent has landed in England since the time of William the Conqueror. The Canadians come armed for pie, horse, foot, and artillery. The force has its own engineers, signallers, transport corps, ammunition parks and field hospitals, and there are 34 chaplains and 105 nursing sisters.

Hope you are all well as I am at present we are going on long marches each day next week we are going to march with bull pack and rifle and bayonet on our backs we play football go to picture shows and try to keep cheered up I am coming to see you all in a week or two soon as I can get a week end pass. I guess this is all this time from your always friend Tom.

Mr and Mrs Wm Woodbridge.
R.R. No. 1.
Arner.
Ont.
Can.

Canada Postage
ONE CENT

Printed in England.

Vertical text on the left:
The European War.
The Canadian Contingent on Salisbury Plain.
Canadian Contingent on Salisbury Plain.
Raphael Tuck & Sons' "Photogravure" Postcard, No. 4324, Series II.
ANY PUBLISHERS TO THEIR MAJESTIES THE KING & QUEEN



HEIRS is the journal of the Harrow Early Immigrant Research Society, a not-for-profit charitable organization founded in 1971. As the oldest historical society in the Town of Essex, HEIRS is dedicated to preserving and sharing the rich history of the original Township of Colchester—now part of the modern Town of Essex—with particular emphasis on Harrow and Colchester South. Each issue features historical and genealogical articles that highlight the people, organizations, institutions, and heritage buildings that have shaped our community's story.

We respectfully acknowledge that we are situated on the traditional territory of the Three Fires Confederacy of First Nations—the Ojibway, Odawa, and Potawatomi peoples. As we continue to learn about Indigenous histories and contributions, we also honour the legacy of the earliest French and Loyalist settlers, freedom seekers, and immigrant families whose lives and labours are deeply woven into the fabric of this region. Together, these diverse threads form the heritage we are proud to preserve.

HEIRS gratefully acknowledges financial support from the Town of Essex (Essex Community Partnership Fund), and the Province of Ontario (Heritage Organization Development Grant).

HEIRS also gratefully acknowledges the Harrow News and County Print for continued support in making history.

Membership

HEIRS welcomes new members. Anyone is able to join.

The membership fee is \$30 CDN/US for individuals. Memberships run from May 1st to April 30th annually.

To become a member, please contact us with your name, postal address, phone number, and email. Memberships may be paid by cash, cheque, or e-transfer. **E-transfer:** heirsont@gmail.com

Members receive five issues of the HEIRS Journal per year—a colour digital version by email or a black & white print version by regular post. Members also receive regular email updates, and the right to vote at regular and annual meetings.

Members may use the resources available in the HEIRS Resource Centre for free. The fee for non-members is \$10 per visit. To help defray our costs, photocopy rates apply to everyone.

Meetings and Speaker's Series

HEIRS holds meetings on the 4th Thursday of the month from September to June (December excepted).

As part of its monthly meeting, HEIRS offers a Speaker's Series. The series includes presentations on a variety of topics related to local history, and everyone is welcome to attend. Advance notice of presentations is provided in the Harrow News, in the HEIRS Journal, on Facebook, and by email to members and affiliated organizations.

Meetings are held in the Community Room at the Harrow-Colchester South Community Centre, 243 McAfee Street, Harrow, beginning at 1:30 PM.

© 2025 HEIRS Journal.

All rights reserved.

All content published in the HEIRS Journal, is protected under Canadian copyright law. No part of this publication may be reproduced, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise—without the prior written permission of the copyright holder(s), except in accordance with fair dealing provisions for the purposes of research, private study, education, or review, as permitted under the Copyright Act of Canada.

ISSN 2819-5833 (Print)
ISSN 2819-5841 (Online)

Resource Centre Hours and Contact Information



Tuesdays & Thursdays 10am to 3pm
or by appointment



519-738-3700



243 McAfee Street
(Harrow Community Centre)
P.O. Box 53, Harrow, ON N0R 1G0



heirsont@gmail.com



HEIRS.ca



H.E.I.R.S. Harrow Heritage & Genealogy
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/273308654125995>

Contents

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| 4 In This Issue
HEIRS President's Message | 6, 8, 12 Coming Events | 19 The Road to Flanders |
| 5-7 Catching Up
Bearded Dog Fundraiser
Speaker Series
Preserving our History | 9 One Family's Wartime Legacy | 22 Stories that Spark
more Stories |
| | 13 Patriots and Panic
Defending the Western Frontier
in 1838 | 23 Colchester Village 2
Beach Party! |

COVER IMAGE: The postcard featured on this issue's cover is titled "The Canadians Arrive on Salisbury Plain." A printed description on the reverse declares: "Nothing like the Canadian Contingent has landed in England since the time of William the Conqueror." It was mailed in March 1915 from London, Ontario, to Mr. and Mrs. William Woodbridge by Tom Roberts—a young Englishman who had worked for Mr. Woodbridge before enlisting in the Canadian Expeditionary Force during the Great War. In his message, Tom mentions his posting to the 33rd Battalion, C Company, B Platoon. According to historical records, the 33rd Battalion was an infantry unit raised in London in 1914. It sailed for Great Britain in 1916, where it became a reserve battalion, supplying reinforcements to front-line units until its personnel were absorbed by the 36th Battalion in July 1916. This photograph of Tom ("Tommy") Roberts is preserved in the HEIRS Archive alongside the original postcard. HEIRS P5.1, P5.2





**Helping
homeowners
make
history
since
1952**



Mike Tomek
519-819-1313
mike@tomekrealty.com

Ann Bezaire
519-818-0651
ann@tomekrealty.com

Hayley Tomek
519-300-6855
hayley@tomekrealty.com

72 King St E, Harrow, ON N0R 1G0 Phone: (519) 738-2562 • TOMEKREALTY.COM



Board of Directors

President

Lorrie Stephenson

Vice-President

James Gatrall

Secretary-Treasurer

Laurie Brett

Marta Leardi Anderson

Jackie Baldwin

Milo Johnson

Esther Meerschaut

Ted Steele

Website

Jenny Obermok

Media Addict

Hospitality

Margaret McLean

Sharing our Stories: A New Year Full of Memories

As the season changes, there's much to reflect on in this issue of the HEIRS Journal. On November 11, many will gather at the Cenotaph in Veterans' Memorial Park to honour those who served. This year, their faces also line King and Queen Streets, thanks to the dedicated work of the Harrow Legion's Veteran Banner Committee. A special thank-you goes to Dawn Bezaire for making it possible for HEIRS director Milo Johnson to share a presentation on the banners on October 23.

During that presentation, Milo encouraged everyone to seek out the military records of veterans in their own families. He shared a book he created using his father's records—a powerful reminder of the importance of preserving our stories. In this issue, you'll find three articles that highlight the experiences of Canadians who served. Reading their words helps keep history alive through the voices of those who lived it.

Each of us has memories worth recording—acts of courage, moments of love, or even the small, whimsical stories that make up our lives. These memories are a gift to our families and communities, ensuring that our shared history endures.

Inside, you'll also learn about a new workshop by Anne Beneteau, designed to help people record their memories. As winter and a new year approaches, I hope you'll take some time to reflect on your own stories and consider how you might preserve them for future generations.

President
HEIRS



Canadel

Custom Dining Furniture

27 King Street W
HARROW
www.canadel.com
519-738-9001

Operating from
the historic Richardson and Clark buildings since 1966





The Fruit Wagon

Quality fresh fruits, vegetables,
herbs & flowers in season

Doug & Leslie Balsillie
www.thefruitwagon.com
leslie@thefruitwagon.com
519-738-4819

793 County Road 50 East, R.R.1 Harrow Ontario N0R 1G0

Family run on the shores of Lake Erie since 1984



Carolina CIDER CO.

Orchard based cidery in the heart
of the Carolinian Forest.
Cider flights, glass & bottles to go.

 **(519) 257-8804** 

Bearded Dog Fundraiser

Big news from the big dog!

Warm summer weather stretched far into the month of September, making for a beautiful day for the HEIRS' Burgers and Beer fundraiser on the 17th at the Bearded Dog. The patio was open and the house was hopping with supporters – thank you to everyone who participated and helped to raise \$619 for HEIRS. We are grateful and fortunate for the Bearded Dog and their commitment to community.



Bearded Dog owner Kim Iler hands cheque to HEIRS President Lorrie Stephenson

Debra Honor, UE, PLCGS

September 25

Belle Vue House in Amherstburg came alive through stories during Debra Honor's presentation on her book *The Lives that Touched Belle Vue Amherstburg*. The book is a result of 14 years of research and is full in detail. Belle Vue, one of only two Palladian architecture style houses left in Canada, has gone through dramatic occupancy transitions over its two centuries. Debra Honor led the audience through its history from the perspective of those who lived and worked there. Stories range from its construction up to its final occupation by the Ukrainian Catholic Church. Books are available at the Marsh Collection and John R Park Homestead.



Author Debra Honor shares stories from Belle Vue, photo by Adam Gault, Harrow News



Book Dedication

September 25th was a day for honouring friendships at HEIRS. During Debra Honor's presentation, friend and fellow UEL member Jean Rae Baxter attended the meeting through Zoom. Following Debra Honor's presentation, a book dedication was held on behalf of Jean Rae Baxter for her dear friend, Ruth Nicholson, UE, who passed away suddenly earlier this year. Family and friends attended the meeting and Jean donated several copies of her novel "Battle on the Ice". Upon Jean's request, copies of the book were donated to Harrow Public School, and Kingsville Migration Elementary and High Schools so that students can learn about our rich UEL history.

Salute our Veterans!

October 23

HEIRS director Milo Johnson shared a presentation on the Harrow Legion Veteran Banners with the help of Dawn Bezaire from the Harrow Legion Branch 338 Veteran Banner Project committee.

Each Veteran Banner was displayed on screen and veterans remembered. During the presentation, Milo explained that veteran military records can be obtained through Library and Archives Canada. For anyone interested in writing the history of their own family, Milo shared a copy of the book he had printed about his father's experiences during WWII, based on military records that he was able to obtain from Library and Archives Canada.

Dawn Bezaire expressed her hope that when people travel down the streets of Harrow and see the banners, they reflect on the fact that the freedoms that we have today are thanks to the sacrifices that veterans made for us and our country.

Anyone interested in a banner for next year can contact the Legion at RCLegion338@gmail.com and be put on a list. The criteria is that the veteran must have past or present local connections to Harrow and Colchester South.



Above: HEIRS Director Milo Johnson speaks to the group.

Left: A banner on display at the presentation



Holiday Hobnob

at THE KING STREET CAFE 24 King St W, HARROW



WORD SEARCH BOOK
with Local History by
author *Laurie Brett*

Gift Membership Special
6 months free!

FRIDAY December 5



HOLIDAY TREATS



HEIRS 2026 CALENDARS



Check off your Christmas list
and take your best guess for the MYSTERY GIFT

Catching Up Preserving our History

INK is back!

With the support of librarians and archivists at the University of Windsor, Our Digital World has released INK2, a searchable and browsable set of historic newspapers from Essex County.

Many of the titles have been rescanned and new titles have been added, including the *HARROW NEWS*!

If an issue of the Harrow News was preserved on microfilm, it has been included in this collection. If it was only preserved on microfiche or the print issue was missing at the time of scanning, it won't appear.

Other newspapers in the collection include the *Amherstburg Echo*, *Essex Free Press*, *Kingsville Reporter*, *Leamington Post*, the *Border Cities Star*, and the *Windsor Evening Record*. The *Voice of the Fugitive* and the *Provincial Freeman*, the first abolitionist newspapers in Canada, are also included. Like most of the historic preservation projects in Ontario, INK2 is mostly a volunteer project, led by Art Rhyno, an HEIRS member and our primary IT support. You can check it out at swoda.uwindsor.ca/ink2

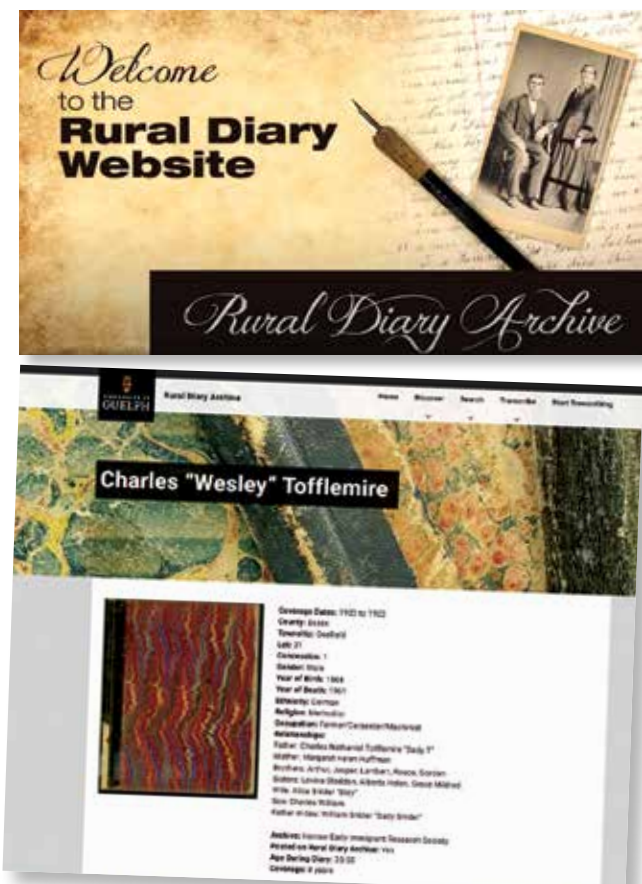


RURAL DIARY WEBSITE UPDATE

Last year, we published an article on the The Rural Diary Archive project led by Catharine Wilson at the University of Guelph. The 1907-1908 Arner farm diary from the HEIRS collection had just been added to the site. HEIRS would like to continue to contribute to this online archive that reflects the history of Ontario agriculture and is willing to digitize old family farm diaries from local farms. For anyone interested in visiting the website to read, search, or transcribe old Ontario farm diaries, the address has been updated to <https://ruraldiaries.uoguelph.ca/>

This month, Charles Wesley Tofflemire's profile has been added to the archives. His 1903-1907 diary has been transcribed and is in queue for proofing and his 1908-1923 diary has been uploaded as of October 17. They can both be found at: ruraldiaries.uoguelph.ca/meet-the-diarists/charles-wesley-tofflemire/

If you're interested in helping to transcribe the newest diary of Charles Tofflemire, visit the link above.



HEIRS Events, Monthly Meetings & Speaker Series



SCRIBES & STORYTELLERS

An evening of readings, reflections, and recollections
with our local historians

FEATURING...

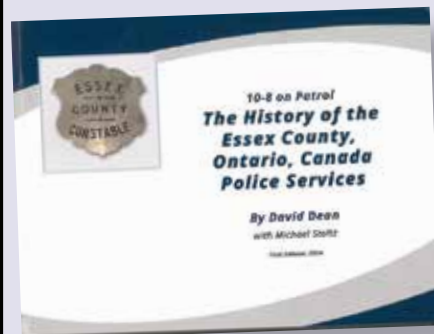
Laurie Brett • David Dean • Fred Groves • Milo Johnson

Laurie Kowtiuk (ECHRS) • Lorrie Stephenson (HEIRS)

Drop in to learn about the stories that have shaped our town
Everyone Welcome!

Nov.
26 6-8 PM

**ESSEX RAILWAY
STATION**
87 STATION ST, ESSEX



DAVID DEAN 10-8 ON PATROL

The History of the Essex County, Ontario, Canada Police Services

David Dean is a retired patrol sergeant from the Town of LaSalle Police Service. Dave's research on the history of local policing is an important connection to the past, which he will share with us.

1:30 PM HARROW ARENA COMMUNITY ROOM

Nov.
27



Check off your Christmas list



Holiday Hobnob
at **THE KING STREET CAFE**

See Page 6 for details

24 King St W, Harrow

Dec.
5



HISTORY OF THE HOME CHILDREN

Between 1860-1930 over 100,000 British children were sent to families around Canada as indentured servants. Lori Oschefski, founder of Home Children Canada, will share an insightful presentation on the history of the British Home Children (BHC) migration programs.

HYBRID MEETING - IN PERSON AND BY ZOOM

Contact heirsont@gmail.com for the ZOOM link

Jan.
22

1:30 PM HARROW ARENA COMMUNITY ROOM & BY ZOOM Everyone Welcome!



THE STORIES WE TELL

Milo Johnson will reflect on his roots from Africa to Canada from his book "The Color of Freedom."

1:30 PM HARROW ARENA COMMUNITY ROOM

Feb.
26

One Family's Wartime Legacy

By Jim Gatrall

Captain (retired), Canadian Army Medical Corps

Remembrance Day for me is a time of personal reflection about the five members of my family who served in harm's way in the world wars. Although none of them have any connection to the Harrow area their stories are illustrative of the experiences of men and women from our community.

Ernest Gatrall, my paternal grandfather, was an English tailor who had served in the Second Boer War (1899-1902). Just before World War I began, he and his family emigrated from England to Canada. Leaving his family to adjust to their new land, he returned to England and re-enlisted in the British Army. He served in the Royal Horse Artillery stationed in Ypres and was wounded on April 22, 1915, when a greenish-yellow cloud of chlorine gas swept over Allied lines. Though the Allied line held against this new form of German aggression, the gas killed and incapacitated thousands of Allied soldiers. My grandfather carried scars from that injury for the rest of his life. After the war, he rejoined his family in Woodstock, Ontario, and resumed his trade as a tailor, working in that capacity on the Home Front during World War II.

Albert Pester, my wife's father, was from Plymouth, England and served in the Royal Signal Corps in the British Army, providing telecommunications support and conducting electronic warfare. In early 1942, he was sent to Singapore just weeks before its fall. After the Japanese captured the island and the British garrison surrendered on February 15, 1942, Albert became a prisoner of war. He worked in POW camps in very harsh conditions until the end of the war. When he returned home, he resumed his job as a city bus driver.

Herbert Myers, my mother's brother, was born in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, a key assembly point for supply convoys to Europe during World War II. Living



Ernest Gatrall

near the main Canadian naval base on the Atlantic, it is not surprising that he joined the merchant marine at Halifax. During the second week of September 1940, Herbert was on the ship *Frederick S. Fales* when it left Halifax harbour bound for the UK. Considered to be one of the unluckiest transatlantic convoys, the *Fales* was sunk by torpedoes about 600 miles off the coast of Ireland. Though the captain and twenty men were lost, the remainder of the crew escaped on lifeboats, including Herbert Myers, and were rescued many hours later by a Free French sloop. After surviving this terrifying ordeal, he went to England where he enlisted in the Canadian Army. He is reputed to have said, "I'm never going on a boat again." He fought in overland battles in France, Germany and the Netherlands for the remainder of the war. After returning home, he worked as a representative for the Swift Meat Company.

Ralph Rosen, my first wife's father, was born in Germany in 1920. In search of better economic opportunities than post-World War I Europe could offer, he and his family emigrated to Essex County in 1926. When the Second World War began, Ralph enlisted in the Canadian army. While in England, he was wounded by a grenade in a training accident and sustained permanent hearing loss and kidney damage. Though he missed the Normandy landings, he was able to rejoin his unit before the war ended. There is an ironic sidenote to his story. Father and son served on opposing sides, his father in the German army during World War I and Ralph in the Canadian army in World War II.

Jim Gatrall Sr., my father, was just 13 when World



Herbert "Bert" Myers Jr.

War II started in 1939. When he was 17, and with written permission from his mother, he enlisted in the Canadian navy. He served as a signalman on escort vessels protecting convoys in the Battle of the Atlantic. When hostilities ended in Europe, he returned to Ontario with my mother, who was from Dartmouth, NS. He worked as a salesman in many fields.

My military experience pales in comparison to the sacrifices made by these five men whose stories are briefly told. During the almost 40 year hiatus between Korea and the Balkans, no Canadian personnel were officially "in harm's way." I was commissioned as a

One of the lucky ones ships out for his final voyage

By Lorna Inness

HALIFAX'S ROLE as an East Coast port in the Second World War is well documented. No one with living memory of that war can look at Bedford Basin without seeing it filled with merchant ships waiting to slide out of the harbour and to attempt the perilous crossing of the Atlantic in the uncertain shelter of a convoy. One morning the Basin would be filled with ships. The next dawn it would be empty of vessels.

Official records show that Canada lost 1,750 men of the Merchant Navy during the war. Seventy ships were sunk. These figures do not take into account Canadians who sailed aboard Norwegian, Greek and other vessels.

While the cargoes each ship carried were vital to the war effort, tankers were the prime targets of German U-boats because of the importance of their loads of fuel.

Those cargoes also made tankers floating bombs. One hit well placed and there was a fireball in the ocean and scant chance for the crew to escape either the burning ship or the fiery, oil-covered sea around them.

The *Frederick S. Fales* was one such tanker which left Halifax in convoy in September 1940.

Many of her crew were Nova Scotians, some of them teenagers.

Disappointed at not sailing with the *Fales* was a 16-year-old

Dartmouth lad whose neighbour, a crewman, had obtained a job for him as a mess boy. Last-minute confusion over a lost registration card, however, kept the lad ashore when the ship sailed.

It was his lucky day.

The convoy had made it safely across the Atlantic and was nearing the Irish coast when it was attacked by submarines. Shortly before midnight, the first torpedo struck the *Fales* amidships. Within seconds, a second torpedo hit the engine room and the ship was doomed.

"The boys in the engine room never had a chance," recalled one survivor later. "The ship sank so rapidly we had to jump in the sea for our lives."

Twenty men, including Capt. F. Ramsay, a Scot, were lost. Some of the men died when ef-

orts to free a lifeboat failed, the boat pulling them under as the ship sank.

Although it was raining, the sea was fairly calm and some survivors managed to get aboard life-rafts.

Others clung to pieces of wreckage until they were hauled on rafts by their shipmates.

When morning came, a British escort vessel picked up the survivors of the *Fales*, but they were hardly out of danger.

Later that morning, a German bomber attacked the warship but failed to sink it and the vessel was able to make it safely to a British port.

It was Nov. 26 before the 21 survivors, most from Nova Scotia, returned to Halifax. As one survivor said, "Halifax sure looked good when the train pulled in tonight."

There were men from the Halifax-Dartmouth area, from Conquerall Bank and Londonderry, from Advocate Harbour and LaHave, from Pleasant Point and Musquodchuik Harbour.

Among them was 18-year-old Herbert G. Myers of Woodside.

For some survivors, the trip had been enough for a while. Others found new ships and returned to the sea.

Said one, "I'm anxious to get back on a ship. We got a lot more to do yet."

Myers was one of those who returned to the war, this time joining the Army and serving in England, France, Germany and Holland.

He survived the war and returned to North Woodside where he managed Myers Grocery. He

spent 30 years as a salesman for Swift Canadian Company before retiring. He and his wife, Marion, raised a family. He was active in Brightwood Golf and Country Club.

On this past Christmas Day, Herbert Myers — Bert to family and a host of friends — passed away.

His obituary in this newspaper, marked with the miniature Canadian flag denoting a veteran, contained the lines: "in 1940, he joined the Merchant Navy and was on the oil tanker *Frederick S. Fales* when it was sunk by enemy action and was one of those rescued at sea."

He was one of the lucky ones.

JAN 17/03

Lorna Inness is a former senior editor with these newspapers.

Halifax Chronicle, January 17, 2003



Herbert Myers Sr., Jim Gatrall Sr., Constance Myers, Ernest Gatrall

2nd Lieutenant in 1968 when I was a medical student. After my training was completed, for two years I worked as a medical officer at CFB Cornwallis near Digby, NS. Then came a one-year stint as a surgical resident at Canadian Forces Hospital Halifax. My final six months were at CFB Shearwater in Dartmouth, NS working as a flight surgeon.

Our peacetime military is very necessary. Since the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) was founded in 1958, we have shared with our American neighbours the air defence of our continent. Canadian warships patrol the northwestern Indian Ocean to deter Somali pirates from capturing merchant ships and holding them for ransom. As part of NATO, Canadian soldiers are stationed in Estonia. Constant vigilance is required to prevent a recurrence of the world wars of the 20th century.

My relatives have been an inspiration to me. It has been an honour and privilege to share their stories. 

I want to thank Jackie Barraco (Kingsville Military Museum) and Laurie Brett (HEIRS) for their research which contributed greatly to this article.

Small Batch Bakery, Small Town History



Hours and location

Monday to Friday 8 to 4
Saturday and Sunday 9 to 4
24 King St. West, Harrow
In the heart of historic Harrow



Small Batch Bakes

We specialize in small batch baking, offering a diverse selection of freshly made goods that you can customize and enjoy.



Small Town History

Our bakery is nestled within a charming historic building, adding a dash of character and nostalgia to your visit.



Big on Quality

Our unwavering commitment is to your satisfaction and delight, reflected in the care and attention we put into each and every product we create.



Big on Community

We're proud of and want to support community activities. We aim to support local events and other local businesses.



**Nov.
11**

Remembrance Day Ceremony

Harrow Legion Branch 338

10:45am O Canada and Land Acknowledgment at the Memorial Cenotaph (*Veterans Memorial Parkette on King Street West beside the post office*)

11:00am Remembrance Ceremony

11:30am (approx) Following the ceremony at the Cenotaph there will be a Fellowship Gathering at the Legion, including a light luncheon



Christmas Events, Tours, Parades, Speakers...

Check out the links below to find out what's happening at Heritage Organizations in and around Essex County.

South Western Ontario Heritage Council swoheritage.ca/events

Crossroads historical guide: visitwindsorsex.com/crossroads



**Nov
29 - 30**

Christmas Market in the Museum

Festive Weekend of holiday shopping - a variety of vendors

**Dec
6, 7, 13,
20 & 21**

Heritage Christmas

Meet Santa! Crafts, Vendors, Music & More

**Dec
13 & 14**

Breakfast with Santa

**Dec
31**

New Year's Eve 2025 Party

For more information on events visit www.ctmhv.com or contact events@ctmhv.com or call 519-776-8321



McGregor Sims Schmoranz Hart Law Office

OUR SERVICES

- Real Estate Services
- Wills & Estates
- Corporate & Business Advising
- Employment & HR Services
- Notarial Services
- Mediation Services



www.msslawyers.ca
P. 519.733.8441
F. 519.733.6874
58 Main Street East
Kingsville, ON N9Y 1A2



www.goldenlawharrow.com
P. 519.738.4111
F. 519.738.3470
P.O. Box 279, 15 King Street W.
Harrow, Ontario N0R 1G0

Town of Essex Community Heritage Preservation Award Winner

PATRIOTS AND PANIC:

Defending the Western Frontier in 1838

Including One Family's Story in the Shadows of Rebellion

By Laurie Brett

IN the spring of 1838, the loyal inhabitants of Essex County were living in a state of high alert. Along the Detroit River shoreline and in the quiet clearings of the inland townships, fears of invasion and rebellion ran high.

Months earlier, William Lyon Mackenzie, publisher of the *Colonial Advocate* newspaper, had instigated a rebellion in opposition to the ruling elite of Upper Canada. Critics derisively called them the “Family Compact,” a small clique of well-connected wealthy individuals who held key positions in the colonial government, controlled patronage appointments, and often acted in their own self-interest.

As a writer and reformer, Mackenzie was initially committed to using pen and ink to effect political change. He ostensibly advocated for responsible government that included political accountability and greater citizen participation—ideals that would eventually give Canadians a democratic political system.

By December 1837, Mackenzie had set aside his pen for the sword. He and a poorly organized assemblage of armed men attempted to overthrow the government in Toronto by force. When they failed, Mackenzie fled to Buffalo, New York, where he gave speeches about British oppression, declared himself the head of a provisional government called the “Republic of Canada,” and began a recruiting campaign with the objective of invading Upper Canada.

Although the rebellion's early sparks flew in Toronto, Mackenzie's activities fueled anti-British sentiment in many border communities. Along the southwest frontier, rumours of secret Patriot meetings on the



**Badge of the
34th Regiment of Foot**

opposite side of the Detroit River quickly spread in Essex County, sparking fear and anxiety in its residents.

Between Forest and Frontier

In 1837, life in Essex County was marked by deep isolation. Settlers scattered across the interior often went weeks without seeing their neighbours, cut off by dreadful roads and vast stretches of forest.

It was in that year that Anna Jameson, an Anglo-Irish art historian and wife of the Attorney General for Upper Canada, traveled throughout the region, recording her observations of this colonial outpost for later publication. Her descriptive travelogue, *Winter*

Studies and Summer Rambles in Canada, provides important details and a vivid picture of life in Essex County at the time.

Visiting the Detroit River just months before the rebellion, Mrs. Jameson was struck by the imbalance between the booming American city of Detroit and the struggling Canadian settlements across the water. She described her experience in vivid terms:

“Our shore is said to be the most fertile, and has been the longest settled; but to float between them (as I did to-day in a little canoe made of a hollow tree ...)—to behold on one side a city, with its towers and spires and animated population, with villas and handsome houses stretching along the shore, and a hundred vessels or more, gigantic steamers, brigs, schooners, crowding the port, loading and unloading; all the bustle, in short, of prosperity and commerce.”

And then, on the Canadian side:

“A little straggling hamlet.”

She further observed that Sandwich, the district capital, appeared to be languishing, while Amherstburg, despite its good harbour and natural advantages, made no progress.

“There is a wretched little useless fort, commanding, or rather not commanding, the entrance to the Detroit river on our side, and memorable in the history of the last American war as Fort Malden. There are here a few idle soldiers, detached from the garrison at Toronto; and it is said that even these will be removed. In case of an attack or sudden outbreak, all this exposed and important line of shore is absolutely without defence.”

Katherine McKenna’s research into the rebellion provides a useful context for understanding settlers’ isolation and the immense fear that a border threat created. In a 1985 report titled *The Impact of the Upper Canadian Rebellion on Life in Essex County*, McKenna noted that residents of the Windsor-Amherstburg area lived on the fringes of Upper Canadian settlement. The

provincial capital at Toronto could only be reached by an overland journey of several days, weather permitting, and the closest urban centre was nearly 200 kilometres away in London. For practical reasons, the inhabitants of Essex County looked to Detroit as their closest commercial metropolis.

As McKenna explained, cross-border activities were commonplace.

“Ferries ran regularly between Detroit and Windsor and commercial and personal communication was extensive. The threat of an armed invasion from the American shore, then, would make these small communities feel extremely vulnerable. Memories of the military conflict during the War of 1812 would certainly not assuage these apprehensions.”

Indeed, many settlers along the lakeshore had arrived in Upper Canada as loyalists fleeing post-revolutionary America. When the War of 1812 began, many had joined local defence efforts and suffered repeated pillaging and unimaginable losses when American forces swept



Red coats, hats and gear hanging in the barracks at Fort Malden

through the county in late 1813. Knowing that rebel forces were now organizing in Detroit, the residents of Essex County must have been extremely uneasy. As Mrs. Jameson had foretold, the last British regulars were withdrawn from the fort as a cost-cutting measure, leaving the region essentially defenceless except for a poorly organized and inadequately trained local militia.

On the Brink of Invasion

On January 23, 1838, Henry C. Grant, editor of the *Western Herald*, was only a few weeks into the challenge of establishing a local newspaper in Sandwich when he reported on the growing tensions leading up to the first rebel incursion. Like many editors of the period, Grant employed sensational language to stir loyalist sentiment and alert his readers to the perceived danger across the river.

“Since our first number was issued we have been in a state of excitement never before equalled in consequence of the threatening attitude assumed by the rebel bloodhounds and their associates, the loafers of Detroit.”

Grant described the enemy as a “desperate band of ruffians” determined to bring American-style republicanism into Canada. According to his reports, they had gathered in Detroit and were receiving financial backing from sympathetic citizens living there. Warning of imminent violence, Grant fanned the flames of fear:

“They are preparing their murderous instruments to deluge our peaceful firesides with the blood of parents and defenceless children.”

As alarm about subversive activity grew and anti-American sentiment surged throughout the district, colonial authorities responded. On December 21, 1837, Sir Francis Bond Head, Lieutenant Governor of Upper Canada, issued a call to arms:



34th Regiment hat at Fort Malden

“Let every man do his duty now and it will be the last time that we or our children shall see our lives or properties endangered, or the authority of Our Gracious Queen insulted by such treacherous and ungrateful men.”

Despite the urgency, the initial response was underwhelming. Many militiamen stayed home, and those who did appear were poorly armed and untrained. With no regular troops stationed in the region and few official officers to lead them, local magistrates—men of high standing with authority over the courts, customs, and land matters—formed an ad hoc council to coordinate a defensive response.

From these efforts, Sheriff Robert Lachlan issued a call to raise loyal volunteer companies. Among those who answered were men “of sterling loyalty” from Colchester and Mersea townships. In Amherstburg, Captain John McCormick’s company of the 1st Essex Militia assembled in response to the threat.

Sheriff Lachlan’s report captures the spirit of the day

and the determination of the local population:

“Such was the effect of the rumoured attack, upon the loyal Lake shore settlers that before the morning dawned a body of ‘good men & true’ had poured in which at the hour of Parade swelled the number . . . actually present (including about 140 coloured men) to more than 600 rank & file, & of whom 320 were found armed with either Rifles, Muskets or other fire arms.”

Notably, Lachlan acknowledged the presence of Black militiamen—many descended from formerly enslaved people who had settled in Essex County seeking freedom in British North America. Their participation in the defence of the region reflected both their deep roots in the community and their stake in its safety.

Many descendants of those who mustered in defence of the county that winter still reside in the Harrow and Colchester South region. Their service, in the face of real uncertainty and danger, remains a point of local pride.

Wretched Little Useless Fort

The written history *Amherstburg 1796-1996: The New Town on the Garrison Grounds* describes the dismal state of Fort Malden in late 1837.

“When rebellion broke out in Upper Canada in early December of 1837, Fort Malden was a dilapidated hulk. The deserted post’s ramparts were in disrepair and there were no cannon guarding its bastions. Not only were the existing structures in a sorry state, there was simply not enough room to house the assorted volunteer companies and Essex Militia which mustered in Amherstburg. Temporary housing was acquired in town, but the lack of adequate arms and supplies for the militia was not resolved before the first rebel strike.”

The fort that had once served as a stronghold during the War of 1812 was now barely functional. Yet, in early 1838, Amherstburg and the surrounding settlements would again face invasion.

The first hostile action came in January, when the Patriot schooner *Anne* sailed down the Detroit River and bombarded the town. Its assault was brief. The vessel ran aground and was quickly captured by the local militia. In February, a group of rebels marched across the frozen Detroit River and occupied Fighting Island, only to be deterred from reaching the mainland

by dangerously thin ice. A third incursion followed in March, when a larger force departed from Sandusky, Ohio, and crossed the frozen expanse of Lake Erie to seize Pelee Island. They were swiftly driven off by a combination of British regulars and Canadian militia.

Despite these repeated incursions, colonial military leaders concluded that the crisis was over. Rather than reinforce the region’s defences, they did the opposite: troops and artillery were withdrawn from Amherstburg, and the militia was formally disbanded. To everyone observing the situation—whether loyal subject or Patriot sympathizer—it sent a clear and troubling message: the western frontier had been abandoned.

Anxiety, Alarm and Astonishment

Amid renewed rumours of a villainous Patriot plot forming on the American side of the Detroit River, the local magistrates once again convened as an ad hoc council. Alarmed by the lack of defensive infrastructure, they sent a formal resolution to Sir George Arthur, the new Lieutenant Governor of Upper Canada, expressing their “deepest anxiety, alarm and astonishment” at the colony’s apparent abandonment of the western frontier. They also condemned the indifference with which colonial officials seemed to regard the border district’s vulnerability.

This time, their protest received a response. Lt. Gen. Sir John Colborne—commander of British forces in Canada—dispatched four companies of the 34th Regiment, under the leadership of Lt. Col. Richard Airey. Deployed from Halifax, the troops arrived at Fort Malden in late July. The *Western Herald* reported their arrival with optimism, declaring that “the whole frontier is to be shortly put in a complete state of defence.”

But the optimism faded quickly. One can only imagine Lt. Col. Airey’s dismay when he inspected the long-neglected fort and found it uninhabitable. Katherine McKenna’s report provides a stark account of what he encountered:

“When Airey and the 34th Regiment arrived with Colborne in late July, they found Malden a shambles. He had over 450 men and nowhere to house them. Airey was forced to quarter them all over the area, with disastrous results. They had arrived in Essex at the peak of the malaria season and suffered severely. By late August, 127 men were ill.”

The severity of the health crisis and the absence of infrastructure prompted swift action. Airey was granted permission to bypass the usual bureaucratic system of requisitions and estimates and to begin repairs immediately. Over the next four months, the 34th Regiment undertook extensive improvements: constructing barracks, repairing ramparts, and adding a new blockhouse on Bois Blanc Island—strategically located at the mouth of the Detroit River to guard against future incursions.

Cheers From The Far Shore

Despite the extensive defensive preparations at Amherstburg, the rebels still managed to surprise the Upper Canadian forces. On the morning of December 4, 1838, a group of Patriots crossed the Detroit River aboard a stolen steamer and landed north of Windsor—well beyond the reach of British regulars stationed at Amherstburg. Their target was a temporary barracks housing local militiamen. The attack claimed the lives of two militiamen, a local resident, and the militia's staff surgeon who accidentally wandered into the path of oncoming rebels.

The ease of the crossing—and the battle's visibility from the opposite shore—underscored how close the two nations were in both geography and sentiment. The next day, the *Western Herald* described the chilling scene:

"On arriving midway between Sandwich and Windsor, our ears were assailed with vociferous shouts of encouragement to the pirates who had landed on our soil, by the 'free and enlightened' citizens of Detroit, which thronged and blackened their cursed shore."

The newspaper's language captures the deep anger and sense of betrayal many in Upper Canada felt toward their American neighbours, whose sympathies with the rebels were no longer secret. To those watching on the ground, the threat felt not just local, but international. Yet for all the chaos, the skirmish ended quickly. When the invaders caught sight of British redcoats approaching, they broke ranks and fled into the woods. Ironically, these were not regular troops, but Captain Sparke's militia unit, mistaken for the 34th Regiment. By the time the actual 34th arrived from Amherstburg, the Battle of Windsor was already over.

A Family in the Fort

The Battle of Windsor may have ended quickly, but for many, the events of 1838 left lasting scars—on the



James Elliott's musket tag

region, on families, and on individuals whose stories are mostly forgotten. One of those individuals was my third great-grandfather, James Elliott, who served among the very soldiers sent to restore and defend Fort Malden during this time of unrest.

James Elliott was one of 500 soldiers deployed with the 34th Regiment to Fort Malden in July 1838. He arrived with his wife, Mary, and their three young children. Born in Enniskillen, County Fermanagh, Ireland, James had joined the 1st Battalion of the 34th Regiment of Foot while it was stationed in Galway. His eldest child, Ann—my second great-grandmother—was born there in 1832. The regiment was posted to Halifax the following year, where they remained until being transferred to Amherstburg six years later.

James Elliott's time at Fort Malden was relatively short. He died in 1840 at just 35 years old, still listed on the fort's payroll. No cause of death was recorded, though it's possible he succumbed to malarial fever, which had taken such a toll on the regiment the summer they arrived.

In May 2012, I visited Fort Malden hoping to learn more about James's final years—and what became of his wife and children. While his cause of death remains a mystery, the tour proved unexpectedly illuminating.

My guide, dressed in the simple green uniform of Caldwell's Western Rangers, brought life at the fort

into vivid focus. Only about six percent of soldiers were permitted to bring their families to Canada. On the day of departure, wives and children would line up at the dock while officers randomly selected which men would be allowed to bring their families. James was among the lucky few.

Conditions at the fort, however, were harsh. Barracks housed 64 adults across three rooms, with four adults sharing each double bunk. Wives slept alongside their husbands; children were left to find space wherever they could. The British government provided two meals a day: oatmeal gruel with peas or salt in the morning, and meat stew in the evening—vegetables included only when available. Meat rations were meager: one pound per day for men, half that for women, and just a quarter-pound for children.

Women who were hired to do laundry could earn more than their soldier husbands. Their pay often covered the army's laundry deduction and left a few cents extra. Children could remain in the barracks until age 14; after that, boys had to enlist or leave, and girls were expected to marry a soldier or be sent away.

When I shared my family's story with the tour guide, she turned to the muskets on display and began inspecting the tags attached to each one. To my astonishment, she found James Elliott's name—along with his regimental number, 1198. The tags had been created using the July 1838 payroll records for the 34th, just after the regiment arrived in Amherstburg.

I asked what would have happened to Mary and the children after James died. Did the army offer support or arrange for their return home? The answer was sobering: widows were given 48 hours to remarry or they were expected to leave the fort. Given the cramped quarters and tight-knit military community, it's likely there was no shortage of soldiers willing to marry a widow.

Whether Mary remarried or was forced out with her children, I don't yet know. What I do know is that her children remained in Amherstburg. Her daughter Ann married Irish-born shoemaker John Brett, who operated a shop on Dalhousie Street with his brother-in-law, Richard Elliott. Ann's son—my great-grandfather—was Richard Ruddy Brett, who apprenticed at the *Amherstburg Echo* and later followed in the ink-stained footsteps of Henry S. Grant as editor of the *Essex Free Press*.

Conclusion

History often feels distant until we find our own name—or that of an ancestor—threaded through its fabric.

What began as an exploration of the 1838 Rebellion and the tensions along the Detroit River ended, for me, in the quiet barracks of Fort Malden, where a single musket tag brought the past into sharp and personal focus. My family's story is just one among many, but it serves as a reminder that behind every regiment, every battle, and every newspaper headline are ordinary people whose lives were shaped by extraordinary times. In tracing their footsteps, we keep their stories alive—and, in a small way, continue the work they left unfinished. 

SUGGESTED RESOURCES: Some of the text for this article is reproduced from my book, *The Rising Village: An Early History of Essex, Ontario*, 2022.

Other written resources consulted include the following:

Amherstburg 1796-1996: *The New Town on the Garrison Grounds*. Vol. 1. Amherstburg, ON: Amherstburg Bicentennial Book Committee, 1996.

Antal, Sandy, and Kevin R. Shackleton. *Duty Nobly Done: The Official History of the Essex and Kent Scottish Regiment*. Windsor, ON: Walkerville, 2006.

Eady, Ronald J. "Anti-American Sentiment in Essex County in the Wake of the Rebellions of 1837," *Ontario History* 61, no. 1 (March 1969), 1-8.

Jameson, Mrs. [Anna]. *Winter Studies and Summer Rambles in Canada*. Vol. 2. London: Saunders and Otley, 1838.

McKenna, Katherine M. J. *The Impact of the Upper Canadian Rebellion on Life in Essex County, 1837-42*. Parks Canada Microfiche Report Series 187. Ottawa: Parks Canada, 1985.

Western Herald (Sandwich). Accessed online at ink.ourdigitalworld.org (currently offline but expected to return soon).



THE HARROW NEWS
The Newspaper That Goes Home!
Contact us for all your printing needs

Our family operated newspaper and printing company has been proudly serving the community for generations.
Proud supporter of HEIRS

5 King St. Harrow 519-738-2542
harnews@bellnet.ca • printing@bellnet.ca

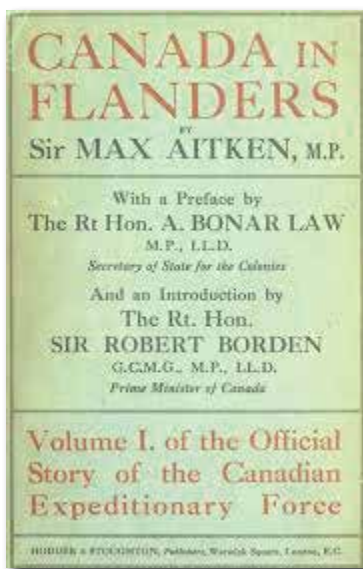
The Road to Flanders

By Laurie Brett



HEIRS recently came into possession of a history of the early days of the Great War. Written by Sir William Maxwell Aitken (1879-1964) and published in 1916 – just months after the Canadian Expeditionary Force arrived in Europe – the first volume of *Canada in Flanders* chronicles the flurry of preparations needed to send Canadian soldiers to the battlefields of Europe. Here are a few excerpts:

“ War came upon us without warning, like a thunderbolt from a clear sky. Our people were essentially non-military, fearing no aggression from a peace-loving neighbour, and ignorant of the imminence of German aggression. Yet, in seven weeks, Canada created the first apparatus of war. In seven weeks we assembled an army which, a few months later, was to save Calais on the battlefield of Langemarck. . .



The Minister of Militia, Major-General the Hon. Sir Sam Hughes, K.C.B., acted with the promptness and energy for which he was already famous in the Dominion. In less than a month the Government, which had asked for 20,000 men, found almost 40,000 at its disposal, and the Minister of Militia deemed it necessary to issue orders that no more recruits be enrolled for the first contingent. . .

As soon as the policy of the Government had been ratified, General Hughes devised and ordered the establishment of the largest camp that had ever been seen on Canadian soil. The site of Valcartier was well chosen. It lay some sixteen miles to the west of Quebec, within a day's march of the gathering transports. The soil was, in the main, light and sandy, and a river of pure water was available. Yet the work of adapting this virgin soil to military purposes was enormous, and the transformation, effected within a fortnight by an army of engineers and workers, a remarkable triumph of applied science. Roads were made,

drains laid down, a water supply with miles of pipes installed, electric lighting furnished from Quebec, and incinerators built for the destruction of dry refuse. A sanitary system, second to none that any camp has seen, was instituted. . . Troughs of drinking water, for horses, filled automatically, so that there was neither shortage nor waste. . . A line of rifle targets 3-1/2 miles long—the largest rifle range in the world—was constructed. . .

Within four days of the opening of the camp, nearly 6,000 men had arrived in it. A week later the number was 25,000. In those August days all roads led to Valcartier, and the railways rose to the occasion, gathering the first Division to the rendezvous, from every corner of the country, in great trains, each of which carried and fed 600 men. . .

While the new army underwent its preliminary training at Valcartier, there were other preparations of every kind to be made. The cloth mills of Montreal began to hum with the manufacture of khaki, which the needles of a great army of tailors converted into uniforms, greatcoats and cloaks. The Ordnance Department equipped the host with the Ross rifle—a Canadian-made arm. Regiments were shuffled and reshuffled into battalions; battalions into brigades. The whole force was inoculated against typhoid. There were stores to manufacture and to accumulate; a fleet of transports to assemble; a thousand small cogs in the machine to be nicely adjusted. . .

The feat of raising such a force is all the more remarkable when one considers that, with the exception of the Princess Patricia's Light Infantry, the overwhelming majority of the men who volunteered for the Great War were civilians, without previous experience or training.

When it was time to deploy, General Hughes expanded the number of infantry brigades from three to four,

the fourth brigade added to supply reinforcements as needed. The First Canadian Division and its reserves left Valcartier on the night of September 23, 2014, marched onto a fleet of ships, and sailed down the St. Lawrence to Gaspé Bay where a number of warships waited to escort them across the Atlantic in a convoy. Their uneventful voyage ended on October 14, when the ships arrived at Plymouth Sound. The men would spend the next four months in training on Salisbury Plain.

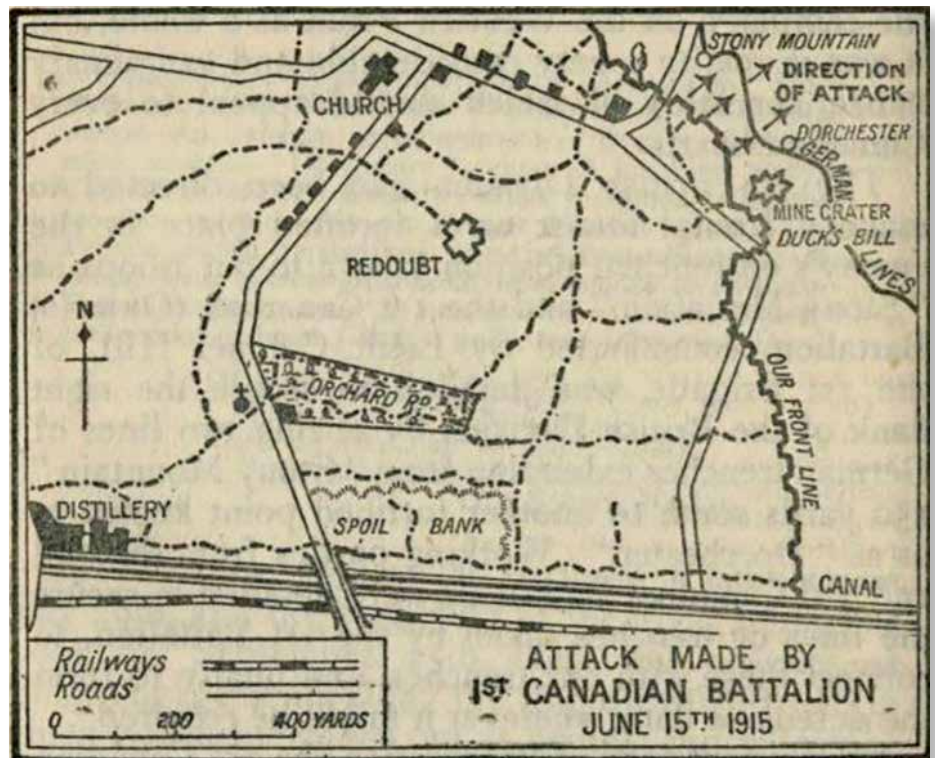
A division of Canadian soldiers left England on February 15, 1915, arriving in the Flanders region of Belgium, near Ypres. As an eyewitness to these early days of the conflict, Aitken observed that the military's field array resembled a fan:

“The long, wavy edge of the fan is the line of men in the firing trenches, at the very forefront of affairs, often within a stone's-throw of the opposing German line. Some hundreds of yards behind this firing line lie the support trenches, also filled with men. The men in the firing and supporting trenches exchange places every forty-eight hours. After a four days' spell they all retire for four days' rest, fresh troops taking their places as they move out. At the end of their four days' rest they return again to the trenches. All relieving movements are carried out in the dark to avoid the enemy's rifle fire.

Further back, along the ribs of the fan, one finds the headquarters of the many brigades; behind these, headquarters of division; then headquarters of army corps, then of armies—the groups becoming fewer and fewer in number as you recede—until, at the end of the fan handle, one reaches the General headquarters, where the Commander-in-Chief stands, with his hand on the dynamo which sends its impulses through every part of the great machine spread out in front.

The deplorable conditions that accompanied trench warfare are well known, but Aitken's description brings them to life. Speaking about the Allied troops, he writes:

“They lived and fought in seas of mud all through the winter. The water was pumped out of the trenches with hand-pumps, only to ooze back again



Attack made by 1st Canadian Battalion, June 15th 1915, from Canada in Flanders

through the sodden soil. Plank platforms were put down, and straw was piled in. Yet the mud smothered everything. The men stood in mud, sat in mud, and lay in mud. Often it was as much as they could do to prevent the mud from clogging their rifles. They crawled through mud to the trenches when it was their time to relieve those in the firing line. They had to hide in the mud of the trenches to escape the German bullets. It was a choice of mud or death.

Aitken's three-volume eyewitness account of the war provides details and insights that are far too numerous to reproduce here. However, an additional word about Aitken himself may be of interest.

Max Aitken is best known as 1st Baron Lord Beaverbrook. Born in New Brunswick, Aitken acquired wealth through the purchase of industrial and media enterprises in Canada, and then moved to England in 1910, becoming a member of parliament with influential connections. Knighted by King George V in 1911, he was a British newspaper publisher by the start of the war and was instrumental in establishing the Canadian War Records Office in London. His visits to the Western Front resulted in candid reports that were published in Canadian newspapers, giving those at home the opportunity to understand what wartime was like for their loved ones. 

HeirGloom

IMAGES FROM
THE 2025 HEIRS
CALENDAR



November 2025
HARROW FLOUR MILL

The Harrow Flour Mill was located at the corner of King Street between Victoria and Centre Street. The Mill was established in the late 1800s.



December 2025
KING STREET BUSINESS SECTION

Downtown Harrow looking west on the south side of King Street circa 1945. Notice Darby's Drug Store and the curved shape of the roof line next to Darby's (now Golden Law & Hopetown Dental).

**GIFT GIVING
JUST GOT
EASIER!**

AVAILABLE AT **HEIRS** (IN THE HARROW ARENA)
– CONTACT HEIRSONT@GMAIL.COM –
OR AT THE **HOLIDAY HOBNOB** ON
DECEMBER 5 AT THE KING STREET CAFE



TALES FROM THE CREEK



Lighthearted and laughter-filled, *Tales from the Creek* captures everyday moments of the past that now feel extraordinary.

Created using Anne Beneteau's simple yet effective formula for short story writing, they're not quite children's books—but also, yes they are! These memory catchers preserve stories of earlier times, especially childhood, helping older generations recall and share the simple joys and traditions that shaped their lives.

Written by Dennis and Anne Beneteau, the series recalls Dennis's 1950s–60s childhood along River Canard, a French-speaking community near the Detroit River. Life was simple but full—ice came by truck, water from a pump, and the church anchored the community.

The *Winter Skates* and *Summer Shenanigans* editions, with Gaye McGee's nostalgic illustrations, bring those days to life in short, engaging tales that spark laughter and connection across generations.

Perfect for bedtime reading, "Coffee and Conversation" sessions, or simply sharing aloud—these stories remind us that telling our stories keeps our memories alive. To purchase your own copies contact annebeneteau55@gmail.com or visit www.Giggle-Stories.com

Stories that Spark More Stories Workshops

Everyone has a story...

Recall and share the simple joys and traditions that shape our lives

Inspired by *Tales from the Creek*, Anne Beneteau leads workshops—helping others capture their own stories in short, heartwarming narratives that celebrate life and legacy. Through a simple, encouraging approach developed from her years as a teacher and administrator, Anne guides participants in writing stories that blend personal history with personality and humour. These stories can stand alone or be woven together into small books of remembered joy.

Discover how your own life stories—ordinary then, extraordinary now—can continue to spark laughter, connection, and legacy for generations to come.

WORKSHOPS AVAILABLE

annebeneteau55@gmail.com or visit www.Giggle-Stories.com

Colchester Village PART 2

By Milo Johnson

Beach Party!



Colchester Beach postcard, circa 1960s

In our memories of Colchester Village, the music of laughter, friendship, and community never stopped. The moving big band, contemporary jazz, and blues sounds of earlier years gave way to mellow crooners like Nat King Cole and Bing Crosby, the bebop beats of the 1950s, rhythm and blues, country, and the rise of rock & roll. The popularity of Motown and rock & roll grew throughout the 1960s and 1970s. You could hear the music echoing softly over the beachfront, down Sullivan and Jackson streets and cottage areas of the village.

Tourists continued to flood into Colchester Village during the summer months. Just as the music evolved, so too did the village. The dance floors of the earlier era gave way to thriving restaurants and roadhouses. Noise and rowdiness complaints continued into the 1960s and 1970s as the cottage rental businesses expanded. This was the character of our tourist town.

Businesses and restaurants adapted and adjusted to the fading of the dance halls, and summer life in the village remained vibrant until the challenges of the 1980s.

Commercial Businesses

Many cottage owners from Windsor and the United States rented their properties on weekends. The beat of

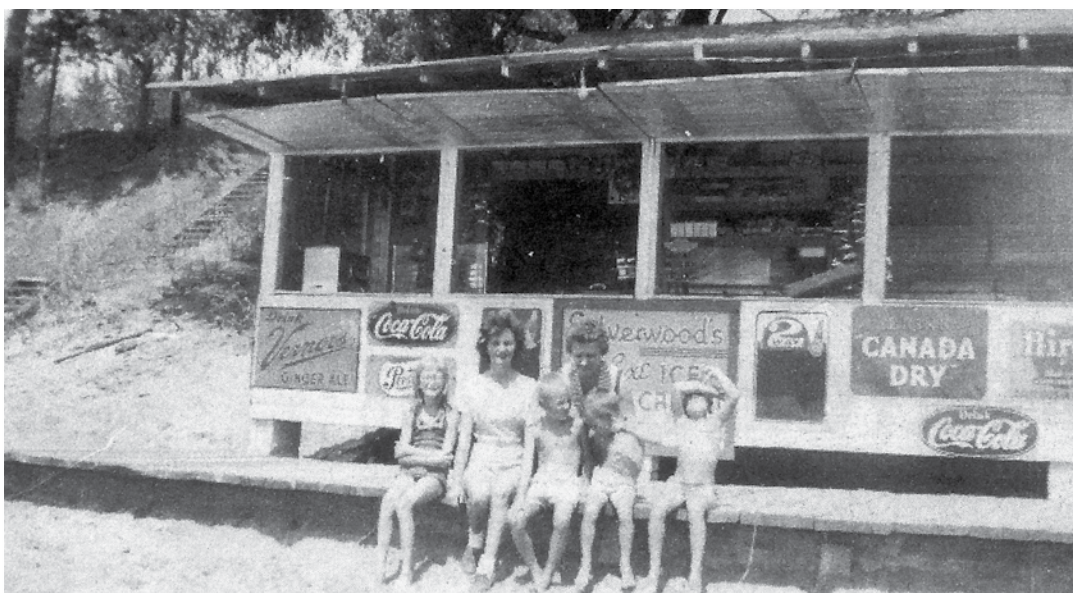
Colchester lived on as businesses adjusted to tragedy and loss. McVittie's Casino and Restaurant on Murdoch Street was sold to the Bygrove family. The heyday of Colchester Casino and the big band era gave way to a quiet snack bar, grocery, laundromat, teen dances, and roller skating. Bygrove's was bought by Bill Miniot in 1986 and became the Village Corner Store – a general store, post office, craft shop, news stand, and arcade. It was destroyed by fire in 1996.

The Village Country Store and XTR Gas Bar, opened in the 1970s, continues to be a quaint establishment located at 60 County Road 50. The store continues to provide a variety of goods and services.

Down on Jackson Street, Gorski's Lake Breeze Grill owned by Edward Gorski, was a popular hangout for many teens, as it boasted pinball machines, air hockey, constant juke box music, dancing and food – French fries, burgers, and ice-cold pop. The sandy, hardwood floors were indicative of the beachfront locale.

Lulu's – a soul food restaurant owned by Lulu Clingman – operated from 1950 to 1985. It was in the northeast section of the village on Erie Road.

The beat of the village reverberated in print along the



Colchester Beach 1956: Barbera Lankin far left. Photo from the Friar Family Archives

north shore of Lake Erie. Hartman Hesbon, a local photographer, ran Hartman's Studio and was involved with *The Beachcomber* newspaper. A summertime tabloid, *The Beachcomber* was in the same building as Hartman's Studio at the corner of Draper and Daly streets. The paper focused on events of the beach area, covering activities from Colchester to Leamington, and was rightly or wrongly known for its 'girl of the week' on the cover. *Harrow & Colchester South This Week* was a year-round newspaper produced by Tom Hunter from 1978-1991. The paper covered news and events for the Township of Colchester South, which included Harrow and Colchester Village. Its office was in the town of Harrow. Cecile McKenzie of the *Harrow News* also reported on Colchester events.

Cottages, Restaurants, and Cabins

Klie's Beach cabins and cottages continued to operate



Lankin's ad, Harrow News 1958

at the end of Erie Road. The Hillis Horseshoe Cabins on Sullivan, were established by Kathleen Hillis and her sons, Les and Jerry, in 1946. They had seven to twelve cabins off Richardson Lane set in a horseshoe shape.

The Wayside Motel, Restaurant, and Cabins resumed under the management of Joseph Swiderski, who became the proprietor in 1957 and continued business until the early 1980s. The Silver

Crescent Restaurant with six

cabins became a soul food restaurant in the late 1960s and continued renting cabins until the decline of Colchester Beach in the late 1990s.

The Harbour and Beach

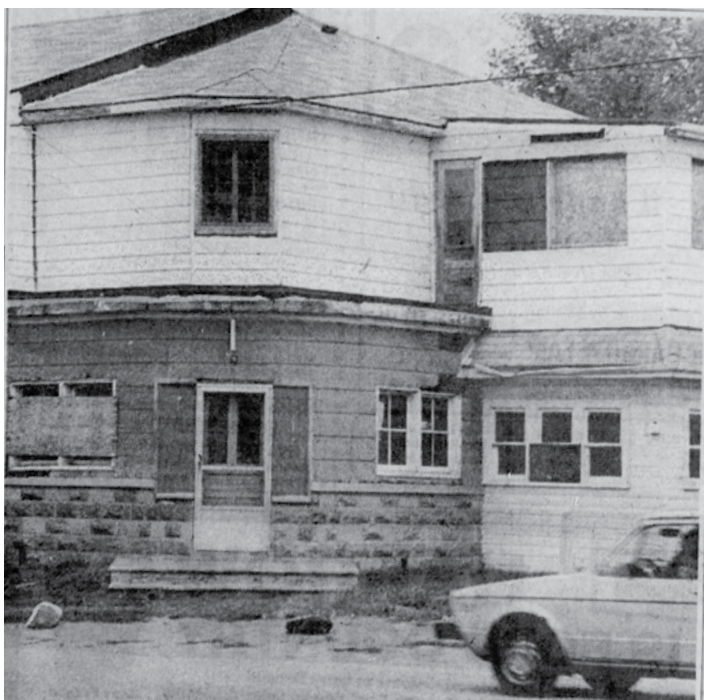
In this tourist-based village, the sandy beach and harbour remained the main attraction. From the transistor radios of the 1960s to ghetto blasters and Walkmans of the 1970s and 1980s, the music played on at the crowded beach. Colchester dock experienced many changes. The original Hackett's Landing of the 1800s was transformed into a commercial fishing harbour. Small boat rentals and sport fishing continued from the pier.

The former Hackett store on Murdoch Street was purchased by the Lankin family. The Lankin brothers operated Lankin's Boat Livery and Bait & Tackle shack at the east-side base of the harbour. They rented boats and ran a commercial fishing boat. East of Lankin's, Manson Campbell ran Campbell's Boat Rentals. He offered small boats for leisure fishing and later operated a fishing tug.

Smelt runs were a highlight of the summer, as the brief run of the small fish was scooped up by locals dragging nets through the shallow lake shore water onto the sandy beach during hot summer nights.

Pigeon's Fisheries was a mainstay commercial fishing enterprise from the 1960s until the early 2000s, though they could not run operations from the harbour when it fell into disrepair in the late 1990s.

One of the most difficult aspects of this beautiful beach



Once a flourishing dance hall and snack bar, Gorski's would be demolished for improvements to the Colchester waterfront.
The Windsor Star, August 29, 1984

locale was the drownings. That's when the joy of the beach and the beat of the village would stop momentarily, recognizing the frailties of life. Boat rentals meant some tourists would venture out without respect for or proper understanding of boating and water safety.

Throughout the years, tourists and locals not used to swimming in natural waters off the beach and pier faced danger. Most of the time, lifeguards were not present. The beach area was also prone to undertows when the water flow of the lake shifted. Far too often, swimmers did not understand the perils of the lake water.

From the 1920s to 2000, many locals made daring rescues of people in trouble on the beach, at the pier, and on the waters. These acts of bravery became part of Colchester's identity – the dedication of its residents, the risks of the unknown, and the realities of beach life.

As the music became somewhat silent in the village, the number of permanent residents increased gradually through the years. Many non-resident cottage owners sold their properties. Buyers from Windsor, seeking a quieter way of life, began to populate the village, surrounding beach roads and beach fronts.

The infamous Lake Breeze Grill was razed in 1985 during a harbour and beach cleanup. Bygrove's, which had a new owner, caught fire and was eventually demolished.

The quiet rural farming land surrounding Colchester Village also evolved. Though fresh produce continued to be grown, the orchards and vegetable farms began to give way to vineyards. A new era had begun, but there was continual music in Colchester - softer, mellow sounds of transformation. 🌱



Bygroves, on the corner of Dunn and County Road 50

DISCOVER ESSEX IN A WHOLE NEW WAY!

FROM

Colchester

TO

Harrow

&

McGregor

TO

Essex Centre

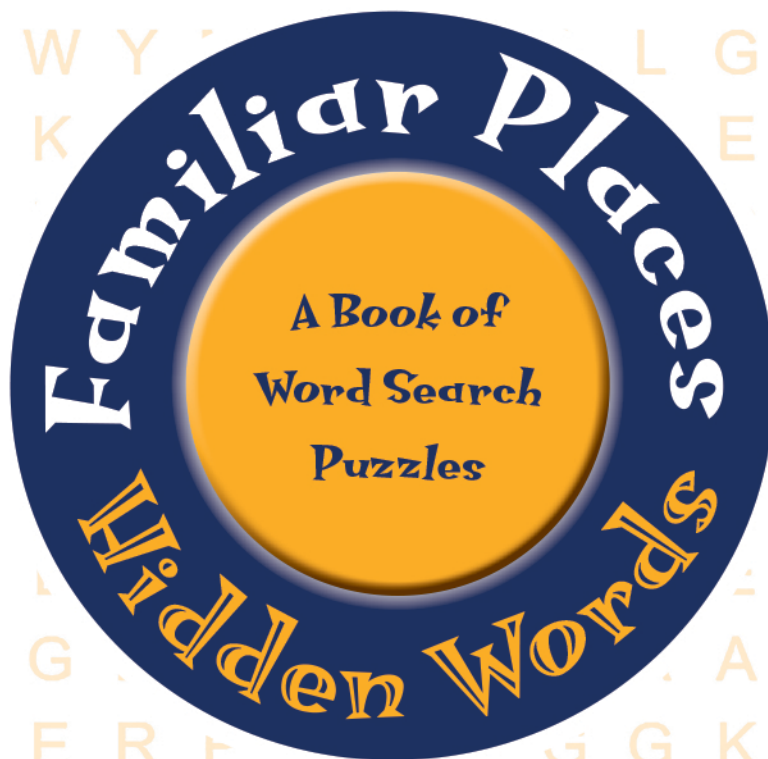
AND ALL THE PLACES IN BETWEEN

Written by Laurie Brett, author of
The Rising Village: An Early
History of Essex, Ontario,
and Colchester 225:
150 Historical Facts.



\$20

A PORTION OF EVERY SALE



60 HISTORICAL SKETCHES
PAIRED WITH 60 WORD PUZZLES

#38 Is There a Doctor in the House?

If you became sick in the early 19th century, your remedy would likely come from medicinal plants. You might use Peruvian bark (quinine) for malaria, sulphur ointment for skin disorders, or household ingredients like mustard and salt to create a poultice or induce vomiting. Contagious diseases were far less easy to remedy.

One of our local history books, *Harrow and Colchester South, 1762-1892*, provides a brief history of medical licensing in Upper Canada and traces the first township physician back to Dr. Malcolm McDonald in 1834.

Harrow's first resident doctor was Dr. Forrest Bell who built a practice in Amherstburg and moved to Windsor to give his family the advantages of higher education.

Dr. Andrew Fisher began his medical career in Oshawa, but moved to Amherstburg in 1859 to work as superintendent of the Malden Lunatic Asylum.

Dr. Thomas Hawkins, a naval surgeon, settled in Colchester about 1840, serving in many additional capacities—school superintendent, township clerk, justice of the peace, commissioner of oaths, bookkeeper for John R. Park, and church warden at Christ Church.

Dr. George Ring is remembered for his slow horse, Rodi! It was said that patients either got better or died waiting for the doctor to arrive. Dr. Ring arrived in Colchester in 1855 and had a rural practice at a time when malaria was a common malady.

Dr. William Campeau assumed Dr. Ring's practice when he retired and is remembered for volunteering to look after smallpox victims on Pelee Island when an epidemic broke out.

In 1889, Dr. Daniel Mitchell took over the year-old practice of Dr. George McKenzie in Harrow. McKenzie moved to Essex Centre and became the town's medical officer of health. Though public health measures were improving, contagious diseases continued to be a concern. Having treated many contagious, Dr. McKenzie died of a severe case of typhoid fever in 1906.

In Essex, Dr. McKenzie initially worked in partnership with Dr. James Brien, the town's first doctor who opened drug stores in Essex and Harrow in the 1860s. Both Dr. Brien and his son, Dr. John Wesley Brien, were elected to the House of Commons for Essex South. The Canadian Legion in Essex is named in honor of Capt. J.W. Brien who served in the World War I Canadian Expeditionary Force.

Is There a Doctor in the House? #38

E C T M A L A R I A D K Y X
R I N L S U R G E O N D M V
O M E U Z J J Z R C E U P Q
T E M N R R R N O M S E U J
S D T A A D P N E T R I Q P
G I N T L I T R A U N B O X
U P I I S A C R V I R U P S
R E O C G M D I N R L O U X
D L L I U I A E S T E L D M
T T O L O N W L I Y P V A I
M U Y H B Q D C L H L E Y
S S P A P Y E X U P A P Y F
A Y R J Z X K R R D O Q M Y
T K P X P D K Q Y B N X J D

FIND WORDS

Asylum	Lunatic	Peruvian bark	Rodi
Contagious	Malaria	Physician	Smallpox
Drug store	Malaria	Poultice	Sulphur
Epidemic	Mustard	Quinine	Surgeon
Examination	Remedy	Remedy	Remedy

AVAILABLE AT THE
HOLIDAY HOBNOB ON DEC 5
(@ THE KING ST CAFE) AND AT
HEIRSONT@GMAIL.COM

GOES TO SUPPORT LOCAL HERITAGE