



Essex murals and the stories they tell



The Tale of our Fiery Rebellion

On July 21, 1896, the sky over Essex County shone bright with the glow of flames.

That was the night when local residents, fed up with paying high access fees for poorly maintained roads between Essex and Oldcastle, took matters into their own hands and burned the tollgates to the ground.

The problem of road maintenance in the early days of settlement was solved by leasing roads to private companies and individuals. The part of Talbot Road that runs from Essex to Oldcastle had reportedly been leased to Alexander Cameron who failed to fulfill his end of the bargain. Swampy conditions made it impassable at times, earning it the name "Cameron's Creek." It was reported to be "too dirty for bathing and too shallow for navigation."

To make matters worse, the tolls charged at the four gates between Essex and Oldcastle kept creeping up.

A group of Essex citizens hatched a plan to put an end to what they saw as greed.

Disguised in old clothes and slouch hats, their faces blackened to avoid recognition (and life in prison for arson), the group first set fire to the west end tollgate, then started marching east followed by a mob of cheering residents. Upon learning that the new east end gatekeeper was ill, the gang decided to leave that tollgate for another day. They jumped into their rigs and headed for Maidstone, then Oldcastle. When dawn broke, three tollgates had been burned to the ground. The fourth one met its demise five days later.

The names of only a few of the men who took part in the rebellion have been recorded. When the police came to investigate, they were surprised to learn no one knew anything. No charges were ever laid.

A small town with BIG stories to tell.

Since the Canada Southern Railway laid tracks across the Talbot Trail, Essex has witnessed a fiery rebellion, two catastrophic explosions and many triumphs of human ingenuity and perseverance.

Outraged by unfair tollgate fees, Essex residents rose in rebellion and burned the tollgates.

Laid low by two powerful explosions – a boxcar blow-up in 1907 and a natural gas explosion in 1980 – the residents rallied to rebuild.

The grit and determination of its residents have made Essex home to many firsts: the first Canadian motorcycle, the first Canadian tractor, the first steam engine, the first retractable ladder, the first aluminum ladder, and one of the first Canadian automobiles.

Visit our outdoor mural gallery in the heart of Essex. We're just a 20-minute drive from Windsor: Take Huron Church Road to the Highway 3 exit to Leamington, then drive until you see the sign for Essex at County Road 8. If you're travelling west on Highway 401 from London and Toronto, take the Puce exit and follow the signs to Essex.



Town of Essex
33 Talbot Street South
Essex, Ontario N8M 1A8
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Stories that grew a community

This little town has many stories to tell. Stories of challenges and stories of triumphs. Human ingenuity and determination have made Essex a town of ideas and inventions that have transformed the way we live. Learn about Essex and its past by visiting our outdoor mural gallery:

1 Sports In Essex

by Dan Lessard

Essex has a province-wide reputation in sports achievement. This mural depicts some of the people who have proudly represented Essex in amateur and professional sports across Ontario and around the world.

2 Liberation

by Layne Vanloo, Elaine Guitar, Johanna Johnson

In celebration of the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II, the Dutch community commissioned this mural depicting Holland's liberation by Canadian soldiers, including the Essex Scottish Regiment, in 1945.

3 Fiery Rebellion

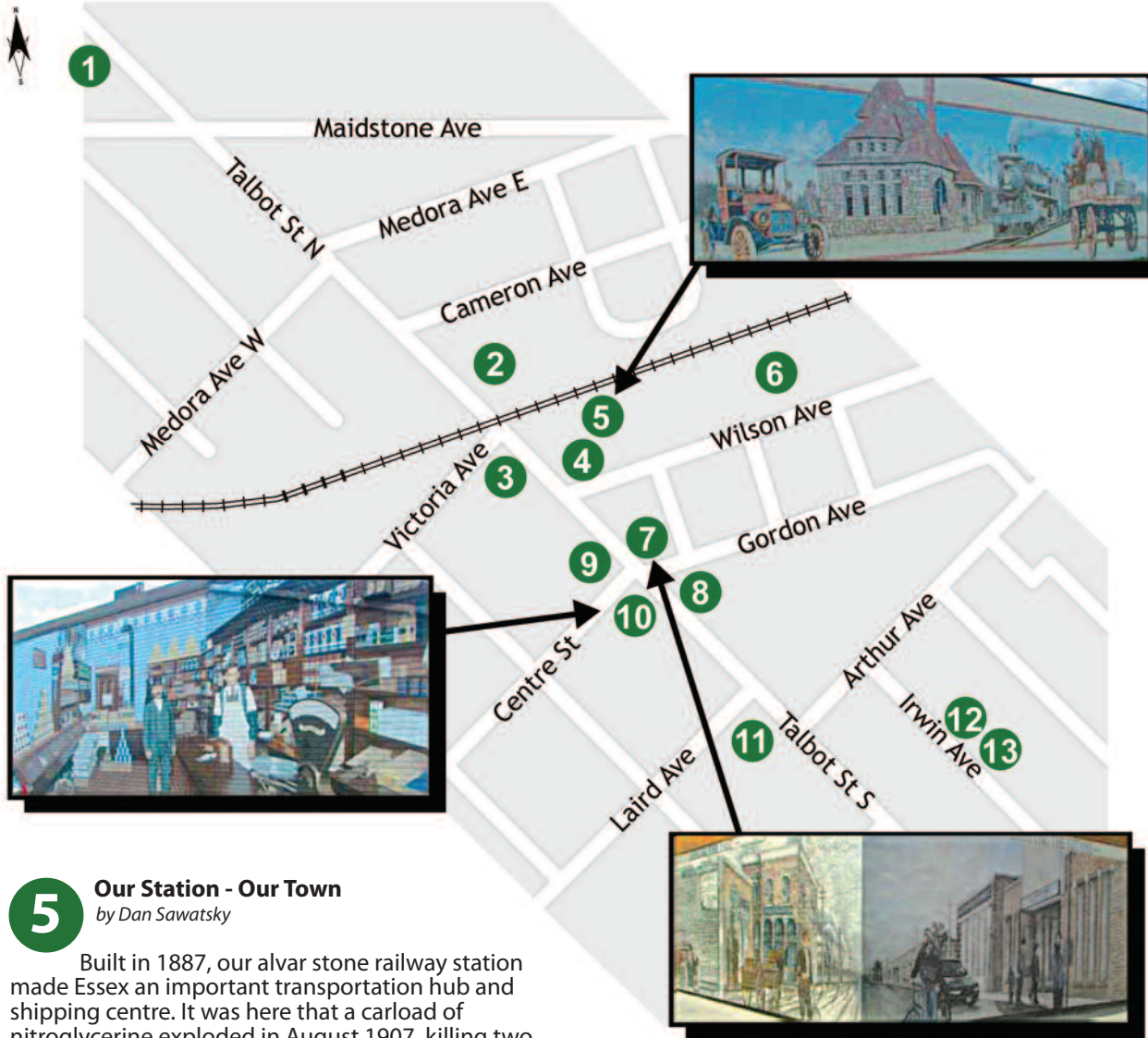
by Milica Yaksich

Angry over high tolls and the poor condition of Talbot Road from Essex to Oldcastle, a group of disguised locals, followed by a cheering crowd, set fire to four tollgates in July 1896. When police investigated, they found no one who could identify the conspirators.

4 Our Rural Roots

by John Hood

As home to the first agricultural office in Ontario, Essex celebrates its rural roots in this mural depicting nostalgic scenes from the early days of farming.



5 Our Station - Our Town

by Dan Sawatsky

Built in 1887, our alvar stone railway station made Essex an important transportation hub and shipping centre. It was here that a carload of nitroglycerine exploded in August 1907, killing two men and shattering the town.

6 Forest Transformation

by Theodore Ziegler

It's hard to believe that dense forest once surrounded Essex. James Naylor established Naylor Cooperage and Lumber Mill in 1882 to make barrel staves and agricultural tools. This mural depicts the mill and lumber yard that helped transform the landscape.

7 Sharing The Past

by Dennis White

From a screen-door shanty built in the early 1880s to today's modern banking service, the past and the present converge in this panoramic corner mural depicting the first CIBC bank in Essex.

8 The Tradition Continues

by John Hood

The Kingsville-Essex Associated Band is the longest continuously operating community band in Canada. This three-panel mural depicts the progressive styles of this award-winning band, which continues the pride and traditions set out by its founders in 1937.

9 Rotarians In Service

by Brian Romagnoli

Seventy years of service throughout the community and around the world are depicted in this Essex Rotary Club commemorative mural.

10 Corner Grocer

by Bruce Bezaire

Welcome to Raines Grocery Store. This mural invites you to walk in and place your order with owner Arthur Raines, an early mayor of Essex who is said to have given penny candy to children while their mothers shopped.

11 Wasco Innovations

by Brandon Walker

Invention and innovation are celebrated in our smallest and newest mural. Damaged engine blocks became a thing of the past when John H. Wass invented the valve seat. Wasco Valve Seat Co. went on to manufacture specialty tools for WWII military vehicles.

12 A New Era

by Brian Romagnoli

When the new Town of Essex was established on January 1, 1999, it united four communities. This mural depicts the municipal leaders from each of the four communities with a central focus on the new town's first female mayor, Joan Flood.

13 Scouting Through The Years

by Milica Yaksich

This memorial to Cub Scout Jeff McMurren is also a celebration of Scouting and its local leaders since 1947.

And the stories keep on coming...