Colchester 225:
150 Historical Facts

CANADA 150 · COLCHESTER 225

Get Your Red & White ON

essex

The brand logo for *Get Your Red & White ON* was designed to reflect the significant place that our region holds in Canadian history. The five Town of Essex colours used in the iconic maple leaf were chosen for their local significance:

- Brilliant Navy Blue for **Stability and Strength**
- Wedgewood Blue for **Water**
- Lime Green for **Land**
- Olive Green for **Nature and Growth**
- Imitation Gold for **Abundant Sunshine**

Revised Edition

Preface

"What terrible events determined the population of our townships!
*What courage they had to start over again!"*
– HEIRS Question Box, March 1, 1978, The Harrow News

Colchester 225: 150 Historical Facts began as a project to identify 150 interesting historical things about Colchester, both as a village and as a large township. During Canada's 150th anniversary year, it seemed like an appropriate, if not simple, thing to do. Many months of research later, it became very clear that the task was not as straight-forward as expected, but it was most certainly interesting. The result is this book, written in honour of Canada 150 and Ontario 150, but with an expansive view to celebrating Colchester 225!

On July 29, 2017, the Town of Essex celebrated this landmark year by hosting a one-day event at Colchester Harbour. *Get Your Red & White ON* aimed to build awareness and community pride about early contributions to the establishment of our province and our country, while also celebrating the great things happening here today. During that event, an interpretive plaque about Historic Colchester was unveiled at the corner of County Road 50 and Jackson Street. A limited edition booklet titled *Colchester 225: A Brief History* was also distributed at the event. The booklet tells a few of the stories contained in this larger work.

The history of our area is much richer than you might first imagine. Before white settlers came to the area, Indian tribes encamped along the north shore of Lake Erie, connecting their settlements with foot paths that later became modern roads. French settlement along the Detroit River began in the early 1700s with the arrival of military commanders and Huron missionaries. In the aftermath of the American Revolutionary War, displaced English settlers who had witnessed "terrible events" and withstood great hardships on their journey began to
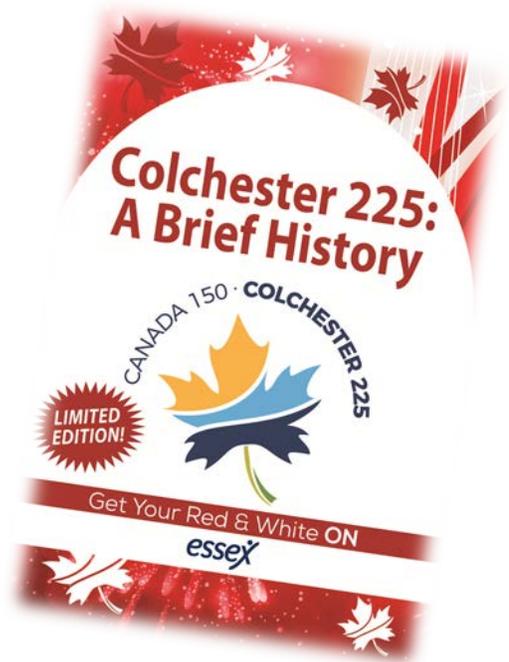
trickle into Essex County, first along the Detroit River near Amherstburg and then along the north shore in "The New Settlement." Parts of Colchester and Gosfield and many local families date their origins back to this time, at the end of the 1700s, when settlement of British North America began in earnest.

This book is intended to spark curiosity, to educate residents about our pioneer past, and to encourage people to find out more by visiting our museums, historic landmarks and historical societies.

Although this work is not comprehensive or academic in nature, it was compiled by consulting comprehensive, academic materials and by visiting many significant historic sites. A select bibliography is included at the back of this book. Please note that the 150 entries are organized by topic but each entry may not necessarily have a connection to the prior or succeeding entries.

We are deeply indebted to a vast number of historians and researchers who have done the difficult work of collecting and recording our local history. While the list is long, we would like to acknowledge the Harrow Early Immigrant Research Society (HEIRS), an invaluable resource on the history of Harrow and Colchester South. In particular, we are indebted to Edith Woodbridge and Milo Johnson for their extremely helpful insights and contributions.

Others who provided materials, insights, photographs, and general encouragement include Chris Carter, Sharon Mulcaster, Robert Boose, Janet Cobban, Mike Drexler, Anne Restoule, Anne Anger, Jeff Coulter, Gerry Pouget, Arthur Rhyno, and staff at the Town of Essex. Thank you, everyone, for your support of this project.

A special thanks goes to Elise Geschiere, our Heritage Summer Student, whose keen interest in local history, dogged pursuit of relevant images, and acute attention to detail have made this finished book a reality.

Lastly, we'd like to thank the Province of Ontario for providing funding and making possible our community celebration of Canada/Ontario 150.

Please address inquiries or comments to:
Laurie Brett, Deputy Clerk, Legal and Legislative Services
Town of Essex, 33 Talbot Street South, Essex, ON N8M 1A8
519-776-7336, ext. 1129
lbrett@essex.ca

ONTARIO
150

Original Inhabitants

Indian Encampments

In the early 1700s, Detroit was selected by French commander Antoine Laumet de Lamothe Cadillac as a strategic military location. To stimulate the local fur trade, Cadillac invited indigenous tribes of the lakes region to come back to the hunting grounds near Fort Pontchartrain that they had fled under pressure from the Iroquois. In *The Windsor Border Region*, Ernest J. Lajeunesse reports that four tribes came and stayed near Detroit: a branch of the Ottawas from the northern part of Lower Michigan, the Potawatomi from Lake Michigan, the Hurons (also called Wyandots) from Michilimackinac, and the Chippewas or Ojibways from Sault Ste. Marie, joined by a number of Mississaugas. The Ottawa and Huron Indians established villages on the south side of the river, at present-day Windsor. According to William McCormick, the Ottawa also built villages and encampments along the north shore of Lake Erie. In his *Sketch of the Western District*, McCormick writes: "The Original Inhabitants of this District were the Autaway & Taway Indians but they having sold the most of their lands to the British there are now but few of them permanently resident in the District." According to Lajeunesse, evidence of at least five Indian encampments was identified by surveyors and early settlers living along the north shore of Lake Erie.

> *"The Original inhabitants of this District were the Autaway & Taway Indians but they having sold the most of their lands to the British there are now but few of them permanently resident in the district."*
>
> *William McCormick, A Sketch of the Western District (1824)*

The Old Tote Road

The Old Tote Road was one of the main Indian trails of Essex County. It ran from an Indian village at Oxley, passing north of Big Creek (a significant barrier to foot travel), then on to the Detroit River. In Colchester, the trail ran parallel to Gore Road (also known as Potlake Road) and was located between Gore Road and Front Road (today's County Road 50). At the Detroit River, the trail was directly across from the terminal point of the Old Sauk Trail that went to Chicago.

Land Grants, Divisions and Restoration

Caldwell's Grant

When the American Revolution ended in 1783, many soldiers who had fought for the British had little hope of returning to their homes in the United States. As a reward for their patriotism and compensation for their losses, these men were offered grants of land under the condition that they settle and improve the land within one year. Captain William Caldwell, an accomplished commander in Butler's Rangers, invited disbanded soldiers to come from Niagara and settle along the Detroit River. When they arrived, however, there were few available parcels of land. So, in 1784, Caldwell secured a grant from the Indians for "a tract of land on the north shore of Lake Erie, from a creek four miles from the mouth of the Detroit River, to a small creek about a mile and a half beyond Cedar Creek." Originally unnamed, the settlement was divided into 97 lots of about 200 acres each. Although provisions and tools were promised to the settlers, they were slow to arrive and only a few of these soldiers settled successfully.
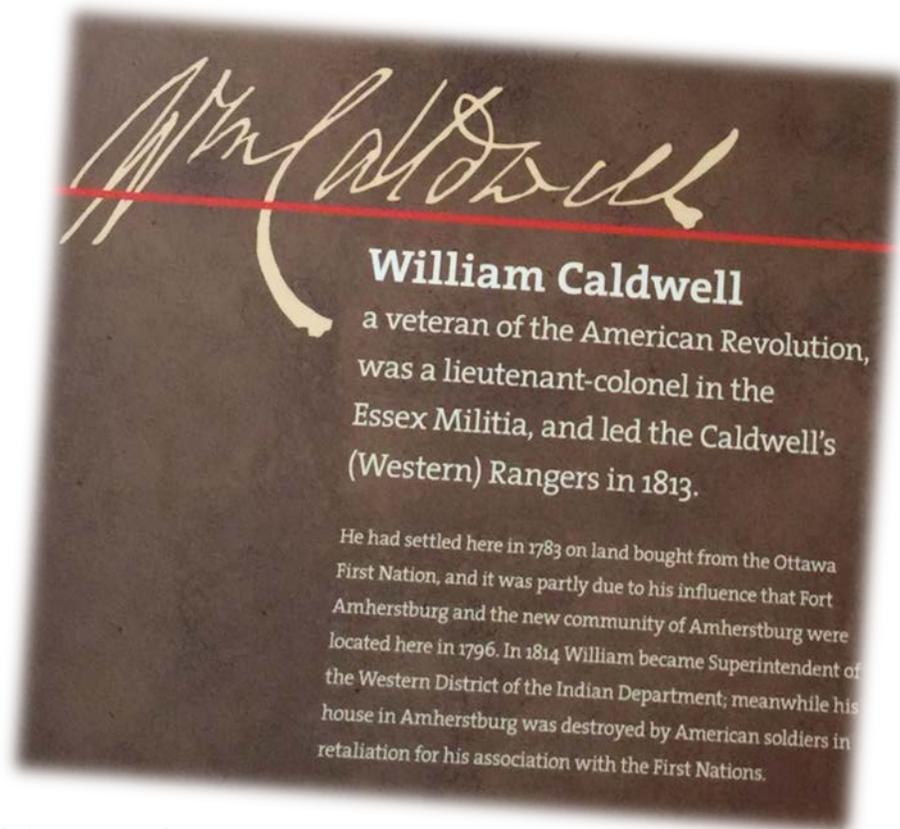
Caldwell signature plaque
Fort Malden, Amherstburg

1787 Survey

In 1787, Thomas Smith surveyed the north shore of Lake Erie to enable early settlers (including some squatters) to know where their lots began and ended. Smith worked under the direction of Major Robert Matthews stationed at Fort Detroit. As a result of Smith's work, 97 lots from Mill Creek to Malden Township were identified as part of this original land survey, 65 of them in Colchester. The lots were long, narrow ribbons of 200 acres each, created in the French tradition and fronting on Lake Erie to facilitate easy communication along the "water highway" as roads were yet to be built. When all the waterfront lots were taken, a second concession consisting of 52 lots was added in 1788.

The New Settlement

The section of lakefront property that Capt. William Caldwell secured from the Indians in 1784 and that Thomas Smith surveyed in 1787 was called "The New Settlement." This name distinguished it from the old settlements at L'Assomption and Petite Côté, both located along the Detroit River. With Lord Dorchester's Proclamation of 1788, both the old and new settlements became part of the judicial "District of Hesse," named in deference to British King George III's Germanic origins. The Province of Quebec was divided into Upper and Lower Canada in 1791 and the district was renamed the Western District in 1792.

The McKee Purchase

Alexander McKee, the British Indian agent at Detroit and a man of great influence among the western tribes, concluded a treaty with four Indian nations in 1790, ceding nearly 1,344,000 acres of land in modern-day southwestern Ontario to the Crown. As a result of the "McKee Purchase," the Ottawa, Chippewa, Potawatomi, and Huron Indians relinquished lands in exchange for "valuable wares and merchandise" including blankets, combs, looking glasses, penknives, ribbons, silk handkerchiefs, hats, tobacco and rum, valued at £1200. Once clear title to the land was obtained, the Crown moved to populate the area with people who had demonstrated their patriotism. Of the 121 people living in the New Settlement in the summer of 1790, only three were not Loyalists or soldiers.

Two Connected Townships

Following the McKee Purchase of 1790, surveyor Patrick McNiff conducted another survey of the north shore of Lake Erie, showing the names of the earliest claimants on each lot. The townships were not yet officially named and so became known as "Two Connected Townships in the New Settlement, Lake Erie." They would soon become known as Colchester and Gosfield Townships.

1794 Survey by Patrick McNiff

Proclamation of 1792

John Graves Simcoe, the first Lieutenant-Governor of Upper Canada, divided the province into 19 counties and named the counties and townships after places in England. The southernmost county became Essex County and the settlement area along Lake Erie formerly known as "Two Connected Townships" was divided into two townships named Colchester and Gosfield. Colchester's date of origin is thus tied to the Proclamation of 1792, making Colchester 225 years old in 2017.

Clergy and Crown Reserves

For every five acres of land granted to a settler, surveyors were required to reserve one acre for the Crown and one acre for the "support of a Protestant clergy." As early settlers along Lake Erie had already made improvements to the land before the first surveys were conducted, the reserves could not be interspersed among the settlers. As a result, the Crown and Clergy Reserves were set aside as huge blocks, starting at the 5th Concession and extending northward. Construction of inland roads was delayed and inland settlement was hindered until the reserves were opened for settlement in the 1840s.

Colchester Village

On early maps of "The New Settlement," lots 68, 69 and 70 were identified as "Land Reserved for a Village." Colchester Village was the first village laid out in Upper Canada west of Niagara. But the village did not materialize until a new survey conducted in 1841 laid out one-acre village lots in the front and 25-acre park lots in the rear. The graveyard and old stone church were included in the layout.
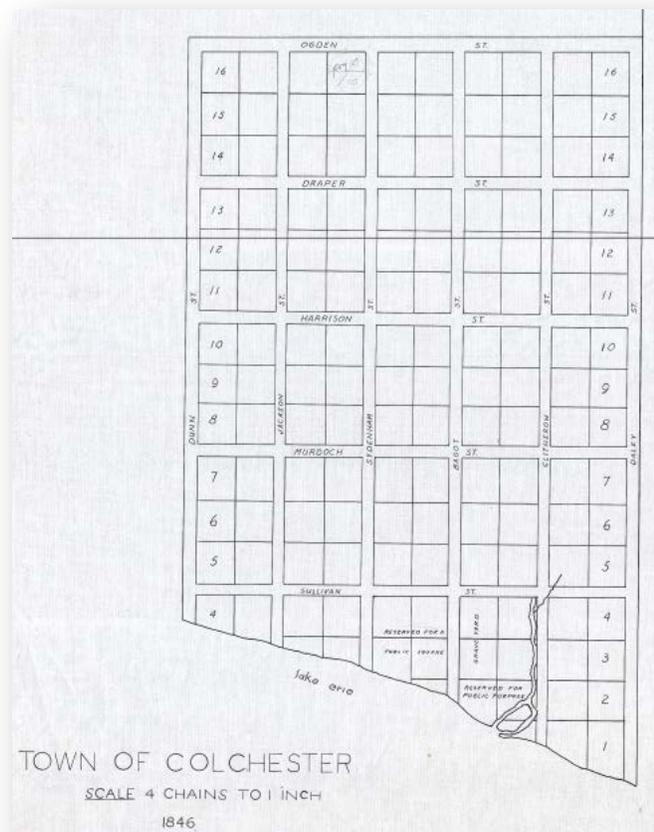

Plan for the Town of Colchester, 1846

Township Divided in Two

From 1792 to 1880, Colchester was a single township that extended from the north shore of Lake Erie to the centre of Essex County. Until the mid-1800s, the interior of Essex County was heavily forested and unsettled. When the Canada Southern Railway started to blaze its way across the Talbot Trail from Tilbury to Amherstburg, the village of Essex Centre grew rapidly in the northeast corner of Colchester Township. Other small hamlets also arose, including McGregor, Gesto, and Edgar Mills. Recognizing the change in settlement patterns and the need to provide fair representation to its citizens, the Province in 1880 divided Colchester along the 7th Concession Road into two townships – Colchester North and Colchester South.

Amalgamation restores 1792 boundaries

The current Town of Essex was created on January 1, 1999 when the former towns of Essex and Harrow, along with the former townships of Colchester North and Colchester South, were brought together through a provincially mandated amalgamation process. This merger effectively restored the boundaries of Colchester Township as it had been established in 1792.
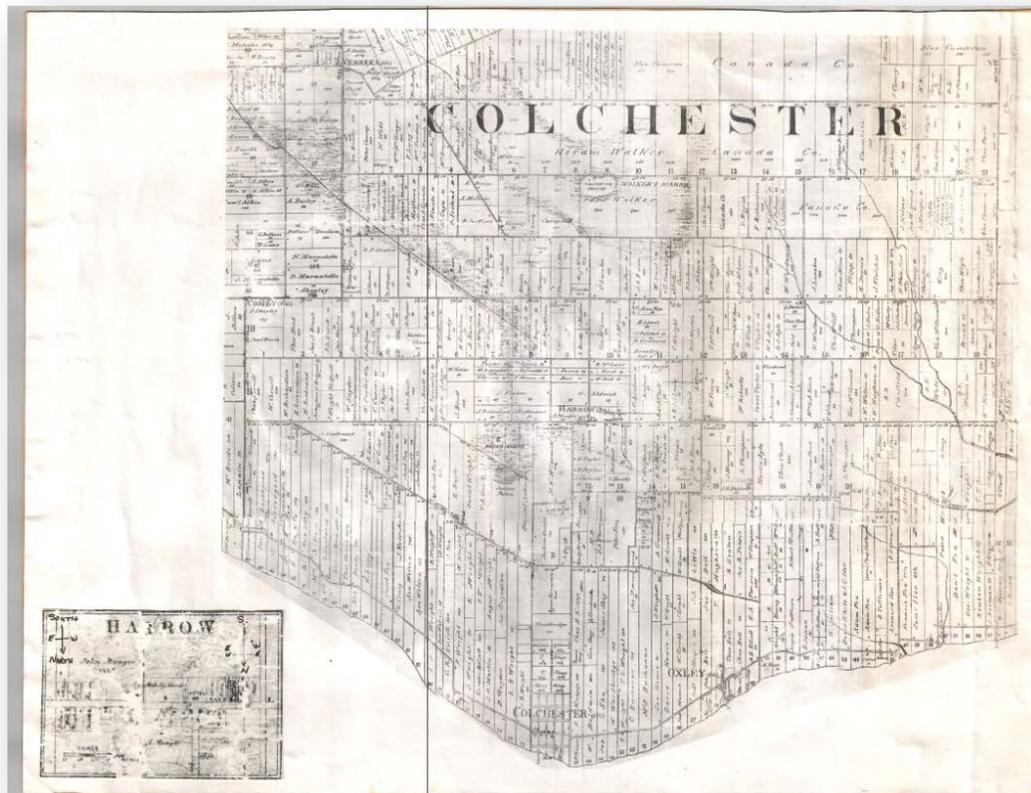
Colchester Map, 1877

Homeland Defence

Defending the Border

In the early years of settlement, the defence of Essex County fell to the local militia. The Militia Act of 1793 required every able-bodied man between the ages of 16 and 50 to belong to a militia unit unless they were crown officials, clergymen or essential workers. The first organized militia units in Upper Canada were established in Essex and Kent counties. In 1794, the Essex Regiment included 72 men from the New Settlement. When the regiment was divided into two battalions, North and South, the Colchester men reported to Lieutenant-Colonel William Caldwell, commander of the Southern Battalion. He, in turn, reported to the commander at Detroit. In August 1794, unrest in Ohio took 60 militiamen from the New Settlement to Ohio. Under Caldwell's command, the militia covered the warriors' retreat after U.S. forces defeated the Indians at the Battle of Fallen Timbers. Casualties among the Colchester company included Daniel McKillop and Charles Munger. During times of peace, the militia was required to report to Fort Amherstburg for military training each year on the King's birthday. By 1823, the 1st Essex Regiment was summoned ten times a year for training and, due to its central location, the regimental parade ground was now located at Colchester.
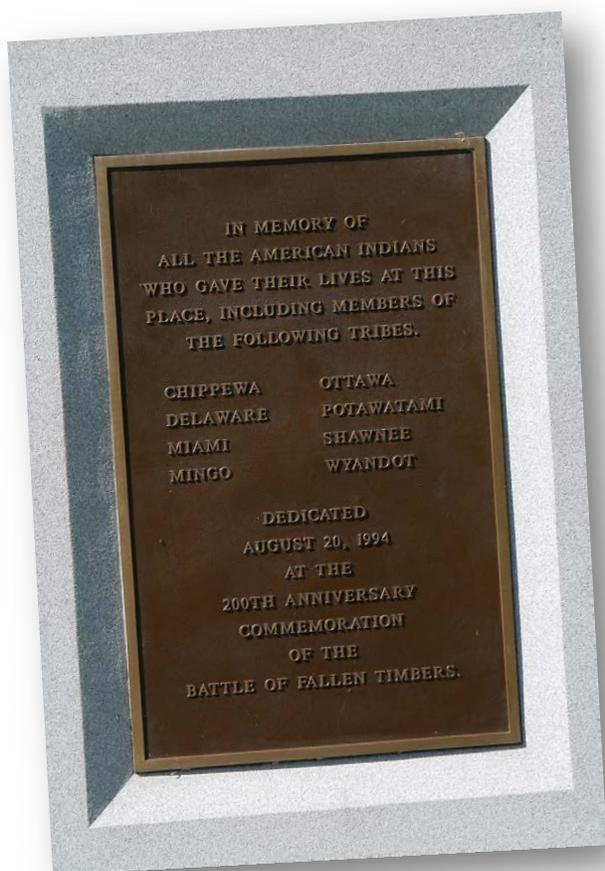
Stone marker, Fallen Timbers Battlefield Near Toledo, Ohio

War of 1812: Military Muster

By 1812, the British had been at war with France for many years. Military ranks in North America were thin and economic resources sparse. To make matters worse, the Royal Navy routinely seized American cargoes and merchantmen from vessels destined for France. This provoked the young republic. On June 18, 1812, President James Madison declared war on Great Britain and called for the occupation of her North American colonies. The defence of Upper Canada fell to a mere handful of British regulars and an uncertain number of local militiamen. As the Western District's 4,000 residents depended on agriculture for family survival, the ranks of the Essex and Kent regiments faced divided loyalties. Major-General Sir Isaac Brock's arrival at Amherstburg on August 14, 1812 brought clarity and command to the situation. Brock declared that local militia would report for duty immediately or be treated as deserters. The men of Colchester were among those who reported to Fort Amherstburg and joined Brock's assault force of 700 men. Along with 600 warriors led by Tecumseh, the British forces crossed the Detroit River on August 16 and forced American Brigadier-General William Hull's surrender at Fort Detroit.

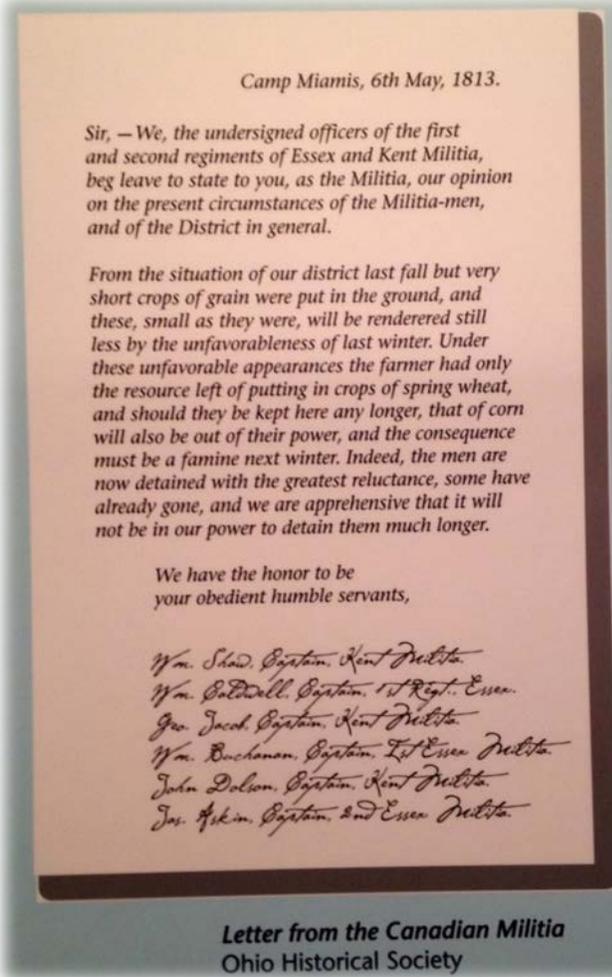**Marker at Fort Meigs, Perrysburg, Ohio**

War of 1812: Battle of Frenchtown

The men of Colchester were listed among the militiamen who engaged American forces at the Battle of Frenchtown in January 1813. Military buildup at the Maumee Rapids (near present-day Toledo, Ohio) had signaled to the British that the Americans were preparing to retake Fort Detroit after its loss the previous summer. Forced to retreat from Frenchtown on January 18, the Canadian militia returned for a surprise attack on January 22. In one of the most complete battle victories of the war, the Canadian militia defeated the Kentucky force sent to occupy the village located near the River Raisin. The River Raisin National Battlefield Park commemorates the battle and its tragic aftermath. Fearing the imminent arrival of American reinforcements, British Colonel Henry Procter called for a hasty retreat and decided to leave some wounded prisoners behind. Before the reinforcements could arrive, native forces returned to Frenchtown and killed the wounded, mostly Kentuckians. The battle is thus also known as the River Raisin Massacre.

War of 1812: Divided Loyalties

During the summer of 1813, the Essex militiamen asked General Procter's permission to go home and harvest their crops but the request was denied. Determined to fulfill their duties both to family and King, the men left the military camp in a group. It is said that Procter ordered them to return at once, but they refused. Next Procter threatened to send native allies to bring them or their scalps back! The men remained steadfast in their resolve to harvest their crops. Fearing possible scalping raids, the men worked in squads on each farm, carrying their weapons to the fields and posting lookouts. When the harvest was in, the men returned to the camp in a group, as promised.

Letter reproduced at Fort Meigs, Ohio

Camp Miamis, 6th May, 1813.

Sir, — We, the undersigned officers of the first and second regiments of Essex and Kent Militia, beg leave to state to you, as the Militia, our opinion on the present circumstances of the Militia-men, and of the District in general.

From the situation of our district last fall but very short crops of grain were put in the ground, and these, small as they were, will be renderered still less by the unfavorableness of last winter. Under these unfavorable appearances the farmer had only the resource left of putting in crops of spring wheat, and should they be kept here any longer, that of corn will also be out of their power, and the consequence must be a famine next winter. Indeed, the men are now detained with the greatest reluctance, some have already gone, and we are apprehensive that it will not be in our power to detain them much longer.

We have the honor to be your obedient humble servants,

Wm. Shaw, Captain Kent Militia.
Wm. Caldwell, Captain 1st Regt. Essex.
Geo. Jacob, Captain Kent Militia.
Wm. Buchanan, Captain 1st Essex Militia.
John Dolson, Captain Kent Militia.
Jas. Askin, Captain 2nd Essex Militia.

Letter from the Canadian Militia
Ohio Historical Society

Battle of Lake Erie

Although the British enjoyed early military successes during the War of 1812, by September 1813 the Americans occupied three British forts and were blocking British supply lines. Running low on supplies at Fort Amherstburg, General Henry Procter and Commander Robert H. Barclay determined that a naval engagement would be necessary to open the supply route. Led by the flagship HMS Detroit, built at the Navy Yard in Amherstburg and quickly outfitted with rusting guns and cannons from the fort, the British fleet was outnumbered and outgunned by the American flotilla. On September 10, 1813, a three-hour battle took place about 15 miles south of Colchester. Residents are reported to have heard the booming sound of cannon and to have seen the billows of white smoke rising in the air. When the Battle of Lake Erie was over, the British fleet had been captured. General Procter would order the destruction of Fort Amherstburg before embarking on a retreat towards the mouth of the Thames River. American forces under the command of General William Henry Harrison would invade Essex County shortly thereafter and occupy it for the next 15 months.

Battle of Lake Erie
Source: US Navy via Wikimedia Commons

War of 1812: The Occupation

When the British forces withdrew from Essex County in September 1813, a 15-month period of American occupation began. Although the militia had been paroled and relieved of duty before the British withdrawal, some men found places in ranger units, like Caldwell's Rangers, and followed the retreat towards Niagara. The farms of serving militiamen were marked by the Americans for plunder and destruction. The shortage of food and supplies was profound during this time and affected everyone – troops and civilians. To remedy the shortage, invading troops confiscated possessions, including horses, livestock, boats, animal pelts, crops, weapons, clothes and cash. Many people were repeatedly robbed. After the Treaty of Ghent brought an end to the war on Christmas Eve 1814, the Western District reverted to British hands and residents began the long process of reconstructing their lives and their homes unaided by government assistance.

Bi-National Peace Garden

The Commander Robert H. Barclay Bi-National Peace Garden, located at the corner of County Road 50 and Jackson Street in Colchester, commemorates 200 years of peace between Canada and the United States. As a project in honour of the War of 1812-14, the garden is named after the British naval commander who engaged a large American fleet in battle just a few miles from Colchester Harbour. Barclay's aim was to break the American blockade that was preventing British supplies from reaching Detroit.

Rebellion of 1837: Battle of Pelee Island

Who would have thought that unrest at York (now Toronto) in 1837 would lead to an uprising aimed at liberating Canadians from oppressive British rule? But that's what happened when William Lyon Mackenzie, dissatisfied with the self-serving power structure of the Family Compact, led a failed rebellion and fled to American soil. What started as a rebellion in Canada transformed into an unofficial threat of invasion from the United States.

Although the main conflict of the "Patriot War" that followed mostly bypassed Colchester, it landed on Pelee Island where the McCormicks, one of the original families of Colchester, then lived. Eleven years earlier, William McCormick had purchased the island from Alexander McKee for 100 British pounds. In 1834, he had moved to the island to take up his new post as lighthouse keeper. On February 26, 1838, a group of self-styled Patriots left Sandusky and crossed the ice field of Lake Erie on foot. Alerted to the danger, the McCormicks fled to Colchester for refuge. The remaining 10 families living on the island were taken captive.

On March 2, the British set out for Pelee Island, traveling along the frozen shoreline. They stopped for a short rest at Wright's Tavern in Colchester (at the foot of what is now Wright Sideroad) before midnight and then headed on to Pigeon Bay and across to Pelee Island. On March 3, the British routed the Patriots, taking prisoners and chasing the rest back over the ice. When the last of the skirmishes were over, the British government sent Lord Durham to investigate the causes of the unrest. Durham recommended that Upper and Lower Canada be merged into the Province of Canada. The Act of Union of 1841 implemented the principle of responsible government for both Canada East (Quebec) and Canada West (Ontario), which now shared a single parliament.

Wright's Inn, where the soldiers stopped for refreshments, sat on land that was an original grant to the Wrights by King George III. Over two centuries later, the property continues to be held by members of the Wright family.

Rebellion of 1837: The Black Militia

In January 1838, the Patriot schooner "Anne" approached Amherstburg and began an artillery assault on the village and the fort. The Essex militiamen were poorly prepared for the assault, having only muskets, but later that night the ship slipped downstream to Elliott's Point. The militia opened fire on the schooner, injuring the helmsman and sending the crew to cower below deck. When the vessel ran aground at Elliott's Point, the militia waded into the cold waters and captured the boat and the Patriot commander on board, Brigadier-General Edward Alexander Theller. Notable among the militia were two all-black companies – Capt. Josiah Henson's 1st Black Company and Capt. Angus MacDonald's 2nd Black Company.

Early Settlers & Distinguished Folks

Early Settlers lived "at Detroit"

Until 1796, Detroit was the seat of local government for people living in the New Settlement. It was also the only place to obtain provisions. Due to their dependence on Detroit, settlers along Lake Erie's north shore were described as living "at Detroit" until the city's formal occupation by the Americans in 1796. For this reason, early records of the Essex County region are to be found in the Burton Historical Collection at Detroit Public Library.

Alexander McCormick and the Battle of Fallen Timbers

In August 1794, Alexander McCormick and his wife Elizabeth Turner were running a trading post near the rapids on the Maumee River. A cluster of nearby trees had blown down in a windstorm. It was here, near present-day Toledo, Ohio, that U.S. General "Mad" Anthony Wayne fought and defeated the Indians of northwestern Ohio in a historic battle that came to be known as the Battle of Fallen Timbers. This battle signified the end of Indian resistance to American expansion into the Ohio Country. It also prompted Alexander McCormick and his family to flee to Colchester Township, where they initially settled on Lot 78 and later on Lot 7 in the Gore. Many descendants of Alexander McCormick and Elizabeth Turner continue to live in the area today. The site of the Battle of Fallen Timbers is preserved today with a number of monuments dedicated to both sides of the battle.
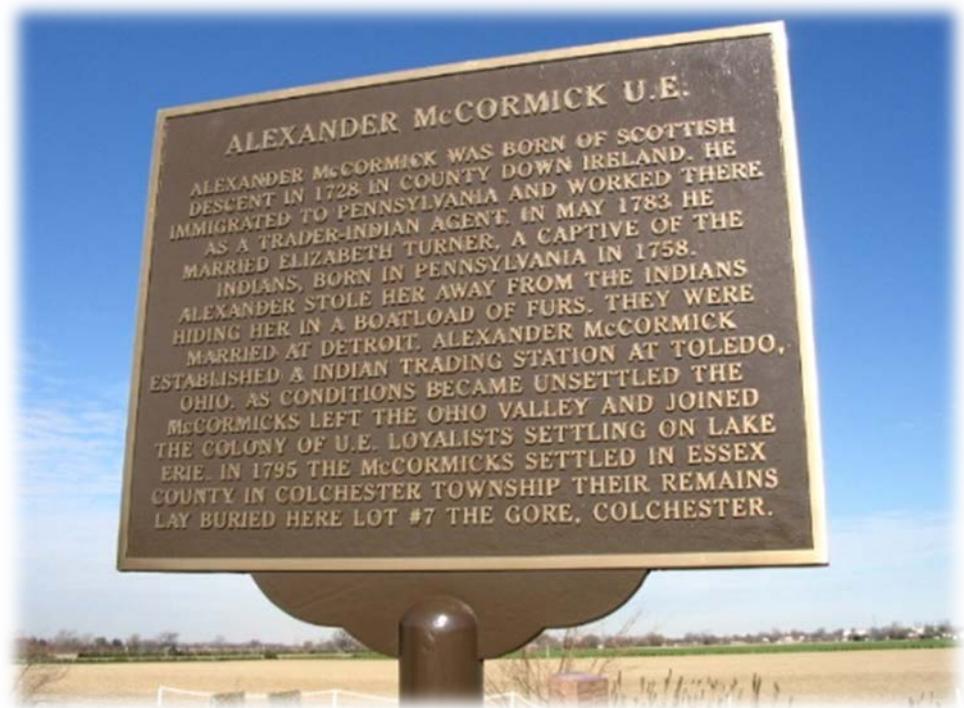
**Heritage marker
McCormick Cemetery**

Quick Family: Captured by Indians

The 18th century frontier was a dangerous place. Although many early settlers in Colchester had been taken by Indians, often as children, John Alexander Quick was one of the few who could say his entire family – he, his wife, and eight children – had been taken by the Indians.

This family of Dutch origin was living in the Virginia Panhandle in 1781 when the Shawnee captured their oldest son, 7-year-old Cornelius, and kept him for 10 years. In 1789, Quick moved his family to Kentucky. The next spring, Indians raided his home and took his entire family as captives. Quick managed to secure his own release and spent the next five years collecting ransom funds and searching for the rest of his family. With help from Simon Girty, known to the Americans as a renegade traitor but to the British as an indispensable guide and interpreter, Quick managed to recover everyone except one young child. The family reunited at Detroit and immediately left for Colchester, settling on Lot 8 at the rear of the First Concession, behind the land reserved for a village.

Many years later, Cornelius Quick told the story of his captivity to his nephew, Joseph Munger Jr., who relayed it and other local histories to Lyman Copeland Draper, the American historian who famously compiled an enormous collection of personal accounts and historical documents related to the northwest expansion of America in the late 18th century. Their correspondence can be found in the Draper Manuscripts.

Quick Family Cemetery

Simon Girty

Elevated to the status of a mythical figure in American folklore, Simon Girty came to be known in his time as "The White Savage," a traitor and a renegade. Born in the Susquehannah Valley of Pennsylvania, Girty's family was captured by Indians in 1756. Taken at age 15, Simon spent eight years with the Senecas, living along the south shore of Lake Erie and learning a wide variety of Indian languages and customs. After he was released as part of a wholesale return of captives, Girty became a skilled interpreter for the British Indian Department, working closely with men like Alexander McKee and Matthew Elliott to advance Crown interests in the Ohio Valley. After they quietly defected in 1782, Girty, McKee and Elliott secured property along the Detroit River in Malden and continued to influence events from Detroit.

Girty's significance to the early history of Colchester can be found in the impact he had on so many families. Girty was instrumental in negotiating the return of many Indian captives, including many of the Quick family members taken in Kentucky, and his future wife, Catherine Malott. Many of Girty's children and grandchildren settled in the Colchester and Harrow area.

Simon Girty mural , Sandwich Street, Windsor

The Mungers and Tofflemires

The Munger and Tofflemire names have long been associated with the Colchester and Harrow area. Like many local families, their journey to Colchester was an arduous one. In 1779, William Monger (note the alternative spelling), his wife Susannah, and their four youngest children left the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia to join Capt. Isaac Ruddle's Company in settling the frontier lands of Kentucky. The Mungers were accompanied by Martin Tofflemire, his wife Eve (Monger), and their six children.

On June 20, 1780, the Mongers and Tofflemires were among the settlers at Ruddle's Station who were attacked by Colonel Henry Bird's British forces and Indian allies. The British were set on destroying the Kentucky forts and driving the colonists back beyond the Alleghany mountains. The families survived the attack, but a Tofflemire infant was killed on the journey to Detroit and two Tofflemire children were taken by the Indians but later recovered. The families were marched to Detroit where General Macomb paid their ransom and housed them. In 1781 they were settled on Hog Island (today's Belle Isle) and in 1796 moved to

Ruddle's Station Roadside Marker
Cynthiana, Kentucky

Grosse Ile where they became tenants of General Macomb. Martin Tofflemire built the millhouse at the Macomb gristmill where John Snider, another Colchester settler, was working as the blacksmith.

After the British ceded Detroit to the Americans, they offered land grants in the New Settlement to many of the men who had settled on the islands of the Detroit River. William Monger, Martin Tofflemire and John Snider were among those men. William and Susannah Monger left

three adult children in Virginia. Those children continued to use the spelling Monger. In Canada, Monger became Munger. The Munger grandchildren would be instrumental in founding Munger's Corners, now known as Harrow.

Hessian Mercenaries Join Caldwell's Rangers

Among the settlers who were attacked by Colonel Henry Bird's British and Indian forces at Ruddle's Station and Martin's Station in Kentucky were a number of Hessian mercenaries, German auxiliary military forces hired to fight for the British. When Bird's large party of captives arrived at Detroit, they met a company of Butler's Rangers from the Niagara region under Captain William Caldwell. Thirteen of the Hessians taken by Bird enlisted in Caldwell's company and joined forces for the remainder of the Revolutionary War. Some of these men followed Caldwell to the New Settlement and acquired land grants along Lake Erie.

John Snider and Snider House

The Snider House just west of Colchester is the oldest continuously family-owned home in our region. Built by John Snider (Snyder) around 1813, the unique home was built into a hill, showing one story from the west but two stories from the east. It has two-foot thick limestone walls with rafters and beams made of hand-hewn walnut.

Snider, a Loyalist, was an accomplished blacksmith who originally settled on Grosse Ile after the American Revolution. Records show that he helped build the gristmill and millhouse on that island in the mid-1780s. In 1790, he obtained a number of lots in the New Settlement, including the property on which the house stands today. It is said that the original builders of the house could hear the cannons and see smoke wafting into the air during the Battle of Lake Erie on September 10, 1813. Over 200 years later, Snider's ninth generation descendants continue to own the property.

Snider House

William Buchanan and the First Sawmill

The earliest sawmill in Colchester Township was established before the War of 1812. In 1804, Scottish immigrant William Buchanan was granted Lot 18 in the Second Concession, near Arner. It was here that Buchanan built a sawmill. Waterpower for his steam engine came from the generous creek that ran through the property – Cedar Creek. During the War of 1812, Buchanan served as captain of the Colchester company of the Essex Militia. He died of natural causes just days after the Americans won the Battle of Lake Erie on September 10, 1813. Upon his death, his brother Gordon arranged for Joseph Munger to run the sawmill. The agreement between Gordon Buchanan and Joseph Munger is one of the oldest existing documents related to the early history of Colchester.

William McCormick, MLA

William McCormick, son of Alexander McCormick and Elizabeth Turner *(see Alexander McCormick entry, p. 17)* and husband to Mary Cornwall, became the representative for Essex in Upper Canada's sixth parliament. In early 1812, he took the seat in the legislature at York and held it for the next 12 years, taking time out during the War of 1812-14 to serve in the local militia. Lt. McCormick was wounded in the knee at the Battle of Frenchtown in January 1813. By May he held the rank of captain and assisted in the British assault on Fort Meigs. Captured by the Americans in 1814, McCormick was released at the end of the war, returned to Colchester, and remained active in the militia.

A Sketch of the Western District of Upper Canada being the Southern extremity of that interesting Province

BY WILLIAM McCORMICK ESQ'RE

Written in 1824

EDITED BY R. ALAN DOUGLAS CURATOR, HIRAM WALKER HISTORICAL MUSEUM

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But McCormick's interests extended far beyond military service. He served as Colchester postmaster and, from 1816 onward, as a magistrate of the Western District. In September 1823, McCormick purchased (yes, purchased!) Pelee Island from Alexander McKee for £100. McKee's father had signed a 999-year lease with chiefs of the Ottawa Indians in 1788 in return for three bushels of Indian corn each year. As McKee did not have clear title to the island, McCormick's claim would be called into question in the mid-1800s, after his death, but the matter was ultimately decided in his favour. The McCormicks continued to reside at Colchester until April 1834 when William was appointed lighthouse keeper on Pelee Island. The family then moved to the island. Only a few short years later, an American invasion would send them back to Colchester.
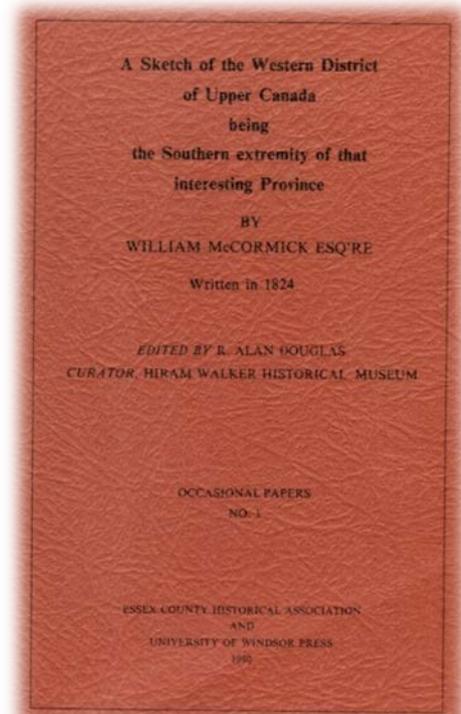
Last Stop on the Underground Railroad

Being so near the American border but distant from urban populations, Colchester became a last stop on the Underground Railroad, a network of secret routes and safe houses used by African-American slaves escaping from the United States to Canada. Many freedom seekers who arrived in Amherstburg were directed to Colchester, a location that removed them from the reach of slave catchers who often crossed the border in search of so-called fugitives.

First Black Settlers

As early as 1790, black members of Butler's Rangers received tickets for land in the New Settlement. This was a reward for loyal service to the Crown during the American Revolutionary War. It is unknown if these men were able to clear the land and meet the requirements for settlement within the first year. The first major influx of fugitive slaves arrived in Colchester Township after 1817. Joseph Mulder is considered to be the first black settler in Colchester Village.

Josiah Henson

Josiah Henson, the man who inspired the title character of Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, spent seven eventful years in Colchester. Henson arrived in Canada as a fugitive slave in 1830. His dream of establishing a self-sufficient black settlement led him to Colchester in 1834. Here, he and a small group of followers lived on rented land until they secured funding to purchase 200 acres in Kent County. Uncle Tom's Cabin Historic Site is located near Dresden, Ontario, at the Dawn Settlement that Henson founded.
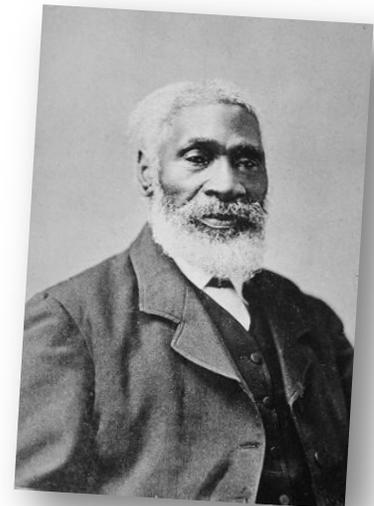
Josiah Henson

Anthony Banks & Esther Malawice Banks

Anthony Wellington Banks, born in Colchester Township in 1840, is historically significant both for his lineage and for his accomplishments. When the County of Essex hired him on April 12, 1881, he became the first black police constable in Ontario. He also served as bailiff, road master and deputy game warden. Anthony was the eldest son of William Irving Banks, a free black from Virginia, and Esther Malawice Banks, reported to be the daughter of General Sir Isaac Brock and his African-born cook, Almania Malawice, a princess from Ghana. The family lived on Snake Lane and later on Walker Road. In May 2014, the Esther Malawice Banks Log Cabin was officially dedicated at the Canadian Transportation Museum and Heritage Village as a symbol of black roots around the world.

"The Real McCoy"

Elijah McCoy, inventor and engineer, was born in Colchester Township on May 2, 1843 (some records say 1844). His parents, George McCoy and Emillian Goins, had arrived in Canada via the Underground Railroad. Elijah attended school in Colchester Township during his formative years and then went to Edinburgh, Scotland to earn an Engineering degree. His parents moved to Ypsilanti, Michigan in 1861. When Elijah returned from Scotland, he sought employment with the Michigan Central Railroad and acquired menial work as a locomotive fireman, stoking the boilers and lubricating the steam cylinders and sliding parts of the trains. Using his mechanical abilities, he designed a revolutionary lubricating cup system that used steam pressure to pump oil when it was needed. He patented his "Self Regulating Lubricator" in July 1872 and buyers were soon asking for "The Real McCoy" when purchasing engines. Elijah McCoy filed 57 other patents in Canada and the United States over the next 50 years, many of them related to lubricating steam engines. Other inventions of note are the folding ironing board and the lawn sprinkler. Today we use the phrase "the real McCoy" when referring to the best, highest quality item.

Elijah McCoy

Delos Davis

Born in 1847 in Virginia, Delos Rogest Davis and his family settled in Colchester Township in 1850. Living in New Canaan, Delos was educated first at the American Missionary School and later at the black school established by the public school board. Although he studied to be a lawyer, he could not find a law office that was willing to let him article with them. Hearing of his dilemma, local MPP William Douglas Balfour introduced a special Act in the Provincial Legislature that would allow Davis to practice as a solicitor if he passed the Law Society of Upper Canada exam. A second special Act allowed him to practice as a barrister and he was called to the bar in 1886. This accomplished criminal lawyer was appointed as King's Council in 1910, the first such appointment of a black lawyer in Canada and the British Dominion.

Rev. William Wilks

Preacher William Wilks arrived in Amherstburg in 1818. Born in Congo, he had been captured at age 10 and taken to the United States as a slave. In adulthood, he escaped to Canada and began to preach the Gospel. A year later, he purchased 40 acres of land in Colchester Township and built a small log church on Gore Road, Lot 4. His church was the first ordained and registered black Baptist church in Upper Canada and was called the First African Baptist Church of Colchester.

John R. Park Homestead

In 2017, John R. Park's home is 175 years old. Built in 1842, the restored Classical Revival home, managed since 1975 by the Essex Region Conservation Authority (ERCA), sits on lakeside property that Park purchased in 1833 at the end of Iler Road. Along with his two brothers, John Richardson Park, originally from Massachusetts, built a successful mercantile and Great Lakes shipping business. That success allowed John and Amelia Park to raise their six children in this idyllic farm setting that continues to depict 18th

John R. Park Homestead

century pioneer life for over 20,000 visitors a year. In 2007, ownership of John R. Park Homestead was transferred to ERCA and the property was designated under the Ontario Heritage Act.

Sir John A. MacDonald

Prime Minister
Sir John A. MacDonald

In 1852, fifteen years before he would become Canada's first prime minister, John A. MacDonald bought multiple parcels of land in Essex County amounting to 2,905 acres. Most of the land was unsettled in northeastern Colchester near what would become Essex Centre. Like many of his privileged colleagues, MacDonald was a land speculator. Within a year he had disposed of most of the land at a profit of 98.5 per cent.

Provincial and Federal Representatives

Since 1792, several men have represented Essex South at upper levels of government. John Cornwall, a private in Caldwell's Company of Butler's Rangers during the Revolutionary War, lived on Lot 97 in the New Settlement and represented Suffolk and Essex in the second Legislative Assembly of Upper Canada from 1797 to 1800. Cornwall's son-in-law, William McCormick, became the representative for Essex in Upper Canada's sixth parliament, holding the seat from 1812 to 1824, taking time out during the War of 1812-14 to serve in the local militia. William Murdoch of Harrow was elected as the Progressive Conservative MPP for Essex South in 1943 and served in that role until his retirement in 1963. From 1960 to 1963 he also served as Speaker of the Legislative Assembly. In federal politics, Stuart Murray Clark of Harrow was elected Liberal Member of Parliament for Essex South in 1935 and served in that position for 22 years, until his retirement in 1957.

Rt. Hon. Paul Martin

Paul Martin's Local Ties

The 21st Prime Minister of Canada, the Right Honourable Paul Martin, spent his childhood summers at the family cottage in Colchester and as a teenager worked in the Lake Erie fishery and on local farms. His maternal grandparents, Edgar and Amelia Adams, owned a general store in McGregor. His great grandfather, T.B. Adams, owned the general store at the end of Queen Street in Harrow. His great-great-grandfather, Dr. Adam Adams, taught school on the Gore Road.

Lionel Sanders

In case you're wondering … we're still making history! In 2016, Essex Town Council recognized Harrow native Lionel Sanders as one of the fastest and most tenacious citizens. Five first-place wins in five consecutive Half Ironman competitions led to the recognition, but Sanders exceeded all expectations in November 2016 when he set the world record for fastest Ironman by clocking a time of 7:44.29 at Ironman Arizona.

Lionel Sanders, Ironman 70.3 Wiesbaden

Early Settlements

The Iler Settlement

Iler Road near County Road 50 is the gateway to property that was once known as the Iler Settlement. In 1808, Jacob Iler and Elizabeth Snider settled on Lot 37 in Colchester's Front Concession, paving the way for expansion of a very productive community of German Plain Folk. In her book on the history of Grosse Ile, Michigan, Isabella Swan describes Jacob Iler as "unquestionably, the tenant farmer of greatest historical consequence to Grosse Ile." Iler lived on the island for 16 years, migrating to it from Pennsylvania around 1882, near the end of the American Revolution. As one of the earliest arrivals to Grosse Ile, Iler knew all the tenant farmers and was able to provide sworn testimony to the Land Board that helped the Macomb family obtain clear title to the island. Shortly after he testified, Iler left for Canada.
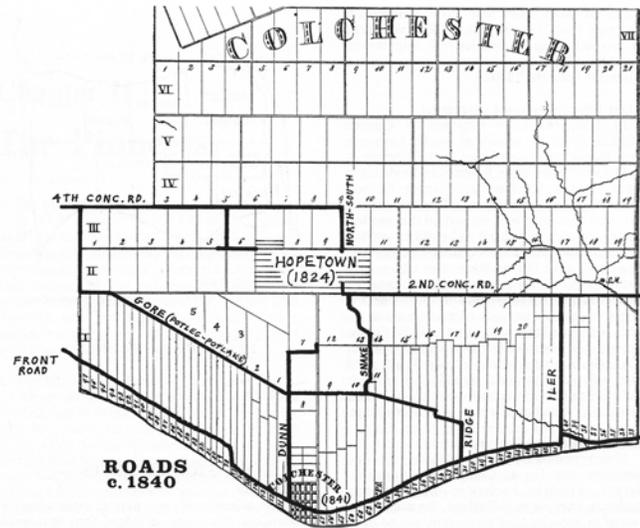

Iler Settlement Cemetery, Twin Gables Drive

Matthews Settlement

As early as 1819, black settlers were living at the corner of Drummond Road and the Third Concession at a settlement that came to known as the "Matthews Settlement." A Baptist church and a school were organized there in the 1820s.

Hopetown

Before it was called Harrow, an official plan identified this settlement as Hopetown. Surveyed in 1824, the property involved 850 acres located on Lots 7, 8, 9 and 10 in the Second Concession, plus a small portion of Lot 7 in the Third Concession. For some reason, the plan was not registered at the County Registry Office until 1878. The surveyed property was divided into 50-acre lots running east and west. The boundary between Lots 9 and 10 became Queen Street and the Second Concession Road became King Street. No one knows why it was called Hopetown but it has been suggested that it was named by fugitive slaves who settled on the northwest corner at a very early date. The name symbolized their dream of freedom in a new land.

New Canaan

The earliest fugitive slaves that arrived at New Canaan settled in the early 1830s on the banks of the Canard River where it crosses Malden Road (Gesto Road/County Road 12). By 1840 New Canaan was a thriving community of about 20 families. Lumbering and farming were the primary economic activities. After the Lake Erie and Detroit River Railway laid tracks just west of New Canaan in the 1870s, the train made regular stops. Notable residents included Delos Rogest Davis *(see Delos Davis entry, p. 24)* and Henry (Butler) Fitzbutler (1837-1901). Fitzbutler spent his childhood in New Canaan, became the first black graduate of the University of Michigan Medical School and the first black to run for elected office in Louisville, Kentucky. He was a noted civil rights activist, physician and publisher.

New Canaan settlement area

Potterville

William Hope came to Canada as a fugitive slave and settled inland at New Canaan, a small settlement that once stood where the Canard River crosses Malden Road (Gesto Road/County Road 12). In New Canaan, east of the Gesto Sideroad, Hope founded a pottery plant called Potterville that manufactured fine china. It is said that Hope walked from New Canaan to Amherstburg to sell his wares. He would then buy supplies and walk back home.

From Oxford to Oxley

Colchester Township's first post office was established at "Oxford" in 1831 with William McCormick as the first postmaster. The name of the settlement was eventually changed to Oxley when confusion arose with other places in Ontario named Oxford. Although we consider Colchester to be the primary harbour in the area today, the dock at Oxley is thought to have been the first dock, as records show that the Harrow postmaster went to Oxley once a week to collect the mail.

In the 1850s, deliberate efforts to develop the settlement into a village were made by two brothers-in-law, John Ridsdale and Thomas Salmoni. On a 400-acre site in Oxley, they established a sawmill and a gristmill near a ravine. A subsequent owner, Philip Ferriss, also ran a lumber business from the property. As Colchester was thickly forested and lumber was in high demand in other parts of the world, the winter months were spent cutting timber, most of which would be shipped away in better weather.

Sketch of the Village of Oxford (Oxley), 1853

Gilgal

Located at the 5th Concession just east of Walker Road, on the edge of a marsh called Marshfield Woods, Gilgal was a predominantly black village. Fugitive slaves who landed at Amherstburg travelled along the Pike Road in the early 1840s and settled on the western edge of the marsh. An important focal point of the community was the British Methodist Episcopal Church, built in 1852 on land donated by Nasa McCurdy. William and Alexander Kersey were instrumental in building the church, which also served as a school until a schoolhouse was built next door. Delos Davis taught at the school and inventor Elijah McCoy was reportedly one of the early pupils of this school. The community erected a new brick school on the 5th Concession section of Walker Road in 1897 using funds provided by Hiram Walker. Walker owned property in Marshfield, which supplied marsh hay for his cattle. Today, a few grave markers at the Gilgal Cemetery (on County Road 11 between the 5th and 6th Concessions) are all that is left of the village, but researchers have identified over 100 burials
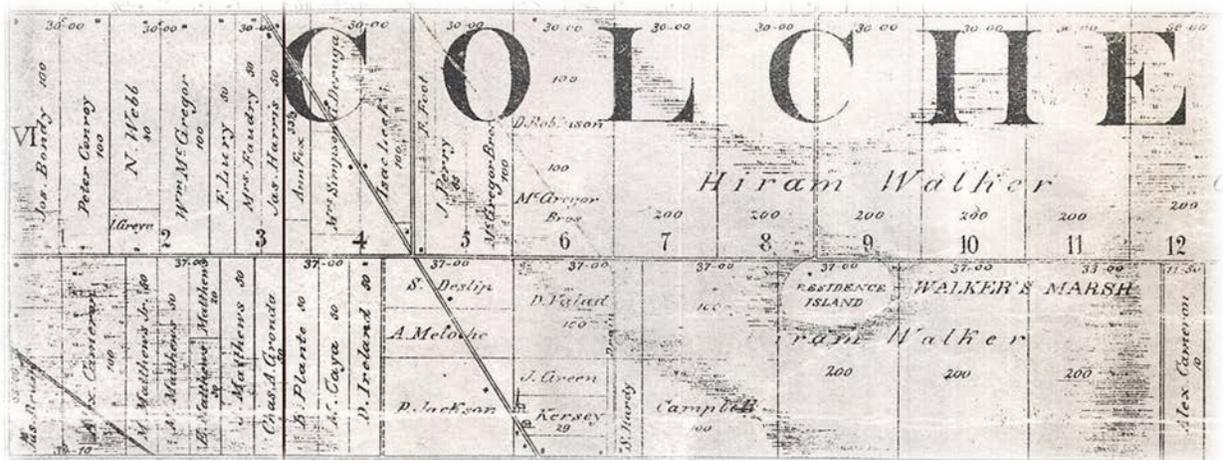
Colchester Survey, 1877, Hiram Walker's Marsh

at this site. The cemetery is also known as the Taylor Family Cemetery because of the significant number of Taylors who lived near Gilgal and were buried on the property.

The Galloway Settlement

About 20 families from the Galloway region of Scotland settled in Colchester Township between 1840 and 1850. Family names included Affleck, Bell, Borland, Brown, Burnie, Clark, Craig, Drummond, Fisher, Howie, McGill, Murray, Rae, Richmond, Saw, Waddell, Watters and Wilson. Many had received quality educations in Scotland and contributed in Colchester as teachers, politicians, engineers, and entrepreneurs.

Pleasant Valley

The community of Pleasant Valley was located on the Fourth Concession, about five miles northeast of Harrow. The first settlers were a mix of English, Irish and black farmers. It grew to be a predominantly black settlement with family names that included Hardy, Green, Artis, Brooks, Waterford, and Dennis. William Kersey and William McCurdy built a school in Pleasant Valley in the late 1850s. The school also served as a church for two denominations, Baptists and Methodists (African Methodist Episcopal). Today, Pleasant Valley is mostly residential properties and large estates.
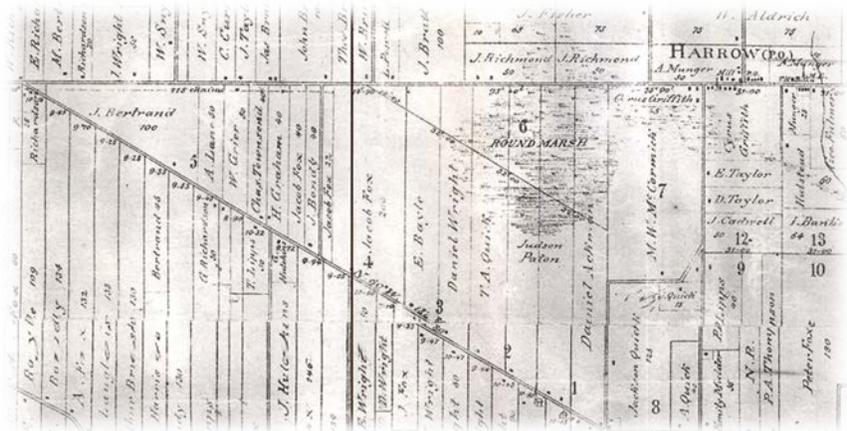
Potlake

It's hard to believe that a small hamlet on the Gore Road was ever larger than Harrow. But it's true! In the mid-1800s, Potlake (also called Potleg) was a thriving concern while Harrow was an impassable swamp. Located along Gore Road just west of the Dunn Road intersection, the hamlet was named after a local landmark – a small lake that developed in a depression in the ground that may have been caused by a comet. At its height, Potlake was a hive of commercial activity. Shops stretched east and west of the Gore and Dunn Road intersection. George Best and Cornelius Lonsbery both had shoe shops. Josiah Best had a general store next to Will Shaw's harness shop. Mrs. Knapp had a millinery shop and also served as dressmaker, tailor and barber. At Matthew Ferriss's general store you could get anything "from a silk plug hat for daddy to copper-toed boots for Johnnie." Amos Quick had a blacksmith shop and Jackson Quick was the veterinarian. The settlement also included the Templar Lodge Temple, a stone schoolhouse, and a Methodist church.

The Gore

A "gore" is a surveyor's term for an irregular-shaped piece of land left over after an area is surveyed. In Colchester, it came to be associated with a settlement area that runs along the ridge in the Gore Concession in a triangular shape. A significant point of high elevation in Essex County, the ground at the corner of Erie and Gore roads is second only to the ridge that runs from Leamington to Windsor through the centre of Essex County. The Gore runs east for quite a distance, to lot 20 just west of Iler Road.

The Gore as it appears on the Colchester Survey, 1877

Munger's Corners

Before it was called Harrow, this settlement area was known unofficially as Munger's (or Mungers') Corners. Named after two descendants of Colchester settler William Munger *(see William Munger entry, p. 20)*, the settlement contained two Mungers and two corners. John G. Munger operated his blacksmith shop at King Street and the southeast corner of Given Road (today's Walnut Street). His brother, Joseph Munger Jr., owned a farm that extended along the north side of King Street. As the town developed along King Street and houses were built, the land was bought from Joseph Jr. and later his son, Alfred. The name Munger's Corners was not a registered name on any official plan.

Harrow shown on Colchester Survey, 1877

Harrow

First it was known as Hopetown, then as Munger's Corners. This urban community just a few miles inland from Lake Erie ultimately became known as Harrow after a letter from the Deputy Postmaster General dated June 25, 1857 authorized "the establishment of a Post Office in the centre of the Township of Colchester at a point known as Munger's Corners" to be opened under the name of Harrow.

As Postmaster, Joseph Munger Jr. had to travel a distance of about six miles from Harrow to Colchester every Monday morning to pick up the mail. He most likely travelled along Given Road, as Erie Road was an impassable swamp at that time.

1910 Postcard of King Street, Harrow

In 1905, his son Alfred explained in a letter how Harrow got its name: "Harrow was named by John O'Connor then Member of Parliament, afterwards Postmaster General, after a place in England, at the request of my Father who founded this office." No additional details are given, but local legend says that a group of early residents gathered at John Munger's blacksmith shop to ponder the choice of a name. One man suggested naming it for his hometown of Harrow, England (Harrow-on-the-Hill). Over half a century of settlement had established the practice of naming places in Canada after British counterparts. It helped to strengthen the connection to Britain after two military outbreaks, the first in 1812 and the second in 1837. For this reason, it is quite possible that local legend on this matter closely reflects the reality.

East Harrow

In the mid-1800s, the swampy area in which Harrow was to be located had not been drained and no road existed from east to west through the area. To travel from Gosfield to Amherstburg, travelers detoured north along the Ferriss Sideroad to the Fourth Concession. A small hamlet known as East Harrow grew up at the junction of the Ferriss Sideroad and the Second Concession, complete with a school, a chapel and shops. The name "East Harrow" likely came into use after Harrow itself was named in 1857. Like Potlake, this community fell into decline after settlement in Harrow began to grow.

Elford

Isaac Elford was the earliest settler to the part of the Arner Townline that lay north of Zion starting in the Sixth Concession. He arrived in 1872, followed closely by George Mulcaster and a host of other familiar family names: Alexander, Baldwin, McBeth, Sweetman, White, Vincent, Fick, Salter, Anderson, Teskey, Russel, and Taylor. Like the settlers at Arner and Zion, the Elford community used both sides of the townline, situating the church on the Gosfield side and the school on the Colchester side of the road. The Bethel Elford Church built in 1885 was donated to Heritage Village in 1977 and is a favourite location for local weddings.

**Elford's Bethel United Church now located at
the Canadian Transportation Museum and Heritage Village**

Gesto

When Colchester North Township was created in 1880, its seat of government was established in Gesto, a new community that had only started to take shape in the early 1870s. Settled by families who originally came from Darlington Township in Durham County, the community was informally called "New Darlington" by the Campbell, Colenutt, Weldon and Sweet families. By 1873 it had been renamed Gesto in honour of John Campbell's birthplace in Scotland, and a post office was established. Sawmills arose in many directions. A blacksmith shop, Weldon's store, Gesto United Church, and a school rounded out the community before Colchester Township was divided in two.
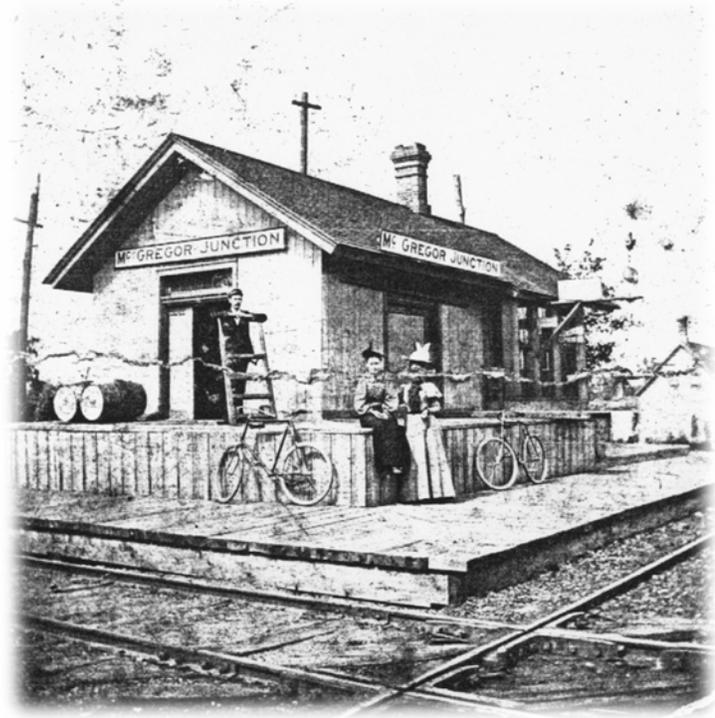
McGregor

The settlement that arose at the McGregor junction of the Canada Southern Railway was originally called Colchester Crossing. According to the history of Colchester North Township, written in 1980 in honour of its centennial year, the name was changed to McGregor (sometimes referred to as McGregor Mills) after William McGregor was elected to the House of Commons. The Liberal Member of Parliament for Essex was first elected in 1874 and served two terms. Early settlers in McGregor were named Meloche, Levack, Paquette, Galipeau and Bondy. St. Clements Roman Catholic Church continues to serve as a historic landmark for this community, just as it did in 1879 when construction first began.

St. Clements Roman Catholic Church, 1903

Paquette

In 1870, Cyril Paquette, a farmer from the River Canard area, moved his family to a spot on the townline road (now Walker Road) about two miles north of McGregor. Hiram Walker's Lake Erie and Detroit River Railway laid tracks near the townline in the mid-1880s. A railway station with a waiting room was built in 1887. Four trains passed through on a daily basis. When Cyril and his wife decided to turn their home into a hotel in 1896, the community became known as Paquette's Corners.

McGregor Junction of the Southern Canada Railway

TALBOT STREET EAST, ESSEX, CANANDA.

Essex Centre

Essex Centre started to materialize in the northeast corner of Colchester Township after the Canada Southern Railway laid tracks across the Talbot Trail in 1872. The settlement grew quickly as a key transportation hub, spurred on by a productive lumber industry and the establishment of key services. The village of Essex Centre was incorporated in January 1884. When it achieved town status in 1890, the settlement became known simply as Essex. To distinguish the urban centre from the municipality, Council re-adopted the name Essex Centre after amalgamation in 1999.

Comet

In 1876, Comet became a Colchester Township post office. A note in the Amherstburg Echo on April 7, 1876 reported that the residents around Marentette's Corners in Malden Township, near the Third Concession in Colchester, had selected the name 'Comet' for the new post

office. An unusual name for sure, the name Comet may have been inspired by an advertisement for Comet Shirt Collars that was on display at the post office. Equally unusual was the fact that the post office seemed to migrate along the Colchester-Malden Townline (County Road 41), at times located close to the lake and at other times closer to the Third Concession. A phone call to the Harrow Post Office has confirmed that the postal station no longer exists, but a location called "Comet" can still be found on Google Maps.

Clearing the land and transporting logs in the Elford area was done by men and horse-drawn sleds during the winter months.

Arner

The small community of Arner was named by postmaster Richard Eede in honour of his mother's pioneer ancestor, Jacob Arner. Although Arner is listed as a Gosfield community, it shares the townline border with Colchester and people were living on both sides of the road near County Road 20 by 1884. Arner was a stop on the Lake Erie and Detroit River Railway and developed a small commercial centre that included two churches, a school, a general store and a sawmill. Both the place and the pioneer gave the Arner Townline its name.

Zion

Named for a small rural Methodist church on the Arner Townline, Zion was never officially named on any map. It stretched from County Road 20 to the south half of the Sixth Concession of Colchester and created a small community for people left out of other church, school and postal route configurations. Zion Church sat on the corner of the Fourth Concession of Gosfield, but the school was built in 1892 on the Colchester side of the road. Today there is no remaining evidence of this community that was shared by people in both townships.

Little Essex

Located at the end of the Arner Townline, where the Carter and Cook Fishery had once operated, Little Essex arose in the 1920s when some residents of Essex (now Essex Centre) bought property on the lake and built cottages. Although it was not officially recognized as Little Essex, the small community is recognized today in the naming of Little Essex Road.

Pioneer Cemeteries

AME Cemetery

The AME Cemetery, also known as the New Canaan Cemetery, is located off County Road 12 (Gesto Road). The area north of Harrow was not well settled until fugitive slaves, seeking to escape punitive slavery laws in the American South, arrived here. To many of the freedom seekers who travelled via the Underground Railroad, "Canaan" was reportedly a code word for Canada. Canada's first black lawyer, Delos Rogest Davis, is buried here. This cemetery is also known to some as the Chavis Cemetery because of the many Chavises that are buried here. Access to this cemetery from County Road 12 is via a 22-foot right-of-way.

Headstone of Delos Rogest Davis, AME Cemetery

Headstone of Rev. Noah Cannon, British Methodist Episcopal Cemetery

BME Cemetery

Located at 25 Walnut Street South in Harrow, the BME Cemetery is the final resting place for some of the earliest black settlers, including Reverend Noah Cannon, the founder of several African Methodist Episcopal (AME) churches across Ontario, and Reverend Josephus O'Banyoun, leader of a distinguished group of Gospel singers called The O'Banyoun (Canadian) Jubilee Singers. In 2013, Essex Town Council designated this cemetery as being of cultural heritage value or interest under the provisions of the Ontario Heritage Act.

Ferriss Cemetery

The Ferriss Cemetery is located on Ferriss Road between the 3rd Concession and County Road 20 East. Joseph Ferriss and his wife, Catherine Hahn (Honn), settled on Lot 12 in the Second Concession, east of Ferriss Sideroad. The Ferriss family is the first recorded family to have settled in the Second Concession. The cemetery layout is in the form of a cross. As it is located within farmland, access to this cemetery may be limited.

Headstones at the Ferriss Cemetery

Huffman Cemetery

The Huffman Cemetery is located on agricultural farmland on County Road 50 East, between Evergreen Road and Cloverdale Beach Road, giving this cemetery limited access. Following the American Revolution, the Huffman family, led by patriarch Rudolph Huffman, came to the area from Virginia and in 1792 received a land grant of 400 acres along the shores of Lake Erie.

Many of the Huffman family descendants still live in the Colchester area. In 2005, a ceremony was hosted at the cemetery to dedicate a new stone in honour of the family lineage and those buried at the site without markers.

Dedication ceremony of Huffman family stone, 2005

Hutchins Cemetery

The Hutchins Cemetery is located off County Road 50 West, between Cornwall Beach Road and Lakecrest Beach Road. The Hutchins were one of the original pioneer families of the area and played a prominent role in local development. Most of the monuments found here are composed of white marble slabs,

Headstone at Hutchins Family Cemetery

reflective of the fine art and carving techniques typical of this time. In 2010, Essex Town Council designated this cemetery as being of cultural heritage value or interest under the provisions of the Ontario Heritage Act.

Iler Settlement Cemetery

The Iler Settlement Cemetery is located on Twin Gables Drive, just off County Road 50 East. The Iler Settlement began in 1808 when Jacob Iler bought Lot 37 on Colchester's Front Concession. Throughout the years, churches, schools, farms and businesses have thrived there. The oldest headstone in this cemetery is dated 1832. In 2010, Essex Town Council designated this cemetery as being of cultural heritage value or interest under the provisions of the Ontario Heritage Act. *(See Iler Settlement entry, p. 27)*

McCormick Cemetery

The McCormick Cemetery is located on Dunn Road between County Road 13 and Fox Sideroad. The McCormicks were among the earliest settlers along Lake Erie's north shore. Alexander McCormick, a fur trader and loyalist during the American Revolutionary War, moved to Upper Canada in 1794, settling near Colchester. The oldest headstone in this cemetery is dated 1803, the year of McCormick's death. In 2010, Essex Town Council designated this cemetery as being of cultural heritage value or interest under the provisions of the Ontario Heritage Act. *(See Alexander McCormick entry, p. 17)*

St. Mark's Cemetery

In the northwest section of Colchester Village, a black settlement arose along Dunn Road and Gore Road starting around 1830. The community established St. Mark's AME Zion Church, often called the Plains Church, on Dunn Road. Today, a pioneer cemetery can be seen on the west side of Dunn Road. The congregation continues to worship as St. Mark's Evangelical Church on Bagot Street.

St. Mark's Cemetery

Quick Cemetery

The Quick Cemetery is located north of the intersection of Gore and Dunn roads. Among the earliest settlers in the area, the Quicks moved to Colchester in the late 1700s after the family had been abducted from their Kentucky home by Indians and reunited with help from frontiersman Simon Girty. The cemetery is located in the middle of a farm field, giving it limited access. The oldest headstone is dated 1855. In 2010, Essex Town Council designated this cemetery as being of cultural heritage value or interest under the provisions of the Ontario Heritage Act. *(See Quick Family entry, p. 18)*

Tofflemire-Snider Cemetery

The Tofflemire-Snider Cemetery sits along the side of County Road 50 East between Iler Road and Park Street. This cemetery serves as an excellent example of the collaborative efforts between two of the earliest pioneer families: the Tofflemires and the Sniders. John Snider and his wife Elizabeth died in the early 1800s and are known to be buried in this cemetery. The location of the cemetery was originally

chosen for its proximity to the home of Snider's daughter, Elizabeth, and her husband, Jacob Iler. Over time a number of Tofflemires and Sniders were buried, here, but the headstones also reveal other family names like Beeman, Buchanan, Wright, Brush and Baldwin. In January 2016, Essex Council formally designated the cemetery as being of cultural heritage value or interest under the Ontario Heritage Act. In August 2016, the Town launched its Heritage Plaque Program by unveiling the first bronze plaque at the Tofflemire-Snider Cemetery.

19ᵗʰ Century Growth

Christ Church

Built in 1876, the white frame church on Bagot Street has significant historical value, not only for its own vintage but also for the Christ Church congregation that has worshipped here since the early 19ᵗʰ century. In 1807, Rev. Richard Pollard, chaplain of the garrison at Amherstburg, started walking on occasion from Amherstburg to minister to a small Anglican congregation in Colchester. As the congregation grew, so too did the need for a church.

Christ Church memorial chapel, 1960

Built by William McCormick (Colchester's first postmaster, a magistrate and the elected Member of Parliament for Upper Canada from 1812 to 1824), the original church was situated in the middle of a graveyard dating back to at least 1808 or earlier. The oldest dated tombstone in the graveyard is known to belong to Stephen Brush who died in that year. The "Old Church" was built of limestone McCormick transported from Pelee Island. Dedicated in 1821, Christ Church was officially Anglican (as Church of England was the only sanctioned religion at the time), but locally, it was considered to be a place of worship for all denominations. It was also used as a school. The first resident minister was Rev. Francis Gore Elliott, son of Matthew Elliott, one of the Indian agents who first settled along the Detroit River in Malden.


White Frame Church, constructed 1876

In the early 19ᵗʰ century, the lakeshore was about a mile out from the church. In a recollection, Mary Brush reported as follows: "In 1821, between the graveyard and the lake bank were three things – a road, a grove of walnut trees and a baseball diamond. People tethered their horses to the trees and watched the boys play baseball all day. I can remember my grandmother saying that she used to play baseball almost a mile out in the lake when she was a child." By 1868, erosion had claimed nearly all of the lakeshore and the church was in danger of falling over the eroding bank. Rather than repair the old stone church, they decided to build a new one. Construction on the white frame church that we know today was completed in 1876.

In November 1893, a very heavy wind took the roof off the old stone church. The ruins continued to mark the church's original location for many years. In 1957 a replica chapel was constructed using limestone from the ruins of the original church.

Engraved stone marks the location of the original Christ Church.
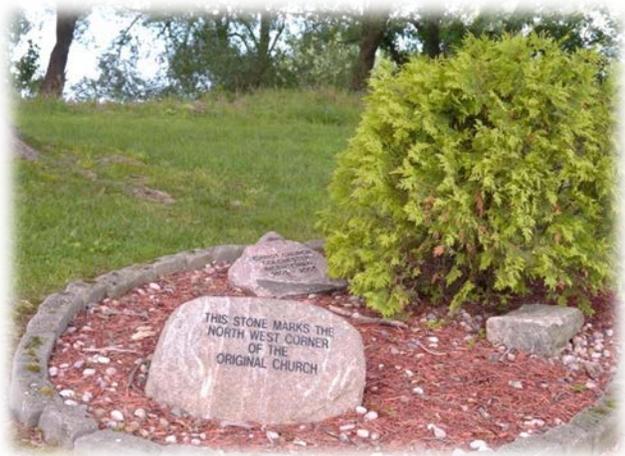
Saddlebag Methodist Preachers

The establishment of religious congregations and churches was slow coming to Colchester Township. Methodism was introduced to the area by itinerant preachers Nathan Bangs (1804) and William Case (1809). Writing in his journal, Bangs lamented the sorry state of spiritual affairs: "A more destitute place [I] had never found. Young people had arrived to the age of sixteen who had never heard a gospel sermon, and [I] found a Methodist family who had lived in that country for seven years without hearing a sermon preached. But although the people generally were extremely ignorant of spiritual things, and very loose in their morals, they seemed ripe for the gospel, and hence received and treated God's messenger with great attention and kindness." Five years later, William Case had greater success during a second mission but made the following observation: "This settlement is composed principally of people from the States who during the two last Revolutionary and Indians wars were employed with or taken by the Indians; and some of them are strangely cut and marked with tomahawks and knives." Case was successful in establishing a Methodist Society that met for the first time at Rudolph Huffman's home east of Ridge Road. Methodist churches would arise at Potlake, East Harrow, Oxford (Oxley) and Harrow.

GOING TO CONFERENCE.

Illustration from The Circuit Rider: A Tale of the Heroic Age by Edward Eggleston depicting a Methodist circuit rider on horseback.
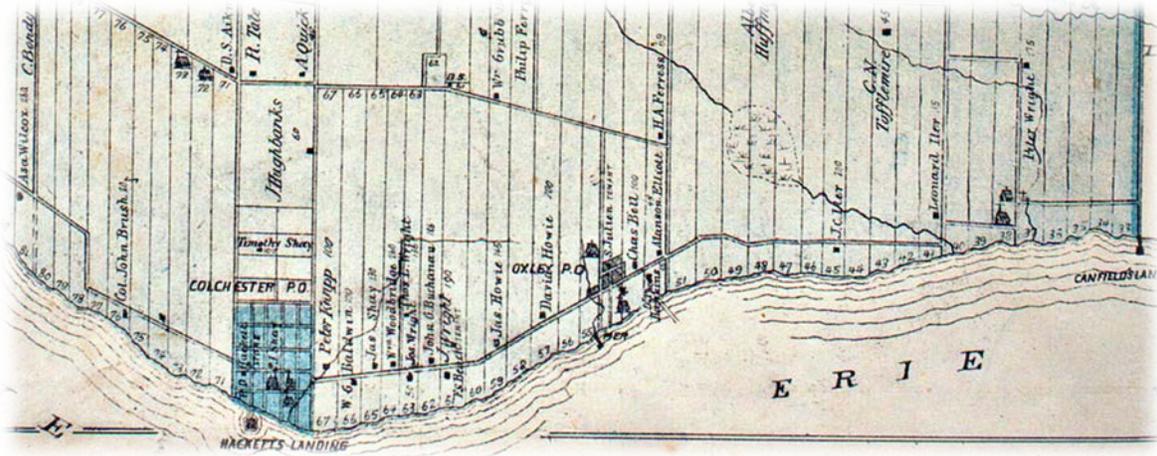
Nineteenth century map of the Lake Erie shoreline with some landowners identified

The Front Road

In the early days of settlement, road maintenance fell to the pioneers, not government. Some settlers maintained their portion of the road, while others did not. To make matters worse, the original Front Road that ran along the lake was lost to erosion. Around 1837, settlers began to construct a road from Henry Lypps' farm to Iler's Creek, but they were delayed for several years at the large cranberry marsh on Huffman's farm. This is the road known today as County Road 50. A map from 1842 shows Wright's Inn on the west end of the Front Road. A map of Oxley dated 1853 marks the road as "Road to St. Thomas." Travellers using the Front Road could stop at Oxley Hotel for rest and refreshments on this route.

Colchester Street Names

After the 1841 survey of Colchester Village was completed, John Alexander Wilkinson, one of two Members of the Legislative Assembly for Essex, named the streets after prominent men in government: Sullivan, Murdoch, Harrison, Draper, Ogden, Dunn, and Daly. Wilkinson also named certain streets after highly distinguished officials. Sydenham Street was named in honour of the recently deceased Governor General of Canada, Lord Sydenham. Clitherow Street was named after Mayor-General John Clitherow who briefly served as Lieutenant Governor of Canada West and Canada East after Sydenham's death. Clitherow was followed in this role by Sir Richard Downes Jackson, after whom Jackson Street was named. Bagot Street was named for Sir Charles Bagot who succeeded Jackson as Lieutenant Governor and also assumed the role of Governor General left vacant by Sydenham's untimely death. All but one of these streets continues to exist today. As part of a major route along the lakeshore, Murdoch Street is now known as County Road 50.

Sinasac's Tavern

Shortly after the 1841 survey laid out streets in Colchester Village, Edward Sinasac (also spelled Sinesac, Senesacques and Sinasaque) built his tavern on the northeast corner of Murdoch Street (today's County Road 50) and Dunn Road. For the next 40 years, Sinasac's Tavern served as the focal point for social and political gatherings, including Colchester Township Council for a time. In recognition of its importance, people often referred to Colchester as "Sacksville" (also spelled "Sacsville").

Sinasac's Tavern, corner of Front and Dunn Roads

Local Government Established

When Upper Canada was established in 1792, there was little provision for local government. Justices of the Peace were appointed to maintain law and order and to make local decisions. They met quarterly in Sandwich at the Court of Quarter Sessions. After the Rebellion of 1837-38, Lord Durham reviewed the administration of government in Upper Canada and recommended that a form of municipal government be established to allow residents to play a role in local decision-making. As a result, Colchester Township elected John Ferriss as its first Reeve in 1842. As Reeve, Ferriss sat as one of 28 members of the Western District Council that met in Sandwich from 1842 to 1849. It wasn't until 1850, after the Western District Council was dissolved, that a Township Council consisting of a Reeve and four Councillors was established. The council met in a new frame building on the northwest corner of King and Church streets in Munger's Corners (officially named Harrow in 1857).

Colchester South Township Hall, 1874 Commemorative building located at the Canadian Transportation Museum and Heritage Village

Municipal Offices

In the early days of political governance, Colchester Township Council met at Sinasac's Tavern on the northeast corner of Murdoch Street (today's County Road 50) and Dunn Road. After formal township government was established in 1850, the township hall moved to a frame building on the northwest corner of King and Church streets in Munger's Corners (officially named Harrow in 1857). In 1872, a new brick township hall was built on the same site. Colchester Township continued to use this building until the mid-1980s.

When Harrow officially became a town in 1930, they built a new municipal building and moved their offices to 44 King Street East. Harrow and Colchester South both governed from Harrow in offices situated just a block apart. In the mid-1980s, the offices were reunited when the main floor of the Harrow Town Hall was renovated to accommodate both administrations, one on each side of the central hallway.

When the towns of Harrow and Essex amalgamated with the townships of Colchester South and Colchester North in 1999, the municipal offices were established at the municipal building in Essex Centre and Harrow Town Hall became police headquarters for the municipal police force. A switch to contract policing in 2009 brought the Essex Detachment of the OPP to the building as its current occupant.

Prohibition

When you think of prohibition, you probably think about that period between 1916 and 1927 in Ontario when rumrunning was at its height. In Colchester, prohibition began much earlier with a municipal ban. The Dunkin Act of 1864 passed by the pre-Confederation Province of Canada, and the Scott Act of 1878 passed by the Parliament of Canada, gave municipalities the option of opting into prohibition. Under the Scott Act, a temperance vote was required. It's not clear when it happened, but we know that Colchester South held a temperance vote that made it a "dry" township. Hotels in the late 1800s thus provided food and lodging only, no liquor. Taverns in adjoining "wet" townships arose at municipal

FOR SALE.

A TAVERN STAND,

In the Village of Harrow, Township of Colchester. The subscriber offers for sale that excellent stand known as the "Harrow Hotel," at present occupied by himself. The house is a two-story frame building containing eleven rooms, and is in a good state of repair. Attached to the premises is a large barn, with granary, and stables capable of accommodating fifteen horses. There is also a good shed, almost new, together with several other out-buildings. In connection with the hotel is about half an acre of land, well stocked with all kinds of fruit trees, of all the best varieties. The place is well supplied with water, there being two never-failing wells on the premises. This stand is in a very desirable locality, being within three miles and a half of Hackett's Dock, on Lake Erie, and on the main road between Amherstburg and Kingsville.

For further particulars apply on the premises to   JOHN THRASHER.
Harrow, March 7, 1872.   568tf.

Advertisement, Essex Record, 1872

boundaries — The Meadows Tavern on County Road 50 West where Malden Township began, Lucier's Hotel on the Colchester-Malden Townline, and the McGregor Hotel in Anderdon. After a century of being "dry," a plebiscite held on November 12, 1985 finally changed Colchester South's status to "wet."

First Store in Harrow

The first store in Harrow was located on the northeast corner of Queen and King streets. Operated by William G. Wright from 1859 to 1874, the store was sold to John McAfee who then expanded the business. Wright Road and McAffee Street (now spelled with two f's) reflect these important family names.

HARROW GENERAL STORE,

Harrow, Ont.

——o——

A large and well-selected stock of seasonable goods in:

Staple and Fancy Dry Goods,

Men's and Boys' Clothing, Gents' Furnishing Goods,

Hats and Caps, &c., &c.

BOOTS, SHOES AND RUBBERS, IN ALL BRANCHES.

GROCERIES AND CONFECTIONERY,

Paints, Oils, Glass, Putty, Coal Oil, Salt, Land Plaster and Water-Lim
Crockery and Glassware, Wall Paper and Stationery,
Shelf and Heavy Hardware,

Farming Implements,

Agent for G. Middleditch's Agricultural Implements.

Prices as reasonable as with any house in the Dominion, that pays 100 cents on the dollar for their goods.

The highest price paid for Farmers produce in exchange for goods.

Agent Montreal Telegraph Co.

JOHN McAFEE.

Harrow, Ont., Dec. 1, 1878.

McAffee Street

In 1876, a new street was planned for Harrow that would provide access from King Street to the new fairgrounds. The street would not see completion until 1888, around the same time that John McAfee was surveying the railway line from Walkerville to Kingsville and building a general store and post office on the southwest corner of King Street and the new unnamed street leading to the fairgrounds. In honour of McAfee's contribution to the era of prosperity that was expected to accompany the completion of the railroad, the street alongside his store was named after him. Today we inexplicably spell it with two f's.

Harrow Becomes a "Police Village"

Before Harrow was a town, it was first a police village. In mid-19th century Ontario, police villages were allowed in cases where the population or the finances of a settlement area were insufficient to permit the creation of a village. As the settlement at Harrow grew, the needs of its residents diverged from the needs of other citizens of Colchester South. In 1898, after petitions and public meetings, Essex County Council passed a by-law establishing Harrow as a police village. Residents of the village had the right to elect three trustees who could levy property taxes to pay for local improvements. This form of municipal government continued until Harrow achieved town status in 1930.

Lake Erie and Detroit River Railway

In the late 1800s, Hiram Walker changed the landscape of South Essex when he decided to build a rail line to the property he owned at Marshfield, and onwards to Harrow and Kingsville. According to the Harrow Early Immigrant Research Society's history of the area, the very prospect of Hiram Walker's railroad passing through Harrow stimulated development before the tracks even reached the community in September 1888. The Lake Erie, Essex and Detroit River Railway brought new opportunities to Colchester Crossing (later called McGregor), New Canaan, Marshfield, and Harrow. It also spurred development of the summer tourist industry in

On the tracks at Harrow Railway Station

Oxley. The word "Essex" was dropped from the railway's name in 1891. In 1903, the Pere Marquette Railway purchased the railroad and extended it to the Niagara frontier. Trains ran from Windsor to Harrow until 1991. A Bell Box mural located on Walnut Street, north of King Street was painted by Ted Hamer during the summer of 2016 and is a celebration of Hiram Walker's railroad.

Firefighting

Firefighting in the early days of settlement consisted primarily of bucket brigades. In 1894, a fire destroyed buildings and a gristmill on Harrow's west end. Then in 1895, another fire destroyed a portion of the central business district. Without a system of municipal taxation to provide firefighting services and equipment, the community was tasked with raising money for a hand pumper, which was purchased in 1895 and stored in a wooden barn on Queen Street. When vandals set fire to the barn in 1898, destroying the engine, the financial crisis that ensued led to Harrow becoming a police village in order to levy costs to Harrow residents. The small engine that was ordered to replace the lost pumper was stored in a corrugated metal shed on the east side of McAffee Street. Through taxation, fire services improved. In 1947, Harrow and Colchester South merged their firefighting efforts into one fire service.

The Earl of Essex

In 1872, land speculator Alexander Cameron bought 100 acres of land in the northeast corner of Colchester Township, where the Canada Southern Railway intersected the Talbot Road. Cameron and his business partner, George Wilson, expected to clear the densely wooded interior of Essex County at this important juncture and to develop a new village at the county's hub. By 1874, Essex Centre was growing into a respectable village with two sawmills, a freight yard, a hotel, and a number of houses. Cameron actively participated in its development by building houses and laying out streets, including Cameron, Wilson and Medora, the latter named after his wife. Known in his time as the "Earl of Essex," Alexander Cameron laid the foundation for the growth and prosperity of Essex Centre.

Canada Southern Railway

On May 20, 1873, the first train stopped to pick up passengers in Essex Centre. This was good news for the residents of Colchester Township. Before rail lines were laid, the transportation of goods and people was limited to horse-drawn carriage or ship. The first railway in the township provided an alternative method of transportation for sawmill operations and farmers living in the northern reaches of the municipality. A similar economic benefit was felt when the Lake Erie and Detroit River Railway laid tracks through Harrow in 1888.

Michigan Central Railway Station, Essex Centre

Education

Education in the New Settlement

Until 1842 there were no school sections and no local government to oversee the planning of education in Colchester Township. The Common Schools Act of 1816 attempted to introduce the basis for public education but it failed to provide the kind of support that would ensure progress. It allowed a school to be built wherever there were 20 students or more. Parents could elect three trustees and could hire and fire teachers (who had to be loyal British subjects), but they were also expected to pitch in, cover any shortfall, and pay education fees. The legislation had little benefit in the New Settlement. Settlements were scattered and the few roads that existed were in poor condition. There were few certified teachers, few books, and no money to pay for either. The emphasis on planting, tending and harvesting crops gave little incentive to take children away from farm work.

First Schools

Early education in Colchester Township took place in churches and farm buildings. The old stone Christ Church was used as a school in Colchester Village until a log schoolhouse was constructed south of the church on land that later eroded into Lake Erie. Records from 1817 show two certified teachers in Colchester – James Price and Angus MacDonald.

As early as 1825, we know that black settlers living at the corner of Drummond Road and the Third Concession had established a Baptist church and a school.

The first school in the Iler Settlement was on Ernest Iler's property near the John R. Park Homestead, followed by a school built at the Snider Cemetery. Teacher James Bell taught at this school from 1837-39, walking from Oxley each day. Bell recorded his experiences in a set of letters sent to his family in Scotland. These letters, preserved by the Harrow Early Immigrant Research Society, provide a rare glimpse into life in our part of Upper Canada.

By 1842, the province required each township to set up a Common School Commission and to establish school sections. The first school established under the new School Act, was the one located on the farm of Lennox Thompson on the southwest corner of the Ridge Road and County Road 20. Mr. Thompson was also the teacher. The building was completed in 1845. That year, residents of Munger's Corners (now Harrow) presented the commission with a petition stating that the school was too far for the children to walk. The first school building erected in Harrow was opened in 1851 on Given Road (today's Walnut Street).

Teacher James Bell

We are indebted to early settlers like James Bell for providing us with a rare glimpse into the early days of Colchester Township. In a set of letters sent to his family in Scotland, Bell recorded his daily experiences in Upper Canada.

Born and educated in Scotland, Bell arrived in North America in 1835 as a young man of 20. In short order he met and married Mary Noble of Amherstburg and purchased an uncleared farm on Lot 56, Concession 1, in Colchester Township. From 1837 to 1839 he taught in the Iler Settlement, walking each day from his rented home, just west of the ravine in Oxley. It wasn't until 1842 that he built a house on Lot 56, but then moved to Toronto for a well-paid teaching position. He didn't return to his farm until after 1857 and lived there for the rest of his life.

As an educated man, Bell was well suited for top positions. He was appointed County Inspector of Public Schools and Superintendent of Schools for Colchester Township in the 1860s. He also held the positions of Clerk of the Fourth Division Court, Justice of the Peace, and Treasurer of Colchester Township. Bell's letters were preserved by his family and have been compiled into a book by the Harrow Early Immigrant Research Society.

On touring the region as County Inspector of Public Schools, 1872

"I have had an excellent opportunity of getting acquainted with the natural appearance of this County and also with its inhabitants. With respect to the first, I think that this is the most beautiful country I have seen, either in Canada or in the U. States. To be sure, it wants the attraction of mountains, but otherwise it has all the natural elements of a fine landscape, and lands as rich as the heart of the farmer can desire, though only partially subdued to human uses. The four townships bounded on the north [sic] by Lake Erie are under my charge, and are only about one-third cleared, the rest being occupied by the primeval forest, or to some extent by what the Americans call wet prairies, and we call marshes, though wet only in spring or in the early part of summer."

On his 1843 winter trip to Toronto

"I travelled by mail sleighs. The traveling was quite safe and rapid but uncomfortable as we were sometimes obliged to sit in an open carriage where the snow was too uneven to admit of driving one with a roof, which would be overturning every now and then. In one part of the route, the winter road for 10 or 12 miles is on the frozen surface of Lake St. Clair. The wind blew strong across the bleak expanse of ice, and the surface being composed of large sheets brought down from the Northern Lakes and cemented together in every variety of form. It was so rough the horses could seldom go beyond a walk. It was really shockingly cold, I was obliged to lie down in the bottom of the carriage with my cloak and a buffalo skin over me…. We came in 70 hours going night and day only stopping for meals."

Segregated Education

In 1842, a new School Act required each township to set up a Common School Commission. In Colchester Township, the commission established school sections using a segregated model. In 1850 there were eleven school sections, seven numbered white sections (1 to 7) and four lettered black sections (A for New Canaan, B for Matthews Settlement, C for Gilgal, and D for the settlement north of Colchester Village). Three additional numbered sections were added shortly thereafter, plus a fifth lettered section for Pleasant Valley. By 1860, the black and white student bodies were integrated and a unified numbering system for school sections was implemented. But segregation continued in the classroom as black students were seated apart from white students and often received separate instruction. In addition, some sections remained predominantly black for some time. Section 11 in the Matthews Settlement remained black until 1965 when protests against the continuation of this last segregated school in Ontario resulted in its closure.

Colchester Schoolhouse

The red brick schoolhouse found at the corner of Bagot and Sullivan streets in Colchester Centre is considered to be a property of cultural and historical significance in our community. When the log schoolhouse originally constructed south of Christ Church was lost to erosion, a school was built in 1856 on the northeast corner of Bagot Street at County Road 50. In 1881, the year that free compulsory education became mandated by law, the schoolhouse building

was moved off site and a new red brick school-house was built further south on the same lot. Known as S.S. #2, the school had one room and one teacher for all grades. The school was closed in the early 1960s, along with other township schools, when elementary education was centralized in Harrow.

Colchester Schoolhouse, corner of Sullivan and Bagot streets

Harrow Public School, 1870-1948

Harrow District High School

Originally called the Continuation Class, Harrow High had its beginnings in 1904 in a second floor classroom at Harrow Public School. There were initially 10 students and one teacher. When the province refused to fund the class unless it had a proper building, a new two-storey brick school was built on Wellington Street in 1914. The Harrow Continuation School continued until 1939 when Harrow District High School came into existence. HDHS served the community well for over 100 years, graduating many fine scholars and community leaders. In 2016, the Greater Essex County District School Board voted to close the school at the end of June 2016 and redistribute the student population to high schools in other communities. Low enrolment and high maintenance costs were cited as part of the rationale. The building currently sits empty.

Lake and Land

Southernmost Settlement in Canada

With the exception of Pelee Island, Colchester Village is the southernmost settlement in mainland Canada, falling below the 42nd parallel, a circle of latitude shared with northern California and central Italy. Road markings on County Road 50, Erie Street South, Dunn Road, and Arner Townline identify where the 42nd parallel runs through our region. A sign on the 42nd parallel at Dunn Road explains its significance.

42nd Parallel Sign
Dunn Road

Steamboat Travel

Without any inland roads, early settlers travelled along the shores of Lake Erie and the Detroit River by boat. In 1818 the first steamboat appeared on Lake Erie. This wood-burning steamer took 44 hours to travel from Buffalo to Detroit. Shipping by water became increasingly popular and lucrative. In 1824, William McCormick's travel guide, *A Sketch of the Western District*, noted that steamboat travel between Buffalo and Detroit took place every eight days from May to December. After the Erie and Welland canals were opened in the late 1820s, agriculture and the lumber industry entered new commercial phases as transportation to European markets became possible. Anything could be transported – crops, timber, sand, stone, livestock, commercial goods, and people.
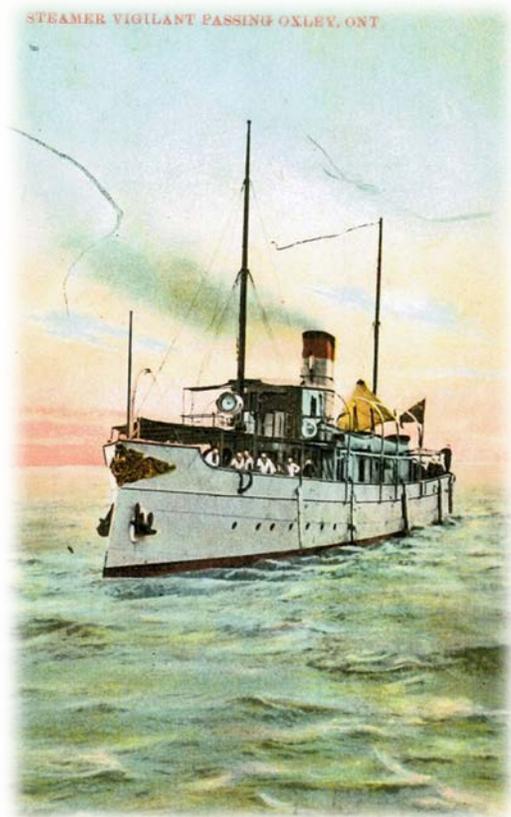
Postcard of Steamer Vigilant Passing Oxley

Road Conditions

It's hard to imagine our region covered in dense forest without a single road on which to travel, but that's how the early settlers found it. Without organized government, the task of road building initially fell to the settlers who were busy clearing the land and planting crops. Road development was thus slow. In 1824, William McCormick noted in his travel book, *A Sketch of the Western District*, that roads were in poor condition: "The roads as may be expected in a new country and particularly in newly improved places are not very good but still passable. During the hard weather in winter they are excellent. A horse will carry a load on a sledge or sleigh from fifty to sixty miles in a day." McCormick describes two early roads: one along the coast of Lake Erie leading to the Talbot Road and another along the Detroit River and up Lake St. Clair, likely precursors of Highway 3 and Highway 2. Stagecoach travel on early roads was an uncomfortable option. In 1884, Albert Fox owned the stagecoach line from Amherstburg to Oxley, with stops at Harrow and Colchester. The trip took three-and-a-half hours each way.

Iron Smelting at Oxley

During the early days of settlement, the discovery of a small deposit of bog iron led to the establishment of a smelting furnace at the Oxley ravine. Discovered in Harrow, west of Erie Road, the iron deposit was described as a gravel pit containing stones and pebbles with a very high concentration of iron. It is said that the gears for the first threshing machine in the district were cast in this foundry from iron taken from the Harrow pit. At least one carload of bog iron was shipped to a Hamilton smelter.

Tales Told by Trees

Observations about vegetation and forest cover assisted early pioneers in determining whether the land they were about to purchase (or be granted) was well-drained or swampy. In *Land, Power, and Economics on the Frontier of Upper Canada*, John Clarke notes that well-drained sites along the Lake Erie shoreline were covered in beech, chestnut, maple, white oak, red oak, and white ash trees. Inland sites, where extensive drainage systems were eventually developed to deal with wet conditions, had more willows, black ash, soft maple, elm, and sycamore.

"The High lands are covered with fine Timber which is used for Building, fencing and fuel – The Timbers most Common are white Red & Black Oaks, Hickory, Ash, Walnut, Chesnut [sic], white and Red Elm, Cherry, Beech, Sugar Maple and Soft Maple – of Sugar Maple there is great abundance and its Sugar when carefully manufactured is equal to that of the West Indies."

William McCormick, A Sketch of the Western District (1824)

Lake Erie Docks

In the early days of settlement, ports of call arose in a number of places along Lake Erie. At Snider's Point, west of Colchester Village, farmers would drive their high-wheeled wagons right into the water to unload produce onto shallow draught boats. The dock at Oxley is thought to have been the first, as records show that the Harrow postmaster went to Oxley once a week to collect the mail. When the firm of Hackett and Co. built the dock at Colchester in 1866-67, the village became an important port of call, allowing enterprising settlers to export lumber and grain. Hackett's Landing, as it was also called, served as a fuel depot for steamships requiring wood. When lake ice destroyed the dock, Hackett dissolved his business. Near the end of the 19th century, the Canfield Dock at the end of the Arner Townline was a busy operation. It included a large platform with turnaround space so that

Postcard of Colchester Pier c1939

teams of horses (and some skittish oxen) could deliver goods to waiting vessels, then turn around safely to exit. After the Lake Erie and Detroit River Railway laid tracks across the Arner Townline, rail became the preferred method of transportation and the Canfield Dock closed.

Bathing the Sheep

Did you know? Sheep farmers in Colchester would drive their flocks to the lake to bathe them before shearing. Young lambs and feeble sheep would travel in wagons, but the rest would walk the distance. Temporary pens would be built on the shore. The Harrow and Colchester South History says: "There were some thrills to be had in the game, such as some tussles when big rams faced the foaming waves. As soon as the struggling animals were caught by the first waves, resistance was over, since their oily fleece floated them clear of the bottom. As they could not swim, they were content to be rolled in the water until their coats were thoroughly cleaned."

Shipwrecks

Within 10 miles of Colchester there are about 15 known shipwrecks. The Western Basin of Lake Erie has about 100 known wrecks. The two wrecks closest to Colchester are the M.I. Wilcox and Jana's Wreck.

M.I. Wilcox

Built in 1868 in Toledo, Ohio by the Bailey Brothers, the M.I. Wilcox was a three-masted, 377-ton schooner that sank in a gale near Colchester on May 8, 1906. The crew escaped to shore in the yawl boat. Today, the wreck lies in 25 feet of water approximately one-half nautical mile from Colchester Harbour. Artifacts that remain at the site include a large wooden stock anchor, windlass, deadeyes, centerboard winch, steam winch, and donkey boiler. The ship's large rudder and wheel lie approximately 100 feet to the east.

Jana's Wreck

Found by local diving expert Mike Drexler, this wreck lies just off Colchester Beach in 10 to 17 feet of water. The hull dimensions suggest a side paddle wheel steamer approximately 200 feet long. Evidence of salvage is pronounced. The dimensions, flue tubes and crude iron and rivet construction suggest a very early design, possibly 1840s or 1850s. At the north end of the wreck, the capstan still boasts its brass manufacturer's plate with "Tallcot & Underhill, Oswego N.Y. No. 3" clearly visible. Tallcot & Underhill were machinery manufacturers in 1853 before the company was sold to Henry M. Ames and became the Ames Iron Works in 1858. The identity of this wreck has yet to be confirmed.

Mariner's Cemetery

The dangers of traveling on volatile Lake Erie were well known to early residents. Bodies that washed ashore were respectfully buried in local burial grounds. At the Huffman Cemetery, a stone marker memorializes the burial place of unknown shipwrecked sailors whose bodies washed ashore and were buried by the Huffman family.
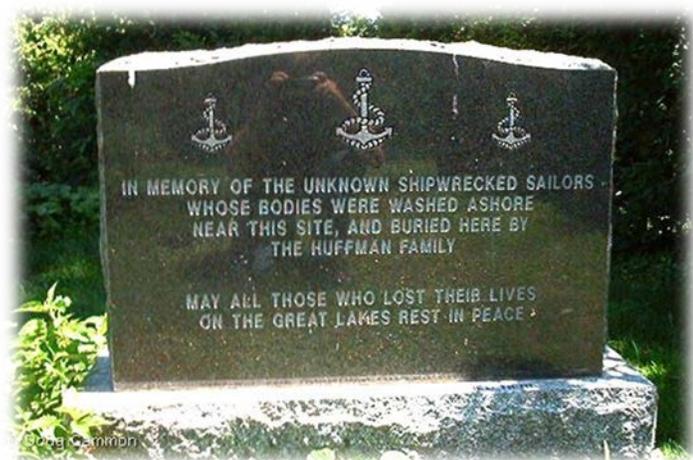
Stone at Huffman Cemetery dedicated to shipwrecked sailors

Oxley Methodist Church: Beacon to Sailors

Although it was not the first Methodist church in the district (that honour being reserved for the Methodist chapel at Potlake), the Oxley Methodist Church served many important purposes. Built in 1870 across the street from what would become Erie View Hotel (today's Holy Family Retreat House), the church was the spiritual and social centre of activity for the community for 60 years. Its position close to the lake also allowed it to serve as a beacon for sailors, as the church steeple on the high bluff could be spotted for miles around on a clear day. The church was closed in 1930 when Harrow became the central location for Methodist services.

Oxley Methodist Church

Colchester Reef

In the 1800s, ships plied the waters of Lake Erie hauling such things as lumber, coal, stone, crops and travelers. A shallow reef located approximately 3.5 nautical miles southeast by south from Colchester Harbour created perilous conditions for these ships and contributed to the demise of at least four vessels. Today known as the Colchester Reef, the very small island or shoal was simply labeled "rock" on an 1849 chart prepared by the US Bureau of Topographical Engineers, War Department. The same chart described it as having an 8-foot depth of water. Mike Drexler, of Drexler Diving Systems in Colchester, says that multiple lightships were stationed at Colchester Reef until the lighthouse was constructed in 1885. One lightship was cut in two by ice flows and sank in 1880 without loss of life. Another lightship foundered in 1883 and Captain Alfred Forrest and another man drowned.

Colchester Reef Lighthouse, built 1885

Colchester Reef Lighthouse

The Colchester Reef Lighthouse was constructed in 1885 to serve as a beacon to vessels traveling past Colchester and the Grecian Shoal, today marked with a red buoy known to most as the "mile stake." Plans for the lighthouse were drawn up by the

The base of the lighthouse, pictured right, can be seen from Colchester on a clear day

Department of Marine in Ottawa as early as 1882, but the lighthouse was not completed until 1885 due to multiple changes in contractors and a destructive storm in August 1883. The caisson that forms the base of the existing lighthouse and helipad structure was notably built with limestone quarried from Pelee Island. John Manson was the longest lighthouse keeper, serving for 26 seasons until his retirement in 1911. One account indicates that Manson heroically swam to light the lighthouse when his small boat capsized in a storm. Fred Malott (1911-1916) and John B. Knapp (1916-1936) also served as lighthouse keepers. When the lighthouse was destroyed by fire in 1959, a flashing beacon was installed on the stone foundation, which still stands 3.5 nautical miles southeast by south from Colchester Harbour.

Changing Shoreline

The shoreline of Lake Erie today is not the same shoreline that early settlers experienced. It is said that a baseball field and a walnut grove south of Christ Church in Colchester Village disappeared below the waves as erosion and lake levels staked a claim. A 1913 article in the Amherstburg Echo describes that early shoreline: "When the old church was built, the property stretched out southward, a

Ruins of the old Christ Church near the eroding bluff

sufficient distance to permit the first school being built, having an extensive schoolyard on which, when the lads played ball, they had no fear of the ball going over the lake to the south, nor breaking the windows of the church to the north… Today the edge of the bank is not 15 feet from the old school." Erosion also changed the shoreline dramatically at John R. Park Homestead. Today, the front door of the home is just feet from the lake, but in the 19th century a large orchard was south of the house. Homeowners in the 21st century maintain breakwalls to help protect the shoreline from further damage.

Lake Ice

Today, we wouldn't think of depending on the lake to provide ice for refrigeration. But before electric refrigerators, ice-cutting on Lake Erie was a major operation during the winter months. People with lakeside property, like the John R. Park family, would cut their own ice and store it in an ice house, insulated with sawdust. Fishermen would also harvest and store natural ice for use in boxing and shipping fish later in the year. In the early 20th century, the Knapp Ice House, situated just west of Erie Cemetery in Colchester, held 100 to 200 pound blocks of ice in a large barn-like building. There was a thriving ice business all summer long as ice was delivered to cottages and farm homes along the lake road. With the arrival of electricity, artificial ice became possible. Natural ice harvested from the lake was not used after the mid-1930s.

Earthworks

When the early settlers arrived in Colchester, many of them discovered Indian mounds or earthworks on their property. On August 20, 1915, the Amherstburg Echo, a key source of weekly news from around Essex County, reported on the existence of Indian mounds in the shape of ridged forts on specific properties. The fort located on the Peter Wright farm was said to be the largest, while smaller mounds could be found on the Philip Ferriss, Birch, and Wilcox farms. Highly prized relics, like arrowheads, spears, and stone axes, were found within the earthworks. During the Cedar Creek Archaeological Survey conducted in 1968, "The Fort" on Earl Iler's property was closely examined and field notes from examinations made in the 1940s were reviewed. Although the property had been altered extensively by plowing, researchers identified 20 or 30 pits that had been disturbed or destroyed and found pieces of pottery and pipes, along with a single corner-notched projectile point. The Cedar Creek and Iler Earthworks continue to be of some interest to archeologists seeking to understand their significance.

Researchers from the University of Waterloo examine the Iler Earthworks during the summer of 2016. Photo shows the remnant ditch feature (the dark, semi-circular stain) on the western side of the site. *Photo courtesy of Prof. Christopher Watts*

Two Creeks

Did you know? Fox Creek was originally known as McGregor Creek. Although the mouths of Fox Creek and Dolsen Creek appear to be separate streams of water at Lake Erie, that wasn't always the case. In the 1700s, before the lakeshore eroded, the two creeks shared a single mouth located midway between the two creeks on property granted in 1794 to Major Gregor McGregor. Hence the reason Fox Creek was originally called McGregor Creek.

Drainage

When Thomas Smith surveyed Colchester's back concessions in 1805 he found them well timbered but incredibly waterlogged in places. Early settlers didn't have the tools or the time to dig big drainage ditches, which made it difficult, if not impossible, to farm the inland parts of the township. With the advent of steam shovels in the 1870s, excavation became possible. And, with the passage of the Drainage Act in 1874, municipalities were given the legal means of assessing costs to landowners. Waters west of Harrow now flow northwest through the Long Marsh Drain into River Canard. The Shepley, Ferriss, McLean, and Richmond drains carry water clockwise almost completely around Harrow and east to Cedar Creek, which flows southeast to Lake Erie. In the late 1800s, these drains effectively converted marshland to farmland and contributed immeasurably to the farming economy of the region.
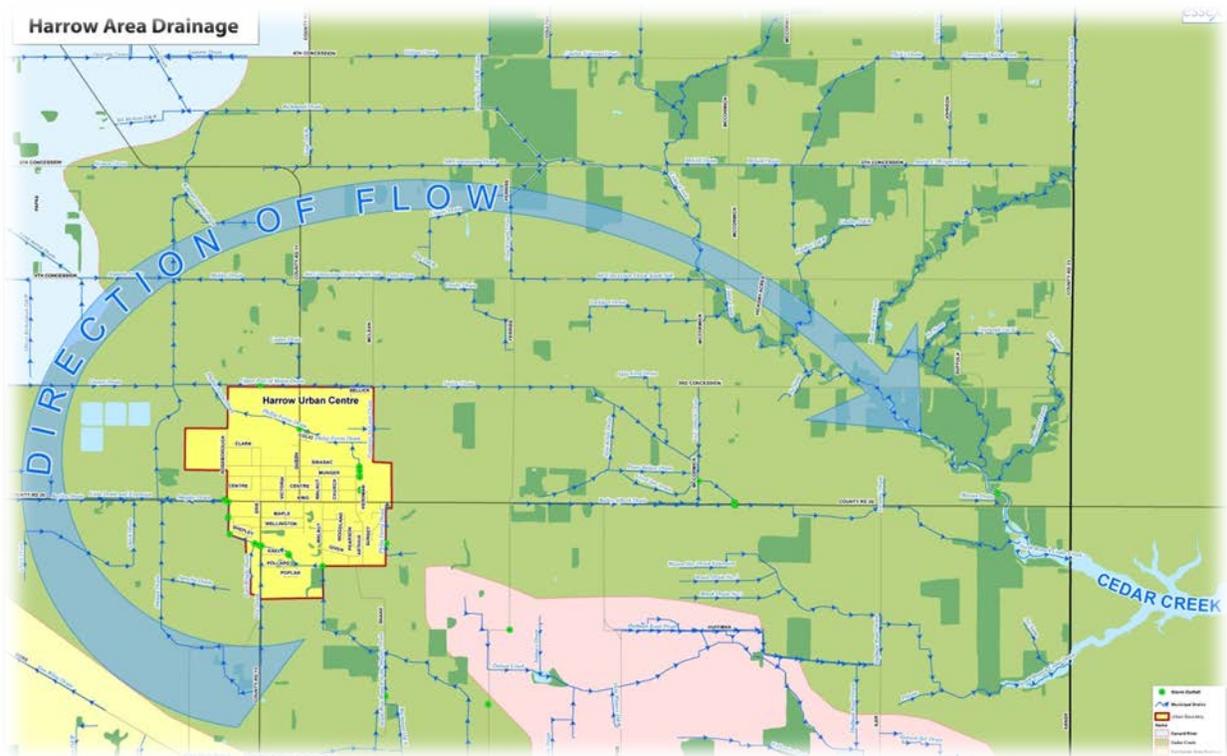
Town of Essex map showing the direction of water flow through municipal drains

Clearing the Woods

Looking across the flat, open expanse of Essex County today, you might be hard-pressed to believe that Essex County was once densely wooded. But it was! To pave the way for settlement and farming, an extensive sawmill industry arose near the lakeshore and slowly crept into the interior. The earliest sawmill was William Buchanan's on Lot 18, Concession Two. A dam on Cedar Creek, west of the Arner Townline, provided the waterpower needed to run the mill. In the 1850s, John Ridsdale and Thomas Salmoni dammed a stream at the ravine in Oxley to run a sawmill. After Francis Fox purchased the John R. Park Homestead in 1865, he set up a sawmill that continued to be operated by his son, Gordie Fox, until 1952. Sawmills arose wherever there was a need and were frequently moved to be near new sources of timber. They also resulted in new settlements. By the 1870s, a number of sawmills were operating north of the 7th Concession. In 1878, the Sweetman Brothers established a sawmill on the 9th Concession where the Canard River crossed the road (in the settlement of Elford). The Campbell sawmill operated on the bank of the Canard River where it meets County Road 15. The Campbell name is reflected in Campbell Sideroad. Further north on County Road 15, between the 12th and 13th Concessions, John Edgar established a sawmill and a settlement just south of the Canada Southern Railway line that came to be known as Edgar Mills. In McGregor, the Sicklesteel sawmill, built in 1876, helped to grow the community by housing employees and their families.

Camp Cedarwin Sawmill Site

Carl Smith Sawmill

As you travel along County Road 20, west of the Arner Townline, you'll notice a sign on the south side of the road for the Camp Cedarwin Sawmill Site. Owned by Scouts Canada, the site is the original location of the Carl Smith Sawmill, located since 2001 at the Essex County Steam and Gas Engine Museum in McGregor. Carl Smith and Herbert "Hub" Malott set up their first mill on Huffman Road in 1936. The mill moved several times over the years but spent most of its time on the west bank of Cedar Creek, a mile or so west of the Arner Townline, on property leased from Alfred Arner Sr. In the early days of sawmills, lumber was hauled by horse-drawn wagon to the Canfield Dock at the end of the Arner Townline. With the arrival of the Lake Erie and Detroit River Railway in the late 1880s, lumber was hauled to the Arner railway siding instead and then transported by boxcar. The forest yielded choice lumber, including shagbark hickory, tamarack, red oak, chestnut, walnut and cherry. The sawmill has been restored and can be viewed at the annual Essex County Steam and Gas Engine Show during the second weekend in August.

Quicksand

Did you know? Quagmires of quicksand have made passage through and construction in Harrow and Colchester South challenging over the years. In the early days of poor drainage, parts of Harrow were impassable. Alvin Ridsdale reported that he and his father Harry, plumbing and electrical contractors, had to abandon their car and carry their tools to avoid the quagmire on Wellington and Maple streets. Even today, veins of quicksand are known to run through the area in pockets. Engineers and contractors working on the Dunn Road construction project in 2015 encountered destabilized sections of quicksand that required additional remediation before road construction could continue.

Jesuit Pear Tree

The origins of a pear tree that grows on Iler Road are somewhat shrouded in mystery. One line of thinking suggests that Jesuit missionaries came to Essex County in 1749 and planted pear seedlings along the banks of Lake Erie as landmarks for new settlers. An article that appeared in the Amherstburg Echo on April 26, 1878, however, suggests the tree is younger: "On Leonard Iler's farm, on the shore, there is a pear tree, ten feet in circumference. Mr. Iler's great grandfather [John Snider] planted it there over seventy years ago." Regardless of how the tree came to be planted, we know that there are less than 40 Jesuit pear trees remaining in Essex County. The Canadian Clonal Genebank at the Harrow Research and Development Centre preserves the rare germplasm of the Iler pear tree and an old pear tree located at John R. Park Homestead.

Pear Tree at John R. Park homestead

Osage Orange Tree

South of St. Mark's Cemetery on Dunn Road you might notice a tree bearing round, yellow fruit during the autumn months. On closer inspection you'll discover large bumpy orbs littering the ground beneath the tree. These are Osage oranges, the fragrant fruit of a unique tree that is prized for its dense, rot-resistant wood. But unlike the fruit from Florida, this fruit is definitely not suitable for human

Osage orange hangs from a thorny tree

consumption. Although it's not considered poisonous to humans, the Osage orange is incredibly difficult to peel and will leave everything it touches covered in a sticky sap. The tree itself grows sizeable thorns on its branches. Pioneers planted these trees in rows resembling hedges (hence the alternate name, hedge apple) and used these trees to deter cattle from wandering into gardens. For a fragrant addition to your holiday centerpiece, and a great conversation starter, include some Osage oranges from Dunn Road.

Oxley Poison Sumac Swamp

The Oxley Poison Sumac Swamp, protected by the Nature Conservancy of Canada, is the only remaining poison sumac community in Essex County. Before agricultural drainage, these wetlands were once common in our region.

Mayflies

The annual infestation of mayflies signals the start of summer in Essex County. Sometimes called shadflies or fishflies (and even June bugs), mayflies hatch in enormous quantities and enjoy a very brief life before expiring on windows, walls and doorways. Although they are associated with proximity to bodies of fresh water, like Lake Erie, mayflies increasingly infest inland areas as well. Just as their lives are extraordinarily short, so too is the inconvenience for residents of our area.

Agricultural Roots

Colchester South and Harrow Agricultural Society

The origins of the Colchester South and Harrow Agricultural Society date back to 1844 when the first meeting of the Colchester Agricultural Club convened at "Quick's school house." The purpose of the organization was to help farmers to improve production through the sharing of information and methods. The Colchester Agricultural Society was officially incorporated in 1854, the same year as the first Harrow Fair was held. The fairgrounds began to take shape in 1880 when the society purchased seven acres for a floral hall and stock pens. Over the years additional land was purchased and structures were added. When fire burned down the old Exhibition Hall in 1981, a larger hall took its place by 1983. In 1992, the hall was chosen as the first location of the Essex County Agricultural Hall of Fame. Thanks to the Harrow and Colchester South Agricultural Society, we continue to honour our farmers – both during the Harrow Fair and in the Essex County Agricultural Hall of Fame.

Harrow Fair

As one of Ontario's oldest country fairs, dating its origins to 1854, the Harrow Fair has stayed true to its rural heritage with its strong emphasis on highlighting and honouring the products of our farmers. The first fair was more like a sale. Quarterly gatherings at different farms gave members an opportunity to show and sell livestock, seed grains and implements. The first annual fair was held in October 1878 behind the old town hall on the Alfred Munger farm. Similar to the fairs held today, that fair featured a long prize list of fruit, vegetables, homemade crafts, horses, cattle, sheep, swine, poultry, grain

At the Harrow Fair

and seeds, field crops, and dairy products. In 1880, seven acres of land at the current fairground location was purchased and an exhibition hall and stock pens were built. The fair has taken place annually at this location ever since. In 2017, it was voted "Best Local Festival" in the Best of Windsor-Essex Awards.

Cheese Factory

Did you know that Harrow once had a cheese factory? The earliest evidence of cheesemaking was in 1879 on Jackson Quick's farm. In 1891, local farmers created a co-operative cheese factory in Harrow with a capacity of 24,000 pounds of milk per day, the output of approximately 800 cows. Cheese sent to the Chicago World's Fair in 1893 was awarded a gold medal.

The Days of Dairies

Dairies and large dairy herds were once a thriving industry in Colchester Township. In 1898, Charles Bell and his son Harry established the Nuttwood Creamery on their Oxley farm, shipping 300 pounds of butter each week. In 1908, the old cheese factory in Harrow was converted into a butter factory. The Farmers' Friend Creamery produced an average of one-and-a-half tons of butter weekly with shipments to Toronto, Montreal, and eastern cities.

Canning Factories

With such an abundance of food available at harvest time in our region, it's no wonder that food processing has been part of our local history. In 1916 the W. Clark Company established the largest cannery in Harrow on Erie Street North. The plant processed tomatoes, tomato juice, ketchup, asparagus, sweet corn, green and wax beans, and pumpkin. Purchased by Green Giant in the mid-60s, the plant closed over a dispute about the cost of water. Other canneries of shorter duration included Harrow Cannery, Quality Canners, and H.J. Heinz, which had a salting station for pickling cucumbers. In 1957 Lakeside Packing Company opened on County Road 50 and continues to produce a small line of pickles. At 60 years old, Lakeside Packing is the longest operating cannery in the area.

The Old Mill

The Old Mill on the west side of Queen Street near Sinasac is a local landmark that has been photographed for weddings, events and historical curiosity. Originally a steam-powered flourmill, the building was purchased by the Harrow Farmers' Co-operative in 1920, during the formative years of that organization's existence.

The Old Mill, Harrow

The Potato Pool

Small acreage potato growers used to be plentiful in the Colchester countryside. Forty-eight growers in 1935 expanded to 165 by 1947 through the united efforts of the Harrow Potato Growers' Association. Known as the Potato Pool, the organization set up shop in some old coal sheds located next to the railroad tracks, east of Queen Street. They were instrumental in getting the Canadian government to convert from 90 to 75 pound jute bags and started the trend to washed potatoes. During World War Two, Harrow was the largest grower-operated grading business in central Canada. By 1953, they had marketed two million bags of potatoes. Changes in production, transportation, and the development of a provincial marketing board spelled the end of the local Potato Pool in 1973.

Harrow Research and Development Centre

Established in 1909, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's experimental farm in Harrow has grown into a world-class research centre that boasts the largest greenhouse research facility in North America. Visitors are often surprised to learn that a moraine divides a massive fresh-water lake located underground at the research centre.

Soybean Success

A soybean breeding program started at the Harrow Research and Development Centre in 1923 has resulted in steady growth for soybean production and increased yields throughout southwestern Ontario. The Harosoy soybean, released by the research station in 1951, won the World Championship Seed Sample in Chicago in 1953-54 and is considered to be one of the most successful soybean varieties ever developed in North America. Valued and preferred by Japanese tofu producers for its high protein content, the Harovinton soybean was named "Seed of the Year" at the 2006 Royal Agricultural Winter Fair in Toronto.

Dry Bean Innovation

Thanks to scientists at Agricultural and Agri-Food Canada's research centre in Harrow, we can choose from a variety of fancy beans for soups, chili, and baked beans. In the last 60 years, scientists here have bred an astounding 35 dry bean varieties.

Leading Vegetable Growers

H.J. Heinz Company of Canada Ltd. set up manufacturing operations in Leamington in 1909, the same year that the Harrow Research and Development Centre was established. This set the stage for an important future partnership and the region has become Canada's largest tomato production area. Superior tomato varieties have been researched and developed in Harrow, along with cucumber, cabbage, cauliflower, broccoli, eggplant, brussel sprouts, sweet corn and peas.

Canadian Clonal Genebank

Since 1990, the Canadian Clonal Genebank at the Harrow Research and Development Centre has been collecting and conserving tree fruit and small fruit crop plants for the genetic information they contain. Over 3,500 tree fruits and berries are represented in the Genebank, including 1,100 strawberry, 100 raspberry, 800 apple, 85 peach, 60 grape and 12 chestnut varieties.

Wine Country

Colio Estate Winery in Harrow is celebrated for its award-winning wines. It's also historically significant as the winery that brought viticulture and wine making back to our region. Grape growing on Pelee Island in the 19th century reached its height in the 1890s when 35 wineries operated on the island. By 1900 that number had fallen to nine. The industry collapsed entirely when Prohibition banned the sale of alcohol. Its renaissance began in 1980 when Colio Estate Wines obtained the first winery license to be issued in Southwestern Ontario. Today, Essex is home to nine wineries that produce some of Canada's best award-winning wines.

Ribbon cutting for the Essex County Agricultural Hall of Fame

Agricultural Hall of Fame

Exhibition Hall at the Harrow Fairgrounds pays homage to over 100 people who have made outstanding and significant contributions to the betterment of Essex County agriculture. That's where the Essex County Agricultural Hall of Fame has been holding its annual induction ceremony since 1992 and where the portraits of inductees are displayed for all to see. At the first induction ceremony on April 15, 1992, eight individuals were inducted, including the late Hon. Eugene Whelan (Member of Parliament for Essex and federal Minister of Agriculture) and local residents Alvin Laramie, Warden McCormick and Dr. Cass Owens. In that same year, Charles Huffman of Colchester South, a vegetable grower and a leader in the co-operative movement, was posthumously inducted into the Ontario Agricultural Hall of Fame.

20th Century

"One of the largest crowds ever accommodated at the Oxley summer resort spent Saturday there. The Pere Marquette train was so crowded that people had to stand on the steps. Seven (horse-drawn) busloads left Harrow on the arrival of the train, and a second trip had to be made. It is said that altogether over 300 visitors were here. Resorters complain that the PM railway does not provide sufficient accommodation for them; 75 people or more had to stand in the aisles coming to Harrow on Saturday."

- Amherstburg Echo, August 11, 1905

Oxley:
Resort Getaway

The railway sparked the start of a booming resort industry at Oxley at the turn of the century. Throngs of tourists, many from Detroit, would arrive in Harrow on the Pere Marquette train. They would transfer to a horse-drawn carriage from Drummond's or Pastorius' Livery, which could

**Postcard of Oxley Bluff and Beach, showing staircase**

carry eight to ten passengers and their luggage. They would then make their way to Oxley and its beach of unsurpassed excellence. The summertime influx of visitors carried on until after the Second World War. The Ravine Hotel and later the Erie View Hotel (today's Holy Family Retreat House) did a booming business, but other homeowners engaged in the summer guest business. This seasonal business was a good income for many. Some families gave up their homes entirely to the visitors and lived in alternate accommodations.

One Hundred Steps to Shore

During the heyday of the resort industry at Oxley, a staircase built in 1912 lead from the top of the bluff to the beach below. This famous staircase consisted of 100 stairs and was accessed from the top of the bluff beside Erie View Hotel, now Holy Family Retreat House. When the stairway deteriorated it was not repaired.

Corrected heading: 20th Century

Ravine Hotel

Ravine Cottages, once known as the Ravine Hotel, has been a local landmark for almost 140 years. Originally a private home built by Stephen Julien, the building was con- structed between 1877 and 1880 on property that had, at one time, supported busy lumber and shipping operations.
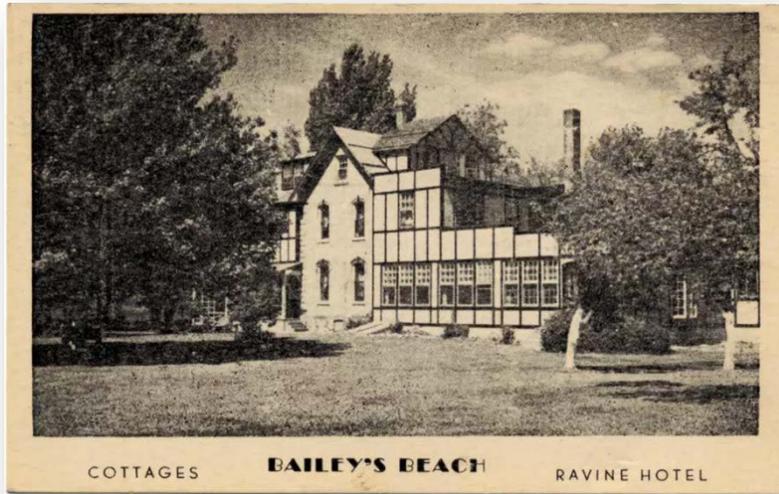

Postcard of the Ravine Hotel

The property was purchased by Arthur Bailey of Detroit in 1902. Recognizing the tourism potential of Oxley, Bailey renovated the building and made it three stories high with guest rooms and a dining room. He aptly named the hotel after the ravine on the property that runs from County Road 50 to the lake. The hotel was marketed to Americans who arrived at Harrow by train and were then transported by horse-drawn vehicles to Oxley. This was the beginning of the summer resort industry in Oxley.

Harrow Becomes a Town

In the late 1920s, by the terms of the Municipal Act, a town needed 2,000 residents to qualify for town status. In the optimistic economic climate of 1929, before the October stock market crash, the people of Harrow believed that they would reach the 2,000 benchmark in no time, so they lobbied the provincial government to pass a special statute incorporating the Town of Harrow. On April 3, 1930, Harrow

Edmund F. Darby, centre, Harrow's first mayor

became a town with Edmund F. Darby, druggist, as their first mayor, Allan C. Quick as the first reeve, and three additional councillors. It would actually take over 50 years for the population of Harrow to surpass 2,000.
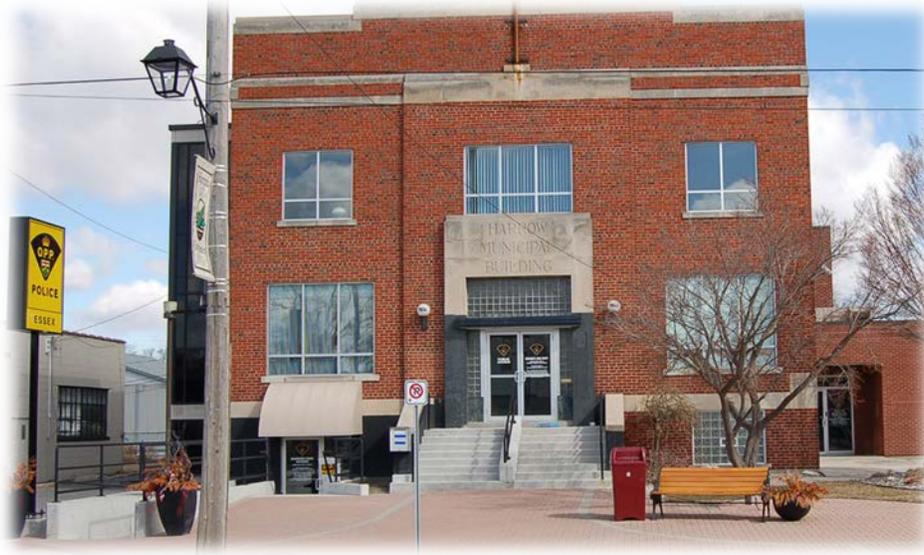
Essex OPP Detachment operating out of the former Harrow Town Hall

Police Service Established

Before local police forces were established, county constables patrolled Essex County and reported incidents to the Windsor Police Department. Growing concern about the lack of a unified provincial constabulary led to the creation of the Ontario Provincial Police in 1909. OPP coverage to all areas of the province not served by municipal police forces was extended in the 1940s. The earliest records show that T.W. Harding was the constable in charge of the Colchester South OPP detachment from 1946-1949, while Chief Thompson was in charge of the Harrow detachment for the same period. On January 1, 1953, the OPP passed the Colchester South operation over to the newly created Colchester South Township Police with J.J. Shepherd as the first chief. The police station was located in a house on Jackson Street, north of 18A Highway (today's County Road 50) and the wives of the police constables provided radio dispatch services from their homes. In 1977, the police station was moved to a dental clinic on Erie Road South and the Colchester South Police assumed additional responsibility for the Town of Harrow, which had been served by the OPP. In February 1986, the police station moved to the basement of the Harrow Municipal Building at 44 King Street East. At amalgamation in 1999, the entire building became police headquarters for the Town of Essex municipal police force. A switch to contract policing in 2009 brought the OPP back to Harrow and Colchester South.

Early Policy Dispatch

Before police radios were invented, Colchester South Police used a telephone that ran off the car battery. The phone would set off the horn, which blew until the phone was answered.

McVittie's Store and Dance Hall

George and Bessie McVittie's dance hall was a summertime attraction that brought people from all over Essex County. Purchased in the mid-1920s, the building that sat on the southeast corner of Murdoch (County Road 50) and Dunn roads was originally a general store and restaurant. When they built a dance hall on the east side of the store and added an orchestra five nights a week, McVittie's became a popular summertime destination, both for locals and for cottagers vacationing at one of the many beach communities.

Geo. McVittie's General Store, Colchester, Ont.

Bus Service

According to the Harrow Early Immigrant Research Society's history, a wrong turn in the road brought bus service to Harrow in the early 1920s. Delivering a bus from Hamilton to Windsor, William Reese arrived in Harrow instead. The townspeople persuaded Reese to invest in a bus service between the village and Windsor. In 1922, the first bus left Harrow from Elliott's Garage. Bus service continued for 10 years.

Flood of 1989

If you lived in Harrow and Colchester South in 1989, you will remember the historic rainfall that dumped 450 mm (17 inches) of rain on the area in less than 24 hours. A significant rainfall that began on the evening of June 19 turned to a deluge by midnight. Rains fell at a rate of 30 millimetres per hour and finally let up around 5 a.m. Then at 9 a.m. on June 20 a second deluge came that lasted for 6 hours and included a one-hour period in which 50 millimetres of rain fell. Two thousand homes were flooded, 20 basements collapsed, and 10 culverts and bridges were washed out. The greatest rainfall ever recorded in Canada east of the Rockies resulted in an estimated $45 million in damages.

Walleye Fishing Capital of Canada

Dubbed the Walleye Capital of Canada" in 2007, Colchester Harbour reels in some of the best perch and pickerel that Lake Erie has to offer. It always has! In *A Sketch of the Western District*, William McCormick wrote in 1824: "The fishes are the Masconundia Sturgeon, Salmon Trout, Pickerell, Whitefish, Pike, Catfish, Black and White Bass besides a great variety of inferior fishes. All the waters abound with the different fishes and they are caught in every little stream and inlet. The Masconundia Pike and Pickerell run up as far as they can find water to float them. The former is the finest fish I ever tasted either of salt or fresh water. White fish and pickerel are salted and sent into the United States for some hundreds of miles where they bring a high price."

Recording & Preserving History

A Sketch of the Western District

Written in 1824 by William McCormick of Colchester, *A Sketch of the Western District* survives as one of the few pieces of contemporary literature describing life along the north shore of Lake Erie in the 1820s. Written as an enticement to potential Irish emigrants, the small travel book was enthusiastic about the British nature of the district and provided vivid descriptions of the waterways, trees, crops, land values, roads, government, weather, etc. It also provided detailed information on what an emigrant might bring with them to ensure comfort and success. Obtaining a cheap but improved farm and planting crops immediately were important recommendations.

Lyman Copeland Draper

Lyman Copeland Draper (1815-1891) was an American historian who famously compiled an enormous collection of personal accounts and historical documents related to the northwest expansion of America in the late 18th century. As a prodigious correspondent and collector of historical documents, Draper had an insatiable interest in recording the stories told by relatives, friends and bystanders of early settlers and military combatants. He was especially interested in stories related to Simon Girty, alleged renegade and traitor. In 1849, Draper began corresponding with Joseph Munger Jr., an influential early resident of Harrow and the grandson of Simon Girty. In 1863 he travelled to Harrow to meet with Munger, Girty and McCormick descendants. As a result of his efforts, Draper compiled a rich collection of observations and letters about early Colchester settlers and a substantial pile of evidence refuting the American characterization of Simon Girty as a heartless turncoat. Draper's work is preserved on microfilm in the Draper manuscript collection of the Wisconsin Historical Society.

The Amherstburg Echo

Did you know that the Amherstburg Echo, founded in 1874, is a key source of information on early settlement and phenomena in Essex County? The weekly newspaper compiled news from across Essex County and included a Harrow and Colchester South page until the 1950s. Historians and genealogists have relied on microfilmed copies of this newspaper and the Harrow News, a local community weekly, to provide them with key details about the past.

Today researchers can view old copies of the Amherstburg Echo and other early newspapers, like the Essex Free Press and the Essex Record, online at http://ink.ourdigitalworld.org.

'Buy at Home – at Harrow" message in the Amherstburg Echo, February 23, 1934

Harrow Early Immigrant Research Society

The Harrow Early Immigrant Research Society (commonly known as HEIRS) was founded in 1971 when Gladys Golden invited 30 guests to her home to discuss the formation of a historical society. Since then, members have worked tirelessly to preserve local history and to support historical and genealogical research. The research centre located at the Harrow and Colchester South Community Centre is a notable accomplishment of the group, offering a large collection of materials, research assistance, and lively discussions for anyone interested in local history. HEIRS is also responsible for a local history book, *Harrow and Colchester South 1792-1992*. This book is an invaluable resource and excellent starting point for anyone seeking to learn more about our history.

Bicentennial Plaques

Have you noticed small plaques affixed to the exterior walls of businesses on King and Queen streets in Harrow? In 1992, Harrow and Colchester South celebrated the area's bicentennial by mounting these commemorative plaques on storefronts. The plaques identify the shops and services that existed at each location in 1930, the year Harrow became a town.

Commemorative plaque on the exterior wall of Blimey's British Store

Get Your Red & White ON

The year 2017 was a year of celebrations. It was Canada's 150th, Ontario's 150th, and Colchester's 225th! The Town of Essex celebrated these important milestones with a community celebration called "Get Your Red & White ON" held July 29th. You can show your civic pride each and every day by celebrating our rich history and helping to create a hopeful and prosperous future.

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