



# Reflections

Newsletter of the Marsh Historical Collection  
Amherstburg, Ontario



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## COLLECTION HIGHLIGHTS

By Kara Folkeringa

As we near its 110th anniversary, it seems only fitting to highlight the contract for the building of the Amherstburg Public Library. The contract was between Joseph B. Wilson and the Corporation of Amherstburg for the Carnegie Library building. The architects are identified as C. Howard Crane & J.C. Pennington. In total, the cost of the building was \$12,000, and the prominent philanthropist Andrew Carnegie gave \$10,000 towards it (Windsor Star, January 30, 1913). It was opened on April 9, 1913.

We will be further highlighting the history of the Amherstburg Public Library and items in our collection that pertain to it through an exhibit that will be available from April 10-30<sup>th</sup> – stop by to learn more!

### Upcoming Events at the Library

**April 12<sup>th</sup>** 4-6pm Open House-Amherstburg Library's 110<sup>th</sup> Birthday Celebration!

**April 12<sup>th</sup>** 6-7:30pm Heritage Buildings of Amherstburg Presentation with Meg Reiner

**April 13<sup>th</sup>** 2-3pm Little House on Dalhousie - Amherstburg Branch 110<sup>th</sup> Birthday Celebration with Stephanie from Park House Museum

Visit [essexcountylibrary.ca](https://essexcountylibrary.ca) for more details and additional events in April.

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**This Agreement,** made the Second day of October in the year one thousand nine hundred and Eleven by and between Joseph B. Wilson, of Amherstburg Ontario,--Canada.

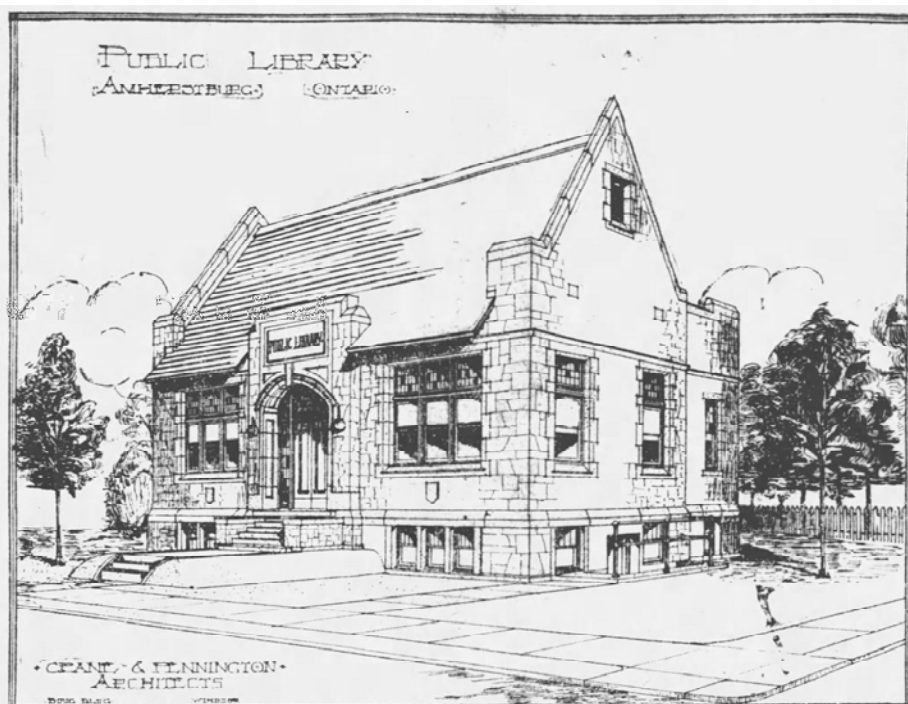
..... party of the first part (hereinafter designated the Contractor), and The Corporation of the Town of Amherstburg Ontario,--Canada.

..... party of the second part (hereinafter designated the Owner),

**Witnesseth** that the Contractor, in consideration of the agreements herein made by the Owner, agree with the said Owner as follows:

**ARTICLE I.** The Contractor shall and will provide all the materials and perform all the work for the erection and completion of all work called for under the heading of Mason Work, Lathing & Plastering, Carpenter Work, Sheet Metal & Roofing, Painting & Glazing, Plumbing, Heating, and Electric Wiring, for the new Carnegie Library Building to be erected in Amherstburg, with the exception of changes noted on attached addenda, all to be

..... as shown on the drawings and described in the specifications prepared by C. Howard Crane & J. C. Pennington, Windsor Ontario. Architect, which drawings and specifications are identified by the signatures of the parties hereto, and become hereby a part of this contract.



# HAPPENINGS AT THE MARSH

## Congratulations to Phyllis Chant on her retirement!



Phyllis joined the Marsh Collection team back in 2016. While at the Marsh, Phyllis entered our entire library catalogue, consisting of over 1300 books, into our collections database. In addition to assisting researchers with genealogy and other inquiries requiring 'history detective' services, she wrote many amazing articles for the newsletter and really boosted our Facebook following. Thank you for your years of hard work and dedication to sharing and preserving Amherstburg's history!

## FACES BEHIND THE PAGES



MEG



KARA

In addition to Meg & Kara, we have many contributors to the quarterly newsletter. If you are interested in submitting an article, please reach out. Thanks to Phyllis Chant, Al Jackson, and Ken Hutnik for additions to this issue! What would you like to see in the newsletter?

## EXHIBITS

### AMHERSBURG PUBLIC LIBRARY

110<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Exhibit April 10-30<sup>th</sup>

### THE MARSH FAMILY

In celebration of the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the founding of the Marsh Collection Society we will have a display featuring Amherstburg's chroniclers of history during the month of May.



### BOB-LO ISLAND

Opening Saturday, June 10<sup>th</sup>  
Stay tuned for event details!



## What's In the Collection?

The Marsh Collection Society mandate is "to collect, preserve and encourage research into the heritage of Amherstburg and the lower Detroit River district."

The facility contains a large collection of photos, books, genealogical records, maps and reference files on a variety of historical topics, plus microfilm of The Amherstburg Echo from 1874 to 2012. There is also a small gift shop which contains various publications about local history.

Funding comes from various foundations and private individuals. While ADMISSION IS FREE, donations are most welcome. A receipt for income tax purposes will be issued upon request for any monetary donation of \$10 or more.

**The Marsh Collection is open to researchers & visitors from 10am to 4pm Monday- Friday.**

Email: [research@marshcollection.org](mailto:research@marshcollection.org)

Website: [www.marshcollection.org](http://www.marshcollection.org)



## THANK YOU TO OUR DONORS

If you enjoy reading our newsletter please consider making a donation through our website:  
<https://www.marshcollection.org/donate/>



## JOE & HAZEL LACEY

The Marsh Collection Society wishes to thank the Joe and Hazel Lacey Memorial Fund and The Windsor Essex Community Foundation for a recent donation. We sincerely appreciate this generous contribution to our organization. The Joe & Hazel Lacey Memorial fund was established in 2009 by their children to celebrate their parents' years of community involvement.





# THE FELLOWCRAFT DILEMMA

By Al Jackson

Captain Nicholson owned and operated the Nicholson Transit Company with docking and warehouse facilities at Ecorse, Michigan. His main business was the transport of steel products from the giant steel mills of Cleveland to his Ecorse Terminal where he could supply the large shipbuilding and automobile industries of Detroit. His small ship named FELLOWCRAFT could make the round trip between Ecorse and Cleveland in approximately two days if all went well.

Early in the morning of March 28, 1932 after spending a winter layup at Ecorse, the FELLOWCRAFT left the Nicholson dock and headed downstream for Cleveland. This ten hour run, her normal transit time, was uneventful with no ice problems. Her cargo of steel was loaded overnight, however, the wind had shifted to the east and this meant a goodly portion lake ice would certainly return to the western end of Lake Erie. The captain of the FELLOWCRAFT decided to take his chances and set out that morning for the return trip to Ecorse. The short

trip across Lake Erie to the Canadian side went well until they reached the South East Shoal Lighthouse that marked the start of the Pelee Passage between Pelee Island and Point Pelee. Heavy ice slowed their forward progress considerably until they almost reached the Colchester Reef Lighthouse at which time the little ship was stopped completely and frozen in. There were no ice-breaking tugs available to assist them in the western basin of the lake and even the United States Coast Guard icebreaker ASPEN had become stuck in this huge ice field near Toledo, Ohio. On the FELLOWCRAFT the cook had put enough food on board at Ecorse for a normal round trip of two days but this was now day four. The captain had distress signals hoisted up on the masts of the ship which could be seen from the Canadian shoreline. This was passed on to Capt. Nicholson who chartered an airplane to fly out and survey the situation. Once the plane was spotted, the crew of the FELLOWCRAFT wrote a message on the hatch covers to say "Ship OK- Fuel OK but No Food." The pilots were able to

drop some supplies, with pinpoint accuracy, on the deck of the FELLOWCRAFT, but not enough to end the crew's hunger.

On the Canadian side of the lake Captain J. Earl McQueen of McQueen Marine Ltd., Amherstburg was informed of this situation and he immediately put a rescue plan into action. He sent three of his employees to find an old rumrunner's boat with steel runners which they filled with provisions and took it to the Colchester Beach. From there they set out for the FELLOWCRAFT, but were caught up in a blinding snowstorm and soon lost sight of the ship. With darkness approaching they turned back towards to beach with the intent of trying again the next day from Kingsville.

At Kingsville a crowd of news reporters had gathered who were keen on getting the highlights of the rescue attempt. Several distress flares had been sent up from the ship and from shore the rescue team could make out the silhouette of the freighter which by now had been dragged to the east by ice flow to a point about eight miles off shore. One reporter from the Detroit News using the fictitious name of "Captain Herring" persuaded the rescue team to allow him to accompany them on their perilous mission. After several hours of dragging their sled/boat across the ice, they finally reached the FELLOWCRAFT only to be told to go back as they were no longer needed.



*The Fellowcraft, no date, Source: Skip Gillham Collection*

*Continued on page 4...*

## ICEBOUND STEAMER'S CREW RECEIVE FOOD BY 'PLANE



...Continued from page 3

Photo from The Daily Mirror March 23, 1932

It seems that a light airplane from Grosse Isle had been chartered that morning by Capt. Nicholson to fly to the imprisoned ship and the dare-devil pilot was able to land his plane on the ice next to the ship. Enough food was put on board and this ended the crew's food dilemma. The exhausted rescue team returned to Kingsville safely with the reporter who took a terrific razzing from his fellow colleagues when they learned there was no actual rescue story to be scooped. He was then known as "Captain Fishbone" for years to come by the newspapermen of Detroit.

That night the wind changed direction and began to break up the massive drifting ice flow that had imprisoned the little steamer for five days. This allowed the FELLOWCRAFT to get underway and head for Lorain, Ohio where she spent the next few days in the safety of the harbour before continuing to the Detroit River and her home port of Ecorse.

## RAILWAY HISTORY

Besides the railways that moved goods in and out of Amherstburg, there were local railways that moved loads around local industries. Here is a picture of Allied Chemical #7 in November 1972, courtesy of Kenneth Borg. If you have information about our local industries and railways, we would love to learn more. Contact us at [research@marshcollection.org](mailto:research@marshcollection.org).



We now have a binder in our reading room FULL of unidentified people in pictures within our collection. It's organized by decade, starting in the 1800s and goes all the way to 2002.

**Come on in and take a look to see if you recognize anyone!**

# UPSETTING THE HOUR GLASS

## 1933

**March-** Town homeowners complain of plaster cracking from the severity of the blasts happening in the Livingstone Channel.

**April-** A group of boys from General Amherst have formed a Glee Club as well as a ten-piece orchestra under the supervision of W.K. Sidey.

**May-** Sometime during Sunday night thieves entered the Mareno Fruit Store, Dalhousie and Richmond streets, and carried off fruit, jam, and other articles. The entry was made by digging a hole under a boarded window at the rear of the building, entering the cellar and thence to the store.

## 1943

**March-** Cold weather apparently frightened the stork away from Amherstburg during the month of February, for Town Clerk George H. Jones reports there were no birthdays in town during that month. However, there were five marriages and two deaths.

**April-** The General Amherst High School has made an interesting contribution of man and woman power to the armed services. At the present time 18 ex-students are officers and 119 are in the ranks on active service. To have 137 of its alumni in the service is an exceptionally fine record.

**May-** There was a splendid crowd of Young People at the first of the Spring series of dancing parties in the Brunner Mond Club, Friday evening. The dances had been discontinued during Lent so that after the recess everyone seemed

happy to be back again and all had a dandy time.

## 1953

**March-** Amherstburg residents didn't have to go very far last week to see large flights of wild geese, for hundreds came in each day to the Henry Rebidoux Bird Sanctuary, corner of the fourth concession and townline, in Malden township.

**April-** Provincial Police in Amherstburg have issued a warning about a gang of car radio thieves that have been working around Windsor and Essex County. Early Tuesday morning they hit Amherstburg and lifted radios from autos around town.

**May-** Interior improvements are underway at the Amherstburg Public Library. New shelves have been constructed and put into use. These are modern and make it easy for the patron of the library to select their books. Plans have been prepared for a new librarian's desk, funded by the Amherstburg Lions Club.

## 1963

**March-** Something new has been added to the area this Christmas season, decorations - a lighted sign atop the high Brunner Mond Canada, Limited building with the word 'greetings' in many colored lights. The sign is on the west side of the building and is not only seen by people passing along the King's Highway #18 in the Anderdon Township but by the residents of Grosse Ile living along the East River Road.

**April-** This past week has been a busy one at the buoy depot,

Department of Transport wharf, Dalhousie Street South. McQueen Marine Limited equipment is placing buoys from Pelee Passage to the Ambassador Bridge.

**May-** In the very near future a goodly number of telephone poles will be taken off the streets in some sections of the town. Already underground lines have been put in and all that remains is to hook them up. Underground lines are also being built in some sections of the Amherstburg rural area, notably along the Middle Sideroad in Anderdon Township.

## 1973

**March-** For several days this past week large trucks have been hauling steel from the New York Central yard to the Bob-Lo dock, foot of Murray Street. This structural material is for the new large roller coaster which will be constructed on the west side of the island. The ride was fabricated in Japan and entered Canada through the Port of Vancouver. It was brought to Amherstburg by rail.

**April-** Keeping up with the times - The Echo has placed an order for a CompuWriter which is a computer to handle the setting of news stories. This will eventually mean the phasing out of the two linotype machines.

**May-** The Essex Terminal Railway through the Town of Amherstburg has donated an old caboose to the Gibson Gallery, Richmond Street. This will be set on rails and become part of this art operation.





# FRANCINE DROLET- A SEAMSTRESS & SPY?

By Phyllis Chant

Ahh ... The famous local seamstress that all Amherstburg women of the 1960s and 1970s knew of; but, really, no one knew her true story. This local business came to light after our Facebook post about Stedman's. In those two decades, Francine Drolet had a dress-making shop on the second floor of the popular department store. Francine Drolet was the name she went by here in Amherstburg. It was said that she had such talent that she didn't even need a pattern to create a dress with Parisian flair. This seamstress rarely advertised. Searching her out was difficult, but then, finally, a break! In a 1965 Yellow Pages phone-book that had recently been donated to us, there was an advertisement for Francine's business.

This is where Francine's story gets interesting. This part of the tale comes to us from Terry Hall whose mother, Mary, related to him a story told by Francine. Mary was a nurse during WWII, which probably led Francine to tell her that she had been a seamstress, supposedly in Paris, during the war. Being beautiful, she became a mistress for a German officer but, dangerously, she was also working as a spy for the Resistance. Surviving the war, Francine came to Canada and settled in Amherstburg to start a new life. Terry's mother smiled politely at the story while being fitted for a dress, never knowing if it was true.



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Advertisement from 1965  
Bell Telephone Directory



Findagrave.com  
Photo by Norm Talbot

A seamstress and a spy? Well, the answer wasn't going to be that easy.

After a bit of digging, more interesting information about Francine was found. Sadly, it was her grave-stone at St. John the Baptist Cemetery: "Drolet, In loving memory, Franziska Korbel, 1903–1978, Cousin". Next, finding her obituary, it read: "Drolet – Franciska (Francine), November 10, 1978 at Grace Hospital ... Dear sister of Annie Specht and Lucie Zboinski of West Germany, and beloved first cousin of Mrs. Lore VonMinnigerode of London ... Ms. Drolet was a dress designer in Amherstburg."

So, now the search began for a "Franziska Korbel". With her two sisters living in West Germany in 1978, and a cousin in London, Ontario, it didn't make any sense that Francine had hailed from France. A "Franzeska Korbel", approximately the right age, left England on the Queen Mary (Cunard White Star Limited) on January 19, 1949, with a destination port of New York, USA.

With a bit more research, a Ralph Drolet was found in a 1955 Amherstburg Echo ad selling "Pfaff" sewing machines. In this advertisement, Ralph is also offering free sewing lessons by Francine. Earlier the same year the Echo mentioned, "Mrs. Ralph Drolet (Francine) received a cablegram Monday that her father had died in Germany.

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Mrs. Drolet recently returned from visiting him.” These are the first times Francine is connected with Ralph Drolet.

In 1956, large ads appear in The Echo for “Francine Pfaff Sewing Circle” at 18 Dalhousie Street. Ralph is not mentioned in the ads for that new venture. A passenger airplane list for February 25, 1958, has a “Fraziska Drolet”, a Canadian, whose birthplace is listed as Pietle Assie, Germany, arriving at Chicago, Illinois. Finally, a confirmation of Francine's birthplace!

Through the 1950s, Ralph was a motor mechanic for the S.W. & A., and resided on R.R. No. 2, Amherstburg. Ralph had been previously married to Hazel E. Harris (1924). Hazel appears in the 1965 Voters Lists for Lambton/Kent Counties by herself. Also in 1965, Ralph is now listed as an office worker, and living on Aubin Road,

Windsor. Marriage records for Francine and Ralph have not been found, and neither has a divorce record for Ralph and Hazel.

In the 1963 Canada Voters Lists, a Mrs. Francine Drolet is listed as a dressmaker, living at R.R. No. 2, Amherstburg, but no husband is listed. Ralph's 1968 obituary does not mention either of the women. This is the same for Francine's obituary – there is no mention of her husband, Ralph.

Through the '60s and '70s, Francine was in demand for wedding dresses and bridal party dresses. She must have been an excellent seamstress, as The Amherstburg Echo reported on November 8, 1972 that Francine Drolet had returned to town after a six-month tour of Europe and a Mediterranean cruise, during which she visited family and friends.

A sadder report comes again from The Amherstburg Echo on November 8, 1978. It recounted that on November 2nd, Francine Drolet received serious injuries when she stepped out on to the

road at 41 Richmond Street and was hit by a north-bound car. The driver tried to avoid her, but couldn't. She was taken to Grace Hospital where she was diagnosed with a broken pelvis and right leg. On November 10th, Francine passed away from her injuries. Her London, Ontario cousin took care of Francine's final details, her burial, and a London lawyer acted as executor.

Unfortunately, through all the file-digging, newspaper searches and looking at family trees, etc., no photo of Francine was found. With two sisters and her father living in Germany, maybe the story of her being part of the Resistance is a tall tale, or maybe she did live in France during WWII. So, as the story started and now as it ends, we don't really know Francine's full story. Maybe the seamstress was a spy ... we will never know. It's a Catch-22.

If by chance you have more details or photos regarding Francine, including photos of her dresses, we thank you in advance for your help.

## THEN & NOW 57 & 59- Richmond Street



*Sew What? Fabrics and Precision Jewellers, 1975*  
Photo by Rev. Theron Brock Buchanan



*Musicland and Will Insurance Brokers Ltd.*  
Photo taken March 9, 2023



# BRICKS-N-BEAMS

## 79-81 Murray Street (Part 2)

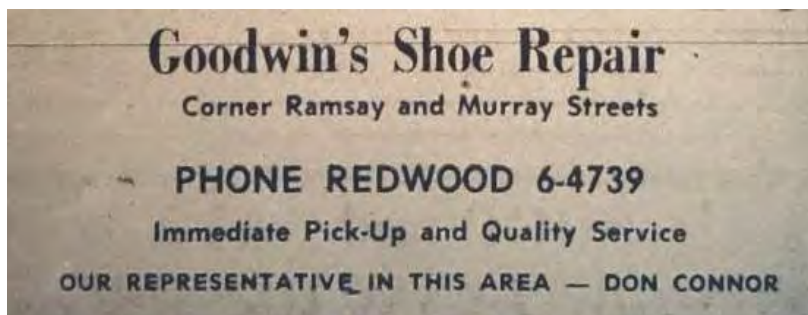
By Meg Reiner

In the last issue of Reflections, we left off with the Brewer's Warehouse moving out of the building which was then owned by Alexander Park. The corner block then returned to the hands of Amherstburg cobblers for many years. In 1936, Ignace Kopacz had a moving sale at his shop on Murray Street called the O.K. Shoe Repair. He then relocated to the featured building, referred to as the 'Park Block.' Two years later, Kopacz closed the shop and again moved, this time to Windsor. The store was taken over by Frank Kusiak and renamed Frank's Shoe Repair.

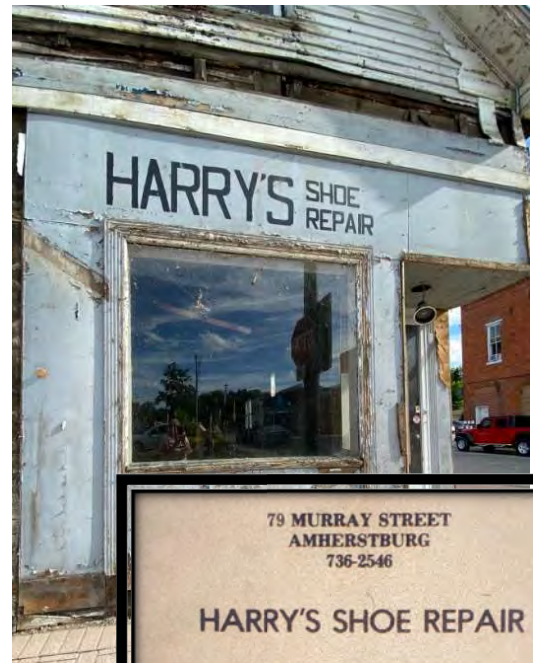
As with many during the Great Depression, the property was lost due to taxes owed and was purchased by a Windsor merchant named George H. Wilkinson in 1943. Colonel George Wilkinson is remembered as an original organizer of the Essex Scottish Regiment. Wilkinson owned the building until his death in 1947, renting to tenants. Interestingly, he was the proprietor of a store on Ouellette Avenue that *The Windsor Star* called "one of the largest shoe stores in the Dominion of Canada." His father Robert Wilkinson had established the firm back in 1865 at Essex Centre.

During the three years that Wilkinson owned the building, Alfred Goodwin was the proprietor. When Alfred took over the shop in 1940, he made an announcement in *The Amherstburg Echo*. The advertisement reported that he had 35 years of experience in the business, and was accompanied by the slogan 'Bring Your Shoes to Alf'. Also known as 'Ralph,' family members have informed us that he made a lasting impression with local children by hammering tacks into his wooden leg.

In 1960, Louis Gansky, also in the shoe business, bought the building and would own it for the next 23 years. When the exterior was stripped this past year, a sign was revealed that reads: "Harry's Shoe Repair." A business was advertised under this name while the Gansky family owned the building. The question remains- who was Harry? Around the same time, a Harry's Shoe Repair existed on Sandwich Street in Windsor under the management of a man named Haritun. Could this be 'Harry'? We're sure someone out there has the answer.



*The Amherstburg Echo April 3, 1952*



*The Amherstburg Echo July 22, 1981*

**Thank you very much to those who shared their memories about this building on Facebook!**

### JANE'S WALK

This year, The Marsh Collection is participating in 2 Jane's Walks the weekend of April 29th:

- (1) Structures with Stories: Built Heritage in Downtown Amherstburg
- (2) Boats in the 'Burg: A River Town History

Visit <https://www.windsorjaneswalk.ca/> for details and the full schedule.

