



# Reflections

Newsletter of the Marsh Historical Collection  
Amherstburg, Ontario



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## INFLATION & AMHERSTBURG (Part II)

By Jeanne McKay

In the 1940s, the Brunner, Mond Co., and the quarries continued their work. Marine contracting and salvage businesses continued to thrive. Amherstburg was a busy town with a variety of jobs and shops.

The cost of some food staples was affected by WW2. Sugar and butter were rationed. Eggs, a food staple, do not appear in the newspaper ads, perhaps they are still being purchased from local farmers. Farmers were being subsidized to grow sugar beets to replace the cane sugar that came from the Caribbean and the South Pacific. Due to the Second World War, sugar was dangerous to transport and could only be purchased with ration tickets. The Borrowmans had traded pounds of honey for other goods before 1920. Honey is replaced by sugar from sugarcane and then sugar beets. There are records pricing ham at \$0.42 a pound and rolled veal for \$0.36 a pound. According to Stats Canada, the average wage, in 1946, was \$27.00 a week. The cost of our basket of food was \$2.63 or 10% of weekly income.

During the 1950s, McQueen Marine was in full operation. Crowder Brothers Inc. were busy hauling coal, sand, and gravel, and supporting the building of greenhouses. Marra's Bread and

SKD Tool Company were also operating. Calvert of Canada was distilling and bottling liquor, providing employment. The canning factory was still in operation providing seasonal employment.

In the 1950s, the Amherstburg food stores advertising in *The Echo* were Dominion and Amherstburg Provision. In *The Echo* on August 8th, 1957, A&P advertised milk for \$0.21 a quart. Fresh milk was now common in stores. Prior to this, dairy products were delivered or purchased directly from the dairy. The dairies stopped door-to-door delivery in the 1960s as people found it more convenient to buy milk with their other groceries.



Ad from *The Amherstburg Echo*  
April 1, 1954

Our food basket, mid-1950s would have cost \$4.12, average weekly wages were \$73.04. The percentage of weekly wages going to the food basket would be 5.5%.

In the 1960s, people were migrating to Windsor for work in the automotive industry. The main roads had been paved and made the commute manageable. There were also buses running from Malden Centre into Windsor, to facilitate the commute. The rail lines had been diverted from Amherstburg to Windsor, which was enjoying economic growth. In Amherstburg, Brunner Mond, now Allied Chemical, continued to be a major employer along with Calvert. The port and downtown waterfront were gradually losing their importance as a commercial centre.

The average weekly wage was \$100.89, the cost of our food basket had grown to \$4.41. The percentage that the food basket is taking from our wages is 4%. Dominion, IGA, Red and White, and Rocco's were serving Amherstburg. Although the percentage of weekly income spent on our original food basket was shrinking, there were many more processed foods, tinned, packaged prepared, that were taxing the weekly budget. A study for another time would be to see what was in the 1960s food basket. *Continued on page 3...*

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## HAPPENINGS AT THE MARSH

### PRESENTATION

At HEIRS (Harrow Early Immigrant Research Society) on March 28<sup>th</sup> at 1:30p.m., Meg will give a presentation about Amherstburg's Heritage Buildings. The meeting is open to the public, at the Harrow-Colchester Arena Community Meeting Room (243 McAfee, Harrow).

### JANE'S WALK

From Friday, April 26<sup>th</sup> to Sunday, April 28<sup>th</sup> the Jane's Walk Festival will be happening in Essex County. Jane's Walks are free, guided tours led by volunteers with an aim to celebrate neighbourhoods in the region. Meg and Kara are leading two walks this year. Details and the full schedule will be available here: <https://www.windsorjaneswalk.ca/> Follow our social media pages for updates.

### EXHIBITS

#### Boats in the 'Burg: A River Town History

This display will feature several aspects of Amherstburg's marine history, including shipping, salvage work, tugboat races, lore, passenger steamers, local mariners & more. On April 26<sup>th</sup> through July 12<sup>th</sup>.



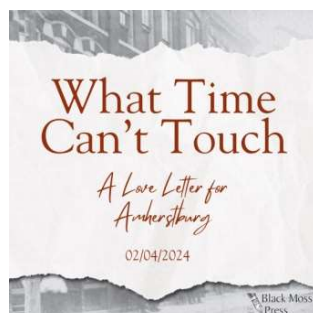
### MAGAZINE

Have you seen the new monthly magazine, *Amherstburg Living*, published by Best Version Media? Each issue will feature an article from The Marsh Collection covering a local history topic. Stop by the Marsh office to pick up a copy!

### COMING SOON

A poetry anthology celebrating Amherstburg's welcoming community and enduring history will be available at the Marsh gift shop. The public book launch will be held at Mackenzie Hall on April 2<sup>nd</sup> at 7:00. For more:

Eventbrite:



## 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 Tuesday- Friday.**

(Mondays by appointment only)

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

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



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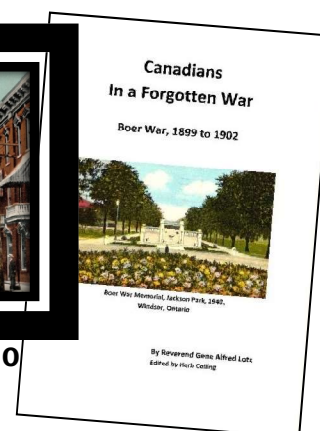
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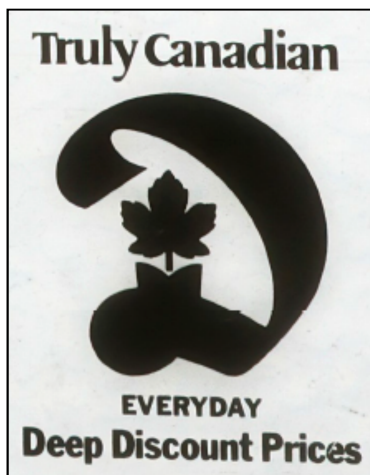


# INFLATION & AMHERSTBURG

By Jeanne McKay

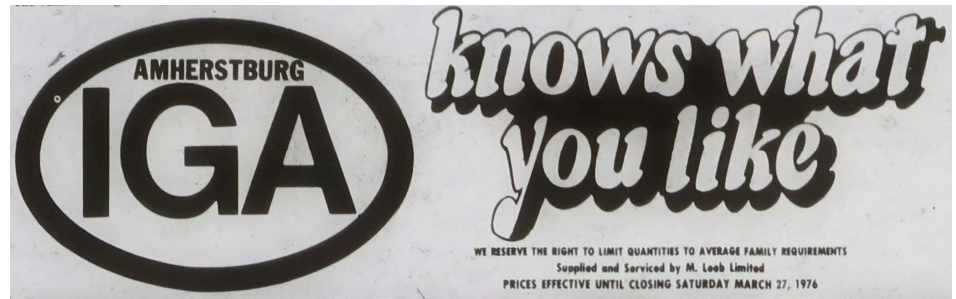
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As more chain stores appear, in the 1970s, there is an increase in advertising by food stores. Food stores advertising in *The Echo* at this time were Dominion, IGA, and Rocco's. The ads were larger and more organized. The variety of canned and packaged food increased. There were pudding mixes, cake mixes and "Fancy" classifications on tins of vegetables. Margarine appears in newspaper sales, instead of butter. Eggs appear in grocery ads on sale for \$0.72 to \$0.77 a dozen. Meat comes in varying cuts and processed meat like bologna and lunch meat become ad staples. In February 1975, Dominion was encouraging people to eat more chicken. Dominion expanded its role and began making suggestions on how to serve balanced meals.



*The Echo* August 29, 1973

In the 1970s McQueen Marine was dredging in the Wheatley Harbour, along with other



Top right: *The Echo* March 24, 1976

Above: *The Echo* February 25, 1976

contracts. The Marine Services Base on Dalhousie was busy cleaning and refurbishing the floating navigation aids and buoys, preparing for the shipping season of 1976. The river was still busy although the ships no longer stopped in Amherstburg. Building permits for houses in Amherstburg were up in number. The number of articles directed at farmers indicates that farming was still very important in the area. Canada was enjoying a 41% increase in Agricultural exports to other countries. The average wage had increased substantially to \$383.30 per week and the cost of our original basket of food was up to \$6.27, but was only 1.63% of weekly income.

Today in Amherstburg we have Sobeys, No Frills, and Walmart competing for our grocery dollars. You can still buy eggs from local

farmers and honey from local beekeepers. You will pay \$5.00 or more for free range eggs and close to \$10.00 a pound for local honey. We are fortunate to have a bakery and a deli, right in town. There are plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables available in the summertime.

Grocery store ads are delivered separately, no longer printed in the paper and those ads take up multiple pages of newsprint, reflecting the variety of food sold by the chain stores. The ads can also be conveniently sent to your cell phone.

There are many small businesses that employ local people. The quarries appear to be ramping up for more business. Diageo (formerly Seagram's) remains in operation. Amherstburg has expanded as a "bedroom" community as people commute to Windsor, Detroit, or work from home. Retirees, requiring services not employment, have been migrating to the area. According to Stats Canada, a general labourer in 2023 earns \$42,645, or \$888.46 weekly. The work week has shrunk from 50 hours in the 1920s to 40 hours or less for most people.

Our 1920s staples now cost \$56.03 or 6% of a labourer's income, compared to \$3.50 or 18% of wages in 1925. Chain stores give us access to a wide variety of food year round. Much of that food is processed to last longer and taste better. Much of the food we

*Continued on page 4...*

...Continued from page 3

taste better. Much of the food we purchase has been shipped once, twice or even three times. Our local greenhouses compete with imported fresh foods to keep fruit and vegetable counters stocked in February. In the winter, the Borrowmans were eating their winter vegetables and preserved fruit. Buying in season helps keep costs down in winter, if there is space to freeze or preserve it. However, demands on our time draw us to the processed, prepared foods that fill our shopping baskets and elevate the price.

Has the price of food inflated more than income since the early 1900s? Apparently not based on our basic food basket. The size of our food basket has increased as we become dependent on purchasing food rather than growing and preserving our food. What we eat has changed considerably. Could food be cheaper? Maybe, and price fixing by grocery chains is a story for another time.

Shopping Basket	1925	1930	18 Oct 1945	1955	1965	1975	26 Oct 2023
Bacon	0.55	0.31	0.39	0.49	0.49	1.09	7.00
Eggs	0.50	0.33	0.50	0.61	0.39	0.67	3.79
Butter	0.45	0.33	0.39	0.36	0.66	0.62	6.49
Flour per lb	0.79	0.04	0.03	0.06	0.10	0.15	1.08
Meat	0.25	0.20	0.25	0.38	0.80	0.87	12.00
Honey/ lb	0.12	0.15	0.19	0.34	0.57	0.50	9.99
Bread	0.09	0.09	0.07	0.07	0.15	0.25	3.00
Sugar	0.19	0.10	0.07	0.08	0.07	0.15	0.68
Rolled Oats	0.08	0.05	0.05	0.13	0.10	0.50	2.00
Tinned Peas/Veg	0.16	0.10	0.15	0.18	0.2	0.25	1.00
Coffee per lb	0.3	0.35	0.42	1.09	0.81	0.93	8.00
Fresh Carrots .82 / 75 lb bag	0.02	0.05	0.12	0.33	0.07	0.29	1.00
Cost of Basket	\$3.50	\$2.10	\$2.63	\$4.12	\$4.41	\$6.27	\$56.03
Weekly Pay	\$19.00	23.50	27.00	73.04	100.89	383.30	888.46
Basket % of pay	18.42	8.94	9.74	5.64	4.37	1.63	6.31

## ASTRONOMICAL EVENTS

By Kara Folkeringa

On April 8, 2024, we will experience a total solar eclipse. Although this is a rare event, it isn't the first time Amherstburg has experienced astronomical events. Here are a few descriptions of these events over time as found in *The Amherstburg Echo*:

**September 5 1895:** "The total eclipse of the moon, on Tuesday night, was one of the finest sights of that kind ever witnessed, as the moon was at the full and the night was beautifully calm and clear. A display of the aurora borealis added beauty to the scene."

**January 30 1925:** "The eclipse of the sun Saturday morning came off in the Amherstburg district under a cloudless sky, and without a hitch. The very interesting program lasted about half an hour, and it is safe to say that the chief participants in the astronomical net played to a capacity audience. Through smoked glass and used films the view was perfect, and the golden half-light that flooded the world was magnificent."

**August 27 1942:** "There was a splendid example of a total eclipse of the moon on Tuesday night starting at 10 o'clock. This was the second time this year that the earth, passing between the sun and the moon, cut off the light of the moon and cast a shadow over it. The eclipse was exceptionally clear and became total shortly after 11. The moon had a reddish cast, during Tuesday's eclipse, due to the reflection of light through the earth's atmosphere."



Photo of an eleven-day-old moon taken by David Hamilton and printed in *The Amherstburg Echo* on September 8, 1982.

# UPSETTING THE HOUR GLASS

## 1934

**March-** Mr. F.M. Haynes, merchant at the corner of Sandwich Street and the Townline, uses the ashes from his stove to good advantage. There is quite a slope where the townline meets Sandwich Street, which is a stop street, and each time Mr. Haynes fines the ash pan full he scatters the contents a few feet above the stop sign. This is a great help to the motorist during this icy weather.

**April-** Lee St. John, caretaker of the Amherstburg park, evidently thinks that spring has rounded the corner as he dismantled the skating rink this week.

**May-** While working on the Hydro-electric street railway tracks on Richmond Street, Amherstburg, workmen found a cave-in underneath the pavement. The Board of Works filled in the cavity on Tuesday.

## 1944

**March-** The policy of granting agricultural furloughs to members of the armed forces who are bona fide farmers and needed on the farm will be extended to the 1944 growing season.

**April-** Parents are asked to warn their children that it is dangerous to play along the breakwall on the river front from the Mrs. Malcolm McGregor property to the Museum as the breakwall is in bad condition and the pump house is falling into the river.

**May-** Mrs. Walter Reaume, librarian, told members of the Amherstburg Library Board that she planned to inaugurate a Story

Hour for children from three to 10 years of age, next October.

## 1954

**March-** L.J. Pettypiece, town clerk and collector of taxes, can vouch for the efficiency of the local constabulary's check of parking meters in Amherstburg. Genial 'Pat' did a little overtime parking, got ticketed and paid his fine - even as you and I.

**April-** Forty-one years ago an up-and-coming young man started what was known as the Jones Soda Shop and he made the best ice cream in the district. This man was George H. Jones. He gradually started in the china business and through his fair dealing with the public he became one of the better known china dealers in Essex County.

**May-** Atomic wins race Saturday; brings honor to Amherstburg and Canada. The McQueen Marine tug Atomic skippered by Captain Jake Penner won the fifth annual International Tugboat race in the Detroit River off Windsor on Saturday afternoon.

## 1964

**March-** McQueen Marine will now be responsible for all navigation sites in Canadian waters from Pelee Passage to Sarnia. For many years McQueen Marine has looked after the Canadian navigation aides from Pelee Passage to the Ambassador Bridge.

**April-** The J.W. Westcott Marine Reporting Agency opened its office for the 1964 season today. This company has been reporting the movement of vessels in the

Lower Detroit River for over a half century. Miles Maricle is in charge of the Amherstburg operation located at Gordon.

**May-** Recently Francis Purdy opened a marina at the east end of Texas Road Anderdon Township. This site was once the terminal for the Canadian Southern Railway for the carferries that ran from the mainland to Stoney Island.

## 1974

**March-** A construction program is taking place on Bob-Lo Island where a refreshment stand is being constructed in the vicinity of the roller coaster, the conversion of the old souvenir building into the Hofbrau and the building of a large warehouse.

**April-** Last Wednesday the parade of lakereiners got underway and in the course of a few hours a number of the largest vessels on the Great Lakes passed upbound in the Amherstburg Channel. Included were the 1000 foot Presquille, the 730 foot Canadian Progress and Canadian Century, the 858 foot Roger Blough as well as many smaller freighters.

**May-** The Amherstburg Council has cleared the way for the closing of a portion of Balaclava Street from St. Arnaud north to William Street. The street closing was made at the request of Calvert of Canada Limited. The company stated this closure would be helpful in connection with a major expansion program the company will undertake.





# Wigle Flour Mill

## (Part II)

By Al Jackson

When the mill was shutdown in 1936 the Wigle family abandoned the stone building and sold off all the machinery to a Russian immigrant who shipped the assembled parts to his community north of Edmonton. After the removal of the machinery a serious accident occurred at the mill, which was described in the July 1, 1938 edition of *The Amherstburg Echo* as follows:

“Johnny McQueen, 10-year-old son of Mr. and Mrs. Walter McQueen of Park Street, Amherstburg met with an accident Wednesday forenoon that might easily have caused his death, when he fell three stories in the old Wigle mill building on the riverfront. He was severely bruised and in shock but fortunately no bones were broken.

Johnny was playing around the old mill, which is being dismantled, with two companions. A rope and pulley had been installed there to lower machinery down from the upper floors of the building, and he suggested that the other boys pull him up on the rope. It looked like a good stunt to the youngsters, and they proceeded to haul Johnny up in the air. His idea was to go up as far as the third storey and then swing out onto the floor but when he got just about to the top his strength gave out. He had just enough time to shout that he couldn't hold on any longer when he let



go and crashed to the floor. He struck the ground with terrific force and lay unconscious while his frightened companions tried to bring him back by dashing water in his face. When they saw this had no effect, they rushed from the building seeking help. Captain Charles R. Hackett happened to be passing at the time and when he heard of the accident he went into the building, saw the boy's condition and took him at once to the office of Dr. E. C. Harris. There it was found the boy was badly injured and he was taken to Hotel Dieu in an ambulance.

Although there were rumors about town that the boy had his skull fractured and was not expected to live, it was found on examination that he was suffering only from bruises and shock and will recover from his perilous adventure.”

The abandoned Wigle mill property was returned to the town by reversion but in April of 1941 the property was sold to Captain J. Earl McQueen. This action put the mill property back on the tax roll and gave Captain McQueen more land and a warehouse for his expanding marine activities.

Prior to 1960, McQueen Marine Ltd. built a new warehouse and machine shop near the river. The old stone mill building was no

longer needed and therefore was demolished by McQueen personnel between August 2 and August 11, 1960. The roof timbers were burned on site and the stone walls crushed by a bulldozer from Amherst Quarries. The only thing saved was a large cornerstone from the building that had a small circular bronze plaque embedded in it. This plaque had been installed by the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers back in the 1930s as a survey marker for the deepening of the Amherstburg Channel at that time. This cornerstone can still be found in the town at a private residence near the river as a reminder to half a century of flour milling in Amherstburg.



McQueen Office next to the old mill, circa 1950s.



Detail of the cornerstone.  
Photo by Al Jackson.

Photo at top right: Department of Transportation Dock with former Wigle Mill at right, c.1950s

# COLLECTION HIGHLIGHTS

*By Meg Reiner*

One of the latest additions to the Marsh archives is a postcard donated by Jon Soyka, President of the Golden Horseshoe Post Card Club. The image on the postcard is of a steamer called Winona, her deck full with passengers. The Winona was a wooden ship built at Port Stanley in 1902, measuring 100 feet in length. That year, she was put on a route between Windsor and Amherstburg under the management of Captain John Ellison. The steamer would leave the waterworks dock (at the foot of Rankin Avenue) each morning at 7:30 am, calling at the Texas Road dock on her route to Windsor. She departed Windsor each day at 4:00. Passengers were charged 50 cents per round trip and the route was well patronized. One day in October, John Mullen and Mike Sullivan played a prank on Walter Campbell, president of the Detroit, Belle Isle, & Windsor Ferry Company. They told the captain of the Winona to look out for Campbell, who was wearing a yellow raincoat, as he was dangerous and carrying dynamite. The pranksters revealed it was merely a joke just before Campbell was thrown overboard.

At the close of the 1902 season, the Winona returned to Port Stanley where she underwent repairs and improvements, receiving fresh paint and upholstery. The following March, the Winona arrived in Amherstburg on the 28<sup>th</sup>, after a delay due to stormy weather. She was again managed by Captain Ellison, with Captain Joseph Hough as master and Odette & Wherry, agents, of Windsor.



When the S.W. & A. Streetcar extended its route into Amherstburg, the Winona suffered and was unable to turn a profit on the Amherstburg to Windsor route. She made her final Amherstburg run on May 21, 1903. The steamer returned to Port Stanley, but soon after returned to service on a new route between Windsor, Wallaceburg, Chatham, and Tupperville.

The Winona met a sad fate on November 16, 1931, near Sault Ste. Marie. A fire broke out over the boiler while she was docked at Spragge, and the ferry was destroyed. The Winona had been servicing a route in that area for some years after being rebuilt in 1919.

*Our thanks to Mr. Soyka for sharing this card with us!*

## THEN & NOW Front Road North



*View of the railway bridge in front of Brunner Mond., looking north, 1918. MCS2019.018.001*



*View along Highway 20. The former Brunner Mond Water Purification Plant is visible in the background. Taken March 13, 2024.*

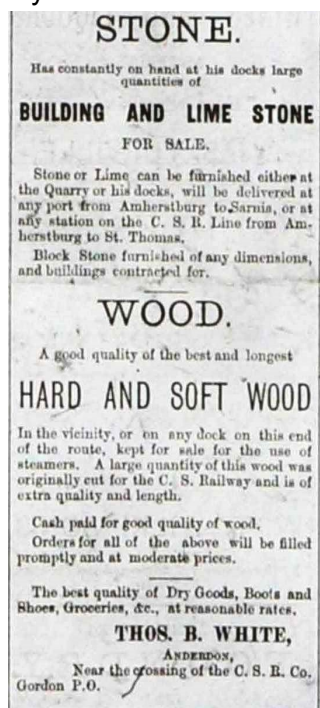


# BRICKS-N-BEAMS

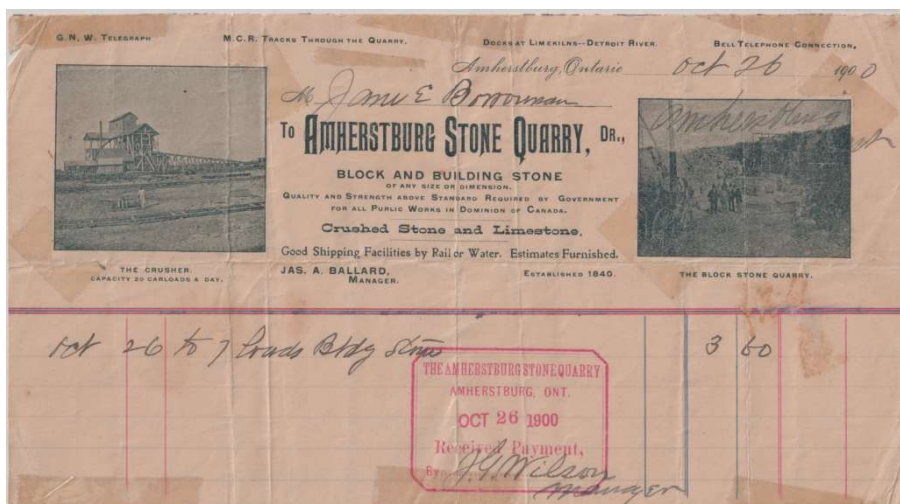
By Meg Reiner

When looking at historic buildings in Amherstburg, you might notice that aside from wood and brick, grey stone is a common building material. Stone was available locally, thanks to the limestone quarries in Anderdon Township. Other quarries existed in the area, though the stone from Anderdon was widely known for its superior quality.

St. John the Baptist Church is one of the earliest surviving examples of a building constructed with limestone from Anderdon. At the time, the quarries were part of the Anderdon Reserve, and the stone for the church was donated by the Wyandots from what was then known as the "Indian Stone Quarry."



Thomas B. White purchased the "Indian Stone Quarry" from The Crown in 1880, though he had leased and operated the quarry



much earlier. A large amount of material was harvested from this quarry during his proprietorship, much of which was shipped beyond Amherstburg for various projects. In 1880, stone was extracted for the Belle Isle Bridge and brought to Detroit by scow. Stone was ordered for a bridge in Wallaceburg, and shipped for a tunnel in Sarnia. In 1890, a large workforce pulled blocks from T.B. White's quarry for the Soo Locks (Sault Ste. Marie). The Anderdon stone had proven effective in the construction of the Welland Canal, making it worthy of the massive undertaking that was the Soo Locks.

Under the ownership of the Solvay Process Co., the quarries provided the material for several local buildings that still stand today. In 1903, the new St. Clement Church in McGregor was opened, showcasing an exterior of rough cut stonework. During construction of the new Roman Catholic School (St. Anthony) on Brock Street in 1911, two to three cars of stone were hauled from the quarry daily. That same year, the massive dance pavilion on Bob-Lo Island required stone from the quarry for its walls. In 1913, limestone for Amherstburg's

Carnegie Library was donated by the Solvay Process Co., at the cost of quarrying. These are just a few examples.

The only time that the quality of the Anderdon stone was questioned was in 1912 when the Town of Essex was constructing its post office. Given that the stone had already been approved by the government for use in various public buildings, including the Essex County Court House in Sandwich (Mackenzie Hall), this questioning was determined to be unjustified.

Several other buildings are rumoured to have used stone from Anderdon in their construction. For example, Historic Fort Wayne and the Fort Street Presbyterian Church in Detroit. Of course, there are many other buildings in town that are likely a product of our local quarry as well, though records have not surfaced to confirm. As was the case with the Wigle Mill, it is possible stone was sourced elsewhere if the quarry was not in operation at the time of construction. If records are not available, we might need to enlist the help of a geologist. Reverend Nattress would have been able to shed some light!

Bottom left: Ad from *The Amherstburg Echo* April 30, 1875/Top right: Invoice for building stone from the Amherstburg Stone Quarry, 1900. Note: More than one quarry was operating in Anderdon at any given time. For example, John Sloan and William Burnell ran two quarries abutting the Indian Stone Quarry in the 1840s.