



# Reflections

Newsletter of the Marsh Historical Collection  
Amherstburg, Ontario



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## Swimmin' Hole Changes But Kids Don't

*As published in The Echo July 4, 1941*

"Now that schools have closed for summer there will undoubtedly be an increase in activity around the Waterworks dock. Scores of children, and many adults, will frequent this popular swimmin' hole daily to escape the oppressive heat of July and August. When the thermometer is hovering in the high nineties, the cooling waters of the Detroit River look so inviting, and there is nothing more refreshing than a good swim on a hot summer day.

### *Always a Swimmin' Hole*

Like so many other fortunate communities, Amherstburg has been following such a custom for years and years. There always has, and there probably always will be, at least one spot along the Detroit River that will be referred to as the old swimmin' hole. Fifty years, or more, ago it was the dock behind Wigle's Mill, later it was Shipman's dock further north along the waterfront, at one time it was the beach at Fort Malden and today it's the Waterworks Dock, and has been for the past 30-odd years.

But there is a big difference in the swimmin' hole of today and the one at Wigle's dock five decades ago. Then the children swam at their own risk, and the term lifeguard was practically unknown. If a child got into difficulty he depended on the older children for assistance and while there was an abundance of excellent swimmers in those days, parents were rather reluctant to allow their children to frequent the dock.

How things have changed in the last couple of years! Today at the Waterworks dock the children swim from a small but suitable dock in comparative safety now that Ray Sawyer has been re-engaged as lifeguard.

### *Learned at Dock*

"We had nothing like that when I was a boy." J.R. Hamilton remarked recalling the summer days spent at Wigle's dock. Mr. Hamilton learned to swim, like many of the other boys, from the deck of the partly submerged tug International which laid in the slip alongside Wigle's dock. After they had mastered the art, one of the favourite pastimes of the gang was to be towed up the river by a tug. Sailing schooners plied the lakes in that era and tugs were employed to pull them through the narrow waters of the Detroit River.

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Swimmers at Waterworks Dock  
Fort Malden NHS Photo Collection

## Amherstburg Firsts

The Detroit River has always been a source of endless recreational activities for Amherstburg residents young and old. But with these opportunities came quite a bit of danger as well. Many unfortunate accidents were reported in the newspaper over the years, which led Town Council to make a state-of-the-art purchase.

In 1939, Council purchased an E and C Resuscitator and Inhaler, making Amherstburg the first town to own one in Canada. "It was believed that the many hazards along the river front in Amherstburg demanded some kind of life-saving equipment". An Emergency Service Association was formed from the members of the Amherstburg Fire Department, which would assist in emergency situations in the vicinity. One of the aims of the association was to "promote better and safer bathing conditions on the river and lake front by periodical inspections of the beaches and erection of warning markers where hazardous conditions exist". The squad would also provide first aid services and assist with the use of the resuscitation apparatus. Members of the novel emergency squad were Fire Chief J.R. Hamilton, Captains Harry Spearing, Jr., and Edward Kemp, Irvin Bernard and William Fryer.

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## Happenings at the Marsh

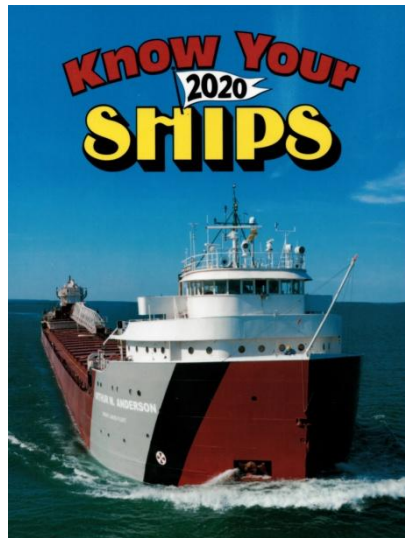
Despite the office being closed, Marsh staff has continued to research, catalogue, and digitize the collection behind the scenes. One of the projects undertaken over the last few months has been scanning negatives of photos taken for publication in *The Amherstburg Echo* during the 1970s. Many great photographs are in this collection, depicting local scenes from the past like 'swimmers at the Lions Pool', 'construction of Caldwell Towers', class photographs and much more.

***If you have any research questions or other inquiries, staff can be reached by email or phone.***

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### What's In the Collection?

The Marsh Historical Collection 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 and visitors from 10am to 4pm Tuesday through Friday.**  
Email: [research@marshcollection.org](mailto:research@marshcollection.org)  
Website: [www.marshcollection.org](http://www.marshcollection.org)



## Then & Now

### 200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

This year marks the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the construction of the brick barracks at Fort Malden. This building has gone through a variety of uses including a mess hall, military hospital, asylum ward, and a private residence.

For more photos and history on the barracks, please visit the Fort Malden National Historic Site Facebook Page:

<https://www.facebook.com/FortMaldenNHS>

Above: As a private residence, c.1930

AS2019.043.046

Bottom: Barracks, present-day





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As many as seven and eight schooners would be taken in tow at one time, and as the "convoy" steamed up the river the boys would swim out to meet it, hang on to the tow line or be taken aboard the tug, sometimes as far as Gordon, and then swim from there back to the dock.

Parker Hutton, Milton Hutton, Bud Patten, Bill Wigle, Walter "Rocky" Hunt, Ed Kemp, George Chevalier, Percy King, Charlie Gillean, "Priggy" Gatfield, Cecil England, John Scratch, Rubber Hamilton, Forest Wigle and Jack Hamilton are some of the boys of that day who used to get a great thrill out of diving off the crosstrees of the schooners that moored at the American docks. For the lads at the other end of town, the beach at Fort Malden served as an ideal swimmin' hole. It was there that Wyman Barrett and his gang used to while away their summer afternoons, and further up the river, at the Marine dock, the kids from around Gordon congregated in droves.

#### *Shipman's Dock*

In later years, when the boys downtown abandoned the hospitality of Colin Wigle and his dock in the rear of the flour mill, Shipman's dock, located behind the post office, became the old swimmin' hole. The gang swam there for years subject to certain regulations passed by the town council. It seems some of the lads were so anxious to get in the water they would neglect to don their swim suits. Realizing it would be hard to break a custom in vogue for years, the Town Fathers, instead of ordering the boys to purchase the proper body covering, simply issued an edict forbidding them to go swimming at the dock before



eight o'clock in the evening. The rule was strictly enforced too, according to Jack Hamilton. Jim Allen was the Chief of Police then and he had strict orders to see that the kids didn't enter the water before the deadline. He was the official starter, so to speak. He would stand down at the dock waiting for eight o'clock, and when the zero hour arrived one shout from him was all the boys needed to start "peeling off" and from then on it was a race to see who would be the first one in.

At Shipman's dock was one of the highest diving towers along the waterfront. The coal chute towered 85 feet in the air, but the divers- at least all but one of them- found this a little too high for their liking. The majority of them favoured the booms of the derricks and dredges that moored at the dock, or the bows of the freighters that tied up there. All this was changed for Jack Hamilton though when a fellow from Cleveland blew into town one day and surprised all the boys on the dock by diving off the 85-foot chute. Later that day Jack had the distinction of being the only person in Amherstburg to make that plunge. When he heard about the usurper from across the lake, Jack donned his swim suit, climbed the tower and after taking two hours to make up his mind finally made the dive. It was a poor

one at that and his legs stung for hours after, but that failed to unnerve him and he repeated the dive a couple of times before going home.

#### *To Bob-Lo And Back*

While the boys liked to dive they didn't neglect their swimming and swims to Bob-Lo Island and back were frequent occurrences.

Two of them, Jack Hamilton and George Nattress, even tried to make it around Bob-Lo one day, but after being in the water four hours they were forced to quit. They started down the Amherstburg Channel and were on their way up on the opposite side of the island when a heavy northwest wind began to blow and the two were forced to abandon the swim at the island bathing beach. Even in defeat they were a success, because as far as Mr. Hamilton knows no one has ever been able to completely circle the island. It would be quite a feat and anyone wishing a good hard swim one day should try it.

Around 1910, the kids deserted Shipman's dock and made their summer quarters at the Waterworks, and, but for a brief period about 10 years ago, it has continued to be the "water home" of young and old during the summer months. Thanks to the Park Committee of the town council, under the able Chairmanship of Harvey "Chub" Hamilton, improvements have been carried out at the dock each season. Two years ago, Ray Sawyer was hired as lifeguard and in all that time there hasn't been a serious accident at the dock. Parents can now allow their children to frequent the beach, knowing full well that in the event of an emergency there is a capable man there to render aid.

*Photo: Swimming at the Mill, Fort Malden NHS Photo Collection*

# Upsetting the Hour Glass

1930

**June-** The audience in the Liberty theatre Saturday night roared its approval of Manager Wright's plan to bring out the latent talent in these communities in what he christened "Amateur nights". The program was particularly apt and snappy.

**July-** The people of Colchester were very much annoyed by the exhibit made last Sunday on the streets by some very modest people who took great pleasure in undressing in public.

**August-** In spite of the long hot dry period the corn crop is making amazing growth. Many fields average over 10 feet in height.

1940

**June-** Three electric buoys arrived at the Government dock in Amherstburg on Wednesday. These will be equipped with batteries and will replace 3 gas buoys. When the new electric buoys are placed in position it will mark the first step in the entire change over from the gas type navigation aid.

**July-** There is a flare-up of whooping cough in town. Parents are warned to report any cases to their family physician.

**August-** The Amherstburg Fire Department will hold a Field Day in the Amherstburg Park on Saturday afternoon, August 31<sup>st</sup>. A right good time is promised for young and old.

1950

**June-** A gang of Windsor youths have been arrested by the Malden Detachment O.P.P. and are being held pending trial in connection with the pilfering of cars parked at the Lakeshore Hotel, King's Highway No. 18, Malden. The case was cracked due to smart police work on the part of Constable Grant, Malden O.P.P. Detachment.

**July-** Lincoln Lodge No. 28 will sponsor a two-day Emancipation Day celebration at the town park in Amherstburg on Friday and Saturday. Invitations have been sent out to all Masonic lodges in the Prince Hall Affiliation and it is expected that a bumper crowd will be in Amherstburg for the event.

**August-** A blast followed by fire, destroyed the distilling building of Calvert Distillers (Canada) Limited on Tuesday evening. This was the main unit of the local distillery and the loss is estimated at over \$1,000,000.00.



1960

**June-** Parents and friends are cordially invited to a concert given by the junior and senior music students of St. Joseph's Academy. The recital will take place at the convent on Sunday, June 12<sup>th</sup>, at two-thirty o'clock.

**July-** Sod turning ceremonies for the Kinsmen Club Scout Hall took place early Wednesday afternoon. It will be located at the corner of Simcoe and Victoria Streets and will face Simcoe Street.

**August-** The Amherstburg plant of Canadian Cannery will start the 1960 tomato pack next Tuesday. The Amherstburg plant produces catsup and chili sauce.

1970

**June-** By the first of the new year the coal pile on the Allied Chemical Canada Limited wharf should disappear as the company is making good progress towards converting its coal firing boilers to another form of fuel which will eliminate most of the pollution caused by the present coal fired boilers.

**July-** As the result of the hot spell last week the facilities of the wading pool on the west town park were taxed. Hundreds of small children had a great time in this facility. The pool was given to the town by the late Malcolm McGregor in 1928.

**August-** This is your invitation to visit the historic grounds of Fort Malden Museum on Sunday, August 23<sup>rd</sup> on the occasion of the Outdoor Art Show and Sale sponsored by the Fort Malden Guild of Arts and Crafts.

# Victory Gardens

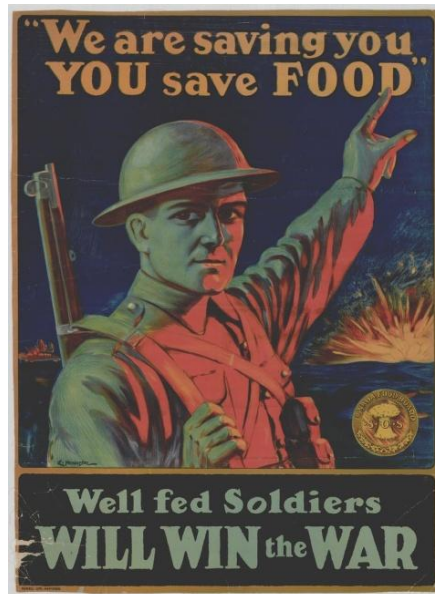
By Phyllis Chant

"To plant a garden is to believe in tomorrow." - Audrey Hepburn

As we look at what has been happening to our world since the early part of the year and the requests from our government to do our part, the younger generation cannot remember that these requests have come long before 2020.

As any local gardener can tell you, there has been a run on vegetable plants, gardening supplies, and plots are popping up everywhere. Gardeners and families have decided to take on growing their own vegetables and to become self-sufficient. There is a new wave of victory gardens happening during COVID-19.

During World War I & II, 'victory gardens' were an urban phenomenon which helped Canadians do their part on the home front. The same idea was also used in the United States, United Kingdom, Australia and Germany. War time gardening was promoted during both World Wars by the Canadian government. The idea behind these home gardens was that the more food that was produced by Canadians, the more food could instead be shipped to soldiers and Canadian allies overseas. Front yards, former flower gardens and vacant lots could be used to grow vegetables.



Source: Library and Archives Canada

In 1917, the federal government was concerned that the provinces would not produce enough food for themselves and certainly not enough for the rest of the country or the troops overseas. Home gardening was encouraged and community groups would have canning demonstrations to assist homeowners. An advertisement in the Amherstburg Echo for F.H. Ferriss' Grocer (1913) asked "How About Your Garden". They offered everything you needed to get a garden started. They also suggested that "taking care of the garden is not only pleasant but is a healthy and interesting way to spend spare moments".

After WWI, gardening continued to be a popular past time. In the 1930s Essex County home garden contests encouraged boys and girls from ages 12 – 16 years of age to create vegetable gardens.

Seeds were supplied by the Department of Agriculture and included: tomatoes, corn, cabbage, peas, beans, onions, green onions, onions pickling, spinach, radish, lettuce and the list goes on. These gardens were expected to be 30'x40' hand cultivated or 35'x75' when horse cultivated. Cash prizes from 50 cents to \$2.50 were awarded.

As early as Spring 1940, planting a victory garden became a patriotic form of leisure activity. In 1944 it was estimated that there were approximately 209,000 Canadian victory gardens which produced 57,000 tonnes of vegetables. An advertisement in the Echo in 1941 by the Farm Service Force/Department of Labour, told of more than 6,000 Ontario high school students volunteering their summer to help farmers.

Continued on page 6...



The Amherstburg Echo April 11, 1941



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From WWII surveys it appears that most victory gardeners were better-off, urban homeowners that used their own properties for vegetable gardens. Although in a 1943 edition of *The Amherstburg Echo* there is mention that several inexperienced gardeners in town were planning gardens. These gardeners were also seeking advice on planting and caring for their plots. Experienced or not, one of the most important factors of these gardens was that they were an enjoyable diversion from the realities of the war. Maybe this is the reason why gardening has become so popular again. Happy gardening!

Ad from *The Amherstburg Echo*  
April 1, 1943

**Have You  
Planned Your  
Victory Garden  
?**

Let us help you with your Victory Garden—we have a complete line of Steele Briggs and Rennie Seeds in bulk and packages.

Garden Wheelbarrows—Garden Rakes—Hoes—Cultivators and General Garden Equipment.

**WIGLE HARDWARE CO.**

PHONE 60 - - AMHERSTBURG



## Heritage Lost

This series looks at some of the historic buildings in Amherstburg that have been lost.

**DALHOUSIE STREET- West Side, Between Murray and Gore**



**Captain John T. Hutton House**  
Next to Gordon House (pre-move)  
Built: 1881  
Razed: 2001

**Kane Building**  
2-storey brick  
Built: By 1860  
Razed: 2001

**Two Victorian Houses**  
Southern house occupied by Sandpiper Gallery for many years  
Built: c.1873  
Razed: 2015

**Churchill Building**  
Narrow 2-storey  
Built: 1902  
Razed: 2015

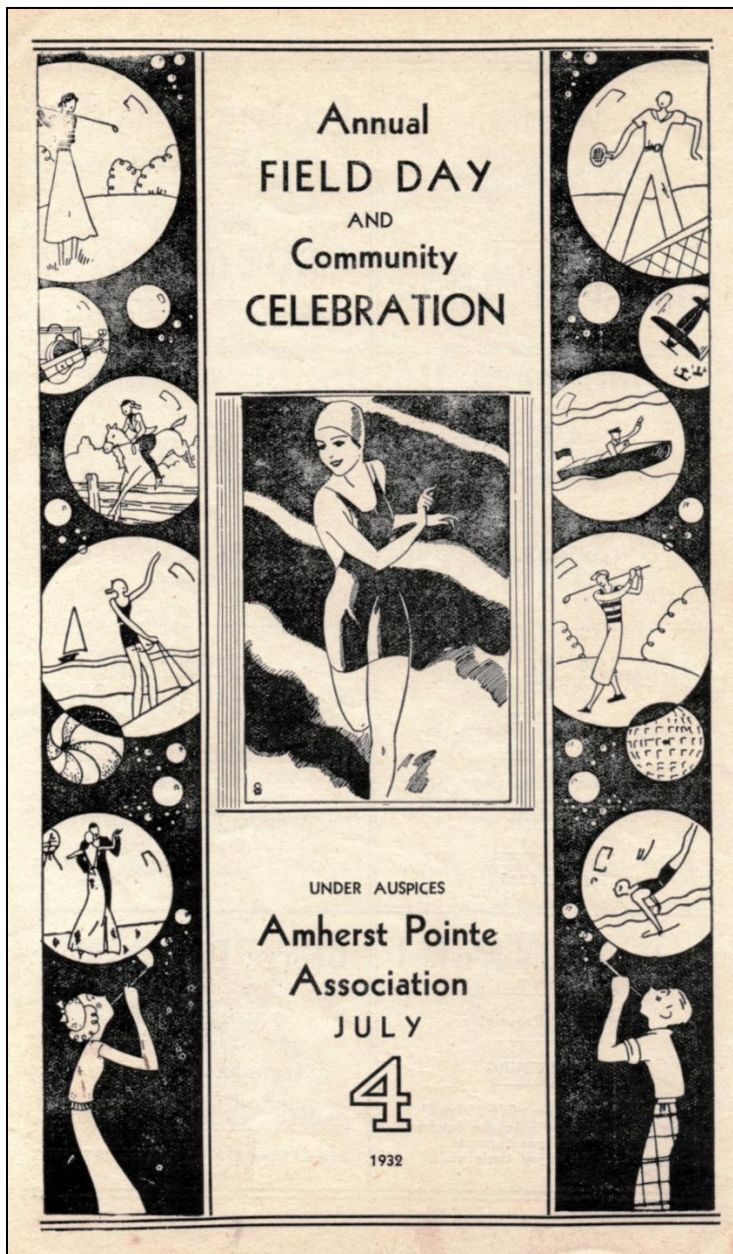
**Shillington Hardware (Kolfage/ Scratch/ Wigle)**  
Southwest corner Dalhousie/Murray  
Built: c.1854  
Razed: 1975

## Collection Highlights

## Amherst Pointe Annual Field Day Program, 1932

From the time the Amherst Pointe Improvement Association was established in 1923, the neighbourhood has hosted regular social gatherings to bring the community together. Featured in this issue's *Collection Highlights* is a program created for the celebration of Amherst Pointe's 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Field Day. At the time, the festivities were organized in partnership with the Town of Amherstburg as part of the Dominion Day-Independence Day Celebrations in the tri-community.

Events took place at 'The Grove' and at Lakewood Boulevard (now Mickle Drive). Typical games and contests included baseball (married men vs. single men), water races, swimming, horseshoe toss, and races on land. Some curious events are listed in the program: "potato and pencil race", "stepping stone race", "cracker eating contest", "cigarette race" and "blow and burst sack race". The Annual Field Day was celebrated on July 4<sup>th</sup> for many years. Eventually, as more Canadians became owners and permanent residents in the neighbourhood, the name of the event was changed to Amherst Pointe Day and the date changed to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday in July. If you have any memories or photos of Amherst Pointe Day you'd like to share, please send an email or give us a call!



## COTTAGE SEASON

"The little streets of Amherst Pointe were sleepy and still a few weeks ago. Cottages wrapped in gray rains. Their windows boarded. Cautious gardens stretching themselves through the still calm earth waited for the warmth of June... for the sound of laughter from the many Cottagers... Then June came. Brooms began to whisk cobwebs away. Paint brushes were waved to old friends in a merry salute to summer...and to each other."

-*The Amherstburg Echo*, July 5, 1940

In the beginning, The Amherst Pointe Subdivision was solely a summer cottage neighbourhood primarily owned by Americans. Fred Mickle, local farmer, sold the lakefront property in 1914 and in 1916, Dr. Frederick H. Woodbridge and Dr. Frances E. Scott, had the land subdivided into 96 residential lots. This remained a summer retreat area into the 1940s, eventually becoming a permanent residence for many.

*For a more detailed history of Amherst Pointe, read Amherst Pointe: A Neighbourhood in the Sun by Dr. Peter Arison Woodbridge, available in our Reference Library.*



# Bricks-N-Beams

## Classics on the Water

*Thank you to Veronica (Reaume) Laing for the information provided for this article.*



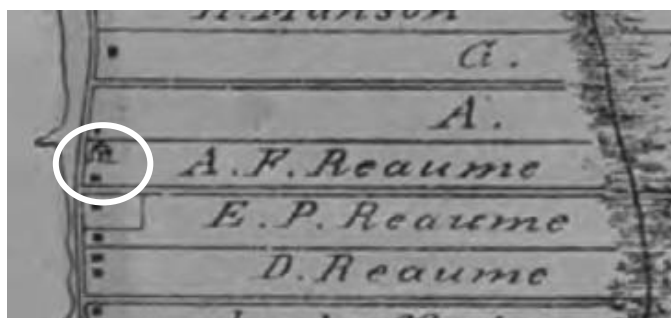
The sign for *Classics on the Water* still stands in front of a quiet building set back from the road on the riverfront south of Amherstburg, a building that was once a bustling restaurant and tavern.

The structure occupies the site of the former Reaume farm. Francis Reaume purchased this lot in Malden Township in 1817. The north part passed to his son Antoine F. Reaume, and here, Antoine built a home after his marriage to Judith Theophile Lemay in 1844. The farm remained in the family even after Antoine's death in 1897. In 1909, the property then referred to as "the old Antoine Reaume Homestead, Riverfront" was for sale by D.F. and Frank W. Reaume (sons of Antoine). The sale advertised about 80 acres of land in perfect condition with fences and buildings in good repair, as well as two good wells. It was sold to Thomas J. Shepley, renowned corn expert in the Western District, in 1912. Shepley moved from Kent County and resided here with his family until his death in 1916.

The property returned to the Reaume family in 1920, when Eugene Reaume (great nephew of Antoine F.) purchased the property from the Shepleys. Eugene was the first proprietor of a tavern on the site. Throughout the 1930s, there is evidence that Eugene was operating out of his residence, being the former Antoine Reaume home. "Amherstburg Provincial Police raided premises of Eugene Reaume, river front, seized a quantity of beer and liquor- faces charges of "keeping for

sale"—several frequenters who were in the place at the time of the raid were not held". Eventually, the space becomes licensed and by 1938 it was advertised in *The Amherstburg Echo* as the Reaume Park Hotel.

In 1943, the old home (originally situated close to the road) was moved back to its present location. At the time, a school existed on the property, adjacent to the old farm house. S.S. #1 had been erected in 1874 on part of the Reaume farm. The law did not allow for a tavern to operate in such close proximity to a school, and so Eugene was forced to move the residence back. Delisle was hired for the job. Once relocated, the front porch was closed in and a second home moved to the site to be used as a store room addition.



Tom Kilgallin Sr. and Wilfred (Bill) Ouellette purchased the Reaume Park Hotel in 1945. Alterations were carried out from May 21<sup>st</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> and the grand opening of the new 'Lakeshore Hotel' was held on May 25<sup>th</sup>. John Herceg, of Toronto, purchased the Lakeshore in 1950. A major fire took place in 1957 and according to the article in *The Amherstburg Echo*, the whole west side of the building was gutted and there was smoke and water damage to the entire building. In the 1960s and 1970s, the Lakeshore passed from Charlie Mulhall to Mike Jojich. In 1977, an advertisement for sale stated that the building was 9600 sq. ft. with a 126-seat beverage room and 108-seat licensed dining room, banquet facilities and owner's living quarters. Raymond Cope purchased the building that year and by 1981, Pillon's Lakeshore Tavern was seen advertised in the *Echo*. When Al Pillon bought the property in 1988, seven months' worth of renovations were conducted on the building and the name was changed to *Classics on the Water*. The building closed its doors as a tavern in 2001.

Images- Left column: Classics Shortly after closing, 2001 MCS P2399

Right Column: Walling Map shows position of schoolhouse and A.F. Reaume home on Lot 12 in 1877