



# Reflections

Newsletter of the Marsh Historical Collection  
Amherstburg, Ontario



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Summer 2021

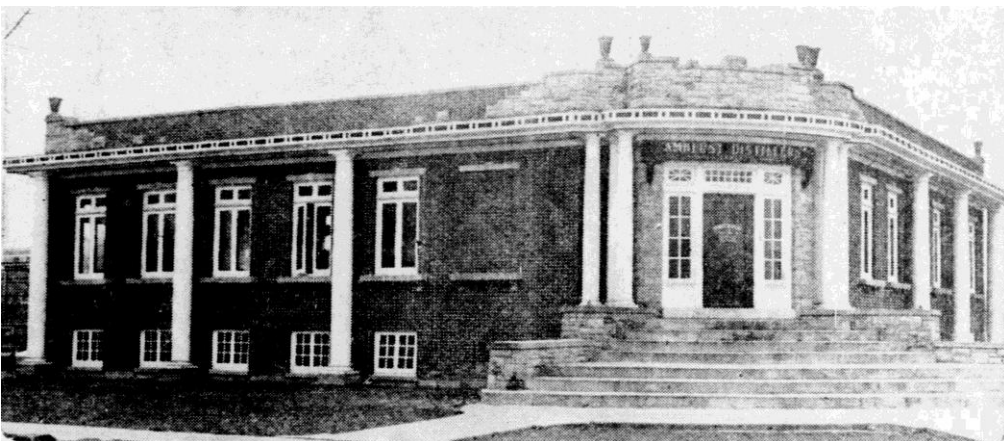
ISSN 1913-8660

## Bricks N' Beams

Many will recall the Calvert of Canada office building at the entrance to town overlooking the Detroit River. It was situated at the southeast corner of William and Sandwich Streets. This unique structure linked to an important local industry, was only forty-four years old when it was torn down.

*The Echo* announced in 1928 that Border Brewers and Distillers would build a large, modern distillery in Amherstburg. In June of that year, the company took option on 16.5 acres of land bordered by William, St. Arnaud, Balaclava and Sandwich Streets. One hundred and twenty-five men were employed in construction of the distillery, in order to meet the completion target of November 1928. The company spent almost \$300,000 to erect several large buildings and install equipment purchased from other plants. By 1929, the distillery went into full operation and was called Pioneer Distillers.

In March of 1929, the *Echo* indicated that construction of a 60' x 60' brick office building was currently underway. It would serve as administrative space, with quarters for the federal government excise officer. The architect responsible for the entire distillery project was Leslie V. Abbott, a native of Illinois, who reportedly had been drawing designs for houses since he was thirteen years old. His own residence in Louisville, Kentucky, designed and erected by



him in 1949, is on the National Register of Historic Places. The National Register notes that Abbott was best known for his work in designing functional constructions, such as distilleries.

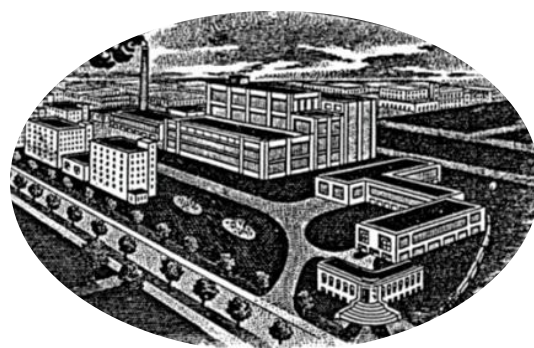
Abbott designed the office structure with many classical details. The exterior was ornamented with stonework, columns and a dentil course, with an elevated entryway on a cut-off corner. The building served its original purpose through major company changes, becoming the offices for Amherst Distillers and later Calvert of Canada. It survived multiple distillery fires and even explosions, until it was replaced by a new facility. On April 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> 1970, the office staff of Calvert of Canada Ltd., moved to the new \$3.5 million office and bottling room complex erected in 1969 on St. Arnaud. Three years later, *The Echo* announced that the former office was being razed. It was described as a landmark with very unusual architecture. The cleared

Amherst Distillers Office, 1938

Photo courtesy <http://internationalmetropolis.com/>

site would be turned into a green area until needed for further plant expansion. The full article about the razing of the building is available here:

[http://ink.scholarsportal.info/viewer/cecil/focus/ink/newspapers/echo/01\\_1973/00469-x0-y0-z1-r0-0-0](http://ink.scholarsportal.info/viewer/cecil/focus/ink/newspapers/echo/01_1973/00469-x0-y0-z1-r0-0-0)



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## Happenings at the Marsh

The Marsh Collection office remains closed to the public. We will post updates on our Facebook page and website when we are able to reopen. In the meantime, we are happy to answer inquiries via email and phone. Curbside pick-up is available for gift shop items.

We are working on digitizing negatives of photos used in *The Amherstburg Echo* in the 1970s. Once the negative is scanned we find the newspaper issue that it was published in to get the full story. Some of the events captured include the Fort Malden Mall, swimming at the Lions Pool, scenes at Bob-Lo, and Art by the River.

### CORRECTION

#### Tea Garden Restaurant

In our last issue we misidentified the woman in this photo as Olga Semeniuk. The waitress pictured here is in fact Dolly Musyj. Thank you to those who pointed this out!

*Photo courtesy  
Museum Windsor P11713*



### 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 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)



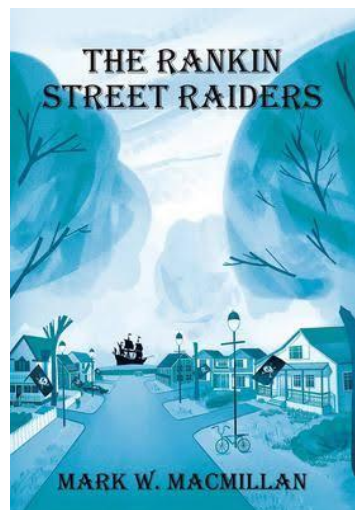
## GIFT SHOP

### NEW BOOK

We have a new book on the library shelves called the Rankin Street Raiders. The story features five close friends who grew up in Amherstburg around the 1960s and cooked up their own adventures. Trips to Bob-Lo Island, muskrat dinners, ordering from the local pizza parlour, and playing along the river are probably familiar tales to many. Thank you to author Mark Macmillan for donating a copy.

*If you have stories of growing up in Amherstburg that you would like to share, please get in touch!*

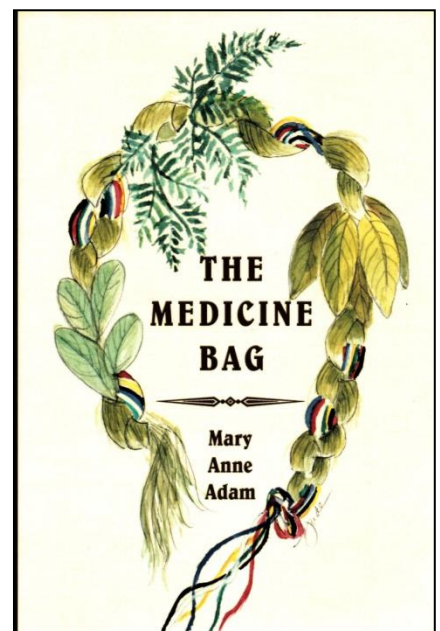
### From the Shelves



#### The Medicine Bag

An historical fiction written by Mary Anne Adam, of the Belle Vue Conservancy. The story takes place in Amherstburg circa 1850. Belle Vue plays a key role throughout this enduring story of courage, friendship, and the power of love.

**\$19.95**





# Upsetting the Hour Glass

**1931**

**June-** Lee St. John, caretaker of the park, has had a refreshment stand erected and this summer Mrs. St. John will serve refreshments to those who use the park as a playground. Hot water will be available at all times at no charge.

**July-** The C. W. L. of St John the Baptist R. C. Church are holding their annual summer carnival July 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>, on the vacant lot at the corner of Murray and Bathurst Streets.

**August-** The recent heavy rainfall was a great help to all growing crops. Some fields of tobacco seem to be growing by leaps and bounds.

**1941**

**June-** Entering the Green Lantern Restaurant, Apsley Street, about three o'clock Saturday morning, thieves carried off two slot machines containing an undetermined amount of cash.

**July-** Members of the Safety Patrol from both the Public and St. Anthony's Separate Schools got the thrill of their young lives when the Youth Activities Committee of the Amherstburg Rotary Club took them to Detroit to see the Tigers battle the St. Louis Browns at Briggs Stadium.

**August-** Sincere tribute was paid to Captain J. Earl

McQueen Friday night when about 70 of his friends and employees gathered at the Amherst Hotel and tendered him a farewell dinner on the eve of his departure to take over his new duties as Lieutenant Commander in the Royal Canadian Navy.

**1951**

**June-** The new sidewalk in front of the Amherstburg Post Office has been completed and placed in use. This is about five feet narrower than the former walk. The extra width was used for the widening of Dalhousie Street at this point and will provide a place for the buses to pull in off the main street

**July-** The Legion softball team is leaving Friday for Forest where it will play in the district playoffs.

**August-** A goodly number of Citizens enjoyed the band concert staged by the Amherstburg Boys' and Girls' Band at the corner of Richmond and Sandwich Friday evening.

**1961**

**June-** A new two-room separate school will be constructed in Anderdon Township at the corner of the Sixth Concession and the Townline.

**July-** Slogans slanted to stir up racial prejudice against the

Jewish in Amherstburg were found painted on Dalhousie Street north at the corner of North Street by Constable Neil Lester. Constable Lester immediately set about rubbing out the wording from the street and made a full report on the police blotter.

**August-** It was at the suggestion of Amherstburg resident Dr. Howard McCurdy, that the New Party assume the name New Democratic Party.

**1971**

**June-** Zarko Vucinic, owner of Duffy's Tavern, will repair and operate the town owned ramp at the foot of Gore Street. He told council members there would be no charge of the use of the ramp by local boat owners.

**July-** A new entrance road has been constructed off Highway No 18, south of Amherstburg into the Malden Hill Estates Mobile Home Park. The development of this park continues with more and more mobile homes being brought in.

**August-** The Fort Malden Horticultural Society deserves to be complimented on their colourful garden, on the former post office site, corner of Dalhousie and Richmond Streets.



# Ancestral Lines

By Phyllis Chant

If you looked through the Hackett genealogy file at the Marsh Historical Collection, you would be surprised by the impressive number of marine captains, doctors and lighthouse keepers that fill it. This article is about a rather unique member of the Hackett family who broke away from those traditional careers.

While scanning photos for our digital files, I have seen hundreds of interesting people from the mid 1800s to the present day. Then along came this unique photo of a Roman, (below) with the inscription, "To Margaret – in remembrance of 'Icilius', Norman Hackett".

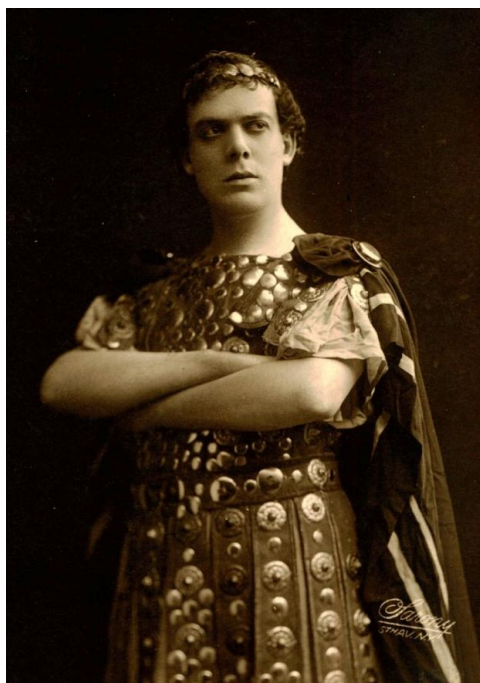


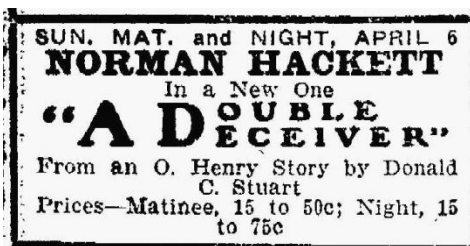
Photo Courtesy  
Parks Canada- Fort Malden NHS

Norman Honore Hackett (1874-1959) was born in Amherstburg, son of Captain Thomas H. Hackett (1840-1894) and Christine Honner (1835-1914). In 1882, the family

emigrated to Detroit, Michigan. By 1894, Norman was attending the University of Michigan, where he was studying literature, languages and oratory with the hopes of becoming a theatre critic. He performed in class plays and was one of the founders of the Comedy Club at the University.

Norman did not finish university and left after his second year. He joined actress/manager Hortense Rhea, a Belgium born French actress, who had a U.S. acting company. He spent three years with them. Norman's forte as an actor was Shakespearean plays. He performed in Macbeth, Hamlet, Romeo and Juliet, and Julius Caesar. Some of his other important performances were in 'Satan Saunderson' (1911), 'Double Deceiver' (1913), 'Classmates', and the film 'The Crimson Dove' (1917).

Advertisements for the plays he was performing in, ran steadily from 1899 to 1928 in newspapers in Ohio, Georgia, Pennsylvania, Indiana, New York, Montana, Texas, Massachusetts, Virginia and New Mexico, to list just a few. Audiences and critics all loved Hackett. Instead of becoming a theatre critic, he became a distinguished and prominent American stage actor. He was associated with numerous actors including, James O'Neill (father of Eugene O'Neill) and the writer, O. Henry.



Advertisement August 16, 1913  
Fort Wayne Daily News



Norman Hackett, 1919  
Hartsook Photo- J. Willis Sayre Collection  
of Theatrical Photographs

Hackett maintained his Detroit residence according to the 1900 and 1910 United States Federal Census. His occupation is listed as 'actor' and he was making a living wage according to the census. In the 1924 U.S. Voter List, Hackett is living in Manhattan, New York. He would have been living in what is known as 'Hell's Kitchen', an area aimed largely at people in the performing arts. Unfortunately, his acting career would slow down drastically by the late 1920s: "In 1927, his theatrical company was caught up in the Great Mississippi Flood of that year. His last theatrical performance was in The Constant Wife with Charlotte Walker and Lou Tellegen, at the Lyceum Theater in Rochester, New York".

According to Hackett's obituary in The Amherstburg Echo, during the Great Depression "he became the traveling secretary for his fraternity, Theta Delta Chi".

*Continued on page 5...*

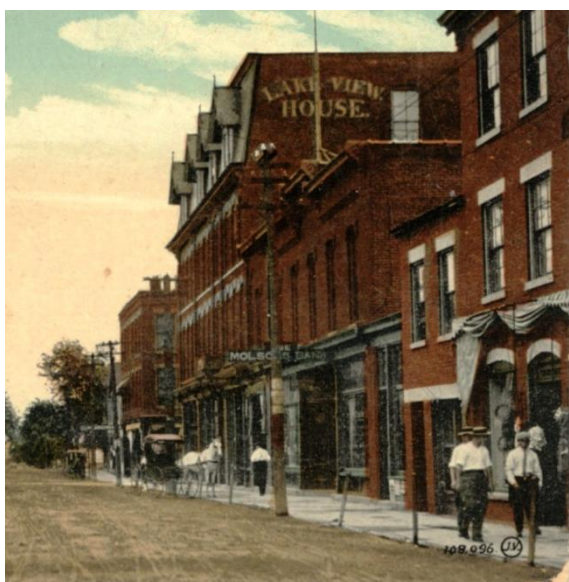
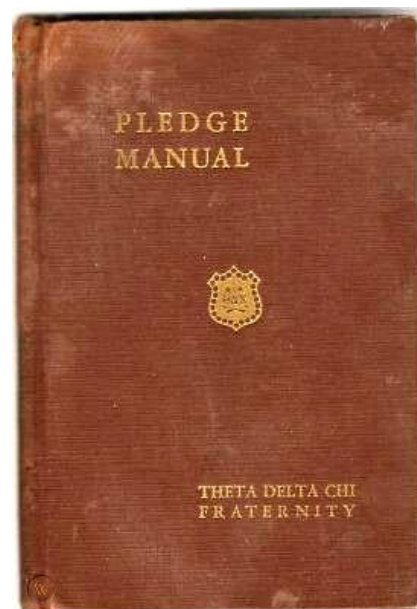


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In the 1940 United States Federal Census, Hackett is living on West 53<sup>rd</sup> Street, New York, New York. His occupation is listed as Executive Fraternity. His income is \$3,000 for the year. At some point in the 1930s, Hackett becomes associated with the Theta Delta Chi Fraternity. He served at their National Secretary and was the author of their pledge manual. To this day donations to the Theta Delta Chi Educational Foundation supports the Norman Hackett (Gamma Deuteron 1898) Memorial Leadership Conference Center at the Theta Delta Chi Central Fraternity Office. Hackett was quoted as saying, "Loyalty to a cause is what keeps life fine, and loyalty to your fraternity must be lived."

Norman H. Hackett died February 12, 1959 in Detroit of a coronary occlusion age the age of 84. He is buried at Woodmere Cemetery with his brother Thomas H (1872-1939) and his sister Augusta M. (1868-1947). Obituaries for Hackett's passing ran in newspapers across the United States. A dedicated American actor and fraternity man had been lost.

A biography titled "Come My Boys" by Norman Hackett is available in our reference library. It was published in 1960 by the Hackett Memorial Publication Fund.



## Then & Now

**Dalhousie Street  
Looking South from  
Richmond Street**

Top: Postcard c.1911  
MCS P227

Bottom: Present-day



### Amherstburg Business Files

We have files arranged alphabetically on many businesses that once existed in Amherstburg, and some that are still operating today. The files contain articles, timelines, advertisements and photos relating to each business- depending on what is available. Do you have information about a local business that you would like to add to our files? Please let us know!



**Girls Wanted**  
TO LEARN  
**Telephone**  
**Operating !.**

Pleasant Employment  
Healthful Surroundings  
Good Wages

TELEPHONE Operating offers a clean, wholesome and permanent occupation for young women. Companionship is congenial, opportunities for promotion good and the work requires no previous experience. Apply to

**Chief Operator at Amherstburg.**

**The Bell Telephone Co.**  
of Canada



## 100 Years Ago

Advertisement from  
*The Amherstburg Echo*  
June 17, 1921

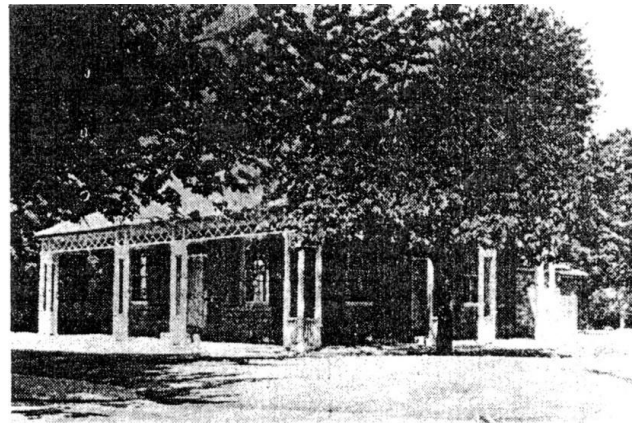
One hundred years ago the Bell Telephone operators were using manual switchboards to connect calls. The operators moved into *The Amherstburg Echo* building in 1918 and remained there until Amherstburg's magneto system was replaced by modern dial telephone equipment in 1951.



## George F. Macdonald & The Museum Tea Room

The quaint stone cottage on the northwest corner of Ramsay and Gore Streets was once an elegant tea room that had on display a unique collection of relics. It was called the Museum Tea Room. A description from the *Border Cities Star* in 1932 paints a vivid picture of the space: "implements of peaceful industry and weapons of warfare, all of the years of long ago are seen in contrast. Here a collection of cannon balls from old Fort Malden and there an old-fashioned spinning wheel. Old time firearms and locks and keys, conspicuous by their size, are on display. On the tables are photostatic copies of ancient official documents. A map of 1657 is fairly correct in its contour of the district." How did such a collection end up in a tea room in Amherstburg?

In 1930, *The Amherstburg Echo* announced that George F. Macdonald had purchased the stone cottage then referred to as the Kolfage House. This was an historic residence even then, and is now at least 173 years old. Macdonald was a well-known historian and collector of local items of historical interest. When he purchased the property in 1930, he was then serving as president of the Essex Historical Society. Much of his collection was exhibited in a private museum at his home on Victoria Avenue in Windsor. The Museum Tea Room would become a



second space for the display of these artifacts. Many pieces in the collection came from Perry B. Leighton, former owner of Belle Vue, who had discovered treasures on the riverbank in front of his house in 1891-92.



After some remodeling, the grand opening of the Museum Tea Room took place on June 12, 1930. Mrs. Clifford Dunbar oversaw operations. The tea room was known for high class service, and attracted guests from Windsor and Detroit for luncheons, dinner parties, and

meetings. A visitor register was kept to record the name of each guest (we would love to know where that register is now!) In 1935, Macdonald announced that the tea room would now be called The Caldwell Arms, to commemorate William Caldwell. The official name change took place on August 10<sup>th</sup>, the date of the Old Boy's Reunion. By 1947, the former tea room was advertised for sale and the following year it was sold.

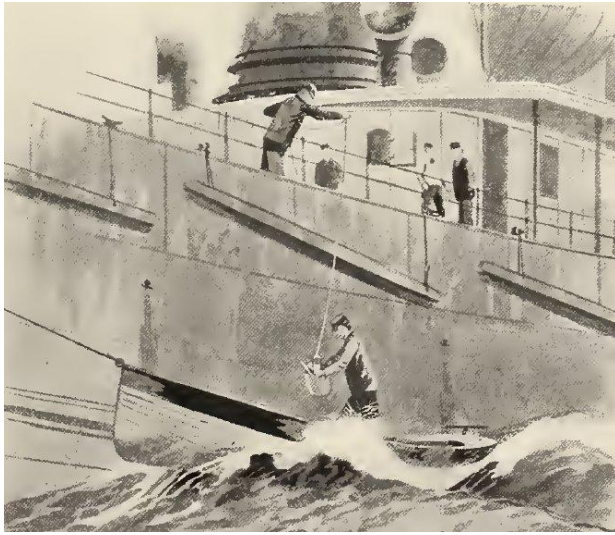
Macdonald's goal in collecting these items was that one day the *Border Cities* would have a public museum to house and exhibit these articles of history. That goal was achieved in 1958 when the Hiram Walker Historical Museum was opened in the restored Francois Baby House. Part of its mandate was to house the George F. MacDonald Collection. The following year Macdonald passed away on August 12<sup>th</sup>, but his contribution to local history lives on. Pieces from his collection can be found at Museum Windsor, the Windsor Public Library (Windsor's Community Archives), and the Archives of Ontario. But, at one time, they were on display right here in Amherstburg.

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Photos- Top Right: Museum Tea Room from Ad in *The Amherstburg Echo* June 13, 1930  
 Top left: Portrait of George F. Macdonald from *The Border Cities Star* October 15, 1932  
 Centre: Part of Leighton Collection, c.1896, Photo by Ben Lapierre MCS P3204

# Mail by the Pail

## The Marine Postal Service at Detroit



On June 21, 1895, *The Amherstburg Echo* announced that the marine post office established at Detroit by order of the U.S. Postmaster General began the delivery of mail, including registered matter, to all boats passing Detroit. The marine post office would deliver to and from lake freighters “who could not enjoy a regular postal service due to their indefinite information as to their ports of call.” This would become the only floating postal service in North America.

Imagine making each delivery to a moving mailbox that did not slow down but continued on even as you made the drop. This requires some skill. The mail boat rides out to the target freighter, steers into the ship’s swell at the exact right moment and stays within a few inches of the larger vessel while the mail transfer is

completed. The crew of the freighter lowers a bucket on a line and the carrier on the mail boat collects the outgoing mail and fastens the ship bound mail to the line to be pulled aboard. As shown in the illustration to the left, in the early days the carriers would board a rowboat towed behind the mail steamer in order to make this exchange.

The *Florence B.* was the mail boat from 1895 to 1907. During the first year, long before ships could radio ahead, Captain Donovan made a request published in *The Marine Record*. He asked that steamers having outbound mail but no ship bound mail give one long and one short blast of the whistle. He asked that schooners display colours in the daytime and swing a lantern at night.

On December 19, 1907, *The Windsor Evening Record* announced that the former U.S. mail boat *Florence B.* had been sold by C.F. Bielman to the Great Lakes Dredging Co. The C.F. Bielman Jr., took over as the mail boat that year. In 1909, the crew of the Bielman consisted of: A.J. Bloom, clerk in charge; W.S. Winler, marine clerk; and six carriers, W. Yates, M.L. Randall, Frank Backus, Bert Galino, Homer Alberson

and Edward Baker. Marine captains were John Ivers and Joseph Flaherty. In November of 1913, it was reported that an average of 2,013 pieces of mail per day were delivered to vessels passing the port of Detroit. During the 1916 season 900,000 pieces of mail were delivered to about 21,000 boats.

The G.F. Becker was given the mail contract in 1932. Reportedly, the crew aboard the Becker was able to identify passing vessels long before it would be possible to identify the ship’s name using binoculars. This was important on especially busy days in order to deliver mail to all passing freighters quickly and efficiently.

The Oliver F. Mook took over service for a decade from 1936-1946. During one busy day in the summer of 1944, the Mook exchanged mail with 21 vessels in 25 minutes!\* An *Echo* article in 1941 about the Detroit River Station (its official name since 1917) describes the Mook: “Outwardly, the Mook resembles a fishing boat. Below decks and aft however, the boat might be mistaken for the inside of a country post office. Boxes marked with the names of more than seven hundred ships regularly served by the Mook line the walls. Scales, sack racks, a cancelling table, a superintendent’s desk and other routine equipment complete the

*Continued on page 8...*

Illustration by Howard F. Sprague.

Published in *St. Nicholas* Vol. XXIX May, 1902 No. 7

“A Little White Steamer, A Man in Gray, And Twenty Thousand Ships”

\**The Windsor Star* April 7, 1945 “Detroit River Postal Service Only One in the World” by Don Brown.



picture.”

The most famous of these boats is probably the J.W. Westcott II, which continues to carry mail to moving vessels today. In 1874, Captain John W. Westcott established a marine reporting agency at Detroit and was using a wooden rowboat to deliver messages to boats on

the Detroit River. He did so using the novel ‘mail by the pail’ method. If the name sounds familiar, it is because an Amherstburg branch of the J.W. Westcott reporting agency operated in an office at the Brunner Mond dock from 1911-1964. The Westcott company took over the federal mail

contract at Detroit in 1948, on the condition that mail is sorted ashore. Today, the J.W. Westcott II is the only non-military floating postal zip code (48222) in the United States. Even after 125 years, the marine post office at Detroit still uses the tried and true “mail by the pail” system.

## Collection Highlights

*Featured this issue is a jewellery case marked  
“W.J. Miller/ Jeweler/ Amherstburg, Ont.”*

In July of 1921, W.J. Miller, of Sarnia, purchased Halsey Park’s Jewelry store and stock, including an optical business, in the Hough Block on Dalhousie Street. Park had been in the business for several years and was retiring due to ill-health. The following description of W.J. Miller was published in *The Amherstburg Echo* at the time of the takeover on July 15, 1921: “The new owner comes to Amherstburg from New York City, where he has been for the past two years in charge of the repair department of the Omega Watch Company, going there from Sarnia, Ont., where he was for many years in the store of E.P. Battley, who conducts in that city one of the best known jewellery stores in Western Ontario. Mr. Miller, though a young man, has had a wide experience in the business, and has many friends in this section who will wish him every success in his new venture. When asked why he chose Amherstburg as a place to locate, Mr. Miller said, “Aside from being an ideal place to live, I believe Amherstburg, located as it is on the Great Waterway, will no doubt share in the great industrial development going on along both sides of the river, and therefore its future is assured, and the opportunity for good business unlimited.”

Several ads appeared in the newspaper announcing that the store had gifts for the whole family, cut flowers, jewelry, watches, clocks, etc. In 1923, Miller engaged Mr. R.H. Wilson as an on-site optometrist, with office hours from 8-11 Wednesday evenings.



In 1926, W.J. Miller relocated to Leamington and opened a jewellery store there. His premises in the Hough Block were leased to the Walkerville Brewing Company and British American Brewing Company as a Brewer’s warehouse. His work was still well-known in Amherstburg. The Amherstburg Echo Gold Medal, awarded to students with the highest High School entrance exams, was designed and engraved by Miller in 1927. By 1931, he had returned to Sarnia to operate the old store, but maintained a store in Leamington under the charge of Beulah Wigle.



Left: The case held two tie pins with clear studs set in a brass holder. The holder was patented Nov. 6, 1906.