

Please
take
one!

Reflections

Newsletter of the Marsh Historical Collection
Amherstburg, Ontario

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Volume IV Issue 3

Spring 2011

ISSN 1913-8660

“Those Were the Days”Something New about Something Old

by Eleanor Warren

Back in the seventies (1970s, that is) I was working on a cataloguing project at Fort Malden. Every Friday afternoon without fail, John Marsh would pop in to see what was happening at “the museum” and he almost always found something to write about in the following week’s *Amherstburg Echo*. One particular day in 1975 he questioned what I was doing with all those old photos spread out on a table. This led to an explanation of cataloguing and I recall saying something like how the *Echo* readers would enjoy seeing an old photo each week, to which John replied, “You get them to me and I’ll publish them.”

We knew that the historic Park House Museum, another of JAM’s favourite haunts, also had some old photos in their collection, so we began a search of what we felt would be appropriate and interesting to folks reading the *Echo*. On November 12, 1975 - over 35 years ago! - the *Amherstburg Echo* published the very first “Those Were the Days” photo, an 1890s landscape shot of the original Simon Fraser residence and lumber yard on the Malden riverfront. Folks were asked to assist in identification of some of the pictures. That’s how we found that the original 14-room Fraser house was razed in the 1960s and a new brick residence was built there for Al Roberts.



Simon Fraser’s residence and lumber yard, circa 1890s, located on the Malden riverfront, approximately where Bastien Street is now.

Courtesy Fort Malden National Historic Site of Canada

Old photos began coming in from all over the district - buildings, schools and classes, marine men and vessels, families, the list goes on and it continues today. After a photo was used in the *Echo* the original was returned to its owner, but today the Marsh Collection has indexed copies of all of them - 35 years of area history documented! They may

be used for research but stringent copyright laws prevent them from being copied or used without the owner’s permission.

John Marsh was one of the folks instrumental in getting both Fort Malden and the Park House off the ground. He would be tickled to see that his beloved *Amherstburg Echo* is still publishing historic photos today.

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Growing Up in the 'Burg

I Thought I Found a Career

by anonymous

Let me tell you about my foray into trapping. In winter on my frequent skating travels to Iler's Creek (located just south of what is now Pickering Drive) I came upon many a muskrat house - those mounds of cattails you see here and there throughout the marsh. The muskrat families live in them, or sometimes in burrows on the bank of the creek when there is no more ice.

In spring, along these banks I would sometimes see poles about five or six feet long sticking up in the air at the entrance to the burrows. Investigation on my part showed that these were called "tally poles" and they marked the spot where someone had attached a trap to catch a muskrat. I also found out that despite the name "muskrat" (or for those of you with more delicate ears, "marsh rabbit"), they were good to eat and, over and above that, a good pelt was worth money. I was hooked. The only thing missing was traps. To my pleasant surprise I learned they could be ordered through the Eaton's catalogue. I checked my treasury and found that all I could afford was one trap. I went for it. What the heck - it was a start.

I rushed down to the Eaton's store (located at the corner of Dalhousie and Murray, the present site of Caldwell's Grant), placed my order and sat back to await its arrival. I don't think time ever moved so slowly as it did while I was waiting for that single trap. If I remember correctly, I was at Eaton's on a daily basis checking to see if my parcel had arrived. When it did get here, I think the staff were happier than me.

With trap in hand, I was now ready. I found the straightest stick I could get my hands on and off I went to the creek, looking for a suitable burrow. It wasn't long before I found one. With a great deal of difficulty I set my trap, almost losing my fingers in the process, and went home with visions of returning to find it full of muskrats. When I did return later that day, the trap was just as empty as when I left. This scenario continued for the rest of the week. I began to feel there were no muskrats at all. Finally, after a week of no luck, I returned one morning to see something in my trap. Lo and behold, it contained the most

beautiful muskrat I had ever seen. (Keep in mind that up until that moment I don't think I had ever seen a muskrat.)

I took it home to perform the job of skinning it and preparing for a feast of the beast. I had never skinned anything before so I wasn't too sure how to go about it. I tried every knife in the house but nothing worked. That skin had to be tougher than my boots. Then it dawned on me - Dad's straight razor would do the trick! As he was at work, I couldn't ask permission but in my excitement I was sure he wouldn't mind. I started with the now unpleasant task and by the time I got the skin off it was almost in shreds and Dad's razor looked like a saw. As for Dad's reaction when he found his razor, I can't use the words here that he did.

After all this work the muskrat no longer looked like anything anyone in their right mind would eat, so it was relegated to a freshly-dug grave in our garden. As for the pelt, I thought that maybe there was a chance for salvation. I turned it inside out and nailed it to a board, as I had heard you did this to dry it out. I put it on the floor in the back of my closet, as I figured this would be great place out of the light for the drying process. Well, to make a long story short, it took a little under two weeks for my mother to discover it. Her nose led her to the exact spot where I had left it. She confronted me with the by now stinking fur ball and she had more than a few loud choice words of wisdom for me, and the pelt joined its owner in the garden.

So ended my days as a trapper.

by Capt. John Burck

OK, I'll try a story. About the sea, Detroit River, life in the 'Burg in the '50s - the teenage years.

As a kid I always knew what I wanted to be: "a Naval Officer." Simple as that. Our family had no marine or fishing connection until my older cousin Dave joined the Navy. Yes, sir. There he was, on the sleek-looking Tribal Class destroyer *Athabaskan* and did two tours in Korean waters. Aboard the smaller destroyer *Sioux* he went to the Queen's Coronation in England. Good stuff. Our English teacher Jack Metcalfe was skipper of a minesweeper during the war and we'd

Where to find us

The Marsh Collection is located at 235 Dalhousie Street on the upper floor.

We are open **Tuesday to Friday from 10am to 4pm.**

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What is the Marsh Collection?

The Marsh Historical Collection is a local history/genealogy centre located in the heart of Amherstburg. Researchers, genealogists and history buffs utilize our information files, books, photographs, maps, genealogy files and other items. Even if you have no specific research purpose, come in to see our exhibits on Detroit River history and other aspects of Amherstburg's rich heritage. We also produce and sell a variety of local history publications and notecards.

The Marsh Collection takes its name from its founders, the Marsh family, who owned and operated the *Amherstburg Echo* for over 80 years.

get out of some boring parts of his subject if we could get him going on some Navy war stories.

Then there was Boy Scouts. Gordon Frye was our Scoutmaster and had been a Gunner's Mate in the R.C.N. in WW II. More stories. The best ones were at one annual camp on Point Pelee. A classmate's dad, Bill Wright, came along on this one. He had been a Chief P.O. in the engine room. We often sat around the campfires listening to sea stories and scratching the poison ivy we invariably caught. One night's tales were particularly exciting. Gord's frigate, the H.M.C.S. *Annan*, had forced a U-boat to the surface and had a close-quarters gun battle with it. It was hot and heavy, but "we won!" Yeah, right. A heck of a good story, but being a cynical teenage boy I took it with a "dose" of salt. Later in Sea Cadets I won a

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Yesterday's News

from the archives of the *Amherstburg Echo*

1881

March - Wm. Horsman is removing the frame building between his building, NE corner Dalhousie and Murray, and the brick block, and is erecting a 2-storey brick building, the upper storey to be used for hotel purposes.

May - The dangerous shoals in the east channel at the Lime-Kiln Crossing are being excavated. The west channel is unsafe for vessels drawing more than 13 feet.

1891

March - A fire in the town hall has caused a great deal of damage.

- Francis Laramie and Darius Wigle plan to manufacture brick and tile on the Laramie farm, 4th of Malden.

April - Lincoln Lodge has rented the hall in the Webber Block for a lodge room.

May - The contract to build the Amherstburg Waterworks has been awarded to James Wilderspin.

1901

March - The Pittsburg Coal Company is rebuilding its docks between Murray and Richmond Sts.

April - Former Anderdon residents Ed and John Biddle have been arrested in Pittsburg in connection with two murders.

May - The Amherstburg Electric Light, Heat & Power Co. will build an electric light plant on the property behind the post office.

1911

March - J.H.C. Leggatt has sold his Ramsay Street office to F.H.A. Davis [now #254 Ramsay].

May - Charles McLean is superintending the construction of the new R.C. school at the corner of Brock and Gore Sts. [St. Anthony School].

- Capt. T.B. Balfour has been promoted to the command of the First Hussars, whose HQ will be moved from Kingsville to Amherstburg.

- The new public school has been completed by Williamson & Co.

1921

March - James Carl Brandie has been appointed Postmaster.

- The first Amherstburg Businessmen's Association has been organized to promote the interests of the old town.

- Dr. E. Hutchinson will be joining the Brunner Mond staff as assistant to Dr. Fred Park.

- Norman Pouget has begun construction of his ice cream parlour on Sandwich Street beside the Liberty Theatre.

- A committee has been appointed to choose a plan for the proposed new high school.

April - The Imperial Bank has opened in their new building, NE corner Dalhousie and Richmond.

May - The Amherstburg Baseball Club asked the Town to assume half the cost of improvement to the town park, about \$300 - the Town has given them \$100.

1931

March - Water levels in the river are unusually low and trouble for shipping is expected.

April - Municipal garbage collection will begin in Amherstburg on May 1st.

May - Over 500 fans watched the Amherstburg baseball team win the opening game against Kingsville.

1941

April - Capt. J.E. McQueen will purchase from the Town the Wigle Mill property and Pulford property facing Dalhousie St.

- Due to border regulations, the Bob-Lo ferry will run from Amherstburg on only three "Canadian Days" this summer.

May - Capt. McQueen has sold the tug *Progresso* to the International Paper Co. of Toronto.

1951

March - The Legion has opened a new lounge room on the second floor of their clubhouse.

- The old telephone system will be changed to dial operation on March 21st.

- The Dept. of Indian Affairs will assist the Anderdon Women's Institute with improvements to the Wyandotte Cemetery.

April - Work on the new 8-room school at River Canard [St. Joseph] has begun.

- The Amherstburg Volunteer Firemen's Association has agreed to take over operation of the ambulance donated to the Town by the Lions Club.

May - The *Atomic* has won the 2nd Annual International Tugboat Race, repeating last

year's victory.

1961

March - The C.N. Telegraph office in Amherstburg will close at the end of March.

April - Fire destroyed the north elevator building of the Harrow Farmers Co-op in Amherstburg.

- Bellevue Veterans' Home is for sale by the Crown.

May - A 5-room addition to St. Joseph School will be started soon.

1971

March - The Town and School Board have reached an agreement regarding use of the Town Park.

- A figure-skating club is being formed at the new AMA Arena.

April - The new Allied Chemical McGregor quarry is now in full operation.

- Houses are being built in the Flynn Subdivision [Pickering St.].

May - Door-to-door mail service is now a reality in Amherstburg, Anderdon and Malden.

- Malcolm Shaw has presented the Gibson Gallery with the old watering trough once located in front of the old town hall.

- Jack Jones has sparked a plan to form a Calvert of Canada Retirees club.

- Negotiations are underway for the Town to purchase the former Amherst Fuel riverfront property.

- St. Rose High School has been razed.

- St. Mary's Academy in Windsor is closing.

1981

March - The former Esso station, SE corner Richmond and Bathurst, is being demolished and a Bank of Nova Scotia will be built there.

- The Garrison Cinema in Fort Malden Mall will open this month with "Stir Crazy".

April - The Legion has purchased the Bob-Lo Tavern and will add it to their clubhouse.

- Good progress is being made on the 74-unit Ukrainian Village, Dalhousie St. South.

- Council has approved the Tri-Community Boat Club's plan to renovate the boat ramp at the foot of Gore St.

May - Fort Malden Golden Age Club has acquired a mini-bus to transport senior citizens in Amherstburg.

- A large addition to Evangelical Baptist Church has been completed.

