

Please
take
one!

Reflections

Newsletter of the Marsh Historical Collection
Amherstburg, Ontario

Please
take
one!

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The Dance

*by a General Amherst High School
alumnus, Class of 1958*

The highlight of the social calendar at the high school was always the Cadet Dance, the culmination of the Cadet Inspection Week.

The preparation that went into this event was a sight to behold. The students in charge were usually the Grade 13s and some Grade 12s, along with members of student council. Preparations and set-up usually took Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday nights from after school until 10 or 11 o'clock. The same crêpe paper streamers were used from year to year - yes, they were rolled up and saved - this was not a throwaway operation!

The local merchants were very supportive, lending us things for decorations and also donating prizes for the "Queen" and "Princesses."

As one entered the gym one saw the false ceiling made up of hundreds of streamers all curled and gathered at one point and hung from the steel rafter in

the middle. At the door was the patio where parents - yes, parents! - usually the mothers - sat along with the judges.

The patio stones were from Jimmie's Flowers and the grass was from Sutton Funeral Home. Chairs came from everyone's houses.

The last year of my tenure with this, we were lamenting that we needed some live flowers to set the whole thing up perfectly. The one problem was that there was no money to purchase any. As I walked home on the Thursday night, I kept trying to figure a way to get flowers, but to no avail.

The next morning when I got to school, I had two people usher me into the gym and lo and behold, behind the curtains on the stage were four or five large buckets filled with cut tulips.

Obviously my next question was, "Where did they come from?" and the reply was, "Ask us no questions and we won't have to lie." I didn't ask.

Dance time arrived, Friday night from 7:30 to 11 o'clock. We couldn't afford to pay the "orchestra" for longer.

The ladies were resplendent in their formal gowns with the corsages that their dates had purchased for the occasion. The guys if they were Amherst students had to wear those cadet uniforms that were lined with itching powder, while visitors from other schools could wear a suit.

The highlight of the evening was the Grand March, led by Mr. & Mrs. W.K. Sidey and the staff. This was when the judges picked the five queen candidates. These ladies were called up on stage and a name was pulled out of a hat - this was the Queen of the Dance!

At 11 o'clock the dance was over. As my date and I left to go to a house party, we drove north on Laird Ave. to Alma St. to Sandwich St. and back down to the Tea Garden Restaurant, and it struck me that there were not as many tulips in the Horticultural Society beds along Sandwich Street as there should have been. I guess the question had been answered.



Grand March,
General Amherst Cadet Dance, 1958
Marsh Collection P4467.1



General Amherst High
School Cadet Inspection,
May 1958.

Marsh Collection P4467.5

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Growing Up in the 'Burg

Setting a Speed Record

It was late spring and I was 11 or 12 years old. I checked my agenda and found nothing on it, so I decided to do some exploring. I jumped on my trusty bike and headed out. Amherstburg at that time wasn't nearly as large as it is today.

I pedalled down Alma Street, heading east. In those days the first thing of interest you came across, other than farms, was Rose Hill Cemetery. It wasn't the cemetery that had my curiosity piqued; the fact was, I tried to avoid those places. I was after the small creek that passed under the bridge near the cemetery. I figured that at this time of year it would be full of turtles, frogs and maybe even the occasional snake.

I parked my bike, looked over the side of the bridge and decided it was safe to have a look under it, as the water was very low. Down the bank I scampered and when I stopped to look under the bridge I heard a faint rattling sound. I slowly turned and there, no more than four feet away, all coiled up, was a rattlesnake.

Most people would freeze in such a situation. Not me. I don't even remember getting back on my bike but when my heart stopped racing and I regained my sanity I was at least a quarter mile from the bridge. I must have covered the first hundred feet of ground without even touching it. I gingerly rode my bike back to the

bridge to look over the side to see if I could spot the snake, but it was nowhere to be seen. I don't know if he was as scared as I was and took off, or whether he was still there. I can tell you this: I did not spend any time looking for him!

To this day, every time I cross that bridge, I wonder if the snake is still there waiting for me.

- by an anonymous person with a healthy respect for snakes

Ancestral Lines

by Eleanor Warren

Since our last *Reflections* there has been a very noticeable increase in visits by family historians to the Marsh Collection. It could be the renewed interest in genealogy since the TV programs *Who Do You Think You Are?* and *Faces of America*. Back in 1977 the television mini-series *Roots* stirred many families to investigate their own ancestry. Or perhaps the increase in visits was simply because Spring had finally arrived and folks were anxious to get out and about. In any case, it has been an interesting and rewarding three months in our genealogy world.

Our visitors and other inquiries (email, phone) came from many places (including Essex County) - British Columbia; Texas; Halifax; Port Huron and St. Clair Shores, Michigan; and

Montreal, to name a few. Some were researching the history of Anderdon Township and the Wyandotte families who had lived there. Others were looking up the following surnames: Abbott, Archibald, Baldwin, Bertrand, Brault, Bush, Caldwell, Carpenter, Chapman, Clark, Coleman, Courtois, Durocher, Gatfield, Gordon, Halstead, Lane, Marion, Marontate, McQueen, Mumford, Nichols, Odien, Palmatier, Parker, Ramsay, Rankin, Smith, Wilcox and Wright.

If you're interested in researching your family's ancestry and just don't know how or where to begin, come in or give us a call and let us help get you started. Bring along what you do know and we'll lead you through the simple process. It's really painless. Honest!

Here's what some of the Malden Central Gr. 7s had to say about their visit to the Marsh Collection back in March...

...It really let us see how cool history can be!
...The Marsh Collection is a great historical place with lots of knowledge. It's really worth dropping by!

...We were amazed by all the artifacts, pictures and books.
...Thanks again for this amazing, wonderful adventure into the past.

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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If you enjoy Reflections, please let us know! We welcome your comments. Reflections is also available by e-mail - please contact us for details.

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.

Yesterday's News

from the archives of the *Amherstburg Echo*

1880

July - Snapping turtles from the marsh have been eating John Ridsdale's piglets.

- George Middleditch bought the foundry lot, northeast corner Dalhousie and Park Sts.

1890

June - The steam barge *Africa* and her consort, the *Severn*, are at the M.C.R. docks loading 1600 tons of stone on each for the Sault Canal.

1900

June - Measurements have been taken for the proposed Dalhousie St. sewer. The filth now emptied from private houses above the waterworks intake will be conveyed into a sewer and emptied into the river below.

August - Work has begun at the old C.S.R. slip on the new Pelee Passage lighthouse cribs.

1910

July - The new ferry *Ste. Claire* made her first trip to Bois Blanc.

August - The U.S. Engineers working on Detroit River improvements are proposing the construction of a permanent dam between Stoney Island and Bois Blanc Island. This is causing quite a stir locally. [see story on page 5]

- Blasting on the Detroit River has caused damage to nearly every building in Amherstburg.

1920

June - The newly-organized Brunner Mond Band will give concerts every Thursday evening this summer on the waterworks lawn.

1930

June - A County Board of Education member has resigned as he is absolutely against the recent hiring of a teacher who is a married woman with a "perfectly good able-bodied husband."

- The dance hall on Bob-Lo is now using an orchestroscope, a glorified electric automatic phonograph.

- A.K. Duff's new café above the Bank of Commerce will be known as the Deerhead Inn.

July - "Talkies" have been introduced at the Liberty Theatre.

1940

June - A recruiting office for the Essex Scottish has been opened in the C.R. Lalonde jewellery store.

- It is rumoured that a brewer's warehouse will be built at the southwest corner of Bathurst and Murray Sts.

- County Council is considering the formation of an Essex County Library Association.

July - Ferry service between Amherstburg and Bob-Lo will be discontinued except for carrying Canadian employees, due to a new immigration ruling.

August - High schools will not open until October 1st so the boys can work on farms.

- The lawn bowling greens are in better shape than ever.

1950

June - The graduating class of St. Rose High School has printed the school's first yearbook.

August - The distillery building at Calvert's was destroyed by fire.

1960

June - The buildings at the United Church camp and retreat near Gesto are nearing completion.

July - Holiday Beach Provincial Park has officially opened.

- A traffic light is being installed at the corner of Richmond and Sandwich Sts.

August - The old Riverside Flouring Mill building, Dalhousie St., is being razed.

1970

June - A multi-million-dollar water treatment plant will be built on Highway 18, Anderdon.

- A daycare centre has been opened by Essex County Family & Social Services in the Amherstburg library as an experimental project.

- Sod has been turned for the new Tri-Community arena to be built at Centennial Park.

- Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau visited Amherstburg.

July - Fire destroyed one of the two remaining 1839 blockhouses on Bois Blanc Island.

- John Goodchild has placed the pilothouse of the former C.N. car ferry *St. Clair* in front of his Dalhousie St. home, converting it into a recreation room with a river view.

- Six thousand people attended the 13th annual Festival of Bands at the town park.

- The tug *Patricia McQueen* has been sold and will be converted into a pleasure craft.

August - A 14-unit motel called the Fort Malden Motel will soon be built on Hwy. 18 south of the Dash Drive-in.

Bricks 'n' Beams

General Amherst High School

In 1878 a petition asking for the establishment of a high school in Amherstburg proved unsuccessful. Nothing would be accomplished to further this endeavour until another quarter century had passed.

"Continuation Classes" were first offered in Amherstburg in 1901, with fees of 75 cents per month for residents and \$1 for non-residents. By 1905 total enrollment was 25 pupils. In late 1909 approval was finally granted by the Minister of Education to establish a Continuation School here, "taking up the whole curriculum as provided by the Continuation Schools Act." For the 1910 school year, B.P. Overholt was hired as principal and Miss Mosey as teacher, with classes held temporarily in the Christ Church parish hall. When the new Amherstburg Public School opened in 1911, rooms were rented on the upper floor for the Continuation School.

Although a committee was appointed in 1913 to secure options on desirable sites for a high school building, it was several years before the Agricultural Society grounds on Sandwich Street were procured and a building committee appointed. Plans were completed in June of 1921 and town council agreed to raise the necessary \$75,000. Although at this time there were 64 pupils enrolled, there was still opposition to the plan, with petitions around town calling for a referendum, claiming that the \$75,000 should be spent on other improvements which were more urgently needed.

On July 21, 1922, the *Amherstburg Echo* announced the opening of "the new General Amherst High School." Sadly, Principal Overholt, who "had worked unceasingly for the new school," had passed away suddenly in May, before seeing the completion of the project.

The opening of the high school "marked an epoch in the development

of this historic settlement...striking a note in educational forethought that will keep it, at least until other municipalities awake into a like sense of their responsibilities, a unique example of its kind...an ideal working example of a 'vocational academic' high school."

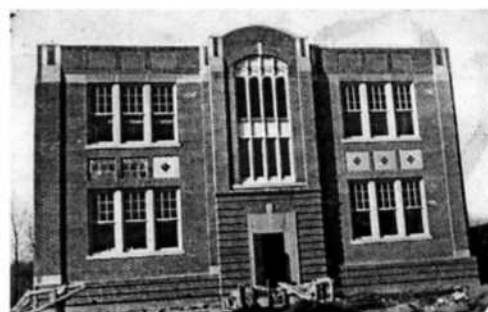
The lower floor consisted of a Manual Training Room, Forge Shop, Art Room, Domestic Science Room, Gymnasium, Principal's Room, Lady Teachers' Room and Boys' and Girls' Toilets. On the upper floor were five classrooms, one of which was for commercial work and another for Science Laboratory work. Designed from the plans and specifications of architect Harold McEvers, the exterior "possessed dignity and restraint consistent with the educational functions of the building, and [was] at the same time...different from the usual run of such buildings."

By 1950 enrollment had begun to strain the capacity of the school. Principal W.K. Sidey made a presentation to town council regarding the need for "increased accommodations," pointing out that the school, originally built to hold 100 students, now had nearly 200 pupils and needed to be able to offer more courses. The school board had already received approval from the Dept. of Education to add four rooms - Home Economics, Shop, Agricultural

Laboratory and a regular classroom - and could then accommodate 310 students. Council agreed, and the \$120,000 addition was opened early in 1952.

Meanwhile, the "Baby Boom" was in full swing, and by 1960 enrollment had doubled. Another addition was opened that May, containing six new rooms - four classrooms, a large library-classroom and a third science room. A basement cafeteria was also created. The school's capacity was now 500 students, but it was still not enough, and a mere two years later the Board approved preliminary plans for a \$250,000 addition. This one would necessitate the removal of several homes along Sandwich Street, and petitions protesting the plan were presented to the High School Board, stating that "a new addition to the school in this location would be an added nuisance to the residents in the area." The project went forward, however, with four homes being

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General Amherst High School nearing completion, 1922.

Marsh Collection P4468

Above: east side, facing Sandwich St.

Left: south side, facing town park

Shipping the Detroit The Bois Blanc Dam

In July of 1910, the U.S. Engineer in charge of the Livingstone Channel work announced a proposal to construct a dam nearly a mile long from Bois Blanc Island to a point near the edge of the new channel, "to prevent a possible reduction of levels in the upper lakes and rivers, resulting from enlarging the outlet of the Detroit River by construction of the new Livingstone Channel." This prompted an outcry among Amherstburg citizens that lasted for three years, the idea finally being put to rest in April of 1913. (The saga can be followed in *Echo Soundings: Marine News from the Amherstburg Echo*, Vols. VIII to X, available at the Marsh Collection.)

The arguments against the dam were set out in the *Amherstburg Echo* of August 5, 1910:

THAT STONEY-BOIS BLANC DAM.-The item that appeared in the *Echo* in regard to the proposal of Col. Townsend, the U.S. Engineer in charge

of the Detroit River improvement, to ask permission from the Canadian Government to construct a permanent dam from Stoney to Bois Blanc Islands has caused quite a discussion among the residents of this section. Some of the many objections urged against the proposal are that such a dam would cause a very swift current through the east channel and some predict that boating would be a thing of the past if the dam be constructed; that there would be no Canadian channel around Bois Blanc Island; that the dam would be an eyesore to the whole locality - literally giving this part of the river a "black eye"; that the town's supply of water would be contaminated by the River Canard water, which drains the country for thirty miles, that water coming down to the intake pipe which now goes with the cross current behind Bois Blanc Island; that in winter the ice would be carried down by the swift current and

the docks swept away and no craft would be in safety at Amherstburg. The proper course is to have the Dominion Government send a staff of engineers and make a thorough examination of the conditions before any action is taken on the matter. There are other things besides the Great Lakes shipping to be looked into and carefully weighed before deciding such an important question as this. We imagine we can hear the howl that would be raised if it were proposed to throw a dam out from Grosse Île or even construct a dam across the Trenton Channel - which is not used by the shipping interests. It is the duty of the authorities at Ottawa to look into this question thoroughly before giving permission to allow such an obstruction to be placed in Detroit River. Canadian residents at this point have rights that must be respected and they should be consulted. There is such a thing as being too neighbourly. There is no sense in extending courtesies to our own serious detriment and disadvantage. The big end of the proposed bargain is all to the vessel interests.

General Amherst High School

continued from page 4

affected. (One was moved to the east side of Sandwich Street and is now the home of "Rags to Riches"; another was moved to the northeast corner of Richmond and Balaclava Streets.) During the renovation, classes were held in the former post office building on Dalhousie Street.

The \$1,800,000 vocational wing and gymnasium were opened in December, 1964. Enrollment at that time was 760 students. As this addition was nearing completion, six murals were created on the west wall of the gymnasium by artist John Oliver, depicting important events in the history of Amherstburg.

The expansion of the high school was not yet complete. In 1966 the

Craig home on Laird Avenue was moved to the Anderdon riverfront to make room for a \$2.5 million addition, which opened the following year. At that time the parking lot east of Maria's Restaurant was constructed.

In the last 40 years General Amherst High School has had its share of ups and downs, including temporarily sharing its facility with Sandwich Secondary School in the early 1970s, and fighting to keep the building from being transferred to the Catholic Board in the early 1990s.

Current enrollment is approximately 750 and General Amherst remains well-known for its students' academic and athletic accomplishments.



Insurance plan, 1926, showing original size of General Amherst High School. The thick outline is the area occupied by the school today.

Then & Now

Southeast corner Dalhousie & Murray Streets



This substantial brick building was constructed by merchant Peter Taylor in 1841 and has housed a variety of businesses over the years. Many Amherstburg residents fondly remember it as the location of Jones' Soda Shop, famous for its "tin roof" sundaes.

The Lovegrove & Scratch Grocery occupied this corner for many years,
as seen in the above photo, dated 1910.

Courtesy Fort Malden NHSC

The photo below was taken June 15, 2010.

Marsh Historical Collection

