

Please
take
one!

Reflections

Newsletter of the Marsh Historical Collection
Amherstburg, Ontario

Please
take
one!

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Love Letters Discovered...75 Years Later

by Eleanor Warren

"SERENDIPITY: The faculty of happening upon or making fortunate discoveries when not in search of them." (Webster's Dictionary)

Serendipity happens often at the Marsh Historical Collection in downtown Amherstburg. Sometimes a person's name, a place or unusual topic is mentioned and often within a day or so we receive a phone call or visit from someone looking for information on that particular person or subject. In this instance, an internet query seen on the Essex County "Rootsweb" site was the instigator of our curiosity...and serendipity.

In recent months a museum in Haliburton County was given a stack of 31 love letters which had been written in 1934 by a man "in the Windsor area" to a "woman in Toronto." The letters (with their 2- and 3-cent stamps still intact) were discovered around 1993 at a landfill site by a stamp collector. When natural curiosity caused him to read the letters, he decided that they might be important to family members of the unknown sweethearts, so he turned them over to the editor of the nearby *Haliburton Echo*.

Not able to find a local connection for a story, the letters were placed in a file cabinet and forgotten. Sixteen years later (in 2009) the editor was cleaning out the cabinet in preparation for a move to B.C., when the love letters reappeared after

gathering dust for so long - so she turned them over to the Stanhope Museum in Minden. The museum curator also felt the letters could be important to someone, so she placed an internet query on the Essex County "Rootsweb" and this is where the Marsh Historical Collection detectives got involved.

The only apparent clues were that "Carl" lived in Walkerville and the love of his life, "Dinty" Dickson, lived in Toronto. In the letters Carl wrote about cutting tobacco, harvesting tomatoes, "Aunt Alma" and "Aunt Olive". Upon reading the query, serendipity began to surround my computer. There might be a local connection and we could probably unravel this history mystery! So I forwarded the query to Jennifer, the Marsh Collection super-sleuth, and within an hour or so she had made some amazing discoveries.

As it turned out, the loving couple were Amherstburg residents for almost all of their married life. They lived first on Sandwich and later Alma Street. There are many folks in this vicinity who will remember Carl and Gertrude "Dinty" Kennedy, as



Valentine card, circa 1930.
Marsh Historical Collection

well as their children - Grant, Vern and Carol.

With just a little more detective work Jennifer found Vern Kennedy living in Scarborough. He had no previous knowledge of the love letters, so was elated to hear of their existence and then proceeded to relate some of the fascinating background of his parents.

"Dinty" was a nickname acquired by Gertrude Dickson while in high school. She was born and raised on a farm near Bracebridge, one of five children of George and Mabel

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Growing Up in the 'Burg

What a Crock of Cranberries!

It was June, 1951, and exams were in full swing. I was in Grade 8 at St. Anthony's School (now the House of Shalom). In those days if you had an average mark of, I believe, 65% in a subject you did not have to write the final exam. You did have to show up at school every morning to see if you had to write that day's exam - if not, you were sent home and appeared again the next morning.

The last exam for the year was writing/penmanship and I was positive that I'd have to stay and do this one. I couldn't believe it when Sister Ellen Agnes said I didn't have to write and I could go home. She also wished me good luck in Grade 9. I can't begin to describe how excited and happy I was to receive this news! The whole summer was now in front of me to enjoy. Swimming, fishing and just goofing off were going to be my lot in life for the next two months!

I jumped on my bike and was pedalling as fast as I could for home to tell my mom the good news.

When I reached the corner of Gore and King Streets, across from the Parish Hall (now Evangelical Baptist Church), the front fender of my bike let go, dropped down onto the front tire and stopped the bike dead in its tracks. I, of course, didn't stop - in fact, I flew through the air and landed very heavily on the pavement. When I finally composed myself I looked at my left arm which was bent at the wrist in a very unusual way. A nice lady in a nearby house heard the noise and came to offer assistance. She called my dad, who came and took me to Dr. Leonard. He quickly deduced that my arm was badly broken and I would have to go to the hospital in Windsor to have it set and put in a cast.

What a fine predicament this was! Here it was, the first day of summer holidays and I was relegated to sit on the sidelines with my arm in a cast and a sling until school started in September. What a crock of cranberries!

- Anonymous



Left: Robert Kitchen in a snow tunnel, Dalhousie Street North, after the big blizzard of 1918.

Courtesy Fort Malden NHSC

Right: Sleigh ride at Fort Malden, 1982.

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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.**
(Closed Dec. 23-Jan. 4 inclusive.)

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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



Yesterday's News

from the archives of the *Amherstburg Echo*

1879 December

-Lake sailors are now getting \$4 per day.

1880 January

-Andrew Hackett procured timber to build a new lantern for the lighthouse on Bois Blanc. The reflectors were sent to Montreal to be re-fitted to the new frame. The light will likely be 20 feet higher.

1889 December

-Henry Reaume, 25, son of Antoine Reaume of Malden, second mate on the steamer *Anna Smith*, lost his life in a storm on the Great Lakes.

1890 February

-Rev. Thomas Nattress will be inducted to the pastorate of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church on February 6th.

1899 December

-During the past navigation season, 42 vessels were lost on the Great Lakes, mostly due to storms or collisions.

1900 January

-Fifteen old veterans of Amherstburg district will receive Fenian Raid medals.

1909 December

-The D.B.I. & W. Ferry Company has given the contract to the Toledo Shipbuilding company to build a new 196-foot steel steamer, to accommodate about 3500 passengers. Frank Kirby is the designer and the vessel will operate on the Bois Blanc and Belle Isle route.
- Bell Telephone will install a line through McGregor as soon as the poles arrive.

1910 January

-A contest will be held to name the D.B.I. & W. Ferry Co.'s new steamer.
- Fire destroyed the Anglo-American Hotel, southwest corner Richmond and Apsley Streets [now the site of the Amherstburg Public Library - see pg. 8].

1919 December

-William Farmer will move the old Bell Telephone building [northeast corner Richmond and Dalhousie] to his Malden farm, making room for the new Imperial Bank building.

1920 January

-Lieut. J. Earl McQueen was decorated by King Albert for saving four Belgian soldiers from drowning.

1929 December

-Application will be made by the police village of Harrow to be incorporated into a town.

1930 January

-Bylaw #129 states that sidewalks are to be cleared of snow within 10 hours of first snow falling or a fine up to \$50 will be imposed.

- The lighthouse residence at the south end of Bois Blanc Island, built in 1838 for James Hackett, was destroyed by fire.
- It cost the Town \$479.20 to remove the deep snow after a severe storm. Three teams, two trucks and 42 men were employed.

1930 February

-Two auto loads of liquor being taken across to Detroit from Amherstburg broke through the ice just above Bois Blanc and sank to the bottom.
- The new addition to St. Anthony's School was dedicated February 2nd.
- Amherstburg will put up 139 street signs at a cost of \$160 and an inexpensive flashing light at the corner of Richmond and Sandwich.

1939 December

-Over 22,000 vessels, laden with commerce from around the world, passed Amherstburg during the 1939 navigation season.
- The Detroit & Windsor Ferry Company name has been changed to

Bob-Lo Excursion Ltd.

1940 January

-Capt. J. Earl McQueen opened a marine machine shop at the dock in front of the Wile Flour Mills Building.
- The Supertest Company bought the Botsford lot, northwest corner Richmond and Sandwich Streets, where they will build a service station in the spring [now Naples Pizza].

1949 December

-Wile Hardware's new store, corner of Richmond and Sandwich Streets, will open Dec. 8th.

1950 February

-A new Separate intermediate school will be built at the corner of Brock and Murray Streets [St. John the Baptist].

1959 December

-During the past year, twelve new homes were built in Amherstburg, at a total of \$128,400.

1960 January

-The Elizabeth Dress Shop on Murray St. is going out of business.

1969 December

-Development has begun on the mobile home park south of town.
- Amherstburg schools raised over \$10,000 in walkathons for the arena campaign.

1970 January

-The Colchester North landfill site went into operation Jan. 2nd.
- The Town has created a new position, Commissioner of Works, at an annual salary of \$12,600.
- A complete renumbering of homes and businesses is underway.

1970 February

-The new Toronto-Dominion Bank on Richmond St. will open Feb. 20th.

Shipping the Detroit Centennial of Sailors' Monument

from the Amherstburg Echo,
December 10, 1909

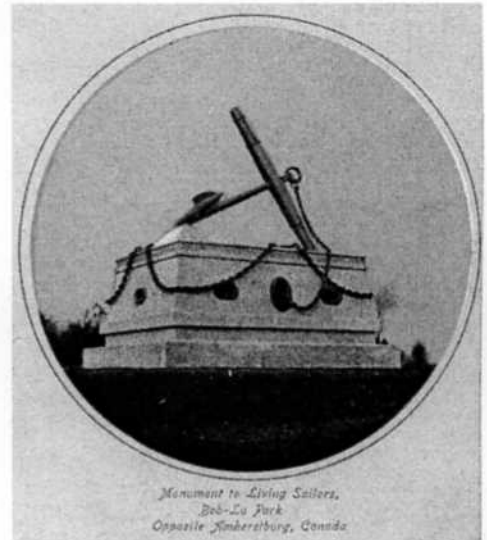
Unique Tribute to Sailors Erected on Bois Blanc Island.— A most noteworthy tribute to the sailors and marine interests of the Great Lakes has just been completed on Bois Blanc Island at the mouth of the Detroit River by employees of the Detroit, Belle Isle & Windsor Ferry Company.

It is a concrete monument measuring 18x24 feet at the base and weighing 125 tons. In height the monument is 14 feet, while an old-fashioned anchor rises 16 feet higher in the air, making the total height of the structure about 35 feet [*sic*]. It has been placed about 1000 feet up

the river from the regular steamer landing and about 500 feet below the Amherstburg ferry dock on the island. All vessels passing Amherstburg will have a clear view of the monument.

At the base there is a fender wale and guard iron reproduced in concrete, then a space upward of six feet, and then the main rail. Twelve inches above this is the monkey rail. On the river side of the monument is a hawse pipe, out of which a big chain leads to the large anchor surmounting the great concrete block. On each side of the hawse pipe and also on the end of the base are full-sized iron

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Monument to Living Sailors,
Bois-Blanc Park
Opposite Amherstburg, Canada
Postcard, circa 1912.
Courtesy Fort Malden NHSC

Love Letters

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(Elliott) Dickson, both of whom were deaf mutes. None of the five children, according to Vern, had any hearing or speech problems. Two of Dinty's sisters are alive and well, Amy in Sarnia and Doris in Windsor. Doris was a school teacher, a writer for *MacLean's* and *Chatelaine* magazines and later hosted a 5-days-a-week interview program on CBC Radio, which eventually brought her to Windsor. (We're sure there's another good story there.)

Carl J. Kennedy was the son of William and Orpha Ellen (Grant) Kennedy. Although he was born in Amherstburg, Carl's family briefly lived in the Muskokas and that's where he met Dinty Dickson. In the early 1930s Carl moved to Walkerville where he lived with his aunt and uncle, Thomas and Alma

(Grant) Findlay. Thomas was an electrician at General Motors and Carl worked there for a while as an "assembler." In his free time he wrote to Dinty, repeatedly expressing his love for her. Soon they were married and took up residence in Amherstburg, where Carl was employed at Brunner Mond (later Allied Chemical) until he retired.

On May 5, 1986 Gertrude "Dinty" Kennedy passed away at the family residence in Edgewater, where the couple had moved after their three children had "left the nest." Some time later Carl was visiting his daughter near Bracebridge. He loved the Muskoka district where he had lived and had met his beloved Dinty. While there he spotted a house for

sale in Haliburton which reminded him of their Amherstburg home; he made the purchase and was moved in by mid-September 1988. According to Vern, Carl spent four months quite happy and content in his new home before a previous illness returned. He passed away in Princess Margaret Hospital in Toronto on January 11, 1989.

We're not absolutely sure how the letters ended up in Haliburton - it's likely that Carl took them with him when he moved there. But now, seventy-five years after they were written, Carl's love letters to his darling Dinty are safely resting in the hands of his family who, previous to Jennifer's detective work, had no idea that they existed...a touching ending to a true romance.

Bricks 'n' Beams

The Leggatt Block

The intersection of Murray and Ramsay Streets is dominated by two large brick buildings - the "Leggatt Block" on the northwest corner and the "Kolfage" or "Hadley Block" on the southwest corner. Both were constructed to replace frame buildings which, along with most of the structures in that area, were destroyed by fire in 1875.

John Henry Collins Leggatt was born in Amherstburg in 1856, the son of Judge Gordon W. Leggatt and grandson of John Leggatt, former Assistant Commissary General at Fort Malden. J.H.C. Leggatt served as town clerk of Amherstburg for over 30 years, later moving to Windsor where he died in 1926. He had inherited the Murray/Ramsay property from his maternal grandfather Jean Baptiste Laliberté.

The *Echo* of July 26, 1878 announced that work had begun on J.H.C. Leggatt's NEW BRICK BLOCK. It was to be two storeys high with a 36-foot front on Murray Street and 70 feet along Ramsay. Plans drawn up by local builder Alex Ellis called for a double store at ground level with offices or dwellings above. (In actuality the building had a 55-foot front on Murray Street and contained three commercial units.) It was noted that the building would be placed five feet back from the "line" on Murray Street, "thus making the street about 40 feet wide."

By the following summer Leggatt's brick block was completed. The centre store was occupied by Samuel Laufer who moved his hardware stock from his former location on Dalhousie Street. His "commodious" store was 20x70

feet with a 14-foot ceiling and boasted a large window with three "handsome" 4x10-foot panes of plate glass imported from England.

The corner unit, similar in appearance to the centre part, was rented to John Deneau and Augustus Rondot, dealers in dry goods, clothing, boots and shoes.

The third tenant was Johnston's Bank. Designed to the specifications of manager C.A. Cuddy, it contained a banking room 27x24 feet and a private office 16x16 feet. The front featured circular-headed windows with heavy galvanized iron caps. The banking room was fitted up with black walnut counters and a fireproof vault with a burglar-

proof safe.

In the fall of 1878 Leggatt hired Peter Benner to build a one-storey, 20x30-foot stone building to the north of his brick block, facing Ramsay Street. Leggatt used this office himself as town clerk, selling it in 1911 to Fred Davis (son of Delos Davis) who operated his law office from this location. In 1969 the building was slated for demolition for a parking lot, but was ultimately saved by its owners. It now houses the Guldie Denture Clinic.

The 130-year-old Leggatt Block, with much of its architectural details intact, still serves as retail space, although Murray Street is no longer the bustling commercial area it once was.



Cuddy-Falls Bank, Leggatt Block, circa 1898.
Courtesy Fort Malden NHSC



D.J. Barron Grocery, Leggatt Block, circa 1910.
Marsh Collection P47



Leggatt Block, 1968
Marsh Collection P4166.2



254 Ramsay Street, 2009.
Marsh Collection P4403

Ancestral Lines

One Man's Family

The first object in the Marsh Collection Society mandate is "to encourage research into the history and development of the lower Detroit River, the Town of Amherstburg and areas adjacent thereto." The second is "to collect and to preserve all articles of interest relating to such history and development." Thirdly, "to provide a place to house, display, conserve, restore, conduct research into, and to otherwise work upon the articles of such collection for their continued care or well being."

Genealogy covers all of those objects. A perfect example which covers all three is a large, framed Beneteau family tree which includes historical research, preservation and display. It includes many generations of descendants of Alexandre Beneteau (1819-1884). This incredible, large piece was created by the late Mrs. Thomas (née Pearl Chrétien) Beneteau. Not only did she research and produce this wonderful heirloom, she made several identical copies for family members, finished and signed in 1965. After Pearl's death in 2004 her family donated one copy to us and it's on display at the Marsh Historical Collection, 2nd floor of 235 Dalhousie, upstairs over Don Luciano's Restaurant. You have to see it to believe it!

The direct Beneteau ancestors are listed on the 'tree' trunk, beginning in France in 1665 with François; then his son Pierre, born in 1698 in France; next is Pierre's son François, born in 1739 in Quebec; then Charles, born at Sandwich in 1782; finally his son Alexandre, born at River Canard in 1819.

In 1844 Alexandre Beneteau married Marie Martin (1819-1850). They had two children: **Philomène**, who married Felix Bezaire; and **Patrice**, who married Rose Dugré and Charlotte Geauvreau. Alexandre's second wife was Febronie Monforton (1824-1869). Their children were: **Joseph**, who married Delphine Reaume and Matilda Burns; **Josephine**, never married;

Maxime married Louise Bondy; **Maurice** married Rose Parent; and **Elizabeth** who married Henry Paquette. All of the descendants of the above children, up to 1965, are entered on the framed Beneteau family tree. If you're one of them we invite you to come in and find your name. If you're not one of them, come in anyway and be amazed at this fantastic work of art!

A Brief History of Rose Hill and St. John the Baptist Cemeteries

During recent months staff at the Marsh Historical Collection have received inquiries about Amherstburg cemeteries, mainly Rose Hill and St. John the Baptist - when did the first burials take place there, who looked after them then and now, where were people interred in the early days, and so on.

Our research indicates that both Rose Hill and St. John's Cemeteries were established in the mid-1860s. There is some evidence of burials having taken place at various sites in and around the old town - behind St. Andrew's Church, on the riverbank both north and south of town, on Bois Blanc, "the graveyard on the old Methodist Church property near the town hall" to name a few, and we all know the location of the Wyandotte Burying Ground...but there's enough material there for a whole other article!

St. John the Baptist Cemetery

In 1857 the Roman Catholic

Diocese purchased part of Park Lot 9, fronting on 3rd Concession, 27 3/10 acres, from Eustache Bastien for £500. In 1864 they sold 23 3/10 acres to Joseph Renaud for \$850, leaving 4 acres for the cemetery which was by then firmly established. Additional acreage has been added through the years.

The public burying ground established circa 1797 from Christ Church along Ramsay to Gore Street and the Catholic cemetery along Bathurst Street near the chapel which stood opposite the end of Simcoe Street were the main final resting places for hundreds of local folks. The Bathurst Street cemetery was used from 1802 until the 1840s when a new one was established on the north side of St. John the Baptist Church. (In 1992 during a search of parish records it was discovered that 595 interments took place on Bathurst Street between 1802 and 1844.)

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Cemeteries

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Rose Hill Cemetery

On January 9, 1855, Amherstburg officials purchased 10 acres, the east half of Park Lot 7 (fronting Alma Street) from James Noble for £200 for a public cemetery. It was 1866 before Rose Hill was officially consecrated but whether or not burials took place there between 1855 and 1866 is not clear. According to the late historian David P. Botsford, "many farms had a private burial plot...and when Rose Hill was opened many of those early graves and monuments were moved there..." which could account for the fact that dates on some monuments are earlier than the actual establishment of the cemetery. Through ensuing years, at various times, additional property was purchased.

First Cemetery Board

In 1932 Amherstburg council passed a by-law which established a much-needed cemetery board. The matter of proper care of the cemetery had long been a concern of A.W. McNally, who drafted the by-law and became the first chairman of the newly-formed board. Others appointed were Mayor W. Fred Park, F.M. Falls, John N. Cooper, Miss Margaret Hackett and Mrs. Charles Bonsor.

Memorials in Cemeteries

In 1948 the local Catholic Women's League unveiled a large cement Memorial Cross in St. John's Cemetery in memory of 16 boys of the parish who lost their lives serving in World War II - Roy Wigle, Frank Higgins, John Thrasher, Jack Thomas, Crimmins Shaw, Desmond Sullivan, Hayward Jones, Donald Bratt, James Girard, James White, Leo Renaud, Ivan Renaud, Gordon Brush, Edsal Amlin, Raymond Martin and Wilfred Lavers.

In both Rose Hill and St. John's Cemeteries there is a large white iron column topped by a flagpole. These were recently refurbished. In speaking with various people about these flagpoles we were surprised to learn that

almost no one was aware of their existence. We began digging into archives at the Marsh Collection and soon discovered that they were manufactured in 1956 at SKD and donated to the Fort Malden branch of the Canadian Legion who installed them. A brass plaque on each pole reads:

*Presented to Fort Malden Branch 157
Canadian Legion
by SKD Mfg. Company Ltd.
1956*

Dedication took place at the annual graves decoration services on Sunday, June 24, 1956. *A lament was played by Pipe-Major Jock Copeland; Last Post was sounded by Bugler Sergeant William Welsh. The Essex Scottish provided the firing party. Gordon Fountain was in charge of the parade which was under the command of Jack Purdie, Legion president. The Amherstburg Band, under the direction of Peter Allen, provided the music.*

Present Ownership of Cemeteries

Until 1964 the town cemetery board supervised Rose Hill and members of St. John the Baptist Parish looked after the Catholic cemetery. That year Amherstburg councillor Tony Dufour spearheaded a movement to consolidate operation of the two cemeteries. A by-law was passed in September 1964, authorizing the creation of a combined cemetery board headed by Dufour. The fence between the two cemeteries was removed and a service road joining them was laid out. Fred Squire was chief caretaker of joint operations, assisted by Howard Sprague.

Cemeteries Sold to Diocese of London

Thirty-two years later the Town of Amherstburg sold both cemeteries for \$250,000 to the Diocese of London, which is now responsible, through Heavenly Rest Cemeteries, for the operation and maintenance of these historic burial grounds.

Sailors' Monument

continued from page 4

chocks molded into the concrete. On the shore side is a modern patent anchor, taken from the flagship *Columbia* of the D.B.I. & W. fleet. This typifies the present era in lake navigation. This anchor is drawn up into position as it would be on the bow of a steamer. An iron chock is placed on either side of the anchor.

The enormous anchor on top of the monument comes from the old four-master steam barge *City of Cleveland*, which in the '70s belonged to the Bradley fleet of Cleveland. The anchor is 10 feet from fluke to fluke and 16 feet in length of stock and also of shaft. It

weighs about 3000 pounds. The barge was wrecked and the anchor afterwards came into possession of Capt. H.W. Baker, Detroit's noted wrecking master. It was obtained from Capt. Baker by President Walter E. Campbell of the Detroit, Belle Isle & Windsor Ferry Co., who is responsible for the construction of the striking tribute to the lake sailor and the inland marine.

The monument was designed in the offices of the company and built entirely by employees. Twenty-five tons of cement and 250 loads of sand and gravel were used in its construction.

Then & Now

Corner of Richmond and Apsley (Sandwich) Streets

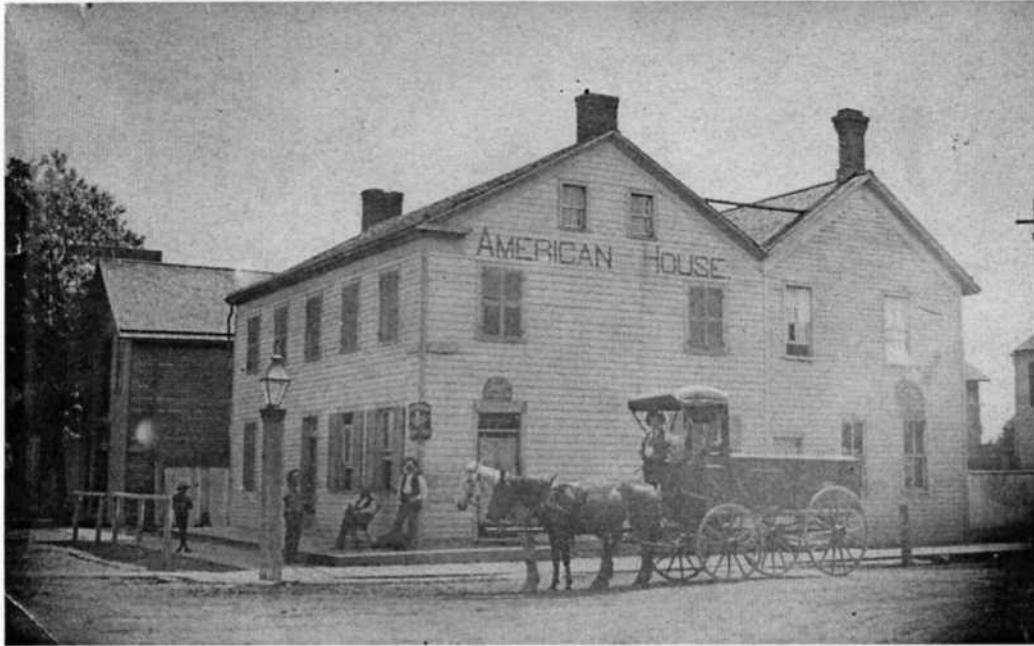
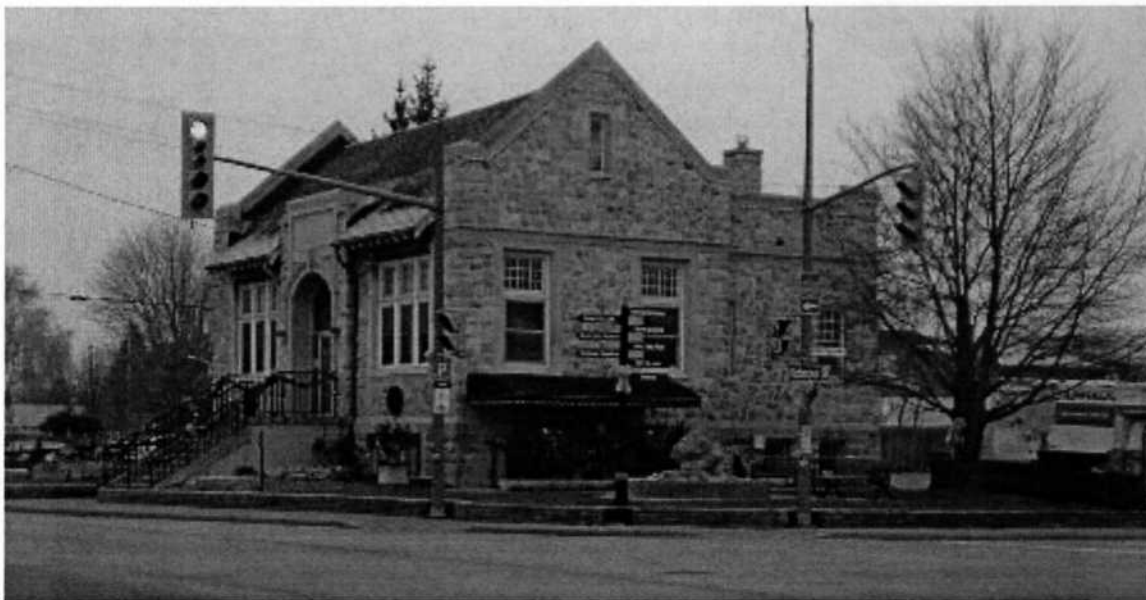


Photo courtesy Fort Malden National Historic Site of Canada

American House Hotel

southwest corner Richmond and Apsley (Sandwich) Streets, circa 1898.

The building pictured above was built in 1898 to replace an earlier structure which had been destroyed by fire the previous year. After another fire consumed the second American House in 1910, the property was acquired by the Amherstburg Public Library Board.



Amherstburg Public Library

southwest corner Richmond and Sandwich Streets, December 2009.

The building was completed in 1913.