

Thursday Is Anniversary of Doughty Colonel's Landing at Port Talbot, Second Choice

Founder Had Hoped to Settle Either at Mouth of Kettle Creek or Catfish Creek, But Was Fore-stalled; Some Interesting Historic Facts About Early Settlers and Development of Settlement

Thursday, May 21, will mark the 150th anniversary of the found-ing of the Talbot Settlement, for it was on May 21, 1803, that Colonel Thomas Talbot landed at Port Talbot.

That was actually the beginning of his settlement for he continued to live there, except for short in-termissions, until his death on February 6, 1853.

It was not Colonel Talbot's first visit to the area that was to be-come known as his settlement.

Ten years previously, during the late part of the winter of 1793, Thomas Talbot, then a lieutenant in the British Army and an aide to John Graves Simcoe, the lieu-tenant-governor of Upper Canada, spent four days going through what was to be his settlement, in trav-elling from Brantford on the Ouse (Grand River) to the site of Chat-ham on La Tranche (Thames River). It is on record that Colonel Talbot was greatly impressed with the great area he was destined to settle and made a resolution to return.

The fact is, he would have re-turned in 1801, to settle either at the mouth of the Catfish Creek (Port Bruce) or the mouth of Kettle Creek (Port Stanley) had he not been balked in his attempts to curry royal favor. A letter of application sent to the Duke of Cumberland on May 16, 1801, from Skitteewaabaa (which was either Port Bruce or Port Stanley) sought the grant of the "township of Houghton, in Norfolk County, or any other adjacent one."

Incidentally, the word "Skitteewaabaa" is Ojibway for whisky or firewater.

Dunwich Selected

Unable to get his first desires for a land grant satisfied, largely because the Baby family of De-troit (then in British hands) and Sandwich, had got in ahead of him to obtain large grants in Yarmouth Township, Colonel Talbot was con-strained to locate his land else-where and selected Dunwich Township.

With the aid of General Simcoe, who returned to England in 1796, Colonel Talbot left the Old Land early in 1803 with a letter from Lord Hobart to the new governor of Upper Canada, Lieut.-General Hunter, containing authority for a grant of 5,000 acres in Yarmouth, if available—or in any other town-

It has been related by Judge C. O. Ermatinger in his "Talbot Regime" how on one occasion Hon. James Crooks, an acquaint-ance of half a century, called on Colonel Talbot while the Aireys were away. Colonel Talbot pro-ceeded to offer his old friend li-quid refreshment but found every-thing in the shape of liquor under lock and key.

Lived in Shanty

By 1849, Colonel Talbot was not living in the main house at all but in what Lady Emmeline Stuart Wortley described as "a sort of shanty, which agrees with my idea of an Indian wigwam, close."

She added that Colonel Talbot, "almost immediately, is going to rebuild it and make a good-sized comfortable house of it." That would suggest that the big house on the Talbot Estate as it is very much today is 103 years old.

Lady Wortley travelled from Buffalo to Port Stanley on the steamer London and wrote about the elite of that village over a century ago. Of the Aireys, she said: "They have made this house delightfully comfortable, and there is an air of true English comfort and of that indescribable refine-ment which the gorgeously fur-nished saloons and chambers of the hotels we have lately been at in New York and other places did not possess. Everything is in the perfection of good taste. The drawing room is a most charming apartment, with large windows reaching down to the ground, pre-senting a lovely view of that fresh-water sea, Lake Erie." She de-scribed her own room as "being draped with beautiful old Greek lace brought by Mrs. Airey from the Ionian islands, where she had resided for some time."

The year after Lady Wortley's visit, Colonel Talbot made over 13,000 acres of land to Colonel Airey, who gave New Glasgow his name for a while, then set out on his last journey to England, ac-companied by the dependable George Macbeth.

In 1851, John Macbeth, youngest of those boys and later Colonel Macbeth, deputy clerk of the Crown at London, Ont., took up abode with Colonel Airey at "Castle Malahide" and assisted in laying out what was to be the major port town along the north shore of Lake Erie—Tyrconnell, capital of Colonel Talbot's Little Ireland. Benjamin Springer was the surveyor—and copies of that survey of streets that never came into existence are still extant.



COLONEL THOMAS TALBOT

before Mr. Pfeffer's death, when the Estate was sold to the present owner, Milton Berry, of Detroit, a native of Port Stanley.

Several times efforts have been made to have the Talbot Estate taken over by the Ontario Govern-ment as a Provincial Park, similar to Rondeau, and the old house preserved as an historic shrine, which undoubtedly it is—a shrine to the memory of an eccentric and undoubtedly brilliant Irish man who gave up the gay life of Lon-don and probable diplomatic car-er to live in the heart of no-where and settle a wilderness.

ship the governor might select. Colonel Talbot selected 5,000 acres in the southwestern part of Dun-wich, being comprised of two grants. Colonel Talbot had al-ready received a grant of 1,200 acres—which was the customary grant made to officers settling in Upper Canada—and had been liv-ing at what he chose to call Skit-teewaabaa.

According to the terms of Lord Hobart's dispatch, an additional grant of 200 acres per family, set-tled by him, was to be made only upon his having surrender 50 acres of his original grant to each family for whom he might claim and that such family should at the time be actually in possession of such 50 acres. This condition was the subject of much future con-troversy as Colonel Talbot pro-ceeded to extend his "empire."

Castle Malahide

And so it was on May 21, 1803, that Colonel Talbot reached the mouth of what was to become known as Talbot Creek, and began his settlement with the building of his own pioneer home. The

Colonel referred to it, facetiously, as "Castle Malahide," after his ancestral home near Dublin, Ire-land, but it was anything but a castle. It was a humble abode, made of logs, chinked with clay, consisting of a sitting-room, a kit-chen and a storeroom. Later a number of one storey buildings were added. It was not until many years afterward, during the latter part of the Colonel's life when his nephew, Colonel Airey, and family, lived at Port Talbot for some time, that the present "Malahide Castle" began to take form.

After Colonel Talbot's death, the estate was in the possession of the Macbeth family (of which the late Judge Macbeth of London, Ont., was a member) for many years.

In his old age, Colonel Talbot made a favorite of young George Macbeth, whose father and mother and four other children were among the brave Selkirk settlers who made the long trek from the Red River in Manitoba to the Thames River in the 1830's. Young George Macbeth took up residence with Colonel Talbot in 1839 and was joined in 1840 by his brother, Donald Macbeth.

From all accounts, the Colonel did not get along too well with the Aireys.

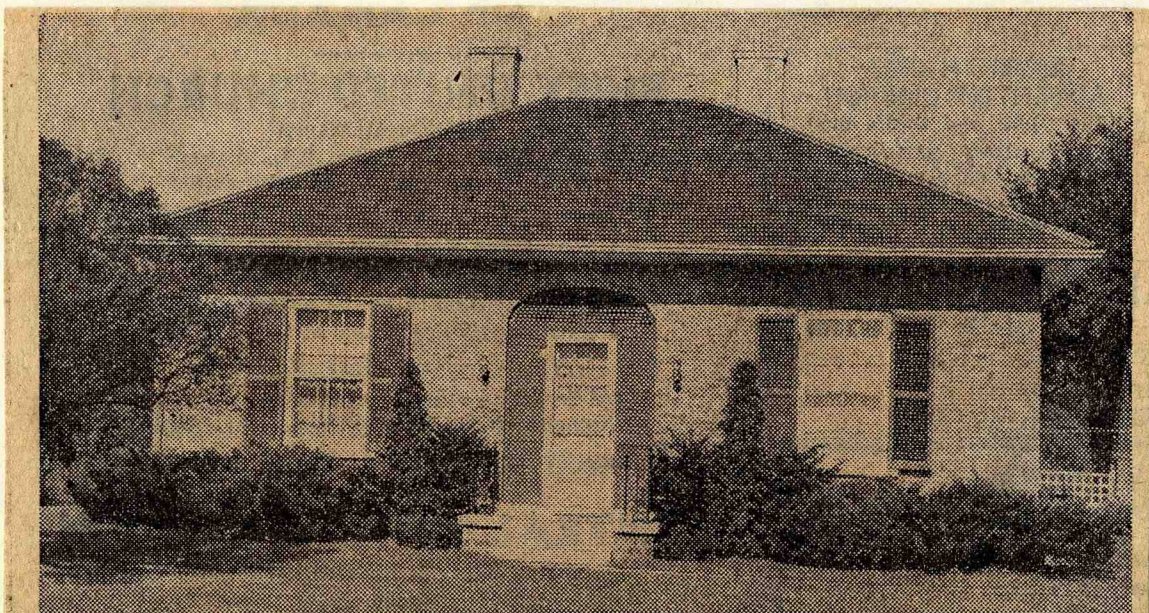
For one thing, Colonel Talbot liked his dinner in the middle of the day, while the Aireys regarded it almost as being a breach of so-cial etiquette to have dinner be-fore seven o'clock in the evening.

The Colonel also enjoyed his li-quor, not infrequently to the point of intoxication, which was dis-pleasing to the Aireys.

Other first settlers were Daniel Rapelje, on the Yarmouth side, and David Mandeville, first on the Southwold side of what was to become St. Thomas; Stephen Backus to Little Ireland in 1810; David Secord Garrett Oakes, Ben-jamin Wilson and Moses Rice, along the Talbot Road, and in Delaware Township, the Bird, Brigham, Springer, Westbrook and Sherick families. By the end of 1809 there were only 12 fam-ilies scattered through Dunwich, Southwold, Yarmouth and Mala-hide.

Sold to American

The Talbot Estate remained in the possession of the Macbeth family until the 1920's when it was sold to a group of Americans head-ed by the late C. A. Pfeffer of De-troit. They planned to convert the historic place into an exclusive summer resort with private dock, swanky hotel, bridle paths, ski and toboggan slides, and other facili-ties for luxury leisuring. Unfor-tunately, the economic depression intervened and the pretentious plans never materialized. Mr. and Mrs. Pfeffer continued to make Colonel Talbot's "Malahide Castle" their summer home until shortly



ATTRACTIVE PIONEER HOME—Few of the pioneer houses in Elgin County have been better maintained and remained more attractive than the first brick house to be built on the London and Port Stanley Highway, between Middlesex County and St. Thomas. This delightful old home, called "Sandymount," is at the top of the winding Sandymount Hill, on the east side of the highway, just north and west of the city. It was built in 1853, by Edward Rogers, great-grandfather of the present owners, the Misses Beatrice and Gladys Cox, and he named his homestead "Sandymount" after a summer resort on the Irish coast near Dublin. The property was the third to be acquired from the Crown in that area and was settled in 1836. For many years there was a building on the property, close to the highway, operated by the original owner as a grain exchange between London and

Stanley. Later the original owner's son, George Rogers, an expert cabinet maker and millwright, used this building as his workshop, making various pieces of furniture, still in use in the pioneer home, from walnut grown on the property. The old toll-gate was located almost directly across the road from the old shop. The homestead has been owned continuously by the same family for 110 years. One of the architectural features of the house is the beautiful elliptic arch of the front doorway. The window-sills are of hand-turned walnut, the doors are handmade and the timbers are hand-hewn. The bricks are also the handmade pioneer type. The original glass is in the windows. The appearance of the old house has been enhanced by the attractive foundation plantings and the wide sweeps of well-kept front lawns with sweeping perennial borders and flower-bordered driveway.

Colonel Talbot was pretty well buried in the forest primeval for several years after his arrival. It was not until 1808 and 1809 that settlers began to arrive in any number to take up the Crown lands. John Barber and James Watson came from Pennsylvania and settled in Southwold, north-east of Port Talbot, and the Pearces, Storeys and Pattersons, also from Pennsylvania, landed at Port Talbot and began the settlement of Little Ireland. John Bostwick began the settlement of Port Stanley in 1804 and blazed the line that was to become the Talbot Road. George Crane, a discharged British soldier, came with the Colonel, and settled in the Wallace town area, and James Fleming, who was with Governor Simcoe's party to Detroit in 1793 and returned with his wife and children in 1796 to settle on Lot 6, fronting the Thomose River in Aldborough.

"Here Will I Roost"

Colonel Talbot has been reported as saying: "Here will I roost and will soon make the forest tremble under the wings of the flock I will invite by my warblings around me."

That remark is supposed to have been made to Governor Simcoe ten years previous to 1803; but it may have applied to Port Stanley or Port Bruce, or some point even east of those places in view of the fact that Port Talbot certainly wasn't the Colonel's first objective.

"Sandymount"

"Sandymount", the first brick dwelling to be erected on the London and Port Stanley highway between Middlesex County and St. Thomas, was built in 1853. The land surrounding this old ancestral home was the third to be acquired from the Crown. Settled in 1836 by Edward Rogers, the property has been continuously in the same family, Mrs. H. E. Cox (Margaret Rogers) a grand-daughter, living her entire life there. The present owners, Misses Beatrice and Gladys Cox are great-granddaughters of the original owner. It is interesting to note the amusing conversation between Colonel Talbot and Edward Rogers, when the latter was in search of land, as recorded in "The Talbot Regime", page 305.

"Sandymount" is a summer resort on the Irish Coast near Dublin and Edward Rogers gave this name to his new home in Canada. The home is a roomy, colonial cottage type, the original architecture having been preserved through the years. The front door represents the elliptic arch to good advantage. The window-sills are of hand-hewn walnut; the doors are hand-made, and the timbers, hand-hewn. The bricks are also of the hand-made pioneer type. The original glass is still in the windows.

Many well-preserved pieces of walnut furniture, built by George Rogers, a cabinet-maker and mill-wright, son of Edward Rogers, seventy and eighty years ago, are still in use. The walnut was used from the timbers grown on the property and constructed in George Rogers' workshop, near the home, on the highway. This building was originally used as a grain exchange between London and Port Stanley.

History of Dr. & Mrs. P. J. Leonard's Home, Property and Surrounding Area

This holding was originally part of a 50-acre area which was purchased in 1848 by Edward Rogers, from Samuel Street of Niagara, Ontario. Mr. Rogers was the third owner from the Crown. It extended from what is now Edgeware Concession to the bottom of Sandymount Hill, ending in a V-shaped portion.

Before this purchase, Edward Rogers was unsuccessful in securing lots in the London district from Colonel Thomas Talbot. In the volume, "The Elgin Regime" by C. O. Ermatinger there is an interesting account of the conversation between the Colonel and Edward Rogers (pages 304 & 305) discussing the possible sale.

This area fronting on what was then known as the North Talbot Road and part of Lot 45, was entirely virgin land. In 1853, the Rogers' home was built by Edward Rogers and his son, George Rogers, and was named "Sandymount", after a summer resort near Dublin, Ireland, from where the Rogers family came.

In the early 1860's, George Rogers deeded the southern area of his homestead, approximately 10 acres, to his nephew, Thomas Metcalfe, who built the original house which is now the Leonard home.

In 1876, the Metcalfe family moved to the West, settling in Winnipeg and district. Their home was successively owned by the VanSeeder, Bowlby, Kitson, Haight, Voaden, Bissett and Leonard families, several of whom added to or altered the original construction of the house.

It is interesting to note that many, many years ago (the date is not established), a road was cut through the solid hill, and the excavated earth was used to help fill in the valley below. For many years this cut-through was called the "cut". It was first a plank road and later was gravelled.

As time passed, through common usage, and its proximity to the Rogers' home, "Sandymount", this hill was called "Sandymount" Hill, a name it has retained to the present time.

The Bennett Farm on The London Road (No.3 Highway)
in Southwold Township

About 110 years ago George Bennett, a blacksmith from Widdicombe in the Moor, Devon, with his wife, formerly Miss Bond of Tunbridge Wells, Kent, ~~and~~ their three sons and two daughters came to Canada from their English home and lived first on Mitchell Street in St. Thomas. Mr. Bennett built a blacksmith shop on Hincks Street and conducted it till 1877 when he bought several pieces of land, parts of Lot "D" East of the London Road to the north of Sandymount Hill. He worked this small farm till he died. When he left the city his son George Jr. bought the shop and carried on the blacksmith business as long as he lived. The shop was located to the south of Haggert Brothers Foundry which stood on the premises now used by Andersons Limited. The old blacksmith shop was pulled down to make way for the Andersons parking lot.

When George Bennett's wife died he continued to live on the farm with his son Frank. On his father's death Frank took over the farm in 1886. Shortly after Frank bought the 20 acres south of him, bordering on the Edgeware Road thus making up some 60 acres which he lived on and worked till he died. He always took an active interest in public affairs and served on the Southwold Township Council, with a term as Reeve. On County Council he was appointed to the St. Thomas Board of Education as a County representative in 1906, the last year of the old joint City-County arrangement. He was an active and interested Liberal and graced the political platforms for his party on many election occasions.

In 1931 he sold the southerly 20 acres of his farm

to his son Frank Ayearst Bennett who disposed of it a few years later. This 20 acres is now owned by Mr. Helka.

Frank Sr. lived on the farm till he died in 1932. Mrs. Margaret Bennett, his widow continued to live there as long as she lived. She died in 1942. There are no surviving members of her family.

February 20, 1965

*Mrs. Norma R. Miller