

Women's Institute logs 104 years

working for community

Your kids' pyjamas are fire retardant because a heartsick Women's Institute member in Southwestern Ontario didn't want another mother to suffer the tragic loss she did.

The white lines running down the middle of highways: you can thank Women's Institute lobbyists for that safety feature.

Credit them also for making sure your loaf of bread comes to you wrapped, so the germs don't get in.

You drink safe, pasteurized milk because WI founder Adelaide Hunter Hoodless pushed it into law after the death of her infant son.

Today's members are urging the province to offer free livestock vaccines in areas where rabies is rampant. They're promoting rural literacy and farm safety.

The volunteer helping out at your local hospital's night re-

DEBORA VAN BRENK



COUNTY VOICES

ception desk is apt to be a WI member. So is the group catering that rural funeral.

If community commitment is what you're looking for, these folks have been ahead of the pack for most of their lives.

But this mainstay of rural family life has changed since our grandmothers' day.

Back when they began 104 years ago, Women's Institute meetings were pretty much the only place outside of church where rural women could escape the isolation of farm life and educate each other about family health and current events.

These were all-in-one sup-

port and political forums, steeped in tea and home-baked cookies.

Their emphasis today on women's health and family information is as strong as ever. But there are fewer to hear — and to pass on — the message.

Cars have made physical isolation less of a problem, public information can be found at the click of a computer mouse and mothers racing home from work to ferry the young ones from hockey practice to music lessons aren't likely to attend a mid-week afternoon meeting with friends.

The London area has 70 Women's Institute groups totalling 1,114 members. The numbers were "probably double that" when Fran Hyatt first joined the group 28 years ago.

Hyatt is head of the Mt. Brydges branch and president of the London and Area WI, which includes Middlesex County and a sizable chunk of

the surrounding counties.

Their good works are prodigious — from April 2000 to April 2001, they logged 68,114 hours of volunteer time, up 8,000 from the year before.

"Women needed to be educated to make their homes and families educated and healthier."

Member Marg Eberle

They drive people to appointments, raise money to equip local hospitals and build wells in developing countries, run fitness programs for seniors and deliver meals to shut-ins.

They run day-long health and education sessions for women in their communities.

Women's Institutes thought globally and acted locally before environmental groups appropriated that phrase for

themselves.

"They're a wonderfully dedicated group of women," Hyatt says.

But fewer. And older.

Most members are 60-plus, Hyatt says. "I'm probably the second-youngest member in the branch and I'm no young chicken."

Although the district saw 29 new members join the ranks last year, they lost more than they gained.

So are these groups headed the way of the quilting bee and wringer washer?

"I think only time can tell that," she says.

Marg Eberle, of Highgate in Chatham-Kent, is more optimistic. Her branch gained four new members this year.

"The original goal was that women needed to be educated to make their homes and families educated and healthier and all that good stuff. And that's what we're still doing today," says Eberle, a director

for the Federated Women's Institutes of Canada and a former president of the provincial body.

"We're still basically an educational organization," she says.

"Part of our job (to entice new members) is to show what we have done and show that we are relevant."

She says it's a struggle to get members just to record their volunteer hours because they just don't want to be a st-

"They don't advertise themselves. We're the best-kept secret in the world."

Without a lot of fanfare these women are making a difference to each other and their communities.

When an organization this crucial to rural life is struggling to find members and support, it's no time for misplaced modesty.

Women's Institutes have more than earned the right to blow their own horns



Argyle Pipe Band - 1964

On October 1, 1957, Duncan K. McGregor started giving chanter lessons to young people from the Crinan, Argyle and West Lorne area. The intent was to have enough people learn to play the bagpipes and eventually form a local Pipe Band.

Duncan had been playing for a number of years and had earned several prizes for his piping skills. Originally he took lessons from Jimmy Bruce who lived in Dutton, and once he reached a stage that Jimmy could teach him no more he transferred for lessons from John Wilson in Toronto. Duncan rode the train from Glencoe each Friday night so he could arrive in Toronto for his lesson on Saturday afternoon. These lessons went from 1954 to 1959

Those that attended the first evening of lessons from Duncan (at Carmichaels garage in West Lorne) included: Dug Carmichael, Ian Cruickshank, Ed Humphries, Sandy Morrison, Bruce Morrison, Bill Reid, Allister McGregor, Betty Ann Graham, Wayne Graham, Terry Graham and Pat Leverington.

Like learning most musical instruments some of the members were keen and continued to attend the lessons regularly and then some only were there a very few weeks before packing it in.

Duncan continued to take new students again in 1958 & 1959 including Doug McCallum, Doug McGill, Bonnie McCallum, David Page, and Ed Bell in 1958 and Colin Leitch and MaryLou McCallum joined in 1959. In 1960 Gary Jamieson and Lorne McGill were the new recruits and 1961 & 1962 Ruth Leitch, Laurie McDonald and Ann McWilliam from Largie and John R. Johnston from Kintyre joined.

All pipers learn on a practice chanter and in 1957 they cost \$7.50 while the Scots Guard music book was \$2.50. A set of ivory mount bagpipes was in the \$ 120 - \$140 range. A Kilt cost approximately \$45.00 and the Sporrans \$24.00 with the Piper's Glen costing \$3.50. Each student paid a \$1.00 per lesson.

Before the pipers could actually learn how to blow pipes and handle them they were required to learn and memorize 6 tunes on their chanter. These tunes included "Barren Rocks of Aden"; "Brown Haired Maid"; "Highland Laddie"; "Mist Covered Mountains"; "Gliding to Arnhem" and "Bonnie Dundee".

While Duncan was teaching the pipers, Les Hawkins from St. Thomas was teaching drums. Members of that section of the band included Bill McCallum, Ed McCallum, Bill Allen, Glen Skelding and Jack Jamieson.

There were enough pipers ready to play in parades and engagements by May of 1959. According to Duncan's notebook the first parade was the Odd Fellows parade in Newbury on May 10, 1959. This must have been an election year as the band also played at a Conservative Cavalcade on June 6 and Jack Spence victory party on June 11. In 1960 the band had engagements throughout Southwestern Ontario including a tattoo in Sarnia, the Campbellton Garden Party and the Dutton Games.

Although the Argyle Pipe Band did not compete in competitions they certainly brought pleasure to many local functions as well as parades. Some of the more memorable parades, over the next few years included the Michigan State Fair parade in Detroit, an overnight bus trip to Bowling Green, Ohio with friends and family along and the 1960 International Plowing Match.

As the young people grew up and moved away from the community changes were imminent for the band. Several of the band members joined the Essex and Kent Scottish Pipe band after the Argyle Pipe Band disbanded in 1966 and there they continued to be taught by Pipe Major Duncan McGregor.

Elgin's first settler was not Col. Talbot

With the plans for the bicentennial of the Talbot Settlement next year, most people believe that Col. Thomas Talbot was the first settler in these parts. In fact the colonel was not the first to clear land and settle in what is now Elgin but a family by the name of Fleming was.

James Fleming is rumored to have travelled with Gov. Simcoe on his travels through southern Ontario to Detroit in 1793-94. Col. Talbot was Gov. Simcoe's aid and these trips were the ones that inspired him to settle in the area maybe the same trips inspired James Fleming.

Fleming is said to have lived in Fort Erie for several years where he married a daughter of Henry Windecker. The Windecker family came to Fort Erie in 1781 as refugees from the American War for Independence — United Empire Loyalists. The Flemings had two children born in Fort Erie, in May 1794 and November 1795. In the summer of 1796 The family made its way to Detroit and up the Thames River to what is now West Elgin. Mrs. Fleming had received land as a descendent of a United Empire Loyalist. James was 36 when he settled in Elgin and his wife 24. The land was untouched by the axe and when a proper lot survey was done in 1797 it was found they had made a clearing that went 15 rods onto the next lot. This required a lot of the first year's work to be redone.

Mrs. Fleming for years loved to tell the tale of how her husband called her into the woods the first morning after that arrived at the river edge to their

new homestead. She carried a baby in her arms and held the hand of a young toddler as they watched the first tree being cut down by her husband to

clear the land: A son, Henry, was born March 23, 1798 and another son, Andrew, on March 24, 1800.

The family kept contact with the Detroit settlement (the closest at the time) and in 1804 were visited by a Rev. Bangs. He informed them of the close proximity of the landing of Col. Talbot in 1803 and his plans to colonize the area.

Life was not easy and the War of 1812 brought on worse times as the family house was destroyed by

fire and the loss of most everything they owned. The second son, Andrew, was said to have been on the battlefield of the Battle of the Thames in the fall of 1813 the day after the battle. This was recorded by him in a statement in 1852.

Mrs. Fleming outlived her husband and lived to age 88, dying in 1862. To the end she had a clear memory and relayed the pioneer story with great accuracy to all that asked. With the passing years, the story of Elgin's first family of settlers has never been glorified, embellished, promoted or immortalized in stone. One would think that such an event would have a more important place in celebrated history. The time may still come that people will be proud of every little event that has made us the great place to live that we are today.

Heritage corner is a weekly column designed to tell local heritage stories by local history expert Jeff Booth, St. Thomas.

HERITAGE CORNER



JEFFREY
BOOTH

Mahlon Burwell an early philanthropist

The surveyor was Col. Thomas Talbot's right-hand man.

BY FRED ARMSTRONG
Special to The Free Press

At Christmas time, it's appropriate to remember a London founder — especially one who was also the city's first philanthropist.

Most Londoners recognize the names of Gov. John Graves Simcoe, who selected our city's site, and Col. Thomas Talbot, who supervised its founding.

But the name of Talbot's right-hand man, Col. Mahlon Burwell, who surveyed London, laid out and named the streets and helped get things started, is all but forgotten.

Yet Burwell, born in New Jersey in 1783 to a Loyalist family dispossessed after the revolution, was a remarkable man himself.

After settling in Port Talbot, he was duly certified as a land surveyor in 1809, in which capacity he surveyed much of Southwestern

LOOKING BACK

Over
Southwestern
Ontario



Ontario and was granted more than 16,000 hectares for his work.

In 1810, he married Sarah Hahn. They would have seven sons and two daughters.

The sons were named after classical and British heroes. Not surprisingly, they included Gen. Isaac Brock, the saviour of Upper Canada in the War of 1812. During that war, Burwell became a lieutenant-colonel in the militia, saw his property torched and was taken prisoner of war.

By that time, he'd become friend and right-hand man of Talbot and surveyed London Township in 1810 and 1818.

After the war, he continued surveying, was chairperson of the magistrates of the London District (Elgin, Norfolk, Middlesex and

Oxford), Middlesex land registrar, collector of customs at Port Talbot and Tory member of the legislature in five parliaments, representing first Middlesex and later London.

As a school trustee, he worked toward a centralized, properly funded system established.

In 1826, provincial Survey-General Thomas Ridout appointed Burwell surveyor for London's townsites when it was chosen for the district capital.

London's city officials
might consider naming
a park in his memory.

His first survey extended from the forks of the Thames River to Wellington Street on the east and present day Queens Avenue to the north. He also sat on the courthouse construction committee.

A second London survey in 1840 extended the town east to Adelaide Street and north to unbelievably remote Huron Street, which

remained the city's northern boundary until 1961.

In both surveys, Burwell named the streets in honour of leading figures in Britain and the province.

In 1842, he turned many of his duties over to his son, Leonidas, who also became an MPP.

The same year, Burwell became London's first philanthropist.

He'd already made generous donations of land to the Anglican Church. Believing London should have a park and a site for a Mechanic's Institute (public library), he gave two strips of land in the Wortley Road/Stanley Street area.

After his death in 1846, however, the property was used for growing potatoes and then the Grand Trunk Railway (CN) tracks were run across it in 1853.

Finally, in 1878 the land was returned to the family.

Burwell Street bears his name, but possibly this attempt at charity of one of our founders also deserves to be remembered.

London's city officials might consider naming a park in his memory.

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF COL. THOMAS TALBOT



► The Middlesex County building in London, completed in 1829, was modelled on Castle Malahide, Talbot's ancestral home in Ireland.

► Talbot came to Canada as a lieutenant in 1790 and was posted to Quebec on garrison duty with his regiment, the 24th Foot.

► The young officer, at age 20, was appointed aide-de-camp to Lieutenant-Governor John Graves Simcoe in 1792.

► The first meal at the forks of the Thames was a porcupine shared by Talbot and members of Simcoe's travelling party in 1793.

► By 1851, two years before his death, Talbot's settlement covered 2.5 million acres in six counties and 29 townships.

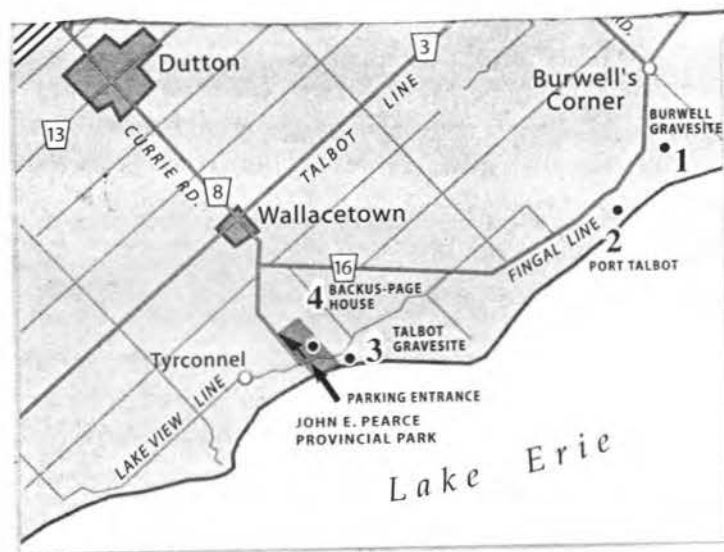
► Talbot's original plan was to create a loyal British settlement to produce hemp for the British navy.

► Talbot, known as the Baron of Lake Erie, had many titles. Among them, justice of the peace, township constable, school trustee, colonel of the militia, road commissioner, Crown reserves commissioner, commissioner for the purchase of hemp and commissioner to safeguard "this province against all seditious attempts or designs to disturb the tranquillity thereof."

► As a member of the Legislative Council of Upper Canada, Talbot was infamous for never attending a session.

► Talbot established a water-powered grist mill at Port Talbot in 1806. The mill was destroyed twice by American troops during the War of 1812.

► Talbot, who died in London in 1853, is buried in St. Peter's Anglican cemetery at Tryconnell near Port Talbot.





MALAHIDE: A sketch by St. Thomas artist Jane Hughes shows Col. Thomas Talbot's home as it appeared around 1841. It's based on a contemporaneous watercolour.

Thomas Talbot's palace

ST. THOMAS

BY JANE HUGHES

The imposing structure pictured here, with its massive squared logs, random scattering of outbuildings and carefully fenced trees, was Malahide, home of Col. Thomas Talbot. The sketch is based on a watercolour painting done by George Russell Dartnell.

Dartnell was a surgeon and talented artist attached to the garrison in London in the spring of 1840 and was a frequent visitor to Port Talbot.

In her book, *Posted to Canada*, Honor de Pencier notes Dartnell did a painting of Talbot's home in January, 1841, which he titled, the *Lion's Den*. She continues, "The composition was then tidied up and improved in a more finished work, in which the trees were changed and a sleigh placed at the front door, perhaps to please Col. Talbot." The painting is in the National Archives in Ottawa. The sleigh was omitted from this sketch to present an open view of the house.

I recognized Dartnell's painting of the aging house in a book called *The Garrison Years* by Jim Burant, where it was mistakenly titled *Barracks*, London.

It is perhaps fitting that this rare view of the front of Talbot's home should come to light during Talbot's bicentennial year.

Fred Coyne Hamil, in his book, *Lake Erie Baron*, says Talbot "coveted land, wealth and power. To achieve his goal he used methods that were sometimes devious and he rode roughshod over those who stood in his way."

Duncan C. McKillop, who has studied Talbot for years, says Henry Coyne, Hamil's ancestor and Talbot's arch-enemy, would have been more direct and less complimentary.

Talbot was given a special grant of 5,000 acres in Dunwich Township, Elgin County, on the condition he create a settlement and grow hemp, an essential source of rope for the Royal Navy.

After landing at Port Talbot on Sunday, May 22, 1803, Talbot began to create the infrastructure for a community. But when these buildings were burned during the War of 1812, he did not rebuild his mills. By acquiring ownership of the watersheds and mouths of creeks in Dunwich, he effectively, if inadvertently, prevented anyone else from building a mill that could become the nucleus of a village.

Talbot's contract called for him to settle 100 families on 50 acres each on his original holding. In return, Talbot would receive 200 acres elsewhere in Dunwich for every family placed. The settler would sign a receipt for 50 acres, with the lot and concession shown.

McKillop, using primary sources such as archives and the registry office, notes that no proof of registration or deed was given or required, and in about 20 cases, McKillop found no deeds were ever registered.

The expensive, labour-intensive growing of hemp was abandoned. The community-based pattern of families was eliminated. Talbot wanted an estate, and contrary to his agreement with the Crown, he did not place settlers on land allotted to him.

Maps show how Talbot had Crown and clergy reserves removed from the lands "reserved" for him. The reserves, for the most part, were in the northern half of both townships and greatly retarded development of those areas.

Much has been made of Talbot "erasing" settlers' names from his maps. Few people know that Talbot, himself, was "rubbed out." In 1793, when he was secretary to Simcoe,

Talbot requested land near York (now Toronto). In 1794 he was promoted and sent to Europe and by 1798, when he had not cleared land or built a structure, council ordered that Talbot's name "be erased from the surveyor general's map."

Talbot's road system was made possible by his 1816 patented grants of 14 lots in Aldborough Township along Talbot Road West. The years 1816 to 1819 saw Talbot place about 150 settlers along this road and Middle Road (Thomson Line), three kilometres north. Indiscriminately, the settlers were placed on land granted to Talbot and on land reserved but not patented to him.

Col. Thomas Talbot "coveted land, wealth and power. To achieve his goal he used methods that were sometimes devious and he rode roughshod over those who stood in his way."

Fred Coyne Hamil

In Aldborough, Talbot received an additional 200 acres for each settler placed on 50-acre lots. This was not according to his contract, but Talbot succeeded in getting away with this scheme for amassing land. It should be noted that this only happened in Dunwich and Aldborough. Elsewhere, such as in Kent and Middlesex counties, Talbot acted solely as a land agent.

Was this a land scheme or a land scam? Secondary sources, which should be read with caution, have often said Talbot was strict about making sure his settlers had performed their settlement duties. He was certainly careful about land due

to him. But a memoir owned by Bill McMillan of St. Thomas has shed an interesting light on Talbot's practices.

Donald Cameron wrote the memoir in 1857, shortly before his death. He tells of leaving Scotland with his wife in the spring of 1819. By late fall, Cameron had seen Talbot and was given 50 acres in Aldborough Township. He began chopping trees to build a house, but after "felling only a few," he returned to Long Point where he had left his wife. He fell sick and stayed in Long Point for 14 months, never returning to Aldborough.

While at Long Point, Cameron heard of land available in Caledon, York County, and in March 1821, he once again began cutting trees to build a home. His wife died after giving birth to two daughters. Cameron remarried, had more children and became a respected member of the community. An 1881 photograph of his widow, family and homestead can be seen in *A History of Vaughn Township* by G. E. Reaman.

The last time Cameron set foot in Aldborough was late 1819, but Talbot enters his name as a settler in a petition in March 1821.

Talbot died in 1853 and left his home, Malahide, and 15,000 acres in Aldborough to his nephew, Sir Richard Airey. The remainder of his vast estate went to his favourite valet/secretary, George Macbeth.

The colonel also left us a green legacy, by accident. By retaining land as a private estate, controlling creek watersheds, removing the reserves from the Talbot roads and separating his parallel roads, he hindered settlement and the result was dense forest cover, which can still be seen along the back roads of West Elgin.

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Tyrconnell education day event gives classes living history lesson

By Scott Hilgendorff
The Chronicle

History came to life last Friday as 1,214 students from across the school district took part in the Tyrconnell Heritage Society's Education Days.

"We felt it was a great opportunity for the students to see the life of the settlers that came here," said Eve Dryfout, society member and organizer for the education day.

Every school from the Thames Valley District School Board, the London Catholic School Board and any private schools that could be found were contacted by the society to take part in the day.

Taking place at the Backus-Page House and surrounding park areas, students had a chance to rotate through several different stations featuring a range of interactive opportunities relating to life in the early 1800s.

"This allowed the students to rediscover their cultural heritage and their region's history," Dryfout said.

The event was held in conjunction with bicentennial celebrations being held across the area celebrating the 200th anniversary of the formation of the Talbot Settlement.

Students could visit several of 30 different stations that taught them how settlers made the items they used from candles to barrels.

There was an old printing press where students could learn how newspapers were first made, weaving demonstrations and a chance to see how native residents lived their lives.

More than 60 volunteers in period costumes helped put the event together which Dryfout said fit into school curriculums of many of the students.

"It brings the learning to life," said Dean McLenaghan, who teaches Grade 8 history at West Elgin Senior Elementary School (WESES).

"To see the blacksmith [working], their intrigued by the way it was. There's so many things they'd never normally get to experience," he said, adding the day gave students a chance to literally see what life was like



Jane Mophew of Museum London demonstrates an old printing press in which lead or wooden letters are placed on the press individually to spell out each word on a newspaper page.

during that time period, rather than just reading about it.

"It was a tough life. They didn't have the technology we have today. It was pretty hard," said William Drummelsmith, a Grade 8 student from WESES.

"It makes me realize how much we have today. This is what it all started with," said Liona van der Zon, also from WESES.

Both said the experience was interesting and a great opportunity for them to learn from the hands-on experience.

The education day led into continued events at the Backus-Page House side which featured a re-enacted raid on the grounds both last Saturday and Sunday.

Events spilled into Port Stanley and St. Thomas where other raids were re-enacted on the weekend.

Talbot Settlement brought back to life



A Tittabawassee tune

Eric Keeley of The Tittabawassee Fife and Drum Corp from Michigan joins fellow players in a rendition of 'O Canada' at Friday's education day hosted by the Tyrconnel Heritage Society and the Bicentennial Committee.

May 16, 2003.