

TUESDAY, JANUARY 20, 1948

Setting Matters Straight About the Buildings Now on Historic Col. Talbot Estate

(The following letter to the editor is by Miss Margaret Coyne, daughter of the late Dr. J. H. Coyne, who was a recognized authority on matters pertaining to the early history of the Talbot settlement)

Editor, The Times-Journal: Sir— I understand that the question of buying the Talbot estate is shortly to be brought before the City and County Councils. The beauty of the site in question, its historical significance, and the fact that for four or five decades distinguished visitors found their way there to visit the renowned Colonel Talbot, all make it a place of unusual interest to the people of this community. Nevertheless, it is possible to exaggerate its historic value.

Of recent years a legend has grown up with regard to the old house on the Talbot estate. From time to time references have been made to it as the one built by Colonel Talbot in which he lived for more than forty years. These statements are astonishing to hundreds of people living in this County who, like myself, have heard the story of this house from parents and grandparents, and also to others trained in historical research who have made a study of the subject. Records left by people closely connected with the place, and information handed down in our families, all agree. Colonel Talbot did not build the present house on the Talbot estate; he never lived in it, and he intensely disliked it.

The house now on the hill-top at Port Talbot was built by a nephew, Colonel Airey, who Colonel Talbot left in charge when he paid a visit to England in 1848. When Talbot returned home the following year to find, in addition to his own house, a new frame house on the premises with his nephew living in it, he was full of wrath. A frame house he considered completely out of place in this new country. He refused to live in it with the Aireys. Since in his absence his own log house had been covered with clapboard by his nephew (an additional cause of anger) he moved with his adopted son, George Macbeth, into a log shack close by. It was only for a year. In 1850 he went again to England. Shortly after his return, George Macbeth married and moved to London. Colonel Talbot made his home with him until his death in 1853. During these last years, spent in London, he never paid even the briefest visit to his old place at Port Talbot.

Visitors to Colonel Talbot during the year he lived on the estate after the new frame house was built, described it in detail as the residence of Colonel and Mrs. Airey, and also remarked on the fact that Colonel Talbot lived in the log shack. Lady Emmeline Stuart Wortley is one of those who writes to that effect, in her description of her visit to Port Talbot in 1849.

My father, who, as many people will remember, was a lifelong student of the life and times of Colonel Talbot, in the year 1935 stated: "The house Airey built was the present one, modelled on similar lines to those of the log house of Talbot. The old log house stood about thirty or forty feet from the new one."

Professor Landon, now representing this section of the Province as a member of the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada, and thus recognized as the leading authority on historical matters in Western Ontario, wrote in 1929: "Colonel Airey had built a large frame house adjoining Colonel Talbot's own log home, and this is the building which stands today at Port Talbot. . . . It stood to the left of the present house."

Twenty years or so ago, when the rumor began in St. Thomas that the frame house now standing was Colonel Talbot's old house, my father and Judge Macbeth decided to investigate to see if by any chance any part of the old house of Colonel Talbot had been incorporated into the present house built by Colonel Airey. Since Judge Macbeth owned the property, they were able with impunity to take boards from different parts of the building. Nowhere was there a sign of a log. They were able to state authoritatively that no part of the present building had ever been part of Colonel Talbot's log house.

In case any one wonders what

became of the original house: The old log house where Colonel Talbot lived for so many years and entertained his famous guests was built in 1804. It gradually disintegrated in spite of the fact previously mentioned, that it was in 1848 covered with clapboard for the purpose of preserving it. Finally in 1878 when only the kitchen was left, an employee of the Macbeth family, not realizing its historic importance, destroyed it. As mentioned above no recognizable vestige of it remains. The late Judge Macbeth of London, and his cousin, John Saunders of Windsor as well as others remembered perfectly the demolition of the last trace of the old log house.

I have stated the facts as I know them. Apart from the foregoing, it would seem advisable in contemplating the expenditure of taxpayers' money, to get all possible information from an historian of sufficient authority that his opinion would count not only now but in the future, not only locally but throughout the Dominion. Thus protection would be obtained against possible future criticism.

As mentioned before, the recognized authority on matters of historical import for this part of the country is Professor Landon, vice-president of the University of Western Ontario. He lives in London. It would be a simple matter to settle any disputed point by phone.

I thank you, Mr. Editor, for this opportunity of presenting certain facts which seem less well known than formerly.

Yours very truly,

MARGARET COYNE.

95 Metcalfe street, St. Thomas,
Jan. 19, 1948.

Colonel Talbot Influenced Whole History of Ontario, Dr. J. J. Talman Declares

Importance of Local History Stressed at Inaugural Meeting
of Elgin Historical Society; Committee to Continue
on Talbot Estate Representations

The little community is the history of the country and without it national history is incomplete, Dr. J. J. Talman, history teacher and assistant librarian at the University of Western Ontario, and secretary of the Ontario Historical Society, declared, Monday evening, when he attended the inaugural meeting of the reorganized Elgin Historical Society, held in the courtroom of the county courthouse. The attendance at the meeting was evidence of the active interest that is being taken by many St. Thomas and Elgin people in the revival of an organization that had its origin as the Elgin Historical and Scientific Institute in 1891. The interest displayed augured well for the success of the Society in starting a new period of research and community service.

Dr. Talman endeavored to impress on his audience the importance of active local historical societies with zealous members dedicated to the task of "discovering" and preserving the past.

"You must know the past to understand the present," he said. "You must know the past of St. Thomas, of Port Stanley and of this whole region along the north shore of Lake Erie in order to understand the present and meet the future. You can't ignore the past when you're thinking of the future. You can't understand the Quebec of today unless you know the history of Quebec. The man in the bush can get out a lot easier if he knows how he got in."

L. T. Holmes, president of the Society, was chairman. Dr. Talman was introduced by J. C. Smith, the secretary, with the thanks of the meeting expressed by City Engineer W. C. Miller.

Committee Carries On

Much of Dr. Talman's latter remarks had to do with Colonel Thomas Talbot and the Talbot Settlement. The subject was especially appropriate as the placing for sale of the Talbot Estate at Port Talbot was largely the motivating influence behind the reorganization of the Elgin Historical Society and the sending of a delegation to Queen's Park last Thursday in an endeavor to have 400 acres acquired by the Ontario Government as a Provincial Park and historic site. While the mission was not exactly successful, it was the opinion of those at the meeting Monday evening that the effort should not be dropped and a motion, sponsored by Lieut.-Col. I. D. Cameron, was passed asking the special committee headed by John E. Pearce of Tyrconnell to carry on and endeavor to devise ways and means of preventing the historic property from being sold to outsiders, probably for commercial purposes. One suggestion from W. Scott McKay, spokesman for the delegation to Toronto, was that the co-operation of the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada and possibly the National Parks Board be enlisted in promoting the campaign to preserve the Talbot Estate.

The meeting also named W. Scott McKay, W. C. Miller and Lieut.-Col. Cameron a committee to draft a new constitution for the Society.

Cannot Ignore Talbot

Dr. Talman brought out a point that the members of the delegation endeavored to impress on the heads of the Ontario Government who received them last week: That the Talbot Estate is of more than local interest and should be preserved as a Provincial Park because of its part in the history of Ontario.

"You can't ignore Colonel Talbot in the history of this Province and of this continent," said Dr. Talman. "He fits in as a colonizer and as a pioneer road builder. He was not a saint, even though St. Thomas was named for him—and can anybody tell me where that 'Saint' attached to this city's name came from?"

"Today, if Colonel Talbot were living, I don't think we would have liked him. We would have found him arbitrary and he would have made us mad. He didn't suffer and sacrifice very much when he got 100 acres of land for himself every time he settled a man on a hundred; but he was a man of vision who could read and understand history and from it he could plan for the future. This country through here today with all its agricultural productivity and its industrious communities, and its good roads and highways, is his contribution."

ment that history is dynamic and has a definite bearing on the future of a nation, Dr. Talman said: "But we must not let history dominate our ideas, as happened in Ireland. Ireland let the past bother it. Cromwell continued to be a living character to too many people in Ireland. Ireland will be a happier country when it quits letting history dominate it."

Dr. Talman came to the inaugural meeting of the Elgin Society from attending a great gathering of representatives of local historical societies from all parts of the continent held in Washington, the tenth annual gathering of the kind. He was a speaker at this meeting and he described it as follows: "Those delegates all talked like we talk. They all are interested in local history."

Dr. Talman brought greetings from both the Ontario Society and the Kent County Society, which opened the lecture room in the Kent-Chatham museum Monday evening.

TALBOT MOST REMARKABLE CHARACTER

Old Sketch That Deals
With Founder of Tal-
bot Settlement

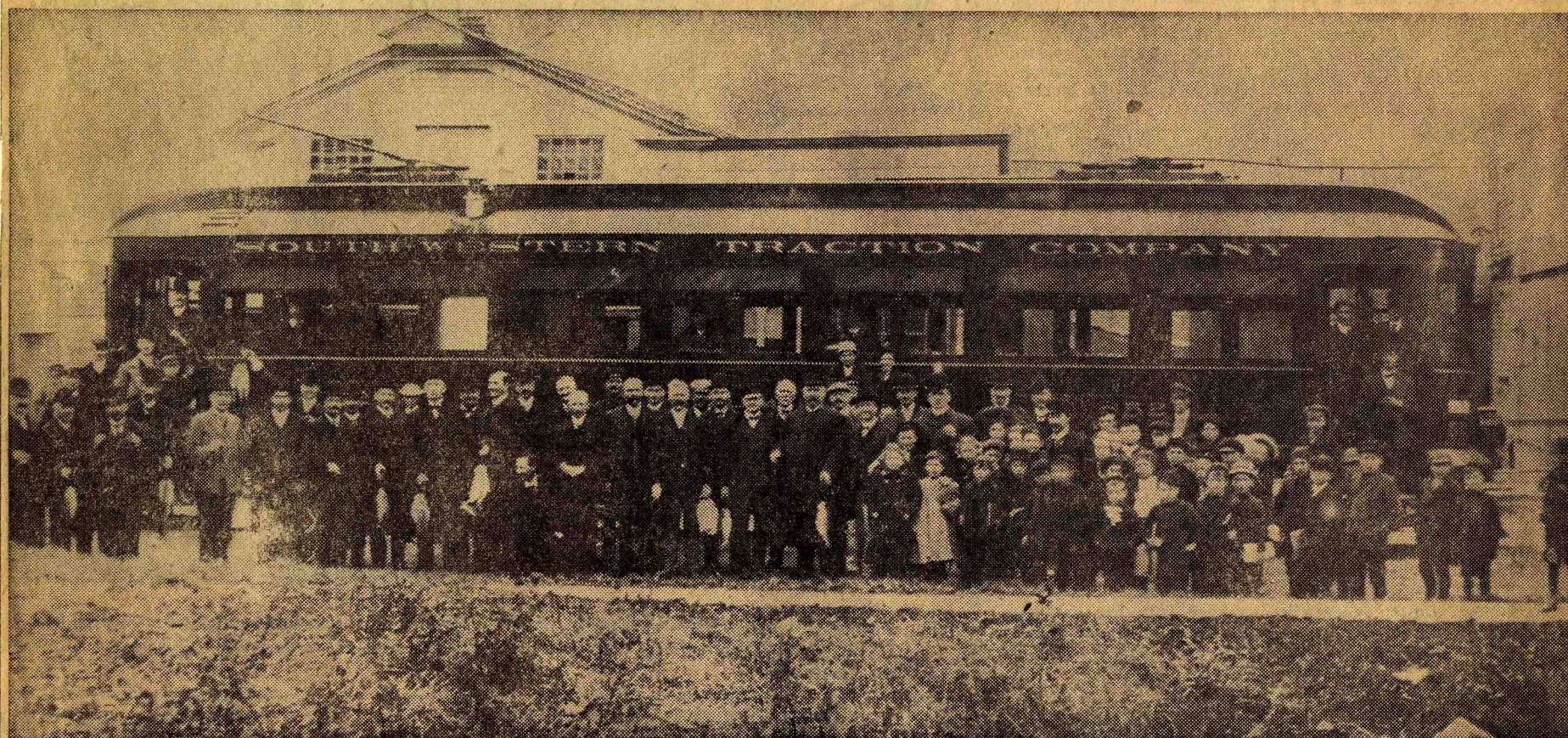
MYSTERIOUS, ALSO

Family and Aristocratic
Pride Prominent Fea-
ture of Lonely Figure

From an illustrated book entitled "Canada," published in 1906, the following most readable article concerning Colonel Thomas Talbot, the founder of the Talbot Settlement is taken. The author is Wilfred Campbell, LL.D., the well-known writer and poet.

The shores of Lake Erie have several interesting ports. South of London is St. Thomas, another beautiful city and county town. St. Thomas is especially famous for being the home of, and being called after, the noted Colonel Thomas Talbot, one of the most remarkable characters associated with the history of old Upper Canada. His history, suffice it to say here, was mysterious, to say the least. He was generally known as the younger son of an old Irish commoner family; but his place of birth, and where he received his early education, are shrouded in mystery. He first comes to light as a fellow aide-de-camp with no less a personage than the great Duke of Wellington, when, as mere lads in their teens, they, as cornets in the army, were attached to the court of the Viceroy at Dublin. Later he came out to Canada as an aide-de-camp to General Simcoe. Here he was unusually successful; and it was during his stay in Canada that he discovered the spot which was afterwards to be the scene of his life's labors, and the place of his death. Returning to Europe, he went with the British army on the disastrous venture into Holland under the command of the Duke of York. He soon rose to be a colonel, and when he had achieved that rank he suddenly, for no known reason, sold out his commission and retired to Canada, where he determined to reside as an "Hidalgo," as he called himself, on a large estate in the wilderness. He applied to the Crown for a large grant of land, about five thousand acres, and comprising a whole township. This he boldly asked for in a direct appeal to two members of the royal family, sons of George III., asking that it should be made a Crown grant in the king's name, and then be handed over to him. This request, through the royal favour, was granted; and settling on his estate near St. Thomas, at a place now called Port Talbot, he approached the government of Upper Canada, with a project he had to bring emigrants out from the old country and settle them on his own and upon government lands. His project being received with favour, he proceeded to the ports in New York and Canada where the emigrants landed, and in that way, after several years, he managed to settle with British people a large portion of what is now called the Talbot Settlement.

Traction Line Service Inaugurated 50 Years Ago Today



With great pride and much fanfare, regular passenger and express service was inaugurated between St. Thomas and Port Stanley 50 years ago today on the old Southwestern Traction Co. line.

The tramline, the most recent development in a spreading network of electric railways, offered cheap, fast transportation to the public. It was generally believed that interurban railways provided the solution for linking many small villages with the growing cities of Southwestern Ontario.

The day before regular service began, a special coach carrying St. Thomas Council members and other prominent citizens took a trip to Port Stanley.

NOTABLES ABOARD

"The car left promptly at two o'clock and made the run in good time," the St. Thomas Daily Times reported. "The car was in charge of S. W. Mower, manager of the line, and George Northcott, the company's superintendent, was at the motor. President F. G. Rumball was aboard, as were also H. M. Rumball, Robert Arkell, manager of the Imperial Bank, London, A. E. Welch, Dr. Routledge, of Lambeth, Managing Editor Miller of the Free Press, and S. S. Mitchell, of California, a guest of F. G. Rumball, when the car reached St. Thomas from London.

Here in St. Thomas, those who got aboard were Mayor Lawrence, Aldermen Day, McCully, Meehan,

RAILWAY OPENED — Fifty years ago today, service was inaugurated on the Southwestern Traction Co. line between St. Thomas and Port Stanley. Here the first official car and its load of distinguished passengers paused at Port Stanley for an official photograph. A crowd of vil-

Geddes, Chant and Guest, Magistrate Glenn, City Clerk Doherty, John Doherty, City Treasurer Perry, City Engineer Bell, Manager Balsden of the St. Thomas Street Railway, Tax Collector Meek, Assessor Freek, Walter Caughell, township clerk, and H. G. Mills, of Yarmouth, Henry Roe, city agent, Chief of Police Armstrong, F. M. Griffin, R. H. McConnell, E. A. Horton, Charles Love, manager East End Branch Imperial Bank, John Thompson of the Journal, and L. H. Dingman of The Times. At Union, James McKenzie, the agent there, joined the party."

The arrival of the special car and its distinguished passengers was a noteworthy event in the history of Port Stanley. The harbor was inspected before the group proceeded to the Loney Hotel.

The leaders firmly believed that the interurban service was here to stay.

SABBATH NOT CONTRAVENED

Mayor Lawrence indicated he saw no more harm in the electric cars being operated on Sundays than driving a tired livery horse on the Lord's Day. He told the

assembly that city residents should be able to enjoy the Sunday country air at the lowest cost possible.

Alderman Meehan believed it would be only the matter of time before the interurban service would be extended to Aylmer, Fingal and Dutton.

When all the festivities had come to an end, it was the time for an official photograph to be taken at Port Stanley by the village photographer Fred Loftus. To Jack Ferguson, of Port Stanley, went the honor of buying the first ticket from Port Stanley to St. Thomas and return.

It was a happy group, nearly all members toting strings of fish, that returned to St. Thomas.

DOOM UNFORESEEN

They little realized that even as the start of the Traction Line service was being celebrated, the dawn of the motor vehicle era was breaking. In 1907, only the more venturesome had purchased the new-fangled gasoline engine powered vehicles. Regarded mainly by the public as curiosities, within a few years the motor cars had become so common that the steam and electrical railways be-

came to feel the pressure of competition. The Traction Line operated regular passenger and express service until the line suspended operations in 1918. Among them was the late L. H. Dingman, publisher of The Times-Journal for many years.

gan to feel the pressure of competition.

The Traction Line also had the competition of the Pere Marquette Railway, the lessees of the London and Port Stanley Railway. In 1907, the P.M. had transported 135,000 passengers to Port Stanley. By 1915, the London and Port Stanley Railway had passed once more into complete London control. Electrified with faster cars than the Traction Line, and having a much more direct route, the competing interurban proved powerful competition.

Finally, the Traction Line suspended its service in 1918.

STILL SOME TRACES

Today, a younger generation can see only a few traces of this memorable railway. The tracks have long since been torn up, and most of the road bed has gradually vanished.

The Traction Line left many fond memories however, and many citizens recall happy excursions on this interurban railway which ran south from London following the road to Lambeth, then on down to Talbotville where it swung easterly to enter St. Thomas via an incline on the

west side of Lynhurst and up the Lynhurst Hill.

The Traction Line cars used the tracks of the old St. Thomas Street Railway along Talbot street to First avenue, thence south and out across the 6th, 5th and 4th concessions of Yarmouth and Dadson's Pond to Union.

PAST SULPHUR SPRING

From Union the track bed went up the Union Hill past the United Church, along the east side of what used to be called the Gravel road and down the long grade to Port Stanley, passing within a few feet of the old Sulphur Springs Hotel at the northern outskirts of the lakeside village. The smell of the spring itself filled each passing car.

The terminal on Main street, Port Stanley, just south of the Bridge street corner in the centre of town, is a concrete block structure next to the Clifton Hotel owned by Harbormaster George Wilson. At Union, the station was a concrete block building just east of the main intersection now serving as a Canadian Oil garage. The remnants of the rail viaduct across Dadson's Pond can be seen to the east of No. 4 Highway.

Few other Traction Line buildings remain standing. In St. Thomas, the carbarns and other facilities of the St. Thomas Street Railway were used. These are now the main part of the Metal Signs plant. Nothing but traces of the roadbed between St. Thomas and London can now be found.

Oct. 31st, 1957.