

This money they got by gathering up ashes after the log heaps had burned, for they burned all their timber as they had no market for it, and out of the ashes they made black salts. These were made by leaching the ashes and boiling down the lye until it became so thick it would not run out of a barrel. These they sold for about \$5.00 per cwt.. They were then manufactured into potash, and from potash to pearlash. This was done in an ashery and pearl-oven by burning the black salts in an oven until they became dry, crumbly and white.

The pioneers hardship's continued until 1820, when they were lessened, and up till that time " No " 9 (as Tyrconnel was popularly called) was a wilderness. In that year Colby built a sawmill, about a half mile up the creek from where the the late mill stood. The first winter he built it there was not enough water to turn his wheel. This so dicouraged him that he sold his mill to Geo. Henry, who immediately sold it to Mr. Siddle. Geo. Henry built a grist-mill in 1821, lower down the stream, and just above where the late mill stood, adding to it a few years later a saw-mill.

These were of great service to the surrounding settlers for up to this time they hand to grind their grain on a hand mill, and whip saw all their lumber. They whip-sawed their lumber by digging a pit and buidng a frame over it, on which they laid the log. One man got down in the pit and took hold of one end of the saw, and generally got his eyes full of saw dust while another took the end above.

PIONEERS FOUGHT OWN WAR WITH WILDERNESS
(By Gladys E. Elliott)

On the lake road about two miles east of Tyrconnell, at the top of a winding hill, there stands a neat white frame cottage that has seen this area of Elgin develop from primeval forest to the fertile farmlands of today. It was here that Meredith Conn settled when he came from Ireland with his family in 1823. Log cabins were the first dwellings of most pioneer families, but it is believed that Mr. Conn was able to build this home by 1828 or 1829.

These intervening years were heavy ones, about which Mr. Conn comments in his journal: "By the mariner's compass the athletic inhabitants of Great Britain and Ireland were conducted to a region visited by intense cold and covered with trees of such enormous size that emigration to this country has justly been termed "war with the wilderness" and certainly any man who has experienced in it amount of fatigue to be endured in cutting down a single tree, in plowing among its roots and in sowing and reaping around its stump, must feel that it required a strong, healthy, hardy race of men to clear a country in which the settler has, as it were, to engage himself in a duel with each and every individual tree of the interminable forest that surrounds him."

Indeed he had to "war with the wilderness for many years and to support a numerous family." There were thirteen children, the youngest of whom was born in 1833.

John E. Pearce, a descendant of the Pearces, Pattersons and Storeys, the earliest pioneer residents on the lake road of Dunwich, states that the first school in this area was on the Stephen Backus property a little to the west and that then the school met in this home of Mr. Conn before moving farther east still. While there, it would make attendance a very simple matter for that large family.

While it is known that the enterprising settlers of this district were able to establish comfortable homes comfortably early, the writer comments that travelling was not as good in those early days. He tells of the particularly poor conditions in spring and autumn, travelling "over causeways named corduroy roads," and of carrying provisions on their backs, having to seek a night's lodging in farmers' homes on a long trip as taverns were far apart.

"MACADAMIZED" BY SNOW

Mr. Conn is more enthusiastic about winter travel and it is interesting to find the word "macadamized" in use a hundred years ago when he was writing his journal. He refers to the "whole surface of the ground, including the roads and pathways of every description" as being "beautifully macadamized with a covering of snow from a foot to two feet deep over which every man's horse with tinkling bells can draw him and his family in a sleigh. The harbors and every river and the lake shore are frozen and become an arterial road."

Mr. Conn had arrived in Canada after the war of 1812-14 which caused so much hardship for the earlier residents of this district, but he saw service during the rebellion of 1837. He writes feelingly about the troubled days of the 1830's, when he states "great excitement" was stirred up "by a few disaffected and disloyal Americans and Europeans about supposed grievances ... They began to concoct rebellion and they issued placards announcing monster meetings

at which speeches very nearly approaching to sedition and treason were uttered."

On the outbreak of the rebellion Mr. Conn served in Col. Talbot's regiment and gives a vivid account of the capture of the schooner "Ann" off Basswood Island. With his strong feeling of attachment for the Mother Country he later welcomed the end of the rebellion and the return of "peace and prosperity to this favored land."

ACTIVE IN COMMUNITY

Mr. Conn was appointed a Justice of the Peace for Elgin County in 1858 and his journal records the sincerity with which he sought to serve in this capacity. Reference is also made early in 1861 to his interest in plans for constructing a pier at Tyrconnell and Mr. Pearce states that Mr. Conn was influential in this important and successful project because for some time Tyrconnell was considered the best harbor on the north shore of Lake Erie with the best dock. Large warehouses were established in the village and in this development too Mr. Conn is said to have taken an active interest.

By the 1860s, a son, Meredith, Jr., had become active in such business enterprises too, and the big brick house still standing at the crossroads in Tyrconnell is that of Meredith, Jr. Another son, Atkinson Conn, had the general store in the village, living in an adjoining house. Mrs. Jane Martin, 91 Curtis Street, St. Thomas, is a granddaughter of the latter, her father being the late Wesley Conn, of Aylmer.

Wesleyan Church

Meredith Conn, Sr., was a deeply religious man and, judging by his journal, his church was one of his chief interests in life. A son of a devout Wesleyan Methodist parents, he was a leader in that denomination in the district. Built in 1827-28, the pioneer Church of England had been erected nearby shortly after the Conn family came to Canada, but he writes that a Methodist minister had only preached in the neighborhood about a month before they arrived. Later, they came once a fortnight and the Conn home was a regular stopping place for them. With the arrival of more immigrant families, Mr. Conn's father took charge of a little class which shortly increased to forty members.

Mr. Conn himself later led this class, which "continued to prosper until the Millerites preached in the neighborhood and caused great excitement by their sophistry and delusions, alleging that the end of all things in this world with itself was at hand." All the members of the class except Meredith Conn and his family and two or three others joined the Millerites, ending the class for several years. It was not until 1855 that he undertook it again at the insistence of the circuit preacher, Rev. J. Hutchinson.

Mr. Conn tells of "camp meetings" and "protracted meetings" and and it was after one of the latter in Tyrconnell that the congregation increased so beyond the capacity of the school-house in which it had been meeting that a Wesleyan Church was erected in the village. It was "a small elegant edifice 30 feet by 40 feet, neatly finished and dedicated to the service of Almighty God about the middle of December by the Rev. Mr. Preston" in 1857.

CRITICAL OF FASHION

Much of the journal is devoted to the description of various services, including "Watch Night" services at the home of Atkinson Conn. At an otherwise inspiring quarterly meeting service at Fingal, Mr. Conn found a disturbing note in the fashionable attire of the women. He wrote that "the ladies small bonnets were placed nearly on the nape or poll of the neck and were profusely decorated with artificials and ribbons and many of these fashionable ladies were Methodists." He feared that succeeding generations might be "versed in all the arts of fashionable life" and was concerned that the church be guarded from anything that might distract from its inspiration and spiritual influence.

Mr. Conn was influential in community life at a period when Tyrconnell was a busy centre. A writer in the Elgin Atlas of 1877 records of him that he "was one of the first assessors of the Township of Dunwich, has been 25 years Magistrate and now lives at Tyrconnell, 86 years of age, with the wife of his youth, both in the cheerful enjoyment of health and faculties."

By that time, according to the Atlas, their son, Meredith, had become "well-known in the County of Elgin as an extensive grain buyer and popular and efficient municipal officer. For the past 14 years no man in Elgin has led a busier life or distributed more cash for the products of the field. In 1862, Mr. Conn moved to Tyrconnell, though he was one of the Company who built a pier for loading vessels there in 1860. In 1860 he built a large warehouse and purchased from this time large quantities of grain every year. At one time in 1875 he had 80,000 bushels afloat. In 1876 Mr. Conn purchased at Tyrconnell, Springfield, Iona, Dutton, Bismarck and Ridgetown". A public-spirited man, in 1877 Meredith Conn, Jr., had been six years a member of the County Council, was president of the Conservative Association and had been often urged to be a Parliamentary candidate.

According to the Elgin Atlas, Mr. and Mrs. Meredith Conn, Sr., lived in Tyrconnell in their later years. In spite of the hardships of pioneering, both lived to a venerable age, Mrs. Conn dying in 1879 just a few days before her eighty-eighth birthday and Mr. Conn in 1889 in his ninety-ninth year. They are buried in the little God's Acre situated on a sunny rise of land just a little west of the village.

PIONEER VESTIGES IN
THE TALBOT DISTRICT
1937



Port Talbot Fishery
Once a thriving L. Erie port.