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Busy slate for Talbot bicentennial

BY TIMES-JOURNAL STAFF

LONDON, Ont. — History buffs in southwestern Ontario are partying this year like it was 1803.

A busy schedule of events to celebrate the bicentennial of the founding of the Talbot Settlement 200 years ago on the north shore of Lake Erie, was announced Tuesday at Museum London by the Talbot Bicentennial committee.

Also unveiled was a bicentennial flag featuring the Talbot hound from the St. Thomas municipal coat of arms, and the motto, *Loyal We Remain*.

"I think it's going to be a great year to remember," bicentennial chairman Rev. Nick Wells said.

Like a number of participants in Tuesday's announcement at the art gallery, Wells was dressed in costume — yesterday, as Col. Thomas Talbot, one of the figures Wells regularly portrays as an historical re-enactor.

Although most events already

have been individually announced, yesterday's gathering provided a forum for the provincial government to support the bicentennial with a \$15,000 grant from the Ontario Cultural Attractions Fund.

Presenting the cheque was London South Tory MPP Bob Wood, who said history is an investment in the future.

"If we are going to build this community, this province and this country ... we have to understand very clearly the mistakes that were made and the accomplishments of the past."

London has contributed \$29,000 to the committee's \$105,000 budget; Elgin, \$15,000; St. Thomas, \$14,000; and corporate sponsor Reid's Heritage Homes, \$10,000.

Bicentennial events range from museum and art exhibitions to land and sea battles. London documentary filmmaker Chris Doty has reconstructed a "lost" 1941 feature, *Talbot of Canada*, which is to be pre-

Dressed as Col. Thomas Talbot, Rev. Nick Wells announces schedule of Talbot bicentennial events this year, Monday at Museum London. (T-J photo)

miered March 28.

Wells yesterday promised a spectacular War of 1812 encampment of historical re-enactors in May at Tyrconnell, featuring the burning of the Talbot Settlement "every day at 11 a.m." until American raiders are chased through St. Thomas by British soldiers and repulsed at Port Stanley, where they are to flee in a 70-foot tall ship.

Some bicentennial programming already is under way. *Thomas Talbot: Man and Myth*, is an exhibition at Museum London through April 27 before travelling to St. Thomas and Windsor.

Elgin County Pioneer Museum also plans a Talbot exhibition and Port Burwell Marine Museum will feature Talbot surveyor Mahlon Burwell.



Feb 2003

200 years of Talbot Settlement

The local area will be celebrating 200 years of the Talbot Settlement next year and major plans are in the works to make the celebration something for many generations to be proud of.

Diana Player a volunteer with the Elgin Historical Society and secretary for the 2003 Planning Committee for the Bi-Centennial says there are hundreds of people working hard.

"It will be the largest endeavour since 1903 when the centennial celebration was held," she says.

In 1903 the communities of the Settlement saw a week full of celebrations that included dedications, ceremonies and also merriment.

In 2003 the ceremonies, re-enactments and celebrations will be a chance in a lifetime to take part in a big part of Elgin County History but more importantly a chance to honour the rich history of the Talbot Settlement. It will also be a year of events.

Four major events are already planned, with more coming.

The earliest event starts in January 2003 and that is the Talbot Exhibition at Eldon House Interpretive Centre at Museum London. It runs from January until the end of December 2003.

The second event will be held March 29, 2003 at Fanshawe College, St. Joseph Campus in St. Thomas. This event is for history buffs who will enjoy the dialogue of actors playing parts in history.

There will also be an re-enactment of the Founding of the Talbot Settlement in Port Stanley on May 21 2003.

Finally there will be three raids on the settlement re-enactments. It will be held three days in the row.

Tyrconnell, May 23, 2003

St. Thomas May 24, 2003

Port Stanley May 25, 2003.

The Backus-Page people will also be assisting with the re-enactment events.

March 6th 2003

The Chronicle

Talbot bicentennial events previewed

By Times-Journal Staff
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TALBOT: Unfailingly helpful to newly arrived settlers

From Page B1

Talbot really lived no differently than his neighbours, Wells says.

"Yes, he may have had a bigger house and had more money in the bank. But he didn't spend it on himself. He spent it on his settlement."

The hard-working colonel expected the same from his settlers, Wells says.

"If you did not work, he did not like you. If you didn't perform your settlement duties, you were gone. He didn't care because he could get another settler."

Offsetting this no-nonsense approach was Talbot's generosity.

Wells says Talbot was unfailingly helpful to newly arrived settlers at Port Talbot.

"The hospitality records are extremely clear," he says. "He fed, clothed and provided feed for settlers over and over and over again."

The colonel also shared in the settlement's setbacks, including the heavy toll inflicted during the War of 1812.

In 1814, marauding Americans struck hard, destroying crops, burning homes and slaughtering farm animals. Some men were taken captive, others were slain.

Talbot narrowly missed being captured during several raids but his household, mill and outbuildings were burned.

In his 1955 book, *Baron of Lake Erie*, author Fred Coyne Hamil pictured Talbot as having genuine concern for the welfare of his settlers.

"But it was the concern of a benevolent despot who believed that he had a divine mandate to rule in the best interests of the people."

Late in life, Talbot became increasingly isolated as he refused to accept the changes happening around him.

He was vehemently opposed to anything hinting at democratic reform and stuck with political ideas that belonged to an earlier age.

In *Lake Erie Baron*, he is portrayed as a man who wanted a grateful populace to regard him as the father of his settlement.

"The tragedy of his life," says the book, "was that his 'children' grew up and rebelled against the parental discipline . . . Their respect, if not love, turned to hate."

Talbot ended his life not in his beloved settlement but in London.

He died in 1853, during a frigid winter, at the home of George Macbeth, his business manager for many years.

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.

Talbot bicentennial events

Now until April 27: Thomas Talbot: Man and Myth, Museum London.

April 12: Video of John Kenneth Galbraith

Today, the site on Princess Avenue in London is occupied by Lord Roberts public school. Talbot was buried in the settlement on a cliff overlooking Lake Erie.

His legacy lives on all around us, says Diana Player, a member of the bicentennial organizing committee.

"Along our country roads, along our busy highways and on our city

streets, the Talbot name is commemorated in businesses, street names and in the names of our communities," Player says.

"There is no denying what Talbot did. He helped open this region to settlers and in doing so created one of the best early settlements in Upper Canada, if not North America."

speech, Talbot of Canada film, Wolf Performance Hall, London central library, 7 p.m.

May 3-4: Battle of Longwoods re-enactment, Longwoods conservation area, Delaware.

May 11- Aug. 31: Early Sail on the Great Lakes, historic marine art by Peter Rindlisbacher, Museum London.

May 18-Sept. 1: Col. Mahlon Burwell, Surveyor, 200 years of surveying, Port Burwell Marine Museum, Port Burwell.

May 21: Talbot Settlement founding re-enactment, Port Stanley harbour. Begins at 11 a.m.

May 24-25: Grand 1812-14 encampment, Backus-Page House, Tryconnell. Mock raids on Port Stanley, Port Talbot, St. Thomas, period ships, military re-enactments.

June 15-Sept. 28: Thomas Talbot: Man and Myth, Elgin County Pioneer Museum, St. Thomas.

July 1: Military muster re-enactment, Eldon House, London, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

July 20: Talbot's birthday party, Pinafore Park, St. Thomas, 2 p.m.

Aug. 2-3: Brock's landing re-enactment, Rondeau Provincial Park, Chatham-Kent.

Aug. 30-Sept. 1: Fairfield Comes Alive, 1812 re-enactment, Fairfield Museum, Longwoods Road east of Thamesville.

Sept. 27: Talbot Settlement Ghost Walk, St. Thomas Anglican Church, St. Thomas. Performances depict historic figures, 2 p.m. and 7 p.m.

Oct. 3-5: Heritage Days 1812 re-enactment, Thamesgrove conservation area, Chatham.

Complete list, with admission prices where charged, <http://home.golden.net/~talbot2003/events.htm>

Free Press staff

Talbot page B8.

→ Talbot page B1

CITY REGION

667-4596 jcarl@lfpres.com

The London Free Press Sat March 29, 2003



REMNANT: Actors in a scene from Canada's first feature-length film, *Here Will I Nest*, tell the story of Col. Thomas Talbot. London filmmaker Chris Doty has used the only surviving remnant of the 1942 film in his documentary *Talbot of Canada: The Restoration*.

Author of prosperity

Southwestern Ontario owes its early settlement to Thomas Talbot.

COLONEL THOMAS TALBOT

BY PETER GEIGEN-MILLER
Free Press Reporter

On a beautiful spring day in May, an ambitious former British officer rowed ashore near Port Stanley and began the monumental task of transforming vast expanses of raw wilderness into one of the most prosperous farming areas in Canada.

By the time Col. Thomas Talbot died in London 50 years later, he had single-mindedly pushed aside all obstacles to help carve out a settlement that stretched over 29 Southwestern Ontario townships and was home to tens of thousands.

The man who had abandoned his aristocratic roots and a promising military career to live as a pioneer backwoodsman, lived to see the wild land filled with villages, neat farms and a network of some of the best roads in Canada.

Talbot's community-building feat and the settlement bearing his name are being remembered this year during the 200th anniversary of his history-making landing on the shores of Lake Erie.

Activities ranging from conferences to museum exhibits and historical re-enactments are planned

sit well with the governing authorities in Upper Canada.

But they worked, points out Wells.

A key to his success was his recognition that good roads were an essential pre-condition for attracting good settlers.

He ensured roads were built quickly by settling new arrivals along right-of-ways and insisting settlers perform their settlement duties, which included opening the road allowance adjacent to their property.

He also shifted around land allotments — blocks of property that had been reserved for various purposes by the Crown — to further the interests of the settlement. And he did it without permission from authorities.

"If he hadn't done it. Southwest-

near Dublin, Ireland, on July 19, 1771.

His wealthy family helped him gain a commission to the British army at age 11 and he came to Upper Canada in 1791 to become an aide to Lieutenant-Governor John Graves Simcoe.

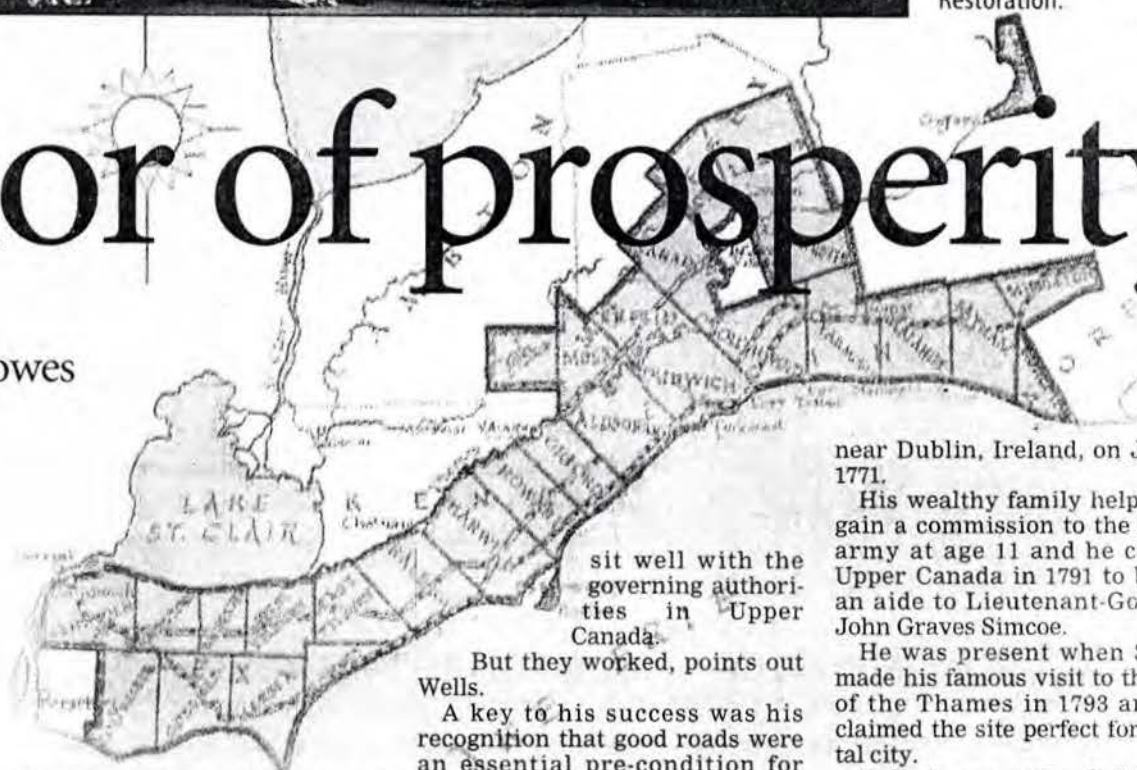
He was present when Simcoe made his famous visit to the forks of the Thames in 1793 and proclaimed the site perfect for a capital city.

Talbot was rewarded for his faithful service with a grant of 5,000 acres of land and came to claim it in 1803.

On May 21 of that year, after a voyage on Lake Erie from Niagara, Talbot and his companions rowed ashore west of Kettle Creek.

With a great sense of occasion, Talbot ceremoniously cut down a tree to begin development of his "principality."

Although Talbot was a major figure, with heavy responsibilities for settling new arrivals on Crown land and ensuring they performed



Talbot film our Gone with the Wind

March 2003

BY NOEL GALLAGHER
Free Press Press Arts
& Entertainment Reporter

Talbot of Canada: The Restoration is a short documentary with a long and storied London past.

COLONEL THOMAS TALBOT

200 years

The 32-minute production features the only celluloid remnant of *Here Will I Nest* (1942), Canada's first feature-length colour film profiling Col. Thomas Talbot who, in 1803, established the settlement named after him and became "the founder of South-western Ontario."

"Here Will I Nest was certainly not a great movie but, in some ways, it's Canada's *Gone With the Wind*," said Christopher Doty, a local historian-filmmaker who headed the "resurrection" of the 16mm feature director Mel

burn E. Turner shot on location in Byron and Poplar Hill during the summer of 1941.

"It was the first time any one in our movie industry attempted to tell a Canadian story of national importance," added Doty. "Without Talbot, there would have been no St. Thomas, no London and this whole part of the world would have been very different."

Here Will I Nest was born on the stage of the Grand Theatre on Nov. 14, 1938 when the historical play, written by Londoner Hilda Mary Hooke, was presented by London Little Theatre. Hooke adapted her script for Turner's screen version starring John Burton as Talbot and Robina Richardson as Talbot's "long-lost love" Susanne Johnson.

On March 31, 1942, the movie premiered at London's central library on Queens Avenue with producer-director Turner doing projectionist duty.

"Apparently it got so hot in the projection room, Mel Turner stripped down to his



LIP READER: Doug Vratsidis, left, a lip reader at Robarts School, deciphers the words being spoken onscreen by actor John Burton, who played Col. Thomas Talbot in the 1942 film *Here Will I Nest*. For his new documentary *Talbot of Canada: The Restoration*, London filmmaker Christopher Doty, right, needed to recreate the dialogue missing from the soundless fragments of the 1942 film.

undershorts so as not to sweat through his tuxedo," recalled Doty, who calls the restoration assignment "the biggest jigsaw puzzle I've ever worked on."

With only a few pages of the original script and excerpts from Hooke's play, Doty had lip readers from the Robarts School decipher what the actors were saying onscreen

and recruited 16 prominent London performers to redub the missing dialogue.

"The original movie is part of London's history and Canadian film history and so Chris's documentary resurrects a piece of our past, literally from the ash heap," said Mike Baker, curator of regional history for Museum London, which co-produced the film's restoration with Doty Docs.

Ironically, the project began, by accident, on March 17, 1998 while Doty was doing research for a TV documentary about London's history at Ottawa's National Archives. He uncovered a 16-minute reel of technically flawed film, with no soundtrack, the sole remaining fragment of Turner's *Here Will I Nest*.

"At first, I didn't know whether I had unearthed a Canadian cinematic gem or just dug up a buried dog," recalled Doty, whose documentary is now part of *Thomas Talbot: Man and Myth*, the Museum London exhibit saluting the Talbot

IF YOU GO

What: Talbot of Canada: The Restoration; a film project supervised by Christopher Doty; produced by Doty Docs/Museum London

When: Until April 27

Where: Lawson Family Gallery, Museum London 421 Ridout St. N.; 661-0333

Note: The film will also be shown at Wolf Performance Hall, London central library in Galleria London, on April 12 and at the Dutton-Dunwich Community Hall at 1 Erie St., Dutton-Dunwich, on May 17; both screenings begin at 7 p.m.; admission to each is \$5

Where to buy: Video copies of *Talbot of Canada: The Restoration* are available for \$15 each in Museum London's Gallery Shop

Bicentennial. Talbot of Canada had its premiere screening at Museum London last night.

VIEWPOINT

Editor Larry Cornies 667-4549 lcornies@lfpres.com www.canoe.ca/LondonOpinions/home.html

Grand finale

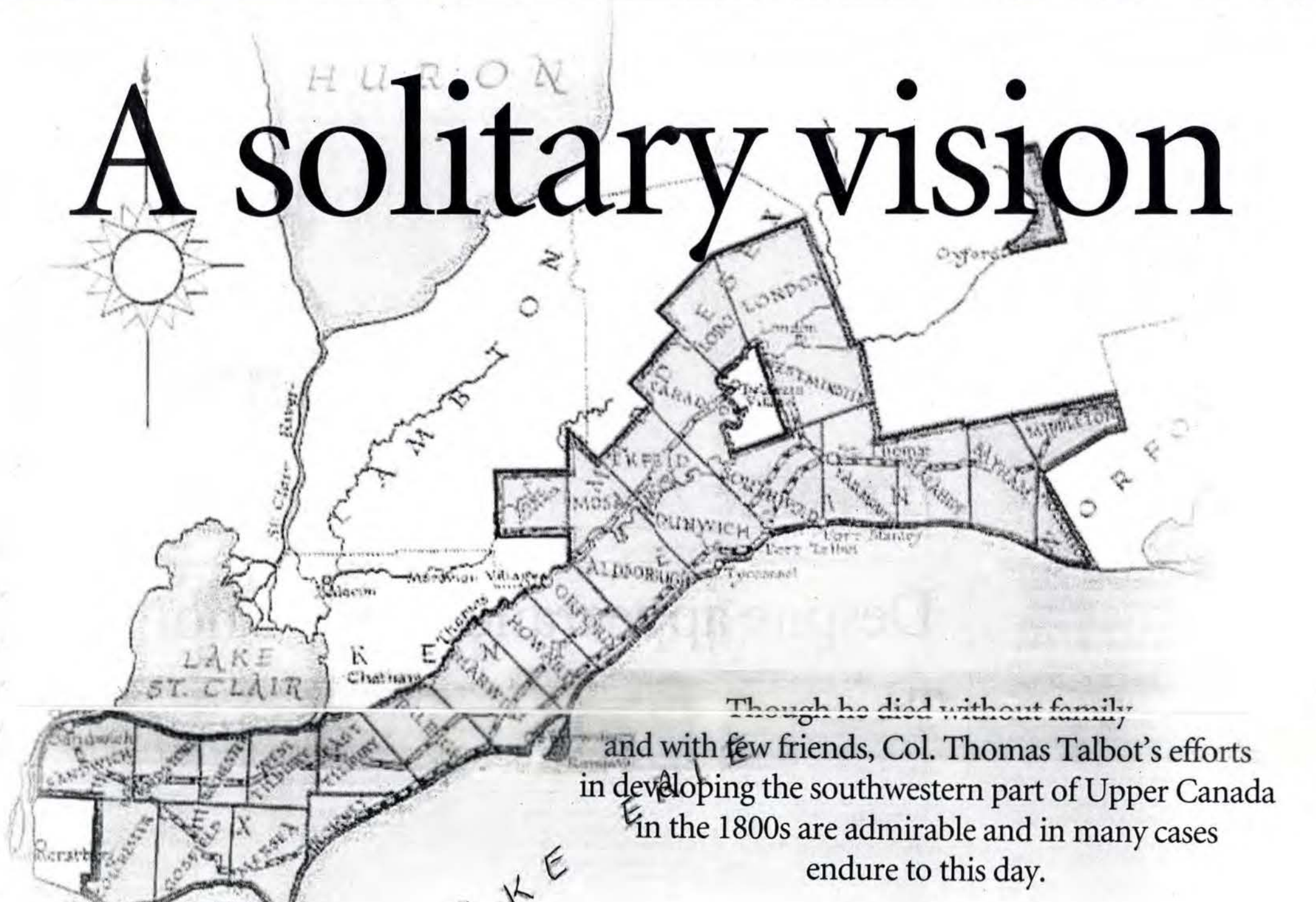
A performing arts centre would be city's jewel in the crown. F3

Travel: Ancient land

China's culture is intriguing and its scenery breathtaking. F12

section **F**

A solitary vision



Though he died without family and with few friends, Col. Thomas Talbot's efforts in developing the southwestern part of Upper Canada in the 1800s are admirable and in many cases endure to this day.



I put on the white cotton gloves and picked up the magnifying glass. The pencilled names were faint, but legible when enlarged under the bright lights of the archives map room. Thomas Talbot's careful handwriting filled in little rectangles all over the map of London Township. Each oblong represented a 200-acre farm lot, the sum of the hopes and dreams of hundreds and hundreds of settlers from far and wide who straggled into the province of Upper Canada in the early years.

COLONEL THOMAS TALBOT

200 YEARS

The fact I was reading Talbot's little notes, made more than 170 years earlier, was nothing short of miraculous. The maps — now safely stored in the controlled atmosphere of the Ontario Archives — lay in his log house at Port Talbot until the late 1850s subject to the hazards of domestic trials and tribulations such as dampness, rodents, fires and general neglect.

The 30 or so maps that cover the townships over which Talbot had power of land granting were supposed to be kept in the Registrar General's office in Toronto. However, such was Talbot's determination to do things his way — the right and proper way — that he managed to keep them in his personal possession until his death in 1853. The pencilled insertions — usually only the name of the settler (mostly the man of the family) and the month and year of settlement — represented the only

ALAN BRUNGER



record of ownership of the farms for thousands of people. This unique arrangement was not a sign of particular tyranny or suppression of the hapless settlers. Far from it. It seems that such was the respect and faith that they had in the venerable administrator that they were content to know Talbot had knowledge of their tenure of the land and would stand by them should it be challenged.

In this remarkable way, a portion of Upper Canada, amounting to about one-tenth its area, was successfully settled with more or less continuous farms and satisfactory, if not good, roads connecting villages and small towns, such as London, St. Thomas and Port Stanley. This orderly development stood in stark contrast to much of Upper Canada, where slack administration and shortsighted land granting to absentee owners had led to empty forested land, out of the reach of genuine farmers, and held by speculators merely hoping for financial gain through the labours of others. Talbot anticipated this and decided he would avoid the ruinous pattern by not only settling himself in the area, but by personally administering and supervising the allocation and occupation of lands by the many immigrant settlers coming to the western part of Upper Canada after 1800.

Much of his legacy in careful supervision of land settlement is now invisible in the subsequent development and transformation of the

region that was known as the Talbot Settlement into its prosperous and diversified modern self.

However, in the period before Canadian confederation, many travellers and literate visitors waxed loudly over the superior quality of the farms, the roads and the general progress of the Talbot Settlement. They were surprised to find such a contrast in the far western part of the province after struggling on stump filled and swamp covered roads between Toronto and London. Talbot very early realized the development of the region needed inland routes to link the excellent waterways provided by Lakes Ontario, Erie and Huron and the principal rivers of the province.

As a result, he made sure he gained power to supervise road surveys and financing and that his intentions were fully understood by Mahlon Burwell, the Crown land surveyor who worked on most of Talbot's projects. Burwell's instructions were to find dry, well-drained routes for the roads, directed inland away from the ports on Lake Erie. Hence if the modern traveller proceeds along, say, Talbot Road east from near Port Talbot, they will follow a generally level route. At regular intervals, distinct changes of direction will occur as the road follows one or another of Burwell's deliberate changes to take advantage of the better natural route.

In this way, Talbot managed to create the basis for inland communication. He provided settlers with a means to reach the good soils in Elgin and Middlesex Counties, from which they exported their products and which could bring in manufactures from the lake ports.

Col. Thomas Talbot's careful supervision of land settlement in this area was recognized by travellers of the day for the quality of its farms and roads.

McIntosh Gallery UWO

TALBOT: A progressive regional society had its roots in the early 1800s

From page F1

Moreover, Talbot insisted upon the roadside land allocation known as the "Yonge Street conditions," which were the brainchild of his erstwhile "boss," Lt. Col. John Graves Simcoe, the first lieutenant-governor of the province. These conditions prohibited Crown and clergy reserves of land from the immediate roadside. This ensured that the whole range of farms on either side would be occupied and developed without the impediment of reserves that plagued all other areas of the province until the mid-19th century.

The combination of dry, level Talbot roads to the east, north and west of Port Talbot, and the reserve-free farm concessions alongside, brought about a startling progressive regional society in the early period of settlement. For its relatively remote "upper inland" situation, the London region — the Talbot Settlement — had a prominence that overshadowed most other areas of comparable size in Upper Canada. This may be fairly said to be partly, if not largely, due to the foresight, determination and energy of one man, Talbot.

In personal terms, Talbot may have been an unlikeable individual. Such

was his education and upbringing that he had scarcely any friends in the local area. He was known by various names, including the Lake Erie Baron and the emperor of the Talbot Settlement. Most of the ordinary settlers regarded him with awe if not displeasure and rarely had a meeting with him. Talbot lived for most of 50 years until his demise in his remote, cliff-top "Castle Malahide," a log and frame home on the western side of Talbot Creek at Port Talbot, as the only resident apart from a few servants.

He operated a farm and mill in the first years, then continued to farm on a small portion of the 24,000-hectare plot that formed his estate. He felt increasingly dissatisfied with life as he aged, a solitary bachelor without wife or offspring to comfort him. His success in acquiring land, which was undoubtedly a prime motive for his extraordinary decision to settle in the raging wilderness of Upper Canada, was not as fulfilling as time passed. In the end, he had no local relative to which to bequeath his land, so his longtime estate manager, George Macbeth, became the beneficiary.

Talbot represented the long-term project of colonization that, in a

sense, the British had been engaged in for hundreds of years.

Talbot was Anglo-Irish, a staunch Protestant loyal to the British monarchy and British traditions. He loathed liberal radical change, the American rebels, and the sinister shift from tried-and-true conservative traditions that had supported his own family background.

Talbot used a pencil to record the applicant settlers, because he could erase the name and replace it with another, should he detect a transgression or misdemeanor in the process of settling, clearing and cultivating land.

He came from a landed estate in County Dublin at the village of Malahide and lived in Malahide Castle, hence the transfer of the name to his Port Talbot home. (London's Middlesex County Court House resembles the Irish Castle).

Talbot possessed "noblesse oblige" — superior by nature, nurtured to administer and lead and unselfcon-

sciously aloof from the "herd." His decision to emigrate in 1800 shocked his social circle in Britain, although he had served in the British Army in Canada. Talbot had become familiar with the Great Lakes and the peninsula of Upper Canada when serving as personal secretary and aide-de-camp to Simcoe in the early years.

His system of land granting, outlined earlier, must be the most remarkable legacy of Talbot's regime. The fact that the penciled maps survived has been alluded to already. Talbot used a pencil to record the applicant settlers, because he could erase the name and replace it with another, should he detect a transgression or misdemeanor in the process of settling, clearing and cultivating land. This threat of being "rubbed out" was real and was on occasion implemented. Most settlers seem to have been satisfied with the system and have noted its benefits in terms of real farming progress by neighbours and peers.

However, Talbot was "caught out" in erasing names of three settlers with whom he disagreed politically. This led to an inquiry and censure so that by 1835 the system drew to a close. By this time the "free" land was being sold and so its acquisition

was more a matter of ability to pay as much as a personal endorsement by Talbot. In spite of the shift in the system, Talbot hung on to the records of land settlement, including the precious maps, until his demise.

It seems fitting Talbot was invited as guest of honour at the inception of the new railway line in London in 1849, because his vision was always the development of good inland transportation and, in the pre-steam power railway era, the Talbot roads testified to that vision. They formed the network of routes that ensured communication and trade in the interior of the Great lakes peninsula and sparked the prosperous agriculture of the region, which was the breadbasket of the province and home to the finest land in the whole Dominion of Canada.

Such was the foresight of this reclusive and lonely aristocratic settler, whose legacy is ubiquitous throughout the London region but whose personal lineage was unfulfilled. If he had left descendants, it would be interesting to speculate how extensive and how influential the Talbot Line might have been.

Alan Brunger is a geography professor at Trent University.

Talbot Settlement Bi-Centennial

This will be the summer for re-enactments, hundreds of visitors in costume and big celebrations—as we mark the 200 year-old story of colonialism, conflict and creativity that is our cultural heritage. The full story is much too big for this small space, but we will try to give you a glimpse of what lies ahead. More background information and a complete listing of events is available on the net at home.golden.net/~talbot2003.

Since our community is at the heart of the story let us begin with the man himself. It was on May 21st, 1803, that an ambitious 32 year old Irishman by the name of Col. Thomas Talbot came ashore near here at what is now Talbot Creek, cut down a small tree to mark the place, and declared “*Here will I nest*”. The rest is history, as the saying goes.

As an agent of the government Col. Talbot was entrusted with locating settlers on Crown Lands and watching over their performance. He granted land to applicants who met with his approval and withheld it from those who did not. When settlers failed to meet expectations he took away their land and gave it to others. By such autocratic methods he successfully colonized twenty-nine townships spanning 260 kilometers along the north shore of the lake, from here west to Detroit and east almost to Long Point.

When he died in 1853, the wilderness to which he had come a half-century before had been converted into cultivated fields and comfortable homes, with numerous villages and towns along the best roads in Canada.

Through him the Talbot Settlement became home not only to English, Irish, Scottish and American settlers, but also to four tribes of first nations people. During the American Civil War the Talbot Settlement was also the terminus for the underground railway that brought thousands of Afro-Canadians to Buxton, Chatham, London and St. Thomas.

Settlers either loved or hated him. There was no middle ground. Despite being an enigmatic character, much of the credit for development in our part of Canada must go to him.

Selected events and themes from the Talbot regime will be written about, re-enacted, discussed and exhibited over the course of this bi-centennial year – and in many different locations. The centerpiece of planned activities will take place in this area. A re-enactment of his arrival will take place at Port Stanley on May 21st, and there will be a Grand Encampment at the Backus-Page House in Tyrconnell on the week-end of May 23-25.



The May 23-25 week-end will feature 3 re-enactments of raids on the Talbot Settlement. The first, on May 23, will be at Tyrconnell depicting the raid made on Talbot's home in 1814. The second, at St. Thomas on May 24th, will depict the destruction of St. Thomas during the same year. The concluding battle re-enactment will occur in Port Stanley on May 25th as British Troops push the retreating Americans off the beach and onto their ships.

Other commemorative plans include a postage stamp, a living history conference, and the Talbot Exhibition running the full year at the Interpretive Centre at Museum London.

You can also watch for information about the restoration of a 1941 film titled *Talbot of Canada - Here Will I Nest*, that will be presented at the WEDS Performing Arts Centre in Dutton on May 17th along with a keynote speech on video by John Kenneth Galbraith.



Talbot history comes to life

BY PATRICK BRENNAN
TIMES-JOURNAL STAFF

Representatives from many of the communities that Col. Thomas Talbot founded when he opened up the Talbot Settlement came to St. Thomas Saturday to celebrate his legacy and explore new ways of preserving and enhancing it.

The Living History conference at St. Joseph's High School and Fanshawe College was as much a re-enactment as it was a day of workshops and sharing of information.

More than half of those attending wore period costumes ranging from military regalia to what the average pioneer would have

been seen in.

The conference was organized by the Talbot Settlement Bicentennial committee and represented one of the events planned this year.

The settlement stretched from the former Norfolk county to the St. Clair River, covering 29 original townships.

In 50 years, Talbot helped to settle 50,000 people in those townships, said Nick Wells, who often portrays Talbot.

There are many reasons to celebrate Talbot's accomplishments, said Diana Player, a member of the organizing committee. In a time when terrorism and war are prominent, it's



Stephen Bourne, left, dressed as a member of the 10th Royal Veterans, instructs Steve Zronik of London, Ont., dressed as an itinerant artist, in the proper use of a musket during the Living History conference Saturday. As Bourne explained, it would have been typical of how a military recruiting officer greeted someone about to sign up during the time the Talbot Settlement. (T-J photo)

relaxing to concentrate on something that is refreshing and bound to spark one's imagination, she said.

"It is filled with stories of heroes, foes and the

struggle for survival. The area known as the Talbot Settlement has a legacy which rivals that of York (Toronto) or Kingston "story for story," Player said.

Guests were reminded

that Highway 3 forms the heart of the Talbot Trail and that the area's biggest strength was its agricultural legacy.

A study of Talbot Settlement history influences

who we are and where we came from, Player added.

Later in the day, organizers said the conference was highly successful in bringing together people with a passion for history.

One of the highlights was the first showing of a video-taped interview of John Kenneth Galbraith, a renowned history professor, political advisor and author who grew up in Iona Station before he moved to the U.S.

"A lot of times you plan and plan for these things and they don't come together," said Brian Masschaele, Elgin county archivist. "Here, it was different."

Galbraith gives own perspective

BY PATRICK BRENNAN
TIMES-JOURNAL STAFF

The Talbot Settlement may be a cherished part of history for many residents of St. Thomas-Elgin and other parts of southwestern Ontario, but John Kenneth Galbraith, a Canadian who left here to work as a respected political advisor and author, sees it in his own perspective.

Those attending a Living History conference Saturday in St. Thomas, sponsored by the Talbot Settlement Bicentennial committee, got a rare glimpse into Galbraith's views when they saw a videotape of an interview with him in 2001.

"The Talbot legacy was not a great thing in my youth," Galbraith, who grew up in Iona Station, told interviewer Nick Wells.

Galbraith said he and others saw Talbot's huge home at Port Talbot as representative of a rich, elite family.

The Talbot Settlement succeeded partly because of the quality farmland that was being given away to settlers, Galbraith

said. It was better than what the immigrant Scots had at home.

While it was suggested that Galbraith accused Talbot of discrimination, that's not exactly true, he explained. Talbot granted parcels of up to 50 acres per settler, but sold other plots for what were considered high prices at the time, he said.

Part of Galbraith's clan settled near Dresden, Ont., close to where the underground railway entered Canada, bringing those fleeing the slave trade.

"I was always surprised to have a playmate who was black," he said.

He recalled the natural urban/rural rivalry in the area of Dutton and Wallacetown. Farmers worked hard to grow crops and resented urban merchants charging them for what they needed to live on.

The Scots who settled in his area fell into one of two categories, he recalled: drinkers and non-drinkers.

The interview with Gal-

braith, taped just a month after the bombing of the World Trade Center, uncovered a number of interesting historical footnotes, many of them local.

Galbraith's father was a staunch Liberal who hand-picked party candidates in his day. At one point, he climbed onto a manure pile to deliver a speech.

"He apologized profusely for speaking from the Tory platform," Galbraith said.

As the eldest son in the family, Galbraith would have been heir to the family property, but after attending the Ontario Agricultural College in Guelph, he left Canada to study at the University of California where he later became a professor. From there spawned an impressive career that saw him teach at Harvard University and serve as advisor to an impressive string of U.S. presidents including Franklin D. Roosevelt and John F. Kennedy.

Over his career, he wrote a score of books on a variety of topics.

The St. Thomas audi-

ence watching the interview that was taped at Galbraith's home in Cambridge, Mass., listened intently to the edited 45-minute presentation.

"I love the stories, especially the manure story,"

said Wayne Chaplow of St. Thomas.

"It brought back memories of Steve (Peters), Don Cosens and me visiting him," said Dean Padon. "He really tells it like it is."

TALBOT - Champion or tyrant?

By WAYNE PADDON
FOR THE TIMES-JOURNAL

From 1966 until the early 1970s, secondary schools in St. Thomas and Elgin county taught a course at the Grade 10 level in local history.

One significant aspect of the course was the role of Thomas Talbot in the settlement of southwestern Ontario.

I think we were all amazed at the power that Talbot wielded in this area during the pioneer period of development from 1803 to 1840. As we learned about the colonel we came to the realization that his life consisted of many contradictions as well as commendable practices. And we debated whether he was a champion or a tyrant.

On the basis of having served as a British officer in Canada under Sir John Graves Simcoe and because he was a personal friend of the son of the King of England, Talbot was given a large grant of land in Upper Canada in 1803. If Yarmouth, Talbot's first choice, was taken, he could choose his land in some other township. Since there was no land available in Yarmouth, Talbot chose a large block of land in Dunwich township which was located adjacent to Lake Erie and included a little creek, which emptied, into Lake Erie. Talbot also took another lot to complete his grant of 5,000 acres. The creek

first 13 permanent settlers were of Irish descent from Pennsylvania, and all related. He gave them land a few miles west of Port Talbot. Talbot realized that he had to provide a better means of bringing new settlers in if he was to be successful and so he proposed a new direct road from Long Point to Port Talbot.

Mahlon Burwell laid out the first Talbot Road using an old Indian portage route as a guide and staying very near the lake. In 1809 a government order-in-council granted 200 acre lots to Daniel Rapelje and David Mandeville on the Talbot Road at the west entrance of what is today St. Thomas. After that, Talbot extended his power and influence far beyond Dunwich and Aldborough. Talbot became one of two road superintendents who were given the power to place settlers along the road, as well as overseeing the road development. Talbot became the sole road superintendent when the other appointee quit during the War of 1812. Talbot very quickly assumed almost unquestioned power in locating settlers and collecting settlement duties in that part of southwestern Ontario, which became known as the Talbot Country. The Talbot Settlement extended roughly 130 miles from Long Point to the Detroit River and consisted of all or parts of 29 townships

near Port Talbot. Talbot placed a settler along the road and made it clear to him that he had to clear some of his land, start farming, build a cabin, and clear and maintain half of the road in front of his house, within three years.

The patentee was penciled in on one of Col. Talbot's large maps and the land was designated in his name. In the event the settler did not fulfill his settlement duties to the satisfaction of Talbot, the colonel used his India rubber eraser to remove the settler's name from the map. In due time a new name would replace the original on the map.

Talbot had the government change the law to waive the payments of land fees until settlement duties were completed and the patent about to be granted.

Without Talbot's perseverance, much valuable agricultural land would have lain dormant for decades under the control of absentee landowners, who cared for little except land speculation. In several cases in order to do this, it was necessary to move the large blocks of land that had been set aside as Crown, clergy and school reserves to the back concessions to allow direct roads to be built.

Talbot and Burwell also laid out the streets and lands of London in 1824, the new capital of the London District, and settlement there, progressed rapidly. He was given control over the Longwoods Road, which was not developing because of absentee ownership and problems with reserved lands. Talbot did not receive any land or other compensation directly for settling this region, or for any work outside of Aldborough and Dunwich, with the exception of an allowance of three per cent from the sales of school, clergy and Crown reserves in the London District. Talbot was given a £400 yearly pension from funds from the Canada Company to help repay him for the use of his personal funds to assist settlers through the years.

Talbot not only helped the settlers get their land, he encouraged the building of mills, helped set-



This is a photo of what is believed to be part of the 1903 celebration of the Talbot Settlement at the Tyrconnell cemetery, resting place of Col. Thomas Talbot. (Contributed)

tlers build churches and made sure schools were opened.

Talbot was, in spite of his eccentricities, much loved and admired by most of the inhabitants of his settlement. Hundreds of people at a time often stayed at Port Talbot while they were waiting for land tickets. Talbot was a good host and friend to them.

In 1826 Talbot stated that there were 20,000 settlers in the Talbot Settlement and that he had spent £20,000 to help them get settled.

But now comes the great contradiction. Talbot had been given his grant with the idea that he would bring in settlers and place each family on a 50-acre lot on his initial grant. The 100 new settlers would grow hemp as a source of rope for the British navy and the little settlement would form the nucleus of a new British settlement.

Although the lots in the little settlement were only quarter lots, the fact that the settlement was compact would make it easier for trade and co-operation. The government felt there would be plenty of land available in Talbot's two townships for those farmers who wanted to increase their acreage.

For his efforts Talbot was to receive 200 acres in Dunwich and later Aldborough for each settler that he located. Had Talbot carried out his directions, he, himself, could

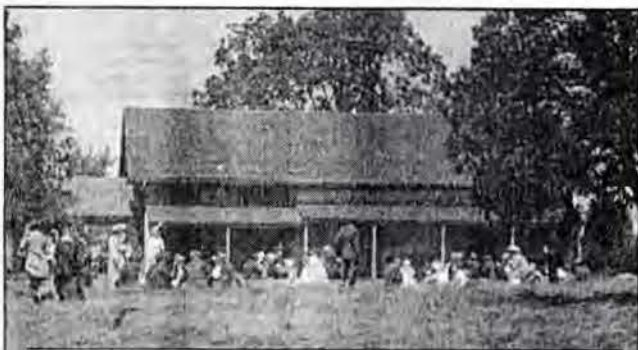
have accumulated, a total of 20,000 acres. But, instead, he kept the original 5,000 acres and placed settlers along the Talbot Road in Dunwich and on the Middle Road in Aldborough, on 50, not 150 acres. His recompense for each of these was 200 acres for himself in Dunwich and later Aldborough. Most of these settlers were Highland Scots from Argyleshire.

In all of the other townships his road program brought many settlers to whom he readily made 200 acre farms available, but in his own two townships his determination to increase his own holdings held back settlement and road development. Moreover, the 20,000 acres he was supposed to get turned out to be closer to

65,000. Scottish settlers were bitter that they did not receive another 150 acres as they thought they would, and Scottish settlers who were able to purchase more land from Talbot had to pay much higher fees than other settlers in the Talbot Settlement.

The government officials did their best to limit his accumulation as early as 1817, but he used his influence in Britain to delay this. Scottish settlers were very bitter for decades.

In 2003, a Talbot Anniversary will be held on May 21 at St. Peter's Church at Tyrconnell, not only to remember, and for many, to honour Talbot, but mainly to celebrate all the accomplishments of all of the people of the Talbot Settlement.



A crowd gathers at the Talbot homestead at Port Talbot as a part of the 1903 celebration of the Talbot Settlement. (Contributed)

soon became known as Talbot Creek. His settlement at that location was called Port Talbot.

In the next few years Talbot brought carpenters and labourers to build his cabins and a saw and grist mill. Talbot's first grant was a farm to George Crane, who had come with him in 1803. Talbot's

between Lake Erie and north to the Thames River and beyond.

Some British officers had taken up land claims and some loyalists were beginning to settle in the Windsor region. At least two native American tribes who had been British allies were living