

# Yarmouth Township Was Preferred by Col. Talbot to His Dunwich Location

Settlement Founder Started Clearing Land Near Port Stanley in May, 1802; In Letter to Duke of Cumberland He Asked For Houghton

If Colonel Thomas Talbot had not been balked by royal favor and the Baby family of Detroit and Sandwich had got in ahead of him, his settlement would have been started in Houghton Township of what is now Norfolk County, or Yarmouth Township in Elgin County, instead of Dunwich Township. Houghton was the Colonel's first choice as "his favorite settlement", but the Duke of Cumberland to whom he wrote on May 16, 1801, did not see it that way. That letter was written by Colonel Talbot, from "Skittee-waabaa Upper Canada"—which is the Ojibway Indian word for whisky or firewater. Nobody knows exactly where Skittee-

encouraging and developing the growing of hemp. He was an authority on the subject; and he had inspected soil along the north shore of Lake Erie, in company with his friend, General John Graves Simcoe, with that agricultural specialty in mind.

Colonel Talbot was eccentric, to say the least. He quit a most promising military career, abandoned the British Court and the world of society at the age of 29 years, to bury himself in the then lonely wilderness of Elgin County. He lived in a crude log house for years, choosing to call it with Irish wit "his castle" and for half a century he remained, most of the time directing with almost regal powers the settlement which bears his name. He began the construction of the Talbot Road in 1804. That famous traffic artery, now largely Queen's Highway No. 3 actually extends along the north shore of Lake Erie from the Detroit River to the Niagara River. In the early part of the 19th Century it was already not only the longest but the best road in Upper Canada.

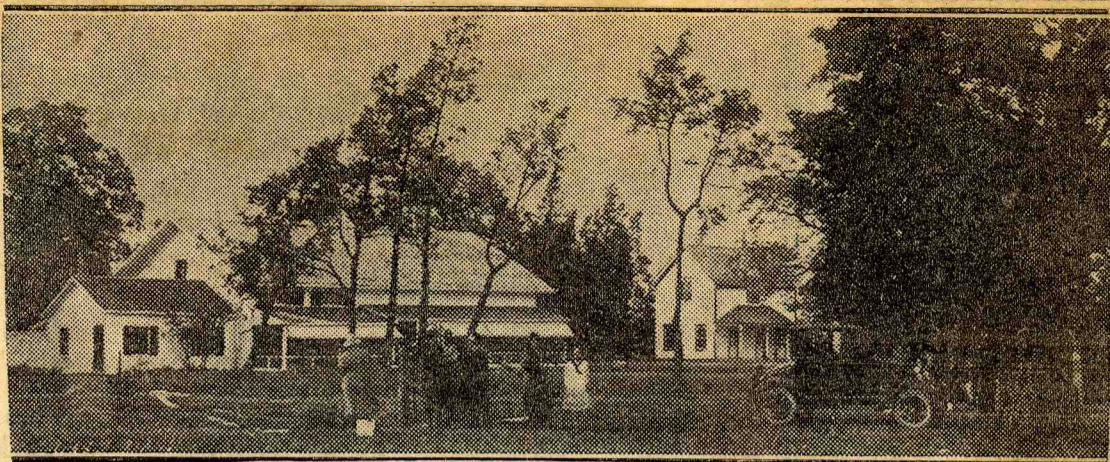
Colonel Talbot remained a bachelor to the end. Some say he was disappointed in love as a young man and that this was one of the reasons for his abandoning his military career and virtually isolating himself in the Canadian wilderness.



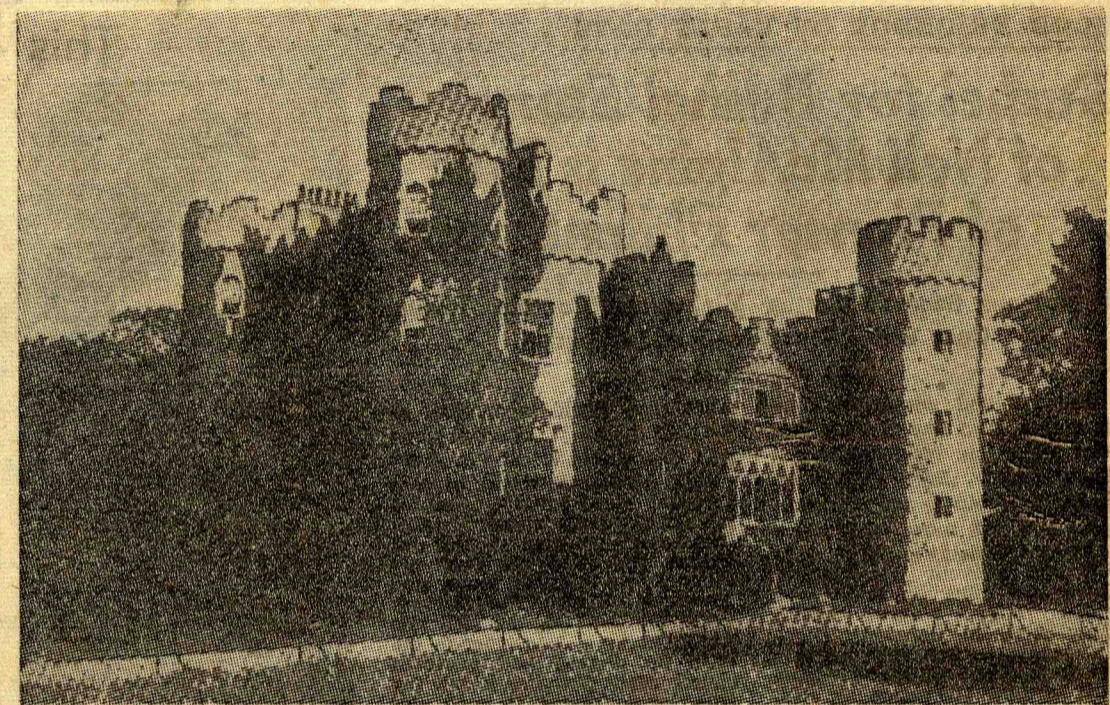
**COLONEL THOMAS TALBOT** woaboa was. Some historians say it was Port Bruce; others, Port Stanley—which suggests that the Colonel actually may have had his eye on Yarmouth.

The late Dr. James H. Coyne is authority for the statement that in May, 1802, Colonel Talbot actually chopped trees near Port Stanley, with a view of starting a settlement in Yarmouth; but on May 21, 1803, he was at Port Talbot Creek, 14 miles west of Port Stanley, in Dunwich Township, beginning the Talbot settlement by cutting down the first tree.

Actually, Colonel Talbot began his settlement for the purpose of



THE TALBOT ESTATE AND HOME AT PORT TALBOT



Castle Malahide, the ancestral home of Colonel Thomas Talbot in Ulster, Ireland, and the name Tyrconnell is associated with the Talbots of Malahide and the ancient Kingdom of Tyrconnell (Tir-Conall)

## Col. Talbot's Old Horse Mill

One of the original structures at Port Talbot that was not completely destroyed by fire by invaders during the War of 1812-14 was the old horse mill which was built for Colonel Thomas Talbot, probably in 1805 or earlier. Being made of hard oak timbers this mill did not suffer much from the fire. It was later moved to a field near Iona where it was used for cutting wood and sawing timber for many years.

Five teams, were needed to operate Colonel Talbot's horse mill. From a centre wheel; five long timbers extended as arms and to each was attached a team of horses, or in the early period, a yoke of oxen. An upright tower affair at the cutting end of the horse mill was raised and lowered by hand, as well as by the horse power. The old mill

is shown in a map of Port Burwell in 1813. In addition to the first dwelling of Colonel Talbot, the map shows a copper shop, blacksmith shop and several poultry houses near the house: with mills a distillery, large warehouse and smaller buildings were near the mouth of Talbot Creek. The early map also shows that Colonel Talbot actually had a fort and blockhouse built at Port Talbot. The fort site has been under water for many years and nothing remains of the stockade, which was on the top of Mount Pisgah, the name applied to the high, flat-topped tongue of land at Port Talbot.

Trees and shrubbery are on the unusual land formation, but the top remained bare as a floor. Older people say that Colonel Talbot desired to be buried on this remote place, but other plans prevailed and he was laid

to rest in the beautiful old God's Acre of St. Peter's Church, Tyrconnell, high above the serene blue waters of Lake Erie.

Colonel Talbot's first "Castle Malahide," did not face south toward Lake Erie, as the present house does. It faced east toward Port Stanley; with the front door at the east end, a long verandah along the lake side; and the kitchen entrance at the west end. The kitchen led by a semi-circular passageway to a large dining room.

## City Hall Vault Yields 1807 Deed Owned by Col. Talbot

A 150-year-old document, a deed, granting Colonel Thomas Talbot a tract of land in Dunwich Township, was discovered today among some old files in the City Hall here.

The deed was found by Jack Reid, assistant city clerk, while he was at work on the files in the city's vault this morning.

The document is in perfect condition and fully readable. On parchment, it is headed "Province of Upper Canada" and was issued on behalf of George III by Francis Gore, the lieutenant-governor of the province.

The deed, dated May 20, 1807, granted Colonel Talbot 162 acres of land on Lot C on Con. 9, Dunwich Township. As near

as this can be ascertained this land was located at what is now known as Burwell's Corners.

An official seal on the cream-colored document measures about four inches in diameter. Unfortunately it has been damaged over the years and only half of it remains. However, sufficient of it still exists to make out the official markings of the seal. The seal itself is made of a dark brown substance, possibly beeswax, and covered in parchment on both sides.

The document is to be framed and preserved at the City Hall.

It is understood that this document is one of the few of its kind dealing with local affairs in existence today.

## ARRIVAL of COYNE Family

From a paper written by the late Wm. Coyne, a few years before his death, interesting passages were read. Referring to the arrival in Dunwich from Pleasant Valley, N.Y., of Henry Coyne and family in a strong wagon, with a pair of good horses, on the 20th of October, 1817, he wrote: Dunwich was a wild place when our people moved into it. In the whole space of about ten miles between Lake Erie and the River Thames there was but one range of lots settled, but one road opened out, and that but imperfectly, for Col. Talbot held the land and refused it to settlers. My father settled on the N. W. quarter of lot 6, on the 8th concession.

*A Hardship 1816*  
The speaker read a letter from Singleton Gardiner to Henry Coyne, dated Buffalo, Oct., 27, 1816, showing the hardships of the pioneers during that dreadful year, when the frost occurred every month, the crops were all killed, wheat was \$2 a bushel, and Mr. Gardiner had been obliged to go in an open boat from Port Talbot to Buffalo, 150 miles, to buy flour to keep his family from starving. "God only knows," he writes, "whether I will get home or not, for the lake is dangerous at this season of the year, and I dread the journey of going 150 miles in an open boat. It is a great undertaking, but I must either do it, or my family suffer for want of bread, which they have never done as yet." The nearest postoffice was Fort Erie. Letters were to be sent in care of John Warren, merchant of that village.

# Story of Early Days in Elgin County

# Richard Dobbyn, Early Dunwich Pioneer, Undertook Heroic Swim to Reach Canada

The story is that of a young man and his bride who set out from Scotland in March, 1811, on a sailing vessel, arriving in New York three months later. Disturbed by the hostility to Great Britain which they were astonished to find there, they decided to move as quickly as possible into Canada and the hardships and pleasures of pioneer travel are described. They go by river boat to Albany, then, partly overland and partly by a small boat which they purchased, on to Oswego through the heavy forest.

At Oswego, they fall in with a party of over twenty Scottish and English people moving from the United States to British Canada, their particular goal being a fertile country on the northern side of Lake Erie of which they have heard. They are thrilled by the great inland lakes, Ontario and

Erie, and the great Niagara, make their way to Chippawa "through the glorious sunlit forests" and buy a long boat to carry the party and their effects along the shore of Lake Erie as they seek a place to make their new homes.

## HOME SITES CHOSEN

They row and explore by day and camp on shore at night, as did so many early settlers who came thus to this part of Canada. Wild turkeys and fish helped to provide food on the journey. Finally a stream flowing between well-wooded banks attracts them and they row up its winding course through the towering primeval forest and choose the site of their homes.

Their progress and arrival seem to have been watched only by deer, bear, beaver and myriads of chattering birds, but even in this lonely wilderness there is more to taking up residence than just choosing a site that pleases and has promise of fertility and a livelihood. They have come to the Talbot district and must apply for ownership to Col. Thomas Talbot to whom has been given the settlement of this area.

They had heard of Col. Talbot and the two men who set out shortly to see him were not unaware of some of the characteristics of this founder of the great settlement which bears his name, but the author, anxious that history should not picture the Colonel as merely a quick-tempered autocrat, has this to say of him, "speaking from scores of conversations with those who had to do with him": "He was very generally respected throughout the settlement, even by those who had come under the rough lash of his bitter tongue. For no man could truly say that his pledge once passed, Colonel Talbot had ever broken it. Such was the confidence reposed in his word, that many a settler after journeying for days through the

deep, dark woods to Port Talbot, where the Colonel resided in an odd collection of rambling buildings, turned his face again homeward, happy in the mere promise of the Colonel, that if he rigidly performed his settlement duties his title would not be withheld from him, and for years, scores of settlers thus went on improving their chosen homes and fighting the grim, silent battle with the forest, and only the Colonel's word between them and absolute beggary. Be it said to his credit then, that among the hundreds—nay thousands—of descendants of these early settlers now inhabiting prosperous, happy homes on the sites their fathers cleared up, there can be found scarcely one, who retains a sense of injustice suffered by his forefathers at the hands of their early patron, Colonel Talbot. Indeed, were no other evidence at hand, the Talbot settlement tells its own story of strong, firm foundations, by its smiling fields, magnificent roads and general air of rural contentment. You, dear reader, may ascribe all this to the vagaries of chance, but the present author will still persist in thinking that the keen foresight of Colonel Talbot had much to do with it."

## PORT TALBOT

Forest travel is again described as the pioneer men of the story make their way to Port Talbot. They arrive late in the day and the author of 1897 describes the place as he himself must have known it sixty years ago. He writes: "No one can visit Port Talbot even now, when it has lost much of its rustic loveliness, and not be struck with the natural beauty of its surroundings. The bold sweep of the bluffs, thickly fringed with red cedar, the magnificent groves of tall, old chestnuts and elms, that overlook the placid, blue waters of Lake Erie, and the sun-kissed slopes of valley land all tell the tale why this odd aristocrat chose this quiet nook as an ideal home."

The description of Malahide Castle of pioneer days and the cluster of buildings on the hill-top is interesting, also the description of Col. Talbot himself as the pioneers met him outside his home, his rough dress, but at the same time his direct glance and his air of command. They are given hospitality overnight, see the Colonel again at nine o'clock in the morning, and later return home with a promise of settlement and possession "on the usual conditions, viz: that each settler should sow and clear ten acres of land, open one-half of the road in front of his farm inside of three years, and then he would be entitled to fifty acres free."

In the interview, as the settlers were named over, the Colonel put their names down on a map, each name on its own place, and, knowing well pioneer conditions and requirements, he also made a special condition in the case of this little colony, "that they should cultivate in common for the first three years the space formed by the bend in the creek which . . . nature had already cleared up, ready for the plough, thus ensuring to all a supply of wheat for bread by the next summer."

## JOIN TO BUILD HOMES

All the men of the colony worked together in building their log homes, the order of building being decided by casting of lots. Furniture too was homemade and a large fireplace was a feature of all the homes.

It was a stern but rewarding life in those pioneer days. Neighbor helped neighbor, but first winters especially were hard, money was scarce, prices very high in those days of threatening war, distances through the woods to get anything very trying. Col. Talbot sent word to the new settlers that if they would come to his mill they could get flour and "testily refused to take pay for it. 'Pay me back when you take off your first crop or don't pay me back at all,' he said when they went to his house and proffered the money, slamming the door in their faces at the same time."

The author points out that to be "worth your salt" in those days really meant something. One of the most difficult and costly articles to obtain for the new settlers was salt, which meant a trying four-day journey to Hamilton and cost \$65 a barrel. This little colony got only a quarter of a barrel which was kept in one home with each handful given out having first to be sanctioned by all the colony. It was not wasted.

The war of 1812, the meeting with Tecumseh and the story of the heroism of that valiant Indian leader interrupt the account of the pioneer homemaking and living, which is taken up again with many an interesting detail of early days, as the early church, the school, the visiting in the village store, the homes are graphically pictured. Later, there is a vivid account of the Fenian raids of 1866, and the story ends on "the dear old farm," rounding out the picture of pioneer life.

## By GLADYS ELLIOTT

With more and more people swimming deep, wide waters more and more during the summer, the press and the public in general were beginning openly to ask "Why? What purpose is served by this grueling endurance testing of heart, spirit and body?" But there was no such question about the daring swim of Richard Dobbyn away back in the early 1800s. The swim, hours long, which he undertook in mid-ocean was a desperate attempt to reach Canada and to rejoin his young wife from whom he had been separated by a cruel trick.

John E. Pearce, of Wallacetown, recalls the story which he has often heard in tales of pioneer days in Dunwich, for Richard Dobbyn survived the swim and became one of the early settlers in that township, the history of which has been a special study of Mr. Pearce's. The story is also one of young Maria Dobbyn, who set out from her home in England early in the last century bound for Canada with a party of friends also planning to make a new home in this land of promise. Her husband had preceded her some time before and prior to his departure plans had been made that he would meet her at the port of Montreal on her arrival.

But Richard Dobbyn was not at the port to welcome his young wife. Nor did he arrive the next day, nor the next when she went back time after time to inquire and the bewilderment and torturing anxiety as to what had befallen her husband en route or after his arrival in the new land were

dreadful for the young woman, a torment which her husband had foreseen and to forestall which was part of his reason for undertaking that heroic swim in mid-ocean so long ago.

A descendant, the late Hopkins Moorhouse, of Winnipeg, once wrote the story of Richard Dobbyn's dramatic experiences in his attempt to reach Canada. It was from Bristol that he had set sail in a ship which had offered remarkably cheap rates for young men who wished to get to America and who would be content to rough it on board. Richard and Maria Dobbyn had already decided to come out to British North America and this cheap passage for the former seemed a God-send. It was decided that he should come over first and prepare a home while she would follow later with friends.

"Roughing it" seemed definitely the prospect when he saw his accommodation on the ship, "a mere hole" lit by a small cobwebbed ship's lantern and reeking with the smell of bilge water, tar and rotten hemp. This was shared by another young man named Lloyd.

In the middle of the night they were awakened by unusual heavy sounds overhead. The motion of the ship told them that they were already out in the heavy swells. Perhaps they had struck a squall. Trying to open their door to see what was happening, they found it locked. As they tugged at it, it opened suddenly to reveal a big seaman in the doorway with a naked cutlass in his hand.

## Press Gang Scheme

Dobbyn was ready to attack the man, but the door was slammed shut again and the young men realized that in accepting the offer of this cheap passage to America they had been fooled by a new kind of press-gang scheme. It had been just a new method of manning a ship with able young men. It was not a merchantman, but a privateer and they were soon to learn that it was not on its way to America. Up on deck in the morning, they found guns which had been well covered and disguised in port were now disclosed and they sailing into the south.

Weeks of mental torment followed as Richard Dobbyn thought of his wife sailing for Canada within a month or two and he not there to meet her. Fortunately Lloyd was a cheerful companion and good friend. They discussed together all sorts of ways of escape but none seemed possible. Then came a desperate chance.

They had been sailing for over six weeks and had seen scarcely a ship considered worth a chase even in the southern seas where they were then seeking vessels from the West Indies. Then one day the wind began to lessen and finally dropped entirely leaving the ship becalmed. Both Dobbyn and Lloyd were in the morning watch that day and as dawn came the daylight disclosed a brig many miles distant with sails set to catch the slightest breeze. They overheard the ship's officers identify it as a "Yankee."

Both ships were still becalmed when darkness fell and Dobbyn

had reached a desperate decision. There is a strange stillness on a becalmed sailing vessel and unusual movements could cause suspicion and failure of his plan. So he waited for the deeper darkness and the changing of the watch with its covering sound of moving feet before he slipped through an open gun port in the waist, down a line into the sea.

He swam quietly and slowly at first away from the great shadow of the ship towards the North where a tiny light showed him the position of the other vessel. Until the day of his death, Richard Dobbyn remembered that nightmare swim. It lasted for hours, but it seemed to lengthen into days and weeks as the endless heaving waves rose before him and bore down upon him. But he was swimming not only for himself and in spite of dizziness and exhaustion kept steadfastly in mind his necessity to reach that little light low on the water.

## Reaches Goal

Of course, the end of the story is known before its telling now. He did succeed in finally reaching the ship and in climbing by a broken rigging cable into the chainwales before he fainted. When he came to, he proceeded up the side of the vessel and eventually stood before a startled officer and finally before the equally amazed captain. The latter hurried him into the cabin and into dry clothes before asking for the full story, and it was then that he reminded Dobbyn that he had been swimming through shark-infested waters. There had been many anxieties in the course of that swim. Might the appalling possibility of a rising wind carrying the strange ship far away before he could reach it have been one of those worries? Never once, however, had he thought of sharks. And fortunately they had not thought of him.

The wind did come soon after daybreak and the privateer, built for speed, began to overtake the New York vessel and a shot came athwart its bows. By now Dobbyn would have been missed and the captain prepared for a search. He concealed Dobbyn in an empty crate in a section of the hold where food stuffs were stored. The captain permitted a search of his ship, at the same time scoffing at the idea that any man could survive such a swim as was being suggested as having taken place in such shark-infested waters.

The search extended into the hold where the crate in which Dobbyn lay concealed was shifted as many as three times and once turned over, but without him being discovered as he braced himself within it. Finally the men of the privateer left, convinced that he had not been able to reach the other ship.

## At Montreal

It was still another month before he reached Montreal, a month of anguish, for he was aware he would be too late to meet his wife as she was expecting. At Montreal he learned that an emigrant ship had arrived about three days before and his wife's name was on the list of passengers. He met a man who had been on the same vessel, who told him that he believed that the party his wife had been with had left for Upper Canada just the day before and although he did not know whether the latter had gone with them or not, he believed that Dobbyn could likely catch up with them.

So Richard Dobbyn went once more to the Government office to make further inquiries and preparations, went on the day when Maria, his wife, was making her final call at that office too. It is told that it was just as she was coming out of the door, disappointed, worried and sad, that they met. It is told also that as she sobbed in relief in his arms that she asked: "Oh Richard! What kept you so late?" The answer would take long in the telling, but fortunately there were to be years for that telling.

Richard and Maria Dobbyn were among the very early residents of this district. They came to Upper Canada and the Talbot Settlement and took up residence near the old Bobier schoolhouse in Dunwich township. In the Talbot papers published by the late Dr. James H. Coyne, a schedule of the Hon. Thomas Talbot's settlement in the townships of Dunwich and Aldborough lists Richard Dobbyn as residing on Concession 9, Lot 13, the southeast quarter, being fifty acres. A Henry Dobbyn resided on the southwest quarter of the same lot at the time the schedule was compiled.

The exact date of their arrival is not given, but that they were resident here in 1820 is clear from the first register of Old St. Thomas Church, which is also the first register of St. Peter's Anglican congregation in Dunwich. The early pioneer traveling missionary, the Rev. and Hon. Charles James Stewart, kept records of all services held during his wide journeyings and when churches were built and their parish registers established he had inserted in them his record of services held in that district previous to that time. The history of St. Peter's Church, Tyrconnell, written by John E. Pearce and the late Mrs. E. V. Docker lists among the baptisms by Dr. Stewart on April 10, 1820, in Col. Talbot's home "John, son of Richard and Maria Dobbyn." At the same service, Mrs. Dobbyn was also one of the sponsors for Charlotte, daughter of Samuel and Hannah Burwell. Col. Talbot was the other sponsor.

On June 20, 1822, record is made of the baptism by Dr. Stewart in Dunwich of "Elizabeth, born 1st May, 1821, daughter of Richard and Maria Dobbyn." On May 15, 1825, St. Peter's Church's own register records the baptism of "Henry, son of Richard and Maria Dobbyn." The sponsors were the parents and Thomas Moorhouse.

It is believed that soon after this the Dobbyns (also the Moorhouses) moved to Lambton County near Shetland. They had a large family, a number of whom became distinguished citizens.