

EARLY HISTORY OF LAND SETTLEMENT OF WALLACETOWN

AND SURROUNDING FARMS

At the close of the war of 1812 there were but 12 families in Dunwich Township, and not a single settler on the Talbot Road except the farm of William Pearce at the extreme west end. This farm was settled in 1809 and descended to his son John L. and grandson Stuart L., both living their entire life on the farm. In 1814 Henry Coyne located at Coyne's Corners. In 1817 six families of Scotch Selkirk Settlers located on 50 acre farms in the west of the Township on land donated by Colonel Talbot.

Concessions north of Talbot Street were not settled until after 1837. In 1819 John Currie from Argyleshire, Scotland settled on Lot 12, Con. 7, and was for many years the only settler where the village of Wallacetown now stands. In 1847 the first business, a shoemaker, started. It is recorded as still owned by Alex McLarty in 1852. In 1848 a tavern was in operation, and soon after a store by Robert Blackwood.

Records in an old Atlas of Dunwich Township name these early settlers in Wallacetown and immediate vicinity, some of which mention the year.

1809	William Pearce	Farmer
1816	John McCallum	"
1826	James Parker	"
1828	D. T. McCall	"
1842	Robert Gow	"
1852	Alex McLarty	Shoemaker
1860	A. S. K. Barclay	Postmaster
1860	Robert Backus	Farmer
1869	A. D. Urlin	Merchant
1870	Rapelji Bros.	Blacksmith, Harness & Carriage Makers
1871	Robert Jordan	Hotel Keeper
1883	Alvro Keillor	Cheesemaker (purchased from J. S. Pearce)
	John Wallace	Builder
	Dr. Daniel S. McCall	Physician

By the year 1877 the following names are recorded as farm settlers bordering the Talbot Rd., Clay St., Currie Rd., and the ninth Concession of Dunwich from Willy's Sideroad to the Coyne Road.

Talbot Rd.--North Side

Chas. Campbell	A. Wood
Duncan McCall	D. McTavish
Archie and Duncan McKillop	James Black
D. McCallum	Wm. Hunter
John and Neil McKillop	J. McIntyre
Campbell Property	George Allen
D. McClaus	Alex Clark
A. McGill	

Talbot Rd.--South Side

A. Campbell	D. McCallum	A. McLarty
Alex McCallum	Helen Gunn	MacBeth Estate
C. Kains	D. G. McKellar	W. H. Backus
McKillop Estate	Jno. L. Pearce	H. Braddon
D. McKillop	Hector McPherson	

Clay St.--North Side

J. McMillan	J. Blue	Jno. Patton
Dugald McFarlane	M. McIntyre	Alex Dewar
Peter McKellar	Robert Campbell	E. Campbell
D. M. McCallum	D. McKillop	J. McCallum
Malcolm McIntyre	John McKillop	Wm. Farr



Clay St.--South Side

D. McKillop  
D. McWilliam  
McArthur Estate  
J. Welsh  
Wm. McKellar  
Elizah Page

John  
Jas. Blue (bordering Currie Rd. Also)  
R. Jordan  
McIntosh Property  
McLary Property  
L W. McIntyre

Ninth Concession--North Side

Geo. Bodkin  
J. Briton  
J. Hooley  
J. Lynch  
John & Denis Crimean

S. & E. Pearce  
Thomas Morrish  
McKillop Estate  
John Campbell

North Concession--South Side

Jno. Graham  
Patton Property  
M. Hooley  
Wm. Cusack  
Jno. Lynch

Henry Bobier  
Josh Bobier  
Robert Backus  
Jno. Gow

D. Bates  
S. H. Backus  
C. Ferguson  
T. L. Pearce



# Pioneering Runs In Southwest Ontario Family

Tradition is an important ingredient in the makeup of any country, community or family. It lends a large measure of stability to civilization and is the bulwark of ordered society. Rural Ontario is steeped in tradition; a tradition established by the first French and Empire Loyalist settlers and colonists from Britain.

One Ontario family, the Pearce's of Tyrconnell in Elgin county, is particularly proud of its tradition—a tradition going back almost 160 years when most of southwestern Ontario was virgin land and the near-legendary Col. Thomas Talbot, the founder of St. Thomas, held sway over Lake Erie and much of the surrounding countryside.

The first John Pearce set foot in Ontario in 1808 in search of land. Being one of "His Majesty's Loyal Yankees," he refused to take an oath of allegiance to the new American government and thus could not buy land in the U.S. So he crossed the border and met Col. Talbot, who was looking for suitable colonists to settle land in southern Ontario.

Col. Talbot was a martinet. He had violent likes and dislikes and applied these volatile standards when choosing "the right type of man" to carve out a farm from the thousands of acres of Crown land that he had at his disposal. He would stare into an applicant's face and either accept or reject him outright.

Despite this unusual and arbitrary method of selection, he rarely made a mistake. The "colonel" was an excellent judge of human nature and practically every man he chose turned out to be a first class colonist.

And John Pearce was no exception. At their first meeting he and Col. Talbot got along famously. He was given title to land flanking the shore of Lake Erie and returned to the U.S. to collect his wife and three children.

In 1809 the Pearce family, together with the Patterson family from Pennsylvania, took a flat-bottomed boat from Erie on the U.S. side of the lake and landed about five miles west of Port Talbot, which, needless to say, was named after Col. Talbot.

Those first years in Canada were hard. There was unceasing toil, with little respite from the blowtorch sun or blasting cold. The forest had to be cleared, the fields put into good tilth, houses and barns constructed, and trails kept open. On top of this, with the war of 1812 looming on the horizon, the menfolk had to do regular bouts of military training.

Gradually other land was taken in the area and the community became known as Tyrconnell. It was a relatively widespread and isolated village. Only close unity of purpose and a unique spirit of co-operation among the families made life bearable—a spirit of co-operation that manifested itself in a slightly different sphere, but just as important, more than a century later.

Years of unremitting labor eventually paid off for the community. Tyrconnell became a thriving small town. Businesses sprang up, a wharf was built, and

the citizens could boast of several hostleries and hotels. Sailing vessels plying the Lakes would dock at Tyrconnell and take on supplies for their voyages—including whiskey at 50 cents a gallon!

All this spelt prosperity for the farming community. Unfortunately, Tyrconnell dwindled in importance as the Lake vessels increased in size and cruising range. Today, it is a relatively small pastoral community located about 20 miles to the west of St. Thomas.

Those early years in the history of Tyrconnell were not easy. In addition to fighting the elements, the Pearce family and their neighbors had to contend with parties of raiding Americans. The entire coastline was ravaged and on Sept. 20, 1814 they burned to the ground Col. Talbot's mills and important buildings belonging to Col. Burwell located in Port Talbot.

The community was staunchly Anglican. It is interesting to note that the first John Pearce's mother was a sister of the first Episcopal bishop in the U.S. The Pattersons also had a record of firm adherence to the Church of England. Travelling missionaries would make a point of stopping at Tyrconnell to administer the sacraments.

As the area developed, the community made sure that their church paralleled this growth. By the 1820's farmers and villagers had built themselves a fine church, St. Peter's, for their services—it is the only Anglican church in that part of Ontario west of Niagara, except for a chapel on the Brantford Indian reservation, where divine worship has been conducted continuously since 1827.

Few descendants of the pioneers have remained in the Tyrconnell area. However, there is one notable exception—the Pearce family. The present John Pearce is the fourth Pearce to farm the family's 165-acre farm granted originally, through Col. Talbot, by King George IV many years before Queen Victoria ascended the throne.

In addition to his own land, Mr. Pearce also farms a major portion of his uncle's farm near Wallacetown. Describing himself modestly as a "general farmer," he has a fine herd of beef cattle, grows soybean, corn and wheat cash crops, and has a 700-flock of hens. Most of the eggs are sold on the London market.

Like his forebears, the fourth John Pearce is a pioneer. He was one of the first members of Elgin Co-operative Services in St. Thomas when launched in 1941 and is now its president. This mighty co-operative has grown enormously in recent years. Sales last year topped the \$6,000,000 mark—up \$1,000,000 over 1962—and membership exceeds 2,000 farm people.

This St. Thomas-based co-operative has four branches—at Aylmer, Dutton, Straffordville and West Lorne.

Why did John Pearce become a founding member of Elgin Co-operative? "The answer's quite simple," he explained. "There was no competition in the area. Prices were universally high and so I thought a little competition from the farmers would do a lot of good."

He added: "Buying a \$100-share (they're now \$200) seemed a low price to pay for bringing competition back to the market."

Few will dispute that the growth of Elgin co-op is an outstanding success story. Top-notch management and enthusiastic directors are part of the explanation. However, this combination can be found at many other Ontario local co-operatives but the results are not the same as at Elgin.

John Pearce is of the opinion that the co-operative's policy on patronage returns has played an important role in expanding sales for this farmer-owned business.

"Since the start of our co-op, we have returned \$1,000,000 to our members in patronage dividends. This money has been paid in cash. The size of our patronage return and the fact that we pay cash has attracted a lot of new members plus a lot of extra business," he

noted.

Another factor to the co-op's success has been the "little extra services" offered members, he continued. "Our co-op will deliver anything to or collect anything from a member's farm as quickly as possible. No farmer is left waiting for a delivery. And," he added, "the charge is nominal."

Agricultural co-operation runs in the Pearce family. His father was a director of the United Farmers Co-operative Company, the forerunner of United Co-operatives of Ontario. He also played a major role in organizing a local farmers' buying club.

Although the club met somewhat irregularly in Wallacetown town hall during the Twenties and Thirties, John Pearce recalls its business activities brought a large measure of stability to the local farm economy. For example, if local prices got out of line, the club would buy carload lots of fertilizer, binder twine, corn or oats. This restored competition to the market.

With agricultural marketing becoming more organized and sophisticated, the functions of the Wallacetown buying club were assumed by Elgin co-operative.

In addition to being a director of Elgin co-operative, Mr. Pearce is a director of Dunwich Farmers Co-operative. This is a farmer-owned livestock shipping business. Centred on Dutton, it organizes the transportation of animals to the Toronto Stock Yards.

Guided by inclination as well as by tradition, John Pearce is a solid churchman. Prominent in the affairs of his village church, he ably shoulders the high standards set by his forebears. On all sides he is reminded of his family's contribution to both Canada and the community.

Not far from his tree-shaded farmstead can be found the John Pearce Provincial Park. The land for this park was given by the Pearce family and "dedicated to the memory of . . . ancestors who settled in this area in 1809."

And against the lime-washed wall of St. Peter's church, a plaque gives the simple but moving story of how his cousin, Ellis, won the Victoria Cross for storming a German machinegun nest. And across the road, a carefully manicured cemetery is a story in itself.

Tombstones and granite obelisks are monuments to the pioneers of Tyrconnell and the surrounding countryside. Near the railed-off grave of Col. Thomas Talbot can be found a stone marking the burial place of the first John Pearce. According to the inscription on the head, he was born in Rhode Island in 1777—one year after the American colonies revolted against the Crown.

So the first John Pearce must have inherited monarchist feelings from his parents. Also, he was 31 years of age before stepping foot on Canadian soil—indicating a man of principle. Few people on reaching the age of 31 will leave the land of their birth and forego the opportunities of getting good



Accurate records play important part in Pearce farm operations.

farmland on the question of whether they will live under a monarch or a republican form of government.

Many of the other headstones in Tyrconnell cemetery are worn with age. Deciphering becomes difficult, but from some of the names a definite pattern develops. Beyond

Pearce and Talbot can be found names such as Sifton, Bobier and Backus—and these are linked with U.S. states, Scottish and Irish counties, English shires, and other parts of Canada. In many respects the village is a microcosm of Old Ontario. And perhaps its people are, too.





[NOTE THE DINNER BELL ON RIGHT GABLE]

We have at hand some interesting facts about the well-known John Bobier family of Port Talbot.

John Bobier of the Township of Dunwich was born in the county of Wexford, Ireland, in 1800. He first settled in the county of Elgin in 1825 and was married in 1829 to Jane Wellwood, of Port Stanley. Their family consisted of thirteen children of whom twelve reached maturity.

Mr. Bobier was a farmer all his

life and lived to the good old age of eighty years. He took a great interest in fine stock cattle and did much to advance the interests of stock raisers in his section of the country. He served as a major in the militia and was a man much respected by all who knew him.

It is unfortunate that no portion of the original 600 acres of land, owned by Mr. Bobier, is now in the name of that family, although descendants still live in the district.

We had the privilege of reading a letter written by a Mr. Winnie of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, in the year 1859, in which the writer delegates Mr. Bobier to act as agent

for him in the buying of sheep in this community. The letter instructs Mr. Bobier to be sure to go and see a man's sheep 9 miles below St. Thomas, and to go wherever he hears of good ones. The writer says he would be willing to pay fifty cents or one dollar per head more, for good ones. These sheep would be driven overland to the purchaser, in the U. S.

It is hard to believe that in the span of 100 years we have developed from travel by foot or horse through forest trails, to motoring on super-highways, or by diesel locomotive or jet plane.

John Bobier, Farm Lot No 17, Con. 10, Dunwich, Township,  
He was born in County of Wexford, Ireland in 1800  
settled on this farm in 1825, married in 1829 to  
Jane Wellwood, a native of County of Carlow, Ireland  
Family consisted of 13 children, Richard and David had  
farms over hill on opposite sides of road. until their  
deaths, now owned by Geo. McArthur and Alex Lackey.  
Alfred built fine brick house on home place, which was  
sold to Richard Green, later to Mr. and Mrs. Lloyd Wigle  
of Kingsville.

IN YEAR 1927



This house, 118 yrs. old - 1850 - 1968



Mary Storey  
Andrew Backus  
Farm  
1809 - 1923

Lot 11, Con. 10

Morley Page

owner  
1925 - 1968  
Sold in 1968, to

Government,  
for in addition  
to Pearce Park

In 1808 Leslie Patterson and John Pearce crossed from Erie, Pennsylvania to Upper Canada at Niagara in search of homes under the British flag. They rounded the western end of Lake Ontario and proceeded as far as Muddy York (Toronto) but did not find any land which appealed to them. What persuaded them to turn their faces westward is not known. Col. Talbot had established his homestead at Port Talbot some five years earlier. Quite possibly members of the government at Newark in the Niagara district and at York may have talked to the newcomers, or as it is known that Col Talbot was in New York in 1807, he may have had some contact with some members of the family or with Government officials who were friends. At any rate they proceeded westward along the north shore of Lake Erie to Port Talbot and chose the farms which were to be their homes for the remainder of their lives. On July 14th 1809 they returned in a flat bottomed boat with all their earthly possessions and landed about the line between lots 11 and 12, Con. 10, Dunwich Township. In the party was Col. Patterson's sister, Mrs. Mary Story, (whose husband died in Ireland), together with her son, Walter and two daughters, Anne and Sarah. Mrs. Story purchased the south half or broken front of lot 11, Con. 10, and her son, Walter, the north half of said lot. Mary Story died in July 1842 and as her son, Walter, wife and child had predeceased her, all of Lot 11 which the Story family purchased from Col. Talbot, (except ten acres which had been given by her for St. Peter's Church and Cemetery) became the property of her first grandson, Andrew Backus, whose mother was Anne Story. Upon his death in 1884 it became the property of his son, Andrew Story Backus, who in 1923 sold the south half to John E. Pearce, a great, great grandson of Mary Story. The north half was sold at the same time to Robert Kennedy, a veteran of the Imperial army of Great Britain who purchased the property under the Soldiers Settlement Act. Consequently when in August 1925, Morley W. Page purchased said property consisting

LAKE VIEW