

History of St. Thomas Church begins with Rapelje

In 1820, Daniel Rapelje, St. Thomas's first settler and owner of the New England Mill, divided his land on top of the hill into suitable town lots for a village site. He had about 35 acres which would be suitable for building homes and by this time, he knew that his future was not to be in farming. To expedite town settlement, Daniel made an offer of land for any worthwhile public buildings.

Captain Daniel Rapelje was a very popular and important resident of the Talbot Settlement. Unfortunately, his eldest son, George, died in the Fall of 1819. That Christmas, Daniel lost another son. This time it was Lambert, his youngest.

In the New Year, Reverend Charles Stewart, representing the Anglican Church in Canada, visited Colonel Talbot and found that there were several members of the Church of England in the Talbot Settlement. He visited the little village at the top of the hill called Kettle Creek Village, and his report indicated that an English church was being proposed there. The Colonel had offered a sizable donation towards the building of a church.

Shortly after that Daniel Rapelje

Local History SCRAPBOOK By WAYNE PADDON

donated two acres of land for a church and cemetery and the land where his two sons were buried was part of the gift. The property was deeded to the Bishop of Quebec in 1821 and included the present location as well as the land to the east where the Thomas Williams Home is located. An apple orchard belonging to the church was found on the eastern part of the lot.

The first brick church was small and rectangular. In 1822, the small brick church was almost completed and Reverend Alexander McIntosh came to Kettle Creek Village to be the new Anglican minister and the village school master.

In 1824, with financial assistance from Colonel Talbot's friends in England, a tower, steeple, a

"recess...for Communion" was added to the front of the little church. The original structure is the nave of today's church, with a small apse, or "recess", where Communion could be held. The pulpit was in the centre at the front of the church before the Holy Table. There was a choir gallery over the entrance to the church and the choir was usually accompanied by a musician; a pipe organ was installed later.

The original pulpit and organ were given to St. John's in 1877 but were subsequently lost. The old organ was in the old organ loft. The Holy Table was given as a gift to Bishop Baldwin who as a young priest had been both ordained and married in the old church by Bishop Cronyn in 1860.

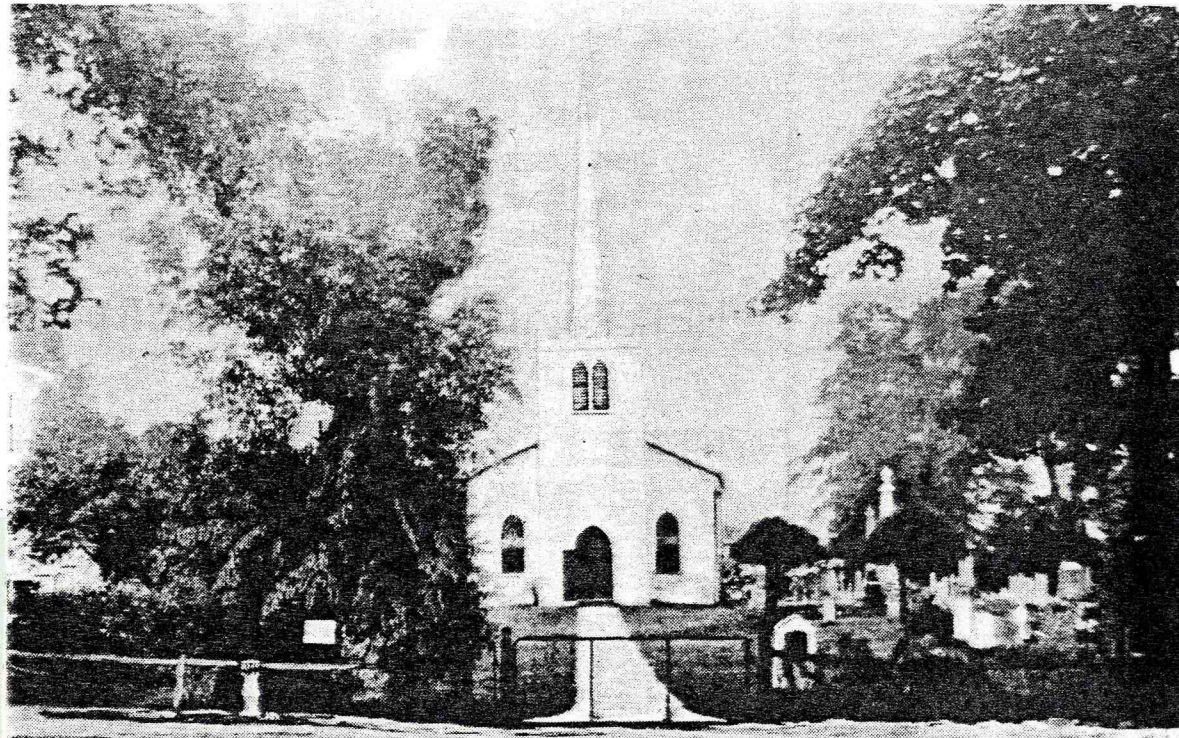
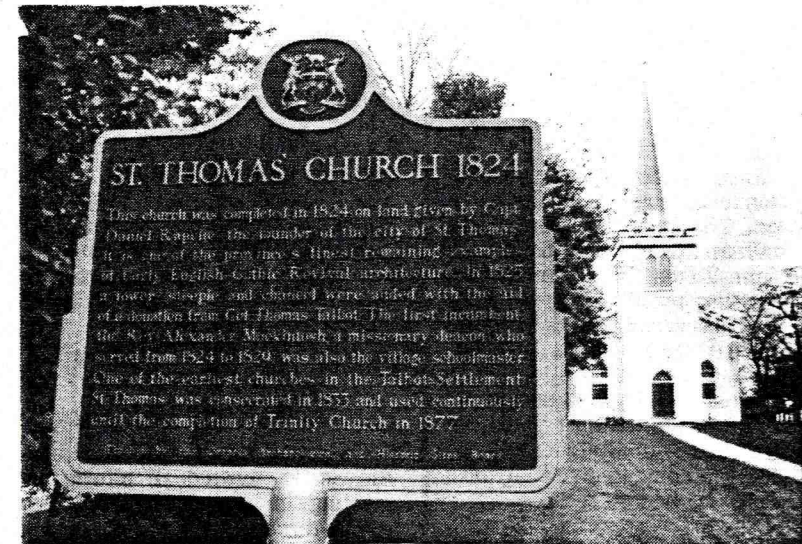
On Sunday, June 19, 1825, the first celebration of the Holy Communion was given to 12 "celebrants". In 1827, there were 41 parishioners of the St. Thomas church. McIntosh and his assistant looked after the needs of St. Thomas, London, and the new St. Peter's church at Tyrconnell. McIntosh left St. Thomas in 1829. He was succeeded briefly by Reverend E. J. Boswell who left St. Thomas to work permanently in London, and then by Reverend Mark

Burnham who was Rector of the church for 23 years.

Some of the old pews were family pews with little rectangular benches so that some of the seats obviously would place the back of their occupant towards the pulpit.

After Trinity was opened in 1877,

the old church was closed. But in the last few years a great deal of reconstruction of the old church has been undertaken by the Restoration Committee of the Church. Every attempt has and is being made to maintain the originality of the church and to make it available for visitors.



This is the Old St. Thomas Church, which was opened in 1824 in St. Thomas. It still opens

for special events each Sunday. Postcard contributed by Mike Vanberkel of St. Thomas.

July 4th/92

Home of early pioneers now a local museum June 11/92

Charles Duncombe taught school briefly in the United States and studied medicine while teaching. As soon as he received his medical degree from the City of New York, he came to Canada at the age of 23. He came first to Burford where friends wanted him to set up a practice, but instead he came to St. Thomas. His sister and youngest brother, David, came with him. His father and mother came to the London area subsequently and settled in Westminster, but when his father, who had been teaching, died in 1822, the family came to St. Thomas to live with Charles. That same year another brother, Dr. Elijah Duncombe, who also had medical training from Charles, graduated from Medical School in Geneva, New York and came to St. Thomas also. David, who had also studied under Charles, also received his degree at Geneva, New York and became a doctor at Waterford.

The Duncombe's were very capable doctors. Charles was ahead of his time with some of his procedures. Charles and Elijah had small offices on Pleasant Street to the south of Talbot Street.

Both Charles and Elijah were leading citizens of early St. Thomas. They both married and were family men.

The original Duncombe house was set back in a clearing from the road with a beautiful orchard surrounding it.

The Duncombe home and offices

Local History SCRAPBOOK By WAYNE PADDON

were eventually moved to Talbot Street and are today the Elgin County Pioneer Museum.

But Charles Duncombe took a leadership role in the Reform movement in provincial politics, eventually leaving St. Thomas in 1828 and moving to Burford, Ontario, where he became not only the most respected doctor in the area, but was elected as a member to the Legislative Assembly of Upper Canada for Oxford County and served from 1830 to 1837 as an M.P.O.

Charles had a brilliant legal mind and was a constitutional expert and could have contributed a great deal to Canadian constitutional development after 1839. But his role in the actual outbreak of violence led to his leaving Canada by a narrow escape and never returning. He died in California at age seventy-five.

On the other hand, Elijah had a long and distinguished career in St. Thomas and was a very active citizen in the village's early life and development. He was a very respected Village Councillor and a very active

person.

He died in St. Thomas at age seventy-five, at the home of his daughter.

As a doctor, Elijah was extremely dedicated and like other doctors of the time, had to travel long distances over rough roads on horse back to make house calls.

On one professional visit to the Ca-

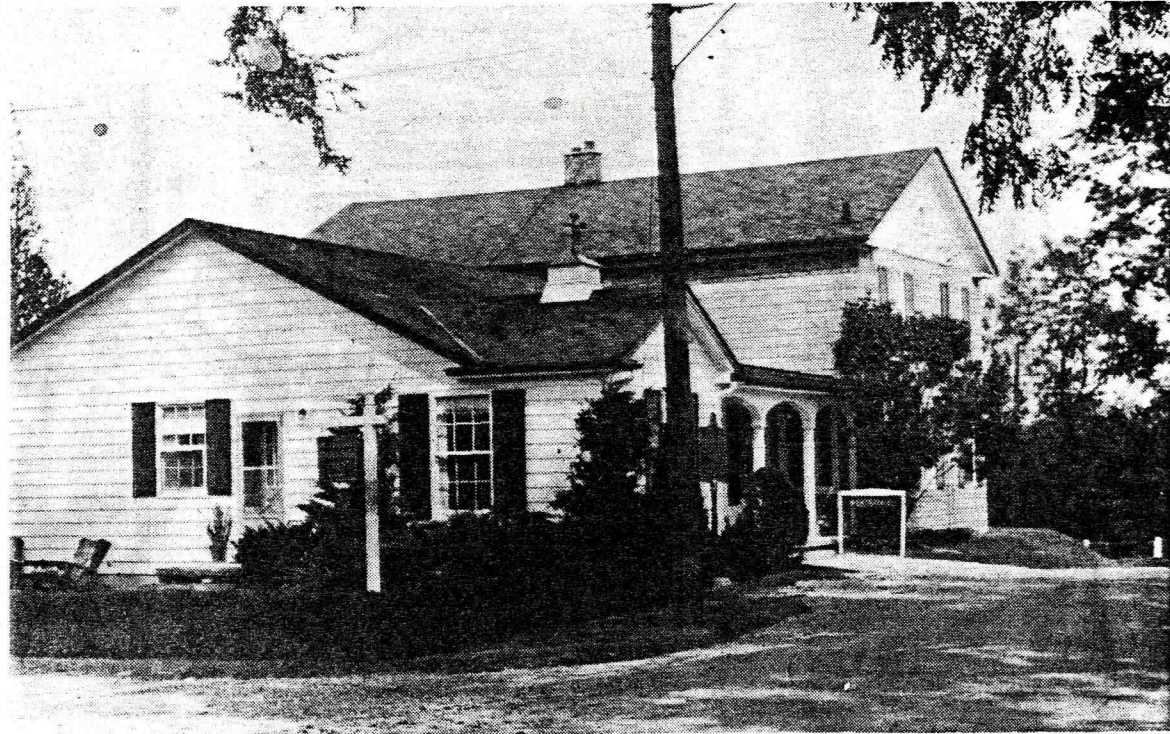
sey Farm in Southwold, which was several miles west of St. Thomas, rains flooded Kettle Creek and washed out all the timbers except the main beams of the bridge which he would have to cross coming from Fingal at the bottom of Talbot Street hill. On his return, Duncombe gave the "reins entirely to his horse". At seven o'clock that night he arrived

safely home in St. Thomas.

prised that he had been able to cross the bridge, Duncombe's wife went the morning to look at the bridge.

mains and see where the horse crossed. It was clear that the horse

had walked over the "ceiling beams".



OUR YESTERDAYS

by James P. Bannon



It is unfortunate that the majority of us in North America view our history on this continent as beginning with the arrival of the first European, and that the arrival of Christopher Columbus was the first glimmer of civilization that occurred on what was previously a dark and forbidding continent.

This is of course entirely untrue. North America was a place, and a lived in place. Before any European nation ever drew breath. Aboriginal societies in North America developed, existed, held territories, traded with one another, warred - literally every thing a society does was feverishly alive in Canada eons before Christopher Columbus began history's greatest culture-clash by bringing a handful of mariners to the island of Hispanola in the year 1492.

One such interesting aspect of ancient aboriginal history occurred in this area. At the time of first European contact, the north shore area of Lake Erie was occupied by a tribe of aboriginal peoples called the "Attiwandaronk", or "people whose speech is awkward." Their society was most heavily concentrated near the west end of Lake Erie in Elgin County, and it extended east as far as the Niagara River and into upper New York State.

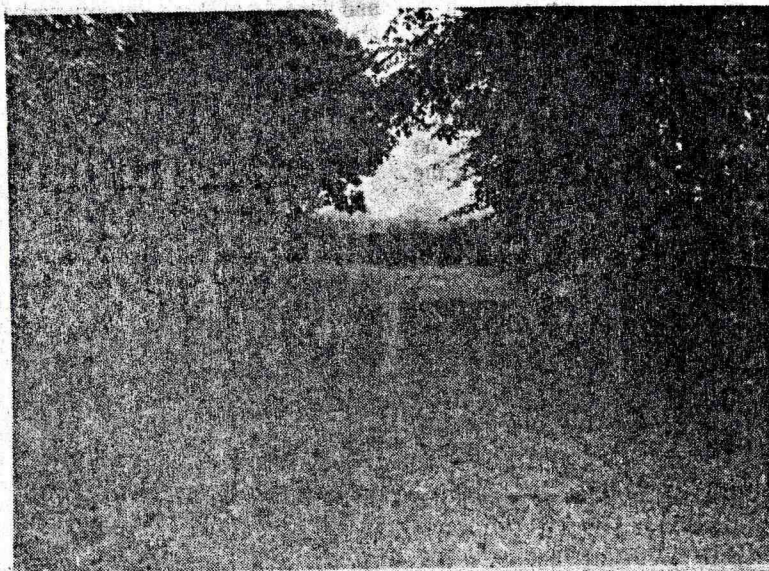
The first Europeans to contact these people were French missionaries of the Roman Catholic faith, whose religious zeal and unparalleled enthusiasm had taken them to the north shore of Erie in the early 1600's. The renowned French explorer Samuel de Champlain quickly named them "la nation Neutre", or The Neutrals, a name derived from their politics, for the Neutrals were at peace with the Huron nation to their north, and the war-loving Iroquois to their east.

In 1638, when the Neutrals first began to experience the ravages of smallpox, a disease brought to them from Europe, the Neutrals numbered approximately 40,000 souls. They spoke an Iroquoian language, and lived in communities of longhouses, which were rectangular structures surrounded by earthwork ridges and palisades.

Some of these communities were very large and well-defended towns.

For a living, the Neutrals sustained themselves by farming horticultural crops, beans, corn and squash, but they also hunted deer, raccoon, black bear and passenger pigeon, all of these species being very abundant in Elgin at the time. They also gathered nuts and grew tobacco for trade and ritual purposes. Pottery was also very popular with tribal artisans, and many Neutrals were buried with his or her best ceramic treasures.

Although the Neutrals were similar in culture to the Iroquois and Huron peoples, they avoided conflicts and did not care to antagonize the aggressive Iroquois tribes, which attacked and robbed neighbouring



The Aboriginal Earthworks near Iona. Visitors to the site may actually walk around the crest of land which the Neutral Indians built around their village and protected the community from attack by enemy tribes.

tribes as a way of life. Their fears were quite justified, for in 1650 the Iroquois over-ran the Neutral villages and slaughtered them in incredible numbers. Survivors were converted into Iroquoian society or killed, and the Neutrals ceased to exist as a unique cultural entity. A small number of Neutrals fled west into what is now the Windsor area and became the Wyandott tribe.

Many archaeological remnants of the destroyed Neutral society remain in Elgin, discovered and yet-to-be discovered. One such treasure is the remains of a small village and fort near the present-day village of Iona. The Neutrals would surround their towns with a high wall of earth, and then build a high, thick fence of logs, called a palisade, on top of the ridge in order to defend against attack. The earthwork remains to this day, and visitors can walk along the crest and gaze down into what was once a thriving village over three hundred years ago, and so gaze down into the face of history.

Stone at Port Talbot marks famous friendship

Stone at Port Talbot was indication of famous friendship.

One of the greatest Canadian military commanders was Tecumseh, a Shawnee Chief who gave his life for Canada in the War of 1812.

Tecumseh was a highly respected Indian chief and a "loyalist" who had been decorated by General James Brock for bravery and leadership in military affairs. Tecumseh was a personal friend of Brock. Tecumseh, who was well known in Southwestern Ontario and a friend and visitor of Colonel Baby at Sandwich was also a personal friend of Colonel Talbot and visited Port Talbot on occasion to see his British friend there.

Tecumseh was killed in 1813 at the Battle of the Thmaes by American troops who had invaded Canada at Sandwich and moved eastward toward the Talbot Settlement. When the British commander, Proctor, failed to make a stand Tecumseh and his Indian troops dug in and made a valiant effort to stop the American advance by themselves. The Americans won the battle and Tecumseh was killed but his body was never found by the invaders. It had been removed by Indian warriors.

Tecumseh was 35 years old when

Sept 17/92

Local History

SCRAPBOOK

By WAYNE PADDON

ST THOMAS PAPER

he dies. He had a light figure and was extremely handsome. He was tall and his complexion copper; his eyes were hazel and had the twinkle of intelligence and a fine sense of humour; from his nose were suspended three small silver crowns; around his neck was a string of wampum holding a large George III medalion; his dress was a plain neat uniform consisting of a deerskin jacket, deerskin trousers, both of which had a neatly cut fringe and leather moccasins ornamented with dyed porcupine quills.

The famous Tecumseh stone was a gift from the great Indian Chief to Colonel Talbot.

When Tecumseh visited Port Talbot he could use the stone which sat behind the Talbot home to sharpen his knives and renew his friendship and acquaintance with Colonel Talbot and the local settlers.

Fingal man gave St. Thomas its first modern hospital

In May, 1894, St. Thomas officially opened the Amasa Wood Hospital on the north-east corner of Pearl and Scott Streets. Amasa (pronounced am-a-see) Wood, its benefactor, provided the city with the \$14,000 to build it and \$2,000 for extras to make the hospital one of the most modern in Canada.

At that time, Amasa Wood lived in St. Thomas on the west side of East Street just south of Talbot Street in a red brick home later torn down to make a parking lot for Spackman Motors.

The hospital became part of the Memorial Hospital in 1923 but has since completely disappeared. But the gift of the hospital and the man who gave it are too important in St. Thomas and Elgin history to forget.

Who was Amasa Wood? Amasa Wood was one of the most ambitious and successful young entrepreneurs who was ever raised in Elgin County. His family moved to the Talbot Road when he was only five years old and by the time he was 12 years old, Wood was an express rider carrying mail for Strawbridge's Stage and Mail Line between Chatham and St. Thomas as a summer job. He attended school in St. Thomas in the winter.

As a teenager he worked in one of the first general stores between St.

Aug 20/92

Local History

SCRAPBOOK

By WAYNE PADDON

Thomas and Port Talbot, just east of Fingal, that was owned by his brother-in-law, Colonel James McQueen. There he learned the retail business and saved the money for his own first investment. McQueen held the government contract to supply the nearby Indian reservations of Oneida and Munsey.

In 1830, White went into business on his own at age 28 when he purchased the "White Tavern", a hotel on the south-east corner of Talbot and Union Roads in Fingal. By 1841 he had moved into the mercantile business with his brother-in-law, Levi Fowler, the founder of Fingal. Fowler who had earlier divided his lot of 200 acres on the north-west corner of Fingal into town lots, owned the first general store, in a log cabin, which was on the same corner in Fingal.

Together Fowler and Wood made a fortune by hard work and good busi-

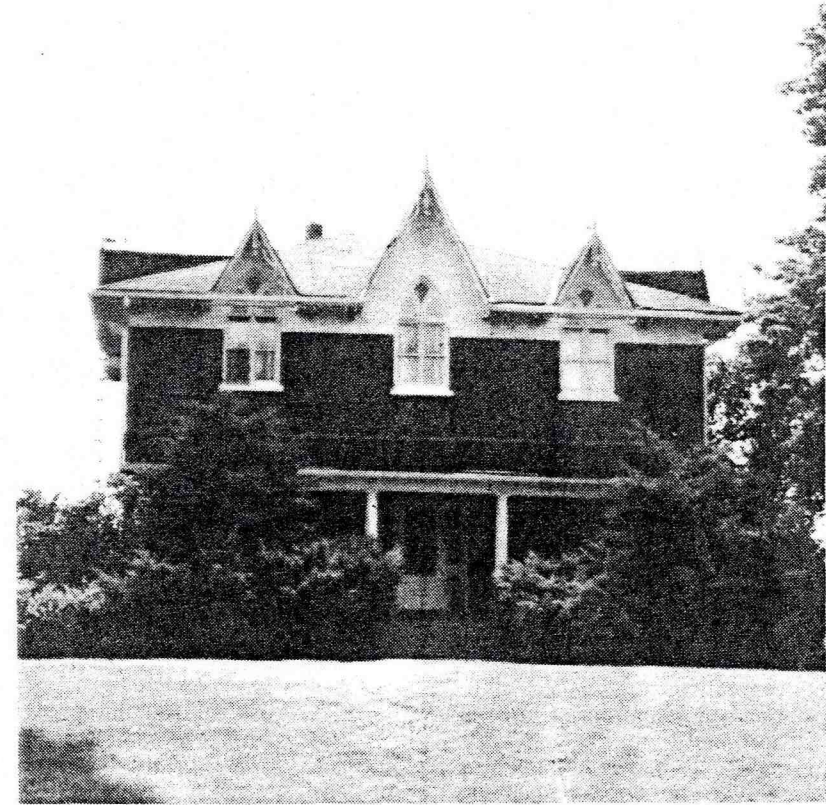
ness sense. Amasa took over the business when Fowler retired. With his hotel, his share in Fowler's business and with the Indian contracts which he acquired from Colonel McQueen, Wood became rich.

In 1850 he built the large, beautiful home in Fingal which is still standing on the south side of Talbot Street just east of the Union Road. The home, which is still magnificent, has been owned by the Cron family for the past 75 years.

Known as the "town bell" because he rose so early and spoke so loud, the stocky Wood was always the shrewd businessman. On one occasion he heard of a shipwreck near Port Talbot in which a cargo of salt had been carried to shore. He made his way quickly to the site and purchased the load of salt from the surprised and pleased captain of the sunken vessel.

But Wood was also a very kind, generous and God-fearing man. He always remembered his native friends at Oneida and Muncey on holiday occasions. He assisted many local people in depression times. He gave money to build churches in Elgin and to rebuild a Methodist Church in Japan which had burned down.

Wood was married twice and had three children. He died at age 88 in his St. Thomas home where he had come to live in his later years.



STILL STANDING — Here is a recent photograph of Amasa Wood's home in Fingal. The house was built in 1850 and is still standing on the south side of Talbot Street just west of the Union Road. It has been owned by the Cron family for the past 75 years.
— (Wayne Paddon photo)

Lynhurst residents fascinated by old gravestones



IN MEMORY OF . . . — Here is a photograph of the monument for Silas Toles, his wife Margaret Toles, and daughter Anna Toles which sits on the highest hill be-

tween Crescent Avenue and Wellington Road, in Lynhurst. The Toles' were one of the area's first pioneer families.

— (Contributed)

Aug 13/92.

Local History **SCRAPBOOK** By WAYNE PADDON

Residents of Lynhurst have always been fascinated by the three gravestones on the highest hill between Crescent Avenue and Wellington Road. The stones mark the graves of Silas Toles, one of the first pioneers to come to this area (1791-1871), Margaret Toles, his first wife, and Anna, a daughter who died at 11 years of age (1818-1829). Silas was 89 years old when he died in 1871 and his first wife, Margaret, died in 1846 (1794-1846).

The monument was built by James Travers of Talbotville who used a truck to carry the heavy stone and materials to the top of the hill.

Silas was a United Empire Loyalist who was born in New York State in 1791 and came to the Talbot Settlement and received land from Colonel Talbot on Talbot Street just west of what became St. Thomas previous to the War of 1812. He fought as a British soldier and was wounded in the War of 1812 at the

Battle of Lundy's Lane. In 1813, Toles eloped with Margaret Kelley of Niagara Falls. They have 10 children. Silas was not on the best of terms with Margaret's family during the courtship and elopement, but eventually they were very friendly.

Toles' house was searched during the rebellion period since his wife's family was suspected of being radical reformers.

In fact, Margaret Toles assaulted the investigating official. After that, Toles' sons kept guard each night to prevent any further intrusion of their privacy.

Margaret died in 1846 and Silas married Jane Wilton in 1847.

Silas was a school trustee and on one occasion while inspecting a teacher in the classroom who was not doing a good job made the teacher apologize to a student whom he had wrongly accused of misspelling a word.

A scuffle followed between the teacher and Toles with the outcome being that Toles went to jail for a month and paid a fine for beating up the teacher.

Toles was known for many of his deeds. For example he and his children are supposed to have been the ones who scared off a bear and chased it right up the St. Thomas hill into a St. Thomas hotel during prime hours.