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**TYRCONNEL WHARF AND HARBOUR COMPANY
1853**

**DUNWICH PIER COMPANY
1861**

March 2003

HISTORY AND COMMENT

By 1853 the settlement of the southwesterly portion of Dunwich Township in Elgin County was well advanced. Nearly all the good agricultural land had been taken up by settlers, with considerable acreage cleared for crops, wheat being the main cash crop. Other farmers of Ontario were shipping their wheat to Great Britain. The threat of the Crimean War only heightened the desire of the Dunwich settlers to find an economical way to send their wheat to Great Britain to share in the rising prices as wheat from Russia and eastern Europe would be unavailable. Dunwich area saw mills were in full operation and although pine was not available in the large quantity as in East Elgin, the Carolinian forest produced large quantities of hardwoods for lumber, barrel staves etc, which would find a ready market in Great Britain.

In the 1840s and early 1850s some grain and lumber had been shipped out of hamlet of Tryconnell on Lake Erie (Lot 8 Concession 10 Dunwich), David J. Hall in his "Economic Development in County of Elgin 1850-1880", (page 96) notes that a "grain elevator" at Tyrconnell had been built in 1840.

Tyrconnell Creek was the largest of all the creeks other than Talbot Creek emptying into Lake Erie in Dunwich and Aldborough Townships. The wagon access to the creek's mouth on the lakeshore was not nearly as steep as at any other location in Dunwich.

(To my knowledge there was not a significant harbour on Talbot Creek in this era. Although Thomas Talbot had rebuilt a grist mill on Talbot creek just after the war of 1812, Talbot seemed to have discouraged shipping from the Talbot Creek. It would be most difficult for anyone to obtain the property needed for a wharf at Port Talbot as Talbot and his heirs owned all the surrounding land in the area and they seemed to have no interest in promoting a harbour there.)

Tyrconnell, as a harbour had a serious drawback, the shallow creek mouth often filled with sand even after a minor storm on Lake Erie. Nearly all cargo had to be transferred to lake ships anchored off shore by scows from the wharfs along the Tyrconnell creek bank. The blockage of the creek mouth often seriously hampered the transfer work.

Building of a Pier out into the Lake would lessen these difficulties as scows could be loaded without having to enter the creek mouth and small ships might be loaded directly from a such a pier. The Tyrconnel Wharf and Harbour Company was formed in 1853 as a stock company to build such a pier.

Hall notes (page 96) that the company failed to build a pier. I do not know if construction of the pier was ever started as the stock company appears to have been under capitalized. The depression following the Crimean war certainly finished off the scheme.

James Blackwood, a local Tyrconnell merchant, had great plans for a major town on the flat land at the top of the lake bank using the harbour at Tyrconnell as its focus. In 1853 he registered a village plan with over 400 lots on Lot 8 in Concessions 9 and 10 (Registered Plan 9 in the County of Elgin Land Registry Office). He planned to sell these lots to people eager to cash in on the upcoming bonanza of a major harbour facility. Alas Blackwood's bonanza failed caused in large part by the general depression following the Crimean war. When no one came to purchase his lots, he was forced into bankruptcy. It is interesting to note that Blackwood did not have stock in the Tyrconnel Wharf and Harbour Company.

The hard times of this period (mid and late 1850's) likely encouraged some investors in the stock company to leave the Dunwich area. With the absence of a 1851 census of Dunwich, it has been difficult to find an alternative reference to some of the stock holders.

In 1861 another stock company, capitalized at \$2000, the DUNWICH PIER COMPANY, was organized to build a pier at Tyrconnell. This company hoped to take advantage of the economic boom which was occurring during the American Civil War. The success of the project was noted by Hall. (pages 96 and 97)

"The chief merchant at Tyrconell for many years was Meredith Conn, a Grain buyer. In 1867 Conn describes the accommodations and trade of that place.

"There is a pier and whare houses. There is a good business done here in grain, timber and staves (Barrel). I shipped this past season about 42,00 bushels of grain (read wheat) from that port. I have generally shipped about 60,000 bushels in the season. There will be about 200,000 staves to ship in the spring beside other timber, consisting of cordwood and hewed logs"

Hall continues,

"Tyrconnell continued to be important as a small shipping centre for a number of years the pier was well maintained and was described as being 500 feet long and 30 feet wide. After this date (1867) however the place went into decline and by 1890 the was considered unsafe and no longer used".

The main access road to Tyrconnell from Dunwich township and the Talbot Road was the Coyne side road (between lots 6 and 7) to the Talbot Road. In the H R Page's "Historical Atlas of Elgin of 1877", a road is show running northerly and westerly from Tyrconnell through Lots 7 and 8 in Concessions 8 and 9 and joins the Coyne side road at the mid point of Lot 7 in Concession 8. This road ran through the property of Meredith Conn (Lot 8 Concession 9) and others. Although there seems to be no legal description of this road registered in the Elgin County Land Registry Office, the road was still shown on a 1910 map of Dunwich. Tremaine's map of Elgin County of 1864 shows a pier at Tyconnell jutting into the Lake but does not show the road.

Commerce at Tyrconnell started to decline with the advent of the depression which followed the American Civil War. The coming of the Canada Southern Railway through West Elgin was the final straw in the demise of the pier. By 1872 the railway had been completed through Central Dunwich and Aldborough Townships and lead to the emergence of Dutton as the major trading centre taking the place of both Wallacetown and Tyrconnell.

Although Meredith Conn Jr may have still utilized Tryconnell as a port, by shipping grain into Dutton by the Canada Southern Railway and "teaming" it to Tyrconnell, this practice likely did not continue for very long.

A small concrete pier for the local commercial fishing industry was built sometime after 1900 and its use continued into the 1920s but it too has long disappeared.

Tyrconnell now basks in the summer sun, the world having passed it by, home to a few seeking peace and quiet.

The stockholder lists are an important genealogical resource, not only giving the residence of some of the area citizens at a particular time period but also some indication of their financial resources.

TYRCONNEL WHARF AND HARBOUR COMPANY 1853

THE STOCK BOOK

Be it remembered that on this twenty ninth day of August in the year of our Lord One thousand and eight hundred and fifty three , We the undersigned stockholders met at the Tryconnel School House in the County of Elgin and the Province of Ontario and resolved to form ourselves into a company to be called the Tryconnel wharf and Harbour Company according to the provisions of a Certain Act of parliament of this Province entitled an act to provide for the formation of Joint Stock companies for the construction of piers, wharves, drydocks and Harbours for the purpose of Constructing a pier and making a harbour at Tyrconnel. and we do hereby declare that the Capital stock of the said Company shall be four hundred pounds to be divided into eighty shares at the price or sum of of Five Pounds each And we the undersigned stockholders do hereby agree to take and accept the number of shares set by us opposite to our respective signatures and do hereby agree to pay the calls thereon according to the provisions of the said act in part recited act and of the rules, regulations, resolutions and by laws of the said Company to be made or passed in that behalf and we do hereby nominate Peter Gow, Joseph Mitchell, Thos. G. Coyne, John Hidden, Robert Gow to be the First Directors of said company

Deposited and Registered the 6th day of September 1853 at One o'clock pm as No 5
"Tryconnel Harbor Company"
Deputy Registrar Middlesex and Elgin

THE STOCK HOLDERS

The stockholders list was signed by each individual stock holder and certain names are difficult to read (As sometimes there was more than one person with same name residing in the Dunwich area, it is impossible to ascertain which person was actually the stock holder)

| Name | Stock Shares | Other Reference to Person |
|---------------------|--------------|--|
| Benson William | 1 | 1844 assessment SE 1/4 Con 7 Lot 21 |
| Coyne Isaac | 5 | Concession 1 Lot 7 |
| Coyne Thomas G | 5 | 1844 assessment Con 9 Lot 9 1842 Census merchant |
| Coyne Wm | 5 | merchant of St Thomas and son of Henry Coyne who lived on the Talbot road at the Coyne sideroad |
| Crane Anthony | 5 | Con 11 L 15 Cen farmer |
| Finlayson Alex'r | 1 | Con A L 6 |
| Finlayson Angus | 1 | |
| Gow Peter | 5 | Con 11 L 14 Cen farmer |
| Gow Robert | 5 | Con 11 L 14 Cen farmer |
| Gunn Thomas | 1 | |
| Hewitt Thomas | 3 | |
| Hidden John | 1 | |
| Luxton Thomas | 1 | |
| McLachlan Hugh | 2 | |
| O Brien John P. | 2 | Cen carpenter Voter 1856 |
| Richie? John | 1 | Cen blacksmith indexed as Rickey |
| Scott Joseph | 1 | Con 9 L 9 |
| Stafford James | 2 | Voter 1856 |
| Weldon Alexander | 1 | Likely Con 10 L 17 Cen labourer |
| Total shares | 48 | |

References are

Location of person, Lot and Concession from 1864 Tremaine's Map of Elgin County
Dunwich Township unless noted

Census listings (Cen) are from the 1861 census of Dunwich Township unless noted

The 1856 Voters were among those in Dunwich Township who voted against the County of Elgin
issuing debentures to assist in the building of the London and Port Stanley Railway

DUNWICH PIER COMPANY

1861

THE STOCK BOOK

Be it remembered that on this eighteenth day of April in the year of our Lord One thousand and eight hundred and sixty one, We the undersigned stockholders met at Wallacetown in the County of Elgin and the Province of Ontario and resolved to form ourselves into a company to be called the Dunwich Pier Company according to the provisions of a Certain Act of parliament of this Province entitled an act 16th Victoria Chap 124 An Act to provide for the formation of joint stock companies for the Construction of piers, wharves, Dry docks and Harbours for the purpose of Constructing a pier at Tyrconnell. And we do hereby declare that the Capital stock of the said Company shall be two thousand Dollars to be divided into one hundred shares at the price or sum of twenty dollars each And we the undersigned stockholders do hereby agree to take and accept the number of shares set by us opposite to our respective signatures and do hereby agree to pay the calls thereon according to the provisions of the said act and of the rules and regulations, resolutions and by laws of the said Company to be made or passed in that behalf and we do hereby nominate John Pearce, Peter Gow, John McKillop, Meredith Conn and James Black to be the First Directors of said company

Recorded in the County of Elgin Registry office as No 11 Joint Stock Co

Recorded the 4th day of June 1861 at two of the clock PM in Liber A for the Register of Joint Stock Companies Folio 26

J McKay Registrar Elgin

THE STOCK HOLDERS

The stockholders list was signed by each individual stock holder and certain names were difficult to read (As sometimes there was more than one person with same name residing in the Dunwich area, it is impossible to ascertain which person was actually the stock holder)

| Name | Stock Shares (\$20 each share) | Other Reference to Person |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|--|
| Allen George | 1 | Concession 9 Lot 7, 1861 Census farmer |
| Backus Andrew | 2 | Con 8 L 8 Cen farmer |
| Backus Robert | 1 | Con 9 L 13 Cen farmer |
| Backus Stephen Jr | 2 | Cen farmer |
| Barr Robert | 1 | Cen carpenter and joiner |
| Black James | 2 | Con 7 L 9 Cen farmer |
| Blackwood Georgina F. | 5 | lived Tyrconnell wife of James Blackwood . Local merchant |
| Blue Neil | 1 | Con 5 South of A, L 14 Cen farmer's son |
| Bobier William | 2 | Cen farm labourer |
| Brown John | 1 | Con 9 L 6 Cen farmer |
| Brown Robert | 1 | Con 11 L 19 Cen farmer |

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| Cameron Donald | 1 |
| Cameron Peter | 1 Cen blacksmith |
| Conn Atkinson | 1 Con 10 L 6 (tenant) Cen sawyer |
| Conn Meridith | 5 Con 10 L 14 Cen farmer |
| Crane Adam | 1 Con 12 L 16 Cen farmer |
| Crane Anthony | 2 Con 10 L 18 Cen farmer |
| Crane Peter | 1 Con 9 L 6 Cen farmer |
| Curtis Samuel | 2 Tyrconnell Globe Hotel Cen innkeeper |
| Gorme Thomas | 1 Cen wagon maker |
| Gow John | 1 Con 11 L 14 Cen farmer's son |
| Gow Peter | 5 Con 11 L 13 Cen farmer |
| Gow Robert | 3 Cen farmer |
| Grainger William | 1 Cen farmer |
| Gunn Donald A | 2 Con 7 L 4&5 Cen Daniel A, postmaster |
| Gunn Donald B | 1 (signed by same person as Donald A Gunn) Cen Daniel B., farmer |
| James Richard | 1 Cen carpenter |
| Kerr John | 1 Con Broken Front A L 6 Cen farmer |
| Liberty Henry | 2 Cen farmer |
| Liberty Septimus | 1 Cen labourer North West 1/4 of Lot 8 Con 8 |
| Matheson Donald | 1 Con 7 L 1 Cen farmers son |
| McBeath A | 2 Cen retired Hudson Bay business |
| McBrayen Daniel | 2 Wallacetown merchant Cen merchant |
| McColl Duncan T | 1 Con 7 L 17 Cen no occupation listed |
| McIntyre L. (Lazers)W | 2 Cen carpenter and joiner |
| McKellar Donald G | 1 Con 4 L 3 |
| McKillop Arch | 1 Con 6 L 21 Cen farmer |
| McKillop Archibald | 1 Con 6 L 21 or Con 7 L 15 Cen farmer |
| McKillop John | 2 Wallacetown Cen merchant and postmaster |
| McLaws David | 1 Cen Blacksmith (Wallacetown) |
| McLean Alexander | 1 Con 4 L 10 Cen farmer |
| McMillan Donald | 1 Con 3 L 13 Cen farmer |
| McPhail Alexander | 1 Cen farmer |
| McPherson Alexander | 1 Con 5 South of A L 12 Cen machinist |
| McPherson Peter | 1 Con 4 L 5 or Con 3 L 6 Cen farmer |
| McRae John | 1 Con 2 L 7 Cen farmer |
| McVannel John | 1 Con 3 L 7 Cen farmer |
| Michen Hugh | 1 |
| Mitchell Joseph | 2 Cen miller |
| Morden William | 1 Con 10 L 6 |
| Morris Robert | 2 Con 9 L 7 Cen carpenter (listed as Morish) |
| Morrish Richard | 1 Cen farmer |
| O'Brien John P. | 1 Cen carpenter |
| O'Neill Thomas | 1 Cen shoemaker |
| Page James | 1 Cen farmer |
| Parker Peter | 2 Con 10 L 16 Cen farmer |

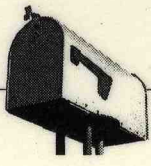
| | |
|-----------------|---|
| Parker James | 3 Con 10 L 16 Cen farmer |
| Paterson Neil | 1 Con 7 L 20 Cen farmer |
| Paton Robert | 1 Cen labourer |
| Pearce John | 4 Con 9 L 10 Cen farmer |
| Pearce Thomas | 1 Con 9 L 10 Cen farmer (census indexes as Pierce) |
| Rankin Donald | 1 Cen Innkeeper(indexed as Daniel) |
| Sanders John | 1 Con 11 L 24 Cen farmer |
| Scott Joseph | 2 Con 9 L 9 |
| Stevenson James | 1 Cen shoemaker and postmaster |
| Thomson Widow | 1 (Is this Ellen Thomson Cen farmer?) |
| Trothen William | 1 Con 9 L 4 (son of Richard) Cen farmer |
| Walters George | 1 Con 10 L 5 Cen farmer |
| Weldon Peter | 1 Likely Con 11 L 17 |
| Illegible | 1 |
| Total Shares | 105 |

References are

Location of person, Lot and Concession from 1864 Tremaine's Map of Elgin County

Dunwich Township unless noted

Census listings (Cen) are 1861 census listings Dunwich Township unless noted



Famed Stork Club brought top musicians to Port Stanley

Thousands would line up to dance the night away near Lake Erie in the mid-1900s

BY JUNE FLATH
Ontario Farmer staff

The music would drift out the open windows, mingle with the mist, then be carried out over Lake Erie on the summer breeze. The velvety strains of those big bands were enjoyed not only by those crammed onto the Pavilion dance floor but by those walking by on the boardwalk, sitting on near-by park benches and playing along the shore.

When the final stake was pounded into place completing the London and Port Stanley Railway, London and St. Thomas residents suddenly had a direct connection to the lakeside playground of Port Stanley and they took advantage of it.

The railway company set out to entertain and feed. They built a cafeteria, washrooms, an outdoor theatre, and a bath house which rented bathing suits and provided a place to change. Down the beach a casino opened and when they or the cafeteria hired a band and hosted a dance, it was obvious that the public enjoyed dancing. The L&PS Pavilion was built to accommodate the dance era.

Built by the Hyman Construction Company, \$85,000 was spent on the building and furnishings, and on July 29, 1926 the Vincent Lopez band direct from New York City's Ritz Carlton Hotel welcomed the 6,500 people willing to fork over the admission fee of 15 cents to be part of the opening night.

Entertainers at the Pavilion performed to capacity crowds for the entire first month. Open six nights a week, with free concerts on Sunday afternoon, the L&PS soon added more cars to the trains heading for the beach.

The two-storey Pavilion provided picnic shelter on the ground floor and a maple dance floor on the upper level. Each floor was 24,000 square feet. The second storey dance floor alone was over 13,000 square feet. There was a promenade around the dance floor for those who wished to watch or rest, as well as a balcony which seated 100 across from the bandstand.

Jitney dancing, a pay as you go form of entertainment, was offered throughout the 1920s and 1930s. While admission to the hall was 15 cents, the privilege of dancing cost another five cents



A typical evening crowd waiting to get in shortly after the club opened in 1926

per person. Once the band finished a musical number, the dance floor was cleared, the next piece was announced and ticket sales began for those who wanted to dance to the next number.

Dancing remained a popular event even during the depression and it was during the 1930s that CFPL radio brought the music of the L&PS Pavilion live to those at home. The depression years were difficult; name artists were expensive and difficult to book, the Canadian dollar dropped out of sight and performers had to be paid in American currency, but the Pavilion persevered and survived.

The year 1939 was the silver lining to the cloud of depression. It was the most successful season the ballroom was to have in the entire course of its history. Possibly because the depression had ended, or because the threatening war reminded people to grasp and enjoy what was before them, whatever the reason, people were in the mood for dancing and that year set attendance records that were never surpassed.

By the time the war years arrived, admission had risen to 85 cents, but Wednesday night crowds still ran over a thousand with Saturday evenings drawing in 2,500. The men of the armed forces stationed at Fingal and St. Thomas helped keep the Pavilion dance floor covered and the board walk activities thriving.

With the end of the war, came a name change. During the 1950s the L&PS Pavilion became the Stork Club, and a furnace was installed allowing the club to be open right through until New Year's Eve. In those years there were bands on Wednesday, Fri-

day and Saturday evenings. But, it was also during this decade that the London and Port Stanley railway passenger service was discontinued.

Over the course of its history, both local and professional bands attracted the crowds. Well known performers such as Charlie Spivak, Lionel Hampton, Benny Goodman, Count Basie, Glenn Miller, Buddy Morrow, Duke Ellington, Xavier Cugat, Louis Armstrong, Cab Calloway, Guy Lombardo and his Royal Canadians, and Johnny Downs graced the bandstand.

On July 27, 1955 Les Brown and his band brought the bunny hop to Port Stanley and the crowd of 2,000 formed long snaking lines that wound their way around the dance floor and up through the aisles, all participants stomping their feet in unison. The walls shook, but the supports held strong.

Ted Lewis, brought his revue of dancing girls, comedians, and

jugglers. He wore his top hat, performed a little soft shoe, played his clarinet and asked the familiar, "Is everybody happy?"

Author and Port Stanley historian, Frank Prothero remembers the first time he attended the Stork Club in 1953. He had been working as a caddy at the St. Thomas Golf and Country Club on a rainy day in August 1953 when along came three golfers.

One of the men was Ted Lewis. At the end of the game after receiving a generous tip, Prothero decided to return the patronage and went to the Stork Club.

The growing popularity of television, and the mobility offered by automobile brought about a change in lifestyle. Port Stanley now not only had to compete with resorts that were further away, but television pushed salaries of top performers out of the reach of dance hall audiences.

The Club was beginning to falter financially in the 1960s and

so a new approach was taken. The building began to be used to cater to annual meetings, banquets, factory and office Christmas parties and service clubs and, to add to the instability, London put the building and its 27 acres up for tender.

Under new management, this Port Stanley institution faltered and fell. The Elgin County Health Unit stepped in and closed the doors.

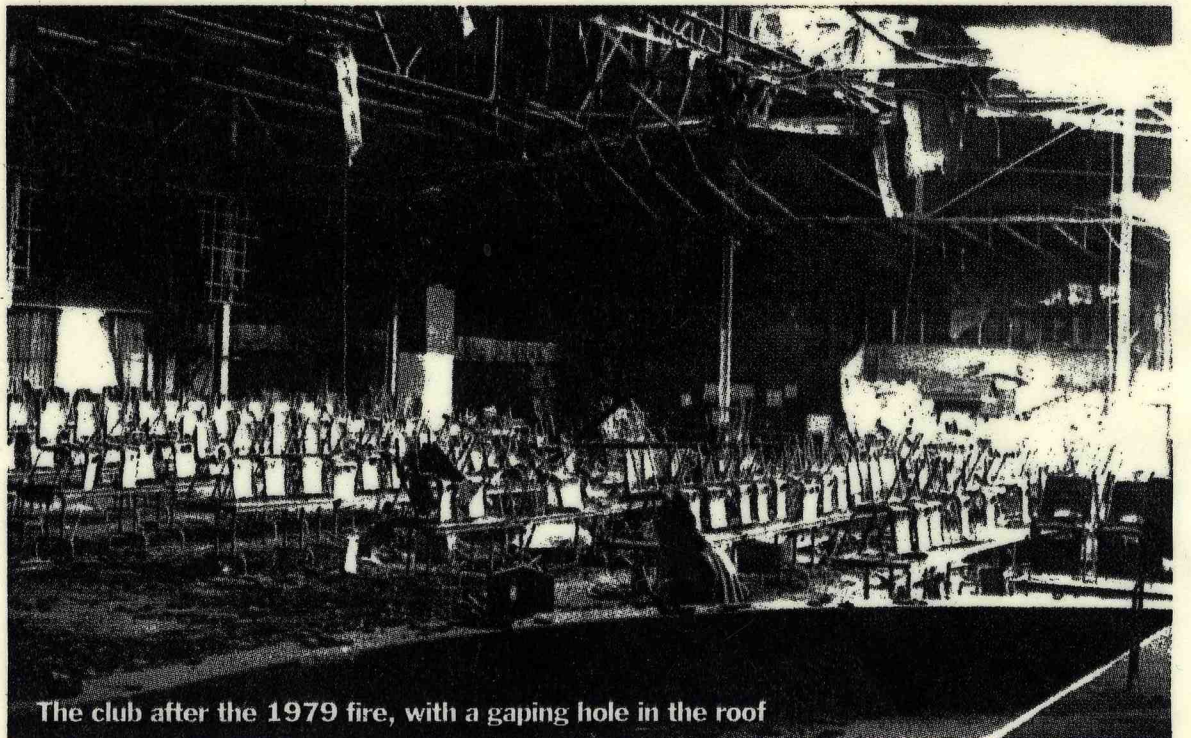
The property was then purchased by Joe McManus who began restoring the building to its former glory with a new roof, siding, wiring, plumbing, washrooms, carpeting, drapes, bar facilities and new sound system. Everything was cleaned and painted.

The Stork Club reopened June 24, 1974 for the village centennial. The ballroom was restored to memory and filled to capacity. Harry James was on the bandstand and it was like old times. But it wasn't old times and over the next two years the club began to again lose money.

In 1978 in an unknown, but final tribute to an era, the bands of Les Elgart, Glenn Miller and Guy Lombardo performed.

Then, mid January 1979, a late night fire that started in an outside garbage container ended the chapter of the Stork Club once and for all. The fire left over one quarter of the building in ruins with a gaping hole in the roof.

Repairs were too costly to consider and the salvageable materials from this historic hall were sold to John Walker of Walker Farms, Aylmer. Owners of a livestock auction business, they used the materials from the Stork Club to construct a livestock barn. The building that had once brought a taste of New York and Hollywood to southwestern Ontario was gone.



The club after the 1979 fire, with a gaping hole in the roof