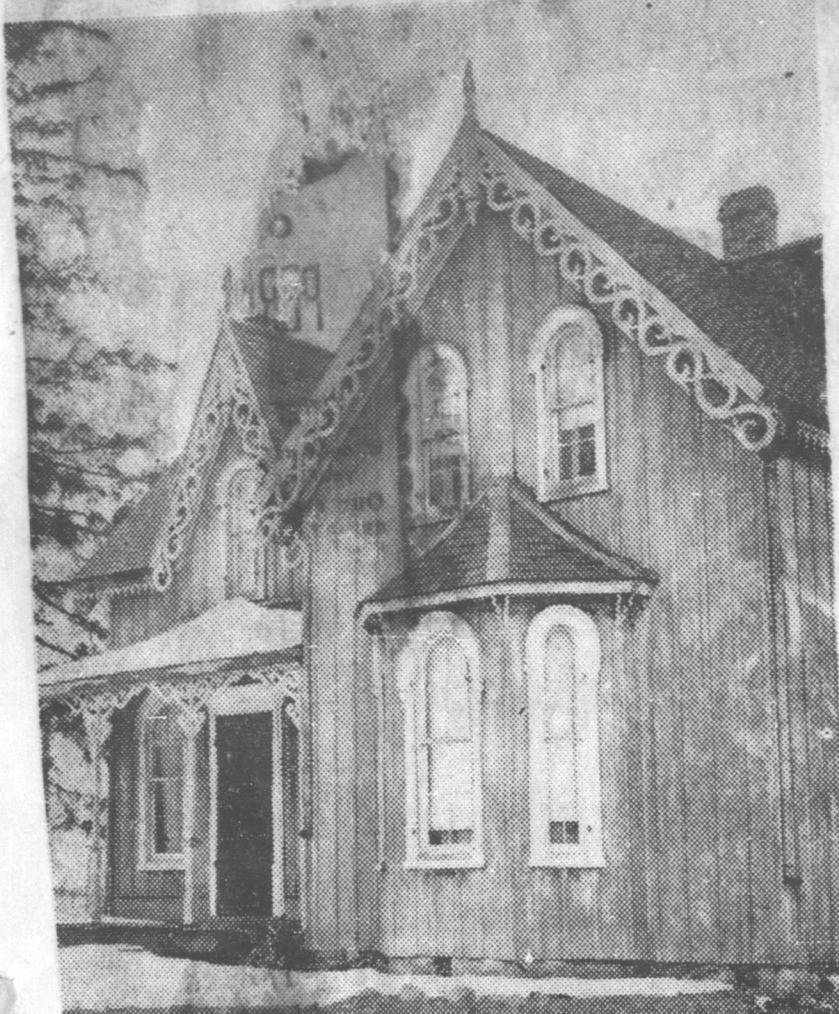


Erie Sprawled Out In Two Directions Never Became Hamlet, Village or Town

By Robert J. Hanley



Fine carpentry, carving identify homesteads.



Montague home was once area's post office.



Along an old stage coach road which has become a tourist highway, is the place called Erie. Officially, it never got to be a village or a town because its township office, hotel, race track and farm homes were scattered along two-and-a-half miles between a Roman Catholic Church at one end, and a Presbyterian Church and an Orange Hall at the other end. Because it was widely strewn, rather than compacted, it never earned identity in the provincial gazette.

Five-mile Boardwalk

But this little place not far from Jarvis is important for its association with a five-mile boardwalk, the negro work party under Col. Talbot which laid the first rough roads from Detroit to York, football and baseball teams and that Man o' War of the harness tracks — the famed Dan Patch.

The men of Erie district still have a lot of things to talk about — trotting horses, dairy cattle, 'coon dogs, the price of eggs, the quality of hay and the cycle of fish catching in Lake Erie, seven miles away. But politically and commercially they have had to surrender their entity to Jarvis, at the intersection of Highways No. 6 and No. 3, and to Nelles Corners, beyond the other end of what should have been Erie.

"Annexed" Into Oblivion

You might say of Erie that by sprawling in both directions along the old stage coach road and by assuming wider boundaries, it actually "annexed" itself right out of a name.

Tom Wright, whose father played for the old Erie football team against Jarvis, Cayuga, Hagersville, York and "The Gore" and another veteran member of the community, Sandfort Fleming, are contributors to this sketch of Erie. Mr. Fleming's historic family homestead was chopped out of the wilderness in 1840 by Joseph Berry, who drove a team of oxen up from Michigan. The present dwelling, completed in 1849, is the oldest in the district.

The two churches are especially important for their quiet churchyards, rich in the old names of the district.

Record Of Old Names

Chalmers Presbyterian (stone) Church, erected in 1833, is surrounded by stones bearing the names Rutherford, Kerr, Donnelly, Keen, Graham, Mowat, Nixon, McMurchy, Porter, Falls, Laidlaw, Clark and others. Its ministers' names have been: Bethune, McCrobie, Maquire, Wells, McClellan, Buchanan, McCrimmon, Hare, Brown, Evans, Fuller and Gillespie.

St. Ann's Roman Catholic Church, built a year later, is surrounded by stones bearing the names: Brennan, McCarthy, Heenan, Sullivan, Brick, Higgins, O'Hara, Devine, Lynch, McSorley, Cavanaugh and Murphy. Its pastors' names have been: Lynch, Gohl, Cleary,

Lessie, Shea, Bardour, Traynor, Harris, Ryan and Bodendistel.

Highway In '21

Erie begins about four miles beyond Jarvis on Highway No. 3. The churches which mark its limits are located near the Sandusk and Cheapside Roads. The old stage coach road, now a speedway for tourists and others, became a provincial highway in 1921.

Brick for St. Ann's Church at the Jarvis end was drawn from Port Dover. Stone for Chalmers Church at the other end was drawn from "The Gore." The property for St. Ann's was donated by Cornelius Devine whose great grandson, William Addison, lives on the original farm.

A little farther down the road is the farm home of Allan Thompson, which once was the Thompson Hotel. To the west (Jarvis side) was the old race track and site of the Walpole Fair in the days of the trim colt, Dan Patch. To the east (Nelles Corner side) was the Walpole Township offices, since removed to Jarvis.

All Time Great

Just a word here about the revered Dan, one of the great pacing horses of all time. Al- though he was born and raised in the Erie district he was sold away as a colt.

At Memphis in 1904 he did the mile in 1:56. A Minneapolis man bought him for \$50,000 and Dan turned in 1:55 1/4 for the mile, a record that was to stand for 34 years.

He was perhaps the most glamorous performer in the story of harness racing and millions came to see his exhibitions across United States. His estimated earnings were \$3,000,000 — the most recorded for any standard bred.

Long after old Dan was gone, another great harness horse, Billy Direct, with Vic Fleming, of Dundas, in the sulky, turned in a mile at 1:55 — the record which stands today.

Former Post Office

Half a mile beyond the old Erie track is the home of Leo Montague, a post office in the days of twice-weekly delivery, often by horseback. The home of Walter Willis, was once used also for reception of the mails. William Widdis' blacksmith shop was farther along on the Amos Porter property. I son, Dr. John Widdis, is now retired and living in Hamilton.

HALDIMAND COUNTY

This County is situated in Southern Ontario and extends northward from Lake Erie. It is bounded on the west by Norfolk County, on the north by the counties of Brant and Wentworth and on the east by the counties of Lincoln and Welland. It has an area of 306,780 acres. It is divided into ten townships, Walpole, Rainham, Oneida, Seneca, North Cayuga, South Cayuga, Dunn, Canboro, Moulton and Sherbrooke. The soil is mainly a heavy clay and has been cleared almost completely, there remaining less wooded area than in any county in the province.

Originally the greater part of this area was granted by Governor Haldimand in 1784 to Mohawk Loyalist. Chief Brant's friends, the Butler Rangers settled on the banks of the Grand River and were given 999 year leases. Among the early settlers were the Nelles, Young and John Huff in the north and John Dochstater in the south. A sale of 20,000 acres was made to and American named Canby at a price of one dollar an acre. Lord Selkirk bought a part of Moulton township in 1840.

The county had been opened to white settlers in 1832 and these settlers had to be self sustaining. They dressed in home spun that was dyed from dyes made from hickory bark. The first mill was erected at Canboro. The Indians were good neighbors if treated fairly, but were revengeful, if mistreated. A man named Clinch from Niagara, while driving from Niagara to the home of John Dochstater was robbed of keg of rum and during the robbery, he shot and wounded two Indians. On arrival at Dochstater's, the latter knowing that there would be trouble, appealed to Chief Brant for aid. Two hundred warriors were sent to save Clinch.

In 1833 the Grand River Navigation Company was formed to develop the river from Lake Erie to Brantford, by a system of canals and locks. In this year, David Thompson built a mill at Indiana. Most of these early settlements have been forgotten, but they bore such colorful names as Bear's Foot Village and Little Buffalo.

The townships of Walpole and Rainham were originally part of Norfolk County and were settled about 1791. Among the first to come were the Hoovers, a Swiss family from Pennsylvania. They settled near Selkirk. Some of these early settlers were discouraged by the hard primitive life and soon returned to the States.

During the war of 1812-14, a band of men in Walpole helped the invaders and had their headquarters on the Nanticoke River. They raided their loyalist neighbours and killed Captain Francis. A company of militia drove them out and captured two of the rebels. One was named Peacock, after whom Peacock's Point was named. These men were taken to Burlington and were tried and executed.

- kneeling
d. Smuck
ret Church
a. Miller
w R. Bailey
Bartlett

Elizabeth Church
Bartlett.

St. Porter.