



Reflections

Newsletter of the Marsh Historical Collection
Amherstburg, Ontario



Volume 18 Issue 1

Fall 2024

ISSN 1913-8660

Collection Highlights

By Kara Folkeringa

Included in the original collection of materials compiled by the Marsh family are letters from soldiers from Amherstburg serving overseas in the Second World War. These letters are written to town council, in thanks for identification disc bracelets (dog tags) that were being sent to Amherstburg men in service.

Throughout the war, packages and mail were treasured as it was a grounding force connecting soldiers to friends and family. As such, these tags held deep sentimental value for the soldiers as a reminder of Amherstburg and the people within.

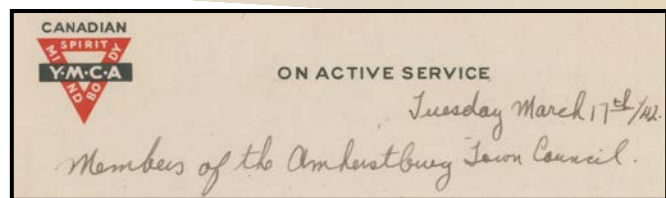
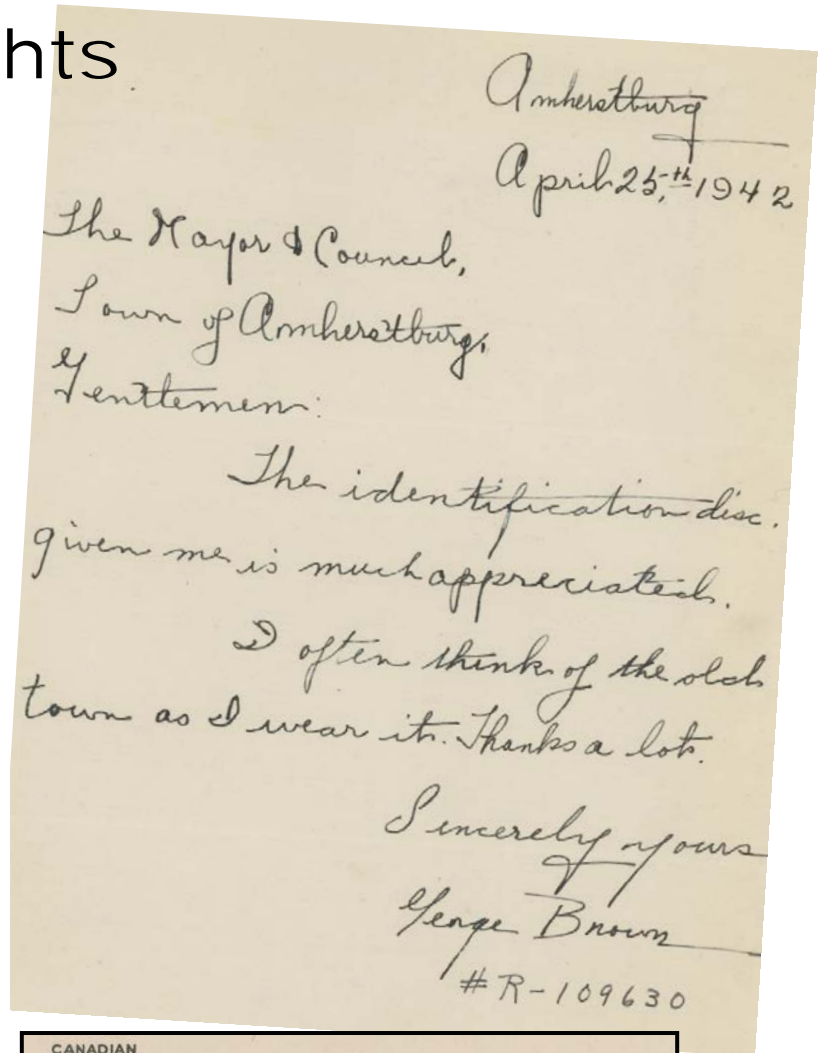
Some excerpts of these letters include:

"I shall always wear this very appropriate gift both for its attractiveness and to remind me of the swell little town in which I am happy to call 'home.'" – Flight Sergeant Arthur Williams (1993.168.004)

"It certainly does give a soldier a feeling of comfort and gratitude to know one thing, and that fact that he has not been forgotten cannot be over-emphasized." – Sergeant Julian Kopacz (1993.168.013)

"It is more than a mere silver ornament to me. It is a small piece of Amherstburg which I shall keep with me." – Lieutenant G. Hayward Jones (1993.168.020)

These thank you letters span several years, indicating the town continued to send out the tags throughout the war. More community groups contributed discs as well – an article in *The Windsor Star* from June 19, 1940 notes the Legion in Amherstburg had sent some out. All in all, townfolk were always doing their best to reach their boys overseas, whether it was through discs, smokes, letters, or other forms of correspondence.



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HAPPENINGS AT THE MARSH

ON THROUGH SEPTEMBER 27TH

Ben Lapierre Exhibit & Silent Auction



On exhibit now is a local photographer's work capturing everyday life in Amherstburg. Ben Lapierre (1866-1911) was unique not only for his subject matter, but also for the inventive processes he used. Lapierre's photographs, equipment, and paintings are on display, as well as some information about his life and innovative work.

OCTOBER 1ST through 31ST

Vincent Price in Amherstburg



Did you know that Vincent Price, an actor best-known for his work in horror films, has an Amherstburg connection? This spooky season, come in to learn more about the actor's time spent in town.

MONTHLY TRIVIA NIGHT BEGINS

We will be hosting trivia night once a month at Shooter's Roadhouse. Each month will feature a different theme so watch for a topic that interests you!

Contact Meg to register a team:
 \$25/team (maximum 5 players per team)
 Registration is for a single game night

THIS MONTH:



What's In the Collection?

The Marsh Collection Society mandate is "to collect, preserve and encourage research into the heritage of Amherstburg and the lower Detroit River district."

The facility contains a large collection of photos, books, genealogical records, maps and reference files on a variety of historical topics, plus microfilm of The Amherstburg Echo from 1874 to 2012. There is also a small gift shop which contains various publications about local history.

Funding comes from various foundations and private individuals. While **ADMISSION IS FREE**, donations are most welcome. A receipt for income tax purposes will be issued upon request for any monetary donation of \$10 or more.

The Marsh Collection is open to researchers & visitors from 10am to 4pm Tuesday- Friday. (Mondays by appointment only)
 Email: research@marshcollection.org
 Website: www.marshcollection.org

THANK YOU TO OUR DONORS

If you enjoy reading our newsletter please consider making a donation through our website:
<https://www.marshcollection.org/donate/>



HERITAGE PASSPORT

Congratulations to Khafid for winning the Heritage Passport Program this summer!
 Thank you to everyone who participated.



Bricks-n-Beams

20 Laird Avenue North

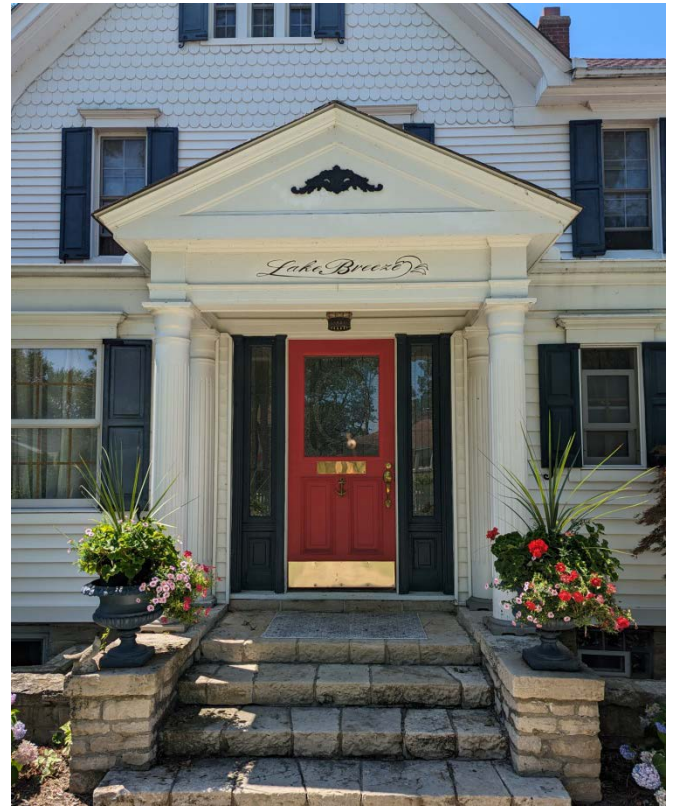
By Meg Reiner

When Mike Marontate came back to his hometown in 1998, he purchased a beautiful home on the riverfront at the north end of Amherstburg. Since that time, the historic building has been a labour of love for Mike and his wife Cathy, who have put 26 years of work into the structure. Named the “Lake Breeze” by the Marontates, the home pays homage to an excursion steamer once owned by Captain Jacques Laframboise, Mike Marontate’s great grandfather. The *Lake Breeze* met her end in Leamington, suffering a disastrous fire in 1878.

This home is deeply intertwined with one of the most significant enterprises to ever come to Amherstburg. Andrew H. Green, vice-president of the Solvay Process Company and manager of the soda ash production facility in Detroit vacationed in Amherstburg. While here, Rev. Thomas Nattress made him aware of the abundance of locally available ingredients key to soda ash production. Soon after the company began purchasing the limestone quarries in Anderdon Township. Thomas W. Bellhouse became the first manager of the quarries. He was known locally as T.W.B., and is remembered as having a large personality. When he arrived in town, he first lived in the McGregor House on the grounds of old Fort Malden before a new home was constructed for company managers by the Solvay Process Co.



View from the rear yard, circa 1930.
MCS P2433

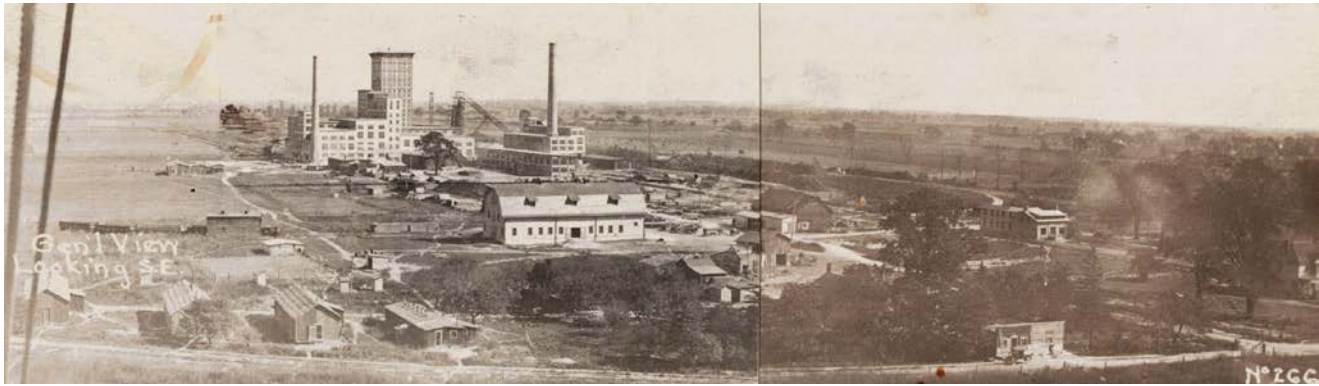


Front Entrance, present-day.

James Wilderspin, prominent local builder, was hired to construct the residence in 1905. The Solvay Process Company’s architect drew up the plans, which were executed with precision by Wilderspin. An article in *The Amherstburg Echo* titled “A Fine Modern Residence” provides a detailed description of the structure. The house included a full basement with vegetable cellar and laundry. On the first floor were a hall, library, parlour, dining room, kitchen and pantry, including two fireplaces. The second floor included a hall and four bedrooms and a bathroom. The house used a gravity-fed water system. A large water tank in the attic was supplied by force pump from a cement cistern on the north side of the house. Apart from the kitchen, each room was heated with hot water radiators.

Upon completion, T.W.B. wrote a letter on behalf of the Solvay Process Co., attesting the “exceedingly good and honest work” by Wilderspin. T.W.B. rode his chestnut riding horse between his new, impressive home and the quarry each day. In 1907, he landscaped the property with fifty elm trees. Three years later, Bellhouse left the company and relocated to Chicago. Bellhouse was the first of many managers to occupy the Laird Avenue home during their time in Amherstburg.

Continued on page 4...



View of Brunner, Mond Plant looking southeast in 1918.

In the early days, material harvested from the quarry was being shipped to the facility in Delray (Detroit). Efforts were soon made to locate a soda ash production plant in town. By 1917, construction was underway on the Brunner, Mond Canada Ltd. plant. This was the name given to the Solvay Co. in Canada. C.S. Glenn, resident engineer, was originally supposed to occupy the Bellhouse place. In March of 1917, he made extensive repairs and improvements to the residence. But in April, he suffered from blood poisoning from "paring a corn too close" and had to have his toe amputated. This meant he was off indefinitely and by June, a new executive was moving in to the home.

Gordon S. Rutherford was the resident manager who led the plant building project, moving into the riverfront home along with wife, two sons, and his furniture from Kansas. Under Mr. Rutherford, the first shipment of soda ash left the plant in 1919, and filtered water became a reality for Amherstburg residents.

G. Norwood Comly took over as manager in November of 1919. During his time, company houses were built for employees and their families on Brunner Avenue, and the Brunner Mond Club was constructed on Richmond Street. Don O. Yeoman succeeded Comly

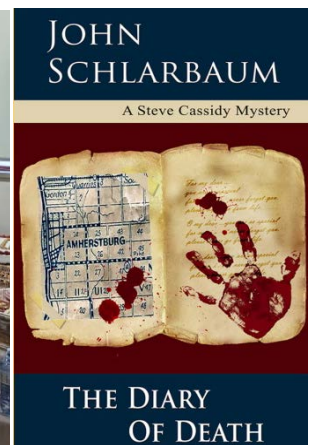
and Fred Nill, of Syracuse, replaced Yeoman in 1930.

The MacFetridge family moved to the home from Syracuse, N.Y., in July of 1934. Clyde MacFetridge remained superintendant at the plant until 1943. Next was Richard G. Zimmer, who was manager of the plant during the first strike which lasted 90 days in 1946. Burt Hoag and family lived at the Laird Avenue residence while he was manager from 1947-1954. The next managers at the plant were Angus W. Cameron, William Y. Lobdell, G. Bostwick, W. Dickie, and W. Bobeck. Under Lobdell, the plant was transferred to Allied Chemical Canada Ltd. in 1958. The last plant manager to live at the residence was Barend "Ben" Manschot. Allied Chemical Canada Ltd. sold the property to the Manschots in 1974. At the time, this included both Lots 14 and 15, better described as the entire northwest corner of Alma and Laird Avenue. This was a large and beautiful parcel, complete with gardens, tennis courts, and stately residence. The following year the land was subdivided and the former Brunner Mond Company house has remained a private home ever since.

If anyone has stories, photos, or information they would like to share about the house, please get in touch with the Marontates at cathy.marontate@gmail.com

Book Launch

We hosted the launch of local author John Schlarbaum's new book *The Diary of Death* which is set in Amherstburg and features The Marsh Collection Society. The book is available in our gift shop for \$15.



UPSETTING THE HOUR GLASS

1934

September- A concerted effort is being made by the municipalities of Anderdon, Malden, and Amherstburg to have the old hulls of ships removed from Callam's Bay by the Dominion Government, and this beautiful bay transformed into a bathing beach.

October- The construction of the third cofferdam of the Livingstone Channel, has been completed by the Dunbar & Sullivan Company. Gaps have been left so that boats may pass through the channel until the dredging commences.

November- Amherstburg is the most poorly lighted town in Ontario in comparison with its population, according to the annual report of the Ontario Hydro Electric Commission. There are 125 street lights for a population of 3,056.

1944

September- Crap shooting on streets must stop, Mayor N.A. Marra tells his council. In spite of the fact that Police Chairman R.E. Golden told council members little could be done to stop crap shooting on the streets of Amherstburg. Mayor N.A. Marra state emphatically, "there is no reason for me to believe we can't stop this practice, I'll take the matter up with the chief and will put a stop to it."

October- On Monday evening a milestone was reached in the history of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, when the mortgage, which was paid in full, was burned.

November- George Simmons, proprietor of Amherst Cleaners, announced Tuesday that he will build an open air dancing pavilion in Amherstburg early in the new year.

1954

September- Bellevue Veterans' Home in Amherstburg will be closed on September 30 according to an announcement made Tuesday. The patients were moved to Western Counties Lodge at Westminster. The closing came as a surprise to the people of this district.

October- A two-room addition will be constructed to St. John the Baptist Intermediate School, Brock Street. The Separate School Board has decided to go ahead with this work to take care of the increasing number of pupils.

November- The auto carriers were the only ships that moved through the fog that set in over the Lower Detroit River at 12:15 a.m. on Friday morning and did not lift for 14 hours. It was 2 p.m. that afternoon before I.T. Kelly, keeper of the Livingstone Channel Lighthouse, turned off the fog siren on that station.

1964

September- The joint operation of Rose Hill and St. John the Baptist Roman Catholic Cemeteries under one board began on September first. A by-law allowing this action was recently passed by the town council, it was approved by the department of health and the Roman Catholic Church. The fence between the two cemeteries has been taken down and a

service road joining them has been constructed.

October- The United States Corps of Army Engineers dredge *Colonel D. D. Galliard* is working out of Amherstburg taking out the high spots at the bottom of the Southeast Shoal Channel. She comes into port over the weekend and when bad weather hits.

November- A permanent road is being constructed on Ramsay Street between Murray and Gore Streets. This is part of the long range construction program of the board of works. Marentette Brothers holds the contract.

1974

September- Western Secondary students buy bus. Two years of planning, determination, and hard work does pay dividends. Students of Western Secondary School accepted delivery of their new 42 passenger bus on September 12th.

October- The foundation and ashes of a barrack and administration stores building, burned when the British retreated from Fort Malden in 1813, were uncovered last week when workmen were excavating around the main museum building to repair the foundation walls and construct a foundation drain.

November- On the occasion of the 100th birthday of the Echo, Don Paterson M.P.P. Essex South, on behalf of William G. Davis, the Premier of Ontario, presented John and Helen Marsh with a commemorative scroll.

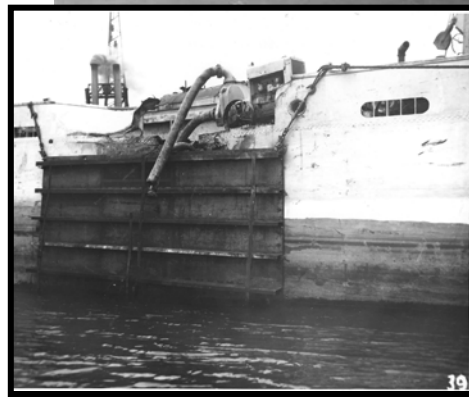


The Salvage of the M/V WALLSHIFF (Part II)

By Al Jackson

In the previous issue of "Reflections" the journey of the small German motor vessel WALLSHIFF on her maiden voyage into the Great Lakes was taking shape but this voyage ended abruptly when it was in a collision with the larger lake freighter PONTIAC. The incident occurred on the night of October 2, 1953 in the narrow part of the St. Clair River under the Bluewater Bridge connecting Sarnia, Ontario and Port Huron, Michigan. The PONTIAC was slightly damaged and the U.S. Coastguard, after an inspection, allowed her to continue downbound to an Ohio shipyard for unloading and necessary repair work. The WALLSHIFF on the other hand was not so lucky. She suffered a large hole amidship in her port side allowing the little vessel to quickly fill with water once the two ships separated. The swift current carried the WALLSHIFF downstream on the Canadian side of the shipping channel until she sank to the river bottom in an upright position in fifty feet of water.

Authorities on both sides of the river agreed that the WALLSHIFF was "a menace to navigation" and that the ship should be removed as soon as possible. A salvage contract was awarded to Captain J. E. McQueen of Amherstburg on October 22, 1953 for an undisclosed amount after he estimated that his company could refloat the vessel before the winter freeze-up. McQueen assembled his salvage equipment consisting of tugs ATOMIC and PATRICIA McQUEEN, lighters T.F. NEWMAN and ACCOMODATION, and



dredge COMMANDER J. E. He employed sixty men including three hard hat divers for this job.

The first step for this job was to have the divers relocate the ship's cargo booms out of the way and remove the hatch covers so that the cargo of steel sheets (325 tons) could be hoisted up onto the lighters in one ton bundles. This dangerous and exhausting underwater work took ten days to complete. On the Canadian shoreline McQueen workers embedded "ground tackle" consisting of a large marine winch, pulleys and long 3" steel cables that were strung out and attached to the bow of the sunken vessel.

Once the cargo was removed and stored on the American shore, the ground tackle was used to pull the ship very slowly towards the



shallower water on the Canadian side of the river. Compressed air was forced into the ballast tanks on either side of the submerged ship to help make her more buoyant and continuously adjusted to keep her on an even keel while being drug up the sloping contour of the riverbed.

When the ship finally reached shallow water a large temporary patch (collision mat) was placed over the hole in her port side and pumping began to dewater the hull. After six weeks since the salvage began the WALLSHIFF was finally refloated and the tug ATOMIC towed her to a shipyard in Detroit for more permanent repairs.

The only mishap during the whole salvage operation happened when Capt. Angus Morrison suffered a broken leg after slipping on the icy deck of the tug PATRICIA McQUEEN. *Continued on page 7...*

Image at top right: The Wallshiff, T.F. Newman and Patricia McQueen/ Father Edward J. Dowling Photo, Courtesy Marine Historical Society of Detroit. Smaller image: Wallshiff patch, photographer unknown, author's collection.

The Wallshiff Part II

By Al Jackson



WALLSCHIFF @ Amherstburg DOT dock/ *Father Edward J. Dowling Photo, Courtesy Marine Historical Society of Detroit.*

...Continued from page 6

During her stay at the shipyard in Detroit the Seaway closed for the shipping season which meant that the saltie would be trapped in the Great Lakes until spring. Once released from the shipyard on January 12, 1954 the two McQueen tugs towed her downstream to the Department of Transport dock in Amherstburg where McQueen workers added more “stiffeners” to her hull in an effort to make her ready for the long tow back to Germany.

On April 22, 1954 the tug HELENA picked up the WALLSHIFF at Amherstburg and towed her to Montreal where a powerful ocean going Dutch tug took over for the 3,500 mile tow back to Germany. Once refurbished the little saltwater vessel went back into service with new owners and a new name. The little vessel continued to trade on the oceans of the world for many years until she was blown ashore on one of the many Indonesian islands by the third largest typhoon in the history of the south Pacific. The location of her final disposition is unclear but it can be assumed that this little motor vessel had a very adventurous life that included a short stay in our town of Amherstburg.

Then & Now



Circa 1940s MCS PC355



Present-Day: September 17, 2024

Dalhousie Street Looking North From Murray

In the postcard image on the left, the Lakeview Hotel occupies the space at the foot of Murray Street. The Lakeview suffered a fire in 1976 and the site is now the location of the historic Gordon House (Amherstburg’s Visitor Information Centre). Gordon House was moved there from its original location further south on Dalhousie Street in 1987. The building on the east side of the street, now home to Artisan Grill, was built in 1867 as the Horsman House.

Life During the Second World War in Amherstburg

By Angelika Klich

When topics of World War II get brought up in a conversation, many flock towards common subjects such as soldiers carrying pounds of material, barbed-wired trenches, and bursts of ammunition. Rarely is it that the stakes of common life spring up within conversations, with questions such as: "How did regular people live during the war?" While many of this generation assume that life during the war wasn't so different, the war drastically impacted daily life. On the home front of Amherstburg, life had changed and new challenges emerged.

One of the most important shifts of war, which echoed in places all around the world, was in the economy. The idea that Canada did not face challenges during the war as they were not an active conflict area was not true. Like many other countries, Canada had to face financial and labour requirements of war, often placing the focus of the economy away from the public. The effects of the war were intensely felt within the Amherstburg area, with a reduction in the working population as so many men were overseas. This involved long work hours, often night shifts well into midnight. Necessities became unavailable with a reduced amount of foods and resources such as silk, and even linens on a scarce list. Clothes often lacked elastics to hold them up, and materials such as nylons were rare, causing many women to paint their legs to mimic them. On top of this, the government implemented a coupon system for food, allowing families to buy only specific amounts of goods depending on their family sizes. In

her column, *Conversation Pieces*, Helen Marsh wrote about the government urging women to "forego their customary tea and cookies at afternoon and evening social gatherings."

While the economic crisis had dawned on the people of the Amherstburg area, social gatherings and parties became scarce. People often began finding joy in more private tasks. Libraries became a hotspot for individuals during the war. Time was spent writing letters, checking casualty lists, and pinning newspapers on the wall to understand where soldiers were fighting. There were significantly more women than men in town during the war, and they were doing their part from home. Many joined the Amherstburg branch of the Canadian Red Cross and took part in the organization of blood donor clinics, among other war-related tasks.

On top of these events, charity drives for soldiers were happening often. A popular push was the "Smokes for Soldiers" fund, raising money for cigarettes for local boys serving overseas. Many of the "Smokes for Soldiers" initiatives were sponsored by local organizations, such as the Amherstburg Chamber of Commerce. Examples of the "Smokes for Soldiers" fund events include a moonlight excursion on the steamer *Roosevelt* held on August 14, 1942, and a band tattoo held September 17, 1942. The band tattoo brought hundreds of people from both sides of the border to watch the parade and performances. One hundred



percent of ticket proceeds were allocated to the "Smokes for Soldiers" fund, in addition to donations collected at the event. As a result of these fundraisers, local boys were able to receive hundreds of smokes each month. *The Amherstburg Echo* would publish thank you letters received from the soldiers for the monthly cigarette donations.

One of the most critical aspects of daily life, and the most well-known throughout history, is the mass movement of people during the war. Throughout the various waves of soldiers leaving and returning to the area, war brides arrived as well. War brides stemmed from the engagement/marriage of local soldiers while overseas. Often, upon arrival, war brides spoke of the differences of the area, but the welcoming nature of the people here. A large population shift happened when soldiers returned home at the conclusion of war. Often, these soldiers arrived at the train stations, greeted by family members. The devastating reality for many who spent the war in Amherstburg, was that their loved ones did not return.

Angelika is studying history at the University of Windsor. She has been volunteering at the Marsh since November of 2023.

Images at top right: John Marsh's wartime ration book (1995.014.001)
Ad in *The Amherstburg Echo* March 21, 1941