



Reflections



Newsletter of the Marsh Historical Collection
Amherstburg, Ontario

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Calvert Distillery Explosion & Fire (Part I)

By Al Jackson

At 8:25 p.m. on Tuesday August 15th, 1950 the residents of Amherstburg and surrounding area were shaken by a huge explosion and spectacular fire that destroyed the distilling building at Calvert Distillers (Canada) Ltd. in the northwest end of town. The explosion could be heard on both sides of the Detroit River and as far as seven miles away. The roof of the eight-story distillation building was blown off and flaming debris sent skyward. Some people thought a ship had exploded in the river and others thought an atomic bomb had been dropped. Company officials speculated that an accumulation of grain dust in the grain elevator had ignited through spontaneous combustion and this blast set off chain reaction explosions in the four large alcohol filled rectifiers which were used to change the alcohol content from a lower to a higher proof whiskey.



The Calvert distillery building in flames. Photograph by Les Hudson.

In 1942 a previous fire in the upper levels of the distillation building was not as extensive as this fire but managed to destroy 13,400 bushels of grain (10,000 bushels of corn, 1,400 bushels of malt and 2,000 bushels of rye). This fire caused major damage to the distillery machinery, fourth floor mill room and weigh scales but within six weeks the \$50,000 damage was repaired.

The Amherstburg volunteer fire department arrived within minutes but there was no hope of saving the distillation building. Tons of water was used to hose down the warehouse buildings but the immense heat caused the south wall of 2-C warehouse to buckle allowing forty barrels of aging whiskey to roll out onto the ground about 200 feet from the still. Thankfully these barrels remained intact.

Continued on page 3...

Distillery Building Of Calvert Distillers Limited Destroyed By Blast, Fire

Blast Followed By Flames—Whole Plant Threatened

Fine Work Done By Firemen

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The Amherstburg Echo
August, 1950

HAPPENINGS AT THE MARSH

EXHIBIT ON THROUGH DECEMBER 31ST

Marsh Historical Collection

150 YEARS OF THE AMHERSTBURG ECHO

A New Display is on now to Commemorate the 150-Year Anniversary

Founded in 1874 by newspapermen William D. Balfour and John Auld, *The Echo* began as a four-page, \$1.50-per-year weekly paper, capturing the essence of Amherstburg life, from major national headlines to local stories like Fort Malden's repurposing. Despite ending publication in 2012, it remains one of the town's richest historical records. Visit us for a special display honouring this iconic newspaper's legacy!



Open Tuesday to Friday 10-4

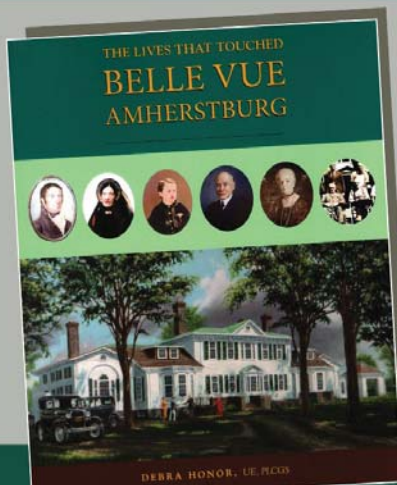
Free Admission

80 Richmond Street

BOOK LAUNCH

There was an overwhelming turnout at the book launch held on November 17th for Debra Honor's new book: *The Lives That Touched Belle Vue*. Thank you to everyone who came out that night! We will host a second signing on Saturday, December 14th, from 1pm-3pm. Copies are available for purchase at our office for \$20.

NEW BOOK



AUTHOR
DEBRA
HONOR
UE, PLCGS

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/>



*Happy Holidays from
the Marsh Collection!*

We will be
closed
beginning
December 24th
and will
reopen
January 7th.



Calvert Distillery Explosion & Fire

By Al Jackson

...Continued from Page 1

Assisting the town fire brigade (many of whom were Calvert employees) were volunteer firefighters from Anderdon and Malden townships along with a large pumper truck from Windsor. Extra O.P.P. police officers were called in from the Essex detachment to control the crowd of onlookers who seemed unaware of the immediate danger that they were in and to keep traffic moving along Sandwich Street. The firefighters fought the blaze for nearly two hours until it was brought under control at two o'clock that morning. Some town firemen stayed on during the day to put out small fires that continued to break out in the smouldering ruins.

The still house had been on redistillation that evening making the loss of aging whiskey even higher. 1,457 gallons of aged whiskey was lost along with 17,327 gallons of recent production and 757 gallons of fusel oil. The total loss and damage were estimated at around a million dollars. The distillation unit, the mill room, fermenting room, cooker room, and laboratory were assessed as total constructive losses by the insurance company but company officials stated that all undamaged portions of the plant would remain in operation which included the warehouses and bottling lines.

A contract was awarded to a Windsor company for the demolition of the distillation building but they were unable to do the work due to technical difficulties. The contract was then given to McQueen Marine of Amherstburg. During the demo and cleanup, a McQueen employee was heard to say that this was the best job he had ever had with McQueen as he didn't have to stop after work for a refreshing beverage at his favourite tavern since ample refreshments could be found at the worksite during the day.

To be continued in the next edition of *Reflections*.



View of the distillery building following the fire.

Photograph by Les Hudson.



Detail of the damage.

Photograph by Les Hudson.



Ruins of the distillery building.

Photograph by Les Hudson.

UPSETTING THE HOUR GLASS

1934/35

December- The first ice of the season came down the river on Monday and made marine traffic difficult. Although compared with last year the formation of ice in the river is much earlier, it is not beyond the average.

January- The farthest south detachment of R.C.M.P. is at Amherstburg, opened in 1932 when they took over the duties of the excise preventive service which was formerly carried on by the customs officers.

February- People on the Pike were interested in seeing the old top of the Stancliff & French delivery motor truck being carried out on a wagon by some farmer who had bought it and was evidently planning when he gets it set up to give a sleigh ride party to a lot of his friends. It would be an excellent place to snuggle in and sing while travelling up and down the icy roads.

1944/45

December- Season's Greetings to the Chamber of Commerce and the townspeople, and sincere thanks for the smokes sent monthly were the thoughts conveyed in the most recent batch of acknowledgements from soldiers overseas on the various fronts.

January- Nature's New Year's gift to the people of the Banana Belt was a crippling blizzard that all but paralyzed highway traffic. It was one of those 'believe it or not storms' when the mercury dropped to zero while a week before it was seven below. But then the week before didn't have the high winds nor the snow.

February- The crowd at the Overall and Calico Party sponsored by the guild of St. Albans in the Malden Hall Monday night surpassed all expectations as about 175 people turned out for this novel affair.

1954/55

December- During the 1954 season of navigation the Lower Detroit River lived up to its reputation as being the busiest waterway in the world. I.T. Kelly of the J.W. Westcott Company reported that during April 15th to December 15th 19,461 ships passed Amherstburg of which 9,768 were upbound and 9,693 downbound.

January- Good progress is being made by Keystone Contractors on the construction of the new water main along King's Highway No. 18 in Anderdon Township. When completed the main will extend to within 150 feet of Petrimoulx Corners.

February- A new 30x28 addition has been completed at the Knights of Columbus Hall, corner Richmond and Balaclava Streets. It will be officially opened February 18 when the Amherstburg Knights and their ladies will play hosts and hostesses to the Knights and their ladies from the Windsor, Belle River, McGregor and Essex Councils.

1964/65

December- Sale of Christmas trees has been brisk at the A.A. and M. First Aid Squad lot on Sandwich Street. The squad is using this method of raising funds to carry on their worthwhile work. Seven hundred trees were

brought in and all but 250 have been sold. Over last weekend 300 trees were sold.

January- Cuts Ribbon... Mayor H. Murray Smith cut the ribbon at the official opening of the Union Gas Company's new office in Amherstburg. On the left is William Johnson, local manager, and on the right Dennis Herring, district manager.

February- Steel Going Up... Construction is proceeding on Allied Chemical of Canada Limited genetron plant in Anderdon Township. It is located on the northwest corner of Brunner Mond division property.

1974/75

December- The removal of snow from the sides of Amherstburg streets continued unabated last week. Thousands of tons of snow have been moved since the 20 inches dropped on the area December first and second.

January- The Amherstburg Council has decided to go ahead with the reconstruction of Fort Street between Victoria and Sandwich. This will be the final part of the storm relief sewer, road restoration and water main project.

February- A large stone screen has been installed at Amherst Quarries. This machine separates the stone into four large sizes. The stone will be used on erosion control work on the Thames River. Dean Construction Company have the contract for the first two phases amounting to 1 1/2 miles. The company expects to have the project completed by September.



COLLECTION HIGHLIGHTS

By Meg Reiner

This item was donated on behalf of Dianne Fox. We are grateful for this valued addition to our historical collections.

In 1912, staff at the *Amherstburg Echo* was lucky for the chance to review a significant piece of Amherstburg's history: an issue of the *Amherstburg Telegraph* from 1855. The artifact belonged to Patrick Bondy, of Malden. Over 100 years later, staff at the Marsh is just as excited by the recent acquisition of a later issue of this same paper, dated October 17, 1856.

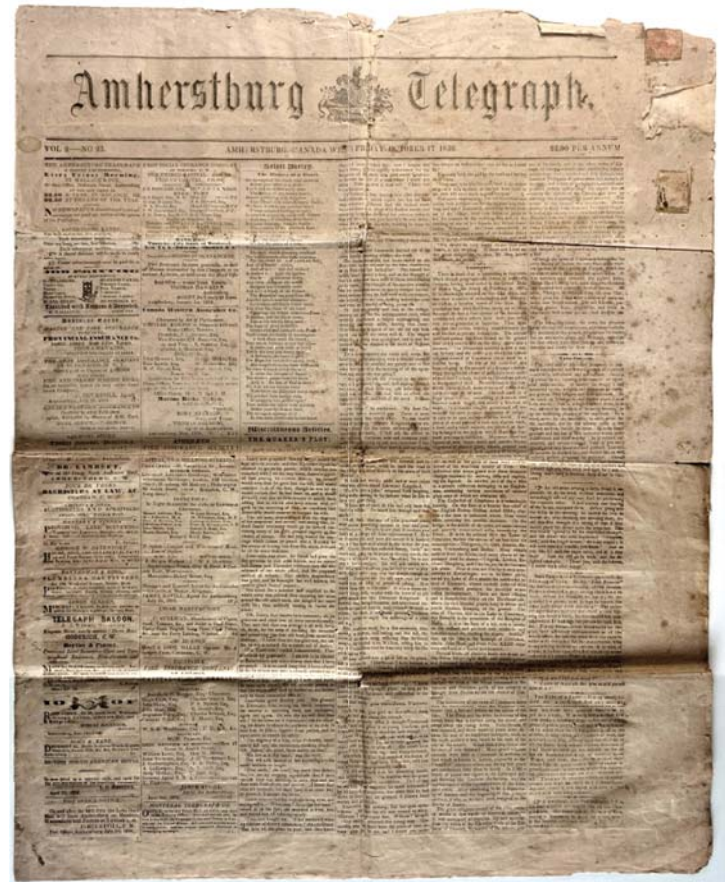
A man named Dr. Thomas Hawkins, who was a former surgeon in the Royal Navy, began publication of a newspaper called the *Forester* in Amherstburg beginning in 1853. The *Amherstburg Telegraph*, formed in 1855, was the result of a merger with the *Forester* to create a new paper under the proprietorship of James "Colin" Fox and W. Wallace Jr. Although Mr. Wallace is a bit of a mystery, we have some details about Mr. Fox, a man who engaged in a wide variety of enterprises throughout his life. After clerking for the Park Brothers, waterfront merchants and vessel owners in Amherstburg, he went into the newspaper business. According to his obituary, he was involved with *The Amherstburg Courier*, which was published from 1849-1850. It is possible this was in error and was meant to refer to the *Telegraph*, which he published in 1855 and 1856.* By 1864, Colin was residing in Detroit, managing

the Great North Western (G.N.W.) Telegraph office there. Later he went into the farming and lumber industries in Michigan. After the death of his wife Christina (nee Dunbar) in 1902, he moved to Kingsville and operated the G.N.W. Telegraph office there, where he died.

The *Amherstburg Telegraph* was published weekly, each Friday morning. It was four pages long, with six columns per page.

The subscription cost was \$2 per year if paid in advance or \$2.50 if paid at the end of the year. The office was situated on Dalhousie Street, likely in the same office from which the *Amherstburg Courier* operated. In an advertisement for Park & Co., their hardware store is noted as being in the "old market house" under the *Telegraph* office. The office of the *Amherstburg Courier* was known to be on the second floor of a building that stood on the northwest corner of Murray and Dalhousie, which was formerly part of the Market Square.

Through this issue of the *Amherstburg Telegraph* (Vol. 2-No.23) we are able to glean much information. Several local businesses put cards in the paper, giving us an idea of who the various Amherstburg proprietors were at the time. George



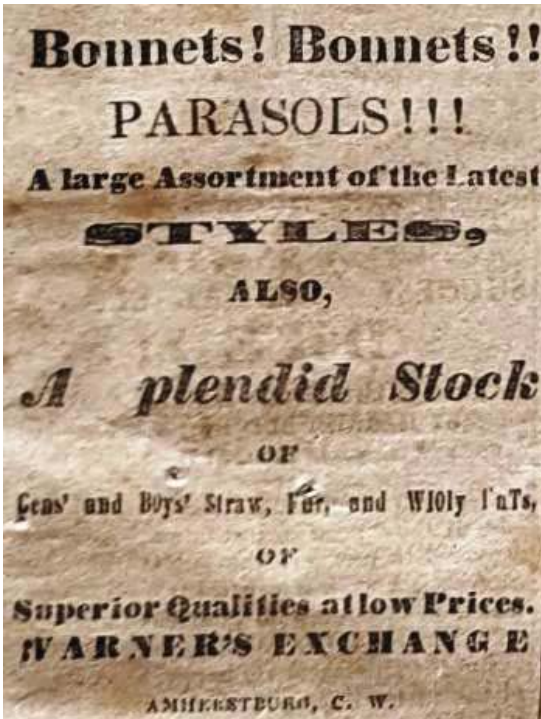
Davenport, painter and paper hanger, had a stand on Gore Street. Dr. Lambert practiced medicine from his office at the British North American Hotel (now Lot 10 Brewery). Mears & Bros. apparently purchased an entire column to advertise their supply of dry goods, clothing, shot guns, wine and spirits. A notice regarding an auction held on Mr. Asa Young's property in Malden was supplied by Thomas Brush, auctioneer, and Rowland Wingfield's prime land in Anderdon Township was announced for sale. In addition to select poetry and miscellaneous articles, foreign and local news occupy remaining column space. A propeller called the *Cuyahoga* had "struck a snag" three miles below Bar Point and because of the damage she was grounded in Callam's Bay to unload her cargo.

Continued on page 6...

*Colin is not listed as editor on surviving issues of the *Courier*, although the *Courier*, *Forester*, and *Telegraph* all seem to have been connected.

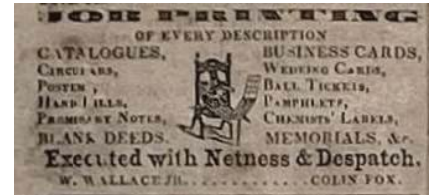
COLLECTION HIGHLIGHTS

...Continued from page 5



An advertisement for Warner's Exchange on Murray Street in the Amherstburg Telegraph.

Local papers are a wealth of information for historical research. A statement regarding their importance was published in *The Amherstburg Echo* on February 12, 1875: "The local paper is an absolute necessity to the county and community where it is published. All the city papers cannot supply the place of the home paper. That should be the first love of every man and woman, for with the paper is the locality identified. The paper gives the county and town where printed much of their importance in the world, and gives in detail the local news which cannot be gained by any other source. Every week's issue of the paper is so much local history, and the rise, growth and development of the town can be measured and recorded only by the local newspaper that constantly is gathering its items...The home paper at any price is the cheapest paper one can take, for in it is found the information to be obtained from no other source...There is therefore the greatest need of activity and interest on the part of the people, to give their own good paper vigorous and substantial support."



Details of illustrations and text in the Amherstburg Telegraph.

Then & Now Murray Street Looking West from Ramsay

Photos & caption by Gabby Pizzuti



Circa 1997



Present Day: December 6, 2024

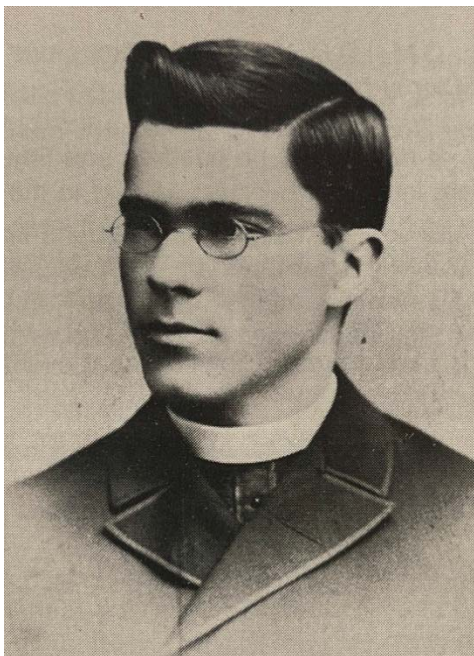


Note the exposed arches in the present-day photo. These originally marked the entrance to Johnston's Bank.

The photo on the left depicts four buildings on the north side of Murray street in 1997. On the far right of the photo was 2-Way Automotive, which has recently been restored and replaced by Hotel STRY. The Masonic Lodge (pictured in the centre of both photos) is still operating today.

LOISELLEVILLE

By Kara Folkeringa



Father Joseph Albert Loiselle took charge of St. Joseph's Church in River Canard in 1909 after the retirement of Father Marseille, who founded the parish. Father Loiselle came into this role with numerous ideas and the energy to implement them. His first priority was creating a village at River Canard, holding meetings with parishioners to convey his vision and gain their confidence.

Of all the work Loiselle orchestrated, the biggest project was building a new church that would cost \$75,000 and required active involvement from



parishioners. Wanting it to be a remarkable addition to the growing village, Loiselle went to Montréal in 1910 to look for models of churches for inspiration. In 1912 work began on the foundation for the new church. Before beginning construction, everyone who was able was required to bring materials to the site of the new church daily. The completed church was dedicated in 1916 and it was noted that it was "one of the finest [churches] in the Diocese of London" (Amherstburg Echo October 20, 1916).

In addition to the new church, there were many other improvements brought to the area under the direction of Father Loiselle. The previous church was demolished in 1912, with the lumber and

materials being moved across the bridge to build a canning factory. This canning factory, along with new shops and stores, brought economic growth. He also oversaw the construction of a new dock and a new boat house to facilitate better access to the area. A large shed with stalls, accommodating over 40 teams was built as well. Additional improvements included a windmill and a 36-barrel water tank.

All of this development brought many French-Canadian families from Québec, totaling 300 by 1916. Known as a "live wire," Father Loiselle was a passionate advocate for the continuation of French-language education.

Continued on page 8...

Image (left): Portrait of Father Loiselle from St. Joseph Parish 125th Anniversary Book/ Image (top right): Postcard depicting Loiselleville, MCS 2019.031.004

LOISELLEVILLE

...Continued from Page 7

He was suspended for insubordination in 1914 for accusing the Bishop of restricting the use of French in sermons and in teaching children. He was reinstated after over a month once he retracted his accusations, but despite this, French-language promotion remained a priority for him.

Around the time of the new church construction, the area became known as Loiselleville. There are conflicting accounts of whether this name was changed by Loiselle himself or if the inhabitants of the village changed it in his honour. Either way, the name did not last very long. By the early 1930s it was officially changed back to River Canard primarily because of mail confusion between Loiselleville, Louisville in Chatham, and Louiseville in Québec. Despite the formal name change, the name was still used by some inhabitants for a few decades until it faded.

Bricks-N-Beams

Father Loiselle's Home

By Meg Reiner

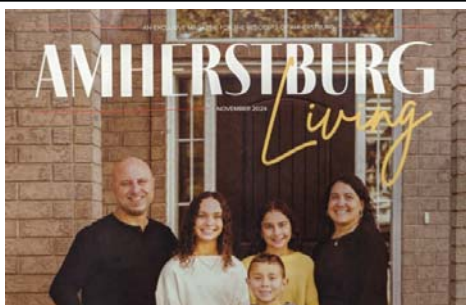
Shortly after arriving, Father Loiselle had a new rectory built for himself on the west side of the church. The site chosen was adjacent to the old brick presbytery built for Father Marseilles in 1878. The old presbytery was designed in the Gothic style by Windsor architect S.M. Goddard. Father Loiselle chose to replace this structure and in April of 1910 work began to clear the site. The frame portion of the former rectory, which composed the original 1864 chapel and parsonage, was moved, and the main brick portion of the structure torn down. The red bricks were re-used in the new construction. The excavation was carried out by the parishioners themselves. Masons began stonework on the foundation in May, and by the end of December, work was nearing completion. The cost is said to have only been \$12,000 due to the re-use of materials.

In 2014, the rectory fell victim to the wrecking ball. Despite arguments made by the Amherstburg Heritage Committee regarding the significance of the building to local Francophone heritage, a demolition permit was issued March 3, 2014. Just as the place name Loiselleville has been lost, so has the home of the prolific Father Loiselle, former pillars of the River Canard Community.



Image (left):
Detail of postcard
showing Father
Loiselle's
Rectory, MCS
2019.031.004.

Image (right):
Detail of postcard
MCS
2019.031.004



AMHERSTBURG LIVING MAGAZINE

Have you seen our feature in Amherstburg Living? Each month, the magazine publishes a short article about a topic in the history of Amherstburg. The most recent issue is available for pickup at our office (limited quantities). If you've finished reading your copy, we'd be happy to re-distribute it at our office.