

## THE COMMUNITIES OF SANDWICH SOUTH

### MAIDSTONE

The one community in Sandwich South which can claim its identity today as one similar to that of one-hundred and fifty years ago, is Maidstone. Little has changed in the basic character of the hamlet for that entire period of time.

Beginning as a stagecoach stop and 'rest station' for weary travellers, Maidstone, originally named 'Maidstone Cross,' has continued to maintain that 'welcome mat' hospitality.

The unfortunate decline of Maidstone as a bustling stop-over resulted from the circuitous re-routing of Highway #3 past the town, thereby saving motorists any inhibition of travel-time, and ensuring the safety of the hamlet's residents. However, local residents seem generally unconcerned by the highway's diversion, grateful instead for the assurance of the community's peaceful nature, and small-town atmosphere.

Maidstone is located about 10 miles east of Windsor and 4 miles west of Essex on the intersection of Maden Road (Highway #114), and the old Highway #3 or Talbot Road. Maidstone as was mentioned earlier, was a 'rest-station' for stage coaches travelling the Talbot Trail from as far away as Leamington or Chatham, and was also the location of one of Cameron's toll gates; bent on capturing the business of these same long distance travellers. As a rest-station, Maidstone offered the services typical of such a centre. Located in the town were all the conveniences needed. Motels offered rest for aching bones, resultant of travel over gravel roads on a wooden seat, and taverns quenched the thirst guaranteed from the dust off the same roads.

Livery stables and a blacksmith shop ensured a change of horses, or the well being of those continuing the journey, while a grocery store restocked the traveller, and a post-office allowed word to be sent ahead, or behind, of one's whereabouts.

At Maidstone's inception this was basically the make-up of the town. Not forgetting of course, the ever heartening presence of the beautiful St. Mary's church in its midst.

For the most part, Maidstone was the central location of the Irish Roman-Catholic community settled there in the early 1800's. However, it contained other European extractions as well, such as New Dutch, English, and Scottish; apparent, for instance, in the naming of the hamlet. In 1833 Joseph Bennett christened the settlement with the name of Maidstone after his hometown of the same name in England.

In 1951 a representative from the British town of Maidstone, Mr. Rupert J. Armitage, visited this locality and brought sincere greetings from the mayor of its namesake with him.

In 1890 the town is recorded as having 150 inhabitants and the following businesses:

General Store  
Saw Mill  
Carriage Maker

E.B. Caya  
Charles Little  
Frank McCloskey

Blacksmith  
Postmaster & General Store  
Grist Mill  
Hotel

Thomas McCloskey  
Thomas Moran  
Orr Brothers  
George Wills

The post office was established in 1838 and John Twomey was Maidstone's first Postmaster. By 1900 much had remained as before except that Ignatius Halford had taken over as the new Postmaster, and had begun his much revered General Store. As well the Hotel had been transferred to the ownership of Dennis Donovan. Most of these early business venturers are men whose names still hold prominence in the conversations of life-long residents of Maidstone. The names are indicative of their heritage, and many are carried on today in the Maidstone area through 4th and 5th generation descendants of these original colonists.

McCarthy, Halford, McAuliffe, McCloskey, Sexton, Deehan, Beahan, McIntyre, Donovan, Connolly, Moynahan, Kavanaugh, and Shanahan are some of these enduring names; though by no means is the list all-inclusive.



*The Post Office and General Store owned by Ignatius Halford since 1890. Mr. Halford continued to be Postmaster for over 50 years, and this building remained standing until 1969. The store is seen here as it appeared in 1920.*

In the 1874 assessment poll there were several French names prevalent in the area as well, and some of these included: Ouellette, Bellair, Coulet, Maitre, Campeau, Lesperance, Papineau, Menard, Blanchard, Lepain, Durocher and Marentette. \*79

Ignatius (Nace) Halford is a name which crops up over and over again in the

history of this community and for good reason. Nace Halford's general store had been used as such as a post office, for almost one hundred years. Mr. Halford's daughter Mrs. John D. Walker, took over operation of the store in 1943, and renamed it Walker's General Store, and running the store until it was pulled down and replaced by a modern structure in July of 1969.

Many relics of the Halford era still exist for when the store was destroyed, uncovered in the attic, were veritable treasures of the early settlement, which had been collected by Ignatius himself.

*Ignatius Halford was born in 1860 of pioneer Irish Stock, son of John Halford and Ellen Barrett. Nace and Christine Rourke, his wife, had nine children Margaret, Bernadette, Frank, Agnes, Dennis, Pauline, Gertrude, Helen and Mary who, with her husband John Walker, carried on the family business and post office. Nace was actively involved in many church organizations as were his brothers Robert and John.\*80*

It was Nace Halford who, with the help of Eugene Sullivan, brought the cornerstone of the present St. Mary's Church from Windsor.

In 1945 Mr. Halford received from his majesty King George VI, a 'King George V' silver medal in honour of his being a civil servant of Canada as Maidstone's postmaster, since 1890. Mr. Halford died on May 1, 1946.



*The Ignatius Halford residence located in Maidstone, Ontario as seen in 1920.*

Another famous name in the annals of Maidstone is McCloskey. Not only were they active participants of community life, but they were famous through-

out the County of Essex. On July 1, 1904 William McCloskey invented and patented a new type of cultivator for farm use, while fourteen years later on Nov. 29, 1918, Leo and James McCloskey patented the 'McCloskey tractor' in both Canada and the U.S., eventually selling the patent to Simon Royal Motors of Toronto for cash royalties on each tractor. In 1953, Thomas P. McCloskey wrote an article recounting his "Life Since March 15th 1875". He explains that his first job was "tending the switch lamps on the MCR, taking them into the station in the morning, filling them with oil, cleaning them, and putting them out before dark." \*81 His wages were \$8.00 a month.

He then worked at the church keeping the stoves going while attending school. Eventually from his deceased father's life insurance of \$2,000 dollars, he was given enough nomey to start a general store; the second in Maidstone.

Thomas further recounts a tale of the poor drainage conditions prevalent in the 1800's.

During the January thaw the water in the fields would often freeze overnight, leaving an impassable sea of ice surrounding most farms. Horses not being used during the season were allowed to roam in the woods. Apparently one winter a small herd of horses became stranded on a high point of land surrounded by unnavigable lakes of ice all around. In order to get the animals back to the safety of their barn, the horses were shod on their makeshift island, by Mr. McCloskey for added 'treads', and led slowly back.

Horses were important to the McCloskey family. Thomas McCloskey established himself as a farrier for a time, and his brother Frank McCloskey, ran a carriage shop of good repute for many years.

George Quanting and Martin Collier were two carriage makers, setting up business in Windsor, who had first learned their trade from Frank. Proving the fine craftsmanship he had learned, Mr. Collier built the woodwork on the first electric streetcar that ran in North America.

Meanwhile Charles Kavanaugh, another McCloskey apprentice, opened a shop in Maidstone, in the mid 1870's, by utilizing what had earlier been the old church house.

In 1909 the first telephone office was opened in Maidstone, located as usual in the centre of activity at Nace Halford's General Store. Miss Madge Sexton was the first operator. There it stayed for three years until it was moved a couple of doors down to an old house. After a short residence there, the phone office was moved again, but this time to the house of another fondly remembered Maidstone resident, Annie Markham, where it stayed until Municipal Bell took over in 1957.

*In any small community there are always certain individuals who played a prominent role in its everyday activities. In our own community, a prime example of this would be 'Mrs. Annie Markham'. She was born August 4, 1879, the oldest daughter of the late Timothy McGuire and Sarah McHugh of Maidstone Township. On Oct. 1, 1901 Annie married George Markham of Belle River. They resided in Windsor for a few years and then moved to their farm in*

*Maidstone Township to raise their family of eight children. However, George passed away in August, 1922 and in 1923 Annie and her young family moved to the village where she became the telephone operator for the Sandwich South Municipal Telephone System, a position she held until March 30, 1957.\*82*

It is related that Annie was a remarkably personable lady, ever ready to help, and knowing her customers by name, rather than number. She passed away on March 27, 1964 and was sadly missed by the whole community.

Another unforgettable lady of the Maidstone settlement was Miss Nellie Moynahan. Born on March 31, 1865 in Ireland, Miss Moynahan came to Maidstone with her immigrant parents, Jeremiah Moynahan and Mary Brennan at the age of seven.

Often at the mention of her name, comes a lifted eyebrow and a mischievous sparkle in the eye; the source of which is the mixed memories of sprightly attempts to undermine the strict disciplinarian authority she held over her school-children. Yet 'attempt' is the best description for these tales of sly endeavour, for none will deny the success with which Miss Moynahan kept control over even the most playful children. Thomas P. McCloskey said "the only slap I got all the time I went to school was from her, that was shortly after I started. Something was done in the school and she could not pick out the guilty ones so she gave all of us a slap."\*83

Nellie Moynahan began teaching at the age of fifteen and continued to teach at SS #7 and later SS #8 and 5 for forty years in Maidstone, before moving to Windsor to teach for the Ursulines. Nellie never married but passed away well renowned, in 1940, at the age of 75.

Other businesses found in an early Maidstone were: three shoe shops owned by a Mr. Jacques and Mr. Follett, where measurements were made and the shoes made right there to order; several saw mills mentioned earlier, with flour mills in conjunction; a tailor shop; two hotels; a butcher shop operated by Joseph Totten and William Hickey located on Malden Road; and a potash manufacturer named Delisle, also on Malden Road, who gave a bar of soap for every bushel of ashes received.

In 1896, in Harrow Ontario, a business was started up which was eventually to become one of Maidstone's most important. This was the Ross C. Flood Grain Company. In 1931 Mr. Ross C. Flood sold his business in Harrow and, buying the elevator and mill from the McCloskey brothers in Maidstone, moved his enterprise there. His sons later became joint business partners in the business as well. On November 7, 1967 the grain company suffered a \$100,000 fire to its equipment and elevators, but managed to recuperate and continues to remain an important factor in the Maidstone economy. Mr. R.C. Flood died on January 28, 1969.

Adding to the little community's fervour was the Windsor, Essex, and Lakeshore Rapid Railway, the electric streetcar service started in 1879. This streetcar train was popularly utilized to carry passengers and goods to the Windsor market. Many farmer's wives would park their buggies in the long vehicle shed located to the rear of the general store and loading butter, eggs, and even fowl onto the train, would continue on into the city; preferring even then to escape

the hectic misadventures of 'city driving'.

And if city dwellers think conversely, that life in a small town is uneventful, here's a tale sure to convince them otherwise.

Between 85 and 90 years ago the general store and Post Office was robbed, on of all days Christmas Eve. Nearby a man by the name of Peter Tiernay had rented a room for the night, and was aroused by the reckless noise of the robbers in the shop. Raising the window to the room he was in, he shot a gun into the night hoping to scare the burglars away. Shortly thereupon the church bells peeled out their emergency clang, and the whole town was bustling out to the street. The crowd gathered around the shop, but none were brave enough to enter the darkened building. However, heroes always being the least suspected in a crowd, the parish priest's large Newfoundland dog was sent in the back door.

After several minutes of anxious silence, emerging finally from the threatening gloom, came the town's hero with his prize...a 14 inch long roll of bologna!

Well, you had to be there! Anyway despite that night's failure to foil the robbers, they were eventually caught and arrested upon admitting to their dastardly deed. Indeed, one of the men's name was Calligan, an already convicted thief whom had escaped from jail in Sandwich.

All kidding aside, Maidstone has indeed seen days of bustling crowded shops and a well-travelled main street. At one point in time its population exceeded that of Essex! The community is a valuable landmark of heritage in the township of Sandwich South. And as long as the present residents continue to possess the vibrant hardiness of their descendants, it is sure to remain so for many years to come.



*The Gerry Collins farm near Maidstone as it appeared in 1920. The Collins family is another group of longstanding pioneers in Sandwich South originally arriving from England in 1850.*