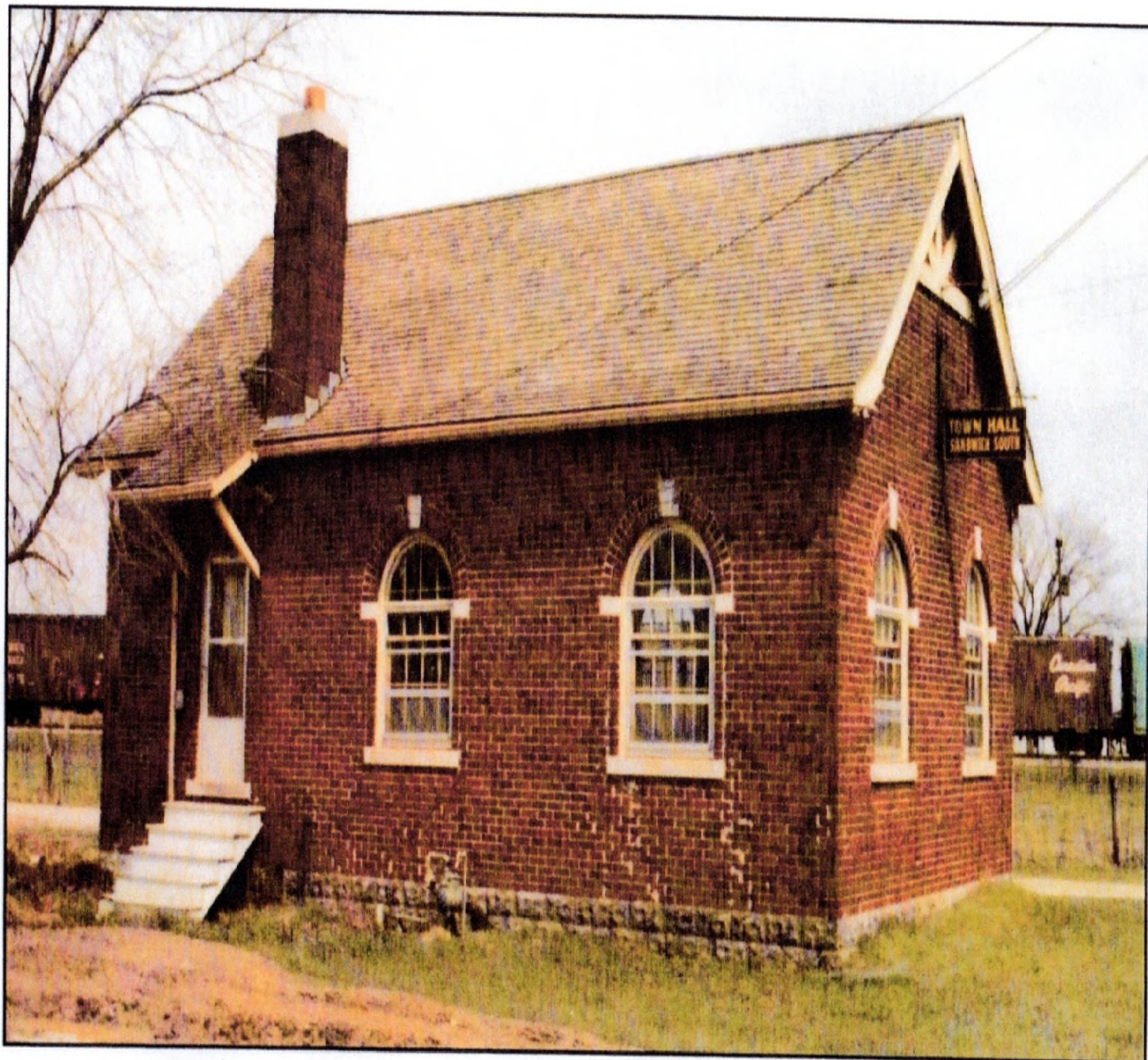


## Evidence-Based Revision of the Sandwich South Town Historical Record



### Township Hall built in 1927

The first council meetings for the township were held in a bar in a hotel that was owned by Mr. Michael McCarthy of Oldcastle. It was located directly across from the site of the old township hall on Hwy. No.3. In 1896 a new township hall was built on land donated by Mr. & Mrs. Robert Sylvester. In 1927 it was replaced by a new structure which was located in front of the Roads Department on Hwy. No.3.

# Evidence-Based Revision of the Sandwich South Town Historical Record – By Judith Wellwood-Robson

## Problem

It has been historically documented that the land where the Sandwich South Town Hall was located on Highway #3 had been donated by Mr. & Mrs. Robert Sylvester. The names credited to donating the land, the municipal town hall was erected upon are found to be incorrect and need to be rectified in order to correctly document this part of Sandwich South History.

This statement “In 1896 a new township hall was built on land donated by Mr. & Mrs. Robert Sylvester” along with the picture of the second Town Hall built in 1927, has become an intricate part of the township’s history and identity found in numerous places; The Township of Sandwich South by Laura L. Langlois, The Town of Tecumseh’s web site, on the story board in the Oldcastle Heritage Park and on various pictures of the former Town Hall.

This may seem on the surface to be a minor historical infraction but by allowing this error to remain, we fail to record a very meaningful and symbolic event in the past of our community. Therefore, I feel that this error needs to be corrected and the true story told.

## Hypothesis

*In 1896, the site of the township hall was donated by Mrs. Mary (Downing) McCarthy*

## Aim

(1) To prove that it was actually Mary (Downing) McCarthy who donated the land in 1896 and to show that this was a symbolic historical act since a) Women were seldom publicly involved in the politics of the times. b) Mary lived much of her adult life in a period of time where women were not recognized as person(s) in the British North America Act. Any property owned by a married woman and any monies she made belonged to her husband. This was not changed until after 1877. It is my opinion that Mary was exercising her now acquired right to do what she wanted with her own property. (Maybe, she just wanted the politicians, “the old boys club,” out of her house?)

(2) To rewrite this part of our local history to include Mary (Downing) McCarthy’s name as the woman who hosted the town hall meetings in her house/tavern from 1893 to 1896 and then donated the land for a town hall to be built so that this early pioneer woman is given her place in history.

It is my opinion Mary’s land donation is an example of the strong influence the pioneer women had in the growth and development of the early settlement that was never recorded.

## Method

- 1) Prove that Gertrude (Downing) Sylvester did not own the land in 1896 the year designated that the Town Hall Land was donated using various research sources.
- 2) Prove that Bob (Romerald Evoi Sylvestre) did not at anytime own property in Sandwich South using various research sources.
- 3) Prove that in 1896 the year of the land donation that it was Mary (Downing) McCarthy that owned and donated the property using various research sources.
- 4) Evidence to support the hypothesis was gathered from various reliable sources; St. Mary’s Cemetery, Canada Census, Ontario Birth Records,

Ontario Marriage Records, Essex County Land Registry Records of both Lot 302N½ S of Talbot Rd. and Lot 302S½ N of Talbot Rd., Canadian Military Records and Minutes of the former Township of Sandwich South.

## Results

### Gertrude (Downing) Sylvester

- 1) **1885** – Assumption Church Windsor Ontario records the death of Gertrude Downing's Mother, Catherine Burke, as March 1, 1885.
- 2) **1887** – Janisse Brothers Funeral Home Prayer Card for Gertrude Sylvester records her birth – January 21, 1887.
- 3) **1891**- Canada Census – Gertrude Downing – Birth Year – 1886, Age 5
- 4) **1901** - Canadian Census – Gertrude Downing - Birth Year –Jan. 21, 1885, Age 16 living in the household of Michael McCarthy.
- 5) **1921** – Ontario Marriage Record – Romeo E Sylvester to Gertrude Mary Downing – 29 Sep. 1921. Address; 428 Pelisser St. Windsor, Occupation; Windsor Post Office Clerk
- 6) **1938** – without any direct heirs the last of the descendents of Michael and Mary (Downing) McCarthy, Josephine passes and the McCarthy farm is left to Gertrude (Downing) Sylvester.
- 7) **1957** – Gertrude Sylvester passes Feb. 17, 1957 and the farm is left to her only son Fredrick Sylvester

## Romeo E. Sylvester (Bob) – Born – (Romerald Evoi Sylvester)

- 1) **1892** – Ontario Birth Records – Romerald Evoi Sylvester – born Mar. 22, 1892, Rochester Township, Essex County, Ontario, Canada.
- 2) **1901** – Canada Census – Birth year 1892, Age 9 – Romeo Silvestre in household of Clothilde Silvestre, Essex (North), On., Canada
- 3) **1917** – Canadian Military Record – Address recorded – 205 Campbell Ave., Windsor, Ont. Essex County
- 4) **1921** – Ontario Marriage Record – Romeo E Sylvester to Gertrude Mary Downing – 29 Sep. 1921. Address; 205 Campbell Ave., Windsor, Ont. Essex County Address ; Occupation; Windsor Post Office Clerk
- 5) **1953** – Land records of lot 302 N½ S of Talbot Road contain only Gertrude's name.
- 6) **1957** – Gertrude passed and left her son Fredrick Sylvester the farm who moved with his family into the house on the farm located on Highway #3
- 7) **1978** – R.E (Bob) Sylvester passed away never owning land in Sandwich South

## Mary (Downing) McCarthy

- 1) **1834** -Mary (Marie Downing, Spring), McCarthy was born and baptized at Assumption Church. She was the first daughter and 3<sup>rd</sup> child of Capt. Denis & Honora (Houlihan) Downing. She was first generation daughter of Irish immigrants living with her family on land granted by Colonel Talbot, Lot 302S½ N of Talbot Road
- 2) **1857** – John Spring a widower and Irish immigrant with a young son Edward Spring purchased from the widow of James Meehan, Lot 302N ½ South of the Talbot Rd. (across from the Downing farm). At the age of twenty-three, in a quick and unusual manner, Mary Downing married John Spring.



- 3) **1858** - John Spring passed away without a will and records show, he was interned at Assumption Cemetery.
- 4) **1859** - Census records show Mary's two brothers living with her, one as a carpenter and one as a **tavern keeper**.
- 5) **1861** - Mary married. Michael McCarthy a lifelong neighbour and they eventually purchased the farm from Edward Spring (Mary's Stepson). Six children were born from this marriage and for thirty-two years they conducted their hotel business on Talbot Rd. in Oldcastle.
- 6) **1885** - Mary's father Capt. Denis Downing died and her younger brother inherited the farm; lot 302 N of Talbot Rd. Denis appears to have given Mary, as settlement from the will, a small triangle shaped parcel of land of his farm (Lot 302 S ½ N of Talbot Rd.) ***(It had been divided from the main parcel by the construction of the Oldcastle Rd. and the railway)*** It was located across from Mary's house on Talbot Rd.
- 7) **1893** - Records show the first council meeting of the newly formed Township of Sandwich South is held at the tavern in Mary's home.
- 8) **1896** – ***The Dec. 15<sup>th</sup> 1896 minutes of the Sandwich South Council Meeting and the land records of lot 302 North of Talbot Rd. clearly indicate that it was Mary (Downing} McCarthy who exercised her right as a woman with property who granted, for \$1.00, the part of the triangle parcel to The Township of Sandwich South to build a Town Hall.***
- 9) **1899** – Mary passed and is interned in St. Mary's Cemetery Maidstone, On.

## Conclusion

After extensive examination of records from various sources, the claim that the historic land donors for the Sandwich South Town Hall in fact were not Mr. and Mrs. Robert Sylvester.

Documentation proves that in 1896, the year the land was granted for the Sandwich South Town Hall, **Gertrude Downing** the niece of Mary Downing was only 10 or 11 years old living with her Aunt and Uncle. She did not inherit the farm until the death of her last surviving cousin in 1938.

Gertrude passed in 1957 and left the farm to her son Fredrick Sylvester.

Records reveal that Robert Sylvester born (Romerald Evoi Sylvester) was born in 1892 in Rochester Township. In 1896, the year the land was donated he would have been 4 years old and did not live or own land in Oldcastle. After 1938 he moved onto the farm inherited by his wife Gertrude (Downing) Sylvester and took up farming until his death in 1978.

The recorded, **Dec. 15<sup>th</sup> 1896 minutes of the Sandwich South Council Meeting and the land records of lot 302 North of Talbot Rd.,** clearly indicate that it was **Mary (Downing) McCarthy who owned and gifted the land** to the Township of Sandwich South.

## Action

That where ever possible, this error in the History of Sandwich South History be corrected.



### Township Hall built in 1927

**In 1893, the first council meeting for the Township of Sandwich South was held in the bar room of the residence/hotel owned by Mr. & Mrs. Michael McCarthy of Talbot Rd., Oldcastle.**

**In 1896, a town hall was built on land donated by Mrs. Mary (Downing) McCarthy, directly across from their hotel.**

**In 1927, it was replaced, by a new structure (depicted above) at the same location and served in this capacity until 1964.**



# Documents

3/26/2019

Gertrude Downing, "Canada Census, 1891" — FamilySearch.org

## Gertrude Downing Canada Census, 1891

Name:	Gertrude Downing
Gender:	Female
Age:	5
Relationship to Head of Household:	Domestic
Birth Year (Estimated):	1886
Birthplace:	Ontario
Marital Status:	Single
Religion:	Roman Catholic
Province:	Ontario
District:	Essex North
District Number:	62
Sub-District:	Sandwich East
Affiliate Film Number:	30953_148136

No image available

Record Collection:  
Canada Census, 1891

### Document Information:

#### Citing this Record

"Canada Census, 1891," database, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/613L7:3:3 August 2016>), Gertrude Downing, Sandwich East, Essex North, Ontario, Canada; Public Archives, Ottawa, Ontario; Library and Archives Canada film number 30953\_148136.

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<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:MW25-3L7>

- ***In 1891 Gertrude Downing was 5 years old and living with her Uncle and Aunt McCarthy. In 1896, the year the land was donated she would have been 10 years old.***