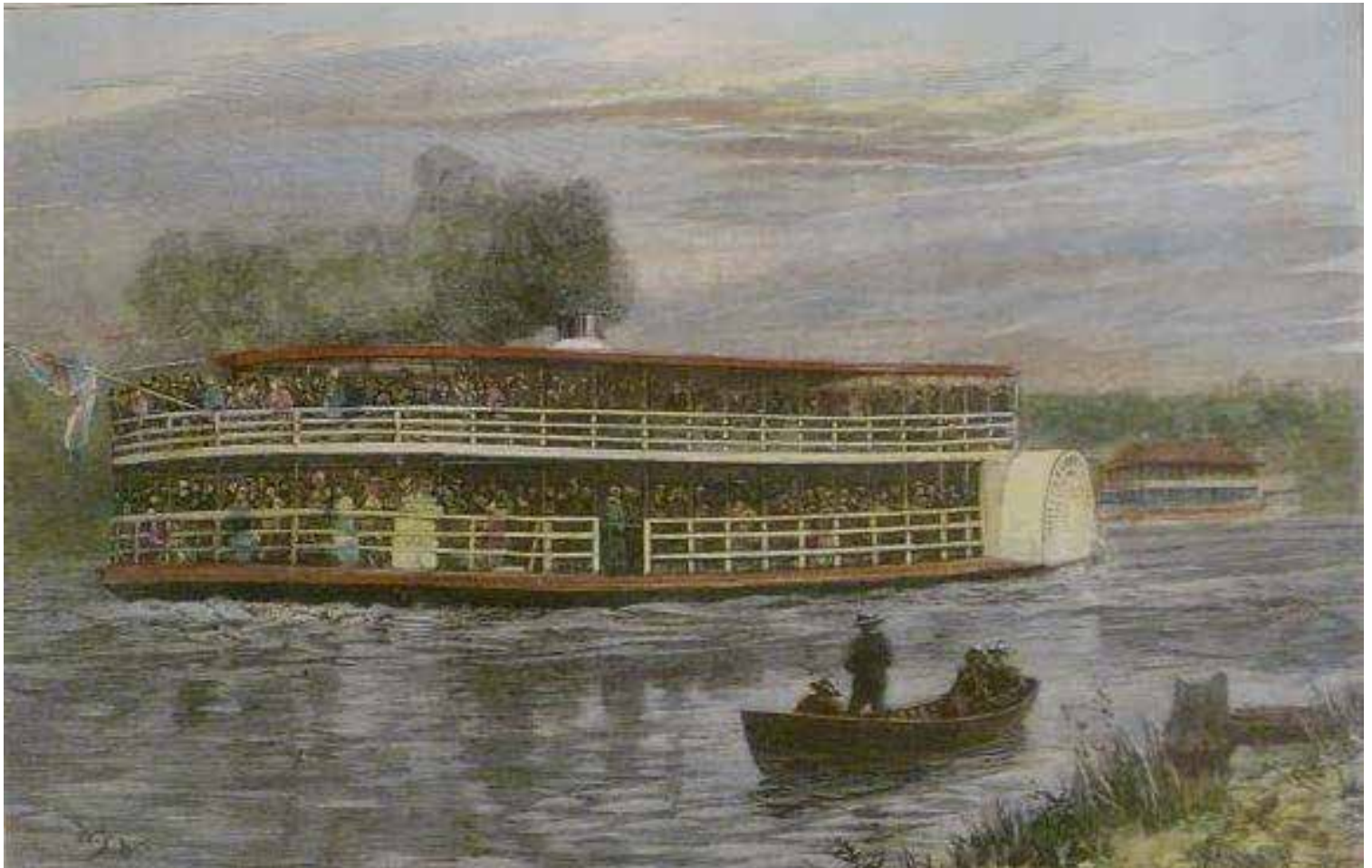


# The London and Middlesex

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## **A Turbulent Chapter in the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century History of London, Ontario**

### **The Debacle over the Federal Square Project, the Acrimonious Debate over the New City Hall, and the Scandal over the Electrification of the London/Port Stanley Railway**

**Marvin L. Simner**

#### **Abstract**

...history is not some inert body of knowledge “out there” in the past, but a continual act of construction whose end product is being reshaped and made anew every time someone ventures into the archives.

The above quotation is from the preface to a book titled *After the Fact: The Art of Historical Detection* by James West Davidson and Mark Hamilton Lyle published in 2005. Although the stories of the Federal Square Project, the need for a new city hall, and the London/Port Stanley Railway have been summarized on several occasions, the purpose of this article is to examine the largely forgotten evidence behind each story through use of material that appeared between 1911 and 1928 in the archives of the *London Free Press* and the *London Advertiser*. While these undertakings were initiated around 1912 and were largely intended to showcase the city and encourage its growth as a manufacturing and commercial business centre, the archival evidence shows that they also led to substantial rancor that lingered for many years among the city’s newspapers and left the city with a heavy financial burden.

#### **Introduction**

With the following words in his 1911 inaugural address, Mayor John Beattie initiated London’s entry into a new age of considerable promise for the growth and prosperity of the city.

London is destined to be the Metropolis of Western Ontario. It has been given every advantage to fill this important part, and it is the duty of every citizen, and the representatives of the ratepayers, to favour in every way possible, the accomplishments of this task... I see the dawn of a brighter day for London as a manufacturing centre and the birth of a progressive movement which the City will never forget.<sup>1</sup>

In the remainder of his address the mayor then specified two major goals. The first was the need for a new city hall. Although initially required to meet the demand for better accommodations and additional space, by 1911 this need had begun to assume a further purpose, namely, to emphasize the importance of the city as a place eminently suited for growth, prosperity and, most important, capital investment. Mayor Beattie further urged city council to establish a site for the new city hall and the next mayor, Charles Graham, in 1912 even suggested that council should combine this site with the location of the downtown Union Station in order to showcase the significance of the city to all entering visitors.<sup>2</sup> Later that year city council was shown a site plan, referred to as the Federal Square Project, that featured the proposed new city hall.<sup>3</sup> The building, with a dominant central tower, was to be situated in the park-like setting shown below, the purpose of which was to attract attention and emphasize the strategic value of the city to all incoming investors.

The second goal in Mayor Beattie's address was the need to convert the London/Port Stanley Railway from a steam operated system into an electrically operated system. Once this was accomplished London would be able to provide an inexpensive and rapid means for transporting locally manufactured goods and materials to the harbour at Port Stanley for shipment to locations throughout North America and elsewhere thereby ensuring the city's future growth. In other words, London would become a port city similar to the other Southwestern Ontario port cities of Windsor, Hamilton, and Toronto, with which London normally competed when it attempted to lure manufactures and other commercial firms to settle here.

Unfortunately, these two undertakings led to considerable turmoil over the next several years. In the case of the London/Port Stanley Railway the turmoil involved a prolonged and often bitter debate that erupted in fallacious accusations between the Honourable Adam Beck and T. H. Purdom as well as their respective supporters, the *London Free Press* and the *London Advertiser*. The debate not only involved two of London's most prominent citizens, but also marked a major clash between the rights of London's citizens to engage in private enterprise versus the rights of the city to compete with these citizens through public ownership of what originally had been a private business.

The Federal Square Project, on the other hand, required a substantial financial contribution from the Dominion Government. While it was assumed from the start that the government had agreed to the terms of the contribution, the onset of the First World War had caused the government to reevaluate its overall financial obligations which, in turn, meant the need to reconsider its financial contribution to London. Thus the Federal Square Project was placed on hold for an indeterminant period despite the fact that the city had previously invested considerable sums in the purchase of land destined for the new city hall and was now faced with the dilemma of not knowing how or even whether to proceed with the project.

To fully understand the highly divisive and protracted turmoil that arose over these issues, it is necessary to review the events for each separately. We begin with the events that unfolded over the plans for the Federal Square Project followed by the controversy over the new city hall and then the need for an electrified London/Port Stanley Railway.



## The Federal Square Project

### Background

On January 1, 1913 a *Free Press* editorial summarized the events that had taken place during the previous two years in Canada as well as in London as a prelude to the events that were anticipated in the coming year.

Nineteen hundred and eleven was an important year for Canada but nineteen hundred and twelve that succeeded has been a year that will go down in record for straight-ahead growth and actual accomplishment of big undertakings such as this country has seldom if ever known... It would be easy to demonstrate by official figures that the records of 1912 stand first in growth of all kinds. More

new citizens came to our shores than ever before; more wheat was grown and more wheat shipped; building construction reached figures that are astonishing, industries expanded, railway construction was marked, and in a score of ways that are just as vital to a new and growing country this spirit of expansion was not only in the air, but taking actual form and substance.

One result of the building of the last two or three years (in London) is seen in the improved store premises on Dundas and Richmond streets. There is no city in Canada that can show a finer lot of retail store fronts than the retail premises in London, and behind the store fronts are carried stocks of goods that in variety and taste are not surpassed. London has always been known as a great wholesale center. Of late it has taken great strides as a retail city as well, a position which it should hold in its central location in Western Ontario.<sup>4</sup>

With these thoughts in mind, and for reasons succinctly expressed in the *London Advertiser*, the site selected for the Federal Square Project was the block bounded by Dundas, Wellington, King and Waterloo. (See above illustration.)

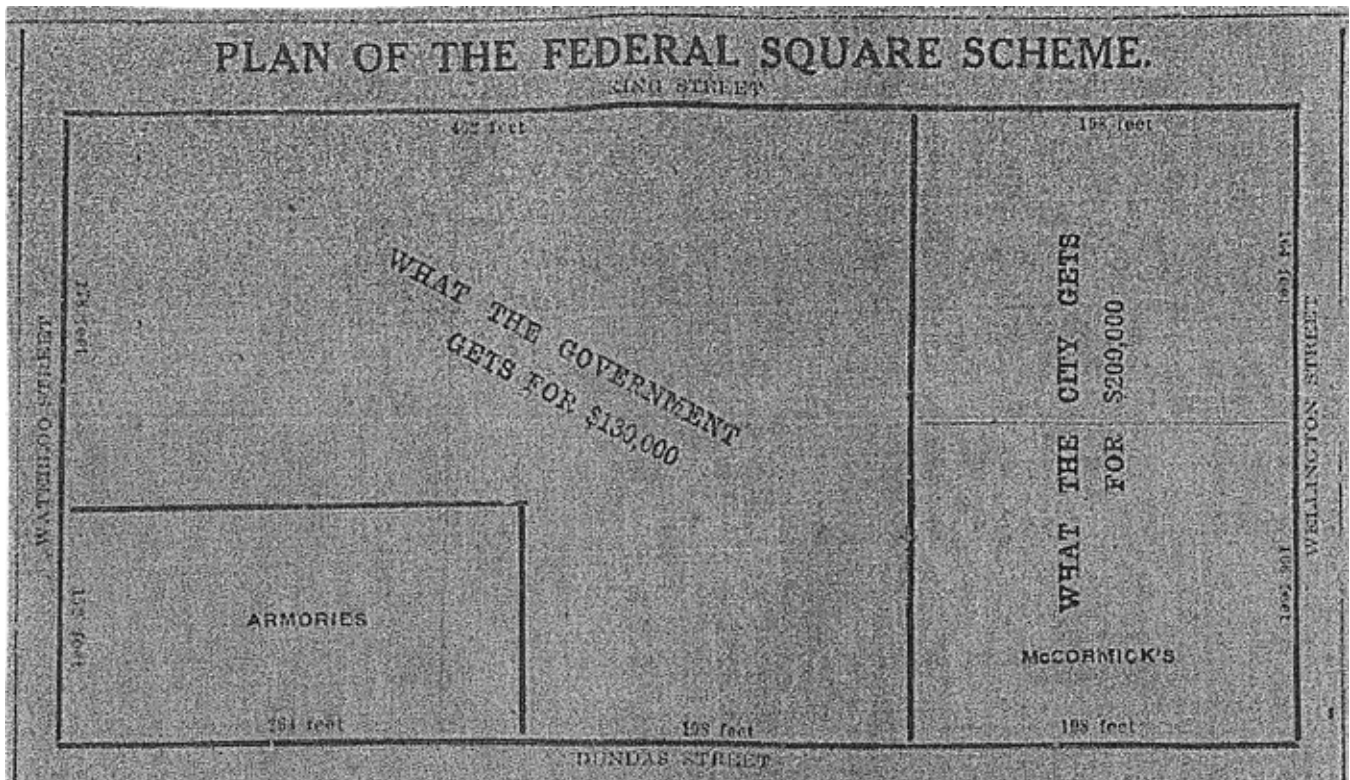
The block is as central as could be desired, and if the city had been laid out 75 years ago this block would then, as well as now, have been as wise a choice as could be made. The city can grow in all directions from the Federal Square.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to its central location, the *Advertiser* also mentioned two other factors that led to the choice of this site. First, the Armories, which already existed on the east end of the block, could easily make use of the proposed park-like setting for military training. Second, the McCormick Company, located at the west end of the block, was known to be contemplating a move owing to its need for more space and “if paid a reasonable sum for their property (could easily relocate) to the East End (of the city) which is the manufacturing part of London...” In short, according to the *Advertiser*; this site was ideal not only because of its central location but also because Alderman William G. Coles, who was the foremost advocate for the Federal Square Project, was said to have already obtained a grant for \$130,000 from the Dominion Government to purchase a portion of the land that surrounded the Armories.

To secure the remaining portion Londoners were asked to approve a bylaw for an expenditure of \$250,000.<sup>6</sup> While part of this money was to be employed to obtain all of the land owned by the McCormick Company at the corner of Dundas, Wellington, and King, as shown on the following map,<sup>7</sup> the land around the Armories was to be obtained with the help of the grant from the federal government. On January 2, 1913, the Free Press announced that the bylaw was approved by a substantial margin: 2,635 voted in favor whereas 1,744 voted against.<sup>8</sup>

In commenting on the federal grant it is important to note, as stated in the last line of a caption that appeared below the map, there did not appear to be any formal agreement with the government that this \$130,000 allotment would necessarily be available to the city. Instead, all that the government appeared to have offered Alderman Coles was “a verbal promise” that funds would be forthcoming. Despite this lack of a guarantee, shortly after the bylaw was approved the city proceeded with the project. Within days after this decision was reached, the price of real estate both within as well as around the proposed Federal Square site had begun to grow almost logarithmically.





Local real estate men report the briskest demand for realty in London at any time within their recollection at this season of the year. The Federal Square scheme has started the people going, and among Londoners there is a disposition to pick up real estate and hold it for speculation. Not only is this the case among Londoners, but there are many buyers and syndicates, large and small, coming in from the outside... Two hundred dollars a foot is a rock-bottom price for land in the vicinity of the Federal Square on Dundas Street, east of the Armories. On King Street the people would laugh at you now if you offered them one dollar a foot. And before three years every foot of land around the Federal Square and within that vicinity will not be purchasable under double the present figures. Even within a mile circle, the prices will double and treble. Property in London has been the cheapest of any city of its size in America, and now it is coming into its own. Watch land values in London grow.<sup>9</sup>

Perhaps the most extreme example of price inflation for land on the Federal Square site was the amount the city was now asked to pay for the McCormick property. Several years before this property had been considered for development, the Company was able to expand at a cost of \$60 per foot. The asking price that the city was now required to pay, however, was \$600 per foot, which of course was 10 fold higher than before.<sup>10</sup> Despite this excessive increase in cost, on February 3<sup>rd</sup> city council approved the purchase and by March 1<sup>st</sup> paid the Company “in cash” with possession slated to take place 15 months later.<sup>11</sup> With these funds in hand, as anticipated, the Company purchased 100 acres of land in east London on which they planned to erect their new factory.<sup>12</sup>

By the end of 1913 London had purchased most of the property on the site which led Mayor Graham in his 1914 inaugural address to urge council to move ahead with the rest “so we will be in a position to carry out our side of the contract with the Government and clear the way to go ahead with the building of the new City Hall as ordered by the vote of the ratepayers.”<sup>13</sup> Undoubtedly encouraged by the extremely optimistic outlook for the future, in July the Advertiser placed a full page announcement in its paper extolling London still further by proclaiming that London is “Canada’s economic, manufacturing, and distribution centre” in addition to being the “Wall Street of Western Ontario.”

It has approximately 250 factories, large and small; over 70 distinctive lines are represented, and between 12,000 and 13,000 people are employed. The last Government census shows that the value of the annual output increased over 100 percent in ten years. It has the largest stove works in the Dominion and two of the Dominion’s largest biscuit and candy factories, etc. (in addition to) four centrally located trunk and seven branch rail lines that carry 251 passenger and freight trains that arrive and depart from London daily along with a rail line to Lake Erie which is of great economic value to shippers.<sup>14</sup>

In view of these statistics, it is not surprising that two days later the Board of Control issued a competitive call for plans for the new city hall, the cost of which “shall not exceed \$250,000” and the Board further advised the City Solicitor to complete “the purchase of all the (remaining) Federal Square properties, and to take the necessary steps for transferring to the Dominion Government its portion of the Square as payments are received from the Government.”<sup>15</sup>

### The Debacle

Unfortunately, these last arrangements could not have been made at a worse time for the city. Two weeks after the city had reached its decision to move ahead with the Federal Square Project, Austria-Hungary shelled the Serbian capital of Belgrade. Then on August 22, 1914, Parliament passed the War Measures Act, and shortly thereafter Canada began to recruit soldiers for overseas deployment. Needless to say, all of these events associated with the start of the Great War caused the federal government to reconsider its financial obligations and in 1915, although promises were made, no funds were forthcoming.

The (city) Clerk recited the history of the negotiations.... and asked that an appropriation of \$50,000 be paid to the city. In responding, (the government) stated that \$50,000 would be paid and that the further payments of the \$130,000 would be made as soon as the financial conditions were improved, but that there should be no further expenditure for government property at present.”<sup>16</sup>

Despite this sense of reassurance by the government, in 1916 city council considered it necessary to request a reevaluation by the electorate concerning the feasibility of moving ahead with the project. On January 1, 1917 Londoners were asked to vote on the following bylaw: “Are you in favor of the Council building a New City Hall and completing the Federal Square proposition?”

While both the *Free Press* and the *Advertiser* endorsed a “Yes” vote, which was obtained (58% voted in favor),<sup>17</sup> the reason for the vote had less to do with any uncertainty on the part of city council over the government’s commitment to funding than with lobbying by a number of local builders who were seeking

immediate contracts to build the city hall and did not seem to care where it would be located. Indeed, according to the *Free Press*, the reason for the bylaw stemmed from demands "...repeatedly thrust upon the mayor's attention during the past few months by a number of contractors, who ask that construction of the city hall be undertaken at once."<sup>18</sup> Under consideration were sites that ranged from the Federal Square property to land on Ridout Street next to the courthouse as well as to land somewhere on Richmond Street.

The builders' assumption was that if the bylaw were approved, funds would be allocated shortly by the city to erect the new city hall without the need to wait for government funding. Contrary to this assumption, however, Mayor Hugh Stevenson's position on the matter was quite different: "the city should not at this time undertake any abnormal expenditures, but that London has a future to be safeguarded and that the Federal Square scheme should not be abandoned." In other words, the mayor interpreted the bylaw as simply a further endorsement of what the city had previously approved, and that no new funds should be allocated by the city to build a new city hall at any location other than on Federal Square property. The *Free Press* concurred with the mayor's position when it stated in an editorial that "London does not so badly require a city hall that in these days of stress and high prices that it should proceed with the proposed new building."<sup>19</sup> Instead it was the view of both the mayor and the *Free Press* that any extra funds in the city's budget needed to be devoted solely to expenses associated with the war effort. In fact, the London City Council provided further support for this viewpoint when it endorsed in 1917 the following resolution which was sent to the Prime Minister of Canada and to the Premiers of each of the provinces.

That in the opinion of the City of London, each and every government, corporation and person throughout the Empire, should spend no money except for necessities and the vigorous prosecution of the war...<sup>20</sup>

In spite of this setback, the city remained confident that once the war was over the promised funds would be forthcoming. In December, 1916, the *Free Press* even stated that: "There is no occasion to conclude that the Government will not keep faith with the promise said to have been made by the late Minister of Militia of a federal grant."<sup>21</sup> Also in 1916 one of the city council's controllers met with the minister of public works in Ottawa who "assured him that while all such schemes as the federal square scheme had to be laid over until after the war, the Government would most certainly go ahead with its share of the expenditure when peace was declared."<sup>22</sup> Indeed, throughout most of the war representatives from the city government had met with representatives from the federal government and on each occasion the city was given the assurance that funds would be forthcoming once the war was over. On January 13, 1919, however, the matter was finally brought to a head. In his inaugural address to City Council, Mayor Charles Somerville stated that he

would commend to the Council the straightening out of this matter with the Dominion Government at an early date, and the securing from the government the completion of payments and the completion of agreement as entered into with the city before the War. The Government, as I understand it, agreed to pay \$130,000 toward this scheme and actually placed in its estimates \$50,000 in the year 1916-17 towards the amount, but so far not one dollar has been paid. The City, under the management, has paid out in cash \$203,675 and assumed large liabilities and losses in taxes, and is further losing each year, so this should not be allowed to drag any longer. The War is over and it can now be carried out as originally planned, or on a revised plan as new conditions may make it necessary, but it should be commenced at once.<sup>23</sup>



Three weeks later council decided to send yet another delegation to Ottawa to discuss the matter. Although the outcome of the meeting was not reported in the minutes, on September 22<sup>nd</sup> council did reach several conclusions. It decided to examine “the possibility of selling what is known as the Federal Square property...and having the Building Inspector call for bids for the purchase of the properties, the said bids to be submitted to a vote of the electors for acceptance or otherwise.”<sup>24</sup> In view of these decisions it would seem reasonable to conclude that the city by now had accepted the fact that the Federal Government would not honour its initial financial commitment. It was not until 1921, however, that the entire matter was finally put to rest in Mayor Edgar Little’s inaugural address to council.

While I believe the people as a whole are in favour of the carrying out of the old Federal Square idea, at the same time we know that we cannot now expect any assistance from the Government along this line. To build a City Hall such as is demanded by a City of the importance of London would entail an expenditure of probably \$2,000,000 and I do not believe that this should be gone on at the present time. Our taxes are high and we should endeavour to see that no expenditure is made that is not absolutely necessary.<sup>25</sup>

To recover at least some of the expenses associated with the Federal Square Project, the city was able to rent portions of the land to various businesses. In September, 1920, for example, city council approved a request from William R. Hueston “for the right to park cars on the Federal Square site during Fair Week” and in December an agreement was reached with the Signry Limited company to rent a portion of the property for “advertising purposes” and to pay the city \$500 per year in rental fees.<sup>26</sup> The city had also considered alternative uses for the property. In 1923, for instance, Alderman Leonard H. Douglass moved “that the Public Utilities Commission be requested to convert the City Hall portion of the Federal Square into a Park, by the placing of flower beds, etc. (throughout the area).”<sup>27</sup>

The major breakthrough finally occurred in 1925 when the city received an offer from the Lynch Construction Company of Chicago to build a large hotel on the Wellington Street portion of the site that previously had been occupied by the McCormick Company. The arrangement Londoners were asked to ratify on September 5<sup>th</sup> specified an exchange of property that the Construction Company already owned on Richmond Street for the site the company had hoped to acquire from the city. Both the *Advertiser* and the *Free Press* strongly endorsed this venture. The following material from the *Free Press* appeared the day before the referendum.

What the ratepayers are asked to ratify is an exchange of these two properties...The Dundas street property has been owned by the city for the past 11 years. During all this time the city had paid interest of the debentures for the purchase amounting to \$6,500 annually. In addition, there has been a loss of revenue from taxation. This property to-day is a dead loss to the city. It is an ugly spot in the heart of London and is blocking the development of Dundas street...The *Free Press* has no hesitation in urging the electors to support this by-law. Upon the erection of the hotel the city will receive approximately \$22,143 in taxes annually from the enterprise.<sup>28</sup>

The *Free Press* further emphasized its endorsement of the hotel project in an editorial that also appeared the day before the referendum was held.

A feature of the hotel proposition which cannot be overemphasized is the question of conventions. London is ideally situated as a convention city. It is in the center of Western Ontario, on all the through lines and has unusual railway facilities in every direction. Yet London has to turn down dozens of conventions for lack of hotel accommodations... There is no question of the value of conventions to a city. They bring real money to a community... Let us make London a convention city.<sup>29</sup>

The results of the referendum, as reported on September 7<sup>th</sup> in the *Advertiser*, was clearly in favour of the project (3,594 voted yes while only 1,176 voted no).<sup>30</sup> In view of these results it is not surprising that construction began shortly thereafter and the new hotel, known as Hotel London, opened on November 14, 1928.<sup>31</sup> With the opening of this hotel on the former Federal Square site, it is safe to say that the Federal Square Project was now truly over.

## The New City Hall Debate

### Background

Until this point both newspapers had been in full agreement over the nature of the new city hall as outlined on the site plan for the Federal Square Project. With the demise of that project, however, the two papers took strongly opposing positions with regard to the use and the appearance of the proposed building. It was Mayor Little, in his 1921 inaugural address to the members of city council, who set the stage for the ensuing conflict.

...that a special Committee inquire into the feasibility of cooperating with the Utilities Commission with a view to putting another story on their building and completing the balance of the property we now occupy (on the Federal Square) with a building similar to that erected by them. I believe this could be done with the money already on hand towards the erection of a city hall, and we would have an administration building which would be quite satisfactory for many years to come, and at the same time a credit to London... I leave the matter for your consideration.<sup>32</sup>

### Conflict Between the *Free Press* and the *Advertiser*

In essence, what Mayor Little had suggested was a much more modest building than the one that had been proposed as part of the original Federal Square scheme. In contrast to Mayor Little's proposal, however, city council in 1923, together with the backing of the new mayor, George Wenige, and the *Advertiser*, were in favour of a modified, but the far more elaborate structure as illustrated below (see page 80).<sup>33</sup>

The rationale behind the 1923 proposal that was endorsed by council, Mayor Wenige and the *Advertiser*, was in keeping with the 1912 belief that London needed a city hall which was sufficiently robust in appearance to promote the view that London was a place worthy of considerable financial investment. Before council could proceed with this undertaking, however, it was necessary for the ratepayers to approve the new structure which meant that a still further bylaw was required. Although the *Advertiser*

had endorsed the 1923 council's proposal and therefore encouraged its readers to approved the bylaw, the *Free Press* did not and instead encouraged its readers to vote against the bylaw. Thus, the referendum which was held on December 3, 1923, became highly contentious.

The reason it became contentious, though, was not solely because the two newspapers held opposing views on the bylaw, but instead, at least according to the *Advertiser*, because the two papers had also endorsed different mayoral candidates and both the mayoral election and the bylaw referendum appeared on the same ballot and needed to be decided on the same day. Whereas the *Free Press* had endorsed Alderman William Wilson for mayor, the *Advertiser* supported Mayor Wenige for re-election. In view of this situation, it was the *Advertiser's* claim that the *Free Press's* opposition to the bylaw depended less on the nature of the building's design than on the *Advertiser's* support of Mayor Wenige. In the words of the *Advertiser*, the referendum had become highly political in nature, with the *Free Press*, merely "acting as the mouthpiece for a group of petty ward politicians" in their opposition to Wenige and in their support of Wilson for mayor.<sup>34</sup>

The *Advertiser* has demonstrated during the last two days the personal motive behind this sudden cry (by the *Free Press* to oppose the bylaw). Until last week the *Free Press* believed in London's prosperity...The change came only when the schemers determined that Wenige must not be allowed to have the credit of building the city hall...if the *Free Press* prefers the name of Alderman Billy Wilson, their mayoralty candidate on the corner stone, then let them put it there. Never mind the corner stone... think of London.

Needless to say, the *Free Press* took exception to this claim and argued that the real difference between the two papers stemmed from the financial costs associated with the construction of the proposed city hall design. As stated in the bottom left-hand corner of the illustration put forward by the *Advertiser* (see page 80), the erection of the proposed building depended on a \$500,000 debenture that the city needed to issue to support the overall costs. Hence, according to the *Free Press* a vote in favor of the bylaw, also meant a vote in favor of a \$500,000 bond that London's ratepayers would now be forced to cover.

On Monday the ratepayers of London will be asked to vote upon a by-law providing for the issuing of \$500,000 debentures for the erection of a new city hall to be built upon the McCormick site, on Dundas street. The *Free Press* is opposed to this by-law for the following reasons... (1) Because London's expenditures and taxes have been increasing in recent years out of all proportion to the population, if London is to maintain her present credit (rating) she must hold down both. The population since 1912 has grown 27 ½ percent and in the same time the taxes have jumped 250 per cent. (2) Because only two kinds of construction work should be proceeded with at the present time, revenue producing undertakings and works which are absolutely essential. The city hall comes under neither of these classifications.<sup>35</sup>

On December 3, 1923, London's ratepayers went to the polls and voted on both the mayoral candidates and the bylaw. While Mayor Wenige was re-elected, the bylaw was defeated by an overwhelming majority (4,566 against, 2,834 for).<sup>36</sup> Because this defeat meant that the city hall issue was not resolved, the issue needed to surface once again, and did so in 1926. Although a further referendum was now also required before the new council could proceed, to avoid the highly contentious nature of the 1923 referendum, the

wording of this further referendum did not deal with the specific nature of a city hall structure. Instead, the ratepayers only received a general description of the building and its costs. Also, the referendum was confined to a location referred to as the Spencer site at the northeast corner of Dundas and Wellington, which was directly across from the previous Federal Square property. On December 6, 1926, the ratepayers were asked to vote either Yes or No on the following question.<sup>37</sup>

Are you in favor of the erection on the Spencer site of a city hall somewhat similar in design to that of the Public Utilities Commission Building, to be paid for out of money on hand and available for the erection of a city hall?

Unlike the outcome of the previous referendum, those who voted in favor (3,765) now clearly surpassed those who voted against (2,525) the bylaw.<sup>38</sup> With these results in mind the newly elected mayor (John Moore) gave the following orders to the new city council on December 20, 1926.

The City Hall question has been determined by the ratepayers. There can be no reasonable doubt that the Legislature will not refuse authority to proceed...Plans and specifications should at once be procured for the new building...The whole question should be referred to the Committee and arrangements made to have the work proceeded with as soon as possible.<sup>39</sup>

The City Engineer and the City Architect subsequently submitted three elevation plans for the members of council to consider.<sup>40</sup>

Plan (a) showing a similar design to that of the Public Utilities Commission Building.

Plan (b) a plan similar to the Public Utilities Commission Building but with every alternate pilaster omitted.

Plan (c) a different plan.

Although the nature of the “different plan” in item c was not specified, there is little doubt that it was the same plan that Mayor Wenige and the *Advertiser* had endorsed in 1923, since it was that plan that was featured in a promotional announcement for the referendum that appeared in the *Advertiser* on December 4, 1926.<sup>41</sup> In view of this outcome, it is quite clear that by 1926 city council was strongly opposed to that plan even though it was still favoured by the *Advertiser*. As reported in the City Council Minutes of 1927 (p. 135); “At first the Council were divided, three in favour of plan (a) and three for plan (b) and two undecided. After further investigation and consideration, five were in favor of plan (a) and three in favor of plan (b). Subsequently plan (a) was unanimously approved.”

The formal opening of the new city hall building, as approved by council in 1927 and which still exists at the corner of Dundas and Wellington, took place on November 14, 1928. While both newspapers were equally laudatory in their coverage of the event, the bitterness that had occurred in 1923 between the two papers over the outcome of the 1923 referendum continued to exist. Whereas the *Free Press* viewed the final structure as a permanent replacement for the old city hall, and even stated that if more space were

needed in the future, “two more floors may be added if necessary,”<sup>42</sup> the *Advertiser*, which preferred a more elaborate building, considered the new structure as little more than a temporary replacement and not worthy of the term “city hall.”

The building was never intended as a City “Hall” proper. It is strictly an office building, housing the departments of the city as might be the department of any private corporation. There are none of the frills of the common City Hall... When it is necessary to erect a larger City Hall—as is likely to happen within five years—the present building will be disposed of for an office building. It was designed with that purpose in mind.<sup>43</sup>

In fact throughout their coverage of the opening on November 14, the *Advertiser* only referred to the structure as “London’s New Municipal Office Building” or the “new civic administration building” but never as the new City Hall. The *Free Press*, on the other hand always used the term “City Hall” and never called the structure a municipal office building.

**PLANS OF THE NEW CITY HALL ARE READY**

You Have Said Four Times To Build It At the Southeast Corner of Dundas and Wellington Streets.

**The City Council Are Now Ready To Go Ahead**

Work can be commenced very quickly after you have again expressed your opinion.

Already about \$10,000 has been expended on plans, etc.

The location is ready.

**Every Preliminary Detail Has Been Arranged**

If the vote is registered for the bylaw the council will proceed, and men will be given work as rapidly as possible.

Men need work, the city needs a city hall.

THE NEW CITY HALL AS PLANNED BY THE CITY COUNCIL

Voting on bylaw to provide for the issue of \$500,000 debentures for the erection of the new City Hall, submitted by the Council of the City.

**FOR THE BYLAW - - - X**

**AGAINST THE BYLAW -**

The city council secured these plans as the result of your former vote. Tell them again to do as you wish.

Delay adds to the cost—valuable documents need greater protection. Protect your property.

**IT WILL BE BUILT IN 1924 IF YOU VOTE FOR THE BYLAW**

**Mark Your Ballot For a New City Hall If You Want It Built.**

Before leaving this topic, and in view of the material to be covered in the next section, it is perhaps also worth noting several further examples of the bitterness that had arisen between the *Free Press* and the *Advertiser*. In their summary of the results on the day after the 1923 mayoral election when the *Free Press*' candidate lost and the *Advertiser*'s candidate, George Wenige, won re-election, the *Free Press*, made the following statement:

the opinion is being freely expressed on the streets today that the ratepayers have decidedly voiced a lack of confidence at the polls yesterday in the (re-elected) occupant of the mayor's chair. Speaking at the campaign meetings (prior to the election) the (re-elected) mayor repeatedly stated that the electorate should "get the hook" after any of their representatives, when those representatives had lost the confidence of the public in some way or another or who would not do the bidding of the people.

Despite the vote of lack of confidence in the mayor, as expressed in the defeat of the city hall by-law yesterday, his (re-elected) worship will not resign. Speaking on the public platform during the campaign he said that it would be foolish to think of resigning because the people opposed the city hall proposition...He contends that the people have merely decided they do not want to spend any money now...It is just a move of carefulness that has swept over the ratepayers.<sup>44</sup>

From the foregoing it appears that the *Free Press* had determined, based on the re-elected mayor's own words, that Wenige should have resigned because the bylaw he had endorsed prior to his re-election was strongly defeated and, since he did not resign, he must be untrustworthy and his future statements should not be relied upon because they are intended only for immediate consumption.

On the same day both papers also attempted to convince their respective readers, as well as others, that their paper was the best that London offered. In a headline that appeared over a full page ad, the *Advertiser* claimed that "In News of London, In News of Western Ontario, The *Advertiser* Tops Them All." As proof of this claim the *Advertiser* compared itself against the *Free Press* during the preceding months on the number of printed columns as well as on the number of printed stories. Specifically, the ad stated that the *Advertiser* provided its readers with 10-15 columns and 58-78 stories, whereas the *Free Press* only offered its readers 9-13 columns and 50-65 stories. Hence, those who subscribed to the *Advertiser* received far more news than those who subscribed to the *Free Press*.<sup>45</sup>

The *Free Press* then countered this claim in an equally large full page ad that emphasized, through the use of bold type in its headline and in several key words, how the *Free Press* was better than the *Advertiser*.

#### We Point with Pride to a Fact that Others May View with Alarm

There is a local application for this famous saying because we have been asked to make plain the differences between the net paid circulation of the two local dailies during the past two and a half years. From April 1921 to October 1923 the *London Free Press* net paid circulation increased by 7,168, whereas during the same period, the circulation of our competitor decreased by 7,957.<sup>46</sup>

We mentioned these additional points because the degree of hostility that the two papers showed towards each other during the 1923-1926 city hall debate surfaced once again in the story that unfolded over the electrification of the London/Port Stanley Railway. To understand the nature of this hostility, however, it is useful to first review the argument advanced by the *Free Press* and the counterargument put forth by the *Advertiser* over the issue of private vs. public sector ownership of electric power, since this became a critical issue in the debate over the electrification of the railway. The background section that appears below provides a summary of this material.



## Electrification of the London/Port Stanley Railway

### Background

By the turn of the century all of London's electrical needs, municipal, commercial, and domestic, could be easily accommodated through a small number of firms that operated in the private sector.<sup>47</sup> Adam Beck and his supporter, the *London Free Press*, however, claimed that a considerable savings would be realized by both the city and the individual consumers if both were to consolidate their purchasing power into one combined order and buy all of their electrical energy from a single source in the public sector (i.e. The Hydro-Electric Power Commission), instead of purchasing their electricity in bits and pieces from separate firms in the private sector.

The rationale behind Beck's claim was that because the Power Commission purchased its electricity in bulk from the Niagara Power Company, the larger this combined order, the lower the unit cost for each consumer. To realize this goal, however, the combined order needed to be placed with the Power Commission at the beginning of the year. With this initial order in mind, the Commission would then be able to determine in advance how much it needed to charge the city as well as the individual consumers. It was not until the end of the year, however, that the actual amount of power that had been used could be calculated to determine the final cost that both would then be required to pay.

In essence, the scheme advanced by Beck and the *Free Press* was based on an extremely risky gamble because there was no assurance at the start of the year exactly how much the electricity would actually cost the consumer at the end of the year. It was because of the risk involved combined with the debate over private sector versus public sector control that both papers once again were at odds with each other.

To illustrate this point consider what happened in 1908 when city council authorized London to purchase 5,000 horsepower of electricity at a cost of \$23.50 per horsepower from the Hydro-Electric Power Commission. The basis for this decision stemmed from Beck's argument that that Power Commission's unit charge was far less than the city would normally pay if it had purchased the same amount of electrical power through one or more of London's private-sector electricity-generating companies.

The *Advertiser*, which was in support of these private-sector companies, disagreed with Beck's argument<sup>48</sup> and therefore questioned whether the city could in fact dispose of this entire allotment of 5,000 horsepower over the course of the following year in order to justify the charge of \$23.50 per horsepower. If the city could only dispose of 3,000 horsepower, the *Advertiser* argued that the cost would increase to \$44.62 per horsepower and if it could only dispose of 2,250 horsepower the unit cost would rise still further to \$56.03. Moreover, these costs were far in excess of what the private-sector firms always charged their customers.

To strengthen its argument, the *Advertiser* also drew attention to the amount of electricity actually sold during the previous year by the London Electric Company, which was London's largest private-sector provider of power: "The peak load of the London Electric Company, at the season of the year when the consumption is greatest, is from 1,800 to 2,000 horsepower." Therefore, according to the *Advertiser*, a unit cost of \$56.03 might in fact have been a far more reasonable figure for the *Free Press* to have publicized.

In summary, according to the Advertiser, since there was no guarantee at the start of the year exactly how much electricity would be utilized in this combined order, if the *Free Press* were a responsible paper it would have informed its readers of the true nature of the risk associated with this venture since it was impossible to know at the start of the year exactly what the final cost for electricity would be until the end of that year.

In response to this argument, three days later the *Free Press* published the results of a survey based on nearly 140 firms that showed the amount of electrical horsepower actually used in London over the entire course of the previous year, not just the amount provided by the London Electric Company during its peak season. The survey included businesses that ranged from small family bakers and butcher shops, to large manufacturing firms such as the McClary Company and the McCormick Company. The results showed that the overall consumption of electricity in London was nearly 9,000 horsepower, which was far more than the 5,000 horsepower that the Power Commission's contract called for. Based on this evidence, the *Free Press* concluded that there is no "cause for fear that London will not be able to sell 5,000 horsepower, as asked for."<sup>49</sup>

Nevertheless, for Beck's scheme to be successful, it was still incumbent upon the city to ensure that a sufficient amount of electricity would always be sold if the city were to guarantee that the low rate established by the Power Commission at the start of the year would be the same rate charged at the end of that year. And it was equally incumbent upon the city to strive for even lower rates from the Power Commission if it hoped to fulfill Mayor Beattie's 1911 inaugural prediction that one day London would become the Metropolis of Western Ontario. In other words, if London hoped to entice new companies and manufacturers to settle here, the city needed to find ways to be competitive with other nearby locations such as Toronto where the electricity rate charged by the Power Commission was only \$18.50 per horsepower and Hamilton where the cost was even lower (\$17.50 per horsepower).<sup>50</sup>

To achieve this added goal, in 1910 the city launched an extremely aggressive and highly successful marketing campaign designed to increase the overall amount of electricity that would be used in London. On November 30<sup>th</sup> the *Free Press* announced in a headline article, the opening of what it referred to as "A Monster Demonstration for (the) Arrival of Hydro Power" to be held in the armories on Dundas Street. The rationale behind this approach, of course, was to convince the public to purchase more electrical appliances and therefore to use more electrical power obtained from the Power Commission, since the greater the amount of power used on a yearly basis, the larger the yearly order and, therefore, the lower the yearly cost.

Londoners will be treated to an electric exposition of no small magnitude if the plans of Chairman (Philip) Pocock go aright. The show is to be free to all and will be held in the armories, sometime between Christmas and New Year's...If we can secure them, Westinghouse, General Electric and other firms who manufacture electrical specialties will be glad to exhibit their different lines here for the benefit of the citizens. It will be a good thing for them and for us also, as there are very few who are familiar with the various home comforts provided by the numerous applications of electricity.<sup>51</sup>

The three day display opened in the armories on December 20th with “a fine programme of speeches... the city was decorated in gorgeous festoons of brightly colored and illuminate incandescent lights,”<sup>52</sup> and upon entry the visitor was greeted with

Every up-to-date electrical device known to modern times, many of which have never before been seen in London...Electrical heaters, flat irons, cookers, hot plates, washing machines and many other labor saving devices for the housewife, as well as power machinery and lighting appliances of all descriptions and the men in charge of the booths will be only too glad to demonstrate the workings of their various specialties.

One firm, The Simplex Electric Heating Company of Cambridge, Mass, will have on exhibition an electric range equipped with a large oven and hot plates for boiling tea kettles and heating frying pans. Although possessed of all the cooking potency of a good-sized hard coal range, the electric stove takes up less room than a small gas stove, and there are no matches, soot or radiation of heat into the kitchen. Simply turn the switch and there you are. A competent baker will be engaged during the period of the show who will bake bread and prepare meals by electricity before the eyes of the visitors.

At this time only a very small number of electrical appliances such as irons, toasters and table lamps were available for purchase in London, and these were stocked by very few privately owned stores.<sup>53</sup> Hence, to encourage the purchase of the many other items that had been on display in the armories, in 1911 the city opened its own store, the sole purpose of which was to encourage the use of more electricity and achieve Beck’s aim of reducing the overall unit cost of electrical power. Initially called the City Hydro-Electric Appliance Shop, the store featured an extensive array of products such as stoves, tea kettles, cereal cookers, milk warmers, cigar lighters, radiators, and even vacuum cleaners. The opening took place at start of the Christmas shopping season.

The city electrical department will hold a Christmas display of electrical appliances in the large windows of the city hall. All the lighting, cooking and heating appliances for sale by the department will be on exhibition.<sup>54</sup>

Because this was an exploratory venture, all of the appliances in the store were obtained on consignment thereby avoiding the need for the city to invest any of its own funds in this exploratory undertaking. When commenting on the policy of selling appliances only on consignment, Hugh J. Glaubitz, General Superintendent of the city’s electrical department, said the following:

...this policy should be vigorously pursued in the future by the Department keeping in touch with all the latest developments (and), procuring samples and introducing them to the citizens. The revenue derived from the power used in flat irons, toasters and similar apparatus will thus eventually amount to a considerable total...

The last sentence in this statement is quite revealing because it indicates that the General Superintendent was less concerned with making a profit through the sale of items in the store than he was with the amount

of electricity that the home owner would subsequently employ in order to make use of these items. The Superintendent also commented very favorably on a plan that was then being considered by the city to loan people money to wire their homes in order to purchase and use even more appliances and of course, more electricity.

The plan contemplated by the Board of assisting responsible consumers by advancing them money when desiring to purchase motors or having their premises wired will, I believe, assist greatly in quickly increasing the number of connections and thereby the amount of power sold. I have no doubt whatever that by the end of 1912, 5,000 people will be connected with the City's lines.

Unless one had the financial means to do so, around this time the wiring of ones' home was quite expensive and could be as high as \$80.<sup>57</sup> The home owner was also required to purchase a permit from the city to cover the cost of the city's wiring inspector.<sup>58</sup> In addition, the purchase of electrical appliances was also very costly. For instance, an electric vacuum cleaner in 1913 purchased from the City Hydro-Electric shop, cost \$30.00 whereas a manually operated vacuum cleaner could be obtained from Cowan's Colossal Hardware store on Dundas Street for only \$11.50.<sup>55</sup> Similarly, an electric toaster in 1914, when it was on sale, cost \$3.25 whereas the regular price for a gas operated toaster was only 25 cents.<sup>56</sup>

Despite these financial drawbacks, in his next annual report to the City Board of Water Commissioners Glaubitz was able to comment very favourably on the success that these promotional ventures had in generating the use of electricity.

The second year's operation of the Electrical Department from December 1, 1911 to November 30, 1912, saw an increase of the City's load from 2,080 to 3,164 horsepower; during the same time the amount of power sold (to manufactures, home owners, etc.) increased from 3,000 to 4,900 horsepower and the total number of (household and commercial) connections increased from 2,903 to 4,801...

A similar level of growth occurred the following year.

The total number of consumers at the end of the 1913 was 6,406, a total net gain for the year of 1605... (in addition) 848 had the service installed in new houses (and) the sale of electrical appliances and lamps increased considerably this year being \$17,400 as compared with \$7,000 for the previous year... (finally) a dining-room was established in the (City Hydro-Electric) store in connection with the Sales Department where the advantages of electric cooking are demonstrated almost daily. Although we are at present selling electric stoves at cost a largely increased revenue is expected in time from the sale of power used for cooking.<sup>59</sup>

It is also worth mentioning that, aside from the promotional activities that the city had engaged in, there is still another factor that may have contributed to this wholesale increase in the use of electricity. Prior to the introduction of electric power into London, home owners frequently relied on natural gas provided by the City Gas Company to supply all of their heating, cooking and lighting needs. In 1911 the Gas Appliance Company store at 213 Dundas Street offered a selection of items that ranged from water heaters and fireplace heaters, to stoves and table lamps. In 1913, however, the use of gas became a major concern for two reasons. The first reason had to do with purification.

The (city) Board of health will not permit the distribution of natural gas in London without its being purified before it enters the city. The contention is that natural gas is a menace to public health in its unpurified state and its distribution means the creating of a nuisance which does not exist at the present time.<sup>60</sup>

In commenting on this matter the president of the City Gas Company stated that “the entire advantage in natural gas lies in the possibility of selling it to the consumer at a very cheap rate. Immense purifiers, as big as any church in London, would have to be built to take care of the supply in London...purification is therefore not practical.”

Needless to say, without purification there was the additional issue of the odor that had recently been encountered in Guelph and Brantford. To deal with this concern Londoners were advised to install their own purifiers, and if they did not, they could be prosecuted by the Board of Health for “maintaining a nuisance.” When faced with this dilemma, many residents in Guelph turned to the use of electricity, which raises the possibility that the same could have occurred in London.

The second reason for the elimination of gas had to do with the need to prevent loss of life. On December 17, 1913, the *Free Press*<sup>61</sup> reported that a coroner’s jury in Toronto brought in a verdict of accidental death in the case of a man who was found in a room with the gas that was normally employed for lighting only partially turned on. Although it was unknown whether this was truly an accidental death or a case of suicide, the paper mentioned that “the toll from gas suicide and accidental death is heavy especially in large cities (and that the coroner’s jury also) recommended that all boarding houses and hotels (in Toronto) be compelled to use electric light.” As a follow-up to this recommendation the *Free Press* felt that London’s city council will probably be asked in the near future to pass a similar bylaw. If such a bylaw were indeed approved, by itself this would have led to an increase in the use of electricity.

### The Scandal: 1st Stage

As summarized above, between 1910 and 1914, the city experienced considerable success in promoting the use of electric power obtained from the public sector Hydro-Electric Power Commission. It was against the backdrop of this success in the public sector electrification of the city that, in December 1912, a scandal erupted between Adam Beck, who also proposed the electrification of the city owned, but leased, London to Port Stanley Railway, and Thomas H. Purdom, who was a major shareholder in a competing private sector railway, the Southwest Traction line, that had previously become electrified through the use of its own private sector electrical generating plant.<sup>62</sup> Throughout the month both parties, with the help of their respective newspaper supporters (Beck via the *Free Press* and Purdom via the *Advertiser*) made a number of fallacious and often malicious accusations against the other. It was Mayor Charles Graham, however, who also set the stage for these attacks when he made the following remarks in his 1912 inaugural address to London’s city council.

...we will in a short time receive an offer for our (rail)road, by parties at the present time more or less interested in said road, to secure a lease of the road, and to use the same as an electric road,

this prospective offer, is, in my opinion, more reason why we should at once take up the question of studying the matter of controlling the road ourselves and improving same, making it an up to date radial electric road, to serve the City in all (of its) parts as an inlet and outlet, both for passenger and freight service, by doing this as soon as possible, we will be in a better position, to consider any offer we may receive, it being our duty to consider this matter from all sides.<sup>63</sup>

The first report that dealt with the issue raised by the mayor over whether to discontinue leasing the rail line to a private company and instead to electrify the railway via the Hydro-Electric Power Commission was brought to council at the beginning of September. Owing to an estimated overall cost of between \$500,000 to \$600,000, this possibility was placed on a tentative hold.

While the idea... has not been dropped altogether, it is thought by the majority of the members of the board to be too big a proposition for the city to handle, coupled with the debt already existing.<sup>64</sup>

Two months later, though, the question surfaced again. This time detailed findings were made available to council in the form of a lengthy report requested by Adam Beck. The report was co-authored by an "eminent consulting engineering firm" in Syracuse, New York and the Hydro-Electric Power Commission. To fully inform the public of the report's contents, the entire report appeared in a two page article published by the *Free Press*.<sup>65</sup> As an aid to its readers, the major findings that the *Free Press* claimed were in the report had been summarized and highlighted by the *Free Press* and appeared in a separate box at the end of the *Free Press* article. The only monetary details in this summary, however, were the projected yearly earnings (\$261,500), related yearly expenses (\$220,543) and the profit the city would stand to realize (\$40,955) if it endorsed an electrification bylaw that was scheduled for approval by the city's ratepayers on January 1, 1913.

What the *Free Press* had neglected to mention in its summary of the report, however, was the overall cost associated with electrifying the system itself. Although these figures did appear in the actual report, as well as on the second page of the *Free Press* article, unless the reader was extremely diligent, they could easily have been overlooked since they were not included in the *Free Press* summary. To correct this shortcoming the *Advertiser* provided the missing material in the form of a page 1 headline: LONG-AWAITED REPORT ON ELECTRICATION, PUTS COSTS AT NEAR \$900,000. Needless to say, this \$900,000 figure clearly exceeded the \$500,000 to \$600,000 figure that the city had already said was simply too high to warrant further consideration. In a follow-up article the *Advertiser* then called for an independent review of the evidence in Adam Beck's report.<sup>66</sup>

Despite this request, though, during a meeting of the Board of Trade on December 2<sup>nd</sup>, only two officials were invited to testify, and these were the same two who had initially prepared the report, which certainly was not the independent review requested by the *Advertiser*. Nevertheless, and based solely on their comments, the Board recommended that city council submit a monetary bylaw for approval on January 1, 1913, that stemmed from the Beck report. In an editorial that appeared on December 3<sup>rd</sup> the *Advertiser* summarized its reaction to the Board's outright dismissal of their request.



Messrs. Gabey (from the Power Commission) and Storer (from the engineering firm in Syracuse) are electrical experts, no doubt of high standing. On problems within their professional sphere, their advice is worthy of respect. But they make no pretense of being railroad men, and on a railroad proposition of this kind they are not qualified to pronounce on anything beyond the cost of electrification. Upon all other phases of the question the testimony of railway experts is needed. It will be an outrage if ratepayers are denied a report from a competent source, and asked to be blindfolded into an expenditure of \$900,000, which Mr. Gabey says should be swelled to \$1,030,000 to complete the job.<sup>67</sup>

The *Advertiser* further noted on December 5<sup>th</sup> that the members of the London Trades and Labor Council were opposed to electrification because “the city will be swamped with debt”<sup>68</sup> and the next day it summarized the outcome of an equally dismissive meeting held by the West London Progressives to discuss this matter.

Everywhere throughout the hall, the members, one after another, stated that they would not put themselves on record either for or against the electrifying proposition. Before doing so they wanted more accurate information on the question. Some suggested the folly of voting on a bylaw they knew nothing about.<sup>69</sup>

In view of these negative reactions to the Board’s decision, on December 9<sup>th</sup> city council was asked to vote once again on whether it was indeed appropriate for council to put forward a monetary bylaw based solely on Beck’s proposal without the need to first obtain additional information. Of the 12 aldermen on council, seven agreed to delay the submission of this bylaw to the public and by a further vote of 8 to 6, council also supported the following resolution “that independent expert advice should be obtained,” which was in keeping with the *Advertiser*’s earlier recommendation.<sup>70</sup>

The next day (December 10) the *Free Press* used the following front page headline and editorial to express its outrage at the nature of this behavior by council.<sup>71</sup>

SEVEN ALDERMEN DECLARED BY THEIR VOTES LAST NIGHT THAT THE PEOPLE CANNOT BE TRUSTED TO DEAL WITH THEIR OWN PROPERTY

The enemies of public ownership won a battle in the City Council last night. By a vote of five to seven the alderman divided on the side of the (private) corporations against the people. It is the struggle to give the citizens of London the right to say what they wish to be done with their own railway, the private interests scored...This journal does not pretend to say what were the influences which prompted these (seven) aldermen to vote as they did.

Is the fight for the people lost? That will be for the people themselves to say. They have been denied the right to vote upon a question affecting the future of a property into which they have put probably two millions of dollars. They have been told in effect they cannot deal with the question, because, forsooth, seven worthy aldermen are, for reasons they best know, not prepared to deal with it. These seven aldermen have said to the people that they are not fitted to judge whether the report which Hon. Adam Beck submitted to them is worthy of their consideration. But if the citizens of London

are not fitted to deal with their own property, THEY AT LEAST WILL HAVE THE PRIVILEGE OF DEALING WITH THE ALDERMEN WHO HAVE BEEN UNTRUE TO THEM. Election day is three weeks distant.<sup>72</sup>

The *Advertiser* then immediately commented on this unprecedented rebuke by the *Free Press* of a city council vote.

Last evening a brow-beating article, evidently inspired, was printed in the *London Free Press* in which aldermen were warned that if they (were the ones who) voted to delay the vote on electrification they would be branded as hirelings of traction and private power interests. It was a disgraceful attempt at intimidation.<sup>73</sup>

Despite the fact that the *Advertiser* had clearly accomplished its aim to postpone any further consideration of this topic until a later date, the level of vitriol associated with this issue continued to fester and become even more heated during the remainder of the month. Throughout this episode, however, it had also become apparent that a number of London's firms were keenly interested in the future of the railway and were also very much in support of the need for public sector electrification. One of the largest of these was the London Rolling Mills Company which then became embroiled in the next stage of the scandal because Adam Beck was a major shareholder in this firm.

### The Scandal: 2nd Stage

On December 23, 1912, the *Advertiser* raised the possibility that the real reason Beck was strongly in favor of public sector electrification stemmed from his relationship with the Rolling Mills Company. According to the *Advertiser*, Beck stood to realize a considerable profit from his shareholdings since electrification would lead to lower shipping costs which, in turn, would improve the firm's overall profit margin. It was also claimed that Beck would gain since all of the existing rails on the London to Port Stanley line would need to be replaced once electrification was approved and the company would then be in a position to purchase "thousands and thousands of tons of rails, plates, spikes, guards and other steelwork..." at an extremely low price which could then be recast and sold at a considerable profit. In short, according to the *Advertiser*, given these two factors, it was clearly in Beck's interest to promote public sector electrification because of the financial rewards that he would eventually realize by taking this stand.<sup>74</sup>

In a front page article on December 24<sup>th</sup> the *Free Press* responded to these charges by publishing a lengthy letter it had received from John White, owner of Rolling Mills. The article began with the following headline along with an excerpt from the letter that questioned whether the firm would indeed profit through the purchase and recasting the scrap rails, etc.

#### JOHN WHITE REBUKES SLANDER IN THE PURDOM NEWSPAPER

I wish to say that the Rolling Mills Company would not be bidders (on this material) for the very good reason that we cannot use steel rails in the manufacture of bar iron, neither are we equipped to roll these into smaller rail sections nor into bars of any kind; they are absolutely valueless to us

as raw material...any person who cares can easily see how absurd is your statement that the Rolling Mills is greatly interested in the scrap material which might be thrown on the market (as the result of electrification).<sup>75</sup>

White also denied the *Advertiser's* claim that his firm was interested in electrification because it might lower the shipping costs of manufactured goods from his company to Port Stanley. According to White, "Our special interest in this matter (of electrification) is the maintenance of the present rate on coal (delivered) from Port Stanley to London." Hence, according to White, his concern was similar to that of many others, namely, would the current delivery charge for coal shipped from Port Stanley to London via rail remain unchanged if electrification were implemented as a replacement for steam? White's letter finally ended in praise of Beck for his many contributions to the city.

This city is indebted to Mr. Beck for bringing the Rolling Mills here at large personal risk, just as it is indebted to him for the Sanatorium, Horton street wells and the various other enterprises in which he has interested himself... The above being absolute facts, I fail to see how Mr. Beck will in any way enrich himself through his connection with the Rolling Mills at the expense of the city.

With the publication of this letter the *Free Press* not only disputed the charges by the *Advertiser* against Beck, but on the previous day it had raised similar charges against Purdom when it drew attention to his pursuit of personal financial gain through the operation of his private railway (the Traction Line) which in turn, was privately electrified. The *Free Press* noted that when the Traction Line began to operate as an electrified railway this led to a substantial loss in the number of passengers who previously had traveled from London to Port Stanley on London's steam railway. According to the *Free Press*, passengers typically prefer to travel on an electrified railway because it is cleaner and quieter than a steam operated rail system. Hence, Purdom's real fear was that if the London to Port Stanley Railway became electrified, the reverse would happen and lead to a substantial decrease in the profitability of Purdom's rail system.<sup>76</sup> In short, it was Purdom's goal that the London/ Port Stanley Railway should continue to operate, not as a municipally owned electrified railway, but under the present private leasing system as a steam railway, which the *Free Press* had previously reported was highly inefficient.<sup>77</sup>

As the end of December, 1912, approached, the issue over public sector ownership and electrification versus private sector ownership and electrification became even more pronounced but now the issue centered not on the matter of electrification per se, but on the city council candidates' stand on electrification as expressed in the *Free Press* editorial of December 10, 1912, discussed above. Specifically, the candidates who were running for alderman in the civic elections to be held on January 1, 1913, had been divided by the two newspapers into opposing camps; the *Advertiser* supported those who previously had favored a delay in the vote on public sector electrification, while the *Free Press* supported those who took the opposite stand. When the final results of the election were tabulated, oddly enough, both sides declared victory.

On January 2<sup>nd</sup> the *Free Press* was extremely pleased with the outcome because seven of the eight candidates who were elected had pledged during the campaign to submit the issue of electrification directly to the people without the need for any further information. This meant, of course, that in a 12 member city

council, the *Free Press* would now be able to manage the controlling vote to be held on all forthcoming matters that concerned the issue of electrification.

The *Advertiser*, on the other hand, was also extremely pleased, but for a very different reason. It had supported five of the six aldermanic candidates who had previously voted for delay, had run for re-election, and were re-elected. Hence, according to the *Advertiser*, this was considered a victory, not in the sense of having achieved a controlling vote in city council, but as a direct insult to Adam Beck in his attempt to prevent the ratepayers from receiving the additional information they were entitled to have in order to cast an informed vote on the matter of electrification. The *Advertiser* expressed its reasoning in the following editorial.

#### THE AUTOCRAT REBUKED

Electors were daily implored (by the *Free Press*) to defeat the six aldermen-candidates who were falsely accused of trying to “muzzle the people” because they insisted on the right of citizens to fuller information on a scheme involving the expenditure of nearly a million dollars; a scheme based on an obviously imperfect report...which aroused grave fears among manufactures and shippers lest they should be deprived of steam road connections essential to their business. Five of the six members of the council who withstood the autocrat (Adam Beck) and were pelted with daily diatribes, have been re-elected.<sup>78</sup>

#### The Scandal: 3rd Stage

The real debate between Beck and Purdon and their respective newspapers, however, came to a head when each paper attacked the other in a series of new charges and countercharges. The major issue under consideration this time, however, was not only over the matter of electrification, but also on the appropriateness of municipal (public) ownership versus private (leased) ownership of the railway.<sup>79</sup> The *Advertiser* had argued on many occasions that the best approach to dealing with the London/Port Stanley Railway was to maintain the private leasing system and hold that system open to “inviting bids for the road from the Grand Trunk, the Canadian Pacific, the Canadian Northern, the Michigan Central, the Pere Marquette and any other railway.”<sup>80</sup> The *Free Press*, on the other hand, favored public ownership and the need to do away with the leasing system. It was this particular concern, as expressed in a December 2, 1912, *Free Press* headline “Clash Between Private and Public Interests Over Electrification of the Pt. Stanley Road,”<sup>81</sup> that now came to the fore on September 19, 1913, as a result of the request by Mayor Graham that city council should consider the following bylaw.

That the London and Port Stanley Railway be constructed and equipped as a (public sector) electric road (and if approved,) that the city solicitor be instructed to prepare a bylaw for submission to the electors ...authorizing the corporation to borrow the sum of \$700,000 and issue debentures therefor for a period of forty years with interest at 5 percent per annum, for the purpose of constructing, equipping and operating the London and Port Stanley Railway as an electric road.<sup>82</sup>

The next day the *Advertiser* reported the outcome of the city council vote.

By the unanimous vote of the city council Friday night, the bylaw for the electrification of the London and Port Stanley Road goes to its court of last appeal—the ratepayers. Without a dissenting member, the twelve aldermen of the council voted to allow the people to voice their opinion of the merits or demerits of the proposed \$700,000 electrification scheme.<sup>83</sup>

Unlike the controversy that had erupted prior to the January 1, 1913, referendum, which centered on the need for more information beyond what was contained in the one report provided by Adam Beck's experts (Gabey and Storer), London's ratepayers were now further subjected to three additional expert opinions and, as a result, a new dilemma arose as reported in the *Advertiser*.

When all four experts' reports submitted on the electrification question are examined closely they are found to be at variance on almost every point. Not only are there wide discrepancies as to fixed charges, but a startling variety of opinion also presents itself when such items as revenue from passengers, revenue from freight and operating expenses are looked into...the Eastman report says that the road will earn in the first year the sum of \$80,000 from freight carried. This is \$60,000 less than the Gabey-Storer estimate, \$40,839 less than the Warfield estimate, and \$15,000 less than the Marshall estimate... In terms of passenger revenue the Marshall report says that the road will make in the first year the sum of \$80,000 which is \$41,500 less than the Gabey-Storer estimate, and \$32,322 less than the estimate in the Warfield report and \$20,000 less than figure in the Eastman report.<sup>84</sup>

In view of these discrepancies, how was one to know whether electrification would indeed be profitable? There was also the possible danger that electrification was said to pose to the men who worked on the railway and there was the further question of whether the various steam operated lines would continue to serve London if London agreed to install an electrified system. Each of these issues was raised in a series of charges against electrification by the *Advertiser* followed by a series of countercharges that appeared in the *Free Press* in the days that led up to the October 22, 1913 referendum.

The one major issue that still most concerned the *Advertiser*, however, was cost. The *Advertiser* noted the absence of any information on the additional expenses associated with the need to purchase or rent further freight cars to accommodate the anticipated growth in future freight shipments. It was estimated that 150-200 cars would be needed at a cost of around \$12,000. Its greatest concern, however, was the overall financial burden that would be inflicted upon the individual ratepayer if the bylaw to borrow \$700,000 were approved. Two days before the referendum the front page headline story in the *Advertiser* contained the following warning.<sup>85</sup>

#### A MORTGAGE OF \$280 ON EVERY HOME IN LONDON

On a debenture issue of only \$700,000 London would be forced to pay in the forty years for which the debentures would be issued the enormous sum of \$2,800,000 in interest and sinking fund, plus the yearly deficits that are certain to be realized. This would mean that every home in London would be mortgaged for the sum of \$280 and that every individual would be mortgaged for the sum of \$60.

On the same front page the *Advertiser* also summarized the advantages of maintaining the current private leasing system by calling attention to the gains that would be made if London were to consider the private leasing proposals that recently had been made by the Canadian Northern, the Grand Trunk and the Michigan Central rail lines. The Canadian Northern, for example, had offered to pay London \$35,000 for its lease, which was double the amount that the London/ Port Stanley Railway had earned in the past. In addition, it was also prepared to enter into a “binding agreement as to freight rates... to grant running rights to all other steam railways, and to erect a large new hotel in the city of London.” Rather than dispute any of these claims, the *Free Press* instead chose to report excerpts in favour of electrification from a speech by Adam Beck.

To hear our opponents, we live by the grace of the Grand Trunk. They tell us that we insult them by desiring to operate our own railway... You might as well try to insult a rhinoceros by poking him in the ribs with your thumb as try to insult the Grand Trunk... I stake my reputation as a public man on the reports of my engineers, Messrs, Gabey, Storer and Murray. They tell us we can make a success of this undertaking, and on their estimates I am prepared to stand.”<sup>86</sup>

The *Free Press* then used its own words in an editorial to comment on the above attack by the *Advertiser*:

Private monopolies in London, more particularly the traction company, have openly shown their antagonism to electrification of the London and Port Stanley Railway. They have used every means in their power to frighten, cajole or cudgel the citizens into voting against the Beck scheme. Not one of these concerns are public spirited in the matter or have the interest of the citizens at heart. THEY ARE OUT FOR THEMSELVES.

In a circular issued by these (private) interests and sent to probably every ratepayer in London there are 28 or 30 paragraphs, and almost every paragraph contains either a direct or an implied falsehood. There is no intention to be fair, frank, or honest. The (private) interests are determined to defeat electrification and they have not stopped at most dishonest methods... The whole pamphlet is an insult to the manhood of London.<sup>87</sup>

On October 22<sup>nd</sup>, of the 8,500 London ratepayers who were eligible to vote, 2,820 voted in favor of electrification while 2,074 voted against. Despite this rather thin (15%) margin of victory, on October 23<sup>rd</sup> the *Free Press* ran the following front page headline: “PUBLIC OWNERSHIP WON A STRIKING VICTORY AGAINST TREMENDOUS ODDS AT THE POLLS.” It justified this somewhat erroneous headline by claiming that in 80% of the 66 London subdivisions the vote was in favour of the bylaw. Not surprisingly, the *Advertiser* then questioned the validity of this claim in its own October 23<sup>rd</sup> front page headline and story.<sup>88</sup>

#### MACHINE TACTICS AND POLITICS AIDED IN MR. BECK’S VICTORY

Well oiled by money supplied from sundry mysterious sources, the entire Conservative machine, supplemented by the expert assistance of the municipal machine and a number of politicians and near-politicians and job-seekers, was running with a wonderful smoothness yesterday... Close tab



was kept on every voter, eligible to exercise the franchise, and everyone was rounded up in short order and hauled to the polls in one of the many conveyances at the disposal of the electrification committee.

Irregularities at the polls were (also) reported from all sections of the city. In one ward a well-known businessman voted twice, contrary to the law. In some of the subdivisions there were two scrutineers for electrification and none against. This was caused by a series of neat little tricks performed by the municipal and Conservative machines (who were) ardent electrificationists having been sworn in as scrutineers AGAINST the scheme. In spite of the fact that the 1912 (voter registration) list was used a number of persons on that list were refused the right to vote and the majority of the refusals were those known to be opposed to the scheme.

### Aftermath

Independent of the truthfulness of any of these accusations by either the *Free Press* or the *Advertiser*, the decision to move ahead had now finally been achieved and, as reported in the *Free Press* on July 13, 1914, the beginning stages of electrification had been undertaken.

Mayor Graham explained that the steel rails had arrived at Port Stanley...The ties were all delivered and the balance of the road-bed equipment was on the way...Arrangements will be made to float a loan with the Molsons Bank... The debentures (approved in October 22, 1913) will not be sold until next year... (and) It is expected that the Michigan Central Railway will do the construction work. Tenders will be finally considered to-day or to-morrow and will be awarded. Construction work will start next week.<sup>89</sup>

On July 15<sup>th</sup> the contract for construction was awarded, not to the Michigan Central Railway as had been anticipated by the mayor, but instead to the Pere Marquette Railway, a steam locomotive company that previously had been responsible for leasing the line. To hasten the changeover from steam to electric power, construction crews were immediately “put to work at both ends of the line,”<sup>90</sup> and on July 22, 1915 the London/Port Stanley Railway was officially opened as an electrified line.<sup>91</sup>

To mark the occasion, a grand celebration was held in downtown London. Although both of London’s papers covered the event, as would be expected, the most detailed and laudatory account appeared in the *Free Press*. While the material in the *Advertiser* presented a brief factual overview of the day’s activities, on its editorial pages it continued to maintained a negative view of the entire venture: “The L. and P.S.R. is a very heavy charm on our watchchain. It is more like a paving-stone hung round our waist, a poor life-preserver.”<sup>92</sup> The following summary of the day’s major events is from the front page of the *Free Press*.

All morning the (600) delegates arrived and registered at the Tecumseh House where they were given badges and introduced to each other. At 1 o’clock the first train (to Port Stanley) left the station at Richmond and Bathurst streets. All the trolley cars were commissioned and one of the electric locomotives hauled a train of 10 C.P.R. passenger coaches. Sir Adam Beck took the first train and was joined by members of Parliament, both provincial and federal. Men prominent in the public

ownership movement all through the province were on hand. It was a demonstration the like of which has seldom been seen in London, or elsewhere, for that matter... One of the striking features was the representation from the rural municipalities. The townships are greatly exercised about the hydro radials, and they welcome the opening of the London and Port Stanley Railway as the first link in a great chain of radials that will cover the whole of the Province of Ontario and eventually spread over the whole continent.<sup>93</sup>

Along with the *Free Press* reporter who covered the events, the *Detroit Journal* also sent its own reporter who was not only extremely impressed with the lead that London had taken in launching this initiative, but even admonished the United States for not being more proactive in pursuing the same municipal ownership goal.

London officials and citizens and hydro-electric engineers from all the over the province realize that this is an extraordinary occasion... This is why London is host to from 500 to 1,000 guests, including many members of the Dominion Parliament and the Provincial Legislature, the mayors, engineers and other officials from scores of cities to see the model electric railway which a city has built for the people.

Detroit and other cities in the United States where the people are interested in municipal ownership have no representatives at the inauguration of London's own interurban line. But a little study of the line itself and of the municipal ownership development in Ontario would startle American communities, which talked municipal ownership years before it was talked of in Canada, but which have done nothing while Canadian cities have done much... The chief event of the day, of course, is the formal opening of the road, in which the delegates will go in detachments from London to Port Stanley. By the time the delegates have taken that trip and have listened to the addresses in the banquet that will follow to-night in the Masonic Temple, municipal ownership of railways in Ontario will have received a tremendous impetus. As a gathering of cities alone this meeting in London to-day is remarkable. But a gathering of cities to witness a demonstration of municipal ownership is unique in the history of city government.<sup>94</sup>

All in all, July 22, 1915, was a truly glorious day not only for the city but also for Adam Beck and Lady Beck, who were the recipients of many honors during the banquet that was held that evening.

The banquet was a distinct triumph for Sir Adam Beck, who was given a memorable reception. He was presented with a piece of gold plate suitably inscribed by the Ontario Municipal Electrical Association coupled with illuminated addresses by major delegates from the City of Toronto and the City of London. Lady Beck was given a fine electric car, as a mark of appreciation from the Municipal Electrical Union. "We do so in admiration and hearty appreciation of the splendid manner in which she has assisted her husband, Sir Adam Beck, during the 12 years he has been in public life," declared Mr. Ellis. "She has made many sacrifices in her home life, which both love so well. Her's has been a real sacrifice and a real devotion. Sir Adam has blazed the way for constructive statesmanship. He has erected a monument to himself that will live after we have all passed away. He has taught statesmen to think out a great project for the public good, and carry it to a successful issue, to the

exclusion of other things. I hope, we all hope, that she will long continue to aid and encourage him. We are proud of Sir Adam, we are proud of Lady Beck. We beg her to accept this gift, which comes from the heart.”<sup>95</sup>

### A Final Summation

In view of the prolonged debate as well as the many false or misleading accusations that accompanied the launch of this rail line, it is important to mention that both the freight and the passenger service were said to be highly successful at least during the early years of operation. In 1943, for example, the railway carried over one million passengers between London and Port Stanley and the freight traffic doubled almost yearly beginning in 1916 then reached its peak in 1929.<sup>96</sup> Unfortunately, however, in the years that followed these early successes both services experienced heavy financial losses which in turn caused London’s city council, in January, 1957, to end the electric railway’s existence.

Funeral arrangements for the London and Port Stanley Railway passenger service were completed today and well in advance of the actual burial there was talk of getting rid of the old girl’s remaining freight business... Notices of the decision went up in all LPS stations today and advertisements in *The London Free Press* and *The St. Thomas Times-Journal* also announced the passing of an era.<sup>97</sup>

As the first stage in this “passing of an era” the notice in the *Free Press* stated that passenger service from London to Port Stanley would be discontinued at midnight on February 1, 1957 and that passenger service from London to St. Thomas would terminate on February 18<sup>th</sup> at 9:05 p.m. Although the end of this era may have ushered in a moment of nostalgia for a few of London’s riders, as reported in the *Free Press*, such was not the case for the majority of others.

Passenger service between London and Port Stanley on the jolly old L & PS Railway ended at 9:12 p.m. last night and final run would have been poor pickings for train robbers: Only 20 persons went to the Port and 10 of them returned immediately after a 10-minute stop. There was no fanfare, pomp or pageantry attached to this end of an era; in fact, the service ceased with as much ceremony as a dog displays when he flicks off a few fleas... (the 10 who returned) were aboard solely because of the historic aspects of the trip.<sup>98</sup>

The situation was similar on February 18<sup>th</sup> when the last round trip occurred between London and St. Thomas.

“Days I knew with you  
Are just a memory  
That is all they are to me.”

If there had been a band, that might have been one of the songs played as the London and Port Stanley Railway passenger service faded into history last night at 9:05. But there was no band and no crowd as the service went out in a blaze of indifference. Some 21 persons were on hand for the passing—12

passengers and two crew. The last passenger off the train was William Thomson, of 187 William street, who, with his wife, made the last round trip to St. Thomas and back for sentimental reasons...<sup>99</sup>

While it is impossible to know what led to this show of indifference, it could be as suggested below, that the lack of regard for the end of the passenger service may have resulted from a diminished reliance on rail transportation between London and Port Stanley owing to the improvement in road conditions coupled with the increased availability of automobiles and bus service. In any event, it is worth noting that along with these factors another cause of the railway's demise was a change-over in electricity from alternating current to direct current at the generating source which made the train's consistent operation largely impossible.<sup>100</sup> Although "a \$40,000 rectifier could solve the problem, the London Railway Commission decided months ago that the revenue-losing line didn't warrant the expense."

It should also be mentioned, however, that the demise of this railway in 1957 was not an isolated occurrence in that most of the other nearby electrified rail lines had also experienced a similar fate. In other words, Beck's vision of electrifying all of the small railways throughout Ontario had largely come to an end between the 1930s and the 1950s.

...nothing came of the grandiose scheme (promoted by Beck) for gridironing the Province with Hydro radials. Toronto and other municipalities that acquired electric radials suffered heavy losses. The Toronto Metropolitan Railway, the Scarboro Railway, and the Long Branch Railway were sold for a song or their tracks torn up. The Windsor line was turned over to the Sandwich, Windsor & Amherstburg Railway Company in 1931... (and) the tiny Guelph Railway ceased to carry passengers in 1937.<sup>101</sup>

In commenting on this matter, William R. Plewman, who was a longtime associate and admirer of Adam Beck suggested the following reason for Beck's initial backing this venture.

His determination to force through a radial programme as he had forced through a power policy was the mistake of this life. It should be borne in mind, however, that he was right, absolutely right, in his radial policy when he first adopted it. At that time Ontario was without a good roads system (and) the automobile was something new...

(While) Opposition to radials in the first place was largely captious... it aroused the fighting blood of Adam Beck and prevented him from seeing the degree to which motor busses, motor trucks and good roads had affected the situation during the ten or twelve years that elapsed before the radial agitation came to a head. The Hydro engineers, particularly Fred Gabey, should have warned him of the altered conditions; instead they assured him that the success of the rubber-tired traffic was a flash in the pan and that when the time came for renewal of equipment, motor competition with electric railways would collapse. Adam Beck kept capable engineers at his elbows and after examining their recommendations from every angle, he was accustomed to gamble everything on their advice. This was one of the rare instances of Hydro engineers leading Adam Beck into trouble.<sup>102</sup>

To conclude this summation it is also worth mentioning two other points. First, despite the fact that the electrified version of the London to Port Stanley Railway ceased to exist in 1957, that same year city council did attempt to resurrect the freight component of the line with the purchase of several Diesel locomotives.<sup>103</sup> Unfortunately, however, because this attempt too proved unsuccessful, the rail line was finally forced to end its overall existence on December 1, 1965.<sup>96</sup>

The second point has to do with the overall cost to the city of this project. As stated above (see page 88) the initial estimates for the electrified line ranged from \$900,000 to \$1,030,000, yet the final cost as reported in 1936 was \$1,913,141.72,<sup>104</sup> which was roughly three times the amount that the city had actually borrowed (\$700,000) to pay for this undertaking. To fully appreciate the magnitude of this financial burden on the city's ratepayers it is important to keep in mind the estimate of \$2,800,000 that the *Advertiser* had claimed would be owed by the city to those who loaned the city this \$700,000, given the 40 year duration of the loan at 5% interest. In addition, it is equally important to keep in mind that the city had also approved a bylaw in 1913 to borrow a further \$250,000 to help pay for the Federal Square Project (see page 72) and with the onset of the Great War in 1914, further funds were required from London's citizens to support the war effort. In 1917 for example, Londoners had purchased \$6,500,000 worth of Victory War bonds from the Dominion Government and in 1918, when the Victory Bond campaign ended, London's sales had reached \$9,087,100.<sup>105</sup> The reason we raised this second point is that it poses an interesting question: how did the city managed to repay all of the debt that both projects incurred beginning around 1912, and at the same time cover the city's other yearly expenses, when so much of its citizen's personal wealth appears to have been devoted to supporting the war effort? While at present we are unable to answer this question, perhaps an additional investigation into other aspects of London's historical archives will contain the necessary information.

## End Notes

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- 4) London Free Press, January 1, 1913, p. 4. Col. 1-2.
- 5) London Advertiser, December 31, 1912, p. 6, col. 5.
- 6) London Advertiser, December 9, 1912, p. 11, col. 4-5.
- 7) London Free Press, December 28, 1912, p. 1, col. 3.
- 8) London Free Press, January 2, 1913, p. 1, col. 6.
- 9) London Advertiser, January 6, 1913, p. 1, col. 6-7.
- 10) London Free Press, December 30, 1912, p. 1, col. 2.
- 11) London City Council Minutes, 1913, p. 49.
- 12) London Free Press, January 4, 1913, p. 1, col. 1-2.
- 13) London City Council Minutes, 1914, p. 3.
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- 16) London City Council Minutes, 1915, p. 101.
- 17) London Free Press, January 2, 1917, p. 1, col. 6-7.

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- 34) London Advertiser, December 1, 1923, p. 1, col. 6.
- 35) London Free Press, December 1, 1923, p. 1, col. 6-7.
- 36) London Advertiser, December 4, 1923, p. 8, col. 1-2.
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- 40) London City Council Minutes, 1927, p. 135.
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- 42) London Free Press, November 14, 1928, p. 16, col. 1-2
- 43) London Advertiser, November 14, 1928, p. 4, col. 3.
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- 68) London Advertiser, December 5, 1912, p. 11, col. 6-7.
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