

The London and Middlesex

HISTORIAN



Autumn 2013

Official journal of
The London and Middlesex
Historical Society

Volume 22



Announcing a New Series of Articles for the Historian

The London and Middlesex Historical Society is interested in promoting greater public awareness of historical buildings, people, and events in local communities throughout London and Middlesex County. It is our hope that if residents are made aware of the historical significance of their surroundings, such an awareness will lead to greater public appreciation and support for the preservation of the many heritage sites that exist in the city and the surrounding area.

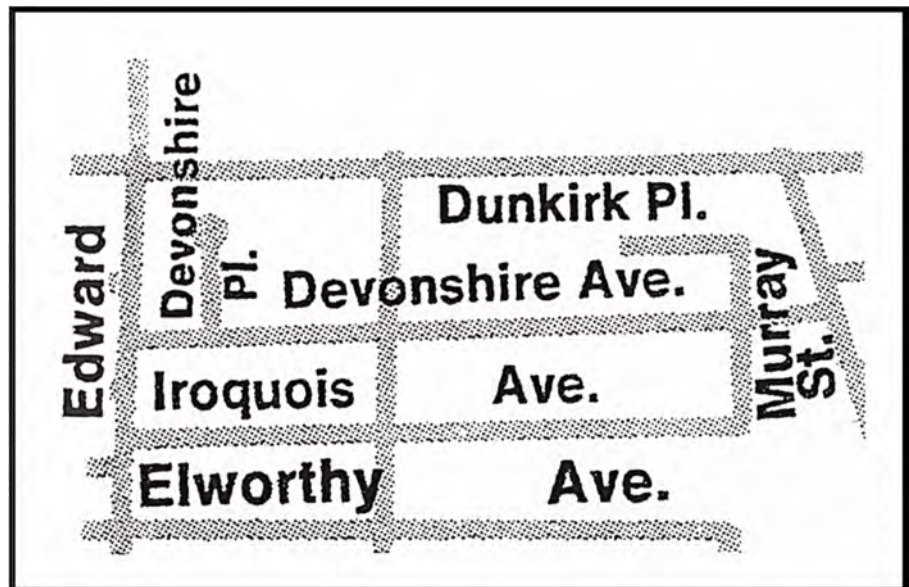
With this goal in mind, the Society wishes to encourage, not only its members, but other local residents to submit articles to the *Historian* dealing with their local neighbourhoods.

Our plan is to launch an ongoing series entitled *Our Neighbourhoods* that will focus on the historical significance of communities throughout the city and the county. We are interested in receiving material on significant historical events, important people and buildings of the past, as well as information on the origin of the neighbourhoods themselves. If you ever wondered about the history of the area in which you reside, please let us know and we will be happy to help you with advice on how to gather the necessary information. The following article is an example of the overall neighbourhood information that we look forward to publishing.

The Unfolding Story of One Old South Neighbourhood

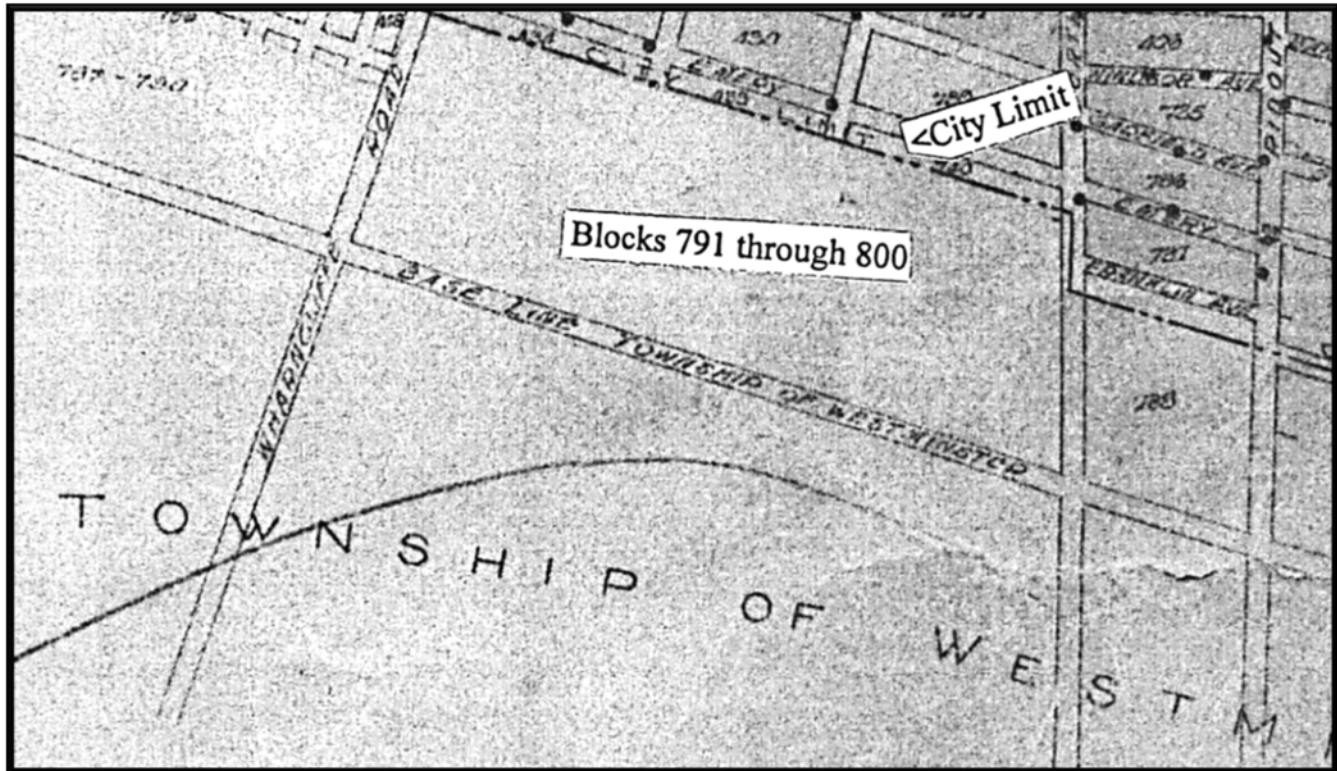
Marvin L. Simner

The six blocks bounded on the north by Dunkirk Place, on the south by Elworthy Avenue, on the west by Edward Street and on the east by Murray Street is one of the last neighbourhoods to be incorporated into the Old South area of London. This area became part of the city on July 1, 1961, when the city annexed approximately 60,000 acres in London and Westminster Townships.



Until then this neighbourhood was part of Blocks 791 through 800 which were outside of the city limits in Westminster Township, as shown on the 1922 map reproduced below (unless otherwise noted all of the maps in this article were reproduced with permission from the Western University Map and Data Centre).

The purpose of this article is to outline the evolution of this area from the time it became Crown Land in the late 1700s, until the early 1960s when it became part of London.



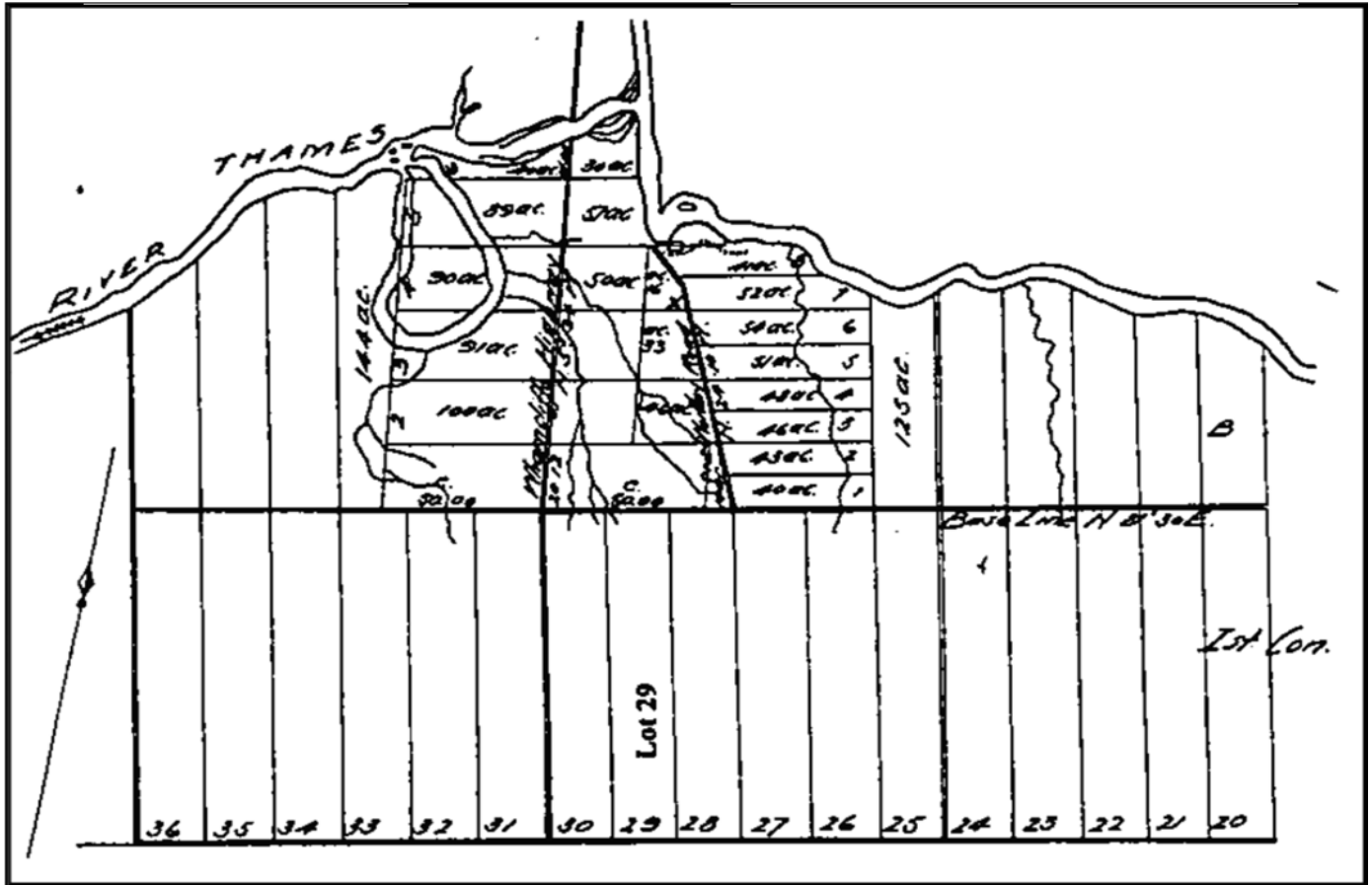
Pre-Annexation History

Following the American War of Independence (1775-1783), Britain was very concerned over the possibility that it might lose further territory above Lake Erie as the result of an invasion from the United States (Armstrong, 1986). To guard against this possibility, and to maintain favour with the Native tribes who resided in this area, the Crown negotiated a series of major treaties, collectively known as

Land Surrenders. Surrender #2, signed on June 22nd, 1790, by the chiefs of the Ottawa, Chippawa, Pottowatomy and Huron Nations, granted the Crown possession of all the land, with the exception of certain reserves, that extended roughly from Lake Erie in the south, to the Thames River in the north, and from Lake St. Clair (Windsor) in the west, to a line somewhat east of present day London (Jacobs, 1983).

It was within this extremely large tract of land that what is known today as Old South emerged,

carved in part from Lot 29 shown below on the 1830 map of what became London.



Early Neighbourhood History

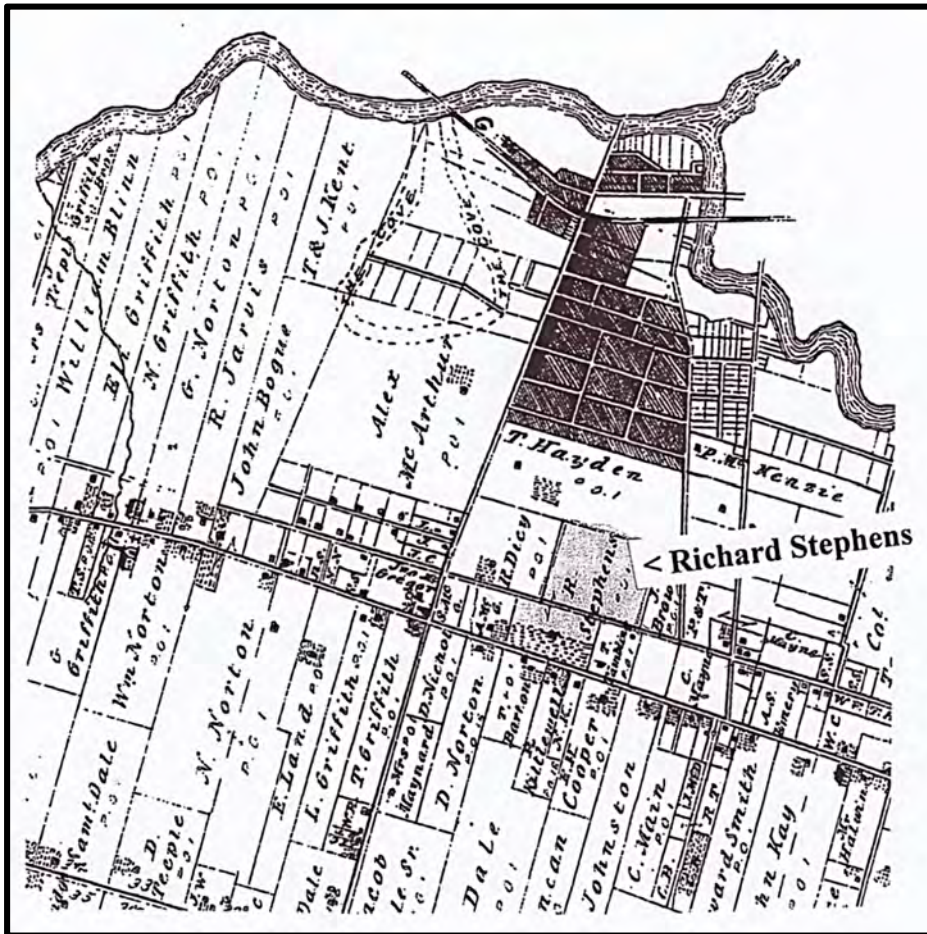
Many of the parcels within this lot changed hands a number of times over the years due largely to land speculators who settled the region. For example, the first land owner, John Davy, purchased 100 acres from the Crown on February 16, 1819. Approximately 11 months later he sold a portion of this property to Thomas Duncome. Three months after that he sold a second portion to George Norton, and four months later he sold the final portion to Richard Dicy. George Norton in turn sold his share to Michael McLaughlin in July 1825 who

then sold the same share to John Stephens in March 1826. Thus, in less than seven years, and contrary to the Crown's admonition against land speculation (see Simner, 2010, p. 18, for a brief discussion of this point), portions of Lot 29 changed hands at least five times. In fact, within the first 40 years of the existence of Lot 29, this property was sold a total of 29 times! The rapid turnover of land solely for the sake of profit is certainly not a recent phenomenon.

John Stephens subsequently purchased 80 acres of Lot 29 together with some ad-

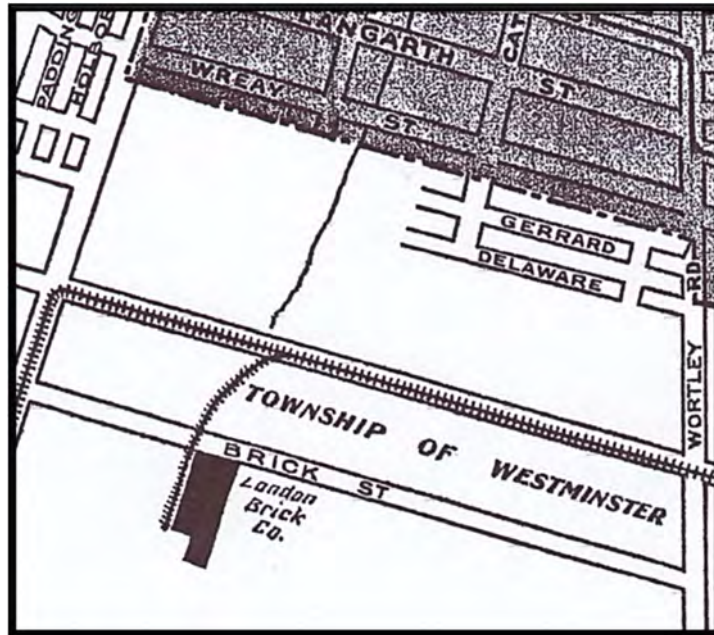
ditional property in Westminster Township north of Base Line Road that eventually became Old South, culminating at Commissioners Road. Stephens was from Warwickshire, England. He served as a midshipman for a number of years in the British navy, was promoted to captain, came to Middlesex County along with his wife Ann in 1820, and settled in Westminster Township.

The portion of his property that eventually became the neighbourhood under consideration was known originally as the Richmond Hill Farm. Following the death of John Stephens, this area was taken over by his son, Richard (1817-1903), whose name appears on the 1878 map reproduced below.



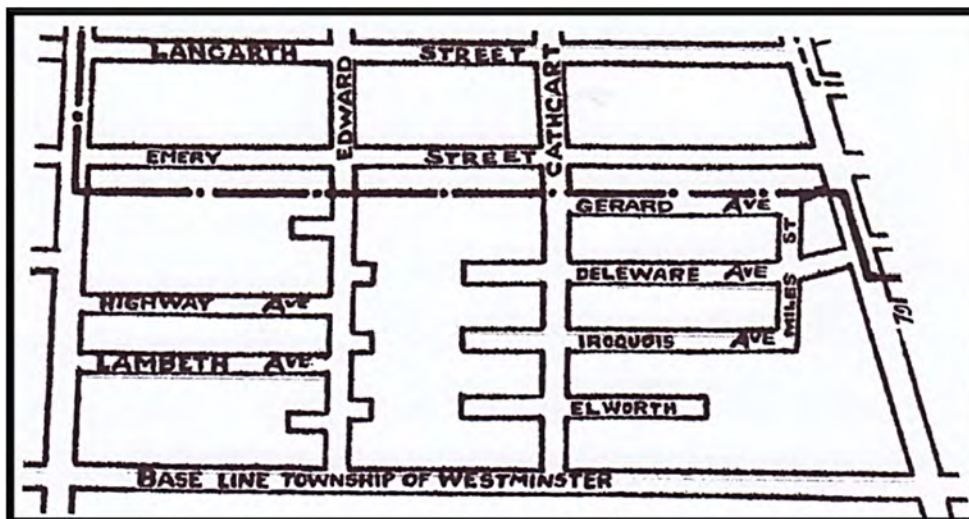
Richard's son Roland (1851-1927) remained on the farm after his father's death. During Richard's time the farm house, surrounded by a large orchard, was located between Baseline Road and Commissioners Road. Apparently, it was during Roland's tenure that the property north of Baseline was

sold and divided into streets and then into individual building lots. The first two streets to be surveyed were Gerrard (now Dunkirk Place) and Delaware (now Devonshire Avenue). As shown below on the 1914 map, initially access to both was via Cathcart since neither street reached Wortley.



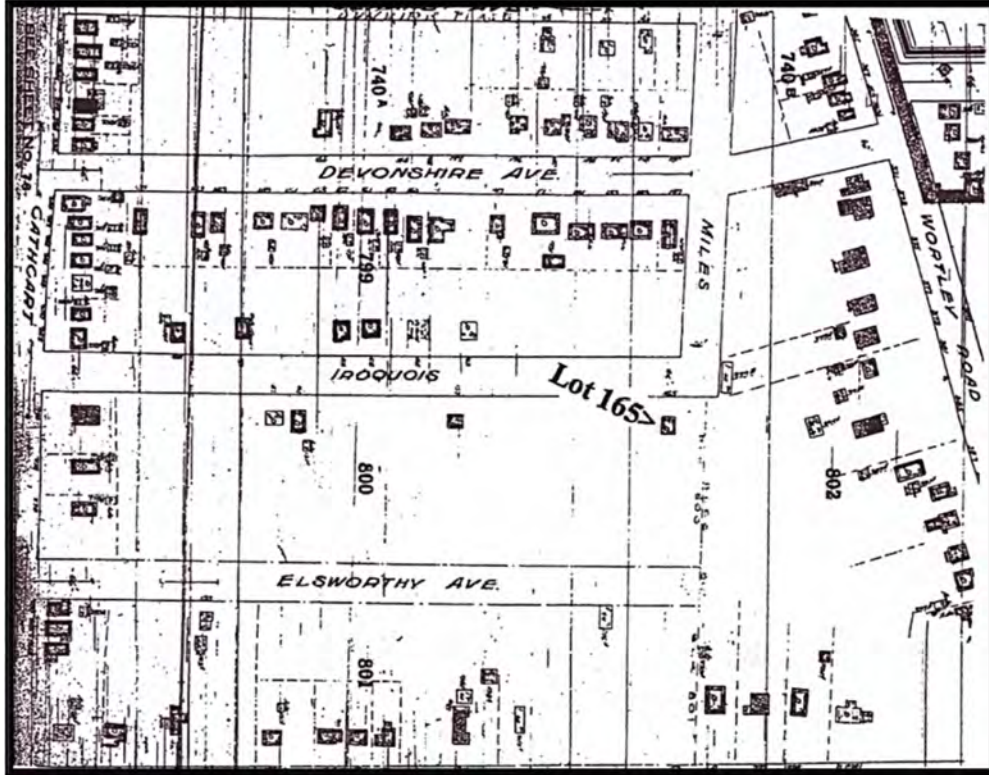
The two remaining streets (Iroquois and Elworthy) along with Murray (previously known as Miles), that now comprise the neighborhood were not completed until sometime within the next 10-15 years. It was not until the mid-to-late 1930s, however, that Devonshire

(Delaware), Iroquois and Elworthy (spelled Elworth on the 1934 map reproduced below) were extended to meet Edward. Instead, the layout of all three streets stopped approximately midway between Cathcart and Edward.



Home construction in the neighbourhood began around the turn of the 20th century. One of the earliest houses to be erected was

on lot 165 at the corner of Iroquois and Murray (referred to as Miles on the 1940 map reproduced below).



This property was purchased in 1907 by Fred Dicks, a florist and resident of Westminster Township, from Maxwell David Fraser a well-known London lawyer and land owner for \$100. As an interesting historical footnote, according to the original deed the terms of sale were “subject to the (following) reservations, limitations, provisos and conditions expressed in the...Grant thereof from the Crown.”

(a) There shall not at any time hereafter be placed or erected upon the said lands any building other than a private dwelling house or houses with appropriate outbuildings to be used in connection therewith, and no trade or business of any kind shall be carried on the said lands.

(b) Any dwelling house erected or placed on the said lands shall be erected in a good, substantial and workmanlike manner, at a cost of not less than one thousand dollars, and the front wall thereof shall be not less than fifteen feet distant from the street; and, excepting bay windows, verandahs, porches, and boundary fences not more than four feet high, no structure of any material whatever shall be erected or placed on the said lands within fifteen feet of the street line.

Shortly after Fred Dicks purchased the lot he sold it to William Phillips, also a florist, and his wife Kate Phillips for \$360 payable "in thirty-five consecutive monthly installments of ten dollars each from the first day of December 1907..." The house was finally built in 1910. Because Iroquois Avenue is not shown on the 1914 map, it would seem that the street must have been surveyed at least as early as 1907 to determine the exact location of the property or street line. Hence, the house was probably erected long before the street was finished. Phillips remained in the house until 1941 when he sold it to Pietro Zanussi who, in turn, lived there until his death around 1964 when his children took possession.

The neighbourhood gradually took shape between 1910 and 1930. As shown on the 1940 map, by the late 1930s a fairly large number of homes had been constructed on the south side of Devonshire, although fewer had been built on the north side and extremely few had been constructed on either Iroquois or Elworthy. In addition, it was not until 1943 that sanitary sewers were added and it also was not until around this time that the streets were paved. Despite these shortcomings, fire protection, electrical power, and water were provided to the residents by the city of London. Police protection, on the other hand, was not offered by the city but instead was provided by the Ontario Provincial Police until annexation occurred in 1961.

References

- Armstrong, F. (1986). The Forest City: An Illustrated History of London, Canada. Windsor, ON: Windsor Publications
- Jacobs, D. (1983) Indian Land Surrenders. In Pryke, K.G. and Kulisek, L.L. (Eds.) The Western District: Papers from the Western District Conference. Essex Country Historical Society.
- Simner, M.L. (2010). How Middlesex Country was Settled with Farmers, Artisans, and Capitalists. London, ON: London and Middlesex Heritage Museum.