

sandy northern shoreline became a popular camping location some 3,000 years ago. Bands of Native people netted spawning fish in its shallow waters until A.D. 1400-1500 when the local population abandoned the Sarnia area. The last 2,000 years of their occupation is represented by numerous camp and burial sites on the sandy knolls to the north and east of the city and a cache of chert (flint) blades along Devine Street in the downtown area. The latter discovery reflects the strategic location of present-day Sarnia on a widespread trade network which existed 2,000 years ago.

To the south near Corunna the famous Parker Earthwork, an A.D. 1400 palisaded village, suggests the violent nature of the period when the last Central Algonkian hunters, fishermen, and farmers resided around Sarnia. Who they were—the Kickapoo, the Sauk, or some other unrecorded group—we may never know.

We do know that Algonkian people returned to hunt and fish and perhaps grow corn in present-day Sarnia around A.D. 1700. The camp of Chief Wawanosh was noted on Lot 43 of the ninth concession of Sarnia Township by surveyor Roswell Mount in 1829; however, most local Native people resided on the Sarnia reserve lands shortly thereafter.

Sarnia, with most of the surrounding area which later became the modern county of Lambton, was ceded by the Chippewa Indians to the Crown in 1827. In the 20 years which preceded, the Indians had already permitted the friendly occupation of their lands by the first white settlers, probably for some private means of payment. Such arrangements were frowned upon by authority, yet were generally amir-

benefit of survey or deed, these early agreements later gave the "squatters," as the settlers were termed, a de facto recognition of title for their farms and homesteads.

Earliest white settlers at Sarnia were French Canadians from the Windsor border region and Michigan. Of 20 families recorded in the year 1811, between Sarnia and the south end of the St. Clair River, all but two bore French names. Three families can be well documented early in the nineteenth century on the original Sarnia townsite: those of Arneus Caselet, Jean-Baptiste Pare, and Joseph LaForge. The descendants of Caselet, later spelled Causley, have lived continuously in Sarnia since the year 1807, making them by perhaps 30 years the longest-running local dynasty. Pare, located at least by 1808, left intriguing details of his purchase from an earlier settler. LaForge is thought to have come in 1809. Needless to say, contemporary documentation of these events is scanty and at variance.

Pare and LaForge, upon learning in 1830 that squatters in the township of St. Clair (a union of the later townships of Moore and Sarnia) were ordered to vacate, jointly petitioned Lieutenant-Governor Sir John Colborne to retain their lands and homes. Pare maintained he had "been thirty years in possession of Lot No 26 (76) in the Township of St. Clair; this land was originally purchased of a Canadian, Labouliere, who received it as a deed of gift from the Chippewa Indians on his marriage with a daughter of their tribe."

Eloquently did Pare and LaForge describe their wilderness life:

Your petitioners with the painful drudgery and careful savings of years, have rescued these spots from

fully, though in an humble capacity, during the late War [of 1812-14] in which their houses were destroyed on this very place and their all lost. It has been the Will of Heaven to cast their lot in a lowly sphere, to doom them to earn a scanty sustenance by the sweat of their brow, and they have hitherto supported their families by honest industry that has enabled the latter petitioner [LaForge] contentedly to maintain his numerous progeny. Your Petitioners throw themselves upon the compassion of the crown, they supplicate your Excellency not to expel them from the dear homes of their youth, from the shelter of their feeble old age . . . Your petitioners cannot in the colloquial phrase of the country be termed squatters.

As both men, the elder Pare, and LaForge, his son-in-law, signed these and other documents with an "x," it is clear they had assistance, perhaps from land agents, in their quest for security of tenure. Three petitions later, in 1834, they were successful.

The settlers and their Indian neighbours were surrounded and isolated by thousands of acres of dense forest. Communication, other than by Indian trail, travelled entirely by water. For many years transport by water also proved to be the easiest. In 1826 the American traveller Thomas L. McKenney, first to leave us an impression of the area, was deeply impressed by the tranquility of it all:

Becalmed. Dropped anchor within thirty feet of the Canadian shore, along which are three or four little log cabins, which seem to relieve the eye from the undisturbed solitude that reigns along these shores. Night is the only time when anything is seen or heard; and then they are lit up with numerous fires, and ever and anon you hear the paddle strike against the side of the canoe, or the spear plunge into the deep—when all is still again. The shores, for the last twelve miles, are beautiful. The banks are bold, and the woods lovely; and these are reflected as in a mirror in the river that runs rapidly, though smoothly by. The water is delightful to drink, and is very cool withal.

Opposite the Sarnia clearing was the little Michigan settlement named Desmond,

Gratiot, which had been a defensive point since the constant wars between the English and French for supremacy in the Midwest. Fort Gratiot, now the home of the United States Coast Guard, included a stone lighthouse first erected in 1824. Though later reconstructed, it remains today as the oldest man-made structure in the area of its community, now called Port Huron, and Sarnia. Sarnia and Port Huron were to develop simultaneously, and became unofficial "twin cities."

In April 1829 the first survey of the township of Sarnia and its neighbour to the south, the township of Moore, was ordered to be done by the surveyor general at York, the capital of Upper Canada, and was completed by January 1830. Roswell Mount, later an MLA, headed the survey party. A young helper named Freeman Talbot from Mount's nearby home, London, 60 years later wrote of this experience. Describing the settlers the party found already on the land, Talbot wrote:

These people had no laws, no post office, no newspaper, very few books, no custom duties, no doctor, no markets, no officers, . . . no title whatever to the land they so long cultivated, and still they appeared contented and fairly prosperous. Their rude agricultural implements, clothing, sheets, hats and caps were made by amateur mechanics that the necessities of the times had educated for action. Women and men showed an industry, thrift and mechanical genius that thousands of the present time man might well be proud to imitate.

By 1830 the little cluster of French settlers on the waterfront and their Indian neighbours were about to experience a frontier "boom" as an influx of newcomers arrived, spread out amongst them, and pushed the edge of settlement back eastwardly into the hinterland.

Five distinctive groups of people shared



*This 1870s photograph shows one of Sarnia's last log cabins. It stood on Frost Street, roughly where the old police station stands today. The large forest in the background covered the area east of East Street. Courtesy, Lambton County Library*

which originally comprised 700 acres, known as Lots 70 to 76 in the Front Concession of the Township of Sarnia. The first group was the Chippewa Indians, who retained, after the Treaty of 1827, one of the most advantageously placed Indian reservations of any: the Sarnia Reserve. Over the years that followed, the original holding of 10,280 acres was somewhat reduced in size as speculators and developers prevailed upon the Indians and their protector, the Crown, to surrender lands for urban or industrial expansion. By prudent management in later years, however, the Sarnia Reserve has become a progressive and at times highly profitable home for the Chippewas. In 1951 it became the only Indian reserve to lie within the corporate bounds of a Canadian city. The Indian presence and participation in the life of Sarnia has, from the beginning, brought the challenge of the preservation of old traditions and values, with the assimilation of the new.

Five persons received original grants from the Crown comprising the area which became part of the municipality as first incorporated. These were:

Lot 70 and 71	Henry Jones	July 17, 1834
Lot 72	Benjamin Fairchild	March 24, 1834
Lot 73 and 74	Richard Emeric Vidal	April 1, 1834
Lot 75	Joseph LaForge	April 7, 1835
Lot 76	Jean-Baptiste Parré	December 1, 1834

Settlement duties, purchase price, and conditions of location would vary; however, all these men would have located upon, or purchased, these lands, some months or even years prior to the date of the patent. The patent date indicates only that all prior obligations to government had been satisfied, and that the patent fee itself had been paid for the issuance of the document.

A second group, therefore, was the pre-treaty settlers, Parré and LaForge, who obtained grants of two of the seven long, narrow seigniorial lots facing the river front at Sarnia. In later years, as opportunity



Captain Richard Eusebe Vidal (1826-1884), one of the founders of Sarnia, received the title "captain" for 20 years from his first rank in 1854. When photos were not yet being produced, rather than in the traditional portrait, his only known likeness. Courtesy, Regional Collections, UWO Libraries.

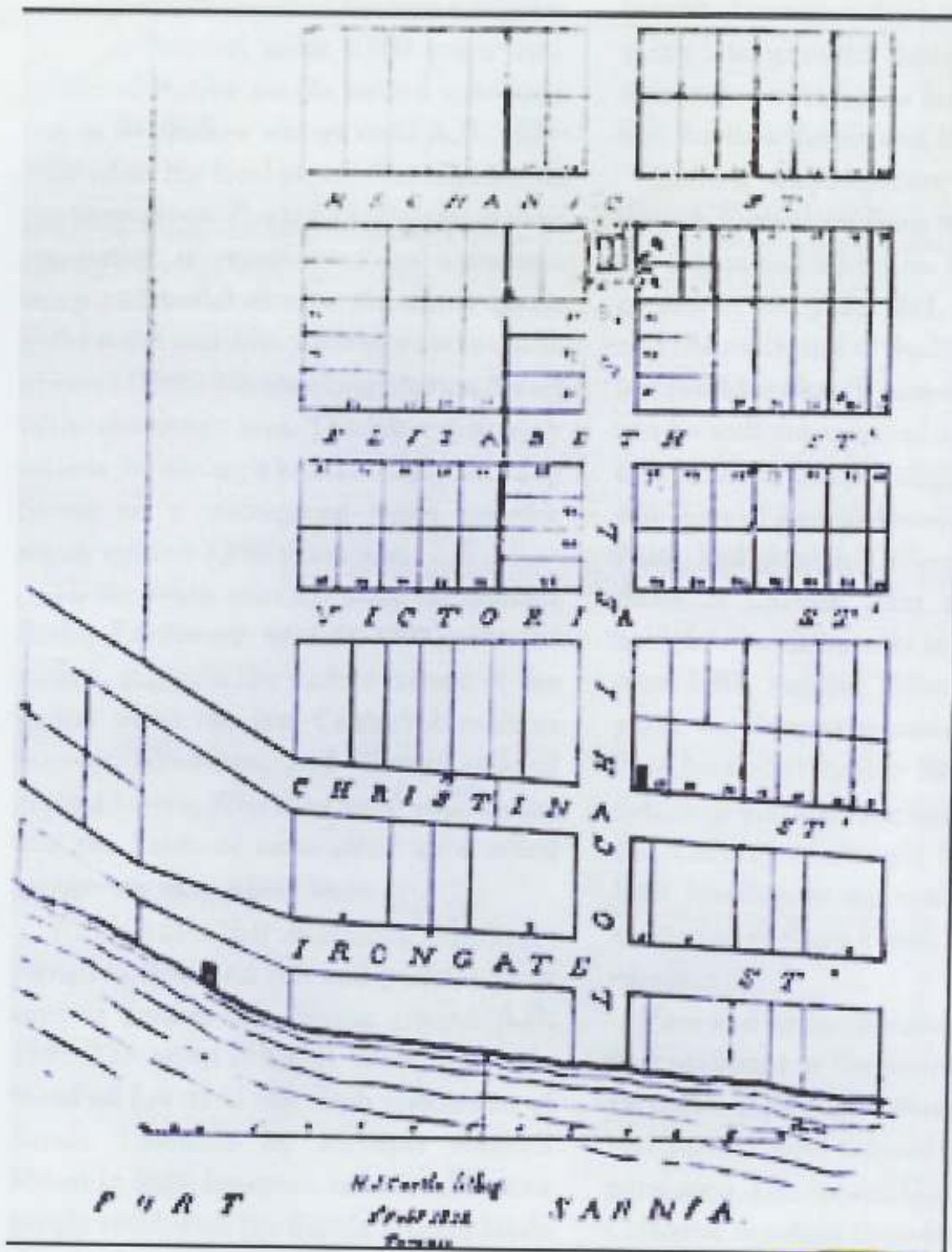
sense, they sold out their holdings to newcomers. Even so, as late as 1868 "LaForge's orchard" was still marked on the official survey of the town of Sarnia. Lying on the east side of Front Street between Davis and Wellington, this site is now occupied largely by the Federal Building.

The Casley family, for whatever reason, did not obtain a Crown grant for their pioneer holdings, though they long outlasted the Parr and LaForge families. These original French-Canadian settlers remained, but as minor players in the unfolding scenario. They seem not to have participated in the later prosperity based on land speculation and commerce.

English settlers of financial means or social status were a third major element in

early Sarnia who left an enduring mark. Foremost amongst these was Richard Eusebe Vidal, one of a group of retired Royal Navy officers who settled in Upper Canada. His reward for services to his monarch was 200 acres which, when laid out into mainly residential lots, was to become the choicest part of the residential district of early Sarnia. Vidal founded a local dynasty which became prominent in business and government for well over a century. Another Englishman, Henry Jones, persuaded the Imperial government that he could be a successful settlement leader. As government was very desirous of groups of sponsored settlers taking up land as communities, Jones received a grant of 1,000 acres: 800 in the township hinterland, and 200 on the north edge of the townsite, an area late in developing. Benjamin Fairchild, a non-resident landowner, received a grant of 100 acres which he quickly sold to George Dorand, a merchant who is believed to have opened Sarnia's first store, and became the first postmaster.

Scottish settlers, many already resident in Upper Canada, resident and non-resident, were the fourth and perhaps the most important element to shape early Sarnia. Led by Malcolm Cameron, an energetic young member of the Upper Canada legislature from Lanark County in Eastern Upper Canada, these Scots left rocky and unproductive farms in that county, all too similar to their Scottish homeland. They trekked to Sarnia in search of timber, a bountiful cash crop, then in high demand in England. They quickly selected farms in the immediate hinterland of Sarnia, where the soil, once cleared, was rich and productive, and the economic opportunities, compared either to Lanark or their original homeland,



Year after year the plea renewed; finally in 1852 the desired land was purchased, surveyed into quarter-acre lots, and sold to individuals who mainly erected homes. By this time the business district of the village had mainly settled to the north, though the dock and shipping area west of Front Street and the St. Clair River was greatly enlarged. By the early 1850s the future growth of

The earliest known town plat map of Sarnia was printed in 1838, possibly to accompany a sale of town lots. The area shown was the northwest corner of lot 75, front concession, a portion of Joseph Lafarge's farm. Christina Street retains its name; others have changed: Irongate (frequently known as Tronigate) to Front Street, Elizabeth Street is now Back Street;