

# HISTORY OF THE CORUNNA REGION 1600-1900

Written and Published by Grade 8A of Hill Street Public School in 1972



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. . . . Then in 1679, La Salle with three of his companions lingered around for about three months while waiting to continue their journey. Originally the river had been called "Ottissippi" by the [Indigenous peoples] meaning "clear water" and LaSalle was the one responsible for calling it St. Clair River. When he reported the wealth of the hunting and fishing many traders decided to try their luck in the St. Clair area. It was not until the 1800's that any [European settler] made the Lambton County his permanent residence. . . .

## French Settlers

Corunna itself has had quite a French background. The French that built St. Joseph's Church had only a few Frenchmen attending it. However there were quite a few French among our early population. Most came as "coureurs de bois" or runners of the wood and the rest were missionaries who came to teach and help the [Indigenous peoples].

## THE BERESFORD SURVEY

There are only a few "Corunna's" in the world and Corunna on the beautiful blue waters of the St. Clair is the second oldest. It is named after a prominent seaport on the northwest corner of Spain.

In 1823 the British Government decided to take steps to decide on a permanent capital for newly formed Canada (only Ontario and Quebec united by the Act of Union, 1841.) King George VI sent authority to Sir Charles Beresford to proceed to Upper Canada to choose and survey a site for the capital.

Beresford and his party, ascending the St. Clair by boat couldn't help but be impressed by the location. Rounding the lower part of a wide crescent in the eastern shore of the St. Clair they beheld a wall of mighty trees reaching almost to the beach, and a little off shore, the green island which the [Indigenous peoples] called Saw-ge-too-yawn, but which later generations called Isle-aux-Cerfs or Stag Island. The site might have seemed perfect for a county or district town, (maybe even a national capital.)

Geographically the situation was perfect and the natural surroundings and the lay of the land were likewise perfect for the foundations of a city to be created at a future date.

As a preliminary to the Corunna survey, the Beresford party delimited an area almost 13 miles square in the south west corner of the vast and vaguely defined St. Clair district, for the township which was later to be known as Moore.

Then the surveyors commenced work on the townsite. It was layed [sic] out in ambitious lines. The original town plot was 400 acres in size. Wide streets, large lots for the different administration buildings, and St. George's Square in the centre for the Parliament Buildings was a perfect setting. The streets were named after officers in General Moore's army; those running east, and west being named Beckwith, Paget, Hill, Fane, and Cameron; those running north, and south were named Beresford, Lyndock, Murray, Baird, Bentinck, and Colborne. In 1826 the eastern half of Corunna was surveyed making it more than twice as large.

Opposition by the political leaders of Quebec and eastern Ontario to having the capital so far west was listened to by those in authority and as a result the Corunna project fell through.

For a few years nothing was done about Corunna, until a farmer Louis Rendt, took the matter up with the Upper Canada Assembly, citing the rapid growth of Port Huron on the Michigan side of the river about six miles to the north. Evidently his letter had weight in the assembly for in 1836 they sent a provincial surveyor, Wilkinson, from Toronto, or York as it was then called, for the purpose of checking the Beresford survey made 10 years previously. He reported it correct but the members of the assembly were not quite satisfied with it and they sent Wilkinson back the following year to recheck the survey. This time his report was accepted, and the lots of the well-surveyed town were priced to sell on the market.

Thus, began the village of Corunna, and as industries were attracted to the area the population and businesses of the town grew quickly.

#### STREETS OF CORUNNA

Lord Beresford named the street facing the river after himself. Colborne Street was named after Sir John Colborne, military secretary in 1808 for General Sir John Moore which the street and the township are named after. The central street east and west was named after General Sir Rowland Hill who also served under Moore in the peninsular war and later succeeded Wellington after the Battle of Waterloo as Commander-In-Chief of the whole British army. The present main street was named after Thomas Graham, Lord Lyndock who served the queen until he was 95 years old. The street crossing St. George's Square was named after Lord William Lavendish Bentinck who was later Governor-General of India.

#### TALFOURD BROTHERS

Froomefield is named after the Talfourd brothers, Froome and Field who came from England. Talfourd Creek is also named after them. This is the creek's third name, the former names being Riviere-Aux-Cerfs (by the French) and also Commodore Creek.

The Talfourds came here to better themselves financially, Froome Talfourd had been a sailor. He and his brother Field deposited their savings with the Canada Company office in London and sailed for New York, arriving here on February 1<sup>st</sup>, 1832. They were unable to proceed to Upper Canada because the waterways were frozen. While waiting for the spring breakup they ran out of money. Froome Talfourd came on ahead by stagecoach to Niagara and on to Toronto to get money from the Canada Company. He returned to Buffalo to await the arrival of his brother and a boy named James Warwick whom they had hired in England.

They settled at Caradoc near Port Stanley where they bought 200 acres, built a house and stable and stayed two years.

They set out on horseback in 1834 to see Lake Huron. They stayed in a tavern in the village of Warwick overnight and found their landlord's provisions consisted of a barrel of flour, a barrel of pork,

and a barrel of whiskey. The road ended at Warwick and from there the brothers followed a trail through Plympton that George Durham had earlier blazed.

They came to where LaSalle Road is now. Just south of it Froome bought a 100-acre farm from a French-Canadian named Jean Pettit. On the property there was a log house and a flour mill.

Field Talfourd stayed in Moore a year clearing his land and then returned to England to do portrait drawing.

Froome Talfourd had P. D. Salter survey his property into a village site with four streets. Highway #40, he called Front Street and the others were Cross, Church, and Richard.

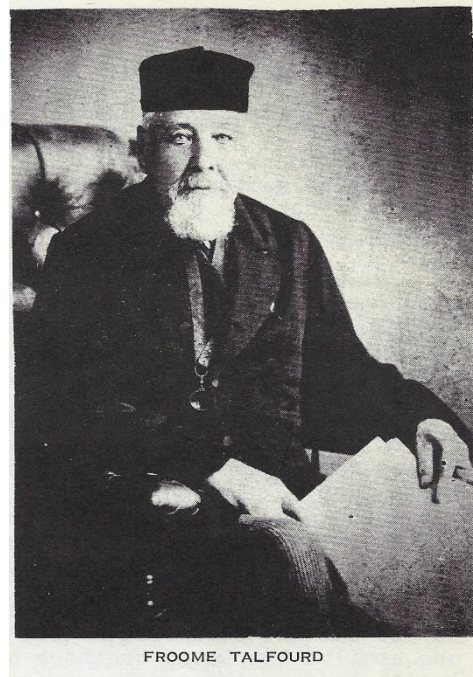
In 1837 he married Eliza Johnston on June 15th. Rev. James Evans conducted the ceremony.

Talfourd cleared 98 acres of his land, covered with mostly black walnut and sold it to passing steamers. He built a red brick house with local tile from a brickyard at Front and Cross Street.

Every year his parents sent him £30 from England. With this money he built St. Mary's Anglican Church at Froomefield.

Talfourd's wife died in 1855. Her grave is around a memorial cairn in a spot which was formerly the church site.

The year before his wife died Talfourd accepted an appointment as superintendent to six Indian bands. He had an office in Sarnia and after marrying again in 1857 to Jane Thornton he moved to Sarnia. He built a cottage on Front Street, north of Derby Lane. When he retired, he received a pension of \$400.00 a year. He decided to go to England on a visit and before he left the Sarnia [Indigenous peoples] gave him a banquet. At the banquet he told them he would give them a dinner on his birthday, November 4th, every year until he returned. He never did come back but the [Indigenous peoples] enjoyed 28 dinners before he died in England in 1902 at the age of 95.



FROOME TALFOURD

#### THE DAVID BROTHERS

In earlier days Theophilus David of Corunna had a ferry service which ran between Corunna and Stag Island; it was a rowboat. Theophilus David's sons (Ed and Fred) were tired of rowing against the current so in 1900 Theophilus bought a small steam yacht.

This boat was called the Delila. It was built in Port Huron. After buying this boat they rebuilt it making it into a first class ferry equipped with protection for passengers. This ferry was in service for around 8 years during the summer time.

The David brothers were always thinking of ways that they could make money. One time they took pictures of the people coming off the boat which the people bought.

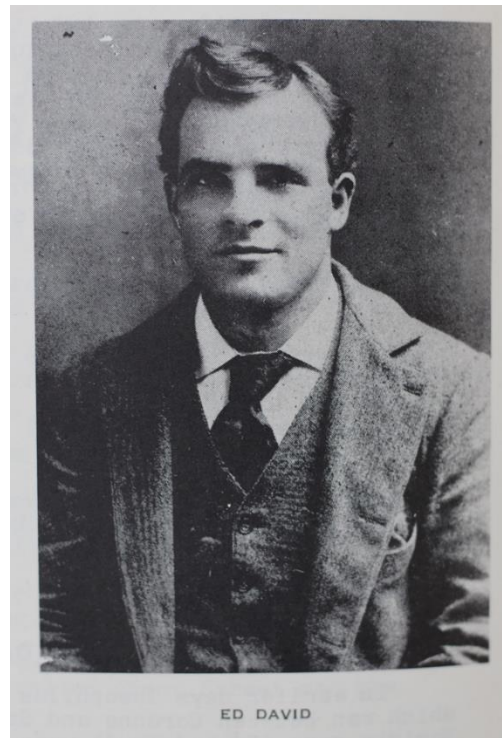
When the ferrying business was slack, they organized trips to Talfourd Creek to see the famous albino turtles. According to the story, Ed David collected mud turtles from the creek and stored hundreds of them in a shed. One night he painted them all with white enamel and then kept them all day till they were perfectly dry and then headed them towards the creek. A day or two later Ed mentioned to a summer visitor that there were white turtles in Talfourd Creek. He told everybody that it must have been a freak of nature.

In no time the Delila ferry enjoyed a booming business taking people on tours of Talfourd Creek charging an admission of 25 cents per person to see the strange freak of nature.

If any man would try to catch a turtle Ed's words would be, "My God man, don't you know that a white turtle's bite is worse than that of a rattler's."

Once an [Indigenous person] from Walpole Island took a ride on the Delila. He was one of the first to catch a white turtle. The next day the [Indigenous person] was gone. But when Ed told this story he forgot to say that the [Indigenous person] had only gone back to Walpole Island.

People flocked from all over just to see the white turtles, until someone spoiled the David brothers booming business. Apparently, someone had caught a turtle and scraped the paint off. Even today people have the odd chuckle over the famous Albino Turtles.



#### CAPTAIN WILLIAM WRIGHT

Many officers of the British Navy who had retired after the wars in Europe with Napoleon had received grants of land in Ontario then known as Upper Canada. One of the first of these arrived in Moore Township in 1834. He was an Englishman who had entered the Navy at the age of 13 and rose from midshipman to captain by stages of promotion. He saw service in various parts of the world, in the East Indies, patrolling the coast of North America and was in the expedition against New Orleans. As captain he was in command of the Griffon which with other ships was stationed at St. Helena guarding Napoleon. As the soldiers took part in the social life on the island they saw a great deal of Napoleon and Captain Wright possessed a tortoise shell snuff box, a gift from Napoleon.

While at St. Helena, Captain Wright married Miss Jane Leech whose father was governor of the East India Company. It is said Napoleon let Miss Leech cut off a lock of his hair with his own sword. This was set in a brooch and belongs to her descendants.

They moved from England to York and then to Amherstburg while their house was being built on the St. Clair.

Mrs. Wright died with cholera and William Wright was left in the wilderness with seven children. In May, 1835 he moved to his farm and named it Oaklands, after his late wife's home in St. Helena. His farm the second lot south of Corunna, Lot 57. He took with him his seven children, his sister, all their household goods, a dog, a cat, a cow, a calf, two pigs, six chickens, and a servant.

They moved up on the General Gratiot, a steamboat which ran between Detroit and Port Sarnia. On May 26th, the boat left Detroit at 3 a.m. and arrived at the farm at 8 p.m. and they disembarked by means of two planks. The next day, a thunderstorm with hail came up which broke 33 panes of glass in the new house. The house, though built of logs was very large and in two sections joined by a hall and stairway.

A Miss Clark came out from England and was governess to the Wright children, and the neighbours' daughters received their education there, also.

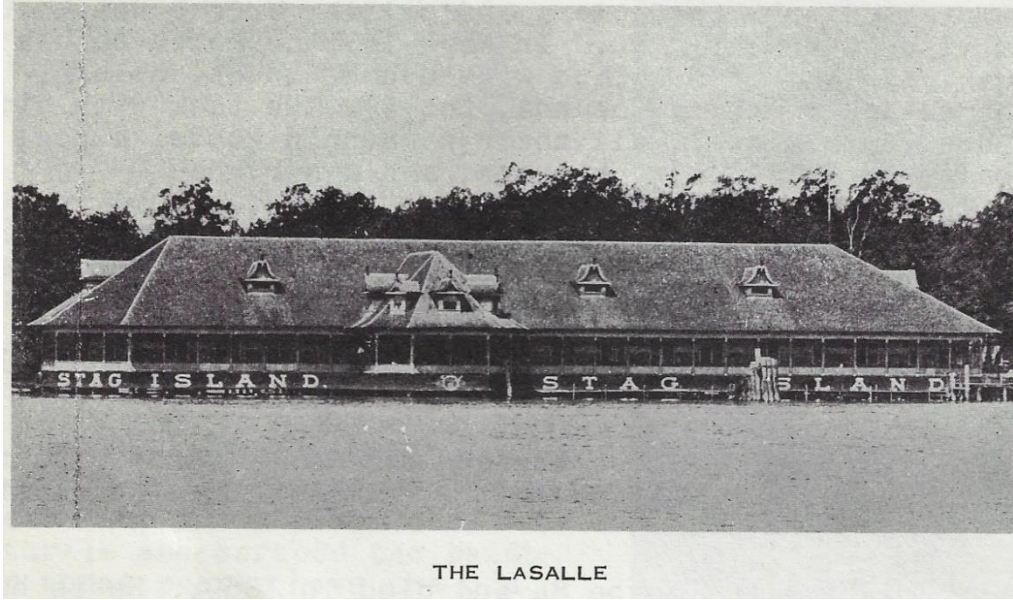
Captain Wright lived to be 84 and died in 1869. He is buried in Old Trinity Cemetery.



## TAVERNS

Corunna had eleven taverns including the one on Stag Island. Every hotel had a little bar and the two large ones were the LaSalle Hall on Stag Island, and the Pier.

The LaSalle Hall was directly across from Hill Street on Stag Island. It was 260 feet long by 75 feet wide. It contained the office, dining room, ballroom, and kitchen.



#### PEATTY'S FURNITURE SHOP

Peatty's Furniture Shop was connected to the big house of Mr. and Mrs. Peatty which was located beside the present Royal Bank location. It is now the home of Mr. R. Britton.

#### THE LAND BETWEEN CORUNNA AND FROOMEFIELD

In 1945 Mr. Harry Curran owned land, where Shell Oil is now located, along the highway to Talfourd Creek. Talfourd Creek runs on the north side of Guthrie Park and back to where DuPont is today.

Mr. Curran bought this land from an American. The only house that existed on this land was the home of Mr. Lloyd Hicks. He had bought this land to build a subdivision, he made a main street and called it Curran Avenue. His plan was to build more smaller streets off the one main one. These streets were going to be named after his sons. Curran Avenue still exists today right across from his son's home, Raymond Curran. In 1950 Canadian Oil offered to buy all this land except for a small piece where Mr. Curran would build his home (today the home of Mr. C. A. Jamieson.) Shell Oil today was the same as Canadian Oil.

#### HOTELS

Although the population in the village was small Corunna was well supplied with hotels. There existed 7 hotels in Corunna and two on Stag Island. There was usually three or more hotels in operation at the same time.

#### **The Francis House**

Located midway between Murray and Baird Street.



### **The Fitzgibbon Hotel**

Located on the southwest corner of Hill Street and the King's Highway. It was located where the Supertest gas station is today.

### **MacNeil**

Located where the Island View house is today on West Beresford.

### **St. Clair House**

On Lyndock and Hill once called King's Highway #40. The owner was Mr. David of Froomefield. It does not exist anymore.

### **Rising Sun**

Situated on the corner of Lyndock and Fane. It still remains on the corner as a home. The name Rising Sun came from the sun that rises in the east. Tom Minton ran the hotel. The property was Tom Ellis'.

### **The Nelson**

It was located on Stag Island. The hotel was a two-story building, twenty-four sleeping rooms with a double bed in each room. First floor had 12 rooms, six facing the St. Clair River. All had bath and toilet, hot and cold water. Second floor had twelve rooms, six facing the river.

### **Griffon**

It was located on Stag Island. The three story building had seventy-five rooms, half facing the river, had bath and toilet on first floor and second floor and had cold and hot water. One toilet on the third floor. Some had private toilet and bath.

### **Corunna Hotel**

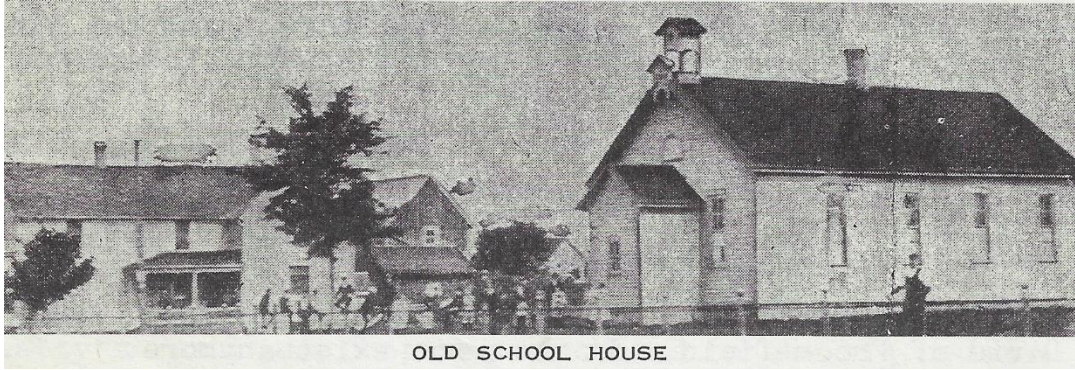
It is standing on the corner of Paget and Lyndock, but it is not used as a hotel today. At one time it was used as Jay's Barber Shop but is now a home.

Corunna was so well supplied with hotels because people waited in Corunna before going to the United States and before going down the river in big boats. The St. Clair River had a lot of boat traffic.

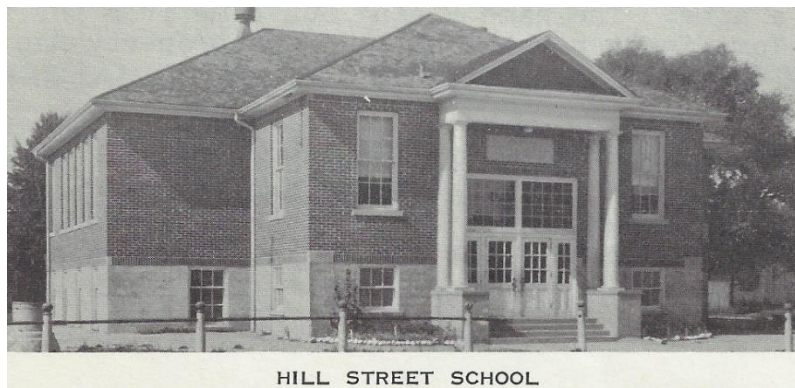
## **CORUNNA SCHOOLS**

Roger Milliken and George Campbell first proposed a school to be built on Lots 13 and 14 which stood on the corner of Lyndock Street and Hill Street. This lot was to be reserved for future government school purposes.

The first school was erected in 1869 and the second in 1896.



The present-day school was erected in 1929 and enlargements were made in 1949. It has 5 classrooms, library, home economics room, shop room, and a music room.



A Miss Isa Gauld taught pupils from grades 1 to 8 and also gave the entry exam. You had to have 60% or better.

In 1890 and 1891, 22,000 people wrote entry exams in Ontario and only 12,000 passed. By 1946 over 67% passed because of better library facilities.

The entry exam took 2 to 3 days to write and 2 to 3 weeks to be marked. Then your name would appear in the paper. The entry exams in the city stopped in 1925 but if you lived in rural communities you had to write it until 1940.

On the exams there were 10 subjects and one was arithmetic. A typical question from the arithmetic exam went like this. If a man earns \$280.00 in 2 and 1/3 months and spends in 4 and 1/6 months what he earns in 8 1/2 months, how much will he save a year? (Do you think you would have passed?).

## CORUNNA CHURCHES

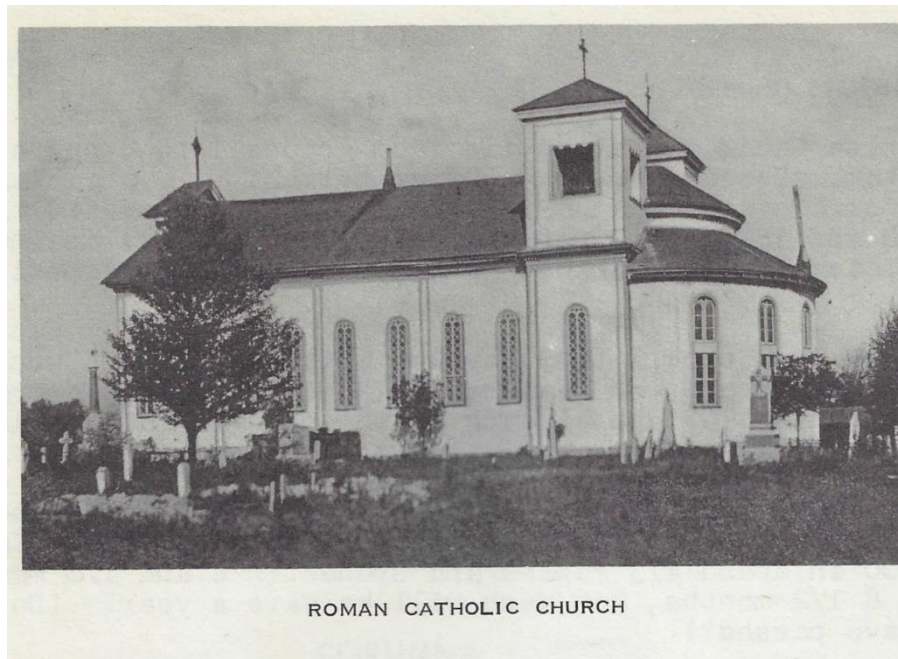
### **Anglican Church**

The first opening of the Anglican Church in Corunna took place on August 11th, 1861. This early church was a large brown frame structure and stood facing south towards Hill Street, about 25 feet west of the present one. The old church was torn down and a new one opened on July 2, 1905. Rev. Edwin

Lee was the minister. The present parish hall was formerly used by the Chosen Friends Society as their meeting place. The parish hall was located on the second lot north of the public school on Highway #40. At the present year of 1972 Rev. E. K. Bissell is the rector.

### **Roman Catholic Church**

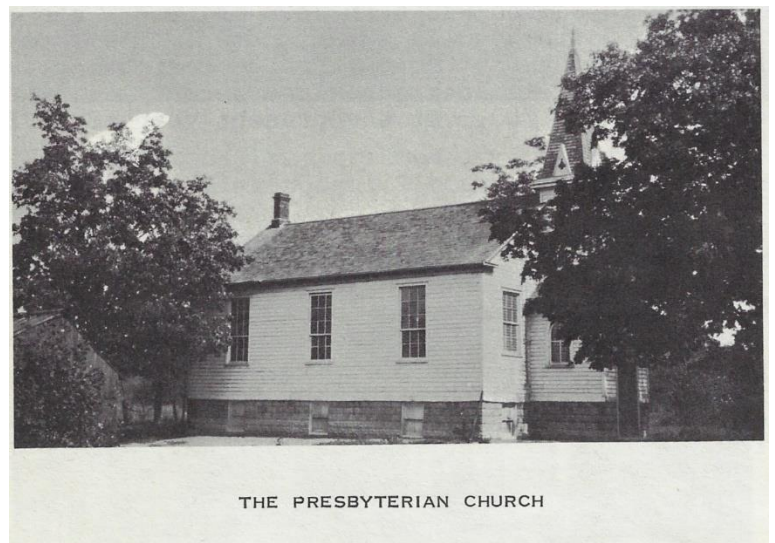
In 1862 the first St. Joseph's Church was started by the French who settled in this area. The church is a French Canadian pine architecture. It was built complete with balconies. The French courier du bois came in pioneer waves and settled in this area. It was they who felt the need for a church, and they're responsible for its completion. At the present year of 1972 Rev. Martin is the parish priest.



### **Presbyterian Church**

With \$63.00 in 1854 the first church was started by Rev. Gould. While the church was being built the people met in Sutherland's orchard to worship. When the church was built it stood between the United Church and the first white house on Hill Street which is now a large vacant lot. It was 106 years old when they tore it down and moved to Colborne and Fane Streets.

Their circuit riders drove as far as 120 miles. In the first little white framed church they had 25 people, now 151 members and only 50 at services. In the present year of 1972 Rev. Cruickshank is the rector.



## The United Church

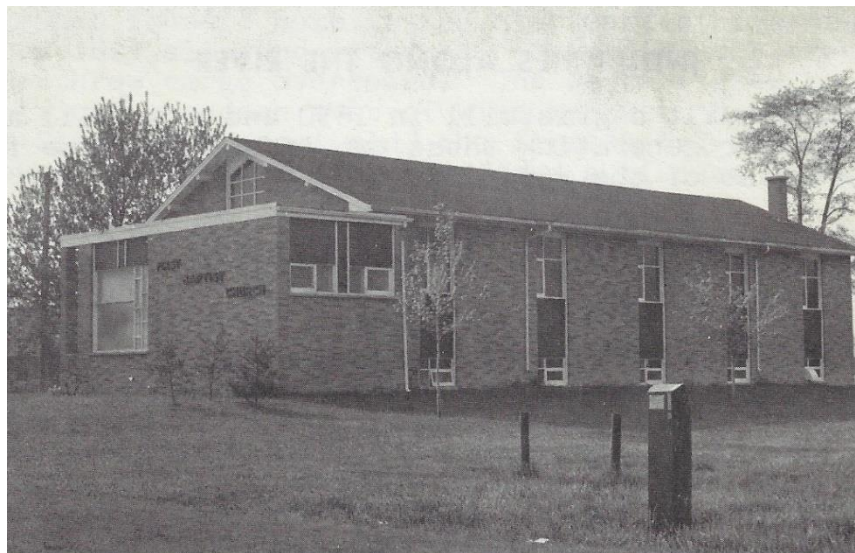
In 1851 Rev. E. White marked the first preaching service here. In 1854 the people decided to build a church on the North West corner of Paget and Murray Streets. A church 36' x 26' was begun. It was not completed until 1855 because an epidemic of cholera swept through our village. In 1881 another bigger church was built on Hill Street on the site of the present one. But on June 13, 1927 it was torn down. Also in 1927, the red brick church was opened and dedicated by Rev. T. Hazelwood. At the present year, 1972, Rev. Tom Redpath is the minister.



UNITED CHURCH

## Baptist Church

This is the first Baptist Church. In 1956, Rev. Glen Richardson from Courtright Baptist Church started a midweek Bible study. In June 1957 the congregation began Sunday services. Before the services they had their Bible study at the Legion Hall with the use of their facilities free. Rev. J. Clemens was appointed minister in 1957, a position he still holds in 1972. During this period, he was absent for three years in which the pulpit was supplied by Rev. Jim Smith and Rev. Jim Beswick.



BAPTIST CHURCH

## BUSINESS AND INDUSTRIES

In the late 1800's Corunna had a very busy and prosperous trade business for its size. There were three shoemakers, two harness-makers, three blacksmiths, one cabinet maker, a tinsmith, two ship builders, a post office and two general stores. Also, several people engaged in the production of potash, a basis for soap making.

One of the blacksmiths and two ship building companies were owned by John Bulley. He was also the owner of the renowned "Kate Bully."

One general store was located at the site of the present day Corunna Snack Bar. This store was called the Ark and its proprietor was Mr. J. L. Locke. He claimed "most anything you need is sold at the Ark." This was almost true because his many goods included china, crockery, toilet and patent medicine preparations, men's clothing, dry goods, groceries, penny candy, and tobacco. A butcher, Mr. R. Brightwell shared this residence with Mr. Locke.

Across from the Ark was a meat and grocery store. It was located at the present day site of Rose's Variety. This store had the first delivery service, by horse and cart, in Corunna.

The other general store was owned by a Mr. Maguire and was located at the present day site of MacRae's.

A Mr. Miller was a postmaster in early Corunna.



## INDUSTRIES ALONG THE RIVER

Mirza Proctor built a gristmill in 1850 and a sawmill along the river. The water for generating these two industries came from a swamp just over a mile east of the river.

The village of Corunna had several docks used in exporting large quantities of fine timber, maple syrup and potash. Most of these exports were going to England.

John Bulley came to Corunna in 1860 where he promptly opened a blacksmith shop. There were two other blacksmith shops in Corunna but Bulley soon outdistanced his competitors. After he realized how prosperous Corunna was he set up a wagon-making company, a gristmill and two shipyards with a boiler shop. Later still he opened a sash and door factory. The blacksmith shop was south of Cameron Street on Lot 58. He also built a wharf for his schooners.

## THE "KATE BULLY"

When a small ship flounders in a Great Lakes storm, there isn't usually a survivor left to tell the tragic tale. However, on October 4, 1869 four of a crew of ten survived the disaster that overtook one such ship, the "Kate Bully".

John Bulley built the schooner in the spring of 1869. To finance his venture, John was forced to sell his farm, steam saw and his grist mill. The mill and farm were on the south bank of Talfourd Creek, at the point where it enters the St. Clair River. John Bulley purchased a property further south on Highway #40 where the highway bends east of the river. Here he built a dock and stocks for the construction of the Kate Bully.

When the Kate Bully was completed the estimated cost was \$18,000.00 but John only insured her for \$12,000.00 (that \$6,000.00 difference proved to be a great mistake very soon.)

The skipper of the ship was Captain Henry Logan MacGlashan. The ship proved to be a good one and a fast one too. She made a run across Lake Ontario between Kingston and the Welland Canal and took only 20 hours.

On September 28th she sailed out of Sarnia, under command of Capt. MacGlashan, (who was a citizen of Corunna) carrying a load of railroad ties and piles for Chicago. Her crew consisted of nine men, including the captain, and their cook, Mrs. Maria Wilson. On the east side of Lake Michigan, off Sleeping Bear Point, the schooner ran into heavy weather and a head wind. This was not altogether unexpected because the year of 1869 was noted for severe gales in the Great Lakes.

On Monday, October 4th at about eight-fifteen in the evening Captain MacGlashan found a hole in the starboard of the schooner and the leak was rapidly allowing water in. He called the crew and all hands began to throw cargo overboard. The weather grew rougher and around nine o'clock a sudden gust of wind knocked the schooner on its side. George Stone of Froomefield, the first mate, was thrown overboard and drowned. A Kingston man suffered a similar fate.

The rest of the crew, including the cook, managed to hang onto the bulwark, (which is a breakwater for protection against waves) or to get back to it after falling into the water. The rolling vessel and chilly water made it difficult for the men to keep their hold. Capt. MacGlashan was encouraging the remainder of his crew to fasten themselves to the bulwark with ropes when a large wave swept him off the wreckage and he drowned.

The cook, Mrs. Wilson, was going to fall, after a wave knocked against the ship but a Nova Scotian crewman hung on to her trying to prevent her from drowning. The boom broke, striking his arm, and he finally had to let her go.

Six men remained tied to the wreck throughout the wild, cold night. Tuesday passed, and they remained in the same position, with endless waves rolling over them.

During Tuesday night, the Nova Scotian who had been struck with the boom, and Merritt Bulley, a son of John Bulley, both died. Their mates untied their bodies and watched them sink. The four survivors were found by the "Black Hawk", a small tug, at five in the afternoon of the next day. Two of the survivors were local men; John Stone of Froomefield and William Mitchell of Mooretown.

John Bulley was his hard, not only by the loss of his good friend, Captain MacGlashan, but financially. The \$6,000.00 he lost was his undoing. He sold his new blacksmithing business, mill and docks to Oliver Simms, who moved the best part of the machinery to Petrolia.

After a few years John Bulley became engaged in an extensive lumbering business. In his later years he also became a veterinarian doctor of sorts in Petrolia. His last years were spent as a lumber man in Northern Ontario.

The stocks of the Kate Bully and piles from the dock were remnants to be seen off the south end of Guthrie Park until the 1940's. A grandson of Captain MacGlashan, who left a widow and five children, lives on the MacGlashan homestead south of Corunna.

### Importance of the Kate Bully

In the voyage of the Kate Bully more than the cargo of green timber and a ship were lost by its sinking. Most likely if it had been successful John Bulley probably would have repeated it again, making more boats and ships. Also, Corunna might have become noted as a worthy shipbuilding centre!

### Stag Island

When the 1890's came around, Stag Island was just beginning to be known as a tourist spot. The David Brothers, Ed and Fred, began a rowboat ferry in order to handle the overflow of visitors.

The two main hotels on the Island were the Griffon and the Nelson. They owned twenty-two cottages on the east side of the Island. These cottages contained from 5 to 10 rooms and were complete with electric lights and running water. The hotels also owned a boat livery service for sight-seers at reasonable rates. One of the hotels boasted a ballroom sixty feet by a hundred and twenty feet, built over running water, therefore always cool. A nine hole golf course was laid out by Thomas Bendlow of the A. J. Spaulding Co., of Chicago on the north end of the Island. A three lane bowling alley was also on the Island as well as double clay tennis courts. The hotels boasted excellent fishing and bathing facilities.



### CONCLUSIONS

Many times we tend to think that only the large cities of this country have vivid pasts. If this is the case then Corunna is an exception. Although Corunna has never been noted for having a large population there has always been much activity within its boundaries.

For most of its history this region's economy has been based primarily on manufacturing and agriculture. However in recent years the tourist trade of years ago has been renewed and the St. Clair Parkway Commission has built and are building facilities to equip the growing need in this area.

It would appear that present economic conditions will continue to expand and continue the growth of the Industrial Valley.

On behalf of the Grade 8A students of Hill Street Senior School we would like to thank the many citizens of Corunna for sending in their helpful information. In most cases we were able to make use of it. Also the students would like to thank you for taking the time and showing such interest in our booklet.

Thank You,

Grade 8A