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A SHORT HISTORY OF THE
RIDGE

by Ronald Casier Aug, 1975

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THE RIDGE

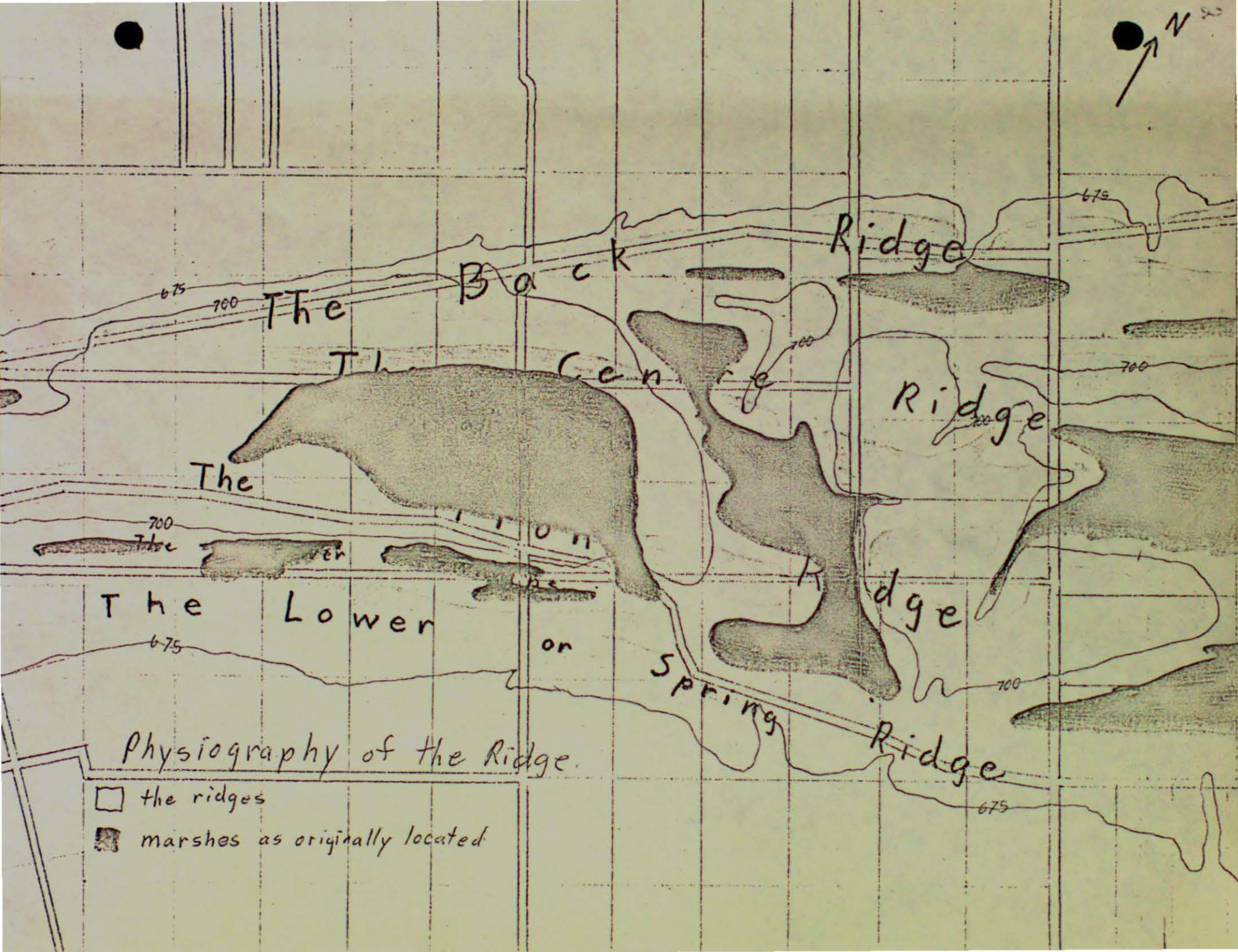
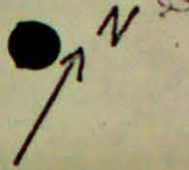
by
Ronald Casier
August 1975

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A Short History of The Ridge

Some ten thousand years ago the last great glaciers silently melted northward marking the end of the Wisconsin Ice Age. In their wake they deposited the Blenheim Moraine which even after several millenium of erosion still poses a striking physical feature accross south eastern Kent County. Although of very small relief when compared with other more elevated parts of the province, it is still an outstanding landform to those who have travelled the flat and fertile tablelands of South Western Ontario. Originating in the south east corner of Raleigh township, the ridge quickly rises and broadens out into a wide plateau with several paralleling ridges along it's summit. Paralleling the north shore of Lake Erie the ridge cuts accross the townships of Harwich, Howard, Orford and eventually terminates in Elgin County.

Although the moraine rises to better than 150 feet above the waters of Lake Erie the action of time and water have made it's grade a rather smooth transition along most of it's lenght. Thus much of the moraine is not recognizable as a ridge but more an inclined plain. However in Harwich and Howard "The Ridge" as it is still called locally, has retained it's steep slopes and rolling hills. This is the area which this essay will discuss. That region extending from the Centre Line in Harwich to the Howard Road in Howard and between the fourth and eighth concessions of the Lake Erie Survey in Harwich and including a portion of the Townline Range. In this section the Ridge broadens into a ever widening plateau marked off by four ridges: the Back, Centre, Front and Lower or Spring which all



Physiography of the Ridge.

- the ridges
- marshes as originally located

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parallel the plateau. Originally large marshes were trapped between these ridges on top of the plateau but efforts by modern man have succeed in draining them off. This history will trace the importance and various settlements of The Ridge.

Originally submerged by the flood waters left by the retreating glaciers the ridge was the first land of Kent to rise from the receding waters of that postglacial lake named Warren. Several lines of ancient beaches and sea cliffs are etched along the ridges marking the various stages of Lake Warren as it receded to form the present lakes of Erie and St. Clair. Man and life rapidly returned to this area from the warmer south. Evidence of this is the prehistoric Folsom arrowheads and numerous pebble tools found along the hills. Fish would have teemed in the shallow lakes trapped between the ridges as plant and animal life rapidly re-established themselves on the warm, rich, gravel hills. The small lakes would gradually silt in forming the great marshes which later settlers would first avoid and then conquer.

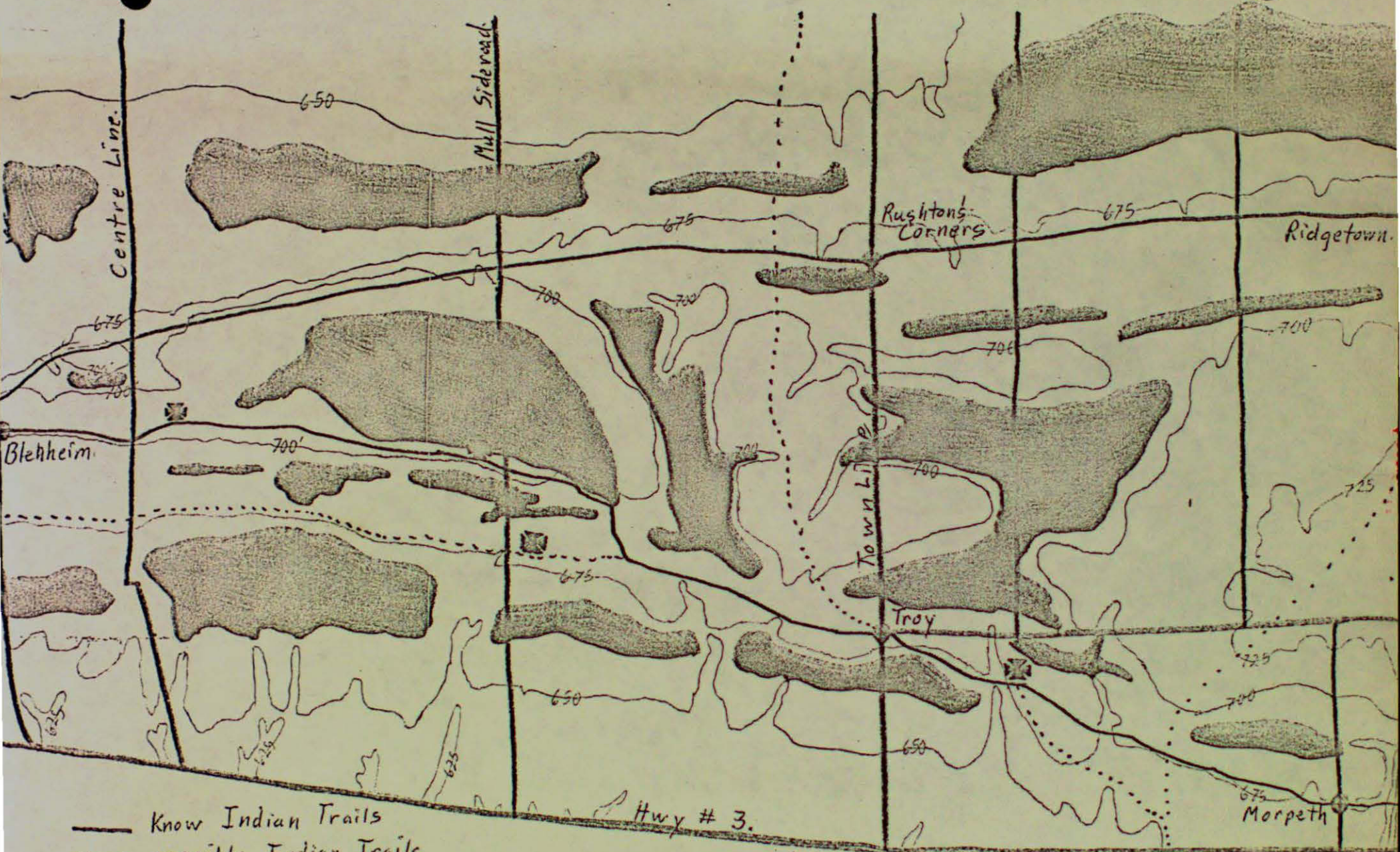
The earliest Ridge dwellers hunted the woolly mastadon whose skeletal remains are still found occasionally in the flats. It appears that these primitive hunters frightened the great beasts into attempting escapes through the marshes when cornered by fire. Here the large animal floundering in the water and mud became a much easier prey to kill.

Several native cultures have flourished along the Ridge as testified to by the numerous finds at the archaeological excavations at the Indian 'Fortress' near Clearville. The

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most noted tribe being the Attiowandarons whose name translates as "The People with The Land" or more liberally as 'the best country' or 'God's Land'. This title fits well with the rich and fertile soil of the area as any farmer will tell you. Physically superior in proportion and strenght to their close cousins: the Iroquois and Hurons, the Attiowandarons were further advanced and developed in culture and society as well in the skills of hunting, fishing, husbandry, agriculture, warfare and weaponry than any other Great Lakes tribe. Their tradings in tobacco and flint weaponry and tools, in which they were expert artificers, sent runners and traders out who returned with treasures of shells and stones from both ocean coasts as well as the Gulf of Mexico. The Attiowandaron empire stretched along the north shore of Lake Erie across the Niagarian Penninsula and as far east as Rochester, New York. In the west it extended well into lower Michigan. It's northern neighbour, the Petun or Tobacco tribe of Georgian Bay paid annual tribute to this powerful nation while the cunning Hurons and fierce Iroquois respected but feared their cousins. The Ridge played an important role in this vast empire as the major coastal route. Several major trails ran along the ridge, one of which connected Niagara to the Detroit River. The present Front Ridge Road is part of this early roadway. Following the height of land along the southern edge of the Ridge plateau to avoid the numerous marshes and swamps of the flats and lowlands, the road continued eastwardly to the 'Fortress' near Clearville and on to the 'Earthworks' at Southwold and the important flint beds

Indian Trails along the Ridge



- Know Indian Trails
- - - possible Indian Trails
- Present Roads
- 700- Contour lines
- Swamps
- ✠ Indian Villages located

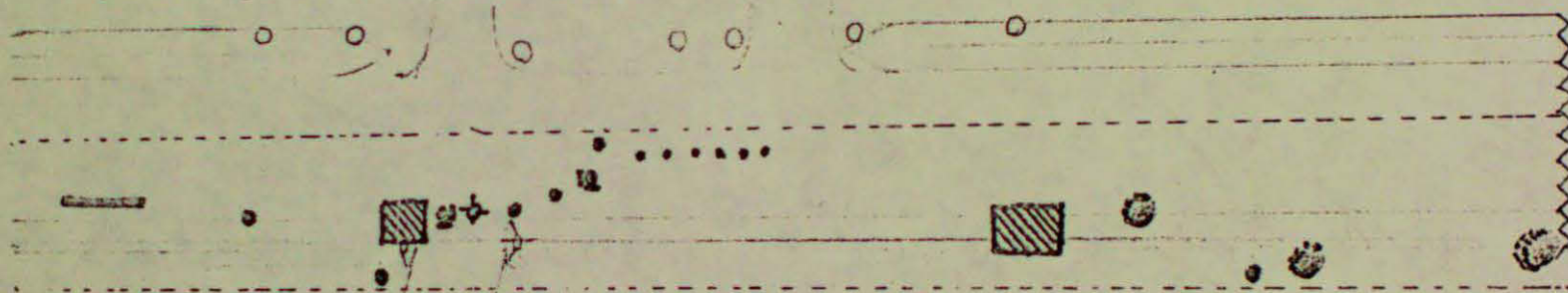
of Point Albino at Niagara. To the west the trail followed the ridge to a major town near Highbanks in Raleigh and hence to the Leamington Moraine and Windsor. It should be noted that this trail survived well into the last century as a roadway, when modern surveys obliterated it except for the Front Ridge Road in Harwich and those stretches that the Talbot Street (Hwy. # 3.) followed in eastern Kent and Essex Counties. Ruins of several small villages have been located along the remaining trail. In 1640, Jean de Brebeuf and Joseph Marie Chaumonot, the Jesuit martyrs probably trekked along this trail on their 'Mission of The Angels' to La Nation Neutre which the French had named the Attiowandaron tribe. Here were the first whites to set foot upon the ridge as they journeyed from St. Alexis (Southwold earthworks) to St Joseph (near Chatham) preaching and stopping at the small villages along the ridge.

Other trails also transversed the moraine. The Back Ridge Road testifies to another trail which hugged the northern edge of the ridge, joining up the more inland villages. A major village in Rondeau Provincial Park as well as two others on Big Creek in Howard were connected by several trails which transversed the Ridge northwardly to Mc Gregor Creek , the Thames, the Sydenham and eventually Lake Huron. Being sedentary people they cleared vast tracks of land to grow corn, squash, beans, tobacco and pumpkins which these roadways carried into the major towns a long with their trade in flint and tobacco. The eastern approach to the Ridge as well as the fertile cornfields in the Thames Valley was safe guarded

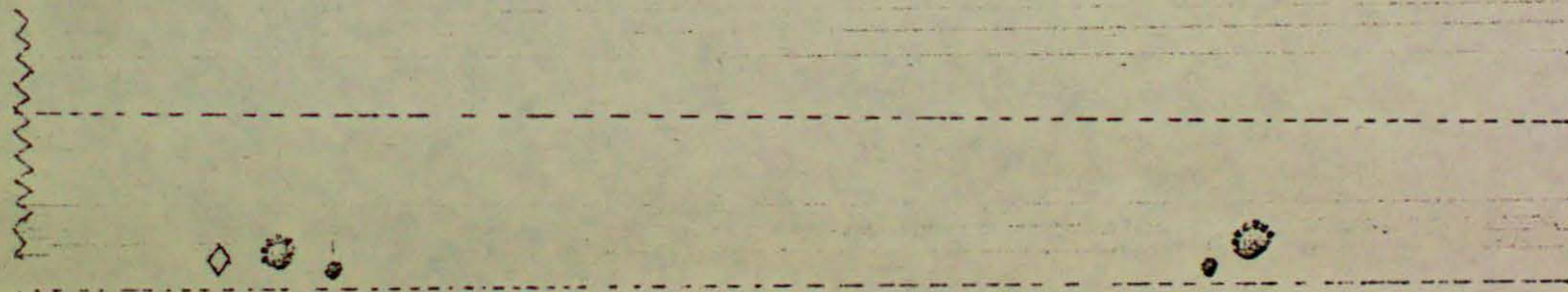
Map marking the location of unusual remains found under the Front Ridge Road in 1972.



- Drain placed 10 to 12 feet under the surface.
- ▨ Area excavated by bulldozers to assist the trencher in achieving maximum depth.
- Stones in association with remains.
- Charcoal post holes
- ◇ Gravel filled post holes
- Present maple trees
- Hydro poles
- Fire places
- ▨ Unusual square pits filled with small pebbles blackened with charcoal and tar like substance
- ◇ find of several Indian artifacts



Schematic of Front Ridge Road, Lot 18, west of Mull Side Road.
- showing unusual remains and Indian fire places found 2 to 4 feet under the surface of the road bed during the 1972 construction on the road

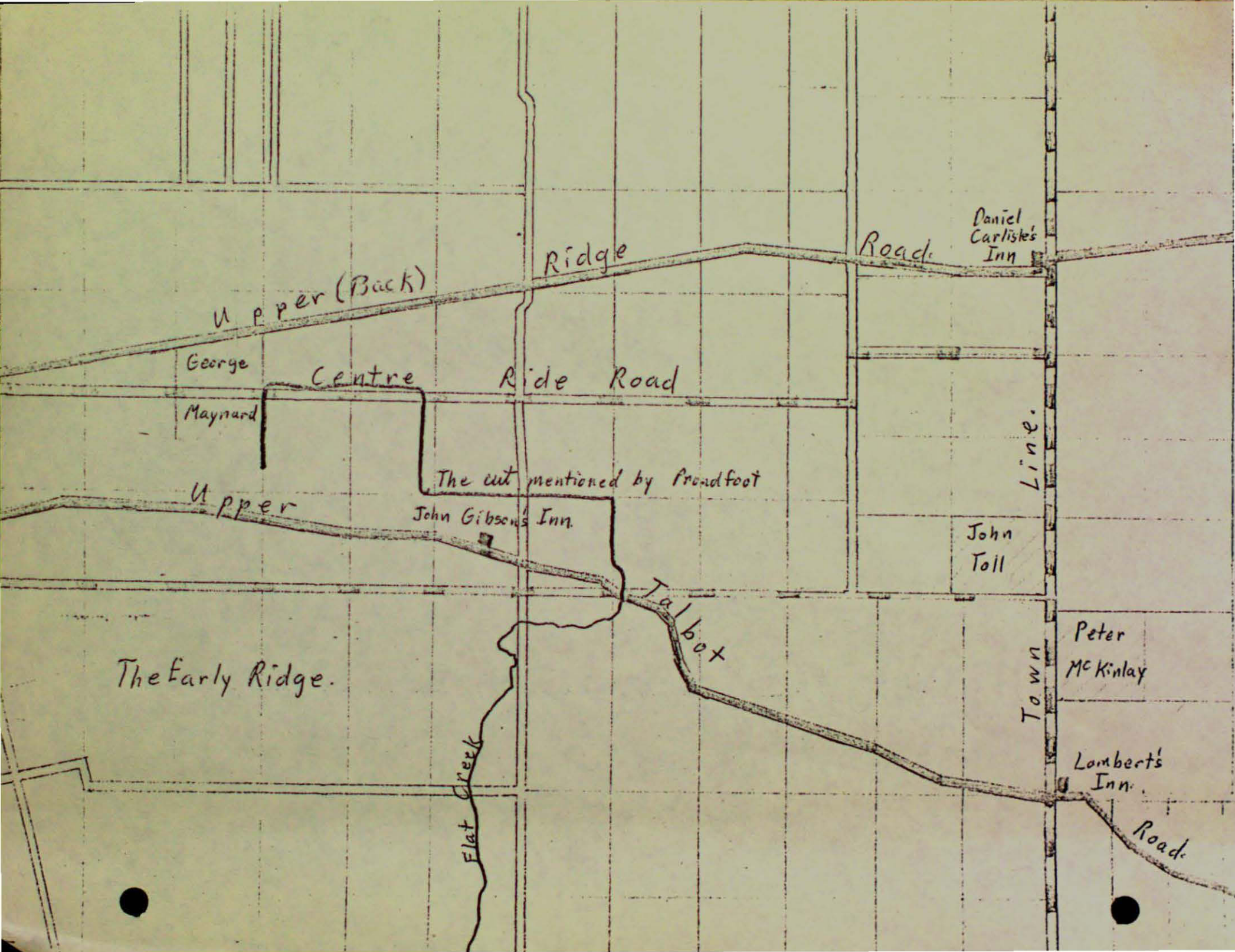


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by the 'Fortress' near Clearville. However in 1650 the Neutral nation collapsed as their fierce cousins, the Iroquois armed with English and Dutch guns first annihilated the Hurons and then turned their vengeance on the Attiowandarons. After a fierce struggle the Neutrals succumbed to the Iroquois' superior weaponry and were wiped from the face of the earth. Although now completely emptied of people the Iroquois did not resettle the area but left it as an open hunting ground with wandering bands of hunters being its only occupants.

The major Neutral roadways were kept open by these wandering bands but the vast open cornfields of the Neutrals slowly returned to the primeval forest. So vast were some of these clearings that white settlers were able to take advantage of these breaks in the bush as John Gibson would nearly one hundred and fifty years after their abandonment. Only French and later British fur traders would trudge along the Ridge trails in search of beaver which thrived in the marshy bush. Not until the late 1790's did settlers begin to travel along the ancient Neutral trails of the Ridge to new homes in the west. Few dared to venture deep into the marshy woods away from the old trail which was then called the Lower Ridge Road but presently called the Front Ridge.

While settlement progressed rapidly along the shores of Lake Erie and the banks of the Thames, the Ridge remained empty due to the dense and wild primeval forest in the south portion of Harwich which included the Ridge. So forbidding and forlorn was the region that it earned the title and reputation of 'The Ten Mile Bush' even though the forest was one continuous stand along the lake.



Upper (Back)

Ridge

Road

Daniel
Carlisle's
Inn

George

Maynard

Centre

Ride Road

The cut mentioned by Prondfoot

John Gibson's Inn

Upper

Talbot

Line.

John
Toll

The Early Ridge.

Town

Peter
McKinlay

Lambert's
Inn

Road

Flat
Creek

This title would set with the area until well after the 1850's. Settlement would be furthered delayed by the War of 1812 although some action was seen along the Ridge. Settlers of the Thames fearing for their livestock herded their cattle and horses along the Lower Ridge Road to Pointe aux Pins to hide them from the advancing American army. Local militias as well as those sent out by the Talbot Settlement further east patrolled the Ridge for American marauders. Several skirmishes are reported to have occurred along the Ridge. One of these battles was located just east of the Centre Line on the Front Ridge Road where a number of cannon balls were uncovered.

After the war the first pioneers of the Ridge arrived and establish their homes. A Late United Empire Loyalist named John Gibson arrived from Salem, Massachusetts and built an inn along the Lower Ridge Road. Colonel Talbot's road along Lake Erie had petered out just past Morpeth due to the Ten Mile Bush and the Clergy reserves in Harwich. Therefore the increasing traffic detoured at Morpeth along the Lower Ridge Road which became referred to as the Upper Talbot Road, until Talbot Road proper could be picked up again in Raleigh. This provided Gibson with a fairly good living as a steady stream of settlers moved westward. This attracted a second innkeeper named Thomas Lambert who established his tavern east of Gibson's. Looking to the future Lambert saw that his location on the Townline, between Harwich and Howard, which had been laid out back in 1809, would have the advantage of being on the northern trail to Arnold's Mill on the Thames

as well as the western traffic on the Upper Talbot. Another innkeeper named Daniel Carlisle wishing to profit on this north bound traffic as well as some of the east - west movement established his inn north of Lambert's on the corner of the Townline and the Upper Ridge Road which like the Lower was an old Indian trail. Thus by 1820 the sites for the future communities of the Front Ridge, Troy and Rushton's Corners had been pioneered by these enterprising business men.

However the axe and plough were quick to follow in the persons of John Toll and George Maynard. The Tolls took land on the sixth concession of Harwich near the Townline while the Maynards settled between the Centre and Upper Ridge Roads about lot 15. Peter Mc Kinley arrived in 1819 from Scotland settling in Howard north of Lambert's on the Townline while his brothers Duncan and Robert settled north of the Ridge. Thus several clearings began to open up in the Ten Mile Bush as pioneers arrived and roads were opened and improved.

Up to 1820, the Upper Talbot Road was the major artery in southern Harwich but at that time Talbot Road proper was finally pushed across the township to Buckhorn (Cedar Springs) in Raleigh. However travellers still preferred the drier and more frequented Upper Talbot to the marshy and desolate Lower Talbot or Old Street as it was locally called to distinguish it from the roadway on the Ridge. At the same time the Townline was resurveyed and work commenced on the trail to make it passable so that the grain could reach Arnold's mill near Howard Bridge (Kent Bridge) on the Thames. It would take til 1829 to accomplish this task. Meanwhile the

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government, to hasten and consolidate settlement in southern Kent between the Thames and the lake, opened up the Middle Road in 1821 to 1823. Laid out along the height of land across the southern portions of the county, it followed the present route of County Road # 10 (the former Hwy. # 98) from the west into Harwich where the surveyors took advantage of the Ridge. Following the Upper Talbot Road for a short stretch, they swung the Middle Road north along the Centre Line to the trail along the northern edge of the ridge. In this manner the new road would not parallel the Old Street (Talbot Road proper) too closely. The Middle Road then swung to the east and followed the trail called the Upper Ridge Road which today is known as the Back Ridge. The new road crossed the Townline at Carlisle's Inn which would have pleased ole' Daniel with this new source of potential customers which would follow. Continuing on into Howard the Middle Road hugged the northern ridge until Orford. Following the surveyors were Edward Palmer and Alex Marsh, both from Morpeth who in 1823 pioneered the site of Howard Ridge (Ridgetown) east of Carlisle's on the new Middle Road which retained the name of the Upper Ridge locally. In the same year Richard Rushton arrived from Nova Scotia taking up land on lots 7 & 8 in Howard along the Townline just across from Carlisle's Inn. Two years later in 1825 his family arrived including his three sons; Jeremiah, Oney and James all of whom took up land around their father who died shortly after. Hailing from Nova Scotia they were the descendants of United Empire Loyalists with their ancestry basically

Howard Road

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RUSHTON'S
CORNERS

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The Harwich - Howard Townline

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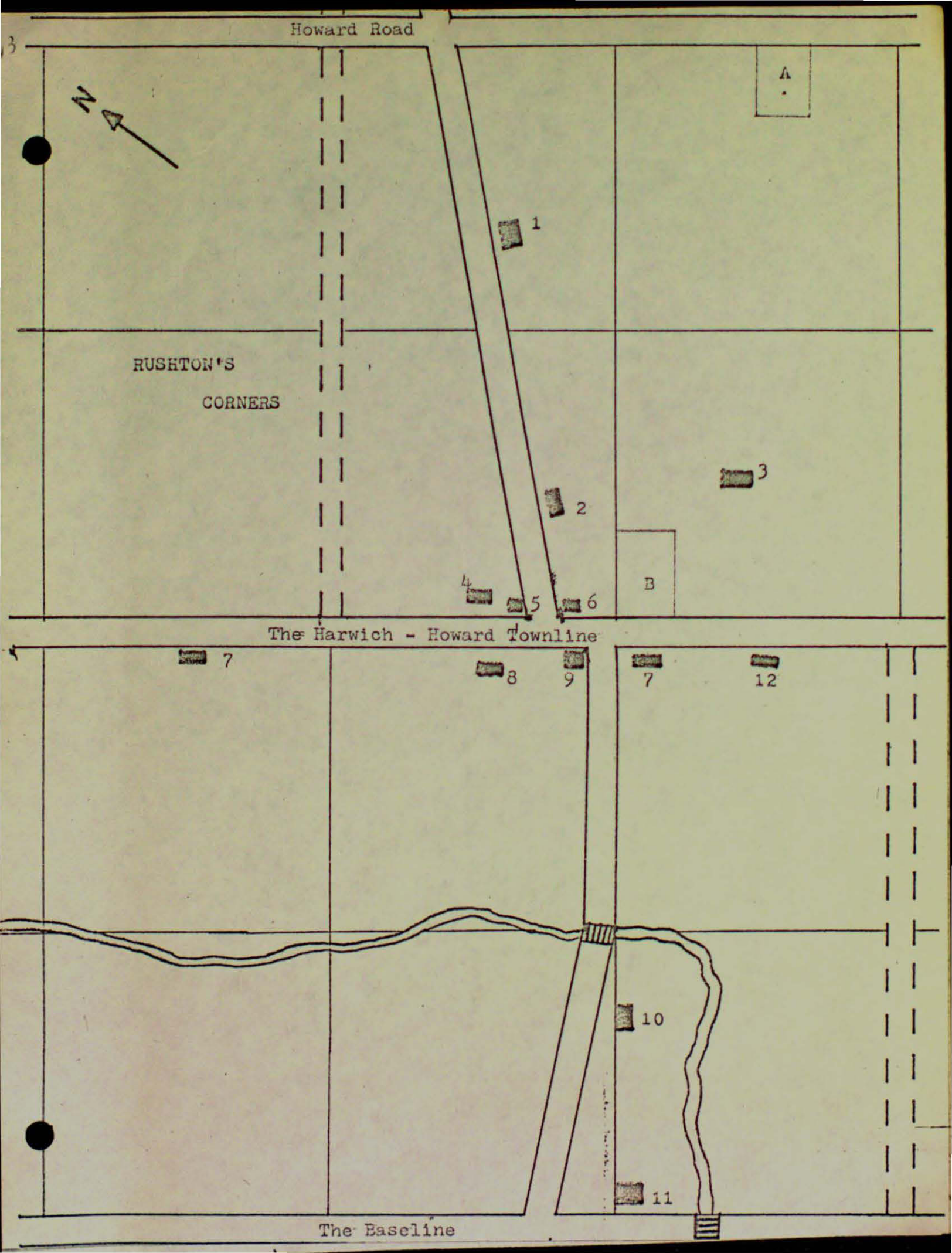
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The Baseline



14
Rushton's Corners

1. Residence of James Rushton
 2. Residence of Oney Rushton
 3. Residence of Squire Mc Cully
 4. Residence of Jeremiah Rushton
 5. Site of log school
 6. Site of brick school
 7. Residences of the Fennacey brothers
 8. Residence of John Mills
 9. Daniel Carlisle's Inn
 10. Residence of Robert Barnes
 11. Site of Thomas Barnes' peppermint mill
 12. Residence of E. Venecy
-
- A The Rushton Cemetary
- B The Military Reserve.

Welsh with some Indian blood. Richard's tales of the new land to be had, not only attracted his sons but many of his Nova Scotian neighbours of Loyalist backgrounds also. John Mills, E. Venecy, Squire Mc Cully and the two Fennacey Brothers quickly followed and helped to establish the thriving farming community called Rushton's Corners rather than Carlisle's since the inn had closed for some unknown reason and Daniel moved. Interestingly, Squire Mc Cully's brother Jonathan would later be a Father of Confederation in Nova Scotia while the son of John Mills would become the Honourable David Mills. Another interesting event of 1825 was the marriage of Jane Gibson, born 1807, daughter of John Gibson of the Upper Talbot Road to Abraham Holmes, born 1797, son of Hugh Holmes of north Harwich who would later be the parents of Dr. Tecumseh Holmes of Chatham.

In 1826, the site of the town of Blenheim was pioneered by John Jackson who took up lots on either side of the Upper Talbot Road near the intersection of the Communication and Middle Roads. Later Jackson would be a prominent figure in the town's history. However for the next ten or so years, as the three villages of Morpeth, Blenheim and Howard Ridge (Ridgetown) which triangulated the Ridge grew no new settlers established themselves upon the ridges. The reputation of the Ten Mile Bush as well as the prospects of cheaper and easier cleared land further west drew all new comers away from the district. However the Ridge did not stagnate but on the contrary the pioneer families already established progressed rapidly. Each year more land was cleared as sons

coming of age sought their own farms next to that of their parents. These new homesteads with their ever expanding fields of grain were interconnected by better roads as the old routes were improved with the removal of stumps and the construction of corduroy bridges and roadbeds. New roads were opened up along the concessions while the Harwich Baseline and the Howard Road were also opened. The Marsh Road (the present Mull Sideroad) was also laid out and partially opened but the marshes on the Ridge made it of little use in joining the district with new settlements north and south of the Ridge. A stage coach run between Morpeth and Chatham, joining the busy Talbot Road settlement with the growing town at the Forks, was started and expanded rapidly. Following the Upper Talbot Road from Morpeth it made stops at Lambert's, Gibson's and Blenheim at which point it turned north along the Communication Road towards Chatham. With the coming of the stage lines regular mail delivery developed. Morpeth received a post office to serve the surrounding district but the area proved too large. To remedy this a second post office was established at Gibson's Inn to service the Ridge. It's official title being the Harwich-Howard Post Office, Western District, Upper Canada.

In regards to the agriculture along the Ridge the farms were reported to equal or surpass those of any other section in the county. In 1833, James Ruddle, a visitor to the district wrote an account of the crops grown along the Ridge. Large fields, some up to forty acres, of wheat, rye, corn, barley, oats, peas, beans, potatoes and turnips were

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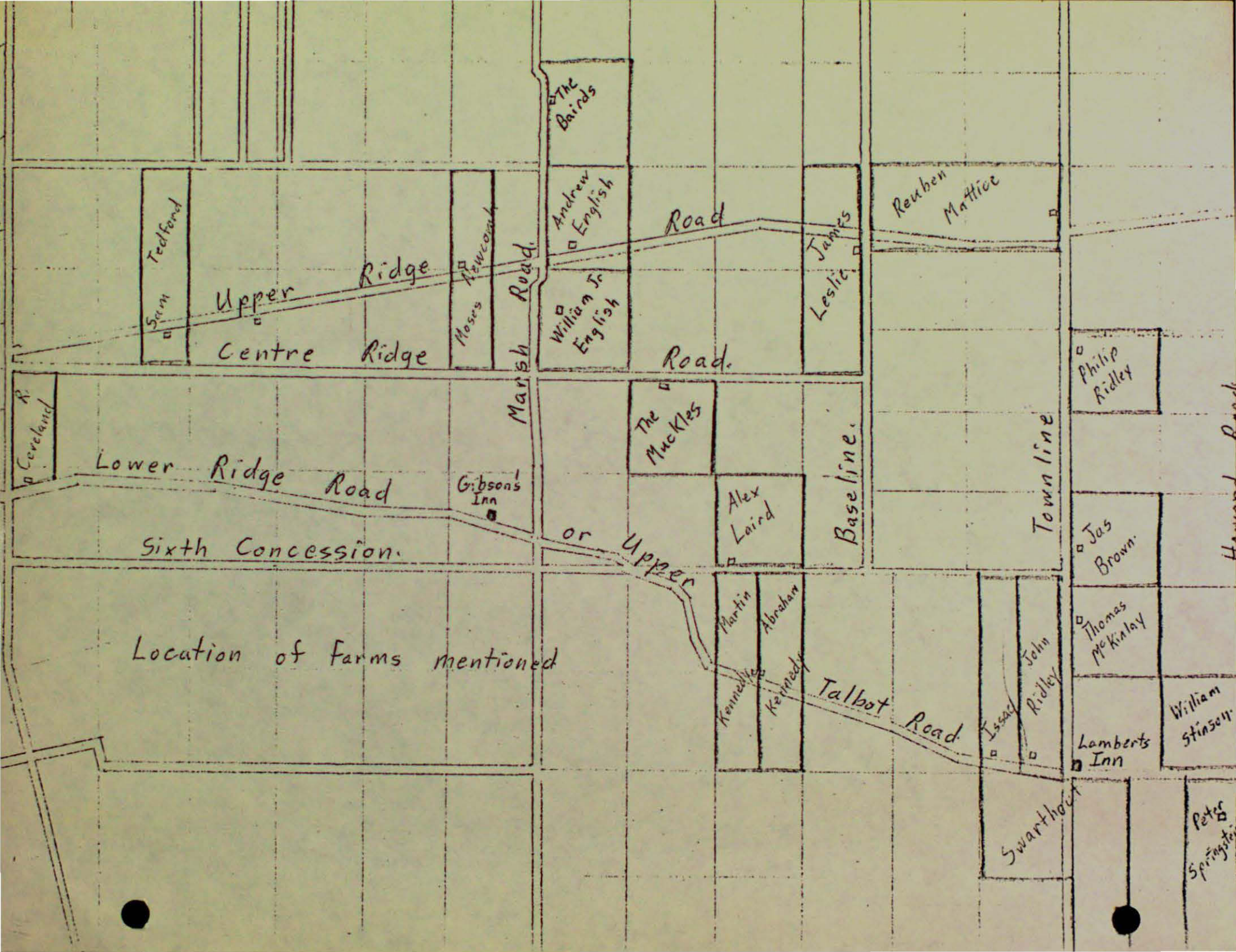
interspersed with orchards of apples, pears, plums, and cherries. Garden vegetables as musk and water melons, cucumbers, squash, carrots, parsnips, beets, onions and cabbage were common and produced exceptional yields on the warm fertile Ridge soil. Gooseberries, currents and raspberries were grown in large quantities as well. A great deal of the best quality tobacco was grown also which is of little surprise since the best Burley tobacco is still grown on the Ridge. Ruddle also reported that not much flax or hemp was sown but of that which was, it grew very well. Ruddle was not the only one to note the bounty and prosperity of the area for a year earlier a young man named Andrew English had visited and written home describing the district.

Andrew had come to the new world from County Down, Ireland in 1830 to seek a better life and new home for his widowed mother, Jane English, and his brothers and sisters. After nearly two years of searching he landed at the port of Antrim just south of Morpeth and proceeded to investigate the possibilities of the Ridge. Along the Back Ridge on the Upper Ridge Road he found a suitable area which he wrote home as being well wooded, fertile, easily drained, with spring water and free from malaria. Here, he told his mother, they could have fruit and farms like those of Ireland. Returning to County Down in 1832, Andrew shared his experiences to family and friends; convincing them all of the better life that awaited. Thus in 1834, Jane English with two of her three sons: Andrew and William Jr., her son in law: Andrew Leslie and her two daughters Margaret and MaryJane left Robert, the

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third son in charge of the lands in Ireland and departed for their new homes on the Ridge. However they were not alone for Andrew's tales had convinced the Hamil, Baird and Muckle families to immigrate to Upper Canada as well. The group purchased 800 acres from the Canada Land Company which controlled all the remaining lands in the area except for the Crown Lands and Clergy Reserves to the south. They established their community which became known as the Irish Settlement along the Back and Centre Ridges where good drainage would be assured. Technically they were not Irish but belonged to the Scotch-Irish stock of Ulster having emigrated there from Fifeshire in Scotland after the great Civil War in England. Theodore Roosevelt later stated that this race of strong, upright and resolute individuals, was one of the best fitted people to conquer the wilderness and hold it. Their devotion to education, religion and community life drove them to establish churches and schools wherever they settled. True to form these Scotch-Irish families set to work constructing a log school at the northeast corner of the Baseline and the Upper Ridge Road on the land settled by Andrew Leslie. His brothers in law: Andrew and William Jr. settled further west at the corners of the Marsh and Upper Ridge Roads with the Bairds taking land further north along the Marsh Road and the Muckles locating on the Centre Ridge.

The Leslie school in the first year of the settlement was the first school established for the entire district. Students attended from the Upper, Centre and Lower Ridge



Location of Farms mentioned

Cleveland

Tedford
Sam

Upper Ridge
Centre Ridge

Moses Newcomb

Marsh Road

The Bairds

Andrew English

William Jr English

Road

James Leslie

Reuben Mattice

Road

The Muckles

Alex Laird

Baseline

Lower Ridge Road

Gibson's Inn

or Upper

Town line

Philip Ridley

Jas Brown

Thomas McKinlay

William Stinson

Martin Kennedy

Abraham Kennedy

Talbot Road

Isaac Ridley

John Ridley

Lamberts Inn

Swarthout

Peter Springster

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Roads as well as the seventh and eighth concessions north of the Ridge. Pupils from as far west as the Centre Line in Harwich attended while in the east they came from nearly Ridgetown in Howard. This school also accommodated and included the children of the Rushton's Corners and Townline settlements for the next twelve years despite a sharp rivalry which was developing.

The Englishs planted orchards with fruit treestock which they had carefully brought from Ireland as well as the first cedar hedges in the county. The year after their arrival Jane English became a grandmother with the birth of James Leslie to Andrew and MaryJane. He was the first white child to be born on the Ridge and so became the pride and joy of the settlement. Over the next few years assisted by the Indians, these Scotch-Irish settlers learned about seasonal planting, tapping Maple trees with homemade wooden buckets, hunting game and the uses of native medicinal herbs while the settlement prospered.

Meanwhile along the Upper Talbot Road things were still progressing well. In 1834 Reverend William Proudfoot of the United Secession Church of Scotland (Presbyterian) visited and preached in the district. He stayed at Gibson's Inn which he described as a very plain log house of several rooms with a stable which provided most comfortable accommodations for man or beast on the road. He noticed a great swamp behind the inn, paralleling the Front Ridge which after sunset produced a dense white fog which blanketed the area between the Front and Back Ridges. He also reported that a

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deep hand dug drain had recently been cut through a portion of the marsh to aid in it's drainage as potential farm land and to permit the completion of the Marsh Road across the Ridge. This drain is still in use although greatly enlarged and slightly altered by modern means. Several stage lines now operated between Morpeth and Chatham and points beyond. This resulted in several new rival stage coach stops being established east and west of Gibson's. To counter this a frame building of heavy timbers (which is still standing) was constructed beside Gibson to accommodate stage passengers during the stop over.

Mrs. Anna Jameson, another visitor to the area in 1837, did not think as highly of Lambert's Inn as Proudfoot had of Gibson's. She described Lambert's as a crude building of logs consisting of only one room which was lighted by only a single window at one end. At the other end she stated that a lodging or sleeping place had been divided off by some planks from the common room. The horses and livestock were housed together in a shed of bark and boughs with the hollow trunk of a tree acting as a water trough. She however being from a earlier settled and further advanced district, found the area quite primitive and the roads impassable. Fortunately others did not agree with Mrs. Jameson's view of the Ridge as a new wave of settlers arrived.

In 1837 Robert Barnes arrived; taking land near his former Nova Scotian neighbours who welcomed him as another sturdy Loyalist pioneer. The following year Elijah and Moses Newcombe arrived reinforcing the Irish Settlement along the

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Back Ridge. In 1839, John Ridley purchased 267 acres of Crown Land in Harwich across from Lambert's Inn. Prior to this no new farms had been established on the Lower Ridge Road since after the War of 1812. An American named Issac Swarthout arrived from Troy, New York about the the same time and established a sawmill near the same corner to exploit this still heavily timbered area. He also took the liberty of renaming the old Lambert intersection to Troy in honour of his old hometown. In 1840 Peter Spingsteen purchased 200 acres just east of Troy followed by Alex Laird in 1842 who settled on the sixth concession or the Lower or Spring Ridge Road as it came to be called after the original Lower Ridge or Upper Talbot Road changed its name to that of the Front Ridge.

Meanwhile in 1841, David S. Baldwin had purchased Gibson's Inn as well as the surrounding 100 acres from the Crown. The farm, tavern and the Harwich-Howard Post Office were operated by his son Samuel while he successfully continued to run his chain of five Inns along the Talbot Road in Orford and Howard.

While things were progressing along the Front Ridge, a regular feud had broken out between the Nova Scotian Loyalists of Rushton's Corners and the Scotch-Irish of the Back Ridge. This hostility was further aggravated by the grow-rivilary between the developing townships of Howard and Harwich. In 1843 the Rushton settlement held a school raising bee and constructed a log building on the northeast corner of the Back Ridge Road and the Townline on Jacob Rushton's farm.

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The event was attended by Squire Mc Cully, The Rushtons, Captain Cochrane, John Scane and David Mills as well as other prominent citizens. They then split their section off the old Leslie school section to the annoyance of the Back Ridge. A fierce rivalry developed rapidly between the Leslie School, S.S.# 6, Harwich and Rushton School, S.S.# 7, Howard which stood only a mile away.

In the same year the first township meeting was held in the new Rushton school marking the beginning of local municipal government in Howard Township. Christopher Arnold, the well known Thames miller was chairman. George Duck and John Williams were elected District Councillors while Thomas Rushton was elected clerk, Richard Rushton; assesor; and William Sheldon; collector.

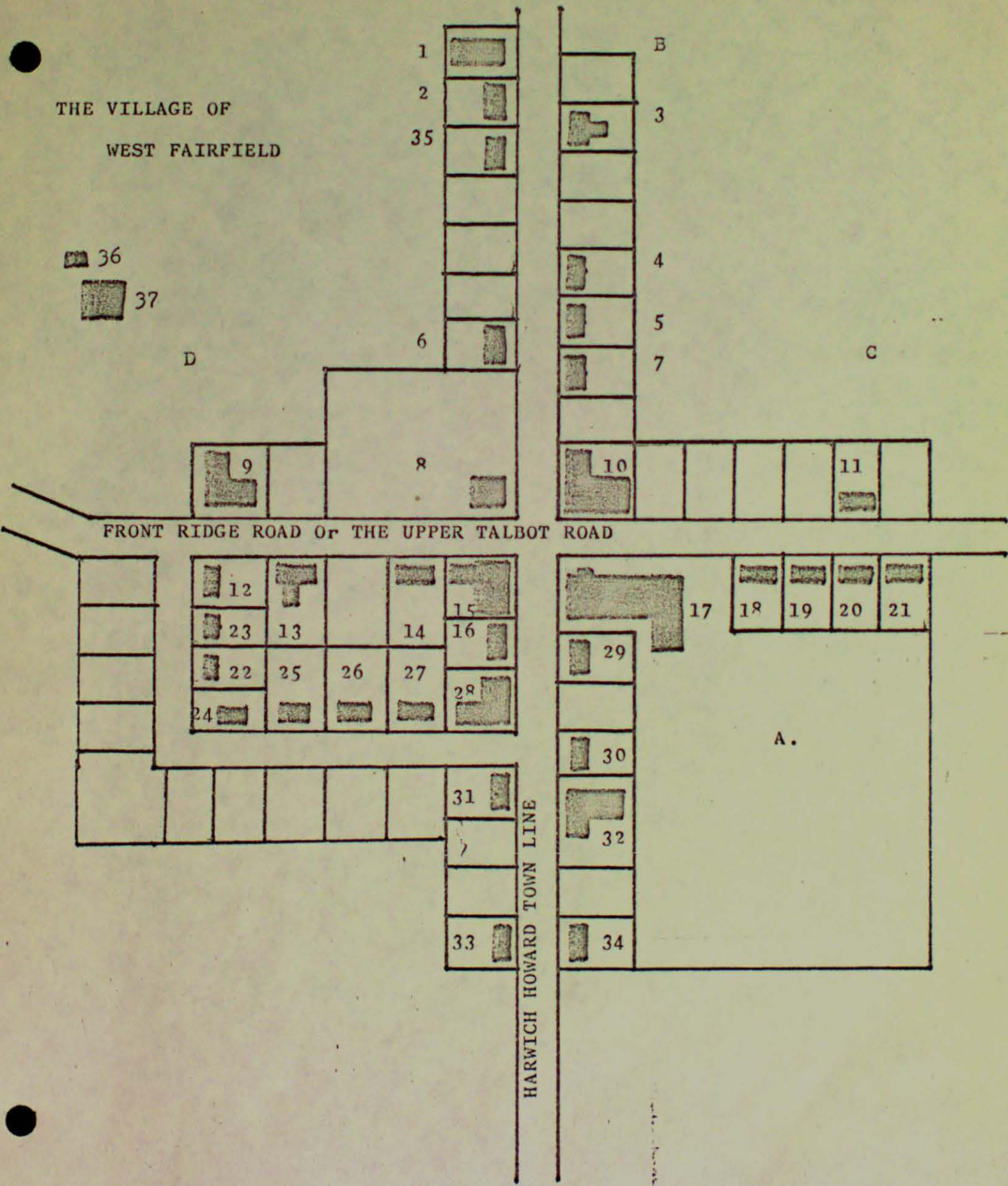
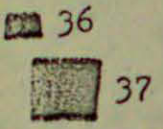
The Honourable David Mills who attended both these events later taught at the Rushton School but went on to higher education and politics. He became the first superintendent of public schools in Kent County for Howard and Orford townships. In 1872, he was hired by the province to examine and define the northwest boundary of Ontario. Elected to the provincial assembly in 1864, he continued his political career and by 1878 he had served as the Minister of Justice, as well as the Minister of The Interior for Alexander Mc Kenzie. He held a parliamentary seat from 1882 to 1896 at which time he was appointed to the Senate. A year later he was made a Justice of the Supreme Court of Canada.

With the new township administration firmly established, the council set aside twelve acres along the Back Ridge

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Road across from the school as a military training ground for the local militia. It was common practice at that time for all able-bodied male inhabitants between the ages of eighteen and forty five to assemble at least once a year for training and drills. However this annual ritual occurred only once or twice on this military reserve which remained a weedy field for several decades.

Meanwhile at Troy Issac Swarthout had prospered and his sawmill expanded. It was a steam powered blade or whip saw cutting the lumber with an up and down motion since the circular saw had not yet been invented. For many years it was the largest steam operated sawmill in Canada. Lumber cut at this mill was used in the construction of many of the new frame houses which were replacing the old log homes. In 1843, John Ridley built a new frame home entirely of Tulipwood as did John Mills and Jacob Rushton who used solid Walnut in their homes, all of which are still standing. Baldwin also bought lumber to build a new tavern which is also still standing. The business at Swarthout's mill soon attracted more people to Troy which grew at a startling rate. At one point it surpassed the villages of Morpeth and Blenheim. Sam Lambert built a large new frame hotel and opened a Cooper shop for the manufacture of barrels. William Ridley opened a Blacksmith shop while Sylvester Jacobs established his Shoe shop nearby. The Filby's opened a store but by 1854, it had been renovated and was used as a school and church. The influx of new people had required a third school to locat in Troy which resulted in the appearance of two new teachers: Mr. Robear and John Finnegan who built homes in the village as many were doing. This school was known as U.S.S.# 1, Harwich

THE VILLAGE OF
WEST FAIRFIELD



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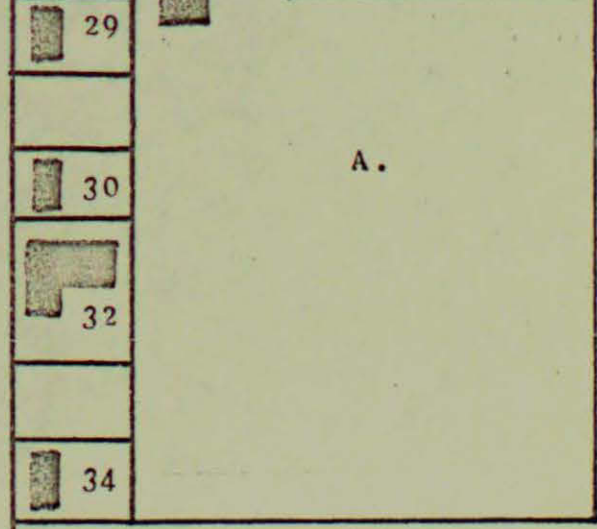
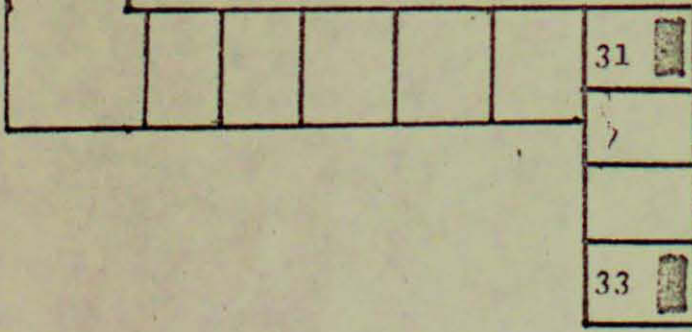
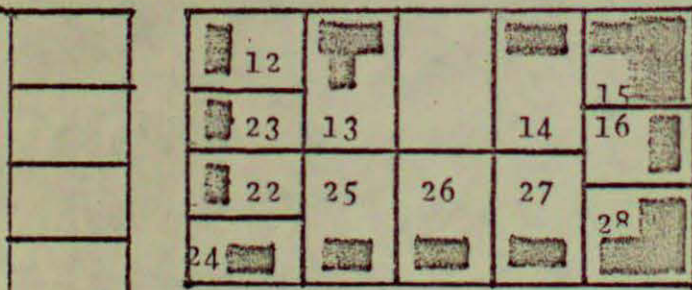
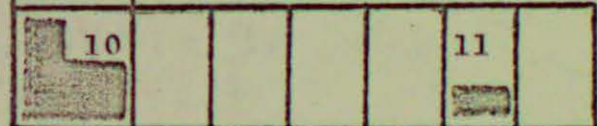
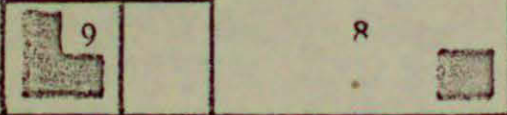
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C

FRONT RIDGE ROAD OR THE UPPER TALBOT ROAD

HARWICH HOWARD TOWN LINE



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THE VILLAGE of WEST FAIRFIELD

1. Present Troy Church - demolished 1970
2. Methodist Parsonage
3. Cooper Shop owned by Sam Lambert
4. Residence of Peter Tonuk
5. Residence of Jas Craig
6. Swarthout residence
7. Residence of Mrs. John Steward
8. Swarthout Office and yard
9. Filby's Store - later used as a school and a church under Mr. Wade
(minister)
10. Lambert's Hotel - later used as a General Store
11. Teetsel residence
12. Residence of William Watson
13. Shoe Shop owned by Sylvester Jacobs
14. Residence of Jas Woods
15. Residence of Mrs. Betts - later a hotel operated by Mrs. Burk
- also contained the 'Fairfield' post office,
store and a boarding house.
16. Residence of William Ridley
17. Saw Mill owned by Issac Swarthout
18. Residence of Cyprus Thatcher
19. Residence of John Smith
20. Residence of Jas Magee
21. Residence of Mr. Robear
22. Residence of Mrs. Holley
23. Residence of Jno Richards
24. Residence of Luke Remmington
25. Residence of John Remmington

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THE VILLAGE of WEST FAIRFIELD

26. Residence of Mrs. Liddy Watson
27. Residence of John Finnegan
28. Blacksmith Shop owned by William Ridley
29. Residence of Joseph Scraf
30. Residence of Henry Wilsher
31. Residence of David Watson
32. Cheese Factory owned by the Clarks
33. Residence of Robert Watson
34. Residence of Sam Lambert
35. Steward Residence
- A The Swarthout Sawmill Yard - covered over 10 acres
 - employed 35 men plus teamsters
 - exported via Northwood Station or the Morpeth Dock.
- B. The Wilson Farm
- C. The Stinson Farm
- D. The John Ridley Farm
36. Post office (still Standing)
37. Residence of John Ridley (still standing)

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& Howard and occupied the store until 1876.

The Leslies and Englishes were instrumental in establishing the United Presbyterian Church of Harwich which held its first services in the old store under the guidance of Reverend A. W. Waddell in 1854. Prior to this a trek of over twenty miles was necessary over rough roads to reach the United Presbyterian Church on Wellington Street in Chatham which many of the faithful accomplished regularly. A new post office was established at Troy to service the area since its population had climbed steadily. The Swarthout sawmill had a ten acre yard which was filled to capacity with piles of logs hauled in by sled during the winter from the surrounding bush. The mill employed over thirty five men which did not include the teamsters who hauled the sawn lumber by wagon and sled to Northwood Station and the Morpeth Dock for export. The mill however was also kept busy with a steady local demand for lumber with all the new homes and barns being put up.

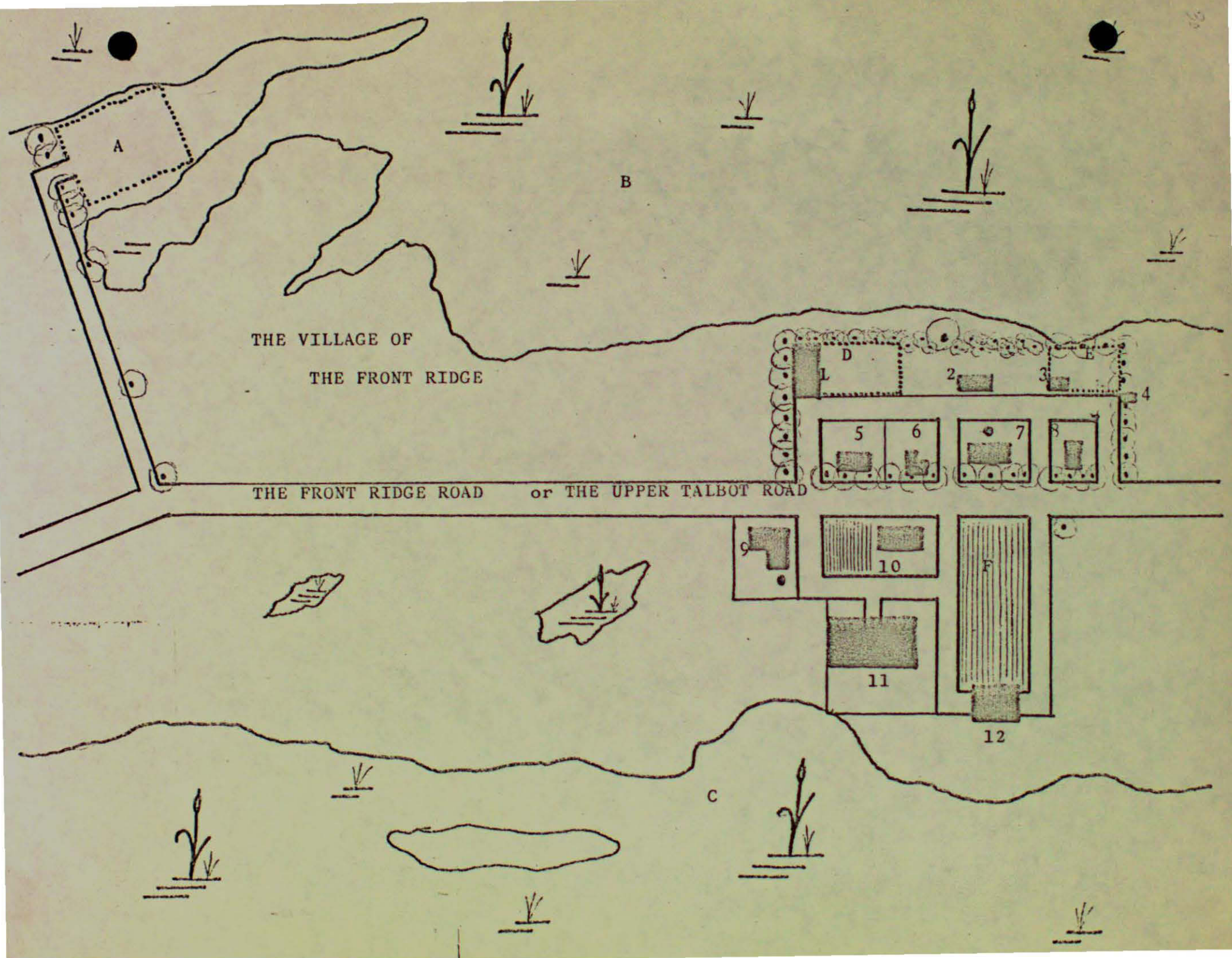
The Troy mail ran into problems when a second Troy post office was found to exist near Toronto. Therefore to avoid confusion the postal name was changed to Fairfield which a few years later proved to be as troublesome since there already existed a Fairfield post office near Brantford. In an attempt to settle the matter, they changed the name to West Fairfield but mix ups continued to plague the mail. Finally the name Ridley, after one of the oldest pioneering families, was chosen for the village as well as the post office and this remained the name until the post office closed when it reverted back to the original Troy.

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The Clarke family opened a cheese factory in Troy as dairy cattle became more numerous in the area and the excess milk could not be consumed. For awhile Lambert's Hotel got competition from the Burt Hotel which was opened by a Mrs. Burt who also operated a store, boarding house and the post office all from the same large frame building. Lamberts however closed their hotel about 1880. Converted to a general store the building continued to serve the community although it exchanged hands several times.

The Methodists under Reverend Graham were able to build a brick church and parsonage about 1870 in Troy. The Presbyterians then moved their services to the Rushton School since it was closer to the largely Presbyterian Back Ridge. The village peaked at well over three hundred residence and continued to thrive until after the turn of the century.

Meanwhile the feud between Rushton and Leslie Schools had not cooled but were further inflamed by the Troy School which sided with Rushton. Regular battles with sticks and stones occurred between the three schools at noon hours and recesses in a gulley along the sixth concession which was about in the middle for all three. Andrew English concerned for the well being of the students leased one acre of land to the Ridge Community for ten shillings per annum on which to build a new school.. Thus in 1850 a new white frame school house was built at the corner of the Mull Sideroad (the old Marsh Road) and the Back Ridge road placing the old school a fair distance from its rivials. It retained the number S.S.# 6, Farwich but changed its name to English's School



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THE VILLAGE of THE FRONT RIDGE

1. Stables operated by Stage Coach Stop
 2. Shed
 3. Chicken Coop
 4. Maple Sugar Hut
 5. Private Residence
 6. Shoe Repair Shop with Private Residence
 7. Tavern owned by John Gibson - later the Stage Coach Stop
 8. Inn operated by the Baldwins
 9. Blacksmith Shop
 10. Private Residence
 11. An English-German style Barn
 12. A double corn Crib, with Tobacco Loft
- A The Front Ridge Cemetary
- B The Great Swamp
- C The Lower Swamp
- D The Corral
- E Chicken yard
- F Village Garden
- ⊙ Maple Trees
- ⊙ Black Locust Trees
- Wells

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in honour of its benefactor.

In the ensuing years many new settlers arrived filling in the gaps and replacing the old pioneering families. Philip Ridley, Major Conrad Rowe, William Stinson, Reuben Mattice, Sam Tedford, Robert Cevaland and James Pickering are only a few of these new arrivals. By 1873 there were enough farms producing large acreages of grain that Martin and Abraham Kennedy who were professional threshers settled on the Front Ridge Road. A blacksmith and a shop repair shop as well as several new homes were build near Baldwins forming the nucleus of the Front Ridge Community. The stage coach still ran regularly from Morpeth to Chatham carrying the mails but now it went along the Talbot Road to Eatonville and from there up the Townline to Troy since the portion of the Front Ridge Road between Morpeth and Troy had been obliterated by the modern surveys. The Ridge prospered with an ever increasing farming community as well as light industries. A pottery shop and a new cheese factory were established just east of the Mull Sideroad on the Front Ridge Road close to the community by that name. In 1882 Major Conrad Rowe opened his Brick and Tile factory on the Baseline. Interestingly Major Rowe or 'Captain' as he was nicknamed, had worked his way up through the ranks until he had taken command of the 24th Batalion Infantry of the County of Kent Militia.

Back in 1876 the Rushton community had prospered so well that they went to the expense of building the first brick school house on the Ridge instead of replacing the old log structure with a cheaper frame building. Squire Mc Cully and Reuben Mattice then travelled to the World's Fair at Philadelphia to obtain a large bell to top the structure.

Lake Erie & Detroit River

Back Ridge Road

Centre Ridge Road

Front Ridge Road

Lower or Spring Ridge Road

Mull Side road.

Rail

Road

Town Line.

Troy

Sawmill

Rushton's Corners

Wilke's Station & Spur

Englisses School
Back Ridge Community

Newcombe
Cemetery

Site of old
Leslie School

Front Ridge Cemetery

Front Ridge Community

Pottery Makers

Cheese Factory

Brick and Tile Yard

Gulley where fights occurred

Gravel Pits

Stage Stop

Front Ridge Community

Stage Stop

Stage Stop

or 6th Concession



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Even though the area had appeared to be still expanding it actually had peaked. The Troy school closed the same year as Rushtons built sending their children to the new school. The decrease in students in both sections forced their merger to form only one section called U.S.S.# 7, Howard & # 1, Harwich.

However this problem never faced Englishes school which was always filled to capacity. When in 1837, the Ridge Communities wished to build a new brick school, a heated debate developed over the location of the new school. The Back Ridge as well as the northern concessions wanted to build on the same site. However those along the Centre, Front and Lower Ridges wished to build at a more central location on the Mull Sideroad near the Centre Ridge Road. The matter was finally settled by a public vote which resulted in the new building being put up on the old site of the Frame structure. However this controversey left a slight rivilarity between the two groups which lasted until quite recently. The old frame school was moved to a corner of the school yard where it served as a church for several years until it was sold to Thomas English and moved to the Centre Ridge where it is still in use as an implement'shed. With the completion of the new brick, all of which were made in the Rowe brick yard, structure, the Presbyterian services were transferred from the Rushton School to the new English School where they were continually held until 1920. At that time a frame church was moved by means of log rollers a distance of over five miles from Blenheim to its present site on the Mull Sideroad.

By the end of the century the area had been entirely settled and was covered with large grain fields, numerous

S.S.#6, Harwich
The Ridge
or
ENGLISHES



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orchards and herds of dairy cattle which kept the cheese factories busy. However with the extinction of the great Ten Mile Bush, Swarthout's sawmill folded marking the end of the booming Troy community. One by one the stores and shops closed and the buildings torn down as were many of the homes. By World War I the process was nearly complete, leaving only a handful of houses, the brick church and the closed post office. Clarke's cheese factory was converted into a barn and was used until fire destroyed it. Swarthout's elaborate office was moved to the John Deere farm west of Troy where it is still in use as an implement shed. The post office with the mail slot still in the door is also still standing on the Verne Arnold farm.

The Lake Erie and Detroit River Railroad as well as the Southern Canada Railway which both passed north of the Ridge killed the hopes of Morpeth as the county seat as well as all the stage coach lines. This not only finished the Troy and Harwich-Howard post offices but ended the hotel business along the Front Ridge Road. With less traffic the Burt Hotel and The Baldwin Inn closed. The small Front Ridge community soon fell apart as the shoe repair shop closed and was torn down as were the few houses. Baldwin's frame building was moved beside the old stage building and the two renovated into a comfortable house which is still in use. The blacksmith remained until the first World War and then closed also. Modern competition after the war closed the pottery makers and the cheese factory along the Front Ridge as well as the brick yard on the Baseline. The cheese factory was moved

Copied from a
Map by
John W. Sutherland

Toronto 1876.



back from the road and is still used as a barn on the Robert Rowe farm. Only shallow pits still mark where the potters dug into the ridge for suitable clay. while the plough still turns up bits of brick and tile along the Baseline.

However despite the decline of businesses of Troy and the Front Ridge, two enterprising individuals along the Back Ridge were busy with new endeavours. Thomas Barnes son of Robert Barnes who had settled near Rushton's Corners in 1839, built a peppermint mill in 1898. Comprising of a press and a still the small building stood on the Baseline with the peppermint field directly behind it. The plants were plucked in the press and then the resulting mash distilled into the Essence of Peppermint as well as Peppermint Oil. Over one hundred pounds of the oil was produced annually. The aroma of peppermint could be smelt as far away as Troy on a calm day during the harvest. Peppermint candy was also produced to the delight of the children who passed by everyday on their trek to school. Besides the mill Thomas Barnes was a natural inventor and is noted for having designed and built a power lathe, a violin and a musical phonograph which was patented and sold for several years prior to the War. The mill operated continuously until well after the first World War with the only disruption being a police raid to seize the still which was suspected of being used for the production of Moonshine. The officers were embarrassed to find only candy and a fresh peppermint mash in the suspected still.

The other individual was Leslie English, son of William Jr. English of the Back Ridge. Leslie had studied the ways

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of the Indian since a child, learning their native medicinal herbs. He had collected the Ginseng root and cultivated it under a special latticed covered area on his father's farm. In 1899 the Ginseng's medicinal uses became well known and popular due to a book written by Maurice Kains of New York. Leslie enlarged his cultivation to meet the demand. The Ginseng was exported to New York and on to China with a small jar of seeds going for over nine dollars. The only other commercial cultivation of Ginseng in Canada was by Indians near Brantford. This profitable enterprise lasted well into the new century.

However after the war all of the small business and industries of the Ridge had been eliminated by the growing towns of Blenheim and Ridgetown which drew them into their own spheres. Morpeth by now had fallen by the way side.

Municipal gravel pits were opened at various locations along the ridges to provide gravel for the improvement of Harwich's roads with the coming of the automobile. However before this Statute Labour had been expected from each farmer for the up keep of the roadway fronting his property. A Path Master was appointed to be in charge of the road and keep a record of the statute labour done. According to their road frontage, each farmer was assigned a certain number of days of statute labour towards the care of his road. This could be shortened by the loaning of a team or wagon for hauling gravel or by agreeing to scrap the road.

About this time Wilke's Station and spur along the Piere Marquette Railway were closed. Built in the early

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1860's just below the Ridge the trains of the Lake Erie and Detroit River Railroad stopped there regularly picking up passengers as well as car loads of grain, livestock and hay for export from the Ridge. However the company had changed hands and modern transport made it impractical to delay the trains there any longer. Thus ended another era in the history of the Ridge as its direct railway link with the outside world was severed. The area was slowly losing its independence as more and more business had to be transacted in the neighbouring towns instead of the local area.

Some excitement was stirred up by the discovery of natural gas in the area but the deposits were insufficient to attract any developers which might have revived the district commercially. However numerous wells were drilled to supply free gas heating and lighting for the school as well as many area homes for the next decade.

This is not to say that the Ridge was stagnating or dying. On the contrary it remained one of the most progressive agricultural districts in Kent County. Remaining quite diversified there continued to be a wide variety of crops produced and sold in local and world markets. Dairy and fruit farms of long standing were thriving concerns until most recent when production costs and low markets forced most to switch to other specialities. Tobacco has always been a major crop along the gravel ridges. Burley is still the number one crop on most farms although when Flue-cured tobacco was introduced to Canada in 1927 some farmers experimented with it in the area. Other crops as corn, soybeans, white beans, oats and winter wheat

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have always been and continue to be important crops as are the potatoes grown in the area. Sugar beets were also grown on the Ridge until the Sugar Plant's closure in Chatham. More recently tomatoes, cucumbers and peppers have come to play an important role in the districts' economy.

No thought after such a long history of farming in this community, agriculture will remain the primary industry of the Ridge for many years to come. However with the closing of the rural schools in 1967 the identity of the Ridge as a community has been severely shaken for the schools and churches are what holds a district together. The little rural church still remains but with the passing of it the name and history of the Ridge will slip away with the next generation.

The end.

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