

A Guided Tour

(13) In 1855, the year that St. Marys was incorporated as a village, T.B. Guest, the first reeve, built what is another early stone store, Crosthwaite's. Four years later he added the four stores to the west. This fine store block depends for its effect not upon lavish detail but on good craftsmanship and pleasing proportions.

(14) By the early 1870's tastes had changed and when Guest erected the adjoining building, at present the Province of Ontario Savings Bank, he had it built of brick trimmed with stone.

(15) Across Wellington Street, the Bank of Montreal, Jackson's Pharmacy, and the St. Marys Journal-Argus were all built for Guest in 1868. Guest was an irascible man and a domineering father. By the terms of his will, his eldest son was to inherit this stone block on the condition that he not marry into the St. John family!

(16) Marshall's, originally the Grand Central Hotel, was yet another handsome building erected for Guest in the early 1870's at a time when there were at least a dozen hotels in St. Marys. This is one of the few which still stand. In its heyday the present greeting card shop was a carriage-way which led from the street to the rear of the hotel.

(17) St. Marys Home Furnishings and the structure to the south, formerly Ruppel's Hardware, two other examples of fine brick construction, were built around 1900. The former Ruppel's Hardware was built as a showroom for Maxwells Ltd., a once prominent manufacturer of farm implements. Be sure to cross the street and admire the detail of the second and third storeys.

(18) Ross Pharmacy is housed in the building where, in the 1860's before moving on to set up an empire in Toronto, Timothy Eaton operated a general store.

Additional Walks

If you would like to see some of the back streets of St. Marys there are three additional interesting walks. See Map

(1) Follow Church Street, South, up the hill past St. James' Anglican Church, built in 1858 and St. Marys United Church, built in 1879. Just past the United Church you'll see the fine stone St. Marys Central School. Continue on down Church Street following the stone wall which is being restored this summer to the St. Marys Area Museum. In 1841 when George Tracy settled here, his farm extended to the banks of the river and included all of what is now the south ward of St. Marys. By selling lots, he made enough money to build in 1854, the first substantial residence in the village, currently housing the museum.

(2) This tour takes the walker across the recently restored Church Street bridge and up a steep hill on Church Street North leading to the Holy Name of Mary Church built in 1892 and St. Marys Presbyterian Church built in 1879-81, two limestone buildings magnificently set with tall spires visible from all over the town.

(3) For a pleasant riverside stroll, cross Victoria Bridge and proceed left along Thomas Street, S. At the Park Street bridge, look up on your right to the former West Ward School, built in 1865, now the St. Marys Art Centre and Day Nursery. Climb the hill and admire the view: on a summer's day the river is often enlivened by the

presence of swans and ducks. Further along Thomas St., are several stone houses: some of the earliest residences of the town, these were built in the 1860's and, without exception, were the homes of masons and carpenters.

Walk or cycle down river to Westover Park, a stately residence on the west side of the road. Westover Park — the home of the Huttons — was the grandest residence in St. Marys in the nineteenth century. In the 1940's, it passed out of the hands of the family and became a Basilian seminary; the Shrine on the property dates from this period. Today it is a guest house, attractive still in its pleasant surroundings.

The road past Westover leads to the sites of two pioneer mills and, if you are lucky, you may even see a Great Blue Heron fishing in the Thames.

Friendship Centre

This two-storey building, a converted factory, is a busy centre of activity for St. Marys and area senior citizens. The doors are open all day from Monday to Friday and there are numerous programs and facilities available to members and their friends. Anyone who is 55 or older can join — and the membership fee for a year is just \$2.00.

Activities of interest include square dancing, physical fitness courses, craft courses of several kinds, art class, lawn bowling, euchre and bridge, pool, shuffleboard, and a naturalist club. Elizabeth Pearson is program coordinator. You can drop in to the centre to see her or phone her at 284-3272 for more information.

The Thames

It is not just the unique stone architecture of St. Marys which distinguishes this town of 5,000 people — it's the natural setting of rambling green hills, great deciduous trees and flowing waterways.

These immortal works from a higher power no doubt inspired the later accomplishments of pioneers who settled the region.

St. Marys, or a good portion of the town, is situated in a river valley and her heart is at the confluence of the north branch of the Thames River and Trout Creek.

No history or descriptive essay of the Stone Town would be complete without an anecdote or two about the usually tranquil but sometimes awesome Thames. The river's north branch is a collector for the Avon River which flows through Stratford. A few miles further to the south she meets Trout Creek in the very centre of St. Marys. The area is known to local citizenry as "the Flats" and it is a natural playground for ballplayers, picnickers and the St. Marys Canoe Club. The Flats is also the annual home of the St. Marys Fair.

Reasons for its popularity are obvious. The Flats happens to be one of the most scenic and peaceful spots in the region. And it is complemented architecturally by the St. Marys Dam and Victoria Bridge connecting near-by Queen St.

Further downstream, the north branch meets the two other branches of the Thames as it wends its way through the city of London, ultimately finding its destiny in the waters of Lake St. Clair.

The Thames and Trout Creek have always been favourite fishing spots for barefoot children in the summertime.

Vested businessmen have also been known to drop a line over the side of one of the many rural bridges in the area during a lull on the sultry work-day afternoon. There are numerous private spots along the river where one can stop awhile for a rest and perhaps some quiet thoughts.

While aesthetic pleasure and recreation are the most common elements associated with the river there have been some disastrous floods down through the years and a number of lives have been lost.

Back in 1912, a major flood caused devastation to a local lumber company, sending logs by the dozens down the fast-moving current.

The flood of 1937 is generally considered as the worst, at least in the modern era. Ironically, as oldtimers tell it, the flooding was not the result of torrential rains in April which built up the rivers' strength enough to carry away a good portion of the Park St.

Bridge. (It has been rebuilt since).

Each year, usually about the middle of March, area residents gather along the Victoria Bridge to witness the spectacular break-up of winter ice and to watch and listen to the mighty force of water as it moves so swiftly away. Flood plain merchants and residents are less apt to be on the bridge as they prepare for another bout with flooded basements and streets. Usually the flooding is irritating but accepted as inevitable. But as we have mentioned above, the river has been known to get nasty.

Recently plans have been developed for a dam to help prevent flooding. At this time the proposed Glegowan Dam is the subject of an environmental assessment study.

But the river, as always, is a strong and positive attraction for residents as well as tourists. And a barefoot boy is still a common phenomenon along the banks of the Thames, carrying his inevitable fishin' pole.



Our Mennonite Friends

Visitors to the area will notice the horse drawn buggies of the Mennonite people. Over the years more and more Mennonites have been

moving to our area.

Hard working and law abiding, the Mennonites were quickly accepted by their neighbours. Please be careful when driving by their buggies.

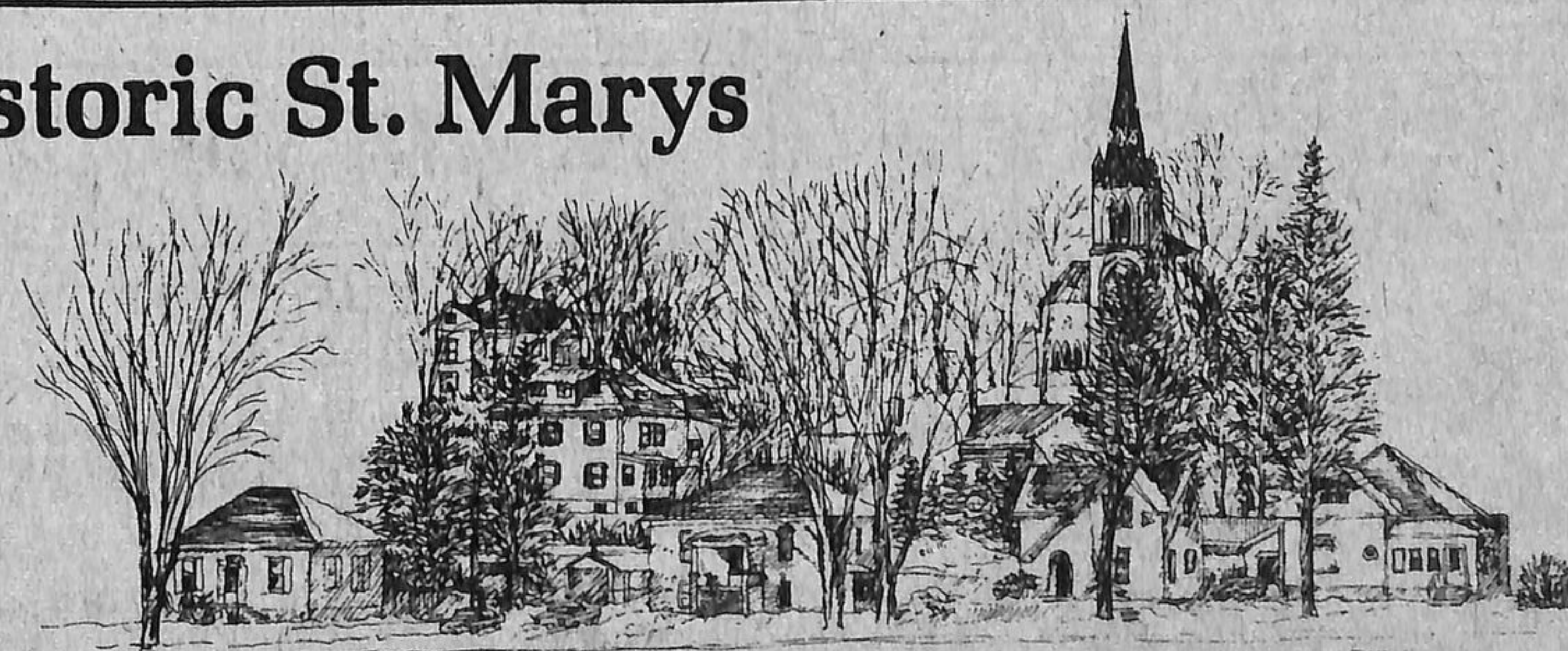
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