HISTORY OF MIDDLESEX COUNTY

Within 200 years, the area of Southwestern Ontario that is now Middlesex County has transformed from wilderness inhabited by Indigenous settlements to modest farmlands to finally, the thriving rural and urban communities of today. Middlesex County is composed of eight municipalities that are home to approximately 75,000 residents, including an array of burgeoning commercial industries and small businesses. It has also become a strategic location for commercial trade due to its proximity and access to major highways, airports, railway lines, and ports. The County has had a rich history shared with the City of London during the early beginnings of Canada; its dedication to establish communities, invest in infrastructure, and develop the lives of its people and future generations is its most significant legacy.

THE BEGINNINGS, FORMATION, AND DEVELOPMENT

In 1793, Lieutenant-Governor John Graves Simcoe camped at the forks of the Thames River. Historically, the Thames River has been known as "La Tranche" (The Trench) by French fur traders or "Deshkan Ziibi" (Antler River) in Anishnaabemowin, the Ojibwe language spoken by Anishnaabe peoples, who together with the Neutrals have lived in this area for thousands of years. It was here that Simcoe proposed the site as the capital of Upper Canada. However, as Simcoe's successors chose York (now present-day Toronto) as the colonial capital, the London District was created in 1798 by an Act of the Parliament of Upper Canada. It was a large administrative unit covering most of what is now Middlesex, Oxford, Norfolk, Elgin, Huron, Perth, and Bruce counties. In 1845, the District was restricted within Middlesex County to include the townships of London, Westminster, Dorchester, Delaware, and townships from what is now Elgin County, including Yarmouth, Southwold, Dunwich, and Aldborough, which would later separate in 1853. Delaware Township is credited with the first settlements made in Middlesex County by British Loyalists who fled the newly independent United States. The first town meetings in Delaware began in March of 1800. By 1842, John Wilson was appointed by the Provincial Government and became the first Warden. Later, William Niles of North Dorchester would become the first elected Warden of Middlesex County in 1850 after the abolition of the historic London District government structure.
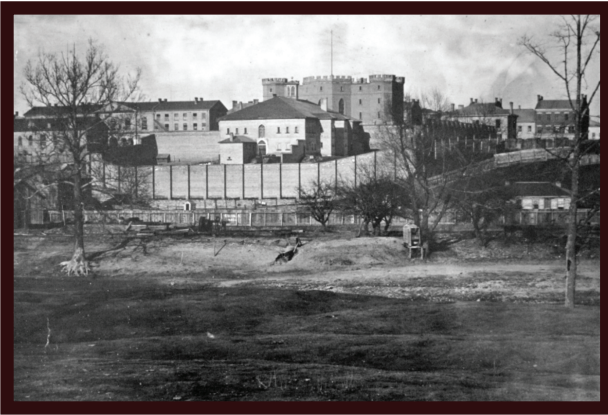
Historically and currently, the County's jurisdiction included roads, social welfare, agriculture, forestry, conservation (until the formation of Conservation Authorities), and community policing (until 1933 when it was transferred over to the Ontario Provincial Police). The first County road system was established in 1853, and in 1908 the County reassembled a new road system of 204 miles—forming the basis of the modern roads system of around 500 miles and highways such as the 401. By 1900 over 200 local schools were established across townships along with fairgrounds, hospitals, social welfare initiatives, and agricultural clubs aided by Women's Institutes.

In as early as 1871, Council noted pollution of the Thames River from industrial waste from East London's oil refineries. Deforestation became an additional concern in the twentieth century. It was in 1945 when County forests were established by purchasing low-grade farmland and planting pine and spruce trees that beautifully cover the landscape today. In 1946, Conversation Authorities were formed, and the entire area of Middlesex County was encompassed in five regions: Upper Thames, Lower Thames, Kettle Creek, St. Clair, and Ausable-Bayfield.

Middlesex County and its citizens have also contributed generously to war efforts; Victory Bonds were purchased to help outfit the 135th Middlesex overseas battalion in World War I. As well, grants have gone into other funds, such as the Canadian Patriotic Fund, that would go on to help re-establish veterans and their families. In World War II, all County reserve funds were placed in Victory Bonds. In June 1944, the HMCS Middlesex, an Algerine class coastal escort vessel, was commissioned by the County and was active in service up until December of 1945. The ship's bell and wheel are on display in the County Building today.

THE MIDDLESEX COUNTY BUILDING

In 1825, London was chosen to be the district capital after the courthouse in Vittoria ravished in flames, bringing about the necessity for a new permanent building to be built on site of the forks of the Thames. This building would be the Court House, and Gaol used to govern both the City of London and the County townships. In 1827, Scotsman John Ewart was chosen as the architect of the new Court House, and Ewart designed a Gothic Revival building resembling the Malahide Castle in Ireland. It was completed in 1829 to serve not only as an institution of law and order but to also serve as a community gathering place for events as markets and fairs. Upon the separation of the City of London in 1855, the Court House and Gaol remained the centre for judicial and community affairs.

Court House and Gaol from the Forks of the Thames, c.1886

Court House and Gaol c.1878

Throughout the years, this historic building has undergone extensive renovations while still keeping the integrity of its original appearance. The Court House and Gaol became a National Historic Site of Canada in 1955. Since the late 1970s, the former London District Courthouse and Gaol have accommodated the Middlesex County Council Chambers and the County Administrative Services and has stood as a visible link between Middlesex County and the City of London.

The Court House Block, c.1982

Court House and Gaol 2017

THE RESTRUCTURING OF MIDDLESEX COUNTY

By the mid-1950s, major restructuring of local governments was a necessity as the Baldwin Act of 1849 remained the blueprint for over a century and a half. Between 1973 and 1975, the Brian Turnbull report, *Towards a Strengthened Middlesex*, mapped a blueprint for Middlesex's future development. This report resulted in the following definite outcomes seen even today:

- The adoption of County-wide welfare in 1976 coordinated by a Social Services Administrator who also acts as the Municipal Welfare Administrator
- A County-City liaison committee was formed to consider mutual concerns such as transportation, waste management, land use planning and development, and shared assets
- A County-wide official plan relating to policy and strategy completed in 1982. All local municipalities completed their own land use plans and zoning bylaws by 1989

HISTORIC ANNEXATIONS IN MIDDLESEX COUNTY

Middlesex County has had several boundary changes since 1845. Below is an overview of some of the significant annexations.

- Williams Township was withdrawn from Huron County to Middlesex County in 1845. Later in 1860, Williams Township was divided into two separate townships: East Williams and West Williams.

- In 1865, Biddulph Township and McGillivray Township also joined Middlesex County from Huron County. Both of these townships can date their early histories to the Canada Company and specifically the Huron Tract, an agriculturally productive region that was sold by the Canada Company to prospective settlers and farmers.

- Middlesex County's neighbour, the City of London, continued to grow over time. As a result, there were small annexations of Middlesex County beginning in 1885 when the County suburb of London East was annexed. London South, which included the area around Wortley Village, was transferred to the City in 1890.

- Smaller annexations, including sections of Westminster Township and London Township, occurred in 1912 and throughout the 1950s.

- In 1961, the City grew once again by spreading out in all directions, including the annexation of the following communities: Broughdale, Masonville, Westmount, Oakridge, Pond Mills, and White Oaks. The City doubled its territorial footprint and added over 60,000 in population.

- The last significant annexation took place on January 1, 1993. The Ontario Legislative Assembly passed the London-Middlesex Act, 1992 (Bill 75) on December 10, 1992, to take effect on January 1, 1993. The City of London annexed Westminster Township almost entirely (the only exception being a small swath of land running south of Highway 401 that was transferred to North Dorchester Township), and this included the rural communities of the Village of Lambeth and the town of Byron. In the north, London Township transferred a large section of lands, including the town of Hyde Park to the City. West Nissouri Township had parcels of land, including the London Airport (formerly RCAF Station Crumlin), transferred to London.

AMALGAMATION OF MIDDLESEX COUNTY'S TOWNSHIPS

Following Ontario provincial elections in 1995, the ruling Progressive Conservative's policy was to have a smaller municipal governance model. This took the form of significantly reducing the number of municipal townships. Throughout the province of Ontario, municipalities were asked to amalgamate through the *Savings and Restructuring Act, 1996* (Bill 26). In Middlesex County, a total of 15 historic townships now became eight new municipalities. The dates of these amalgamation changes are as follows;

On **January 1, 1998**, Delaware Township, Lobo Township and London Township (note that this does not include City of London) were combined to form the Municipality of Middlesex Centre

On **January 1, 1999**, Biddulph Township and the Village of Lucan were amalgamated and became the Municipality of Lucan Biddulph

On **January 1st, 2001**;
- The Townships of Adelaide and Metcalfe were amalgamated and renamed Township of Adelaide Metcalfe
- Caradoc Township and the Town of Strathroy were combined to become the Municipality of Strathroy-Caradoc
- East Williams, West Williams and McGillivray Townships along with the Town of Parkhill and the Village of Ailsa Craig were amalgamated to become known as Municipality of North Middlesex
- The villages of Glencoe and Wardsville, along with the Townships of Ekfrid and Mosa, were combined to form the Municipality of Southwest Middlesex. The Village of Newbury became its Municipality surrounded by Southwest Middlesex
- North Dorchester and West Nissouri Townships were amalgamated and became the Municipality of Thames Centre

Through the last two centuries, Middlesex County has grown with a prospering agriculture sector, bustling manufacturing industries, and thriving communities with flourishing ways of life. From a population of Indigenous inhabitants and a small number of European settlers surrounded by wilderness and vast frontier, each community in the County emerged through the resilience and courage of its people. Today, the County takes steps forward to learn from the past, cultivate initiatives in the present that improves the quality of life for its future generations and continues to stand by its mission statement:

> *"Through strong leadership, growth management, and partnerships, Middlesex County will enhance the quality of life and the economic, environmental, and industrial sustainability of the county."*

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