

ST. THOMAS, PAST AND PRESENT—*Continued*

The roads are good all round, and the Talbot road, carried directly through the town, is the finest in the Province. . . .

. . . The population of St. Thomas is at present rated at seven hundred, and it has doubled within two years. There are three churches, one of which is very neat, and three taverns. Two newspapers are published, one violently Tory, the other violently Radical. I found several houses building, and, in those I entered, a general air of cheerfulness and well-being very pleasing to contemplate. . . . I was very much struck with this beautiful and cheerful little town—more, I think, than any place I have yet seen."

St. Thomas is now known as the "Railway City," but there are citizens who still recall the time when the four-horse stage coach, heralded by a blast from the coachman's horn, dashed up to the "Mansion House," on its way from Port Stanley or London—the event of the day. A larger number remember the opening of the first railway—the London and Port Stanley Line—and the devastation which it brought, in 1857, or was charged with bringing, to the business of the thriving little town—how the taxes increased and the population decreased. Though

"The never falling brook, the busy mill,

The decent church that topt the neighboring hill,"

still remained, rows of empty shuttered shops and grassy streets attested the weight of the blow which the former prosperity of the town had received. Not until the seventies, when the rival through lines of railway—Canada Southern and Canada Air Line—came, did St. Thomas revive.

There are those who still recount the struggles of W. A. Thompson from 1847 until 1870 in procuring a charter for the C. S. R.; how he afterwards went to one capitalist after another representing the advantages of a straight through line across Ontario; how, as a measure of self protection, the Great Western Company built at the same time their Loop Line from Glencoe through St. Thomas also to the Niagara River. All this is well known, and the result was the expenditure in St. Thomas of hundreds of thousands of dollars, the employment of much labor, and the consumption of much material. The station grounds of both roads were outside of the old corporation, and the boundaries of the town were extended.

The Loop Line was formally opened for traffic in Febru-

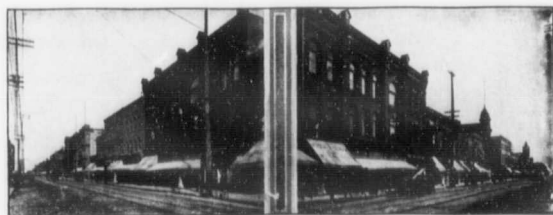
ary, 1873, and the offices of the Canada Southern taken possession of in the same year, although trains had been running irregularly on both roads during the greater part of 1872.

St. Thomas first became incorporated in 1852, and the old town hall, built the previous year by the township of Yarmouth did duty as town and city hall until 1898, when it was superseded by the present handsome new municipal building. By act of parliament passed in 1851, the county of Elgin was created from part of the county of Middlesex, and in 1853 the first court house was erected on a beautiful site given by Benjamin Drake. In 1898 this fine edifice was so damaged by fire as to necessitate its being practically rebuilt, with necessary additions, the handsome cut-stone front being, however, retained as a central feature.

The growth of the city eastward following the erection of the Canada Southern shops and yards continued rapidly though greatly to the chagrin of the earlier settlers who fought the inevitable from year to year by every means in their power, and not until the erection of the city hall on the present site did they give up the fight as lost. Since then, 1898, the growth of the city has continued without exciting sectional feeling, and the result has been the bringing into usefulness of vacant spaces and the knitting together of the straggling city of the eighties and nineties. The erection of the Ross street subway in 1908 aided in this natural development and prevented what for a time appeared might develop into a split between the north and south sides, such as the historic east-end versus west-end controversy that had kept the rapidly growing town for two decades in a state of continuous strife.

With the increase of several thousand in population in the past decade, the result of the coming of new manufactories and the constantly increasing development of its railways, the city has kept pace by providing improved facilities and accommodations in schools, churches, parks, etc., and through its municipally owned utilities of waterworks, light, heat and power; and street railway, its citizens are enjoying the conveniences of modern civic life at a minimum cost.

Today, with a population of 18,000, St. Thomas looks forward to the time not far distant when it will be the home of 30,000 people.



Central Talbot Street Business Section of Today
Here It Was That the Race Course Was Located in the Early Days