

## HERITAGE CORNER

### HAMLETS OF ST. CLAIR TOWNSHIP GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN



People on hand for the public unveiling of the Duthil sign included, from left: Heritage St. Clair members Murray McAllister, Bob Goodearle, Bob Nicol, Dave Pattenden, Eldon Grant, Brent Anderson (representing his father, Allan Anderson), and Mayor Steve Arnold. *Bonnie Stevenson photo*

When we take a drive through the rural beauty of St. Clair Township, it's easy to forget that there used to be tiny centers of habitation scattered throughout its \*908,699.33 square kilometres.

Some of these hamlets were little more than a post office or general store surrounded by a few houses, but they were hometowns to many, places where newcomers settled and families were raised. They are the places that still live in the childhood memories of township residents like Eldon Grant. He's a founding member of Heritage St. Clair and, along with his fellow members, he's trying to preserve the memories of 32 of St. Clair Township's hamlets.

Eldon was a Duthil kid. His father, William J. Grant, was a merchant in the hamlet, which also boasted a United Church that was also Presbyterian and Methodist during its lifetime. Eldon recalls meeting his friends after school (*at school house #9 where there were three students*) at the "Duthil tree", which stood in the middle of the hamlet's intersection until it was cut down in the 1950s. (*See photo on right.*) He also recalls a sight that is not possible today. "From the hamlet you could see the masts of sailing ships going up the (Sydenham) river," he said.

A new sign recently unveiled near the intersection of Duthil Road and Holt Line is an assurance that the name and spirit of Eldon's hometown will be preserved. During the unveiling ceremony, the late Allan Anderson, an avid Heritage St. Clair member, was remembered as the man who spearheaded the hamlet project after he expressed concern that the hamlets would be forgotten.

The Duthil sign is just the latest hamlet sign to be erected and dedicated through the hard work of Heritage St. Clair. The sturdy double-sided sign features fluores-

cent lettering for night viewing and a QR code that can be scanned with a smart phone. The code will connect the viewer to the Heritage St. Clair website.

Signs have already been erected at eight hamlet sites, including Froomfield, Becher, and Kimball, with eight more slated for installation next year and the remaining 16 in 2021, depending on the availability of funding for the project. The sign project has been supported with funding from St. Clair Township and the Lambton County Creative Fund.

Heritage St. Clair President Dave Pattenden says the signs have been of value because of the additional information they encourage from those who are familiar with the hamlets histories. "(After they see them) it leads to people contacting us with more information," he said.

*\*2016 census profile*

