

Safeguarding “The Frog Pond”: London West and the Resistance to Municipal Amalgamation 1883–1897

Greg Stott

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Résumé de l'article

London West, petite agglomération de la périphérie de London (Ontario) entre 1874 et 1897, offre l'exemple d'une communauté qui a lutté pour conserver son autonomie. Le village, peuplé principalement de salariés indépendants, d'artisans et de propriétaires de petites entreprises, tenait à conserver une identité distincte par rapport à la ville voisine. Si l'inondation dévastatrice de 1883 a d'une part provoqué la dévaluation des propriétés et a contribué dans une large mesure à la dégradation des relations entre le village et London, elle a d'autre part renforcé l'unité de la communauté de London West. L'inondation a également poussé les villageois à insister, lors des discussions avec la ville à propos d'une éventuelle fusion, pour conserver certains contrôles afin de pouvoir assurer la sécurité de leurs propriétés et de leurs familles. Les discussions n'en finissaient plus. Les villageois ont tenu bon jusqu'en 1897, moment où les conditions étaient devenues à ce point dégradées que les contribuables ont dû céder, forcés d'accepter les conditions peu avantageuses édictées par London. La décision ultime de se joindre à la ville en 1897 a été principalement prise en raison de la lamentable situation financière du village. On peut déduire de la longue résistance de London West à la fusion municipale que loin d'être des extensions sans identité propre réclamant à grands cris la fusion avec les villes voisines, les banlieues du XIX^e siècle en Ontario étaient de véritables communautés.

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Abstract

The London, Ontario, suburb of London West (1874 to 1897) provides an example of a community that strove to maintain its municipal autonomy. Composed of independent wage earners, artisans, and small-business owners, London West cultivated a sense of identity separate from that of its neighbouring city. While a devastating flood in 1883 devalued property and greatly soured relations between the village and London, it buttressed community unity in London West. The flood similarly caused the villagers to insist upon the maintenance of certain controls in order to assure the security of their property and families in their negotiations with the city for amalgamation. After several protracted periods of discussions, the village tenaciously held out against the city until 1897, when ratepayers had little alternative but to accept London’s less than satisfactory conditions. While the ultimate decision to join the city in 1897 was based more upon the village’s dismal financial situation, London West’s protracted resistance to municipal amalgamation indicates that nineteenth-century suburbs in Ontario were complex communities in their own right and not simply undifferentiated adjuncts that craved amalgamation with their urban neighbours.

Résumé

London West, petite agglomération de la périphérie de London (Ontario) entre 1874 et 1897, offre l'exemple d'une communauté qui a lutté pour conserver son autonomie. Le village, peuplé principalement de salariés indépendants, d'artisans et de propriétaires de petites entreprises, tenait à conserver une identité distincte par rapport à la ville voisine. Si l'inondation dévastatrice de 1883 a d'une part provoqué la dévaluation des propriétés et a contribué dans une large mesure à la dégradation des relations entre le village et London, elle a d'autre part renforcé l'unité de la communauté de London West. L'inondation a également poussé les villageois à insister, lors des discussions avec la ville à propos d'une éventuelle fusion, pour conserver certains contrôles afin de pouvoir assurer la sécurité de leurs propriétés et de leurs familles. Les discussions n'en finissaient plus. Les villageois ont tenu bon jusqu'en 1897, moment où les conditions étaient devenues à ce point dégradées que les contribuables ont dû céder, forcés d'accepter les conditions peu avantageuses édictées par London. La décision ultime de se joindre à la ville en 1897 a été principalement prise en raison de la lamentable situation financière du village. On peut déduire de la longue résistance de London West à la fusion municipale que loin d'être des extensions sans identité propre réclamant à grands cris la fusion avec les villes voisines, les banlieues du XIX^e siècle en Ontario étaient de véritables communautés.

As the 1880s progressed, the Village of London West seemed to fall short of its auspicious yet optimistic motto, *Per angusta ad augusta* (“Through narrow things to great things.”)² There had undeniably been many perplexing “narrow” matters that had taxed the morale and internal fiscal responsibilities of the corporation since its incorporation in 1874. Chief among them had been a catastrophic flood of 1883, which more than any other event altered the village’s development and security. To be certain, nature had dealt London West a vicious blow, and the resulting financial woes would have taxed even the most resourceful and bustling community. Yet unlike other communities of comparable size, London West had to contend with the very near and very real presence of an infinitely more populous, powerful and, aggressive neighbour, the City of London.

The very existence of London West was, and had always been, dependant upon the proximity of its larger neighbour and namesake. The inhabitants of London West relied upon London as a source of employment and as an important marketplace.³ Despite London’s vital role in sustaining the prosperity of London West, the city was also seen as a potential adversary, threatening the political independence and integrity of the village. Virtually throughout its entire period of municipal autonomy, London West was confronted with the prospect of amalgamation with the larger urban centre. While there appears to have been little dispute among the inhabitants of London West and the City of London that amalgamation would one day occur, that seems to have been the extent of the consensus. As one London West resident explained he supported the village’s amalgamation with London in principle, but he was adamant that “when some cranks want to give the village away just for the sake of getting into the city, I, like the majority of ratepayers, will put my foot down solid.”⁴

In the historical literature on Western urbanization, the suburb in the nineteenth century was traditionally ignored or denigrated, even to the extent that suburbs were seen as mutant communities or unwanted growths upon the city. Historians such as Gregory Singleton and Kenneth Jackson have largely countered these early misconceptions by revealing that suburbs were often economically and socially diverse, although generally subservient to the cities they bordered. Contemporary nineteenth-century civic leaders, revelling in the popular business conception that bigger was inherently better, adopted similar axioms in dealing with municipal organization. Jackson explained that there was an incredible spate of suburban annexation during this period, with community leaders lauding the benefits that amalgamation or annexation provided to suburbanites by the extension of infrastructure, not to mention the resulting increased confidence and desire of the larger metropolis for civic development. Yet as both Jackson and later Ann Durkin Keating observed during the last quarter of the century, suburban municipalities increasingly fought to retain their independence from larger cities.⁵ In the Ontario of the 1880s, the general rationale behind suburban annexation tended to focus on “the advantage of sharing the

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costs of providing urban services . . . ,” with the result that five incorporated suburbs, including Toronto’s northerly neighbour of Yorkville and London’s industrial suburb of London East, were either enticed or successfully pressured into amalgamation. By the 1890s, however, there was considerable slowdown in the number of suburban annexations occurring throughout Ontario.⁶

The debate over amalgamation frequently divided the residents of London West on whether their interests and welfare might be better served within the scope of the City of London or by retaining their separate municipal identity and local control.

There was general fear that if London West joined the city, many of its ratepayers would be ineligible to hold public office or to vote in municipal elections. While the ratepayers of London East had opted for amalgamation in 1885 as a means to secure better infrastructure and fiscal resources, so that they could further entice industrial development within their boundaries, London West consistently turned down overtures for amalgamation because the proposals did not guarantee the political control of its inhabitants or the safety of their homes against the pervasive threat of flooding.⁷ Throughout the protracted negotiations between London West and the City of London over amalgamation, village officials and concerned ratepayers stubbornly insisted upon the inclusion of safeguards that would see the village retain a semblance of autonomy within the new urban framework. More important, however, villager negotiators demanded that measures be in place to ensure the security of their homes and families from the dangerous whims of the Thames (see fig. 1).

London West

Settlement on the west bank of the Thames began with local speculators capitalizing on the close proximity of the low-lying farm land to the centre of London. Similar developments had occurred to the south and east of the growing city, with London’s merchant elite building substantial “rural” retreats to the south and establishing factories and working-class dormitories to the east. After only two decades, considerable numbers of people had purchased lands in the western hamlets of Petersville and Kensington, so that together the communities possessed a population of 1,097. Displeased with the governance of the rural government of London Township, the citizenry opted in the spring of 1874 to incorporate their community as the Village of Petersville, and their counterparts in London East secured incorporation as well. Six years later, after a series of riotous meetings and much discussion, the name of the municipality was formally changed to London West.⁸

The majority of the village’s inhabitants probably thought of themselves as being from the middle strata of nineteenth-century Ontario society. They were not independently wealthy, needing to ply their trades or be successful in their businesses in order to make a living. It was in London West, where property values were substantially less than those in the city, that people of moderate means established themselves and at least hoped to retain both property and an existence for their families. A

Table 1:
Population of London West 1874–91

| Year | Population |
|------|------------|
| 1874 | 1097 |
| 1881 | 1602 |
| 1891 | 1916 |

clear majority of the ratepayers and their families lived within their own homes, while a minority appear to have inhabited rental property. A survey of the 1879 municipal voters indicates that of the nearly 360 registered voters, an overwhelming majority of some 65 per cent had earned the right to vote by maintaining freehold on their property. The remaining voters consisted of diverse tenants whose property had the necessary leasehold of \$200 to guarantee the vote.⁹

By 1881, the village’s population had grown to 1,602, a stunning increase of over five hundred people since incorporation seven years earlier. As for the composition of London West’s population, there was nothing particularly striking about it. It largely conformed to the ethnic and religious makeup of the majority of semi-urban communities strung out across Ontario. It was essentially a British Protestant settlement: nearly 50 per cent of its inhabitants of English origin, another quarter with an Irish background, and smaller infusions of German, Danish, and French stock. While in the first seven years of incorporation the population of the village increased by over 30 per cent, over the ten years from 1881 to 1891 (at the close of which time London West boasted a population of 1,916) the rate of growth slowed considerably, having increased by only 16 per cent. Certainly the community took a severe beating from the floods of 1883. There does not appear to have been a mass exodus, but the flooding caused property values to severely deflate, and it slowed the subsequent growth of the community, as potential residents weighed the obvious disadvantages of London West.¹⁰

Flooding

The flood of July 11, 1883, was a dreadful benchmark in the village’s development, taking seventeen lives and leaving behind vast destruction. Property values took an inevitable steep dive, causing general alarm. Although assessment records for the period 1882 to 1885 have been lost, a comparison of records from 1881 and 1886 shows that often there was a considerable drop in the assessed tax value of property in London West.

Two years after the flood, its effects were still being felt, and many in the village placed much of the blame for it on the city’s extensive waterworks dam. This perception persisted when village spokesman Robert F. Lacey told a reporter that villagers were seeking compensation of \$20,000 from the city because of the severe depreciation in village property values. As Lacey saw it, this money could fund the construction of a breakwater and allow property values to rise.¹¹

Table 2: Comparison of Property Values in London West, 1881 and 1886

| Location and Owner | 1881 Assessed Value | 1886 Assessed Value |
|---|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Lots 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 Beech St. South W. H. Bartram | \$1500 | \$465 |
| Lots 44, 45 Ann St. North John Bowman | \$550 | \$350 |
| Lot 43 Ann St. North John Coombs (1881) George Bowman (1886) | \$300 | \$125 |

Perhaps the most compelling reasons for the people of London West to resist amalgamation with the city were the provincial regulations that governed municipal elections and the flooding that had degraded village property values. The 1873 statute that governed municipal incorporation, set guidelines and regulations for establishment and maintenance of municipal government. For the people of London West, the most important elements were mandatory property qualifications that were ranked according to municipal status. In an incorporated village such as London West, to be able to run for a position on council, one had to own property worth at least \$600, or lease property valued at \$1200. Similarly, in order for a ratepayer to be eligible to vote in a municipal election he (or she, in the case of a widow or unmarried woman) was required to possess or lease property not valued under \$200. The statutes created a tiered system that ranged from townships to cities. In urban municipalities such as London, the required freehold or leasehold for office holders was \$1,500 and \$3,000 respectively. Even without the reduction of property values in London West after the 1883 flood, few inhabitants would have been able to hold office within London City Council. With the deflation of property value throughout the village after 1883, few ratepayers would have been eligible even to vote in municipal contests in the city. Therefore while villager John Evans agreed that annexation might increase the value of London West's property, he felt that "in case of annexation to the city the villagers, with very few exceptions, would not be eligible for a seat in the City Council."¹²

At best, the Village of London West and the City of London observed an uneasy peace, with each holding its ground on its own side of the Thames River. For the larger municipal corporation, there was ambivalence about the petty concerns that erupted in their western suburb. Within the corporation of London West, persistent difficulties raised the ire of many in the

village, with cries against perceived incompetence of elected officials, whom several ratepayers blamed for the village's financial woes. A long and incriminating debate in 1880 and 1881 surrounded the changing of the village's name from Petersville to London West, an irony not lost on those who had foreseen that changing the corporations' names would soothe partisan differences in Kensington and Petersville. In essence, it had been hoped that a new name might spell a new start.¹³

Throughout the 1880s, relations between the city and London West were less than congenial. For example, in 1887 an indictment was drawn up by the village's Board of Health against the city for a nuisance caused by its wanton dumping of sewage into the river which was unduly affecting the village.¹⁴ There was also continued irritation over more trivial, but equally heated, issues. In the summer of 1884, a dog's carcass floated in the river not far from the Dundas Street footbridge, which connected the city with London West. Though admittedly "not a very pleasant sight to the pedestrians . . .", neither side would concede that the body within its jurisdiction. The question so perplexed both communities that it was finally suggested that "[t]he two Health Inspectors should proceed to the spot and measure the distance," and once and for all determine which of the municipal councils was responsible for the animal's removal. Similarly, the village levied complaints against the city because of "a large crop of full-blown Canada thistles on the city side between the mill race and the river." The wind, claimed several villagers, carried the seeds across the river and into the lush gardens of London West. Despite Nature's obvious complicity in the matter, London Westers preferred to levy the majority of the blame upon their urban neighbours.¹⁵

By the same token, cooperative ventures between both the City of London and London West (with significant aid and direction from the County of Middlesex) were a frequent source of contention. For London West, the joint maintenance of Blackfriar's Bridge (see fig. 2), which connected the two municipalities, was the chief difficulty. In fact, the village was often perplexed by what it saw as wasteful expenditure by the city. In November 1881, complaints were made that the city had dumped several loads of gravel on the Ridout Street hill descending toward the bridge. As village critics observed, this was a "useless expense, as the first heavy rain will wash it all down the hill and into the river." The frugal villagers were not only quick to condemn this wasteful enterprise but to also suggest that "[g]ood broken stone is what is wanted."¹⁶

Periodically the call for London West's amalgamation with London appeared in the local papers, both of which incidently were based in the city. As early as March 1880, the question of amalgamation became hotly contested. At least one villager voiced the opinion that annexation to the city would be beneficial because police protection would be stepped up against those "roughs [who] get drunk in the city and come over the bridge to indulge their circuses . . ." Others rejected this view, noting that the village was growing rapidly and that the ratepayers' interests were far better served "by persons solely responsible to the

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electors of the division which they represented . . ." than by the larger City Council.¹⁷

Barely a year later, in 1881, a few disgruntled villagers noted that London West had only \$525 in its coffers and could not afford to set up a proper fire brigade. One local merchant, Daniel Collins, though not endorsing annexation, went to so far as to offer the City Fire Brigade \$100 to come to his aid, should the need arise.¹⁸ A year and a half later, the issue was raised again. A. J. B. McDonald voiced his opinion that, because village government was inept, the time had come to face the inevitable and join the city. McDonald argued that prompt action was necessary to secure favourable terms for amalgamation. Many others, however, failed to share McDonald's outlook, viewing the ability to control and influence their own local affairs as a strong incentive for maintaining their independence. Certainly this was the driving conviction of one particularly "violent anti-annexation type," George Stratford, who "created an uproar of considerable dimensions." While Stratford's arguments were not clearly reported, his comments were quickly followed by those of James Daniels who claimed to speak for the village's majority by declaring that "they wanted workingmen to represent them not, professional men." Daniels's comments were a clear assault upon the aspirations of men such as barrister William H. Bartram, who had lamented his loss of the position of reeve the preceding year.¹⁹

On May 1, 1890, the old unincorporated suburb of London South was taken from Westminster Township and formally added to the city as Ward Six. The move to annexation had been troubled by a series of debates, with supporters of annexation lauding the benefits of tapping into the city's water supply, school system, and fire protection, and gaining increased political representation as a ward in the city rather than as part of a rural township. The chief worry of opponents to annexation was that they would suddenly become heirs to a massive city debt that was not of their making. Such fears were mollified when the city made a generous overture, which assured that for fifteen years London South would be given a preferential tax rate, lower than the rest of the city. The absorption of London's southern suburb meant that London West was the only significant community left adjacent to the city's boundaries.²⁰

By the middle of May 1890, the situation in the village was particularly grim. London West's financial resources had been so seriously eroded by the continued spending on improving the breakwater and "by law expenses and other useless expenditures . . ." that many ratepayers felt that the only rational response was to "escape in amalgamation with the city, where, indeed, most of them get their employment." Sensing the underlying mood within their westerly neighbour and bolstered by their recent success in enticing London South into a formal union, the city proposed terms for amalgamation, tailored specifically to the needs of the western suburb. including adoption of the village debt and work toward flood protection. Interested in the terms set by the city and angered by the

lethargy with which the village council entertained the proposition, in May 1890 a petition signed by 235 village ratepayers was brought before the council requesting that a bylaw calling for amalgamation to the city be passed. Citing technical irregularities in the recommendation, Reeve Robert F. Lacey declined to act upon it. Exasperated by the reeve's "high-handed manner" in refusing to entertain their petition, several ratepayers village sought to compel council to act by applying for the issuance of a mandamus. That forced the hand of London West's reticent council, and within a month negotiations with the city were well underway.²¹

In a gesture of goodwill, the city offered generous terms that were laced with a warning for village negotiators "that there was not a place situated as was the village which did not finally come to the conclusion that they could not run a show so close to a larger one . . ." A joint committee of city and village officials was therefore set up to look into the possibility that London West would join the city. As with all of their previous discussions on the matter, the people of London West were adamant on maintaining certain controls over their own affairs. The city was initially willing to hear their concerns and at least entertain their demands. Similarly, the city resurrected a proposal from the preceding year that, from their perspective, had been particularly generous. Attempting to gauge the sensibilities of the village ratepayers on a possible merger with the city, the village council sponsored a meeting at Collins' Hall on May 20, 1890. After laying out the issue before the assembly, they opened the floor to comments and criticisms, and Deputy-Reeve Duncan C. Macdonald took the stand. Demonstrating that within the framework of Middlesex County Council the village received barely enough stipends to maintain the existing infrastructure, he lauded the benefits of joining with London's larger fiscal system. Recalling the calamitous flood of 1883, Macdonald worried that if the village faced another such catastrophe, they had insufficient resources to contend with it. As it was, Macdonald warned, "the village was a laughing stock to everybody, and our property was below par."²²

Angered by Macdonald's apparent infatuation with the idea of annexation former reeve William H. Bartram loudly condemned the deputy-reeve's outlook and reminded him that if London West opted to join the city, they would become heirs to London's considerably larger debt, which was not of their making. Similarly he was quick to remind the meeting that in his view a large portion of London West's own sizeable debt was primarily due to the negligence of the city. He argued that the city failed to respect the situation in London West, and put again the point that their persistence in creating dams and other contrivances upon the river had been partially responsible for the scourge of flooding. He argued also that when the Court of Chancery had ruled against the city, forcing it to pay damages to the village on account of the Waterworks Dam at Springbank, the moral victory had quickly given way to disillusionment, for the village council did not persist in extracting payment of these damages, even though London "in reality, owed London West this money."²³

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Figure 1: A view of Peterson (circa 1874) looking west from Ridout Street. The Blackfriar's Bridge was replaced in 1875 by the present construction. The tall chimney beside the bridge is a remnant of the Peters' distillery. Courtesy of the J. J. Talman Regional Collection, the D. B. Weldon Library, the University of Western Ontario

Others quickly jumped in to counter Bartram's assertions, for as William Smith (Bartram's longtime nemesis) lamented, "the village at one time was in a prosperous state . . ." and early in its incorporation it had cost a mere thirteen mills on the dollar to run. This, he mourned, had long since given way to the higher value of twenty-two mills on every dollar. He denounced the mismanagement of the relief funds following the 1883 flood and decried the \$32,000 spent on erecting the breakwater, claiming that a greater part of the allotted money had been "wasted by jobbery, negligence and incompetent work . . ." Smith concluded with a call for amalgamation as the only solution to the financial woes that plagued the community. Others disagreed with Smith and worried that a merger would mean a loss of independence and an increased financial burden upon the ratepayers. A "Mr. Garratt thought if the village elected good, economical representatives in the Council and the School Board we should be able to run the village at a less rate of taxation than if we amalgamated with the city."²⁴

After a series of further meetings to discuss the proposed annexation, the committee developed a potential agreement, which was brought before the respective councils. The proposal delivered to both councils indicated that should London West be admitted into the city, it would be designated Ward Seven, with its own aldermen representing it on city council. Beyond

the mundane issues of merging the assets and liabilities of the two communities, and the extension of "water, light, fire and police protection . . ." there was agreement in principle on control of the Waterworks Dam at Springbank. London West, citing its susceptibility to flooding, demanded that after amalgamation it should be granted some control over the running of the dam. So the negotiators hammered out an agreement in which a section of the offending dam was outfitted with "stop logs," which could be removed when it was necessary to allow an outflow of excess water, or at the request of aldermen from the proposed ward, in consultation with the city engineer.²⁵

While this agreement found initial acceptance among both parties, reception in the village soon became hostile, as its citizens insisted upon adding further demands and safeguards. The negotiators from London West returned to the table with additional requests, demanding construction of a breakwater at the base of Dundas Street, as well as the straightening and dredging of the riverbed, which the city engineer estimated would cost \$17,000. The London West delegation confronted city representatives with a further demand that, upon amalgamation, London West be guaranteed a differentiated rate of three mills for a period of fifteen years. Perhaps inevitably, London City Council, while accepting the terms of the first agreement with minor alterations, refused to entertain the more exacting

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demands of the second proposal. Decrying the absurdity of compiling two separate agreements, several members of city council were hostile to London West. As Alderman John Boyd noted, "it was absurd for London West to think it was in a better position than the city. It was quite a boon for London West to have the city offer them the privilege of joining."²⁶

Village Councillor William Spence, a local tinsmith, informed his urban counterparts that the terms as the city saw them "were not at all suitable to the villagers." Angered by the suburb's apparent arrogance, Alderman George Taylor reiterated London's terms and warned Spence "that every citizen he had talked with thought London West would be a burden." Citing the fear that the villagers would be swamped by the city's debt, Deputy-Reeve William Scarrow received a similar response when an agitated Alderman Taylor, recalling London West's own dismal fiscal outlook, retorted that that was precisely the city's concern: that they should be encumbered by London West's financial mismanagement. As the debate drew to a close, the only matter upon which all delegates seemed to agree was "that there had been too much law and not enough common sense in the recent bitterness."²⁷

Continuing in their negotiations with city hall, one of London West representative, Councillor William Duff, argued that if annexation was to be acceptable to London West, it would be necessary for the village to be able to appoint their own tax assessors for fifteen years after they joined the city. His suggestion was immediately rebuffed by city officials, who said such a provision was impossible. At the same time, city aldermen were concerned that acquiring London West would mean an increased burden upon city taxpayers. Despite the city's confidence that "the terms so amended would be fair and square and as favorable to London We[s]t as the terms granted to London South . . .", this attempt at annexation—like all previous bids—was "not suitable to the villagers." Further negotiations also failed to bring about any agreement between the two parties, especially when the city refused to entertain other demands made by the village. Indeed, as the summer dragged on, negotiations stalled completely.²⁸

Talks toward the goal of amalgamation reemerged early in 1892, when the idea was again broached at a meeting of London City Council. As in 1890, following some initial consultation, a committee comprising representatives from the two respective councils was created, and discussions began in earnest. By November 1892 a bargain had been reached. While this draft did not encompass all the demands that London West had made two years earlier, it was, nonetheless, a relatively generous document, setting out terms that guaranteed a semblance of autonomy for the village as London Ward Seven. In a similar overture, city council also agreed that London West's current rate of taxation would be maintained for ten years after it entered the city.²⁹

Some ratepayers in London West seem to have been enamored with these proposals, and wary that any future terms

might be less favourable, a large number clamoured for acceptance of the agreement. However, as had happened in earlier discussions on the subject, opinion was still widely split, with a sizeable number of villagers opposing the accord. At a particularly stormy nomination meeting for village council at the close of 1892, the issue of amalgamation easily divided the assembly, with candidates for village office emphatically stating their stand on the issue. As the election campaign got under way, there was no question that the only issue in people's minds was amalgamation. In the four-way contest for the office of reeve, three of the candidates stood in the pro-amalgamation camp, while the sole anti-amalgamation candidate was Robert F. Lacey. Despite the three-way split in the pro-amalgamation camp, the incumbent reeve, John Platt, emerged with an overwhelming lead of 152 over both his compatriots, who managed to garner seventy and fifty-eight votes each. As for the anti-amalgamation candidate, Robert Lacey came in with a dismal fifty-four votes.³⁰ With an apparent mandate from the electors of the village, the new council quickly set out to see that annexation came closer to reality and submitted to London City Council a copy of the bylaw that would have seen the merger of the two communities. Bolstered by an apparent sense of optimism, the *London Free Press* praised the decision of both councils to return to the bargaining table and further explained that not only would the longstanding feud between the two municipalities cease, but London West would greatly benefit socially and financially "as now the inhabitants can command all superior advantages enjoyed in the city."³¹

After such a promising start, however, things began to turn sour. By the middle of March, at a special meeting of city council, portions of the village bylaw were repudiated, including provisions that would have bound the city to maintain the breakwater and asserted that London West would maintain a different assessment level for ten years. Angered by this about-face, D. C. Macdonald, one of London West's most ardent proponents of the agreement, condemned those who seemed intent on derailing amalgamation.³²

With continued opposition to the bylaw emerging among several aldermen, city council delayed submitting the necessary legislation to the provincial legislature for ratification. In the meantime, opposition from another corner of the city mounted an attack. The Board of Trade openly condemned the basis for amalgamation, and one member went so far as to indicate that "the assets of London West would be a detriment to the city, rather than a benefit." The board feared that London West's inclusion in the city would only burden the rest of the city and hinder progress. Angered by the idea that London West should form a ward of its own, the board continued to assail the proposed legislation. Questioning the validity and morality of the board's attempt to reverse a decision endorsed by two elected bodies, Deputy-Reeve William Scarrow of London West soundly denounced the actions of the board as unscrupulous and contrary to the British way. Other commentators also called the actions of the board into question and assumed that such an

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Figure 2: A view of London West (circa 1880) looking west. Running from the far left is Ann Street. Top right is the two-story Ann Street school, to the left of which the Methodist Church is visible. Note the striking height difference between the east and west banks of the Thames. Courtesy of the J. J. Talman Regional Collection, the D. B. Weldon Library, the University of Western Ontario

assault, even if justified, was "a little late in the field . . ." However, like all previous attempts to generate a formal union between the two municipalities, after more than a year of discussion and consultation, this attempt also faltered and died.³³

By the close of 1896, despite the hopeful reports of fiscal solvency by Deputy-Reeve William Moore, the Village of London West had acquired a massive debt of some \$44,640, which was largely the result of increased expenditure on the breakwater. The several thousand dollars in uncollected taxes and other apparently minor expenditures had also helped to create this large debt that seemed to hobble the corporation.³⁴

For several years the cost of duplicated services had become an increasing concern for many of village officials, who had attempted, with limited success, to procure agreements with various city councils. In 1893, despite the failed attempt at gaining favourable terms for entry into the city, the Everett-Moore Syndicate, who owned and operated the London Street Railway, had negotiated a thirty-year contract with the London West Council to extend their services into the village. The contract had provided for continuous service from the Kensington Bridge, along Dundas Street, and up Wharncliffe as far as

Oxford Street, where cars would then turn about and retrace their path. The difficulty was that the City of London had refused permission for the London Street Railway Company to link the main lines west of Richmond Street with the branch in London West. So until permission was finally granted in 1897, anyone riding the transportation system had to disembark at the Kensington Bridge and walk into the city to the corner of Dundas and Richmond Streets in order to board streetcars on the city side of the river. Certainly the issue had weighed heavily upon Reeve William J. Saunby, who had been engaged in a turbulent negotiations to link up the street railway service. The difficulty, as he saw it, was simply that "there were three parties to fight—the city, the street railway, and the county." Saunby hoped that at last a settlement suitable to all parties would soon result in the linking of London West with the larger city service. Indeed, Saunby dared go even further with the declaration that "he was in favor of going into the city."³⁵

It had been over three years since the last discussions for amalgamation had collapsed. In that period, much that had come into play in the 1893 discussions had changed. There appears to have been a distinctive sense that time had at last worn down the resistance of oppositionists in London West.

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Overtures from city council were made to the village in May 1897 on the old perplexing issue of annexation. Certainly the goal of London West's council to improve links with the London Street Railway and the mounting village debt played right into the hands of those advocating amalgamation.

The demographics of the city had altered considerably. At the time of the major negotiations in 1890 and 1893, London's population had been just over 30,000. By 1897 its population likely topped 35,000. The significance of this population change for London West was profound. While the village negotiators met with the special Amalgamation Committee set up by city council, it became clear that the older agreements set out by the city in 1890 and reinstated in 1893 were no longer tenable for city officials. As the *Free Press* explained, "The question of the amalgamation of London West is one of dollars and cents among the wise men at the City Hall. Sentiment has no part or parcel in it." Indeed, conventional wisdom held that small suburbs were both inefficient and frequently misgoverned by a series of amateur politicians. Indeed, "the cry of efficiency was a mask for the desire to exploit and to control . . ." ³⁶

The old basis for amalgamation had set out the promise that London West would be made into its own city ward, just as London South had been, and that might have preserved at least some of the village's autonomy and identity. However, a simple comparison of London West and London South in 1897 showed glaring inequalities. The estimated assessment for London West was a mere \$300,000, while that of London South, or London's Ward Six, was \$1,300,000, still the lowest of any city ward. It was the opinion of many in city hall that "the addition of the village to the city is not something to be so ardently desired, because it amounts to comparatively little, here or there." London South was deemed a much more viable and enticing component for the city. As to whether London West should enter as an independent ward within the city, one alderman refused to entertain the idea, explaining, "If they [London West] had three fellows over there they would always be pulling for more than their share . . ." ³⁷

There was little question that the optimum time for amalgamation had long since passed. With insufficient bargaining power left, there seemed little to do but to garner the best terms possible and no longer delay the merging of the two municipalities. After a careful analysis of the village's accounts, the city came forward with an agreement that, after amalgamation, London West "would pay a rate of 25 mills on the dollar for a period of ten years . . . [and] be allowed three mills more every year for streets and breakwater improvements than would be expended in the other six wards . . ." Seeing little other option and assuming that the terms were as good as could be expected, the village councillors asked only that they be charged the rate of twenty-five mills for seven years and not ten. To this modification the city agreed. While there had been no question of letting London West form its own ward, "it was constituted into two distinct polling subdivisions, presumably to sustain the apparent accessibility of the West London electorate and also

possibly to assure its representation on City Council." In short, this concession allowed the village a semblance of legal separateness with two inclusive divisions within its old municipal boundaries. Similarly, it was perhaps hoped that such a concession would force aspiring candidates for London City Hall to be more responsive to the former village's concerns, because their success would hinge on carrying these two stations. Except for a minor dispute over which ward London West should be appended to, the basis for amalgamation passed through London City Council on May 31, 1897, by a margin of one vote. All that was left was for the matter to be taken to the ratepayers of London West. ³⁸

The vote was held on June 28, 1897, although, perhaps sensing the inevitability of amalgamation, only a bare majority of 332 of the 600 eligible voters exercised their prerogative and, as the *London Advertiser* explained, few villagers doubted the outcome would favour amalgamation. Indeed, an overwhelming majority of 297 of those ratepayers who did choose to vote, voted in favour of amalgamation, with a tiny minority of 35 voting against. The *Free Press*, in its final hard-nosed assessment of the saga that had been London West, declared that it should never have opted for municipal independence twenty-three years earlier, labelling the entire experiment a waste of time and money, because with "[a]ll small local municipal governments being detached afford[s] strong inducements for extravagant and unnecessary expenditure . . ." The *Advertiser* offered a more considered assessment, by speaking of the numerous and longstanding personal and business ties that already linked the two communities and how "by the union any little municipal friction will be prevented and the united community will be the better able to make the most of its energies." ³⁹

At the stroke of midnight, on Monday, December 20, 1897, the village of London West was to be no more. Some young men in the community made straight for the school and clambered up into the belfry and the sound of the bell could be heard ringing out the village's death knell across the night. As the *Free Press* revealed, "They had first consulted some of the school trustees hence prosecutions are not likely to follow." In fact, the enthusiastic bell-ringers were overly hasty, as formal amalgamation did not occur until three carriages left city hall at three o'clock in the afternoon, and hurriedly made their way across the Kensington Bridge. The party from the city then slowed their pace "to one more becoming to the importance of the occasion." It was an end of an era to be sure, but seems to have had little impact upon the former villagers, only some of whom turned out to witness the tiny procession that made its way through the streets. The dignitaries then proceeded to collect the financial and municipal records of the former village before they made their way back across the river and on to city hall. ⁴⁰

Many of the fears expressed by London Westers about losing their municipal independence appear to have borne fruit. The ratepayers of London West, once represented by a council of five members, with two eligible to sit on Middlesex County Council, now had a sole representative in city hall. To simplify

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the matter of duplicate street names, city councillors decided that the most expedient and gratifying measure would be to rename many of the streets after themselves and several patron saints (choosing the name of St. Patrick for the overwhelmingly Protestant thoroughfare known as Queen Street)⁴¹

In the years immediately following amalgamation, London West (or West London, as it had unofficially been renamed) acquired increased access to city water and hydro, and belated linkages to the London Street Railway. Yet the most important consideration that governed the decision to join the city was the assurance that, with access to the wider resources of the city, they would be better protected from the perennial problem of flooding. But it was a problem that did not go away, and the frequency and destructiveness of the flooding did not abate. Serious breaches appeared in the breakwater in March 1904 when London West was again inundated by the rampaging Thames. While the city did make allowances for further work on the breakwater, the worst was yet to come. As for the people of London West, they "were not a wealthy lot, and most of their money was tied up in their submerged dwellings." The worst flooding to hit London West would come in 1937, leaving much of it underwater and hundreds of its inhabitants temporarily homeless. The security London Westers sought within the City of London would not be assured until 1952, with the completion of the Fanshawe Dam, fifty-five years after village ratepayers had voted to join the city.⁴²

If a study of London West brings anything to light, it is that the internal political and social organization of an individual suburb in the nineteenth century was as complex as it was at times turbulent. Similarly, what emerges from a study of London West is that suburbs that were largely the preserve of wage-earning artisans and small-business people were not necessarily dominated by the cities that they surrounded.

The catastrophic flood of 1883 seriously impinged upon the village's ability to fend for itself in the face of chronic deflation of property values, yet gave the village a unity of purpose that had eluded it in its earliest years. In conjunction with the new solidarity that arose in the village, the flooding antagonized relations between London West and the City of London. As villagers set out to ensure the security of their property and families, deeply held hostilities toward the city frequently impeded negotiations and delayed London West's entry into the city for several years. For the largely lower-middle-class ratepayers of London West, dependant upon the city for their economic security and their livelihoods, and subject to the whims of the Thames River, retention of their community's municipal autonomy remained an important sphere of control. It was in village politics that the ratepayers could control and direct at least one aspect of their lives. The corporation of London West allowed them an arena for expression and debate where they might influence decision making.

Beset by seemingly impossible financial burdens and unable to continue their struggle against the Thames River alone, the

ratepayers of London West exchanged their municipal independence for the apparent security offered by the City of London. While few in the community doubted that amalgamation with the larger urban centre was inevitable, they had been unwilling to see it occur without guarantees that could secure their political prerogatives and a semblance of autonomy for their community. Perhaps their greatest fault was their tenacity, for their tenacity caused them to reject several overtures from the city retrospect might have secured them a better political position than the ultimate agreement they accepted with little enthusiasm or choice. Certainly within a few years London West came to enjoy many of the benefits of belonging to the larger corporation, including the extension of water and hydro and other amenities that the larger city tax base could provide. The hope that joining the city would finally guarantee safety from the dangers of flooding, it proved largely elusive, and some of the worst flooding to strike London West would come several decades after it had joined the city. As for a sense of community, the amalgamation of London West to the city hardly eroded the neighbourhood identity. Separated from the rest of the city by the Thames, and continually subjected to flooding, if only for these unwelcome reasons, London West continued to cultivate a distinctive sense of community well into the twentieth century.

Notes

1. Jean Dunham, interview by author, June 23, 1999, Komoka, Ontario, tape recording. Author's possession. Dunham recounted, "Apparently, at one time, years ago they called it [London West] the *Frog Pond*." She surmised that, among those who lived in the "city," the term was a joking reference to the old village, probably because of London West's susceptibility to flooding. Dunham went on to explain that there had also been a low marshy area to the west of the main part of the village.
2. Village of Petersville and Village of London West. By-Laws. Numbers 1–340. 1875–1897. City Clerk's Office, City Hall, London, Ontario. The imprint of the village's seal is found throughout the bylaws.
3. John H. Lutman, *The South and West of London: An Historical Guide and Architectural Guide*, London, Ontario (London: Corporation of the City of London, 1979), 54.
4. *London Free Press*, May 21, 1890, and June 26, 1890.
5. Jeffery K. Hadden and Josef J. Barton, "An Image that Will Not Die: Thoughts on the History of Anti-Urban Ideology," *The Urbanization of Suburbs*, (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1973), 79, 85–7, 92, 95, 102, 105; Gregory H. Singleton, "The Genesis of Suburbs: A Complex of Historical Trends" in *The Urbanization of the Suburbs*, eds. Louis H. Masotti and Jeffery K. Hadden (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1973), 29, 36–37; Jon C. Teaford, *City and Suburb: The Political Fragmentation of Metropolitan America, 1850–1970* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), 1; Walter van Nus, "The Role of Suburban Government in the City Building Process: The Case Study of Notre Dame de Grâce, Quebec, 1876–1910," *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine* 13 (October 1984): 91–103; Paul-André Linteau, *The Promoter's City: Building the Industrial Town of Maisonneuve 1883–1918*, trans. Robert Chodos (Toronto: James Lorimer, 1985), ix; Ann Durkin Keating, *Building Chicago: Suburban Developers and the Creation of a Divided Metropolis* (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1988), 1, 7, 107, 120–26; Ronald Dale Karr, "Brookline Rejects Annexation, 1873," *Suburbia Re-examined*, ed. Barbara M. Kelly (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989), 103–10.

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The studies by both Linteau and van Nus shed a great deal of light upon the development of Canadian suburbs during the latter portion of the nineteenth century, although their focus on amalgamation is more limited.

6. Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 144–7; Elizabeth Bloomfield, Gerald Bloomfield, and Peter McCaskell, *Urban Growth and Local Services: The Development of Ontario Municipalities to 1981* (Guelph, Ontario: Department of Geography, University of Guelph, 1983), 15, 20. The villages of Yorkville and Brockton, and the town of Parkdale, were annexed to Toronto in 1883, 1884, and 1889 respectively. The village of New Edinburgh was annexed by the City of Ottawa in 1886, London East was amalgamated with London in 1885, and London West joined the city in 1897; Sandra Moore, "Yorkville, 1808–1883," (B.A. thesis, University of Toronto, 1968), ii. Moore argued that Yorkville's annexation in 1883 was mainly due to the fact that the village had already come to depend upon certain city-based services, and the ratepayers wanted further integration into Toronto's more extensive infrastructure.
7. John Lutman and Christopher L. Hives, *The North and the East of London: An Historical and Architectural Guide* (London, Ontario: Corporation of the City of London, 1982), 59–60. London East had been incorporated in 1874, at the same time as London West, but its incorporation was championed by industrialists and entrepreneurs. It was well over twice as large as Petersville (London West), with 2,416 inhabitants. This growth accelerated, so that by 1880 it boasted 3,651 inhabitants, and in December 1881 it was officially granted the status of a town; Ian C. Ross, "London East, 1854–1885: The Evolution, Incorporation, and Annexation of a Satellite Municipality" (master's thesis, University of Western Ontario, 1977), 97.
8. *London Advertiser*, June 5, 1874. At a particularly heated meeting, ratepayers complained that under London Township there was "insecurity of property," among other concerns; Lutman, *South and West*, 54; Christopher L. Hives, "Flooding and Flood Control: Local Attitudes in London, Ontario 1790–1952" (master's thesis, University of Western Ontario, 1981), 42–53.
9. "Voter's List of the Municipality of Petersville for the Year 1879." (London, Ontario: London Free Press Printing Company, 1879), 1–12.
10. Peter G. Goheen, "Currents of Change in Toronto, 1850–1900," *The Canadian City: Essays in Urban and Social History*. eds. Gilbert A. Stelter and Alan F. J. Artibise (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1982), 88–9. While obviously a much larger example, Toronto's population between 1860 and 1900 was overwhelmingly British in origin, with the English leading the Irish and Scots. Similar to the composition of London West, half of Toronto's citizenry were native-born Canadians; Canada 1881 Manuscript Census, Petersville, Ontario. The information and statistics that follow are derived from an analysis of the census material for Petersville; City of London Collectors Rolls, 1882. Ward Three, 58; London West Assessment Rolls, 1881. Ann Street North. Perhaps one of the most fundamental attractions of London West as a place of settlement was its lower tax rate and the cheaper, available land. A simple comparison of London West's property values with those from London's Ward Three, which lay in the southeastern quarter of the city, indicates the propensity of London West to attract inhabitants of moderate means. Residential Simcoe Street ran through the heart of London's Ward Three, lying south of the Great Western Railway and to the north of Labatt's brewery, and provided homes for some of London's skilled tradesmen and their families. A glance at the occupations of Simcoe Street residents shows a remarkable similarity to those of London West. Unlike the situation in London West, however, where a large proportion of householders owned property, the vast majority of their Simcoe Street counterparts simply rented, a situation no doubt a partial result of inflated property values on the city's side of the river. As it was, the typical householder on Simcoe Street lived on property whose value rarely fell below \$400, and could go as high as an astounding \$1300. In London West, on the other hand, on the densely settled Ann Street the two most highly assessed properties belonging to William Smith and John Bowman were valued at only \$550 and \$650 respectively. As for many of their neighbours, even freeholders of long standing, most property values hovered in the vicinity of \$300 or \$400, making London West a much cheaper place to live.
11. Bartram's experiences with flooding (see table 2) would not to end in 1883. In 1904 his home was again flooded, but it was noted that "[t]he lesson taught by the flood of 1883 was not forgotten by some residents of West London. For instance, Mr. W. H. Bartram had a large row boat attached to his back door when the waters rose, and all that the members of the family had to do was to step into it." *London Advertiser*, March 26, 1904.
12. *Statutes of Ontario*, 1873, 36, Vi. 48, c. 212–5; *London Advertiser*, December 16, 1882.
13. *London Advertiser*, December 2, 1880.
14. *Ibid.*, April 8, 1887.
15. *Ibid.*, July 30, 1884; *Ibid.*, August 8, 1884. The problem of thistles seems to have been a recurring theme in village life. In August 1881, several villagers were threatened with legal action "for allowing Canada thistles to grow on their property . . ." despite repeated warnings by the village council. *Ibid.*, August 22, 1881.
16. *Ibid.*, June 4, 1880.
17. *Ibid.*, March 20, 1880.
18. *Ibid.*, April 8, 1881.
19. *Ibid.*, March 20, 1880. There seems to have been a recurring consensus among many villagers that annexation would one day be inevitable, but that to join the city too soon would hurt the villagers and diminish their voice in the political arena; *Ibid.*, December 16, 1882. George Stratford was a plasterer who lived on John Street in London West. During the 1883 flood, Stratford and his wife lost three children. *London Advertiser*, July 13, 1883; *History of the County of Middlesex, Canada* (Toronto: W. A. and C. L. Goodspeed, 1889; reprint ed., Belleville, Ontario: Mika Studio, 1972), 725–6. A native of Gloucestershire, England, William Henry Bartram emigrated to Canada as a child, volunteered to fight the Fenians in the late 1860s, and moved to London in 1867 where he commenced his legal studies. As well as establishing his own law firm, Bartram became the registrar in the Law Department of the fledgling Western University, and was reeve of London West from 1880 to 1881. He moved to London West in 1876. Lutman, *South and West*, 59.
20. Lutman, *South and West*, 9–10.
21. *London Free Press*, May 21, 1890; Henry Campbell Black, *Black's Law Dictionary* (St. Paul, Minnesota: West Publishing, 1979), 366; Daphne A. Dukelow and Betsy Nuse, *Dictionary of Canadian Law* (Scarborough, Ontario: Thomson Professional Publishing, 1991), 608. A mandamus is "[a] prerogative writ which compels the performance of a public duty, often used to compel an inferior court to exercise its jurisdiction."
22. *London Free Press*, June 30, 1890; *Ibid.*, May 21, 1890.
23. Hives, 64–5. After 1883 there were calls from London West for the removal of the Springbank Waterworks Dam, a call that was only intensified after a severe ice jam in 1884 nearly inundated the village again; *London Free Press*, May 21, 1890.
24. *Ibid.*
25. London, City of. *Proceedings of Municipal Council 1890* (London, Ontario: R. Southam Printer, 1891), 63. J. J. Talman Regional Collections, U.W.O. The meeting was held on July 7, 1890.
26. *Ibid.*, 63; *London Advertiser*, July 8, 1890.

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27. *London Free Press*, June 30, 1890; *London City Directory 1883*, 146, 148. Councillor William Duff was a brushmaker who lived on the north side of Dundas Street in London West. William Spence sold "stoves, tinware and lamp goods . . ." on Talbot Street in the city, but resided on Napier Street, south of Blackfriar's Street in London West.
28. *London Free Press*, June 30, 1890, and July 8, 1890.
29. *Proceedings of Municipal Council 1892: January 18, 1892 to January 9, 1893* (London, Ontario: R. Southam Printer, 1893), 20. The matter of amalgamation with London West was discussed briefly at the third council meeting on February 15, 1892; *Ibid.*, 244. Along with the major concessions listed, there were the usual provisions for London to assume the debt of London West, as well as pay off its portion of Middlesex County's debt. Other notable portions of the basis for amalgamation included stipulations for the extension of services such as water and electricity. The latter was to receive no expenditures above the level at which the village was currently spending.
30. *London Free Press*, December 28, 1892, and January 3, 1893. Besides John Platt, the two other pro-amalgamation candidates for reeve were John Chapman and long-time annexationist D. C. Maconald. A similar stance had been taken by the two candidates for the office of deputy-reeve. In this case, however, the race between the incumbent William Scarrow and his anti-amalgamationist opponent A. R. Murdock was fought with a narrow margin of 144 and 122.
31. *Ibid.*, January 10, 1893, and January 11, 1893.
32. *Proceedings of Municipal Council 1893: January 19, 1893 to January 15, 1894* (London, Ontario: Jones and Lawson, 1894), 83-4; *London Free Press*, March 31, 1893.
33. *London Free Press*, April 24, 1893, and April 28, 1893; *London Advertiser*, April 27, 1893; *Municipal Council 1893*, 114, 121. After the middle of the year there appears to have been no more discussion of the amalgamation deal.
34. *London Advertiser*, December 29, 1896. *Ibid.*, May 22, 1897. It is difficult to make a full assessment of London West's debt at the dawn of 1896. However, it appears to have made a relatively stark comparison with the debt incurred by London East before its annexation to the city in 1885. London East's debt amounted to \$61,806.88, while in 1896 London West's stood at \$44,640.00. When one considers that in 1896 the population of London West was roughly 2,000 and London East's population in 1885 was about four thousand, the debt in London West, if divided amongst its inhabitants, was profoundly higher. London East estimated the value of its assets at \$88,999.40. London West's remaining assets in 1896, valued at \$16,000, seemed comparatively negligible. For while London East could boast the ownership of three schools and a town hall, London West possessed only one school, which was also used for their village meetings. Similarly, London East had \$40,000 tied up in a waterworks and adjacent land, something London West never possessed; Ross, 93, 96; Bloomfield, 156.
35. Lutman, *South and West*, 55; *London Advertiser*, December 29, 1896.
36. Bloomfield, 156. The population of London in 1891, the year after the failed negotiations with London West, was listed as 30,062 (a number that included the annexed suburbs of London East and London South). By 1901 the population had risen to 37,976, which included London West, annexed four years earlier. Because London West's population appears to have barely topped 2,000 at the time that the village was annexed, the number 35,000 is an estimate for London's population in 1897; *London Free Press*, May 31, 1897; Jackson, 144-5.
37. *London Free Press*, May 31, 1897.
38. *London Advertiser*, May 22, 1897; Jeff Leunisson, "London's Ward System 1840-1986: An Exploration in Municipal Electoral Geography" (senior undergraduate thesis, University of Western Ontario, 1987), 29; *London Free Press*, June 1, 1897.
39. *London Advertiser*, June 28, 1897 and June 29, 1897; *London Free Press*, June 29, 1897.
40. *London Free Press*, December 20, 1897, and *London Advertiser*, December 21, 1897.
41. Harriet Priddis, "The Naming of London Streets." *Transactions*. London and Middlesex Historical Society (1909), 26-27. The old village Centre Street was named Wilson Avenue after the incumbent Mayor Dr. John Wilson, and from there the list continued with councillors bestowing their names in wholesale fashion in West London. Ironically the only council member who lived in London West, George Jolly, declined to have his named given to any street, especially considering that the proposed name of *Jolly Row* would become not only the laughingstock, but too great a temptation for local boys to refrain from engaging in fist fights. Oak Street was christened Forward for an elderly resident on the street, one of the few concessions made to commemorate villagers themselves, other than the retention of names such as Gunn, Irwin, and Saunby for other early village families.
42. *London Advertiser*, December 20, 1897; Leunissen, 29; Hives, 82, 110-114; Lutman, *South and West*, 57.