



Welcome to Leamington, Ontario. Leamington began as a small hamlet named Wilkinson's Corners after Alex Wilkinson who established a farm here in the 1840's at the cross roads of Talbot and Erie. The hamlet grew over the years with grist/saw mills, grocery and blacksmith shops. The hamlet grew in importance and was recognized by the establishment of a Post Office in 1854. The Hamlet was given the name of Gainesborough by a Mr. Gaines, however this duplicated the name of another post office so Mr. Gaines chose Leamington, the name of the town in England from which he came. The growth of Leamington continued, and by 1860 the community was comprised of 75 people, an assortment of small commercial and industrial outlets, farms, and mills. On November 26th 1874 the by law to incorporate The town of Leamington was passed

In Leamington early years lumber and fishing were the kings of industry with 3 docks on the Lake Erie shore and 3 railways to enable the shipping of products to markets far away. Gas and oil was discovered in Essex County and became the next major industry. Many wells can still be seen functioning to this day. A cattle bonanza was also born during this period.

The next major industry was the growing, harvesting and processing of tobacco. This is virtually gone from the area now. With the land cleared, agriculture on the land became the areas major industry. In the 1920's community leaders adopted the slogan "Leamington, in the garden of Canada."

The most significant milestone occurred in 1908 when the town's leaders persuaded the H.J. Heinz Company of Pittsburgh to locate their Canadian factory here. They started processing pickles first then in 1909 started to make the world famous ketchup we know today. Leamington soon became known as the Tomato Capital of Canada.

During these changes the uptown area began to flourish with merchants that provided the local residents and businesses with a wide variety of goods and services. This uptown area, known as the four corners at Erie and Talbot was the place to be. It still is! This was the area to accomplish all your shopping needs. As you strolled around the uptown there were the banks, grocery stores, restaurants and personal goods stores.

The uptown area has gone through many changes and transformations. Merchants and businesses would come and go over the years and unfortunate incidents like fires would take away some of the original buildings. However many still remain with great merchants and shops to cater to your needs.



We would like to take you on a tour to discover our uptown describing the “then and now” places of interest. Please come along for the walk and see what changes this great town has seen over the years.

We will start at the tourist Tomato located at the corners of Talbot St. W. and Mill St W. at Fox. This structure was built by the Engineers of H.J. Heinz Company and was opened on May 8th 1961.

Talbot St W S Side

Walking east towards the four corners on the South side of Talbot St the first building is now the Art Gallery with a great memorabilia area dedicated to the H.J Heinz Company.

Also inside is the Erie Quest display, artifacts from ships found in nearby Lake Erie Please go in and take a good look around. In the past this grand building was home to the Government of Canada local offices including a Customs and Excise.



Walking along towards the four corners we see many different businesses ranging from clothing to specialty food stores. Back in the 1930's this stretch was private homes with small businesses out front. A unique location is a small barbershop run by the Mastronardi brothers. This is a truly a barbershop from times past. As we pass the Shotten Parkette take some time to look at the murals of buildings from the past posted here. Moving up towards the four corners are various shops and boutiques. The large new

3 storey concrete building occupied by Sale E Pepe Ristorante was Diana's Restaurant in the 1970's and Diana's Sweets before that, truly an old fashion soda fountain. Clyde Hatch at Ease has been in the same location since the 1970's and was previously occupied by Ormston's Grocery in the 1930's. We next have Natasja's Hair Design formerly Bennet Dental Lab. Next is Exquistite Fashions where Wharram's Jewellery was located from 1955 to 1980. At the corner we now have the Pita Place, which in 1974 was Paul Brown's Quality Footwear. In this stretch of Talbot St W the landscape of businesses has changed dramatically over the years. In the 1930's this area had homes and various businesses including the Lyric Theatre, a bank, jewelers, grocers, and drug stores as well as clothiers, lunch counters and professional offices. What a difference from then to now!



Talbot St W 1960's



Talbot St W

We are now at the S.W corner of Erie St S and Talbot St W. At one time an electric railway system ran right into the uptown core of Leamington. The Windsor, Essex and Lake Shore Railway brought city weary travelers to Leamington to enjoy the area's bounty. This railway closed in 1938.



The four corners at Erie St S in 1908

Erie St. S. West Side

Turning the corner onto Erie St. S. on the west side we have various small business shops all along the first block. The most interesting from a historical perspective, is the current Sun Parlor Cab office. Formerly it was Whites Lunch. You can see the name carved into the step. Where Makayla Beauty Salon is today was Beneficial Finance, and in the 1930's, albeit a different structure was a Chinese Laundry. J & G Bargain Brothers was M. Schmidt Jewelers. T-K Discount is still here and at the corner is the International Hotel. Before the hotel was built in the 1930's at this corner was a livery stable and barn owned by a George Atkins, a Town Councilor. Jumping across Mill St are two cafes and the Eerie Art Shop, Forsyth Motors formally occupied this section of Erie St. S. The next structure is now known as the The Village Inn that in the 1930's was known as the Auto Stop Hotel. The train pictured above use to drop off passengers there.



Erie St S. West Side 2009

Erie St. S. East Side

Going across Erie St to the east side the Babkirk Tax Offices were formally Laba Cleaners. Moving back up Erie St there are various shops providing services, clothing and personal grooming. The Jean Academy is unique in that the Major Chord Music store was here in the 1970's. The interior of the building is like an orchestra pit. We continue to move towards the four corners, the next block of businesses consists of clothing stores, Modern Ground formally Sorrell Jeweler then Mode Tot previously Bert's Men and Boys Wear. Next UNKNOWN, which was Reid Furniture. The former Bank of Montreal still stands today and will soon house Lamington's performing Arts Centre. There are personal, and professional services outlets that remain as we reach the four corners again were Ten Thousand Villages shop is today. This store had previously been Al Law Mean's Wear in the 1960's and before that Cox gent's furnishings in the early 1900's.



Erie St S East Side 2009

Talbot St. E South Side



Talbot St East South side 2009

Turning east on Talbot street again we are on the south side of the street. Along here we find two drug stores computer professionals and clothing merchants. Where Hard Drive Café and Cybergrade Technologies are today was the former Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce, the night deposit box is still in the wall. Further along is a Mexican store, in the 1930's this was a jewelry store, the advertising markings are still at the window base.



We come to Princess Street where there is currently an empty lot. This was where the Leamington Hotel once stood until the building was demolished in the late 1980's. The photograph below was taken from the roof of this hotel in the 1930's.



Talbot St E facing west towards the four corners in the 1930's

Talbot St. E. North Side

Next we cross Talbot Street to the north side to walk back towards the four corners. Here we also see an empty lot and the more modern buildings. The worst fire in Leamington's recent history destroyed this section on June 20th, 1989. When it was over it had engulfed 3 separate buildings and destroyed 9 businesses, none of which are here today.



Talbot St East north side 2009

As we head west we find cafes, restaurants, clothing and professional businesses. Kennedy's Cleaners has been here for many years. At the corner we come across The Gingerbread House restaurant, formerly Canada Trust and in the 1970's, the Toronto Dominion Bank.



At the four corners facing Erie St N 2009

Erie St. N. East Side

Moving north up Erie Street we find restaurants clothiers, a chocolate shop and lastly the former town hall of Leamington. These are pretty much the original buildings on this block. The most interesting building currently occupied by Gilligans was formally Edwards TV. Odd's and Ends was formally Schmidt's Grocers and Willabee's was Beaul's Furniture and Interiors in the 1970's.



Erie St. N. West Side

Crossing over Erie St N to the west side and you're standing in front of Royal Canadian Legion, which was formally Dixie Autoland. Returning to the four corners we pass The Et Cetera Shop occupying the 3-story IOOF Temple building built in 1901. Source for Sports is next which was previously Leamington Sporting Goods.

Talbot St. W. North Side

Turning right we are back on Talbot St W. on the north side. A fire destroyed several businesses at this corner in 1967; a date tablet is located on the corner of the building. Paterson's Dry Goods and the Pro Hardware occupied these buildings prior to this mishap. Passing Beautiful Reasons we arrive at Jackson's Fine Gifts and Unforgettable Boutique. This section was for many years Jackson's Furniture & China. The next building now occupied by Wharram's Jewellery was formally the Royal Bank in the 1970's and before that the Union Bank in the 1930's. The uniquely round windowed store next was the Agnew Surpass Shoe store currently occupied by the Clothing Bar. At the corner the current Royal Bank resides which was previously the A&P Grocery store. It moved to the southern part of town and is currently named Metro.



Wharram's 2009

At this juncture we are at Talbot St W and Queens St. Look to your right up Queens and you will see the Gallery Restaurant, with its outdoor patios, once the temporary Art Gallery home hence the name. This building was originally a Pentecostal church, and was built in 1941.



Gallery Restaurant

We are near the end of our journey as the next block is completely occupied by Gabriele Floor and Home; the largest home décor store in the area. F.W Woolworth's previously occupied this large structure. From the 1920's to the 1960's there have been a variety of different business along this stretch of Talbot. At the corner of Queens there was garage and service station and before that the Huffman Hotel. From there to the corner at Albert Street were 5 residences and 2 offices. One in particular was the F.R. Gregory residence which also served as a tobacco trading office in the 1930's. This office was located where Gabriele's front entrance is now.



Front Entrance to Gabriele's



F.R. Gregory Office in the 1930's



Talbot W at Mill St 1930's



Four Corners in 1928 facing Erie St S.



Union Bank 1930's

That's our brief tour of the Uptown Leamington area. For more information visit the Leamington Public Library at the corner of Erie St. N. and John St. They have many books and articles on the history of Leamington.

Sources: Leamington's Heritage 1874 – 1974 compiled by Frances Selkirk Snell
Leamington's Book of History The Old Boys reunion of 1939
Leamington – Mersea Souvenir History and Centennial Program