

## Henry Warren Lancey

Henry W. Lancey was born April 5<sup>th</sup>, 1826 in Pittsfield, Maine. The son of Thomas and Susan (Wheat) Lancey, Henry lived in Pittsfield he was 31 years of age. In 1857 he married Miss. Lydia Emmeline Drummand of Bangor Maine and the couple moved to Portland, Maine. In Portland, Lancey started a wholesale hardware business that proved quite successful for him. However, the rumors of growing opportunities in the Canadian oil industry were working their way south across the border into the United States. Lancey like so many others decided to pack up his life, sell his business and set off for Canada. In late 1865 he and his wife moved to Petrolia having been attracted by the growing oil boom in the Lambton County area. He utilized the money he had made from the sale of his hardware business in Maine and invested heavily in land and oil production. He would quickly become one of the area's largest oil producers.

Henry Warren Lancey and his wife had two daughters, Ella and Emma Lancey. Ella Lancey married William English, a local book keeper and manager who had worked for Henry since he was 16 years of age. Emma married a Henry B. Sherman of Chicago. The Lancey's had also had a little boy, but he died very young. William English became instrumental in the Lancey empire and made quite a name for himself in the town of Petrolia as well. He joined Lancey as a clerk at the age of 16. In 1881 he worked as a live-in book keeper for the Burgess family in Petrolia. William married Ella W. Lancey on April the 13<sup>th</sup> 1892 and later became the manager for the Crown Savings & Loans Co. He was also hired to manage the Petrolia Wagon Works a local company plagued with financial trouble. He also started Lambton-Kent Creameries, a local company that shipped butter to Great Britain. When the Petrolia Water Works was built, English became Petrolia's first Water Commissioner. This led to municipal government where he served as both a member of council and even Mayor. In politics he was a Conservative with Liberal views.

In the late 1860's Lancey made one of the best decisions of his business career. He reinvested a portion of his money as a shareholder in an English oil syndicate called the Western of Canada. This investment proved substantially prosperous for Lancey. Just 12 years after he had invested in the syndicate he sold his holdings at a massive profit. He received \$250,000 for his share, that's approximately \$5.8 million in today's money for just one of his businesses! Yet instead of running off and building a massive palace or starting his own town, Henry Lancey put his money back into Petrolia. For instance, he helped fund the Consumers Oil Refining Company, which was one of the town's first oil refineries. Lancey would remain president of the refinery until just before his death. He was also the Chairman of the Mutual Oil Association, which was one of several Petrolia based oil cartels.

In July of 1871, Lancey purchased the assets of the Crescent Petroleum Association, a local oil producer that was having trouble. The company's assets included 190 acres of land southwest of Bear Creek, several small homes, steam engines, oil rigs, piping, and scores of other petroleum equipment. Using some of that land, Lancey decided to create a high-class housing subdivision in the style of his New England birthplace. This development was up high on the hill overlooking Bear Creek, safe from the raging spring flood waters and in the quieter western side of Petrolia. He called his development Crescent Park after the Crescent Petroleum Association that he had bought the land from. The first three

streets that you use to enter the subdivision he named Lancey Street, Warren Street and Henry Street after himself. The other three streets he named Ella, Emma and Emmeline streets after his wife and two girls. He purchased the land in 1872 and by 1874 there were 13 homes built in the Park. The open field in the center of the park had originally been designed for additional housing, but it was never built upon so it remained as an open area where residents could play croquet or have picnics. In Crescent Park Lancey built himself a beautiful timber frame house with colonial styling to match the atmosphere of his subdivision. The home is now owned by Martin and Dorothy Dillon who have gone to great extent to retain the originality of the home utilizing period lighting and garden architecture.

In 1881, Lancey decided to build a massive brick store block in Petrolia's west end. Until this point the majority of development in Petrolia was taking part in the eastern side of Bear Creek. Many skeptics laughed at Mr. Lancey, claiming him to be a fool for wanting to build such a nice and expensive structure so far from the business district in the east end. One man claimed that Lancey's plan "would be pure folly", since there would be no one to buy from him in the west end. Lancey brushed aside the criticism and mockery and built his block anyway. In a show of wit Lancey named his store block "Lancey's Folly", carving the name into a keystone on the front for all to see. The store was located on the corner of Tank Street and Petrolia Line where Crabby Joe's restaurant is located today. "Lancey's Folly" started such a building boom on the western side of Bear Creek that within a few short years the focal point of the town had migrated from the eastern side to the west. Lancey's mockers could do nothing but watch as other large brick buildings went up along Petrolia Street (now Petrolia Line) such as Van Tuyl & Fairbank's massive store and the Kerr building. "Lancey's Folly" housed a general mercantile store, operated by Henry W. Lancey himself, as well as the Scarsbrook General Store. Later a creamery run by William English would operate on the main floor while the Masonic hall met on the second floor.

Henry W. Lancey showed very little interest in the political affairs of Petrolia. He served one term on council, but never took part ever again. He left no record of any political affiliation despite his popularity and prominence in the town. Lancey instead, was more interested in the business affairs of the town, helping to promote economic growth wherever possible. As an Anglican, Lancey was always an honourable, honest and upright man that demanded equal honesty and justice from others. He was openly criticized in the Topic a Petrolia newspaper in February of 1880. Lancey felt himself so insulted by the remarks made in the Liberalist newspaper that he sued the company for libeling his character and demanded the name of the author. The charge which he claimed to the tune of \$3,000 was later dropped by Lancey. Henry W. Lancey showed no hard feelings when the Topic would later rent space in "Lancey's Folly".

On August 15<sup>th</sup>, 1891 Henry W. Lancey passed away. The official death certificate states the cause of death as Paralysis. All stores in the town of Petrolia closed from 1pm to 4pm for Mr. Lancey's funeral. Mrs. Lancey died on November 5<sup>th</sup>, 1899 of Organic Disease of the Bowel. She showed no signs of being gravely ill until the third day when in the morning the disease entered an acute phase. That same day at 8:00 she died. The Lancey family made great contributions in the business and commercial planning of the town of Petrolia. While his brick building was torn down in the 1960's the other brick buildings that were built because of Henry Lancey's business sense and risk taking now form our

Victorian downtown. Crescent Park, his subdivision, remains intact and well preserved. The original street names and homes are still present and well-kept by their 21<sup>st</sup> century owners.