

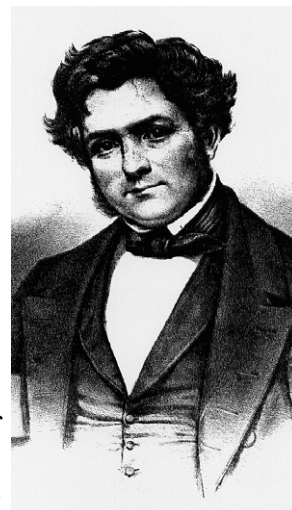
*grant, and his son settled on it some years before his father followed. Neil O'Neil then made his home on half the original purchase, and spent the rest of his life there. He and his wife were cared for in their old age by their son, John."*

In 1855, Neil sold his original grant of land to William Thom (it is not known if this was his son-in-law) and moved to Plympton Twp. In 1853, Neil had deeded the west half of L 4 C 1 in Plympton to his son Robert and then, in 1872, the other half of the lot to son John.

### **Why did the O'Neil families choose Lambton County?**

The Lanark families moved to Lambton County at the urging of the Hon. Malcolm Cameron (1808-1876). Cameron, a colourful opportunist, was a dominant figure in the early settlement of Sarnia and surrounding areas. As well as a member of the parliament and a newspaper man, Cameron was an entrepreneur, realtor, ship and railroad builder, temperance advocate and an exporter.

He was born in Trois-Rivières, Quebec to Euphemia MacGregor and Angus Cameron, a hospital sergeant in a Scottish regiment, who established a tavern beside the Mississippi River between Lanark and Perth. Malcolm was the 'barefoot ferry boy' who carried travelers across the river, then a store clerk, a stable boy and a clerk in a brewery and distillery. In 1834 he joined with his brother, John, in establishing the *Bathurst Courier*, an independent newspaper which folded within a year as the wealthy Tory merchants refused to advertise in it. Cameron was a Reformer in politics who fought for the farmers/settlers of Lanark against the establishment i.e. the Family Compact. By the 1830s it was evident that most of the Lanark settlers could not make enough money from their land to pay back the loan which had been initially given them. As long as the loan was outstanding they did not have clear title to their land. Cameron took up their cause and in 1835 the loans were forgiven. He was first elected in 1836 as a representative for Lanark and he generally supported the Reformers and went so far as to volunteer in the Rebellion of 1837. He continued to represent Lanark until 1851 when he transferred to the constituency of Lambton. He served in many different capacities in the various governments (Inspector of Revenue, Postmaster General, member of the Board of Railway Commissioners and Queen's Printer). He was called a 'coon' because like a treed racoon you would never know which way he would jump for he had a habit of changing parties depending on the issue.



Hon. Malcolm Cameron

In 1833, Cameron visited the St. Clair area and was very impressed with the opportunities the area presented. He established a general store in Port Sarnia in 1835 and then moved there in 1837. He operated lumber and flour mills and built ships to transport merchandise along the lakes from Chicago to Quebec City. He acquired good land in the interior and established a timber business and then in 1847 was a contractor in the building of the Great Western Railway.



Historic marker honoring Malcolm Cameron in Perth

The land in Lambton was virgin forest so that the first crop off the land was oak timbers for the shipyards, shingles from the pine trees, potash for soap, fertilizer and ammunition from the elms and syrup and sugar from the maples. Once the forest was cut the land looked like a prairie, ready for the first crops. The land in Plympton and Enniskillen, the two townships where the families settled, was much better farm land than that of Lanark County.



Painting by Evelyn Griffiths of a typical Lambton Co. barn