

Bluewater **HERITAGE**

Walking & Driving Tours



HAY TOWNSHIP *'The Brother of Invention'*

Produced by the Municipality of Bluewater Heritage Advisory Committee in 2018 with the generous assistance of the Huron Heritage Fund.

This tour will take approximately 60 minutes at a comfortable driving speed.



Municipality of
Bluewater

WELCOME!

This is a Driving Tour.

Just because this is a driving tour, you don't need to spend all of the time stuck inside your car! Be sure to take time to get out and walk around, to explore the little villages and public spaces and to enjoy a libation or snack when you see one of our local breweries, wineries or cideries, or our interesting cafes and restaurants.

And before you start your engines for this driving tour, a few things to keep in mind.

Please respect people's privacy. Many places on the tour are private residences and their mention is meant to highlight their history or architecture. Their presence on the tour doesn't include permission to enter the properties, unless they are public spaces or businesses offering public services.

Keep in mind that construction and other temporary events may involve the need to adjust your tour route – please keep a Huron County map in the car (available at tourist information centres and libraries) or have

your GPS (app or device) in the car to help make any necessary detours.

Water and picnic supplies are also nice to have along for a tour in the country, not to mention a cooler for refreshments or to store the goodies you find at the farm markets, local breweries and cider shops along the way.

Please respect the land and its property owners. Just because every square feet of countryside isn't fenced, have buildings on it or look occupied, does not mean it's 'wild' and free to wander upon. Land, no matter how open, isn't public property. Unless designated a park, someone owns it.

Don't stress if you get lost – sometimes you find the best treasures this way. In this area, the lake is always West. That's why we have such great sunsets!

We start our tour in Drysdale, a small community located at the intersection of Kippen Road and Highway 21.

You'll be driving South on Highway 21 to St. Joseph. But before you head out, you'll want to read this information about the history of the general area.

DRYSDALE AREA

French Canadian Settlement

The area along the lake between Drysdale and St. Joseph (or between Drysdale and Bayfield) is a lovely drive, even on a rainy day.

To the West are farms shaped like those in Quebec along the St. Lawrence, long and narrow. This area on the lakeside between Drysdale and St. Joseph was a French Canadian community whose ancestors may have come to this area for jobs clear-cutting the land so it could be farmed.

This was the only French settlement in southwestern Ontario between Midland and Windsor at the time. The settling families came from Quebec's Sainte-Élisabeth,

Joliette, Saint-Félix-de-Valois, and Berthierville around 1846.

The village of present day St. Joseph was nameless until it became Johnson's Mills in 1860 and Lakeview in 1874. When Narcisse Cantin changed the name to St. Joseph after his beloved saint, that name stuck.

While the French loggers were in the Stanley/Hay area, they saw an opportunity to own their own land. The opportunity to become a landowner was more difficult and more expensive to achieve in Quebec. Many bought land in this area, and went home to move their relatives and families to the shores of Lake Huron.

Original Families

Some of the French families that came to the area in the 1800s, are still here today. Their names can be found on the mail boxes, businesses and barns.

In the once prosperous hamlet of Drysdale, at the junction of Highway 21 and Kippen Road, many of its store and business owners were French – like Joe Bedour, Louis Brisson, Jerry Corriveau (who was also a shoe maker) and John (Jean) Denomme.

In 1890, Joseph Ducharme built a blacksmith shop on the west side of Highway 21 in Drysdale and remained in business until 1949, long past the age of horse power. By 1949, he was doing more work in forging iron than in shoeing horses.

If you keep a sharp eye out, you'll find the clues to the area's past and those who settled here.

While speaking of who settled here, do you know who originally lived on this land before the Europeans arrived?

Check out this link to find out what treaty territory you're in: https://files.ontario.ca/treaties_map_english.pdf

LOT 6, WLR, HAY WEST
(Just south of Danceland Road)
P. Contine (Cantin) Farm

Antoine Cantin (or Contin, as it's spelled on the 1879 map of Hay Township) made the journey from Quebec to the shores of Lac Huron and settled on Lot 6 Lakeshore Road West (LRW) around 1850.

He came to the area with his wife, Julie Manville. They lived in Goderich in 1846 before settling on land in Hay Township.

The Cantins had only two children – both boys. Julie died between 1851 and 1861, leaving Antoine a widower. He split his 51 acre lot between his two sons, Pierre and Archin, both of whom appear to be born in Hay Township.

Antoine's sons raised their families on their father's land, each with 25 acres to clear, plant and harvest. Archin settled on the front end of the property that fronted on Lakeshore Road West, now known as Highway 21 (or Bluewater Highway).

Pierre raised his family on the back half of the property, overlooking the lake and its beach below. Pierre, a brick and stone mason, married Mathilda Masse, who lived just up the road. She and Pierre had eight children: Narcisse; Rosalie; Rachel (Denomme); Pierre (married Josephine Papineau); Marie Josephine (Papineau); Jules; Mary Claris; and Louis Paul.

Pierre (Peter) and Mathilda's oldest son, Narcisse Maxime Cantin, had a head for business and no desire to farm. He went into business at 17 as a cattle dealer in Hensall, married Joséphine Denommé at 19, and moved to Buffalo shortly after the wedding where he began work laying gas pipe lines. After his invention of an automatic pressure regulating gas burner, he became a salesman for the Gas Consumers Benefit Company and responsible for a large area that included southern Ontario. He returned to the St. Joseph area in 1896, seven short years

later, three years after his father died.

Narcisse and Joséphine had nine children: Marie Clarisse “Josephine”; Joseph Louis “Olivier”; Marie “Anne”; Marie “Antoinette”; Marie “Madelaine” Leda; Joseph Louis de Gonzaque; Jean Narcisse; Napoléon; and Joseph Lewis Regish (JLR). All were raised in St. Joseph, while their father tried to transform a hamlet into a city.

But that story continues down the road in the village of St. Joseph, home of spectacle and drama on a scale that boggles the 21st century mind.

Leaving Drysdale, drive south along the Bluewater Highway (Highway 21) until you reach St. Peter’s Catholic Church.

73334 BLUEWATER HIGHWAY St. Peter’s Catholic Church



While enjoying your drive along the Lake Huron’s shore, keep an eye to the East for the tall white spire of the St. Peter’s Catholic Church.

If you stop to explore, please treat this site with the reverence and respect it deeply deserves.

This elegant yellow brick church began as a log cabin that served as place of worship, school and meeting place for those of the Catholic faith. In 1856, 10 acres on the southwest corner of Concession Lake Road East (LRE) was registered as a Roman Catholic cemetery.

One of the first people buried in the cemetery is Mrs. Gett, wife of Samuel Boyle. She died on November 30, 1856.

In 1859, the log building serving the local Catholic population burned to the ground. Getting wood was not a problem due to its abundance. With help from the congregation, the log church, school and hall was rebuilt in months.

As the farmers in the area cleared their lands and began to bring in money for their crops, the collection plate grew heavier, allowing the congregation to save enough to build a fine yellow brick church and steeple in the Gothic tradition of sharply arched windows, soaring steeple, a circular rose stained glass window and a layout found in most European medieval churches.

Within two years, the brick rectory addition (priest's residence) was constructed to the original brick church's east end.



In 1882, the peal of new church bells, donated by Father Moron and blessed by the Right Reverend Monsignor Bruyère, rang out over the lakeshore.

A second fire broke out in 1894 in the back of the church, damaging the priest's quarters. Within the year, the damaged portion of St. Peter's was rebuilt and the priest resettled in his residence.

More church building was undertaken in 1899 to add a transept (wing of the church built at a right angle to the

south side of the main building) and a sacristy (an apartment within which the Church's sacred articles are kept). Stained glass windows began to replace clear glass, sponsored by the congregation and individual families as acts of remembrance.

A barn to shelter parishioners' horses from Lake Huron's cold winter winds; other outbuildings; and a pulpit were later added to the church grounds and church proper. As the congregation prospered, so did St. Peter's.

St. Peter's literally turned red as a summer sunset in 1929, when Father Marchand decided to have the brick exterior painted that colour. It remained so until returned to its original brick yellow in 1987 through a sandblasting and restoration project.

Between 1941 and 1946, as more cars than horses began to fill the church parking lot, the barn was torn down and a frame wooden church hall was built in its place to host church gatherings, meetings and social events. Between 1946 and 1953, a one storey 25 foot brick addition was added to the rectory under Monsignor William Bourdeau's term as priest.

The 1960s brought significant changes to the service and structure of the church as a result of Vatican II. In St. Peter's, as in many Catholic churches, the communion rail was removed and the priest began delivering the service facing the congregation, addressing them in English or French, instead of Latin.

St. Peter's Catholic Church continues to serve its community well. The church celebrated with the world when a little known priest from Montréal became Canada's first saint born in Canada. Brother André, who visited the church and community between 1917 and 1922 as a guest of the Cantin family, was canonized on October 18, 2010 as Saint André Bessette for the many miracles of faith and healing he performed on the thousands

of people who came to him for help.

Hidden within the sacristy of St. Peter's Catholic Church are no doubt sacred religious items used by Brother André on his visits to the area. Though on a priest's vacation and very fragile of health, he would help those who came to him. One of his wishes were granted in 1972 – but let's save that story for your exploration of St. Joseph's Park.

The Statues of St. Peter's Church



The group of four statues found on the south side of the Church – two angels and St. Joseph holding Infant Jesus while standing over the figure of a kneeling Brother André – were added in October 1955 ... a donation by the Cantin family to remember their great friend, Brother André, a simple man of God from Montréal.

Below is carved, "St. Joseph, priez pour nous; pray for us."

Made from concrete, the statue was produced by the Montréal firm of Carli-Petrucci. The two angels which sit atop a small brick wall on either side of the main statue complete the monument, which was designed by Dr. Josef Hilpert.

Father Henri Bernard CSC of Saint Joseph's Oratory of Montréal presided over the celebration of the unveiling of the monument in October 1955; he gave bilingual instructions to the St. Peter's Catholic Church congregation which filled the church every evening.

When the lone statue of the Sacred Heart of Jesus was put in place around 1922 at the late Brother André's request, the terrible storms in the area reputedly subsided. The plaque on the statue of the Sacred Heart of Jesus with his arms

raised reads, "Sacre Coeur de Jesus Sauvez Nous" (Sacred Heart of Jesus Save Us.) Below is engraved, "En souvenir du révérend frère André qui a demeuré quelques temps prami nous 1917 et 1922." (In memory of the Reverend Brother André who lived among us 1917 and 1922)

Brother André



Brother André was a simple brother of the Catholic faith, who didn't minister to a congregation. He suffered from frail health his entire life, but perserved with deep faith to become a porter of the Collège de Notre-Dame-du-Sacré Coeur in Montréal – sweeping; lighting lamps; giving hair cuts; running errands for the teaching priests and the school's boys; and assisting the sick. In this he excelled, helping cure many a sick student with his prayers to his favourite saint, Saint Joseph.

Many sick people of Montréal heard of Brother André's work and came to the school asking for his help. When the students' parents complained of the danger to their children through infection, Brother André asked permission to build a small chapel to Saint Joseph on church land on Mont Royal. Since the Church's permission was dependent on the funds coming from other sources, Brother André built it from the pennies he was given by the students for haircuts and errands.

Narcisse Cantin of St. Joseph met Brother André in 1908 when he was in Montréal visiting one of his sons, who

was in school there. Cantin liked him immediately and the two men – the small, frail man of the church and the big, tall French Canadian from the shores of Lake Huron – began a long friendship.

Brother André visited St. Joseph and stayed with the Cantins on several occasions between 1917 and 1922. Photos from the era show him with the Cantin family, spending time with friends of the area on the dock, at the St. Joseph Fishery and at Narcisse Cantin's home. He continued his friendship with Narcisse's son, Joseph, and daughter, Josie's family, who lived in Montréal. When he died in 1937, the Cantin family members were given special invitations to his funeral, as they were for his canonization ceremony in Rome in 2010.

The next stop is less than 200 m south of the church.

**73304 HIGHWAY 21
Ecole Ste. Marie (CHCSS) #1
Hay & Stanley**



Though it's not clear if classes in the log church of St. Peter's Church continued, a French Catholic school for area students was built beside the church in 1959. Ursuline nuns from the Convent, located in the Denomme farmhouse across the road from the school, taught Grades 1 through 10.

The new school had three classrooms and a resource room for a population of 84 pupils. Mother St. Felix taught Grades 1 to 3; Dorothy Etue taught Grades 4 to 6; and Mother Rosella (also the school's Principal) taught Grades 7 to 10.

By 1963, Grades 9 and 10 were no longer taught at École Ste. Marie, and area students

attending Grade 9 and higher attended the local high schools.

Between 1964 and 1970, when the Ursuline Convent across the road closed, Mother Jean Marie Audette was Principal of École Ste. Marie. Despite the changes, enrolment climbed to 107, necessitating the addition of a fourth classroom.

In 1960, Lilliane (Dupont) Laporte began to teach at the school, going on to become its last principal from 1975 to 1985. When local enrolment dropped below 53 students in Grades 1 through 8, the Separate School Board closed the school and bussed students to St. Boniface School in Zurich.

Part of the schoolyard was acquired by St. Peter's for the Cemetery. Doug Ducharme bought the building and turned it into an apartment building.

Continue heading South along Highway 21 toward St. Joseph.

DANCELAND ROAD

The lakeshore lots along Lake Huron have always been in high demand, no matter their height from the water's edge.

From Drysdale to St. Joseph, families from Quebec inhabited almost every lot on the west side of the trail called Lake Range Road, a primitive predecessor to Highway 21 (also known as Bluewater Highway). Along Kippen Road and the London Road (Highway 4), property lots also sold well.

In the 1950s, along the edge of the lakefront lots of the Quebec settlement, a new demand grew for small lots. Farmers in this area, if allowed, could sever small strips of lake cliff property, survey it into tiny lots and people would buy it for cottages.

Many small lake front communities have developed at the western rim of Huron County from Exeter Road to Amberley, North of Goderich. But in Hay Township, where the land is so flat, it's easy to see the cottage communities from

Highway 21.

Keep an eye out for Danceland Road. It leads from Highway 21 back to a laketop community that once had a lively summer dance hall. The hall attracted visitors from miles around with its entertainment and the opportunity to dance the night away with friends, old and new.

Keep travelling south along Highway 21.

72850 BLUEWATER HIGHWAY Narcisse Cantin Home



This house was built by Narcisse Cantin to impress.

The solid Edwardian style of its time, with high ceilings; spacious rooms, and space that stretched high and wide, lit up with the Lake's dazzling sunsets in the evening and was bathed in the light of morning sunrises.

It was large enough to contain Cantin's growing family and still have room to entertain lavishly.



When Narcisse and his wife, Josephine returned to his home community in 1896, he was no longer a farm boy, but a businessman and manufacturer. He had one idea that occupied his mind from the age of 26 in 1896 until his death at 66 in 1940.

Narcisse's business success creating, buying and selling patents for inventions – such as a cement called Crockery Mender; a liquid furniture polish; and his gas regulator – brought him into contact with

a number of American business owners. Narcisse soon sold them on the creation of a deep water canal system for safer ship travel that ended at a city he called St. Joseph, on the shore of Lake Huron.



His vision and the wealth from his business successes in Buffalo inspired Narcisse to build a city to demonstrate what could be achieved.

Under his wife's name and through family relatives, Narcisse began to acquire land on the east and west side of the Lakeshore Road (Bluewater Highway) in the area of Lots 9-12, and in October 1896, he created a town plot. He named the town St. Joseph in honour his favorite saint – the carpenter and guardian of Jesus.

Prior to the Cantin's land purchases and surveying, the small community of predominantly Catholic French Canadian settlers had been known as Johnson's Mill or Lakeview.

Josephine Cantin began the dream on October 31, 1896 by buying 14.5 acres from David Spencer on the North half of Lot 11 for \$800; it was one of the largest early land purchases central to the establishment of St. Joseph. By February 13, 1897, the Cantins had mortgaged the property for \$7,000, using the money to purchase other properties and invest in businesses.

The Cantin's next move was to build this large, impressive two storey red brick home on the northern edge of the new St. Joseph for their family of four: Jean (1890); Napoléon A. (1891); Josephine "Josie" (1893) born in the United States; and Olivier (1894), born in Toronto.

While Narcisse worked at building up St. Joseph, he and Josephine continued to

increase their family. Five more children were born to the couple between 1896 and 1904: Marie (1895); Anne (1897); Antoinette (1901); Madeleine (1902); and Louis DeGonzague (1904).

With his enthusiasm and salesmanship, Cantin created a town out of thin air, complete with industry, business and filled with large, stylish houses. At the same time, he began to petition the government for the necessary legislation and permissions to go forth with his canal project.



Throughout the period between 1898 and 1907, Narcisse, under Josephine Cantin's name, continued buying, selling and mortgaging land.

The town survey of the day reads like a list of Cantin's family and investors. Lavallee Street, the main street of St. Joseph (today known as Bluewater Highway 21) was named after brothers, Cyrille and Napoléon Lavallee who invested over \$65,000 in mortgages. George Campbell, another major investor, had an avenue named after him. Many streets were named after Narcisse's children.

St. Joseph grew more quickly than Cantin's family. Buying all the available land allowed Narcisse to ensure that no small buildings were built – buildings that didn't look fashionable and successful. By 1897, he had a road, complete with tile, built from Bluewater Highway to the lakeside where he envisioned a man-made harbour, a busy lakeside port and recreation area.

Building blocks for stores were built by Cantin or local families that invested in his dream. Mr. Foster built a brick and tile yard, and ended up supplying Cantin with the bricks to build the 30 to 40 large homes he

owned and rented out in the community. Oliver Cabana Jr., a Buffalo capitalist, built a second brickyard with three kilns, as well as the Novelty Factory. The Bissonnettes, across the road from Cantin built an organ factory and began a wine vineyard. George Campbell operated a lumberyard, while Mr Blanchard opened a blacksmith shop, Mr. Bachau was the public notary, Dr. Routhier looked after the inhabitants' health and a post office, designated St. Joseph, (and not the former name of Johnson's Mills) was located in Mr. Spencer's home.

To populate the growing village, Cantin recruited expatriate French Canadians in Chicago to the area, promising them employment in the future manufacturing plants, docks, warehouses, summer resorts and lakeside playgrounds he envisioned as a result of the canal.

ST. JOSEPH

Napoléon Cantin House



In 1898, across the road from Narcisse Cantin and his growing family, Olivier and Georgianna Bissonette built one of the first and prettiest homes in St. Joseph: a lovely two storey, yellow brick Victorian style home.

The Bissonettes were friends of the Cantin family. Olivier was the godfather of Narcisse and Josephine's second son, Joseph Louis Olivier Cantin, who was born in 1894.

Behind the house, Bissonette built a brick pipe organ factory, where he made pipe organs and parts. He also planted a vineyard in St. Joseph.

This house was sold (or given) to Narcisse's son, Napoléon, who lived there with his wife, Valerie Laporte after they were

married on March 1, 1916.

Napoléon and Valerie filled the house with their eleven children: Gabrielle; Yvonne; Napoléon Edward; Doris; Joseph Louis Olivier; Eugene; Charles; Pierre; Theresa; André; and Jean-Paul.

It was to Napoléon that his father entrusted the care of his good friend, Brother André, on his first visit to St. Joseph in October 1917. Prior to the Brother's visit, Narcisse wrote his son a five page letter from Buffalo, outlining how he wished his friend treated. According to a translation of the original letter, Narcisse told Napoléon, "Brother André is coming – He is truly a saintly man. Make sure he eats proper, make sure you feed him only our purest food. Learn to know him. He will delight you with wisdom."

And Brother André did delight – with wisdom and, reputedly, with miracles. As his fame as a healer spread throughout the small community, people sought him out. He performed healings in Napoléon and Valerie's living room, stopping one boy from stuttering and helping an asthmatic man to sleep through the night by praying to St. Joseph to intercede on their behalf.

At the time of his first visit, Napoléon and Valerie had just one child, Gabrielle, so Brother André was housed in the tower room of the house. One day as he and Napoléon were speaking, Brother André suggested honouring St. Joseph, the ipso facto saint of the village, with the placement of a statue of the saint in a centrally located but empty lot. He chose the precise location and asked Napoléon to fetch a hammer and a piece of pipe so he could mark the eventual location of the statue. (This was sworn by Napoléon's wife, Valerie in an affidavit used to legitimize the sacred nature of the hammer Brother André employed.)

This promise was eventually fulfilled by the Cantins in St. Joseph Park, where we'll be heading shortly. But before

you leave our current location, take a look at one of the only surviving industrial buildings from the Cantin canal system project.

ST. JOSEPH **Bissonette Pipe Organ Factory**



Olivier Bissonette's Pipe Organ Factory was built behind his house around 1897. The production and selling of organs and organ parts was essentially a one man operation, and therefore not a large employer for the area.

But impression was everything in Cantin's St. Joseph.

The foundation of the building was composed of beach stone, of which there was plenty along St. Joseph's shoreline; the bricks probably came from the local brick works. The labour to build the organ factory, and the many houses Cantin was building came from the local population.

Cantin was not always quick to pay his bills. On a couple of the properties, local liens were issued and the reason cited was "non-payment of the mechanics' wages of John Foster, Laughlin Gordon and James Gow." John Foster was the operator of the new brick works, source of most of the building materials in the village.

The Pipe Organ Factory was in business from 1897 to 1902.

In later years, when Napoléon A. Cantin lived at this address, one of his passions and businesses was breeding horses. While he had purpose built stables, the old organ factory may also have served to board some of his horses.

It was also used as Cantin's Archives regarding his family; his father; Brother André; the development of St. Joseph;

and his father's other plans. His wife, Valerie, even made a little sign for the organ factory building that Napoléon affixed to it that read, "Archives."

After his death, an archivist at the Archives of Ontario, Hugh P. MacMillan, on a tip from the head of Harvard University's School of Celtic Studies, learned about Narcisse Cantin and his life, and tracked down some of his papers to his grandson, Napoléon E. Cantin, then a resident of Grand Oaks, Michigan.

The archivist "struggled for nearly five years to physically acquire the papers, faced with the donor's indecision, busy schedule, illness, desire to sort through the records, and decision to lend out materials from the collection to a researcher in another state."

This excerpt is from Hugh P. MacMillan's book, *Adventures of a Paper Sleuth*. That treasure trove of Cantin material is now known as the Narcisse Cantin fonds and includes 37 maps, 32 plans, 20 technical drawings, 185 photos and 12.6 metres of textual records – correspondence, promotional materials, court documents, clippings and more – and is held at the Archives of Ontario in Toronto.

When Cantin's grandson finally relented, MacMillan drove to Michigan to meet the man he'd been hounding for a full five years. When Cantin agreed to the donation, MacMillan loaded his station wagon with as "many of the boxes" as he could, and headed home. At the border, he was challenged by Canada Customs on the type of material he was bringing into the country; a 2 hour debate ensued before they allowed him entry with his treasure trove of Cantin history.

The rest of Napoléon Sr.'s collection of family memorabilia is housed by the St. Joseph Historical Society on the premises of Hessenland Inn in the St. Joseph Archives and Museum. Hessenland is an area treasure Narcisse would have enjoyed. The Inn

brings many to enjoy its meals, accommodations, and grounds for getaways, weddings, events or just the fine food. And like Bissonette, its owners, Frank and Liz Ihrig, have begun a micro-vineyard.

72846 HIGHWAY 21 Cantin Housing



The white-sided two storey house to the South of the Cantin house is an example of the type of housing that Narcisse Cantin was having built all over St. Joseph.

Built between 1897 and 1902, this house, like the Pipe Organ Factory, probably had a foundation of beach stone and was made of bricks from the St. Joseph Brick Works or wood from George Campbell's lumberyard. The labour for the build was probably supplied by area builders in and around St. Joseph.

Photographs of the day reveal the unusual cut of the two storey bay window, the intricately carved gingerbread brackets drawing attention to the first floor bay window, as well as the dark coloured trim around windows and between the two storeys. With the property line defined by a picket fence, it appeared as elegant as any mansion found in Toronto's more prosperous districts.



With 30 to 40 houses of this size and presence scattered around the village, St. Joseph seemed to visitors and new investors to be an up and coming place to live.

One of Cantin's sales strategies involved bringing investors and their wives into the area by the evening train in Hensall, where a fine carriage was waiting to meet them. As they approached St. Joseph in the twilight, Cantin ensured that all the large houses, business blocks and other structures in the village were ablaze with light.

Narcisse would then 'wine and dine' them either at his home or at the Balmoral Hotel (we'll visit the site shortly) till late in the evening. The next day, he'd wake them up early and have them hustled out of town on the first morning train before they really had a chance to look around, thus giving the impression that St. Joseph was a large community, full of people and businesses.

This home is one of the few that have survived from St. Joseph's first boom.

Today St. Joseph is a popular place to live, with sub-divisions of year-round residences. All that's missing is the canal, the industry and a main street full of shops that Cantin envisioned. That being said, it's probably the reason many residents choose to live here: it's a beautiful and quiet community with a great view of Lake Huron in all her varied moods.

BLUEWATER HIGHWAY & HIGHWAY 83 - S/W CORNER Site of New Balmoral Hotel

The southwest corner of Bluewater Highway and Highway 83 was the site of Narcisse Cantin's huge three storey hotel called the New Balmoral Hotel.

Between 1897 and 1907, work on the Balmoral site continued, boosted at times by investor capital and Cantin's unique problem solving. For example, he bought the contents of a large Montréal hotel which was being demolished and used the furnishings in his St. Joseph's hotel. Although the lounge wasn't graced with the 80' foot long bar counter

he advertised – he never got it completely installed – it did sport many finely crafted pieces.

Scheduled to open June 15, 1907, the New Balmoral was planned and promoted as an intricate part of a summer resort in St. Joseph. Advertisements which claimed the New Balmoral was a “modern all-the-year-round hotel” were printed in newspapers in Toronto, Montréal and the eastern American cities. The resort was to offer fishing, bathing, golf, tennis, riding and the finest imported and domestic wines and liquors.

The Hotel itself took up a town block, with arched entrances and windows gracing its exterior. It had the typical flat roof of the commercial buildings of its time and was built of yellow brick, probably out of the St. Joseph Brickworks. Although the ads for the hotel showed a structure with onion-domed towers, those were never built.

To reserve or arrange views of the hotel and its environments, interested parties were to mail N.M. Canton, Secretary, in St. Joseph, Ontario, but the ads also listed a New York office opposite the Waldorf-Astoria.



The hotel acted as a lure to those rich individuals who enjoyed the best things in life, and might like to invest in a new Eden of recreation on the shores of Lake Huron. To do so, a hotel needed to exist. “If you build it, they will come,” seemed to be Cantin’s philosophy.

Except he couldn’t realize his dream of building a canal without a great deal of money and government support.

St. Joseph – with its hotel, large houses, industries and businesses – was a stepping stone and lure which helped him obtain many things,

including government docks (which helped the local fishing industries). But the canal remained elusive.

Around 1907 and 1908, Cantin decided to prioritize his goals. He'd put a lot of energy into St. Joseph – the locals could take it from there. He needed to concentrate on seeing his dream of a canal system through to fruition. He divested himself of the St. Joseph development and concentrated fully on the canal, eventually moving to Montréal to pursue investors from there.

Without his strong presence and personality, the development of the village of St. Joseph wobbled, then crashed. By 1920, most of the industries were gone and the New Balmoral Hotel was torn down. (Pieces of the Hotel were sold to local businesses and individuals. One of its large plate glass windows ended up in the storefront of Thomas "Cleave" Joynt at 112 King Street in Hensall, and was reputedly still there in the 1980s.) Only the houses, buildings, a road to the lake and the government docks remained.

But the village of St. Joseph was a place history did not forget, and the fascinating story of Narcisse Cantin and his big dreams for that small village still loom large in local imaginations.

33996 HIGHWAY 21

St. Joseph's Park



It seems unlikely that a vigorous businessman with visions of golden success and a poor, sickly Catholic Brother and doorkeeper would find anything in common, but Narcisse Cantin and Brother André did just that.

When they met in Montréal in 1908 at the St. Joseph Oratory of Mont-Royal, they

discovered they shared a personal devotion to St. Joseph and from this developed a life-long friendship. When Cantin invited Brother André to see the town he'd named after their favourite saint, Brother André was delighted to accept, after getting permission from the Oratory.

During that 1917 visit, when he choose the site for the placement of a statue of St. Joseph, Brother André set in motion the creation of the St. Joseph Memorial Park. It took 55 years to become a reality, but it eventually did happen.

The white marble statue of St. Joseph came originally from St. Peter's Seminary in London, Ontario and was placed in the spot Brother André chose on a piece of land donated by the Cantin family for the creation of a park. On the pedestal of the statue is engraved a dedication to Brother André:

“Memorial to Brother André of St. Joseph's Oratory on Mount-Royal at Montréal, whose virtues and good works, known throughout the world, inspire this dedication to St. Joseph, patron saint of Canada. This exact spot was chosen for a memorial by Brother André.”

In 1982, ten years later, Pope John Paul II beatified Brother André; and in 2007, Pope Benedict XVI canonized him as Saint André Bessette.

That same year, a provincial heritage plaque was erected in the new park honouring Narcisse Cantin, “Father of the St. Lawrence Seaway.”

The park was enlarged in 1999 when the St. Joseph & Area Historical Society installed a brick walkway to make it more accessible; the bricks were engraved with the names of area families. Signage featuring stories and photos of early St. Joseph and the Cantin family, as well as a trellised garden table, were also added. A monument honouring veterans of the St. Joseph area also found a place in the park; the annual Remembrance Day gathering there draws more people every year.

Your Hay Township 'The Brother of Invention Tour' is now complete.

But where will you go now?

From St. Joseph, you can explore more of Hay Township by continuing along the coast until you come to Exeter Road. Turn east and you'll be driving along the southern boundary of the township that leads to the Town of Exeter.

Or you can turn east up Highway 84, past the [Masse Fruit & Vegetable Stand](#) – that deserves a visit. This is one of the only spots in the area where you can get sun-ripened strawberries from the field from June till the first frost. They also sell many other locally raised vegetables, plants, and food products.

If you choose to go up Highway 84, you'll go through Zurich, where you can go on a lovely walking tour and sample the delights of the **Tasty-Nu Bakery** and the treats of [Jerry Rader's Homestyle Catering](#), which no one should miss visiting when in the area. The on-site prepared food is delicious, as are the frozen offerings from many area producers whose ingredients are featured in many of the local restaurants, not to mention the great gift shop and live music on Saturdays in the summer.

Further up Highway 84 is the town of Hensall where you can go on another walking tour, or visit [Ice Culture](#), the source of ice sculptures for events around the world, get a selfie with town founders, the Petty brothers and enjoy great hospitality and witness a railroad still at work, shipping the area's famous white beans across the continent and around the world.

Help us make this tour better!

We'd like to improve your experience with the Bluewater Heritage Tours. Would you kindly click [here](#) to give us your opinion of what you liked best and least about this tour? We'd appreciate it so much. Thank you!

Nothing in life is perfect!

If you find any historical inaccuracies in this tour, please contact us at ecdev@municipalityofbluewater.ca.

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