

# Essex Liberal (Essex, Ontario)

## Title Variations

Essex Centre Liberal  
Essex Center Liberal

## Publication Dates

1885: Dec.? - 1889: Dec. 6

## Frequency

Weekly

## Online Holdings

1886: Mar. 5 (Vol. 2: no. 9) (Whole no. 61) 8p.  
1886: Aug. 27 Supplement 4p.

## Source of our Digitized Holdings

Museum Windsor

## Description

The Essex Liberal had a long and complicated publishing history. The Essex Liberal was preceded by the Argus, owned by George Laing and John Stafford. The Argus was published from January 1885 until December 1885. In December 1885, the Argus was purchased by Dr. James Brien (later a Liberal MP), who changed its name to the Essex Liberal. The new newspaper maintained the numbering of its predecessor. Isaac Harley Brock (1847-1910) was the first editor. He was succeeded by J. G. Hands. Jacob M. Kennedy may have been the editor from August 1886 on; in any case, he bought the paper in April 1887 (Globe and Mail 1887: April 13, page 5). The Essex Liberal was sold

again in 1888 to John E. Johnson of Leamington and then in 1889 to the Walters Brothers, Frank (b. 1865) and Henry (b. 1871). On Friday, December 13th, 1889, they changed the name of the Essex Liberal to the Essex Free Press. The Walters sold the newspaper to Edwin J. Lovelace in August 1892. On June 1st, 1896, the Essex Free Press was then sold to Richard Ruddy ("Bert") Brett and William H. Auld.

The Essex Liberal was published every Friday morning "in time for the earliest mails" from an office and printing plant at the north end of the Essex Centre Manufacturing Company building on Talbot Street. Its motto was "Eternal Vigilance is the Price of Liberty" and it cost \$1 per annum in advance. It was originally an 8 page, 5 column newspaper which was expanded to 6 columns in 1888.

Like its predecessor newspapers in Essex Centre, the Liberal had great local news coverage, with regular reports from all the surrounding villages and towns. It also had extensive general and classified advertising, reports from local organizations, and articles on the needs of Essex Centre and the County. Unlike the earlier papers, the Essex Liberal appears to have been very partisan. It was basically the mouthpiece of local liberals. As mentioned above, Dr. James Brien, the first owner, was eventually elected as a liberal MP for Essex South in 1887. The 4 page supplement that still exists is a detailed account of the annual meeting of the South Essex Liberal Association, including the transcription of speeches by the liberal Ontario Premier, Sir Oliver Mowat and the liberal MPP William Douglas Balfour. Articles in the March 5th, 1886 issue are very critical of the federal conservative government under Sir John A. Macdonald. What is somewhat more disturbing are the editorial notes which contain very nasty personal, and often racist attacks, on local Conservatives. In this one issue, the editor manages to make derogatory comments about French Canadians, African Canadians, and indigenous peoples. This seems to have been the regular editorial tone, as evidenced by many reprints of Essex Liberal remarks in the Globe and Mail and other newspapers. When the Walters changed the newspaper's name on December 13th, 1889 to the Essex Free Press, it was an attempt to take a more independent viewpoint and get away from "partyism" (Detroit Free Press 1889: Dec. 11, p. 8).

Updated: Katharine Ball, March 2020