

# River Walk Heritage Tour.

River walkways with breathtaking views along the historic Thames River, manicured gardens and parks, heritage buildings, and local history unite in Stratford and St. Marys. This interesting blend of architecture, interesting personalities and natural beauty provides an ideal way to spend the day in Perth County.

## Stratford's Avon River

Boasting the largest park land per capita, Stratford's main park system contains approximately 115 acres of formal parkland and nearly 60 acres of natural area. Enjoy the parks, the architecture, and the personalities that are a part of one of Canada's best preserved heritage communities.

*Begin the tour at the York Street Visitor's Information Centre located the base of York Street and Veterans Drive. Walk to York Street and travel west.*

This area known as The Mill Block, is the oldest business block in Stratford and as you can see, was designed to the lay of the land with three stories at the front and four stories here along the back which were originally reserved for deliveries and stables. Four & six Ontario Street as well as 55 Ontario Street (along the front) were constructed during the 1850s, with the buildings in between replacing original structures during the 1880s and later. Built on a natural cliff, the back of the Mill Block is York Street, which is exactly one storey below. During the 1980s, York Street became a boutique area transforming the original delivery service entrance to what you see today.

Note the heritage sign located along York Street, reflecting the history of Stratford's parks systems

*Cross Ontario Street to The Court House & Shakespearean Gardens.*

### **1. The Perth County Court House.**

Built in 1885-87 in the most commanding position of Stratford, this masterpiece of the Queen Anne Revival Style was designed by London architect, George F. Durand who also designed the Stratford Jail. It opened in 1887 on Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee during a party costing \$500. By way of celebrating that is was also the year that electricity came to Stratford, electric lights in the Perth County Court House were turned on. The building uses various architectural details including turrets, decorative chimneys, Italianate brackets, and neoclassical features such as columns adorning the windows. It is known to have the best display of terracotta in Canada.

### **2. Shakespearean Gardens.**

The 65' chimney, now topped by a 24 suite Purple Martin apartment house, is all that remains of the Dufton Mill destroyed by fire in 1910. A dream of prominent business man and visionary of the Stratford Parks system, R. Thomas Orr, the development of an Elizabethan Garden set the stage for what is now the Shakespearean Gardens. Officially opened in 1936, the Shakespearean Gardens were resplendent with plants mentioned in Shakespeare's plays. There are five different types of gardens in it which include the perennial garden with some five hundred varieties of flowers. The stately bust of Shakespeare, designed and sculpted by Toronto sculptor Cleve Horne, became a central figure nestled amongst the roses in 1939. As a result of Mr. Orr making the request (through the proper channels of course) the original roses were a gift from Queen Mary who had also donated roses to the garden in Stratford-Upon-Avon in England.

*What Elements Make A Garden Shakespearean?*

*Shady walks, flower-wreathed arbours, banks of thyme, rosemary and woodbine, intricate knots of bright blossoms bordered with thrift or boxwood, pleached alleys (woven vines), elaborate fountains, terraces, labyrinths and mazes, subtle shadings of blossoms from dark to light as opposed to masses of colour, sensitivity to fragrance, medicinal properties influenced plantings, Dove-house, fruit trees & stone seats.*

### **3. Huron Street Bridge.**

This stone bridge was built in 1885, the year that Stratford officially became a city, and is the only double-arched aqueduct road bridge in North America still in use for automotive traffic. Its limestone blocks came from nearby St. Marys, often referred to as “Stonetown.” It was intended to be a triple arch, but the river was too narrow.

*Cross Ontario Street and travel across the bridge. In front of the Lions pool you will see the Dutch Memorial.*

### **4. Dutch Memorial.**

This memorial was a gift from the Netherlands after WWII, as a token of appreciation for Stratford's hospitality to seven hundred free men of Dutch birth who came to Stratford to form a battalion. After the occupation of Holland by Nazi armies, Canada invited free men of the world to use Stratford for a military training base. Queen Juliana of the Netherlands came four times to see them. Their Caserne or barracks was a former furniture factory on Trinity Street. For this reason and that of the participation of the Perth Regiment in the liberation of Holland in 1945, there is a close bond between our countries. The pair of hands symbolizes Canada's support; the dove is symbolic of the Netherlands.

### **5. Pergola.**

This neoclassical structure is the second to be built on this site. The first was constructed in 1931, and was swept away when the Avon and Thames Rivers flooded not only Stratford but nearby St. Marys, Ingersoll and London. Severe rainfall did not allow the floodgates to effectively deal with the overflow. The flood has been recorded as the worst in Stratford's history.

*Continue up Mornington Street to St. James Church.*

### **6. St. James Church.**

This is the official church of the Crown and is the third church building on this site. Built in 1870, the tower was added in 1905. The church's first pipe organ, installed in 1874 and probably powered by water, was rebuilt in 1902 and several times since, most recently in 1992. The biggest of the 11 bells in the church tower weighs 955 kilograms (2,100 pounds) and is nicknamed Big Joe. Beside this lovely Early Decorated Gothic style church is God's Acre, a cemetery used between 1844 and 1871. The gravestones, including one of the Sargint family (owner of the Shakespeare Inn), a brother and his son, have been laid flat to reduce deterioration. A note of interest; the sapphire blue carpet in front of the church altar came from Westminster Abbey, England after the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II.

*Constructional note: As more than one hundred years have passed since the building of St. James, structural issues are needing to be addressed. A census of heritage churches in Ontario reveals St. James is not alone, as many of these cherished buildings are in crisis. Design and engineering flaws of the time reflected those of the Europeans who built them, and did not factor issues such as snow loads in Canada versus Europe. In the case of St. James, the walls do not have enough mass to resist the lateral load of the roof. Basically, if you think of the roof as a triangle, the “triangle” roof of St. James does not have a bottom - a common design defect to many churches of the time. To correct the problem, the roof will be stabilized with a series of tie rods. The structural crisis facing many of our heritage churches does not result from neglect, rather as stated by the engineer working on St. James, “It's just your turn”.*

### **7. Alec Guinness – 108 Mornington Street, Stratford Star location: in front of the Avon Theatre.**

Alec Guinness was born in Maylebone, London England on April 2, 1914. Guinness worked for an advertising company writing copy while attending the Fay Compton Studio of dramatic art. At the age of 22 he made his acting debut at the Old Vic Theatre. Guinness served in the Navy for most of World War II and continued acting in the London's West End.

Guinness moved to Stratford Ontario to join his friend Tyrone Guthrie at the Stratford Festival Theatre in 1953. Guinness was in the Stratford Festival's first performance as *Richard III* on July 13, 1953. After a brief stay in Stratford, Guinness continued his acting career in movies and theatre winning a best actor Oscar and Golden globe for his work in the film *The Bridge on the River Kwai*. The role of Obi-Wan Kenobi from the *Star Wars Trilogy*, is undoubtedly one of Guinness' most famous. Sir Alec Guinness died on August 5, 2000 at the age of 86, after succumbing to liver cancer.

**8. J. Waldo Monteith** – *186 Mornington Street – residence, St. James Anglican church, Bronze Star Location: In front of City Hall*

J. Waldo Monteith or “Monte” as his friends called him was born in Stratford Ontario on June 24, 1903. He attended school in Stratford before going on to Trinity College and the University of Toronto. While there Monte obtained a degree to become a chartered accountant. Soon after, he married Mary Bancroft in 1936 and had three daughters, he then returned to his hometown Stratford to open the accounting firm of Monteith and Monteith in 1933. A year later he was elected to Stratford City Council and the Mayor in 1944. After his term, he was elected to become the Perth County Conservative Member of Parliament in Ottawa for the next six years. From 1957 to 1963, he served as the Minister of National Health and Welfare. Monteith also became financial critic and chairman of the Progressive Conservative caucus. In the 70s Monte ventured back to his hometown Stratford and was awarded the Silver Jubilee Medal for contributing to his community. Monteith lived out his days peacefully in Stratford and died December 19, 1981.

**9. Mr. William Gordon** - *198 Mornington Street, The Gordon Block downtown Stratford.*

Built in 1897 as the private home of Mr. William Gordon, one of Stratford's best known and most prominent and progressive citizens. As the first Mayor of the “City” of Stratford, Mayor Gordon championed the cause of city hood for Stratford, which meant separation from the County of Perth, a controversy that had been raging for 20 years. A separation vote had been defeated in 1876 and again in 1881, but in 1885, Mayor Gordon was determined to win and he did. Perhaps the biggest issue in 1885 was prohibition. The “wets” afraid that the county would go dry and take Stratford with them, won by an overwhelming 1,162 in favour and 322 opposed. A special provincial statute was passed on March 30, 1885, the city was incorporated on March 31 and the official inauguration celebrations took place that July. William Gordon is probably best remembered today as the builder of the Gordon Block, located on the south side of Ontario Street at the Downie Street intersection (see Downtown Heritage Tour) the former Albion Hotel located at 55 Ontario Street, and a leading member of the business community. William Gordon topped off his political career by becoming Mayor of the city again in 1907-08. The Gordons were also prominently known for their large Victorian Mansion at 198 Mornington Street (now altered to suit the People Care Nursing Home). Still dominated by its octagonal entrance tower, William Gordon had the interior richly paneled in the finest of woods. Over the years, many mysterious stories have arisen about the house. Some say there are vast fortunes bricked up in the walls and it was rumored that money had been hidden in the backyard in addition to stock, bonds and debentures hidden throughout the house. The children led quite colourful lives, particularly son “Jukes” who managed to get control of the Gordon Block and was said to have secret bank accounts in Buffalo and Detroit. An avid gambler, Jukes was known to regularly draw the curtains of the octagonal tower hosting gambling parties raising more than a few eyebrows about town.

*At the intersection of Mornington and Waterloo Streets, turn right and travel south on Waterloo Street.*

**10. Falstaff School** – *35 Waterloo Street North.*

The former Falstaff Public School (currently Falstaff Family Centre) was one of nine public schools with names related to Shakespeare since the establishment of the school wards in the mid 1800s. Falstaff Public School was associated not only with the education of the youth of Stratford but also with prominent local architect J.S. Russell, whose notable designs throughout Stratford include; the Stratford Public Library, St. Andrews Church, Zion Lutheran Church, the former Avon Public School and the Masonic Temple. This “new” school was constructed in 1929 to replace the “old” Falstaff Public School. The design features a symmetrical facade with expansive windows, flat roof, and parapet. The projecting frontispiece, wall buttresses, arched entrance with stone detail, and parapet reflect neo-Gothic influences that were common in Ontario public school design in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. You can also see the bust of Shakespeare's Falstaff looking out above the front doors. In order to preserve its historic relevance, Stratford-based singer/composer Loreena McKennitt purchased the property during a public auction in 2000. Since that time, more than one million dollars has been invested in the extensive renovation to convert the building into a current social services

centre.

*Cross William Street to #4 Waterloo Street.*

**11. William Hutt** – *4 Waterloo Street, William Hutt Bridge, Avondale Cemetery – Stratford.*

Born in Toronto May 2, 1920, Mr. Hutt earned his reputation as one of the world's most respected classical actors while performing in Canada, primarily at the Stratford Shakespeare Festival. He joined the festival during its inaugural season in 1953 and continued to tread the boards until 2005, when he declared retirement at the age of 85. Appearing in more than 100 plays, Hutt was the rare performer who played both fools and kings, and tragic as well as comic leads. Although giving unforgettable performances as King Lear and Prospero, it was his role as Lady Bracknell in Oscar Wilde's play in 1975 that garnered such fame, that was revived in 1976 and again in 1979. Hutt also appeared on stages in London, Toronto and New York. He won every major theatre award in Canada, as well as a Governor General's Award for lifetime achievement, and was made a companion of the Order of Canada. William Hutt died at the age of 87 of leukemia in 2007. He is buried in the Avondale Cemetery in Stratford. After his death, the Waterloo Street bridge that crosses the Avon river immediately south of 4 William Street was named the William Hutt Bridge in his honour.

*Did you know? William Hutt volunteered in the Second World War as a medic in the 7<sup>th</sup> Light Field Ambulance unit, winning the Military Medal in 1944 for "bravery in the field" during the Italian campaign for his services.*

*Walk back to William Street and travel east.*

**12. Sir John Cunningham McLennan** – *203 William Street (Queen Anne or Italianate?).*

Sir John McLennan came to Stratford in 1867, and after teaching at a number of Perth County schools, entered the physics program at the University of Toronto. He later became the Head of the Faculty of Physics and had a building on campus named after him. He was instrumental in discovering the use of radium for cancer treatment; developed a process for liquefying helium in large amounts; and discovered the yellow-green ray in the aurora borealis. He was knighted in 1935 and died later that year.

**13. 300 William Street.**

With its original entrance off James Street, this large Italianate mansion was built by local architect Alexander Hepburn in 1873. The Italianate Villa Tower featured in this picture has a different roof than is typical for the style and sadly, was demolished in the 1930s. The mansion was first owned by Chief Justice John Idington, a judge in Canada's Supreme Court. The creek out front is known as Idington Creek. In 1909, Chief Justice Idington sold the mansion to the Hyslop sisters who converted it into a hospital. It is thought that Ancrum Brae, the name of the hospital, referred to Dr. Michael Ancrum, a physician in the late 1800s, and brae referred to a hillside or riverbank. Ancrum Brae was declared bankrupt on March 12, 1925. It has been a private residence since, and operated for a number of years as a Bed and Breakfast. Three hundred William Street was also the location for the Stratford Shakespeare Festival's annual garden party for many years.

**14. Norman Bethune** – *342 William Street.*

This quaint cottage with its stone chimney seems a little out of place among the larger homes of the area. It was the summer residence of one of Stratford's most prominent doctors, Dr. Lorne Robertson. Dr. Robertson spent his summer months in this cottage far from the hustle, bustle and *smells* of downtown Stratford. One of the young interns who came here for several summers around 1919 to relieve him was the now famous Dr. Norman Bethune. Dr. Bethune set up the first mobile blood transfusion service in the Spanish Civil War in 1936 saving thousands of lives, and in turn, developing the model for the later development of Mobile Army Surgical Hospital (MASH) units.

He joined the Chinese Communists in their struggle against the Japanese in the Second Sino-Japanese War performing emergency battlefield surgical operations on war casualties and establishing training for doctors, nurses and orderlies. He did not distinguish between casualties,

treating wounded Japanese prisoners as well as Chinese. Bethune died on November 12, 1939, of blood poisoning from a cut he received when performing surgery, in the midst of the Second Sino-Japanese War. He is one of the few Westerners to whom China has dedicated statues, of which many in his honour have been erected throughout the country. He is buried in the Revolutionary Martyrs' Cemetery Shijiazhuang, Hebei Province, China.

### **15. 480 William Street.**

This area was developed in 1936 as the Delamere Subdivision as the family of the first land owner, Colonel Delamere, gave the land between William Street and the river to the city to be used as parkland. Originally a chicken ranch, his farm house still stands at 480 William Street. This parkland was used as a military training base during WWII by free men of Dutch birth who came to Stratford to form a battalion. It is for that reason and that of the participation of the Perth Regiment in the liberation of Holland in 1945, that there is a close bond between our countries.

*Continue along William Street and cross the river at the Festival Bridge and walk up Snake hill to Upper Queen's Park.*

### **16. Upper Queen's Park**

Under a canopy of mature trees, approximately 6 acres in size sits Stratford's most prominent park. Queen's park was obtained by the town in 1877, and was redesigned by Canada's leading landscape architect, Frederick G. Todd in 1905. Other projects of Todd's include the Parc des Champs de Bataille (Plains of Abraham National Battlefield) in Quebec City, site planning and design for Trinity College in Toronto, and restoration of Ile de Ste. Helene (St. Helen's Island), Montreal, in the St. Lawrence River. The unusual pattern of diagonal tree placement as well as the park's pavilion make it the most scenic and popular park, then and now.

### **17. Festival Theatre – 55 Queen Street,**

in 1952 after successfully lobbying city council, Stratford Shakespeare Festival founder Tom Patterson, was given \$125 to meet with Sir Laurence Olivier in New York city. Unsuccessful, Patterson was given the name of Tyrone Guthrie, who was persuaded to come to Stratford in July of 1952. The Stratford Shakespeare Festival opened in 1953 in a tent with a permanent amphitheatre operating under this fashion for four years until 1957, when architect Robert Fairfield, who won an award for his innovation, replicated the tent design in the building you see today. Over the years the building has adapted to different needs with various additions with the integrity of the original structure still intact.

### **18. Stratford Normal School – 270 Water Street, across from the Festival theatre.**

Now known as the Discovery Centre, the Stratford Normal School (or teachers college) was built in 1908 and is a unique example of Italianate architecture. Designed by Francis R. Heakes, it was one of four identical training colleges built by the Province to establish a set of "norms" or standards for teaching in Ontario. Unlike the others, there is a Memorial Chamber with a grand stain-glass window commemorating the fallen soldiers of World War 1. Additional important features include, the segmented window arches and central keystones. The building has been recognized with a plaque from Parks Canada and designated a Heritage Building.

*Walk across Upper Queen's and note the heritage sign located beside the "Bridge to No Where" reflecting the history of The Pumphouse.*

### **19. Confederation Park.**

This park is a small Japanese garden, designed by a Japanese Canadian from British Columbia, to commemorate Canada's 100th birthday in 1967. The knoll at the highest point of the garden is the former site of the city's water tower. The Boy Scouts planted the Norway spruce and White Pine trees in 1937 to commemorate the coronation of King George VI. The stairway behind you, known as the *Bridge to No Where*, was used as an overpass when a former railway line ran through this section of the park.

## **20. Gallery Stratford.**

Protected under the *Ontario Heritage Act*, Gallery Stratford is located at in the original Stratford pump house building. Architect, George F. Durand, who also designed the Perth County Perth County Court House, designed the building in 1882-83. Since the 1960s the building has been used as an art gallery and remains an important cultural attraction to residents and tourists. More than 14 inspiring exhibitions are presented annually in this prominent public art gallery. Located beside Gallery Stratford is Millennium Park.

## **21. Delete? Fragments of Memory, Millennium Park.**

*Delete? Fragments of Memory* by Ernest Daetwyler is a sculpture consisting of sandstone elements framed in steel, which are stacked four deep in rows. The stones, salvaged from Stratford City Hall where they were being replaced by new pieces, were originally brought from Great Britain in 1898, hand carved and erected to build the city hall. The first two frames are empty followed by two holding what is barely discernible as a T then Y and beneath it what remains of the word Hall. The retrieved stones which are quite spinnable, range in size from pieces no bigger than a shoe box, to an impressive almost intact block featuring the city's original coat of arms showing a locomotive, a beehive and the inscription, Industry – Enterprise. The work weighs thirty tonnes.

*Make your way back to the river and walk west along Lakeside Drive.*

## **22. The William Allman Memorial Arena, 15 Morenz Drive.**

The William Allman Memorial Arena is one of the last remaining examples of the so called "Ice Palaces" built in North America during the 1920s and 30s, which took advantage of new technologies that permitted the installation of indoor artificial ice surfaces. Built in 1924, it is touted as the longest continuously operating arena of its kind in the world. 150 tons of structural steel and 275,000 bricks make up the arena designed by Toronto architect A.W. Cameron, who was instructed to design an arena with wooden bench-style seating for 3,500 and standing room for 1,000 patrons. The arena was built at a reported cost of \$110,000 in only 66 days. It was used by the Stratford Kroehlers of the Ontario Hockey League up until 1951, and is currently home to the Stratford Cullitons.

The list of NHLer's who began their careers with the Cullitons includes: Mark Bell, Rob Blake, Kevin Dahl, Louie DeBrusk, Greg de Vries, Boyd Devereaux, Nelson Emerson, Jeff Halpern, Rem Murray, Ed Olczyk, Mike Peluso, Chris Pronger, Garth Snow, and Tim Taylor. World champion figure skater Don McPherson also called it home ice. It has been used by numerous film and television crews including in Bauer's "Leave an Impression" advertising campaign featuring Eric Lindros.

The arena's story is more than steel, bricks and mortar. It is about the people of Stratford who came together to build and ensure that survival of the arena during the past 85 years and to establish the facility as a central place in the sports, social and cultural history of the City of Stratford. A town hall meeting in 2001 returned a vote of 90 per cent in favour of restoring the structurally sound old barn. While the interior has been updated, the visible brickwork, roof trusses (specifically their shape) and the steep pitch of the seating along with some of the wooden flooring on the upper level are original to the building. There is also a portrait of Queen Elizabeth, covered from pucks in protective plastic, that hangs regally at one end of the arena.

## **23. Tom Patterson Theatre - 111 Lakeside Drive.**

Known as the Casino – The Busy Lady of the Avon, during the 1930s, 40s and early '50s this building was one of the most popular dance halls in Southwestern Ontario. For many years the theatre was the winter home of the Stratford Badminton Club. In 1971, the Stratford Shakespeare Festival opened the space as a new venue known as the *Third Stage*. It was renamed in 1991, in honour of Tom Patterson, founder of the Stratford Shakespeare Festival. Originally used to house, music programs and various workshops, the space has been modified over the years with its runway style thrust stage

Designed by Desmond Heeley and now has an intimate seating capacity of 496.

*Continue along Lakeside Drive and cross at the Waterloo Street intersection. Turn left and walk south on Waterloo Street to the corner of Waterloo and Cobourg Streets.*

**24. R. Thomas Orr – 50 Cobourg Street,**

This Gothic Ontario house was constructed in 1874 by Thomas Orr and remains in the family to this day. An architect by training, an avid horticulturist, a prolific reader and local historian, R. Thomas Orr's vision of converting the industrial and commercial lands along the Avon River into parkland led to the formation of the Stratford Parks Board in 1904. In addition, he also led the successful campaign in 1912 to prevent the Canadian Pacific railway from building a railway through the parkland along the river. He was instrumental in the hiring of Canada's foremost landscape architect, Frederick G. Todd, to design the Stratford parks system.

*Return to the Waterloo Street and Lakeside Drive Intersection. To your left you will see the Bandshell. Lakeside drive has now become Veteran's Drive.*

**25. Bandshell and R. Thomas Orr Plaque.**

The Bandshell, which was constructed in the 1930s, replaced an octagonal shaped bandstand which was originally located on Erie at Ontario Streets. To the right of the bandshell is a provincial plaque honouring R. Thomas Orr for his foresight to create a park system.

**26. Stratford War Memorial.**

This sculpture, originally located on Erie Street, was designed by W.S Allward (1876–1955), noted sculptor, who also created the monuments in Peterborough, Ottawa and Vimy Ridge in France. This work was completed in 1922 and features the classical theme of right versus might.

*Continue along Veterans Drive to Ontario Street.*

**27. Timothy Findley – 70 Ontario Street**

Known to many as “Tiff” (an acronym formed by his initials), Toronto-born novelist and playwright Timothy Findley (1930-2002) had strong ties to Stratford, where in 1953 he was a member of the first company of the newly created Stratford Festival. He also acted at the Edinburgh Festival and on CBC television, but it was as a writer he received a Governor General's Award, two [Canadian Authors Association](#) awards, an Alliance of Canadian Cinema, Television and Radio Artists ([ACTRA](#)) award, the [Order of Ontario](#), the Ontario [Trillium Award](#), and the appointment of Officer of the [Order of Canada](#). Four of his plays were produced by the Festival in Stratford, where Findley and his partner lived for several years in a condominium at 70 Ontario St. A booth in the cellar pizzeria of Pazzo is identified by a framed photograph honouring Mr. Findley's favourite spot to sit and enjoy an exceptional bottle of wine or on occasion, a dry martini. In 2004, the Stratford Festival created the Timothy Findley Award for new Canadian plays.

**28. Thomas Edison – 46 Ontario Street above Sputnik**

The prolific American inventor Thomas Edison (1847-1931) is hardly remembered as a telegraph operator, but it was in that capacity that he worked in the Grand Trunk Railway station in Stratford. His father had been born in Nova Scotia, but the Edison family was living in Port Huron, Michigan, when young Thomas saved three-year-old Jimmie MacKenzie from being struck by a runaway train. Jimmie's father, a railway station agent in Mount Clemens, Michigan, was so grateful that he trained Thomas as a telegraph operator. Edison was 16 when he got his first job as a telegraph operator, but he was fired soon after for experimenting with chemicals and causing an explosion. His second chance came in Stratford, where he is said to have stayed in the Albion Hotel at 56 Ontario St., and where he was fired again, this time for failing to warn the engineers of two trains that nearly collided.

This concludes the Stratford River Walk Heritage tour.

*Continue south on Erie Street leaving Stratford en route to St. Marys. Erie Street will become Highway 7 /19. Turn right at the Highway 9 exit to St. Marys. Highway 9 will become Queen Street as you enter the downtown.*

## Stonetown Heritage Town St Marys

*Carved in stone and etched in history, St. Marys is known as the Stonetown. Its magnificent limestone buildings, were crafted by Scottish stone masons and embellished with a European flair. This picturesque town enveloped by river, hills and stone was first settled in the early 1840s on the bank of the Thames River and Trout Creek.*

Coming to St. Marys in 1908, this former right of way of the St. Marys and Western Ontario Railway, later part of the Canadian Pacific Railway, completed the well established Grand Trunk Railway. After 80 years of activity, CPR abandoned this section of track and thus, the Riverview Walkway was developed in 1992. This paved 2.4 km path travels from the centre of town south along the Thames River to Canada's largest spring fed swimming pool, The Quarry. Along with the picturesque river, this tour will take you up and through the core area of the "Stonetown" giving you the opportunity to explore attractions along the way.

*Begin your tour at the intersection of Queen and water Streets.*

### **1. Downtown Queen Street.**

Downtown St. Marys is a good place to study the vernacular architecture of 19<sup>th</sup> century Ontario. As you walk down the main street, look up to the roof lines, the windows, wood trim and other features original to many of the structures. Unique to St. Marys are the solid, limestone commercial blocks, built along the main street using local stone. The intersection of Queen and Water has a 19<sup>th</sup> century limestone building on each of the four corners. Look for bronze plaques on some of the store fronts. These buildings have been designated and the plaques provide information about their historic and architectural importance to St. Marys.

### **2. Timothy Eaton - 166 Queen St. E**

He apprenticed in a general store in his native Ireland, and worked in another in Glen Williams, Ontario, but it was in 1856 in a log building on the banks of Fish Creek, just west of the main intersection in Kirkton, that Timothy Eaton (1834-1907) opened his first store. There, assisted by his brother James, the village postmaster, and two of their sisters. In 1860, Timothy and James moved their store operation to St. Marys, where their brother Robert was a well-established merchant. Timothy and James had a number of business ventures in St. Marys, working mostly out of rented quarters, among them the limestone building at 166 Queen Street East. In 1869, Timothy moved to Toronto, where he bought an existing dry-goods and haberdashery business at 178 Yonge Street, and proceeded to build a department-store empire and in the process revolutionize retailing in North America.

*At the corner of Queen and Water Streets, turn north onto Water and walk to the green painted, steel bridge over Trout Creek.*

### **3. Water Street Bridge.**

This steel truss bridge was built in 1899. From its walkway, there is a pleasant view of the Sarnia Bridge, perhaps the most picturesque trestle bridge in Southwestern Ontario, as it is joined by Trout Creek and falls over the old mill dam. On the opposite bank is Milt Dunnell Field, formerly known as the Flats, where generations of St. Marys residents have enjoyed sports and special outdoor events.

### **4. View of Sarnia Bridge and the Grand Trunk Trail.**

The original Grand Trunk Railway line to Sarnia was abandoned by the Canadian National Railway in

1989. By 1993, the Town of St. Marys had purchased the right of way through town and in 1996 a volunteer committee was formed to raise money to convert the line, including the high-level Sarnia Bridge, into a community walkway. The Grand Trunk Trail was officially opened in 1998 and largely, because of the view from the trestle bridge, has remained one of the town's most popular recreational areas.

### **5. Milt Dunnell Field – *The Flats Renamed***

Frequently flooded by the Thames River, the area of land known as *the Flats*, was not suitable for any permanent structure. Although the riparian rights to the land belonged to a flour mill downstream, cricket and baseball teams played here as early as 1860, with bats changing to lacrosse nets in the 1890s through 1920 when it was home to the St. Marys Alerts Lacrosse Team. As a young lad Milt Dunnell himself could evade the nickel charge at the gate to watch a referee get tossed into the river after a bad call. In 1922, Dunnell would provide the play-by-play commentary on the team's provincial championship run. Athletic competitions, agricultural fairs, firework demonstrations, as well as cultural fairs and political gatherings have been held on the Flats. Prime Minister Arthur Meighen spoke there during his 1926 federal election campaign and again in 1942 when the town celebrated their 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of settlement.

#### **Milt Dunnell, *Milt Dunnell Field.***

Born on Christmas Eve 1905 on a Downie Township farm not far from St. Marys, Milt Dunnell came to be known as the “sports editor of Canada” during his more than 50 years with the *Toronto Star*. While he was still an infant, the Dunnells moved to St. Marys, where they lived in a modest house in the West Ward, and Milt played all the sports of the day. After graduating from St. Marys Collegiate Institute, he worked in the local post office, was a sales representative for a fruit company, wrote stories for the hometown weekly, the *Journal-Argus*, and became the St. Marys correspondent for the Stratford *Beacon-Herald*, a daily newspaper. In 1929 he took a full-time job with the *Beacon-Herald* and moved to Stratford, where he stayed until 1942, when he joined the *Toronto Star*. From Toronto he traveled the globe to cover sports, but he cherished his ties to Perth County, where in 2005, in honour of his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday, St. Marys renamed the town's athletic field Milt Dunnell Field. Milt Dunnell died on January 3, 2008 at the age of 102.

*The Riverview Walkway leads from the Water Street Bridge along the creek and then beside the old millrace. It crosses Queen Street and follows the Thames River beside one of the town's most famous buildings.*

### **6. The Opera House.**

The Opera House was built from St. Marys limestone in 1879 for the independent Order of Oddfellows. Its impressive architectural details and fine stonework are enhanced by the more restrained design of the two limestone commercial blocks that flank it.

The Opera House had stores at ground level, a concert hall above and the Oddfellows' lodge rooms on the top floor. In its years of activity, many plays, concerts, lectures and political rallies were held on its stage. Sir John A. MacDonald, Canada's first prime minister, campaigned here in 1891 during his last election.

The Oddfellows had difficulty keeping up with the cost of maintaining the building and eventually were forced to sell it. In 1919, the entire block became part of the St. Marys Milling Company's operations. The Opera House was used as a flour mill for 50 years and then stood derelict for more than a decade. Rescued in the mid-1980s through the intervention of the St. Marys Lions Club, its interior was rebuilt and converted into apartments and stores. The exterior retains many original features.

### **Thames River.**

The north branch of the Thames, a Canadian Heritage River, flows through St. Marys and is the heart of the town. Early economic success depended on the mills along this river. The town's prosperity was also helped by the presence of accessible limestone, taken in blocks from the river block and from quarries along the riverbanks. This limestone has provided the town with its characteristic appearance and earned

it the nickname, “Stonetown.”

*From the Riverview Walkway, take Park Street to Cadzow Park at the corner of Church Street. You may also continue along the walkway to the Quarry, double back and continue on to Park Street.*

### **7. The Quarry, Water Street South.**

Carved in stone and etched in history, limestone has been important to St. Marys since its founding. Stone from earlier quarrying operations provided building material for many of the oldest homes, churches, and commercial buildings in the town. Today, the quarries, out of production since the 1920s, are Canada's largest outdoor spring-fed swimming pool. The depth of the water in the Quarry ranges from 20 to 25 feet deep. Deep, cool and refreshing, this swimming hole of legendary stature is a perfect destination on a hot summer day. In fact, former Prime Minister of Canada Pierre Elliot Trudeau dove off the high dive while visiting St. Marys in 1968.

### **8. Cadzow Park/ St. Marys Museum - 177 Church Street South.**

The St. Marys Museum is located in Cadzow Park, once the private grounds for the owners of this limestone house. It was built in 1854 for George Tracy, one of the town's earliest settlers. At that time, the house was by far the largest stone residence in the area and was nicknamed “Castle in the Bush.” Some years later the park was given the name of Cadzow after an estate in Scotland, near the birthplace of subsequent owners of this property.

Cadzow has been a community park since 1926 and George Tracy's house has been the St. Marys Museum since 1959. It contains a fine collection of artifacts and resource materials relating to this area.

*Take Church Street northward toward the downtown area. As the name suggests, several of the town's oldest churches are on this street.*

### **9. Church Street Churches.**

The United Church, 85 Church Street South, was built in 1879 as a Methodist Church using yellow – called “white” - Ontario brick. It replaced a smaller 1850s limestone building on the same site. A portion of the original exterior wall of this stone structure can still be seen at the back of the church. The church tower once supported a graceful spire but it was struck by lightning in the 1940s and not replaced. The interior of this church is a wonderful open space, with the view to the pulpit and magnificent organ unrestricted by pillars or partitions.

Across Elgin Street is St. James Anglican Church. The oldest portion of this church was built in the late 1850s from St. Marys limestone, a simple, rectangular building. In the mid-1880s, extensive renovations, raised the roof and added the square tower, the buttresses and the west entrance porch. The parish hall to the north was added in 1907. The grounds were landscaped by an early rector and are cared for by members of the congregation.

*Continue along Church Street to Jones Street East. Lind Park will be visible to your left.*

### **Arthur Meighen.**

Born in Anderson, a hamlet northwest of St. Marys, Arthur Meighen (1874-1960) in 1920 became the ninth prime minister of Canada. Hoping to ensure for their children a good education, Joseph and Mary Jane (Bell) Meighen moved to 524 Elgin Street West in St. Marys, where Arthur's grandfather had been master of the town's first school. After going to North Ward Public School (since renamed Arthur Meighen Public School), Arthur attended St. Marys Collegiate where, in his final year, he was elected secretary of the literary society, was a member of the school's debating society and earned first-class honours in mathematics, English and Latin. After graduating from the University of Toronto and Osgoode Hall Law School, Arthur was a teacher, lawyer and businessman before taking up politics as a member of the Conservative party. In addition to his alma mater in St. Marys, a school in Portage La Prairie, Manitoba, has been named for Arthur Meighen, as has a peak in the Cariboo Mountains in British Columbia, an island in the Canadian Arctic, and a federal government building in Toronto. There are two other plaques commemorating Meighen in St. Marys. In the west ward, a plaque in front of 524

Elgin Street West, and at the St. Marys Cemetery, Parks Canada has marked the Meighen gravesite with the honour due to a former prime minister. The gardens at the Stratford Shakespeare Festival also bear his name.

#### **10. Lind Park/Arthur Meighen Statue.**

This beautiful little park was a gift to the town of St. Marys in 1934 by John Grieve Lind (1867-1947). Similar to R. Thomas Orr of Stratford, Mr. Lind as well as a successful businessman (one of the original founders of the St. Marys Cement Company) was an advocate and generous supporter of the parks in St. Marys. The downtown location and size of this park make it an ideal site for the Meighen statue. The statue of Aurthur Meighen was commissioned by the Federal Government in 1967. When the statue was completed in 1969 by Montreal artist Marcel Bratstein, its impressionistic appearance was not considered appropriate for parliament Hill. It was stored in Ottawa until 1987 when it was presented to the Town of St. Marys.

#### **11. First Baptist Church.**

Across the street from Lind Park is another of the lovely Church Street churches, First Baptist. The Baptist congregation has been in St. Marys since the 1850s; this church has been on this site for more than a century. If you look carefully, you will find the cornerstone, laid July 1902.

*Take Church Street back to Queen Street and the downtown.*

#### **12. St. Marys Town Hall – 175 Queen Street East.**

Fire destroyed an earlier frame Town hall on this same site in 1890. Town Council called for proposals for a new building and Toronto architect George W. Gouinlock's plans were chosen. The replacement was built at the cost of approximately \$15,000 using St. Marys limestone trimmed with imported red sandstone. The structure officially opened in June 1892.

The Town hall has a variety of medieval details including its main tower with the bell chamber, stone porches, turrets and steep gables. The sandstone trim creates an interesting checkerboard pattern on the facade. It is still the administrative centre of the Town, housing the council chamber and offices for municipal officials and their support staff. There is a public gallery complete with stage on the upper floor – the perfect setting for many a “Town Hall Meeting.”

#### **13. Public Library – 15 Church Street.**

The Public Library was built in 1904-05 with a \$10,000 grant from Andrew Carnegie. J.A. Humphris, a local architect was able to adapt the usual Carnegie design so that it could be built out of St. Marys limestone therefore complimenting the neighbouring Town Hall (built in 1891). An addition to the east, containing new offices and a children's area, was completed in 1988.

This concludes the St. Marys Riverview Walkway Heritage tour.

*From Queen Street travel east returning to Highway 7/19. Turn left onto Highway 7/19 and travel back Stratford.*

Special thanks for information leading to the development of this tour are given to:  
Stratford-Perth Archives,  
St. Marys Museum  
Heritage Stratford Steering Committee

# Stratford Riverwalk Personalities

- P** Indicates parking lots
- W** Indicates washrooms





# St. Marys Riverview Walkway Heritage Tour