

From Little Thames to Stratford

FASCINATING FACTS

- 2005** Stratford mourns the loss of Festival founder Tom Patterson
- 2002** The Stratford Festival of Canada celebrated its 50th season welcoming 672,924 patrons to 18 plays. This was a record number of playgoers during the 50 seasons. The Avon Theatre realized a complete renewal and The Studio Theatre, a fourth theatre space seating 256 people was added.
- 1997** Stratford named "prettiest city in the world" as champion of the Nations Bloom Award presented in Spain
- 1997** Act III, a \$13 million Festival Theatre renovation project, updated the patron services including seating, restrooms, box office and theatre store.
- 1993** Canadian Travel & Tourism Industry nominates the Stratford Festival as the Canadian Attraction/Event of the year. Population reaches 28,200 with an economy based on theatre and automotive industries.
- 1991** Tom Patterson Theatre dedicated. (formerly the Third Stage.)
- 1985** \$3 million dollar addition to Festival Theatre allows production facilities to be housed in one of North America's largest backstage areas.
- 1982** 150th anniversary of the founding of settlement.
- 1957** Stratford Festival moves into a new permanent structure.
- 1953** Stratford Festival opens in a tent, founded by Stratford journalist, Tom Patterson.
CNR announces its closure.
- 1935** Shakespearean Gardens open.
- 1918** First swans given to the city by a Michigan CNR employee.
- 1904** Parks Board founded, eventually servicing 850 acres of city parkland.
- 1901** The 1250 seat "Theatre Albert" is built (now the Avon Theatre).
- 1882-1889** Stratford reaches a population of 9000, designated a city. Present jailhouse and courthouse are built.
- 1856** Stratford becomes a railway town with the coming of the Grand Trunk and Buffalo-Lake Huron railways.

- 1854** Stratford is established as a village.
- 1849** First weekly newspaper, 'Perth County News' is established.
- 1832-1834** 'Shakespeare Hotel' opens as Stratford is officially named. First sawmill & gristmill are built.
- 1827** Stratford is surveyed as a site for the Canada Company.

Stratford's Unique History

The settlement of Stratford began with the surveying of the Huron Road by the Canada Company in 1828. In December of that year and January of 1829, their agent, William "Tiger" Dunlop, planted his surveyor's stakes around the area that was to become this beautiful city. The Canada Company had been formed in 1824, when the government of Upper Canada granted it a million acres of land to settle. The district was known as the Huron Tract and included what is now Stratford and most of Perth County.

Stratford, itself, began to take shape in 1832 when Thomas Mercer Jones, a Canada Company director, gave a picture of William Shakespeare to William Sargint, the owner of the Shakespeare Hotel. A stone marks the site of this hotel, near 70 Ontario Street.

Jones gave the village the name of Stratford and the creek, which had been known as Little Thames, was renamed the Avon River.

In 1834 surveyor John MacDonald created the town plan. He placed the geographic centre of town at the

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point where four townships met, not far from today's Wade's Flower Shop. He then created four main roads radiating from the centre. Three of these roads were named for the Great Lakes to which they lead, Huron, Erie and Ontario.

In 1853 Perth County decided to separate from the Huron district, of which it had always been a part. A condition of separation was that Stratford become the county seat, with a courthouse, jail and registry office. The next year Stratford was incorporated as a village, and in 1859 it became a town.

The year 1856 signaled the arrival of the Grand Trunk Railway and the Buffalo and Lake Huron Line, beginning Stratford's long history as a major rail centre. In 1871 a locomotive repair shop came to town; it was expanded in 1889 and 1906. The Grand Trunk amalgamated with the Buffalo and Lake Huron Railway and in 1923 was taken over by the Canadian National Railway. The CNR was a significant contributor to the town's economy until the closure of the shops.

Another major economic sector was the furniture industry. In 1886, the year after Stratford was incorporated as a city, George McLagan created jobs in the furniture industry. These positions attracted prospective workers to the area in the early 1890's, a time of economic hardship in other parts of the country.

With corporate success came industrial dispute. In 1933 a general

strike, which started with furniture workers and chicken pluckers, became so unruly that the army, along with its tanks, was called in to put a stop to the strike. The strike was a major event in Canadian industrial history and is the subject of playwright James Reaney's play *Kingwhistle!*

In 1904 the Parks Board was established. It created Upper Queen's Park, a professionally designed horticultural system around the area where the Festival Theatre now stands. Another major accomplishment came between 1905 and 1912, when the Board and citizens dissuaded the Canadian National Railway from laying its tracks along the Avon River.

Stratford's signature swans were introduced to the park system in 1918. And, in 1936, R. Thomas Orr, an original member of the Parks Board, succeeded in having the Shakespearean Gardens created.

It wasn't until 1953 that Tom Patterson, a Stratford-born reporter for Maclean's Magazine, and a group of local supporters opened the Stratford Festival. As the CNR shops closed and the success of the furniture industry waned, the Festival helped make tourism a significant industry for the city. Today Stratford has a diversified economy featuring manufacturing, finance and service-related businesses.

St. Marys

FASCINATING FACTS

- Laura Secord's brother Thomas Ingersoll founded St. Marys.
- Timothy Eaton and his brother James operated a dry goods business in St. Marys from 1860 to 1868, before moving to Toronto to open the store that grew into the nationwide Eaton's department store chain.
- The Quarry is Canada's largest natural spring-fed swimming facility.
- North America's first game of organized baseball was played in the nearby community of Beachville in 1838. League play was later organized in St. Marys.
- At the turn of the century, St. Marys Wood Products introduced the soon to be famous St. Marys bat, the forerunner of today's Cooper bat.



The Stonetown

A brief history of St. Marys

St. Marys will capture your attention the moment you arrive. From the glorious Thames River winding its way out of the countryside and through the centre of town to the distinctive limestone homes and buildings, St. Marys is truly picture perfect.

The town was settled in 1841 after a public sale of land and a mill was built soon after. Originally, St. Marys was known as Little Falls because of the cascading waters of the Thames. However, Mary Strachen, daughter of the influential Bishop Strachen and wife of Canada Company Director Thomas Mercer Jones, offered a donation to begin a school if the town was named for her. St. Marys was chosen, therefore, not for a saint at all. The apostrophe was left off the name simply to make it unique.

You may have seen the name St. Marys on bags of locally made cement sold throughout North America. St. Marys is known for much more than its stone and cement. Because of the town's links to the origins of baseball, The Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame is located here.

Milverton, Listowel & Millbank

FASCINATING FACTS

- The Spirit of Listowel, a Lancaster Bomber used in the Second World War, was purchased and outfitted with funds raised by the people of Listowel. The cost, including fuels and bombs for its first mission, was \$374,050.
- Listowel is known as “Car City” because more cars are sold here per capita than anywhere else in Canada.
- During the Boer War, Listowel was a main depot for warhorses, shipping more than 1,000 to Africa. It brought an estimated \$250,000 into the area.
- The Amish and Mennonite communities trace their roots back to the Anabaptist wing of the 16th Century Reformation. The term Anabaptist comes from the fact that they discontinued infant baptism in favour of “believer’s baptism.”

The Village of Milverton

Fabulous farmland

Milverton owes its heritage to a rail line that was built between Stratford and Listowel in 1877. Instead of passing through Millbank, the main business centre for the wheatlands of Mornington Township was routed through Milverton. As a result a busy village was created, attracting a variety of factories. It was incorporated in 1881. Today Milverton lies in the midst of some of Canada’s richest farmland and most of its businesses are related to that industry.

Listowel

A history of coping

Listowel was part of the Queen’s Bush settlement after the Huron Tract. With fine public buildings and all the usual amenities, the town was completed within 22 years.

Originally called Mapleton, the town had its name arbitrarily changed to Listowel by the Post Office in 1856. Its Irish namesake is not far from the Mouth of the Shannon.

The town quickly turned its new Irish links to its advantage, demonstrating its marvelous ability to cope in almost any situation. And cope it has! Listowel has the dubious distinction of having its downtown burnt to the ground and flooded more than any other centre in Ontario. Yet the downtown remains, modernized, but at the same crossroads by the Maitland River. The community is also graced with Victorian architecture.

Millbank

An Irish Heritage

In the middle of the 19th Century, Irish pioneers settled in the area that is now Millbank, carving a pretty village out of the forest on the banks of the Nith River.

By the end of the century the village was bustling with several large stores and topping 400 residents. Many businesses have changed with the times, but Millbank, the centre of the area’s Amish community is a fascinating blend of the modern and historic.

Sebringville, Mitchell and Shakespeare

FASCINATING FACTS

- The town of Mitchell is said to have been named for a runaway slave who built a log cabin on the Thames River where travelers could find shelter or lodging.
- Howie Morenz, a National Hockey League star, grew up in Mitchell. In 1950 he was named the greatest hockey player of the first half of this century.
- Sebringville is the longest village in Western Ontario. How's that for a statistic!
- St. Patrick's Church in Kinkora was built in 1882. The cost? \$30,000!
- Perth County's federal electoral district is Canada's No. 1 agricultural producer.
- Shakespeare has more antique shops per square mile than any other place in the province.



Interesting origins

Sebringville was established in 1834 and named for its first settler John Sebring, who died in 1871. Sebring built the second gristmill in Perth County in 1834 and opened the first Post Office in 1840.

Just down the road is **Mitchell**, said to have been named for a runaway slave who built a shanty on the riverbank. The status of Founder of the village, however, was reserved for John Hicks, who moved to Canada from Cornwall, England.

The Canada Company laid out the town plot of Mitchell in 1836. It was incorporated as a village in 1857 and as a town in 1873.

Shakespeare was founded in 1832 by David Bell. Alexander Mitchell, owner of the first hotel, suggested the name Shakespeare in 1852. Shakespeare grew to 5 general stores, shoe shops, blacksmiths, two carriage factories, tailors, potters, a cooper's shop, doctors, two-room schoolhouse, cabinet factory, tannery, four hotels, opera hall and even a weekly newspaper.

Today the hamlet is home to 750. With more antique shops per square mile than any other place in the province and interesting stores and businesses, Shakespeare is truly unique.