

## The Food Industry in Stratford

Perth County is full of prime agricultural land and has been known for its agriculture since it was first settled by Europeans beginning in the 1820s and 1830s. Today Perth is one of the most diverse farming counties in Ontario, known primarily for mixed farming, dairying, and hog production. Stratford, of course, is the county seat, and with its railways was a major distributor of many local products including pork and cheese. Today, Stratford continues this tradition by being the home of the Ontario Pork Congress, the Dairy XPO, and the planned Canadian Poultry XPO. Also, since 2018 Stratford has been home to the 65,000-sq.-ft. Trillium Hatchery located in the Wright Business Park, as well as Masterfeeds and Stratford Agri-Analysis, a subsidiary of Masterfeeds that is a nationally recognized provider of feedstuff analysis in Canada.

### MEAT PROCESSORS AND BUTCHERS

In this newsletter we will be focusing on our plaqued properties, including the Whyte Packing Company, a prime example of how Stratford became a centre for pork processing, as well as a number of our houses that were homes to several butchers over the decades. Sometimes in the 21st Century it is difficult to appreciate how important butcher shops were in the 19th and early 20th Centuries. Such shops were essential in the days before the advent of the supermarket. Almost everyone ate meat or, in the case of the poor, wanted to do so. During this period there were very few voluntary vegetarians or vegans.

### WHYTE PACKING COMPANY

John Whyte Sr. was born about 1822 in Scotland, where he apprenticed to become a stone cutter and mason. John emigrated to Canada in 1849, and was followed the next year by his wife, Margaret, and their two children and Margaret's mother. They settled on a farm in Hibbert Township, Perth County. An additional six children were born over the next fourteen years.



The Whyte Family

John was able to supplement the family's farm income by taking commissions for stone cutting and masonry work, and was particularly in demand for stonework on bridges through the county and beyond. On one commission, he worked in Stratford on the stone bridge on Huron Street. As a result of the Crimean War (1854-56) the prices for agricultural products substantially increased. John prospered and, with his new found capital, expanded his land holdings. In 1859 he diversified his business to include pork barreling, which was the genesis of the Whyte Packing Company. (During the winter months hogs were slaughtered, the carcases were dressed, and the pork was cured and packed in barrels filled with brine.) Within a few years he built a small processing plant in the village of Cromarty, but by 1870 had built a larger plant in the town of Mitchell with its link to the rail lines and easier access to expanding markets.

John Jr. would manage the business while his father travelled by train and boat to logging camps and sawmills in the Gravenhurst-Muskoka area, which he supplied with his pork products. He also regularly travelled to the Red River Colony, which took him by rail from Stratford to Sarnia, Chicago, and St. Paul, and then up the Red River by boat to what is now Winnipeg to sell his products.

As explained in the Canadian Encyclopedia: “Driven by buoyant markets for cured “Wiltshire sides” of pork in Britain, the Canadian industry grew rapidly from 1880 to 1890. As meat processing industrialized, hundreds of small butcheries were absorbed by larger enterprises seeking international markets for their meat exports. By the turn of the century, meat processing establishments were among the largest employers in Canada’s food and beverage industry and sales of cured pork products became a significant part of Canada’s agro-food exports.”

In the late 1890s the Whyte Packing Company was one of the largest such companies in Canada. John Jr. went to England to successfully establish a network for their products. As a result, he convinced his father to move their operations to Stratford, which had better and more diversified rail links. They hired some of the best architects and engineers from Chicago, the hog processing capital of the U.S., to design and build the largest and most modern processing plant in Canada. The plant opened on July 1, 1900. It was located on a six-and-a-half-acre site on Linden Street just off Erie Street where the municipal bus garage now stands. They also built a plant in Brockville and established retail stores in Toronto, Montreal, Mitchell, St Marys, and two in Stratford - one on Downie Street where the CIBC Bank is located, and 174 Queen Street to serve the expanding east end of the city.



In 1959 the firm held a big party at what is now the William Allman Arena to celebrate its 100th anniversary. More than five hundred employees and guests were invited to an Elizabethan feast. In 1966, facing bankruptcy, the firm was sold, and in the seventies the site was purchased by the city and the plant was demolished. The last remaining vestige of the Whyte Packing Company, in Stratford, is the building that housed their butcher shop at 174 Queen Street.



### **Harry Dempsey - Secretary/Treasurer - Whyte Packing Co. 300 Cambria Street, Built 1914**

In the 1901 census Harry (at 17 years of age) is listed as a bookkeeper. After graduating from the Stratford Collegiate Institute and Central Business College, Harry began his almost 47-year-long employment with the Whyte Packing Company. He began his career when the plant was two years old and he worked in all departments of the plant for the next 14 years prior to assuming the position of secretary-treasurer.



Harry was an extremely active and prominent citizen. He was the first chairman of the Stratford Board of Education and served the board for most of 25 years. Harry was also a chairman of the Perth-Stratford A

Harry was also a chairman of the Perth-Stratford Advisory Board of the C.N.I.B and president of the Stratford Rotary Club, among other positions in community organizations.



**Archibald Stapleton, Commercial Traveler -  
Whyte Packing Company 277 Cambria Street,  
Built 1905**

Archibald (Archie) Stapleton was working as a salesman by 1909, and in the 1911 census, Archie was enumerated as a "Traveler". At the time, traveling salesmen went by a number of names including traveler, commercial traveler, and drummer. Unlike many traveling salesmen, Archie spent his career working for the Whyte Packing Company where he later became a supervisor.



**John William Casson - Butcher (Whyte Packing  
Co.) 45 Player Street, Built 1922**

By 1901 at 20 years of age, John William Casson was a butcher and lived with his parents and siblings on Rebecca Street. In 1917 John was working as a manager for Henry Pauli "Grocery and Meats" at 402 Downie Street where he remained for several more years. He became highly skilled and later gave long years of service to the Whyte Packing Company.



**Edwin Moore Tout - Merchant  
108 Ballantyne Street, Built 1911**

At 14 years of age, Edwin Moore Tout was listed as a butcher, probably as an apprentice. By the age of 24 he was working at George Larkworthy's butcher shop on Market Place. From 1913 to 1919 Edwin had his own butcher shop at 33 Market Place,

and subsequently at 41 Market Place, where the business had expanded to groceries as well, in partnership with Howard Morrow (Tout & Morrow).



**Henry C. Yeandle - Proprietor/Central Meat  
Market 210 Albert Street, Built 1906**

By 1910 Henry had his own shop, Central Meat Market, at 1 Market Place, at the corner of Downie Street. A newspaper article of the day describes Henry's shop as being expertly managed and well stocked, offering the finest in fresh, smoked, and cured meats, and an excellent supply of poultry and game in season. After several years he joined forces with the Kalbfleisch and Rohfrisch butcher shop down the street at 17 Market Place where he remained until retirement.

**George Larkworthy - Merchant/Butcher/First Town Constable  
81 Cobourg Street, Built 1857**

The first record of George Larkworthy occurs when Stratford was incorporated as a town in 1854 and he was appointed the first town constable. His duties as constable on the one-man police force included rounding up stray livestock and traffic control. By 1861 George had acquired a number of properties and had completed the family home at 81 Cobourg Street. His son George Jr. had joined him in his business as a butcher. George Sr.'s eldest son, William, became an innkeeper in Mitchell, and eventually became a butcher in that town. Isaac, the second oldest son, set up a butcher shop in Dereham Township, Oxford County. William's son would eventually be the fourth George Larkworthy to become a butcher.

The third George Larkworthy purchased 81 Cobourg from his father at the time of his marriage in 1899. He enlarged the house to the style it is today and changed the brick colour from ginger to yellow.





## The Johnson Family - Butchers

Please refer to our December newsletter or our website to read about the Johnson family of butchers: Thomas B. Johnson, 185 Albert Street; George Johnson, 81 Nile Street; and Henry Johnson, 161 Elizabeth Street.



## BUTCHERS TO BE FEATURED IN OUR UPCOMING BROCHURE ABOUT MARKET SQUARE

### Henry Ubelacker - 49-53 Market Place, Built 1899

Henry's father, Christian, established one of the first butcher shops in Stratford in 1855. By 1899 Henry had built a two-and-a-half storey building on the corner of Wellington Street and Market Square. For three generations, the Ubelackers maintained a reputation for serving high quality meats and game, in season, to their customers in Stratford until 1953. Their name is still visible on the side of the building.



### James Wright - 41 Market Place

James Wright was trained as a butcher, working as his father's assistant before emigrating from England to Canada. In Stratford he worked as a butcher for McLart and Wright. He then had his own butcher shop in at least two different locations on Ontario Street before moving to 41 Market Place. In 1899 he closed his shop and moved to Toronto. 41 Market Place was later occupied by other butchers or butchers/grocers: E. Tout, Tout & Morrow, and C.W.Anderson.

### Interested in Volunteering?

Do you like to write? We need people to write articles for our newsletters. The word count should be from 250 to 400 words. The topic? Something concerning the buildings in Stratford and Perth County and the stories that they tell. Contact Carole Huband [hubandca@rogers.com](mailto:hubandca@rogers.com)

Interested in information about researching or having a plaque made? Get in touch with our plaque coordinator Mark Yakabuski [yakster@rogers.com](mailto:yakster@rogers.com)

Interested in advocacy for Heritage Conservation Districts? There is a group looking into this for Hamlet Ward. Get in touch with Mary Walton [mmwalton1997@gmail.com](mailto:mmwalton1997@gmail.com) or Richard Wood [rwoodn618@rogers.com](mailto:rwoodn618@rogers.com)

### Please join us for our Annual General Meeting on Tuesday May 25, 7:00 p.m., by Zoom.

I am pleased to announce that at the beginning of the meeting we will have Mark Tovey, Adjunct Research Professor, Department of History, Western University delivering a talk in which he will outline the process by which a community works towards a Heritage Conservation District, using the Talbot North neighbourhood in London as a case study. Mark has already been extremely helpful to the committee that has been working on organizing the Hamlet Ward HCD initiative ([hamletwardhcd.com](http://hamletwardhcd.com)), which our branch of the ACO has been supporting. We hope that the Hamlet Ward HCD will be the first of many such designated neighbourhoods in Stratford.

See you on the 25th!  
Allan Tye, President



An invitation to attend the meeting will be sent out to members and interested parties on May 24, 2021.