

George Randall

George Randall arrived in the area from New Hampshire in 1854 to build train stations along the Grand Trunk Railway line. Within three years, however, he had also established a small mill on Erb Street that would become the foundation for the world-renowned Seagram distillery.



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Randall established the Granite Mills, just west of Caroline Street with his partner William Hespeler in 1857. Within a few years, fifteen men were working there and 50,000 gallons of whiskey were being produced each year from surplus grain. Randall and Hespeler became well known for their “old rye” and sold it for 25 cents a gallon.

Joseph Seagram joined the business in 1870 and within thirteen years became sole owner of the historic mill, changing its name to The Joseph Seagram Flour Mill and Distillery Company, and producing one million gallons of whiskey that year.

Randall, who eventually opened a grocery and liquor store in downtown Berlin in 1884, had been very much involved in the community life of Waterloo while pursuing his business interests. For three years, starting in 1870, he served as the village magistrate. When Waterloo officially became a town in 1876, Randall was the reeve and eventually became the mayor in 1878.

While it is true that Waterloo was a relatively prosperous community in the late nineteenth century, there were still many social issues that needed attention and Randall became intimately involved with them. As the president of a Hospital Trust, Randall helped co-ordinate the campaign to raise \$15,000 for a community hospital. The Berlin-Waterloo Hospital was completed in 1894 after a successful campaign.

Randall was also named to the first Board of Health, a body set up in 1866. The fledgling board would have been responsible for everything from standards for farmers, hotels and restaurants, to procedures in case of disease outbreaks. Records show that during the late 1800s, Waterloo county was home to epidemics of typhoid, diphtheria and “above average cases” of dysentery.

Randall’s name also appears on a committee charged with the responsibility of building the region’s first “poor house.” When the Waterloo County House of Industry and Refuge was opened on June 15, 1869 it became the first of its kind in Ontario. Up until then, refugees, the “friendless poor” and the disabled were being housed in the local jail. An historical account reads, “. . . even in this wealthy county there have always been those who have not been able to earn a livelihood. Some have physical infirmities; others lack mental ability. A few seem to be dogged by the hound of misfortune.”

From 1873 on, Randall and his wife Caroline Roos lived on the corner of Union and King streets which later became the site of the Mutual Life Insurance Company. The couple had three children, George, Clara and Emma.

Randall, who was a Conservative politically, also served as director of the Waterloo Mutual Fire Insurance Company for thirty-three years and president from 1890 to 1908.

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