

# Clarence “Bud” Clair



Bud Clair was a man who used his hands to lay stones, construct buildings, plant forests and create a small lake in Waterloo.

When Clair purchased a 120-acre farm at the end of Amos Avenue in 1946, he noticed an old dam and small stone bridge over a creek that ran through his property. The veteran stone mason surveyed the creek with the same intensity and purpose with which he had been examining stone for many years.

Clair envisioned a small lake, stocked with fish; trees shading picnic blankets and children swimming. He imagined an outdoor skating rink in the winter. In the summer of 1948, Clair rebuilt the old dam, installing floodgates. He planted trees and soon the tiny lake and park became a destination for families. In the early days, Clair raised twenty-two swans on the lake, which has since been named after him. He gave half the swans to the City for the enjoyment of other Waterloo residents.

Today the lake and park are still enjoyed; however, the City of Waterloo is working to clean up the lake while still preserving it for the enjoyment of the neighbours.

When Clair sold much of the farm in 1955 to developers, his hands continued to work building houses. Throughout his seventy year career, Clair laid thousands of stones and bricks. While his handiwork is especially evident in the Beechwood homes of his former farm, it can also be seen throughout Waterloo Region on everything from factories to libraries to places of worship. He laid the cornerstones of at least seven Kitchener-Waterloo churches.

His son Jim Clair once said that anyone can lay a brick but that it took a special flair to work with stone. “He could look at a stone and know where it would go,” said Jim.

Clair, who died in 2006 at eighty-nine years of age, learned masonry from his father George, who started Clair Masonry in 1900. Today, Bud Clair’s son Jim still runs the business, along with his other son Cam and grandson Tom Milligan.

While he was born in New Hamburg in 1916, the family moved to Waterloo when Clair was a young boy, building a house in 1923 on the corner of Erb and Moore streets. The home sat on ten acres of what was called the Ontario Seed Farm. He remembered clearly the neighbourhood of his youth. As a boy, he was hired to stamp on the newly-cut cabbage of a nearby sauerkraut factory on Devitt Street. The Bratton house owned by the Seagrams was in the area, as was the Tweed mansion.

Bud Clair started working with his father during the Depression, taking any job he could for 25 cents an hour. In 1939 he married Betty Thaler of Breslau, and together they raised four children, Cameron, Joan, Marilyn and James. During the Second World War, Clair used his knowledge of masonry at various locations.

When he moved north of Baden in the late 1960s, Clair built a home on the twenty-acre property, incorporating many of the bricks and stones he had gathered during his long

career, including some from the old Waterloo City Hall. When the city hall was being torn down, tradesmen were offered the old bricks.

Clair was particularly proud of the home's impressive chimney. "I can tell you every stone that's in it. The Waterloo post office was built of this stone . . . And the TD bank in Preston is of this," he said.

Just as he had done in Beechwood, Bud Clair planted many trees over the years. At the height of his conservation efforts, Clair estimated he, his children and grandchildren planted two hundred trees a year for twenty-five years.

*Photo courtesy of Joan Wolf.*