

Ford S. Kumpf



Ford S. Kumpf began serving the public as a young boy, holding the mayor's horse while the civic leader drove the last spike into the Berlin-Waterloo trolley line in 1889. The mayor at that ceremony was his own father, Christian Kumpf, and it was a proud day for the 12-year-old boy who would go on to become "Mr. Waterloo."

By the time he died in 1960 at the age of 83, Kumpf was known for serving as a "patron of almost every drive and public campaign in Waterloo." His obituary honoured a gentleman who had touched the lives of many early residents:

"Mr. Kumpf will always be remembered for his leadership in community welfare, for his business acumen, for his stimulation of business growth, for his personal charity, good humor and sharp wit."

Kumpf was born in 1877 in what is now known as the historic Erb-Kumpf house at 172 King Street South. His father bought the home in 1869, which was built in 1812 by Waterloo founder Abraham Erb. In addition to mayor, Christian Kumpf was a newspaper owner and one of the founding fathers of the Dominion Life Assurance Company.

After attending K-W Collegiate Institute, Ford Kumpf became a junior clerk at the insurance company his father helped establish. He left his job in 1900 to pursue a career in journalism as a reporter for the *Waterloo Citizen*, which later became the *Waterloo Sentinel*. In 1902 he settled into a position as treasurer, and then clerk for the Town of Waterloo. Later, he took on additional responsibilities as manager of the Water and Light Commission.

Many years on, Kumpf reminisced about how in the early days street lights in the Town were turned off during a full moon to save money. "It was called the moonlight schedule and Mr. Kumpf said he often recalled when the moon failed to make its scheduled appearance and the streets remained dark."

In 1914 he rejoined the Dominion Life Assurance Company as an assistant manager. He quickly rose through the ranks, becoming managing director in 1919 and president ten years later. In 1923 he married Anna Henrich. Kumpf remained on as president for four years after retiring from his managing director post in 1945.

As a leader in the insurance sector, Kumpf was well-known across Canada and became the "best promoter Waterloo ever had." Kumpf was unabashed in his support, often pitting Kitchener against Waterloo with his quip, "The best thing Kitchener ever had is Waterloo."

Despite his heavy workload, Kumpf found time to volunteer for the Boy Scout Association, the Canadian Red Cross and during the Second World War, Kumpf led the Waterloo North Victory Loan Committee.

In 1935 he was awarded the Jubilee Medal and two years later won the Coronation Medal for his community service. He was also instrumental in securing a summer camp – called Everton Camp – for local Cubs and Scouts. A building at the camp was named in his honour. The University of Waterloo awards several scholarships each year to outstanding high school students in Kumpf's name.

Ford S. Kumpf's passion for his community never diminished. At 80-years-old he was still attending board meetings and raising funds to erect the Waterloo Cenotaph. After an interview with the octogenarian in 1957, a newspaper reporter wrote: "Ford S. Kumpf can outwalk, outtalk, outsell and outjoke men 20 years his junior."

Photo courtesy of the Waterloo Public Library.