

Edward Frowde Seagram



When Edward F. Seagram died suddenly on a winter afternoon in 1937, much of the history of his generosity died with him. While Seagram was well-known for his support of everything from music to sports in his “beloved Waterloo,” Seagram often insisted his many donations to the needy be carried out in private:

“The Biblical phrase ‘Let not your left hand know what your right hand doeth’ was an outstanding characteristic of Mr. Seagram in his many charitable actions. He helped many a needy person and needy cause and no one but the recipient of his big heart ever knew of it. He will be sadly missed by a host of friends.”

Seagram, who was born on September 28, 1873, was the eldest son of distiller Joseph E. Seagram. He followed in his father’s footsteps in many ways, joining the company in 1894 and carrying on his passion for horseracing. Like his father, Edward also carried on the Seagram tradition of philanthropy.

His reach extended into the community’s musical life when he donated a band-shell in Waterloo Park, and throughout his life he was an enthusiastic supporter of the Waterloo Musical Society.

Seagram, who was known as Waterloo’s “most prominent son and respected citizen,” attended Ontario’s Lakefield Preparatory school and Trinity College, and McGill University in Montreal. He joined the management staff of the distillery in 1894 and became president in 1920.

As a sportsman, Seagram was perhaps best known for his interest in horseracing. A millionaire himself, it is said that he pursued the sport not for financial gain but for the sheer joy of his pastime. The horses he bred at his Waterloo stables off Bridgeport Road won races across North America under the Seagram colours of black and yellow. His interest helped support the sport in Ontario. Major Palmer Wright, secretary of the Ontario Jockey Club, said it would be “impossible to exaggerate how much he will be missed on the Canadian turf.”

Seagram was also an avid fisherman and hunter and enjoyed hockey, bowling, cricket and curling. His legacy of sportsmanship is still visible at the Westmount Golf and Country Club, which he helped establish. He and his brothers donated the Seagram Memorial Athletic Field to Waterloo College, now known as Wilfrid Laurier University. He also made contributions to the Waterloo Lawn Bowling Club and the community tennis courts.

When Edward Seagram died, the local newspaper wrote, “Not more has a family done for a municipality than the Seagram family has done for Waterloo. No more prominent and leading part has any individual played in the upbuilding of a community than has E.F. Seagram.”

At the time of his death he was owner of the famous Seagram Racing Stables, president of both the Seagram Distillery and Canada Barrels and Kegs Ltd., and a director of many financial institutions. On the day of his funeral, Frowde Limited, the distillery, the Dominion Life Assurance Company and the Waterloo Mutual Fire Insurance Company closed for the afternoon. The Waterloo Town council draped his portrait in the council chambers with royal purple and held a moment of silence. In addition to his many activities, Edward Seagram had served as mayor in 1906 and 1907.

The funeral cortege, which proceeded from his home to the Church of the Holy Saviour, was the largest the Town of Waterloo had ever seen.

Photo courtesy of the Waterloo Public Library