

William Snider



William Snider was a prominent businessman and politician who ran the old grist mill in Waterloo during the days when coming to the mill was seen as a warm destination for isolated farmers. Snider's mill on King Street just south of Erb had a reception room with a large fireplace where farmers could socialize.

“. . . in those far off days, when there was more bush land than tilled fields, the visit to the Snider mill was looked forward to as a sort of vacation - a huge reward for a weary journey with the grist.”

Snider purchased the mill from his father Elias in 1879. While ownership changed in the mid-1800s, it was Snider's grandfather, Jacob C. Snider, who bought the mill in 1829 from Waterloo pioneer Abraham Erb.

As the first manufacturing business in Waterloo, the mill played an important role in the development of the Village. It is said the historic Union Mill's heyday was under the ownership of William Snider who made improvements to the building and the machinery, creating “the most modernly equipped and progressive (mill) in the province.”

Not content with success in the business world, Snider left his mark on the political history of Waterloo as well. Snider served on the Village council beginning in 1873 and when Waterloo was incorporated as a Town in 1876 he served for two years as an alderman. He was the Town reeve from 1878 until 1881 and was mayor in 1885–1886 and again in 1891–1892.

In a newspaper article it was written: “Mr. Snider has brought to bear upon the public business the same progressiveness, sound judgment and prudence as characterized the management of his business, and has proved one of the most efficient and valuable public men the town has had.”

At the height of the William Snider Company Ltd, the business was producing 300 barrels of flour “of the most superior quality” every day. Some of the popular products – “Seven Lilies” and “Ocean” – were shipped across Canada and to Britain.

Snider's interests in business and government came together when the council asked him to provide gas for its lamps with his generating plant on Laurel Creek. In 1891 the council ordered Snider to light the Town's twenty-eight lamps on King Street every evening with the exception of eight nights each month – six nights before the rising of the full moon, the night of the full moon and one night after. In 1909, the Town purchased Snider's small electrical generating unit.

Snider's history of serving the community didn't help him when in 1911 he wanted to donate the large parcel of land he owned on the southwest corner of King Street at Erb. The land in question had been used as a town square for almost 100 years. Snider did not want to pay taxes anymore on land that was being used as a public space.

Surprisingly, the Town voted against Snider, ordering him to pay full tax. Snider then sold the land to the Molson's Bank for \$10,000 and in 1914 a bank and office building was erected on the site.

The original Snider mill was removed from its location at the centre of town in 1927. After Snider died in 1915, his son Fred W. Snider took over as president and managing director.

Photo courtesy of the Waterloo Public Library