

Waterloo 150: Moses Springer

The future must have looked very grim for the 10-year-old Moses Springer when his parents both died two weeks apart in the cholera epidemic of 1834. Remarkably, this young man, one of 11 Springer orphans, went on to become one of the founding fathers of Waterloo. Moses Springer was the first reeve of the Village of Waterloo in 1857, and the first mayor of the Town in 1876.



Nobody took more interest in the progress and general welfare of Waterloo than Mr. Springer or has done more solid work in its municipality and that of the county, it was once written.

Fortunately for Springer, a noble-souled Mennonite Bishop, Joseph Hagey of Hespeler, took in the orphaned boy. While Springer's public school education was limited during those early years, an honest and kind-hearted Scotchman named William Collins provided him with nightly lessons, and Springer went on to become a teacher.

Moses Springer was born in 1824 to Benjamin Springer and prominent Mennonite Mary Rykeman, on a farm near Blair in the County of Waterloo. After being orphaned he attended school and farmed until he was 20 years old. He then taught himself land surveying and eventually moved to the Waterloo area where he started up a German-language newspaper called *Der Canadische Bauernfreund* in 1854.

Two years later he became a merchant, opening up a business called Moses Springer & Company. He sold dry goods, groceries, crockery, wines and liquor at the King Street store.

In 1863, he became interested in insurance and became president of one of the first insurance firms in the area Waterloo Mutual Fire Insurance Company. He was also a founder of the Mutual Life Assurance Company, and served as secretary and general agent from 1869 to 1870. He was active in the selling of many of the first 500 policies, in the company that would later become Sun Life.

During all of this activity, Springer was also serving as Waterloo's reeve off and on for about ten years between 1857 and 1875. He also sat on the Waterloo County council for 11 years, and between 1867 and 1881 he represented the riding of North Waterloo in the provincial legislature.

He was the first mayor when Waterloo was incorporated as a town in 1876. As mayor, Springer oversaw the establishment of new by-laws governing community safety, public

morals, business operations and the granting of incentives for new businesses to establish themselves in the growing town.

Springer is also remembered as the mayor who brought the railway to Waterloo. In 1877, he negotiated an agreement with the Grand Trunk Railway Company to run a branch line from Berlin to Waterloo.

In 1881, Springer became the sheriff of Waterloo County, a position he held until his death in 1898.

A Waterloo park and community centre on Lincoln Road have been named in Moses Springer's honour.

Photo Credit: Waterloo Public Library