

# Stratford's Market Place



In its earliest years, the Huron Street bridge and "Shakespeare Place" at Ontario Street and Erie Street (now the Perth Regiment Memorial Park) formed the centre of Stratford. The grist and saw mills were located here as well as the first stores and the very first building in Stratford, the Shakespeare Inn.

However, with the incorporation as a village in 1854 and the arrival of the railway in 1856, both of which presaged important growth for the town, a more desirable town square was required. The railways were planned and built to the south of the built-up area of the village and this exerted pressure for the centre of town to develop further south towards the stations.

The site that was chosen was a triangular piece of land offered by Donald McDonald, a former surveyor for the Canada Company and soon-to-be Canadian senator. The terms of the purchase agreement specified that it was to be a "Market Place" to ensure that a market area would always be central to the downtown. The land was originally criss-crossed by a creek and was adjacent to a potashery.

But Stratford also needed a town hall to fit its aspirations, and so in 1856-1857 a new building was constructed at the tip of the triangle, where the present city hall sits. The old town hall was also the market building, with four shops on the ground floor at the front as well as market stalls (under the concert hall) at the back along Market Place. (See the panel for City Hall – "The Queen of the Market Square".)

Soon commercial buildings (and lots of hotels) developed along Wellington and Downie Streets opposite Market Place. Eventually, the creek was completely enclosed and, by 1900, commercial buildings were built along the south side of Market Place.



Market Place quickly became the centre for commercial activity in the town, with regular and special market days. The weigh scales for the town were located at the Downie Street side of the square. It also became the focus for many special events, and during the 1866 Fenian Raids was used as a parade ground for the unit of British soldiers housed at city hall.

After the first town hall burned down in 1897, it was decided not to rebuild market facilities with the new city hall. Instead a new market building was built one block away behind the firehall, at Brunswick and Waterloo Streets. The weigh scales were also moved there. These were torn down in the 1950s.

However, Market Place continued to be used for many years for outdoor markets as well as occasional events. The latter still occur today, especially the Canada Day celebration on July 1. With the arrival of the automobile, it also became a parking area on busy days, later formalized with an island down the centre.

The commercial nature of the triangular "square" continues with the many stores and restaurants that line its boundaries. Today, its perimeter is protected by the heritage district designation of the core area. Ideas are presently being considered to enlarge the public space within Market Place.

BY C. BART-RIEDSTRA AND L. RIEDSTRA, STRATFORD-PERTH ARCHIVES

TOP TO BOTTOM:

MARKET DAY IN THE MARKET SQUARE, CIRCA 1910 (LOOKING TOWARD DOWNIE STREET).

THE AUTOMOBILE TOOK OVER THE MARKET SQUARE BY THE 1930S. LOOKING TOWARD DOWNIE STREET, THIS PHOTO SHOWS THE BUILDINGS ALONG THE SOUTH SIDE OF MARKET PLACE BUILT IN THE 1890S AND THE EARLY 1900S.

MARKET PLACE IN THE 1870S. NOTE THE MARKET BUILDING AT THE BACK OF THE OLD CITY HALL (LEFT), THE WEIGH SCALES NEAR DOWNIE STREET (CENTRE), AND THE OPEN ROMEO CREEK (RIGHT).