



### **Inducted: 2006**

Alex Stewart always had an interest in producing better crops from better seed. He began a mixed grain and beef farming operation in East Williams Township, Middlesex County in 1910 and by 1925 was growing winter wheat for seed and selling it cleaned to his neighbours. By 1929, he had established Alex M. Stewart & Son Seeds and became a member of the Canadian Seed Growers' Association. After serving in the Royal Canadian Air Force in World War II, Alex's son, John A. Stewart, joined the business and expanded their reputation for quality, pedigreed, cereal seed. The business evolved into Stewart Seeds and won international acclaim. Their many seed varieties took top honours in world-wide competitions. Both father and son were contributing members to local agricultural groups, as well as provincial and national associations.

### **ALEX M. STEWART & JOHN A. STEWART 1890 – 1967      1919-1991**

When Alex M. Stewart was born in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, seed stewardship was a comparatively new concept. Early in his life, young Alex had an interest in pursuing better crop production and began working towards producing better seed.

Born November 24, 1890, in East Williams Township, to parents John (Black Jack) Stewart and Mary McLeish, Alex, was one of seven children. Following his early, local education, Alex, in 1907, was sent to Queen's University in Kingston. When his family went to visit him, they couldn't find him. He had left for Western Canada, and was managing a grain elevator in Alberta. He soon returned home, and in 1910, purchased a farm and started growing open pollinated Golden Glow corn. For cash crops, he grew sugar beets and Black Burley tobacco, and for feed, he grew wheat, oats, barley, alfalfa and corn silage.

By 1937, he won the world's championship for oats at the International Livestock and Grain Show in Chicago, and he was rapidly gaining international acclaim. He started by selling seed to his neighbours, but soon his business developed a solid reputation, being a producer, processor and merchandiser of pedigreed seed. He twice captured the title of "World Oat King".

As his reputation for his pedigreed seed grain grew, his motto was "You reap what you sow, so sow the best."

Alex was one of the founders of the Soil and Crop Improvement Association of Ontario and served as its first president. He was also very involved with:

- The Canadian Seed Growers Association
- Middlesex Soil and Crop Improvement Association
- Ontario Stockyards, Toronto- its first chairman
- Royal Winter Fair Seed Division
- He was inducted into both the Ontario and Canadian Agricultural Hall's of Fame
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In 1915, Alex married Christena Jean Happer and they had four children. Alex M. Stewart died in 1967.

Born in 1919, Alex M's son, John A., attended Beechwood public school and high school in Strathroy. In 1942, John A. Stewart graduated from Ontario Agricultural College in Guelph, with a B.S.A. degree in Field Husbandry. He served in the Air Force in World War II and then joined his father in the seed business in 1945. This was the beginning of Alex M. Stewart and Son Limited. A seed cleaning and warehouse facility was established near Ailsa Craig and the business grew and prospered. By the 1960's, the company was known as Stewart Seeds, with many new breeding programs gaining recognition. Winter research was conducted in Mexico with the new "Russel" oat variety. In 1965, John entered into private plant breeding of early maturing hybrid seed corn and a winter nursery was established in Jamaica that produced 32 licensed early hybrid varieties of seed corn. .

In 1972 a new private cereal-breeding program was initiated, complete with a 24-hour growth chamber laboratory and a new research department. During this time, Stewart Seeds had Canada's largest private plant breeding program. In the 70's, the company tested Stewart hybrids in 17 international areas, including the U.S., Russia, China, Japan, Europe and all across Canada. In 1974, there were 50 full-time employees.

The Stewarts' reputation for superior seeds continued when Ciba Geigy Canada Ltd. bought the business in 1975, and then in 1984 was sold to W. G. Thompson Ltd.

John A. Stewart continued his father's tradition of involvement in agricultural organizations. In 1960, he received the Canadian Seed Grower's Association's highest award, the Robertson Associate Medal. He was the first chairman of the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario, was on the Board of Governors at the University of Guelph. He served as director, vice-president and president of the Canadian Seed Trade Association. In 1979, he was awarded the Distinguished Agrologist Award by the Ontario Institute of Agrologists. He was inducted into the Ontario Agricultural Hall of Fame. This partial listing, of awards and positions held, is a testament to John A's ability, within, and the respect he held throughout the agricultural community.

In 1942, John married Madelyn Sanford from Nova Scotia and they had three children. John A. Stewart died in 1991.

Thanks to the groundbreaking work laid by both Alex M. and John A. Stewart, their dedication to superior seed and improved crop production, the seed business continues to be central to agriculture in Ontario. For their solid foundation in the seed business, Alex M. Stewart and John A. Stewart are inducted to the Middlesex County Agricultural Hall of Fame.