



Inducted: 2011

William Weld was a farmer, entrepreneur, editor publisher and all round leader in things deemed of agricultural importance in Ontario in the latter half of the 19th century. He established a farm on the Thames River near Delaware where through hard work, perseverance and the use of advanced methods of farming he became an acknowledged success as a farmer. In 1866 he established the Farmers Advocate and Home magazine which became the dominant agricultural journal in Ontario for 99 years. Through this publication, Weld was able to provide farmers with a means of communication whereby they could freely discuss important agricultural issues, exchange advice and keep informed about upcoming agricultural events

WILLIAM WELD

1824 - 1891

William Weld was born in Wiltshire, England and educated privately. In 1844, at the age of nineteen, he immigrated to Canada. In those days Canada was sparsely settled and railroads were unknown. Arriving in Hamilton, he walked across much of south western Ontario before taking up a bush lot of 100 acres on the Thames River fourteen miles southwest of London near Delaware.

The following year in 1845, he married Agnes Johnston, a Delaware girl, and true to pioneer tradition they raised a family of eleven children, nine sons and two daughters.

The farm prospered as Weld applied the ideas about scientific agriculture that he had obtained from British and American journals to the solution of practical problems in Canadian farming. He soon became well known locally as a successful farmer and a breeder of superior livestock. He had a fine herd of Shorthorn and Ayrshire Cattle as well as Lincoln and Leister sheep.

His success led him to establish a seed distribution business, the Canadian Agricultural Emporium through which he introduced Red Fife wheat and other imported varieties of grains to the Delaware district. William also introduced many other new and different varieties of grain to the area, first to be tried on his experimental farm and then if proven sold through the Emporium. The demonstration or experimental farm later was moved to a 215 acre parcel of land on the edge of London that became known as "Weldwood Farm". His Agricultural Emporium would in time become one of the most important seed houses in Canada. From his own experience he knew that agricultural journals were a good source of practical knowledge for farmers. Since his neighbours were already seeking his advice, the transitions from local expert to agricultural

journalist seemed natural. The *Farmer's Advocate and Home Magazine*, which Weld founded in 1866, was intended to be both a business venture and a vehicle for the propagation of his ideas on agriculture. For a time the *Advocate* was written and edited at Weld's Delaware farm, but the paper soon became his major interest and around 1867 he set up a publishing office in London, leaving the farm to his sons. The early editions of the *Advocate* consisted of only a few pages but after some years, when it had become a well known monthly, it carried informative articles on agricultural techniques as well as news, a women's page, a children's section and fiction aimed at rural readers. By the 1880's the *Advocate* was the most widely read farm journal in Canada with an estimated circulation of 17,000 copies a month. A western edition, published in Winnipeg was established in 1891.

As editor of the *Advocate*, Weld kept a keen and constant watch of the whole Canadian scene. He encouraged the move to a more diversified agriculture with articles promoting new techniques such as winter dairying and the use of ensilage, he promoted the settlement of Manitoba and the northwest for ranching and grain growing. He steadily advocated improved stock and better farming methods. He was ever vigilant that the quarantine laws be enforced and diseased stock thus kept out of the healthy herds and flocks of Ontario. His editorials envisaged the Canadian Pacific Railway crossing the west several years before it was to happen. He was one of those who initiated the Provincial Winter Fair at Guelph, the first educational livestock show to be established in the British Empire. Through his paper and with the aid of the men he gathered about him, he sponsored the first Canadian Livestock Breeders Associations under whose guidance was developed the system of livestock registration that ultimately became the model for the English speaking world.

William Weld would become an influential friend Sir John Carling. Because Weld believed that farming was a profession and that farmers required training, he encouraged Carling to establish the Ontario School of Agriculture (O.A.C.) which opened in 1874. Through his writings, both the O.A.C. and the Ontario Agricultural Administration, from time to time, received stern criticism for their short comings. Such criticism was couched in expressive language. For instance in writing of the Advisory Board of the Association of Arts and Agriculture and their connection with experimental work, Weld said: "WE express the opinion that they are a pack of incapables, every old fogey of them, from the chairman all the way down to that overbearing little braggart, the ex-official member, who basely, falsely and maliciously accused us of assuming an antagonistic attitude for party purposes." Such criticism had its effect and considerable deference was usually paid the fiery journalist.

Based on the success of his own experimental and demonstration farm, Weld also persuaded John Carling to establish the Dominion Experimental Farm System which was eventually created by the Federal government in 1886 and it began under the guidance of William Saunders. The first five farms were opened in Nappan Nova Scotia, Brandon Manitoba, Indian Head Northwest Territories, Agassiz British Columbia and in Ottawa Ontario.

At perhaps the height of his popularity, William Weld died in 1891 as a result of drowning in his home while doing plumbing repairs.

Through his outspoken editorials prodding governments into more effective regulation, his attacks on party spirit and patronage, and his promotion of new farming techniques, William Weld became the best known agricultural journalist of his time. The tone of his prose was often acerbic and sometimes intemperate, but he was willing to admit his errors and move with the times. His contemporaries saw him as a man of vision, a

pioneer of good farming practices and an independently minded defender of the farmer's interests. His paper = the *Farmer's Advocate and Home Magazine*= would survive him and flourish as *the* Canadian farm paper until 1965, a total of 99 years of continuous publication.