



Inducted: 2000

Keith Riddell, Agricultural Representative for the Department of Agriculture in Middlesex County from 1929 – 1965.

He helped guide a large number of young farmers through what he described as the greatest farm revolution. Many farmers in Middlesex County will remember W.K. for his vigorous activity on behalf of Junior Farmers and 4-H, and his leadership in the Middlesex Soil and Crop Improvement Association out of which grew the Seed Fair (now the Western Fair Farm Show).

During the period of his activity, the whole concept of farming was transformed and he helped a great many people cope with the transformation.

**WILLIAM KEITH RIDDELL
1900-1970**

William Keith Riddell or “W.K” as he was known was born on March 9, 1900, at lot 34 concession 2 of West Nissouri Township in the count of Middlesex. Upon completion of high school at Stratford Collegiate, he attended the Ontario Agricultural College at Guelph where he received his degree in agriculture in 1923. Fresh out of school, W.K. was hired by the Department of Agriculture and worked in Walkerton first as an assistant and then later as Agricultural Representative for Bruce County. In 1929 he became “Ag. Rep.” For Middlesex County and the City of London.

W.K. worked endless hours providing a service for the rural community, which included many night meetings. His whole career involved working directly with farmers on an individual basis as well as with numerous farm groups and organizations. He seemed to thrive on assuming responsibilities and he had the ability to handle big jobs right down to the smallest detail. Many farmers have said that if it was not for Keith Riddell’s advice and assistance they would not have been able to get their farm business established.

He probably did more than any one individual of his time in promoting rural-urban rapport. Quite apart from what was considered the normal responsibilities of an Ag. Rep. , W.K. was the secretary-treasurer of many breed associations and crop organizations wherein he provided much appreciated leadership. He seemed to have a natural ability to train young men to assume responsibilities. It is not by coincidence alone that a number of his assistants went on to become deputy ministers of agriculture. These include Gordon Bennett, Everett Biggs and Kenneth Lantz. Former Minister of Agriculture, Bill Stewart, gave W.K. credit for

helping him with his public speaking and development for that position. Another former deputy minister of agriculture, Clayton Switzer, credits W.K. for directing him into the field of agriculture.

It was W.K. who first sparked the idea of the Middlesex Seed Fair, which later became the Western Fair Farm Show. He was also instrumental in the development of the Upper Thames Conservation Authority. His insight, even before the flood of 1937, led to a meeting of county officials and agricultural representatives from which later was formed the UTRCA.

He was a tremendous promoter of 4-H, Junior Farmers and continuing education in agricultural fields. He also coached many livestock judging teams, which took their share of awards. W.K. was a great public speaker and was able to inject a lot of humour in his speeches. His supply of stories seemed to be limitless and his unpredictable introductions of head table guests came to be fun sessions for both the audience and the 'victim'. His retirement in 1965 represented 42 years of service to the agricultural community.

W.K. Riddell and his wife, the former Dorothy Spong had four children: Dorothy, Catherine, John and Douglas. John (Jack) influenced by the leadership and training of his father became an Agricultural Minister for Ontario and a long-term MPP in Huron County.

At the age of 69 W.K. Riddell died on January 1, 1970. It is said that his passing marked the end of an era in the agricultural extension service.