

Jacob Uffelman

Jacob Uffelman (far right in photo) began planting the seeds of what would become one of the City's oldest businesses, when he was just fifteen years of age. It was 1875 when the young man began his mercantile apprenticeship at what was known as the Corner Store in Waterloo.



The early years saw many changes for young Jacob Uffelman, and by 1891 he had established his own store on King Street South. The J. Uffelman store, which sold dry goods and clothing, grew under his leadership and in 1911 he purchased the Ontario Seed Company (OSC). Thus began an era of opportunity for the Uffelman family, and today it is one of the largest suppliers of wholesale seeds in Canada.

The original store, now known as Ontario Seed Home Hardware, still operates at 16 King Street South, but the family has also expanded its operations to include a large plant on Phillip Street, seed warehouses, the Glenbriar Home Hardware store, and a 150-acre seed farm in Woolwich Township.

The family's success began with the hard work of Jacob Uffelman, whose establishment is described in a 1906 newspaper account as "a model of a bright and up-to-date store and the constantly increasing trade of the business is a tribute to the enterprise with which it is being carried on." It further states that Uffelman's store is to "be numbered in the foremost ranks of the mercantile establishments of the county."

After Uffelman's apprenticeship, he worked at the John Shuh Company, which was on the site of the current hardware store. Uffelman also ran his own general store in Breslau before moving to Elmira, and finally returning to Waterloo to purchase the John Shuh Company store in 1891.

The Uptown Waterloo landscape has changed dramatically since those early years when Uffelman owned a 100-acre farm bordered by Allen, Moore, Willow, Devitt, and Bridgeport Road.

In addition to the seed business, Uffelman grew his own cabbage during the 1920s to feed his Silverthread Sauerkraut factory on Devitt Avenue. The factory shipped barrels of sauerkraut across Canada.

Jacob Uffelman also found time to serve on Waterloo's town council in 1895 and again in 1902-03. One year on he served as the mayor, and was later appointed a justice of the peace. Uffelman's son William also served as mayor in 1931.

Today, the well-known third and fourth generations of Uffelmans run the business, including Jim and Bill (Buck), and Buck's son Scott. The company now sells more than forty million packets of seeds every year.

Photo courtesy of the Waterloo Public Library.