

Clayton Wells



Dr. Clayton Wells was the son of a dentist who worked alongside his father in an office above the old Snyder's Drug Store. When Wells sold the dental practice in 1918, just six years after the death of his father Walter Wells, the local newspaper reported the sale:

“The Wells dentistry parlours are among the oldest and best known in Western Ontario . . . Dr. Wells has enjoyed an extensive practice and is well and favourably known throughout Waterloo County and Western Ontario.”

While he had spent many hours over the course of his 39-year career inside this office, the legacy of Clayton Wells is illuminated in the ways he spent his time after work.

It seems Dr. Wells' hand touched every aspect of community life in the early history of Waterloo. When he died in May 1934 he was remembered as one of Waterloo's “most prominent and public-spirited citizens . . . (he) was keenly interested in civic affairs, music, parks, athletic activities including bicycling in the early '90s, fraternal societies, historical society and travel.”

Wells was an advocate of protecting and enhancing Waterloo Park while he served as chairman of the Waterloo Park Board. He also loved the outdoors, spending many hours organizing meets for cyclists. In the 1890s, bicycling had become a popular sport and Wells was a member of the Canadian Wheelman's Association, serving as the vice-president of that association in 1898. He also helped organize community lacrosse and football teams in the early 1880s. “Dr. Wells took a keen interest in clean amateur sport and was a regular attendant at baseball, hockey and other sports,” it was written.

Many of the athletic meets he helped organize were designed to benefit his other love, the Waterloo Musical Society. He served on the executive committee of the musical society for three years in the 1890s and was a member of what was known as the “Big Four” singing quartette that appeared in local concerts in the 1880s.

He also made time for politics, serving as a member of the Waterloo town council in 1898 and was an active member of the Board of Trade, the Germania Lodge of the Independent Order of Oddfellows and the local Hive of the Knights of the Maccabees.

In 1920 he served on the board of directors of the Dominion Life Assurance Company and much later served on the Waterloo Town Planning Commission. After retiring, he became very involved in the Waterloo Historical Society, writing an historical sketch of the town for the 1928 annual report of that society.

His affection for the people of his community and appreciation for their stories can be seen in the whimsical writing of his well-used history. In an early draft of the historical sketch, Dr. Wells wrote about a picnic in 1869 or 1870 organized by a Mr. John King, the principal of Central School in downtown Waterloo:

“Accordingly, a bright little chap was chosen to be King, and a little blue eyed girl was selected as Queen, their ages being

about 8 years. For several weeks Mr. King had the teachers train the scholars in singing appropriate songs for the occasion. . . On the day of the picnic the children formed in line, and headed by the band marched to the square at King and Erb Streets. The King and Queen did not march, of course, for who ever heard of a Queen marching, anyway.”

At the end of the written sketch, Dr. Wells revealed that the Queen was a little Eleanor Hughes who went on to become “Mrs Clayton W. Wells”. They were married in 1888 and had two children.

When Dr. Clayton Wells died in 1934, the family received friends and associates in their home where “the drawing room and casket were banked with beautiful flowers sent by friends.” On that day flags at the town hall and Dominion Life Assurance Co. were flown at half-mast in tribute to Dr. Wells.

Photo courtesy of the Waterloo Public Library.