



William Atcheson Stewart 1915-1990

William A. (Bill) Stewart was born on February 15, 1915, a 4th generation resident of London Township. His early education was at a one-room elementary school. He then traveled by horse and buggy to the Lucan High School.

Following the death of his mother, Bill at 15 decided to quit school. His father did everything he could to persuade him to continue his education but Bill only wanted to farm and could no advantage to furthering his formal education. In the next ten years, he did however, take every opportunity to further his knowledge of the agricultural business. Bill was an active member of the Boys and Girls Clubs (forerunner of 4-H) and Junior Farmers. It was through these that he was able to take part in many of the Short Courses offered during the winter months by W.K. Riddell from the London office of the Department of Agriculture and at the Ontario Agricultural College in Guelph.

Towards the end of the depression there was a movement to unite farmers to try to solve many of their problems. In 1938 Bill became a founding director of the Middlesex Chamber of Commerce – later known as the Middlesex Federation of Agriculture of which he was president in 1945 and '46. This group's concerns with health and education issues led to Bill being appointed Middlesex County representative on the East Middlesex High School board in 1947.

In 1957 he was elected MPP for the riding of Middlesex North, beginning a political career which was to span eighteen years. Bill in 1960, became Minister without Portfolio under Premier Leslie Frost and in 1961 Agricultural Minister under John Robarts.

As a local MPP., Bill felt his most important achievements were the Lake Huron-London water pipeline with water being supplied to London as well as many municipalities along the way and the establishment of the London Children's Psychiatric Hospital on the grounds of the former Byron Sanatorium. During his career as a cabinet member he crossed many hurdles – some of them teetering in the rural wind. While he could be aptly called the father of Ontario's commodity marketing system, he did not gain that status without perilous moments. Some of the legislation coming from this period includes the Farm Products Marketing Act and the creation of Milk, Egg, Broiler, Turkey, Pork, Wheat, Soybean, Bean and Apple Marketing boards in an effort to bring unifying and stabilizing forces to the marketing of agricultural commodities in the province.

Under his guidance agricultural colleges at Centralia, Kemptville and New Liskeard were established to supplement those at Guelph and Ridgetown. He also promoted and helped establish the Ontario Agricultural Museum at Milton as well as the Ontario Farm Council, the Agricultural Research Institute of Ontario and the Ontario Farm Machinery Board.

Bill retired from the legislature in 1975 as the longest serving Agricultural Minister in Canada and returned to his farm, which over the years had changed its focus from dairy to beef and pedigreed seed production. In 1977 his daughter Marilyn and her husband Tom Jenkins took over the farm and once again changed its focus back to dairy production.

Retirement from one career led to opportunities in others. In the late 70's and 80's Bill served as director with several boards and companies. His lifetime involvement on behalf of education, agriculture and agricultural education led to the granting of honorary Doctor of Laws degrees from both the University of Guelph and the University of Western Ontario as well as lifetime memberships in both the Ontario and Canadian Institutes of Agriculture.

Bill and his wife Edythe (Jones) had four children: Marilyn, who along with husband and children are the 5th and 6th generation on the original family farm; Norma who married Richard Brock from Adelaide Township; Barbara who married Bev Shipley (mayor of Middlesex Centre) and Gay who married John Slinger from Guelph.

William A. Stewart died on December 8, 1990 at the age of 75. He will long be remembered for his unswerving dedication to improving the profile and stability of agriculture. For a boy who just wanted to farm and who was always happiest when he was just "Bill" his accomplishments were remarkable.