



The Saturday Market is a favourite spot for friends to meet.

HISTORY, TRADITION & COMMUNITY: Brockville Farmers' Market

By Russ Disotell

With most of the emphasis on Canada's Sesquicentennial, 2017 has become a year for reflection on our history and heritage. Locally, Canada's century and a half is getting most of the press, closely followed by the imminent re-opening of the Brockville Railway Tunnel, Canada's oldest, both worthy of our attention. But lost in the hoopla is a part of the fabric of the community that predates both of these historic events. Most of us are likely to have visited it during the past year, and it is open to the public three days a week. It is the Brockville Farmers' Market.

Long before anyone dreamt of a railway tunnel to the waterfront or Confederation of the British North American colonies, the Brockville Farmers' Market was created. One of Brockville's leading citizens, the Honourable Charles Jones, donated a parcel of land running from the King's Highway (King Street) to the St. Lawrence River for a market on October 28th 1832. The grant contained what is now, East and West Market Street and the land between.

If you think those were simpler times, at least

in terms of bureaucracy, think again. It took a special Act of Parliament on February 13, 1833 to bring about the creation of what was then known as the East Ward Market. This, only after a very contentious debate in the Legislative Assembly that lasted several weeks.

In the mid 1830's the East Market Hall, located at the rear of today's City Hall, was built to accommodate butcher's needs. Market operations were handled by the Board of Police, which offered a few complications. The Clerk of the Market was the Sergeant of Police, who was responsible for the weighing of all produce sold. The market scales were kept at the police station when the Market wasn't open, which meant that after noon, anyone wishing to weigh products had to go to the police station. The challenge? The police station was housed in the Opera House, located at the site of the present-day Brockville Arts Centre.

In 1904 Brockville municipal offices were moved to Victoria Hall, today's City Hall, and the Market became entirely an outdoor operation. For nostalgia's sake, here are some

of the selections available at the 1910 Market and their prices. All manner of produce cost between ten cents and thirty-five cents a bushel. Chickens were a quarter, geese fifty cents and turkeys seventy-five cents. Local beef cost between three and four and a half cents a pound.

Today the Brockville Farmers' Market continues to flourish, with a few changes that might shock the original vendors. I'm sure they never dreamed there would be alpacas on site! Some things remain the same, as it is still recognized as the best spot to find locally grown and raised products. Today the Market is somewhat smaller in area but plays host to over fifty vendors, selling products ranging from the aforementioned local produce and meats to fresh cooked delicacies, maple syrup, seasonal specialties, and works by local crafts people and artisans.

The broad range of vegetables, many new international varieties planted locally, would probably be a surprise to vendors from "back in the day". As well the multicultural offerings in prepared foods, reflecting the twenty first century make up of the region, has changed a great deal. Today you can find Ukrainian, Hungarian, Syrian, German and Chilean delicacies spread throughout the vendors.

Add in music and special events every weekend and you begin to understand why the Market is a meeting place for so many residents. Saturdays you can have a nosh, meet with friends, enjoy the picturesque locale, shop for your week's supplies, chat to the knowledgeable vendors picking up tips, recipes and information on their products and take in some wonderful music by talented local musicians. Tuesdays and Thursdays offer smaller weekday versions of the same hustle and bustle.

The vibrancy of the Market hasn't gone unnoticed. Gusto, the new Canadian food-oriented network headquartered in Ottawa, caught wind of one of Canada's oldest continuous markets and, as this article was written, had sent a crew to Brockville to record a segment on the Market and its vendors.

The Brockville Farmers' Market operates on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays until Thanksgiving weekend, although, if the weather cooperates, many vendors set up on Saturdays until November. Additionally, Christmas Markets are held Dec. 2, 9 and 16 at Wall Street United Church. More information on Market events can be found at www.brockvillefarmersmarket.ca or on their Facebook page. [LH](#)