

# a great benefactor whose last gift will never be surpassed

His final gift to the greatest home ever built in Midwestern Toronto.

In 1888, at the time of his death, The Star wrote that he had been not only the wealthiest man in the city, he had been the wealthiest man in the entire province.

In an age when success with a million dollars was considered rich beyond most people's dreams, he had acquired a personal fortune worth more than £13 million that all of his life he had devoted publicly and today, almost a century after his death, his major legacies to Toronto's past are no less remembered as George Gooderham.

In most transactions of his day, he had been known only as the reserved and somewhat aloof head of his family's vast distillery empire, and there was little mystery when it was discovered that his funeral would be a private affair, limited to members of his family and to only his closest friends.

But, on the day of the funeral, in the attendance of official mourners, those who rode in the long cortège of carriages to St. James' Cemetery included many of the city's most famous and admired figures. James Lambton, the president of the University of Toronto, E.J. Lamson, the young Toronto architect who had built the then new city hall at the top of Bay St., Frederick Thompson, "The Father of Canadian Music," and many of Toronto's religious leaders. The story behind these friendships would have prompted a 70-year portrait of Gooderham that all of the editors that appeared on the front page of Toronto's newspapers that week.

From the beginning of the family's business in England has become forgotten and yet it is an integral part of the opening lines of my monthly 190-year-old news.

The founder of the family's early wealth was George's father, William Gooderham, who was born on a farm in Lincoln on the east coast of England in 1786. He was in his teens when the Napoleonic wars broke out and immediately returned to the Royal York Dragoons. A few years later, at the age of 17, he was wounded twice and, when he was well again, he was offered a position as a recruiting officer.

It was a time when landowner revenues were being paid to any successful warrior, and the young William soon earned enough money to pay off the mortgage of the family's farm, and when the war ended, he became one of Lincoln's most prosperous gentlemen farmers.

In the early 1820s, he persuaded a brother-in-law, James Wicks, to join him and begin a new life in the burgeoning new British colony of Upper Canada. In 1825, shortly after their arrival in Toronto (then known as York), they founded a flour mill on the banks of the Don River.



What it was soon realized that more money could be made from grinding grain into flour, the mill became the Gooderham and Wicks distillery.

By the 1850s, it had become so successful that Gooderham began selling his plant by selling a large complex of land and stone buildings and it is this very collection of mid-19th century buildings that is about to be transformed into a major new development in the oldest part of the city.

In later years, Gooderham began acquiring more and more of the operations of the distillery to his eldest surviving son, George Gooderham had been born on the family's farm in Lincoln and was two years old when the family arrived in Toronto.

When the elder Gooderham died in 1861, he left a personal fortune worth £13 million, and had made his company the most successful distillery in Canada. George Gooderham would make it the largest and most successful in the British Empire.

All of the Gooderhams were church members and regularly attended the services at Little Trinity Church on King St., near their home and the distillery. George's father became such a popular and generous benefactor of this church that, for almost 100 years, it was always known as "Gooderham's Church."

In his spare time, George became the church's librarian, and it was at the church that he met and fell in love with one of the church's volunteer workers, Harriet Cross. On March 14, 1855, on the day of George's 21st birthday, he and Harriet were married there.



PHILPOTTS BUILDING

**THE LEGACY:** Gooderham Distillery headquarters at Wellington and Church streets known as the Philpotts Building.



PHOTO BY THE HON. J. H. HARRIS FOR THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES

**FAMILY HOME** George Gooderham, pictured with his wife Harriet in 1890 photo, called his magnificent home at 55 and 56, George St., "Waverley." It housed the York Club after his death.

It was George, who, every year, to the furtherance of the Gooderham family, like his father, he became president of the Bank of Toronto and a principal holder of the new railways. He was also one of the chief founders of the Manufacturing Life Company and served as one of its early presidents. More importantly, he became one of the major beneficiaries of this city.

He succeeded his father as one of the main supporters of the work of the Toronto General Hospital, and he became such a generous benefactor of Frederick Taylor's new Toronto College of Medicine that he caused the college permanently named him as the college's president.

He also changed the skyline of Toronto, for it was George Gooderham who was responsible for three of the superb buildings that have survived from those days.

In the 1850s, his father had commissioned a Toronto architect, David Roberts, to build a major part of the new complex of buildings at the distillery. In 1861, George Gooderham commissioned Roberts's son, David Roberts Jr., to design an appropriately impressive building to house the new head-quarters of his company.

The site would be the triangular-shaped lot at the corner of Wellington and Church Sts., and it was there that Roberts built one of the most beautiful buildings of 19th-century Toronto, the famous Gooderham Building that has become popularly known as the "Waterloo Building."

At the same time, Gooderham commissioned Roberts to build him a home on a large lot he had bought at the corner of Upper and St. George Sts.

Those who know Gooderham's character of any stage of construction — and who have — he preferred to visit the structure in work rather than see his heritage — were startled by the size and the grandeur of Gooderham's new home.

What only a few knew was that, away from his business, Gooderham devoted his life almost entirely to his large family.

By the 1860s, in addition to his own nine children, there were 101 grand-children, a growing number of great-grandchildren and literally hundreds of descendants of the Gooderham and Water families who had followed the two men to Canada in the 1830s.

The great house would be large enough to accommodate them all, and it was one of only two extravaganzas of Gooderham's life. The other was a succession of railroads that he had kept his young.

Gooderham was also one of the city's biggest money-changers. At the turn of the last century, when he believed Toronto needed a money bank on the scale of the great banks in American cities, he commissioned the most admired architect of the day, E. J. Lambert, to design it. When it was completed in 1902, Gooderham named it after the reigning sovereign and called it the King Edward House.

The full extent of Gooderham's paternal gifts will probably never be known. One of his conditions was that any gift be listed as "anonymous" but because of his extraordinary generosity to the University of Toronto, following a disastrous fire in 1890, he was appointed one of its trustees, a position he held with great pride for more than a decade.

His last and grandest gesture was

appreciated and, in his interest, will likely never be forgotten.

By the time of his death on May 1, 1901, his personal fortune was estimated at more than \$22 million. As The Star reported on May 2, it was then learned that he had never transferred a single share of his stock in accord with the intention of creating the government's succession duties, such an act he considered unconscionable, and especially unworthy of anyone who had made his fortune in an alleged manner.

As a result, a vast amount of his wealth was passed to the government and, as The Star recorded, it was large enough to wipe-out the province's debt that year and provide it with an unexpected profit.

In the years following his death, his name continued to run the family's affairs until the 1920s, when it was sold and became part of the Street Market Complex.

The great house on St. George St. passed from the family's hands very soon. In 1905, it was bought by a group of wealthy Canadians and became the new and permanent home of a private establishment, the York Club.

Gradually, over the years, the story of the man who had once lived there was forgotten. Even the remains he had the original name for the house has been lost. In 1962, on the day George Gooderham bought his family in 1861 here, he named their new home "Waverley" after the small street that flowed near the farmhouse in Norfolk where he was born.

Donald James's articles on Historical Toronto appear regularly in The Saturday Star.