

Grimsby Agricultural Works and Innovations of the Late 1800s

By Jessica Linzel

Grimsby Agricultural Works (also referred to as Grout Agricultural Works) is an example of Niagara's influence in Ontario's broader agricultural sector at a time when wheat was still the dominant crop. Technological advancements and agricultural education were an important part of the growth of Ontario's agricultural sector after 1850.

Grimsby Agricultural Works was founded by John H. Grout in 1856. It produced a variety of time-saving machinery and cultivating implements for the agriculture industry including grape cultivators, sulky plows, reaping machines, harvester binders, and disc harrowers. The grape cultivator allowed farmers to cultivate around the grape vines to uproot weeds without harming the roots of the vine. The sulky plow had wheels and a seat so the farmer could ride behind the horses instead of walking beside them. A scale model of the Grout sulky plow won awards at area fairs and exhibitions like the Great Central Fair in Hamilton (1888) and the Dominion Industrial Exhibition in Toronto (1887) for "workmanship by non-mechanics." This helped to promote the full-sized Sulky plow.

With the shortage of farm labour that permeated Niagara throughout the 1800s, the invention of time-saving machinery was vital for increased production and growth. Tools for cutting hay and winter feed also cut down on animal labour, so Niagara farmers could begin rearing and selling livestock as a more profitable venture. In fact, the working oxen population in Ontario dropped from a peak of 50,000 in 1841 to only 6,700 by 1891.

In Welland, farming implements and edge tools were manufactured at Tuttle, Date & Rodden, founded in 1869 and eventually becoming known as Welland Vale Works. It manufactured scythes, hoes, forks, rakes, chisels, picks and more, winning prizes at Toronto's Provincial Exhibition in 1870. This exhibition, as well as the ones in Hamilton, Monck, and other parts of the province, were routinely entered by companies like Welland Vale Works and Grout Agricultural Works, both of which won many prizes for their inventions and are some great examples of Niagara's agricultural manufacturing innovators.

The original Grout factory was destroyed by fire in 1879, and the business relocated to a different part of Grimsby on the corner of Main Street and Oak (Elm) Street where it continued to flourish.

John H. Grout was also the proprietor of the Grimsby Basket Factory, which was a prominent local business due to the rapid growth of the tender fruit sector in Niagara. Grimsby was known especially for its peaches at this time.



Courtesy of
the Grimsby
Museum.



Demonstration of the Grout Binder. Courtesy of the Grimsby Museum.