

## Morris, Stone & Wellington Nurseries in Fonthill

By Jessica Linzel

Today, Niagara is dominated by both fruit and greenhouse operations. Already in the 19th century, nurseries and market gardens were an important part of Niagara's agricultural sector. One of the largest operators prior to 1900 was Morris, Stone & Wellington Nurseries in Fonthill, Ontario, which was also known as "Fonthill Nurseries." Advertisements for this business often boasted that it was the "largest in Canada."

While the townships in Lincoln County were producing fruits for human consumption locally as well as for shipping to external markets, farmers and market gardeners in other parts of the region like the southern townships in Welland County began focusing on a different form of agriculture. In the 1880s, the demand for ornamental trees and shrubs had grown rapidly and was second only to apples which were always profitable, according to an 1878 edition of *The Canadian Horticulturalist* which was published in St. Catharines.

Morris, Stone & Wellington produced trees and shrubs as well as fruit, being ideally located in the temperate Fonthill Kame growing zone. One of the reasons why Pelham was a prime area for apple orchards and other fruits, despite its location on top of the escarpment, was because of the pockets of sandy soil there which allowed for better drainage, compared to the rest of Welland County which was primarily clay and even up to 1880 was not tile-drained at all. Also, Fonthill's proximity to the Welland Canal made it a good place to grow produce for shipping.

In 1887, the Fonthill Nurseries owned approximately 400 acres of land and employed 175 people during its busy season, bringing in around \$200,000 in annual sales. At its peak, it rented over 1,000 acres and employed as many as 250 workers, with dozens of sales agents across Canada. Some local advertisements referred to it as one of the "largest and finest nurseries in Canada." Part of what made Fonthill Nurseries so successful was the fact that it had a

distribution office based in Toronto, which helped connect it to a wider variety of markets. It was eventually shipping worldwide, and in the 1930s its catalogue of products included flowering shrubs, roses and evergreens, fruit trees, ornamental and shade trees, small fruits, asparagus, and rhubarb plants.

### References

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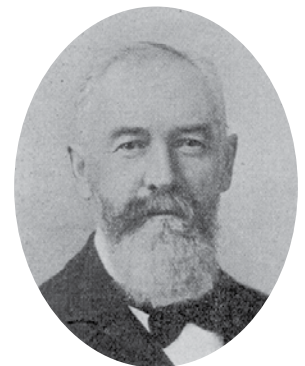
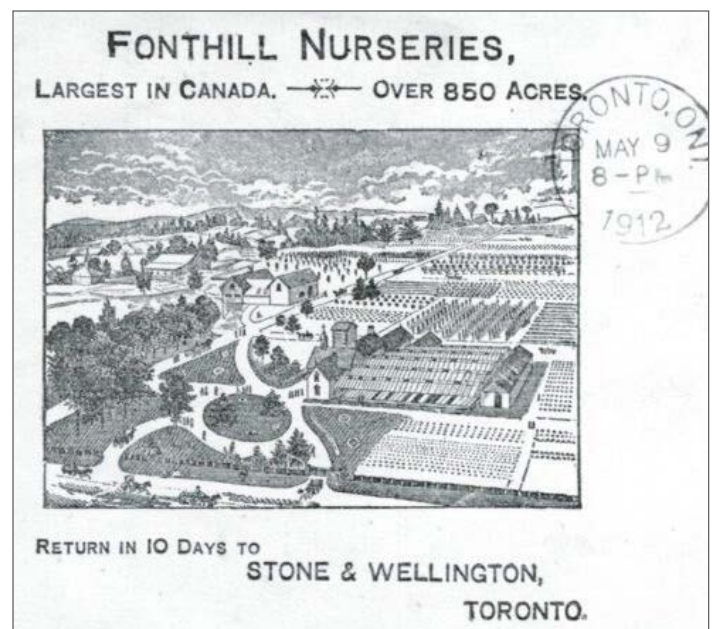


Photo courtesy of The Fruit Growers' Association of Ontario (1878)



Courtesy of the Pelham Historical Society