

## Stokes Seeds

By Jessica Linzel

Stokes Seeds was founded in New Jersey in 1878 by Johnson & Stokes Seed Company. It branched into Canada in 1927, led by Harry Gale who was a Canadian cauliflower farmer, first by supplying vegetable seeds to commercial growers in the northeastern United States and Southern Ontario. Gale bought out the Canadian branch of the company in 1934 including the inventory and rights to the name, and by the mid-1960s owned both the U.S. and Canadian corporations.

Gale turned the farm on Martindale Road in St. Catharines into a seed-planting and testing facility, and the family continues to operate the company within Niagara to this day. Throughout its existence, the family has sold and continues to sell seeds on a global scale, while also establishing themselves as a reliable local supplier for the many greenhouses, nurseries, and farms scattered throughout the Niagara region.

Gale sold seeds all over the world, including parts of Asia and Europe. The company expanded its head office into New York in the 1970s, becoming the principal seed supplier of farmers and greenhouse growers throughout Canada and the northeastern United States. Thanks to increasing globalization throughout this period, a sizable portion of their sales were directly made through mail order. By 2000, 20 per cent of their sales were by mail.

Catalogues like the ones with the logo of a moustachioed man quipping "Play Safe Neighbour! Plant 'Stokes Seeds' in 1951!" included mail-order slips for customers to fill out and order from any location. The catalogues also provided information about certain seed varieties, and how to grow and care for them. Stokes offered free delivery to all Canada and U.S. locations, prompt service with orders filled within hours of being received, remittance for any errors, discounts for cash orders of more than \$25, and guaranteed germination-tested stock. Much of Stokes' success came from its ability to test the seeds on its farm to assess how well they performed in local weather and soil conditions.



Photo courtesy of the Niagara Falls Public Library.

Harry Gale passed away in 1975 and his son John took over the family business, communicating with buyers, developing attractive catalogues and newsletters, and continuing to ensure that improved varieties of seeds be made available to growers near and far. In 1990, the research farm on Martindale was sold and the testing site was moved to a location on Lakeshore Road in St. Catharines "in favor of trialing on commercial grower farms" and today the company sells its seeds out of a retail store located in Thorold. Now under management by the third generation, John's son Wayne Gale has been running the company since 1984.

### References

"About Stoke Seeds." [www.stokeseeds.com/ca/about-stokes-seeds](http://www.stokeseeds.com/ca/about-stokes-seeds)

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