

CULTURAL MOMENT FOR NOVEMBER 18, 2024

CELEBRATING THE DUKE OF WELLINGTON



Arthur Wellesley, Duke of Wellington in approximately 1841.

What are the origins of the names Wellington County and the Village of Arthur?

As Ontario was settled under British rule, place names were often chosen to reflect British gentry who had distinguished themselves in battle. The Duke of Wellington, Arthur Wellesley, was one such. The Village of Arthur bears his first name and Wellesley Township bears his surname. His title was used for Wellington County.

Born in 1769 into an aristocratic Anglo-Irish family and heir to the Earl of Mornington, Wellesley was active in wars in Mysore, India, and was famously part of the Napoleonic wars. His adaptive defensive style of warfare is still studied today, as it minimizes losses, especially when faced with a superior number of foes.

After retiring from active duty, Wellington returned to politics and served twice as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. His nickname of "Iron Duke" seems to have less to do with his battle strategy and more to do with his politics, though it could be attributed to the installation of iron shutters on his home to protect from rioters.

Arthur married Catherine Pakenham, known as Kitty, and they had two sons, Arthur and Charles. The couple themselves did not spend a lot of time together, partly due to Wellington's duties in warfare and partly because they were not well suited. Kitty died of cancer in 1831 and Arthur's married lover, Harriet, died of cholera in 1834, so Arthur spent his final days living at one of his homes with the companionship of the husband of his deceased lover.

Arthur died at the age of 83 after what was diagnosed as a stroke with subsequent seizures. From all accounts, he never visited Canada.



The Duke of Wellington at Waterloo.

An example of the extent to which Canadian place naming depended upon British gentry, are the three townships of Tiny, Tay and Flos (near Penetanguishene) which were named after the pet dogs of Lady Sarah Maitland, wife of the Lieutenant General of Canada, Sir Peregrine Maitland. The area is now known as Springwater.