



Preserving, promoting, and developing Wellington North's unique cultural resources to build a vibrant community and a prosperous economy.

CULTURAL MOMENT FOR SEPTEMBER 21, 2026 CELEBRATES KENILWORTH – THE TOWN THAT ALMOST WAS

Today, Kenilworth is a small rural community located at the intersection of Highway 6 and Sideroad 7 West, but in the 1850s, a pair of Elora businessmen had much bigger plans for the community.

In 1855, Charles Allan and James Geddes purchased 150 acres of land on the east side of the Owen Sound Road, just north of the Kenilworth crossroads. At the time, land speculation was booming in Canada West, and the two men hoped to take advantage by turning their property into a new town.

They divided the land into approximately 250 town lots and another 22 larger “park lots,” complete with a grid of proposed streets. Large, colourful maps were produced to promote the new community and attract potential buyers.

Kenilworth seemed like a good location. The Owen Sound Road was an important route through the area, and Kenilworth was located roughly halfway between Fergus and Durham – about a day's travel for a freight wagon at the time.

On December 27, 1855, Allan and Geddes held a sale at the Queen's Arms Hotel in Fergus, hoping investors would buy up the lots in their proposed town.

Things didn't exactly go according to plan.

Despite approximately 250 lots being available, only about six were spoken for. Even those sales weren't particularly successful, as the buyers apparently hoped they could quickly resell the properties for a profit before actually having to pay for them.

They couldn't.

Local historian Stephen Thorning would later describe it as possibly the least successful land promotion and sale in Wellington County history.

Geddes eventually walked away from the project, while Allan died in 1859. In 1864, Allan's estate sold the remaining property to another land speculator, David Foote.

By that point, the grand new town of Kenilworth consisted of little more than a field filled with surveyor's stakes.

Foote hoped the possibility of a railway coming through the area might finally increase the value of the property, but those plans also failed to materialize. He sold the land in 1867 to Elora lawyer George Drew.

A railway did eventually come to Kenilworth. When the Toronto, Grey and Bruce Railway planned its route through Arthur Township, the Township agreed to contribute \$35,000 toward its construction. One of the conditions was that Kenilworth receive a station.

The railway reached the community in 1871 and helped Kenilworth develop as a small commercial centre. Government records show that 1,092 cords of wood were shipped from the Kenilworth station in 1873 alone.

But the large town Allan and Geddes imagined in 1855 never appeared. In 1903, George Drew's widow finally sold the former townsite as farmland.

There is, however, an interesting ending to the story.

More than 170 years after Allan and Geddes tried to establish Kenilworth as an important centre in Arthur Township, the community is now home to the municipal offices of the Township of Wellington North.

Kenilworth may never have become the town they envisioned, but it did eventually become an important centre for the surrounding community.

Submitted by the Wellington North Cultural Roundtable.