

## “Worts & Gooderham”



**Bank of Upper Canada**

**JRR**

On July 25, 1832, James Worts' brother-in-law and business partner, William Gooderham, finally arrived in York. As agreed, Worts had landed in North America a year earlier, inspected a variety of possible locations for their milling business, selected Little York, supervised the construction of a windmill, and prepared the way for arrival of his friend and their families.

For his part, Gooderham prepared everyone for the trans-Atlantic voyage. Leaving England in the spring of 1832 aboard Capt. Potts' brig *Anne*, the travellers apparently enjoyed a “fair passage” of about six weeks before landing safely in Quebec City. The passage may have been “fair” for some, but it was undoubtedly grim for others, who fell ill and even died of cholera making the same voyage. Meanwhile, anxiety ran high in far-distant York, where Worts and his son, James Gooderham Worts, awaited news of their relatives amid the raging cholera pandemic that had just hit town.

When William Gooderham landed in York 175 years ago, he was at the head of a party of 54 people, including members of both the Gooderham and Worts families, their servants, and 11 orphans informally adopted by Gooderham during the plague-filled voyage. Sadly, the names of the orphans have not been

discovered, but their arrival under the protection of Gooderham speaks well of the charitable capitalist-to-be.

No doubt the party was welcomed with great joy at the town wharf where their vessel docked after passing its public health inspection for cholera. Elizabeth Worts, James' beloved wife, arrived with the couple's five other children, who ranged in age from about 3 to 13. There's no record of just where everybody stayed, but the main group of Gooderhams and Worts probably headed for the property near King & Sumach Streets that James had purchased the previous March. After a long sea-and-lake voyage, the travelers would have relished vegetables fresh from Worts' carefully tended garden. But celebrations weren't prolonged.

On July 27<sup>th</sup>, just two days after the Great Arrival, the immigrant millers got to work. They established a business partnership named **Worts & Gooderham**, perhaps in honour of Worts' year-long separation from family and friends, by opening an account at the Bank of Upper Canada. Their £1,823.06 was the largest private over-the-counter deposit ever received by Cashier Thomas Gibbs Ridout and surely brought the pair to the attention of York's power elite, many of whom served on the board of the bank. The bank itself was Canada's first purpose-built bank, a handsome Georgian structure that still stands at the northeast corner of George & Adelaide (then Duke) streets.

After transacting their bank business in one of York's most fashionable residential areas, Worts and Gooderham returned to the less fashionable, but soon-to-be commercially successful, waterfront district where more "firsts" would occur during the remainder of 1832.

For more information about the Bank of Upper Canada, see *Stones, Bricks, and History: The Corner of Duke & George* (1984) by Sheldon and Judy Godfrey, who were instrumental in preserving and restoring the old bank building. The image is from John Ross Robertson's *Landmarks of Toronto*, vol.1.

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