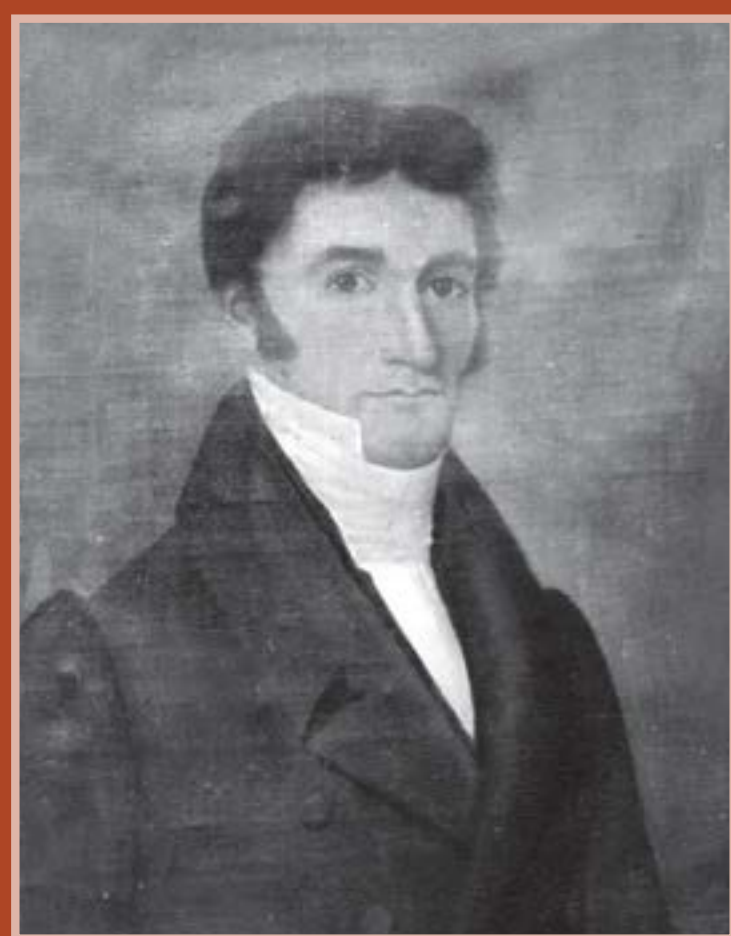


# STAGECOACH TRAVEL

## THE WELLER LINE



Weller's involvement with the stagecoach began in earnest when he partnered with Hiram Norton in 1829 to buy the line from York to Kingston. Soon he had bought out Norton and was adding lines to Hamilton, Niagara and Peterborough. Sometime in the 1840s he moved his headquarters from Toronto to Cobourg, adding considerably to the town's reputation and prosperity.

His coaches were built in his own shop at George and Orange Streets and repaired at his shop on Swayne Street. It is reported that at the peak of their prosperity the Weller lines had as many as four hundred employees.

It was in the winter of 1840 that William Weller really made a name for himself. As the story goes,

*The Governor General, The Right Hon. C. Poulett-Thomson, (Lord Sydenham) needed to get to Montreal - quickly; possibly to deliver a reprieve for a condemned man, possibly just to catch his boat for England.*

*Weller took on the task himself, and set a personal challenge. He placed a £1,000 wager with some friends that he could cover the 360 miles between Toronto and Montreal in under 38 hours. It was a trip which regularly took over four days when stopovers were included. Weller proposed to do it for the Governor General in just over one and a half.*



*Weller's Toronto to Montreal run with Lord Sydenham.*

*Sketch reproduced from the O'Keefe's Brewing Co., Ltd.*

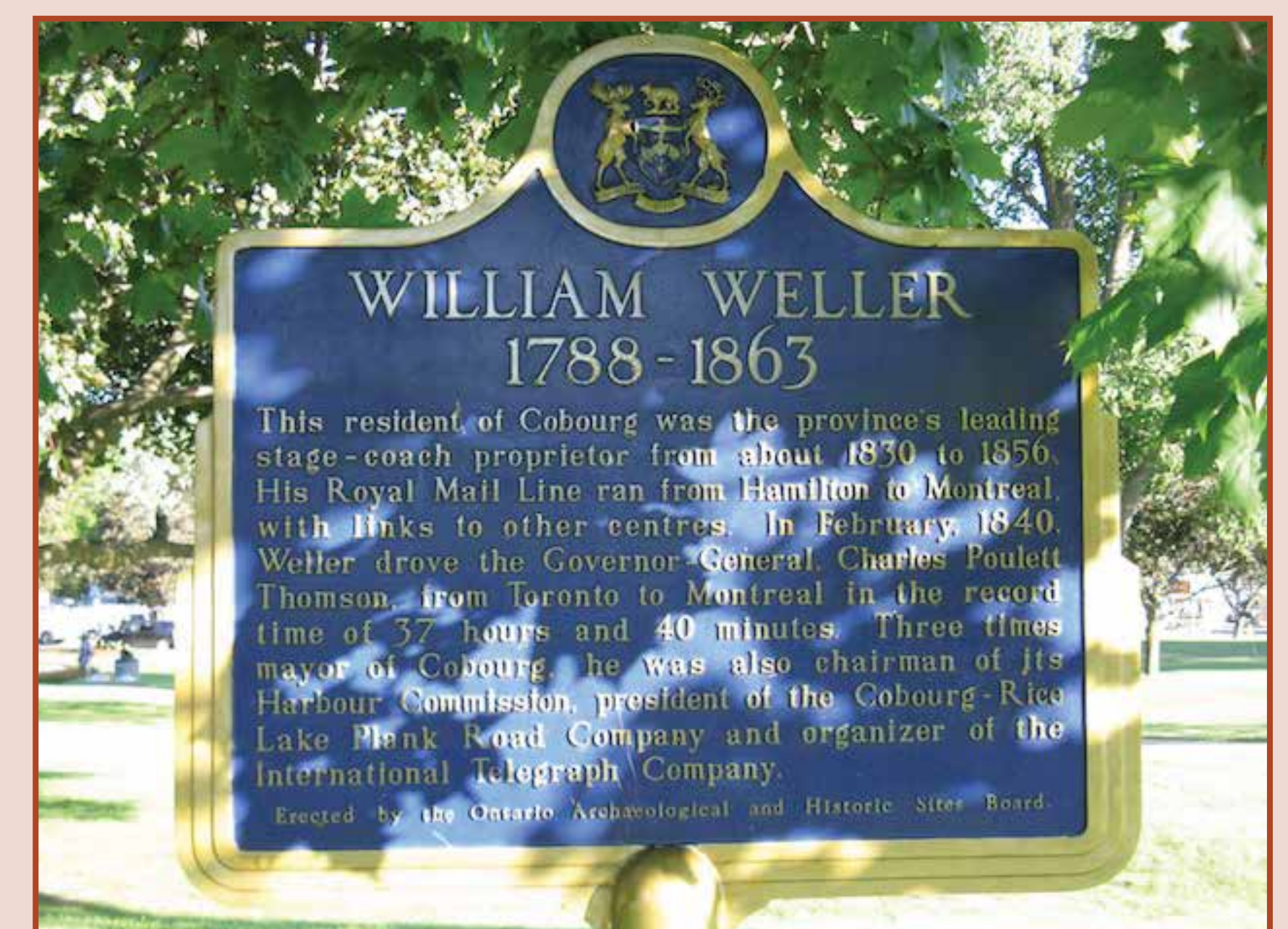
*At 6 a.m. on a Monday morning they were off, with the passenger well wrapped in the coach, now equipped with runners. There was no time for Weller to sleep, but every fifteen miles or so there would be four fresh horses, and hot food and drink at the stages along the way.*

*Across the snow covered ground Weller drove through that night and the next day. On Tuesday evening, reportedly at 7:40pm but certainly with time to spare, the coach pulled up outside the Montreal stage office, the driver exhausted but happy. Happy, too was His Excellency, who paid Weller £100 for his fare and, as a bonus, gave him an engraved gold watch. On his return to Upper Canada, Weller, of course, picked up the £1,000 wager.*

With the arrival of rail travel the stagecoach business began its decline in Ontario. Recognizing the inevitable, Weller invested in the ill-fated Cobourg & Peterborough Railway. Speaking at a dinner in 1854 in honour of that undertaking he is reported to have enthused, "I am rejoiced to see old things passing away and conditions becoming *weller*..." But this time his enthusiasm was misplaced.

It was as a poor man that William Weller died in 1863, but he was recognized by the people of Cobourg as one of their outstanding citizens. The Cobourg Sentinel eulogized, "one of our oldest and most influential citizens, a thorough businessman (who) served this town... with honour to himself and credit to the town."

*Credit: William Weller: The Stage-Coach King by Lawrence F. Jones*



*William Weller's historical plaque situated in Victoria Park, Cobourg.*

*Credit: Wayne Adam, 2010. OntarioPlaques.com (Weller's actual year of birth is 1799.)*