Young Joe was one of the driving forces behind the formation of the Northumberland Agricultural Society. Early in the 1840s, he began construction of the home intended to serve as his family's monument, Kelwood, at the top of the hill from which Old Joe first surveyed the territory back in 1789. This architectural marvel – a 16-room, two-storey mansion in which both floors opened onto an octagonal atrium type of central hall – took 20 years to complete. Joseph A. Keeler did not live to see its completion, and Kelwood was destroyed by fire in 1911. Many pictures survive of its ruins, which became a popular spot for local picnickers in the early 20th century.

Joseph A. Keeler, died in 1855, aged 67. Nancy died three years later, at age 68. They are both buried in Lakeport Cemetery, near their daughters Anne and Eliza and their son Joseph, who was known as Little Joe.

Colborne incorporated as a village, separate from the Township of Cramahe, in 1859. By then, the railroad had come through (1856) and Colborne was a thriving transportation hub, served by road, rail, and water. Leading community citizens decided to name the village for Sir John Colborne, a friend of the Keeler family.

The third generation of Keeler men to bear the name Joseph was a mover and shaker like his father and grandfather. Little Joe (1822-81) was small in stature but large in energy.

He and his family are listed among the first members of the congregation of Trinity Church, Colborne (est. 1846). The couple had two sons: Joseph and Thomas Phillips, and one daughter, Annie Sybilla. No further mention is made in any records of the baby Joseph, who likely died in infancy. Thomas married Blanche Elizabeth Boyer of Brighton and Annie married John Boyer, probably Blanche's brother.

Little Joe was the owner of considerable property, and in 1856 he established The Transcript, Colborne's first newspaper, and served as its editor and publisher. He was also a major in the local militia and one of the prime movers and shakers behind the establishment of the first bank branch in Colborne, the Bank of Toronto, in 1856.

In 1861, upon completion of the mansion, he moved his family into Kelwood, where they lived in lavish style for the next 20 years, as befitted the area's leading family.

Keeler is listed as the builder of the 1872 three-storey Keeler Block (the third storey was later removed) on the north corner of Victoria Square and King Street East.

The following year, the block next to it was also built by Keeler to serve as a public hall (second-storey level) with commercial establishments at street level.

Around 1874, he became the owner of an 84-foot schooner he named Octavia, docked, naturally, at Keeler's Wharf at Lakeport. Some sources report that he had a fleet of schooners.

A Conservative, Joseph Keeler was elected Member of Parliament representing the riding of Northumberland from 1867 – the year of Canada's Confederation – to 1873, and again in 1879 until his death in 1881. He was a strong supporter of Canada's first Prime Minister, Sir John A. Macdonald, and sided with him on the importance of building a railway across the prairies to lure British Columbia into Confederation.

MP Keeler fought for the creation of the Trent Canal System, particularly for the Murray Canal, which joins Weller's Bay to the Bay of Quinte at Carrying Place, about 15 miles east of Colborne. At a time when road travel was still uncertain and very uncomfortable, the waterways were the fastest and easiest way to move goods and people. The Murray Canal cut off miles of water travel and eliminated the need for the historic portage used by the First Nations since time immemorial.

Joseph Keeler died in Ottawa Jan. 21, 1881, before the commencement of work on the canal. His widow, Octavia, wielded the ceremonial spade at the official sod-turning on Aug. 31, 1882. Years later, her granddaughter, Ruth Brown, wife of former Colborne physician J. Archer Brown, still had the ceremonial shovel. It was silver-plated with three small gold maple leaves fanning out from the wooden handle.

After her husband's death, Octavia moved to the Toronto area. The Keelers' son, Tom, had already moved to Brighton and John Boyer, their son-in-law, became administrator of the estate. Octavia outlived her husband, son, daughter, and son-in-law. When she died in 1899, she left her remaining holdings in Northumberland to her daughter-in-law, Blanche Boyer Keeler.

The passing of Little Joe marked the end of the Keeler era in Colborne and Cramahe Township. Although Keelers are revered for their leadership role, it should be remembered that it took more than one family to build these communities.

Eileen Argyris lived in Colborne from 1975-1997 and served as editor of the Colborne Chronicle from 1979-97. She is the author of How Firm a Foundation, a History of the Township of Cramahe and the Village of Colborne, from which the information in this piece was taken.

Mayor's *Message*

As Mayor of Cramahe Township, and on behalf of all of Cramahe Council and staff, I welcome you to the Village of Colborne's 150th Anniversary celebrations. Come celebrate our rich heritage and community spirit that has flourished for more than 150 years.

Colborne is indeed rich in heritage. Joseph Keeler was the first settler, coming to this area from Rutland, Vermont in 1787. He returned in 1793 with 40 families who took on the task of carving farms out of the forest. From then to today, Colborne built itself as a community strong in tradition but also keeping with the influences of ever-changing modern times.

Colborne is now the key urban area for Cramahe Township, and is a key place to do business. Colborne's industrial park thrives with industries providing employment and business development opportunities for the people of this area. Now the industrial park is set to expand once again along with the Village's commercial sector as we welcome a new Tim Horton's this fall.

Colborne also offers a way of life with a relaxed pace. It provides many services, amenities and activities for everyone to enjoy.

There is much to celebrate in the Village of Colborne and we invite you to join in the 150th anniversary celebrations from July 30 to August 2.

Welcome and LET'S CELEBRATE!

Marc Coombs
Mayor, Cramahe Township

"Celebrating our Past & Looking to the Future"

Twindmills

Come Celebrate with us
Colborne's 150th Birthday

Aug 1 & 2, 9am-5pm

• Antique / Craft Show & Sale • Sheep Dog Demo • Stained Glass Demo • Farmers Market • Live Local Entertainment • Historical Displays/Antique Farm Equipment • Vintage Cars • Lawrence Massey-Book Signing (Saturday 2-4 only), "Aquadale" -The Final Chapter, Story of 5 Generation Farm in Morganston • Old Time Iron Forging Demo (Sunday Only) ***and much more.....***

Twindmills Markets – Antiques & Stained Glass Studio
Open 7 Days a Week – 9 till 5
Hwy 401 Exit 497 (Big Apple Dr, Colborne)
Immediately South on Left
905.355.3715 | www.twindmills.com

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905-355-3666
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