

Historic Christmas Market Featured Poultry Sales, Horse Show

Stouffville's One Day Celebration Among the Best in Rural Ontario in the 1930s and 40s.

By Jill McWhinnie

The Christmas Market in Toronto's Distillery District, featuring "old world" European Christmas traditions, food, and decorations is hailed as a magical and unique holiday event.

However the Christmas Market is not only a European tradition. Rural Ontario had its own version of the celebration and Stouffville's was one of the best. In the 1930s and 40s. The Christmas Market brought town and country together on Main Street Stouffville for a wonderful day of commerce and entertainment.

On Christmas Market day, usually around December 19, local farmers would bring poultry - geese, turkey, chickens, ducks, and 'specialty' fowl - to town for sale to local merchants, Toronto buyers and local residents. The 'ruling price' for turkeys in 1939 was 27 cents per pound, geese 20 cents and chickens 18 cents. A bunch of jack rabbits went for nine cents a pound. About ten tons of poultry was sold on market day, with local farmers pocketing thousands of dollars for their efforts.

The Christmas Market also featured a poultry competition, judged by staff from the Ontario Agricultural College in Guelph. Prize money was awarded for the fairest fowls in each category. The prize poultry exhibits were displayed in Ratcliff Hall, located on the southeast corner of Main and Market Streets, which also provided the venue for the home baking contest.

Local ladies competed for top honours for home made bread and rolls, sponge cake, chocolate cake, and pumpkin pie. White layer cake (iced) was to be made from Aurora Belle Flour and the sales slip from Ratcliff & Co store was to accompany the entry. First prize in that category was 48 pounds of Aurora Belle Flour.

A horse show, which took place in the CN yard, was a major draw, with 1,000 people watching the judging of no less than 12 teams of 'heavy' horses, dressed up in brass mounted harness. There were also competitions for best geldings, mares and hitched ponies. Prizes for winning equine entries were "liberal" - the best mare or gelding took home \$15. Third prize in that category was 100 pounds of Master Chick Starter.

The local merchants were well compensated for their sponsorship of the Christmas Market. Reports from the day noted that "farmers flocked to the village from miles around and stayed all day to shop and have a meal. Ratcliff's Hall was crammed all day and Main Street took on the appearance of famous markets held years ago."

However as the decade progressed to 1950, the focus of holiday commerce shifted to an extended period of Christmas shopping rather than just one day, the Santa Claus parade became the premier Christmas event in the village and the horse show became a summer event.

But the Christmas Market days remain a memorable part of Stouffville's history, and a reminder of how the village prepared for Christmas in a simpler time.



Cards such as this one were sold in Stouffville stores in the 1930s and 40s. Artwork Courtesy the Whitchurch-Stouffville Museum

Chamber Honours Top Businesses



The Stouffville Chamber of Commerce handed out the hardware at its annual Business Recognition Awards at the Stouffville Legion November 17. The winners and their representatives were (left to right): Best New Business; Oak Ridge Family Eye Care, Dr. Jasmintha Ellaurie; Small Business Award; Moonflower's Magical Touch, Charlene Bateman;

Large Business Award; K-Line Group of Companies, Georgia Stevens; Entrepreneur of the Year; Nadia Clarke, Repetitions Fitness Studio; Non-Profit Enterprise Award; 707 Marion Orr CM Royal Canadian Air Cadet Squadron, Bonnie Hodgins & Scott Harvey.

Bruce Stapley photo

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Dec. 31 (Wed) 12:00pm - 12:00pm
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