

# Elias Weber Bingeman Snider



The grand-daughter of E.W.B. Snider once wrote that she remembered her grandfather taking slow evening walks down the lovely green banks of the mill race that brought power to his mill in St. Jacobs.

“I am quite sure that his dreams of harnessing the power of Niagara Falls began with the old wooden dam which spanned the Conestogo and brought power to his flour mill,” wrote Miss Winifrid Snider.

Elias Weber Bingeman Snider, who was born in Waterloo in 1842, was well-known during his life as a prosperous miller, manufacturer and politician.

“I may say that I knew Mr. E.W.B Snider for many years and thought him one of the most progressive business men in Canada. He seemed to be the first to take up any new scheme and invariably succeeded in his efforts. I considered him one of the most modest, unassuming and strictly honest men that I have met in this country,” wrote fellow miller W.M. Stark.

Snider’s most enduring legacy, however, was his campaign to bring affordable electricity to the people of Waterloo County.

Known as one of the fathers of hydroelectric power in Ontario, Snider raised the idea of publicly-owned hydroelectric power at a banquet held by the Berlin Board of Trade in 1902. At the time he was the former MPP for Waterloo North and his idea was warmly received by Daniel Detweiler, vice-president of the Berlin Board of Trade.

Later that year, Snider and Detweiler organized a meeting to form a strategy to convince the Ontario government to allow municipalities to buy power from Niagara Falls. Snider and Detweiler formed a committee to study the possibilities. When the province permitted a Toronto group to buy power in 1903, Waterloo County authorities were outraged. Amidst growing pressure, the premier finally passed a bill later that year to give municipalities the right to purchase hydro-electricity. The eager municipalities had to gain approval from the Ontario Power Commission, however, which was headed by Snider and Waterloo lawyer J.C. Haight. Sir Adam Beck, then mayor of London, was also a proponent of public power and served on the commission.

Finally, on October 11, 1910 hundreds of light bulbs were dramatically turned on inside a Berlin arena after Ontario Premier Sir James Whitney pressed a button in front of 8,000 people. On that day Berlin, now Kitchener, became the first town in Ontario to receive hydro-electric power.

On May 14, 1956 the Ontario Hydro Commission unveiled a monument to Snider “in recognition of his leadership in promoting Ontario’s publicly owned ‘Hydro’ enterprise to serve the common good.”

While his advocacy for public power is well-remembered it is important to note that Snider was also a pioneer in the milling industry, bringing new technology to North America from Europe to grind superior flour. He was also the founder and first president of the Waterloo Manufacturing Company Ltd, a large manufacturer of agricultural machinery.

“E.W.B Snider had vision as well as courage, initiative and faith in his native land . . . Replete with good acts, and of sympathetic nature, his life was an inspiration to those who knew him best.”

*Photo courtesy of the Waterloo Public Library*