

Who Was Walter Farwell?

Perhaps a small town in a new land is the perfect place to start over?

What do you have to do to get a street in Hartney named after you?

It's an exclusive club. Of about twenty streets and avenues only six seem to be named after people. Three of those people are only identified as "John", "George", and "Frederick"... very short streets as it happens. Joslyn Street commemorates the first Methodist Minister. Mr. Spencer was one of the first homesteaders, and J. Manson was councilor with no other mention in the local history.

And then there is Farwell Avenue. One wonders: perhaps he contributed to the community in some way? Started an important business? Served as mayor?

On the other hand it would be more interesting if he was a gambler, a bigamist and a bit of a mystery. Which of course he was.

Walter Aldorus Farwell was born in 1852 at Grimsby, Ontario. In 1874, he married Olive Seaman and they had two sons. In the early 1880's Walter left his wife and young sons to join the North West Mounted Police. Or so he said... there is no record of him in the N.W.M.P. files.

Whatever he was up to, his wife Olive eventually became worried about her long lost husband. He'd been gone over a year when she wrote to Edmonton in an effort to track him down. Maybe she didn't miss him that much? Somehow she was able to learn that he was in Prince Albert.

The problem was that by this time, there had been another wed-

ding, this time to Ann Spencer. William Spencer, the father of the (second) bride, suspected something was amiss and did some investigating. He was not impressed with what he learned. He filed bigamy charges against his new son-in-law and Farwell was imprisoned to await sentencing. But by happy accident, or clever design, a jailor left a window open and some friends helped

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him to escape. He ran first to the United States, and then to the Carrot River district in northeastern Saskatchewan. From there he travelled to Deloraine where Ann and three of her youngest children joined him.

While living in Deloraine they farmed and Walter opened the first ice skating rink.

Ann died in 1888 of consumption and her dying wish was that Walter look after her daughter, Agnes. I guess you could say he kept his word; he married his stepdaughter in 1889. He and his new family then moved to Hartney. While living at Hartney they farmed and Walter became quite a gambler. He had found his vocation.

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how he owned so much land around the Hartney and Deloraine area. His daughter recalled how she had to wash and iron the money her father won at nightly card games.

Agnes and Walter had five other children while living at Hartney. Agnes died in 1897. Walter stayed around and raised his family then sold off most of his land when his children left home. Not trusting banks, he buried most of his savings under a tree on the home place. There were many rumors about what happened to his money.

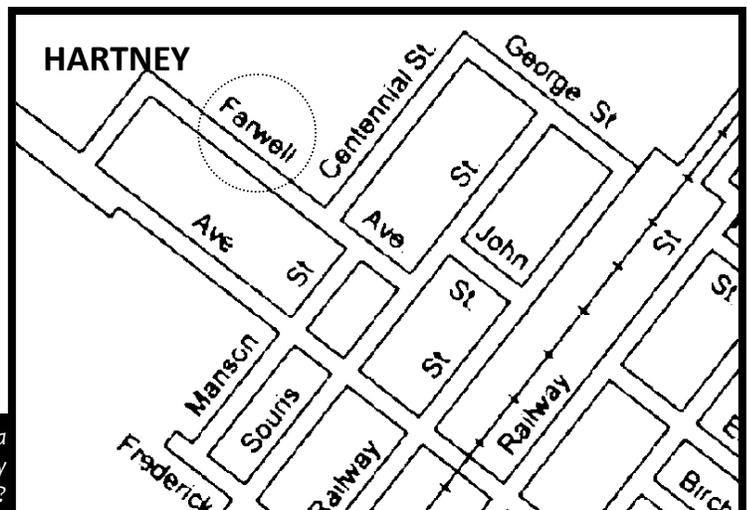
Walter left Hartney about 1920 for Niagara On The Lake. He later turned up in California, then he moved on to Minnesota. There is no record of his death at any of these places, but apparently he died around 1923.

That's quite a story, most of it might even be true, but it doesn't quite explain having the street named after him. There is no record of any public good deeds in either the Deloraine or Hartney histories. Perhaps someone just found him interesting.

Sources:

Deloraine History Book Committee. *Deloraine Scans a Century 1880 - 1980*: Altona. Friesen Printers, 1980.

Hartney and District Historical Committee. *A Century of Living - Hartney & District 1882 - 1982*. Steinbach. Derksen Printers, 1982.



► Why name a street in Hartney after Walter Farwell?