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## Samuel Keefer

Publish Date: Wednesday, 20th of January 2010  
by [Ronald Wolf](#)

Some people believe that only the powerful and evil (not to say that they are one of the same) will be remembered years after they have died. There are exceptions to the rule, Samuel Keefer (1811-1890) for instance.



Keefer was born on this day 199 years ago today to a world where the bloody Casas Revolt began in San Antonio, Texas and the Battle of Lissa which took the lives of many.

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Keefer began his journey through life at Thorold, Ont. in 1811. Keefer became a civil engineer and learned his trade working on the Erie (started 1817 ended 1832) and Welland Canals (started 1841 ended 1854).

Keefer's had an apprenticeship from 1827 to 1833 in the Welland Canal Company, which was interrupted by two years at Upper Canada College. By the age of 30 Keefer held one of the most important engineering appointments in British North America.

He was Canada's first Chief Engineer of Public Works, and built the country's first suspension bridge at the Chaudière Falls in Ottawa in 1843, as well as the Clifton Bridge, the first suspension bridge at Niagara Falls in 1869.

In 1869 it was the longest bridge of its kind in the world. For this achievement he ultimately won a gold medal in the engineering competition at the 1878 universal exposition in Paris. Unfortunately, the bridge blew down in the great storm of 1889 after the bridge company directors had doubled its width without consulting their engineer.

He also selected the plans for the Parliament Buildings in 1859, and directed their construction. Keefer spent his remaining years in semi-retirement in Brockville where he was active in the Church of England and in local Conservative political affairs. He also took a hand in attempting to elevate engineering above immediate political and commercial servitude to proper professional status.

Since 1860 he had been a member of the Institute of Civil Engineers in London and in 1869 joined the American Society of Civil Engineers. In 1887 Keefer helped found the Canadian Society of Civil Engineers, serving as its second president (T. C. Keefer was the first).

Keefer's life seemed to be one huge accomplishment for someone that was born so long ago and without the use of the Internet or computers. Most people never knew what he offered Canadians. Only part of his journey through life is recorded in a place we call It's Our History, Our Country.

- <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/index.cfm?PgNm=TCE&Params=A1ARTA0004249>
- [http://www.biographi.ca/009004-119.01-e.php?&id\\_nbr=5618&&PHPSESSID=yhzfqkvzape](http://www.biographi.ca/009004-119.01-e.php?&id_nbr=5618&&PHPSESSID=yhzfqkvzape)
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