



It's Our History, Our Country

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Timothy Eaton, Open For Business

Dec. 8, 1869

Timothy Eaton was a Canadian businessman who founded the Eaton's department store, one of the most important retail businesses in Canada's history. Eaton's department store opened for business on Dec. 8, 1869 in Toronto, Ont.

He was born in Ballymena, County Antrim, Ireland. His parents were Scottish Protestants, John Eaton and Margaret Craig. As a 20-year-old Irish apprentice shopkeeper, Timothy Eaton sailed from Ireland to settle with other family members in southern Ontario, Canada. On May 28, 1862, Eaton married Margaret Wilson Beattie. They had five sons and three daughters. Among the sons were John Craig Eaton and Edward Young Eaton. One of the daughters, Josephine Smyth Eaton, survived the sinking of the RMS Lusitania off the Irish coast in 1915. Her daughter, Iris Burnside, was lost.

In 1865, with the help of his brothers Robert and James, Timothy Eaton set up a bakery business in the town of Kirkton, Ont., which went under after only a few months. Undaunted, he opened a dry goods store in St. Marys, Ont. In 1869, Eaton purchased an existing dry-goods and haberdashery business at 178 Yonge St. in Toronto. In promoting his new business, Eaton embraced two retail practices that were ground-breaking at the time: first, all goods had one price (no haggling) with no credit given, and

second, all purchases came with a money-back guarantee (a practice expressed in what would become the long-standing store slogan of Goods Satisfactory or Money Refunded).

Starting in 1884, Timothy Eaton introduced Canada to the wonders of the mail-order catalogue, reaching thousands of small towns and rural communities with an array of products previously unattainable. In these tiny communities, the arrival of Eaton's catalogue was a major event. More than clothing, furniture, or the latest in kitchen gadgetry, the catalogue offered such practical items as milking machines, in addition to just about every other contraption or new invention desirable. And, when rendered obsolete by the new season's catalogue, it served another important use in the outdoor privy of most every rural home.

Timothy Eaton spawned a colossal retail empire that his offspring would expand coast to coast, reaching its high point during the Second World War, when the T. Eaton Co. Limited employed more than 70,000 people. Although Timothy Eaton did not invent the department store, nor was he the first retailer in the world to implement a money-back guarantee, the chain he founded popularized both concepts and revolutionized retailing in Canada.

Timothy Eaton died of pneumonia on Jan. 31, 1907 and is buried in Mount Pleasant Cemetery in

Toronto. He was succeeded by his son, John Craig Eaton.

In 1919, two life-sized statues of Timothy Eaton were donated by the Eaton's employees to the Toronto and Winnipeg stores in celebration of the 50th anniversary of the company. For years, it was tradition for customers in both Toronto and Winnipeg to rub the toe of the statue for good luck. The Toronto statue is now housed by the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM), and the Winnipeg statue sits in the city's new arena, the MTS Centre, in almost exactly the same spot where it stood in the now demolished Eaton's store (albeit one storey higher). Museum-goers in Toronto and hockey fans in Winnipeg continue to rub Timothy's toe for luck.

Toe rubbing for luck and a money-back guarantee only in Canada and a place we call It's Our History, Our Country.

