

Temperance in Niagara

In the mid-19th century, Niagara had a very active group of individuals who were trying to ban, or prevent the sale of alcohol. The Museum possesses the record book of the Niagara Temperance Society for the years of 1841 to 1851, it was this organizations mission, or as they called it, “the grand object” was “the suppression of drunkenness and what is termed moderate drinking”. At the time, there was much support for such organizations. Niagara was no exception. This was no small task, as Niagara in the 1850s had a population of just over 3,000 people with 27 places to find alcohol.

Organizations such as the Niagara Temperance Society (at different times there was also the Sons and Daughters of Temperance and possibly the Royal Canadian Rifles Temperance Society operating in town) believed that if one could cut out alcohol, many of the problems of Victorian society could be eliminated; poverty, loss of family values and many more. Fathers who were out drinking, would not be at home with their wives and children, would be spending the family money and would be creating more problems for the rest of the family. Temperance Societies attempted to provide alternative entertainment, refreshments and diversions for the community.

Members may have worn medals to indicate their sobriety, they signed up in the register. The register the museum owns has a very large list of names of members, some of which have remarks such as “removed”, “relapsed”, “drinks”, “expelled”, “withdrawn” or, my own personal favourite “requested to be taken off because he is to be married this day – Oct. 20th 1843”. Between 1846 and 1850 the Society did not function but was reorganized in 1851. The town even had a temperance newspaper called *The Fountain*, of which we only know of the first copy existing, from 1847.