

# Jesse Doan

## Rebel & Band Leader

*Farmer, band leader, local politician and rebel, Jesse Doan burned the candle at both ends. When he died in 1868 at age 54, he had led the Children of Peace band for 30 years, taken part in the Rebellion of 1837, become one of the most prosperous farmers in the township, and served as Reeve of the township of East Gwillimbury.*



Jesse was the son of John Doan, the cabinet maker who built the ark which stands at the centre of the Temple. He married Waite Ann Brooks on 31 Dec. 1834, and the couple built a substantial two storey brick house in the village of Sharon. By 1865, Doan was a successful farmer, owning a total of 247 acres of land assessed at \$5,684, making him one of the wealthiest persons in East Gwillimbury. One hundred of these acres were on Lot 11 on the fifth concession, the farm from which the log cabin now on the Temple grounds was reclaimed.

Doan was an extraordinary musician, leading the band with his clarinet. "He was a farmer, so in the fall after the harvest was all in, he was free to go to Boston, the musical centre of the continent at that time. Practically all the best of the new music was introduced there in the first few weeks of the season, and Jesse Doan was there to hear it. After the concert, when he returned to his room, he would write down the theme or air of any numbers he considered good. After two or three weeks of this, he would come home and write out the parts for the different instruments of his band. In this way the Sharon Band had all the good new music long before Boston had released it for publication.

Politics, however, is as recurrent a theme in his life as music. Like his brother Charles, a shopkeeper, John D. Willson (David Willson's son) and "about 20 others" from the village, Jesse joined rebel leader Samuel Lount of Holland Landing to march on Toronto in 1837. And like his brother, he was jailed for more than 7 months for standing up for his principles.

It was these principles which made him a popular local politician in the years following the rebellion. He was first elected to the township council in 1850. He served as Deputy Reeve in 1863, 1864, 1866 and 1867. He was elected Reeve in 1868.

Despite all of his considerable economic and political accomplishments, it appears that Jesse most wanted to be remembered as a music maker. His substantial grave marker, rising to a curved peak, towers over the Children of Peace cemetery to the south of the village. Below an ornate carving of a draped female figure before a weeping willow, a trumpet raised in her right hand, an Aeolian harp leaning against her left thigh, are the following verses.

This marble tomb our father dear  
Shall thy rare genius long display  
Thy melodies have charmed the ear  
On many a social hallow day.

May we thy faculties retain  
On generations still descend  
Thy talents bright with us remain  
While chords of music sweetly blend.

...

# Jesse Doan

## Rebel & Band Leader



A “Rebellion Box” is a small, carved keepsake made by the rebels of 1837 while they were held in the Toronto jail. These small momentos served as powerful reminders of the ideals which led these poor farmers to take their stand against the powerful clique of merchants who ruled the province. Usually inscribed with words like “Liberty” and “Independence”, they put a brave face on the uncertain future confronting both prisoners and their families. This box, however, strikes an almost melancholy note of hope almost lost. Made after 7 long months in jail, its’ sides bear the names of martyrs Samuel Lount and Peter Matthews, hanged for their role in the rebellion. On the remaining sides are the following verses:

Oft clinging to the massy grate,  
To catch a glimpse of heavens fair light.  
Uncertain as to future fate,  
Yet trust in God to set all right.

Now summer is her robes of green  
Looks smiling fair and gay,  
Yet not a charm for those are seen,  
Whose rights are torn away.

The box was “A present to Mrs Isaac Rose from Jesse Doan, while a state prisoner, Toronto, July 6th, 1838”. Both Isaac Rose and Jesse Doan were members of the Children of Peace jailed for their part in the Rebellion. Nancy Harrison, wife of Isaac Rose, was part of the large Hollingshead clan. The couple later farmed near Mt Albert. The box was passed through their daughter’s family, the Thirsk of Zephyr, to Edith Pope, the late wife of Robert Howard. Mr Howard donated the box, and a child’s rocking chair of similar vintage and origin.