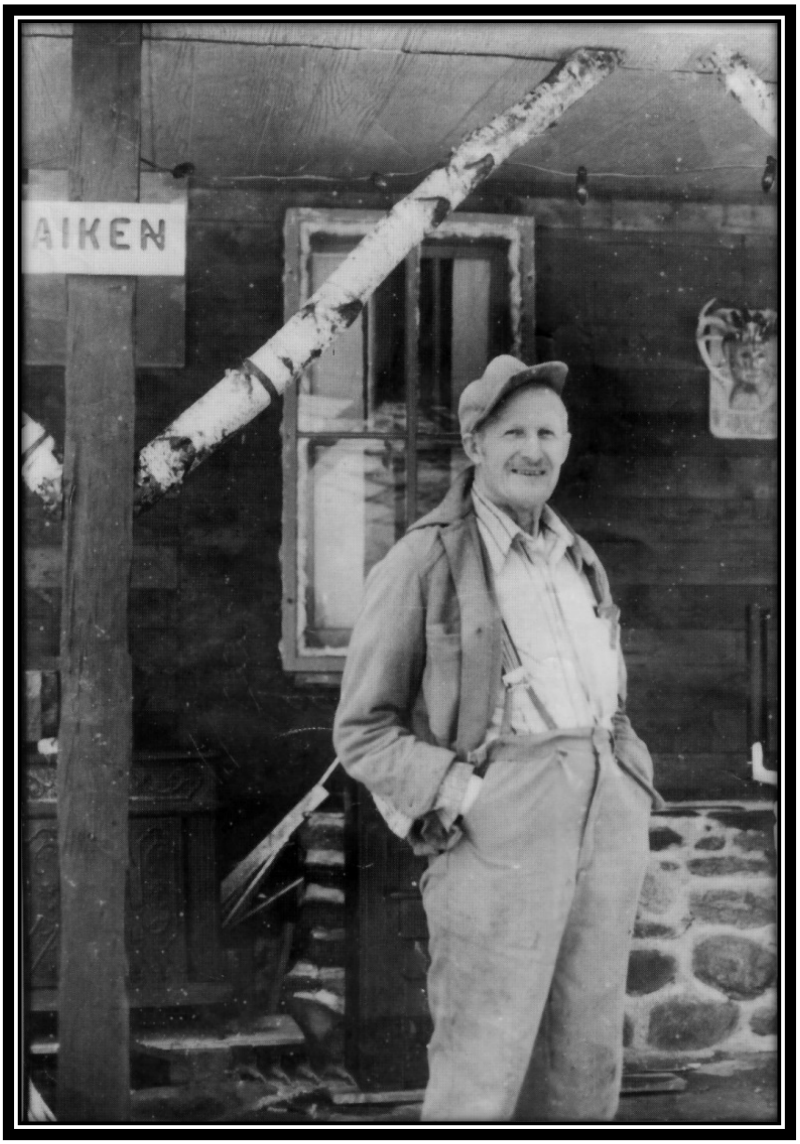
HISTOIRE POTTON HISTORY



Pete Aiken
Photo | Joe Smillie | 1983

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Sommaire

A Word from our President

In this volume, we present the biography of an "ordinary" man, who was something of a local folk legend: Pete Aiken who was born and brought up in the vicinity of Dunkin. We thank the Aiken family for sharing their memories and photos with us. We begin with a reprinted testimonial to Pete, which appeared in the Townships Sun of January 1983. Used with permission. A second, a more personal view, is drawn from family history by Pete's daughter-in-law, Lorraine Rouillard Aiken, and coincidentally one of our Directors.

As a keen observer of human nature, Pete Aiken recorded his life and times, speaking of simple pleasures, making note of what struck him as interesting, humorous, or touching. For instance, The Chopping Contest irreverently immortalizes Poison Pete, Sanitary Sam, and Wild Bill Magoose, three real or imagined finalists in a chopping contest designed to winnow out potential workmen for a lumber camp. Two other poems speak with a quiet poignancy and nostalgia that the reader cannot help but feel. Though his words can reflect a wry sense of humour, most are those of a humble man, grateful for a loving family and good friends. We sincerely hope you will enjoy reading about Pete Aiken and come to know him through his poetry.

Wood was the staple of Canadian trade for much of the 19th century. It seemed a natural spin-off to investigate the early history of logging in Potton and of the manufacturing industries which depended on the resource. We will tell you about some of these.

The Heritage Association is very happy to introduce François Hébert to you. François took up our invitation to contribute to HPH. I was most intrigued that he chose to write about the Female Benevolent Society of Potton. These ladies were the matriarchs of some of the first New England families to settle here bringing with them their faith and community values.

To these ladies, social order and education of a young community were essential, and they provided responsible standards for almost thirty years. François intertwines the local with the wider growing pains of region far removed from the British reality. He brings interesting perspective to the Rebellion of Lower Canada in 1837-38 and writes of Robert and Wolfred Nelson, the two English doctor brothers who espoused social justice and joined the Patriote cause. François' research presents the life and times of the Nelsons. We have presented these two in the context of the "Troubles In Potton'' of 1837-38, when the Township was under martial law. Then as now political differences did indeed manifest themselves! My fervent hope is that François will continue to research and write for HPH. Thank you François!

Jean-Louis Bertrand notes that Owl's Head and Memphremagog are the inexhaustible source of many legends. In a short article, he interprets how Cornelius Kreighoff skilfully illustrates three of these legends with his inimitable vision and typical romanticism.

Evoking a day which now may seem long ago, Thérèse Descary invites us to retrace her steps through the village during last year's Spirit of Potton Festival, as she observed the many faces and facets of our community, seeking that very spirit! Thank you Thérèse.

We have published this edition of **Histoire Potton History** during the unprecedented time and circumstances of a global pandemic of Covid 19. For weeks families have lived in the isolation of their homes, socially distanced from kith and kin. Our habits have changed, perhaps permanently. We will see. Be well everyone. À bientôt!

Sincerely

Sandra Jewett, President
Potton Heritage Association

Le mot de la présidente

Dans ce numéro, nous présentons la vie d'un homme « ordinaire », figure légendaire locale : Pete Aiken, qui est né et a grandi dans les environs de Dunkin. Nous remercions la famille Aiken de partager ses souvenirs et ses photos avec nous. Nous commençons par reproduire un témoignage publié en janvier 1983 dans le *Townships Sun,* avec l'autorisation requise. Puis, sa belle-fille et administratrice de l'APP, Lorraine Rouillard Aiken, apporte un point de vue plus personnel tiré de l'histoire familiale.

Fin observateur de la nature humaine, Pete Aiken a raconté sa vie et son époque en parlant de plaisirs simples et de ce qui lui paraissait intéressant, humoristique ou touchant. Ainsi, son poème *The Chopping Contest* immortalise Poison Pete, Sanitary Sam et Wild Bill Magoose, trois finalistes réels ou imaginaires d'un concours visant à recruter les meilleurs travailleurs pour un camp de bûcherons. Deux autres poèmes expriment une intensité et une nostalgie qui ne peuvent qu'émouvoir le lecteur. Même si l'humour de Pete Aiken est empreint d'une ironie désabusée, ses mots sont ceux d'un homme humble, reconnaissant d'avoir une famille aimante et de bons amis. Nous espérons sincèrement que vous découvrirez avec plaisir Pete Aiken, en particulier à travers sa poésie.

Le bois a été, au Canada, le produit de base du commerce pendant une bonne partie du 19e siècle. Il semble donc tout naturel de nous pencher sur l'histoire de l'exploitation forestière à Potton et de certaines des industries manufacturières qui dépendaient de cette ressource.

L'Association du patrimoine est heureuse de vous faire connaître François Hébert, qui a accepté notre invitation à collaborer à la revue. J'ai été très surprise qu'il s'intéresse à la Potton Female Benevolent Society. Ces femmes étaient les matriarches de certaines des premières familles de colons venues de la Nouvelle Angleterre et elles ont apporté avec elles leur foi et leurs valeurs communautaires. Pour elles, l'ordre social et l'éducation d'une jeune collectivité étaient essentiels, et elles ont fait preuve d'un sens des responsabilités exemplaire pendant près de 30 ans. François interrelie les souffrances du canton avec celles, croissantes, d'une région fort éloignée de la réalité de la Grande-Bretagne, en abordant d'une manière inusitée la rébellion de 1837-1838 dans le Bas-Canada. Il écrit ensuite sur les frères Robert et Wolfred Nelson, les deux médecins anglophones épris de justice sociale qui se sont joints aux Patriotes; la recherche de François porte sur la vie et l'époque des Nelson. Nous avons déjà parlé des frères Nelson dans l'article d'un numéro précédent intitulé « The Troubles in Potton », à l'époque où le canton était soumis à la loi martiale. Alors, comme maintenant, il y avait des divergences politiques dans la population! Je souhaite ardemment que François continue de contribuer à la revue.

De son côté, Jean-Louis Bertrand nous fait découvrir le peintre et conteur Cornelius Krieghoff qui, pour notre plus grand plaisir, a peint le mont Owl's Head et le lac Memphrémagog lors d'un court séjour à Potton.

Enfin, Thérèse Descary a écrit un texte charmant qui nous invite à réfléchir à ce qui constitue l'essence de notre collectivité et à ce qui inspire « l'Esprit de Potton ». Qu'en est-il exactement? Merci, Thérèse.

Nous publions le présent numéro de ***Histoire Potton History*** durant cette période exceptionnelle que constitue la pandémie de COVID-19. Depuis des semaines, les familles et les individus vivent reclus dans leur maison, séparés de leurs parents et amis. Notre façon de vivre a changé, peut-être pour de bon. L'avenir le dira! Portez-vous bien et à bientôt!

Sandra Jewett, présidente
Association du patrimoine de Potton
Traduit par Jacqueline Robitaille

Pete Aiken | Missisquoi Valley Man

By Joe Smillie

The following article was published in the edition of the The Townships Sun | January 1983.

Pete Aiken
Photo | Joe Smillie | 1983.

A introduction to Pete Aiken

I first met Pete Aiken in the spring of 1971 when we were renovating an old house near the Glen Sutton border crossing. The house was situated on the side of the valley above the Missisquoi river. This valley stretches from North Troy Vermont through Québec to Richford, Vermont.

We were facing some monumental problems with a caved-in foundation wall and had made a number of inquiries as to who could help us out. Moving "back to the country" presents a number of hefty challenges to those raised in suburbia. The answers we got approached a consensus. The man we should see was Pete Aiken who lived up the valley in Dunkin. Needless to say the foundation was well repaired but it was the stories we heard during those hours in the basement that have an even more enduring value.

Stories about the valley; the people who had lived there, the river that ran through it, the border that crossed it, and the mountains that formed it. Tales of the "booze cars" that ran the valley road at night, fabulous treasures hidden in the hills, log drives down the river and the numerous characters who made the valley their home.

People who have lived there, and some who have just passed through, have recognized its special beauty. Pete says "it used to be called the Missisquoi valley when I was a child. Now the Potton county line is just a mile from here. People who live on this side of the line call it the Dunkin valley while those on the other side call it the Glen Sutton valley".

Pete is a storyteller in the grand old tradition. He even has a pot-belly stove in his den. These are just a few of his recollections; many of these he thought would be of historical interest. The 'buried treasure' stories and the hair raisin' escapades will have to wait for another time. You have to leave Pete's house to hear the tales of his [dare I say, hell raisin'] adventures.

Pete was born in Dunkin 66 years ago and has lived there all of his life except for a few years when he went to war. His father had moved to Singerville [a Blair veneer mill town on Ruiter Brook] from Barton, Vermont, just before Pete was born. His mother was from Beauce county and had met his father when her family moved to North Troy, Vermont. They weren't the first Aikens in the area however as an Aiken had been among the first settlers at Ruiter Brook. This settlement, which started around 1796, was the result of a loyalist land grant given to Col. Hendryke Ruiter of the British army. His gravestone, among many others, can still be seen in the cemetery near the town of Dunkin.

A lot of this is going to be hearsay; it's things that I heard from people when I was a kid. They were good people so I would imagine the foundation of most of this stuff is true ... if not, it won't hurt anyone. These things all did happen, that's for sure, and probably a whole lot more.

Lumbering was the staff of life throughout all the years that this little town was in existence. Most of the people made their money that way because they lived beside Ruiters Brook which empties into the Missisquoi. They would work in the woods al! winter, pile the logs on the frozen brook and have a log drive in the spring. The logs would go down ·the brook and dump into the river. They'd drive them down to Steven's Mills (near Richford) where they'd be processed. It was quite a sight to see all those logs coming down the brook into the river.

I remember that they'd get such log jams they'd have to use dynamite to break them up. There would be huge logs flying up in the air and landing ail about. The drivers would roll the nearest ones back into the brook and away they would go. The others are what we called swampers. A lot of people got their wood and their lumber that way-free of charge-just by picking up stray logs.

These log drivers were quite a crew and they'd board in the village. My mother kept them. They would work for 50 cents a day and a quart of white whiskey a week. There was something about they believed if a man got wet and drank this whiskey he wouldn't catch cold.

People also sold their logs to the Blair Veneer Company in North Troy. They . would have to haul them there with 4-horse teams. Wages were very low. It was always a poor town-no industry just the logging business. This was a seasonal thing and with a good winter it would flourish but when the snow got too deep to log, it was hard times.

It was hard to get a good education cause the highschools were 15-20 miles away and the people weren't in any position to take their kids. There were no cars. There were two schools in Dunkin - grade 7 was tops here. When kids got out of grade 7 that was the end of their education. Two-thirds of the people were too poor to dress their kids properly to make the trip on foot through the deep snows to school. The primary school teachers of the time would board with a farmer. Some people were awful reluctant to have a teacher board because they considered the teacher coming from a better class than they were themselves. Once they got to know each other over the winter things went along just fine.

I remember the fantastic jobs that the mothers would do taking care of their children. They seemed to be able to take care of anything that went wrong with them. They were as good as any doctor in most cases.

They learnt the hard way; but they never lost anybody.

Women who bore their children were always delivered by a mid-wife. That's one reason why so many people around here and in all parts of the country have no birth record. They never bothered to write the date down when a child was born. Right out of this area here I know of 6 or 7 people that didn't have a birth record - they had to get an affidavit made. When the doctors had to come, if the people didn't have any money they'd get a bag of potatoes or a bag. of turnips.

Everyone would help out - if someone was sick why his neighbours would help. People were rich in friendship. They would dig in and help out - for years if necessary. Why I remember a fellow walking four miles every morning and night to do another man's chores for three months. There was no such thing as asking for pay or even accepting pay. The guy would say - well I'll do something for you - they would pay each other back in this way.

This town was always in danger of a flood in spring. You see the brook comes down from Fullerton's pond and passes close to the. village. I remember the great flood of 1927; every building in the valley near the river was washed away; all the bridges from Glen Sutton way up through were knocked out. Every bridge on Ruiter brook disappear in a gigantic foam of water rolling down from the mountains. The whole of Dunkin was shaking in fear ·because they thought the mill pond would go. Now this pond is ½ mile wide and three miles long and very deep. I remember people·staying on the side of the mountains waiting for the waters to subside. This was the greatest scare this town ever had.

The culture of this little village was always alive. People made their own fun. Parties were always held in someone's house and the dancing was in the kitchen. There was a hall overhead of the old store and a man by the name of Mr. Shaw used to come and put on these movies for ten cents a person. If you had the money that was okay. If you didn't you could set it on a bill and he'd set the ten cents down against you. Course if you were a child that made you feel pretty good cause your credit rating was all right.

This town is protected from the winds by the valley. It has a tremendous amount of beauty, but it's pretty difficult to live on beauty alone - so when people got older they had to move. To better yourself you had to get out. They always came back though because there is something special about the valley - you have to come back to see the old place.

Then there's the old Mill Pond. I don't think that there's a child alive that ever lived in Dunkin that didn't have wonderful memories of this place. They'd go for picnics and swim in the beautiful crystal clear water. It was a natural pond and they had dammed it to make it larger to hold the logs for the mill. You can still see the old flues. It's a memory for many people who were children even as long ago as the mill was in operation. They would allow the kids to swim there when the flues were closed.

Sometimes when I am there alone I stop and think of the ones I know that played there and made great friendships. I seem to hear the laughter of the children and the joyful screams of children splashing in the water.

The waters here - like the pond and Ruiter's Brook and the Missisquoi river were all consumed as people used to get their water right out-and it was pure and good. When we

were fishing we'd just dip it out of the river to drink - now it's so polluted…

People had not much transportation in the old days so they made moonshine. I remember working for this old fella and he used to go to church every Sunday with 5 or 6 bottles of this stuff and before church would open he'd sell this stuff to his special customers. Someone asked him what he was selling and he said "This is a house of worship and I'm selling spirits", "If the spirit moves you, you have to do something about it.''

It was a boom time during the Prohibition years. Anyone who had a house with a big basement would have it filled with bottles. They'd pay you to do this and you didn't have to worry about the revenuers as they never came. When we were children we'd go down and see all these bottles and wonder what they were but it wasn't long before we found out.

There was a lot of coming and going on the old road. A lot of booze cars, people shot up, big wrecks and new hotels. A lot of people got rich even around here! Some went to jail but they didn't stay long. The customs men and U.S. state troopers had an impossible task. They'd try to stop these booze cars but many wouldn't stop. They'd take planks out of the bridges to try and stop them. For me it was a pity. It caused a lot of greed. The government needs the money anyhow. One thing about the whiskey business - its great for taxes.

Many of the Americans used to come over the border to get a drink. Now when I was young I worked at a place in Leadville in front of the Leadville customs house near Magog lake. The bar itself was on the Canadian side but they had it fixed in such a way that the glasses would slide across the bar to the American side.

They used to smuggle cattle through the same way. A man would have. a pasture that was half in the States and half in Canada. They would buy in Canada and sell in the States where prices were higher. You sure saw a lot of different cattle in that pasture.

We used to have a lot of cheese factories in the valley in the old days. We got even more when a number of Swiss families moved into this area. They were, and still are, good farmers. They saw in this little valley a resemblance to their homeland. I'll tell you what happened to these cheese factories. When the government inspectors got into the act they put in such rigid laws that they couldn't operate. It just didn't pay when they had to test all the milk and install a lot of new equipment. It was a good thing that they did start testing because of the T.B. time around the early 30's. There were thousands of cows that were destroyed. You had to have a big operation to do your own testing or wait for an inspector to come from Sherbrooke or Montreal. Now many factories got this done but they just kept on passing more and more laws. Now the big (cheese) companies are in with the government - so that's the way it worked. They finally all had to close down.

There is sort of a similarity now to the depression. It's·a different kind of a depression now - it's a mental depression. People are depressed in their minds more than financially. This may become a depression but it will never be like the Great Depression. We are wiser now and we have developed a lot of our resources. I hope that the small farmers can keep going and make a living. One thing, I sure hope they don't start a big war to end the depression.

The Chopping Contest | Pete Aiken

We used to have a lumber camp
The place called Sargent's Mill
Just above ol' Talkin Rock
On this side of the mill.

We had men who came to work up there
From every walk of life
They came from North South East and West
We had to sort them out and hire just the best
So we organized on Friday noon
What we called the big contest.

Now each man stepped up and made his cross
On a paper pure and white
And the contest was to chop some wood
Either that or hide from sight
Now many tried to be the best
But three stood out from the rest.

There was a man there in the gang called Sanitary Sam
And I can tell you now he was a funny looking man
He had bow legs, pigeon toes, a long horse face and a crooked nose.

As the sun shone it was awful hot
As Sam chopped through his lot
The chips they flew both far and wide
As very few landed by his side
You could see Sam was filled with pride
He sat down to take a rest, thinking he'd won the old contest.

The next man up was Wild Bill Magose
He was tall and slim and his teeth were loose
His ears were big and they flopped around
His feet turned out and his socks hung down.

When he chopped you should see his speed
His ax moved faster than a galloping steed
Those chips didn't have time to hit the ground
As the others were up before they come down.

They had to stop just in time
Cause Poison Pete was next in line
He hopped about like a kangaroo
And had a face like a caribou
You could see by his looks he was no prize
When he looked at you through bloodshot eyes.

He grabbed his axe and in a couple of hops
Up to the wood and he starts his chops
The chips went so high they never came back
When finally he stopped to rest
It was time to tally the old contest.

When the results came out in a 3-way tie
They all shouted it was a lie
Screamed at the judge he was a fake
And went down to the hotel to celebrate.

When they got there I'm sorry to tell
They all got drunk and were raisin' hell
They broke up the bar and tore out the light
And ended up in jail for the rest of the night.

They broke out of there, no law or order
Borrowed a team and headed for the border
With Poison Pete at the reins they hit a stump,
Missed a turn, and ended up in the garbage dump.

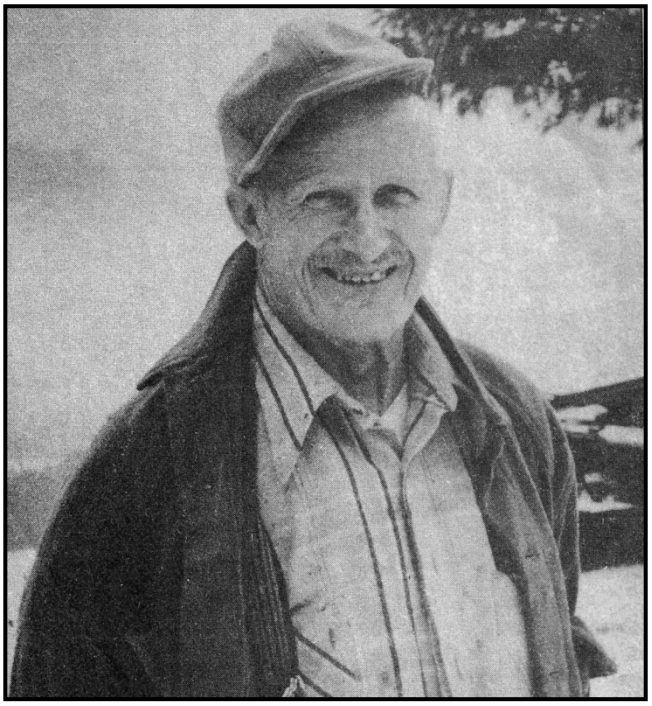
Well the rats had a meeting and thought it best
Under cover of darkness they all left
That's the way it was way back then
Workin' in the woods, it was hard to get good men.

Peter Aiken | Légende de Dunkin

par Lorraine Rouillard Aiken

Qui était Peter Aiken? Qu'a-t-il accompli pour mériter le titre de « légende »?

Peter, que tous appelaient affectueusement « Pete », est né à Dunkin le 17 décembre 1915. Il a passé les premières années de son enfance près de « Singerville », au bout de la Ruiter Brook, mais c'est à Dunkin qu'il a vécu la majeure partie de sa vie.



Pete Aiken
Photo | Township Sun

Pete était un homme aux mille facettes et aux mille métiers.

À l'âge de 10 ans, il quitte la maison familiale pour devenir ouvrier agricole. Il revient à la maison lors de congés. Il est apprécié et bien traité par les fermiers qui l'engagent. Cette expérience se révèle enrichissante pour lui. Il y apprend des choses qui lui serviront toute sa vie. Plus tard, il décroche un emploi de bûcheron, métier qu'il exercera pendant des années. Les scies et les haches n'ont aucun secret pour lui puisqu'il devient rapidement un aiguiseur de lames émérite. Cela lui permettra de gagner, plusieurs années plus tard, le titre de champion du « godendard ». Il enseignera ses techniques à son épouse Bridget et à ses enfants. Ils auront du plaisir à parcourir ensemble les Cantons-de-l'Est pour participer à différents concours de sciage du bois d'où ils reviendront souvent gagnants dans leur catégorie.

Revenons à la jeunesse de Pete : il s'enrôle dans l'armée canadienne en 1940. Comme pour plusieurs jeunes hommes de son âge, à cette époque, ce choix représente une hausse de salaire et de meilleures conditions de vie à leur retour au pays. Inutile de préciser que plusieurs reviennent de la guerre désen-chantés : le jeu n'en a pas valu la chandelle. Pete servira jusqu'en 1945. Durant ces années, sa fonction de canonnier l'entraînera en Afrique du Nord, en Italie, en France, en Belgique, en Hollande et en Angleterre.

Mais la guerre n'est pas que malheureuse pour Pete, puisque c'est en Angleterre qu'il rencontre et épouse une belle Irlandaise en mars 1941. Bridget Gaughan Aiken arrive au Canada en tant que mariée de guerre; elle retrouve ainsi son mari et découvre son nouveau pays. Le Mauretania accoste à Halifax le 27 mars 1946. Bridget n'est pas seule à bord, elle est accompagnée de leur fille aînée, Eleanor, née en 1942.

L' après-guerre n'est pas facile pour le couple. Les emplois et les logements sont souvent refusés aux ex-militaires. Les jeunes époux passent donc les premières années de leur vie conjugale dans un petit camp sur le mont Écho. On peut s'imaginer que Bridget a dû

faire preuve de beaucoup de courage et de résilience pour s'adapter à cette nouvelle vie.

Un jour, Pete a la chance de s'installer sur une fermette à Dunkin.

Maison de Pete Aiken
Photo | Lorraine Rouillard | 2020

Il devient alors un homme à tout faire. Il est bûcheron, marchand de bois, fermier, éleveur de bœufs, de porcs, de chiens de chasse et d'autres animaux qu'il revend.

Il est aussi menuisier, charpentier, bâtisseur de fondations et de murs en pierres des champs. Il ne faut pas longtemps pour que plusieurs nouveaux arrivants dans la vallée de la Missisquoi fassent appel à ses services. On dénombre encore plusieurs de ses travaux dans la région de Dunkin et de Glen Sutton.

Au fil des ans, la famille s'agrandit et finit par compter cinq filles et un garçon.

On ne s'ennuie pas sur la ferme Aiken. Les enfants ont accès à toutes sortes d'animaux de compagnie : chiens, chats, vaches, chevaux, chèvres, lapins, cochons, etc. Ils ont même pendant un certain temps un ours abandonné par un cirque. Les jeux y sont multiples et les parents jouent avec les enfants. Ces derniers vivent dans un monde de créatures fantastiques, créées par leur père. Certaines sont féériques, d'autres font peur quelquefois, car Pete est un bon conteur et tout ce qui sort de sa bouche semble réel.

Pete est aussi un homme sociable, enjoué, drôle, son rire est communicatif. On se sent bien en sa compagnie. Il aime les gens peu importe leur statut social, leur origine ou leur religion. Chez Pete et Bridget, la porte est toujours ouverte aux visiteurs ou à ceux qui sont dans le besoin. Pete aime aussi rendre visite, raconter ses histoires, prendre un thé accompagné de gâteaux ou de biscuits. Des histoires, il en a plein. Il connaît bien la vallée, ses légendes, ses habitants. Les gens qui le reçoivent voient sa visite comme une fête. Le temps s'arrête, on cesse les travaux pour écouter Pete. Il raconte des légendes entourant la prohibition, les trésors fabuleux cachés dans les collines, la drave sur la rivière et les nombreux personnages établis dans la vallée. Il partage aussi des tranches de vie quotidienne. Et il repart en laissant un sourire sur les lèvres et une douceur dans le cœur de ses hôtes.

Malheureusement, à une certaine époque de sa vie, Pete est atteint d'une forme de maladie rhumatoïde qui le rendra immobile pendant un an ou deux. Il ne peut marcher, les muscles de ses jambes étant atrophiés. Pendant cette période, il s'occupe à jouer de l'harmonica et du violon. Durant toute sa vie, il a adoré la danse et la musique, particulièrement le folklore et le bluegrass.

Il se découvre également une autre passion : la sculpture du bois au couteau. Ses œuvres sont naïves, primaires, et s'apparentent au « Folk Art ». Elles représentent souvent des têtes humaines ou animales et différents animaux aussi. Il y a toujours de la couleur dans ses statues tout comme dans les roses rouges qu'il aime sculpter.

Sculpture de Pete Aiken
Photo | Collection Lorraine Rouillard

Oui, Pete est un romantique!

Sensible, il l'est aussi dans sa poésie. Il rédige plusieurs poèmes dont certains sont publiés. Ainsi peut-on trouver un recueil de ses principaux poèmes à la bibliothèque de Potton. Tout comme ses histoires, ses poèmes sont basés sur la vie quotidienne et les légendes de la vallée.

Enfin, comme ses œuvres, Pete est un être pittoresque qui ne laisse personne indifférent. Son habillement le reflète bien : bas de couleurs différentes, chemise et pantalon non assortis, toujours accompagnés d'un chapeau et d'une cravate. Cravate que ses amis s'amusent fréquemment à couper. Peu importe, Pete les porte quand même. Son originalité s'exprime jusque dans sa maison, dont la toiture doit être rouge ou, à défaut, orangée.

Vingt-cinq ans après son décès, on nous parle encore de lui. Cet homme unique, spécial, doté de plusieurs talents mérite bien qu'on lui rende hommage et qu'on lui décerne le titre de « légende ». Non, il n'a rien accompli d'extra-ordinaire, mais il a laissé sa marque dans bien des cœurs.

Quant à moi, je l'ai aimé comme on aime un père, car j'ai eu le bonheur d'épouser son fils.

Je vous laisse, en joignant à cet hommage, un de ses poèmes parmi les préférés de ses enfants.

Lorraine Rouillard Aiken

In the greenness of the valley | Pete Aiken

In the greenness of the valley
where my children used to play
I can still hear their tears and laughter
and the little things they'd say.
They would run up and tell me their troubles
and then they would run away
And the fields were filled with flowers,
and the willows blowing in the wind.
Birds were singing in the treetops,
their cheerful song each day
In the greenness of the valley
where my children used to play.
You'd see them chasing the puppy or,
the puppy chasing them.
Or running across the field to catch a pony
so they could play with him again.
Oh, the days they seem to pass so quick
when your children are at home
And when they go away, they seem so long
when you're alone.
I remember their mother, Bridget,
how good she was to them
She used to dress them up and
make sure that they were warm
So they could walk to the little town
to catch the bus in the winter's blizzard storm.
She used to tell them stories
about all the little animals
Who lived up in the trees: squirrels and
the chipmunks, and the little chickadees.
And about the little rabbit who always dressed in
blue dancing through the woods in his
little magic shoes.
He used to sit on an old spruce log,
playing his little accordion
The birds would come from miles around
and sing all day with him, that's the way it was
In the greenness of the valley
where my children used to play.
The vision of my memory I can
still see them there today,
In the greenness of the valley
where my children used to play.
As time passes each one goes
their separate ways
Assured that they will have their memory
of the valley where their children used to play.
Where time presents itself
in a tangled web of grief and love,
Like a star that is falling,
from the heavens up above,
And you stand there and you watch it,
and you think it's lost its way
To the greenness of the valley
where my children used to play.
Each night as I lay my head on my pillow,
in the dulled vision of my eyes,
I see a vision of my children as each one,
the faces, goes passing by
A little prayer for them I say,
down there in the greenness of the valley,
Where my children used to play.

Peter Aiken | The Legend of Dunkin

By Lorraine Rouillard Aiken
Translation by Sandra Jewett

And just who is this Peter Aiken? Why does he deserve to be called the Legend of Dunkin? What has he done?

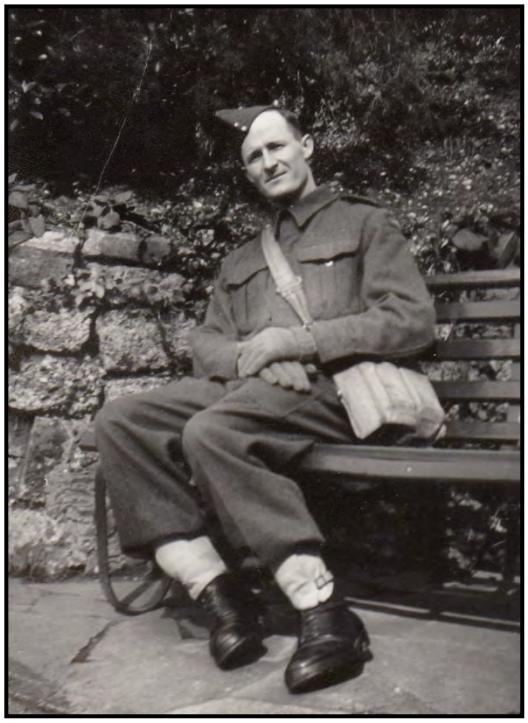
Peter, affectionately called Pete by all who knew him, was born on December 17, 1915 in Dunkin. His early childhood was spent near ''Singerville'', a mountainside logging camp near the head waters of Ruiter Brook, on property now owned by the Nature Conservancy of Canada. Singerville was well named since much of the hardwood cut off the mountain was destined for cabinetry made by the Singer Sewing Machine company then located in St.-Jean-sur-Richelieu.

It was in Dunkin however, that he lived the greater part of his life.

Pete Aiken was a man of many facets and a veritable jack of all trades.

At 10 years old, he left the family home to earn his living as a farm hand. He returned home only on holidays. His help was appreciated by the families for whom he worked. Pete learned quickly, and this practical experience taught the young man lessons which would serve him all his life. In time, Pete found better paying work as a lumberjack, a profession he practiced for several years. Before long, he became very skilled at honing axes and saws to razor-sharp edges. At a time when lumbering depended exclusively on man power by back breaking labour of saw and axe, his talents are in great demand! Over the years his skills lead to him becoming an expert sawyer specializing in crosscut. He teaches his techniques to his wife Bridget and to their children. The family travels far and wide to various woodsman competitions from which they often return as champions in their respective categories

But, let's return to Pete's younger days. He enlisted in the Canadian Army in 1940. Quite apart from any patriotic inclination, many believed that volunteering for the Army would result in a steady income and better living conditions upon their return from active duty. Such expectations however, often meant disillusion when the perils endured were compared to any gain. Pete would serve from 1940 to 1945. During these years, his duties as a gunner would bring him from England to campaigns in North Africa, Italy, France, Belgium, and Holland.



Pete Aiken | Années '40
Collection Lorraine Rouillard.

Pete's army experience overseas must have had its moments of happiness however, for it is in England that he met a pretty Irish colleen who stole his heart and was to become his wife in March 1941. In March of 1946, Bridget Gaughan and her 4 year old daughter, Eleanor, arrived aboard the Mauretania at the Port of Halifax to begin their life in Canada.

The post war experience was not easy for the young couple. Jobs and lodging were often refused to the returning soldier. The first years of married life were difficult, living as they did in the small logging camp on Mount Echo which they called home. We can only imagine the courage and resilience that Bridget, a young wife and mother, must have shown in her determination to make circumstance work! In time, more children are borne to the couple as Pete and Bridget become parents to five daughters and one son.

Perseverance often brings opportunity! And one day, the young couple's fortunes changed. They were able to move to a small farm in Dunkin.

Pete knew farming, so he raised cows, pigs, hunting dogs to sell! He knew wood and lumbering, so he sold wood. Pete adapted quickly, becoming a jack of all trades. He is industrious and very practical, so rarely is he short of work as a carpenter, cabinet maker or stone mason specializing in foundations and stone walls. It does not take long for many newcomers to the Missisquoi Valley to call upon Pete's services.

Boredom is not a problem on the Aiken farm! Soon the children have a real menagerie of dogs, cats, cows, calves, horses, goats, rabbits, and pigs to care for. For a time there was even a circus bear that had been abandoned by his handlers! Games and laughter echoed in the Aiken household, for Pete and Bridget enjoyed playing with their children who sometimes lived in a world of fantasy, with creatures imagined by their dad. Some were magical and benign, some were scary and fearsome much to the delight of the kids. Pete had an incredible imagination and was a gifted story teller. To his children though, whatever Dad said must be true!

Aiken Family's Home
Photo Lorraine Rouillard | 2020

Pete was very good natured, sociable, and cheery; gifted in the art of conversation. He was a man of quick wit and infectious good humour. Sourness didn't live long around Pete. No matter what their social status, origin, or religion, everyone was at ease with Pete and he with them. The welcome mat was always out at Pete and Bridget's, be it for a social visit or from someone needing a hand. Pete reciprocated with his neighbours as well. Over a cup of tea and a cookie, reminiscence came easily. Pete could pull a story or two from his endless store and then be on his way, leaving his host with a smile on their face and a warm feeling in their heart.

There was little about the Missisquoi Valley, its residents or their stories that Pete did not know. Time stood still and work slowed when Pete came by for a visit. Depending on his mood (and his audience) Pete told stories of close encounters and daring escapades during prohibition. At other times he wove tales of fabulous treasure hidden in the hills, or shared bits of wisdom and stories everyday life. His accounts of log drives on the Missisquoi were so real that one could almost feel the mist off the water.

Unfortunately, at one time in his life Pete was afflicted with a form of a rheumatic illness that left him debilitated and unable to walk for well over a year. Recuperation was long and when discouragement threatened, he would lift his spirits by playing his harmonica and violin. He had always enjoyed dancing and was particularly fond of folk and bluegrass music.

Not one to be idle, Pete whiled away many hours developing his skill at wood carving. Without formal training, and patiently using nothing more than a sharp jack-knife, Pete coaxed blocks of wood into the likeness of animals or human form. Naïve art made for his own pleasure was derived from his imagination. His pieces of folk art all bore distinctive colour, predominately warm reds and pinks, because Pete abhorred the drab and dreary. Even Pete's home sported a cheery red roof! At heart, it seems Pete was a bit of a romantic for often he included red roses in his creations.

Sculpture by Pete Aiken
Collection Lorraine Rouillard.

Some who read this may already know that Pete Aiken also wrote poetry. A compendium of his better known poems is available at the Library in Potton. His poems were based on his observation of the life and legends of the Valley, and are valuable chronicles of a sort. Many of his works contain memorable and comical historical elements, invariably lifting one's spirits in the reading.

Definitely Pete Aiken was a man whose colourful personality and easy nature left no one indifferent. In fact, his personality was reflected by the clothing he wore. His socks were often mismatched, shirt and trousers likewise uncoordinated; however Pete made little of that! Always a cap worn at a jaunty angle and a tie to complete the tidy ensemble! One or two of the more mischievous of his friends enjoyed cutting inches from his ties. No mind! Pete would wear the shortened tie anyway.

It is a tribute to this gentleman, that still we talk about Pete Aiken, some twenty-five years since his passing. This unique, special person, gifted with so many talents, well deserves the honour of being called a 'legend'. While there were no special or extraordinary accomplishments, he left few hearts untouched by his charm, wit and positive nature – itself a gift.

As for me, I have loved him as a father since I had the good fortune of marrying his son.

I will leave you with one of his poems, chosen from amongst his children's favourites.

Lorraine Rouillard Aiken

"People will seldom remember what you did –
they will never forget how you make them feel –"

Bridget Gaughan (b. May 12, 1918 – d. April 13, 2014)
Peter Aiken (b. Dec. 17, 1915 – d. April 24, 1995)
Collection Lorraine Rouillard

The Letter | Pete Aiken

In the peaceful little valley where the
Missisquoi River flows,
There was a man who lived there,
now he was living there alone.
He sits beside the fire and watches the flames,
they seem to dance and play
They make him think of his children
before they went away.

He listens for their laughter and envisions
the sparkle in their eyes
He looks across the pasture and thinks
he hears one cry.
Sometimes in the evening, the fog
comes down with the silence
Of a gliding butterfly and nestles
around his homestead cabin
There is a glowing of the sunset,
such beauty to behold
Just like a sparkling diamond, all mounted
in precious gold.

Then comes the blanket of darkness
It comes for man to sleep and hide
his grief and sorrow,
And gives a man a chance to weep.
Then comes the breaking of the morning
The fog goes back to the arms of the clouds to
nestle in its bosom so it appears another night.
The sun is now rising and it kisses
away the dew
It wakes up the sleeping roses around his
homestead
The place his children used to know.
When they left the old homestead,
they told him they would write
They were soon lost in the wonders
of the city and he was soon forgotten.

His hair had turned to silver
He stayed on the homestead,
although he was getting old
He longed to get a letter, but it seems
one never came.
He would walk down to the mail box
down the crooked little lane,
Still looking for the letter
that never came.

He would start back to the homestead
and watch the squirrel and chipmunk play
He would listen to the songbirds
so high up in the trees.
Then he would wonder, why is it
I never get a letter
For them I did the best I could
I know they could write if
only they would.

He picked a bunch of roses and
tied them with a ribbon of scarlet red
He put them in the mailbox with a note
and this is how it read:
"Each rose here tells a story of the love
I held for you
I hope this note will find you
and you will remember me again
My heart is filled with sorrow
waiting for a letter.

The Pioneers of Potton

By Edgar C. Barnett

The following article was taken from a scrap-book donated to the Brome County Historical Society and was written by Edgar C. Barnett of Highwater, P.Q. and is one of many found in magazines and periodicals printed around the turn of the century under the pen-name ''The Heron's Quill''.

Copied by Howard Eldridge.

- This is a transcription of an article which was re-printed in The Centennial, in three parts, sequentially, in issues appearing every Wednesday, the last of these being November 15, 1967.
- The Centennial was a very locally circulated paper, published by Permar Publishing Co. Ltd, Bolton Center, Brome County, Qc.
- Its publisher-editor was Milton E. Perry. Its managing editor was Russell Marsh, a native son of Bolton Center. (Mr. Marsh's descendants live in Bolton Center) – He served in WWII and was known locally for his interest in history and pronounced patriotism. He was an interesting character whom I had the pleasure of knowing!!
- I believe The Centennial was a short lived enterprise.
- The bold type I used, did not appear in the original article as printed in the Centennial. All that is in bold in this transcription appeared in capital letters. St. Johns is now known as Saint Jean-sur-Richelieu.

Transcribed on February 3 & 4th 2015 by Sandra Jewett for the use of l'Association du Patrimoine de Potton.

Albany, 1742

And what, asks the reader – has this date and a little Dutch town on the banks of the Hudson – (Fort Orange of other days) to do with or have in common with the South-eastern corner of Brome County of today or its settlement? Little, perhaps, but there are few of this World's happenings that may not be traced back to a trivial starting point. Some little event taking place today, unnoticed, may as years roll on, prove the pivot upon which hinges the fate of nations; and had not the above date been recorded in the little Dutch Reformed Church register at Albany, it might have been General Schuyler, instead of General Montgomery who led the attack on Quebec that fatal morning of December 31,1775, though the termination might have been the same. It might have been General Schuyler left in command in place of Gen. Gates, to oppose the victorious Bourgoyne at Saratoga, considered one of the World's fifteen decisive battles, though the results might have been the same.

Henry Ruiter was born in Albany, Sept 26 1742, eldest son of Frederick Ruiter, Jr. And Enceltje Van Werken, of stock known as ''High Dutch'' and but one generation removed from the Fatherland. In possession of some of his descendants still exists a portrait of the old Dutch admiral, ancestor of the American branch, one of the few who according to legend, had been able to flaunt defiance in Britain's face, sailing up the Thames with a broom as his mast-head.

Hendrick (Henry) was left an orphan when less than four years of age, and his brother Johannes (John) seventeen months his junior, and his sisters being scattered – he fell to the not too tender care of a relative who made life little less than slavery for the fatherless boy. One day while employ(ed) as usual, he was surprised at being accosted by a young officer riding past who had noticed the lad's hard life, and who had inquired why he was treated so

harshly, there having been left sufficient means by his father to prevent his son being made a slave. Finally, promising the lad he would look into the matter, the officer left him.

True to the self imposed task, Henry's friend immediately took the matter up, and as the Laws of the Colony allowed the minor to have a voice in the choice of a guardian, young Ruiter immediately named his soldier friend. Scarce more than a boy himself, but already an officer in the army, and a member of the Legislature of the Colony, this man was none other than Philip Schuyler, of Albany, a descendant of one of the most noted men of the country. He immediately took young Ruiter to his own home, where the youth remained treated as a brother, until his marriage, August 16, 1763 to Rebecca Dooth.

He then removed to Hoosick, where he leased a farm from one Daniel Bratt for a term of years, with right of improvements. In 1768, he bought from Jacob Leasing – a lot of land in Stone Arabia Township. A year before the Rebellion of the Colonies, he purchased from William Smith, 303 acres of land in Pitt's Town, just outside the City of Albany, where he erected a saw-mill, two dwellings and other buildings. Thus situated with a family of six children, soon to be increased, peaceful and prosperous, we find him when the war broke out in 1775,

With his old friend and guardian, he had seen service in the late War that had wiped ''New France'' from the map of North America – a War that an over-ruling Providence had ordained should have implanted in the bosoms (of) the American Colonists, the germ of a Nation – yet to be. And while England's brightest intellects were striving to warn and pacify – blind and self-seeking politicians, at Westminster and bigoted, brainless underlings in the New World, were prematurely hastening the pangs of revolutionary travail which began at Lexington that eventful morning of April 19, 1775, and ended at Paris – November 30 1782.

But friendship aside, human nature sees only with the eyes God has given, and while ambitious and popular Philip Schuyler saw the time had arrived for the making of a Nation, his friend and ward saw only the King he had served and the Flag 'neath which he lived.

Ruiter offered to remain neutral, but a rebel – Never, but as he had seen service, his assistance to the Colonial cause – at this moment, was particularly valuable. Indicated at last, with a squad of forty men sent to take him, dead or alive, he was forced to flee. Leaving his family, confident that his old friend, now so powerful, would not see extreme measures resorted to, though his wife's life was threatened if she did not disclose his whereabouts, and give up his papers. He lived for three months the life of a guerilla, with a band of men waiting the approach of Burgoyne, in the rear of the rebel force, whom he joined August 1, 1777.

History tells us that the Americans (immediately their appeal to Canadians fell short of its aim) fitted out two expeditions to take by force what they had diplomatically failed to win to their cause. The rash impetuous Arnold, in command of one, was to move up the Kennebec, throught the wilderness of Maine, over the height of land, straight down upon the St. Lawrence, while our old friend Schuyler, in command of the other, was to move down Lake Champlain, the Richelieu, take Montreal, and proceed down the St. Lawrence and meet Arnold at Quebec. We are told that he was taken sick and on the brave young Irishman, Richard Montgomery, the second in command, devolved the carrying out of the expedition, which was successful, until he stood with Arnold before the walls of the the grim Northern fortress of Champlain,

where Fate seemed to have beckoned him – for the sole purpose of dying bravely; for the first shot fired killed not only him but his two aides. If Saratoga decided the fate of the Colonies, that shot probably decided the fate of Canada.

Backward slowly rolled the tide of war. Back, back through the same old gateway, across a border, that Fate had allowed and was still to allow, man in triumph to an inglorious end, but which remains comparatively the same as when introduced to History by Champlain's thoughtless expedition in 1609.

Burgoyne is now in command of the successful invaders, one after another of the rebel posts are taken and, and ''Old Ty'' which Allen had so valiantly taken once more the triple crosses. And tis along this march that the indicted and exiled guerillas of New York and New England, came in touch for the first time with the armies of their King.

As before stated, August 1st, 1777, saw Capt. Ruiter join Burgoyne : August 16th, saw the Battle of Bennington, where he lost the thumb and index finger of his right hand. Two days later Capt. Ruiter's property was raided and his stock consisting of twenty head of cattle, thirteen horses and ten hogs was nearly all taken principally by Captains Bentley and Wright of the rebel army.

Animosity and hate seemed to have been let loose; on both sides – during this campaign, and malice perpense was justified where dead men tell no tales.

'Tis Schuyler who again commands the Northern Army. But sinister rumours are afloat. Even Allen, the hero has been doubted. An express arrives – 'Tis the will of Congress that Horatio Gates take command of the men in the field'' – and those it were whom Burgoyne met on Oct. 7th 1777 at Saratoga.

After the disastrous termination of Burgoyne's campaign, with the remnants of his company, Capt. Ruiter retired to St. Johns, where his men were transferred to other companies lacking a full complement. Ruiter now received a commission in the regular Army and was ordered by the Command-in-Chief to return to the Colonies and recruit another company, which he did at great risk, returning to St. Johns with his men where they became of the regiment known as the **King's Rangers** or the **Royal Yorkers** commanded by Major Rogers.

Meanwhile his estate at Pitt's Town had been confiscated and advertised in the ''Albany Gazette '' as for sale. By 1780 he had become so obnoxious to the Americans, that an order was passed, banishing his family from the States. They soon joined him in St. Johns. But hardship and privation immediately following childbirth wrought their work, and it was a motherless family, that, at the close of the War he took to Caldwell's Manor on Missisquoi Bay. Here he was appointed by Henry Caldwell as his agent.

Shortly before his marriage, near the close of the French and Indian War, while on service one day, he had chanced, nearly exhausted, upon a cabin in the woods, at which he applied for food to allay his hunger. He found only a woman at home, rocking a child which she informed him was sick and therefore she could not leave to prepare him a meal. He told her that he would look after the child if she would prepare him some food, as he was about famished, and as he showed some aptitude, she consented.

After he had appeased his hunger and was preparing to leave, the mother jokingly remarked that, as he had been so good to the child, he might have her, when she grew up, as his wife. And now, at the close of another war, a widower, he returned, proposed and was accepted by that child, Catherine Friott,

now a young lady. He purchased of Caldwell, a farm on what is known as Beach Range, then part of Caldwell's Manor. To this home, he brought his young wife to care for his motherless children.

The close of the War brought Capt. Ruiter preferment. He was appointed one of four commissioners to report upon the loyalty, principals and standings of incoming settlers, and administer the oath of allegiance thereto and therefore – a Magistrate of both the Districts of Quebec and Montreal, which later contained the Border Lands, subsequently known as the Townships.

He was also the first field officer appointed to these Townships, being gazetted Lieut. Col. Of the Militia. As in the case of all other officers of the War, he was granted by the Home Government, half pay, according to rank, which amounted to a crown a day for life.

The close of the War opened up to the Government of Canada a task at once arduous and bewildering. I refer to the claims of the United Empire Loyalists. Scarcely had peace been declared ere Gov. Haldimand was interrogated as to what those who had seen service were to expect. Petition followed petition so rapidly that it is small wonder that some waited years for their reward. Many died unrewarded, and some, less persistent than their neighbors, became discouraged, drifted back to the States or elsewhere embittered against the Sovereign they had upheld.

But the Land Committee's hand were full without them. Everybody signed everybody else's petition, so as to be in at the final round-up. But while the Government was willing and ready to grant land to the petitioners in the vicinity of Fort Cataraqui, Kingston and Nova Scotia, as Major Mathews, secretary to Gov. Haldimand, informed Capt. Myers, one of the first petitions in January 1784 – ''The Government did not wish to colonize the **Valley** of the **Missisquoi** and **Lake Memphremagog**'', as had been petitioned but awaited – **a solid peace with the Americans**.

The majority of the Loyalists accepted these terms and sought homes among these distant wilds. But many of the exiles hovered about Missisquoi Bay and the old Seigniory of François Foucault, then called Caldwell's Manor.

Three years later, March 1787, we find George Smythe, Henry Ruiter, Philip Luke, John Ruiter, Thomas Chandler, Andrew Mabon and Christian Wehr, in a petition to Lord Dorchester, setting forth the advisability of colonization the lands of Memphremagog and Pike River – **with Loyalists, this being the route of intelligence from Connecticut, New Hampshire and Cohoos** and asking for a grant for this purpose, the petition was read and filed – but, with no result.

In January, 1791, Col. Ruiter and Patrick Conroy again petitioned Lord Dorchester, asking for lands along the West branch of the Chateauguay River, in what is now Huntington County. The reply to this was the issuing, at once, of Warrants of Survey to Conroy and Ruiter and three hundred and one associates, of two Townships along the Province Line, West of Lake Memphremagog, to be known as Sutton and Potton. Jesse Pennoyer, Deputy Surveyor, was ordered to run out the side lines of said towns(hips) – which he did in the early summer of 1792.

On June 9th 1792, Lieut. Gov. Clark was petitioned by the following leader of the Associates – H. Ruiter, late Capt. Of the King's Rangers; Duncan Cameron, Late Ensign of the Royal Regt. N.Y.; Daniel Bronson, late Ensign C.W.A. Regt; John Ruiter, late Lieut. Royal Rangers; Philip Luke, late Lieut. of Butler's

Rangers; Patrick Conroy, late Lieut. of Royal Rgt N.Y.; Hermanns Best, late Ensign, L.R.; Christian Wehr, late Lieut. Royal Regt. N.Y. – asking that these towns(hips) be sub-divided, and that Jess Pennoyer be ordered to the service, as many were anxious to enter upon their lands. This was immediately ordered by the Land Committee, with this proviso – **that those not having borne arms, must pay for the survey of their lands.** Pennoyer was sent to Missisquoi Bay on June 18th, 1793, for this purpose and £15 advanced him for expenses. For some reason, a hitch seems to have taken place, for, upon Samuel Holland, General-Surveyor, asking money from the Lieut. Gov. for this purpose, he was told to ''wait Lord Dorchester's return''. In March, 1794, Holland received instructions that no more money would be advanced by the Government, and Pennoyer had to reimburse the £15 he had received.

But in the meantime, Conroy and Ruiter had guaranteed Pennoyer his pay and the survey had been proceeded with, Ruiter paying him that year the sum of £132,11s,2d. The survey of the town(ship) being completed in 1802, when Ruiter paid him the balance of £28,6s,8d, the total expense £160,17s.10d. Of this amount he was later reimbursed by Major McLean and others, who had received lands in the town(ship) to the £94,11s.10d., Conroy, meanwhile had paid £247 for the survey of Sutton.

Ruiter would probably never have left Caldwell's Manor, where, according to Henry Caldwell – ''He owned one of the best farms on the Manor'' had it not been for periodical attacks of fever and ague, or lake fever, which was fast undermining his health, and the pure hillside springs of Potton seemed the Mecca which he sought. Here he at once proceeded to take the life of a pioneer, accompanied by his family born of his second wife; two sons-in-law, Joseph DeGroat and Henry Abal and three grown-up sons, Philip, John and Henry and their families.

Local history has perpetuated many errors, but tradition unsupported is apt to be tinted by pride or prejudice, to say naught of failing memories – the sieve must be fine that preserves the facts alone.

Almost immediately after taking up his abode in Potton, Col. Ruiter had set about erecting both a grist and a saw-mill. He also put in a stock of goods for traffic with the fast increasing population as well as the roving bands of natives. A distillery likewise soon followed.

The town(ship) was fast being settled. The soil seemed productive of large families and the need of a school was soon felt. In 1802 Col. Ruiter and sixteen others petitioned Sir Gordon Drummond, Administrator-in-Chief, for a charter to erect a school in the Township, but it was not until January 24th, 1816 that the same was granted, when Henry Ruiter, James Polson and Perkins Pike were appointed syndics.

It must not be thought that pioneer life was entirely devoid of interest. Class lines – there were none; and whatever the event, distance was no barrier to the socially inclined setlers. Many of these were of Dutch descent, and as such, brought the folk-lore, superstitions and customs of their race with them to their new homes.

One of the customs was seeing the bride and groom safely in the bridal bed. And in the Brome County Historical Society at Knowlton is an old cupboard, which, if it could speak, could give a second '' Young Lovell '' episode, though happily without the fatal termination. In 1805, when Catherine, Col. Ruiter's eldest daughter, by his second wife, was united in marriage to

David Heath, the event was one to be remembered. For a wedding present to his daughter, Col. Ruiter had had manufactured – a cupboard, which for that day, was considered to be a rather fine one. Open above for dishes, with two large compartments beneath and closed by a door. When the time had arrived for escorting the happy pair to their nest – no bride could be found – and search where they would, her maidens could find no trace of the truant Katie who, safely ensconced in the lower compartment of her cupboard, was enjoying their discomforture – though not her cramped situation; only after the search had been given over and all had retired, did she emerge from her hiding place and acting as her own escort, seek her room.

Ghosts and haunted houses were among the beliefs of the credulous settlers and many are the weird tales told of supposed happenings and visitations. And for many a long year after Col. Ruiter and his wife had passed to their long home in 1819, and were buried on the little bluff to the West of their dwelling – brave was the man, to say naught of the woman who passed that then, tenantless abode after night had fallen. Later, its timbers went to erect the first school in Glen Sutton. But one incident that happened while the premises were still habitable is worth mentionning.

The wife of the then proprietor had spent the afternoon at a neighbors while her husband had been gathering and storing cabbages, and other vegetables to the cellar, which could be entered from the outside, there being a door for convenience in storing such truck. Arrangements had been made for the master of the house to take supper with her at the neighbor's house to-gether. This plan was carried out, but, in his hurry had forgotten to close the outside door – otherwise the story would never have been told. They arrived home safely in the early evening and at once retired, but scarcely had they done so, when they were aware of a tap-tap-tap somewhere, apparently on the floor.

Says the wife, ''Thomas. What is that noise? Do you hear it?''

''Yes,'' says her husband in a tremulous voice.

''Well '' says she, ''Get up and see what it is.''

''No, Hannah'', says he in a firmer tone, ''We can't find out what it is, so leave it alone''.

''Bosh'' says she. ''I'll find out what it is'', so springing out of bed, she struck a light which she bade her shrinking husband hold, while she located the sound which seemed to come from the cellar. Grasping a poker and bidding her husband follow with the light, she started for the lower regions. When, partially down the stairs, the light from the candle, held in her husband's nervous grasp, revealed – two bright spots in the darkness in the far corner – that moved side to side followed by the tap-tap-tap on the floor above.

Says the master of the house – ''Hannah, let's go back to bed and let it go'.

''No'' says she determinedly. ''I'm going to find out what it is'', and bravely on she went, poker in hand, until she brought up face to face with her husband's two year old bull. He had entered the open door, regaled himself on cabbages to his heart's content and was now quietly chewing his cud – the tips of his horns just reaching the floor above, and their motion, as he chewed, causing the mysterious tap-tap-tap.

But to return – Father of fourteen children – Potton's first settler ''has not a descendant today within the Township's borders'' – **that bears the name of Ruiter** – though no less than thirty families could claim descent from that staunch old Dutchman – though many of them know it not.

And, of the 2,400 acre of land in the Township of Potton, or the 5,600 acres in the Town of Barford, granted to him and his family – **every foot has passed to strangers,** and **few today could tell where they were located.** And aside from the little tablet (circa 1914) that marks the site of Potton's first white settler's habitation – **one memorial, and one alone preserves the name of Potton's first settler'' – the Ruiter Brook.**

In the little cemetery, West of Henry Ruiter's first home in Potton, now ''the Ruiter Cemetery'', beautifully situated, showing signs of careful management and tender care – this is the last resting place of the tired old warrior and many of his family.

This is the inscription on a beautiful granite marker:

HENDRICH RUITER
Captain of Roger's Rangers of
The Revolutionary War
Colonel of the 2nd Bat. of the
Townships – 1812 –1813
1739-1819

His wife
CATHERINE FRIOTT
1760-1819

Their children
JOSEPH – JACOB – ABIGAIL

Erected by T.M. Woods great grandson –
Lincoln, Nebraska
and
E.C. Barnett – great great grandson – Potton
Quebec

Collection APP

Au temps de la Potton Female Benevolent Society et des rébellions, le canton de Potton et la frontière (1790-1850)

par François Hébert

J'habite le canton de Potton depuis une vingtaine d'années et j'y possède depuis peu une maison. C'est en cherchant à connaître l'histoire de cette petite maison du village de Mansonville dont les fondations sont en pierres des champs, que je me suis intéressé à la Potton Female Benevolent Society. Parce que cette association tenait ses réunions chez l'une ou chez l'autre d'entre de ses membres, j'ai cru que ma maison avait dû les accueillir à un moment donné et qu'il serait peut-être question de la maîtresse de maison dans les annales de l'association.

Je me trompais, parce que les débuts du canton de Potton ont eu lieu plus au sud et plus près de la frontière, dans les environs où le bras nord de la Missisquoi qui descend d'Eastman, rejoint l'autre bras qui descend de Troy au Vermont et coule vers la baie Missisquoi du lac Champlain. C'est donc dans les maisons du secteur autrefois appelé Meig's Corner que les dames bénévoles tenaient leurs *meetings*. D'ailleurs, c'est là que se trouvait le bureau de poste du canton, avant de déménager en 1845, dans le village actuel de Mansonville qui s'est d'abord appelé Manson Bridge.

UN COUP D'OEIL SUR MEIG'S CORNER

Meig's Corner désignait un hameau ramifié de part et d'autre de la Missisquoi-Nord, traversée vers le sud par un pont couvert pour atteindre les environs des actuels chemins Rodrigue à South Potton (Highwater) et du Monastère qui se prolongeaient au Vermont. Meig's Corner était aussi relié à West Potton (Dunkin) par un chemin autrefois emprunté par les diligences mais qui, maintenant, n'est plus entretenu au-delà de Fitzsimmons. Vers le nord, il y avait la route Principale, mais aussi le chemin White qui atteignait l'actuelle intersection des chemins des Marguerites et Miltimore, où se trouve toujours le cimetière.

Les premiers à cultiver les terres de Meig's Corner, dans les environs de l'intersection de la montée Rémillard et de la route 243 actuelle, sont venus de Sanbornton au New Hampshire en 1798. Ce sont Jacob Garland, son gendre Jonathan Heath, père de Jonathan Heath junior, dont le fils Ruiter Heath serait le premier garçon né dans le canton en 1799. Avant de venir au Canada, les Heath ont combattu pour l'indépendance dans l'armée américaine. Jonathan Heath ayant vendu une partie de sa terre à Levi A. Coit en 1825, le hameau s'appela Coit's Corner avant l'arrivée des Meig en 1834.

Cette recherche me réservait d'autres surprises. Je réalisai peu à peu ce qu'impliquait la frontière qui longe tout un côté du canton. L'immédiate proximité des États-Unis, qu'un Montréalais d'origine peut difficilement imaginer, ne concerne pas que Potton.

J'avoue que je ne voyais la frontière que comme une limite, la fin du Québec côté sud et le début des États-Unis. Évidemment, rien n'est aussi simple, le Québec n'est pas un aquarium et, dans l'écologie humaine, les échanges et les évolutions se poursuivent en

dépit et parfois à la faveur des frontières artificielles.

En 1826, alors que la première génération de colons est toujours active et que le canton compte à peine plus de 300 habitants, quelques femmes de Potton créent la *Potton Female Benevolent Society* dédiée aux démunis. Ernest M. Taylor, dans son *History of Brome County,* dresse une liste d'une cinquantaine de membres dès les premières années de l'association. Plusieurs des noms de famille qu'on y trouve sont de nos jours encore bien présents à Potton[1].

Ce qui paraît plus surprenant encore, est qu'il s'agit de la toute première association féminine officiellement inscrite auprès du gouvernement du Dominion britannique du Canada. Cela s'explique, comme d'autres particularités de Potton, par la proximité de la frontière. (La première association bénévole féminine américaine, la Society for the Relief of Poor Widows and Small Children a été créée à New-York en 1797.)

Le canton fut l'un des premiers à voir s'installer des colons venus des proches États-Unis, à la fin du XVIIIe siècle. Dans les premiers temps, ils arrivent non pas en groupes organisés d'immigrants anglais, écossais et irlandais ou de loyalistes américains, comme ce sera le cas dans le reste du Bas-Canada (le Québec actuel), à Knowlton ou à Sherbrooke, et dans le Haut-Canada (l'Ontario actuel).

Ils traversent une frontière qui n'est pas encore définitive, individuellement ou en famille. Ils empruntent les rivières ou traversent le lac Memphrémagog; ils parcourent les bois d'une contrée encore sans chemins, à cheval et, souvent, à pied.

Parmi les loyalistes américains, il en est qui traversent la frontière, non pas à cause d'un si grand attachement à la Couronne, mais parce qu'ils sont victimes d'intolérance dans les anciennes colonies. Plusieurs des premiers habitants de Potton ont combattu dans l'autre camp, pour l'indépendance des États-Unis, et certains bénéficient de pensions à ce titre. Mais la rareté des bonnes terres disponibles autour d'eux et la lourdeur des taxes imposées par le gouvernement américain après la guerre d'Indépendance les incitent à partir, même s'ils sont relativement à l'aise. Ils viennent parfois d'aussi loin que des environs de Boston, mais surtout du New Hampshire, du Rhode Island, de l'État de New-York et du Vermont.

En 1826, Gardner Bartlett, alors étudiant baptiste, est venu à Potton pour donner les premiers cours de niveau secondaire à l'école de la North Branch (Meig's Corner). Il semble que l'éloquence de cet éducateur passionné inspira la création de l'association bénévole, dans un hameau où s'installent aussi des distilleries et où la contrebande est florissante. Avant 1835, les pasteurs baptistes et congréganistes, qui officiaient des deux côtés de la frontière, étaient liés à des églises de Troy, au Vermont. Les méthodistes sont présents à partir de 1831 et l'Église d'Angleterre, à partir de 1856. Les francophones étant absents du canton avant les années 1860, la paroisse catholique n'est érigée qu'en 1872.

L'école dite de la North Branch, première ouverte dans le canton, que les Benevolent Ladies contribueront à rénover en 1837, est établie à Meig's Corner depuis 1809. Le colonel Ruiter et dix-sept autres habitants signataires d'une pétition - l'un d'eux ne pouvait signer que d'un X - en avaient demandé la charte en 1802.

Le début du XIXe siècle voit l'expression grandissante des idées qui ont inspiré la guerre d'Indépendance américaine (1775-1783), et la Révolution française qui commence en 1789, mais est interrompue par la Restauration (1814-1830) et par la

monarchie de Juillet (1830-1848). Les mouvements pour l'abolition de l'esclavage et l'égalité entre les citoyens, pour la liberté de presse et d'association, font apparaître, chez les anglophones comme chez les francophones, la nécessité d'une éducation accessible à tous. L'ignorance est perçue comme un obstacle au développement économique, à l'exercice démocratique et à la formation du citoyen.

La Société historique du comté de Brome conserve les archives de la Potton Ladies Benevolent Society de 1826 à 1848. Il y est, par exemple, consigné que le 10 août 1837, 25 $ sont déboursés par les *Ladies* pour réparer la vieille école du gouvernement sur la North Branch. Concernant le meeting de janvier 1840, on mentionne que la *Society* est propriétaire d'une vache qui a été louée, prête à vêler suivant l'habitude, à 3,75 $ pour un an à Hannah Perkins. Au meeting de septembre, il est question d'acquérir une deuxième vache. Au meeting annuel de 1841, on prend la décision de mettre de côté 30 $ pour construire une *meeting house* - on peut à l'époque acheter une maison pour moins de 100 $ - et on y note aussi que les *Ladies* ont produit 18 verges de flanelle et, qu'avec une partie de ce tissu, on a confectionné une robe pour une dame Mills, veuve et malade. En 1845, les *Ladies* se réunissent dans la nouvelle *meeting house*, achevée en 1844, près du cimetière qui est en haut de l'actuelle montée Miltimore.

Une *meeting house* est habituellement un bâtiment modeste, mais son unique grande pièce est conçue de façon pratique pour pouvoir servir de lieu de réunion, de chapelle ou d'école, au gré des besoins. En 1846, on rapporte que le révérend Adam y prêche que : « Il y a plus de félicité à donner qu'à recevoir » et il reçoit pour ses services 1 $ et une paire de souliers. Deux chemises de flanelle sont données à un monsieur Gordon et une robe à une dame Blanchard.

Élue en janvier 1848, Catherine Elkins est la dernière présidente connue de la Potton Ladies Benevolent Society, dont les membres, alors au nombre de sept, se sont cotisées pour acheter vingt noeuds de laine filée. Si les archives détenues par la Société historique du comté de Brome ne vont pas au-delà de cette date, les activités de l'association des *Ladies* ont pu se poursuivre de façon moins formelle, mais on ignore pour combien de temps.

Les dames de la Potton Female Benevolent Society, qui changera son nom pour Potton Ladies Benevolent Society en 1840, vivent sur des fermes prospères. Elles se réunissent dans la résidence de l'une ou de l'autre de ses adhérentes, soit chez mesdames Blanchard, Perkins, Heath, Orcutt, Kidder ou Norris de Meig's Corner. L'assemblée des bénévoles commence et se termine par la prière et des chants. Bien sûr, le thé est servi à 16 heures. On discute des besoins les plus urgents et de l'aide à apporter aux plus démunis. On réunit des contributions en argent pour supporter l'éducation et le culte, de même que les tissus et les vêtements à distribuer. Les bénévoles tissent, filent la laine, tricotent et confectionnent des vêtements.

Le bénévolat procède de ce que les chrétiens appellent la charité et les révolutionnaires, la fraternité. Cette empathie qui incite au partage n'a, bien sûr, pas été inventée et introduite à Potton par la Ladies Benevolent Society. La convivialité et l'entraide étaient partagées et le sont encore dans la culture des fermiers et des cultivateurs comme elles l'étaient, avant eux, chez les peuples amérindiens.

Pour donner une idée de l'esprit du temps, l'article 3 de la « Déclaration de la République canadienne », proclamée en 1838 par le patriote Robert Nelson, promet entre autres « que sous le Gouvernement libre du Bas-Canada, tous les citoyens auront les mêmes droits; les Sauvages cesseront d'être sujets à aucune disqualification civile quelconque, et

jouiront des mêmes droits que les autres citoyens du Bas-Canada. ».

Depuis 1791, les femmes du Bas-Canada ont, officiellement, le droit de vote sans cependant pouvoir se présenter comme députée. Il faut dire aussi que seuls ont ce droit les propriétaires de race blanche, tous mâles, à l'exception de quelques veuves qui, elles, le perdront en 1834, pour le retrouver en 1940. Il faut ajouter aussi qu'aux États-Unis, si les femmes du New-Jersey obtiennent ce droit en 1776, celles du Tennessee ne l'auront qu'en 1920.

À l'époque de la Potton Ladies Benevolent Society, les Canadiennes françaises patriotes s'impliquent dans la rébellion. En 1837, une dame Girouard fonde l'Association des dames patriotes des Deux-Montagnes qui sera imitée à Verchères et dans le comté de Richelieu. Ces associations qui veulent « concourir à faire réussir la cause patriote » n'ont évidemment pas demandé à être reconnues par le gouvernement du Dominion. Elles s'occupent du boycott des produits britanniques, entre autres, en tissant et en confectionnant avec « l'étoffe du pays » des vêtements qui rivalisent d'élégance avec la mode anglaise. Elles tirent le sucre du sirop d'érable, pour remplacer la mélasse et le sucre de canne importé vendu par les marchands anglais. Des femmes fondent des balles de fusil et fabriquent des cartouches de poudre. D'autres encore abritent des fugitifs et soignent des blessés ou, comme Émilie Gamelin à Montréal, elles nourriront les détenus de la prison du Pied-du-Courant.

C'est pendant cet hiver de 1838 qu'une compagnie de rebelles ayant ses quartiers à Troy, sachant que la milice de Potton avait récemment été approvisionnée par le gouvernement en armes et en munitions, conçoit le projet de s'en emparer. Rebelles canadiens et sympathisants américains[2], au nombre d'environ 70, traversèrent la frontière et arrivèrent en peu de temps à la maison de Salmon Elkins. Ses trois fils, Robert, Harvey et Hector, prirent position avec leurs mousquets en haut de l'escalier qui menait au grenier pour les empêcher d'entrer. Un homme nommé Hadlock tenta de monter les marches; il fut tué d'un coup. Cependant, les Elkins ne pouvaient pas tirer sur les autres rebelles à partir de leur position. Comme ces derniers menaçaient de mettre le feu à la maison s'ils ne leur donnaient pas leurs armes, ils les leur cédèrent pour ne pas perdre la maison et, possiblement, la vie. Les rebelles s'en retournèrent à Troy avec un cadavre et trois mousquets.

L'hostilité entre les loyalistes et les rebelles persista quelque temps et suscita des incidents autour de la frontière. Un des incidents relatés concerne la *meeting house* de Meig's Corner. Au cours de l'automne de 1838, comme c'était la coutume le dimanche matin, un homme vint allumer le poêle avant l'office et s'aperçut, juste à temps et avec effroi, qu'on avait caché dans les cendres un paquet de poudre à mousquet. L'autre incident imputé aux rebelles, mais qui eut lieu en juin 1840, serait l'incendie de la maison habitée par la veuve du Dr Gilman et des bâtiments de la ferme.

Les chantiers des citoyens actifs à l'époque de la Potton Ladies Benevolent Society se sont poursuivis tout au long des XIX^{e} et XX^{e} siècles. Ils sont toujours en cours à travers le monde et il reste sans aucun doute encore du travail à accomplir. Heureusement pour nous, le canton de Potton compte un nombre impressionnant de citoyens qui s'impliquent bénévolement dans plusieurs champs d'action. Qu'on pense simplement à tout ce que je n'ai pu inclure dans le présent article et que, malheureusement, je ne fais que mentionner, comme le Centre d'action bénévole, le Centre Ken Jones, le cinéma Potton, le sauvetage de la grange ronde et toutes les activités et évènements paramunicipaux où l'apport des bénévoles est déterminant.

LA BIBLIOTHÈQUE DE MANSONVILLE, FONDÉE GRÂCE AU BÉNÉVOLAT.

La bibliothèque de Mansonville a été fondée en 1975 par Louise Oliver, avec l'aide de Françoise Blais, de Jean Brown et de la fille de Louise, Charlotte Oliver Krausser. Leur travail était entièrement bénévole, les livres provenaient uniquement de dons et le local utilisé était prêté gracieusement par l'association de vétérans de la Légion[3]. Lorsque la Légion se départit de son édifice, elle le céda à la municipalité, à condition que la bibliothèque qui s'y trouvait soit nommée « Bibliothèque commémorative de la Legion Memorial Library ». Depuis, la municipalité a pris en charge la rémunération de la bibliothécaire responsable, toujours assistée de bénévoles, de même que l'achat d'une partie des livres. La bibliothèque est actuellement logée au deuxième étage de l'hôtel de ville.

La passion de Louise Oliver allait au-delà des livres. Retraitée en 1974, elle s'occupa avec son mari et quelques autres participants de Katimavik de la rénovation de l'ancienne chapelle-école de Vale Perkins, à l'intersection des chemins du Lac et Peaboby, et de la mise sur pied de la maison Reilly. Louise Oliver, qui était membre de la International Society of Poets, s'impliquait dans l'enseignement de la littératie et publia des livres pour enfants. Elle voyait l'éducation comme l'apprentissage de toute une vie. Elle avait l'habitude de dire : « Certaines personnes voient les choses comme elles sont et se demandent : "Pourquoi ?", d'autres les voient comme elles pourraient être et se disent : "Pourquoi pas !" »[4].

Notes

[1]
Mercy Orcutt, Zeviah Blanchard, Lydia Elkins, Hannah Hoyt, Mary Garland, Nancy Miltimore, Patty Blanchard, Jemima Norris, Sally Fullerton (the Society's first President), Deborah Heath, Ruth Norris, Betsey Austin, Amanda Barber, Polly Heath, Azubah Holbrook, Mary Barber, Freelove Gilman, Judith Perkins, Azubah Peabody, Matilda Sisco, Nancy Norris, Carola Hoyt, Catharine Barker, Harriet Coit, Martha Miltimore, Clarisa Bourn, Patty Manson, Fanny Hoyt, Lucy Holebrook, Patience Manson, Hannah Perkins, Roxana Walker, Betsey Holebrook, Elisa Elkins, Nancy Heath, Betsey Perkins, Hannah Gilman, Rebecca Woods, Mary H. Elkins, Martha P. Hunt, Zeviah Barker, Lovisa Bruce, Ann Fullerton, Nancy Norris, Abigail Austin, Abigail Garland, Hepsibeth Peck, Viola Coit, Friendly Orcutt, Carline Howlett, Lucy Kidder.

[2]
Captain Ira A. Bailey (capitaine de milice rebelle) James Manson, Hazen Hadlock, Ithamar Hadlock, Jonathan Elkins (fils de Josiah Elkins de Troy), John Miltimore (fils de Daniel Miltimore), Dr L. C. Moore, William Perkins, Jonathan Bailey, Ashley Walker, Daniel Miltimore junior et d'autres.

[3]
L'association bénévole des vétérans de la Légion (« Royal Canadian Legion » à Potton, section 154), active depuis 1946 jusqu'à sa dissolution en 2005, avait acheté l'ancien couvent catholique en 1966, entre autres, pour y aménager un appartement et un cabinet pour loger un médecin à Mansonville. Outre la bibliothèque, l'édifice de la Légion abrita le Centre d'action bénévole, avant que le CLSC s'installe dans le nouvel édifice construit à l'emplacement du couvent.

[4]
Some see things as they are and say « Why? ». Some see things as they could be and say « Why not? ». Extrait de l'éloge funèbre prononcé par le révérend Ryk Allen à l'église baptiste de Mansonville, le 18 octobre 2006. Le texte de cet éloge fait partie des archives de la bibliothèque, rassemblées à l'origine par Peter Downman qui y contribua bénévolement de la fin des années 1970 jusqu'aux années 2010.

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Remerciements à Sandra Jewett, pour ses connaissances du passé de Potton et son aide à la recherche.

The following article, written in French, focuses on the Nelson brothers during the 1837 rebellion.

Our English-speaking readers are invited to browse the Fall 2018 publication[*] to find related articles.

See in particular *The Capture of Wolfred Nelson In the Rebellion of 1837* by following this link: https://patrimoinepotton.org/appnum/s/HPH/item/447

[*] HPH Volume 6 – Numéro 2 – Autome 2018 | https://patrimoinepotton.org/appnum/s/HPH/page/tap-62

Les frères Nelson et la rébellion

par François Hébert

Dans un numéro précédent*, nous avions publié quelques extraits du *Yesterdays of Brome County,* portant sur la rébellion de 1837-1838.

Nous revenons sur l'histoire des frères Nelson, deux médecins anglophones, épris de démocratie et de justice sociale, qui s'engagèrent aux côtés des Patriotes pour défendre les droits des Canadiens de langue française.

[*] HPH Volume 6 – Numéro 2 – Autome 2018 | https://patrimoinepotton.org/appnum/s/HPH/page/tap-62

Les frères Nelson n'ont pas vécu à Potton et Robert, pas plus que Wolfred, n'était apparemment destiné à devenir un adversaire de la mauvaise administration britannique au Canada. Ils sont d'une famille de loyalistes qui a quitté l'état de New-York après la Révolution américaine. Leur mère était fille d'un riche propriétaire terrien de l'État de New-York, qui avait tout perdu parce qu'il était resté loyal à la Couronne britannique pendant la Révolution américaine. (En 1784, une législation entre en vigueur qui permet à l'État de New York de vendre les terres des loyalistes pour éponger les dettes dues à la Révolution). Leur père a fait ses études à Londres, enseigné à New-York, puis à Montréal où il s'installe après la Révolution américaine.

Ce père éducateur ouvre ensuite une école à Sorel (dont le nom officiel était alors William Henry). C'est là, à l'intérieur des palissades de cet avant-poste britannique à l'embouchure de la rivière Richelieu, que Robert et Wolfred grandissent. La famille vivait près de la résidence d'été du gouverneur et les frères Nelson fréquentaient l'école de leur père, où ils eurent pour compagnons les fils des officiers britanniques. Wolfred et Robert allaient tous les deux devenir médecins.

Leurs destins commenceront à basculer au cours de la guerre de 1812 entre la Grande-Bretagne et les États-Unis. Wolfred, qui a fait son apprentissage au sein de l'armée, est nommé médecin du 5e bataillon de la milice incorporée, dont le quartier général se trouve à Saint-Denis sur le Richelieu, où il se trouve être le seul officier de langue anglaise. Il écrira, des années plus tard : « Dans ma jeunesse, j'étais un ardent tory et j'étais porté à détester tout ce qui était catholique et canadien-français, mais une connaissance plus intime de ces gens changea mes vues. » C'est d'ailleurs à Saint-Denis qu'il ouvrira son premier cabinet de médecin après la guerre.

Quant à Robert, qui a étudié la médecine à Montréal, puis à Harvard, il débute la pratique de la médecine comme chirurgien pour l'armée en 1814, vers la fin de la guerre, auprès du Deschambault Corps, puis il est muté au service du Indian Braves Corps. Au retour de la paix, il offre bénévolement ses services aux Mohawks des communautés de Caughnawaga, d'Oka, de Saint-Régis et aux Abénaquis de Saint-François. En 1821 et à nouveau lors de l'épidémie de syphilis de 1826, il tente sans succès auprès du gouverneur Dalhousie d'obtenir le poste de chirurgien attitré des Indiens. Au cours de la guerre de 1812, environ 10,000 autochtones ont perdu la vie

en combattant avec l'armée britannique dans l'espoir d'obtenir des territoires dans l'Ouest américain.

À l'invitation de son frère Wolfred, devenu membre du Parti patriote, Robert fait le saut en politique et est élu député en 1827, aux côtés de Louis-Joseph Papineau. Retiré de la politique en 1830, il commence l'enseignement de la chirurgie et vient en aide aux immigrants malades de la Pointe-Saint-Charles lors de l'épidémie de choléra de 1832[1], année où il est élu président des Amis de la liberté de presse. Il est réélu député aux élections de 1834.

Même s'il ne participe pas au soulèvement de 1837, il est arrêté, comme bien d'autres hommes politiques et citoyens du parti opposé au gouvernement. L'éminent chirurgien, reconnu en Europe comme en Amérique, est indigné et furieux. Relâché, il quitte immédiatement le Bas-Canada et se joint aux patriotes qui s'exilent aux États-Unis. Le 2 janvier 1838, Robert Nelson, ainsi que nombre d'exilés dont Papineau et le curé Chartier, sont à Middlebury (Vermont) pour débattre d'un projet de prise de contrôle militaire du Bas-Canada. Les patriotes présents votèrent pour l'établissement d'un gouvernement provisoire et le lancement d'une attaque à partir des États-Unis. Certains patriotes influents votèrent contre cette option, dont Papineau qui croyait inévitable l'échec d'une invasion effectuée sans l'appui officiel d'une puissance militaire comme les États-Unis ou la France.

Le 28 février 1838, Robert Nelson, qui avait été élevé au rang de général et élu, par les exilés, président de la République du Bas-Canada, campa ses hommes (300 à 400 patriotes bas-canadiens et volontaires américains) à Alburgh, ville frontalière du Vermont baignée par les eaux du lac Champlain. C'est là qu'il proclama l'indépendance du Bas-Canada et distribua des copies de sa Déclaration d'indépendance. Nelson et sa petite armée furent bientôt arrêtés par l'armée américaine pour violation de la loi de neutralité des États-Unis, mais un jury sympathique à la cause patriote libéra Nelson ainsi que d'autres patriotes.

Les États du nord-est comptaient de nombreux réformateurs, réclamant l'abolition de l'esclavage et de l'emprisonnement pour dettes, l'émancipation de la femme et l'extension de la liberté aux peuples opprimés. Plusieurs de ces réformateurs étaient imprégnés de la ferveur révolutionnaire de 1776. Par ailleurs, des milliers de sans travail rendaient la Banque d'Angleterre responsable de la récession de 1837 et pouvaient être tentés de se venger de la Grande-Bretagne.

Cependant Londres et Washington n'étaient pas disposés à reprendre les hostilités et la loi de neutralité venait d'être renforcée par le Congrès. Elle était terminée, l'époque où les Américains avaient souhaité que les Canadiens, sujets de la Couronne d'Angleterre depuis seulement une quinzaine d'années, se joignent à leur cause. Ils avaient même enlevé Montréal aux Britanniques pendant six mois, en 1775-1776. Benjamin Franklin, un des pères fondateurs des États-Unis, qui était aussi imprimeur, avait fait transporter une presse au château Ramezay, où il s'était installé avec l'État-major de l'armée américaine. Après avoir pris les places fortes de St-Jean, Chambly, Sorel, Montréal et Trois-Rivières, l'armée rebelle à la Couronne, partie de Boston, avait été défaite à Québec et repoussée. La majorité des habitants ordinaires était restée neutre, n'étant prête à se battre ni d'un côté, ni de l'autre.

Robert Nelson mettra donc sur pied une association clandestine, qui eut ses supporteurs dans les villes et dans la plupart des villages du Bas-Canada : les Frères chasseurs.

La coordination et l'approvisionnement en munitions de cette association seront défaillants en regard de l'immensité du pays, mais les Frères chasseurs passeront à l'action en novembre 1838 et prendront le contrôle de la seigneurie de Beauharnois. Après quoi plusieurs Frères chasseurs retournent aux États-Unis et c'est le 9 novembre qu'a lieu la dernière bataille des rébellions de 1837-1838. Environ 700 Frères chasseurs canadiens et américains s'en prennent aux milices loyales à la Couronne qui se sont organisées dans les villages frontaliers. À Odelltown (Lacolle), les volontaires loyaux se réfugient dans l'église méthodiste. Les patriotes assiègent l'église, mais après quelques heures, des volontaires loyaux en provenance d'Hemmingford et de l'Île-aux-Noix viennent en renfort et les obligent à se disperser. Les pertes sont minimes d'un côté comme de l'autre, mais de nombreux Frères chasseurs sont emprisonnés et plusieurs sont condamnés à mort par un tribunal militaire.

Les chefs patriotes obtiendront finalement l'amnistie et plusieurs rentrent au pays, mais Robert Nelson demeurera aux États-Unis. En 1849, il pratique la médecine en Californie. De retour dans l'est américain en 1851, il s'établit à New York en 1863, où il pratique la chirurgie, entre autres sur ses patients de Montréal et, en 1866, il publie un ouvrage sur le choléra[2]. Il décède à Staten Island (New York) le 1er mars 1873 et est inhumé au cimetière anglican de Sorel.

Remontons un peu le cours du temps pour suivre maintenant le parcours de son frère Wolfred. Ses hauts faits mériteraient d'être rappelés aux Québécois d'aujourd'hui. Commencée à Saint-Denis, la conversion politique de Wolfred Nelson aux idées réformistes l'amena à se porter candidat à Sorel contre James Stuart, procureur général du Bas-Canada qui était publiquement appuyé par le gouverneur, lord Dalhousie. Au cours d'une assemblée, Nelson interrompit Dalhousie qui parlait en faveur de Stuart : il l'informa que sa conduite était inconstitutionnelle, le forçant à cesser de s'ingérer dans la campagne électorale. Wolfred Nelson remporta l'élection à l'Assemblée par deux voix, « à l'étonnement et à l'indignation de la partie respectable des habitants », selon la *Montreal Gazette*. Furieux, Stuart multiplia les démarches judiciaires pour faire annuler l'élection, ce qui mit plutôt en lumière sa propre corruption et entraîna, en 1831, sa destitution comme procureur de la Couronne.

Wolfred Nelson ne se portera pas candidat à l'élection suivante de 1830. Il passe plutôt les sept années suivantes à remplir ses devoirs de médecin, à voyager en Europe, notamment en Angleterre pour étudier les institutions médicales, et il met sur pied une distillerie à St-Denis où il est nommé juge de paix. Ses conceptions politiques ne se diluèrent cependant pas à la suite de ses succès matériels. L'assassinat à Sorel de son ami et allié politique Louis Marcoux, au cours des élections de 1834, et l'acquittement par un jury truqué de celui qui fut accusé du meurtre, déclenchèrent son retour sur la scène publique.

En mai 1837, il organisa la première des nombreuses assemblées des patriotes dénonçant les mesures antidémocratiques mises de l'avant par lord John Russell. À cause du rôle qu'il joua au cours de cette assemblée, Wolfred Nelson fut relevé de ses fonctions de juge de paix. En octobre, il fut porté à la présidence de l'assemblée des six comtés et proposa une résolution dictée par la colère : « ...quand une forme de gouvernement, quelle qu'elle soit, devient destructrice (...) c'est le droit du peuple de la modifier ou de l'abolir. » Le gouvernement riposta en émettant le 16 novembre 1837, hors des procédures légales, des mandats contre Nelson et vingt-cinq autres patriotes, sous l'inculpation de haute trahison. Peu après, Papineau, et O'Callaghan

rejoignirent Nelson à Saint-Denis, où ils décidèrent de résister à l'arrestation, de fournir au peuple des armes et de déclarer l'indépendance du Bas-Canada.

Ce fut ensuite la victoire du médecin de campagne et de sa bande d'artisans et de cultivateurs armés de faux et de fourches contre la brigade du vétéran de Waterloo, le colonel Charles Stephen Gore. Victoire qui électrisa le Bas-Canada et fit de Nelson un héros. Mais Papineau avait quitté le champ de bataille avant cette victoire qui ne fut suivie que de défaites. À peine plus d'une semaine était passée que les défenseurs de Saint-Denis n'étaient plus que six. Certains du retour imminent de Gore, ils s'enfuirent le 1er décembre dans les bois. À Granby, Wolfred Nelson se trouva séparé de ses compagnons. Il erra sans nourriture dans les bois pendant dix jours avant d'être capturé par des volontaires près de Stukeley. Il fut amené à Montréal pour subir son procès, n'ignorant pas que la loi martiale avait été décrétée et que la peine encourue pour haute trahison était la mort.

Le procès toutefois n'eut pas lieu. Après avoir passé sept mois en prison, lui et sept autres patriotes furent exilés aux Bermudes, après s'être reconnus coupables, dans une lettre adressée privément à lord Durham, de « rébellion contre la mauvaise administration coloniale ». Et par un autre retournement du sort, le désaveu par Londres de l'ordonnance de Durham permit aux exilés de quitter les Bermudes. Au début de 1839, W. Nelson était parvenu à Plattsburgh, où il ouvrit un cabinet médical et où sa famille le rejoignit. En 1842, un de ses amis devenu procureur de la Couronne, Louis-Hippolyte La Fontaine, fit en sorte qu'il puisse déménager à Montréal, où il poursuivit sa pratique médicale.

Après l'Acte d'union, La Fontaine, qui a été élu premier-ministre du Canada-Est en 1842, mais qui a démissionné, tout comme Baldwin (premier-ministre du Canada-Ouest) en 1843, à cause du refus de Downing Street d'admettre le principe du gouvernement responsable pour le Canada, demande à Nelson de se porter candidat à l'Assemblée en 1844. Wolfred Nelson, exaspéré par l'intransigeance de Londres, ne se fait pas prier. Élu, il prononce en 1845 son premier discours à l'Assemblée législative du Canada-Uni, en français, comme l'avait fait La Fontaine en 1842, alors que cette langue est spécifiquement interdite par l'Acte d'union. Pendant les sept années suivantes, il est le député de Richelieu, l'interprète anglophone des droits des Canadiens français et un avocat déterminé du principe de gouvernement responsable, c'est-à-dire un gouvernement élu par des Canadiens et redevable aux Canadiens. Ce qui fut obtenu en 1848. Le tandem La Fontaine-Baldwin reprend le pouvoir et offrira à Nelson, retiré de la politique nationale et alors âgé de soixante ans, le poste d'inspecteur des prisons et des asiles. Ce poste, en d'autres mains, aurait pu n'être qu'une sinécure, mais le rebelle a connu de l'intérieur la prison de Montréal et il fera des rapports rigoureux et détaillés. D'ailleurs, il n'a cessé d'être au service de ses concitoyens en tant que médecin. Il soigne les habitants de Saint-Denis en temps paisibles, comme les soldats de la Couronne après la bataille, ses compatriotes en prison, comme en exil les Noirs des Bermudes ou comme les immigrants malades du typhus sur les quais de Montréal.

En 1849, il préside une assemblée convoquée pour s'opposer à la peine de mort, qu'il qualifiait d' « assassinat légal ». À cette époque, un jeune homme de dix-huit ans avait été pendu pour le vol d'une montre en argent.

Il reviendra à la politique, cette fois municipale. Premier maire de Montréal élu au vote populaire en 1854, il perfectionne la règlementation des services municipaux et engage des inspecteurs. Il organise des

mesures de soutien aux démunis pour trouver des logements salubres et met sur pied plusieurs institutions publiques: des asiles pour les aliénés, alors confinés à la prison, pour les aveugles et les sourds-muets. Pour les jeunes délinquants, il organise non seulement un refuge, mais une ferme modèle pour leur réhabilitation. Il publie, à ses frais, en anglais et en français, une brochure utile à la prévention du choléra[3].

Enfin, notons qu'il recommanda au conseil municipal d'étudier sérieusement la suggestion de l'explorateur et naturaliste James Edward Alexander de créer un parc au sommet du mont Royal.

Notes

[1-2]
Nelson, Robert, Asiatic cholera: its origin and spread in Asia, Africa and Europe.

[3]
Nelson, Wolfred, Practical views on cholera, and on sanity, preventive and curative measures to be adopted in the event of the visitation of the epidemic.

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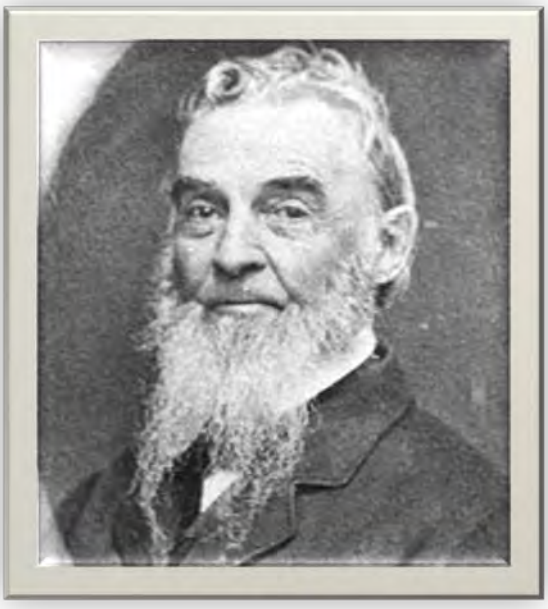
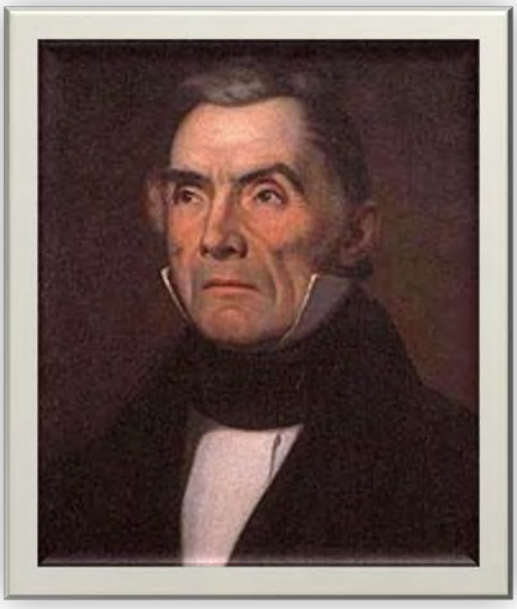


Robert Nelson
Wikipédia



Wolfred Nelson
Wikipédia

Early history of logging in Potton

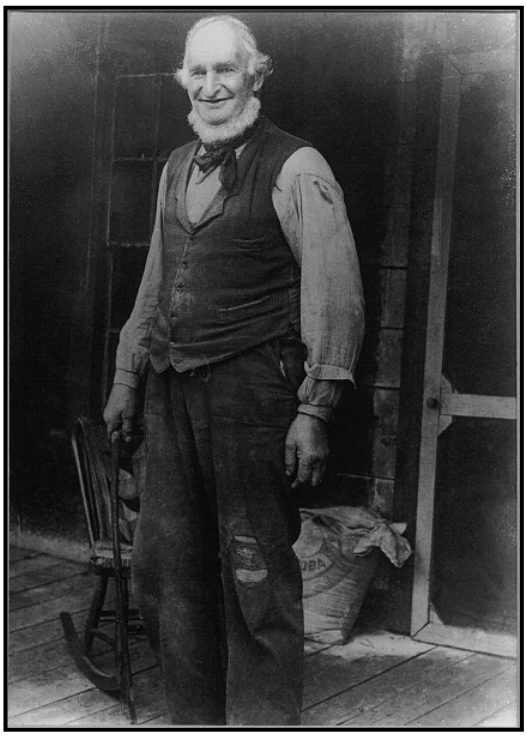
By Sandra Jewett

Although the primary subject of this issue of HPH is a man of our time – it also seemed natural time to investigate the earlier history of logging in Potton and of any industries related to it, primarily the connection with Singer Manufacturing of the early 1900's.

It is fortuitous that in 1976-77, Marion Phelps, then curator of the Brome County Historical Society, aided by Maria Bray, wrote a comprehensive article called *Dunkin, the Picturesque Potton Township*. It appeared in 1977, Volume 3 of Yesterdays of Brome County. In one of the segments was a collection of memories from five life-long residents of Dunkin and, as luck would have it, one of the contributors was Pete Aiken – the very one to whom we have devoted this issue of Histoire Potton History! From it, we present certain excerpts:

"*… Logging has been important to the people of this area through the years both during the late 1850's and early 1900's. An old map of 1864 shows three saw mills along this (Ruiter) Brook which has its farthest north source in Fullerton Pond. … smaller mills that were run by water power. At the turn of the century and earlier, Osmond Titus (see photo opposite) is said to have made shingles at his mill. Later on in the early 1900's stood the Mill and Sash shop of Leon Truax, which was swept away in the 1927 flood, it too was a water mill. Lee Brown built a new mill on the site … water power was still used at Brown's mill in 1930. The abundant supply of lumber accounted no doubt for other early industries such as E.H. Record's Sash Factory and Jacob Brown's Wheelwright shop.*

It was in the early 1900's that large logging companies moved in to lumber on a large scale. The Missisquoi Lumber Company of Richford and Sutton had wood lots and mills in several places and lumbered along the Ruiter Brook around 1911 and some years before the Singer Sewing Machine Company of St. John's, Quebec operated on the largest scale between 1918 & 1926. The Blair Veneer Mill of North Troy, Vt., Sweat & Comings of Richford, Vt. and the Atlas Plywood of Richford, Vt., carried on logging until late 1960's. (more information on next page). When the logging operations were there business improved in Dunkin and local people had jobs. During the depression years of the 1930's men found work here when they couldn't find it elsewhere. Most mills took all kinds of timbers, the plywood mills used mostly hard woods. The logging companies in most cases bought up the wood lots."



Osmond Titus
Archives APP

The Orleans County Monitor, November 8, 1916 edition notes:

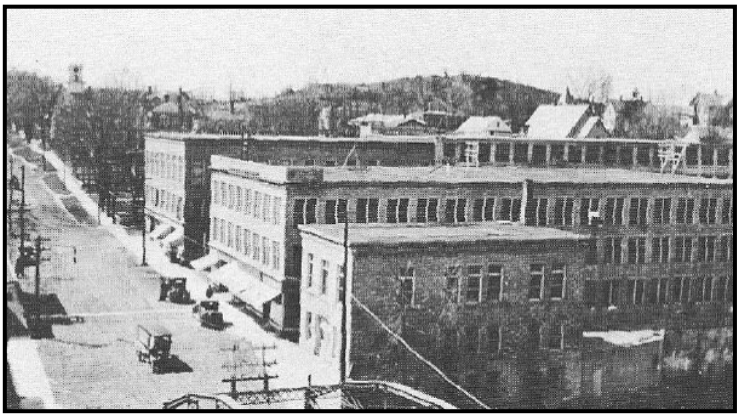
"The Blair Veneer Company of North Troy has just concluded two large purchases, being all the timber except spruce on hundreds of acres of land in and around the township of Potton, Canada, some being located around Fullerton pond and on adjacent territory. It is called the Heath tract and was bought of Escanaba Manufacturing of Mich. (Michigan) By the terms of the sale, at least 500 000 feet of timber must be removed each season, but it is expected that much more will be cut.''

Because of the abundance and good quality of the timber near Richford, woodworking in its various branches is the town's main industry, nearly 500 persons being employed in the furniture, plywood and veneer mills. The largest of these mills is in the center of the village adjacent to the falls that supplied the power for the necessary grist mill of the early settlers.

The Blair Veneer* Company was established around 1904 in North Troy, Vermont and produced chair seats, furniture panels, box shooks**, and bent work. It was the only company in New England that turned out sound boards for pianos, as well as other musical instruments.

- *A **box shook** is a set of parts for assembling a cask or barrel or a packing box, dismantled and packed for shipment.
- ****Veneers** are produced by holding a log firmly at each end in a lathe and rotating it against a knife. The veneer exits from the lathe knife in a continuous ribbon that is clipped to desired widths or to eliminate defects. After drying, the veneers are sorted into sets, each of which will form a plywood panel of the desired thickness and size. Alternate sheets are coated with glue that forms a waterproof bond when subjected to high temperature and pressure in a hot press. The rough plywood panels are then trimmed and may be sanded.

The Sweat and Comings Company was first established in Richford 1875 as Sweat & Powell, to manufacture blinds and sashes, then evolving into a maker of high quality furniture for which customers were willing to wait a year or more for delivery of a bedroom or dining room set. After a fire swept through Richford in 1907, destroying part of its downtown and the Sweat & Comings factory complex, the factory complex was rebuilt in 1909. The plant closed in the early 1990's after there was no resolution in a dispute with the town.



Sweat and Comings, Richford, VT.

The Atlas Plywood Company is described as a box material manufacturer – essentially plywood shipping crates. It was located in Richford, Vt and was formerly called Richford Industries. The company was in existence in 1945. Fire destroyed the plant in 1954. Details about this company are scarce.

The Singer Years

Arguably the most famous of the industries which used Potton hardwood in massive quantities, was that of Singer Manufacturing, the makers of Singer sewing machines for the domestic and industrial market. The heyday of "Singerville" appears to have been between 1918 and 1826 Oak and Maple were sought after for the cabinets of Singer sewing machines.

Singer sewing machine
Singer-featherweight.com

In 1996, the Heritage Association published a pamphlet, composed by Gérard Leduc and commemorating the bicentennial of the founding of West Potton – 1796 – 1996. The following is extracted from that document.

…*"Another important component of Dunkin's industrial history is, without doubt, Fullerton Pond and its dam. We have there a superb example of an industrial heritage site. A Mr. Boright owned the surrounding land and supposedly built the dam to control the headwaters of Ruiter Brook to facilitate the floating of logs. The dam is a remarkable example of heritage engineering. It measures 175 m (about 400 feet) long and is built with masonry, some stones weighing close to a ton each. To waterproof the dam an earth bank was laid alongside the entire length. …*

We continue by quoting again from the article in Yesterdays of Brome County – Dunkin, the Picturesque …

"The Singer Sewing Machine Company created a little village where they carried on their logging operations on a road forking west off the Ruiter Brook Road, and it was referred to many a Singerville. They erected a bunk house, stables, blacksmith shop, saw mill, cook house and a refrigerator (by cutting large blocks of ice to be stored all summer in an ice shed) The Singer company did not run their logs down the Brook, they took out their wood in the form of lumber by team. Leon Truax was the sawyer for Singer's and ran their saw mill."

Singer's lumbering
Archives APPHA

To continue in the words of the late Merrill Sherrer, who contributed to the original 1977 article.

"The logs had to be brought down the mountain to the Missisquoi River and some companies would run the logs down the Ruiter Brook. To control this operation a dam was built at the head of the Brook on Fullerton Pond. This gave the loggers a longer season and made them less dependent on the whim of the weather. Here water could be stored and released as desired to convey the logs downstream. The brook descends several hundred feet in about five miles and has eroded a path between the hills in some places sixty feet deep, its bed strewn with boulders some as big as a small house and a lot heavier.

About 100 teams of horses on the way to the Singer Co.
Collection APPHA

"It is into this Brook that they rolled the logs, several hundred board feet[1] at a time to be sent down the Brook to the River. A company having logs at Ruiter Brook and also logs above Mansonville would start the two drives to reach the mouth of the Brook at the same time and so become one drive down to the mill. A drive lasted several days and took fifteen to twenty men to manage it, certain areas along the banks of the Brooks were dyked to prevent erosion by the logs. There are still remnants of logs and cables visible today.

"There was a boom[2] just below the Brook's mouth across the River to hold the logs in case of a slight misjudgement."

"Occasionally logs that had been brought down off the mountain by team were also rolled into the River here. The logs going to the farther destination were run first to Richford, to Stevens Mills, to East Richford last. Any logs belonging to a company downstream were punched under the boom and allowed to go on downstream, logs belonging to a mill above had to be hauled back or sold. Each company painted the ends of their logs for identification. Sometimes a log would catch between the boulders, others would pile up behind it, the water pushing them even higher and spilling over the top or worse still going around and carrying logs across someone's fields. This has resulted in big damage claims …

Of course, only soft logs were run, hardwood logs would not float well enough, no logs were ever run to mills located on the Ruiter Brook, the Brook was too swift and I don't think they could ever stop them at a mill. The last big run of logs was back in 1910 or thereabouts …"

"At one time the present road from Highwater to Dunkin was a secondary road used only at flood time, the main road was on the south side of the River past the Highwater station down past the Baker Talc and the old Fred Crowell place. Dunkin is situated near where the Ruiter Brook flows into the Missisquoi River

[1] A **board foot** is **equal** to the volume of a piece of wood that measures one **foot** long, one **foot** wide, and one inch thick or 144 cubic inches.

[2] A log boom is a barrier placed in a river, designed to collect and/or contain floating logs. Booms were themselves large floating logs linked together end to end, like a large floating chain connecting foundations or anchors on the river banks, or in the river, while strategically guiding the transported logs along their path.

and is protected on the west by the Sutton Mountains."

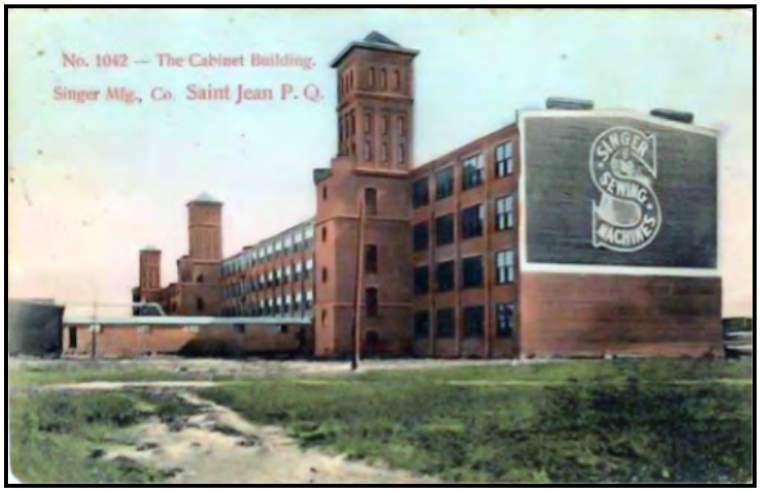
"*There was an old wooden bridge called the Crowell Bridge that crossed the Missisquoi River a little bit south of Dunkin, and this was used to transport logs by four horse teams using sleighs in winter. This was after the logging companies stopped using the Missisquoi River and the logs or lumber were brought over the old bridge to Crowell's siding on the South side of the river to the Canadian Pacific Railway where it was loaded on flat cars and shipped to the Singer Co. in St. John's . In later years trucks were used to transport the logs. The old bridge was rebuilt three times and it finally broke up in the 1950's."*

One of the abutments of the Crowell Bridge is still visible in the Missisquoi. Best appreciated from the River, it is often photographed by kayakers.

Abutment of Crowell Brige
Canoe et Cie

"It is believed that logging kept Dunkin on the map in the 20's and 30's as it was the mainstay of the people as well as farming''

Brief history of Singer in St. Jean

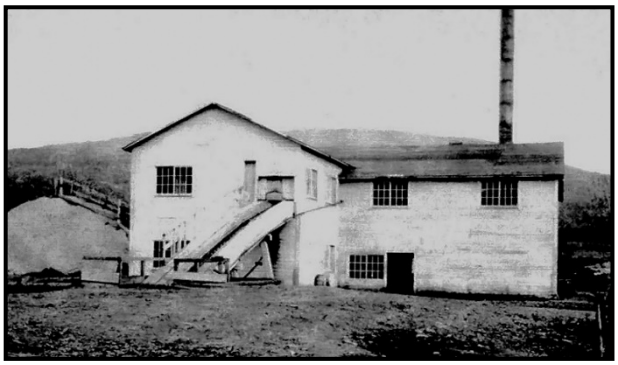


Singer manufacturing plant
Archives APP

The Singer manufacturing plant opened in 1906 and produced sewing machines, most of which were encased in hardwood cabinetry, derived from hard wood cut off the mountain which eventually bore its name. The site of more than 18 separate fire-proof buildings, with a floor area of over 12 acres and 5 miles of railway track … in the 1950's and 1960's, it employed around 3000 people; however, like its namesake in Potton, Singer Manufacturing exists no longer. The Company thrived in St. Jean-sur-Richelieu, as a major employer, until the 1980's when prolonged and bitter labour disputes precipitated its hostile closure. All claims were settled in 2006. Condominiums are to be built where the massive factory once bustled.

A century has passed and all vestiges of the former Singerville logging site have long disappeared; however Potton Heritage is fortunate to have in our archives two photos showing the place and some of the Singer facilities.

Lumberman camp | Singerville | Circa 1920
Archive APPHA



Sawmill | Singerville | Circa 1920
Archivess APPHA

Logging on a large scale ended in the Dunkin area in the 1940's with the exception of some farmers cutting pulpwood in the 1950's and 60's. … The Singer wood lots were sold to Canada Paper in the 1960's and now belong to Dominion Tar and Chemical. (Domtar) The Boright woodlots now belong to the Champigny Brothers of Mansonville. Blair Veneer sold theirs to the same company …

Perpetuation of the tree growth is assured by the fact that these mountain lots have young growth coming in all the time and do not need replanting. The same land can be cut every 20 to 30 years. At that rate logging could be resumed here safely by the 1990's."

Not one of us will ever see the canopy of an Eastern Canadian old-growth forest, or glimpse any of the several species doubtless rendered extinct as a result of its disappearance.

Note: The so-called Singer woodlots sold to Canada Paper and to Domtar, are now the property of Nature Conservancy of Canada. The Fullerton Pond, dam and environs are part of the Appalachian Corridor and Fiducie de la Vallée Ruiter.

Owned by Mr. Borigth | Circa 1930
Archive APPHA

The Fullerton Pond and dam
David Brisson | 2016

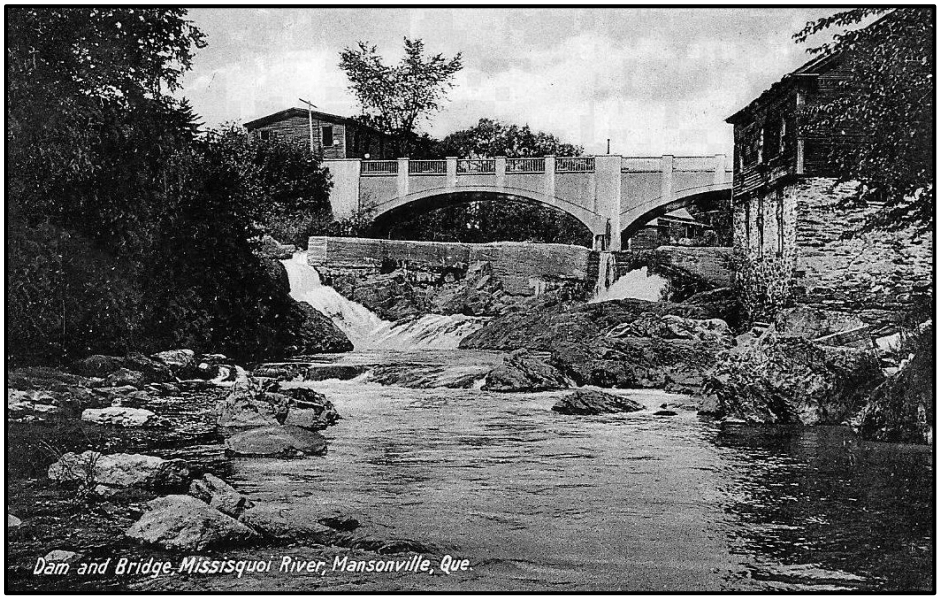
Logging near Vale Perkins

Principal in the network of waterways that criss-cross our territory is the Missisquoi River, which has its headwaters in Vermont and flows westward through Potton to eventually empty into Lake Champlain in the area south of Swanton, Vermont. One of its main tributaries is the North Missisquoi which flows north through central Potton and joins the mainstream at Highwater.

Chemin George R. Jewett | 1908
Collection Minnie Smith

Mansonville is the site of one of the only significant waterfalls on either branch of the Missisquoi River which could be harnessed to run saw and grist mills required by the settlers is the site of Mansonville. For the most part, the Missisquoi and that part of the Missisquoi North in Potton are both approaching grade.

The south flowing Ruiter Brook enters the Missisquoi near Dunkin; however, Ruiter Brook, on the other hand, is a much smaller and more youthful stream having a gradient of approximately 1 foot in 35 feet over its eight mile course, and a relatively narrow valley.



Waterfalls | Mansonville Bridge
Archives APP

Had the stream which flows into Lake Memphremagog at Vale Perkins been larger and able to support large scale mills, Vale Perkins, with its access to the Lake would probably also have developed into a sizeable town[3]. (At one time it did have two small saw mills and a grist mill in operation on it.) Some things are just not meant to be!

[3]The above is paraphrased from "An Historical Geography of Brome County: 1800-1911" by John Derek Booth, 1966 available on line.

From Volume I of *Beautiful Waters* by William B. Bullock, this quote from W. C. Perkins regarding Perkins Landing: "*About 1840 my grandfather built a sawmill on the brook (then a small river) which empties into the Lake at the Landing. Some 25 years later the late Capt. George w. Fogg built a saw mill further up the brook, also built a small landing for the Mountain Maid."*

As a child in the 1950's growing up beside the Vale Perkins Brook, I do remember the remnants of a platform in the brook that I understood was where the Magoon family had once operated a mill.

Below is an undated photograph showing a logging site at a very steep area just to the north of Perkins Landing, likely on property belonging to Carlton J. Oliver from Mansonville. This site later became a popular campground. Logs were tumbled into the lake, and corralled in the water by loggers, who were housed in the white boat visible on the right. On the right, a crib of logs. The boat was identified as the Oscar Sea, by a lady whom I have known all my life, Ann Stanger Hruby, who has summered on Lake Memphremagog for many decades. Ann is the granddaughter of S. Carl Carpenter from Richford, VT., one of a handful of original 'cottagers' with camps north of the Perkins Landing wharf, among whom Carlton J. Olivier and Claude Boright, from Mansonville, as noted in *Beautiful Waters* in 1926.

Logging site | Memphremagog Lake
Archives APP

Ann has kindly allowed us an authentic peak into the past by sharing the following photo. The slash from logging stayed prominent on the steep landscape for years. Barely visible in the photo is the Oscar Sea, however, remember the photo was probably taken 100 years ago.

Oscar Sea
Collection Ann Stanger Hruby

Further north, at the mouth of the Chateau Brook, then likely called Revere Bay, another landing site was used by Prouty and Miller logs. Once sufficient logs were collected into a manageable cribs on the lake, they would be tugged south to Newport to Prouty and Miller, a lumber and building supply company, which still operates in Newport, although the logs today are trucked in!

Note the mill visible on the far left below and look closely at right side mid-photo where a boom may be seen behind Bay Street which crosses the bay. In spite of our efforts to enhance the photograph, the image remains unclear. It is judged to be circa 1940.

Newport
Prouty & Miller
Archives APP

Excerpted from an unpublished manuscript entitled "Border Crossings - Potton Township" authored by M. E. Bailey of Mansonville for the Operational Services of Revenue Canada in 1982 is the following: *"Usually the Lady of the Lake made her first trip each year around April 20th. However, in 1887, the first trip was on May 10th. She arrived in Newport, towing two rafts of logs, some 800 000 feet, for the company of Prouty and Miller."*

Mr. Bailey indicated that this practice continued until the 1930's.

Did you know?

The figure of speech ***''High and Dry''*** describes and unsuccessful log drive. Maximum river flows typically coincided with the runoff from snowmelt, and was sometimes augmented by water released from dams. If logs were started downriver when there was not enough water to move them all the way to the sawmill, the investment made in cutting timber might be stranded ***high and dry*** in the shallows along the stream bed for a year until the next spring's snowmelt!

The phrase '***Come hell or high water'***, used when one is determined to get something accomplished no matter how hard or whatever difficulties one may face, originated in the race to get logs into the brooks and streams so they could reach rivers while the water was high enough to float the drive

The Willard Shoe Last Company

The Willard Shoe Last Company, owned by George Willard, which was established around 1906 was also a buyer for hardwood produced in Potton. Plate 89 of Potton d'antan shows this enterprise, located at McNeil's Crossing on Traver road. It too was established in roughly the same time frame that saw Singerville and Blair Veneer in full operation. (You will notice the presence of two boys in this picture. One of these was a lad by the name of Hughie Baird whose parents ran the boarding house for a time. To my knowledge Potton children were not subject to child labour!!)

The history of George Willard's business was recorded by Marion L. Phelps, then curator of the Brome County Historical Society, and was reprinted in the April 20th 1967 edition of The Eastern Townships Advertiser, a weekly paper out of Knowlton published by C.M. Black (Yes!– that would be Conrad Black!!)

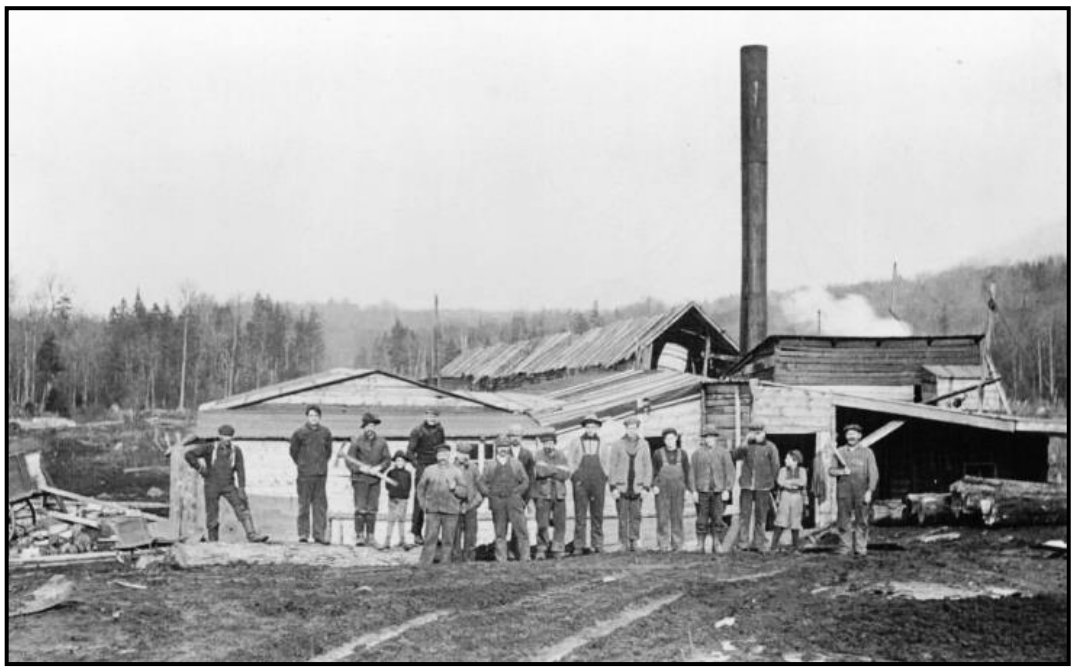
George Willard was the grandson of Samuel Willard who was the leader of the group of settlers from the vicinity of Newfane, Vermont who first took up land in the Township of Stukely around the year 1800.

The *shoe last*[4] factory, located at McNeil's Crossing on Traver Road in our municipality, began business in Potton in 1903-05. Opposite photo shows several workmen posed in front of the buildings in 1907 in which two types of block lasts were produced.

[4] *Shoe lasts made at that time began life in crude form, either from hewn blocks or from lathe turned blocks* are wooden forms of the human foot, over which shoes (generally high end!) are made! Shoe "lasting" is the shoemaking operation that sets the final shape of a shoe and holds it in place so the outsole can be permanently attached. What Mr. Willard produced was the raw form.

Below are excerpts drawn from the original longer article by Miss Phelps entitled: *The Wooden Shoe Last Factory, Traver Road.* The excerpts are intended here to describe actual lumbering techniques in Potton a century ago. Additional historical notations or explanations are signified by an asterisk *, inserted by me, and did not form part of Miss Phelps' article.

"The Orford Mountain Railway had just extended in 1906 their line from Potton Springs to Mansonville and one of their stopping places was to be Traver Road. This was to solve a transportation problem for Mr. Willard, since the last blocks could be shipped on the O,M,R, by box car to Eastman, and from thence on the CPR, those destined for England would be taken to Montreal and those destined for Granby could be shifted to C.V.R. at Farnham.



George Willard Last Block Mill
at McNeil's Crossing | Circa 1907
Archive APPHA

About a million feet of maple was used each year to fill the orders. They used only the straight grained maple and it had to be free of knots. The hewn blocks went to the Miner Rubber and those turned on a lathe went to England. They were sold at a so much per thousand blocks.*

*Miner Rubber company was located in Granby. It was founded in 1911 – after taking over Granby Rubber, a company founded in 1891. Miner Rubber specialized in making rubber boots, galoshes and some rubberized clothing. The Company was put out of business in 1982, when foreign products flooded the markets after tariffs fell in 1974.

The (Willard Shoe Last) factory was open and working only in the months from April to October. During the winter months from November to March, the men were in the woods getting the maple logs. These would be mostly the same men who had been working in the factory in the summer. As soon as the factory closed at the end of October, logging camps were set up in the Potton woods wherever a stand of maples had been bought. The number of camps depended on the size of the contract which they had to fill. The tar paper shacks complete with bunks and cook were soon ready to accommodate the twelve or fifteen men in each camp.

They figured having the logs all cut by New Year's and from then on to March, the logs were drawn out by log team back to the factory. It depended on how far the logging camp was from the factory as to how many trips the log teams could make each day but is was usually two or three trips. This winter logging was a hard kind of work for teamsters, horses and foremen. This was in the days when trees had to be chopped down and sawn by hand. It was a rough life and work had to be done the best way they could get it done.

It took about twenty teams to haul these logs so that horses and stables were a necessary part of this establishment. Just before Christmas, a carload of horses would arrive from the McDonald Construction Company in Montreal which did not use their horses in the winter. They were unloaded in Mansonville, since there were facilities there for so doing. The first thing the horses had to be sharp shod in Mansonville for the mountain teaming. There were barns on the farm near the factory where the teams were kept. Repairing shoes or sleds was done in a shop there also and a blacksmith and three men were employed working all night to be ready for the next day. The horses were shipped back to Montreal always around March 10th.*

*Sharp shod indicates a type of horse shoe to permit more grip or traction on rough or inclined terrain.

During the summer there were usually about twenty-five men employed in the factory, some of whom lived right around the locality. Others lived in a 'boarding house' near the factory which was run by different people at different times. Mrs. Hannah Stanhope and her husband from Sutton ran the boarding house for a long time. She cooked and he looked after the horses at night seeing that they were fed at 4 o'clock in the morning. The boarding house was open all year round. … Among the men who worked for Willard Shoe Last were names of some still found in Potton and environs: Those of Fuller, Baird, Smith, Bracey, Boyce, Woodard, Darling and Metigee are named in the article.

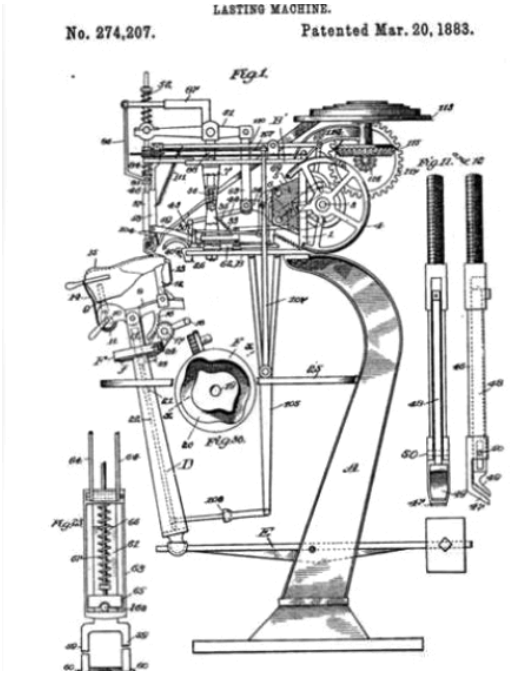
(Several descendants of these families remain in Potton and East Bolton today.)

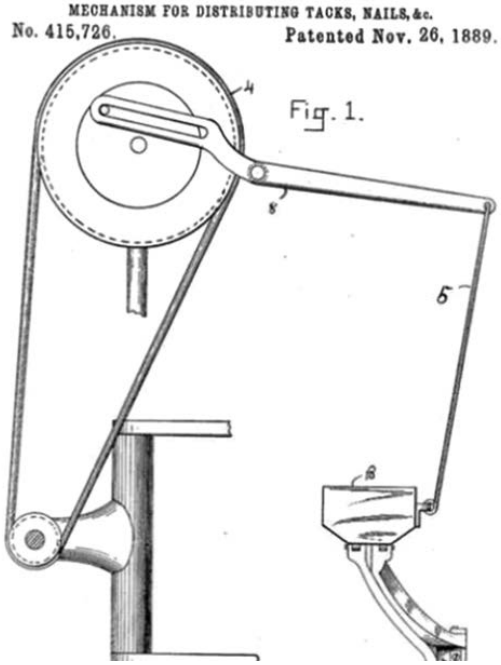
The cost of shipping the last blocks to England was quite cheap since they went as ballast. At the beginning of World War I Willard was forced to stop shipping to England since freight of that type could no longer be taken. Then they began shipping lasts to Lynn, Massachusetts by way of Troy, Vermont via by the Orford Mountain Railway."*

*Lynn, Massachusetts was arguably the shoe-making mecca of colonial America from the 1600's. In the early 19th century shoe making moved from small shops making 5 shoes a day to the factory floor making 50 pairs. Over time, most of the steps required had become mechanized, save one: Artisans still had to hand stretch the leather upper over a last, and nail the leather to the insole.

In 1883, Jan Matzeliger, a cobbler, born in Africa to a Dutch engineer father and a Surinamese slave mother, obtained a patent for a mechanized lasting machine, reproduced below.

When the machine was demonstrated in 1885, "it changed everything. Factory production jumped from 50 pairs a day to 750 pairs a day. The cost of a pair of shoes made in Lynn dropped by half … 234 factories are churning out more than a million pairs of shoes each day; however shoe making waned through the 20th Century. The Great Depression hit the industry hard – and the only remaining shoe factory in Lynn burned to the ground in 1981."


LASTING MACHINE.
No. 274,207. Patented Mar. 20, 1883.


MECHANISM FOR DISTRIBUTING TACKS, NAILS, &c.
No. 415,726. Patented Nov. 26, 1889.
Fig. 1.

By Edgar B. Herwick III | May 30, 2014

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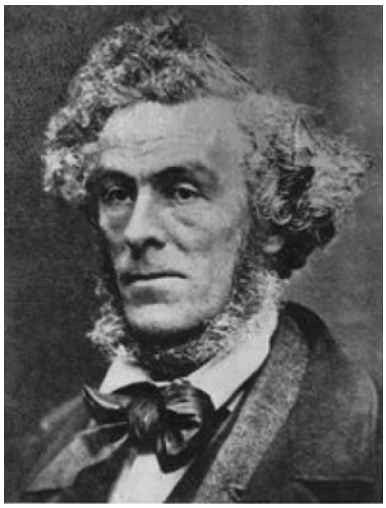
Image | Histoire forestrière de l'Outaouais

Krieghoff, peintre et conteur

par Jean-Louis Bertrand

Cornelius Krieghoff
(1815-1872)



Source :
Wikipedia

La beauté des paysages de Potton fascine les photographes et les peintres.

Cornélius Krieghoff, l'un des plus célèbres peintres du XIX^{e} siècle, raconte notre terroir par ses portraits et ses paysages.

Ce peintre néerlandais est né à Amsterdam le 19 juin 1815. Il est décédé à Chicago le 4 mars 1872 à l'âge de cinquante-six ans. Après ses études, il voyage, s'installe aux États-Unis, puis dans le Bas-Canada (Québec) où il épouse Émilie Gauthier, une Canadienne française.

Il poursuit ses voyages et approfondit son art. Il s'installe à Montréal en 1846 : vivant d'expédients jusque-là, son talent est enfin reconnu. Ses tableaux de prédilection sont les paysages, les portraits des Amérindiens et des paysans du Bas-Canada, leur habillement, leur mode de vie; en somme, il peint les scènes de la vie quotidienne.

Il adopte un nouveau style de peinture qui tranche avec l'académisme et l'art religieux. Krieghoff se fait chroniqueur des histoires, des légendes, des tranches de vie du Bas-Canada. Selon Guy Boulizon, les œuvres de Krieghoff « sont habilement composées, au romantisme séduisant et à l'ensemble agréable, elles enchantent beaucoup de monde! » (op. cit. p. 62).

Il demeure, au fil du temps, un imagier populaire toujours apprécié et un anecdotier fabuleux.

Heureusement pour nous, il fait un court séjour à Potton. En 1859, il peint Owl's Head, une présentation spectaculaire dont l'original est conservé au Musée des beaux-arts du Canada.

Le mont Owl's Head et le lac Memphrémagog sont des sources inépuisables de légendes. Cornelius Krieghoff, dans sa peinture, en illustre trois.

Owl's Head and Skinner's Cove, Lake Mempremagog, 1859 | MBAC.

Scheuer, W. Lake Memphremagog – 1874.

Sur cette première image, remarquons d'abord l'effet d'ensemble théâtral du paysage d'automne qui est illustré : nuages noirs de tempête, lac très agité, barque instable, antre mystérieux, rocher forteresse.

Zoomons ensuite sur le sommet de la montagne : nous y distinguons la silhouette d'un Amérindien.

Selon les premiers pionniers de Potton, la montagne doit son nom au chef abénaquis Owl dont le profil est inscrit dans la pierre. Il s'agit ici d'une légende basée sur une mauvaise compréhension. Pour les Abénaquis, le mont se nomme Kokokas (le hibou) ou encore Walowandjo (la montagne du hibou).

Le hibou est un oiseau sacré pour les Abénaquis : oui, pour le hibou (Owl); non, pour le chef amérindien Owl, puisqu'aucun chef de ce nom n'est répertorié au Conseil des Abénakis Odanak.

Il est, de plus, difficile aujourd'hui de percevoir le profil de ce chef. Si nous comparons la peinture à l'illustration de W. Scheuer de 1874, nous remarquons que la tête de l'Amérindien est inversée.

Concluons donc que Krieghoff nous impose sa vision et son romantisme.

La seconde légende est celle du Skinner's Cove. Skinner est un contrebandier du XIX^{e} siècle. Selon la légende racontée par John F. Tuck, Urial Skinner traversait la frontière canado-américaine sur le lac Memphrémagog avec son alcool de contrebande.

Pourchassé par les douaniers, il s'est caché dans la grotte naturelle de l'île qui porte maintenant son nom. Et c'est là qu'il est mort. Selon la légende, ses ossements sont découverts par un pêcheur qui, fuyant une tempête, se réfugie dans la grotte.

Legend	Traduction libre
« He looked above beneath and around, And what do you think the fisherman found? Neitheir a gold or a silver prize, But a skull whith sockets where once were eyes; Also some bones of arms and thighs And a vertebral column of giant size	« Il regarde en haut, en bas et tout autour, Et que croyez-vous que le pêcheur découvre? Ni or ni argent, Mais un crâne avec des orbites en guise d'yeux; Et des cubitus et des fémurs Et une colonne vertébrale de géant.
Tis needless to say In this later day 'twas the smuggler's bones in the cave that lay. »	Que dire d'autre? C'est là, dans cette caverne, que le squelette du contrebandier repose aujourd'hui. »
John F. Tuck	John F. Tuck

Owl's Head and Skinner's Cove, Lake Mempremagog, 1859 | MBAC.

Skinner's Cave – Archives de l'APP.

Enfin nous découvrons la troisième légende en la comparant à cette photo qui montre clairement l'entrée de la grotte. Sur la peinture de Krieghoff, nous constatons une importante transposition. En effet, dans cette dernière, l'île n'apparaît plus. L'entrée de la grotte est dramatiquement représentée comme un antre inquiétant. L'île qui se situe près de la rive orientale du lac est bien éloignée du mont Owl's Head. Kriegfoff la situe près du mont pour créer un décor fantastique. Est-ce un lien avec la légende du serpent Anaconda ou Memphré qui, selon les Abénaquis, se terrait sous la montagne dans une caverne dont l'entrée se situe sous le niveau du lac?

Un dernier détail : quel est ce frêle esquif qui lutte contre les flots pour atteindre la rive inhospitalière? Les vagues semblent sur le point de submerger les deux occupants. Les naufrages et les noyades sont le lot des Indiens et des colons blancs qui se méfient des sautes d'humeur du grand lac. Les humains sont des lilliputiens face aux géants de la nature, montagne et lac.

Une œuvre sublime de Krieghoff qui, non seulement dépeint un paysage titanesque, mais, surtout, qui expose les légendes qui nous ensorcellent.

Notes

- Pour visionner d'autres œuvres de Krieghoff, consulter le site du Musée des beaux-arts du Canada.
- Voir aussi la section Illustration dans notre Bibliothèque numérique : https://patrimoinepotton.org/appnum/APP-IL

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Esprit de Potton

par Thérèse Descary

Évocation d'un temps qui nous semble aujourd'hui très lointain? Thérèse Descary nous propose une promenade au village durant le Festival *L'Esprit de Potton*. Un clin d'oeil tendre et nostalgique, en attendant le retour des beaux jours sans pandémie ni confinement...

Ce matin du 9 août, jour du festival *L'Esprit de Potton*, je me rends au village pour participer au festival, mais surtout pour y retrouver l'Esprit de Potton. S'il existe, prend-il la forme d'un hibou? Et où se cache-t-il?

La place de la Grange-Ronde est particulièrement animée. L'électricité est dans l'air. Esprit de Potton, c'est toi?

Sous leur parapluie et portant chacun sa chaise, un petit groupe se met en ligne, les enfants assis devant sur le bord du trottoir, question d'être aux premières loges pour voir passer le défilé prévu dans 30 minutes. En face, devant l'église Saint-Cajetan, les gens sortent du marché aux puces et s'installent à leur tour. Et voici qu'arrive une jeune fille toute de blanc vêtue accompagnée de trois joyeuses amies. Elle a trouvé sa robe de mariée au marché aux puces: 25 dollars! Elle se marie dans quinze jours.

Au marché public, les étals débordent de bons légumes. Capuccino en main, je retourne à la grange pour voir la progression des travaux. Impressionnantes transformations depuis ma dernière visite! Je pense à tous ces bénévoles et à ces donateurs, particulièrement à la famille Giroux, qui ont vu avant nous le potentiel de cette magnifique grange encore debout au cœur du village. L'Esprit de Potton

se manifeste-il à travers eux? En sortant, je fais le tour des marchands tout en m'arrêtant pour jaser avec tout un chacun.

Près du marché, une maison blanche de trois étages et de deux logements: on y offre en vente des objets hétéroclites. Je reluque une petite étagère. Robert, le propriétaire, me dit qu'il a trouvé tous ces objets dans le sous-sol de cette maison qu'il a achetée en copropriété avec un ami musicien qui veut transformer l'étable en salle de musique. Mais il doit être patient, car les ouvriers de la firme qui devait commencer les travaux de rénovation hier ne se sont pas présentés. L'Esprit de Potton s'oppose-il à ce changement de vocation? « Savez-vous, me dit-il, que cette maison a été la première église Saint-Cajetan? » Je l'apprends. La maison était située à l'emplacement actuel de l'église. On l'a tout simplement déménagée de l'autre côté de la rue et l'ancienne église est devenue une résidence privée. Tous les signes religieux ayant disparu, il est difficile d'y imaginer un ancien lieu de culte.

Voici que la musique des fanfares nous parvient. Le défilé s'approche avec, en tête, madame Korman et sa fille, chacune montée sur un cheval fringant. La famille Korman, fait-t-elle partie de l'Esprit de Potton? Suivent les chars de tous les regroupements citoyens, les enfants de la maison des Jeunes, les boîtes à savon, les pompiers, l'Hiro volante, les tout-terrain, les anciens tracteurs, les entre-preneurs locaux, un Jason Ball rayonnant, fier responsable du festival et conseiller municipal, les clowns et les amuseurs publics. Entre tout ce beau monde, le maire Jacques Marcoux se faufile en patins à roulettes… Les applau-dissements fusent depuis le chemin West-Hill jusqu'au parc Manson.

Je comprends que l'Esprit de Potton, c'est tout cela à la fois. Des gens qui aiment fêter, des bénévoles omniprésents, des élus remar-quables, des nouveaux arrivants qui veulent participer à l'embellissement de leur village et de leur canton, des adeptes de VHR, des fermiers bio-solidaires, des premiers répon-dants alertes, des amuseurs publics fous des enfants...

Enfin, une communauté tissée serrée malgré la diversité des points de vue trop souvent mis de l'avant. Potton c'est chouette!

Sculpture de J.F. Bertrand
Chemin de Vale Perkins

FESTIVAL L'ESPRIT DE POTTON
SPIRIT OF POTTON

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Publications de l'Association

Dépliants bilingues
[Formats papier et numérique]

- Grange ronde de Mansonville, 2014
- Dunkin, 2011
- Highwater, 2011
- Le patrimoine religieux de Potton, 2011
- Vale Perkins, 2011
- Knowlton Landing, 2010
- Monastère russe, 2010
- Owl's Head, 2010
- Vorokhta, 2010
- Pont de la Frontière, 2009

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- Cimetières de Potton, 2017
  Potton's Cemeteries
- Le tourisme à Potton au tournant du 19e siècle, 2017
  Tourism in Potton at the turn of the 19th century
- Incomparable Potton, 2013 et 2016
- Les ponts couverts de Potton, 2016
  The covered bridges of Potton
- Le patrimoine bâti de Potton, 2015
  The Heritage of our Buildings,
  Les commerces – *Potton's Businesses*
- Les paysages de Potton, 2014
  Un bien culturel collectif
  The Landscapes of Potton
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- *Place Names of Potton and More,* 2013
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- Potton d'antan
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La revue accepte de recevoir pour publication des articles qui concernent l'histoire et le patrimoine de Potton.

Reader contributions about the history and heritage of Potton and its families are welcomed.

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