

## The Nigger Road by Sandra Jewett

Province Hill Road begins at the southern extremity of the Township - one of several old roads which once from Vermont. Although the Customs house is still recognizable on the border at the end of this road, no crossing posts exist on this road. Province Hill Road intersects Leadville road and leads to the Vale Perkins Road where it again intersects. The continuation of the road is called Chemin Bombardier.

Years ago, that part of Province Hill Road, from Chemin Leadville to Chemin de Vale Perkins, was known as Nigger Road. It is thought that this name derived from the fact that freed or escaping slaves from the American south, during the Civil War and during emancipation, may have used the route as part of an underground railway to the Maritimes or to Montreal. Such a notion is possible since old maps show the prolongation of Chemin de Province Hill (or Nigger Road) across what is now the Bombardier residential settlement to an intersection with Chemin Peabody. This, however, does not explain the name for only a portion of road and begs the questions: Why not for the entire length, beginning at the border? More importantly, what else would explain the odd road name?

An underground railway route was documented from Massachusetts to Montreal, though its exact route is not described. It was essentially a network of secret routes and "safe houses". Along that route, notably in the Farnham area, were found a number of the "Religious Society of Friends" or Quaker families. Although there were no Quakers in Potton that we know of, the Methodists were known to be sympathetic to emancipation and the deliverance of slaves. (Nicholas Austin was a Quaker, but his passage here was short lived

and not in the time frame of the Civil War 1861-1865.)

In Saint-Armand, close to the US border « A little known pioneer cemetery at Nigger Rock is the resting place of the area's early black population. Research continues on whether those buried here were escaped slaves from the south or servants who came here with Loyalist families. » ( quebecheritageweb. com – missisquoi-heritage-trail).



**The Nigger Rock – Photo Caroline Kehne –  
Circuit patrimonial : Missisquoi i**

In terms of absolute historical documentation, insofar as Potton is concerned, the above means little. Nothing specific to the underground railway having crossed Potton exists that has been found. However, the question begs: Why would a Potton road be so named, and remain so until recent memory? The name of Nigger Road was replaced only in 1991.

There is a reference in our Potton history to the effect that « About 1805, a mulatto, named Joseph Abel, settled at the foot of Owl's Head and lived here until the close of the War of 1812. » (Taylor, History of Brome County, Volume II, page 109 and Thomas, Contributions to the History of The Eastern Townships, page 331)

It is said that Abel was instrumental in delivering messages during that time. This man is reputed to have lived in a shanty in the area of what we now call the Site Jones!