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## Our Achievements

Jean-Louis Bertrand and Sandra Jewett

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To choose our best achievements from amongst the many of the Association is no easy task! Essentially we have chosen the key topics with which we are closely identified, and on which we have built our reputation both in Potton and with the MRC.

Throughout the exercise of choosing, it became ever more obvious that we have, over the years in our activities and accomplishments, respected fully the goals set out in 1990 : *to make known, to protect and promote our local heritage; to inform our members about subjects of local and regional heritage through different publications; to organize varied group activities such as lectures and excursions; to study and research subjects of a historical or archeological nature; and to organize exhibitions.*

### POTTON ON THE ROCKS

This theme was the mantra of our Association in 1990, under the ægis of an indefatigable promoter, Gérard Leduc.

At the first meeting on March 19th, 1990 aimed at forming an association, three presentations were made : *Stonehenge* by Peter Downman; *Ogham and petroglyphs* by Joe Palmer, and *Les sites archéoastronomiques dans la région de Mansonville* by Gérard Leduc.

Archeology was to be a principle preoccupation of the Board of Directors under both presidencies of Gérard Leduc (1990 – 1994) (1997 – 2003). During his tenure, the Association affiliated itself with the New England Antiquities Research Association (NEARA); sponsored lectures, site visits in Potton and in Vermont; witnessed research of the Jones site by Archéobec in 1992; sponsored the *Arkeo* exhibition in 1998; and published the folders : *The Indian Rock* and *Cairns* in 2003.

In 2013, the second exhibition presented by the Association in the Round Barn was themed on *Archeology in Potton* and showcasing years of local research led by Gérard Leduc. The Jones site and its enigmas were lead articles in our first edition of *Histoire Potton History*, published in the spring of 2013.

### THE BICENTENNARY OF POTTON 1797 – 1997 AND PUBLICATION OF POTTON D'ANTAN – YESTERDAYS OF POTTON

To celebrate and commemorate the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Township of Potton by royal decree of King George III in 1797, a Bicentennial committee was formed : Gérard Leduc, President, Réjean Champagne, Vice-president; Roxanne Rouillard, Treasurer; Laurette Rouleau, Secretary; Lynn Lapierre, publicist; Paul Rouillard; and Murielle Parkes.

As the following chronicle for that year will indicate, these folks were evidently very busy :

Festivities kicked off on February 8<sup>th</sup>, 1997 in the basement of Église Saint-Cajetan, with a supper and a unforgettable variety show, organized jointly by the Association, the Optimist Club of Mansonville and le Club des retraités.

On June 7<sup>th</sup>, 1997, came the launching of what is still our most sought after publication, *Potton d'antan - Yesterdays of Potton*, authored by Gérard Leduc and Paul Rouillard. For this occasion, Gérard had secured the presence of native Abenakis to lend splendor and meaning to the celebration.

Print costs for the book totalled \$14,203, and it sold out at \$20 per copy.

Later that day, a solemn ecumenical service was held, organized by United Church minister Bill Thomas, bringing together the Abenakis from Odanak, representatives from the diverse ethnic and religious communities of Potton, and even including a solitary Buddhist from Sutton.

On August 8<sup>th</sup>, celebrations continued with a packed house in the Catholic basement, at a gala featuring a concert with Ragtime pianist and performer Mimi Blais.

In 2010, Sandra Jewett recollected the evening : *“There was another evening, for the Bicentennary, where I was the Mistress of Ceremonies, masquerading as Madam Lit-Lit, retired madam from her house of ill repute, a brothel, in the basement of the Church. Mimi Blais entertained with Ragtime. Another costumed affair – the gay 90’s. What a night! There I was, all dressed, or should I say more undressed, in a red chiffon peignoir, black feather fan – black stockings, high heels, make-up plastered on – looking much the role of Madam (semi-retired, but still all business, of course) – ostrich plumes in upswept curly hair (it wasn’t grey then and I had let my hair grow for a year)... a real ‘femme fatale’. Two quick double vodkas, for Dutch courage and I was ready for the part. What fun it was that night! I think I must have taken my role quite seriously because two ladies refused to speak to me for a week or two, believing that I was a bit overly convincing! The poor girls!”*

Significantly 200 years to the day of our Township’s “ birth “ October 31<sup>st</sup>, 1997, a time capsule was buried under the Bicentennial Memorial, in Place Manson, by David Perkins (82 years) and Juliette Marcoux-McDuff (84 years). It was a metal box measuring 12 x 14 x 10, donated by the Maison funéraire Désourdy Wilson. The box is scheduled to be opened on July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2055, on the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the *Municipality* of Potton. The capsule contains a 4 hour video cassette, a 1997 telephone book, brochures, restaurant menus, history of the Canada customs, stamps, photos of the students from both school, a bicentennial sweater and flag. It also contains predictions for the year 2055, in which students foresee helium powered cars, motorized skate boards; and, not surprisingly – NO schools. Computers would do all the work and a cemetery would replace our school!

A Gala Bicentennial Costume Ball and dinner topped off the year’s celebrations on November 1<sup>st</sup>. It was held in the Catholic Church basement and cost \$50.00 per ticket. The occasion required a gala ball gown for the ladies, included in the price of a ticket. Cocktail, meal and music were also included. The town crier for the occasion was Denis Audet, and music was provided by Les productions Unispec and l’Ensemble Oréalis; all stage produced by Josée Francoeur. Invited guests were King George III, Queen Charlotte, Governor General Lord Prescott and Lady Prescott, the Court

Jester and Countess Sandra Jewett from Vale Perkins! A Bicentennial year filled with truly unforgettable events!

### LET'S WALK POTTON

It was at the Annual General Assembly of Association members on March 24<sup>th</sup>, 2002 that Carol Bishop presented an innovative new programme called *Marchons Potton - Let's Walk Potton*. Elected to the Board, she took charge of developing her idea. Essentially, the goal was to discover the historic, scenic and natural Potton, in all seasons, in a group – on foot, on bike, by kayak, snow shoe or cross country skis. In her first year, she organized twenty-five (25) excursions. An instant hit was born.

Perhaps due to that initiative, membership in the Association grew to 57. Carol's deft blend of fellowship, heritage, in the great outdoors helped bond new friendships between individuals and families. Often to the benefit of the Association, new arrivals to Potton soon found a fine way of making friends and getting to know their adopted Township and its history. Over thirteen years, Carol has refined this recipe for success and it still works well. Many excursions now include the conviviality of a shared meal.

At an average fifteen excursions a year, over 200 have now been organised, often with the help of our members who offer to guide excursions on their land, providing commentary along the way. As a matter of record, from 1990 to 2001, membership in the Association stood at less than one hundred. Since the inception of *Let's Walk Potton*, membership has grown and remains around the two hundred mark – after having reaching a high of 258.

This accomplishment, unrivalled by any other organization in Potton or by any of Quebec's Historical Societies, is thanks to Carol Bishop's imagination, determination, and natural friendliness. And so, we sincerely thank you, Carol, and are grateful to those who have helped you over the years, notably Édith Smeesters and Janine Sourdif.

### THE ROUND BARN

The Round Barn has been a preoccupation for the Board of Directors since 1993; yet it was only in 2003 that we published the folder *Round Barns*; and in 2004, took up serious study for its conservation. In 2008, when a background study confirmed the alarming physical state of the Barn, this file took immediate priority. The Association reported the situation to the Municipal Council, to no avail.

In 2009 an inspection report, commissioned by the Association and prepared by engineer Michael Grayson, showed restoration costs for the structure to be substantial : \$365,000 for essential, and \$135,000 for secondary repairs. Only a half million dollars required!! In order to obtain subsidies, the Barn had first to be classified. The Association deposited a brief to that effect before the Municipal Council; and on July 9<sup>th</sup>, 2009, the Council officially cited the Barn as an historical monument – the first crucial step in a long journey.

That year, the folder *The Mansonville Round Barn* is published.

The Board commissioned engineer Pascal Fortin to establish the costs of stabilizing the barn. His opinion warned that urgent remediation was needed to prevent the structure's collapse; and costs for its repair were estimated at \$50,000. The Board opened a bank account for donations to the cause.

In May 2010, the Municipality acquired the Round Barn property by donation from proprietor, Jean-François Giroux. In July, the specialized firm BLITZ Culture et Patrimoine was commissioned to prepare an interpretation plan to showcase the heritage value of the Round Barn. This plan was subsidized by a grant from the Pacte rural.

Work began to temporarily stabilize the Barn on December 13<sup>th</sup>. The Association remitted \$10,000 to the Municipality for the renovation of the barn. Mayor Jacques Marcoux created the Groupe bénévole municipal de Potton (GBMP) to take charge of the heritage assets of the Municipality.

The GBMP took up its function in January 2011, and assumed leadership of the Round Barn file. The Association continued to follow-up and organized guided tours of the building.

In November 2011, the stabilization work of Mansonville Round Barn under the direction of Michel Bastien began. The preliminary phase of stabilizing the structure was completed at a cost of \$ 190,000.

In 2012, the Association organized celebration of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Barn's construction by Robert J. Jersey. For that occasion, the Association organized a modest display of butter making equipment and showcased a collection of farm implements donated by Kenneth Jersey, great grand nephew of the original owner.

At the Annual General Assembly of members held on March 24<sup>th</sup>, 2013, the following was adopted unanimously : "(that) each member of the Association to subscribe personally to the financial campaign for the Round Barn and invite the active participation of family and friends in this collective effort, since our objective, over five years, is to gather the sum of \$100,000."

During the following summer season, the Association sponsored a second exhibition, organized primarily by Gérard Leduc and entitled *Archeology in Potton*.

In late September, a fundraising campaign, conducted jointly with the GBMP, collected \$39,266 at a benefit supper.

In 2014, the Association presented its third exhibition in the Barn - an extensive production called *The Landscapes of Potton*, under the direction of Hans Walser.

The fundraising campaign for the Round Barn was suspended until 2015, while we awaited production of studies establishing the real costs of completing Phase I which includes raising the barn and renewing its foundations.

In preparation for the 2015 season, an exhibition of the barn itself is planned, to showcase its architecture and specific function. The fundraising will be resumed.

It is most evident that putting the Round Barn into shape will be a challenge, continuing to require energetic leadership, much time and work. This grand heritage building was placed front and center with the creation of Place de la Grange-Ronde and the installation of a Public Market space. It is thanks to the preliminary stabilization work already completed, that the exhibitions mounted by the Association draw 1,500 persons during the summer season.

As of December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2014 the funds administered by the GBMP reached \$54,408. According to the last information, to complete Phase I projections would cost around \$175,000 - which is a lot of money to collect from our members and from the population in general, particularly in the absence of any financial aid from the Municipality and without government subsidy. Nevertheless, with the unwavering support of our members, we will succeed.

### PLACE NAMES OF POTTON AND MORE

For the newly arrived, our visitors and even for some Pottonites, the origin and significance of the names of roads, brooks, hills, lakes, mountains, places, parks, streets and heritage sites in Potton is not always obvious. From whence therefore, the idea of cataloguing these names in order to better understand and appreciate the heritage of our Township through its toponymy – or the study of place names in a region. Jean-Louis Bertrand carefully prepared the *Répertoire toponymique de Potton*, while Sandra Jewett translated, researched and augmented the English edition.

The appearance of the *Répertoire toponymique de Potton*, in 2009, and of *Place Names of Potton and More*, in 2013, was a turning point for the publications of the Association. Retracing the signature of time and space across the place names of our community is but another way to take ownership of our history and to register it into collective memory.

The Township of Potton, in 2013, counted 161 roads, 8 montées (or named hills), 18 streets and 3 commons. Both works listed bays, bridges, brooks, capes, cemeteries, churches, Customs, ecological reserves, heritage buildings, hamlets, hills, islands, lakes, memorials, mines, mountains, parks, paths, points, rivers, archeological, industrial, historic and natural sites, schools, shoals, and phew! Even the tunnel of trees.

In total, the English edition of 2013 contained over 350 entries, presented alphabetically with a map reference. Each year, the list grows longer with the creation of new roads. Our next edition, in French, will appear in 2017.

Our accumulated expertise has allowed us efficient intervention with Municipal authorities in opinion and advice to them on subjects dealing with our toponymy. New proposals for road names are vetted by the Association.

Experience gleaned in compiling these two publications led us to launch our magazine in 2013, *Histoire Potton History*, dedicated to documenting the vestiges of Potton's history.

## INCOMPARABLE POTTON

For the past twenty years, the Association has published folders and booklets for our community and as an offering to visitors to our region, renewing them regularly as demand requires. For the tourist, these publications are the window on Potton. In the intervening, we have refined both graphics and overall presentation. *Incomparable Potton*, published in 2013, illustrates very well the progression of our publications for wide distribution. The genesis for that publication arose from *Mansonville – Promenade du village – Village Tour*, printed in 1995, in a handy pocket format created by Karen Muzerall and Jean-Marc Tétrault under the supervision of Gérard Leduc. Graphics and design were those of Elaine Gagnon and Catherine Arcouette. In 2002, Peter Downman and Gérard Leduc published the *Potton : a township to discover* series with folders of the same name as well as *Mansonville*. Pierre Nadeau was responsible for computer graphics.

In 2007, Bernard Sansoucy and Hans Walser produced our first booklet on the theme of *Une promenade au village Mansonville - A walking tour*, revised by Jacqueline Robitaille and Peter Downman. Graphics were again by Pierre Nadeau. In 2008, with the help of Hans Walser and Jacques Thouin, Bernard Sansoucy composed the brochure *Un Canton à découvrir, Potton Yours to discover*, revised by Jacqueline Robitaille, with graphics and photographs by Pierre Nadeau. These very popular brochures were reprinted in 2010 and 2011 respectively.

In 2013, Jean-Louis Bertrand, Jacques Huppertz, and Bernard Sansoucy were asked by the Board to design a driving tour of Potton, one that was both heritage and tourist oriented, and would complement to the "Townships Trail" better known as the Chemin des Cantons, which crosses the Estrie region and is a popular promotional tool for the tourist trade. Much discussion led to eventual agreement on the bilingual name of *Incomparable Potton*. Our previous folders and brochures were adapted and melded; a route was well marked with distinctive indicators. *Incomparable Potton* was officially opened on July 25<sup>th</sup>, 2013. Its success was immediate. The Tourist Info office in Potton distributed 641 in 2013. **The result is a quality product much the envy of other Townships.**

## OUR EXHIBITIONS AND CONFERENCES

We would be remiss in reviewing our accomplishments without mention of the number of exhibitions and lectures which have marked the past twenty-five years.

In 1996, on the occasion of the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of Dunkin, Gérard Leduc and associates presented an exhibition of archival photos of the founders of this hamlet. Exhibitions continued the same vein in 1997, 1998, 1999 and 2001, with *Quelle élégance – A Touch of Class*, *Arkéo Potton*, *Les chemins de fer – the Railroads of Potton*, and *Lake Memphremagog, Crossroad of history and legends*.

In 2002, it was *Le patrimoine de Uncle John*, a retrospective on John O'Donigan, presented by Madeleine Audet. In 2003, the Association presented a retrospective of artist-painter Jeanne Cookson, a Pottonite by adoption. In 2005, an exhibition of historical photographs was mounted in the Town Hall.

After an interlude of three years, came the master stroke by Hans Walser. Eight panels on permanent exhibition in the Council Chamber of the Town Hall, relating the history of the Township of Potton, were unveiled on June 27<sup>th</sup>, 2009.

During the intervening years between 2009 and 2013, the Association sponsored or cooperated in some smaller exhibitions notably in the Reilly House where farming in Potton was featured one year and the one-room schools of Potton in the following.

In 2012, the first exhibition in the Round Barn, *Potton's Farms* presented by Hilary Head, Gérard Leduc and Hans Walser. In 2013, was the second exhibition in the Round Barn – that of *Archeology in Potton*, presented by Gérard Leduc. In 2014, *The Landscapes of Potton*, a thought provoking exhibition was presented under the direction of Hans Walser.

To these accomplishments we must add the installation of the 10 interpretation panels which punctuate any tour of Mansonville. These present the most significant of our heritage buildings within the village, and were the initiative of Peter Downman and Gérard Leduc in 2005. Similar panels were added later at the Public Market, on the grounds of the Round Barn.

It would be far too long to enumerate all the lectures the Association has sponsored over twenty-five years. Suffice to say, there were an average of three per year – with speakers drawn locally and from outside our Township. Without a doubt, our most prolific speaker has been Gérard Leduc, always appreciated by his audience.

## CONCLUSION

This whirlwind overview provides ample example that we have attained the ambitious goals set out at the inception of our Association. We must, however, persist with the mission, by continuing to rethink and innovate. The creation and maintenance of our sophisticated website has allowed us to reach a wider audience. By it, we can today affirm that the information concerning Potton's heritage is accessible to every one, be they local, regional, national or international guests. This arguably may be the greatest of our accomplishments!