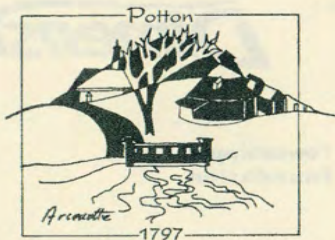




Potton: YOURS TO DISCOVER
Mountain House



Dining room in Owl's Head Mountain House Hotel, circa 1890.



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OWL'S HEAD MOUNTAIN HOUSE HOTEL

In the late 19th century Lake Memphremagog was well known for its many summer resorts, from Georgeville's "Camperdown" and "MacGowan House", Newport's "Memphremagog House" to the luxurious "Owl's Head Mountain House Hotel" charmingly situated on a point of land at the foot of towering Owl's Head Mountain, on its south flank. The grounds comprised over 500 acres of mountains, meadows, garden and woodlands. While other hotels were reached by road and rail, the "Mountain House" vacationers could only approach by means of the paddlewheel steamships, "Lady of the Lake" and "Mountain Maid" which operated between Magog and Newport.

The first building was built by Myles Knowlton of Knowlton's Landing in 1845 but burnt down in 1855. It was rebuilt shortly afterwards and during the 1880's, reached the height of its popularity under the ownership of Charles Watkins of New York City. The hotel's catalog, published in 1889, went as far as promoting the area as the Geneva of Canada! A copy of this catalog may be consulted in the Potton Memorial Library.

With the addition of an annex and cottages, the number of rooms increased to about 75, providing accommodation for some 100-150 guests. Clear, cold water from a mountain brook fed a stone dammed reservoir which supplied water by gravity to each of the floors. The hotel had its own vegetable garden, cows for milk and cream and even a vineyard as seen in an old photograph.

The guests were pampered with a variety of amenities including a billiard room, a casino, tennis, lawn bowling, croquet and row boats. Excellent fishing was specially promoted as 30-40 pounders were regularly caught along with the occasional 100 pounders lake trout, a size impossible in these days!

Dancing and theatricals also took place. The hotel had a small steam launch, the Owl, used for excursions on the lake and to take patrons across to Magoon Point for evening opera shows or to Newport. A small, pretty gazebo stood near the steps leading down to the wharf and painter artists had a pavilion of their own. The hotel season ran from June to September with rates ranging from \$9 to \$15 per week.

Among the distinguished guests who stayed at the hotel were Lord Dufferin, Governor-General of Canada, Edward, Prince of Wales (later King Edward VII) and William Notman, celebrated Montreal photographer, who took several pictures of the hotel and in the area. Also, British author Anthony Trollope who, in his 1863

book *North America*, wrote "...in spite of its position the hotel is well kept, and on the whole we were more comfortable there than at any other inn in Lower Canada". Hiking up Owl's Head mountain following a trail beginning close to the hotel, was another outdoor activity and Trollope strongly recommended the two hour climb, especially in the afternoon when the sun was setting. "I was never on a mountain which gave me a more perfect command of all the country around." The ladies also managed the climb despite their ground-hugging skirts and fancy shoes, but ropes were provided along the trail for assistance at the steeper places.

On June 24, 1857, the Freemasons from the Golden Rule Lodge of Stanstead inaugurated the first outdoor lodge in the world on the mountain top where they still hold initiation rites at the time of the summer solstice (around June 22).

On October 11, 1899, about nine in the morning, fire destroyed this famous hotel caused by tar being heated on the kitchen stove for use on roof repairs. The Stanstead Journal reported that the fire was so intense that "...the hotel...with annex...burnt to the ground in about an hour...The boat house, dance hall, etc...are still left but they present a lonesome appearance". The hotel was never rebuilt, a fate shared by most of the others on the lake. Today a private house occupies this beautiful site.

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