

Potton: Yours to discover
Vale Perkins



Fred Jersey, Gathering sap



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Vale Perkins

Nestled between Owl's Head and Elephantis, not far from the shores of Lake Memphremagog, is a valley extending to Knowlton Landing. This is Vale Perkins, an area of easy terrain likely used by the Abenakis as a « carrying place » between Lake Memphremagog and the North Missisquoi River, south to Lake Champlain. It is thought that Chemin de Vale Perkins roughly follows an original native portage trail.

The original settlements in Potton Township were named by geographic location. This area was then East Potton. From 1867 to 1880 it was called Herbert; however, history is silent as to the reason. In 1880, Herbert became known as Vale Perkins, named after its founding family.

The Pioneers

In 1793, Loyalist Nicholas Austin arrived to clear a portion of land granted to him, near what is now Perkins Landing on Lake Memphremagog. He miscalculated the location of his grant, however; and was obliged to move north. Austin settled near Gibraltar Point, on the bay now bearing his name.

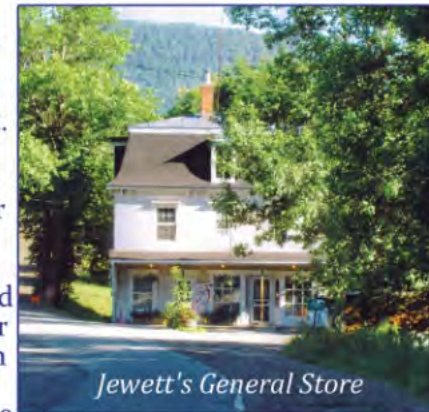
In 1793, Peter Perkins also arrived in Potton with his family. In 1795, his son Samuel followed the Abenaki trail to Austin's original partially cleared lot on the lake. He homesteaded there with his three sons. Upon his death, Cyrus, the eldest son, inherited the Perkins' homestead, and left it to his son, David G., who lived there for 92 years. The property then passed to William Cyrus, who, with his wife, Gertrude, operated a popular boarding house called "Ufton Court", which attracted many American visitors. Their son, David F. Perkins (1915-2001), wife, Rita, and sons, Scott and Alan, continued the tradition. William Cyrus Perkins was Mayor of Potton in 1856. David F. Perkins, and his second wife, Doris, founded Boulangerie Perkins Bakery, which closed in 2004. Alan Perkins is the last descendant of the Perkins family living in Vale Perkins. The Perkins family history in England can be traced to the year 937. A manor called Ufton Court, after which the Perkins land in Potton was named, was awarded by King Richard II to the Perkins family, around 1385. Chemin Ufton Court is the road to the original Perkins property in Potton.

The Perkins family also has ties to the Brome-Missisquoi-Perkins Hospital in Cowansville. Edward Calvin Perkins was born in Potton in 1858 and owned a general store in Mansonville in 1892. In 1897, E.C. Perkins moved to Montreal where he acquired the Webster and Russell Hotels, on rue Saint-Jacques. Upon his death in 1918, half of his assets were given to build a hospital in Brome County. In 1931, the Perkins Hospital amalgamated with the General Hospital of Bedford of Missisquoi County, thereby becoming the Brome-Missisquoi-Perkins Hospital.

Built Heritage

In the mid 1800's, Vale Perkins was a self-sufficient settlement with a church, school, general store, post office, cheese factory, saw mills and blacksmith shops. Few of these buildings remain. The one room Jones School # 12 stands at the corner of Peabody and Chemin du Lac. It was built in 1865, used as a school until 1948, and sold in 1949 to the United Church for use as a Church. It was closed in 1964, but re-opened in 1982, for seasonal use, and was finally closed in 2006. The property was sold to private interests in 2010.

Another heritage building, known as Jewett's Store, was built around 1840 by Charles H. Gordon, merchant. Owners have included Rob & Mamie (Geer) Magoon, both descendants of pioneer families of Vale Perkins. George U. Jewett and his wife, Orma Booth, purchased the business in 1944. Their daughters, Sandra, Carolyn and Jane, restored the building in 1990's and have continued to operate the family business.



The building is of Second Empire architectural style, with a mansard roof. It is a fine example of Potton heritage, showcased by Elephantis to the north, and Owl's Head to the south. To enter the store is to step back in time. Friendly conversation and personal attention come with a smile in this small grocery store. A magnificent antique icebox, housing dairy products, is still in use at the rear of the store.

The Jewetts came to the east side of Lake Memphremagog from Massachusetts around 1798. They are listed as one of seven founding families of the 'Lake Shore Settlement' in 1800. Seven generations of Jewetts have lived in Vale Perkins. Frederick A. Jewett served as municipal councillor for 25 years and as mayor of Potton from 1942 to 1944.

Agriculture

Vale Perkins's early vocation was farming, thanks to comparatively fertile land on which oats, wheat, barley, flax and corn were grown. Horses were essential for cultivation and transportation. Dairy cattle, oxen, pigs, sheep and poultry were raised. Maple syrup production was common. Bill and Conrad Jewett continue family tradition by producing excellent quality syrup in the Vale Perkins area.

Cheesemaking, wood and the beginning of the tourist trade

A cheesemaking plant was once located at the corner of Chemins de Vale Perkins and du Lac. It was owned by Joe Labelle, who married Kate Magoon, a daughter of an original Vale Perkins family. The commerce flourished locally in the early 1900's. The building was later used as a church and community hall. The ancestral home of the Magoon family in Vale Perkins is located at 10, Chemin George R. Jewett.



The Wharf, circa 1920

Perkins Landing, on Lake Memphremagog, was once a valuable staging area for a thriving forestry industry. Logs destined for Newport, Vermont, were stockpiled and floated south in large "booms" or "cribs"

Perkins Landing was a stop for the Lady of the Lake, the Mountain Maid and the Anthemis, passenger boats which once plied Lake Memphremagog. Stops were made at the Mountain House, a luxury hotel opened in 1845 and destroyed by fire in 1899.

Boarding houses such as Ufton Court, Geogedale Farm and Edgewater Lodge grew in popularity. A private girl's camp, owned by Miss D. Gass, was situated at the foot of Owl's Head, on the Lake. Years earlier, in the same place, Colonel Edward's camp for boys was popular.

Vale Perkin's only claim to nightlife was the popular Sugar House Bar at Ufton Court, operated seasonally by Dave Perkins in the 50's.

To-day Vale Perkins is but a shadow of its former self. The rhythm of life is now tuned to the seasonal and leisure activities of to-day's world. Quiet natural beauty lures sport and nature enthusiasts in all seasons.

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Sources

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