

G rard Leduc, Founder of the Association

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Perhaps it was the discovery of a cairn that led to the founding of the Association. In fact, driven by his passion for history and archeology, G rard Leduc crisscrossed the Township of Potton in search of "treasures". Successful publications and conferences about the rocks of Potton led G rard to share his love of heritage with his fellow citizens. Thus, was born the Potton Heritage Association, of which he was president for ten years. During 30 years, his interest in the Association never wavered. G rard Leduc died suddenly on November 28, 2021.

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G rard Leduc | Vale Perkins
Collection APPHA

Any tribute to those who built the Potton Heritage Association must first begin by warmly acknowledging our very own self-styled nonconformist who "wants to re-write history, notably the part about Europeans coming to North America." With respect, this is a quote from *The Vancouver Sun*, April 14, 1993 where, much to my surprise, the headline read "Quebec cairns linked to ancient Celts". I write of none other than our G rard Leduc, who does not cease to surprise! Potton is hardly next door to Vancouver...

Our Association may be rooted in the discovery of a single cairn in 1988 and the curiosity it subsequently aroused; but without a doubt, it was G rard whose reach exceeded his grasp in the study of these 'old stones' – and who forged ahead in spite of a contingent of non-believers.

Having earned degrees in biochemistry and biology, and a Ph.D. in fisheries and water pollution, G rard's career spanned 25 years as Professor in the Biology Department of Concordia University, that is, until a chance encounter with a stone mound changed his life! With his keen mind and insatiable interest in archeology, he spent half his life trying to unlock the secrets of old stones in Potton among other. He bolstered this passion with formal studies in archeology at Concordia University, the University of Maine and UQAM.

Drawn to Potton initially for visits to his sister's weekend home, G rard found our territory quite to his liking, and promptly began to explore Potton. So enamoured did he become with people and place that in the early 1980's he bought property and built his home near Schoolcraft Road. Incidentally, around this time a building boom was taking place on Schoolcraft, an idyllic road which follows the western flank of Pevee Mountain. No coincidence then that many ardent supporters of the Association were actually his neighbours!

Somewhere along the line, Gérard, whose training was marine biology, but whose passion laid in the mysteries of archeology, fell upon the 1976 book *America B.C. Ancient Settlers in the New World* by Barry Fell, then a professor of invertebrate zoology at the Harvard Museum of Comparative Zoology. Fell is best known for his pseudo-archeological work in *New World epigraphy*, the study and interpretation of ancient inscriptions. Fell broke with tradition in his book and set out to prove America was visited by ancient explorers and settlers BC, before Columbus. It seems a little ironical that Leduc and Fell, both with careers in marine biology, would be led to these alternate theories about enigmatic inscriptions on stone? Maybe there is something in the water after all!

By his own admission, lab work was not for the free-spirited Gérard, who by then, had a family. Before making his home here, this weekend warrior combed the fields and forests, exploring the enigmas of Potton's many cairns and petroglyphs, while currying the support of his network of friends.

In June 1986, Gérard presented a lecture entitled "Potton on the Rocks – Les roches de Potton, énigmes préhistoriques" in the United Church in Mansonville. Early in 1987, Gérard was invited by Peter Downman, then President of the Brome County Historical Society, to speak about the "Prehistoric relics in Potton" at the museum in Knowlton. Both events were well attended.

The text of this BCHS lecture may well have been the basis for Gérard's article published in 1991, in *Yesterdays of Brome County*, Volume VIII, wherein he writes of his first formal archeological investigation of several stone mounds called cairns, undertaken in 1988 with archeologist Jean-Pierre Roset, from the Université de Bordeaux, who "patiently taught" Gérard the essentials of field archeology – an experience that proved pivotal.

In 1989, when *Découvrez - Discover Potton*, a tabloïd styled promotion of our Township was published, it was comparative newcomer Gérard Leduc who penned the lead article: "Potton B.C. The Secret of Old Stones". His opening sentence read: "*For many years the people of Potton were intrigued by several old stones that seemed to hide a legend, a message. ...*" thus, suggesting an alternate theory, planted by Fell and promoted by Gérard, that an ancient Amerindian civilization, or ancient Celts had roamed our hills before time began. Previously, the only plausible explanation of the strange markings on the "Indian Rock" had been researched by L. Auger who delivered his theory in 1969 to the Community School in Knowlton, the text of which later appearing in Volume III, 1977, *Yesterdays of Brome County*. A new word was inserted into the rural Pottoneer's lexicon – that of "petroglyphs". "*Petroglyphs and carved stones depict predictive models of astronomy*" says Gérard, therein tempting the lover of esoteric mystery by deftly planting another dimension for the curious. "*The fields and forests of Potton probably hide many more secrets that wait to be unravelled by those who will look at them for what they are instead of what they are supposed to be.*" Intentionally or not, Gérard's unique branding in Potton was under development!

Gérard's car was often seen parked on the roadsides, often with others lined up behind. Troupes of knapsack bearing hikers were observed peering keenly at heaps of rocks! Such presence raised no alarm, only a *little* derision and maybe one or two pranks by the locals. His intrepid wanderings were definitely a curiosity, especially since many of the hikers were out-of-towners from what could be discerned at a distance. The somewhat xenophobic 'local' teetered on the precipice of possibility – not always so certain that Gérard's theories and suspicions could be totally discounted. Gérard was blithely undeterred and

totally unperturbed by the skeptics. Never did he trespass, which gained him respect from the local property owner. He engaged with people: asked, and then listened. His bilingualism was a great asset as was his genuine friendliness, a trait always judged and tested in Potton. In some ways, Gérard was a little reminiscent of, yet far more sophisticated than, the revivalist 'preacher' of the last century as stories of his 'theories' and discoveries echoed along the grapevine in Potton.

His discussions and fair-weather excursions grew in popularity, drawing many from beyond our borders. Gérard and several of his most ardent supporters soon recognized the growing need to formally organizing into a provincially recognized non-profit association. In March 1990, Potton Heritage Association was born, with founder Gérard as its first president. It was coincidentally the very year Gérard moved permanently to Potton.

The first years of the Association's existence were a little rocky. (Pardon the inference!). Growing pains, power struggles, and how're we going to finance all we want to do? Varying opinions on these issues prompted a fair degree of movement within the membership list – but the Association survived.

Gérard was undeterred in the promotion of his theories. A convincing speaker, the handsome, well educated, and somewhat enigmatic man continued to develop a unique APP "brand" in Potton. For instance, in 1991, Gérard was a featured and popular speaker of Elderhostel's Cultural Vacations programme. \$255 bought two nights in an upscale (and popular) country inn, all meals – and most important, a chance to play archeologist for a couple of days!

In the March 23, 1991 issue of *The Gazette*, an article by Paul Waters in "Travelling Light" notes "Mr. Leduc's a cautious man. He has to be. His trade attracts a lot of quacks. But he thinks his

mounds may date back to pre-Columbian times. (Gérard says) "*We've done some carbon dating ... and the evidence is that they're old enough.*"

In 1992 and 1993, the Minister for Culture and the Municipality of Potton commissioned studies of the archeological potential of the Jones site, in Vale Perkins, and the graphological elements of the petroglyphs there. Inconclusive results.

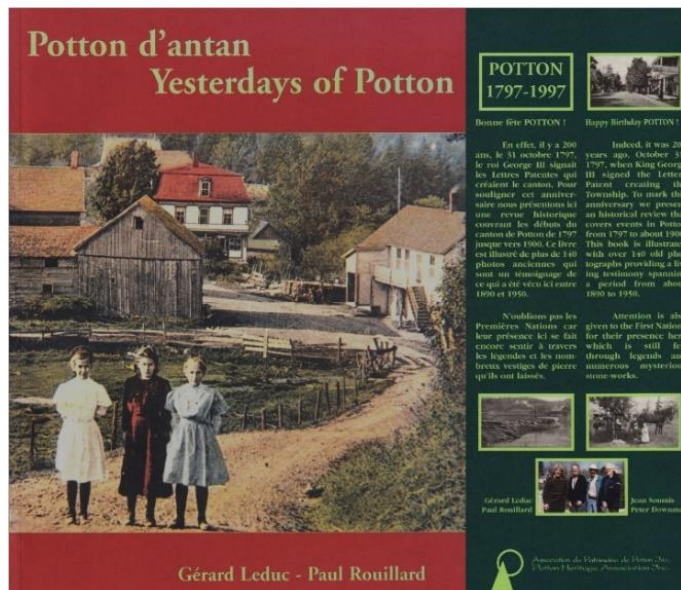
In April 1993, Southam News picked up and printed an article by columnist Peter Maser wherein the conclusion appeared a little bolder. Subsequent headlines in the *Calgary Herald*, *Edmonton Journal*, and *Vancouver Sun* questioned that "Celts may have visited Quebec 1800 years ago", "Celts here long before Cartier?" and "Quebec cairns linked to ancient Celts".

From 1994 to 2002, Gérard, with help from equally enthusiastic friends, continued to promote the history and heritage of Potton. On May 21, 1994 the Association sponsored a guided walking tour of Mansonville with Gérard, and of the Round Barn with Lionel Marcoux, a former owner. Incidentally, this seems to be the first mention of the Round Barn in Association archives. Gérard's energy was boundless and his ideas unique! I mean, who else would have thought of an unforgettable bicentennial ball, in 1997, complete with King George IV (aka Fred Korman) and his Queen Charlotte (aka Ghyslaine Meunier), with costumed courtiers, a splendid banquet and contre dancing? Who could have ever imagined an evening of ragtime entertainment with Mimi Blais, in the setting of a *VERY* popular brothel run by Madam Lilly (aka Sandra Jewett) and her very adept helper (aka Francine Eyland) in the basement of the Catholic Church ... an enthusiastic community of Potton soared on newly found wings? History was such fun! And making it – even more!

In the space of 9 years, Gérard Leduc authored the first heritage brochure *Potton, Then and*

Now', with three guides for heritage tours in Potton. He researched, translated and supervised the filming of a 20 minutes video about Potton; organized a popular exhibit of 150 vintage photographs and one of vintage clothing with the collaboration of the Colby-Curtis Museum of Stanstead; and sponsored another about Missisquoi Valley Trains. He authored a brochure to celebrate the bicentennial of *West Potton- Dunkin 1796 to 1996* and, with Peter Downman, researched and authored leaflets to accompany tours to the four corners of Potton. His crowning achievement was shared with Paul Rouillard, Jean Soumis, and Peter Downman. It was the bilingual and still sought-after book *Potton d'antan | Yesterdays of Potton*, – a compendium of historical facts and photos. Concurrently, Gérard and the Heritage Association sponsored a dizzying array of conferences, excursions, dinner lecture series, hikes, exhibitions, a boat cruise on Memphremagog, musical brunches, street dances Phew!

In late 1999, to mark the tenth-year anniversary of the Association, Gérard introduced an ambitious heritage project involving the school house at the corner of Peabody and Ch. du Lac, the Jones cemetery and barn, the Jones homestead and blacksmith's forge, in Vale Perkins. It proposed that a cultural center be developed in this heritage zone.



Publication | 1990
Collection APPHA

Well before its time, the plan drew interest but no funding!

Mention of Gérard as a speaker on a Heritage sponsored excursion guaranteed excellent participation. Without a doubt – he was the Grand Old Man of the Heritage Association. Without his efforts, it is questionable that this Township would have the credible Heritage Association that we have grown to be.

In his latter years, Gérard kept very busy. He continued to investigate and write about the Knights Templar in the context of free masonry. In December 2020, *Le mythe de Potton Springs décodé*, authored by Gérard, was published. In early March 2021, Gérard left his adopted municipality and moved to be closer to his daughters. He died on November 28, 2021.

My own personal memories of Gérard are fond and varied. One stands out: in 2000, when a January 6th car accident put me in a wheel chair convalescing in Knowlton House for 10 weeks, Gérard visited me faithfully. We had grand conversations. He often brought me a crisp salad to break the monotony of typically bland institutional foods served to the older populations of rest homes, of which Knowlton House was one! I sometimes wonder if he ever knew the reason I so looked forward to his visit!

Chapeau à toi, Gérard!

Mille remerciements ne seront jamais suffisants.

**An Open Letter to Gérard Leduc
and Congratulations to the Potton Heritage
March 13, 2021**

Dear Gérard,

What a pleasure to be able to join in with kudos to you and to APPHA on the occasion of your 30th anniversary. Pottoneers have much to be grateful for, and yes Gérard, so much of it we owe to you!

Not only did you found a great organization, you also brought us a fun and interesting community of friends, replete with fellowship, knowledge and oh yes, exercise, too!

- Indeed, we walked and we talked,
- We snowshoed on trails and socialized in homes and other venues,
- We visited cemeteries, and welcomed winter solstices,
- We climbed mountains, and explored sites,
- We listened to you and other pundits and learned oh so much ... *more than we could ever remember.*

Oh, and not to forget, we also dined and danced at a great bicentennial ball, as well as buried a time capsule scheduled for opening by a future generation in 2055, because, as you said to us in the park: "We love Potton, the people, our heritage, the mountains and the forest." Yes, Gérard. Your accomplishments are legend, as are those from fellow team members, past or presently now at the helm.

We celebrate our Potton Heritage Association's multiple achievements: its exhibitions, print publications of history, lore and heritage sites and buildings - including the Round Barn, a noteworthy achievement in itself, brought about by dedicated heritage buffs of Potton Township.

Bravo to you! Bravo to the APPHA faithful. May there be many, many more birthdays to celebrate!

Sincerely,
Murielle Parkes | *One of your original and faithful members*

Madeleine, Gérard's Beloved Soul Mate

Madeleine Soucy shared life with Gérard for over a decade, from 2006 to 2019. Gérard had been searching for a soul mate for several years before he met Madeleine.

Madeleine was born and brought up in Cap-Chat, in the Gaspé, a region to which she remained attached all her life; and to which she happily returned each summer to see family and friends. Madeleine became a primary school teacher who worked most of her career in Repentigny, a suburb of Montréal. Once installed here in Potton, she helped with the NutriSanté programme offered in the primary schools of Potton by the CAB, which allowed her to interact with the youngsters she so enjoyed.

Madeleine had abiding admiration for Gérard and was for him, a wonderful helpmate. Though she did not always share his theories, she was his tireless champion, ever steadfastly encouraging his endeavours and tireless in revising and proofing his writing.

Madeleine was charming and had an endearing personality. She will be long remembered by those who knew her.

Jacqueline Robitaille