

**The Skinner Burial Ground**  
**By the late Edgar C. Barnett<sup>1</sup>,**  
**annoted by Sandra Jewett**

The second earth broken in Potton for burial purposes climaxes a tragedy: the drowning of the Skinner boys, Abel and Josiah, on the evening of the 10th of June 1799; and whose bodies were not found till the waters subsided several days later.

Tortuous and sluggish, winding through what, at some prior age, was the bed of a chain of narrow lakes draining a vast mountainous water-shed, as compared to its length, from some source to outlet in Lake Champlain, old Missisquoi, Missisco, Missisquog, fed by its

mountain torrents, after a few hours of rain goes back to its pristine formation, as more than one of the first settlers found to their cost after erecting their huts on its banks, and asserts for a time its rights to its ancient bed; and here begins the toll of human life, in so far as the white inhabitants of the valley goes, season following season and the gatherers' hand is never stayed.

A tragedy any where at any time excites interest and sympathy, but how much more among the lonely and scattered inhabitants in a new land. It must be remembered that a water-way in the early days was a road-way.

<sup>1</sup> Extract from *Potton's Dead*, by the late Edgar C. Barnett, Highwater, Quebec, (b. February 21, 1865 – d. February 2, 1942). Transcribed by Sandra Jewett, January 29, 2015.

That the distance between two points when the river is in flood, for purposes of travel, is lessened oft times by more than half. What wonder then that the settlers were quick to take advantage of the unseasonable freshet to do a little trading?

Several boatloads of the settlers who had located near the Vermont line were returning, on that fatal evening, from a trading trip to Col. Henry Ruiter's establishment at West Potton; dusk had overtaken them as they neared their home when suddenly the boat

containing Esq. Skinner's three sons struck some submerged brush, was overturned and the two eldest drowned.

Deeply religious, mentally retroactive, Deacon Skinner's reason tottered from the blow and for days he wandered up and down the stream calling for his boys. A few days later

when the waters subsided and the bodies were found locked in each other's arms, he went frantic and had to be confined. His hair, which had been very dark, in a few days became nearly white; and though he lived for nearly forty years after the accident, as the season returned, he had to be confined to protect him from harming himself. And a strong room in the old house, not many years gone, bore witness thereto. During his lucid intervals he obtained natural slabs of a variety of slatestone; and there is none that I know of nearer that the southern part of Orleans County, Vermont. These he sculptured, be it ever so rudely verbatim thus. "Here lie the bodies of Abel and Josiah who were drowned 1799 June 10. Abel 23 years and Josiah 22."



**Skinner Cemetery**  
**Jean-François Boulais | 2010**

This is followed by a verse which time has placed beyond deciphering.

The funeral sermon was preached by Judge Olds of Westfield, Vt, from Psalm 46:10, "*Be still and know that I am God*".

Interred on a little elevation on the old Elkins place opposite Skinner's home lie probably upward of thirty bodies. Uncared for and in ruins, cattle graze above the dead.

### Context by Sandra Jewett

Some time ago, I received an email inquiring about the Skinner Cemetery. Mrs. Ethel Dessert, its author, and I, began corresponding. She provided me with a listing of Skinner Cemetery graves, containing names familiar and some unknown. It intrigued me to such a degree that I decided to research the matter one day.

Edgar Charles Barnett, a Potton native born in 1865, compiled and recorded much of our history, some of which was published in the various newspapers of the time.

In 1926, he carefully compiled the tombstone inscriptions of Potton's cemeteries, which were placed on file in the archives of the BCHS. This collection, handwritten by Mr. Barnett and carefully annotated by others, is entitled *Potton's Dead*, and is an invaluable source for the researcher.

For the history buff that I am, seeing these pages, yellowed and fragile, yet still very legible, was to hear a voice speaking from the past. It was entitled "The Skinner Burial Ground", written some 92 years ago, with an obvious respect for history, and with regard for those who would follow and perhaps thirst to know from whence they came.

- Bell, William, 1739 – Dec. 5th 1816
- Elkins, Capt. Moses
- Elkins, Ruth Leavensworth, w. Feb. 24th 1765 – Nov. 1st 1825
- Elkins, Samuel, Peacham, Vt. July 25th 1785 – New Orleans, Feb. 29th 1835
- Elkins, Sarah J., daughter of G.W and Caroline H. Elkins, Aug. 7th 1848 – May 18th 1850
- Elkins, Nancy E., dau. of G.W. and Caroline H. Elkins, Dec. 30th 1856 – July 20th 1859
- Green, Bradbury, June 1763 – Sept. 10th 1838
- Green, Jemima, w. Jan. 25th 1768 – Oct. 3rd 1857
- Green, Jacob, s. 1791 – June 29th 1833
- Green, William, Jan. 1822 – Sept. 25th 1845
- Green, John, Nov. 1824 – Edwardsburg, Mich., Dec. 27th 1854
- Jenkins, Margaretta J., Aug. 1852 – June 20th 1853
- Skinner, Abel, 1755 – 1839
- Skinner, Jemima, w. 1754 – Dec. 24th 1838
- Skinner, Abel, 1776 – June 10th 1799
- Skinner, Josiah, 1777 – June 10th 1799
- Skinner, Ezra, 1781 – Apr. 12th 1855
- Skinner, Anna, w. Jan, 15th 1785 – Jan. 26th 1863
- Skinner, Abel, s. July 6th 1808 – Mar. 14th 1813
- Skinner, Rozetta, dau. 1815 – Mar. 17th 1817
- Skinner, Josiah, Oct. 1st 1812 – Mar. 23rd 1891
- Skinner, Sophronia, dau. Feb. 1844 – July 14th 1858
- Skinner, Abel, s. Aug. 1852 – April 23rd 18??

The Skinner Burial Ground is situated on the original farm belonging to Moses Elkins.

It later became the Colgan farm – and is now owned by Steven Hurlburt.

The Skinner farm is the adjoining one to the west – currently owned by Viateur Rodrigue.