

People, Landscapes and Buildings of The Eastern Townships

by Robert Lemire

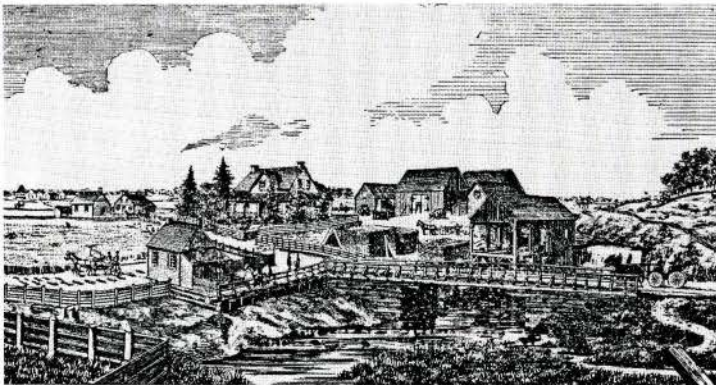
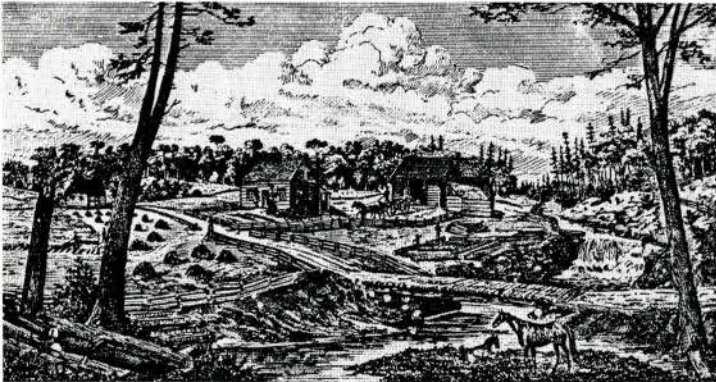
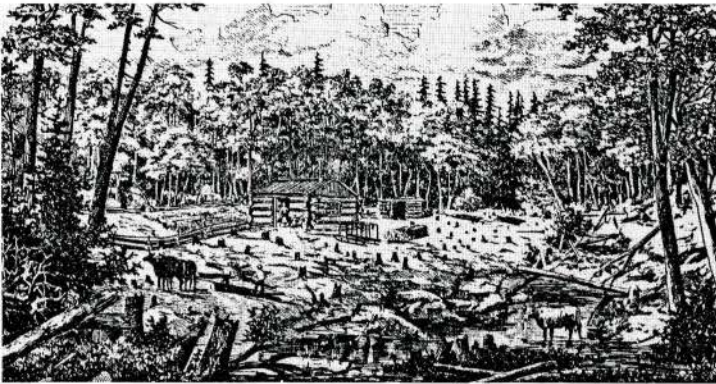


Figure 1. Three Views in the Life of a Canadian Farmer in the Eastern Townships. Reference: deVolpi, Charles P. and P. H. Scowen, *The Eastern Townships, A Pictorial Record*. Montreal: Dev-Sco, 1962, plate 108.

The SSAC holds its Annual Meeting in many different areas of Canada. Each year members anticipate that, perhaps, somewhere within the chosen area the long sought after vernacular structure will be found that is truly Canadian in conception. Someday, we may be forced to conclude that the tepee and the igloo hold the honours; but, until such time, we will continue to study and analyse our landscapes and buildings, gaining knowledge and appreciation, while at the same time voicing constructive criticism of what we have done, and, hopefully, learning to adapt to our surroundings without altering them beyond recognition.

Alteration of the natural environment was the main preoccupation of people who settled in The Eastern Townships. Settlement began after the American War of Independence when Loyalists crossed the border from the United States to remain British subjects. Survival was the first concern of the early settlers. They were confronted by a vast landscape covered with forests, lakes and rivers; but, these gifts of nature offered potential that brought later generations a life of prosperity and comfort.

An excellent illustration of how a settler progressed from a shanty in the bush to a model farm was promoted in *The Eastern Townships, Information for Intending Settlers* (1881) (Fig. 1).

Dense forests of spruce, pine, cedar and maple were cleared to provide wood for construction, fuel, and products such as pot and pearl ash. An informative description of the hardships and challenges faced by settlers of the region is found in: Charles P. deVolpi and P. H. Scowen, *The Eastern Townships, A Pictorial Record*. (Montreal: Dev-Sco, 1962).

Geological formations of limestone, granite, slate and clay were exploited by the mid-19th century when brick was manufactured and quarries were opened. These more durable materials offered a certain measure of security against the ever present threat of fire that preoccupied settlers as their villages and industries expanded. Brick lent itself well to the fashion, at that time, for Gothic buildings. Slate for roofs was also introduced then, and the slate industry centered in the Richmond and Danville areas was extensive. In fact, the New Rockland Company's quarry in the county of Richmond, together with other quarries in that area, were the major suppliers of slate for Canada. (I owe knowledge of this information to Mary Cullen, Architectural Historian, Parks Canada.)

The early economic base of The Eastern Townships was farming and forest products. After the mid-19th century, other industries were established, mining and textile; being the most important in terms of investment and employment. For a history of mining in the region see, W. Gillies Ross, *Three Eastern Townships Mining Villages Since 1863: Albert Mines, Capelton and Eustis, Quebec*. (Bishop's University, Department of Geography, Occasional Publication No. 3, 1980).

The success of these industries was, of course, dependent on railway transportation. The Eastern Townships had by the end of the First World War, one of the densest railway networks in southern Canada. This reliance on the railways as a means of transportation, not only for freight, but for passengers as well, led to a lack of good roads throughout the region. As Derek Booth noted in *Railways of*

Southern Quebec (Toronto: Railfare, 1982), this absence of good roads meant that in the Townships it was only a short distance to the nearest railway station, some were as close as five miles apart. This situation changed after the First World War when improved roads owing to the advent of automobiles and trucks eventually led to the abandonment of many railway lines and the loss of numerous heritage railway stations.

Sherbrooke

Sherbrooke, the Queen City of the Eastern Townships, was formerly called Hyatt's Mills, after Gilbert Hyatt one of the first settlers who migrated from Arlington, Vermont. Located at the confluence of the Magog and St. Francis Rivers, Sherbrooke was incorporated as a town in 1852, and as a city in 1875. The location was chosen to take advantage of the great potential for hydrolic power. The role of the St. Francis River in early transportation and industrial development is related in, J. Derek Booth, *Townships of the St. Francis* (Montreal: McCord Museum, 1984).

Hyatt's saw mill was the only industry in 1838, and the settlement maintained its village appearance until 1867 when Andrew Paton established a large wool-spinning mill. This mill became the largest of its type in Canada and was the area's largest employer (Fig. 2). The complex of mill buildings, abandoned in 1978, is presently being converted to commercial and residential use with restoration being carried-out by the Heritage Canada Foundation.

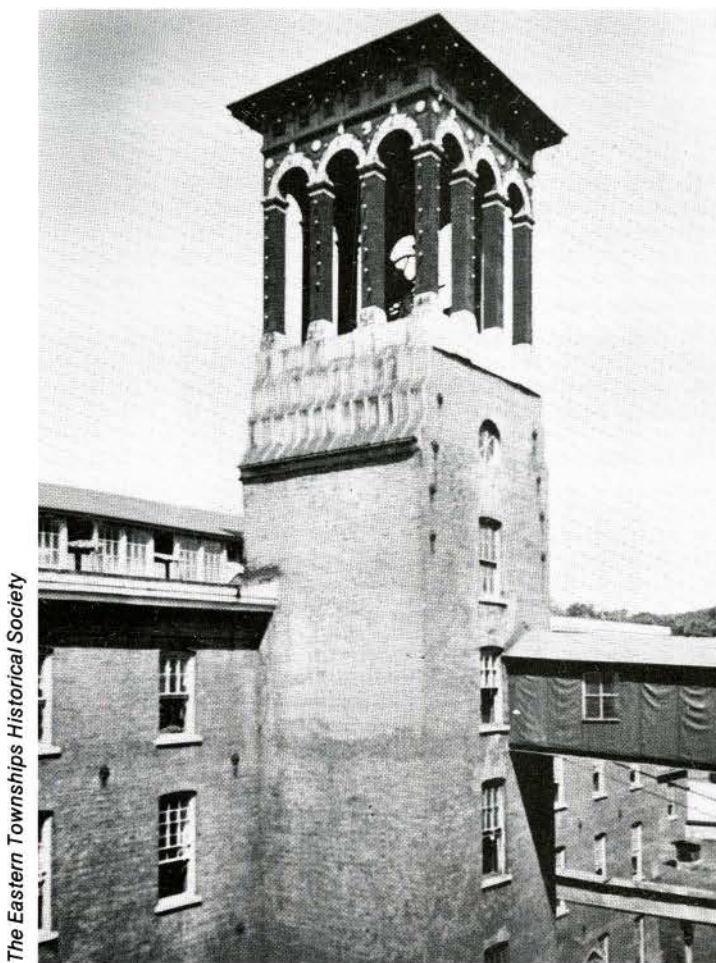
An internationally known urban planner when recently asked what he thought of the Paton Project in Sherbrooke responded that a better solution would have been redevelopment of the site with high-rise condominiums. Tenants would have had the advantage of a superb view of the river and surrounding hills; but what of the people outside looking-on, not to mention the history that would have been eliminated had the mill buildings been replaced. It is just this type of narrow minded viewpoint and self-centred attitude that has inflicted

such physical and moral grief on life in large urban areas. A quote from Gerald Hodge and Mohammed A. Quadeer, *Towns and Villages in Canada, The Importance of Being Unimportant* (Toronto: Butterworths, 1983) illustrates the reawakened knowledge of the tangible values still inherent in most small urban areas.

"It is increasingly coming to be recognized by residents of small centres and by outsiders that most towns and villages possess many valuable examples of historic and architecturally significant buildings. The lack of dramatic growth in small places, bemoaned by some, is also the reason why many older buildings still remain. Houses, churches, public and commercial buildings and railway and industrial structures dating from halcyon days, often in the 19th century when every town's future seemed assured, provide a sense of tradition and stability to residents and visitors alike."

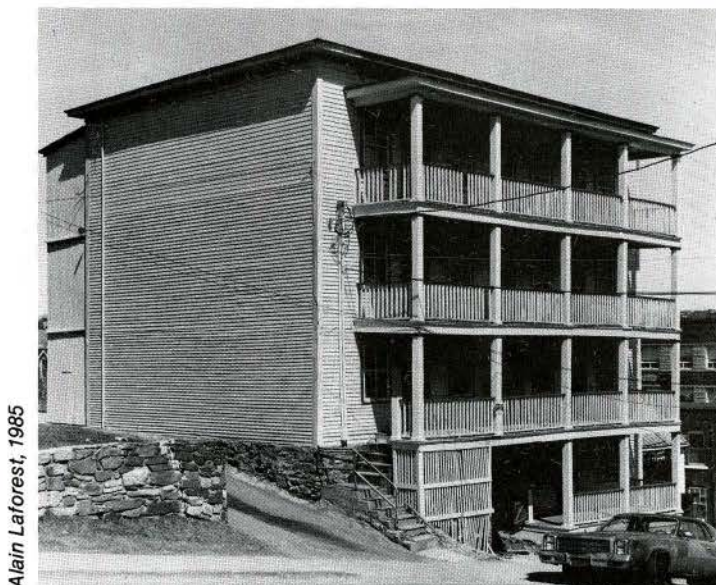
Many of the employees who laboured in factories like the Paton Mills, lived in a type of tenement known locally as *les boîtes carrées*. These tenements are usually of wood frame construction faced with clapboards and their outstanding feature is the multi-level veranda with square posts and railings, as shown in Figure 3. Occasionally, more elaborate columns and balusters are used giving the structure the look of a sea-side hotel. These verandas give tenants a sweeping view of the hills surrounding the city. There are examples of this type that have verandas not only across the street front, but along one or both side elevations as well.

Sherbrooke's late 19th and early 20th century architecture reflects the prosperity and comfort afforded by the industrial investment of the period. In the section known as *le vieux nord*, are fine examples of large detached houses. A good variety can be seen in the area surrounding Plymouth Church. This temple-like structure with fluted Doric columns in *antis*, was designed by Montreal architect, William Footner, whose best known work is Bonsecours Market in Old Montreal, constructed 1845 to 1852 at the same time as Plymouth Church was built. The exterior design of the church illustrates the faith that its congregation had in Sherbrooke's destiny as the metropolis of the Eastern Townships.



The Eastern Townships Historical Society

Figure 2. Paton Mills, Sherbrooke. The bell cast by Meneelys, West Troy, New York, was removed in 1946, and the belfry, shown above, demolished soon after. The bell is in the Collection of The Eastern Townships Historical Society at Sherbrooke.



Alain Laforest, 1985

Figure 3. These tenements known locally as "Les boîtes carrées" are representative of low income housing in Sherbrooke dating from the turn of the century.

Stanstead - Rock Island

Following the visit to the Paton Mills, the tour will proceed south to Stanstead where lunch will be served in the dining hall at Stanstead College. After lunch will be a walking tour of the neighboring town of Rock Island (Fig. 4), home of Quebec's oldest weekly, *The Journal*.

This area of the Townships is known for its extensive quarries of granite, a building and ornamental stone that has played a major role in shaping cities both for the living and the dead. The monumental Sun Life building facing Dominion Square in Montreal, is faced entirely of Stanstead granite, and cemeteries throughout the area include monuments of the same material.

The *Journal* has initiated a project called Heritage Technologies, whose aim is to involve both residents and visitors in the history of the area. The following description of the project is provided by the *Journal* for the information of SSAC members.

Heritage Technologies

When they were settled, the Eastern Townships were cleared for farm land. But by the second half of the nineteenth century, the region had also become a bustling centre for industry. Rivers provided the power for mills, and trains transported goods. Rock Island and surrounding towns prospered, as local factories like W. M. Pike and Son overall manufacturers and the Lay Whip Company exported their products on both sides of the border.

Heritage Technologies is a community-based project which would like to recreate that golden industrial era in the Townships. Our plan is to acquire three historic buildings on Church and Main Streets in Rock Island and renovate them in period style. Besides being display areas, these buildings would all be active work places. They would house press and steam shops, an antique photography centre, and an artists' cooperative, along with a restaurant and a bar and cocktail lounge.

The Press and Steam Shops

In setting up the press and steam shops, we intend to resurrect two now-defunct companies with strong Townships' ties—the Journal Printing Company, established in 1845, and Murray and Williams, incorporated about 1890. The Journal Printing Company was the original name of the publisher of the Stanstead *Journal*, Quebec's oldest weekly newspaper (Fig. 5). The *Journal* was founded by Leroy Robinson. For many years it was housed in a building on Church Street, kitty-corner to the famous Haskell Free Library and Opera House. In the fall of 1983, however, these premises were damaged by fire, and the *Journal* moved to the former Customs House on Main Street.

Because of its history, the old *Journal* building is an ideal spot for a print shop, publishing house, and a steam shop modelled after vintage operations. The owners of the *Journal* will donate the Church Street building and land to the community. They will also provide their old printing press and other equipment, which will be used to reprint historic Townships' publications and publish contemporary regional books and posters. Visitors will be able to watch the press in operation. They'll also be able to purchase copies of publications, including replica newspaper pages as souvenirs.

The steam shop, which will be housed in a building near the *Journal*, will supply power for the printing press, heat both buildings, and perhaps even power a generator for electricity. It will also manufacture highly sought-after parts for Stanley Steam Cars. And it will build complete steam engines, including a replica of a Murray and Williams marine engine.

A local expert in steam technology will furnish equipment and tools, as well as many important collectors' items for display. Among these will be a Stanley Steam Car, which was developed a few years after the first Canadian steam car designed by Henry Seth Taylor of Stanstead. We also hope to have a collection of early manuals, original blueprints, and period publications illustrating steam engines and the boats and other machines they powered.

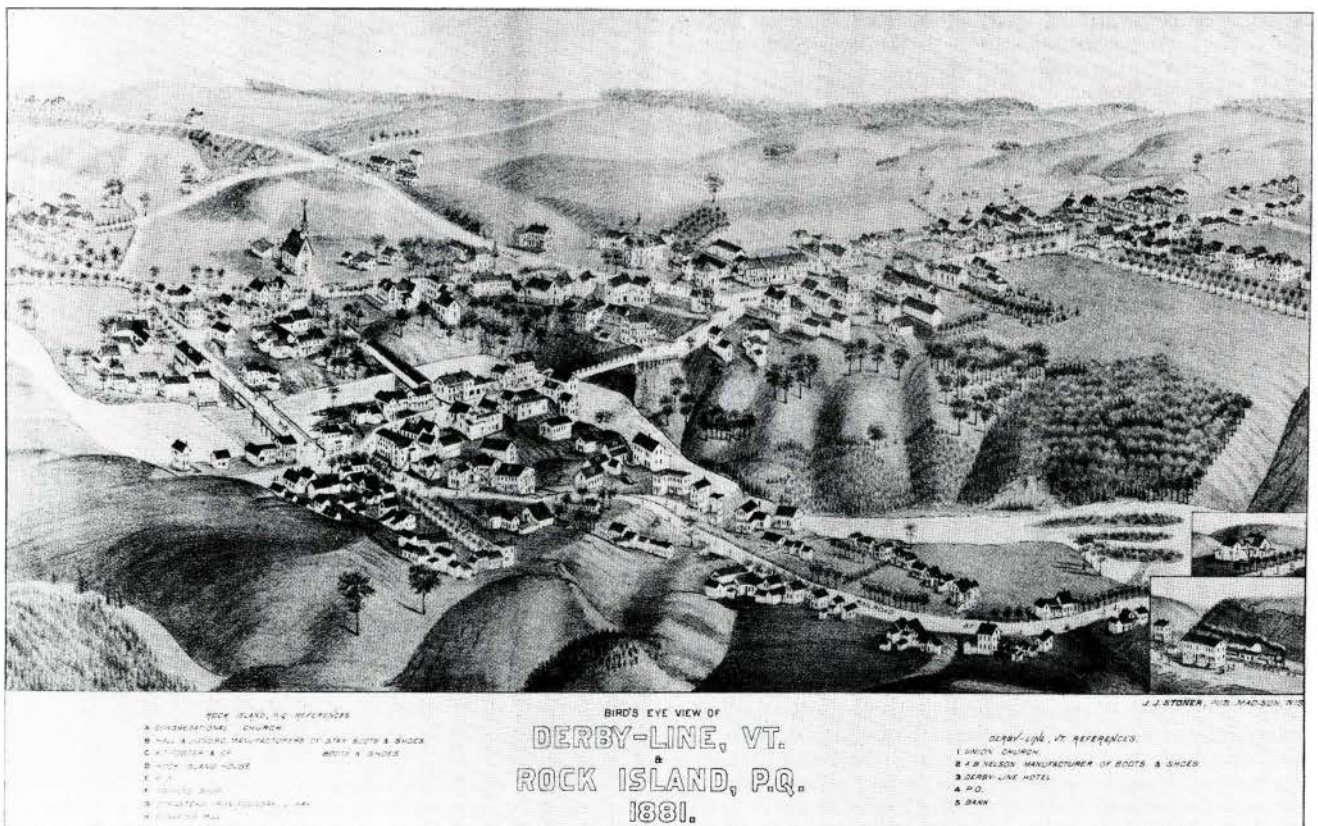


Figure 4. Rock Island, 1881.



Figure 5. Heritage Technologies hopes to set up a press and steam shop in the old Stanstead Journal building.

The press and steam shops will also serve the other parts of the Heritage Technologies project, printing menus, doing machine repairs, and much else. These operations will require start-up money, but should eventually become self-financing. They will belong entirely to the community, and local people will be trained as printers, machinists, guides, and editorial, research, clerical, and administrative staff.

The Photography Centre and Garden Tea House Dining Room

In another, as yet undesignated building on Church Street, Heritage Technologies wants to establish a photography centre with an archives, gallery, studio, and darkroom. This will draw on the many collections of historic camera equipment and photographs which exist in the area. There will likely be a cross-section of work, for instance, by William Murray, whose descendants still live in the family home of Dunkeld in Georgeville. Mr. Murray was a marine engineer by vocation, and a photographer by avocation. He used to tote around a large-format camera and wooden tripod, along with 5 x 8-inch glass plates for negatives. He documented the interior and exterior of his own home as well as friends' and relatives' houses. He also chronicled family outings and local events.

We also hope to have photographs from other Townships' collections, including many portraits of local people in years gone by.

In addition to seeing historic photography equipment and prints, visitors will be able to obtain souvenir copies of old photographs, have portraits of themselves taken with the daguerreotype or other historic processes, and get help with genealogical research.

In the same building as the photography centre will be the Garden Tea House Dining Room. This restaurant will reawaken memories of fund-raising efforts for the boys at the front during World War I. The original Garden Tea House was in a charming location in Stanstead. Our old-style restaurant in Rock Island will be equally inviting, offering a gracious place for lunch, afternoon tea, and dinner.

Seed money will be required for both the photography centre and the Garden Tea House Dining Room, but the restaurant will be expected ultimately to support itself and help support the photography centre. Local people will be hired for the jobs of curator, archivist, photographer, darkroom technician, guides, chefs, waitresses, and managerial staff.

Artists' Cooperative and Bar and Cocktail Lounge

The third building which Heritage Technologies would like to renovate is the Pike Building on Main Street, once the site of the Pike overall factory. On the first floor there will be a period store in which local artists and craftspeople will be able to exhibit and sell their work without worrying about overhead or commissions. The Townships can take pride in being home to many talented creators, like stainedglass maker Marika Szabo and ceramicist Kent Benson, whose work is known in both Canada and the United States. On the second floor there will be studio space for rent and a cultural centre.

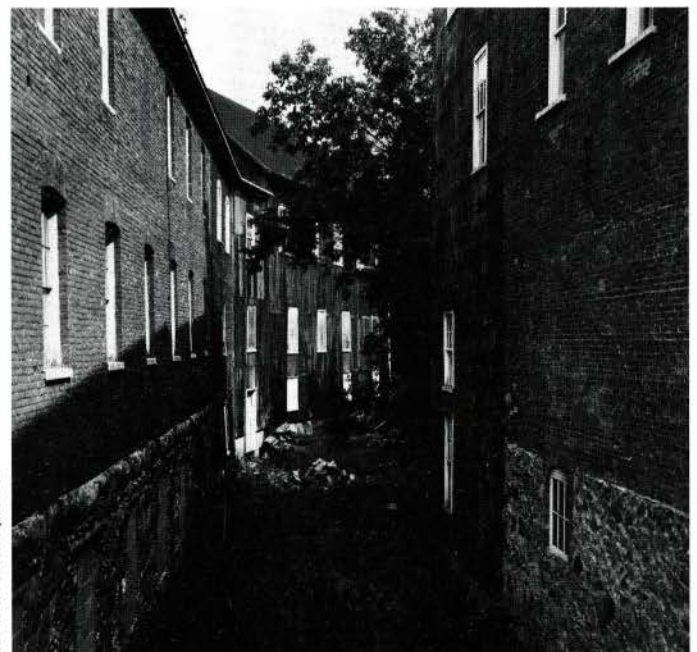
On the third floor of the Pike Building, the old overall factory will be reconstructed to provide the theme and backdrop for a bar and cocktail lounge. Taking advantage of its location, the large open bar will look over the river and towns, and have cosy nooks for privacy. High-quality drinks and snacks at reasonable prices should ensure enough revenue to finance both the bar and the cooperative.

Is Heritage Technologies a pipe dream? Is it too big, too unwieldy a project? We don't think so. We see it as a way to preserve the region's heritage, generate jobs, and enhance the community, none of which can be done effectively on a small scale. We have already received an enthusiastic endorsement from the local town councils and organizations like the Stanstead Historical Society and the Townshippers' Association. The provincial Ministry of Cultural Affairs has granted us funds to hire local architect Bill Stewart to conduct a feasibility study for renovating the *Journal* building. And we have received donations from several individuals in the community.

We believe that Heritage Technologies will attract tourists from far and wide, who will be impressed by the history and culture of the Townships, and captivated by its natural beauty. At the same time, Heritage Technologies will create employment—and hope—for those who live here.

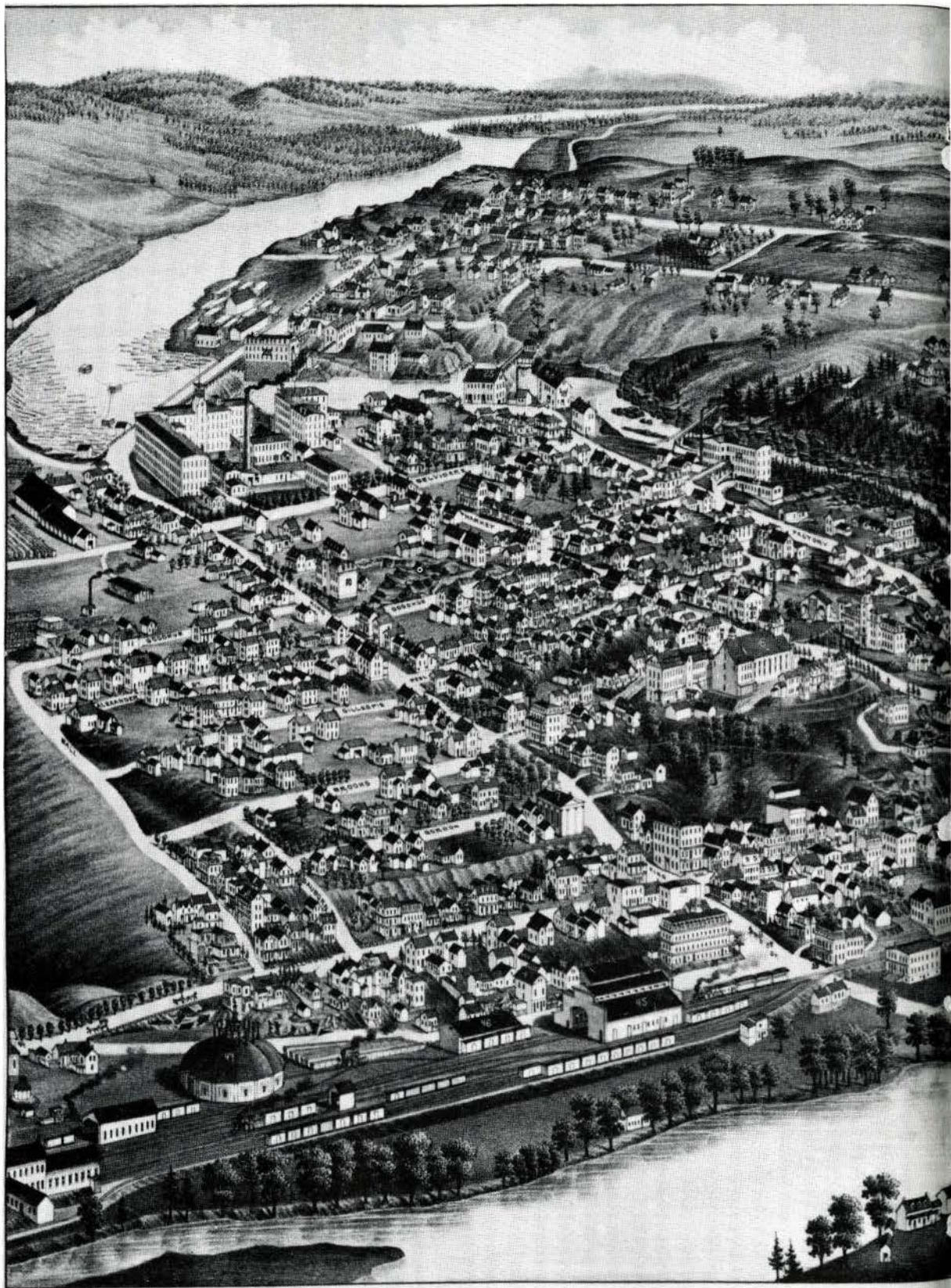
Danville

Danville, where the tour will conclude with dinner in Trinity United Church, is celebrating this year its 125th anniversary of incorporation. Settled by immigrants from New England during the early 19th century, the village, by 1850, was well established as a centre for trade and commerce in an area renowned for its prime agricultural land.



Robert Lemire, 1984

Figure 6. The Square, east side, Danville.



BIRDS
SHERBROOKE
18



VIEW OF
DOKE, P.O.
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Robert Lemire, 1984



Figure 7. 20-22 Water Street, Danville.

Robert Lemire, 1985



Figure 8. 45 Water Street, Danville.

Robert Lemire, 1984



Figure 10. 51 Grove Street, Danville.

Incorporated as a town in 1860, Danville experienced a high level of prosperity that endured until the First World War. Small fortunes were made in store-keeping and light industry. The plan of the town, its Square, and surrounding tree-lined streets with fine residential, commercial and religious buildings, reflect the sense of pride and quality of life that has in large part, been preserved.

Since the Great Depression, the town has become a bedroom community of Asbestos, site of the largest open-pit mine in the Western World. The population of Danville has declined since that time and construction of new houses has been moderate with investment in new industries nonexistent. The result of slow growth within recent decades has meant that the town escaped the brutal transformations that affected most urban and rural areas of North America, since the Second World War. The photographs that follow, show a few of the historic properties of Danville that will be seen during the tour.

The former J. L. Goodhue tannery can be seen at the left of Figure 6. The creek still flows through conduits hidden beneath fill, above centre. This creek, its source is the pond located at the height of land, once powered several mills along Water Street.

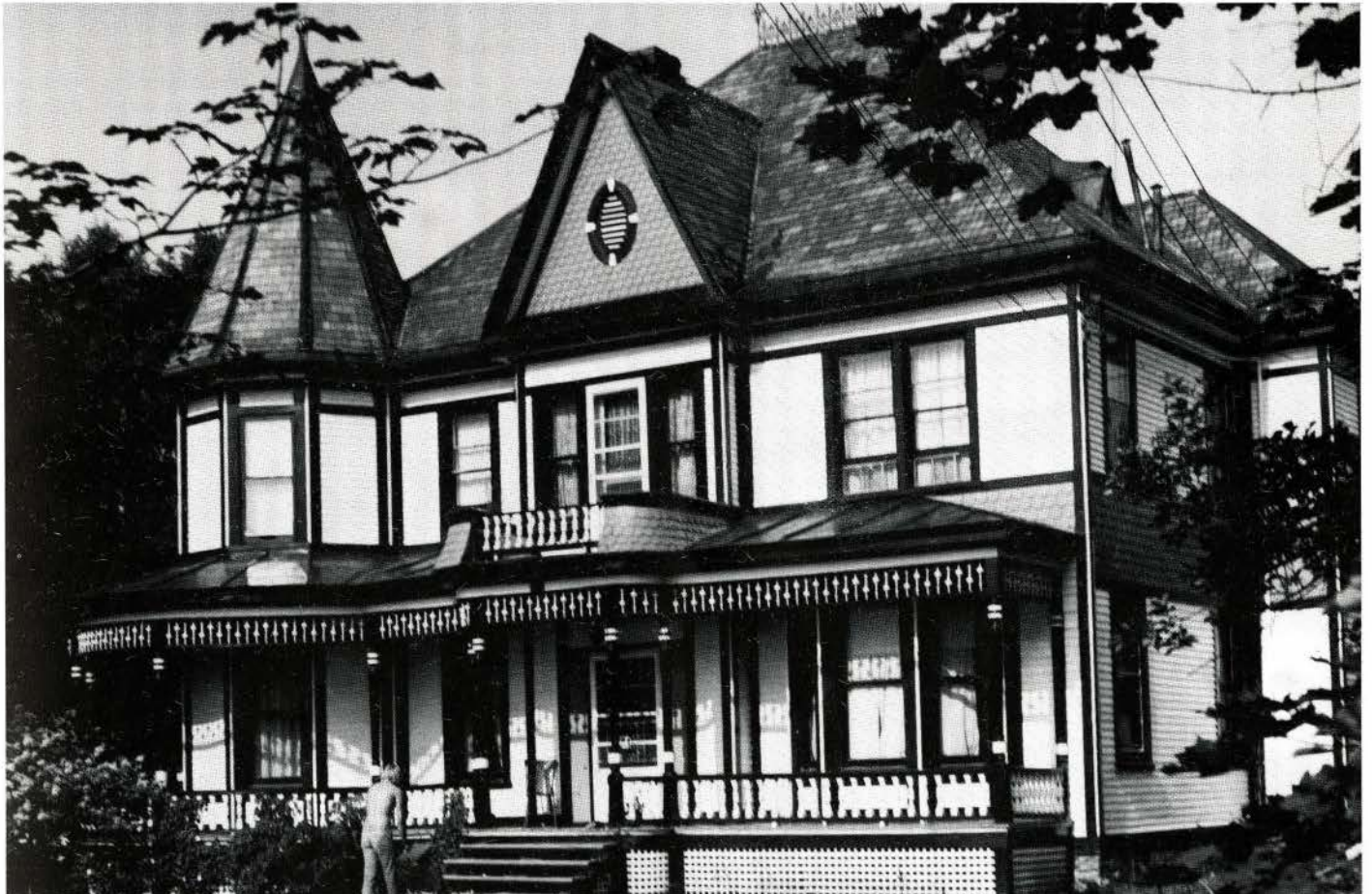
Like most early wood-built settlements, Danville experienced several disastrous fires. One in 1882, destroyed half the town, including most buildings on the Square. These were replaced by brick structures and the one shown at Figure 7 is the best preserved example of its type—a shop at ground floor level with living quarters above. The fret-saw railing is one of several different patterns seen on buildings in town. The bargeboard is identical on at least a dozen other buildings here, and on others in Sherbrooke, Lennoxville and Richmond. In the background at centre-left is the former tannery.

The street front of Figure 8, with veranda and loggia was inspired by house pattern books. Examples can be seen on Phelps Street in Rock Island. Danville has several variations of this type. One further



Robert Lemire, 1984

Figure 9. 110 Crown Street, Danville.



Robert Lemire, 1984

Figure 11. Grove Street, Danville.

Localisation des ponts couverts des Cantons de l'Est

MUNICIPALITÉ	RIVIÈRE	STRUCTURE	LONGUEUR
1. Adamsville	Yamaska	Town	27m.
2. Adamsville	Yamaska	Town	32m.
3. Coaticook (F)	Coaticook	Kingpost	18.5 Rue St-Marc
4. Compton Station (F)	Coaticook	Kingpost	30m. (Près de Waterville)
5. Coaticook (F)	Eaton	Town	40.5m. Halte routière Fermé
6. Cowansville (A) (F)	Yamaska	Town	28.5m. (Dans les limites de la ville)
7. Eaton (D)	Eaton Nord	Kingpost	34m.
8. Fitch Bay	Lac Fitch Bay	Town	28m. Fermé
9. Gould (Lingwick) (A, D + G)	Au Saumon	Town	63m.
10. Huntingville (Milby)	Moe	Town	24m. Halte routière
11. Lennoxville (Capelton) (E, F)	Massawippi	Town	35m. Fermé
12. Lennoxville	Massawippi	Kingpost	29m.
13. Mansonville	Mud Creek	Town	31m. Fermé
14. Mansonville	Missisquoi	Town	22.5m. Fermé
15. Melbourne Canton (B, F)	Au Saumon	Town	16m. Halte routière Fermé
16. N.-D. de Stanbridge (F)	Aux Brachets	Howe	41.5m. Halte routière
17. St-Armand (C)	Groat Creek	Town	15m.
18. St-Camille	Nichollet Centre	Town	19m.
19. Ste-Catherine de Hatley (F)	Misseau	Town	20m. Halte routière Fermé
20. Sawyerville (St-Isidore)	Eaton	Town	29.5m.
21. Stanbridge-East (F)	Aux Brachets	Howe	16m. Fermé
22. Warwick	Des Pins	Town	29.5m. Fermé

LÉGENDE
 A - Le plus long de l'Estrie E - Côtes inclinées
 B - Portique spécial F - D'accès facile
 C - Plus petit de la province G - Deux travées
 D - Portique porte à faux

Figure 12. Location of covered bridges in the Eastern Townships

east on this street has an ogee arch and fortunately retains its original veranda posts and railing, which is not the case with 45 Water Street. Note the side windows on the first floor tucked-in beneath the eaves and the blind semi-circular window above the loggia, likely used to ventilate the attic. Also of note is the considerable depth of the house which is the result of a later addition. More modest in scale, with

fine carpentry and just the correct amount of detail is 110 Crown Street (Fig. 9). The sloped board held by brackets above the lintel is a clever way to shed rain water.

A huge addition to the rear at 51 Grove Street provides a total of 29 rooms presently converted to several flats (Fig. 10). The delicate veranda with paired columns, at right, originally extended on either side of the entrance vestibule. The square bay above the entrance is a design element found on many large houses in Danville, and does not appear elsewhere in the Eastern Townships. This bay offers several advantages; it gives ample light and air to the upstairs hall, provides a sheltered place for observation and indicates that the centre-hall plan was popular with local builders and clients.

The ornate house at Figure 11 is known as *The Halloween House* because of its orange and black trim. The exterior reads like an architectural glossary: iron creasting along the peak of the slate roof; an eye-brow window at the side centre gable with oval vent set in a field of patterned shingles; corner tower and veranda with turned posts and balusters. As with most of the town's larger houses, the property is ample enough to show the house to advantage. Mature trees add character and complement the forms of these houses. Some of the maples planted along Grove Street in 1876 still survive, as well as a number of old spruce, pine and a few precious elm.

This brief introduction to the Eastern Townships has attempted to illustrate the predominant influence from New England that shaped the built environment of this region during the 19th century. Residential, commercial, religious and industrial structures of wood and brick are based on models encountered south of the United States border.

There are building types that have not been included here, that deserve equal appreciation. The wooden farm buildings: round barns, barns with gambrel roofs, silos, milk houses, chicken coops, stables and sheds; everywhere, accentuate the landscape and give physical evidence of the area's agricultural base. These out-of-date structures, victims of present high technology farm programs, may soon become extinct (Fig. 12 and 13).

I hope that all who participate in the Annual Meeting will return to the Eastern Townships and continue to explore and to enjoy its people, landscapes and buildings.

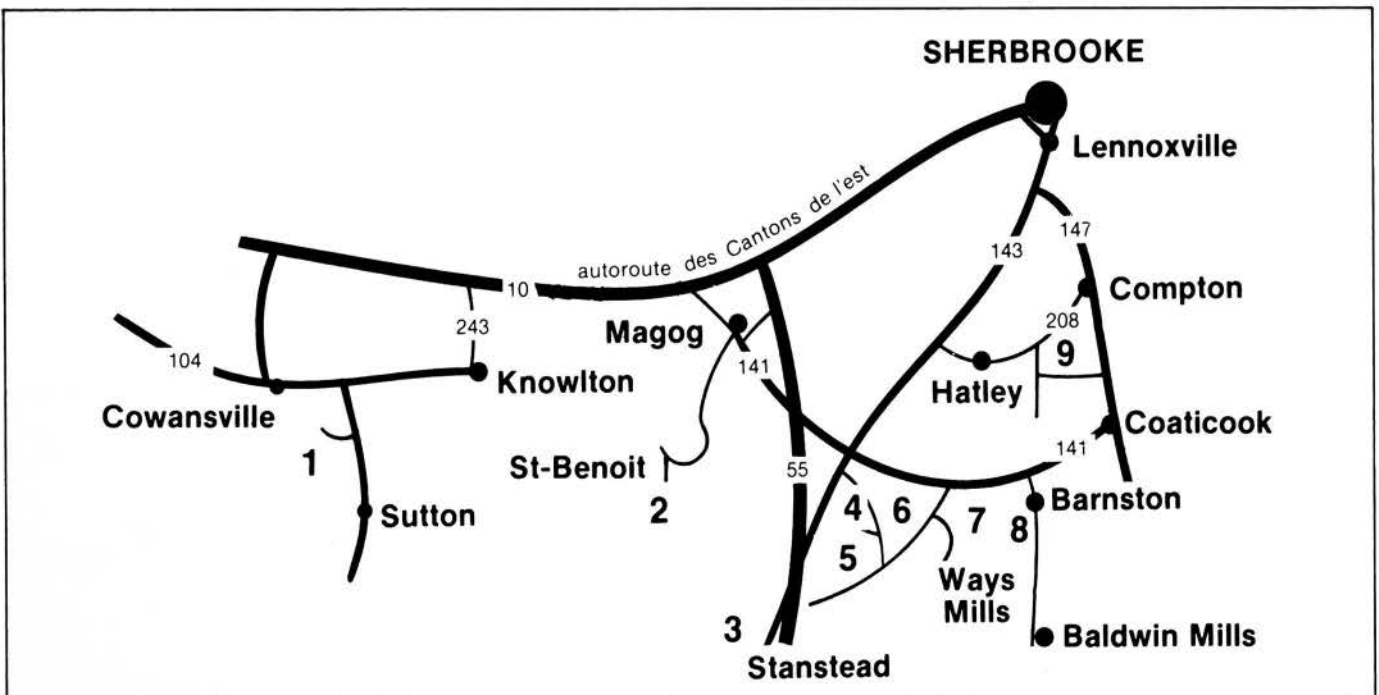


Figure 13. Location of round barns in the Eastern Townships source, Ministère des affaires culturelles, Bureau Régional de l'Estrie. Localisation des grandes rondes de l'Estrie source, Ministère des affaires culturelles. Bureau Régional de l'Estrie. 1. Brome-Ouest 2. Benoitdulac 3. Stanstead 4-7. Auxenvirons de Ways Mills 8. Barnston 9. Entre Compton et Coaticook.