



## Société d'Histoire de Georgeville Georgeville Historical Society



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### Native Issues

The Georgeville Historical Society is pleased to announce that the guest speaker at this year's Annual General Meeting will be Julia Lewandowski, a doctoral student currently studying at the University of California at Berkley. Julia, who received her Master of Arts degree from McGill University, is originally from Vermont. Her PhD dissertation compares indigenous land tenure in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century Quebec, Louisiana, and California.



*Julia Lewandowski*

Her talk will be an overview of Native history and land ownership in the larger region of northern Vermont, the Eastern Townships, and the St. Lawrence Valley. Within this broad overview, she will focus more specifically on Abenaki territory and history during the 19th century, when they briefly held land in the township of Durham, as well as part of two seigneuries along the St. Francois River. This more specific topic will be incorporated into the subject of her dissertation, with the goal of providing a basic knowledge of the Native history of this part of Quebec.

Everyone is invited to attend Julia's presentation as part of the AGM on Sunday, July 8<sup>th</sup>, at 2:00 P.M.





*Remains of the lime kiln.*

## **The Lost Village of Magoon's Point, Revisited**

Back by popular request, the GHS will return once again for a tour of the lost village of Magoon's Point. Two previous trips to the wilds of the promontory, for which the village was named, have not dampened the interest in the one-time community on the Point that is no more.

The village that took the name of the point of land that juts out into Lake Memphremagog, was once a prosperous and lively community during the 1800s. Fate, however, was against it and the village faded away almost over night. Today, a visit to the area reveals little indication of human habitation. Only a closer look on foot will uncover evidence of not only habitation but industrial development and village life as well.

Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the village was a viable entity, whose economy was based on the extraction of limestone, including the shipment thereof as well as the refinement of the raw material into lime for export. Both the unrefined ore and the finished lime were shipped around the lake, the former primarily to Newport on the American side, the latter for retail sale in Fitch Bay as well as other various destinations.

The prosperity generated by the lime industry, was also supplemented to a significant extent by the farming operations in the immediate hinterland surrounding the village. The local farms were among the most productive agricultural facilities in the latter 1800s within the township of Stanstead; all the more noteworthy for a period when the township included both what is now Ogden and Stanstead East. The farms were larger, the livestock greater in number and the farm produce more extensive.

The tour in July will be led by current GHS president, Stephen Moore, some of whose ancestors resided in the village. It will include visits to some of the sites hidden among the landscape, an accounting of the infrastructure that once was attributable to the village, and an explanation of its ultimate demise.

Participants are requested to meet at the Memorial Centre in Georgeville the 18<sup>th</sup> of July at 10:00 A.M. In the case of rain, the tour will be held the following day. Everyone is welcome and invited to bring a picnic lunch and dress appropriately.



## **A Garden 25th Anniversary**

The summer of 2018 marks a milestone for the Georgeville Historical Society. This year the Society celebrates the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Bigelow Pioneer Garden. The Garden project was the first major undertaking by the Society after its founding just two years earlier. And, it has been the most successful and

most visible project to date.

One of the immediate concerns following the founding of the GHS in 1991 was the question of the Society's contribution to the forthcoming 1997 Bicentennial of Georgeville, already in the planning stage. Katherine Mackenzie, a director of the Society, proposed creating a pioneer garden to commemorate the early New Englanders who first settled the village. A skilled gardener herself, and a talented published botanical artist, Katherine was delegated the task of coordinating the design and creation of a period garden.

Joan Murray, a fellow director, leased a plot of land on her property to the Society for the garden. The rent was a mere dollar per year. The prime location in the heart of the village opposite the park had been in earlier days the site of a prominent stagecoach inn. The establishment had been owned and managed by Levi Bigelow from 1841 to 1867. The GHS decided that the new garden would be named, appropriately, the Bigelow Pioneer Garden. Jacques Valiquette, the current owner of the land, now leases the site to the Society for the same token sum.

Katherine Mackenzie initiated the whole project, took up researching pioneer gardens and consulted with historic garden specialists in nearby New England. The final design consisted of an enclosed garden, formally laid out in four main beds. These beds were planted with the useful plants needed in pioneer households, remote from shops and pharmacies. The beds contained culinary plants, medicinal plants, household plants and a bed devoted to plants mentioned in the Bible – a traditional New England feature. A narrow border for flowers framed the garden.

While most of the plants destined for household use were grown from seed, or sought out as seedlings from specialists in heritage seeds and plants, the flower border welcomed existing, established plants from many local gardens, including the much-loved old Georgeville white rose. Most of the construction and planting involved was accomplished by volunteers from the village. As part of the second annual meeting of the GHS, the Bigelow Pioneer garden was officially opened on July 10<sup>th</sup>, 1993, well in advance of the Bicentennial celebration.

Each year, the volunteer gardeners held plant sales to raise money for plants and maintenance. They held a successful tour of several fine local gardens and even sold herbal vinegar made from the culinary herbs. It was always hoped that the garden could be self-supporting but this was not always possible. Katherine Mackenzie in a 1996 report wrote: "The garden is in its fourth summer and should be a very presentable garden for the Bicentennial." And it was.

In 2003, a Vin d'honneur was held in the garden to mark its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary. At the time, Katherine Mackenzie



*The official opening.*

was living in a retirement home in Knowlton, the garden in excellent condition thanks to her many years of dedication. With Katherine no longer involved, care of the garden fell to a keen group of volunteers organized by GHS director Valerie Pasztor.

For most of the next decade, Valerie Pasztor was primarily responsible for the garden. Where Katherine gradually moved towards more and more professional maintenance during her tenure, Valerie in contrast took a completely opposite tack. Instead of professionals, she resorted to volunteer participation. In doing so, she turned the fortunes of the garden around, relieving the financial burden that had begun to plague the GHS's board of directors. Valerie organized the planting and maintenance and kept excellent records of the heritage garden plants. As well, she was a regular hands-on gardener herself.

As the years passed, to wane, the plant sales structural repairs beginning to fade and attract younger and

In fact, the group was anniversary of the were enlisted and the restructured.

Suzanne Marcil, an gardener, was named the coordinator in charge of planting, matched by Martin Bosch, as coordinator of garden structures and equipment. Meanwhile, Valerie Pasztor was elevated to the status of Gardener Emeritus, in recognition of her scholarly and practical care over the years.



the level of volunteerism began declined, and the need for apparent. With the garden looking its age, it was time to more nimble volunteers.

revitalized, in time for the 20<sup>th</sup> garden in 2013. New volunteers garden's activities were

experienced and committed

In 2013 and the following summer, a revitalization plan went into effect. Fences and benches were repaired, the arbors strengthened, the plant beds refurbished and an attractive cedar and pebble stone bed was installed to replace the tired, out-of-control lilies at the garden's entrance. Beyond the confines of the garden, a developing wilderness surrounding the fence was subdued and contained to a reasonable border. As a final touch, a substantial, handsome new sign was donated and installed near the boardwalk.

An informal appeal to the community for funds to support the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary revitalizations proved successful. Interested villagers also donated materials as well as their time and labour. It was the spirit of the village at its best,

Since then, improvements continue to enhance the appearance of the garden. The plant beds have been beautifully laid out, restored to their original geometric plan, and with fresh cedar log edging installed. Added to the scene is a neat, discrete barn-board garden shed donated by 'a friend' of the garden. The new small structure has proved quite useful for the volunteers to store their supplies and tools.



A novel addition to the site has been the introduction of a now-beloved scarecrow, named affectionately as Hannah. Named for Levi Bigelow's wife, Hannah presides over the garden hopefully deterring all flying creatures from ravaging the plants within the garden's perimeter. Her appearance changes with the

seasons, but she is always dressed appropriately. Over the year different themes are highlighted as well, including Fall harvest, Christmas, Valentine's Days and St. Patrick's Day.

The renewed group of hands-on gardeners that came together for the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary continues to meet for work every Monday morning during the season. They tend the garden and plan for future development. A larger group of 'Friends' is kept informed of developments, and waits in the wings with suggestions and encouragement.

At present, Suzanne Marcil serves as the garden's head plant authority, as she has since 2013. Jill Cobbett is the coordinator of the overall operations of the garden, while Aileen Desbarats has served as the garden's representative on the board of directors for many years.

The Society and the Bigelow gardeners want to share the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations with the community. Supported by the GHS, the gardeners invite everyone to a festive 'Garden Party', Georgeville, the 9<sup>th</sup> of August from 4:00-6:00 P.M. to be held on the lawn next to the garden, courtesy of Jacques Valiquette.

Dates to Remember:

Saturday, June 30th, 1:00 P.M. - Canada Day Parade  
Sunday, July 8th, 2:00 P.M. - GHS Annual General Meeting  
Wednesday, July 18th, 10:00 A.M. - Magoon Point Lost Village Tour  
Thursday, August 9th, 4:00-6:00 P.M. - Bigelow Pioneer Garden Anniversary Party  
Wednesday, August 15th, 10:00 A.M. - Molson Island Tour  
Saturday, September 22nd, 10:00 A.M. - Bridle Path Tour

## **Molson's Island & the Island Lighthouses**

Back in the 1790s, imagine the response that passengers aboard Copp's Ferry would have received from Captain Moses when they queried about the location of Molson's Island. They would have been told that it did not exist. In fact, over the years, the same response would have emanated from the captains and/or navigators of other, more, larger vessels, which plied the waters of Lake Memphremagog during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

For it was not until the late 1800s that the land mass known today as Molson's Island could in fact be recognized by this more modern name. During the 1800s and for some time beyond, it was commonly known as Baird's Island.

The origin of the name is tied to the Baird family, some of whose descendants still reside in the Township of Stanstead. These local residents trace their ancestry back to Elijah Baird who was among the earliest settlers to take up land on the eastern side of the lake during the 1790s. Having settled on the southern mainland opposite the island, Baird did not nevertheless have any claim to the island itself. He likely used it, however, for various endeavors, which led many locals to assume ownership and thus justification for referring to it as Baird's Island.

Regardless, the island along with all its counterparts situated throughout the Canadian portion of the lake remained the possession of the Crown until the latter half of the 1800s. It was not until this period that Baird's Island and others were granted to private individuals.

As for Baird's Island specifically, the land was granted by Letters Patent the 27<sup>th</sup> of October 1883 to one Egerton Ford, a stockbroker from Montreal. Any use of the island prior to this date would have been unauthorized and illegal in the absence of any permission from the government land commission.

While little is known of the grantee, Mr. Ford, he likely had no interest in the grant except from a monetary perspective. Just four months later, in March 1884, he sold the island to Eliza Holmes, the wife of Alexander Molson. It was at this juncture in time that the island passed officially into the hands of the Molson family. Alexander Molson was a business acquaintance of Ford and was indebted to him previously regarding a mortgage obligation.

Many years before in 1862, Alexander's wife Eliza had purchased a 50-acre tract on the south shore, a part of the farm belonging to George Washington Brown and his wife, Sarah Jewett. In 1865, Alexander bought the remaining 115 acres constituting the Brown farm. In essence, the two tracts composed the original homestead of Elijah Baird. That is, the mainland south of the island. To this, Alexander purchased other parcels of land, including lakeside farms and islands to the south. Before they were married, Alexander and Eliza had arranged for a legal separation as to property.

Alexander was the grandson of John Molson of Montreal brewery fame. His father, John Molson Jr. and his uncle William were successful business entrepreneurs with their partnership accounting collectively for most of the family's fortunes. Alexander on the other hand, was less inclined to matters of finance as reflected in the Mechanics Bank, an institution he established and ill-managed until it failed completely in 1875. The consequence of this debacle was the near financial ruin that resulted, including the loss of the additional properties recently acquired on Memphremagog by Alexander. Only the original Brown farm acquired in Eliza and Alexander's name was saved, which in the interim, had been transformed with buildings and gardens into an appealing lakeside estate known as 'Fern Hill'.



*"Fern Hill;; the Molson estate looking across to the island.*

The subsequent purchase of Baird's Island in 1884 from Ford suggests the possibility of collusion between the Montreal stockbroker and the Molson couple. Alexander and Eliza may have aspired to owning the island, but given the former's tattered reputation following the bank failure, the option of applying for a grant may have been consequently compromised. There may have been therefore an unwritten agreement with Ford whereby he secured ownership with the understanding that the island would in turn be sold shortly thereafter. Given Eliza's separation as to property, the acquisition may have been negotiated in her name in lieu of Alexander's reputation at the time.

As for the island itself, there is no evidence that the Molsons ever attempted to develop the land. Its purchase may have been in fact an attempt to protect their privacy as well as their view of the lake and the surrounding wilderness.

Alexander Molson died in 1897. Not long after, in 1907, Eliza also became deceased. Her Memphremagog holdings were passed on to her children. A little more than a year later, however, Alexander and Eliza's third child, Ella, bought out the interests of her siblings with respect to Fern Hill, but not the island.

Regarding the latter, it may be assumed that each of the surviving children became owners of an undivided share, as later evidence suggests the land was parceled up seven ways perhaps in relation to the number of children emanating from Alexander and Eliza's marriage. Ella would have been included in the mix of shares. The island although was not then, and never has been, actually subdivided.

Ella retained ownership of Fern Hill and her undivided share of the island until her death in 1945. The property was thereafter broken up into parcels and subsequently sold. Erwin Camber purchased the farm portion of the estate, with the main residences and buildings, as well as her share in the island, going to a Molson family relative in the short term.

Over the years from the time of Eliza's death, the Molson family members gradually sold off their individual undivided shares, with the last one about the time of Georgeville's bicentennial in 1997. Circa this date, the Molson family connection to the island has been in name only.

Thanks to recent private owners of the island, as well as those of the late 19th and 20th century, it has remained essentially undeveloped. It is almost as pristine today as it was centuries ago for the Odanak Abenakis who traversed the lake.

In the past, the impact of man did in fact compromise the wilderness aspect of the island. With the increased activity of steam-powered vessels plying the lake from 1850 onwards, the western tip of the island posed a threat to navigation. Protruding out into the main body of the lake, the point threatened vessels heading both south and north. This hazard along with others around the lake, forced the federal government to commission the construction of a number of lighthouses at strategic locations.

Nathan Beach, a received the lighthouses. The these aids to private influence, emanated from the prominent lakeside



local Georgeville contractor, commission to build all of the new decision by the government to erect navigation was likely the result of not the least of which was that which offices of Sir Hugh Allan, a property owner as well as owner of

*The first island lighthouse.*

most of the steam vessels on the lake.

In the end, the government appropriated \$1000 in 1878 “for the erection of five small beacon light towers on Lake Memphremagog”. Included, was the one built on the western tip of Molson’s Island. This particular one was unique, as all the other four were land-based. Regardless, all were to be 22 feet high with a fixed white catoptric light visible for eight miles. They employed parabolic mirror reflectors to focus the lamp’s flame into a concentrated beam, resulting in visibility at fourfold greater distance.

The initial versions of the lighthouses had red roofs and sloping board and batten sides, attractive but not necessarily well protected from the weather. The government design was improved when enhanced versions of the lighthouses were built in 1914. The new design included the use of cedar shingles and a vertical lantern room, along with other technical advancements in lighting.

The first light keeper for the island was most likely the contractor himself, or rather, the responsibility of one of his workers. The job was all the more difficult as the tender of the light had to access the lighthouse day and night by boat – in the evening to ignite the beacon and in the morning to extinguish it. A pleasant row when the waters were calm, but it was known on occasion to be quite hazardous when a storm or squall came up unexpectedly, the lake teeming in whitecaps.

Local lore has it that on one dark, stormy night, Erwin Camber, one of likely many caretakers since 1878, in attempting to return to the mainland, faced a daunting predicament. After fulfilling his duties on the island, he struck out for home, but lost his bearings and capsized. Camber who was the chauffeur and farm manager at Fern Hill for Miss Molson at the time, had been pushed off course by the high waves and in the dark, was unaware of his exact location on the lake. Fortunately he had a strong flashlight with him and was able to determine the closest shoreline. He survived the ordeal by swimming to the shore in question, surrounded in darkness.

The lighthouse was decommissioned in 1944. Up till this point, Camber and his children maintained the lighthouse during the 1930s and ‘40s. The youngest and only surviving of the three, Edna McKelvey still has fond memories of the island and its fabled lighthouse, which she tended as a young woman.

After the demise of the second generation of the Molson’s Island lighthouse, a large red buoy was anchored off shore, a few hundred feet from the western point, its flashing amber beacon, a diminutive alternative to that of the former picturesque lighthouses that went before.



*The second generation island*

This summer, on the 18th of August, the GHS is organizing a walking tour of the island to the sight of the former lighthouses. Access will be via pontoon boats out of Fitch Bay. Participation is limited to 30 individuals, including the boat captains and guides. The fee is \$40/person. Reservations are required, with availability open to GHS members only and on a first come basis. Payment is due by the first of August. Arrangements may be made by contacting Judy Bachelder at 819-847-2595 or judy.bachelder@gmail.com

## The Bridle Path Tour, Once Again

Those who missed the Bridle Path tour in August of 2017 will have another opportunity to savor that very popular experience. This fall, on Saturday, September 22, from 10 am to noon, GHS president Stephen Moore will once again be leading us on a walking-tour of one of the original settlement roads of our community, in the sector known as Magoon's Point.

The Bridle Path was the name given to the initial crossroad that connected Magoon Point Road with Jones Road. The origins of its name remain a mystery but given the research skills of the current members of our GHS Board, there is

no doubt that the mystery will soon be unravelled, perhaps as early as our September tour.



*A group discussion about an old foundation.*

The roadway ran parallel to today's Camber Road but south of it and closer to the lost village of Magoon's Point, cutting through the hinterland of what once was a thriving community. There remain today many vestiges of the life lived by the original settlers in this area such as foundations of houses and out

buildings, wells, fences and apple orchards.

Striking evidence of the life from another time is manifested in the less than evident landmarks that exist along the now abandoned thoroughfare.

Unfortunately, a number of interested parties were unable to join the tour last year due to various conflicts. Because of this, a repeat of the walk is being conducted this fall.

Participants are asked to meet at the community centre and to don appropriate clothing and foot-wear. A picnic lunch will be convened at the end of the walk.

## Time to Renew!

GHS membership fees are due the first of January every year. Now is the time to renew your membership if you haven't already. Individual memberships are \$15, family memberships \$20.

Submissions may be mailed to GHS Membership, 4600 Georgeville Rd., Georgeville, QC J0B 1T0 or by contacting Judy Bachelder at: [judy.bachelder@gmail.com](mailto:judy.bachelder@gmail.com)

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<https://www.georgevillehistoricalsociety.website>