

SCHOOLHOUSES OF THE EASTERN TOWNSHIPS

Text and Photography (except where noted) by Matthew Farfan

The Eastern Townships were once dotted with rural schoolhouses. One has only to look at early maps of the area to see that virtually every neighbourhood had one. The typical one-room schoolhouse could be found every mile or two, or at nearly every second crossroad. Usually built by the people of the neighbourhood, whose children would be attending class there, these schools were often very simple structures. They were unadorned, purely functional, and built of local materials at hand – usually wood, but occasionally fieldstone or brick. They served their purpose faithfully well into the 1950s in some areas. However, with the advent of a modern centralized educational system and bus transport for children in the countryside, the rural schoolhouse soon became a thing of the past. Some were converted into storage sheds for farm equipment. A few became private dwellings. Many were too isolated or too tiny, so their uses were limited. These fell into disuse and neglect or were simply torn down. Today, however, a surprising number of these little schools remain. Scattered across the Eastern Townships, they are quaint reminders of a simpler time, a time, when we think about it, that is really not so very distant.

The following is a tour of some of the more interesting schoolhouses in the Townships. It is not meant as an exhaustive list, but as a taste of an important part of our rural heritage.

1)

NAME: Mansur (or Brick) School

LOCATION: Stanstead East. West side of Rte. 143 at the junction of Curtis Rd.

DESCRIPTION: 1 storey. Brick.

DATE: Reputedly 1819 (prob. c.1840).

HISTORY: Stanstead's first government (Royal Institution) school is officially the property of the local English school board, but since its closure in 1929, this charming little one-room schoolhouse has been lovingly maintained by the Stanstead North Women's Institute, which still holds meetings there and occasionally welcomes school groups. The Mansur School was the site of the inaugural meeting of the Stanstead Historical Society in 1929.

NOTES: The building boasts its original floorboards and desks, and the names of teachers who have taught at the school can be found on the wall. Visits may be arranged through the Colby-Curtis Museum in Stanstead. Info: (819) 876-7322.

- a. Mansur School.
- b. Stanstead Historical Society inaugural meeting, 1929. (Photo: Stanstead Historical Society).
- c. Front door.
- d. 1819.
- e. Lock.
- f. Elaine and Phyllis, keepers of the school.
- g. Schoolroom.
- h. Queen Victoria.

2)

NAME: Cassville School (now Stanstead East Town Hall)

LOCATION: South of Cassville Rd. on the West side of Rte. 143 in Stanstead East.

DESCRIPTION: 2 storeys. Clapboard siding. Recessed porch and entrance (rare, if not unique, in Quebec).

DATE: 1817.

HISTORY: This former Academy is named after the hamlet founded here in the late 1790s by settlers from New Hampshire and Vermont. The schoolhouse served the local Protestant

(English-speaking) and later Catholic (French-speaking) communities into the 1950s, at which time it was converted into the local town hall.

NOTES: Despite its nearly 200-year history, the building is remarkably well preserved.

- a. Cassville School.
- b. Woodshed.
- c. Window.
- d. 1817.
- e. Cassville School, c.1860. (Photo: Stanstead Historical Society).
- f. Sign, Stanstead East Town Hall.

3)

NAME: Georgeville School

LOCATION: In the village of Georgeville (on Rte. 247), on the East side of Lake Memphremagog.

DESCRIPTION: 1 ½ storeys. Clapboard siding. Bell tower. Dormer windows added.

DATE: 1849.

HISTORY: Built after a fire that destroyed an earlier school, the schoolhouse accommodated elementary classes and, beginning in 1854, high school classes, as well. It remained in service until 1934, when a larger school (now the Murray Memorial Centre) was built across the road. The building served as a community center until the 1960s and was then converted into a private residence.

NOTES: A popular subject for artists and photographers, this quaint little building is located in the heart of one of the most picturesque villages in the Eastern Townships. As the school is now a private dwelling, visitors are asked to please respect private property. The village itself contains many early 19th century homes, a central common, a number of restaurants and boutiques, and a public dock on Lake Memphremagog. The village (formerly known as Copp's Ferry) was once a stop on the stagecoach line from Boston to Montreal. The famous paddlewheeler the "Lady of the Lake" stopped here on its trips up and down the lake. Over the years, Georgeville has attracted many of the well-to-do from Montreal and Boston, some of whom have built beautiful homes along the lakeshore.

- a. Georgeville School, now a private home.
- b. The village, c.1895. (Photo: Georgeville Historical Society)
- c. The village, c.1910. (Photo: Farfan Collection).

4)

NAME: Charleston Academy (now St. James Church Hall)

LOCATION: In Hatley village, adjacent to St. James Church, overlooking the village common.

DESCRIPTION: 2 storeys. Clapboard siding. Mansard roof and central tower added.

DATE: 1830 (began operating 1832).

HISTORY: The former Charleston Academy operated as a school for many years, ending its career in the 1960s as the Hatley Intermediate School. A beloved local landmark, the building now houses the village library, open on Saturday mornings.

NOTES: The architecture, central common, and tree-lined streets of historic Hatley village (settled in 1795) betray the area's deep New England roots. The Common is the site of the village war memorial, appropriate since this was the training ground for the local militia in the early 1800s. The *Queen's Invincibles*, as the company was called, are said to have planted the maples that line the village streets. The *Invincibles* donated their flag to the Church where it hangs to this day. Every year on July 1st, one of the largest Canada Day parades in the Eastern Townships takes place here.

- a. The view across Hatley Common.
- b. Charleston Academy.

5)

NAME: Little Hyatt School

LOCATION: Milby village. Just off of Rte. 147 on the North side of McVety Rd.

DESCRIPTION: 1 storey. Clapboard siding.

DATE: c.1822

HISTORY: This early one-room schoolhouse, which operated until 1946, has recently been restored through the hard work and fundraising efforts of Patrimoine-Ascott-Heritage and the Little Forks Branch of the United Empire Loyalists' Association of Canada. Plans for the building include an interpretation centre and a community hall.

NOTES: The names of pupils and other early graffiti carved on the original wooden walls are still visible inside the classroom. The historic Milby covered bridge (1873) is a short walk away, and St. Barnabas Church (1875) and Milby Cemetery are right across the road. Info: (819) 346-6746.

- a. Restored schoolhouse.
- b. Volunteers Milt and Bev. Loomis during restoration work.
- c. Desk outlines revealed during restoration.
- d. Desk outline.
- e. Finishing touches.
- f. Moving the schoolhouse across the road. (Photo: Bev Loomis).
- g. Before the work began. (Photo: Bev. Loomis).
- h. St. Barnabas Church, Milby.

6)

NAME: Huntingville Schoolhouse

LOCATION: In Huntingville village. Just East of Rte. 147, next to the Universalist Church.

DESCRIPTION: 1 storey. Clapboard siding.

DATE: Prob. 1844.

HISTORY: The history of Huntingville dates back to 1815 and is intimately connected to the mills that were built on the Ascot River at this spot. The school, itself, is the third school on record in the settlement. It operated until 1947.

NOTES: The schoolhouse is adjacent to the superb and recently restored Huntingville Universalist Church (1844), both buildings dating to the same era. The church is said to be the first Universalist Church built in Canada. A mill and dam are immediately across the road.

CAUTION: Motorists should be careful, because the schoolhouse is located on a dangerous curve.

- a. Huntingville Schoolhouse and Universalist Church.
- b. The Church.
- c. Huntingville Mill and Dam.

7)

NAME: Old Stone School

LOCATION: Melbourne (Richmond). From the junction of Bridge St. and Rte. 243 in Melbourne, go 1.5 km (1 mile) NorthWest on Rte. 243 to the Jct. of Rte. 143; then continue 1.8 km (1.1 miles) NorthWest on Rte. 143. The school is on the West side of the road.

DESCRIPTION: 1 storey. Fieldstone.

DATE: c.1820s.

HISTORY: Little is known about the early history of this charming little school, which operated until 1905, after which the building was neglected for many years. In recent years, it has been looked after by local residents interested in its preservation.

NOTES: In 1927, a plaque was mounted on the outside of the building to commemorate the names of the pioneer builders of this school, which occupies a picturesque spot overlooking the St. Francis River and a railway bridge, and which is adjacent to a pioneer cemetery. The nearby village of Melbourne, now a part of Richmond, was famous in its heyday for locally quarried slate that is still visible on the roofs of many of the historic buildings in the area.

- a. The Old Stone School.
- b. In memory of the pioneers.
- c. The school from the cemetery.
- d. View from the school. (Photo: Farfan Collection).
- e. On the banks of the St. Francis, near Richmond, c.1900. These boys may well have been students at the old school. (Photo: Farfan Collection).

8)

NAME: Knowlton Academy

LOCATION: On the grounds of the Brome County Museum, at 130 Lakeside in downtown Knowlton (Lac Brome).

DESCRIPTION: 2 storeys. Brick. Bell tower.

DATE: 1854. Second storey added in 1867.

HISTORY: The brainchild of the Hon. Paul Holland Knowlton, who donated money, land, and materials to build the school, the schoolhouse was deeded to St. Paul's Church immediately after its completion in 1854. It operated until 1896, at which time a larger school was built on Victoria Street. The building sat vacant until 1903, when it was donated to the Brome County Historical Society. Since then, it has been known as the Paul Holland Knowlton Memorial.

NOTES: Knowlton (Lac Brome) is one of the most popular tourist destinations in the Eastern Townships. The village boasts antique shops, restaurants, boutiques, B&Bs, and some wonderful heritage architecture. Brome Lake is nearby. The old Knowlton Academy has been the centerpiece of the Brome County Museum for a century, and both floors of the building feature displays of artifacts from around the region. The bell atop the Academy is the subject of an interesting legend related to the St. Francis (Abenaki) Indians. Be sure to inquire at the museum!
Info: (450) 243-6782.

- a. Paul Holland Knowlton Memorial (Knowlton Academy), Brome County Museum.
- b. Knowlton, c.1905. (Photo: Farfan Collection)

9)

NAME: Tibbits Hill School

LOCATION: From downtown Knowlton, travel 1 km (0.6 miles) West along Victoria; at the junction of Victoria & Centre, take Centre West for 2 km (1.2 miles) until you arrive at the junction of Tibbits Hill Rd. The school is at the intersection.

DESCRIPTION: 1 storey. Fieldstone.

DATE: 1844 (began operating 1846).

HISTORY: Tibbits Hill School, which operated until 1928, was converted to a school-museum in 1964. It is beautifully maintained in its original state by the Brome County Historical Society, and may be visited on Sundays during summer months, or by special appointment.

NOTES: The school is located in a pretty spot with a view of nearby Mount Sutton. For visits, call: (450) 243-6782.

- a. Tibbits Hill School.
- b. Plaque, *Commission des monuments historiques du Québec*.
- c. Schoolroom, interior.
- d. Old pump organ.
- e. School, Mount Sutton.

10)

NAME: Lee School

LOCATION: 1.9 km (1.2 miles) East of Dunham, on du College Rd.

DESCRIPTION: 1 storey (½ storey added later). Fieldstone.

DATE: 1852.

HISTORY: This tiny Protestant one-room schoolhouse operated until about 1908. It is now a charming private home.

NOTES: Please be sure to respect private property. Travelers along this road will notice the remarkable former Ladies College (built in 1875 at a cost of \$8600), just East of Dunham, and not far from the old Lee School. Today, the College is the home of the organization, *Jeunesse en Mission*.

- a. Lee School, today a private dwelling.
- b. Lee School in its heyday. (Photo: Missisquoi Museum).
- c. The Ladies College, c.1905. (Photo: Farfan Collection)

11)

NAME: Frelighsburg Academy

LOCATION: In Frelighsburg, at the junction of Rtes. 213 & 237; adjacent to the Frelighsburg Town Hall.

DESCRIPTION: 2 storeys. Brick. Bell tower. Extensively remodeled in 1926.

DATE: c.1856.

HISTORY: This lovely old building started out as a Protestant Academy, but was later converted to a Grammar School. It underwent major modifications in the 1920s, when the upper storey was remodeled and the towers and gables were removed. The building served as a school into the 1960s. In recent years, it has housed the local tourism office.

NOTES: The village of Frelighsburg is very pretty and boasts a number of cafés and other points of interest, including a historic mill on the banks of the Pike River, which meanders its way through this corner of the Townships. The village also contains many early homes made of the red brick typical of this area. In recent years, a number of artists have made the area their home.

- a. Frelighsburg Academy.
- b. The old mill.

12)

NAME: Mystic Model School

LOCATION: In the hamlet of Mystic, North of Bedford, on the East side of Rte. 235.

DESCRIPTION: 2 storeys. Clapboard. Bell tower.

DATE: c.1880 (1st floor); c.1886 (2nd floor).

HISTORY: According to surviving school board minutes, the trustees did not want a second storey on this building. A prominent villager, the eccentric Alexander Walbridge, decided on his own to build an upper floor to accommodate older students. He wanted to send his own children to high school within the village, so on a day when virtually the entire village was attending a funeral, Walbridge had the workmen from his foundry come in and build the second storey at his own expense. When the villagers returned (including the school trustees), the job was done. The

school, which operated until the mid-1940s, is now the property of the Mystic Recreational Association.

NOTES: Today this classic New England-style schoolhouse is used only occasionally for Sunday school picnics and strawberry socials. At Christmas, villagers decorate the old school with trees and lights. The United Church and the unique 12-sided barn (1882), both built by Alexander Walbridge, are just up the street. The village of Mystic is charming and seems untouched by time

- a. Mystic Model School.
- b. Bell tower.
- c. The Walbridge barn.
- d. Mystic, c.1900. (Photo: Farfan Collection)

13)

NAME: Malmaison School

LOCATION: St-Charles Rd.

DESCRIPTION: 1 ½ storeys. Clapboard.

DATE: c. late 1800s

HISTORY: A former Roman Catholic (French) school, this one-room schoolhouse is now private property. It has been used for years as an outbuilding on a farm.

NOTES: If visiting the area, please be sure to respect private property. This little schoolhouse is typical of the dozens (if not hundreds) of plain wooden schools that once dotted the countryside at almost every other crossroad. Although in a state of neglect, it retains its simple charm. Within view of the school and just up the road is the historic Des Rivières covered bridge, built in 1884.

- a. The former Malmaison School: In need of paint.
- b. School with covered bridge in the distance.

14)

NAME: École du rang Campbell

LOCATION: East of Sainte-Sabine, then South on Campbell Rd. On the West side of the road.

DESCRIPTION: 1 ½ storeys. Clapboard siding.

DATE: c.1891

HISTORY: An earlier French Catholic schoolhouse located on an adjacent property was transported to the location of the present school in 1885. That school burned to the ground in 1891. The current schoolhouse was built after that disastrous fire and served as a place of learning until 1958, when a large central school was built in the village. The building was converted to a storage shed, fell into disrepair, and became very overgrown. Since 1993, the building has been completely restored and now serves as a small museum. It is managed by the *Comité du patrimoine de Sainte-Sabine*.

NOTES: Like many rural schools, the ground floor of this schoolhouse served as a classroom, the upstairs as the teacher's lodgings. The Museum is open to visitors Friday to Sunday during July and August. It is managed by volunteers. Info: (450) 293-7617.

- a. École du rang Campbell.
- b. Doorway.
- c. Before restoration. (Photo: *Comité du patrimoine de Sainte-Sabine*).

15)

AND KEEP YOUR EYES OPEN ALONG THE WAY FOR...

- a. A cute little house in Brome County...
- b. That was once a school, c.1905. (Photo: Farfan Collection).

- c. A little red schoolhouse in Missisquoi County.
- d. And a place of learning...
- e. That seems past the point of repair.