

Société d'histoire de Georgeville

Georgeville Historical Society



AUBERGE McGOWAN:

Celebrating its history in a 30-minute video

— by Keith Wilcox

At our June 2020 GHS Board Meeting we faced a real challenge: how to appropriately celebrate Auberge McGowan's place in Georgeville's history before the building was demolished and rebuilt.

Originally, we were planning a lunch at the Auberge before demolition started. Members would be invited to share memories of their experiences at the McGowan. COVID nixed those plans. Then we talked about encouraging our members to post McGowan stories on our website.

From there a suggestion was made to do a virtual tour of the McGowan, interspersed with voice-over memories. Finally, we settled on engaging Louise Abbott and Niels Jensen to do a 30-minute video documenting the history of the McGowan, its role and place in Georgeville's history. Yes, the McGowan will re-open in the summer of 2021, if all goes well, but we felt that the origins and importance of the McGowan for our village needed preservation.

This video is a collaborative venture; there are several contributors combining to make it a reality: the GHS of course; Heritage Georgeville; the major shareholders in the rebuilding project, Robert Coallier and Hubert Sagnieres; along with the Canton de Stanstead, and the MRC. Thanks to this support we have the financing necessary to complete the project. We are most appreciative of this collective effort to tell the story of Maison/Auberge McGowan House: A tribute to the value this community places on its history.

The video will focus on telling the stories of the key actors in the McGowan story. Some of those we have interviewed include John Atkin, Steve Moore, Dick Hornby, Ross Spencer, Louise Hébert, (who provided an original Peterborough boat, similar to those used in the days when Henry and Kay McGowan owned the McGowan), Brian and Judy Rochester, Nancy Amos, Tony Straessle and Robert Côté (the longest serving manager of the McGowan, from 1997 to 2015).

Charles McGowan's great-grandson Wayne McTavish and his wife Penny have been invaluable contributors: they have patiently answered all of our questions. More importantly they sent us the memory book of Alexandra 'Allie' McGowan, the daughter of Charles, who first opened the boarding house in 1886. Allie was born at Gowanbank, as it was called until the 1930's. This memory book was compiled by her daughter Frances Hagen, who remains a living link to life at McGowan at the beginning of the twentieth century. From Frances' transcription of Allie's journals, we learned that Allie's

[cont. page 9...](#)

GHS NEWSLETTER / FALL 2020

WHAT'S INSIDE

- [Cover, p.9](#): Auberge McGowan: Celebrating its history in a 30-minute video
- [Page 2](#): A Georgeville Telephone Relic
- [Pages 3 & 9](#): Frederick Stillman Keet
- [Page 4](#): Bigelow Garden Gossip
- [Page 5](#): Jardin Bigelow
- [Page 6](#): Dick Hornby's Georgeville Recollections
- [Page 7](#): GHS Photo Contest; Upcoming Events
- [Page 8](#): GHS Board of Directors 20/21; Aileen Desbarats ; Membership Renewal



Located along the roadside of one of the approaches to the village, there was at one time a vintage telephone sign. Constructed of wood, the sign advised the general public of the availability of telephone service a mere 500 feet distant.

Indeed, telephone service in the community dates back at least to the late 1880s or early '90s. It was a period when telephones began appearing in every town and village throughout the region and the country as a whole. Often, there was but one single instrument, centrally located in a facility of high daily traffic such as a general store or post office. Public in nature, the telephone was available to all. It would be several years before telephones appeared in commercial establishments and private residences.

At first, Georgeville was served by the fledgling Bell Telephone Company of Canada, the antecedent of Bell Canada, by means of a line from Magog. But thanks to the earlier efforts of a small telephone entity known as the Dominion Telephone Company based in Magog, the Bell patents had been nullified and thus anyone was able to create their own telephone, company or system without the threat of legal reprisals.

In 1888 a jeweller in the city of Sherbrooke by the name of Carlos Skinner started his own telephone company, first identified as the Sherbrooke Telephone Association, later to become the People's Telephone Company shortly thereafter. One of the first investors in the independent Association was T.B. Rider, from nearby Fitch Bay. Mr. Rider, an entrepreneur himself, became closely involved with the affairs of the enterprise, eventually becoming the general manager of the company.

T.B. realizing the growing acceptance of the telephone, was quick to take advantage: by using the expertise and knowledge of the industry obtained through his association with the People's Telephone Company, he was

able in the late 1890s to establish his own system based in his native village of Fitch Bay. From here he created a system that extended in every direction to all the surrounding communities, including Apple Grove, Magoon's Point, Smiths Mills, Oliver Corner, and last, but not least, Georgeville. The 'Rider Line' as it was known, was linked to the outside world with connections at Rock Island to the People's system.

By the turn of the century, the connection at Rock Island was significant, as it provided a link to the People's Telephone Company, which by



this point in time, had become the largest independent telephone company in Canada.

Thus, for a period, Georgeville was served by two different and separate telephone systems, Bell and Rider. It was not the ideal situation, as the community was split, some on one system, the rest on the other. Commercial enterprises, for example, had to subscribe to both companies to be connected to all their customers. Statements from this period for various stores and related operations listed both company phone numbers on their letterheads.

By 1912, People's, which in the interim had become the Eastern Townships Telephone Company, amalgamated with Bell. Or at least, the larger entity acquired controlling interest in the E.T. operation in exchange for various financial considerations and arrangements. Duplication of service henceforth was eliminated, though throughout the region, the name of the Eastern Townships Telephone Company was retained given the general public's hostility to Bell at the time.

Locally, the Rider name was retained and the line's operations remained independent until the mid 1930s, when T.B. Rider's son Claude, sold the family's interest in the line to the Eastern Townships Telephone Company, in effect to Bell.

As for the sign depicted in the accompanying photo, it was likely installed during the 1940s or '50s. Over time, its wooden construction became affected by the elements and had begun to deteriorate substantially. It had become unsightly and destined to be replaced by a longer lasting metal substitute. Knowing that removal was likely imminent, and that disposal was the probable outcome, the sign was rescued by a local telephone enthusiast in the late 1970s.

The original sign, which incidentally was never replaced, later resurfaced at a GHS exhibition on telephone service in the village. A base had been constructed to support the otherwise free-standing sign, a true Georgeville artifact from a time now long past.

The Society is offering a free one-year membership to the person who can accurately describe where the sign was originally located as well as the nature and site of the public telephone in the village at the time of the removal of the sign. In the case of multiple correct answers, a drawing will be held for the winner.

As we were about to publish our newsletter, we were most saddened to learn that Fred Keet passed away just a few days after he turned 100. Our condolences go out to the Keet family.

He lived a full life.

Frederick Stillman Keet

A brief biographical sketch by Doreen Keet Moffat and her son, Jim.

Fred Keet's parents, and subsequently his brother, Alton G. Keet, owned the General Store in Georgeville during the 1950s and '60s, before Alton & Dell moved to British Columbia in 1971.

My father Fred started school in 1927, the first year of the newly opened



Fitch Bay Consolidated School. In 1941 he had the good fortune to marry Connie Cass who lived at the Orchard on the East Road. Fred retired to Saskatchewan and will be 100 years old on November 26, 2020.

The Keet family (John and Mireille Keet and their sons) still own the Farm

This is a photo of Fred Keet, born November 26, 1920, receiving a certificate of congratulations from the Queen for his 100th birthday.



located between Georgeville and Fitch Bay. Fred was on the board of the Fitch Bay Consolidated School, a Trustee of Georgeville United Church, and was an active member of the Quebec Farmer's Association".

Below is a short summary of the many changes that Fred has seen in his life.

Born in November 1920, imagine the changes he has seen in his life:

- The post-war advances of the 1920s, including the introduction of cars with windows (they called them "glassed-in" cars).
- During the 1930s Great Depression, as a teen, he worked in the woods one winter and earned \$70 selling the wood - enough to buy a new suit of clothes at the time. He left to work on the construction of the Beauharnois Dam. He decided he was better off back at the farm in Georgeville. He courted Connie Cass. The roads were not passable by automobile in the winter, so he would use a horse and sleigh to go visit her.
- When World War II was declared, he was rejected by the army doctors for having a "heart murmur" but several of his brothers served in the military.
- In the 1940s he bought the farm from his father and was married. The war was raging, and the farm focused on dairy and beef. He had the first of his 11 children at this time.
- During the 1950s the cars got bigger, airplanes got faster, the Russians launched Sputnik, and he had many more children as the family and farm grew.
- In the 1960s Fred invested heavily in raising chickens, which was a wise move. His first children were

married. His 11th child was born when he was already a grandfather. He rebuilt the farmhouse in a modern 1960's style.

- During the 1970s, with several of his teenage children growing their hair long like "hippies", he joined-in for fun. The hair was cut as they grew up and were married. More grandchildren joined the family. He saw the Montreal Olympics and traveled to Europe a few times.
- In the 1980s the cars got smaller, the farm got bigger, and his grandchildren were now getting married.
- During the 1990s he became a great-grandfather, moved to Saskatchewan to be near some of his younger children and grandchildren, and built his last house. Always one to be active, he started doing carvings.
- In the early 2000s the Y2K scare, fortunately, did not bring an end to the world, but his wife Connie Cass passed away in 2005 and that was almost as bad for him.
- In the 2010s he continued to live alone but surrounded by his dedicated family who took turns taking care of him every day.
- In 2020, when COVID-19 struck, he moved in with one of his sons and his children, who along with the grandchildren continue to take care of him every day.



The Little Devil Le petit diable

Over the past few weeks, I have tried to find information regarding gardening during the 1918 Flu Pandemic. Sadly, I was not successful. One would imagine that people carried on as best they could with the available information. That is pretty much what has happened at the Bigelow Garden in 2020.

2020 started calmly with Hannah overseeing the snow that blanketed the garden. As in the past, the Christmas wreath on the gate was replaced by a Valentine in February, followed by a Shamrock in March.

It was about this time that the early rumblings of an epidemic were being reported around the world. Quebec's first case was reported in February. On March 11, the World Health Organization announced COVID 19 as a pandemic. March 15 the government enforced the closure of many enterprises. Schools did not reopen after the March break, and then on March 23 all non-essential businesses were ordered closed.

In the little Bigelow Garden, we initially thought that it would be a few months if we were all very careful. Then certainly life would return to normal. Well... that wasn't and isn't the case, but during the past 7 months since March 23, The Bigelow Garden has continued to shine in our village community.

Initially, the Garden was closed to the public. Under the supervision of our Head Gardener, Suzanne Marcil, a very small group of volunteers managed to work at a distance and tend the flowers and plants as they grew unaware of the threat to human health.

In early July, we were permitted to open the garden to visitors provided they respected the rules regarding "keeping a 2-meter distance" and wearing a mask when unable to do so.

Volunteers continued to work during this time. However, we would close the garden to visitors while we worked.

It was very hot and dry during July and early August. The soaker-hose system worked very well. As in the past we tried to be vigilant with water consumption. The plants did survive. Again, we thank Jacques Valiquette for his generosity in providing us with our water.

As it was not advisable to venture out to shop for non-essential items, a decision was made to postpone any purchases of new shrubs or plants this year. We did grow and plant a few items from seed.

The Sweet Peas were determined to put on a special show this year and under Judy Bachelder's constant care were a showstopper until the beginning of September. It is the first time in seven years that they have been so healthy, beautiful, and fragrant. This was much to the dismay of our resident red squirrel, who tried untiringly to dig up the

seeds as soon as we sowed and resowed them. We finally got the better of the little devil

In early September, Nancy Sullivan and Martin Bosch hosted a delightful "bring your own picnic" lunch on their beautiful verandah overlooking the village. It was a wonderful event and lovely to be able to see many volunteers.

Towards the end of September, volunteers cut back the plants and transplanted a few items in preparation for next Spring. The water system was drained and closed. A few pumpkins have been placed in the middle of the garden for autumnal colour.

In early October, a few volunteers met and sat in the garden after it had been put to bed, to enjoy a last picnic lunch together.

We hope that the Garden will be able to open to the public without restrictions in the Spring of 2021. In the meantime, the plants are dormant and settled for the upcoming winter months.

A special thank you to Suzanne Marcil, who oversaw the Garden throughout this challenging time, and to Judy Bachelder, her devoted helper and our Georgeville Historical Society representative.





by Dick Hornby



Editor's Note: In Transcribing Dick's Reminiscences in the Spring issue of the Newsletter, I wrote that Mr. JP Woodyatt trapped fur-bearing animals, when in fact it was Dick's Uncle Matthew who did the trapping. In the third paragraph, it should have read "Matthew trapped fur-bearing animals". JP Woodyatt was the owner of the property where Dick's parents were the caretakers.

My apologies to Dick for that mistake.

CHAPTER 1

In the first chapter we learned that long-time Georgeville resident, Dick Hornby arrived in Georgeville as a result of the Second World War. His father joined the army in 1939 and Dick's mother moved the family from Morrisburg Ontario to live with her parents Dan and Matty Ramage. They were caretaking the Hawthorden Estate, the present-day site of the Desmarais property on the Georgeville Road.

CHAPTER 2

My first day at school at Georgeville Consolidated (the current site of Murray Memorial) also burns brightly in my memory. I was late in lining up at the bottom of the stairs before class, and was greeted by a rather powerful lady principal who grabbed me by the scruff of the neck and, with my feet clearing two flights of stairs, firmly deposited me at the head of the line. Everyone was more careful to line up on time after that. The strap was another instrument

that our beloved principal used with great dexterity, as most of us boys discovered throughout the year.

Travel in those days was severely restricted by the seasons and the pocketbook. Eventually, winter roads were plowed, and car travel took over. But some of the traditional snow removal methods continued into the '50s. Erwin Camber with sons Richard and Percy, rolled Magoon Point Road in the winter with a large wooden, horse-drawn roller, currently resting with the Stanstead Historical Society.

This packed down the snow, and when frozen, made a solid foundation for the teams to travel on. The first efforts at snow removal were made by Joe Roy using a blower on a tractor. Jim Routledge, Sir Hugh Allan's grandson, purchased an army type "Power Wagon" with a V-plow and with "Bink" Woodward and Alphonse "Joe" Leblanc at the controls finally provided a satisfactory winter road.

The type of school bus used varied from a cabin installed on a truck in early fall and early summer, to a cabin on a sleigh powered by a team of horses in the late fall and winter. The cabins were equipped with bench seats and heated with a kerosene heater. Edna Camber, a young lady in her mid-teens, was the bus driver of record on the Camber run, covering the area from Camber Road to Georgeville. Edna drove the large truck when roads permitted. A chauffeur's license with a minimum age requirement of 18 required the stretching of her age for a couple of years. She was an excellent driver of

either mode of transportation. The kids were in good hands.

Before the roads were plowed and sanded with regularity, we lived in what assuredly could be described as bobsled heaven. There were three large hills at our immediate disposal, zero traffic except for an occasional team of horses, and when the temperature was right, some extremely slippery roads.

Every family had at least one set of bobsleds, some of them very impressive with new sleds, side rails, red paint, etc., others pounded together with whatever one could scrounge were considerably less impressive, but nonetheless very competitive in their usually short life span.

On a good day, with 4 or 5 kids on a set of bobs, you could slide from the top of Channel Hill to the lake at the Mudge property. The trick was to navigate the corner at Alton Keet's store, today the General Store, and never tip over! Our top speeds were never clocked to my knowledge, but I cannot recall any dog in the village beating us from Channel Hill to the Mudges although many tried with regularity. Unless of course they were included as passengers which was often!

A favourite pastime was to build a jump for the bobs at the bottom of the hill. This was great sport except that occasionally the bobs would go through, instead of over the jump. This generally wreaked havoc with the sleds as the jumps were generally constructed of pulpwood and snow. Back to the shop!!

GHS PHOTO CONTEST

(We asked readers to identify the photo at right in the fall issue of the newsletter. I intended to announce the winner in the spring 2020 issue, but I inadvertently left out the announcement. My apologies to Ruth and Steve.)

And the winner is...

RUTH
PARTINGTON

The village's oldest living resident, Ruth, now 99, was quick to identify the photo's location as the obscured field in proximity to the entrance to the Colby estate.

Although unable to precisely locate the exact spot, given her restricted mobility and the remoteness of the site, Ruth was precise enough to be declared the winner of the contest.

For those desiring exactitude, the photo of Owl's Head was taken about 30 feet south of the Old Mail Road, also known as the Green Lane, a few hundred yards southeast of the Colby gate. This abandoned roadway once linked the similarly unmaintained southern section of the Magoon Point Road with the terminus of the Elephant Road.

Down along the lower reaches of the road, there is a field on its southern flank which offers a rather unique perspective of the mountain on the opposite shore of Lake Memphremagog. It is a view that is seldom seen by the general public, save by hikers, horseback riders, and cross-country skiers.

Ruth was familiar with the area in question, having spent her childhood on the Colby estate. Her father, George Atkin, was employed by Dr. Colby as the estate's resident gardener during the late 1920s and throughout the 1930s. Ruth, as the winner of the contest, is entitled to one year's free membership in the Society.

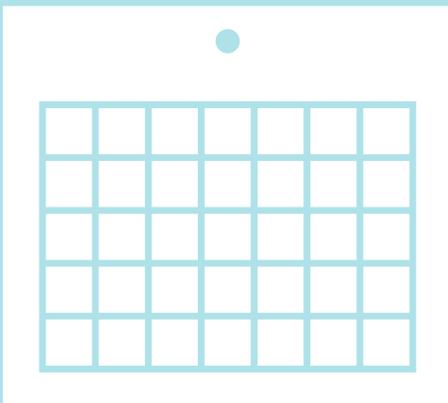
Kudos are extended to Hugh Scott, who identified the right perspective or line of sight regarding the mountain, though at a distance further afield. He suggested the location as one of the upper fields on the Straessle property.

The contest will continue with the spring edition of the newsletter, complete with a different local scene for GHS members to identify.

— Steve Moore, Past President, GHS, and former editor of the GHS Newsletter



UPCOMING EVENTS



THIS YEAR'S GUEST SPEAKER

Our ever-popular Guest Speaker event will be held separately from our AGM on July 4, 2021. Board Member Martin Bosch will be giving a talk on the story of the presence of the Thomas Merton Centre in Georgeville.

Depending on the public health guidelines in force at that time, that talk may be held at the hall, with Zoom being used for those who cannot attend. If the hall is not a possibility, the meeting will be held virtually, for all who wish to attend, as it was in July 2020.

More details will follow as we get closer to the event.

A DATE FOR OUR NEW AGM

This year's AGM is being planned for March 20, 2021. We tried doing this last March, but with the pandemic being declared a little over a week before, we were not prepared to organize a virtual AGM.

In view of how well received last July's virtual AGM was and given our newfound facility with Zoom technology, this year we are confident we can repeat last year's success. A March AGM is more in keeping with the government requirement that our Annual Meeting be held within three months of the end of our fiscal year.

GHS Board of Directors, 2020-2021

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D Jacques Valiquette
Tara Wright

Bob Scott is our new webmaster, replacing Lorne Waid Jr., who stepped down from our Board this year. Lorne was the person who got the website off the ground several years back. Thank you so much for all the work you did Lorne. Your task was not easy, and you put in a lot of work, learning as you went, to create our first website.

Tara Wright, the head of our Nominations Committee, has done a fine job recruiting new members to our Board this year. Deanne and Denise Cyr as well as Cindy Horsfall-Rigaud are part of this group.

Doreen Moffat has also joined our Board, continuing the work of her late husband Deane. As Doreen has said on many occasions, the GHS had always meant a lot to Deane.

Welcome, to our Board everyone. We are looking forward to having you join us.

AILEEN DESBARATS, a member of the GHS board for 18 of our 28 years of existence, had an unfortunate fall in front of her house almost two years ago and broke her femur. Since then she had been unable to attend any of our meetings.

Just before our AGM in July, she announced, with considerable regret, that she was stepping down from our Board.

Aileen was on our founding board, served for a few years after that, stepped aside for a bit, and then came back in 2005 and has been on our board ever since. She was a wise, insightful presence, a major loss for the GHS.

An archivist by profession, she established the Colby Curtis Museum archives in Stanstead. In recent years she instructed Judy Bachelder on how to do the same for us at the loft. She has served in a variety of capacities over the years, one of which was to work on a subcommittee cataloging heritage buildings in Georgeville. The recommendations of this group eventually went to the municipality where regulations ensured that new buildings had to respect the existing architectural heritage.



To honour the work Aileen has done, the GHS Board unanimously recommended to our 2020 AGM that Aileen Desbarats be named Director Emeritus. This recommendation was unanimously accepted by our members at that meeting.

Aileen Desbarats, Director Emeritus — we will miss you and wish you well in the future!

M E M B E R S H I P R E N E W A L

As has been the case for all non-profit organizations, this has been a difficult year: memberships are down, fundraising is more of a challenge.

In the past year, we have added the possibility of making Interac e- transfers as a new, more convenient way to renew memberships and make donations.

Just use the following address to avail yourself of this simple way to renew or donate gville.hist.soc20@gmail.com.

Stay in Touch

Keep in touch. Visit the GHS web site for information on the Society, for stories, photographs, postcards, featured artefacts, past newsletters, and more! Always changing, always improving:

georgevillehistoricalsociety.website

Visit our Facebook page at facebook.com/GeorgevilleHistoricalSociety

or our Twitter Handle at GeorgevilleHis1.

You are also always welcome at our headquarters at the loft, behind 4665 Georgeville Road. Most Saturdays you can find Judy Bachelder there between 11 and 4 pm. If you wish to drop off an artefact, do some research, or just chat, Judy is usually around.

Once again, we wish to remind everyone that we have the loft thanks to Jacques Valiquette's generosity. He provides this precious space rent-free.

Happy Holidays • Joyeuses Fêtes

As I write this, we do not know how we will celebrate this holiday season, although there seems to be a movement to let up a bit. So, let us celebrate and enjoy if we can.

Stay safe and be well.

And let's hope 2021 will be less fraught with danger.



cont. from page 1, Auberge McGowan...

father Charles had quite a temper. Allie's brother Harold would climb the trellises at Gowanbank to escape his father's wrath. Charles was also a firm believer in child labour according to Allie. Of course, in the eyes of a young teenager, we might take this assessment with the proverbial grain of salt.

Allie preferred winter when Gowanbank was closed for boarders, and she was free of most responsibilities, except, perhaps to help her father's sister Aunt Jane make her famous apple pies. This was not such a labour since she adored her Aunt Jane, who took over running Gowanbank after Allie's mother died when Allie was only 4.

This is just a brief sample of some of the stories that have come to light while researching the McGowan story. Stay tuned for more. We hope to have the film's premiere in the fall of 2021. Who knows? Maybe at the new auberge!

cont. from page 3, Fred Keet...

Unfortunately, due to the pandemic, we were not able to have a grand 100th birthday party in November, as we had hoped, but we need to be proud of a man that, although he never completed high school, due to his ambition, intelligence and work ethic, managed to become very successful and remains a great influence for a family of over 100 offspring: with 11 children and their spouses, 36 grandchildren and their spouses, great-grandchildren and even his first great-great-grandchild born in October.

GHS Newsletter Contributors: Stephen Moore, Jill Cobbett, Keith Wilcox, Sylvia Miller, Linda Bachelder, Doreen Moffat, and Dick Hornby.

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Layout & Design: Linda Bachelder



We get lots of positive feedback about our newsletter. Here is a brief biographical sketch of those who are major contributors to the look and content of our newsletter.

— A big thank you to you both. —

SYLVIA MILLER of Clayton, Ontario, Editor-At-Large

I was introduced to Georgeville and environs as the girlfriend of a young man, Stephen James Miller (later to become my husband), who I had met at the University of Guelph in the early 70's. Stephen's father, W. James Miller, was born in Austria, and was living in Beebe when he married Bessie M. Bachelder of Georgeville. We visited Georgeville and Beebe, Ayer's Cliff and Graniteville, and Griffin and Applegrove, where I was introduced to extended family, maternal and paternal, with deep roots in community and the very landscape. Over the years, there were reunions, memorial services, housewarmings, planned (and unplanned) visits with family: it was always a "homecoming". The extended family: Bachelders, Millers, Parkhills, included auto-mechanics, farmers, quarrymen, postmasters, beekeepers, syrup producers, and dairymen. I have been blessed to be able to share the strong sense of connection and belonging in this beautiful area with such a rich heritage.

LINDA BACHELDER of Montreal, QC, Layout & Design

Linda Bachelder is a retired graphic designer who has also spent time working as a Speech-Language Pathologist, farmer, waitress, and stay-at-home-mum — actually, just put those first four job titles under the description of stay-at-home-mum! Linda is the niece of Judy Bachelder, her last remaining tie to Georgeville, and someone whom Linda counts her lucky stars for having in her life. Judy is an ever-constant presence who works hard to keep in touch with her nieces and nephews. Linda's father, Richard, grew up in Georgeville and although Richard is no longer with us (nor is his brother, Lem, Judy's late husband), their memories live on through the recounting of many funny stories and fond memories, usually in very different versions, depending on who's telling the story! Christian Hurlow (GHS secretary) is one of Linda's cousins and Sylvia Miller (GHS Newsletter Editor-at-Large) is also a, um, cousin-in-law? Linda has been very happily married to the handsome and wonderful Terry Higgins, 25 years next June (that's how many years they've been married — not Terry's age). They have two sons: Noah, 23 and Lucas, 21, equally handsome and wonderful!