THE GEORGEVILLE ENTERPRISE

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Société d'histoire de Georgeville / Georgeville Historical Society

RUDELY WELCOMED BY A HAIL OF STONES, WILLIAM McGOWAN STAYED & PROSPERED

A customs officer's lot was never easy. When James Thompson, the collector of customs in Stanstead, approved the purchase of a row boat – for 3 pounds and 15 shillings – for preventive officer William McGowan in 1846, the boat was promptly stolen.

McGowan, who was then based in Stanstead, reported to his boss that he had every reason to believe some folk in Georgeville had "sunk her in the lake, from a determination to frustrate any attempt to frustrate smuggling carried on there."

Small wonder. As the Townships historian J.I. Little records in *State and Society in Transition* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), "the port of Georgeville was a particularly troublesome spot" for the customs men. In an earlier episode, McGowan was driven off by a hail of stones when he caught some entrepreneurial Georgeville folk attempting to liberate three steers he had impounded on the suspicion that they had been smuggled in from south of the border.

Despite this rather rude introduction, William McGowan, who emigrated to Lower Canada from County Cork in the 1840s, elected to settle in Georgeville, buying a farm on Channel road that would remain in the family for 140 years. Here, doubling as a farmer and an officer in Her Majesty's customs – including a spell as customs man on the steamer *Mountain Maid* -- he and his wife Mary McCabe raised a family of twelve children. William's children and their descendants have played a leading role in village life. In later years McGowans operated three of the main boarding houses – Charles McGowan's "Gowanbank Hall" (an early name for Maison McGowan) , William McGowan, Jr.'s "Cedar Cliffs," where his daughter Grace Heath welcomed a number of summer visitors who are now permanent residents, and Douglas McGowan's "Ellabank" (now the Auberge). The latter was renamed "Rainbow House" in the 1930s, when Douglas and his son Henry began

Douglas McGowan at home on the lake (circa 1950)

to specialize in guiding fishermen on the lake.

Wayne McTavish, a great grandson of William McGowan who grew up on the original family farm, will be the guest speaker at the Georgeville Historical Society's 8th annual meeting, sketching the story of five generations of McGowans in the village.

The annual meeting will be held on Saturday, July 10, at the Murray Memorial Centre at 2:30 p.m. Everyone is welcome.

STEVE MOORE HEADS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Stephen Moore, a director of the Georgeville Historical Society for the past six years, is the new president of the society.

A summer resident at his family's cotttage on MacPherson Bay, Stephen is a genealogist at the Eastern Townships Research Centre at Bishop's University. He earned an M.A. in history at Bishop's, writing his thesis on the Rider family of Fitch Bay, the leading merchants there at the turn of the century. Members will recall his vivid evocation of the once thriving community of Magoon Point at the society's 1994 annual meeting.

President Stephen Moore

Stephen succeeds John Scott, who served as president of the society from its first annual meeting in 1992.

Other new officers elected at last summer's annual meeting are Judy Bachelder as first vice-president and Stewart Martin as second vice-president, succeeding Bernard Drew and Bruno d'Anglejan, respectively. Vivian Cochrane continues to keep everyone in line as the society's able secretary-treasurer.

Bernard and Bruno continue as directors of the society, along with Adelaide Atkin, Serge Bombardier, John Boynton, Erwin Camber, Lucille Delorme, Nicole Ferguson, Goulding Lambert, Lorne MacPherson, Charlie Scott and Howard Smith.

The board of directors is grateful to Joan Murray, who retired as a director, for her many services to the society since its foundation.

From the Mailbag

A READER'S SEARCH FOR FAMILY ROOTS

A sincere and heartfelt thank you for your information on Charles Burbank. At the risk of exposing how emotional I feel, let me say that I was in tears. I have had this pent-up need to know about my family and Georgeville for so long. I cannot begin to tell you how much you have enriched my life.

Jane Dexter Russell
Raleigh, N.C.

Mrs. Russell is a great-granddaughter of Charles Orville Burbank (1842-1899), who was for more than 20 years a blacksmith in the village. The Burbanks first occupied what is now the Vancour house and later built a house on the property now owned by Joseph Mouledoux. In 1899, rowing home from Magog on a dark and windy night, Charles Burbank drowned when his skiff foundered near Lord's Island.

INSIDE THE OLD CAMPERDOWN: ALL THE BEST, WITH A LOOKING GLASS IN MOST EVERY ROOM

Surviving photographs of Georgeville's celebrated "old Camperdown" Hotel -- like this one taken by the Newport photographer P.F. Blanchard in 1861 – prompt one to wonder: what was it like inside?

We can now come much closer to an answer to that question, thanks to a record of a lease turned up by John Boynton at the Stanstead Registry Office.

Built probably as early as 1810 or 1811 on what is now the grounds of the Murray Memorial Centre, the hotel was the first travellers inn in the village, and was known for most of its first five decades as Abraham Channel's Tavern Stand.

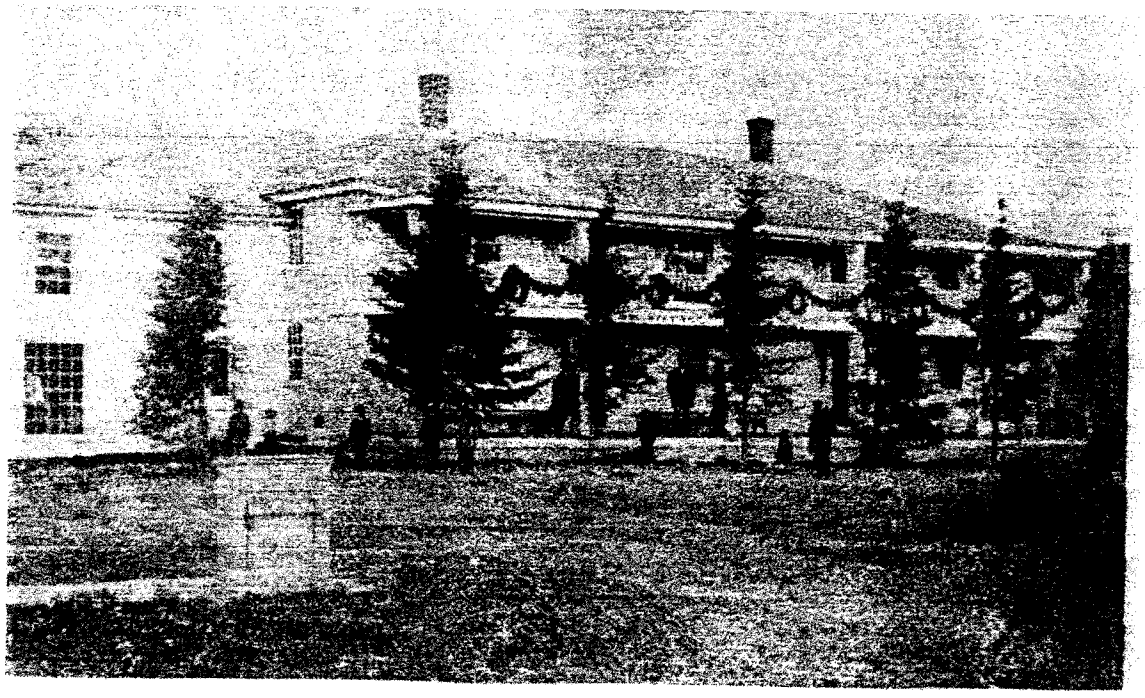
The colourful Channel, who boasted the unusual distinction of having fought on *both* sides in American revolutionary war, found his way to Copp's Ferry about 1813. He acquired the hotel in the following year. By the early 1820s Channel was advertising in Stanstead's weekly *British Colonist* that his tavern stand was "as commodious as any other in this part of the country. He has the best of pasture and water very handy, and is determined that no exertions should be wanting to serve the patronage of the public."

Abe Channel was notable for his exertions. One account says that on his 75th birthday, in 1828, he "took a run across the barroom and, giving a jump, planted his heels against the door as high as his shoulder."

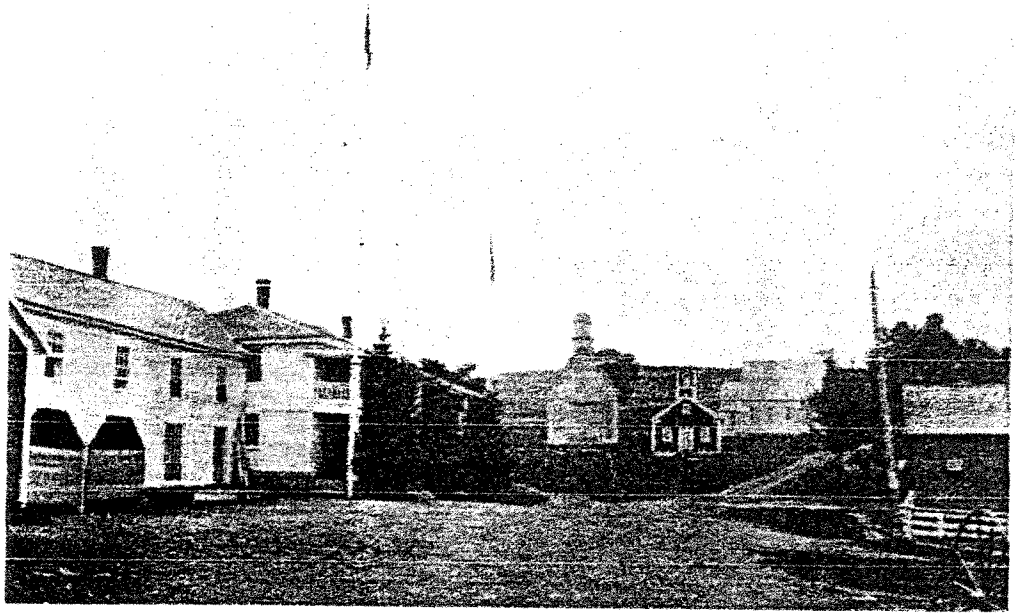
By his 86th birthday, Channel's energy was running low, and he decided to lease the inn to Levi Bigelow, a 40-year-old newcomer to the village from Worcester, Ma.

The lease, dated March 1838, indicates that there were nine main rooms in the hostelry, and lists the furnishings they contained:

IN THE SITTING ROOM: one clock, two tables, six dining chairs, one rocking chair, one looking



The old Camperdown decorated for Sir Edward Walker Head's visit in 1861



With the first Methodist church, School House and St. George's Church.

glass & two brushes.

IN CHAMBER OVER THE SITTING ROOM: one bureau, one work table, four chairs, one bed, bedding and bedstead and one looking glass.

IN BEDROOM ADJOINING SAID CHAMBER: one bed and bedding belonging, one light stand, one chair.

IN SQUARE CHAMBER: one bed and bedding belonging, six chairs, one rocking chair, one wash stand & furniture belonging to it and fire set.

IN CHAMBER ADJOINING SAID LAST MENTIONED ROOM: the bed and bedding as they now are, one wash stand & furniture and floor rug.

IN CHAMBER FRONT OF THE STAIRS: one bed and bedding & one light stand.

IN DINING ROOM: two tables, one bureau, seven chairs, one looking glass and all the window curtains to all the rooms and chambers mentioned above.

The lease also mentions the kitchen and equipment on the adjoining farm behind the hotel, on land now partly occupied by the Inverugie Golf Course: "The large cupboard and stove in the kitchen and bunk and dining table and other furniture in the bar and bar room as it now is and the said Levi Bigelow is also to have the use of two chains, one harrow, one plow and one cart and about two hundred sugar buckets and other sugaring apparatus now on the said farm."

Levi Bigelow evidently made a great success of Channel's Tavern Stand. "It is said that every man has his gift," Bigelow's younger contemporary, Hazen Increase Bullock, wrote, "and hotel-keeping was certainly his." As soon as his lease with Channel was up, Bigelow bought the hotel across the road and went into competition with his former landlord. This was the larger coaching inn built by Joshua Copp and James Peasley in 1824 to serve travellers on their Stanstead-Montreal winter stage. Bigelow operated this hotel for the next three decades.

Back at Channel's Tavern stand, Abe Channel, who was now 88, turned over management of the hotel to sons Leon and Charles Stewart and son-in-law John Carty Tuck. But the old man was still a familiar figure around the hotel. Hazen Increase Bullock recalled its ambiance on summer evenings:

"In front of the Channel Hotel main entrance, large stone flags were placed and on each side of these was a long, broad bench or permanent settle running out at right angles from the house upon which the patrons of the

hotel would sit, smoke and converse while imbibing the ale of mine host, in the purple haze of glorious summer evenings, such as is only to be experienced in this Eden of the western hemisphere.

High and Comfortable

"Like one of Dickens' scenes seems the retrospect. I remember well that the seats were painted red, the backs, high and comfortable, and in the posts that formed their ends and made them immovable, rings were affixed to which horses could be fastened while their owners lingered at the hospitable inn.

"Just at the end of one of these seats, a tall post was set into the ground and from an arm there swung about twenty feet from the earth, a square sign implicating the name of the proprietor and his ability to accommodate man and beast at all hours of day or night."

The inn remained a centre of village life, as suggested by this notice in the Stanstead *Journal* of a "charitable entertainment" in August 1847: "The Ladies of the Georgeville Sewing Society will have a DINNER on Tuesday, the 17th inst., at Channel's Hall, on which occasion a variety of FANCY ARTICLES, wrought by the Ladies for the occasion, will be offered for Sale, and the amusement attending a Post Office may be expected. -- The Horse Boat will be in attendance to accommodate parties of Pleasure."

On his 100th birthday, according to Bullock, Abraham Channel "danced a jig to the accompaniment of a violin, just to show what he could do, though he admitted that was rather violent exercise." In 1858, he died at 107, and a few years later this sons sold the old hotel to Thomas Macduff, a Scotsman who had recently arrived in Montreal as manager of the lumber firm Pollok, Gilmour and Co. and first came to Georgeville as a summer visitor.

Like Levi Bigelow's 1838 lease, an advertisement for the inn provides additional details on about the property:

DESIRABLE PROPERTY FOR SALE

THAT OLD TAVERN STAND IN GEORGEVILLE, FORMERLY KNOWN AS THE CHANNEL STAND, AND NOW KEPT BY J.C. TUCK, CONSISTING OF A HOUSE 36 X 80 FEET, PART BRICK, HORSE STABLE 40 X 50; NEW BARN 30 X 40; NEW SHED 20 X 60; LARGE WOODSHED AND OTHER OUTBUILDINGS.

THERE IS A NEVER FAILING SUPPLY OF WATER ON THE PREMISES. CONNECTED WITH THE ABOVE ARE 100 ACRES OF EXCELLENT LAND, 80 OF WHICH ARE UNDER IMPROVEMENT, THE REMAINDER WOODLAND.

It was the new owner, Thomas Macduff, who renamed the hotel the "Camperdown" in honour of one of his heroes: the Scots-born admiral, Adam Duncan, the Earl of Camperdown, who won a famous naval victory off the Dutch coast at Kamperduin in 1797, the year Moses Copp settled the site of Georgeville.

A Farewell Tour

In the Blanchard photo, the balcony of the Camperdown is decorated for a visit by Sir Edward Walker Head, who in September 1861 was making a farewell tour of the Townships after seven years as Governor General of Upper and Lower Canada. According to the *Journal*, Sir Edward and Lady Head arrived in the village by boat and "proceeded to the Camperdown House, followed by the assemblage in due order, the band playing a lively air. They were allowed to drive about by themselves to admire the countryside and a lunch was served."

Channel's Tavern Stand was torn down to make way for a larger, new Camperdown in 1883, leaving Samuel June Barrows to lament that 'the old Camperdown, with the sentinel evergreens which stood like grenadiers in front of its portals, was one of the picturesque features of [the village], and harmonised with the primitive fashion and comfortable inactivity of the little town. It was constantly crowded with more boarders than it could hold."

A DIFFERENT SORT OF MILLENNIUM BUG BROUGHT ON SCREAMING AND KICKING FITS

These days the millennium bug conjures fears of a chain reaction of crashing computers on Jan. 1, 2000. At the historical society's 7th annual meeting last summer, Denis Fortin, assistant professor of theology at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Mich., took us back to a time when William Miller, the best known American millenarian of the 19th century, came to Georgeville, spreading the word about a different sort of millennium bug – the belief that the world was about to end with a fiery cataclysm and the return of Christ for a thousand year reign of peace. Excerpts from his talk:

William Miller and his associates changed the religious landscape of the Eastern Townships in the 1840s. To this day we still have the effect of their preaching in this area which reveals a fascinating side of our religious heritage. Who is this William Miller? How could he have had such an impact on this community?

Denis Fortin

Miller was born in 1782 in Massachusetts and grew up on a farm in Low Hampton, New York, south of Lake Champlain. The eldest child of a poor family, he received no formal education but from a young age became an avid reader. Although raised in a devout Baptist home, Miller became a deist soon after his marriage and relocation to nearby Poultney, Vermont. There, respected and esteemed by the people, he served as constable, justice of the peace, or deputy sheriff for most of his life.

During the war of 1812, between the United States and Great Britain, he served as a captain in the American army. Later, reflecting on the surprising victory of the American forces in the Battle of Plattsburg in September 1814, he became convinced that God intervenes in human history. In 1816 he began a detailed study of the Bible and, after two years of research, concluded that Christ would return to earth in 1843.

Like many other contemporary interpreters of the Bible, Miller believed in a literal interpretation of the Scripture. One passage in the book of Daniel particularly drew his attention. When he read "unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed" (Daniel: 8:14), he understood that the cleansing referred to was the eradication of all sin on earth at the second coming of Christ.

Many historians have commented that Miller's complex chronologies were no different from those of his contemporaries and many of these calculations appeared in the margins of their Bibles. But his teachings clashed with those taught in most evangelical churches of New England. While these churches were expecting the dawning of a millennium of peace and plenty achieved through social reforms, Miller predicted instead that the event would be the destruction of the kingdoms of this earth and all the wicked. His teachings were radical in awakening a fear, or a hope, that he might be right.

Miller had good reason to come to the Townships in the 1830s and 1840s. Not only was he willing to preach his urgent message everywhere he could obtain an invitation. He also wanted to visit and convince his own sister, Anna, and her husband, Joseph Atwood, who were among the first settlers at the Outlet (or Magog).

His first tour of the Townships in the summer of 1835 took him to the Outlet, Hatley, Georgeville, and Stanstead Plain, as well as Derby, Vt. In three weeks, he preached about 24 sermons, all about the imminent second coming and judgment. His first sermon in Georgeville during this tour, the evening of July 1, emphasized that those not ready to meet their Lord would suffer the final punishment coming to the wicked.

His most successful visit was in the summer of 1840. On June 28, he began a series of lectures in Georgeville-in eight days, he lectured 15 times.

(Years later, Hazen Increase Bullock wrote of Miller's appearance in what was then the village's school house and meeting hall, a brick building on the site of the old red school house that now belongs to the Rochesters: "It was in the large windows at the rear of the building that Miller stood and preached to the multitude that filled the capacious interior and common outside, his doctrine of the early conclusion of their mundane existence.")

According to Edward Mitchell, the Baptist pastor in Georgeville (who farmed on the Georgeville-Outlet road just south of the Ives cemetery), Miller's presence was a blessing. In a report to the Canadian Baptist Association, he wrote:

"A part of the present year has been a time of refreshing to us. Mr. Wm. Miller, of Hampton, N.Y., held a series of meetings in this settlement... His favourite theme was the second coming of Christ. Prayer and exhortations by the saints, accompanied these exercises... Many souls felt anxious to be prepared for death, judgement and eternity; and quite a number have manifested hopes of pardoning mercy. Since that time, thirty have been baptised and added to the Baptist Church in this settlement."

Why were Miller and his message well received? Three reasons seem plausible. First, it is possible that his sister's family may have done some preparation for his visits by spreading his message and seeking invitations for him to lecture. Second. Miller was a baptised preacher and his evangelical message corresponded to the belief system of most people in the townships he visited. As in the New England states, itinerant preachers were a common occurrence.

Third, Miller was an American and so were the great majority of the descendants of the early settlers along the border. Although the Townships were a British colony, the religious mentality and culture of the southern townships were largely American.

At the beginning of 1842, Miller's influence from his visits were still being felt around Lake Memphremagog. His lectures, journals and booklets distributed in the area were making a definite impact on the population. To spread the Millerite message, it was decided to organize a series of lectures in Stanstead. Hundreds of people came from miles around.

Dr. Joseph Litch, a Methodist Episcopal minister who had accepted Miller's views, wrote: "The seed sown by brother Miller in this vicinity is now springing up and bearing abundant fruit." A Free Will Baptist minister shared with him the information that, before

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Editor for this issue: John Scott. Desktop publishing by Larry Bernais.

Miller's lectures in Georgeville, the spiritual condition of the churches in the area had been low. But after his lectures, a revival had broken out and the Free Will Baptists had baptised 200 new converts.

A Stronger Hold

The first Millerite camp meeting, in the village of Hatley in June 1842, was typical: two lectures each day and the rest of the time spent in prayer and testimony meetings. On Sunday, June 26, the crowd was estimated at 2,300 people. One attendee estimated that 500 persons had been converted. Litch wrote: "In no community, probably, has the doctrine of the Second Advent taken a stronger hold than in Canada."

Miller had always been approximate about the time for the second advent, limiting himself to "about 1843." For some Millerites in the Townships, this range of a year was still too vague and they set Febraury 14, 1843 as the expected day. This failed prediction did not escape the watchful eye of Montreal newspapers.

The *Montreal Transcript* reported that this "delusion" had caused considerable excitement in the townships of Stanstead and Hatley. People rolled on the floor with the "struggles," exhibiting convulsions and screaming and kicking fits. The editor added: "Though disappointed in their predictions, the Millerites bate not a whit their belief in the truth of their doctrines."

Not discouraged in the least, some Townshops Millerites set another date – April 14, 1843. "But it passed in the usual way, " wrote George Stacey in Ascot, "and with it I trust will pass this most impious doctrine. To such a pitch has it been carried on in these Townships that hundreds of families have plunged themselves into difficulties and sold up everything"

In July 1844 a new interpretation was proposed, as Millerites revised the anticipated end of the 2,300 years of Daniel's prophecy . It now could be expected on October 22, 1844. This new calculation gave new fervour to the movement. Millerism was now headed for its final climax.

Many closed their businesses, forsook their animals and gave up their jobs. Others gave away their belongings.

On the expected day, Millerites gathered peacefully in their homes or halls to pray and wait. They had anticipated this day for a long time, but after they waited all day and all night, October 22, 1844 was a day like any other. It was a great disappointment. Expressing feelings similar to those of many other Millerites, Hiram Edson, in western New York, wrote: "Our fondest hopes and expectations were blasted and such a spirit of weeping came over us I never experienced before. We wept, and wept, until the day dawned."

Deceived and Abandoned

This latest disappointment was the end of Millerism but only the starting point of new denominations in the Eastern Townships. In the weeks that followed, thousands of Millerites throughout North America felt deceived and abandoned the movement, if not religious life altogether. Many churches invited their former members to return to their folds and some chose that option. But for many Millerites this was an impossibility.

In the succeeding years, Adventism developed rapidly in the Townships, reaching a high of some 4,200 believers by 1881. The largest Adventist denomination was the American Evangelical Advent Conference, but by 1920 all of its churches in the Townships had been disbanded. However, traces of its presence still exist: the Stanstead Township office in Fitch Bay and the Olivet Baptist Church in Sutton are former Evangelical Adventist houses of worship.

William Miller visited the Townships again in 1846 and 1848. He died at his home, still a fervent believer in the imminent second advent of his Lord, on December 21, 1849.