

THE GEORGEVILLE ENTERPRISE

Vol. 9 No. 2

An Occasional Publication

Summer 2000

Société d'histoire de Georgeville / Georgeville Historical Society

WHEN PHONES RANG ON A VARIETY OF LINES EXCEPT ON SUNDAYS OR IN THUNDERSTORMS

The young Georgeville woman holding the telephone on this page is unfortunately unidentified (people *will* neglect to jot names and dates on the back of family photos) and the expression on her face is anything but revealing. Is she waiting for someone to answer her call? Is she enduring a long-winded, one-sided conversation? Is she listening to her mother-in-law?

As with the Mona Lisa, the mystery remains unresolved. But Stephen Moore, the president of the Georgeville Historical Society – and a long-time collector of antique telephones – does know all about the candlestick phone she is using, and much else about the village telephone system following the arrival of competing lines in the 1880s. He will present his findings as speaker at the 9th annual meeting of the society in the Murray Memorial Centre on Saturday, July 8, at 2:30 p.m.

Until the eighties, as Samuel June Barrows noted in *The Shaybacks in Camp*, Georgeville relied on “a single [telegraph] wire and a daily mailbag [for] communication with the outside world.” Then, in 1874-76, the Scots immigrant Alexander Graham Bell invented the telephone in Brantford, Ont., and the technology spread with astonishing rapidity.

Georgeville’s relative isolation ended in 1884 when both the Bell Telephone Co. of Canada and the Magog-based Dominion Telephone Co. brought rival lines into the village. Later a third competitor, the Rider Line, developed by the entrepreneurial H.P. Rider of Fitch Bay, entered the fray – and

remained in business well into the last century. The Rider Line aligned itself with the People’s Telephone Company of Sherbrooke, which would become one of the largest independent phone companies in the country.



Georgeville's Mona Lisa

“The superiority of telephone over telegraph lines seems to be now quite well established,” the *Stanstead Journal* reported in August 1884 when the Dominion Telephone Company’s line was installed on roadside poles from Magog to Georgeville: “When the telephone connection was completed, dignitaries in each place tested the perfectness of the line.”

"The byproduct of the rivalry was both positive and negative," Stephen says. "Initially, the competition led to a dramatic increase in the availability of local services. But if you subscribed with one company, you couldn't reach some one who had signed up with either of the others, which was not very efficient for business or residential customers."

By 1891, Bell's "Subscribers' Directory for the County of Stanstead" listed 92 subscribers in Stanstead, Rock Island, Derby Line, Barnston, Beebe, Baldwin's Mills., Smith's Mills, and Fitch Bay, including four in Georgeville. They enjoyed "continuous service day and night, except Sunday," but were warned: "Do not attempt to use the telephone during a thunderstorm." Georgeville's four subscribers were the contractor, Nathan Beach, the storekeeper James Taylor, Dr. William Keyes and summer resident E. Goff Penny.

This will be Stephen Moore's second appearance as speaker at the historical society's annual meeting. Members who recall his 1994 evocation of the once

flourishing community of Magoon Point will not want to miss his account of a subject in which he is equally well versed. His great-great-grandmother, Frances Pearson, was a switchboard operator for the Rider system in Fitch Bay, and his master's thesis at Bishop's drew on his exploration of that system and of the People's Telephone Company.

He has also prepared an exhibition of period photographs, excerpts from phone directories and vintage telephones that will open in the society's gallery following the annual meeting.

RECENT GIFTS TO THE LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES

The historical society gratefully acknowledges the following recent donations to its library and archives:

From the late Lorne MacPherson, a life preserver from the steamer *Anthemis*, and the framed photograph of the steamer that was hung over the piano in its saloon. Lorne salvaged the photograph in the winter of 1954-55 when the *Anthemis* was sunk at the Magog wharf.

From Marjorie Hand Dezan and her sons, a reproduction of a Passumpsic Railroad broadsheet, announcing special fares in celebration of the American centennial on July 4, 1886, including an excursion aboard "the fine iron steamer, the *Lady of the Lake*."

From Jean Seaman, Henry M. Burt's *The Wonders and Beauties of Lake Memphremgog: How to Go There and What is to be Seen* published for the Connecticut and Passumpsic Rivers and Massawippi Valley Railroad in 1870; and R.B.Y. Scott's *Georgeville, 1797-1945*.

FOR YOUR CALENDAR

The GHS/SHG's 9th Annual
Meeting

Saturday, July 8, at 2:30 p.m.
at the Murray Memorial Centre
Speaker: Stephen Moore

Exhibition opens at the Gallery
following the annual meeting

"Window to the Past": The
photographs of J.J. Parker at the
Gallery, mid-August
through Labour Day

150 Years Ago

ON A WARM AND CLOUDLESS DAY 'THE BOAT' WALKED THE WATER LIKE A THING OF LIFE

STEAMBOAT LAUNCH

THE SUBSCRIBERS RESPECTFULLY ANNOUNCE TO THE PUBLIC, THAT THE STEAMBOAT NOW IN COURSE OF CONSTRUCTION AT GEORGEVILLE, WILL BE LAUNCHED INTO THE WATERS OF LAKE MEMPHREMAGOG ON THURSDAY, THE 27TH INST. LADIES AND GENTLEMEN ARE INVITED TO BE PRESENT AND WITNESS THIS NOVEL (IN THIS PART OF THE COUNTRY) CEREMONY.

THE LADIES OF GEORGEVILLE WILL PROVIDE A DINNER, THE PROCEEDS OF WHICH WILL BE DEVOTED TO FURNISHING THE CABIN OF THE BOAT.

"COME ONE, COME ALL."

EPHRAIM CROSS
GEO. W. FOGG

GEORGEVILLE, JUNE 18, 1850

By John M. Scott

Come they did, setting out in farm wagons early on the warm and cloudless morning of June 27 one hundred and fifty years ago. From miles around, they came in their hundreds, bumping and jostling over the rutted

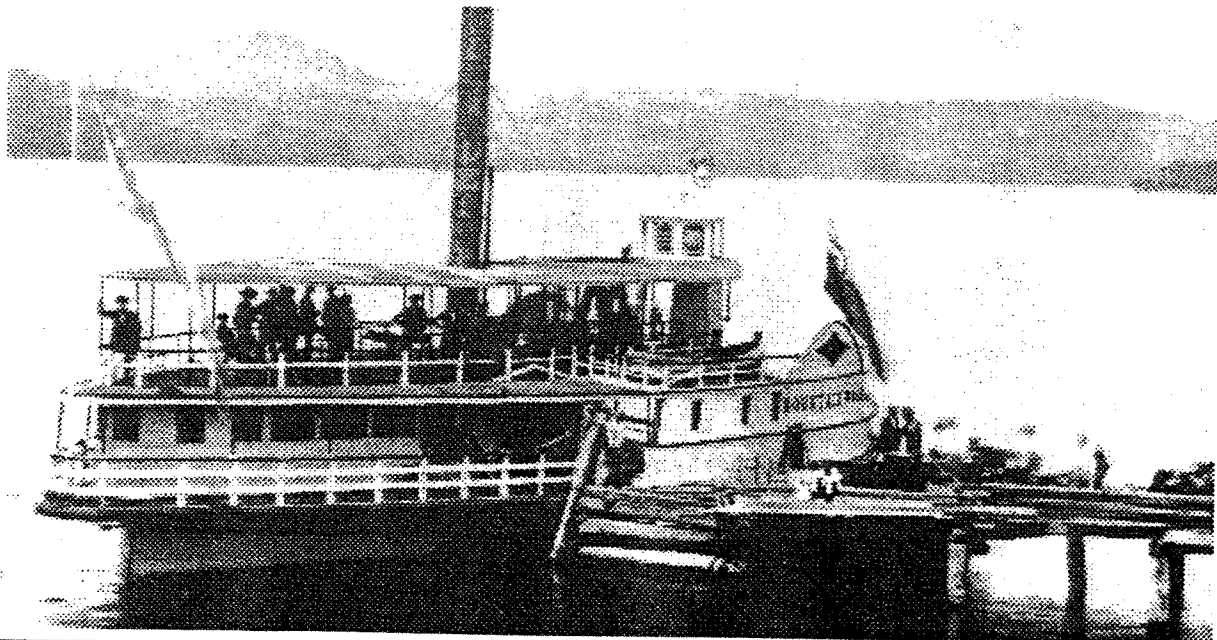
roads, drawn by the opportunity to witness not simply "a novel ceremony," as the notice in the *Stanstead Journal* modestly put it, but nothing less than a wonder of the modern age.

"It seemed," recalled a young villager, Hazen Increase Bullock, "as if the crowd filled the entire basin formed by the surrounding hills, and flowed over the heights in places, so great was the curiosity to see a real steamboat. Possibly many had read or heard of steamers but not a half dozen had seen one, and this opportunity was not to be lost."

Nor did Georgeville fail to make the most of its day in the sun. Let Hazen Increase Bullock's reminiscence set the stage.

"A vacant field between the two lake streets [now the village green] was chosen in which tables were erected with seats running nearly the entire width of the lot and shaded by a profusion of evergreen trees. At the entrance of each street arches trimmed with spruce, fir and cedar were erected, under which admittance was given to the grounds.

"At one side a temporary kitchen was erected of rough boards, containing a cook



stove and all the accessories required in the culinary art, and in which coffee, tea, oysters, roast meats and turkeys were prepared for the hungry guests.”

At 11 a.m., the ceremonies began. Led by the Georgeville Brass Band, a parade of invited dignitaries formed for a march through the village and then threaded its way through one of the archways to the banquet awaiting.

Toasts and speeches

The places of honour were occupied by 30-year-old George Washington Fogg, who had conceived the daunting idea of building the lake's first steam boat in the village [see following story], and his principal partner, Ephriam Cross, a recent arrival from New Hampshire. Sharing the crowd's applause was Orson Spear, the shipwright Fogg had imported from Lake Champlain to supervise the construction of the steamer. After a liberal round of toasts and speeches, “the last tableful had hardly risen from their seats when notice was sent through the crowd to prepare” for the crowning event of the day.

There, decked with bunting and towering high on her ways at the foot of the north side of today's Carré Copp, was the wooden-hulled, paddle-wheel steamer. To Bullock, she was “an object of surpassing beauty.” The *Stanstead Journal* described her simply as “the Boat”, since she was as yet ungraced with a name. But she was, wrote the *Journal*, “said to be a beautiful model of nautical excellence by those who are au fait in such matters.” Her deck measured 115 ft. from stem to stern, her beam 35 ft., her capacity 160 tons. And impressive she was in her early photos, as in the 1862 Notman photo on the previous page.

As George C. Merrill, who grew up in the village and later served as purser and captain of the boat, would write: “The whole of the lake contributed to the steamer. The oak of which the bow and floor timbers were made was taken from the sides of Owl's Head; the engine frame and kelsons of Norway pine from

Indian Point [at Newport]; the white pine fore hull and decks from Magog; the knees and frames of tamarack from swamps near the lake; the rock maple for bottom from hillsides in Potton.”

Finally came the moment for Fogg's wife Sophronia to break a bottle of wine on the bow (Hazen Increase Bullock thought it was she, but wasn't sure). As the *Journal's* correspondent observed, “the Boat took to her ‘native element like a duck’, or to speak more classically, she ‘walked the water like a thing of life.’ The bay was covered with craft of various description, filled with eager spectators, and the shore was lined with applauding witnesses.”

Swarm of skiffs

As Bullock described it, “no wharf of any size being there to obstruct her course, the boat took to the water without the slightest cant and with that portion of the band who had the courage to risk any mishap upon the deck with Capt. Fogg. The band struck up a lively air. The momentum that the vessel acquired carried her nearly a third of the distance to the opposite shore, and a swarm of small skiffs went out and towed her back to her moorings at Georgeville.”

And the name of “the Boat”?

There was much expensive finishing work still to be done on the steamer. This, with a few trial runs, took the rest of the summer and fall. In the interim, Capt. Fogg cannily put the selection of a name up for bids. He advertised that he was open to suggestions and would make the final choice based on their suitability – and the amount of cash that went with them. The publisher of the *Journal*, L.R. Robinson, proposed the *Pioneer*. Some surviving accounts suggest that the steamer was briefly named the *Jenny Lind*, after the popular operatic soprano known as “the Swedish Nightingale.”

But it was as the *Mountain Maid* that she began her first season of scheduled sailings the

following summer – a name finally chosen, it was said, in honour of an attractive young lady in the village who preferred to remain anonymous. Under Capt. Fogg and later other Georgeville skippers, the *Mountain Maid* would play a significant role in transportation of people and goods on the lake over the next forty years.

On the day she was launched, the celebration continued into the wee hours. “As a consequence of the fire water on every hand

that day, the number of drunks was appalling,” Bullock wrote. “and *so thoroughly* drunk they were” – notably Uriah Jewett, an amiable bachelor on the Magoon Point road who was everyone’s uncle, and his brother-in-law Elijah Geer. “Poor Uncle Riah laid under the lee of a board fence where the summer night’s dew fell upon his upturned face till morning, and old Elijah Geer was in his best fighting mood that night, convinced that he could whip all mankind combined.”

George Washington Fogg

THE FUTURE USUALLY RAN A LITTLE LATE FOR THE UNDAUNTED MASTER OF THE *MAID*

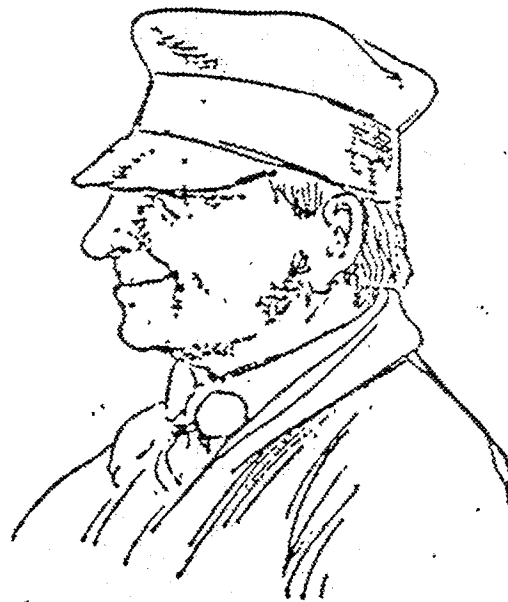
Capt. George Washington Fogg, who enjoyed launching himself into tales of his years on the lake, once conceded to an enquiring reporter from the *Boston Journal*: “Folks joke me by saying that ‘Capt. Fogg’s origin is very misty.’” He was not far wrong.

He was born, probably in 1820, place uncertain, to a “Mr. Fogg”, as the International Genealogical Index unhelpfully puts it. His schoolmates in Georgeville knew for certain only that he arrived in the village from New Hampshire at about the age of ten, and was welcomed into the family of Asa Lillie and his wife Hannah Thayer.

The Lillies lived on the Bullock hill road, in a comfortable cottage below the Boynton house. One of George’s school chums was Titus M. Merriman (whose family name survives in the Merriman shoals two km. north of the village). “George was fond of independent action,” Titus later recalled in the

Newport Express & Standard. “He was expert in feats of horsemanship and athletics, which none but George could do.”

It was perhaps natural, given his way with horses, that George Fogg soon had them walking on water. About 1840 he became the skipper of what his friend Titus Merriman described as “the famous old Georgeville horseboat.” Well, it was not really that old. Propelled by a pair of horses, walking in place on a revolving platform that turned its paddlewheels, the horseboat had been in service since 1829, ferrying travelers and cargo mainly between Georgeville and Knowlton’s Landing.



CAPTAIN FOGG.

Under Fogg’s command, the horseboat expanded its range. He conducted excursions for parties such as the ladies of the Georgeville Sewing Society, and ventured as far as the south end of the lake in search of new



The Fog house on Bullock hill

business. An observer at Newport recalled that, even then, Fogg had the bearing of a seasoned old salt: "I heard him, with his stentorian voice, giving his customary command, 'Trim the boat!,' as if he had been in command of an ocean liner."

His only major setback came in October 1843, described by Lydia Child in a letter from Stanstead to her husband, Marcus, who represented Stanstead County in the Legislative Assembly, "The news came this afternoon that the Horse Boat in Magog Lake sank yesterday," she wrote. "We had the most terrible winds I ever knew." The good news was that "with great exertion, they got [the boat] so near the shore that nothing was left on it and I think it not entirely under water."

By his mid-20s, George Fogg owned the horseboat and was an established figure on the lake. He married 22-year-old Sophronia Lillie and bought a substantial piece of property lower on Bullock Hill, opposite the eventual site of St. George's Church. And, like many others when the first symptoms of railway fever spread through the countryside, he began dreaming of bigger things. Titus Merriman recalled: "Forseeing the development of railroad enterprise in the

country, he turned his attention to meet the coming demand for more transportation facilities on the lake. A large horseboat would be needed, if not two, and even they would not be sufficient. Hence was begotten in the mind of Capt. Fogg the almost incredible idea of a steamboat for Memphremagog lake."

Steamers were coming into their own on busy Lake Champlain, supplementing both sail and horse-power. So it was to Orson Spear, an experienced shipwright in Burlington, Vt.,

that Fogg turned. His letter to Spear dated January 16, 1849, is preserved in the Bailey-Howe archives at the University of Vermont:

GEORGEVILLE

SIR,

I AM INFORMED BY A GENTLEMAN FROM YOUR PLACE THAT YOU ARE A STEAM BOAT BUILDER AND AS THERE HAS BEEN A COMPANY FORMED HERE FOR BUILDING A STEAM BOAT I SHOULD LIKE TO KNOW IF YOU CAN BUILD US A SMALL STEAM BOAT OF NINETY FEET KEEL, AND IF YOU CAN PLEASE LET US KNOW THE LOWEST YOU WILL BUILD IT FOR WITH THE TIMBER FURNISHED ON THE BUILDING GROUND. PLEASE LET US KNOW YOUR TERMS BY THE DAY, AND BY THE JOB. AND IF YOU CAN BUILD SAID BOAT WE WANT YOU TO EITHER COME, OR WRITE BY RETURN OF MAIL. IF YOU CAN NOT BUILD IT WILL YOU PLEASE TO NAME SOME ONE THAT WE CAN OBTAIN FOR THE PURPOSE.

AND BY DOING SO YOU WILL MUCH OBLIGE
YOUR OBT.

GEORGE W. FOGG

P.S. PLEASE DIRECT THE ANSWER TO G.W. FOGG, GEORGEVILLE, STANSTEAD, C.E. VIA DERBY LINE, VT.

Orson Spear accepted the assignment. With Ephriam Cross, a 47-year-old newcomer to the village from Lancaster, N.H., Fogg set about bankrolling the venture. George C. Merrill recalled that as a boy he "spent many long winter evenings an interested listener to the discussions of Capt. Fogg and others on the building and running of a steamboat. A subscription paper was started and residents along the lake as far as Barton, Vt., signed liberally, the whole amounting to over \$4,000." According to Merriman, Fogg travelled to Boston and Montreal in search of investors. The final cost of the steamer was variously estimated at \$8,000 to \$10,000 – well over \$100,000 in today's terms.

Sawed by hand

Construction began during the summer of 1849, mostly from home grown materials. "All of the large timbers and planking were sawed by hand," George Merrill noted, "as there were no power mills that were fitted for sawing long lumber." Fogg ordered the steamer's 21-cylinder low pressure engine from Molsons' St. Mary's Foundry in Montreal – and managed to persuade John Molson, who as a young man had been master of the Molson steamer *Swiftsure* on the St. Lawrence, to invest in the venture. It was said that it took seven teams of oxen three months to haul the engine over make-shift roads to the lake.⁽¹⁾

Following her trials the fall of 1850, Fogg proudly advertised on June 26, 1851, that the *Mountain Maid* was "now fitted up in the finest style," with a beautiful Saloon, State Rooms, Offices, etc." and ready for business. "Every facility will be offered for the

⁽¹⁾ Alexander Molson (1830-1897), who created the Molson estate south of the village in the 1860s, was John Molson's son. The estate remained in the Molson family until the death of Alexander's daughter, Miss Ella, in 1945.

The Georgeville Enterprise

The Enterprise is an occasional publication of the Société d'histoire de Georgeville / Georgeville Historical Society and distributed to its members. Individual membership is \$10 per year and family memberships \$15. The membership year runs from July 1st to June 30th. Communications may be addressed to the Secretary, 184 Chemin Channel, Georgeville, QC, J0B 1T0.

Articles are published in English or French, in the language in of the writer. Your comments and submissions are welcome.

Desktop publishing for this issue of *The Enterprise* by Larry Bernais.

transportation of Merchandise and other effects. Fares will be such as to leave no reasonable grounds for complaint."

If the *Mountain Maid* was ready, the same unfortunately could not be said for customers – at least in the numbers Fogg expected. For at least the steamer's first decade, he suffered the frequent fate of the pioneer, as a man ahead of his time. The trouble was that the Connecticut and Passumpsic Railroad was agonizingly slow to push its railhead north from St. Johnsbury to Newport. Rail service from Montreal to the Outlet (Magog) was even longer in coming. In Titus Merriman's words, "no difficulties so nearly disheartened Capt. Fogg as did the lack of patronage after the steamboat was a fact. The *Mountain Maid* was a little in advance of the age."

Yet Fogg remained undaunted in his promotion of the lake. During the summer of 1851, with James B. Hoyt, who had married Sophronia Lillie's sister Rhoda Ann, he built the first inn at the foot of Owl's Head, the forerunner of the grander Mountain House. The *Stanstead Journal* glowingly reported:

“The view from the summit is said to surpass that from the top of Mount Washington – the city of Montreal being plainly visible with the aid of a glass. Altogether Lake Memphremagog offers the finest inducements to summer excursions. The public are invited to give it a trial.”⁽²⁾

Evergreens and flags

Aboard the *Mountain Maid*, the captain was ever a congenial host, as the *Quebec Morning Chronicle* recorded in its account of a leisurely 1856 trip by a group of sportsmen from Quebec City: “Gaily decorated with evergreens and flags, the boat steamed slowly through Lake Memphremagog while passengers leaning against the rail took shots at birds. The captain would obligingly stop the craft to retrieve the hunters’ take.”

George Fogg finally became a prophet with honour on Oct. 14, 1863, when the first Connecticut and Passumpsic train pulled, in a cloud of steam, into Newport and its lakeside terminal next to the Memphremagog House. “The Cars come to Newport now,” he wrote exultantly to Orson Spear in Burlington, asking the shipwright to come and supervise

⁽²⁾ James Hoyt rather let down the side, according to George Merrill, in an account published in Newport in 1917 under the title *Uriah Jewett and the Sea Serpent of Lake Memphremagog: from notes left by the late George C. Merrill who was purser on the Mountain Maid in Uriah's time*. Merrill recorded that the first inn at Owl's Head burned down in 1854, and was replaced the next year by a larger hotel built by Hoyt and Miles E. Knowlton. Soon after Hoyt was presumed to have drowned when his coat and hat were found in an empty boat on the lake; despite extensive dragging by Fogg and others, a body was never found. According to Merrill, James Hoyt later surfaced alive and well in Minnesota, having left a trail of debts behind him.

needed repairs to the *Maid*. “There is no man that knows her so nice as yourself.” Over the years Spear made several visits to keep the *Maid* in trim.

During the next two decades, Fogg came into his element, a favourite of thousands of visitors to the lake. He was skipper of the *Mountain Maid* until 1868 and then, for fourteen years, master of Hugh Allan's new, iron-hulled *Lady of the Lake*. But the *Maid* retained his greatest affection, and he eventually acquired full ownership of her. In the mid-70s, he and his wife moved from Georgeville to Newport and built a large yellow mansion that still looks down on the harbour from Prospect Hill.

‘Twas mosquitos

In the summer of 1883, the reporter from the *Boston Journal* boarded the *Lady* at Newport. He found the captain, “a dear old gentleman,” as absorbed as ever with the lake's potential for development. Newport? “Bless your heart, sir, I can remember when ‘twas sure death to camp down where Newport is – Pickerel Point, we used to call it. What? Injuns? Not much. ‘Twas mosquitos – they'd eat you up.”

As the *Lady* turned toward the Georgeville wharf, he warmed to a familiar theme: “This is the best part of the lake at this end. Why, man alive, there's so many come here now that you can't get a bed to sleep in at Georgeville, although there's nothing above an average country inn in the place. I wish I could get someone with capital interested in this region. Money in it? Well, I guess there is!”

George Washington Fogg retired the next season and died in Newport on April 2, 1885. Appropriately enough, I.B. Futvoye, the superintendant of the Waterloo & Magog Railway Co. bought the *Mountain Maid* from his widow. The steamer sailed on for another seven years before she was dismantled for scrap at Magog. (JMS)