

Hereford Forest / Viewpoint and Memorial Site 4

Old Hereford Cemetery

Station: Old Hereford Cemetery – Owen’s Road

The first gravestone

The earliest gravestones in Old Hereford Cemetery date from 1852; sadly, they are those of three young children. Ella Haynes Bigelow was the last person to be buried in this cemetery in 1926. The cemetery contains between 30 and 40 graves. The cemetery remains in good condition thanks to financial support from the Tillotson North Country Foundation, based in Dixville Notch, New Hampshire, in accordance with Mr. Neil Tillotson’s wish that the cemetery should continue to be maintained after his death.

Religious diversity on ‘Hereford Hill’

The Old Hereford Cemetery is multi-denominational and is considered a ‘remote cemetery’, that is to say, one not affiliated with any place of worship and generally comprising members of the same community (hamlet, locality, village) or the same family. Several denominations, mainly Protestant, coexisted in the hamlet of Hereford: Episcopalians, Anglicans, Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, Universalists, Adventists, etc. This multi-denominational nature within a single cemetery, which was particularly evident in the first half of the 19th century, seems to be based on three main factors: the low population density, the diversity of religious denominations within a given area, and the relatively limited importance attached by Protestants to religious institutions and their representatives.

The founding families of the hamlets of Hereford Hill and Hall Stream

Entirely English-speaking until the 1860s, the inhabitants of the hamlets were mainly of English, Scottish, Welsh and Irish origin. Most arrived via the United States, primarily from New Hampshire, Maine and Connecticut. Names such as Piermont, Rumney, Claremont, Lisbon and Temple, originating from New Hampshire, recur frequently. A few came from the Eastern Townships, including the townships of Eaton, Hatley and Barnston.

The Farnhams, Workmans, Bigelows¹ s, Andrews, Aldrichs and Judds settled in the 1820s and 1830s. The settlement continued with many other families, including the Rowells, Flanders, Ellis, Howes, Abbotts, Whites, Hibbards and, of course, the Owens.

The founding families purchased land titles as early as the 1800s, cultivated the land and harvested timber. Some residents pursued trades other than farming: teacher, carpenter, cooper, blacksmith, cobbler and innkeeper. It was not until after the 1850s that the region saw the emergence of entrepreneurs operating sawmills and grain mills, despite the local resources: according to the 1874 *Eastern Townships Gazetteer and Directory*, the miller Charles Green was established in the hamlet of Hereford.

1 This name is also found in historical sources spelled without the ‘e’: Biglow.

Settlement

The township was surveyed around 1800, and the southern part was granted by the government of Lower Canada to James Rankin and his associates with a view to developing the area. As settlers had been living on the American side of Coös County (New Hampshire) and in Canaan (Vermont) as early as 1785, some families probably settled in the Hereford area around the same time.

Several residents played a significant role in the history of the Republic of Indian Stream, notably Alexander Rea, who is listed in the 1825 census and is buried in the Compton Cemetery. The Rowell and Flanders families, meanwhile, moved from Indian Stream to Hereford Township, as they had always favoured an affiliation with the territory of Lower Canada: the cemetery contains several graves of the Rowell family, including those of three sons of Wellman (spelled Wilman on his headstone) Rowell and Hannah Flanders.

One of Aaron Workman's daughters, Sarah Knox, died in infancy and is among the first three people buried in Old Hereford Cemetery. Aaron Workman himself is buried in All Saints Cemetery.

The second mayor of Hereford Township was William Ellis, who served from 1862 to 1864 and from 1873 to 1876. He was also a lawyer, a justice of the peace and a commissioner for the Hereford School Trustees. Like his wife Sarah and his daughter Mary, he is buried in the cemetery. His son, William J. Ellis, was also mayor of Hereford Township between 1908 and 1912, as well as in 1917.

The mystery surrounding the two stones found outside the cemetery

William Owen and Dorothy P. Heath are listed as living in the hamlet in the 1851 census. Their son, James Dudley Owen, a farmer, married Miriam Rowell. They had eight children in Hereford Hill, Quebec. James Owen died in 1903 in Stewartstown, New Hampshire.

Two gravestones were found on the nearby embankment, one for Mr. James Dudley Owen and one for Mrs Miriam Rowell. However, at Alice Hunt Cemetery, situated on Route 114 in Canaan, Vermont, there is a single gravestone bearing the same information about the couple. Where were they actually buried? At Old Hereford Cemetery or at Alice Hunt Cemetery, as confirmed by their great-grandson? The mystery remains.

Rumours of diphtheria-contaminated soil

According to the story, some of the people buried there had diphtheria, and the soil was not to be dug up or disturbed, as the virus could spread. When two lilac bushes were planted just a few years ago, they were planted outside the plot in accordance with this information. Nowadays, we know that diphtheria is caused by a bacterium: the infection is usually transmitted via the respiratory tract or, rarely, through contact with items contaminated by the secretions of infected people. The incubation period does not exceed 10 days, and the contagious period rarely lasts more than 4 weeks, whilst chronic carriers – who are very rare – may shed the bacterium for more than 6 months. Given that over a century has passed, the soil at Old Hereford Cemetery is certainly no longer contaminated, but the precaution remains.

But was there really a diphtheria epidemic in the region? According to the Rowell family archives, it is mentioned that the Hilliard family lost all six of their children to diphtheria between 1876 and 1883. In

the early years of the township, censuses did not include causes of death, so the information is difficult to verify.

According to Nancy Dodge: “The 1850s through the 1870s saw severe outbreaks of diphtheria, which produced extremely high death rates among children, with those in the 2 to 5-year-old age group being the most susceptible.” (Extract from *Settlement and Cemeteries in Vermont’s Northeast Kingdom*, 1986, page 5)