

Hereford Forest / Viewpoint and Memorial Site 5

The region's pioneers

Station: Owen Road at the junction with Eliza C. Tillotson Road

The rediscovery of the gravestone

In the early 2000s, a gravestone was found by a walker from Sherbrooke, Mr. Marcel Couture, who thus uncovered a well-kept secret of the residents. Ronald Owen was familiar with this gravestone and was able to provide the name and age of the person buried there—Angelina Abbott—as well as directions to the grave; however, these were too vague to locate it immediately. Thanks to his brother, William ‘Bill’ Owen, the directions obtained were more precise, and the gravestone was eventually found. It was in two pieces. There appears to have been a chain around the grave, as inferred from the presence of four posts. Ronald Owen mentioned that he thought there were other headstones on the land, but that the Hanns, who owned the property from 1918 to 1941, had removed them to expand the meadow.

The Abbott family

The Walter Abbott family is listed in the censuses of 1842 and 1851 on Lot 11, Range 1. The surname Abbott matches Angelina’s perfectly, and the age on the stone corresponds to that in the census; she was 22 years old in 1851. The seven members of the Abbott family were recorded in the 1842 census as having lived in the township for 10 years.

Farming

Farming was part of everyday life for most of the inhabitants of the hamlet of Hereford. Sheep were still found in large numbers on the farms of Hereford Hill, providing wool for spinning and making warm winter clothing. For their part, the Abbots owned 200 acres of land; 170 were under cultivation, including 78 acres of pasture. Like most people in their community, they grew wheat, barley, rye and vegetables. In 1851, they reported having two orchards and producing forty pounds of maple syrup. The farm consisted of ten oxen, six dairy cows, eight calves, two horses, forty-seven sheep and one pig. Their produce also included butter, cheese, and tinned beef and pork.

In the 1861 census, no Abbott family can be found. Walter Abbott sold his plot in 1856 to Lyman Graham of West Stewartstown (New Hampshire). No further trace of the family can be found thereafter.

Teachers in the Abbott family

According to the 1851 census, three children from the Abbott family, including Angelina and one of her brothers, are said to have been teachers. Could they have taught at Andrews School? No records from that period have been preserved, so we can only speculate.

Reference to the fence marking the private cemetery

James Ladd, the father of Zonoaster and James G. Ladd, was among the first settlers in Indian Stream and Hereford Township. His will, dated 1818, sets out the distribution of his estate amongst all his children—six sons and five daughters—but, more importantly, contains instructions regarding his burial. He specified that he wished to be buried in the cemetery near the house, to the north of the graves of his twin babies. This provides further evidence for the theory that there are other graves on the same plot, not far from that of Angelina Abbott. Furthermore, James Ladd added a codicil to his will containing instructions regarding the cemetery fence.

Family burial sites

The pioneer communities in the Eastern Townships followed the American colonial tradition in sparsely populated areas, that is to say, they buried their dead on family land. Several logistical factors explain the adoption of this tradition in the hamlet of Hereford: the absence of religious and civic institutions (it is worth noting that Old Hereford Cemetery dates from 1852, well after the first settlements in the area, and that there was no church until 1864), the long distances to the nearest cemetery, and the harsh climate, which did not facilitate the transport or preservation of bodies (especially as the lying-in-state in the house lasted several days). If the tradition continued after the establishment of the first cemetery, it may be because, for some people, burials on family land also had social significance, in that they served as a way of asserting one's right of ownership. It may also be assumed that some people wished to be buried near loved ones who had died before the cemetery was established, such as James Ladd alongside his twins.

The McPheters and the Wells

Abner McPheters (1852–1907) purchased plot 8C R1 and part of plot 10 R2 (10-E) in 1884, totalling approximately 95 acres. The farm was situated at the junction of Owen Road and Eliza C. Tillotson Road. The family is said to have had one of the finest barns in the region; it was dismantled and rebuilt in the village of East Hereford around 1907, on land belonging to the Westons (the family of Abner McPheters' wife). The barn was destroyed by fire in the 1990s.

Abner McPheters and Mary Jane Weston (1857–1930) had two children, Sanford and Ella. Records indicate that the family spent the summer of 1906 at Hall Stream (now Route 253) and moved to Canaan in December of that same year, probably for the same reasons as many others who left Hereford Township to settle in the United States (access to healthcare and a shared language). Abner and Mary Jane, along with their daughter, are buried at Alice Hunt Cemetery in Canaan, Vermont.

William Wells and Abner McPheters were brothers-in-law. They married Alice and Mary Jane Weston respectively, the daughters of William Weston and Bridget Glen. The first Weston family arrived in Hereford Township in 1818 and settled on Lot 5, Range V, near the present-day rest area and Main Street in the village of East Hereford. The Wells family also arrived early in Hereford Township; Hiram was already living there at the time of the 1825 census. The Wells lived in the vicinity of Chemin des Côtes and Route 253. They gave their name to the stream that runs alongside Chemin des Côtes, which is referred to as 'Wells Stream Road' in several township minutes.

The challenges of settlement

Life was hard in Hereford Township for those settling there: the region is remote from towns, few public services are available, many have no running water, and until the 1940s, the property formerly owned by Thomas-Henry Van Dyke (see previous entry) was the only one in East Hereford to have electricity. Self-sufficiency was a necessity rather than a choice; having a farm enabled people to provide for themselves or, at the very least, to ensure their survival.

As a general rule, farmers kept animals for meat, milk, eggs and wool, as well as for work in the fields, etc. Many farms in the region kept flocks of sheep. The early settlers cleared the land and set aside part of it for their sheep. It is worth noting that they had to clear their land before they could cultivate it, which added to the difficulties. Only after cutting down the trees and removing the stumps could plots of land be put under cultivation or used as pasture for the animals. Several apple trees have been found near the foundations of old houses, which supports the principle of crop diversification to better ensure the family's survival. Acres of vegetable gardens and orchards were, moreover, included in the agricultural censuses.

All these difficulties certainly explain why many residents of Owen Road eventually sold their properties and moved elsewhere, either to the American side – often to Canaan in Vermont – or to the Canadian side, to the villages around the hamlet of Hereford. There were several reasons for these moves: the need for easier access to healthcare, homes with running water and

electricity, public and legal services, or local shops. As mentioned earlier, some people also preferred to leave Canada and Quebec to live in a wholly English-speaking community.