

Hereford Forest / Viewpoint and Memorial Site 6

The birthplace of a great man

Station: Eliza C. Tillotson Road

Site of Neil Tillotson's birthplace

His family's history is unique and spans both sides of the border.

Elizabeth Cowan (also known as Eliza C. Tillotson) was born in Ireland and was Neil Tillotson's grandmother. She possessed a strength of character and a spirit of initiative that were remarkable for her time. It was she who, in 1875, signed the contract to purchase the land on which we now stand. A few months later, she transferred the property to her son-in-law, Stephen P. Goddard; indeed, when signing her marriage contract with Stephen, Elizabeth's daughter, Eva Cora Tillotson, refused to accept joint ownership of property or her future husband's debts, which was highly unusual for the time.

Neil Tillotson's grandfather and Elizabeth's husband, Nathaniel, was a cobbler (although Elizabeth is said to have told her descendants that he had been a crockery pedlar) before the American Civil War. He enlisted in the 8th Vermont Volunteer Regiment in 1861 before deserting in 1864. Elizabeth and one of her sisters became nurses during this period. After the war, Nathaniel moved back and forth frequently between Quebec and the United States: he was struggling to find the best place to settle down. As life with Nathaniel was not easy (he had developed a drinking problem whilst in the army), Elizabeth eventually concluded that divorce would be the best solution. She obtained the divorce in 1895 in Pittsburg, New Hampshire, which, according to several members of the Tillotson family, was probably the first divorce in that town, and then returned to live in East Hereford. Her children pooled their resources and bought back five acres of the land she had sold, and Elizabeth's sons then built her a new house on that plot.

Neil's father, Benjamin, married Achsa Anna Hodge and began building a house in Beecher Falls, Vermont. As she was pregnant, Neil's mother stayed there with her mother-in-law, Elizabeth. As Elizabeth was a midwife, she delivered Achsa's baby. Fortunately, the family kept a record of the child's date of birth; he would not be given a name until he was one or two years old and would end up without a birth certificate (it was his military record that would enable him to obtain a passport). Neil Tillotson was born on 16 December 1898 in Hereford Hill, Quebec, although some sources mention Canaan, Vermont, instead (without a birth certificate, this is impossible to prove). The house where his grandmother lived in East Hereford was moved next to his parents' house in Beecher Falls; it was there that he spent the early years of his life. Overlooking the River Connecticut, the two houses still bear witness to history. The house is said to have been rolled on logs from the meadow site in Beecher Falls along Reservoir Road.

His maternal great-grandparents, David Hodge and Mary Titus, who had settled in Dixville Notch, New Hampshire, came to make their home here in Hereford Township. His grandparents, Gilbert Hodge and Anna Wells, along with other members of the Hodge family, also lived there. Furthermore, Mary Titus was an Abenaki woman adopted by one of the Titus families of Colebrook: Neil Tillotson always spoke with pride of his origins.

The community forest and conservation of the White Mountains nature reserve

The forest has always played a major role in Hereford Township.

The forest is situated in the Appalachian Range and covers most of the mountain massif formed by Mount Hereford, Mount Goblet and Mount Green Goblet. The summit of Mount Hereford, which we can see ahead of us, is the highest at 865 metres, taller than Mount Orford, near Magog, and Mount Sainte-Anne, near Quebec City.

The forestry industry is growing in importance, particularly in the western and eastern parts of the township. It is in these areas that the largest tracts of land and their occupants are concentrated. In 1881, the township's total population stood at 1,498. The Van Dyke family, in particular the brothers George and Thomas-Henry, would go down in history as owners of over 4,000 acres of land. They supplied timber to the Connecticut Valley Lumber Company, of which George was the principal shareholder.

The railway: *Hereford Railway Inc. (1887–1925)*

George Van Dyke, nicknamed the ‘King of the Connecticut River’, played a key role in bringing the railway to the region in 1887: the Hereford Branch Railways. He was the township’s leading landowner. On his death in 1909, he was worth over 10 million dollars. With the arrival of the Hereford Railway Inc., built between 1887 and 1889 and running alongside the Hall River (Hall Stream), farmers and timber merchants were able to sell their produce on the markets of New England. The Hereford Railway runs from Portland in Maine, passing through Beecher Falls and East Hereford, and terminates at Lime Ridge (Dudswell Junction) in the Beauce region, via Paquetteville, Malvina, Auckland and St-Malo. It also connected to two major Canadian networks: the Québec Central Railway at Duswell Junction and the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) at Cookshire, providing access to the major centres of Montréal, Québec City, Sherbrooke and Saint John in New Brunswick.

The trains mainly carried freight: squared birch timber, logs and telegraph poles. There were also consignments of limestone destined for the paper mills in Groveton, NH, and Berlin, NH. During the summer, raspberries were shipped to markets in American cities. These consignments earned the line the nickname ‘Raspberry Branch’.

In 1890, the Hereford Railway network was leased to the Maine Central Railway Company for a period of 99 years. The network ceased operations in 1925.

East Hereford: The Christmas Tree Capital

Today, part of the fields and mountain slopes of Hereford Township is home to over a million balsam fir trees, both in plantations and growing wild. Known as the Christmas tree capital, producers in East Hereford export thousands of trees, wreaths and grave blankets to the New England states every year. Christmas trees from the region (15 metres tall) have delighted visitors at Bryant Park in Manhattan, New York – the city’s largest Christmas market.

This local production accounts for one per cent of Quebec’s total output and has won several Forestry Merit Awards. The open-air interpretation centre, ‘Jardin Sapins et merveilles’, in the heart of the village of East Hereford, offers visitors the chance to learn more about this industry.

The exact origin of ‘grave blankets’ is lost in history. Some suggest they originated in Scandinavia, where families would place conifer branches by graves in winter to add a splash of colour when fresh flowers were unavailable.