

The Impact of Immigration on Art, History and Architecture

Monique Nadeau-Saumier

Volume 14, Number 2, 2008

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/11378ac>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Les Éditions Histoire Québec

ISSN

1201-4710 (print)

1923-2101 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Nadeau-Saumier, M. (2008). The Impact of Immigration on Art, History and Architecture. *Histoire Québec*, 14(2), 34–42.

The Impact of Immigration on Art, History and Architecture

by Monique Nadeau-Saumier,
art historian and heritage consultant

Born in Sherbrooke, Monique Nadeau-Saumier first graduated from Bishop's University, then went on to obtain an M.A. in Art History from Concordia University, an M.A. in Museology from Université de Montréal and a Ph.D. in Art History from UQÀM. She lectured in the Fine Arts Department and, for eight years, was Director of the Eastern Townships Research Centre at Bishop's University. A former Director-Curator of the Colby-Curtis Museum in Stanstead, she is currently a Visiting Fellow of the Gail and Stephen A. Jarislowsky Research Institute in Canadian art at Concordia University.

Main axes of immigration to the Townships

The territory of the Eastern Townships covers some 15,000 square kilometres to the east of the Richelieu Valley, between the St. Lawrence Valley to the north and the American border to the south. During the French Regime, the area was largely untouched, a wild country which served as a buffer zone between New France and the hostile New England colonies. After the British conquest, settlement in the area was strictly forbidden on account of the antagonistic attitude of the new American Republic against Great Britain. This policy was reversed in 1791 when the territory was opened up to settlers and then surveyed in approximately 100-square-mile townships. One seventh of each township was reserved as Crown land and a similar portion for the Clergy. This cadastral division, originating in England and based on freehold common soccage, or tenure, was radically different from the seigniorial system of the lowlands of the St. Lawrence Valley, and is probably the main factor that characterized the identity of the Eastern Townships.

Of the many descriptions of the Eastern Townships, historian Jean-Pierre Kesteman aptly wrote: "this area is an in-between territory, an intermediate country, located through geographical and historical hazards between the valleys of the St. Lawrence and the Connecticut, between the seigniorial stronghold of New France and the New England colonies, between Montreal and Quebec on the one side and Boston and New York on the other."

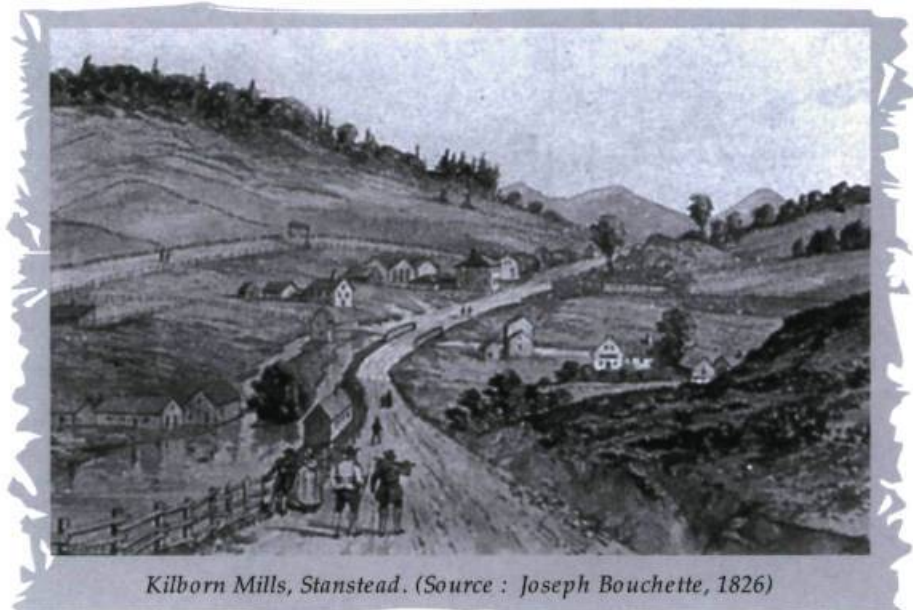
First settlements

Initial settlements in the Townships did not start before 1792,

when British authorities decided in favour of land grants. There are three distinct phases of occupation of the territory. First, the Americans from 1792 to 1845, then, immigrants from the British Isles from 1819 to 1856 and, finally, French Canadians from 1850 to 1920.

The Americans

The Americans were the first to come. Among them, there was a small number of Loyalist refugees but, on the whole, they were mostly people looking for good land to farm and settle. Held back close to the Atlantic shoreline before the Erie canal



Kilborn Mills, Stanstead. (Source : Joseph Bouchette, 1826)

opened the way to the West in 1825, New England settlers were forced to work their way north. Momentarily halted by the War of 1812, American immigration continued until 1845. In his sketch, Bouchette, who was the first surveyor of the townships, wanted to show the presence of prosperous settlements, cleared lands, farms, cattle, mills, solid and convenient homes. The typical American vernacular architecture of the homes scattered on both sides of the road was thus described by him in 1831 : "The Village of Stanstead is built near the province line and consists of 23 houses and 200 souls; the houses are in general neat and substantial, many of them two-stories high and several are built with bricks. The style of building is very different here and throughout the township to what is practised in the seigniorial settlements of the province and borders considerably, if not absolutely, to the American Style as practised in the adjoining state of Vermont."

Vermont being so close, it was easy at the onset for American nationals to set roots in the territory. The towns of Stanstead and Georgeville received the first settlers at the end of the XVIIIth century, soon after the opening of the territory. Johnson Taplin travelled by foot to settle in Stanstead in 1796. Moses Copp came to Georgeville with his family in 1796 by waterway. With Nicholas Austin, his partner from across the lake, Copp planned a ferry operation between the east and west sides of the lake that would eventually be incorporated into a route con-

necting Montreal to the American border. This initiative marked the beginning of navigation on Lake Memphremagog.

The New Englanders who were the first settlers of Stanstead and the adjoining Townships had a good basic education, if not advanced learning. At the onset of the XIXth century, they were the most literate nation in the world. They established and managed their own schools in each Township, taxing themselves for their sustenance, and founded their own academies, such as Stanstead College, in 1817. Churches, schools, cemeteries abound. "One school for every 5 homes" noted Lady Monk, wife of the Governor-General. There were more schools per capita in early XIXth century Stanstead Township than anywhere else in Quebec.

The immigrants from the British Isles

The end of the Napoleonic Wars resulted in a surplus population, made more stringent by the agricultural reforms in Scotland and the famine in Ireland. In 1832, a group of British merchants founded the British American Land Company (BALC) to bring nationals from the British Isles to develop lands in the Townships. Eight hundred thousand acres of land were granted to the BALC by the British Government. Among the newcomers, some 3,000 Irish nationals formed the largest group of immigrants. About 1,000 more followed from both Scotland and England. These figures are not impressive when compared

to the 20,000 Americans already settled in the Townships. Newly arrived in the Townships, the British found themselves in a completely foreign cultural environment, which they had difficulty understanding and accepting.

The French Canadians

The French Canadian immigration to the Townships, thwarted during the first half of the XIXth century by the opposition of the Catholic Clergy, gained strength after 1850 when parishes were created beyond the old seigniorial lands. The first migration phase was mostly in the northern part of the area, the townships of Ely, Roxton, Milton and Richmond. By the end of the century, French Canadians were found just about everywhere, and in 1900, only Brome County could still count a majority of English-speaking residents.

Means of access

The stagecoaches

In 1811, a year after the opening of the Craig Road, the first stagecoach line connected Quebec to Boston. To get to the States, the coaches had to go through the Townships of Richmond, Sherbrooke and Stanstead. Since the roads were practically unfit for travel, traffic was mostly in winter time. A road connecting Stanstead to Georgeville, and then Montreal, was built in 1824.

The railroads

The arrival of the railway in 1853 marked the end of the isolation of the Townships. The rail network, quickly built during the second half of the XIXth century, helped develop a budding tourist industry, notably in Magog and Newport, Vermont, by providing access to Lake Memphremagog and, in North Hatley, to Lake Massawippi.

Many other subsidiary lines crisscrossed the Townships until the second half of the XXth century.

Steamboats and the beginning of the summer resort industry

With its fifty kilometres of navigable waters, from Vermont to the heart of the Townships, Lake Memphremagog has a long history of water travel with boats of every kind. In 1851, the *Moun-*

tain Maid, the first steamboat to navigate in the south of the province, was launched at Georgeville. This was the beginning of a full century of steamer operations on the lake, used mostly to carry resort visitors. During the second half of the XIXth century, seven other steamboats operated on the lake, the most important being the *Lady of the Lake* and the *Anthemis*, both of which offered a regular shuttle between



Lady of the Lake, c. 1887. (Source : Notman Photographic Archives, McCord Museum, Montreal)

Newport, Vermont and the town of Magog during the navigation season, with stops at various docks along both shores.

Then the emblem of the City of Newport in Vermont, the *Lady of*

the Lake cruised Lake Memphremagog for fifty years from its launch in Magog in 1867 until it was put on the stocks in 1917. This large steamer with a steel hull had been built in the shipyards of the River Clyde in

Scotland, then taken apart and shipped to Montreal. It cruised Lake Memphremagog for fifty years, from its launch in Magog in 1867 until it was put on the stocks in 1917.

Artistic Panorama

Embellished throughout its territory by mountains and lakes, the Memphremagog region offers one of the most spectacular topographies of the Townships. The first artist to capture its sublime scenery was William Henry Bartlett (1809-1854). Between 1836 and 1842, this British artist made four trips to Canada and the United States. Bartlett was particularly attracted to the Townships, largely because of its unspoiled and pristine scenery.

This engraving is typical of Bartlett's romantic approach to the Memphremagog landscape, where the topography of the mountains is greatly exaggerated. Largely inspired by Bartlett, but with a more pragmatic rendition of the topography, William S. Hunter (1823-1894), a self-taught artist from Stanstead, published *Eastern Townships Scenery* in 1860, incorporating thirteen views of the region, including the one on this right.

Architecture

The town of Stanstead, where a remarkable display of heritage architecture can be seen, offers several important institutional buildings with marked influence from American, British and French settlers.

Designed in 1939 by the American-born architect Ernest Isbell Barott to replace the main building of Stanstead College, destroyed by fire, this handsome red brick pavilion shows the influence of American colonial



Lake Memphremagog, near Georgeville. (Source : *Canadian Scenery*, London, 1842)



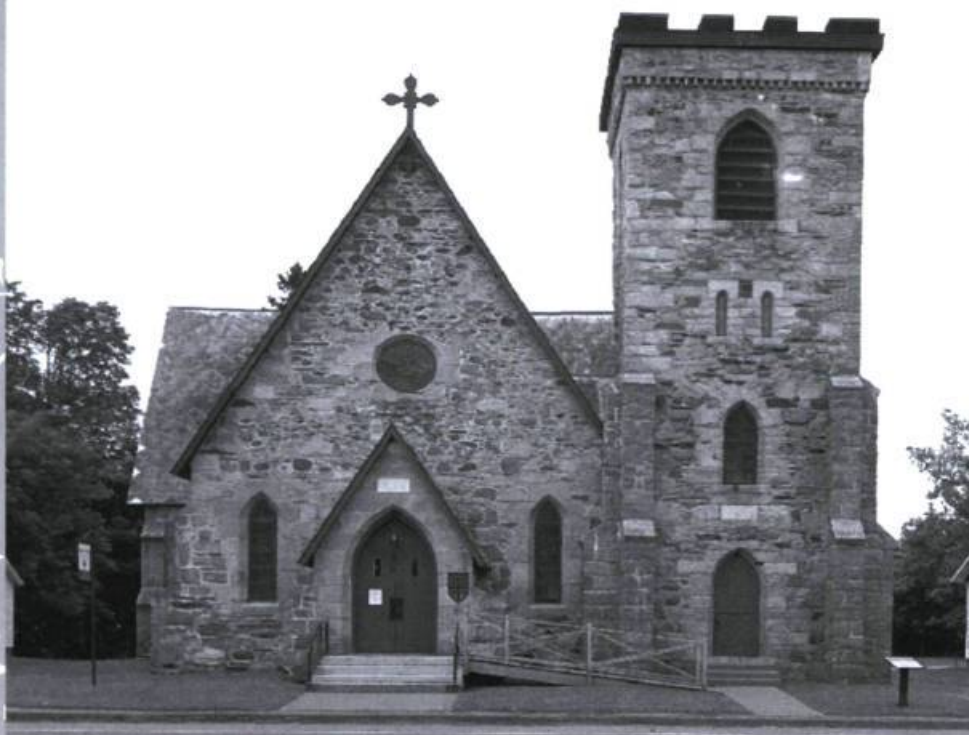
Lake Memphremagog. (Source : *Eastern Townships Scenery*, 1860)

architecture. The symmetrical, rectangular block features three arches at the center of the main façade, with a gable roof pierced by dormers and crowned by a cupola. Set back from Dufferin Road and enhanced by an attrac-

tive green lawn, the main building of Stanstead College evokes the American origin of this important teaching institution, created in 1829 and largely inspired by the New England academies.



Stanstead College, Architect, Ernest Isbell Barott. (Photo : Brian Merrett)



Christ Church, 1858, Stanstead. (Photo : Brian Merrett)

This charming Anglican Church features the architectural vocabulary of XIVth century country churches in England. It is built of fieldstone in the simple English gothic style, as proposed by the Ecclesiological movement, active in mid-XIXth century in Cambridge and Oxford Universities, which favoured a return to gothic architectural forms for Anglican churches in the United Kingdom and English colonies. The neo-gothic characteristics of Stanstead's Christ Church were further enhanced in 1909 by the addition of the crenellated Norman tower.



Couvent des Ursulines, 1884, Stanstead. (Photo : Brian Merrett)



Carrollcroft, 1859. (Photo : Brian Merrett)

Also located in Stanstead, the Ursulines Convent, first erected in 1884, is in the neoclassical style favoured by most catholic convents in Quebec. The original building with its mansard roof recalls the Ursulines long history as the first teaching order in Nouvelle-France. A second wing was erected in 1894 and a third, built in 1907, is featured in the photograph. As the convent's chapel is located in this wing, the roof is adorned with an elegant steeple, a traditional feature in Quebec convent architecture.

The stately granite heritage home of the Colby family, Carrollcroft, today houses the Colby-Curtis Museum. Yet, another building in Stanstead, the picturesque Butters residence, shows the influence of Italianate villas that graced the Hudson River Valley in mid-nineteenth century New York State.

Historical Societies in the Townships

The traditional historical and museum societies of New England have influenced the

foundation of several historical societies in the Townships.

The Missisquoi Historical Society

Founded in 1898 at Stanbridge East, it has operated a museum complex since the early twentieth century. Located in the Cornell Mill, built in 1830 on Pike River, the Missisquoi Museum holds collections of exceptional value, of which many artefacts relate to the first loyalists settlers. The Society also takes pride in an important regional archival collection.

The Brome Historical Society

Established in 1897, it manages a museum complex of five heritage buildings in the town of Knowlton, in which are displayed part of its rich collections, including Amerindian artefacts and objects from the pioneer era. The Society maintains a repository of archives, highly prized by researchers and genealogists.

The Richmond Historical Society

It operates a museum in Melbourne in the summer season. Set in an American vernacular architecture house that was once used as a stagecoach relay, the museum has a garden featuring rare cultivars, salvaged from old time gardens.

The Compton County Historical Society

It operates a charming seasonal museum at Eaton Corner, in an old Congregationalist church dating from 1841, now classified as a heritage building. Open during the summer season, the museum presents artefacts related to the lifestyle of the region's American pioneers.



The Butters Residence, c. 1863, Stanstead. (Photo : Brian Merrett)

Uplands Cultural and Heritage Centre and Lennoxville-Ascot Historical and Museum Society

Both institutions are located in Uplands, a stately neo-Georgian heritage home built in 1862 and set in a quiet wooded area, yet close to Lennoxville's town centre. Visitors to Uplands can enjoy regularly changing exhibitions as well as a variety of traditional arts and crafts workshops. Tea is served in the garden and on the veranda during the summer.

The Stanstead Historical Society and Colby-Curtis Museum

Founded in 1929 to record and publicize the history of the original Stanstead County, the Society has acquired over the

years a large repository of archives and an important collection of artefacts. Since 1992, thanks to the generosity of the late Helen Colby, both museum and archives are housed in a magnificent Victorian residence, built in 1859 by Charles Carroll Colby, and bequeathed to the Society with its entire furnishings, including a significant collection of the Colby family archives.

Regional Identity

Pluralism is at the very root of art and culture in the Townships. Artefacts of varying sources are united in a single place, which in this case is our own region. A new term has been created in English, "Learning Travel", that expresses at

once a desire to know and a will to learn. The Eastern Townships, as we have tried to demonstrate in this article, constitute a splendid place to develop this new form of cultural tourism that seeks to link together the history and the intimate fibres of the cultures that have shaped this country. Here, its memory has been safeguarded by historical societies, by many museums, heritage sites and interpretation centres, by cultural tours and by two universities. These institutions have given us all we needed to create a new route, *Le Chemin des Cantons / The Townships Trail*. Promoted by provincial departments in culture and tourism, this route will position our region as a powerful agent to promote cultural tourism in the province.

Notes

- ¹ BOOTH, J. Derek, *Les Cantons de la Saint-François/ Townships of the St. Francis*, Montreal, M'Cord Museum, McGill University, 1984.
- ² BOUCHETTE, J. A., *Topographical Description of the province of Lower Canada*. London, W. Faden, 1815.
- ³ BROWN, Kathleen H., *Schooling in the Clearings: Stanstead 1800-1850*, Stanstead, Stanstead Historical Society, 2001.
- ⁴ KESTERMAN, Jean-Pierre, « À chacun ses Cantons-de-l'Est : l'évolution d'une entité culturelle », *Journal of Eastern Townships Studies/ Revue d'études des Cantons de l'Est* (Lennoxville) ETRC/CRCE, Bishop's University, n° 15, Fall 1999, p. 69-80.
- ⁵ WAGG, Susan, *Ernest Isbell Barott Architect/ Architect*, Montreal, Centre Canadien d'Architecture/ Canadian Centre for Architecture, 1985.