

## La belle époque de Denison's Mills Denison's Mill's Finest Period

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# La belle époque de Denison's Mills

André Lachance



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Ce n'est qu'à la fin du 18<sup>e</sup> siècle, avec l'arrivée des premiers loyalistes venus des colonies américaines, que le territoire des Cantons de l'Est commença à se peupler. A cette époque, le gouvernement ordonna l'arpentage de ce territoire — qui portait alors le nom de Buckinghamshire — et sa division en cantons (townships) de 108 milles carrés le long des cours d'eau et de 100 milles carrés dans les autres régions. On découpa ainsi 93 cantons. Les Américains, loyalistes ou non, s'établirent de préférence dans les cantons du sud-ouest; les Anglais s'installèrent plutôt dans les cantons du nord.

Là où l'eau était disponible en quantité suffisante, les colons, venus des États-Unis, se groupèrent en petits hameaux de quelques maisons. Ils s'établirent de préférence près d'une chute afin d'en recueillir l'énergie. La confluence de deux rivières était pour eux un endroit de prédilection. Ce sont ces facteurs géographiques qui amenèrent le loyaliste Avery Denison à s'établir, en 1797, dans le canton de Shipton, à la convergence de deux ruisseaux. Il obtint de la Couronne une terre de 5000 acres bornée, au sud, par ce qui s'appellera, en 1811, le Chemin Craig, et s'étendant, vers le nord, sur une distance d'environ deux milles. Il y bâtit une maison en bois de pièces sur pièces et, en 1801, s'y installa avec sa femme Eunice Williams; il s'était marié, l'année précédente. De cette union naquirent deux fils: Simeon Minor et John Williams, et deux filles: Malvina et Eunice. Denison semble avoir pratiqué une agriculture florissante. C'est ainsi qu'il se rendit, à quelques occasions, à Québec pour y vendre les fruits de sa récolte et de son élevage. Le 28 juin 1826, alors qu'il revenait de Québec, il fut attaqué sauvagement et tué aux Trois-Rivières par des voleurs qui s'emparèrent des fruits de la vente de bestiaux.

Simeon Minor, son fils aîné, prit la direction de l'exploitation qui continua à prospérer. Petit à petit, d'autres colons vinrent s'établir sur la terre des Denison. En 1850, Simeon Minor voulut réaliser un des rêves de son père: ériger sur sa terre un moulin à farine pour les cultivateurs des alentours. Commencée la même année, la construction se ter-

mina en 1855. Pour actionner le moulin, il lui fallut de l'eau. A 50 verges en amont du moulin, Simeon Minor construisit donc un barrage avec les pierres ramassées lors du nettoyage du terrain. Il endigua l'eau de deux ruisseaux et créa ainsi un lac artificiel de 80 acres appelé depuis Lac Denison. L'eau du lac était dirigé par un gros tuyau de fer vers la roue à aubes du moulin installée, non pas sur le côté du bâtiment, mais sous l'étage principal.

Puis, peu à peu, construit à un carrefour de chemins, autour du moulin, prit naissance un petit centre de services pour les agriculteurs en majorité anglophones de la région; le hameau de Denison's Mills prenait naissance. Vers la fin du 19<sup>e</sup> siècle, existaient, regroupés dans un rayon d'un huitième de mille autour du moulin à farine, un bureau de poste, un magasin général, une fromagerie, une forge, un moulin à scie, une église et une école.

## Le moulin à farine

Le moulin que Simeon Minor Denison a construit au milieu du siècle dernier et qui a été récemment restauré par la famille Quig est une œuvre splendide. Elle comporte cinq étages, dont deux sont cachés sous l'étage principal. Les murs extérieurs, faits de planches à clins, recouvrent une muraille de briques. Pour soutenir la charpente du moulin, des madriers équarris à la hache traversent obliquement les rangs de briques.

C'est lorsque les chemins commençaient à durcir, à la fin de l'automne, et que l'on pouvait se servir des traîneaux que les cultivateurs des cantons environnants se rendaient au moulin pour faire moudre leur grain. Une activité intense régnait alors au moulin, et l'on pouvait voir le meunier et ses quatre ou cinq employés, tout blancs de farine, s'agiter autour des cuves carrées, meules et blutoir. Pour son travail, le meunier recevait un sac de blé pour chaque dix sacs moulus.

## Le magasin général et le bureau de poste

A deux pas du moulin, au centre du hameau, se trouve une maison de briques rouges construite, en 1865, pour servir de demeure au meunier Joseph Root Denison. Maison de belles proportions, ses

1. Le Moulin à farine Denison, avec petit pont.

2. Le deuxième étage du moulin à farine.

3. Madriers équarris à la hache dans les murs de brique du moulin.

4. Le Moulin Denison.



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5. Maison du meunier (1865).

6. Plancher du moulin en bois de pin. Vieille grange au toit d'ardoise située à l'arrière de la maison du meunier (1865).

7. Vue d'ensemble du moulin à farine et de la chapelle Holy Trinity.

8. La chapelle Holy Trinity.

(Les photographies sont de Réal Hébert)

grandes fenêtres, son toit d'ardoises et sa vaste galerie lui donnent beaucoup de charme. C'est dans l'aile arrière de cette demeure que se trouvaient, à la fin du siècle, le bureau de poste et le magasin général. Le magasin appartenait aux Denison. On y vendait des épices, du thé, du sucre, des biscuits, du fromage, de la farine d'avoine, du pétrole lampant, des fouets, des clous, des vis, etc. De plus, au début du siècle, le meunier Bill Denison offrait en vente les céréales Denison's pour le petit déjeuner, un mélange de blé, seigle et lin.

Ce bâtiment servit aussi, tour à tour, de cordonnerie et d'école.

#### La fromagerie

A côté de la maison de briques, il y a un bâtiment qui, aujourd'hui, ressemble à s'y méprendre à une vieille grange abandonnée et dans le rez-de-chaussée duquel, à la fin du siècle, un certain Jim McCullum fabriquait du fromage, du caillé que, pendant quelques années, il vendit à Halifax, N.-E. Il était rémunéré, à ce moment-là, en partie en poissons avec lesquels il payait ses fournisseurs de lait.

C'est aussi dans ce bâtiment, à l'étage, que se tenaient les assemblées publiques et les fêtes populaires. Les vieux racontent que pendant les années trente, on y projetait des films muets pendant que les chauves-souris voletaient devant l'écran.

#### Le moulin à scie

A quelque trois cents verges en aval du moulin à farine, se trouvait un moulin à scie dont Simeon Minor Denison entreprit la construction en 1858, trois ans après l'érection de son moulin à farine. Pour faire fonctionner les turbines de son moulin à scie Simeon Minor avait élevé en aval du premier, un second barrage d'une vingtaine de pieds. Le moulin et le barrage furent démolis en 1938. Il

ne reste plus aujourd'hui que leurs fondations de pierre.

#### La forge

A la fin du 19<sup>e</sup> siècle, dans un centre de services comme Denison's Mills, situé en milieu agricole, il était normal de trouver une forge. L'agriculteur avait souvent recours au forgeron pour ferer ses chevaux, réparer ses charrues, ses voitures et ses outils. Construite, en 1861, à quelques centaines de pas du moulin à farine, la forge fut démolie en 1940.

#### L'école

A environ six cents verges du moulin à farine, se trouvait l'école. En y entrant, les enfants pouvaient lire, gravée dans la pierre d'une des marches, l'inscription *House of Knowledge*. Dans une salle commune, chauffée par un poêle à bois, on apprenait les rudiments de la lecture, de l'écriture et de l'arithmétique. Bâtie en 1875, il ne reste plus aujourd'hui de cette école que les fondations.

#### L'église

Au sommet de la colline, dominant les deux moulins, la maison de brique, la fromagerie, la forge et l'école, il y a l'église anglicane Holy Trinity. Centre de l'activité religieuse de Denison's Mills, dont la majorité de la population était protestante, la chapelle fut construite en 1875. En plus de s'y réunir au moins une fois par mois pour le service religieux, les événements importants de la vie des habitants de Denison's Mills, tels que les baptêmes, mariages, sépultures et les fêtes des semences et de la moisson (Thanksgiving Day) y étaient célébrés.

Bâtiement aux lignes simples, la chapelle a belle allure et constitue, encore aujourd'hui, un des éléments les plus attachants du hameau.

#### La maison de pierre des Denison

Enfin, à un huitième de mille environ du moulin à farine, se dresse la maison de pierre des Denison. Construite, en 1831, par Simeon Minor, elle a toujours été, depuis ce temps, la demeure des Denison, grands propriétaires terriens. C'est là aussi, à l'arrière de la maison, dans la grande cuisine d'été, que l'on servait les repas de la trentaine de personnes que les Denison engageaient au temps des moissons. De plus, entre 1860 et 1872, le grenier de cette demeure tint lieu d'école.

Fort bien conservée, cette maison, avec ses murs de trois pieds d'épaisseur, a l'allure d'une forteresse.

Le hameau de Denison's Mills, témoin à sa façon d'une page importante de notre histoire, mérite que ses principaux éléments constitutifs soient conservés. Il illustre d'une manière vivante l'esprit d'entreprise, le dur labeur et la volonté de faire souche dans le sol québécois des premiers colons loyalistes qui vinrent s'établir dans les Cantons de l'Est. La sauvegarde de cette partie de notre patrimoine est importante; elle demande une action gouvernementale immédiate.

Price, with her book, *Legends of the Lakes* of 1923, would fix the legends that had flourished there for more than a century.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Brome and Massawippi were popular with artists such as Nora F. E. Collyer of Foster, Henrietta Mabel May of Montreal and Prudence Heward of Knowlton.

One of the most productive and most representative indigenous artists of this period is undoubtedly Aaron Allan Edson, born at Stanbridge in 1846. After an apprenticeship in painting in Montreal and Paris, he devoted a large part of his pictorial production to representing the natural beauties of the Memphremagog and Orford regions, of course, but particularly those of his native soil on the banks of the Missisquoi River and, finally, those of the area around Glen Sutton, until his premature death in 1888.

Essentially the works of a landscapist, his oil paintings and water-colours are testimony of Edson's intense interior life, sometimes serene, sometimes tumultuous; it is expressed by plays of light no doubt borrowed at the same time from contemporary French artists and from the English Turner. Obtained by means of a wide range of colours, in which the complementary ones are juxtaposed, his colours are often contained at the interior of minute outlines. It happens that the contours blur, and this occurs in the same composition, as if Edson were adding the contrast of pure tones to that of forms.

George J. Bompas, born in England, settled in Bury in 1860. His views of Sherbrooke, Bury and Garthby, in paint and pencil, were engraved and published in the *Canadian Illustrated News* of 1870-1872. Bompas moved to Sherbrooke in 1884 and died there in 1889, leaving two daughters who inherited his talents: one would be a music teacher and the other a painter. At Sherbrooke, the Dominion Exhibition of 1886 showed several of his works in oil and his pencil sketches; it also exhibited some still-lives by his daughter, Rosa.

Like the Royal Academy of London, the Canadian one turned the railroads to account to send exhibitions travelling across the principal centres of the newly confederated country; alternatively, there were those Dominion Exhibitions at Halifax, Montreal, Quebec and Sherbrooke. The last city was host to a second exhibition in 1907, in which artists from Toronto and Montreal participated and to which there seemed to be added to the catalogued works those of a certain Robert N. Hudpeth of Lennoxville, a teacher at Bishop's University, as were his predecessor, G. J. Bompas and his successor, also a painter, Rank O. Call.

Sherbrooke, a city of 9,000 inhabitants, had its art gallery early, accompanied by a library and a museum of natural history, whose founder was Samuel F. Morey, an inspector with the Eastern Township Bank. In 1882, a building, Wellington Square, was specially conceived to house this *cultural centre* with three branches. There was Morey's Art and Library Building, whose ground floor was a lecture hall where periodicals were to be found for reference: pictures and display cases containing stuffed birds decorated this room. Adjoining, the shelves of the Library held some three thousand volumes, and another room exhibited mineralogical specimens of the region. The first and second floors were devoted to the art gallery, which, in 1892, offered to the public some fifty pictures and water-colours, of which the *Library and Art Union* was part owner; in case of need, the first floor could be changed into a hall for lectures or performances with four hundred moveable seats; for the last floor, Morey provided a glass ceiling that assured the maximum light for this second level of the art gallery. From 1910, this building passed gradually into the hands of the francophone daily *La Tribune*.

Morey built a collection of undeniable value and showed great insight. In 1900 this collection comprised in very great part Canadian works of reputation such as *Mount Orford* by J. A. Fraser and works already appreciated by him at the beginning of the century, like *Twilight* by J. W. Morrice; many landscapes belonged, by the nature of their subjects, to the region, and the gallery hung works of fine local artists, such as *Fish* by W. S. Hunter, *Autumn Road* by Georges Chavignaud, a landscape by Mary Gill of Lennoxville, pencil drawings by G. J. Bompas of Sherbrooke, early discovered pencil works by F. S. Coburn of Richmond-Melbourne and even a collection of photographs of Sherbrooke buildings chosen for their architectural quality.

Born in Pierreville, Mary Gill settled in Lennoxville, from where she commuted to La Malbaie; there she worked with Charles Eugene Moss. Her canvases of the first two decades of the twentieth century drew their inspiration chiefly from these two places; her talent was recognized by the Sherbrooke milieu as much as by the Art Association of Montreal.

The French aquarellist, Georges Chavignaud, lived for some years in Sherbrooke, opened a studio about 1894 on Montreal St. and produced watercolours of lyrical content.

Granby was the birthplace of Palmer Cox, who attained fame in the United States with the characters in his *Brownies* comic strip; as Coaticook was that of muralist Frederick Lincoln Stoddard, who also became known in the same country.

Pictorial art, like the piano, was more and more available to the public through the existence of drawing and painting courses; besides Mont Notre-Dame, which had been offering courses right through its long history, private schools early were established. Miss S. C. Draper had a studio on Wellington St. from 1892 to 1905, and later, from 1908 to 1930, Marie Sagalla offered the same service on Gillespie St. The city of Waterloo had an Amateur Art Association in 1886, where two professors, Randall and Baldwin, taught drawing from nature.

In addition, citizens of Sherbrooke could have their portraits made in charcoal or pastels by J.-A. Montmigny until Nakash stole the limelight from him around 1920 with his artistic photography studio.

Sculpture also had the freedom of the city at Sherbrooke, if we consider Louis Jobin's works that overhung the town from the roof of the Seminary; George Hill's monuments to the dead at Magog and Sherbrooke, which do not do justice to the artist who reveals himself more in the splendid fountain at Mitchell Park in Sherbrooke, for which Alfred Laliberté from Warwick competed. Dom Bellot recognized the talent of Montrealer Sylvia Daoust and commissioned a statue of St. Benoît for the Saint-Benoît-du-Lac Abbey; the same artist produced a statue directly hewn in wood for the cathedral at Sherbrooke.

The ornamentation of churches and public buildings also constitutes an important page in the artistic events of the region. Some businessmen even specialized in this field, such as Frederick Barrington of Waterloo, at the beginning of the century. They often called upon artists from outside; Joseph-T. Rousseau of Beauce finished the decoration of Saint-Lucien de Drummondville; Joseph-Adolphe Rho executed a scenic décor for the Sherbrooke Seminary in 1916 and, notably, Ozias Leduc of Saint-Hilaire, after his apprenticeship with the latter, created in 1919 three cartoons for the windows of the apse of the Pauline chapel, the present ground floor of the Sherbrooke cathedral; it was in 1922 that Ozias Leduc began the decoration of the chapel at the bishop's palace. For more than a year, assisted by his young fellow-citizen Paul-Émile Borduas, Leduc stencilled the decorative motifs at the chapel, where the tones of blue and ochre on the clustered pillars and the ribs of the vault recreate, as the artist said himself, the décor of the Sainte-Chapelle in Paris. In the same period, Raoul Barbin undertook the decoration of the baptistry of the Pauline chapel.

The decoration of the chapel at the bishop's palace was completed by Leduc in 1931-1932 by the placing of four large fixed canvases on the side walls and the execution of a mural painting in the apse of the chapel. This work is justly considered one of his greatest religious creations. Leduc also painted the portraits of Mgr. Gagnon and Sir John Coape Sherbrooke, the latter from Robert Field's drawings.

Dom Paul Bellot's stay also marked the region, as much by works like the decoration of the Seminary's crypt as by some moving landscapes of the area that he immortalized on his canvases and by the influence he exerted on the conception of Saint-Benoît-du-Lac Abbey. The site chosen for this building had, almost imperatively, to be on the shores of Lake Memphremagog . . .

(Translation by Mildred Grand)

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## DENISON'S MILLS' FINEST PERIOD

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By André LACHANCE

It was only at the end of the 18th century, with the arrival of the first Loyalists from the American colonies, that the territory of the Eastern Townships began to be populated. At this time the government ordered the surveying of the area — which was called Buckinghamshire then — and its division into townships 108 square miles along the water-courses and 100 square miles in the other regions. In this way ninety-three townships were created. The Americans, Loyalists or not, preferred to settle in the townships of the south-west; the English settled rather in those of the north.

The settlers from the United States gathered where water was available in sufficient supply, in small hamlets of a few houses. They preferred to settle near falls in order to make use of their energy. For the Loyalists, the junction of two rivers was a favourite location. These were the geographical factors that influenced Loyalist Avery Denison to move in 1797 to the township of Shipton, at the meeting of two springs. From the Crown he obtained an expanse of 5,000 acres bordered on the south by what would be called Craig Road in 1811 and extending toward the north for about two miles. There he built a house of squared logs and in 1801 he settled in it with his wife, Eunice Williams, whom he had married the year before. Two sons were born to them, Simeon Minor and John Williams; and two daughters, Malvina and Eunice. Denison seems to have had a prosperous farm. And so he went on some occasions to Quebec to sell his produce and his animals. On June 28, 1826, as he was returning from Quebec, he was savagely attacked and killed at Three Rivers by thieves who seized the money he had received for his stock.

His older son, Simeon Minor, assumed the management of the farm, which continued to prosper. Gradually, other colonists settled on the Denisons' land. In 1850, Simeon Minor wanted to make one of his father's dreams come true: to build on his land a flour mill for the farmers of the area. Begun that same year, the construction was completed in 1855. To run the mill, water was needed. Fifty yards above the mill Simeon Minor built a dam with the stones gathered at the time of the clearing of the land. He dammed the water of the two springs and in this way created an 80-acre artificial lake later called Denison Lake. The water of the lake was directed by a big iron pipe toward the paddle-wheels of the mill, installed not on the side of the building but under the main floor.

Then, little by little, around the mill, built at a cross-road, arose a small service centre for the mostly anglophone farmers of the district; Denison's Mills hamlet was born. Toward the end of the 19th century there existed, grouped in a radius of an eighth of a mile around the flour mill, a post office, a general store, a cheese factory, a smithy, a sawmill, a church and a school.

#### **The Flour Mill**

The mill that Simeon Minor built in the middle of the last century and that was recently restored by the Quig family is a splendid piece of work. It comprises five stories, two of which are hidden under the main floor. The exterior walls made of lap-jointed planks cover a brick wall. To support the mill's framework, beams squared by the axe cross the rows of bricks slantwise.

It was at the time when the roads began to harden at the end of autumn and they could use their sleighs that the farmers of the surrounding townships came to the mill to have their grain ground. Then intense activity reigned at the mill, and the miller and his four or five employees could be seen, all white with flour, busy around the square vats, the millstones and the bolting-machine. For his work the miller received one sack of wheat for each ten sacks milled.

#### **The General Store and the Post Office**

Two steps from the mill, at the centre of the hamlet, stood a red brick house built in 1865 as the home of miller Joseph Root Denison. A house of lovely proportions, its large windows, its slate roof and its huge gallery lend it great charm. It was in the back wing of this dwelling that the post office and general store were located at the end of the century. The store belonged to the Denisons. In it they sold spices, tea, sugar, biscuits, cheese, oatmeal flour, lamp oil, whips, nails, screws, etc. Further, at the beginning of the century, miller Bill Denison offered for sale Denison's breakfast cereals, a mixture of wheat, rye and flax. In turn, this building was also used as a shoemaker's shop and a school.

#### **The Cheese Factory**

Beside the brick house there is a building which to-day unmistakably resembles an old abandoned barn and on the ground floor of which, at the end of the century, a certain Jim McCullum manufactured cheese, cottage cheese, that for a few years he sold in Halifax, N.S. At that time, he received payment in part in fish, with which he paid his milk suppliers.

It was also in this building, on the first floor, that public meetings and celebrations were held. Old people tell that during the thirties silent films were shown as the bats fluttered in front of the screen.

#### **The Sawmill**

Some three hundred yards downstream from the flour mill there was a sawmill whose construction Simeon Minor undertook in 1858, three years after the erection of his flour mill. To work the turbines of his sawmill, Simeon Minor had built a second dam of about twenty feet, downstream from the first one. The mill and the dam were demolished in 1938. All that remains to-day is their stone foundations.

#### **The Smithy**

At the end of the 19th century, it was usual to find a smithy in a service centre like Denison's Mills, situated in an agricultural area. The farmer often needed the blacksmith to shoe his horses and to repair his ploughs, wagons and tools. Built in 1861 some hundreds of steps from the flour mill, the blacksmith's shop was demolished in 1940.

#### **The School**

The school was situated about six hundred yards from the flour mill. As they entered, the children could read, engraved in the stone of one of the steps, the inscription *House of Knowledge*. In a common room heated by a wood stove, they learned the rudiments of reading, writing, and arithmetic. Built in 1875, nothing remains to-day of this school but the foundation.

#### **The Church**

At the summit of the hill, overlooking the two mills, the brick house, the cheese factory, the smithy and the school, is Holy Trinity, the Anglican church. The centre of religious activity in Denison's Mills, the majority of whose population was Protestant, the chapel was built in 1875. The church was the place where the people met at least once a month for religious services; and important events in the lives of the inhabitants of Denison's Mills, such as baptisms, marriages, funerals, spring festivals and Thanksgiving Day, were celebrated there.

A building with simple lines, the Holy Trinity church has a beautiful appearance and to this day is one of the most attractive elements of the village.

#### **The Denisons' Stone House**

Finally, at about an eighth of a mile from the flour mill, rises the Denison's stone house. Built in 1831 by Simeon Minor, it has always been the home of the Denisons, big landowners. It was there too, in the large summer kitchen at the back of the house, that were served the meals for the some thirty persons whom the Denisons employed during harvesting. Furthermore, between 1860 and 1872, the attic of this home was used as a school. This very well preserved house, with its walls three feet thick, has the appearance of a fortress.

The village of Denison's Mills, a witness in its way of an important page of our history, deserves that its chief constituent elements should be preserved. It illustrates vividly the enterprising spirit, the hard work and the will to take root in the Quebec soil of the first Loyalist colonists who came to settle in the Eastern Townships. The safeguarding of this part of our heritage is important; it demands immediate government action.

(Translation by Mildred Grand)

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## **ARTISTIC LIFE AND INSTITUTIONS**

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By Luce COUTURE-LALIBERTE

In the Eastern Townships region, artistic and crafts activity is developing to a level of perfection comparable to that of Montreal. Although somewhat distant from that city, Sherbrooke, the capital of the Eastern Townships, attracts artists and craftsmen anxious to be in close contact with magnificent nature. They draw inspiration from the environment, they revolve around it to discover a scope that is not confined to regional attraction.

Nor do the institutions, direct agents of the life of the arts, restrict their aims only to regional possibilities. They extend their objectives a little further by collaborations, exchanges, new approaches and constant restructuring, in order to satisfy the demands of the public on the one hand and of artists and craftsmen on the other.

In turn we shall examine the sites of art life in the Eastern Townships; those, at least, that are enjoying a regional development and, besides, we shall discuss two groups of craftsmen in full expansion which are being integrated more and more into the milieu.

#### **The Seminary Museum**

Established on the three floors of the Sherbrooke Seminary's central tower, the Museum displays to the public impressive collections of mineralogy, ornithology and anthropology as well as others. There we can find unusual articles, such as a sword of Dr. Wolfred Nelson, a patriot of 1837, and a cane that belonged to Louis Riel.