Meigs' Corner

The Ghost Hamlet of Potton

By Sandra Jewett

Beneath those rugged elms, that yew-tree's shade,
Where heaves the turf in many a mould'ring heap,
Each in his narrow cell forever laid,
The rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep.

Thomas Gray
Elegy written in a Country Churchyard

June 17, 2012 was a significant date in Potton's history, but certainly not because that was the day I was privileged to give a short talk at the Chapel Hill Cemetery. I had chosen to speak about our earliest settlers and Meigs' Corner!

Few could ever know why I will long remember June 17, 2012, much less my utter amazement that the day coincided exactly with the 215th anniversary of the day that the Moses Elkins family set foot in Potton to stay, arguably the first settler to Potton. Serendipity, to say the least! Had I not been so deeply engrossed in research for *Place Names of Potton*, the coincidence would have been completely unnoticed.

The project of translating the *Répertoire toponymique de Potton,* and enriching its depth with further historical fact, had taken on a life of its own, so very appealing that I had quite happily steeped myself in local history. Meigs' Corner was a bit troubling to me, for I didn't really know where it could have been, knew little about the place and, worse yet, could find no-one with the least inkling of what, or where, I was talking about. But the Elkins family were like old friends to me! Much

has been written about them in the annals of Potton history…

Research was definitely in order. Surprisingly, quite a bit has been recorded about our little corner of the world, particularly in the context of its early days. The gold standard of books, in that respect, is that by Cyrus Thomas, born in 1836 virtually next door in Abercorn, who wrote *Contributions to the History of the Eastern Townships… a work containing an account of the early settlement of St. Armand, Dunham, Sutton, Brome, Potton, and Bolton; with a history of the principal events that have transpired in each of these townships up to the present time.* His book was published in 1866. Of the 33 pages that Thomas devotes to Potton, ten provide detail of a settlement called Meigs' Corner. This alone was curious. How is it that I, born here, had never heard of the place except through the Heritage Association?

I then embarked on a mission to learn about this ghost hamlet – this mysterious place that time has forgotten. At first, I suspected that Meigs' Corner would probably have been near the Chapel Hill Cemetery, given that so many names mentioned by Thomas were buried there.

What follows is the substance of what I intended to say, albeit expanded. If memory serves, I believe I wandered substantially from my original plan, and herein beg your indulgence to present the facts in a more comprehensible form!

Friday the 13th of April 2012, was a cool and sunny spring day, and was the first time I had ever visited the Chapel Hill Cemetery, much less looked for Meigs' Corner. There was not a leaf on the trees – only the breeze, the sun, the birds and me. It was early morning. I carried a notebook and camera, and slipped into this field of peace to photograph old gravestones which told me plainly where the

pioneers have gone, but I found no trace of Meigs' Corner that I believed to be close by.

Chapel Hill Cemetery

The last pictures I took were of the mountains before me with beautiful fields in the foreground – still quite brown, warming in the early spring sun. Before me lay Highwater, the border, and distant mountains; Owl's Head was to my left – and on her flanks, Leadville and Province Hill, little places where settlements once thrived and time has forgotten. I tried to visualize that same panorama in the days *"when green dark forests were too silent to be real"* – to borrow a line from Lightfoot! The perspective gave me a sense of how small Potton really is, geographically speaking; and yet, I thought, how comfortably it holds the history of so many.

In 1869 Mrs. C. M. Day published *History of the Eastern Townships,* a book so full of history that surely it was years in the writing. She tells us *"that up until the year 1791, unless along the immediate frontier of the province, the part known as the Eastern Townships was an almost unbroken wilderness"*, and *"No settlement was made in Brome County prior to 1793…"* (Taylor)

Potton is one of the townships forming the original County of Brome. The Townships of Sutton, Brome, Bolton and Farnham were the others. In 1793 however, Potton was included in the County of Richelieu. It was only in 1855 that the County of Brome was formed from parts of Stanstead, Shefford and Missisquoi counties.

In the latter half of the 1700's, North America was embroiled in years of conflict: the Seven Years War, or 'the French and Indian conflict', as Americans refer to it. Endless struggles see-sawed between France and Britain over the control of this huge continent, ending in 1760, when the possession of Canada and its adjacent territories was confirmed to Britain by the Treaty of Paris, signed in 1763. Or so it was thought.

"While laws, enacted in 1774…, tended to reconcile the Canadians to British domination," insofar as the colonies to our south were concerned, those changes were *"extremely unpalatable and offensive to the newly conquered subjects; which repugnance was openly manifested. There were now unmistakeable signs of the American Revolution looming up in the distance."* (Day)

And sure enough, from 1775 to 1783, the Revolutionary War, also called the War of Independence, seethed with fervour between

Britain and the 'Thirteen Colonies' to our south, – a fervour that only fury and desire for self-determination can inspire. Such was their zeal that our rebellious neighbours even made a futile attempt to invade and retake Canada! The famous Declaration of Independence was signed in 1776 and, when the dust had settled, the Treaty of Versailles was signed September 3rd, 1783 to confirm the new nation's complete separation from the British Empire. A major demographic shift ensued with Great Britain losing an estimated 2.5 million subjects. (Estimated, because the first United States Census was taken only in 1790.)

The die was then cast for those who had supported the British in the United States. "*In March* (1784), *230 souls in forty-eight families from Claremont, New Hampshire, petitioned to be allowed to settle in their 'Royal Master's Dominion' between Lake Memphremagog and the Connecticut River because they were 'overburdened with Usurpation, Tyranee, and Oppression'* (sic)*."* (Epps)

Ruthlessly and relentlessly persecuted during the war, their assets confiscated, British supporters found themselves living an untenable reality by the end of the conflict. These were the Loyalists, left with little choice but to flee to Canada, to other British colonies or to return to Britain. Their numbers were significant – and their ultimate settlement in Canada represented both problems and opportunity. Over 100,000 left the Thirteen Colonies; and, in 1783, some 8,000 of these sought refuge in Lower Canada. (http://www.slmc.uottawa.ca/?q=treaty_versailles)

The Constitutional Act of 1791 established what is now southern Ontario, as Upper Canada and decreed what is now southern Quebec, as Lower Canada, the names being assigned according to location on the St. Lawrence River. The administration

shunted many Loyalists to Upper Canada and about 38,000 to the colony of Nova Scotia, which, prior to 1784, included the territory of what is now New Brunswick and the island of Cape Breton, all part of what are now the Maritime Provinces.

To many however, the wilderness north of the 45th parallel in Quebec represented a solution with enormous potential; this in spite of the fact that Quebec was overwhelmingly French speaking, with an estimated population of 113,000. Claims for compensation and requests for resettlement soared, while the British administration dithered over whom to award land grants and settlement privileges.

From 1768 to 1791, the administration of Quebec was predominantly in the hands of former British army officers: notably Sir Guy Carleton, an Irish born career soldier, who had commanded a battalion of Royal Americans on the Plains of Abraham and was twice the Governor of Quebec. Through long experience, he "*understood that the British system of hierarchical society would not take root in the New World where all men faced the same struggle".* (Epps) In 1778 Carleton was succeeded by General Frederick Haldimand, Swiss born and another career soldier, who had a deep distrust of the 'Sons of Liberty' to our south. Thus, for different reasons, both Carleton and Haldimand favoured the settlement by the Quebec habitant family – judging that the cultural differences of language and religion would provide an effective barrier from the advance of ambitious Yankees. Neither prevailed.

When in 1791 Guy Carleton, again Governor of Quebec, was named Baron of Dorchester (Lord Dorchester), he returned to Britain to take his seat in the House of Lords; he was replaced by General Alured Clarke, another former British officer who spoke no French, and then Lieutenant Governor of colonial Quebec. Clarke

remained in office for only four months. He then became responsible for putting into effect the instructions of King George III, inviting all his loyal subjects in the rebellious colonies to make this part of America their home! On February 7, 1792, the proclamation was made, the conditions laid out, and the whole widely published in the newly minted United States, in addition to Quebec's Official Gazette.

Lower Canada (Quebec), along the St. Lawrence River and to both sides of the Richelieu, was already well populated under the seigneurial system of New France. Under British rule, however, crown lands would be opened for settlement, employing the British system of townships, wherein each parcel was measured out at increments of roughly ten miles square (100 square miles). The word township stems from the Anglo-Saxon *tun* meaning an 'enclosure or farmstead' – or, that part of a wilderness fenced off around a settlement.

Here, I quote Bernard Epps:

"*The purpose of a 'township' can be best explained by the Anglo-Saxon 'hundreds'… They grouped together a hundred 'hides', a 'hide' being the amount of land required to support one family and hence, one warrior. Its size consequently varied with the fertility of the soil, but was generally about 120 acres in England and Ireland. Each 'hundred' could therefore, in time of need, produce one hundred warriors, the classic division of the Roman army.*"

"*A township in the new world would consequently provide a living for a number of families grouped together for mutual aid and protection. Ideally, each township would have a village in its geographic center so that no settler was more than five miles (walking distance) from mill, store, church or town hall. Since mills had necessarily to be sited on* sufficient water power, they were seldom in the geographic center of the township, but even today, a great many Eastern Townships towns and villages remain approximately ten miles apart.*"

Epps writes that "*Within a year of Clarke's Proclamation, some 150 townships covering three million acres had been warranted for survey… Six years after the Proclamation, only five grants had been completed.*" Part of the great delay was that "*In 1792 there were but sixteen surveyors recognized in the whole country or Province, and there were eleven more in the woods, learning the business.*" (Taylor)

No matter the administrative dallying and efforts to keep the territory along the border as an unpopulated buffer, settlers known as 'squatters' percolated ever further north into our region. With the exception of Henry Ruiter, a bona fide Loyalist, it does not appear our earliest settlers had Loyalist tendencies. Quite the contrary. Most, if not all, had served the American side during the Revolution, and all were from south of the border! According to the website mentioned above, there were only about 1,500 actual 'Loyalists' who settled in the Eastern Townships.

So, why did they come here? Probably a combination of ambition, industry, taxation, the possibility of cheap land, maybe for peace, and some even for reasons best buried in oblivion! Most were essentially squatters, many of whom were obliged to settle with Henry Ruiter before their ownership of land could be squared away!

So who were they, these first settlers to Potton?

Though many would disagree, I see a certain legitimacy in claiming **Nicholas Austin**, as our first settler that history records in Potton

(1791-92). He had cleared some 54 acres near Perkins Landing on Lake Memphremagog, built a cabin and seemed prepared to make this place his home. That he *chose* to move on from Potton to Bolton in December of 1793, when his land claims in Potton were disallowed, does not remove from him the distinction.

That being said, it was undeniably the south part of our Township that was settled first.

And, according to Cyrus Thomas, Potton's first settler was Moses **Elkins** and family on June 17, 1797. He puts Peter Perkins here "*as early as 1806*". This is contradicted by E.M. Taylor in Volume II of *History of Brome County Quebec*, published in 1937*,* whereby the genealogical notes of the Perkins family tell us that it was in the summer of 1793 that Peter II, wife Anna Ames and two sons, Peter III, 39, and Samuel, 30, "*settled on the meadow land across the river from Highwater…*" and that Samuel "*took up the land vacated by Austin in the same year*" (1793). Evidence shows, however, part of that to be incorrect, since Austin had not yet vacated to Gibraltar Point (Shufelt). He left only in December 1793 – likely using the frozen lake as his highway and dragging his possessions on the ice. No matter, close enough! Our purpose is not to re-arrange history!

The Elkins family first settled close to the border on the road we now call chemin Rodrigue. Favourable reports brought by Josiah Elkins, a trader who knew this area well, drew his brother Moses to relocate here. In August of the same year, Deacon Abel **Skinner** and family arrived in Potton. And here again, another divergence of opinion is found. Interestingly enough, Taylor reports "*M*ʳ· *Manson considered Deacon Skinner as the first settler of Potton,*" with no other explanation, to my dismay! The Skinners

settled near the Elkins. The tiny Skinner cemetery on chemin Colgan witnesses their homestead.

Now, as an aside to this very subject – and one not included in my original talk:

In November 2012, the Association received correspondence from Mʳˢ· Ethel Dessert, from the State of Washington, USA, asking for help in verifying genealogical information about the Bell and Skinner families, who were her ancestors. Of the former family, I knew nothing, but I provided what I could with regard to the Skinner relatives. She kindly provided us with a page of hand written cemetery records, presumably authentic, though photocopied, given their many notations. To me the information was far too precious not to be shared herein: "*The Skinner burying grounds which time has placed beyond deciphering… Interred on a little elevation on the old Elkins place, opposite the Skinner home, lie probably upwards of 30 bodies, – uncared for and in ruins; cattle graze above the dead.*"

It listed William **Bell** (b.1739, d.1816), the first buried in the plot; and noted that "*this burial ground is very near the land which*, his son, *Bela Bell owned and probably lived in Potton. Bela bought this land in Potton in 1803.*" (Skinner records – APPHA)

Only verification of notarized deeds will confirm this information; however, on that same page, one crucial notation 'blinked red': the burial of two Skinner sons, Abel (b.1776) and Josiah (b.1777), who died by drowning, July 10th, 1799. Taylor records these tragic deaths in the Skinner family; however, he gives neither name nor date of the death of these young men. The 23 and 22 year olds drowned on the Missisquoi returning from a visit to the Ruiter family. On the strength of those previously unknown facts, provided in

the document, I believe the Bell name deserves its place with the early settlers of Potton, though the name is unfamiliar.

The Abijeh **Bailey** family also *"came into Potton from Peacham, Vt., not far from the time of the Skinners and Elkins".* (Taylor) Where in Potton is unknown; however, because the Bailey name is a familiar one in Potton, I am presuming some relationship to that branch, although this remains unverified. On the first census taken in the United States, that of 1790, both Abijah Bailey and Moses Elkins are listed as residents of Peacham, Vermont, with households totalling 14. (1790 United States Census – Peacham)

While these very first settlers were settling, *"Potton was erected into a Township by Letters Patent issued October 31, 1797. On that date a portion containing 8,400 acres was granted to Laughland McLean, Captain of the 84th Regiment, British regulars, reduced."* (Taylor) His grant, the first be made in Potton, bordered Lake Memphremagog, and included what became Vale Perkins and Knowlton Landing – areas known at that time as East and North Potton. The first settlement came to North Potton only around 1819.

Meanwhile, now living to our west, in Caldwell's Manor, was Captain Henry **Ruiter**, a proven Loyalist, doubtless very familiar with our region given his history with Major Rogers' Rangers; waiting impatiently for an answer to his repeated petitions for land in Potton. His wife, Rebecca, along with many other women and children, had been banished from the 'colonies' during the Revolution. She and their six children had arrived at St. Johns (Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu) in October 1780, but sadly, she died soon after her arrival, at around 38 years old. (Epps)

In November 1798 Jacob **Garland** and his son-in-law Jonathan **Heath** journeyed here.

So pleased were they with their findings that they returned to their homes in Sanbornton, N.H., to retrieve their families. They had *"commenced labour on their land… and had built a primitive log shanty 'partly covered in basswood'."* (Taylor)

In March 1799, Jacob Garland, Jonathan Heath, Senior and Junior packed their worldly possessions and headed north into the frozen wilderness. History doesn't tell us how they came – but for reasons of practical efficiency, they would have used sledges pulled by oxen. Cyrus Thomas tells of their first nights of utter discomfort here in Potton – two feet of snow fell on the roofless cabin – the winds howled and the children were put under the bed for shelter. He locates these families in the vicinity of Meigs' Corner, and mentions the name for the first time.

By 1799 Henry **Ruiter,** now 57, had a new lease on life – his petition for land in Potton had been confirmed; he had remarried in 1784 to Katherine Friott, a woman some 20 years his junior, who bore him eight more children, among whom, son Abraham (b.1785), daughters Mary (b.1787) and Katherine (b.1784). Ruiter and his entourage left Caldwell's Manor to begin a new life in Potton, settling near the brook that bears his name, upon which he set about building a saw and grist mill.

The presence of the **Barnett** family in Potton arises from the marriages between Ruiter's son Abraham to Betsey Barnett, daughter of Captain Benjamin Barnett from Sutton Township, and daughter Mary to John Barnett, his oldest son. Katherine Ruiter married David Heath in 1805. (Taylor)

Ruiter *"received the lots of land in the first four ranges of land in the township of Potton"* (minus reserves for clergy and Crown). (Taylor) Range I begins at the Sutton line with

Potton; and Ranges II, III & IV lie sequentially to the east, ending roughly not far from the present day chemin Miltimore, oriented south to north to Potton's limit with Bolton Township. Others of the Ruiter family were approved for grants of land in Potton and elsewhere.

Only on July 27, 1803 did Henry Ruiter finally receive title to his land in Potton.

History documents the arrival of Captain David **Blanchard,** in 1800**,** from Canterbury, N.H. Blanchard was a man of 44, who married one of Jonathan, Sr.'s daughters and settled here "*to become parents of a numerous posterity,*" to quote Thomas. Records seem to indicate that this family gravitated to the north of Mansonville, on Route 243. The Blanchard family cemetery is a good indicator this is true.

The Henry **Abel (or Able)** family were amongst the earliest settlers as well, and may have settled in the Highwater area, one of the sons marrying a Ruiter daughter. In 1805 a Joseph Abel settled at the foot of Owl's Head and lived there until the close of the War of 1812.

Thomas Gilman, considerably advanced in years, arrived in 1800, according to Cyrus Thomas, with sons **Ezekial** and **William C.** Thomas tells us William was a physician, and for thirty years – the only one in Potton. Incidentally, William Gilman had also studied surveying and was "*immediately called into requisition on arriving here*". (Thomas) In addition to surveying several lots, Dr. Gilman "*was instrumental in opening many of the public roads, and was second to non in labors for public improvements*". (Thomas)

Thomas locates the Gilmans near Meigs' Corner.

Dr. William C. Gilman was nothing, if not enterprising. Owing to the absence of anything like a tavern or public house in Potton for many years, Dr. Gilman furnished "*entertainment for travellers,*" in addition to keeping "*such goods for sale as the simple style of living among the settlers required*". (Taylor) Eventually, he acquired substantial property in the Township, including a part of Ruiter's estate. (Thomas)

On March 20, 1800 came **Bradbury Green** and his wife, Jemima Skinner, – Potton's first nurse, you might say, as she was known for her empathy and caring for the sick. Horace Green, a son of these settlers, and, around the same time, Levi & Viola **Coit,** who appear to have had family connections with the Heaths, arrived. It is likely that Lemuel **Orcutt** and family settled near property now belonging to the McDuff family on Route 243, south of Mansonville, as the Orcutt burying ground is located there. The **Peabody** family, from Orford, N.H., were very early settlers of South Potton as well. (Taylor)

Where was Mansonville or what was to become Mansonville, in all of this flurry of early settlement? It seems that in 1802-03 John **Lewis** and Joseph **Chandler** built a saw mill, "*on land purchased from Henry Ruiter*" in what would become known as Mansonville. Robert **Manson** travelled from St. Armand to investigate, perhaps because of prior acquaintance with Chandler. In 1804 Robert Manson "*bought from Mr. Chandler the water power of Mansonville. The purchase included a saw mill, poorly constructed.*" (Taylor) This has variously been reported as having occurred in 1807 or 1811; and as an exchange between Chandler and Manson, for property in Frelighsburg, where Manson lived, and that the purchase was from Abraham Ruiter. At any rate, Manson "*improved the dam and built a grist mill at the east end of the dam*".

A mill would not have been built unless settlers were in place to use it – and could not be built

unless water power existed for it, be it several miles from a settlement or at its heart. Insofar as the earliest settlement of Mansonville is concerned, history seems silent. One thing is certain, the positioning of mills at the descent point of the Missisquoi River was pivotal! By 1812, Mansonville was bustling!

Around the same time, reportedly as early as 1803, a fellow by the name of Roswell **Bourn(e)**, a humble, pious man "*raised up to proclaim glad tidings to those who would hear,*" came to Potton. (Taylor) He is credited with the "*commencement of Methodism in this township*". (Taylor) A century later, his descendant, Leonard Bourne, became our mayor from 1905-1908.

In **1805 Thomas Norris** from Derry, N.H., came to settle in Potton, and a decade later Daniel **Miltimore**, from the same town, arrived. They lived in the area of the Miltimore family cemetery. Around 1820 arrivals included those of the **Pike, Hall, Babcock, Darrah** and **Holbrook** families, though these names are not as familiar in Potton. *"Nathaniel Holbrook married Miss Lucy Pike, and moved from Alburg, Vt. to the hill farm in Potton, two miles west of Mansonville, about 1820, bringing 8 sons and 2 daughters."* (Taylor) The Samuel **Clark** family, the **Jerseys,** David and Sarah **Fullerton** – all sought to make Potton their home within this time frame as well, according to Taylor. And nearly all of these, comparatively close to one another: in and around the vicinity of Meigs' Corner.

In **1809** or thereabouts – the community built "*a large building which was designed to serve the triple purpose of meeting house, school house and court house. This was the first school house in Potton – and for twenty years, the only one.*" (Day)

There was a distillery, owned by the Heath 'boys' and another owned by the Perkins family. It was a practical matter in the earliest of days to distil spirits from the excess grains and potatoes which this fertile soil produced and for which there was no market – there being no roads and no money!! All small communities seemed to have had at least one distillery located centrally. Presumably an abundance of hard liquor led to certain merriment within the drinking population and likely some considerable misbehaving – thus becoming a source of great concern and being conducive to the eventual formation of temperance societies – and, well, to the Honorable Christopher Dunkin, and West Potton becoming Dunkin, which is another interesting story to tell. But another time!

By 1816 inhabitants of Potton, led by Lt. Col. Henry Ruiter, petitioned successfully for the building of a school, although it wasn't built until 1825, when it received a grant of $96 per year. Taylor's description almost seems dismissive: "*a so-called highschool,*" at which a young Baptist minister named **Gardner Bartlett** was engaged to teach. The school persisted for some 6 years. Bartlett's zeal seemed not so much for teaching children but more in "*work(ing) earnestly for the extension of the redeemer's kingdom*". (Taylor) At any rate, this young man must have been fairly persuasive, for under his influence, and at his suggestion, the **Potton Female Benevolent Society** was formed in May of 1826. This Society provided practical help to the less fortunate in the community. It was through the influence of this group that the **Union Meeting House** was built in 1844 – adjacent to Chapel Hill cemetery, thus giving it a more familiar name of 'the Chapel'. Though the building still stood in 1866, nothing remains of it today. (Taylor)

In 1825, when Levi A. Coit bought land from Jonathan Heath, the general area of his purchase became known as Coit's Corner. There Coit opened the first store in Potton, probably with a small inventory of staples like tea, salt, tobacco and so on. Although the first post office in Potton was at the time in Knowlton Landing – it was soon moved to Coit's Corner, with M^r. Coit as the first post master. About 9 years after Levi Coit bought, a M^r. Meigs appeared on the scene. **M^r. Meigs** then **"***became the nearest inhabitant to the point where the roads intersect; hence the place became known as Meigs' Corner***"** – and unsurprisingly, nearly 180 years later, not one shred of tangible evidence remains. (Thomas)

And now, at long last, we come to the crux of the matter! Where was this place called Coit's Corner and latterly, Meigs' Corner? I confess

Clues to the exact location of Meigs' Corner came in perusing Edgar Barnett's account of a skirmish which took place there during the Rebellion of 1835, wherein he writes that *"warning had come that Nelson's troops are approaching from Coventry... (the men) gather on foot and horseback at* **Coit's Corners***, to barricade the main road leading into town from the* **south***, '*tearing*' down the rail fences in the vicinity bringing them in to bar the road where the bridge crosses the river then called the '*Branch*'."* (Taylor) Such excitement!! (The impending arrival of troops was an unfounded rumour, by the way. And yet again – we have another story to tell!).

The 'Branch River' can only be what we call the Missisquoi North, and which meets the Missisquoi at Highwater. The main road leading into town from the south can only be

Wallings Map - 1864

that I first thought Meigs' Corner was to be found near the Chapel Hill cemetery. Closer reading of history has proven my assumption quite wrong!

Route 243. Coit's Corners was an intersection of roads somewhere above the Branch River. Maps provided the confirmation.

In the absence of bridges, settlement roads followed topography and forded waterways at the most benign place possible for convenience and safety. One old map (Wallings 1864) indicates that such a road led to the west of Hawk Mountain, possibly following a suspected portage route, described by Harry Shufelt in *Lore and Legend of Brome County*. The road I describe seems to have crossed the Missisquoi North Branch, where a covered bridge was eventually built – (the one I believe is pictured on the inside back cover of *Potton d'antan – Yesterdays of Potton*). This was a continuation of chemin Spence, off chemin de l'Aéroport. From there the route was up valley side, across what is now Route 243, to the intersection of what is now called chemin René-Remillard. **Meigs' Corner is clearly shown on the 1864 Wallings Map!** (Confirmed by the name H.S. Meigs at the precise intersection!)

At one time, chemin René-Remillard connected with chemin Fitzsimmons, which, in turn, intersected a ridge road that connected West Potton (Dunkin) and Mansonville, and continued on to what we now call chemin West Hill. This 'old road', often explored on Association excursions, crossed Clark Hill, intersected chemin Fitzsimmons and passed east, by the Chapel Hill cemetery, to enter Mansonville to the west of the Bank of Commerce, on Joseph-Blanchet. Many still remember it.

And, now you know where Meigs' Corner was… but then again, perhaps YOU already knew that!

So in the space of a decade to 12 years – **1797** to **1809** – Potton held but a handful of families, inevitably some of whom history did not record. Twenty, if not more, settler families lived within a 5 mile radius of one another. By **1805** – Mansonville was barely on the map. Though some would disagree, it

appears that only around 1810 and later, did Mansonville develop into a village; the war of 1812 seemingly slowed progress.

Meigs' Corner, on the other hand, would seem to have been a veritable beehive of pioneer activity.

"*In 1820 Joseph Bouchette, Surveyor General, reported Potton to contain 59,000 acres, Reserves 16,704… 3,000 acres were supposed to be cleared…*" (Taylor)

The statistics for Potton Township in **1831** are a testimonial to industry, courage and determination. From the handful of families who came first to the hills of Potton, with little more than a yoke of oxen and a milk cow, fields were cleared, homes reared and a community was begun. By 1831, we had a population of 804 persons. Province wide, for the same year, "*the population increased from 250,000 in 1806 to 561,061*". (Taylor) In one generation, Potton managed to produce: 5,380 bushels of wheat, 16,600 bushels of potatoes and 2,380 of corn. There were 212 horses, 521 cows, 340 oxen, 600 swine and 1,204 sheep. There were 3 grist mills, 1 carding mill, 1 fulling mill, 4 saw mills, 1 tannery, 1 pearl ashery, 1 brewery, 1 distillery, 1 tavern, and 3 potasheries… and only 2 shopkeepers! (Bouchette)

Oxen are neutered mature bulls, trained for work, and are now rarely even seen. Their early use is explained by need. Horses need better feed than oxen. Oxen can browse, and being slow and strong, were the draft animal of choice in the earlier days. Horses have it for speed and agility! Sheep were an obvious practical choice for providing wool for clothing and blankets in addition to meat. Being close browsers, they also cultivated the territory.

In the earliest of days – there was little money, as we would recognize. These early

pioneers, coming from the new United States, left without pockets full of coin. Continental currency was virtually worthless at the end of 1776 – and quite without value in Canada, in any case. People bartered, traded 'black salts' or pearlash. Potash was made from the ashes of their hardwood trees, particularly elm. These were used in trade and eventually were shipped to markets in Montreal or St. Johns, thence to England for use in the manufacture of gunpowder and glass. The bark of soft wood trees, particularly hemlock, being high in tannins, was collected and sold. It was used to soften and condition hides for leather. Carding, cloth dressing and fulling mills prepared flax and wool for useable cloth. Gristmills ground corn, oats, and buckwheat. Barley was dried.

Thus ends our trip to Meigs' Corner. The ghost hamlet of Potton has been found! And in the Chapel Hill Cemetery, granite slabs silently witness where "*each in his narrow cell forever laid, the rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep".* (*Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*, Thomas Gray)
The facts for this text were gleaned and interpreted by me alone. Any errors or omissions are mine. My roots here, and my fascination for our history have given me great love for this place and deep respect for the ancestors who forged it. The cornerstones for the Potton we now know grew from a small settlement known as Meigs' Corner.

Harley S. Meigs and his wife Emily Scott are interred in Mansonville Cemetery. If these dates are correct, this pair would be descendants of the original M^r. **Meigs.** Thomas reports that Meigs arrived about 9 years after Levi Coit, or about 1834. Harley Meigs died in 1899 at the age of 75, thus making him roughly 10 when he arrived in Potton; and his eventual wife, Emily Scott, only 4. Unlikely that he was **the** Mr. Meigs, wouldn't you think!!

Levi A. Coit died February 13, 1844 at 47 years of age. His son William, who died 4 days later, on February 17th, 1844, is buried beside his father in the Chapel Hill Cemetery; as are so many of our earliest settlers.

Vale Perkins, 2012 and 2014

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