

Potton : Yours to discover

Knowlton Landing



W.H. Bartlett, Copp's Ferry, 1841



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A short drive north of Vale Perkins on Chemin du Lac will reward you with glimpses of Lake Memphremagog, across broad pastoral vistas. Century old maples, now in grave peril, line the road before a breathtaking vista of the Lake appears. Framed by manicured farmland and pristine lakeside homes, this is the northeastern extremity of Potton. You are looking at Knowlton Landing - once an important and bustling pioneer settlement.

At nearly 50 kilometers in length, roughly 3.5 kilometers in width, the open waters of Lake Memphremagog were both convenience and obstacle to the early traveller. In 1797, ferrying points for east-west travel across the Lake were established by Nicholas Austin, the first settler on Memphremagog, and his associate, Moses Copp.

A miscalculation had led Austin to settle near Perkins Landing in 1789; however, in 1792 he was obliged to relocate further north to the Township of Bolton, at a cove near Gibraltar Point, now Austin Bay. Copp came to Bolton Township in 1796. In 1797, for reasons unknown, he established his family across the lake, at a place soon known as Copp's Ferry, renamed to Georgeville in 1822.



F.S. Schell, Bolton Pass

Had Austin established a ferry at Austin Bay, the circumvention of Sargent's Bay would have added needless overland miles to the only route west : a primitive foot trail, barely passable on horseback, leading from the lakeshore, over the mountain to what is now South Bolton, and onward through the rugged and dangerous Bolton Pass. Oxen dragged heavier loads only in winter. Surveyor Joseph Bouchette's 1805 map showed the tracing of a road, but it was 20 years later before wagon travel became possible on it. Stagecoach routes from points north (Montreal) and south (Boston) increased as settlements grew. Ferry service to and from Knowlton Landing was essential.

Moses Copp's first ferry was a man powered scow, later replaced by horse powered craft to traverse with larger and heavier loads. Ferry service declined as steamships plied the Lake from 1860 : the first of these being the Nora, and the Jenny Lind, later renamed the Mountain Maid; in 1867 came the Orford and the grand Lady of the Lake. In 1879, the Minnie was put into service, followed by the Anthemis, finally retired in 1954.

Signal Hill Road in Knowlton Landing recalls these days of lake travel. The mouth of Sargent's Bay is clearly visible from its summit. Raising a flag signalled the arrival of lake vessels. Carriages were then dispatched to collect the visitors, perhaps en route from Boston to Montreal — perhaps for a stay at Pine Lodge, or other nearby inns.



Lady of the Lake



*1900, building of the wharf
Charles Éthie is on the first horse team*

In large part, Knowlton Landing's early development was due to its first settler, Levi Knowlton. Born in 1769, he left Templeton, Massachusetts in 1821, settled first in Stukely, Quebec, and then established Maplehurst farm at Potton Landing, later Knowlton Landing. The 1825 census of Lower Canada shows the Levi Knowlton family as numbering six : he, his wife, three sons and a daughter. Levi and his son Miles built Pine Lodge, now i'Aubergine, to accommodate stage and ferry travellers. He died April 27, 1842 and is buried in the family cemetery at Knowlton Landing. His descendant, Lyman Knowlton, served in Potton municipal politics and as Mayor of the Township from 1901 to 1902.

Other settlers included Charles Bullock, Ezra G. Ball, his wife, Lucy Rexford Ball, and the Greene family. The Tiltens operated a gristmill in 1855, the vestiges of which remain, to the left at the junction of Mountain and Coolidge Roads. Eliot Coolidge was a prosperous farmer who married Polly, Levi Knowlton's daughter. They adopted three children. Coolidge died in 1859. His name lives on with Coolidge School, built in 1831, now a private residence, first on the left, on Coolidge Road. The former Ezra Ball homestead « Glenbrook » is opposite, to your right. Access is private.

Around 1850 — at the height of the steamship era, John F. Tuck moved to Knowlton Landing from Georgeville. Affectionately known as Uncle John, he seemed to lead a very full life here. He operated a general store, the ferry service, a customs agency, and the post office. (Potton's first post office was opened at Knowlton Landing in 1820, with Levi Knowlton as postmaster.) In 1862, Tuck bought Pine Lodge, renaming it Tuck's Hotel, thus becoming an innkeeper as well. In 1879 John Tuck hired a Miss Kate Wilson, graduate of McGill Normal School, to teach in a private school located in his home. In 1904 Tuck offered public telephone service at his Inn. John Tuck died in 1928, at the age of 93, still in office as Postmaster. His daughter, Mattie, sold the Inn to Dan and May Jones who operated a successful boarding



Jonh Tuck, 1915

house, known again as Pine Lodge. Their great grand daughter is married to a descendant of Levi Knowlton. They continue to operate Knowlton Maplehurst Farm.

The mid to late 1800's were also days of the grand hotel, the Mountain House, our most famous. In addition to Pine Lodge, the Château Da Silva, or Revere House, was built in 1870 to the south of Knowlton Landing and destroyed by fire in April 1882. Smaller lodges also became popular.

Hog's Back, Elephantis, and Sugar Loaf Mountains rise above Knowlton Landing to the southwest. From 1900 to 1925, 800 tons of copper ore and gold were extracted by the Memphremagog Mining Company from a mine at the foot of Hog's Back. The back sides of these mountains curve into steep rock faces, surrounding an area known locally as Sebastopol. Similar rock formations found in Sevastopol on the Black Sea, in Ukraine, perhaps explain the name. Does 'our' Sebastopol recall the capture of the European counterpart during the Crimean War? A very marshy area, owned by the Nature Conservancy of Canada and known as « l'étang du mont Éléphant » is located off Chemin des Faucons-Pèlerins. Access is restricted and difficult.

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