

ORDINARY STANSTEAD, EXTRAORDINARY LIVES: HOLDINGS OF THE ETRC ARCHIVES ON THE COUNTY AND ITS PEOPLE¹

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The Eastern Townships Resource Centre (ETRC) has a wide range of holdings related to the county of Stanstead, many of them recently acquired. This important archival collection is now more easily accessible than ever, thanks to a new finding aid, produced by ETRC archivist Jody Robinson and former ETRC archivist Sophie Morel, entitled *Guide to the Private Archival Fonds and Collections of the Eastern Townships Research Centre*.² Their *Guide* has served as a principal source for the present article (for the sake of convenience, I will reference it by fonds *call numbers* rather than by *page numbers*). This article will describe some of the more significant holdings pertaining to Stanstead County so that researchers can get a sense of their nature and potential use. The “Archives” section of the ETRC website offers a selective, but by no means complete, picture of the holdings. The most complete inventory of the ETRC archival holdings is the computerized Archi-Log database, which is available for consultation in the Old Library, McGreer Hall, Bishop’s University.

It is important to understand, first of all, that there are three main categories of records within the ETRC Archives that concern historic Stanstead County: 1) Individual fonds (call numbers P001 to P199); 2) Collections (P994 to P999) and 3) United Church records (UC001 to UC083).

1. Individual Fonds

The Hackett family fonds (P158) (1875–1953, 4.1 meters of textual records, 1,200 photographs), which was acquired by the ETRC in 2006, stands out as a collection of exceptional importance, both in size and richness of content.³ In particular, this fonds casts light on political life in the Stanstead area, at the municipal, provincial and federal levels. It includes ten series, nine of which contain the

archives of particular members of this Irish Catholic Stanstead family. In addition to source material on the personal and professional lives of family members, the fonds includes research notes and records relating to Eastern Townships history. Three series grouping records of individual members of the family merit particular attention.

The Michael Felix Hackett series documents a remarkably distinguished career.⁴ Michael Felix Hackett practiced law in Stanstead, was mayor of the village of Stanstead Plain for fifteen years, warden of Stanstead County for five years, chairman of the board of Catholic school trustees, president of the Stanstead County Farmers' Institute, vice-president of Stanstead and Sherbrooke Mutual Fire Insurance Co. and Grand President of the Catholic Mutual Benefit Association of Canada from 1895 to 1916. He also sat in the Quebec legislature as member for Stanstead from 1892 until 1900, and served as Provincial Secretary in the Taillon government. Michael F. Hackett was married to Florence Alberta Knight, the daughter of Albert Knight who represented Stanstead in the Canadian legislature during the years immediately prior to Confederation (1861–1867).⁵

As an example of the type of material included in this series, the following is one of Michael Hackett's letters, written in his professional capacity concerning a matter of child custody:

4/11/07

Mrs R. W. George,
Georgeville, Que.

My dear Madam ,-

I am authorized by your husband to demand from you the custody of the minor child "Roxie" and to declare that unless you give her up at once or place her in some institution where she can be educated, you will be held responsible for all bills connected with her maintenance, and that he will refuse to pay any further bills for her or you unless you consent to give up the said child.

Respectfully yours,

[P158/001.01/001 K] Fig1.

From a feminist perspective, this letter provides a particularly interesting insight into the way matters of child custody were resolved in the early 1900s.

Michael Hackett and his wife Florence had five children, and their records are also included as individual series in the fond. Their eldest son, John Thomas Hackett, whose records are also of particular interest, was a lawyer like his father and resided in both Montreal and Stanstead throughout his adult life. He stood as Conservative candidate for Stanstead County in five federal elections from 1925 to 1949. Although defeated three times he was nevertheless elected twice and represented the Stanstead constituency in Ottawa from 1930 to 1935 and from 1945 to 1949. He was appointed to the Canadian Senate in 1955, a year before his death.⁶ He was also passionately interested in the history of his community and of the Eastern Townships in general. He served as president of the Stanstead Historical Society during the last twenty years of his life, from 1936 to 1956.

The third series in the Hackett Family fonds that merits particular attention is the Linda Harding Hackett series. Born in Derby Line, Vermont, the daughter of Dudley William Davis and Annie Kidder Harding Davis, she shared the Hackett interest in history and, in 1941, published *Eleazer Fitch: The First Leader of Stanstead Township*.⁷

The Elvyn M. Baldwin Family fonds (1,42 meters of textual records, 506 photographs)⁸ is an important archival collection that was not included in the *Guide to Private Archival Fonds and Collections* because it was acquired only recently, in 2008. Although this fonds promises to be of great interest for future research on the history of Stanstead County it has not yet been processed and is therefore not available for consultation at present. According to the ETRC Archives database, it includes records of several generations of the Baldwin family, one of the earliest to settle in the area. In particular, it includes the records of Willis Keith Baldwin, an important Barnston landowner, lumber merchant and mill operator, born in 1857, who also had an active political career, sitting as Liberal Member of Parliament for Stanstead from 1917 to 1930. In 1935, he was murdered in his general store, at Baldwin Mills, during a robbery.⁹ According to the database the fonds also contains records of Willis Keith Baldwin's son, Harold Ferrin Baldwin (1886–1975) and granddaughter Elvyn Mead Baldwin (1925–2008). There is considerable genealogical material on the Baldwin family as well as other related families. Further accruals to this fonds are expected.

The Davidson family fonds (P016) (1831–1984, 0.24 meters) is a rich source of documentation on two particular subjects: the development of cottages on the shores of Lake Memphremagog, and the activity of a typical farm in the Georgeville area between 1858 and 1899.¹⁰ James Everet Davidson and his son James Arlington Davidson operated a construction business in the village of Georgeville from 1890 to 1945. The father, James Everet Davidson, married Annie Myrtella Brevroort in 1883 and entered the business of building boats, furniture and summer cottages. The son, James Arlington Davidson, who carried on the business, married Margaret Merrill. He was interested in local history and wrote a booklet entitled *Copp's Ferry, Georgeville 1797–1977*.¹¹

The Davidson Family fonds contains material related to their business, including contracts, account books, and correspondence. The contracts and account books illustrate the types of construction undertaken by the Davidsons and the costs of building during the period. The Davidsons seemed to have built mostly cottages, but there are also contracts for church renovations and one house. Researchers examining these records can glean information as to the architectural preferences of the seasonal residents who were the Davidson's most frequent customers. As for the costs of construction, one cottage, which was 20' x 24' in size, cost \$350.00 to build while another cost \$1,480.00. People searching for cottages in the Georgeville area today might view such prices with nostalgia. In addition, some of the Davidsons' contracts were for church renovations such as a hall, built for the Church of England in Fitch Bay, and a foundation wall for St. George's church in Georgeville.

Besides documenting cottage construction activity in the vicinity of Georgeville, the material contained in the Davidson Family fonds also documents farm life in the Georgeville area during the second half of the 19th century. J.E. Davidson's wife, Annie Brevroort, contributed her own family archives to the fonds, which describe farming operations on the Brevroort farm between 1858 and 1899. Her family file contains a diary, which also serves as a ledger describing the quantity of oats from her father's farm sold to various buyers. This ledger contains useful information for those doing family research in the Georgeville area, since the surnames of those who bought oats can be found within the ledger. Additionally, the "miscellaneous" file includes a number of religious verses possibly intended for comfort or motivation, some of which may have been written by members of the Davidson family.

For information on culture, researchers can turn to the **North Hatley Play House fonds (P139) (1943–1961, 0.05 meters)** and the **Piggery Theatre fonds (P001) (1964–1996, 0.91 meters)**.¹² The North Hatley Play House fonds provides a scattering of information, beginning in 1943, on a local amateur theatre group, the Community Club Players. In 1956, the North Hatley Play House was inaugurated with a view to producing professional summer theatre. It was housed in a building used as a curling rink, in winter, as part of the Brae Manor hotel complex (the future Hatley Inn). Its activities came to an end when the building collapsed under heavy snow and other difficulties followed. Finally, in 1965, the Townships Playhouse Guild of North Hatley created the Piggery Theatre, which continued that community's tradition of professional summer theatre into the next century.¹³

Combined, these two fonds give insight into the cultural life in Stanstead County over a period of half a century. Researchers can study the administrative, financial and artistic history of Quebec's first summer theatre. The fonds include programs, scripts, advertisements, photographs and architectural drawings. They also include information on media reaction. An undated *Montreal Star* article, probably published in 1965, gives both a positive and a negative assessment of the stated ambitions of the new Piggery Theatre:

It was difficult to ascertain precisely from the rambling introductory speech the current ambitions and ultimate goals of the Guild, though one gathered that the impetus came from a desire to launch a professional theatre to fill the vacuum left by the demise of the old playhouse company at the curling club. Although no concrete plans were announced one learned that the Guild hopes to have a season of plays in English throughout each summer, preceded and followed by short French seasons.

The author of this article, it would seem, was either not convinced that the management of the theatre had a vision of what it wanted to accomplish, or thought it unable to clearly articulate its message. The author nevertheless reserved some praise for the enterprise:

Two things were apparent to the stranger, however. That Arthur R. Virgin had played in the dream and realization of this North Hatley theatre a role of inspiration and help somewhat similar to that of Tom Patterson in the Stratford Festival, and that Patrick McG. Stoker, the architect, had performed an almost incredible feat of imaginative design in transforming an old piggery into what seems to be a very functional and good-looking theatre with a workable stage, good acoustics and excellent sight lines.



The Figgery Playhouse in North Hatley will open tonight in Schisgal's "The Tiger."

[August 2nd, 1965. *The Montreal Star*, P001/006.01/001] Fig 2.

Although the *Montreal Star* reviewer was somewhat skeptical of the organizers' ambitions, the theatre itself and those involved with it seemed to provide him with some hope for the theatre's future.

On the subject of education in Stanstead County the ETRC Archives collection has quite limited holdings. However, the **Stanstead County Teachers Association fonds (P175) (1942–1966, 0.08 meters)** is an important source for research on the history of education in the county during the middle years of the last century.¹⁴ The Teachers Association's mission was "to support the activities of the Provincial Association of

Protestant Teachers, to maintain friendly relations and promote better understanding among the teachers of the district."¹⁵ The Association brought together teachers from Ayer's Cliff, North Hatley, Coaticook, Beebe, Magog and Stanstead and the material in its fonds includes minutes and correspondence.

Education does not only occur in school classrooms. In 1915, the homemakers' clubs of Smith's Mills, Ayer's Cliff, and Way's Mills joined together to form the Stanstead County Women's Institute, an organization dedicated to mutual support and continuing education for rural women. In the following years, Women's Institutes began to spring up throughout the county, several of which began as homemakers' clubs. Most of these local Women's Institutes eventually became affiliated with the Stanstead County Women's Institute. **The Stanstead County Women's Institute fonds (P115) (1915–1992; 0,34 meters)** contains source material on the Institute's organization and activities.¹⁶ The fonds is divided into the following series: History, Minutes, Accounting Books, Programs, Building and Property, Reports, Correspondence, Poems, Press Clippings, and Miscellaneous Documents. In addition to the Stanstead County Women's Institute fonds, the six following local Stanstead Women's Institutes have deposited their archives at the

ETRC: the Tomifobia Women's Institute (1919–1968), the Way's Mills Women's Institute (1930–1965), the Beebe Women's Institute (1921–1989), the Massawippi Women's Institute (1919–1922), the North Hatley Women's Institute (1965–1968) and the Hatley Centre Women's Institute (1955–1983).¹⁷

Collections

A separate category of holdings is classified as “collections”. The records included in these collections are documents of specific types used for interdisciplinary research on the Eastern Townships, taken as a whole. These include, first of all, **P994, Eastern Township Aerial Photographs collection (1933-1978)**. The earliest of these systematic aerial photographic surveys were made in the 1930s and 1940s and the same areas were photographed more than once during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. Consequently, this collection contains essential material for studying the development of towns and villages and understanding the fundamental changes in agriculture and landscape which took place in Stanstead County between the Second World War and the 1970s. **P996, Eastern Townships Resource Centre Cartographic Material collection (1834?-1989)** includes a rich collection of maps and plans, a large proportion of which relate to Stanstead County. The plans are of particular interest. For instance, Fire Insurance Plans describe in minute detail the layout and built environment of towns and villages (exact proportions of buildings and outbuildings, materials of construction, roofing types, etc.) at specific moments in time. The collection includes fire insurance plans for Rock Island (1928), Stanstead Plain (1960), North Hatley (1903), Magog (1951) and Coaticook (1960). Four other collections, the **Special Media Collection (P995)**, the **Textual Records Collection (P997)**, the **Graphic Materials Collection (P998)**, and the **Postcard Collection (P999)** package documents from all over the Eastern Townships containing a great diversity of textual and image records such as obituaries, posters, diaries, scrapbooks, ledgers, and thousands of photographs and illustrations, a considerable proportion of which relate to Stanstead County. Examples of the type of records which can be found in these collections are the “time books” of day labourers engaged in roadwork. They record whether a person worked alone or with a horse or truck. The locations of the road works are not provided in these books but the wages and the days and hours worked by the men are recorded.

The ETRC also has a great deal of material that is not included in fonds or collections. This material, as well as all material included in fonds and collections, is most easily accessed through the computerized Archi-Log database, which can be consulted on site.

Church Archives

As previously mentioned, the United Church archives have been classified as a separate category (UC) within the ETRC collection. The ETRC is the official depository for the archives of the Quebec-Sherbrooke Presbytery of the United Church of Canada and all Eastern Townships churches under its jurisdiction. All in all, fourteen Stanstead County churches are represented, most of which were originally organized as Methodist or Congregationalist churches before amalgamation into the United Church of Canada when that institution was created in 1925. Given the importance of religion in people's lives throughout the 19th and the first half of the 20th century, church fonds constitute an indispensable source of information on the social and cultural history of that era. The individual church fonds usually includes material on church management (minutes and account books), registers of baptisms, marriages and burials, membership lists, records of church organizations, historical information and press clippings. They are all organized according to a common classification system and are therefore easy to consult.

The Stanstead South United Church (Rock Island) fonds (UC039) (1840–1994, 0.07 meters) is of particular interest because it contains the records of an institution which, over a long period of time, upheld Rock Island's cross-border identity.¹⁸ The church was originally Congregational. Organized in 1816, its members first held services in the Union Meeting House in North Plain, which, at the time, also accommodated the local Methodist, Episcopalian and Baptist congregations. Then, in 1829, the Congregationalists erected their own church in Rock Island, close to the border and the present building was built on the same site in 1876. Material in this fonds enhances our understanding of how the Rock Island community church governed matters and what issues were most important for the leading members of its congregation. The church's minutes and history provide interesting insight into the church's affairs.

Aside from providing information on baptisms, marriages and deaths, the Stanstead South United Church fonds contains interesting material on the cultural climate in early 20th century Rock Island, as evident in the following undated newspaper clipping:

This interesting little United Church, formally Congregational, now known as Stanstead South United Church, is situated only a few rods from the boundary-line between Rock Island, Que., and Derby Line, Vermont. This is one of the few Canadian churches that have the distinction of having an International membership—about half the members are on the American side.... Inside the church the silken folds of the Canadian flag hang from a tall staff at one side of the altar, while an American flag of similar size and texture adorns the opposite side.¹⁹

This joint worship of Canadians and Americans in this church astride the Canadian-United States border demonstrates that religious institutions did not always respect political boundaries.

Of the other twelve Stanstead church archives deposited in the United Church (UC) category of the ETRC Archives, three are from congregations that began as Congregationalist: the Fitch Bay United Church fonds (1851–1992), the Beulah United Church (Ayer's Cliff) fonds (1878–1990) and the Boynton United Church fonds (1892–1932).²⁰ The remaining nine, presented in order of earliest records, are from congregations that began as Methodist: Stanstead Plain (1831), Hatley (1857), Georgeville (1857), Coaticook (1860), Beebe (1875), Barnston (1875), Way's Mills (1881), Magog (1884), Tomifobia (c.1890).²¹



[1937?, *The Missionary Monthly*,
by Maude Gage Pellerine, UC039/013] Fig. 3.

Conclusion

The ETRC holdings provide researchers with a wealth of information about the County of Stanstead but finding material on a particular theme is not always easy. This author recommends that

individuals who are not familiar with the ETRC archives may find it best to make an appointment with the archivist, Jody Robinson. Thanks to her guidance and judicious use of the Archi-Log database, it is almost certain that genealogists, historians and other interested persons will be rewarded with insights into the extraordinary lives of the people of Stanstead County.

NOTES

1. Special thanks to Dr. Gordon Baker, Dr. Jean Manore, Dr. Peter Southam, Jody Robinson and Chloe Southam for all their wonderful aid in the production of this article.
2. Jody Robinson and Sophie Morel, *Guide to the Private Archival Fonds and Collections of the Eastern Townships Research Centre*, Lennoxville, Eastern Townships Research Centre, 2007, 363 p.
3. Eastern Townships Resource Centre, P158, *Hackett Family Fonds*.
4. V.E. Morrill and Erastus G. Pierce, "Hackett, Michael Felix. B.C.L.," in *Men of Today in the Eastern Townships*, Sherbrooke, Sherbrooke Record Company, c. 1917, pp. 178–179; Quebec National Assembly Archives, "Michael Felix Hackett", Found online at <http://www.assnat.qc.ca/fra/Membres/notices/g-i/HACKMF.htm>
5. Quebec National Assembly Archives. "Albert Knight". Found online at <http://www.assnat.qc.ca/fra/Membres/notices/j-l/KNIGA.htm>
6. V.E. Morrill and Erastus G. Pierce, "Hackett, John Thomas, B.L., B.C.L.," in *Men of Today in the Eastern Townships*, Sherbrooke, Sherbrooke Record Company, c. 1917, pp. 179; Parliament of Canada, "The Hon. John Thomas Hackett". Found online at <http://www2.parl.gc.ca/Parlinfo/Parliamentarian.aspx>
7. Linda H. Hackett, *Eleazar Fitch. The First Leader of Stanstead Township*, Stanstead, Stanstead Historical Society, 1941. 41 p.
8. Eastern Townships Resource Centre, Computerized Database, *The Elvyn M. Baldwin Family fonds*
9. V. E. Morrill and Erastus G. Pierce, "Baldwin, Willis Keith," in *Men of Today in the Eastern Townships*, Sherbrooke, Sherbrooke Record Company, c. 1917, pp. 97–98; Parliament of Canada, "Baldwin, Willis Keith". Found online at <http://www2.parl.gc.ca/Parlinfo/Parliamentarian.aspx>
10. Eastern Townships Resource Centre, P016, *Davidson Family fonds*
11. J.A. Davidson, *Copp's Ferry, Georgeville 1797–1977*. n.l., c.1977, 23 p.

12. Eastern Townships Resource Centre. P139, *North Hatley Playhouse fonds*; P001, *Piggery Theatre fonds*.
13. Phyllis Emery Skeats and Terry Skeats, North Hatley: A Centennial Reflexion, n.l., North Hatley Historical Society, 1997. pp. 64–65, 125–126.
14. Eastern Townships Resource Centre. P175, *Stanstead County Teachers Association fonds*.
15. *Ibid.*
16. Eastern Townships Resource Centre, P115, *Stanstead County Women's Institute fonds*.
17. Eastern Townships Resource Centre, P104, *Tomifobia Women's Institute fonds*; P105, *Way's Mills Women's Institute fonds*; P107, *Beebe Women's Institute fonds*; P116, *Massawippi Women's Institute fonds*; P117, *North Hatley Women's Institute fonds*; P118, *Hatley Centre Women's Institute fonds*.
18. Eastern Townships Resource Centre, UC039, *Stanstead South United Church (Rock Island) fonds*.
19. Eastern Townships Resource Centre, UC039, *Stanstead South United Church (Rock Island) fonds*.
20. Eastern Townships Resource Centre, UC034, *Fitch Bay United Church fonds*; UC016, *Beulah United Church (Ayer's Cliff) fonds*; UC067, *Boynton United Church fonds*.
21. Eastern Townships Resource Centre, UC011, *Centenary United Church (Stanstead Plain) fonds*; UC014, *Hatley United Church fonds*; UC032, *Georgeville United Church fonds*; UC019, *Sisco Memorial United Church (Coaticook) fonds*; UC007, *Wesley United Church (Beebe) fonds*; UC048, *Barnston United Church fonds*; UC047, *Way's Mills United Church fonds*; UC006, *St. Paul's United Church (Magog) fonds*; UC043, *Tomifobia United Church fonds*.

