

6 Transportation: Water, Roads and Rail

Today, as in the past, the maintenance of our roads and highways is a topic of conversation and concern. How has transportation developed in Ogden? How has it contributed to local development?

Each era has its determining mode of transportation. Access to our region was initially facilitated by water routes thanks to the rivers of the St. Francis, Connecticut, and Missisquoi watersheds, and of course Lake Memphremagog itself. In the 2nd half of the 19th century, the railways took over, allowing for year-round access to the region. Finally, although late, the improvement of the road network supplanted the rails, bringing more flexibility and autonomy to teamsters and travellers. Let's take a look at the evolution of these three modes of transport in our region.

Ogden's road network

At the beginning of the 19th century, the construction and maintenance of roads in the Eastern Townships suffered from a critical lack of funding. At that time, settlers in the new townships had to find their own means to construct the first roads. Isaac Ogden, although it was his responsibility as the settlement leader and largest landholder in Stanstead Township, failed to fund or even oversee these efforts. The French-speaking majority in the Legislative Assembly of Lower Canada did not want to bear the expense for the townships, occupied as they were by a scattered population of immigrants from the United States. Also, it was only in 1829 that Stanstead was granted representation in the Legislative Assembly of Lower Canada. Moreover, since local political institutions at that time had no power of taxation, the situation did not improve.

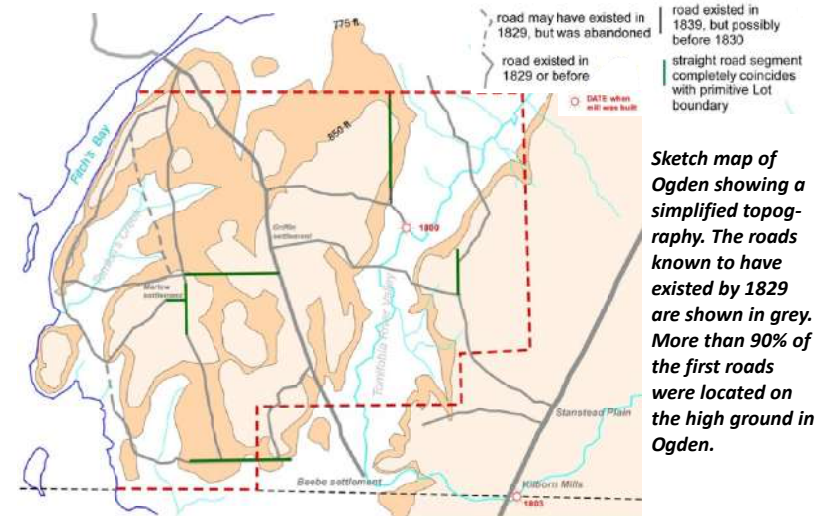
Consequently, the first roads in Ogden were rough trails laid out by the settlers themselves and many of these, albeit significantly improved, are still part of our road system. Later, other routes were built as shortcuts between the established roads, allowing access to undeveloped lots to new settlers. These first roads were often built on higher ground, in less densely wooded and better-drained areas. Lamarche Road, with its beautiful views of the area, is a good example.

Little by little Ogden gets better roads

It was not until 1855 that provincial laws provided for the creation of municipalities empowered to levy taxes based on property values, and with the right to borrow money to finance infrastructure.

However, in 1913 all of Ogden's roads were still narrow dirt roads impassable at certain times of the year. Most had been graded and improved with ditches and bridges, but it was not until 1931 that sections of Tomifobia, Stanstead and La Rivière roads were surfaced with crushed stone.

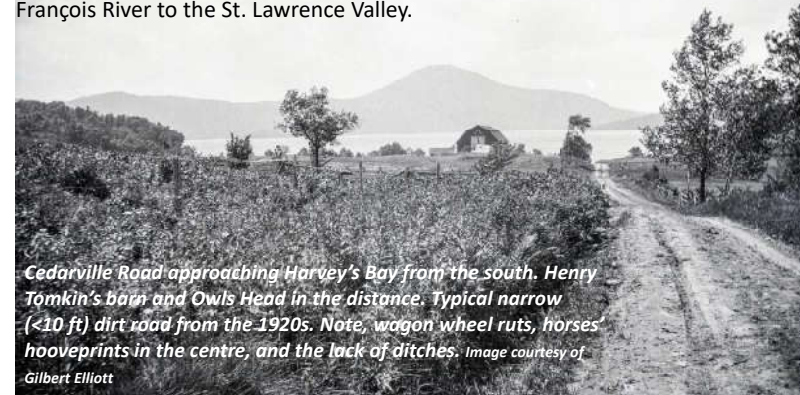
Griffin Road (Route 247) was paved in the 1940s, as it was a provincial road. The road from Beebe to the hamlet of Graniteville was not paved until 1968, and was done out of necessity because of the weight of the larger trucks then transporting the granite. The paving of a short section of Cedarville Road was probably done only to facilitate traffic to Weir Park (opened in 1959).



Sketch map of Ogden showing a simplified topography. The roads known to have existed by 1829 are shown in grey. More than 90% of the first roads were located on the high ground in Ogden.

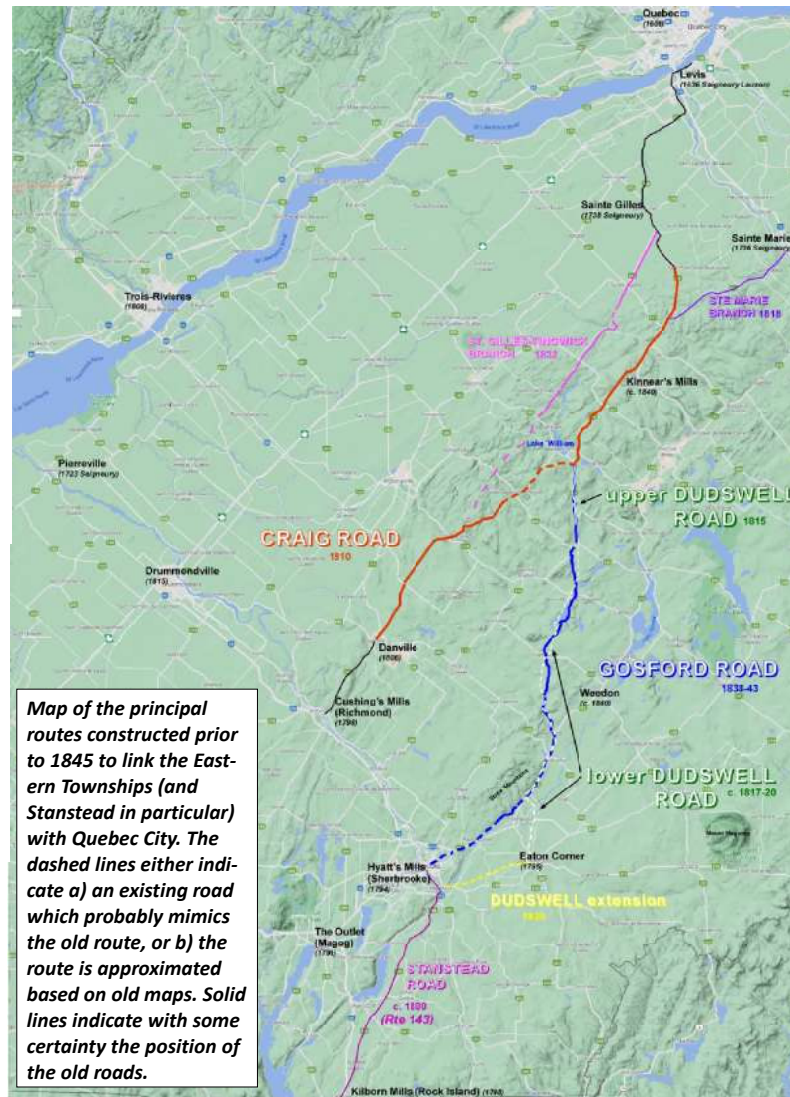
Connecting the Ogden area to the rest of Lower Canada

The longer-established road network in northern Vermont allowed the first settlers on this side of the border to maintain commercial links with their country of origin, but it was also necessary to develop communication routes with the major cities of Lower Canada at the time, namely Quebec, Trois-Rivières and Montreal. At the beginning of the 19th century, the only road linking our region to the rest of Lower Canada went through Sherbrooke and then along the Saint-François River to the St. Lawrence Valley.

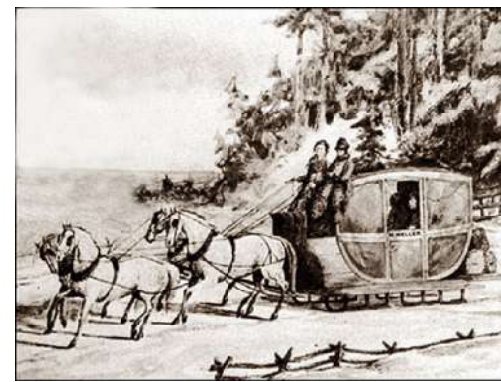


Cedarville Road approaching Harvey's Bay from the south. Henry Tomkin's barn and Owls Head in the distance. Typical narrow (<10 ft) dirt road from the 1920s. Note, wagon wheel ruts, horses' hoofeprints in the centre, and the lack of ditches. Image courtesy of Gilbert Elliott

In 1810, Governor Craig ordered the construction of a road linking Quebec City to Boston, which would pass through Stanstead. This road, named the Craig Road, was born out of the need to bring agricultural products from the Eastern Townships and the American colonies to Quebec City. A stagecoach service between the two large towns was inaugurated in 1811, which allowed the village of Stanstead, situated roughly mid-way, to prosper with the development of inns, stables, blacksmith shops and saddleries.



Are you up for the trip? Leave Quebec City on Monday and arrive in Boston the following Saturday exhausted, shaken to the bone and probably bruised from the endless ruts, washouts and fallen trees that litter the road. You should know that the price of the ticket varies according to a rather unique scheme. If the stagecoach gets bogged down, third-class passengers have to assist the horses and push, second-class passengers have to get out to lighten the stagecoach, and the better off first-class passengers can continue to sit in the stagecoach. Unfortunately for our region, this route was quickly abandoned due to its poor condition, and in the War of 1812, the road was considered a liability - a possible invasion route for the Americans! In 1838, the Earl of Gosford became Governor-General of Canada and decided to open another more suitable route between Quebec City and Sherbrooke. In 1849, however, the Gosford Road, which had become an impassable quagmire due to lack of maintenance, was also abandoned.



(left) winter stagecoach c. 1830 from Upper Canada



(right) Montreal to Stanstead stagecoach negotiating Bolton Pass in the summer

The road to Montreal developed little by little. In 1824, a stagecoach service was established during the winter season. Once a week, a four-horse enclosed sleigh left Stanstead, crossed frozen Lake Memphremagog and then the Appalachian hills to reach Montreal the following evening. In 1834, the summer stagecoaches linking Stanstead to Montreal took the route that would later become Route 112 twice a week. It was then considered one of the busiest roads in the province.



Maintenance of dirt roads, was done infrequently using primitive log "drags"

It was only with the union of Upper and Lower Canada (1841) and the creation of the Board of Works that funds for the maintenance of "main" roads became an annual expense and the major roads were gradually improved.

The railway

A railroad in Ogden? Where? Yes, the old-timers still remember, there was once a railroad and even a station in Tomifobia that once bore the name Smith's Mills.

As early as 1853, the local population began to dream about railway projects, since the presence of a rail line and station was a major asset for any small town and surrounding rural area. The stakes were high and local business people were fervent promoters of the railway. However, the major investments needed to carry out these projects were not forthcoming and they were abandoned one after the other. This was the case with the *Stanstead Shefford & Chambly Railway*, which threw in the towel after building just a few kilometres of track at Chambly.



The project was resumed a few years later, but financial difficulties resulted in the line bypassing the town of Stanstead when connecting to the Vermont Central system.

Map of the railroad that never actually got here!

It was not until 1862 that the *Massawippi Valley Railway* (MVR) was chartered and started to build a line connecting Newport with Sherbrooke, which was to provide our region with rail links to the rest of Quebec and New England. Upon completion in July of 1870, the MVR was immediately leased to the *Connecticut & Passumpsic Rivers Railroad* for 999 years! This lease was later taken over by the *Boston & Maine Railroad* in 1919, then by the *Quebec Central Railway* (Canadian Pacific) in 1926.



Railroad work crew at Tomifobia circa 1920s. Image courtesy of Stanstead Historical Society.

The arrival of year-round rail service was a major asset for several sectors in the region, like agriculture, forestry, mining and textiles. However, for Ogden and the surrounding area, it was the granite industry in particular that benefited, thanks to the six kilometre spur line built in 1892 providing efficient transport of blocks from the quarries in Graniteville to the cutting sheds at Beebe. Thanks to the export of their products by rail, the quarries and the trades related to granite work prospered.

Tourism was also on the rise, as the interest in train rides led to the discovery of the region's attractions by many city dwellers, both Canadian and American, who came to stay and enjoy this enchanting part of the country.

In North America, the train's monopoly on the transportation of goods and people was relatively short-lived. The development of the road network and the growth of the trucking industry caused its decline throughout the 20th century. The local railway line, then owned by the CPR, was abandoned in 1990, but thanks to the *Sentiers Massawippi* organization and to our great delight, its route was transformed into an all-season pathway linking Ayer's Cliff to Stanstead via Ogden. It is now the beautiful *Tomifobia Nature Trail*.



Undated photograph of a freight train steaming north through the village of Tomifobia. Image courtesy of Wynn Dustin.



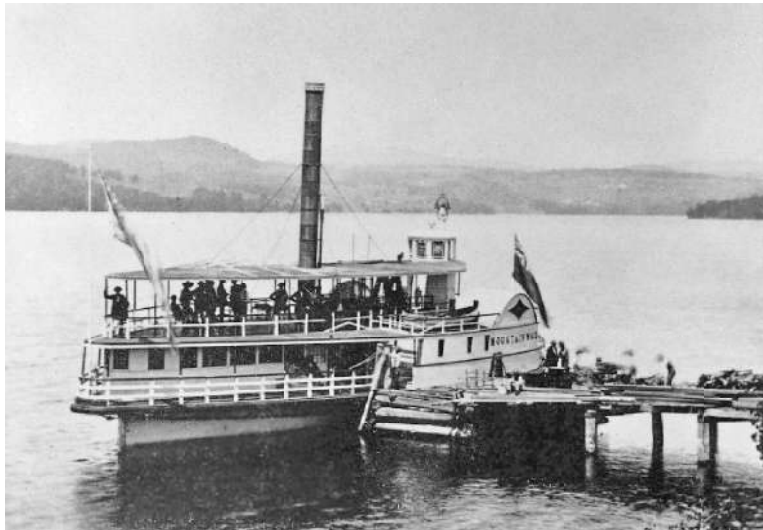
On August 9, 1916, the Tomifobia River overflowed its banks and washed out the railroad tracks at Smith's Mills (Tomifobia). Image courtesy of Stanstead Historical Society.

Navigation on the Lake

Waterways have always been central to transportation and development in North America. Early on during the settlement period the lakes and rivers of the Eastern Townships allowed for the creation of vital communication networks. Even in winter, the frozen surfaces of the waterways proved more useful than the poor roads of the region.

Lake Memphremagog, linked to the St. Francis River system to the north and several Vermont rivers to the south, was always an important factor in the region's settlement and economic growth. Thousands of settlers from New England were able to come to the various new townships surrounding Lake Memphremagog with less hardship (but occasional mishap) by crossing its waters. Immigrants from the British Isles who came here by way of the nearly impassable immigration roads from the St. Lawrence River had a much more difficult slog. At forty-two kilometres long, Memphremagog is the largest navigable lake in the region. Eventually, several boats and ferries provided not only north-south but also east-west connections.

In the first half of the 19th century, thanks to the ferry service between Georgeville and Knowlton Landing, the stagecoaches on the Montreal-Stanstead route no longer had to go around the lake. Some of these ferries were powered by horse-driven paddle wheels. Various mechanisms have been used over the years, but the most primitive of them forced the horses to walk in circles for hours. It is said that the poor animals became physically and mentally ill.



The first edition of the Mountain Maid moored at the Georgeville wharf, c. 1860. Launched in 1850, the boat was rebuilt in 1878 and served on the Lake until 1892. Image courtesy of the Notman Archives.

Fortunately for the horses, steamboats began to operate in 1851. The *Mountain Maid* was the first steamboat to operate on the lake. Financed entirely by private funds from the Eastern Townships and Vermont, it was built with local wood, its metal hull was made in Burlington and the engines were supplied from Montreal. For 41 years, it provided supplies to the villages and small settlements along the lake, including at Cedarville (Ogden). It played an important role as a tug in the trade of timber and sawn lumber between Canada and the United States when it was not employed conveying passengers.

Later on, seven other steamships would travel between Newport and Magog, stopping at various wharves along the lake. The two best-known vessels were the *Lady of the Lake* (1867 - 1917), built in Scotland, and the *Anthemis* (1909 - 1953), built at Magog. For over a century, these ships contributed to the prosperity of the region by transporting goods and people and greatly enhancing the region's tourism.



(left) The Lady of the Lake moored at Newport in her inaugural year - 1867. Image courtesy of the Notman Archives.



(below) The Anthemis was launched in 1909 and was a much smaller, screw-driven steamboat. She was scrapped in 1953.