A Research Guide on Local Businesses and Economic Life in Brome County

The Brome County Historical Society

Knowlton Landing. Postcard Collection BCHS8004.

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INTRODUCTION

From general stores to inns, Brome County was an economic hub of commerce dating back to the 18th century. As Loyalists and other settlers began to call Brome County home, development of business and commerce set in motion the foundation of a successful society. After the railroad was put in place, the 1880s transitioned the Eastern Townships from a local economy to a more robust economy based on exports. Businesses were numbered and vast during the centuries, and undertaking research on this subject can be broad , however this research guide will provide a base for engaging with the subject. Using the archives at the BCHS as well as external resources presented in this guide, researchers will be able to gain resources to assist their research on historic businesses and economic life in Brome County.

# HOW DO I FIND INFORMATION PERTAINING TO INDIVIDUALS' BUSINESSES?

Directories

Before the advent of modern phone books and internet directories, Brome County and the surrounding communities would have used publications known as township directories. These directories would not only help in finding the mailing information of individuals, but a list of businesses as well.

Two common publication companies would distribute these directories; Might's Directory Co. and Lovell's.

The BCHS has a copy of the 1892 Eastern Townships Directory by Might's Directory Co. The directory is split into two sections:

1. Personal directories by county, township: An alphabetical list of post office information of individuals can be found. The name of the individual along with their town (or city/village), p.o. address, range, and lot is listed.

2. Business directory: Beginning on page 362, a complete business directory of Eastern Township counties including Brome is listed. The business names as well as the owners associated with it are noted. Individuals' names appear listed in alphabetical order with the individual's employment (carpenter, farmer, dressmaker etc.).
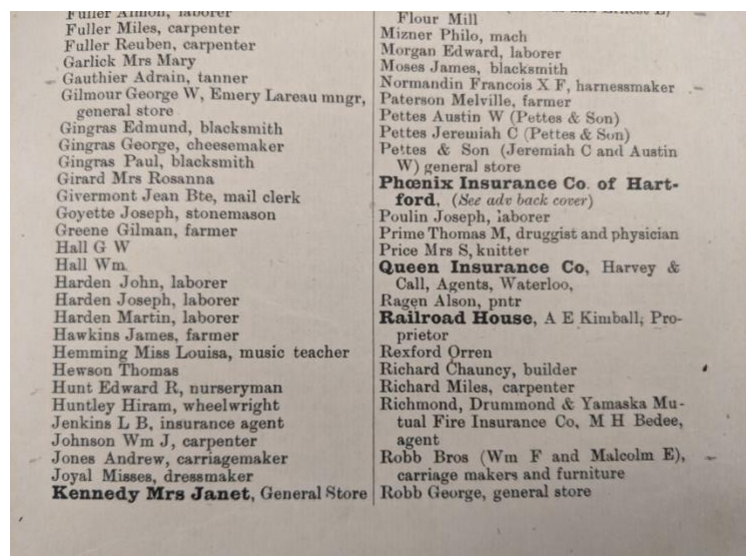
How do I find business information using the BCHS archives?

A notable Brome County figure, George Robb, is listed as the owner of a general store in the 1892 directory.

Searching the archives for George Robb will yield results from the Commissioner's Court Papers (BCHS8003).

Within these files, a copy of an account statement from George Robb's general store shows contextual material related to the business.

Fonds such as the commissioner's court and other family/personal fonds often contain receipts and correspondences helpful for research.

Other versions of the directories can be found from various resources:

- The BAnQ has a digital copy of the Lovell's Directory which includes the Eastern Townships.
- Eastern townships gazetteer & directory for the years 1875-76 is a similar directory to the ones previously mentioned
- The Toronto Public Library holds 10 Eastern Townships directories.

Another book at the BCHS that could be of assistance for research is the *Lovell's Farmers' Register* which lists names and locations of farms/farmers.

To access family and/or personal fonds to find material related to businesses, consult the archives portal and note down the call number (ex. BCHS001 for Samuel Willard).

Note: Knowing call numbers prior to research is the best way to quickly access documents. Call numbers assist BCHS staff at finding documents as proficiently as possible.

As Brome County only became an official county in 1855, many business dealings and correspondences took place prior to the county's establishment. The fonds of various figures at the BCHS contain pre-Brome County accounts and business papers, such as:

- Samuel Willard Papers (Business)
- Rev. Richard Whitwell Papers (Business)
- Cornell Family Papers (Accounts)
- Stephen Westover Papers (Accounts)
- Knowlton Family Papers (Almus A.,Ezekial, Lyman) (Business, Accounts)

HOW CAN I FIND PHOTOS OF HISTORIC BUSINESSES?

The BCHS has many photos in its archives pertaining to the area of Brome County. Photos of various businesses can be found in the archives among different files.

The Postcards Collection

The postcards collection (BCHS8004) contains around 4,000 postcards from Brome County, the Eastern Townships, Canada, and the United States. Photos highlighting Brome County businesses can be found.

- Series 1 contains Brome County regional postcards. The files include Knowlton, Brome Lake, Bolton Centre, Saint-Benoit-du-Lac, and Abercorn among others. The seven series files mostly highlight scenery but also contain historic buildings and businesses.
- Series 2 contains local postcards. 42 cities, towns, and townships are located in this series alphabetically. Photos of businesses can also be found, such as a gas station and general store in Bondville or the post office in Knowlton for example.
- The following series pertain less to Brome County, as they include postcards from the Canadian provinces and territories, over 20 American States, and holiday greeting cards.
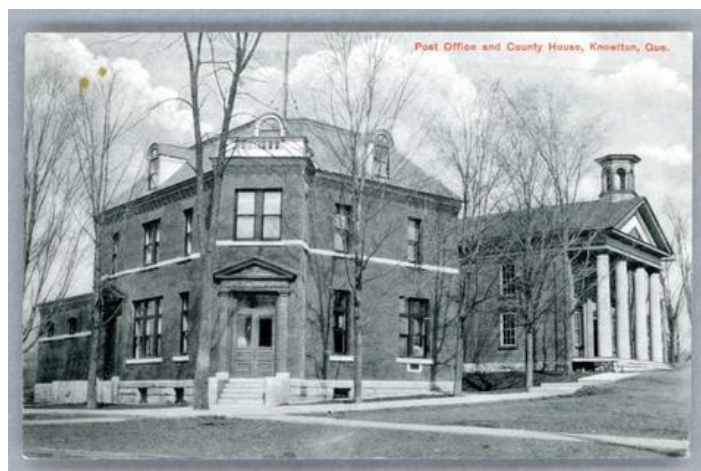
Post office and Court House, Knowlton, Que. BCHS8004 S2-D17.

Newspapers

Various collections of newspapers can give contextual information on businesses through advertisements. Since newspapers are dated, business ads can provide researchers with the timeframes of companies.

The newspaper collection at the BCHS ranges from the 1840s- 1990s. Newspapers such as the *Brome County Advocate* and *Granby Leader Mail* often times talk about new businesses and contain local ads.

In the war collection, multiple newspapers show ads during war times.

Family/Personal Fonds

If families or individuals owned businesses, photos of those businesses will often be found in their fonds.

Village Files

The BCHS also has a collection of files containing photos and documents pertaining to villages. These files ordered alphabetically, often contain photos of local businesses.

Wilson's Store Glen Sutton. BCHS8004-S1-D5-P148

THE GENERAL STORE

Located in the Old Fire Hall building of the museum, researchers will be able to make use of the general store museum. It was set up in 1971, and contains authentic artifacts from historic businesses. The general store features a post-office, a barber's corner, a tobacconist's corner, an apothecary counter, a ladies' hat and dress display, and more. The artifacts ranging back to the 1800s demonstrate what local businesses may have looked like on the interior. The artifacts include medicines, dishes, tools, gadgets, grocery products, bottles, and much more. All of the artifacts were donated from local Brome County businesses and individuals over the years, such as the labeled drawers from the Stone Store in South Stukely, the barber chair from Paul Bressette's barber shop in South Stukley, and the counter showcase from the Brouillette store on England hill.

HOW CAN I FIND WHERE BUSINESSES WERE LOCATED?

Using the directories, it becomes evident that addresses are not listed. The use of business/personal addresses are more of a modern convention. However, the P.O. box addresses of individuals may be similar to their businesses.

To locate stores and businesses, historic maps of Brome County may be of use.

The BCHS has a map collection including the Eastern Townships, Brome County, and Lower Canada among others.

While the maps vary by subject, some may be of use for researching locations of individual estates and businesses. The maps include information such as land plot numbers, street names, and some may even highlight land and buildings based on who owned them.

Some examples of maps with useful information in the larger collection include:

- H.F. Wailings map of Brome 1864
- Map of Farnham Township 1815, adapted from J Bouchette
- Plan of the village of West Farnham
- St John's Map (Missisquoi)

BANKS OF BROME COUNTY

The development of financial institutions in Brome County was important for businesses and individuals. Economic prosperity in Brome County often relied on banks for financial assistance, as they assisted farmers and businessmen to get their companies up and running.
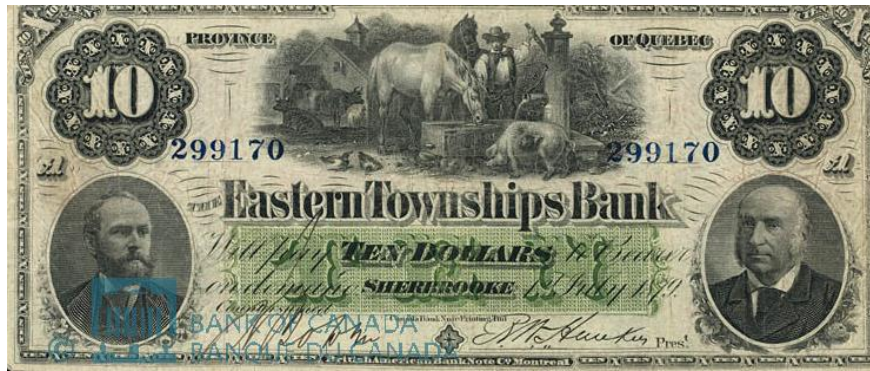
The Eastern Townships Bank

The first Eastern Townships Bank was established in Sherbrooke in the year 1859 by wealthy businessmen. Of note, 89% of the Eastern Townships Bank's capital was held by residents of the Eastern Townships, keeping in fashion the bank's goal to serve the community. Not only did the bank assist smaller businesses with loans, it also funded many large-scale companies in the Eastern Townships. By the end of 1859, the E.T. Bank had two branches outside of Sherbrooke. In a span of 50 years, the bank expanded to 61 branches across Quebec and various locations in Canada extending to British Columbia. In 1912, as more capital was held by non-Eastern Townships individuals, the bank was sold to the Canadian Bank of Commerce (now known as CIBC).

The BCHS holds a copy of the *Charter and Annual Reports, 1859-1912* of the Eastern Townships Bank. These reports offer a wide-range of material beneficial for research as they list bank branches and substantial financial information.

Bank Notes

The E.T. Bank issued its own bank notes which featured art and imagery of Brome County. [The Bank of Canada Museum](#) has bank notes from the Eastern Townships in its collection.

Canada, Eastern Townships Bank, 10 Dollars: July 1, 1879. National Currency Collection, Bank of Canada Museum.

Molson's Bank

Molson's Bank was founded in 1853 and was another notable financial institution in early Brome County. Molson's Bank was a competitor to the Eastern Townships Bank as it also funded local businesses and farms in the Townships. Likewise, Molson's Bank also expanded and eventually merged with Bank of Montreal (BMO) in 1925. The bank, located at 101 Chemin Lakeside still holds the coat of arms located above the door. The original building of the bank before it moved to Lakeside still stands in Knowlton today. Therefore, two Eastern Townships banks helped to establish two of Canada's most prominent banking companies; CIBC and BMO. Information on Molson's banknotes can be found [here](#).

SUBJECT FILES

The BCHS has a collection of various thematic subject files. Among them, mostly secondary source material and some primary source material can be found on various businesses of Brome County.

Below is a list of examples of subjects found within the files:

- Brome Corner- Organ Factory Site
- Brome County Asbestos Development Ltd.
- Brome County Hotels
- Brome County Post Office History
- Eastern Townships Bank
- Eastern Townships Land Companies
- Industries
- Mills, Grist & Saw
- Mining
- Money
- Stores

Contact us for more information or for a more detailed directory of the files.

ISRAEL ENGLAND: AN INDUSTRY PIONEER

Israel England was born on April 2, 1821 in Vermont. He moved to Quebec sometime in the 1830s when his parents settled in Dunham. Israel England began his career in Stanbridge, securing a position as an apprentice for a tanner. In 1843, he opened his own tannery in Knowlton, which sat on the present day site of Star Café. The tannery was very successful and gained a reputation for its quality. During the 19th century, the tanning industry was one of the fastest-growing industries in Brome County. The industry took a nose-dive however at the end of the 19th century due to an overproduction of bark. England's tannery survived the decline, but burnt down in 1903. The tannery was rebuilt and was operated by England until his death in 1911. Israel England was a successful businessman and giver to the community, supporting the construction of two Methodist churches. He also was on the association of the Pettes Memorial Library.

The Fonds

The England family fonds (BCHS553) contain photos of Israel England and contextual documents. Israel's son, Rufus, also operated a general store in downtown Knowlton.

Israel England. BCHS553.

THE ERNEST FLEURY FONDS

Ernest Fleury was born in 1860. He had an accomplished career in Knowlton, and in 1889, documents prove he was already an established notary. Ernest Fleury was also mayor of Knowlton for a few years.

The Ernest Fleury fonds (BCHS212) are substantial for research since he was notary for many individuals and businesses, overseeing dealings in marriage, death, deeds of sale, and so on. When the Dominion of Canada opened the post office in Knowlton, Ernest Fleury oversaw the business transaction and signed papers relating to its opening.

The textual records of the fonds are divided into different categories:

- Series 1: 30 notes acknowledging receipt of declaration of estates of deceased persons from Levi A. Perkins, Collector of Provincial Revenue, 1892-1905
- Series 2: 50 notes acknowledging receipt of declaration of estates of deceased persons from John McCrum, Collector of Provincial Revenue, 1905-1910
- Series 3: 19 notes and letters stating succession duties due, clearance on estates, etc., from Carl. D. Griggs, Collector of Provincial Revenue
- Series 4: 31 letters relating to settling estates of deceased persons, 1922-1953
- Series 5: Documents involving settling of 13 estates and land sales
- Series 6: 50 deeds of sale bearing dates between the years 1801-1951
- Series 7: Death notices and succession documents (over 200) between the years 1908-1948, arranged in alphabetical order by surnames.

CONTACT US/ FURTHER INFORMATION

For more information or for research assistance please do not hesitate to reach out to us at archives@shcb.ca. You can also reach us by phone at 450-243-6782.

To read the BCHS's research policy click here.