

BAS GATINEAU

CIRCUIT PATRIMONIAL



Réseau du patrimoine anglophone du Québec

Couverture: Montage de photos d'archives par Adrienne Herron, Gatineau Valley Historical Society

La rivière Gatineau était une voie de passage sauvage traversant la forêt vierge des Laurentides.

Avant que les bûcherons et les fermiers défrichent ses rives, les chasseurs algonquins utilisaient ce cours d'eau de 275 kilomètres de longueur, qui servait de route principale vers l'arrière-pays riche en gibier. La rivière servait de lien à l'important système commercial des Premières Nations reliant les Hurons et les Nipissing des Grands Lacs aux Innus-Montagnais situés près du Lac-Saint-Jean.

La rivière doit son nom à Nicolas Gatineau, notaire et marchand de Trois-Rivières, qui faisait le commerce des fourrures sur la rivière Ottawa à la fin des années 1600.

Les colons anglophones vinrent dans le Bas-Gatineau au début des années 1800 en provenance de Wrightstown, future ville de Hull. Les grands pins et chênes de la Vallée de l'Outaouais qui représentaient une source importante de billots équarris destinés aux navires britanniques tombèrent rapidement sous la hache des bûcherons.

Une fois les forêts épisées, les principaux marchands de bois, incluant Philemon Wright, George Hamilton, C.A. Low, Thomas McGahey et les Gilmours portèrent leur regard sur les collines de la Gatineau. Au cours des années 1830, la Vallée de la Gatineau constituait la principale source de bois d'œuvre sur la rivière Ottawa.

Le premier hôtel de ville fut construit en 1876. L'édifice se trouve toujours sur le côté sud de l'autoroute 5 et du chemin Old Chelsea. La Société historique de la Vallée de la Gatineau publie un guide détaillé sur les édifices patrimoniaux locaux.

OLD CHELSEA

Les plus vieilles traces de pionniers que l'on retrouve dans le Bas-Gatineau sont situées derrière les portes de fer du cimetière protestant. Ce dernier se trouve de l'autre côté de la rue, en face du restaurant Agaric, derrière le vieil hôtel Dunn (1901), situé au 253, chemin Old Chelsea.

Les pierres tombales rappellent le décès des premiers pionniers tels que Thomas Wright natif du Massachusetts et Asa Meech, pasteur, enseignant et médecin, d'où vient le nom du lac Meech situé à proximité du parc de la Gatineau.

Le ruisseau Brooks, qui coule par-delà le cimetière, fut d'abord maîtrisé par un autre personnage de la Nouvelle-Angleterre, pour les moulins à scie et à provende. Thomas Brigham, de Chelsea dans le Vermont, était le gendre de Philemon Wright, le fondateur de Hull, et un homme d'affaires qui immigrera dans les cantons de Hull.

Chelsea fut le lieu de résidence de la populaire famille Gilmour, dont les vastes opérations d'exploitation forestière modèlèrent le développement du Bas-Gatineau. Les Gilmour financèrent un barrage rempli de pierres, un moulin et un glisseur à billots de deux milles de longueur sur la rivière Gatineau aux chutes Chelsea. Tout fut submergé en 1926 lorsque la compagnie Gatineau Power construisit le barrage Chelsea.

Aujourd'hui, le chemin Mill mène au-delà de la United Church et traverse les voies ferrées pour se rendre jusqu'à l'emplacement de l'ancienne gare ferroviaire de Chelsea. Cette gare fut démolie en 1970, mais non les rails qui permettent aux trains remplis de touristes venant du monde entier d'admirer les collines en amont à bord du train à vapeur Hull-Chelsea-Wakefield.

Juste au nord du village, surveillez l'enseigne indiquant l'entrée du cimetière des pionniers de Chelsea.

LA VALLÉE DU RUISEAU MEECH

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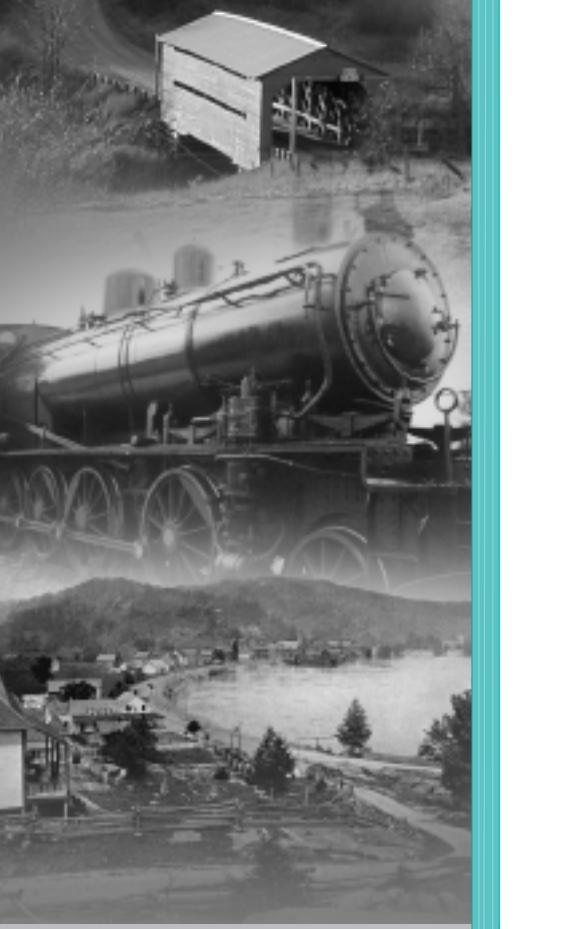
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LOWER GATINEAU

HERITAGE TRAIL



Cover: Archival photo montage by Adrienne Herron, Gatineau Valley Historical Society.

Quebec Anglophone Heritage Network

OLD CHELSEA 1

The Gatineau River was a wilderness thoroughfare through unbroken Laurentian forest.

Before loggers and farmers cleared its banks, the 275-kilometre long waterway served Algonquin Indian hunters as their main route to the game-rich hinterlands. The river was a link in a vast First Nations trade system joining Huron and Nipissing people in the Great Lakes with Montagnais Innu near Lac Saint-Jean.

The river's namesake, Nicolas Gatineau, was a notary and merchant from Trois-Rivières who traded for furs in the Ottawa River in the late 1600s.

English-speaking settlers came to the Lower Gatineau in the early 1800s by way of Wrightstown, the future city of Hull. A chief source of squared logs for Britain's shipyards, the great pine and oak trees of the Ottawa Valley fell swiftly before the woodcutter's axe.

As the forests were depleted, leading wood merchants, including Philemon Wright, George Hamilton, C.A. Low, Thomas McGoey and the Gilmours turned their gaze upon the Gatineau Hills. By the 1830s the Gatineau valley was the main source of timber in the Ottawa River.

The first town hall was built in 1876. The building still stands on the southeast corner of Autoroute 5 and Old Chelsea Road. A detailed guide to local heritage buildings is published by the Gatineau Valley Historical Society.

Gatineau Valley Historical Society
Telephone: (819) 827-4432

KINGSMERE (GATINEAU PARK) 2

William Lyon Mackenzie King was a great admirer of Quebec's Gatineau Hills and in 1902 the future Canadian prime minister bought land on Kingsmere Lake, a few kilometres from Old Chelsea. Here he built a cottage and extensive gardens. Upon his death in 1950 King bequeathed the estate to the Government of Canada. Today the National Capital Commission (NCC) operates the Gatineau Park site as a major cultural attraction.

HOW TO GET THERE

This Heritage Trails tour begins in the village of Old Chelsea, about a 15-minute drive from downtown Ottawa. Head north through Hull on Autoroute 5 and take exit 12, turning left onto Old Chelsea Road.

For more information call 1 800 465-1867
Gatineau Park website: www.canadascapital.gc.ca/gatineau

NEW CHELSEA 3

A short drive east along Old Chelsea Road brings visitors across Aut. 5, past the municipal hall and the English primary school toward the community of New Chelsea. Note the typical Gatineau fanlight in the Gardner Church House (1870) directly opposite the stop sign on Route 105.

WAKEFIELD 6

Church was a master carpenter who styled his home after neoclassical building traditions popular with Gatineau residents during the Victorian period. Many of Church's outside design details remain intact: the symmetry of doors and windows, the columned porch and a transom above the front entrance stand out.

Buried here are such leading pioneers as Massachusetts native Thomas Wright and Asa Meech, a preacher, teacher and doctor for whom Meech Lake in nearby Gatineau Park is named.

Brooks' Creek, which flows past the cemetery, was first harnessed for saw and grist mills by another New Englander. Thomas Brigham was Hull founder Philemon Wright's son-in-law and a businessman who emigrated to Hull Township from Chelsea, Vermont.

By the end of the 1820s, Irish farmers outnumbered their American counterparts. Some had come to Canada as labourers to dig the Rideau Canal. Others arrived in the 1840s fleeing famine in their homeland. St. Stephens Catholic Church (1845) on Old Chelsea Road, made of stone from quarries used to build Canada's Parliament Buildings, is a reminder of the strong Irish influence on early Gatineau settlements.

Just north of the village watch for a sign indicating the entrance to the Chelsea Pioneer Cemetery.

MEECH CREEK VALLEY 4

Continue up Route 105, over the top of the hill above the traffic light and La Vallée Motel, then veer left onto Pine Road. Drive a kilometre or so, then turn right onto Cross Loop Road. This road leads through gently rolling farmland of Meech Creek Valley across an old wooden covered bridge before merging with the highway. The land was expropriated in the 1970s and now forms part of Gatineau Park. At the peak of the lumber trade in the 1800s this narrow watercourse channeled logs to a sawmill at Farm Point.

FARM POINT 5

The MacLaren family cemetery behind the mansion contains the grave of Canada's prime minister Lester B. Pearson. The Wakefield Covered Bridge, a striking replica of an older structure destroyed by fire in 1986, is a popular visitor attraction.

A number of Wakefield homes have been awarded heritage plaques by the Municipality of Lapêche, many of which can be seen on Burnside Avenue.

Hull and Wakefield Steam Train
(819) 778-7246 or (800) 871 7246
www.steamtrain.ca

ALCOVE 7

Once called North Wakefield, this small settlement was a busy sawmill town and ferry crossing. James and Judith Pritchard, farmers from Northern Ireland, first settled here in 1834 and their large white wooden family homestead

LOW 9

(circa 1850s) still stands at 49 chemin de la Rivière, part of the original Gatineau River road. Much of the farm country to the west of the hamlet along Maple Drive was cleared by Pritchards descendants.

Steeped in the history of the log drive, this village near the junction of the Lapêche and Gatineau rivers has lured cottagers and tourists since the early 1900s. Before that, Wakefield's lively streetfront served the needs of farms and distant logging camps.

New Chelsea was home to the famous Gilmour family, whose extensive lumbering operations shaped development of the Lower Gatineau. The Gilmours financed a stone-filled dam, a mill and a two-mile lumber slide on the Gatineau River at Chelsea Falls. All vanished under water in 1926 when the Gatineau Power Co. built the Chelsea Dam.

Many of Wakefield's original hotels, churches, stores and homes remain. The Earle House (circa 1880) on the corner of Valley and Riverside drives, belonged to Robert Earle, a carpenter, carriage-maker and blacksmith. Patterson's General Store at 740 Riverside Dr. (circa 1880), now a gift shop, retains much of its original interior. The Wakefield train station (1892) has operated as a restaurant since 1970. Les Trois Érables, an elegant doctor's residence built in 1896 today functions as a bed-and-breakfast.

Today Mill Road leads past the United Church and over the railroad tracks to the site of Chelsea's former railroad station. The station was demolished in 1970 but not the tracks, which now shuttle trainloads of tourists from all over the world into the hills upriver aboard the Hull-Chelsea-Wakefield Steam Train.

Just north of the village watch for a sign indicating the entrance to the Chelsea Pioneer Cemetery.

FARRELLTON 8

Veer left onto Plunkett Road, off Route 105 to admire the St. Camillus Catholic Church and manse, built by local Irish colonists. The name honours Patrick Farrell, a Gatineau pioneer who opened a general store here in the 1800s. Farrelton prospered as a supply depot for lumber camps and at one time supported a blacksmith, a sawmill and a butter factory.

A Scottish millwright and stonemason named William Fairbairn built Wakefield's first grist mill beside the waterfalls on the Lapêche River in 1838. Fellow countryman David Maclaren, a hardware merchant from Glasgow, built a sawmill in the centre of the village in the 1840s then added Fairbairn's grist mill to his operations. Later he built a large brick three-storey woolen mill. The mill complex was a leading employer in the Gatineau until the 1930s. It has been converted into a 26-room inn. The brick-clad Edwardian-Gothic style Maclaren House (1860) next door is used for conferences.

LOW 9

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One of three hydroelectric plants built on the river between 1926 and 1932, the Paigan Dam spans a 35-metre deep gorge at Low. Today there is a good road leading across the dam offering visitors a close-up view of the power plant, the gorge, the head-pond and the log chute.

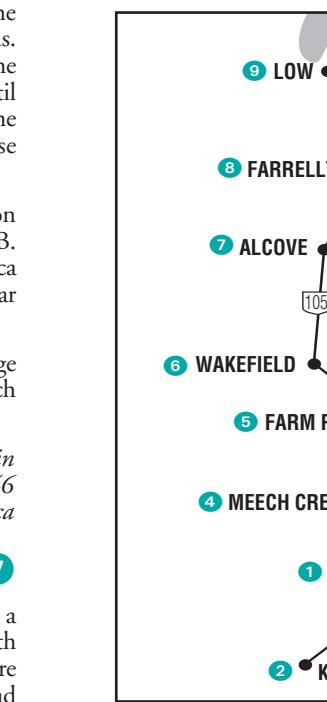
Before Route 105 was built, the narrow tree-lined street along the river was Alcove's main thoroughfare. The brick church (57 chemin de la Rivière), Alcove United, was built in 1889 as a Methodist meeting house. The North Wakefield General Store, last run by Oliver Daffin, sits abandoned nearby. The Alcove Ferry operated from an approach to the river a few metres further north. The former schoolhouse, now a private residence, stands behind some trees on the other side of the railbed.

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LOW 9

This guide is presented by the Quebec Anglophone Heritage Network and is made possible by a grant from Economic Development Canada and the Department of Canadian Heritage. Space constraints preclude mention of all possible sites. Thanks to Jay Atherton, Ernie Mahoney and Adrienne Herron of the Gatineau Valley Historical Society for their help. For more information call the QAHN office at (819) 564-9595 (toll free within Quebec at 1-877-964-0409) or visit our Quebec Heritage webmagazine at www.quebecheritageweb.com.



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