

# A Lost Chapter in Our History Revealed



By Guy Dubay

Across the St. John River from Van Buren's Community Hospital, one can see a "flat" (Land), that is "Un platin," where someone sows and harvests a potato crop.

Yet clearly visible from the American shore, somewhat in the middle of the field, is a copse of fine evergreen with a thick undergrowth of wild grass.

The site marks the spot of an abandoned graveyard, the early burial ground of the Valley's English settlers.

About 15 or 20 years ago, I remember, a group of Van Buren Boy Scouts dedicating themselves in a project of partial restoration of this historic but abandoned graveyard.

About 10 years ago or so, on one of those balmy Summer days which youth is bound to present to the viewer, I ventured on to the spot in search of recording what history was left there to record.

Many fine beautiful headstones lay toppled over by perhaps years and years of rust. A few still stood proud, however, shielded by low branches and underbrush.

And there I read the lost chapter in our Valley History.

I read that Leonard Coombs and wife Ann lost a son named George, aged 8 years, on the 22nd of February 1835. Leonard Coombs, among other things, was a land

speculator.

In 1844, Coombs, who lived in Grand Falls, loaned my great-great-grandfather, Abraham Dubay, \$246.11 as mortgage on the family farm in Hamlin, Me.

The mortgage conditions not being met by my ancestor, Coombs got the Court in Houlton to issue a summons.

In those days, when the Sheriff came after you like that, it meant nothing else but debtors' prison - so Abe, the river pilot, was remanded to debtors' dungeon, but apparently not to stay.

My ancestor secured another mortgage the following year and lived on another 40 years on his Hamlin farm thereafter unmolested.

As for Coombs, I know not the remainder of his tale.

One other family with several members buried in the old Protestant Cemetery were the Hammonds.

By the 1920's, the Hammonds, weighed by generations of association with Valley French, had adopted the religion of that majority and got themselves elected to the State Legislature.

But the original Hammond settlers were, I believe, Anglican, that is, as English as an Englishmen can be.

Andrew Benoni Hammond was born Nov. 22, 1805, and died in Van Buren June 18, 1854. He lies buried on the Canadian Shore.

I'm not sure whether this man, the progenitor of the Hammond line in this part of the Valley, was the son or descendent of Andrew Sanpe Hammond, the English son of a gun who, in 1783 as Baronet, usurped the lands my Ancestor,

Francois Violette, had lived on for nearly 20 years.

As lieutenant-governor of Nova Scotia, Hammond was in a position to take part in the land speculating spree in New Brunswick after the American Revolution.

The Acadians in the Kennebecassis area, who at various times had been employed to haul masts and spars out of the virgin forest for the "Queen's Naviee," maintained subsistence level farms on the eastern New Brunswick river.

With the Hammond grant, many settlers, now labeled squatters, saw their farms bisected and sold to incoming loyalists.

A petition in the New Brunswick archives records Francois Violette's pleas to retain both lots 13 and 14, which included "his improvement."

Governor Carleton then granted Francois title to lot 13 - no mention being made of 14, which we presume went to Hammond.

In any case, Francois Violette found cause in this to remove up river to what later became Van Buren, Me.

A 1786 petition records his second plea for redress, the result of which Violette is allowed to emigrate northward.

In any case, not long after Violette's son built the second grist mill on the Picquanositac (Violette Stream) in Van Buren in 1826, the Hammonds are met once more in history.

Andrew Benoni Hammond (1805-1854) apparently came up river with a younger brother, William, from whom Hammond Brook in Hamlin plantation derives its name.

William Cook Hammond, born Jan. 7, 1819, died May 9, 1891, and also was buried there in the all-denominational Protestant cemetery.

It was William C. Hammond who started the Van Buren Lumber Co. which held property on the first bend of Violette Brook, where the Watermill Rd. now leads.

The Hammonds later expanded their holdings to mills in the Allen-Dale, area, further up Violette stream in Van Buren.

In any case, old William C. Hammond and wife Caroline fathered Charles F. Hammond, who for many years was Postmaster in Van Buren, when the post office stood on the corner of Main & Bridge Sts.

Charles F. Hammond (b. Sept. 3, 1842, d. June 22, 1922) lies buried there, too, in the little woods under the sweet smelling fir.

Charles Hammond was the father of George V. Hammond (1883-1924), who served Van Buren for three terms in the State Legislature between 1917 and 1921.

His brother, H. Herbert Hammond (1871-1946), became a medical doctor who treated patients in an office where the Parent Brothers business office later stood.

Dr. Hammond may have been one of the last few persons to be interred in that now abandoned cemetery.

Another Hammond, Joseph W., probably a brother of the last two, succeeded George V. Hammond in the State Legislature, when the latter died in 1924.

Joseph W. Hammond, a convert, became a founding member

<sup>2-6-74</sup> of Madawaska Council 1635 of the Knights of Columbus in Van Buren.

Educated at Colby and Harvard, Joseph Hammond went on to become the American Consul at Fredericton, N.B.

Other English families with members interred in the old cemetery were the Akerleys, Crockers, Youngs, Reids, Lynches, the McLearys, Ginns and a Raymond family of loyalist background.

Here, then, as the headstones bare the information, are some of the names found in the old cemetery:

Andrew Benoni Hammond b. Nov. 22, 1805 died June 18, 1851 and his son John C. P. Hammond b. Dec. 2, 1851 died Nov. 18, 1854 and his daughter Elizabeth H. died Sept 30, 1856 aged 24 wife of Abijah W. Raymond who died May 13, 1857 age 38."

"William Cook Hammond, d. May 9, 1891 aged 72 years 5 mo. 7 days"

"Mary Elizabeth, wife of C. F. Hammond, b. St. Leonards Nov. 5, 1841 died Van Buren, March 7, 1895. Charles F. Hammond Sept 3, 1842 died Jan. 2, 1922. William Hammond died Feb. 23, 1879 1 day."

"May Louisa Hammond b. Sept. 3, 1878 d. Nov. 7, 1896."

"John Charles Hammond b. Feb. 17, 1873 d. Dec. 1906."

"Mamie A. E., daughter of Simon N. and Anne Ingram Hammond b. Nov. 8, 1833 died April 11, 1907."



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# PERSPECTIVE

By

Guy Dubay

An insight into Van Buren's past

## A case of politics

There were two Van Burens in 1915 - a Democratic Van Buren

and a Republican Van Buren. Both existed side by side and met once a week in Church on Sunday. During the week, however, one could live a relatively party-narrow life.

For example, there were two large Hardware stores in town, one Republican and one Democrat. Joseph Martin was a Republican. Honore Gagnon was a Democrat. So if it was nails he wanted, a Republican might go to Martin's and Sons. (Now Martin Brothers). A Democrat would head for Gagnon's.

To borrow money, a Republican would head for the First National Bank of Van Buren. Joseph Martin was its president. Attorney Levite V. Thibodeau its first Vice-President.

WE RECALL IN the famous electoral dispute of 1914, Levite V. Thibodeau claimed victory in the run for Van Buren's legislative seat. But the Democrats, undaunted, asked for a recount, and Democrat F. O. Michaud was declared the victor by two votes.

Other members of the First National Bank were Republican, J. Adolphe Hebert, cashier; and G.O.P. State Senator Patrick Theriault, Second Vice-president. So you see the walk from Martin's Hardware Store to the First National Bank was a natural one, that is if you were a Republican.

A Democrat on the other hand, after talking to the boys at Honore Gagnon's would head across the road to the Van Buren Trust. P.C. Keegan, its president was a lawyer of renown, and by then generally recognized as the Patriarch of the party in town.

Joseph F. Theriault, a potato grower and shipper of note, also a Democrat was its Vice-president.

When it came to buying electricity, efficiency and economy were not yet the watch word. Here too, politics matter for there were two Power Companies in town. One Republican and one Democrat of course.

IT IS SAID that there were two separate sets of power lines in Van Buren and their poles often stood side by side, just inches or feet from each other. In 1910 the Van Buren Light and Power Company was incorporated. Its officers were Attorney, Levite V. Thibodeau, Pres. J.A. Pelletier, Vice-President, Joseph Martin, Treasurer, and Emile Lebrun, secretary. The party affiliation of all officers, of course was Republican.

The Van Buren Light and Power District of which the Democrat attorney, A.J. Dubay became treasurer was incorporated in 1917. Willie F. Paradis and Honore A. Gagnon two of its officers were Democrats.

Thus by 1918 you had Van Buren, the Power Company and the Power District. (The Company probably preferred its bills paid with \$5 bills with Republican Lincoln on them. The District probably was too happy to oblige with \$2 bills. Democrat Jefferson must have been a more acceptable face.)

The entire question of Power Company or District ended up in celebrated court cases too complicated to explain here. But most any good lawyer's office can supply you with the 1920 and 1922 Maine Supreme Court ruling in

regard to Inhabitants of Van Buren versus Van Buren Light and Power Co., and Van Buren Power Company versus the Inhabitants of Van Buren.

If you were a farmer, you could buy your implements at Fred J. Parent's place. He founded Parent Brothers in 1903, and of course that is where the Republicans bought their tools.

Then if you were a Democrat and a farmer, Willie F. Paradis who ran the same kind of business as the Parents did could supply you with necessary implements.

And so social intercourse was carried out in the Van Buren of 1915. We do not know if the Republicans sat on the Gospel side of the church on Sunday, and the Democrats of the epistle side of the altar; or if it was the Democrats who were on the Gospel side, and the Republicans on the epistle. But life did have its particular slant in Van Buren in its heyday.

BEFORE THE READER goes on to take all this too literally though, let me point out that the treasurer of Van Buren Trust from 1905 to 1928 was none other than Henry K. Bradbury. Bradbury, the Republican in the Democratic house was widely known for his courteousness and amicability. His obituary writer noted that Bradbury was a man with an exceedingly large circle of friends.

One thing is sure though, Bradbury did not sit on the Gospel side of the Church. Yet he did not sit on the epistle side either. He sat on neither side of the Church of course because he was a Protestant.

# The Changing Face Of Van Buren



BY GUY DUBAY

A hundred years is enough to change the face of any town.

Considering Joseph Falter's recent guest editorial, a hundred years is more than adequate to do that. A map of Van Buren, published in 1877 helps us to note the changes that have occurred there over the past century.

At the top of the map is the church property. C. Sweron, listed as proprietor of the building next to the church is of course Reverent Charles Sweron second pastor of Ste. Luce from 1860 - 1908.

Prior to the coming of the Marists in 1884, Charles Sweron was administrator of all the parishes on the American side.

During absences or between terms of different pastors it was he who held on to the reigns of church government.

From 1827 to 1876, St. Bruno's church was originally located in Keegan where International Paper later built their mill.

In 1871 however Rt. Rev. David Bacon, first bishop of Portland, bought a four acre lot at the present site. Belonie Violette, who sold the land, then resided in the home now occupied by his great-grandson, Val Violette. That home can be seen on the right or west side of the highway labeled B. Violette on the map.

Just about everything else on the map, however, is different. You will note that there is a Sawmill (labeled s.m.) at the end of present day Center Street. None exists there today.

Violette Brook itself must have undergone significant change, or perhaps its course was im-

properly mapped.

In any case, the brook's path from Main Street to the St. John River is neither so short or so direct.

On the map it is given an almost easterly flow - though we know from the brochure published by the Town of Van Buren that an aerial photo reveals as much as a 180 degree bend in Violette Brook's flow from Main Street to the St. John.

Next to Belonie Violette, the map indicates A Willett, and at the brook itself a block labeled G.M. for grist mill is also indicated as belonging to A Ouellette.

Antoine Ouellette at that time owned the grist mill which had originally been founded by Francois Violette II in 1826. That same year, however, it was sold to Vital Thibodeau who leased it in 1868 to Israel and Cyrille Michaud (the I. Michaud home is listed on the map - two buildings from the church. That home fell recently to progress of the automobile age, and the parking lot in front of Sacred Heart School marks its site).

The mill was sold in 1871 to Pierre Cyr who sold it two months later to Joseph Martin and Antoine Ouellette. The

map clearly indicates Joseph Martin's home next to that of his partner, Antoine Ouellette. The Registry of Deeds records for us that Antoine Ouellette property was only deeded in 1879 after Belonie Violette's death. This was two years after the drawing of this map was two years after the drawing of this map which clearly indicates his residence. Today, of course, a new home, the Dan Cyr residence marks the spot.

On the corner of Poplar and Watermill the map locates G.H. Smith, This property dates back to the 1845 sale of Belonie Violette of that lot to George Smith of Bangor.

Smith's 1845 partner is listed as Charles Crosby. In 1847, the Hammonds had moved into the area where they dominated the lumbering complex at the end of present-day Watermill Road. Volume 6 p 320 of the registry of deeds reveals to us Belonie Violette's sale of that land and pond to Caroline Hammond, wife of W.C. Hammond. The map clearly indicates these holdings.

Noting how often the name Hammond occurs on the map, one can envision the near-complete dominance of that

family over the economics of the town.

Indeed as much as two generations later the Hammonds were still a factor in the local economy ranging from lumbering to hotel enterprises.

Today we're still reminded of that family's influence by the name of the "New Hammond Hotel" in Van Buren, and Hammond Brook, a favorite fishing spot in Hamlin. This writer recalls a pond and bridge where the Hammond mills once stood, but that too is long gone.

Climbing the hill from Violette Brook to what's called the town section of Van Buren, we come on to the J. Farrell residence, where Miss Constance Michaud now dwells. John Farrell was the father-in-law to Fortunat Michaud who built the home now on that site. Like the Violette property across the brook, it too is one of the oldest in Van Buren.

It was originally deeded as lot 302 by Maine and Massachusetts to Michael Farrell on July 12, Deane and Kavanaugh's 1831 census informs us that Farrell arrived here in 1821.

Across the street from the

Farrell home was a Hammond building, no longer in existence. Honore Gagnon later built a mansion on that site but it too has long disappeared. A 1902 view of this spot appears in the recently republished book.

Next to the Hammond building the map indicates a school house, approximately where the F.O. Michaud or Agathe Delisle properties now stand. This school figures in the next property across the street. That land, the Maley property, was originally deeded in 1859 to Catherine Farrell, whose husband sold it to John McCloskey, in 1864 after a sale from McCloskey to Rufus Mansur, it was sold by Mansur to James Maley.

In 1881, Maley's son sold it to Martin V Hall who saw it foreclosed by Patrick Lynott two years later. In 1887 Peter C. Keegan bought it from Lynott. Keegan sold it to the church wherein it became the convent land from that year to 1901 when the nuns who had arrived in 1891, moved to a building where Sacred Heart School is now.

It seems then that the school round about 1887 moved across the street from its site in 1877. Many older people can relate interesting stories in regard to this property.

The late Rose (DIONNE) Pelletier remembered her schooling here, and not long after that schooling there, she worked for T.H. Pelletier, M.D., who published a newspaper a couple of lots further down the street.

On the map we note the post office in the C.F. Hammond store and the Maine Register indicates his role as postmaster from 1873 to 1882 and again in 1889 and 1890, and finally from 1901 to 1914.

Beyond the Martin V Hall Hotel on the corner of what must now be Main and McKinley we come to a second church. Presently located here is Chanel

Bouchard's Exxon Station.

The church was used intermittently by several denominations. The building must later have been moved on the corner of Lafayette and St. John Streets though I would not vouch for this at present.

Michael Farrell dominated the south end of town where his farm and ferry house can be noted on the map.

Thomas Sirois, whose marriage to Marie Luce Martin was the first recorded in the St. Bruno registry in 1838, occupied the last lot on the map.

We know from old deeds that Dydime Morin was his next neighbor.

As a final note we add that Caribou Road or State Street was non-existent in 1877.

Rather, Poplar Street extended in those days to present-day Castonguay Road, and from there could follow Settlement Road on to Cyr Plantation.

McKinley Street also reached back to Castonguay Road, passing by what later became the Jos Martin poultry farm and climbed "LA MON-TAGNE A RENE," named after Rene Violette, Belonie Violette's grandson. Mrs. Alphy Levasseur's Cyr Plantation Book indicates this clearly.

Thus the face of Van Buren has changed completely in the 95 years since the publication of this map. If the next hundred years repeat the experience of the past, Van Buren os 2073 may have no resemblance of the town of today.

Remaining open to correction, I believe that only onne building now standing can be located on the map. The Val Violette house which may date back to 1844 if not earlier, is the only one that can be located on the map precisely where it is today. No other building in Van Buren can antedate it. IT IS TRULY AN HISTORIC PROPERTY. According to this map it alone has withstood the test of time.