Randonnée des trois cimetières historiques de Chelsea **Visit to Chelsea Cemeteries** **The General Store – 244 Chemin Old Chelsea** **Le 27 septembre 2025** **10am – 12pm**
Visit of the Old Chelsea Protestant Burial Ground **Guided by André Renaud**

Introduction

Not only is the protestant cemetery Chelsea's oldest but also it is older than Chelsea. The first grave is dated 1835, so 40 years before Chelsea.

By using the protestant cemetery as a starting point, this tour allows us to glimpse at what life was like at the time and identify some grave stones to relate to the early settlers.

In 1801, **Philemon Wright** and his older brother **Thomas** came to the area from Woburn, Massachusetts. They qualified for a grant of the vacant Hull Township, a tract of nine by twelve miles, as investors committed to establish an agricultural community and develop the land. They came with mechanics, axemen and five families to establish an agricultural community.

In 1875, the city of Hull was created and the remainder of Hull township was divided. A portion was incorporated as the West part of the Township of Hull. It encompassed the area from Ironside to Farm Point as well as the other side of the Gatineau River. Eventually, Ironside became part of Gatineau; the east side became Cantley and the remainder of West-Hull changed its name to Chelsea in 1990.

Chelsea 1824-1875

In 1824, **Thomas Brigham,** Philemon Wright's son-in-law, secured a grant for 600 acres adjacent to a 200-acre lot in Hull Township which had been reserved for a yet to be named future townsite. Brigham thought that his purchase would be a good development opportunity being next to the future town. He named the area Chelsea after his hometown in Vermont. However, as it happens, development

had not waited to occur outside the reserved townsite and the 200-acre vacant lot was finally sold in 1835. Brigham was able to purchase half the site which was no longer needed. It included the **cemetery** and he allowed it to continue.

Development was sufficiently advanced that Brigham saw a need and built a sawmill and grist mill to serve the growing community. In the 1830s, the Old Chelsea Road was a dirt road, named High Street. It passed right-by the edge of the cemetery, which was probably bordered by a split rail fence, and led to Chelsea Brook or Creek where Brigham operated his mills. A few years after 1835, the High Street was angled north which created space between High Street and the new road – today's Old Chelsea Road. The added space was used for building lots where, for example, sits the Dunn Hotel, the green building on the right, as we pass the gates. The 1891 date on the gates likely indicates the year when they were installed.

By 1875, one hundred and fifty years ago, in addition to the sawmill and grist mill, the village had a number of services including a post office, a general store, four hotels, a blacksmith, the St. Stephen Church (at the time a wooden structure), a tannery, a shoe maker and a shingle mill. Chelsea had expanded to what was then known as "New Chelsea" and several houses and services were built along highway 11/105. Indications are that the population of the new municipality was at least 3,000 persons in 1875.

West Hull council's first meeting was at the O'Neil Hotel built in the 1850's, number 577 on Highway 105, south of the entrance to the Pioneer Cemetery. Arthur O'Neil had the place painted red, with a sign indicating that it was a temperance hotel with stabling for horses. Ten diners could be accommodated at the long table. Such hotels, whether dry or wet, were used amongst others by teamsters to stable their horses on their journeys.

Old Chelsea Protestant Burial Ground

Today we designate the cemetery as the Old Chelsea Protestant Burial Ground (OCPBG). It is owned and managed by the municipality of Chelsea and listed as an Historical monument which is closed to further burials

There are 54 stones in the old section and nearly half of the families with monuments were in Chelsea in the 1820s and 75% had arrived by 1842, years

before West Hull was incorporated. The 14 stones in the Annex refer to more recent burials. All told, there are 104 persons named on the stones. However, it is estimated that there are more or less 200 burials in the cemetery as various records identify an additional 78 persons buried with no grave marker. These include Phillip Leppard, (1842-1925) a blacksmith whose forge was just west of the St. Stephen parking lot and who may well have been the one responsible for the gates.

The persons buried in the first few decades came from all sectors of the West Hull community, including areas that are now part of Cantley or Gatineau. As there was no cemetery attached to the existing protestant churches, the religious denominations of those buried were also diverse. They were: Anglicans, Presbyterians, Methodist, Baptist, Plymouth Brethren, Catholic Apostolic, and others no longer heard of.

Some of these earlier arrivals were connected to Hull Township's founding Wright family, by personal or business relationships, or both. Others, simply arrived and took up available farm land or found other work. By the end of the mid 1850's, Gilmour Mills attracted workers from other Canadian settlements and abroad and some of these families used this cemetery.

Cemetery Tour

You will have noted that some stones have been flagged and you are invited to visit them with the help of the information below. But first, let us look at the bench and plaque honouring Carol Matin. She was a dedicated citizen of Chelsea who wrote a master's thesis on Chelsea's Historic Cemeteries and whom I relied on for the suggested tour. Her thesis was summarized in a book which you can borrow from the Chelsea library or purchase from the Gatineau Valley Historical Society.

West Section

i) **Wilson** The Wilson family arrived in Cabada in 1842.here are four stones. Andrew Wilson tried his hand at various enterprises, including Old Chelsea's first powered loom before turning to printing. He published the weekly *Banner*, which later became the *Daily News*, Ottawa's first daily newspaper.

ii) Asa Meech for whom Meech Lake is named. The reverend Asa Meech was well loved and respected by the people to whom he ministered as pastor, teacher and doctor. His farm was at the east end of Meech Lake. His house is situated off the road in a small grove of trees and is maintained by the NCC.

iii) William Chamberlain The stone of this eight-year-old does not name his parents. With his monument's1835 date it is the second oldest in the cemetery.

iv) **Reid-Chamberlin** (Two monuments) James Reid and Cynthia Chamberlin, a young married couple who died within months of each other and remembered by the telling lines on the stone.

For James who died in February 1857	For Cynthia who died in October 1857
Our wasting lives grow shorter still *As months and days increase* *And ev'ry beating pulse we tell* *Leaves but the number less*	*As daughter sister mother wife* *But few have equalled none surpassed* *Her faithful constancy through life* *Her strong affection to the last*

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v) **Thomas Wright** This is the earliest-dated grave monument in the NCR, commemorating this founder of Hull Township. At the time when Wrighville in Hull Township was just beginning, the grave stone was probably made in Vermont and subsequently installed after 1835.

<u>East Section</u>

vi) **Childs** The gate of the Childs Plot inscribed 'Mather 1870", marks the entrance to a "recycled plot", used by the Childs family after the Mather family transferred Annie Mather's remains to a city cemetery.

vii) **Schalm** William R" Schalm has the only military marker in this cemetery, and the headstone for his plot announces that he was a "home boy", a child worker sent from an English orphanage to Canada.

viii) **Kirk** Note the stone for Lydia A. Kirk to admire this Victorian tablet with a dove and olive-branch motif and its heartfelt epitaph for a 16-year-old.

South Annex

ix) Crawley Note the Crawley Film logo for Judy and Budge Crawley famous Canadian film makers.

x) Spry Note the detailed inscription for the social activist and businessman Graham Spry.

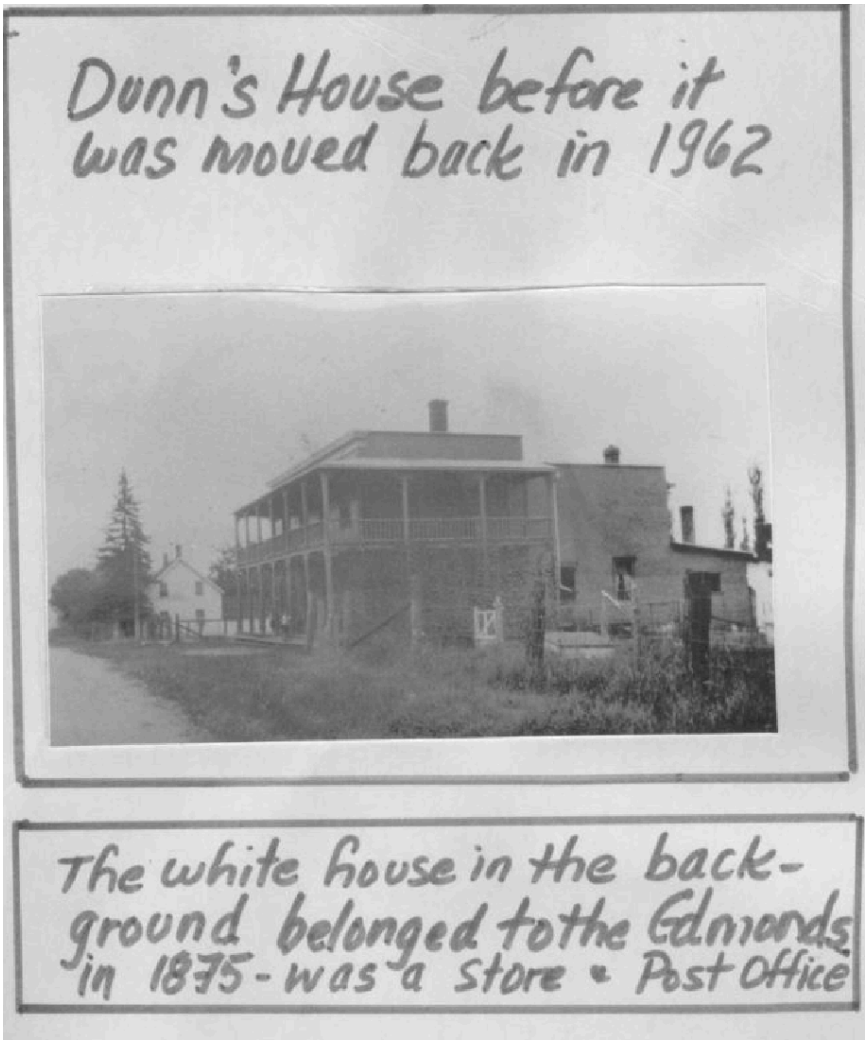
The world is a better place because he lived in it"

He was a city resident who spent his summers at a cottage in Kingsmores. He was a activist and businessman. His stone describes his education.

xi) Heisel Note the Scandinavian style stone for Fritze Heisel.

Landmarks

i) The **Dunn Hotel**, previously mentioned, was originally built as a private residence before being transformed into a hotel in the mid-1800s. The original structure was rebuilt in 1901. It was later converted into apartments and remains in that form today.

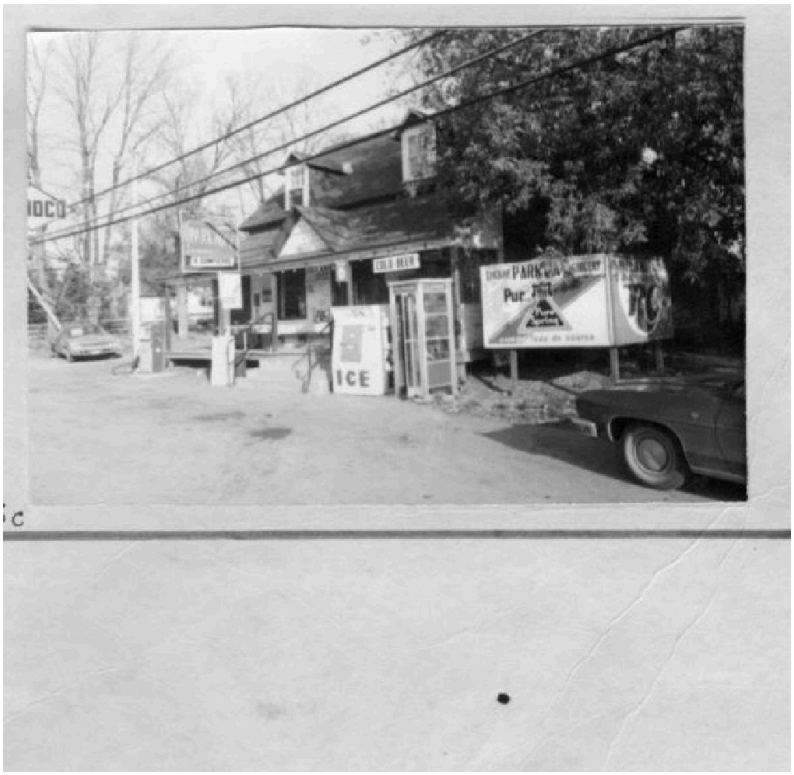


ii) Across the street, corner of Padden and Old Chelsea roads, the Chelsea Pub is where the old **Dean Hotel** was. The West Hull Council held several meetings there in 1875 before building a town hall next door the following year. The hotel business was closed when prohibition was declared in 1893. See below at corner of Paden Road next to first Town Hall. See picture below which includes the Dean Hotel on the rightot the Town Hall

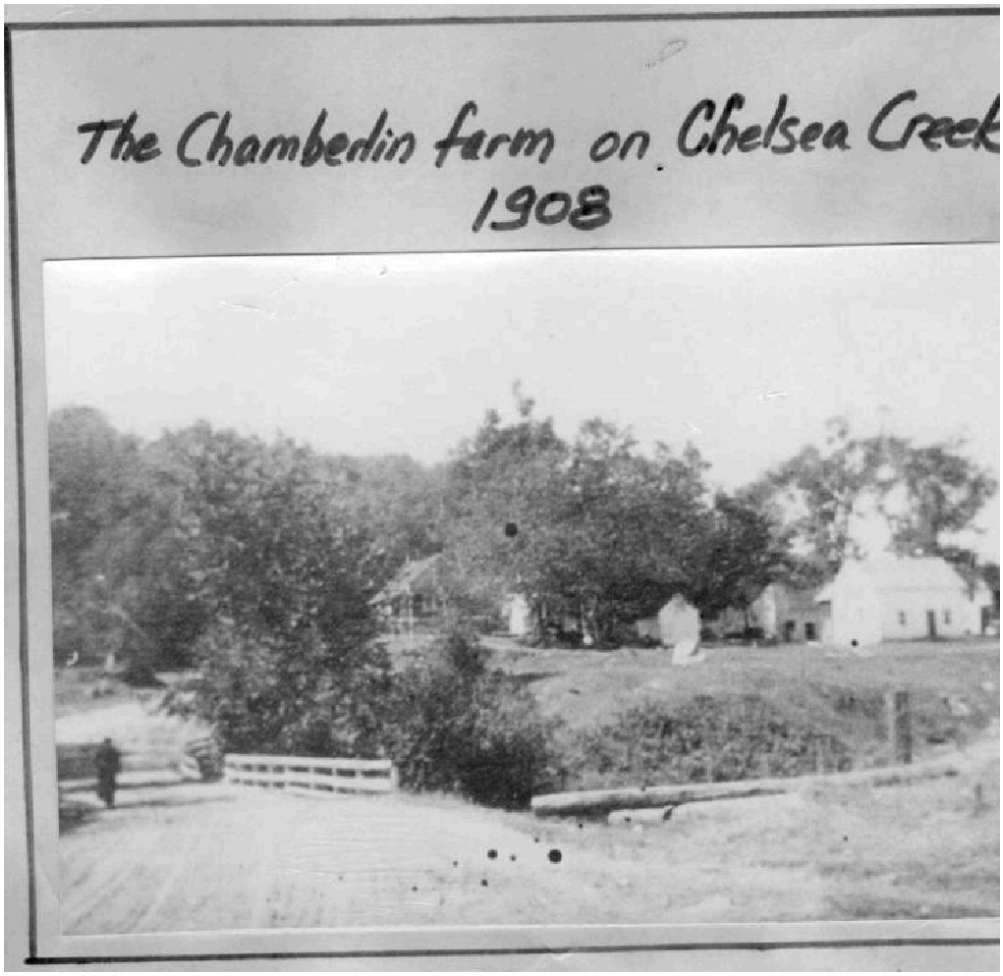
iii) The **Town Hall** was built where the Chelsea Pub's patio is located.

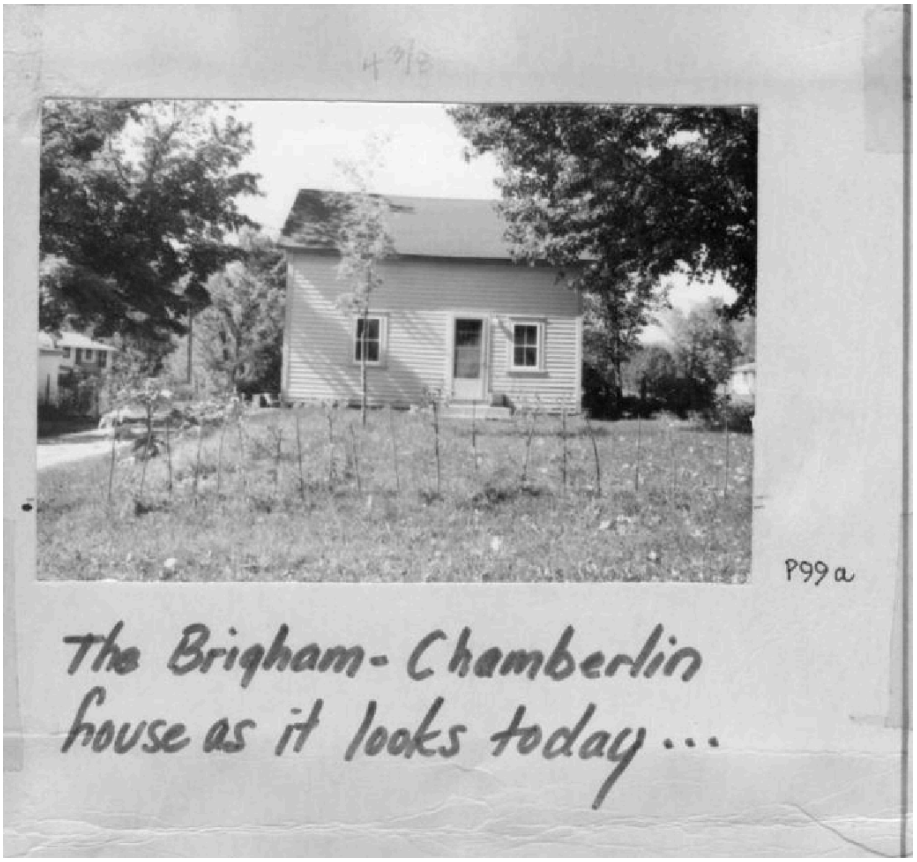


iv) The **Sweeney Hotel** was located where the Boulangerie du Village is located and where T.B. Prentiss (the T. B. stands for Thomas Brigham) operated his general store and post office in 1834.



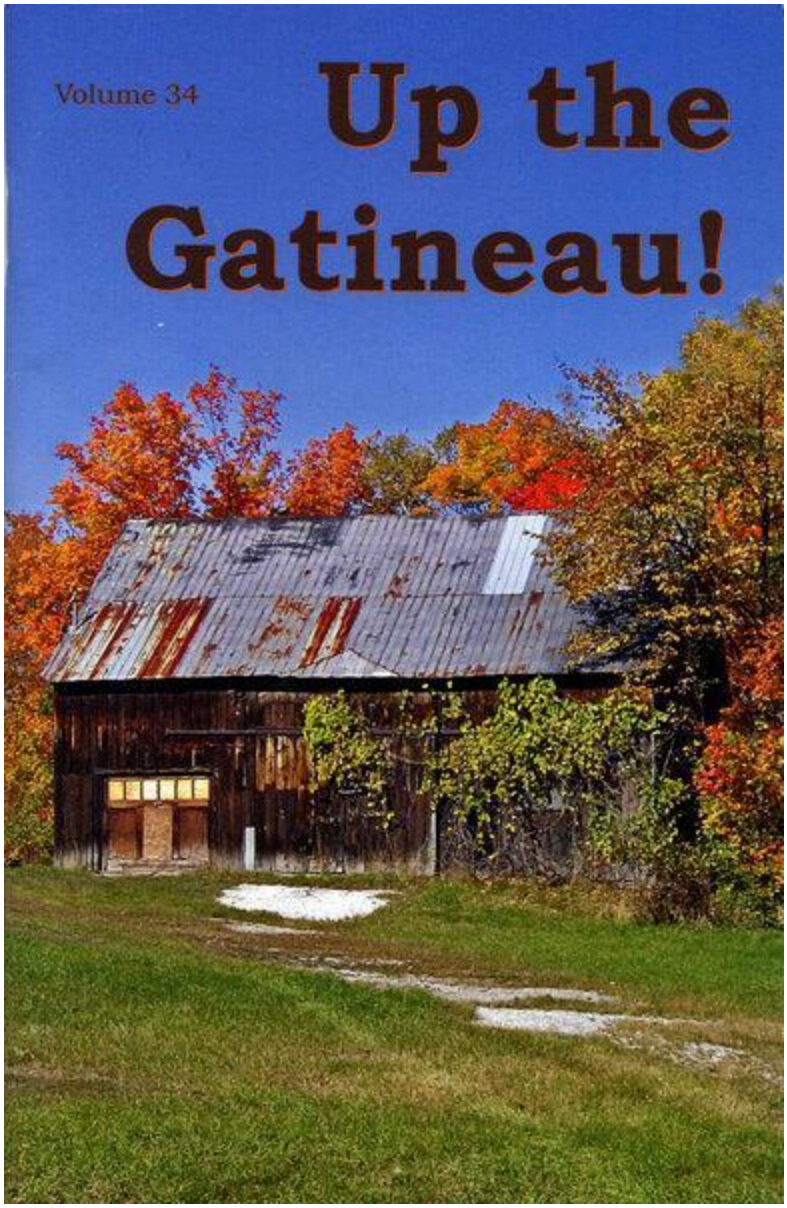
v) Along the Padden Road as we leave for the St, Stephen cemetery, we can see on the left, number 9, the Brigham-Chamberlin House which is the oldest house in the village. Due to road enlargement, it was moved in 1962 from the original farm nearby. It is believed that the house had been constructed in 1850, so 175 years ago. It stood adjacent to the barn that still stands across the corner of Kingsmere and Old Chelsea roads. The photos below show the house before and after it was moved as well as the barn.


The Chambedin farm on Chelsea Creek
1908



P99a

The Brigham-Chamberlin house as it looks today...



Up the Gatineau!

Volume 34, 2008

Recent History

The municipality has received a donation of $ 260,000 in June 2020 from Ms. Janet Benedict for the historical cemetery. One set of her great grandparents are buried in the cemetery - Philip Leppard (1832-1909) previously mentioned and Mary Anne Bradley.

Sources:

In Memory of Chelsea's Historic Monuments, Carol Martin, Castenchel Editon, 2005

Touring the Chelseas, R.A.J. Phillip, The Historical Society of the Gatineau, 1991

A Tale of Two Chelseas, P.M.O. Evans, es Éditions J, Oscar Lemieux Publisher Inc.,

Contributors to the UTG in volumes number:1, 2, 4, 11 13, 14, 17, 27, 26, 34, 43 and 47.

Photos:

A scrapbook of Old Houses by Heather Quipp, 1975, Original document in PDF format, 

old-chelsea-scrapbook.pdf GVHS, Places, Towns, Villages and Municipalities, Old Chelsea.