10 The Roaring Twenties and the Great Depression

Introduction

The best of times, the worst of times. This appropriately describes Ogden in the period between the two World Wars. The men came back from the Great War, or at least most of them did, to a nation grateful in spirit but less than generous in terms of practical support, and almost negligent to those wounded in body or mind. The young men returned to their family farms or awaited for mill jobs or granite work as those industries slowly adjusted to a post-war economy. A few Ogden men, having been overseas and having tasted city sophistication, forsook the rural life for good. Agriculture remained the mainstay of Ogden life, but the smaller farms could not compete, and the larger ones were facing market challenges, particularly from western producers and rising costs due to mechanization as the sector gradually moved away from horse-powered farms. Still, it was a living and most farmers made do, often by taking on other seasonal or part-time employment. The granite industry did quite well in the 1920s, both on the monument and construction side and Ogden benefited greatly from this. Although Stanstead Township voted for Prohibition, the rest of the Province did not, and so new opportunities arose for the enterprising souls of this border-hugging region!

And then came the Great Depression. In an era where there were no social safety nets, the hardest hit were at the mercy of neighbours, churches, and a handful of secular charitable organizations. Farmers were resourceful as always, but the farms were not as self-sufficient as they had been in pioneer days. It is easy now to underestimate the impact the Great Depression had, but as stated by the late Alan Bullock, " *If it wasn't for the quarries during the depression there would have been people who would have starved to death here, I'm sure*".

In the midst of all this - taxes, roads and politics. There was talk of separation. Then there was separation, as Ogden after much wrangling, became its own municipality.

All in all, it made for some interesting times, and some wonderful local history.

The Municipality of Ogden was founded in 1932

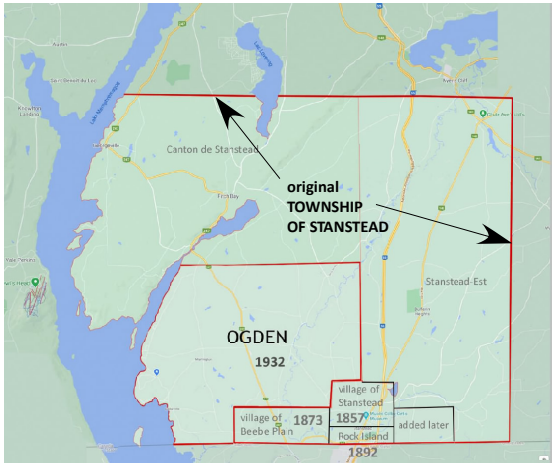
When an Ogden resident provides an address for a delivery or service call, it is not uncommon to hear the reply, "Ogden? Where is that?" Indeed, outside the Memphremagog MRC, few people know about Ogden which, however, has existed since 1932. Here is the story behind the municipality's birth.

Angry citizens in Stanstead Township

A wind of anger blew through the Township of Stanstead in 1930 because a large section of the township was not represented on the municipal council and many people felt excluded from decisions. Residents sent a petition of 190 names to the Quebec Minister of Municipal Affairs, Mr. Oscar Morin, demanding the creation of a new municipality. They argued that the township covered too much territory and was not able to effectively defend the interests of all its citizens.

The new territory

The Township of Stanstead had already suffered several fractures with the separation of Stanstead Plain (1857), Beebe Plain (1873) and Rock Island (1892).



The territory claimed by the malcontents would be bounded on the south by the villages of Beebe, Stanstead Plain and the State of Vermont, on the west by Fitch Bay, on the east by Range 11 and on the north by the 16th Lot line. Under the proposed new division, the northwestern section of the Township would inherit the most difficult mountain roads, but also the highest property values because of the rich lakefront properties at Georgeville and Fitch Bay. The southern section (Ogden) would have to maintain more bridges, but would benefit from a good road (now Route 247), more valuable farms, granite quarries and the village of Tomifobia.

Difficult negotiations

On June 14, 1930, the members of the Stanstead Township Council passed a resolution protesting the proposed division of the municipality. Many of them felt that they had managed the municipality well up to that point and that the creation of Ogden would be unfair, as the cost of road maintenance in this area was lower than elsewhere in the township.

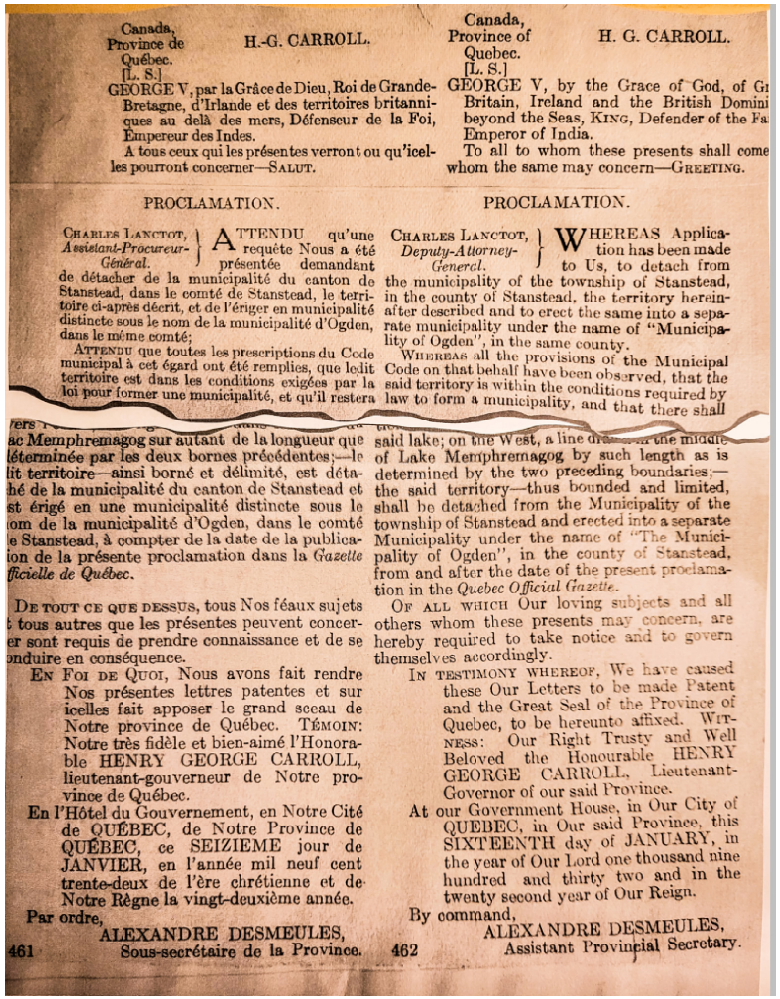
Three petitions against the division of the Township of Stanstead were sent in succession to the Lieutenant-Governor by residents.

The Minister of Municipal Affairs was of the opinion that the Township of Stanstead was indeed too large and that it would eventually have to be divided to ensure better management. He organized several meetings between the parties in order to reach an agreement. These meetings were held in Tomifobia but came to nothing. Faced with a lack of cooperation and intransigence from the parties,

in order to find a solution, the Minister convened a delegation of 20 people from both camps in Quebec City, but it was another failure.

On January 12, 1932, the Lieutenant-Governor settled the matter and granted the applicants the creation of the new municipality. The new Municipality of Ogden was created in the south-central part of Stanstead Township. Like most divorces, the issue of property division was difficult to resolve. Since the value of homes was lower in Ogden ($356,175) than in the rest of Stanstead Township ($895,835), Ogden came into existence with assets of $7,109.45, almost a third of the value of Stanstead Township.

(below) Small portions (top & bottom) of the official proclamation of the Municipality of Ogden



Canada, Province de Québec. [L. S.] H.-G. CARROLL.

GEORGE V, par la Grâce de Dieu, Roi de Grande-Bretagne, d'Irlande et des territoires britanniques au delà des mers, Défenseur de la Foi, Empereur des Indes.

A tous ceux qui les présentes verront ou qu'icelles pourront concerner—SALUT.

PROCLAMATION.

CHARLES LANCTOT, *Assistant-Procureur-Général.* } ATTENDU qu'une requête Nous a été présentée demandant de détacher de la municipalité du canton de Stanstead, dans le comté de Stanstead, le territoire ci-après décrit, et de l'ériger en municipalité distincte sous le nom de la municipalité d'Ogden, dans le même comté;

ATTENDU que toutes les prescriptions du Code municipal à cet égard ont été remplies, que ledit territoire est dans les conditions exigées par la loi pour former une municipalité, et qu'il restera

ac Memphremagog sur autant de la longueur que léterminée par les deux bornes précédentes;—le lit territoire—ainsi borné et délimité, est détahé de la municipalité du canton de Stanstead et st érigé en une municipalité distincte sous le om de la municipalité d'Ogden, dans le comté e Stanstead, à compter de la date de la publicaion de la présente proclamation dans la *Gazette ficielle de Québec.*

DE TOUT CE QUE DESSUS, tous Nos féaux sujets t tous autres que les présentes peuvent concerer sont requis de prendre connaissance et de se onduire en conséquence.

EN FOI DE QUOI, Nous avons fait rendre Nos présentes lettres patentes et sur icelles fait apposer le grand sceau de Notre province de Québec. TÉMOIN: Notre très fidèle et bien-aimé l'Honorable HENRY GEORGE CARROLL, lieutenant-gouverneur de Notre province de Québec.

En l'Hôtel du Gouvernement, en Notre Cité de QUÉBEC, de Notre Province de QUÉBEC, ce SEIZIEME jour de JANVIER, en l'année mil neuf cent trente-deux de l'ère chrétienne et de Notre Règne la vingt-deuxième année.

Par ordre,

ALEXANDRE DESMEULES,
461 Sous-secrétaire de la Province.

Canada, Province of Quebec. [L. S.] H. G. CARROLL.

GEORGE V, by the Grace of God, of Gr Britain, Ireland and the British Domini beyond the Seas, KING, Defender of the Fa Emperor of India.

To all to whom these presents shall come whom the same may concern—GREETING.

PROCLAMATION.

CHARLES LANCTOT, *Deputy-Attorney-General.* } WHEREAS Application has been made to Us, to detach from the municipality of the township of Stanstead, in the county of Stanstead, the territory hereinafter described and to erect the same into a separate municipality under the name of "Municipality of Ogden", in the same county.

WHEREAS all the provisions of the Municipal Code on that behalf have been observed, that the said territory is within the conditions required by law to form a municipality, and that there shall

said lake; on the West, a line dr the middle of Lake Memphremagog by such length as is determined by the two preceding boundaries;—the said territory—thus bounded and limited, shall be detached from the Municipality of the township of Stanstead and erected into a separate Municipality under the name of "The Municipality of Ogden", in the county of Stanstead, from and after the date of the present proclamation in the *Quebec Official Gazette.*

OF ALL WHICH Our loving subjects and all others whom these presents may concern, are hereby required to take notice and to govern themselves accordingly.

IN TESTIMONY WHEREOF, We have caused these Our Letters to be made Patent and the Great Seal of the Province of Quebec, to be hereunto affixed. WITNESS: Our Right Trusty and Well Beloved the Honourable HENRY GEORGE CARROLL, Lieutenant-Governor of our said Province.

At our Government House, in Our City of QUEBEC, in Our said Province, this SIXTEENTH day of JANUARY, in the year of Our Lord one thousand nine hundred and thirty two and in the twenty second year of Our Reign.

By command,

ALEXANDRE DESMEULES,
462 Assistant Provincial Secretary.

Why the name Ogden?

Isaac Ogden (1739-1824) is as little known as the municipality that bears his name. Why was he chosen? It was to honour the memory of this Loyalist lawyer who lost all his property following the victory of the American patriots against the British crown. He arrived in Canada in 1788 as a judge of the Court of Admiralty and was granted, along with his 24 fellow petitioners, 25,000 acres of land on the east shore of Lake Memphremagog (see separate article on Fitch and Ogden). This land represented the southern half of the Township of Stanstead and corresponds approximately to the current location of the Municipality of Ogden.

For the record

Politics is full of ironies. Warren Benjamin Bullock, the first mayor of the Municipality of Ogden, and most of the councillors Burbank, Bacon, Rediker, Burgess, Miller and Lussier, were among those who opposed the creation of the new municipality in the first place.

Warren B. Bullock (1856-1948), was a farmer, cheese factory owner, postmaster, and life-long resident of Marlington. He also served as Ogden's first mayor.

The Fairview Hotel in Tomifobia served as the venue for Ogden Council meetings for many years.

Bootleggers and Dance Halls

The following anecdotes are all 2nd or 3rd hand accounts, and given the nature of the activities, verifying them is simply not possible. Even if only half true and greatly exaggerated, they provide a colourful glimpse into Ogden during the Roaring '20s.

From about the 1840s, the temperance movement had established very strong footholds in both the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont and the Eastern Townships. The goal, on both sides of the border, was to abolish the consumption of alcohol and to rid society of that habit's many associated sins. In late 1919, with the passage of the Volstead Act, the United States prohibited the production, sale and/or consumption of alcohol, and this law came into force on January 17, 1920, and would not be repealed until 1933. Quebec was moving in precisely the opposite direction. There had been a Canadian-wide, wartime ban on alcohol for a brief period from April 1918 to November 1919, but in Quebec, a provincial ban on alcohol passed early in 1919 was quickly overturned by a referendum held on April 10th of the very same year, where 81 percent of Quebecers voted against any ban on beer, wine and cider. By 1921, Quebec had legitimized and was regulating the sale of hard liquor as well. The Township of Stanstead (Ogden became a separate municipality in 1932), found itself in the awkward or advantageous position, depending on your point of view, of being right on the border, where these contrasting legal jurisdictions met.

Rum-running

One means to profit from Prohibition south of the border was to smuggle/run booze across to buyers in Vermont. Although referred to as rum-running, the booze was usually rye whiskey or moonshine. The following story was told by William Weir May to his son Bill:

> *Frequently, I was woken up at night at Cedarhurst* [their cottage] *by the noise of large, high-powered, inboards racing down the lake without any of their running lights on, trying to smuggle hooch across the border. When I got up, I could see the high-powered searchlights from the revenuers' boats dancing across the waters in search of the smugglers. There was lots of noise from inboards and, occasionally, the sound of gunfire. More often, there was the noise of gunfire in the early morning mists as U.S. revenuers were trying to shoot holes in barrels of hooch that were on the Canadian side (or had drifted back across the border). It was entertaining to sit on the dock and watch the battle evolve between the locals, who were scrambling to retrieve the barrels and the Revenue agents who were trying to pepper the barrels full of holes to sink them. Typically, the smugglers, in their attempts to elude their pursuers, would jettison their cargo if the revenuers got too close. It did not work all the time but it was a boon for the locals.*

Probably the most interesting story W. W. May related was about Henry Tilton:

> *Henry was an old codger who lived up Tompkins Creek. He had this old rowboat that he would row close to shore in the early morning heading south and return north in the evening, the gunwales always a little higher from the water on the return trip. My mother was always worried that Tilton might be stealing from our boathouse so she would send me down to keep an eye on him. I would talk to him frequently and he seemed like a nice guy. Eventually, he stopped coming around the shore and, later, my family heard that there had been a huge explosion and fire at the Tilton homestead and that Henry had disappeared, never to be seen again in this area. They did find a burnt-out still and his boat. The boat had a false bottom that could hold copious amounts of hooch. He eluded the revenuers by smuggling in broad daylight and in front of their very noses. I have always wondered what happened to him and all his ill-gotten gains.*

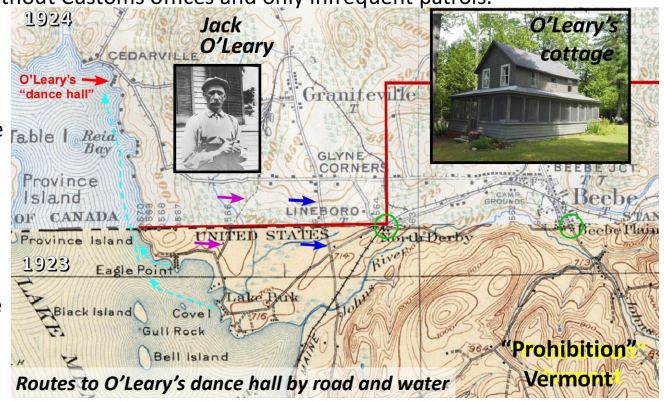
In remembering the smuggling in the Prohibition era, the late Alan Bullock recalled that for the locals "*it was a joke*"….. *all the farmers, they knew about it*", they knew who was doing it, and often where and when, but "*nobody would squeak*". Even Alan's dad, who had a boat with a good motor, occasionally *crossed the line.*

Serving a thirsty American clientele

Another way to profit from Prohibition was to offer a handy place for Americans to come to, at or just north of the border, to wet their whistles and perhaps enjoy some entertainment.

John (Jack) Charles O'Leary (1868-1939) was an Irish-Canadian stone cutter who worked in the quarries. In 1910, he bought some lakeshore property with several buildings (Lot 154-6) in Cedarville from Frederick Hall. Eventually, the property was sold to the Haseltons and family lore has it that O'Leary ran a dance hall by the Lake, in particular for the local Americans who happily travelled a short distance for a legal drink and who could get to his place by boat or by road via two back roads without Customs offices and only infrequent patrols.

Apparently, apart from selling booze, there was live music and dancing. If you couldn't bring a partner, O'Leary could provide that as well.

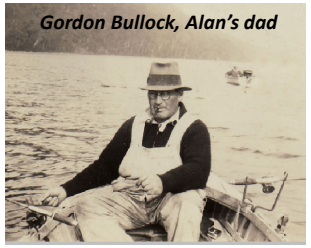


Routes to O'Leary's dance hall by road and water

Remembering the 1930s - Alan Bullock

The Bullock family has been an important part of Ogden society since at least 1860. Alan Bullock, who lived on Lamarche Road most of his 98 years, always made time to chat with the occasional passer-by. These are a few of many recollections of his childhood years.

Alan Burton Bullock (1920 - 2018)



Gordon Bullock, Alan's dad

A dinner of freshly-caught landlocked salmon would normally be something to look forward to, but if this was what you had every day of the week you could get very tired of seeing more fish being brought into the kitchen! The late Alan Bullock, in his memories of growing up in Ogden during the Great Depression (1929-1939) recalled that his father, Gordon, would act as a fishing guide, *"taking clients out, like business men in the town, just fishing and he'd come home with four or five salmon, anywhere from six to ten pounds. So we lived on salmon for a long time, then. About the only meat we could get."*

Alan and his mom Edith

Alan, the youngest of 10 children, would have been nine years old at the start of the Great Depression in 1929. That was not a good year for the Bullock family: in the spring of that year, a fire started in the hayloft of the barn during the night and spread quickly to the attached house. The cause of the fire was never determined for sure, but the Bullock family suspected vagrants accidentally sparking the blaze. None of the animals survived, and they lost everything that was in the house, as well. Fortunately, Gordon's workshop was located across the road from the house, so it remained intact along with all the tools and materials in it. The family wound up buying a neighbouring farm down on Marlington Road.

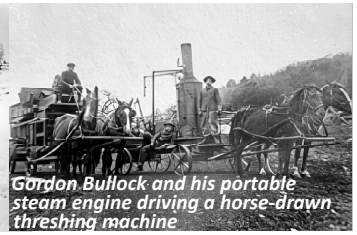
(left) Gordon and Edith and behind them the connected farmhouse and barn that burned in June 1929. (right) Gordon's workshop that escaped the flames.

Alan's chores, as a young boy, included keeping the woodbox full for the stove at home, as well as getting up early and walking to the Marlington school to get a fire started in the stove there to heat up the schoolroom before the others arrived. He and a cousin would go rabbit hunting, and no doubt rabbit made a nice change from salmon! Before the barn was destroyed by fire, when they had cows, he helped his mother by working the lever of a barrel churn to make butter to sell, and if there was any left over it could be traded at the general store in the village for clothing and other necessities.

Alan and his sister Marion

As many other farmers had to do, Gordon Bullock turned to other work to support his family. Alan remembers the workshop where his father did blacksmithing - repairing wagons, wheels, snow rollers and other farm equipment - and woodworking, making neck yokes, whippletrees and other harness components. He made logging chains and was one of the first to make improved runners for farm sleds which allowed them to carry heavier loads in winter. He owned a drag saw, which was a long, horizontal, reciprocating steel blade. These saws were commonly used, before chainsaws were invented, for sawing felled logs into lengths for the mill, but mainly for firewood. Gordon's saw was steam-powered at first, then converted to a gasoline engine, and would have been towed around the area to neighbouring woodlots. From Alan's recollections, it seems that his father's first love was woodworking, particularly boatbuilding, as he produced and sold at least twenty flat-bottomed rowboats, using forms in his workshop to shape the sides using western cedar. Apparently, he was also hired to do repairs and modifications to cottages along the lakeshore.

A drag saw in operation on the Reed farm on Marlington Road.



Gordon Bullock and his portable steam engine driving a horse-drawn threshing machine

Alan remembers his father, who was a Stanstead councillor up until 1930, gathering names on a petition in favour of creating a new municipality from part of Stanstead Township. The family was split on the issue. Alan's grandfather, Warren Bullock, who opposed separation, eventually become the first mayor of Ogden.

Farming has never been easy on our uneven, stony Ogden land, and this means long days of hard work to support a family. During the Great Depression, when much needed income was reduced to a trickle, just to survive required determination, patience, ingenuity, and a strong back. Those farmers, and their equally hardworking wives, deserve our greatest admiration!