

ETRC ARCHIVES

From Rail to Trail: Sentiers Massawippi and the struggle for a recreational nature path

On a cold and wet September morning in 1990, 60 runners gathered at Bishop's University for a five and 12 kilometer race to raise funds for a feasibility study on the possible conversion of the recently abandoned Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) line stretching from Lennoxville to Beebe. Although the event raised a nominal amount, it was part of the beginning of Sentiers Massawippi's years-long mission to see the establishment of a recreational trail along this stretch of railbed.

Following Canadian Pacific Railway's official abandonment of what was known as the Beebe Subdivision line early in 1990, a group of local citizens mobilized to form the Sentier Massawippi Trail (later becoming Les Sentiers Massawippi) organization. Initially, the abandoned line was eyed for two entirely different potential ventures. In addition to the "rail to trail" project, another group (Nostalgie de la Vapeur) had their eye on the line to establish a tourist steam train to run from Lennoxville to Beebe. It was not long, however, before Sentiers Massawippi's lobbying efforts gained traction with the Town of Lennoxville and by June 1991, CPR announced that the first 13-km section from Lennoxville to North Hatley had

been sold to the Town to convert to a walking and cycling trail.

From the beginning, the second section of the line (12 km) between North Hatley and Ayer's Cliff, which lay along the edge of Lake Massawippi, was on more contentious ground. Property owners along the lake were wary of a public trail running through their yards and were keen to obtain the direct water access through the acquisition of what was once CPR's right-of-way. By the summer of 1991, an association of Lake Massawippi homeowners had struck an agreement with CPR to act as an intermediary to sell the nearly 115 acres along the lake to the adjacent owners.

In September 1991, Sentiers Massawippi voted to start buying the land that made up the remaining 19-km section, from Ayer's Cliff to Beebe. In 1992, the rails and ties were removed from the section but it would be a number of years before all the municipalities involved accepted the proposed nature trail and rehabilitation work was completed. The first 6 km from Ayer's Cliff were opened in 1996 and with the group's perseverance in face of repeated hurdles, the 19-km Tomifobia Nature Trail reached completion in 2002.

Sentiers Massawippi's mission was

not unique for the time period; as the kilometers of abandoned railway lines increased from the 1960s on, there was a growing impetus for this conversion from "rail to trail" with the desire to increase Canadians' access to outdoor recreational space. Locally, however, Sentiers Massawippi was vital in the projects to establish the nature trails along this stretch of the countryside. The group was key in fostering political will to act on the creation of the trails and in highlighting the public interest in such a conversion. Thanks to their initiative, local residents and tourists have access to this scenic way to experience nature and native wildlife. Still, the road was not always easy-going following their

momentous achievement and the group has faced major reparations following significant washouts in 2008, amounting to \$26,000 in repairs, and restorations arising from acts of vandalism. Despite it all, Sentiers Massawippi remains dedicated to the maintenance of the Tomifobia Nature Trail for all to be able to take advantage of this beautiful greenway.

To explore what documents the ETRC preserves for Sentiers Massawippi or a number of the nature-related organizations, visit our online database: www.townshipsarchives.ca.

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Walking Group in Potton

By Mable Hastings

Last week the Scoop announced the start of the Walking Group in Potton, a program of the Misisquoi North Volunteer Centre (CABMN) in collaboration with the Municipality of Potton. Animated by Senior Services Co-coordinator,

Monique Gilbert, the first Wednesday was attended by over 20 people! The group will meet again on Wednesdays throughout the summer from 10am to 11am and meets in the Park Manson in the middle of Mansonville. The more the merrier, please join the group!



PHOTO COURTESY OF TRISH WOOD, POTTON COMMUNITY ORGANIZER



A portion of the Beebe Subdivision railbed shortly before the removal of rails and ties, ca. 1992 (P124 Sentiers Massawippi fonds)

Lennoxville resident

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then went to LES, Galt, Champain and ended at Bishop's."

Little had up until a month ago been a director at Freedom 55, a branch of London Life Financial. He had worked there for nearly four years, but right from the start, he had made it clear to his employers that financial advising was what he wanted to do.

"It was always clear to me that it was my calling. It's what I'm passionate about," said Little. "Sitting in front of someone, putting myself in their shoes, and finding ways to attain their goals in a creative, comprehensive way. That's what motivates me."

"I've waited for the right moment," he added, about his departure from Freedom 55. "I didn't want to leave them unprepared. They've known for the past year that I was going to leave and start

my own practice."

According to Little, a big part of what led him to choosing a career in finance in the first place was the fact that there was "no geographic ceiling".

"I didn't want to have to uproot my family to take my business to the next level," he explained. "I have clients as far as Laval, Asbestos, but lots of my clients are Townshipper Anglophones. Lennoxville is such a convenient hub; the highway is nearby, and some of my older clients feel a lot more comfortable coming to Lennoxville than driving to the city."

"I do a fair amount of mileage. I have a commitment to my roots in Lennoxville. My business is referral based but also home based," continued Little, calling his car an 'office on wheels'. "I must meet clients face to face, at least until a relationship is formed, once there's trust. After that we can

work via Skype. It's really a tailored customer experience. I have clients who are 20 and clients who are 83; there are different demands and different comfort levels."

The opening of The Fortress will be coming very soon, probably in August. According to Little, things have been moving at "a ferocious pace". As excited as he to begin work, Little is also thankful to be established in the region.

"It's not working when you love what you do, and Lennoxville has such charm," he said. "I never had a reason to leave. It's so picturesque, and we have four seasons. It's really a melting pot, and there's such a distinct anglophone history that's really neat and has prevailed so long. And the people are phenomenal, there's an incredible sense of community. I mean, if it ain't broke don't fix it, right? I'm happy here."



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