



County Fairs of English-speaking Quebec: The Eastern Townships

Report prepared by the Eastern Townships Resource Centre (ETRC) for Agri-Réseau and
Patrimoines - Identités

Research by Kevin Mancini, Archives Technician
with revisions by Jazmine Aldrich, ETRC Head Archivist
and Etienne Domingue, ETRC Director.

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1.1 Introduction

The Eastern Townships (also known as Estrie) is a historical and administrative region in southeastern Quebec situated between the St. Lawrence Lowlands and the Canadian-US border on the unceded ancestral territory of the W8banaki.¹ The region is at the crossroads of many different histories and cultures; indeed, the Townships have cultivated an identity that mixes their cultural traditions with the land that has been worked by generations of Irish, Scottish, English and French families. Several British colonization projects introduced English and Gaelic-speaking immigrant settlers “to the unpopulated margins of the region” as “insular communities” among French colonists in the area.² The early settlers that remained worked to clear land and would develop farms and towns that dot the Townships today.³ Among many cultural rural traditions typical of Quebec, county fairs have exemplified the regional character and identity of the Eastern Townships since the mid 19th century.

1.2 Agricultural Practices and the Geography of the Eastern Townships

The geography of the Eastern Townships lends itself to farming and, by extension, its regional identity. In particular, the mixed geographic features of the Northern Appalachians and “abundant pastureland” meant the region has always favoured livestock breeding practices, cheese production and “small-scale mixed farming” over large-scale “monocrop cultivation” practiced around the

¹ The Eastern Townships are situated on the unceded ancestral territory of the W8banaki nation, the Ndakina. Please consult the W8banaki mission for more information: <https://gcw.ca/en/history-of-the-nation/>, and the 94 Calls to Action by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to Canada: <https://nctr.ca/about/history-of-the-trc/truth-and-reconciliation-commission-of-canada-calls-to-action/>

² J. I. Little, ““The Security of Our Frontiers”: British Colonization Projects in the Eastern Townships during the First Half of the Nineteenth Century,” in *Quebec’s Eastern Townships and the World*, ed. C. Gosselin, A. Holman, and C. Kirkey (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s, 2025), 59-60.

³ Interview with Mrs. William Young, [1979-2000], P163/003.03/042, box E-39, file 42, Ian Tait collection, Eastern Townships Resource Centre, Bishops University, Sherbrooke, QC (hereafter cited as Ian Tait collection, ETRC).

St. Lawrence Valley.⁴⁵ As such, Townshippers historically have engaged in agricultural activity year-round from harvest preparation, cultivation, and preservation of goods within their localities, in part due to these mixed agricultural practices. Compared to their counterparts elsewhere in Quebec, the Townships largely remained self-sufficient in these rural areas through various, difficult economic and agricultural periods while maintaining their agricultural output.⁶⁷

1.3 Agricultural Societies: County Representation in the Townships

Various oral testimonies and textual records attest to the community-centredness of the Eastern Townships. It was common for these farming communities to help each other with important agricultural tasks such as haying and barn construction.⁸ As stated above, these communities were in part insular and largely separated by region. Throughout the 1800s, local agricultural associations across the Townships formed which then began organising fairs to exhibit livestock and produce during the harvest season, and have persisted over the past two centuries in municipalities such as Bedford, Ayer's Cliff, Cookshire, Brome, Richmond, and Sherbrooke.⁹ Some notable agricultural associations include:

- Brome County Agricultural Society (1856-?)
- Compton County Agricultural Society (18??-196?)
- Drummond County Agricultural Society (185?-196?)
- Eastern Townships Agricultural Association [1884-198?]
- Richmond County Agricultural Society (1846-)
- Stanstead County Agricultural Society (1845-)

⁴ Government of Quebec, 1914, *The Eastern Townships of Quebec: The Garden of Canadian Agriculture*, 17-18.

⁵ Darren Bardati, "Agriculture in Transition": Global Crisis and the Eastern Townships' Identity" in *Quebec's Eastern Townships and the World*, ed. C. Gosselin, A. Holman, and C. Kirkey (Montreal: McGill-Queen's, 2025), 88-89.

⁶ ETRC. *Quebec's Eastern Townships: A Brief History of its Peoples, Politics and Economy – Part 1*, 2019, 48.

⁷ Interview with Cecil Dougherty, [1979-2000], P163/003.03/005, box E-38, file 005, Ian Tait collection, ETRC.

⁸ Interview with Liliane Beaulieu, [1979-2000], P163/003.03/025, box E-38, file 025, Ian Tait collection, ETRC.

⁹ ETRC. *Quebec's Eastern Townships: A Brief History of its Peoples, Politics and Economy – Part 2*, 2021, 32-33.

1.4 County Fairs in the Townships

These county fairs invited local exhibitors and county residents including the surrounding townships.^{10, 11, 12} The Sherbrooke County Fair (also known as Canada's Great Eastern Exhibition), for example, showcased exhibits from all Eastern Townships counties including: Arthabaska, Brome, Compton, Drummond, Frontenac, Missisquoi, Richmond, Shefford, Sherbrooke, Stanstead, Wolfe,¹³ and in later years, Mégantic and Yamaska as well.^{14, 15}

1.4.1 List of County Fairs - Past and Present¹⁶

Name of Fair	Location	Details
Coaticook Valley Fair (previously, Coaticook Milk Festival)	Coaticook, QC	Ongoing (1978-) ¹⁷
Compton County Fair	Cookshire, QC	Ongoing (1845-) ¹⁸
Danville County Fair	Danville, QC	Discontinued [1875-1954?] ¹⁹

¹⁰ Annual Exhibition - Cookshire, 1943, P232/005/004, box 333, Société d'histoire et du patrimoine du Haut-St-François collection, Eastern Townships Resource Centre, Bishops University, Sherbrooke, QC (hereafter cited as SHPHSF collection, ETRC).

¹¹ Twelfth Annual Seed Fair Program, 1963, P036/004.12/002, box 305, Donald J. MacMillan fonds, ETRC.

¹² Richmond County Fair Prize List, 1893, P244/003.1.05, box 596, Freeman Clowery collection, ETRC.

¹³ Canada's Great Eastern Exhibition Prize List, 1895, P244/003.01.01/001, box 596, Freeman Clowery collection, ETRC.

¹⁴ Sherbrooke Fair, 1947, P244/003.01.07/001, box 596, Freeman Clowery collection, ETRC.

¹⁵ Boy's Calf Club Contests Programme, 1934, P036/005/001, box 305, Donald J. MacMillan fonds, ETRC

¹⁶ This list does not include every county fair that has existed in the Eastern Townships but attempts to include the notable, and longstanding fairs held in each respective county.

¹⁷ Festival du Lait de Coaticook became Exposition Vallée de la Coaticook in 2008 (*L'écho : bulletin d'information inter-municipal*, July 2008, <https://collections.banq.qc.ca/ark:/52327/4244385>). Festival du Lait held its third edition in 1980, so presumably began in 1978 (*La Tribune*, 11 août 1980, Cahier 1, <https://collections.banq.qc.ca/ark:/52327/3683979>)

¹⁸ See source: <https://expocookshire.com/>.

¹⁹ These are the dates for the Danville Cattle Show, which was put on by the Danville Agricultural Society (formed 1875). Source: *Townships Sun*, September 1997, p.12, <https://collections.banq.qc.ca/ark:/52327/4543915>

Drummond County Fair	L'Avenir, QC	Discontinued [1856-1866]-[1966?] ²⁰
Mégantic County Fair	Inverness, QC	Discontinued 1847-[1999?] ²¹
Missisquoi (Brome) County Fair	Bedford, QC	Ongoing ([1856?]-) ²²
Richmond County Fair	Richmond, QC	Ongoing (1856-) ²³
Shefford County Fair	Waterloo, QC	Discontinued [1834?]-[1959?] ²⁴
Sherbrooke County Fair	Sherbrooke, QC	Discontinued 1885-1997 ²⁵
Stanstead County Fair	Ayer's Cliff, QC	Ongoing (1845-) ²⁶
Wolfe County Fair	Marbleton, QC	Discontinued [1881?]-[1969?] ²⁷

²⁰ The history of this fair is marked by several interruptions and governance chances. For its origin, see: *The Montreal Witness*, 29 septembre 1866, p.4: <https://collections.banq.qc.ca/ark:/52327/4184368>; Drummond County Agricultural Society (originally, Agricultural Society No. 2 of the County of Drummond) founded July 8, 1856 (source: *Montreal Herald and Daily Commercial Gazette*, 12 juillet 1856, p.2:

<https://collections.banq.qc.ca/ark:/52327/3132478>; as of 1997, Drummond District Fair (source: *Townships Sun*, June 1997, <https://collections.banq.qc.ca/ark:/52327/4543915>); as of 2004, l'Expo agricole de Drummond (38th year, with a plausible 1966 start), source: *La Tribune*, 22 mai 2004, Cahier 5, p.2:

<https://collections.banq.qc.ca/ark:/52327/4033504>; First "regional" exhibition in 1966, supposed to fuse with exhibitions from Nicolet and Yamaska but in 1966 reported Nicolet was unlikely to participate

Expo agricole de Drummond was held the previous year (1965), source: *La Tribune*, 8 février 1966, p.1,

<https://collections.banq.qc.ca/ark:/52327/3634268>.

²¹ Start date source: *The Montreal Witness*, 18 octobre 1847, p.1, <https://collections.banq.qc.ca/ark:/52327/4182757>; Last reference found to "Megantic District Exhibition" (under Agricultural Fairs): *Townships Sun*, May 1999, p.3, <https://collections.banq.qc.ca/ark:/52327/4543915>.

²² Source: <https://bromefair.com/history-of-brome-fair/>

²³ Source: <https://www.exporichmondfair.com/about-us/>

²⁴ 1834 is when the Shefford County Agricultural Society was formed. Source: *The Quebec Gazette = La Gazette de Québec*, 28 juillet 1834, p.2, <https://collections.banq.qc.ca/ark:/52327/4615206>; The Sherbrooke Daily Record reports in 1960: "The only local fair reported out of the running is Waterloo, serving Shefford County, which has been discontinued this year for an indefinite period." Source: *Sherbrooke Daily Record*, 12 août 1960, p.3, <https://collections.banq.qc.ca/ark:/52327/2997112>.

²⁵ Source: <https://www.etr.ca/canadas-great-eastern-exhibition-rise-decline-sherbrooke-fair/>

²⁶ Source: <https://www.ayerscliffair.com/about-the-fair/>

²⁷ The ETRC head archivist notes: The last references that I can find to Wolfe County Fair and Marbleton Fair are in 1969. The land and buildings were for sale in September 1970.

Sources:

1. *The Sherbrooke Record*, 11 août 1969, p.3, <https://collections.banq.qc.ca/ark:/52327/2981993>

2. *The Sherbrooke Record*, 6 août 1969, p.14, <https://collections.banq.qc.ca/ark:/52327/2981990>

3. *The Sherbrooke Record*, 23 septembre 1970, p.18, <https://collections.banq.qc.ca/ark:/52327/2982277>.

1881 is the earliest reference that I can find to the Wolfe County Agricultural Society No. 1, though it is not a reference to its founding so it may have been founded earlier. Source: *The Weekly Examiner*, 26 août 1881, p.4, <https://collections.banq.qc.ca/ark:/52327/3467876>.

Cattle were at the focal point of these fairs which typically lasted several days, starting from the early morning into the evening with many judging events, festivities such as music and dancing, and ended with livestock and cattle parades seen in many fairs in the Townships.²⁸ A majority of these fairs would be held around late August and September, close to the end of the harvest season. Other seasonal events such as Winter fairs and seed fairs were also common; the former particularly meant to exhibit and sell livestock.²⁹ Lastly, youth clubs, such as the 4-H Club and Calf Clubs would also take part in exhibitions, which actively involved local youth in raising cattle.^{30, 31}

1.5 Fair Exhibitions and Agricultural Products³²

Fair exhibitions showcased regional product staples in various categories of livestock, produce, and homemade goods. Broad judging categories included beef cattle, dairy cattle, poultry, sheep, swine, fruits and vegetables, dairy products, maple products, baked goods, flowers, and handicrafts, such as crocheting, stitching, and sewing. As early as 1894, a majority of exhibitions and judging events focused on livestock, mainly cattle and poultry,³³ whereas agricultural exhibitions were varied, including many varieties of apples, pears, plums, grains, garden vegetables, and homemade cheeses.

²⁸ Sherbrooke Fair Prize List and Official Programme, 1934, P036/005/001, box 306, Donald J. MacMillan fonds, ETRC.

²⁹ Sherbrooke Winter Fair Booklet, 1945, P244/003.01.07/001, box 596, Freeman Clowery collection, ETRC.

³⁰ ETRC. *Quebec's Eastern Townships: A Brief History of its Peoples, Politics and Economy – Part 2*, 2021, 33.

³¹ Sherbrooke Winter Fair: Fat Stock Show and Sale, 1953, P036/005/005 box 306, Donald J. MacMillan fonds, ETRC.

³² Tables 1.5.1 Livestock Exhibitions; 1.5.2 Agricultural & Horticultural Exhibitions; and 1.5.3 Baking Exhibitions include categories from various prize lists from the Sherbrooke Fair, Ayer's Cliff Fair, Cookshire Fair, Megantic Fair, and the Richmond County Fair between 1894 to 2008.

1.5.1 Livestock Exhibitions

Livestock Categories	Names of Categories (Subcategories)
Beef Cattle	Aberdeen-Angus; Durham (Shorthorn); Hereford
Dairy Cattle	Ayrshire; Canadienne; Guernsey; Holstein; Jersey
Horses	Boulonnais [Boulognaise]; Belgian; Clydesdale; Hackney; Norman; Percheron; Shire
Sheep	Dorset; Hampshire; Leicester; Lincoln; Oxford; Shropshire; Southdown
Pigs	Berkshire; Chester White; Du Roc Jersey; Poland China; Tamworth; Yorkshire
Poultry	Andalusian; Bantam (Sebright, Pekin, etc.); Black Spanish; Brahmas (Light; Dark); Cochin (Buff, White, Black, Partridge); Dorking (White; Silver Gray, Colored); Hamburg (Black, etc.); Houdan; Langshan; Leghorn (White, Black, Brown) Minorca (Black, White); Plymouth Rock (White, Barred); Poland (Black, White, White Crested, etc.); Red Cap; Wyandotte (Golden Laced, Silver, White)
Other	Ducks (Aylesbury, Rouen, Pekin, etc.); Geese (Bremen, Toulouse, etc.); Guinea Pig; Pigeons (Antwerp, Black Carrier, Fantail, Tumbler); Rabbit; Turkey

1.5.2 Agricultural & Horticultural Exhibitions

a. Agriculture

Produce Categories (Fruits and Vegetables)	Names
Corn	Flint; Sweet Corn (White; Yellow; Black); Indian; Shelled
Grains	Alfalfa; Barley; Buckwheat (Silver Hull); Millet; Oats; Rye; Wheat (White; Red; Ladoga); Hay (Clover; Tomothy; Mixed)
Potatoes	Green Mountain; Irish Cobbler

b. Horticulture

Produce Categories (Fruits and Vegetables)	Name of Category (with Subcategories)
Apples	Duchess of Oldenburg; Fameuse; Golden Russet; Greenings; Lobo; MacIntosh Red; Melba; Milwaukee; Northern Spy; Peach; Red Astrachan; St. Lawrence; Talman's Sweet; Wealthy; Wolf River; Yellow Transparent
Beans	Shelled; Snap Wax; Snap Green
Cabbage & etc.	Broccoli; Cabbage (Red; Summer; Winter); Cauliflower (Winter); Celery (Red; White); Kohlrabi; St. Denis; Winningstadt; Drumhead
Grapes	Allen's Hybrid; Champion; Brighton; Delaware; Hartford; Lady; Lindly; Wyoming
Melons	Citron; Montreal Market; Muskmelon; Watermelon; Green
Onions & etc.	Onions (Red; White; Yellow); Leek
Peach	Early Crawford; Late Crawford; Early Beatrice; Early Louise; Lord Palmerston

Pears	Bartlett; Beurre Clairgeau; Clapp's Favorite; Duchesse D'Angouleme; Grey Doyenne; Flemish Beauty; Lawrence; Louise Bonne de Jersey; Seckel; Swan's Orange; White Doyenne; Winter Nelis
Plums	Bradshaw; Coe's Golden Drop; Green Gage; Huling's [Oullins] Superb; Imperial Gage; Lombard; Lord Dufferin; McLaughlin; Pond's Seedling; Prince Engelbert; Smith's Orleans; Victoria; Yellow Egg
Root Vegetables	Beet (Rooted; Long Red); Carrot; Mangel; Parsnip; Rutabaga; Salsify; Turnip (White, Aberdeen Yellow)
Squash & etc.	Cucumber (Long Green; Whole Pickling; White Spine); Squash (Buttercup; Green Hubbard; Green Warty Hubbard; Summer Squash); Pumpkin
Other	Eggplant; Garlic; Okra; Pepper (Sweet, Hot) Tomato
Preserves	Raspberry (Wild, Tame); Strawberry (Wild, Tame); Red Cherry; Cherry; Peach; Plum; Pear; Blueberry; Gooseberry; Orange Marmalade; Rhubarb (Green, Red); Currant (Black, Red, White); Jam (Blackberry, Gooseberry, Raspberry, Strawberry); Canned (Corn, Peas, Beans, Tomatoes, Beets, Carrots); Pickles (Sweet, Sour, Mustard, Beet)
Dairy Products and Eggs	Creamery Butter; Cheese (White, Homemade, Colored) Dairy Butter; Eggs (White, Brown); Milk

Maple Products, Honey, and Sugar	Pure Maple Syrup; Maple Sugar; Maple Cream; Maple Wax; Honey in Comb; Pure Honey; Soft Sugar; Taffy; Cured Bacon; Cured Ham
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1.5.3 Baking Exhibitions

Baking Categories	Names of Categories (with Subcategories)
Bread	Brown; Graham; Nut; White
Cakes	Chocolate; Sponge; Fruit; Marble; Angel; Nut
Pies	Apple; Blueberry; Custard; Lemon; Cherry; Pumpkin;
Other Desserts	Baking Powder Biscuits; Jelly Roll; Tea Biscuits; Oatmeal Cookies; Parkerhouse Rolls; Doughnuts (Plain, Sugar)

1.6 Conclusion: The Eastern Townships and Agricultural Fairs Today

Despite recent challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many county fairs in the Eastern Townships continue to host their historic agricultural exhibitions and events for their communities. While some exhibitions, like the Sherbrooke Fair, were discontinued due to various issues,³⁴ many of the oldest agricultural fairs in the region continue to host exhibitors and social events for the community at large.

³⁴ Expo-Sherbrooke Programme Souvenir 1885-1985, 1985, P244/003.01.07/001, box 596, Freeman Clowery collection, ETRC.

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