

## Cowansville's First Town Council

# O'Halloran, Nesbitt, Ruiter, Gleason and Three Williams

Jean-Paul Sirois

The first municipal council in Cowansville was directed by James O'Halloran who had been elected by acclamation before being named Mayor by the other councillors, following a proposal by Hiram E. Gleason, on 21 February 1876.

Four of the six other original council members were also elected by acclamation, they were: Nelson Ruiter, George K. Nesbitt, William Kathan and William P. Carter. Their colleagues, William Dent and Hiram E. Gleason received majorities of 35 and 48 votes respectively.

The newly elected councillors met for the first time on 14 February 1876. William Stevenson was named Secretary of the Municipality, at a salary of \$50 a year, one week later, on 21 February at the second council meeting.  
txt: Born in Fermoy, Ireland, **James O'Hallo-**

**ran** came to Canada in 1828. A graduate of Vermont University, he fought under the American flag during the war against Mexico. Returning to Canada, Mr O'Halloran studied law under his future brother-in-law Judge Marcus Doherty before being admitted to the Canadian Bar in 1852. He then became Crown Prosecutor and President of the District of Bedford Bar Association.

Elected Member of the Legislative Assembly of the old Province of Canada in 1861, he was re-elected by acclamation in 1863 and continued to represent Brome-Missisquoi until 1867. Opposed to the Confederation project he did not seek a further mandate.

James O'Halloran was President of the South Eastern Railway for several years, a railway which was subsequently purchased by Canadian Pacific Railway and for which company O'Halloran became its Quebec Counsel.

### Others elected

In 1870, **George Knight Nesbitt** bought the mill built in 1839 by Andrew Cowan, brother of Peter, and William Carter, brother-in-law to Andrew. He installed a dynamo capable of lighting some 300 lamps and supplied the first electricity to the village. It is to Nesbitt, who died in 1909, that we owe the house erected at the intersection of South and Rivière Streets. **Nelson Ruiter** was the son of Jacob Ruiter, the first settler. His farm extended from today's Willard Street to the Yamaska River and from Veterans Boulevard to the Gear Brook near today's Auberge des Carrefours. Nelson died in 1885.

**William Dent's** farm was situated on the east side of South Street, on top of the hill. His two storey home, a brick structure, is still there today and numbered 955 South. John Dent, who died in 1895, was the builder of the Sainte-Rose-de-Lima church.

Justice of the Peace and general merchant, **William Kathan** also built the commercial building of the Buzzell and Daniel Brothers at the intersection of South and Main Streets, where the Caisse populaire is today. He also gave the land to provide for a cemetery and upon part of which Christ Church was built. He died in 1876.

**Hiram E. Gleason** was the son of Hiram Gleason Sr, merchant and owner of The Hub, situated at the intersection of Main and South Streets, adjacent to the Bank of Montreal.

Originally from Florence, Massachusetts, the Municipal Secretary, **William Stevenson** married Elisa Ruiter daughter of Jacob Ruiter. He took up his post in February 1876 and remained in it for 24 years. He lived in a house, which is still there, at 114, William Street, the street having been named after his first name. He died in 1912.