

The Energetic Mr. Beach

Written by

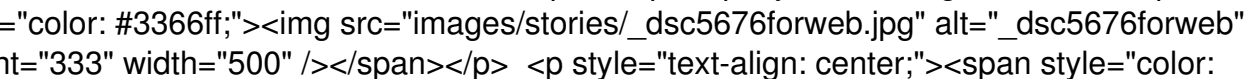
In the winter of 2011, Louise Abbott wrote a feature story about Nathan A. Beach (1841-1923), a prominent builder and contractor in the Eastern Townships of Quebec and the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont. The article was published in the *Stanstead Historical Society (SHS) Journal* in June of 2011. To obtain a copy, please email the SHS (info@colbycurtis.ca) or phone them at

819-876-7322. Below are some excerpts from *The Energetic Mr. Beach*:

In Derby Line, Vermont, a quiet residential street called Beach intersects Main not far from the United States customs office. Although the street name may mean little to inhabitants nowadays, it commemorates a man who was once a familiar and forceful presence in the historical Three Villages (Derby Line, Rock Island, and Stanstead) and the Memphremagog region♦Nathaniel (Nathan) Allen Beach.

Beach was a contractor and builder non-pareil whose reputation spanned the border as surely as his magnum opus, the Haskell Free Library and Opera House. This distinctive building of granite and yellow brick♦designed to serve both Canadian and American patrons♦was completed in 1904, when Beach had more than three decades of building experience behind him.

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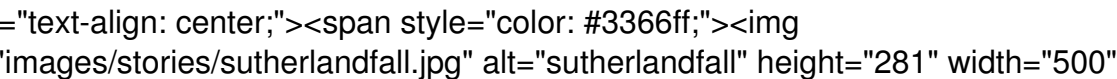
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(Photo : Louise Abbott)

In 1864 Beach received what was reportedly his first commission: he constructed a farmhouse for his in-laws on the Magoon Point Road two miles or so south of Georgeville. The MacPhersons occupied the house for generations, gradually making additions and modifications to it.

During the course of his career, Beach occasionally collaborated with architects♦the Haskell Free Library and Opera House, for instance, was designed by James Ball of Stanstead and his partner, Gilbert Smith, of Boston. More often, Beach took charge of building design himself and likely drew inspiration from the architectural pattern books and advice manuals that were then popular in the United States. Certainly the gabled roof and gingerbread details of the MacPherson farmhouse reflect the influence of the Romantic, or Picturesque, Style that was favoured by American authors like Andrew Jackson Downing and embodied in homes on New England country estates of the period.

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(Photo: Anick Valiquette)

Beach commenced the construction of a house in 1880 on an estate on the southern edge of Georgeville, working from sketches that owner John Murray provided. The house, completed in 1882, had three stories and a basement, a tower on one corner, and twenty rooms. John Murray was a strapping man over six feet tall, and he was tired of stooping in the low-ceilinged cottage where he had previously resided; he called for twelve-foot-high ceilings in his new home. The grand building, painted a salmon colour, was

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named Dunkeld in honour of the Scottish town from which the ancestors of John Murray's wife, Isabella MacDuff, had emigrated.