

ISLAND FALLS

In the whole of Aroostook County there is no more picturesque town than Island Falls and none where the natural scenery is more beautiful. It is a sportsman's paradise and is becoming noted as a pleasant, healthy and beautiful summer resort. Its lakes, rivers and wooded hills add much to the attractiveness of the town, and nowhere is there a purer air or a more comfortable summer temperature than here.

The west branch of Mattawamkeag River enters the town near the northwest corner and, after flowing south for nearly two miles and being enlarged by the confluence of Fish Stream, sweeps madly through a rocky gorge and dashes over precipitous ledges, forming one of the finest falls in the country. Midway of the falls is a small island, its rocky sides rising abruptly from the water and dividing the swift current. This little wooded island in the midst of the falls gives the name to the town of Island Falls. After leaping the falls the river continues in a course a little south of east for nearly three miles, when it empties into Mattawamkeag Lake, a beautiful body of water which covers a large portion of the eastern part of the town.

Previous to 1842 no white man had pitched his habitation in this picturesque region. Indians from the Penobscot and Passamaquoddy tribes were accustomed to spend a part of the year hunting and fishing in this vicinity and had their camps near the falls. They even continued their visits for some years after the white man invaded the region and during the first years of the little settlement, while the hardy pioneer was felling the forest trees and clearing up fertile tracts of land near the banks of the dashing river the crack of the Indian's rifle woke the echoes in the surrounding forest, and the gentle dip of his paddle parted the waters of the river and lake as he glided along in his light birch canoe.

In 1842 Levi Sewall and Jesse Craig came from Farmington to search for a chance to make a home in the forests of Aroostook. Coming to Patten, they turned eastward through the town of Crystal and after traveling a few miles came to the end of the road. They then followed the streams down to the West Branch, in what is now the town of Island Falls. As soon as Mr. Sewall discovered the falls he at once saw that here was a valuable water power which might at some time be improved and utilized for manufacturing purposes. He therefore deter-

mined to look no farther, but to make this place his home. He at once went to work and felled five acres of trees near the falls and then returned to Farmington. The town was then the property of the State of Massachusetts and Mr. Sewall bought a tract one mile square, including the falls. In March, 1843, he returned to Aroostook with two two-horse teams and one single sleigh, bringing with him his family, which consisted of his wife and six children. Leaving his wife and the younger children at Mr. William Young's in Crystal, Mr. Sewall with his two sons, David and Samuel, came down the stream to the falls, cleared up the five-acre chopping, built a log house and on the first day of July, 1843, the family came to their new home. Mrs. Sewall was brought down Fish Stream and West Branch in a boat, and the girls walked in through the woods by a spotted line.

The family were now settled in the midst of a vast forest with no road on the west nearer than Crystal Mill and none on the east nearer than Smyrna Mills on the East Branch. Their first crop was necessarily put in somewhat late and though everything grew abundantly and promised a bountiful harvest, a heavy frost on the night of the last of August killed everything and nothing whatever was harvested from this first crop. The prospect looked dark, but the family had the courage needful for all successful pioneers. The forests abounded in game, and the river with fish, which ensured them against suffering from hunger and the boys worked at Patten and Crystal and earned bread enough to supply the family until another crop could be raised. The next year an additional clearing was made, a good crop was raised and after that there was no lack of bread.

Mr. Jesse Craig, who came with Mr. Sewall in 1842, took 160 acres of the mile square block taken by Mr. Sewall, and he also made a five acre chopping that year and returned to Farmington in the fall. In the spring of 1843 he went back and cleared up his five acres and felled five acres more, living with the Sewalls that summer and returning to Farmington in the fall. Mr. Craig did not bring his family to Island Falls until the winter of 1844; when they were brought in on a sled drawn by oxen. Mr. Craig cleared up a large farm on the north side of the West Branch and kept a hotel here for many years. He was for years the only justice of the peace in the town and was treasurer and clerk of the town for a long term. He also held the office of first selectman much of the time after the organization of the

township. He was well known as a man of the strictest honor and integrity and was much respected by all his fellow townsmen. Mr. Craig lived to see a flourishing village spring up around him and died at a good old age five years ago.

In 1843, David Lurvey came from Woodstock, Oxford County, and settled on a lot north of the West Branch and next below Mr. Craig's. He cleared some twenty acres of land, built a frame house and barn and then moved to Patten, and afterwards to the mouth of the Aroostook road, where he kept a hotel for a number of years and then returned to Oxford County, where he died a number of years ago.

Charles W. Harding came from Windham in the spring of 1844, and settled on the south side of the stream, opposite Mr. Sewall's. Here he cleared a farm and built a house and barn, and afterwards returned to Windham and died. Charles Hanson came with Harding and made a small clearing near his, but did not remain long.

The above named were all the settlers in the town in 1844 and of these only the Sewalls and Craigs remained permanently. No other settler came to join them for eight years. In the meantime Mr. Sewall and his sons continued to enlarge their clearing and were also engaged in lumbering in the winter season. Levi Sewall was for many years a prominent man in this section and died at his home in Island Falls, in 1866. His widow, three sons and one daughter still reside at the Falls.

The next settler who came to Island Falls was Mr. Isaac Robinson, who came from Oxford County, and after living for some time in Crystal, came to Island Falls in 1852 and settled on the ridge a mile east of Mr. Craig's. Here he cleared a farm upon which he lived until his death in 1858. His son, George F. Robinson, then took the farm. He afterwards went into the army and gained a national reputation by being instrumental in saving the life of Secretary Seward on that terrible night of April 14, 1865. He is now a paymaster in the United States Army. The Robinson farm is now owned by Mrs. Mary Dow.

In 1853 Mr. Stephen Thorn came from Freedom and settled on the lot next to Mr. Robinson's. He made a clearing and built a log house and barn and then moved to Crystal, where he died some twelve years ago. Mr. John B. Hathorn now owns this farm.

A number of settlers came about this time, very few of whom remained. Among those who stayed was Mr. Jacob Manuel, who settled in the north part of the town and made a farm,

upon which he lived until his death. About the same year (1853) Mr. Cyrus Barker and family came from Kennebec County. With him came his son, Addison Barker, and family. Mr. Cyrus Barker took four lots for himself and sons on one of the most beautiful ridges of land in Aroostook County. It is still known as Barker Ridge, though none of the family are now living on the tract. Mr. Barker made his first clearing near the homestead so long occupied by his son, Capt. Rodney C. Barker. He cleared up a large farm and was for many years a prominent man in the town. Cyrus Barker died in 1886. His son, Rodney C. Barker, then took the farm and made it one of the finest in the County. He was largely engaged in lumbering and trading and was a prominent business man. He also served in the Union Army and received a pension for injuries received in the service. He built the first steamboat on Mattawamkeag Lake in 1882 and commanded it until his death. The steamer was used for towing logs across the lake and also in the summer season for excursion parties. Capt. Barker had cottages and boats on Norway Island in Mattawamkeag Lake for the use of pleasure parties, and it is still a most beautiful summer resort. Capt. Barker was a man of much push and energy, had strong friends and strong enemies, as such men generally do, but we remember him as a genial, whole souled man, a kind husband and father and a good friend. He died at his home some five years ago and his widow did not long survive him. The Barker estate, one of the finest in Aroostook, is now owned by Geo. E. Cutler, Esq., of South Framingham, Mass. Mr. Addison Barker, who lived on the farm adjoining, was killed by a falling tree a year or two after coming to the town.

Up to the year 1854 Island Falls was the property of the State of Massachusetts. In that year it came into the ownership of the State of Maine and the same year was lotted by Mr. Daniel Cummings and opened by the State for settlement. Settlers now began to come in and take up lots, but the State afterwards most unwisely sold the town to proprietors, by which action its settlement has been very much retarded.

Capt. Daniel Randall, a man well known throughout Aroostook County and indeed throughout the State, came from Portland to Island Falls in 1859. He was a retired sea captain and was for some time city marshal of Portland. Capt. Randall bought a farm on Fish Stream, on the road from Island Falls to Patten, one mile from the Falls. Here he built up a large farm and built a handsome two-story house and good barn. He

at once took an active part in the business and also in the politics of the county. He engaged in lumbering quite extensively and also paid good attention to his farm, which he made productive and profitable. He served two terms as a member of the State Legislature and also served as sheriff of Aroostook County. He afterward returned to Portland, where he died some years ago. He was a man of massive build, weighing 325 pounds, but active and full of energy. He was a genial, good natured man and had many friends.

Dr. Isaac Donham came from Readfield to Patten in 1858, and in 1860 moved to Island Falls and took the lot next to Capt. Randall's. He was a druggist and physician in Readfield and also practiced medicine in Patten and Island Falls. In 1862 he entered the service in the 1st Me. Heavy Artillery, and afterwards re-enlisted in the 31st Inf. and died in the hospital at City Point, Va., in 1864. His son, Mr. George H. Donham, now owns the farm, which consists of 160 acres of land, with fifty acres cleared and a good set of buildings. Mr. Donham was formerly engaged in trade at Island Falls, but three years ago sold his business to Eemrson Bros. and went into the printing business. He has two presses and does all kinds of job printing. He is also chairman of the board of selectmen, town clerk, supervisor of schools and trial justice, and may be called a fairly busy man.

In 1861, Mr. Levi H. May moved from Lowell, Mass., and took a wild lot in the north part of the town, where he made a good farm, upon which he lived until his death six years ago. His son, Levi H. May, now lives on the farm.

Mr. David A. Sewall, the eldest son of Levi Sewall, has long been a prominent man at Island Falls and is well known throughout the county. He was largely engaged in lumbering for many years. He has been for years an officer of the town and was a member of the board of county commissioners for eight years. He has a fine residence on the south side of the stream and is now living quietly and happily, farming some in the summer and sometimes scaling in the woods winters, just to keep his hand in. Mr. Samuel Sewall, the second son, has a very handsome set of buildings on the north side of the river. In company with his brothers he attends to the business of the farm, for Levi Sewall's land has not been divided, but his sons carry on the farms together and seem to own all things in common. The large homestead built by Levi Sewall in 1861 is occupied by the youngest son, Mr. Wm. W. Sewall, and with him

live his aged mother and only sister, Miss Sarah E. Sewall, who holds the commission of postmaster of Island Falls. Mr. Wm. W. Sewall was the first white child born at Island Falls, and he is a white man in every respect. He has for years been a friend and companion of Theodore Roosevelt of New York, who formerly came to Island Falls every summer for a few weeks' outing. A few years ago Mr. Sewall went with Mr. Roosevelt to Dakota and for two years took charge of a large cattle ranch for that gentleman. Mr. Sewall also having an interest in the business.

The township was organized as a plantation Sept. 6, 1858. At the first meeting Levi Sewall was chosen moderator, Jesse Craig, clerk, D. A. Sewall, Cyrus Barker and Nathan Thorn, assessors. The town was incorporated in February, 1872.

We have visited few towns where there is so general a community of feeling and such a genuine each-help-the-other spirit as in this town of Island Falls. Every man says his neighbor is the best fellow in the world, and I think they all tell the truth.

MOLUNKUS AND BENEDICTA

Two miles west of the village of Macwahoc the Military road enters the township of Molunkus, now an unorganized plantation with the exception of the little hamlet at the mouth of the Aroostook road. This township is in the extreme southwest corner of Aroostook County and is bounded on the north by the unsettled township No. 1, Range Five, on the east by Macwahoc, on the south by Mattawamkeag in Penobscot County, and on the west by Medway in the same county. The entire township, with the exception of a comparatively small tract near the mouth of the Aroostook road and a few clearings farther north upon that road, is still covered with forest growth and is owned by non-resident proprietors.

The old Aroostook road starts from Molunkus and continues northward through No. One, Benedicta and Sherman to Patten, and thence on to Fort Kent, at the mouth of Fish River. The intersection of this road with the Military road at this point made Molunkus an important business center for lumbering operations and for the moving of supplies to the country away to the north.