

History of Aroostook

VOLUME I. PART 2

INTRODUCTION

The part of this work following the foregoing pages, gives a cursory and somewhat imperfect sketch of the development which has taken place since the date when Mr. Wiggin wrote the history of the County's early settlement. It was at first planned to have this form a separate volume, but it has been decided to include it as an appendix to the work of Mr. Wiggin. It is not as complete as to merit the name of history, but will perhaps serve to picture imperfectly what Aroostook has accomplished within the past thirty years in the way of business, industrial and social progress. As such it is submitted in connection with the work which it was the primary purpose of this publication to place before the public, and as such, we trust that it will serve its purpose, even though it deserves more time and ability than the writer has been able to give to its preparation.

CHAPTER I.

Extent Of Aroostook And Its Political Origin

Geographically, the County of Aroostook is a great domain. Comprising 6408 square miles, it is larger than the States of Rhode Island and Delaware combined, and is nearly as large in area as the State of Massachusetts. It has probably more fertile soil, cleared and uncleared, than all the rest of New England. No greater or more productive area is to be found east of the Mississippi than the County of Aroostook would represent were all its potential wealth of fertile soil developed.

Originally embraced in Washington County, Aroostook was taken off that County in 1839, and incorporated March 16th of that year. March 21, 1843 it was enlarged by additions from Penobscot, and March 12, 1844, by additions from Piscataquis and Somerset Counties. At present writing it contains 50 towns and 21 plantations.

According to the Maine Year Book its population in 1830 was 3399; in 1840 9413; in 1850 12,529; in 1860 22,479; in 1870 29,609; in 1880, 41,700; in 1890, 49,589; in 1900, 60,744; in 1910, 74,644; in 1920, 81,728.

According to these figures its largest percentage of gain was in the decade between 1850 and 1860. Immigration in this period was stimulated by the visit of the Maine Press Association to Aroostook in 1858, the tide being checked in the following decade by the outbreak of the Civil War, after which Aroostook's growth was small until the advent of the potato starch making industry.

Aroostook would have cut a still bigger figure than it does on the map of New England, had the claims of Maine in what is called the "Northeastern Boundary Dispute" been fully sustained in the settlement of that controversy. The claim of Maine overlapped the upper St. John River and extended to the St. Lawrence, and upon a fair reading and interpretation of the Treaty of 1783, which attempted, rather bunglingly, a definition of the boundary, there is little doubt but that Maine was justified in her full contention. The claim of Great Britain would have designated the Northeastern Boundary line as one running from Mars Hill Mountain in a practically westerly direction across the State to the border of Canada.

Maine's insistence upon her claim was the sentimental one of a maintenance of her sovereign rights. The claim of Great Britain was made in the hope of securing an award of territory which, even at that early date, was recognized as important, as it would have afforded a much shorter and more direct communication between Quebec and the Maritime Province of New Brunswick. Important eighty years ago, when the boundary line dispute raged, this territory, now comprised in what is known as North Aroostook, is vastly more important to Canada and Great Britain today, with the great industrial and commercial development that has taken place in Canada. In the changed conditions, to have Eastern and Western Canada separated by this huge wedge represented by North Aroostook, is a great inconvenience in time of peace, and in event of war, as was demonstrated in case of the World War, is calculated to be a handicap to military movements and operations of the first magnitude.

On the part of Maine, when the Northeastern Boundary dispute was rife, feeling could not have been more intense and public bitterness could not have been roused to a higher pitch, had those engaged in that controversy on the part of Maine had

a clear vision of all the possibilities time has disclosed of the great agricultural and timber wealth of Aroostook.

In the "Aroostook War" era Aroostook meant nothing to the stout defenders of Maine's claim under the boundary treaty, except a right founded on principle. It was not supposed that to concede the British claim would have meant a material loss of any magnitude, but to have yielded and surrendered territory, however valueless, to an unjust claim vitally challenged the manhood and American spirit of the men who then held authority in Maine's administrative and legislative halls. They fought a strenuous and long-drawn out battle in defence of the State's sovereign rights. So tenacious were they of these rights, so ably did they uphold them in argument, and with such vigor did they urge upon the somewhat listless and indifferent Federal government its duty to defend Maine in a cause founded on justice, that the national spirit was finally aroused. The cause of Maine in connection with the Northeastern Boundary question ceased to be a local and became an international affair. It engaged the best statesmanship of Great Britain and the United States, and as all know was finally settled by an extended negotiation, wherein the claims of Maine were represented by Daniel Webster, and the claims of Great Britain by Lord Ashburton.

The settlement finally made was a compromise. Maine fell short of the St. Lawrence "highlands" construction, and of her contention in full, but the settlement satisfied her honor and dignity, and was much better than war, which at one time seemed imminent. In fact, it afforded a fine exemplification of the spirit of mutual forbearance, and the rule of reason as opposed to force which has since become the settled policy of the United States and Great Britain in composing differences which have arisen between them.

The so-called "Aroostook War" has sometimes been treated as a joke. Incidents in connection with it may have their humorous, even their ridiculous side, but it was, nevertheless, a serious chapter in international, and especially in Maine history. Maine showed characteristic American spirit and the highest moral and intellectual vigor, in the assertion of her rights in connection with the controversy, and as has been said, it reflects credit and honor upon her because of the firm and unyielding stand she made upon principle.

There are today remaining on Maine soil few visible memorials of this historic episode. It is recalled in the names of two Aroostook towns, Fort Fairfield and Fort Kent, named after

Governor Fairfield and Governor Kent, who figured in connection with the lengthy controversy. There is still standing on a most picturesque spot overlooking the St. John River in Fort Kent, the old "Block House." This unique and ancient landmark is in a good state of preservation, and is likely to be increasingly valued as a historic relic as time goes by.

The Aroostook War also left as a legacy to Northern Maine what has long been known as the old "Military road," put through when the boundary dispute was in its most acute stage. Built as a means of bringing American troops into Aroostook to guard the boundary at points exposed to military invasion in event of war, it remained after the international incident was closed, a most important public utility. Thereafter for a long period it was the great thoroughfare over which immigration flowed into the County, and constituted its only link of communication with the outside world for many years.

Practically abandoned, except to small local traffic, for some decades after Aroostook acquired railroad facilities, with the development of motor car travel and traffic it is again coming to the front. Sections of it have already been made into a macadamized State highway, and in a comparatively short time it bids fair to be again a great and important artery of traffic.

The early history of the County, which Mr. Wiggin has traced with such painstaking care in the pages contained in the first part of this work, is of great value and interest for purposes of reading and reference, and it is a record that has the peculiar interest which attaches to all the annals of pioneer life in our country, whose growth and development in every section are traceable to the hardy virtues, the toil and simple thrift of the early settlers. It is not conceivable that what these early settlers did, it would be possible to repeat in the present or any succeeding generations, because in all the teeming population now within the borders of New England and Canada, from which the Aroostook pioneer settlers were chiefly recruited, there can not be found today those with the fibre of the men and women who made their homes in the primeval wilderness of Northern Maine, and laid the foundation of Aroostook as we see it today. The bounds of settled Aroostook are practically at the points these pioneers reached in their hard struggle, pushing the forest back, and even were the conditions for acquiring forested farms as easy now as they were in the County's first days, young people could not, in any appreciable numbers, be found willing to take up new farms and submit to the gruelling toil and the se-

vere hardships which were the common experience of pioneer days. So radically have the accepted standards of living among all classes changed, that in no class of workers in all our land, are there those who do not now demand for themselves conditions of life totally incompatible with the toil and hardship these early settlers of our County endured. Modern habits and tastes, and the present day relaxation of the rugged energy which characterized the pioneer settlers, seem to make it out of the question that the now unsettled portion of Aroostook will to any great extent be further reclaimed for agricultural purposes.

Events now unlooked for many modify probable future conditions. For example, were it to transpire that the Western wilderness section of Aroostook should be penetrated by a railroad, wherever soil and other conditions favored, agricultural development would follow. But this development would not be of the extent, nor would those who engaged in it be of a like class with the pioneer immigrants, who settled in the wilderness of Northern Maine from sixty to seventy years ago.

If one reads and analyzes the record of Mr. Wiggin in the foregoing pages, it will throw light upon the after history of our County. Aroostook has come to take rank as a great community, not wholly because it has developed a peculiar branch of agricultural industry, which has favored its progress and prosperity. The seed of its successful development was likewise, to a large extent, in the sound and vigorous manhood and womanhood which came here in the early days to make homes in the wilderness.

All those who found their way here were not of the material that is requisite to succeed in the hard struggle of pioneer life. But the great percentage must have been possessed of the rare qualities, physical, moral and mental, which are indispensable in those who make and succeed in the attempt to conquer obstacles such as confronted the early settlers of Aroostook. And the real tap root of Aroostook's worth and value as a community today is not drawing its strength and nourishment out of the special favor of a bountiful soil, but out of the inheritance of this sturdy pioneer ancestry.

It is easy by a careful perusal of Mr. Wiggin's narrative to trace the sources from which immigration came into the different Aroostook towns in the early days, and to gather from the circumstances attending the planting here of different settlements much in regard to the character and quality of this pioneer stock. Some of it came from the older towns of Southern

Maine and Massachusetts, and had the strong virtues characteristic of the best New England stock.

Some of it came from New Brunswick, and while some of this Provincial immigration of the pioneer days was good, a percentage of it was less desirable. The towns bordering the boundary line which had roads communicating with the Province, in the early days of the County's history, became dumping grounds for refugees from across the line, some refugees from debt, and others those who sought an asylum on American soil in consequence of various offences they had committed against the Provincial laws. By way of reciprocity, when the Civil War came on, and conscription was resorted to, what were then termed "skeeaddlers" and "bounty jumpers," migrated in very considerable numbers from Aroostook to New Brunswick. In that way, what the Province got rid of in the shape of these undesirables called refugees, she got back in the shape of fugitives from this side of the boundary, so that the balance was about even in the exchange.

The so-called refugees generally remained in the Aroostook towns to which they emigrated from the Province, for the most part settling close to the border, and building up settlements of a low type of community life, now happily nearly faded out and merged in the general picture of thrift which Aroostook presents as a whole.

To the handicap of the refugees for many years was added the equally bad factor of the boundary line rum shops, which preceded schools and churches, and located astride the boundary line so that they were able to shuffle their illicit business back and forth across the boundary, and in the absence of active co-operation of the enforcement authorities on either side the line, were able to defy the laws of both governments with impunity. These outlaw strongholds did not entirely succumb until to a growing sentiment for enforcement on the Provincial side was added the vigor which was put into the prosecution of offenders against prohibition through the liquor traffic being outlawed by the Federal Government. While they existed and flourished, which was for many years, they were a dead hand of bad influence upon settlements within their reach, and blighted every community within or near which they were located.

Later on Aroostook began to get Provincial immigration of a far more desirable sort. This was after the potato growing and shipping industry had become fully established, and was being conducted in Aroostook with great profit. When that came about

the Provincial farmers, on account of the United States duty of twenty-five cents a bushel on foreign potatoes, were shut out of the American markets, and with just as good a soil as the Aroostook farmers, were forced to farm on a small margin of profit, and to look across the line and see the tillers of the soil in our County getting forehanded, and in many cases accumulating wealth. The result was that farms remained stationary or went down in value in New Brunswick, and a rapid enhancement of values took place in Aroostook. During this process which began about 1900, there was a great drift of Provincial farmers into Aroostook, particularly North Aroostook, and this went on until values rose to practically prohibitive prices. During that period New Brunswick contributed to Aroostook many hundreds of her best and most substantial farmers. They brought with them cash to buy our best farms, and what was more important, they brought every essential quality that goes to make up a clean, sober, industrious and highly desirable community. These good men and women from across the border, and there is no better class in the world than the best that New Brunswick has raised on her farms, came to us with narrower ideas of saving and living than prevailed in Aroostook, and with habits of smaller and snigger methods of farming, but they were not slow to conform to the standards they found here, both as to farming and the general fashion of living and doing things. The result is today that the Provincial farmers who have come to us, while they have lost none of their distinctly good traits as citizens, have fully adopted the broad-guaged ideas of Aroostook.

CHAPTER II.

Conditions Of Life In Pioneer Days.

It is almost impossible to realize today the conditions of life which prevailed in Aroostook in the really primitive days of the County's history. What surrounded people then and the environment now, the habits and customs of life then and the habits and customs of life now, are in almost unbelievable contrast. Yet there are a few, a very few of course, still active today who were active participants in Aroostook pioneer life.

In the pre-Civil War period of Aroostook history, practically the only turnpiked highway was the Military Road from Houlton, built at the time of the Aroostook War, with the extension northward to Presque Isle and Ashland, which was made