

the last year it was \$225,000, and there is plenty of power for sale yet, and an ample reserve for further development of the County.

At the time that the plant was set in motion, such a customer for the power as a pulp mill was not dreamed of, but at the present time one such industry, the pulp mill at Van Buren, uses fifty thousand dollars worth of power a year. The company is now spending a quarter of a million dollars in improvements, for the further development of the power plant.

CHAPTER X.

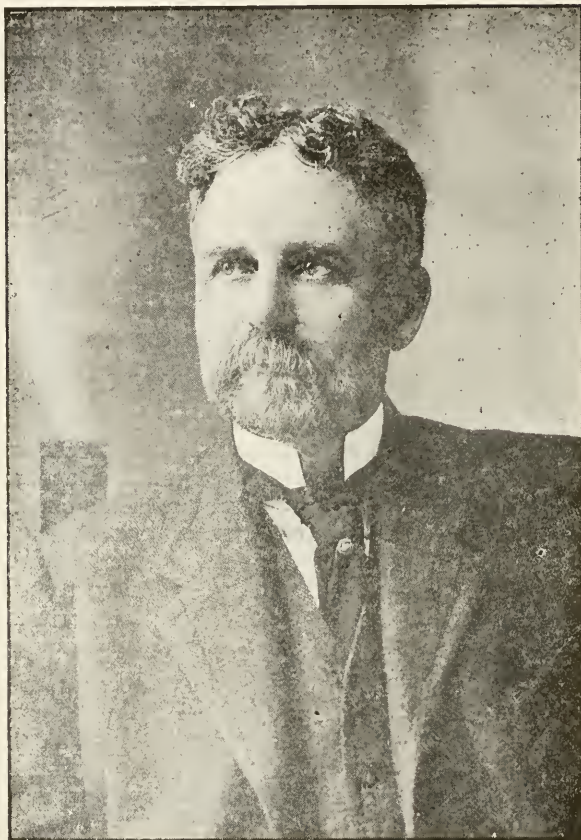
Beginning Of Aroostook's Great Staple Industry—The Introduction Of Starch Making.

Having concluded the foregoing cursory and rather imperfect review of the steps which have entered into the acquisition by Aroostook of facilities for communication with the outside world, we will sketch the development that has been made as the result of acquiring railroad facilities.

Except for its great and distinctive industry, that of potato production, acquiring the means of railroad transportation, while it would have improved conditions of living in Aroostook, and conduced to growth and progress, there would have taken place no such marked transformation in the way of increase of wealth and prosperity as has followed since the advent of the Bangor & Aroostook Railroad into the County. As a matter of fact, while the railroad has been a great and helpful agency, the greatness of Aroostook is founded upon the potato. This humble vegetable is the veritable corner stone of the thrift in this great county, as it has been built up to wonderful magnitude within the last half century. It was about forty-five years ago that the potato began to be a recognized factor in the business and industrial life of the County. Aroostook's great career as a potato producing section, in the course of which it has risen from obscurity to the distinction of being the foremost county in the United States in the value of its agricultural products, was when the peculiar adaptability of its soil for raising potatoes for starch making was discovered.

At first the discovery did not go very deep, it was merely superficial, and the extent of it was merely that Aroostook was

a promising region in which to plant potatoes for the manufacture of potato starch.

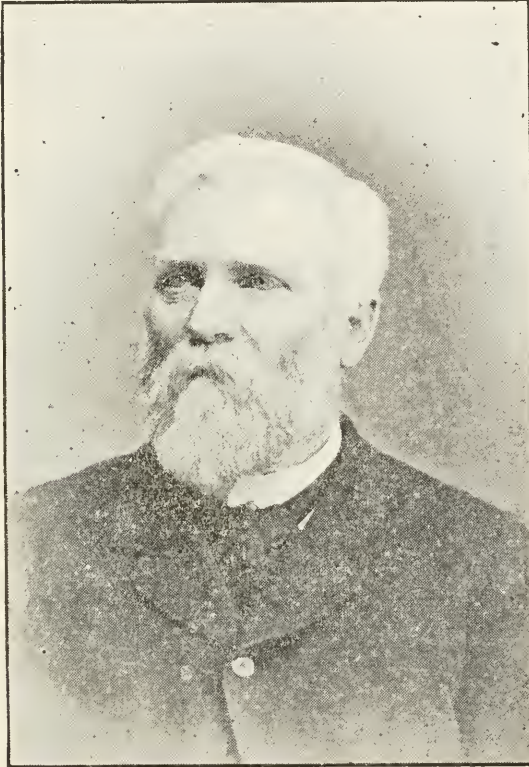


HON. T. H. PHAIR

A Business Leader and Known as the
Aroostook Starch King

The first factory in the County was built in Caribou in 1871 by Albee Holmes. Then followed one in Presque Isle in 1874 by a Mr. Wheeler of New Hampshire. The latter, located at the west end of the cement bridge, on what is now known as State Street, is still a going concern. For many years it was one of the chain of about twenty factories, owned and operated

in North Aroostook by the late T. H. Phair. It is now owned by a company, and in the fall and winter of 1921—22, operated by C. J. Hanson, manufactured thousands of barrels of surplus potatoes which would otherwise have gone to waste, and turned out about three hundred and fifty tons of starch.



HON. C. F. A. JOHNSON,

Prominent in the Business Life of Presque Isle
in the Seventies and Eighties

In 1875 the firm of Johnson & Phair, Presque Isle, went into starch making, and expanded this part of their business to such an extent that in a few years they were the largest manufacturers in the County, and in North Aroostook had a practical monopoly of the business. In 1889 the firm dissolved, and the starch

making end of it passed into the hands of the junior partner, the late T. H. Phair, who pushed the business very aggressively, so that at the apex of his business career he was known as the "Starch King of Aroostook."

For many years Mr. Phair was perhaps the leading business man in North Aroostook, and the leading figure in many lines of activity in that section of the County. Strictly self-made, he became a man whose useful citizenship touched many interests around him, and he was related in a many-sided way, to the welfare of his community.

At the outset of the starch making industry in Aroostook, as an inducement to parties to locate factories in different communities, the farmers signed contracts pledging themselves to plant each a specified number of acres, the product of which was to be delivered to the factories at a specified price per bushel. All the early contracts of this kind were for a price of twenty-five cents per bushel. Later, when these contracts had run out, the price fluctuated more or less according to the conditions of the starch market and the yield of potatoes in the County.

While the price received by Aroostook farmers for their potatoes at the starch factory was small compared with the prices often received later for potatoes shipped to the outside markets, for table stock and seed, the business averaged to be quite profitable farming, and in the starch making era of Aroostook agriculture, marked strides were made in the improvement of farms and in increased thrift.

Many farmers date the beginning of their prosperity to the time when they began raising potatoes for the factory, and it is sure that the starch making business was the first rung in the ladder. At the height of the industry of starch making, before it was superseded by the demand for table and seed stock, which practically drove the starch makers out of business, Aroostook had as many as forty factories. On a good season these would average an output of perhaps two hundred and fifty tons of starch. In the northern end of the County, which was then and has continued to be the great potato producing section of the County, the business was not long in finding its way into the hands of a single concern, first, the firm of Johnson & Phair, and later the late T. H. Phair. It was not probably a decade after the introduction of the starch factory before the discovery was made that Aroostook grown potatoes were of superlative excellence for table use. The discovery was made that while other localities could grow potatoes which, to all appearances were as good as Aroostook

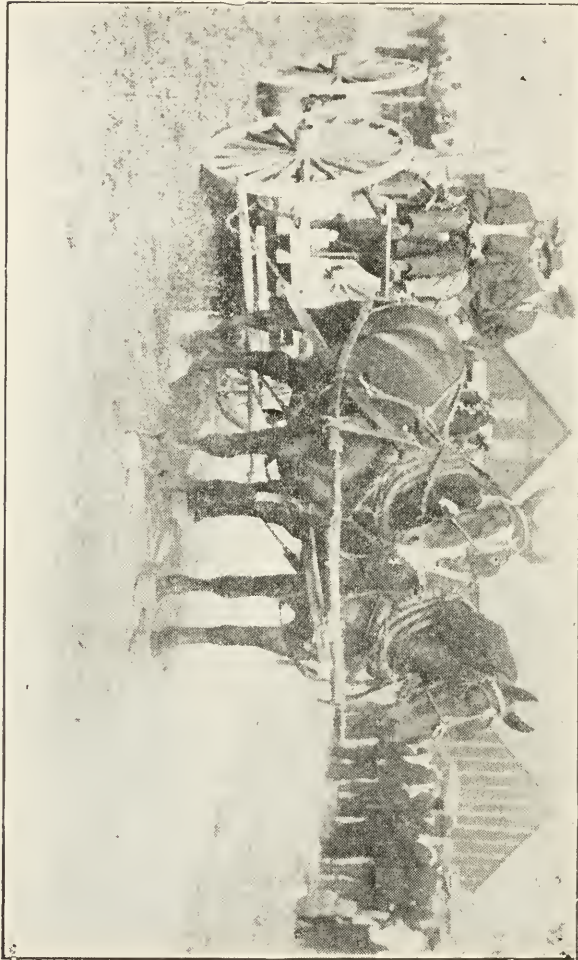
stock in point of excellence of flavor they were very much inferior to them. With this discovery began the shipping of potatoes to the Boston market for table use, first on a comparatively small scale, because markets had to be found and the reputation of Aroostook potatoes had to be established, and because Aroostook farmers were a long time in getting into a stride anything like comparable with the present proportions of the industry. Almost simultaneously with the beginning of the potato shipping business, came the invention of the Hoover digger, which made it possible to increase the acreage raised, as rapidly as suitable land could be brought into cultivation for the production of the crops. In the earliest years of the industry, little or no fertilizer was used, and when at length fertilizer became recognized as a necessary adjunct of the business, the quantity used per acre was very small, something like two hundred pounds to the acre. As the results in stimulating increased yield were noted, and with recognition of the fact that there was profit in using larger quantities of fertilizer, more and more was used, from year to year, until at the present time no farmer uses less than a ton to the acre if he has either cash or credit to buy it.

At the same time there was introduced into the potato raising industry, the practice of what is called "crop rotation." That consisted in following a crop of potatoes with a crop of grain, usually oats, and at the same time seeding the ground to clover, and after taking off a crop of clover, in the fall plow under the aftermath and the next year return to potatoes. This is the accepted rule of Aroostook farmers at the present time in potato production, and in the process of following it and in the progressive increase from year to year in the application of fertilizer, there has been a steady increase in the yield per acre, and along with this more broadly and generally recognized system of potato husbandry there has been a constant gain on the part of Aroostook farmers in raising every detail of the industry to a higher level of skill and efficiency.

At the present time the Aroostook farmer is up to the minute in every process and method essential to the highest success in potato raising, so far as success can be measured by results in getting a maximum yield per acre. Aroostook fields under the high skill and intelligence with which farmers of Aroostook have pursued this specialty, have been made to produce astonishing crops. There is no part of the country today which compares with Maine in production per acre, and the comparison showing the marked superiority of Maine over other States, is almost en-

tirely due to the preeminence of Aroostook in potato production.

TYPICAL AROOSTOOK FARM TEAM



Other sections of Maine which started into the production of starch as a specialty, found themselves unable to maintain the fertility of their soil and the result was soil bankruptcy. This was in part due to the fact that the resources of their soil in the way of fertility were more limited than the rich and deep loam of Aroostook, and also to the fact that as potato raising was

practiced on an extensive scale in the lower part of Maine and in New Hampshire, the rotation of crop system, which very early came into vogue in Aroostook, was not practiced there. The result was disasters in the business of such magnitude that the opinion obtained in southern Maine that to go into potato raising exclusively, to the abandonment of mixed husbandry, would surely invite agricultural ruin. Aroostook was not without warnings to this effect, from farmers in the southern part of the State. Something like twenty-seven years ago, on invitation of some of the leading farmers of Aroostook a meeting of the State Board of Agriculture was held in Presque Isle. This brought here a large number of representative farmers from all parts of southern Maine. In the course of the meetings of this body the point was stressed by all these prominent farmer visitors that Aroostook was on the wrong road agriculturally, and that the seeming prosperity she was enjoying was only apparent and not real and permanent. These farmers insisted that with every trainload of potatoes that was being shipped from the County, those who sent them were not so much shipping potatoes as they were their farms to market, and they urged Aroostook farmers who listened to them to take up a system of diversified farming which, they said, was the only way of maintaining the fertility of their farms. For many years after this meeting it has seemed that the course of things has contradicted their prophecies, and it may be that they were in the wrong. There is, however, this fact, which in part, at least, goes to establish the soundness of their claims, and that is that slowly but constantly, from year to year, ever since these southern Maine farmers uttered the warning, Aroostook farmers who have continually persisted in their exclusive attention to potato raising, have had to continually increase the application of fertilizer in order to secure a full yield of potatoes, and every succeeding year are more absolutely dependent upon fertilizer to get a crop.

There is no doubt but that, on general principles the advice which was given at that time was sound. Aroostook was not then, and is not now, in a position to abandon potatoes as its leading farm industry, but its condition would be better today, and it would no doubt be enjoying a sounder prosperity if it had so far diversified its farming that the intent and purpose the visitors to Aroostook expressed had been carried out in a better rounded and properly balanced system of diversified husbandry.

There is, however, no doubt that potato raising, even though followed as exclusively as it has been in Aroostook, has brought

results in the way of increase of wealth and prosperity, such as probably no other farming section in the entire United States, has enjoyed during the same period. The experience in Aroostook, has been that of alternate good and bad years, but on the average the Aroostook farmers have gotten ahead, and increased in wealth and prosperity as no other section in the country. As it is with the County as a whole, so it is with individuals, and no farming section that we have any knowledge of can point to as many cases where farmers have risen from poverty to wealth, as has been the case in Aroostook as the result of the big returns they have reached from their investment of money and labor in potato raising.

This great staple industry of Aroostook has built more comfortable homes—not only comfortable homes, but those equipped with every comfort and luxury than can be found anywhere else in the East. It has multiplied great and fertile farms and prosperous potato growing farmers in Aroostook in every neighborhood until these communities are a wonder and revelation to all who visit the County and travel about in its various sections. The industry has built schools not surpassed elsewhere in New England, and as a result of it has naturally sprung up the greatest agricultural fair in New England, excepting only one or two, possibly, in the State of Massachusetts.

In due course of time the potato industry wrought a marked transformation in Aroostook. Its large development came after transportation facilities had been afforded by the building of the Bangor & Aroostook Railroad. This road made the County, as we now know it, and in turn the fame of the Aroostook potato, and the prolific abundance with which the mellow soil turned out the tubers, made the railroad. The railroad prospered as well as the County, and as a result of this prosperity, accomplished the marvel of paying back to fortunate Aroostook every dollar which the County put into it in its vote of nearly a million dollars to aid in securing its construction.

Naturally, good potato land grew steadily in value under the impetus of the bonanza profits which were reached in favorable years. With the opportunity for making such profits out of the soil, came the incentive to farm improvement, and the desire to make every rod of land pay tribute in the shape of potato revenue. The tillable area of every farm was increased to the utmost by reclaiming all waste land. Rough and broken fields were made smooth and easy to cultivate as potato raising became

more and more an exclusive pursuit, stock raising was practically abandoned, and fences disappeared from Aroostook farms. The over-greedy farmer cultivated his fields to the very edge of the traveled highway, made himself the despair of road builders and commissioners, who were finally compelled to resort to the legislature and secure the passage of a law forbidding farmers to plow into the ditches, and by choking them up, destroy the drainage which was necessary in order to maintain roads. This statute was in general terms, but it was probably aimed at Aroostook, whose farmers were the chief offenders.

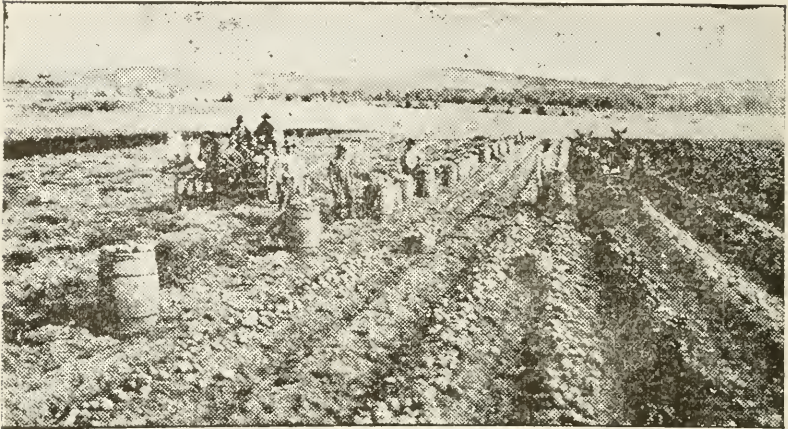
Of course when the farmers had killed off or sold off practically all their flocks and herds, and taken down all their fences, they committed themselves almost irretrievably to the system of husbandry they had embarked upon. They became a one-crop section, staking everything on the potato crop.

While this in the main, as has been said, has made Aroostook rich and famous, it has had its disadvantages, and has, and will continue to have, serious risks of possible disaster to the County. With the easy money that came in the big years to Aroostook farmers and Aroostook people in general, there was engendered a habit of free spending and extravagance. The surplus of a big year was inconsiderately swallowed up in improvements, in buying additional land to plant more potatoes, or in the general free spending which goes with easy profits, so that when lean years succeeded the fat ones, there was sometimes stringency and hard times.

In due course of time farming became less a legitimate business than a gamble, which was participated in not only by the farmers, but by non-farming classes, who speculated in buying and raising potatoes. It became the rule that fortunes were made and lost just as much in the spirit of gambling as they are at card tables.

Every year after the potato raising and shipping industry became firmly established and Aroostook potatoes had got a foothold in the markets of the country, particularly after their value became recognized for seed purposes, each succeeding year more and more potatoes were planted and more trainloads of fertilizer were rolled over the tracks of the Bangor & Aroostook and the Canadian Pacific to supply the needs of Aroostook farmers. It finally became so that he was a moderate farmer who did not have a fifty acre potato field, and he only was a big figure in the business whose plant did not reach one hundred acres, and sometimes double that acreage. Under such circumstances, when a

big yield and a big price came, even the little farmers reaped thousands of dollars in profits, and the really big ones cleaned up fortunes in a single year.



AROOSTOOK POTATO HARVEST SCENE

With the big farming to which the potato industry introduced Aroostook, small things, that have sufficed in the small days had to be done away with. The moderate sized native horses which had well enough done the work in the early days of Aroostook farming, were displaced by big western draft horses and later on tractors were added to big horses, constituting an impressive array of motive power on Aroostook farms, impressive to the eye, and also quite impressive in the figures of their cost.

With the draft horses and tractors, and the great and rapid expansion of the potato industry, it became necessary to acquire facilities for potato storage, and thus there is now added to almost every plant of farm buildings in Aroostook of any pretensions, a potato storehouse. Some of these are small and comparatively inexpensive, and some of them are large and run into big figures of cost. The smaller ones will store, in a practically frost-proof basement, from 2500 to 3000 barrels of potatoes, while the storage capacity of larger and more ambitious farm storehouses will run from 5000 to as high as 10,000 barrels. In recent years it has become the habit of farmers in different neighborhoods to combine together and build storehouses on railroad sidings. This enables them to take advantage during

the shipping season, of sudden advances in the potato market, which may be succeeded by a slump, and these railroad sidings usually supplement storehouses on the farm, so as to enable the larger farmers to store all their stock in case the conditions at the time of the digging and harvesting season seem to warrant holding instead of selling.

So marked a feature of Aroostook County are these farm potato houses, that one can tell when he crosses the border, or particularly when he goes into the neighboring Province of New Brunswick that he has left Aroostook because he has left these distinctive landmarks of Aroostook husbandry.

What the potato industry has done for Aroostook is evident to the most casual observer who travels from our County into New Brunswick and notes the marked contrast in the farming landscape of the respective sections. Generally all that part of New Brunswick which borders Aroostook, is in general as fertile a soil as that which the better portions of Aroostook County possess. In fact, the characteristic physical features of the two sections are alike, but the potato industry has caused the Aroostook farmer to pursue an intensive system of cultivation of the soil, and to clear all the waste land of his farm, and to improve every rod of it and bring it to the maximum of fertility and productiveness. The prosperity which the industry has brought to Aroostook is thus reflected in broad, smooth fields, almost a total absence of waste land, and in fine large plants of farm buildings which are in marked contrast to the farming neighborhoods of New Brunswick, or in fact, any section of New England.

At the present time it is pretty easy to estimate the acreage of potatoes in Aroostook County, by an estimate of the quantity of fertilizer that is brought into the County from year to year. The fertilizer shipments, which have steadily increased with the increase in plant, now approximate ninety thousand tons yearly. As a standard use of fertilizer per acre is one ton, that would mean an acreage in the County of ninety thousand. Assuming that the average yield per acre is eighty barrels, which would not be far from correct, it would make the normal crop of potatoes in Aroostook at the present time approximately twenty million bushels. In the season of 1921—22, the crop in Aroostook was abnormal, the statistics for the State of Maine being 37,000,000 bushels, of which the whole State outside of Aroostook probably did not contribute more than three million bushels, leaving Aroostook County with a crop of about 34,000,000 bushels.

The potato industry of Aroostook has developed not only big farms, but farming on a bigger scale than is practiced anywhere else in the East. In order to handle such an industry, the business end of it, which is the shipping end, must be highly organized in a business way, and that is the case under present conditions. This is particularly a necessity of the business since the seed trade has assumed such proportions as it has now reached. This has made the relations of the County to the outside world very extensive in the area covered, and the requirements of the seed trade are so varied and exacting that of necessity there must be a constant effort made to place the raising of potatoes and all the details of marketing the crop on a more scientific and systematic basis.

Aroostook owes the reputation that her seed has come to enjoy, to the fact of its undoubted superiority to potato seed grown in any other section of the country. Hence the constantly growing demand for Aroostook seed, and the high prices it has commanded in the market. At present it is claimed that the seed demand absorbs from a quarter to a third of the crop raised, and it is claimed by those who are experienced in the business, and broadly familiar with the conditions as to the possibilities of creating new and larger markets for Aroostook seed that it might be so developed and expanded as to practically take care of all the potatoes that Aroostook ought to raise, assuming that she followed anything like a well balanced and diversified system of farming.

CHAPTER XI.

Banks And Newspapers As Factors In Aroostook's Progress

Nothing has illustrated Aroostook's marvelous growth for the past thirty years more than the development of its system of banks. The banks that have been planted in the course of its progress in response to demands for such institutions in different centers of the County, have contributed immensely to the business welfare and prosperity of the County, and in turn they have been without exception enabled to build up a prosperous and profitable business, as a result of the great growth and increase of wealth of the people of Aroostook.

In the ante-railroad days of the County Aroostook was without banks, and practically without money. Such business as was done was done on an almost endless system of credit, and the habit of asking for and depending upon credit became so fixed