

CHAPTER XV

The Natural Divisions and Sub-Divisions of Aroostook and Their Distinctive Features

Broadly speaking, Aroostook, although a political unit, is divided into North and South Aroostook, sections to a large extent separate and distinct in their business and social relations. Outside the communication these two sections have one with another by reason of their political identity, they have comparatively small interests in common. This is not to say that there is antagonism, jealousy, or lack of friendly feeling between them, but the situation arises simply from the great geographical extent of Aroostook, the diversity in soil conditions, as between the northern and southern sections, and those factors social, business and industrial, which operate to crystallize people into separate communities, and which even define the bounds of such communities with distinctness.

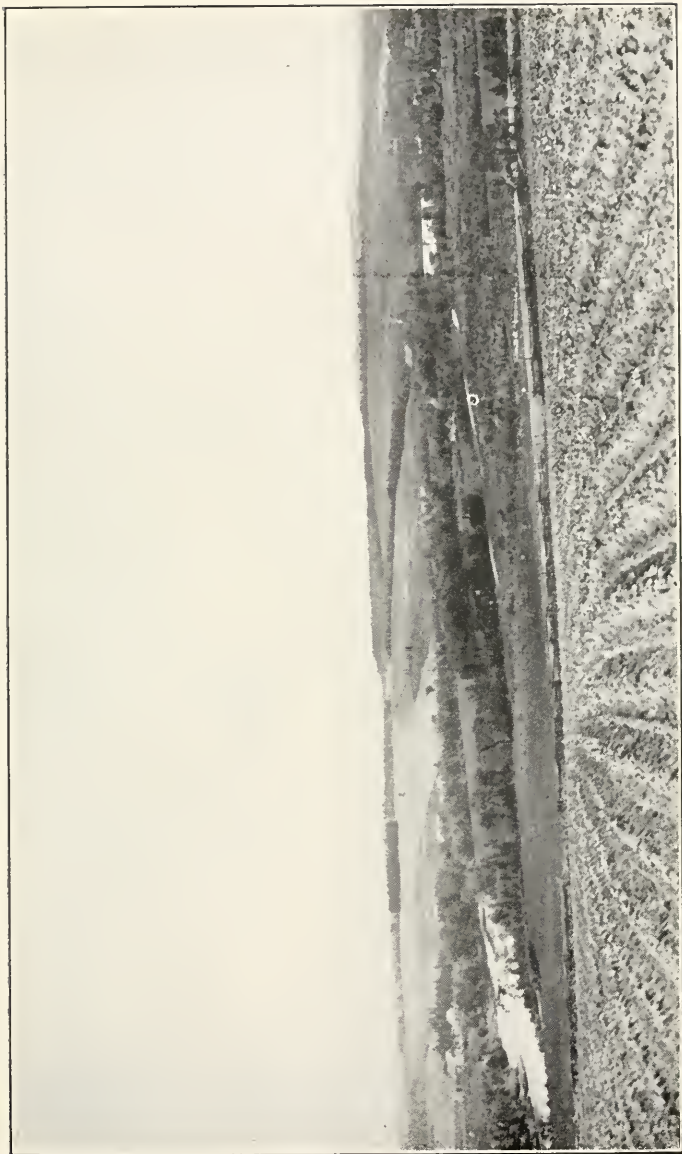
Roughly speaking, the social and business "divide" between North and South Aroostook is at a point where a line drawn from east to west across the map of the County, would coincide with the north line of the town of Mars Hill. Practically all of the business of Mars Hill, and the towns in its vicinity to the south, such as does not find a center at the growing village of Mars Hill, flows southward to Houlton, which is the magnet which attracts the population lying below the line mentioned. In other words, a Mars Hill man, or a Bridgewater man, and even more strongly, a Monticello or Littleton man, has his face turned toward Houlton and his back to North Aroostook, though he may not be giving the latter anything like a "cold shoulder."

To go further in the process of subdivision, Aroostook might be divided into five sections. These would consist of those parts of the County of which Houlton is the immediate center: Middle Aroostook, which has its natural center at the growing village of Mars Hill, that part of North Aroostook which the three big villages of Pressque Isle, Fort Fairfield and Caribou serve as business centers, the French section of Madawaska, and the Ashland region. All these several sections are distinct communities, but they each have, nevertheless, the physical features and the social and business characteristics which are broadly common to Aroostook and its people. Each is, with the exception, of the Ashland region and Madawaska, distinctly agricultural, the people of each follow the same lines and the same methods of husbandry, and with the exception of Madawaska, are of the same stock, and represent the same type of citizenship.

When one goes below the line we have specified, into the atmosphere of South Aroostook, he will find the farmers inclined to farm on snigger and smaller lines. They plant fewer potatoes, are less prone to reach out and try to absorb surrounding tracts, they go more cautiously, and are inclined to take smaller risks. In other words, they "bore with a small auger." Where the big farmer of North Aroostook plants a hundred acres of potatoes, the so-called big farmer of the southern part of the County plants maybe fifty or seventy-five. As one goes further and further toward the southern limit of Aroostook, the habit of conservatism in farming is more marked, until when one gets down into the towns below Houlton their people, if they journey up into the big potato country of the North, are nearly as much astonished at the immense scale on which farming is conducted as are the small farm folks of the extreme lower part of the State.

The North Aroostook style of breadth and boldness has its merits as compared with South Aroostook, and it also has obvious defects, for while it makes bigger gains in the big years, it makes those who follow the broad-gauge system liable to much greater losses in bad years. When there are good years—and some amazingly rich ones have fallen to the lot of Aroostook in connection with the potato raising game, great clean-ups are made by the big North Aroostook farmers—sometimes fortunes in a single year. Conversely, when bad years come, and Aroostook has plunged into not a few "sloughs of despond," when either the crop was a partial failure, or the price went below the cost of production, then sackcloth drapes the homes of North Aroostook farmers much more heavily than it has to be hung out by the more careful farmers of the south end of the County.

In the southern part of the County we call to mind no really big farm as compared with the big farms of North Aroostook, with the exception of what was long known as the Whited farm at Bridgewater Corner. The original farm of 160 acres was bought by Mr. Fred Whited, who came from New Brunswick, shortly after the Civil War, the purchase price being less than \$2,000. To this Mr. Whited added later an adjoining farm of eighty acres. When the first starch factory came within his reach, he began raising potatoes. He also raised along with his crops of potatoes, a family of three husky sons, and the sons all got busy just as soon as they were able to handle a rake or pitchfork, to drive a horse or steer a plow. The Whited family lived simply. A mammoth stack of buckwheat pancakes always loomed up at the beginning of every meal like a small mountain,



AROOSTOOK RIVER VALLEY FROM CHRISTIE HILL



but when the meal was finished, the place it had occupied on the family board was a level plain. What is now termed "overhead" expenses were unknown to Fred Whited. He was scrupulously honest, a hard worker and though not at all an educated man, a most excellent planner and manager. The result was that he constantly got ahead, fairly fast during the starch factory era, and in some big years later on, wonderfully fast. He knew nothing of banks, and for many years had no use for them, his bank being a pasteboard box, which he kept under his bed. Mr. Whited got his first jolt as to the wisdom of this simple, home-made banking system one day when his buildings caught fire and were burned. As the fire spread from the big barn to the house, Mr. Whited naturally thought of his paste-board bank and the thousands of dollars it contained. He rescued it, and then, carrying it under his arm, went out among the crowd of neighbors who had collected, and began to give directions about salvaging other movable effects. While he was so engaged, the twine string which held the cover on to the bulging hoard of currency, became untied, and several wads, containing hundreds of dollars each, crept out of the box and fell to the ground. Fortunately, all the neighbors who had gathered at the scene of the fire, were honest, and as fast as a roll was discovered and picked up, it was returned to its owner. After this fire Mr. Whited thought it best to invest his surplus cash, rather than leave it lying around loose, and began to buy adjoining land. This he continued to do until the Whited holdings represented a big, compact tract of 500 acres.

In due course of nature Mr. Whited died, the big farm passed into the hands of his youngest son, Harry, and the latter some years ago sold it to the Edmunds Seed Potato Company of Boston, for between \$60,000 and \$70,000, which company still owns and operates it as a seed farm. Its history is that of typical Aroostook farming, and it would be interesting to know, if it could be computed, how many scores of thousands of dollars this great farm has made for its owners since Mr. Whited came across from the Province and purchased it many years ago.

Without regard to comparison of their respective merits and attractions, there is much to admire both in North and South Aroostook. In South Aroostook the splendid village of Houlton, besides having a history it can well afford to be proud of, is one of the finest and most attractive towns in the State. It is known far and wide for its business strength and stability, having the unique distinction of possessing the largest amount of wealth per

capita of any town in New England, with the exception of Brookline, Massachusetts. It is a town that has social culture and refinement in a high degree, is noted and much admired for the beauty of its residences, and possesses perhaps the largest number of fine and attractive residences, in proportion to its size, of any town in the State. It is well worthy of the pride its citizens take in it, and is also worthy of its title and office as the shire town of the great County of Aroostook.

Houlton has had in the past and has today many strong and deservedly influential citizens. At its bar, as the shire town, have figured many able men, notably the late Governor Llewellyn Powers and other members of the Powers family, which in the person of Hon. F. A. Powers, now a resident of Houlton, furnished the judiciary of Maine one of the ablest in its line of justices. It has had many able business men, and it contributed to the potato trade, which has flourished for so many years in Aroostook. Hon. E. L. Cleveland, who is, if we are correct, the dean of the business in Southern Aroostook, and one of the most successful and conservative men in the trade. Besides potatoes, Mr. Cleveland has ventured into other lines, such as buying and developing real estate, and made various investments, in which he has been very successful. He is at the present time the President of the Aroostook Anti-Tuberculosis Association, and is an admirable choice for the position.

Houlton also takes a just pride in being the home of Col. Frank M. Hume, one of the most gallant soldiers Maine sent abroad in the World War. It was fortunate for many years in having a citizen of remarkably versatile ability and usefulness in the late Michael M. Clark, Esq., for many years Clerk of Courts, and during the period of his active life the real "Mayor of the City." It has today in the person of Register of Deeds, James H. Kidder, a man of such unique popularity that in that respect he is recognized as being in a class by himself. It also has the distinction of having been the home for many years of Hon. Albert A. Burleigh, truly in his latter years the "grand old man" of Aroostook, and deservedly entitled to occupy the place of honor in the esteem and gratitude of the people of Aroostook for his service in promoting the welfare and development of the County.