

## CHAPTER XVI

*Middle Aroostook A Flourishing Section Of The County*

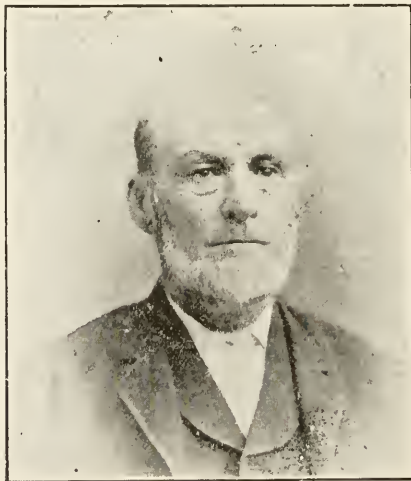
For many years after North Aroostook, or at least a considerable percentage of its area, had been provided with railroad transportation, what may be termed "Middle Aroostook," represented by the towns of Mars Hill, Blaine, Bridgewater and Monticello, were without any rail facilities, and their growth and progress were held in check on that account.

Up to the date of the building of the Bangor & Aroostook Railroad, farmers in these several towns were obliged to team all their produce to Houlton, a distance all the way from twelve to twenty-five miles, and the most of this teaming had to be done during the fall and winter months, involving besides hardship and severe exposure, so much expense that this section of the County was entirely unable to compete with sections favored with a rail outlet.

With the advent of the railroad all this was changed, Middle Aroostook was put on a footing of equality with other sections of the County. All the previously sleepy and listless little villages woke up with the coming of the railroad, the waking up being especially pronounced in Mars Hill and Blaine. These two villages, separated by quite a clear gap up to the time the railroad came, fostered more or less of a spirit of rivalry so long as it remained an open question which was to be the leading place on the County map. In deference to this feeling, and in order to keep peace in the family, the management of the Bangor & Aroostook gave the station at this point the name "Mars Hill & Blaine," which it carried for some years. Then the two villages began to fill up the gap between them, until they became practically one, with the growth predominating in the Mars Hill end of the community. The fine and flourishing school, known as the Aroostook Central Institute, was built on a commanding elevation intermediate between the two villages, and now the two have merged into one fine business center, and are a unit except as to name, and the conduct of their municipal affairs, which remain separate and distinct.

The twin villages make one very fine community, and owing to the fact that they have around them a big territory of as productive land as there is in the County, tilled by industrious and progressive farmers, and as the business men of the two villages are wide-awake and enterprising, they have a very promising future.

We do not know that either Mars Hill or Blaine owes its start to the late Benjamin Jones, but undoubtedly Mr. Jones' activity and enterprise were a good deal of a factor in laying the foundation of the two villages. In the course of the later development of the community the ability, public spirit, and various movements for the public good originated and promoted by the late H. W. Safford, were a decided factor in advancing the welfare of both Mars Hill and Blaine. At the present time they have many men in their list of strong business citizens. Among these may be mentioned the Husseys, who conduct now, as they have for many years past, the largest mercantile business between Presque Isle and Houlton. The original Hussey Store, then located at what was called Blaine Corner, was founded by the late S. H. Hussey. Some years since, the business was transferred to Mars Hill, where it is at present conducted, practically as a department store, under the management of Mr. Hal Hussey. The latter's son, Stetson Hussey, Jr., is a young and very promising lawyer, who for two terms occupied a seat in the House of Representatives at Augusta, and, as the candidate of the Republican party, will be one of three State Senators from Aroostook.



HON. GEO. W. COLLINS, BRIDGEWATER  
An Old-time Business Man of Aroostook, and Prominent  
As Worker for Railroad

Besides its extensive mercantile business, as one of the principal trade centers of the County, Mars Hill is one of the biggest shipping points for potatoes and other produce in Aroostook, having many storehouses of large capacity, and being equipped both in this way, and through having a large list of strong and reliable buyers, to handle the extensive potato raising and shipping industry, which centers at Mars Hill.

Next to Mars Hill, Bridgewater is the principal town in Middle Aroostook. The village of Bridgewater Centre is quite a hustling business place. The Bridgewater farmers are noted for their snug thrift, and many of them who make small pretensions, are not only moderately well off, but even wealthy. This is because the Bridgewater habit is to practice industry, and to save instead of spend.

The founder of Bridgewater Centre was the late Hon. Geo. W. Collins. When Mr. Collins took possession of its site for business purposes, planting there, first a store, then a starch factory, then a lumber mill and then a large sole leather tannery, he planted the seed from which has grown the prosperous village of today. Mr. Collins was a pre-railroad figure in the business life of his section of the County, but as such was one of the most active, energetic and capable men in the County, and Bridgewater Centre owes much to the work he performed in laying its foundation in the early days.

It is impossible, within the limits imposed in the preparation of this series of sketches of Aroostook progress and development, to go into details in describing the three splendid farming towns of Presque Isle, Caribou and Fort Fairfield, and the flourishing villages where their business, and to quite an extent the business of surrounding towns, centers. Three towns more on an equality in all that goes to make up community thrift and attractiveness, cannot be found anywhere in New England. In respect of this even balance in business enterprise, in the possession of wealth, fine farm and village homes, handsome and up-to-date business establishments, and creditable and useful public institutions these three North Aroostook towns and villages are unique.

Southern Maine towns of the same size have the appearance of having reached their growth and then having fallen into a slumber from which they have not wakened, but these three North Aroostook towns are always in a hustle. This statement might be qualified by saying that one day in each year this hustle is suspended. That is when, on the Fourth of July, two of them

empty their population into the third, it being the pleasant and amicable custom of the three towns to rotate Fourth of July celebrations. When this great event comes around, elaborate preparations are made, and instead of having rival celebrations, one village pulling against another, they boost for each other, their local papers declare in great headlines, what a glorious celebration their sister town is to have, and describe at length its features and attractions.

In general, though the territory they occupy necessarily makes them competitors in trade, everything is carried on pleasantly and without any unseemly strife. They speak well of one another, evidently think well of one another, though of course, a Presque Isle man must have the subconscious idea that Presque Isle is the hub of North Aroostook, and so must also a Caribou or Fort Fairfield man be possessed of the idea that they live in the only town in Northern Maine.

Each of the three towns has strong and able leading citizens in it, and each has, as a whole, a sound and highly respectable body of citizens to carry on its business affairs and its various social and civil activities.

At the present time, both in North and South Aroostook, business is being carried on largely by young men. Young men predominate in all lines, whether it be in the business life of the villages, or in conducting the operations of the big farms. Consequently Aroostook is a forward looking county, full of courage and spirit. Business, both on the farms and in all other lines, is cut out on a big, broad-gauged scale. A bad year or a succession of them, are not accepted as final. In Aroostook men in all lines make big gains in a good year, sometimes surprisingly big gains, and in off years they make big losses, sometimes almost staggering ones, but in good and bad years alike, things go along with the same vim and cheerfulness, optimism, courage and resiliency. This same spirit, in a different way is apparent in social affairs, and in everything that goes on in these fine towns. Either of them can mobilize more strength in numbers and substantial aid to boost anything that is worthy of being pushed and boosted than any other towns in New England. This makes each and all of them very pleasant places to live in, and to try to do business in.

Before concluding these rather hasty and imperfect sketches, which may be corrected and amplified at a future date, to deal more adequately of Aroostook development, it would not be proper to ignore the Ashland region or the French or up-river section. The Ashland region is one which is defined by natural

local limits and characteristics quite as clearly as any other section of the County. It has its peculiar attractions, and its peculiar lines of activity which distinguish it from the Aroostook River Valley towns, the latter section being to all intents and purposes purely agricultural. The Ashland region was in past years, and to quite an extent still is, a great lumbering section. Ashland itself was for many years a lumbering center of great importance, and up to the present time the lumber, fish and game interests have a tendency to overshadow agriculture.

Within a narrower area, the Ashland region has as fertile a soil as any other part of the County, but the farms are not cultivated so intensively by any means as in the Caribou—Fort Fairfield—Presque Isle section. The conditions are changing, however, in this respect, and farming is coming more to the front in the Ashland region. The pulp octopus, represented in the Ashland region by the International Paper Company, is gradually killing out the saw-mills, and with the disappearance of these from the industries of Ashland, that section will be thrown back more upon agriculture. The fish and game interests will remain and their importance will increase in this section. The vast forest which stretches west from Ashland will remain, it is to be hoped, perpetually preserved and protected. As it is not a probable development of the future that its great forest should be improved, and converted into cleared townships, then, as the next best thing for Northern Maine, they should be kept intact and protected against waste and devastation by the pulp makers, so that the big game in its forested area and the fish in its hundreds of lakes and streams may attract increasing thousands of hunters and fishermen to the region.

The Ashland section is one of the most interesting hunting and fishing regions in the entire country, and every year as this fact is recognized, there will be an increasing influx of sportsmen to this region, and to the end of featuring this great asset, all who are interested in the County, and especially directly interested, namely, the residents of Ashland and the other towns of that section, should make every effort to make the region better known and more attractive. One of the measures to this end should be a realization on the part of people of what these interests mean to the prosperity of their section, and there should be a zealous effort made to preserve what they have by co-operation with the Fish and Game Commission in the protection of fish and game, and the education of the public mind to the importance of the passage of laws to conserve and protect the forested

townships in Western Aroostook from the devastation which has been the fate of so many other forest areas of the country.

A whole book might be written, and interestingly written, giving the history of the development of what is known as the Madawaska region. Indeed, such a book was written by the late Patrick Therriault, and has been published, but whether there is an edition in English, the writer is not aware. Mr. Therriault prepared himself by research and investigation for this work, and the volume he prepared is said, by those who have read it, to be a very interesting history of this most interesting section of our State.

As the writer understands, the inhabitants of the towns of the Upper St. John River are the descendants of the ancient Acadians. Outside of the history which has been prepared by the late Mr. Therriault, probably Mr. Wiggins's history, given in the first part of this work, is the best account available. The tragic features and incidents of the migration of the French people to the homes they now occupy on the Upper St. John, has nothing of the commonplace experience which entered into the lives of those who migrated into the wilderness of the lower part of the County, and carved homes there out of the wilderness.

The romance and adventure in which this community of Northern Maine had its origin, still lingers in the quaintness and simplicity in the habits and customs of the people, which reflects very faithfully the image of Acadian life as it was drawn by Longfellow in the sweet and beautiful poem of *Evangeline*. Added to this quaintness and simplicity in the life and general habits of the "Up-River" French, is the fact that this life has, as a setting, the most charming natural scenery to be found in New England. These considerations make a trip through the region of great interest, and as the highways of auto travel are improved, it will be increasingly visited from year to year by tourists from different parts of the country.

But the Madawaska country is by no means anchored in the past, or living placidly in bygone times, however much the past may still be mirrored in the life of its people. No part of Aroostook is undergoing more of a business transformation, and no part is making greater progress than the towns of the Upper St. John River. No towns in the County have more hustling business men, and none are growing faster. Indeed, the Hon. Peter Charles Keegan, who has figured more prominently, at least in a public way, in the development and progress of Van Buren, and in the other communities of Madawaska, than any other

man, declares that Van Buren is destined to be the biggest town in Aroostook. This may be an extreme statement, but when one visits Van Buren and views it from various angles, so as to comprehend the different factors of its growth and prosperity, the snug thrift of its people, the great lumbering interests, which the vast territory covered by the St. John River and its tributaries seems to afford assurance of reasonable stability, the enterprise of the business men of that section, the activity of the people in fostering schools, and the progress they are making in education—all these things seem to give Mr. Keegan's prediction an air of plausibility at least.

The so-called Madawaska region was brought out of obscurity by the advent of the railroad. For the extension to Van Buren, that young city has Hon. Peter Charles Keegan to thank to a great extent—at least for greatly hastening the date of its coming. For the Fish River Extension there was more of a purpose on the part of the projectors and builders of the Ashland branch to enlarge that field, and to reach, as an objective, the great lumbering manufacturing center of Fort Kent. The result has been to bring these upper towns in a railroad way to the front and to put them and especially Van Buren, still more on the map by railroad developments which have taken place in Canada, across the St. John River from Van Buren.

At Van Buren proper they have now what has been classed as the biggest lumber manufacturing plant east of the Pacific Coast, the one operated by the St. John Lumber Company. Van Buren also has the advantage of lumber and other business activities carried on by Mr. Allen Hammond, one of the most energetic and successful business men in the County. It also has other men of the calibre of Mr. Hammond, so that in business and social life and last but by no means least, in the political affairs of the County, the up-river part of Aroostook is a very decidedly important factor to be dealt with and recognized. At Keegan, a short distance above Van Buren proper, there is a very smart pulp mill, the extent of whose operations may be imagined from the fact that in the mere matter of electric power consumption, it pays the Gould Electric Company \$50,000 a year.

Educationally, Van Buren has, in St. Mary's College, a very flourishing and finely conducted school, a counterpart of which may be found in the State Training School, which is being conducted so successfully at Fort Kent. These and other schools are important factors in promoting the successful development of this great upper country, and their influence is very evident

in the bright and wide awake young men and women who are coming up in that section. Many convent schools are also taking a very helpful part in the educational training and development of the rising generation in Madawaska.

The writer is aware that what has been written herein concerning the development of Aroostook, is only a superficial picture of what is being accomplished in this great County. The purpose is to round out the record so admirably and studiously prepared by Mr. Wiggin, and to give at least a glimpse of what has taken place in Aroostook since he wrote his early history of the County. We are aware that in what we have written little has been done except to give an imperfect glimpse of the progress that has been made, but, as we have said, this may be later revised, improved and enlarged so as to be a worth while contribution to the history of Aroostook progress and development, and as such it is submitted to the kind consideration of the reader.