

side world was the occasion of a jubilee such as Presque Isle never saw before and has not witnessed since. It was like the firstborn in an expectant home. Others that come later may be fairer, brighter and more promising, but the first has in it the real peach bloom of joy, pride and happiness.

When Presque Isle assumed an indebtedness of \$15,000, and in exchange therefor secured connection with the Provincial line in Dec. 1881, she made perhaps the best investment in her history up to that time. Her rail communication with the outside world was long and roundabout, and had the disadvantage of running through a foreign country, but it was a vast improvement on the old order of things. Property values advanced, population began to increase, and there was a distinct step forward in wealth and prosperity immediately following the advent of railroad facilities.

CHAPTER V.

The Direct-Line Railroad Agitation.

When the railroad outlet a community gets has a superfluous distance from the objective to be reached of something like 90 miles; when personal travel or the transportation of freight has to go out of its way scores of miles, first in an exactly opposite direction, and then scores of miles more in a rambling and weary detour from a direct line to its destination, it can not be a permanently satisfactory arrangement. And the old-time railroad via New Brunswick had these drawbacks.

The result was that Presque Isle had not had its newly acquired railroad facilities half a decade before there was agitation started for other and better facilities. This agitation took definite form with the return of Hon. Joseph B. Hall to Presque Isle in October, 1884, and his resumption of publication of the Aroostook Herald. Mr. Hall was a good newspaper man, quick to discern and seize upon the immediate and pressing need of his field for better railroad facilities, and had the faculty of bringing that need to the front and agitating it so as to create public interest and enthusiasm. Advocacy of what was termed a "Direct Line Railroad," started very shortly after Mr. Hall revived the Herald, and it was not long before the persistent agitation in its columns bore fruit in a local association of citizens to forward the scheme.

The first to enlist in the movement and to add their influ-

ence and leadership to Editor Hall's vigorous booming of the scheme were the late Dr. Geo. H. Freeman and Jas. W. Bolton of Presque Isle. Both were solid and substantial citizens, as good as the County has ever had in the matter of public spirit and alert zeal to promote the public welfare.

At what stage of the project or just how they succeeded in bringing the Direct Line Railroad scheme to the attention of a man of real influence and weight in railroad circles, we do not know. But in due time such a man put in appearance in the person of the late Mr. Geo. P. Wescott of Portland.

Mr. Wescott was a man who stood high in business and financial circles of the State, was affiliated with many large and

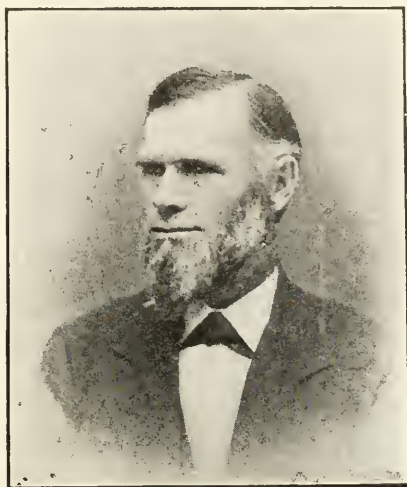


HON. JOSEPH B. HALL
Publisher of Aroostook Herald, and
Prominent Railroad Worker

important corporate interests, and his connection with the movement immediately gave it character and standing. Whatever engagement Mr. Wescott entered into, his reputation and financial connections and influence seemed to afford ample guarantee would be carried out.

Coincidentally with Mr. Wescott's hand appearing in connection with the development of the project, Hon. Joseph Manly of Augusta became known as one of its patrons or promoters in a financial way. Mr. Manly, in addition to other large business

interests, stood high in the councils of the Maine Central Railroad, which was represented as being behind the enterprise, and as being willing to help boost a railroad into Aroostook, because of the large industrial development it promised, and the prospect of such a line becoming a great feeder for the Maine Central.



DR. GEO. H. FREEMAN

A Pioneer in Agitation for Railroad

Negotiation with Mr. Wescott resulted in a proposition on his part that he and those associated with him would undertake to bring about the construction of a direct line of railroad into Aroostook on condition that the County gave \$100,000 in aid of the enterprise, and provided the right of way. Accordingly a charter was obtained in the Legislature of 1887; what was called the Northern Maine Railroad Company was organized in April of that year, and the Company agreed to build and operate a railroad to Presque Isle within five years, if the people of Aroostook would guarantee \$100,000 and the right of way. The charter of the Company extended from Mattawamkeag to Houlton, thence to Presque Isle, Ashland and Fort Kent.

The agitation to raise the sum required of the County extended through the year 1887 and through 1888 and 1889, and was a strenuous and earnest one. Besides the newspaper campaign, in which the Aroostook Herald and the North Star led,

supplemented by good work on the part of the Caribou Republican, there were many mass meetings in the various towns interested. These were addressed by leading citizens, among them being Hon. Columbus Hayford, Hon. Edward Wiggin, Rev. G. M. Park, Hon. C. F. Daggett and Dr. Freeman of Presque Isle, Hon. Geo. W. Collins of Bridgewater, and other citizens.

In opposition to the aggressive fight that was made by Presque Isle, with the aid of most other towns of the County, to put the Direct Line through, it had to contend with an element in Houlton, which, led by the Aroostook Pioneer, then published by the late Geo. H. Gilman, opposed the project. Under the existing railroad status Houlton was the undisputed center of business for a great territory, and the continuous caravans of loaded teams which filled the highways leading into the town from almost every direction in busy seasons, afforded grounds for the fears on the part of some Houlton citizens that when a direct railroad swept this traffic away, and the sections which contributed it became to an extent independent of Houlton, it would be a blow to the town's prosperity. The broader and more far-seeing people of the town argued differently, and some of them, notably the late Hon. Albert A. Burleigh, gave warm support to the direct line railroad project. Their position has been amply borne out by the results. Houlton has grown and waxed big and strong along with the whole County, as a result of the acquisition of railroad facilities, and the arguments made by those advocating the direct line road that when all Aroostook took on new life and began to enjoy the expansion of industry and prosperity a railroad would bring, all towns in the County would share in the benefits, have been fully vindicated by what has come to pass.

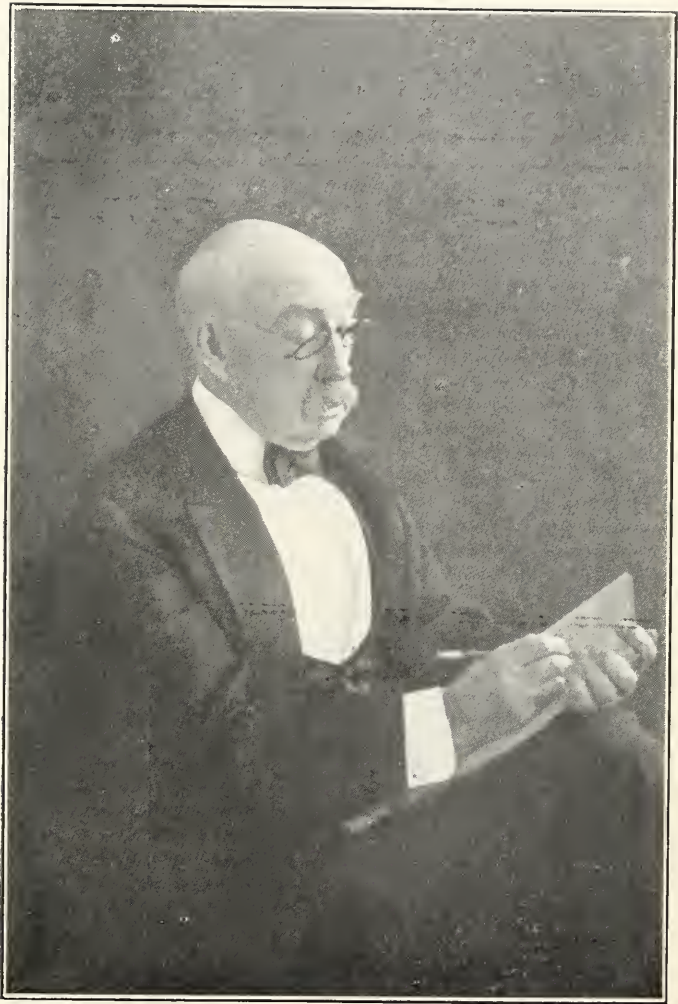
In due course of time, and after the putting forth of much strenuous public effort, the County succeeded in meeting the demands of the financial sponsors of the Direct Line scheme. It was only \$100,000 for the County, but in those days that sum of money was more for all Aroostook to raise than would be a like amount for either of the larger towns, or for that matter, almost any thrifty town within its borders today. The people were poor where they are now strong and wealthy. Such great change has come about by means of the opportunities the coming of the railroad has brought that many single farm properties now represent a value in excess of what was asked of the County to insure the building of the railroad line under agitation in the eighties.

The Direct Line railroad scheme must be credited with being the parent enterprise in securing a short line railroad for Aroostook. The immediate result of the years of arduous effort this project involved was a seeming failure, for the enterprise directly represented by the so-called Northern Maine Railroad collapsed as we recall, sometime in the year 1890. The story of the old Direct Line movement, so far as the Wescott, or financial end of it was concerned, was a story of long drawn out delay, of repeated excuses for non-fulfillment of pledges and promises made to the local promoters of the project. It was an illustration of building a railroad according to what is known as "absent treatment," as regards Mr. Wescott's relation to the scheme. During the nearly four years he was at the head of the company organized to build the road, so far as we recall, he was never personally inside the borders of the County, never once volunteered a statement in regard to the progress that was being made, or initiated a single act which could be construed as indicating a positive and sincere purpose to carry out the undertaking to which he had committed himself. It was a case of perplexing, and toward the last, quite distracting lack of interest which Mr. Wescott showed in the matter of the Direct Line. So dumb was he on everything connected with the project, and so much wrapped up in secrecy and reserve, that it bred public distrust of the good faith with which the enterprise was being handled. Mr. Wescott was suspected of representing interests which had a selfish object in the matter, and of acquiring the control of a franchise covering the route for a short line of railroad into Aroostook for the purpose of securing traffic concessions from the Canadian Pacific Railroad, whose interests were opposed to such a proposition. This was not definitely established, however, and from first to last Mr. Wescott had the confidence of the local promoters of the enterprise that he was acting in entire good faith.

Whatever may have been the purpose of those outside the County who represented the money end of the scheme, it was a movement which had enlisted the local promoters in a sincere and honest effort to secure a railroad outlet for the County. They labored hard and long and zealously, and while they incurred censure when the scheme finally collapsed, their years of service in the cause of better railroad facilities for the County were not lost. As we have said, the finally successful enterprise which came later was the direct fruit of the earlier campaign which came to naught in the failure of what was known as the Direct Line movement.

The work done in the eighties under the leadership of such men as Editor Hall, Dr. Freeman and J. W. Bolton laid the foundation, and when the later enterprise, which originated in a proposition broached by the late Hon. Albert A. Burleigh, in the early nineties, came, it found the public educated and the sentiment of the County ripe and ready for immediate active steps in the undertaking. It turned out that it was needful to have conditions favorable to speedy development of the project, for any undue delay in carrying the undertaking forward would have inevitably shipwrecked what came to be known as the Bangor & Aroostook movement. The financial ends of this undertaking were securely tied up, so as to insure the building of the road not three months before the bottom fell out of all lines of business in the financial panic which 1893 ushered in, and which held the country in its disastrous clutch until about the year 1900. Had this panic caught the Bangor & Aroostook job of financing unfinished, it would have gone on the scrap heap along with thousands of other failures caused by the smash-up, and a decade at least would have elapsed before any further effort would have had any chance of success in inducing capital to take hold of a railroad into Aroostook. More than that, not only would the time have been lost, but the same combination of men and circumstances which gave the undertaking at the time it started a peculiarly favorable chance of succeeding, would not have been present ten years later.

There have been few periods in the history of Aroostook, when people donned the sackcloth and ashes of discouragement and discontent to the extent they did after the demise of the so-called "Direct Line" railroad scheme. For nearly five years during which it was in process first of agitation, and then of seeming development to a practical reality, people had been buoyed up with excitement and the hopes and expectations growing out of its assumed success. Then when the bird of bright plumage seemed to be right in the hand of Aroostook, it flew away, and was lost to view in the tall timber. It isn't pleasant for a community to be so lifted up, and of a sudden to take the fall that Aroostook took when the Direct Line movement became an admitted failure. The people in every community and neighborhood whose interests were affected, and who had planned and built up hopes on the strength of the promised railroad, when it suddenly fell through, practically sat down in despair.



FRANKLIN W. CRAM