

Correspondence.

The Free Grant Lands of Muskoka.

(Continued.)

ROADS.

Large sums of money have been annually laid out by the Ontario Government in building colonization roads through this district, and now it is intersected in almost every direction by them. The principal one is that from Washago to Gravenhurst, which was the first made in Muskoka; it was then extended to Bracebridge. Then the Bracebridge and Huntsville Road was built, from which diverges the Parry Sound, the Port Carling, the Brunel and the Stisted Road, each having branches of minor importance, all tending to open up the surrounding lands, which have been surveyed for settlement.

During the summer months steamboats ply upon the Lakes Rosseau, Muskoka, Joseph, Mary and Vernon, which are a great accommodation to settlers located in the vicinity of these waters. The railway, too, has been extended to Gravenhurst, which is its present terminus at the foot of navigation of Muskoka Lake; it is, however, expected that a further extension of the line will be made northward, passing through several townships, to tap the Pacific line now under construction from Lake Nipissing to the Georgian Bay; with this line completed, every portion of the district will be within easy and direct access of Toronto and Ottawa.

DEVELOPMENT.

The progress of development and improvement in the district has been very rapid indeed. In this immediate neighborhood, on my first settling here, neither roads, churches, schools, post offices or stores existed, but now we have all within easy distance; lines of telegraph have also been constructed. Persons who visited Muskoka five years ago would scarcely recognize it now, so great have been the improvements in a short time. Ministers of almost every Protestant denomination are stationed in the district, and a Roman Catholic Bishop now resides in Bracebridge. Two newspapers are published, viz., the *Free Grant Gazette* and the *Liberal*, the former at Bracebridge and the latter at Huntsville. Saw mills and grist mills are numerous, and liberal encouragement is given to manufacturers of all kinds. The municipality of Bracebridge has just voted a bonus of \$2,000 for a tannery, and has also granted bonuses to other descriptions of manufactures. The unlimited water power throughout the district offers rare facilities for manufacturing enterprise, not to be surpassed in the province.

MARKETS.

The continual influx of new settlers creates a demand for produce of all kinds at paying prices. Store-keepers, too, will take in trade or pay cash for any quantity of grain, &c., or furs. The operations of lumbermen have improved the market for hay, grain, and such supplies as are required by these parties. Hay sells at about \$10 a ton, and oats for 50 cents per bushel at the present time, and when the lumbering business is any way brisk these prices are doubled. Every settler coming in goes farther back to the unsettled lands. He, in turn, wants supplies, which, until he grows enough for his own consumption, he purchases from older settlers, who thereby secure a ready market for what they have to dispose of. The home demand will thus be good for some years, and as the means of communication (now pretty good) is always improving, there is no danger of the local market becoming glutted before a railway is opened through the district, a misfortune which has been felt by settlers in some of the more remote townships in Western Ontario.

THE FREE GRANT ACT.

By this Act heads of families obtain a grant of 200 acres of land; single adults, of either sex, or those who are 18 years of age, get 100 acres, or if more is required they are at liberty to purchase 100 acres at 50 cents an acre cash. The conditions of settlement are, that there shall be cleared in five years, at least 15 acres, which must be fenced and under crop; a habitable house must be built, the dimensions of which must not be less than 16 x 20 feet. These conditions being complied with, at the end of five years, the deed will be issued. The Homestead Law provides that if a locatee or his heir remain on the land it cannot be seized for debt for twenty years. The Free Grant

Act has, undoubtedly, proved a great stimulus to the settlements to which it extends, and has proved a great boon to many families, who, under its provisions, have been enabled to secure good farm lands, which they could not otherwise have hoped to possess. Of the several Free Grant Districts of Ontario, Muskoka has far surpassed the others in progress of settlement. During the year 1876, in this township (Stisted), 68 persons located, the number of acres located for being 7,566. During the same period seven patents were issued for those locations upon which the regulation duties had been performed.

THE SETTLERS.

The present inhabitants are perhaps as good a class of pioneers as ever invaded a new district. Certainly, the classes and nationality of them are of great variety. We find here some rich, and some poor; many intelligent and well educated, as well as unlearned; but all are throwing their energies into the same channel and vie with each other in hewing out for themselves independent homes in the new settlements. Doing this now in 1877 is easy, compared with what it was a few years ago, when there were no colonization roads running through the district in all directions, as we have now. There is little trouble experienced by new comers now to reach their locations, whereas settlers in days gone by had no such advantages, but rather many trying privations and drawbacks to contend with. Many of those settlers are now living in comparative ease and comfort, and enjoying the results of their many years of toil, and they delight to recall the thrilling incidents connected with the early history of settlement.

INTENDING SETTLERS.

Those who are likely to succeed in Muskoka are men who have been accustomed to work. A strong, hardy man, who has courage and perseverance, with powers of endurance, and has some little means to commence with, cannot fail to get along. There are, however, other classes who also do well here; I refer to those who have lived on rented farms, and who possess sufficient means to enable them to employ labor and to support their families until they can raise crops from the land they take up; others, too, who, though they may not have been accustomed to farmer's life, are desirous to adopt agriculture as their profession, and who have means to support them until they become acquainted with the work, and get some land cleared. Many men even with families have come here without money, and have succeeded, but these experience many hardships and privations; therefore the experiment is not one that I would recommend, as the man who takes up bush land without the necessary means to give him a start, has a poor chance. At least two hundred dollars would be requisite for a married man to have at command to expect to succeed on a bush lot. It is a common practice for those of limited means to hire out, and get employment from home, either upon the roads or with the lumbermen, but this way of working can only succeed for a short time at first, as their absence from home only leads to their farms being neglected. Some have adopted a plan which has been found to succeed well in cases where persons of limited means wish to make farms for themselves here; the mode of operation is this:—The person locating being in steady work in some city, or older settled district, visits the Free Grant Lands, and after making a selection of land for location, engages with some reliable and trustworthy settler in the neighborhood to clear a few acres for him as his means will allow, while he himself steadily works away at his accustomed employment (at which he can earn good wages), until he can see his way clear to finally settle upon his land. I would not recommend any one to follow this plan who did not wish to reside on their land after, say, one or two years, as a longer period of absence might result in the loss of their land. Those who intend going into the bush to make a farm should consider well before they make a move that way; if they can do as well elsewhere they should not come here, but those who can benefit themselves by leaving, should lose no time in doing so. Some have come who never should have come, and there are also many who are not here who should be here. There are many on small farms, on rented farms, or on mortgaged farms, with families growing up, who could here secure homes both for themselves and their families; many are hired out and working hard, who, if they would come here and work as hard for themselves, would soon be independent. It is surprising that there are so many able-bodied men

living in cities, paying high rents, paying high prices for provisions and fire-wood, and losing their health into the bargain, whereas, if they were here, they would get land of their own for nothing, a house of their own for raising, fire-wood for chopping, and very soon they would be able to raise their own provisions. Many spend their winters loafing round, not being able to obtain a day's work, and consuming what little means they have acquired during the summer, besides often running into debt before the spring opens. To the attention of this class in particular I would recommend the advantages which the Free Grant Lands present. Many, doubtless, there are who would willingly come here if they knew more about the country, and were to seek the information they require.

HOW TO SEE THE LANDS.

The best time to look for land is in the spring, before the leaves are fully out, or in the autumn, after they have fallen; at these times the flies are not troublesome, nor does the snow prevent a thorough examination of the land. New arrivals cannot too closely examine the land before locating; there being an abundance to select from, they should not begrudge a few days in search of good lots, so that if they do not get them, the fault is their own. It is to be regretted that through carelessness or a too hasty decision in this matter, sometimes settlers become dissatisfied after residing a while on their land, a state of affairs which they might avoid by exercising a little more discretion in their choice.

ADVANTAGES OF MUSKOKA.

The advantages which Muskoka presents are both varied and substantial. Being within easy access of Toronto, almost in the line of the shortest route from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and forming the intervening space between the northern extension line and the Canada Pacific Railway, it must, at no distant date, be intersected by a line which will be its main artery of communication; such a line is the projected Muskoka Junction and Canada Pacific Railway, which is to connect the two lines. This line completed, Muskoka will be placed in a position equally as favorable as any district through which the Grand Trunk or any of our principal lines of railway pass, for being linked by railway with Toronto, the market will be little inferior to that busy centre of commerce.

The advantages, too, which the ample water-power of the district presents is unsurpassed and is practically unlimited, and enough some day to cause this to be an important manufacturing country. Minerals have been found here in sufficient quantities to pay for working as soon as more efficient means of communication are completed, in order that they may be transported to a distance. Besides the pine, the hardwood timber in several localities will become an article of commerce with increased facilities for exporting it. Much of the fine birch found throughout the district will be very valuable. Hemlock bark, too, will be in demand for tanning purposes. As a stock-raising country, Muskoka possesses advantages which surpass every other portion of the Province. It will doubtless become the nursery for sheep and cattle, and will eventually be the district from whence the older settled portions of the Province will draw their supply. The land is high and rolling, is well watered, and as a grazing country it will always be famous. In no portion of Canada will be found for the family of the emigrant so many advantages combined as Muskoka presents, providing that they have but sufficient means to gain a footing in it. This, when not possessed by those when arriving in the country, can soon be acquired by industry and thrift, while working for wages for a year or two after their arrival. Indeed, I would not advise newly arrived emigrants, excepting those with some means, to settle here, until they have been in Canada a year or two, and until they have acquired some knowledge of the mode of working, and the ways of the country, which are in most instances so totally different to what they have been accustomed to in the Old Country. Such persons will find the climate of Muskoka preferable to that of Great Britain, the seasons being more regular, and although the winters are colder, we have warm, bright, sunny days, the sky being bright and clear.

ROUTE.

Muskoka is reached from Toronto by the Northern Railway, which extends as far as Gravenhurst, now a thriving village in the Free Grant District. The next point is Bracebridge, distance 11 miles, by stage in winter, or by boat during the season of