

The Muskoka Area and Gravenhurst

Brief historical background:

The name "Muskoka" probably derives from that of an Ojibwa chief, "Mesqua-Ukee."¹ His name was spelled in many different ways in sources consulted, but was uniformly translated as "Yellowhead." He was one of the most celebrated Ojibwa chiefs because (1) he was recognized as the head chief by the Ojibwas of Lakes Simcoe and Huron, (2) he fought against the Americans in the War of 1812, and (3) most importantly, he was a signatory to treaties which ceded to the Crown about 2 million acres of land between Lake Ontario and Georgian Bay.

From about 1820 on, various surveying parties reported on the topography of portions of Crown lands thus ceded in the Muskoka area and their potential for white agricultural settlements. Some reports were not very sanguine. The most depressing emanated from J.W. Bridgland, who wrote in 1853,

The general quality of the land is extremely rocky and broken, so much so, indeed, that in a district explored of about five hundred square miles, not a portion sufficient for a small township could be obtained in any locality of a general cultivable nature.

1 There are other theories on the derivation of the name. The above is the most plausible.