

THE HISTORY OF PRESQUE ISLE, MAINE

Introduction

In attempting to write and compile a fragmentary History of Presque Isle, I have hesitated, as did William, the son of Dwight L. Moody. When a friend of his father asked the privilege of writing the biography, Mr. Moody said, "When my biography is written, I want you, my son, to write it." When his son remonstrated and said, "Father, I fear my literary ability is not equal to the work," his father replied, "It is not that I fear so much as I do inaccuracies and misstatements."

So in the attempt to write and compile a history of the early settlers of Presque Isle, its growth and progress, its institutions, its men and women who have been so closely identified with all that has produced and insured so much of what it is today, I have not only thought of my inability for the work, but have also thought that by careful study and research, I might add something to some of the brief but very able and valuable articles that have been written. I have also thought I might correct a few of the mistakes and inaccuracies that have occurred from memories dimmed, and from lack of full information. Then I have thought I might take up the work where others have left it and carry it forward, taking up the developments of the more recent years, which have proved the greatest growth and development of Presque Isle and Aroostook, along many lines.

It will be our earnest endeavor to deal fairly with all

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periods of the past decades, taking them up decade by decade, from the settlement to the present time, or year. In so doing, I propose to give to each as full a recognition as possible, depending as I must upon traditional information. Therefore, I undertake this history, realizing as I do, my liability to errors which may occur, and which must be expected in compiling and writing a history of a time when no accurate record was kept. Indeed, for many years no record at all was kept. This forced investigation from so many sources both personal and traditional which takes much time and travel, also much reading of every sketch and scrap of history written of the early families who were the first settlers and pioneers. Many of these, it is said, had limited opportunities for even a common school education, and some could neither read nor write, hence kept no record of passing events and dates.

I have sought information from every source from which reliable facts and dates could be obtained; from those who lived back in the years previous to the settlement of the boundary line question, or before the unfought battles of the Aroostook War of 1839-40; from those who were boys and girls, the children of the early settlers, who had heard their fathers and mothers repeat over and over again the stories of their first rude log houses and hovels, of the first clearings, first crops of food and grain raised, of their hardships and sufferings endured, their scanty supplies, their fears and anxieties about the days and nights before them, of the conditions of their neighbors in the wilderness and along the shores of the Aroostook, until these dates were as familiar as household words. But it must be remembered that these persons who were then

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children are now sixty, seventy, and in a few cases, eighty years of age. Consequently so much time has intervened between their childhood and the present time, with few records or writings to refresh their memories, it will be wonderful if some incidents and facts are not omitted that should be related and have a place in this book.

Hence, many things, because unknown to the writer, must and will be omitted which would make a more readable, enjoyable, instructive and complete book, had there been a record kept or published as we have facts recorded at the present time in our local papers. Therefore, it is easy to see and understand the difficulties one has in acquiring facts which are reliable, accurate and unquestioned.

In the few cases where I have an opportunity of obtaining information of the past, and tracing out events and the time of their occurrence, it is a real pleasure to search them out and by comparison, get near the truth, and so write the story of the early settlers and their families and what they did and accomplished. It is a source of special satisfaction to acknowledge with deep gratitude those authors whose writings have been published, and who thus have preserved facts from which I can draw, forming many connecting links between 1820 and 1870.

It may not be out of place for me, here in the preface, to state that as a citizen of Presque Isle I have an acquaintance who has urged me several times to undertake this work. He is one whom we may regard as a friend, for such he has proved himself to be, in the accomplishment of some other great and valuable acquisitions which have come to our town which he visits annually, and has for almost half a century; a man who has

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spent most of his life in literary work, as an editor and writer for one of the State papers, and who is now soon to publish a book of his travels in foreign lands, a man who is familiar with our town, and deeply interested in its past and present, in its growth and progress, institutions and people, and had rejoiced in its uplift in every way.

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As I have never rushed hastily into a special work of special importance and responsibility, which is to affect others, without careful thought and consideration and a strong conviction of duty which one cannot feel free to shrink, as I have hesitated in this matter. But when I have felt and seen the necessity of a movement, as we did the establishment in our village of the Aroostook State Normal School, and in the building of our first high school building and founding the Aroostook Central Institute at Mars Hill and Blaine, with such consideration coming so clearly and plainly as an inspiration, I have entered upon the work of this book.

So far everything has worked out favorably, and everyone without a single exception says the make-up and outlines are splendid, and the work will be one of great interest and value, I have ventured upon the task which I assure you is not an easy one.

As this friend has said to me, I have, I acknowledge, had some things helpful to the undertaking that not everyone has, such as a large and intimate acquaintance, professionally, with many of the old families, and I have attended the funerals of many of the oldest residents who lived back in the thirties and forties, and of some who came into the country as early as 1820,

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or near that time. I have also married many of their sons and daughters, which has given me a fund of information from which to draw.

Then my early connection with the schools as an official, is, I find, of much use in the writing up of that department of Presque Isle and its wonderful achievements.

My connection with the Grange, which has been active in so many of the progressive acquisitions of the newer and greater Aroostook, and with other fraternal societies of whose origin, growth and influence I have intimate knowledge, cannot fail to be of help.

Having been with these families in prosperity and adversity, in health and sickness, in sorrow and death, this has given me an opportunity to gain some knowledge which may be utilized to advantage, and help to a more reliable write-up of many events of the past.

Then, I have seen the town and county grow from its period of small and limited conditions to those of great business activities, industries, of which we as citizens may be well proud. I have seen it make its most rapid strides in its acquisition of needed institutions like schools and churches, blocks and banks, telegraphs and telephones, steam and electric railroads, electric lights, waterworks, sewerage, sidewalks, public library, municipal building, and our school methods changed to the best system of New England's instruction and schools which have made the Presque Isle of today. Of some of these, I have been closely connected as an official for 20 successive years, and as chairman of our local committee in securing the Aroostook State Normal School,

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which began in the summer of 1883 and continued until 1903, never in a single year being a dead and unlooked for need, and hoped for acquisition in our County's future development upon one of its greatest and most valuable necessities of its most helpful progress and institution. This has been aid to me in this branch of our local and county growth.

In this, I only did my duty as I hope I am doing in the attempt to write and compile this book.

G. M. P.

Chapter I

PRESQUE ISLE, ITS NAME, WHY SO CALLED

It is no conjecture to state that until of recent date many people, and some well informed, or considered so, have thought Presque Isle was an island, others that it was an isle in the Atlantic Ocean. It is reported that a Massachusetts school teacher thought so. But this must have been before the days of the Bangor and Aroostook Railroad or the Great Potato Crops or industry, or before Payson Smith, Superintendent of State Schools, or the establishment of the Aroostook State Normal School, or the Hoyt and Wheeler great seed potato farm, or the Northern Maine Fair, and John R. Braden. Never again will this be true, for Presque Isle and Aroostook are on the map to stay, if Washington, D. C. is forgotten and who wrote the Declaration of Independence is omitted from our school books.

For it is a fact that Presque Isle, one of the largest towns in one of the counties of the nation was called an island, a short distance out in the Atlantic Ocean. I think some of my New Hampshire friends when I came to Presque Isle asked me how big the island was. This is no longer true. Potatoes have made it known. Starch has made it known. Its large farms have advertised it. Its wealth has made it envied. Its great fertility and productive soil are a surprise, and its 6500 miles square have made it the North Eastern American Boundary of the Republic. Aroostook. Presque Isle is a great town if for no other reason than that it is the center of this great geographical extent of land. An empire by itself, and being bounded by some of the best towns in all New England, and not surpassed, as time

and development will tell in the entire country.

But how Presque Isle came by its name is traditionery. At the mouth of the Presque Isle Stream in the Aroostook River there was a small island -- size about $\frac{1}{2}$ acre at freshet time, but at the common pitch of water it was a peninsula about three rods wide, covered with grass and elders, the same as on the island on which was some tall elm entwined with wild hops. This narrow strip of land made a dry passage to the land. So in the sense of other islands in Aroostook, it was almost an island, and the stream took its name. Since civilization came and logs and ice came on the piers of the bridge and island, the current of the river has washed the island away...

The name Presque Isle consists of two French words: "Presque", pronounced "Prest", meaning "almost or nearly", and "Isle", pronounced "eel", meaning "an island": hence the name, "Presque Isle", although custom seems to have insisted upon one being pronounced in French and one in English.

It is, however, more than probable that the Presque Isle Stream was so called by the French-speaking people, because among our early settlers many were descendents of the Acadians and French. It also explains the name and meaning and adds a ray of light, or helps to remove the mysticism which has long hung around the name.

The people like the name, and always have, for in all my long years as resident of Presque Isle, and in my intimate acquaintances in the many homes I have visited, I have never heard a wish expressed that the name of the town might be changed, or another take its place...