CALEDONIA, QUEENS COUNTY

In June 1943, for a holiday, and to see how a timber-cruiser works, I went to Caledonia with R.S.Johnson of the Mersey Paper Company. I volunteered to act as compass-man, and we were to cruise a couple of old farm wood-lots at the south end of the Brougham Road, by the shores of Russell Lake and Third Christopher Lake.

The spring of '43 was long and wet and cold, but now the weather had turned hot, and there were black-flies and swarms of mosquitoes. The lots proved worthless for pulp-wood; they had been logged years before, and in place of the former pine and hemlock the land had grown up mostly with hardwoods. The woodland was beautiful, with flowers everywhere -- blueberry blossom, huckleberry, rhododendron, star-flower, bunchberry, blue-eyed grass, white and blue violets, lady's slipper, sarsaparilla, false Solomon's Seal. In places we had to tramp over a thick blue carpet of violets, grinding them into the mud and feeling like vandals.

The most interesting feature of this area was the abandoned farms. The arable soil in North Queens is largely confined to low rounded hills, which geologists call drumlins; the farms therefore are usually perched on the tops of these hills, each like an island in a sea of scrub woods and swamps, with small lakes and streams glittering in the intervales. These farms were cut out and cleared of stones by Scots and Irish settlers from the old country, between 1820 and 1840. They had large families, and there were usually several strapping sons to help in the farm work until they married and went off to cut out a farm for themselves.

The only road to the outside world was the Liverpool-Annapolis highway, which passed through Caledonia village. (Caledonia is roughly in the centre of the peninsula, about 32 miles from salt water at Liverpool, and 41 miles

from Annapolis.) For many years this was a rough and narrow dirt road winding through the woods, especially the part between Caledonia and Annapolis, which was cut about 20 years after the settlement of Caledonia. Trade was mostly with Liverpool, and there was little of it, because the settlers were poor and isolated, and had to be self-sufficient. This continued for many years.

A mile or so outside Caledonia village on the road to West Caledonia a lane turned off to the south. This was called the Brougham Road, probably after Henry, Lord Brougham (pronounced "Broom") who was prominent in the Reform Party in British politics from 1816 to 1838. The Brougham Road had four farms scattered along it on hills about a mile or so apart.

In 1943 the farmhouses were still standing, although the barns and other outbuildings were shaky. In the order in which you came to them they were the Telfer farm; the Douglas farm (originally the farm of Hallet Cole); the Charles Cole farm; and the George Shea farm. The first two were still inhabited, although the occupants did little or no farming. The others were tenantless.

The Charles Cole farm had a curious story. After Charles's death the farm belonged to his son Albert. About 1923, in the hard times that followed the First World War, Albert Cole went to Northern Ontario and got a job in the gold mines at Timmins. After a time he sent for Amanda, his wife. Their intention was to stay a few years at Timmins, saving money from the good pay in the mines, and then return home to the farm. Before she left, Amanda Cole tidied the house and left the key with Mrs. Edmund Telfer at the first farm on the road.

As the years went by, Cole sent money to pay the taxes, also to board up the doors and windows to keep out intruders. When Johnson and I stopped

to look at the house in 1943 some of the boards over the windows had got loose, and we were able to peer in. What we saw was confined to glimpses of the downstairs rooms, but it confirmed what we had been told:-

The house and its contents were exactly as they had been nearly 20 years before. The roof remained tight. The furniture was neatly arranged, the beds "made". The kitchen woodbox was full of split hardwood and kindling. There was even a cloth spread on the dining table, and plates, cups and saucers set out ready for the next meal ! Obviously when the Coles did come back they would walk into a home that was still exactly as they left it when they were young, a strange and somewhat ghostly experience.

However the Coles put off their return, year after year. They became old residents of Timmins, their friends were people of the mining community, their old neighbors on the Brougham Road had died or gone away. Motor cars and trucks were few in Caledonia when the Coles left in 1923. By the Second World War, motor transport was common, and all the back roads were subject to invasion by hunters and fishermen and wandering marauders of the modern mobile type. The old farmhouse on the Brougham Road was broken into, and bit by bit the furnishings disappeared, the windows were smashed, the doors left swinging in the wind. With rain and snow drifting into the rooms the house rotted inside and out, and finally a gale blew it down. The Coles never came back.

The fourth and last farm on the Brougham Road, the Shea place, had been occupied by tenants until quite recent years when we saw it in 1943. The barns and outbuildings were falling down, but the house doors and windows were fastened and intact. The fields, untilled for many years, were red with sorrel and sprouting with knee-high bushes of alder, birch and spruce.

In another 20 years the whole farm would be forest again.

We peered between the weathered boards over the windows of the Shea house. Most of the furniture was gone, the rest was in bad condition; but there was a charming little child's high-chair, hand-made from oak. We noted an old picture turned to the wall, and on the floor of one room a scatter of old letters bearing American stamps. The story of the Sheas was there, a familiar one in the Caledonia district:-

The young folk went off to the States, got jobs in the cities, and married there. For some years they came home for summer holidays, or more usually in the Fall, when the sons and their American friends could enjoy moose-hunting in the surrounding woods and swamps. When the old folk got too feeble to look after the farm or themselves, they moved to live their last years with a son or daughter "across the line". The heirs sold the timber on the farm woodlots to a lumber company, and with that the last income was gone from the place. The house was let to tenants who made no attempt to restore the farm, and udually left owing the rent. Finally the county tax authorities took possession, but that meant nothing. Everything of value was gone, the buildings would soon fall down, and the whole would go back to forest, as it was in the first place.

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Johnson and I spent two or three days on this timber-cruise, and we made our headquarters in Caledonia at the little hotel, the Parker House, whose proprietor was George Parker. In June 1943 he was a hale old fellow of 80, round-faced, smiling, intelligent -- and deaf as a shad. (He wore what was then the latest aid to hearing, a microphone as big as a doughnut slung on his chest and connected to a single ear-piece fastened by a metal band over the top of his bald head.) (He died in the spring of 1944.)

George Parker was fond of talking about the past, and I made notes of various bits of North Queens history. He was born in 1863, when his mother was 41. She lived to be 97, with a keen memory of the past. She was born near South Brookfield in 1822. Her parents kept a small wayside tavern or inn for travelers ~~xxx~~ on the road between Liverpool and Nictaux.

(Note by THR:- The road from Liverpool to Nictaux was cut through in 1798. It went by way of South Brookfield and North Brookfield. At that time it was the only road between the South Shore and the Annapolis valley. About the year 1840 a branch road was cut through Caledonia to Annapolis, and from that time the old part between North Brookfield and Nictaux gradually fell into disuse. Wyld's map of Nova Scotia, 1841, shows the road Liverpool-Caledonia-Annapolis ~~xxxxx~~ as the main highway.)

Reminiscences of George Parker

My grandmother could remember well the coming of the first Irish people to Caledonia. She and her husband kept a small public-house on the Liverpool highway near South Brookfield. All of a sudden they saw a straggle of people coming along the road through the woods, men, women, children -- some of the men and women carrying babies. They were poorly dressed, a lot of them barefoot, and they were hungry and tired. They had walked all the way from Liverpool, and all they owned was on their backs.

These Irish people had set out from the old country in an emigrant ship. They thought they were going to St. John. The captain said he was short of food and put them ashore in Liverpool. They wanted free land where they could farm, and the Liverpool people told them the only good land available was in the Caledonia district. So out they came. At that

time there were a few Scotchmen at Caledonia, where they had settled a few years before. Six of them were single men, and married girls from South Brookfield and other settlements. My grandfather was one of them. They had been carpenters and masons in the old country, and some of them used to go to Halifax to work for a little cash when times were hard. My grandfather worked on Government House in Halifax when it was completed.

(Note by THR:- More's History of ~~Queens~~ Queens County, speaking of the Scotch settlement at Caledonia, gives the date variously as 1817, 1820, 1824. R.R.Macleod says that seven Scots founded Caledonia about 1820. Government House in Halifax was ready for occupation in 1805, although Governor Wentworth went on with changes until 1808. Province House in Halifax was begun in 1811 and finished in 1819. Possibly Parker's granddfather worked on repairs to one of these Houses.)

Most of these poor Irish people had little more than an axe and a bundle, and probably the axes had been given to them in Liverpool, because very few of them knew how to fell a tree. The Scotchmen at Caledonia did the best they could for them, and showed them spots where the soil was good once you cleared it of trees and rocks. Most of the Irish settled at what came to be known as West Caledonia, but some went further towards Lake Rossignol, and some made farms at what they called Hibernia.

The Irish worked hard, men and women and boys together. They first built a shanty at the foot of the hill they'd picked out, and they cleared enough of the hillside to plant potatoes between the stumps. They burnt the trees and brush around the stumps, and the ashes made good fertilizer. Those "burnt-land potatoes" were good spuds, I can tell you. For the rest of their food, well, the brooks were full of trout, and they caught a lot and salted some for winter. The same with moose and caribou meat. They made

out somehow through the first few years.

After a time they were able to get a cow or two, and an ox for pulling up stumps and ploughing. And they kept chopping away at the woods, till they'd cleared the hill and could roll the biggest boulders down the slope out of the way. The women worked right along with the men and boys. If they had no cart, they'd shoulder a basket of manure from the pile by the cow's lean-to and trudge up the hill with it. Finally, when there were sawmills on some of the streams, they hauled logs to the mill in winter, and got lumber enough to build a proper house on the hilltop, where they were clear of flies and mosquitoes, and could have a view. All the farms were on hilltops, and when they could look out and see each other the country didn't seem so lonely.

Those people raised big families. The food was simple but there was plenty of it. Even in my own boyhood nearly everything we used or wore came from the farm itself. The wool from our own sheep, the linen from our own flax, and so on. The women made homespun cloth on big wooden looms. A suit of homespun would wear years and years. You got sick of it. The dyes came from bark and roots. The usual color of homespun cloth was grey, which they got by weaving black and white wool together. Moccasins made of hide "shanks" -- the tough skin on the fore knees of moose and oxen -- were common wear for men and youngsters around the farm. For shoes you'd tan a good piece of hide and save it till the traveling cobbler came around "whipping the cat" -- stopping at each farm to make up the leather into shoes. He carried a stock of his own leather in case you hadn't any.

The first settler at Caledonia cleared a farm by the lake east of the present village. He called it Lake Nancy after his wife. A man named

Telfer settled on the shore of the lake at Caledonia itself, and called it Lake Mary after his wife.

There were no Indians at Caledonia in the early days, but there were quite a few on the Medway River around Molega and Ponhook. The old Caledonia settlers used to get baskets from them. I can remember an Indian woman making a grain basket for me. It was sort of rounded-in on one side, to fit against your hip. It was for sowing grain, and you could walk along casting the seed right and left, with the basket fastened to your side.

For a long time the mail was fetched from Liverpool by Thomas Waterman, a son of the pioneers. He lived in South Brookfield, and took the mail to and from Liverpool three times a week. Once he got caught in a terrible blizzard that lasted three days and was followed by very severe cold. When he didn't arrive in Liverpool, the Liverpool paper said it feared Mr. Waterman had perished. But "Uncle Tommy" had holed up like a bear in some shanty by the road, with his horse, and turned up all right. Someone said, "Tommy, you're dead according to the paper." Tommy had seen the paper. He growled, "I knew t'was a lie, soon's I saw't." He was an odd character, and well liked.

In the 1880's a man named Maguire discovered gold on the line between our farm and his, and there was a big gold rush. The main Brookfield mine was right on our farm. My wife and I set up a tavern in South Brookfield, and times were good as long as the gold rush lasted.

In 1913 I took the contract to drive the mail between Caledonia and Liverpool. I used a two-horse wagon except when the snow was deep enough for sleighing. I had no cover on wagon or sleigh - in rain or snow I and my passengers just had to take it. With my two-horse wagon an average good passage from Caledonia Corner to Liverpool was 4 hours. That's about 35 miles.

I once did it in 3 hours, but that was with a smart team and when the road was good in summer. The farmhouse where Elmer Webber lives at Middlefield was the half-way inn. I used to change horses there, leaving the pair I had just brought from Caledonia, and hitching on ~~the pair~~ the pair I had brought from Liverpool the day before. Coming back, I'd switch about again.

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Note by THR:- Elmer Webber's home was the so-called Twelve Mile House (12 miles from tidewater at Milton) still standing in 1964 at Middlefield.

Note by THR:- The actual facts about the Irish people who settled at Caledonia are these:- During the 1820's two Liverpool sea captains formed a trading partnership. They were Caleb Seely, a successful privateersman during the War of 1812, and Patrick Gough, an Irishman. They did business in the fish and shipping trade, all the way from Newfoundland to the West Indies. Gough made frequent voyages to Newfoundland on business of the partnership, and in the summer of 1826 he commanded the brig "Caledonia" on a trip to St. John's, Nfld. While there he encountered a number of poor Irish folk, put ashore there by an emigrant ship. They were destitute and could find no way to make a living in that stony region, being used to farming. When Gough returned to Liverpool N.S. in November 1826 he brought with him in the "Caledonia" no less than 84 Irish men, women and children. These must have been sheltered and fed in Liverpool through the winter, and then directed to the arable hills around Caledonia in the spring of 1827.

-- See the letter-book of Seeley & Gough, May 3,1827, now in possession of the Queens County Historical Society. See also Public Archives of N.S., Publication No.6,"Immigration to ... Nova Scotia 1815-1838", page 56.