

The stands of timber on both sides of the Muskrat Lake and Muskrat River, in the heart of historic Westmeath Township, were of prime quality and the basin itself was examined as a possible canal route.

In July 1984 the **Pembroke Observer** published an insert entitled "*Ottawa River Gazette*" and the following article by Evelyn Moore Price was included.

The Pembroke Observer—5A

MUSKRAT LAKE

Lumbering Helped Open Ottawa's Tributary In Early 1800's

By EVELYN MOORE PRICE

If Samuel de Champlain had visited the vicinity of Muskrat Lake about 1613, he would have found little change after his initial trip in 1613. Indians and fur traders were the only folk familiar with this area but with the coming of the lumbering industry, this section of the country experienced further development.

In this Bicentennial Year 1984, research does not reveal much detail in the era 1784 to 1820. By 1829 it was learned that Alexander Sherriff, a very careful observer, reported that the best of red pine was cut back from Muskrat Lake. MacDonald's were known as the first lumbermen followed by Spencer Allan who took out his first timber in 1830. Other lumbermen were N. Thayer, operating principally in Bromley township along Snake River - Independence Nappan on the west side of Muskrat Lake, and most important of all was Walter Beckett mainly because he was a local "king of the Shriners." The shantymen of the 1830's were a wild lot, those having the priority being the Shriners.



MRS. PRICE

When the water level receded, they stopped at Coffey's Landing, and when extremely low, they only reached Devon's Wharf, near where Meath is located. Ox-carts were used to convey freight and passengers from these points to Pembroke, later being replaced by horses and wagons in line with progress.

Every district has a feature that gives it a distinction peculiar to its own locality. In this respect, Muskrat Lake and the lakes and streams feeding into it flow north to empty into Muskrat River, thence northerly to Pembroke and into the Ottawa River, flowing in a southerly direction. Water that leaves Cobden to empty into the Ottawa 18 miles north, returns via the Ottawa River a few miles east of Muskrat Lake on its southerly course to the St. Lawrence. This peculiar situation in the flow of water, first north, then south, is believed not equalled elsewhere this side of the Hudson Bay Watershed.

Be that as it may, it has been my privilege to see the Ottawa River flowing north through rapids, on a route from its headwaters. So unique was this phenomena that a picture was taken to prove such was the case.

But the route of the lengthy Ottawa River of Destiny is another story within itself!

Ashwood

Lumbering was a hazardous undertaking for rollways of logs along the banks of the Muskrat Lake and Snake River had to be ready for the "drive" in the spring. When the lake was reached, the timber was assembled into cribs of 20 sticks of timbers, then these joined to make a raft. These had to be broken up at the end of the lake to be forwarded.

Result of Sherriff's observations, the Government of Upper Canada sent the famous surveyor and explorer, David Thompson, to examine the basin of the Muskrat River and lake of the same name, to determine the feasibility of a canal. This survey was made in November, 1837, and when completed, Thompson arrived at the conclusion that the Muskrat route was not suitable for this project.

Transportation was by canoe on the Ottawa and Muskrat Rivers or over roads well nigh impassable in certain seasons. Matters in respect to communication were greatly improved when Jason Gould, founder of Cobden, built the "Muskrat," launching it in 1850 to facilitate movement on the Gould Forwarding Line.

It was made by placing two row boats side by side, catamaran fashion decking them over, placing an engine and boiler on the deck and a paddle wheel in the stern. His second boat "The North Star" was launched in 1853 and, during high water periods, boats could travel to Croskery's Landing, 2½ miles south of Pembroke.

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