

POOR SOILS AND RICH FOLKS: HOUSEHOLD ECONOMIES AND  
SUSTAINABILITY IN MUSKOKA, 1850-1920

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### *Abstract*

This dissertation examines the social, economic and environmental dimensions of the transformation of the Muskoka region in southcentral Ontario from an Aboriginal place into a renowned tourist mecca between 1850 and 1920. More specifically, it explores how changing social relationships, patterns of economic exchange and environmental conditions shaped sustainability in a marginal landscape located at the southern edge of the Canadian Shield and in close proximity to large urban populations. Focusing on the household level, this study situates the challenges and opportunities faced by people in Muskoka within a broader set of social, economic and environmental histories of Ontario, Canada and North America. This work draws on a variety of primary sources, including diaries and journals, ledgers, legal testimony, Indian Affairs reports, local histories and memoirs, government files and oral interviews.

The rural and environmental history of the southern Shield region has received little attention from historians. This dissertation begins with two chapters on the history of transportation in the Muskoka region, which establish the importance of mobility on the lakes and access to outside resources as central to the narrative that follows. These chapters also identify the transition from an exclusively organic fuel economy to a largely mineral fuel economy as central to the history of sustainability in the region. The dissertation then turns to the history of the region's First Nations and the relationship of continuity and change they had with the marginal landscape of the southern Shield during this time period. The next section devotes three chapters to Eurocanadian settlement of Muskoka during the 1860s and 1870s, the rise of tourism during the 1880s and 1890s and the emergence of a culture of conspicuous consumption on the lakes during the 1900s and 1910s. Finally, the dissertation considers the alternative small-scale household approach to logging that co-existed with the commercial exploitation of Muskoka's forests before 1920.

This dissertation argues that society at the southern edge of the Shield was shaped by environmental limitations and a reliance on resources, manufactured goods and wealth from outside the region. Ultimately, this dissertation concludes that life in a marginal environment, such as Muskoka was never completely sustainable only more or less sustainable. Sustainability was part of a process, not a condition, of life in Muskoka. Life at the southern edge of the Shield became *more* sustainable when social relationships, patterns of economic exchange and environmental conditions were shaped mainly by local material and energy flows, and became *less* sustainable when local material and energy flows are greatly exceeded or undermined by exogenous ones. The most sustainable moment occurred during the 1880s and 1890s when visitors and residents formed interdependent relationships, while less sustainable moments existed before those relationships had been established and after the turn of the century when they were eclipsed by a consumer culture. The history of Muskoka did not unfold on a trajectory toward or away from an exclusively sustainable or unsustainable end. Changing circumstances either enhanced or diminished the potential for people in Muskoka to reproduce or maintain certain social, economic and environmental arrangements over time.

For my parents, who taught me so much at  
the wee aicht,  
Castle Rock,  
Mosquito Bay,  
the little lake,  
the point,  
and  
down at the dock

### *Acknowledgements*

There are no words to describe what Muskoka means to me. It is part of my identity. The love I have for island and the cottage where I've spent every summer of my life inspired me to write this dissertation. The questions I have about Muskoka's future directly informed the questions I sought to answer in writing this dissertation. For this reason I must thank Wegamind Island and Lake Joseph for enlightening me in their own way.

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*Preface*

From a very young age, I spent my summers at an old cottage on an island in Muskoka. Thinking back, I see the chapters of this dissertation already written out in that place. For starters, the island is separated from everywhere else by water. Almost everything my family and I ate, wore, used to furnish the cottage, and played with came from some place else. We occasionally ate fish that we caught and blueberries that we picked. The wood we used to make crafts, build our forts, and burn for warmth all came from trees that grew not far from the cottage. My father once had a giant pine tree milled into lumber after it blew down one winter. But that was it, everything else came from places that were not that island. When I was a boy I planted apple seeds on the island in the hope that at least one would turn into a tree, but they never grew. If we wanted apples, or pretty much anything else, we had to drive to the marina in a boat, and then in a car to the grocery store in town. Like the island where I spent my summers, Muskoka has never provided everything that people needed or found useful. Like a family spending the summer on an island, people living in Muskoka have always relied on things from outside the region.

The process of getting to that island reinforced the impermanence of my presence. It took a little more than two hours to get there by car from the city, and another fifteen minutes by boat across the lake before we arrived. The journey did not take very long or involve much effort, because cars, paved roads, motorboats, and marinas made the trip quick and easy. These technologies made it possible to visit Muskoka, and to leave just as easily. Yet, not far from where we tied up our boat on the island, hidden beneath the surface of the water, was evidence that the journey had once been less quick and easy. The cribs of an old steamer wharf are proof



of older technologies from over a century ago, which placed limits on when people arrived and what they brought with them. The journey of a century ago by train and steamboat enabled a similar coming and going as my trip by car and motorboat, but not nearly to the same extent.

When I was nine or ten, my father found a stone spearhead buried in the sand along the shore of the island that had once been used for fishing by one of the region's Aboriginal population. And in the cottage itself were birch bark baskets and place mats adorned with colourful quillwork, quite possibly made by the descendants of whoever fished the shores of that island many years earlier. My family were certainly not the first people to inhabit that island, and neither were the people who built our cottage in the 1880s. The spearhead is evidence that Muskoka was home to an indigenous population for a very long time, and the quillwork is proof that their descendants continued to think of Muskoka in that way well after our cottage was built. While the spearhead was used to catch fish, the quillwork was used to earn money. Both represent knowledge and skills used to acquire what Muskoka could provide.

Until my teenage years there was an ice house behind the cottage. It fell into disrepair after electricity was added in the 1960s and was eventually torn down. An overgrown path leading up from the lake, and a clearing behind the cottage where the structure once stood, are the only evidence that for many years ice had been cut out of the lake, hauled ashore, and stacked in the ice house as the only way of keeping things cold during the summer. Like the ice that melted over the course of the summer, the deterioration of the unused ice house concealed proof of the connection between people who spent summers without electricity on the island and people who lived year-round on the mainland. The comforts of the island in the summer were made possible by labours from the mainland during the winter.

The forest which blankets the island was never logged the way most of Muskoka had been, and yet old tree stumps were a common feature growing up at the cottage. Some of these stumps marked trees that died and had to be taken down, grew too close to the cottage, or were used as firewood. Along a path that follows the shoreline are much older stumps from ancient white pines. Almost all the old-growth pine was cut in Muskoka, but on the island most were protected. Sometime before the Second World War, however, a year-round resident from the mainland was allowed to take a few pine trees from the island as payment in kind for some work done around the cottage. These trees were then brought to a sawmill and sold for a profit. Like this island of old-growth trees surrounded by a forest with a long history of logging, these stumps are evidence of alternative approaches taken to generating income from woodland resources in Muskoka.

As this dissertation will show, the stories written out on the island where I spent my summers growing up are just a part of a larger history of sustainability in Muskoka during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

## *Introduction*

The truth about Muskoka is not now a matter of doubt: it has had its day of small things, and the settler his hour of trial. (G. Mercer Adam, 1899)<sup>1</sup>

In less than seventy years, between 1850 and 1920, Muskoka, Ontario was transformed from an almost exclusively Aboriginal place into a renowned non-Aboriginal tourist mecca. During this transformation, Muskoka experienced a failed attempt at establishing a Eurocanadian agricultural community in the region, the near-exhaustion of the region's white pine and hemlock tree species, and a tremendous expansion in the material and energy required to support affluent seasonal residents and visitors that had become the defining feature of Muskoka's culture. So much changed in such a relatively short period of time that it is easy to overlook the things that remained the same. Although Eurocanadians denied Aboriginal peoples their rights to resources and land during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the First Nations who called the region home continued to return to Muskoka each year and engage in many of the same patterns of economic exchange and subsistence that defined their traditional ways of life. Farming never became the foundation of Muskoka's economy, but many people continued to work the land in ways best suited to the environment - and made money doing so. And, while the removal of so much pine and hemlock changed Muskoka's forests in subtle ways, the landscape remained predominantly wooded throughout this period.

How are historians to make sense of the continuity amongst all the change? More importantly, how are historians supposed to identify those instances when change improved the socioecological system that structured people's relationships with each other and with the natural

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<sup>1</sup> G. Mercer Adam, "Georgian Bay and the Muskoka Lakes" in *Picturesque Spots of the North: Historical and Descriptive Sketches of the Scenery and Life in the Vicinity of Georgian Bay, the Muskoka Lakes, the Upper Lakes, in Central and Eastern Ontario, and in the Niagara District*, George Munro Grant, ed. (Chicago: Alexander Belford, 1899), 36.

world? And in contrast, how are historians supposed to identify those instances when change deteriorated the system? To answer these questions and others related to the environmental history of life at the southern edge of the Canadian Shield, this dissertation examines the social, economic and environmental arrangements of households, communities and society in Muskoka, and how changes to those arrangements made life more or less sustainable over time. In pulling together scholarship from the disciplines of history, geography, environmental studies, social ecology, and some of the hard sciences, such as ecosystem biology and limnology, this dissertation develops a means of usefully applying the concept of sustainability to historical enquiry. Its main argument is that the environmental limitations of Muskoka and wealth from outside the region combined, depending on circumstances, to either enhance or diminish the potential for social relationships, patterns of economic exchange and environmental conditions to maintain and reproduce themselves over long periods of time. In Muskoka, the most sustainable arrangements were those that strengthened local interdependencies, while the least sustainable tended to be those that privileged a reliance on linkages with places outside the region.

#### History and Sustainability

The field of sustainability studies can gain a great deal from the work of environmental historians studying the relationship between humans and the natural world in the past. Historians pay very close attention to carefully delineated temporal and spatial parameters, which the concept of sustainability requires to explain social, economic and environmental dynamics. Yet, as civil engineers Nilo Tsung et al. point out, most contemporary sustainability studies “tend to draw conclusions too quickly (they wait only for a few decades, at most) and over too small

geographical scales.”<sup>2</sup> In his 1995 article exploring the ways complexity shapes sustainability, anthropologist and historian Joseph Tainter makes a “case for the central role of historical and archaeological knowledge in comprehending and resolving today’s [environmental] issues.” He argues that “An important part of research into sustainability must therefore be historical research to refine our understanding of our past... .”<sup>3</sup> Historical case studies utilize existing source materials to provide extremely useful models, that can be applied to appropriate temporal and spatial parameters, for determining how changes resulting from certain behaviours, practices, assumptions, ideologies, and natural phenomena shape sustainability. By understanding how sustainability unfolded in the past, research into sustainability in the present and future can ask more appropriate questions, develop more rigorous data on which to draw, and anticipate the kind of changes that inevitably modify approaches to sustainability in the present. One of this dissertation’s main aims is, therefore, to demonstrate the importance and usefulness of historical enquiry to an understanding of sustainability in the present.

### *Canadian & Ontario History*

By applying the concept of sustainability to the environmental history of Muskoka during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this dissertation contributes to a greater understanding of the history of colonization, settlement and community development in Ontario, Canada and North America. In the broadest sense, Muskoka’s past was shaped by the grand historical narratives of ecological imperialism, the great land rush and the commodification of

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<sup>2</sup> Nilo Tsung, Ross Corotis, Paul Chinowsky, and Bernard Amadei, “A Retrospective Approach to Assessing the Sustainability of the Grand Canal of China” *Structure and Infrastructure Engineering*, Vol.9, No.4 (April 2013), 297-316.

<sup>3</sup> Joseph A. Tainter, “Sustainability of Complex Societies” *Futures* Vol.27, No.4 (May 1995), 405-406. See also Robert Costanza, Lisa J. Graumlich, and Will Steffen, “Sustainability or Collapse? Lessons from Integrating the History of Humans and the Rest of Nature” in *Sustainability or Collapse? An Integrated History and Future of People on Earth*, Robert Costanza, Lisa J. Graumlich, and Will Steffen, eds. (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2007), 3-17; Simone Gingrich, “Historical Sustainability Research: Past Processes and Present Challenges” in *Human Nature: Studies in Historical Ecology and Environmental History*, Péter Szabó and Radim Hédl, eds. (Czech Republic: Institute of Botany of the ASCR, 2008), 28-35.

nature that were common throughout North America during this period.<sup>4</sup> What distinguishes Muskoka's history, however, were the limitations that the forces driving these grand historical narratives encountered when they came up against the Precambrian Shield. Although it lay within the broad temperate zone identified by the famous ecological historian Alfred Crosby as ideal for the forces of ecological imperialism, and despite the strong influence of imported ideas about private property, improvement and yeoman farming from Britain, European plants and animals did not significantly transform Muskoka. The applicability of these ideas and the transformative role of the European portmanteau biota had approached their limits in Upper Canada when settlement reached the Shield. Consequently, an agrarian society did not emerge to form the basis for economic growth and wealth in Muskoka. In almost every way, the settlement of Muskoka formed a disjuncture with the general trend of European settlement in North America at the time. Of these three grand narratives, only the commodification of nature and the formation of Muskoka as a resource hinterland echoed similar forces elsewhere in North America.

Muskoka is a relatively neglected chapter in the Canadian story.<sup>5</sup> Unlike the United States, there was in Canada no steady march of Eurocanadian settlement across the continent in

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<sup>4</sup> Alfred W. Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900*, 2nd Ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); John C. Weaver, *The Great Land Rush and the Making of the Modern World, 1650-1900* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003); William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991).

<sup>5</sup> Nearly all the scholarship on Muskoka focuses on the region as a tourist destination. Patricia Jasen, *Wild Things: Nature, Culture, and Tourism in Ontario, 1790-1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 116-126; Claire Campbell, *Shaped by the West Wind: Nature and History in Georgian Bay*, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2005), 139-160; Geoffrey Wall, "Recreational Land Use in Muskoka" *Ontario Geography* Vol.11 (1977), 11-28; Peter Stevens, "Getting Away From it All: Family Cottaging in Postwar Ontario" (PhD. Dissertation, York University, 2010); Peter Stevens, "Cars and Cottages: The Automotive Transformation of Ontario's Summer Home Tradition" *Ontario History* Vol.100, No.1 (Spring 2008), 26-56; Elaine A. Boone, "From Hot Streets to Lake Breezes: The Development of Tourism in Muskoka, 1860-1930" (M.A. Thesis, Laurentian University, 1992); Roy I. Wolfe, "The Summer Resorts of Ontario in the Nineteenth Century" *Ontario History*, Vol.54, No.3 (1962), 149-161. Only two seldom-referenced works have explored aspects of year-round life in Muskoka. Norman Hall MacKenzie, "The Economic and Social Development of Muskoka, 1855-1888" (PhD. Dissertation, University of Toronto, 1943), 77-78; Geoffrey Wall, "Pioneer Settlement in Muskoka" *Agricultural History* Vol.44, No.4 (October 1970), 393-400.

pursuit of the frontier, progress, and individualism.<sup>6</sup> Although Muskoka was colonized as a logical extension of the settled territory of Upper Canada/Ontario, the settlement of the southern edge of the Shield, including the District of Muskoka, did not logically lead to the settlement of places slightly farther north. Thus, it is no coincidence that at about the same time as the Shield frontier would have been expected to push north, the Canadian Pacific Railway bypassed the southern portion of the Shield altogether. As the linchpin of the Canadian government's National Policy under Sir John A. Macdonald, the completion of the transcontinental Dominion railway redirected settlement efforts during the late nineteenth century toward the more fertile prairies and away from the barren and inhospitable Shield.<sup>7</sup> Having discovered that agriculture was doomed to failure on the Shield, the Dominion government sought to resume the national project in the fertile prairies. From the perspective that sees Canadian history as, in the words of Cole Harris, "slowly worked out near or beyond the northern continental limit of agriculture, with

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<sup>6</sup> Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Dover Publications, 1996); Michael S. Cross, ed. *The Frontier Thesis and the Canadas: The Debate on the Impact of the Canadian Environment* (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1970); Elizabeth Furniss, *The Burden of History: Colonialism and the Frontier Myth in a Rural Canadian Community* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1999). In many ways, Canada was much more the product of ideas of progress than it was a steady socio-political march across the top of the continent. Suzanne Zeller, *Inventing Canada: Early Victorian Science and the Idea of a Transcontinental Nation* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1987); Ian McKay, "The Liberal Order Framework: A Prospectus for a Reconnaissance of Canadian History" *Canadian Historical Review*, Vol.81 (2000), 617-645.

<sup>7</sup> Peter A. Russell, *How Agriculture Made Canada: Farming in the Nineteenth Century* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2012), 190-208; Gerald Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies: A History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 162-194; Doug Owram, *Promise of Eden: The Canadian Expansionist Movement and the Idea of the West, 1856-1900* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992). To a certain extent, provincial governments deterred settlement on the Shield. Aware that the land was less than ideal for farming, and keen to benefit from the timber revenues, the Ontario government began putting northern Shield lands into forest reserves rather than open them up to settlement and lose profits to land clearing. A.R.M. Lower, *Settlement and the Forest Frontier in Eastern Canada* (Toronto: The Macmillan Company, 1936). In Quebec, the experience of settling the Shield was quite similar, but many people emigrated or worked in the northeastern United States instead of moving to western Canada. Alan Greer, Mary McKinnon and, Chris Minns, "Conspicuous by Their Absence: French Canadians and the Settlement of Canadian West" *Journal of Economic History* Vol.65, No.3 (2005), 822-849; Gérard Bouchard, *Quelques arpents d'Amérique: population, économie, famille au Saguenay, 1838-1971* (Montréal: Boréal, 1996); Gilles Paquet and Wayne R. Smith, "L'Émigration des canadiens français vers les États-Unis" *L'Actualité économique*, Vol.59, No.3 (September 1983), 423-453; Robert Painchaud, "French-Canadian Historiography and Franco-Catholic Settlement in Western Canada, 1870-1915" *Canadian Historical Review*, Vol.59, No.4 (December 1974), 447-466.

discontinuity, paradox, and limitations - with boundaries at almost every turn,”<sup>8</sup> Muskoka represents a dead end. In the northern parts of each province, Eurocanadians intentionally avoided attempts at agricultural settlement on the Shield. As Ken Coates and William Morrison point out, ‘development’ not ‘settlement’ is a more accurate way of thinking about “a process by which non-Natives discovered and exploited small disparate pockets of resources” in these northern Shield environments.<sup>9</sup> Yet, it is not because this project of nation-building passed over the Shield during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that the story of Muskoka is so distinctive and important to Canadian history. Rather, the contribution that Muskoka makes to the history of Canada lies in the fact that it *was* settled by Eurocanadians, remained settled, and prospered at a time when it seemed that much more attractive options existed for land hungry immigrants and entrepreneurs. This dissertation acknowledges the limits of the agrarian ideals that stalled expansion of the Upper Canadian frontier at the edges of the Shield, while at the same time revealing how and why settlement at the southern edge of the Shield was a success despite the enormous limitations.

Of course, as nearly every chapter of early Canadian history has shown, the history of settlement is also the history of colonization. First Nations people lived in Muskoka long before any European efforts were made to re-settle the southern edge of the Shield, and continued to live in Muskoka long afterwards. As such, the Aboriginal history of Muskoka provides a long context to this abnormal history of Eurocanadian settlement, one that acknowledges the deliberate and resilient features of indigenous life in the region, and neatly folds attempts to

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<sup>8</sup> Cole Harris, *The Reluctant Land: Society, Space, and Environment in Canada Before Confederation* (Vancouver, UBC Press, 2008), XV.

<sup>9</sup> Ken Coates and William Morrison, *Forgotten North: A History of Canada's Provincial Norths* (Toronto: James Lorimer, 1992), 46.



remake Muskoka as an agrarian society into the nineteenth-century Canadian project of colonization. The colonization and settlement of Muskoka by Eurocanadians not only imposed patterns of land use unsuited to the environment, but at the same time obscured indigenous patterns that did work. This dissertation reveals that efforts to eliminate indigenous culture and patterns of subsistence were not only incomplete, but also ignorant of the adaptive strategies manifest in an Aboriginal way of life on the Shield.

As an agrarian society, Muskoka was unconventional, struggling to attain even something akin to self-sufficiency. Wheat - the main commercial staple grown in the province for most of the nineteenth century - was never the surplus-generating export crop it was in southern Ontario; in fact, there was almost no wheat at all in Muskoka. And while the habitat was perfect for fur-bearing animals, Muskoka was never an important part of the fur trade. Through forest resources, however, particularly white pine timber, Muskoka entered the staples economy. As was the case wherever Eurocanadian settlement efforts encountered trees, logging complemented as much as it undermined the local economy. The exploitation of Muskoka's forests created extraordinary wealth, but very little of the wealth stayed in Muskoka. This dissertation demonstrates that the greatest benefits of the staples economy for small communities existed when households, not large commercial enterprises, commodified trees.

Although the work that follows contributes to the historiography of First Nations,<sup>10</sup> tourism<sup>11</sup>, and resource extraction<sup>12</sup> in Ontario during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this dissertation's most important contribution is featuring the Shield as a place where people lived, and not just as a place where colonization unfolded, tourists spent their summers, and resources were exploited. Thus, this dissertation is primarily a history of rural households.<sup>13</sup> With few exceptions, the scholarly histories of rural Ontario have focused on the portion of the province south of the Shield. Since most histories of rural Ontario have tended to equate rural with agrarian, and because places on the Shield were generally unable to ever achieve status as traditional, agrarian-based communities, rural histories of Ontario have excluded Muskoka. Historians treat efforts to settle the Shield as separate from, rather than as a continuation of, earlier efforts to settle southern Ontario. For example, J. David Wood concludes *Making Ontario*, a history of the province before the railway, in the 1850s - less than a decade before Muskoka was opened for settlement, but more than twenty years before the railway reached the Shield.<sup>14</sup> Wood extended this study with *Places of Last Resort*, a history of early twentieth-century

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<sup>10</sup> Neal Ferris, *The Archaeology of Native-lived Colonialism: Challenging History in the Great Lakes* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2009); Robin Brownlie, *A Fatherly Eye: Indian Agents, Government Power, and Aboriginal Resistance in Ontario, 1918-1939* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Joan A. M. Lovisek, "Ethnohistory of the Algonkian Speaking Peoples of Georgian Bay - Precontact to 1850" (PhD. Dissertation, McMaster University, 1991); J. Michael Thoms, "Ojibwa Fishing Grounds: A History of Ontario fisheries law, science, and the sportsmen's challenge to Aboriginal treaty rights, 1650-1900" (PhD. Dissertation, UBC, 2004); Peggy Blair, *Lament for a First Nation: The Williams Treaties of Southern Ontario* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008)

<sup>11</sup> Peter Stevens, "Getting Away From it All"; Claire Campbell, *Shaped by the West Wind*; Patricia Jasen, *Wild Things*.

<sup>12</sup> A.R.M Lower, *The North American Assault on the Canadian forest : A History of the Lumber Trade Between Canada and the United States* (Toronto: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1938); H.V. Nelles, *The Politics of Development: Forests, Mines & Hydro-electric Power in Ontario, 1849-1941, 2nd Ed.* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005).

<sup>13</sup> For a general overview of ideas and geographies related to the concept of 'rural,' see Michael Woods, *Rural* (New York: Routledge, 2011). In the Canadian context, see R.W. Sandwell, "Rural Reconstruction: Towards a New Synthesis in Canadian History" *Histoire sociale/Social History*, Vol.27, No.53 (May 1994), 1-32; James Murton, *Creating a Modern Countryside: Liberalism and Land Resettlement in British Columbia* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007).

<sup>14</sup> J. David Wood, *Making Ontario: Agricultural Colonization and Landscape Re-creation Before the Railway* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000).

attempts by land-hungry settlers to find farmland in the boreal forest, but its focus on marginal environments in northern Ontario and the prairie provinces overlooks a similar history that took place in Muskoka half a century earlier.<sup>15</sup> Even in monographs aimed at surveying Ontario's economic or agricultural history, the province almost always seems to end at the Canadian Shield.<sup>16</sup> For historical geographers and rural historians of Ontario, Muskoka is a blind spot in the rearview mirror, ignored in both the history of pioneering and the history of rural economic development. This dissertation addresses this shortcoming in the historiography, while at the same time using Shield settlement to provide new insights into the functioning of rural life.<sup>17</sup>

Muskoka's trajectory differed from that of southern Ontario and the prairies in the household responses to the distinctive material realities of the Shield. Ironically, given that the land was unsuited to agriculture in much of the region, the desire for wilderness experiences among residents in cities, such as Toronto and Hamilton, was the key to Muskoka's successes. Unable to generate much income through farming, settlers quickly realized the potential of their

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<sup>15</sup> J. David Wood, *Places of Last Resort: The Expansion of the Farm Frontier into the Boreal Forest in Canada, c. 1910-1940* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006).

<sup>16</sup> Indeed, most studies of agriculture in Upper Canada/Ontario either end just around the time Muskoka was settled in the 1860s and 1870s, or focus only on southern Ontario. Graeme Wynn, "Notes on Society and Environment in Old Ontario" *Journal of Social History* Vol.13, No.1 (Fall 1979), 49-65; John McCallum, *Unequal Beginnings: Agriculture and Economic Development in Quebec and Ontario until 1870* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980); David Gagan, *Hopeful Travellers: Families, Land and Social Change in Mid-Victorian Peel County, Canada West* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981); Douglas McCalla, *Planting the Province: the Economic History of Upper Canada, 1784-1870* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993); John Clarke, *Land, Power, and Economics on the Frontier of Upper Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001). The only real exception has been work on the Clay Belt, a fertile region of the Shield in northeastern Ontario. Lower, *Settlement and the Forest Frontier*; Peter W. Sinclair, "Agricultural Colonization in Ontario and Quebec: Some Evidence from the Great Clay Belt, 1900-1945" in *Canadian Papers in Rural History, Volume 5*, Donald H. Akenson, ed. (Gananoque, ON: Langdale Press, 1986), 105-112; Kerry M. Abel, *Changing Places; History, Community, and Identity in Northeastern Ontario* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006).

<sup>17</sup> Although very little work has been done on the history of agricultural settlement on the Shield specifically, several historians have explored rural life in hinterland, frontier and fringe environments across Canada. Frank Tough, *'As Their Natural Resources Fail': Native Peoples and the Economic History of Northern Manitoba, 1870-1930* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1996); James D. Mochoruk, *Formidable Heritage: Manitoba's North and the Cost of Development, 1870-1930* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2004); Béatrice Craig, *Backwoods Consumers and Homespun Capitalists: The Rise of Market Capitalism in Eastern Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009); Merle Massie, "At the Edge: The North Prince Albert Region of the Saskatchewan Forest Fringe to 1940" (PhD. dissertation, University of Saskatchewan, 2010); Brenda McDougall, *One of the Family: Metis Culture in Nineteenth-Century Northwestern Saskatchewan* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010).

environment for tourism. To the extent that farming was possible, families grew crops and garden vegetables, and raised domesticated animals to perform work or provide milk, eggs, hides and meat. A great deal of evidence shows that settlers prided themselves on their success as farmers where and how they could. But the limitations far outweighed the opportunities of an agrarian life on the Shield. Wage labour represented a significant part of coping with the false promises of owning land on the Shield, but prosperity lay in the relationships and exchanges between households. The household also served as the nexus for Muskoka's most important cultural transformation, the rise of tourism and cottaging. As was the case elsewhere and at different times in North American history, tourism and recreational uses of nature often emerged where the environment frustrated people's attempts to reorder the landscape and/or control nature for more 'productive' purposes.<sup>18</sup> Cognizant of the limits of their land, enterprising settlers in Muskoka initiated a realignment of the local economy towards the shores of the larger lakes and rivers where wilderness seekers from cities to the south sought the promise of curative and recreational experiences. Pioneer homes became boarding houses and hotels. Cottages evolved from little more than wooden tents into households, albeit seasonal ones. The functioning of this seasonal economy relied on a socioecological system that blended material and energy from the

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<sup>18</sup> In upstate New York, Adirondack Park was created as a patchwork of private land owned by farmers and public land unsuited for agriculture. Glenn Harris, "The Hidden History of Agriculture in the Adirondack Park, 1825-1875," *New York State History*, Vol.83, No.2 (Spring 2002), 165-202. Karl Jacoby, *Crimes Against Nature: Squatters, Poachers, Thieves, and the Hidden History of American Conservation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 9-78. Similar dynamics existed as part of the back-to-the-land movement after the Second World War. Many back-to-the-land settlers were well-educated, middle-class urbanites looking for an authentic life closer to nature and working the land. As Sharon Weaver points out, these individuals were often only able to obtain marginal land that others did not want. Sharon Weaver, "First Encounters: 1970s Back-to-the-land Cape Breton, NS and Denman, Hornby and Lasqueti Islands, BC," *Oral History Forum d'histoire orale*, Special Issue "Talking Green: Oral History and Environmental History," Vol.30 (2010) 1-30. Jenny Clayton explores the efforts of long-term residents and back-to-the-land newcomers to challenge the dominant forest industry in British Columbia's Kootenay region during the 1970s. By contesting the perception that this marginal landscape was suited for little other than resource extraction, these groups succeeded in creating a wilderness conservancy by insisting the forest had ecological and psychological value, not just commercial value. Jenny Clayton, "'Human beings need places unchanged by themselves': defining and debating wilderness in the West Kootenays, 1969-74" *BC Studies*, Iss.170 (Summer 2011), 93-118.

surrounding environment with the labours and technologies of interdependent year-round households.

Although a few industries and public works projects had an important role in shaping society in Muskoka, the reconceptualization of the landscape according to cadastral maps and 100-acre lots during the 1860s, 1870s and 1880s positioned private property-owning households at the centre of all social, economic and environmental arrangements. Thus, while the trajectory of life on the Shield differed from that in southern Ontario and the prairies, it shared inspiration and logic with settlement efforts both prior to and after settlement in Muskoka. By focusing on the household, this dissertation shows that while the earliest attempts at settling the Shield by Eurocanadians fit into a long-established pattern - informed by widely held beliefs about the connection between progress and owning land - of opening new lands to colonization, households adopted novel arrangements that made permanent settlement on the Shield more sustainable.<sup>19</sup>

Taking the household as the primary unit of analysis, this dissertation relies on the microhistory approach to rural history. Informed by Ruth Sandwell's microhistorical work on Saltspring Island in British Columbia, this dissertation uses "the detailed observation and analysis of the minutiae of everyday life in one small community or region" to understand "the complexities of societies in the past."<sup>20</sup> Microhistory at the household level is particularly useful for studying sustainability in the past since an "emphasis on processes and relationships, on the

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<sup>19</sup> Russell, *How Agriculture Made Canada*; James Belich, *Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Anglo-world* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Weaver, *The Great Land Rush*

<sup>20</sup> R.W. Sandwell, *Contesting Rural Space: Land Policy and Practices of Resettlement on Saltspring Island, 1859-1891* (Vancouver, UBC Press, 2005), 7; R.W. Sandwell, "The Limits of Liberalism: The Liberal Reconnaissance and the History of the Family in Canada" *Canadian Historical Review*, Vol.84, No.3 (2003), 423-450. See also, Giovanni Levi, "On Microhistory" in *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, Peter Burke, ed. (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1991), 93-114.

local and the specific, and on the variety of human experience” permits historians to more accurately compare changing social, economic and environmental arrangements over time than would be possible by evaluating larger social, political and economic structures.<sup>21</sup> In particular, the household provides an ideal perspective from which to evaluate how such changes shaped sustainability.<sup>22</sup> By exploring the ways households in Muskoka influenced and adjusted to social, economic and environmental changes at the community or regional level, this dissertation contributes to a greater understanding of how sustainability shaped rural history.<sup>23</sup> Placed in these broader contexts, this study of Muskoka’s past contributes general observations on sustainability in rural history, specific observations on the distinctive historical patterns of life on the Shield, and the commonalities this story shares with the rest of Canadian and Ontario history.

### *Environmental History*

As a work of environmental history, this dissertation uses the concept of sustainability to challenge the dominance of declensionist narratives within the field. In seeking to explain relationships between humans and the natural world, environmental historians have tended to focus on stories in which humans have degraded ecosystems, exhausted resources, or exposed people to harm as a result of environmental change. By using the concept of sustainability to explain the history of settlement on the Shield, this study explores the instances in which socioecological systems were both degraded *and* enhanced by social, economic and environmental changes.

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<sup>21</sup> Sandwell *Contesting Rural Space*, 8.

<sup>22</sup> Paul Warde explores the ways rule-making and management shaped sustainability in pre-industrial agro-ecosystems. These rules, he argues, while instrumental in establishing sustainable social, economic and environmental arrangements, applied to households not entire systems. Sustainability in microhistorical work is therefore most fruitfully dealt with at the household level. Paul Warde, “The Environmental History of Pre-industrial Agriculture in Europe” in *Nature’s End: History and the Environment*, Sverker Sorlin and Paul Warde, eds. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 70-92.

<sup>23</sup> Daniëlle De Vooght, Carolin Spirinckx, Theo Geerken, and Peter Scholliers, “Two Centuries of Heating Our Homes. An Empirical-historical Contribution to the Problem of Sustainability on a Micro Level” *Environmental Sciences*, Vol.3, No.1 (March 2006), 39-56.

Several environmental historians have employed the concept of sustainability in their work in one way or another. But as Richard Hölzl points out, however, “[a] historical approach to the concept [of sustainability] itself... remains largely to be developed.”<sup>24</sup> Much of the historical scholarship that relates to sustainability focuses on relationships between humans and the natural world that were completely, or almost completely, *unsustainable*.<sup>25</sup> Like ecosystems, however, socioecological systems are nonlinear, meaning the story is not always one of decline. As such, a few studies that deal with sustainability in the past explore the potential for societies to maintain and reproduce particular social, economic and environmental arrangements over time.<sup>26</sup> Brian Donahue, for example, argues that in the case of nineteenth-century New England, it is more appropriate to start with the “hypothesis that a system of resource conservation at the community level was built into traditional agrarian society” than it is to assume that settlers “overstepped the sustainable limits of their land.”<sup>27</sup> In other words, just because settlers sometimes overstepped limits, does not mean that they always did. In fact, evidence suggests they made every effort not to, even if the outcome was unintended. By avoiding a strictly declensionist or progressivist narrative, this dissertation contributes to a historiography that sees the concept of sustainability

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<sup>24</sup> Richard Hölzl, “Historicizing Sustainability: German Scientific Forestry in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries” *Science as Culture* Vol.19, No.4 (December 2010), 433.

<sup>25</sup> Elinor G.K. Melville, *A Plague of Sheep: Environmental Consequences of the Conquest of Mexico* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Andrew Isenberg, *The Destruction of the Bison: An Environmental History, 1750-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Jared Diamond, *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed* (New York: Viking, 2005); Dean Bavington, *Managed Annihilation: An Unnatural History of the Newfoundland Cod Collapse* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010).

<sup>26</sup> Brian Donahue, *The Great Meadow: Farmers and the Land in Colonial Concord* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2004); Geoff Cunfer, *On the Great Plains: Agriculture and Environment* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2005).

<sup>27</sup> Indeed, Donahue nuances the standard narrative, first put forward by Carolyn Merchant, that saw capitalism and the market economy as the root cause of ecological degradation in nineteenth-century New England. Instead of a linear progression, Donahue reveals that the heart of husbandry’s sustainability - economic growth - was also its demise once those forces exceeded the limits of the socioecological system. Brian Donahue, “Environmental Stewardship and Environmental Decline” *Journal of the Early Republic*, Vol.24, No.2 (Summer 2004), 237-238. Also see Carolyn Merchant, *Ecological Revolutions: Nature, Gender and Science in New England* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989); Richard W. Judd, *Common Lands, Common People: The Origins of Conservation in Northern New England* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

as useful for understanding more than just the history of human failure. This dissertation shows that the concept of sustainability provides important insights into understanding how and why households, communities and societies have established social relationships, patterns of economic exchange and environmental conditions that had the potential to maintain or reproduce themselves over long periods of time.

This dissertation applies these insights to the study of the marginal environment of the Shield. Scholars from many disciplines have used the term ‘marginal’ to refer to a variety of environments in which humans have typically faced challenges creating sustainable economic, ecological or social arrangements. Writing during the Great Depression, economist John Galbraith explored the economic dimensions of assessing the limits of arable land in the United States, or what he called “the margins of cultivation.”<sup>28</sup> Medieval historian Mark Bailey uses marginal in a geographic sense to refer to the woodlands and pastures at the agro-ecological periphery of ancient English settlements that farmers converted to arable land during years of demographic pressure in the thirteenth century.<sup>29</sup> And environmental historian Jennifer Bonnell argues that the Don River Valley in Toronto was not only geographically marginal to the city, but socially marginal as well, acting as a refuge for the city’s industries and undesirable peoples.<sup>30</sup> In all cases, however, marginal land is a concept that privileges the centre at the expense of the

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<sup>28</sup> G.M. Peterson and J.K. Galbraith, “The Concept of Marginal Land,” *Journal of Farm Economics*, Vol.14, No.2 (April 1932), 295-310.

<sup>29</sup> Mark Bailey, “The Concept of the Margin in the Medieval English Economy” *The Economic History Review*, Vol. 42, No.1 (February 1989), 1-17.

<sup>30</sup> Jennifer L. Bonnell, “Imagined Futures and Unintended Consequences: An Environmental History of Toronto’s Don River Valley” (PhD. dissertation, University of Toronto, 2010).



periphery, and in the case of this study, understands marginality in a Eurocentric way.<sup>31</sup>

Nevertheless, what these varied uses of the term ‘marginal’ share in common is a characteristic of the environment that made it unsuited to year-round settlement or use. As with most other histories that employ the concept of sustainability, this dissertation uses environmental characteristics as the point of departure for understanding the parameters within which sustainability can be assessed. Marginal environments in particular provide interesting case studies for sustainability in the past, because the likelihood that humans may at some point have found (or will find) living in these places to be completely, or almost completely, unsustainable is high relative to regions that support larger populations.<sup>32</sup> Assessing sustainability is made easier by the presence of the marginal environment’s limiting factors. That marginal environments have limiting factors is what makes them so useful to study. Drawing on the work of Michel de Certeau and Fernand Braudel, social historian Matti Peltonen argues that marginal areas “are somehow more revealing and less complicated to analyze than areas that can be assessed as more central.”<sup>33</sup> In the case of Muskoka, soil fertility was the limiting factor,<sup>34</sup> and is treated as the defining feature of marginality in this study. As this dissertation will show,

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<sup>31</sup> As archaeologists Sam Turner and Rob Young point out, ‘marginal’ is a relative term that can be applied to ecological, economic and socio-political contexts, which “are rarely exclusive.” Sam Turner and Rob Young, “Concealed Communities: The People at the Margins” *International Journal of Historical Archaeology*, Vol.11, No. 4 (December 2007), 298; Indeed, Muskoka’s Aboriginal peoples did not conceive of that portion of their home situated on the Shield as ‘marginal.’ James Scott has explored the contested categorization of the Zomia upland region of Southeast Asia as marginal. From the perspective of those who live in agrarian regions, the Zomia was uncivilized because of its unsuitability for agriculture. To those who lived there, however, the Zomia was a refuge from the oppressive rule of the central government in the agrarian valleys. James C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

<sup>32</sup> Sandwell, *Contesting Rural Space*; Richard White, *Land Use, Environment, and Social Change: The Shaping of Island County, Washington* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1980); Wood, *Places of Last Resort*.

<sup>33</sup> Matti Peltonen, “Clues, Margins, and Monads: The Micro-Macro Link in Historical Research” *History and Theory*, Vol.40, No.3 (October 2001), 353.

<sup>34</sup> For a general overview of how soil fertility has shaped human societies and settlement in the past, see J.R. McNeill and Verena Winiwarter, eds., *Soils and Societies: Perspectives from Environmental History* (Isle of Harris, U.K.: White Horse Press, 2006).

marginal environments illustrate important lessons about sustainability in the past because these environments were generally less resilient than regions with higher population densities.

Perhaps the most common case study of a marginal environment has been the history of arid regions in which humans modified the landscape, applied new technologies, and intensively exploited water resources to suit agricultural purposes.<sup>35</sup> These studies, among which Geoff Cunfer's history of Great Plains agriculture addresses the issue of sustainability most directly, have tended to emphasize soil fertility, energy inputs, and water scarcity as factors challenging stable arrangements in arid environments over time. More importantly, they demonstrate that sustainability is nonlinear, and therefore, not static and absolute, but rather dynamic and relative. In the case of Muskoka, where the Shield presented more substantial barriers to agricultural success, the concept of sustainability helps explain the contradiction between the inability of Muskoka's marginal soils to support human life year round, and its history of human occupation and long-standing reputation as a place of abundance, wealth and affluence. As was the case in other marginal environments, settlers encountered, altered and adjusted to the ecological realities of Muskoka.<sup>36</sup> But, since Muskoka contained very little arable land, year-round residents relied on many resources, particularly food, from outside the region to survive. This dissertation therefore provides insights into how and why a relative absence of agriculture and dependence on resources and wealth from outside the region shaped sustainability in a marginal environment. Moreover, given the agricultural shortcomings and dependence on exogenous inputs, the

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<sup>35</sup> Donald Worster, *Dust Bowl: The Southern Plains in the 1930s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979); Donald Worster, *Rivers of Empire: Water, Aridity and the Growth of the American West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Alon Tal, "To Make a Desert Bloom: The Israeli Agricultural Adventure and the Quest for Sustainability" *Agricultural History*, Vol.81, No.2 (Spring 2007), 228-257; James C. Malin, *History and Ecology: Studies of the Grassland* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1984); Cunfer, *On the Great Plains*.

<sup>36</sup> Geoff Cunfer describes this process on the Great Plains during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries as "a history of people inserting themselves into the middle of ecological processes, adapting to those processes, and shifting them slightly toward human purposes." Cunfer *On the Great Plains*, 5

Muskoka case study explains how and why particular social, economic and environmental arrangements were established, and how changes to those arrangements made life either more or less sustainable in a place with very low agricultural capacity.

#### Methodology: Sustainability & Societal Metabolism

This dissertation uses the concept of sustainability as a lens through which to analyze the successes and failures of life on the southern edge of the Shield. Regardless of the scale of analysis, providing a single, unifying definition or use of the concept of sustainability is complicated by the temporal and spatial, as well as technical and ethical, variables to consider.<sup>37</sup> The most frequently referenced definition originated with the 1987 report of the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development (commonly known as the Brundtland Report), *Our Common Future*. In the report, sustainable development was defined as that which “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”<sup>38</sup> More recently, the *Berkshire Encyclopedia of Sustainability* defines sustainability as “the capacity to maintain some entity, outcome, or process over time.”<sup>39</sup> As historians are fond of pointing out, however, change, not stability, is the central organizing concept of much historical enquiry. Indeed, society did not stay the same for long in Muskoka during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Society is embedded within living systems, and, as ecologist William Rees argues, “[b]ecause living systems exist in changing

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<sup>37</sup> Mark A. White, “Sustainability: I know it when I see it” *Ecological Economics* Vol.86 (2013), 213-217; Sarah E. Fredericks, “Challenges to Measuring Sustainability” in *Berkshire Encyclopedia of Sustainability, Vol.6: Measurements, Indicators, and Research Methods for Sustainability*, Willis Jenkins and Whitney Bauman, eds. (Great Barrington, MA: Berkshire, 2010), 46; Paul Johnston, Mark Everard, David Santillo, and Karl-Henrik Robert, “Reclaiming the Definition of Sustainability” *Environmental Science and Pollution Research*, Vol.14, No.1 (2007), 60-66. Many definitions of sustainability are not useful for historical enquiry because they involve certain goals and ways of thinking about the world that were extremely uncommon a century ago. To attempt to apply such understandings of sustainability to the past would be anachronistic.

<sup>38</sup> United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development, *Our Common Future* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), also available <http://www.un-documents.net/ocf-02.htm> (last accessed February 8, 2014).

<sup>39</sup> Willis Jenkins, “Sustainability Theory” in *Berkshire Encyclopedia of Sustainability, Vol.1: The Spirit of Sustainability*, Willis Jenkins and Whitney Bauman, eds. (Great Barrington, MA: Berkshire, 2010), 380.

physical environments, they too are constantly changing and adapting. In these circumstances, reliable prediction [of ability or capacity] is limited to narrow domains of relative stability, and the size and boundaries of those domains may themselves be shifting. Surprise and structural change are inevitable in complex systems, particularly socio-ecosystems in which humans are exploiting nature.”<sup>40</sup> Acknowledging these realities, sustainability expert Daniel Lerch argues that sustainability “is best thought of as a process, not a goal.”<sup>41</sup>

Thus, informed by the theory and framework of other definitions, this dissertation provides a historically-minded definition. In the chapters that follow, sustainability is taken to mean the *potential* for a society, or a particular feature of a society, to reproduce, or maintain over time, existing social relationships, patterns of economic exchange, and environmental conditions. This definition of sustainability asserts that nothing is completely sustainable, only more or less sustainable. Thus, the potential to reproduce or maintain social, economic or environmental arrangements is enhanced when those arrangements become ‘more sustainable’, and diminished when they become ‘less sustainable’.<sup>42</sup> In the words of journalist Richard

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<sup>40</sup> William E. Rees, “Thinking ‘Resilience’” in *The Post-Carbon Reader: Managing the 21st Century’s Sustainability Crises*, Richard Heinberg and Daniel Lerch, eds. (Healdsburg, CA: Watershed Media, 2010), 30-31.

<sup>41</sup> Daniel Lerch, “Preface” in Heinberg and Lerch, *Post Carbon Reader*, xxiii. Several scholars have also acknowledged that change prevents the study of sustainability from being an exact science. For example, Costanza and Patten argue that “because we can only assess sustainability after the fact, it [sustainability] is a prediction problem more than a definition problem.” Robert Costanza and Bernard C. Patten, “Defining and Prediction Sustainability” *Ecological Economics* Vol.15 (1995), 193-196. In other words, changing circumstances and conditions, not identifying indicators, are the real challenge in using the concept of sustainability. For John Ehrenfeld, sustainability is only a “possibility” not a measurement. John R. Ehrenfeld, “The Roots of Sustainability” *MIT Sloan Management Review* Vol.46, No.2 (2005), 24. Likewise, McMichael et al. see sustainability as maximizing the chances that given conditions can be maintained indefinitely. A.J. McMichael, C.D. Butler, and Carl Foulke, “New Visions for Addressing Sustainability” *Science* Vol.302 (December 12, 2003), 1919-1920.

<sup>42</sup> For the purposes of this dissertation, and drawing on the work of Geoff Cunfer who argues that socioecological systems exhibit the same features of unstable equilibrium as non-human systems, an ‘arrangement’ is defined as “an accommodation between natural imperatives and human desires that could be sustained for the medium term, but not forever.” In addition, his use of the concept of sustainability aligns nicely with its use in this study. For Cunfer, “No system is ever ‘sustainable’ forever. Sustainability, at its best, can only mean a temporary state of equilibrium and a willingness and ability to change again in the future.” Cunfer, *On the Great Plains*, 6.

Heinberg, “*sustainability* is a relative term.”<sup>43</sup> Since change is inevitable, this dissertation argues that the sustainability of a society, or a particular feature of a society, can only be measured relative to itself at an earlier or later point in time, or relative to a similar unit of analysis at the same point in time. Sustainability therefore provides a lens with which to consider not the static conditions of society, economy and environment, but rather their constantly changing circumstances. As environmental ethicist and philosopher Sarah Fredericks points out, these changes involve some combination of technological (what can be sustained) and normative (what people want to sustain) influences.<sup>44</sup> Rather than serving as a template for explaining features, characteristics and typologies of the past, sustainability helps explain measurable changes in history. Specifically, sustainability allows historians to identify changes that shaped the potential for societies to maintain or reproduce particular social, economic and environmental arrangements over time. For the study of Canadian history, the concept of sustainability is useful because its relative nature allows very different categories of analysis, such as the lifeways of Aboriginal people, Eurocanadian settlement, and the resource economy, to be considered using the same criteria in each case.

As may already be evident, any discussion of sustainability must take into consideration the social, economic and environmental components of the system under study (in this case the Muskoka River watershed - see below). This dissertation devotes a great deal of space to analyzing changes to the local economy and environment. The easier it was for a household to

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<sup>43</sup> Richard Heinberg, “What is Sustainability?” in Heinberg and Lerch, *Post Carbon Reader*, 13, emphasis in original. Similar conclusions regarding the relative nature of sustainability have also been made elsewhere. “Sustainability can not be measured per se, but rather can be seen through the comparison of two or more systems. The comparison can be made cross-sectionally (e.g. comparing an alternative and a reference system at the same time), or longitudinally (e.g. by analysing the evolution of a system over time).” Santiago López-Ridaura, Omar Masera, and Marta Astier, “Evaluating the Sustainability of Complex Socio-environmental Systems: The MESMIS framework” *Ecological Indicators* Vol.2, No.1-2 (2002), 138.

<sup>44</sup> Fredericks, “Challenges to Measuring Sustainability,” 49.

acquire what they needed from the land, through barter with neighbours, or by generating an income, the more sustainable a household was in Muskoka. The more closely human activities mimicked the material and energy flows of natural ecosystems, and adjusted to reflect the rate of regeneration of exploited resources, the more sustainable the human relationship with the environment was in Muskoka. Yet, as economists Jesse Dillard and Mary King and sociologist Veronica Dujon argue regarding research into sustainability, “concerns with environmental and economic sustainability have eclipsed efforts to understand the social aspects of sustainability.”<sup>45</sup> Therefore, this dissertation also pays close attention to the social ties that bound households and communities together. The more often individuals interacted, and the more diverse the occasions of those interactions, the more sustainable social relations were in Muskoka. Despite the fact that certain themes in this study lend themselves more toward one particular component of sustainability, this dissertation attempts to strike a balance between all three components in assessing sustainability in Muskoka’s past.

To explain how changes to particular social, economic and environmental arrangements influenced sustainability in the past, this dissertation treats the geographical region of Muskoka, the biotic and abiotic non-human world, and the people who lived in it, as a socioecological system. As social ecologists Helmut Haberl et al. point out, accepting that “sustainability is a problem of society-nature interaction means that we must observe societies, natural systems, and their interaction over time.”<sup>46</sup> In much the same way an ecosystem functions by the transfer of material and energy between biological organisms and their non-biological environment,

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<sup>45</sup> Jesse Villard, Veronica Dujon, and Mary King, eds., *Understanding the Social Dimension of Sustainability* (London: Routledge, 2009), 2; Fredericks, “Challenges to Measuring Sustainability,” 48.

<sup>46</sup> Helmut Haberl, Marina Fischer-Kowalski, Fridolin Krausmann, Helga Weisz, and Verena Winiwarter, “Progress Towards Sustainability? What the Conceptual Framework of Material and Energy Flow Accounting (MEFA) Can Offer” *Land Use Policy* Vol.21 (2004), 200.

Muskoka's socioecological system functioned by the transfer of material and energy between humans and the natural environment. And in much the same way biologists might describe the transfers of an ecosystem as a kind of metabolism, historians can treat the transfers of a socioecological system as a *societal* metabolism. Social ecologists, including Haberl and Marina Fischer-Kowalski, use the term 'societal metabolism' as "more or less crude parameters that quantitatively and qualitatively describe the 'input' of a society, the uses this input serves, and the transformations it undergoes, and, finally, the quantities and qualities of 'output' - that is, off-products of society handed back to nature."<sup>47</sup> Moreover, societal metabolisms "take into account that usually there are both exchanges with nature and exchanges with other social units. In other words, there are extractions (from nature) and imports (from other social units), and there are emissions (to nature) and exports (to other social units)."<sup>48</sup> In this sense, societal metabolism is a model that combines social and natural sciences to trace the material and energy flows of a society. This method of accounting for material and energy flows was developed by researchers working in the field of industrial ecology, and subsequently adopted by social ecologists to explore sustainability at the societal level.<sup>49</sup> Researchers working at the Institute for Interdisciplinary Studies of Austrian Universities have used this methodology to explore

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<sup>47</sup> Marina Fischer-Kowalski and Helmut Haberl, "Tons, Jules, and Money: Mode of Production and Their Sustainability Problems" *Society and Natural Resources* Vol.10 (1997), 62.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>49</sup> R.U. Ayres and U.E. Simonis, *Industrial Metabolism, Restructuring for Sustainable Development* (New York: United Nations University Press, 1994); Marina Fischer-Kowalski and Helmut Haberl, "Sustainable Development: Socio-economic metabolism and colonization of nature" *International Social Science Journal* Vol.50, No.4 (1998), 573-587; Marina Fischer-Kowalski and Walter Hüttler, "Society's Metabolism: The Intellectual History of Materials Flow Analysis, Part II, 1970-1998" *Journal of Industrial Ecology* Vol.2, No.4 (1998), 107-137. For more on the background of the concept and its intellectual origins, see Marina Fischer-Kowalski, "Society's Metabolism: The Intellectual History of Materials Flow Analysis, Part I, 1860-1970" *Journal of Industrial Ecology* Vol.2, No.1 (1998), 61-78.

sustainability in Austrian environmental history.<sup>50</sup> And the concept has since been employed in a variety of other historical studies.<sup>51</sup> Rather than adopting societal metabolism as a model in which hard data is used to recreate the physical processes of production and consumption and their relationship to carrying capacity and thresholds in the natural world, this dissertation uses societal metabolism as a metaphor for conceptualizing these processes and their relationship to sustainability.

Using societal metabolism as a metaphor rather than a model is necessary for two reasons. The first is that unlike the research carried out in the Austrian setting, the sources available for this study do not lend themselves to a material and energy flow accounting sufficient for any meaningful conclusions. While this dissertation does rely on interpretation of quantitative data, the sources lent themselves more readily to a qualitative approach.<sup>52</sup> The second reason is that the study of sustainability involves a social component, in addition to the

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<sup>50</sup> Helmut Haberl, Karl-Heinz Erb, Fridolin Krausmann, Wolfgang Loibl, Niels Schulz, and Helga Weisz, “Changes in Ecosystem Processes Induced by land Use: Human Appropriation of Net Primary Production and Its Influence on Standing Crop in Austria” *Global Biogeochemical Cycles* Vol.15, No.4 (2001), 929-942; Fridolin Krausmann and Helmut Haberl, “The Process of Industrialization from the Perspective of Energetic Metabolism: Socioeconomic Energy Flows in Austria, 1830-1995” *Ecological Economics*, Vol.41, No.2 (2002), 177-201; Fridolin Krausmann, Helmut Haberl, Karl-Heinz Erb, and Mathis Wackernagel, “Resource Flows and Land Use in Austria, 1950-2000: Using the MEFA Framework to Monitor Society-Nature Interaction for Sustainability” *Land Use Policy*, Vol.21, No. 2 (2004), 215-230; Fridolin Krausmann, “A City and its Hinterland: Vienna’s Energy Metabolism, 1800-2006” in *Long Term Socio-Ecological Research: Studies in Society-Nature Interactions Across Spatial and Temporal Scales*, S.J. Singh, H. Haberl, M. Chertow, M. Mirtl, M. Schmid, eds. (New York: Springer, 2013), 247-268.

<sup>51</sup> Marina Fischer-Kowalski, *Socioecological Transitions and Global Change: Trajectories of Social Metabolism and Land Use* (Cheltenham, U.K.: Edward Elgar, 2007); Sylvia Gierlinger and Fridolin Krausmann, “The Physical Economy of the United States of America: Extraction, Trade and Consumption of Materials from 1870 to 2005” *Journal of Industrial Ecology*, Vol.13, No.3 (June 2012), 365-377; Fridolin Krausmann, Simone Gingrich, and Reza Nourbakhch-Sabet, “The Metabolic Transition in Japan: A Material Flow Account for the Period from 1878-2005” *Journal of Industrial Ecology*, Vol.15, No.6 (November 2011), 877-892; Rolf Peter Sieferle, Fridolin Krausmann, Heinz Schandl, and Verena Winiwarter, *Ende der Fläche. Zum gesellschaftlichen Stoffwechsel der Industrialisierung* (Cologne, Germany: Böhlau, 2006); Xavier Cusso, Roman Garrabou, and Enric Tello, “Social Metabolism in an Agrarian Region of Catalonia (Spain) in 1860-1870: Flows, Energy Balance and Land Use” *Ecological Economics*, Vol.58, No.1 (June 2006), 49-65; Geoff Cunfer and Fridolin Krausmann, “Sustaining Soil Fertility: Agricultural Practice in the Old and New Worlds” *Global Environment*, Vol.4 (2009), 8-47.

<sup>52</sup> In particular, this dissertation explores the idea of ‘outputs’ only sparingly. For the most part, this is a product of the sources. Very little information is available to explore the history of waste in Muskoka between 1850 and 1920. But this is also the result of waste not being a large concern for most of this period, since population density was low and industries were few in number. However, where information is available and relevant, in the chapter on Muskoka’s logging and tanning industries, for example, wastes and pollution are addressed.



economic and environmental components. As Fischer-Kowalski and Haberl argue, the material relationship between society and nature “cannot be adequately grasped by looking only at input-output processes.”<sup>53</sup> “Although societies are essentially dependent on material and energy,” these authors argue elsewhere, “they have emergent properties that cannot be fully understood by analysing the biophysical structures sustaining them.”<sup>54</sup> So, while quantitative sources provide hard data useful for comparing economic behavior and environmental impacts, they never reveal the wider social, political and cultural context within which the data are embedded. Thus, in using societal metabolism as a metaphor instead of a model, this dissertation uses quantitative information to supplement the qualitative. Thinking of Muskoka as a societal metabolism, with material and energy flowing into, through, and out of the region, makes it possible to discuss the sustainability of the entire socioecological system. Like particular features of society in Muskoka, the entire system became more or less sustainable in response to social, economic and environmental changes over time.

With few exceptions, Muskoka’s societal metabolism expanded throughout the period under study. The amount of material and energy moving into, through, and out of Muskoka increased steadily, with few interruptions, between 1850 and 1920. Yet, sustainability did not necessarily correlate directly with changes to Muskoka’s societal metabolism. Changing social relationships, patterns of economic exchange, and environmental conditions contributed to an expansion of Muskoka’s societal metabolism over time. Sometimes that made life in Muskoka more sustainable, sometimes less sustainable. By treating Muskoka as a societal metabolism, this

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<sup>53</sup> In addition to input-output processes, Fischer-Kowalski and Haberl discuss efforts made to “deliberately transform natural systems in ways that tend to maximize their usefulness for human purposes” which they term ‘colonization.’ Fischer-Kowalski and Haberl (1997), *Tons, Jules, and Money*,” 64. Although this concept certainly facilitates incorporating the social component into societal metabolism research, this dissertation does not use the term in order to avoid confusion with its historiographic usage.

<sup>54</sup> Haberl et al, “Progress Towards Sustainability?,” 201

dissertation reveals how social, economic and environmental changes shaped sustainability for the entire socioecological system.

### Geography and Time

The District of Muskoka is located approximately 150 kilometres north of Toronto. Situated at the southern edge of the Precambrian Shield, east of Georgian Bay and west of Algonquin Park, Muskoka was created as a distinct political territory during the 1850s and 1860s as part of a wider effort to settle the Ottawa-Huron Tract (a swath of land north of the St. Lawrence lowlands between Georgian Bay and the Ottawa River as far north as Lake Nipissing). This dissertation does not, however, equate ‘Muskoka’ with these political borders. Instead, this study takes a ‘bioregional’ approach to delimiting its geographic scope. Inspired by the work of Walter Prescott Webb and James Malin, Dan Flores insists that environmental history’s “emphasis on the close linkage between ecological locale and human culture” is best served by “drawing the boundaries of the places we study in ways that make real sense ecologically and topographically” rather than according to “politically-derived boundaries.”<sup>55</sup> For exactly this reason, this study equates ‘Muskoka’ with the watershed of the Muskoka River, which includes not only the lakes, rivers and streams, but just as importantly the terrestrial landscapes adjacent to those bodies of water. While many of the primary sources consulted in this study make reference to and organize information according to the township and district borders created by surveyors during the third quarter of the nineteenth century, in many cases these sources and the people who wrote them thought of Muskoka in different terms.

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<sup>55</sup> Dan Flores, “An Argument for Bioregional History” *Environmental History Review*, Vol.18, No.4 (Winter 1994), 5-6.

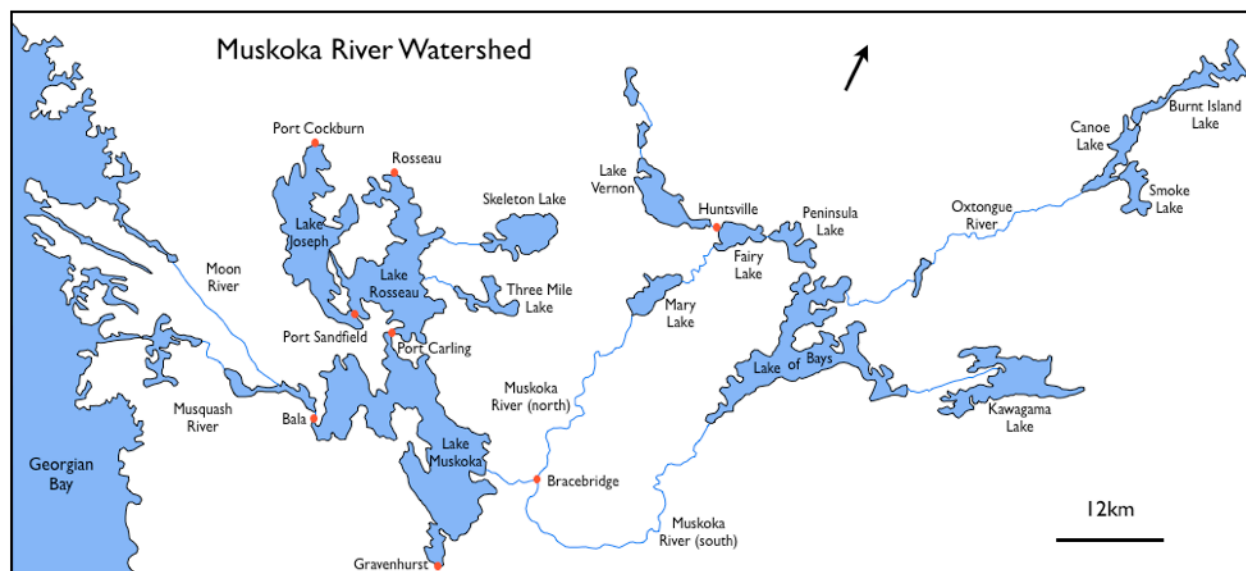


Image 1: The Muskoka River Watershed

The Muskoka River is almost entirely a product of the combined forces of geology and glaciation.<sup>56</sup> Although not as old as the rock of the Shield farther north, the gneiss granite that forms the rocky foundations across all of Muskoka was created roughly one billion years ago when metamorphic rock thrust upwards as the mountainous Algonquin Dome. Once as tall as the Rockies, all that remains after eons of water and wind erosion is the base of these mountains. Approximately one million years ago, the planet's climate began to cool and the northern hemisphere of North America experienced cycles of glaciation, the most recent of which began to subside around 20,000 years ago. This process occurred across most of southern Ontario, including Muskoka, between 11,000 and 12,000 years ago. Glaciers scoured the Earth's surface of its soils and softer sedimentary rock, such as limestone, leaving behind a barren landscape of granite. As they melted, the waters from the glaciers flowed in enormous volumes out of the Algonquin Dome forming the tremendous post-glacial Lake Algonquin, which at its greatest

<sup>56</sup> Gary Long, *This River, The Muskoka* (Erin, ON: Boston Mills Press, 1989), 23-30; Jamie Bastedo, *Shield Country: The Life and Times of the Oldest Piece of the Planet* (Red Deer, AB: Red Deer Press, 1994), 38-47.

extent covered the basins of Lake Michigan and Lake Huron, including Georgian Bay and the western half of what is now Muskoka (see Image 2).

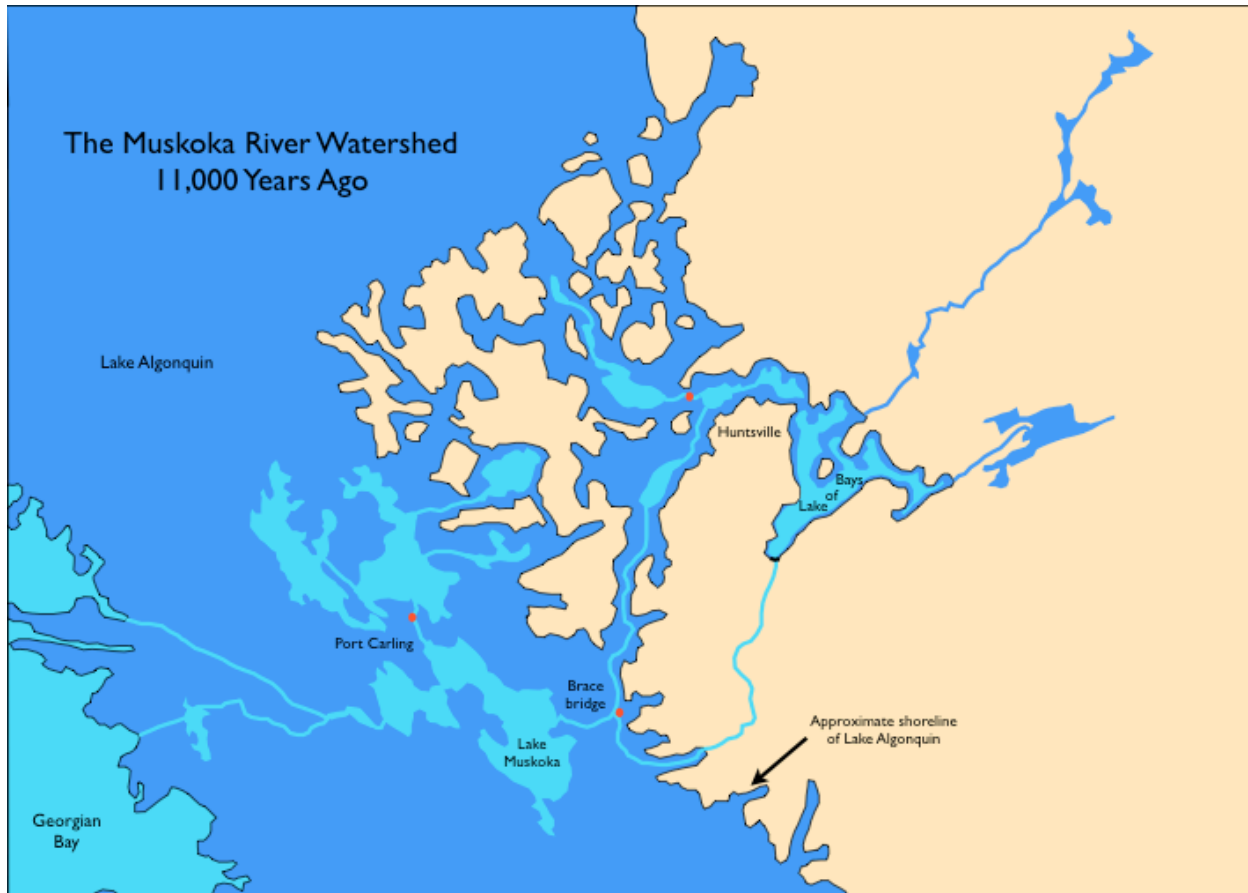


Image 2: The Muskoka River 11,000 Years Ago  
 Gary Long, *This River, The Muskoka* (Erin, ON: Boston Mills Press, 1989), 25

The force of these meltwaters eroded billions of tons of rock and deposited them downstream as glacial till (clay, silt, sand, gravel, etc). As the meltwaters subsided and Lake Algonquin drained out to form the Great Lakes, the region underwent isostatic rebound, and the basins carved by glaciation and erosion formed lakes that characterize the landscape today. The outwash of glacial till by meltwaters, followed by the receding of Lake Algonquin, created the soil arrangements present in Muskoka when Eurocanadian settlers arrived during the second half of the nineteenth century. Meltwaters carried glacial till downstream to the irregular shoreline and archipelago of

Lake Algonquin's eastern coast. Over roughly eight hundred years, the glacial till deposited by meltwaters settled to form a lacustrine clay lake bottom in the low-lying areas along the eastern shoreline of Lake Algonquin. As Lake Algonquin receded, these clay deposits formed Muskoka's most fertile soils, the only pockets of land where farming was possible. Owing to the relatively short timeframe during which Lake Algonquin existed, however, little or none of the outwash settled along the lake bottom in deeper water. Thus, in addition to those portions of Muskoka that remained above the level of Lake Algonquin, places to the west of Lakes Muskoka, Rosseau and Joseph received minimal amounts of meltwater deposition, leaving these areas to develop only very thin soils through organic processes over the next several thousand years. In addition to the large glacier-scoured basins that filled with water to form lakes, rivers carved paths through the glacial till. As these waters eroded their courses, they met the bedrock below and uncovered sills and gradients of bedrock, which turned into waterfalls, rapids and chutes as water flowed downstream from the Algonquin highlands. The resulting streams, rivers and lakes comprise the watershed of the Muskoka River, the focus of life in Muskoka.

The Muskoka River watershed as it has existed historically emerges as two branches (see Image 1).<sup>57</sup> The waters of the north branch of the Muskoka River originate in the height of land that is now Algonquin Park from a series of small lakes and wetlands that feed the Big East River, which empties into the Huntsville Lakes (Lake Vernon, Fairy Lake and Peninsula Lake), which all flow into Mary Lake before meeting the south branch of the Muskoka River at Bracebridge. The south branch of the Muskoka River also originates in what is now Algonquin Park. From a series of small lakes, water drops down the Oxtongue River into the Lake of Bays

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<sup>57</sup> Long, *This River*, 13-22.

before emptying into the south branch of the Muskoka River, which meets up with the north branch at Bracebridge. From Bracebridge, the joined waters of the Muskoka River flow into Lake Muskoka, where it combines with water slowly emptying from Lake Joseph and Lake Rosseau. A very small number of lakes feed the waters of Lake Joseph, which empties into Lake Rosseau along with water from the Shadow River, Three Mile Lake, Skeleton Lake, and a handful of other small lakes and wetlands. All the waters of Muskoka meet in Lake Muskoka, which empties into the Moon River at Bala before splitting into the Moon River and Musquash River farther downstream, and finally emptying into Georgian Bay on Lake Huron.

Although township and district lines made Muskoka legible to government agencies, using watershed boundaries instead of political borders is more useful for understanding the socioecological history of Muskoka. The watershed exerted far more important influences on people's lives than did the arbitrary borders created by mapmakers. While most of the area included within the District of Muskoka correlates fairly well with the Muskoka River watershed, parts of the watershed lay outside the District of Muskoka, such as the north ends of Lake Joseph and Lake Rosseau. Although technically located in the District of Parry Sound, the north ends of these lakes functioned as part of the bodies of water within the District of Muskoka. Moreover, as the history of the region's Aboriginal peoples reveals, the top of the watershed, which lay outside the eastern borders of the District of Muskoka, was culturally and ecologically connected with portions further downstream.

Defining Muskoka in terms of its watershed as opposed to its political borders is particularly pertinent to the time period of this study, since to varying degrees most people relied on the region's lakes and rivers for transportation. Throughout the late nineteenth and early

twentieth centuries, the Muskoka River and the lakes that connected one length to the next attracted human activity from First Nations peoples to white settlers, from loggers to tourists.

The time period 1850 to 1920 was chosen because the most profound and long-lasting changes to Muskoka's society, economy and environment unfolded between these years. Apart from the odd explorer, fur trader or surveyor, Muskoka was an exclusively Aboriginal place in 1850. Muskoka's Anishinaabeg peoples (whose population remained relatively stable throughout the nineteenth century at around 1,000 individuals) had adjusted to the environmental characteristics of the Shield by adopting rhythms of life that mimicked the seasonal cycles of the natural world. Within ten years of the Robinson-Huron Treaty of 1850, colonization roads connected the Shield with places to the south, surveyors mapped the first townships and the government opened Muskoka for Eurocanadian resettlement. In the 1871 census, Muskoka's population was listed as 5,400. By 1875, settlers claimed a significant portion of the surveyed lots, steamboats plied the larger lakes, logging companies had begun cutting licensed timber berths and the first railway onto the Shield in Ontario reached Gravenhurst. By the end of the century, Muskoka's permanent population was 33,000. Tourism probably added another 10,000 people during the summers, and had transformed the culture and local economy of Muskoka. After the turn of the century, white pine was all but exhausted. By 1920, Muskoka's permanent population had declined to less than 20,000 people, while its seasonal population remained steady. New technologies and fossil fuels tied transportation in Muskoka with mineral landscapes hundreds of kilometres away, and a consumer culture had emerged to dwarf the scale of local exchange. In short, as was the case across much of the continent, the seventy years between 1850

and 1920 witnessed the most significant social, cultural, economic, political and environmental changes in Muskoka's history.

### Sources

Focusing on what Fernand Braudel refers to as the 'structures of everyday life',<sup>58</sup> this study draws extensively from sources that reveal minute and personal details about peoples' perceptions, struggles and relationships. Particularly useful were many diaries, journals and memoirs written by several settlers, both men and women, which covered nearly the entire time period and a variety of different locales in Muskoka. As Virginia Dejohn Anderson argues for the case of seventeenth-century New England, these types of sources "reveal not only what colonial [or pioneer] farmers were doing but also what they thought about their world."<sup>59</sup> Both published and unpublished, these diaries, journals and memoirs create a sense of the social fabric of Muskoka, describe the ways households connected with one another to inform the local economy and reveal how the environment shaped everyday lives. A variety of ledgers from local businesses and industries provided extensive lists of settlers that could be cross-referenced with one another and a mixture of other source materials to reconstruct details about people's material lives. Although ledgers rarely provided any commentary, the quantitative information contained in them combined wonderfully with the qualitative information contained in other sources. Since this dissertation takes a deliberately materialist approach to the study of the past, these ledgers were an invaluable way of supplementing the fabric of people's everyday lives with the data necessary to determine concrete patterns.

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<sup>58</sup> Fernand Braudel, *The Structures of Everyday Life: The Limits of the Possible*, trans. Slân Reynolds (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981).

<sup>59</sup> Virginia Dejohn Anderson, "Thomas Minor's World: Agrarian Life in Seventeenth-Century New England" *Agricultural History*, Vol.82, No.4 (Fall 2008), 497.



This dissertation also draws heavily on published local histories of Muskoka. Written by amateur historians, these books are decidedly non-scholarly and provide distinct challenges.<sup>60</sup> For starters, since the intended audience of these books is a popular audience - mainly cottagers and local history enthusiasts - almost none of them provide citations or reference their sources. It is clear, however, that the sources on which these local histories are based combine government documents, newspapers, and oral interviews. Thus, while one should use their information cautiously, the content of these books is on the whole reliable. Less reliable is the authors' interpretation of the past. Consciously writing for a popular audience, many of the sources used by local historians seem not to have been rigorously interrogated. Typically employing a narrative of challenges faced and overcome, or nostalgia for an age gone by, most of these histories tend to function as promotion or defence of a particular view of the past. Despite the precautions involved in working with them, these local histories are an invaluable source of information without which this dissertation could not have been written. Many of them drew on oral interviews with community elders who have since passed away, and many of the authors are themselves Muskoka residents who have acquired considerable first-hand knowledge of Muskoka's past, which they have used to weave together narrative histories that reflect community understandings of their past. Recreating the relationships that defined life in Muskoka relies on this type of inherited knowledge of Muskoka as a place.

Historic maps have also been an invaluable source of information for understanding the spatial component of this research. Of particular importance has been the *Guide Book and Atlas*

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<sup>60</sup> David Russo, *Keepers of Our Past: Local Historical Writing in the United States, 1820s-1930s* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1988); James Wilkinson, "A Choice of Fictions: Historians, Memory, and Evidence" *PMLA*, Vol. 111, No.1 (January 1996), 80-92; David Lowenthal, *Possessed by the Past: The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (New York: Free Press, 1996).

of *Muskoka and Parry Sound Districts*, which mapped every lot in every township, as well as every village, town, road, sawmill, and post office, in the District in 1879.<sup>61</sup> The Atlas lists the locatee or owner of each lot, and while ownership sometimes changed, where it stayed the same these maps were extremely important in identifying where people lived as a base to correlate information from other sources, particularly diaries, journals, memoirs, and ledgers. Maps from the *Muskoka Lakes Bluebook, Directory and Chart* from 1915 and 1918 were also very helpful in identifying cottages, old steamer routes, and hotel locations that no longer appear on modern maps.<sup>62</sup> In addition to these historic maps, Google Maps often served as an easy reference to check old maps against modern topography.<sup>63</sup> Being able to follow the precise course of a stream or river, or determine the proximity between places in Muskoka was more easily done using Google Maps than with older maps. And, it was often a pleasant surprise to find that place names from over a century ago persist in the landscape.

Finally, the majority of the sources used in this dissertation focus on the three lower lakes that were settled by Eurocanadians earliest and experienced logging and tourism first. Source material for the lower lakes (Muskoka, Rosseau and Joseph) is only slightly more plentiful than for the upper lakes (Mary, Vernon, Fairy, Peninsula, and Lake of Bays). In several cases, I draw on sources from the upper lakes to add important perspectives and evidence to this history, but ultimately I focus on the lower lakes to highlight the earliest examples of the most important social, economic and environmental changes, and to maintain a straight-forward geographic focus. While slight cultural and economic differences did emerge in the upper lakes, very similar

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<sup>61</sup> W.E. Hamilton, *Guide Book and Atlas of Muskoka and Parry Sound Districts*, maps by John Rogers, sketches by Seymour Penson, 2nd offset ed. (Port Elgin, ON: Richard, Bond & Wright, 1972).

<sup>62</sup> John Rogers, *Muskoka Lakes Bluebook, Directory and Chart, 1915* (Port Sandfield, ON: John Rogers, 1915); John Rogers, *Muskoka Lakes Bluebook, Directory and Chart, 1918* (Port Sandfield, ON: John Rogers, 1918).

<sup>63</sup> Google Maps, <http://maps.google.ca/> (last accessed February 8, 2014).

histories unfolded throughout Muskoka and the trends in the lower lakes can very comfortably be taken as indicative of similar trends in the upper lakes.

### Organization

This dissertation has seven chapters. The first two chapters focus on the history of transportation in Muskoka. Chapter 1 explores the history of organic modes of transportation (powered by muscles and wood), while chapter 2 traces the development of mineral modes of transportation (powered by fossil fuels, such as coal and petroleum). These two chapters demonstrate that constant efforts to expand both the capacity of Muskoka's transportation network and enhance the ease with which people and things moved into, through, and out of the region enabled an expansion of Muskoka's societal metabolism, which in turn influenced sustainability. Moreover, these chapters trace the modifications to both the terrestrial and aquatic environments of Muskoka necessary to increase capacity and enhance travel. I decided to separate the chapters on transportation from later chapters to eliminate repetition that would result from trying to weave a detailed discussion of transportation into each chapter. Dealing with transportation separately establishes the movement of people and things as an important, perhaps even the central, characteristic of Muskoka's societal metabolism, and a major determinant shaping sustainability. At the same time, however, dealing with it separately makes clear that transportation rarely affected sustainability directly, but rather enabled people to make choices that resulted in either more or less sustainable social, economic and environmental arrangements over time.

Chapter 3 examines the Aboriginal history of Muskoka. While avoiding simplistic tropes of the ecological Indian, this chapter explores how Muskoka's First Nations lived sustainably on the Shield, and how consistent pressures related to colonization eroded the resiliency Aboriginal

people had developed over hundreds of years living in the region. In particular, this chapter outlines how Muskoka's first peoples acknowledged the limitations of life on the Shield and adjusted their seasonal cycle to accommodate life in a marginal environment. Muskoka could never provide for everything that was needed. Consequently, people spent only part of every year in Muskoka. More importantly, this chapter explores how Muskoka continued to offer the people of Rama, Christian Island, Georgina Island and Parry Island First Nations the most sustainable social, economic and environmental arrangements at a time when government policy restricted access to traditional territory, fisheries and resources elsewhere. Ultimately, the Aboriginal history of Muskoka reveals that First Nations understood the limitations of life on the Shield and adjusted their lifestyle accordingly.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 focus on Eurocanadian households between the 1860s and 1920s. These chapters trace the expansion of Muskoka's societal metabolism during this period and identify its effect on sustainability. By taking the household as the primary unit of analysis, the expansion of Muskoka's societal metabolism can be explained in terms of changing social, economic and environmental arrangements. In turn, these changing circumstances reveal how particular arrangements became more or less sustainable over time. I therefore measure sustainability relative to the expansion of Muskoka's societal metabolism and in terms of changing social, economic and environmental arrangements between households and the natural world. The trajectory of sustainability over this period was nonlinear. Chapter 4 reveals that poor soils unsuited to agriculture, a lack of experience living on the Shield, and an inadequate transportation network combined during the 1860s and 1870s to create social, economic and environmental arrangements that were much less sustainable than ones that emerged during the

1880s. During this first decade or two of white settlement in Muskoka, farmers struggled to learn what would grow and how to generate income. It became apparent that agriculture would not support Muskoka's economy, and that markets that brought wealth from outside the region would be necessary to support a permanent population. Chapter 5 traces the rise of tourism, and the relationship between seasonal visitors and year-round residents that formed the basis for Muskoka's most sustainable social, economic and environmental arrangements. While life on the Shield continued to rely on a variety of exogenous inputs, the two most important of which were wheat and cash, year-round residents in Muskoka learned how to generate income by selling tourists many of the things that settlers *could* produce on the Shield: fresh foods, wood, ice, accommodation, services, labour, and perhaps most important, an aesthetically pleasing setting close to nature. Tourism created a market for products and services that would not have been available to year-round settlers if they had been forced to rely on agriculture alone. Chapter 6 explores how less sustainable arrangements emerged from new patterns of consumption and the advent of the internal combustion engine after 1900. These changes interacted with and took priority over more sustainable pre-existing arrangements that had been established between seasonal and year-round households at the local level in Muskoka. While local interdependencies continued to function, they comprised a shrinking proportion of economic exchange within a rapidly expanding societal metabolism. In this context, households that had previously formed close mutually-beneficial relationships became atomized, functioning separately from one another rather than interdependently.

Finally chapter 7 deals with the logging and tanning industries in Muskoka. Although this chapter considers the impact large resource extraction industries had on Muskoka's society,

economy and environment between 1850 and 1920, its focus is more on sustainable household approaches to harvesting forest resources. As an alternative to the extensive exploitation of white pine and hemlock trees practiced by the logging and tanning industries, the small-scale model of harvesting timber and hemlock bark enabled more stable households, provided settlers with a larger share of the value of each tree, and put fewer pressures on local ecosystems than the large-scale commercial approach.

Taken together these chapters reveal that the least sustainable social, economic and environmental arrangements of life in Muskoka were those that privileged the flow of material and energy into and out of the region, while the most sustainable arrangements were the interdependent relationships at the local level. Environmental limitations and wealth from outside the region shaped life in Muskoka. Over time people's responses to these realities either enhanced or diminished the potential to maintain and reproduce certain social relationships, patterns of economic exchange, and environmental conditions.

*Chapter 1: Muskoka's Organic Modes of Transportation*

We slept the night at Belle Ewart... and the next morning took the steamer to Orillia. This passage across the lake was the most beautiful part of our journey. The day was bright and clear, the water blue, and the scenery most beautiful... . We landed at Washage [sic], and... took the stage-wagon for Gravenhurst, the vehicle being so overcrowded that even the personal baggage most essential to our comfort had to be left behind. Oh! the horrors of that journey! The road was most dreadful... . [We] had to cling convulsively... to avoid being thrown out, and for long afterwards we both suffered from the bruises we received and the strain upon our limbs.

Harriet Barbara King (1871)<sup>1</sup>

When Harriet Barbara King and her family arrived in Bracebridge for the first time in 1871, Muskoka was a difficult place to reach from Toronto. Travelers took a train to Belle Ewart on Lake Simcoe, two steamers to Washago, a coach to Gravenhurst, and another steamer to Bracebridge. The trip took a long time and even though they relied on other people, animals, and engines to do most of the work for them, passengers found it physically tiring. At the time, there was no other option. People and things had to be able to move into, through, and out of the region in order for Muskoka's societal metabolism to function. Consequently, Muskoka's society and economy reflected the prime movers and fuels that performed this work.<sup>2</sup>

Muskoka's nineteenth-century societal metabolism was not simply an inventory of different material and energy resources. Socioecological systems are not static. They occupy time and space, and as such, are dynamic. Societal metabolisms are open systems with boundaries that are permeated by material and energy entering and leaving. Over time, material and energy flow

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<sup>1</sup> Harriet Barbara King, *Letters From Muskoka, by an Emigrant Lady* (London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1878), 22-25.

<sup>2</sup> Vaclav Smil defines a 'prime mover' as a tool that enables humans to extend their physical limits. In this case, a prime mover is a vehicle that allows people to carry more cargo over longer distances than would otherwise be possible by the physical limits of their bodies alone. Vaclav Smil, *Energy in World History* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994), 3.

into, through and out of societal metabolisms. Chapters 3-7 will explore the relationships between humans and the different material and energy components of Muskoka's changing societal metabolism. This chapter and the one that follows will focus on the flows, or the movement of people and things into, through, and out of Muskoka via different modes of transportation. Without exception, each new mode enabled an expansion of Muskoka's societal metabolism. Initially, transportation was largely confined to organic modes: human and animal muscle power, and wood fuel. Shortly after the turn of the century, transportation was dominated by mineral modes: coal and petroleum fossil fuels.<sup>3</sup> Organic modes of transportation differed from mineral ones in that the former placed limits on the movement of people and things into, through, and out of Muskoka, which the latter overcame. The limits imposed by human and animal muscles, as well as wood fuel, shaped the scale and pace of change in Muskoka, and also influenced the potential for society to reproduce or maintain particular social, economic and environmental arrangements over time. The present chapter examines the relationship between Muskoka's societal metabolism and organic modes of transportation, while chapter 2 will consider the impact of mineral modes of transportation.

The movement of people and things from one place to another has had a central role in explaining the history of socioecological systems, economic development and sustainability. The centrality of transportation is featured prominently in three of the essential works of North

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<sup>3</sup> E.A. Wrigley has identified this switch from an organic to a mineral economy as the defining feature of the Industrial Revolution in England during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. E.A. Wrigley, *Continuity, Chance and Change: the Character of the Industrial Revolution in England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988). But the distinction between organic and mineral is also useful in explaining the many changes that occurred in North American transportation during the nineteenth century. There are, of course, some limitations to treating transportation as a history of organic and mineral economies, however, since doing so obscures the role of wind and water power. By the second half of the nineteenth century, the kinetic energy available in moving water occupied a diminishing share of transportation-related work in North America. In Muskoka, only loggers used water power for transportation in any meaningful way, and wind power was never used for more than recreational sailing.



American environmental history. In *Ecological Imperialism*, Alfred Crosby explores the impact of the transfer of plants, animals and pathogens across the Atlantic since the arrival of Christopher Columbus to the New World. As Crosby points out, these transfers would not have been possible were it not for technological advances in seafaring vessels and the accumulation of knowledge regarding oceanic wind currents.<sup>4</sup> In Richard White's study of energy and the Columbia River, transportation and the ability to either mimic or overcome the work done by the river is central to understanding the Columbia River as an organic 'machine.' For White, transportation was a blend of human labour and energy available from the surrounding environment that when combined allowed humans to partially reorganize the natural world to suit their needs.<sup>5</sup> The crucial role played by transportation in shaping human control over the environment is most clearly outlined in William Cronon's *Nature's Metropolis*, where the ability to move people and things over large distances facilitated an entire reconceptualization of the continent's natural resources and economic system. The replacement of what Cronon terms 'first nature' (geographies created by natural processes) with 'second nature' (geographies created by humans) made it possible to move enormous quantities of people and things across the continent and transform wheat, pigs and pine trees into grain, meat and timber commodities.<sup>6</sup> Richard Hoffmann has shown that this commoditized transfer of plants and animals also has antecedents outside North America and several hundred years earlier when a discrepancy between demand and supply necessitated the transportation of grain, cattle and fish across medieval Europe.<sup>7</sup> In the Canadian literature, Liza Piper has outlined the innovative, energy-intensive transportation

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<sup>4</sup> Alfred W. Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: the Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900*, 2nd Ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

<sup>5</sup> Richard White, *The Organic Machine: the Remaking of the Columbia River* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995).

<sup>6</sup> William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991).

<sup>7</sup> Richard Hoffmann, "Frontier Foods for Late Medieval Consumers: Culture, Economy, Ecology," *Environment and History* Vol.7 (2001), 131-167.

solutions developed to link Canada's natural resource hinterland in the subarctic with markets much farther south given the unsuitability of the railway in a treeless permafrost environment.<sup>8</sup>

And numerous scholars have acknowledged the importance of transportation to pioneer communities throughout Canadian history and the challenges to daily life posed by poor systems of supply and communication.<sup>9</sup>

Each mode of transportation was not responsible for, nor led directly to, an expansion of Muskoka's societal metabolism; rather, each mode *enabled* an expansion of Muskoka's societal metabolism. Canoes, horse-drawn wagons, steamboats, trains, motorboats and automobiles were just vehicles. They conveyed people and things from one place to another, and each new mode of transportation enabled people and things to move with less time and effort. It was people and the decisions they made regarding the use of these technologies that were responsible for consistently increasing the flow of material and energy into, through and out of Muskoka. Yet, expanding Muskoka's societal metabolism was not inherently more or less sustainable. Thus, it was the uses to which each new mode of transportation was put that determined whether they contributed to making Muskoka's societal metabolism more or less sustainable. In some cases, new modes of transportation enabled more sustainable arrangements; in other cases, they enabled less sustainable arrangements.

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<sup>8</sup> Liza Piper, *The Industrialization of Subarctic Canada* (Vancouver, UBC Press, 2009).

<sup>9</sup> Graeme Wynn has suggested that inquiries at the "sub-regional scale" produce meaningful insights into the relationship between transportation and local economy. Graeme Wynn, "Moving Goods and People in Mid-Nineteenth Century New Brunswick" *Canadian Papers in Rural History, Vol. VI*, Donald H. Akenson, ed. (Gananoque, ON: Langdale Press, 1988), 226-239; Ruth Sandwell, *Contesting Rural Space: Land Policy and Practices of Resettlement on Saltspring Island, 1859-1891* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005); Allan Greer, *Peasant, Lord, and Merchant: Rural Society in Three Quebec Parishes, 1740-1840* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985); Douglas McCalla, *Planting the Province: the Economic History of Upper Canada, 1784-1870* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993); Beatrice Craig, *Backwoods Consumers and Homespun Capitalists: the Rise of a Market Culture in Eastern Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009).

The decisions to introduce new modes of transportation in Muskoka had environmental consequences. To increase the flow of material and energy into, through and out of Muskoka required modifications to the local environment to create ordered, homogenized and reliable transportation corridors. In some cases, modifications followed and mimicked the natural landscape and hydrology; in others it required significant alterations and control. Moreover, as Muskoka's transportation network developed over the course of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries energy expenditures grew and diversified. The earliest and longest-lasting modes of transportation consumed renewable fuels created in Muskoka, while later modes relied on non-renewable inputs of exogenously-produced fuels. This chapter and the next will explore the ways humans modified local and distant environments as part of the process of expanding transportation networks.

While each new mode of transportation that emerged in Muskoka enabled a greater flow of material and energy than the older ones, the effect was compounded by the fact that new modes did not replace the older modes. Martin Melosi has made a similar point with regards to forms of energy in nineteenth-century America. "Older sources of energy (muscle power, renewable resources) are not replaced totally by newer sources (fossil fuels, atomic power)," Melosi argues, "Instead, they are supplemented, complemented, or slowly displaced according to use."<sup>10</sup> Thus, the transition from one source of energy to another is "a process rather than... a contrived barrier separating energy eras."<sup>11</sup> Since transportation is essentially an application of

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<sup>10</sup> Martin V. Melosi, "Energy Transitions in the Nineteenth Century" in *Energy and Transport: Historical Perspectives on Policy Issues*, George H. Daniels and Mark H. Rose, eds. (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1982), 58.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

energy to prime movers, the same is true for successive modes of transportation. Each new mode co-existed with older modes, sometimes in complementary ways, sometimes in conflicting ways.

The organic stage can be further broken down into somatic and extra-somatic modes of transportation. The word ‘somatic’ is an adjective of the body, in this case broadly referring to the body of a human being or an animal.<sup>12</sup> The early years of Muskoka’s transportation history involved an exclusively anthropogenic somatic mode of transportation. Prior to Eurocanadian settlement in the 1860s, the calories consumed by people who traveled in canoes and by foot fueled transportation in Muskoka exclusively. Muskoka’s First Nations used canoes for hundreds of years before the arrival of Europeans in the seventeenth century. Between the middle of the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, explorers, fur traders and surveyors also used their muscles to power canoes and traverse the region. After 1858, when the first road was built to Muskoka, roads facilitated an unguulate somatic mode of transportation. White settlement before 1875 relied on non-human labour to transport people and things into Muskoka. Humans alone, in canoes or on foot, could not perform enough work to adequately meet the needs of the sedentary, agrarian society that was intended when Muskoka was opened for resettlement. The energy available from the caloric intake of plants by oxen and horses enabled the first notable expansion of Muskoka’s societal metabolism.

The first extra-somatic means of moving people and things in Muskoka was a steamboat launched on Lake Muskoka in 1866. For the next sixty years, the organic economy provided people in Muskoka with wood from the region’s forests to fuel the steam engines that moved large amounts of people and things from one place to another in Muskoka. Muscle power alone

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<sup>12</sup> I.G. Simmons, *Changing the Face of the Earth: Culture, Environment, History*, 2nd Ed. (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 22.

placed limits on the ability to transfer material and energy within Muskoka. Steamers overcame these limitations by separating humans and animals from the vast majority of the work involved in transportation.

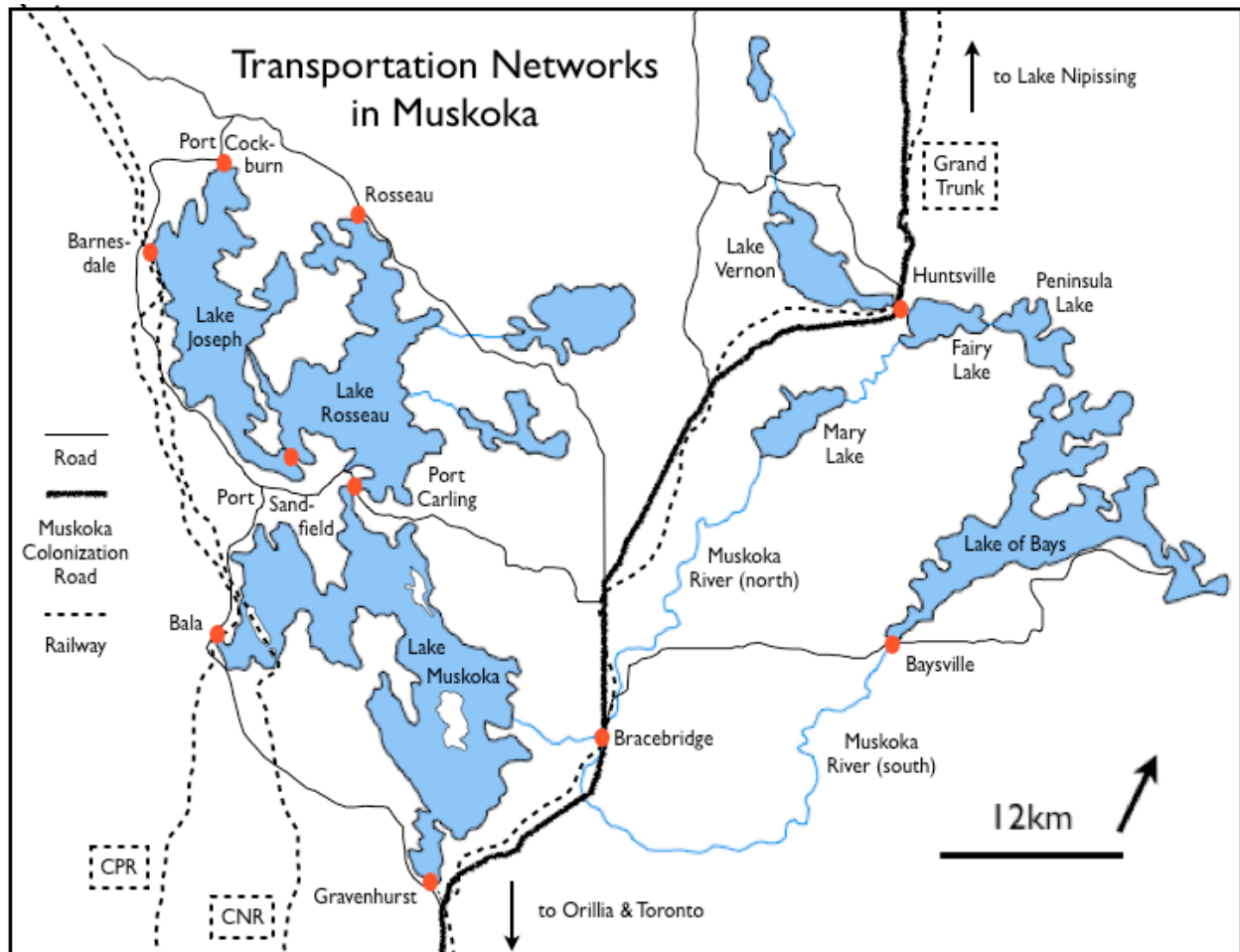


Image 3: Transportation Networks in Muskoka, ca. 1910

Just as the building of Muskoka's first road did not stop people from canoeing places in Muskoka, the arrival of steamers did not stop people from moving overland by road, and the arrival of trains and motorboats did not stop people from using steamers, wagons and canoes to get around. All these modes of transportation, organic and mineral, somatic and extra-somatic, co-existed by 1920. Some complemented one another, others conflicted. Taken together, however, these stages outline the chronological trend in the expansion of Muskoka's societal

metabolism. Considered separately, each illustrates the important role of transportation in shaping Muskoka's societal metabolism and the role different modes of transportation had in enabling more or less sustainable economic, social and environmental arrangements.

### Anthropogenic Somatic

For several hundred years prior to the 1850s, the flow of material and energy related to human lives in Muskoka followed the hydrology of the region's watershed. Humans made no significant modifications to the local environment to make this possible. And, as such, no significant expansion to Muskoka's societal metabolism occurred during this stage in Muskoka's transportation history.

The Muskoka watershed was part a larger geographical territory, which archaeologist William A. Allen has called 'Southern Algonquia.'<sup>13</sup> This territory stretched from the Severn River in the south to the French River in the north, and from Georgian Bay in the west to the height of land in the east separating the Great Lakes basin from the Ottawa River basin. Southern Algonquia was inhabited by Algonquian-speaking peoples who led what geographer J. Michael Thoms describes as 'multi-modal' lives, moving between different well-known resource sites at various times of the year.<sup>14</sup> Anthropologist Joan Lovisek has referred to the specific pattern Algonquian-speaking peoples followed as a 'river mouth/inland pattern' of subsistence. Members of these First Nations communities fished next to the mouth of rivers that emptied into Georgian Bay in the spring, and hunted and trapped in places like Muskoka further inland during the fall

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<sup>13</sup> William Arthur Allen, "Wa-nant-git-che-ang: Canoe Route to Lake Huron through Southern Algonquia" *Ontario Archaeology* No.73 (2002), 38.

<sup>14</sup> J. Michael Thoms, "Ojibwa Fishing Grounds: A History of Ontario fisheries law, science, and the sportsmen's challenge to Aboriginal treaty rights, 1650-1900" (PhD. Dissertation, UBC, 2004), 44.

and winter.<sup>15</sup> Nothing confined Algonquian-speaking peoples to Southern Algonquia. They traveled south, north and east during the summer months to trade with the Wendat, Nipissing and Ottawa.<sup>16</sup>

To move between all these important places within and outside Southern Algonquia, Algonquian-speaking peoples used their muscles.<sup>17</sup> Yet, Algonquian-speaking peoples preferred to travel across lakes and along rivers by canoe, because the buoyant force of water made it possible for their muscles to move a larger mass of cargo in water than was possible to carry on land. And, since Algonquian-speaking peoples could more easily move cargo by water, it was also faster. Moreover, as Richard White points out, gravity works on rivers to move water from higher to lower elevations, thereby releasing kinetic energy that humans harnessed to perform work, including transportation. Thus, when Algonquian-speaking peoples harnessed the energy of the river, they mimicked the natural flow of energy contained in moving water, turning rivers into energy-efficient transportation corridors.<sup>18</sup> The only time Algonquian-speaking peoples needed to overcome rather than mimic the natural energy flow in rivers was in traveling against the current, or when portaging around rapids and falls.<sup>19</sup> Regardless of the abundant energy available from the Muskoka River, ultimately, their somatic mode of transportation imposed

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<sup>15</sup> Joan A. M. Lovisek, "Ethnohistory of the Algonkian Speaking Peoples of Georgian Bay - Precontact to 1850" (PhD. Dissertation, McMaster University, 1991), 259.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.

<sup>17</sup> According to the records of a surveyor in the 1860s, the Sandy Island Indians generally used birch bark canoes when traveling by water in Muskoka. Florence Murray, ed. *Muskoka and Haliburton: A Collection of Documents* (Toronto: Champlain Society for the Government of Ontario by University of Toronto Press, 1963), 126.

<sup>18</sup> White, *The Organic Machine*, 3-8; Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: the Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19th Century*, trans. Geschichte der Eisenbahnreise (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 9; Carolyn Podruchny and others have explored the importance of Canada's lakes and river in the history of the fur trade, and their role as the highways of canoe transportation in the seventeenth and eighteenth century. Carolyn Podruchny, *Making the Voyageur World: Travelers and Traders in the North American Fur Trade* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), chapter 4; Carolyn Podruchny, Frederic W. Gleach, and Roger Roulette, "Putting Up Poles: Power, Navigation, and Cultural Mixing in the Fur Trade" in *Gathering Places: Aboriginal and Fur Trade Histories*, Carolyn Podruchny and Laura Peers, eds. (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010), 25-47.

<sup>19</sup> White, *The Organic Machine*, 12.

limits on Algonquian-speaking peoples in Muskoka. Rather than move everything they needed throughout the year to one place, which would have required an expenditure of muscle power greater than what was available, they moved themselves to where the resources were and transported only the most valuable items to trade. The resources they relied on were spread over the entire Southern Algonquian territory, and a somatic mode of transportation enabled Algonquian-speaking peoples to utilize and access each section of that territory, including Muskoka, in flexible and persistent ways. As the process of contact with Europeans unfolded between the early seventeenth and the mid nineteenth centuries, the societal metabolism of life in Muskoka relied on anthropogenic somatic modes of transportation.

In July 1615, a group of Wendat showed Samuel de Champlain a route from Quebec to Huronia at the southern end of Georgian Bay via the Ottawa River, Lake Nipissing and the French River.<sup>20</sup> On his way south from the French River, Champlain passed the mouth of the Musquash and Moon Rivers - the entrance Algonquian-speaking peoples took to access Muskoka. For the next thirty years, until the dispersement of the Huron by the Haudenosaunee, the French took this Ottawa-French River route by water to reach their allies in Huronia.<sup>21</sup> During the 1630s and 1640s, the Jesuit priests found their task of converting the Huron's Algonquian-speaking allies much more difficult than converting the more sedentary Huron. Father Paul Ragueneau wrote "Had we but enough people and enough means, we would find more employment in converting those peoples than would suffice for our lifetime. But, as there is a dearth of laborers, we have been able to undertake only a portion of the task, - that is to say,

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<sup>20</sup> Murray, *Muskoka and Haliburton*, 3.

<sup>21</sup> Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).



four or five Nations... .”<sup>22</sup> With only their muscles to transport them, the priests found it very difficult to follow the many groups that set out by canoe from Huronia each spring.

Exploring and mapping the region during the nineteenth century also relied exclusively on muscle power. Between the American Revolution and the War of 1812, British anxieties about invasion encouraged colonial authorities to commission surveys of the major waterways between the Ottawa River, Lake Ontario and Lake Huron. But as these surveys were aimed at major routes across the colony, such as the French and Severn Rivers, Muskoka was not included in this work.<sup>23</sup> Led by an Aboriginal guide, Royal Engineer Henry Briscoe traveled up the Muskoka River watershed in August 1826 via “a very large Lake and fine river connected by minor Lakes and rivers” to the Madawaska River in an effort to chart a route from Georgian Bay to the Ottawa River.<sup>24</sup> In an effort to map the region and find a more direct route than the Welland Canal across the province, European surveyors made at least four more exploratory trips prior to 1850, including David Thompson’s in 1837. In each case, often with the help of Aboriginal guides, surveyors found the most efficient route through the region by water.<sup>25</sup> Since no viable commercial route connecting Georgian Bay with the Ottawa River existed, Muskoka’s societal metabolism before 1850 remained limited to the seasonal activities of Algonquian-speaking peoples and a few fur traders who mainly hunted game and trapped furs. Moreover, during this period, anthropogenic modes of transportation required only minor modifications to waterways corridors. Human muscles adjusted to environmental conditions.

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<sup>22</sup> Quoted in Murray, *Muskoka and Haliburton*, 7.

<sup>23</sup> Murray, *Muskoka and Haliburton*, xlii-xliv.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 42

<sup>25</sup> In 1835, a party surveyed an extension of the line separating the Home and Newcastle Districts, which required an overland route, not an exclusively waterborne route. Subsequent surveying trips during the 1860s illustrate that parties spent more time trekking overland in all seasons than they did on the water. In the winter, toboggans were used to reduce the labour of transporting supplies and equipment. Murray, *Muskoka and Haliburton*, 70, 75-82, 85-96, 138.

Canoeing and rowing remained a popular way of getting across the lake or down the river for several decades after 1850, while walking became an increasingly popular mode of transportation as new paths and roads were built. Human muscles never stopped working, but by the end of the 1850s, moving people and things from one place to another in Muskoka involved more than just anthropogenic modes of transportation.

### Ungulate Somatic

Roads provided the first opportunity for people in Muskoka to harness the muscle power of ungulates for transportation. Although the energy available from an ox or horse was considerably more than what a human could provide, the power source was still somatic. To a certain extent, then, the earliest roads also mimicked the natural flow of energy in the surrounding landscape. Ungulate work capacity combined with the environmental constraints imposed by the landscape necessarily placed limits on the expansion of Muskoka's societal metabolism. The sedentary character of homestead farming required a greater flow of material and energy into, through and out of Muskoka than was possible within the limits imposed by an ungulate mode of transportation. As Douglas McCalla has pointed out, roads were really only effective for local transport.<sup>26</sup> In Muskoka, bottlenecks occurred along the most important roads, which limited the ability of communities to generate enough economic activity and attract newcomers. The response, which proved to be only marginally effective, was to modify the local environment so as to enhance the capacity of the region's roads network to connect with places to the south.

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<sup>26</sup> McCalla, *Planting the Province*, 116-140.

Although the history of roads in Muskoka has been called “a gloomy one”, they share a great deal in common with the history of roads more generally in nineteenth-century Ontario.<sup>27</sup> Throughout the province, observers described the “ruts, mud, washouts, inadequate maintenance, and the deterioration caused by freezing and thawing... .”<sup>28</sup> But the trajectory these roads followed over the course of the nineteenth century went from little more than cart paths to highways as use required. Roads were not generally used to move people and things in large quantities or over long distances. Early settlement along the north shore of Lake Ontario and the banks of navigable rivers demonstrates the use of waterways for these purposes. The main areas of settlement in Muskoka, however, were not accessible via navigable waters from the rest of Ontario. Connecting Muskoka with the province’s heartland along the north shore of Lake Ontario relied exclusively on roads until the railway arrived in 1875. Unlike the heartland of the province, however, Muskoka lay at the southern edge of the Precambrian Shield. As Claire Campbell has shown in the case of Georgian Bay to the west of Muskoka, roads in Shield country were “notoriously unpleasant, difficult to maintain amid rocks and swamps, and continually chewed by logging traffic.”<sup>29</sup> The Muskoka Colonization Road between Washago on Lake Couchiching and Bracebridge on the Muskoka River was commissioned in 1857 as part of what Neil Forkey describes as a larger social policy of the government of Canada West to open

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 132; Florence B. Murray, “Agricultural Settlement on the Canadian Shield: Ottawa River to Georgian Bay” *Profiles of a Province: Studies in the History of Ontario*, Edith Firth, ed. (Toronto: Ontario Historical Society, 1967), 178-186; Keith A. Parker, “Colonization Roads and Commercial Policy” *Ontario History* Vol.67 (March 1975), 49-65; Helen E. Parson, “The Colonization of the Southern Canadian Shield in Ontario: The Hastings Road” *Ontario History* Vol.79 (September 1987), 265-273.

<sup>28</sup> McCalla, *Planting the Province*, 132.

<sup>29</sup> Claire Campbell, *Shaped by the West Wind: Nature and History in Georgian Bay* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2005), 66.

new lands to logging and settlement.<sup>30</sup> Eager to attract immigrants from Britain and discourage emigration to the new lands of the American west, the Crown pursued colonization roads as a means of extending its geography into the Shield. Construction began in 1858 and the fifteen miles to Gravenhurst were completed in 1860. A further eleven miles were built to Bracebridge the following year, before it reached the future site of Huntsville in 1863.<sup>31</sup> Secondary roads were also opened around this time to provide access to the surveyed townships of the District.

Like the water routes used by the area's First Nations, fur traders, explorers and early surveyors, road routes mimicked the natural features of the landscape where possible. Crown surveyor David Gibson reported in March 1858 that several attempts to locate a suitable line for the Muskoka Road had encountered "many obstacles to overcome," before he settled on a route that required "deviating slightly from the course where it is crossed by [granite] ridges."<sup>32</sup> Surveyors endeavoured to locate lines that were as straight as possible, but that followed as many gradual contours and avoided as many steep inclines as possible. In some places, Florence Murray points out, "Straight lines were impossible; lakes, rivers, and hills caused wide deviations. Numerous rivers and creeks required bridges, swamps required causeways, and parts of the country were so rough that no practical road line could be obtained."<sup>33</sup> Thus, necessity worked for and against efforts to follow the path of least resistance over the Shield. Gradients had to stay low enough for ungulate modes of transportation. Where obstacles presented themselves, routes either deviated from the line or the environment was modified to remove

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<sup>30</sup> Neil Forkey, *Shaping the Upper Canadian Frontier: Environment, Society, and Culture in the Trent Valley* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2003), 75, 77; Graeme Wynn, "Notes on Society and Environment in Old Ontario" *Journal of Social History* Vol.13, No.1 (Fall 1979), 54; Geoffery Wall, "Pioneer Settlement in Muskoka" *Agricultural History* Vol.44, No.4 (October 1970), 394-395.

<sup>31</sup> Murray, *Muskoka and Halibuton*, lxx.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 190-191.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, lxxviii-lxix.

them. Where roads met rivers or streams, for example, wooden trestles or cribs were built with local timber to support bridges. These required suitable footings in the river bank or bed and maintenance to counter the destabilizing forces of the water and ice. Bridges were of no use through swamps. In these low-lying, perennially wet portions, crews built corduroy roads by, as one local settler described it, “laying logs horizontally alongside of each other at right angles to [the road’s] direction.”<sup>34</sup> Government contractors and local settlers worked to repair the damage done to corduroy roads by winter ice and spring floods. To utilize ungulate muscles for transportation, people in Muskoka had to apply their own labour to modify those features of the landscape that did not already provide a smooth route over the Shield.

The roads that were built were not always adequate for the purposes they were intended to serve. A frontier society required access to markets for both farmers and loggers. Until the railway arrived in 1875, the only transportation corridor that provided an overland link to those markets was the Muskoka Colonization Road. During the 1860s, when settlers first discovered local production, exchange and credit were insufficient to sustain their sedentary lives, inputs from the south encountered a major bottleneck along the Muskoka Road. In a letter to the Commissioner of Crown Lands in March 1863, settlers in five townships requested a town plot where the Muskoka Road crossed the south branch of the Muskoka River, to attract “Merchants, Mechanics, and others [who] would establish themselves thereon.” According to the petitioners, “settlers are put to much inconvenience and unnecessary cost in having to purchase their provisions and other necessaries at Orillia, and in the transport of the same to the settlement [Muskoka Falls] a distance of upwards of forty miles, Orillia being the nearest point at which

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<sup>34</sup> Frederick Montague de la Fosse, *English Bloods: In the Backwoods of Muskoka, 1878*, Scott D. Shipman, ed. (Toronto: Natural Heritage Books, 2004), 21.

they can be procured.” Moreover, the settlers were “determined not to sow wheat this year, as the transport of the Grain to Mill, and of the Flour back again to the settlement would cost more than the value of the Flour.”<sup>35</sup> The inadequate condition of the road constrained access to the closest markets outside Muskoka to such an extent that the community at Muskoka Falls proposed establishing their own market centre to provide the goods and services they needed.

Six years later, the road was not much improved. In 1869, Kivas Tully, chief engineer for the Muskoka Road, claimed “...it is still in a very bad state, and under the most favourable conditions, an ordinary passenger stage wagon, with a good team, take three hours to perform the 14 miles [between Washago and Gravenhurst]; in fact there are few places... where the horses can go beyond a walk and the difficulties for loaded wagons are still greater.”<sup>36</sup> According to the local newspaper, twenty percent of the cost of the journey between Toronto and Gravenhurst in 1869 was for the fourteen-mile stagecoach ride from Washago to Gravenhurst.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, the metabolic requirements necessary to alleviate the bottleneck involved a greater landbase than the road alone. In the early 1870s, the Harvie Brothers of Orillia operated a stage line between Washago and Gravenhurst that ran as many as two hundred teams during the summer months.<sup>38</sup> E.A. Wrigley has put the amount of land required to sustain a team of four horses in England at between 12-20 acres.<sup>39</sup> Acknowledging that the land used to feed horses at the southern edge of the Shield had a lower carrying capacity, if similar numbers are used here, the Harvie Brothers’

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<sup>35</sup> “Correspondence Regarding the Establishment of a Town Settlement at Muskoka Falls, February-July, 1863” AO, RG 1-524-2, Box 12, file 4.

<sup>36</sup> Quoted in Richard Tatley, *The Steamboat Era in the Muskokas: Volume I – To the Golden Years; A History of the Steam Navigation in the districts of Muskoka and Parry Sound, 1866-1905* (Erin, ON: Boston Mills Press, 1983), 61.

<sup>37</sup> *Northern Advocate*, Parry Sound, December 21, 1869.

<sup>38</sup> George W. Boyer, *Early Days in Muskoka: A Story about the Settlement Communities in the Free Grant Lands and of Pioneer Life in Muskoka* (Bracebridge: Herald-Gazette Press, 1970), 21.

<sup>39</sup> Wrigley, *Continuity, Chance and Change*, 28.

four-horse teams would have required 286 acres to feed and water the horses for each mile of road between Washago and Gravenhurst.

Muskoka's slowly expanding societal metabolism took its toll on the Muskoka Road. In a November 1866 letter to J.W. Bridgland, Superintendent of Colonization Roads, Alexander Campbell, the Commissioner of Crown Lands did not hesitate to identify lumbermen as the main culprits, and blame them for the disastrous conditions of the colonization roads:

In scarcely a single instance has any new road we have made had time to settle into a compact state before it had been ploughed into the deepest ruts and mudholes by the heavy provision loads of lumbermen, so that the roads have not only been mainly used by them, but most unfairly made to suffer in their tenderest condition.<sup>40</sup>

The wear and tear further contributed to the bottleneck. Maintenance and repair were vital if the roads were to keep up with the demands placed on them by the comings and goings of wagons and stagecoaches during this time. Busy clearing their farms, settlers did not repair roads more often than they were forced to, and along some stretches there were no residents that could be pressed into service. The government had no choice but to continually pay to have the roads repaired. The government experimented with a variety of new materials in an effort to limit the constant outlay of government money needed to keep roads passable. The effect further distinguished the human artifice of the road from that of the surrounding environment.

On February 21, 1870, the Ontario Department of Public Works engaged J.T. Kirkpatrick of Gravenhurst in "the construction of a macadamized and plank road on that part of the Muskoka road extending from the Wharves at Washago to the Wharf at Gravenhurst..." The government intended the work to improve the surface of the road, as well straighten and level portions. According to the specifications, the road was macadamized for three and a half miles

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<sup>40</sup> Murray, *Muskoka and Haliburton*, 187.

from Washago past the Severn Bridge, and then in discontinuous sections farther along the road. Using a portable steam sawmill to cut logs on site, the remainder of the road - approximately eight miles - was to be planked with pine or hemlock eight feet long and three inches thick.<sup>41</sup> Although the planks only lasted about three years before rot or fire destroyed them, the improvements to this fifteen-mile stretch of the Muskoka Road greatly increased its carrying capacity. Thomas McMurray, author of a promotional tract on Muskoka, and editor of the district's first newspaper, *The Northern Advocate*, called the new road "a great boon to the settlers."<sup>42</sup> These improvements made this stretch of the road undeniably more reliable and comfortable, but even these significant material improvements did not effectively address the bottleneck itself.

Over time and with greater use, roads throughout the region improved well enough to convey an ungulate mode of transportation, which remained an important mode of overland transportation until the 1920s. Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, however, roads alone placed limits on the flow of material and energy in Muskoka. For humans to live in Muskoka year-round, a mode of transportation was needed that freed the flow of material and energy from the limitations of muscle power. Even before the bottleneck of the Muskoka Road was solved by the railway in 1875, steamboats became the first extra-somatic mode of transportation in Muskoka, propelling waterways past roads as the primary transportation corridors. After all, "It was the building of the Muskoka road that," according to

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<sup>41</sup> "Contract between Department of Public Works and J.T. Kirkpatrick for Improvement of Washago and Gravenhurst Road," AO, RG 15-55-1, Vol.1, file 29; Tatley, *Steamboat Era*, Vol.1, 62.

<sup>42</sup> Thomas McMurray, *The Free Grants Lands of Canada from Practical Experience of Bush Farming in the Free Grant Districts of Muskoka and Parry Sound* (Bracebridge: Office of the *Northern Advocate*, 1871), 10-11.



one local cottager, “opened the way to the country of waterways.”<sup>43</sup> The road was necessary, but it was not enough.

### Extra-Somatic

In many instances where only muscle power was available, settlers chose to transport themselves and their things by water even where roads were available. At the end of the 1870s, when the twenty-mile trip between Bracebridge and Huntsville still took as long as eight hours by road, the trip by canoe was actually preferable.<sup>44</sup> In 1879, Frederick de la Fosse, a newly arrived settler north of Huntsville, decided he and his companions would float the lumber for their new homes across two lakes and a small stream, rather than cart it overland twenty kilometres.<sup>45</sup> One of the reasons people chose to move between places by water was that it saved time. But this was not true of all routes. What universally appealed to people who chose the lake or river was that it saved effort, or was more comfortable. Yet, canoeing and floating lumber required the right weather. Early settlers recalled being stranded miles from their home with provisions while they waited for a fall storm to pass, or the dangers of near-freezing waters after the spring thaw.<sup>46</sup> Regardless of whether they moved on land or water, somatic modes of transportation limited the flow of material and energy in Muskoka to the work muscles could perform. The introduction of steamboats made moving people and things far less laborious.

What made steamboats so transformative was that they were machines. And as Richard White puts it, “Machines could exert far greater force than human bodies alone could muster.

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<sup>43</sup> D.H.C. Mason, *Muskoka: The First Islanders and After* (Bracebridge: Herald-Gazette Press, 1974), 4.

<sup>44</sup> Tatley, *Steamboat Era, Vol.I*, 95.

<sup>45</sup> De la Fosse, *English Bloods*, 97.

<sup>46</sup> Tatley, *Steamboat Era, Vol.I*, 37.

Machines replaced bodies. Machines overcame nature.<sup>47</sup> By relying on machines - extra-somatic sources of work - people in Muskoka could move far greater quantities of people and things. As we will see in later chapters, steamboats enabled Muskoka's societal metabolism to expand enough that settlers could establish more sustainable social, economic and environmental arrangements than had been possible up to that point.<sup>48</sup> Ironically, bypassing the limitations of somatic modes of transportation required a great deal of muscle power. For starters, major modifications to the watershed were necessary to accommodate steamboat navigation. This entailed, in William Cronon's terms, a replacement of first nature with second nature.<sup>49</sup> Muskoka's First Nations, fur traders, surveyors and earliest settlers conformed to the watershed that geology and hydrology created in Muskoka. Steamboats could not be made to do the same. Therefore, during the 1870s, people designed improvements to the watershed, modified the adjoining landscape and added artifice to bodies of water that natural processes alone had, up until that point, been responsible for shaping. Like the roads, however, built waterways mimicked the natural environment as much as possible. That the waterways existed at all was due to natural processes, and so too was the fuel that powered the steamers. Steamboats in Muskoka operated within the organic economy - fueled exclusively by wood until after the turn of the twentieth century. As Richard White points out, "There was nature in a steam engine's bowels, but it was far less obvious than the stunning nature... that could be seen from the windows of steamboats... . The organic - wind and wood - necessarily supported the

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<sup>47</sup> White, *Organic Machine*, 30.

<sup>48</sup> Water transportation was absolutely essential to settlement on the Shield in the nineteenth century. Where water transportation was available elsewhere on the Shield, such as Georgian Bay or Lake Winnipeg, communities tended to establish more sustainable arrangements, whereas communities with only road access to outside markets struggled to establish similar arrangements. Campbell, *Shaped by the West Wind*, 66; James David Mochoruk, *Formidable Heritage: Manitoba's North and the Cost of Development, 1870 to 1930* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2004), 79-83; Forkey, 75-96.

<sup>49</sup> Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*, 56-57.

mechanical.”<sup>50</sup> Muscle power provided the fuelwood. Thus, as an extra-somatic mode of transportation, the steamboat relied on somatic and organic forms of energy to enable an expansion of Muskoka’s societal metabolism.

Steamboats were not new to North America by the time the *Wenonah* was launched on Lake Muskoka in 1866. Steamboats emerged inland much earlier than they did along the Atlantic coast, where steady wind made water transport between ports more suited to sailboats. West of the Appalachian Mountains, rivers were the main transportation corridors, and sailboats were ill-suited to downstream currents and the lack of wind. The first commercial steamboats in North America operated on the Hudson River in 1807, and settlement in the Ohio and Mississippi River valleys had progressed far enough that steamboats appeared along those rivers just five years later.<sup>51</sup> In 1848, more than 2,800 steamboats arrived in Pittsburgh every year, while over 4,000 arrived in Cincinnati and roughly 3,000 were arriving in St. Louis and New Orleans.<sup>52</sup> North of the border, Upper Canada’s first steamer began plying Lake Ontario between Kingston, York and Niagara in 1816. Throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, steamboats competed with and co-existed alongside sailboats on Lake Ontario. With the majority of passenger, freight and communications carried by water, McCalla argues, the steamboat’s “speed, growing reliability, and relative comfort made it almost at once the main carrier of passengers, mail and higher-value imported goods. It was not just a substitute because its conveniences undoubtedly intensified passenger and mail movement.”<sup>53</sup> The construction of the Rideau and Welland Canals meant steamboats were present on the Ottawa River, and the other Great Lakes, well before mid-

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<sup>50</sup> White, *Organic Machine*, 37-38.

<sup>51</sup> Louis C. Hunter, *Steamboats on the Western Rivers: An Economic and Technological History* (New York: Octagon Books, 1969), 4-5; Ari Kelman, “Forests and Other River Perils” in *Transforming New Orleans and Its Environs: Centuries of Change*, Craig E. Colten, ed. (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000), 45-63.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 644-645, Table 2.

<sup>53</sup> McCalla, *Planting the Province*, 119.

century. In 1849, the government registered 44 steamboats in Upper Canada, although McCalla suspects many owners did not see the benefit of registering, so this number is probably low.<sup>54</sup> West of Muskoka, in Georgian Bay, steamers were introduced in the 1850s when railway connections and the rise of logging provided demand. Once the western grain trade developed in the United States and later the Canadian prairies, Georgian Bay steamers became part of a continental network, and adjusted to accommodate tourism in the later nineteenth century.<sup>55</sup> And as we will see in chapter 7, some of these steamers had ties with Muskoka as well, towing logs that had once grown next to the shores of lakes in Muskoka. Given the popularity and importance of steamboats throughout North America, it is not surprising the first one was introduced in Muskoka less than a decade after the Muskoka Road was built.

Steamboats have become somewhat iconic in Muskoka. Perhaps the most authoritative history of Muskoka is local historian Richard Tatley's two-volume *The Steamboat Era in the Muskokas*. Although some part of the attention steamboats receive in the twenty-first century can be attributed to romantic celebrations of a bygone age, in reality they were prominently involved in every stage of Muskoka's economic and social development. For over sixty years, from the 1860s to the 1920s, they performed the work that moved people and things in Muskoka. From towing logs to sunset cruises, and everything in between, steamboats formed the lifeblood of Muskoka's societal metabolism.

The history of steamboating in Muskoka is closely tied to the life of Alexander Peter Cockburn. The second son of Scottish immigrants who arrived in Upper Canada in 1837, Cockburn was ambitious, enterprising and relatively wealthy. The family settled in Kirkfield,

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 128, also Table 7.1 & 7.2, 283.

<sup>55</sup> Lake Simcoe, the Kawartha Lakes and Rice Lake in Ontario each had about 20 steamers between them by the time Muskoka got its first one. Campbell, *Shaped by the West Wind*, 78.

between Lake Simcoe and the Kawartha Lakes, where Cockburn opened a store in 1863 and became reeve of the township in 1864. When it became apparent the government had delayed indefinitely plans to extend the Trent Canal from the Kawartha Lakes to Lake Simcoe and Georgian Bay, Cockburn looked further north for an opportunity. In September 1865, Cockburn spent three weeks canoeing through Muskoka and Parry Sound Districts. According to first-hand accounts given to Department of Crown Lands employees, Alexander Kirkwood and J.J. Murphy, who visited Muskoka in 1878, Cockburn “was much impressed with the beauty and importance of these lakes.”<sup>56</sup> The three lower lakes, Joseph, Rosseau and Muskoka, were ideal for navigation. After Cockburn wrote a letter to D’Arcy McGee, Minister of Agriculture, in which he proposed to introduce a steamboat on Lake Muskoka if the Crown would effect certain improvements to navigation, the government published a report that promised many of the things Cockburn had requested, including a lock to bypass a set of rapids between Lake Muskoka and Lake Rosseau.<sup>57</sup>

On July 7, 1866, the Toronto *Globe* published an advertisement announcing Cockburn’s new venture in Muskoka:

Cockburn’s Royal Mail Line.  
(Established June 1866.)  
The only expeditious and reliable route between  
Washago, head of Lake Simcoe,  
and  
LAKE ROSSEAU.  
Comfortable stages connect (daily) at Washago, (head of Lake Simcoe  
navigation) running to Gravenhurst, (foot of Muskoka navigation) overland  
(route 14 miles) and on Muskoka Lake (also upon the Indian and Muskoka

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<sup>56</sup> Alexander Kirkwood and J.J. Murphy, *The Undeveloped Land in Northern and Western Ontario: Collected and Compiled from Reports of Surveyors, Crown Land Agents, and Others, with the Sanction of the Honourable the Commissioner of Crown Lands* (Toronto, 1878), 72-73.

<sup>57</sup> Murray. *Muskoka and Haliburton*, 341-342.

Rivers), the fine new side wheel steamer

“WENONAH”

33 HORSEPOWER,

Makes regular trips, calling at Alport, Bracebridge, Indian Village, and intermediate places.

...The Wenonah also connects at the Indian Village, on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, with an open boat which plies upon Lake Rosseau.

The new region now attracting the attention of business men and farmers, and for pleasure-seekers, tourists and sportsmen, it is quite unsurpassed in Upper Canada, the trout fishing is this season (as usual) most excellent.

Charges very moderate...<sup>58</sup>

This advertisement, aimed primarily at potential tourists in Toronto and other parts of southern Ontario, reveals just one aspect of the steamboat’s new potential for Muskoka. In terms of the tourist industry, however, steamer service preceded railway service, and exceeded it in importance. John Armstrong and David M. Williams, writing about the impact of steamboats on tourism in Britain, argue that “...the case of the railway in promoting popular recreational travel, introducing excursions and encouraging resort development has been overemphasised and in some instances wrongly credited with a pioneering role. That role, in fact, was played by the steamboat.”<sup>59</sup> Precisely the same could be said of tourism in Muskoka.

Steamboats also became extraordinarily important to the logging industry and local commerce. Loggers easily floated pine logs down rivers and streams in Muskoka during the spring, but were stalled at lakes where the current all but ceased. To facilitate the extraction of Muskoka’s timber, an extra-somatic mode of transportation was necessary. Cockburn’s steamboat filled this niche. The lakes provided the perfect transportation corridor, and the introduction of a

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<sup>58</sup> Reprinted in Murray, *Muskoka and Haliburton*, 334.

<sup>59</sup> John Armstrong and David M. Williams, “The Steamboat and Popular Tourism” *The Journal of Transport History*, Vol.26, No.1 (2005), 61.

steamboat greatly facilitated social and economic exchange between places in Muskoka that had previously been separated by too many miles of terrible or non-existent roads.

The Muskoka Lakes were certainly large and deep enough for steamers to navigate, but they were not ‘natural’ transportation corridors. As William Cronon has shown in the case of Chicago’s river and harbour, waterways were seldom adequate to nineteenth-century transportation needs without human modification.<sup>60</sup> On the lower Mississippi, Ari Kelman has shown that substantial environmental changes accompanied efforts to introduce steamboat navigation as far as New Orleans. Those committed to making North America’s inland bodies of water work for them refused to accept the “limits that their environment had placed on the ease of river [or lake] transit. Instead, [they] attempted to consolidate gains... by imposing further order on their environment.”<sup>61</sup> Modifying Muskoka’s waterways proved to be a necessary part of introducing an extra-somatic mode of transportation to Muskoka as well. The lower Muskoka lakes (Joseph, Rosseau and Muskoka) are large bodies of water that rest as basins on a plateau of the Precambrian Shield, interrupting but not preventing the flow of water from the Algonquin highlands to Georgian Bay. Unlike rivers, however, the Muskoka lakes present very few obstacles to navigation. The most imposing obstacles exist where the water encounters a gradient change in the underlying rock, the work of millions of years of erosion. On a lake, gradient changes form rapids or waterfalls. Above the rapids or falls is a lake, below is a river. In Muskoka, the three lower lakes on which Cockburn decided to commence his steamer service were connected by two rivers, a set of rapids and a set of falls. Unlike somatic modes of transportation, which were obliged to conform to the energy realities of natural obstacles,

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<sup>60</sup> Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis*, 56.

<sup>61</sup> Kelman, “Forests and Other River Perils,” 55

steamboats obliged humans to transform features of the local environment to conform with the energy realities of the steamboats. In order for the lower lakes to be inter-navigable, Cockburn brokered efforts to replace the rapids and falls with dredged canals and locks.

In December 1868, three years after his letter to D'Arcy McGee, Cockburn organized a petition from residents in three townships to remind the new provincial government about the need for improvements in Muskoka. Couched in terms of the potential for settlement, the petition insisted that "...Inland navigation... is so constituted by nature that... with a little government aid [a lock between Lake Rosseau and Lake Muskoka] will supply a high way for 7 months of the year, for Transportation of freight and passengers... ." In addition to the lock, the petition also requested "the removal of certain obstructions in the River between Lakes Muskoka and Rosseau... ." <sup>62</sup> Within a year of the petition, the government commissioned both projects. On May 27, 1869, the Ontario Department of Public Works signed a contract with John Ginty of Toronto to effectively bypass the Baisong Rapids by excavating a channel across a narrow section of land separating the Rosseau and Muskoka sides of the Indian River, and to build a lock to negotiate the difference in water levels. The lock was specified at 133 feet long and 33 feet wide. The job was to be completed by June 1, 1870, but was not actually finished until November 1871, shortly before the ice formed. <sup>63</sup> At the same time, the government contracted William Whiteside of Toronto to dredge the bottom of the Indian River below the rapids to make it suitable for steamboat navigation.

The construction of the locks proved to be as important symbolically as it was practically.

At the time Eurocanadian settlement began in Muskoka, the site of the proposed locks was

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<sup>62</sup> Quoted in Tatley, *Steamboat Era, Vol.I, 57.*

<sup>63</sup> "Contract between Department of Public Works and John Ginty for a lock between Lakes Muskoka and Rousseau," AO, RG 15-55-1, Vol.1, file 10.



occupied by a year-round Anishinaabeg village called Obajawanung.<sup>64</sup> Referred to as ‘Indian Gardens’ or ‘Indian Village’ by surveyors and early settlers, according to an early report from the 1860s, Obajawanung “consisted of some 20 log huts, beautifully situated on the Indian River and Silver Lake with a good deal of cleared land about it used as garden plots, and the Indians grew potatoes, Indian corn, and other vegetable products.”<sup>65</sup> Obajawanung was important because the Baisong Rapids were the hub of the lakes, a place of comings and goings where people and fish passed on their way up- and down-stream. The site was symbolically and unceremoniously transformed in 1868 when the postmaster of the budding white settler community next to the rapids decided to name the village after the Member of Provincial Parliament for London, Ontario, John Carling, who happened to be in the area on a fishing trip.<sup>66</sup> More practically, the same features that made it attractive to Muskoka’s First Nations also made it attractive to Cockburn. But if his steamer service was to navigate all three lower lakes, the Baisong Rapids would have to be bypassed. To do so meant modifying the way humans interacted with the rapids as well as physically transforming the local environment itself.

Prior to the locks, travellers between Lake Rosseau and Lake Muskoka portaged a narrow strip of land next to the rapids. In 1869, when Cockburn introduced his second steamer, *Waubamic*, a team of men took several days to warp the boat up the rapids so it could work Lake Rosseau. Transferring people and goods proved laborious and time-consuming. Several delays during construction of the lock, however, reveal the human labour and time involved in modifying the landscape to suit an extra-somatic mode of transportation. Built almost entirely

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<sup>64</sup> Historically, the region’s Algonquian-speaking peoples did not stay in Muskoka year-round. The reason for this particular community’s decision to establish a permanent village at this site has to do with changing colonial relationships and internal Anishinaabeg politics.

<sup>65</sup> Murray, *Muskoka and Haliburton*, 125-126.

<sup>66</sup> Tatley, *Steamboat Era*, Vol.I, 57.

with hand tools, “the lock,” one traveler remarked, “has evidently been a difficult bit of excavating, and Irish muscle and Irish dynamite have been put to legitimate and laudable use... .”<sup>67</sup> Whether the Irish who laboured on it, or the First Nations who were displaced by it, would have agreed is doubtful.

The locks at Port Carling made Lake Rosseau and Lake Muskoka inter-navigable, but to interconnect all three of the lower lakes, Lake Rosseau and Lake Joseph also had to be inter-navigable. In 1870, Lake Joseph emptied into Lake Rosseau via the Joseph River. Unlike the Indian River, however, the Joseph River had only a slight set of rapids, a product of the two lakes being very close to the same water level. The Joseph River was too long and narrow to justify a canal at this natural outlet. Instead, the government chose to excavate a channel at the Sandy Portage near the south end of both lakes. George Blain of Malton, Ontario was commissioned on February 5, 1870 to build a sixty-foot wide cut through the narrow isthmus of land separating the lakes. As with the Indian River, the cut was to be dredged to five feet below the low water mark, and was to be completed by the summer of 1870. Delays prevented the channel from opening to steamer traffic until July 1872, after which time the community renamed the site Port Sandfield, in honour of the Minister of Public Works at the time, John Sandfield MacDonald. Rather than emptying into Lake Rosseau through the Joseph River alone, Lake Joseph now had two outlets, one natural, the other artificial.

One last adjustment to the lower lakes was necessary before Cockburn’s steamers could reliably service society in Muskoka. By this time, Cockburn had added a third steamer,

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<sup>67</sup> G. Mercer Adam, “Georgian Bay and the Muskoka Lakes” *Picturesque Spots of the North: Historical and Descriptive Sketches of the Scenery and Life in the Vicinity of Georgian Bay, the Muskoka Lakes, the Upper Lakes, in Central and Eastern Ontario, and the Niagara District*, George Munro Grant, ed. (Chicago: Alexander Belford & Co., 1899), 47.

*Nipissing*, to his fleet. But navigation was still hampered by the unregulated nature of Lake Muskoka's water levels. There were no charts of the lakes available to captains in the late 1860s and early 1870s, but they would not have been useful for the entire navigation season as the water level could drop as much as nine feet between the spring and fall. Manoeuvring shoals and rocks could result in damage to steamers, but the greatest danger from the unregulated waters existed where Lake Muskoka poured over the falls at Bala. Arriving in Bala Bay before any efforts to regulate water levels had been made (and likely for the first time), the crew of the *Wenonah* entered into a contest between the energy of the falls and that of the boat's steam engine. As Richard Tatley tells the story,

...suddenly the men realized that she [the *Wenonah*] was caught in the current, and being relentlessly dragged towards the Musquash [Bala] Falls and certain destruction. Springing into action, they started ramming as much wood as they could into the firebox to generate more steam and set her paddlewheels churning in the opposite direction, just as fast as they could go. The steamer slowed down and sluggishly began to move the other way... For an agonizing half-hour or so it was a desperate struggle, but gradually the steamer managed to creep away from the cataract...<sup>68</sup>

The water level on the lake remained unregulated until November 1874 when a dam was built at Bala Falls. While this created consistent water levels, initially it kept water levels too high, resulting in floods during 1875 and 1876. Consequently, blasting and dredging created a second

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<sup>68</sup> Tatley, *Steamboat Era*, Vol.I, 50-51.

outlet slightly south of the original falls, which was also dammed.<sup>69</sup> Together the North and South Bala Falls were controlled to maintain a constant depth of water on Lake Muskoka.<sup>70</sup>

These modifications to the region's watershed opened the lower lakes entirely to an extra-somatic mode of transportation, which enabled an immediate and wide-ranging expansion of Muskoka's societal metabolism. Logging in Muskoka progressed only as far as Lake Muskoka until the late 1860s, when the *Wenonah* was launched. After 1866, the *Wenonah* towed booms of logs from around the lake to Bala Falls where they were sent to Georgian Bay. After the locks were built at Port Carling, steamers could perform the same function on Lake Joseph and Lake Rosseau. It cannot be a coincidence that timber licenses for Muskoka were auctioned off in November 1871, the same month the locks at Port Carling were completed. With Cockburn's steamers running on all three lakes, logging companies could easily and quickly transport logs. By the 1880s, several sawmills operated their own tug steamers to tow log booms. Throughout the late nineteenth century, the Muskoka River below the falls at Bracebridge was so tightly plugged with logs each spring and early summer that steamers had trouble navigating the river.

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 68

<sup>70</sup> As Member of Parliament for Muskoka, Cockburn had a great deal of success lobbying for these public works projects, but he did not always get everything he wanted. In October 1884, Cockburn wrote to the Ministry of Canals and Railways to propose a canal between Muskoka Bay on Lake Muskoka and the Leg Lakes to the south. This cut, if completed, would have made Lake Muskoka inter-navigable with the Severn River and the Great Lakes. Although there is no indication that any survey was carried out, the proposal came at a time when there was renewed expectation that the Trent-Severn Waterway would be completed. As such, this proposal must be seen as an attempt by Cockburn to anticipate the route immediately south of Muskoka that would connect the Bay of Quinte and Georgian Bay, and in turn extend the reach of his enterprise. Connections to both Georgian Bay and Lake Ontario via the Trent Valley would have greatly expanded the potential of his steamship company. However, had this scheme been successful, the isolated Muskoka Lakes would have been open to aquatic plant and animal transfers with the Severn River and Georgian Bay system, which had only ever shared species of fish, such as trout and pickerel. But, the proposal appears to have been abandoned by the end of the decade, as efforts to connect the Trent system to the Severn River stalled. Instead, the railway continued to be the predominate means of traveling to and from Muskoka. Consequently, the Muskoka Lakes waterways remained relatively self-contained. "Muskoka Lake Canal – Proposed canal to supply water to Trent Severn System, 1884-87," LAC, RG43, Vol.1290 Pt.1, file no 262; James T. Angus, *A Respectable Ditch: A History of the Trent-Severn Waterway, 1833-1920* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1988), 162-166, 181-182.

The flow of material and energy created by the logging industry had become so great as a result of the work steamboats could perform that the river itself could accommodate little else.

Another industry that took off once steamboats could inter-navigate the lower lakes was tourism. Historian Patricia Jasen has shown that during the second half of the nineteenth century, tourism was becoming popular in many places in Ontario, including Muskoka.<sup>71</sup> The first tourists in Muskoka were two University of Toronto students, James Bain and John Campbell, who ventured north in the summer of 1860. They continued to come each summer bringing more of their friends with them, and calling themselves ‘The Muskoka Club’. A descendant of one of the club’s original members and the group’s biographer, D.H.C. Mason, drew connections between the expansion of the group’s activities and the introduction of steamer service in Muskoka. The first women to join the club, for example, arrived in 1866, the same year as the launch of the *Wenonah* (no doubt taking up Cockburn’s advertised offer to carry pleasure-seekers and tourists), and in 1872, the same year the cut at Port Sandfield was opened, club members purchased several islands where the group camped on Lake Joseph.<sup>72</sup>

In terms of tourism, however, steamers provided much greater opportunities for businessmen interested in hotels than for groups like the Muskoka Club who took many years to evolve into cottagers. In 1869, William Pratt of New York visited Muskoka to ascertain the possibility of establishing what Richard Tatley calls “a first-class hotel with all the comforts of home, set in the middle of nowhere!”<sup>73</sup> The following year, Pratt built the Rosseau House at the north end of Lake Rosseau. Around the same time, A.P. Cockburn hosted Hamilton Fraser from

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<sup>71</sup> Patricia Jasen, *Wild Things: Nature, Culture, and Tourism in Ontario, 1790-1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 116-126.

<sup>72</sup> Mason, *First Islanders*, 25-28.

<sup>73</sup> Tatley, *Steamboat Era, Vol. I*, 63.

Brampton, Ontario. Cockburn took Hamilton to the top of Lake Joseph, where Hamilton built the Summit House in 1872. Opening within months of the improvements to navigation, these first hotels can be seen as microcosms of Muskoka's societal metabolism more generally. Tourism became the most important component of Muskoka's economy as the number of hotels rose from two in 1872 to seventy-six by the first decade of the twentieth century.<sup>74</sup> Hotels attracted people to Muskoka, and steamers brought them in.

In addition to the work performed in service of the logging and tourism industries, steamers also provided a variety of tangible social and economic benefits for settlers by directly altering the nature of exchange in Muskoka. In 1879, W.E. Hamilton's *Guide Book and Atlas of Muskoka and Parry Sound Districts* described the measurable economic benefits that had accrued since the introduction of steamers. Freight rates per hundredweight dropped significantly after the introduction of the *Wenonah* from \$0.75-\$1.00 to just \$0.40, while the price of salt had fallen from \$4.00 a barrel to \$1.35, and a keg of nails went from \$7.00 to \$3.50.<sup>75</sup> In the early days, the *Wenonah* carried nearly anything settlers could need: "lumber, cement, lime, bricks, tools, machinery, grain, groceries, dry goods, furniture, fodder, even livestock."<sup>76</sup> By connecting lakeside residents and redistributing the produce of local farms, supply boat steamers enabled vital social and economic relationships between people and with environments across the lake that otherwise would not have existed. As we will see in chapter 5, supply boats privileged the flow of local energy and material, while also providing greater access to exogenous inputs.

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 232.

<sup>75</sup> W.E. Hamilton, *Guide Book and Atlas of Muskoka and Parry Sound Districts*, maps by John Rogers, sketches by Seymour Penson, 2nd offset ed. (Port Elgin, ON: Richard, Bond & Wright, 1972), 22, 25.

<sup>76</sup> Tatley, *Steamboat Era, Vol.I*, 46.

Steamers also enabled people from opposite ends of the lakes to visit one another. Although tickets aboard one of Cockburn's stately steamers remained relatively expensive throughout the late nineteenth century, smaller tugs and launches provided more moderately priced alternatives. Cockburn's steamers assumed the title of Royal Mail Ships soon after they were launched. After 1875, when the railway was extended to Gravenhurst, mail was delivered by steamer at least three times a week, up from once a week when stagecoaches delivered the mail. At some point before the turn of the century, steamers delivered the mail daily, and after 1900 mail arrived three times a day. The smooth integration of railway and steamboat transportation, and the steady addition of post offices around Muskoka before 1900, enabled postal communications to become what Brian Osborne and Robert Pike call an "amenity of everyday life."<sup>77</sup>

Over time, maps of the steamer corridors on the lakes became dotted with nodes representing wharves next to villages, resorts and cottages. Muskoka's societal metabolism expanded where the steamers docked at the nuclei of emerging villages, such as Gravenhurst, Bracebridge, Bala, Port Carling, Windermere, Rosseau, Port Sandfield and Port Cockburn. Where steamers did not call, the flow of material and energy stagnated and in some villages disappeared.<sup>78</sup> Some places, such as Craigie Lea on Lake Joseph, were simply not on the steamer route. Mabel Croucher Ames, daughter of a first generation pioneer at Craigie Lea remembered feeling "very lonely" and "stranded" during her first year of marriage with no steamer service.

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<sup>77</sup> Brian Osborne and Robert Pike, "Lowering 'the Walls of Oblivion': The Revolution in Postal Communications in Central Canada, 1851-1911," *Canadian Papers in Rural History, Vol. IV*, Donald H. Akenson, ed. (Gananoque, ON: Langdale Press, 1984), 200-225; Tatley, *Steamboat Era, Vol. I*, 46; Adam, *Georgian Bay and the Muskoka Lakes*, 36; Brendan O'Brien, *The Prettiest Spot in Muskoka*, (Toronto: Bobolink Books, 1999), 76.

<sup>78</sup> The village of Dee Bank experienced this effect. Dee Bank was located slightly upriver from Lake Rosseau on the Dee River where Cockburn's steamers could not reach. Steamers opted to stop just south at Windermere instead. Consequently, the latter became an important resort destination, while the former dwindled into obscurity.

There was “no way for me to get [anywhere],” Ames recalled. “If we went anywhere we had to walk, row, or hitch up the horses.”<sup>79</sup> People who lived back from the water experienced lonely feelings even more strongly. And during the winter when the ice came in there was no steamer service, but the frozen lakes were still busy with sleighs as people took advantage of more direct routes across the lakes to travel.

Steamers took the pressure off regional roads, but did not replace them. They remained vitally important. Where and when steamers could not go, roads made the connections. Yet, all roads in Muskoka eventually ended at a wharf - a node between land and water - where the flow of material and energy encountered less resistance. Whereas the roads continued to provide necessity and flexibility, waterways presented capacity and reliability. In fact, apart from the capacity to transport enormous quantities of people and things, a steamer’s most important attribute was its ability to run to schedule. In 1877, Cockburn’s two passenger steamers ran 12-15 hours per day in order to provide service to all three lower lakes.<sup>80</sup> In 1883, the Muskoka and Nipissing Navigation Company (the name of Cockburn’s newly incorporated steamboat line) ran one boat on each of the three lower lakes, connecting with the train at Gravenhurst.<sup>81</sup> In 1886, the extension of the railway to Bracebridge meant less steamer service was required between Gravenhurst and Bracebridge. In 1893, the Navigation Company (briefly renamed the Muskoka and Georgian Bay Navigation Company before being shortened to just the Muskoka Navigation Company after its venture in Georgian Bay failed) ran one boat on Lake Joseph, one on Lake Rosseau, a third on both Lake Joseph and Lake Rosseau, and a fourth small steamer that

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<sup>79</sup> “Memoirs of Mabel Croucher Ames, 1884-1977,” oral memoirs originally shared with and transcribed by Vera Gross Ames, 1975, presented to Bill Gray by Lynda McClelland Stringer, June 10, 2006, Muskoka Lakes Museum Archives, Port Carling, Ontario, 17-18.

<sup>80</sup> Tatley, *Steamboat Era*, Vol.I, 78.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.



ran between Gravenhurst and Bracebridge.<sup>82</sup> So ubiquitous were the Navigation Company steamers, and so reliable were their schedules, that people in Muskoka perceived their functions in much the same way they did the sun and the moon, as clockwork.

As we have seen, somatic modes of transportation were not expected to keep tight schedules. The duration of the same trips by canoe or by road could vary widely depending on environmental conditions. Steamers kept to schedule for one important reason: their engines converted the sun's energy stored as wood into steam. Throughout the nineteenth century, steamboat engines in Muskoka were fueled exclusively by cordwood taken from the townships that bordered the lower lakes. The Navigation Company purchased cordwood from a variety of places around the lakes and arranged to have it stacked next to the shore for fueling up. F.W. Coate, a retired auction house owner *cum* gentleman farmer took up several hundred acres near the north end of Lake Rosseau. In 1883, he sold 125 cords of fuelwood to the Navigation Company, and did so again in 1886, 1888, 1889 and 1893.<sup>83</sup> The Navigation Company purchased thousands of cords from settlers each year in this way. Judging from the company's year-end balance sheets, the most the Company ever consumed in a year was approximately 6,500 cords of wood for nine steamers in 1906.<sup>84</sup> Steamers moved beyond the limitations of somatic modes of transportation, but not the need for muscles, or a reliance on the organic economy. Humans cut down and chopped up trees into cordwood, stacked it in the hold of the ship, and finally loaded the logs into the furnace. The engine did the rest. The perception that steamers ran like clockwork, showing up when they were expected to and delivering passengers in time to meet

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<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>83</sup> "Diary of F.W. Coate, January-June 1883, October 1886, November 1888, March 1889, January 1893," AO, Frederick W. Coate family fonds, F720.

<sup>84</sup> Both soft- and hardwood. "Navigation Company balance sheets, 1906," Archives of Muskoka Steamship and Historical Society, Royal Muskoka #4 File, Accounting Data, drawer FC 1a, Muskoka Boat and Heritage Centre, Gravenhurst, Ontario.

departing trains, obscured an enormous amount of work - the conversion of calories by settlers' muscles and the combustion of wood in engines.

The Progressive Era of the late nineteenth century was characterized by the idea that through proper management and a thorough understanding of the natural world, humans could control and maximize the efficiency of every aspect of their lives. The problem, of course, was that much of the natural world does not conform entirely to this idea. Too much variability exists in ecosystem processes. As we saw above, however, modifications to the lakes had removed the most disruptive features for navigation. Weather and climate still forced adjustments during storms and through the winter, but the greatest frustrations came from those disruptions that emphasized the agency of both humans and the natural world. Logging operations were always the most common cause of this frustration. On April 26, 1889, the Secretary of the Post Office Department wrote to the Deputy Minister of Justice to complain on behalf of the Municipal Council of Bracebridge that “owing to the obstruction of the main channel of Muskoka River by lumber booms, the steamer carrying the mails to and from Bracebridge cannot reach that point, asking whether there is a legal remedy for that state of affairs, which is the source of much inconvenience to the residents of that town.”<sup>85</sup> Throughout the 1880s and 1890s, local governments and the Navigation Company tried repeatedly to have logging companies keep waterways open for steamers, but to no avail. Occasionally, steamboat captains would take matters into their own hands by ramming logs in an effort to break a path, but this often resulted in nothing more than damage to the boat. The federal government affirmed the legal obligation of the logging companies not to obstruct navigable waters, and threatened to enforce the law, but

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<sup>85</sup> “Post Office Department – Obstruction of the Muskoka River by booms preventing the passage of mails, 1889,” LAC, RG13, Vol. 73, file 1889-477.

logging companies were never penalized. Logs continued to block the Muskoka River each spring until logging declined in Muskoka after the turn of the century.<sup>86</sup>

Some disruptions to the Navigation Company were more alarming than they were frustrating. The average passenger had no idea how a steamboat functioned. Richard White argues that around this time the average person in North America had come to accept a situation in which “the machine had alienated human labor from nature.”<sup>87</sup> All the moving parts, gauges, wood and fire were kept below decks away from the paying customer. Yet, steamers were piloted by human beings, not automated. Thus, human error had much to do with the reliability and safety the average passenger associated so closely with the steamboat. Steamboat captains acquired a vast compendium of knowledge about the lakes’ shores, shoals, water depths and currents. The safe functioning of the steamboat was as much a product of this accumulated expertise as it was of the engineered technology and modified waterways. Largely ignorant of these realities, passengers happily boarded Navigation Company steamers expecting everything to run like clockwork.

On August 11, 1908, passengers were reminded that steamers were largely human artifice operated by fallible humans. On this day, the *Kenozha*, which had approximately 60-75 passengers aboard, and the *Sagamo*, which had about 100, were both leaving Beaumaris on Lake Muskoka at the same time. Normally, the captains of both ships could arrange this relatively synchronously. In this instance, the *Kenozha*, which had left the dock first and had backed up a couple of hundred feet, was in the process of turning to starboard when it rammed nose-first into

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<sup>86</sup> As we will see in a later chapter, a great deal of the frustration in this matter stemmed from the fact that logging companies and the government had a mutual interest in large-scale logging operations. H.V. Nelles, *The Politics of Development: Forests, Mines & Hydro-electric Power in Ontario, 1849-1941*, 2nd ed. (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2005), 18.

<sup>87</sup> White *Organic Machine*, 37-38.

the stern of the *Sagamo*, which had begun reversing away from the dock. As it turned out, the first mate piloted the *Kenozha* at the time of the accident, and according to most witnesses, was severely intoxicated. The formal investigation into the accident, conducted at Gravenhurst in September 1908 by Commander O.G.V. Spain, Wreck Commissioner of Canada, concluded that James Ariss had been drunk for most of the afternoon. In fact, earlier in the day, just south of Rosseau, Ariss had also been at the helm when the steamer struck bottom approaching a different wharf. One of the passengers, A.P. Walker, wrote to the Navigation Company regarding the incident, stating that Ariss was “in such a state of intoxication that I was afraid he would fall over the railing into the water...” Upon witnessing the condition of the mate, Walker insisted on transferring to a new boat, but was assured of passenger safety when the captain took control of the vessel after the morning incident. In the afternoon, it appears the first mate was once again behind the wheel. After the accident at Beaumaris, Walker “refused to go on board again, as I did not consider the boat seaworthy.” Revealing the impression left with his family, Walker made clear “no amount of money would tempt me to take such a chance again.”<sup>88</sup> The failure of the steamer to run predictably alarmed this particular passenger so much that he refused to depend on it any further. Steamers were predictable because humans had made them such. When humans were unpredictable, so too were the steamers.

Steamers enabled an expansion of Muskoka’s societal metabolism, and in the process became a ‘natural’ component of the flow of material and energy in the region. Settlers and tourists, loggers and businessmen, all accepted the role of steamboats in shaping the social, economic and environmental realities in Muskoka. Unlike the somatic modes of transportation

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<sup>88</sup> “Investigation into the collision of the *Sagamo* and *Kenozha* at Lake Muskoka, 1908-09,” LAC, RG42, file no. 29224.

that preceded and co-existed with steamers in Muskoka, these extra-somatic modes of transportation necessitated modifications to the watershed and landscape rather than conformity with them. This was the only way energy from burning wood could exceed the energy of muscles in Muskoka. Ultimately though, steamboats were embedded within an organic economy. Not only did their functioning rely on the same buoyant force of water and accumulated operator expertise that canoes did, but steamboats were fuelled by the potential energy contained in the cellulose fibres of the trees that grew in Muskoka. Without the work done by steamboats in moving people and things from one place to another, Muskoka's societal metabolism could not have expanded to enable more sustainable social, economic and environmental arrangements.

### Conclusion

For hundreds of years, human muscles accounted for the flow of material and energy within Muskoka's societal metabolism. This metabolic reality played an important role in shaping the social, economic and environmental lives of the region's First Nations. After 1850, somatic modes of transportation continued to dominate transportation options in Muskoka, but along with Eurocanadian settlement came ungulate modes of transportation that could perform much more work than humans. The introduction of the *Wenonah* to Lake Muskoka in 1866 inaugurated an era of transportation fuelled by extra-somatic sources of energy. These three modes of transportation overlapped and co-existed as people pursued the most appropriate method of satisfying their mobility needs. By the 1860s, those needs involved economic exchange and material inputs from outside the region. In order for Muskoka's struggling agricultural society to survive, the flow of material and energy into, through, and out of Muskoka had to expand. Enabling Muskoka's societal metabolism to expand, however, required a

thorough reorganization and modification of the local environment into higher capacity transportation corridors. Initially, those changes were subtle and mimicked the natural features of the surrounding landscape. Muskoka's earliest roads followed topography as much as possible, but even new materials and sturdier surfaces could not overcome the bottleneck created by entirely somatic modes of transportation. Within Muskoka, steamboats overcame these limitations by using wood as an extra-somatic fuel to perform the work people and horses could not. Here too, the environment was altered to suit human purposes. Ultimately, even engines consuming organic fuels were intimately linked to the work done by people and animals who chopped, stacked and stoked. In this way, all three modes of transportation were linked to the organic economy, since all three relied on renewable energy from living plants and animals. Organic modes of transportation placed limits on Muskoka's societal metabolism, which shaped social and economic development. In some cases, the changes that resulted contributed to more sustainable arrangements, and in other cases less sustainable ones. After, 1900 many of the limitations imposed by an organic economy were overcome when mineral modes of transportation became widespread.

*Chapter 2: Muskoka's Mineral Modes of Transportation*

If a man travels to work on a horse for twenty years and then an automobile is invented and he travels in it, the effect is both an acceleration and a slowing. In an unmistakable way the new journey is faster, and the man's sense of it is as such. But that very acceleration transforms his former means of traveling into something it had never been – slow – whereas before it was the fastest way to go. Suddenly his old horse has become obsolete... So, in the larger world, the impact of ...the accelerating technology was at least twofold – it speeded up the tempo of current existence and transformed the memory of years past, the stuff of everybody's identity, into something slow.

Stephen Kern (1983), *The Culture of Time and Space*<sup>1</sup>

Technologies powered by fossil fuels helped overcome the limitations imposed on Muskoka's societal metabolism by organic modes of transportation during the late nineteenth century. Muskoka's societal metabolism continued to expand as new technologies and fuels removed the limitations of the flow of material and energy into, through and out of Muskoka. In some cases, the expansion of Muskoka's societal metabolism enabled more sustainable social, economic and environmental arrangements, and in other cases it facilitated the conditions for less sustainable ones. Fueled by coal, the arrival of the train in 1875 alleviated the bottleneck of somatic transportation along the Muskoka Road. Muskoka was always dependent on inputs from outside the region, and the railway immediately enabled a movement of people and things into and out of Muskoka adequate to the reproduction and maintenance of more sustainable social relationships, patterns of economic exchange and environmental conditions. After the turn of the twentieth century, however, the capacity of the rail network expanded to the point where the imperatives of the system demanded a less sustainable flow of material and energy into and out of Muskoka. Within Muskoka, the introduction of coal-fired steamers and gasoline-fueled

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880-1918*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1983), 129.

internal combustion engines overcame the limitations of local circulation imposed by the steamboat's organic economy. By providing greater personal mobility, automobiles and motorboats also enabled less sustainable social, economic and environmental arrangements.

A reliance on non-renewable fuels with a much higher energy-density distinguished mineral modes of transportation from organic modes of transportation. Rather than coming from plants and animals, the energy which powered these new modes of transportation came from underground in the form of fossil fuels. Fossil fuels changed the way people and things moved into and out of Muskoka, as well as the way they moved through Muskoka. In almost all cases, mineral modes of transportation dominated, and in many instances undermined, organic modes of transportation. Moreover, the various ways that personal mobility challenged mass transportation in Muskoka also had significant impacts on the relationship between sustainability and fossil fuels. The uses to which people put these new technologies and fuels, not the technologies and fuels themselves, shaped sustainability. As Stephen Kern argues in the passage at the opening of this chapter, fossil fuels shaped the way people thought about mobility. But they also shaped how people engaged with their community, the local economy and environments of energy production. Thus this chapter is divided into sections on mass transportation (railways and steamboats) and personal mobility (automobiles and motorboats). Mass transportation refers to the railway and steamboat networks developed to move large amounts of people and things long distances at regular schedules. Personal mobility privileged the individual by offering more flexible transportation options. The adoption of the internal combustion engine in automobiles and motorboats enabled people to make trips with less effort and planning than was necessary by mass transportation.



In one very important way, the arrival of each of these new modes of transportation continued the trend started by steamboats in Muskoka: the work they performed was extra-somatic. Yet, integration with the mineral economy meant coal-fired trains and steamers, and gasoline-powered automobiles and motorboats had novel impacts on the way material and energy flows shaped social, economic and environmental arrangements. These new modes of transportation enabled less sustainable arrangements to occupy a larger share of Muskoka's societal metabolism as it expanded. Railways used such a large amount of energy and modified the landscape to such an extent that the movements of trains took priority over many other aspects of Muskoka's societal metabolism. Cars encountered more troubles than horse-drawn wagons on Muskoka's roads, and motorboats reconceptualized mobility in Muskoka. New patterns of consumption were made possible in the process of establishing these mineral modes of transportation, and Muskoka became part of an extended network of non-renewable commodity flows that made concentrated usable energy available to move people and things into, through and out of Muskoka. This transformation was incomplete by the 1920s, but the trends were very well established.

### Mass Transportation

#### *Railways*

Steamboats alleviated many of the constraints on the flow of material and energy in Muskoka, but could do nothing to bypass the bottleneck of the Muskoka Road between Washago and Gravenhurst. Even after 1866, when A.P. Cockburn launched the area's first steamer, Muskoka's societal metabolism expanded only as quickly as somatic modes of transportation could move people and things into and out of the region. Permanent sedentary settlement in

Muskoka relied heavily on exogenous inputs. Steamers on the lakes enabled communities to redistribute the services and resources available in Muskoka, but the road that connected the region to southern Ontario and beyond was inadequate. Like most frontier/hinterland communities across North America, Muskoka needed a railway to properly connect it with the outside world.

The railway overcame the limitations of the road in two fundamental ways. First, more so than any other mode of transportation that existed at the time, railways replaced natural systems with anthropogenic systems. In other words, the people who built railways more fully overlaid first nature with second nature, and in the process mimicked very little from the natural world. And, second, coal made it possible for railway locomotives to move large quantities of people and things very quickly across great distances, thereby altering people's perceptions of time and space. As William Cronon has shown in the case of the growth of Chicago, railways routed through the city enabled a greater flow of material and energy between western resource hinterlands and eastern manufacturing centres. The ability to send bulk commodities east and finished consumer goods west much more quickly and with much less effort than had hitherto been possible, enabled a dramatic reorganization and expansion of the American economy.<sup>2</sup> In order to perform this warp of time and space, trains had to appear to be, as Wolfgang Schivelbusch explains it, "independent of outward nature and capable of prevailing against it - as artificial energy in opposition to natural forms... . Motion was no longer dependent on the conditions of natural space, but on a mechanical power that created its own new spatiality."<sup>3</sup>

Accomplishing this reconceptualization of time and space had much to do with the transition

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<sup>2</sup> William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991), 55-93.

<sup>3</sup> Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: the Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19th Century*, trans. Geschichte der Eisenbahnreise (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 9-10.

from an organic to a mineral economy as railways switched fuel from wood to coal.<sup>4</sup> Yet, like all the things humans create and build, railways and trains were a blend of artifice and the natural world, which when combined produced what John Stilgoe calls a “trackside ecosystem.”<sup>5</sup> To create the conditions in which the mechanical energy of trains could overcome natural space, humans had to transform stretches of the landscape into a homogenized transportation corridor, the ‘metropolitan corridor.’ Unlike roads and waterways, which were more idiosyncratic and easily known to those who traveled on them, the railway was a ‘mystification’, uniformly disconnected physically and psychologically from the surrounding environment.<sup>6</sup> According to Stilgoe’s description, crossing the railway at ninety-degrees to the tracks was largely an alien experience:

First the trespasser climbed over or wiggled through a fence, then walked several yards through weeds before encountering a drainage ditch often filled with standing water... Next he jumped the ditch and scrambled up the gravel sub-ballast onto the even higher crushed granite ballast on which lay ties and rails. To continue in a straight line meant encountering the same obstacles in reverse order. To proceed was to walk over a dry, almost level surface paved with wooden ties nine inches wide placed nine inches apart – exactly the wrong distance for comfortable adult walking.<sup>7</sup>

To replace first nature with second nature so thoroughly demanded a huge capital investment characterized by what Stilgoe calls “the power of the new, expert builder, the engineer, the architect, the landscape architect,” and which “announced modernity, planning, and systems

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<sup>4</sup> E.A. Wrigley, *Continuity, Chance and Change: the Character of the Industrial Revolution in England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 7-33.

<sup>5</sup> John Stilgoe, *Metropolitan Corridor: Railroads and the American Scene*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 137-139; Leo Marx describes the effect new industrial technologies like the railway had on American perceptions of the pastoral ideal and humanity’s place in the natural world during the nineteenth century. Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967).

<sup>6</sup> Stilgoe, *Metropolitan Corridor*, 15, 137-139.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

engineering.”<sup>8</sup> Remaking the landscape into an ordered and controlled metropolitan corridor capable of carrying enormous weights at high speeds required a *transformation* of the landscape, not just modifications.

As Cronon puts it, “the iron horse molded topography to suit its particular demands.”<sup>9</sup> And it did so just as thoroughly in Canada as it did in the United States. The Canadian Pacific Railway - built between 1881-1885 as part of the Conservative government’s National Policy - effectively linked the Dominion together. Ontario’s history with railways, however, began earlier. The first plans to build railways in what is now Ontario were stalled first by the Upper Canada Rebellion in 1837-38 and then a collapse in British investment stocks before mid-century.<sup>10</sup> Between 1852 and 1859, more than 1,400 miles of tracks were laid in Upper Canada. The three largest railways in 1860 were the Grand Trunk, the Great Western and the Buffalo & Lake Huron. Fourth largest, with 95 miles of track laid between Toronto and Midland, Ontario, was the Northern Railway.<sup>11</sup> Originally conceived as the Toronto, Sarnia & Lake Huron, and later the Ontario, Simcoe & Lake Huron, the Northern Railway was built between 1852 and 1853 with the intention of acting as a through route for traffic from Georgian Bay to Lake Ontario.<sup>12</sup> By 1870 the Northern was generating considerable revenue, mainly through lumber and fish shipments, and passenger service. The impact the addition of the Northern had on the regional economy is perfectly summarized by Claire Campbell:

The arrival of the railway on Georgian Bay marked a turning point in the history of the Great Lakes. It transformed the scale of all other industries and catapulted shipping, timber, fishing, and tourism to a new intensity. In particular, fish and

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>9</sup> Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis*, 78.

<sup>10</sup> Douglas McCalla, *Planting the Province: the Economic History of Upper Canada, 1784-1870* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 200.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 311.

<sup>12</sup> A.W. Currie, *The Grand Trunk Railway of Canada*, (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1957), 260-280.

lumber could now be sent in vast quantities to southern markets, a powerful incentive for accelerated harvesting. Railways also built a landscape that endures as one of the most visible legacies of the industrial age... they could be a destructive force, as sparks from engines lit forest fires... they introduced people to a formerly remote area in unprecedented numbers. The very technology that exported natural resources and symbolized the Victorian veneration of progress was soon importing wilderness seekers... .”<sup>13</sup>

Between Confederation and the First World War, another 2,783 miles of railway were built in Ontario.<sup>14</sup> Ian Drummond has characterized the efforts to develop southern Ontario’s railway network, as he does all of Ontario’s economic growth during this time, as ‘progress without planning.’<sup>15</sup> Among the first lines to be built during this period was a stretch of line running north from Barrie along the west shore of Lake Simcoe, through Orillia and up the east side of Lake Couchiching, to Washago, over the Severn River and into the Precambrian Shield as far as Gravenhurst on Lake Muskoka. Originally chartered as the Toronto, Simcoe & Muskoka Junction Railway Company, in December 1869, the owners ran into financial trouble during the early stages of construction. Consequently, the lease was absorbed by the Northern Railway in June 1871, and the line renamed, somewhat predictably, the Northern Extension Railway.<sup>16</sup>

The purpose of this railway was clear right from the start: to access Muskoka’s timber resources, while at the same time supporting the local settler economy. Accessing timber and supporting the local economy was also the main purpose of every railway built north of the

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<sup>13</sup> Claire Campbell, *Shaped by the West Wind: Nature and History in Georgian Bay* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2005), 71.

<sup>14</sup> H.V. Nelles, *The Politics of Development: Forests, Mines, and Hydro-electric Power in Ontario, 1849-1941*, 2nd Ed. (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2005), 117.

<sup>15</sup> Ian Drummond, *Progress Without Planning: The Economic History of Ontario*, (Toronto: Ontario Historical Studies Series for the Government of Ontario by University of Toronto Press, 1987), 250-255.

<sup>16</sup> In 1875, after it reached Gravenhurst, the Northern finally absorbed the entire extension into its operations. Currie, *Grand Trunk Railway*, 272-273; Richard Tatley, *The Steamboat Era in the Muskokas: Volume I – To the Golden Years; A History of the Steam Navigation in the districts of Muskoka and Parry Sound, 1866-1905* (Erin, ON: Boston Mills Press, 1983), 73-76; *Northern Advocate*, December 14, 1869; “Railways - Legislation - Amalgamation - Amalgamation of Toronto, Simcoe and Muskoka Junction Railway Company and North Grey Railway Company as the Northern Extension Railways Company and lease of amalgamated lines to the Northern Railway Company of Canada, 1871-1872,” LAC, RG12, Vol.1952, file 3502-5.

Shield for the next half century.<sup>17</sup> Railways were seen, according to Wolfgang Schivelbusch, “as a means of gaining a new civilization from a hitherto worthless (because inaccessible) wilderness... a producer of territories... .”<sup>18</sup> It is, perhaps, not surprising that both A.G.P Dodge, the biggest lumber baron in the Western timber district, and A.P. Cockburn, the enterprising individual responsible for introducing steamboats to Muskoka, were provisional directors of the new line in 1869.<sup>19</sup> While standing to gain the most from the arrival of the railway to Muskoka, the capitalists’ enthusiasms were surpassed by those of local residents.

As was the case everywhere in North America, many people in Muskoka eagerly anticipated the railway and celebrated its arrival. Thomas McMurray, editor of the region’s first newspaper, the *Northern Advocate*, was the consummate Muskoka booster. In his 1871 pamphlet acclaiming all things Muskoka, McMurray relayed the feelings of a ‘Mr. Albert Spring’, who, according to McMurray, “claimed to be a railroad man, and considered that all we wanted here in order to make a first rate country was a railroad.” Spring, McMurray continued, “was convinced that this district would be a great stock producing section, and we required the ‘iron horse’ to bring us into contact with Toronto, where we could find ready sale for fat cattle. He thought the Government could not better promote the interests of immigration than by giving a liberal grant towards the building of the Muskoka Junction Railway.”<sup>20</sup> McMurray himself insisted that if Muskoka was granted a railway, “our district will become quickly settled, and capitalists will be

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<sup>17</sup> For Harold Innis, this type of transportation improvement was essential prerequisite to staples resource development. Harold A. Innis, “The Importance of Staple Products in Canadian Development” *Staples, Markets, and Cultural Change: Selected Essays Harold A. Innis*, Daniel Drache, ed. (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1994), 15-16; A.R.M Lower, *The North American assault on the Canadian forest: A History of the Lumber Trade Between Canada and the United States* (Toronto: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1938), 178-180.

<sup>18</sup> Schivelbusch, *Railway Journey*, 90-91; Nelles also discusses this in the context of Confederation-era Ontario. Nelles, *Politics of Development*, chapter 3.

<sup>19</sup> Tatley, *Steamboat Era, Vol.I*, 73.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas McMurray, *The Free Grants Lands of Canada from Practical Experience of Bush Farming in the Free Grant Districts of Muskoka and Parry Sound* (Bracebridge: Office of the *Northern Advocate*, 1871), 61.

induced to come in and develop its resources.”<sup>21</sup> Local inhabitants associated the railway with new economic opportunities. The same year, recently located settler Harriet Barbara King reported that her neighbour was “full of hope that the coveted railway would certainly pass through his lot.”<sup>22</sup> Muskoka historian Richard Tatley describes the general atmosphere regarding the arrival of the railways as “So anxious were people to have a railway that they declared themselves ready to donate time, land and labour to the project, and to tax themselves to meet the costs.”<sup>23</sup> This was something settlers in Muskoka had not been prepared to do for colonization roads just a few years earlier.

When completed, the Northern Extension bypassed steamboat service on Lake Simcoe and Lake Couchiching, as well as the Muskoka Road. The task of transforming the landscape into a metropolitan corridor required different kinds of work to bypass the Muskoka Road than it did to bypass Lakes Simcoe and Couchiching. Owing to glaciation and the region’s geologic history, north of Washago the landscape changed dramatically just before the Severn River. South of the Severn River, the landscape belonged to southern Ontario with its sandy-clay soils and limestone. North of the Severn River, the landscape belonged to the Shield of northern Ontario and its thin soils and granite outcroppings. Two Northern Extension ledgers contain expenses associated with the construction of the railway and provide insight into the amount and kind of work needed to extend the corridor through these two different landscapes.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>22</sup> Harriet Barbara King, *Letters from Muskoka, by an Emigrant Lady* (London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1878), 68.

<sup>23</sup> Tatley, *Steamboat Era, Vol.I*, 73.

The construction of the railway from Barrie to Gravenhurst was completed in four sections, or divisions.<sup>24</sup> Throughout the nearly three years contained in the ledgers, expense categories related to construction included: “Labor in Field Work; Bridges & Culverts; Ballast; Construction; Clearing & Grading Station Yards; Fencing; Track Laying; Track Iron, Rails &c; and Crossing, Cattle Guards &c.” After January 1874, five new categories were added: Clearing; Close Cutting; Grubbing; Earth Excavation; and Rock Excavation.” These new categories suggest work had progressed onto the Shield. Much of the land south of the Severn River had already been settled by the time construction on the extension began in 1870, so presumably little clearing, cutting and grubbing-out of trees was required over the first three divisions. North of the Severn River, the Precambrian Shield, a landscape of thin soils and exposed bedrock required much more earth and rock excavation to lay track in the southern portions of the Muskoka District. Judging from these new expense categories, then, it appears the fourth division corresponded with the rocky, well-timbered landscape of Muskoka’s Shield country.

The landscape in Ontario south of the Shield is relatively flat, so transforming the landscape into a railway corridor was primarily a project in elevating and separating the road itself from the landscape it passed through. Workers devoted a great deal of time, effort and expense to building up an even roadbed with ballast, constructing bridges over streams and rivers, and putting culverts under the road. These categories of construction “provided an

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<sup>24</sup> Although the ledger does not include the earliest or latest stages of the work, it is clear that the first three divisions were completed prior to January 1874, while the fourth division was built between January 1873 - July 1875 when the first train arrived in Gravenhurst. The latest entry in either ledger is from September 1874, but it is clear from the expenses listed that the majority of landscape modifications necessary to complete the fourth division were carried out in 1874. Although the locations of each division are not indicated, if construction progressed from south to north, it is logical to assume that the fourth division was the final stretch of the line between Washago and Gravenhurst. This conjecture is supported by the fact that new construction expense categories related to building a line on the Shield appear in the ledgers after January 1874. “Northern Extension Railway Company - General Ledger No.1, 1872-1874,” LAC, RG30, Vol.1319; “Northern Extension Railway Company Ledger, 1872-1874,” LAC, RG30, Vol. 1320.



absolutely firm foundation on which to bed the track necessary to high-speed operation and very heavy luxury passenger cars.”<sup>25</sup> As workers laid tracks, other features, such as crossings, cattle guards, and fences were added to separate the railway from the surrounding agricultural countryside. Once the corridor reached the Severn River, however, extending the railway demanded an approach appropriate to the distinctive, and as yet uncleared, Shield landscape. The ledgers do not list materials, but include categories “Clearing,” “Close Cutting,” and “Grubbing,” showing forest clearance along the corridor, while “Earth Excavation” and “Rock Excavation” no doubt corresponded to the blasting and removal of granite. By 1875, the end result was a transportation corridor suitable to the passage of trains regardless of the surrounding terrain. Although the railway remained embedded in the natural world, enormous quantities of energy were necessary to reorder the landscape into a homogenous corridor capable of moving a large amount of people and things at relatively high speeds.

Over the next fifteen years, the Northern Extension Railway went through several iterations, including the North and North Western Railway and the Northern and Pacific Junction Railway before being absorbed into the Grand Trunk Railway of Canada in 1888.<sup>26</sup> In that time, the railway was built north to Lake Nipissing where it met the Canadian Pacific Railway in 1886. After this date, trains traveling through Muskoka made stops at Gravenhurst, South (Muskoka) Falls, Bracebridge, Utterson and Huntsville. The bottleneck on Muskoka’s societal metabolism was removed in 1875, and after 1886 the railway enabled a dramatic expansion to the flow of material and energy into the region by integrating Muskoka with distant places through the annihilation of space and time. Geoffrey Wall claims the railway arrived “to the disadvantage of

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<sup>25</sup> Stilgoe, *Metropolitan Corridor*, 145.

<sup>26</sup> Currie, *Grand Trunk Railway*, 276-280.

the Muskoka farmer” since access to exogenous markets made it impossible for them to compete.<sup>27</sup> Although the arrival of the railway had a variety of negative social, economic and environmental consequences, it also enabled many positive arrangements.

Shortly after 1900, the Grand Trunk Railway published a promotional pamphlet entitled *Views of Picturesque Points along the line of the Grand Trunk Railway*, which featured spots in Muskoka along with scenic photographs of many other places, including Chicago, Hamilton, Montreal, New Hampshire and Maine.<sup>28</sup> At the turn of the twentieth century, Muskoka had become part of a continental-scale transportation network capable of carrying “more than twenty-five thousand passengers” to the “Highlands of Ontario.” The arrival of so many visitors each year contributed to the formation of important social, economic and environmental arrangements at the household level. Yet, the railway also enabled people in Muskoka to participate in a wider North American economy as both consumers of commodities and finished products grown or manufactured in places that had previously been inaccessible, and as producers of a variety of goods and services. As William Cronon argues, “By using speed to lower the cost of space... rail transport made it possible for urban markets to extend their reach not just geographically, but culturally as well.”<sup>29</sup> Moreover, while part of this phenomenon certainly derived from the necessity for trains to always operate near capacity (what Cronon calls the railway’s “imperatives toward growth”), in Muskoka permanent settlement actually demanded the kind of material and energy flows that only trains could provide.<sup>30</sup> The critical

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<sup>27</sup> Geoffrey Wall, “Pioneer Settlement in Muskoka” *Agricultural History* Vol.44, No.4 (October 1970), 399.

<sup>28</sup> *Views of Picturesque Points along the line of the Grand Trunk Railway* (Publication location unknown: Grand Trunk Railway, 190?); *America, Her Grandeur and Her Beauty, Part Seven: The Muskoka Lakes Highland of Ontario* (New York: Union Book and Publishing Company, 190\_); Patricia Jasen, *Wild Things: Nature, Culture, and Tourism in Ontario, 1790-1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 120-121.

<sup>29</sup> Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*, 318.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 92; Currie, *Grand Trunk Railway*, 371-393.

nature of Muskoka's integration into the North American economy and the effects this had on Muskoka's societal metabolism is perhaps most clearly illustrated in the census returns for wheat production in Muskoka between 1871 and 1911.

In the early 1870s, the bottleneck posed by the Muskoka Road deterred anyone from easily importing or exporting wheat in Muskoka. As a result, Muskoka produced only 0.91 bushels per person in 1871 (See TABLE 3 in Appendix). Ten years later, the railway had arrived in Muskoka and farmers responded to increased access to southern Ontario markets by raising production to 1.79 bushels per person. After the Canadian Pacific Railway was completed in 1885 and prairie wheat became more accessible to eastern markets, Muskoka's yield per capita dropped below pre-railroad levels, likely in response to competition. This number almost doubled in 1901 after several prosperous years during the 1890s, before plummeting to near total collapse in 1911 (0.21 bushels per person).<sup>31</sup> The fact that Muskoka farmers grew tens of thousands of bushels of wheat during the late nineteenth century suggests they equated wheat with successful yeoman farming. Yet, Muskoka's soils were highly unsuited to growing wheat. Wheat production in Muskoka was never sufficient to meet the requirements for a wheat-based economy, or even local consumption, and railways made the abundance of high-quality prairie wheat cheaper than scarce, poorer-quality Muskoka wheat. Thus, rather than encourage settlers in Muskoka to grow a crop for which the soils were unsuited, the railway integrated Muskoka with surpluses produced elsewhere on the continent. The same was true for many commodities. Trains that connected Muskoka with distant grain markets also linked the region with distant markets for other inputs necessary to the expansion of its societal metabolism.

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<sup>31</sup> *Census of Canada*, 1871, 1881, 1891, 1901, 1911.

In addition to helping to deter staples-based agriculture, the railway also enabled the establishment of more sustainable social, economic and environmental arrangements in Muskoka, by bringing in tourists. At the same time, however, the railway reconfigured transportation in Muskoka so that the flow of material and energy entering and leaving the region took priority over those within Muskoka, thereby enabling an expansion of Muskoka's societal metabolism far beyond what was necessary for the most sustainable arrangements. This scenario emerged as early as the 1880s when the Northern Railway built its line to Lake Nipissing and became even more critical after 1906 when two more railways built lines through Muskoka.

When the Northern Railway extended its line past Gravenhurst during the 1880s, it overlaid tracks onto pre-existing human geographies. A variety of small villages established themselves at important crossroads or nodes between waterways and overland transportation corridors. Before the railway extended its lines, numerous local conditions shaped which of these villages would emerge as important social and economic centres. The railway superseded nearly all the local determining factors shaping the region's development. While towns like Gravenhurst and Bracebridge would undoubtedly have risen to prominence owing to their locations next to the lower lakes, others were very much uncertain. The trajectories of towns next to the upper lakes provide a sense of how the railway shaped development in the region through its role as the prime mover of people and things into and out of, but not necessarily within, Muskoka.

In 1880, Huntsville was slightly more prosperous than the neighbouring communities of Port Sydney, Hoodstown and Ilfracombe. At the time, all four villages were hopeful the railway would extend its line through their community. In the end, perhaps because it was positioned slightly more opportunely on the upper lakes, the railway chose a route through Huntsville

instead of the others. By the end of the decade, Huntsville was a prosperous town with six mills, several stores and hotels, a number of industries exporting lumber, railway ties, pulpwood, cordwood, tanbark and sole leather, while Port Sydney, Hoodstown and Ilfracombe had stagnated or declined.<sup>32</sup> In the 1920s, more than forty years after he left Muskoka, Frederick de la Fosse returned to the village of Ilfracombe, close to where he had taken up land in 1879, to find the community had disappeared.<sup>33</sup> According to de la Fosse, the benefits of the railway appear to have bypassed Ilfracombe almost entirely. Like the entire Muskoka region, the metropolitan corridor was essential to the prosperity of many communities. Rail links were important transfer points for people and things entering and leaving Muskoka. Within Muskoka, however, the railway did little to enable the movement of people and things, and in many cases it actually hindered it.

Muskoka's rail capacity expanded during the first decade of the twentieth century when two new railways built tracks up the west side of the lower lakes. The James Bay Railway built up the east side of Lake Simcoe and through Washago before continuing north past Muskoka with stations at Torrance and Bala Park Island on Lake Muskoka, and Barnesdale and Gordon Bay on Lake Joseph. By the time the James Bay Railway opened as far as Muskoka in October 1906, the Canadian Northern Railway (CNoR) had absorbed it. Less than a year later, the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) completed a line through Muskoka that ran up the west side of Lake Simcoe before running nearly parallel to the CNoR tracks, with stations at Bala on Lake Muskoka, and Barnesdale and Gordon Bay on Lake Joseph.<sup>34</sup> Unlike the Northern Extension

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<sup>32</sup> Tatley, *Steamboat Era, Vol.I*, 193.

<sup>33</sup> De la Fosse, *English Bloods*, 151.

<sup>34</sup> Richard Tatley, *The Steamboat Era in the Muskokas: Volume II – The Golden Years to Present; A History of the Steam Navigation in the districts of Muskoka and Parry Sound, 1906-Present* (Erin, ON: Boston Mills Press, 1984), 23.

Railway, which for many years did not extend past Gravenhurst, these companies intended their new railways to access resource hinterlands (for mining in particular) much farther north than Muskoka, in the Sudbury, Algoma and Temiskaming Districts.<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, these new stations enabled the region's societal metabolism to expand by enabling an even greater volume of exogenous inputs.<sup>36</sup> And as we saw with the construction of the Northern Extension Railway in the early 1870s, trains required a dramatic modification of the landscape through which they moved. To warp time and space, trains could not mimic natural energy flows, but rather had to exceed and even disconnect from them entirely. By doing so, railways gave priority to the movement of people and things into and out of Muskoka and often conflicted with the exchange of material and energy at the local level.

At the time the CNoR built its line up the west side of the lower lakes, W.O. Whiting owned and operated a small resort hotel called the Muskoka Springs. Situated next to the shore at Coulter's Narrows in Torrance on Lake Muskoka, when the Muskoka Springs was built around the turn of the century visitors could only reach it by steamer. Thus, when the CNoR announced that Torrance would have a station, Whiting no doubt eagerly anticipated the added clientele this would bring. Indeed, the CNoR and CPR promised to bring a great deal more of pretty much everything to the Torrance and Bala communities, but the realities did not always line up nicely with the expectations. Between September and December 1907, Whiting wrote the CNoR three letters claiming damages caused by construction work.<sup>37</sup> Whiting complained that the railway

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<sup>35</sup> Nelles, *Politics of Development*, 116-122.

<sup>36</sup> The same 'imperatives towards growth' that defined the economics of the railway business twenty years earlier, continued to operate with these new railways. This meant both railways promoted freight and passenger use in an effort to recover costs between Toronto and Muskoka, otherwise relatively empty space from the railway's perspective.

<sup>37</sup> "The Canadian Northern Ontario Railway Company – Miscellaneous Construction Claims – Claims of W.O. Whiting, Muskoka Springs, Torrance, Ontario, for Live Stock killed, and for Damage to His Property, 1907-1908," LAC, RG30, Vol.9128, file 100-2-10.

had blocked his “access to the post office and public steamboat wharf” as well as to “the use of three public roads.” Whiting also claimed a train had killed two of his calves and that workers had cut down “a beautiful pine grove” on his property to construct a blacksmith shack next to the tracks. The CNoR refused to compensate Whiting for any of these claims. The company outright ignored the issue of his restricted access and loss of the calves. Regarding the trees, the company rejected the claim on the grounds that “some trimming of the trees [was] the only care he has taken of the ‘Beautiful Grove,’” implying that the company attributed no aesthetic value to this grove of trees. According to the company’s contract engineer, even Whiting’s neighbours believed “he has no claim against the Company on this score.” In a contest with the CNoR, the railway took priority over the operations of a hotelier and his business. There is no indication the railway ever compensated Whiting for his claims.

As Whiting’s example demonstrates, beyond the station, where people and things exited the metropolitan corridor and entered Muskoka’s societal metabolism, the railway was expected to exist separately from local flows of energy and material. The railroad was built at a higher grade than the surrounding landscape, fenced off where it passed through settled areas, and included designated crossings for both water (in the form of culverts) and roads (in the form of graded crossings) in an attempt to create a semblance of that separation. In reality, however, bits of the surrounding environment interacted with, and spilled over into, the controlled and engineered railway. Although similar assumptions got people into trouble when they thought steamboats functioned separately from the uncertainties of the natural world, in the case of the railway greater dangers to property and people’s lives demanded fuller efforts to ensure that separation. Thus, when a cow strayed onto the tracks and was hit by a train near Torrance in May

1910, the CNoR immediately sought to lay the blame on its owner, B.S. Rose for not keeping his pasture separate from the high-speed corridor. In an attempt to remove company liability, representatives of the CNoR insisted the cow entered the railway via a public crossing. When it became clear, however, that the cow had gotten through a hole in the fence caused by a tree that had fallen from the company's right-of-way, Rose received \$30 in compensation for his cow.<sup>38</sup> Unable to maintain a separation between the railway and adjacent pastures, the CNoR was responsible for the damages that resulted from prioritizing the movement of people and things by train over local metabolic realities.

The construction of the CNoR also influenced the flow of material and energy on the water. While constructing three railway bridges spanning the gaps between Coulter's Narrows, Jannack's Narrows and Wallace's Cut where Lake Muskoka flows into Bala Bay, the James Bay Railway obstructed the natural flow of water downstream. Between 1904 and 1905, blasted rock from the shoreline filled Coulter's Narrows and partially blocked Wallace's Cut, leaving Jannack's Narrows as the only channel connecting Lake Muskoka with Bala Bay. In March 1905, one month before the ice melted on Lake Muskoka that year, the Department of Public Works reported that even "when the dams [at Bala Falls] are full open," to allow the seasonal outflow of spring melt waters, "the current... on account of closing of Cotters' [sic] Narrows, will have an exceedingly strong current [at Jannack's Narrows], against which boats will have great difficulty in making progress, as well as manoeuvring [sic]."<sup>39</sup> In constructing a transportation corridor designed to move people and things into and out of Muskoka, the James Bay Railway/CNoR

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<sup>38</sup> "The Canadian Northern Ontario Railway Company – Claim of B.S. Rose for a Cow Killed at Torrance, Ontario, 1910," LAC, RG30, Vol.9127, file 100-1-108.

<sup>39</sup> "The James Bay Railway Company, and the Canadian Northern Ontario Railway Company – Bridges – Regarding Bridge Over Janacks Narrows, Lake Muskoka, Ontario, 1904-1910," LAC, RG30, Vol.9336, file no 1046-61-2; Michael Peake, *The Muskoka Lakes Association Members Handbook*, (Waterloo, ON: Johanns Graphics, 1988), 27.



disrupted a transportation corridor that moved people and things between places within Muskoka. The flow of material and energy into and out of Muskoka tended to take priority over flows taking place within Muskoka.

On July 7, 1905, as his supply boat *Nymoca* was passing through Wallace's Cut on its regular run to Bala, J.J. Beaumont struck what he referred to as "a sharp pointed rock," which had not been there any of the previous ten years. The rock punctured his hull, ruining a portion of his stock onboard, and forcing Beaumont to lay the boat up for repairs in Gravenhurst. According to local historian Bob Petry, sawmill operator Joseph Wallis made Wallace's Cut navigable for smaller steamboats in the late 1870s.<sup>40</sup> Beaumont felt confident in concluding "there is no doubt there had been stone thrown in by blasting" when he wrote to claim \$110.50 in damages from the James Bay Railway (JBR) less than three weeks later.<sup>41</sup> The managers of the JBR must have realized they were responsible for the rock Beaumont struck, because six months earlier they had gone to great lengths to convince the Board of Railway Commissioners that Wallace's Cut should not be considered navigable and that, therefore, their work could not create any obstructions to navigation. In obtaining approval for their plans to extend a series of bridges across Bala Bay, Assistant Solicitor of the JBR, Gerard Ruel assured the Commissioners in a letter dated January 26, 1905, that "[Wallace's Cut] is only a side channel which is too tortuous to be available for use by the Lake steamers and is only used by steam launches and small craft." In response, A.D. Cartwright, Secretary of the Board of Railway Commissioners questioned the proposed plans "on the ground that this [Wallace's Cut] is navigable water." Ruel's cagey reply

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<sup>40</sup> Bob Petry, *Bala, An Early Settlement in Muskoka: A Pictorial Story of Bala from the late 1800's*, (Bala, ON, Bob Petry, 1998), 154.

<sup>41</sup> "The James Bay Railway Company – General Claims - Claim of J.J. Beaumont and Sons, of Bracebridge, Ontario, For Damages Caused To the S.S. NYMOCA (Supply Boat Calling Tri-Weekly At All Points On the Muskoka Lake) and Cargo, Caused By Running On a Rock Placed In Wallace Cut By the Blasting Operations of the Railway Company, 1905," LAC, RG30, Vol.9402, file no 1046-78-1.

that “It is difficult to determine what constitutes navigable water” and that, “we [the JBR] are willing to take the risk of the channel being subsequently declared to be navigable...,” suggests the managers of the JBR felt confident that the company’s work on Wallace’s Cut would not create navigation problems. Apparently Ruel’s assurances were enough for Cartwright and the Board of Commissioners, since they approved the plan for the bridge without further delay that March.<sup>42</sup> In fact, Wallace’s Cut was too small for the large Navigation Company steamers. But it was navigable for mid-sized steamers, such as *Nymoca*, which Beaumont had been running through Wallace’s Cut since he began his supply boat business in 1895.<sup>43</sup> Despite the obvious efforts by the JBR managers to avoid any obligation to keep Wallace’s Cut unobstructed, and the evidence cited by Beaumont’s lawyer of “drill holes” in the rock the *Nymoca* struck, Ruel felt justified denying the claim, stating in a letter in October that “Upon careful investigation and report we came to the conclusion that the rock had not been placed in the channel by other than natural causes.”<sup>44</sup> Thus, rather than face the consequences of disrupting a portion of the pre-existing transportation network on the lake, Ruel and the JBR chose to reinforce the priority of the railway over the flow of local energy and material.<sup>45</sup> Beaumont was never compensated for the damage to his supply boat.

The construction of the JBR/CNoR even managed to cause disruptions to one of Muskoka’s largest industries, the Muskoka Leather Company, located nearly forty kilometres away in Bracebridge. The Muskoka Leather Company established a tannery in Bracebridge to

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<sup>42</sup> “The James Bay Railway Company – Bridges – Proposed Railway Bridge Over Wallace Cut At the North End of Janacks Island, Lake Muskoka, Ontario, 1905-1907,” LAC, RG30, Vol.9336, file no 1046-61-3.

<sup>43</sup> Tatley, *Steamboat Era*, Vol.I, 245.

<sup>44</sup> “Claim of J.J. Beaumont and Sons,” LAC, RG30, Vol.9402, file no 1046-78-1.

<sup>45</sup> The JBR, which was renamed the CNoR in 1906, removed a more substantial obstruction from the more frequently traveled Coulter’s Narrows, but it took roughly five years before the job was actually accomplished. There is no evidence that any work was done by the company to remove obstructions from Wallace’s Cut. “Claims of W.O. Whiting,” LAC, RG30, Vol.9128, file 100-2-10.

easily access bark from the region's abundant hemlock trees, which were used to tan leather. In January 1905, during the early stages of railway construction, W.D. Beardmore, President of the Leather Company, wrote to the managers of the JBR to voice his concern that the railway would block the road his company's lumbering and bark operations used in Freeman Township. The Leather Company harvested tanbark from the unsettled Crown lands west of Lake Joseph, and transported it overland to Lake Joseph where it was loaded onto scows and towed to the company's tannery in Bracebridge. Beardmore estimated that his company would haul "from 25,000 to 30,000 cords of bark and from 65 million to 75 million [board feet] of logs" from their limits in Freeman Township.<sup>46</sup> "To secure this road we had to buy a farm," Beardmore continued, "also the right of way over other property and we have spent a large amount of money in making the road... ." Since the road was vital to the Leather Company's operations, Beardmore requested the JBR construct a crossing to re-connect his road after the railway was built. Not until February 1908 was the Leather Company awarded compensation for the disruption to their business caused when railway construction cut off access to their road. A crossing was not provided, however, and the Leather Company was forced to make new arrangements with a neighbouring farmer to use his road and crossing instead.

As each of these examples demonstrates, railways often took priority over other aspects of Muskoka's societal metabolism. The metropolitan corridor bypassed the bottleneck posed by the Muskoka Road and expanded the capacity of the region's transportation network. Trains brought more visitors and made much-needed staples and manufactured goods more accessible and affordable. These new connections with distant markets enabled Muskoka's societal

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<sup>46</sup> "The James Bay Railway Company, and the Canadian Northern Railway Company – Highway Crossings – Request of Muskoka Leather Company for a Crossing at Lot 4, Concession 7 of the Township of Medora, Ontario, 1905-1908," LAC, RG30, Vol.9319, file no 1046-58-4.

metabolism to expand to the point that more sustainable social, economic and environmental arrangements were possible than when life had been limited by the access provided by the road alone. Muskoka had always relied on some level of exogenous inputs, but somatic modes of transportation did not enable a flow sufficient for a sedentary farming society. Trains solved this problem by warping time and space. In doing so their speed and scale required unprecedented environmental modifications, operated under imperatives that took priority over nearly every other aspect of Muskoka's societal metabolism, and conflicted with local material and energy flows every time they crossed the metropolitan corridor. The railway was locked into scales of economy that both exceeded what was required for Muskoka to establish its most sustainable arrangements, and enabled Muskoka's societal metabolism to expand until exogenous inputs greatly exceeded the scale of local exchanges.

Although the railway enabled people to establish some of Muskoka's most sustainable social, economic and environmental arrangements, the energy required to fuel locomotives inexorably drew Muskoka's transportation network into the mineral economy. The earliest locomotives anywhere in the North America used wood for fuel. In the 1850s, as steam engine technology advanced and a greater supply of coal became available from the Appalachian coal fields, railways made the switch from an organic to a mineral fuel. As historian Edward F. Keuchel argues, after about 1860, trains used coal almost exclusively.<sup>47</sup> Coal was a more desirable fuel, because it had a higher fuel-to-weight ratio and fewer labour requirements than wood. Since coal was a more concentrated source of energy, fewer stops has to be made to fuel-up, and coal could be shoveled and poured, whereas wood had to be handled and stacked. Many

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<sup>47</sup> Edward F. Keuchel, "Coal-Burning Locomotives: A Technical Developments of the 1850's" *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol.94, No.4 (October, 1970), 494-495.

of these labour requirements, however, became exacerbated around the middle of the century as forests disappeared across North America. In Ontario, the railways of the 1850s, 1860s and 1870s consumed cordwood for fuel, but land clearance throughout the nineteenth century had removed the forest in regions where these lines were built, making it necessary for Ontario railways to follow the American example in converting to coal as well.<sup>48</sup> In 1858, the Great Western Railway experimented with using coal, and by 1873 had converted 25 of its locomotives.<sup>49</sup> In 1878, the Grand Trunk Railway of Canada released a memorandum outlining how a shortage of cordwood had contributed to rising fuel costs for the company. Two years later, Grand Trunk President W.H. Tyler announced that engines would be systematically converted to coal.<sup>50</sup>

Ontario has no coal deposits. Importing coal from Britain and the Maritimes was not economical.<sup>51</sup> But, as economist M.J. Patton concluded in 1925, the “Ontario peninsula... is thrust southward almost into the large coal-producing area of the United States... .”<sup>52</sup> Such close proximity to the Appalachian coal fields in Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and Ohio meant coal was available in Ontario in sufficient quantities and at a price necessary to supply the province’s earliest railways. In 1855, for example, the Welland Canal was used to transport 45,692 tons of coal.<sup>53</sup> While the majority of this coal went to industrial purposes, more than enough would have been available to fuel the handful of railways in Ontario during the 1850s. By 1870, coal imports

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<sup>48</sup> J. David Wood, *Making Ontario: Agricultural Colonization and Landscape Re-creation before the Railway*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2000), 162-163; William G. Dean, ed., *Concise Historical Atlas of Canada*, cartography by Byron Moldofsky and Geoffrey J. Matthews, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 139.

<sup>49</sup> Currie, *Grand Trunk Railway*, 175, 207.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

<sup>51</sup> Drummond, *Progress Without Planning*, 253.

<sup>52</sup> M.J. Patton, “The Coal Resources of Canada” *Economic Geography*, Vol.1, No.1 (March 1925), 73.

<sup>53</sup> Canada, *Tables of the Trade and Navigation of the Province of Canada for the year 1855*, (Toronto: Stewart Derbishire & George Desbarats, 1856), 2.

were up to 115,000 tons, climbed to 750,000 tons in 1880, 2.2 million tons in 1890, and roughly doubled again in each of the next three decades.<sup>54</sup> Throughout the late nineteenth century, coal was shipped to Ontario by both water and railway, but by 1871, railway connections with the United States at Windsor, Sarnia, Niagara Falls, Fort Erie and Prescott lowered freight rates for coal so that by the 1890s nearly all the coal entering Ontario came by railway.<sup>55</sup> By the time the Northern Extension Railway reached Gravenhurst in 1875, trains everywhere in Ontario had access to coal.

Numerous historians have explored the social, economic and environmental impacts of coal mining on the people and places of the Appalachian states.<sup>56</sup> By consuming coal, the Grand Trunk, Canadian Northern, and Canadian Pacific became parts of an extended network of non-renewable commodity flows that made concentrated usable energy available for purposes which functioned “outside the range of actual biospheric cycles.”<sup>57</sup> Access to fossil fuels enabled a positive feedback in the expansion of Muskoka’s societal metabolism, since economic activity could ignore certain environmental limitations associated with the organic economy, such as that posed by the Muskoka Road bottleneck. Consequently, Muskoka’s railways became agents of intense, large-scale, and unsustainable economic activity driving environmental change. This is ironic, since on the one hand trains enabled more sustainable social, economic and

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<sup>54</sup> David F. Walker, “Transportation of Coal into Southern Ontario, 1871-1921” *Ontario History*, Vol.63 (1971), 16

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 18; William J. Wilgus, *The Railway Interrelations of the United States and Canada* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1937).

<sup>56</sup> Christopher F. Jones, “A Landscape of Energy Abundance: Anthracite Coal Canals and the Roots of American Fossil Fuel Dependence, 1820-1860,” *Environmental History* Vol.15, No.3 (July 2010), 449-484; Michael Knies, *Coal on the Lehigh, 1790-1827: Beginnings and Growth of the Anthracite Industry in Carbon County, Pennsylvania* (Easton, Pennsylvania: Canal History and Technology Press, 2001); Geoffrey L. Buckley “The Environmental Transformation of an Appalachian Valley, 1850-1906” *Geographical Review*, Vol. 88, No. 2 (April 1998), 175-198; Donald L. Miller and Richard E. Sharpless, *The Kingdom of Coal: Work, Enterprise, and Ethnic Communities in the Mine Fields* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985); Thomas G. Andrews, *Killing for Coal: American’s Deadliest Labor War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

<sup>57</sup> Marina Fischer-Kowalski and Helmut Haberl, “Tons, Joules, and Money: Modes of Production and Their Sustainability Problems,” *Society & Natural Resources*, Vol.10 (1997), 63; Wrigley, *Continuity, Chance and Change*, 26-29.

environmental arrangements in Muskoka, while on the other hand they facilitated less sustainable arrangements at the sites of coal extraction. Around the turn of the century, trains enabled a pattern of consumption by year-round residents, cottagers and tourists, which relied on increasing amounts of exogenous inputs. Moreover, in privileging exogenous inputs over forms of local exchange, this pattern of consumption placed even greater burdens on the sites of coal extraction. While trains may have been the most ambivalent mode of transportation in terms of sustainability, they were certainly not the only mode of transportation in Muskoka to rely on the mineral economy.

### *Steamboats*

Until 1907, Muskoka's steamboats were fueled exclusively by cordwood, harvested and sold by local settlers. After that date, however, the fuel requirements of the Muskoka Navigation Company were met by both the local organic economy and the exogenous mineral economy. In 1907, the Navigation Company introduced the *Sagamo* to its fleet, followed the next year by the *Cherokee*. Both boats were coal-burning vessels, the first of their kind on the Muskoka Lakes. Although labour costs undoubtedly influenced the Company's decision to experiment with fossil fuels, unlike the adoption of coal as the fuel of choice for locomotives, the decision to switch from cordwood to coal by the Navigation Company was not based on scarcity. At the time the *Sagamo* and *Cherokee* were launched over 80 percent of the land in Muskoka was unimproved - the vast majority forested. Even before the turn of the century settlers had stopped clearing the land once they discovered how unsuited it was for agriculture. Thus, the environmental conditions that prevented humans from transforming the landscape into a series of yeoman-style

agricultural communities meant that Muskoka's terrestrial ecosystem was capable of providing an on-going supply of cordwood to fuel the region's steamers.

During the nineteenth century, local settlers provided all the fuel the Navigation Company consumed. Not all the wood, however, came from properties directly adjacent to the shoreline. Evidence from the Homer and Company general store ledger in Rosseau reveals that many settlers, living back from the lakes, indirectly supplied cordwood to the Navigation Company by selling it through the store. Homer funneled cordwood from the backwoods to the steamer wharf at Rosseau where the Company could access it.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Rosseau was only one of many locations around the lakes where similar arrangements were established. Nancy Thompson, "A Tour of Port Carling, Part 1," *Muskoka Sun* (Thursday, June 13, 2002).



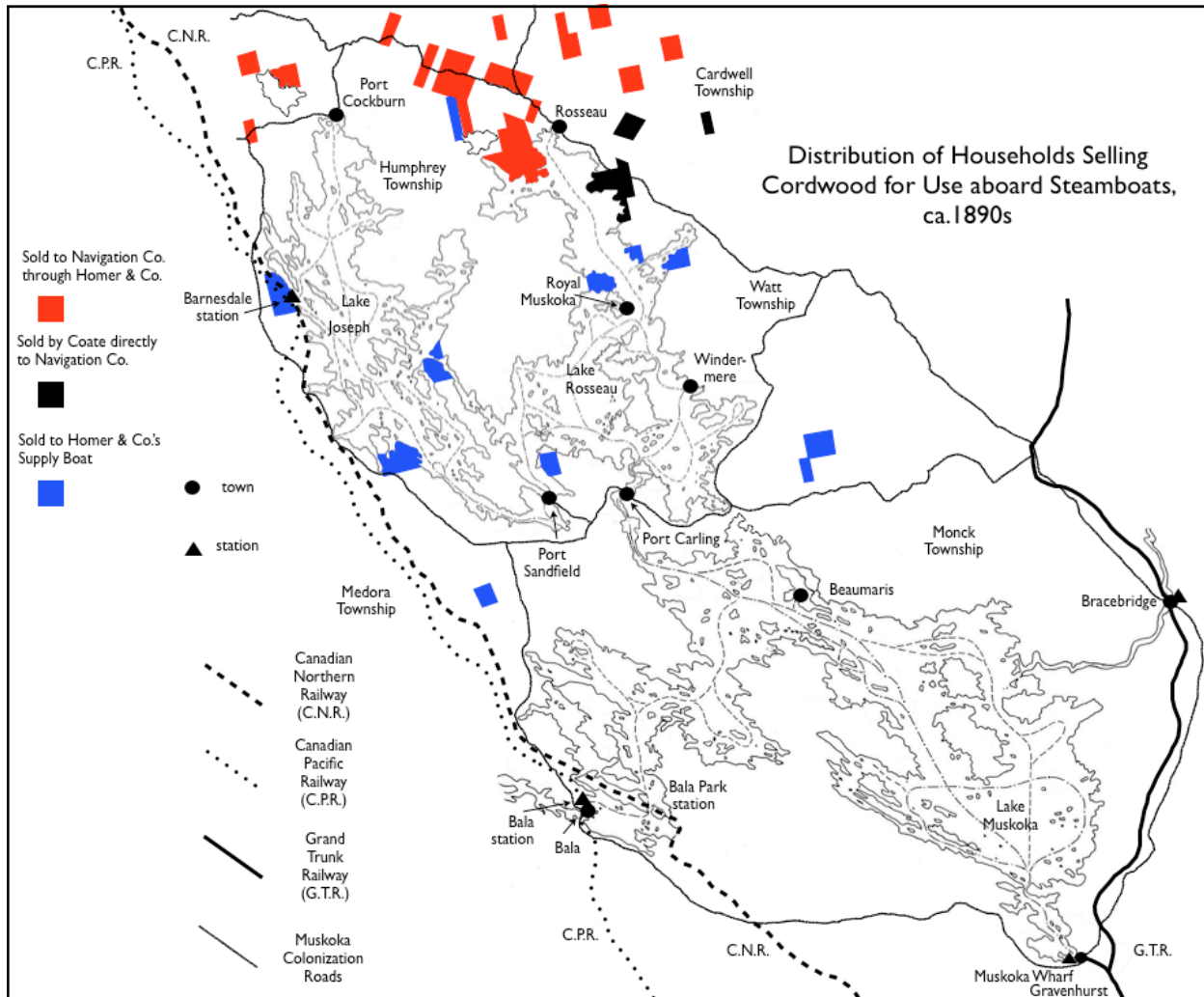


Image 4: Distribution of Households Selling Cordwood for Use aboard Steamboats, ca. 1890s

Source: "General Store Ledger of George Henry Homer, 1896-1901," Gravenhurst Public Library Archives, Box 35, Gravenhurst, Ontario.

On March 3, 1897, the Navigation Company paid Homer \$749.50 for 482 cords of wood, which Homer had obtained from ten local households. At the end of March the Company paid another \$1,334.51 for 938 cords of wood. Combined these two purchases were enough to cover the fuel requirements of the two largest steamers in the Company's seven-boat fleet, or roughly 41 percent of the Navigation Company's entire fuel budget that year.<sup>59</sup> In total, the Navigation

<sup>59</sup> These totals include both soft- and hardwood. "General Store Ledger of George Henry Homer, 1896-1901," Gravenhurst Public Library Archives, Box 35, Gravenhurst, Ontario, 133; "Board Meeting Minutes of the Muskoka and Georgian Bay Navigation Company, 1896-1903," Archives of the Muskoka Steamship and Historical Society, Minutes of Navig. Co. Bd. File, Steamships Folder, Muskoka Boat and Heritage Centre, Gravenhurst.

Company spent \$5,048.30 on fuel in 1897, all of which would have been cordwood, equating to approximately 3,440 cords of wood. Using rough estimates for the size of trees felled and the spacing between them, cord usage correlated to between 5,160 and 13,760 trees and a footprint of between 10 and 26 acres.<sup>60</sup> This amount of wood was not harvested from a contiguous piece of land. In fact, the largest single sale of cordwood through Homer to the Navigation Company was 101.5 cords, requiring a footprint of no more than an acre. The environmental consequences of operating the Navigation Company's fleet on cordwood was minimal because the trees came from dozens of different parcels of land spread out around the lower lakes.

By 1902, fuel expenses for the Navigation Company had almost doubled owing to the addition of new boats, a significantly expanded service, and new amenities such as electric lighting aboard all the passenger ships. Over the next few years, fuel requirements never required more than fifty acres of woodland spread out around the lower lakes. Fuel expenses remained fairly consistent until the *Sagamo* was added to the fleet in 1907 and the *Cherokee* was added a year later. In 1908, fuel expenses rose to \$11,323.01 - a 16.4 percent increase over 1906. For the first time since steamboats were introduced to Muskoka over forty years earlier, a portion of fuel expenses went towards fossil fuels. In 1908, just under 30 percent or \$3,333.51 of the total fuel expenses, was spent on bituminous coal from Appalachian coal fields.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> The range in the number of trees required to make a cord of wood was calculated assuming a diameter base height between 12" and 18", which corresponds with between 1.5 - 4.0 trees/cord. The number of acres necessary to harvest a given number of trees was calculated assuming an average 9' x 9' spacing between harvested trees, which corresponds to 538 trees/acre. "Homer Ledger," Gravenhurst Archives, 133; Kim D. Coder, "Number of Trees per Acre by Spacing" (Warnell School of Forest Resources, 1996), <http://warnell.forestry.uga.edu/service/library/for96-054/index.html> (accessed June 28, 2013); *A Landowner's Guide to Selling Standing Timber: Managing Your Woodlot for Profit and Pleasure* (Kemptonville, Ontario: Ontario Woodlot Association, 2001), p.60. It should be noted that these calculations suggest a typical old-growth acre of mixed forest could produce as much as 130 cords of wood. This is 3.25-6.5 times the estimates of either William Cronon or Michael Williams. Wood, *Making Ontario*, 13-14; William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England, 2nd Ed.* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2003), 120-121; Michael Williams, *Americans and Their Forests: A Historical Geography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 81.

<sup>61</sup> "Navigation Company balance sheets, 1897, 1902, 1905, 1906, 1908, 1910," AMSHS, Royal Muskoka #4 File, Accounting Data, Drawer FC 1a, Muskoka Boat and Heritage Centre, Gravenhurst.

Unfortunately, no records exist which detail precisely why board members of the Navigation Company decided to build two large coal-fired steamboats at this time. A significant part of the answer must lie in the strategic vision of the Company itself. In 1903, after entering into a partnership with the Grand Trunk Railway to build the largest and most opulent hotel in Muskoka - the Royal Muskoka Hotel - the Muskoka and Georgian Bay Navigation Company was re-organized as the Muskoka Lakes Navigation and Hotel Company.<sup>62</sup> The new coal-fired steamers should then be seen as part of broad strategy to corner a greater share of the tourist trade in Muskoka, which had grown to more than 50 hotels, some with a capacity of 200 guests. Furthermore, popular ideas about progress and modernity, combined with technological advances in marine steam engine technology, informed the general business climate within which the board made these decisions. The state of coal production in the United States undoubtedly also influenced the decision to switch from wood to coal. In 1895, total coal production in the U.S. was 135,118,000 tons. A decade later, when the first plans to build the *Sagamo* were undertaken, that number had skyrocketed to 315,063,000 tons.<sup>63</sup> Total coal imports in Ontario reached 4,416,000 tons in 1900, and bituminous coal imports to Toronto alone totaled 555,000 tons in 1908.<sup>64</sup> Most importantly, as was the case with the railway, labour costs and operating delays associated with the need to stop for fuel at various places en route surely made coal a more economical energy option. A pound of air-dried wood contains between 5,800-6,400 British Thermal Units (BTUs) of energy, while a pound of coal contains 12,000 BTUs.<sup>65</sup> This greater fuel-to-weight ratio meant fewer stops were required since more energy could be stored in less

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<sup>62</sup> Tatley, *Steamboat Era*, Vol.I, 265.

<sup>63</sup> Samuel H. Schurr and Bruce C. Netschert, *Energy in the American Economy, 1850-1975: An Economic Study of its History and Prospects*, (Wesport CT: Greenwood Press, 1977), 492.

<sup>64</sup> Walker, "Transportation of Coal into Southern Ontario," 16, 30.

<sup>65</sup> What is Energy? Section C: Measuring and Quantifying Energy. <http://www.uwsp.edu/cnr/wcee/keep/Mod1/Whatis/energyresourcetables.htm>, accessed February 8, 2014.

space. It is also no coincidence that the new coal-fired steamers arrived within a couple of years of the CNoR and CPR, since increased competition would certainly have lowered freight rates.<sup>66</sup> Furthermore, the new stations at Bala Park and Barnesdale provided the perfect connection to quickly transfer coal from hopper to hold.

Regardless of the reasons, the Navigation Company's choice to use coal instead of cordwood to fuel the new steamers brought that mode of transportation firmly into the mineral economy. In doing so, the Company itself "broke with the sun" as Cronon puts it,<sup>67</sup> and became part of a larger network of non-renewable material and energy flows. Yet, unlike other components of Muskoka's societal metabolism that relied on exogenous inputs, such as wheat, a local renewable alternative existed for fueling steamboats in Muskoka. In 1899, the last year for which Dominion data exists for Ontario coal imports, the average price of coal in the province was \$2.30/ton.<sup>68</sup> If this average price per ton is accepted as the rate paid by the Navigation Company in 1908, the two coal-fired steamers in Muskoka consumed roughly 1,450 tons of bituminous coal that season. If the average cord of air-dried wood burned in Muskoka contained approximately 23,500,000 BTUs, 1,450 tons equaled roughly 1,480 cords of wood.<sup>69</sup> Using the same methods as above, this means the *Sagamo* and *Cherokee* would have required between just four to eleven acres of forest spread across Muskoka to provide their fuel in 1908. Thus, despite that fact that no shortage of fuelwood resources existed in Muskoka after the turn of the century, the Navigation Company chose to rely on the mineral economy for part of its fuel needs. Doing so created a reliance on non-renewable exogenous inputs, which had detrimental consequences

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<sup>66</sup> Walker, "Transportation of Coal into Southern Ontario," 19.

<sup>67</sup> Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*, 79.

<sup>68</sup> Drummond, *Progress Without Planning*, 399. Calculated using Table 7.6.

<sup>69</sup> The BTU content of a cord of wood in Muskoka was calculated using the average BTU content of a cord of white oak, beech, red maple, hemlock and white pine. *A Landowner's Guide to Selling Standing Timber*, 61.

for the people and environments that produced them in distant places, such as Pennsylvania, West Virginia and Ohio. The switch from wood to coal had social, economic and environmental consequences in Muskoka as well.

Many households generated income by selling cordwood to the Navigation Company. According to the Homer general store accounts ledger, settlers who sold to the Navigation Company through the store in 1897 generated an average of \$72 from 48 cords.<sup>70</sup> If the transactions arranged through Homer are accepted as typical, the Navigation Company would have purchased \$5,048.30 of cordwood from 70 households to supply its fuel needs that year. In 1902, the Company would have purchased \$9,435.25 worth of cordwood from 131 households. By 1906 that number had climbed slightly to 135 households. Two years later, however, after the routes had been reorganized to reflect the addition of the new coal-fired steamers, only 111 households would have sold cordwood to satisfy the Navigation Company's fuelwood supply.<sup>71</sup> Although the Navigation Company remained dependent on local households to meet their energy requirements, the addition of the *Sagamo* and *Cherokee* had the effect of eliminating an important source of income for 24 households. Furthermore, if the *Sagamo* and *Cherokee* had been wood-fired, these two steamers would have consumed roughly 1,480 cords of wood in 1908, bringing the number of households required to meet the Navigation Company's fuel requirements to 142, thereby generating income for seven more households than 1906. Thus, the actual loss to the local economy was roughly \$2,200 spread among 31 households. At no point did the Navigation Company's fuelwood consumption place unsustainable pressures on

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<sup>70</sup> "Homer Ledger," Gravenhurst Archives, 133.

<sup>71</sup> "Board Meeting Minutes of the Muskoka and Georgian Bay Navigation Company, 1896-1903," AMSHS, Minutes of Navig. Co. Bd. File, Steamships Folder, Muskoka Boat and Heritage Centre, Gravenhurst; "Navigation Company balance sheets, 1897, 1902, 1905, 1906, 1908, 1910," AMSHS, Royal Muskoka #4 File, Accounting Data, Drawer FC 1a, Muskoka Boat and Heritage Centre, Gravenhurst.

Muskoka's forest environments, quite the contrary. And providing for the Company's fuel needs generated important economic opportunities for settlers, which the switch to coal undermined.

Although the switch to coal possibly reduced the Navigation Company's impact on a small portion of Muskoka's terrestrial environment, it actually increased the negative effects of the Navigation Company on Muskoka's air and water. The transition from fuelwood to coal transformed two of the Company's steamers from relatively benign components of an organic economy into industrial extensions of a mineral economy. According to one cottager, this transformation altered many people's perceptions of the steamers, as well as long-standing routines and rituals:

The *Sagamo*, *Cherokee*, *Islander*, *Charlie M.*, *Kenozha*, and *Nipissing* called at Beaumaris each afternoon or exchanged passengers out in the lake. The boats were greeted by crowds of cottagers and hotel guests dressed in their summer best, but after 1917 [1907] the crowds thinned out when the Muskoka Navigation boats converted to soft coal and engulfed the wharf in clouds of black soot...<sup>72</sup>

Although this excerpt contains inaccuracies, it demonstrates how the transition from fuelwood to coal also changed the Navigation Company's relationship with the local environment. Equally important, the transition also altered the way lakeside residents thought about and related to the Navigation Company steamers. Their clock-like schedule now also dictated a new pattern of social behaviour in response to the soot. Many years later, Bob Cornell, owner of Cleveland's House hotel, recalled a similar adjustment:

I can remember the *Sagamo* when it would back up from the dock, the soot would fly from it and always drift over toward the laundry. In those days, all the laundry for the hotel was hung outside on clotheslines and the sheets that were sparkling white all had to be redone. So the laundresses got their times

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<sup>72</sup> Quoted in Patricia Walbridge Ahlbrandt, *Beaumaris* (Erin, ON: Boston Mills Press, 1989), 87. Boats did not *switch* fuels at this time, but rather coal-fired ones were added.

figured out so they didn't hang out the laundry until after the *Sagamo* had been in.<sup>73</sup>

After the turn of the century, the Muskoka Lakes Association (MLA) - a cottagers' group consisting of both year-round and seasonal residents - had become a leading voice in the region for many concerns, including water quality and pollution. Although the minutes of the MLA's annual meetings do not include direct references to either soot from the boats, or other coal-related pollution, such as the spent cinders and clinkers dumped into the lake, local historians insist that these became topics of concern for the membership.<sup>74</sup>

Many of the most sustainable arrangements in Muskoka relied on coal indirectly, because by the end of the 1870s locomotives were fueled by coal. By transporting a larger quantity of people and things into and out of Muskoka, trains enabled an expansion of the region's societal metabolism sufficient to establish and maintain more sustainable social, economic and environmental arrangements than had been possible prior to 1875. After the turn of the century, however, access to abundant energy that existed outside of biospheric processes enabled even further expansion. The imperatives to growth inherent in this scale of transportation network ensured that Muskoka's societal metabolism could and did continue to expand until exogenous inputs dwarfed the local flows of energy and material. In the process, environments were transformed as flows into and out of Muskoka took priority over flows within Muskoka. The mineral economy's spread to steamboats furthered these trends by divorcing steamer transport from the renewable fuels that had been supplied from the local landscape up until 1907. Yet,

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<sup>73</sup> Quoted in Cameron Taylor, *Enchanted Summers: The Grand Hotels of Muskoka* (Toronto: Lynx Images Inc., 1997), 25.

<sup>74</sup> Judy Ross, "A Century of Concerns: The History of the Muskoka Lakes Association," *Summertime: In Celebration of 100 Years of the Muskoka Lakes Association* (Erin, ON: Boston Mills Press, 1994), 178; Ahlbrandt, *Beaumaris*, 87; "Minutes of the Muskoka Lakes Association," University of Waterloo Archives, MLA Fonds, GA 100, Box 1, File 1-14.

Muskoka's transportation landscape was still not entirely immersed in the mineral economy. Not until the arrival of the internal combustion engine and the consumption of refined petroleum products did transportation in Muskoka become overwhelmingly reliant on exogenous, non-renewable inputs.

### Personal Mobility

#### *Automobiles*

The automobile's most important influence on Muskoka took place after the Second World War. Yet, as Peter Stevens shows, almost as soon as automobiles were available in North America, people were driving them to Muskoka.<sup>75</sup> The first automobiles in North America were imported from Germany in 1895 and sold by three New York department stores.<sup>76</sup> In 1907, US automakers produced 44,000 cars. The following year, Ford introduced their Model-T, and the automobile took off. In 1913, all US automakers produced 485,000 automobiles. Three years later, Ford manufactured 738,811 Model-Ts alone.<sup>77</sup> The automobile's success was replicated north of the border, in Ontario. Between 1904 and 1915, Canadians built 135,000 automobiles, almost all of them in Ontario.<sup>78</sup> Car ownership in the province remained relatively small until the second decade of the century, when the number of cars registered climbed from 23,700 in 1913

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<sup>75</sup> Peter Stevens, "Cars and Cottages: The Automotive Transformation of Ontario's Summer Home Tradition" *Ontario History* Vol.100, No.1 (Spring 2008), 26-56. The automobile revolutionized transportation in North America, which had a variety of political, economic, social and cultural effects. James J. Flink, *America Adopts the Automobile, 1895-1910*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1970); James J. Flink, *The Car Culture*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1975); James J. Flink, *The Automobile Age*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988); Warren J. Belasco, *Americans on the Road: From Autocamp to Motel, 1910-1945*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1979); Michael Berger, *The Devil Wagon in God's Country: The Automobile and Social Change in Rural America, 1893-1929* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1979); The best on this topic in Ontario is Stephen James Davies, "Ontario and the Automobile, 1900-1930: Aspects of Technological Integration" Unpublished Dissertation (PhD. Dissertation, McMaster University, 1987).

<sup>76</sup> Flink, *Automobile Age*, 13.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 27, 36-37.

<sup>78</sup> Davies, "Ontario and the Automobile," 31.



to 127,860 in 1919.<sup>79</sup> Automobiles transformed towns and cities, but the most important changes related to their introduction occurred in the country where farmers owned between a quarter and a third of all cars in Ontario between the First World War and the Great Depression.<sup>80</sup>

The railway altered society's perceptual and physical experiences with time and space during the late nineteenth century. Yet, trains had two distinct limitations. The first was that the options for destinations were limited and pre-determined by the route of the tracks. The second was that passengers and shipments had to conform to train schedules. As automobile historian Stephen Davies argues, for North Americans during the early twentieth century, "The automobile... meant liberation from railway timetables and pre-determined destinations; it provided hitherto unknown freedom of distances and direction."<sup>81</sup> Simply put, the automobile enabled the rural population to transform fundamentally the way they organized and engaged with community, leisure, religion, education and health care.<sup>82</sup> Although cars made new social and economic contacts possible, and enriched the lives of many isolated and lonely people, it also undermined many community and family patterns of rural life.<sup>83</sup> In the process, as historian Joseph Interrante argues, the automobile did not so much enlarge rural space, as reshape it "into a more centralized and hierarchical form... ." Automobiles expanded the socioeconomic hinterland of rural residents very little. Instead, "[a]utomobile use encouraged not longer trips but *more frequent*."<sup>84</sup> The result was what Interrante calls 'metropolitanism.' He explains:

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 387, Appendix 1; Ontario, *Sessional Papers* (1929-30), No.5, 190.

<sup>80</sup> Davies, "Ontario and the Automobile," 390, Appendix 4.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 111-112.

<sup>82</sup> Berger, *Devil Wagon in God's Country*.

<sup>83</sup> Davies also explores the use of advertising by car companies and their influence on the way rural residents thought about the potential benefits of the automobile. While these advertisements do reflect a certain segment of the population, there were also vocal critics of the car, especially in rural areas. Berger, *Devil Wagon in God's Country*, 24-31, 138-143; Davies, "Ontario and the Automobile," 302-379.

<sup>84</sup> Joseph Interrante, "You Can't Go to Town in a Bathtub: Automobile Movement and the Reorganization of Rural American Space, 1900-1930" *Radical History Review*, Vol.21 (Fall 1979), 157-58, emphasis in original.

‘Metropolitanism’ is a de-politicized way of describing the reorganization of everyday life according to dictates of a consumer economy. Many, if not all, of the village-centered institutions sold goods and provided services - food, clothing, education, health care, entertainment - which farm women had produced or performed themselves, and over which farm families had retained a close and immediate control. Metropolitanism interrupted that relationship and thus represented a reorganization of the social relations of consumption.<sup>85</sup>

Prior to the automobile, rural residents made trips by foot or horse and wagon, and their plans necessarily took into consideration the limitations of these somatic modes of transportation. The automobile made it possible for individuals to devote less time and effort to transportation, and therefore less thought to the types of trips made. By burning gasoline, the internal combustion engine made it possible to separate the consumption of energy from its production.

Transportation choices were, therefore, guided increasingly by consumer-style and individualistic preferences, and less by social circumstance, economic necessity, or cultural norms. As we will see, in Muskoka, these kinds of changes, occasioned by the internal combustion engine, took place on the water after motorboats appeared on the lakes.

Many of the effects that automobiles had in rural communities further south did not materialize in the same way, or as quickly in Muskoka owing to the region’s rocky topography and thinly settled population. Nevertheless, the appeal of the automobile to *tourists* occurred quite early. In contrast to the attraction cars held elsewhere, argues Peter Stevens, “people who drove their automobiles to the cottage during this period did so mainly to prove they could, not because the trip was particularly fast or convenient.”<sup>86</sup> Although province-wide road and highway improvement projects were not begun in Ontario until roughly a decade later,<sup>87</sup> the earliest recorded motor tourists entered the region in 1905, when two brothers attempted to drive

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 158

<sup>86</sup> Stevens, “Cars and Cottages,” 34.

<sup>87</sup> Davies, “Ontario and the Automobile,” 353.

from their home in Cleveland, Tennessee to North Bay on Lake Nipissing. It was not until Walter and Jack Milne reached the unforgiving landscape of the Precambrian Shield that they encountered problems. South of Gravenhurst, the car's two rear springs broke, forcing a stop in Gravenhurst for repairs. Their journey then continued north along the Muskoka Road through Bracebridge and Huntsville before the car broke down completely near Burk's Falls.<sup>88</sup> A few years later, a regular guest to Summit House, William W. Harker, journeyed from his home in East Liverpool, Ohio to Port Cockburn at the north end of Lake Joseph in the family's Stearns Knight touring car. That year the hotel had postcards made featuring Harker's car with the captions "Prettiest Spot in Muskoka" and "U Auto Come to Summit House, Port Cockburn, Muskoka, Canada."<sup>89</sup> Like the Milne's trip, nature foiled Harker's plan to make the return journey by car when heavy rains washed out part of the Parry Sound Road. The Navigation Company rescued Harker and his auto by transporting them both to Gravenhurst by steamer.<sup>90</sup> Indeed, as these two examples illustrate, little was comfortable or liberating about the automobile as far north as Muskoka.

As Gregory Summers has shown in the case of a similar landscape in rural Wisconsin, "[b]efore the advent of paved roads, the fields, hills, and rivers, as well as the sheer distances that comprised the [regional] landscape, had been nearly inseparable from the human labor required to move around, over, and through them."<sup>91</sup> In Ontario, it was not until 1919, when the United Farmers of Ontario (UFO) formed the provincial government, that road building became a priority across the province. Over the next four years, the UFO dramatically increased

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<sup>88</sup> Lee Ann Eckhardt Smith, *Muskoka's Main Street: 150 Years of Courage and Adventure Along the Muskoka Colonization Road* (Bracebridge, ON: Muskoka Books, 2012), 135-137.

<sup>89</sup> Brendan O'Brien, *The Prettiest Spot in Muskoka* (Toronto: Bobolink Books, 1999), 8-11.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>91</sup> Gregory Summers, *Consuming Nature: Environmentalism in the Fox River Valley, 1850-1950* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2006), 141.

expenditures devoted to road building in the province. In 1923, the UFO's last year in power, the government spent over \$23 million on roads, almost a third of provincial expenditures that year. Unfortunately for people in Muskoka, highway improvement projects stopped at the Severn River. Between 1889 and 1908, the townships in the District of Muskoka spent only \$170,752 on roads, while townships in the District of Parry Sound spent just \$88,733 (just 40 and 21 percent of the provincial average respectively).<sup>92</sup> And, even after the Highway Improvement Act came into effect further south, Simcoe County was the farthest north provincially-funded road improvement projects extended until the Muskoka Road was incorporated into the Ferguson Highway in the late 1920s.<sup>93</sup> Thus, during the first three decades of the twentieth century, driving a car to Muskoka on Shield country was just as much (if not more) a contest with the landscape and environmental irregularities as driving a horse and wagon. Roads in Muskoka did not keep cars separate from the surrounding landscape, they embedded cars within it.

During the First World War two separate families, the Trusslers and Graingers, made their first trips to Muskoka by car and experienced the myriad ways the local environment continued to shape personal mobility. In 1914, Edwin Grainger and his family traveled north from Toronto in their Model-T to their cottage on Morrison Lake. According to the reminiscences of Grainger's daughter, Edna, although the roads became "tortuous, full of hazards for the early little Model-Ts" north of Richmond Hill, no problems occurred until the family was approaching Orillia, where "the car bogged down in a stretch of fine sand" and everyone had to get out and push. Further along, as the car struggled with the hilly terrain, "[t]he motor overheated

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<sup>92</sup> Ontario, *Sessional Papers* (1910), No.14, 94.

<sup>93</sup> Smith, *Muskoka's Main Street*, 143-144.

frequently, and Dad... [would] have to go in search of water to fill the rad[iator] again... .”<sup>94</sup> The following year, and traveling in the opposite direction from the small town of Trout Creek south of North Bay, Hartley Trussler’s family followed the Muskoka Road south to Bracebridge. Like Edna Grainger, Trussler was young at the time, and remembered one of his main responsibilities along the way was “to put stones behind the wheels of the car when the driver changed gears on a hill.”<sup>95</sup> En route, the Graingers and Trusslers adjusted their expectations and worked to overcome the obstacles presented by the environment they moved through. The absence of maps or signage to help travelers identify where they were reinforced their embeddedness in the landscape. “No one knew where we should turn off the main road [to get to Morrison Lake],” recalled Edna Grainger. And, Hartley Trussler was repeatedly sent “into farm houses and stores to ask the way to the next town.” Without any reference points, visitors by road had to pay close attention to the landscape and rely on local knowledge to navigate Muskoka’s roads. Until the late 1920s, the frontier of the automobile coincided with the Canadian Shield. Beyond the frontier, there were no guarantees.

Automobiles were unpopular with year-round residents in Muskoka during the first quarter of the twentieth century. In 1919, a year in which 127,860 automobiles were registered in Ontario, Muskoka residents owned just 345. In 1920, there were 611 cars in Muskoka, and in 1926 there were 1,659. By 1929, there were still just 2,363 cars registered in Muskoka.<sup>96</sup> Year-round residents began to experiment by offering transportation by car instead of stage coach, and

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<sup>94</sup> Edna Irene Grainger Page, “Otiosus,” memoirs of cottaging on Morrison Lake, 1960, shared with the author by Benjamin Bryce, 66-68.

<sup>95</sup> Smith, *Muskoka’s Main Street*, 139.

<sup>96</sup> Ontario, *Sessional Papers* (1920), No.15, 91; (1922), No.15, 82; (1929), No.43, 190; (1931), No.47, 193.

delivering supplies by road instead of water, but overall cars remained a novelty during the golden age of steamboat navigation in Muskoka.<sup>97</sup>

### *Motorboats*

Unlike the case on land, on the water, the internal combustion engine changed personal mobility, and in turn, the social, economic and environmental characteristics of transportation in Muskoka. The movement of people and things within Muskoka took place primarily by water. The bulk of this traffic comprised commercial steamboats, such as those operated by the Navigation Company. Rowboats and canoes provided a modicum of personal mobility, but muscles and weather limited these modes of transportation. Personal mobility in Muskoka was revolutionized when internal combustion engines were combined with wooden launches to create motorboats. Apart from the winter (roughly December-April) when the lakes froze, the motorboat faced very few obstacles in Muskoka. Consequently, the motorboat did for Muskoka what the automobile did for southern Ontario. With only a small amount of an incredibly energy-dense, non-volatile liquid fuel, and a relatively simple, easy-to-operate motor, people in Muskoka effortlessly and affordably traversed the lakes and rivers without having to conform to the Navigation Company's schedule or routes. Although the engine noise was much louder than anything else on the lakes at the time, initially there were so few motorboats that their presence barely registered notice. As their benefits became known, and their numbers increased, however, the effect of this new mode of transportation became more widely felt. Taken individually, a motorboat had almost no impact on society, economy or environment in Muskoka. But, in

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<sup>97</sup> O'Brien, *Prettiest Little Spot in Muskoka*, 142, 144.

aggregate they had begun to reorganize several aspects of Muskoka's societal metabolism by the end of the First World War.

It took almost no time for enterprising boatbuilders to transfer internal combustion engines to watercraft. For a few years before this happened, however, personal mobility by water in Muskoka was limited to rowboats and canoes, or for a select few (mainly summer cottagers), private steam yachts.<sup>98</sup> The first privately-owned steam yacht in Muskoka intended solely as the means of transportation for its owner, was the *Naiad*. Built in 1890 in Toronto, for William Eli Sandford of Hamilton (the 'Wool King of Canada'), the *Naiad* was the first of several dozen extravagant steamers owned by wealthy cottagers.<sup>99</sup> Many factors made steam yachts an impractical personal mobility option for the majority. The first, and perhaps most important, was cost. Steam engines, in addition to being expensive themselves, were so large that the crafts bearing them generally were large and expensive. Second, steam engines were not on-demand modes of transportation. Pressure had to be built up before the engine could perform any work, which required time. Thus, trips had to be planned ahead. Third, and somewhat related, steamers were complex and potentially dangerous machines, which the average cottager had no idea how to operate. Owners often kept engineers in their employ, which added to the costs. And, when the owner wanted to go for a ride, the engineer was needed. All of these factors meant steam launches remained unrealistic transportation options for the majority of Muskoka residents. Nevertheless, several of Muskoka's wealthier summer residents invested in private steam yachts during the final decade or so of the nineteenth century. In 1902, the Muskoka Lakes Association

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<sup>98</sup> A handful of year-round residents owned small steamers, but these were almost exclusively working boats that operated in connection with logging, merchant or contracting businesses. A few offered passenger excursions on special occasions, but these supplemented the Navigation Company's services rather than providing personal mobility solutions. Tatley, *Steamboat Era, Vol.I*, 153-188.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 239.

(MLA) Yearbook recorded a total of 28 steam launches belonging to roughly 15 percent of its members.<sup>100</sup> In that year, however, the yearbook also revealed that personal mobility was about to change.

Both the McLachlan Gasoline Engine Co. of Toronto and the Hamilton Model Works featured advertisements for marine engines in the 1902 MLA Yearbook. The Hamilton Model Works even included a photograph of a motorboat filled with people to demonstrate what exactly a gasoline engine might offer Muskoka residents.<sup>101</sup> The modification of the internal combustion engine for marine use enabled Muskoka's local boat builders to become industry pioneers. Although many of the earliest gasoline launches came to Muskoka from a few manufacturers in Toronto, Hamilton and the United States, in 1898 local boat builder Henry Ditchburn began building gasoline launches in Gravenhurst.<sup>102</sup> A decade later, Ditchburn's 1908 catalogue featured a canoe, rowboat, small 'power skiff' and a larger 'cabin day cruiser.'<sup>103</sup> Two years later, Hubert C. Minett began his own boat building company in Bracebridge, and three more boat builders also began operations in Port Carling around this time.<sup>104</sup> In 1906, the MLA Yearbook listed four gasoline launches and 52 steam launches.<sup>105</sup> By the First World War, motorboats were ubiquitous around the lower lakes. The 1915 *Muskoka Lakes Blue Book, Directory and Chart* lists 407 gasoline motorboats on the three lower lakes, 80 percent of these boats belonged to cottagers.<sup>106</sup> In 1915, Port Carling resident William Johnston built the prototype for the first,

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<sup>100</sup> *Muskoka Lakes Association 1902 Yearbook*, J.D. McMurrich, ed. (Toronto: Oxford Press, 1902), 62.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 11, 70.

<sup>102</sup> A.H. Duke and W.M. Gray, *The Boatbuilders of Muskoka* (Toronto: W.M. Gray & Company, 1985), 15, 17.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 13-14

<sup>104</sup> A.H. Duke in 1908, John Matheson in 1910, and W.J. Johnston in 1915. Duke, 91-92; Paul Dodington, et al., *The Greatest Little Motorboat Afloat: The Legendary Disappearing Propellor Boat* (Toronto: Stoddart Publishing Co., 1994), 29.

<sup>105</sup> Brendan O'Brien, "Memories: Cottage Life at the Turn of the Century", in Muskoka Lakes Association, *Summertimes: In Celebration of 100 Years of the Muskoka Lakes Association*, (Erin, ON: Boston Mills Press, 1994), 117.

<sup>106</sup> John Rogers, *Muskoka Lakes Bluebook, Directory and Chart, 1915* (Port Sandfield, ON: John Rogers, 1915).



mass-produced motorboat in North America: the Disappearing Propeller Boat. Initially, Johnston simply added a small gasoline engine to modified rowboats, but by 1916 they were in factory production.<sup>107</sup> In 1917, by which point the Disappearing Propeller Boat (or Dippy, D.P., for short) had already become extraordinarily popular in Muskoka, the company sold their cheapest model for \$225, roughly two-thirds the cost of a Model-T. In fact, the popularity and price of Dippys were such that people had begun comparing them to Model-Ts. Johnston's company quickly adopted the association when they decided to name their original model the 'Water-Ford'.<sup>108</sup> In 1915, the company advertised Dippys as motorized rowboats, capable of running in shallow water and being pulled up on dock.<sup>109</sup> Three years later, advertisements claimed Dippys were "Safe, economical, convenient" and capable of getting 23-25 miles per gallon.<sup>110</sup> Of the 895 cottagers listed in the 1918 *Rogers Blue Book and Directory*, 38 percent of them owned a motorboat.<sup>111</sup> Although the number of automobiles in Muskoka surpassed the number of motorboats in 1920, the number of motorboats continued to climb. Ultimately, so many motorboats on the lakes greatly expanded the flow of energy within Muskoka's societal metabolism. The consequence of so much extra-somatic energy devoted to personal modes of transportation was that motorboating often came into direct conflict with pre-existing social, economic and environmental arrangements.

With the use of a motorboat, the time required to get from one side of the lake to the other had been reduced dramatically without requiring more effort, planning or expense. Aside from getting it started (which sometime did require a good amount of force), motors performed all the

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<sup>107</sup> Dodington, *Greatest Little Motorboat*, 29, 40.

<sup>108</sup> Dodington, *Greatest Little Motorboat*, 43-45.

<sup>109</sup> Rogers, *Bluebook (1915)*, 102.

<sup>110</sup> John Rogers, *Muskoka Lakes Bluebook, Directory and Chart, 1918* (Port Sandfield, ON: John Rogers, 1918), 82.

<sup>111</sup> Rogers, *Bluebook (1918)*.

work. Since gasoline engines provided on-demand power, saving effort did not require coordinating trips with the Navigation Company's schedule. Owning and operating a motorboat was far less expensive than owning a steam launch. For instance, in 1918, at a time when gasoline was scarce, it cost approximately \$0.02 per mile to run a Dippy.<sup>112</sup> By comparison, a few years earlier, a trip aboard the *Kenozha* from Port Carling to Rosseau cost \$0.60.<sup>113</sup> All of these factors meant cottagers and settlers who could afford a motorboat gave little thought to the decision to make a typical trip. Moreover, as Joseph Interrante points out for the case of the automobile, a typical trip by motorboat did not generally cover any more distance than a trip by rowboat or steamer, but the frequency of those trips increased significantly.<sup>114</sup> This new way of thinking about travel time on the lakes quickly brought the individualism of the motorboat into conflict with the mass transit of the Navigation Company. In September 1909, Frank P. Jennings, wrote to the Minister of Railways and Canals to complain about "the practice of the SS. [sic] Sagamo, and other steamers, of using the lock at Port Carling, Muskoka, as a dock for loading and unloading freight and passengers, thereby causing serious delay and inconvenience to other boats wishing to pass up or down the lakes."<sup>115</sup> Prior to this time there were too few other boats on the lakes for a contest over access to the locks. Steamers had been the dominant mode of transportation on the lakes. By 1909, individuals with motorboats had begun to view steamers as impediments to their personal mobility. The competition for space at the docks and use of locks

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<sup>112</sup> Local historian Brendan O'Brien claims gasoline cost \$0.50/gallon in 1917, while the Disappearing Propeller Boat Company claimed their boats got 23-25 miles/gallon. O'Brien, *Prettiest Spot in Muskoka*, 127; Rogers, *Bluebook (1918)*, 82.

<sup>113</sup> The Muskoka Lakes Navigation and Hotel Company, *Muskoka Lakes Line: Summer Time Table, 1913* (unknown publisher, 1913), 15.

<sup>114</sup> Interrante, "Automobile Movement," 157-158.

<sup>115</sup> "Muskoka Canal – Port Carling – use of lock, 1909-1928," LAC, RG43, Vol. 1580, file no 8127.

likely continued for the next decade or so until the government opened a second smaller set of locks for motorboats next to Baisong Rapids in 1922.<sup>116</sup>

Motorboats themselves only started coming under fire a few years later when the number of motorboats began to rise and their aggregate effect began to be felt. The most pressing concern involved speed along narrow waterways, such as the Muskoka River, where the energy of motorboats represented a real threat to others on the water. In May 1914, George N. Wilkins of Baysville wrote to the Department of Marine and Fisheries (DMF) to complain that

in the summer time a good many fast gasoline launches travel up and down the [south branch of the Muskoka] River at all times of the day and night, and as on the same river a good many tourists with their families live and reside, and come and go in their row-boats and canoes, it has become dangerous to travel on account of the swell thrown from the said launches.<sup>117</sup>

Wilkins concluded by enquiring whether the municipal government had the “jurisdiction and power to make and pass by-laws restricting the speed of launches on [the Muskoka River].” The same month, councillor James D. Smith, writing on behalf of two Townships along the river requested the authority to regulate boat traffic speed on the South Muskoka River, since “some of the owners run as high as fifteen miles an hour endangering [sic] the lives of people in row boats and canoes, people are getting afraid to allow their children out in case of their being swamped.”<sup>118</sup> The following August, William Rumsey, a resident of Huntsville, described a similar story on the North Muskoka River, claiming “several accidents have happened, in this vicinity, from the wash of both Steamboats and Gasoline Launches running at what is considered by some to be excessive Speed.”<sup>119</sup> To Rumsey the threat was not just the boats, but the energy

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<sup>116</sup> Richard Tatley, *Port Carling: The Hub of the Muskoka Lakes*, (Erin, ON: Boston Mills Press, 1996), 71.

<sup>117</sup> “Marine – General – Control of small boats – Muskoka Lakes District, general, 1914-1929,” LAC, RG42, Vol. 436, file no 161-1-10.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

contained in their wake as well. Indeed, motorboat wake was not just a threat to others on the water, but the shoreline ecology as well. In August 1917, the Municipal Clerk for the Town of Huntsville wrote to the DMF about the effect persistent wake was having on the shores of the north branch:

Dear Sirs:-

I am instructed by the Municipal Council to call your attention to the way in which the [North Muskoka] River bank in certain places within the Corporation is being washed away.

Owing to the speed at which the Steam and Motor Boats travel at certain points the River bank is being washed away very quickly, And if it is not put a stop to it will not be long before it will encroach on a Street which runs along the River bank...<sup>120</sup>

On the lower lakes, where the water opened up, wind and storm patterns had kept exposed shorelines clear of soil and vegetation. As waves hit these shores, their energy slowly eroded granite. In narrow bodies of water, more protected from strong winds and large waves, the shoreline developed and held soils and vegetation. When motorboats passed through at fast speeds, the energy from their wake had nowhere to go, and so slammed into the shoreline causing significant erosion.

In almost all cases, requests for regulation or permission to institute local traffic by-laws met with little support. Responding to George Wilkins' letter, the Deputy Minister of the DMF stated that he thought it was "doubtful" that any "by-laws restricting the speed of motor launches in the Muskoka River" were "in order."<sup>121</sup> Other responses simply informed concerned citizens and township officials that there were no rules governing the speed of boats on navigable waterways, and charged the senders \$0.25 for a copy of the Canada Shipping Act. The municipal

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

governments of the lower lakes finally got involved in the fall of 1918, when J.H. Forbes, Municipal Clerk for two Townships that included parts of Lake Rosseau and Lake Joseph, highlighted the “453 power boats on the lakes by actual count, the majority of these being high powered speed boats. This does not include a large number of small motor boats of the disappearing propeller type [Dippys] estimated count about one hundred each having a speed of nine miles per hour.” In particular, Forbes’ concern focused on “the narrow places on the lakes, [such as] the Port Sandfield cut between Lake Joseph and Lake Rosseau.” Forbes estimated that “On average at least twenty five power boats pass through the above named dangerous place [Port Sandfield cut] each day during the summer season and by actual observation not three out of every twelve boats, slow down...”<sup>122</sup> A number of township councils petitioned to have boats licensed and speed regulated for the District of Muskoka by the beginning of the 1919 season. Three years later, at the sixth annual meeting of the Gordon Bay Association, permanent residents and cottagers at the north end of Lake Joseph resolved, “That the Government be requested to investigate the question of high speed limits for motor boats in channels, and near wharves or near small boats, and if necessary to provide further legislation, or more vigorous enforcement [sic] of the present law, in order to insure the safety of life and property.”<sup>123</sup> Efforts such as these continued throughout the 1920s, as the number of motorboats in Muskoka continued to rise. It was not until 1929 that an amendment to the Government Harbours and Piers Act (itself only enacted in 1927) applied the “Rules for the Road for the Great Lakes, their connecting tributary water, etc.” to “All the waters of Lakes Muskoka, Rosseau, Joseph,

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

including their connecting and tributary waters.”<sup>124</sup> Considered individually, motorboats caused only isolated problems. Taken in aggregate, the growing number of motorboats during the first quarter of the twentieth century changed the very nature of transportation in Muskoka, and contributed to environmental change at the sites of energy production in much the same way as coal production.

During the early years of the century, small quantities of gasoline could be purchased from the general store. Orders of Imperial Oil were occasionally shipped by scow by the Navigation Company in steel barrels.<sup>125</sup> But, as the number of motorboats increased, gasoline supplies came from more specialized distributors. Initially, boat builders supplied gas for motorboats. Gasoline was shipped to Muskoka by rail tanker and transferred to holding tanks next to the water. Employees of firms like Ditchburn at Muskoka Wharf, or Bastien at Barnesdale, would portion out barrels and 5-gallon cans and deliver them around the lake to customers by scow.<sup>126</sup> As demand grew, this method also proved inadequate and too dangerous. In 1919, a 2,300-gallon tanker, the *Motor Queen*, was introduced by Imperial Oil to deliver its products around the lakes. The fuel was transferred from rail tankers to the *Motor Queen* at the Canadian Pacific Railway station in Bala, and shipped around the lake where it was pumped into barrels or customers’ personal holding tanks. Two years later, presumably in an attempt to keep up with demand, the *Motor Queen* was replaced with the *Muskokalite*.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> The controversy and struggle for regulation of motorboats shares many similarities with the efforts to regulate automobiles around the same time. Davies, “Ontario and the Automobile,” 204-301; “Control of small boats,” LAC, RG 42, Vol.436, file no 161-1-10.

<sup>125</sup> Petry, *Bala*, 95.

<sup>126</sup> Duke, *Boatbuilders*, 27.

<sup>127</sup> Another tank depot belonging to the British-American Oil Company was located on Bala Park Island next to the siding. Petry, *Bala*, 95-96, 144-145; Duke, *Boatbuilders*, 27, 29.

The *Rogers Blue Book and Directory* lists 395 motorboats in 1918. Yet, the Municipal Clerk mentioned above estimated the number of motorboats, including Dippys, to be 553 in his letter to the DMF in September 1918. Taking the average between these two numbers, if the average fuel efficiency of all the boats is taken to be 17 miles per gallon, and each owner made an average of one two-mile trip everyday for the ten weeks of the summer, then all the motorboats in Muskoka required approximately 3,900 gallons of gasoline in 1918. This is most likely a low estimate, since the *Motor Queen* could carry 2,300 gallons of gas, but was replaced just two years later with the larger *Muskokalite*.<sup>128</sup>

Like the coal requirements for the Navigation Company, the petroleum requirements of motorboats in Muskoka were minuscule compared to the available supply. Unlike coal, Ontario produced petroleum. In 1858, James Williams struck oil in Enniskillen Township in Lambton County, Ontario. In the years that followed, the community of Oil Springs (later renamed Petrolia) quickly became a world leader in oil production.<sup>129</sup> In the year Ditchburn built Muskoka's first motorboat in 1898, Ontario produced 27 million gallons of petroleum.<sup>130</sup> Nearby refineries in Petrolia and Sarnia processed the vast majority of this into kerosene and lubricants. There was little regulation of the industry during the nineteenth century, and production declined just as the internal combustion engine was becoming popular. In 1909, Lambton County oil

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<sup>128</sup> The average motorboat fuel efficiency was calculated by averaging that of the Dippy (24 mi/gal) and this author's estimate of the lowest mileage (10 mi/gal). The average trip length is strictly a guess based on the assumption that on some days no trips would be made and on others considerably longer trips would be made. To put this in perspective, 3,904 gallons of gasoline equals 488,000,000 BTUs. This equates to less than half of one percent of the BTUs needed to fuel the Navigation Company in 1910. "Navigation Company balance sheets, 1897, 1902, 1905, 1906, 1908, 1910," AMSHS, Royal Muskoka #4 File, Accounting Data, Drawer FC 1a, Muskoka Boat and Heritage Centre, Gravenhurst; *A Landowner's Guide to Selling Standing Timber* 61; "What is Energy?," <http://www4.uwsp.edu/cnr/wcee/keep/Mod1/Whatis/energyresourcetables.htm> Last accessed February 8, 2014.

<sup>129</sup> Drummond, *Progress Without Planning*, 93-97; Christina Burr, *Canada's Victorian Oil Town: The Transformation of Petrolia from a Resource Town into a Victorian Community*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006).

<sup>130</sup> Drummond, *Progress Without Planning*, 390-391.

production dropped below 15 million gallons - less than any year since the 1870s - forcing refineries in the province to look to the American producers in Pennsylvania for more than half of their throughput.<sup>131</sup> Production continued to decline through the 1910s and 1920s until Lambton County production accounted for only a tiny fraction of the oil being refined in the province. Still, the few million barrels of oil produced in Lambton County was more than enough to satisfy the demand for gasoline in Muskoka by the time motorboats and automobiles became popular during the second and third decades of the twentieth century. But, by 1920 petroleum products refined in Ontario were a blend of crude oil supplies, only a fraction of which came from Lambton County. Regardless of where it came from, gasoline, like coal, was a non-renewable mineral fuel brought to Muskoka as an exogenous input with origins in a distant landscape.

More than just automobiles and motorboats, gasoline fueled a reconceptualization of transportation in Muskoka. Steamboats and trains had transformed mobility in their own right during the nineteenth century, but the internal combustion engine personalized mobility. Rough roads precluded the widespread adoption of the automobile in Muskoka until the end of the 1920s, while horses continued to provide the motive power for personal modes of transportation overland. With motorboats, traveling from one place to another by water was no longer strictly a choice between cramped muscles or crowded steamers. Unlike trips on foot, by canoe or in wood-fired steamboats, trips by motorboat divorced the consumption of energy from its production, which made the decision to make a trip much easier. As a result, motorboat owners

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<sup>131</sup> Technological advances after the turn of the century enabled refiners to get more end product out each barrel of oil. Around 1900 five gallons of gasoline could be refined from one 42-gallon barrel of crude oil. After the cracking method of separating petroleum was introduced in 1913 the gasoline yield per barrel increased until in 1918 22.5 gallons of gas could be refined from a single barrel. Schurr and Netschert, *Energy in the American Economy*, 116-117; Drummond, *Progress Without Planning*, 96.



found they could make trips more frequently than they did before. Taken individually, motorboats did not change social, economic or environmental arrangements much. But adding the individual trips together, this mode of transportation altered the way people interacted on the water, the way fuel was distributed and consumed in Muskoka, and the way mobility shaped and was shaped by the surrounding environment. While Muskoka's societal metabolism did not expand much as a direct result of the adoption of these new technologies, as we will see in chapter 6, a pattern of personal mobility was established that would enable further expansions to the flow of material and energy into Muskoka following the Second World War.

### Conclusion

Not much stayed the same for very long in Muskoka between 1850 and 1920. Socioecological relationships were constantly changing, reshaping the region's overall societal metabolism. Many factors influenced the flow of material and energy in Muskoka, but transportation shaped them all. In nature, plants and animals facilitate the flow of material and energy through ecosystems aided by soils, geology, water and air. When humans were added to the equation in Muskoka, people's relationship to the environment repurposed these flows to turn 'movement' into 'transportation'. Transportation accounts for the dynamism - the flows - in the human-nature relationship. The socioecological relationships that comprised Muskoka's societal metabolism were constantly changing, and were products, in very large measure, of numerous, evolving, overlapping, complementary and destabilizing modes of transportation. New modes coexisted and conflicted with older ones, and enabled a steady expansion of Muskoka's societal metabolism. In some cases, this expansion resulted in more sustainable social, economic and environmental arrangements, and in other cases less sustainable ones.

With the arrival of the railway in 1875, transportation in Muskoka entered the mineral economy. Locomotives consumed coal, not wood. After the turn of the twentieth century, steamers also began burning coal, and automobiles and motorboats ran on gasoline. Without replacing older organic modes of transportation, these mineral modes of transportation assumed a more dominant position within Muskoka's society and economy, changing the way people and things moved into, through, and out of Muskoka. Prior to the railway, the flow of material and energy into Muskoka was insufficient to reproduce and maintain certain social relationships, patterns of economic exchange and environmental conditions. The railway's coal-fired locomotives overcame the limits imposed on the region's societal metabolism by muscle-powered carriages and wagons traveling along the Muskoka Road. After the turn of the twentieth century, however, coal also enabled lifestyles in Muskoka to exceed some of the more sustainable limits imposed by organic modes of transportation. And incredibly energy-dense gasoline enabled new patterns of personal mobility that challenged mass transportation by train or steamboat. While personal mobility provided individuals with more choice, it also changed the way they engaged in their community, the local economy and sites of energy production.

At each stage in Muskoka's transportation history, new technologies and fuels made greater quantities of energy available for humans to perform the work of moving people and things from one place to another. In each case and to varying degrees, these technologies and fuels represented a blend of the natural world and human artifice. Humans modified the environment to accommodate different modes of transportation, but the environment also defined the limitations of each. The technologies involved in any particular mode of transportation were not inherently any more or less sustainable than another. Rather, it was the uses to which the

technologies and their associative fuels were put that determined their role in shaping sustainability in Muskoka. Each mode of transportation enabled progressively greater expansions of Muskoka's societal metabolism. Along with the capacity to move large amounts of people and things, the choice to move things greater distances in less time enabled people in Muskoka to increase the flow of material and energy into, through and out of Muskoka. As we will see in the five chapters that follow, the society, economy and environment changed in Muskoka as flows increased. No group experienced these changes more profoundly than Muskoka's Aboriginal peoples.

*Chapter 3: Experiences of Continuity and Change for Muskoka's First Nations*

We cannot but fear that the day may be approaching when the pressure of the tide of immigration into the country may overpower all the barriers which now fence the Indian possessions, when the demands of the White population for land may become too strong to be successfully withstood, and that the Redman may be deprived of all that still remains to him of his once wide domain.

R.T. Pennefather, *Report on Indian Affairs in Canada*, 1856<sup>1</sup>

For the Anishinaabeg of south-central Ontario who called Muskoka home, relations with white people and proximity to encroaching Eurocanadian settlement from the south had by 1856 begun to deprive them of their 'domain'. The changes that resulted from this systematic loss of their domain, or sovereignty over the land, made their lives less sustainable than they had been prior to colonization. The social, economic and environmental arrangements of south-central Ontario's Anishinaabeg were not entirely sustainable at the start of the nineteenth century. To suggest they were reduces the Anishinaabeg to "ecological Indians" whose connections with the natural world were so essential to their culture and economy that they were incapable of shaping their environment in ways that had unintended and destructive consequences.<sup>2</sup> Like any other group of people, the Anishinaabeg contended with changing demographics, economic imperatives, and ecological variation from within their own society. By the start of the nineteenth century, the Anishinaabeg of south-central Ontario had experienced roughly a century in which outside forces had not seriously disrupted their society, subsistence activities and relationship

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<sup>1</sup> *Report of the Special Commissioners Appointed on the 8th of September, 1856, to Investigate Indian Affairs in Canada* (Toronto: Stewart Derbishire & George Desbarats, 1858), Part III, 10. Hereafter *Pennefather Report*

<sup>2</sup> Shepard Krech III, *The Ecological Indian: Myth and History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1999). There was nothing inherent to indigenous world views that made their culture more sustainable than European cultures. As Krech wrote in a later article, "What determined environmental impact in North America was not environmental knowledge but, rather, mainly subsistence and material needs keyed to population size and density, human mobility or sedentariness, and work and leisure cycles." Shepard Krech III, "Reflections on Conservation, Sustainability, and Environmentalism in Indigenous North America" *American Anthropologist*, Vol.107, Issue 1 (2005), 80.

with the natural world. The result was a way of life and a societal metabolism that reproduced itself socially, economically and environmentally. As the nineteenth century unfolded, colonization brought wave after wave of disruptive change, which fractured and redefined their social organization, restricted and denied their rights and access to resources, and dispossessed them of their land and the material and energy flows that sustained them. Compared to the circumstances that existed at the start of the century, conditions became less sustainable with each wave of colonization and the changes it brought.

After 1881, the Anishinaabeg were not the only Aboriginal people to inhabit Muskoka. As a result of social and political disruptions for the Mohawk of Kanasatake (Lake of Two Mountains) at Oka, Quebec during the nineteenth century, the federal government gave almost three dozen families permission to relocate to a reserve in Gibson Township in Muskoka. The Mohawks did not share the Anishinaabeg's intimate history with Muskoka and the surrounding regions. As a result, they do not turn up until the final section of this chapter. For roughly two hundred years prior to relocating in Muskoka, the Mohawks lived in close proximity with Eurocanadians in New France and Quebec. The Mohawks lacked the intimate knowledge of Muskoka's environment that the Anishinaabeg possessed, but were confronted with many of the same restrictions, paternalistic policies and discrimination when they arrived in 1881. Their long experience with Eurocanadians and a market economy, not with the place itself, prepared this community to adjust to its new setting in Muskoka.

In south-central Ontario, the worst effects of colonization and state control were somewhat mitigated by the particular environmental characteristics of the Precambrian Shield. The region remained an Aboriginal place, beyond the purview of the Crown, until after the

midpoint of the nineteenth century. Janet Chute has made a similar argument, revealing the ways that Anishinaabe leaders in northeastern Ontario purposefully retained a traditional approach to band governance while adopting creative and pragmatic approaches to the imposition of colonizing pressures during the mid to late nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup> As Chute points out, the Shield environment provided conditions for greater Aboriginal autonomy than were available further south and west.<sup>4</sup> The geological history of the Shield created topography and soils in Muskoka that were highly unsuitable for agriculture. Compared to areas south of the Shield, places like Muskoka experienced considerably less conversion from forests to farmland during colonization. This meant that despite the pressures in Muskoka to eliminate indigenous ways of life during this period, for over a century after Eurocanadians began to deprive them of their domain, the Shield provided opportunities for the Anishinaabeg of south-central Ontario to employ local knowledge and skills in pursuing more sustainable social, economic and environmental arrangements than were available to them along the shores of Georgian Bay and further south. And since much of the landscape was not converted to farmland, but remained largely forested, Aboriginal people and Eurocanadians managed to avoid the kinds of direct conflict and physical violence that characterized settlement in places where occupation of, and control over, the landscape was more complete.

Compared with First Nations communities further north, Muskoka's Aboriginal peoples experienced more opportunities for coping with the pressures of colonization. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, resource development and transportation industries

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<sup>3</sup> As Janet Chute argues, "The years following the close of the [War of 1812] constitute a significant era for the study of traditional modes of Ojibwa decision making, since the Aboriginal peoples of the Upper Great Lakes region still lay beyond the westward thrust of agricultural settlement and industrial resource development." Janet E. Chute, *The Legacy of Shingwaukonse: A Century of Leadership* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 3.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

provided wage labour jobs all along the eastern shores of Lake Huron, including Muskoka. The economic realities of places further north were somewhat different than in Muskoka. As Robin Jarvis Brownlie has shown in her work comparing the Parry Island and Manitowaning agencies during the early twentieth century, less game and fewer tourists around Manitoulin Island meant band members there made less use of hunting and canoe tripping skills than was the case in Muskoka.<sup>5</sup> To varying degrees, every Anishinaabeg community next to Lake Huron relied on fisheries, but better soil conditions on Manitoulin Island translated into a larger farming population compared with any of the communities in south-central Ontario. Northeast of Manitoulin Island, the Anishinaabe in the Temagami region also experienced colonization in ways that compared and differed with places elsewhere on the Shield.<sup>6</sup> As was the case on Manitoulin Island and Muskoka, logging was an important industry in Temagami during the late nineteenth century. Yet, unlike Muskoka, Temagami was set aside as a timber reserve and was never opened for agricultural settlement. The absence of a permanent Eurocanadian population and the rise of tourism after 1900 meant that, as was the case in Muskoka, Temagami's Aboriginal peoples continued to hunt and trap, in addition to acting as guides, well into the twentieth century. Muskoka's Aboriginal peoples, therefore, shared common experiences with other Aboriginal communities on the Shield, while at the same time enjoying a variety of opportunities not always available further north.

As we will discover below in more detail, the region's Aboriginal population relied on Muskoka for a variety of resources. But the natural environment of Muskoka, like the Shield

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<sup>5</sup> Robin Jarvis Brownlie, *A Fatherly Eye: Indian Agents, Government Power, and Aboriginal Resistance in Ontario, 1918-1939* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>6</sup> Jocelyn Thorpe, *Temagami's Tangled Wild: Race, Gender, and the Making of Canadian Nature* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2012).

more generally, cannot provide for all human needs. Its nutrient-poor soils translated into a lower capacity, compared to other parts of the province, to support the kinds of plants and animals most important to year-round habitation. Less food meant a relatively small indigenous population.<sup>7</sup> None of the five Aboriginal communities that relied on Muskoka during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were ever larger than a few hundred people.<sup>8</sup> The archaeological and historical records suggest that Aboriginal people tended to focus their seasonal occupation of Muskoka around a handful of major catchment areas along the Muskoka River watershed, indicating a desire to move easily into and out of the region.<sup>9</sup> This type of mobility across the landscape should not be confused with nomadism. Instead, as Neal Ferris argues, this type of internal migration exhibits “intimate personal and community knowledge of the resources and

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<sup>7</sup> Compared to First Nations in southern Ontario, the Anishinaabeg of south-central Ontario had a small population density. Since their home territory straddled the southern edge of the Shield, their land base was somewhat constrained when compared to Aboriginal populations further south. Yet, when compared to First Nations located entirely within the boreal forest or in subarctic Canada, the population density of Muskoka’s First Nations was somewhat higher.

<sup>8</sup> Exact populations for these communities are difficult to determine since census enumerators did not understand the kinship interconnections between them or the seasonal movements of individuals over the course of the year. This could result in some people being missed and others counted more than once. Nevertheless, census returns and government reports provide some rough measure of populations. In 1842, the population of Rama was 184, while the population of those on Beausoleil Island numbered 232. In 1857, the Sandy Island Indians numbered 145. In the 1871 census, three of these communities (Beausoleil Island, Snake Island and Rama) were enumerated together as ‘Rama’, with a population of 904. In September 1884, a memorandum sent to the Deputy Minister of the Department of Indian Affairs lists the number of people eligible for annuities at each of these three communities as Beausoleil Island - 318, Snake Island - 137, and Rama - 248, for a total of 703, slightly less than in 1871. By the turn of the century, the population of ‘Rama’, which still encompassed the three bands, is listed as 1,752. The population of Parry Island is more difficult to determine since its population in the census is always combined with the population of the town of Parry Sound. Nevertheless, Parry Island likely never grew to be larger than a few hundred individuals during this time period. Finally, the Wahta Mohawks, who were granted a reserve in unsurveyed Gibson Township in Muskoka in 1881, also never numbered more than a few hundred. In 1891, the census lists the combined population for Baxter, Gibson and Freeman townships as 700 people made up of 143 families. Since only 32 families moved to Gibson Township ten years earlier, it seems reasonable to conclude that the Mohawks also never numbered more than a few hundred during this time period. The Aboriginal population that relied on Muskoka therefore likely numbered slightly fewer than 1,000 in 1850, and not more than 3,000 by 1920. Florence B. Murray, ed. *Muskoka and Haliburton: A Collection of Documents* (Toronto: Champlain Society, University of Toronto Press, 1963), lviii; “Correspondence, reports and publication regarding claims to compensation for lands improperly included in the Robinson Treaty of 1850, by the Mississaugas of Mud Lake, Rice Lake, Alnwick & Scugog as well as the Chippewas of Lake Huron and Simcoe,” LAC, RG10, vol.2328, file 67071 Pt.1B; Canada, *Census of Canada, 1870-71, Volume III* (Ottawa: I.B. Taylor, 1875), 36, 48; Canada, *Census of Canada, 1890-91, Volume I* (Ottawa: S.E. Dawson, 1893), 164, 166.

<sup>9</sup> *Report of the Master Plan of Archaeological Resources of the District Municipality of Muskoka and the Wahta Mohawks*, 3 vols. (Toronto: Archaeological Services Inc., 1994), vol.2, 97-98. Hereafter *RMPAR*.



landscape within a home territory.”<sup>10</sup> The area’s First Nations understood very well the environmental limitations inherent to the Shield, and developed a resilient way of life, which included Muskoka as part of a larger suite of places that comprised their home. Having access to each of these places, including Muskoka, supported different material and energy flows, and more sustainable social, economic and environmental arrangements. Resilience was so well built into their way of life that Muskoka’s First Nations were able to adjust when Eurocanadians began resettling their land and restricting access to their resources. At the same time as Eurocanadians were discovering the environmental limitations of the Shield, the region’s First Nations were utilizing their knowledge of the resources available in Muskoka to make their lives under colonization and state control more sustainable.

#### The Context for Change and Continuity in Aboriginal Experiences

The first moves to deprive the Anishinaabeg of south-central Ontario of their domain occurred after the War of 1812 and continued into the 1830s as white settlers colonized the fertile regions around Lake Simcoe and south of Georgian Bay. These years witnessed a handful of treaties between the British Crown and the First Nations of what later became the province of Ontario. These treaties secured regional-scale land agreements with Aboriginal peoples to establish transportation corridors, facilitate white settlement and legitimate large-scale resource extraction. Late nineteenth-century jurisdictional disputes between the federal and provincial governments used the written versions of these treaties as a “technology of occupation” to justify the marginalization of the region’s Aboriginal peoples by restricting their mobility and denying

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<sup>10</sup> Neal Ferris, *The Archaeology of Native-lived Colonialism: Challenging History in the Great Lakes* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2009), 38. Hugh Brody explores the inaccuracy of classifying Aboriginal peoples’ cyclical migrations as nomadic. Hugh Brody, *The Other Side of Eden: Hunters, Farmers and the Shaping of the World* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2000).

their rights to the land and its resources.<sup>11</sup> By the midpoint of the century, white settlement meant the Anishinaabeg found themselves increasingly restricted to reserve lands at the same time as new laws favouring commercial operations denied the Anishinaabeg their rights to fisheries. After Confederation, new game laws systematically restricted access to resources off reserve, while on reserve First Nations were forced to contend with a paternalistic state bureaucracy. Numerous scholars have outlined similar trajectories as colonization and the imposition of state control by Eurocanadians dispossessed and marginalized Aboriginal peoples across Canada.<sup>12</sup> Over the course of the nineteenth century, through no fault of their own, the social, economic and environmental arrangements that organized the societal metabolism of south-central Ontario's Aboriginal peoples became less sustainable.

In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the British Crown demonstrated far more respect for Aboriginal people and their rights than they and their Canadian successors did during the remainder of the nineteenth century and after. Political and economic arrangements allowed Eurocanadian and indigenous communities to interact through, what Rani Alexander calls, networks of “symmetrical exchange” and “cultural entanglement.”<sup>13</sup> These contact histories extended across geographies, nationalities and languages to establish common economic, social and ritual domains between natives and newcomers. As the importance of military alliances

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<sup>11</sup> John C. Weaver, *The Great Land Rush and the Making of the Modern World, 1650-1900* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003), 139.

<sup>12</sup> William C. Wicken, *Mi'kmaq Treaties on Trial: History, Land and Donald Marshall Junior* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002); Edwin C. Koenig *Culture and Ecologies: A Native Fishing Conflict on the Saugeen-Bruce Peninsula* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005); John Sandlos, *Hunters at the Margin: Native People and Wildlife Conservation in the Northwest Territories* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007); Cole R. Harris, *Making Native Space: Colonialism, Resistance, and Reserves in British Columbia* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2002); Douglas C. Harris, *Fish, Law, and Colonialism: The Legal Capture of Salmon in British Columbia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001).

<sup>13</sup> Rani Alexander, “Afterword: Toward an Archaeological Theory of Culture Contact” in *Studies in Culture Contact Interaction: Culture, Change and Archaeology*, James Cusick, ed., Center for Archaeological Investigations Occasional Papers 25 (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1998), 476-495.

waned and the centrality of the fur trade to the colonial economy declined, the willingness to reconcile indigenous lifeways with Eurocanadian society dissolved.<sup>14</sup> With each new cohort of government officials responsible for managing relations with the country's Aboriginal population, and each generation of land-hungry pioneers eager to settle their own land, the memory of what the treaties had originally intended fell victim to the same colonizing prerogatives felt throughout continent. Moreover, as the century progressed, Eurocanadian interests came up against indigenous ways of living, and government officials manipulated and interpreted the treaties - the only records they considered reliable - in such a way as to legitimize the former at the expense of the latter.

The erosion of respectful relations accelerated as the Crown imposed paternalistic administration over Aboriginal affairs and carried out involuntary relocations and resettlement of Aboriginal communities to make way for white settlement, agriculture and resource extraction. The loss of institutionalized memory regarding the treaties within the government bureaucracy inaugurated a transition toward a phase of "asymmetrical interaction" in the contact history of Ontario. Differences in power became great enough to allow the colonizer to actively coerce the colonized and impose new core-periphery relations.<sup>15</sup> These asymmetries were further exacerbated with Confederation and the creation of the Ontario provincial government, since it became nearly impossible for the federated state to reconcile Eurocanadian interests with indigenous ways of living. While the federal government and its Department of Indian Affairs (DIA) maintained paternalistic responsibility for Aboriginal peoples, Ontario's Department of

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<sup>14</sup> Weaver, *Great Land Rush*, 139-140; Canada. *Report on the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, 7 vols. (Ottawa, Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996), vol.2, part 1, chapter 2, section 1. Hereafter *RCAP*; *RCAP*, vol.2, part 2, chapter 4, section 4.

<sup>15</sup> Alexander, "Afterword."

Lands and Forests assumed control over all Crown land and resources in the province. The federal government lost the authority effectively to defend Aboriginal treaty rights, while the provincial government operated free from obligations to recognize *any* Aboriginal treaty rights whatsoever.<sup>16</sup> The result was that the Anishinaabeg in south-central Ontario came under successive and cumulative pressures to surrender their land and adopt a sedentary, Christian and ‘civilized’ way of life. These efforts were pursued even more vigorously under the reserve system after Confederation as Aboriginal communities experienced concerted attempts by the DIA to discourage and prevent ways of living that utilized traditional knowledge or took them outside reserve borders.

While the history of the Anishinaabeg in south-central Ontario during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century featured many hardships, it would be a mistake to characterize the story, as Pennefather did in 1856, by suggesting that Aboriginal peoples were "closing one phase of their existence and are on the threshold of a new era in their history."<sup>17</sup> Instead, the story is typified by access as well as restriction, assurance as much as denial, and acceptance in the face of marginalization. At the same time as the government pursued policies that forced Aboriginal people in Ontario into less sustainable circumstances than they had ever experienced before, members of the Anishinaabe communities in south-central Ontario pursued their own strategies to counteract government injustice and establish more sustainable social, economic and environmental arrangements.

Racial discrimination within Eurocanadian society, and restrictions on their mobility and access to traditional hunting grounds, obliged the Anishinaabeg in south-central Ontario to

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<sup>16</sup> Brownlie, *Fatherly Eye*, 10.

<sup>17</sup> *Pennefather Report*, Part III, 102.

pursue a “moditional economy.” John Sutton Lutz defines a moditional economy as one that combines a “traditional mode of reproduction and production” with “new modes of production for exchange in a capitalist market.”<sup>18</sup> For example, game laws made it difficult to hunt without a license, but working as a guide for white hunters allowed Aboriginal men to use traditional knowledge and skills to acquire resources and income in a new way. The result is a history that accounts for evidence of what Neal Ferris calls “the nonlinear nature of changed continuities.”<sup>19</sup> The ultimate benefit of acknowledging both the change and the continuity, according to the 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, is that “It allows us to reflect more deeply on the factors that have contributed to a relationship that has been more mutually beneficial and harmonious in some periods than in others.”<sup>20</sup> And, taking this a step further, understanding the nature of change and continuity experienced by Aboriginal peoples - those who have lived in south-central Ontario the longest - helps us to identify resilience, and therefore the most sustainable environmental, economic, and social arrangements in the past.

### Ethnographic Background

For many hundred years, perhaps even several thousand years, the Algonquian-speaking peoples from whom the Anishinaabeg of south-central Ontario descend have relied on the inland portions of the southern Shield east of Georgian Bay for part of their subsistence. This environment did not meet all of their needs. The coastal region of Georgian Bay to the west contained abundant fisheries, while more fertile regions to the south provided access to trade goods from abroad and indigenous crops that grew poorly on the Shield. Despite environmental

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<sup>18</sup> John S. Lutz, *Makúk: A New History of Aboriginal-white Relations* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008), 23.

<sup>19</sup> Ferris, *Native-lived Colonialism*, 29.

<sup>20</sup> *RCAP*, vol.1, part 1, chapter 3.

limitations inherent to the Shield, places such as Muskoka were crucial components of the Algonquian-speaking peoples' economic and cultural way of life.

By the early decades of the seventeenth century, Algonquian-speaking peoples occupied an enormous swath of territory in what later became Canada and the northern United States, from the Rocky Mountains to the Atlantic Ocean. The southern extent of this territory - what archaeologist William Arthur Allen has termed “southern Algonquia” - shifted according to the hegemony of the Iroquoian-speaking Wendat, Petun and Neutral who controlled the territory of what is now south and south-western Ontario.<sup>21</sup> At the time of contact with Europeans, southern Algonquia, which included the Muskoka River watershed, covered the southern boundary of the Canadian Shield, from the Severn River and Kawartha Lakes in the south to the French River and Lake Nipissing in the north, and from Georgian Bay in the east to the height of land in the west (what would later become Algonquin Park).

French written records from the seventeenth century contain only sparse references to the Algonquian-speaking peoples of southern Algonquia, in favour of the far more active Huron, Nipissing and Ottawa groups to the south, north and east. According to Joan Lovisek, historian of the Algonquian-speaking peoples of Georgian Bay, relatively peaceable relations and trade occurred between all four of these groups.<sup>22</sup> Perhaps the most vital to Algonquian-speaking peoples of southern Algonquia was the relationship with the Huron to the south, since coastal fisheries and inland hunting grounds could not provide for all needs. These two groups interacted in many ways, including some shared hunting grounds,<sup>23</sup> and trade involved many items,

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<sup>21</sup> William Arthur Allen, “Wa-nant-git-che-ang: Canoe Route to Lake Huron through Southern Algonquia,” *Ontario Archaeology* No.73 (2002), 38.

<sup>22</sup> Joan A. M. Lovisek, “Ethnohistory of the Algonkian Speaking Peoples of Georgian Bay - Precontact to 1850” (PhD. Dissertation, McMaster University, 1991), 144.

<sup>23</sup> Allen, “Wa-nant-git-che-ang,” 40.

including “corn, nets, fish, skins, bark, fibres, dried berries, venison, birch bark canoes, and ornaments of shell and copper.”<sup>24</sup> As part of an anthropological study with elders at the Parry Island reserve during the late 1920s, Diamond Jenness learned the Algonquian-speaking peoples of Georgian Bay traditionally traded seasonal food sources, such as berries and maple sugar, fish from Georgian Bay, and game meat and furs from inland hunting grounds such as Muskoka, with the Huron in exchange for corn and tobacco, neither of which could be grown adequately on the Shield.<sup>25</sup> Corn, in particular, was a dietary staple, the procurement of which organized the rest of their seasonal cycle. As Joan Lovisek argues:

Access to people who grew it, combined with the environmental conditions to grow small amounts of corn, had major consequences for the way the Algonkian speaking peoples of Georgian Bay conducted the rest of its food-gathering activities in the region... . Corn likely contributed to the large gatherings of linguistically similar peoples wintering near large populations of horticulturalists. It was politically sound for the Algonkian speaking peoples of Georgian Bay to cultivate a relationship with corn growers, or corn traders, in this case the Huron, Ottawa, and Nipissing, than intensively to cultivate corn themselves.<sup>26</sup>

The disruptions and trauma caused by the invasion of the Five Nations Iroquois (Haudenosaunee) and dispersal of the Huron and their Algonquian-speaking allies around the midpoint of the seventeenth century, followed by the expulsion of the Five Nations Iroquois by the Anishinaabeg from regions north of Lake Superior in the late seventeenth century, resulted in the Anishinaabe occupation of most of southern Ontario during the eighteenth century. The Great Peace of 1701, between Algonquian- and Iroquoian-speaking peoples, provided enough stability

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<sup>24</sup> Lovisek, “Algonkian Speaking Peoples,” 151.

<sup>25</sup> E.S. Rogers and Flora Tobobondung, “Parry Island Farmers: A Period of Change in the Way of Life of the Algonkians of Southern Ontario,” *Contributions to Canadian Ethnology*, 1975, National Museum of Man Mercury Series, David Brez Carlisle, ed. (Ottawa: National Museums of Canada, 1975), 256-257; Diamond Jenness, Canada Department of Mines & National Museum of Canada, Bulletin No.78, Anthropological Series, No.17, *The Ojibwa Indians of Parry Island, Their Social and Religious Life*, (Ottawa: J.O. Patenaude, I.S.O., 1935), 13-14.

<sup>26</sup> Lovisek, “Algonkian Speaking Peoples,” 194.

in Ontario for the Anishinaabeg to establish seasonal patterns of subsistence similar to those practiced by Algonquian-speaking peoples prior to dispersal, as well as organize a band structure that persisted more or less intact into the nineteenth century.<sup>27</sup>

In the late 1920s, anthropologist Diamond Jenness provided a rough overview of the mid-nineteenth-century seasonal cycle of the Anishinaabeg of south-central Ontario:

This variety and seasonal nature of their foods kept the Indians in constant motion. The hunting and the fishing grounds, the maple groves, the patches of wild berries, and of wild rice, lay scattered in different places often many miles apart. At certain seasons a whole band might camp together for a few days or weeks, but then the exigencies of the food supply would bring about its dispersal into small groups or perhaps four or five families each. These small groups again would dissipate, and the families roam about individually through certain signs and signals...<sup>28</sup>

Historian J. Michael Thoms refers to this pattern as “multi-modal: they moved between defined resource sites throughout the year.”<sup>29</sup> During the eighteenth century, Anishinaabe groups in south-central Ontario followed a “river mouth/inland pattern” of subsistence, which combined seasonal trips inland during the fall and winter to hunt and trap with coastal fishing and trading during the spring and summer.<sup>30</sup> Their seasonal cycle typically meant traveling between four or

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<sup>27</sup> Bruce G. Trigger, *The Children of the Aataentsic: A History of the Huron People to 1660* (Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1987); Bruce G. Trigger, *Natives and Newcomers: Canada’s ‘Heroic Age’ Reconsidered* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1986); Peter S. Schmalz, *The Ojibwa of Southern Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 18; It should be noted that there is some controversy over whether the Anishinaabeg who migrated south from the top of Lake Superior during their conflict with the Iroquois were comprised of descendants of the original Algonquian-speaking peoples who resided along Georgian Bay prior to their dispersal. As Richard White has shown, most of the Algonquian-speaking peoples from south-central Ontario moved west into what later became Michigan and Wisconsin. These Algonquian-speaking peoples returned to Ontario in the aftermath of the battles led by Tecumseh and claimed ancestral rights to southern Algonquia. Moreover, Joan Lovisek argues that some portion of Algonquian-speaking peoples of Georgian Bay were not entirely displaced, but rather remained inland or, for brief periods along the coast Georgian Bay, moving often to avoid detection and confrontation with the Iroquois. Thus, the population of the Anishinaabeg who resided in south-central Ontario at the time of the Robinson-Huron Treaty in 1850 were very likely an amalgam of two politically separate, yet ethnically-related Algonquian-speaking peoples. Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Lovisek, “Algonkian Speaking Peoples,” 219, 229-232.

<sup>28</sup> Jenness, *Indians of Parry Island*, 11.

<sup>29</sup> J. Michael Thoms, “Ojibwa Fishing Grounds: A History of Ontario fisheries law, science, and the sportsmen’s challenge to Aboriginal treaty rights, 1650-1900” (PhD. Dissertation, UBC, 2004), 44.

<sup>30</sup> Lovisek, “Algonkian Speaking Peoples,” 259.



five camps within the band's home range. The cycle was purposeful and utilized a wide-range of resources for consumption, trade and spiritual uses.<sup>31</sup> Mid-winter was typically spent in medium-sized camps comprised of several families located along the shores of inland waterways where conditions were somewhat milder than along the coast of Georgian Bay or Lake Simcoe.<sup>32</sup> Occasionally, they relocated the winter camp and men would go ice fishing if conditions demanded it, but they embarked on hunting only at rare times when fish or corn reserves were insufficient to last until the spring spawning runs.<sup>33</sup> In late winter and early spring, families harvested maple sap for syrup and sugar. Depending on how long and how much sap flowed, families either remained in larger camps, or dispersed into family-specific sugar bush territories, which elders occasionally reorganized to reflect demographic realities within the band.<sup>34</sup> As Neal Ferris observes, the importance of maple sugar "is in both its timing - arriving when game was scarce and food supplies depleted - and its abundance, with surplus yields traded for [what was needed]."<sup>35</sup>

Signs of the spring fish runs in April (moon when the suckers spawn) instigated a move by nearly all the families within the band to fishing camps along the shores of Georgian Bay or Lakes Simcoe and Couchiching.<sup>36</sup> According to Thoms, these communal fishing camps were the hubs of the seasonal cycle. The logic of the remainder of the seasonal cycle stemmed from the centrality of the fishing grounds. At these sites, families "preserved additional fish to enable a variety of terrestrial harvesting strategies for other periods of time in other places. The result of

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<sup>31</sup> Allen, "Wa-nant-git-che-ang," 38.

<sup>32</sup> Ferris, *Native-lived Colonialism*, 47-48.

<sup>33</sup> White, *Middle Ground*, 46-47; Ferris, *Native-lived Colonialism*, 42-43.

<sup>34</sup> Ferris, *Native-lived Colonialism*, 47; Lovisek, "Algonkian Speaking Peoples," 330-331.

<sup>35</sup> Ferris, *Native-lived Colonialism*, 42-43.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 47-48; Allen, "Wa-nant-git-che-ang," 38; Lovisek, "Algonkian Speaking Peoples," 334; Sometimes additional camps were established in alternative locations if the run was not as plentiful as was necessary to support the entire band. Generally, however, the spring run was an occasion for large groups to gather together.

this adaptive strategy was a schedule of resource harvesting at a variety of known communally-allocated resource sites throughout the year... .”<sup>37</sup> May (planting moon) did not generally see any significant migration of the band to other parts of the region. Instead, families planted corn, squash and later potatoes in close proximity to spring fishing grounds, where soil conditions, frost-free days and fire prevention were optimal.<sup>38</sup> The present-day site of the town of Parry Sound, for example, was traditionally a preferred site for Anishinaabeg to plant their crops during the early spring.<sup>39</sup> A similar scene took place next to the narrows between Lake Simcoe and Lake Couchiching. This relatively widespread adoption of horticulture after the turn of the eighteenth century meant the Anishinaabeg in south-central Ontario did not need to trade much for staple foods like corn.<sup>40</sup> Where appropriate conditions allowed, the Anishinaabeg cleared fields inland, closer to hunting and trapping grounds where women monitored crops over the summer and took advantage of berry harvests between June (strawberry moon) and August (blackberry moon) as well as nuts, herbs, roots and grasses.<sup>41</sup> July was a popular deer-hunting season.<sup>42</sup> They exploited fall fishing runs in September and October (trout fishing moon), at around the same time as they harvested field crops.<sup>43</sup> In October and November, they hunted and trapped for meat, skins and furs before the rivers and lakes began to freeze up for winter, at which point families moved to their winter camps, and the seasonal cycle started all over again.

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<sup>37</sup> Thoms, “Ojibwa Fishing Grounds,” 61.

<sup>38</sup> Lovisek, “Algonkian Speaking Peoples,” 45.

<sup>39</sup> Rogers & Tobobodung, “Parry Island Farmers,” 286.

<sup>40</sup> During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, however, there were times when certain bands could not grow sufficient crops to support their participation in the fur trade, and provisions were acquired from Eurocanadian posts. Lovisek, “Algonkian Speaking Peoples,” 262, 287.

<sup>41</sup> Ferris, *Native-lived Colonialism*, 42-43, 47-48; Allen, “Wa-nant-git-che-ang,” 38; Fruit and berries were often included in the process of preserving fish. Lovisek, “Algonkian Speaking Peoples,” 330-331.

<sup>42</sup> Ferris, *Native-lived Colonialism*, 42-43.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 47-48; Allen, “Wa-nant-git-che-ang,” 38.

The seasonal cycle reflected more than just economic realities and strategies, it was also a manifestation of many cultural practices and ways of seeing the world. For example, within Anishaanabeg oral culture, the threat of the cannibal monster *Windigo* served to reinforce more sustainable patterns of consumption throughout the year, so that in the winter family members did not develop an appetite or expectation for food that could not be met during times of seasonal scarcity. According to tradition, the *Windigo* is a starving individual who succumbs to the temptation to consume human flesh instead of other food sources. When this lapse occurs, the individual becomes a monster with a heart of ice, roving the land seeking more victims to satiate its overwhelming appetite. The *Windigo*'s body swells with its consumption of human flesh and becomes impossible to destroy. Only the coming of spring may defeat the *Windigo*, which is forced to retreat further north. Jenness made a clear connection between the *Windigo* tradition and the consequences of less sustainable patterns of consumption:

A glutton who eats butter or fat by spoonfuls, or drinks gravy from a bowl instead of mixing it with his potatoes, is especially liable to develop into a *Windigo*. Children are, therefore, trained to eat carefully, and cautioned against greediness or perverse appetites that might impel them under stress of hunger to practice cannibalism.<sup>44</sup>

During more plentiful times of the year, social norms dictated that individuals should not enjoy any unfair advantage or benefit more than other members of the community. "If three Indians go fishing," wrote Jenness, "and one catches far more than the others, the less successful fishermen feel aggrieved, never doubting their companion of surreptitiously using medicine."<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Jenness, *Indians of Parry Island*, 41; Robert Brightman, "The Windigo in the Material World," *Ethnohistory*, Vol. 35, No.4 (1988), 337-379; Charles R. Williams, "Northern Algonkian Cannibalism and Windigo Psychosis," in *Psychological Anthropology*, Thomas R. Williams, ed. (Chicago: Aldine, 1975), 237-248; Cecil Chabot, "Witiko Possession and Starvation Cannibalism among the James Bay Cree: Monstrosity or Maddness?" in *Creating Humanity, Discovering Monstrosity: Myths and Metaphors of Enduring Evil*, Elizabeth Nelson, Jillian Burcar and Hannah Priest, eds. (Oxford: Interdisciplinary Press, 2010), 3-16.

<sup>45</sup> Jenness, *Indians of Parry Island*, 84.

Stories like these, taking place in both times of scarcity and times of plenty, reinforced social norms and counteracted certain types of socially divisive behaviour within the community brought on by changing seasonal conditions and resource abundance.

Times of abundance - most often spring or fall fish runs - marked an important time during the seasonal cycle when many families came together into large camps. People ate well after, and stockpiled supplies in preparation for, a long period of scarcity. On these occasions, they also socialized, traded, told stories, arranged marriages, and solidified bonds between different groups by celebrating festivals such as the Feast of the Dead.<sup>46</sup> Since seasonal mobility restricted full gatherings of a territorial community to only certain times of the year, important social, religious and political events took place at the same time as vital resource harvests, such as fish runs. Drought, pests, or early frosts shaped decisions made throughout the year, and prevented the formation of a 'normal' seasonal cycle. Instead, a series of contingencies determined the pattern, which reflected the flexibility and resiliency built into a system of acknowledged and expected variability. The system was not haphazard, nor entirely controlled. Instead, the Anishinaabeg derived their system from long-standing, consensus-style customs made credible by dodem-based band organization.

Unlike the Iroquois further south, the Anishinaabeg of south-central Ontario formed independent bands whose members were related to other bands through marriage and dodem affiliation, all of whom shared a common language and way of life.<sup>47</sup> Dodems are patrilineal

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 108. The Feast of the Dead was a symbolically important multi-day ritual that not only gave thanks to ancestors and important spirits, but also demonstrated the communal nature of the band structure.

<sup>47</sup> Heidi Bohaker, "'Nindoodemag': The Significance of Algonquin Kinship Networks in the Eastern Great Lakes Region, 1600-1701" *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, Vol. 63, No.1 (January 2006), 23-52; Allen, "Wa-nant-git-che-ang," 39.

identities associated with animal or spirit guardians that determined patterns of reproduction and hunting territories within each band. As Thoms argues, the dodemic system

developed a sense of a ‘chain’ between themselves, their environment, their past, their ancestors, and their creator and believed that if they faithfully followed their ancestor’s traditional resource use customs, which had proven successful through long practice, that the lakes would continue to abound in fish, and the forests retain plenty of game.<sup>48</sup>

Each band included members affiliated with a variety of different dodems. Leadership, while closely associated with dodem, fluctuated between dodems depending on the demographic composition of the band and the quality of leadership.<sup>49</sup> The leadership of chiefs during the nineteenth century was extremely critical since new technologies, such as firearms, created more opportunities for individuals to disrupt peaceful relations within and between communities.<sup>50</sup> Chiefs earned their authority by demonstrating suitable leadership abilities through “hunting and sharing, handling crises, making decisions, orating and shamanistic ability.”<sup>51</sup> This authority was legitimized through consensus, and lost when that consensus was challenged or shifted to another individual. Where more than one band shared fisheries, sugar bushes or hunting grounds, higher-level chiefs assumed territorial authority over economically and ecologically cohesive groups.<sup>52</sup>

The dodem (derived from the word ‘dodaim’ meaning “a town or village, or original family residence”<sup>53</sup>) lay at the heart of Anishinaabeg culture and informed the most sustainable approaches to the variable circumstances of life on the Shield. To allocate limited inland

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<sup>48</sup> Thoms, “Ojibwa Fishing Grounds,” 68.

<sup>49</sup> Lovisek, “Algonkian Speaking Peoples,” 282.

<sup>50</sup> Chute, *Legacy of Shingwaukonse*, 4.

<sup>51</sup> Ferris, *Native-lived Colonialism*, 38.

<sup>52</sup> Chief Mesquakie served this function for the Chippewa band of south-central Ontario. The categories ‘Chippewa’ and ‘Ojibwa’ are derivations of the same word, meaning ‘people of the puckered seam’, and reflect useful Eurocanadian distinctions more accurately than they do how the Anishinaabeg self-identified. Blair, *Lament for a First Nation*, 3.

<sup>53</sup> Henry R. Schoolcraft, *Historical and Statistical Information respecting the History, Condition and Prospects of the Indian Tribes of the United States*. Part 1. (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo & Co., 1853), 420.

resources fairly amongst all members of the band, family hunting grounds in Muskoka were divided up according to dodem. Centred on a lake or river along the Muskoka River watershed, these limits were defined by geographic boundaries and landscape features and often delineated by blazed trees.<sup>54</sup> As with most elements of the seasonal cycle, it is highly likely that despite the preference for and claims of continuity related to hunting grounds amongst Chippewa and Ojibwa bands, changes over time would have forced realignments as certain dodems became too large or small for their particular grounds.<sup>55</sup> Regardless, the members of each dodem strictly respected the boundaries between different dodem hunting grounds, whatever their form. Dodemic affiliations with specific hunting grounds were a purposeful strategy to avoid competition between band members, and structure a more sustainable access to scarce resources. Consequences for breaching the system could often be serious. In one example from Diamond Jenness' research at Parry Island in the 1920s, trespassing on another's hunting grounds could result in witchcraft if the party whose territory was violated discovered the transgression and took offence.<sup>56</sup> In fact, the dodems were such strong signifiers of identity that all members of that dodem, even if they lived in separate communities and had never met, were responsible for one another's well-being. These dodems "were the glue that held the Anishnaabeg Great Lakes world together."<sup>57</sup> They created the basis for extensive trade and political arrangements between

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<sup>54</sup> Thoms, "Ojibwa Fishing Grounds," 39-41.

<sup>55</sup> Diamond Jenness observed that heads of families would gather together prior to winter dispersal to decide "where each family should hunt during the ensuing winter." Jenness, *Indians of Parry Island*, 4. However, oral testimony given at the Williams Treaty hearings in 1923 suggest that these limits remained constant over long periods of time. "Bound volume of testimony given to a commission, chaired by A.S. Williams, investigating claims, by the Chippewas Mississaugas of Ontario, to compensation for land not surrendered by the Robinson Treaty of 1850," LAC, RG10, vol.2331, file 67071-4B. In fact, Joan Lovisek's suggestion that the fur trade was a catalyst for the establishment of this system would tend to support the argument that limits shifted to reflect changes to dodem demographics and status within the band. Lovisek, "Algonkian Speaking Peoples," 270.

<sup>56</sup> Jenness, *Indians of Parry Island*, 3.

<sup>57</sup> Darlene Johnston, "Connecting People to Place: Great Lakes Aboriginal History in Cultural Context" (Prepared for the Ipperwash Commission of Inquiry, 2005), 7. (<http://www.turtleisland.org/news/ipperwash2.pdf>, last accessed February 8, 2014).

communities that did not live all year or even much of their lives in close contact. In Muskoka, and along the east shore of Georgian Bay, there were several dodemic connections between different communities, which historically informed the way the entire region's Aboriginal population self-identified and organized socially.

By the end of the eighteenth century, the Anishinaabeg of south-central Ontario had achieved economic and cultural definition owing to geo-political colonial realities, and the establishment of a seasonal cycle of internal migration based on variable resource exploitation structured by dodems.<sup>58</sup> Muskoka formed a vital part of this economic and cultural definition. But, it was only ever *part* of a larger, fluid system based on continuity over time, capable of accommodating changes from one generation to the next. After the turn of the century, changing political realities and white immigration challenged this flexibility and forced the Anishinaabeg to adjust their strategies for pursuing the most sustainable arrangements.

#### Treaties made, Promises broken, 1812-1850

The Anishinaabeg of south-central Ontario have a complex genealogy that reflects the group's historic and fluid geographic and kinship affiliations. Although common experiences characterize the history of this group during the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the remainder of this chapter refers to sub-groups and bands.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Aboriginal peoples on the British side of the Great Lakes had reason to feel confident that their way of life would remain stable for the foreseeable future. At this time, no coherent distinction existed between the sub-groups that later became identified as Mississauga, Chippewa and Ojibwa. In fact, differentiating between sub-

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<sup>58</sup> Allen, "Wa-nant-git-che-ang," 40.

groups only emerged after the War of 1812 when Aboriginal peoples in Ontario were no longer needed as military allies, and became subject to a variety of new pressures to surrender their land. To accommodate these pressures, the Anishinaabeg signed a series of treaties over the course of the early nineteenth century, which granted the Crown permission to settle its subjects south of the Severn River. Combined with an early reserve system established in the 1830s and the pre-existing dodemic structure of Anishinaabe society, the artificial distinctions created by these treaties resulted in the formalization of two main groups in south-central Ontario: the Mississauga centred around the Kawartha Lakes and north shore of Lake Ontario, and the Chippewa further to the west around the shores of Lake Simcoe and Georgian Bay around Penetanguishene. The Chippewa utilized Muskoka as part of their seasonal cycle, and are the main Aboriginal group considered in this study.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> The Mississauga also utilized parts of the southern Shield as part of their seasonal cycle. But, since their territories were located east of Muskoka, in the Haliburton region of the province, they are not considered in this study. See Peggy Blair, *Lament for a First Nation*, for more on the history of the Mississauga around the Kawartha Lakes.



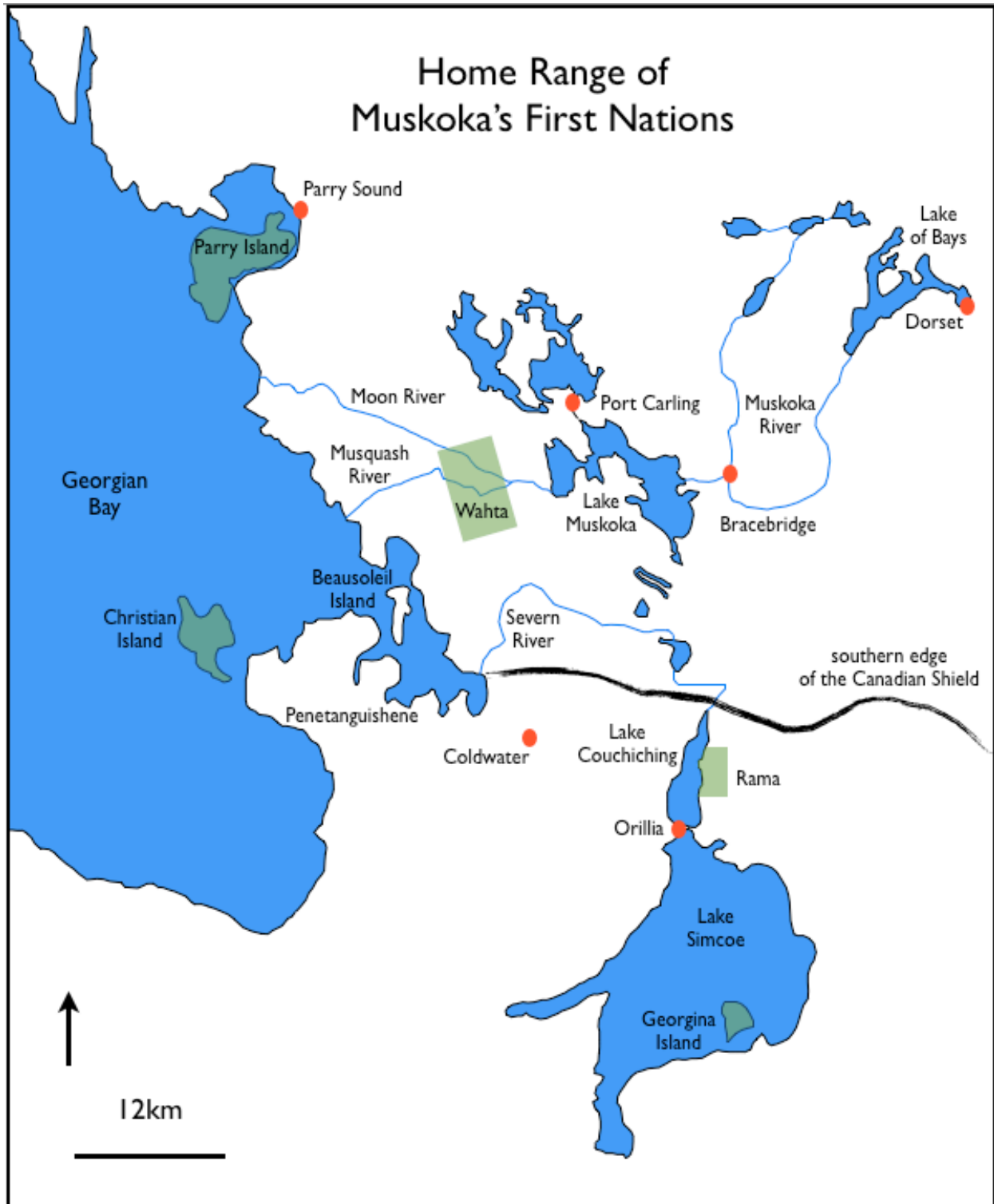


Image 5: Home Range of Muskoka's First Nations

Restrictive conditions resulting from treaties, along with the Crown's coercive tactics to impose farming and a more 'civilized' way of life on special reserves, forced a further

dissolution of the Chippewa into four distinct bands during the 1830s and 1840s: Rama, Snake Island (later renamed Georgina Island), Beausoleil Island (later moved to Christian Island), and Sandy Island (later renamed Parry Island). The Sandy Island band signed the Robinson-Huron Treaty in 1850 - along with several other bands further north along the shore of Lake Huron - and the British Crown reclassified them as 'Ojibwa.' The Rama, Snake/Georgina Island and Beausoleil/Christian Island bands, as non-signatories to the Robinson-Huron Treaty, remained classified as Chippewa. The break-up of the Chippewa into smaller, more formal bands, and their classification as such by the government of Upper Canada, should not be viewed as an overly significant event. It did not result in the complete isolation of bands from one another. Members from all four of these bands continued to interact through trade, social gathering and marriage throughout the nineteenth century. These bands formed the basis for later reserve communities after 1850, but at the time and for several decades afterwards the choice to move apart was very likely a method of resisting Upper Canadian pressure to settle permanently. James Scott explores the motivations of indigenous peoples in south-east Asia to live in marginal environments to avoid being governed by centralized state authorities during and before the era of colonization by Europeans. Rather than viewing these peoples as backward and uncivilized, as governments did at the time, Scott suggests that living beyond the purview of state administration was a deliberate strategy to maintain autonomy. A similar strategy worked for the Anisihinaabeg of south-central Ontario for the first half of the nineteenth century, but ultimately failed to limit state control during the second half of the century.<sup>60</sup> Throughout the nineteenth century, as the Upper Canadian government, and subsequently the Dominion government, moved to restrict their

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<sup>60</sup> James C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

mobility, deny access to their resources and discriminate against their communities on reserve, these bands continued to pursue their traditional seasonal cycle and rely on the resilience of a dispersed societal metabolism.

Most scholars of First Nations history in Ontario insist that both the British and their Aboriginal allies understood the *Royal Proclamation* of 1763 to implicitly recognize Aboriginal sovereignty over lands and resources west of a line running north-south from the mouth of Lake Nipissing, and demonstrated a willingness on the part of the British to co-exist and cooperate with Aboriginal peoples.<sup>61</sup> Changing public sentiment and immigration pressures, however, caused successive Crown administrations to lose sight of the meaning behind this document. The result was that as the importance of the Anishinaabeg as allies waned after the War of 1812, so too did the political resolve to uphold the promises of the *Royal Proclamation*.

Between the 1763 and the War of 1812 a variety of economic opportunities encouraged many Anishinaabeg to gravitate towards the northern shore of Lake Ontario, thereby creating a practical division between the Anishinaabeg situated closer to southern trading posts, such as Fort York, and the ‘back Indians’ closer to Georgian Bay.<sup>62</sup> This distinction was further solidified by the leadership of Chief Mesquakie (Mesqua-Ukee) who spoke for several bands inhabiting south-central Ontario from the Kawartha Lakes in the east to the Saugeen Peninsula in the west and from the headwaters of Lake Simcoe in the south to the height of land along the Muskoka River watershed to the north. During the War of 1812, Chief Mesquakie (known to the British as William Yellowhead) and members of the Chippewa bands from his territory helped defend York

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<sup>61</sup> White, *Middle Ground*; Jean Teillet, “The Role of the Natural Resources Regulatory Regime in Aboriginal Rights Disputes in Ontario” (Prepared for the Ipperwash Commission of Inquiry, 2005), 20; Peggy Blair, *Lament for a First Nation*, 37; Thoms, “Ojibwa Fishing Grounds,” 89-91.

<sup>62</sup> Schmalz, *Ojibwa of Southern Ontario*, xi.

in 1813.<sup>63</sup> These bands signed three treaties with the Crown in 1795, 1815 and 1818.<sup>64</sup> Originally intended as agreements that would allow the Crown to settle British subjects on land in south-central Ontario while ensuring the continued rights of the region's Aboriginal peoples to hunt, trap and fish for resources according to the long-standing patterns of seasonal subsistence outlined above, as the nineteenth century wore on the colonial and dominion authorities interpreted these treaties as an effective extinguishment of Aboriginal title to all the territory south of the Severn River.<sup>65</sup>

In 1826, as part of the earliest attempts by the British to 'civilize' Aboriginal peoples in Ontario, Lieutenant Governor John Colborne established model villages for the Anishinaabeg at Sarnia, Credit River and Coldwater. By 1830, after control over Indian affairs had passed from military to civil administration, three Chippewa bands, headed by Chief William Yellowhead Jr. (Mesquakie's son), Joseph Snake and John Aisance, agreed to participate in the Coldwater experiment.<sup>66</sup> This model community extended from the Narrows at Lake Couchiching (the site of present day Orillia), where Yellowhead and Snake settled their bands, to Coldwater approximately 20 kilometres northwest, where Aisance settled his band.

The colonial government pressed the group to abandon their seasonal migrations in exchange for sedentary lives as farmers. These bands had no intention of doing so and consistently left their farms for long periods at a time to exploit fisheries and hunting grounds further north. Moreover, the treaties that the government had come to interpret as full

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<sup>63</sup> Murray, *Muskoka and Haliburton*, 100n.

<sup>64</sup> The 1795 treaty aimed to secure a transportation corridor for the Crown along the Severn River between Lake Huron and the eastern end of Lake Ontario. The 1815 and 1818 treaties were intended to permit white settlement.

<sup>65</sup> Murray, *Muskoka and Haliburton*, lvi.

<sup>66</sup> Blair, *Lament for a First Nation*, 32-33; Lovisek, "Algonkian Speaking Peoples," 297; Thoms argues that the Coldwater reserve was established in an attempt to convince the Chippewa under Yellowhead to relocate away from their shoreline locations and into land-locked sites where they could be coerced into becoming Christian farmers. Thoms, "Ojibwa Fishing Grounds," 183.

extinguishment of the land south of the Severn, the Chippewa understood as ceding only the upland area suitable for farming, and not the lower wetland areas where the Anishinaabeg had traditionally exploited many resources (sugar bushes, fisheries, berries, etc).<sup>67</sup> Yellowhead agreed to send the children to school, but made it clear that members of his group intended to continue hunting.<sup>68</sup> As Robin Jarvis Brownlie argues, “First Nations people had never intended to surrender control of their lives to the government or any other outsiders - on the contrary, by signing the treaties they had sought to retain a measure of self-determination.”<sup>69</sup> It took only a few short years for it to become apparent to both the government and the Chippewa that the Coldwater experiment was not going to work and that the Chippewa would continue to pursue their seasonal cycle and expect to receive their annual gifts from the government.<sup>70</sup> In response, both sides abandoned their hopes for the settlement. The Crown purchased the Coldwater settlement to make the land available to white settlement, and the Chippewa under Yellowhead split up into four bands. The changing interpretation of the 1815 and 1818 treaties and the Coldwater experiment were the first significant challenges to the Chippewa way of life, but had only minor effects on their societal metabolism.

In 1836, Yellowhead’s band purchased 1,600 acres of abandoned land at Rama on the northeast shore of Lake Couchiching with money from the sale of the Coldwater reserve.<sup>71</sup> They moved to the site in 1839, and by 1845 had built twenty homes and four barns, and had cleared

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<sup>67</sup> Thoms, “Ojibwa Fishing Grounds,” 1; Ferris, *Native-lived Colonialism*, 61.

<sup>68</sup> Murray, *Muskoka and Haliburton*, 105-106.

<sup>69</sup> Brownlie, *Fatherly Eye*, 81.

<sup>70</sup> Schmalz, *Ojibwa of Southern Ontario*, 148. The Lieutenant-Governor of Upper Canada, Sir Francis Bond Head, also expressed some concern that exposure to white settlement was having an adverse effect on the Chippewa living at Coldwater. Murray, *Muskoka and Haliburton*, 112-113.

<sup>71</sup> Murray, *Muskoka and Haliburton*, lvii-lviii. Yellowhead and his group had difficulty obtaining the money they were promised. Their complaints during the early 1840s resulted in a series of investigations and a commission of inquiry in 1842.

approximately 300 acres for farming. A little more than a decade later, 201 people were growing mainly corn and potatoes, but also kept a handful of horses, cows and pigs. The 1858 Penefather Report recorded contradictorily that members of this band “were given to hunting and basket making, consequently avoiding tilling the soil, and are dragging through a life disgraceful to humanity,” yet were still “able to dispose of their surplus agricultural produce to the surrounding settlers.”<sup>72</sup> The Anishinaabeg had a great deal of experience cultivating domesticated plants. Thus, rather than an accurate report of agriculture at Rama, this report is more likely an example of what Sarah Carter points out was the Eurocanadian predisposition to claim that “Indians and agriculture are incompatible.”<sup>73</sup> Band members were growing food for their own needs, rather than to meet the expectations of government bureaucrats. Pennefather’s mention of a surplus sold to surrounding settlers suggests their agricultural needs were being met. In addition, however, members of the Rama band were clearly continuing to migrate seasonally, and had begun to take advantage of Eurocanadian markets as part of this cycle.

As part of the Coldwater experiment, Joseph Snake’s band established themselves on an island at the south end of Lake Simcoe, which became Snake Island. The Snake Island band had cleared only 39 acres for planting by 1858, but were raising comparable numbers of livestock and harvesting almost exactly that same amount of corn and potatoes, along with wheat and oats, as the Rama band.<sup>74</sup>

By 1842, John Aisance’s band had established themselves on Beausoleil Island on Georgian Bay. This band distinguished themselves from the primarily Methodist bands under

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 120.

<sup>73</sup> Sarah Carter, *Lost Harvests: Prairie Indian Reserve Farmers and Government Policy* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1990), 3.

<sup>74</sup> Murray, *Muskoka and Haliburton*, 122-123.

Yellowhead and Snake by practicing Catholicism. An 1857 census reported that Aisance's band was clearly putting the most effort into agriculture with approximately 300 cleared acres, yielding more than ten times the output of corn grown at Rama or Snake Island, and a comparable quantity of potatoes. By this date, the Beausoleil band had also begun to engage in commercial fishing, producing 150 barrels of dried fish from Georgian Bay. One year later, the Pennefather Report recorded that this group had begun to move to Christian Island for reasons of which he was unaware.<sup>75</sup>

The Sandy Island band is the hardest to summarize, mainly because its leadership was more fluid and social structure more fractious, but also because of all four bands it engaged the least with agriculture and spent the most time on the Shield beyond the purview of the state during the period 1830-70. At the time of the Coldwater settlement, the Sandy Island band was nominally led by Yellowhead. The group spent time between the shores of Georgian Bay at the future site of Parry Sound, and a broad swath of territory inland that stretched from the Moon River in the south to the Magnettawan River in the north. Muskoka was only part of this territory. Fleeting references to the Sandy Island band prior to 1850 suggest the band maintained a relatively undisturbed seasonal cycle compared to the other three bands.<sup>76</sup> By 1850, the Sandy Island band leadership was split between the Shawanaga branch under Chief Muckata Mishoquet at Shawanaga (roughly 25 kilometres northwest of Parry Sound) and the Muskoka branch under Chief Muskato (Peter Megis) at Parry Sound. Muckata Mishoquet was succeeded by Solomon James shortly after the middle of the century, and maintained his leadership of the Shawanaga

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<sup>75</sup> More than likely the band decided to move because the soil was better suited to farming, but may also have chosen Christian Islands for its proximity to more plentiful fisheries. Ibid., 121.

<sup>76</sup> For example, oral interviews carried out by John Macfie and Joan Lovisek with members of Wasauksing (formerly Parry Island) First Nation, reveal that the Seguin River (*sehavrani-winishing* - 'place to camp in spring') was a major route leading to and from the hunting grounds of the Manitowaba family during the nineteenth century. Lovisek, "Algonkian Speaking Peoples," 44.

branch well into the 1880s. Megis had only recently assumed leadership over the Muskoka branch from Chief Maitwaiosh in 1848, and not long after was replaced by Chief Pegahmegahbow in 1858.<sup>77</sup> Unlike the bands to the south, the Pennefather Report recorded little farming other than “very small patches of Corn and Potatoes” by the band in 1858<sup>78</sup>

The break-up of these bands and the distinctions between them are important in that each of them experienced a different combination of pressures emanating from Eurocanadian society. Yet all continued to utilize Muskoka as a strategy for coping with those hardships and maintaining a more sustainable way of life during the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>79</sup>

The distinction of the Sandy Island band is particularly important, since Muckata Mishoquet and Megis were included in the 1850 Robinson-Huron Treaty, while Yellowhead, Snake and Aisance were not. The Crown understood the Sandy Island band to have surrendered their rights to inland Shield territory, but was unaware that the same rights of the Chippewa at Rama, Snake Island and Christian Island had never been the subject of any treaty.<sup>80</sup> Over the course of the first half of the nineteenth century, constantly changing relations with the British government forced the

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<sup>77</sup> Murray, *Muskoka and Haliburton*, lviii, 117, 129; Rogers & Tobobodung, “Parry Island Farmers,” 273-275.

<sup>78</sup> Pennefather Report, Appendix, No.30. It is likely that Pennefather was not witness to other cultivated patches in this Shield territory that may have been located at different locations where suitable soil was found.

<sup>79</sup> It should also be noted that during the 1830s and 1840s, after the United States introduced a policy that forced all Aboriginal people onto reserves west of the Mississippi, many Anishinaabeg from places in Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana and Michigan with kinship ties in Ontario immigrated to different parts of the province. After moving around for several years, groups of Menominee, Potawatomi and Odawa settled with each of the four bands considered here, although especially large numbers eventually joined the Christian Island and Parry Island bands, and a non-status community established itself at Moose Deer Point near the mouth of the Moon River on Georgian Bay. Schmalz, *Ojibwa of Southern Ontario*, 200-204; Brownlie, *Fatherly Eye*, 15; Rogers & Tobobodung, “Parry Island Farmers,” 261-263, 275, 278.

<sup>80</sup> The fact that these bands were never party to the Robinson-Huron Treaty was confusing and contentious during the entire period under study. The Crown assumed it had, by formalizing the terms of the Robinson-Huron Treaty, extinguished all Aboriginal title to the territory that comprised the hunting grounds of the Chippewa of south-central Ontario. In fact, only the Sandy Island band, which subsequently became known as the Parry Island band, had surrendered their claim to this territory. Members of the Rama, Snake and Christian Island bands continued to travel to Muskoka each year to the bewilderment and frustration of the government. It was not until 1923, when the Williams Treaties were completed, that both the Chippewa and Mississauga received compensation for the violation of their unceded rights. In 1923, these rights were extinguished. Blair, *Lament for a First Nation*; Murray, *Muskoka and Haliburton*, lix.



Anishinaabeg of south-central Ontario to respond to new colonizing pressures, which resulted in the crystallization of distinct political identities for the Chippewa of Rama, Beausoleil Island and Snake Island, and the Sandy Island Ojibwa.

New realities and familiar strategies for Muskoka's Anishinaabeg, 1850-1880

In many respects, the Sandy Island band was left in a far less sustainable arrangement after they signed the Robinson-Huron Treaty in 1850. Misunderstanding between the band and Crown surveyors tasked with establishing reserves under the Robinson-Huron Treaty, disagreement between the Shawanaga and Muskoka branches of the renamed Parry Island band and an influx of white settlers into the band's preferred inland camps sites after 1865 resulted in fewer opportunities than were available earlier and elsewhere.

In July 1852, a little less than two years after the Robinson-Huron Treaty was signed, Provincial Land Surveyor, John Stoughton Dennis, and Department of Indian Affairs (DIA) agent, John W. Keating, met with members of the Sandy Island band to determine the borders of their reserve. Initially, the band's reserve was to encompass over 10,000 acres on the mainland where the town of Parry Sound now stands. This land was an ancestral camp site where large numbers of Georgian Bay Algonquian-speaking peoples had traditionally preserved fish and cultivated gardens.<sup>81</sup> At the 1852 meeting, the band informed Dennis and Keating that they intended to create a settlement on Parry Island - presumably because it provided better access to local fisheries. For reasons that are not clear, Dennis and Keating exchanged the Parry Sound site for the entirety of Parry Island on their official maps. Thereafter, the DIA referred to the band as Parry Island, rather than Sandy Island. However, the band did not discover that the Parry Sound

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<sup>81</sup> Rogers & Tobobodung, "Parry Island Farmers," 286.

site was not included as part of their reserve until many years later.<sup>82</sup> Although both sites were located on the Shield, soil conditions were much worse for cultivation on Parry Island. Over the remainder of the nineteenth century, government efforts to convince band members to take up farming were frustrated by the stark environmental realities of Parry Island.

Even after the reserve was established at Parry Island, members of the Muskoka branch continued to reside inland, next to the shores of larger lakes, rivers and streams. In fact, unlike the Chippewa bands further south, some of the Muskoka branch appear to have remained inland year round next to these larger lakes for several years around the midpoint of the century.<sup>83</sup> In 1835, while mapping the area for the Royal Navy, John Carthew encountered a group of six families lead by Chief Pamosagay on an island in Muskoka. According to Carthew's report,

These Indians were very civil, and after making some enquiries as to their mode of life, they took me to their village. I was surprised to find about 40 acres of good clearing, planted with corn and potatoes. I learned from them that they had made this in 4 years. The plantation is on an island in the Lake, but only a small part of the island is good land... . They appear to reside here all year round, taking plenty of white fish and trout.<sup>84</sup>

Over thirty years later in 1868, the island Carthew described (Tobin Island on Lake Rosseau) was again visited by government representatives when Provincial Lands Surveyor Albert Fowlie mapped it. Fowlie remarked on the foliage of new growth and young shoots, suggesting that the inhabitants had recently discontinued their use of the site as a camp grounds and garden.<sup>85</sup>

Evidence of occupation on Tobin Island is in keeping with the accounts included in local history,

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<sup>82</sup> Michael Marlatt, "The Calamity of the Initial Reserve Surveys under the Robinson Treaties" *Papers of the Thirty-fifth Algonquian Conference* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba, 2004), 284, 295-296. There is a great deal of controversy surrounding this decision, whether the band had actually asked for their reserve to include both sites, or be switched outright, or whether Dennis and Keating made a unilateral decision based on the value of the Parry Sound site and the difficulty that would arise from having the reserve lands split in two.

<sup>83</sup> *RMPAR*, Vol.2, 9.

<sup>84</sup> Murray, *Muskoka and Haliburton*, 108.

<sup>85</sup> *RMPAR*, Vol.2, 50.

which dates the departure of these families to around 1860.<sup>86</sup> By this account, the Tobin Island families, now led by Chief Mishoquetto (William King), relocated to a larger site, Obajawanung, next to the Baisong Rapids separating Lakes Rosseau and Muskoka.

By the early 1860s, Obajawanung was the hub of activity for the Muskoka branch of the Parry Island band. In 1858, Chief Megis passed away and was replaced by Chief Pegahmegahbow. A few years later, Vernon Wadsworth, another Lands Surveyor working in Muskoka during the 1860s, described Obajawanung as “beautifully situated” with twenty log homes and “a good deal of cleared land about it used as gardens,” but no domesticated animals apart from dogs.<sup>87</sup> Wadsworth also witnessed members of the Menominee family trek from Mary Lake to Obajawanung on Lake Rosseau to visit relatives.<sup>88</sup> Located roughly thirty kilometres to the east, the Menominee family lived and hunted year round, growing corn and potatoes along the shore of Mary Lake and Menominee Lake during the 1860s and early 1870s.<sup>89</sup> In November, 1869, George Hunt (an enterprising settler for whom the town of Huntsville was named) recorded in his journal that “Young Menominee and his cousin called to see if I had a nipple to give them for their gun... .”<sup>90</sup> Another homesteader, Annie Avery, recalled that the Menominee family had built “a log pole house, with bunks for sleeping and a room for cooking and eating,” which suggests at least a prolonged, if not year round, residence.<sup>91</sup> It is not known how many

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<sup>86</sup> Richard Tatley, *Port Carling: The Hub of the Muskoka Lakes*, (Erin, ON: Boston Mills Press, 1996), 14-15.

<sup>87</sup> Murray, *Muskoka and Haliburton*, 125-126.

<sup>88</sup> Menominee was a family name and should not be confused with ethnic affiliation. It is likely, however, that this family had connections with ethnic Menominee communities from the American side of the Great Lakes who arrived in Ontario during the 1830s and 1840s. See note 79.

<sup>89</sup> *RMPAR*, Vol.2, 7.

<sup>90</sup> “George Hunt Diary, Vol.2.,” reproduction, Muskoka Heritage Place Archives, 2003.10.125, Doc Box P-2m, Huntsville, Ontario, 21.

<sup>91</sup> Sidney Avery, “The Outdoor Life in the Muskoka Bushland,” (Unpublished essay as part of *Pioneer Muskoka: Notes on the History of Muskoka District as Presented by Guest Speakers on Behalf of Georgian College* (Barrie), Bracebridge, Gravenhurst, Huntsville, Port Carling, September-November, 1975), Huntsville Public Library, Muskoka Local History Collection, 18.

other families remained inland year-round, but Obajawanung appears to have become the centre of the Muskoka branch activities.

Around this time, Pegahmegahbow petitioned the government in an effort to have the band reserve moved from Parry Island to Obajawanung. In January 1862, Pegahmegahbow (with the aid of John Stoughton Dennis) wrote to the Department of Indian Affairs:

FATHER

Our feelings have changed.

This place [Obajawanung] is beautiful in our eyes, and we found we could not leave it.

Many winters have passed since we settled here and began to cultivate our gardens.

We have good houses and large gardens where we raise much corn and potatoes.

Our children have grown up here and cannot make up their minds to go to a new place. We are not so fortunate as some of your Red Children who have large farms cleared and plenty of cattle.

We live by hunting and taking furs - and our hunting grounds are all near here. Were we to go to Parry Island we should have to clear new Gardens and our hunting grounds would be far off.

FATHER

We wish that you would take back Parry Island, our Reserve on Lake Huron, and instead of it give us our Reserve of three miles by six miles at this place... .

We hope you will grant the wish of your Red Children, and do it soon, because the whites are coming in close to us and we are afraid that your Surveyors will soon lay our lands here into lots.<sup>92</sup>

Obviously a response to the arrival of some of the first white settlers into the area after the Muskoka Colonization Road had been completed in 1858, a few band members appear to have had doubts about the choice to reserve Parry Island. The Muskoka branch's desire to switch reserves did not have the approval of Solomon James and the Shawanaga branch of the band, however, and the Department of Indian Affairs never pursued this petition. Yet still the Muskoka branch did not remove to Parry Island.

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<sup>92</sup> Quoted in Tatley, *Port Carling*, 14.

During the 1860s, the band co-existed with incoming settlers. According to settler accounts, this co-existence was one of mutual respect and exchange.<sup>93</sup> Thomas M. Robinson, an early settler in the Gravenhurst area during the early 1860s, recalled rowing twenty kilometres in the spring to Obajawanung to buy ‘corn seed’.<sup>94</sup> Elizabeth Penson, granddaughter of pioneers living not far from the ‘Indian Gardens’ (as local white settlers called Obajawanung), remembered that “Local Indians brought [her grandparents] food in exchange for flannel. They were good kind neighbours.”<sup>95</sup> And, at the north end of Lake Joseph, a group of hardy adventure-seekers who established themselves as the area’s first tourists, remembered Pegahmegahbow as “our old friend Peg.”<sup>96</sup>

Elders at Wasauksing First Nation (formerly Parry Island) remember this period somewhat differently. According to Carleen Partridge, “the Indians didn’t like living with white people.”<sup>97</sup> Consequently, members of the band relocated to new spots when settlers moved into the area around Baisong Rapids. Invariably, more white people arrived, and band members relocated to another spot. Located where Lake Rosseau empties into Lake Muskoka, Obajawanung quickly became a hub of white settler activity in the region as well.

With the introduction of Muskoka’s first steamboat in 1866, outsiders could more easily reach the Indian Gardens. The commencement of the government project to build a set of locks at Obajawanung in 1870 appears to have been the final factor influencing the decision of

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<sup>93</sup> Unfortunately, most local history on Muskoka pays only cursory attention to, or entirely omits, the area’s First Nations. The accounts that do exist, however, tend to romanticize relations between the indigenous population and white settlers. Despite the somewhat biased memory of these encounters, I have found no indication that physical violence accompanied resettlement by Eurocanadians during the 1860s and 1870s.

<sup>94</sup> D.H.C. Mason, *Muskoka: The First Islanders and After* (Bracebridge: Herald-Gazette Press, 1974), 10.

<sup>95</sup> Joan E. McHugh, *Beloved Muskoka: Diaries and Recollections of Elizabeth Penson* (Port Elgin, ON: Brucedale Press, 2009), 66.

<sup>96</sup> Mason, *First Islanders*, 19.

<sup>97</sup> Interview conducted by author with Carleen Partridge, Oct. 21, 2011.

Pegahmegahbow and the Muskoka branch to acquiesce to the growing pressure for their land and move away from the site of what had only recently been renamed Port Carling by its new inhabitants.<sup>98</sup> Yet, evidence suggests the entire branch did not relocate to Parry Island right away. While Pegahmegahbow settled at Parry Island, others, including Mishoquetto (William King), migrated to new sites closer to the shores of Georgian Bay, north of the Moon River.<sup>99</sup> Others spent their winters at smaller inland sites, such as Maple Lake, Swan Lake and Turtle Lake.<sup>100</sup> And, while members of the band continued to return to Port Carling in the summer months to take advantage of the tourist trade selling crafts, all evidence suggests that their presence in Muskoka diminished almost entirely.

The Anishinaabeg of south-central Ontario chose the locations of the Rama, Snake Island, Christian Island, and Parry Island reserves for reasons that made their seasonal way of life more sustainable, particularly in the face of state pressures and white settlers. All four bands that had formerly been under Yellowhead's leadership chose significant fishing grounds camps, particularly islands, as their reserves in the second quarter of the nineteenth century.<sup>101</sup> The Rama band located next to Lake Couchiching where an important fishery made use of the inlet of Lake Couchiching and the Narrows separating that lake from Lake Simcoe. The Snake Island band took up an island at the south end of Lake Simcoe to utilize that body of water's large fishery. The Christian Island band initially chose Beausoleil Island, but relocated to Christian Island just north of Penetanguishene on Georgian Bay, perhaps the most advantageous location of the four

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<sup>98</sup> Tatley, *Port Carling*, 14-15.

<sup>99</sup> "Parry Sound Superintendency - Correspondence Regarding Certain Indians Reported by Chief Paudash as Living in the Vicinity of Moose Deer Point, Georgian Bay. It was Learned that the John King Family, Non-treaty Indians, Came Under the Control of this Agency," LAC, RG10, Vol.3082, file.272444.

<sup>100</sup> Rogers & Tobobodung, "Parry Island Farmers," 275.

<sup>101</sup> Blair, *Lament for a First Nation*, 25-26; Rhonda Telford, "Anishinabe Interest in Island, Fish and Water," *Papers of the Thirty-first Algonquian Conference* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba, 2000), 415.

in terms of access to fisheries. The Parry Island band's location further north on Georgian Bay provided similar advantages. Fish were the most critical component of these bands' yearly cycle. Forced to choose their reserves, Aboriginal peoples selected places where they spent the most time each year, where they collected in large groups, and had access to fish, their most critical resource of consumption and trade.

Starting in 1847, under increasing pressures from white settlement and commercial fishing operations on the upper Great Lakes fisheries, the government of Canada West began making Indian fisheries available to whites. Like earlier strategies to acquire their land, initially, commercial fishermen and the government justified this strategy of usurping Aboriginal fishing rights in terms of a civilizing mission. With the passing of the *Fisheries Act* in 1857, however, these groups altered the justification. They accused Aboriginal fishermen of using treaty rights to over-fish. Recent scholarship has revealed how the *Fisheries Act*, along with later government regulations and disputes about federal versus provincial jurisdiction, denied Aboriginal rights and imposed legal restrictions on access to fisheries resources at the same time as they facilitated an expansion of commercial fishing controlled by whites.<sup>102</sup> White fishermen criticized Aboriginal peoples for employing 'lazy' or 'unsportsmanlike' methods of fishing. Yet, as Tim E. Holzkamm, Victor T. Lytwyn, and Leo G. Weisberg have shown, although Georgian Bay fisheries may have collapsed periodically due to climate, disease, or cultural influences prior to white commercial impacts, it never failed due to Aboriginal over-fishing.<sup>103</sup> The perception that Aboriginal fishing

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<sup>102</sup> Blair *Lament for a First Nation*; Thoms "Ojibwa Fishing Grounds"; Teillet "Regulatory Regime"; Brownlie, *Fatherly Eye*; Chute, *Legacy of Shingwaukonse*; Koenig, *Culture and Ecologies*.

<sup>103</sup> Tim E. Holzkamm, Victor T. Lytwyn, and Leo G. Weisberg, "Rainy River Sturgeon: An Ojibway Resource in the Fur Trade Economy" *The Canadian Geographer* vol.32, No.3 (September 1988), 194-205.

methods were more efficient than white methods seemed to bother officials and observers.<sup>104</sup>

After 1857, new legislation required band members to obtain leases and licenses from the Crown to use fisheries that had never been included in any of the treaties signed during the first half of the nineteenth century.<sup>105</sup> In effect, the *Fisheries Act* transferred fisheries rights from Aboriginal peoples to white people by introducing a bureaucracy that privileged the latter group over the former. The real danger of this policy decision for Aboriginal peoples in south-central Ontario, however, was not simply that the government denied their rights to fish, but that they denied access to their most critical resource. Compounding the problem was the fact that territory south of the Shield was becoming increasingly inaccessible due to white settlement. During the second half of the century, then, fisheries had become even more critical for the Chippewa and Ojibwa because other components of their seasonal cycle had become inaccessible.

Relatively isolated from the mainland where market-oriented farming provided additional opportunities, the Christian Island band depended on commercial fishing much more than the other bands, and therefore experienced the most severe effects of the *Fisheries Act*. In 1883, Indian Agent William Plummer remarked that band members engaged in fishing “have been greatly interfered with by white fishermen,” and that “their rights and privileges in this respect should be strictly guarded.”<sup>106</sup> The following year, a new agent, H.H. Thompson, conveyed the band’s insistence on the need for continued access to the fisheries:

The Indians assert that neither the crops raised by them at present, nor the remuneration they obtain for the odd jobs got by them during the summer, such as loading lumber at Muskoka Mills, are sufficient to keep them in food during

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<sup>104</sup> Blair, *Lament for a First Nation*, 38-61; The *Fisheries Act* was amended in 1859 to allow for *bona fide* domestic consumption. This did not reduce the impact of the *Act*, however, since the Anishinaabeg in south-central Ontario had always relied on fish for trade in addition to consumption. Brownlie, *Fatherly Eye*, 85.

<sup>105</sup> Blair, *Lament for a First Nation*, 48-57.

<sup>106</sup> Dominion of Canada, “Part I: Reports of Superintendents and Agents,” *Annual Report of the Department of Indian Affairs for the Year Ended 31st December, 1882* (Ottawa: MacLean, Roger & Co., 1883), 121-122.



the winter, and that for some years a large portion of their subsistence must come from fishing.<sup>107</sup>

Regardless of the justification, or the efforts on the part of certain Indian Agents to recognize and defend Aboriginal fishing rights, neither level of government took any measures to do so. By 1890, Annual Reports to the DIA on Christian Island no longer included any mention of commercial fishing, reflecting the elimination of the industry on the island.

After 1867, Indian Agents such as William Plummer (Rama, Christian Island, and Georgina Island - formerly Snake Island) and Charles Skene (Parry Island and Shawanaga) argued vehemently that these bands “retained the Islands especially for privileges of fishing, on what they have always regarded as their own property,” and that they had never discontinued their fishing activities in these locations.<sup>108</sup> In a March 1876 letter, Plummer also pointed out that at Rama, the fishing grounds next to Lake Couchiching were the primary residence of women, children and elders while the men traveled north to their hunting grounds in the winter. For the Christian Island band, Plummer argued, “it is here the old men and women, and children fish when the able bodied men are absent.”<sup>109</sup> Yet the opinions of these agents were less influential than other government officials in Ottawa who paternalistically believed that restrictive policies were in the best interests of the Indians. A letter written in January 1876 by W.F. Witcher, Deputy Commissioner of Marine and Fisheries, to E.A. Meredith, Deputy Minister of the Interior, illustrates the viewpoint within government circles at the federal level:

Mr. Skene seems to think that the Common Law... is irreconcilable with these Indians treaties; and that the Indians ought therefore to be exempted from the

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<sup>107</sup> Dominion of Canada, “Part I: Reports of Superintendents and Agents,” *Annual Report of the Department of Indian Affairs for the Year Ended 31st December, 1883* (Ottawa: MacLean, Roger & Co., 1884), 18.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 415

<sup>109</sup> “Headquarters - Reports by various agents on the state of the fisheries under their jurisdiction,” LAC, RG10, vol. 1972, file 5330.

statutory restrictions as to fishing and hunting to which all others of Her Majesty's subjects are liable. The obvious purpose of prohibiting the destruction of fish and game... is quite as necessary if not more so in the interest of Indians as in behalf of white people... it is desirable that the Indians should clearly understand the sole object of such uniformity to be the general protection and multiplication of the various kinds of fish and game. At the same time they might be instructed that these restrictions really involve nothing inconsistent with the spirit of any treaties entered into with the Government. Rather, in fact, they are designed to render more valuable the privileges which Indians are entitled to enjoy in common with their fellow subjects by virtue of the reservations contained in such treaties.<sup>110</sup>

After 1876, heightened jurisdictional disputes between the provincial and federal governments resulted in the DIA's capitulation to the authority of the Provincial Department of Lands and Forests over resource issues. Different bands undertook a variety of efforts to challenge the denial of their fishing rights. First, they attempted legal appeals. In 1866, band members at Rama sent a petition to the DIA complaining that a fisherman named Harris "is taking many Herrings at the [Couchiching] Narrows and selling them," and that if he "is allowed to go on much longer he will entirely ruin the fishing...".<sup>111</sup> When such complaints failed to garner a response around Georgian Bay, Aboriginal fishermen disrupted white fishing by lifting and destroying nets, stealing fish, and in extreme cases assaulting white fishermen.<sup>112</sup> As both Rhonda Telford and Peggy Blair argue, despite protests from the DIA, the federal Department of Marine and Fisheries determined that the waters and fisheries were public rights, which the Crown could not allocate to one individual or group exclusively unless temporary licenses were granted for particular fisheries. Thus, while the Anishinaabeg never agreed that the public should have rights to waterways or fish, British law provided the justification for denying Aboriginal rights, since

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Telford, "Anishinabe Interest in Island, Fish and Water," 410.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 411 & 415.

signatories had not codified those rights in law (i.e. the treaties did not make such rights explicit).<sup>113</sup> Moreover, the end of the century also witnessed new laws that privileged conservationism in response to a concerted lobby from sportsmen and anglers in Ontario. Paralleling the perspective of white commercial fishermen, these groups viewed Aboriginal fishing practices as unsportsmanlike.<sup>114</sup> The result was that throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, laws consistently denied the Anishinaabeg of south-central Ontario access to their traditional fisheries. The loss of this vital component of their seasonal cycle and commercial opportunity created the least sustainable social, economic and environmental circumstances the Chippewa and Ojibwa bands had ever experienced. Paternalistic and discriminatory conditions on reserve only made these circumstances worse.

The DIA in Ottawa, and specific Indian Agents in the field, took control of reserve governance under the terms of the *Indian Act* of 1876. After this date, all decisions made by band councils had to receive DIA approval, including the use of band funds. As Brownlie argues, “the Indian Act superseded the treaties, becoming the sole legal document by which the department was guided in its relations with First Nations.”<sup>115</sup> The Indian Act had serious implications for the ability of each band to maintain a socio-political structure, or generate meaningful economic opportunities on reserve. In the case of Parry Island, as the DIA came to dominate the political economy on reserve, chiefs lost a large measure of their ability to address community concerns and material needs. Since the Indian Agent represented the community’s only source of redress and social assistance, community members approached the agent for many of the same reasons

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 412-414; Blair, *Lament for a First Nation*, 69-73.

<sup>114</sup> Teillet, “Regulatory Regime,” 27; Frank Tough, “Ontario’s Appropriation of Indian Hunting: Provincial Conservation Policies vs. Aboriginal and Treaty Rights, ca. 1892-1930” (Paper prepared for the Ontario Native Affairs Secretariat, Toronto, Ontario, January 1991), 10.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

they might have previously approached the chief. However, while band members assumed this relationship was based on reciprocity, and therefore obligation, the Indian Agent treated it in paternalistic terms. Rather than assume a responsibility to aid members of the community in ways familiar to Aboriginal peoples, the agents directed community affairs by limiting their involvement.<sup>116</sup> In the case of Parry Island, this dynamic was further complicated by the fact that prior to the First World War, the band's social structure was fractious, with multiple leadership nodes. For example, in August 1888, on behalf of the band council, Chief James Pegahmegahbow, and two Second Chiefs, Peter Megis and Charles Sinebah, wrote to their Indian Agent, Thomas Walton, to request two wagons. In his letter to Ottawa requesting the funds needed for the two wagons, Walton justified the need because "the band consists of two communities living about six miles apart. Consequently when one community needs anything the other claims an equivalent. In this case each community desires to have its own waggon [sic]."<sup>117</sup> Apart from the particular challenges at Parry Island, this letter reveals that the DIA took an interest in even the most basic of band affairs by controlling band funds. Authoritative, and in many cases, racist Indian Agents and DIA representatives frustrated attempts by members of the band to pursue new strategies for generating income on reserve. In some cases, without the band's consent, the DIA allowed non-Aboriginals to expropriate valuable reserve resources, which could have generated more sustainable social, economic and environmental opportunities for members of the community.

In 1856, Crown Surveyor W.H.E. Napier reported to R.T. Pennefather, Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, that the coasts of Parry Island were "high and rocky timbered with

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<sup>116</sup> Brownlie, *Fatherly Eye*, 101.

<sup>117</sup> "Parry Sound Superintendency - Requisition of the chiefs and councillors of the Parry Island Band for two lumber waggons," LAC, RG10, Vol.2427, file.88559.

pine and hemlock.” There were, Napier went on, “many very excellent flats of open hardwood, beech, maple, elm, ironwood birch and ash interspersed with occasional groves of large pine of good quality.” By using words like “timbered” and “quality” it is not hard to see that this colonial representative was eyeing the commercial value of trees growing on reserve land, particularly the white pine.<sup>118</sup> In September 1871, the Parry Island band, under Chief Pegahmegahbow, sold the rights to the merchantable timber on the island to a lumberman named Alvin Peter who operated a sawmill in Parry Sound. In 1887, Chief Peter Megis wrote to the Governor General in Council to request assistance in preventing hardwood timber from being cut on Parry Island. According to the petition, Megis and the Parry Island band understood the agreement to cut timber as applying to the pine on the reserve, but nothing else. Initially, both the logging company and the band leadership understood “merchantable” to refer to pine alone, since pine was the only timber being harvested.<sup>119</sup> But the word merchantable meant something different to lumbermen in 1887 than it did in 1871. By 1887, the lumber company’s definition of merchantable had expanded to include several other species of tree that now had a market with the Standard Chemical Co, which operated an alcohol plant in Parry Sound. By addressing the letter to the Governor General, Megis was following a long tradition of expecting the Crown to uphold its treaty promises, and obviously did not expect the DIA to offer any redress. This letter illustrates that not only did Eurocanadian and Aboriginal versions of formal agreements continued to differ as they had since the start of the nineteenth century, but also that, when read alongside Napier’s report, the federal government was clearly prone to interpreting an agreement such as this in

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<sup>118</sup> “Ontario - Copy of ‘Sir Francis Bond Head’s Treaty’ signed at Manitowaning in 1836 in the matter of the islands on the north and east shores of Lake Huron. Copies of Robinson Superior, Robinson Huron and Lake Simcoe Treaties and correspondence, reports, memoranda and claims relating to these treaties,” LAC, RG10, vol.2848, file. 178978.

<sup>119</sup> “Parry Sound Superintendency - Correspondence Regarding the A. Peter Estate Timber License Covering the Parry Island Reserve,” LAC, RG10, Vol.2477, file.98011-4.

favour of the logging company and not the Parry Island band, whose interests they were entrusted to defend.

Twenty-five years later, Chief Megis and the band council were still insisting they had not surrendered the rights to any timber other than the pine. In August 1912, George L. Chitty, Crown Timber Inspector, settled the matter in a letter to the Deputy Minister of the Interior. Chitty dismissed the claims by Megis and others that band leaders had been intoxicated and induced to sign the surrender in 1871, and stated categorically that “the right [of the licensee] is undeniable as the license he [Alvin Peter] holds includes the right to cut Ash, Elm, Birch, Beech, Hickory, & Oak.”<sup>120</sup> Thus, for over forty years, differing understandings of the original agreement eliminated logging as a viable strategy for generating income on the reserve. In this context of restrictions, denial and marginalization on and off reserve, Muskoka provided the only opportunities and stability for communities experiencing dramatic changes to their traditional way of life.

During the first quarter of the twentieth century, the Chippewa at Rama, Georgina Island and Christian Island engaged in serious legal efforts to have their claims to territory in Muskoka addressed by the federal and provincial governments. Since the Chippewa had not signed the Robinson-Huron Treaty in 1850, legally these bands still had full rights to hunt, trap, farm and fish in Muskoka. Since access was all but impossible by the second decade of the century, they demanded compensation. In 1911 and 1912, these bands, along with several Mississauga bands further east, hired a series of lawyers to press their claims through proper legal channels. Less than a decade later, in 1923, many of the same members gave testimony as part of the Williams

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<sup>120</sup> “Parry Sound Superintendency - Correspondence regarding the surrender of the timber on Parry Island reserve,” LAC, RG10, Vol.3082, file.271899.

Commission established to determine the legitimacy of Chippewa and Mississauga claims to rights in Muskoka and Haliburton. The combined testimony provides clear evidence that places along the Muskoka River watershed were the primary hunting grounds for many members of these bands. As Thomas Kadegegwon of Christian Island insisted, Muskoka was “in the centre of all the hunting grounds.”<sup>121</sup> The testimony given in 1911-1912 and 1923 demonstrates overwhelmingly that members of these bands continued to travel to their traditional hunting grounds from their various reserve locations throughout the second half of the nineteenth century and that Muskoka remained an important part of their seasonal cycles during a period of intense colonization.

For example, seventy-eight year-old Joseph Yellowhead of Rama described his reindeer dodem hunting grounds between Ox-tongue Lake and Canoe Lake upstream from Trading Lake (renamed Lake of Bays by this time).<sup>122</sup> This area was also specifically mentioned in his father’s last will and testament of September 1861.<sup>123</sup> Joseph Yellowhead began hunting with his father in 1848 when he was fifteen years old, and traveled the same route through Muskoka each year for over a decade and a half. Other informants from Rama also described hunting limits located at the northern extremity of the Muskoka River watershed. The same testimony also reveals that fur trapping was an important reason for journeying to Muskoka. The members of the Rama band, and their kin at Georgina Island and Christian Island, appear to have remained somewhat independent of the Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC) trading network. Rather than trade with HBC posts at Penetanguishene or Orillia, the men who traveled to Muskoka in the 1860s typically sold

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<sup>121</sup> “Bound volume of testimony,” LAC, RG10, vol.2331, file 67071-4B.

<sup>122</sup> “Correspondence and reports regarding claims, by the Chippewas and Mississaugas of the Province of Ontario, to compensation for land not surrendered by the Robinson Treaty of 1850,” LAC, RG10, vol.2329, file 67071-2.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

their furs to a mixed-blood trader named Alexander Bailey (Beetobeeg) who kept a post at Kekahpekong, the future site of Bracebridge.<sup>124</sup>

Starting in 1862, at the age of nine, fifty-eight year-old John Bigwin (also reindeer dodem) described traveling with his father, James Bigwin,<sup>125</sup> from Georgina Island to hunting grounds between Trading Lake and Hollow Lake (present-day Kawagama Lake) for over forty-five years. Bigwin traveled the same route as Yellowhead to reach his family's limits each year.<sup>126</sup> At Cedar Narrows where the town of Dorset now stands they cleared an area for cultivation, but Bigwin and his family also ate a lot of "wild meat --- meat of the fisher and mink and otter."<sup>127</sup> Another member of the Georgina Island band, George Bigcanoe, and his family trapped "beaver, otter, muskrat, fisher, marten and mink" for their furs, but only killed deer for food.<sup>128</sup> Like the Rama band, members of the Georgina Island band sold their furs to Alexander Bailey at Bracebridge. Hunting and trapping served a variety of subsistence and commercial purposes that were closely connected.<sup>129</sup> These resources, therefore, made life more sustainable at a time when access to fisheries was restricted and opportunities on reserve were few.

From Christian Island, ninety-year-old Samuel Aisance - whose father, Chief John Aisance, initiated the split of the band from the Rama and Snake Island bands in the 1830s - described his otter dodem hunting grounds along the shore of Georgian Bay between Beausoleil Island and Moose Deer Point (at the Moon River), which he traveled to with his father starting in

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid.; See Joan Lovisek for more on the inability of the HBC to penetrate the lower Georgian Bay fur trade during this period. Lovisek, "Algonkian Speaking Peoples," 313-315. It is also worth noting that William Benjamin Robinson, who brokered and signed the Robinson-Huron Treaty on behalf of the government, also ran a post in Muskoka on Yoho Island on Lake Joseph during the 1820s. Robinson was able to successfully complete the treaty in 1850 thanks to the relationships he has established through his post. Murray, *Muskoka and Haliburton*, 117.

<sup>125</sup> James Bigwin was originally a member of the Georgina Island band but moved with his family to Rama shortly after the turn of the twentieth century. RMPAR, Vol.2, 9.

<sup>126</sup> "Correspondence and reports regarding claims," LAC, RG10, vol.2329, file 67071-2.

<sup>127</sup> "Bound volume of testimony," LAC, RG10, vol.2331, file 67071-4B.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Tough, "Ontario's Appropriation of Indian Hunting," 3.



1838 at age sixteen, and continued to visit this limit for fifty years. Starting during the 1860s, seventy-five-year-old Wesley Monague traveled much farther inland to his uncle's hunting grounds around Trout Lake (in the vicinity of Yellowhead's limits) just beyond the northern reaches of the Muskoka River watershed, at the height of land now included within Algonquin Park.<sup>130</sup> Other members of the band described limits located further north, upstream of Parry Island and Shawanaga.<sup>131</sup> Like the other bands, fur trapping was important, but unlike the Rama and Georgina Island band members, most sold their furs to Alfred Thompson at Penetanguishene, rather than Alexander Bailey at Bracebridge.<sup>132</sup>

Despite the many changes to their societal metabolism elsewhere, Muskoka provided social and economic continuity in their lives. Members from different bands continued to respect *dodem* limits and avoided violating one another's hunting grounds at all costs. Gilbert Williams recounted his father's warning "to not go over the boundary, this west boundary [west of Lake Joseph], and I never went over it, I just went near there and come back into lake Joseph and Rosseau lake and Skeleton lake."<sup>133</sup> Likewise, Charles Bigcanoe impressed upon R.V. Sinclair, one of the Williams Treaty Commissioners, the seriousness of the boundaries between limits by evoking the sanctity of private property: "They [band members] were very attentive of keeping their limits, like a farmer would be. They don't want anyone to hunt in their grounds."<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> "Correspondence and reports regarding claims," LAC, RG10, vol.2329, file 67071-2.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.* Reference to limits located further north suggests that members of the Parry Island and Christian Island band often intermarried, and is corroborated by the fact that one member described limits originally belonging to a member of the Parry Island band, Asa Waswani. It should also be noted that not all informants specified areas located within the Muskoka River or adjacent watersheds. Several members from all three Chippewa bands identified hunting grounds either in Haliburton or various locations around Penetanguishene and Lake Simcoe. Their testimony has not been included here despite the fact that it too demonstrates that members of the Chippewa bands utilized Shield-country hunting grounds to ameliorate the worst effects of colonization pressures around reserves.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>133</sup> "Bound volume of testimony given to a commission, chaired by A.S. Williams, investigating claims, by the Chippewas Mississaugas of Ontario, to compensation for land not surrendered by the Robinson Treaty of 1850," LAC, RG10, vol.2331, file 67071-4A.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

Moreover, of the fifteen informants whose hereditary hunting grounds were located in Muskoka, eleven were able to recall detailed information regarding multiple generations of hunting rights in the region from the 1830s through to the turn of the century. Indeed, returning to seasonal hunting grounds was an essential part of maintaining dodemic identity. Failing to do so was understood to have intergenerational consequences that went beyond one's ability to provide for the family. According to oral tradition as told by Elisabeth Shilling of Rama, the health of members of her dodem was proportional to time spent in their dodemic limits. In her story, an old woman went to Lake Joseph each summer to feed her serpent. She knew that if she missed one summer a cousin would die. Sure enough, as access to Lake Joseph became restricted, she was unable to visit her serpent and her cousins died, followed by her son and daughter.

Eventually, having failed to return to feed her serpent, she died as well.<sup>135</sup> This story suggests that members of each band believed returning to Muskoka each year was important not only as a strategy for acquiring material resources, but also as an essential element of constructing identity amongst each dodem. Returning to Muskoka not only made their material lives more sustainable, but their socio-cultural (and spiritual) lives as well. Testimony like that given in 1911-12 and 1923 reveals that Muskoka remained a critical and stable part of the seasonal cycle at a time when other parts were transformed for members of the Rama, Georgina Island and Christian Island bands.

#### Adapting indigenous knowledge to a changed Muskoka, 1880-1920

Although Aboriginal peoples continued to return to Muskoka each year, the region itself experienced significant changes during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Conceptual and

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<sup>135</sup> John Robert Colombo, *Voices of Rama: Traditional Ojibwa Tales From the Rama Reserve, Lake Couchiching, Ontario* (Toronto: Colombo & Company, 1994), 24-25.

physical changes to the region's environment transformed Muskoka from an overlapping and fluid set of *dodem* territories into a rigidly organized and permanent collection of private properties.<sup>136</sup> The new Eurocanadian pattern of life was fundamentally at odds with the way Aboriginal peoples fit Muskoka into their own pattern of life. As J. Michael Thoms argues, reorganizing the landscape into cadastral spaces suitable for agrarian settlement implied both empty land ready for resettlement, and a kind of "social engineering and surveillance of peoples."<sup>137</sup> While Aboriginal peoples continued to find ways of maintaining their presence throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Eurocanadian settlement patterns also restricted, denied and marginalized indigenous ways of life in Muskoka.<sup>138</sup>

Yet Muskoka's Aboriginal peoples did not disappear. They did not simply retire to their reserves as many local histories have implied. As early as the 1860s, and continuing throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, members of the Rama, Georgina Island and Christian Island bands complained to the DIA about the difficulties they encountered hunting and trapping.<sup>139</sup> These bands had not surrendered their rights to hunt and fish in their ancestral territory north of the Severn River and insisted as much in their letters to Ottawa, but were consistently rebuffed and ignored at the same time as settlers and tourists flooded in. Nevertheless, they continued to return to Muskoka each year and apply the knowledge and skills they possessed about the region in innovative ways that worked with rather than against the changing social, economic and environmental arrangements in Muskoka.

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<sup>136</sup> This topic will be more thoroughly dealt with in the next chapter, but for an excellent overview of how this process unfolded throughout North America see Weaver, *Great Land Rush*.

<sup>137</sup> Thoms, "Ojibwa Fishing Grounds," 109.

<sup>138</sup> Neal Ferris points out that throughout southern Ontario, "hunting grounds were afforded little protection from the land clearing and increased settlement." Ferris, *Native-lived Colonialism*, 71.

<sup>139</sup> Blair, *Lament for a First Nation*, 73-80.

The 1892 Ontario *Act for the Protection of Game and Fur-bearing Animals* caused the greatest challenges for Aboriginal people in Muskoka. Apart from fisheries restrictions, this Act went furthest in undermining their traditional seasonal cycle. Although exemptions for the first four years allowed Aboriginal peoples to hunt and fish for subsistence purposes, in 1896 an amendment required all hunters to have licenses and follow strict kill limits and closed seasons.<sup>140</sup> The fact that the provincial government was not obliged to consider Aboriginal peoples' rights discouraged both levels of government from working together to find a solution. As Jean Teillet states,

Jurisdictional questions further complicated disputes that arose between the resource rights of Aboriginal peoples and the natural resources regulatory regime enforced by the Ontario government. The nexus point where federal jurisdiction and provincial jurisdiction met was exaggerated by aggressive provincial policies, ambiguous policies, and as time wore on, a progressive 'forgetting' that Indian resource rights were legal rights.<sup>141</sup>

By the First World War, the province had established a conservationist regime, which effectively eliminated Aboriginal hunting and fishing rights by maintaining that Aboriginal people should be treated the same as everyone else in matters of hunting and fishing.<sup>142</sup> In response to these colonizing and discriminatory pressures by both levels of government, Muskoka's Aboriginal peoples modified their seasonal cycles by combining traditional knowledge and skills with new economic opportunities. In this way, band members managed to compensate for inadequate reserve conditions and restrictions to their traditional way of life, while also maintaining cultural and physical connections to their ancestral hunting grounds.

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 87

<sup>141</sup> Teillet, "Regulatory Regime," 27.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 28-29, 33; Blair, *Lament for a First Nation*, 105.

After 1881, Muskoka was no longer an exclusively Anishinaabe place. In that year it became also a Haudenosaunee place when Mohawks from Kanesatake (Lake of Two Mountains) at Oka, Quebec moved to a newly created reserve in Gibson Township in Muskoka. This Mohawk community faced very similar circumstances to the Chippewa and Ojibwa bands, but for reasons that relate to a much longer history living in close proximity to Eurocanadians in western Quebec, they adapted very quickly to conditions in Muskoka during the late nineteenth century.

Starting roughly a century earlier, Aboriginal peoples living around Montreal came under increasing pressure to move to the margins of the growing city. During the middle of the nineteenth century, the Algonquian- and Iroquoian-speaking peoples who made up the communities around Montreal resettled at Akwesasne (at Cornwall), Kahnawake (across from Montreal) and Kanesatake (at Oka). The Mohawks that settled at Kanesatake eventually came under the authority of the neighboring seigneurie of the Sulpician Order, Lake of Two Mountains.<sup>143</sup> The Sulpicians pressured them to convert to Catholicism, and French settlers persistently encroached upon their land, particularly their woodlots. In his annual DIA report for 1880, Indian Agent John McGirr described the cutting down and complete destruction of the community's sugar bushes (stands of sugar maple trees), as well as the "disposing of all the most valuable timber on this reservation."<sup>144</sup> At some point in the 1870s, following the lead of their Chief Louis Sahanatien, many members of the band converted to Methodism, possibly as an act of defiance against their Sulpician seigneurs.<sup>145</sup> These spiritual and material disputes with the

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<sup>143</sup> Brenda Katlatont Gabriel-Doxtater and Arlette Kawanatatie Van den Hende, *At the Wood's Edge: An Anthology of the History of the People of Kanehsatà;ke* (Kanesatake, Québec: Kanesatake Education Centre, 1995).

<sup>144</sup> Dominion of Canada, "Reports of Superintendents and Agents," *Annual Report of the Department of Indian Affairs for the Year Ended 31st December, 1880* (Ottawa: MacLean, Roger & Co., 1881), 28.

<sup>145</sup> Philip Laforce, *History of Gibson Reserve* (Bracebridge: Bracebridge Gazette Ltd, n.d.), 2.

Sulpicians led the Mohawks to request a new reserve. According to Philip Laforce, one of the first generation born at their new location, the band was given a choice between three locations: Rama, Sault Ste. Marie (referred to simply as a place “way up north” by Laforce), or Gibson Township in Muskoka.<sup>146</sup> In 1881, those who were determined to leave Oka, led by Sahanatien, chose Gibson.

The Gibson Mohawks received a great deal of assistance establishing their reserve in Muskoka. For starters, the government removed a community of twenty-four francophone loggers who were squatting along the Musquash River at the time the Mohawks arrived in 1881.<sup>147</sup> The government also obliged the Sulpician Order to purchase the reserve from the Ontario government,<sup>148</sup> compensate those who left Oka for improvements to the land they were leaving, and provide material assistance in the form of food for the first fourteen days and a log house for each of the thirty-two families who moved to the Gibson reserve.<sup>149</sup> Nevertheless, hardships characterized the early years. During land clearance in the first year, band members brought supplies in by foot from Bala, including the most basic necessities (pork, corn meal, molasses, etc). According to Laforce, approximately 50 percent of their diet in the early years

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 2; According to Joyce Tabobandung, the second option was Sault Ste. Marie. Interview conducted by the author with Joyce Tabobandung, Oct 21, 2011. There is a good reason the band chose Gibson over the other options. According to Joan Lovisek, ancestors of the Mohawks that settled at Kanesatake may have been part of the Algonquian-speaking peoples who were dispersed from the Georgian Bay region by the Iroquois in the middle of the seventeenth century. Lovisek, “Algonkian Speaking Peoples,” 229-232.

<sup>147</sup> Laforce, *History of Gibson Reserve*, 7; “Parry Sound Superintendency - Correspondence regarding an inspection of the Indians from Oka Agency located on the Gibson Reserve and a request from superintendent Thomas S. Walton that the band be attached to the Penetanguishene Agency rather than Parry Sound” LAC, RG10, Vol.2788, file.156530.

<sup>148</sup> This land did not become the property of the Gibson Mohawks, but was put in trust for the band by the federal government. Gibson, therefore, effectively became a reserve just like those at Rama, Georgina Island, Christian Island and Parry Island.

<sup>149</sup> Dominion of Canada, *Annual Report of the Department of Indian Affairs for the Year Ended 31st December, 1881* (Ottawa: MacLean, Roger & Co., 1882), liv-lv.

came from venison and other game meat.<sup>150</sup> Despite many of the challenges facing the band, the Wahta Mohawks, as they became known, received glowing DIA reports.

In a report sent to Prime Minister and Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, John A. Macdonald, concerning a visit to the Gibson Reserve in September 1883, Reverend William Scott described a band that did not fit the pattern of the other Anishinaabe bands in the region. They pursued hunting and fishing only rarely despite having an ideal location for both, and instead vigorously pursued agriculture on land that was apparently well-suited for growing crops:

I found the land of the very best quality, and far more free from rock and stone than I had anticipated... . Every Indian in possession of a hundred acre lot expressed himself perfectly satisfied in that respect... . I passed through several full fields of oats, or turnips, and of potatoes... .

...There was not a solitary complaint as to their present circumstances... . The general statement was, - We are quite satisfied with Gibson - nothing could induce us to go back to Oka; we have peace; we are without fear when we go into the woods to cut timber. One said: 'I am as happy as if I were born here.'

Indians have ample opportunities of employment at good wages, apart from their own farm work. There are fine chances for fishing and hunting, but they said: 'We have no time for that sort of thing. Our own farms take up our time, and when not engaged at home, we have profitable employment at the mills or in the lumber shanties.'<sup>151</sup>

The following year, the band's Indian agent, Thomas Walton, reported 220 acres cleared, and for the next fifteen years Indian Agents all reported the same thing: "members of this band depend chiefly on agriculture."<sup>152</sup> Yet, Walton's 1884 report also noted \$773.50 earned from selling tanbark, \$1,700 from making lacrosse sticks, and \$1,200 from work at a local saw-mill.<sup>153</sup> This

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<sup>150</sup> Laforce, *History of Gibson Reserve*, 3, 5.

<sup>151</sup> Dominion of Canada, *Annual Report, 1883*, 19.

<sup>152</sup> Dominion of Canada, "Part I: Reports of Superintendents and Agents," *Annual Report of the Department of Indian Affairs for the Year Ended 31st December, 1884* (Ottawa: MacLean, Roger & Co., 1885), 9; Dominion of Canada, *Annual Report of the Department of Indian Affairs for the Year Ended 30th June, 1896* (Ottawa: S.E. Dawson, 1897), 31; Dominion of Canada, *Annual Report of the Department of Indian Affairs for the Year Ended 30th June, 1897* (Ottawa: S.E. Dawson, 1898), 34; Dominion of Canada, *Annual Report of the Department of Indian Affairs for the Year Ended March 31, 1910* (Ottawa: C.H. Parmelee, 1910), 32.

<sup>153</sup> Dominion of Canada, *Annual Report, 1884*, 9.

income was considerable for a community of only a couple hundred people. By the 1880s, the Mohawks had adapted their knowledge and skills to a new set of moditional opportunities available in Muskoka.

As we have seen, the world was changing rapidly for Muskoka's Aboriginal peoples. On Parry Island, greater effort was devoted to farming during the late 1870s and early 1880s, not because of any enthusiasm for commercial agriculture per se, but because as Indian Agent Charles Skene reported, "In consequence of the falling off of the hunting and trapping, and the fishing not being so good as it used to be, the Indians in this superintendency find they must depend more upon agriculture."<sup>154</sup> According to a study on farming on Parry Island conducted by anthropologist Edward S. Rogers and band elder Flora Tobobodung, band members had no trouble figuring out how to make the most of the island's poor soils in the nineteenth century, but they were not supplied with resources adequate to the work.<sup>155</sup> By the late 1880s, crops of oats, beans, peas, squash, carrots and many other market vegetables, as well as hay, appear to have been insufficient to support the entire band. Farming by Parry Islanders differed very little from that of their Eurocanadian neighbours. But since the Shield was unsuited for agriculture, crop yields had very real environmental limits. As with Pennefather's report of Rama, Snake Island, and Christian Island in 1858, this type of assessment may only reflect the perspective of the Indian Agent. Thus, when Indian Agents reported that Parry Island farms "might be better cultivated" or "might easily be brought to a much higher state of perfection" in the early 1890s, it likely reflects band members' ability to acquire what they needed from reserve agriculture

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<sup>154</sup> *Report of the Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, 1879*, 26

<sup>155</sup> Rogers & Tobobodung, "Parry Island Farmers," 251, 310; Dominion of Canada, *Annual Report, 1896*, 27; Dominion of Canada, *Annual Report, 1897*, 30.



given their access to a variety of other economic opportunities that utilized knowledge and skills associated with the traditional seasonal cycle.

Muskoka was a vital part of the Anishinaabe seasonal cycle in south-central Ontario, especially once other parts came under pressure from the colonial government, Eurocanadian settlement, and commercial interests. As was apparent from the testimony given in 1911-1912 and 1923, traditional knowledge and skills related to Muskoka were still known to band members. Yet, legal restrictions and discrimination made it increasingly difficult for successive generations to access their dodemic hunting grounds, and when they did, to apply their knowledge and skills in same ways their ancestors had. Rather than disappearing, this knowledge and skill was repurposed for a moditional economy commensurate with the times. In this way, they combined continuity with change, and continued to utilize Muskoka as part of a more sustainable way of life. And, despite the fact that the Wahta Mohawks did not have the same long history in Muskoka as the Chippewa and Ojibwa, nor the same cultural identification to the land, they had much experience with a moditional economy. None of the bands remained confined to their reserves during this period, as the DIA would have preferred, but rather they combined agriculture and certain types of resource extraction on reserve with a variety of market-oriented and waged labour activities off reserve, including working in local sawmills and factories, selling crafts to tourists in the summer and acting as guides for white anglers and hunters as demand dictated.

The most straightforward method of engaging in the moditional economy was as waged labour in logging camps, local sawmills and factories. The earliest reference to waged labour comes from Indian Agent reports during the early 1870s when members from Christian Island

and Parry Island obtained work in local mills at Penetanguishene and Parry Sound.<sup>156</sup> In the 1880s, members from both of these bands took “contracts to load lumber [on and off ships] at saw mills on the ‘North Shore’ [at Manitoulin Island].” Mills, timber yards, and docks throughout Georgian Bay hired Aboriginal people as stevedores during the summer months.<sup>157</sup> Located along the Musquash River, where timber was floated downstream, the Wahta Mohawks were ideally situated to “obtain remunerative employment” at places such as the Muskoka Mill and Lumber Company.<sup>158</sup> In 1885, Indian Agent, Thomas Walton, reported that Wahta members earned a total of \$1,200 from sawmill work.<sup>159</sup> By the 1890s, members of Wahta had worked out a fairly regular seasonal cycle of planting their crops in the spring and working at Muskoka Mills for \$30 per month in the summer before returning to cut hay in the autumn.<sup>160</sup> Starting in 1896, Indian Agent reports mention members from Parry Island and Wahta receiving work during the winter and spring as part of logging crews and on timber drives.<sup>161</sup> After the Parry Sound, Arnprior and Ottawa Railway was completed to Parry Sound in 1897, several members of the Parry Island band received work every year loading and unloading trains in Parry Sound. After the turn of the century, Rama band members found work at the Standard Chemical Works at Longford, just south of the reserve.<sup>162</sup> In fact, the number of opportunities for waged labour continued to expand as the Eurocanadian presence in south-central Ontario developed. Yet,

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<sup>156</sup> “Indian Branch, Report of Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs,” *Annual Report of the Department of the Interior for the Year Ended 30th June, 1874* (Ottawa, MacLean, Roger & Co., 1875), 19, 36-37.

<sup>157</sup> Dominion of Canada, *Annual Report, 1881*, 4.

<sup>158</sup> Dominion of Canada, *Annual Report, 1882*, xxix.

<sup>159</sup> Dominion of Canada, *Annual Report, 1884*, 9.

<sup>160</sup> Dominion of Canada, “Part I: Reports of Superintendents and Agents,” *Annual Report of the Department of Indian Affairs for the Year Ended 31st December, 1890* (Ottawa: Brown Chamberlin, 1891), 9.

<sup>161</sup> Dominion of Canada, *Annual Report, 1896*, 27, 31.

<sup>162</sup> Dominion of Canada, *Annual Report of the Department of Indian Affairs for the Year Ended 30th June, 1903* (Ottawa: S.E. Dawson, 1904), 5.

waged labour, while often an important part of the moditional economy, did not really utilize traditional knowledge and skill.

Although Aboriginal people did not immediately recognize the potential opportunities, tourism provided the best fit to mobilize their traditional knowledge and skill in the moditional economy. Yet, engaging as “authentic Indians” in the tourist economy by selling crafts or acting as guides contributed to cultural stereotypes and, ultimately, became a justification for restrictive game laws and the dispossession of their land.<sup>163</sup> As Paige Raibmon explains, “authenticity was a structure of power that enabled, even as it constrained, [Aboriginal peoples’] interaction with the colonial world.”<sup>164</sup> Members from all five bands typically sold craftwork to tourists every summer, but band members from Georgina Island and Christian Island rarely traveled all the way to Muskoka for this purpose, preferring instead to sell to tourists on Lake Simcoe or Georgian Bay. The list of crafts sold to tourists included bows, moccasins, snowshoes, axe handles, beadwork, quill boxes, sweetgrass baskets, splint baskets, birchbark baskets, and birchbark canoes to name just the most common.<sup>165</sup> Women and girls engaged in craftwork during the winter when there was not much else to do. According to Joyce Tabobandung, an elder at Wasauksing First Nation (formerly Parry Island), craftwork created an opportunity for three or four generations of women and girls to spend time together, the older generation passing

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<sup>163</sup> As Janet Chute has shown for the case of Ojibwa communities around Garden River in northeastern Ontario, Aboriginal men also acted as guides for early resource exploration prior to the Robinson-Huron Treaty. Chute, *Legacy of Shingwaukonse*, 75. In Muskoka, Aboriginal men were often engaged to assist surveyors and early timber cruisers on trips during the 1850s and 1860s. “Crown Land Surveys Accounts Files, 1860. J. Dennis – Parry Sound and Muskoka” AO, RG 1-524-2, Box 10, file no:1.

<sup>164</sup> Paige Raibmon, *Authentic Indians: Episodes of Encounter from the Late-nineteenth Century Northwest Coast* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 11; See also Patricia Jasen, *Wild Things: Nature, Culture, and Tourism in Ontario, 1790-1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1995), 80-104; Ruth Phillips, *Trading Identities: The Souvenir in Native North American Art from the Northeast, 1700-1900* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1998).

<sup>165</sup> Rogers & Tobobodung, “Parry Island Farmers,” 322; Diary of F.W. Coate, May-June 1883, AO, Frederick W. Coate family fonds, F720.

on stories as well as the skills for bead-, quill-, and birchbark-work.<sup>166</sup> In the late spring, when tourists started arriving, women dressed themselves and their daughters in Aboriginal regalia and traveled to central locations, such as Port Carling, where their crafts were guaranteed to sell. Indian Agents for Parry Island, Wahta and Rama all reported that these women “found ready sale during the tourist season,” for “large quantities of fancy work” from which they earned “a considerable amount [of money] by the manufacture and sale of Indian fancy work and baskets [to tourists].”<sup>167</sup> Judging from these observations it appears families generated an important income from the sale of these seasonal crafts. To do so, however, required a connection with the past and the land. Mothers and grandmothers passed knowledge and skills on to the next generation at the same time as they sought out new opportunities within a changing world. Indeed, as these women returned year after year into the 1930s, they “would tell their cottaging clients how, each year, they needed to walk in the footsteps of their ancestors.”<sup>168</sup>

By the 1880s, as we shall see in chapter 5, the tourism industry was thriving in Muskoka. Hotels and resorts relied on Aboriginal men to act as guides for hunting and fishing parties. The result, Brownlie argues, was that “a reasonably respectable role for Aboriginal skills was integrated into the local Euro-Canadian economy... [and] created a market for the sale of wilderness skills... .”<sup>169</sup> Moreover, the ability to maintain, and in some cases pass on, the knowledge and skill employed as guides allowed some men to retain an identity as a hunter. In

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<sup>166</sup> Interview conducted by the author with Joyce Tabobandung, Oct 21, 2011; Dominion of Canada, *Annual Report, 1910*, 32.

<sup>167</sup> Dominion of Canada, “Part I,” *Annual Report of the Department of Indian Affairs for the Year Ended 30th June, 1895* (Ottawa: S.E. Dawson, 1896), 5; Dominion of Canada, *Annual Report, 1897*, 4; Dominion of Canada, *Annual Report of the Department of Indian Affairs for the Year Ended 30th June, 1904* (Ottawa: S.E. Dawson, 1905), 5; Dominion of Canada, *Annual Report, 1910*, 32; Dominion of Canada, “Part II: Reports of Indian Agents,” *Annual Report of the Department of Indian Affairs for the Year Ended March 31, 1914* (Ottawa: J. de L. Taché, 1914), 10.

<sup>168</sup> Allen, “Wa-nant-git-che-ang,” 45-46.

<sup>169</sup> Brownlie, *Fatherly Eye*, xiii.

1874, a group of campers from Toronto known as the Muskoka Club hired John Moses, George and Richard Snike, and Joseph Yellowhead from Rama as guides for the season.<sup>170</sup> The first mention of guiding in the DIA's Annual Reports occurred in 1889 when the Agent for Rama, D.J. McPhee remarked that "During the summer months a number of the Indians are constantly employed as guides to tourists and pleasure-seekers, by whom they are well paid, some of them earning as much as \$60 per month."<sup>171</sup> This rate appears to have held up through the 1890s, when even members of the Wahta band were hired as guides despite the fact they had only lived in Muskoka for a little more than a decade.<sup>172</sup> Men from Wahta and Rama in particular appear to have employed "their thorough knowledge of Muskoka" as guides in the region, while men from Parry Island were hired by tourists visiting Georgian Bay.<sup>173</sup> Guides were in high demand after the turn of the century. The same tourist groups booked the best months ahead of time so that guide schedules were filled between May and November.<sup>174</sup> In fact, close relationships often emerged between affluent hunters and their perennial guides. According to Joyce Tabobandung, whose father was a guide, "a lot of them [from the hunting party] would come to the house. And, you know, meet his family... ." <sup>175</sup>

Outsiders had concerns about this kind of preferential treatment by white tourists. Indian Agents worried that being treated like equals by their clients would have "a detrimental effect on

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<sup>170</sup> Mason, *First Islanders*, 29; Jasen, *Wild Things*, 118-119. The men named 'Snike' were likely members of the Snake family.

<sup>171</sup> Dominion of Canada, "Part I: Reports of the Superintendents and Agents," *Annual Report of the Department of Indian Affairs for the Year Ended 31st December, 1889* (Ottawa: Brown Chamberlin, 1890), 18.

<sup>172</sup> Dominion of Canada, *Annual Report, 1897*, 4, 30, 34.

<sup>173</sup> Dominion of Canada, *Annual Report, 1903*, 5; Interview conducted by the author with Joyce Tabobandung, Oct 21, 2011. Men from Georgina Island and Christian Island would also have worked for tourists closer to their reserves.

<sup>174</sup> Dominion of Canada, *Annual Report of the Department of Indian Affairs for the Year Ended March 31, 1913* (Ottawa: C.H. Parmelee, 1913), 10; Interview conducted by the author with Joyce Tabobandung, Oct 21, 2011.

<sup>175</sup> Interview conducted by the author with Joyce Tabobandung, Oct 21, 2011.

their [Indians'] sense of humility."<sup>176</sup> Although the DIA Annual Reports feature mainly positive assessments of Aboriginal participation in the tourist industry, several indications show that their knowledge and skills were sometimes taken for granted. In 1909, for example, D.F. MacDonald, the Indian Agent at Parry Sound, who was also responsible for the Wahta band, referred to "canoemen" and "boatmen" instead of guides suggesting that he understood their role simply as physical labour instead of knowledgeable and skilled men.<sup>177</sup> It is ironic that Aboriginal people in Ontario ended up working as guides for anglers and hunters. Their continued identity as hunters was possible, in large part, thanks to the same group of men who were instrumental in getting legislation passed that restricted hunting and fishing thereby denying them the very basis of that identity. Nevertheless, while the government seemed to perceive their role as guides as being separate from their identity as hunters, Aboriginal guides conflated the two by harvesting traditional resources during trips.<sup>178</sup> Equality was not a characteristic of these arrangements, but it did create options. As Paige Raibmon argues, "Survival under colonialism required compromises, but these compromises were not necessarily symptoms of decline and could be signs of resiliency."<sup>179</sup> Aboriginal men used guiding as a means of employing and passing on traditional knowledge and skills, as well as supporting their families on reserve.<sup>180</sup>

By the time of the Williams Commission in 1923 it was no longer possible for Aboriginal people in south-central Ontario to hunt and fish in Muskoka. The Parry Island Ojibwa had signed

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<sup>176</sup> Brownlie, *Fatherly Eye*, 129.

<sup>177</sup> Dominion of Canada, *Annual Report, 1909*, 30.

<sup>178</sup> In one instance, a guide from Wahta sent home several quarts of blueberries home between trips. Brendan O'Brien, *The Prettiest Spot in Muskoka*, (Toronto: Bobolink Books, 1999), 118-119.

<sup>179</sup> Raibmon, *Authentic Indians*, 64.

<sup>180</sup> It is likely that sport hunting was much less sustainable than the kind of subsistence hunting practiced by Muskoka's Aboriginal peoples prior to the rise of tourism. Aboriginal hunters tended to disperse according to tried-and-tested patterns based on *dodem*, while Eurocanadian hunting parties tended to include denser groups of hunters taking game for more than subsistence. There is not, unfortunately, enough evidence to draw these types of conclusions with any sort of confidence.

the Robinson-Huron Treaty in 1850, and the Wahta Mohawks arrived in Gibson Township without a treaty related to Muskoka. As early as 1881, the Chippewa bands (Rama, Georgina Island and Christian Island) had insisted that none of the treaties they had signed surrendered their rights in Muskoka. For the next forty years, as white loggers, settlers, and cottagers poured into their hunting grounds, their pleas, petitions and lawyers were all rebuffed or ignored.

Annual Reports from the DIA make clear that band members from Rama continued to travel to Muskoka as guides, and testimony given to Chippewa band lawyers in 1911-12 and the Williams Commission in 1923 reveal that several members from all three reserves returned to their ancestral hunting grounds during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

By 1923, Muskoka's Aboriginal peoples were left with the frustration that the trend outlined in Pennefather's prediction from this chapter's opening quote had come true.<sup>181</sup> Yet, Muskoka had provided a variety of strategies for alleviating some of the least sustainable circumstances in their lives, particularly the restrictions placed on their reserve resources and assets, the denial of their fishing rights, and the marginalization of their reserve communities as Eurocanadians moved in to occupy their ancestral hunting grounds. Muskoka was not a complete solution to the challenges of the early twentieth century, but without the opportunities available there, life would have been even less sustainable.

### Conclusion

Muskoka was home to several First Nations during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Here they hunted game and trapped furs, spent particularly harsh winters, cultivated small garden plots, reproduced their culture and taught their children about their

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<sup>181</sup> See opening quote.

identity, avoided government control, and generated income when few other options were available. But, for the Anishinaabeg, Muskoka was only a *part* of their home. Their home also included Lake Simcoe, Lake Couchiching, the Severn River, Georgian Bay, and all the smaller lakes and rivers that connected the land in between. Containing many different resources spread out across a vast area, this home was accessed with varying degrees of reliability according to a flexible seasonal cycle. Resilience was built into the Anishinaabeg way of life, but during the nineteenth century that resilience was eroded as white people systematically took away their home.

By the end of the 1830s, the Anishinaabeg of south-central Ontario had signed a series of treaties with the British Crown, which granted permission for roads to be built, white settlers to take up land and resources to be extracted on that part of their home lying south of the Severn River. Over the course of the nineteenth century, these treaties would be reinterpreted by the government and used to justify more rigid acts of colonization and restrictions of Aboriginal rights. In the 1850s, the colonial government formally assigned the Anishinaabeg reserved lands to which they were expected to remain confined. The Chippewa and Ojibwa chose the locations of these reserves because of their proximity to Aboriginal fisheries, but the government worked consistently to deny access to those fisheries in favour of white commercial fishing interests. Confederation (1867) and the Indian Act (1876) institutionalized Aboriginal dispossession by separating responsibility for First Nations and Crown lands between the federal and provincial governments, and imposing a disenfranchising, racist and paternalistic authority over reserve administration. Provincial game laws restricted hunting and trapping off-reserve, while the DIA controlled band funds and resources on reserve.



Yet, throughout this period, the Anishinaabeg of south-central Ontario continued to rely on Muskoka to compensate for dramatic changes occurring elsewhere. Testimony given in 1911-1912 and 1923 reveals that indeed band members from Rama, Georgina Island and Christian Island returned to Muskoka at the same time as treaties, jurisdictional disputes, new laws, and paternalism were being used to deny their rights elsewhere. This is not to suggest that change did not take place in Muskoka. Resettlement, tourism and logging dispossessed Aboriginal peoples in Muskoka as well. But in any given year during this time period, Muskoka provided the Anishinaabeg with a variety of resources and lessons for understanding their culture without which life as they knew it would have been far more difficult, if not impossible. Even after Muskoka had become relatively well-populated with whites and new game laws ignored their rights at the turn of the twentieth century, Aboriginal knowledge and skills specific to the region were adapted to match the opportunities available. In this way, Muskoka provided continuity during times of disruptive change. This dynamic continued through the first quarter of the twentieth century despite the fact that Aboriginal people had to reconceptualize their roles within Canadian society more broadly.

The root of this continuity, of course, was that Muskoka was only part of a larger suite of places that comprised the Anishinaabeg home. Apart from the Mohawks who moved into the region in 1881 and the years the Muskoka branch of the Parry Island band lived at Obajawanung during the middle of the century, Aboriginal people never lived in Muskoka year round. In fact, because Muskoka was located at the southern edge of the Precambrian Shield, it was unsuited for any type of sedentary lifestyle. As we have seen, many important resources were available in Muskoka, but the Anishinaabeg seasonal cycle took them out of Muskoka for most of every year

to obtain other resources not available on the Shield. That the Anishinaabeg were able to continue to rely on Muskoka in this way during the late nineteenth century has a great deal to do with the fact that it was unsuited to year-round settlement. More specifically, Muskoka was highly unsuited to agriculture. With less pressure to clear and occupy the land, it remained largely forested. Its unsuitability for agriculture meant Aboriginal people could return to Muskoka on a seasonal basis and access resources in much the same way generation after generation. The fact that Muskoka was unsuited to agriculture proved critically important in creating more sustainable social, economic and environmental arrangements for Muskoka's Aboriginal peoples. It had the opposite effect for the first generation of Eurocanadian settlers.

*Chapter 4: Landscape Transformations and Emergent Interdependencies, 1860-1885*

In the spring of 1878, seventeen-year-old Frederick de la Fosse journeyed on his own from southern England to the small community of Ilfracombe in Muskoka. His uncle, and sole guardian, Colonel Montague Ricketts, had arranged for Frederick to learn backwoods farming at the Harston Agricultural School in Stisted Township, on the shores of Buck Lake (northeast of what would later become the town of Huntsville). Ricketts had agreed to pay £100 per year for three years to lodge and feed Frederick as well as teach him to farm in the wilderness of Muskoka. After that time, Frederick was free to take up his own land. In reality, the Harston Agricultural School was simply the homestead of retired army officer, Captain Charles G. Harston. A recent settler himself, Harston had no credible agricultural knowledge suitable to frontier farming on the Canadian Shield, where thin acidic soils, a colder climate and a shorter growing season were generally unsuited to agriculture.<sup>1</sup>

The arrangements made by Frederick's uncle for his nephew reveal assumptions widely shared by almost all nineteenth-century settlers emigrating from England or Southern Ontario to places where the government treated agricultural settlement as the key to continued colonial

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<sup>1</sup> Frederick Montague de la Fosse, *English Bloods: In the Backwoods of Muskoka, 1878*, Scott D. Shipman, ed. (Toronto: Natural Heritage Books, 2004), x-xi, 3, 177-178. De la Fosse originally published this book in 1930 under the pseudonym Roger Vardon, and used many fictitious names for neighbours, including Harston (called Captain Martin). The editor of the 2004 version, Scott Shipman, suggests this was done in order to avoid embarrassing those involved, but there exists the likelihood that names were changed in order to take liberties with the truth. De la Fosse's father was employed by the East India Company, but Frederick and his sister became orphans when their parents died shortly after the family returned from India in 1867. Frederick's uncle, Colonel Montague Ricketts, became the children's legal guardian. Frederick attended boarding school until just before his eighteenth birthday. According to de la Fosse's granddaughter, Ricketts was concerned that Frederick would not pass the military exams, so decided to send him to the backwoods of Canada instead, where an army friend, Harston, would give him an equally suitable experience to the army. De la Fosse arrived in 1878 only a few years after Stisted and McMurrich Townships were opened for settlement. Although the way he came to Muskoka is exceptional, his experiences as a pioneer were fairly representative.

expansion and state formation.<sup>2</sup> Pioneers arrived, site unseen, and expected the climate, soils, and opportunities to be much as they were in the more populated regions settled earlier. As Joy Parr puts it, “They planned for the future as most people plan for the future, with their eyes firmly fixed on the past.”<sup>3</sup> Yet, as John Clarke’s research on the early settlement of Essex County in south-western Ontario reveals, environmental realities often challenged these inherited assumptions. Settlers had to adjust their culturally-derived expectations for an agrarian landscape to reflect individually-lived experience.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, throughout the first half of the century, British travelers, writers and settlers had tended to advocate for specifically British agricultural practices, which privileged imported thinking over experience and knowledge based on local conditions.<sup>5</sup> Thus, new arrivals, like Frederick de la Fosse, did not expect that living permanently on the Shield as a pioneer meant re-inventing the homestead to match the limitations and potentials of the marginal environment of the Shield.<sup>6</sup> The settlers’ ideals and purposes were the same, but the realities they faced were quite different.

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<sup>2</sup> J. David Wood, *Making Ontario: Agricultural Colonization and Landscape Re-Creation Before the Railway* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2000), 12, 163.

<sup>3</sup> Joy Parr, “Hired Men: Ontario Agricultural Wage Labour in Historical Perspective” *Labour/Le Travail* Vol.15 (1985), 91-104.

<sup>4</sup> John Clarke, *Land, Power, and Economics on the Frontier of Upper Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2001), 5-6.

<sup>5</sup> Kenneth Kelly, “The Transfer of British Ideas on Improved Farming to Ontario During the First Half of the Nineteenth Century” *Ontario History* Vol.63, No.2 (1971), 103-111.

<sup>6</sup> Settlement of the Shield shared many similarities with settlement of other marginal lands where the processes of ecological imperialism remained incomplete. Incoming European settlers had no way of knowing what the soil conditions would be, and so imported problematic conceptions of what they should expect and how they should proceed. Alfred Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900, 2nd Ed.* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Liza Piper, *The Industrial Transformation of Subarctic Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2009) Liza Piper and John Sandlos, “A Broken Frontier: Ecological Imperialism in the Canadian North” *Environmental History* Vol.12, No.4 (October 2007), 759-795; J. David Wood, *Places of Last Resort: The Expansion of the Farm Frontier into the Boreal Forest of Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2006); Gérard Bouchard, *Quelques arpents d’Amérique: population, économie, famille au Saguenay, 1838-1971* (Montréal: Boréal, 1996); J.I. Little, *Nationalism, Capitalism and Colonization in Nineteenth Century Quebec: The Upper St. Francis District* (Kingston, Ontario: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1989); Neil S. Forkey, *Shaping the Upper Canadian Frontier: Environment, Society, and Culture in the Trent Valley* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2003), 75-96; James David Mochoruk, *Formidable Heritage: Manitoba’s North and the Cost of Development, 1870 to 1930* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2004).

In fact, very few people had any idea that farming in Muskoka would be different than it was in southern Ontario. The resettlement of Muskoka was approached from the perspective that, as J. David Wood argues, “the changes wrought in [southern] Ontario between the 1780s and 1853 were the products of an epic victory of human ingenuity and effort over a challenging wilderness.”<sup>7</sup> Once the entirety of the colony south of the Shield had been turned into domesticated countryside and populated with British subjects by the third quarter of the century, the lands of the Ottawa-Huron Tract - which included Muskoka - were the next logical regions to resettle the frontier in Upper Canada. Yet, the ingenuity and effort that transformed southern Ontario did not result in the same ‘epic victory’ on the Shield.<sup>8</sup>

On the final leg of his journey to Harston’s farm, Frederick de la Fosse arrived in Bracebridge on a steamer and stayed overnight before continuing north along the Muskoka Road to his new home. In the sitting room of the British Lion Hotel, de la Fosse received his first indication of the realities of life as a farmer in Muskoka from a group of rough-worn settlers. The group had a laugh at Frederick’s expense when they learned his reason for being in Muskoka. At the time, de la Fosse was more taken aback by the way the group of men formed an “absolute contrast to those with whom I had been in the habit of associating.” But, forty years later,

When I ponder the matter now, it does not appear at all strange. It must have seemed in the highest degree ludicrous to those stalwart men to hear a boy whose weight was just one hundred pounds talking glibly of clearing a farm in the woods, but more excruciatingly funny was the fact that he was actually paying out

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<sup>7</sup> Wood *Making Ontario*, 8; Kenneth Kelly, “The Changing Attitude of Farmers to the Forest in Nineteenth Century Ontario” *Ontario Geography* Vol.8 (1974), 64-77; Clarke, *Land, Power, and Economics*, 7-9.

<sup>8</sup> Very little was known about the environmental limitations of the Shield. Consequently, realities on the ground challenged the commonly held assumption that the New World promises of egalitarianism, liberal individualism, and progress could be fulfilled indefinitely by an expanding frontier of settlement. Graeme Wynn, “Notes on Society and Environment in Old Ontario” *Journal of Social History* Vol.13, No.1 (Fall 1979), 49-65; Susan L. Laskin, “The Myth of a Northern Agricultural Frontier in Nineteenth Century Ontario” (MA research paper, Department of Geography, University of Toronto, 1979).

what appeared to most of them a fortune for the privilege of helping a man to clear his farm and attend his cattle.<sup>9</sup>

Frederick discovered that not only was the likelihood of success as a farmer in Muskoka slim, but the idea of paying someone else to improve those chances was farcical. What local settlers knew, and newly arrived immigrants did not, was that preconceived notions of agriculture imported from England or even Southern Ontario were of little use in Muskoka.

In his study of pioneers in the prairies of the American West, James C. Malin argues that flexible relationships between human culture and the environment were central to the environmental history of places where Europeans did not come to an agricultural arrangement obviously or easily.<sup>10</sup> Pioneers found it difficult to establish farms in marginal environments, and so had to adjust their expectations to suit the setting. In the grasslands of the Western US, “the agricultural adaptation by European forest-culture people... was a painfully slow and disorganized folk process that succeeded only because of the ingenuity and resourcefulness of individual settlers.”<sup>11</sup> Similarly, the unpredictability and variability of the Shield’s poor soil conditions was such that even the best practices and advice inherited from successful farming cultures could not improve the conditions most settlers confronted. Only experience, not ambition, or determination, or education would decide the outcome of settlement on the

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<sup>9</sup> De la Fosse, 15

<sup>10</sup> James C. Malin, *History and Ecology: Studies of the Grassland*, Robert P. Swierenga, ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984). Indeed, the history of settlement on the Shield shares a great deal in common with the history of settlement on the Great Plains. As Geoff Cunfer points out, the plains were an “alien landscape that... stymied [pioneers’] efforts at westward expansion.” At almost exactly the same time, the Shield thwarted the northward expansion of the frontier in Ontario. And like the plains, the majority of the landscape was never ploughed. Geoff Cunfer, *On the Great Plains: Agriculture and Environment* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2005), 8-9.

<sup>11</sup> Robert P. Swierenga, “The Malin Thesis of Grassland Acculturation and the New Rural History” *Canadian Papers in Rural History, Vol. V*, Donald H. Akenson, ed. (Gananoque, ON: Langdale Press, 1986), 11-22.

Canadian Shield.<sup>12</sup> In Muskoka's pioneering period, it took settlers a great deal of discovery and experimentation to learn how life on the Shield differed from the lives they had previously known, and how to apply what they learned in creating social, economic and environmental arrangements that were more sustainable than applying conventional agrarian thinking and practices.

From the 1860s until the mid-1880s, most of the material and energy involved in Muskoka's budding societal metabolism went toward efforts at transforming the landscape from a forested state to an arable state through land clearance. Muskoka contained only pockets of land suitable for agriculture. Mid-nineteenth-century surveys of Muskoka's townships had no way of determining which plots of land combined to constitute these preferable pockets of land. Looking at a map, the surveyor's notebook, or the dense wooded landscape itself from the lakeshore or roadside offered no assurances of the land's suitability for farming.<sup>13</sup>

If land clearance was the defining feature of Muskoka's societal metabolism during the pioneering period, the household was its heart (as indeed it tended to be in most economies). The majority of landscape transformations, discoveries and experimentation in Muskoka were undertaken at the household level. Members of settler households cleared the land to discover the suitability of the soil beneath and experimented with different forms of mixed farming appropriate to their land. Each household relied on the flow of material and energy to convert

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<sup>12</sup> Neil Forkey makes a similar argument for the case of the Trent Valley in Ontario, although he suggests settlers learned certain landscape management techniques, such as controlled burnings, from the area's First Nations. This type of imparted knowledge does not appear to have occurred in Muskoka. Forkey, *Shaping the Upper Canadian Frontier*, 15-24.

<sup>13</sup> Often the quality of the land was judged by the species composition of the trees. Not only was it impossible to get a sense of an entire 100-acre lot from maps, surveyor notes or a glance from the roadside, but the mixed forest of the southern Shield was an unreliable indicator of soil quality. Clarke, *Land, Power, and Economics*, 9-34; Wood *Making Ontario*, 17; Norman Hall MacKenzie, "The Economic and Social Development of Muskoka, 1855-1888" (PhD. Dissertation, University of Toronto, 1943), 77-78; Geoffrey Wall, "Pioneer Settlement in Muskoka" *Agricultural History* Vol.44, No.4 (October 1970), 393-400.

food calories into work, work into cleared land, cleared land into crops, and crops into consumable or marketable products. Yet, no household existed in isolation. Muskoka's societal metabolism was not simply an aggregation of individual households, but rather a matrix of interconnected households establishing and maintaining interdependent relationships. This pioneering stage of resettling the land was characterized by a great degree of uncertainty, hardship and vulnerability. As Brian Donahue demonstrates in the case of colonial Concord, Massachusetts, it was only after a lengthy period of time, often more than one human generation, that the process of discovery and experimentation required to learn the productive limitations inherent to the land, and the flexibility of the material and energy flows available, revealed what would work to make life more sustainable.<sup>14</sup>

Under these conditions, as Ruth Sandwell has pointed out for other regions in Canada, settlers were less concerned with becoming "profit-maximizing, commodity-producing, self-interested individuals."<sup>15</sup> Subsistence was often their aim. Even with subsistence as the main priority, every pioneer household relied, to varying degrees, on inputs of material and energy from outside Muskoka, to contend with discoveries that were not always beneficial and experiments that often failed. Inputs cost money, so households needed markets where they could sell their labour and agricultural products. Thus, as Sandwell continues, "most families survived on the work of all household members, who engaged in a variety of waged work, commercial sales, and hunting and gathering activities organized around a loosely defined

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<sup>14</sup> Brian Donahue, *The Great Meadow: Farmers and the Land in Colonial Concord* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004). Geoff Cunfer makes the same point regarding the period of experimentation and adjustment that followed the opening up of the Great Plains around the same time as Muskoka was being settled. Cunfer, *On the Great Plains*, 16-36.

<sup>15</sup> Ruth Sandwell, "Missing Canadians: Reclaiming the A-Liberal Past" in *Liberalism and Hegemony: Debating the Canadian Liberal Revolution*, Jean-Francois Constant and Michel Ducharme, eds. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 260.



‘family farm’.’<sup>16</sup> As was the case elsewhere in the province, some settlers worked on teams building colonization roads throughout Muskoka.<sup>17</sup> A certain amount of this was statutory, but as much if not more was compensated for with wages that households used to purchase things the land could not provide. Lumber camps often employed farmers and their sons, and sometimes their horses or oxen, while at the same time purchasing hay, oats, produce and meat from local farmers.<sup>18</sup> However, working on roads or selling produce to lumber camps became less sustainable with each passing year as roads and camps moved farther away from home.

Part of the solution to creating more sustainable arrangements was subtle at first, but was firmly established by the mid-1880s. Visitors from places in relatively close proximity, such as Toronto, Cleveland and Pittsburgh started appearing around the lakes shortly after settlers took up land. Looking for a place to stay and their meals provided for them while they explored the area, fished and hunted, tourists and cottagers brought their disposable income with them from the city, and occasioned the start of an entire realignment of Muskoka’s societal metabolism. Yet, before tourists could be accommodated, settlers like Frederick de la Fosse struggled to find their niche in Muskoka.

#### Discovering and Experimenting with What Worked

Like so many other would-be settlers who tried their hand at farming in the Canadian backwoods, Frederick de la Fosse’s optimism can be forgiven when surveyor and promotional reports are taken into account. Surveyors acknowledged but tended to dismiss the inferiority of the soils in places like Muskoka. They insisted that patience and hard work would succeed in

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p.261

<sup>17</sup> Forkey, *Shaping the Upper Canadian Frontier*, 84-85.

<sup>18</sup> Gérard Bouchard refers to the strategy of combining subsistence agriculture with wage labour in logging camps as co-intégration. Gérard Bouchard, “Co-intégration et reproduction de la société rurale: pour un modèle saguenayen de la marginalité” *Recherches sociographiques*, Vol.XXIX, no.2-8 (December 1988), 283-309. For more on efforts by small holder farmers’ efforts to pursue economic plurality, see Gérard Bouchard, *Quelques arpents d’Amérique*.

transforming the wilderness into farmland. And as Graeme Wynn points out, “Those reports that were less favourable were generally passed over by the writers of emigrant guides and advertisements.”<sup>19</sup> One of these men was newspaper publisher Thomas McMurray. In his 1871 booklet entitled *The Free Grant Lands of Canada from practical experience of bush farming in the free grant districts of Muskoka and Parry Sound*, McMurray gushed about the merits of locating on a plot in the free grant lands in Muskoka or Parry Sound Districts. Describing the climate as “perfect summer and perfect winter,” McMurray assured prospective settlers that “In summer there is more moisture here than further south, owing to the greater elevation and vicinity to the lakes... [and thus] freedom from drought which is so mischievous below... .” “If we have somewhat more snow,” McMurray justified, “we can fairly claim that, almost as soon as the snow is gone, the land is dry for the plough, and soon ready for the seed.” The soil - two-thirds of which McMurray estimated as “fit for cultivation” - was claimed to be “mostly of a loamy nature” but with “clay deposits... found in many places.”<sup>20</sup> McMurray reserved his most glowing praises for the crops:

Splendid samples of wheat have been raised in the district, the yield being large and the grain of superior quality... . Oats grow luxuriantly and pay well, we have seen as good oats here as we ever beheld in either Ireland or Scotland... .

Great crops of potatoes and turnips are also raised, and of the very best quality. Vegetables of all kinds do well... . Clover and all the grasses are eminently successful even in the ridges... the herbage being green and fresh from early spring till snow falls again in the autumn.<sup>21</sup>

Prospective settlers were encouraged to expect quite favourable conditions for farming based on selective and often exaggerated information.

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<sup>19</sup> Wynn, “Notes on Society and Environment,” 53; Forkey, *Shaping the Upper Canadian Frontier*, 89.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas McMurray, *The Free Grants Lands of Canada from Practical Experience of Bush Farming in the Free Grant Districts of Muskoka and Parry Sound* (Bracebridge: Office of the Northern Advocate, 1871), 4-5.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 8-9

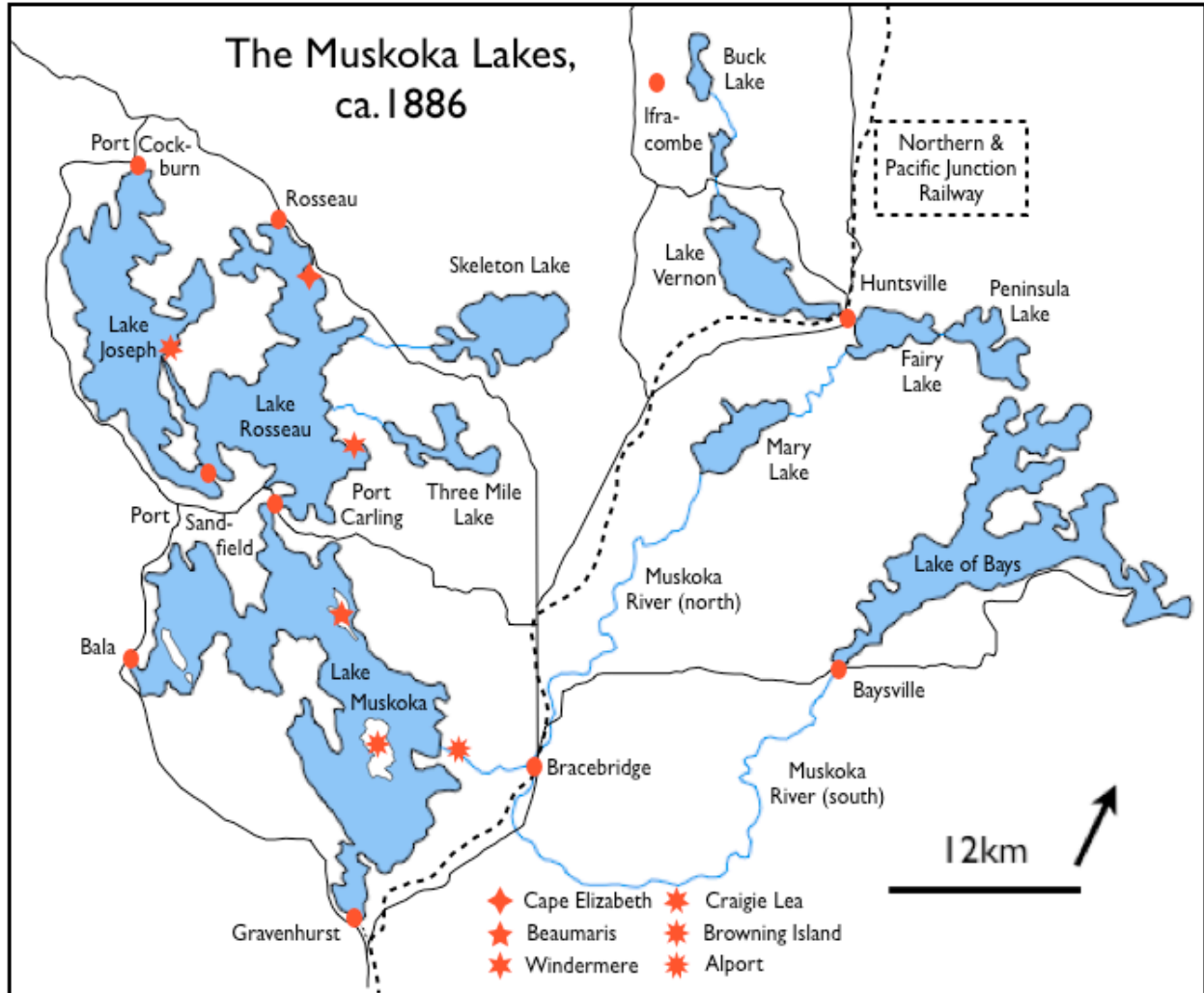


Image 6: The Muskoka Lakes, ca. 1886

There had been no booster pamphlets, however, when the first settlers located along the Muskoka Colonization Road almost twenty years before de la Fosse made his way to Buck Lake. In 1859, one year after the completion of the Muskoka Road and the first township surveys, the government officially opened up the Muskoka District of the Ottawa-Huron Tract, and sold plots of land under the terms of the 1853 *Act to Amend the Law for the Sale and Settlement of the Public Lands*. The Act allowed the government to sell 100-acre plots of land at fixed prices, and grant 100-acre plots of free land to settlers willing to locate next to the public road. The government sold the first plots of land in July, and issued the first location tickets for lots along

the Muskoka Road in October, 1859.<sup>22</sup> In February 1860, P.M. Vankoughnet, Commissioner of Crown Lands wrote in a Department of Crown Lands report that 54 separate settler households had located along the Muskoka Road in the first season.<sup>23</sup> The following January, R.J. Oliver, the agent in charge of settling new arrivals, recorded that the number of located lots had dipped slightly to 48, with a population of 190. Nearly two years later on December 31, 1862, the number of locatee households had increased to 99, with a population of 287.<sup>24</sup> However, what is more revealing are the crop yields Oliver recorded.

As TABLE 1 indicates (see Appendix), early settlers discovered that Muskoka's soils were much better suited to root crops, such as potatoes and turnips, than to cereal crops, such as wheat and corn. The sample size is quite small, so these numbers do not provide the most reliable picture of yields. In fact, these numbers likely provide a somewhat inflated picture of what households were capable of in Muskoka, since soil fertility would have been somewhat higher in the first years after clearance.<sup>25</sup> Yet, they point to the start of a process in which settlers adjusted to farming practices that suited their environment.<sup>26</sup> As Oliver conveyed in his 1861 report, these early pioneers on the Shield were also attempting to "render their position comfortable in many ways that cannot be reduced to figures."<sup>27</sup> "Although considerable belts of rock intersect the country," he added two years later, "yet good farming lands abound, especially

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<sup>22</sup> Florence Murray, ed., *Muskoka and Haliburton, 1615-1875: A Collection of Documents* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963), lxx, lxxx.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 243

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 244-252

<sup>25</sup> After clearing the land of trees, settlers often burned the logs and slash, and then used the ashes to enrich the soil. This represented a one-time input of a significant amount of fertilizer, which would have been difficult to repeat under normal farming conditions in later years. William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England, 2nd Ed.* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2003), 152; Forkey, *Shaping the Upper Canadian Frontier*, 32.

<sup>26</sup> Wheat, the staple crop that defined Upper Canada's agricultural economy during the first half of the century, did not grow well in the thin, acidic soils of the Shield. John McCallum, *Unequal Beginnings: Agriculture and Economic Development in Quebec and Ontario until 1870* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), 4.

<sup>27</sup> Murray, *Muskoka and Haliburton*, 245.

on the upper Roads. Extensive Lakes and rivers, offering beautiful sites for residences; Fish, and the ordinary varieties of game, are plentiful. Other townships of good land will soon be added.”<sup>28</sup> Hopeful that things would improve for newly located settlers, Oliver highlighted opportunities to take advantage of Muskoka’s lakes and forests. In terms of farming, he believed it would just take time to discover what was rock and how the good land could best be used.

Despite the optimism, and the opening of new townships in Muskoka, this scheme to extend settlement north of the Severn River stalled by the middle of the 1860s. Population growth was slow or stagnant. Speculators located or bought plots of land along the road only to strip them of their valuable white pine and abandon them. More commonly, since there were few markets in Muskoka, settlers found they could not generate an income to make payments or obtain credit to support their households.<sup>29</sup> At the first meeting of a Settlers Association, held in Orillia in November 1867, the owner of Muskoka’s first steamboat and the District’s Member of Provincial Parliament (MPP), A.P. Cockburn, commented that “very often people had come [into Muskoka] with exaggerated ideas of the country and had left in consequence of the disappointments they had met with.”<sup>30</sup> By the late 1860s, then, the discoveries and experimentation of the earliest settlers had revealed that Muskoka did not measure up to the boosters’ promises and would have trouble establishing itself as an agricultural extension of Upper Canada.

As part of their new legislative purview after Confederation, the Ontario government revitalized efforts to attract settlers to Muskoka. Early in 1868, the government passed *An Act to*

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 251

<sup>29</sup> Norman Hall MacKenzie has referred to the limited number of markets in Muskoka during the 1860s as a “serious” problem. MacKenzie, “Economic and Social Development of Muskoka,” 100.

<sup>30</sup> Murray, *Muskoka and Haliburton*, 253.

*Secure Free Grants and Homesteads to Actual Settlers on the Public Lands*. Effectively, this law granted 100-acre parcels of land anywhere within the surveyed townships of the Ottawa-Huron Tract to anyone over the age of eighteen.<sup>31</sup> The issue of patent to the land was withheld for five years. In that time, the locatee was obliged to build a house, reside in it for at least six months a year, and have fifteen acres of land cleared and under cultivation, with at least two acres cleared each year.<sup>32</sup> Unlike southern Ontario, where agriculture was almost exclusively the focus of settlers taking up grant land during the first half of the century, timber speculation plagued government efforts under the 1853 Act to settle land in the Ottawa-Huron Tract.<sup>33</sup> As a compromise between settler and logging interests, free grants lands did not include timber rights under the terms of the 1868 Act.<sup>34</sup> Settlers could obtain building materials, fencing and fuel off their land under the terms of the grant, and clear the trees off land intended for cultivation, but they could not sell logs without paying hefty dues. After the land was patented, settlers obtained the timber rights, but by then logging companies with the rights to cut timber had harvested almost all of the white pine, the only merchantable species at the time. Perhaps the most attractive clause in the Homestead Act stipulated that if they stayed on the land the original locatee and his heirs could not have their property seized because of debt for twenty years.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Richard Tatley, *The Steamboat Era in the Muskokas: Volume I – To the Golden Years; A History of the Steam Navigation in the districts of Muskoka and Parry Sound, 1866-1905*. (Erin, ON: Boston Mills Press, 1983), 53. The land grant was enlarged to 200 acres the following year when it became evident that many 100-acre plots did not contain enough suitable land.

<sup>32</sup> Research by Peter Russell suggests that settlers at the southern edge of the Shield had “clearing rates consistently below the [provincial] average of one a half acres per farm per year.” This would have made it difficult for the average locatee in Muskoka to meet the conditions for free grant land patent. Peter A. Russell, “Upper Canada: A Poor Man’s Country? Some Statistical Evidence” *Canadian Papers in Rural History, Vol. III*, Donald H. Akenson, ed. (Gananoque, ON: Langdale Press, 1982), 137; Neil Forkey found only a small percentage of families along the Bobcaygeon Road were capable of clearing ten acres. Forkey, *Shaping the Upper Canadian Frontier*, 82-83.

<sup>33</sup> Wynn, “Notes on Society and Environment,” 57.

<sup>34</sup> Free grant timber rights were also restricted, because the provincial government stood to benefit financially from selling timber berths and licenses to large commercial logging companies. This dynamic will be further explored in chapter 7.

<sup>35</sup> Murray, *Muskoka and Haliburton*, 238-240; McMurray, *Free Grants Lands of Canada*, 50.

Along with the completion of the Muskoka Road to the upper lakes and the future site of Huntsville, as well as several other regional roads during the 1860s and 1870s, the *Free Grant and Homestead Act* created much more attractive conditions to settlement.

In their study of land and home ownership in late nineteenth-century Ontario, Gordon Darroch and Lee Soltow point out that the *Free Grant and Homestead Act* served broader purposes than just attracting settlers into Muskoka. The Act also functioned as a release valve for concerns that farmland in previously-settled regions of Ontario were filling up. As Darroch and Soltow observe, “[a]ccess to land, above all, held the key to the independence and security promised in the very widely held image of Ontario as a society of ‘free yeoman.’”<sup>36</sup> The Shield may not, in hindsight, have been the most appropriate environment for further agricultural expansion, but under the circumstances, and given that no one truly knew the region’s potential, it made sense.

One of the first people to take advantage of the new Homestead Act was John Lacey Oldham, a forty-year old immigrant from Nottingham, England.<sup>37</sup> Oldham arrived in Muskoka sometime in the late fall of 1868 with his three sons, thirteen-year old John Jr., eleven-year old Charles and eight-year old William. The family originally settled several kilometres east of Lake Rosseau, on lot 17, concession 3 in Watt Township, and quickly focused their energies on meeting their household needs from the wooded landscape. According to his farm journal, much more of Oldham’s time and effort during the first winter of 1868-69 was occupied harvesting woodland resources than it was clearing a section of their land for sowing crops. The Oldhams made the most of their well-wooded land by utilizing cedar logs for fences and shingles, white

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<sup>36</sup> Gordon Darroch and Lee Soltow, *Property and Inequality in Victorian Ontario: Structural Patterns and Cultural Communities in the 1871 Census* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 202.

<sup>37</sup> “Farm Journal of John Oldham, 1868-1871,” Muskoka Lakes Museum Archives, 978.20.1, Port Carling, Ontario.

pine for planking, maple for sugaring, and a variety of hardwoods for fuelwood. In the spring, Oldham burned piles of logs and slash cleared during the winter in preparation for sowing. This method of clearing the land was most common in Muskoka, and one newly arrived settler recalled “at least one hundred of these great heaps of logs blazing up high into the air” as he made his way along the Muskoka River in the mid-1870s.<sup>38</sup>

Effort alone was not enough, however, since cleared land did not necessarily mean good *farmland*. Location influenced the strategies certain households employed once they had cleared the land. Choosing a lot was obviously the most important decision any settler would ever make. Perhaps too late to be of much assistance to John Oldham and his family, Thomas McMurray recommended in 1871 that settlers “make a thorough examination of the land before locating.” “Some take almost the first lot they see, without proper examination,” warned McMurray, “and after a time get discouraged. The plan is to take time, in the first instance, and make a wise selection, then begin and work with a will.”<sup>39</sup>

It is unlikely that Oldham had any idea whether the land he chose would be any good for farming. With the trees removed, however, Oldham discovered some of the best agricultural land in Muskoka, and only occasionally complained of “Harrowing up Rock.” Not knowing exactly what plants would grow best, Oldham experimented with a variety of different crops, including peas, wheat, rye, potatoes, oats, barley, corn, beans and turnips. Although he does not record yields in his journal, references in Oldham’s journal to digging a storage pit for potatoes, pulling up turnips for several days, thrashing peas and having wheat milled suggest that these crops

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<sup>38</sup> Thomas Osborne, *The Night the Mice Danced the Quadrille: Five Years in the Backwoods* (Erin, ON: Boston Mills Press, 1995), 11-12. For a thorough discussion of the process of transforming the land in Upper Canada, see Forkey, 15-24.

<sup>39</sup> McMurray, *Free Grants Lands of Canada*, 37.



turned out reasonably well the first season. Oldham also made good use of the diversity of his land, harvesting meadow hay from two fields he called ‘Hill’ and ‘Home’. That same summer, in June 1869, Oldham took up two adjacent plots a little south of his homestead, on lots 14 & 15, concession 13 in Monck Township. The following winter Oldham and his sons continued to clear new land and add to the local knowledge they had acquired their first year. Oldham settled on some of the best farmland in Muskoka, but his experiences during the first years in Muskoka were shared by other pioneers.

A few years after Oldham and his family began their farm in Muskoka, Harriet Barbara King and her extended family journeyed along the Muskoka Road from Washago to Bracebridge, and from there to their new homesteads northeast of Mary Lake, on lots 17-21, concession 12 in Stephenson Township. Upon arriving on their land, in the spring on 1871, the King family also channeled most of their productive energies into clearing the land. Like the Oldhams, the King men did the felling themselves. Unlike the Oldhams, however, the Kings hired a group of loggers and their team of oxen to haul all the logs together into piles for burning in the spring.<sup>40</sup> Despite an overly wet spring, which prevented them from planting more than three-quarters of an acre, the Kings managed to harvest 80 bushels of potatoes, as well as “a good average crop” of peas, French beans and other garden vegetables in their first year.<sup>41</sup>

Harriet Barbara King’s account of her family’s first year in Muskoka also reveals other ways in which the wooded landscape supported and supplemented many households. The Kings quickly learned from their neighbours that it was much simpler to fence in their crops and leave their two cows to forage in the woods than it was to provide them with fodder during the warmer

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<sup>40</sup> Harriet Barbara King, *Letters From Muskoka, by an Emigrant Lady* (London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1878), 65, 87.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 86-87

months.<sup>42</sup> To feed their animals during the winter months, however, the Kings, like many other households, relied on the harvest of fine wild grasses that grew naturally in the meadows created by beaver dams.<sup>43</sup> Oldham's 'Hill' and 'Home' fields, for example, were likely beaver meadows, since he does not mention putting any work into creating hayfields. Beaver meadows are a wonderful example of how locally acquired knowledge led to more sustainable arrangements on the Shield, since farmers did not have to devote good farmland to growing hay. By holding back streams that flooded in the spring and began to dry out by the end of the summer, these beaver dams naturally lock nutrients into fertile, yet slightly acidic, pockets of seasonal meadows. Without needing to modify the environment, households realized the potential of beaver meadows to support animal husbandry and mixed farming.

Households could not support themselves on what they were able to grow alone. Harvesting hay from beaver meadows was one strategy for utilizing natural material and energy flows to supplement efforts at transforming the Shield into an agrarian countryside; hunting and fishing were others. In 1880, the Department of Agriculture released a pamphlet entitled *Muskoka and Lake Nipissing Districts: Information for Intending Settlers*. The pamphlet encouraged prospective settlers to think about game and fish as components of their household economy. As J. David Wood points out, hunting and fishing were part of the pioneer's confrontational attitude toward nature, which over time evolved into a kind of sport mentality.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 89-90. This was a popular strategy among pioneers. William Cronon, *Changes in the Land*; Virginia DeJohn Anderson, *Creatures of Empire: How Domestic Animals Transformed Early America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 158-163.

<sup>43</sup> King *Letters*, 44; Osborne, *Night the Mice Danced*, p.39; Seymour Penson, "Seymour Penson and his Muskoka Neighbours, Part I," *East Georgian Bay Historical Society*, vol.3 (1983), 217.

<sup>44</sup> Wood *Making Ontario*, 9. In the Adirondacks, by the end of the century, the evolution of this sport mentality conflicted with hunting by year-round residents for subsistence needs. New game laws in New York placed limits on how permanent residents and tourists hunted. Similar laws came into effect in Ontario during the 1890s, but hunting and fishing remained important to the local economy. Karl Jacoby, *Crimes Against Nature: Squatters, Poachers, Thieves, and the Hidden History of American Conservation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 58-63.

Apart from seasonal restrictions, the pamphlet assured settlers there were “no game laws to preserve it for the exclusive use of particular persons.” It listed moose, caribou, deer, red deer, silver grey, red and black foxes, otter, marten, mink, muskrat, raccoon, hare, swans, geese, ducks, partridges, quails, woodcocks, wild turkeys, bears, wolves, salmon trout, white fish, trout, herring, muskellunge, bass, pickerel, pike and many other kinds of wildlife to be had by hunting, fishing and trapping.<sup>45</sup> Although Harriet Barbara King did not have access to this pamphlet when her family took up land in the early 1870s, she nevertheless arrived in Muskoka with “a vague notion that passing deer might be shot from one’s own door, that partridge and wild-duck were as plentiful as sparrows in England, and that hares and rabbits might also be caught with the hand.” This was certainly not the case during the Kings’ first year, since they “had to look for [partridges and wild-ducks]” and were only successful in trapping some beavers and muskrats and shooting the odd porcupine.<sup>46</sup> Once the skills were learned, however, settlers relied in part on hunting, trapping and fishing to adjust to Muskoka’s environment.

Thomas Osborne had a similar experience to both Oldham and King. In the spring of 1875, Thomas Osborne arrived in Muskoka with his younger brother Arthur. They met their father, William, in the nascent village of Huntsville, and proceeded to lot 23, concession 11 in Franklin Township, which William had purchased from a Polish squatter at the portage between Peninsula Lake and the Lake of Bays. Over the next several years, William and Thomas acquired additional lots and increased their combined holdings to 400 acres. Like the Oldhams and Kings before them, the Osbornes contributed to Muskoka’s pioneer societal metabolism by clearing the land they obtained, and planting peas, beans, turnips, corn, potatoes, wheat and other garden

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<sup>45</sup> *Muskoka and Lake Nipissing Districts: Information for Intending Settlers* (Ottawa: Department of Agriculture, 1880), 20.

<sup>46</sup> *King Letters*, 42.

vegetables.<sup>47</sup> And, like the Kings, Osborne and his brother supplemented their farming with the occasional beaver or porcupine. Yet they soon discovered that the more they modified the landscape by cutting down trees to suit their agricultural purposes, the easier it became to access game. Larger game was not lacking, but animals like deer preferred disturbed areas with young shoots to eat. Thus, in the process of transforming the landscape, the Osbornes thinned out the thick mixed forests, and inadvertently created conditions conducive to attracting larger game, such as deer and bear. In fact, much of Muskoka's popularity over the next quarter of a century as a 'sportsman's paradise' is attributable to the pioneer societal metabolism that actively created habitat for game as part of the process of clearing the land.

For the Osbornes, similar advantages came in the form of ready access to fish. Unlike the Oldhams or the Kings, the Osbornes enjoyed tangible short-term benefits from the bounty of aquatic life in the Lake of Bays and Peninsula Lake. Throughout their first year, Thomas and his brother caught fish, which they consumed or used as barter for seed, clothing or food as needed.<sup>48</sup> By 1879, the Osbornes were using up to six home-made nets at a time, and were so successful that fish became a central component rather than a supplement to the household economy: "We caught so many fish, we sold them to the settlers in Huntsville, mostly in trade. We also salted them down into... wooden washtubs and a fifty-five-gallon salt-pork barrel all filled with brine."<sup>49</sup> There was always a risk that reliance on game and fish for subsistence could over-exploit wildlife, but pioneer households had few other options when farming did not provide enough.

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<sup>47</sup> Osborne, *Night the Mice Danced*, 15-24.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

The primary focus of every settler's time and energy during the pioneer period was clearing land. Evidence suggests that some of the more common land clearance practices had unintended consequences, involving sometimes serious, widespread and permanent damage to soil, forest and lake system ecology in Muskoka.<sup>50</sup> En route to her family's land in 1871, Harriet Barbara King observed the results of a land clearance method that was commonly employed by settlers, but which had clearly gotten out of control. Between Washago and Gravenhurst, King recounted, "The forest gradually closed in upon us, on fire on both sides, burnt trees crashing down in all directions, here and there one right across the road...".<sup>51</sup> Further along, north of Bracebridge, the fires resumed "burning fiercely... . At times when the trees were burning at each side of the narrow road we felt a hot stifling air as we passed rapidly along."<sup>52</sup> When burning the forest got out of control and became too intense or too extensive, it had unintended consequences for Muskoka's environment. In a few cases, where entire swathes of the forest were burned, the soil was burned away as well.

This method of clearing the land also brought settlers into conflict with loggers. Since settlers had no rights to the white pine on their land under the conditions of the 1868 Homestead Act, everything apart from the trees used to build their homes was cleared. The loggers, who had

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<sup>50</sup> Saloni Clerk, Roland Hall, Roberto Quinlan and John P. Smol, "Quantitative inferences of past hypolimnetic anoxia and nutrient levels from a Canadian Precambrian Shield lake" *Journal of Paleolimnology* Vol.23 (2000), 319-336; Roland I. Hall and John P. Smol, "Paleolimnological assessment of long-term water-quality changes in south-central Ontario lakes affected by cottage development" *Canadian Journal of Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences*, Vol.53 (1996), 1-17.

<sup>51</sup> King *Letters*, 24.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 27; Wall, "Pioneer Settlement in Muskoka," 398.

paid for the rights to the white pine, complained bitterly to the government about locating settlers amongst valuable timber stands.<sup>53</sup>

Where the fires themselves were not the problem, settlers discovered that cleared land, absent the root systems that held the soil in place, was quickly eroded by wind, and especially rain.<sup>54</sup> In 1879, Frederick de la Fosse and his mates discovered this for themselves:

The first crop that we essayed to sow was Lucerne [alfalfa]. It was not a successful one. Not a blade of it appeared above the ground, owing to the fact that on that particular part of the clearing there was no soil fit to grow anything. Whatever earth there may have been originally had been either burnt up when the fallow was set fire or washed into the lake during the heavy rains. The good old granite bobbed up serenely everywhere.<sup>55</sup>

Several years earlier, a July 20, 1872 *Toronto Mail* article revealed that even where fire was not used in the processes of deforesting the landscape, the soil was at risk: “In too many instances the settlers have made the mistake of clearing off the timber from the rocks... . The result had been that the soil being no longer held by the fibrous roots of the trees, is readily washed away by the rains, so that the rocky protuberances look and really are more marked and bare than ever... .”<sup>56</sup> Settlers learned these lessons the hard way, and in the process undermined the viability of what little soil there was for future generations.

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<sup>53</sup> The debate over whether the Shield should be settled or left as timber reserves received much attention around the middle of the nineteenth century. Advocates for preventing settlement insisted timber wealth trumped any value from doomed attempts at farming, while those who believed the future of the province would be expanded freehold agriculture insisted on the need to make more land available. A.R.M. Lower, *Settlement and the Forest Frontier in Eastern Canada* (Toronto: The Macmillan Company, 1936); H.V. Nelles, *The Politics of Development: Forests, Mines and Hydro-electric Development in Ontario, 1849-1941*, 2nd Ed. (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2005), 16; Wynn, “Notes on Society and Environment,” 55-56; Neil Forkey goes so far as to say “Traditionally settlers were the bane of lumbermen... .” Forkey, *Shaping the Upper Canadian Frontier*, 78, 86-90. For more on the tension between these two groups in Muskoka see MacKenzie, “The Economic and Social Development of Muskoka.” Similar tensions also played out during Manitoba’s early resource-settlement period around the turn of the century. Mochoruk, *Formidable Heritage*, 161.

<sup>54</sup> Paul King, “The Promised Land” in *Summertime: In Celebration of 100 Years of the Muskoka Lakes Association* (Toronto: Boston Mills Press, 1994), 64.

<sup>55</sup> De la Fosse, *English Bloods*, 53.

<sup>56</sup> Murray, *Muskoka and Haliburton*, 260.

In other cases, Muskoka's societal metabolism was just not resilient enough during the early pioneer years. In the stretch of time between the summer of 1879 and the spring of 1880, Muskoka experienced a short-lived famine. A particularly harsh growing season in the spring and summer of 1879, which saw unusually heavy rain, hail and late frosts ruined crops and impeded settlement efforts at a time of widespread recession in Canada. The severity of the famine was compounded by the fact that many settlers had no surpluses stored, most had little cash to buy food and much of the population most severely affected was relatively isolated. Throughout the fall of 1879 and the winter of 1880, letters and petitions from starving and destitute settlers arrived in the offices of local M.P.s, the Commissioner of Crown Lands, J.B. Pardee, and even the Premier, Oliver Mowat. The vast majority of these letters came from settlers or witnesses in the northern townships of Muskoka and Parry Sound Districts. While similar weather hampered yields further south in areas of Muskoka lying adjacent to the lower lakes, settlers in those townships did not make nearly the same number of requests for relief.<sup>57</sup> In times of distress, isolation could be fatal.

#### Local Interdependencies and Exogenous Inputs

Even in the best of times, or in the best of locations, no household in Muskoka was capable of providing for all its own needs. And, this was especially true during the toilsome and uncertain years of the 1870s when settlers were transforming the landscape and learning how to subsist in their new environment. Settlers invariably found themselves short on labour, with too much of a particular crop, and not enough of certain essentials. At times like these, settlers turned to their neighbours, establishing the first, most important, and longest-lasting of the

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<sup>57</sup> John J. LePine, "The Famine of 1880," *East Georgian Bay Historical Society*, vol.3 (1983), 1-5.

interdependencies that shaped Muskoka's societal metabolism. Despite its pretensions, the Harston Agricultural School, to which Frederick de la Fosse and three other young men paid £100 per year to learn backwoods farming, was not a well-established farm. In fact, Harston and his four pupils consistently relied on the help and kindness of their neighbours as they cleared land and figured out what worked on the shores of Buck Lake. In turn, many of their neighbours relied on the men of the Harston Agricultural School. In many cases, this meant working together. According to de la Fosse, he and his mates did a poor job of underbrushing and piling logs to be burnt, which resulted in considerably more work than they could handle alone. Thus, "Captain Harston gave it up as a bad job and decided to have a 'bee'."<sup>58</sup> Bees were popular forms of collective labour in rural communities, which tied neighbours together socially as much as it accomplished important economic outcomes.<sup>59</sup> Frederick and his associates were able to round up about twenty men and their wives. While the men carried out the field work, the women prepared meals. "There had not been one refusal," states de la Fosse, "it being an unwritten law of the woods that everyone must help his fellow man."<sup>60</sup>

De la Fosse and the Harston household maintained strong relationships with other families in the vicinity between Buck Lake to the north and Lake Vernon to the south. "Everywhere we were most hospitably received," de la Fosse recalls, "for if there is one thing more than another that can be said for the pioneer, it is that no matter how poor his resources or how attenuated his means of subsistence, he greets you warmly and gives or lends fully and freely of anything that he possesses."<sup>61</sup> In some cases, such as when Mrs. Harston and a

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<sup>58</sup> De la Fosse, *English Bloods*, 40.

<sup>59</sup> Catherine Anne Wilson, "Reciprocal Work Bees and the Meaning of a Neighbourhood," *The Canadian Historical Review* Vol.82, No.3 (September 2001), 431-464.

<sup>60</sup> De la Fosse, *English Bloods*, 48.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.



neighbour shared laundry duties, interdependencies developed between actual neighbours.<sup>62</sup>

Other times, greater distances between neighbours were bridged, as was the case when de la

Fosse made long journeys through the woods to obtain butter and eggs from other settlers.<sup>63</sup>

Taken together, these interdependencies represented some of the strongest, and most sustainable features of Muskoka's societal metabolism. Nevertheless, an inability to provide for all needs locally meant an ever-present and growing proportion of Muskoka's material and energy needs came from outside the region. Moreover, just starting a farm required a wide array of things that had to be brought into Muskoka from elsewhere. These exogenous inputs, as well as most of the commercial exchanges within the local economy, could only be met with liquid capital, or cash.

As was evident from the smug reaction of the hard-worn settlers he encountered on his arrival to the Canadian backwoods, Frederick de la Fosse did not quite fit the mould of the typical pioneer. Frederick and his three peers "felt the same cold and the same heat, and we entered fairly thoroughly into the settler's work," he recalls, "but we were always assured of three good meals a day and thus escaped the privations and anxieties that were the common lot of those around us."<sup>64</sup> What assured Frederick and his household, but caused privation and anxiety for many of their neighbours, was cash or a lack thereof. Captain Harston received £100 per year from each of his four 'students'. Whether or not the average pioneer household generated this much income per year, few arrived in Muskoka to establish a farm and expected to survive without cash.<sup>65</sup> The land was being given away for free, but nothing else was. In 1880,

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 45

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 75

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 113

<sup>65</sup> Indeed, the need for start-up money, along with the conditions that had to be met under the terms of the Homestead Act, meant agriculture still risked becoming hierarchical in Muskoka, as it had in southern Ontario. Parr, "Hired Men," 92-95; David Gagan, *Hopeful Travellers: Families, Land and Social Change in Mid-Victorian Peel County, Canada West* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), 34.

the Department of Agriculture published a pamphlet for intending settlers, which stated, “The question of funds is one that should be well considered by the settler.” The pamphlet included a list of provisions and necessities each household would need to survive “while waiting, at all events, for [their] first crop.” The list included eight barrels of wheat, two barrels of pork, bushels of potatoes, wheat and oats for seed, tools, housewares, blankets and livestock, which totalled \$247.40, or roughly £50 sterling. Ten years earlier, in a letter to a prospective settler, Muskoka booster Thomas McMurray estimated £148 would be needed to work a 200-acre cleared farm.<sup>66</sup> And, even if settlers managed to clear enough land and determined how best to harness its potential, the daily cost of living required money as well. Thus, while Harriet Barbara King could remark on the way the Shield acted as a kind of social leveller in which she found herself “shaking hands and sitting at a table familiarly with one of a class so different from my own,” the colonization of Muskoka took more than one generation, and relied very much on abundant labour and an influx of wealth from outside the region.<sup>67</sup> As Peter Russell points out, “It took a lifetime for anyone lacking either large family, or sufficient capital to clear a farm... and so provide a comfortable living.”<sup>68</sup> In fact, it was common for poor settlers to find themselves forced to abandon or sell their land if they arrived without enough money or had not any relatives to send them more. During the 1870s and early 1880s, the number of settlers who cancelled (or abandoned) their locations each year, throughout the Free Grant Lands of the

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<sup>66</sup> *Muskoka and Lake Nipissing Districts*, 17-18; McMurray, *Free Grants Lands of Canada*, 44; Helen Cowan has estimated that £100 was sufficient to clear a farm. Helen I. Cowan, *British Emigration to British North America* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961), 67-79.

<sup>67</sup> King *Letters*, 66-67.

<sup>68</sup> Russell, “Upper Canada,” 144; Indeed, one of the overriding considerations regarding settlement during the first half of the nineteenth century was to maintain a socially stratified, hierarchical society by making it difficult for anyone without wealth to own land. Yet by 1871, it was still possible for the majority of those who wanted a farm to eventually secure land somewhere in Ontario. Certainly the 1868 Free Grant Lands Act helped make land acquisition possible after 1850, but the costs associated with owning a farm still contributed to some measure of inequality in Muskoka during the late nineteenth century. Cole Harris, *The Reluctant Land: Society, Space, and Environment in Canada before Confederation* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008), 318-319, 363.

Ottawa-Huron Tract, grew consistently in proportion to the number of new locations made (see TABLE 2 in Appendix). In 1874, settlers located roughly four new lots to every one lot abandoned. By 1881, settlers abandoned almost three lots for every four newly located.<sup>69</sup> Many eventually emigrated to the American West or the Canadian prairies.<sup>70</sup> The four individuals mentioned in this chapter thus far all had at least a moderate amount of wealth, or else were able to depend on family members still living in the city to send them money when it was necessary. John Lacey Oldham does not mention money sent from relations, but nor does he mention food shortages, misery, or the kind of privations that forced poor settlers out of Muskoka. King came from a wealthy background, and the Osbornes had family members in Philadelphia who periodically sent money.

Local and informal interdependencies between households were an important part of Muskoka's societal metabolism. Yet, several different local products and services vital to the functioning of the average pioneer household could only be exchanged for cash. Lumber, for example, was most often purchased from one of the early, small-scale sawmills located throughout the district. The earliest known sawmill in Muskoka was Alexander Bailey's mill at the North Falls of the Muskoka River, the future site of Bracebridge. A few years later, Archibald Taylor established a sawmill along the Dee Bank River in Watt Township. Taylor's mill was the only source for lumber in the vicinity of Lake Rosseau for almost a decade. Lumber from Taylor's mill, which was often cut on-demand for customers who supplied logs from their own land, was used in buildings as far away as the north end of Lake Joseph, and sold for \$8.00 per

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<sup>69</sup> MacKenzie, "Economic and Social Development of Muskoka," 19.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 193; Marvin McInnis, "Westward Ho" *Proceedings of the Seventh Agricultural History of Ontario Seminar*, Alan A. Brookes, ed. (Guelph: University School of Part-time Studies and Continuing Education, University of Guelph, 1982); Wall, "Pioneer Settlement in Muskoka," 396; King, "The Promised Land," 64; Douglas O'ram, *Promise of Eden: The Canadian Expansionist Movement and the Idea of the West, 1856-1900* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992).

thousand feet.<sup>71</sup> Pine logs were squared off or whipsawed to make the timber for a frame house, and shingles were split and sloed from a block of cedar wood, but lumber had to bought from the mill.<sup>72</sup>

Most crucially, however, cash was necessary to obtain food, supplies and products that could not be obtained within Muskoka. During the entire pioneer period, the process of transforming the landscape from a forested state to an arable state was regularly subsidized by inputs of material and energy from places further south, such as Orillia or Toronto. As we saw in the first three chapters and will also see in last three chapters, central to the environmental history of Muskoka at *any* point in human history was the reliance people living on the Shield had on resources from places further south. Settlers needed tools, clothing and footwear, furniture and home furnishings, and staples, such as flour, salt and pork. All of these items could be bought at general stores, but during the 1860s and early 1870s, when Muskoka's transportation network experienced a bottleneck due to the limitations inherent to somatic modes of transportation, this often meant a trip south of the Severn River to Orillia.<sup>73</sup> For instance, in 1863, settlers in the village of Muskoka Falls struggled to support themselves at a time when accessing markets in Orillia required a long and costly trip by road. In a petition to the Commissioner of Crown Lands, settlers from several townships complained that "the settlers are put to much inconvenience and unnecessary cost in having to purchase their provisions and other necessaries at Orillia, and in the transport of the same to the settlement - a distance of upwards

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<sup>71</sup> Penson, "Muskoka Neighbours, Part I," 197; William M. Gray, *Lake Joseph, 1860-1910: An Illustrated Notebook* (Toronto: William M. Gray, 1991), 15.

<sup>72</sup> Cash was also necessary to buy livestock, or pay for deliveries and transportation.

<sup>73</sup> With the opening up of Muskoka, Orillia became a rival to Barrie, the region's main market town in 1860s. Kenneth Kelly, "The Development of Farm Produce Marketing Agencies and Competition Between Market Centres in Eastern Simcoe County, 1850-1875," *Canadian Papers in Rural History, Vol. I*, Donald H. Akenson, ed. (Gananoque, ON: Langdale Press, 1978), 80-81.

of forty miles, Orillia being the nearest point at which they can be procured.” The settlers were “determined not to sow Wheat this year,” the petition continued, “as the transport of the Grain to Mill, and of the Flour back again to the settlement would cost more than the value of the Flour.”<sup>74</sup> Nine years later, with the onset of winter looming in the fall of 1869, Seymour Penson, the son of recently located settler R.G. Penson, journeyed to Orillia and back with 2,400 pounds of supplies he could not obtain from the local general store in Port Carling.<sup>75</sup> The region’s Aboriginal people made trips between Muskoka and Orillia, but did so only once a year as part of their seasonal cycle. Frequent trips to Orillia were far less sustainable, since settlers were unable to cover the cost in time and money. Settlers in Muskoka needed markets where they could sell their produce, generate an income and in turn purchase necessary inputs coming in from the south. The sustainability challenges that existed in Muskoka during the pioneer period involved the uncertainty of how to adapt to the environmental conditions on the Shield, the risk that households would be unable to support themselves and the possibility that the region’s pioneer societal metabolism could collapse. As we will see, this differed from the sustainability challenges in later years when households in Muskoka were firmly established and the growth of the region’s societal metabolism pitted local interdependencies against exogenous inputs.

A lack of markets made adapting to the Shield environment challenging, but as transportation networks linked the region with southern Ontario and interconnected places within the region itself, new opportunities emerged. Between 1866 when the first steamboat was introduced on Lake Muskoka and 1875 when the railway arrived in Gravenhurst, the logging industry increased its presence in the region substantially. This expansion of logging operations

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<sup>74</sup> “Correspondence Regarding the Establishment of a Town Settlement at Muskoka Falls, February-July, 1863,” AO, RG 1-524-2, Box 12, file no.4.

<sup>75</sup> Penson, “Muskoka Neighbours, Part I,” 207.

coincided with many of the landscape transformations described above. As was the case a generation earlier in the Ottawa Valley, settlers experimented with farming and discovered that Muskoka was more suited to oats and potatoes than corn and wheat, and hay grew naturally in nutrient-rich beaver meadows.<sup>76</sup> During the 1870s and 1880s, Muskoka's pioneer farmers specialized in hay and oats, and nearby lumber camps became their first, and in many cases, only market. At first glance, the relationship between settlers and lumber camps seemed almost perfect<sup>77</sup> - even if its long-term viability was uncertain. Lumber camps needed large quantities of potatoes and meat to feed the men, and oats and hay to feed the horses and oxen. Although many of the provisions consumed in lumber camps consisted of exogenous inputs from outside Muskoka, settlers could expect camp bosses to buy most of what they had to offer at relatively high prices. In this way, settlers could exchange some of their crops and perhaps a few of their animals for cash with which to purchase much needed supplies or equipment at the general store and obtain other items from outside the region. Frank Nicholson Macfie arrived from Scotland on his uncle's land on lot 49, concession A in Hagerman Township, northeast of Parry Sound in 1880, and soon took over operation of the farm. From the start oats were their main crop. In 1881, Macfie harvested 110 bushels of oats from 18 bushels planted, and over the next twenty years averaged 10 bushels harvested to every one planted. Macfie also made a little money selling logs to sawmills and produce to local merchants, but a significant proportion of his household's annual income was derived from selling oats to lumber camps.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> McCallum, *Unequal Beginnings*, 11.

<sup>77</sup> Graeme Wynn, for example, claims that "To a very considerable extent, settler and lumberman in [the Ottawa-Huron Tract] had a complementary relationship." Wynn, "Notes on Society and Environment," 57. And, in Manitoba James Mochoruk insists, "the thousands of winter jobs provided by tie cutting and lumber camps[...] were crucial to the local economy." Mochoruk, *Formidable Heritage*, 160.

<sup>78</sup> John Macfie, "Farming in the Parry Sound District," *East Georgian Bay Historical Society*, vol.1 (1981), 29.

Over time, however, households could not always rely on this form of income, since lumber camps switched locations as the timber became exhausted. As Geoffrey Wall argues, during the crucial pioneer period, “the [lumber] industry was essentially of a transitory nature and did not promote settlement to any great degree.”<sup>79</sup> During the years Thomas Osborne lived at the portage between Peninsula Lake and the Lake of Bays, logging companies still found it too remote to set up camps in the winter. Referring to the summer of 1878, when the government sold the first timber licenses in Franklin Township, Osborne recalled “They [lumber company representatives] didn’t buy [a license], so we didn’t have any lumber camps.”<sup>80</sup> If lumber camps were not located close to the settler’s household, the settler could always go to the lumber camp and work for wages during the winter. During the pioneer period, when settlers had no rights to the white pine, few alternatives existed to working in a lumber camp to generate income. However, more sustainable ways to generate income could be found in the forest. Settlers needed a reliable market where they could sell their produce and their labour, and develop relationships of interdependence. Luckily, people from the city, who needed a place to stay and meals to eat, started to turn up on the rivers and lakes of Muskoka.

### Tourism and New Interdependencies

In July 1860, eighteen-year-old James Bain Jr., and twenty-year-old John Campbell, of Toronto took the Toronto, Simcoe and Muskoka Junction Railway to Belle Ewart on Lake Simcoe, boarded the steamer *Emily May*, which took them to Orillia, and rented a rowboat to travel up the length of Lake Couchiching to Washago. After spending the night at Severn Bridge, only a short distance north of Washago, the pair walked the remaining fourteen miles north along

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<sup>79</sup> Wall, “Pioneer Settlement in Muskoka,” 397; Forkey, *Shaping the Upper Canadian Frontier*, 77.

<sup>80</sup> Osborne, *Night the Mice Danced*, 119.

the recently completed Muskoka Road to Gravenhurst. They stayed only a short time, commenting on the undisturbed shoreline and the presence of two “wigwams” on the beach. The next year, 1861, the two returned to Gravenhurst with a friend known only as “Crombie.” At Gravenhurst, Blain, Campbell and Crombie found accommodation at the Freemason’s Arms, the home of Mr. and Mrs. McCabe. Curious to know what these young men were up to in Muskoka, ‘Mother’ McCabe assumed “Yez’ll be measuring and surveying, I suppose.” The three answered that they were not in Muskoka on a surveying trip. “Yez’ll be preachers, then?”<sup>81</sup> Mother McCabe was astonished to learn that Blain, Campbell and Crombie had traveled all the way from Toronto for pleasure. In the summer of 1862, the three returned with two other young men, and on the advice of a local settler, T.M. Robinson who acted as their guide, brought with them a rowboat, as well as “100 pounds of sea biscuit... 60 to 90 pounds of ‘ham or other salt meat’... tea, coffee and sugar.”<sup>82</sup> The group continued to return every summer to explore the area by water, and camp on different islands on the lower lakes (Muskoka, Rosseau, and Joseph). In 1864, they named their group the Muskoka Club, and the following year hauled enough lumber to erect a cooking shelter on an island on Lake Joseph. Before the end of the 1860s a few women, including Campbell’s three sisters, had joined the hitherto all-male club. In 1872, the three lower lakes became inter-navigable for steamers, and the Muskoka Club established a permanent base of operations on Yoho Island, where members of the Club and their guests came and went each summer. During the 1870s a few members and acquaintances of the Club purchased islands nearby and inaugurated a cottaging community at the north end of Lake Joseph.

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<sup>81</sup> D.H.C. Mason, *Muskoka: The First Islanders and After* (Bracebridge: Herald-Gazette Press, 1974), 6.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.



By the 1860s, tourism had become a popular leisure activity for many affluent residents of the province's cities. As Patricia Jasen has shown in her study of tourism in nineteenth-century Ontario, places like the Thousand Islands on the St. Lawrence River, Niagara Falls and Toronto Island attracted thousands of visitors a year at this time.<sup>83</sup> Hoping to encounter some sort of wilderness, which they could contrast with the civilization of the city, tourists sought divine, romantic, primitive and curative imagery and identity in landscapes that had not obviously been colonized by human beings.

By 1870, outsiders recognized the business potential of Muskoka as a tourist destination. William H. Pratt, an American entrepreneur from New York, deserves credit for establishing Muskoka's first wilderness resort.<sup>84</sup> In July 1870, Pratt built the Rosseau House at the north end of Lake Rosseau in a small village of the same name. Two years later, Hamilton Fraser, a merchant from a small town outside Brampton, Ontario, built Summit House at the north end of Lake Joseph.<sup>85</sup> The area surrounding Fraser's hotel would be named Port Cockburn in honour of A.P. Cockburn, owner of the first steamboat on the lakes, Muskoka's first MPP, and the man largely responsible for the government efforts to interconnect the lakes in 1871-72. Moreover, Cockburn had been the one to convince both Pratt and Fraser to try their hands at running hotels in the remote setting of Muskoka.<sup>86</sup>

The Muskoka Club, however, reserved a certain mild contempt for the comforts and conveniences of Pratt's Rosseau House. Their minimalist sentiments were expressed in the songs

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<sup>83</sup> Patricia Jasen, *Wild Things: Nature, Culture, and Tourism in Ontario, 1790-1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995); Geoffrey Wall, "Recreational Land Use in Muskoka" *Ontario Geography* Vol.11 (1977), 11-28.

<sup>84</sup> Barbaranne Boyer, *Muskoka's Grand Hotels*, Richard Tatley, ed. (Erin, ON: Boston Mills Press, 1987), 19.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>86</sup> Cockburn had been thinking of ways to enhance the economy of Muskoka, and especially, the revenues for his steamboat operations.

they sang, and Pratt House (as many people referred to Rosseau House) was an easy target for ridicule:

Peace and plenty in our dwelling,  
 Beef and biscuit in our store,  
 Oatmeal, all oatmeal excelling,  
 Where's the wretch would ask for more!  
 Let him go and live at Pratts'es  
 Roost a while with Dugald Brown,  
 Where mammas with noisy brats-es  
 Long to pack their traps for town.

Far from gasolier's and lustre's  
 Sockly artificial light,  
 Every eve our party musters  
 Round the camp fire burning bright,  
 None may sleep while Signor Sandi [Club member, William Alexander]  
 Leads the philharmonic din,  
 While we raise our voices and he  
 Plays upon his violin.<sup>87</sup>

The result was the emergence of two distinct but closely related seasonal economies in Muskoka: cottages and resort hotels. For the first decade or so, members of the Muskoka Club brought much of what they consumed with them. Yet as their presence on the lakes made the transition to cottaging and others arrived to join in the trend of private summer retreats next to the lakes, tourists became a primary market for settler labour and agricultural produce. Similarly, Rosseau House and Summit House, while definitely reliant on many inputs from outside the region, represented the start of new arrangements between Muskoka residents and seasonal visitors. Both hotels kept gardens and raised animals to provide fresh produce, dairy and meat for their guests, and in many cases purchased the produce and labour of local settlers. By the 1880s, settlement had become firmly established and steamboats were regularly running up and down

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<sup>87</sup> Mason, *First Islanders*, 27.

the three lower lakes. After several years of depression during the 1870s, the provincial economy was improving and an interest in Muskoka had been piqued in cities to the south. Most importantly, however, settlers had caught on.

Enoch Cox and his family arrived in Ontario from Warwickshire, England in 1870. After a brief reconnaissance trip, Enoch and his son Edward moved to Muskoka where they rented land for a season, before taking up lots 16-18, concession 7 in Medora Township, on the shores of Lake Joseph. The two initially left Enoch's wife and daughters behind in Toronto so things could be straightened out in their new home before the family moved in. Enoch and Edward quickly learned that oats grew well on their land. Fanny Cox, Enoch's daughter, writing under the alias Ann Hathaway, remembered "the cleared land lying all round the shore, planted with oats, which were so high and green they had completely hidden the disfiguring old stumps, so that it looked like one large field of waving green."<sup>88</sup> And, much like the other pioneers discussed above, the boys benefitted from having family members in the city. Sarah, Enoch's wife, and their daughters, ran a small boarding house in Toronto, and periodically shipped wooden boxes of groceries and supplies to the homestead on Lake Joseph. Their remote location, coupled with the fact that shipments to Muskoka were transferred between several modes of transportation in the years before the railway, meant being provisioned from the city was wrought with complications. In a letter written home to Sarah and the girls in 1873, Enoch wrote

The box [which the girls had sent several days earlier] arrived on Monday, but it had been so long on the way that the meat had gone bad, and all the other things spoilt in consequence. [Young Edward] almost cried over the big plum cake... . We have spread out the tea, too, and hope we may be able to use it.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Ann Hathaway, *Muskoka Memories: Sketches from Real Life* (Toronto: William Briggs, 1904), 78.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 45-46.

By 1880, Sarah Cox and the girls had joined Enoch and Edward in Muskoka, and a community of settlers was slowly materializing around the south end of Lake Joseph. In 1882, Sarah Cox became conscious of a much better way to make use of her family's land. Inspired by the growing presence of visitors to the lakes who sought an experience similar to that of the Muskoka Club, as well as the popularity of Rosseau House and Summit House, Sarah proposed building a boarding house for explorers, adventurers, anglers and hunters. Soon after, Enoch bought a parcel of land on the north side of the cut at Port Sandfield and built a hotel with enough room to accommodate fifty guests, which they named Prospect House. In conjunction with the hotel, the family continued to run their farm, to which they added pigs and dairy cows. In their first season they served guests beefsteak, fried ham, eggs, fish, vegetables and "whatever we might have."<sup>90</sup> In the years to come, however, the fare became more sophisticated.

This type of arrangement was a response on the part of settlers like the Cox family to an intensifying infatuation amongst middle-class North Americans with a wilderness experience. Unlike some of the earlier manifestations of tourism, however, as Patricia Jasen argues, "Muskoka was in fact presented as a place where people could escape the burdens of civilization without blurring the lines of social class."<sup>91</sup> In Muskoka, being close to nature and being rich were not contradictory in the tourist imagination. Local Muskoka historian Richard Tatley describes the process that ensued once railway and steamboat transportation networks made the Muskoka Lakes more accessible to urbanites:

Parties of hunters and anglers, mostly Americans, would call upon farmers lucky enough to have located near lakes, asking for directions to the best areas for fishing and shooting. Sometimes they also requested food and overnight accommodation. As they offered cash for what they consumed, the farmers were

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 116

<sup>91</sup> Jasen, *Wild Things*, 123.

willing to oblige, and as they kept coming back, year after year in larger and larger numbers, the farmers gradually started building extensions to their homes. In time, the farm evolved into a summer boarding house...<sup>92</sup>

A new arrangement, centred on the lakes, thus emerged in Muskoka. Access to Muskoka became much easier when the three lower lakes were interconnected after 1872, and the Canadian Northern Railway reached Gravenhurst in 1875. By the 1880s, tourism became a stable and growing market in which settlers could sell their produce and labour, and generate income.

### Conclusion

Having discovered the limitations of life on the Shield, and having experimented with ways to make such a life work, settlers were confronted with an arrangement that provided income opportunities on a seasonal basis. Settlers needed ways to cover the cost of living on the Shield and pay for inputs from outside the region that could not be provided locally. At the same time, tourists wanted accommodation and access to provisions and fresh supplies. During the early years, inexperience and isolation discouraged newly arrived settlers from staying for long. In 1862, for example, 71 newly-arrived settlers, representing approximately ten percent of the District's population, left Muskoka disillusioned.<sup>93</sup> And as TABLE 2 illustrates, the problem just grew worse over the next two decades. By the mid-1880s, however, the societal metabolism of Muskoka was moving out of its pioneer phase, in which the majority of material and energy flows were involved with the transformation of the landscape from a forested state to an arable state. Settlers were largely finished discovering Muskoka and experimenting with what worked best on the Shield. The future of Muskoka, and the most sustainable features of its societal

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<sup>92</sup> Tatley, *Steamboat Era, Vol.I*, 115.

<sup>93</sup> Wall, "Pioneer Settlement in Muskoka," 396.

metabolism, would be found close to the shores of the lower lakes, where interdependent relationships were created by the interface between settlers and tourists.

As final proof of this trend, one need only look at the experience of those settlers discussed at the beginning of this chapter. Three of the four pioneers mentioned in the first half of the chapter could not reconcile the limitations and potentials they discovered on the Shield with their hopes for the future. None of them lived close enough to the three lower lakes to benefit from the earliest wave of tourism in Muskoka. In 1875, only seven years after arriving in Muskoka, John Lacey Oldham died at the age of forty-seven.<sup>94</sup> Because the land he settled was among the best in Muskoka, his family continued to farm in Muskoka until well after the turn of the century. In the same year, Harriet Barbara King moved to Bracebridge while her offspring continued to farm.<sup>95</sup> Thomas Osborne left Muskoka to return to Philadelphia in 1881 and did not return. His father and brother continued to farm until 1913 and 1915 respectively, and undoubtedly enjoyed greater prosperity as tourism moved into the upper lakes.<sup>96</sup> Frederick de la Fosse took up his own land in 1879, but left Muskoka in late 1880 or early 1881 to join a surveying team in Alberta, before returning east to settle in Toronto in 1886.<sup>97</sup> Forty years after leaving, Frederick returned to Muskoka and rediscovered his old community of Ilfracombe. It still faced the same challenges:

Clearings which had once borne more or less of a crop were grown up again, and their wildness was as the wildness of the forest primeval. Ferns luxuriated, and silver birches and balsams and maples raised their heads above the dense undergrowth. By roadsides and in deserted clearings I noted many desolate graves... it presented so clear an illustration of the state of abandonment into which the settlement had fallen.

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<sup>94</sup> "Farm Journal of John Oldham," MLM, 978.20.1.

<sup>95</sup> King *Letters*, 185.

<sup>96</sup> Osborne, *Night the Mice Danced*, 5, 190.

<sup>97</sup> De la Fosse, *English Bloods*, 140, 170.

The eight miles of road leading from the railway station to the lake were rockier and wilder than ever... Sheep browsed along the roadside, and children clad in next to nothing pattered with bare feet in the mud puddles. Occasionally one met a man clad in nondescript garments trudging along the road, carrying a pack on his back. It was essentially a byway of civilization...<sup>98</sup>

Further destabilized when the railway bypassed the community in favour of Huntsville in 1886, Ilfracombe continued to struggle with life on the Shield, while areas next to the lower lakes established more sustainable communities.

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 151.

*Chapter 5: The Lakeshore Realignment and Settler-Tourist Interface, 1885-1905*

The tourists we may liken to butterflies, because they flock in upon us with the summer sunshine and the flowers. The hard-working settlers are like the bees, because they gather their honey with busy toil in the hot sun and store it away for the cold winter days.<sup>1</sup> (Fanny Potts, née Cox, under the pseudonym, Ann Hathaway, 1902)

The contrast at the heart of this passage, written by the daughter of one of Muskoka's earliest hotel proprietors, captures very well the place that tourism occupied within Muskoka's society and economy when it was written in 1902. "For the past few years," Potts wrote, "the population of Muskoka has been gradually dividing itself into two classes - the tourists and settlers, otherwise capital and labor, pleasure and toil, butterflies and bees, whichever you like to call them." The analogy between industrious bees and free-floating butterflies highlighted a socioeconomic dichotomy that Potts had seen emerge in Muskoka by the turn of the century. Indeed, the wealth that cottagers and hotel guests brought with them on their holidays introduced new power dynamics to life in Muskoka. It was, perhaps, unfortunate that "Between these two classes there is a great gulf fixed," and that "It seems to come naturally to the pleasure-loving tourist to look down with a kind of pity on the hard-working settler, and it seems just as natural for the hard-working settler to look down on the giddy tourist." Yet, Potts insisted that such a dichotomy was the lesser of evils, since "One thing is sure, each class would be very badly off without the other... ." Given the option, however, the opportunities made possible by an influx of rich folks each summer was preferable to, and in many ways more sustainable than, the challenging conditions that Muskoka's pioneers endured trying to farm poor soils.

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<sup>1</sup> Ann Hathaway, *Muskoka Memories: Sketches from Real Life* (Toronto: William Briggs, 1904), 144. Ann Hathaway was a pseudonym. Potts also used pseudonyms for other members of her family.



During the pioneer period, the linked processes of transforming the landscape, discovering the agricultural potential of the land, and experimenting with more sustainable ways of supporting the household revealed environmental limitations inherent to the Precambrian Shield, an unavoidable reliance on inputs from outside the region, and a dearth of local markets where settlers could generate income by selling their produce. In addition, isolation and poor transportation networks conspired to make solutions to these challenges almost impossible. After 1875, however, the lower lakes (Muskoka, Rosseau and Joseph) were inter-navigable to a small fleet of steamboats providing passenger and freight service, and were met at Gravenhurst by the Canadian Northern Railway,<sup>2</sup> which linked the lower lakes with metropolitan centres to the south. These two modes of transportation combined to vastly improve the communication and mobility of people and goods, and thereby reduce some of the isolation experienced by households in Muskoka. Greater quantities of exogenous inputs became available at lower prices, and communications with the outside world became more reliable. But most importantly, improved transportation networks made places in Muskoka more accessible and, hence attractive, for an increasing number of curious tourists interested in visiting the lower lakes. These seasonal visitors represented a reliable and growing market for settlers' produce and labour, and facilitated an expansion of Muskoka's entire societal metabolism.

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<sup>2</sup> After 1888, the Grand Trunk Railway.

Historians have explained the motivations and meanings of tourism in North America.<sup>3</sup> Patricia Jasen defines tourism as “a consumer industry... built upon selling images and arousing romantic fantasies.”<sup>4</sup> As such, “a tourist means being in a state of mind in which the imagination plays a key role... .”<sup>5</sup> According to Jasen, “anyone... became a tourist whenever the pleasures of sightseeing, or the pursuit of new experiences and the sensation of physical or imaginative freedom, emerged as the main priority.”<sup>6</sup> Despite the metaphysical prerequisites, however, tourism involved the act of physically visiting a place that was not one’s home in order to have an experience or live in a way that reflected one’s imagination of a different culture or environment. Moreover, while tourism allowed for varying degrees of permanency, tourists were temporary and their presence can always be measured by duration even if their attachment to and understandings of the specific places being visited were considerable.<sup>7</sup>

For tourists, including campers, hotel guests, and cottagers,<sup>8</sup> Muskoka “offered all the requisite qualities of picturesqueness, a fresh, brisk climate, and accessibility, and was widely viewed as the *natural* place for Torontonians in particular to retreat to and renew themselves... .”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Peter Stevens, “Getting Away From it All: Family Cottaging in Postwar Ontario” (Unpublished PhD. dissertation, York University, 2010); Claire Campbell, *Shaped by the West Wind: Nature and History in Georgian Bay*, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2005); Alan MacEachern, *Natural Selections: National Parks in Atlantic Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2001); Michael Dawson, *Selling British Columbia: Tourism and Consumer Culture, 1890-1970* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004), Ian McKay, *The Quest for the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1994); Hal Rothman, *Devil’s Bargains: Tourism in the Twentieth-Century American West* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1998); Cindy Aron, *Working at Play: A History of Vacations in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>4</sup> Patricia Jasen, *Wild Things: Nature, Culture, and Tourism in Ontario, 1790-1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 13.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 4; This is done, in part, by employing what John Urry calls ‘the tourist gaze’, which identifies and seeks to experience difference. John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*, 2nd Ed. (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2002).

<sup>6</sup> Jasen, *Wild Things*, 6-7.

<sup>7</sup> Urry, *Tourist Gaze*, 2-3.

<sup>8</sup> While there are certainly differences in these categories of tourist, such as the duration of their stay, the frequency of their visits, and the level of intimate or acquired knowledge about the place visited, each fall into one of two experiential modes of tourism that Erik Cohen has termed ‘recreational’ or ‘diversionary.’ Erik Cohen, “A Phenomenology of Tourist Types” *Sociology*, Vol.13 (May 1979), 179-201.

<sup>9</sup> Jasen, *Wild Things*, 116-117, emphasis in original.

Central to understanding the role tourism played in the environmental history of Muskoka is the fact that in all cases “[t]he tourist industry mainly served the propertied classes in the nineteenth century... .”<sup>10</sup> Central to this was the fact that the material needs of upper- and middle-class visitors represented lucrative markets for the goods and services year-round residents needed to sell in order to maintain more sustainable lives on the Shield. Tourists may have been attracted to Muskoka by the chance to consume romantic experiences and picturesque images, but while they were in Muskoka they physically consumed goods and services provided by settlers who relied on the income generated.<sup>11</sup>

Unfortunately, all year-round residents did not enjoy the benefits created by the rise of tourism equally. By the end of the pioneer period in the mid 1880s, a dichotomy had emerged between settlers who lived along the shoreline of the major lakes and rivers where tourism developed, and those who lived inland, away from the direct benefits of the new arrangements.<sup>12</sup> The result was that life close to the shores of the lower lakes became more sustainable than life further back from the water. In the period between the mid 1880s and the first decade of the twentieth century, Muskoka’s societal metabolism realigned from the kind of agrarian geography that characterized settlement in southern Ontario towards the shores of the lower lakes, where tourism redefined the society and economy in Muskoka.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 20

<sup>11</sup> As Michael Dawson points out, “tourism is as much about purchasing goods and services as it is about obtaining ‘authentic’ experiences.” Dawson, *Selling British Columbia*, 10.

<sup>12</sup> Karen Snell, “An Introduction to the History of Muskoka. Chapter Five: Farming,” Edwyn Petersen and Susan Leskew, eds. Funded in part by the Ontario Ministry of Education’s Experience ’75 Projects and printed by the Bracebridge and Muskoka Lakes Secondary School, Bracebridge, Ontario, 1975, Gravenhurst Public Library, 79-1, F10; Edwyn Petersen, “An Introduction to the History of Muskoka. Appendix: The Development of Farming in Muskoka: An Economic Perspective,” Edwyn Petersen and Susan Leskew, eds. Funded in part by the Ontario Ministry of Education’s Experience ’75 Projects and printed by the Bracebridge and Muskoka Lakes Secondary School, Bracebridge, Ontario, 1975, Gravenhurst Public Library, 79-1, 8-11. The same type of outcome took place where tourism placed greater value on land in close proximity to Niagara Falls and the Thousand Islands. Jasen, *Wild Things*, 36-37, 76-77. And, similar arguments have been made regarding the uneven benefits (and drawbacks) accruing from tourism thanks to road construction in British Columbia, and National Park location in the Maritimes. Dawson, *Selling British Columbia*, 96; MacEachern, *Natural Selections*, 107.

As tourism took hold of Muskoka, obvious socioeconomic and cultural discrepancies developed between lakeside settlers and tourists.<sup>13</sup> But, equally apparent were the variety of interdependent relationships that existed between the two groups. As Fanny Potts's description reveals, tourism was highly seasonal, especially during the late nineteenth century. Some tourists stayed into the fall for the hunting season, and a few showed up earlier than usual with the arrival of spring. The great majority of visitors to Muskoka, however, arrived and departed in the summer months every year. Settlers, on the other hand, stayed in Muskoka year round. By the final decade of the nineteenth century, the overriding dynamic shaping Muskoka's societal metabolism during the summer was the exchange of material and energy between year-round residents and tourists. This new arrangement saw Muskoka's overall societal metabolism expand considerably, and a significant proportion of the material and energy flows required to support tourism took the form of exogenous inputs from the south. At the same time, however, the local knowledge accumulated by settlers during the 1860s and 1870s was repurposed to cater to the needs of summer visitors. Pockets of good farmland located in close proximity to the shores of the lower lakes provided the basis for a more sustainable societal metabolism in Muskoka than had existed during the pioneer period.

#### From Farmers' Fields to Lakeside Resorts

The arrangements that emerged between seasonal and year-round households during the 1880s relied on the application of accumulated knowledge acquired by settlers during the 1860s and 1870s. Apart from the founding members of the Muskoka Club, who brought many of their own supplies with them, tourists did not show up until after settlers had discovered where the

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<sup>13</sup> Peter Stevens has done the best job of outlining how social status informed even the very earliest manifestations of tourism and cottaging in Ontario. Stevens, "Getting Away from it All," 35-98.

best agricultural land was and had experimented with what worked best. Thus, by the beginning of the 1880s when tourism emerged as an opportunity for economic growth, settlers were already mostly prepared for its demands. Throughout the remainder of the century, farmers pursued Shield agriculture within the constraints of what had been learned by the first generation. In 1899, in a ‘historical and descriptive sketch of the scenery and life in the vicinity of the Muskoka Lakes’, G. Mercer Adam repeated what was already well known about Muskoka by stating, “Wheat raising is not always to be depended on... .” Reminiscent of promotional reports on the region thirty years earlier, Adam insisted:

Grasses... grow luxuriantly, and coarse grains and root crops are an amazing success. The pasture, moreover, doesn’t burn up in midsummer as it does to the south. Hence, for stock-raising and dairying there is no portion of the Province so suitable. Cattle live and fatten in the woods for seven months in the year. In the woods, indeed, they find their most succulent pasturage, and from choice they will leave a clover-field to browse on shoots of the young basswood and maple. For sheep-raising the rocky land of the district is also excellent, as vegetation is both nutritious and abundant.<sup>14</sup>

“Potatoes yield some three hundred bushels to the acre,” Adam went on, “and turnips from six to nine hundred bushels. Oats, rye, barley, and Indian corn are the chief cereal; oats, the chief crop, generally yielding fifty bushels to the acre.” While acknowledging that as much as forty percent of the land in Muskoka was unsuited for agriculture, Adam insisted that “much of the best [farmland] is yet to be reclaimed from the beaver-meadow and swamp,” without realizing the importance of the former for growing hay.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> G. Mercer Adam, “Georgian Bay and the Muskoka Lakes,” *Picturesque Spots of the North: Historical and Descriptive Sketches of the Scenery and Life in the Vicinity of Georgian Bay, the Muskoka Lakes, the Upper Lakes, in Central and Eastern Ontario, and the Niagara District*, George Munro Grant, ed. (Chicago: Alexander Belford & Co., 1899), 36-38.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

The censuses between 1871 and 1911 provide a good illustration of the continuity and change that existed in Muskoka agriculture throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Most settlers in Muskoka modelled their farm households on what Cole Harris describes as one that “aimed to produce as many as possible of the goods and services that it required, plus a marketable surplus to pay down debts and provide needed goods and services that its own economy could not provide.”<sup>16</sup> In Ontario, during the nineteenth century, wheat was the most lucrative crop to grow in surplus. And so the ‘rule of thumb’ as David Gagan puts it, for evaluating the land was its ability to produce wheat.<sup>17</sup> The difficulty for Muskoka’s pioneers was that the region’s soil could not provide many household needs or a surplus of wheat. Once settlers had discovered and experimented with what worked, they continued to grow the crops well-suited to Shield soil conditions and discontinued those that were ill-suited. While wheat never managed to assume a prominent position, oats, potatoes and turnips fared better in Muskoka (see TABLE 3 in Appendix). In fact, as TABLES 4-9 show, the learning curve encountered by Muskoka pioneers between 1871 and 1891 is especially clear when trends for the number of acres per family and the yield per family are compared for categories of wheat, potatoes and hay. In seven central Muskoka townships for which consistent census records are available, the same trends occurred.<sup>18</sup> Settlers cleared land and planted several different crops. Wheat yields fell below expectations, so farmers cleared more land hoping to find better soils, only to have their earlier experiences confirmed: Muskoka was no good for growing wheat. By

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<sup>16</sup> Cole Harris, *The Reluctant Land: Society, Space, and Environment in Canada before Confederation* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008), 332.

<sup>17</sup> David Gagan, *Hopeful Travellers: Families, Land, and Social Change in Mid-Victorian Peel County, Canada West* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), 43.

<sup>18</sup> Census boundary township groupings changed between 1871 and 1881, and then again between 1881 and 1891, making it necessary to evaluate the three township groupings they way they are presented in TABLES 2-7.

1891, farmers in Muskoka had largely given up growing wheat.<sup>19</sup> The opening up of the Prairies for settlement in the late 1880s reinforced the decision not to grow more wheat.<sup>20</sup> Potatoes, however, were much better suited to Muskoka's soils, bountiful in comparison with wheat. Farmers did not, therefore, generally clear more than an average of an acre per family, but managed to yield somewhere between 75 and 100 bushels per family in 1891.<sup>21</sup> Oats were always an incredibly important crop in Muskoka. Not only did they grow reasonably well, but lumber camps bought large quantities every winter to feed work horses.<sup>22</sup> It also does not appear as though Adam's prediction regarding beaver meadows came true, since the amount of hay harvested appears to have steadily increased over time. Although farmers were able to harvest only about one ton of hay per acre, its importance as winter feed and suitability to Muskoka's environment meant the number of acres the average family devoted to hayfields (beyond just beaver meadow) increased each year and vastly outnumbered the acreage devoted to any other crop (TABLES 4 & 7).

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<sup>19</sup> The significant rise in the amount of wheat grown in 1901, shown in TABLE 1, is not necessarily an indication that settlers from the 1870s were returning to wheat. Rather, these returns more likely reflect the optimistic efforts of newly arrived settlers in recently opened townships further north in Parry Sound District, which were included in the returns for Muskoka in 1901. Since 1891 is the last year township-specific returns are available, it is impossible to determine precisely what accounts for the 1901 increase in wheat yields, but it is safe to say that the rise was not from farmers who settled in Muskoka during the 1870s.

<sup>20</sup> Wheat production declined throughout Ontario in response to competition from prairie farmers during the late nineteenth century. While there is debate as to the nature of this relationship, since Ontario farmers did continue to grow wheat, in Muskoka imported flour substituted for locally grown wheat. Marvin McInnis, "The Changing Structure of Canadian Agriculture" *The Journal of Economic History*, Vol.42, No.1 (1982), 191-198; William Marr, "The Wheat Economy in Reverse: Ontario's Wheat Production, 1887-1917" *Canadian Journal of Economics*, Vol. 14, No.1 (1981), 136-145; Gérard Bouchard and Régis Thibeault show a similar trend for wheat in the Saguenay region of Quebec, which shares similar climatic and soil conditions with Muskoka. Gérard Bouchard and Régis Thibeault, "Change and Continuity in Saguenay Agriculture: The Evolution of Production and Yields (1852-1971)" *Canadian Papers in Rural History*, Vol. VIII, Donald H. Akenson, eds. (Gananoque, ON: Langdale Press, 1992), 231-59.

<sup>21</sup> The census data shows the average family in Muskoka devoted less than an acre to potatoes in 1891 (TABLE 3), which equated to far less than the estimation provided by Adam, "Georgian Bay and the Muskoka Lakes."

<sup>22</sup> Adam, "Georgian Bay and the Muskoka Lakes," 38; Grant Head, "An Introduction to Forest Exploitation in Nineteenth Century Ontario" *Perspectives on Landscape and Settlement in Nineteenth Century Ontario*, J. David Wood, ed. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart in association with the Institute of Canadian Studies, Carleton University, 1975), 104-105; James T. Angus, *A Deo Victoria: The Story of the Georgian Bay Lumber Company, 1871-1942* (Thunder Bay: Severn Publications, 1990), 78.

Thus, as TABLE 1 illustrates, the expansion of Muskoka's societal metabolism during this period of growth was not the result of sounder agricultural practices than those experimented with during the 1860s and 1870s. Moreover, Muskoka's societal metabolism did not expand because of population growth in Muskoka. As we saw in chapter 4, the ratio of the number of lots abandoned to the number of lots located was much higher in the early 1880s than it had been in the mid 1870s. Many settlers who realized the poor agriculture potential of the land in Muskoka left. Rather, Muskoka's societal metabolism expanded because settlers found a better way to *apply* accumulated local knowledge by creating interdependencies between their households and the growing number of summer visitors.

Although resort hotels like Rosseau House and Summit House were extremely ambitious and successfully attracted visitors to Muskoka, the tourism industry took a decade to catch on. Owing to a combination of prolonged economic depression, limited repute, and some on-going accessibility challenges, hotel accommodation did not expand much beyond what these first two resorts offered during the 1870s. During the next decade, however, locals opened approximately twenty more hotels. In the 1890s, another fourteen were added, bringing the total number in Muskoka to 34. By 1903, there were 57 hotels, and by 1909 there were 76 with a combined maximum occupancy of approximately 5,000. The largest, such as Summit House and the Beaumaris Hotel, could host about 200 guests, while the average hovered around 65 guests.<sup>23</sup> The growth in the number of hotels in Muskoka can be seen as evidence for the overall growth in the region's societal metabolism. Although hotels of all kinds, from small boarding houses to

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<sup>23</sup> Richard Tatley, *The Steamboat Era in the Muskokas: Volume I – To the Golden Years; A History of the Steam Navigation in the districts of Muskoka and Parry Sound, 1866-1905*. (Erin, ON: Boston Mills Press, 1983), 121, 232; Barbaranne Boyer, *Muskoka's Grand Hotels*, Richard Tatley, ed. (Erin, ON: Boston Mills Press, 1987), 53, 66, 100.



grand resorts, relied on material and energy flows coming into Muskoka from the south, their operations and ability to provide for the needs of their guests functioned, by and large, according to the relationships that existed between settler households, and between settler households and the environment.

As with Rosseau House and Summit House, most of these hotels were located on Lakes Rosseau and Joseph. Geography and ideas about wilderness played important roles in making Lake Rosseau, in particular, the most appropriate setting for hotels and tourism during the 1880s and 1890s.<sup>24</sup> Throughout the nineteenth century, the main artery of Muskoka's watershed - the Muskoka River - also acted as a transportation corridor for floating white pine to market. Originally squared timber traveled via Bala Falls to Georgian Bay, but after 1875 the vast majority of timber and lumber went by railway from Gravenhurst. In both cases, Lake Muskoka acted as the main thoroughfare. For tourists who did not wish to be confronted by the rapacious destruction of the wilderness so many of them had come to enjoy, this made Lake Muskoka less appealing than Lakes Rosseau or Joseph, which experienced less logging traffic during the 1880s and 1890s.<sup>25</sup> Yet, tourism took off first and established itself most sustainably on Lake Rosseau

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<sup>24</sup> A great many historians have explored the appeal that images of undisturbed landscapes - separate from human habitation and anthropogenic change - had for nineteenth- and twentieth-century North Americans. Visitors to Muskoka, like visitors to natural parks and preserves juxtaposed 'civilization' and their overly urban lives with 'wilderness' and natural settings seemingly devoid of people and history. Tourism in Muskoka was, therefore, most successful where 'wilderness' could be portrayed most convincingly. This often meant undisturbed shorelines, intact forests, and even isolated settings. Jasen, *Wild Things*, 116; Stevens, "Getting Away from it All," 63-66; Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and American Mind*, 3rd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982); William Cronon, "The Trouble with Nature, Or Getting Back to the Wrong Nature" in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, William Cronon, ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1995), 69-90; John Sandlos, "Nature's Playgrounds: The Parks Branch and Tourism Promotion in the National Parks, 1911-1929" in *A Century of Parks Canada, 1911-2011*, Claire Campbell, ed. (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2011), 53-78.

<sup>25</sup> This preference for undisturbed nature had many connections with the preservation ethos of Henry David Thoreau, John Muir, and Aldo Leopold, but is actually more usefully explained by the development of economic activity that tended to obscure production from the process of consumption in late nineteenth- and twentieth-century North America. The benefits of urbanization and industrialization became disconnected from their negative effects. So, while resources were exploited as the material and energy needed to create wealth for urbanites on vacation, "nature came to function instead as a place of recreation, beauty, and escape... ." Gregory Summers, *Consuming Nature: Environmentalism in the Fox River Valley, 1850-1950* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2006), 113.

rather than Lake Joseph because the region's geology and processes of glacial melt had blessed the east shore of Lake Rosseau with more fertile soil necessary for growing vegetables and raising livestock.<sup>26</sup>

We have already seen during the pioneer period one example of the transition from farming to tourism, in the case of the Cox family on Lake Joseph. The same trend unfolded on Lake Rosseau. In 1869, R.G. Penson and his family arrived in Muskoka and took up land on lot 30, concession 5, and lots 29 & 30, concession 6 in Medora Township, in a small bay on the south shores of Lake Rosseau just outside of the Indian Village of Obajawanung (later renamed Port Carling). Here Penson and his son, Seymour, discovered “enough workable land that it was worth clearing.”<sup>27</sup> During the late 1870s, tourists and rich folks from the city who had bought islands on the lake turned up at the Penson homestead asking to purchase fresh vegetables, eggs or whatever was available. In 1880, the Pensons erected a larger building, which they named Ferndale House, “To accommodate folks looking for a place to stay for a holiday... .”<sup>28</sup>

Ownership of the hotel flipped back and forth between members of the Penson family and a man named John Cope in the years between 1895 and 1916, before being sold in the 1920s. The Penson family fed their guests with vegetables from their garden, milk, cream and cheese from their small dairy, meat obtained from neighbouring farmers, fish caught in the lake, fresh berries

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<sup>26</sup> Although much of the best farmland in Muskoka was located inland east of Lake Rosseau, a great deal of reforestation occurred, especially along the shoreline, as settlers dispensed with large-scale land clearing and agriculture in favour of smaller plots necessary to support the needs of a boarding house or hotel. This localized reversal of the pioneer transformation, after about 1880, was also reinforced by the aesthetic consumption of the landscape by tourists who preferred treed landscapes to the denuded and eroded shorelines of only marginally useful farmland.

<sup>27</sup> Joan E. McHugh, *Beloved Muskoka: Diaries and Recollections of Elizabeth Penson* (Port Elgin, ON: Bruce Dale Press, 2009), 67.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 66-67.

picked and turned into pies and jams and water from a cool spring behind the hotel.<sup>29</sup> For many settlers, the logic of tourism was self-evident, and many took advantage of these types of opportunities.

Successful hotels became nodes along the waterways' transportation corridor, and it was not long before guests began to ask owners if they could buy land to build cottages.<sup>30</sup> While many cottagers bought islands that had not been taken up by settlers, a comparable number opted for cottage locations in close proximity to hotels and successful farms that could provide some of their household needs. In 1872, Edward Prowse and John Wilmott bought Tondern Island from a settler named Paul Dane, and split the island between them. In 1883, recognizing the same trends the Cox and Penson families had, and the importance his wharf commanded in the area, Prowse built a three-storey resort hotel. Prowse repurposed his farm to provide the hotel with fresh vegetables, eggs and dairy products, and by 1887, the Beaumaris Hotel could hold 150 guests, and included a small general store that sold a variety of supplies and groceries.<sup>31</sup> An 1887 article from the *Toronto World*, described the foundations of a healthy community:

Adjoining [the hotel] is a new enterprise conducted by Messrs. Prowse & Richards, a store where the campers and cottagers from surrounding islands can purchase groceries, stationery, fishing tackle, canned goods, butter, bacon, eggs and like sundries, as well as that prime comfort, ice... . Mr. Prowse proudly shows a garden the like of which we have not seen elsewhere, a veritable triumph of Adam's trade, its trim beds and forcing boxes filled with luxuriant vegetables for the benefit of the coming man and his wife. A herd of blooded milch cows is tended on the farm land near and their lacteal product stored in a cool dairy house for the exclusive use of guests. On the island back from the house is a farm of 175

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 13-14, 53, 107; "The Muskoka Country: Where Nature's Attributes Combine to Please the Artist's Eye and Captivate Every Artistic Sense; Description of That Mecca of the Tourists and Paradise of the Hunter and Fisherman" *Toronto World*, July 14, 1887, reproduced in John Denison, *Micklethwaite's Muskoka* (Erin, ON: Boston Mills Press, 1993), 19.

<sup>30</sup> Peter Stevens' research on early tourism in Ontario has demonstrated that this type of cottaging colonization occurred in many places where permanent residents created the foundations for more privileged seasonal residents. Stevens, "Getting Away from it All," 50-55.

<sup>31</sup> Boyer, *Grand Hotels*, 36.

acres, and a bridge 350 feet long connects this with a mainland tract of 340 acres more.<sup>32</sup>

The prominence of the Beaumaris Hotel was achieved primarily due to the popularity of the locale with wealthy American tourists from Buffalo, Detroit, Cleveland, Chicago, and particularly, Pittsburgh. The train made the trip relatively quick and easy, but Muskoka appealed to many Americans looking for an authentic wilderness experience. Although accommodations were only available because the region had been resettled by Eurocanadians, as Peter Stevens argues, “the [Shield] landscape seems to have matched the rhetoric more faithfully [than places closer to home in the United States].”<sup>33</sup> So popular was Beaumaris with the crowd from Pittsburgh that several members of a camping party from Mercer, Pennsylvania (a suburb of Pittsburgh), known as the Solid Comfort Camp, bought individual properties on Tondern Island from Prowse. By the 1890s, even friends of the Solid Comfort Camp (which later relocated north to the French River in 1905) had bought properties from Prowse, and the tiny community centred at Beaumaris was dubbed ‘Little Pittsburgh.’ By the turn of the century, a competitive atmosphere of one-upsmanship had transformed the collection of modest plank and batten structures that comprised the original cottages into opulent mansions and summer homes famously known as ‘Millionaire’s Row.’<sup>34</sup> The roots of this affluent community were the interdependencies that developed between year-round residents and visitors. At first this took the form of accommodation at the hotel, but over time the arrangement evolved to include a wide variety of goods and services that encouraged visitors to build cottages in small colonies in close proximity to the hotel, its general store, and its wharf.

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<sup>32</sup> “The Muskoka Country,” *Toronto World*, July 14, 1887, reprinted in Denison, *Micklethwaite’s Muskoka*, 13.

<sup>33</sup> Stevens, “Getting Away from it All,” 64-65.

<sup>34</sup> Boyer, *Grand Hotels*, 36; Denison, *Micklethwaite’s Muskoka*, 44.

The Settler-Tourist Interface: The Cape Elizabeth Colony

Settler-tourist communities did not always emerge next to an important resort hotel. In the case of the Cape Elizabeth colony, near the north end of Lake Rosseau, F.W. Coate's household provided the nucleus. A retired auction house owner turned Shield farmer, Frederick and his son Harry took up several hundred acres of land (or bought it from settlers who had already cleared portions of the land and erected homes) sometime in late 1875 or early 1876. The 1879 *Guidebook and Atlas of Muskoka and Parry Sound* shows F.W. Coate settled on lot 33, concession 2, and lots 33-35, concession 3, Cardwell Township.<sup>35</sup> Frederick Coate kept diaries of farm and household activity in 1876 and 1877, and then again continuously from 1881 to 1893 (except 1885). These diaries reveal the same kinds of landscape transformation and processes of discovery and experimentation explored in chapter 4. Coate's dairies also trace in some detail the local interdependencies that emerged between settlers and tourists on the lakes. Located only a couple of miles south of Rosseau, Coate and his son found an early market for their produce in the burgeoning hotel businesses at the north end of the lake. As the number and capacity of these hotels grew throughout the 1880s and 1890s, operations on the Coate family farm expanded, reinforcing the kind of relationship that characterized Muskoka's societal metabolism at the end of the nineteenth century. As at Beaumaris, hotels and their guests relied to varying degrees on vegetables and dairy products that were available on site. Yet, hotels were seldom able to provide for all of their own fresh produce, dairy, and meat throughout the tourist season, and periodically (or frequently in some years) turned to the produce and labour provided by settlers to meet their needs. At the same time as these relationships were developing between the Coate family and the

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<sup>35</sup> Harry took up land on lots 54 and 55, concession B, along the Parry Sound Road, Cardwell Township. Frederick and Harry also farmed land bought under the name of Harry's brother, Charles (C.B.), on lot 32, concessions 3 and 4, Cardwell Township.

hotels at the north end of the lake, Cape Elizabeth emerged as a settler-tourist colony. Friends and relatives of F.W. Coate visited the farm during the summer months. Over time, a few bought property and built summer homes along the shoreline. By the turn of the century, a relatively sustainable arrangement based on settler-tourist interdependencies existed, with the Coate household and farm at its heart.

Frederick Coate and his son, Harry, were the only members of the Coate family to live in Muskoka year-round. Coate was a partner of a well-known auction house in Toronto named Oliver, Coate and Company (or, ‘The Mart’).<sup>36</sup> In 1880, at age 59, and four or five years after acquiring his land in Muskoka, Coate retired from active participation in the business, leaving his partner, and son-in-law, J.D. Oliver to take over running the company.<sup>37</sup> The rest of the Coate family lived in Toronto, and Frederick and Harry benefitted from periodic cash infusements as needed over the course of their first few years in Muskoka. In 1876, for example, while Frederick was in Toronto, he mailed letters to Harry in Muskoka with different amounts of cash ranging from \$23 to \$80.<sup>38</sup> The Coates used some of this money to pay extra hands to help clear new land in the winter, sow crops and work on construction projects in the spring and summer, and bring in the harvest during the fall.

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<sup>36</sup> Given Coate’s background as a relatively wealthy businessman from Toronto, his household is perhaps not the ideal model to explore the kind of social and economic changes that unfolded as a result of tourism in Muskoka. Nevertheless, the Coate household is an interesting blend of farming and cottaging, and provides critical insights over a number of important years into the nature of the settler-tourist colony. Moreover, the fact that the Coate household was characterized by, what social historian David Gagan describes as the four basic measurements of social betterment (property ownership, improved housing, household structure, and the employment of domestic servants), suggests the Coate household did in fact represent the ideal to which other settlers in Muskoka would have striven. Gagan, *Hopeful Travellers*, 99-100.

<sup>37</sup> Newspaper clippings from *Toronto Globe*, Oct 31, 1884, and *Toronto Mail*, November 14, 1884 pasted into Coate Diary on dates specified. “Diary of F.W. Coate, October-November 1884,” AO, Frederick W. Coate family fonds, F720.

<sup>38</sup> “Coate Diary, March 1876,” AO, F720.

The Coates appear to have learned quickly that potatoes and oats were best suited to the type of soil, and that beaver meadows were perfect for growing hay. Due in large part to the amount and diverse types of land at their disposal, the Coates were not limited to these staple crops. Harry appears to have grown a wide variety of market vegetables, which he switched from year to year, while Frederick focused most of his own efforts on cultivating several varieties of fruits, such as crabapples, raspberries, blueberries, strawberries, and Coate's own favourite grapes.<sup>39</sup> Frederick and Harry were also consistent participants in the Rosseau Agricultural Fair each fall. The first year Coate entered, 1881, he won first prize in four categories: carrots, squash, corn and ram.<sup>40</sup> Over the next decade, Frederick and Harry won prizes in many different categories.

In July 1876, Coate's first cow arrived by steamer.<sup>41</sup> By the fall of 1882, Frederick and his son had acquired enough animals between them to justify building a meathouse to store sides of meat over the winter. The following summer, Coate had several sheep and an ox slaughtered and the meat hung in the meathouse, while the hides and wool were taken into Bracebridge for trade at the tannery and woollen mill.<sup>42</sup> During the first two or three years living in Muskoka, Coate also kept reasonably accurate records of the number of eggs his hens laid during the first several weeks of spring. On average, a small number of hens laid anywhere between two or three dozen eggs per week.<sup>43</sup> Judging from the diversity of crops, vegetables, fruit and animals raised

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<sup>39</sup> Coate meticulously planted more fruit plants each spring and potted some in the late fall to bring indoors and protect them from the harsh Muskoka winters. He devoted extra-special attention to his grape vines, which were finally numerous enough to make wine in 1888. That first winter, Coate managed to ferment twenty gallons of wine. Most years Coate was unable to grow enough grapes to make more than a dozen gallons on average. In 1892, however, he succeeded in bottling 47 gallons of wine, and the next year 27 gallons! In Muskoka, with its short growing season, early frosts, and cool winds blowing off Georgian Bay, this was quite an accomplishment. *Ibid.*, October 1888-1893.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, October 1881.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, July 1876.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, December 1882.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, February-April 1881.

on their land, Frederick and Harry appear to have been capable of supplying a wide variety of their own household needs, which they supplemented through trade and sale. The Coate family farm did not exist in isolation, but was part of a wider integrated local economy. They depended on local markets and consumers as much as Rosseau merchants, hotels, industries and cottagers depended on households like the Coates.

The very act of enlarging the farm's operations required extra-household sources of labour. By the time he assumed year-round residence in Muskoka in 1880, Coate was already an old man. At 59 years of age, Coate was incapable of performing much of the heavy physical labour involved in running a farm, and, with his wife and daughter living in the city, wanted help with the housekeeping as well. During the fifteen years he kept a diary before his death in 1893, Coate hired six different men and three young women to contribute to the functioning of the household.<sup>44</sup> All of the men came from the local community, while two of the three young women were daughters of a settler who lived more than a day away by road.<sup>45</sup> Coate depended heavily on the labour performed by these hired hands. Although Harry worked a great deal for his father, the hired men and women represented vital household energy inputs.

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<sup>44</sup> Joy Parr has shown that "rural wage labourers have been essential to the functioning of the province's persistent and unmistakably hierarchical agricultural system." Joy Parr, "Hired Men: Ontario Agricultural Wage Labour in Historical Perspective" *Labour/Le Travail* Vol.15 (1985), 92. In many cases, hired labourers may have been tenant farmers rather than land owning farmers. Catharine Anne Wilson, *Tenants in Time: Family Strategies, Land, and Liberalism in Upper Canada, 1799-1871* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009), 14. In Muskoka, free grant land did not guarantee fertile soil, obliging many settlers to work for their neighbours for wages or payment in kind. Peter A. Russell, "Upper Canada: A Poor Man's Country? Some Statistical Evidence" *Canadian Papers in Rural History, Vol.III*, Donald H. Akenson, ed. (Gananoque, ON: Langdale Press, 1982), 137. Some rural households would also have sent one or more of their daughters to work outside the home in order to generate income for the family. Alan A. Brookes and Catharine Anne Wilson, "Working Away from the Farm: The Young Women of North Huron 1910-1930" *Ontario History* Vol.77, No.4 (1985), 281-300.

<sup>45</sup> The men are mentioned far more often than the women in Coate's diaries. Most of the men who worked for Coate lived in their own homes, on their own land, while all the women who worked in Coate's home stayed with Coate for several weeks at a time, primarily in the winter and early spring. "Coate Diary, July 1876, April 1884, October 1888," AO, F720.



Three of the men, referred to in the diary only by their last names (Strachan, Sheridan, Bartlett), all spent several days a week during the fall and winter cutting trees and chopping cordwood from the woodlots on different parts of the Coate property. In January 1888, Coate paid these men one dollar per cord for 40.5 cords of wood. The next year, Harry and the men hauled another 40 cords, and into the 1890s the number of cords harvested rose slightly to about 50 each winter.<sup>46</sup> Likewise, Harry was often engaged helping other neighbours with similar kinds of work. The Coates also maintained a reciprocal relationship with the Mutchenbacker Brothers sawmill in Rosseau, where the family obtained most of its lumber during the 1880s, and found a market for several tons of hay each winter.<sup>47</sup> An important aspect of creating a more sustainable arrangement for the Coate family was the social and material benefits that arose out of interdependent energy exchanges with other households in close proximity.

As Muskoka's societal metabolism expanded, however, hotels and village merchants provided very important arrangements for settler households. For example, Coate periodically sold garden vegetables and fruit to Rosseau House until it burnt down in 1883. Two other nearby hotels, Monteith House and Maplehurst Hotel, often bought strawberries, raspberries, gooseberries, and currants from the Coate farm.<sup>48</sup> F.W. Coate also made imprecise references to bushels of oats, different garden vegetables, meat and crabapples, among other items from the farm that he took to the village for sale.<sup>49</sup> However, the connections between the Coate family and the families that ran the Rosseau House, Monteith House, and Maplehurst Hotel went beyond the flow of energy and material. In fact, when the Rosseau House burnt down, its loss

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., Jan-Mar 1888-1893. In 1887, Coate leased the rights to take cordwood from Sheridan's field, and a few years later 'Sheirdan's field' is mentioned as a new field for crops, suggesting that Coate either bought the land or continued to lease it from Sheridan.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., February 1883, April 1884.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., July 1883, 1886.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., October, December 1882, September 1883, 1892.

had a palpable impact on both Frederick and Harry. On their way home across the lake, after a day spent installing a new stove in one of the town churches, the two discovered the hotel had been lost to flames. In his diary the next day, Frederick wrote that “passing the ruins of the Rosseau House made us sad as if we had lost a dear friend.”<sup>50</sup> The owners of the hotel, the Pratts, appear to have stayed in Rosseau for another three years, after which their name no longer appears along with other family friends in Coate’s entries. Monteith House, which existed as a boarding house in town for several years before the Rosseau House burnt, assumed a more prominent place in the village after the destruction of Muskoka’s first hotel.<sup>51</sup>

J.P. Brown opened Maplehurst Hotel in 1886.<sup>52</sup> F.W. Coate became close friends with J.P. Brown, and was one of Maplehurst’s first visitors in April 1886. In the years that followed, members of the Coate family visited Maplehurst about two or three times a week during the height of summer. In the spring of 1886, the Browns cleared land for a summer home on a parcel of Coate’s shoreline called ‘Arthur’s Seat’. Arthur’s Seat was eventually renamed ‘The Cedars’ by the Browns, and leased from Coate for ten years at \$5 per year, and renewable every ten years on valuation.<sup>53</sup> In this way, the Browns became the first new members of the Cape Elizabeth colony. The Coate farm continued to exist within the framework of a wider set of socioecological relationships operating at the north end of Lake Rosseau, but it also became the heart of a settler-tourist colony with its own distinct interdependencies.

In addition to Harry, F.W. Coate had three other sons, Frederick (Fred), Charles (Charlie), and Philip Stenning (Sten), and an only daughter, Elizabeth (Bessie). Apart from Harry, none of

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., October 1883.

<sup>51</sup> Boyer, *Grand Hotels*, 31.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> “Coate Diary, April-June 1886,” AO, F720.

Coate's children spent any time in Muskoka between late September and early June. Mrs. Coate, Fred, Charlie, Sten, Phil and Bessie were all urbanites who ventured north once the weather and water got warmer. The arrival of the Coate family each summer enlarged the household to over a dozen members. Coate's children varied in ages from Sten who was in his late teenage years to Bessie who was in her thirties, and as the years went by the addition of grandchildren and friends meant in some years dozens of people stayed at the Cape Elizabeth colony during the summer. Coate's business partner, J.D. Oliver married Bessie, and in April 1887, the two made arrangements to build their own cottage along a stretch of the Cape Elizabeth shoreline, with the unfortunate name 'Mosquito Place'. In the middle of the 1880s it was customary for summer residents to hire local carpenters to build their cottage. F.W. Coate had initially arranged to have Robert Shuttleworth, a respected local carpenter who built many cottages on Lakes Joseph and Rosseau, build the Oliver cottage. Enlisting the services of Binstead and McIntyre of Toronto, Oliver was instead one of the first people in Muskoka to hire an architect from the city to design and build their cottage. Although no more properties were subdivided during the remainder of his life, F.W. Coate did put some thought into leasing out more lots, his family having suggested that it "would be a good move."<sup>54</sup>

Cape Elizabeth quickly emerged as the hub of activity for the extended Coate family and their friends. Mrs. Coate, Bessie, her children, the children's nannies, and a constantly shifting assortment of the Coate men and their acquaintances usually arrived near the end of June or first week of July, and stayed throughout July and August. J.D. Oliver usually stayed the shortest period of time - never much more than two weeks - while the Coate men often arrived separately

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., August 1889.

and stayed for varying amounts of time. At some point during the 1880s, the Coate men established business relationships with the cotton industry in the southern United States.<sup>55</sup> As early as 1883, F.W. Coate mentions Fred and Sten traveling to Memphis.<sup>56</sup> By the end of the decade Sten was living permanently in Memphis, and a few years later Fred had moved to New Orleans. Every year, however, all the Coates returned to Muskoka for the summer.

The arrival of the extended Coate family highlights a quickly changing trend in the character of tourism in Muskoka - and hence the region's societal metabolism. With the inclusion of women and children, tourism ceased to be an exclusively masculine experience. Tourism in Muskoka during the 1870s and early 1880s had been largely dominated by men. Although a few groups, such as the Muskoka Club, included women earlier, most of the groups who ventured into the wilderness in these years were hunting and fishing parties from places like Toronto and Pittsburgh. While women were occasionally included in hunting and fishing activities, they were highly masculinized rituals centred around the act of dominating and subjugating nature.<sup>57</sup> By the end of the 1880s, however, and certainly by the mid-1890s, vacations had become more family-focused, prone to socializing and spending time indoors, while at the same time democratizing some of the outdoor activities, such as regattas and day-

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<sup>55</sup> The reason Fred and Sten come to live in the southern United States is revealed in the annotations, added several years after, to a letter from one of the Coate brothers to the Muskoka Lakes and Navigation and Hotel Company, originally written on August 29, 1917. *Ibid.*, August 1917.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, September 1883.

<sup>57</sup> Greg Gillespie, "Sport and Masculinities in Early Nineteenth-Century Ontario: The British Travellers' Image" *Ontario History* Vol.92, No.2 (2000), 113-126; Tina Loo, "Of Moose and Men: Hunting for Masculinities in British Columbia, 1880-1939" *The Western Historical Quarterly* Vol.32, No.3 (Autumn, 2001), 296-319; John M. MacKenzie, "The Imperial Pioneer and Hunter and the British Masculine Stereotype in late Victorian and Edwardian Times" in *Manliness and Morality: Middle-class Masculinity in Britain and America*, J.A. Mangan and James Walvin, eds. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), 176-195.

outings.<sup>58</sup> This changed the requirements of seasonal households, including boarding houses and hotels. Not only did overall consumption grow with the addition of each new family member, but the pattern of consumption changed to accommodate the presence of wives and children, who stayed at the same hotel or cottage for several weeks at a time (or even the entire summer), while husbands and fathers came and went on fishing trips.<sup>59</sup> When men were not out camping, they expected to be as comfortable as their wives and children. As Muskoka historian Richard Tatley says, “Visitors who had formerly wanted to leave their upper-class lifestyle behind when they came out to the wilderness now brought it with them.”<sup>60</sup>

The same changes took place in cottaging as well. Thus, while members of the Cape Elizabeth colony spent a great deal of time at the Coate family farm, just as much time was spent visiting with neighbours, going into town, attending social events at Monteith’s roller rink and Maplehurst’s tea rooms, or going on day trips to picnic on one of the nearby islands and the Shadow River at the north end of the lake. Moss and Wylie’s Islands and the Shadow River on Lake Rosseau were particular favourites for many tourists in Muskoka. About once or twice a summer, a party of young people from Cape Elizabeth set off on an overnight camping trip. In 1883, Bessie, Katie Brown, Charlie, Sten, and an acquaintance named Nellie went for a camping trip to “Campbell’s Island” (Chief’s Island) on Lake Joseph.<sup>61</sup> In 1889, Sten, Fred, and two

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<sup>58</sup> This trend should be seen as part of the social reform movements that began in English Canada in the 1880s, which argued that vacations to places like Muskoka were part of a middle-class mother and wife’s responsible care for her family (indeed what it meant to be masculine began to turn towards concern over the domestic as well). The stresses and ills of life in the city had to be balanced with restorative and relaxing time spent in the country or close to nature in order to ensure racial purity and industriousness. Jasen, *Wild Things*, 105-126; Cecilia Morgan, ‘A Happy Holiday’: *English Canadians and Transatlantic Tourism, 1870-1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008); Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (New York: Pantheon, 1981); Mariana Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap, and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885-1925*, 2nd Ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto: 2008).

<sup>59</sup> William M. Gray, *Lake Joseph, 1860-1910: An Illustrated Notebook* (Toronto: William M. Gray, 1991), 51.

<sup>60</sup> Richard Tatley, *Port Carling: The Hub of the Muskoka Lakes*, (Erin, ON: Boston Mills Press, 1996), 41.

<sup>61</sup> “Coate Diary, August 1883,” AO, F720.

friends, Arthur Hine and A.J. Warwick set off for two weeks in August on “a camping expedition up the Muskoka River to the Ottawa.”<sup>62</sup> And, in 1890 Sten and five others went camping in Georgian Bay.<sup>63</sup> In all these cases, members of the Cape Elizabeth colony traveled by somatic modes of transportation, such as rowboat, canoe, or wagon, to reach their destinations. In some cases, the journey was only a few miles across the top of Lake Rosseau. In other cases, trips took several days.

Fishing and hunting were not important activities for the men of Cape Elizabeth. Wild game and fish appear not to have contributed much to household consumption, since Coate rarely mentions either. In this regard, the Coates were not representative of typical settler households. But fishing and hunting also do not appear to have been important recreational pursuits either. In August 1884, F.W. Coate took friends visiting from the city fishing south of Cape Elizabeth where the group caught 26 bass and perch between the four of them.<sup>64</sup> September was the busiest time of the year for hunting. In 1884, 1887 and 1889, Coate mentions his sons, Fred and Sten, hunting for partridge, while two bears were killed at different times using bear traps in September, 1889. Apart from these rare instances, however, fishing and hunting are not mentioned.<sup>65</sup>

Regardless of whether members stayed close to home or ventured on overnight camping trips, the Coate family farm supplied most of their needs. During the summer, Harry and their hired man, Bartlett, operated the farm and provided a wide assortment of garden vegetables, dairy, eggs and meat for household consumption, in addition to what they sold in town. In the

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., August 1889.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., July 1890.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., August 1884.

<sup>65</sup> It is possible Coate neglected to mention regular instances of fishing and hunting in his diary, but this seems unlikely considering the number of other mundane aspects of life at Cape Elizabeth he recorded on a regular basis.

winter, Harry and Bartlett cut ice for the colony's ice houses by hand with large ice saws, and chopped cordwood for their stoves.<sup>66</sup> By the end of the 1880s, the Cape Elizabeth colony numbered several dozen at any given point during July and August, and had become both a fully functioning farm and a private summer resort. Cottages were appearing all over the lower lakes by the 1890s. In some cases they emerged in close proximity to a prominent hotel, and in other cases such as Cape Elizabeth, they took shape around a successful settler household. In both settings, these colonies formed the most sustainable social, economic and environmental arrangements of Muskoka's societal metabolism by creating interdependent relationships between settlers and tourists.

#### Island Cottages and Isolated Households

The socializing and camping activities enjoyed by members of the Cape Elizabeth colony were typical of tourism in Muskoka during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Places throughout the lower lakes like Beaumaris, Windermere, and Port Cockburn reflected the kind of settler-tourist arrangements that characterized Cape Elizabeth - where lakefront settlers provided the nucleus for a colony of seasonal visitors who in turn supported the local economy. Yet, a sizeable population of both year-round and seasonal residents did not function as part of any particular close-knit settler-tourist colony. Scattered throughout the lower lakes were many waterfront locations with almost no agricultural potential that were isolated to varying degrees from the regular flows of material and energy moving about the lakes. Consequently, many settlers living on this type of land did not benefit to the same degree from the influx of visitors from the south as some of their neighbours more opportunely situated on good farmland or

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<sup>66</sup> "Coate Diary, February-March 1888-1889," AO, F720.

adjacent to important transportation nodes. Moreover, throughout the end of the nineteenth century, the most popular location for a cottage was on an island that had not been settled. Given these conditions, however, the settler-tourist interface developed in a variety of ways that compensated for the unequal potential of land in different parts of Muskoka.

Islands provided the perfect opportunity for rich folks from the city to acquire property in Muskoka. In the 1870s, several members and acquaintances of the Muskoka Club bought islands from the Crown for as little as one dollar per acre. While these properties certainly appreciated in value over time, many islands were later purchased from their owners for much less than the price of a typical vacation in Muskoka. For instance, in 1898, Louis K. Martin purchased Star Island on Lake Joseph for \$250 from Charles Corbould, who had bought the island for \$25 from its original owner Samuel Robinson, who had paid only \$5 to the Crown for the five-acre island.<sup>67</sup> In that same year, a family of five visiting from Toronto, and staying at Prospect House, for example, would have spent much more for a six-week holiday. The round trip from Toronto to Port Sandfield (including steamer ride from Gravenhurst) cost \$6.05 per person, or \$30.25 for the family.<sup>68</sup> Rates at Prospect House around the turn of the century were anywhere from \$10-15 per person per week.<sup>69</sup> If \$60 is taken as the total for the family each week, a six-week stay at a hotel in Muskoka would have cost this hypothetical family a total of at least \$400.

Islands were very attractive to potential cottagers since they included more privacy and an undisturbed, rugged shoreline.<sup>70</sup> Yet the same features that appealed to holidaying cottagers also made it more difficult to integrate into settler-tourist arrangements. In order to establish the

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<sup>67</sup> Gray, *Lake Joseph*, 77.

<sup>68</sup> Grand Trunk Railway Company of Canada. *Picturesque Muskoka: to the highlands & lakes of Northern Ontario*, (Toronto: Grand Trunk Railway System and Muskoka Navigation Company, 1898).

<sup>69</sup> Boyer, *Grand Hotels*, 34.

<sup>70</sup> Minus the impact of logging, which varied according to the size of the island and when the island was bought.



kind of interdependent relationships that emerged at places like Beaumaris, Windermere and Rosseau, a special arrangement was needed that would link islands and other isolated spots on the lakes with farmers at fertile locations on the shore, and temporarily eliminate the distance between places of production and these particular sites of consumption in Muskoka.

Not all land was created equal in Muskoka, and this became particularly important along the shores of the lower lakes. Owing to large-scale processes of glacier melt at the end of the last glaciation, the land west of Lake Joseph did not benefit from the same till deposition that formed the basis for better agricultural land east of Lakes Rosseau and Muskoka. Only a few places around Lake Joseph could generate the kind of direct interdependent settler-tourist arrangement that existed at Cape Elizabeth on Lake Rosseau. By experimenting with what worked on their land, unfortunately located settlers on Lake Joseph engaged with the tourism industry in more inventive and labour-intensive ways.

For instance, Mabel Croucher Ames was born in 1884 into a settler household near the head of the Joseph River in an area known as Craigie Lea. Written when she was ninety-one years old, her memoirs illustrate that, given the proper conditions and experience, even land ill-suited for agriculture could produce vegetables, dairy, eggs and meat. Although the area around her homestead could provide for on-going fuel needs, it also featured some of the poorest agricultural land in Muskoka, accentuated by large outcroppings of bare granite Shield and thin acidic soils. Ames does not mention her family growing any grain crops, but insisted “Having a garden was a must if we were to survive the winter... .”<sup>71</sup> In all likelihood, George Croucher, Mabel’s father, discovered there was not enough good soil to justify planting much in the way of

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<sup>71</sup> “Memoirs of Mabel Croucher Ames, 1884-1977,” oral memoirs originally shared with and transcribed by Vera Gross Ames, 1975, presented to Bill Gray by Lynda McClelland Stringer, June 10, 2006, Muskoka Lakes Museum Archives, Port Carling, Ontario, 20.

crops, since Ames never mentions cereal crops, such as rye, barley or oats. Instead, the family raised vegetables, such as potatoes, carrots, turnips, onions and cabbage, which they kept stored in a roothouse for the winter. If the Crouchers land was too poor to grow cereal crops, it appears to have been well-suited to raising livestock, such as pigs, dairy cows and a few cattle, as well as chickens. They purchased young piglets in the spring, fattened them in the summer, and butchered them, along with a spring calf, in the fall. Ames also mentions plentiful fish, which family members often caught by tying a line to one's ankle when traveling by rowboat. Women turned wild berries and plums into preserves and jams, and different varieties of game, such as deer, rabbits and partridge supplemented seasonal swings in the availability of meat.<sup>72</sup>

They sold some portion of their produce and dairy to tourists in the summer, but settlers at Craigie Lea more commonly interacted with tourists by providing services and selling their labour than by selling vegetables, dairy and meat. According to Mabel Croucher Ames, cottages and hotels around Lake Joseph “gave the settlers work building the [summer] homes for [people from the city] and acting as chore boys or caretakers taking care of them.”<sup>73</sup> Mabel worked as a maid herself, beginning at the age of twelve in order to supplement her family's income. In 1896, John Campbell on Yoho Island paid Mabel two dollars per month, two dresses, and a pair of shoes. She also worked at boarding houses and hotels, including Craigie Lea House and Stanley House, before she married in 1902 at the age of eighteen.<sup>74</sup> Her father, George Croucher, was a respected carpenter who built several of the earliest cottages on Lake Joseph, including those on Yoho, Gitchie, Bungay, and Wegamind Islands.<sup>75</sup> Traveling several miles by rowboat

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<sup>72</sup> “Ames Memoirs,” MLM, 14.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>75</sup> Gray, *Lake Joseph*, 86, 93, 113.

from their home near the mouth of the Joseph River, George Croucher often stayed overnight with his crew on site while building cottages during the 1880s.<sup>76</sup> Building materials, such as timber frames, lumber, battens, and shingles, came primarily from the property on which the cottages were built. Lumber and batten boards were milled at one of the local mills - most likely Love's mill at the south end of the lake across from Port Sandfield - while timbers and shingles were shaped and cut from logs on site and as needed.

George Croucher was one of many contractor-builders, including the Brown Brothers, J.J. Knight, Harry Sawyer, C.A. Young, Alex Cameron, Robert Rogers, Norman Kaye, George Leask and Peter Curtis, who built the first generation of Muskoka cottages during the 1880s and 1890s.<sup>77</sup> By the 1890s, however, increased demand amongst affluent North Americans for comfortable and spacious summer homes with ornate features and enough room to accommodate a dozen people occasioned a preference for pre-designed cottages chosen from pattern books, which contractors and carpenters used for floor plans and instructions to erect larger two-storey cottages. In 1889, the *Bracebridge Gazette* advertised catalogues for architectural plans, mainly for year-round homes. As demand for cottages increased in the last decade of the nineteenth century and first decade of the twentieth century, with minor alterations many of these plans led to the construction of replica cottages around the lakes. Four nearly identical cottages on Lake Muskoka, near Beaumaris were built within four years of one another around the turn of the century using the same plans from architect Sidney R. Badgley. Later cottagers used plans sold by Aladdin Homes of Toronto. Designs called 'The Parry' (cottage design) and 'The

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<sup>76</sup> "Ames Memoirs," MLM, 9

<sup>77</sup> Graham Smith, "A Room with a View: Cottage Architects and Builders" *Summertime: In Celebration of 100 Years of the Muskoka Lakes Association* (Erin, ON: Boston Mills Press, 1994), 137.

Carling' (boathouse design with sleeping quarters above) were intended specifically for seasonal residents.<sup>78</sup> Almost all were built by local carpenters or contractors.

As these cottages became more elaborate, ice houses, laundry houses, boat houses, wood sheds, summer kitchens and staff quarters were all added, transforming the simple board-and-batten shelter of the Muskoka Club-style into the grand, sometimes opulent summer homes that have made Muskoka famous. These stylistic and functional changes in the construction of seasonal homes demanded greater labour inputs, which created new opportunities for settlers to sell affluent cottagers their services. In 1902, Mabel Croucher married Frank Ames, the son of a German immigrant who settled two hundred acres along the Joseph River. For many years around the turn of the century and afterward, Frank Ames cut cordwood and ice for many cottagers on Lake Joseph during the winter. In her memoirs, Mabel Croucher Ames describes her husband cutting an average of about one hundred cords of wood each season, which was divided between their own household and several cottages around the lake. Equally laborious, if somewhat more dangerous was the process of cutting ice out of the lake and storing it in cottagers' ice houses to keep food cool during the summer. When the ice was about two-and-a-half to three feet thick in the centre of the lake (usually sometime in February), a team of horses and men would accompany Ames out onto the frozen surface of the lake to cut blocks of ice 18 by 30 inches in size. These blocks, weighing anywhere between 150 to 200 pounds, were pulled out of the water with tongs, pushed up planks onto sleighs, hauled ashore behind the cottage, stacked in the ice house, and covered with sawdust to prevent evaporation in warmer weather. Mabel recalled that her husband and his team of three men looked after between ten and twenty

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 135.

ice houses per season, requiring at least an entire day to fill, and earning the team \$5.00 per job.<sup>79</sup>

Writing shortly after the turn of the century, Fanny Potts observed that cottages “appear to be springing up like mushrooms on every island and point... [in] an endless variety as regards shape and size... .”<sup>80</sup> And as Muskoka became increasingly popular among the well-to-do, the rustic minimalism of the nineteenth century gave way to what one descendant of the Muskoka Club dubbed ‘The Age of Elegance’. Writing during the 1970s, D.H.C Mason recalled the subtle cultural changes to tourism in Muskoka wrought by the arrival of so many affluent cottagers, and the expansion of more conspicuous consumption that accompanied these new preferences:

Wealthy people usually without previous knowledge of the lakes bought islands and points, brought up city architects and contractors and built and furnished, more or less regardless of expense, large and luxurious houses with numerous bathrooms and other city conveniences, not to mention tennis courts and large imposing steam yachts. To the old timers, ‘c’etait magnifique mais ce n’etait pas Muskoka.[sic]’<sup>81</sup>

Even Mason’s own parents opted for more comfortable accommodations on Chief’s Island. In 1902, Mason recalls, “The house was extended to the rear to provide a dinning room, a large sun room, three more bed rooms and (a sign of increasing effeminacy) a complete bath room... . Then the acetylene gas generator was installed and all the buildings piped for gas lighting.”<sup>82</sup>

Still, many cottagers, particularly the islanders, maintained certain aesthetic standards. When new cottagers transgressed these standards their neighbours ridiculed them. Despite the popular image of grassy lawns that many associated with Muskoka, during the nineteenth

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<sup>79</sup> “Ames Memoirs,” MLM, 18-19.

<sup>80</sup> Hathaway, *Muskoka Memories*, 145.

<sup>81</sup> D.H.C. Mason, *Muskoka: The First Islanders and After* (Bracebridge: Herald-Gazette Press, 1974), 36-37.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

century these were rare apart from properties that had once been farms.<sup>83</sup> Thus, Mason recalls, “When one cottage [a new addition to the community] displayed a patch of lawn grass in front of it, we children looked upon it with contempt and wondered what sort of sissys occupied it. Probably their children even wore shoes and stockings [rather than running around barefoot]!”<sup>84</sup>

This perspective moved into the minority by the turn of the century, however, as the number of cottages increased, and efforts to beautify the setting dovetailed with what was possible in the soil. As Fanny Potts observed, “summer cottages were, many of them, very pretty, and nearly all of them with gardens in front, bright with blossoms, flowers evidently being cultivated in preference to vegetables by their fair owners.”<sup>85</sup> Exposure to stiffer winds across the open lake on all but the largest islands meant vegetables were ill-suited to growing conditions. Where the soil was just too thin, or non-existent, some cottagers improved the odds of having a lovely garden by, as Canada’s first female physician, Emily Stowe did, bringing “Good Earth” over from the mainland.<sup>86</sup> Regardless of aesthetic appeal, or whether they were even capable of growing some of their own food, maintaining a reliable connection with mainland agriculture was absolutely vital.

In the absence of the kind of close proximity that existed between settlers and tourists at Beaumaris and Cape Elizabeth, maintaining a connection with mainland agriculture relied on social interaction.<sup>87</sup> For instance, Paris, Ontario, woollen factory owner John Penman maintained a close friendship with the Judd family across Lake Rosseau throughout the nineteenth century.

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<sup>83</sup> Claire Campbell insists that rocky granite and grassy lawns were the most commonly referenced characteristic difference between Georgian Bay and Muskoka. Campbell, *Shaped by the West Wind*, 151.

<sup>84</sup> Mason, *First Islanders*, 35-36.

<sup>85</sup> Hathaway, *Muskoka Memories*, 225.

<sup>86</sup> Liz Lundell, *Old Muskoka: Century Cottages and Summer Estates* (Erin, Ontario: Boston Mills Press, 2003), 43

<sup>87</sup> As John Urry argues, this connection “occurs as the intended outcome of a necessarily *social* process in which some interaction occurs between one or more producers and one or more consumers.” Urry, *Tourist Gaze*, 60, emphasis in original.

Penman bought Island ‘U’ from James Foran in September 1882, but only built a cottage in 1894. Like many others from the same time, the Penman estate featured many out-buildings, including an acetylene gas house, horse barn, ice house, tool shed, a caretaker’s boathouse and a wood-burning boiler that generated hot water for radiators.<sup>88</sup> Across the lake, Francis and Ann Judd arrived on the west side of Lake Rosseau in 1875, and by 1877 were running a post office out of their home, which became the nucleus of a community called Juddhaven. In 1890, their son, Alfred Judd, built Earnescliffe Hotel to accommodate 125 guests thereby vaulting the tiny community into the status of a settler-tourist colony.<sup>89</sup> The close relationship between the Penman and Judd households is revealed in a poem read aloud at a concert hosted by the Penmans and attended by “a large and illustrious number of guests from Earnescliffe” in August 1897:

Only Earnescliffe [sic] could presume  
 To pronounce proudly Penman’s doom;  
 But never even Jiant Judd  
 Could put a Penman in the mud.

Nor does Penman’s palace hold  
 Any human heart that’s cold.  
 ‘Welcome’! is the word that looms  
 Longest round its royal rooms.

All the luxuries of life  
 In this paradise are rife;  
 While its magic music thrills  
 And enchants Juddhaven’s hills.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Lundell, *Old Muskoka*, 85, 87.

<sup>89</sup> Boyer, *Grand Hotels*, 63.

<sup>90</sup> “A Bardic View of Penman’s Isle,” AO, Penman Family Fonds, F181, box 2, Miscellaneous material (5), Package 1.

More than likely, the people from Ernescliffe in attendance were guests at the resort rather than the Judds themselves, but the high esteem for Juddhaven and Earnscliffe evident in this poem suggests the two households shared interdependencies that consisted of more than social favours.

For most cottages and other isolated households around the lower lakes, however, direct relationships with settlers farming good land were difficult. Distance created challenges for households and cottages located in more remote parts of the lake. Settlers provided a variety of services to these households by traveling across the lakes to reach them. But their on-going, daily and weekly needs required a more consistent connection to the kind of social, economic and environmental arrangements featured at the settler-tourist colonies. In order for remote and isolated households to function, a distribution network was required that could disburse the agricultural products from fertile pockets on the eastern shore of the lakes to places in need of fresh produce, dairy, eggs and meat throughout the summer months. To meet these needs, a few enterprising Muskoka farmers and merchants introduced supply boats to the Muskoka Lakes.

#### Interdependent Relationships and Lakeside Supply Networks

As we saw from the passage that opened this chapter, Fanny Potts had her finger on the pulse of life in Muskoka. Her parents were among the earliest settlers to realize the potential of the tourist industry. Growing up in Muskoka, she eventually met Edwin Potts, a picture framer from Toronto, married him, and moved to the city. During the 1880s and 1890s, Fanny and Edwin built and rented a few cottages southeast of her parents' hotel, Prospect House at Port Sandfield. By 1900, when Edwin and Fanny Potts moved back to Muskoka permanently, the couple managed three rental cottages on Lake Joseph in addition to their own cottage.<sup>91</sup> Renting

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<sup>91</sup> Gray, *Lake Joseph*, 57, 61.



a cottage was much more like owning a cottage than staying at a hotel, and thus included many of the perks, such as greater privacy, as well as the drawbacks, such as arranging for the household's provisions and supplies.

The closest proper general store for visitors staying in one of the Potts' cottages was in Port Carling, more than two hours away by either foot or rowboat. Cottagers seldom traveled by steamer to buy groceries or supplies, as the cost was disproportionately expensive compared to the price of the rest of the holiday, and ran on schedules that required the whole day to complete a simple grocery run. In almost all cases, families on an extended vacation shipped much of the dry and canned goods needed for the duration ahead of time. But supply needs were on-going, and fresh fruit, vegetables, dairy and meat were expensive and challenging to have delivered from the city as needed without spoiling. Not only did anything arriving at the cottage from the city require a long train trip, but potentially a lengthy trip by steamer as well.

Re-supply troubles were also a constant problem for year-round residents whose homesteads were located in isolated spots on the lakes. Something as simple as obtaining coal oil could prove to be an incredible burden if settlers needed to travel a long way to buy it. Settlers hesitated to include coal oil in their regular shopping trips, since the smell would taint some of the other goods, and if spilled would ruin supplies, especially food, entirely.<sup>92</sup> Women in particular suffered in these situations. Responsible for taking care of the home in the Victorian era, yet reliant on, or denied access by, male members of the household to travel by vehicle, female settlers often dealt with hardships in provisioning the home. Mabel Croucher Ames remembers her mobility constraints around the turn of the century:

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<sup>92</sup> "Ames Memoirs," MLM, 11.

The first few years I found very lonely living here [in her and her husband's new home], with Frank away working and no neighbours to talk to. I often looked across the mile of lake to my old home and longed to see and talk to my family, if only for a few minutes. But there was no way for me to get there. The only boat we had was a rowboat, and Frank took it to work with him so this left me stranded. Outboard motors were unheard of, and we could not afford a steamboat. If we went anywhere we had to walk, row, or hitch up the horses.

We often rowed or walked the 12 miles to Port Carling to church or to visit friends. Sometimes we would go by horse and cutter to Glen Orchard in the winter to a Christmas concert or maybe ice skate over to Foots Bay, five miles directly across the lake.<sup>93</sup>

The “we” in this excerpt of Mabel’s memoirs reveals that women rarely traveled very far on their own at this time (see chapter 6 for more on the gendered access to transportation). But, it also exposes mobility as a limiting factor for many households in Muskoka. In this context, supply boats became extremely important components of Muskoka’s societal metabolism, not just because they linked the isolated tourists’ consumption needs with the production of the local supplies, but also because they represented a crucial means of interconnecting the entire economy and society in Muskoka for most of the year.

Supply boats were a class of steamboats outfitted to carry a wide variety of provisions, supplies and groceries, as well as a few passengers. Prior to the mid-1880s, tourism had not established itself thoroughly enough to necessitate such a specialized service. In fact, before this time, steamboats operating on the lower lakes were multifunctional vehicles, offering mobility solutions to almost every facet of the region’s societal metabolism. In the spring, steamers of all sizes were mainly utilized as tugs to tow large booms of logs. In the summer, most steamers switched their function to accommodate passenger and freight service. In the fall, they shipped

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 17-18.

supplies and provisions for the lumber camps.<sup>94</sup> As steamboat functions became specialized, their owners included the Navigation Company, logging companies, sawmills, cottagers, farmers, and town merchants. The last two categories of owners, responding to the needs of isolated households, initiated specialized steamer services for supplying lakeside residents during the navigation season.<sup>95</sup> Farmers bought small steamboats to distribute their produce, dairy, eggs and meat to cottagers during the summer months, while merchants usually ran larger boats as adjuncts to their general stores in Port Carling, Rosseau, or Bala.<sup>96</sup>

The very first supply boat in Muskoka was not steam-powered, but muscle-powered. Francis Forge settled on lots 29-30, concession 7 in Watt Township, just south of Windermere, on the east shore of Lake Rosseau and was the first person to realize the potential of linking the needs of tourists on isolated islands with the surpluses of farmers on the mainland. As tourism took off in the early 1880s, Forge experimented with a dugout canoe before settling on a rowboat as the vessel with which to supply cottagers on Lake Rosseau with lamb, eggs, milk, fresh vegetables, and other items twice a week. According to local settler Seymour Penson, Forge was “a kind of distributing agent. He bought from the settlers, for he could not raise nearly all that he could sell. And he sold to the islanders at almost any price that he liked to ask.”<sup>97</sup> Although his property included good agricultural land, Forge opted to forsake more rigorous farming in favour of some combination of tending a few gardens, raising chickens and sheep, and bartering with

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<sup>94</sup> Harley E. Scott, *Steam Tugs and Supply Boats of Muskoka* (Lancaster, NY: Cayuga Creek Historical Press, 1987), 2.

<sup>95</sup> Other Canadian historians have demonstrated the central importance of steamboats to the rise of tourism in inland communities situated on waterways large enough to accommodate such vessels. None, however, have explored the use of steamboats as supply boats. Jasen, *Wild Things*, 55-79; Campbell, *Shaped by the West Wind*, 78; J.I. Little, “Scenic tourism on the northeastern borderland: Lake Memphremagog’s steamboat excursions and resort hotels, 1850–1900” *Journal of Historical Geography* vol.35 (2009), 716–742.

<sup>96</sup> Tatley, *Steamboat Era, Vol.I*, 245.

<sup>97</sup> Seymour Penson, “Seymour Penson and His Muskoka Neighbours, Part II,” *East Georgian Bay Historical Journal*, vol.5 (1985), 185-186.

his neighbours for produce and dairy to sell to islanders. In 1888, Forge purchased a steamer, which he used for three years to extend his services to Lake Joseph, before selling it and resuming his business by rowboat once again.<sup>98</sup> Forge's brief foray into steam-powered supply boat services was no doubt inspired and ultimately thwarted by a more successful merchant from Port Carling.

In 1887, William Hanna decided to make a portion of his business more accessible to folks living on the shores of the lakes. Hanna hired Arthur Thomas Lowe of Acton Island on Lake Muskoka, and his steamer, to serve as an extension of his general store. That summer, an article in the Toronto *World* featured a tour of the Muskoka Lakes aboard one of the Navigation Company steamers. During a stop at Port Carling, the author described W. Hanna & Co.:

Mr. Hanna has just erected a special oven and embarked in the bakery business, so as to be able to supply a fresh article of home-made bread; he has arrangements with farmers for supplies of fresh butter, eggs, and milk, as well as vegetables and fruits in season. The desirable lines of native and imported tinned, potted and preserved meats, fowl and fruits are all on hand. To facilitate the transaction of business he has arranged with Mr. Acton [sic] Lowe of the steamer 'Lady of the Lake,' who will make regular trips upon certain days of each week to take orders, and or the delivery of goods.<sup>99</sup>

During the 1890s, Hanna expanded his supply boat services by purchasing larger boats and adding a second route. Shortly after the turn of the century, several supply boats plied the three lower lakes, connecting cottagers and lakeside residents with goods from the city, as well as local produce, dairy and meat.

The first successful supply boat on Lake Muskoka operated as part of Alport, a large farm owned by John James (J.J.) Beaumont and his son Frank. Alport was a well-established,

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<sup>98</sup> Tatley, *Steamboat Era, Vol.I*, 245; Tatley, *Port Carling*, 36; Mason, *First Islanders*, 27-28.

<sup>99</sup> "The Muskoka Country," *Toronto World*, July 14, 1887, reprinted in Denison, *Micklethwaite's Muskoka*, 17.

657-acre farm at the mouth of the Muskoka River by the time Beaumont purchased the property in 1887. It already boasted large vegetable gardens, orchards, pastures and barns when the tourist industry hit its stride on Lake Muskoka. Having quickly developed a reputation as the best supplier of lamb in Muskoka, Beaumont began selling his meat, vegetables, fruit, dairy, eggs and other items by supply boat in 1894. According to local historian Richard Tatley, by the turn of the century, the Beaumonts employed “over two dozen people as butchers, bakers and farm hands.”<sup>100</sup> By the end of the nineteenth century, the Beaumonts were only one of several supply boats operating on Lake Muskoka. In 1896, another large land-owning farmer named William Packer used a supply boat to sell vegetables, fruit, dairy and meat to local cottagers during the summer.<sup>101</sup> In 1897, Bala’s founder, Thomas Burgess, ran a supply boat in conjunction with his general store. Throughout the nineteenth century, access to Bala was almost exclusively by water, so Burgess’ supply boat represented an important lifeline connecting that community with other places around the lake.

The supply boats that operated on Lake Muskoka rarely passed through the lock at Port Carling to sell to cottagers on Lakes Rosseau and Joseph. Instead, these lakes had their own supply boats. George Henry Homer ran a general store in Gravenhurst, and in 1890 opened a second store in Rosseau. Throughout the 1880s and early 1890s, Homer depended on the Navigation Company steamboats to deliver mail-order items to customers on the lakes, but in 1896 he purchased a supply boat to run as an extension of his Rosseau store. In the 1902 Muskoka Lakes Association Yearbook, Homer ran an advertisement for his store, which clearly outlines the supply boat’s role as a link between isolated tourists and his store in Rosseau:

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<sup>100</sup> Tatley, *Steamboat Era, Vol.I*, 245.

<sup>101</sup> Diane Rimstead, “The Packers of East Bay” *Muskoka Sun*, June 28, 2001.

Tourists' Supplies

Homer & Co.

Dealers in DRY GOODS, GROCERIES, FRUITS, CONFECTIONERY,  
CROCKERY, GLASSWARE, FLOUR AND FEED – BOOTS AND  
SHOES, HARDWARE, STOVES, TINWARE, Etc.

Our Supply Boat “Constance” calls at all Points, Cottages, Camps and Hotels on  
Lakes Rosseau and Joseph, and is stocked with a complete assortment of Fine  
Groceries, Fruits, Confectionery, etc.

Save freight and all unnecessary trouble by purchasing your  
Supplies from our Supply Boat, or direct from our stores at  
GRAVENHURST AND ROSSEAU  
Letter Orders have Prompt Attention.<sup>102</sup>

For visitors new to Muskoka, supply boats were unusual. But, to returning cottagers, it  
was an entirely normal way of obtaining groceries and provisions. Fanny Potts described how  
she explained the supply boat system to a first-time renter in Muskoka:

[W]hen strangers have rented a summer cottage and are coming up to the  
Muskoka Lakes for the first time, the question they invariably ask is, Where shall  
we obtain our supplies? Where shall we buy our meat, our butter, our groceries?  
Are there any stores near we can go to? And we reply with a laugh, No! there are  
no stores near, but the stores come to you instead of you going to the stores; they  
float up to your very doors, bringing you ‘everything under the sun,’ or, as that  
may be going too far, we will say, ‘everything we mortals can possibly need in  
Muskoka.’”<sup>103</sup>

The pattern of obtaining supplies that seemed logical elsewhere (making a trip to the store) was  
treated as abnormal, and the rather novel method of buying groceries (the store making a trip to  
the consumer) became ordinary.

Supply boats rushed to keep pace with the demand of affluent and capricious summer  
visitors. In 1902, commenting on the place supply boats assumed within the region’s society and  
economy, Potts claimed that “[the supply boat’s] trade has gradually grown to meet demand,

<sup>102</sup> *Muskoka Lakes Association 1902 Yearbook*, J.D. McMurrich, ed., (Toronto: Oxford Press, 1902), 64.

<sup>103</sup> Hathaway, *Muskoka Memories*, 218.

which is increasing every year, and in consequence they seem nearly always able to supply just what is needed.”<sup>104</sup>

The logistics necessary to provide these services and meet the constantly growing demand was extraordinary. For the employees responsible for Hanna’s boat, the day started at 4:30 am everyday stocking and preparing the steamer for the day. At J.J. Beaumont’s farm, butchers were up at 2:00 am butchering and dressing lambs to have them in the iceboxes aboard the boat by cast off at 7:00 am.<sup>105</sup> Hanna’s employees re-loaded foodstuffs, dry and fresh, each morning, and brought special orders of hardware on board as needed. The village butcher, George McCulley, supplied meat. The boat also needed to be loaded with fuelwood before the captain, engineers, butcher and grocer all piled aboard at 7:00 am. During the busy summer months, Hanna’s supply boats averaged about sixty calls per day, and often did not return to Port Carling until after 10:00pm.<sup>106</sup> For several years, starting in 1908, both of Hanna’s boats operated simultaneously; one boat working Lake Joseph, the other Lake Rosseau. The introduction of Homer’s supply boat, which also plied Lakes Rosseau and Joseph, prompted both merchants to agree not to run their boats on the same days. During the summer, each boat would call twice a week, and in the spring and fall only once, but never on Sundays.<sup>107</sup> In so doing, Hanna and Homer kept lakeside residents well supplied throughout the navigation season.

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 226. Supply boats did not always provide just what was needed. Cottagers often placed orders for items that were unavailable, and items ordered from the city were usually delivered by a Navigation Company steamer, not a supply boat.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 245

<sup>106</sup> Richard Tatley, *The Steamboat Era in the Muskokas: Volume II – The Golden Years to Present; A History of the Steam Navigation in the districts of Muskoka and Parry Sound, 1906-Present* (Erin, ON: Boston Mills Press, 1984), 38

<sup>107</sup> Scott, *Steam Tugs and Supply Boats*, 11.

Steamboat historian Harley E. Scott calls Muskoka's supply boats "a social institution."<sup>108</sup> As the supply boat moved up and down the lake, its three-toned whistle gave notice of its approach. If a settler or cottager wanted the boat to stop, a white flag was run up their flag pole to signal to the captain to pull into the closest wharf. Almost all stops were significant events, since neighbours would gather on whomever's wharf the boat docked at to buy groceries and pick up orders, sell produce, visit with day trippers aboard the boat and socialize.<sup>109</sup> Although there were plenty of other social occasions throughout the summer, such as dances, day-trips and regattas, a visit by the supply boat was an event in and of itself. As Scott points out, social standing was often indicated by the presence of a supply boat: "When a prosperous cottage built a suitable dock then all his neighbours rowed over to shop on the supply boat... . The steamer had to wait 20 minutes for everyone in the neighbourhood to arrive. The large docks became a status symbol, which everyone just had to have."<sup>110</sup> Yet, supply boats served all members of the local community, not just the wealthy.

Mabel Croucher Ames, whose family lived in relative isolation at Craigie Lea on Lake Joseph, remembers the excitement she felt and how important it was to the household when the supply boat stopped at their wharf:

...The boat would land at your dock, you would step on board, and there you would be in a small grocery store. There would be meats in the cold locker, fresh vegetables, canned goods, and all the staples.

It was always a big thrill for us children when the boat came in. Mother would always buy salt pork, prunes, raisins, and sugar, along with the week's supply of flour. Whenever she bought something else it was always for a special occasion. We had our own meat and vegetables so very seldom did we have to buy any of them.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>109</sup> "Ames Memoirs," MLM, 24

<sup>110</sup> Scott, *Steam Tugs and Supply Boats*, 10.

<sup>111</sup> "Ames Memoirs," MLM, 8.



Many of the busier wharfs and ports of call were sites of settler-tourist interface. Settlers sold produce, berries and dairy to the supply boat grocers, which was then sold to cottagers, campers and hotels around the lakes. In this way, supply boats distributed exogenous goods from stores like Eaton's or Michie's in Toronto as well as fresh local foods. At these sites, the supply boats represented a meeting of the bees (year-round residents) and the butterflies (seasonal residents).

Supply boats not only linked the production of mainland farms with the consumption of shoreline households, but often attempted to do so equitably. Since cottages and hotels closer to the eastern shores of the lower lakes were in much closer proximity to more fertile farmland, the risk was that those households would also have first choice of the fresh produce and meat each week, thereby denying households further away the most popular types of fruit, vegetables and cuts of meat. This was not the case, however, as butchers and grocers made every effort to distribute the farmers' products as fairly as possible. Potts recounts how this process worked aboard the *Constance*:

‘No’, [the butcher] says to one lady, ‘I can’t give you a hind-quarter of lamb to-day, you’ll have to take the fore-quarter. You had the hind-quarter last week. Everybody has to take their turn, for we can’t grow lambs with four hind-quarters even in Muskoka.’<sup>112</sup>

Although special orders were often made, this system made it more likely that highly prized items were evenly distributed around the lakes. This conscious effort on the part of supply boat grocers and butchers to equitably distribute their fresh products is probably what made it hard for many lakeside residents to choose which service they preferred. In fact, Fanny Potts' nephew sums up quite well, in a poem, what must have been typical sentiments:

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<sup>112</sup> Hathaway, *Muskoka Memories*, 221.

Which do I like best, the *Constance* or the *Mink*?  
 I'm 'fraid I don't quite know, I'll have to stop and fink;  
 I heard my mamma say last week to Auntie Nan,  
 'I get some things off each,' so just you try that plan.  
 I know the candy squares on board the *Mink* are grand,  
 And *Constance* man, he gives me apples in my hand;  
 So guess I love 'em both, they bring us everyfink  
 To eat and drink and wear, the *Constance* and the *Mink*.<sup>113</sup>

Regardless of the reason, supply boats remained reliable sources for almost any item someone in Muskoka could imagine. Acting as mobile extensions of both farms and general stores, the supply boats linked isolated Muskoka households with both exogenous consumer goods from the city, and fresh Muskoka farm products, such as vegetables, milk, eggs, and Muskoka lamb. This arrangement provided resilient socioecological linkages between settlers and tourists where the absence of an actual physical interface, as existed at Beaumaris or Rosseau, threatened to drastically reduce the development of more sustainable arrangements.

### Conclusion

In the forty or so years between the 1860s and the turn of the twentieth century, Muskoka's societal metabolism underwent dramatic changes. The pioneer period witnessed significant changes to the environment north of the Severn River, with the most noticeable landscape modifications taking place within the Muskoka River watershed. Free Grant Land homesteaders who arrived during the 1860s and 1870s discovered a relatively new environment. Certain environmental limitations inherent to the Shield, an unavoidable reliance on exogenous inputs from outside Muskoka, and a lack of proper markets for settlers to sell their farm products and labour posed formidable barriers to sustainable communities in the region. However, their efforts to understand and accumulate knowledge of their setting, while experimenting with

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 218.

different types of mixed farming suitable to the kind of variable local conditions typical of the Canadian Shield, helped create the foundations for more sustainable social, economic and environmental arrangements during the 1880s and 1890s. The growing interest in tourism and the wilderness experience in Ontario during the late nineteenth century helped solve many problems. Although the effects were most pronounced closest to the shores of Muskoka's three largest lakes (Muskoka, Rosseau, and Joseph), the influx of visitors during the summer months created interdependent relationships with settlers. The population of almost every township in Muskoka declined between 1881 and 1891.<sup>114</sup> And although several regained population by 1901, the expansion of Muskoka's societal metabolism had nothing to do with an increase in permanent population. Rather, the growth was attributable to the new arrangements made possible by tourism and cottaging. As Fanny Potts suggested in her turn-of-the-century memories, the arrival of butterfly-like tourists and their disposable income each year complemented the earnest and hard-working bee-like settlers who were in constant need of markets and cash. Initially, tourism had only a slight impact, as the majority of visitors were male hunters and anglers looking for a place to stay and perhaps a few meals between fishing and camping trips. By the mid-1880s, however, Muskoka was already experiencing a demographic transition of the seasonal population. Social reform trends encouraged men to have their wives and children join them in Muskoka. Boarding houses were turned into hotels, and the number of cottages grew steadily through the 1880s, 1890s and 1900s. The effect of this increase in Muskoka's summertime population was, predictably, to enlarge the region's overall societal metabolism. A sizeable portion of this growth came in the form of consumer goods, supplies,

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<sup>114</sup> Norman Hall MacKenzie, "The Economic and Social Development of Muskoka, 1855-1888" (Unpublished PhD. dissertation, University of Toronto, 1943), 244. See TABLE 1 in chapter 6.

tools, machines, foodstuffs, staples and information from places to the south, such as Toronto, Montreal, Pittsburgh, Chicago and New York. Exogenous inputs were an important and growing aspect of Muskoka's societal metabolism; Muskoka just could not provide all of its own needs, or wants. Nevertheless, there was a vibrant demand for many items people in Muskoka could and did provide. Tourism swelled the concentration of people adjacent to the shores of the lower lakes, requiring forest resources for building materials, fuel and aesthetics, and farm products, such as fresh vegetables, fruit, dairy, eggs and meat for households of all sizes. In many cases, settler households, whether in the form of a hotel or a successful farm, formed the nuclei of settler-tourist colonies where the two groups established more sustainable interdependent relationships. Not all households benefitted from the actual physical presence of the settler-tourist interface provided by the colony arrangement. Many households, especially cottages built on islands, were isolated from the kind of direct interdependency experienced by hotel guests and cottagers at Beaumaris or Rosseau. Supply boats alleviated this challenge by linking isolated households at the water's edge with farmers and merchants that otherwise were inconveniently located many miles away across the lakes. At a time when mobility was limited, supply boats brought the farmer's market or the general store, as well as the social interaction that went along with those places, right to the cottager's wharf. In this way, Muskoka's societal metabolism developed along far more resilient and sustainable lines during this period of realignment than during the pioneer period. Many of these sustainable arrangements continued throughout the first two decades of the twentieth century, but were joined by new social and technological forces that reshaped Muskoka's societal metabolism in less sustainable ways.

*Chapter 6: The Rise of Consumerism and Household Atomization, 1905-1920*

Muskoka's societal metabolism expanded significantly after the turn of the twentieth century. Tourism and the growth in cottaging played a key role. Within the context of increased tourism and cottaging, the exchange of local goods and services, which defined Muskoka's society and economy for two decades prior to 1900, declined in proportion to the flow of material and energy entering Muskoka from the south. Social and economic transformations that had begun to take shape across North America during the 1890s, and technological advancements that emerged after 1900 to enhance personal mobility, combined with an expansion of the region's railway capacity to reshape the pattern of consumption and dramatically reduce the sustainability of Muskoka's societal metabolism.

Prior to 1900, the realignment of Muskoka's society and economy toward the shoreline of the lower lakes (Muskoka, Rosseau and Joseph) and the interface that existed between year-round and seasonal households enabled more sustainable arrangements for communities in the region than had been possible just twenty years before. Having discovered the limitations and potential of their land, and experimented with what worked best during the 1860s and 1870s, settlers were in a good position to redirect their household energies towards accommodating tourism when wealthy people from the city began arriving in large numbers during the 1880s.

To a certain extent, the realignment of Muskoka's societal metabolism is evident in population statistics for the region. As TABLE 10 illustrates (see Appendix), the population of townships and urban areas next to the lower lakes increased by 20 percent between 1891 and

1911, while the population of townships further inland declined by 15 percent.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, Muskoka's seasonal population also surged. Hotels increased in size and overall capacity. By 1896, 30 hotels existed in Muskoka. That number jumped to 57 in 1903, and then again to 76 in 1909.<sup>2</sup> Between 1895 and 1915, more than 300 new summer homes were built.<sup>3</sup> Three hundred summer homes does not sound like many cottages. Yet if each cottage was occupied by a family of five and invited an average of ten additional guests each summer, this amounts to an increase of roughly 4,500 new annual summer visitors in two decades. In the summer of 1915, then, the number of cottagers roughly equalled the population of the five shoreline townships around the lower lakes listed in TABLE 1. Membership in the Muskoka Lakes Association (MLA) - an affiliation of mainly seasonal residents as well as a handful of more prominent year-round residents in Muskoka - also reflected a significant growth in the seasonal population. In 1902, the MLA Yearbook lists 182 separate members. In 1913, membership had climbed to 238 members, and in 1918 to 290.<sup>4</sup> The numerous hotels that appeared during the first decade of the twentieth century varied from small boarding houses to enormous resort hotels, while almost all of the new cottages were more elaborate than the earlier, minimalist cottages of the late 1870s and 1880s.

The increase in the seasonal population stemmed from, in part, the ballooning fame of the Muskoka Lakes throughout much of northeastern North America, as well as the easing of

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<sup>1</sup> Townships located close to the shores of the lower lakes, as well as those located further inland both experienced a population loss of about 13 per cent between 1911 and 1921. Roughly 60 per cent of the decline in both sets of townships are losses in male populations, suggesting that the First World War accounts for most of the population decrease in Muskoka between 1911 and 1921. Gravenhurst had been an important sawmilling centre during the late nineteenth century. By 1900, logging was in decline in Muskoka and Gravenhurst's population dropped as sawmills closed. See chapter 7 for more on the logging industry in Muskoka.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Tatley, *The Steamboat Era in the Muskokas: Volume I – To the Golden Years; A History of the Steam Navigation in the districts of Muskoka and Parry Sound, 1866-1905*. (Erin, ON: Boston Mills Press, 1983), 232.

<sup>3</sup> Graham Smith, "A Room with a View: Cottage Architects and Builders" *Summertimes: In Celebration of 100 Years of the Muskoka Lakes Association* (Erin, ON: Boston Mills Press, 1994), 137.

<sup>4</sup> Again, membership, like cottages, represented entire households, not just a single individual. *Muskoka Lakes Association 1902 Yearbook*, J.D. McMurrich, ed., (Toronto: Oxford Press, 1902); *Muskoka Lakes Association 1913 Yearbook*, Hugh Neilson, ed., (Toronto: Parker Bros., Ltd., 1913); *Muskoka Lakes Association 1918 Yearbook*, Hugh Neilson, ed., (Toronto: Parker Bros., Ltd., 1918).

Canada's depressed economy during the 1890s. Three other factors, however, combined to have a much greater influence on the growth of Muskoka's seasonal population and the resultant expansion of the region's societal metabolism.

The earliest of these factors was the rise of consumerism and the culture of convenience that permeated Victorian and Edwardian society in Canada, including Muskoka, at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries.<sup>5</sup> The availability of a wide variety of relatively affordable, mass-produced consumer goods through mail order from department stores and retailers, such as Eaton's in Toronto, allowed people in Muskoka to experience a standard of living comparable to that enjoyed in the city. Indeed, as Donica Belisle argues, the rise of a consumer society in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century symbolized "Canadian modernity" and the belief that a department store's "goods and services would enhance democratic life, strengthen the Canadian nation, and create citizen fulfillment."<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, the ability to replicate an urban lifestyle of affluence and convenience while on holiday in the woods next to the lake simply attracted more people to Muskoka.

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<sup>5</sup> A number of historians have explored the ways consumerism shaped society, culture and economy in postwar North America, but relatively less work has been done on the formative years of consumer culture around the turn of the twentieth century. Joy Parr, *Domestic Goods: The Material, the Moral, and the Economic in the Postwar Years* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999); Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003); Gregory Summers, *Consuming Nature: Environmentalism in the Fox River Valley, 1850-1950* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2006), 150-179. Examples of work done on the rise of consumer culture include: Jackson Lears, "From Salvation to Self-Realization: Advertising and the Therapeutic Roots of the Consumer Culture, 1880-1930" in *The Culture of Consumption: Critical Essays in American History, 1880-1980*, Richard Wightman and T.J. Jackson Lears, eds. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), 1-38; Susan Porter Benson, *Counter Cultures: Saleswomen, Managers, and Customers in American Department Stores, 1890-1940* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988); William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991), 310-340; Donica Belisle, *Retail Nation: Department Stores and the Making of Modern Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011).

<sup>6</sup> Belisle, *Retail Nation*, 4.

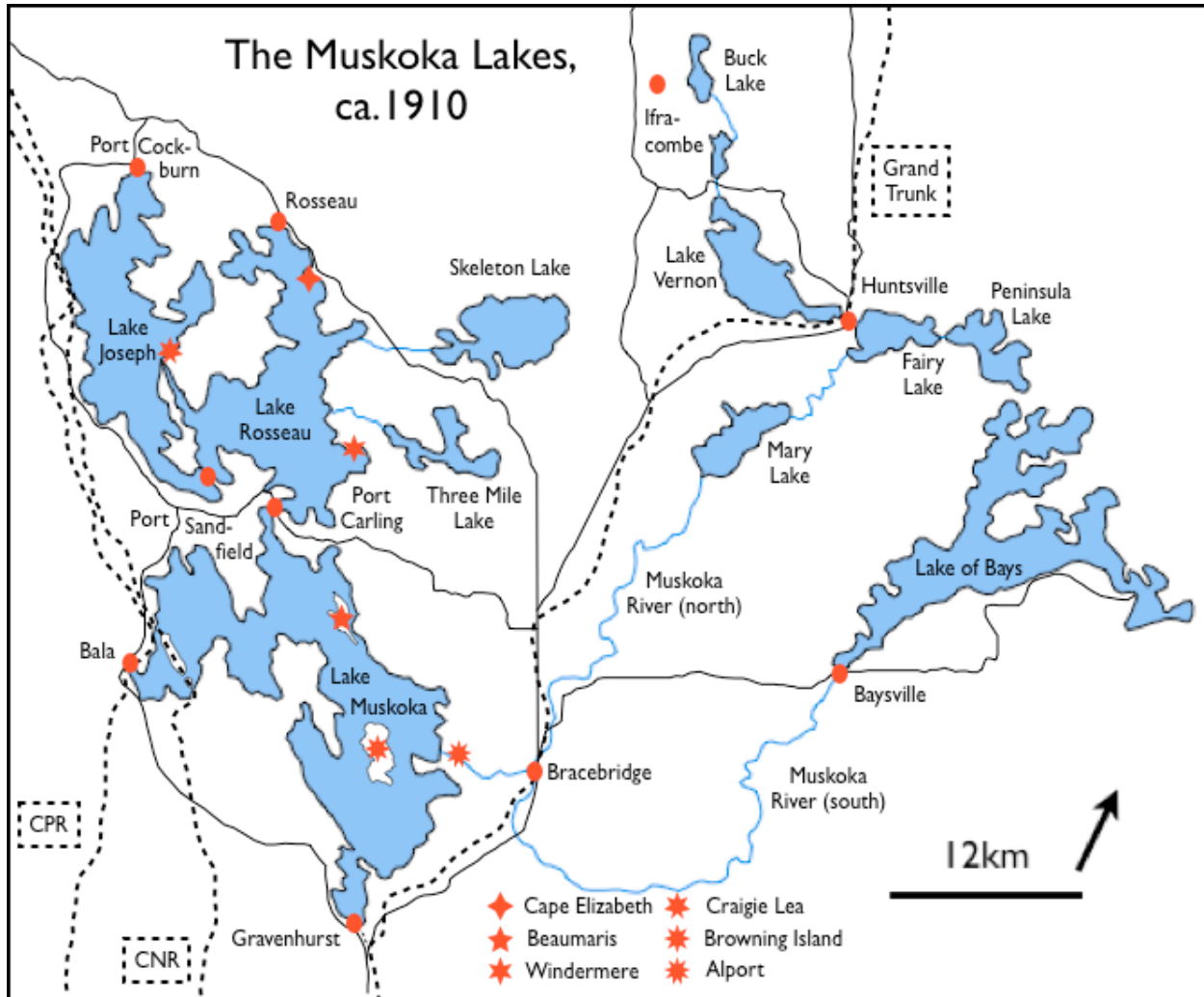


Image 7: The Muskoka Lakes, ca. 1910

The next factor influencing the growth of Muskoka's societal metabolism was the expansion of the region's network of railways. In less than a decade between 1897 and 1907, the number of railways in Muskoka went from one to four. In addition to the main Grand Trunk Railway line that ran up the east side of the lower lakes, with stations at Gravenhurst, Bracebridge and Huntsville, three more lines opened. The first was the Ottawa, Arnprior and Parry Sound Railway constructed across the top of the lower lakes and finished in 1897. This railway mainly hauled timber and freight, but occasionally transported passengers from the Ottawa area into Muskoka. In 1906 and 1907, two more lines, the Canadian Northern Railway



(CNoR) and the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) respectively, extended up the west side of the lower lakes with stations at Bala (on Lake Muskoka) and Barnesdale (on Lake Joseph). Not only did this dramatically improve communications with the outside world, and increase the number of passengers and the amount of freight that could be brought into Muskoka on a daily basis, but it also increased the number of entry points for people and freight transferring between railways and waterways. After 1907, people had a choice between four transfer points instead of two when traveling or having things shipped between the city and places on the lower lakes. Thus, the expansion of the region's railway capacity enabled Muskoka's societal metabolism to grow as well.

Finally, the arrival in Muskoka of the internal combustion engine and refined petroleum products intensified household-level energy consumption. Showing up around the same time as the CNoR and CPR lines were built up the west side of the lower lakes, motorboats offered lakeside residents a more convenient alternative to the rowboat, and also a more affordable and manageable form of personal mobility than the steam yacht. Motorboats enabled lakeside residents to travel more frequently to get to town, obtain supplies and visit friends without needing to rely on rigid steamboat schedules. For an elite few, internal combustion engines were used as stationary power plants to generate electricity for household consumption at cottages and summer estates. Regardless of the ways they were put to use, internal combustion engines relied exclusively on exogenous fuel inputs. Unlike steam engines, which were capable of burning wood or coal, combustion engines could only be powered by gasoline that came from outside Muskoka. The combustion engine's greatest influence, however, was the way it undermined the interconnectedness of year-round and seasonal households. With more flexible modes of

transportation at their disposal, lakeside residents were individually mobile, rather than collectively reliant on mass modes of transportation. The effect was that people made a greater number of consumer choices and mobility decisions independent of the local settler-tourist interface.

All three of these factors combined so that Muskoka fast became a setting for conspicuous consumption, which local merchants, farmers, and supply boats had trouble satisfying. The concept of conspicuous consumption was first posited by Thorstein Veblen in his highly influential and critical sociological study *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899).<sup>7</sup> Writing at precisely the same time as tourism, cottaging and consumer culture established a firm presence in Muskoka, Veblen argued that the leisure class (i.e. those with enough wealth to afford time away from work), having determined that labour was “intrinsically unworthy”, engaged in the possession, use, and ingestion of high-value goods and services with the express purpose of demonstrating social (or “honorific”) standing.<sup>8</sup> Canadian humourist, Stephen Leacock (a student of Veblen) took a satirical look at the leisure class in his novel *Arcadian Adventures with the Idle Rich* (1914). In chapter five of the novel, Peter Spillikins is invited to “rough it” in the “simplest fashion” at the Newberry’s woodland summer retreat, Castel Casteggio, a thinly veiled proxy for an opulent Muskoka cottage. Instead of roughing it, however, Spillikins arrives by train with “two quite large steamer trunks... together with his suit-case, tennis racket, and golf kit”, and is driven by car to “a beautiful house of white birch with sweeping piazzas and glittering conservatories, standing among great trees with rolling lawns broken with flower-beds as the ground sloped to the lake.” The simplest fashion consists of Mr. Newberry’s “plain flannel

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<sup>7</sup> Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, Martha Banta, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 28-69.

trousers, not worth more than six dollars a leg, an ordinary white silk shirt... that couldn't have cost more than fifteen dollars, and... an ordinary Panama hat, say forty dollars.”<sup>9</sup> Yet, while such excessiveness remained the purview of the leisure class, the general pattern of consumption normalized by wealth was not limited to the idle rich. As Veblen argued, the conspicuous consumption exhibited by the leisure class informed an over-arching culture of consumption that permeated all segments of society.

This new pattern of household consumption created a disconnect between producers and consumers and relied on non-renewable energy to fuel the technologies that artificially obscured those separations. The result was that Muskoka's societal metabolism became less sustainable as households underwent atomization. If communities in Muskoka, from settler-tourist colonies to small towns to larger urban centres, can be thought of as socioecological molecules, then households were the atoms that comprised those molecules, and the interdependencies between them the bonds that held the atoms together. Atomization can therefore be understood as a process whereby the bonds between households and the local socioecological community dissociate at the same time as households form new bonds on an individual basis with larger more distant socioecological systems. Not only is the diversity and resiliency of the local community reduced as households function increasingly separate from one another, but in becoming more isolated from one another, those households also become increasingly dependent on systems over which they have little or no control. New consumer options for Muskoka households based on the enhanced availability of goods and services from outside Muskoka weakened, and eventually dissolved, interdependent relationships within the local economy,

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<sup>9</sup> Stephen Leacock, *Arcadian Adventures with the Idle Rich* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1989), 112-116; For more on the parallels between Leacock's chapter on cottaging and Muskoka, see Peter Stevens, "Getting Away From it All: Family Cottaging in Postwar Ontario" (PhD. dissertation, York University, 2010), 71.

which had been so important less than a generation earlier. To the visible, knowable bonds between households in Muskoka were added the more numerous and dominant, yet ultimately obscured, connections with the wider capitalist markets of North America. The arrival of consumer culture and individual modes of transportation based on fossil fuels introduced new choices to the household economy in Muskoka, and exposed the most sustainable arrangements - the interdependencies between seasonal and year-round residents - to enormous pressures and competition from exogenous inputs.<sup>10</sup>

Yet, the process of atomization was always incomplete, especially during the first two decades of the twentieth century. Much of Muskoka's late nineteenth-century societal metabolism remained intact despite these new social and technological forces. Exogenous inputs had always been an on-going and unavoidable fact of life in Muskoka. Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, many household items were obtained from outside the region, including tools, home furnishings and many different foods. At the same time, interdependent relationships between neighbouring households formed the core of more sustainable communities. In addition to exchanging goods and services with one another, settlers sold fresh farm products and their labour to tourists and cottagers. As the number of hotels and cottages grew so too did the importance of these interdependent relationships. With the rise of consumerism and the atomization of households after the turn of the century, these local features of Muskoka's societal metabolism were not simply replaced by new linkages with the city to the south. Rather, these new linkages were overlaid onto pre-existing locally-based material and energy flows. As such, households in Muskoka were never atomized completely. Settlers

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<sup>10</sup> This process of atomization was not complete, since interconnections and exchanges continued to exist on many levels between seasonal and year-round residents.

continued to work for hotels and cottagers, and supply them with fresh vegetables, dairy, eggs and meat. But, over time and in subtle ways, the new linkages began to undermine the resiliency of local interdependencies, and lessen the sustainability of Muskoka's societal metabolism.

### The Resiliency of Local Interdependencies

Even as the process of household atomization unfolded, the most sustainable features continued to revolve around the functioning of, and exchange between, interdependent households. In Port Carling, the Medora and Wood Agricultural Society Fall Fair reinforced the interdependent relationships amongst year-round residents whose livelihoods formed the foundations of the community's arrangement with the tourist industry. As Ross Fair, Daniel Mizener and others have shown, agricultural fairs were a way for members of farming communities to gather, share expertise, celebrate culture and reaffirm the foundations of the rural economy.<sup>11</sup> Over one hundred different names appear as prize winners in the Fall Fair Entry Book between 1907 and 1912. Nineteen won prizes every year, and 44 won prizes at least three of the six years for which records exist.<sup>12</sup> An average of about 48 different men and women split nearly 1,000 prizes each year in dozens of categories, including grain crops, garden vegetables, fruit, livestock, maple syrup, preserves, baked goods and flowers. Those who won on a regular basis, such as Joseph McCulley who owned a butcher shop in Port Carling, took home prizes in many, sometimes dozens, of categories, worth between \$15-20 every year. Most winners,

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<sup>11</sup> For more on the ways agricultural fairs reinforced community and best farming practices see Wayne Caldwell Neely, *The Agricultural Fair* (New York: AMS Press, 1967); Thomas R. Irwin, "Government Funding of Agricultural Associations in Late Nineteenth Century Ontario" (PhD. dissertation, University of Western Ontario, 1997); Ross D. Fair, "Gentlemen, Farmers, and Gentlemen Half-Farmers: The Development of Agricultural Societies in Upper Canada, 1792-1846" (PhD. dissertation, Queen's University, 1998); David Mizener, "Furrows and Fairgrounds: Agriculture, Identity, and Authority in Twentieth-Century Rural Ontario" (PhD. dissertation, Toronto: York University, 2009).

<sup>12</sup> "Medora and Wood Agricultural Society Fall Fair Entry Book, 1907-1912," Muskoka Lakes Museum, no accession number.

however, generally won only a few prizes worth between \$5-6 on average. At a time when a dozen eggs or a pound of butter cost about \$0.15 and a bag of flour cost \$2-3 in Muskoka, prizes of one or two dollars were quite valuable.<sup>13</sup> The most sustainable social, economic and environmental arrangements involved households that optimized the productive capacity of good agricultural land close to the shores of the lower lakes by selling agricultural produce to tourists and cottagers during the summer. Thus, the level of participation evident in the annual fall fair demonstrates that the community continued to place value on farming excellence, that dozens of households continued to identify to varying degrees with farming, and that even after the turn of the century the foundations for these arrangements continued to exist in Muskoka.

Outside Port Carling, this community of settlers and year-round residents carried on close-knit interdependent relationships based on intimate knowledge of the environment and flexible responses to the seasonal demands of tourism. Charles Riley and his family settled land on lot 21, concession 10, and lot 22, concession 11, in Monck Township. By the turn of the century, their farm 'Brooklands' had become reasonably successful and was comparable in many regards to other homesteaders in close proximity to the lakes. But, they were not *on* the lake. As a result, Charles Riley, his wife Emma, and their eight children never benefitted from tourism directly, the way lakeside settlers did during the late nineteenth century. Nevertheless, the family was only a short distance away from the community of Beaumaris on Lake Muskoka where a large hotel and steamer wharf formed the nucleus for one of Muskoka's earliest settler-tourist colonies. Undoubtedly, the Rileys benefitted *indirectly* from being so close to this hub of social and economic activity. Around 1900, however, Charles Riley's second youngest child, Charles

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<sup>13</sup> "General Store Ledger of George Henry Homer, 1896-1901," Gravenhurst Public Library Archives, Box 35, Gravenhurst, Ontario.

(Charlie) Walker Riley, bought a piece of property along the shore of Lake Muskoka from Charles Kaye on lot 32, concession 12 in Monck Township.<sup>14</sup> The land included a home, which Charlie converted into a boarding house and named ‘Scarcliff’. Although it is not clear when, at some point before 1909, Charlie’s two unmarried sisters, Mary H. (Hettie), and Julia (Leena), moved in with their brother to help run the hotel and take care of the household. Leena Riley kept a diary, between October 1909 and May 1914, of her days living at Scarcliff. Despite many of the new social and technological forces influencing her life, Riley’s diary entries reveal that many of the most sustainable features of Muskoka’s societal metabolism continued to operate in ways critical to the success of the hotel.<sup>15</sup>

Scarcliff itself was not situated on land suitable for much more than a vegetable garden and grazing land for a few sheep, pigs, and dairy cows. The property was well-wooded, however, and provided for almost all Scarcliff’s fuelwood needs. In the spring Charlie bought piglets from Bickmore’s in Bracebridge, which he would fatten up over the summer to slaughter in the fall.<sup>16</sup> Several lambs were born each year in the late winter or early spring, most of which were sold in June either in Port Carling or Bracebridge, but occasionally to J.J. Beaumont who operated a supply boat.<sup>17</sup> Both Scarcliff and Brooklands kept many dairy cows, which produced large quantities of milk, cream and butter that the owners regularly sold or traded with neighbours. Scarcliff does not appear to have kept chickens or horses. The Rileys at Scarcliff almost always

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<sup>14</sup> Barbaranne Boyer, *Muskoka’s Grand Hotels*, Richard Tatley, ed. (Erin, ON: Boston Mills Press, 1987), 74.

<sup>15</sup> Tourism aside, the diverse ways households provided for their own needs and generated income shared parallels with rural communities throughout Ontario in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Adam Crerar, “Ties That Bind: Farming, Agrarian Ideals, and Life in Ontario, 1890-1930” (PhD. dissertation, University of Toronto, 1999).

<sup>16</sup> “Diary of Julia ‘Leena’ Riley - Diary of Pioneers at Milford Bay, October 19, 1909-May 31, 1910,” April-May 1910, 1912, 1913, October-November 1909-1912, Archives of Muskoka Steamship and Historical Society, Drawer FC 1c, Gravenhurst, Ontario.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, June 1910, 1912.

obtained eggs from Brooklands or a neighbour and borrowed horses from either the Kayes, whose land adjoined Scarcliff to the west, or the Huttons, who operated a hotel of their own across the bay. Leena Riley does not mention Charlie entering the fall fair, nor does he appear in the entry books. However, several of their neighbours won prizes at the fair: James Kaye won prizes in diverse categories, including bread, apples, cabbage and colt, while Jack Hutton consistently increased the number of his entries each year, and won in the categories of celery, squash, tomatoes, maple syrup, chickens and cattle.<sup>18</sup> Tourism permeated most aspects of Muskoka's society, economy and environment after the turn of the century. What made this the most sustainable arrangement for people living in Muskoka, however, was the extent to which households continued to rely on one another and their knowledge of the land during this period.

As had been true earlier, throughout the first quarter of the twentieth century, farms continued to form the heart of the largest and most successful hotel operations in Muskoka. In the 1915 *Muskoka Lakes Bluebook, Directory and Chart*, six of seventeen hotels featured farms in advertisements. Summit House at the north end of Lake Joseph noted a "Dairy and Vegetable Farm in connection [with the hotel]," while Ernescliffe on Lake Rosseau assured guests that a "Large farm supplies eggs, poultry, milk, vegetables, etc."<sup>19</sup> In the 1918 *Bluebook*, thirteen of the 33 hotels that took out advertisements featured farms. Two of the thirteen were Elgin House on Lake Joseph, which boasted that their "table is liberally supplied from the farm and garden belonging to the house," and Scarcliff, which highlighted "200 acres of Farm and Forest Lands... ." <sup>20</sup> Almost all hotels continued to operate farms of varying sizes to supply much of their own fresh vegetables, dairy, eggs and meat. The reference to farms and gardens in hotel

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<sup>18</sup> "Medora and Wood Fall Fair Entry Book," 11, 25, 41, 57, 88, 89, 106, 155, 172, 185.

<sup>19</sup> John Rogers, *Muskoka Lakes Bluebook, Directory and Chart, 1915* (Port Sandfield, ON: John Rogers, 1915).

<sup>20</sup> John Rogers, *Muskoka Lakes Bluebook, Directory and Chart, 1918* (Port Sandfield, ON: John Rogers, 1918).



advertisements suggests that some proprietors understood that many guests still recognized the importance of locally available fresh foods.

The majority of interdependent relationships the Riley's maintained were with other households within walking distance of Scarcliff. As most of what Leena and her siblings needed could be obtained closeby, part of this arrangement appears to have been pragmatic. Yet, as we saw in the case of Mabel Croucher Ames in chapter 5, another aspect shaping these relationships was the gendered access to transportation. Since society expected women to manage the domestic sphere and the household during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries it just did not stand to reason that women should have access to a vehicle.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, as Marjorie Griffin Cohen says, "the problems of adequate transportation to urban markets often forced women to barter their farm produce for groceries or to trade with neighbours who could provide some essential service."<sup>22</sup> None of the three traveled by steamboat more than once or twice a year. Instead, walking and rowboats were the most common form of transportation for Leena and Hettie, while Charlie almost always received a ride by wagon or sleigh from a neighbour. Thus,

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<sup>21</sup> Marjorie Griffin Cohen, *Women's Work: Markets, and Economic Development in Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 22. A similar justification for limiting farm women's mobility existed in New York State, where "[household] responsibilities restricted travel over great distances" and "[t]he more discrete character of men's tasks, coupled with the greater mobility inherent in their work, gave them relatively more freedom to interact with others beyond the locality." Nancy Grey Osterud, *The Bonds of Community: The Lives of Farm Women in Nineteenth-Century New York* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 233. According to David Mizener, "Women only rarely took the reins or wheel, the non-commercial world of the home being her principal sphere of interest." Mizener, "Furrows and Fairgrounds," 250. Mizener's study shows that none of the rhetoric surrounding the ideals of homemaking, domesticity, and farm women required that women have access to personal modes of transportation, such as horse and wagon/sleigh or automobile. Mizener, "Furrows and Fairgrounds," 238-253; Crerar, "Ties That Bind," 57, 103-105; As Monda Halpern has pointed out, "men claimed almost indisputable rights to the family farm" and therefore "ownership of production." Monda Halpern, *And on That Farm He Had a Wife: Ontario Farm Women and Feminism, 1900-1970* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), 15-16. Since wagons, sleighs and later automobiles were property and essential technologies for agricultural production and commodity exchange, access to these modes of transportation tended to be restricted for women. On those rare occasions when farm women did use a vehicle, it was usually to attend market. Cohen, *Women's Work*, 88-89; Osterud, *Bonds of Community*, 151.

<sup>22</sup> Cohen, *Women's Work*, 101.

many of the interdependent relationships maintained by the Scarcliff household occurred within a short distance from home, in part because women had only limited mobility options.

Limited transportation does not appear to have been a major hindrance in the summer when Scarcliff became a hive of activity. During July and August, Leena Riley was extremely busy accommodating guests at Scarcliff, since her diary entries always stop toward the end of June and recommence late in September. The hotel remained quite busy every summer between 1909 and 1914, with between eighteen and twenty-five people staying at any given time.<sup>23</sup> Scarcliff was also part of a wider community that included Beaumaris, Milford Bay, Hutton House, Port Carling and assorted islands in close proximity to the north shore of Lake Muskoka that followed the same ebb and flow of tourism every summer.

The turn of the century witnessed no momentous changes to the important place of general stores in the local community, or their role in shaping Muskoka's societal metabolism. In Port Carling, William Hanna continued to be the most prosperous and ubiquitous merchant in Muskoka. Throughout the year, Hanna's kept year-round residents well supplied, and in the summer his supply boats plied the lakes connecting lakeside consumers with producers at distant points on the lakes. Judging from Leena Riley's diary, the Scarcliff household did not often make purchases from Hanna during fall, winter or spring. An entry on June 27, 1911, in which Riley notes that "Hanna's supply boat called for the *first time* this year" suggests, however, that during the busy summer the hotel (and its guests) relied on Hanna's more often.<sup>24</sup>

The Rileys' cousins, the Pennys, lived less than a kilometre away on the east shore of Arthurlie Bay on Lake Rosseau. Harry Penny bought 160 acres from Benjamin Hardcastle

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<sup>23</sup> "Riley Diary," September 1912, AMSHS.

<sup>24</sup> "Riley Diary," June 1911, AMSHS, emphasis added.

Johnson in 1898 when the latter moved to Port Carling to build boats. Harry had a frame house built the same year, and he, his wife Emily, and their seven children, ran a small farm, which they called ‘Shennamere’. In addition to the income generated from their farm, Harry also built cottages and worked as a carpenter. In her memoirs, Harry’s youngest daughter, Bessie, recalls a typical life growing up on a Muskoka farm next to the lake. Their family benefitted from tourism and maintained close ties with extended family and neighbours in the community. Born in 1908, her childhood memories feature Hanna’s general store prominently:

One or two of us [children] usually accompanied Dad when he would go by boat to Port Carling for groceries at Hanna’s General Store. That old store always had a pleasant aroma, emanating from coffee, molasses, cheese, broken biscuits (kept in a wood barrel), fruits in summer time, and other commodities. Sometimes we had a jar of fresh buttermilk for one of the men clerks, and he usually repaid us in candy...<sup>25</sup>

On the main floor, Hanna sold groceries and dry goods where the clerks, according to Bessie, “were kept really busy since they had to measure or weigh out a half-pound of this and five pounds of that, then wrap each brown paper bag with a couple rounds of string.”<sup>26</sup> The lower floor was the hardware, including tools, cookware, dishes, rope and coal oil for lamps.<sup>27</sup> Located in Port Carling - the ‘hub of the lakes’ - Hanna’s general store was a central place for the flow of both exogenous and local materials in Muskoka.

At the north end of Lake Rosseau, the George Henry Homer’s general store served much the same purpose. Although perhaps not as vital as Hanna’s store, Homer’s was still an important hub of exchange. In 1887, George Henry Homer opened a general store in Gravenhurst, which stayed in business for more than twenty years. Building on the success of his store in

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<sup>25</sup> Bessie Waters, *Country Tales: A Collection of Colourful Old-time Reminiscences by a Muskoka Lady* (Bracebridge, ON: MOS Graphics, 1992?), 6.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

Gravenhurst, Homer opened a second general store in Rosseau, in 1890.<sup>28</sup> A ledger including accounts from 1896 to 1901 reveals the importance of Homer's store to the surrounding community, as well as the different patterns of consumption that existed for seasonal and year-round residents.<sup>29</sup> Homer kept accounts with over 400 year-round and seasonal households, in addition to several churches, sawmills, the Navigation Company, the Muskoka Leather Company and the Ontario Government. Most of the accounts are with year-round residents whose households were located either along the shoreline of Lake Rosseau and Lake Joseph, or else back from the lake in the vicinity of the village. It is difficult to determine exactly how many were cottage accounts, but the 1915 *Muskoka Lakes Bluebook* directory can identify twelve, including four members of the Cape Elizabeth colony south of Rosseau.

At some point near the end of the nineteenth century, after their father F.W. Coate had died in 1893, the Coate brothers expanded the Cape Elizabeth colony. Sten (P.S.) took up summer residence in his father's home, while Charlie (C.B.) and Fred, as well as their friend, A.J. Warwick, built cottages of their own on land bought from the Coate family.<sup>30</sup> Fred's accounts with Homer consist of only four purchases, but his brothers and Warwick visited Homer far more frequently during their visits to Muskoka. Although it is unclear how much time each of these men actually spent in Muskoka, members of each household continued to make purchases at Homer's throughout the summer months, suggesting that, at the very least, their wives and families spent the entire summer at the cottage. In most years, the first purchase made by Sten, Charlie or Warwick occurred during the first or second week of June, while the last purchase

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<sup>28</sup> Tatley, *Steamboat Era*, Vol.I, 250.

<sup>29</sup> "Homer Ledger," Gravenhurst Archives. Several historians have outlined how important general stores were to hinterland communities. Graeme Wynn, *Timber Colony: An Historical Geography of Early Nineteenth Century New Brunswick* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981); Beatrice Craig, *Backwoods consumers and homespun capitalists: the rise of a market culture in eastern Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009).

<sup>30</sup> Rogers, *Bluebook* (1915), 21, 22, 27.

usually came sometime in early or mid-September. Warwick's account suggests his family stayed an average of 85 days each summer, while Sten's family stayed 75 days, and Charlie's family only 56. Over the course of the summer, as TABLES 11 and 12 illustrate (see Appendix), each of these households generally made frequent trips to Homer's store, but usually never for more than a few items at a time.

Sten and Charlie's brother, Harry (H.J.) lived year-round at Cape Elizabeth, working the farm he and his father had built during the 1880s and 1890s. Harry's account with Homer reveals a different pattern of consumption than the seasonal households at Cape Elizabeth. Instead of frequent trips for only a few items, Harry visited Homer's store about once or twice a month and purchased a dozen or more items each time. Hotel owners also relied on Homer for many supplies. John Monteith, owner of Monteith House in Rosseau made one or two trips per week to acquire just two or three items at a time, while Amy Brown of Maplehurst Hotel visited Homer every other day. Further south on Lake Rosseau, Alfred Judd made trips to Rosseau from Juddhaven for several items about once or twice a month. These different patterns of consumption shared one thing in common, at the turn of the century they all met certain on-going needs with visits to the general store.

Some households were too far away from Rosseau to make more than a handful of visits to Homer's store. In these cases, Homer's supply boat brought the store to them. In 1896, the first year that accounts are recorded in the ledger, Enoch Cox, owner of Prospect House, made only six visits to Homer's store in Rosseau. At the beginning of that year, Cox sold his steamer, the *Edith May*, to Homer for use as a supply boat. By the end of the year, Cox's supply boat account with Homer totaled \$173.55 (approximately 86 percent of his entire store account with

Homer that year). The following two years were similar, with Cox spending \$223.33 (or 87 percent of his total account) in 1897, and \$274.67 (or 77 percent of his total account) in 1898, on the supply boat. Two events in 1898 changed the Cox family's relationship with Homer. The first was that Enoch Cox died, and the second was that Homer sold the *Edith May*, and replaced it with a different steamer, the *Constance*. The following year Enoch's son, Edward (Ed), made only \$15.87 worth of purchases from the *Constance*, while in 1900 the tab was a mere \$0.87. Clearly, Ed Cox did not feel the same affinity to Homer and the *Constance*, as his father did to the store and the *Edith May*. More than likely, the Cox family began acquiring what they needed from Hanna's supply boat. But, it is also possible Cox found alternatives to supply boats altogether. The general store and its supply boat continued to act as a central distributor of goods in Muskoka, but their role within the local economy was subject to changing circumstances. Around this time, new cultural trends and patterns of consumption originating from the city expanded the region's societal metabolism by overlaying novel exogenous inputs onto locally-available ones. In certain cases, this development weakened the relationship cottagers and settlers alike had with general stores and local farms.

### The Rise of Consumerism

Cox's sister, Fanny Potts thought of the supply boats as "Eaton's in miniature."<sup>31</sup> That Potts chose to compare a supply boat (which made farm products and other supplies conveniently available to almost all lakeside residents) with a mail order department store in Toronto suggests that she, and other shoreline residents in Muskoka, felt Eaton's goods had become almost as easy to access as potatoes or milk from across the lake. If Potts' perspective is

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<sup>31</sup> Ann Hathaway, *Muskoka Memories: Sketches from Real Life* (Toronto: William Briggs, 1904), 218.

taken as representative of the general view in Muskoka at the time, Eaton's and the pattern of consumption made possible by mail order catalogue shopping had entered the popular consciousness of Muskoka by the turn of the twentieth century.

Emerging in tandem with department stores and mail order catalogues was a new pattern of consumption, which increasingly came to characterize early twentieth century society, culture and economy in North America. Using definitions established by Donica Belisle,

The word 'consumer' denotes an individual who is pursuing, purchasing, or using commodities. The term 'consumerism' indicates a social, cultural, and economic predisposition toward consumer activity, and the phrase 'consumer society' refers to a society in which much social, cultural, and economic activity is oriented around consumer activity. A consumer culture is one predisposed to consumerism, and 'consumption,' finally, refers to the process whereby commodities are pursued, purchased, and used.<sup>32</sup>

As this new consumer culture took hold, the proportion of Muskoka's societal metabolism made up of exogenous inputs grew significantly compared to the material and energy derived locally.

As Bessie Waters recalled, the general store may have been "the heart of the village," but "What could not be purchased in Hanna's could be ordered through Eaton's catalogue."<sup>33</sup>

Timothy Eaton opened his first department store in 1869, and the store printed its first catalogue in 1884. By the 1890s Eaton's was distributing mail order catalogues to customers across Canada, including Muskoka.<sup>34</sup> These catalogues made it possible for people living in rural areas to gain access to basic supplies, hardware, staples, groceries and new consumer products that had previously required either a special trip to the city or a third party to prepare the shipment. Once catalogue orders became available, people of all classes throughout rural Canada

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<sup>32</sup> Belisle, *Retail Nation*, 9-10.

<sup>33</sup> Waters, *Country Tales*, 35.

<sup>34</sup> Belisle, *Retail Nation*, 20-24; "Canadian Mail Order Catalogues, History" (Library and Archives of Canada) <http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/mailorder/029006-200-e.html> Last accessed February 9, 2014.

were encouraged to order whatever they pleased.<sup>35</sup> Muskoka had always been reliant on inputs from outside the region, but this new pattern of consumption transformed exogenous inputs into abstract commodities and products. As William Cronon argues for the case of the Montgomery Ward department store in the United States, with mail order catalogues, “There was no need to wonder where such things came from - how they had been created, by whom, from what materials, with what consequences for the place in which they had been made - for the answer to that question stopped at the [department store].”<sup>36</sup> As residents in Muskoka made increasing use of Eaton’s mail orders, the region’s societal metabolism expanded to include a new layer of consumption entirely obscured from processes of production and distribution that created them.

The rise of consumerism coincided very closely with Timothy Eaton’s purchase of a summer estate, Ravenscrag, on Lake Rosseau just south of Windermere. In 1896, Eaton bought four and a half acres from Francis Forge (Muskoka’s first supply boat operator), who had subdivided the point of land directly south of Windermere.<sup>37</sup> Eaton likely observed the growing affluence of Muskoka’s cottaging and vacationing community, and endeavoured to create a market geared toward their needs and wants. Whether Eaton shaped consumerism in Muskoka, or Muskoka influenced Eaton’s marketing (probably a bit of both), Eaton’s became an important component of Muskoka’s expanding societal metabolism only a few years after he and his family built their summer home.

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<sup>35</sup> Catalogues made it possible for Eaton’s and other department stores to target consumers in small towns and farms, in addition to the urban clientele who more frequently visited the stores in person. Belisle, *Retail Nation*, 14, 27. Targeting the enormous buying power of the lower-middle class and working class, Eaton’s managed to build an economy of scale that supported dominion-wide business. Muskoka is distinctive in this history in that it generated business across all consumer demographics, from the typical rural resident to the most affluent seasonal cottager.

<sup>36</sup> Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis*, 339. Prior to mail order catalogues from large department stores with incredible economies of scale that could bring together nearly every consumer product imaginable, general stores may have held any number of items in stock that were not produced locally. But, in most cases, manufactured goods, and especially luxury items, had to be ordered from the company or person who made them, which demanded the consumer have a fuller idea of the connections between production and consumption.

<sup>37</sup> Richard Tatley, *Windermere: The Jewel of Lake Rosseau* (Erin, ON: Boston Mills Press, 1999), 25.



It is not possible, with the sources available, to provide a thorough analysis of the kinds of things households in Muskoka ordered from Eaton's during this time period. All Eaton's records for sales in Ontario are aggregate values, and while they do provide item breakdowns, they do not specify where in Ontario specific products were sold. The catalogues themselves, however, provide a fairly accurate glimpse of the influence mail order consumerism had on the societal metabolism of places like Muskoka. In 1900, Eaton's released a 'Camper's Supplies' supplement to its summer catalogue.<sup>38</sup> The booklet itself featured a variety of photographs and sketches depicting people and landscapes that may very well have been inspired by places in Muskoka. It lists camping supplies, such as canned vegetables, biscuits, coffee, fresh and dried fruit, salted and smoked meats, preserves and condiments, as well as toiletries, fishing tackle and tents. On the last page, the booklet juxtaposed a description of the benefits of ordering by mail with a sketch of the rural setting Eaton's both serviced and competed with:

No matter how far away from Toronto you may be this summer this store's goods and its unequalled facilities are at your disposal, and within your easy reach. Simply write to our Mail Order Department, telling them your wants or expressing your wishes, and we will do the rest...<sup>39</sup>

By framing their mail order goods as "within your easy reach," Eaton's claimed the same advantage that local farmers, merchants and supply boats had offered throughout the previous two decades. During the 1880s and 1890s, people in Muskoka had turned to year-round residents to provide for many of their needs, because local sources were all that was within "easy reach." This applied as much for cottagers and tourists as it did for settlers and other year-round residents. After the turn of the century, as the culture of consumerism was firmly established,

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<sup>38</sup> "Camper's Supplies, 1900," AO, T. Eaton's Records, F229-5-0-58, no.2.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p.26.

Eaton's was in a position to fulfill the wants of folks in Muskoka almost as quickly as customers could fill out and mail in an order form.

In 1901, along with the camping supplies and provisions offered in the 26-page supplement of the previous year, a full 73-page Summer Catalogue featured a far wider variety of goods and consumer products, including garden tools, sporting goods, canoes and rowboats, refrigerators, screen doors, veranda chairs, cutlery, books, sewing machines and women's fashions. Whereas the 1900 campers' supplement represented an early attempt to tap into a new market of seasonal leisure activity, the 1901 Summer Catalogue was clearly aimed at a middle-class, white female demographic, whose disposable income enabled a pattern of summer living that functioned as an extension of an established lifestyle.<sup>40</sup> Of the nineteen pages devoted to clothing, five pages featured men's apparel, while fourteen showcased the latest girls', and particularly, women's fashions and accessories. Being at the cottage, or on vacation at a hotel, was an exercise and display of wealth and consumption, as much as it was an occasion of recreation, leisure and socializing.

Although Eaton's catered to all forms of consumption, other firms targeted the more conspicuous forms. One of the more popular firms that sought the business of the leisure class was Michie & Company of Toronto. On the back cover of a turn-of-the-century Williamson Book Company pocket map of the lower lakes, entitled *Muskoka Lakes: Rosseau, Joseph,*

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<sup>40</sup> Proscribed gender roles around the turn of the century informed patterns of consumption. A man's role was to be outside the home in the public sphere of 'production', while "private consumption was connected with the household, and women were charged with acquiring goods... [Women] acquired necessities and status-laden goods, the latter essential to the formation of bourgeois class identity." Belisle, *Retail Nation*, 127-128. For more on the role race and class played in Eaton's attempts to associate consumerism with modernity and nationalism, see Belisle, *Retail Nation*, 45-81; Victoria de Grazia, "Changing Consumption Regimes" in *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective*, Victoria de Grazia with Ellen Forlough, eds. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 11-24.

*Muskoka and all the Islands, Hotels, Steamboat and Canoe Routes, Cottages, etc.*, Michie's included an advertisement aimed at affluent tourists:

Established Over 50 Years  
 MICHIE & CO  
 ...Family Grocers...  
 Purveyors of  
 Fine Table Delicacies  
 Provisions and Cigars

Camping and Holiday Supplies a Specialty  
 Importers of  
 Fine Wines, Spirits  
 and Mineral Waters

Telephone 409

MICHIE & CO  
 7 King Street West, Near Yonge St.  
 Branch Store – 440 Spadina Ave.<sup>41</sup>

According to local historian Brendan O'Brien, whose family spent summers at a cottage adjacent to Summit House at Port Cockburn during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, shipments from both Eaton's and Michie's arrived by Navigation Company steamer. "Michies in particular," O'Brien recalls, "were widely known for its fine food and wide range of camping equipment. Shipments arrived in wooden boxes... containing food, such as bacon, sausages, cheeses, olives and other delicacies."<sup>42</sup> O'Brien also remembers dew worms arriving from Michie's packed in sphagnum moss.

Also of particular note are the cameras and photographic supplies that were available. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the well-known Toronto photographer Frank Micklethwaite took the most famous and important images of life in Muskoka. According

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<sup>41</sup> *Muskoka Lakes: Rosseau, Joseph, Muskoka and all the Islands, Hotels, Steamboat and Canoe Routes, Cottages, etc.* (Williamson Book Co., unknown date), 189.

<sup>42</sup> Brendan O'Brien, *The Prettiest Spot in Muskoka*, (Toronto: Bobolink Books, 1999), 124-125.

to local historian Gary Denison, Micklethwaite first visited Muskoka in 1887, and traveled around the lakes taking pictures of things that interested him and selling prints to lakeside residents. Micklethwaite returned each summer for the next two decades or so, setting up a small workshop along the shore at Port Sandfield.<sup>43</sup> Micklethwaite's work, combined with the increasing number of postcards depicting scenes around the lakes, likely contributed to the inspiration of many Muskoka households to invest in cameras after the turn of the century. Owning a camera must have been extremely appealing in Muskoka. Campers, hotel guests and cottagers not only consumed a variety of local farm products and woodland resources, but the aesthetics of the forested lakeshore landscape as well. Cameras and photographs allowed that consumption to take physical form, which then returned home with visitors at the end of the season. While food and fuel were consumed in Muskoka, photographic images of the places they visited during their visit were consumed over a longer period and in a variety of different spaces. The result is a rich photographic legacy of life in Muskoka throughout this period; a legacy that reveals the rise of consumer culture even as it embodies it.

The prominence of a consumer culture in Muskoka is illustrated by an advertisement in the Muskoka Lakes Association's 1902 Yearbook. On the back cover of the yearbook, Eaton's took out a full-page advertisement targeting the capriciousness of cottagers and their spending habits:

The pleasure and comforts of your summer outing in Muskoka will be greatly increased if you have easy access to the things you want or would like to have. Shopping by mail is the secret. It's so simple, too. You merely make a list of your particular wants, enclose the list with money in an envelope, and send by mail to this store in Toronto. Experts will give it prompt attention. They devote all their time selecting goods for persons who live outside of Toronto, and of course have

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<sup>43</sup> John Denison, *Micklethwaite's Muskoka*, (Erin, ON: Boston Mills Press, 1993), 11.

become quite skilful at the work. They are sure to give satisfaction. If not, your money will be refunded.

Write to us for anything you want – for things to eat, things to wear, things for the house and things for pleasure or sport. Our catalogue will help you. Be sure and get a copy; FREE FOR THE ASKING, and mailed to any address you say.

And remember:

**Money refunded if goods are not satisfactory.**<sup>44</sup>

Even with only 182 members in 1902, the Muskoka Lakes Association (MLA) was still the perfect community to target. Indeed, while efforts were made to alter their advertising to appeal to different regions of the country, Muskoka - and the southern Ontario urbanites who spent their summers in Muskoka - were often prominently featured in Eaton's national advertisements.<sup>45</sup> The cover of the Eaton's 1903 Summer Holiday Needs Catalogue, for example, featured three scenes reminiscent of Muskoka.<sup>46</sup> In the first scene, three young men are setting up a tent on a smooth carpet of grass under a canopy of thinly spaced, secondary-growth white pine. In the second, a mother reclines on a hammock next to the lake; in the foreground is a stump suggesting an environment that was a wooded landscape not too long ago. In the third, a man and woman are engaged in a bit of fishing, while in the background a rather familiar style of steamboat makes its way across the lake.

Yet, as Bessie Waters' comments about the reliability of Eaton's catalogue shopping suggest, the effect Eaton's had on Muskoka's societal metabolism was not limited to seasonal residents. Furthermore, in almost all cases, people in Muskoka found it pleasing to easily access new consumer products from the city. During the first decades of the twentieth century, the

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<sup>44</sup> *Muskoka Lakes Association 1902 Yearbook*, back cover; emphasis in original.

<sup>45</sup> Although Donica Belisle explores the ways Eaton's advertisements relied on and contributed to a distinctive Canadian national identity, she also acknowledges that regionally specific messages were another way Eaton's sought to profit from consumer culture around the turn of the century. Sometimes the two would be conflated, such as when a 1905 advertisement featuring "The Country We Live In" focused on a "Moonlight Scene Muskoka" and "Residential Street Toronto". Belisle, *Retail Nation*, 49, 54.

<sup>46</sup> "Summer Holiday Needs Catalogue, 1903," T. Eaton Records, AO, F229-5-0-60, no.2.

average North American was unaware of the systems that delivered manufactured products made with resources from distant places. Consumers rarely lamented the impact of an exogenous consumer culture on the local economy, because it was subtle and difficult to perceive. The celebratory sentiments toward this new pattern of consumerism should, therefore, be understood as a perspective that saw only its merits and very few of its drawbacks. Leena Riley, for example, excitedly describes packages from Eaton's and Simpson's (another prominent Canadian department store retailer) arriving by steamer three times in 1910, and then again once in both 1911 and 1912.<sup>47</sup> Since Riley discontinues her diary during the summer months, it is hard to say for certain whether additional orders were made in July and August, but it seems likely given the greater ease of transport and hard marketing toward warm-weather consumption. In fact, the impact of Eaton's in Muskoka was evident almost year round. Bessie Waters fondly recalled that a crystalizing feature of the Christmas season was "when our order [had to] be sent off to the T. Eaton Company in Toronto. After we had poured through the catalogue time after time, Mother would fill out the order sheet... . About a week or so later when we returned from school, there in a corner of the kitchen we spied the big wooden box with the Eaton's label on top... ." <sup>48</sup>

Christmas took form as part of a larger trend toward consumerism that facilitated an expansion of Muskoka's societal metabolism.

Although the actual purchase and use of consumer products, such as clothing, sporting goods and household furnishings had a negligible effect on the kind of interdependent relationships that represented the most sustainable features of Muskoka's societal metabolism, the *pattern* of consumption made possible by mail order inputs soon broadened to include fresh

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<sup>47</sup> "Riley Diary," March, April, November 1910, October 1911, November 1912, AMSHS. Simpson's was Eaton's chief competitor in Ontario.

<sup>48</sup> Waters, *Country Tales*, 81.

foods. This development put retailers like Eaton's in direct competition with local merchants, farmers and supply boats. In the 1903 summer catalogue, Eaton's made its first attempt to compete with local farmers by offering butter, eggs and fresh meats, such as beef, lamb and pork.<sup>49</sup> By 1915, Eaton's was still advertising mail order catalogue shopping and express delivery as "the ideal way to buy for the summer home... ." But now, Eaton's was encouraging customers to "Get a copy of our Catalogue, and consult it each week, buying from it all you need in the way of Clothing, Furniture Supplies, *Groceries*, etc... ." <sup>50</sup> Clearly, Eaton's was attempting to entice cottagers to place orders each week, and have groceries sent up from the city. To facilitate this, Eaton's reduced its minimum purchase necessary for free shipping. In 1906 it had been \$25; in 1915 the minimum was only \$10.<sup>51</sup> Increased consumption of groceries from Toronto, whether fresh or processed, reveals a modified pattern of consumption that saw many dietary needs that local suppliers had provided replaced by exogenous inputs.

This new trend of acquiring perishable foods otherwise available in Muskoka slowly became indistinguishable from the importation of more exotic items. In an article from July 16, 1906, a correspondent for the *Bracebridge Gazette* observed a shipment of foods arriving at Muskoka Wharf with fascination, and took the time to consider their origins:

In the city one does not take much interest in the neighbour's groceries, but in Muskoka there is no unfailling interest in the hotel's and campers' supplies. I watched the barrels, boxes and queer shaped bundles as they were wheeled to the various steamers, and wondered just where they were going to. There were bunches of bananas, boxes of pine apples, crates bursting with lettuce and one box with an escaped carrot hanging wearily down... . It was a sight... when a huge consignment labelled 'canned beef' came down with the traditional sickening

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<sup>49</sup> "Holiday Needs Catalogue," AO, F229.

<sup>50</sup> Rogers, *Bluebook* (1915), 3, emphasis added.

<sup>51</sup> T.Eaton Co. Order Form, included with "Outing Supply Catalogue, 1906" T. Eaton Records, AO, F229-5-0-60, no. 2; Rogers, *Bluebook* (1915), 3.

thud. One shuddered and looked away, and then reluctantly looked again to find it did not come from Chicago, but was made and compressed in Canada.<sup>52</sup>

Regular shipments of food not only included exotic items, such as bananas and pineapples, and processed foods like canned beef, but also fresh produce, including lettuce and carrots, which was already regularly available from local suppliers.

The implications of fresh produce deliveries from the city were not lost on local suppliers. In 1905, J.J. Beaumont attempted to reposition his business in response to the added competition posed by mail order deliveries from the city. In a four-page catalogue-style circular to lakeside residents, Beaumont listed a wide variety of staples, non-perishable goods, hardware, soaps and luxury items, and promised to keep “a more up-to-date stock than in previous years in every department.”<sup>53</sup> In addition to an expanding orchard and fruit garden, Beaumont highlighted “Meat of the best quality and variety. Butter, Milk, Cream, Fresh Eggs, Poultry (of which this season we have reared close onto a thousand) and vegetables of all kinds, fresh from our own farm.” It is clear, however, that Beaumont was conscious of competition from the city. Perhaps recognizing a growing preference people in Muskoka had for quality baked goods from the city, Beaumont hired a “first-class City baker” to prepare bread and confectionaries. Finally, Beaumont pleaded with his customers that “before ordering supplies from outside, give us a trial as we feel sure that we can in every department, supply as good quality, and at as reasonable price as they can purchase elsewhere.” Although Beaumont did not reveal where or who was meant by ‘outside’ and ‘elsewhere’, the timing of the request suggests it was in response to increased competition from exogenous sources, such as Eaton’s or Michie’s.

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<sup>52</sup> *Bracebridge Gazette*, July 16, 1906, reproduced in Denison, *Micklethwaite’s Muskoka*, 29.

<sup>53</sup> “Summer Supply Season, 1905: Supply Boat ‘Nymoca’ Calling tri-weekly at all points on the Muskoka Lake” The James Bay Railway Company - General Claims, Claim of JJ Beaumont and Sons, 1905, LAC, RG30, file no: 1046-78-1.



The rise of consumerism and mail order deliveries from the city did not replace existing patterns of locally-based consumption, but rather added a new layer to the flow of material and energy in Muskoka, which posed a challenge to the kind of interdependent relationships that existed prior to the turn of the century. The new extended portion of Muskoka's societal metabolism, which linked households in Muskoka with consumer goods from the city, functioned in tandem with older interdependencies within Muskoka. Farmers continued to enjoy a great deal of success in pockets of good farmland along the eastern shores, merchants remained among the most prosperous members of the local community and the supply boats continued to link local producers with local consumers. After 1900, however, new railways enabled a much greater volume of exogenous inputs to compete with locally based social, economic and environmental arrangements.

In 1900, almost everything and everybody that ended up on the lower lakes arrived the same way they had for over a quarter of a century: via the Grand Trunk Railway (GTR) at stations in either Gravenhurst or Bracebridge. Muskoka Wharf in Gravenhurst was the most popular transfer point for passengers and freight switching from trains to steamboats. As a result, Muskoka Wharf represented a bottleneck in the movement of people and goods into and out of Muskoka. Whereas the Muskoka Road bottleneck had inhibited the establishment of a more sustainable societal metabolism by placing limits on the flow material and energy into and out of Muskoka during the 1860s and early 1870s, at the turn of the century, the bottleneck at Muskoka Wharf maintained a more sustainable societal metabolism by limiting the pace and extent to which consumerism could contribute to an expansion of the region's societal metabolism. Since only a certain number of trains arrived in Gravenhurst each day, and the Navigation Company's

steamers were obliged to make connections with just a single transfer point, the costs and logistics of this bottleneck capped the scale of exogenous consumption.

This bottleneck was removed when two new railroads were built up the west side of the lakes, creating two new transfer points and the capacity for further exogenously-based expansions to Muskoka's societal metabolism. The James Bay Junction Railway Company, which was incorporated into the Canadian Northern Railway Company (CNoR) early in 1906, built its line north from Toronto, east of Lake Simcoe, through Washago, and northwest into Muskoka, with stations at Torrance, Bala Park Island and Barnesdale, before continuing on to the Sudbury basin. Opened in October 1906, it was too late to have an impact that year. The Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) line was built at almost exactly the same time, but followed a slightly different route north of Toronto, passing up the west side of Lake Simcoe, before running northwest through mainland Bala, and then almost precisely mirroring the route of the CNoR line west of the lakes north to Parry Sound.<sup>54</sup> The first CPR trains arrived in Bala in July 1907. Neither of these new railways were originally intended to service the Muskoka Lakes the way the GTR had, but the opportunity to generate revenues could not be ignored.

The Navigation Company was forced to adjust its schedules to accommodate the new stations and railway traffic at Bala, Bala Park and Barnesdale. Instead of almost all lakeside passengers and freight switching from train to steamer at one spot (Muskoka Wharf), transfers could now be made at the closest of three different spots (Muskoka Wharf, Bala and Barnesdale). which significantly reduced the time it took passengers and freight to reach their destination at the north end of the lakes. As Donica Belisle points out, this type of improvement to regional

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<sup>54</sup> Richard Tatley, *The Steamboat Era in the Muskokas: Volume II – The Golden Years to Present; A History of the Steam Navigation in the districts of Muskoka and Parry Sound, 1906-Present* (Erin, ON: Boston Mills Press, 1984), 23.

railway networks greatly facilitated consumer culture. “Not only did rail enable shoppers to travel to Eaton’s downtown Toronto stores,” says Belisle, “but it also carried manufactured goods from distant markets... and transported commodities from Eaton’s warehouses to customers across the dominion.”<sup>55</sup> The implication of these new railway lines for Muskoka’s societal metabolism was, simply put, that more people and things could enter Muskoka more often and in less time than had been possible with only a single railway.

### The Atomization of Households in Muskoka

The addition of these new railways up the west side of the lake in the first decade of the twentieth century coincided perfectly with another technological innovation that even further extended Muskoka’s societal metabolism outside the region: the internal combustion engine. Apart from rowboats and canoes, mobility on the lakes was primarily mass transportation. For the average lakeside resident, traveling further than one could comfortably row required a scheduled and expensive ticket by Navigation Company steamer, or the services of one of the many smaller workboats for day trips on special occasions. Social interaction occurred in relatively close proximity to one’s own household, while regular access to provisions in more isolated households involved a visit from one of the supply boats rather than a trip into town. However, a small number of privately-owned steam launches provided personal mobility for members and guests of more affluent households and hotels. In the 1880s, both Summit House and Prospect House were among the first private owners of steam yachts. These small steamboats offered guests excursions, or met them at the train in Gravenhurst (a very long trip,

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<sup>55</sup> Belisle, *Retail Nation*, 27. Indeed, railways were part of larger system that saw nature transformed into commodities that were then sold to consumers. As William Cronon shows in his study of the commodification of nature in the United States, the sale of consumer goods was only the last stage in a long set of linkages connecting consumption with production, made possible by an increasingly sophisticated and diffuse transcontinental railway network. Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis*, 324-333.

but much quicker without the many stops the Navigation Company's boats were obliged to make).<sup>56</sup> No cottagers owned steam yachts until 1890, when Canada's leading wholesale clothing merchant, Senator William Eli Sanford, bought the *Naiad* to travel to and from his cottage on Sans Souci Island on Lake Rosseau.<sup>57</sup> The Muskoka Lakes Association's 1902 Yearbook lists twenty-seven steam yachts belonging to members.<sup>58</sup> And, according to Muskoka steamboat historian Richard Tatley, approximately seventy more yachts appeared between 1904 and 1918, only a small number of which belonged to cottagers.<sup>59</sup> Not all of these yachts stayed with the same owners or escaped fire, but over time the number of cottagers owning steam yachts declined. The 1918 Rogers *Muskoka Lakes Bluebook* lists just twenty-eight steam yachts listed to seasonal residents.<sup>60</sup> In contrast, the number of gasoline launches listed is 345. Internal combustion engines powered over ninety percent of extra-somatic modes of personal mobility for cottagers in Muskoka.

Although their impact was not immediately felt, by the end of the First World War motorboats contributed greatly to the continued expansion and extension of Muskoka's societal metabolism by providing lakeside households an alternative mode of transportation powered by fossil fuels. As early as 1902, gasoline engines were advertised in Muskoka. The Gasoline Engine Company of Toronto took out a full-page advertisement in the MLA's yearbook that summer, but were unsure how best to promote their product's benefits. The company claimed its engines were ideal for both household-power generation (see discussion below) and "as a launch motor."<sup>61</sup> This was a novel idea at the time, and for the next decade or more, most internal

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<sup>56</sup> Tatley, *Steamboat Era, Vol,I*, 173-174.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 238.

<sup>58</sup> *Muskoka Lake Association 1902 Yearbook*, 62.

<sup>59</sup> Tatley, *Steamboat Era, Vol,II*, 27.

<sup>60</sup> Rogers, *Bluebook* (1918).

<sup>61</sup> *Muskoka Lake Association 1902 Yearbook*, 57.

combustion engines that ended up in motorboats were sold separately from boat itself. In some instances, it was the decline of steam technology that occasioned the adoption of combustion technology for personal mobility. In 1907, a year after the owners of Summit House sold their steam yacht, *Onaganoh*, William Harker, a regular guest from East Liverpool, Ohio, introduced Port Cockburn's first motorboat.<sup>62</sup> Over the next few years many other seasonal and year-round residents purchased motorboats or refitted their steam yachts with gasoline engines. Brendan O'Brien recalls family outings aboard motorboats to visit acquaintances, take picnics and make connections with the trains at Barnesdale. Similarly, between 1909 and 1914, Leena Riley refers to gasoline launches around Beaumaris and Port Carling with increasing frequency. Although her brother's experiment owning a motorboat was short-lived, she frequently described neighbours and cottagers using their own boats for such varied purposes as meeting the train in Bala, picking up the mail at Hutton House and making trips into Port Carling to shop or socialize.<sup>63</sup> In many cases, members of the community, including the Rileys, who did not possess their own motorboat received rides with a neighbour or cottager who did. In 1915, Charlie and Sten Coate are both listed as owning motorboats, as are J.D. Oliver (their brother-in-law), A.J. Warwick, and four members of the Eaton family.<sup>64</sup>

By 1919, gasoline engines had become ubiquitous, and it was common for people to make trips by motorboat that they would have made by rowboat just ten years earlier. In that summer, Brendan O'Brien remembers the excitement caused by a boxing match in Toledo, Ohio, featuring Jack Dempsey:

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<sup>62</sup> O'Brien, *Prettiest Spot in Muskoka*, 48.

<sup>63</sup> "Riley Diary," May 1910, June, November 1911, AMSHS.

<sup>64</sup> Rogers, *Bluebook* (1915).

Boxing fever spread to Port Cockburn, where arrangements were made to hire the Hamer brothers with their two boats... to make the trip to the telegraph office [where news of the fight could be relayed]... . When we arrived at Lake Joseph Wharf [Barnesdale], it was an extraordinary sight. Every inch of dock space was occupied with launches tied two and three deep, and the wharf itself was crowded with people... .<sup>65</sup>

Lakeside residents were no longer exclusively dependent on either muscle power, or mass transportation to move about the lake. They could hop into their boat and set out across the lake without needing half an hour to build up steam or ready an engineer. Although most seasonal households continued to maintain close interdependent relationships with year-round households on the lakes for a variety of the same reasons they had during the late nineteenth century, the motorboat enabled many households to function more independently than they had previously and contributed further to a changing pattern of consumption, both of which instigated an atomization of households on the lakes and an expansion of Muskoka's overall societal metabolism.

Internal combustion engines became most popular in watercraft, but as the Gasoline Engine Company's 1902 advertisement suggested, these engines also had the potential to alter the daily routines of the household itself. Labour-saving strategies have always been evident in Muskoka. Horses and oxen performed enormous amounts of work, and windmills saved effort by bringing water up from the lake. The MLA's 1902 Yearbook reveals a number of options that were aimed specifically at seasonal household water needs. The Goold and Muir Company of Brantford, Ontario promised to "supply you with the BEST GALVANIZED STEEL WINDMILL outfit for your summer home." The Ontario Wind Engine and Pump Company of Toronto likewise assured cottagers that their 'Airmotor' was "just the thing to keep your Water

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<sup>65</sup> O'Brien, *Prettiest Spot in Muskoka*, 147.

Supply O.K. at your Summer Resort.”<sup>66</sup> Windmills could not, however, perform all household work.

After the turn of the century, several large hotels and a few of the most opulent summer estates installed steam power plants to provide electric lighting, steam heating, and hot and cold running water. Few sources detail the use of private steam power plants necessary to provide these amenities, but owners appear to have preferred fossil fuels to locally available fuelwood. Correspondence between Charlie Coate at Cape Elizabeth and the Navigation Company reveals that in the spring of 1918 his household had “one [rail]car load of anthracite coal” delivered from Muskoka Wharf by steamer to the wharf at Cape Elizabeth.<sup>67</sup> Although his father’s diary states that Charlie owned a steam yacht during the 1890s, the 1918 *Muskoka Lakes Bluebook* lists Charlie as owning only a gasoline boat.<sup>68</sup> Thus, the coal was likely used to fuel a steam power plant at Charlie’s summer home. The same letter also revealed that the Navigation Company intended on delivering “a carload of stove coal for use at the Royal Muskoka... .”<sup>69</sup> The Royal Muskoka Hotel opened in 1902 as a subsidiary of the Navigation Company. Capable of accommodating 350 guests the year it opened, the Royal Muskoka immediately became the most luxurious resort on the lake, and one of the earliest to offer electric lights, steam heating, and hot and cold running water.<sup>70</sup> Although the description “stove coal” suggests that this delivery was intended for smaller scale uses, such as cooking and heating staff quarters, coal would most

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<sup>66</sup> *Muskoka Lakes Association 1902 Yearbook*, 25, 62.

<sup>67</sup> “Correspondence with Muskoka Lakes Navigation and Hotel Company, March 16, 1918,” AO, Frederick W. Coate family fonds, F720.

<sup>68</sup> Rogers, *Bluebook* (1918), 22.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> Boyer, *Grand Hotels*, 96.

likely have been the fuel of choice for running the hotels' larger power plants, as well.<sup>71</sup> Other hotels followed suit, offering modern amenities, which replicated an urban lifestyle, and contributed to the expansion of the region's societal metabolism. In 1915, Prospect House was "Lighted by electricity," while Monteith House promised "Hot and cold running water in every room... . Steam heated; Electric Lights."<sup>72</sup> Although a number of the hotels are known to have had steam power plants by this date, only six out of seventeen featured in the 1915 *Bluebook* made any mention of these types of modern convenience. In 1918, fifteen of thirty-three hotels advertised in the *Bluebook* mention at least one of a list of amenities, including hot running water, steam heat, electric lighting and acetylene lighting.<sup>73</sup> The adoption of steam technologies for heating and electricity improved people's comfort, but it also contributed to the atomization of households. Even if some used fuelwood, those who purchased coal to fuel their power plants disconnected their households from local interdependencies in favour of obscured linkages with distant systems of production and commodity flows. Recognizing that visitors from the city increasingly came to expect modern conveniences while on vacation in Muskoka, affluent cottagers and hotel owners were able to utilize a familiar, yet somewhat complicated, technology to accommodate desires for greater comfort. In the process, they separated a portion of their household functions from more sustainable social, economic and environmental arrangements.

A growing number of cottagers were also turning to a less cumbersome, yet still altogether exogenous form of household power generation: stationary gasoline engines.

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<sup>71</sup> Other hotels, however, used cordwood to fuel power plants. William Gray, whose grandparents spent their summers next to another of Muskoka's grand hotels, Elgin House at the south end of Lake Joseph, claims the hotel burnt cordwood to generate electricity and steam heat, in addition to the approximately 200 cords of wood the kitchens required each season. William M. Gray, *Lake Joseph, 1860-1910: An Illustrated Notebook* (Toronto: William M. Gray, 1991), 65.

<sup>72</sup> Rogers, *Bluebook* (1915), 78, 85.

<sup>73</sup> Rogers, *Bluebook* (1918).



Ultimately, this technology became most popular as means of personal mobility, but over the course of the first two decades of the twentieth century, a number of cottagers experimented with them as a means of enhancing household comforts and convenience. Toronto's Gasoline Engine Company was manufacturing small engines as early as 1902 that could be used as boat motors, or "for running an Electric Light Plant, or pumping water at your summer cottage."<sup>74</sup> Other companies also advertised their combustion engines in the MLA's 1902 Yearbook. The Hamilton Model Works sold stationary, marine, and vehicle gasoline engines, while the MacLachlan Gasoline Engine Company in Toronto advertised "4 to 20 H.P." stationary and marine engines. The Canadian Fairbanks-Morse Company of Toronto promised their Residence Lighting and Water System would "eliminate all the drudgery of carrying water and filling oil lamps."<sup>75</sup> Since oil lamps also used fossil fuels, replacing them with power plants did not create entirely new linkages with exogenous material and energy flows. Yet the use of power plants to provide interior lighting (not to mention heating) made it easier to use more fossil fuels, thereby expanding the proportion of Muskoka's societal metabolism reliant on exogenous inputs while at the same time serving to isolate households from local fuel supplies and the local interdependencies they represented.

While it is impossible to determine with any accuracy how many households had oil- or gas-powered generators installed before 1920, various sources make passing references to these types of systems. In her collection of brief histories on century cottages and summer estates in Muskoka, local historian Liz Lundell describes a gasoline powered Lister-Bruston Dynamo installed in James Hardy's cottage on Ouno Island, Lake Rosseau, in 1909. Local historian

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<sup>74</sup> *Muskoka Lake Association 1902 Yearbook*, 56.

<sup>75</sup> Rogers, *Bluebook* (1915), 4.

Cameron Taylor mentions a similar power plant installed in Clevelands House in 1910.<sup>76</sup> In 1912, Harry Penny sold a portion of his property in Brackenrig Bay to Elizabeth Robinson who built a thirteen-bedroom summer home, which Penny's daughter recalls "held a Delco [power] plant for lighting throughout [the building, with] large glass tanks filled with acid solution and [a] big engine nearby that thumped and roared away."<sup>77</sup> It also appears as though at least one household at Cape Elizabeth had an oil-powered stationary power plant of some sort. In a letter to the Navigation Company in June 1915, an unknown member of the colony wrote to enquire as to the whereabouts of an oil heater that was supposed to have been delivered along with a barrel of oil.<sup>78</sup> Two years later, in October 1917, Charlie Coate wrote the Navigation Company wondering why an order for a barrel of "Petroleum refined Oil shipped by the Imperial Oil Co. of Toronto" was taking longer than three or four days to arrive.<sup>79</sup> Fossil fuels were a regular household commodity in Muskoka prior to the turn of the century. After 1900, however, the amount of fossil fuels consumed grew considerably as new technologies made their use much easier and affordable. Although most households in Muskoka continued to rely on steamboats in one way or another for another generation, and consumed mainly cordwood as household fuel, new trends in household energy consumption were added to, and in some cases replaced, the more sustainable patterns of the 1880s and 1890s. Interdependencies between seasonal and year-round residents remained, but lakeside households started to demonstrate patterns of atomization

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<sup>76</sup> Liz Lundell, *Old Muskoka: Century Cottages and Summer Estates* (Erin, ON: Boston Mills Press, 2003), 108; Cameron Taylor, *Enchanted Summers: The Grand Hotels of Muskoka*, (Toronto: Lynx Images, 1997), 47.

<sup>77</sup> Waters, *Country Takes*, 78-79.

<sup>78</sup> "Correspondence with Muskoka Lakes Navigation and Hotel Company, June 19, 1915," AO, Frederick W. Coate family fonds, F720.

<sup>79</sup> "Correspondence with Muskoka Lakes Navigation and Hotel Company, October 5, 1917," AO, Frederick W. Coate family fonds, F720.

as lakeside residents accessed an extended energy source, disconnected from the local environment and the sun.

### Conclusion

In the roughly two decades between the turn of the century and the 1920s, new cultural trends in consumption and mobility combined to expand the proportion of Muskoka's societal metabolism emanating from the south. Yet, the heart of that metabolism and the local economy remained the interdependent relationships between year-round and seasonal households. Most households continued to consume fresh vegetables, eggs, dairy and meat from local farms, to which they added wild berries, fish, game meat and fuelwood from the lakes and wooded landscapes back from the lakes. This type of arrangement did not disappear during the first two decades of the twentieth century, but it did decline as the defining feature of Muskoka's societal metabolism. As early as the 1890s, a consumer culture had established itself on the Muskoka lakes. Mail order catalogues from Eaton's not only made shopping from the city easier and more affordable, they also introduced people living in rural areas to things they never even knew they needed. Moreover, as consumer trends took off in the cities, cottagers and summer visitors to the lakes assumed a pattern of consumption on the lake that resembled that of the city. These trends continued after the turn of the century as two new railways were extended up the west side of the lakes by 1907. More railways meant more people and freight could arrive in Muskoka more often. Coinciding almost perfectly with the introduction of the new lines were the internal combustion engine and the advent of greater personal mobility in the form of the motorboat. Although motorboats had technical challenges early on, by the First World War, they accounted for approximately 80-90% of all mechanical forms of personal transportation on the lower lakes.

The internal combustion engine was not confined to transportation applications, however, as several hotels and a few of the more affluent cottagers installed generators to provide electric lighting and other modern amenities. The implications of this new technology had less to do with the machines themselves, and more to do with the fossil fuels that powered them. Gasoline and other petroleum products were entirely exogenous to Muskoka and had social and environmental impacts not felt in Muskoka. As the number of gasoline-fuelled engines in Muskoka grew, so too did the proportion of the region's societal metabolism dependent on exogenous inputs and the number of households needs that could be met independent of the local environment. Exogenous inputs were nothing new to life in Muskoka. Life on the Shield included on-going inputs from outside the region regardless of the capacity of the local environment to provide a wide variety of needs. Consumerism and technological innovations dramatically expanded the proportion of Muskoka's societal metabolism coming from outside the region. The result was a dilution of the more sustainable pre-existing relationships, and a strengthening of less sustainable patterns of consumption and personal mobility.

*Chapter 7: Household-based Approaches to Wood Resource Harvesting,  
1860-1920*

“Staple trades are precarious,” Arthur Lower wrote in the preface to his 1938 history of the lumber trade between Canada and the United States: “They may bring great wealth quickly, they may as suddenly bring calamity. Canada has known and knows both extremes.” Owing to the country’s limited arable land, Lower continued, the population is sparse, “and consequently the country will always have an economy that is out of balance - a large production of primary commodities and a comparatively small population. Hence it will always be dependent on outside markets. This is the key to its history and will be the key to its future.”<sup>1</sup> Historians have debated this assessment of Canada’s reliance on the staples economy, but staples production did have a major role in shaping the environmental history of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Canada.<sup>2</sup> In Muskoka, between 1850 and 1920, the commercial exploitation of white pine timber and hemlock tanbark shaped Muskoka’s society, economy and environment on a scale that was entirely ‘out of balance’ with the most sustainable arrangements of the region’s societal metabolism.

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<sup>1</sup> A.R.M Lower, *The North American Assault on the Canadian forest : a history of the lumber trade between Canada and the United States* (Toronto: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1938), xx-xxi.

<sup>2</sup> Harold A. Innis, “The Importance of Staple Products in Canadian Development” *Staples, Markets, and Cultural Change: Selected Essays Harold A. Innis*, Daniel Drache, Ed. (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1994), 3-23; Kenneth Buckley, “The Role of Staple Industries in Canada’s Economic Development” *The Journal of Economic History* Vol.18 (1958), 439-460; Allan Greer, *Peasant, Lord, and Merchant: Rural Society in Three Quebec Parishes, 1740-1840* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985); Marjorie Griffin Cohen, *Women’s Work: Markets, and Economic Development in Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988); Serge Courville and Normand Séguin, *Rural Life in Nineteenth Century Quebec*, CHA Booklet no.47 (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 1989); Gregory S. Kealey, *Toronto Workers Respond to Industrial Capitalism, 1867-1892* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991); Douglas McCalla, *Planting the Province: The Economic History of Upper Canada, 1784-1870* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993); Ruth W. Sandwell, “Rural Reconstruction: Towards a New Synthesis in Canadian History” *Histoire sociale/Social History* Vol.27, No.53 (May 1994), 1-32.

Timber commodities generated enormous wealth for the individuals, firms and governments that facilitated their exploitation. As Lower points out, white pine was the focus of commercial logging during the nineteenth century, “because of the quantity available but also because of its qualities. Its wood is soft and easily worked, light yet strong. It has been used... as building timber, for ordinary lumber, for flooring, for doors and windows, for ship-building... for frames, for mirrors and the best of it for engineers’ patterns.”<sup>3</sup> Hemlock trees were less desirable for lumber. Instead, the main purpose for commercially logging hemlock was to extract the bark, which contained a high concentration of tannins used to chemically transform animal hides into finished leather. The interest in accessing timber resources in particular was a main reason for the development of Muskoka’s transportation network. The wealth that timber and tanbark generated contributed to a political economy that reinforced resource extraction as one of the primary means of social and economic development in Ontario.

The narrative here is not new. Many historians have traced the rise and fall, as well as the social and environmental impacts, of large-scale commercial timber economies across Canada and North America.<sup>4</sup> Whether Canada’s trees were consumed in Britain, the American midwest, or only a short distance from where they fell, commercial logging was rapacious. In the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries, commercial logging took all it could, with outcomes that generally benefitted the political and economic core of the country (urban areas,

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<sup>3</sup> Lower, *North American Assault*, 22; Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991), 152.

<sup>4</sup> Graeme Wynn, *Timber Colony: An Historical Geography of Early Nineteenth Century New Brunswick* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981); James David Mochoruk, *Formidable Heritage: Manitoba’s North and the Cost of Development, 1870 to 1930* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2004), 83-96, 156-160; A.R.M. Lower, *Great Britain’s Woodyard: British America and the Timber Trade, 1763-1867* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1973); Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis*, 148-206; Richard White, *Land Use, Environment, and Social Change: The Shaping of Island County, Washington* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1980); Jamie Swift, *Cut and Run: The Assault on Canada’s Forests* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1983); Gordon Hak, *Turning Trees into Dollars: The British Columbia Coastal Lumber Industry, 1858-1913* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000). Unfortunately, almost no work has been done on logging associated with tanning industries.

such as Ottawa, Montreal and Toronto) far more than it did the periphery (hinterland regions, such as Muskoka).<sup>5</sup> As Daniel Drache points out, repeating one of the main arguments originally put forth by Harold Innis in his staples thesis, “The wealth from resources, the revenues from markets, and the benefits from production flowed largely to others [i.e. staple wealth did not stay in hinterland regions].”<sup>6</sup> This was an organizing principle of a staples economy. Consequently, Muskoka lumber companies and tanneries, under license by the provincial government, took as much of central Ontario’s white pine and hemlock as possible for as long as it was profitable to do so. The results were more or less the same everywhere North Americans waged their assault on the Canadian forests.<sup>7</sup>

The massive flow of timber from the forests of Muskoka to the urban markets of Canada and the United States represented the largest and least sustainable component of Muskoka’s societal metabolism between 1860 and 1900. A great number of trees cut down in Muskoka ended up in nearby homes, barns and fences. But the vast majority left Muskoka as a massive metabolic output. The logging industry brought some wealth into the region and facilitated a seasonal flow of local energy and material but did not provide lasting social, economic and environmental arrangements for year-round residents in Muskoka. Many farmers sold their produce, and many more sold their labour to logging camps. But as the trees were cut down, and the camps moved on, it became more difficult and less likely that the same people could maintain

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<sup>5</sup> The idea that Canadian history can be explained by the relationship between metropolitan centres and hinterland regions of the country is largely based on the work of Donald G. Creighton, *The Commercial Empire of the St. Lawrence, 1760-1850* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1937); J.M.S. Careless, *Frontier and Metropolis: Regions, Cities, and Identities in Canada Before 1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989).

<sup>6</sup> Daniel Drache, “Celebrating Innis: The Man, the Legacy, and Our Future,” xxii.

<sup>7</sup> To a very large degree, the commercial approach of taking as much pine as they could for as long as they could was only possible because the state understood the forests in strictly utilitarian terms - through the fiscal lens of revenues, which the forest could yield. James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 12-13.

a sustainable relationship with these companies. The men who worked in logging camps for a third of the year left their families behind and lived in all-male environments with few societal benefits. The removal of almost every mature tree of two key species of the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Forest of south-central Ontario had serious impacts on forest and lake system ecology, altering the composition of the forest itself and shifting the nutrient levels of the region's many lakes.

In contrast to the unintended consequences of this commercial approach, historians of New England have demonstrated that small-scale woodland exploitation during the eighteenth century (and late twentieth century) provided forest products, particularly for local consumption, which did not inherently involve destructive methods or exhaustive outcomes for local socioecological systems.<sup>8</sup> The difference between large-scale and small-scale types of wood-resource exploitation was one of both scale and kind.

The large-scale approach demanded what Lower described as “sawmills used specifically for commercial lumber production, chiefly for export,” while the small-scale approach required a “saw mill of the countryside, cutting local supplies for local consumption.”<sup>9</sup> But this is not simply a matter of smaller mills being more sustainable than larger mills - although this was almost always the case. In each instance, people living in Muskoka cut down trees in Muskoka. The relationship between the men who felled the trees and the mill to whom those logs were sold shaped the sustainability of wood-resource exploitation in Muskoka. The commercial sawmills and tanneries in Muskoka relied on abstract government licenses to cut down a vaguely defined

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<sup>8</sup> Brian Donahue, *Reclaiming the Commons: Community Farms and Forests in a New England Town* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999); Brian Donahue, *The Great Meadow: Farmers and the Land in Colonial Concord* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004); David R. Foster and John D. Aber, *Forests in Time : The Environmental Consequences of 1,000 Years of Change in New England* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2004).

<sup>9</sup> Lower, *North American Assault*, 43-44.



number of trees in broad swaths of a (mainly) forested region of the province. Consequently, these companies hired teams of men to extract all the pine or hemlock they could within the berths to which they had rights. In contrast, the countryside sawmills functioned by purchasing logs from the individuals - or their associates - who cut down a limited number of trees themselves, usually on their own property.

Despite the dominant commercial approach in which settlers sold their produce and labour to logging camps, households could occasionally derive sustainable benefits from a relationship with some of the larger sawmills. Historians of Ontario's logging industry have acknowledged that "a small proportion of the cut was made by settlers who supplied the industry from their own woodlots or homesteads," but very little work has been done on this alternative approach to logging.<sup>10</sup> It was common for settlers throughout pre-industrial Canada, who had not much else to do during the winter, or time to spare between seeding and harvest during the summer, to generate considerable income by selling some of the wood growing on their land. This smaller-scale, household-based approach to extracting the value of wood-resources from Muskoka's forested landscape had a number of economic, social and environmental advantages over the larger-scale, government-condoned, industrial-commercial approach taken by logging and tanning companies. The majority of the logs sold by settlers to large mills still left Muskoka as finished lumber. But these settlers could rely on the woods for capital, not wages. As was the case with tourism, logging brought wealth into Muskoka from outside the region. In much the same way tourism offered an alternative to traditional agrarian land use, household-based

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<sup>10</sup> Ian Radforth, *Bushworkers and Bosses: Logging in Northern Ontario, 1900-1980* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 26. See also, Judith Fingard, "The Poor in Winter: Seasonality and Society in Pre-Industrial Canada" in *Pre-Industrial Canada: 19760-1849*, Michael S. Cross and Gregory S. Kealey, eds. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), 62-78; Beatrice Craig, *Backwoods Consumers and Homespun Capitalists : The Rise of a Market Culture in Eastern Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009).

logging represented a value-added alternative to traditional commercial approaches. The household-based approach reserved a greater share of the value in each tree for the person who cut the tree down, and who was often also the person who owned the land on which the tree grew.<sup>11</sup> Men who sold the trees they cut on their own land could also stay at home with their families, along with the money they earned, although they were limited by their own somatic energy potential, in addition to that of their hired hands and ungulate tractors (oxen or horses). Individual households, therefore, cut fewer trees per capita each year than logging companies, and the impact was more dispersed, resulting in less stress on the local ecosystem. Wood cut by settlers on their own land still left Muskoka, but made a more sustainable contribution to the region's societal metabolism by leaving more wealth behind and placing limits on undesirable outcomes.

Despite the more sustainable approach taken at the household level, by the 1920s, both white pine and hemlock were commercially exhausted in Muskoka. Thus, while a more sustainable arrangement did exist for extracting value from the region's forests, the scale and kind of approach taken by commercial industries ultimately exhausted the basis for a wood-resource economy.

#### Background and Context, 1850-1875

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, logging in what later became Canada took place primarily in the Maritimes, particularly New Brunswick.<sup>12</sup> In the early 1800s, commercial logging operations established themselves in Ontario along the St. Lawrence River, the lower

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<sup>11</sup> Wynn provides evidence, which argues that compared to those who sold their labour to camps, "Those who worked [at logging] independently could derive even larger profits from their winter's work..." Although Wynn is talking about the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, this was also true for the case of Muskoka during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Wynn, *Timber Colony*, 82.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

stretches of the Ottawa River, and the north shore of lakes Ontario and Erie.<sup>13</sup> By the 1840s, considerable logging occurred throughout southern Ontario, including the Trent and Grand River valleys. Logging commenced along the shores of Georgian Bay and the lower reaches of the Muskoka watershed a decade later, when the Crown issued the first timber licenses along the Moon and Musquash Rivers.<sup>14</sup> Throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, logging was carried out primarily for square timber and British markets.<sup>15</sup> American interest in Ontario's forests emerged around the same time as logging commenced in the states bordering the Great Lakes in the 1850s. Consequently, timber barons built the earliest mills in Muskoka as part of a general trend to develop timber resources along the entire eastern shore of Georgian Bay from the Severn River to Parry Sound. In 1861, the Crown licensed timber berths in five of the surveyed townships in Muskoka where access was easiest.<sup>16</sup> Owing to the difficulty of getting logs out of the district, however, very little logging was carried out until the 1870s. During the late 1850s and early 1860s, the earliest companies logged the most accessible areas along the Moon and Musquash Rivers, and adjacent to the southern length of the Muskoka Colonization Road. By the 1860s, even before the introduction of steamboats to the lower lakes, all the white pine greater than a foot in diameter was gone from the shores of Lake Muskoka.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Donald MacKay, *The Lumberjacks*, 3rd ed. (Toronto: Dundurn, 2007), 18.

<sup>14</sup> Gary Long, *This River, The Muskoka*. (Erin, ON: Boston Mills Press, 1989), 144-145.

<sup>15</sup> Lower North American Assault; H.V. Nelles, *The Politics of Development: Forests, Mines & Hydro-electric Power in Ontario, 1849-1941*, 2nd ed. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005).

<sup>16</sup> Richard Tatley, "Timber! The Lumber Trade in Muskoka" in *SummerTimes: Celebrating 100 Years of the Muskoka Lakes Association* (Erin, ON: Boston Mills Press, 1994), 77.

<sup>17</sup> Harley E. Scott, *Steam Tugs and Supply Boats of Muskoka* (Lancaster, NY: Cayuga Creek Historical Press, 1987), 2.

The government held a public auction for timber berths in the centrally located townships of the Muskoka and Parry Sound Districts on November 23, 1871 in Toronto.<sup>18</sup> Depression limited the amount of logging in Muskoka throughout the 1870s; berths in Draper, Morrison, Muskoka and Ryde townships remained virtually untouched during these years. Increased market demand after 1880, however, instigated a rush on the timber in Muskoka. Public works projects in the early 1870s had connected all three of the lower lakes (Muskoka, Rosseau and Joseph), making it possible for logging companies to tow enormous booms of logs 200 feet wide and 500 feet long, some containing as many as 20,000 logs, across the lakes to Bala Falls where they were sent down the river to Georgian Bay. The province licensed nearly the entire surface area of Muskoka's forests to logging companies. Even some of the islands, which the government had decided not to include in the limits, were shrewdly harvested. In 1880-81, the newly formed Toronto Lumber Company, logged over a million board feet of white pine from a handful of islands on Lake Joseph that belonged to the company lawyer and two of its owners.<sup>19</sup> As logging moved upstream from the main basins of the lower lakes, along the Shadow, Rosseau, Skeleton and Muskoka Rivers, the number of logs cut greatly exceeded that which had been cut along the shores of the lakes alone.<sup>20</sup> While accurate statistics for just Muskoka are not available, those for the entire Western Timber District (of which Muskoka was a major part until the end of the century) demonstrate a meteoric rise in white pine being exported from the region. In 1874, almost 400,000 white pine saw logs were counted, amounting to almost 65,000 mbf (thousand board feet). Less than ten years later, more than three and half times as many white pine saw logs

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<sup>18</sup> The remaining timber berths in Muskoka were auctioned off on June 6, 1877, and December 6, 1881, as surveys made new townships open for settlement and exhausted pineries pushed logging companies farther upstream. Norman Hall MacKenzie, "The Economic and Social Development of Muskoka, 1855-1888" (PhD. dissertation, University of Toronto, 1943), 176.

<sup>19</sup> William Gray, *Lake Joseph, 1860-1910: An Illustrated Notebook* (Toronto, William Gray, 1991), 20.

<sup>20</sup> Scott, *Steam Tugs and Supply Boats*, 2.

were counted, amounting to well over two and half times as many mbf. Indeed, the general trend in white pine saw logs cut in the Western Timber District of Ontario suggests that logging companies took as much as they could as fast as they could. Throughout the 1880s and 1890s, the trend was unequivocally on the rise. By the end of the nineteenth century, however, the trend was clearly on the decline as the white pine was exhausted in regions such as Muskoka.<sup>21</sup>

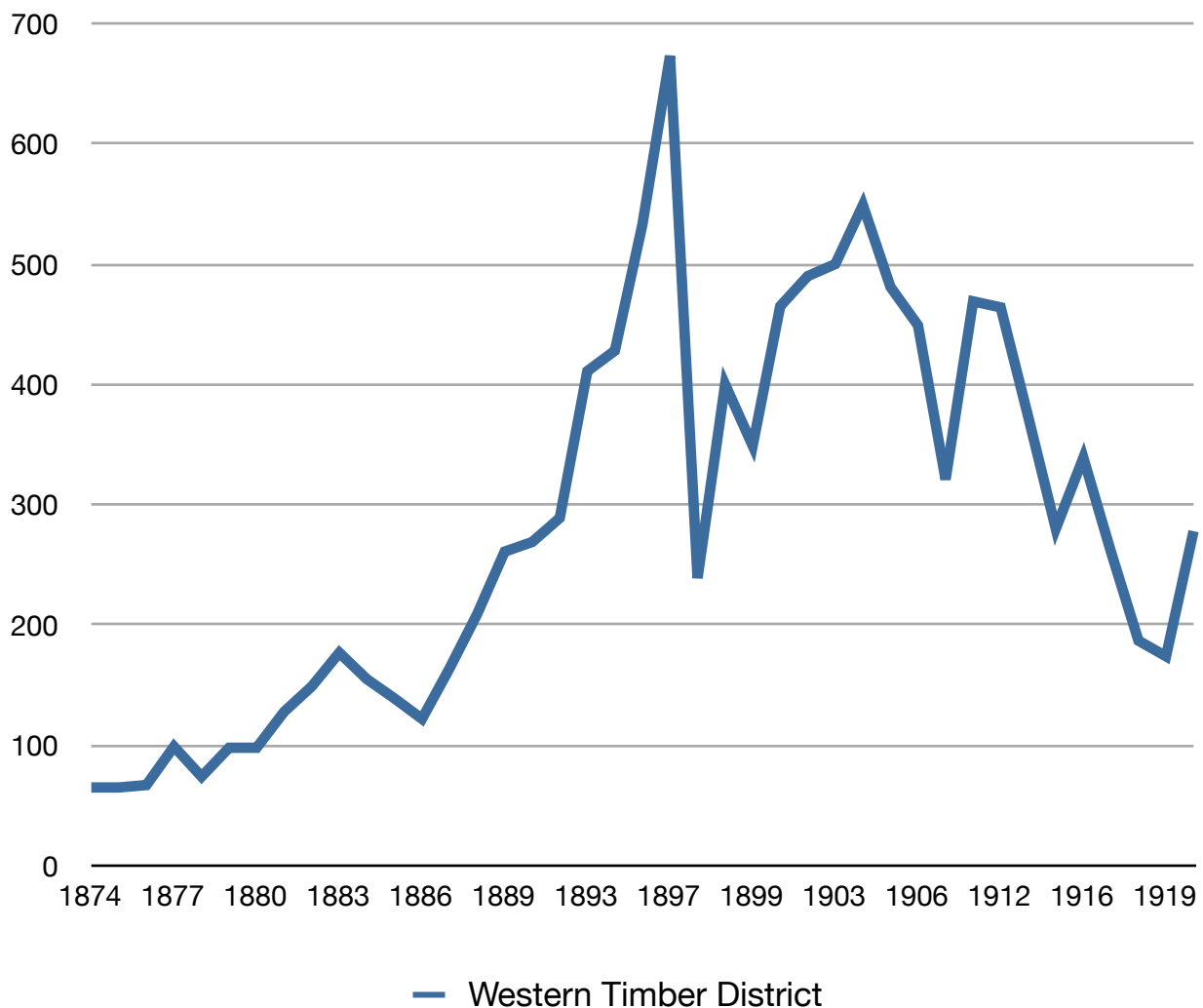


Image 8: White Pine Saw Logs Cut in Western Timber District of Ontario, 1874-1920  
Source: Ontario, *Sessional Papers*, 1874-1920

<sup>21</sup> Ontario, *Sessional Papers*, 1874-1920.

The ease with which loggers siphoned off the region's white pine owed as much to the first nature of the Muskoka watershed's natural hydrology as it did to the second nature of human artifice.<sup>22</sup> "The Canadian Shield," Arthur Lower wrote:

lends itself admirably to the industry of lumbering. There is a good snowfall, and dependably low winter temperatures, so that no climatic difficulties present themselves to the task of getting the logs out of 'the bush.' There are innumerable rivers, which because of the geological nature of the country, never lack for water for the 'drive.' Hard granite ridges running across their courses form natural dams for impounding the spring freshets, and thus regularize the flow. The countless lakes, combined with the irregular surface of the country, ensure that nearly all trees cut down need be drawn only a short distance to water and that on a down grade.<sup>23</sup>

Although this appraisal of the naturally occurring features of the Shield that made it ideal for logging operations is quite accurate, it belies the many serious obstacles presented by shoals and outcroppings of ragged granite that characterize the watershed's many waterfalls and rapids. These micro-features of the Shield's topography meant logs were often damaged or prone to jams. As local Muskoka historian Gary Long notes, "Human ingenuity and enormous amounts of labour went into modifying these landscapes in order to bypass these geologic features."<sup>24</sup> Until the 1880s, however, logging companies had little incentive to ease the flow of logs downstream by investing in timber slides and dams along the rivers in Muskoka, since no laws existed to permit those who built the infrastructure to charge others for their use. Consequently, numerous logging companies lobbied the government to take over responsibility for enhancing the watershed's capacity to carry large quantities of logs downstream. In a memorandum written in 1874 concerning the government's role in improving stretches of the Musquash River suitable

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<sup>22</sup> Cronon differentiates between geographies created by natural processes (first nature) and those made by humans (second nature). Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*, 56-57.

<sup>23</sup> Lower *North American Assault*, 5.

<sup>24</sup> Long, *This River*, 147.

for floating logs down to Georgian Bay, T.B. Pardee, Commissioner of Crown Lands, reported that “for years past complaints have been made verbally to [this] Department by parties holding licenses and getting out logs and timber on the Muskoka and Muskosh [sic] rivers (the latter being a continuation of the former) that large quantities of timber and logs have annually been destroyed in passing over chutes (falls) and rapids on these streams, which destruction it is alleged might have been averted by a comparatively small expenditure in building slides.”<sup>25</sup> In the late 1870s, the Department of Public Works agreed to make certain improvements along the major Muskoka waterways. Between 1878 and 1879, for example, the government built an important log slide at the South Falls on the South Muskoka River. At 305 metres long over a drop of 30.5 metres, the slide could pass 600 logs per hour, and greatly enhanced the flow of white pine logs brought down from the Algonquin highlands.<sup>26</sup> After this, however, the government turned over responsibility for building this infrastructure to a privately owned licensed company, the Muskoka Slide, Dam and Boom Company, which collected tolls to maintain the improvements.<sup>27</sup>

While most early sawmills tended to be located in practical places next to a moving current of water, the large commercial sawmills chose their sites based on second nature rather than first.<sup>28</sup> For most of the first two decades of logging in Muskoka, sawmills remained small and cut lumber for local consumption only. Large operations did not make sense until 1875, when the railway arrived in Gravenhurst. Until that time, nearly every tree that left Muskoka was floated down the Moon and Musquash Rivers to Georgian Bay where they were towed to mills

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<sup>25</sup> Florence Murray, ed. *Muskoka and Haliburton, 1615-1875: A Collection of Documents* (Toronto, Champlain Society-University of Toronto Press, 1963), 310.

<sup>26</sup> Long, *This River*, 151.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

<sup>28</sup> For more on sawmills and their social, economic and environmental effects, see Wynn, *Timber Colony*; Lower *North American Assault*; Hak, *Trees into Dollars*.

elsewhere in Ontario and states bordering the Great Lakes. A great deal of square timber and saw logs continued to leave Muskoka via the river after 1875, but most were cut in Muskoka and shipped out by railcar. Since Gravenhurst was the only rail link on the water in Muskoka until 1886, the small town became the logical spot for nearly every commercial industrial sawmill in the region.<sup>29</sup> The railway enabled the logging industry to significantly expand this enormous output component of Muskoka's societal metabolism. By 1878, just three years after the railway arrived, seventeen large mills operated in the Gravenhurst area, transforming the local economy and character of the community, and earning the town the name 'Sawdust City'. Gravenhurst's population grew with the demand for millworkers, but declined as the white pine gave out and sawmills closed. Between 1881 and 1901, the population doubled from 1,015 to 2,146, and dropped off to 1,624 in 1911, and 1,478 in 1921.<sup>30</sup> Sawmills also transformed people's conceptions of natural resources. As William Cronon has shown in the case of lumbering operations in Michigan and Wisconsin, at sawmills wood lost its connection to any ecosystem and became a commodity.<sup>31</sup> Gravenhurst's sawmills - and the many others like them that existed almost everywhere forests could be exploited - were the last stage in the process by which human labour transformed nature's wealth into capital.

In Ontario, only Ottawa, and perhaps Midland, exported more than the 50 million board feet and 35 million shingles that Gravenhurst did in 1883.<sup>32</sup> With the arrival of the railway in 1875, the majority of Muskoka pine was shipped through Toronto to Oswego and thus on to

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<sup>29</sup> A few notable exceptions established themselves in Bracebridge and Huntsville after the railway arrived in those towns in 1886.

<sup>30</sup> MacKenzie, "Economic and Social Development of Muskoka," 244.

<sup>31</sup> Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*, 148-206.

<sup>32</sup> Tatley, *Steamboat Era, Vol.II*, 81; Richard Tatley, *The Steamboat Era in the Muskokas: Volume I - To the Golden Years* (Erin, ON: Boston Mills Press, 1983), 83-85; Lower, *North American Assault*, 175. By this time the number of mills in Gravenhurst had dropped to fourteen.



American markets, especially New York City. In 1883, however, the Erie Canal was made toll-free, and shipments were switched to Tonawanda/Buffalo at the start of the canal. Without the same incentives to ship through Toronto, Muskoka's pine found its way west to the Chicago market as well. According to Lower, "Georgian Bay pine [of which Muskoka's was a major part at this time] continued to be shared between the two markets [New York and Chicago]" until the end of the white pine boom at the turn of the century.<sup>33</sup> Commercial logging in Muskoka began even before the region was opened for settlement, and remained the most intensive and widespread economic activity in the region until after the turn of the century. Logging company owners and managers, along with government officials, viewed these developments enthusiastically. At the local level, however, the enthusiasm often met with disappointing and unintended consequences.

#### The social consequences of commercial logging in Muskoka, 1870-1900

The life cycle of the commercially processed white pine may have ended in large metropolitan centres like Chicago, New York and Toronto, but it started in forests like Muskoka.<sup>34</sup> Of the 845 square miles in thirteen townships encompassing the Muskoka watershed lying between the lower lakes and the upper lakes, 582 square miles - or roughly 69 percent of the region, including lakes - was under license as of the winter of 1871-72.<sup>35</sup> Of those 582 square miles under license, 93 percent was controlled by two firms: the Cook Brothers (227 square

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<sup>33</sup> Lower, *North American Assault*, 179. Not to be outdone by the upstart Georgian Bay logging companies, J.R. Booth built the largest privately owned railroad in North America, the Ottawa, Arnprior and Parry Sound Railway, from the Ottawa Valley, across the height of land, to Georgian Bay. Completed in 1897, the OAPS allowed Booth to access the Chicago markets during the fleeting years of his logging empire. Long, *This River*, 146.

<sup>34</sup> Although humans were involved in transforming forests into dollars, as William Cronon argues, "the abundance of the northern forests had far less to do with human labor than with autonomous ecological processes that people exploited on behalf of the human realm." Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*, 149.

<sup>35</sup> Ontario, *Sessional Papers (1871-72)*, 15-18. Note: the 845 square miles was based on an average of each township containing 416 100-acre lots.

miles) and Hotchkiss, Hughson and Company (315 square miles), with the rights to the other seven percent controlled by three others.<sup>36</sup> Although the berths were obtained in late 1860s and 1870s, a prolonged recession during the 1870s meant the vast majority of this territory, tributary to the Muskoka River watershed, remained untouched until the 1880s. By this time, the settlement of these townships in Muskoka was nearly complete. More critically, by the start of the 1880s, settlers had discovered the limited agricultural potential of the region and were eager to find other ways of supporting their families. Those close to the shores of the larger lakes realigned their household economies towards the tourist industry. Many husbands and fathers, however, had little choice but to sell their labour to local logging camps for wages.

Logging camps were generally built next to tributary streams throughout Muskoka. As timber was cut and the logging frontier pushed into more remote, untouched locales within each company's limits, the camps tended to move farther away from the shorelines of settled rivers and lakes. Camps usually consisted of a stable for the horses, a series of buildings for the blacksmith, foreman and cookhouse, and cambooses for sleeping.<sup>37</sup> Logging was a winter activity, since the sap stopped running and it was easier for men, oxen and horses to move logs with snow on the ground. The foreman and a skeleton crew would set up camps by the end of September, and the rest of the logging gangs arrived not long after the agricultural harvest at the

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<sup>36</sup> This was facilitated by an arrangement between A.G.P. Dodge, a partner with Hotchkiss and Hughson, and the Cook Brothers to share the timber limits in Muskoka and Parry Sound by not competing with one another's bids when the territory was auctioned in 1871. James T. Angus, *A Deo Victoria : The Story of the Georgian Bay Lumber Company 1871-1942* (Thunder Bay, ON: Severn Publications, 1990), 49.

<sup>37</sup> Tatley, "Timber!," 83; As Graeme Wynn argues, there existed "a fundamental functional unity" in all pre-industrial Canadian lumbering operations "that transcended local variations in the relationship between lumbering and farming, and in the relative importance of lumbering in the pioneer economy." Wynn, *Timber Colony*, 6. Thus, for the sake of a comparative context, even where more detailed information is lacking in the history of logging in Muskoka, other research into similar operations elsewhere in British North America and Canada may be drawn on as representative examples. For a more detailed discussion on logging camp work and operations, see Robert Pike, *Tall Tree, Tough Men* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1967); Radforth, *Bushworkers and Bosses*; Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*, 156-159; Ian Radforth, "The Shantymen" in *Labouring Lives: Work and Workers in Nineteenth-century Ontario*, Paul Craven, ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 214-221.

end of October. Over the remainder of the fall and the first month or so of winter, twenty- or thirty-man crews cut down and prepared an average of sixty logs per day. By the beginning of February the snow was usually deep enough for camp activity to switch from log-cutting to log-hauling, skidding and piling. By the time the ice began to break up in late April or early May, logs were ready to be dumped into the water and floated downstream by the rivermen who brought the logs out to the open lakes where steamers would collect them into booms and tow them across to mills in Gravenhurst.<sup>38</sup>

With few or no other options to generate income, working in logging camps became an important part of the local economy. Historians of rural Quebec, for example, have detailed this type of economic plurality among small holders, revealing that many subsistence-based households pursued logging as a means of earning cash.<sup>39</sup> But logging camps were not very sustainable. Initially, logging took place in settled townships, and men could return home each night. But, as operations pushed farther upstream, wage labour in camps pulled men away from their families for as much as a third of the year, and immersed them in all-male homosocial environments.<sup>40</sup> “In some cases”, writes Graeme Wynn, “home and work were separate in the extreme.”<sup>41</sup> In early nineteenth-century New Brunswick, wives went as much as ten months without seeing husbands, who were away working in lumber camps. Thus, a significant part of

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<sup>38</sup> Angus, *Deo Victoria*, 79-80; Wynn, *Timber Colony*, 54-69.

<sup>39</sup> Gérard Bouchard, “Co-intégration et reproduction de la société rurale: pour un modèle saguenayen de la marginalité” *Recherches sociographiques*, Vol. XXIX, no.2-8 (December 1988), 283-309; Gérard Bouchard, *Quelques arpents d’Amérique: population, économie, famille au Saguenay, 1838-1971* (Montréal: Boréal, 1996); J.I. Little, *Crofters and Habitants: Settler Society, Economy, and Culture in a Quebec Township, 1848-1881* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1991).

<sup>40</sup> MacKenzie, “Economic and Social Development of Muskoka,” 206; Geoffrey Wall, “Pioneer Settlement in Muskoka” *Agricultural History* Vol.44, No.4 (October 1970), 398; Radforth, *Bushworkers and Bosses*, 26. Even in those cases where men did not leave home for an extended period, many observers also worried that work in logging camps would cause farms to be neglected. There is little evidence to substantiate these claims. In fact, much the opposite appeared to be true. Wynn, *Timber Colony*, 83-84.

<sup>41</sup> Wynn, *Timber Colony*, 86.

each logger's identity was wrapped up with his time spent in the woods with other loggers.<sup>42</sup> While this arrangement conformed to conventional middle-class Victorian thinking on separate public and private spheres for men and women, some observers believed it had the potential to threaten the family's well-being. As Adele Perry has shown in the case of the nineteenth-century frontier society of British Columbia, the homosocial setting was often a vibrant one that challenged, as often as it reinforced, dominant norms.<sup>43</sup> Moral reformers viewed instances of all-male culture in British Columbia as problematic because most men were unable to fulfill their proscribed gender roles as breadwinners. Where the ratio of men to women was high enough that most men could find a wife and start a family, homosocial culture was more tolerable. In Muskoka, during the logging era, the ratio remained roughly 1.2 men for every woman.<sup>44</sup> Somewhat ironically, then, the homosocial environment of the logging camp was tolerated precisely because it enabled men to perform the breadwinner role. In doing so, however, it demanded husbands and fathers to live apart from the families they supported. Harriet Barbara King conveyed the hardships endured by wives and children left at home in Muskoka when men spent the winter in logging camps:

...on the first approach of cold weather he [a typical settler engaged in the camps] starts for the lumber-shanties, and receiving from twenty to twenty-five dollars a month and his food...

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<sup>42</sup> Steven Maynard, "Rough Work and Rugged Men: The Social Construction of Masculinity in Working-Class History" *Labour/Le Travail* Vol.23 (Spring 1989), 159-169; Radforth, "Shantymen," 232; Adele Perry, *On the Edge of Empire: Gender, Race, and the Making of British Columbia, 1849-1871* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 29-30.

<sup>43</sup> Perry, *Edge of Empire*, 21; Radforth, "Shantymen," 230. In fact, many loggers may have sought work in camps as much out of disillusionment with traditional gender roles and the appeal of outdoor work away from other responsibilities, as they did to satisfy the need to obtain income. Radforth, *Bushworkers and Bosses*, 44-45; Perry, *Edge of Empire*, 38; Hak, *Trees into Dollars*, 147-148.

<sup>44</sup> *Census of Canada, 1871-1901*.

It is certainly a very hard and anxious life for the wife and children, left to shift for themselves throughout the long dreary winter, too often on a very slender provision of flour and potatoes and little else.<sup>45</sup>

Ultimately, however, men could not rely on logging for their entire lives, since the labour was so hard on the body.<sup>46</sup>

Regardless of whether camps were located close to home or far upstream, commercial logging relied on socioeconomic power structures that created what Wynn calls “a full-time lumbering proletariat.”<sup>47</sup> As American historian Joseph Conlin shows for logging operations throughout North America, “Wages were not good, well into the twentieth century. Employment was unsteady; job security did not exist. Bunkhouse conditions appalled the roughest of outsiders... .”<sup>48</sup> Wages earned from work in logging camps supplemented household incomes, but never provided enough for families to live on.<sup>49</sup> According to the Department of Labour’s report on *Wage Rates and Salaries*, choppers in Ontario received \$26 (including board) per month in 1914, only a few dollars more than King says men were paid forty years earlier.<sup>50</sup> In Muskoka, a

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<sup>45</sup> Harriet Barbara King, *Letters from Muskoka, by an Emigrant Lady* (London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1878), 135-136.

<sup>46</sup> Wynn, *Timber Colony*, xi. Not only did labourers working in the logging industry face the potential of the exhaustion of the resource base, but the likelihood that economic instability associated with the capitalist mode of production and commodity markets would periodically put them out of work as well. Since this type of external pressure was common to both the commercial-scale and household-scale approaches to logging, it is not considered as part of a comparison between the two. Wynn, *Timber Colony*, 44-53; Drache, “Celebrating Innis,” xxxix-xl.

<sup>47</sup> Wynn, *Timber Colony*, 86. A similar argument has been put forth by Normand Séguin for the case of Quebec. Normand Séguin, *La conquête du sol au 19e siècle* (Quebec: Editions du Boreal Express, 1977). Gérard Bouchard, however, argues that work in the woods did not always result in a dependent economic position for small holders. In fact, economic plurality, made possible by the agroforestry economy, helped stabilize rural households - especially in marginal environments with low agricultural potential - by providing wage labour opportunities within the context of subsistence agriculture. Gérard Bouchard, “Co-intégration et reproduction”; Gérard Bouchard, *Quelques arpents d’Amérique*.

<sup>48</sup> Joseph Conlin, “Old Boy, Did you get enough pie? A Social History of Food in Logging Camps” *Journal of Forest History*, Vol.23, No.4 (Oct, 1979), 165. Graeme Wynn suggests “The communal camaraderie of camp life described in many fulsome accounts of lumbering elsewhere in eastern North America was almost certainly exaggerated.” Wynn, *Timber Colony*, 62.

<sup>49</sup> As Ian Radforth argues wage labour in logging camps tended to lock households into a dependent relationship within the agro-forestry economy. This effect was amplified during downturns in the economy. Radforth, *Bushworkers and Bosses*, 28, 40-43; Radforth, “Shantymen,” 214.

<sup>50</sup> Radforth, *Bushworkers and Bosses*, 43; King, *Letters*, 135. Depending on skill, however, other roles in the camp could earn a logger more or less. During the 1870s: hewers, \$30-38/month; liners, \$20-22/month; scorers, \$15-19/month; general hands, \$14-16/month. Radforth, “Shantymen,” 217.

chopper's wages were considerably less than what a settler could earn from selling logs cut from his own land around the turn of the century. Moreover, husbands and fathers often spent a portion of their wages buying equipment and gear, or else squandered their earnings on alcohol. During the 1870s, several roadside taverns popped up that catered to transient labourers.<sup>51</sup>

A corollary of the power capital that had over labour was that the work itself was among the most, if not *the* most, labour-intensive jobs in Muskoka.<sup>52</sup> According to the work of British physiologists J.V.G.A. Durnin and R. Passmore, the various tasks involved in commercial logging required between eight to twelve calories of somatic energy per minute, anywhere between 1.5-6 times more energy needed to perform other jobs in North America. Drilling coal, for example, uses four calories per minute, while 2.3 calories per minute is necessary for automotive assembly.<sup>53</sup> Depending on the length of the work day, loggers required 6,000-9,000 calories per day to sustain their energy output chopping, trimming, squaring, hauling, skidding and piling logs. This required what Conlin refers to as “vast *fueling*.”<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, for most of the nineteenth century, apart from the occasional serving of game meat or fish, very little of what the loggers ate was fresh food. Although diets began to change into the twentieth century (at exactly the same time as white pine and logging began to wane in Muskoka), during the 1870s and 1880s, camps had little or no vegetables, fruit, eggs or milk.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> MacKenzie, “Economic and Social Development of Muskoka,” 206. For more on the prevalence of alcohol in all-male environments, like those associated with logging camps, see Perry, *Edge of Empire*, 40-42; Hak, *Trees into Dollars*, 143-144; Craig Heron, *Booze: A Distilled History* (Toronto, Between the Lines, 2003), 84, 285.

<sup>52</sup> Many historians have noted the toll that such physically demanding work had on the men who worked in logging camps. Wynn, *Timber Colony*, 62.

<sup>53</sup> J.V.G.A. Durnin, and R. Passmore, *Energy, Work, and Leisure* (London: Heinemann, 1967), 71-73.

<sup>54</sup> Conlin, “Old Boy,” 165, emphasis in original.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 166-68; Radforth, “Shantymen,” 229; Bob Petry, *Bala, An Early Settlement in Muskoka: A Pictorial History of Bala from the Late 1800s*. (Bracebridge: Bob Petry, 1998), 121.

The region's ability to grow hay and oats was relatively good, but initially Muskoka's societal metabolism was unable to provide the scale of nourishment required to sustain all of the logging camps each winter. According to Grant Head, over the course of a season, a logging camp of thirty men and their horses consumed approximately 36 barrels of pork, 10 barrels of beef, 34 barrels of flour, 76 bushels of potatoes, 20 tons of hay, 400 bags of oats and 400 bags of chop.<sup>56</sup> When multiplied by the dozens of logging camps scattered throughout the region during the last twenty years of the nineteenth century, the scale of provisions required was immense. During the 1860s and 1870s, logging and settlement overlapped temporally and spatially in Muskoka, but local produce could not meet the needs of the camps. In an effort to clarify who or what was responsible for deteriorating road conditions in Muskoka, the Supervisor of Colonization Roads, J.W. Bridgland, wrote to the Commissioner of Crown Lands in November 1866 to insist loggers were to blame. In doing so, Bridgland exonerated the local settlers when he determined that "the whole market produce of all the settlers on one of these roads [along which the logging companies brought in their provisions] would very little exceed (and in some instances it would fall below) the amount required to supply the united gangs of the adjacent lumberers."<sup>57</sup> In Bridgland's estimation settlers could barely produce enough to supply the logging camps, so should certainly not have borne any of the responsibility for damage to the roads. As TABLE 1 in chapter 5 shows, by the 1880s at the height of commercial logging in Muskoka, settlers produced large quantities of oats and potatoes, much of which was undoubtedly sold to logging camps that had begun to move upstream of the lower lakes. As

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<sup>56</sup> Grant Head, "An Introduction to Forest Exploitation in Nineteenth Century Ontario" in *Perspectives on Landscape and Settlement in Nineteenth Century Ontario*, J. David Wood, ed. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart in association with the Institute of Canadian Studies, Carleton University, 1975), 78-112. Variations on camp provisions exist in Wynn, *Timber Colony*, 69-71.

<sup>57</sup> Murray, *Muskoka and Haliburton*, 187.

logging moved further upstream, it became harder and less profitable for the same settlers to sell their produce to camps. Perhaps for a few years, logging camps provided an excellent market for local produce. But this relationship never developed into the kind of interdependent arrangement that tourism made possible around the same time. In fact, shortly after the turn of the century this option for settlers was eliminated altogether when the last of the white pine was cut in Muskoka.

Large-scale commercial logging also had consequences for the way people imagined the landscape of Muskoka. Many settlers perceived the forest as an impediment to their success as farmers. But as Claire Campbell has shown in the case of Georgian Bay, the opening of the region for settlement coincided with, and in many ways made possible, the establishment of the white pine as a symbol of the rugged beauty of the Canadian wilderness in Ontario.<sup>58</sup> As early as 1871, many people in Muskoka perceived the white pine as a symbol of untouched nature at the same time as others perceived it as profits waiting to be collected. The white pine attracted the attention of Harriet Barbara King, a newly arrived emigrant from France. Although King did not find the Canadian forest “half as beautiful as I had been led to expect...,” she could not help notice “there are certainly some very tall pines, and they are of a considerable girth... .”<sup>59</sup> The pines were so exceptional to King that she composed a ‘Sonnet to the Muskoka Pines’:

Weird monarchs of the forest! ye who keep  
 Your solemn watch betwixt the earth and sky;  
 I hear sad murmurs through your branches creep.  
 I hear the night-wind’s soft and whispering sigh,  
 Warning ye that the spoiler’s hand is nigh:  
 The surging wave of human life draws near!  
 The woodman’s axe, piercing the leafy glade,  
 Awakes the forest-echoes far and near,  
 And startles in its haunts and timid deer,

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<sup>58</sup> Claire Campbell, *Shaped by the West Wind: Nature and History in Georgian Bay* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2005).

<sup>59</sup> King, *Letters*, 59



Who seeks in haste some far-off friendly shade!  
 Nor drop ye stately Pines to earth alone.  
 The leafy train who shar'd your regal state -  
 Beech, Maple, Balsam, Spruce and Birch - lie prone,  
 And having grac'd your grandeur - share your fate!<sup>60</sup>

While this poem also identifies the damage falling trees did to the surrounding forest, it reveals that for King, and many others like her, the white pine was the most appealing feature of the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Forest. Ironically, the vanishing white pine was also a sign of humanity's destructive effect on the natural world. As Seymour Penson, the son of an original settler, noted in 1910, the picturesque images of Muskoka conveyed no memory of "the great white pines that sprang up higher [on the islands] than their neighbours on the shores, or towered majestically upon the highest ridges inland."<sup>61</sup> The fate of the white pine became a warning about the decline of valuable resources that forestry experts and government officials had previously thought inexhaustible. Certainly, this fact was not lost on many of Canada's earliest proponents of forest conservation. Debates between preservationists and conservationists in the United States influenced thinking in Canada as well. Aware that timber stands were quickly giving out, scientists, politicians and lumbermen advocated as early as the 1880s for industry practices that would avoid waste from fire, unnecessary land clearance and poor cutting methods. Apart from hiring rangers to monitor timber limits for forest fires, the first efforts on the part of the Ontario government to address timber exhaustion came in 1893 with the creation of Algonquin Provincial Park (which contained the headwaters for a large portion of south-central Ontario, including the Muskoka River watershed). The Royal Commission on Forest Protection

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 55-56.

<sup>61</sup> Seymour Penson, "Seymour Penson and his Muskoka Neighbours, Part I" *East Georgian Bay Historical Society*, vol.3 (1983), 191.

followed in 1897 and the Forest Reserves Act in 1898.<sup>62</sup> Yet as several historians of forestry in the United States and Canada have pointed out, scientific approaches to forestry did not begin to shape the history of commercial logging until after 1900.<sup>63</sup> Merchantable white pine was almost entirely exhausted throughout the region and most lumber companies had closed their sawmills by the time forestry experts, such as Edmund Zavitz began reforestation programs, created conservation authorities and succeeded in imposing tighter regulations on the industry during the first quarter of the twentieth century.<sup>64</sup>

By the end of the nineteenth century, after logging had moved much farther upstream, and merchantable white pine was all but exhausted throughout Muskoka, residents and visitors alike resented any hint of the logging industry, even if its effects had not been felt locally for over a quarter of a century. In 1899, G. Mercer Adam remarked that it would “chill the heart of the lover of the picturesque to be told” that the Muskoka Milling and Lumber Company owned half of Browning Island - right in the middle of Lake Muskoka - even though that company had not cut any trees there for over twenty years.<sup>65</sup> As early as the 1880s, the most overt exposure anyone had to logging in Muskoka was the annual flotilla of logs sent downstream and across Lake Muskoka. Logs repeatedly accumulated along the lower stretches of the Muskoka River below Bracebridge in the spring and summer, disrupting navigation and drawing attention to the

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<sup>62</sup> Bruce W. Hodgkins, Jamie Benidickson and Peter Gillis, “The Ontario and Quebec Experiments in Forest Reserves, 1883-1930” *The Journal of Forest History* Vol.26, No.1 (January 1982), 20-33; Gerald Killan, *Protected Places: A History of Ontario's Provincial Parks System* (Toronto: Dundurn, 1993).

<sup>63</sup> Nancy Langston, *Forest Dreams, Forest Nightmares: The Paradox of Old Growth in the Inland West* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995); L. Andres Sandberg and Peter Clancy, *Against the Grain: Foresters and Politics in Nova Scotia* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2000); Richard Rajala, *Clearcutting the Pacific Rain Forest: Production, Science, and Regulation* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1998).

<sup>64</sup> John Bacher, *Two Billion Trees and Counting: The Legacy of Edmund Zavitz* (Toronto: Dundurn, 2011).

<sup>65</sup> G. Mercer Adam, “Georgian Bay and the Muskoka Lakes” in *Picturesque Spots of the North: Historical and Descriptive Sketches of the Scenery and Life in the Vicinity of Georgian Bay, the Muskoka Lakes, the Upper Lakes, in Central and Eastern Ontario, and in the Niagara District*, George Munro Grant, ed. (Chicago: Alexander Belford, 1899), 40.

massive scale of the logging industry.<sup>66</sup> In July 1881, the children of wealthy settler F.W. Coate, who visited their father in Muskoka every summer, returned two days after leaving their cottage on a camping trip having found that logs prevented their passing up the Muskoka River.<sup>67</sup> Even the Muskoka Leather Company, which relied on locally sourced hemlock bark to tan leather, complained that the river became so clogged with logs that steamers could not make deliveries.<sup>68</sup> As the timber limits gave out and sawmills started going out of business after the turn of the century, lakeside residents had fewer encounters with commercial logging. By the 1920s, nobody traveling on the Muskoka River needed to worry about log drives anymore, because there were no more logs to drive.

#### The ecological consequences of commercial logging in Muskoka, 1870-1900

Change is certainly normal in ecosystems such as the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence forest. Forests are dynamic and experience a variety of significant and unpredictable influences from fire, insects, diseases and weather, which affect the composition of the ecosystem in varying degrees overtime and from place to place.<sup>69</sup> In some cases, these disturbances occur on a scale equal to or greater than what humans have caused. For example, approximately 4,800 years ago, hemlock trees in eastern North America were decimated in an event known as the hemlock decline, believed to have been caused by the outbreak of a forest pathogen.<sup>70</sup> And while major

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<sup>66</sup> Richard Tatley, *The Steamboat Era in the Muskokas: Volume II – The Golden Years to Present; A History of the Steam Navigation in the districts of Muskoka and Parry Sound, 1906-Present* (Erin, ON: Boston Mills Press, 1984), 45.

<sup>67</sup> “Diary of F.W. Coate, July 1881,” AO, Frederick W. Coate family fonds, F720.

<sup>68</sup> As we will see, tanbark was removed from hemlock trees and loaded onto scows that were towed to Bracebridge, which meant supplying Muskoka’s tanning industry did not require the same disruption to navigation as the logging industry. “Tannery Journals,” Huntsville Public Library, Leather Industry folder, Muskoka Local History Collection, Huntsville, Ontario, 16-17.

<sup>69</sup> Eric A. Bourdo, Jr., “The Forest the Settlers Saw” in *The Great Lakes Forest: An Environmental and Social History*, Susan L. Flader, Ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 3-4.

<sup>70</sup> Roland I. Hall, and John P. Smol, “The Influence of Catchment Size on Lake Trophic Status During the Hemlock Decline and Recovery (4800 to 3500 BP) in southern Ontario lakes” *Hydrobiologia* Vol.269-270 (1993), 371.

events such as the hemlock decline produce carry-over effects, such as a sharp reduction in evapotranspiration and increased catchment erosion and nutrient deposition in lakes, the risk of fundamental shifts in forest ecology as a result of natural events is much less than that caused by humans, since background variability smooths out the effects of dramatic change.<sup>71</sup> Despite the similarities between natural and anthropogenic changes to the forest, humans exert pressures on the forest through land clearance and logging that fundamentally alter and deteriorate the local ecology, transforming the overall ecosystem.

In his study of the settlement of Island County, Washington, Richard White determined that small-scale bull team logging “did not mean serious deterioration of forest ecology,” since selective logging allowed the forest to regenerate quickly.<sup>72</sup> Bull team logging was also practiced in Muskoka during the late nineteenth century. According to White’s argument, since this type of logging only targeted the largest, most mature trees of specific species, the rest of the forest would have remained relatively untouched. Yet, as Thorpe, Thomas and Caspersen show in their study of tree mortality following selective logging in the boreal forests of the Shield in northern Ontario, post-harvest mortality of uncut trees tended to spike in the two years immediately following logging and remained above background rates until ten years afterwards. According to the study, the skidding of logs damaged and compacted root structures and led to a 13.3 percent increase in residual tree mortality, representing a 475 percent rise in tree mortality above background forest conditions.<sup>73</sup> Thus, while the effects of selective logging were not always

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<sup>71</sup> Hall and Smol, “Influence of Catchment Size,” 383.

<sup>72</sup> White, *Land Use, Environment, and Social Change*, 91.

<sup>73</sup> H.C. Thorpe, S.C. Thomas, J.P. Caspersen, “Tree Mortality following Partial Harvests is Determined by Skidding Proximity” *Ecological Applications* Vol.18, No.7 (Oct, 2008), 1656-57.

serious or extensive, consequences for the local ecosystem lingered for several years after trees were cut.

As a greater proportion of trees per unit area are taken, the risk of catastrophic forest fires increases dramatically.<sup>74</sup> The slash left behind after logging gangs stripped trees of their branches and canopies presented enormous fire hazards. In the summer, many months after the valuable timber had been removed from the forests, forgotten debris acted like “a powder-train in igniting the whole region.”<sup>75</sup> Forest fires fueled by slash grew out of control and placed abnormal pressures on the reproductive cycles of pine. Not only was the probability of good seed years reduced by selecting for the most mature trees, but the seedlings that did take root required 25 years free of disturbance before they too could contribute to the seed supply.<sup>76</sup> Thus, if large conflagrations followed in the years following logging, entire sites could be sterilized, preventing the forest from regenerating or altering its composition.<sup>77</sup> The removal of softwood trees, such as pine and hemlock, on the Precambrian Shield is typically followed by a new forest complex dominated by hardwood deciduous species.<sup>78</sup> But pine grow well in disturbed areas, so cleared patches where seedlings were able to take root were ideal, especially if the clearing was caused by windblow rather than logging.<sup>79</sup> Pine do not return where forest fires destroy the conditions for regrowth. Hemlock is intolerant of burning and may take centuries to recover its former

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<sup>74</sup> For an excellent historical overview on the effects of fire on the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence forest, including Muskoka, see Stephen J. Pyne, *Awful Splendour: A Fire History of Canada* (Vancouver, UBC Press, 2007), 41-44, 92-93. And, for an overview of early efforts to establish a forestry service equipped to protect forested Crown lands from fire, see Pyne, *Awful Splendour*, 140-160.

<sup>75</sup> Adam, “Georgian Bay and the Muskoka Lakes,” 46-47.

<sup>76</sup> Clifford E. Ahlgren, and Isabel F. Ahlgren, “The Human Impact on Northern Forest Ecosystems” in Flader, 38-39.

<sup>77</sup> Bourdo, “Forest the Settlers Saw,” 14; White, *Land Use, Environment, and Social Change*, 89.

<sup>78</sup> R.L. France, “Macroinvertebrate Colonization of Woody Debris in Canadian Shield Lakes following Riparian Clearcutting” *Conservation Biology*, Vol.11, No.2 (Apr 1997), 514; Jamie Lawson, Marcelo Levy and L. Anders Sandberg, “‘Perpetual Revenues and the Delights of the Primitive’: Change, Continuity, and Forest Policy Regimes in Ontario” in *Canadian Forest Policy: Adapting to Change*, Michael Howlett, ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto PPress, 2001), 305.

<sup>79</sup> Bourdo “Forest the Settlers Saw,” 9.

abundance after intense fires.<sup>80</sup> Hemlock tends to do well on shallow, wet soils.<sup>81</sup> If forest fires destroy those conditions, hemlock does not generally regenerate.

Of course, it was not only the terrestrial section of the forest that was altered as a result of logging. Forests are critical to the hydrological cycle. They regulate watershed flow rates by slowing water run-off during and after large rainfall events. Leaves, decaying vegetation and the root structures of living plants absorb much of the water, obstructing the flow into rivers and streams. Tree cover next to the shores of streams and rivers also provides shade from direct sunlight, keeping the water cool, and preventing nutrient loading from shoreline run-off and erosion. Both water temperature and nutrient levels are critical water quality components that shape habitat conditions in the nutrient-poor lakes on the Shield.<sup>82</sup> Needless to say, logging activity directly influenced aquatic environments. As J. David Wood points out, “timber exploitation had perhaps an even greater effect on the waterways... through the scouring and gouging of river banks, by rolled or dragged logs; damming and diverting streams to expedite the logrush; and sedimenting of lakes and streams with eroded soil, ‘deadheads,’ and debris from felled trees.”<sup>83</sup> Analysis of diatoms contained in a core sample taken from Peninsula Lake, east of Huntsville, in the late 1990s, showed that the lake was nutrient-poor until about 1870 when settlement and logging commenced in the area.<sup>84</sup> Around this date phosphorous concentrations

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<sup>80</sup> Foster and Aber, *Forests in Time*, 111.

<sup>81</sup> Bourdo, “Forest the Settlers Saw,” 8.

<sup>82</sup> Long, *This River*, 51; David M. Gates, C.H.D. Clarke, and James T. Harris, “Wildlife in a Changing Environment,” in *The Great Lakes Forest: An Environmental and Social History*, Susan L. Flader, ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 62.

<sup>83</sup> J. David Wood, *Making Ontario: Agricultural Colonization and Landscape Re-Creation Before the Railway* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2000), 12.

<sup>84</sup> Diatoms are a major form of algae, one of the most common types of phytoplankton. Saloni Clerk, Roland Hall, Roberto Quinlan and John P. Smol, “Quantitative inferences of past hypolimnetic anoxia and nutrient levels from a Canadian Precambrian Shield lake” *Journal of Paleolimnology* Vol.23 (2000), 325, 327.

approximately doubled, significantly changing nutrient availability in the lake, which reduced deepwater oxygen availability and decreased water quality for human consumption.

In another study carried out on the effects of logging on the habitat conditions of wood debris-consuming aquatic organisms called macrophytes in Shield lakes, R.L. France determined that in extensively deforested areas, macrophytes struggled to survive in the years after logging, adding pressure to the entire marine ecosystem.<sup>85</sup> Yet both the diatom and macrophyte studies also suggest that overall aquatic ecosystems in Muskoka, and Shield environments more generally, did not suffer in a consistent or irreversible way as a result of commercial logging in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Indeed, a separate study on the impact of logging on several lakes in Muskoka revealed that phosphorous concentrations - necessary for altering the nutrient content of lakes - generally went down, not up, after the arrival of European settlers at the end of the nineteenth century. In the thirteen lakes from Muskoka included in the study, phosphorous concentrations declined in seven, rose in four, and remained unchanged in two. Since less organic material was available to contribute to phosphorous loading in the lakes, concentrations decreased relative to those after the Second World War (when regrowth began to introduce more leaf litter to the nutrient cycle again).<sup>86</sup> Thus, phosphorous concentrations in Muskoka lakes tended to spike during European colonization before declining to below preindustrial levels owing to a reduction in the total biomass available as a result of land clearance and large-scale commercial logging in the region.

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<sup>85</sup> France, "Macroinvertebrate Colonization."

<sup>86</sup> Roland I. Hall and John P. Smol, "Paleolimnological assessment of long-term water-quality changes in south-central Ontario lakes affected by cottage development" *Canadian Journal of Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences*, Vol.53 (1996), 13-14.

Removing trees from the forest environment was not the only way large-scale commercial logging deteriorated local ecologies. The moniker of ‘Sawdust City’ for Gravenhurst hints at a more focused and concentrated problem associated with the industry: point-source pollution of sawdust directly into the water. The town is situated in Muskoka Bay, an isolated pocket of the lake that only gradually exchanges water with the rest of Lake Muskoka. During the late nineteenth century, this feature of Gravenhurst’s location meant sawdust that ended up in the water never drifted very far from the mills, and settled in large volumes at the bottom of the bay. Unfortunately, no scientific studies have been carried out to determine the effects of so much sawdust on the local ecology of Muskoka Bay at the time.<sup>87</sup> The federal government, however, was conscious of the problems sawdust pollution could have on fish spawning grounds. No evidence shows that sawmills at Gravenhurst affected spawning, perhaps because of its isolated location in the watershed. Downstream, however, one large sawmill attracted considerable attention for the impact of its operations on spawning grounds at the mouth of the Musquash River on Georgian Bay.

In 1853, William Hamilton of Penetanguishene built a small water-powered sawmill at Three Rock Chute at the outlet of what is now Go Home Lake, where the Musquash River empties into Georgian Bay. In 1869, after many years of being underutilized, J.C. Hughson of Albany and Lewis Hotchkiss of Connecticut bought what had come to be known as the Muskoka Milling and Lumber Company.<sup>88</sup> Muskoka Mills, as the mill was known, was moved slightly further south and grew quickly to become the largest water-powered sawmill ever to operate on

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<sup>87</sup> A number of historians have pointed out that sawdust from mills dumped in streambeds had a detrimental effect on local ecology, wildlife, and navigation. Wynn, *Timber Colony*, 93-94; Gates et al., “Wildlife in a Changing Environment,” 62. Indeed, Cronon points out that demand for unblemished lumber resulted in as much as one-third of every sawlog ending up as waste (scraps or sawdust). Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis*, 159.

<sup>88</sup> As we saw above, Hughson and Hotchkiss bought the rights to 54 percent of the timber in the heart of Muskoka.



the Muskoka watershed. In 1871, the Census of Canada listed 82 employees producing 8,500,000 board feet of lumber from 80,000 pine logs (roughly 27 percent of all the white pine logs cut in the Western Timber District that year).<sup>89</sup> In addition to Hamilton's original timber license for 75 square miles along the Musquash and Gibson Rivers downstream from Lake Muskoka, Hotchkiss, Hughson and Co. owned limits all along the Muskoka River and seven Muskoka townships.<sup>90</sup> The scale of its operations and the detrimental impact of sawdust pollution on local fish habitat attracted the attention of the federal government as early as 1875. In a letter to Hughson in April 1875, A.H. Campbell, foreman of Muskoka Mills, claimed that someone from the Department of Navigation had notified him that the company could not "put sawdust, slabs, or refuse into the river at the mill." Campbell went on to say that he intended to write the Commissioner to request an exemption from the Fisheries Act, and then if that failed, "insisting on the law would virtually close the mill."<sup>91</sup> Ten years later, the practice of letting sawdust fall into the water caught up with Muskoka Mills. Although they had taken precautions to prevent most sawdust from ending up in the water, enough escaped to warrant an investigation. In the end, the foreman of the mill was forced to pay a \$50 fine and another \$10.10 for undisclosed "costs."<sup>92</sup>

Shortly after the turn of the century, nearly all of Muskoka's white pine was gone. In roughly fifty years beginning in the late 1850s, large-scale commercial logging operations took as much of Muskoka's white pine as they could as quickly as they could. Logging had been the

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<sup>89</sup> Long, *This River*, 85; Angus, *Deo Victoria*, 35-37.

<sup>90</sup> Ontario, *Sessional Papers* (1871-72), 15-18; Hughson and Co. fonds, LAC, R3448-0-8-E vol.3.

<sup>91</sup> "Hughson and Company fonds," LAC, R3448-0-8-E vol.3.

<sup>92</sup> "Muskoka Lumber Mills Case, 1884-1885," AO, Frederick George Mackenzie Fraser fonds, F1034, file 3; In 1877, Indian Agent for Parry Island drew a direct connection between the deposition of sawdust in waters surrounding sawmills in Parry Sound and a decline in the number of fish in the vicinity. Dominion of Canada, *Annual Report, 1877*, 22.

primary reason for the introduction of the region's first steamer in 1866, the interconnection of the lower lakes in 1871-72, and the construction of the Northern Railway to Gravenhurst in 1875. All of these developments benefitted the people who lived in Muskoka and enabled an expansion of the region's societal metabolism for years to come. But their harvesting of the wealth contained in Muskoka's forests, left few social, economic or environmental arrangements with any potential to be maintained over time. This approach provided settlers with only short-lived opportunities to sell their labour or farm produce to camps, and pulled fathers and husbands away from their families in the process. Large-scale logging also had serious detrimental effects on the local environment by altering forest composition and lake system ecology. Yet, cutting down trees was not inherently unsustainable. Alternatives to the commercial approach were practiced at the household level, which created much more sustainable social, economic and environmental arrangements.

#### The household-based approach to logging in Muskoka, 1880-1920

The Ontario government had a financial incentive to facilitate commercial logging and discourage household-based approaches. Even before Muskoka was opened for settlement, the government had passed laws that privileged the large-scale commercial model and handicapped (but did not eliminate) the household-based approach. H.V. Nelles' research on the politics involved with the development of Ontario's natural resources reveals a close relationship between the provincial government and commercial logging companies. These relationships stemmed from the Crown Timber Act of 1849, which set out to manage Canada's forests at the time. Although the Crown allowed private interests broad rights to dispose of timber on licensed lands, it maintained overall control of the land itself rather than transferring those rights as

private property. Maintaining control over the land not only allowed the Crown to regulate the industry but also to retain a financial stake in the profits accruing from exploiting Canada's forests.<sup>93</sup> After Confederation, this arrangement continued when the province assumed control of Crown lands. The challenge, however, was that both farmland for new immigrants and timber had become scarce in southern Ontario by the middle of the nineteenth century. Part of the solution was to open Muskoka for both colonization and commercial logging after the midway point of the century.<sup>94</sup>

In passing the 1868 Homestead Act, the province committed itself to opening new lands for communities based on the principle of fee simple freehold properties. At the same time (in the late 1860s and early 1870s), however, the province also auctioned off the entire region as timber berths to logging companies. In order to avoid confusion and conflict over who owned the timber rights, the Homestead Act restricted land grants to areas "not being Mineral Lands or Pine Timber Lands," and stipulated that "All Pine trees growing or being upon any land so located... shall be considered as reserved from said location, and shall be the property of Her Majesty," with the caveat that locatees would be allowed to "cut and use such trees as may be necessary for the purpose of building, fencing, and fuel" as well as clearing land for farming.<sup>95</sup> The reason was simple: the government intended to sell licenses to cut timber in the region to derive as much public income as possible from the exploitation of Muskoka's wood-based resources and did not

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<sup>93</sup> Nelles, *Politics of Development*, 13-14.

<sup>94</sup> Part of the reason logging companies cut so many trees down as fast as they could was because they were worried that settlement would destroy the trees before they could be harvested. Although the government was committed to settling the southern region of the Shield, this tension between settlers and loggers informed much of the legislation that granted rights to access forest wealth with logging companies rather than settlers. A.R.M. Lower, *Settlement and the Forest Frontier in Eastern Canada* (Toronto: The Macmillan Company, 1936); Nelles, *Politics of Development*, 16; Graeme Wynn, "Notes on Society and Environment in Old Ontario" *Journal of Social History* Vol.13, No.1 (Fall 1979), 57-58.

<sup>95</sup> Murray, *Muskoka and Haliburton*, 239-240.

want settlers to engage in land speculation and sell the resources to which these companies were purchasing the rights.

The provincial government received payment from logging companies for the right to cut timber on Crown lands in three ways. The first was the cost of the license, which a logging company bought at auction and usually paid a bonus to outbid competing companies. The second was an annual ground rent paid according to the number of square miles held under license. And, the third was dues paid according to the number of board feet of timber cut by a particular company on their berths. The license was a one-time fee, but the ground rents and timber dues fluctuated from year to year. Ground rents doubled each year a license holder did not make use of their timber berth, and the amount of timber dues depended on how many trees were cut each season. The system was designed to make the provincial government a great deal of money - and to do so encouraged the rapid exploitation of licensed berths. As Nelles summarizes, Ontario's finances relied heavily on this revenue:

Between 1867 and 1899 bonuses, dues and ground rent from the lumber industry produced in excess of \$29 million, or approximately 28 per cent of the total provincial revenue. Only the federal subsidy brought in a larger sum. In large measure the flourishing state of Ontario's public finances after Confederation can be traced to this extraordinary income from forest regulation.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Nelles, *Politics of Development*, 18.

Despite the fact that the province retained the rights to the forests' resources and occasionally sought to regulate their exploitation, the province always treated commercial logging interests and its own governing interests as the same thing.<sup>97</sup>

The federal government was also involved in facilitating the exploitation of Muskoka's forests. Protective tariffs on imported lumber in the U.S. made it difficult for Canadian companies to compete with American companies selling lumber south of the border. But it did not make sense to allow logging companies to sell Canadian saw logs directly to American lumbermen and bypass the profits available to Canadian sawmills. In 1866, Canada imposed an export duty of one dollar per thousand board feet on pine logs, which was increased to two dollars per thousand board feet in 1886.<sup>98</sup> It was not until 1898, at about the time logging for pine began to decline precipitously in Muskoka, that the Canadian government passed the manufacturing condition requiring that "All timber taken from crown lands... be made into sawn lumber in Ontario."<sup>99</sup> Both levels of government believed the logging industry was drawing on an infinite supply of timber.<sup>100</sup> Thanks to the efforts of both the provincial and federal governments in facilitating the large-scale commercial exploitation of pine forests in Ontario, argues Arthur Lower, "the only worry of the millowner was as to how he might get out his product fast enough."<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Lawson et al. conclude that the provincial government "saw the long-term interest of business and its own fiscal needs as its priorities." There was, however, nothing 'long-term' about the business model or policy approach taken by industry and government at this time. Lawson, 286. The only exception might have been the use of revenues from timber dues in funding road construction in Muskoka. Between 1863 and 1871, the government collected \$124,439 in timber dues and spent \$79,872 on roads in Muskoka. Paying for these roads would have been challenging without revenues generated from timber dues. MacKenzie, 175. The irony, of course, is that if this was the only way to finance settlement on the Shield, the whole scheme lends further weight to the argument that permanent settlement on the Shield was unsustainable. Lawson et al., "Perpetual Revenues."

<sup>98</sup> Lower *North American Assault*, 153-56.

<sup>99</sup> Nelles, *Politics of Development*, 74.

<sup>100</sup> Lawson, "Perpetual Revenues," 287.

<sup>101</sup> Lower, *North American Assault*, 45.

In *The Politics of Development*, Nelles argues that the 1868 Homestead Act “represented at best a drawn battle with the Shield and its economy” and that “the generally thin soil and rock of the bulk of the Shield precluded its being parcelled out to a permanent farming population.”<sup>102</sup> Neither of these statements adequately applies to Muskoka. Over time settlers discovered pockets of good farmland, and the rise of tourism provided vital social, economic and environmental arrangements. The Homestead Act, however, prevented settlers from deriving any wealth from pine timber growing in settled areas. Instead, that wealth was split between large logging companies and the provincial government. Nevertheless, individual households eventually found ways to make logging a meaningful part of Muskoka’s societal metabolism. In fact, household-based logging turned out to be much more socially, economically and environmentally sustainable than commercial logging.

Household-based logging was possible during the 1870s and 1880s, but the 1868 Homestead Act made the sale of pine timber (the only merchantable timber at the time) prohibitively expensive under the terms of free land grant agreements.<sup>103</sup> Settlers were obliged to pay the same dues as the holders of timber licenses if they sold pine trees cut off their land. These dues were dropped after five years, when locatees had fulfilled the terms of their agreements and obtained patents to their land. Prior to and during the five-year period of settler location, timber licenses gave logging companies the right to cut as many pine trees as they could. As Florence Murray points out, “Under these regulations a law-abiding settler had little hope of reaping much profit from his pine.”<sup>104</sup> For the many settlers who took up free grant lands

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<sup>102</sup> Nelles, *Politics of Development*, 44-45.

<sup>103</sup> Neil Forkey shows that lumbermen engaged in operations along the Bobcaygeon Road at the southern edge of the Shield north of the Kawartha Lakes in central Ontario bought pine and saw logs from local settlers. Neil Forkey, *Shaping the Upper Canadian Frontier: Environment, Society, and Culture in the Trent Valley*, (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2003), 83-84.

<sup>104</sup> Murray, *Muskoka and Haliburton*, xcii.

soon after 1868, the timber clause did not present an immediate concern. It was not until October 1871 that timber licenses in Muskoka were auctioned. Consequently, many settlers must have patiently thought that if they waited five years they would gain the rights to their pine trees. This was not to be the case, as Harriet Barbara King discovered when she arrived in the fall of 1871 to learn that the sale of timber licenses had “at once lost me the power of selling my pine-trees... .”<sup>105</sup> Over the course of the 1870s and 1880s, townships in Muskoka were logged at the same time as they were settled by incoming locatees. By the time any of them had acquired patents to their land, most of the tallest, mature white pine were gone.<sup>106</sup>

Throughout the late nineteenth century, settlers continued to clear their land, build homes, erect barns and put up fences, which constituted the only purposes for which settlers were permitted to cut the pine growing on their land without paying government dues. Often pine was simply burned as part of land clearance. But a great deal was also floated to one of dozens of small-scale sawmills that catered to local needs by cutting on-demand lumber.<sup>107</sup> Most small sawmills in Muskoka were built in the 1860s and 1870s and rarely cut more than 1,000 or 2,000 board feet per day in their first years. As single blade band-saws were replaced with turbine-powered circular saws around the turn of the century, several mills expanded their capacity to about 10,000 board feet per day. After 1900, larger commercial operations that could easily and affordably deliver lumber anywhere in Muskoka squeezed many of the smaller mills out of

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<sup>105</sup> King, *Letters*, 26.

<sup>106</sup> In some cases, settlers obtained the patent to their land while there were still merchantable pine on their property. When this happened, settlers often engaged in the logging companies' pattern of large-scale cutting. Some sold the standing timber directly to logging companies, while others hired men to do the work themselves and sell the logs for higher profit. While the scale may have had similar environmental outcomes to commercial logging operations, a greater share of the value remained with the settler. MacKenzie, “Economic and Social Development of Muskoka,” 182.

<sup>107</sup> In 1869, in response to what many saw as threat to their livelihoods by the licensing system, small sawmill owners petitioned the government to reserve a certain amount of timber for local purposes. The result was a policy requiring logging companies to leave 50,000-100,000 board feet per limit for local purposes. Tatley, “Timber!,” 82; Gray, *Lake Joseph*, 15.

business. Others hung on until after the First World War, and some even to the onset of the Depression.<sup>108</sup>

While sawmills made a steady income from trees during these years, settlers tended not to, since their only option under the timber clause of the Homestead Act was obtaining building materials, not income, from the forest. Over the years, however, as logging camps moved farther upstream and settlers began to acquire patents to their land in larger numbers, many sawmills began purchasing a greater share of saw logs from local households. In this way, as Beatrice Craig argues, sawmills played “a pivotal role in integrating the agricultural and the lumbering sectors of the economy.”<sup>109</sup> Moreover, without the restrictions imposed on them by the licensing system, logging became what Graeme Wynn calls an unrivalled “means for the ordinary man to acquire capital.”<sup>110</sup> Unfortunately, no records survive from nineteenth-century Muskoka sawmills that could provide evidence of the exact nature of the relationship between sawmills and nearby household-based logging. After the turn of the century, ledgers reveal the household-based approach to logging, and its importance to lumber companies and the local economy in Muskoka.

In 1877, brothers Elias and William Snider, both prominent businessmen and politicians in Waterloo, Ontario, took up free grant land and built a sawmill at Rosseau Falls in Cardwell township. In partnership with Peter Mutchenbacker who had taken up a lot at the site of Rosseau Falls, the three started the Snider Lumber Company. Around 1895 or 1896, Snider and Company sold their share of the Rosseau Falls mill to Mutchenbacker’s two sons, Asa and Herman, and consolidated their business in Gravenhurst where they owned another larger mill. The

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<sup>108</sup> Long, *This River*, 86-98.

<sup>109</sup> Craig, *Backwoods Consumers*, 98.

<sup>110</sup> Wynn, *Timber Colony*, 83.



Mutchenbacker brothers and Snider continued to carry on a close business relationship until 1903 when the Mutchenbacker brothers sold the mill back to their father who quickly sold it again to the Kaufman Furniture Company of Berlin. At its height, the Mutchebacker mill cut as much as 1.5 million board feet of lumber per year and employed fifteen to twenty men.<sup>111</sup>

The account book ledgers of the Snider Lumber Company provide important insight into the operations of a medium-sized sawmill in Gravenhurst in the first decade of the twentieth century. Moreover, these ledgers reveal that small-scale logging provided individual households with the opportunity to establish more sustainable social, economic and environmental arrangements with large logging companies than by simply selling labour or supplies. Snider held accounts with approximately 600 different individuals and companies from all over Muskoka, southern Ontario and a few locations in upstate New York. In addition to timber acquired from berths in Muskoka, Snider purchased a great deal of logs from local households around the lower lakes (Muskoka, Rosseau and Joseph) and sold finished lumber by railcar to businesses and individuals throughout southern Ontario via their head office in Waterloo.

Accounts with local residents reveal that the kind of economic plurality made possible by selling logs provided a measure of economic stability for households. Between January 1902 and April 1907 (the years for which records are available), the Snider Lumber Company purchased nearly \$64,000 worth of logs from 133 individuals in seven Muskoka townships. Not all 133 individuals can be clearly identified, but 70 distinct households emerge when the accounts are cross-referenced with census returns and the 1879 Rogers *Guide Book and Atlas of Muskoka*.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> The Mutchenbacker Brothers eventually moved west to Mafeking, Manitoba in 1903, where they struggled for a decade to maintain a viable business cutting several million board feet per year. Mochoruk, *Formidable Heritage*, 157-158; Tatley, *Steamboat Era, Vol.I*, 161; Andrew Hind and Maria Da Silva, *Ghost Towns of Muksoka* (Toronto: Natural Heritage Books, 2008), 33-35.

<sup>112</sup> For the purposes of this analysis, a household is defined as the combination of relatives who are determined to have worked together and/or shared profits.

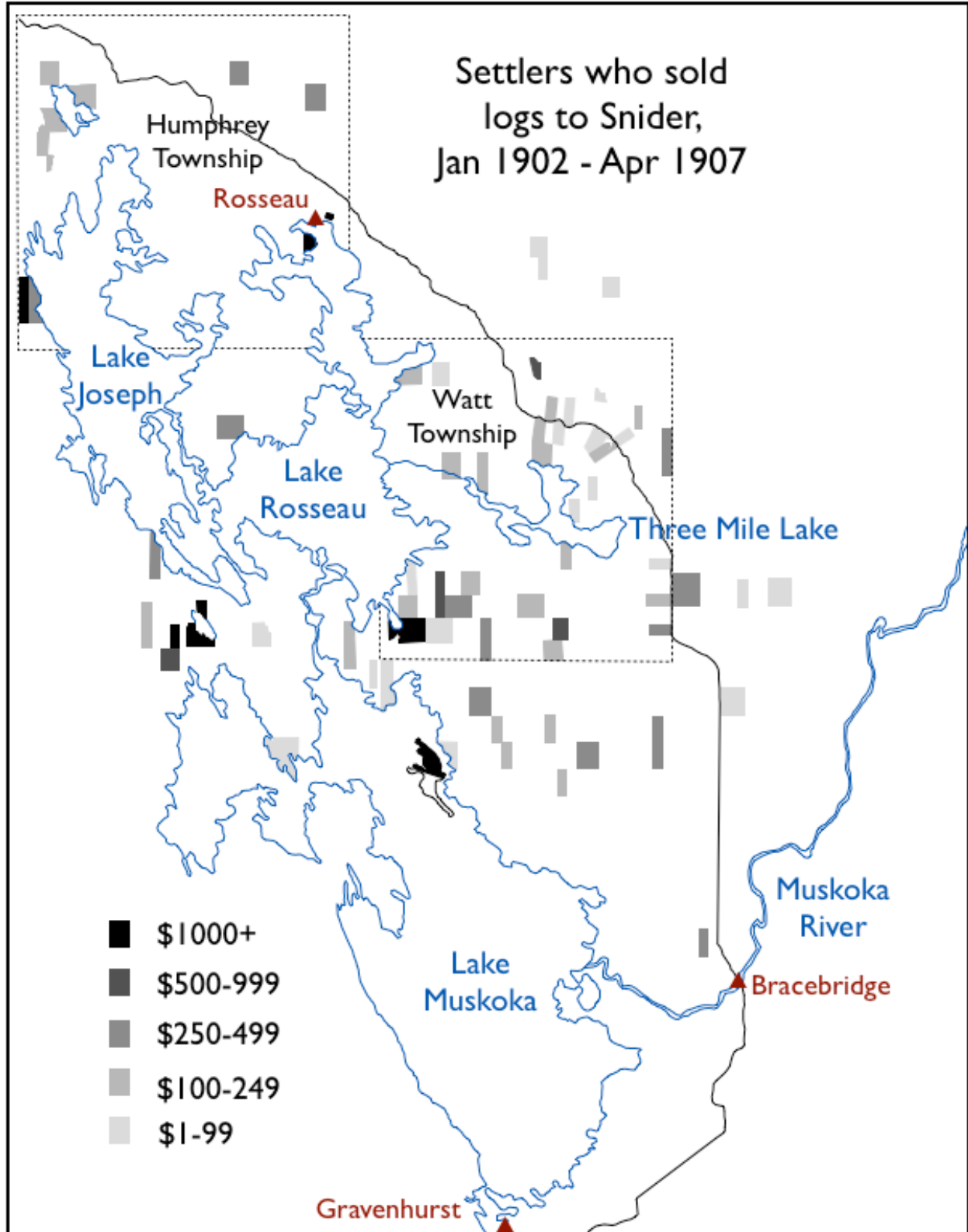


Image 9: Settlers who sold logs to Snider, January 1902 - April 1907

Source: "Accounts Ledger for Gravenhurst Sawmill of Snider Lumber Company, 1902-1907," Archives of the Muskoka Steamship and Historical Society, Muskoka Boat and Heritage Centre, Gravenhurst, Ontario.

During the 64 months records are available, 59 percent of those 70 households sold an average of \$106 logs each, totaling just 11 percent of the amount spent by Snider. Over the same time period, 11 percent of households sold an average of \$3,095 logs each, totaling 66 percent of the amount spent by Snider. Thus, while enormous profits were available to households capable of harvesting large quantities of logs each season, a majority of households benefitted from selling just a handful of logs from their property.

When compared to general store accounts, it becomes apparent that log sales covered a significant proportion of household expenditures. Take just two examples. In January 1906, Snider purchased \$65.82 of hemlock logs from Julius Grenkie in Cardwell Township.<sup>113</sup> Nine years earlier, in 1897, Grenkie purchased \$93.46 worth of goods from Homer's general store in Rosseau.<sup>114</sup> Thus, if Grenkie's 1897 account with Homer is assumed to be typical, this one-time sale of logs to Snider amounted to 70 percent of a typical year's bill at the Homer general store. Even more significantly, Alex Phillips of Humphrey Township sold Snider \$282.53 of pine and hemlock logs in the winter of 1902.<sup>115</sup> Four years earlier, in 1898, Phillips bought a total of \$105.97 worth of goods from Homer.<sup>116</sup> Phillips' sale of logs to Snider amounted to more than 250 percent of his household's annual general store bill. It would have taken Grenkie over two months, and Phillips over two years, working as choppers in a logging camp to earn the same amount of money they received selling logs to Snider.<sup>117</sup> Equally important, this scale of cutting could be continued by households occupying 100-acre lots almost indefinitely. Assuming that

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<sup>113</sup> "Accounts Ledger for Gravenhurst Sawmill of Snider Lumber Company, 1902-1907," Archives of the Muskoka Steamship and Historical Society, Muskoka Boat and Heritage Centre, Gravenhurst, Ontario, 688.

<sup>114</sup> "General Store Ledger of George Henry Homer, 1896-1901," Gravenhurst Public Library Archives, Box 35, Gravenhurst, Ontario, 117.

<sup>115</sup> "Snider Ledger," AMSHS, 762.

<sup>116</sup> "Homer Ledger," Gravenhurst Archives, 192, 227, 298.

<sup>117</sup> Based on an average wage of \$26/month over a five-month period working. Radforth, "Shantymen," 43.

the size of the logs sold to Snider were 18 inches in diameter and 40 feet long, and that each log equalled one entire tree, Grenkie would have required approximately 16 hemlock trees for his sale in 1906, and Phillips would have required about 21 white pine and 34 hemlock trees for his sales in 1902.<sup>118</sup> Thus, even just a few logs cut from his own property each season contributed substantially to a typical Muskoka settler's annual household budget, while placing very little pressure on the local forest ecology.

The combined total of all the logs acquired from households by Snider and Company created only a modest demand on the enormity of Muskoka's forest resources. Altogether, in the winters of 1903-04, 1904-05 and 1905-06, Snider purchased approximately \$42,500 worth of logs from local households around the lower lakes. Since merchantable white pine was almost completely exhausted in Muskoka by the turn of the century, Snider bought mainly hemlock logs from these households. In the winter of 1903-04, the company bought approximately 1,114 thousand board feet (mbf) of hemlock, equal to roughly 2,102 logs, from local settlers. The following winter that number had risen to 2,922 mbf from 5,513 logs, before declining to 1,309 mbf from 2,470 logs in 1905/06.<sup>119</sup> This was a large amount of hemlock. But, when spread over the entire area from which Snider obtained their logs, it placed far fewer pressures on the forest ecosystem than conventional commercial logging operations.

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<sup>118</sup> These calculations are based on 1901 & 1911 Canadian Census used for determining \$/m.b.f (\$12.76 for pine; \$7.89 for hemlock on average), and the gross board-foot volume equivalent for a tree 18 inches in diameter and 40 feet long. See Figure 6 in Paul Oester and Steve Bowers, "Measuring Timber Products Harvested from Your Woodland" *The Woodland Workbook*, Revised Ed. (Oregon State University, 2009) <http://ir.library.oregonstate.edu/xmlui/bitstream/handle/1957/13600/EC1127.pdf;jsessionid=5887CCE8F390E14E8C1212550F46802F?sequence=1> (last accessed, February 9, 2014). These calculations do not take into consideration portions of each log that ended up as waste as part of milling.

<sup>119</sup> These calculations are based on the same sources listed in the footnote 116, as well as total log purchases by the Snider Lumber Company between October and May in each of the winters listed. "Snider Ledger," AMSHS.

Of the 70 households who sold logs to Snider and Company between January 1902 and April 1907, eight sold more than \$1,000 worth (See Image 9). One of these households, that of hotel proprietor Arthur Monteith, was located in the middle of the village of Rosseau, and so more likely represents logs bought from neighbouring households and resold to Snider. Over the course of several years, the other seven households sold an average of 1,980 thousand board feet from the equivalent of roughly 3,736 large, mature trees.<sup>120</sup> These households engaged in fairly intensive logging on their properties, but they were relatively well spread out. In fact, 93 percent of the total value of logs purchased by Snider and Company between 1902 and 1907 was fairly evenly split between four townships with considerable shoreline on the lower lakes.<sup>121</sup> Yet, environmental factors influenced how many households sold how many logs during these years. Although 53 percent of the 70 households who sold logs to Snider between 1902 and 1907 lived in Watt township, only 26 percent of the total value of those logs came from Watt. And, just 10 percent of the 70 households came from Humphrey township, where 30 percent of the value of logs originated. Watt contains much of the best farmland in Muskoka as well as two large lakes that emptied into Lake Rosseau. As a result, households in that township must have found it easy to cut and sell just a few dozen logs to supplement their incomes. In contrast, in Humphrey township the soils were very poor, making the average household somewhat more dependent on selling logs cut on their land to make ends meet.

Household-based logging was responsible for cutting down thousands of trees every year in Muskoka, but the scale and extent of that cutting was far less than commercial logging and

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<sup>120</sup> These calculations are based on the same sources listed in the footnote 116, as well as total purchases by the Snider Lumber Company from households selling more than \$1,000 worth of logs between January 1902 and April 1907. Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> The other seven percent came from three townships with little or no shoreline on the lower lakes.

was dispersed over dozens of square miles. Moreover, the incentive and capacity for households to cut enormous amounts of timber was limited by either the needs of the household or the labour required, and in many cases by both.

Small-scale household-based logging provided subsidiary benefits to the community as these households still consumed many of the same goods and services as the large logging camps. And, since household-based logging was carried on throughout Muskoka's many townships, the need for men with horse teams and or skill scaling logs was dispersed. In addition to helping his sisters run their boarding house on Lake Muskoka during the summer, Charlie Riley worked scaling logs for local loggers during the winter. According to a journal belonging to his sister, Charlie left home for a day or two several times each winter to measure logs for men, two of whom sold logs to Snider.<sup>122</sup>

When compared to the results of the commercial logging model, the people who cut and sold their own trees were able to remain living with their families during the winter, received a greater share of the value of each tree, and dispersed the effects of their cutting (both positive and negative) over a bigger area. Thus, while commercial logging accounted for a much larger proportion of Muskoka's societal metabolism by extracting the region's white pine as quickly as possible, individual households tended to harvest timber resources in a much more sustainable way, providing local residents with more social, economic and environmental benefits.

#### The consequence of the tanning industry in Muskoka, 1877-1920

Hemlock played a prominent role in the business model of the Snider Lumber Company after the turn of the century. Between 1903 and 1906, hemlock represented anywhere from one-

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<sup>122</sup> "Riley Diary," AMSHS; Scaling refers to the process of measuring a tree or log to determine the amount of lumber it contains. Loggers were required to have a third party scale their logs in order to maintain impartiality between buyers, sellers and government inspectors. Angus, *Deo Victoria*, 79.

third to three-quarters of the logs purchased from the 70 households identified in the company ledgers. The region-wide exhaustion of merchantable pine by the turn of the century accounts for the prominence of hemlock. Where it was available, the industry preferred pine to any other species. That many switched to hemlock instead of any other species is explained by the fact that hemlock was the second most populous species of softwood tree in Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Forest of Muskoka. Hemlock thrives in wet, cool conditions and tolerates a wide variety of soils, while white pine grows best in direct sunlight. These growing conditions complemented one another in Muskoka's old growth forests, with stands of both species occupying similar habitats.<sup>123</sup> Since hardwoods did not float when placed in water, hemlock became the next logical type of wood to extract at a time when loggers still relied on Muskoka's watershed to transport timber to sawmills. However, hemlock logs brought far fewer profits for the industry. Thus, for logging companies, the switch to hemlock marked the beginning of the end of business in Muskoka. Having exhausted the basis of their economy - pine - logging companies did not last much past the turn of the century. The Snider Lumber Company, for example, closed their sawmill in Gravenhurst in 1910.<sup>124</sup>

For Muskoka's other large industry, leather tanning, hemlock was the species of interest. In 1877, George Beardmore established a tannery in Bracebridge. Originally from Liverpool, Beardmore arrived in Canada in 1843 with his brother, Joseph. The following year, the two built a tannery in Hamilton. After Joseph died a few years later, George continued on with a variety of small tanneries before opening one in Acton. Disappearing forests in southern Ontario around the

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<sup>123</sup> Kevin Kavanaugh and Martin Kellman, "Performance of *Tsuga canadensis* (L.) Carr. At the Centre and Northern Edge of its Range: A Comparison" *Journal of Biogeography*, Vol.13 (1986), 145-157; Norman Villeneuve and Jacques Brisson, "Old-growth forests in the temperate deciduous zone of Quebec: Identification and evaluation for conservation and research purposes" *The Forestry Chronicle*, Vol.79, No.3 (2003), 559-569.

<sup>124</sup> Tatley, *Steamboat Era*, Vol.I, 161.

middle of the nineteenth century also meant disappearing supplies of hemlock. Hemlock bark contains about 8-10 percent tannin on average, a chemical found in vegetable fibre used in processing animal hides into leather.<sup>125</sup> Consequently, Beardmore looked north to the still-forested Muskoka region to supply his business. Attracted by the Town of Bracebridge's offer of \$2,000 and a ten-year tax exemption for the company, Beardmore located his new tannery amongst the enormous quantities of hemlock that had not yet been exploited by the logging industry. The arrival of the railway in Muskoka enabled Beardmore to tan leather close to the tannin supply and manufacture the finished products in factories closer to markets, such as Acton, and later, Toronto.<sup>126</sup>

These circumstances also attracted another prominent leather manufacturer to Muskoka. The firm Shaw, Cassils and Company toured Muskoka in the late 1880s looking to benefit from the same arrangements that Beardmore had secured a decade earlier. The Shaws were originally from Massachusetts, but moved part of the family business to Montreal, eventually operating as many as sixteen tanneries in Quebec and Ontario.<sup>127</sup> In 1891, the company built a tannery in Huntsville, having also received a ten-year tax exemption.<sup>128</sup> At some point before the turn of the century, the Shaws also acquired a small tannery across the river from Beardmore, which by this time had been renamed the Muskoka Leather Company, from its original owner, David Watson Alexander.<sup>129</sup> In 1905, the Shaws renamed their company the Anglo-Canadian Leather Company.

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<sup>125</sup> Abbot Conway, *A History of Beardmore and Company Limited and Anglo Canadian Leather Company Limited* (Toronto: Canada Packers Inc, 1990), 4.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 20

<sup>127</sup> Abbott Conway, "The Tanning Industry in Muskoka" (Unpublished essay as part of Pioneer Muskoka: Notes on the History of Muskoka District as Presented by Guest Speakers on Behalf of Georgian College (Barrie), Bracebridge, Gravenhurst, Huntsville, Port Carling, September-November, 1975), Huntsville Public Library, Muskoka Local History Collection, 19.

<sup>128</sup> "The Rise and Fall of the Huntsville tannery, part one" *Huntsville Forrester*, May 19, 1982.

<sup>129</sup> Tatley, *Steamboat Era, Vol.I*, 158.



Thus, by the beginning of the twentieth century, two tanneries were operating across the Muskoka River from one another in Bracebridge, while a third was in operation in Huntsville between Lake Vernon and Fairy Lake. As was the case with the logging industry, the material and energy flows of the tanning industry contributed significantly to the expansion of Muskoka's societal metabolism between the 1870s and the 1920s. And while tanning amounted to a smaller net output than did logging, it nevertheless resulted in similar - and perhaps even more damaging - social, economic and environmental consequences.

During the first decade of the twentieth century, all three tanneries in Muskoka expanded production considerably. Unlike the logging companies, the tanneries operated year-round.<sup>130</sup> In 1906, the Anglo-Canadian Co. tanneries processed approximately 313,000 hides per year.<sup>131</sup> One local historian of the tanneries estimates that the three tanneries together could have processed as many as 10,000 hides per week.<sup>132</sup> Muskoka supplied the hemlock, but it could certainly not supply the hundreds of thousands of cow hides processed by these factories every year. Thus, tanneries shipped hundreds of thousands of hides into Muskoka by rail each year, which were then processed and shipped back out as heavy leather. The need for so many hides embedded Muskoka's societal metabolism in a transnational flow of resource commodities from all over the world, including China, India, South America, as well as the United States and Western Canada, not to mention southern Ontario and even a small amount from nearby farmers in Muskoka. One former employee estimated the proportion of hides as: 25 percent from Toronto packing house plants, 25 percent from Western Canadian packing house plants, 20 percent from the United

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<sup>130</sup> Conway, *History of Beardmore*, 5.

<sup>131</sup> Tatley, *Steamboat Era*, Vol.II, 67.

<sup>132</sup> Gail Smith, "Chapter Three: The Tanning Industry in Muskoka," Anglo-Canadian Leather Company: Tannery & Housing, Concert Band Binder of Collected documents, Muskoka Heritage Place Archives, 785.06 ANG c.1, Huntsville, Ontario, T7-8.

States, 20 percent from South America, and 10 percent from New Zealand, Northern Italy, Switzerland and Germany.<sup>133</sup>

Although it had many advantages over the logging industry, in many ways, the tanning industry shared the same pattern of resource extraction as the logging industry, leaving few economic, environmental or social benefits to the people of Muskoka. It started more than a decade later than the logging industry did but did not reach its full extent until after the logging industry had begun its decline around the turn of the century. The tanning industry destroyed Muskoka's hemlock just as thoroughly as the logging industry destroyed its pine. And since hemlock trees comprised an average of 60 percent of old growth forest cover, it is likely tanbark harvesting caused more deforestation than white pine logging in the areas affected.<sup>134</sup> Unlike the logging industry's assault on the region's pine, there were no restrictions on settlers selling hemlock trees or bark, and the tanning companies did not purchase timber licenses in areas occupied by settlers (they were already owned by the logging companies). Yet, the scale of tanning operations in Bracebridge and Huntsville demanded an enormous amount of tanbark, which necessitated a commercial approach to exploiting Muskoka's forests, similar to that of the logging industry.

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<sup>133</sup> Conway, "The Tanning Industry in Muskoka," 22. Reliable documentation on the source of overseas hides is almost non-existent. Numerous local histories, first-hand account, oral histories, and local newspaper articles describe hides coming in from a variety of overseas locations, with South America and Argentina being the most common. The earliest scholarly research on Muskoka, lists "South and Central America" as the source of Beardmore's imported hides, but with no primary sources to confirm or deny the claims, suffice is to say that some portion, between a quarter and a third, of the hides processed in Muskoka came from 'overseas.' MacKenzie, "Economic and Social Development of Muskoka," 151. Indeed a survey of American tanneries, published the year before Beardmore built his tannery in Bracebridge, argued "the Spanish hides of South America are better grown, both in the English and American sense, than are the hides of our States. The extremes of weather we have are never experienced there. The cattle feed on evergreen pastures, and are never housed, as with us." Jackson Smith Schultz, *The Leather Manufacture in the United States: A Dissertation on the Methods and Economies of Tanning* (New York: 'Shoe and Leather Reporter' Office, 1876), 190.

<sup>134</sup> Vagel Keller's research on the tanning industry in the upper Allegheny region of Pennsylvania during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries has shown that between 48-76 percent of the forest was comprised of hemlock. Vagel Charles Keller, Jr., "Forgotten Brownfields: Rural Industrial Districts in Pennsylvania, 1870-1930" (PhD. Dissertation, Carnegie Mellon University, 2005), 175.

Unlike the large logging camps, however, which housed 20-30 men for several months during the winter months, tanbark was harvested between the middle of May and the start of August - when the bark was most supple - by four-man teams, known as 'bark gangs'. While this arrangement still took men away from their families for extended periods of time, the hardships experienced by wives and children would have been fewer, since provisions were generally easier to obtain in summer. In fact, the timing of the tanbark harvest fell neatly between seeding and harvest time on the farm, supplementing household incomes at a critical time in the agricultural calendar.<sup>135</sup> Despite the shorter season when compared with the logging industry, the tanning industry was still responsible for the destruction of much of Muskoka's hemlock trees.<sup>136</sup> As was the case with logging, a more sustainable household-based alternative approach existed to the commercial tanbark harvest.

According to Gail Smith, a local historian of the tanneries in Muskoka, bark was cut in four-foot lengths and could be anywhere from 1-3.5 inches thick. Each tree usually supplied between ten to fifteen four-foot lengths of tanbark. Assuming an average diameter of 16 inches, each cord of tanbark (4 feet tall x 4 feet wide x 8 feet long) required roughly four hemlock trees. In 1879, the Beardmore tannery in Bracebridge consumed 4,000 cords of tanbark, which would have required 16,000 hemlock trees.<sup>137</sup> According to Herbert Hergert, a historian of the tanning industry in the United States, 2.5 cords of wood were required to process 100 hides.<sup>138</sup> Thus, in 1879, approximately 160,000 hides could be processed (about 3,000 hides per week) with the

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<sup>135</sup> Having spent money on seed and materials, and possibly extra help, farmers could put their labour to work earning an income to see them through until the agricultural harvest in the fall.

<sup>136</sup> A weird twist of fate, considering a similar fate befell the hemlock in an event known as the 'hemlock decline' of 4,800 BP, assumed to have been caused by a insect pathogen instead of a human one. Hall and Smol, "Influence of Catchment Size."

<sup>137</sup> Tatley, *Steamboat Era, Vol.I*, 91.

<sup>138</sup> Herbert H. Hergert, "The Tannin Extraction Industry in the United States" *Journal of Forest History* Vol.27, No. 2 (April 1983), 92.

bark used by the tannery. Twenty-seven years later, in 1906, at the height of the tanning industry in Muskoka, the Anglo-Canadian Leather Company processed an astonishing 313,000 hides at its Huntsville tannery. Using Hergert's ratio of 2.5 cords/100 hides, this would have required 7,825 cords of tanbark, or 31,300 hemlock trees.<sup>139</sup> Without any other aggregate data for the intervening years, and assuming all three tanneries processed comparable amounts of leather, the average between the lowest requirements (1879) and the highest requirements (1906) must be used as an indicator of the number of trees cut each year to supply the tanning industry. Therefore, between 1879 and 1891 (when the Huntsville tannery was built), 23,650 hemlock trees were cut each year to feed the single tannery in Bracebridge. Between 1892 and 1900 (when the Anglo-Canadian Leather Co. built a second tannery in Bracebridge), 47,300 hemlock trees were required every year to supply the needs of the two tanneries. And, after 1900 until sometime after the First World War when production began to falter in Muskoka, 70,950 hemlock trees were felled each year to tan leather in Muskoka.<sup>140</sup> Roughly estimated, the three tanneries in Muskoka consumed the bark from over 2,000,000 hemlock trees between 1879 and 1918. This kind of destruction of the region's hemlock was only possible because of the large-scale business model applied to Muskoka's forests by the commercial tanning industry.

Ex-tannery workers, interviewed by local tannery historian Gail Smith, claimed a bark gang could finish about 35-40 hemlock trees per day (one tree every 25 minutes per 15-hour work day). Yet, each man was expected to produce at least one cord per day, or four cords per

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<sup>139</sup> This is roughly two thirds the amount of tanbark

<sup>140</sup> This estimate must be treated as extremely rough, since the 1901 census lists 30,426 cords of tanbark sold in Muskoka that year (the equivalent of 121,704 trees) - approximately 50,000 more trees than this author's estimate. There is no way of knowing how many cords listed in the census were consumed locally, and is likely that some amount was being shipped out of Muskoka to tanneries in southern Ontario and elsewhere.

gang (one tree every 60 minutes per 15-hour work day).<sup>141</sup> If 36 trees are taken as the high-end of what a gang could complete in a day (equivalent to nine cords per day), and four cords per day was the minimum, a typical bark gang probably cut about 6.5 cords of tanbark per day, requiring 26 hemlock trees. In 1879, a local newspaper advertisement announced the company would pay \$3.00/cord if the tanbark was delivered to the tannery in Bracebridge, and \$2.25/cord if the tanbark was delivered to the lakeshore where a company scow could collect it.<sup>142</sup> The article also claimed the company consumed 4,000 cords that year. If all the tanbark had come from bark gangs, Beardmore would have paid between \$9,000 and \$12,000 to eight bark gangs made up of 32 men, with each bark gang member earning between \$280 and \$375 depending on where the cords were delivered.<sup>143</sup>

Few sources that shed light on where gangs cut bark or how they formalized their arrangements with the tannery. No contracts have survived to provide reliable details. But a tannery ledger from the Muskoka Leather Company listing accounts between July 1905 and August 1906 contains some clues. Every week, an entry was made under ‘Bark Ticket a/c’, which included the number and price of cords of tanbark bought. Bark Tickets were bought by bark gangs, which entitled the holders to cut cords of tanbark from company lands and timber berths. These cords were then sold to the company at a price slightly above the going rate for

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<sup>141</sup> Finishing a tree meant chopping down, removing the branches and canopy, girdling and stripping the hemlock, and stacking it into cords. Smith, “Tanning Industry in Muskoka,” T4.

<sup>142</sup> Tatley, *Steamboat Era*, Vol. I, 91.

<sup>143</sup> This assumes a 77-day work schedule, May 15-August 1. 6.5 cords x 77 days = approximately 500 cords per gang. 4,000 cords/500 cords per gang = 8 gangs (32 men).

tanbark purchased from local households.<sup>144</sup> In the year between August 1905 and July 1906, Muskoka Leather bought 2,118 cords via the Bark Ticket account, approximately 27 percent of the company's needs.<sup>145</sup> Nearly two thirds of the purchases were made during the winter months, however, suggesting that most of the tanbark obtained through the Bark Ticket account was cut inland - not close to the lakeshore where company scows could retrieve it during the summer - and only brought to the tannery when snow made overland transport by sleigh easier. According to the company ledger, Muskoka Leather owned sixteen 100-acre lots spread throughout six townships. All but two of these lots were located well back from the water, and twelve of them were, as Bracebridge was, east of the lower lakes. Muskoka Leather also held rights to timber berths in the unoccupied portions of Medora and Freeman townships, west of the lower lakes, and shared an agreement with the Conger Lumber Company for the rights to hemlock trees in the licensed parts of Conger township, also west of the lower lakes.<sup>146</sup> In fact, during a dispute in 1905 between the Canadian Northern Railway and Muskoka Leather regarding the interference of railway construction with tanbark operations, W.D. Beardmore, president of the company, remarked that he expected his gangs would take out as much as "25,000 to 30,000 cords of bark" from their limits in Medora and Freeman townships, presumably over several years.<sup>147</sup> Bark

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<sup>144</sup> The 1901 Census lists 30,426 cords of tanbark sold in Muskoka for \$133,518, an average price of \$4.39/cord, well below the approximately \$6/cord paid under 'Bark Ticket a/c' in the Muskoka Leather Company ledger. It should be noted that sources explaining what 'Bark Tickets' were and how they worked could not be found. The explanation is a hypothesis I make based on the information available. Since weekly 'Bark Ticket a/c' entries were almost always accompanied by both the number of cords and the price paid for them, I assumed a company managed system. Moreover, since the amount purchased in certain weeks is often extremely high and no names are ever associated with any Bark Ticket entries, I likewise assumed that these purchases were not made from individual households, but were instead aggregate numbers purchased from all bark gangs holding tickets.

<sup>145</sup> This assumes the Muskoka Leather Company consumed as many cords as the Anglo-Canadian Leather Company did in 1906: 7,825 cords. "Muskoka Leather Company Ledger, July 1905-August 1906," Muskoka Lakes Museum Archives, Port Carling, Ontario.

<sup>146</sup> "The James Bay Railway Company, the Canadian Northern Ontario Railway Company – Regarding Agreement between the Muskoka Leather Company and James Bay Railways for construction of dam and sluice way at Stewart Lake outlet," LAC, RG30; file no: 1046-25-2; Conway, *History of Beardmore*, 6.

<sup>147</sup> "The James Bay Railway Company and the Canadian Northern Railway Company – Highway Crossings – Request of Muskoka Leather Company for a crossing in Township of Medora," LAC, RG30; file no: 1046-58-4.

gangs cut tanbark off inland lots and timber berths owned by the company during the summer. Bark cut close to the shores of the lower lakes was transported during the navigation season, while bark cut further inland was transported to the tannery by sleigh during the following winter. This model of tanbark harvesting was relatively intensive, since bark gangs had an incentive to cut as much bark as they could during the brief period between the middle of May and end of July. Gangs worked long hours cutting trees all day. And, until a market developed for hemlock timber after the turn of the century, the logs themselves were left to rot in the woods.<sup>148</sup> The result was a rapid depletion of hemlock trees in Muskoka by the early 1920s.

The detrimental effects of tanning operations were not, however, isolated to the forests. Large-scale tanning operations also produced great quantities of tanning wastes. The sheer scale of production at these tanneries in the first decade of the twentieth century must have had a seriously destructive effect on the local aquatic environment downstream from processing. Tanning leather in Muskoka during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries involved transforming the collagen proteins of hides into insoluble material through the absorption of tannic acid. Tannic acid was produced by dissolving the tannins from vegetable matter, in this case hemlock bark, into warm water - similar to the way tea is steeped. The hide, which first underwent a week-long process to remove hair and excess flesh, was suspended in vats of tanning liquor, after which the leather was bleached, oiled and dried before being rolled, pressed, graded and shipped to factories and turned into finished products. The entire process took 60 and 80 days.<sup>149</sup> Other methods of tanning leather used chrome or oil to produce soft leather suitable for clothing, bags, and shoe uppers. The use of hemlock tannins produced a hard, reddish-colour

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<sup>148</sup> Gray, *Lake Joseph*, 15.

<sup>149</sup> "Brief Synopsis of Leather Manufacture," Muskoka Local History Collection, Huntsville Public Library, Huntsville, Ontario.

leather used in shoe soles, mechanical belts, harnesses and upholstery. After tanbark had been brought in and leather sent out, the tanneries were left with the waste byproducts of this process.

Even before it was used in tanning, quantities of tanbark, most of which was towed on scows to Bracebridge by water, often found their way into the water. As late as 1919, a board member of the Muskoka Lakes Association witnessed employees from one of the tanneries dumping “a deposit [of tanbark] a foot deep on one of the Bark Scows into the water.”<sup>150</sup> Spent tanbark was loaded onto scows and sold to cottagers and resorts as a lining for paths and walkways.<sup>151</sup> According to New York City merchant, Jackson Smith Schultz, whose father operated a tannery in Pennsylvania, exhausted lime and sodium sulphide solution (used to remove the hair and flesh from hides) and all the “sweepings and scrapings” were combined with spent tanning liquor in large reservoirs, which was then spread on farmers’ fields as fertilizer.<sup>152</sup> In Pennsylvania, heavy tanneries produced an average of 730 gallons of effluent for every 100 hides processed.<sup>153</sup> If this ratio is accepted for the tanneries in Muskoka, the Anglo-Canadian Leather Company produced approximately 2.3 million gallons of effluent in 1906, the equivalent of 44,000 gallons per week, or 6,277 gallons per day. Evidence revealing how wastes were dealt with in Muskoka is very thin, but it tends to indicate that incredible amounts of viscous and useless tanning wastes were held onsite in vats and pits before being simply dumped into the river by workers, releasing a toxic soup of animal fats, biodegradable organic matter, heavy

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<sup>150</sup> “Minutes of the Muskoka Lakes Association, August 1919,” University of Waterloo Archives, MLA Fonds, GA 100, Box 1, File 1-14.

<sup>151</sup> Scott, *Steam Tugs and Supply Boats*, 17-18; John Denison, *Micklethwaite’s Muskoka* (Toronto: Stoddard, 1993), 40.

<sup>152</sup> Schultz, *Leather Manufacture in the United States*, 153-154. Hair and flesh removed from hides was regularly sold to other industries for use in manufacturing and chemical production. Keller, “Forgotten Brownfields,” 181-182; *Huntsville Forrester*, July 26, 1906; “The Tanning Process,” Anglo-Canadian Binder, Muskoka Heritage Place, T7-8.

<sup>153</sup> Keller, “Forgotten Brownfields,” 188.



metals, and poisonous chemicals downstream.<sup>154</sup> No evidence exists that any tannery wastes were ever sold as fertilizer to local farmers in Muskoka, although this happened to a very limited extent in Pennsylvania.<sup>155</sup> The on-going exposure to the anaerobic activity necessary for microbial decomposition of organic tanning waste - the most benign of tanning byproducts dumped into the river - meant aquatic organisms suffered significantly from drastically reduced dissolved oxygen levels in the water.<sup>156</sup> Surprisingly, no one mentions this pollution in local histories, and no scientific studies have been carried out to determine its effects on the local ecology. Since the Muskoka River is a relatively fast-flowing river, a great deal of the wastes from the Bracebridge tanneries would have been carried downstream along the Muskoka River. As was the case with the logging industry, the tanning industry caused serious damage to a single species of the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence Forests in Muskoka, and its industrial byproducts caused ecological damage in the form of toxic point source pollution downstream from the factories.

#### Household-based approach to tanbark harvesting in Muskoka, 1877-1920

An alternative to the large-scale logging pursued by the Muskoka Leather Company and the Anglo-Canadian Leather Company did exist. Some proportion of tanbark was purchased, as was the case with the logging industry, from local settlers working on their own. Households generally produced fewer cords each season than the average bark gang member. As with the logging industry, the household-based approach to harvesting tanbark never accounted for a majority of tanbark procurements by these companies. But they reduced the scale and dispersed the impacts of harvesting on the local environment.

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<sup>154</sup> Harry Wahl, "A lesson in the workings of the tannery" *Huntsville Forester*, October 17, 2001.

<sup>155</sup> Keller, "Forgotten Brownfields," 189.

<sup>156</sup> Mwinyihija Mwinyikione, *Ecotoxicological Diagnosis in the Tanning Industry* (New York: Springer, 2010), 22.

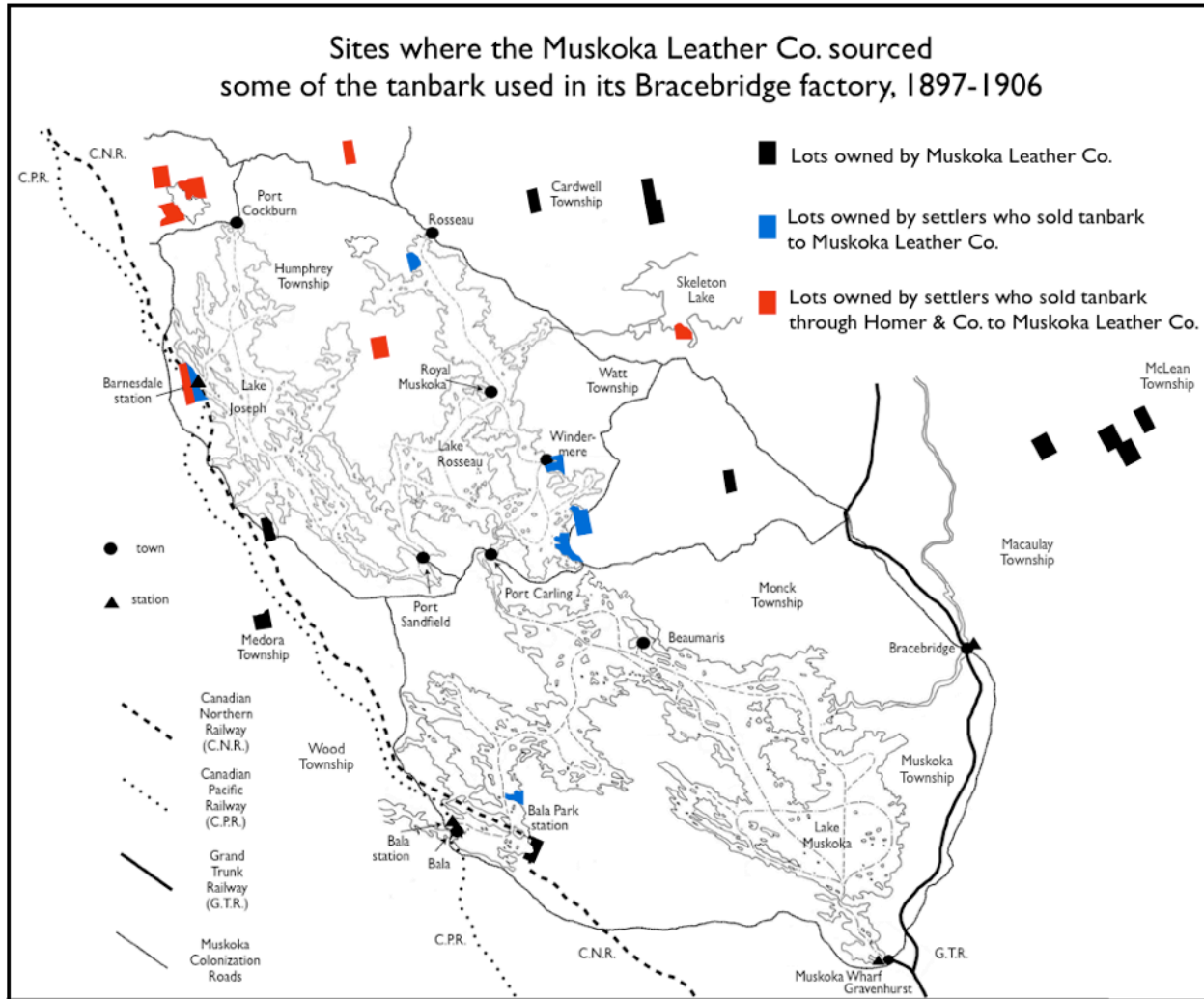


Image 10: Sites where the Muskoka Leather Co. sourced some of the tanbark used in its Bracebridge factory, 1897-1906

Source: "Muskoka Leather Company Ledger, July 1905-August 1906," Muskoka Lakes Museum Archives, Port Carling, Ontario.

In 1886, according to a surviving tannery journal, the Muskoka Leather Company made 18 tanbark purchases from seventeen different households around the lower lakes between July and October, totaling 665.5 cords; roughly 11 percent of the company's annual tanbark supply.<sup>157</sup> While a few men sold an enormous number of cords to the company in 1886, the average between the seventeen households was just 37 cords each.<sup>158</sup> Similarly, between 1897 and 1899, the Homer general store in Rosseau resold tanbark bought from local households to Muskoka

<sup>157</sup> This percentage is based on an average of 23,650 hemlock trees cut in 1886. "Tannery Journals," 17.

<sup>158</sup> One household sold 127.5 cords, and five others sold at least 50 cords, but nine sold 25 cords or less. Ibid.

Leather. In 1897, nine households sold 305.25 cords; an average of 34 cords each. In 1898, nine households sold 271.75 cords, an average of 30 cords each. And, in 1899, ten households sold 196.8 cords, an average of about 20 cords each. Over these three seasons, only four households sold more than 50 cords through Homer to Muskoka Leather. Presumably much more tanbark not mentioned in these sources came in from other settlers around the lakes, but this sample provides a glimpse into household-based approaches to harvesting tanbark in Muskoka during the nineteenth century and begins to reveal how this approach was much more sustainable than the commercial model that provided most of the tanbark.

If 1886 and 1897-1899 can be accepted as indicative of the pattern of household-based tanbark harvesting prior to the turn of the century, it is safe to say a typical household cut anywhere between 80 and 150 hemlock trees each year they engaged in the tanbark trade.<sup>159</sup> When compared to the 500 cords (approximately 2,000 trees) cut per season in the average bark gang, these are considerably smaller totals. Moreover, whereas bark gangs would cut over an entire area of all its hemlock, with a few exceptions, the household-based approach spread out the impacts of tanbark harvesting between multiple locations around the lakes. Rather than committing all their energies to cutting as much tanbark as quickly as they could, individual settlers harvested a portion of their property of its hemlock to supplement their household economies.

Writing during a trip through Muskoka in 1899, G. Mercer Adam learned that “The bark of the [hemlock] is to the settler no inconsiderable source of revenue at the hands of the

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<sup>159</sup> Of course, a few settlers each season cut far more intensively. But, they were anomalies to the general pattern. Also, since consecutive records are unavailable, it is impossible to conclude whether this pattern was replicated each season by certain households, or whether households only engaged in the tanbark trade periodically.

tanner.”<sup>160</sup> If the price paid by Beardmore in 1879 is taken as the price paid by Muskoka Leather seven years later (perhaps a slightly low estimate), then the average household earned approximately \$88 selling tanbark in 1886. The price had risen by then end of the century, when households earned anywhere between \$60 and \$112 per season selling tanbark between 1897 and 1899. In 1899, one local settler, Joseph Paisley, sold 13.5 cords of tanbark through Homer to Muskoka Leather for \$47.25. This amount covered almost a third of the Paisley household’s entire \$165 account with Homer’s general store in Rosseau that year. The same year, Louis Phillips, sold 55 cords of tanbark for \$192.50; more than enough to cover Phillips’ entire \$134 bill.<sup>161</sup> From these two examples it is clear that households could supplement their household budgets very nicely by cutting down a few dozen hemlock trees and selling the bark to one of the tanneries.

As with the logging industry’s voracious consumption of the region’s white pine, the tanning industry in Bracebridge and Huntsville exhausted hemlock in Muskoka. In 1906, an article in the *Huntsville Forester* talked somewhat blindly of the tanning industry and “the glad realization is that there is no probable limitation to its continued existence and usefulness. Unlike the lumbering industry, there is no possibility of the supply of raw material [hemlock] failing.”<sup>162</sup> In 1911, however, the census records 75 percent fewer cords of tanbark harvested in all of Muskoka than in 1901.<sup>163</sup> While this does not necessarily mean hemlock was running out, other evidence suggests exhaustion was setting in. Shortly after the end of the First World War, the tanneries began switching to mineral-based (particularly chromium-based) and high-concentrate

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<sup>160</sup> Adam, “Georgian Bay and the Muskoka Lakes,” 38.

<sup>161</sup> “Homer Ledger,” Gravenhurst Archives, 329, 389, 560, 601.

<sup>162</sup> *Huntsville Forester*, July 26, 1906.

<sup>163</sup> *Census of Canada*, 1901, 1911.

imported vegetable-based tannins, presumably in response to rising costs associated with accessing increasingly scarce hemlock bark.<sup>164</sup> Furthermore, two maps of the Anglo-Canadian Leather Company tannery grounds in Huntsville, one from 1911 and the other from 1921, illustrate declining hemlock in Muskoka. In 1911, four large buildings labelled Bark Sheds A,B,C, and D are clearly visible next to the docks along the water's edge. Ten years later, those sheds were gone.<sup>165</sup> With no hemlock bark coming into the tannery from the surrounding forest, the company removed the sheds and repurposed the space.

Hemlock bark was the reason for locating the tanneries in Muskoka. Once the hemlock ran out, the purpose for being in Muskoka expired too. Although the Huntsville tannery continued to operate until the 1960s, both hides and tannins were imported. After the 1920s, the only thing the Anglo-Canadian Leather Company continued to need Muskoka for was to serve as a sink for its industrial wastes.

### Conclusion

Individual settlers located on free grant land during the late nineteenth century could not sell the pine they cut off their land. But large logging companies could, and did. Aided by the provincial government, which saw the profits of these companies as a vehicle for generating public revenues indefinitely, the logging industry entered Muskoka's forests everywhere it could, as soon as it could, and cut as much timber as it could as fast as it could. Since settlers were prohibited from selling their own trees, they were forced to sell their labour to logging camps instead, cutting trees for the companies if they hoped to benefit at all from the destruction of the

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<sup>164</sup> Conway, "The Tanning Industry in Muskoka," 19-20; Long, *This River*, 4. A special extract, produced by boiling quebracho hardwood that grew in Argentina and Brazil, contained tannins that could be substituted for those found in hemlock bark. Conway, *History of Beardmore*, 20.

<sup>165</sup> "Anglo-Canadian Leather Company tannery grounds maps, 1911 and 1921," Anglo-Canadian Binder, Muskoka Heritage Place, T7-8.

region's extremely valuable pine. The result was that throughout the late nineteenth century merchantable white pine was almost exclusively an output of Muskoka's societal metabolism, and shortly after 1900 had all been cut in Muskoka. By the time settlers obtained the patents to their land and were legally allowed to sell pine, it was gone. Not only were the most mature trees of one particular species gone, but the scale and kind of logging employed by the logging companies had serious social, economic and ecological effects on the environment and people living in Muskoka. Large forest fires, substantial erosion and post-harvest mortality all followed the intensive logging methods of these companies. To generate income during the winter, male heads of households left their families behind to work in logging camps. Despite this extensively studied relationship with logging operations, however, households also demonstrated a different pattern of timber extraction, which offered more sustainable social, economic and environmental arrangements as part of Muskoka's societal metabolism. After the turn of the century, many households sold relatively modest amounts of timber directly to sawmills, obtaining a larger share of the profits on each log, while remaining with their families over the winter, and limiting the damage done to the local ecosystem.

This household-based approach to wood-resource extraction existed prior to 1900 as well, in the form of the tanbark trade. Settlers could not sell pine, but they could sell hemlock bark. Three tanning companies arrived in Muskoka between 1877 and 1900 specifically because Muskoka had ample supplies of hemlock. Almost immediately, households found a market for hemlock trees growing on their land. Bark gangs also cut hemlock trees on property and timber berths owned by the tanneries. Just like the logging companies the objective of the bark gangs was to cut down as many hemlock trees as possible as quickly as possible. The camp or gang

model of taking every tree useful for industry purposes on a given parcel of land had more detrimental consequences for the environment, and fewer economic and social benefits at the local level, than the household approach. Household-based harvesting of tanbark, by contrast, targeted only a few dozen trees on privately-owned land. This approach was much more sustainable than the model imposed by the commercial prerogatives of the logging and tanning industries. Had the household-based approach been followed exclusively, had timber and tanbark been harvested at a scale and pace similar to that of the average household, these industries would have been much more sustainable than they were.

### *Conclusion*

Poor soils and rich folks were the defining features of Muskoka's societal metabolism between 1850 and 1920. This dissertation has three main arguments. First, during this time period environmental limitations (particularly soils unsuited to agriculture) and a reliance on resources, manufactured goods and wealth from outside the region (particularly cash and credit) shaped life at the southern edge of the Canadian Shield. Owing to processes of geology and glaciation, the soils in Muskoka were generally very thin and acidic, tended to drain poorly, and eroded when the root structures that held them in place were removed by farmers and loggers. Pockets of better soils were found east of the lower lakes where the mouth of the Muskoka River deposited glacial till along the shores of Lake Algonquin 11,000-12,000 years ago, but when compared to southern Ontario even those soils suited agriculture poorly. Although oats and potatoes did comparatively well, Muskoka pioneers were unable to grow wheat, the main staple crop of the late nineteenth century. For thousands of years, the Anishinaabeg of south-central Ontario had adjusted their lifeways to these environmental limitations. The Eurocanadian pioneers who resettled Muskoka in the late nineteenth century were forced to do the same. In fact, despite the many differences and inequalities that developed between Aboriginal and Eurocanadian patterns of life on the Shield after 1850, both experienced the same environmental limitations and relied on surprisingly similar seasonal responses to cope with those limitations.

During the early nineteenth century, the Anishinaabeg of south-central Ontario occupied a territory that stretched across the southern edge of the Shield, along the shores of large water bodies, such as Georgian Bay and Lake Simcoe, and throughout the more fertile region between



Penetanguishene and the Kawartha Lakes. They spent the late fall and early winter in Muskoka obtaining meat and skins, and reaffirming their social structure through kinship. Although Muskoka was an important part of their home, they did not stay in Muskoka year round, because their lifeways relied on many resources that were unavailable on the Shield. Eurocanadians, by contrast, maintained much more sedentary lives in Muskoka after they resettled the region beginning in the 1850s. Instead of moving between locations where they could obtain what Muskoka could not provide, Eurocanadians transported resources, manufactured goods and wealth from outside the region into Muskoka. Many inputs, such as foodstuffs and household wares, were inelastic and continued to flow into Muskoka year round at a relatively steady rate. The flow of cash and credit, however, was highly seasonal. Logging, for example, on which many settlers relied as a means of generating income to purchase other inputs, was only practical during the winter months. The most important inputs to Muskoka's societal metabolism during this period were cash and credit brought by tourists and cottagers every summer after 1860. Life at the southern edge of the Canadian Shield relied on seasonal resources from outside the region as a way of coping with the environmental limitations of Muskoka.

More conceptually, the second argument of this dissertation is that sustainability, as it pertains to understanding the past, is a process not a condition. Nothing is completely sustainable, only more or less sustainable. Most definitions of sustainability help historians little as they tend to imply the achievement of static conditions that were maintained over time or at least several generations. This conception of sustainability is laudable, but not very useful to think with. History, as a discipline, accepts change over time as a central tenet. Even when continuity or stability are the focus, their historical significance is derived from their contrast to

change. Therefore, this dissertation offers a more historically minded definition, which is that sustainability is the *potential* for a society, or a particular feature of a society, to reproduce, or maintain over time, existing social relationships, patterns of economic exchange, and environmental conditions. In other words, people living in the past, and in this case people living in Muskoka during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, never achieved sustainability, because the society, economy and environment changed constantly. Instead, people in the past established and maintained arrangements that were more or less sustainable when compared to earlier or later periods in time, or when compared to similar arrangements existing under different conditions. As agroecologists, Santiago López-Ridaura, Omar Masera, and Marta Astier argue, “Sustainability can not be measured per se, but rather can be seen through the comparison of two or more systems. The comparison can be made cross-sectionally (e.g. comparing an alternative and a reference system at the same time), or longitudinally (e.g. by analysing the evolution of a system over time).”<sup>1</sup> Since sustainability is relative, historians can use the concept to explain the various social, economic and environmental dimensions to change in the past. This dissertation has applied this approach to sustainability to very different aspects of Muskoka’s environmental history, including the lifeways of the region’s Aboriginal population, the interdependent relationships between settlers and tourists, and the patterns of resource exploitation.

Combining the first two arguments creates a third, which is that life in a marginal environment will become *more* sustainable when social relationships, patterns of economic exchange and environmental conditions are shaped mainly by local material and energy flows.

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<sup>1</sup> Santiago López-Ridaura, Omar Masera, and Marta Astier, “Evaluating the Sustainability of Complex Socio-environmental Systems: The MESMIS framework” *Ecological Indicators* Vol.2, No.1-2 (2002), 138.

Continuing this third argument, life in a marginal environment will become *less* sustainable when local material and energy flows are greatly exceeded or undermined by exogenous ones. Adopting the metaphor of the societal metabolism to explore the material and energy flowing into, through and out of Muskoka has made it possible to arrive at conclusions about the sustainability of the entire socioecological system between 1850 and 1920. Changes to Muskoka's societal metabolism almost always resulted in expansion. Yet Muskoka did not become more or less sustainable based simply on changes to Muskoka's societal metabolism. Sometimes certain social, economic or environmental arrangements became more sustainable when Muskoka's societal metabolism expanded. In other cases those arrangements became less sustainable. The relative nature of sustainability in a marginal environment is therefore not a consequence of the amount of material and energy flowing through the socioecological system, but rather of the relationship between the system's societal metabolism and the biophysical realities of that system.

The flow of material and energy into, through, and out of Muskoka is a critical part of this story. Life in Muskoka had social, economic and environmental dimensions. Together they formed a socioecological system, a blend of human culture and the natural world. Human needs and wants influenced the decisions people made to alter the environment and the choices they made for more comfortable lives in Muskoka. Just as importantly, the physical realities of the natural world shaped what could be transformed and structured how people experienced the world around them. The socioecological system, Muskoka's societal metabolism, was therefore dynamic and changed over time. The fluidity of the system relied on the movement of people and things into, through and out of Muskoka. For thousands of years this was done by human

muscles and gravity. By harnessing the power of moving water as it flowed downstream through the Muskoka River watershed, Aboriginal peoples, European explorers, and surveyors mimicked the flow of energy in the natural world. Energy of the body, somatic energy, remained a critical mode of transportation during and after Eurocanadian resettlement. Non-human somatic energy was a prime mover of transportation technologies in Muskoka after 1860. Horses and oxen pulled carriages and wagons, significantly increasing what humans could transport. After 1866, steamboats enabled the movement of people and things to push beyond the limitations of somatic energy, but nevertheless transportation within Muskoka remained part of the organic economy.<sup>2</sup> Steamboats consumed fuelwood provided by local settlers. The flow of people and things into and out of Muskoka entered the mineral economy with the arrival of the the railway and coal-powered locomotives in 1875. The construction of two more railways, the adoption of coal aboard large steamers, and the introduction of gasoline-powered motorboats after the turn of the century firmly embedded Muskoka's transportation network into the mineral economy. On their own these new technologies were not agents of change. But in all cases, new modes of transportation, and the changes to Muskoka's environment necessary for their use, enabled people to expand dramatically the region's societal metabolism.

To Muskoka's Aboriginal peoples an expanding societal metabolism meant colonization. The environmental limitations of the Shield and the need to rely on resources from outside of the region was well understood by Muskoka's first peoples and allowed them to live a more sustainable life prior to Eurocanadian settlement. Throughout the nineteenth century, the Anishinaabeg of south-central Ontario experienced several waves of colonization that deprived

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<sup>2</sup> The concept of organic and mineral economies is derived from E.A. Wrigley, *Continuity, Chance and Change: the Character of the Industrial Revolution in England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

them of traditional territory between Penetanguishene and Lake Simcoe, restricted access to critical fisheries, and imposed increasingly discriminatory and racist policies aimed to eliminate an Aboriginal way of life. When compared to the changes that unfolded elsewhere in their home range, Muskoka provided a high degree of continuity. Thanks in large measure to the unsuitability of Muskoka for agriculture, members of the Chippewa of Rama, Christian Island and Georgina Island, as well as the Ojibwa of Parry Island were able to return to hereditary hunting territories along the Muskoka River watershed well into the twentieth century. Moreover, these groups, along with the Mohawk of Wahta, adapted their traditional skills and knowledge of the landscape to take advantage of new opportunities to earn income as guides and by selling crafts to wealthy tourists and cottagers during the summer. At the same time as colonization made their lives incrementally less sustainable everywhere else, Muskoka presented the most sustainable arrangements for coping with rapid cultural change.

Eurocanadians arrived in Muskoka during the 1860s and 1870s with little or none of the environmental knowledge of the Shield that the region's First Nations had acquired over hundreds of years. Furthermore, few had much experience with agriculture in North America. As was the case in New England during the colonial era and the Great Plains during the late nineteenth century, settlers expected to clear the land and farm in much the same way European peoples had in the Old World. Instead they confronted stark environmental limitations, and were obliged to experiment and discover by trial and error what worked best with the land they had settled. Settlers struggled to maintain a societal metabolism that met their needs. It took less than a generation to realize that their future in Muskoka would not be found in agriculture but rather in the scenic landscapes and rocky shorelines unfit for cultivation. At the same time as Muskoka

was filling in with settlers, visitors from southern Ontario and parts of the United States close to the Great Lakes began journeying from the city to Muskoka's largest lakes in search of a wilderness vacation and a rest cure holiday. The interdependent relationships that developed between visitors looking for a place to stay and settler households looking for a way to generate an income quickly became the foundations for Muskoka's most sustainable social, economic and environmental arrangements. Farming was pursued in Muskoka where conditions allowed, but tourism and cottaging became the defining feature of Muskoka's societal metabolism after about 1880. A synergy emerged between the expansion of Muskoka's societal metabolism and the establishment of more sustainable arrangements. After the turn of the century, however, a new consumer culture and the introduction of gasoline-powered motorboats marked a shift in the relationship between societal metabolism and sustainability. Cottagers and year-round residents found mail-order catalogue shopping just as convenient as acquiring items from a local farmer or general store. And they found moving around by water much easier by personal motorboat than by mass transit steamboat. The result was that households formed new linkages with distant retailers and commodity flows, which accounted for a much larger share of the region's overall societal metabolism than local interdependent relationships. The means by which inputs arrived in Muskoka remained the same, mainly by train, but the proportions of Muskoka's societal metabolism had shifted towards exogenous inputs. Cottagers and settlers continued to rely on one another for most of the same reasons they had a generation earlier, but by 1920 the most sustainable arrangements comprised a much smaller portion of Muskoka's societal metabolism.

Tourism expanded Muskoka's societal metabolism because it introduced much greater inputs from outside the region than would have occurred otherwise. The most sustainable

arrangements that emerged as a result were those that strengthened local interdependencies, especially between settlers and tourists/cottagers. At the same time as tourism was expanding Muskoka's societal metabolism by bringing material and energy *into* the region, large-scale resource extraction industries were doing the same thing primarily by directing the flow of material and energy *out of* Muskoka. The logging and leather tanning industries were the two largest components of Muskoka's societal metabolism. But they were also the least sustainable. Shortly after the turn of the twentieth century, the logging industry exhausted the last of the merchantable white pine in Muskoka. Roughly twenty years later, the tanning industry did the same to the region's hemlock. The approach these industries took was to take as many trees as they could, as fast as they could, for as long as it was possible for them to do so. A household-based approach to logging offered a more sustainable alternative. The commercial approach took men away from their families for five or six months of the year to sell their labour cutting trees in a manner that had harmful effects on local ecosystems. In contrast, the household-based approach enabled men to stay home with their families and sell logs cut off their property to sawmills, retain a greater share of the value of each tree, and disperse the impacts of logging over a larger area. Cutting down trees and shipping them out of Muskoka was an important part of the local economy, but the commercial approach created less sustainable arrangements than the household-based approach.

Muskoka's societal metabolism continued to expand after 1920. As was the case during the period of this study, changes to Muskoka's societal metabolism resulted in new social relationships, patterns of economic exchange and environmental conditions that continued to be more or less sustainable over time and from place to place. For the next few decades, visitors

continued to travel to Muskoka by train and steamboat, but improved roads and the postwar economic boom meant that by the early 1950s nearly everyone made the trip by car.<sup>3</sup> Steamboats remained an important mode of transportation during the 1920s and 1930s, but into the 1940s and 1950s they were relegated to a novelty, taking passengers on tours of the lakes rather than serving as a primary means of mobility the way they had half a century earlier.<sup>4</sup> In 1958, the last of the large steamboats, the *Sagamo*, made its final journey before being unceremoniously dry-docked in Gravenhurst. In fact, for most cottagers and lakeside residents, traveling by water was largely a leisure activity by the Second World War. It was still often quicker to get between places along the shoreline by water, but better roads made the decision to travel by car increasingly preferable. By the 1950s, mass transit options in Muskoka had been almost entirely replaced by personal modes of transportation. And the flow of material and energy into, through, and out of Muskoka became entirely dependent on fossil fuels.

Muskoka's First Nations maintained a presence in the region for several decades after 1920. During the interwar years, members of Rama and Wahta in particular traveled to Muskoka during the summer to work as hunting and fishing guides and to sell crafts to tourists. They camped next to Baisong Rapids in Port Carling and Little Trading Lake near Dorset during the height of the summer. In the 1930s and 1940s, Aboriginal people were accepted as vanishing vestiges of a more romantic era of Muskoka's past. A few were paid to act out the role of the 'authentic' Indian for tourists and cottagers who had less awareness of or tolerance for the fishing, hunting, trapping and horticultural practices that had historically brought Aboriginal

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<sup>3</sup> Peter Stevens, "Cars and Cottages: The Automotive Transformation of Ontario's Summer Home Tradition" *Ontario History* Vol.100, No.1 (Spring 2008), 26-56.

<sup>4</sup> Richard Tatley, *The Steamboat Era in the Muskokas: Volume II – The Golden Years to Present; A History of the Steam Navigation in the districts of Muskoka and Parry Sound, 1906-Present* (Erin, ON: Boston Mills Press, 1984), 263-264.



people into Muskoka every fall.<sup>5</sup> When Bigwin Inn was built on Bigwin Island on Lake of Bays in the 1920s, C.O. Shaw (also the owner of the Anglo-Canadian Leather Company at this time) agreed to preserve the the burial grounds of the Bigwin family and Reindeer dodem from Rama. After the Second World War, resorts and children's camps throughout Ontario appropriated Aboriginal imagery and customs as a way of packaging a wilderness experience, and Aboriginal people were often hired to work in these camps.<sup>6</sup> Good road access, better maps, and outfitting companies operated by whites eliminated the need for Aboriginal guides. Craft sales by women from Rama, Wahta and Parry Island continued much longer as 'trading post' stores, which commercialized the sale of moccasins, baskets and regalia. The same pattern of consumption that privileged exogenous inputs over local interdependencies also eroded the opportunities Aboriginal people had to use their traditional knowledge and skills within the tourist industry. As tourism and cottaging became less sustainable during the interwar years, so too did the arrangements in Muskoka that Aboriginal people had relied on since the 1880s.

For several decades after 1920, the interdependent relationships between visitors and year-round residents in Muskoka continued to be the most sustainable aspect of the region's societal metabolism. The proportion of material and energy flows from outside the region greatly exceed those operating at the local level. But throughout the interwar period, the Second World War, and into the 1950s and 1960s, many hotels were still run by year-round residents, and cottagers received their fresh vegetables, dairy and meat from a local farmer or general store. Cottages received electricity from local hydroelectric generating stations along the Muskoka

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<sup>5</sup> Douglas McTaggart, *Bigwin Inn* (Erin, ON, Boston Mills Press, 1992); Cameron Taylor, *Enchanted Summers: The Grand Hotels of Muskoka* (Toronto: Lynx Images Inc., 1997), 87

<sup>6</sup> Sharon Wall, *The Nurture of Nature: Childhood, Antimodernism, and Ontario Summer Camps, 1920-1955* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2009), 216-250; Barbaranne Boyer, *Muskoka's Grand Hotels*, Richard Tatley, ed. (Erin, ON: Boston Mills Press, 1987), 88-89; Taylor, *Enchanted Summer*, 74-75.

River, and local contractors and handymen built new cottages and repaired or renovated existing ones. The democratization of cottaging that occurred as smaller lakes became accessible and cottages themselves became more affordable,<sup>7</sup> revitalized many of the more sustainable arrangements with year-round residents. Not only did smaller lakes add entirely new shores for cottaging, but new lots also became available on the larger lakes as rising property values encouraged owners to subdivide their land. But postwar cottaging also presented new challenges to the interdependent relationship between visitors and year-round residents. On the one hand, cottagers expected certain services from the municipal government, such as road maintenance and waste management. On the other hand, local governments insisted that seasonal residents contribute to the tax base that paid for services, such as schools and hospitals, which benefitted mainly year-round residents. In some cases, cottagers and local government found common cause in bylaws that protected the environment and their property values.<sup>8</sup> New cottages translated into a larger tax base, but they also demanded greater expenditure for government services. By the end of the twentieth century, and sooner in more developed municipalities, the local tax base reached the point of diminishing returns, in which services cost the government more than it received in taxes. Tourism and cottaging were still the most important sectors of the local economy and contributed more to the local economy in the postwar period than they ever had before. But after the Second World War the relationship between seasonal and year-round residents was more complex than it had been fifty years before.

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<sup>7</sup> Peter Stevens, "Getting Away From it All: Family Cottaging in Postwar Ontario" (PhD. Dissertation, York University, 2010); Roy I. Wolfe, "Summer Cottagers in Ontario," *Economic Geography*, Vol.27, No.1 (January 1951), 10-32.

<sup>8</sup> Greg Halseth, "The 'Cottage' Privilege: Increasingly Elite Landscapes of Second Homes in Canada," in *Tourism, Mobility and Second Homes: Between Elite Landscape and Common Ground*, C. Michael Hall and Dieter K. Müller, eds. (North York, ON: Channel View Publications, 2004), 35-54; Stephen Svenson, "The Cottage and City: An Interpretation of the Canadian Second Home Experience," in Hall and Müller, *Second Homes*, 55-74.

This dissertation contributes new understandings to the study of Canadian history and North American environmental history. It emphasizes the importance of place and makes a strong case for sustainability as a useful concept in historical enquiry. The settlement of Muskoka served as both a continuation of, and a break from, the pattern of agricultural settlement in Canada at the time. Having colonized and occupied southern Ontario, Eurocanadians turned their energies to the southern edge of the Canadian Shield. Not knowing that the region's poor soils were unsuited to imported agricultural ideas and practices from Britain, the government before and after Confederation envisioned the settlement of Muskoka as simply the next logical step in the colonization of British North America and Canada. When settlers discovered the limitations of the Shield for agriculture, Muskoka became a dead end. Yet Muskoka's history is distinctive in this larger national narrative, not because it was passed over, but because it was settled, remained settled, and prospered at a time when more attractive options existed for immigrants and entrepreneurs. This dissertation, therefore, contributes to our understanding of the patchwork process of nation-building through agricultural settlement in Canada, while also revealing how settlement in unconventional landscapes contributed to this project. More specifically, this dissertation adds a new perspective to Ontario history, by establishing that the rural history of the province did not stop at the southern edge of the Shield. Although the region's poor soils precluded an agrarian society, the history of Muskoka demonstrates that alternative lifeways existed for people living in parts of rural Ontario unsuited to farming. By exploring how rural life in Muskoka was distinctive from rural life in southern Ontario, this dissertation also reminds readers that the Shield was a place where people lived, not just where people took their holidays and industries extracted resources.

The focus in this dissertation on the southern edge of the Canadian Shield expands North American environmental history by demonstrating that life in marginal environments offered more than simple narratives of either overcoming hardships or conforming to environmental limitations. The Eurocanadians who settled in Muskoka encountered myriad problems that stemmed from a mismatch between their expectations and the material realities of life on the Shield. In Muskoka, the solutions to these problems arose from both acquired local knowledge and reliance on resources from non-marginal environments. By exploring the paradox of a sedentary society permanently situated in an environment unable to support a year-round human population, this dissertation reveals that life in a marginal environment was impossible unless social, economic and environmental arrangements involved both local interdependencies and exogenous inputs. Furthermore, Muskoka demonstrates that the stories of marginal environments are neither exclusively declensionist narratives, in which humans degrade the natural world in an attempt to gain control over it, or progressivist narratives, in which humans reclaim a wasteland and fulfill its potential. Here instead histories of marginal environments become non-linear narratives that feature many, often simultaneous, examples of both failure and success.

The concept of sustainability has enabled new perspectives to the histories of Aboriginal people, tourism and resource extraction in Canada and North America. For hundreds of years prior to the nineteenth century, Muskoka was part of a larger suite of places that comprised the home of the Anishinaabeg of south-central Ontario. The Anishinaabe developed resilient ways of coping with the seasonal variability and environmental limitations to life in this part of North America. Confronted with several waves of colonization elsewhere within their home range, Muskoka's First Nations continued to rely on Muskoka for resources and income during the

nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. At a time when nearly every aspect of their lives was becoming less sustainable, access to Muskoka provided the most sustainable opportunities for Muskoka's First Nations. Viewed through the lens of sustainability Aboriginal peoples are seen to have relied on what Eurocanadians thought were marginal landscapes to contest colonization, maintain cultural traditions and access important resources.

Almost as soon as the region was opened for settlement, visitors from cities to the south arrived in Muskoka during the summer to experience the wilderness. Over the course of the late nineteenth century, permanent residents reoriented the entire economy in Muskoka toward the shoreline of the lakes. Waterfront households turned their homesteads into hotels and sold property to cottagers, while inland households provided services and sold produce to these seasonal visitors. Tourism became the foundations for the most sustainable social, economic and environmental arrangements in Muskoka. Tourists and cottagers brought cash and credit to Muskoka, which they spent on local services and produce. After the turn of the twentieth century, however, tourism also introduced much less sustainable patterns of consumption, which privileged exogenous inputs over local material and energy flows. The concept of sustainability has highlighted how wealth introduced by tourism solved many problems associated with life in a marginal environment, but also created new problems that resulted in unintended social, economic and environmental consequences.

Commercial logging pulled Muskoka into the Canadian staples economy. Licenses to cut timber in Muskoka were sold at the same time as the region was opened for settlement, and companies took as much white pine as they could as quickly as they could for as long as it was profitable to do so. Restricted from selling the white pine on their land, settlers sold their labour

and produce to logging camps in the winter to generate income. Commercial logging undermined much more than it complemented the local society, economy and environment in Muskoka.

Small-scale household-based alternatives to the commercial approach emerged after the turn of the twentieth century, and provided more beneficial arrangements for local settlers. The concept of sustainability helps establish that small communities gained the greatest benefits from the staples economy when households, not large commercial enterprises, commodified trees.

In addition to these historiographical contributions, this dissertation reminds us of the importance of place in all history.<sup>9</sup> Place connects people to their past as well as their future. Muskoka's future has always been next to the shores of its lakes and rivers. In the days before Eurocanadian settlement, each generation of Muskoka's Aboriginal peoples anticipated their next trip up the Muskoka River watershed to ancestral territory where they taught their children to harvest forest resources, hunt deer, and trap fur-bearing animals. As testimony from the 1923 Williams Treaty hearings makes abundantly clear, their canoe routes into and out of Muskoka led them to places where families found many of the things they needed to maintain and reproduce themselves over the coming year, and entire communities acquired the knowledge and learned the skills to sustain the next generation during times of significant changes.<sup>10</sup> As colonization unfolded, and the first generation of white settlers arrived in Muskoka, it took less than one generation for this nascent society to appreciate that the future of their families and communities lay next to the water, not the backwoods. Undoubtedly, many of the hard lessons learned by these

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<sup>9</sup> No scholarly work has done a better job of revealing the importance of place than Keith Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language among the Western Apache* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996).

<sup>10</sup> Peggy Blair, *Lament for a First Nation: The Williams Treaties of Southern Ontario* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008), 125-148; "Bound volume of testimony given to a commission, chaired by A.S. Williams, investigating claims, by the Chippewas Mississaugas of Ontario, to compensation for land not surrendered by the Robinson Treaty of 1850," LAC, RG10, vol.2331, file 67071-4A & 4B

pioneers would have been easier had they thought to ask the region's first peoples. Those who thought they saw a future in the backwoods, where valuable white pine and hemlock grew, invariably found themselves next to the shores of lakes and rivers in order to move timber and bark out of the woods to mills and tanneries in town. As the pine and hemlock vanished, so too did the future they had envisaged in the backwoods. For those who turned toward the shores, however, not only was moving into, through, and out of Muskoka much easier by water, but that water attracted rich people from cities to the south with money to spend on accommodation, meals, skills and services. The future arrived every summer by steamer, rather than every autumn with the harvest. Many people continued to make a living farming, but the best return on their labours came from selling their produce to tourists and cottagers rather than to distant markets where they would have had to compete with producers from more fertile regions. So important were the shores of the lakes and rivers to Muskoka's future, that they became the places of Muskoka's most sustainable social, economic and environmental arrangements. In this sense, the shores of its lakes and rivers have defined Muskoka's past.

The findings in this dissertation and its main arguments have much to contribute to the study of the interplay between society, economy and environment in other marginal environments in the past. Situated so close to densely settled portions of southern Ontario and the northern United States, Muskoka developed culturally as the northern edge of places further south. At the same time, situated under what was once two kilometres of ice, ecologically it is also quite obviously the southern edge of places further north. Its advantages are largely attributable to the former, while its disadvantages are almost entirely related to the latter. Environmental limitations inherent to the Shield made permanent sedentary life in Muskoka

largely unsustainable without exogenous inputs of material and energy. Inputs from outside Muskoka made it possible for people to establish social, economic and environmental arrangements that had the potential to be maintained and reproduced over time. Yet as Muskoka became fully integrated into the culture, political structures, and economy of Ontario, Canada and North America, arrangements based entirely on exogenous inputs also had the potential to take priority over and undermine the most sustainable social relationships, patterns of economic exchange, and environmental conditions that existed at the local level. In other words, inputs had the potential to make Muskoka more *and* less sustainable.

These conclusions contribute new perspectives on the history of settlement in other marginal environments where people did not come to a comparatively sustainable arrangement obviously or easily. If Muskoka belonged culturally to one place and ecologically to another, than historically other societies at the edge of marginal environments may have shared this characteristic as well. Regions such as the Adirondacks in New York, the North Shore in Michigan, the Dells in Wisconsin, Lake of the Woods in Northern Ontario, Cape Breton in Nova Scotia, and the Kootenays in British Columbia all share a similar history of poor soils and rich folks.<sup>11</sup> The case of Muskoka suggests that understanding the history of sustainability in similar regions must consider not only the biophysical realities of marginal environments, but also their cultural connection to places with more diverse resources and greater wealth. Sedentary societies that developed in marginal environments became more sustainable when social relationships,

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<sup>11</sup> In particular, the Adirondacks has attracted scholarly research. Karl Jacoby, *Crimes Against Nature: Squatters, Poachers, Thieves, and the Hidden History of American Conservation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 9-78; Tony Perrottet, "Birthplace of the American vacation: First in Crude Tents and Later in Elaborate Resorts, City Dwellers Took to the Adirondacks to Explore the Joys of the Wilderness," *Smithsonian*, Vol.44, No.1 (April 2013), 68+; Melissa Otis, "'Location of Exchange': A History of Algonquian and Iroquoian Peoples in the Adirondacks, 1776-1920" (PhD. Dissertation, University of Toronto, 2013). On Cape Breton see Alan MacEachern, *Natural Selections: National Parks in Atlantic Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001).



patterns of economic exchange and environmental conditions were shaped mainly by local material and energy flows, and less sustainable when exogenous inputs greatly exceeded local material and energy flows.

Finally, this dissertation has some important implications for thinking about sustainability in the past. Beyond the main argument that nothing is completely sustainable, only more or less sustainable, this dissertation reveals that studying sustainability in the past must take into consideration social, economic and environmental factors. Sustainability is a useful concept for studying the past only when historians pay attention to the potential for people to maintain and reproduce certain social relationships, patterns of economic exchange, and environmental conditions over time. An arrangement in which the local ecology remains basically intact, but people live miserable lives with no prospects of improving them is unsustainable. Similarly, an arrangement in which people generate large amounts of wealth, but natural systems are degraded or destroyed is also unsustainable. The measure of sustainability is not strictly whether or not a certain arrangement endures for a long time. This study covers roughly seventy years. Some conclusions about sustainability aligned with the expectation that the most sustainable arrangements were those that endured throughout the period (tourist-settler interdependencies) and the least sustainable arrangements were those that encountered an abrupt end (exhaustion of white pine due to commercial logging). But this gives a false measure of sustainability, since people often discontinued more sustainable practices (using cordwood aboard steamboats) in favour of less sustainable practices that endured for much longer (adoption of fossil fuels for transportation). Thus, sustainability must be measured by the socioecological system's *potential* to provide stability, by its resiliency, not by any perceived stability over a predetermined

duration. In other words, sustainability is the measure of the social, economic and environmental consequences of an arrangement, not simply the fact that a given arrangement continued for a relatively long time. Were duration the only measure of sustainability that mattered, given the right time frame, any arrangement could be shown to be sustainable or not. After all, the sun will eventually explode.

*Appendix*

TABLE 1: Free Grant Land Homestead Crop Yields for Muskoka, 1860 & 1862

	<b>1860</b>	<b>1862</b>
<b>bus. wheat/household</b>	10.94	9.24
<b>bus. barley/household</b>	0.73	0.61
<b>bus. oats/household</b>	4.38	6.72
<b>bus. corn/household</b>	2.08	0.20
<b>bus. peas/household</b>	0.21	1.52
<b>bus. potatoes/household</b>	125.00	94.44
<b>bus. turnips/household</b>	70.83	56.97

*source:* Florence Murray, ed., *Muskoka and Haliburton, 1615-1875: A Collection of Documents* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963), 244-245, 248-249.

TABLE 2: Locations made, locations cancelled, and patents issued in Ontario, 1874-1882

	<b>New locations made</b>	<b>Old locations cancelled</b>	<b>Patents received</b>
<b>1874</b>	919	453	-
<b>1875</b>	1387	381	570
<b>1876</b>	1463	462	546
<b>1877</b>	1914	691	542
<b>1878</b>	2115	1118	472
<b>1880</b>	1292	870	487
<b>1881</b>	1077	781	487
<b>1882</b>	932	624	502

*source:* Norman Hall MacKenzie, "The Economic and Social Development of Muskoka, 1855-1888" (PhD. dissertation, University of Toronto, 1943), 19.

TABLE 3: Crop Yields for District of Muskoka as Listed in the Canadian Censuses, 1871-1911

<b>District of Muskoka</b>	<b>1871</b>	<b>1881</b>	<b>1891*</b>	<b>1901*</b>	<b>1911</b>
<b>Total Population</b>	5,400	27,204	26,515	33,674	21,233
<b>Yield (bushels)</b>	<b>1871</b>	<b>1881</b>	<b>1891*</b>	<b>1901*</b>	<b>1911</b>
<b>wheat**</b>	4,904	48,135	19,315	44,853	4,536
<b>barley</b>	2,485	11,759	16,957	29,409	14,340
<b>oats</b>	n/a	337,340	367,568	634,981	363,747
<b>rye</b>	3,231	7,618	4,718	4,729	791
<b>corn</b>	807	14,505	3,117	3,846	2,204

District of Muskoka	1871	1881	1891*	1901*	1911
<b>Total Population</b>	5,400	27,204	26,515	33,674	21,233
<b>Yield (bushels)</b>	<b>1871</b>	<b>1881</b>	<b>1891*</b>	<b>1901*</b>	<b>1911</b>
<b>turnips</b>	78,479	460,445	277,637	n/a	69,730
<b>potatoes</b>	85,281	390,534	320,083	316,465	192,646
<b>hay (tons)</b>	3,987	24,281	42,238	56,191	38,355

\*includes Parry Sound District

\*\*includes both spring and fall/winter wheat (with spring > fall/winter yields)

source: *Census of Canada, 1871-1911.*

TABLE 4: Acres per family devoted to wheat

	1871	1881	1891
<b>Humphrey/Watt/Cardwell</b>	0.67	1.57	0.53
<b>Brunel/Stephenson</b>	0.22	1.72	0.46
<b>Stisted/McMurrich</b>	0	1.3	0.53

source: *Census of Canada, 1871-1911.*

TABLE 5: Acres per family devoted to potatoes

	1871	1881	1891
<b>Humphrey/Watt/Cardwell</b>	0.59	0.75	0.59
<b>Brunel/Stephenson</b>	0.7	0.83	0.65
<b>Stisted/McMurrich</b>	0	0.74	0.68

source: *Census of Canada, 1871-1911.*

TABLE 6: Acres per family devoted to hay

	1871	1881	1891
<b>Humphrey/Watt/Cardwell</b>	2.13	7.91	11.79
<b>Brunel/Stephenson</b>	1.36	8.92	10.9
<b>Stisted/McMurrich</b>	0	3.34	11.3

source: *Census of Canada, 1871-1911.*

TABLE 7: Yield per family of wheat (bushels)

	1871	1881	1891
<b>Humphrey/Watt/Cardwell</b>	8.26	15.42	4.1
<b>Brunel/Stephenson</b>	1.17	15.74	3.57
<b>Stisted/McMurrich</b>	0	10.55	4.74

source: *Census of Canada, 1871-1911.*

TABLE 8: Yield per family of potatoes (bushels)

	1871	1881	1891
<b>Humphrey/Watt/Cardwell</b>	73.4	84.1	62.3
<b>Brunel/Stephenson</b>	94	99.9	65.9
<b>Stisted/McMurrich</b>	0	73	87.1

source: *Census of Canada, 1871-1911.*

TABLE 9: Yield per family of hay (tons)

	1871	1881	1891
<b>Humphrey/Watt/Cardwell</b>	2.88	7.99	12.63
<b>Brunel/Stephenson</b>	1.36	7.92	10.52
<b>Stisted/McMurrich</b>	0	3.15	11.93

source: *Census of Canada, 1871-1911.*

TABLE 10: Population of Muskoka, its Main Urban Areas, and Select Townships

	1871	1881	1891	1901	1911	1921
<b>Total Population</b>	5360	12973	15666	20971	21233	19601
<b>Townships next to lower lakes*</b>	1828	3638	3610	4250	4327	3745
<b>Townships back from lower lakes†</b>	1611	4447	4405	3945	3737	3253
<b>Bracebridge</b>		1260	1419	2479	2776	2451
<b>Gravenhurst</b>		1015	1848	2146	1624	1478
<b>Huntsville</b>			1159	2152	2358	2246

\* Humphrey, Cardwell, Medora, Watt, Monck

† Stisted, Stephenson, Brunel, Macaulay, McLean

sources: Norman Hall MacKenzie, "The Economic and Social Development of Muskoka, 1855-1888" (PhD. dissertation, University of Toronto, 1943), 244.

*Census of Canada, 1871-1921.*

TABLE 11: Average Number of Days between Visits to Homer's General Store, 1896-1901

Household	1896	1897	1898	1899	1900	1901
<b>Brown, J.P.</b>	2-3	2	2	2	1-2	3
<b>Judd, Alfred</b>	15-16	15-16	21-22	12	n/a	n/a
<b>Coate, C.B.</b>	n/a	n/a	10-11	12	9-10	n/a
<b>Coate, H.J.</b>	25-26	19-20	15-16	12-13	33-34	n/a
<b>Coate, P.S.</b>	n/a	4-5	13-14	20-21	6-7	n/a
<b>Monteith, John</b>	10	5	3	4-5	3-4	5-6
<b>Warwick, A.J.</b>	2-3	5-6	6-7	7-8	3-4	n/a

source: "General Store Ledger of George Henry Homer, 1896-1901," Gravenhurst Public Library Archives, Box 35, Gravenhurst, Ontario.

TABLE 12: Average Number of Items Purchased per Visit to Homer's General Store, 1896-1901

Household	1896	1897	1898	1899	1900	1901
<b>Brown, J.P.</b>	3-4	3	3-4	3-4	4	2-3
<b>Judd, Alfred</b>	6-7	5	3-4	5-6	n/a	n/a
<b>Coate, C.B.</b>	n/a	n/a	2-3	1-2	2-3	n/a
<b>Coate, H.J.</b>	2-3	2-3	15-16	12-13	33-34	n/a
<b>Coate, P.S.</b>	n/a	6	3-4	4	6	n/a
<b>Monteith, John</b>	2-3	2-3	2-3	2	2-3	1-2
<b>Warwick, A.J.</b>	4-5	2-3	4-5	4	4-5	n/a

*source:* "General Store Ledger of George Henry Homer, 1896-1901," Gravenhurst Public Library Archives, Box 35, Gravenhurst, Ontario.

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