

THE WINTERS OF PIONEER DAYS

Windermere, Muskoka,
Feb. 28th, 1936

To The Editor of the Bracebridge Gazette,

Dear Mr. Editor:

Will you please allow me a little space in your highly esteemed paper to reply to your comment of Feb. 27th, 1936, in which you refer to us old fellows and old white heads as harping about what we have seen and done in years gone by. I must say that I do not like the way you try to belittle those dear old men and their statements. As far as their truthfulness is concerned, those old white heads, as you term us, are quite as able to tell the truth as you are. Last winter you sent out a few statements of the same nature as to the truthfulness of some of us old white heads and statements as to cold weather. Perhaps when we were out shoveling snow at 44 below zero you were in alongside of a good hot fire toasting your shins.

We came to Muskoka the fall of 1873. The snow in the bush that winter was five feet on the level. It may not have been cold, but the thermometer went down to 44 below.

Our first house was 12 x12 feet square; walls 8 feet high, practically flat on top, made out of inch lumber, no battens on the walls. You could see out through the cracks anyplace. As we had no money, no nails, this building was pinned together with wooden pins, built in the middle of the bush, trees all around it. We had no bedsteads, no mattresses of any kind, no stove. We built a fireplace out of common stone. The mortar for the fireplace was blue clay and straw mixed. When we had bread my mother baked it in a cast iron pot in the fireplace. We had no chairs. Eight of us lived in this shanty the first winter we were here. We children wore cloth moccasins made out of any old cloth we could get. One morning I started for Port Carling on snowshoes it was 44 below zero that morning. I didn't get far until my feet started to freeze so I turned for home. They had to cut my cloth moccasins off my feet; all my toes were frozen solid, both heels and the bottoms of my feet nearly up as high as my ankles all around. This

frost was taken out by a pan full of snow and ice cold water. This happened in early January and I did not get out of the house until grass was growing next spring, but thank the Lord I got both feet and all my toes up to the present time.

While you may not think it was cold, yet it's not hard for me to remember what happened.

Now the above statements are perfectly correct. I've seen more than one winter with nearly twice as much snow as we had this winter. Thanking you in advance for the space contained in your paper, I beg to remain very truly, one of your old white-headed friends.

I. Hough

Ed. Note. – Mr. Hough's very interesting letter clearly shows the hardships of pioneer life in Muskoka. The idea of "Comment", however was not to belittle or minimize the hardships suffered in the early days but merely to point out that those hardships were due to lack of some modern comforts, such as good housing and good clothing, rather than the more severe climate.

An Old Timer Writes of Early Days

To the Editor of the Bracebridge Gazette.

Dear Sir:

I was very much interested in the letter that appeared in The Bracebridge Gazette of March 5th under the hand of Mr. I. Hough. Like Mr. Hough I too have had a little experience in by-gone days. Many months has the writer attended public school with a pair of socks knit from yarn made by the old hand spinning wheel that my mother was an expert at operating in those early days, and on the soles of those socks was sewn a piece of full cloth, which would last nearly as long as some sole leather that you can buy these days. In those days cloth was always made from the pure wool from the sheep's back, not shoddy or mostly so that people often buy at the present time.

I can well remember when my parents used to take a bag of wool to the Henry Bird woolen mills – that was back in the 1880's -- and my mother would get carded what they called rolls which she spun with her own hands into yarn. The same rolls were spun and then woven into cloth that the head of the family would wear until they didn't know what the original color was, it was so much faded with the weather, and this was what they would use to face mitts and sew onto socks soles for the family to go to school. Those who didn't have socks would have top boots with a copper toe. I could mention names of pupils who went to school at the same time as I did at the same school that can verify these facts. In those days those that did raise sheep would get from 12 to 17 cents per lb. for their wool and if you wanted yarn you could buy it for 45 to 50 cents a lb.

Now Mr. Editor, two or three years ago yarn was 80c to \$1.00 a lb. and you could get the enormous price of 5 cents per lb. cash for your wool. Some say there is the tax. Well, does the farmer get his land free of tax? At the above price if the sheep grows 7 lb. of wool a year that is 35 cents well they would say, but she raises a pair of lambs or one at any rate. Perhaps she does and perhaps she doesn't. Is it any wonder that so many farmers are living retired at such enormous profits as the above? Pay taxes and feed the sheep for 12 months for 35c. At the present price of yarn the farmer should get from 25 to 35cents per lb. for wool.

Mr. Hough has given an outline of conditions that he has actually seen himself. In the early 1860's a Methodist Minister used to preach on a Saturday forenoon within a gunshot of Mr. Hough's present home and the settlers used to gather in their neighbor's house to the service in their shirtsleeves or with a swallowtail coat. After the service a couple of those settlers would step into a log canoe and paddle to what is now Portage Bay, Lake Rosseau the minister would be the front passenger and when they neared the shore he would put one foot onto the nose of the canoe and before the bow struck the sand he would jump and at the same time say "Good Day," for the mosquitoes and black flies would meet them. I haven't said anything about the minister getting dinner before he left; he got no dinner, only when he called on some settler's turnip patch. Well, you may say, he may not have been going far. His next stop was South Falls, three miles below Bracebridge. The younger generation will say, "All that way without a car or horse and no dinner."

More than once has a log canoe started from what is now Windermere with two "tough nut settlers" with 20 bushels of wheat and headed for what is now called Port Carling before the locks were built and portaged the wheat and canoe across on their backs, reloaded again and turned ahead full speed for the grist mill at Bracebridge, there to lie down on the mill floor and sleep while the grist was being ground. Then they would move out to the mouth of the river with their cargo and wait till the wind went down before venturing Muskoka Lake on their homeward voyage. In these times Mr. Editor, we hear a great deal about "Relief", but we don't hear of any of the "Reliefers" doing as I have described -- and in those days there was no relief to be had. In a great many cases we hear of people wanting the supplies delivered to their door. These early settlers around Ufford and Windermere carried supplies on their backs from Washago and later from Tommy George's where Moore Bros. store is at present, and the trail was only a cow path at that. In the 1860's wages were eleven to thirteen dollars a month on the road and more than one was led to camp blinded with blackflies and mosquito bites. In the year 1868 when the Wenonah was brought up the rapids at Port Carling, the settlers all turned out gratis for work, getting their board and all the whiskey they could drink. I understand there were two dams built before she could float into Rosseau Lake. The steamer wintered on Rosseau Lake side the following winter. The following summer the locks were built and, as Mr. Nixon, formerly of Redwood post office narrated in the Toronto Star some weeks ago, the locks were christened with a barrel of whiskey. If I am not mistaken it was the

year 1867 that the steamer Wabamic was chartered to run an excursion from a rock on the north shore of Portage Bay, the deepest available spot for deep water, to Port Carling, with the Three Mile Lakes wolves to celebrate the twelfth of July at the Port and bring them back at the end of the celebration. When that was I am not prepared to say. This must have been a great experience for those backwoodsmen, to take a first class passage ticket on this noble craft. The writer never heard how much the return fare cost. The last time the writer was on the Wenonah was an excursion to Port Cockburn when Capt. Hough was in command. That must have been in 1888 or 1889.

I have often thought, Mr. Editor, would it not be a very thoughtful idea for all the townships in Muskoka to raise sufficient funds to erect a statue somewhere near our District Town of Bracebridge, right on the Highway, to be erected right in the centre and the traffic could go on either side, to have all the names of our pioneer settlers inscribed on it to show our appreciation to our forefathers for their hardships and labors that were the foundation of our fair Muskoka of the present day.

As I do not wish to take up too much space of your valuable paper, at some future time I may again write a few more reminiscences of early days. Thanking you, Mr. Editor, in advance for space, I remain,

Yours truly,
George Dawson

2117 East 32nd St
Cleveland Ohio,
June 17th 1932

To G.H.O. Thomas,

Editor of the Gazette, and to all residents of the Township of Watt: I have looked for years to find some history of the early settlers of the township, so if I will not be intruding on valuable space I will endeavour to give you the names of all the early pioneers as near as I can remember. So if I should not be as accurate as I should be, I hope you will pardon me. To begin with I will commence with the first ones around Three Mile Lake. In the year 1861 or 1862 the following families came to the south shore of the lake: There were James Shea and family from Stormont County, his two sons, John and William, two or three daughters, namely Mrs. Wm. Morley and Mrs. Peter Pickering, and Mrs. Dan McIntosh. Next there were Jacob Bogart and his family, who came from Winchester, Ont., those two families being about the first. Following soon after were the Morleys, Kay and Patrick Lovely, the Golleys and Oldhams, Thos. Wright and the Giles family, Sandy Grant and the Shannons, John and G. M. The Leiths settled on a farm at the outlet of Three Mile Lake, just below the falls, now the farm owned by A.W. Briese, Reeve, at present. Most of those came in before the township was surveyed. In such case there were two or three families on the one lot. Frank Forge and William Dawson squatted on the shores of Lake Rosseau, Mr. Forge having tramped all the way from Markham. In fact he had made several trips back and forth and always carrying a good heavy pack on his shoulders. I remember hearing him tell of bring 50 lbs of flour, some side bacon and other parcels of tea and such, lugging it all the way from Orillia or Severn Bridge. At the upper end of the lake Christopher Martin had settled on a 100 acre lot and was one of the first to become housed in the township. His place used to be quite a noted stopping place for those who made use of the ice on the lake as a short cut to the lower end of the township. About this time John Young took up a lot on the Parry Sound Road where the family were raised and lived up to quite recent years. John McCoy and his father located a little further south at the junction of the old Three Mile Lake road, and William Jack, his brother-in-law lived there as well. About mid-way between the Parry Sound Road and Ufford, Nicholas Bennett had located on a 200 acre tract and cleared a large field but the ground was so stoney he afterwards abandoned it.

From 1862 to 1867 there were many of other families came in. Beginning at what is now Raymond there were the Billingsleys, Pickerings, Atchinsons, Bob Mitchell, Donald Mitchell, the Fosters, the Gott brothers, Anthony Suffern, Jerry Ryan, Edward Hamilton, William Graham, Thos. Nutt, the Greers, McCaskels, the Hammells, Webbers, Emmersons, Putnams, Kingshotts, Galloways, Hunts, Sibbetts, Edwards, John Etty, Beaumonts, Ernshaws, Olsens, John Innis, who was the first assessor and collector of the township, Fred Richardson, George and Henry Creasor, Geo. Bunn Sr., the Gaffneys and Simms, and along the Windermere road were Henry Buckerfield, Joseph Stephens, Richard Huggard, John Creasor, James Barber, Alex Shannon, Archie Taylor owner of the first sawmill in the district, David Fife, Thomas Aitken, Scott Atkins.

During the year 1867, L. G. Simmers, father of the writer, took up lot 20 on the 7th concession, moving the family in one year following. I can well remember our first house in the bush. When father would be cutting down the big trees around the house, mother and we younger ones would be told to come out of the house while the tree would be falling. And there were some big ones too; elms four feet through and some very large birches. I often think now of the Herculean tasks of clearing up a bush farm. The younger generation have little idea of the work their fathers had and the long years of toil with little in the way of money and the comfort of the present day. Most of those noble pioneers have passed on to a greater reward and may their souls rest in peace for my recollections of them are very dear : such charity and generosity. It would be hard to find anything to compare with it today. As the motto of those hardy pioneers was, one for all and all for one. It is true they never became rich but they were ever generous and liberal with what they had. Although not accumulating riches they have left behind something far greater in carving on the pages of memory which will go down to posterity when all earthly treasures have passed into oblivion. Now Mr. Editor, I have taken up considerable of your valuable space but will complete the full list of Watt's Pioneers at another writing.

With sincerest wishes to you and to all my Watt friends,

Geo. H. Simmers

(Thank you. – G.H.O.T.)

Records of Watt Township indicate a Summers family in Ufford during the time described. It is probable that the newspaper erred in printing his signature as "Simmers"

OLD TIMES IN WATT

Cleveland, Ohio,
May 4th, 1936

Dear Mr. Editor:

Hope I will not be intruding on your valuable space but having seen letters from some of the old timers, Messes Hough, Dawson and Shea, I might just give a short write-up of the early days of Dee Bank and the lower end of Three Mile Lake. In 1869 my father moved the family from Brock Township, Ontario County, to the South shore of Three Mile Lake. We first lived on the Portage lot {now occupied by Alexander Cowan), then the property of the late Alexander Grant, who died the year before.

The following year we moved to Lot 20 on the 7th concession of Watt Township. But in 1868 John Shannon took up 300 acres of land and the mill site and put up a sawmill and commenced to build a flourmill. When completed it was one of the largest mills north of Orillia. I well remember the raising of the frame. There were three days of the event and what a time – all you wished to eat and whiskey galore. Frank Newell was the framer. There was not a mistake in the whole building. The machinery was furnished by that well-known firm of Goldie & McCulloch and was considered the very best at that time. I will name a few of the pioneers who were at the raising: British Bateman, Bill Russell, John L. Shea, William Shea, Roxborough Shea, Pete Pickering, Eli Pickering, Jim Gott, Jerry Ryan, Henry Smaley, Wm Kay, Bill Winfield, several of the Bogart family, Robert Giles, and Thomas, Thos. Wright, George Oldham Sr., Patrick Lovely, Bill Polly, David Fife, Thos. Aitken, Archie Taylor, Sandy Fraser, George, Henry and John Creasor, Richard Huggard or King William as he was called at that time, some of the Kingshott family, Bill and Jim. There was a grand ball or dance at the wind-up. I can remember British Bateman singing ever so many songs, among them was “The Rambler From Clare”, a good old Irish song too. Jim Gott was what you would call director of ceremonies and

how well he performed his part. Poor old Jim. It seemed a sad fate to great expectations and hopes for starting a village – it deserved a better fate.

Now Mr. Editor, I will not encroach on your good nature and at some future date I will write another letter giving some of the experiences I well remember which will be rather amusing. I will give a write-up of the first nomination of the Township of Watt and other happenings.

Sincerest wishes to you and all the old friends and many thanks.

GEO. H. SIMMERS
2117 E 32 St.,
Cleveland, Ohio

Records of Watt Township indicate a Summers family in Ufford during the time described. It is probable that the newspaper erred in printing his signature as "Simmers"

A DESCRIPTION OF PIONEER TIMES

Huntsville Forester 1936

The story is told by Mrs. Alfred Clubbe of Rosseau, of her early days, perhaps the story in part of most of the early settlers. Mrs. Clubbe has a wonderful sense of humor and she knows Muskoka for over sixty years, although she lives in Rosseau, Parry Sound District. She says:

“It is over sixty years since I came to Muskoka. We lived in Toronto, or Muddy York as it was then called. We came to Barrie by train and took the boat to Washago. The boat was called the Ida Burton. We took the stage from Washago to Gravenhurst, where we stayed all night and slept on the floor with one blanket and no mattress and in fact no floor but mud padded hard. I slept well in spite of mosquitoes. I just covered my head and let them hum.

The next morning we again took boat to Port Carling. It was a small tug. One could put one's hand out the window and dabble it in Lake Muskoka. There were no locks at Port Carling then. Everything had to be portaged across into Lake Rosseau. We then took a smaller boat to what was known as Cameron's Bay, - the only landing at the head of Lake Rosseau. Rosseau itself was not on the map at that time. From Cameron's Bay we had to follow a narrow bush trail and the mosquitoes were in thousands to give us a welcome. I was only ten years old and thought it rather a joke, but it was hard on my poor mother who had never been out of the city before and she was a frail woman at that. We had to walk three miles to my uncle's. There were four families ahead of us and the neighbors made a bee and built us a log house. The cracks between the logs were chinked with moss. There was a trough roof and a mud floor for two years.

The cold was dreadful. We had only one small cook stove. A pail of water would freeze solid in the night and so would the bread. We sometimes had to chop it with an axe and toast it. We had lots of wood and bedding and we were never ill. There was one small store, but the storekeeper never got in flour enough in the fall to do until the break-up, so we had to live on potatoes and salt six weeks, although we had money in the house. Then a neighbor managed to get a bag of flour. He brought it 24 miles and all the neighbors got a few pounds. My but that bread tasted good.

The next year we got a cow and some hens and conditions began to improve. There was not a horse in the place but one man had a yoke of oxen. We put in our crops with a grub-hoe and I had to do my share. I was up against it for I was the oldest. I had only one brother and he was the baby, so I took a boy's place. We cut wild hay for cow feed and had to carry it all to stack it. We raised a calf that became an ox and I taught it to work. I called him Jack. I always drove him and we drew up all the wood. He would not work for anyone else and I was very proud of him.

At last we got a school and a man preached from house to house. What I missed most was books, but at last we had a Sunday school and someone in the city sent us a library and that was the most wonderful thing that ever happened to me."

Such was the interesting story Mrs. Clubbe related to me of her early days, and of just such "good Stuff" were our pioneers made. We have many like her in and around Huntsville, and just such people laid the foundation for the Town of Huntsville in the early days.

Foot Note

(Added by Rosseau correspondent of Gazette)

Mr. and Mrs. Clubbe are among the few of our oldest respected citizens and could perhaps tell us many humorous tales as well as tales of hardship following their arrival in these parts which was similar to that of many of our parents and ourselves, many of whom kept body and soul together on a short ration for some weeks of either potatoes or turnips alone and sometimes cornmeal for weeks at a time, it having been absolutely impossible to get anything more than one had until spring came and trails opened up. I wonder how many of the present generation have gone without decent satisfying food for a day only, and could realize what it would mean to be without for five and six weeks as Mrs. Clubbe and the writer hereof have been.

Windermere, Muskoka,
April 1st, 1936

Dear Mr. Editor of Gazette

Would you please allow me a little space in your worthy paper in reply to Mr. George Dawson's letter.

We came to this country in 1873. Referring to the old spinning wheel, my own mother used one of those. Many a day I put in carding wool with the old hand cards while my mother would be spinning it into yarn. The first two years we were here we didn't have any socks at all just rags wrapped around our feet.

Your father and mother, the late Mr. and Mrs. Dawson, were among my first acquaintances when we came to this country. Many a good meal I had at their place. I remember the copper-toed shoes very well. We used them before we came to Muskoka.

My father preached in Windermere before they had a preacher here. The services were held in the little old house belonging to the late Thomas Scott Fife. My father built the first tourist house in Windermere, owned by the late Thomas Aitken. He built the whole house: made the doors by hand also the sash and shingles. My father lathed and plastered this house; painted it; stained and grained it all complete, even to the chimney. The late John Trail and I mixed all the mortar for the house.

The canoe you speak of was made by the late Frank Forge and the late Thomas Aitken. This canoe was twenty-five feet long, four-foot beam, six inches thick on the bottom to keep it from turning over. Many a time I have walked from one end of this canoe to the other in the gunwale and it scarcely moved. These two dear old men, Aitken and Forge, would put their grist in this canoe, paddle it all the way to Bracebridge in one day; get the grist

ground the second day and get home sometime on the third day. I wonder how many could do that now.

I remember the Wabamic well. It was the first boat on these lakes. It used to carry the mail from Port Carling to Rosseau before the locks were built at Port Carling.

I knew all the Three Mile Lake Wolves very, very, well. Not many of those dear old men are left now. I joined the Orange Lodge at Port Carling when I was seventeen years old, a little under the schedule age, but you know, George I wanted to get at the old drum. I still take it out once in a while when I want to wake up some of the old timers in Windermere.

The rock as referred to in your letter on the north side of Small Bones bay, where this wonderful excursion landed is still there, right in front of Weston cottage, the property owned by Doctor Rountree of Toronto. Many a hundred cord of bark we put on scows off that rock including all we peeled of your father's bush. The excursion on the Wenona was while my brother; Captain Sylvianous Hough was in charge. He, too, has past away long ago. We walked and staged together from Washago to Gravenhurst. The late Jim Harvey from Rosseau was in charge at that time. All this seems a short time ago and I was tickled to death to read over your letter, being an old acquaintance from boyhood up. I am always delighted to have a chat with old timers who helped build up this fair famed Muskoka. Long may you live in this land of the pure and free.

Your old friend,
I. Hough

Pioneer Days

Windermere, Ont.,
April 20th 1936

Mr. G.H.O.Thomas,
Editor, Bracebridge Gazette,
Bracebridge, Ont.

Dear Sir,

Letters on pioneer days in Muskoka by Messrs I. Hough and George Dawson of Windermere, also Mr. John Shea of Ufford have been very interesting and no doubt revived many memories of long ago. Though I am much too long to consider myself a pioneer, yet different incidents related by Mr. Hough and Mr. Dawson recalled to me some of those experiences as related, yes, many times, by my parents and other old time residents of their generation.

Mr. Dawson's descriptions of the minister's visits to Windermere in those days were, I think, the ones that impressed me the most, perhaps for the following reasons. First, when the minister arrived it was my father, then just a lad, who was sent on foot (and no doubt barefoot) to notify the neighbors of his arrival and the hour of service. Of course this did not necessarily mean that it was Sunday but just whatever day the minister happened along. If a neighbor happened to be ploughing when word arrived, the oxen were immediately relieved of their yoke and given a half-holiday. As Mr. Dawson pointed out, the minister traveled on foot and no doubt took all the short cuts possible irrespective of creeks, puddle hole, etc., for often were his clothes well splattered with mud and wet to the knees when he arrived. After being supplied with dry clothing belonging to my grandfather, and the neighbors had arrived, service was conducted in the home. Meanwhile my grandmother washed and dried the preacher's clothing in the back shed baked a pan of hot biscuits for his lunch then he was ready for that 3 mile paddle in the log canoe to Portage Bay.

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I have known Mr. George Dawson all of my life and know him to be a man not to exaggerate and just here would like to touch on one point in his very interesting narrative. He says if the preacher got a lunch it was in some neighbor's turnip patch. In explanation of this point I am only relating the story as I have heard my father tell it on more than one occasion. In fairness to all, Mr. Editor, I might add that it would not be at all unlikely if the wherewith to make the pan of hot biscuits that I have referred to may not have always been available and the turnip patch was the next best. But be that as it may, personally the days and incidents referred to were before my time and thank God they were.

I would like here to mention an incident as related to me by the late Mr. Frank Forge while we were traveling to Bracebridge aboard the steamer Islander. It happened that my grandfather, the late Mr. Thomas Aitken, and a great uncle of mine, the late Scott Aitken, who was known, I think, to most who knew him, especially in his late years, as "Uncle Scott," were making a return trip from Bracebridge with their two log canoes loaded with grists. After laying at the mouth of the Bracebridge River till after dark waiting for the wind to go down before venturing up Muskoka Lake they decided to continue their journey. As they neared the mouth of the Indian River the storm became worse and as Mr. Aitken and my grandfather were paddling together in one canoe and uncle Scott alone in the other he naturally got some distance behind. Eventually the first canoe reached main land at the Indian River but no sight nor sound of uncle Scott. By this time it was raining and blowing in no mean style so the boat was pulled ashore and turned upside down over the grist, then a fire was lit in the hope it would serve to direct Scott but as the storm grew worse it was feared that his craft had capsized. At daybreak the two men started back down Muskoka Lake to look for a floating canoe. About this point in Mr. Forge's narrative the steamer Islander was just about opposite a little rocky island about a half a mile south of the Indian River and pointing to it he said, "Right there is the spot where they found Scott, his canoe upside down over his grist and he fast asleep."

My grandparents moved to Muskoka in 1869 settling on lot 30, Concession 8, Watt Township, which now constitutes the major portion of the well-known Windermere Golf Course. Though locating additional lands, it was on this particular lot they settled, their original log house occupying

the exact site of that stately concrete block residence now owned by Mr. and Mrs. W.J. Bunn of Windermere.

My grandfather made his first trip to Muskoka , locating and erecting his log house in 1868, the family following the next spring from Otonabee Township, Peterborough County.

My grandmother lived in her new home thirteen months before she saw another white woman although had plenty of “Indian women” visiting.

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paper, Mr. Editor, I would like to give a few dates which I have in my possession having been handed down from generation to generation which I think might be more or less interesting.

David Fife, the writer’s great grandfather, was born in 1805, the fifth of ten sons of John Fife and Agnes Hutchison who were married in Kincardine, Perthshire, Scotland. The family came to Canada in 1820 and settled on what is now the 4th Concession of Otonabee Township, Peterborough County. David married Jane Beckett in 1825 and built a rude home on the 100 acres immediately north of his father’s. He was the originator of the Fife Wheat in Canada of which, with your permission, I will give the history, based also on facts and dates as handed down to each succeeding generation, together with the likeness of the old gentleman and his wife, in a later edition of your paper. The eldest son, David Fife, was my grandfather, who as previously mentioned, moved to Muskoka in 1869 when my father David Fife Jr. was 12 years of age.

The writer represents the 5th generation and my son the 6th, of which I am justly proud.

Trusting the above may be of some interest to the readers of the Gazette, including our esteemed friend the Walker’s Point correspondent, I am,

Yours very truly,
ARTHUR W. FIFE

In pencil below this letter is: Arthur Sept. 27

Ufford, Ont.

Well, Mr. Editor,

I see some of your readers appear to appreciate some of the old-time tales put out by Messrs Hough and Dawson and myself. So, although I am pretty busy, will do my best to interest them. We have but a very few of the genuine Old Timers left, I myself being only a second - growth pioneer. Some of the real old bush whackers still living are Eli Pickering of Sudbury, James C. Bogart of Fenwick, William Oldham of Lambeth, John Davidson of Brackenrig and George Summers of Cleveland, Ohio. These men, if they wished, could give us volumes of information on the early days of Muskoka.

My grandfather and family moved into what is now known as Three Mile Lake district in January 1863, and some of us are still living here. About that date the Bogarts, Sufferns, Pickerings and Gotts arrived on the scene.

A little village was formed on the south side of Three Mile Lake on what was afterwards known as Bogart's Point. Thirteen families in all settled here. A few months later the Government surveyors came along and these hardy squatters found out that they were all living on one lot. Apparently Jacob Bogart bought the claims of the rest of them as he retained the point and the Sufferns, Gotts and Pickerings moved to the east end of Three Mile Lake and formed what is now the thriving community of Raymond.

My uncle, John L. Shea, was one of the foremost men in opening up Watt Township. He assisted the surveyors in surveying the Parry Sound road and Watt Township. He was one of the first councilors of Watt and without map or assistance laid out the township of Watt into its various school sections.

Mr. Dawson speaks of the hardships of the early ministers. They surely had their troubles but they were the men for the hour and if they had to get their meals out of the turnip patch, as Mr. Dawson says, it was because the settler himself did not have anything to divide with them.

As to real pioneer hospitality I will give you an example of Mr. Smallbones and the Preacher. As nearly as I can make out, Mr. Smallbones was a very highly educated Old Countryman and sort of a hermit. He built a little dug-out on the Indian portage between Three Mile Lake and Rosseau Lake and lived there alone. This was on the Port Carling- Three Mile Lake - Skeleton route. One dark, cloudy night in the Fall, the wind blowing in gusts the rain falling in torrents, there came a knock at Mr. Smallbones' door. He hastily opened it and a man walked in. It was the minister: he was cold, drenched to the skin and lost. Smallbones lost no time in helping him dry his clothes and getting him something to eat and as there was only one small bed in the shack he gladly gave it to the minister while he (Mr. Smallbones) kept the fire going. Weary and tired the minister dropped into bed but his rest was disturbed he was annoyed, he rolled and tumbled, he sat up in bed and said, "I cannot sleep here, too many bugs in the bed." "It's a lie," retorted Smallbones, "and if you can't sleep in it, I can," and with that he jumped into the bed and the minister had to sit in the chair until morning. Further investigation in the morning proved to Smallbones that the preacher was right and like a good sport he asked the minister's pardon and the little incident did not in any way interfere with the friendship of the two men.

Mr. Smallbones lived in this little shack until he was too feeble to live alone and the remainder of his days were spent with Mr. and Mrs. Sandy Fraser of Brackenrig.

Well, Mr. Editor, I might be able to give you a few more little incidents like this in connection with pioneer days but I would far rather some of the Old Timers themselves would enter into the spirit of this. For instance I would like Mr. Geo. Summers of Cleveland, Ohio, to touch on the early days of Dee Bank. Come on, George, Muskoka wants this and you are the man.

Thanking you, Mr. Editor, for space, I am,

Yours respectfully,
JOHN SHEA

THE FOLLOWING ARTICLE APPEARED IN THE BRACEBRIDGE HERALD
GAZETTE ON THURSDAY, JULY 20, 1939.

The following has been typed as it appeared, with NO changes to grammar or spelling.

DAYS WHEN SINGLES WERE HAND MADE

Starting of Farming and Lumbering Operations

Muskoka's Future Looked to With Confidence

(By Harry Linney)

A few days ago we chatted with Mr. Ireneous Hough of Windermere, on first days in Muskoka. He is a real old-timer and his experiences are interesting. He has been a farmer, a hunter and trapper, a lumberman, and for many years has applied himself to the conducting of a splendid summer hotel, the Maple Leaf at Windermere.

"My father made sash and doors on the property, rived the shingles out of pine bolts with a frow, smoothed them with a draw knife, and cut the lath out of half inch lumber which had been hand-sawn," Mr. Hough informed us when speaking of the first summer hotel at Windermere, the Windermere House, the original unit of which was erected by Mr. Thomas Aitken in early days of the Muskoka recreation traffic.

"Jack Trail, a step-son of Mr. Aitken, and myself, mixed the mortar and carried it in a box to the upper floor," Mr. Hough told us. "Jack Trail was a fine fellow, sort of a preacher. He married a Toronto woman."

Mr. Hough reminisced on early days. "While we lived across the lake we were often on this Windermere side. In summer we canoed: in winter we skated. We often met the Judds from over yonder. Alf Judd and myself skated the lakes in winter. Alf was splendid on skates."

From winter sport on skates Mr. Hough reminded us that "the Hough family's first team for farm work and transportation was a milch cow and a two-year-old bull we had. The milch cow was bought from Thomas Aitken. That mixed team was not quite so fast as this car I drive to-day, but we were just as proud of it."

Speaking of the tourist trade of to-day Mr. Hough stated that "bookings were never better. We could not bed them if only one-third came that are writing. We have a full house at week-ends."

Ireneous Hough came to Windermere in 1873. He was born in Lambton County in 1865 – September 3rd - 74 years ago. He came to Muskoka with his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Isaac Hough. He was a child of eight when he arrived here. The Houghs settled on 100 acres of land where Morinus House and Thorel House are today. In later years Ireneous Hough and his brother Daniel built the Morinus House under contract for Bro. Marcotte of

the Christian Brothers, "one of the finest of gentlemen, educated and refined," Mr. Hough opines when talking of those days. "We sold the land on which the Thorel House of today is, progressive and grand."

"In the old days the family life of the community was quite intimate. Families helped each other, and sympathized with each other in their struggles. The Judds and the Houghs associated with each other a great deal. As young men Alf Judd and myself were thrown together in many ways, in work and in play. Alf Judd was always one of the best."

2

"I was councilor and Reeve of Watt Township for a number of years and also served in the same capacity in Windermere Village. I was superintendent of construction when the government wharf was built."

Mr. Hough married, first to Miss Mary Ellen Clark, daughter of the late Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Clark. He was foreman of the Clark mill at the time. He built the first Maple Leaf House, which, ten years later was burned, and next year, 1907, he built the present hotel. To the first marriage were born Ethel, Edna, Arnold, Leslie, Ivan Reginald and Norman Theodore. Eight years ago Mrs. Hough died and two years later Mr. Hough married Miss Elsie Louise Slater, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Jas. Slater of Watt Township, neighbors of old days, and to this union three children have been born, Laurel Chancey, Don Roland and Armand Durand, the latter six weeks old.

When the Houghs as a family came to Muskoka the locks at Port Carling were under construction and A.P. Cockburn was in his prime pushing along the boat business, which is now the Muskoka Lakes Navigation Company. My father and myself built the foundation under the Presbyterian Church at Port Carling and my brother Daniel and myself and George Sutton plastered William Hanna's first store at "the Port," Mr. Hough informed us. "My father built Thomas Aitken's first tourist house at Windermere. The house had living room, dining room, kitchen and five bedrooms. Father made the sash and doors on the property.

Continuing his narrative, Mr. Hough said, "Thomas Aitken married Mrs. John Trail, and to them two children were born, William and Minnie. William as you know is a merchant at Windermere. Minnie married Alex. Brown, C.P.R. Telegraphs. She met her husband in Winnipeg and they live there today I believe. Minnie was a telegraph operator here at Windermere, then in Toronto, and later she was transferred to Winnipeg. A few years after the death of his wife Mr. Aitken married Miss Elizabeth Boyer, sister of James Boyer, J.P., Bracebridge, and to this union were born Leslie and Gertrude. Leslie has made a big success of the Windermere House. His sister is Mrs. Charles Roper.

"Our first boat was a square-sterned punt which father built. Later on he built a 25-foot sailboat with quarterdeck on it, mainsail and jib. We sailed it all over the lakes. To paint this punt we rendered tar out of pine knots. This process of securing the tar was interesting, and was this way. We split the pine into slivers and fine kindling and placed

the slivers in an old iron kettle we had which was used for baking, soap-making, maple syrup boiling and other early day home requirements.

“This kettle, 16 inches across the top, when filled with the pine tar slivers or broken knots, would be turned over on the heavy board with a “cat face” or space gouged out to fit the top of the kettle. The kettle would then be turned over with top down on the “cat faced board, which board four feet long and two feet wide, would act as a spile with grooved surface to conduct the tar down into a container. The pine knot slivers would have fire applied and when the sap or tar was roasted out the wood refuse would then be a solid mass.”

Continuing, Ireneous Hough said, regarding their first Muskoka home, “Our first shanty was 12 feet square, almost flat roof, rough inch lumber for walls. Unbattened, and floor of same material. We could see day light between the boards and in winter, our first winter, snow drifted through into the one-room house. And that first winter was cold, bitterly cold. The house was heated by a fireplace built by father of round stones or boulders held together by blue mud taken out of the lake bottom. Straw was added.

“Mother baked bread in the big iron kettle used for domestic cooking from syrup-making to soap-making. We were a family of eight. Sometimes flour was short, when travel to Dee Bank or Bracebridge gristmills were impossible, but we never starved. Corn bread was used a great deal. Mother would place the dough in the iron kettle, then put the kettle in the corner of the fireplace, and heap hot sand and hot ashes right over the kettle, and

3

The best bread I ever ate came from that crude baking effort.” And Mr. Hough said this with pride. We were reminded of the experiences told us by Mrs. Schulz of Sparrow Lake and Mrs. Wetlaufer of Germania, and hundreds of others, such as the Ditchburns of Rosseau, the Burgesses of Bala, and the Dennisses of Macaulay.

“Father was a cabinet-maker in Forest, Lambton County, and his training was a big help to him in this new country in his first days here. Isaac Hough had lots of tools, more than Daniel and I could carry.” Mr. Hough reminded us. “Benjamin H. Johnston, then postmaster at Port Carling, who built wonderfully fine boats, rowed us over from Port Carling to our new Place. Father paid him \$1.50 for the service. He had eight passengers and all our belongings. There wasn’t much left in the family purse when we landed,” Mr. Hough lamented, “and from there we started to make our living in the new land, surrounded by the best of neighbors mostly blessed equally with us.”

We will continue this narrative next week.

THE FOLLOWING ARTICLE APPEARED IN THE BRACEBRIDGE HERALD
GAZETTE ON THURSDAY JULY 27, 1939.

This article is continued from the previous week. It has been typed as it appeared with
NO changes to grammar or spelling.

EARLY DAYS AT WINDERMERE

Tourists Urge Farmers Give Rooms

Lumber Camps Converted to Holidaying

(By Harry Linney)

We were last week chronicling experiences of Ireneous Hough of Windermere. The
narrative continues:

4

“The Fifes, Aitkens, Forges and Houghs were among the earliest here,” Mr. Hough
Explained. “The Fife House was one of the first hotels in this tiny village. The present
owner, Arthur Fife, is the fourth in the back-ground of the Fifes, and William Fife,
Arthur’s son, is the fifth in line from David Fife, originator of the Red Fife Wheat of
Scotland, prime wheat of the western world.”

In passing it might be said that the Fife House is enjoying a fair trade this year. To
enter the hotel nothing meets the eye to jar one. The rotunda is bright and cheerful, and
the service excellent. The house faces
beautiful Windermere Bay. David Fife, grandfather of Arthur Fife, came to Windermere
in 1862, and his Grandmother Fife lived in a log cabin for over a year before she saw
another white woman. Those were the days when supplies were carried in from Orillia
and Bracebridge.

Let Ireneous Hough continue his story: “F.E. Judd and my father were at one time great
smokers. They would lend each other tobacco from their pouches when one had a supply
and the other had not. One day neither had tobacco. It was then they agreed to swear off
smoking. For a time both kept their pledge not to smoke. Father one day had a smoke

and then continued the use of the weed. F.E. Judd never smoked again, however. He was a very fine gentleman, upright, honourable – a straight-shooter – and Mrs. Judd too, as well as his boys. Alf Judd was my chum. His wife was one of the best of women, a balance wheel for Alf. Her name was Annie Skinner, a teacher at the Peninsula school when Alf met her. She mothered Norman and Bernard, yes, and worshipped them. Too bad she was called by death. Alf Judd met a high type of woman in his second wife, Miss Nellie Pain. You know of course that she is a daughter of the late Mr. Fred Pain, an early settler. She was born here. Mrs. Judd is a lovely character, a splendid woman, unexcelled. Her two children are Stanley and Audry. Her mother and Mrs. Michael Woods were sisters.

“When we came to Muskoka we brought two Enfield rifles and a carbine rifle. When we ran out of shot we had to use rot nails or anything we could find. Many a deer have we killed for meat by using a big club. We would go out to the bush on snowshoes and follow the deer, overtake them through their inability to travel in deep loose snow, and successfully attach them. It was in this way we secured our meat. The Judds had some money, and the Minetts had some too, but the Houghs did not, and we had to get our meat on the chase.

“The first snowshoes were made by bending a maple or birch bough and platting elm bark across the loop for the feet to rest on. Later we built chairs in the same way.

“Talking about flour, we would take our grist to Dee Bank or to Bracebridge. Going to Bracebridge Frank Forge or Thomas Aitken would convey it there by canoe. This Canoe was made out of a pine tree. Mr. Forge and Mr. Aitken made it. This canoe was strong enough and big enough to carry big loads. One could walk around on the gunwale without even a hint of upsetting it.

“At Dee Bank 64 years ago there was a tannery owner by James Barber and Wm. Bowman. They made a good job of tanning leather. There was a grist mill there too. It was owned by John Shannon. There were three brothers, John, Peter and Alex Shannon. It was Alex who had the store at Dee Bank then serving the community. John Shannon, a big man, powerful, massive ran the sawmill. In that day Louis Klingbeil was the village blacksmith and his services were much sought for. The church at that time was the Presbyterian Church, served by a travelling missionary. Peter Shannon was later lockmaster at Port Carling.

“Father helped to build the first Methodist Church at Windermere. Rev. Law came from outside and held service in David Fife’s house before the church was built. Law was a little man, sharp as a steel-trap. Rev. Noble was one who came also, a big man, square shouldered, six feet high, who weighed over 200. These were

5

the first I recall who preached here. Mr. Frank Forge occasionally took the pulpit, as did my father at times. This was when the minister did not arrive.”

“Muskoka has grown from those days,” Mr. Hough continues. “We have a paradise here, as you say so often, and I believe in advertising it. Our first people saw this in their visioning, that it would be a place hard to beat for holidaying. We came here through advertising appeals. Down in Lambton County we saw and read a circular telling of this land of Muskoka for farming. So did others. We came and soon saw that it was ideal for fishing and hunting.

“Let me tell you of a poem or lyric which was sent us in circular form in that early day advertising. It ran like this:

‘Come to the land of rivers and groves of goodly pine,
A land to last forever, to be both yours and mine.

Yours friends and your comrades, may wish to be at ease,
Take courage boys and come along and it will your sweethearts please.

The Severn in its grandeur, which splash from rock to rock,
Remind us of our native home, our father and his flock.

One hundred acres every man, shall have on terms good,
Only come and lead the van, to grand Muskoka wood.

Our homes shall be in these wild woods, our daughters young and fair,
Shall sing about the bright log fires, in health and free from care.

Then here’s a cheer for our good Queen, for Britons we are still,
We have the hearts to fill the bush, and work with good will.’

“The late Willie Hanna of Port Carling wrote a book called “The Land of Rivers,” which Thomas McMurray of the Northern Advocate at Bracebridge published, and these verses were incorporated. I learned them over fifty years ago.”

Mr. Hough prepared himself for work as a scaler and for lumber mill work. For years he travelled the bush, scaling for lumber interests, and was considered an expert in measurements. He has seen Muskoka grow from the days of pine log canoes and oxen and oxcarts to the high-powered gas boats and automobiles, and from holidayers seeking only fishing and hunting to present day sports-seekers of tennis, golf and badminton and all the other activities, dancing being no small part. He and his neighbors’ children were adept with canoe and paddle and skates.

6

“One winter I skated with Dr. Ed Topp, then practicing medicine at Rosseau where he in June 1896 married a daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Alf Clubbe,” Mr. Hough reminisced.

“We skated in a carnival at Rosseau one night. Another time we skated with some others from Windermere to Rosseau, had dinner, and then to Smallbone’s Bay. and all over lake Rosseau, and reached home at 2 in the morning. On another day I raced with a fast horse owned and driven by Rev. R.B. Fralick. He was the Methodist minister at Windermere and was visiting his parish. He married Mary Trail, daughter of Mrs. Thomas Aitken. I raced him on lake ice from Smallbone’s Bay to Windermere dock and beat him by 25 yards.”

Mr. Hough told us that he had seen four mills at Windermere. The first was Drummer’s. Then Taylor bought from Drummer and Wm. Hutcheson bought from Taylor. “One morning I met Mr. Hutcheson, then wearing a stubby beard, and asked him if he wanted a man. He smiled and looked at me, then a young gaffer of 15. “Yes, I want a man,” Mr. Hutcheson said. “He sent me down to a lumber piler to start me to work. My arrangement with him was that I was to receive a wage of \$20 a month and board if after a week’s trial without wages I could prove that I could do the work. I worked for Mr. Hutcheson for over two years and received wage increases. I jacked lumber, piled, ran the edger, sawed and pointed and packed shingles, ran the carriage, set and file, scaled. John Boyd was there at that time.”

Our conversation with Ireneous Hough was an interesting one. We didn’t discuss Orange parades or beating of bass drums.

THE END