

A Bit of History: The Development of the Nashwaak
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[1895]
New Brunswick Museum
William F. Ganong Scrapbook, No. 1. p.114
Microfilm SB-1

Schiller, in his famous siege of Antwerp, has remarked, how attractive a spectacle it is to see man's inventive genius, by means of wisdom, courage and a determined will, overcome difficulties which seemed to be insurmountable to common capacities. No more striking instance of this is to be had in eastern America than that exhibited by the development of the Nashwaak.

The first that we hear prominently of the Nashwaak in history is when late in the 17th century the decree was signed by Colvert Louis XIV's great minister for a change of name from Naxoat to that of Solanges, in honor of the then owner, Jolbert de Soulanges, lord of Soulanges and Marsom, in France. When the writer first knew this property it was owned by Robert Rankin and Company, who were very anxious to get rid of it at the price of \$28,000, their representative in this country informing me that it had cost them \$130,000. Nearly thirty years ago S. T. King, then a leading merchant of Calais, in the state of Maine, asked me if I knew of a good place for the manufacture of spruce deals on the Saint John river. I replied that Isaac Bradbury, then one of the principal lumbermen of New Brunswick, had said to me that the Nashwaak river was the best. I was accordingly instructed by Mr. King to investigate the matter, and Thomas Robinson and myself were sent on the mission. When we came to Fredericton we each engaged an Indian, with his canoe, and with these we ascended the river to the mills. Here we found a large mill in a bad state of repair, a store and a few mean, dirty looking houses. The place was unhealthy, typhoid fever being endemic, owing to the use of water from a filthy well which stood behind the store, and into which drained all the bacteria from the neighbouring cesspools. The cause of religion was represented by a small, unpainted building with a truncated spire just large enough to hold a bell. the edifice stood on a piece of low land and diverged very considerably from the perpendicular. Connected with the property was a farm and farm house, which, I learned, were most highly prized by their owners. Mr. Robinson, my companion, was an excellent mill and woodsman, and I had had much experience in the matter of spruce lands. A very little time convinced us of the value of the property, as well as the incapacity shown in its management. On our return to Calais we recommended Mr. King, who had formerly been a partner of Mr. Gibson, to buy. He hesitated and, not seeing his way clear to accept the offer of \$28,000, declined. I may here mention that, beside the land around the mill and dirty buildings, there were 7,000 acres of as good spruce land as I ever saw, which were to pass into the hands of him who purchased the mill. This was regarded as a small matter, however, then the then owners. Mr. Gibson, hearing of the property, came up Saint John river, saw and purchased the property.

A glance at the situation showed him what was to be done in order to convert a losing property into one which was to give employment to tens of thousands of people, and to yield millions of dollars. When he took possession, the old houses were burnt or removed, the poisoned well filled up, skilled millmen and millwrights were introduced, and the old mill thoroughly renovated. While Mr. Gibson was directing matters at what is now Marysville, I was sent by him into the forest on the stream to select such portions of the same as I could recommend him to purchase. So little had the former owners known of their property that the chief lake on the stream, now known as Saint Mary's lake, was shown on their plans in a position which was a mile and a quarter distant from its true place. The first thing that Mr. Gibson did on taking possession of the property was to build about a couple miles of piers in order to be able to hold a sufficient stock of logs therein, for a season's sawing. The former

owners had not seen the necessity of this, and instead of doing their river driving entirely in the spring, when the water was high and the flow constant, they could only drive a very few logs at a time into the very small boom at their mills, and thus they were river driving all summer.

Then expert lumbermen were sent up the Nashwaak to clear out the streams and build dams, and the whole river and its branches were put in complete order. Thus, by pier-building and river improvements alone, to say nothing of anything else, the cost of log production was cheapened about \$1 per M. feet R. M. This cheapening spread over the period of Mr. Gibson's operations there, would show a saving during that time of upwards of \$600,000.