

## An Old Book Tells of Muskoka

We are much indebted to Mr. William Jeffery, of Torrance, who has lent us a bound copy of *The Canadian Illustrated News* for the year 1874. This famous journal of other years gave each week a comprehensive review of Canadian and international affairs, with special articles and fiction, the latter being rather tedious for modern reading but no doubt giving good entertainment in older, slower days. The pictures were of the old wood-cut variety, all of large size and no doubt in their day being given a leisurely appraisal by the subscribers to the *Canadian Illustrated News*. They were of a different sort than pictures in our leading magazines and papers today — there were views of banquets given to prominent men and pictures from overseas of British military campaigns in jungle countries and elsewhere, religious festivals in Russian cathedrals, scenes in Spanish and United States parliamentary halls and so on in endless variety.

The year 1874 was one of much history. There were still references to Charles Dickens, who had died four years before, and to Dr. Livingstone, the famous missionary, who died the previous year. Early in the year the Canadian elections were held. The ministry of Sir John A. Macdonald had fallen, being defeated in Parliament, and *The News* ran for two issues, with suitable cartoons, a satire, "The Unspecific Scandal." In the elections the newly-formed government of Hon. Alexander Mackenzie was triumphant but *The News* had a great deal to say about the manner in which the elections were held, with vilification, bribery and corrupt practices being condemned very heartily. Louis Riel, the Manitoba rebel, had been elected and there was much conjecture as to what this man would do about attendance. He secretly came to Ottawa and signed the members' roll, but then disappeared; later his seat was to be declared vacant. The election result had aroused some against the Conservative leader, but *The News* which did not support him nevertheless said that any attempt to remove Sir John A. as leader "if successful would be suicidal and would stamp the Conservative party with blackest ingratitude. Sir John cannot be dispensed with. He is too closely associated with the destinies of the country thus to be set aside to please a few faint-hearted and hypocritical followers. With all his faults, he is a prince among his peers."

But for our own part of the country the greatest interest would centre around a series of articles, "Experiences of a Commercial Traveller." The writer told of travelling from Toronto by the railway and stopping at the towns along the line north from Toronto. Then from Orillia he came

to the Muskoka towns, travelling in February weather northwards by sleigh since the railway had not been built then. Called at the unseasonable hour of half-past six on a February morning, he left Orillia breakfastless for the ride. It was the day after the election. About six miles out from Orillia "we passed a sleigh-load of the 'free and independents,' and among them Cockburn, the winning man, who was being brought down in triumph to Orillia. As they passed they raised a howl of 'Hurrah for Cockburn,' which from its character, I judged to be as much stimulated by strong waters as by enthusiasm for the so-called Reform cause." They stopped at Severn bridge for breakfast, and at the hotel kept by Mr. McKenzie, he soon found "by the disgust he expressed at the result of the election that Cockburn was not 'his man'." When he reached Gravenhurst he found the town still in a turmoil from the heated events of the day before, where there had been plenty of "ructions" and fights, and he then indulged in a diatribe against the Canadian style of fighting which he found unchivalrous and distasteful. "Leaving Gravenhurst shortly after dinner, we drove on to our ultimate destination — Bracebridge. This latter part of the road is the most picturesque by far, abounding in rock and hill and dale scenery which only lacked the charm of summer to make it most romantic. Within three miles of Bracebridge we crossed the beautiful Muskoka Falls, which with their rapids have a total fall of nearly 160 feet. The bridge on which we crossed spans the river at a point but a few feet about the largest fall, and from the sleigh we had a magnificent view of its beauties, to which winter had added a charm of spanning it with a gorgeous rainbow (for I can call it nothing else) of ice, that glistened and glittered in the sun with all the varied hues of the rainbow."

There was a later article written from Bracebridge, which the Commercial Traveller spoke of as the aspiring capital of the Muskoka District. The town, he said, in its winter dress did not seem the most inviting place to live in; "whichever way you enter it, you have to go downhill," and to travel all over it required considerable climbing. The town being of four or five years' growth, the dwellings and stores were much scattered, while most of them had a mushroom appearance as if they had gone up overnight; the principal hotel was made up of two or three dwellings rolled into one. He thought the country around to be rather unproductive as it was mainly rock, but he found the farmers who visited the town to be happy and cheerful folk, and it seems he enjoyed his visit to Bracebridge in that winter of 1874.