

PIONEERS

----- Memories as told to me by my parents -----
--- as written by Annie Martin Bennet ---

The first settlers were mostly from the British Isles. They were told there, that the necessities of life were cheaper here. They did not tell them that the nearest store could be thirty or more miles away and the nearest neighbor ten or more miles away. Unlike the counties to the south of us, by their wildest stretch of imagination, they could not realize that Muskoka was not a farming district.

When my mother came here in 1870 there was an Indian camp and houses on the east side of the river between Bailey Street and Dukes Narrows up to Joseph Street. In 1859 the grants for land were introduced but the rush for land did not begin until the grants for Homesteads Act of 1868. All the virgin pine was reserved by the Crown. The settlers could cut any other type of trees. Later hemlock was found to be valuable for tanning leather.

My mother used a birch bark canoe and while paddling up the river in November they were upset. They were rescued by the father of George Bailey who was later captain of the Sagamo. The next day the river froze over. Her companion in the canoe was Phyllis Adams, a cousin.

When my mother arrived in May from England she only had ankle socks and summer clothes.

There is a boulder in the Dukes Narrows where ^{Folmann} ~~Dukes~~ first home was. Here they sat and with pole, hook and line, caught enough fish in half an hour to feed eight for a meal.

The people who came between 1865 and 1884 were the real pioneers. They came rich in hope and often poor in money. Their greatest assets were their courage and neighborliness. Like all our parents, they worked to make life easier for their children. If they could come back now, how amazed they would be to see Port Carling as it is to-day, a thriving Village. How much we of later generations owe to the wonderful, remarkable people of the early pioneer days. The memories I write about are mostly my own familys experiences but I am sure the other pioneer families had the same. As many of these early pioneers came from cities, no doubt there were many mistakes made.

There were eleven lumber companies in the district of Muskoka. I remember Mickle Dymment and Son. They had two boats; the "Bertha May" and the "Charlie M". They were used to tow the log booms and scows. Steam boats and lumbering were sufficient to serve the needs of the settlers while the foundation was being laid for Muskokas' permanent industry, the tourist trade, which was increasing rapidly, as early as 1878. The tourist was not a transit trade then. Some came year after year through July and August. Many were from the U.S.A. Some from Pittsburg who built some of those beautiful homes at Beaumaris. Mr. C. J. Duke Sr. built some of them.

Annie Martin Bennet