



Unveiling and Dedication

of an

Historical Plaque

at the

BALA FALLS PARK

BALA

SUNDAY, JULY 5, 1970

2:00 P.M.

SPONSORED BY:

Town of Bala and Bala Women's Institute

By 1873 the settlers in the region of Bala had a means of land communication with the "outside." That year the Musquosh Road, "a cheap settlement road," was completed. This road ran from Gravenhurst some 17 miles up the west side of Lake Muskoka to Musquosh Falls (Bala), then continued northward some six miles farther to the vicinity of the present Glen Orchard, where it intersected the Lake Joseph Road. Thomas Burgess was the contractor for the "six miles and sixty-one chains" from Musquosh Falls to the Lake Joseph Road. His account for \$1,352.50, headed "Final," is among Ontario Archives' papers, and covers work done up to October 13, 1873. Construction of the road for its total length of some 23 miles was evidently finished at that time.

While the Musquosh certainly does not rank in importance with a major "free-grant" colonization road such as the Muskoka Road, nevertheless, it was the original road chopped out of the wilderness to serve the region west of Lake Muskoka. Each year during the long period when navigation was closed all supplies for Bala and other points west of Lake Muskoka had to be brought in over the Musquosh. A very interesting photograph, taken in the 1870's, shows Thomas Burgess driving a flock of sheep across the north channel bridge on the road at Bala Falls. Numerous sections of the Musquosh Road have become parts of provincial highway 69.

As early as 1872 a post office, named Bala, with Thomas Burgess as postmaster, was established. Though during the next few years the little "post" village seems to have had only some 30 to 40 permanent inhabitants, tourists and sportsmen were discovering the beauties of the Bala area and creating a demand for accommodation. "River View House," proprietor Henry Culley Guy, was probably Bala's first boarding house and summer resort, and though it followed Gravenhurst's "Robinson House, the first Muskoka Tourist Resort" by a few years, it was the forerunner of grander Bala tourist establishments to come.

While carrying on his other activities during those early decades, Burgess helped to manage the settlers' affairs by serving as Reeve of Medora and Wood Townships for a number of years. He also played an important role in helping to settle a band of Iroquois Indians from Oka, Quebec, on a reserve in Gibson Township some twelve miles west of Bala. This group of twenty-five Iroquois families under Chief Sahanatien were a Methodist splinter group from the Caughnawaga Iroquois who had become Roman Catholics many years before. In 1881-2

the band moved from Oka to Gibson Township where, though they were apparently given little help either by the government or the Methodist Church, they survived, and built a church and school by their own efforts. Burgess not only gave "heroic service" in transporting and settling the Sahanatien band, but for many years, "acted as Agent between them and the Department of Indian Affairs. His paternal interest...greatly appreciated by the Band."

By the 1880's Bala was already benefiting from a growing tourist resort by the turn of the century it was well established as a bustling tourist resort boasting a variety of hotels and tourist homes, and numerous summer cottages, though its permanent population numbered no more than 150. Two large summer hotels, built in the 1880's or early 90's, were the Clifton House, John Board, proprietor, and the Bala Falls Hotel, Thomas Currie, proprietor. The third to be built, the Swastika, was Muskoka's first brick (summer) hotel - E. B. Sutton, proprietor. The Suttons were among the early arrivals and did not at first settle in Bala. They cleared a Medora Township farm and developed a summer resort, Camp Sutton, erecting the Camp Sutton Hotel at an early date. A very popular place, it was destroyed by fire, and the family moved into Bala where they built the Swastika Hotel. Numerous smaller resorts followed, including: Jackson House, Big "B" Camp, Rose Lawn Lodge (T. Burgess, proprietor), Muskoka Rest, Moon Chute House and Hillcrest Lodge.

Trains did not reach Bala till over 30 years after the Northern Railway was extended to Gravenhurst in 1875, but between 1905-1908 no less than two lines, the Canadian Pacific Railway and the Canadian Northern Ontario Railway (now the Canadian National), were built northward through the region west of Lakes Muskoka and Joseph to Parry Sound and beyond. The C.P.R. went right into Bala, while the Canadian Northern had a station at nearby Bala Park. By 1907 the trains made Bala probably the most accessible of the Muskoka centres which might be described as mainly tourist resorts, and its popularity as a summer and vacation playground continued to increase.

Bala remained under the jurisdiction of Medora and Wood Townships until 1914 when its people petitioned the provincial government for incorporation as a town. That year the unincorporated village of Bala, plus sizable adjoining areas of Medora and Wood Townships, were incorporated as a Town with some 800 inhabitants. Bala is the only community in Muskoka to reach the status of a Town without first serving a municipal apprenticeship as a Village. Dr. A. M. Burgess, a son of the community's founder, became the town's first mayor.

Bala continues to hold a pre-eminent position as a Muskoka tourist resort. Its permanent and summer populations are in the ratio of about 1:10. While today permanent inhabitants total only some 530, the number of visiting tourists and cottagers exceeds 5,000 at almost any time during the busy summer season.