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Word Picture of the Founding and Progress of Kapuskasing

"Branching Water." Town Now Almost 2,500 Population with Waterworks and Sewerage, Hospital, Elegant Community Club Building, Etc. Great Pulp Industry. Wonders of the Experimental Farm. Country Specially Adapted for Agriculture, Says Noted Authority.

(By Letitia Moore Shouldice)
Lying almost midway between Montreal and Winnipeg on that part of the Canadian National known as the Old Transcontinental Line is the aggressive little town of Kapuskasing with a population of almost twenty-five hundred. It has no ancient history; no tombs to unearth; and no reminders of prehistoric civilization, even though the waters of the Kapuskasing river which divides it, coursed along its winding rocky bed centuries and centuries before the scientific hawk-like eye of Columbus sighted the shadowy plumes of smoke oozing upward from the Indian teepees when the Red Man of the Forest was monarch of all he surveyed.

As already stated this town— which apparently is off to a good start—is by no means large. It is merely in the prime of its adolescence with its ear tuned to the call of modernism and earnestly endeavoring to contribute its full quota to the charm and development which go to make up this new Northern Ontario with its illimitable quantities of spruce, tamarack and poplar brushing elbows with the silver, gold and nickel in the mines.

The extensive china clay deposits that have been recently discovered along the Mattagami give further evidence that only the fringe has been touched of the natural resources in Northern Ontario.

The Kapuskasing (meaning "branching water") river has a peculiar charm, with its winding spruce-fringed rim, and great boulders of rock jutting out in quaint-looking fashion, and its beauty is further enhanced by the addition of several natural waterfalls, which must have quickened the pulse of the first white man who threaded his way along its forest banks when the God-given rights of nature were unmolested and untrammelled by the hand of man. Flowing northward, as all rivers in Northern Ontario do, the Kapuskasing loses its identity in the Mattagami, the Mattagami flowing on into the Moose, which empties into James Bay.

The history of this town, which is situated about three hundred miles northwest of North Bay (the gateway to the new northern country,) and one hundred and eighty south of Moose Factory, where on several occasions canoeing parties have made the return trip from Kapuskasing, dates back to Christmas day nineteen fourteen, soon after the construction of the Transcontinental Line had been completed, when approximately one hundred alien prisoners, sent from Toronto in the custody of Colonel Clarke and his guardsmen, made their debut in box cars along the siding where they remained until barracks were ready for occupation. By the middle of January nineteen fifteen they had begun the work of clearing the virgin forest for the Dominion experimental farm, as pre-arranged by the Government. The number of prisoners gradually increased, having been sent from Kingston, Petawawa, Banff, Spirit Lake, and Amherst, Nova Scotia, until sixteen hundred names had been enrolled, and when the Camp was abandoned in May nineteen fifteen a large acreage of the experimental farm lands had been cleared.

About that time—the hamlet having outgrown the siding—a station was erected just west of the water tank, the town then being west of the river. A Post Office, and a few small stores comprised the business section, while tar-papered shacks of varied architecture vied with each other in maintaining the dignity of the residential portion. Skirting close to the railway track on the right as the train travels westward we noticed a sign that fairly made our hearts yearn with affection, for in large coal-black letters were the words "Husbands Wholesale." A glorious message this was. We mean to our feminine ears! And "Broadcast" it must be. And we prayed for a station to loom up in the night! but alas. Then the blue-green mist of the shimmering waters and the pale azure shafts of the entrancing moonlight got busy and set the words to music, and the clever little bobolinks with their fondness for romance took up the sweet refrain and wafted it o'er the tops of the tall forest trees until the glad news had reached the ears of every maiden both far and near.

In passing from the old town, which we will now mentally abandon as we travel eastward to the new, we noticed two natural waterfalls, one at either end of the two steel bridges that are spanning an island of small area. The new townsite was thrown open in the fall of nineteen twenty-two and is very fine, affording excellent drainage, also a splendid view of the river. During the past year the population has increased considerably and a number of new buildings have been erected. The business section of the town is laid out in the form of a wheel (which gives it that

"just a different" appearance, so to speak) with the different streets running into the hub, where a fountain will be placed in the centre. The main streets have already been supplied with water and sewerage and the contract let for further extensions. Other municipal needs of the citizens receive due consideration, while adequate churching and schooling facilities have been provided as well. And what you'll find if you take a sprint into the country is the radio.

"We listened to a concert from 'ome last night. Could 'ear every word of it from Piecadilly in Old London." The responsibility of filling the Mayor's chair rests on the shoulders of E. J. Yelle who has long since inspired the confidence of the citizens, though his activities have to some extent been retarded through illness. Mayor Yelle is knee-deep in optimism regarding the town, and believes that this Northern country carries every promise of being second to none in the Dominion as an agricultural centre in fifteen years hence. The Honorable Robert Gregg, Minister of Agriculture for Scotland, is authority for the statement that the land is specially adapted for agriculture and stock. Mr. Gregg was one of a party of British scientists who toured Canada not more than a year ago, visiting the gold fields of this country where extensive British capital is invested.

In October nineteen fifteen the Government erected the first house on the experimental farm and in August nineteen sixteen J. P. S. Ballantyne of Nova Scotia arrived to take up his duties as Superintendent. Mr. Ballantyne comes from Ballantyne Cove (the old homestead in Antigonish County on the Straits of Northumberland where his great-grandfather settled when he arrived from Scotland almost a century ago), and has pioneered in Northern Ontario since March nineteen-four when he arrived with the Transcontinental survey party which was assembled in Ottawa.

The experimental farm contains nearly thirteen hundred acres, with six hundred under cultivation. Extensive experimental work is carried on under the different divisions, viz: animal husbandry, forage crops, rotation of crops, drainage experiments, horticulture, etc. These experiments are proving of vital importance to the farmers in the surrounding district.

In the south-west corner of the horticultural grounds in nineteen twenty-four, there were almost two hundred living fruit trees, representing forty-eight varieties and strains of hardy apples, plums and crab-apples. Small fruits such as currants, gooseberries, raspberries and strawberries have practically all withstood the climatic conditions. Ornamental trees have been planted in hedges or artistically grouped in clumps, then again in rows to serve as a wind-break or shelter. Considerable attention is also given to floriculture on the grounds of the different homes. Altogether the experimental farm seems to have taken on a finish that one would suppose could have only been acquired through a longer period of time. In the poultry division the flock of birds number almost four hundred with a very satisfactory egg production. The work of apiculture was begun in nineteen twenty-two with nine colonies of bees, the intention being to increase the honey-producing apiary as quickly as possible until at least fifty colonies were in the yard. Satisfactory progress has been made and an exceptionally fine quality of honey has been produced. The benefit that the town and surrounding country derives from the farm can only be ascertained by a sojourn there.

Another jog in the road brings us to the Spruce Falls Company's Pulp Mill, and incidentally we may say that when the Board of the Kimberly Clarke Company was casting about for a location in Northern Ontario their attention was drawn to the excellent natural facilities which the townsite of Kapuskasing exhibited and in December nineteen twenty-two, the plant being completed, operations were begun. The mill is located south of the east bridge and in the spring of the year millions of logs can be seen scattered along the river and its banks for a distance of from one to six miles. The logs, varying in length from eight to sixteen feet, are taken from the river by a conveyor, then carried by a jack-ladder into a bank of circular saws where they are divided into the required lengths, measuring approximately thirty-two inches. From the slashers they pass into the roasting plant where the large revolving iron cylinders of the drum barker, measuring about sixty feet in length and fifteen in diameter, removes the bark by friction of the logs rubbing against one another. Dropping from the drum barker into another conveyor they are carried either to storage or directly to the plant for current consumption.

From the roasting plant the logs are taken to the wood room where they are sorted and the knots removed, also any remaining pieces of bark being removed by hand. Passing then into the chipper they are cut into small chips and from here, run through a set of screens which removes all over sized pieces. The chips are then ready for cooking and are conveyed to the chip-bin which is located above the digester. The digester is fitted with large steel, brick-lined cooking vessels standing about fifty feet in height and measuring fifteen in diameter. The vessels are then filled and sulphurous acid pumped in until the chips are submerged. After the lids have been tightly screwed down, the steam is turned on and the cooking process continues for about ten hours when a large valve at the bottom of the digester is opened and the pulp blown with great velocity into the blow-pit. This is constructed with a false bottom through which the acid in the pulp is drained away. The water is then turned on by means of a hose and the pulp thoroughly washed to remove all traces of acid. It is then taken to a large storage tank and from there to the knitter screens where any uncooked particles are screened off. After leaving the knitter screens it passes to the flat screens which consist of sections of flat, brass, slotted plate. These serve the purpose of eliminating all foreign matter such as dirt, bark or shives. From the flat screens the pulp is taken to the large storage tanks and from there on to the dryer machine. The wire of the dryer machine travels forward carrying the solution of water and pulp with it until the water has drained away, leaving the pulp in the form of a wet web, which after passing through several press-rolls, reaches the drying section of the machine. This consists of a large number of revolving steam-heated, steel drums, over which the wet sheets pass around until dried when they are cut into small sheets about twenty-four by thirty inches and placed in piles, then pressed in bales ready for shipping.

The sulphurous acid which is used in cooking, as we have already stated, is manufactured from lime-water and sulphur dioxide which is formed by burning sulphur in rotary burners. The acid tower is built up of several compartments having perforated plates. The sulphur dioxide passing upward from the bottom of the tower by means of vacuum pumps, combines with the lime-water trickling down from the top thus forming the sulphurous acid.

A steam plant furnished the electrical power for the mill until the spring of nineteen twenty-three when the Hydro was ready for operation. The power house is located to the north of the east bridge. It is semi-automatic, controlled from the mill and only inspected periodically. More than one hundred motors are installed in different parts of the mill, ranging in size from three to three hundred horse-power. The Hydro also furnishes the light for the town and experimental farm.

The Spruce Falls Company have extensive timber limits and agricultural lands in Northern Ontario, also large holdings in town property in Kapuskasing, including Hospital, Community Club, Staff Cottages, etc. The Club was erected in nineteen twenty-three, costing with equipment, over forty thousand dollars and makes an imposing structure for a town of that size, though its chief attraction is inside. As you enter, the lounge presents a noticeably inviting appearance at once, convincing you that comfort has been the cardinal consideration. A large log fire-place lying snugly to the left, co-operates with the judiciously grouped furniture and adequate lighting in providing the fundamentals for a homey evening. Opening off the lounge to the left is an office and writing room, also a ladies' rest room where daintiness has been combined with utility, including dressing-tables, shower baths, etc. On the right is the refreshment room, while directly in front of the main entrance are the doors opening into the auditorium. This serves a manifold purpose including motion pictures, dance-hall and gymnasium, etc. Special mention might be made of the ladies' and children's classes in physical exercises that are under the efficient instruction of Mrs. Carpenter; also indoor baseball and basketball. The top floor of the building contributes the assembly hall and gallery, while last but by no means least, is the basement. This is equipped with shower baths and bowling alleys, also billiard and pool-tables while a smoking room in conjunction proves a very satisfactory device in the completion of the scheme.

Almost three years ago the Honourable E. J. Jones took over the management of the Kimberly Clarke Company's interests in Northern Ontario. Mr. Jones comes from Bradford, Pennsylvania, where he had been engaged in the practice of law, also for a number of years representing the 21st District of Pennsylvania in Congress. At time of writing he leaves Kapuskasing, where he was held in the highest esteem by both employees and citizens, for his home in Bradford.

J. H. Black has already taken up his duties as General Manager, and with the large extension of the pulp industry, already planned for by the Company, great developments may be looked for.

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