“THE PICTURESQUE PLAYGROUND OF CANADA”:
LANDSCAPING THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND
SOCIAL IDENTITY OF MUSKOKA, 1850-1914

by

Danielle Watters Westbrook

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
Graduate Department of Theory and Policy Studies in Education
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
University of Toronto

© Copyright by Danielle Watters Westbrook (2009)
“THE PICTURESQUE PLAYGROUND OF CANADA”:
LANDSCAPING THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND
SOCIAL IDENTITY OF MUSKOKA, 1850-1914
Master of Arts, 2009
Danielle Watters Westbrook
Graduate Department of Theory and Policy Studies in Education
University of Toronto

Abstract

This thesis explores the complexities of Muskoka’s past between 1850 and 1914. Through the lenses of class-consciousness and popular notions of ethnicity and race, Muskoka’s geographical and social landscape were redefined during this period by the government, the area’s industries, visitors, and local inhabitants. It was not until the early twentieth century that the nature-tourism industry was able to standardize a regional identity for the district; this identity has remained prevalent through to the twenty-first century. As the title of Edward Roper’s 1883 booklet Muskoka; the Picturesque Playground of Canada suggests, the area became closely associated with leisure and recreation. However, this Muskoka identity misrepresented the district’s terrain and populace, and our contemporary understanding of the region has consequently been compromised. In order to better recognize Muskoka’s diverse social and geographical landscape, this thesis explores several historical viewpoints and questions the manner in which the district was promoted.
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the staff at the Provincial Archives of Ontario, the National Library and Archives of Canada, the Baldwin Room, and the Thomas Fisher Rare Books Library for their assistance. Additionally, special thanks are due to the Muskoka Lakes Museum, the Muskoka Heritage Place, the Simcoe County Archives, and the Bracebridge Public Library for their assistance and infectious excitement for remembering Muskoka’s past. The nine figures that are used in this thesis are all public domain and were obtained from collections housed in the Archives of Ontario, the Muskoka Lakes Museum, and the Baldwin Room.

In researching and writing this thesis I have been fortunate to have had the support and guidance of my supervisor, Dr. Cecilia Morgan. Her mentorship, insight, and constructive advice allowed me to continuously better my work, and her kindness will always be remembered. As well, I would like to thank my secondary reader, Dr. David Levine, for his encouragement and enthusiasm – it was especially appreciated during the seemingly never-ending home stretch. Dr. Ruth Sandwell was another source of support in the department, and I am grateful to her for sparking my interest in history education. During my time at OISE I also had the good fortune of meeting and befriending Mary Chaktsiris. I would like to thank Mary for her thoughtful assistance and much needed humour, as well as congratulate her on the successful completion of her own thesis.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my parents, Peter and Claudette Westbrook, and my sisters, Andrea and Jillian, for their love, patience, and support.
# Table of Contents

**ABSTRACT** ................................................................................................................................. ii

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS** ........................................................................................................... iii

**LIST OF FIGURES** .................................................................................................................. vi

**INTRODUCTION** ...................................................................................................................... 1
   A FEW NOTES ON METHODOLOGY ......................................................................................... 3

**CHAPTER ONE: “OPENING UP” MUSKOKA** .............................................................................. 9
   CLAIMING OWNERSHIP OF NATIVE LAND ............................................................................. 10
   SURVEYING THE REGION ........................................................................................................ 16
   THE COLONIZATION ROADS .................................................................................................. 21
   “OPENING UP” MUSKOKA ..................................................................................................... 24
   MUSKOKA’S ABORIGINAL POPULATION ............................................................................... 26
   CONCLUSION ............................................................................................................................... 33

**CHAPTER TWO: SETTLING THE MUSKOKA DISTRICT** ............................................................ 35
   PREVIOUS SETTLEMENTS IN UPPER CANADA ....................................................................... 36
   THE SALE OF CROWN LANDS AND FREE LAND GRANTS ................................................... 38
   THE INVENTED LANDSCAPE .................................................................................................. 41
   THE IDEAL SETTLER ............................................................................................................... 47
   ABORIGINALS IN SETTLED MUSKOKA .................................................................................. 55
   FURTHER ENCOURAGEMENT TO SETTLERS ..................................................................... 58
   CONCLUSION ............................................................................................................................... 60

**CHAPTER THREE: THE REALITIES OF SETTLEMENT LIFE IN MUSKOKA** ......................... 62
   THE ABORIGINAL PERSPECTIVE ............................................................................................. 62
   MUSKOKA’S SETTLER POPULATION ..................................................................................... 69
   THE SETTLER’S PLIGHT ......................................................................................................... 82
   NEWSPAPER DEBATES ........................................................................................................... 87
   THE UNFORGIVING LANDSCAPE .......................................................................................... 89
   THE FORGOTTEN INHABITANTS .......................................................................................... 91
   FINDING OTHER MEANS ....................................................................................................... 96
   CONCLUSION ............................................................................................................................... 98

**CHAPTER FOUR: MUSKOKA AND THE TOURISM INDUSTRY** .................................................. 99
   MUSKOKA’S EARLY TOURISTS: THE ADVENTURERS ............................................................ 100
   FROM ADVENTURE TOURISM TO NATURE TOURISM .......................................................... 106
   LANDSCAPING MUSKOKA’S PHYSICAL IDENTITY ................................................................ 115
   LANDSCAPING MUSKOKA’S SOCIAL IDENTITY ................................................................... 124
   CONCLUSION ............................................................................................................................... 128
CHAPTER FIVE: FORGING MUSKOKA’S REGIONAL IDENTITY ..........130
THE TOURIST’S PERSPECTIVE ..............................................131
THE EXPANSION OF NATURE TOURISM ................................136
TRANSPORTATION AND THE TOURISM INDUSTRY ............148
MUSKOKA INHABITANTS AND THE TOURISM INDUSTRY .......153
LOGGING AND THE TOURISM INDUSTRY ..........................160
CONCLUSION ........................................................................162

CONCLUSION .......................................................................164

PRIMARY SOURCES ................................................................171

SECONDARY SOURCES ..........................................................175

ILLUSTRATION CREDITS .....................................................179
List of Figures

Figure 3.1: Barn Raising in Muskoka, [190-] ..................................................72
Figure 3.2: Logging Bee in Muskoka, 1880 .....................................................93
Figure 4.1: The View from a Verandah in Muskoka, 1883 .............................119
Figure 4.2: Fishing and Boating in Muskoka, 1883 .......................................121
Figure 4.3: Camping Lakeside in Muskoka, 1883 .........................................122
Figure 5.1: Royal Muskoka Hotel Postcard, 1906 .........................................142
Figure 5.3: Guests of Windermere House, [188-] ..........................................143
Figure 5.4: Windermere House, 1909 ............................................................144
Figure 5.5: Log Jam on the Muskoka River, 1914 .........................................160
INTRODUCTION

Having attracted tourists since the late nineteenth century, the allure of Muskoka goes beyond its picturesque landscape and recreational opportunities. Although modern conveniences have been incorporated into the standard Muskoka vacation, its basic characteristics have remained the same throughout the twentieth, and into the twenty-first century. The region has long been valued for its history as a site for nature tourism, and for its propensity to continue to serve generation after generation of seasonal residents and vacationers. During my own childhood, I spent the first two weeks of each summer vacationing in Muskoka; although at the time I would have hardly called it vacationing. A Muskoka cottager since I was eighteen months, my family’s annual drive to Muskoka was tradition. Each year our trip felt more like a homecoming as the same friendly faces greeted us, exhausted from their own journey north. Although the cottage we stayed at was a rental and our lake was surrounded with countless other residents, it was a shared space we could all enjoy. What’s more, at the end of our two weeks we could count on the fact that next year we would again see our friends and enjoy the lakes and recreation of Muskoka.

A popular site for cottages, camps and lakeside resorts, Muskoka attracts visitors looking to relax and enjoy the district’s various recreational amenities. Located in central Ontario, the district spans over 6000 square kilometers and contains upwards of 1600 lakes. Often referred to as “cottage country,” Muskoka’s unique landscape is promoted as an idyllic retreat from city life.¹ Densely treed shorelines and island-spotted lakes provide

---

¹ Muskoka is located approximately 150 kilometers north of Toronto, and extends from the western boarder of Algonquin Park in the east to the shores of the Georgian Bay in the west. Known for its rocky and
the perfect backdrop to socialize with friends and family and enjoy the outdoors.

Nevertheless, despite Muskoka’s longstanding reputation as a recreational getaway, the area’s geographical and social identity has not always been so easily defined. Aiming to explore the formation of Muskoka’s contemporary identity, this thesis will examine the complexities of the region’s past as a physical and discursive site.

Between 1850 and 1914 Muskoka’s regional identity was repeatedly reconstructed as a means to develop and maintain the area’s local economy. Over the course of this period the district’s geographical and social landscapes were redefined by the government, the area’s industries, visitors, and even local inhabitants themselves. After being endorsed as a frontier and then a site for agricultural development, Muskoka’s prevailing regional identity was one that promoted the district as an “authentic” site for nature tourism. In forging a standardized representation of the district, both Muskoka’s terrain and populace were misrepresented. Promoted solely as the tourists’ “picturesque playground of Canada,” the public was restrained from regarding Muskoka as anything but a site for recreational getaways. However, when examining the area from viewpoints other than this dominant perspective, the district’s regional identity becomes more varied and complex.

Muskoka’s landscape was manipulated by several different factions that all worked to shape a shared, yet divided, geographical space. The government worked to redefine the function of both the land and its inhabitants in order to meet certain moral and economic goals. The area’s main industries and inhabitants also affected the physical


2 Edward Roper, Muskoka; the Picturesque Playground of Canada (Hart & Co., 1883).
and societal identity of Muskoka as they projected their own expectations and needs on the land. Such occupants included the agriculture, lumber and tourism industries, and Aboriginals, settlers, local officials, and seasonal inhabitants. Adventurers and tourists similarly viewed Muskoka based on their own needs and assumptions.

Throughout the second half of the nineteenth and the first quarter of the twentieth century, Muskoka’s terrain and populace were reinterpreted by varying standpoints through the lenses of class-consciousness and popular notions of race and ethnicity. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the nature-tourism industry had been able to generate a social and geographical landscape that for the most part has remained Muskoka’s regional identity through to the twenty-first century. In order to recognize Muskoka as having both a diverse social and geographic landscape, it is important to examine both the contrary and like historical viewpoints which both contradict and confirm its contemporary identity.

A FEW NOTES ON METHODOLOGY

In approaching this analysis of the Muskoka Lakes District, I established a set of related questions that would help determine both the focus and methods behind my research. These included: What motivations brought individuals and groups to Muskoka, and in what ways were their findings expected or unexpected? Moreover, how and why were the area’s geographical and social landscapes reshaped and reinterpreted? Broadly speaking, this study is an inquiry into the ways in which Muskoka’s identity was promoted between 1850 and 1914. The region
went from being considered part of Ontario’s backwoods, to being looked at as a site for settlement and agricultural development, to being a well-regarded destination for lakeside, recreational retreats. However, at its core, this thesis examines the manner in which the government, local industries, inhabitants, and tourists all created separate identities for the same shared landscape.

On account of the broad timeline and complex subject matter being examined, I wanted to establish boundaries to further structure my study. In order to do so, I took stock of the key terminology being used in my examination: landscape and identity. As Claire Campbell notes in *Shaped by the West Wind: Nature and History in Georgian Bay*, “studying landscape means taking a broad view of history. The very word ‘landscape’ implies seeing things in a context, a context that may be thematic, spatial, or functional.” To examine landscape is to undertake an interdisciplinary study, “drawing from a wide range of subjects in the humanities and the social sciences.” Accordingly, I resolved my study would be a preliminary survey of the geographical and social landscapes of the Muskoka district. I determined I would look at the many ways in which these landscapes were promoted, and examine the regional identities forged from them and how these identities reflected the realities of the district.

Muskoka’s topographical identity and the identities of its inhabitants were all interrelated and defined according to external identities and understandings. As Bonita Lawrence asserts, “while identity is intrinsically an individual issue, it is also relational, juxtaposed with others’ identities, with how they see themselves and

---

4 Ibid.
see others.” Lawrence delineates in her article, “Gender, Race, and the Regulation of Native Identity in Canada and the United States: An Overview,” that identities are entrenched in processes of control and power based on gender, race, and class. In the Muskoka District, this was the case not only for the identities of the Aboriginal, settler, and tourist populations, but also for the ways in which the land was understood.

Having established preparatory questions as well as boundaries by which to rein in my preliminary study, I set out to examine primary sources. In order to better comprehend the varying interpretations of the Muskoka District, I searched for sources that illustrated the manner in which Muskoka was promoted, as well as the ways in which it was received and experienced. This included political reports on the area, surveyors’ accounts of the land and its populace, settlers and workers’ diaries and memoirs, letters and journals of visitors, and articles and reviews written in newspapers. Additionally I examined promotional books, pamphlets and advertisements produced by the Department of Agriculture, hotel proprietors, and tourism and transportation agencies.

During my research I was able to locate sources that uncovered firsthand accounts and reflections from government officials, settlers, lumber workers, seasonal residents and tourists. While there were several primary sources that directly discussed the Aboriginal population in the district, I was only able to locate a few records of firsthand Aboriginal accounts. Muskoka’s Aboriginal populace had long established correspondence with the Department of Indian Affairs, and had

---

also petitioned the government on various occasions. However, in several instances I have only been able to uncover the responses returned by government officials, or secondhand accounts of requests made by Muskoka’s Native community. Generally, these accounts were transcribed by a non-Native constituent, such as a surveyor or government official. I have also found several settler and surveyor accounts of encounters with the Ojibwa who were seasonally located in Muskoka. The difficulty in analyzing such sources lies in deciphering the intentions, biases, or misconceptions that have tinted the narrative. Nevertheless, it was my goal to best understand how contrary geographical and social identities affected the manner in which Muskoka’s Aboriginals were perceived and misrepresented. Ultimately, I have endeavored to compare Aboriginal sources from Muskoka with secondary sources regarding Aboriginals in Canada during this period, and from there draw an exploratory reading.

In addition to using research questions to help develop a framework for my investigation, Patricia Jasen’s *Wild Things: Nature, Culture, and Tourism in Ontario, 1790-1914*, provided background information, as well as a foundation to work from. In *Wild Things* Jasen traces the reconstruction and popularization of nature tourism in Ontario from the upper St. Lawrence in the late eighteenth century to the Nipigon and Temangai areas prior to World War One. Each chapter is devoted to a specific time and place in the history of Ontario tourism: Chapter Five focuses on the development of the "therapeutic back-to-nature holiday" in the late nineteenth century, paying particular attention to Muskoka.  

---

concentrates on the lasting connection between romantic values and tourism. Jasen asserts: "tourism as a consumer industry was built upon selling images and arousing romantic fantasies – romanticism established the cultural foundations of the tourist industry and supplied its strategies for success".\(^8\) In examining nature tourism in Muskoka, Jasen investigates how questions of class and gender, along with representations of authenticity and native culture, shaped the Muskoka Lakes District into a "playground for the well to do."\(^9\) Jasen utilizes a variety of newspaper articles, advertising materials, diaries and travel narratives in studying the popularization of nature tourism in Muskoka. Building upon Jasen’s work, I decided to further examine the dynamic role Muskoka’s regional identity played in the district’s nature-tourism industry, and how it differed primarily from the landscape that settlers and Aboriginals faced.

Through framing my investigation between the signing of the Robinson Treaties in 1850 and the outbreak of World War One in 1914, I have focused my work on the development and beginnings of Muskoka’s contemporary recreational identity. The Robinson-Huron Treaty marks the moment that the Muskoka Lakes District was brought under the control of the Crown, as well as the onset of the colonial government’s program to expand Central Ontario’s utility. I have decided to conclude my investigation prior to the start of the First World War because of the effects the war had on both Muskoka and North America’s tourism industry, as well as the nation’s inhabitants in general. As previously stated, covering such a vast period of time in such a limited amount of space meant that, from the start, I had to

\(^8\) Ibid., 13.
\(^9\) Ibid., 126.
recognize that this thesis would not be anywhere close to a definitive examination of the area between these years. However, after having completed my research, I can now safely say that producing a definitive study of the Muskoka Lakes District would be impossible; with such a rich history and varied culture, it would be more than a life’s work.

Given the expansive timeline being covered, the chapters that follow will primarily be structured chronologically, beginning with the Robinson Treaties of 1850 and examining the area until early 1914. The first chapter will examine the “opening up” of Muskoka. Here, I will delineate why the land was considered closed before 1850, what “opening up” meant to the government, and how Aboriginals living in the area were affected by the development. In my second chapter I will examine the ways in which settlers were lured to Muskoka. Subsequently, this section will look specifically at the promotion of both the land and the settler populace. My next chapter will explore the realities of settlement life for both settlers and the region’s Aboriginal population, and will also look at the development of the agriculture and lumber industries. The fourth chapter will examine the rise of adventure tourism and subsequently nature tourism, as well as the manner in which Muskoka was promoted to lure tourists and seasonal residents to the area. For my final chapter I will explore the nature tourists’ perspectives, and how the district’s inhabitants partook in nature-tourism, despite the industry’s tendency to misrepresent both the land and the area’s settler and Aboriginal populations. Amidst the competing viewpoints that still existed at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century, I will analyze how Muskoka’s contemporary identity emerged.
CHAPTER 1: “Opening Up” Muskoka

During the first half of the nineteenth century the Crown steadily obtained the Muskoka Lakes District through a series of agreements made with the Ojibwa Chiefs residing in the area. Prior to these treaties, Muskoka was part of a larger tract of land under Aboriginal jurisdiction; for the most part, contact was only made with missionaries, government surveyors, and traders. Beyond the goods extracted from the area through trade, the Muskoka District was still largely regarded by non-Natives as unchartered territory. Although preliminary surveys of the waterways in Muskoka and surrounding areas were taken during the four decades following the War of 1812, little had been done with the materials produced on these expeditions in terms of summaries or analyses. It was not until after the Robinson Huron and Superior Treaties of 1850, when the Crown gained possession of the land, that the government developed a serious interest in Muskoka and began to reexamine its usefulness. Despite surveyors’ warnings of bad soil and harsh terrain, Muskoka was classified as a promising site for settlement and agricultural production. Immediately, the government began to ready the area for incoming settlers: transportation lines were surveyed, colonization roads were quickly cleared, and the aboriginal population evicted. In evaluating the land and declaring it an ideal site for agrarian settlement, the Crown redefined Muskoka’s geographical and social identity to best suit its own needs.

---

10 Muskoka and Haliburton, 1615-1875, ed. Florence B. Murray (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963), lii.
Claiming Ownership of Native Land:

Between 1818 and 1850, the Crown gradually secured ownership of the Muskoka District. By means of treaties made with Aboriginal Chiefs, the government was able to acquire sole ownership of the land situated between Lake Huron and Ottawa. Through these contracts the government relocated the area’s Aboriginal populace onto several reserves, namely the Rama and Parry Island reserves. During this period, and for the decades following, the Crown was able to acquire large tracts of Native land across British North America. This stretch of land acquisitions reflected a drastic change in the relationship between Aboriginal populations and the Crown.

For the Aboriginals of British North America, the conclusion of the War of 1812 was a defining moment in their relations with the Crown. During times of colonial war, Aboriginals had been able to maintain their land and certain rights “in return for their war services.”\(^\text{11}\) Ultimately, the War of 1812 “delayed the erosion of colonial institutions and their concomitant relational practices on the frontier.”\(^\text{12}\) Once Aboriginals were no longer of service to the colony’s military security, they lost their most important means of bargaining. By 1830, two ideas dominated the imperial administration’s understanding of British North America’s Aboriginal population: “that as a people they were disappearing and that those who remained should either be removed to communities isolated from Euro-Canadians or else assimilated.”\(^\text{13}\) With advocates such as Major-General H.C. Darling, Indian Affairs’ Superintendent, the Crown’s “official” position “stabilized on its


\(^{13}\) Dickason, *Canada’s First Nations*, 203.
perceived duty to ‘civilize’ migrating Natives by settling them down as farmers.’”

Darling campaigned for a system of reserves that would allow Aboriginals to adopt a more sedentary lifestyle. Such model villages had already been established in Canada East, and the Crown hoped to emulate their success in Canada West. Trial sites were established in 1829 near Orillia, at Coldwater as well as the Narrows. Although the Aboriginal populations at the model villages were regarded “as minors whose interests were secondary to those of settlers”, the area’s Chiefs cooperated with the Crown. Among them was Chief Musquakie, also known as William Yellowhead, who relocated with other Ojibwa to the village at the Narrows. The Ojibwa of Lake Huron and Simcoe, although divided into several bands, all recognized Musquakie as their headman.

After remaining at Coldwater and the Narrows for six years, Musquakie and the other chiefs were convinced to sell their land and abandon their villages. While this treaty did not directly involve the Muskoka District, it reflected both the growth of non-native settlements and the mentality that Natives should be removed from “all communication from the Whites.” Not all Crown officials believed in “civilizing” British North America’s Aboriginal population. Sir Francis Bond Head, lieutenant-governor of Upper Canada from 1836-38, believed that “model villages implanted more

---
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid., 210.
16 Ibid., 212.
17 Ibid.
18 “Ojibwa Chiefs to Sir John Colborne, September 15th, 1830,” Murray, Muskoka and Haliburton, 1615-1875, 105-106.
19 Murray, Muskoka and Haliburton, 1615-1875, lvii.
20 “Sir Francis Bond Head to Lord Glenelg, Toronto, August 15th, 1830,” Murray, Muskoka and Haliburton, 1615-1875, 112-113.
21 Dickason, Canada’s First Nations, 213.
vices than they eradicated.”

He reasoned that the “greatest kindness we can perform towards these intelligent, simple-minded people” would be to remove them from white civilization. Bond Head convinced the Ojibwa at the model villages that it would be better for them to “receive some Money for their Hunting Ground than to continue on it, surrounded as it was by the White population, and consequently deprived as it was of its Game.”

In November of 1836 the Ojibwa Chiefs met with Bond Head in Toronto to sign over their land. By 1837, the model villages had been abandoned, and the Ojibwa moved farther north. Although a government report reveals that the Ojibwa in the model village sites near Orillia had successfully established a “budding farm community,” it was believed that nearby Europeans posed a threat to their success. Ultimately, it was the Aboriginal population that was moved as “progress for the whites took precedence over progress for Ojibwa.”

In 1822, Henry Row Schoolcraft, Indian agent at Sault Ste Marie, Michigan, had similarly called for the segregation of the Aboriginal and white populations in the Upper Great Lakes frontier.

Tensions amongst Canada West’s Aboriginal population grew as each bands’ territory grew smaller. In addition to Bond Head’s agreement with the Aboriginals at the model village sites, earlier treaties had been made with the Crown. On November 5, 1818, “the Chippewa Nation of Indians inhabiting the back parts of the New Castle District” surrendered a tract of land amounting to almost two million acres to the

22 Ibid.
23 Ibid.
24 “Sir Francis Bond Head to Lord Glenelg, Toronto, August 15th, 1830,” Murray, Muskoka and Haliburton, 1615-1875, 112-113.
25 Peter S. Schmalz, The Ojibwa of Southern Ontario (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 144.
27 Dickason, Canada’s First Nations, 231.
government. In exchange for their land, they were promised a yearly payment of seven hundred and forty pounds. In the agreement the description of the boundary lines is somewhat unclear; the forty-fifth parallel is said to strike the northern entrance of Lake Simcoe when in fact it hits Lake Muskoka. Whether or not Muskoka was included, the Ojibwa agreed to sign over a significant tract of land to the Crown. As more bands were pushed farther north, the division of Native territories became stricter. Trespassing on another band’s land could result in death, as it did for fourteen Aboriginals who hunted on Pic River territory in northern Ontario.

Aboriginals in Canada West also felt the government should comply with the boundaries they had established. In 1846, the colonial government sanctioned the construction of several mines north of Lake Superior after mineral deposits were discovered. The Ojibwa Chiefs who held jurisdiction over the area contacted the government twice to establish a means of remuneration for the use of their land. After both attempts they were dismissed by the government. In 1846 the Ojibwa chiefs immediately insisted that the revenues from the mining leases should be paid to them, as owners of the land. In 1849 the Ojibwa again contacted the government, this time to organize a land settlement. Realizing the government would not respond, the Ojibwa decided to force the closure of the Quebec and Lake Superior Mining Company themselves. After three weeks, the colonial government sent in troops to suppress the

---

28 “Indian Surrender of Parts of Haliburton and Muskoka,” Murray, Muskoka and Haliburton, 1615-1875, 101-103.
29 Ibid., 102.
30 Ibid.
31 Dickason, Canada’s First Nations, 231.
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid., 232.
'revolt.' Government officials who were dispatched to look into the situation quickly found that the Ojibwa were eager to formalize treaties with the Crown, as they expressed confidence in the government and “the ‘wisdom and justice of their Great Father.’”

Utilizing the findings of the commissioners, William B. Robinson arranged land treaties with the Ojibwa of Lake Superior and Lake Huron for the land from Penetanguishene to Batchawana Bay on Lake Superior. The Lake Superior Chiefs signed on September 7 1850, and the Chiefs from Lake Huron signed on September 9 1850, after waiting for better terms. Under the treaty signed with the Aboriginals of Lake Huron, the Muskoka District was signed over to the Crown. While both groups received an initial payment of £2 000, the Lake Superior Aboriginals were to receive an annual stipend of £500, and those from Lake Huron were to receive £600. The Native populations were also granted the right to retain their hunting and fishing privileges in all ceded territory, so long as the land had not yet been leased or sold by the Crown. As resolved from the commissioners’ reports in 1849, each treaty specified a reserve for the bands to share. From the Aboriginal perspective, the reserves negotiated in treaties were not granted to them; “they were simply lands that had not been shared with the newcomers.”

Deeming that the Muskoka District and surrounding areas were completely under the control of the Crown, the government looked to develop the land. Although proposals had been made during the first three decades of the nineteenth century to establish a land

34 Ibid.
35 Ibid.
36 Murray, Muskoka and Haliburton, 1615-1875, lix.
37 Dickason, Canada’s First Nations, 233.
38 Ibid.
40 Dickason, Canada’s First Nations, 233.
41 Ibid.
company and create townships between Ottawa and Lake Huron, it was not until after the Robinson Treaties of 1850 that the idea was reexamined. The decision to turn the heavily forested region of the Canadian Shield into an agricultural district was rationalized in several ways. Colonists argued for settling the area by emphasizing the poverty which still existed in England; they asserted that “homes should be found for the needy immigrants on the unsettled lands in Canada”. Politicians, more influenced by economic considerations, hoped that new settlements and greater areas for cultivation would ensure land for future generations of Canadians, and would consequently increase the population and bring financial prosperity. There were also many political and public figures that encouraged new settlement because they were tired of seeing immigrants from Great Britain move to the United States, “where wages were higher and land could be had on easier terms than in Canada.” Faced with the famine in Ireland, the rapidly growing population in England, and labour displacements brought about by the agricultural revolution, many European immigrants relocated to North America in hopes of bettering their situation. Canada West’s colonial government hoped they would choose their colony to settle down in. Ultimately, alongside securing Crown ownership of the land, a multi-sided rationale brought about the non-Native settlement of the Muskoka Lakes District.

43 Ibid., lxxx.
44 Ibid.
45 Ibid.
46 Schmalz, *The Ojibwa of Southern Ontario*, 141.
Surveying the Region:

Before settlement could begin in Muskoka, the district had to be surveyed in order to examine the landscape and map out townships, roads and bridges. However, the expeditions and surveys conducted during the decades leading up to 1850 by David Thompson, Lieutenant John Carthew, and even Lieutenant Henry Briscoe, who was considered “the first white man known to have crossed the heart of Muskoka”, were not returned to after the Robinson Treaty.\(^{47}\) In fact, surveyors who were dispatched to the area after 1850 were unaware that any accurate surveys of the district between Ottawa and Lake Huron existed. Although no explanations have been found for this “total disregard” of the detailed surveys already conducted of the lakes and rivers of Muskoka, in deciphering the purpose behind the expeditions it becomes clearer why earlier surveys may not have been reexamined.\(^{48}\)

The initial surveys were launched to examine the area’s waterways and establish new lines of communication. In contrast, the later surveyors entering Muskoka were sent to map out townships, roadways and bridges, and to appraise the quality of the soil and land. David Thompson’s 1837 expedition, thought to be the most detailed of the earlier surveys, included maps and records of Muskoka’s landscape. In his notes Thompson also occasionally discussed the nature of the land he was travelling through. While he praised the agricultural potential of certain areas, such as Lake Muskoka, he had only harsh words for others, and continually complained about the barren state of the land and lack of wildlife.\(^{49}\) Considering the intentions and expectations for the expeditions sent out

\(^{47}\) Murray, *Muskoka and Haliburton, 1615-1875*, xlvii.


after 1850, perhaps the government did not want future surveyors influenced by earlier assessments. Regardless of the forethought behind examining the Muskoka District as if it were uncharted land, the government was determined to turn it into a site for new non-Native settlement.

This notion that Muskoka was a frontier was grounded in European expansionist assumptions. To the colonizers, Muskoka was an unexplored territory because the region had yet to be surveyed and organized using European classifications; it was a frontier, but “only with respect to Europe.”

Beginning in the mid-eighteenth century, various classificatory frameworks took shape in the study of natural history. The discipline involved mapping “not the thin track of a route taken, nor the lines where land and water meet, but the internal ‘contents’ of those land and water masses whose spread made up the surface of the planet.”

Texts, such as *Histoire naturelle*, written by French naturalist Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon, proclaimed that the study of natural history involved embracing and categorizing all objects encountered.

Through exploration,

One by one the planet’s life forms were to be drawn out of the tangled threads of their life surroundings and rewoven into European-based patterns of global unity and order. The (lettered, male, European) eye that held the system could familiarize (“naturalize”) new sties/sights immediately upon contact, by incorporating them into the language of the system.

By surveying and claiming areas and objects previously unknown to Europe, colonizers attempted to reorganize the contents of the world “into a new knowledge formation whose value lies precisely in its difference…” here the naming, the representing, and the

---

52 *Ibid*.
claiming are all one; the naming brings the reality of order into being.” Although by 1850 Muskoka had already been mapped out, named, and occupied by the area’s Ojibwa population, because it had not yet been surveyed and developed for European purposes it was considered a frontier to Canada West’s colonial government.

In a motion presented at the legislative assembly on November 8, 1852, William Lyon Mackenzie argued for the uninhabited areas of Upper Canada to be immediately surveyed in order to “provide homes for the youth of Canada, encourage immigration, and prevent emigration.” With these intentions in mind, the colonial government commissioned, through the Department of Lands and Forests, a survey of a road line from the Eldon portage road to the Muskoka River in an attempt to determine the value of the land. Believing the area to be an “eligible locality” on account of its access to water, the government financed the construction of the Muskoka road.

Although the government and the Crown Lands Agency identified the Muskoka settlement as a site for agrarian development with “advantages not usually met with in a new district”, the reports as well as private notes of surveyors reveal that the district’s terrain did not necessarily align with the Agency’s agricultural aims. In the field notes produced in 1852 by J.W. Bridgland, the commissioned surveyor concluded: “I must express my regret and disappointment, in being unable after so much labour and time expended in exploration, to report anything concerning the lands examined, which will

54 Ibid., 33.
55 “Address of Legislative Assembly, Praying for a Survey, November 8, 1852,” Murray, Muskoka and Haliburton, 1615-1875, 150.
57 “Oliver, Report on the Muskoka Road, 1862,” Murray, Muskoka and Haliburton, 1615-1875, 251.
prove satisfactory, as to their value, or eligibility”. The region’s unpromising features, namely its poor soil, rocky terrain and dense forests, did not encourage settlement.

Despite finding arable tracts of land “here and there,” including a patch by the Muskoka River that was eligible for milling and settlement, Bridgland continued his report, stating:

to call to attention, particularly, to the remaining portion of the exploration, would only be to repeat the tedious monotony, of rocky, barren, swamps, marshes, and burnt regions; destitute of good water, good timber, in sort every-thing, necessary to make settlement desirable, or life supportable.

Bridgland testified that corroborating reports from traders and hunters who had traversed the area supported the supposition that “these unpromising features continue over all that tract, situated between Muskoko and the Severn River.” Noting that “local attraction is certainly, in places, very great,” Bridgland expressed his regret as to his findings.

Subsequent surveyors commissioned to investigate deeper into the Muskoka district made criticisms similar to those of Bridglands. In the spring and summer of 1853 Alexander Murray surveyed areas between Georgian Bay and the Ottawa River. In his report Murray asserted that “the country on each side of the Muskoka River…[was] for the most part rugged and barren.” He continued, stating: “the portion of the shores of Muskoka Lake which came under my notice, like the banks of the river below, is bold,

---

59 With “unquestionable water power easily attainable” at the Muskoka River, as long as a route was secured, Bridgland thought the area could become an eligible locality. “J.W. Bridgland’s ‘Report… of Exploring Lines from the Eldon Portage Road to the Mouth of the River Muskako,’ January 31, 1853,” Murray, Muskoka and Haliburton, 1615-1875, 151.
60 Ibid., 154.
61 Ibid., 152.
62 Ibid., 154-155.
63 “Alexander Murray’s ‘Report for the year 1853… to Wm, E. Logan, Provincial Geologist,” Murray, Muskoka and Haliburton, 1615-1875, 159.
rocky, and barren, which is also the case with Rosseau Lake, although in the latter some good land occurs in patches”. 64 J.S. Dennis surveyed the Muskoka District in July of 1860, following an exploration line “westerly from a point five miles north of the crossing of the north branch of the Muskoka River, and to terminate at the mouth of the Muskoka River”. 65 This survey was conducted after southern Muskoka had already been divided into lots and the area was in the midst of being settled. Although for the most part Dennis examined the land for the construction of new roads and bridges, he also noted that the character of the country was “generally hardwood... soil sandy and gravelly loam – affording say ⅓ of the surface fit for settlement – the remainder rocky and swampy”. 66 Dennis did claim that in some areas there existed “considerable portions together of land desirable for settlement”. 67

While all of the surveyors did take note that there were intervals of better soil and more promising settlement conditions, they all recorded that for the most part Muskoka was rugged, and that the soil, rocks, and dense forests did not make the land an easy fit for agricultural development. Despite these reports, the government still promoted the Muskoka District as an agricultural settlement, and went about dividing the area into townships and forging roadways for incoming settlers.

64 Ibid.
67 Ibid.
The Colonization Roads:

The means to initiating settlement in the Muskoka District lay in developing lines of transportation both towards and within the region; aware of this, the government issued surveys in 1856 and 1857 to establish the best line for a colonization road. Given the district’s rugged terrain, several surveyed lines were abandoned. Moreover, financial insecurity, strict government guidelines, weather conditions, and insufficient labour supplies threatened the quality of the roadways. As the government wanted to “open the tract from the Ottawa River to Georgian Bay more or less as a unit”, several other colonization roads were simultaneously being surveyed and outsourced.68 Presumably, setbacks everywhere also beset the Muskoka roads’ progress.

Charles Unwin was instructed to survey two lines to the great falls on the Muskoka River; one from the east and the other from the west side of Lake Couchiching in 1856 and 1857. However, after taking into account the rocks, trees, and rivers running though the lines, both were terminated because the cost of clearing and flattening the land would have been too great.69 Ultimately, an attainable line was surveyed by David Gibson later on in 1857. The Minister of Agriculture announced that the Muskoka road would proceed from Washago, located at the top of Lake Couchiching’s navigation, to the falls on the Muskoka River. To gain access to the road, settlers and travelers had to take the Northern Railway from Toronto to Barrie and then journey by steamship to Orillia.70

The government contracted out the construction of the Muskoka road, and work began at Washago in 1858. Alongside the roadway construction, surveyor Charles

68 Murray, Muskoka and Haliburton, 1615-1875, lxx.
69 Ibid.
70 “Free Grants on Colonization Roads,” Murray, Muskoka and Haliburton, 1615-1875, 184.
Rankin was directed “to lay out free grant lots of one hundred acres each on both sides thereof.” The completion of the road was publicized in the Report of the Board of Agriculture and Statistics for 1859. The announcement read:

From the termination of the navigation on Lake Couchiching where a wharf has been erected, to the Great Falls of Muskoka – a distance of about 21 miles – all streams have been substantially bridged and the road has been leveled and crosswayed. A very good road between these points has been opened, and the country along it is being rapidly settled.

Following this public statement, both officials and settlers believed that further expeditions and surveys for townships farther into Muskoka’s interior could begin, and that that area’s most southern lots could now be settled and developed for farming.

Despite the government’s assertions that the Muskoka road had been completed, Vernon Wadsworth, an assistant to surveyor J.S. Dennis, noted that in July of 1860 the road was only twelve miles long and stopped short where Gravenhurst would soon be located. Moreover, Wadsworth recalled that although it was the only travelled road in the district, the Muskoka road “was so unfinished that a loaded team could only haul about 800 pounds of provisions.” If they wanted to avoid getting stuck in the mud or damaging their wagons, surveying parties had to take several trips in order to forward their supplies to Lake Muskoka. A year after the Muskoka road was announced completed, most of the road’s surface was unfinished and it was still nine miles short of its target. An inspection of the Muskoka Road in 1861 revealed that while the first two miles from Lake Couchiching were “tolerably passable in dry weather”, a bridge at the

---

71 “Andrew Russell, Instructions to Charles Rankin,” Murray, Muskoka and Haliburton, 1615-1875, 191.
73 Wadsworth, History of Exploratory Surveys Conducted by John Stoughton Dennis, part 1, 1.
74 Ibid. part 1, 3-4.
end of this distance was “weak and ill founded.”75 The two miles following the bridge were then described to be “in a wretched state – Bad mud holes, bad roots, and bad stones abound.”76 It was not until the last two or three miles of the road that the inspector remarked, it had become level and was suitable for settlers traveling into the region.

The completion and maintenance of the Muskoka road as well as several other roadway projects farther within the district were delayed despite reports that everything was running on schedule. Weather conditions, such as late snowfalls, postponed work and kept surveyors from being able to properly appraise the quality of the land. As reported in May of 1859, the depth of the snow did not keep the contractors from starting their work, but it did hinder surveyors from being able to make “observations on the character of the surface.”77 In 1861 it was disclosed that snowfall kept the subcontractor from finishing his work on the Muskoka road. Although it was reported he would begin again in the spring, the contractor had not returned by the time the inspector visited in June, and the road was in a “wretched and unfinished condition.”78 In addition to the troubles caused by the weather, strict government guidelines also caused financial instability and fluctuating labour supplies. The Department of Crown Lands established a set of rules for the contractors pertaining to the labourers hired to build the colonization roads. All workers were “to be boarded in one place and not at their respective homes.”79 This was to provide uniformity, and allow the men to work in tandem and without the advantages that local proximity would provide. This meant the roadway contractors had

---

76 Ibid.
77 “Rankin to the Commissioner of Crown Lands, to P.M. Vankoughnet,” Murray, Muskoka and Haliburton, 1615-1875, 193.
79 “Andrew Russell to R.J. Oliver, Orillia,” Murray, Muskoka and Haliburton, 1615-1875, 187.
to subcontract both board and provisions and deduct the cost from the labourers’ pay, or else lose their own contract with the government. Pressed for time and faced with several challenges, contractors tried to work quickly under the given conditions. As a result, work in some areas was done hastily, and the overall quality of the roadway was sacrificed.

“Opening Up” Muskoka:

This interval of change that occurred after the Robinson Treaties of 1850, involving the arrival of surveyors and workers to plot townships and clear colonization roads, has often been described as the “opening up” of Muskoka. While the new roadways and lines of transportation moving into the district created a doorway for settlers, the expression “opening up” signifies much more. The opening up of Muskoka involved economic, social, and administrative motivations. Furthermore, in classifying Muskoka as a newly opened settlement destination, the government was redefining its backwoods, frontier identity, while also further displacing the district’s rich Native history.

In part, the decision to develop and settle the Muskoka District was both promoted and received as a grand opening. To encourage non-Native settlement, the government first offered inexpensive land parcels, and then eventually began to advertise free land grants. With townships already structured and lots equally drawn, incoming settlers had the opportunity to obtain large tracts of land. The social initiatives behind the idea of opening Muskoka meant that the general public would not only have access to

---

80 The government first offered free land grants of 100 acres in 1859. The Free Grants and Homestead Act was then introduced in 1868, and offered incoming settlers 200 acres of land for farming. The free land grants will be discussed in the next chapter.
new land, but a space where organized communities of newcomers could thrive. Advertising across Canada, in England, and in the United States, the government wanted all potential settlers to believe that “here was a farm for everybody”. The government, aided by the media, promoted the opening of the Muskoka District as a social equalizer: with plenty of land for everyone, it was asserted, “any newcomer possessed of good health and an average amount of activity, cannot fail to succeed.”

Alongside presenting Muskoka as a doorway to higher social strata, the opening of the Muskoka District also meant that the area was now open for business. As with any business, the government had to invest in it; in surveying the region and clearing colonization roads, the government hoped Muskoka would flourish as an agricultural community. However, in addition to contractors and road workers, those in the lumber industry and entrepreneurs who realized the potential for businesses, such as boarding houses and general stores, also moved into the area. The opening of the Muskoka District, from encouraging settlement and farming to physically creating the roadways and infrastructure, involved making the area profitable.

The act of “opening up” Muskoka also represented the government’s control over not only the land, but also its geographical and social identities. As the party opening up the area for the use of others, the government controlled how it wanted Muskoka to be viewed. Moreover, in controlling the region’s present identity, the government also manipulated its historical representation. As previously discussed, by depicting Muskoka

82 “Hints to Intending Settlers,” The Forrester, March 29, 1878.
83 In S.R.G. Penson’s memoir he recalls men moving to the Muskoka District not to farm, but to open general stores and boarding houses for the workers. His memoir will be examined further in Chapter three. The S.R.G. Penson Memoirs, 49.
84 As mentioned earlier, the government wanted to settle the area for farming. Chapter 2 will examine this agricultural identity that was promoted to potential settlers and surrounding communities.
as a newly opened frontier and developing district, the government was classifying it as an area that before had been closed and undeveloped. While the area may not have been considered developed by European standards, Muskoka was not an uninhabited location. The land treaties the Crown had to obtain before it could claim the area as government property clearly demonstrate that several Aboriginal communities were seasonally located in the Muskoka district. They were well acquainted with the network of lakes and rivers that spanned across the area, as well as the natural resources the district had to offer. Although the government was attempting to open the region for white settlement, it did not necessarily follow, despite some of the government’s initiatives, that Muskoka was suddenly closed to Aboriginals.

**Muskoka’s Aboriginal Population:**

Although several bands left after the signing of the Robinson treaties, a number of Muskoka’s Aboriginal population attempted to remain residents of the area. Ojibwa communities continued to live seasonally in the district until the late 1860s. Such groups included those who resided on Big Island, which was later referred to as Tobin’s Island, and in Obajewanung, a village which later became the site of Port Carling.

Despite being assigned to the Parry Island reserve under the Robinson-Huron Treaty, the Muskoka Band, also known as the “Miskoko Indians,” remained settled in the district. The band was part of a demographic referred to as the “Sandy Island Indians,” who, together with their neighbouring bands, were part of the Chippewa of Lakes Simcoe.

---

and Huron; their principal Chief was Chief Musquakie. As discussed earlier, Musquakie and his band had lived at the model village at the Narrows before the village was abandoned by both the Ojibwa and the government in 1837. During the decade following the dissolution of the model villages, the Ojibwa bands moved farther north, ultimately settling upon a tract of land situated between Lakes Rosseau and Muskoka. This site, known as Obajewanung, became a more permanent settlement for the band during the 1850s. The Ojibwa did not remain in the area throughout the entire year, but went “away in October to hunt in the vicinity of Blackstone Lake, and in December they returned laden with furs and game.” Although the Robinson-Huron treaty arranged for the Aboriginals situated in Muskoka to be removed to reserves, the band was for the most part uninterested in moving. In 1859, Chief Musquakie initiated correspondence with W.R. Bartlett, the Indian Affairs Superintendent in Toronto. The Chief entreated the government, “applying on behalf of the Miskoko Indians for the grant of a parcel of land [Obajewanung] north of Miskoko Lake.” Ultimately, Bartlett denied Musquakie the land, declaring that reserves could not be created on land that had already been surrendered.

Eager to advance their case, the Muskoka Band attempted to reach an agreement with the colonial government through the appointed surveyors that were sent to map out the Muskoka District. In January of 1862 the Muskoka Band invited surveyor J.S. Dennis

---

87 Ibid., 29.
89 Brendan O’Brien, “Memories: Cottage Life at the Turn of the Century,” Summertimes: In Celebration of 100 years of the Muskoka Lakes Association, 123.
90 W.R. Bartlett to Chief Yellowhead for the Miskoko Indians,” Murray, Muskoka and Haliburton, 1615-1875, 123.
91 Ibid.
to attend a council meeting to discuss their request to trade their reserve for their land in Muskoka.  

Recalling that the band had approached him with a similar proposal two years earlier, he agreed to meet with them. In a letter to the Commissioner of Crown Lands, Dennis supported the Muskoka band’s appeal and declared: “I should say I know of no reason why their request should not be granted – on the contrary I think an exchange might be made which would be mutually advantageous.” Nevertheless, despite Dennis’ knowledge “as a party conversant with the matter from the beginning,” the exchange was again disapproved.

As Dennis noted in his letter to the Commissioner, the Muskoka Band became “less inclined each succeeding year to leave the locality where they had lived for so many years.” Their location allowed them easy access to the district’s vast network of lakes and rivers, and they were close to their preferred hunting grounds. Moreover, as an early settler noticed in 1861, the Aboriginal community had already built several log cabins and had been able to successfully cultivate their land. However, as Obajewanung was desirable to the Aboriginals, it was similarly attractive to the colonial government. Not only did the site provide access to both Lakes Muskoka and Rosseau, but the land had already been cleared. The government presumably viewed Obajewanung as an ideal site to develop a centralized, non-Native settlement to serve the surrounding settler communities. This seems quite likely, as once the district’s Aboriginal population was removed, the government developed Port Carling where Obajewanung originally stood.

---

92 “Colonel J.S. Dennis to P.M. Vankoughnet,” Murray, Muskoka and Haliburton, 1615-1875, 127.
93 Ibid.
94 Ibid.
95 I. Robinson, Mss. Misc. Coll. 1968 #4 MU21400, F775, 32. Archives of Ontario, Toronto, Ontario. Robinson’s experiences in Muskoka will be examined in Chapter three, when the realities of settlement life in the Muskoka District are examined.
96 Wadsworth, History of Exploratory Surveys Conducted by John Stoughton Dennis, part 1, 2.
Big Island was another sought after area within the Muskoka District. Located on Lake Rosseau, not far from and presumably associated with Obajewanung, several Native families attempted to claim the island as a reserve.97 Although a settler, Joseph Tobin, convinced the island’s inhabitants to allow him build a house “for the sum of five dollars” on the southern end of the island, the Aboriginals remained there until the late 1860s.98 Despite their willingness to aid both surveyors and white settlers, the colonial government did not permit permanent Native settlement in the Muskoka District.99 They “were removed by order of the Indian Department from their village” and forced to relocate to the Parry Island and Rama reserves.100

Before continuing this examination of the Muskoka District, the work of two surveyors, James W. Bridgland and John Carthew, and their reports on the area’s Native settlements should be noted. While Bridgland’s accounts display the expansionist sentiments that inhabited the colonial government, Carthew’s earlier record of Muskoka’s aboriginals reveals a sedentary Native village prior to 1850. Moreover, Carthew’s work sheds light onto the poor, sporadic state of existing documentation on Muskoka’s Aboriginals.

In August 1865, government surveyor James W. Bridgland submitted a report to the Department of Crown Lands on the colonization roads in Muskoka. In his report, Bridgland also took note of Obajewanung and discussed the state of the village:

---

97 The S.R.G. Penson Memoirs, 24. Penson’s memoir will be examined to a greater extent in Chapter three, when the realities of settlement life in the Muskoka District are examined. However, being that there is a lack of sources on the band living on Big Island, his narrative provides useful insight.

98 Ibid.

99 In Chapter three, I will examine how the district’s Aboriginal inhabitants aided surveying parties, as well as how their trade with early settlers aided white settlement.

100 Wadsworth, History of Exploratory Surveys Conducted by John Stoughton Dennis, part 2, 13. S.R.G. Penson also mentions the district’s Aboriginal population being removed to reserves. The S.R.G. Penson Memoirs, 24.
The land occupied is of a sandy quality, and cleared and cultivated in the most slovenly and wretched manner…. And from year to year, the limited crop is planted by this careless people, with hoes, among all this debris, when a few days expenditure of industrious and well applied labour would clear away the obstructing rubbish and add 100% to the crops raised…

Bridgland’s depiction of both the village and its residents is particularly unfavourable. Although his report reiterates earlier settler accounts, that the community had erected log houses and had thirty to forty acres under cultivation, Bridgland decries the inferiority of the settlement. Similar to the government’s decision to “open up” Muskoka, Bridgland’s observations were motivated by settler expansionist assumptions. Regardless of agricultural development or the village’s infrastructure, to the colonial government Obajewanung was still representative of the frontier. Reiterating this colonial attitude, an earlier report by Bridgland employs a similarly hostile tone towards not only Muskoka’s Aboriginal population, but Aboriginals in general. Following a survey of the Muskoka River in 1852, Bridgland described his encounter with Muskoka Aboriginals, observing:

I have learned, however, to place but a small value upon the information received from this class of persons; their judgement of the quality of land, being, in general, exceedingly deficient; their statements as to the distances to places, and of their localities, being, generally not even an approximation to correctness; and their far famed property, of acuteness in finding out places, being explained, most truthfully, by the fact, of their ransacking in every tortuous direction, all the area between, until they strike at last upon the only thing left, viz. the place looked for.

Although this passage represents another instance of the “unknown” being surveyed and claimed using settler or British classifications, it also displays the growing sentiment that Aboriginals were to be looked upon as children. This notion gained popularity with the

---

implementation of the Crown Lands Protection Act of 1839. Declaring the Crown guardian of all Native lands, Aboriginals were excluded “from political rights based on individual property qualifications.” Accordingly, this supported the belief that Aboriginals were wards of the state, “in need of paternal protection.” Both of Bridgland’s reports reflect the attitudes of not only the colonial government, but also the growing settler population of British North America. Throughout the nineteenth century, Aboriginals were “romanticized into the White Man’s Burden.”

Three decades before Bridgland visited Obajewanung on Lake Rosseau, Lieutenant John Carthew made his way into the district. In his September 1835 report to the House of Assembly, Carthew recalled his encounter with Aboriginals on Lake Rosseau:

> These Indians were very civil, and after making some enquiries as to their mode of life, they took me to their village. I was surprised to find about 40 acres of good clearing, planted with corn and potatoes. I learned form them that they had made this in four years. The plantation is on an island in the Lake, but only a small part of the island is good land.

Although Carthew does not state whether the village is also on Lake Rosseau, the limited description he provides does match that of Obajewanung. Moreover, given the densely treed and rocky terrain of the Muskoka District, if two separate villages existed in such close proximity, each with approximately forty acres of cleared land under cultivation, one would have expected the government reports conducted after 1850 to reflect this. In the account, it appears that Lake Rosseau is the only lake discussed. Upon outlining,

---

103 Dickason, Canada’s First Nations, 225.
104 Ibid.
105 “John Carthew’s Meeting with Indians on Lake Rosseau, September, 1835,” Murray, Muskoka and Haliburton, 1615-1875, 108.
“they name it Rousseau’s Lake,” Carthew continued to refer to “the Lake” throughout the available fragment of his account. If the village in question is located on Lake Rosseau, then the island on the lake utilized by the Natives as a plantation could potentially be Big Island. As previously discussed, it was during this period that the Department of Indian Affairs began introducing model villages designed to “civilize” Aboriginals by settling them down on reserves. White settlers were even employed by the government “to instruct the Indians in farming.” While model sites existed south of Muskoka in Orillia, the existence of a village developed by Natives in the 1830s would be quite revealing. It is not unlikely that the Ojibwa of Muskoka adopted their own village infrastructure much earlier than was first suspected, which allowed them to cater to their own needs while also attempting to navigate the rapidly changing world that surrounded them.

The disconnectedness of the Carthew source epitomizes the scattered and incomplete state of many primary documents regarding Upper Canada’s Aboriginal population. There is an absence in Aboriginal perspectives, as well as gaps in accounts of their day to day existence. This is the result of narratives not being recorded, or simply later being destroyed, because they were not believed to have any merit. Historian Olive Patricia Dickason notes that until the mid-twentieth century, “not even the records of Indian Affairs were considered worth saving.”

---

106 An earlier spelling, the change from Rousseau to Rosseau was gradual, both forms being used until the 1870s. Murray, Muskoka and Haliburton, 1615-1875, 108.
107 “John Carthew’s Meeting with Indians on Lake Rosseau, September, 1835,” Murray, Muskoka and Haliburton, 1615-1875, 108.
108 Dickason, Canada’s First Nations, 203.
109 Murray, Muskoka and Haliburton, 1615-1875, 113.
110 Dickason, Canada’s First Nations, 237.
In Janet Chute’s text *The Legacy of Shingwaukonse: A Century of Native Leadership*, Chute reveals the manner in which such setbacks can be mitigated in her examination of Shingwaukonse, or Little Pine, one of the most revered chiefs in Grand River First Nation’s history. Published in 1998, Chute began the fieldwork for her text in 1982. Although a complex and quite expansive study, the text concentrates on a specific subject, Chief Shingwaukonse. Accordingly, Chute conducted numerous interviews with the residents of Garden River and Batchewana. As opposed to relying on North American archival sources, “oral traditions constituted a major source” for Chute’s study.\(^{111}\) Taking into account the memories and accounts provided through interviews, Chute also considered the structure of Ojibwa society and how relationships and understandings within Native communities evolve and change.\(^{112}\) By utilizing not only North American, but also Ojibwa means of remembering and archiving, Chute was able to gain valuable insight into the life of her subject, Shingwaukonse.

**Conclusion:**

Following the Robinson Treaties of 1850, the Crown decided to turn Muskoka into a non-Native agricultural settlement. Overlooking the surveyors’ concerns regarding the unfavourable terrain and poor roadway construction, the colonial government began dividing the region into settlement lots and townships. The understanding that Muskoka was being “opened” held several symbolic meanings that have previously been discussed. However, it also denoted the physical effort and toil both surveyors and construction teams had to endure in order to “open” the district so as to allow a standard colonial

---


\(^{112}\) Ibid.
settlement to be erected along, as well as beyond, the Muskoka road. In time, settlers would also come to experience Muskoka’s dense and seemingly obstinate terrain. Other settler colonies, such as British Columbia, were similarly attempting “to dispossess indigenous societies and build a settler population in their stead.”*113* Both Muskoka and British Columbia “aimed to create an orderly, white settler colony anchored in respectable gender and racial behaviours and identities.”*114* In an effort to attract European settlers who were otherwise immigrating elsewhere, the government attempted to configure Muskoka’s geographic and social identity so as to best reflect the desires and needs of potential settlers.

---


*114* *Ibid.*, 3.
CHAPTER 2: Settling the Muskoka District

Once the construction of Muskoka’s colonization road was underway, the process of settling the area began. Although survey and roadway work brought potential inhabitants to the region, the government made more formal bids to settle the Muskoka District through land grants and promotional literature. Despite surveyors’ reports, which noted the area’s poor soil and harsh terrain, the government recommended Muskoka as an ideal site for agricultural development. The Department of Crown Lands, the Department of Agriculture, and agents already settled in the district all endorsed this agricultural identity; they hoped to attract prospective settlers who would cultivate the land and help establish a network of agrarian communities throughout the district.

However, alongside this controlled perspective of Muskoka’s physical environment, the government also shaped the district’s social environment. Although the projected social identity recognized a degree of diverseness, it ultimately portrayed Muskoka’s inhabitants as an industrious group of white settlers who were able to benefit from their labour and establish themselves as respected landowners. In narrowly defining Muskoka’s physical and social environment, the government propounded the projected function of the settled landscape and the type of settler they believed would be fit to work the land. Through these contrived representations, the government successfully lured thousands of settlers to the Muskoka District.

Previous Settlements in Upper Canada:

By 1850 southern Upper Canada consisted of a series of connected colonial settlements. Presumably, the next logical measure for the colonial government was to obtain the Native land in central and northern Upper Canada for similar development. In order to better understand why Muskoka was promoted as a site for agricultural development despite its contrary physical landscape, Upper Canada’s previous settlements need to be examined.

Upper Canada began to expand as a colony when the American Revolutionary War (1775–1783) brought roughly six thousand Loyalists to the province, all in search of colonial settlements upon which they planned to reestablish themselves and build new lives in British North America. However, at the time, Upper Canada had only two main settlements, at Kingston and Niagara, and the colony’s fur trade and military hardly supported permanent settlements elsewhere. Looking to further develop the region, the British government set out to obtain the land in southern Upper Canada from the district’s Native inhabitants. By 1787, the government had acquired a considerable tract of land from the Mississaugas. The area was comprised of the majority of the land along the water front between the Lower Canada borderer and what became York County. Although the Mississaugas initially retained control over the land between York and Burlington Bay along Lake Ontario, the government was able to take possession of the area by 1806. Subsequently, following the War of 1812, the government was able to steadily acquire the remaining Native lands “all the way from the Ottawa River to the St.

---

117 Ibid.
However, it took more than the government’s acquisition of Native lands to develop permanent settlements. Although at times unknowingly, the area’s already developed fur trade supplied and supported new agricultural settlements in Upper Canada.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century furs remained an important export for Upper Canada’s economy. Nevertheless, the expansion of settlement and the agriculture industry was associated with the decline in the fur trade industry, as the supply system which sustained the fur trade began supplying new settlements. Although fur merchants in New York and London would have hardly been interested in investing in Upper Canada’s new farm economy, they supported prominent businessmen in York and Montreal who, after furs began to lose their importance in British North America’s economy, moved from outfitting fur expeditions to supplying farmers. Despite the economic downturn experienced throughout the Atlantic in the 1810s and early 1820s, immigration to Upper Canada did not deteriorate. As prices began to steady in 1822, Upper Canada experienced a drastic population growth as over the next thirty years a stream of immigrants from the United Kingdom entered the province. Up until the early 1850s, continuous immigration, combined with a high birth rate, bestowed Upper Canada with a population growth of approximately seven per cent each year, “a rate at which the population double every ten years.”

With the Robinson treaties of 1850, the colonial government looked to develop central Upper Canada. Aiming to continue this tide of immigration and growth, roads and

---

118 Ibid., 14.
119 Ibid., 23.
120 Ibid.
121 Ibid.
122 Ibid., 3-4.
new townships were surveyed and districts were opened up for settlement. As later expressed in 1870 in a Department of Agriculture correspondence, “the Dominion having large tracts of land suitable for settlement and being desirous of building up the Dominion of Canada, the best measures should be adopted to accomplish so great and good an enterprise.”

The Sale of Crown Lands and Free Land Grants:

In conjunction with the surveying and construction of Muskoka’s colonization road, the government determined the conditions on which Muskoka would be settled. In 1853 the Crown assented to “An Act to Amend the Law for the Sale and the Settlement of the Public Lands.” Under terms set by the Governor in Council, this statute declared that the sale of land could be set at fixed prices and free grants could be given to those who settled “upon or in the vicinity of any Public Roads in any new settlements.” It was expected that the settlers on free grant land would then take responsibility for maintaining the colonization roads and, as a result, relieve the government of such expenses. Under the Free Land Grants of Severn and Muskoka road of 1859, R.J. Oliver was appointed settlement agent for the region. Oliver was given the power to approve of grants, limited to one hundred acres, for the purpose of settlement. Consequently, several new townships opened, such as Draper, Macaulay, Muskoka and Minden. The population of the District also steadily began to rise; in January of 1861

---

125 Muskoka and Haliburton, 1615-1875, ed. Florence B. Murray (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963), lxx.
126 “Appointment of R.J. Oliver, Agent for Road Settlement of the Severn and Muskoka Road,” Murray, Muskoka and Haliburton, 1615-1875, 237.
there were 190 settlers on free grants lands, and by the end of 1862 there were 287 free grant land settlers and another 743 inhabitants on parcels of purchased Crown Land. Despite the ostensible success of the Muskoka settlement, the government quickly recognized several setbacks.

During the 1850s and 1860s settlement in Muskoka gradually expanded. Nevertheless, the haphazard manner wherein the area was settled kept the district from developing into the proposed network of agrarian communities. While some townships quickly expanded, others were settled more slowly and, as a result, were not as attractive to potential settlers. Moreover, the government found that speculators who purchased Crown land often left it untouched or cleared it of its pine and then deserted it. This left surrounding settlers at a disadvantage as it meant more gaps within communities already spread out due to the size and terrain of settler lots. In 1865 the Governor General received a report from the Simcoe County Council on the weaknesses of Muskoka’s settlement scheme. At that juncture several of the Muskoka townships had been attached to Simcoe County while the district developed. In their statement, the Council insisted that the manner in which land was being disposed of by the Crown was contrary to the best interests of the area, and hindered the progress and settlement of the Muskoka District as well as surrounding counties. The Council recommended the “giving of free grants of land, with proper conditions as to actual settlement.” Aware that settlement practices needed to be changed, the government revised its settlement statute.

---

128 Ibid.
129 Ibid.
130 Ibid.
131 “Simcoe County Memorial on Land Sales,” Murray, Muskoka and Haliburton, 1615-1875, 237.
Under the Free Grants and Homestead Act of 1868, introduced by the Legislative Assembly of the Province of Ontario, the district of Muskoka was reopened for settlement. As per the Free Grants Act persons eighteen years of age and older were given one hundred acres of land. However, unlike previous statues, several stipulations were introduced. To gain full ownership of their land, the act required settlers to clear and cultivate fifteen acres within the first five years of occupancy. The act’s strict guidelines also insisted that settlers build a house “fit for habitation at least sixteen feet by twenty feet,” develop at least two acres annually, and permanently reside upon the acreage for the duration of the probationary period.\(^{132}\) In 1869 the provincial government amended the act to grant two hundred acres to settlers, and also agreed to give extra land to compensate for overly rocky terrain.\(^{133}\) With the introduction of the Free Lands Grant, government officials attempted to reinvigorate interest in new agricultural settlements such as the Muskoka District.

Limitations were put into place to keep settlers from using the land for any other purpose but agrarian during the probationary five year period. Settlers had few alternatives other than to cultivate and farm their lots. All gold, silver, copper, lead, iron, or other materials found on Free Grants land was “considered as reserved from said location” and was the property of Her Majesty.\(^{134}\) Furthermore, to restrict every settler from turning the grant lands into lumberyards, the Free Grants Act outlined that trees could only be cleared for cultivation or “for the purpose of building, fencing, and

\(^{132}\) “An Act to Secure Free Grants and Homesteads to Actual Settlers on the Public Lands,” Murray, Muskoka and Haliburton, 1615-1875, 239
\(^{133}\) Ibid.
\(^{134}\) Ibid., 240.
Following the release of the Free Grants and Homestead Act of 1868, the Muskoka District was further branded as an agrarian site in the promotional materials that were used to attract newcomers to the area.

The Invented Landscape:

Prior to the mid-nineteenth century, advice literature for potential immigrants was decentralized, produced by travelers, investors, and land companies. However, by the 1850s, the government became “a major player in the production and distribution of immigrant guides and in the promotion of the Canadas.” To attract settlers to the Muskoka District, the Crown Lands Agency and the Department of Agriculture produced or assisted in the production of promotional narratives and advertisements. Works such as Thomas McMurray’s *The Free Grant Lands of Canada: from practical experience of bush farming in the free grant districts of Muskoka and Parry Sound*, Barlow Cumberland’s *The Northern Lakes of Canada*, and the Department of Agriculture’s *Information for Intending Settlers: Muskoka and Lake Nipissing Districts* all endorsed the governments controlled agricultural landscape, and promoted Muskoka as an ideal site for farming.

Thomas McMurray immigrated to Canada with his family in May 1861. Settling in the Muskoka District, he was one of the first settlers in the Draper Township, where he purchased 400 acres of land two miles east of the village of Muskoka Falls, on the

---


southern edge of the Muskoka River.  

McMurray started the first newspaper in the Muskoka-Parry Sound area, the *Northern Advocate*, in September 1869. Although McMurray was forced into bankruptcy in July 1874, through his newspaper he was able to publish a series of favourable articles on the Muskoka District. In 1871, McMurray published *The Free Grant Lands of Canada: from practical experience of bush farming in the free grant districts of Muskoka and Parry Sound*. The text was printed through the *Northern Advocate*, and was comprised of a collection of articles McMurray had originally written for the newspaper. Drawing from his own experience as a settler, McMurray set out to answer the question of whether or not Muskoka was fit for settlement. In the work’s examination of the free land grants of Muskoka, the author appraised the soil, crops, scenery, roads and progress of the district, while also giving descriptions of particular townships and lakes.

McMurray begins *The Free Grant Lands of Canada* by informing incoming settlers to disregard rumours of bad land: the quality of soil was in fact not worse but better than they had anticipated as after the trees were cleared on a lot, the land was easy to cultivate. Discussing wheat crops and the superiority of the yield in the area, the author boasted, “from practical experience the writer feels confident that, by good tillage and paying proper attention to the rotation of crops, this staple can be profitably raised.” McMurray also promoted the high quality and yield of oats, corn, potatoes and turnips in the area, and further supported agricultural settlement in Muskoka by avowing that the

---


area provided the “perfect summer and perfect winter.” Even if the year brought more snowfall, residents of Muskoka could rest assured that “as soon as the snow is gone, the land is dry for the plough and ready for the seed.” The climate and terrain was also summarized as being favourable for dairy as well as stock-raising, “the land being high, dry, and rolling.” In addition to discussing the area’s geography, McMurray also explained how the area was being further landscaped to support farming communities. He confirmed that the government was dedicated to developing Muskoka, as seen through their commitment to extending and maintaining the roads, and was working to ensure that rural life in the area would not isolate settlers. Progress in the Muskoka settlement was depicted as being “sure and steady.” McMurray reassured settlers that they too could make use of the advantages the land had to offer. McMurray’s narrative presents Muskoka as a thriving new locale where, although there was once only wilderness, there was now plenty of eligible land for habitation and agricultural expansion.

When examining Thomas McMurray’s *The Free Grants Lands of Canada*, it is important to investigate McMurray’s experience with Muskoka farming and his motivations for producing such a positive narrative of the district. As discussed in the first chapter, and as will be further examined in the next chapter, agricultural development in Muskoka was described by many as a great mistake. Although one could assume that McMurray was misleading prospective settlers to benefit his own interests and investments in the district’s local economy, other grounds should be examined.

---

McMurray’s land was located to the south of the Muskoka River, in a site referred to by government surveyor J.W. Bridgland as the “most eligible, as to quality of soil, and extent of surface, of any [area] discovered in the exploration.” Even though McMurray’s objective in publishing this work was to allow others to benefit from his “knowledge and experience,” the land which he purchased, cleared and developed was unlike most of the land north of the Muskoka River. McMurray also notes that, having received hundreds of letters questioning the quality of settlement life in Muskoka, that it was his duty to “put [prospective settlers] in possession of the most reliable information.” Though *The Free Grants Lands of Canada* appears to have been written on McMurray’s own accord, the copyright at the beginning of the work reveals that it was written by McMurray for the Minister of Agriculture. By writing on behalf of the Department of Agriculture, McMurray’s work would have first been authorized by the Minister before it was sent to publication. Although letters to the editor on “considerations” for the Muskoka District were published along with the text, through addressing such concerns, *The Free Grants Lands of Canada* presented potential settlers the government-prescribed agricultural landscape.

Reiterating much of McMurray’s work, the Department of Agriculture released *Information for Intending Settlers: Muskoka and Lake Nipissing Districts* in 1880. Promoting the efficacy of the land, the booklet declared that “for coarse grains and roots of all sorts, the soil and climate are extremely well adapted, and the progress made [in

---

147 “J.W. Bridgland’s ‘Report… of Exploring Lines from the Eldon Portage to the Mouth of the River Muskako,” Murray, *Muskoka and Haliburton, 1615-1875*, 152. This was also discussed in Chapter 1 of my thesis.
Muskoka] has been most satisfactory."\textsuperscript{151} Attempting to combat fears that the area’s terrain was too rough for agricultural pursuits, the department asserted:

The soil however is exceedingly variable. The Laurentian rock crops up freely, and at some places, especially at the southern and western entrances of the Muskoka district, frequently appalls the newcomer, with its ominous appearance. But there is plenty of good land nevertheless, and the abundance of moisture makes even some rather unpromising locations far from unprofitable.\textsuperscript{152}

Admitting that the rocks and densely treed landscape associated with the Canadian Shield are present in the Muskoka District, the government’s text dismissed such agricultural obstructions as only a visual barrier to the newcomer; the industrious settler would clear the rocks and trees to find arable soil beneath.\textsuperscript{153}

In 1886 Barlow Cumberland, a government official under the Minister of Agriculture, attested to Muskoka’s agricultural advantages in \textit{The Northern Lakes of Canada}. Attempting to approach the subject in a different manner, Cumberland emphasized not only the agricultural adeptness of the area, but also the creature comforts that could be found there. The area was still promoted as an agrarian settlement, but settlers were also assured by the Department of Agriculture that they would not be “roughing it in the bush”.\textsuperscript{154} Cumberland informed potential settlers that, albeit the

\textsuperscript{151} \textit{Information for Intending Settlers: Muskoka and Lake Nipissing Districts} (Ottawa: Department of Agriculture, 1880), 16.
\textsuperscript{152} \textit{Ibid.}, 17.
\textsuperscript{153} W.E. Hamilton similarly argues that the rocks found in Muskoka should not deter farmers: “Our Muskoka rocks are not altogether an unmixed evil. When of large size, they act as barriers against the north and north-west winds, and as shelters to our grain-fields. The upper surface of the rocks is of a porous nature so that they act as natural reservoirs for moisture which they impart in time of drought to the parched ground in their vicinity. They also act as storehouses of heat and raise the temperature of the ground… Nature is full of compensations…” Alexander Kirkwood and Joseph J. Murphy, \textit{The Undeveloped Lands in Northern and Western Ontario} (Toronto: Hunter, Rose & Co., 1878), 57.
settlement was new, it was to be looked upon as a rapidly developing location. Muskoka was a site where “the common simple wants are fully supplied, and the extra velvets and sauces of city civilization are left at home”.\textsuperscript{155} Cumberland’s work depicted the landscape as developed, but not extravagant. The district was advocated as a locale that permitted a simple, yet self-sufficient rural lifestyle, one easily improved by the landscape and climate of the area.

To maintain interest in the free grant lands of Muskoka, the government also attested to the district’s inexhaustible landscape. Alexander Kirkwood and Joseph Murphy, colleagues at the Crown Lands Department, published \textit{The Undeveloped Lands in Northern and Western Ontario} in 1878. As a government sanctioned book to promote agricultural expansion, the text examined the resources and suitability of several settlement areas between Ottawa and Georgian Bay, the French River and Sault Ste. Marie, Lake Nipissing and the north end of Lake Temiscaming, and within the Lake Superior Region. Kirkwood and Murphy prefaced their book by stating,

One would image that the settlement lands in Ontario were already exhausted, or that what remain are barren and unfit for agricultural purposes. This is by no means the case. We have millions of acres of land still lying idle – the greater portion of which is well suited for settlement, of easy access, and offer to the industrious and intelligent, a comfortable home and ultimate independence.\textsuperscript{156}

Declaring that plenty of land was still available for settlement, the authors began their examination with Muskoka, not only because of its close proximity to Toronto, but also due to the “rush there [had] been for land there lately.”\textsuperscript{157} While Kirkwood and Murphy

\textsuperscript{155} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{156} Kirkwood and Murphy, \textit{The Undeveloped Lands in Northern and Western Ontario}, 3.
\textsuperscript{157} Ibid., 55.
advertised the infinite number of lots waiting to be settled, they also encouraged settlers not to wait and risk losing their ideal plot of land.

The government promoted a carefully defined agricultural landscape so as to attract prospective settlers who would be disposed to farming the land and raising livestock. Between the accessibility of free land grants and the never-ending landscape offering plenty of agricultural opportunity, Muskoka settlement initiatives encouraged not only farmers, but every able-bodied and determined person to relocate to the district.

The Ideal Settler:

The landscape upheld by the government presented Muskoka as a simplistic, bucolic site, and the area’s inhabitants were similarly depicted as residing in a unified pastoral community. The social environment of Muskoka was described as being moderately diverse. When examining the nationalities of settlers, it was believed that Muskoka’s population was “one-third Canadian, one third Irish-Protestant, [and] one-third composed of English, Scot, and German.”158 Moreover, it was asserted that in Muskoka you could “find all classes, rich and poor, learned and unlearned, fired with the same zeal and working for the same object, namely, to prepare an independent home and improve their circumstances.”159 Despite these noted points of difference, Muskoka’s perceived social identity was homogeneous. Inhabitants were portrayed as being white

158 McMurray, The Free Land Grants of Canada, 53. Other promotional texts describe the various nationalities of Muskoka’s population: “take of English, Irish, Scotch equal parts, sift thoroughly and add a dose of Canadians equal to the whole, would have been a good recipe to get at our Muskoka mixture...We have also a sprinkling of intelligent Americans and would like more.” W.E. Hamilton, Guide Book and Atlas of the Muskoka and Parry Sound Districts, offset Edition (Elgin, Ontario: R. Cumming, 1971), 2.
and from either North America or Western Europe. Moreover, they were all expected to share similar agricultural objectives and societal values.

Government produced promotional material depicted Muskoka settlers as being practical and industrious; their objectives revolved around family life and agricultural success in order to ensure domestic independence and well-being. A settler succeeded in Muskoka through hard work and diligence, not money or education. The government outlined these characteristics as being typical of the Muskoka inhabitant in hopes of attracting settlers who possessed a similar mentality. In addition to these general traits and values, the gender of potential settlers was carefully outlined in immigration pamphlets. While the narratives concentrated on male settlers and their masculinity, women and children were decidedly absent.

In Canada 1863, For the Information of Immigrants, by A.C. Buchanan, the author asserts: “money is of little use here unless muscle is brought into play, for the most unfortunate are those who entertain romantic ideas of bush life, thinking that nothing is required beyond their means but a little pleasant relaxation”. Without strength, both physical and mental, the male settler would not succeed. This sentiment is reiterated in the booklet Facts for Emigrants 1868. The narrative outlines: “the Government papers say that a settler in going into the woods should have £40 capital. The government is right, though many a man carves out an independence who carries nothing to the woods but his axe”. The masculinity endorsed by the government coincided with the notion of “self-made manhood” that early industrialization heralded. It

---

161 A.C. Buchanan, Canada 1863, For the Information of Immigrants (Quebec: Joseph Norbert Duquet, 1863), 20.
162 C.L. MacDermott, Facts for Emigrants (H. Born, 1868), 14.
was an era where emphasis was placed on individualism, ambition, and a man’s ability to identify and define himself according to his achievements, and not based on the social stratum he was born into.\textsuperscript{163} A few promotional narratives noted that “persons having no particular trade or calling and unaccustomed to manual labor should on no account be persuaded to emigrate.”\textsuperscript{164} Nevertheless, alongside the masculine imagery every text presented, the true Muskoka settler was defined by his dedication and strength. While Natives were depicted as being childlike and reliant on the government, the masculinity of male settlers was equated with their commitment and independence.\textsuperscript{165} So long as the settler was determined, he too could expect to make something for himself out of the free land grants in the Muskoka Lakes District.

An article published by Charles Marshall in London’s \textit{Fraser Magazine}, titled “The Free-Grant Lands of Canada,” identified the social and physical environment of the Muskoka District. Printed in the January-June 1871 issue, the article is an account of the author’s invitation to Muskoka by the premier of Ontario, and his tour around the district with several members of the Ontario government. Analogous to other articles and pamphlets written on the Muskoka District for the government, Marshall intended to showcase life in Muskoka. However, unlike other promotional materials, this article is exceptional in that the author also depicts the typical settler family. According to Marshall, the settler family was self-sufficient and had no need to seek out a market. Everyone had their own responsibilities, including “the good wife [who] should have her

\textsuperscript{163} Adie Nelson and Barrie W. Robinson, \textit{Gender in Canada} (Toronto: Prentice Hall, 2002), 75.
\textsuperscript{164} Buchanan, \textit{Canada 1863, For the Information of Immigrants}, 38.
\textsuperscript{165} The notion that British North America’s Aboriginal population was dependent on the government is discussed in Chapter One in the section titled, “Muskoka’s Aboriginal Population.”
cows, and pigs, and multitudinous poultry.”  

In the industrious Muskoka family unit, the wife’s duties were extended out of the home and into the farmyard. Upon visiting a school in Port Carling, Marshall depicted the Muskoka inhabitants’ offspring: “many of the children were bonnetless; some had bare feet; but they were all strong and healthy-looking and seemed fairly intelligent.”  

Reiterating the assertion that no particular class or education was required to succeed in Muskoka, the district’s children, although belonging to different socioeconomic backgrounds, were all hale and hearty beneficiaries of the advantages found in Muskoka. Marshall also emphasized the pride and value placed not only on resourcefulness, but also growth. Describing the newcomer to Muskoka, he attests: “In three or four years the loghouse becomes too small for the settlers increasing family and growing importance. He builds a new one of squared timbers, and uses the old place for cattle or horses.”  

In Muskoka’s invented social environment, betterment was a point of satisfaction as well as a symbol of self-respect. According to the government and local officials, “any newcomer possessed of good health and an average amount of activity, [could not] fail to succeed”. Consequently, if a settler was unable to make a living off of the land, he only had himself to blame. 

Despite this seemingly straightforward take on the success of the settler family in a rural economy, “making a farm entail[ed] numerous choices in the farm family’s use of time and money.”  

While those with enough capital or credit were able to put a down-payment on a farm or buy land that was already developed, poorer farm families were only able to afford land that was undeveloped, and more often than not, in a remote

---

167 Ibid., 53.
168 Ibid., 52.
169 The Forester, Huntsville – March 29, 1878, “Hints to Intending Settlers.”
170 Douglas McCalla, Planting the Province (Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 1993), 68
And as other families may have decided to rent land or work for another farm before starting their own, there was no guarantee a farm family would succeed, no matter what the state and quality of their land was. Contrary to the promotional narratives produced on the Muskoka District, “farm-making was a protracted, multi-generational process.” Although agricultural narratives produced by government and local authorities often informed farmers “they could clear four or more acres a year… aggregate rates tended to be considerably lower than that.” Clearing and cultivating land for farming was laborious and involved a multi-step process, “including removing underbrush, tree-felling, cutting or burning trees to shorter lengths, hauling them together, piling, and burning.” Moreover, once established, farms had to be maintained and the construction and upkeep of houses and farm buildings were also a concern.

As the government reported that farmers could not fail to succeed in Muskoka, the social identity of the district’s inhabitants portrayed them as dedicated and successful farmers who valued similar characteristics in their neighbour. If a settler did not succeed in Muskoka, it was because he was at fault; either he was languid or he had fallen victim to “the settlers greatest enemy:” alcohol. In The Free Grant Lands of Canada Thomas McMurray declares:

I will simply state that not a few farms have been lost on account of intemperance. Some of the first settlers, in consequence of it, have been obliged to quit the settlement after considerable improvement have been made, and not a few deaths have been caused by indulgence in the seductive practice of drinking.

---

171 Ibid.
172 Ibid.
173 Ibid.
174 Ibid., 68-69.
175 Ibid., 69.
177 Ibid.
Drinking in the Muskoka District was frowned upon by both the government and temperance workers because they believed that it not only disrupted agricultural development, but it also represented a decline in values. The temperance propaganda McMurray promoted was in keeping with the agenda formulated during the first half of the nineteenth century. The temperance movement gained momentum in Canada West during the 1840s as major cities such as Toronto began attracting groups looking to fashion themselves after the Montreal Temperance Society. Unlike societies in Canada East, who were aligned by politics or faith, the new tide of temperance in Canada West ensured constitutions were inclusive and “without distinction of sex, religious creed, political party or condition of life.” Missionary centers were established in various townships, and by 1845 the greater part of the population had come into contact with temperance gospel.

By the 1850s temperance was associated with another movement: progress. In 1850 the Christian Guardian suggested it was connected to “the gradual but irresistible march of improvement, rising and swelling in its movement until it reaches its climax, ‘Man’s Perfection.’” The Globe echoed this approach later on in that decade, as it “gloried in the capacity of the human mind for ‘progress from total ignorance to almost unbound knowledge.’” The government wanted to promote Muskoka as a place for progress and development; the ideals associated with temperance aided their cause. Moreover, the Crown wanted to ensure that Muskoka’s geographical and social identity

---

178 Jan Noel, Canada Dry: Temperance Crusades Before Confederation (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 113.
179 Ibid.
180 Ibid., 115.
181 Ibid., 126.
182 Ibid.
did not depict the district as a backwoods, where inhabitants were on the edge of society. As it was a new settlement, the government did not want a reckless, frontier culture to erupt as it had in British Columbia.\textsuperscript{183} Instead, a settler colony “both respectable and British in character” was desired.\textsuperscript{184} The opportunity to take up land and establish oneself was available in Muskoka, just as long as the settler was principled and willing to put forward the effort.

Along with the ideals transparently presented in settlement narratives on Muskoka, prospective settlers also carried with them more general social standards and understandings not necessarily spelt out in the government’s promotional materials. In the nineteenth century, the family-based agrarian economy was part of the development of rural Upper Canada. As in other imperial settlements, families and familial bonds were thought to “claim this land from the wilderness and from its Aboriginal inhabitants.”\textsuperscript{185} From the family units that supported fur trade to farming, it was understood that “material security could be attained only through collective labour.”\textsuperscript{186} Each family member was responsible for part of the family economy:

Men concentrated on land-clearing, the principal crops and the husbandry of large animals. Women and children took charge of domestic production, weaving fabrics which were made into the family’s clothing, knitting, rug-braiding, planting vegetables, and raising chickens and other small animals.\textsuperscript{187} During this period, in not only Upper Canada but British North America, the typical family unit was nuclear; each containing a man, woman and their children, although

\textsuperscript{183} Adele Perry, “Fair Ones of a Purer Caste: White Women and Colonialism in Nineteenth Century British Columbia,” \textit{Feminist Studies} 23, no. 3 (Fall 1997): 505.
\textsuperscript{184} \textit{Ibid.}, 509.
\textsuperscript{185} Cynthia Comacchio, \textit{The Infinite Bond of Family: Domesticity in Canada, 1850-1940} (Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 1999), 17.
\textsuperscript{186} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{187} \textit{Ibid.}
various financial situations meant kin and even neighbours might join a household.188 Although notions of separate spheres based on biological differences between men and women were growing increasingly popular by 1850, these ideals did not necessarily indicate how women actually lived, especially in a burgeoning rural community.”189 As will be examined further in the following chapter, women had to adapt such social understandings to fit the demands of living on a farm. In rural, more remote agricultural settlements, such as Muskoka, “separate spheres did not distinguish public and private so much as they represented the mutuality and reciprocity of all work by family members.”190 Overall, the economic benefits of having a complete family unit meant that, due to high mortality rates, particularly amongst women in childbirth, “remarriage and the blending of families from previous marriages” was standard.191 In frontier colonies, marriage was not only of vital importance for the individuals involved, but it was also viewed as a civic duty.192

Through pamphlets and articles, the government worked to promote a settler identity that reflected gendered traits and values generally associated with rural colonial settlements. Whether found at the center of a family unit or in an independent bachelor, the strong and assiduous male settler was the focal point of the Muskoka identity. Nevertheless, wanting to distance the area from the reckless culture sometimes associated with backwoods living, the government established that the industrious male settler was an independent individual who was always looking to better himself and his station in life. Consequently, this implied the existence of a family unit. Women and children,

188 Ibid.
189 Ibid., 21.
190 Ibid., 35.
191 Ibid., 19.
192 Ibid., 17
adapting to the requirements of settlement life, would provide support to the male settler as well as help ensure the respectability of the community.

**Aboriginals in Settled Muskoka:**

The government’s invented pastoral landscape for the Muskoka Lakes District relied upon depictions of the area’s Aboriginal population as part of a receding past. Promotional articles and booklets reassured potential settlers that aboriginals were only a part of the area’s heritage; although “proofs of former Indian occupation of this district are abundant,” they were no longer inhabitants. On the rare occasion they were seen in the district, it was only because they were passing through. Aboriginals were not recognized as being an active part of Muskoka’s community identity.

Thomas McMurray discussed Aboriginals in *The Free Grant Lands of Canada*. In an effort to calm any anxieties potential settlers and investors had about Muskoka, McMurray’s text depicted Aboriginals as being of little relevance to settlement life. Discussing the history of the region, McMurray indicated that although the area was once inhabited by Aboriginals, few still remained: if they ever were in Muskoka, it was because “numbers of them pass through it on their way from Rama to their hunting grounds”. McMurray also notes that Aboriginals were “dying off very fast” and that it was expected they would soon become extinct. This particular prospective was not unique during this period. In 1824 it was estimated that over 18 000 Aboriginals lived in

---

195 Ibid.
Upper and Lower Canada; by 1848 the population had fallen to 12,000. The drastic drop in population gave credibility to the popular belief that Aboriginals were a “vanishing” race, confined to an irreversible state of decline. Employing imagery easily recognized by their target audience, the government’s promotional literature identified Muskoka’s Aboriginals as a “very quiet, inoffensive” and mainly bygone people.

In addition to being characterized as a vacant passerby, Muskoka’s Aboriginal identity was relegated to relics and namesakes. In Barlow Cumberland’s *The Northern Lakes of Canada* the author explores the area’s Aboriginal history, stating:

> The origin of the name [Muskoka] is, as is the case with all names originating from Indian sources, couched in mystery from the Indian word “Mus-quo-tah,” signifying “red ground,” probably owing to its rusty iron and ochre-coloured sediments which may be seen in the soils of many of the fields, and around the banks of some of the streamlets. Others that its meaning is that of the “Clear-sky-land,” a signification which would appear to have some reasonable accuracy…

The author uses Muskoka’s Aboriginal history to legitimize the government’s depiction of the area’s landscape. Through romanticizing Aboriginal phrases and titles, the rich soil and clear skies become native entities that the government is entrusting to settlers. After discussing the history of the Muskoka River and whether it was named after Chief Mesqua-Okee, Cumberland asserts, “All Indian names have some attendant meaning; be this whatever it may, it was borne by a gallant warrior and a bold hunter, whose renown

---


197 Ibid.


spread through the surrounding country.” Idealizing warrior imagery, Cumberland associated Muskoka’s aboriginal heritage with characteristics the government hoped potential settlers would possess: bravery, confidence, and self-reliance. Concluding, Cumberland declared, “thus we connect the present beautiful and improving district with the romantic and receding past.” Such narratives attempted to empty the district of real Natives. They supported the idea that Natives were disappearing, while also denying the dynamic cultural and social systems present within Aboriginal communities. While stereotypes will be further examined in Chapters Three and Five, it is important to recognize that they were used to mold settlers’ perceptions of both the historical and contemporary identity of British North America’s Native populations.

While ignoring the social and cultural identity of Aboriginals, the government also disregarded the affect Muskoka’s Native population had on the district’s landscape. In the Guide Book and Atlas of the Muskoka and Parry Sound Districts Muskoka’s Aboriginal community is described to have left behind mere reminisces of their existence. The narrative states: “Indian relics, both mortuary and domestic, have been discovered in the adjoining County of Simcoe, and in Muskoka the evident traces of ancient Indian gardens are on record.” The text disregards the village of Obogawanung, the Aboriginal settlement on Big Island, and the trails that existed in the thick of Muskoka’s dense forests. As surveyors and government officials described the district while “opening” it up for settlement, Muskoka was again wrongly depicted as a site that not long ago had been a forgotten, uninhabited tract of land.

---

200 Ibid.
201 Ibid., 101.
In order to make way for non-native settlement, the government attempted to erase the existence of contemporary native occupancy. Aboriginals were barred from being recognized as actors in the area’s prescribed social and physical environment. Instead, they were only mentioned when their heritage was being romanticized and manipulated to advance the government’s agenda. As Chapters Three and Five will illuminate, such stereotypes and misunderstandings surrounding Native culture and customs were entrenched in settler societies in British North American through European understandings of what it meant to be civilized.

Further Encouragement to Settlers:

Further encouragement to settlers was disseminated through the government’s promotional literature. In addition to easing fears regarding the terrain and populace found in Muskoka, the area’s climate, scenery, and wildlife were positively endorsed. Not only could settlers find arable land and good society, but they could enjoy picturesque vistas, a nourishing climate, and would not have to worry about dangerous animal life.

Muskoka was frequently described as having “one of the healthiest climates under the sun.” Promotional materials insisted that inhabitants joked that doctors seldom had reason to visit the region except for “bush-accidents and the results of a faithful obedience to the injunction of Gen. 1:22.” For The Undeveloped Lands in Northern and Western Ontario Kirkwood and Murphy consulted W.E. Hamilton, an editor of Bracebridge’s Free Grant Gazette, for a more detailed account of settlement life in

---

204 Kirkwood and Murphy, The Undeveloped Lands in Northern and Western Ontario, 60.
Muskoka. Hamilton states that, “the ruddy children and boys, tough as hemlocks and utterly indifferent as to severity of heat or cold, are living certificates of character for the Muskoka climate.”\textsuperscript{205} Even winter was fondly described as “a more cheerful season, and not associated with the British ideas of gloom and dismal weather.”\textsuperscript{206} Thomas McMurray similarly renamed winter “sledding season,” and described it to be a “pleasant period.”\textsuperscript{207} Muskoka’s weather was presented as always being enjoyable, and a contributing factor to the good health and happiness of the area’s inhabitants.

The district’s scenery was another feature potential Muskoka settlers were told they could look forward to. In addition to finding fertile soil, a Muskoka inhabitant would be living by one of “the most charming sheets of water in this Province.”\textsuperscript{208} Regarding Lake Rosseau, Thomas McMurray stated that it was “particularly placid, filled with picturesque islands, and the shores [were] wooded to the water’s edge.” The land not only afforded resources upon which the settlers survived; it granted them scenic vistas to enjoy after a long day’s work. In addition to being providing a pleasing view, prospective settlers could fully enjoy the outdoors in Muskoka: “no fear need be entertained with reference to wild animals.”\textsuperscript{209} Assuring readers that wild animals were rare in the district, McMurray described Muskoka wildlife as being uninterested with human settlement. The wolves were too preoccupied with the abundant deer, and the bear, although often seen, had “never been known to attack any one.”\textsuperscript{210} As evidence of the safety which the area

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{205} \textit{Ibid.}.
\item \textsuperscript{206} \textit{Ibid.}, 59.
\item \textsuperscript{207} McMurray, \textit{The Free Land Grants of Canada}, 17.
\item \textsuperscript{208} \textit{Ibid.}, 18.
\item \textsuperscript{209} \textit{Ibid.}, 30.
\item \textsuperscript{210} \textit{Ibid.}, 36.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
enjoyed, McMurray attested, “I may state that not so much as a lamb has been destroyed by any wild animals in this neighbourhood.”

To further entice prospective inhabitants, the government depicted the Muskoka district as more than an agricultural settlement; it was a safe place to raise a family. The healthful benefits of the climate ensured more productive work on the farm and promoted the well-being of the farmer’s wife and children. The district’s landscape could also be enjoyed not just for its resourcefulness, but also for its beauty. Moreover, settlers could rest peacefully, knowing that their loved ones were not in danger when they ventured into the woods.

Conclusion:

As a developing agrarian society, Muskoka’s “economy was dependent upon, and equal to, the sum of the economies of its resident[s].” Consequently, the government worked to settle the district with hard-working inhabitants with agricultural ambitions. The promotional literature produced in the 1860s, 1870s and 1880s by the Department of Crown Lands and the Department of Agriculture marketed a particular geographical and social identity for the Muskoka Lakes District. This invented agricultural viewpoint defined the area’s physical and social landscape according to the government’s settlement motives and expectations. However, in narrowly defining the land and its populace, the regional identity created for Muskoka did not best represent the geography of the area or its people. In order to better understand this period of settlement and agrarian development, it is necessary to look at additional viewpoints, separate from this

---

211 Ibid.
212 Nelson and Robinson, Gender in Canada, 73.
contrived agricultural interpretation. In doing so, the landscape and the experiences and identities of the district’s inhabitants become both more diverse and multifaceted. These alternative perspectives, from the area’s Ojibwa and settler population, reveal that the social and physical landscape posed threats not accounted for in the government’s representations. Moreover, these standpoints disclose how a variety of inhabitants actively worked to find their place within the government’s prescribed identity, while also working to redefine the area’s repute.
CHAPTER 3: The Realities of Settlement Life in Muskoka

After the signing of the Lake Huron Robinson Treaty of 1850, Muskoka was promoted by the government as an ideal landscape for agrarian settlement. Accordingly, its populace was depicted as a prototypical, non-native agricultural community. However, despite the government’s homogenous agricultural representations, the nature of both the area’s geography and its residents was far more complex. Settlers, Aboriginals, and lumbermen: Muskoka’s population was comprised of individuals and groups with varying backgrounds and intentions. Through examining their encounters with the land and surrounding populace, we can see that the area’s social and geographical landscapes were unlike the agricultural pretense upheld by the government. Although Muskoka’s geography greatly influenced the lives of its inhabitants, the district’s residents equally shaped the region’s dynamic social and physical landscapes. In order to understand the district’s topography and populace, this chapter will examine firsthand narratives from the inhabitants themselves. Such documents will include both published and private journals, memoirs and letters, as well as newspaper articles. In examining the varied perspectives of Muskoka’s residents, it becomes increasingly apparent how the government’s imposed agricultural identity misrepresented the district’s diverse geographical and social landscapes.

The Aboriginal Perspective:

A number of Muskoka’s Aboriginal population remained seasonal residents of the district until the late 1860s. The government, determined to stimulate non-Native
settlement, worked to relocate Muskoka’s Ojibwa population to reserves situated in the neighbouring Lake Simcoe and Georgian Bay regions. Accordingly, propaganda literature for non-native settlement depicted the area’s Aboriginal populace as bygone and barely pertinent to the area. Nevertheless, during the early years of settlement in the Muskoka District both surveyors and settlers “looked to the Ojibway population for various kinds of assistance.”213 The Aboriginal populace was not passively displaced by the government; rather, they remained active within the Muskoka community both while they were residents and after they moved to neighbouring reserves. The influx of interest and surge in the area’s population provided an additional source of income for the Ojibwa, as they were able to act as guides as well as trade with surveyors and settlers.

Facing new challenges and a rapidly changing social and physical environment, Muskoka’s Native population adapted to best make use of the district’s new landscape.

Although Central Upper Canada’s Aboriginals relinquished nearly 140,000 square kilometers of land to the government, under the stipulations of the Robinson Treaties, they retained “Native ownership of aquatic and animal resources” on all ceded land.”214 Though the land belonged to the Crown, Upper Canada’s Natives could continue to hunt, fish, and maintain traditional means of subsistence. However, despite Native authority, the government passed legislation in 1857 that allowed the Crown to grant non-Native companies permits to Native fishing grounds. By 1859, ninety-seven licenses had been granted, of which only twelve were given to Native applicants.

Regardless of the provisions agreed upon under the Robinson treaty, “Aboriginal people were now required to compete for the opportunity to exercise their never-ceded right to

214 Ibid., 61. The conditions of the Robinson Treaties of 1850 are examined in Chapter 1.
fish, and to do so within a system heavily biased against them.\textsuperscript{215} Within the colonial government, Native interests routinely conflicted with other concerns, especially once the Department of Indian Affairs and the Department of Crown Lands merged in 1853.\textsuperscript{216} The rights of Upper Canada’s Native population were often left unobserved, and the colonial government offered little sympathy.

In addition to losing their fishing rights, the Ojibwa’s hunting rights were similarly diminished. Although the Robinson treaty granted Natives the authority to continue to hunt on ceded land, a condition outlined that this right would be denied on all land that was converted into private property. During the 1850s the government began developing Central Upper Canada for both settlement and lumber. As the district became privatized, Native hunting grounds were greatly reduced. Moreover, the expanding agriculture and lumber industry also affected the wildlife of the area. As large segments of Upper Canadian forests were cleared, the district’s natural terrain changed. Deer as well as bear began to increase in numbers, while Moose, “now deprived of their appropriate habitat,” became scarce.\textsuperscript{217} Although Aboriginals farther north were able to continue “their old subsistence and fur-trapping activities until at least the end of the century,” as settlement grew east of the Georgian Bay, the ceded lands no longer afforded the Ojibwa the same means for supporting themselves.

In mid-nineteenth century Upper Canada, the “rural economy of the province’s Native population ranged from the established agriculture of the Six Nations and several

\textsuperscript{215} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{216} Peter A. Baskerville, \textit{Site of Power: A Concise History of Ontario} (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2005), 61.
other southern communities to the hunting, fishing, and trading of woodland groups on
the northern fringe of the settlement economy.” As Muskoka was developed into a
non-Native settlement, the district’s Aboriginal population found various opportunities
within the expanding frontier community. Utilizing their familiarity with the terrain and
resources available, Muskoka’s Natives offered services otherwise unavailable to the
White newcomers.

Muskoka’s Aboriginal population actively took part in the government’s
“opening up” of the Muskoka District. In 1923 V.B. Wadsworth, an assistant to surveyor
J.S. Dennis, published a firsthand account of his experience surveying in the 1860s
entitled the History of Exploratory Surveys Conducted by John Stoughton Dennis,
Provincial Land Surveyor, In the Muskoka, Parry Sound and Nipissing Districts, 1860-
1865. In his narrative, Wadsworth confirms that when assembling the expedition team for
the survey Dennis hired “Indians and Half-breeds – the best of men for such work.”
Although both local and nonlocal Aboriginals were employed to carry packs and clear
pathways, they were sought-after hires for reasons other than their proximity to the areas
being surveyed. In his narrative, Wadsworth describes the Native workers as “great axe-
men, packmen and canoe-men [who] prided themselves on their walking powers.” The
Aboriginal workers were valued for their strength and their familiarity with the land.
However, surveyors and white expedition members held unreasonable expectations for
the Aboriginal members of the party, believing that “if occasion required they could do

---

218 Douglas McCalla, Planting the Province (Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 1993), 85.
219 V.B. Wadsworth, History of Exploratory Surveys Conducted by John Stoughton Dennis, Provincial
Land Surveyor, In the Muskoka, Parry Sound and Nipissing Districts, 1860-1865 (Toronto: V.B.
Wadsworth, 1923), part 1, 2-3.
220 Ibid., part 2, 14.
without food for long periods and travel with heavy loads.” Although they were not treated as equals to the white expedition workers, Aboriginals were often desired members of surveying parties attempting to “open up” Muskoka’s interior.

In addition to obtaining employment with surveyors, Muskoka’s Native population also traded and volunteered their services to expedition parties traveling through the district. In his narrative, Wadsworth describes trading with the Ojibwa in Muskoka and, after getting lost on the water, coming across two Aboriginals who directed his party to safety. Wadsworth also discloses how an Aboriginal woman provided him with medical care:

I had the ill luck to cut my arm with an axe and I had to keep my arm in a sling. The port diet did not help to heal the wound and I feared proud flesh was appearing. However, one day two of those Rama Indian women visited our camp to get a good meal and gossip. While there one woman saw my arm in a sling and asked to see the wound and after seeing it she went off into the woods and soon returned munching bark or something like it and presently, after fully masticating the material, she placed the stuff in poultice form on my wound and it proved most efficacious and soon healed the wound.

Wadsworth’s account records the manner in which the region’s Aboriginal population voluntarily provided invaluable assistance to the government’s surveying parties attempting to chart and map out the Muskoka District.

Despite their active involvement, the documents produced for Crown officials did not recognize the manual labor and support Muskoka’s Aboriginal population provided for the government commissioned surveys entering Muskoka. Furthermore, the reports reveal that some surveyors doubted the Native inhabitants’ ability to provide assistance to

---

221 Ibid.
222 Ibid., part 2, 6 and 9. Recalling how disorientated his crew was, he stated: “[they] showed us the passage, which is very intricate, and in due course we reached the village.”
223 Ibid., part 2, 6-7.
expeditions. In the field notes from a survey conducted in 1852 for the Department of Lands and Forests, the surveyor distrusted an Aboriginal’s recommendation for finding good land, questioning in an aside, “whatever reliance can be placed upon it.”224 The surveyor reiterated this belief later on in his report, and claimed that one should “place little upon the information received from this class of persons.”225 Regardless of their familiarity with the land and the services they provided, Muskoka’s Ojibwa population was not recognized in government reports as having participating in the opening of the Muskoka District. Nevertheless, in addition to Wadsworth’s narrative, several other accounts reveal that Muskoka’s Ojibwa inhabitants were looked upon by many settlers and surveyors as helpful guides and aides.226

Memoirs from Muskoka settlers during the first two decades of settlement take note of Obajewanung, the Ojibwa village discussed earlier in Chapter One. If ever in need of seeds to grow corn, early settlers could venture to the “Indian Village, at the extreme north west end” of Lake Rosseau to trade and barter.227 One early settler, Thomas Robinson, remembered that he “took time to notice the log houses and the cultivated land across the river, and could see, peeping past the building, women and children, trying to see, without being seen”.228 Robinson also recalled how the Aboriginal community also sought out settlers for trade, travelling to other areas in the Muskoka District: “the Indians from the village had been seen at McCabe’s, selling venison, and

225 Ibid.
226 Wadsworth, History of Exploratory Surveys Conducted by John Stoughton Dennis, part 2, p. 6-7.
228 Ibid., 32.
taking tobacco and flour in exchange”. Although settlement literature excluded the district’s active Aboriginal population from the district’s regional identity, in actuality Muskoka’s Ojibwa population provided vital assistance to newcomers through trade. Even after the government claimed Obajewanung, Muskoka’s Aboriginal community continued to work in Muskoka. Visiting from neighbouring reserves in Georgian Bay, Muskoka’s displaced Aboriginal population maintained ties and continued to trade with Muskoka settlers.

Throughout the nineteenth century across southern and central Upper Canada, “farmers had cleared much of the land, lumbermen had cut over large tracts of forests, and railroads linked together the growing urban centres and towns of the hinterlands.” As non-Native settlements continued to expand, Muskoka’s Native population would have found it increasingly difficult to move beyond the influence of the newcomers. Consequently, the province’s Aboriginals became “enmeshed within the fabric of two cultural traditions, that of their ancestors and that of the new arrivals from across the Atlantic.” This entanglement would have affected various elements of Native life. One of the most outwardly visible would have been Native dress. Euro-Canadian clothing styles were often adopted, although the extent of which generally depended on their proximity to non-Native settlements and the individual’s acceptance of the newcomer’s customs. As Aboriginals also began to adopt a more sedentary lifestyle, the construction of canoes began to change. Where birch bark canoes were light and easy to

229 Ibid., 31.
232 Ibid.
233 Ibid.
234 Ibid., 144.
transport over land, the dugout canoes that became associated with more sedentary
Natives were made of either basswood or pine and were much heavier. However, dugout
canoes held more passengers and supplies.\textsuperscript{235}

Muskoka’s Native inhabitants were a dynamic population that adapted to the
growing dominance of Euro-Canadians. However, despite the assistance and cooperation
of the district’s Aboriginals, many were persecuted by not only the government but also
the greater settler society. The stereotypes that obscured the general public’s
understanding of British North America’s Aboriginal population will be examined both
later in this chapter and in Chapter Five.

\textbf{Muskoka’s Settler Population:}

As the government’s agricultural representation of Muskoka failed to recognize
the district’s Native population, so too did it misrepresent Muskoka’s settlers. As
discussed in the previous chapter, the social standards and gendered norms upheld within
the greater settler society often did not translate to life on new, more remote settlements.
Moreover, the expectations, standards, and disposition of newcomers all depended on
their “birthplace, ethnicity, gender, colour, wealth, and class.”\textsuperscript{236} Overall, the Muskoka
District’s settlers were a varied population.

Throughout England during the nineteenth century, Upper Canada had the
reputation of being a “poor man’s country;” it was regarded as a colony where “a
struggling family in the Old Country could emigrate with reasonable hopes for bettering

\textsuperscript{235} Ibid., 134-135.
\textsuperscript{236} Baskerville, \textit{Site of Power: A Concise History of Ontario}, 53.
its position.”237 Through affordable land as well as land grants, Upper Canada offered an agricultural ladder for emigrants to improve their financial and social circumstance. Although many moved several times throughout British North America in search of land that would allow them to successfully operate their own rural enterprise, many settlers achieved “the ability to support their family and to bequeath to their children a small stake for future development.”238 While the government presented Muskoka as a site where agricultural ambitions could easily be realized, the experiences and accounts of settlers who relocated to the district prove otherwise. The Penson Family Memoir and the Robinson memoir, *A Voyage in Search of Free-Grants Lands*, both provide a more forthright depiction of Muskoka’s inhabitants and the social landscape of the district.

The Penson Family Memoir, completed by Seymour Richard George Penson on April 10 1910, provides insight into the Muskoka landscape and the experiences of early settlers. The account discusses local families and presents the backgrounds and attitudes of a number of the area’s populace. S. R. G. Penson was the eldest son of Richard George Penson and Elizabeth Mary Holdaway. Born on July 23 1861 in Gloucestershire, England, S.R.G. Penson moved to the Muskoka District with his family in April of 1869. In writing his family’s memoir, Penson asserted that he was undertaking “the task of writing down as much of the history of the Penson family as comes within my own knowledge, or from information that I know to be true and reliable”.239 However, Penson does more than chronicle the whereabouts of his family. In narrating their move to the

238 *Ibid*.
Muskoka Lakes District he provides a detailed description of the community in which Penson and his family found themselves.

Given the remoteness of new agricultural settlements, rural communities in nineteenth century Ontario often banded together to assist one another on the farm. Such labour exchanges, involving individual farm families who united when labour and skill were lacking, were called “work bees.” Bees occurred throughout the year, and could be called for raising houses and barns, shearing sheep, ploughing and developing the land, planting, clearing logs, cutting grain, and even picking and peeling apples. Although numbers varied depending on the size of the community, “many farm families found their year liberally sprinkled with such occasions.” Bees were more frequent in remote frontier communities where there was an abundance of available land but capital and labour were both in short supply. Uniting families from across great distances, bees helped foster a sense of community in the backwoods, and allowed inhabitants to better manage the hard and often unpredictable working conditions and low living standards frequently found in new settlements.

Penson’s narrative of settlement life in Muskoka suggests that, although the land often united newcomers, it was also a site of tension and conflict. Activities such as raising a house brought men from townships across the Muskoka District together to come to one another’s aid. Penson recounts watching such an event take place upon

\[240\] Catherine Anne Wilson, “Reciprocal work bees and the meaning of neighbourhood,” *The Canadian Historical Review* 82, no. 3 (September 2001): 431.
\[241\] Ibid., 436.
\[242\] Ibid., 437.
\[243\] Ibid., 442.
\[244\] Ibid., 442-43.
\[245\] Other settlers also mention work bees. In *Letters from Muskoka* a “raising bee” could include the wives and daughters, dressed in their Sunday best, who would accompany the able-bodied men of their family. Emigrant Lady, *Letters from Muskoka* (London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1878), 35.
first arriving in the District, and comments, “men were scarce there at that time, and we afterwards knew that some of those men came from as far away as Three Mile Lake to raise that house.” More established settlers also called on newcomers to provide aid and advice on clearing the land. When Penson reminisces about their first visitors, he explains, “they showed us how to peel basswood bark to make our tent more habitable… and showed us how to throw trees in any direction that we wished them to fall: then they pointed out the best trees for us to cut for building.”

Realizing that it was not enough for a man to possess an axe and strong constitution, settlers both accepted as well as provided assistance, even for distant neighbours with whom they had never before come

3.1. A work bee raising a barn in Muskoka. (Barn Raising in Muskoka, [190-], C 1272-0-4-9, Archives of Ontario).

---

246 The S.R.G. Penson Memoirs, 18.
247 Ibid., 20.
into contact. However, despite the willingness to come together, settlers often brought with them certain expectations. Penson describes his neighbours as being hard workers but also “very shrewd” when it came to trading and making deals. Moreover, if newcomers posed an economic threat to an older settler by trying to provide the same service as the later, the competition created tension within the community. The land both unified the settlers to work towards a common cause and to a degree drove them apart as, out of desperation, they tried to ensure their own survival.

The language used in the Penson family memoir further reveals that settlers did not view themselves as part of a homogeneous group. Though the narrative is for the most part written using the voice of S.R.G. Penson, the author does record the dialogue of another Muskoka local. When Penson and his family arrive in Bracebridge in 1869 they reside at the Dominion hotel. Recalling how they slept on the floor due to the lack of space, Penson claims the hotelier told them: “theres men stopping in this house for over a week, and they aint had no bed yet. I can board youz men all right but yez’l hev to sleep on the floor of the sitting room, where fully half of the boarders hev to sleep”. The speech of the hotel keeper stands out in the text because it is unlike the manner and speech of Penson and his family. As this discourse took place in 1869 when the narrator only eighteen years old and the memoir itself was written in 1910 when Penson was nearly sixty, it is presumably not a direct quote. However, through the evident dichotomy that is presented it can be understood that Penson differentiated himself from some of the other backwoods locals, perhaps on account of how rural, or “rough” they appeared and

---

sounded. Even though settlers shared common goals, to clear and cultivate their land, they did not always look upon one another as equals.

The point of view present in the Penson Memoirs reveals a perspective on the attitudes of settlers that is inconsistent with the identity promoted by the government. Additional settler accounts, such as the Robinson Memoir, recapitulate this difference, while also revealing other experiences contrary to the government prescribed settler identity. In Thomas Robinson’s memoir, *A Voyage in Search of Free-Grants Lands*, the author describes his journey from his initial arrival in Toronto to seek out information on the free grants lands of Canada in 1860 to his eventual move into the Muskoka District in 1861. Describing the area’s first settlers, Robinson asserts that, despite being the earliest, many selected their land poorly. Because the government proclaimed that agricultural experience was not required to succeed in Muskoka, many settlers arrived in the district ill-equipped to begin farming. Robinson reveals that settlers often planted themselves “near the road” without examining the condition of the land. Countless newcomers entering Muskoka had no prior farming experience and did not know what to look for when choosing their free grant lots. Both their ignorance and the government’s misinformation led many settlers to impulsively take up the first plot of land offered to them by Crown agents.

Further revealing the multiplicity of the settler identity, S.R.G. Penson’s memoir offers a detailed description of two Métis brothers, Alexander and Michael Bailey, who moved into the Muskoka District as settlers. Alexander, who was thought to have been the first settler to travel up the portage road to claim land, was described as having “a full

---

knowledge of everything that pertained to the woods.” Moreover, being of “a quiet, natural dignity,” Penson recalled that he thought Alexander “should have been dressed in the fashion of the Indian chiefs of long ago.” Alexander’s wife “was said to be a full blooded Indian woman,” although Penson commented that he believed “that she too, was partly French.” Recalling Michael, Penson declared: “All the froth of the Frenchman came to the surface in Michael. He was a big man, with quick jerky actions, and impetuous speech, and withal, he was as lazy and as fond of liquor as an Indian. All the repose and dignity of his brother was lacking in him.” Michael was married to an Irish woman, who claimed that she did not know he was native, and just believed that everyone was more “dark skinned” in the backwoods of Canada. In addition to the manner in which local Ojibwa engaged in the “opening” of Muskoka’s non-native settlement, Métis or mixed-race people appear to have also actively sought out free grant lands for their own farming ventures.

Penson’s account of the Bailey brothers is quite informative. To begin with his narrative displays two Métis brothers taking part in sedentary agricultural pursuits in a rural, non-Native settlement. Although it can not be presumed that this occurred often, it is of interest to note as it reveals that exceptions were sometimes made within a community’s social hierarchy. Penson’s account of Michael’s wife, and her belief prior to marriage that all backwoods men were dark-skinned, is also quite interesting. This comment reiterates the notion previously discussed, that frontiers were wild and so close to the edge of civilization that they were almost absorbed into the wilderness. However,

---

254 Ibid., 35.
255 Ibid.
256 Ibid.
257 Ibid., 36.
258 Ibid.
the claim could also be taken as an excuse, and consequently a way for the Irish woman to avoid the condemnation associated with miscegenation. Throughout Penson’s account of the Bailey brothers, the wide use of stereotypes based on race, gender, and culture also reveal common understandings that shaped settler society. The narrator’s use of Native and French stereotypes is particularly revealing of the social landscape that existed throughout British North America.

The manner in which Penson describes the Bailey brothers demonstrates how Aboriginals were stereotyped in British North America’s settler society. Although the Bailey brothers interacted with both Muskoka’s settler and Aboriginal communities, they presumably would have been considered outsiders to both populations. While their dress and agricultural purpose in Muskoka was similar to other settlers, they were viewed as more civilized Métis wedged between two worlds: the modern white world and the traditional Native world. Penson’s account of the Baileys depicts this supposed entrapment through invoking Native stereotypes. When discussing Alexander Bailey, Penson employs the mythical Aboriginal imagery of the “Noble Savage.” A venerable and idealized image initially constructed by dramatist John Dryden in his 1670 play *The Conquest of Grenada*, the term “savage” did not denote violence or viciousness. Rather, Dryden “meant innocent, virtuous, and peace-loving, free of the guile and vanity that came from living in contemporary society.” Correspondingly, in likening Alexander to Chiefs from long ago, Penson was assigning him an “innate nobility of character” obtained through a separation from the influences of modern white society.

---

Conversely, Penson evokes the “disappearing Indian” stereotype for Alexander’s brother, Michael. During the second half of the nineteenth century it was believed that “Natives were disappearing from the face of the earth, victims of disease, starvation, alcohol and the remorseless ebb and flow of civilizations.” While Alexander is looked upon as being detached from contemporary society, Penson identifies Michael as a representative of how Aboriginals will fall victim to modernity.

In addition to employing Native stereotypes, Penson’s memoir also makes use of French stereotypes when describing Michael Bailey. Stating that “all the froth of the Frenchman came to the surface in Michael,” Penson was pitting Michael’s Frenchness as the antithesis to his own British manliness and masculinity. Eighteenth century “Britons, whether they hailed from Wales or Scotland or England… [partly] defined themselves against the French as they imagined them to be, superstitious, militarist, decadent and unfree.” Basing their sense of self-worth in both their religion and the Crown, Protestant Britons, whether they were wealthy or destitute, believed that they were better-off in every other sense, particularly over Catholics and above all over the French.

While Britons viewed Catholics as being “economically inept: wasteful, indolent and oppressive if powerful, and poor and exploited if not,” the French were stereotyped as being slothful and misguided. Both lacked the fervour and clear vision that allowed Protestant Britons to “enjoy a true and lasting prosperity.” Moving into the nineteenth century, the British continued to define themselves in relation to the French. While they

---

262 Ibid., 23.
264 Ibid., 33.
265 Ibid., 35.
266 Ibid.
saw themselves as being masculine, rational, and straightforward, the French were effeminate, devious, and self-indulgent.\textsuperscript{267}

Furthermore, many conservative Britons believed that the outbreak of the French Revolution was “a grim demonstration of the dangers that ensued when women were allowed to stray outside their proper sphere.”\textsuperscript{268} The notion of separate spheres began spreading throughout Western Europe and North America in the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{269} It was thought that the biological differences between men and women produced intellectual, emotional, and moral differences between genders.\textsuperscript{270} Accordingly, while men dominated the public sphere, women were supposed to keep to the private, domestic sphere where “their social and familial roles [were] synonymous.”\textsuperscript{271} However, both farm and working-class women continued to labour in the public sphere in order to support the family economy.\textsuperscript{272} Susanna Moodie describes her experience as a new immigrant to Canada and as a settler in Canada West in \textit{Roughing it in the Bush; or, Life in Canada}. In her account, Moodie admits:

\begin{quote}
I had a hard struggle with my pride before I would consent to render the least assistance on the farm, but reflection convinced me that I was wrong – that Providence had placed me in a situation where I was called upon to work – that it was not only my duty to obey that call, but to exert myself to the utmost to assist my husband, and help to maintain my family.\textsuperscript{273}
\end{quote}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{267} Ibid., 252.
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{268} Ibid.
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{269} Cynthia Comacchio, \textit{The Infinite Bond of Family: Domesticity in Canada, 1850-1940} (Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 1999), 20.
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{270} Ibid.
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{271} Ibid.
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{272} Ibid., 21.
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{273} Susanna Moodie, \textit{Roughing it in the Bush; or, Life in Canada} (Toronto: Penguin Canada, 2006), 326
\end{flushright}
Women living in frontier non-Native settlements, such as the Muskoka District or Peterborough in Moodie’s case, were required to manage the space of the household and garden, while also assisting their husbands on the farm.

*Letters from Muskoka*, written by H.B. King under the pseudonym “an Emigrant Lady,” presents settlement life in the Muskoka District from the perspective of a female settler. Printed in 1878 by a London publisher, the narrative written by Mrs. King describes her experience both moving into and out of the free grant lands, and her encounters with the district’s inhabitants. While relating her time spent in Muskoka, King recounts when “an old negro” set up camp in the gully on the outskirts of her property, near the concession road. Stating that the squatter “complained that his neighbours were very unkind to him, and did not want him located among them,” King was convinced by her sons to allow him to remain throughout the winter. On account of the harsh conditions of Muskoka’s winters, King relented and allowed the African American settler to camp on her land. However, when it was discovered that a white woman, with whom he had “a wholesome dread of five children” of out wedlock, was also staying with him in his tent, the squatter was told he should be on his way. Believing him to be morally abhorrent, she evicted him without any hesitation, off her land and into the cold. In her narrative King also discusses a disagreement her family had with their neighbours. After a servant girl left her job in the King household, Mrs. King was told that “no settler would allow his daughter to be in service where she was not allowed to sit at the same table with the family, and to join freely in the conversation at all times!”

---

account depicts Muskoka’s social landscape as a complicated site where class consciousness and race relations were both challenged and reaffirmed.

King’s *Letters from Muskoka* is reminiscent of Susanna Moodie’s *Roughing it in the Bush*. Moodie’s text was published in 1852 to warn prospective settlers of the difficulties immigrants experienced when they settled in Canada. Although *Roughing it in the Bush* discusses rural settlement life in Southern Canada West in the 1830s, King’s account of the Muskoka District in the 1870s shares several similarities with Moodie’s narrative. This is not to say that King plagiarized Moodie’s text; rather, *Letters from Muskoka* may have been influenced by it. King and Moodie take a more solemn tone towards their targeted British audience and they also write about several like experiences. Both discuss work bees and the laborious nature of life on a farm; moreover, King’s comments on servants and race relations are similar to Moodie’s account. While discussing servants in Canada Moodie asserts that, due to its small size, there existed a spirit of freedom and opposition amongst the serving class. Because servants were not easily acquired on settlements, they were able to demand higher wages and more respect from their employers. Moodie lamented,

> The possession of a good servant is such an addition to comfort, that they are persons of no small consequence, for the dread of starving no longer frightens them into servile obedience. They can live without you, and they well know that you cannot do without them. 278

As a new settlement, settlers relocated to the Muskoka District to acquire land and build a rural enterprise to support themselves and their family. Due to the struggles they all faced to cultivate the land and build a home, perhaps many settlers believed that, despite their background or individual finances, they all should be viewed as equals. Or, because there

---

278 Moodie, *Roughing it in the Bush; or, Life in Canada*, 184.
were so few servants, conceivably they felt they had the power to demand certain
working standards. Nevertheless, as is evident in both Moodie and King’s narratives,
tension often arose between the servant class and their employers in rural settlements.

In addition to commenting on the hostility that existed between the serving class
and the settler women running their households, Moodie’s depiction of the charivari\textsuperscript{279}
shares several similarities with King’s account of “the old negro.” Describing a
neighbour’s account of a charivari for a black man and his young white wife, Moodie
relates that the black man “Tim Smith was such a quiet, good-natured fellow, and so civil
and obliging” that he made a life for himself amongst the white settlers in
Peterborough.\textsuperscript{280} However, after persuading a young Irishwoman to marry him, the young
men of the settlement decided to “give them the charivari in fine style, and punish them
both for the insult they had put upon the place.”\textsuperscript{281} Moodie’s neighbour informs her that
during the charivari they “so ill-treated him that he died under their hands.”\textsuperscript{282} In both
Moodie and King’s narratives the black men were at first tolerated by the white settlers.
However, once they disrupted the social order by developing relationships with white
women they were persecuted. Although “frontier” white settlements allowed a degree of

\textsuperscript{279} Moodie describes a charivari as: “When an old man marries a young wife, or an old woman a young
husband, or two old people, who ought to be thinking of their graves, enter for the second or third time into
the holy estate of wedlock, as the priest calls it, all the idle young fellows in the neighbourhood meet
together to charivari them. For this purpose they disguise themselves, blackening their faces, putting their
clothes on hind part before, and wearing horrible masks, with grotesque caps on their heads, adorned with
cocks’ feathers and bells. They then form in a regular body, and proceed to the bridegroom’s house, to the
sound of tin kettles, horns, and drums, cracked fiddles, and all the discordant instruments they can collect
together. Thus equipped, they surround the house where the wedding is held, just at the house when the
happy couple are supposed to be about to retire to rest – beating upon the door with clubs and staves, and
demanding of the bridegroom admittance to drink the bride’s health, or in lieu thereof to receive a certain
sum of money to treat the band at the nearest tavern. If the bridegroom refuses to appear and grant their
request, they commence the horrible din you hear, firing guns charged with peas against the doors and
windows, rattling old pots and kettles, and abusing him for his stinginess in no measured terms.” Moodie,
\textit{Roughing it in the Bush; or, Life in Canada}, 184.

\textsuperscript{280} \textit{Ibid.}, 191.

\textsuperscript{281} \textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{282} \textit{Ibid.}
leeway in terms of social understandings of gender, race and class, at the same time such standards were vehemently upheld once the dominant, white settlers believed they were being challenged on matters of fundamental importance.

The agrarian identity imposed on Muskoka by the government did not recognize the district’s varied and often complex settler populace. Although at times like circumstances united settlers, prejudices and principles transposed from homelands often divided the regions settler population. Although it was asserted that all newcomers, despite their financial or educational background, were considered equals in Muskoka, this was not the case. These accounts hint at the class and social divisions that existed throughout the district.

The Settler’s Plight:

In addition to misrepresenting the identity of Muskoka’s populace, the government’s imposed agricultural depiction also misconstrued the settlers’ encounters with the land. The farm economy in rural Upper Canada was laborious and often unpredictable; regardless of the quality of land or the capital of the farm family, many attempts to farm and cultivate the land were unsuccessful. However, due to the settlement literature produced by the government, settlers relocated to the Muskoka District with particular agricultural and organizational expectations. They were assured of the area’s agrarian potential and the government’s dedication to supporting community development through roadway construction and furthering the infrastructure of individual townships. Nevertheless, narratives such as the Penson Family Memoirs, Robinson’s *A Voyage in Search of Free-Grants Lands*, and the published account *Letters from*
Muskoka, expose the physical and mental hardships many settlers faced, unprepared and unknowing, in the Muskoka District.

The Penson Family Memoir provides a detailed description of the Muskoka landscape from the settler’s point of view. The Penson family had certain expectations regarding the land in Muskoka and the opportunities it would generate. In his memoir, S.R.G. Penson recalls: “the Canadian Government was advertising the Muskoka District very freely in the London newspapers. Two hundred acres of land was offered to each family, and rock was not ever mentioned. Here was a farm for everybody.” Upon arriving in Muskoka the Pensons discovered a landscape unlike what they had been expecting. As the free grant lands of Muskoka had been promoted as a site for agricultural settlement, the Pensons presumed the soil and land would be favourable for farming. Recounting the journey from the gateway into Muskoka, Washago, and up the Portage road to Gravenhurst, Penson states:

I can never forget that walk. It was for the most part through the unbroken forest; still occasionally we came out upon a clearing, hideous with blackened stumps, and centered with a cheerless log hut. We looked upon these settlements with astonishment, and wondered how anybody in his senses could pick upon such a place to live… for we never dreamed of the rock extending past ‘The Portage’.

The Penson family came to Muskoka confident that, given the seemingly generous terms of the free land grants, they could find independence and a degree of prosperity through farming. Nevertheless, the Muskoka landscape and the conditions of the settlement were not what they had expected. This realization was what many settlers experienced upon entering the district; “they came from overland as well as overseas, and they shut their eyes to the rocks of ‘The Portage’ and held a steady faith in the green fields that they

---

284 Ibid., 12.
were sure they would find beyond”. Instead of finding lush, open land waiting to be cultivated, settlers found themselves trudging through dense and rocky forests with poor farming prospects. As it was for other settlers, the land the Penson family settled on proved to be unfit for agricultural purposes. In his memoir, Penson recounts, “the quality of the small amount of arable land that we had, held out the prospect of a bare living, but the truth had been slowly borne in upon me that there was no chance there for anything more”. Barely producing enough for the family to subsist on, Penson admits that they had “made a great mistake in coming to the bush at all”. Despite being an agricultural settlement, the condition of the land was in no way amenable for farming.

The viewpoint present in the Penson Memoir is that of the settler family. When they departed England for the Muskoka Lakes District, the vision they held of their destination was one created from a standpoint that was very different from their own. For the government, the Muskoka landscape was an unquestionable site for agricultural growth and prosperity; it was enough that it was unsettled and located by bodies of water. Conversely, from the settler’s point of view it was a site of hard labour, sacrifice, suffering, and often failure. They did not have the pleasure of looking at the land from a bird’s-eye view, but instead had to deal with the hardships of the environment directly.

In Robinson’s account, *A Voyage in Search of Free-Grants Lands*, the terrain he encounters does not correspond with the inviting and open settlement that originally attracted him to the area. Robinson describes how unforgiving and confusing the landscape could be, stating that it was “easy to loose ones (sic) way when out on the

---

lakes if they did not take note of all of the points and bays”.\textsuperscript{288} Even after being settled in the area for almost two years, Robinson found the landscape difficult to navigate.

Recalling an evening when he had to return to his homestead after nightfall, he explains,

I plunged into the thick woods with the confidence of ignorance, scrambling through pools and over fallen trees until completely confused as to direction and I was on the point of making up my mind to selecting the dryest knoll for the night; I made another effort and reached my little clearing and my little home soon.\textsuperscript{289}

Instead of appearing to be a site of opportunity, for many settlers the land in Muskoka appeared to be a bewildering maze of rocks, trees, and bays that all looked the same.

Similarly, \textit{Letters from Muskoka}, written by H.B. King, reports on the harsh landscape and living conditions of settlement life in Muskoka. Recalling how they prepared to emigrate, King states: “we read up a few books on emigration which invariably paint [Muskoka] in the brightest colours”.\textsuperscript{290} Nevertheless, King and her family found that the accounts given of Muskoka had been deceptive. Questioning who would move to Muskoka, King answers: “those who are entirely ignorant of the miseries of Bush life, or those who have been purposely misled by designing and interested people.”\textsuperscript{291} King states that “roads to walk upon, a church to worship in, and a doctor within reach,” for the most part, remained wanting in the Muskoka District. Moreover, because of the harsh and unwelcoming landscape, King attested that Muskoka settlers carried “in their faces the unmistakable signs of hard work, scanty food, and a perpetual struggle for existence.”\textsuperscript{292}

\textsuperscript{288} \textit{Ibid.}, 33.
\textsuperscript{289} \textit{Ibid.}, 55.
\textsuperscript{290} Lady, \textit{Letters from Muskoka}, xi-xii.
\textsuperscript{291} \textit{Ibid.}, 138.
\textsuperscript{292} \textit{Ibid.}, 138-139.
The encouragement of a family member was ultimately what brought the King family to the free grant lands of Muskoka. Although Mrs. King cites higher taxes and prices as a stimulant, her youngest son, who immigrated to the district earlier, frequently wrote home, urging his family to join him. King, along with her daughter and eldest son, moved to Muskoka to try their hand at farming. However, the King family found that the district’s land was not easily developed for agricultural purposes:

We by no means slackened in our efforts to improve the land and make it profitable; but we found that although our expenses increased, our means did not. The more land we cleared, the more the want of money became apparent to crop and cultivate it... 

Although “in vain did [they] hope and wait,” the King family found their prospects in Muskoka growing bleaker by the day. King claimed: “I am inclined to think that from the very first the capabilities of its soil for agricultural purposes have been greatly exaggerated... it is a poor and hungry soil, light and friable, mostly red sandstone loam”. Both the land and Muskoka’s climate appeared to counteract settler life. Following a seemingly never-ending winter, King recalled, “instead of the spring which I fondly anticipated, we burst at once from dully gloomy weather and melting snow, to burning hot summer and clouds of mosquitoes and flies of all kinds.” After spending four years trying to realize their agricultural goals, they packed up their belongings and returned to England. Defeated, King exclaimed:

I went into the Bush of Muskoka strong and healthy, full of life and energy, and fully as enthusiastic as the youngest member of our party. I left it with hopes completely crushed, and with health so hopelessly

---

293 Ibid., x-xi.
294 Ibid., 163-164.
295 Ibid., 166.
296 Ibid., 156-157.
297 Ibid., 95.
shattered from hard work, unceasing anxiety and trouble of all kinds…298

The landscape which greeted the King family was a far cry from the agricultural Mecca the government advertised. The physical landscape of bush life in the Muskoka District presented settlers with several challenges. Agricultural development was slow moving and often offered no prospects of progress past producing enough for a family to attain subsistence from.

The contrasts between settlers’ agricultural expectations of the land and the realities they faced once they had settled in Muskoka are stark throughout Penson, Robinson and King’s narratives. The physical landscape settlers were confronted with often held no hope of ever turning into successful agrarian developments, and settlers’ dreams of bettering their station in life in Muskoka were repeatedly shattered. The disparity between the government’s representations and the settlers’ accounts of the land caught the attention of both local and international newspapers, sparking a series of debates on the issue.

Newspaper Debates:

Alongside government published narratives regarding the agricultural suitability of the Muskoka District settlers, visitors, and journalists evaluated the region in open letters and newspaper reviews. As a result, various debates concerning the areas aptness developed in both local and international newspapers. In these discussions, both government and settler perspectives were vehemently defended, and the blame was set either on the government or the settlers.

298 Ibid., 186.
Unlike the unanimously supportive government reports, newspaper articles published after the inception of the Free Lands Grant reveal a divided stance on the success of Muskoka settlement. A writer for *The New York Times* visited the Free Grants Lands in Muskoka in 1872 and reported on the state of distress he found many newcomers in. Describing the hardships that the settlers faced and the difficulties they had clearing the land, the article depicted Muskoka as a wild land consisting of “acres of rock and roods of soil, [where] the better the soil the denser the forest.” Conversely, an article published in the *Toronto Mail* in 1872 describes the landscape as “70 to 75 per cent. of good farm land, with from 25 to 30 per cent. of protuberant and often rampant-looking rock.” Written by an anonymous farmer from the area, the article attests to the “excellence of both soil and climate,” and asserts that the government intentionally gave the settlers one to two hundred acres of land, knowing that at least thirty or so acres would be practical for farming. The British newspaper *The Times* printed an ongoing debate on the quality of the Free Grant Lands from the end of 1873 into 1874. One letter to the editor, describing the Muskoka settlers as “ragged and haggard-looking,” declares that “the hundred acres of land given to the settlers [was] a sort of white elephant to the unfortunate recipients; the donation drags them down to the verge of barbarism.” In response, another writer retorted that even the poorest settlers “were much better off than many of [the] English farm labourers.”

---

301 *Ibid*.
fault of the men, “who are not suitable for farmers.”\textsuperscript{304} Whether it was due to their insufficiencies or the disagreeable state of the land, it remained the case that many settlers struggled to make a living in the Muskoka District.

In addition to voicing concerns through newspapers, frustrated settlers began to petition the government. A petition sent to officials in 1871 by a township in Huntsville exhibits the anxieties of the neglected settlers, and that they feared having to give up their land and “beg [their] way out of the country completely ruined.”\textsuperscript{305} Unfortunately, many came to this end; lack of opportunity and difficult farming conditions stifled the settlement of the Muskoka district.

The Unforgiving Landscape:

Upon moving into the Muskoka District, settlers were confronted with dangers related to both the social and physical landscape of the region. In addition to being ill-equipped, misinformed, and facing agricultural troubles, settlers were also forced to cope with many other hazards related to their remote location and the physical features of the land. The topography of Muskoka presented several problems for settlers. As mentioned, Robinson found that when it came to navigating the region, the networks of lakes and dense forests were quite confusing. Even once he had been settled in the district for a few years, Robinson noted that it was easy to lose one’s way.\textsuperscript{306} Although this would not have posed a threat to the district’s Ojibwa population, because most free grant lots were located away from the waters edge, many newcomers felt the mental anguish as well as immediate danger of being surrounded by wilderness.

\textsuperscript{304} Ibid., 7.
\textsuperscript{305} “Petition for Extension of the Muskoka Road,” Murray, Muskoka and Haliburton, 1615-1875, 196.
In *Letters from Muskoka* King describes how she felt about her log house and small clearing: “the very sight of the dense forest circling us all round, with hardly any perceptible outlet, gave me a dreadful feeling of suffocation, to which was added the constant alarm of fire, for the dry season had made every twig and leaf combustible.”

King also complains about the heat of the summer and the swarms of flies and mosquitoes, declaring “we were bitten from head to foot; in a short time we felt more like lepers than healthy, clean people, and the want of sleep at night was most trying to us all, after our hard work.” In the Penson Memoirs, the dangers of the winter season were depicted. Deep snow often left trails unusable and although crossing the ice reduced travel time, instances of settlers falling through the ice and drowning did occur.

The social landscape of Muskoka also presented dangers and complications to the area’s settlers. In 1870, a letter to the editor of the *Northern Advocate*, the Parry Sound newspaper, discussed theft and drunkenness in Muskoka. In the letter, a settler complained that the government workers, who were clearing rocks and building a water lock, would often get drunk and steal items left out on settlers’ wharfs. However, theft was not the only result of behaviour deemed depraved. As Karen Dubinsky notes in her book, *Improper Advances*, sexual abuse and exploitations occurred in rural and small-town communities during the second half of the nineteenth century, often “where it was least expected and policed.” On an early September evening in 1905, a teenaged girl walking to the post office at Brown’s Bay in Muskoka was dragged into the bushes by a

---

309 The S.R.G. Penson Memoirs, 60.
310 “Letter to the Editor,” *The Northern Advocate*, November 25th, 1870, [Muskoka], S.l. : s.n., 1869-1944, T-10 00008, Box 1, Thomas Fisher Rare Books Library, the University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario.
local townsman where he “began to rip her clothes.”³¹² Dubinsky notes that whether or not the victims during this period were considered “‘good girls’ or ‘bad,’” a common characteristic was vulnerability.³¹³ The dense landscape and distance between both lots as well as towns would have created countless spaces and situations where young women would have been susceptible to attack, whether it was from a local townsperson or a temporarily-stationed road worker. Expressing the frustration presumably felt by many of Muskoka’s inhabitants, *The Weekly Times* reported in July 1905 that “the influx of drunks and rowdies run the flies a close second, the bush is infested.”³¹⁴

Not only the geographical, but also the social features of Muskoka’s landscape challenged the district’s newcomers looking to cultivate the land. Although government publications depicted Muskoka as a thriving agricultural site, the size of the district and the remoteness separating both townships and individual homesteads meant many settlers had to travel a fair distance in order to seek aid. In addition to the spatial difficulties, both the climate and the topography of the region, with its dense, seemingly never-ending forests, provided further obstacles for the districts inhabitants to overcome.

**The Forgotten Inhabitants:**

Following Muskoka’s earliest settlers was a group of men unconcerned with the development and settlement of the district. Seemingly uninterested in the area’s agricultural woes, this faction laboured for decades in Muskoka and its surrounding

³¹³ *Ibid.*, 44.
regions, with the peak of their activity ending just prior to the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{315} These men were the lumbermen. Launching Muskoka’s lumber industry, they systematically cleared portions of the district to meet the demands of the British, American, and Canadian market.

British timber merchants first turned to British North America for lumber in the early nineteenth century, using the forests of New Brunswick and Upper Canada’s Ottawa Valley.\textsuperscript{316} In the decades leading up to confederation, British demand for British North America’s pine, oak, elm, and tamarack helped establish the colony’s lumber industry.\textsuperscript{317} The cost of lumbering in the backwoods of the Canadas and New Brunswick was not particularly high, and consequently hundreds of lumberers flooded the forest hinterlands to meet the demands of the market.\textsuperscript{318} Most lumber operators in British North America sough out timber licenses from the colonial government. Issued licenses granted lumber companies the right to clear Crown lands of their timber without purchasing the land itself. Although by confederation the trans-Atlantic timber trade was in decline, Canada was able to maintain its market because of the growing demand for lumber in the United States. Over the course of the second half of the nineteenth century, lumbermen began harvesting the pine and timber in central Ontario, along the southern boarder of the Canadian Shield.\textsuperscript{319}

\textsuperscript{315} Murray, \textit{Muskoka and Haliburton, 1615-1875}, xic.
\textsuperscript{316} Ian Radforth, \textit{Bushworkers and Bosses: Logging in Northern Ontario, 1900-1980} (Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 1987), 12.
\textsuperscript{317} \textit{Ibid.}, 12-13.
\textsuperscript{318} \textit{Ibid.}, 13.
\textsuperscript{319} \textit{Ibid.}
During the first half of the nineteenth century several attempts were made to establish a lumber industry in the Muskoka District. Around 1830 a mill was built at the mouth of the Severn River, but after a short period of activity it was abandoned and left in disrepair.\textsuperscript{320} In 1837 interest in the Severn Mill saw a short-lived revival, but it was not until the government surveyed and mapped out the region after the Robinson Treaty of 1850 that the Crown assigned a Timber Agent for the “Huron & Superior Territory.”\textsuperscript{321}

The Governor General appointed Alexander William Powell the Crown Timber Agent

\textsuperscript{320}Murray, \emph{Muskoka and Haliburton, 1615-1875}, xciv.
\textsuperscript{321}“W.M. Dawson to Alexander William Powell,” Murray, \emph{Muskoka and Haliburton, 1615-1875}, 299.
for the Muskoka and surrounding areas in June 1855. With an annual salary of £250 Powell supervised the lumber development in his assigned region and collected all timber duties.\textsuperscript{322} By the end of 1856 there were thirty-five licensed lumber sites in Muskoka, each ranging in size from eight to fifty square miles.\textsuperscript{323} By 1871 “five of the largest and wealthiest lumbering firms on the American Continent – Messrs. Dodge & Co., Messrs. Clarke, White & Co., Messrs. Hotchkiss, Hughson & Co., Messrs. Cook Brothers, and the Bell Ewart Company” had lumber sites in the Muskoka District.\textsuperscript{324} Orillia’s local newspaper, Northern Light, commented in October 1871: “Muskoka… its almost exhaustless growths of pine are contributing wealth to our country, and afford a tempting field to American enterprise and capital.”\textsuperscript{325} A year-round industry, after months of cutting trees, logs would drift down Muskoka’s thawed lakes “for many miles, taking all summer to make the trip, shoved along by ‘river-drivers’ who camped with them on the way.”\textsuperscript{326} Travelling from several camps, each employing hundreds of men, the logs were “devoured by the mill at Gravenhurst.”\textsuperscript{327} Unlike the failing agricultural industry, Muskoka’s lumber industry was flourishing.

Amidst the lumbermen who entered the district for work, countless local Muskoka farmers and their sons worked for the lumber camps during the winter months. Desperate for an income to supplement their disappointing farming ventures, such employment was crucial for the survival of many settler families. As Capt. L.R. Fraser recalls in his 1946 account, History of Muskoka: A Complete History of Pioneer Days,

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{322} Ibid., 300.
\textsuperscript{323} “Timber Licenses in Muskoka, 1856, Selected from ‘Return of Licenses Granted and Duties Accrued in the Several Territories,” Murray, Muskoka and Haliburton, 1615-1875, 300-301.
\textsuperscript{324} Thomas McMurray, The Free Land Grants of Canada (Bracebridge: the Northern Advocate, 1871), 67.
\textsuperscript{325} “Resources and Growth of Muskoka, Murray, Muskoka and Haliburton, 1615-1875, 306.
\textsuperscript{326} Lumber Industry, Charles Mickle, lumber operator, [Muskoka], S.l. : s.n., 1869-1944, T-10 00008, Box 7, folder 5-6, Thomas Fisher Rare Books Library, the University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario.
\textsuperscript{321} Ibid.
\end{flushleft}
“as a stimulus to the settlement of Muskoka, lumbering was a prime factor.”

During the winter season, the industry provided settlers with employment, and in the summer and fall the fulltime lumbermen offered a market for the farmer’s produce. The purpose of Capt. Fraser’s book was “to depict the lives and work of the ordinary men and women who changed Muskoka.” Born in 1873, Fraser spent sixty years in Muskoka “on the farm, steamboating, and lumbering.” Although his idealized account should not be accepted as a comprehensive depiction of life in Muskoka, Fraser outlines how various forms of labour in the district became inter-twined. In order to thrive, the lumber industry needed the additional workforce that the settlers could provide during the winter months. The local produce provided by farmers also decreased the lumber companies’ expenses, as less food was ordered from Toronto. The lumber industry offered farmers consumers for any products they could produce, as well as a supplementary income to ensure that the following season they could continue to farm the land.

The lumber industry had both positive and negative effects on agricultural development in Muskoka. Although it provided both employment and patrons for the region’s farmers, the lumber industry only passively supported settlement in the district’s townships. After a lumber site had been exhausted of the desired timber, it was abandoned. Neighbouring farmers would then have to travel to another, possibly farther site for work, and the community would be left with the remains: plots of stumps and unwanted trees.

---

329 *Ibid*.
331 *Ibid*.
Finding Other Means:

The rocky and heavily treed Muskoka terrain frustrated many of the settlers who were eager to clear their land and begin farming. However, instead of abandoning their plots many Muskoka settlers found other means to increase their income. Farmers unable to make a profit off their land engaged in work at lumber-shanties with “the first approach of the cold weather,” or sent family members to larger cities in search of better paid work. Some settlers, in defiance or ignorant of the terms of the Free Grants and Homestead Act of 1868, sold timber from their own properties or squatted and sold timber from more distant, unoccupied lots. The more fortunate farmers “with teams of horses were assured of winter work” at the lumber yards and saw mills, as they could help deliver timber to awaiting sites. Wages ranged from fifty cents and board at saw mills to one dollar and twenty-five cents on a railway construction gang. Although these pursuits kept able-bodied men from working on their own land, it meant settlers had an income that afforded their family’s immediate needs.

In addition to working in the lumber or out-of-town industries during the winter months, families often sought out work for one or more members during the spring and summer. More affluent residents with more fertile land frequently hired workers to help remove trees and rocks and cultivate their plot. One settler, F.W. Coate, recorded in his log when a neighbour was taken on to help clear the land. Workers were hired on a monthly basis, or they were paid by acre cleared. In H.B. King’s account of settlement

332 Lady, Letters from Muskoka, 136.
333 Murray, Muskoka and Haliburton, 1615-1875, xc.
334 Lumber Industry, Charles Mickle, lumber operator, [Muskoka], S.l. : s.n., 1869-1944, T-10 00008, Box 7, folder 5-6, Thomas Fisher Rare Books Library, the University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario.
335 The S.R.G. Penson Memoirs, 62.
337 Ibid.
life, *Letters From Muskoka*, the author claims that “a man who hires himself and his oxen out for the day, has two dollars and food for himself and his beasts; and should he bring any assistants, they each have seventy-five cents and their food.”  

Those who required extra help but could not afford to pay instead had to establish agreements with other farmers to exchange labour and assist one another. However Frederick and William Wrenshall, two brothers who arrived in Muskoka from Liverpool in 1865, decided to solve their lack of labour and funding issue all at once. Believing they had good land, they embraced an unusual method of clearing and cultivating it. In newspapers across England they advertised “for young men with a small capital to come to Canada to learn farming.” The Wrenshalls charged their “pupils” two hundred dollars each to cover the training and board, and “as they arrived, they were turned loose with an axe or a hoe, to chop, or to plant potatoes, as the case might be, and this was about all the teaching that they ever got.” Penson notes that for the most part the pupils would never stay for long with the Wrenshalls, but that “more of them kept coming, and so it must have been a profitable business as long as it lasted.”

Other settlers looking to acquire an additional income turned their residence into boarding houses for the government workers and lumbermen who frequented the Muskoka District. However, recognizing a developing market, soon settlers such as Robinson began arranging trips for adventurers. For “a considerable amount of ready

---

339 The S.R.G. Penson Memoirs, 32.
cash,” settlers offered adventurers a dry place to sleep, a warm meal at the end of the day, and advice on where to fish and camp.  

**Conclusion:**

The varied social and physical landscape of the Muskoka District becomes apparent when the perspectives and experiences of the area’s inhabitants are examined. Although several regions offered suitable conditions for farming and agrarian communities were able to work together towards common goals, the remainder of the district was unlike the regional agricultural identity promoted by the government. Countless settlers discovered that even after investing a considerable amount of time, labour and capital, they were still unable to generate returns from their farming ventures; a considerable percentage of the populace simply abandoned their land and left the district empty-handed. The inhabitants that remained in Muskoka, but could not earn a living solely from farming, found other means of obtaining a supplementary income. While many settlers arranged contract work amongst themselves as well as within the lumber industry, a small minority gathered revenue through converting their homesteads into boarding houses. Although unbeknownst to them, their entrepreneurship would spark the growth of the district’s forthcoming primary industry.

---

CHAPTER 4: Muskoka and the Tourism Industry

In response to Muskoka’s uncertain farming economy, a small minority of early settlers transformed their homesteads into boarding houses. Although taverns already located in the district were built to accommodate “many a weary land-seeker,” the settlers’ boarding houses targeted a group of visitors new to the district: the adventurers.\(^{344}\) Offering board, food, and camping supplies, the settlers acted as trip coordinators and tour guides for the adventurous travelers looking to explore Muskoka. These settlers duly earned a living either alongside or in lieu of farming. As adventure tourism began to gain popularity in Muskoka, the pursuit of “roughing it in the bush” was succeeded by a form of nature tourism that was orchestrated by middle and upper class values. As Thomas McMurray predicted in his narrative *The Free Land Grants of Canada*, wealthy travelers, accustomed to modern conveniences and comforts, began vacationing in the Muskoka Lakes District to visit its “healthful and enchanting shores.”\(^{345}\) Moving from “bedrolls to bedrooms and campfires to fireplaces,” wilderness resorts and luxury nature hotels replaced backwoods boarding houses as adventurers gave way to nature tourists.\(^{346}\) By the end of the nineteenth century, tourism had swiftly surpassed agriculture as the district’s main industry. Accordingly, government representations of Muskoka’s social and geographical landscape were altered to better depict the area as an ideal destination for nature tourism.

\(^{345}\) Ibid., 19.
Muskoka’s Early Tourists: The Adventurers:

The adventurers who traversed Muskoka during the 1860s were “bent upon a few weeks of sight-seeing and recreation upon the beautiful inland lakes and rivers” north of Toronto. While hunting and fishing were essential aspects of exploring the area, the experience of camping out and discovering Muskoka’s untouched and picturesque vistas equally motivated early adventurers to journey into the seemingly inaccessible and wild district. Although some adventurers established connections within the district to organize supplies or routes in advance, others chose to embark on their voyage without such contacts. Using the area’s natural transportation lines, the network of lakes and rivers, adventurers sought to camp out and explore the natural beauty of Muskoka.

The first recorded adventure tourists to visit Muskoka were James Bain and John Campbell, who traveled from Toronto in 1860. With the railway only going as far as Allandale and Belle Ewart on Lake Simcoe, the two travelers took a steamboat to Orillia and then rowed “the next twelve miles up Lake Couchiching to Washago.” Staying the night in Severn Bridge, the travelers then trekked north on the Muskoka road, finally stopping at the site that would soon become Gravenhurst. Subsequent to their initial trip, both Campbell and Bain continued to take their summer holidays in Muskoka and brought more friends with them each year. In 1861 Bain and Campbell trekked farther into the district with a mutual friend. The trio visited McCabe’s tavern, also known as the Freemason’s Arms, an “old log shanty” where newcomers in search of land could “rest

---

347 “Up the Muskoka and Down the Trent,” The Globe, 4 October 1865, in Florence B. Murray, ed., Muskoka and Haliburton, 1615-1875, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963), 393.
348 Murray, Muskoka and Haliburton, 1615-1875, 388.
349 Boyer, Muskoka’s Grand Hotels, 13.
350 Ibid.
their weary limbs and get some refreshment to sustain nature.” Receiving sustenance as well as permission to borrow McCabe’s boat the men continued on their journey. Heading back home through Washago, the party paid for a passage on a boat heading to Orillia. It was on this trip that Bain and Campbell met Thomas M. Robinson, a Muskoka settler who would soon become an important contact for the two men.

Following their second expedition into the Muskoka district in 1861, Bain and Campbell commenced what would become a lasting correspondence with Thomas Robinson. Robinson, an English settler, had arrived in the district in 1860 and resided on the Muskoka Bay with his wife. In June 1863 Robinson received a letter from Bain, requesting the settler’s aid and outlining the party’s plans and needs. Robinson replied: “it is with great pleasure that I attempt (sic) to be of any service to you on your proposed expedition.” Bain and Campbell continued to solicit Robinson’s services and the Muskoka Bay resident remained their tour guide and connection in the Muskoka Lakes District during the subsequent years. Robinson gladly accepted the employment. In his memoir, A Voyage in Search of Free-Grants Lands, Robinson recalls working for Bain and Campbell: “Of course, I was glad and eager to learn more of the boundless

351 Thomas McMurray, The Free Land Grants of Canada (Bracebridge: the Northern Advocate, 1871), 14.
354 There exists a discrepancy regarding when Robinson first began to act as Bain and Campbell’s guide in the Muskoka District. Robinson records in his memoir, A Voyage in Search of Free-Grant Lands, that he first assisted Bain and Campbell in 1862. Conversely, Dr. Tytler’s journal of an expedition to Muskoka in 1863, on which he accompanied Bain and Campbell, records the exact events which Robinson narrates in his account of the 1862 expedition. Such incidences described by both men include when their oxen smashed the party’s wagon tongue after attempting to turn into a settler’s house. Nevertheless, in Tytler’s account the dates and days of the week match the 1863 calendar. As James Bain’s son also concluded, although “this discrepancy throws doubt on T.M.R.’s memory as to dates… his recollections of the lay of the land and water, and of the events of the journeys are clear and distinct.” Bain, J.W., “Collection of Journals, Reminiscences, Letters… Concerning Muskoka, ca. 1860-1880,” 8vo, introduction, 6-8. Baldwin Room, Toronto Reference Library, Toronto Public Library, Toronto, Ontario.
355 “Thomas M. Robinson to James Bain,” Murray, Muskoka and Haliburton, 1615-1875, 388.
unexplored region that lay beyond my private explorations. Even more important still was the fact that I was out of money, and needed the money so earned for our scanty housekeeping.”

Unable to earn a living by farming his land, Robinson’s employment with Bain and Campbell provided him with the supplementary income he required to maintain his farmstead on the Muskoka Bay. Moreover, it presented him with opportunities to make contact with more tourists and develop his seasonal operation.

With each voyage Robinson became a more central figure of Bain and Campbell’s party. Both in Dr. Tytler’s journal of their voyage in 1863 and in Bain’s account of the 1864 expedition Robinson is listed under the group’s “dramatis personae.” In both instances Robinson is referred to as the “Ducens.” Derived from the Latin word ducere, ducens means “leading.”

Although Robinson remained the group’s guide and resident expert on navigating Muskoka’s lakes he also became a member of the party, despite being on their payroll. In his memoir, Robinson’s enjoyment is presented alongside his discomfort regarding his compensation: “I may say that my experience with the Club was of the pleasantest kind and their payment was always generous and often more than I wished to take.” This intimacy Robinson had with Bain and Campbell also allowed him to establish his tourism business. In June 1863 Robinson wrote to Bain: “the time is approaching for parties of pleasure leaving Toronto for different places, this place among the rest, I have this opportunity of mentioning my...”

---

readiness to provide boats etc. for any parties that may write and inform me.” In addition to navigating for Bain and Campbell, Robinson became known as a capable Muskoka tour guide who could offer provisions and board, as well as recommend fishing and camping sites. Alongside Robinson’s initiative, many other Muskoka settlers began converting their homes into boarding houses and offering maps and advice to visiting adventurers.

Settlers such as Thomas Aitken and David Fife, who were neighbours on Lake Rosseau, accommodated adventurers visiting the area. The Fife family history, *Down Memory Lane*, reveals how settlers lodged guests in the early years of hospitality in Muskoka. Leaving the bedrooms and main sitting room for guests, “owners of the house typically moved out to the woodshed.” Matthew Fife recorded that “straw ticks were used for mattresses” and that “each day, the straw in the ticks had to be fluffed and when it became broken, was discarded and replaced with fresh.” Also on Lake Rosseau, Charles and Fanny Minett began to provide accommodation for visitors looking to explore, fish, and hunt in the great outdoors of Muskoka. Not all settlers prearranged when they would lodge visitors; often, due to the weather, adventurers would at first take refuge with settlers but then typically prolong their stay.

Within a few years of Bain and Campbell’s original expedition, Muskoka was quickly becoming known as a notable destination for nature enthusiasts. In the article “Up the Muskoka and Down the Trent,” published in the *Globe* in 1865, a Muskoka

---

365 Ibid.
adventurer outlined “information particularly for persons desirous of knowing something of the conditions of the country.” Describing the trekking, portaging, and paddling necessary to navigate the land north of Orillia, the article outlined both the demanding travel conditions as well as the many natural pleasures travelers would experience in Muskoka.

Early Muskoka adventurers visited the district to relax in the great outdoors and to explore the region’s lesser known areas. Bain and Campbell noted in their account of their 1861 expedition into the area: “our objects are to enjoy ourselves during the summer holidays and to gain some information about this section of the country.” With both recreational and exploratory motivations behind their travels, Muskoka’s adventurers often chose to visit the district in late summer, typically August. As noted in the *Globe* article “Up the Muskoka and Down the Trent”: “earlier, the heat would have been too great and the black flies intolerable, while a month later, though the fishing and hunting would have been vastly better, the nights would not have been so pleasant, or the promise of fair weather so good.” The calculation behind deciding which month to schedule an expedition reveals the potential considerations held by adventurers who entered Muskoka. They wanted to explore the district, and see as much of it as possible. Accordingly, they chose to visit the district during months that would allow them to move about comfortably and with relative ease. However, because many adventurers were selective about which months they would travel in, they were only experiencing a fraction of Muskoka’s physical landscape. Despite their desire to experience and

---

366 “Up the Muskoka and Down the Trent,” Murray, *Muskoka and Haliburton, 1615-1875*, 394
368 “Up the Muskoka and Down the Trent,” Murray, *Muskoka and Haliburton, 1615-1875*, 393.
appreciate Muskoka’s natural and untouched land, they knowingly chose to encounter the landscape when its seasonal disposition best suited their wants and needs. Perhaps inspired by idealized depictions of Hudson’s Bay traders, the adventurers’ activities – trekking, canoeing, and portaging their way through the Muskoka district – were purely recreational.

The traders of the Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC) and the voyageurs of the North West Company (NWC) have been similarly romanticized in North American history. Although the HBC absorbed the NWC in 1821, the companies have a shared yet separate background in the fur trade industry. Consequently, the images associated with one company often also apply to the other; while one may be referred to as “the magnificent Company of Adventurers,” the other is comprised of the “sons of the wilderness.”³⁶⁹ Across the board, these men evoke images of ruggedness, vitality, and resourcefulness.³⁷⁰ In overcoming the district’s landscape, adventurers such as Bain and Campbell may have believed that, like voyageurs and traders, they “could claim a stronger manhood.”³⁷¹ For Bain and Campbell this sense of manhood included a more gentlemanly nature of expedition. This is noticeable in the arrangement of their party into a “dramatis personae” and the Latin terminology used in Bain’s account of their journeys; while traversing the wilderness these adventurers still maintained a sense of their class.

Although it would seem reasonable to state that adventurers were upper and middle class men who could afford to take a vacation, this was not always the case.

³⁷⁰ Podruchny, Making the Voyageur World: Travelers and Trades in the North American Fur Trade, 1.
³⁷¹ Ibid., 11.
Although typically male, the adventurers who explored the Muskoka region were both male and female.\textsuperscript{372} Moreover, settlers from both Muskoka and, one can assume, the districts surrounding Muskoka, became adventurers themselves. Robinson reminisces, “we could not afford to spend time on working days, yet the Sundays afforded compensation for much hard work. We often took lunch with us and spent the day exploring unknown bays and islands.”\textsuperscript{373} Due to their proximity, settlers were able take an afternoon, or occasionally camp out overnight, and explore neighbouring districts. Although adventurers who visited Muskoka from Toronto or more distant regions required the economic freedom to take such a lengthy journey, those located closer to the district were able to do so without such liberties.

As Muskoka became a more popular site for adventurers, it also began to attract the attention of businessmen looking to capitalize on the district’s natural beauty and launch the area’s tourism industry. Nevertheless, before Muskoka’s tourism industry could expand to accommodate visitors other than adventurers, improvements had to be made to the district’s transportation network.

\textbf{From Adventure Tourism to Nature Tourism:}

The adventurers who travelled throughout Muskoka used transportation lines that were already being used by settler, lumber, and Aboriginal populations. In order to reach the district’s interior travelers would employ several different means of transport.

Beginning their journey in Toronto, passengers would travel by train and then by


steamboat to Orillia. From this point, travelers would continue towards Muskoka in one of two manners. Similarly to settlers, if they were available and if the travelling party’s funds permitted, either a stagecoach or an oxen-drawn wagon would be hired to transport both the travelers and their belongings. Otherwise, the party would journey north on the road by foot. Once the travelers reached Muskoka they had the option of continuing their trip by canoe or rowboat, or again simply carrying on by foot along the surveyed roads and beaten pathways. Although adventurers were willing to accept such methods of transportation, Muskoka was unlikely to expand its tourism industry if all tourists were expected to hike up the Muskoka road with their belongings on their backs. Recognizing that better transport would encourage development and the future success of the district, A.P. Cockburn set to work promoting roadway and waterway improvements for Muskoka. Cockburn believed in the area’s “great potential, for settlers, lumbermen and sportsmen” alike. Originally a merchant, Cockburn became a community leader in the Muskoka District as both an entrepreneur and a politician.

Shortly after becoming a resident of Orillia in 1864, Cockburn traveled through Muskoka while on a canoe trip in 1865. Amazed by both the scenery and the area’s potential for agricultural and commercial growth, Cockburn offered several recommendations to the Minister of Agriculture, the Hon. Thomas D’Arcy McGee. Along with his suggestions regarding roadway and waterway development, Cockburn also presented the Minister with a proposal: if the government would agree to build a

---

374 It should be noted that although the adventure tourists adopted the same means of entering the district as the settlers, they did not have to carry with them their life’s possessions or farming equipment. Although the means of transportation was similar, the experience of entering the district was not only emotionally different, but physically as well.


376 Ibid.
lock at Port Carling to allow boats to bypass the rapids, he would undertake to build and launch “a good substantial passenger freight steamer” on Lake Muskoka.\textsuperscript{377} Impressed, the Minister relayed Cockburn’s proposal, and the government resolved to pledge their support and build a lock at the Port Carling rapids. Committed to bringing his proposal to fruition, Cockburn built a general store in Gravenhurst and established a stage service between the peak of the steamship line in Orillia and Washago in 1866.\textsuperscript{378} Cockburn’s “fleet grew from a single ship in 1866 to six by 1881, at which time the venture was incorporated as the Muskoka and Nipissing Navigation Company Limited.”\textsuperscript{379}

Running for the Liberal party, Cockburn was elected the Member of Provincial Parliament for Victoria North in 1867, a district which included Muskoka. As an MPP, Cockburn encouraged the pre-confederation coalition government, comprised of the parti bleu and the Ontario Liberals and Conservatives, to continue to survey northern districts for settlement.\textsuperscript{380} Cockburn was also a fervent supporter of the Free Grants and Homestead Act of 1868.\textsuperscript{381} By 1869 he had persuaded the government to begin construction of the lock at Port Carling, as well as a canal at Port Sandfield.\textsuperscript{382} These additions allowed steamships on Lake Muskoka to also service both Lake Rosseau and Lake Joseph. This greatly assisted the district’s lumber and settler populations, as more direct waterway routes could be taken, and poorly maintained, circuitous roadways could

\textsuperscript{377} Richard Tatley, \textit{The Steamboat Era in the Muskokas: Volume I – To the Golden Years} (Erin: The Boston Mills Press, 1983), 42


\textsuperscript{379} \textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{380} \textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{381} \textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{382} \textit{Ibid.}.
be avoided. By the 1880s Cockburn’s steamships were travelling Muskoka’s three main lakes, transporting people, goods, and mail throughout the district.\textsuperscript{383} Despite the limited information on the early service years of Cockburn’s steamships, undoubtedly they were of great assistance to the communities located in the Muskoka District. The steamships provided a faster alternative to the area’s inadequately preserved roadways and were able to accommodate considerably larger loads than drawn wagons. On the lower deck, steamships such as the Wenonah would carry “lumber, cement, lime, bricks, tools, machinery, grain, groceries, dry goods, furniture, fodder, [and] even livestock.”\textsuperscript{384} In addition to the passengers carried overhead of the cargo, Cockburn’s Wenonah also carried the mail. The introduction of steamships on Muskoka’s lakes also affected rates and prices in the district. The freight rates for transporting goods from Washago to Bracebridge decreased “from $1.00 per hundredweight to a mere 40¢,” and the cost of goods also dropped, as salt fell from $4.00 to $1.35 per barrel and nails from $7.00 to only $3.50 per keg.\textsuperscript{385}

Although at first the district’s growth remained slow, if not stagnant at times, the introduction of the Free Grants and Homestead Act of 1868 helped expand settlement in the Muskoka district as well as marked the first year the Wenonah began to turn a profit.\textsuperscript{386} In 1869 the construction of the lock at Port Carling commenced, followed by the Port Sandfield canal in 1870. While the lock allowed steamers to pass through from Lake Muskoka to Lake Rosseau, the canal connected Lakes Rosseau and Joseph, and was

\textsuperscript{384} Tatley, \textit{The Steamboat Era in the Muskokas: Volume 1 – To the Golden Years}, 46.
\textsuperscript{385} \textit{Ibid}.
\textsuperscript{386} \textit{Ibid.}, 57.
wide enough to allow steamships to pass through.\textsuperscript{387} Although the canal was expected to be completed by September 1871, after the steamer ran aground during the opening ceremony boats were not able to pass through until summer 1872.\textsuperscript{388}

While steamships opened up the interior of Muskoka, railway trains carried visitors on the first main stage of their travels towards the district. As discussed earlier in Chapter One, by 1853 the railway only reached Allandale, but by the following year a branch line had been laid from Lefoy to Belle Ewart on Lake Simcoe; this allowed for connections to steamships during the summer months.\textsuperscript{389} In 1870 arrangements were made to have the train line extended up to Barrie, where a steamer could then take travelers further into the Muskoka district.\textsuperscript{390} Although the railway was not extended to Gravenhurst until 1875, its eventual presence made for a great day in Muskoka.\textsuperscript{391} Similarly to other locations throughout the province, “the arrival of the railway signaled the beginnings of [a] new era of growth, development, and social change.”\textsuperscript{392} The railway was finally extended up to Bracebridge in 1885.

Railways and steamships worked cooperatively to improve transportation towards, as well as within, the Muskoka Lakes district. This helped reduce the cost of goods as well as aided settlement. Moreover, it also stimulated the area’s tourism industry. Unlike the adventurers who eagerly explored Muskoka during the 1860s and 1870s, the nature tourists who began to visit the district in the 1870s and 1880s were

\textsuperscript{387} \textit{Ibid.}, 61.
\textsuperscript{388} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{389} Bruce Hodgins, \textit{John Sandfield MacDonald, 1812-1872} (Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 1971), 109; Murray, \textit{Muskoka and Haliburton, 1615-1875}, ci.
\textsuperscript{390} “Frank Smith to William F. Munro to the Provincial Secretary, M.C. Cameron,” Murray, \textit{Muskoka and Haliburton, 1615-1875}, 350.
\textsuperscript{391} Murray, \textit{Muskoka and Haliburton, 1615-1875}, cii.
attracted to the district by the new luxury hotels. Presumably, they were not interested in travelling on foot or by canoe as the settlers were obligated to do. Improved transportation allowed for the construction of the resorts; it also presented potential nature tourists with a viable and more comfortable manner of reaching their seemingly remote destinations.

As Cockburn encouraged the government to transfer funds into developing Muskoka’s infrastructure, he also promoted the district amongst his acquaintances. Cockburn met William H. Pratt, an entrepreneur from New York, in 1869. That year, Cockburn invited Pratt to visit Muskoka; once there Pratt envisioned a first rate luxury hotel in the middle of the barely inhabited district. Pratt built his retreat at the top of Lake Rosseau. As the first nature resort in Muskoka, Pratt’s Rousseau House was built at a time when “vacations in the bush were definitely not in style” for the majority of those who could afford to take a holiday. Nevertheless, Pratt was confident that if he built his hotel “on a scale which ha[d] not… its equal north of Toronto” then the unique scenic advantages of the district would do the rest to attract patrons. Pratt announced his project to the public in 1870 and began accepting guests that same July, although Rousseau House was not ready for larger parties until the following summer. Instead of appealing to adventure tourists, the more costly wilderness resort was constructed to attract upper class families.

393 “Pratt’s Tourist Hotel”, Murray, Muskoka and Haliburton, 1615-1875, 402.
394 Boyer. Muskoka’s Grand Hotels, 19
395 “Pratt’s Tourist Hotel”, Murray, Muskoka and Haliburton, 1615-1875, 402.
396 Pratt’s intended opening is found in “Pratt’s Tourist Hotel”, Murray, Muskoka and Haliburton, 1615-1875, 402. However, Barbaranne Boyer notes Pratt’s “soft” opening in 1870. Boyer, Muskoka’s Grand Hotels, 19.
The earliest stage of the area’s tourism industry, its adventure tourism years, displayed the basic characteristics of tourism. Travelling for recreation, these adventurers sought out pleasure in leaving their permanent place of residence and temporarily exploring another; they wanted to experience and examine new landscapes. Although goods and services were available for the adventurers’ consumption, they were not widely accessible and offered little variety. However, notions of wilderness and wild men were used as representations of freedom, and Muskoka appealed to adventure tourists looking for deliverance from the restrictions and obligations of their lives.\textsuperscript{397} Although visitors such as Bain and Campbell employed guides and locals to help coordinate their trips, they wanted to transport themselves by canoe and by foot, set up their own shelter, and prepare their own food. In traversing the landscape themselves they were asserting their manhood and liberty. Nevertheless, as discussed earlier, for the adventure tourists, experiencing the area’s landscape and unexpected charms was an end in itself.

The arrival of Pratt’s Rosseau House and the expansion of the steamship and railway line transformed Muskoka’s tourism industry. With greater goods and services available, the industry began to attract a new group of visitors: the nature tourists. The Muskoka district became a haven for upper and upper middle class tourists looking to return to nature and restore themselves from the damaging effects of modernity. As urban centres expanded, “people naturally wondered what might have been lost through the processes of civilization.”\textsuperscript{398} Ultimately, wilderness became “a product of perception more than an objective reality.”\textsuperscript{399} Especially amongst the urban elite, individuals looked

\textsuperscript{398} \textit{Ibid.}, 15.
\textsuperscript{399} \textit{Ibid.}, 19.
to offset “the debilitating effects of civilized life” by exposing themselves to nature.⁴⁰⁰ Visiting and exploring rural districts such as Muskoka was no longer an end in itself, but rather a means to attaining better mental and physical health through the freeing properties of the wilderness. Accordingly, Muskoka’s luxury hotel proprietors arranged stagecoaches and steamships to transport these nature tourists from the railway directly to their resort. In offering inclusive vacation packages which allowed their guests to “experience” Muskoka, luxury hotels were providing a representation of wilderness for tourists to come into contact with. In providing a more controlled vacation, Muskoka’s re-established tourism industry was able to embody the upper and middle class values of their target clientele.

Muskoka’s early nature tourists were individuals who could bear the expense of vacationing. However, what truly differentiated the nature tourists from the adventurers were the values and standards that propelled the nature tourism industry. In The Geography of Tourism and Recreation Colin Michael Hall and Stephen Page argue that over the nineteenth century, “town and country were viewed as a continuum rather than as two distinct resources juxtaposed to each other.”⁴⁰¹ Although the elite’s private rural environments would slowly open up to middle class and, in the twentieth century, working-class tourists, during the second half of the nineteenth century these spaces offered an escape for upper and upper-middle class tourists from the negative effects of modernity in urban environments.

Industrial growth altered both the physical and social landscapes of Ontario during the nineteenth century. As urban populations expanded, the layout of the

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid., 105.
provinces’ cities began to realign so as to best support the growing industrial economy.\textsuperscript{402} New roadways, slums, and congestion altered the physical nature of urban centres such as Toronto.\textsuperscript{403} While growing populations and industries continued to physically shape cities, the social landscape also began to change. Amidst urban development, “growing fears about the effects of overwork and ‘overcivilization’” emerged.\textsuperscript{404} Moreover, upper and middle classes began to view urban centres as increasingly “mysterious, full of dark, unpleasant, hidden spaces, humanly contrived spaces, spaces spawned by greed that in turn bred ill health and immorality.”\textsuperscript{405} As newcomers moved about cities and began to take advantage of the opportunities growing industries presented, social distinctions began to blur, and one’s dress and company no longer adequately represented an individual’s background and class. Wary of the changes brought about by industrial and urban growth, upper class residents sought to impose higher moral standards and reshape the city’s physical environment.\textsuperscript{406} From the second response emerged the Park Movement of the 1840s, which in turn made parks a standard feature of North American cities. Parks provided a recreational space apart from the industrial urban growth where individuals could relax and experience the rejuvenating effects of nature.\textsuperscript{407} Alongside the expansion of park space in urban centres, popular interest in wilderness tourism also grew.

In traveling to remote, nature hotels the upper and upper middle classes were not only asserting their concern over the chaotic social landscape of city life; these tourists

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{402} Keith Walden, \textit{Becoming Modern in Toronto: The Industrial Exhibition and the Shaping of a Late Victorian Culture} (Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 1997), 224. \\
\textsuperscript{403} Ibid., 225. \\
\textsuperscript{404} Jasen, \textit{Wild Things: Nature, Culture and Tourism in Ontario, 1790-1914}, 105. \\
\textsuperscript{405} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{406} Walden, \textit{Becoming Modern in Toronto: The Industrial Exhibition and the Shaping of a Late Victorian Culture}, 225. \\
\textsuperscript{407} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{408} Ibid., 226.
\end{flushleft}
were also demonstrating their “purchasing power.” Distinguished as a “true medieval wilderness, not far from civilization but very real nonetheless,” Muskoka offered upper and upper-middle class tourists a rural environment where they could temporarily reject modernity and urban life to rejuvenate themselves and re-establish their social status. Muskoka’s luxury nature resorts offered tourists a controlled wilderness where social rank was monitored, and their opulence juxtaposed the surrounding wilds.

Throughout the 1870s Pratt’s Rosseau House controlled the market for nature tourism in Muskoka. Although the voyage from Toronto generally took about two days and at five dollars a day his rates were quite high, Pratt’s luxurious resort quickly became a popular destination, “with guests arriving as far as the southern United States and England.” The only other accommodations for visitors were smaller, backwoods lodges that attracted adventurers and newcomers seeking land. However, during the 1880s, either from the ground up or through extensive renovations to lodgings such as The Summit House and Windermere House, resorts similar to Pratt’s were constructed throughout Muskoka. It was during this decade that the district’s tourism industry transformed from sustaining adventure tourism to nature tourism.

**Landscaping Muskoka’s Physical Identity:**

In order to stimulate the area’s popularity, Muskoka’s physical identity had to be re-landscaped to better fit its new restorative identity. This effort involved both hotel proprietors as well as government agents redefining the district’s geography. No longer

---

defined as a site solely for agricultural development, popular literature began rewriting Muskoka’s physical environment so as to attract tourists to the district’s new luxury nature resorts.

Advertising Muskoka as a settlement to promoting it as a vacation spot was a gradual transition. One of the first publications to outline the area as a popular tourist retreat was the *Guide Book & Atlas of Muskoka and Parry Sound District*. The introduction to the guide was written by W.E. Hamilton for the Minister of Agriculture in 1879. Asserting that “Muskoka is eminently lake land,” the narrative defines the land for both cautious settlers as well as potential tourists.\(^{411}\) Both winter and summer seasons are depicted as providing “wealthy tourists” with impressive vacation environments, conducive for such enjoyable recreation as sleigh riding and canoeing.\(^{412}\) While still recognizing the district’s status as an agricultural settlement, the *Guide Book & Atlas* began to redefine the characteristics of the area, emphasizing the agreeable natural qualities of the Muskoka landscape.

Texts concentrating solely on tourism and travel also began to include descriptions of the Muskoka District. George Munro Grant of Queen’s University wrote *Picturesque Canada: The Country as it was and is* in 1882 to promote the attractiveness of the nation. The guide depicts the Muskoka district as a naturally stunning tourist destination. Born in Nova Scotia in 1835, Grant was a Presbyterian minister, author, and educator.\(^{413}\) Moreover, he was an enthusiastic supporter of the transcontinental railway


\(^{412}\) Ibid.

and confederation. In 1872 Grant travelled to Victoria, British Columbia as part of an expedition lead by Sandford Fleming, the chief engineer for the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway.\footnote{Ibid.} In 1873 Grant published \textit{Ocean to Ocean}, an account of his travels across the country. The travel book outlined the possibilities of Canada as a new country, as well as attempted to conjure political support for the railway.\footnote{Ibid.} Across British North America a connection between national pride and nature was growing. Tourism literature often presented “back-to-nature and northwoods themes… wedded to the rhetoric of nationalism, as they were in many other forms of English-Canadian cultural expression in the period after Confederation.”\footnote{Jasen, \textit{Wild Things: Nature, Culture and Tourism in Ontario, 1790-1914}, 109.} Canadian guides, newspapers, and magazines explored the implications of Canadian nationalism in the assumed “relationship between ‘northerness’ and racial health.”\footnote{Ibid.} Promoting both the individual merit of regions as well as the united, national attractiveness of Canada, Grant’s patriotism is evident throughout \textit{Picturesque Canada}.

Grant attests that as the vacationer travelled north from Gravenhurst, “the view… almost instantly opens up in fine panoramic effect before him.”\footnote{Picturesque Canada: The Country as it was and is, ed. G.M. Grant (Toronto: Blenden Bros., 1882), 608.} Grant continues: “sky, and land, and water, here all combine… to make a perfect picture, the effect of which, particularly when the woods are ablaze with the colouring of a Canadian autumn, is almost indescribable.”\footnote{Grant, \textit{Picturesque Canada: The Country as it was and is}, 615.} In addition to promoting Muskoka’s picturesque landscape, Grant emphasizes the area’s physical aptness for recreational activities. He encourages sportsman to embrace the unique features of the outdoors as “in the lakes and streams
trout are abundant, and in the woods, in season, will be found plenty of deer.” Grant also assures his readers of their safety; neither the land nor the animals the land harbored posed a threat to them. Picturesque Canada promoted the district as a welcoming destination with staggeringly beautiful vistas at every outlook. According to Grant, Muskoka epitomized an environment that, when left alone, naturally formed into breathtaking and uninhibited beauty.

The physical presence of Muskoka’s lumber and settler populations is also noted in Grant’s Picturesque Canada. However, their existence is not recorded as part of the district’s regional identity. Instead, the narrative associates the two factions with Muskoka’s “many square miles of beautiful forest [that] annually fall prey to the devouring element.” Grant asserts,

The settler has need to be more careful than he is, for he has been known to let fire run through a bush, to save the toil of chopping, regardless of the injury he is doing to the soil. His greed, too, has sometimes to be put under restraint, when the lumberman offers him the bait which is to denude the land of its glory and the farm of its wealth.

The author indirectly acknowledges the physical presence of lumber sites and agricultural settlement through emphasizing the danger the two populations posed to the district’s pristine vistas. Grant is also obliquely entering the debate as to whether Muskoka’s land and soil could support agrarian enterprise. As indicated in the preceding quotation, it was the settler’s “greed” that led to farmlands beings stripped of their “wealth.” The text also alludes to a tension between the tourism industry and the lumber industry. As will be discussed in Chapter Five, this friction spread throughout the end of

---

420 Ibid., 611.
421 Ibid.
422 Ibid.
423 Ibid., 615.
the nineteenth century, and by the twentieth century was part of an ongoing argument between the two factions. Grant’s travel narrative relegates the existence of settlers and the lumber trade to the fringe of Muskoka’s landscape.

Published in 1883, Edward Roper’s *Muskoka: The Picturesque Playground of Canada* provides visuals of the district’s landscape. The booklet consists of a series of hand drawn pictures of various scenic Muskoka snapshots. However, these representations are done from a specific point of view: that of the tourists. Figure 4.1 is an illustration of the view from a veranda of a lakefront. Although in the distance there are thick forests, the property on which the picture was drawn has been cleared. The landscape and the veranda have been built to maximize their aesthetic value: a picket fence lines the cleared walkway down to the waterfront, and the details on the support
beams of the porch are the work of a craftsman. Moreover, as the vantage point is framed by the construction of the porch it impresses the separation between the property’s civilized nature and the uncontrolled wilderness beyond. The shawl hanging over the rail and the umbrella propped up against it give the impression that if a sudden chill or bout of rain were to suddenly arrive, the onlooker would not be disturbed, but could continue to enjoy their view. In the dense forests across the lake, the woods so thick openings are not even faintly visible, there is no manicured pathway or front lawn for late afternoon rambles or covered verandahs to take shelter from the heat or rain. Roper displays the tourists’ landscape as being a civilized yet, with such close proximity to the actual wilderness, still natural and organic backwoods experience.

Roper’s illustrations in Muskoka: The Picturesque Playground of Canada depict a variety of civilized, “wild” Muskoka vignettes that were available to tourists. By the end of the eighteen century, members of the middle and upper classes began to “imbue ‘wild nature’ with new meaning and value.”

Romanticism and tourism became closely associated as notions of the ‘sublime’ and ‘picturesque’ became principal aesthetic classifications in travel. Although individually, each picture in the booklet displays aspects of the romantic imagery often employed in tourism, together they also reveal the reconfigured physical identity thrust onto the Muskoka District by the tourism industry and government during the 1880s.

Figure 4.2 displays how modernity tamed the wilds of Muskoka, allowing tourists to picture themselves enjoying leisurely recreations such as sailing and fishing. The mansion or grand hotel in the background and the steamship cutting across the water

---

425 Ibid.
again contrast the dense woodlands at the farthest end of the lake. However, the juxtaposition in this picture, between the modern elements and the uncivilized wilderness, calls attention to the desire of the upper and upper-middle class tourists to affirm their opulence and social standing. Modern industry transformed the urban landscape and led to an entanglement of the social and consequently spatial paradigms upheld by the urban elite. However, in “returning” to nature and contrasting their own wealth against the wild landscape of the supposed backwoods, the upper and upper-middle classes were able to reassert their wealth and social elitism. The grand hotel in the background of the illustration juts out from the tress, providing a private haven from which upper and middle class nature tourists could safely enjoy the wild playground that surrounded them.

4.2. Fishing and boating in Muskoka – Illustration from Edward Roper’s 1883 Muskoka: The Picturesque Playground of Canada (Baldwin Room, Toronto Reference Library, Toronto Public Library, 1883).
In figure 4.3, an illustration of a campsite along one of the Muskoka Lakes, again there is a dense forest in the distance, away from the tourists. Although the camp is much more “in the wild” than the landscape presented in figure 4.1, the shore the tourists have camped on has been cleared. This picture gives the impression that these adventurous


travelers are in unmapped territory. Nevertheless, in all likelihood they are on an authorized campsite. A rough pathway just enters the picture from the bottom-right-hand corner, and a flag pole stands beyond the first tent, presumably marking the site for tourists. Although their location is not as manicured as the site in figure 4.1, it is equally as calculated and controlled by its proprietor. Offering a more “rugged” backwoods experience for nature tourists, several resorts began to provide lakeside campsites,
complete with attendants who organized groceries, supplies and boats for hire.\textsuperscript{426} Other resorts also used camp sites as a measure to deal with overflow. Nature resorts such as Cleveland’s House offered tents for single men at a reduced rate to accommodate the increasing demand for rooms.\textsuperscript{427} At the WaWa resort on the Lake of Bays, “a series of tents with board floors, electric lighted, and neatly furnished” were used as an auxiliary to the hotel in 1913.\textsuperscript{428}

The illustrations taken from Roper’s \textit{Muskoka: The Picturesque Playground of Canada} also reveal representations that were missing from promotional literature for Muskoka. In all three pictures there are no Native inhabitants. As will be discussed in Chapter Five, Muskoka’s Native inhabitants as well as Aboriginals from surrounding regions were active in the district’s tourism industry, acting as guides and selling souvenirs. However, the people in Roper’s illustrations are primarily white men. There are no Native men or women, and there appears to be only one white woman in figure 4.3. Although the social landscape of the district will be examined in the following section, Roper’s illustrations demonstrate how the physical features of Muskoka were rearranged to fit mainstream upper and middle class values that were influenced by notions of gender and race.

Muskoka’s geographical identity was closely controlled by tourism officials and hotel and campground operators during the final decades of the nineteenth and the beginning of twentieth the century. The literature published promoted a narrowly-defined

\textsuperscript{426} Captain Mac, \textit{The Muskoka Lakes and the Georgian Bay: Portraying the Fishing and Hunting Grounds, Islands and Summers Resorts with some view and descriptions} (Ottawa: McAdam (Ministry of Agriculture), 1884), 22-23.
\textsuperscript{427} Frank Michlethwaite, \textit{Micklethwaite’s Muskoka} (Toronto: Stoddart, 1993), 126.
\textsuperscript{428} \textit{The Lake of Bays “Highlands of Ontario”: A concise Description of One of the Most Attractive Resort Districts in Ontario, Canada} (Montreal: Grand Truck Railway Press, 1913), 12.
Muskoka landscape that ensured picturesque vistas and social stability for the elitist nature tourists. In reinterpreting the district’s physical identity, Muskoka’s social identity was also reshaped and redefined to suit the wants of both the tourists and the nature tourism industry.

**Landscaping Muskoka’s Social Identity:**

While representations of the physical landscape endorsed by the tourism industry and government presented a specific, restricted identity, so too did Muskoka’s social landscape. As the above discussion of the geographical landscape shows, Muskoka’s renewed tourism identity, shaped by gendered roles and norms, upheld upper and upper-middle class values. However, extending beyond a desire to assert their elite social standing, nature tourists were looking for a restorative destination. In addition to the growing confusion about metropolitan social hierarchies, pollution, congestion, and longer work hours threatened the elite’s levels of comfort and security. Far from the urban centre, Muskoka’s tourism industry presented nature tourists with a supposedly unambiguous social climate where health and well-being were the order of the day.

The geographical landscape of Muskoka allowed the district’s nature resorts to boast a climate “most invigorating and pure,” where visitors would “find immediate relief and perfect immunity” from any disease or ailment. G. M. Adam’s pamphlet *Muskoka Illustrated*, disbursed in 1888, attested that for the “the wearied and over-worked professional man,” a trip to the Muskoka district could provide “mental and

---

physical refreshment,” a remedy that was “well nigh incalculable.” Accordingly, Muskoka was a destination where upper and upper-middle class tourists could better assert their social status through not only an awareness of their health, but also their economic ability to ensure their family’s well-being.

Subscribing to the restorative traits promoted by the Department of Agriculture and tourist information booklets, tourists viewed “the calming and unspectacular nature of Muskoka’s beauty [as] integral to its health-giving properties.” The restorative qualities of the region were valued even more with the support of the modern medical community. The plans and final construction of the Muskoka Cottage Sanatorium in Gravenhurst during 1897 reassured nature tourists that their understanding of Muskoka as a restorative destination was correct. Further assurance came from an address by Dr. G. Roddick, given in front of the British Medical Association but reprinted in newspapers such as the New York Times. In his speech, titled “Health in the Dominion,” Roddick stated that Canadian localities such as the Muskoka Lakes District had been “proved to possess many of the qualities which constitute a climate for convalescents from fevers and other depressing diseases.” However, most luxury nature resorts clearly outlined: “sufferers form tuberculosis are not admitted.” Threatened by the congestion and disease of industrial urban centres, members of the upper and upper-middle classes took proactive measures in an attempt to ensure their families well-being.

434 The Lake of Bays “Highlands of Ontario”: A concise Description of One of the Most Attractive Resort Districts in Ontario, Canada (Montreal: Grand Truck Railway Press, 1913), 11.
The social landscape of Muskoka also offered liberties to each member of the family. For businessmen, a Muskoka getaway offered the opportunity to “emancipate oneself at intervals from the toils of business.” It presented them with the opportunity to repel the everyday restraints on their lives: “no starched shirt and no collars nor cuffs. You fairly revel in the comfort of an old flannel shirt, straw hat and a pair of last season’s trousers.” It was believed that through experiencing this liberation, “young men [would] return to the city with their perceptive power increased, and just ache to take part in the controversy entailed on some vital question, as for instance: the contraction of the promise to pay, or the equal taxation of church property.” While staying at the luxury resorts in Muskoka, the upper and upper-middle class gentlemen did not need to distinguish their social status through their dress or business. The steep hotel rates and remote location ensured that guests were of the same class. G.M. Grant noted in *Picturesque Canada; The Country as it was and is* that the nature tourist could “hardly come to so favourite a resort and fail to meet with someone he knows.”

For young men, the features Muskoka afforded them were similar to that of their older counterparts. The nature resorts presented opportunities that were believed to be more limited in the city, including controlled recreation and wilderness. As the middle class presented parklands in urban settings as a means of curing idleness in young people, so too did the Muskoka landscape represent an opportunity to ensure young men

---

438 Chapter Five will question whether this presumed separation was actually upheld, or if ‘others’ were able to infiltrate luxury nature resorts and mingle with the upper and upper-middle class guests.
439 Grant, *Picturesque Canada: The Country as it was and is*, 616.
developed into “virtuous and self-reliant” individuals.\textsuperscript{440} With vaster green space available and recreational activities such as hiking and canoeing, it was thought that young men would have more opportunity for “physical regeneration” and to “foster an appreciation of beauty and order.”\textsuperscript{441}

Although the tourism booklets and promotional materials for Muskoka did not directly address women or young girls, they did travel to the district as nature tourists. The “negative evidence” or lack of representations should not prevent their voices and experiences from being the subject of speculation.\textsuperscript{442} While social conventions made it harder for wives and daughters to escape the confines of the home and family, travel provided a break from “housebound existences” and “domestic boredom.”\textsuperscript{443} Over the second half of the nineteenth century a shift in social spheres also allowed women to enjoy a greater presence in the public sphere through “more regular and improved schooling” and even higher education for some.\textsuperscript{444} However, there was still a “growing emphasis on the mothering role” of women and how to better train women through nutrition, cooking and domestic science classes.\textsuperscript{445} Accordingly, as family obligations fell more squarely on women’s shoulders than men’s, it presumably could have been within a wife’s jurisdiction to encourage her husband to invest in a restorative and healthful family vacation.\textsuperscript{446} Once on holiday in a district such as Muskoka, women and young girls would have had the opportunity to take part in light recreation, such as canoeing or

\textsuperscript{440} Walden, \textit{Becoming Modern in Toronto: The Industrial Exhibition and the Shaping of a Late Victorian Culture}, 226.
\textsuperscript{441} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{443} \textit{Ibid.}, 23.
\textsuperscript{444} \textit{Ibid.}, 155,159.
\textsuperscript{445} \textit{Ibid.}, 144, 157.
going on walks, and move into a more public social sphere and consort with friends. For single women, it also would have provided an occasion to meet eligible suitors, as evening dances and parties were often on the agenda amongst the upper and upper middle class tourists visiting Muskoka.447

Muskoka’s physical landscape was reshaped to support upper and upper-middle class tourists’ desired social landscape. Molded by gendered, racial, and class-based value and practices, the district’s tourism industry offered restorative vacations where the supposed hardships sustained from modern, industrial city life could be easily remedied. Moreover, it was an opportunity for tourists to flaunt their purchasing power and wealth.

Conclusion:

Muskoka’s nature tourism industry promoted the district as a secluded wilderness destination for urban elite. Providing manicured wilds and respite from congested industrial cities, Muskoka was upheld as a site where upper and upper middle class travelers could return to nature and detach themselves from the negative repercussions of modern life. However, in temporarily rejecting modernity nature tourists were in fact asserting their modernity to a greater extent. Their means of transportation, accommodations, and even their motivations for leaving the city were all decidedly modern. In addition to examining this, Chapter Five will also explore how reshaping Muskoka’s geographical and social landscape affected the district’s Aboriginal, lumber, and settler populaces. All were re-characterized in hopes of ensuring the economic advancement of the area. Nevertheless, while tourism sought to exploit the identity and

447 In a letter home to her mother Genevieve Caniff describes neighbours and guests coming together for a ball. “Two letters from Genevieve Caniff to her Mother.” Dated 1892, Chief’s Island, Lake Joseph, Muskoka District. Social Misc. MU 7827 #4, F830, Archives of Ontario, Toronto, Ontario.
history of the area’s Native and settler inhabitants, these two factions also endeavored to
take advantage of the monetary returns the nature tourism industry brought to Muskoka.
As we have seen, prior to the expansion of Muskoka’s nature tourism industry the district was endorsed as an agrarian Mecca by both the government and agriculture industry. The regional identity promoted by the government for settlement contradicted the experiences and realities of Muskoka’s inhabitants. By the 1870s Muskoka played host not only to government officials, but also to various cultural and industrial groups who had a vested interest in the district. These groups included Aboriginals, settlers, lumbermen, adventurers and nature tourists. Failing to forge a collective regional identity, their contrary self-representations caused both inlanders and outlanders to question the character of Muskoka’s geographical and social landscape.

Admits this confusion, in the 1880s the nature tourism industry expanded and redefined the district’s topographical and societal prospects. The historical narratives of Muskoka’s Native and settler populations were modified by the nature tourism industry to better reinforce the district’s new regional identity as a recreational frontier for upper and upper-middle class tourists. While the government, print media, and transportation companies supported Muskoka’s reconstructed tourism identity, it was the efforts of local inhabitants, despite their misrepresentation, that helped entrench this depiction in the general public’s understanding of the district. Endorsed by the government, nature tourism providers entered into arrangements with inhabitants and transport companies to ensure that visitors would consider Muskoka a retreat from the confusing state of modern, urban life, and an opportunity to return to nature; in turn, the “authentic” Muskoka experience was founded.
The Tourist’s Perspective:

By the end of the nineteenth century, Muskoka was a popular locale for upper and upper-middle class tourists. More than a vacation spot, Muskoka was promoted as a site where tourists could withdraw from the city and enjoy the recreational and restorative benefits of the district. However, in coveting remote, backwoods destinations these tourists were not rejecting the modernity and industrial growth of urban centres. On the contrary, through their travels they were asserting their citizenry in an increasingly industrial, modern society. Studies of the history of tourism and theories regarding the tourism industry illuminate the motivations and perspectives of tourists. The analyses of Karen Dubinsky, John Urry, and Alexander Wilson provide insight into constructs surrounding tourism and tourists that are applicable to Muskoka’s nature tourism industry in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Karen Dubinsky discusses the importance of location in her work on honeymooning and Niagara tourism, *The Second Greatest Disappointment*. Dubinsky outlines that places are more than just mere locations: “the spatial is also socially constructed, and places can mean different things at different times.” Depending on the perspective of the onlooker, the significance of a landscape or location can take on different meanings. “As social divisions are often spoken in spatial terms,” the identity of both Muskoka’s landscape and inhabitants was contingent on the outlook of the observer. John Urry similarly discusses how vacationers perceive and construct their surroundings in his book *The Tourist Gaze*. Urry states that the gaze of the tourist is generated in

---

relation to its opposite, “to non-tourist forms of social experience and consciousness.”

Subsequently, a tourist’s perception of their surroundings depends on the other surroundings or places they use to form contrasts. Moreover, “the tourist gaze is structured by cultural specific notions of what is extraordinary and therefore worth viewing.” Separated from their ordinary day-to-day experiences, tourists evaluate their surroundings based on pre-conceived ideas and expectations while also directing their gaze towards differences in landscape, persons, and objects.

As Dubinsky and Urry examine how landscapes and gazes are formed, Alexander Wilson argues in his book, *The Culture of Nature*, that because nature is a part of culture, “our experience of the natural world… is always mediated.” For Wilson, the very notion of the landscape requires “the physical world [to be] something we can know, enjoy, and control.” Through landscape we see the world, and through our depictions of landscape we project different relationships. Dubinsky, Urry, and Wilson all outline the dynamic nature of vacationing and being a tourist. Traveling is not a linear event; it involves the development of a series of distinctive relationships between the tourist and ‘the other’. In Muskoka, nature tourists established relationships not only with the Muskoka inhabitants and tourism providers, but also with their fellow tourists and the neighbours they left behind in the city.

The tourist’s perspective was motivated by their background and current surroundings. As discussed in Chapter Four, industrial growth altered both the physical and social landscapes of urban Ontario during the nineteenth century. Large urban spaces

---

450 Ibid.
451 Ibid., 59.
453 Ibid. 14.
became increasingly crowded, and industrial opportunities allowed individuals to dress and move about in social circles they did not belong to. Upper and upper middle class tourists believed that by travelling to a “true medieval wilderness, not far from civilization but very real nonetheless” they were temporarily rejecting modernity, and the plight of modern, industrial life.\footnote{Patricia Jasen, \textit{Wild Things: Nature, Culture and Tourism in Ontario, 1790-1914}. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 116.}

However, Urry points out in \textit{The Tourist Gaze} that the very act of deciding to take a vacation is to assert one’s modernity. To claim “I need a vacation” is to take part in a modern discourse where mental and physical restoration is achieved by “getting away” from modern life.\footnote{Urry, \textit{The Tourist Gaze}, 5.} Prior to the nineteenth century travel for pleasure’s sake was unheard of outside the upper class. Nevertheless, with the democratization of tourism the belief that one deserved or even required a vacation grew increasingly important, as did the destination itself. A sign of one’s class and social status, travel and holidays to certain places were viewed as necessary and vacations became “a crucial element of modern life.”\footnote{Ibid.}

Cecilia Morgan notes in her book \textit{‘A Happy Holiday’: English Canadians and Transatlantic Tourism, 1870-1930} that “nineteenth- century tourism was intricately and intimately tied to modernity.” Morgan explains that, through “technological and cultural forms,” it was modernity that brought tourists to their destination to begin with.\footnote{Ibid.} From the reasoning and decision-making that resulted in the individual deciding to take a vacation, to the means of transportation employed and the amenities enjoyed once at the destination, being a tourist was a decidedly modern undertaking. A vacation

\footnote{Cecilia Morgan, \textit{‘A Happy Holiday’: English Canadians and Transatlantic Tourism, 1870-1930} (Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 2008), 17.}
in the remote wilds of the Muskoka District at an elite nature resort, such as Rosseau House, Windermere House, or the Royal Muskoka, was considered a “marker of status.”

By the second half of the nineteenth century, “a resort hierarchy developed and certain places were viewed as embodiments of mass tourism, to be despised and ridiculed.” As England’s Bath had earlier been visited for the healthful benefits of its waters and as the seaside resorts of nineteenth-century England were popularized for the medicinal advantages of the beach, so too was the Muskoka Lakes District regarded as a restorative destination. It was upheld that in Muskoka, “the waters of the lakes and streams are all absolutely soft and free from all organic impurities; a point of very great importance in certain classes of disease, which demand exactly this condition in their treatment.” Moreover, “pulmonary troubles of all kinds are greatly benefited by the climate, and a better place to strengthen ‘weak lungs’ would be hard to find, either in America or elsewhere.” The fresh air and pure water were not exclusive to upper and upper middle class tourists; Muskoka’s working class and adventurers had access to these supposed features and the further democratization of travel opened up the district to less affluent tourists in the twentieth century. However, the district’s luxury nature resorts provided a distinct physical space in which upper and upper middle class tourists could distinguish themselves from other factions, whether they were the Muskoka inhabitants, adventurers, or those left behind in the city.

459 Urry, The Tourist Gaze, 5.
460 Ibid., 16.
461 Ibid., 29.
462 Tourist Travel via Grand Trunk Railway System (Passenger Department, Grand Trunk Railway, 1900), 48.
463 Ibid.
Both the social and physical environment of the luxury resorts situated in the Muskoka Lakes District had to cater to the desires of nature tourists. As Urry observes in *The Tourist Gaze*, “almost all the services provided to tourists have to be delivered at the time and place at which they are produced.”\(^{464}\) Accordingly, the quality of the contact between the provider of the service and the consumer is “part of the ‘product’ being purchased by the tourists.” Urry explains that because service producers are often present for the consumption of their service, the location itself must also “convey appropriate cultural meanings,” or else the tourists’ encounters may be ruined.\(^{465}\) Ultimately, “to buy the service is to buy a particular social or sociological experience.”\(^{466}\) Presumably, Muskoka’s working-class inhabitants operating the production line for services provided at the hotels would not have always completed their service, in its entirety, “backstage, away from the gaze of tourists.”\(^{467}\) Consequently, “spatial fixity” at such luxury resorts was a crucial aspect of the tourist’s experience.\(^{468}\) The physical landscape, recreational opportunities, and the richness of the resorts’ amenities all had to appear seamless in order to create a social atmosphere that would attract and retain upper and upper-middle class tourists. From the maintenance of the manicured properties to the dining and cleaning services, Muskoka’s luxury nature resorts had to be carefully managed in order to ensure tourists received the associated social landscape they desired.

Nature tourism providers adopted the strategy William H. Pratt first established with Rosseau House: to build a luxury hotel “on a scale which ha[d] not… its equal north

---

\(^{465}\) *Ibid*.
\(^{466}\) *Ibid*., 60.
\(^{467}\) *Ibid*., 38.
\(^{468}\) *Ibid*. 
of Toronto,” juxtaposing the wilderness with lavish accommodations to attract patrons. The luxury hotels reflected the desires of the upper and upper-middle classes to have an escape from the supposedly crumbling social and physical landscape of the cities. However, in order to make certain tourists received the promoted restorative and recreational benefits of Muskoka, both the “behind-the-scenes” services and the landscape itself had to be carefully arranged and restricted to properly reflect the tourist’s gaze. To facilitate their success, as will be discussed later, nature tourism providers built arrangements with transportation industries, and the district’s Aboriginal and settler inhabitants. However, alongside these alliances, the nature tourism industry also sparked a contentious relationship with the lumber industry.

The Expansion of Nature Tourism:

Although William Pratt formally introduced luxury nature tourism to Muskoka in 1870, the industry did not proliferate until the 1880s. This was mostly due to Pratt’s monopoly of the industry. It was not until Pratt’s hotel, Rosseau House, was destroyed by a fire in the autumn of 1883 that other hotel companies and proprietors attempted to reconstruct what Pratt had first created. It was asserted by tourists and speculators that:

so great was the satisfaction of visitors with the amusements and the beauty of the environs of this part of the lake, that attention was almost wholly directed to it, and it was not until the withdrawal of the hotel accommodation having obliged visitors to seek other points of sojourn, that the world woke up to the knowledge that there were many other beautiful spots on the shores of the lakes.

---

469 “Pratt’s Tourist Hotel”, Murray, Muskoka and Haliburton, 1615-1875, 402.
When Rosseau House was not rebuilt, new luxury resorts began establishing themselves on the district’s shores. Older boarding houses also expanded their accommodations and services to better suit the influx of upper and upper middle class tourists. Juxtaposing the grandeur of their resorts with the surrounding wilderness, the nature resorts set out to offer modern comforts in the picturesque backwoods of Ontario. Accordingly, the character of these hotels, their amenities, and their adjacent lands had to be carefully controlled in order to ensure that visitors’ experiences matched their expectations and they “saw everything at the best advantage.”

The Department of Agriculture produced a guide for prospective tourists in 1886 titled, *The Northern Lakes of Canada, The Niagara River & Toronto, The Lakes of Muskoka, Lake Nipissing, Georgian Bay, Great Manitoulin Channel, Mackinac, Sault Ste. Marie, Lake Superior, A Guide to the Best Spots for Waterside Resorts – Hotels – Camping Outfit, Fishing and Shooting*. This particular guide displayed the transition from adventure tourism to nature tourism. While the booklet alludes to adventurers – “groups of eight and ten large tents and reverberating reports from guns [that] will salute the steamer as it passes by” – for the most part Muskoka is portrayed as a destination for upper class tourists who wished to enjoy the district’s vistas from a comfortable position. Depicting the southernmost summer resort in Muskoka on Tondern Island, the guide states:

Elevated well above the lake, and with broad continuous verandahs, the hotel is one of the most modern in this district. From the steamer it cannot be seen that in front of the west side is well cared for tennis grounds, or that the very freedom from surrounding obstruction affords unexampled island views extending all over the lake and

---

giving a pleasant outlook from every window, while the shady verandah and free access of the breeze give the coolness so much sought for…

The prospective tourist was also informed that “the bathing houses are on a nice sand beach near the hotel, and affording perfectly safe bathing for ladies and children.”

And, if rainy days should spoil the visitors’ plans, they could rest assured that “the bowling alleys and billiard rooms in a separate house, close by the hotel, will afford pleasant recreation.”

_The Northern Lakes of Canada_ depicted other tourist destinations in Muskoka. In Port Sandfield, there were “pleasant verandahs and shady groves covering the tops of rocky points, fifty and sixty feet above the level of the water, form[ing] pleasant lounging places.” In Port Cockburn, resorts boasted “a large room for concerts and dancing [that] ensure[d] plenty of amusement for the summer evenings.”

The tourism pamphlet _The Lake of Bays “Highlands of Ontario”: A Concise Description of One of the Most Attractive Resort Districts in Ontario, Canada_ outlined the well-appointed amenities available at the WaWa Hotel on the Lake of Bays. The narrative promised that “besides the numerous baths with hot and cold water that are found on each floor and which are for the use of guests free of charge, there are forty luxurious private baths in connection with bedrooms en suits, a feature very much appreciated by patrons.” Furthermore, guests could expect fine foods and fashionable dining services:

---

473 _Ibid._, 113.
474 _Ibid._
475 _Ibid._
476 _Ibid._, 134.
477 _Ibid._, 139.
The cuisine is under the supervision of an experienced chef, and it will
be the object of the management to see that the table service is
satisfactory to the most fastidious. A smaller dining room is connected
with the main dining room for the use of children and nurses or for
small evening gatherings or private parties.479

From the hotel facilities to the picturesque vistas, luxury hotel proprietors worked to
ensure that upper and upper-middle class tourists enjoyed the Muskoka landscape that
best displayed “nature’s most lavish handiwork.”480 As seen in the representations they
promoted, nature tourism providers limited Muskoka’s physical landscape to tree lined
shores, unobstructed views of the lake and surrounding vistas, recreational pursuits such
as canoeing, swimming and hiking, and the lavish resorts themselves. Abandoned farms,
logging camps, and evidence of existing Aboriginal settlement in the district were not
part of the regional identity promoted by the nature tourism industry.

In addition to the amenities and recreation offered on hotel grounds, rented
canoes and boat tours gave tourists the opportunity to explore and discover more of the
Muskoka landscape. Canoes and rowboats were available at most resorts to allow guests
to survey the immediate waters on their own. On Tondern Island, tourists were able to
rent a boat and travel around the course of the island “in a pleasant row of about three
miles.”481 For a fee, steamship rides allowed tourists to relax while being escorted around
the densely-treed waters edge of the Muskoka lakes, and past its waterfalls and pleasing
views.482 Also carrying incoming tourists on their way to their resorts, the steamship
allowed the passengers a panoramic view of the physical landscape of Muskoka – its

---

479 Ibid., 10.
480 Muskoka Lakes: Highlands of Ontario, The Finest Summer Resort Region in America (Muskoka:
Passenger Department, Grand Trunk Railway System, 1904), 3.
481 Cumberland, The northern Lakes of Canada, The Niagara River & Toronto, The Lakes of Muskoka,
113.
482 Water navigation companies declared they were improving their boat services, asserting that they were
“better prepared” to meet the needs of tourists. The Lake of Bays “Highlands of Ontario”: A Concise
Description of One of the Most Attractive Resort Districts in Ontario, Canada, 12.
Enraptured by the thought of being able to return to nature in such style, the Muskoka District’s popularity amongst upper and upper middle class tourists continued to grow. Due to the rapid increase in Muskoka’s attractiveness to tourists, luxury resorts were soon inundated with accommodation requests. Although hotels such as Windermere House and the Beaumaris Hotel quickly added extensions on to the original buildings, other hotels began offering tent colonies, primarily for young, single gentlemen. At Cleveland’s House, rows of “double-fly tents” were set up on wooden bases, offering cots and a few comforts for the guests. All meals were still had in the dining room, and guests staying in the tent colony still enjoyed the other services the hotel had to offer. As the hotel rooms were kept up to date, so too were the tents. Not wanting tent guests to view their accommodations as secondary to the finer hotel rooms, by 1913 the WaWa Hotel had secured electric lights and modern furnishing in each tent to ensure the comfort of all occupants. As discussed in Chapter Four, upper and upper-middle class tourists wanted all the alleged benefits of temporarily suspending their modern lives and returning to nature. However, they wanted to do so in comfort, and did not want to be susceptible to the perils generally associated with the wilderness and the frontier, such as wild animals, hazardous terrain, and savage residents.

Thus tourists visiting the luxury nature resorts of the Muskoka District came into contact with a carefully calculated and arranged landscape. While Muskoka’s townships

---

483 Picturesque Canada: The Country as it was and is, ed. G.M. Grant (Toronto: Blenden Bros., 1882), 615.
485 Ibid., 46.
486 Ibid., 46.
487 The Lake of Bays “Highlands of Ontario”: A Concise Description of One of the Most Attractive Resort Districts in Ontario, Canada, 12.
were depicted as having “an Old World air of comfort and beauty,” the luxury nature resorts offered upper and upper-middle class tourists more modern vacation destinations within “the most attractive of Ontario’s forest shrines.” This tourist point of view is reminiscent of the “monarch-of-all-I-survey” approach particularly popular amongst eighteenth-century European and British explorers. Mary Louise Pratt discusses this brand of discovery in her text *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. In Romantic and Victorian writing, imperial rhetoric was used to describe geographical findings to the home audience as “won.” Pratt argues that, while the discovery itself had no existence on its own, it had to be made real and brought to life after the traveller returned home. While the landscape was estheticized and redefined, a “relation of mastery [was also] predicated between the seer and the seen.” As the explorer created a verbal painting, “the landscape was intended to be viewed from where he has emerged upon it. Thus the scene is deictically ordered with reference to his vantage point, and is static.”

Tourists travelled to the Muskoka District already familiar with the travel narratives that had been assigned to the landscape. From these already won over static sites within Muskoka’s wilderness, tourists found a supposedly safe space from which they could enjoy the area’s restorative and recreational benefits, as discussed in Chapter Four. Tourists were able to take advantage of these attractions because of the elevated

---

488 Grant, *Picturesque Canada: The Country as it was and is*, 600, 620.
position their accommodations afforded them. Similarly to the promontory descriptions utilized in the “monarch-of-all-I-survey” viewpoint, hotel proprietors boasted that their properties were atop high cliffs, overlooking the surrounding water and land.\textsuperscript{492}

Verandahs also provided visitors with a platform on which they could sit and enjoy both the weather and their immediate surroundings. For visitors, the resort properties outlined the wilderness which had been mastered and the point from which they could take account of their surroundings and enjoy the benefits of the district.

The language of “monarch-of-all-I-survey” produced a picture in words that attributed particular esthetics and ideology to a landscape. Photography was also utilized to depict different physical discoveries, as photographs were thought to be “neutral

\textsuperscript{492} Ibid., 202.
sources untouched by human bias and representative of real people, things, or events.

Despite this supposition, photographs were produced within a confined setting to create certain “‘truths’ about persons and places.” In the second half of the nineteenth century photography was quickly being integrated into the growing national and international industries of print culture, and was often used to record rural and civic expansion.

Photography was also utilized in tourism literature, as well as by tourists who could afford to either hire a photographer or,  

5.2. Guests of Windermere House (Muskoka Lakes Museum, 188?).

---

493 Carol J. Williams, *Framing the West: Race, Gender, and the Photographic Frontier in the Pacific Northwest* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 9.
494 Ibid., 27.
495 Ibid., 8-9.
especially after the turn of the century, purchase their own camera. Figure 5.2, a photograph of Windermere House taken in the final decades of the nineteenth century, displays the hotel in the background, elevated above the rest of the property. The guests in this picture have gathered on a pathway leading down to the water, and the wilderness seems to be enclosing around the party. Windermere House appears to be overlooking the guests, offering a civilized base camp from which they can safely benefit from and take pleasure in the picturesque landscape. However, the luxury hotel both oversees the guests and provides a frame for the viewer, a potential visitor. As is evident in figure

5.3. Windermere House (Muskoka Lakes Museum, 1909)

---

497 In his Muskoka guide, manufactured for the Department of Agriculture, Captain Mac states, “The scene is every changing, peaceful and dreamy, and the true lover of nature can assuredly on these waters and among these lands find health and repose.” Captain Mac, The Muskoka Lakes and the Georgian Bay:
5.3, a picture of Windermere House taken from the water, the hotel did not face a dense and wild forest and was directly on Lake Rosseau. The first picture of Windermere was carefully arranged so as to give the impression that the tourists were in the thick of it. However, from the second image it becomes obvious that, although they had access to the “uncivilized” woods, the nature tourists’ viewpoint was steered out over the immediate landscaped property and shorefronts.

Muskoka’s nature resorts attempted to frame and direct the gaze of tourists. Out of sight and a distance from the towns, logging camps, and abandoned farms, the hotels were generally lakeside, with views of the water and densely treed shores. Being a controlled landscape, it was one unlike the landscape to which settlers, Aboriginals and lumbermen were accustomed. As seen in the discussion of Edward Roper’s drawings in Chapter Four, the manicured resorts and surrounding properties were separate from the wilderness in the distance. Moreover, as outlined in Chapter Three, unlike many settlers’ plots, which were far from the shore and seemingly in the thick of the forest “with hardly any perceptible outlet,” tourists enjoyed open, lakeside views, forest rambles along cleared pathways, and recreational rowboat rides.499 Where certain dimensions of the topography and transportation associated with the tourists’ landscape offered visitors amusements and pleasure, the same features, when associated with the inhabitants’ landscape, presented adversity and hard work.

---

498 Portraying the Fishing and Hunting Grounds, Islands and Summer Resorts with some views and descriptions (Ottawa: McAdam, 1884), 21.
499 “The tourist gaze is directed to features of landscape and townscape which separate them off from everyday experience.” Urry, The Tourist Gaze, 3.
499 “Dense forest circling us all round, with hardly any perceptible outlet gave me a dreadful feeling of suffocation.” Emigrant Lady, Letters from Muskoka (London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1878), 33. The landscape is discussed at greater length in Chapter three, in the section titled “The Unforgiving Landscape.”
Steamships offered tourists both a means of transport and a pleasurable boat ride along Muskoka’s main lakes. At the wharf, the bustle of both cargo and passengers making their way onto the steamship would have been an exciting experience, especially for first time visitors. The steamship ride itself would have provided panoramic views for the passengers and a relaxing way to reach their destination. Also, being summertime, the weather would have generally been agreeable to travel on the water. For the district’s settlers, navigating the lakes would have been a potentially arduous task. As many presumably could not afford to take the steamship while running errands, smaller crafts such as rowboats and canoes were often used. Travel across the lakes was attempted throughout all seasons, in unfavourable weather conditions, and sometimes after dark. Muskoka’s *The Weekly Time* reported in early December 1903 that, after picking up supplies for the winter in Bracebridge, an inhabitant and his “heavily laden” boat had “sank with all hands” on their journey home.⁵⁰⁰ Although travelling by boat often provided a more direct route for settlers and allowed them to avoid poor roadway conditions, it was not without its hazards.

Muskoka’s forests also held different implications for tourists and local residents. Although the densely treed lakefront provided a pleasurable sight for tourists aboard steamships or walking along the shores of their resort, for settlers the trees which covered the district were an imposition on their task at hand: to develop Muskoka as an agricultural district. As clearing trees by axe could be time consuming for even the skilled settler, many instead chose “to let fire run through a bush, to save the toil of

---

Nevertheless, if the settler was not careful, such a fire could consume their homestead and barn. Again, while the seeming remoteness of the district appealed to tourists looking to escape crowded city life, for the lumbermen and settlers who lived there year-round it could denote loneliness, as well as a removal from vital goods and services, such as medical aid. When Issac Langford took to his bed in pain on the March 8, 1873, “friends sought for help, but all in vain. No physicians gave him ease until the 20th of March, when his pain ceased.” The physical landscape brought about many hardships for the district’s inhabitants. However, by being confined to the nature tourism industry’s prescribed view of Muskoka, tourists elevated themselves above the region’s topographical realities and experienced a limited Muskoka landscape.

In addition to encountering a separate, elevated landscape, upper and upper-middle class tourists experienced Muskoka from a socially elevated position. Guests at the luxury nature resorts enjoyed amenities and accommodations not available to the Aboriginal, settler, and lumber populations of the district. The resorts also attempted to reinforce social hierarchies. As discussed in Chapter Four, urban life no longer provided the societal divisions to which the upper and upper-middle classes were accustomed. In the city, “it was impossible to tell from surface impressions who was legitimate and who was not, especially if the circumstances of acquaintanceship were fleeting.” In a destination such as Muskoka tourists believed they were only associating with others

---

501 Grant, Picturesque Canada: The Country as it was and is, 615.
502 Articles in the Muskoka Herald reported on fires in the district. One article mentions a new clearing on a settler’s property, but that his home was consumed by fire. “Fire – On Friday Afternoon…” August 5, 1880, The Muskoka Herald. [Muskoka], Box 7, Thomas Fisher Rare Books Library, the University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario.
503 “Chapter of Accidents,” Bracebridge, March 27th, 1873. [Muskoka], Box 1, Folder 6. Thomas Fisher Rare Books Library, the University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario.
504 Keith Walden, Becoming Modern in Toronto: The Industrial Exhibition and the Shaping of a Late Victorian Culture (Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 1997), 118.
from similar social backgrounds. Nevertheless, although the remoteness and cost of vacationing at one of Muskoka’s luxury resorts kept members of the urban working-class from staying as paying guests, it is easy to imagine local inhabitants sneaking on to hotel properties. In the documentary *Life on the Edge: Stories from Muskoka’s Past* a Muskoka resident recalls sneaking into a Muskoka luxury resort as a young boy. Although this instance is outside of the timeline being studied in this paper, this account supports the notion that Muskoka residents had the opportunity to sneak into the luxury resorts. Whether to take advantage of the amenities or to consort and swim with similarly aged guests, locals could have easily blended in. As discussed in Chapter Four, the upper and middle class guests were encouraged to dress down while vacationing in Muskoka. Although the nature tourists believed they were in like company, there was no guarantee they could always tell who their fellow guests were.

In order to ensure that tourists experienced the promised restorative and recreational benefits of the district, the nature resorts attempted to restrict visitors’ gazes so that only a carefully arranged landscape and populace would be available. However, Muskoka’s nature tourism industry was ultimately able to successfully attract upper and upper-middle class tourists because the viewpoint promoted did not merely direct the gaze of the urban elite: it also reflected their desires.

**Transportation and the Tourism Industry:**

At the start of nature tourism, transportation companies were ready to service the tourists who sought out the remote nature resorts of the Muskoka District. As discussed

---

in Chapter Four, the railway line reached Gravenhurst in September 1875, and two months later was extended to the Muskoka Bay, where the Muskoka Wharf Station was erected. A.P. Cockburn’s steamships could then carry travelers to local wharfs on Lakes Muskoka, Rosseau, and Joseph. In 1885, the railway line was developed farther north, with a stop at Bracebridge, in an effort to connect the line with the Canadian Pacific Railway. However, in addition to expanding farther north and being able to accommodate more passengers as well as destinations, the railway also began forging arrangements with hotel companies as well as individual hotel proprietors.

On January 20th, 1900, the Grand Trunk Railway Company of Canada signed an agreement with the Ontario Summer Hotels Company. The accord was regarding the construction of hotels in the Muskoka District. The Hotels Company vowed to “construct, furnish and equip, and conduct hotels in the Muskoka District, the sites, plans and specifications of which are to be approved by the Grand Trunk, such hotels being designed to attract tourists and visitors to the Lakes of the Muskoka District.” In return, as the Grand Trunk was “already enjoying a profitable business in the transportation of passengers and goods to and from said district,” it would promote “the said undertaking of the Hotels Company.” Under the agreement, both the manager of the Hotels Company and the manager of the Grand Trunk had to both approve the hotel projects designed by the Hotel Company for the Muskoka District. To support the Hotels Company, the Grand Trunk declared:

---

506 Richard Tatley, “Getting There is Half the Fun! Transportation In and Around Muskoka,” *Summertimes: In Celebration of 100 years of the Muskoka Lakes Association* (Toronto: Boston Mills Press, 1994), 149.
The Railway Company will carry free of charge, but at owner’s risk, to Gravenhurst Wharf from points on its system of railways, all materials, plant, furniture, and things to be used in the construction, furnishing, and equipment of said hotels, and all persons employed in and about such construction furnishing, and equipment it will carry to Gravenhurst Wharf and return from and to points on its System of railways, at the rate of single fare for the round trip.

The Hotel Company asserted that their hotels and business would be “maintained and carried on in a first class manner.” If a hotel within the Company ever wished to close any earlier than the tenth of September each season, they had to attain written consent from the general manager. In the event of any damage to the buildings or grounds, the Hotels Company was bound to “rebuild, restore, and re-furnish” so the property at least equaled its original state. As with the construction of the hotels, the railway would carry all material and men necessary to reconstruct damaged hotels. In addition to further stipulations, such as the repercussions if a hotel property did not meet the Grand Trunk’s standards, the agreement also declared that the latter would pay an annual allowance to the Hotels Company until the business had been operating for ten years. The stipend was a percentage of the actual cost of the property, including “all structure and things incident to first class hotel property…and all actual expenses and charges connected with the undertaking actually expended, or which may have been incurred up to the time of the opening of the hotels for the reception of guests.”

Each year, the Hotels Company would prepare statements for the Grand Trunk, on behalf of each hotel under their jurisdiction, outlining all expenses. Agreements such as this revealed that the interests of Muskoka’s nature resorts and the railway line leading to the district became more entwined as the nature tourism industry developed.

Ibid.
It appears that measures were also taken by other railway companies, such as the Canadian Pacific Railway, to ensure that the construction of railway lines would not interfere with the summer tourism season in Muskoka. The noise and commotion created when using explosives to break through the Canadian Shield was a disruptive force that settlers were forced to live through during the districts off season. “The Weekly Times” asserted on December 14th 1905 that, for the residences of Bala Falls, “lessons in deportment under nerve-racking explosions are part of the hourly experience in this rockriven city, and betime the C.P.R. get through, every man, woman and child will be able to stand a siege without so much as winking.” Since the C.P.R. wanted most of its work to be completed by the time tourists began booking their train tickets north to the Muskoka District, construction work on the railway line was presumably undertaken when tourists were less likely to be visiting during the fall, winter, and spring.

Tourism literature on the resorts in the Muskoka Lakes District was frequently written and published by the Passenger Department at the Grand Trunk Railway System. The train ride from Toronto was often described as part of the Muskoka experience. In the 1904 pamphlet Muskoka Lakes: Highlands of Ontario, the trip is described as “a most interesting one.” The Grand Trunk Railway System elaborates, stating:

Taking the traveler through a continuous scene of hill and dale, diversified with beautiful lakes and rivers and until the more rugged portion of the country is reached, the prosperous farmer is much in evidence, judging by the well-tilled fields and pretentious buildings on every site.

---

511 Ibid.
The train ride is similarly depicted in many tourism narratives. Although not published through the Grand Trunk Railway System, G.M. Grant’s *Picturesque Canada* asserts that the tourist would find views “that almost instantly open up in fine panoramic effect before him.” Supporting the nature tourism industry, the railway company encouraged tourists to visit the Muskoka District, declaring that the vacation would begin as soon as the train departed from the station. From their window in the passenger car, tourists would see the landscape shift from urban sprawl, to a rural landscape, and finally to the picturesque wilderness. Although the manner in which nature tourism misrepresented settlers will be discussed later on in this chapter, this example reveals one way in which the regional identity of the district was altered by nature tourism providers to attract visitors. In the narrative, the farming land is described as being before “the more rugged portion of the country is reached.” The Grand Trunk Railway describes the land south of Muskoka, or perhaps only its most southern edge, as the agricultural district in the area. Muskoka itself is portrayed as being rugged, and separate from the farm lands between itself and Toronto. As discussed in Chapters Two and Three, the rugged and rocky Muskoka District was opened up for agricultural development soon after the government signed the Robinson Treaty and began surveying the district. The pamphlet thus is misleading, as the Grand Trunk Railway System ignores the settlers’ agricultural history in the district, and instead relies upon the geographical landscape established by the nature tourism industry.

The railway forged an important relationship with the tourism industry. While the steamships run by the Muskoka Navigation Company provided a local means of

---

512 Grant, *Picturesque Canada: The Country as it was and is*, 608.
transportation and were able to initiate customized routes in order to better service tourists and the district’s hotels, the railway was able to provide wider support. While the company’s promotional literature reached potential tourists nationwide as well as internationally, the railway’s expanding line and attentive construction schedule kept the interests of tourists and hotel proprietors in mind.

Muskoka Inhabitants and the Tourism Industry:

If either settlers or Aboriginals were mentioned in the nature tourism’s Muskoka landscape, they were both mythicized. Accounts of these Muskoka inhabitants were for the most part historical, and depicted the two groups as no longer active, or as active, in the district. As the nature tourism industry began to gain momentum in the Muskoka district, both the area’s Aboriginal and settler populations became increasingly misrepresented in the district’s popularized regional identity.

G.M. Grant’s travel narrative *Picturesque Canada* acknowledges the hardships that challenged many early settlers. Grant comments that “it is only honest to say, that the Free Grant Territory is a wild region; but, though, hitherto the abodes of solitude, the several districts are rapidly being brought within reach of civilization, and here and there under a fair measure of cultivation”. 514 Although Grant recognizes the struggles many newcomers had to face alone, he does not mention the countless settlers who were forced to either abandon their land or their agricultural pursuits. 515 Neither does he acknowledge the settlers who continued to toil just to produce enough to subsist on. According to Grant, though agriculture was once a difficult undertaking in Muskoka, it no longer

---

514 Grant, *Picturesque Canada: The Country as it was and is*, 603-604.
515 As discussed in Chapter three, under the section titled “The Realities of Settlement Life in Muskoka.”
posed any difficulties: “the truth about Muskoka is not now a matter of doubt: it has had its day of small things, and the settler his hour of trial”\textsuperscript{516} As seen in Chapter Three, the settlers’ efforts and pains were publicly downplayed as well as denied by various mediums. As the geographical and social landscape settlers had to contend with was not adequately depicted in immigration pamphlets, so too was it misrepresented within the nature tourism narrative.

Depictions of Muskoka’s Native population also adhered to mythological imagery. In Grant’s account, Aboriginals were recalled not for the assistance they provided settlers or for their involvement in tourism, but as “the wayward child of the woods… fierce in tattoo and war-paint”.\textsuperscript{517} In Grant’s narrative, “the settler has had longer to subdue Nature, not the savage.”\textsuperscript{518} Briefly retelling the story of the “decimation of the Huron,” Grant states, “the story is one of the long past, and having recalled it, we may recur to the present.”\textsuperscript{519} Visual representations of the “Indian warrior” and other Native stereotypes were evident in other promotional materials. In the 1904 brochure \textit{Muskoka Lakes: Highlands of Ontario}, the cover of the pamphlet depicts a young woman standing atop a cliff with a pair of binoculars in her hands, looking out over the water. Below her a grand hotel is clearly visible, as is a steamship, and a dock with several canoes and canoeists awaiting their journey on the placid lakes of Muskoka.\textsuperscript{520} Above the young woman, in the clouds, is the figure of a Native in traditional dress; with a bow in his hands, arrows on his back, and what appears to be the top of a tee-pee just behind

\textsuperscript{516} Grant, \textit{Picturesque Canada: The Country as it was and is}, 604.
\textsuperscript{517} \textit{Ibid.}, 591.
\textsuperscript{518} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{519} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{520} \textit{Muskoka Lakes: Highlands of Ontario, The Finest Summer Resort Region in America} (Muskoka: Passenger Department, Grand Trunk Railway System, 1904).
him, the Aboriginal man is looking forward with his head held high. Both *Picturesque Canada* and *Muskoka Lakes* make use of Native stereotypes that, as Chapter Three has discussed, were widely held during the second half of the nineteenth century. Where Grant utilizes the idea of the “disappearing Indian,” *Muskoka Lakes* employs imagery of the “noble savage.”

At nature resorts, for the most part, Native people were also associated with the past, and at times remembered for their roles as hunters. After Pratt’s Rosseau House burnt down, John Monteith’s Monteith House became a popular tourism destination. Monteith created “the Indian Room” to display both the Monteith family’s hunting prowess, as well as various Aboriginal objects they had collected. Included in the room were “relics” such as a teepee, tomahawk, and traditional dress. Ignoring the active role Aboriginals played in surveying and settling the district, as well as their participation in the tourism industry, nature tourism depicted Natives as a mythical population whose presence and influence, as discussed in Chapter Four, had long been restricted to the region’s Aboriginal name.

However, rather than opposing nature tourism, Muskoka inhabitants, both Native and settlers, recognized the economic opportunities the industry could provide. Many settlers abandoned their farming pursuits and began expanding their homesteads to accommodate the influx of tourists. For example, settlers such as Charles James Minett and his wife Fanny, Edward Prouse, Thomas Aitken, and David Fife began expanding their own homesteads, first into boarding houses, and then into properties that offered

---

521 Described in Chapter 3, under the section titled “The Settler Population”
comfortable accommodations, unobstructed views, and recreational facilities. In addition to becoming hotel proprietors, Muskoka’s settlers found other ways to take part in the quickly growing tourism industry.

As adventurers and tourists entered into Muskoka, a market for both canned goods as well as fresh produce began to grow. *Muskoka Through a Camera: An Album of the Muskoka Lakes*, edited and published by Frederick Smily, describes the “floating stores” that began operating on the Muskoka lakes. The Constance, operated by Messrs. Homer & Co., of Gravenhurst and Rosseau, made daily trips through Lakes Joseph and Rosseau, “calling at all cottages and hotels when required, delivering goods and taking order for the next days supply.” Residents and hotel proprietors either flagged down the boat, or scheduled which days and at what hours the boat would stop by each week. Aboard, customers could find:

[All] the leading brands of canned goods, pickles, sauces, etc., besides fine grades of sugar, teas, coffees, condiments, candies, and standard makes of confectionery. A special feature is made of fresh meats, prime beef, and the noted “Muskoka lamb and mutton,” besides salt meats. Fresh fruits and vegetables in season are supplied. Coal oil, hardware, crockery, dry goods, flour and feed, boots and shoes, stoves, tinware—everything, in fact, including the best brands of cigars, tobacco, cigarettes, etc., etc., is carried on this boat.

As Smily’s pamphlet was published in 1899, the railway was already bringing supplies all the way up to Bracebridge, and there was hardly a canned good or luxury item that could not be found in the Muskoka District. Amidst the imported wares and stock, the

---

525 *Muskoka Through a Camera: An Album of the Muskoka Lakes*, devoted to a description of the unrivalled beauties of this region, hotel accommodations, railway and steamboat service, fishing, hunting, etc., containing list of hotels, boarding houses, map of the lakes and view of hotels and scenery. Ed. Frederick Smily (Muskoka: F. Smily, 1899).
Constance offered “Muskoka lamb and mutton” and “fruits and vegetables in season.”

In using meat and produce raised locally, Messrs. Homer & co., themselves a local company, supported neighbouring businesses and helped stimulate the local economy.

Both settlers and Aboriginals took advantage of the various types of jobs brought about by tourism. Aboriginals were hired to build the hotels and wharfs at larger luxury resorts, and to help landscape the property. Working as a guide was also a viable form of employment for both Aboriginals and settlers. Discussed earlier in Chapter Four, Thomas Robinson, an English settler who resided on the Muskoka Bay, acted as a guide for James Bain and John Campbell. Robinson became well-known as a Muskoka tour guide who also offered provisions and board, as well as recommended fishing and camping sites. Robinson also promoted the “regular hire of the Indians” to act as guides for tourists. As inhabitants of the wilderness, both Aboriginals and settlers could provide a sense of authenticity to the nature tourism industry’s representations of the district. As Tina Loo argues in her article “Making a Modern Wilderness: Conserving Wildlife in Twentieth-Century Canada,” in the early twentieth century “tramping around in the woods ‘getting aboriginal,’ as one enthusiast put it, were all the rage, just the thing for the growing numbers of enervated brainworkers populating Canada’s cities.” The Globe’s account of the Muskoka District titled ‘Up the Muskoka and Down the Trent,” describes the journalists’ escort as “a well known Indian guide name[d] Charles Jacob,” who accompanied the party in a canoe. Tourist pamphlets printed the rates for guides,

526 Ibid.
527 Zach Melnick, Life on the Edge: Stories from Muskoka’s Past. Presumably, settlers were also hired to help with construction.
528 "Thomas M. Robinson to James Bain," Murray, Muskoka and Haliburton, 1615-1875, 389.
530 “Up the Muskoka and Down the Trent,” Murray, Muskoka and Haliburton, 1615-1875, 394.
which by 1900 were anywhere from $1.00 to $1.50 per day, plus board.\textsuperscript{531} Guides were divided by regions within Muskoka, with towns and villages such as Bracebridge, Bala, Port Carling, Port Cockburn, and Rosseau advertising their own guides.\textsuperscript{532} As Native guides may have used their English names, as in the case of Charles Jacob, it is not possible to judge from the lists of guides in the pamphlets who were white settlers and who were Aboriginals. Not surprisingly, due to their familiarity with the region, these two factions dominated the guide industry in the Muskoka district.

In addition to their role in building nature resorts and acting as guides for the guests of the hotels, trade was also an important source of income for Aboriginals. Across British North America, “with the disappearance of land and game, commodity productions tied to the expanding tourist trade had become essential to many local economies.”\textsuperscript{533} The commodities made for struggling settlers and surveyors were predominately “utilitarian wares.”\textsuperscript{534} Aboriginals traded and sold both supplies vital to the newcomers’ survival as well as several souvenirs. Bain, Campbell and their company often “bargained for items sold by the [native] children,” as did surveyor V.B. Wadsworth.\textsuperscript{535}

Early settlers, such as Thomas Robinson, mentioned visiting the Native

\textsuperscript{531} Smily, Muskoka Through a Camera: An Album of the Muskoka Lake.
\textsuperscript{532} Ibid. However, the Ojibwa were no strangers to staging performances of “Indianness” for settlers and colonial officials. Ian Radforth discusses the Native public performances conducted during the 1860 Prince of Whales tour in his book \textit{Royal Spectacle: The 1860 Visit of the Prince of Wales to Canada and the United States}. The ceremonies emphasized stereotypical conventions and racial constructs, “thus underscoring the formidable obstacles to the successful assertion of Native rights.” Ian Radforth, \textit{Royal Spectacle: The 1860 Visit of the Prince of Wales to Canada and the United States} (Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 2004), 207.
\textsuperscript{534} Ibid.
settlement to trade for food items. However, the souvenirs tourists bought from Aboriginals would have been “art commodities,” such as decorative clothing and accessories, and ceremonial items and representations. In the July 6 1905 issue of “The Weekly Times” the paper reported: “Indian Joe has added to his menageries a photo of himself and squaw, decked out in tomahawk and feathers as a chief of Iroquois, copies of which may be had at the wigwam near the Owlery.” In North America, in order to ensure the marketability of their art commodities, Aboriginals had to convey concepts of “Indianness” and difference that would be recognizable by the tourists.

Unlike the districts’ other main industries, lumber and agriculture, the tourism industry offered Muskoka’s Aboriginals and settlers the opportunity to attain an income and turn around the district’s uncertain economy into the twentieth century. Although lumbering provided employment opportunities throughout the year, after the nineteenth century closed the lumber industry began to decline. While we do not know if Aboriginals and settlers were aware of the misrepresentations of the area, the expansion of nature tourism was an opportunity to attain a steady seasonal income and remain in the district. As agriculture continued to fail in all but a few locations, inhabitants from Muskoka and the district’s neighbouring regions found work in the nature tourism industry.

Logging and the Tourism Industry:

As the nature tourism industry forged arrangements with transportation industries and Muskoka’s Aboriginals and settlers it developed a contentious relationship with the logging industry. Even though Muskoka’s lumber barons provided a ready supply of timber that was easily accessible to the hotel companies and proprietors looking to build their resorts, the very purpose of the lumber industry was contrary to the regional identity that the nature tourism industry fought to maintain.

As both industries developed over the second half of the nineteenth century, there was an “increasing friction between the lumber trade and tourism industry.”\textsuperscript{540} Although

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{log_jam_on_muskoka_river}
\caption{A log jam on the Muskoka River (Log jam on the Muskoka River, [1914], C 7-3, Archives of Ontario)}
\end{figure}

the district’s lumber companies were often dependent on the Navigation Company tugs to keep their logs moving to the mills,

\textsuperscript{540} Denison, *Micklewaithe’s Muskoka*, 38.
difficulties arose in confined waters, such as the Gravenhurst Narrows and Muskoka Bay which might be entirely clogged up with timber rafts, or the Muskoka and Indian Rivers, where the river-drivers usually let their logs loose to drift downstream, to be bagged together with booms on the open lakes.\textsuperscript{541}

As reported on July 9\textsuperscript{th}, 1904 in the \textit{Toronto Daily Star}, “that the season is yet young is seen in the fact that Muskoka’s streams are yet clogged with the results of last winter’s work in the bush. Thousands of logs – a century of nature’s labor – block the way of the canoe, or come dashing down the rapids.”\textsuperscript{542} The Bracebridge Gazette revealed a similar sentiment, declaring: “let it be known to all owners of crafts plying in Muskoka waters that the log nuisance – the most outrageous nuisance the Town of Bracebridge endures – is over for another season.”\textsuperscript{543} The logs floating downstream would have been an irritant to any inhabitant attempting to traverse the lakes and rivers of the Muskoka district by boat. However, for the tourism industry, the logs not only obstructed the steamships, at times even breaking the boats’ propellers, but they were also visual confirmation that Muskoka was no longer an “untouched” wilderness.\textsuperscript{544}

The lumber industry destroyed what the nature tourism industry sought to preserve. The tree line and the alleged restorative benefits of the greenery and vegetation was a large part of the picturesque scenery Muskoka’s tourism industry promoted. If the lumber baron’s cut down all of Muskoka’s forests, it could no longer be endorsed as a frontier with “romantic grandeur… with its all but countless islands and its rocky and wooded shores,” an identity it had maintained since the district was first opened by the

\textsuperscript{542} \textit{Toronto Daily Star}, July 9\textsuperscript{th}, 1904, in Denison, \textit{Micklewaithe’s Muskoka}, 38.
\textsuperscript{543} \textit{Bracebridge Gazette}, July 30\textsuperscript{th}, 1908, in Denison, \textit{Micklewaithe’s Muskoka}, 38.
\textsuperscript{544} Zach Melnick, \textit{Life on the Edge: Stories from Muskoka’s Past}. 
government for non-Native settlement. However, the lumber industry in Muskoka expanded at such a rapid pace, that by 1910 nearly all of the white pine in the district had been cleared. In 1911 the region’s output for lumber was only $367,533, where ten years earlier it mounted to approximately $1,591,696. The lumber trade peaked in Muskoka between 1883 and 1890, although the industry continued to be an annoyance to the tourism industry in to the twentieth century, from the 1900s onward lumbering declined in the Muskoka District.

This examination of logging in the Muskoka District is brief. Although lumbering is discussed earlier, in Chapter Three, further examinations of the lumber industry in North America can be found elsewhere, such as in Ian Radforth’s *Bushworkers and Bosses: Logging in Northern Ontario, 1900-1980*. A thorough examination of lumbering in both Muskoka and Ontario would be an extensive study, much larger than the limits of this paper. Nevertheless, an analysis of the lumber industry in relation to Muskoka’s tourism industry is helpful when trying to understand how the representations of Muskoka’s regional identity were contrary to realities of the district.

**Conclusion:**

As Muskoka became an increasingly more popular tourist destination, vacationers began purchasing lakeside properties and building their own summer retreats. Where before the district’s temporary inhabitants were only tourists on vacation, now many had seasonal residences and wanted to play a greater role in determining how to protect their

---

547 Ibid.
548 Ibid., 86.
own interests within the district. Established in 1894, the Muskoka Lakes Association’s objective was to “unite together all those interested in the three Lakes, Muskoka, Rosseau, Joseph, and their vicinities, for the purpose of protecting owners, cottagers and tourists, and encouraging amateur aquatic and other sports.” As Muskoka’s landscape as a tourist destination became part of the public’s general understanding of the district, nature tourism’s own history began to blur. The industry’s own narrative was rewritten to depict the district as a wilderness that organically evolved into the recreational frontier enjoyed by tourists today.

549 Muskoka Lakes Association Yearbook, ed. J.D. McMurrich (Toronto: Oxford Press, 1889), 10
CONCLUSION

By the first quarter of the twentieth century Muskoka was promoted to the public by the government and tourist industry as “the finest summer resort region in America.”\textsuperscript{550} Presenting “nature’s most lavish handiwork”, the district attracted tourists looking to enjoy the restorative and recreational benefits of the Muskoka Lakes.\textsuperscript{551} However, by the end of the nineteenth century, wealthy travelers were purchasing lakeside properties and building summer vacation homes. Suddenly, Muskoka’s shores began to transform: there appeared “peaceful country homes, cozy island cottages or villas of the affluent” alongside the “modest hotels or popular resorts where the fashionable and wealthy congregate[ed].”\textsuperscript{552} As Muskoka attracted more seasonal residents, both as landowners and long-standing visitors taking up residence at a luxury hotel, Muskoka’s regional identity was again reconstructed.

Muskoka’s seasonal residents began to take a greater interest in maintaining the district’s natural beauty and opportunities for relaxation and recuperation. These concerns are clearly demonstrated in the formation and mandate of the Muskoka Lakes Association. Formed in 1894, seasonal property owners and veteran Muskoka tourists united to protect their assumed stake in the district. The association upheld the constructed nature-tourism landscape that first attracted its members to the district. Organizing an annual regatta, the Muskoka Lakes Association worked to promote and protect the recreational and healing qualities that first popularized the Muskoka

\textsuperscript{550} Muskoka Lakes: “Highlands of Ontario” (Toronto: Passenger Department, Grand Trunk Railway System, 1904), 1.
\textsuperscript{551} Ibid., 3.
\textsuperscript{552} Ibid.
wilderness resorts. In 1899, out of the organization’s one hundred and ninety nine members, barely ten percent were permanent residents of the Muskoka region. Membership to the Muskoka Lakes Association was granted “upon his or her application being passed by the Executive Committee, and upon payment of the annual fee.” Association by-laws stated that “ordinary members” were required to pay one dollar annually, where “ladies and boys of seventeen years and under [could] become special members on payment of an annual fee of 50 cents.” Although women were welcome to apply for membership, the gendered confines of the organization kept them from promoting or protesting any agenda item that might have specifically benefited women. While their membership permitted them free entry into all of the Muskoka Lakes Association events, they had “no vote at meetings.” The social networks that brought the Association’s members together, not to mention membership fees and the application process, would have kept the district’s Aboriginal and settler populations from becoming members of the association. Consequently, their concerns did not form part of the Association’s early discussions. In the formative years of the Muskoka Lakes Association, the Association’s mandate did not reflect the desires or needs of the settlers and Aboriginals living in the region, despite their involvement in promoting nature-tourism or their history in Muskoka.

As tourists and seasonal residents began to lay greater claim to Muskoka, the district’s regional identity once more began to take new shape. While the geographical landscape constructed by nature-tourism remained, the social landscape was re-

554 Ibid., 20.
555 Ibid., 21.
556 Ibid., 24.
established to ensure the survival of the tourism industry and accommodate the desires of Muskoka’s new landowners, the seasonal cottagers. Muskoka continued to be promoted as “the finest playground and the best resting place on the continent of America… [where] people of good taste like to gaze upon the beauties of nature.” However, now the district’s hotels were associated with “the typical Muskoka summer hotel man [who] grew into his business.”

In September 1905, an article in Muskoka’s *The Weekly Times* described this quintessential local entrepreneur: “twenty years or so ago he took a few boarders into his private house. The houses grew and the number of boarders grew in some cases to a hundred or more. The knowledge and business capacity of the landlord and landlady also grew.” While this narrative reflects the history of several Muskoka resorts, such as Windermere House and Cleveland’s House, it is not an adequate representation of the origins of many of the district’s hotels. Presenting Muskoka’s growth into a popular tourist destination as seamless and organic, the account fails to recognize the agricultural trials settlers faced, and that taking in boarders was a secondary venture many undertook as a supplementary income to their farming. Moreover, this new narrative overlooked the hotel companies, such as the Ontario Hotels Company, that were investing large sums of money into building and maintaining luxury resorts in the Muskoka District. It also ignored the nature-tourism industry’s founder, William H. Pratt, a wealthy American entrepreneur who built the district’s first luxury resort. In the first quarter of the twentieth

---

558 *Ibid*.
559 *Ibid*.
century, the district’s history was reshaped in order to better classify Muskoka in itself as an authentic site for nature tourism.

Muskoka’s regional identity was in part reconstructed using memories of Muskoka.\(^{560}\) Throughout the second half of the nineteenth and into the twentieth century, the representations of Muskoka’s social and geographical landscape were historically shaped and conditioned by prevailing cultural norms. Nevertheless, the regional identity produced during the first quarter of the twentieth century appropriated the histories of not only Muskoka inhabitants, such as the settlers and Aboriginals, but also of the tourism industry itself.

The district was depicted as a site that would always afford visitors a restorative and recreational nature retreat as long as it was properly maintained. If mismanaged, the district would be “considered ‘spoiled’ by tourism,” and risk damaging its natural allure.\(^{561}\) Presumably, seasonal residents wanted to ensure that the tourism industry which first attracted them to the area would not become over-saturated, as happened to neighbouring attractions such as the Niagara Falls. By the 1880s, the commercialization

\(^{560}\) Colin M. Coates and Cecilia Morgan discuss Canadian memories and historical memory in their text \textit{Heroine and History: Representations of Madeleine de Verchères and Laura Secord}. Examining the theories of French historian Pierre Nora and British historian Raphael Samuel, Coates and Morgan conclude that the differences that distinguish ‘memory’ and ‘history’ are not straightforward. Coates and Morgan establish that the distinctions between ‘memory’ and ‘history’ are dynamic and never definite; ‘history’ does not operate as a “default function” of ‘memory.’ Stories such as those examined by Coates and Morgan on Madeleine de Verchères and Laura Secord, when analysed historically, can be observed as being “historically conditioned.” With their discussion of ‘memory’ and ‘history’ Coates and Morgan also analyse how, through colonial contexts, Canada’s historical memories have been shaped by the histories of Britain and France. Such contexts have meant that some peoples’ histories and memories, such as First Nations, have been overlooked or appropriated, “relegated to the realm of memory, fantasy, and desire.” Coates and Morgan also outline historian John Gillis’ argument that, similarly to other mental and physical efforts, “memory work” is “embedded in complex class, gender and power relations that determine what is remembered (or forgotten), by whom, and for what end.” Colin M. Coates and Cecilia Morgan, \textit{Heroine and History: Representations of Madeleine de Verchères and Laura Secord} (Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 2002), 4-8.

of Niagara Falls was looked upon by many with contempt and the tourist industry was blamed for the “desecration of Niagara.” The frenzy of commercial activity at the falls was depicted as a vision “of tawdry shows, extortionate hacksmen and tradespeople.”

It is possible that, given Muskoka’s close proximity to the Niagara Falls, Muskoka’s tourism promoters would have kept Niagara in mind when promoting the district. Moreover, most tourists would have likely been familiar with Niagara Falls and the tourism circus that surrounded the area. Accordingly, the representations used by the nature tourism industry promoted Muskoka as “the Grandest Spot in all America,” where “amid miles of inland lakes are thousands of picturesque islands…” The district’s resorts and hotels were depicted as being amidst nature without disturbing or ruining it.

However, if the district was naturally a site for nature tourism, then the emerging cottage community was similarly inborn if it was presumed to protect the same recreational and restorative values. In purchasing property and establishing a sense of permanence in the district, cottagers were securing the Muskoka landscape for future generations. Visiting the family cottage was not merely about experiencing a shared Muskoka aesthetic; it involved remembering past Muskoka experiences and ensuring such experiences for future generations. No longer simply a summer getaway, the Muskoka experience involved tradition and family heritage, in addition to its then standardized recreational and restorative features.

---


Muskoka has remained Ontario’s “cottage country” throughout the twentieth and into the twenty-first century. Although it is still upheld for its picturesque views and outdoor recreation, there has been a growing interest in the district’s settler and Aboriginal history. The Muskoka Lakes Museum, located in Port Carling, was opened in July 1967. The Museum houses seasonal and permanent exhibits, as well as offers educational workshops and programs that examine the area’s heritage. In addition to exploring Aboriginal, tourism, and settlement life, the Museum also examines the history of “cottaging” in Muskoka. The Muskoka Heritage Place, located in Huntsville, offers visitors a museum exhibit and tours of an outdoor historical site. Both present settlement life in Muskoka at the end of the nineteenth century. Fueled by local historians and heritage sites, Muskoka is increasingly being remembered not only as a longstanding site for summer vacations, but also for its Aboriginal and settlement history. In this thesis I have examined the manner in which the district was promoted between 1850 and 1914. In comparing and contrasting the experiences of the district’s inhabitants and industries with the area’s regional representations, I have sought to uncover the origins of Muskoka’s contemporary identity. However, given the number of immigrants and industries that located to the district during this period, as well as the political and cultural changes the nation underwent, this investigation provides a snapshot of a complex district. This should not sound defeatist, as I only mean to point out that more extensive studies are needed to encompass Muskoka’s rich past.

As Timothy Stanley outlines in his article “Racisms, Grand Narratives, and Canadian History”, if public memory relies on a grand narrative it is incapable of representing people’s lived histories of racism, persecution, or difference. This type of
history obscures the artificiality of its representations, and wrongly excludes members of society from the nation’s past. Stanley argues that the “grand narrative is more about the nation as a kind of naturally occurring and unquestioned category than it is about the actual state called ‘Canada.’” Instead, we need to replace “the monolith of grand narrative with a web of multiple overlapping histories.” As Stanley argues for national narratives to be replaced, I believe we should begin with micro-histories such as Muskoka’s. In providing an overview of the representations and realities of the Muskoka District over such a broad timeline, I hope I have not only revealed the origins of the area’s contemporary identity, but that I have also pointed to areas of study that deserve further examination.

566 Ibid., 47.
Primary Sources:

Newspapers

The Forrester, 1878 (Huntsville)

The Globe, 1865 (Toronto)

The Muskoka Herald, 1880 (Muskoka)

The New York Times, 1870 – 1908 (New York)

The Northern Advocate, 1870 (Bracebridge)

The Scotsman, 1861 – 1872 (Edinburgh)

The Times, 1857 – 1874 (London)

Toronto Daily Star, 1904 (Toronto)

Published Primary Sources

Adam, G.M. Muskoka Illustrated, with Descriptive Narrative. Toronto: W.M. Bryce, 1888.


Buchanan, A.C. Canada 1863, For the Information of Immigrants. Quebec: Joseph Norbert Duquet, 1863.


Grant, G.M. ed. Picturesque Canada: The Country as it was and is. Toronto: Blenden Bros., 1882.


“Hunt with a Kodak.” Canadian Magazine (June 1905): 76.


Mac, Captain. The Muskoka Lakes and the Georgian Bay: Portraying the Fishing and Hunting Grounds, Islands and Summer Resorts with some views and descriptions. Ottawa: Ministry of Agriculture, 1884.


Smily, Frederick, ed. *Muskoka Through a Camera: An Album of the Muskoka Lakes, devoted to a description of the unrivalled beauties of this region, hotel accommodations, railway and steamboat service, fishing, hunting, etc., containing list of hotels, boarding houses, map of the lakes and view of hotels and scenery*. Muskoka: F. Smily, 1899.

Tourist Travel via the Grand Trunk Railway System. Toronto: Passenger Department of the Grand Trunk Railway, 1900.


**Unpublished Primary Sources**


Boyd Family History, Simcoe Country Archives.

Diary of Robert Mayes, Ms. Diaries #36 MU 842, Archives of Ontario.


Genevieve Caniff, Social Misc. MU 7827 #4, F830, Archives of Ontario.


I. Robinson, Mss. Misc. Coll. 1968 #4 MU21400, F775, Archives of Ontario

[Muskoka], T-10 00008, Thomas Fisher Rare Books Library, the University of Toronto.


“Township Notes,” Accession # 978-67, B4 R3B S8 Sh5. Simcoe Country Archives.
Secondary Sources:


Wilson, Catherine Anne. “Reciprocal work bees and the meaning of neighbourhoood.” *The Canadian Historical Review*. 82, no. 3 (September 2001): 431.

Illustration Credits:

**Archives of Ontario:** ‘A Work Bee Raising a Barn in Muskoka,’ C 1272-0-4-9; ‘Log Jam on the Muskoka River,’ C 7-3.

**Metro Toronto Reference Library:** *Muskoka; The Picturesque Playground of Canada*, Baldwin Room, 917.1316 R58 \B BR.