

Harry Green

Aroostook was not always peaceful. Both the United States and Great Britain claimed an immense tract of land north of a line running from Mars Hill to the western boundary of Maine. While the controversy was being settled, lumbermen from New Brunswick were cutting valuable timber and floating it down river to St. John. During the winter of 1838–39, Maine sent a posse to Aroostook to stop this. New Brunswick Governor Harvey then declared his province had been invaded by a foreign foe and posted troops along the eastern border. Maine sent militia, but a truce was declared, and the whole fracas was settled by the Webster Ashburton Treaty of 1842.

By 1860 there were 22,000 people in Aroostook County. Traffic over Military Road was heavy in winter when the well-packed snow made great roads—used less when they piled high with snow drifts after a storm. In summer, when the low places were “sloughs of despond,” laden wagons sank to their axles in mud. The four- and six-horse teams often went in caravans to help each other. Twenty miles was a good day’s journey. The faster four-horse teams made the trip with mail and passengers from Bangor to Presque Isle in three days.

Aroostook County is not considered “down east” for it is inland and somewhat separated from the rest of Maine. Here the Mic Mac Indians practiced agriculture. The soil yielded buckwheat, not common wheat or corn. The enemies were Iroquois and

Mohawks when the French and British explorers came. Until a hundred years ago Aroostook was a frontier region.

During the American Revolution loyal British escaped to Nova Scotia and Houlton. Now one-third of the residents are descendants of Loyalists and live in peace with Swedes, French, English, Irish, and Scots.

Harry Green left Vilna, Russia, at age sixteen to escape the army. His father, a lumberman, sent him to a friend in Philadelphia, but Harry did not like city life. He managed to reach Houlton in 1895; there he photographed and framed pictures. In a few months he learned English and traveled with a horse and wagon. He brought his parents and six brothers and two sisters. In a few years the family opened stores throughout Aroostook County as well as south in Waterville and Augusta.

When I met Alfred Green (Harry’s son) in Houlton, he was retired. He told me he was a “wild one” when he was a young man. It was his non-Jewish wife who changed him. He began to work in the store from 6 A.M. to midnight on Saturdays and from 6 A.M. to 9 P.M. several nights a week. His father would go to the lumber camps in winter and measure the lumberjacks for suits that would be sewn in Malden, Boston, or New York.

In the spring the men came to the store for their suits. After the long, hard winter, thousands of men came to town to get drunk and have fun. Once a year the restaurant would pay a fine for liquor smuggled from Canada, but “one hand washed the other.”

By 1900 all the peddling and saving led to the opening of a store in Houlton. Profits were invested in real estate in Presque Isle and throughout Aroostook County. All went well until the depression of 1921 when Alfred’s father and uncle lost \$65,000. They split up and left Aroostook to start over again. Alfred’s family remained. Peddlers sometimes spent harsh snow storms with the Greens. They told stories about fishing between farms in the spring and summer. Alfred got a “bang out of them.”

Now the grandchildren of this large family are professionals and breeders of trotters. At the reunion ten years ago, eighty people came, but now they are not close. Alfred’s daughter, a flight attendant, came back to take care of her mother. Alfred is no longer a “wild one,” he said.