

## MY VALLEY

The St. John River has been called the Rhine of America and I think it is no exaggeration. Of course, my appreciation may be influenced by my personal feelings but to my knowledge all those who have visited the St. John River Valley have been impressed by its beauty.

The River itself is 450 miles long. It starts in northwestern Maine, not far from the headwaters of the west branch of Penobscot River. It flows in Maine for some 100 miles but it receives water from the Daaquam, the Big Black Rivers, the Chememticook, outlet of the East Lake, the Little Black, the St. Francis, all full of Canadian water. Thirty miles above Fort Kent, it receives the clear waters of the Allagash that I would call with the Aroostook River, two of its most important tributaries. Between St. Francis, Me. and Grand Falls, N.B., the St. John flows between New Brunswick, Canada and Maine. From Grand Falls down, it flows in New Brunswick, Canada. I am not too familiar with that last part of it but I know that at its mouth where it flows in the Bay of Fundy, there is a unique phenomenon called the Reversing Falls. When the tide is coming in, it falls in the river and flows up, really! When the tide is down or flowing out, it falls toward the ocean. The river was named by Samuel de Champlain, a Frenchman who discovered it around 1604 on the feast thy of St. John the Baptist. At St. Francis, Me., the river of that name comes in from the left going down-river. It empties three beautiful lakes and serves as the international boundary from Esteourt, down. At Fort Kent, on the right coming down-river, the St. John receives the water of the Fish River. Years back, it was called the Decharge (the Outlet); it is indeed the outlet of seven beautiful lakes. The Baker Brook comes in from the right side five miles below Fort Kent. Fifteen miles below Baker Brook, the Madawaska River comes in. It empties many nice lakes, the two most important being the Temiscouata and the Long Lake. A few miles below, the Green River comes in with its clear water from seven lakes and a little above Van Buren, the Grande River, that route was used sometimes by missionaries coming into the Valley from the Gaspé country.

The People: In the 17th Century, the French had a fort and trading post at the mouth of the St. John. Across the Bay, the first Acadians had settled. The settlers organized a wall along the shore to keep the sea out and made a system of valves to let the brooks flow out when the tide was down. In 1755 those French settlers were deported by the English but one shipload of them were smart enough to put the English sailors in the ship hold, sail up the St. John River as far up as Fredericton and run into the forest, leaving the sailors the trouble to go back to sea in their ship. They

settled around there, Ste. Anne des Pays Bas, they called the place, but when the United States became free the Loyalists fled to New Brunswick and the governor gave them the land of the Acadians. They had to move again. They went to Quebec, but the English governor there, brother to the governor of New Brunswick who had thrown them out, did not accept them. So they came back to the St. John River Valley above the Falls. At that spot, the river falls 70 feet into a wild gorge. Since in those days the rivers were the main way of travel, the district they came to was not easy enough to make it desirable to anybody. That was in 1785. They settled a bit below the mouth of the Madawaska River but they had landed first on the American side at what is now St. David, a few short miles below Madawaska, Me. They knew the Madawaska River and they used it to communicate with the Canadians settled along the St. Lawrence River around River-du-Loup. They had the same language and practiced the same Catholic religion. In 1795, a group of Canadians came to join them and in a short time there were settlers on both sides of the river from St. Francis to the Grand Falls. A few years later, another group of settlers came up the St. John River from the mouth of the Miramichi River, where they had lost all in a great forest fire. They were Scottish and Irish mostly, not Catholic and they settled at the mouth of the Allagash River.

When the United States became free the border between them and Canada in that region was supposed to be a line going north from the head waters of the St. Croix River to the height of the land between the St. Lawrence River and the St. John River. So when the first white men came

to the Madawaska, it was not sure who owned the land because the Canadian and the British reconsidered, especially after the War of 1812. The rich forests of Northern Maine were a prize worth fighting for. The Canadians wanted all of Northern Maine, with the 45th parallel as boundary line. Surveyors were sent by the State of Maine. The last came in 1830 and took a complete census of the people living on both sides of the river from St. Francis to Grand Falls.

They noted that lumbering operations had been going on the Allagash River at the Falls which are about 15 miles above the mouth of it. A Mr.

Cavanach was one of the surveyors; he later became governor of Maine. In 1847, the Webster-Ashburton Treaty settled the boundary line where it is now. The French Catholic group on the shores of the St. John River was cut in two. The United States lost the woodlands on the watershed of the Grande River, the Green River, the Madawaska River, the Baker Brook, and a good part of the St. Francis River.

A settlement had been started some time before by a group of French Canadians south of what is now St. Pamphile. They had come all the way from the shore of the St. Lawrence River, which was a trip nearly 50 miles

long. Except for a strip just a few miles from the shore of the St. Lawrence River, the land was not too favorable for farming. But at THE NEW SETTLEMENT, called Seven Islands, the land was very good. How many families were there? I have no idea, but I have been told that there was a school. A chapel? Not sure, but there was an old graveyard with a dozen bodies left in it now. A score of them were moved to St. Pamphile when the church was started there. The landowners have bought the farms out and nobody is living there now. The last one to move out was Conrad Poulin, who left about 25 years ago.

Traveling above the Grand Falls was done on the river with birch bark canoes and pirogues. These were made by shaping a big log like a canoe and digging the inside. These were very tipsy but more sturdy than the birch bark canoes. They were propelled down river by paddles and going up, a man could stand in the back of the dugout and push it along the shore with a set pole. They could push their skiff against the current as fast as a man could walk. For bigger loads a toe-path was kept clean along the shore for horses who pulled up barges. The first houses were log cabins, even the first church had a roof made of spruce bark. It was built about ten miles down-river from the Little Fall (Edmundston) on the Canadian side of the river. Another one was soon built after the boundary question had been settled; that one was at Violette Brook (now Van Buren). The next one was built a couple of miles above the Corner (Le Coin) at Upper Frenchville. The river took a sharp left turn at the Corner. The next one was built about five miles below the mouth of the St. Francis River on the Canadian side.

In the beginning a priest would come about once a year to take care of baptisms, marriages and Easter duties. In 1830, there was a resident priest at the first chapel. The first Marquis to come in the Valley was settled just above the site of the church in Upper Frenchville. He had four sons who settled in the Valley. They were my ancestors. At the mouth of Fish River (La Decharge) the Outlet, there lived in 1830 a Mr. Nadau, forefather of my mother.

(The Fish River is the outlet of seven beautiful lakes in Northern Aroostook County). My father and mother are buried a short distance below the mouth of the Fish River on a knoll between the highway and the river. In summer, the river is a beautiful series of miles of quietly flowing water separated by short rapids. Some of these can be dangerous, like the big rapid above Allagash and the Big Black Rapids, just above the mouth of the river known by that name. In spring, though, it's another story. That giant has pulled barns and houses from their foundations. I have seen cakes of ice two feet thick on Main Street in Fort Kent and many people driven from their homes in town and around by the high waters.

Above the falls, the Valley is quite wide and the hills on both sides are not very high, that makes room for beautiful farms. The rivers coming in to the St. John River make openings and broaden the view. Above Madawaska, Me., the hills are closer to the river and higher. It is more so above St. Francis, but then the river flows in Maine and the farmlands are few. We used to climb the hill opposite the Baker Brook Valley and there we could see across to New Brunswick and the hills of the Province of Quebec. About four miles above, another valley opens out to the right going up river and it is a long one. A small brook comes in but just a short mile further and a few feet of level, you come to Baker Lake, which flows into the Baker Brook from its north end.

If you follow the valley for just a few more miles, you come to Long Lake, which is separated from Baker Lake by a low knoll. That one too flows from its north end into the Cabano River, into Temiscouata Lake and comes back into the St. John River by the Madawaska River. Follow that valley a few more short miles and you come into the St. Francis River Valley without crossing any big hills. That river empties a nice lake leaving it at Estcourt and reaching the St. John River at St. Francis.

Less than 15 miles above the mouth of the St. Francis River, you come to the mouth of the Allagash River, well known to the sportsmen for its beauty and its good fishing. More about that one later. About six miles up river you come to the mouth of the Little Black River coming in more than 35 miles from the Canadian border through the woods all the way. It offers good canoeing for 10 or 15 miles up and is well appreciated for its beautiful trout. A mile or so above that on the St. John River, you come to the foot of the Big Rapid which is two and a half miles long. There the river comes down a hill 80 feet high and is one of the two biggest challenges for the canoeist. When the water is high, you can come through in three minutes.

Just above the Rapids on the right going up, there is a little clearing, Aaron Jackson used to live there, at the end of the road. He would run a tote boat in the fall for the lumber companies and in the summer he would take canoeists around the rapids in his truck or get into the canoe and steer it down the rapids for them. He would charge \$10.00. The main tote road would not go by that house but leave the river and go around a hill and come back to the river, a few miles further at the Bishop's farm. There is just a little clearing there now and a camp owned by Mr. Guy Kelley, for hunters.

A few miles further up, always on the right shore of the river, there was another small farm. The last man to live there was Lee Mullins. That is at the mouth of a small brook; Ouellet's Brook. A little further up you cross the Pockwok Brook, go by the old school house. (I went by there in 1934 and it was gone already). About four miles further up, you come to



the Castonguay Settlement. When I first saw it in 1934, Didime Jandreau was living there. He had married Annie Castonguay, I think the last of that family, and above the Cunliffe had a depot store house for lumbering equipment and old Mr. Sam Noble was caretaker. In early March that year, he had burned the camp he was living in and lost his dog in the fire. He moved into another camp close by.

On that trip I came about four miles further up-river to the mouth of Savage Brook on the left side going up-river where my father had his depot. We were there, my brother Adrien and I, to watch over his equipment until he found a man who came in June and stayed all summer as watchman. We stayed there for about three months. We could not travel much because the ice was rotten on the river and after the ice went, the water was too high for our little 18-foot canoe. We had the telephone; there were six parties on the line but it did not ring so often. We got acquainted with all of them, the last one being George Ouellette's family at the mouth of the Big Black River 11 miles above Savage Brook. He was fire warden. We were invited there and one nice day in June I poled my little canoe up there, had lunch and paddled back down. I had not seen that part of the river before.