

Madawaska, on St Johns River

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Dear Sir, Thinking, that you might feel some interest, in this portion of our country, which has been so often referred to, before the settlement of the disputed Territory, & which still remains, to most persons an unknown region, I have determined to give you a short account of its part history, & present situation -

From the point, where the American line, running North, strikes the St Johns River - which is about 2 miles, above the Grand Falls - This river is thickly settled, on both sides, as far as the mouth, of the St Francis - from thence, there are a few settlers, as far as the Aligash, & even as high, as the mouth of Little Black River, a distance of nearly 100 miles - The population is mixed - French, American & English, but principally French - who are descended, from the Acadians of Nova Scotia, who fled here from the persecution of the English - there are also many emigrants, from Canada, & their descendants - the first settlers have resided, here, about 60 or 70 years - The French inhabitants, are distinguished for their simplicity of manners, & adherence to their ancient customs & language - they are extremely ignorant, & very little attention has been given to them to schools - A few however have been supported, by the patronage, of the English Government - since the treaty however, this of course, has been withdrawn from the American side, & they will probably be discontinued -

As the State of Maine has done nothing hitherto to encourage common schools - there are none here, where the English language is taught, & many children are consequently brought up in deplorable ignorance -

In 1840 the number of persons, on the North of the St Johns was 1886 - on the South 1584 - Total 3470 - number of white persons, over 20 years of age, who could not read or write 833 - the present population is probably over 4000 - the climate is severe

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From the point, where the American line north, strikes the St. Johns River_ which is about 2 miles above the Grand Falls – This river is thickly settled on both sides, as far as the mouth, of the St Francis or from thence, there are a few settlers as far as the Aligash, + even as high, as the mouth of Little Black River, a distance of nearly 100 miles – the population is mixed – French, American + English, but principally French – who are descended, from the Acadians of Nova Scotia., who fled here from the persecution of the English – there are also many emigrants, from Canada, & their descendants the first settlers have resided, here, about 60 or 70 years – The French inhabitants are distinguished for their simplicity of manners, + adherence to their ancient customs + language – they are extremely ignorant, + very little -----

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Contributed to Maine Memory Network by the Maine Historical Society (Local code: S-5108 109/37) Date: 1845 Description: Unsigned letter describing life in the Madawaska region after the settlement of the boundary dispute.

The thermometer, not infrequently, being from 25 to 30 below 0 - & sometimes lower, & snow falling to the average depth, of from 6 to 10 feet - vegetation is slow, in commencing, & frost appears early in the season - the small grains are the most certain crops - Potatoes do well, except in cold, & wet seasons - Indian Corn, & the varieties of vines, cannot be raised, with any certainty - winter generally commences towards the latter part of October & cannot usually be said to terminate till the latter part of May - or 1st of June - and as this season is so long, & the land rather poor & difficult to clear it requires great exertion in the poor man, during the short working season, to support his family, & raise sufficient to keep his stock during the winter - The early settlers have laboured under great difficulties. They fled here, from the Province, winter of 1776, & this increased by removal, to a country difficult of access, & to which it was extremely hard, to transport the most common necessaries of life, & where there was an entire want of every convenience, of civilized life they suffered moreover, from the unsettled & disturbed state, of the country, uncertain under what government they might finally fall, & with no security, of reaping the reward of their labor - Finally after many long & tedious years of expectation - the treaty of 1842 which promised, to treat the inhabitants, on both sides, with liberality was concluded, to their Great joy & satisfaction - Notwithstanding the settlement of the question, so long in dispute - the people still suffer, greatly, from the want of roads, mails, schools, & other conveniences, of more highly favored parts of the state - The road formerly cut out, from the Mouth of Fish River, to the Aroostook is now impassable & the only means of communication with the United States, is through her Majesty's Province 50 miles of which is by canoes - a Company of U.S.

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troops under command of Capt Melvton, is stationed
 at the mouth of Fish River - 55 miles from the
 Grand Falls, & the river, is 110 miles from Houlton
 their only communication with the rest of the United States
 is 5 months express, through the Province of New Brunswick
 the English P.O. is 28 miles distant, & it is very troublesome
 & expensive, to obtain letters & papers in that way -
 & their regulations impose such high postage, as hinders
 American Newspaper publications, as ~~to~~ to amount
 to a prohibition - Moreover, in the occurrence of difficulties
 with the English Authorities, no public letters could
 be transmitted that way - the situation of these troops
 would appear to be a very un military one, as in case
 of necessity of marching of hostilities, there are no means
 of reaching the states, or receiving supplies, or communications
 except through an enemies country - it is much to
 be denied, that either the state, or General Government
 will ere long cause a road, to be made from Fish
 River
 to Bangor -

The great ignorance,
 prevailing among the people, & the want of common
 schools, has already been alluded to - I would say
 a word, as to the necessity of introducing here Protestant
 Missionaries - there are two French Catholic chapels, on this
 river, but no Protestant church, of any denomination
 whatsoever - I understand, that application was made
 of the troops, to the War Dept, for a chaplain, but the number
 allowed by law, had already been assigned to their posts -
 so that none could be sent here -

There is a great scarcity here of the learned professions
 which generally abound, in every other country - so that
 there are neither Protestant clergymen - lawyers
 or Doctors, with the exception of the uniform of the military
 post, at Fish River - Whether this may be an advantage
 or not, the people can determine, for themselves -
 During the last year, several mercenary traders
 from Canada have introduced, large quantities of
 that curse of society, and ardent spirits - & unfortunately
 many of the inhabitants have been induced, & the love

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love of gain, to engage in this most detestable traffic -
much vice & immorality have been caused by it, & it is
sincerely to be hoped, that no licenses may ever be
granted, for the sale of spirituous liquors - ~~As the~~
the necessity of forbidding the introduction & sale of spirits
which excite the evil passions of the borderies? + endanger
Methinks & difficult, between the citizens, on the opposite
sides of the River, is abundantly manifest -
within the last 2 months, a Custom house officer
has been sent here, and duties are now obliged, to be paid, on
all English goods, brought on this side of the river - this measure
is exceedingly unpopular, the people with justice, complain
that their lot is sufficiently hard, without adding to their
burdens - they say, that before, they should be obliged to
pay duties, on English goods, which are almost the only kind
which can be brought here - that some road should have
been provided, to enable them to transport American goods
here - If British goods could be brought here, from Canada
or the Province, & then carried into the interior, of the state
then there would be good reason, for placing an
officer here to prevent smuggling - but this is impossible -
Whatever goods are introduced they are consumed here
on the River - I am informed that it is customary with the English
authorities of the Province, not to impose duty, on American articles
which are brought here merely
for consumption, on the River - as is sometimes done, in
the winter - Many complain, that they are worse off, than
before the treaty, then having the benefits of Free Trade
& of some, though English legislation -
there is no land on the American side, though it is constantly
wanted, & has been petitioned for, by the inhabitants - civil
cases are of daily occurrence, & occasionally outrages are committed
& many have fled here, from justice, yet it appears that
nothing can be done - To show how the interests of the people
have been neglected - when the attempt occurred, which was
made last spring, to carry off ^ An American citizen
the people petitioned, that a sufficient number of magistrates
might be stationed here, to protect + that they might have the
benefit + protection of American laws - This petition was

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This petition was introduced into the State Legislature the only notice taken of it - was by an honorable senator, who very inappropriately took occasion, to introduce certain inflammatory resolutions, against the treaty, while the object of the petition - remained unaccomplished

Since that time the Legislature of annexing this portion of territory to Aroostook county, annulled the only magistrate's commission, then in the county - left it entirely without any law - a long time, after the occurrence of the event above alluded to, & after the subject had long excited public attention, in the papers of the day, the Governor of this state, proclaimed that he had heard unofficially of some transaction of the kind, & directed the sheriff of this county, & others who might know, to give him some information about it - this will show the indifference manifested, towards this community - Many settlers here are very anxious, that the division of the lands between Maine & Massachusetts, may soon take place - At present, the lands are undivided - & a person wishing to settle, is uncertain, whether his land will fall in Maine or Massachusetts & as the difference in price of the two States, is considerable, & as there is no preemption law + consequently no security, for the settler, till his land is paid for, he is naturally feels uncertain + insecure - I believe, this deters several, who might otherwise remain ere long in the country - this will however probably be rectified in conclusion, I cannot but hope, that something may be done to alleviate the condition of this people - who after having been persecuted, shut out from all the advantages + benefits of refined society, have now become American citizens - Much dissatisfaction exists - I certainly think that their wants + grievances entitle them to the respectful consideration of the Legislature -
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