

## EARLY HISTORY of HOULTON CHAPTER THREE

Reprinted verbatim and exactly as it appeared in the *Aroostook Pioneer* of May 25, 1858, from the pen of Joshua Kendall, then of Hodgdon. What happened to Chapter Two is not known. It could not be found in the issue of May 18, 1858.—Ed.

### First House Built in Houlton

Joseph Houlton and family, Sam'l Cook, Esq., his son in law, and James Houlton, who was married the day previous to their leaving New Salem, constituted the first three families of that novel home.

The first object, after their arrival, was to obtain fire and food to refresh the weary occupants. After adjusting the limited supply of kitchen utensils, with the order and neatness of New England house-keeping, they baked their bread without chimney or oven, in a bake kettle or "Dutch oven" as it was called, with a cover to it, hung on a pole, supported by stumps or crotches, or placed in the corner with coals above and beneath. This was one specimen of their culinary operation by which many barrels of flour have been baked by the first settlers, until they could obtain materials for building. They usually commenced with a small cabin made of spruce logs, locked together at the four corners; the inside hewed off to an even surface. Among the nobility, they would even make the outside to compare with the inner. — The roof consisted of rafters

ribbed with small poles, and covered with bark or split cedar; and, until a chimney could be built, a large aperture was left through the roof for the smoke to ascend to its accustomed altitude. The spacious fireplace, large enough to burn small mill logs, was constructed of stone and clay mortar up to the mantle-piece; the chimney above was made of cedar sticks, laid up cob-house fashion, and plastered with a thick covering of mortar mixed with oat straw.

But to secure the temporary habitation from the insidious intrusion of Jack Frost, they caulked the crevices between the logs with moss gathered from trees. This was the humble style of log cabin architecture.

The long winters passed off almost imperceptibly, while they were busily engaged preparing timber and getting materials for building fences, threshing their grain and cutting firewood, which was no ordinary task, as it was found necessary to keep fires night and day during the severe cold weather.

At the opening of the spring, the first business was to prepare for

sugar making. The troughs for catching the sap were made of the fir tree, or birch bark, which the French and Indians used. The tenth of April was the usual time for tapping the sugar maple. The iron ware for boiling the sap, from the size of two barrels, down to two gallons, were brought into requisition for three or four weeks, with pipes and puncheons that were placed in due order near the kettles beside the camp, to hold the sap.

In the morning, on the crust, the boys with moccasins and snow-shoes, a handsled and a deep tub, each with two pails, commenced gathering the sap, which was a laborious but not a bitter task, for the saccharine came next, when each, with his spoon and dipper, partook freely of the delicious candy, giving a deep vermilion hue to their glowing countenances.

Having made during the autumn, some improvement by clearing the land for sowing about their cabins, which it was found expedient to do as early as possible in the spring, to secure a mature growth from the destruction of untimely frosts, for the change is sudden from winter to summer, consequently vegetation progresses with rapidity and luxuriance.

In those seasons wheat and other grains, yielded a bountiful harvest. But the inconvenience and expense attending the grinding, rendered those crops of comparatively little value, there being no mills nearer than Woodstock; and at times they were obliged to go down the St. John fifteen or twenty miles below Woodstock, travel-

## It Looked This Way Once



This southern and western exposure view gives a vista of Houlton's now heavier populated residential section. It was taken about 70 years ago from just west of the intersection of Main and Military streets. The original Madigan Homestead, which is now Madigan Hospital, appears on the left. In the distance can be seen the buildings of Ricker Classical Institute and, still further away, the spire of the old Free Baptist Church.

ing upon snow-shoes and hauling the grain on handsleds. This may appear appalling to the reader, but we state facts as they occurred, which we learned from unquestionable authority. But they were not long subject to this Herculean task: — the Yankee ingenuity and versatile talents of Capt. Houlton soon put a hand-mill in operation, which did their grinding, though probably not in all respects quite equal to New York manufacturers.

The condition of the first settlers must have been gloomy indeed but for the friendship of their British neighbors; yes, neighbors — although twelve miles distant, they acted the humane part of the good "Samaritan" in their deeds of kindness and benevolence. Their doors were opened to receive and their

standing the tide of New England emigration was to the west.

In May, 1810, Messrs. Varney Pearce, Esq., Dea. Samuel Kendall, Joshua Putnam, Ebenezer Warner of Springfield, Joshua G. Kendall, Jacob Haskell and Putnam Shaw left New Salem for the Province of Maine. They embarked at Boston, and after a tedious passage of several weeks; from the ceaseless rocking and pitching of the vessel, being green hands just from the country, they were all distressedly seasick; poor souls, they must have had a rather squally squirming time of it, for when they landed at the city of St. John, where they tarried a short time, to their chagrin, they found they had lost their center of gravity, so that on attempting locomotion they reeled

newly yoked pigs, than with the measured pace of terra firma pedestrians. Mr. Amos Pearce and Simeon Holden left New Salem a fortnight later than those who came from Boston by water, and after a separation of about five weeks, having traveled some 400 miles by land, they arrived at Woodstock on the same day, which must have been a remarkable coincidence.

We must couple the idea of distance in some measure with the time it used to be traveled in those days of Herculean labor,

some 50 years ago to impress the mind with a just sense of the effort which was required to perform a journey from New Salem to Houlton by either route, in order duly to appreciate the facilities for transportation at the present time. (circa 1858) The facilities for travel and intercourse which are now enjoyed have become the admiration of the world; and whenever we contemplate the junction of Europe and America — annihilated both time and distance by the anticipated submarine telegraph, that puts spiritualism and

clairvoyance and the whole category of those magic wonders all in the distance.

If the reader will pardon this digression we will proceed. During the summer Mr. Aaron Putnam built a mill dam across the creek near his house, as before described. At the western shore it was found difficult to obtain a permanent foundation on which to build, and at the time of freshet the water undermined and washed away the bank and carried off the dam. In July the house of Mr. Putnam was

(Please Turn to Page Eight)

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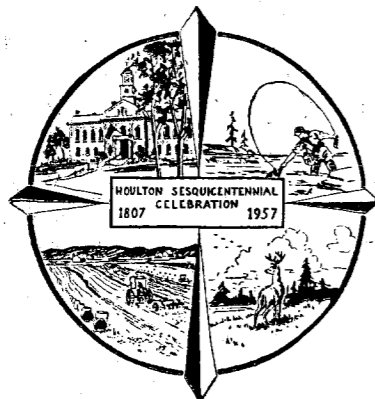
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to their hospitable homes, rendering such aid as their necessities required. Their trade and intercourse for years were confined to His Majesty's subjects, with whom they sustained the most friendly relations.

The pioneers of this infant colony were men of industry and enterprise, who had enjoyed advantages of intelligence beyond the general migratory class, who, when they remove, seldom stop longer than barely to gain a residence, and then proceed to make other new improvements for those of more staid habits, of perseverance and energy; consequently possessing more of wealth, character and influence.

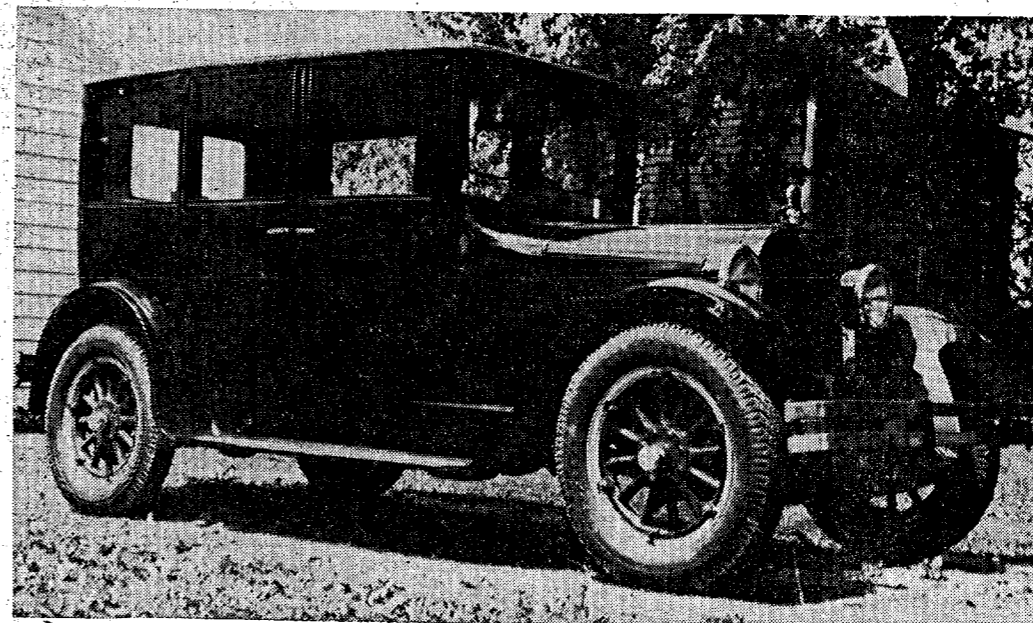
In 1808, Capt. J. Houlton received an appointment to the office of Register of Deeds for the northern district of the county of Washington, by his Excellency's command, James Sullivan, Esq., Governor and commander-in-chief of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

In 1809 Mr. Joshua Putnam and Phineas Stevens left New Salem for Houlton. Mr. Warren Putnam, who had been four years in trade at Woodstock, removed to Houlton with his family, consisting of his wife, mother and four sons, viz: — Amos, S. Jay, Lysander, Aaron, and an adopted son, Joseph Godenough.

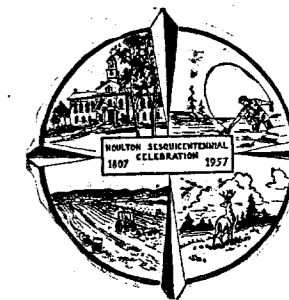
Mr. Putnam made a location of rare romantic beauty; surrounded as it is on the east, west and south by the waters of the Meduxneke, the aboriginal name, but which is now familiarly called creek, the north branch empties on the west, which contributes about one-third to its waters. The elevated bank, which rises rather abruptly, following the creek, upon which Mr. Putnam built a log house, affords a fine view of the opposite surrounding locality. Here the Indians frequently passed up and down, with their bark canoes deeply laden with their valuables, such as a variety of game, squaws and papooses. Here, too, the wild ducks, of various species, played in the rippling current practicing their newly fledged broods, now diving beneath the limpid element, then on their wings, whizzing through the trackless ether, to seek some new seclusion.

It may appear to some that, at that time, the Province of Maine must have presented some imaginary, as well as real inducements to the people of New Salem, for their decided predilection and destiny it seems was for Houlton, notwith-

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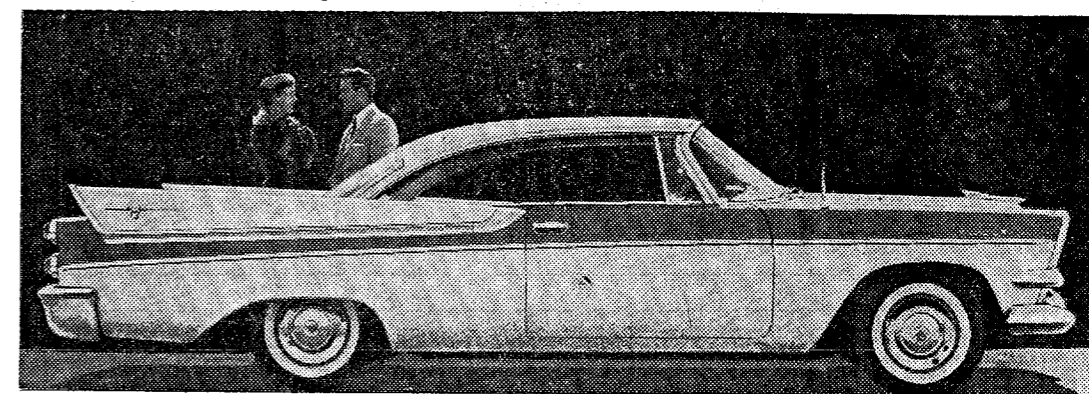
Houlton

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