

## *1836 Adirondacks*

A soaring fish hawk was merely a dot in the sky as it dipped in and out of the low clouds, peering intently on the travelers along the terraced shore. Mountains stepped up, like a grandstand, cut by the Ausable river flowing into Lake Champlain. Not quite the Giant's footsteps of County Antrim, but a majestic basalt rock formations that warmed his yearning heart. John drove the lumber wagon, with crew, upstream along a rutted dirt road beside the rapidly moving river lined by ancient pines rising up the mountains. "Take the first right turn onto the Port Kent-Hopkinton Turnpike." his boss had told him. "Clear the woods west of Union Falls, it's the second lake along Silver Lake Road." The hawk floated down watching for prey in the heavenly, cornflower-blue of chicory, black-eyed Susans and the burnt orange of hawkweed interspersed with invasive Queen Ann's lace.

After emptying a wagon of logs at Union Falls, John led the horses along the dirt turnpike to a clear brook to quench their lathered thirst and graze in the tall grass before returning to camp. He dropped a fish line into the ice-lined brook and tied the other end to a maple sapling. In a flash the hawk floated out of the crown of an old alder, retracted into an arrow and dove in the grassy edge. A high scream erupted from its arched wings. The hawk rose again with a plump rabbit in its talon, dead from fear. A fish quivered the line. The pine studded terrain of rock outcroppings echoed the Glens of Antrim.

He'd be twenty-six tomorrow. John's boot sunk deeply into this shady mire. He shook himself and gazed at the bird, who cautiously peered about, before tearing into its meal. The trout trembled the line. The sapling juddered. Bent horizontal. John grabbed the wiry stem, pulled in the fish, before disentangling the sprout. In his soft foot print he scraped a deeper hole

and rooted the tree along the road where the maple could grow straight and tall out of the alder's shade. He'd survived by the grace of God so far, if only for a moment's pause.

John took up the reins and drove along the icy creek through the field. A six-point white-tail buck promenaded, glanced with haughty, brazen curiosity. Only his tail twitched. What was this place? The buck bolted away through a clearing, below a mountain. John sensed waters running deep. This land beckoned his heart to a calm. He returned to the Silver Lake campsite enthusiastic about this remarkable discovery. These logging lads had close scrapes with illness, injury and the trials of immigration together.

Once known, the crew of Irish lads camped by the clear brook so often it began to feel like home. With an uncharacteristic impulse, John made a claim on plots 26 and 27 to farm a homestead under the mountain. The other lumbermen were heartened to do the same. After brushing down the horses, he joined the logging crew, surprised to see a visitor.

"This large domed area was a volcanic hotspot," explained the visiting gentleman in trapper's clothing, "that pushed up through the earth's crust." The shaggy bearded traveler was warming by the fire where fish and cattail hearts were being grilled.

"Any chance of an eruption?" was asked.

"Not in the next million, or so, years. *Adirondack* is a Mohawk name for Algonquin "bark eaters." Only the Algonquin could survive here."

"Why does a trapper sound like a college professor?" John wondered. He glanced over at his maple sapling not yet eaten by a deer. They must be well fed.

"They ate bark because they didn't have enough provisions at Winter's end?" a friend summed up. "Sounds like we found Ireland lads. Who else would know how to grow a livelihood in rocky soil."

“Not the Mohawks. They lived along the fringe of this spectacular and sparsely soiled terrain. There is nothing like this circular domed range in America.” He lectured on, “Mile thick glacial sheets advanced and retreated over worn mountain ranges, carving lakes and depositing boulders to contour rivers. The Algonquins hunted, fished and collected plants from a rich reserve of boreal forests.” he carried on trying to forget about dinner. “The first Europeans are thought to be French Catholic missionaries, Father Isaac Joques and explorer, Samuel de Champlain from the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. These two settlers established a lucrative fur trade encouraging 18<sup>th</sup> century settlements and military posts-mostly along the big lakes we’ve named George and Champlain.”

“Was this a peaceful collaboration?” was asked.

“For a while. A sordid tale evolved. Peqouts battled Puritans, Narragansetts were annihilated for relating with Puritans. French were defeated by the Iroquois’ seven nations. Turbulences peaked of conflicts between colonists and Canadian British that lapped at Lake Champlain shores and left politics an open debate.” John thought, “Resonates of the misuses of dear Ireland-but don’t let those thoughts rise to conquer the emotions of your day.” The fish and roasted cattail hearts were passed on birch bark with forks whittled from forked twigs. Icy brook water was poured from an oiled haversack into tin cups. The cook found pleasure in providing for others.

“Greetings, I’m Ebenezer Emmons, geologist.” He reached out his hand to shake John’s.

“John McKillip, Burlington logger wouldn’t you know,” he noted the gentle handshake and lightened his firm grip.

“Colonists decimated the Iroquois and pushed the Brits back over the northern border,” Ebenezer continued. “This rocky, wooded shoreline emerged from the bloody remnants

of the Revolutionary War, veneering abandoned military shards scattered from the War of 1812. During the 1813 Battle of Plattsburgh, U.S. and British had a battleship each in Lake Champlain. Colonial militia swarmed Wellington's "Royal Savage" battleship. We chased them back to Canada and the area has prospered since."

"How'd they get battle ships onto a land-locked lake?" a bearded logger asked.

"Built them with your lumber." Ebenezer replied.

"Imagine us!" was exclaimed. "Founders of a mere shadow under an alder by a brook."

"Well there you have it," John smiled. "Let's call this place "Alderbrook." Laughter erupted as they barely considered it a campsite.

Ebenezer reached into his bag for a jar of ink, pen and his map and wrote carefully "Alderbrook" at this spot of the turnpike. As Ebenezer was packing up, John pointed out a mountain, "I've got a claim on that one." Ebenezer recognized the significance of this ensemble of loggers and wrote the name McKillip Mountain. John walked away hopeful by a definition of community from an intellect with worn deerskin boots.

John, and his new bride Betsy, visited their homestead for the weekend, enjoying their scarce solitary time in balancing her teaching in Burlington, John's logging trips, their life in a new country and hopes to find a moment's pause. The waning snows of Alderbrook captured their ambition while it offered them hope and calm.

"I mentioned the naming McKillip Mountain to Professor Ebenezer Eammons, a geologist from Williams College. He wrote it on his survey. Is it fittin' for you?" John inquired. She nodded as it fit with creating a legacy for her imagined family. "We'll see if Professor Eammons and his map made it back to the registry," Betsy stewed a venison hock with carrots, onions, and herbs. "Mr. Eammons is mapping what he calls, *The Adirondacks*." A fresh deerskin was

wrapped for the tannery to be finished into a coat and leggings. A generous bundle of stripped hemlock bark was his exchange for tanning the hide.

“He’s written “Alderbrook” as the name of this corner.” John looked up.

A luster of pearl glistened in the low hanging shelf of mist circling the mountain. Betsy envisioned an earl or nobleman in John’s face that had no hint of time passing, though he was ten-years her senior. She liked that he was never rushed, but was always occupied. She liked that he was not much for small talk, yet thoughtfully said what was important accurately. She liked, no loved, that about him.

“I’ll manage the cutting of this mountain range so we can remember these forests. I’ll take only what’s needed of old growth and allow the woods to flourish,” stating his wish to steward until he be buried here. “There’s plans to build a single room schoolhouse on the corner. We will need a teacher. Would you consider that?” John lifted a brow in her direction knowing she adored her Burlington students.

“If you’ll be the grocer.” Betsy replied. “To have children for a school we need a working community, a church, a place to share harvests, skills and potluck conversations. John, if you were the grocer, this pie-in-the sky idea of a town could be a reality.”

“I’ve grander ideas than being a mere grocer,” John replied.

“A grocer arranges land exchanges, mediates barter for crops, disputes between land borders, runs the post office, the stage coach stop, the conversations amongst those who need to be heard. Of the lot of you Irish blokes, you’re the pick of the bushel.”

“Well now, that’s quite a complement. Bushel of what?” he chuckled.

Exhaling a long and loud sigh, they arranged their hopes and aspirations with a just-so log cabin in the woods, by a brook, under a mountain with their name. A gurgling brook from the

mountain was sloped with a crescent of stones to pool by the kitchen. Terraced above stood a lean-to for hay, carriage and a horse barn. Terraced above that was a glade with a garden, apple orchard and raspberry patch. John tilled the soil for hops and oats, milked a dairy cow and harnessed an enviable pair of dappled grays when he wasn't logging. The animals offered heavy labor and nutrients for the meager soil. Their quiet cabin in a boreal forest was a mile wagon ride on a municipal road. Heavy snow required a sleigh to the turnpike. Where the roads met was a parcel for one building. Betsy imagined her school house there.

Early on, John milled and smoothed a small fag-bottom oak rocking-chair for the cabin's kitchen corner by the only window. Betsy fashioned a patchwork cushion of scraps from her mother's dresses. The chair invited a gentle swaying back and forth with its wide welcoming arms. She was still teaching in Burlington, but the rocker let her know this was home. Above the rocker, John nailed a board with his flint tool and arrowhead collection from Ireland to remind him of his Celtic culture. Betsy contacted the School Superintendent of the district to alert him of her decided interest to teach on the turnpike. He indicated a District 1 school house was planned for the Alderbrook intersection and a committee was interviewing for a teacher.

"Would the school be supplying a piano? The settlement has procured string instruments, bodhrans and tin whistles, but an understanding of chords, intervals and octaves on a piano would be foundational to all the student's musical education," she was uneasy to make a request before procuring a position, but wanted to make known her desires for a well-rounded education. John offered to oversee and build the schoolhouse at the turnpike and the deal was sealed.

Sugar Maple saplings were gently transplanted by neighbors, alongside the sunny shoulders of the Turnpike. Nestled in their tiny cabin, John staked out lots 50 and 51 up the south hills where the snow was cleared by the settlement. He began building a barn for his horses there,

near the Union Falls side of the road with a sizable log cabin. Across the street he laid a larger stone foundation. John liked to set foundations, to work the stone into solid drywall for marking land or underpinnings for log walls.

A teamster by trade, he and Betsy reserved enough excess herbs, vegetables, milk, butter, and preserves to sell to passing stage coach and pony express riders. Extra cash was sent to Antrim for his brother's and sister's fare to America. John made claims for lots 31 by Sweeny Brook and 73 on the top of the next hill, each 50 chains by 50 chains. The crew was becoming citizens with meetings at the corner tavern to agree on lots, boundaries and use. John negotiated.

"Let's lose Settlement as the name," sounded a voice at the table. "It's bound to be called Catholic Corners, with the likes of us colonizing here, if the Whigs have anything to say about it."

"We've called it Alderbrook since we camped here, let's stick with that," was chimed in.

"They won't be calling this Catholic Corners until we get our church built." John replied. A when-hell-freezes-over kind of silence was the response. In the meantime, each family harnessed their horse to the wagon, bundled the family and drove ten miles to Blackbrook, AuSable Forks or fifteen miles to Jay for Sunday Mass and provisions. They drew plans for a grocery, blacksmith shop, school, churchyard, and butter factory up the hill from the original campsite reserved for fresh water and grazing. Every homestead stored a stack of drying tree trunks.

John claimed several furlong lengths of land at the turnpike corner for the essential grocery. Was he made for the job or had he acquired the skills with Betsy's vision? The village men built John's stick grocery, covered with stucco, with a wrap-around roofed porch extending the rooms by five feet. Horizontal sapling banisters, were three-feet high, with criss-crossing bent branches for the children's safety. Eight chairs were built of spruce branches roped together so the seat

dipped down in the back to swing a bit. At the back of the knees the seat raised up to a bullnosed front lifting the knees to stretch and relax their tired backs. Lengths of milled pine were toe'd together with butterfly joints into benches that lined the walls under two finished windows.

The grocery store was stacked with pickled vegetables, canned fruit, pine nuts, acorn flour and chicory root. The McKillips carried haversacks over their shoulders to forage as they worked. John sowed his cleared acres of uninterrupted fields of every variety of oats he could find. His two gentle grays could clear a field or haul a wagon of stones without breaking a sweat. With a bull and cow, he started his herd that grazed at the campsite. Betsy started her flock of chickens up the hill. John's not-so-well-kept secret was to feed them all oats. After harvest he and his neighbors began the annual clearing of the boundary lines to post private property. If they didn't, property would be disputed.

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The tidy Alderbrook corner had a blacksmith shop, designated church yard, tavern and newly finished grocery amidst towering Spruce and White Pines, an orchard of apple trees at the corner and rows of Maple along the Turnpike. The web of roots of these trees reached around rocks for water and nourishment, intertwining to exchange alerts of drought, cold, excessive heat and invasive bacteria for survival. Trees reacted with pine scents to ward off disease or furling leaves to avoid dehydration. In the shops and homes above, people were sharing skills and harvests, knowledge, tips and questions. Networks of shared information prepared settlers to survive a colder winter or sow a proven seed.

“Did I see John limped a bit? Bridget asked Betsey as they cooked in the recently finished McKillip's stucco grocery. “That's likely, between the grocery and logging, he's been working



long hours.” This roomy, brightly painted kitchen with a glossy green floor was swept dustless. A prim well-blackened cooking stove was the focus of their attention with shiny pots steaming full for a festive mid-day meal. Betsy’s large wood table, surrounded by glossy green chairs, was covered in flour handprints from their biscuit making. Her fag bottom rocker was set up in the bright corner of two windows. This quiet scene of honest, homely enjoyment countered the hammering, sawing and shouting that gave rise to a butter factory across the road. Parish women were on their way from St Matthews with bread, salads and news of the day.

“In Oregon territory, women have the right to own land” Bridget stated.

“That’s because no woman wants to live there,” Betsy retorted.

“The states want equal representation and needs more votes,” Bridget chimed in.

“Making babies ensured more people and more votes for the territories.” She poured more dried chicory root into a mortar to pestle it into a powder to stretch the coffee. “One scoop for me and one for the pot. I hear Kansas might allow women to own land soon.” They thoughtfully skinned and quartered apples for a pie.

“Speaking of... Betsy, I think you’d better tell John your news?” Bridget looked wisely at her friend. Betsy looked surprised she had noticed. “I can’t imagine not having rights to a child I birthed. We’ve got to get his law passed!”

“Betsy, Please separate politics from family. Your husband deserves to know.”

I had just hoped to be established in the classroom and get the state amendment passed for our right to land,” Betsy explained. Bridget silently nodded.

“There are many women working hard for the amendment, enjoy your family’s moment.”

The back door opened and a screen door slammed with the parish women arriving with a potluck of fresh baked bread, steaming turnips and green beans. These women preferred to chat

on the back porch when the weather was amiable. This grocery was community space though John and Betsy kept it heated with wood, furnished with provisions and were always ready to hear a neighbor's point of view over a cup of coffee.

As the spruce chairs squeaked, John and his friend rested on the front porch. The lot was filled with teams of horses hitched to carriages and wagons, de-bridled and tethered to mow the grocery yard's brush and grass. Each family had a freshly built home and a sprouting vegetable garden. Most had smoked venison in their attics, stretched rabbit and fox skins on their back porches. This scene exemplified a settlement of content immigrants who felt the worst of their trials and travels were over. None wanted to see Ireland again, all missed their families fiercely. Let's take a moment to enjoy their satisfaction at having more than survived. They flourished by being together.

"To welcome Hugh and Patrick to our cornucopia!" a mustached neighbor cheered. Chickory-coffee was lifted celebrating to the day of rest as well as the relief of John's brothers who'd arrived safely from County Antrim. The brothers soaked hay in pine tar to stuff cracks between logs and chinked fireplace stones of John and Betsy's abandoned log cabin with the terraced gardens.

"Thank you for the welcome," Hugh stood. "I'd like to earn my keep by building a Hall for Mass to be served and the lot of us to gather in the space next door." Hugh had his heart set on the foundation laid for a house across from John's new home and cow barn. He enlarged its footprint for the settlement's first frame house and painted it yellow. Patrick was happy in the cabin with the terraced gardens and barns.

"I'd like a collie myself," Hugh said

"I'd like a hound dog more," Patrick responded.

“Yes, a hound makes a good hunting dog. It’s like anything else. Some people like one thing, some like the other. I’ve always liked blunt-toed shoes. Well, I know fellas that likes pointed-toed shoes,” the mustached man took a sip of cooling coffee.

“Doesn’t make much difference to me about my shoes. Wouldn’t you know I like boots?” Hugh replied.

“You’re like me with coffee. Might you be wondering?” another smiled.

Hugh chuckled. “Am I?” Hugh had just finished a chair more upright than the low chairs.

“With coffee I can take it with cream or without cream. With sugar or without sugar. Six of one, half a dozen of the other. I could name you off a dozen folks it makes plenty of difference to about whether they take cream an’ sugar in their coffee or not. But not me. Put sugar in my coffee or don’t put sugar in my coffee. I’ll drink it,” he explained. “Been that way all my life,”

Patrick added. “But, about dogs. I think hounds have more pep than a collie. A hound’d just as soon bite your leg off as look at ya’. What I’d like to have is a mean hound dog. Lead him around on a choke chain. Wouldn’t you?”

“I ‘d like a coy-dog,” John said. “half wild and half tamed.” Betsy called from inside, “John!”

“Oh, hello,” he looked up.

“Kin ya’ give a moment?” Betsy retreated into brogue.

“Sure.” He loved her brogue that was waning as she became an American citizen.

“Come on inside, please. You makin’ out all right, Patrick?” Betsy opened the front door.

“Fine, Betsy, fine.” Patrick added, “Wonderful day.”

“Yes, it is.” She replied

“Looked like rain when I got up this morning,” Patrick answered

“Did it?” Betsy looked up.

“Quite a few dark clouds in the west.” Patrick replied with a nod.

“Uh-huh.” Betsy retreated into the house with John.

“Say Betsy,” Patrick called after her, “you were all wrong in that argument we had yesterday. I looked up the information in the encyclopedia and it...Betsy tried to cut him off “Patrick! Watch yourself.” Patrick called after her “...said rutabagas had just as much nourishment, any day of the week, as parsnips. If you didn’t hear it?”

Once inside, Betsy looked about and said quietly, “John, you should know right away. I’m with child.” She said apologetically. “I know we’re not ready. I haven’t secured my teaching job, but here we are!” She threw up her hands and he swept her off her feet and gently spun her around.

“Nothing else matters!” he beamed with all the energy found in the wind and the sun.

“There’s just one thing I’ve hesitated to mention,” She continued. “I might have a strand of Mick Mack on my mother’s side.”

“I’ve nothing but joy, Betsy. It’ll mean our child is native to this free land that seems like it’ll be here awhile,” as he hugged his beautiful bride and beamed. “We will have a citizen born in America!” They hugged and kissed again. On his way back to the porch, John looked out the window to see a group of families laughing under the apple tree.

He recognized the Catholic parishioners, who worshipped at St. Matthew’s Parish in Black Brook. After their mid-day meal, some continued on the Turnpike to Loon Lake, others traveled south on Sorrel Road to a Saranac Lake community that would be called Timbuctoo. These few found Sunday solace at this intersection under the apple tree’s shade with their breakfast

wrapped in kerchiefs and towels to stay warm. A ceramic jar of coffee was still steaming from the center of the picnic table to share their community's news.

"He aren't saying that his Eliza is a better cook than you," a large woman said.

"You aren't much better, no way!" a thinner woman replied.

"Good Lord she kind of sweeps it into a room with an air of getting' up in style" retorted the first.

"Well 'nough. I hear you say Eliza's a pretty fair cook?" Harris was leaning against the tree's trunk and defended his wife.

"So I did," she replied. "I may say that. Good plain, common cookin'."

"Liza do make a good pone o' bread, her taters are fair, her corn cakes aren't extra—their fair," the larger woman listed Eliza's potluck contributions.

"Liza makes pies like nobody's business. She makes pie-certain she does. She makes you a real flakey shell, as melts in your mouth and flies up all like a puff!" the thinner woman described with dramatic expression.

"I know my pie and puddin' privledges," Harris comments. "Eliza bakes one for the church and one for George and I, and we don't go near the one for your gatherin'." The two women sat back on their bench and let loose a hearty gaffaw of laughter 'til the tears ran down their black, shiny cheeks. Sure enough they both looked forward to Eliza's cooking at their gathering and hadn't thought of her guarding their food from her own family. They righted themselves into a playful clapping and poking that sent them into more fits of laughter. They shared a calm and gentle moment of settlers enjoying their harvest and homes.

"Yes, yes it is certain', my Chloe makes the best chicken' pie 'round here."

"You's jus sayin' that 'cause I can't quit gaffawing." the lean woman bends over in laughter.

“Near not a crumb left when we leave the dinner table.” The porch door slammed loud as a pistol’s crack. They looked up. Betsy returned to the back porch with a coffee for her friends with a little white lie, “I’m not hungry after all my tasting.” Her peaked look and new found quietness gave clues they all but guessed. Well- it could be the flu?

“Are there mountains in Oregon? I’d miss real mountains.” A redhead said.

“I’d rather live here not owning land.” another replied.

“How did we let them change the law on our watch!!” Bridget was furious. “Women lost their rights to their own children, to own land and to keep their wages just a short time after the bill had passed. There’s nothing in the Constitution about women not being able to vote.”

“Oregon can get as cold as Alaska”

“Let’s stay focused here ladies,” Betsy spoke softly. “We toil the land that our sons will own if our husbands die. If we have daughters, they are expected to toil with no hopes of ownership. No one here is moving to Oregon. We can change the paradigm if we work together. Let’s find out what groups are working for change.”

They heard the men in the kitchen fill their plates with rooster stew, oatmeal bread and green beans, then filled their empty coffee cups with home brewed beer.

“Did you know that slaves are sixty percent of the wealth in cotton producing property and they are counted as 3/5ths a person.” One man mentioned to another. They were discussing the free states that went north from the Ohio River through Wisconsin territory. Slave states were from Missouri 600 miles south to New Orleans and east of the Mississippi River.

“New York’s decided a free black man must own land worth \$250 to vote.”

“Gerrit Smith is doing something about that.” The front door thumped behind them.

Returning to the back porch, “Well I did want to tell you something t’day,” Betsy gave a seriousness to her quiet voice. “John and I are to have a child.” And they all sighed a breath of relief. What they’d mostly guessed was out in the open. Congratulations and hugs were shared, advice assailed her from all directions until the cry of a child caused all heads to turn to the side porch. Bridget got up to check on one year old Nicholas who had caught a splinter in his finger. Older children cared for younger ones on the side porches while parents met on the front and back porches. Wooden trucks, soft dolls and little log cabins littered the split wood floor. A stack of small wood blocks in the corner were stacked as high as possible before they tumbled and skittered into a heap.

The opposite side of the house was for checkers, reading and music. Adults taught children to play the bodhran or fiddle, tap a rhythm with their toe to guide their voices. Tin whistle fingerings and breathing were taught to a group of kindergarten age children by young adults. Friday evenings this side of the house was used for a gathering of musicians that made up a band. If teens could keep up they could join the adults. The audience sat on log benches between the grocery and the Hall to listen or dance.

Autumn weather cooled to a spectacular array of Maple’s boasting health. Men met around the potbelly stove in the grocery. Women gathered in the kitchen and the children played noisily in the post office. The concerns of each season were deliberated and voted. Grocers, John and Betsy distributed the mail, negotiated bartering, enabled land loans and horse sales. Snow was cleared along the turnpike by volunteers. Rules and regulations of the community were discussed by the folks who gathered around stoves. Exchange of time, skills, labor was measured and traded. John mediated disputes. Betsy tempered injustices with an extra cup of flour or fudged

the weights when measuring butter at the counter. Their survival depended on the community helping others.

The following Spring, John discovered the fish hawk's nest in a Red Spruce. Three fluffy fledglings peeked over the stick nest with downy faces framing tiny, dark eyes. Parents regurgitated food into their open beaks. Within weeks, they were awkwardly feathered out with vanes sticking straight out of the soft down in a constant state of pterodactyl surprise. A few flaps of their wings sent old unwanted fluff throughout the high forest.

One feathered early and practiced its flight in laps across the three-foot-wide nest. She jumped up on a branch and plucked tufts of infant down, in adolescent defiance, from her belly, to flutter in the wind. Which parent swooped in with a squirming rodent's dangling tail? Nestlings raised open beaks in infantile expectation of a meal. Poking and pouncing on the mouse, they learned to pierce into life. John witnessed the fledglings set off into the wilderness to fend for themselves or meet their demise. The fleeting moments of a brief two months in the nest gave context to the peaceful safe community they'd created in Alderbrook.

What might lie ahead for this new country testing a democratic constitution? Would his sisters arrive to be part of Alderbrook? How would his parents fair without them? What might lie ahead for his daughter and Betsy? By the grace of God, we've made ourselves a safe pause, how long will it last? John wondered?