

The Northern Post

VOL. 1 NO. 41

GROWING WITH THE NORTH

MAY 30, 1973

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF ALEC ROSS

-by Donald Pugh

Discovery of gold at Mackey Point by William Teddy in 1897 led to a massive influx of prospectors. Wawa sprang into existence. From a few shacks, the small community soon boasted a population of over five hundred in good sturdy homes and an additional five hundred in tents. Although the times were somewhat wild, the steady element in town maintained adequate law and order without the aid of a regular police force. The camp simply informed disturbers that their stay in town was terminated, and with such an ultimatum the camp was able to rid itself of undesirable citizens.

One of the prospectors to the town was Alex Ross. Unlike most, however, he had not come as a gold seeker. Alex had heard of the great Helen iron range and he came to Michipicoten determined to locate an iron ore stake. He arrived too late and on reaching the crest of the Helen range he found it already staked in. Sitting on the crest of the mountain top, he meditated on the magnificent view. To the southward lay the great blue expanse of Lake Superior running out to the horizon, and bounded by its magnificent sandy shoreline towards Puckasaw to the westward and on towards Gargantua to the east. Looking towards the other points of the compass Alex' eyes swept over range upon range of rugged mountain crests; virgin territory leading northward to the Canadian Pacific Line sixty miles beyond, where sometimes on clear days, the plume of smoke from burning engines of smoke from coal burning engines could occasionally be observed.

"It looked like a great country to me", said Alex. "It looked to me

as though it would amount to something. It couldn't help but do so with the resources I knew the hills contained. And so instead of turning back I decided to stay and grow with the country."

Indeed, Alex was to grow with the country. He saw the original gold boom fade and die. He saw the boom town of Wawa vanish until all that remained was a double row of deserted houses. Alex Ross was to be the only inhabitant of the town except for the eccentric old Dr Carrick. In later years Alex gained the company of two other families, W. Bottoms' and P.A. Arnotts'.

In spite of the lack of people, Alex kept himself busy. At first he worked as a cook at the Minto Mine, and then ran a half way house during railway construction days. He took to tending large fields of potatoes and oats, and he raised horses and oxens for freighting and mail delivery between the Mission and Gasset on the C.P.R. His team also found employment with the Helen Mine and the Magpie Mine. The occasional producing gold mine, the logging camps and the power plants also were a source of employment for Alex.

The leanest years were from 1918 to 1920 following the closing of the Helen Mine. Less than 150 people were to be found in the whole Michipicoten area at this time. At Michipicoten Harbour the great ore docks stood silent, and the population dwindled to a handful.

(Cont. Next Week)

THIS, TOO, SHALL PASS AWAY.