



Worth Travelling Miles to See: Diary of a Survey Trip to Lake Temiskaming, 1886

A.H. Telfer

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In the 1880s the provincial government sent out teams of land surveyors to explore the northern Ontario hinterland. By rail, canoe and on foot they and their crews cut through the forests and across streams, establishing the boundaries for townships in preparation for settlement.

Alexander Herkes Telfer was a member of the party led by the Haliburton surveyor Alexander Niven, who was responsible for running the lines for seven townships around the head of Lake Temiskaming. The child of Scottish immigrants who settled in Scarborough, Ontario, **A.H. Telfer** logged his experiences in a personal diary, revealing a love of new frontiers and adventure that the hardships of life could not diminish. His vivid account provides interesting details of early surveying methods and of the lives of some intrepid early settlers in this wild but beautiful land.

An introduction and annotations by the editor and early photographs of the upper Ottawa/Lake Temiskaming area complement the diary and create a historical context.

"I personally have long been interested in the surveyor Alexander Niven from Haliburton. I grew up on Niven Street in New Liskeard, and as a child wondered about the man the street was named for. The story of Niven and the other surveyors who mapped the Townships of the Little Clay Belt in the District of Temiskaming in the 1880s is long overdue.

"**A.H. Telfer**'s personal diaries, which tell of the day-to-day hardships and accomplishments of these surveyors, are a fascinating account of the country before the great land rush of the 1890s and the Cobalt mining boom of 1903, which changed the landscape dramatically. This personal account by one of the members of the actual survey party of 1886 is interesting from a historical perspective, as it bridges the gap between the fur trading and logging eras, and the settlement of Temiskaming. Of equal interest is the mention in the diary of pioneers in the area, such as C.C. Farr, the founder of the town of Haileybury; Edouard Piche, one of the earliest settlers on Lake Temiskaming; and the Heard brothers from Haliburton, who were among the first homesteaders.

"For anyone interested in the history of northern Ontario, this is a 'must read.'"

- Bruce W. Taylor, genealogist, historian and author, his most recent book being *New Liskeard: The Pioneer Years* (2003).

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