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CHAPTER 2: THE ROAD TO NOWHERE (1852 TO 1859)

The "Killing Work" of Surveying

The Muskoka Road might never have come into being if the government of Canada West had listened to surveyor James W. Bridgland. In 1852, surveyor B led a team through his team conducted an exploratory survey in 1852 of about 1300 square kilometres, from the Talbot River in Kiwartha Lakes, through the southern part of Muskoka and on to Georgian Bay. His Bridgland's report to the Commissioner of Crown Lands almost vibrated with scorn as he pronounced the region "entirely unfitted as a whole, for agricultural purposes."

settlement was But agricultural purposes were the priority of the day for the Govt of Canada West.

At that time in Muskoka's history, it was part of a vast, largely uncharted area known as the Ottawa-Huron tract. Stretching from the Ottawa River to Georgian Bay, and from Lake Nipissing to the northern boundaries of white settlement along Lake Ontario, these wild lands were about to become the government of Canada West's chief target for settlement.

Note: Parry Sound Muskoka

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Until the 19th century, anything north of Orillia was largely unknown to the colonials and their governments. The white settlers of Canada West - commonly called Upper Canada - huddled along a skinny strip of land from Kingston to Toronto. They also lived in the Niagara Peninsula, in the London area and in a few pockets near Ottawa. Primarily Loyalists dislocated by the American War of Independence and immigrants from the British Isles - over half of them Irish - they numbered about one million strong at the time of Bridgland's survey.

The settlers living along the shores of Lake Ontario were pushing the government to open land northward.

And The government was already trying to deal with a recent flood of European immigrants - 100,000 Irish in 1847 alone. - added to the urgency. (made the need urgent?) So the powers in the capital city of Québec started to consider the

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