Brooklyn Public Library

The Brooklyn Daily Eagle (Brooklyn, New York) · Sat, Feb 8, 1879 · Page 4

Downloaded on Feb 27, 2015

The Great East End Indian Reservation to be Sold in Bulk.

Views of the Referee on the Question of Partition—The Value of Proprietary Shares—A Vast Expanse of Worthless Territory and Little Tillable Land—Indian Privileges and Abuses—The Harbors, Bays and Fresh Water Ponds—Ten Miles from Civilization—No Improvement in Over a Century.

On the 18th day of last July Judge Dykman made an order of sale in the case of Robert M. Grinnell against Edward M. Baker and others, representing the owners of Montauk, the Indian reservation on the southeastern extremity of Long Island, and are bounded by the Atlantic Ocean, Long Island Sound and Gardiner's Bay, excepting along the western end and the extreme eastern end. For over two hundred years these thousands of acres have been used for little else than pasturing cattle, and have been of little value to any one of the many shareholders. Mr. Grinnell, who owns as much as is represented by a share of £5, brought suit to have the whole reservation sold, the underlying purpose being its purchase by a stock company and the establishment of an immense watering place, the Long Island Railroad to be extended from Bridgehampton. There was also in view the making of the Point a place of entry and departure for foreign passenger steamboats, the mails and passengers to be forwarded to New York by rail, and the freights by lighters. Aside from the many other advantages, such an arrangement would relieve vessels from the dangers of shipwreck on the Long Island coast. The smallest share represented is £1 5s. and the largest £305 0s., owned by Washington L. Tyson, and there are in all thirty-five full shares and three-eighths of a share, each full share representing £40 sterling, according to a custom which has been in existence for 135 years. The individual interest of each person in the undivided lands is in the proportion that his share will bear to the sum of £1,417 0s. 01-7d. The liens upon the property are mostly mortgages. An interest represented by £40 is mortgaged for $2,000 to Richard Cook, and the whole sum, and interest from November, 1877, is unpaid. An interest represented by £126 is mortgaged for $6,000 to Henry P. Hedges as executor of Josiah Douglass. An interest represented by £60 is mortgaged for $3,000 to Harriet S. Deering. An interest represented by £40 is mortgaged for $2,000 to Mary S. Halsey, and a similar interest is mortgaged for the same amount to Frank S. Winchester. There are a few judgments of record, not aggregating more than $3,000, which are incumbrances upon all the shares, being against the trustees.

WHAT THE RESERVATION IS.

The premises in question, to be sold in bulk or by partition as the Court may determine, are nearly ten miles long and vary in width from a mile and a half to three miles. Including the land under water, which is quite as valuable as the upland, there are eleven thousand five hundred acres, and the referee, the better to describe the vast domain, has divided it into three parts. The tract lying to the west of a line running through Fort Pond is known as Hither Woods, and is four and a half miles long and a mile and three quarters wide. It covers four thousand three hundred acres of land, one hundred and fifty acres of water. There is also in this section seven hundred acres of worthless sand beach and salt meadow, four hundred acres of rock and barren ridge unsusceptible of cultivation; from fifteen to eighteen hundred acres of woodland, and from fourteen to seventeen hundred acres of cleared and tillable land. The soil is variable in quality, the greater part being sandy. The timber is scattering, principally oak, but there is some pine in the western part. Near this the keeper, named Conklin, cultivates a farm of one hundred acres, and the same quality of land, within a mile of Easthampton, is worth $25 to $50 an acre.

The second tract is bounded by lines running approximately north and south through Fort Pond and Great Pond, comprising the Nine Score Acre Purchase and North Creek. There are three thousand acres in this tract, and six hundred and fifty are covered by water. There are also two thousand acres of beach and barren meadow, and one hundred and fifty acres of rock and barren land. Two thousand acres are cleared, but there are some swamps and marshes, and a scattering growth of trees near Culloden Point. The land in the Nine Score purchase is level, and part of it is cultivated by a keeper named Osborn. It is considered good land, worth from $50 to $80 an acre. The North Neck land is not so good, being hilly and extremely deep in places, rising to an elevation of one hundred and twenty-five feet above sea level.

The land lying to the eastward embraces the Indian Field and the Point, in all forty-two hundred acres, and nine hundred acres are covered by water. Four hundred acres are made up of beach or worthless meadow, two hundred acres of rock or barren ridge, and twenty-seven hundred acres of cleared and tillable soil. The northern part of the Indian Field embraces twelve hundred acres, and is quite hilly, but the soil is the best in Montauk. The Indians cultivate about thirty acres. The point is level in the west. It comprises the Ditch Plain, and is hilly in parts, beside having a seventy-five acre swamp. Ninety acres are cultivated by a keeper named Stratton, and, the soil being fair, would be worth from $35 to $80 an acre within a mile of Easthampton.

Excluding water and beach, there are in the whole of Montauk eight thousand six hundred and fifty acres, and seven hundred and fifty acres are rock and barren ridge. There are about fifteen hundred acres of woodland in the Hither Woods, and in all the other scattering tracts of woodland and swamp some three hundred and fifty acres. Of tillable land there are some six thousand acres. By reason of the poverty of the soil, and natural impediments, much of the land is only valuable for pasturage, and of this there are some thirty-five hundred acres. Some part of the woodland could be cleared and profitably cultivated. Of the thousands of acres now cleared, not more than thirty-five hundred acres can be cultivated with reasonable chances of profit. The three keepers who do the bulk of the farming have their lands fenced, and their buildings are worth, in the aggregate, $3,500. There are no roads whatever, but a cart track from end to end, passable only by strongly built vehicles. Nor are there any piers or docks, so that the only means of getting ashore is by small boats. There are no harbors on Montauk proper. There is an anchorage in Turtle Bay, near the light house, and another near Shagnowock Point, which can be used in certain states of wind, and only by small vessels. Fort Pond Bay is an excellent anchorage, with water enough to float the largest vessels, but during a gale from the northeast no vessel could lie there with guaranteed safety, and it is doubtful if a pier could be maintained there. It could be made an excellent harbor by the construction of a breakwater half a mile long.

THE FRESH WATER PONDS.

Fresh Pond, in Hither Woods, is a sheet of fresh water, not very deep, and covers fifty acres. Fort Pond is also fresh, is over half a mile in length,, varies considerably in width, in places is bold and hilly and is well stocked with pickerel and perch. Great Pond is two miles in length and three-quarters wide, covering twelve hundred acres, with low and sandy shore and alive with perch and eels. The two Reed ponds are small, with marshy banks. Oyster Pond covers twenty acres, but the water is brackish in consequence of the ebb and flow of the Sound tides. It is a great oyster btd. Money Pond covers twelve acres. These are the principal ponds. There are many small ones scattered about. The fisheries are worth $350 a year and if well regulated might become extremely valuable. The shore fisheries in the waters of the Sound and ocean are worth $75 a year, and each person occupying a station for the setting of nets has to pay $25 annually. The exclusive right of shooting over Montauk is said to be worth a great deal. The nearest village and post office to Montauk is Amagansett, ten miles away. The road is very bad and for seven miles lies over a sandy beach and marsh, where mosquitos have been so thick at times as to worry horses until they dropped in the traces. Amagansett is nine miles from the nearest railroad station, Bridgehampton, which is over ninety-six miles from Brooklyn.

Excepting the premises occupied by the Indians and the keepers, and the woodland, all the rest have been used for pasturage for over two centuries, and are worth now for that purpose $3,500 a year. Portions of the reservation could be divided into small farms, but they would be isolated, and thus the other portions would be diminished in value. For stock farming on a large scale the lands are invaluable, and for $6,000 all the necessary buildings could be erected. The referee does not think the place fitted for hotels, boarding houses or private villas, and thinks that one person should own all of the thousands of acres to make them profitable.

Were the premises divided among the several owners in proportion to their respective interests, the owner of £1 would be entitled to six acres, and all others in the same ratio. In consequence of the varied soil, differences of situation, whether cleared or woodland, encroachments on the ocean, and liens and incumbrances of the Montauk tribe, as well as the numerous owners and disparity of interests, the referee deems it wholly impracticable to partition the premises, and advises hat they be sold in bulk. The Indians have a right of occupation of a certain portion of the premises, comprising Indian Field and North Neck, either of which they can use for pasturage, but not both at once. The first parcel contains eighteen hundred acres of cleared land, but has not been occupied by the tribe for one hundred and seventy years. The second tract, which the tribe, only two families, now occupy, comprises twelve hundred acres and is the best on Montauk. They cultivate but about thirty acres, shifting the area from time to time. They keep two horses and no cattle. It has been their custom to release to the proprietors the exclusive right of pasturage in Indian Field, but it has been determined by this action that they cannot hereafter do this, nor keep cattle, sell hay or lease land to any person. The disposal of the lands in parcels would necessitate their being fenced at $1.12 for every twelve feet, and it would cost for the fencing of the highways $1,400 a mile, while the cost of grading and making the roads would be $500 a mile. Sporting privileges would be destroyed.

Clipped By:

admin510
Fri, Feb 27, 2015

Copyright © 2015 Newspapers.com. All Rights Reserved.