

Cornwall Township Historical Society

Newsletter June 2011

www.cornwalltwphistorical.ca

Editor: Don McIntosh

Logging Days in Northern Ontario

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, logging in Northern Ontario was big business. The work was seasonal from freeze up in late fall until spring thaw. For this reason the industry attracted a lot of temporary transient labour. Many of these loggers were young unmarried men looking for adventure. Several were from our locale who worked here on area farms in the summer but come fall when the cows dried up they headed north to Blind River and the environs of northern Algonquin Park, attracted by the lucrative wages paid by the logging companies.

At this period in time, most of our local pine had been harvested so companies moved north to log the seemingly endless supply of pine logs on Crown land in Northern Ontario. There was an insatiable demand for pine lumber in the U.S. for housing and construction created by westward expansion. As timber in Michigan began to disappear, American logging firms looked to the north shore of Lake Huron and Georgian Bay for a new supply of white and red pine in order to keep their sawmills in operation.

The conditions of the rugged terrain governed the season that logging was possible. In the winter the frozen lakes made an ideal storage area for the cut logs awaiting the spring drive. Also, the snow and ice were used to the loggers' advantage, reducing friction as the logs were pulled from the bush on ice roads. In those days heavy equipment was either non-existent or at most primitive and this created a huge demand for manual labour. Logging companies were under licence to provide raw material to the American owned sawmills. The largest firm, McFadden Saw Mill Co., alone sawed 50 million board feet of lumber per year. This kept logging companies busy recruiting suitable manpower for the hard work in

the bush. The most skilled workers were the teamsters. Most logs were pulled by horse downhill from the hillsides to the frozen lakes. Since it was impossible for the horses to pull the huge logs uphill for any great distance, hillsides sloping away from lakes or rivers were rarely logged. Hauling these loads of logs made for dangerous work for both horse and driver as most loads were pulled downhill. An inexperienced teamster could easily lose control of the load down a steep grade, charging the team of draught horses from behind with tons of runaway logs. Any injury to the horse would invariably lead to its early demise. The unwritten rule was that men were replaceable; horses were too valuable to lose. That's why experienced teamsters were admired and treated with respect.



Teamsters were highly skilled workers

The sawyers were the crews that felled the trees. These were pre-chain saw days so that felling was done with two man cross-cut saws. A well sharpened saw was indeed a sawyer's best friend. After the tree was felled bucking took place. This cut away branches from the log before being cut into log lengths. Some logs were used to make river rafts so they had to be squared. Hewing a log with a broad axe to produce square timber was a skill of its own. Only the most expert of axmen could wield a broad axe. Their expertise wielding the broad axe could square a timber almost as good as one produced in the mill.



Axmen notch a pine tree with cross cut saw

The lowest of worker in the bush crew was the river hog. The term applied to men who were employed as river drivers; balancing precariously on the floating logs breaking up log jams on the web of rivers and lakes that connected the logged forests to the mills. Without question theirs was the most dangerous of occupations. Their stay with the logging companies was short, possibly just a few weeks while the river drive took place in the spring. For this reason the river hogs tended to be transient labour and most of the employee recruitment for this position took place at the local bar rooms and watering holes. Since many rivers were too narrow and shallow to carry the large log booms, log dams were built to create an artificial lake with deeper water. The river hogs had the unenviable task of maneuvering the logs through the chutes in these dams. Many men drowned during these operations, unable to resurface after falling from a log in turbulent waters.



A typical logging camp

To say that living conditions in the logging camps was poor is an understatement. A typical logging camp could house as many as 3,000 men, no showers or baths provided. A single bunkhouse could house as many as 40 men, all sleeping side by side with only a board between them. Camp food,

haphazardly prepared by rough and tumble cooks, was plentiful but plain. A dinner meal might consist of black tea, beans, soup, potatoes and some salt beef.

Men would have to share space at a woodstove to try and dry their sodden clothes before work began the next morning. At the first sign of the spring thaw, camps were quickly deserted. Men picked up and left with nothing but the clothes on their back, returning the camps to Mother Nature. These abandoned camps have made for interesting finds amongst amateur archeologists. Cross cut saws, unopened tin cans of food, and numerous other relics from the past are there for the taking for those willing to trek deep in these northern forests on a discovery mission.

Loggers did not realize it at the time but they were creating ideal conditions for a disaster. The slash (debris from the cut trees) left behind stifled the young saplings' growth; reforestation measures were unheard-of. In 1948 during an unusually dry spring a fire started near Sault Ste. Marie that would change forestry practices in Canada forever. The fire started on May 25 and burned for more than two months leaving $\frac{3}{4}$ million acres of scorched forest in its wake. This fire and the realization that past logging practices were unsustainable began many of the forest conservation and reforestation measures that we have in place today.

Many interesting tales abound about the men who worked in the logging camps in North Ontario. The name of Big Joe Moufferand is indeed legendary as a woodsman who could accomplish any feat. Unfortunately, these men have all passed on and all we have left are the stories that they shared with their descendants and colleagues. Perhaps you know of someone's experience in the bush from years ago. If you do, please get in touch with the newsletter editor and we will be happy to publish any interesting story you may have.

The editor wishing to thank Mr. John Filliol for his input on this newsletter. John is a professional forester who worked for several years in Ontario's northern forests.

Welcome new members:



Mr. Gerry McDonald of Winnipeg Manitoba. Gerry has roots in this area and would be interested in hearing from anyone related to the Alexander McDonnell (McDonald) and Jeanette (Janet) McIntosh families.
gmgermac467@gmail.com

Also, Brenda Chisholm and Randy Kinnear from Harrison's Corners joined us as new members at our May meeting.

Our next meeting is our annual June pot luck event. This will take place Tuesday June 28th at 5:00pm at the Heritage Centre. Bring your favorite dish and bring along a friend too. Come early and meet new friends and old acquaintances.



Congratulations to our MMP Jim Brownell who successfully passed a bill in the Ontario Legislature declaring every September 28 British Home Child Day. There were many orphaned Home Children sent to this area, including Jim's grandmother. Another famous local Home Child was Claude Patrick Nunney who received the Victoria Cross posthumously in 1918 for courage in battle during WWI.

Thanks for your hard work Jim in seeing this important bill through the maze of our political process. It's a great political as well as a personal achievement for you.



Did you know that the Cornwall Township Historical Society is a registered charitable organization with the Canada Revenue Agency? With any financial donation you make to keep our organization going, you will receive an official tax receipt which will reduce your income tax commensurately. Remember, you have a choice to send your money to Ottawa or keep it local for a good cause.

Congratulations!

To the new executive of the CTHS who were acclaimed at our May 24th annual general meeting:

President: Bill Costello
Vice President: Gerald MacDonald
Treasurer: Maureen McAlear
Recording Secretary: Don McIntosh
Past President: Ken McDonald

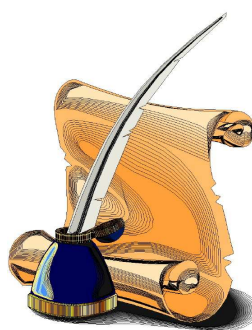
You're Invited



The Sir John Johnson Manor House Committee in

Williamstown wishes to extend a special invitation to attend their annual Lawn Social. The date is Wednesday July 20th at 6:30 pm. There will be local entertainment and refreshments. Everyone welcome.

The President's Pen



A few more ramblings from the pen, but first I have to address some outstanding items of some importance.

The first being our serious concern about the hydro rates issue and I can only advise you that the matter is still being considered by the South Stormont council.

Next is the "Simon Fraser Plaque" project. The project is now in the hands of the appropriate officials of our

municipality for the completion of the sign and we should know a date for the completion quite soon. Thanks to Kevin Wheeler for his knowledge of our local history and who provided the wording for the sign.

On a more positive and happy note, the St. Andrews School “Simon Fraser Essay “ project has been finally concluded and I am delighted to inform you that the winners of our sponsored competition are as follows: First, Rebecca Macdonell (\$100.00). Second “Tristen Pawis “ (\$60.00). Third, Danielle Breau (\$40.00). These winners will be presented with their prizes at an appropriate ceremony at St Andrews School. Our Historical Society is extremely grateful and thankful for the talents of two of our members, Edith McPhail and Gay Young, who kindly volunteered to act as judges for the competition. Our sincere thanks also to Mrs. Margaret Benke, Principal of St Andrews School, whose enthusiastic support of this competition greatly contributed to its successful completion.

In closing, I hope to see a good turnout for our next meeting on June 28th; Remember ?? This is our “Pot Luck“ meeting. There will be a minimum of business but a maximum of enjoyment. See you there.

Bill Costello, president

Editor’s Note: Will run a copy of the winning Simon Fraser essay in our next newsletter.

Thanks to those who volunteered to act as greeter this summer when the Heritage Centre is open. The following is the schedule. If for some reason you can’t make your assigned time, please find an alternate. Note the new hours from 1:00 to 3:00. Last year we were open from 2:00 to 4:00 so we’ll see if these new hours improve traffic through the Heritage Centre.

Heritage Centre – Open House Summer of 2011

Hours Open – Sunday 1:00 pm to 3:00 pm

July 3	Bill & Myra Costello
July 10	Edith McPhail & Margaret MacDonald
July 17	Gerald & Hazel MacDonald
July 24	Don McIntosh & Maureen McAlear
July 31	Ranald McDonell
August 7	Don McIntosh & Sheila Cadieux
August 14	Bill & Myra Costello
August 21	Brenda Chisholm & Randy Kinnear
August 28	Ken McDonald



The Cornwall Township Historical Society wishes everyone a safe and happy summer.