

LUMBERING I

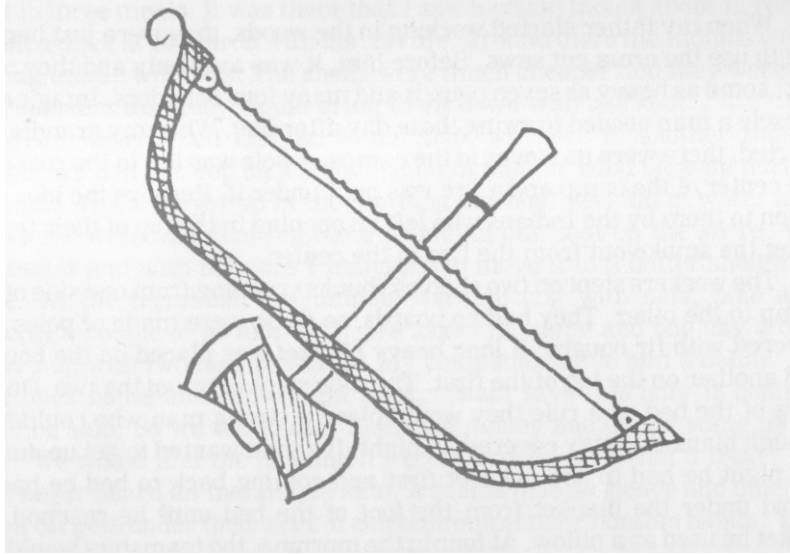
When my father started working in the woods, they were just beginning to use the cross cut saws. Before him, it was axes only and they were big: some as heavy as seven pounds and many four pounders. Imagine the muscle a man needed to swing those day after day. When my grandfather started, there were no stoves in the camps. A hole was left in the roof over the center of the camp and a fire was built under it. Perhaps the idea was given to them by the Indians who left an opening in the top of their tepees to let the smoke out from the fire in the center.

The workers slept on two shelves (bunks) running from one side of the camp to the other. They had no boards, so these were made of poles and covered with fir boughs. A long heavy blanket was placed on the boughs and another on the top of the first. The men slept between the two. On the ends of the bed as a rule they would place a strong man who could hold enough blanket to stay covered all night. If a man wanted to get up during the night he had to slip out feet first and coming back to bed he had to crawl under the blanket from the foot of the bed until he reached the jacket he used as a pillow. At four in the morning, the teamsters would get up to feed their oxen and later their horses so that they could eat before going to work.

Besides the main camp there was the hovel of course (a stable) and a hay shed, Around the turn of the century they had stoves in the camps. More buildings were added too. A cook room for the kitchen and dining. A bunkhouse for the workers, a stable (hovel) for the horses and a hay shed. A blacksmith shop to shoe the horses and repair the sleighs, an office for the boss and clerk and sometimes one for the saw filer.

The men would go to work in the morning with a freshly filed saw and at lunchtime the filer would bring them a fresh one again. The workers were on the job at daybreak and worked until dusk with an hour for lunch, around noon. Then they would gather around an open fire even when the snow was falling, sit on the logs and eat the beans and biscuits that had been warmed up near the fire. They would wash that down with good strong tea sweetened with molasses. As a rule the molasses was mixed with the tea leaves at the camp. If this was not done someone would sneak to the lunch box in the morning and eat the molasses and the others had to think their tea without.

The activities would start in the middle of September. The workers would walk to a chosen place and there they lived in tents for about a month until their camp was built. Then they would start cutting the trees: pine, spruce, fir, and cedar. They were about 40 men in all. The workers were divided in crews: two cutters, one branch trimmer, a swamper, whose job was to clear the way for the team to reach the cut tree and haul it (twich) to the yard (log pile) at the hauling road.



LUMBERING II

The workers were paid by the month with a bonus if they stayed all winter. I remember that wages went up to \$100 a month after the First World War. There was emulation between the different crews; who would put more logs at the road every day. Two men were at the hauling road piling things very neatly. After supper the boss would walk into camp and ask every teamster how many logs he had brought to the yard at the hauling road. If he had made a good day, he would not declare all his logs but keep some secret for the bad days. That would happen if he broke a sled or a harness. Also, some trees were not easy to bring down because of the other trees around it. If a tree hit another coming down and would not reach the ground, the choppers would try and bring another across it and break the top of it or the branch that held it. Sometimes they would hitch the horses to the foot of the first tree and pull it away from the tree that was holding it. This took time and did not always work. That would not happen often to the good choppers. You could put a stick 50 feet from a tree and a good chopper could bring his tree right on it.

I have been told a strange story by my father, my Uncle Ernest and Belone Pelletier, who knew the man. It happened in the neighborhood of Little Musquacook Brook. The choppers had cut a tree and it was hooked in another. They threw another tree across it and it still hung up. They threw a second tree on it and it would not come down. One of the choppers flew in a rage. He swore and swore like nobody had done before. The tree

came down but under it there was a small spruce tree and it did not bend nor break but went right through the big tree. When the workers went to bed after supper the blasphemer had a nightmare and even when his companions tried to wake him up they never could and he died. When I worked in the woods the men would swear once in a while but as they said, not on the job because it was unlucky.

The hauling road had been blazed in the Fall and while the cutters were doing their job a crew was preparing the road to bring the logs to the river or to the lake closest to the cutting area. This was a delicate job. Usually it followed a brook. It could not be too steep because it would be dangerous for the loaded teams coming down. In some cases they had to put dirt or hay to slow the loads. If it was too steep sometimes they rigged a steel cable tied to the load and made a few turns around a tree on the hill. A man holding the end of the steel cable could hold the load and let it go down as slow as he wanted.

After Christmas, the chopping was stopped, the snow was quite deep in the woods then and the hauling would start. The sleds were set near the pile of logs (yard) and the horses unhitched and moved a short distance so that they would not be hurt by logs falling from the pile. Two men were on the pile pushing the logs down. Two were near the sled to prevent them from rolling over the sled. The bunks on the sleds were eight feet wide, A row of logs was placed on them and chained together. Then another row was placed on top of the first one and chained and so on until the teamster said he had enough. Then he would hitch his horses to the load and after hitting the runners with a stick to unglue them from the snow, he would bring his load to the end of the road, at the river or at the lake where two men were waiting for it. There the logs were placed close enough to the water so that they would not be too hard to set afloat after the ice was gone in the spring, but not too close to the river so that the ice would not take them down as it went.

By the middle of March, the job was done and the camp would close. The supplies left over would be brought back to the depot and everybody would go home except the watchman responsible for the supplies. How were those supplies brought up there in the first place? If the camps were along the river, the supplies were brought there in late summer and fall by tote boats pulled by horses. Those tote boats were barges 40 feet long and about eight feet wide. They could hold as much as ten tons and the horses would pull the load up against the current if the water was deep enough. This was done very much on the Allagash and some on the St. John River, too.

In August, horses were sent along the river with scoops to clear the channel for the boat. Then the hauling up of the supplies started. It would

last sometimes until the river froze. When they would come to a fall or a big rapid, the boat was unloaded and the load carried by wagon to another boat above the bad spot. From the depot to the camps inland, the supplies were hauled by horses and wagons or sleighs. There was always a pair or two of horses toting during the winter but most of the supplies were brought up before, especially things that could freeze like potatoes. Log driving was quite an enterprise by itself and required lots of know-how. After the ice was gone a group of men would come up and push the logs in the river. The big holding booms at the mill were set. Along the river sheer booms were set at the proper place to guide the logs away from islands and ledges, away from the big cement supports of the bridges along their way to the mill. Those sheer booms were a chain of logs tied one to the end of the other and anchored ashore to a good rock or a dead man. (a dead man is a log buried deep in the ground and to which a chain is tied.) Alongside of the logs were placed planks on their side and tied to the upper end of logs. Those planks were pushed away from the lower end of the log by a brace that was about eight feet long. The plank was called a wing. It caught in the current and pushed the boom away from the shore. When the ice was gone a crew went up-river to the places where the logs were piled along the river and pushed them in the water. Usually the camp of the log cutters was along the river too, so the log drivers slept in them. If not, they cleared the snow, built a platform of poles and pitched a tent over it. After the logs were all in the water, the men followed them in bateaux pushing back in the current the logs that had gotten stuck along the shore. The cook and the supplies followed in scows and stopped at the proper places for lunch and for tenting for the night. The cook had a scow to himself for his kitchen. A shelter was built over stove and supplies. It was open at both ends. The workers slept in a shed tent about 40 feet long. It did not take long that the snow disappeared and they slept on a thick blanket about 40 feet long on the ground and another on top. Two strong men were stationed at the ends to hold it. I did some of that work but it was in June when the weather was warmer. At 4:00 in the morning, the cook's helpers started fires in front of the open tent and a short while later they would yell: "Turn out!" We would get up then. We had gone to bed with our wet clothes on and they had dried some during the night. We would put our boots on, wash a bit and when the cookies (cook helpers) yelled: "Come get it", we would take a tin plate, a fork, a cup and in turn help ourselves to the fresh pork and beans, hot biscuits, doughnuts and hot coffee. The sun was not up when we would take a peavey, pole or pickeroon and begin pushing or carrying the logs to water deep enough to take them

down river. Around ten in the morning, we had a break for the first lunch and another one around two in the afternoon for the second lunch. The food was brought to the workers by the scows if the scow carrying the kitchen did not happen to be near. In the evening we would stop soon enough to have supper in daylight. That business went on until the last log had reached the boom at the mill. Those logs would travel as far as 100 miles on the river. Other crews were stationed along the river. They would set the sheer booms before the logs reached their section of river. As time went by, the level of the water went down and it was important that the logs that had stopped along the shore be pushed back in the water. Otherwise they would sometimes be quite a distance from it when the crew on the rear came by.

The men working in the sections slept in shacks and each crew had a cook. The St. John River from the mouth of the Allagash River to Van Buren and the mill was divided in sections. A crew was stationed in Allagash Village, one in St. Francis, one in St. John, one in Fort Kent, one at Baker Brook on the U.S. side of the river, one in Frenchville, one in Edmundston and one in St. Basile. The two last ones had their shacks on the Canadian side of the river. The job was very dangerous but the workers had been at it every spring for years, at least a few of them in every crew. The young were well trained by the older ones and most of them were as safe on a log as on the ground.

I am told that a man from Allagash came down the Big Rapid on a log. Now that Big Rapid is nearly three miles long and the river drops 80 feet in those three miles. When the river is high you travel those three miles in three minutes ... the man had a pole for balancing. If you had only a peavey, you tried to drive it in a second log and hold it alongside the one you stood on.

Around 1927, the Cunliffes moved their lumbering operations from the Allagash to the St. John River. Their headquarters (depot) were at Castonguay Settlement. Dad was supervisor (walking boss). Nick Cunliffe was contractor. They had two to three camps, some on the Schebanticook Stream, the Outlet of East Lake and some on the St. John, above the Settlement. The contractor would visit the operations in a Model A Ford transformed into a snowmobile. With that, he would travel on any road and on the River also. Once he broke through the ice at School House Rapids; only the rear end of the machine sank. They brought a pair of horses to pull the machine out but the horses went down through the ice and drowned. The snowmobile was pulled out by men with levers and poles. As supervisor, Dad walked a lot and he did not bring a lunch. He told me that one day, he had walked all day without lunch and barely made it back to his office.

Later the company let him have a horse and cutter. He always loved animals and he made a pet with that horse. On cold days, he would even bring it into his office to enjoy the warm room. On work days the lights would be put out at nine in the evening but not on Saturday nights, because Sunday was their day off. On that night, the men would tell stories and sing songs, play the mouth organ or even a violin. Some of them were real good dancers. Some were good at story telling.

My Uncle Ernest could read a book and tell it to you from cover to cover. Some would make their own stories like the one who was telling the men about his adventures on the Titanic when it was sunk. When asked how he managed to get in a boat, he answered that he had put on a lady's dress. And when asked what kind of a job he had on that huge ship, he said that there was a swamp on one end of the ship and his job was to shoot rabbits for the officer's table. Of course, that broke the spell. Men often are proud of their horses and their dog. About dogs, one remarked that some dogs have more brains than their master, somebody objected. "I should know," said the speaker, "I have one like that."

On Sunday, the men washed their clothes, made spare axe handles, walked in woods collecting spruce gum for their wives or their sweethearts. Others did some trapping. Dad and his brother, Uncle Ben were good at trapping. They made a few extra dollars that way. One spring Dad came home with a few beaver pelts that he had frozen. He spread them on the floor upstairs to dry and sold them after but soon after we discovered that he had taken a tribe of bedbugs with the pelts. So one day, in May, we were all kept out of the house and my parents burned sulfur in the house. That took care of that but you can bet that mother never after allowed Dad to dry his beaver pelts in the house. Once at Castonguay Settlement, Dad had caught a bobcat. He managed to get it out of the trap and in a box, he brought it to his office, put a collar around its neck and tied it to a log. He could never tame it and Nick ordered him to get rid of it before it broke free and someone got hurt. He was more lucky with a big housecat that he adopted. The animal weighed over 10 pounds. He brought it home in the spring, the cat stayed with us but there was no doubt who was his best friend. Dad was supervising the log drive and we knew that he was on his way home, because the cat asked for the door to go meet him when he heard the outboard motor on Dad's boat. He was the boss on our property and all the cats and dogs in the neighborhood knew it but there was a cloud in his blue sky. If the cat heard a train coming, (we were less than a hundred yards from the track), and he was out, he would make a beeline for the house, got inside in a flash and went to hide under my mother's bed.

When my father was lumbering on the Allagash, there were others cutting logs on the upper St. John. So far as I can remember, Donald McLellan was cutting near Morrow Shed, about eight miles above Castonguay Settlement, Rob England was doing the same of the Big Black River. Potts had lumbering going on near the Big Black Rivr too and Billy Jack was busy in the Upper St. John, that is in the Baker Lake district. He had a camp on Brailey Brook, about ten miles from the Canadian border. He had other camps and his depot was down river with other camps in the area.

When I was living in Rockwood in the middle fifties I was visiting camps and when the Great Northern Paper Co. connected its road system in that area with the International Paper Co. road system, I paid a visit to a camp on the International Paper Co. territory. That camp was on Brailey Brook, near the site of Billy Jack's camp. There was not much snow in the area when I visited it and the boss, Mr. Miranda from St. Aurelie, P.Q., brought me to the clearing where the old camp had been. He showed me a hollow spot and told me that a man had been buried there. The man was clerk at Billy Jack's camp and he was an alcoholic. They would get their supplies from Canada and there was a tote road from the camp to St. Aurelie. One stormy winter day, when the cook was alone in the cookroom, the clerk walks in, crazy with drink. The cook got scared, grabbed the poker and killed the clerk. He pulled a few boards from the floor, dug a hole and buried the clerk. He put the boards back in place, washed his floor, and when the workers came back in the evening he asked them if they had seen the clerk. He said he had seen him walking away in the storm. They looked for him and of course, never found him. He was given up as lost in the snowstorm. Years later when the cook was dying he told them what he had done with the clerk. They went back, dug him out and buried him in a graveyard.

When they shifted from hauling logs with horses to hauling them with the steam log haulers, they could go farther in the woods from the water because the steam outfit could haul more than one set of sleighs hitched one to the other like a train. The road for those heavy loads had to be iced over. Stove wood was cut and piled along the hauling road to keep the fire going and make enough steam to keep the hauler working. Along the old hauler road near the Ramsey Brook, we still can see the old piles of firewood left there after the hauling was finished. The front end of the engine was on runners and in the beginning the steering was done by a horse hitched between two poles tied to runners. The horse was guided by a man sitting on a platform set over the runners. Later on, a steering wheel was installed. Of course, the steam engine was rigged with a whistle and a headlight. The haulers were out early and it was ten in the even-

ing sometimes before they were in for supper. The speed of travel was controlled by an engineer assisted by a fireman.

When I was a boy there was no pulpwood floating down-river; it was all logs, long logs 40 feet long. There were some square logs; I saw only an old one that had been left in a bay. An old-timer, Mr. Mack Robichaud, who was riding in my canoe identified it for me. It was quite rotten. Those were squared in the wood with an axe. I never learned the reason. When Fraser Pulp and Paper Co. built its mill at Edmundston and Mr. Lacroix brought his further down-river, lots of four foot logs, pulpwood was cut and hauled all over northern Maine. In the log business, the cutters were allowed to cut a tree 12 inches in diameter four feet from the ground but they would never bother with something that small. They had no trouble finding better and bigger trees. When the chainsaw came and the bigger trees were mostly gone they cut trees six inches across. It will take more time to grow a new crop of trees but they do not have much choice because the budworm epidemic has killed most of those small trees, and they cut them to save them. Less than six years ago, I was told by a boss working for the Great Northern Paper Co. in the Musquacook area that they had an order for straight spruce logs, 70 feet long and 12 inches in diameter at the top. "We did not search the forest for them," he told me, "they picked them in the pile at the mill." Of course, trees like that are beauties and there is no surplus of them but there are still some.

In the mid-fifties, when I was visiting the lumber camps of the Upper Penobscot and St. John Rivers, I came to Fifth St. John Pond one winter. Adelard Gilbert and his cousin, Pete, had cut 60,000 cords of pulpwood and they were hauling that to the pond from as far as Baker Lake further down the St. John. That wood had to go to the west branch Penobscot River to reach the mill in Millinocket. So they built a dam at the foot of the pond to keep the water from going down the St. John River and had dug a canal connecting the pond to the north branch of the west branch of the Penobscot River. They were hauling their wood up-river but there was no big hill along the road. They had built an ice road five miles long. The wood was brought to that road by horses and loaded on sleighs five cords to a load. A huge diesel tractor would pick those one after the other until it had as many as 30 sleighs; a load of 150 cords of wood and bring it to the pond. The road had ruts in the ice to keep the sleighs on the road. Reaching the pond, the big tractor was unhitched, the train was broken in three sections and a smaller tractor would haul those on (he ice of the pond. There another tractor would lift the side of the load with its blade and dump the wood on the ice. The big tractor was busy from 4a.m. until 10 p.m. Come spring the wood was pushed to the canal and down the river it would go. If there is a lake on the way, the wood is caught in a

boom at the inlet and hauled by a tug boat to the outlet and down the river again. Years back, they did the same with logs but they had no motor boats. So they built a raft about 15 feet square with a big log standing in the center of it. That log was about four feet high. The raft was tied to the boom holding the logs. A long rope was tied to the post with a big anchor tied to the other end of it. The anchor was put in a bateau and brought as far as possible on the lake in the direction where the logs were wanted to travel. The anchor was dropped to the bottom of the lake.

Now there were horizontal holes in the standing log big enough to hold a big stick. There were men on the raft with sticks in those holes. They would walk around on the raft pulling the rope around the standing log until they came to the spot where the anchor was stuck in the bottom. They had hauled the logs in the boom behind them. When they came over the anchor as a rule, it would let go. If it did not they would turn sometimes until they were knee deep in the water on the raft. They would not always succeed and then the rope had to be cut and a new anchor tied to it. That kind of work was not bad when they had a tail wind or no wind at all, A head wind would make the thing impossible. As the wind has a tendency to die down in the evening, it was at that time that the hauling started and would sometimes last all night if the workers could see the rope and step over it at every turn.

The biggest logs that I have seen were close to four feet in diameter. They were pine logs. How old were they? I could not say. I think that pine grows faster than spruce but Jam not sure. At one of the camps at St. John Pond, I saw a piece of black spruce that was close to three feet in diameter. I counted the rings and it was two hundred years old. At 35 years of age it was only four inches across but after that it grew fairly fast. When it was born, Canada was still under the French Government and the United States was not yet free. I imagine that it was in a thick bunch of trees for those first hard years and struggle for life was hard. That tree was a leftover and I presume that it was left because it was too hard to haul to the water, too far out or behind a knoll.

There are good forest lands in Michigan and of course, our trees cannot match those of the west coast in size but the woods of northern Maine sure have been a gold mine for our State and our neighbors in Canada. We import more wood and paper from Canada, then we sell them and there is no custom on unfinished wood products between the two countries.

