

"Big Bill" and life in a camboose shanty

Recollections of lumbering days in the valley

by Harry Hinchley

This photo of a camp in the bush is from the collection of the late A B Palmer, father of Vivian Elliott and the late Ethel Rankin. He served his time as a cook in the shanties for Martin Russell, early lumberman and sawmill owner of Renfrew. In a story written some years ago for the Mercury he gave his recollections of life in the lumber camps.

In 1892 as a boy just out of school, he was hired with Martin Russell to be a cook in his camp. He had learned the art from his uncle, Steve Burton, of Goshen. He was to be paid \$16 a month which was good pay for a boy when men working in the bush cutting logs received only \$13.

The foreman of the camp was Big Bill Eady of Horton, the grandfather of William C Eady, well-known resident of Renfrew. Big Bill was noted not only for his size but also for his great strength. He was said to have astonished the neighbors one time by lifting a 509-lb pig off a hook where it had been hung after butchering.

The young cook joined Big Bill's gang at Douglas where they had stopped over night on their way to the camp in the fall.

The next morning they set out in a wagon loaded with supplies and equipment. By noon they had reached Eganville where they stopped for dinner. In the afternoon they pushed on to Killaloe where they stopped for the night.

The next forenoon they travelled as far as Wilno. Here they had a late dinner at the stopping place of Adam Prince who also kept Wilno's store and post office.

Adam Prince was the grandfather of Mayor Audrey Green of Renfrew. In the afternoon they went on and by evening had reached the place of a set-



tlar named Broton when they spent the night. The next morning they arrived at the camp. It was a camboose shanty which had been built the previous year on the little Madawaska.

In the centre of the camp was the camboose or fireplace. This was an enclosure a foot or so high which was filled with fine sand where the cooking

fire was kept burning. Beside the camboose was a crane on which pots were hung to swing over the fire. At the end were two troughs in which bake kettles were put for baking in the hot sand.

Bread, beans, land sea pie were all baked in the hot sand. At meal time they took tin dishes and helped themselves to the food which had been

set out. This was done under the watchful eye of the cook who reigned supreme and whose word was law in his cook-house.

A B Palmer went on to become a clerk in the lumber camps. In later years he bought a farm where he lived and brought up his family.