

Rattlesnake pork and white pine

by Michael Bennett

Pollock McDougall's memories of the lumber camps of the north are well documented with pictures because the folks back home were skeptics.

"I was two years in the north," explains Pollock. Pollock McDougall lives at RR3, Lanark—a few miles north of Watson's Corners. "The first time I was up was in 1907."

"In 1907 I didn't have a camera to take pictures, and when I told people about the loads they drew and the work they done, they wouldn't believe me. That's why I took a camera up in 1910—to show people—so they would believe. It was a two-way Brownie. It cost \$1.98."

Pollock was a bigger man then. "I've wasted down so that the crows won't even look at me," he muses of his present condition in comparison to what it once was, and goes on to relate that, although the work was hard and the days long, there were no complaints in the lumber camp at Bigwood Lake. Bigwood Lake was north of Sudbury.

"We marched out of camp at 7 am in the short days—when we camped (ate) in the bush. We never saw the camp again in daylight. We would come back at dark."

He looks at the old crew standing in front of the camp in one of his pictures and comments: "Nobody complained about hard work. They were able for it and fed for it. You spent the whole winter and never saw a sick man."

"Two men will put down a pretty big tree in 10 minutes. They had saws that would cut. They used two-man crosscut saws," Pollock states. "They used a seven-foot saw for a big tree," he says, and then adds,

"The biggest tree we cut was 60 inches on the stump-pure White Pine. That's all we cut."

"They were all nice men," he says of the 85 men in the camp. "Everybody was good. The best of men," he repeats, and adds that he would love to get in contact with some of the old survivors of the Bigwood camp.

"There was two tier of bunks and two men in each bunk," Pollock explains when asked how one camp could possibly sleep 85 men. He also adds that the cooking was not done in the same building.

"The cookery and tables and everything was 50 yards from camp. There was two cooks and a choreboy. Oh, they worked day and night," he recalls clearly. "They baked a bag of flour a day."

Rattlesnake Pork

"We had everything," Pollock continues as he remembers the camp grub. There was the best of beef, rattlesnake pork, all kinds of canned goods, pies, cake—everything you could think of."

Pollock explains the term 'rattlesnake pork'.

"The rattlesnakes got so plentiful on the Muskoka Islands no one could go on them. These islands was beautiful islands and the government wanted to use them," he relates.

"The government put the pigs on the islands and the pigs ate the snakes. Pigs don't care anything of rattlesnakes," he tells, meaning that the rattlesnake venom had no deadly effect on the animals.

"They shot the wild pigs in the fall, dressed them, and packed them in brine. The government shipped it out for the

lumbermen," he says, then points out that the pork was available, at no charge, to anyone who wanted it.

"If they had two or three barrels left over, they buried them until the next year," he says. "Nobody ever said a word. Never any kick about the grub of any kind. They were glad to get it—it was the best of meat. It was sweet."

Taken

Pollock grins as he remembers how the men in the camp were once suckered into parting with a dollar apiece. He tells that on one day a woman came to their camp and gave them a long and detailed story of hardship that had fallen on her.

Her son was hopelessly ill and was in hospital. She needed money desperately to pay the bills and take care of him. As it turned out, she was nothing more than a beggar who followed the lumber camps around, picking the dumps with her husband and 'healthy' son.

Pollock McDougall is 90 now, and enjoys owning 'one of the finest farms in the area'. It has long been known for its remarkable displays of roses around the farmhouse. Pollock and his late wife have had as many as 400 roses blooming at one time.

His spring project is to replace 300 roses that were 'winter killed', and refurbish the old home to its earlier beauty. After that his plans are quite simple. He hopes to sell the property to someone who can look after it 'the way it deserves' and move to Perth and take it a little easier.

Pollock will then be fully retired, at 90 years of age.

Peep into the past

100 years ago May 1874

The first locomotive has arrived for the Kingston and Pembroke Railway, and the last cargo of iron rails.

At the Brockville money market as reported by Mr W M Fulford Exchange Broker and General Railway and Steamship Agent — Greenbacks and New York exchange bought at 87 and a half and sold at 88 and a half Dominion of Canada Bank Notes. Buying American silver at discount and buying Bank of Upper Canada Bills and Deposit certificates at 55 cents on the dollar.

Sealed tenders are being accepted this month for the mail route Eganville to Renfrew. Six times a week and commencing August first.

The conveyance to be made in a two horse stage or wagon.

The route pursued in conveyance of this Mail to be via the Post Offices at Douglas and Admaston. The computed distance between Eganville and Renfrew is 27 miles. The rate of travel to be not less than five miles per hour, including stoppages for all purposes.

Last Friday evening a meeting was held to discuss the prohibition of the sale of intoxicating liquor.

Held at the Temperance Hall the Reverend R Campbell was called upon to take the chair. Reverend Beckwith of New Brunswick first addressed the meeting on the evils of intemperance and the progress of the Temperance movement. His main points being medical documents attesting to the evil consequences of the habitual use of intoxicating liquors both physically and mentally.

May 22, 1903

John Lorn McDougall, Auditor-General of Canada, who was brought up in Renfrew, visited with his brother Sam McDougall and renewed old acquaintances around town.