

History of Lumbering in Nova Scotia with a Portable Sawmill from 1900 to 1930

Author Unknown

Early History

Long before the Indigenous and the White Man came to Nova Scotia, the eagle sat on his lonely perch at the top of some giant tree and looked across a vast expanse of timber, never touched except for the occasional fire started by a thunderstorm. How many years it was this way, we do not know. The trees would grow to immense size, then die and fall, then others would grow in their place, an act of nature and the Will of God.

First the Indigenous came. Their way of life and culture did not require many trees; they just used what they needed. Next came the White Man from across the seas and started to settle the country. To clear land for settlements and farms, the White man cut down the trees and burned them, using the ashes for fertilizer. Some of the best timber was used for building forts, houses, barns, churches, and other buildings.

At first, the buildings were made of round logs; the first lumber was made with a Broad Axe, the logs hewn square for framework, rafters, and sills. If a plank was needed, the log was hewn off on both sides to make the required thickness. This was a great waste as only one plank could be taken from a log, but timber was plentiful—it only required a lot of hard work.

The next method to make lumber was called the Saw Pit. One man could stand on top of the log, and another stood in a pit underneath the log. They put a log Rip Saw up and down through the log from one end to the other. This way, they could cut quite a few planks of boards from one log. This was very hard work, more so for the man underneath as all the sawdust fell on him.

Next came a mill driven by water power; that was known as an Up and Down Saw Mill, because a large Rip Saw was driven up and down through the log by a water wheel. The log was moved along on a carriage; this mill could be operated by one man. It would not cut very fast but made very good lumber; it operated approximately 1800 to 1900, and a few years after that, as I saw one still in operation in 1942.

Lumbering has been one of the main occupations in our lives for years, and the methods of cutting, hauling, sawing, and use have changed very fast since 1930, more especially since the Second World War. Now everything is done with machinery, Power Saws for cutting, Skidders for yarding, Loaders for loading trucks to haul the logs to the mill, and modern Mills for sawing the lumber, no carrying anything, everything done on a large scale.

The life of a lumberman...

So let's go to work in the lumber woods, back in the early years around 1924, for a short time with a Portable Mill.

As I look back to the first thirty years of the 20th century and see what a great change has taken place in the method of lumbering operations, it seems to fill me with a little sadness; time is passing, and we cannot go back.



Isenor's Cook and Camp, Lantz

The day of the Portable Mill is past history. They are no more, and a great many of us who worked at this type of work have also passed away. I would like to take this opportunity to pass on to the younger generation of our time what the lumber woods were like when I first started to work in them in the year 1924, when there were no Skidders, Tractors, Trucks, or Power Saws, nor any other gasoline or diesel motors of any kind, and all hauling was done with horses hitched to wagons, sleds, scoots, and trollies, and the cutting of the trees was done with axes and cross-cut saws; and in some cases, only a double-bitted axe was used.

Most of the lumbering operations of that time were carried out during the winter time, and a winter that did not have a fair amount of frost and snow was a poor winter to cut and haul logs, as all the yarding and hauling was done with horses, even to hauling the finished lumber to the railroad.

The timber was cut from a timber lot belonging to the lumber operator or was purchased standing from someone who had standing timber for sale. The cutting of the standing timber usually followed the same pattern. In the fall, before the ground froze, the lumberman would cut a main road into the centre of the timber lot, as near as possible, and locate his camps on a brook. Then, some logging roads for hauling the logs to the mill were cut where needed.

To cut the logs to keep a portable sawmill running would require about ten men, more or less; this all depended on how good the timber was and how fast the mill could cut. To cut the trees, two men usually worked together—this



Lower Selma Logging Camp

was called a “set of choppers.” There was sometimes a third man in the group to make the logs ready, help to cut the limbs off, and to cut a snig path for the yard-horse to haul them to the brow, where they could be picked up by the hauling teams; but, in most operations, there were only two men to do this work. They most always started at the back of the lot and cut in the direction of the hauling road. Their equipment usually consisted of two double-bitted axes, “one bitt was ground thin for chopping, and the other bitt was thicker for cutting off the limbs.” It is hard to believe, but most axes will break on a frozen hemlock limb if not properly ground. Other equipment included cross-cut saw, a peevee, and wooden wedges. The cross-cut saw had a handle on each end; the peevee was used to roll the trees when cutting off the limbs. To cut a tree, one man would cut a notch in the side of the tree with his axe so that it would fall in the right direction; then each man stood on opposite sides of the tree and pulled the saw back and forth until the tree was cut through. If the tree was leaning back, the wedges would be driven into the saw cut to make it fall in the right direction. The tree then was cut into different lengths, usually from 10 to 18 feet and the front end snouted so that it would not catch on roots when yarded to the brow.



Elmsdale Lumber Camp near
Nine Mile River

The men worked ten hours a day, or in the winter, when the days were short, from daylight to dark, six days a week. They got up at 6:00 a.m., had breakfast and were in the woods by 7:00 a.m., worked until 12:00 o’clock, then had one hour in which to eat their dinner, then back to work until 6:00 p.m. or dark, whichever came first, then back to the camp for supper. If their axes needed grinding, this was done on their own time after supper. There was usually a man who filed cross-cut saws through the day. This man was called a Filer, and it was nearly a full-time job. There were extra saws, so no one would be without one while his saw was being filed. The cross-cut saw was about five feet long and, when properly sharpened, would cut quite fast. The most of the choppers, except for a very few, were good men. They could fall a tree exactly where they wanted it. When they cut the limbs off the trees, they left no long knots to catch on anything, and when notching a tree or chopping one down, it was considered a disgrace to leave axe marks in the notch.

Quite often, two men would chip a big tree. To fall it, they would stand on opposite sides, and each would try to cut to centre of the tree before the other man. This was called “taking the heart” and was more or less a competition between them for fun. Also, one set of choppers would sometimes try to cut more logs in a day than the other sets, as they seemed to take pride in doing a big day’s work and getting ahead of the other choppers, but, except for a very few, they all had one thing in common: that was to do a good day’s work for their employer. A chopper’s wages were from \$1.00 to \$1.50 a day, plus food and lodging. If the day was stormy so that they could not work, they did not receive any wages, only their food and lodging.



Stephen’s Sawmill, Tenecape

When the logs were made ready, they were hauled to the brow on the sled road by a horse driven by one man; this was called “yarding” and the yarding road was usually called a “snake path” because it was very narrow, no wider than the horse required, and wound around between the trees. The equipment used for yarding logs consisted of iron “dogs” that were driven into the end of a log. These were fastened to a spreader with a length of chain; the spreader had chain traces that were hooked to the horse’s harness. The horse followed the snake path to the brow on the hauling road without being driven. The horse would turn right by the command to “GEE” and left by the command to “HAW.” Some horses were good at this type of work; if a log caught behind something, they would turn and pull sideways to loosen it and then turn back into the path again. They required no reins to drive them.

When the logs were landed at the brow, they were rolled to the front where they were picked up by the sled team. The man driving a yard horse got up around 5:00 a.m. to feed and harness his horse and was ready for breakfast at 6:00 a.m., went to work at 7:00 a.m., had dinner at 12:00 noon, with one hour in which to let his horse eat, and then back to work at 1:00 p.m. until 6:00 p.m. or until dark, whichever came first. After supper when his horse had finished eating, he would give it a good cleaning and a bed of straw for the night.

A man driving a yard horse received around \$1.00 a day plus food and lodging; he worked 12-13 hours a day, six days a week. If the day was too stormy for work, he received only his food and lodging. Usually, when a young man started to work out, yarding would be his first job; most every young man knew how to drive a horse and take care of it.

There were different ways in which logs were hauled from the woods to the mill. Sometimes on large operations, a Trolley was used. This had four flanged wheels that ran on round wooden poles; sometimes on short hauls, a Scoot was used; they were used mostly when very thick timber was cut in windrows with a road between. A Scoot was made with two wooden runners. It hauled hard and would not carry a very big load. In most cases when the sledding was good, the logs were hauled from the brow in the woods to the mill by two horses hitched to a double sled and driven by one man called a teamster. The teamster had to load the logs onto the sled by hand; there was usually a



King's Creek Sawmill, Noel Shore

helper at the brow to help him load, and sometimes if the yard man was not too busy, he would help load. It was not an easy job to roll large logs up skids to the top of a load by hand, as sometimes in good sledding, a sled team could haul enough logs at one time to saw out a thousand feet of lumber.

A double sled had four runners, two in front and two behind. Each set of runners had a bench to hold them together, with six-foot bunks on top to carry the logs and fastened together with cross chains. The front sled had a pole in it, and the horses were harnessed on opposite sides of the pole and fastened to the pole by an evener and two whiffle-trees with leather tugs fastened on the harness for hauling. A neck-yoke fastened to the horse's hames with a ring in the centre that fitted over the end of the pole guided the sled and held it back when going downhill. The teamster sat on the top of the load and guided the horses with two long reins fastened to the horses' bridles. It required about four teams to log to a mill. This all depended on how fast the mill cut and how far the logs had to be hauled. When the logs were landed at the mill, they were unloaded on the mill brow with the help of the man who rolled the logs into the mill.

A teamster usually got up around 5:00 a.m. in the morning to feed his horses and harness them; he had breakfast at 6:00 a.m. and then hitched his horses to the sleds and was away to the woods at 7:00 a.m. He worked until 12:00 noon, had one hour to feed his horses and have his own dinner, then went to work again at 1:00 p.m. and worked until 6:00 p.m. or dark, whichever came first. After feeding his horses and having his own supper, he would give his horses a good cleaning and a bed of straw for the night.

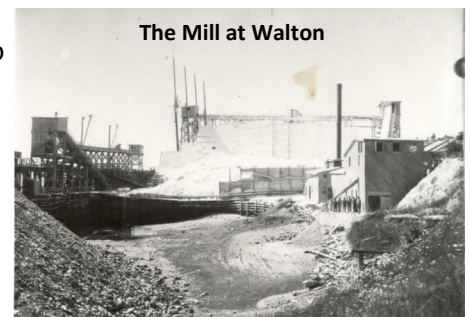
It was always a strict rule that a teamster must feed his horses before having his own meals. A teamster worked around 13 hours a day, six days a week. He received \$1.50 to \$2.00 a day plus board and lodging. If he supplied his own team and sleds, he received approximately \$60.00 a month; the wages were not always the same, as some lumbermen would give more or less wages than others.

Hauling logs with a team of horses required good judgement as to loading and driving and required more skill than it does to operate any of the modern logging equipment used in the lumberwoods today. The men who drove the woods horses, except for a very few, were good drivers. They took good care of their horses, fed them well, and did not overload or over work them; yet they accomplished a lot of work, and for some men, it was their way of life.

All the horses were kept in a long barn, sometimes called a Hovel, with a long row of stalls, one for each horse. It was quite warm, and most horses had rugs on them at night and a good bed of straw to rest on. The horses were fed approximately six quarts of round oats at a feed, with lots of good hay, three times a day. Some horses would require more feed and some not as much, according to their size. There were a lot of good horses used in the lumber woods in those days. Most of them were good to work and well-conditioned to work. They usually weighed from 1200 to 1600 pounds, not as large as the present-day pampered show draft horse that we see in the show rings at the exhibitions today.

There was generally a woods boss to oversee all the work. Some of the lumbering operations had a small blacksmith shop with a blacksmith to shoe the horses, repair sleds and any broken chains. All the welding was done by heating the two pieces of iron in the forge, sprinkling on some welding compound, again heating in the forge, then placing the two pieces together on the anvil, and striking them with a heavy hammer to seal them together. There was a great art to this kind of welding, and when properly done, the two pieces would fuse together and be as strong as an electric weld. This type of welding will soon be a lost art as it is rarely done today.

If there was no blacksmith shop at the camp, then the teamster would have to have extra shoes sharpened for the horses at a blacksmith shop in a village and put them on himself in the evening. Blacksmith shops were quite plentiful in those days all around the countryside.



The sawing of the logs was a special operation. Sometimes, the lumberman had a mill of his own, and sometimes he hired one. Some mill men had their own mill and made a practice of going from one place to another to saw logs wherever they could find a cut. The type of mill used was called a Portable Rotary sawmill. This meant that it could be taken down and set up again in a short time. It consisted of a steam boiler, engine sawhusk, carriage, edger, trimmer, and sometimes a planer or lathe machine.

In the fall before the ground froze, all the mill except the boiler was loaded on wagons; the wagons had wooden wheels and steel tires and were hauled with horses to the place where the mill was to be set up for the next cut. The boiler had heavy steel wheels of its own and weighed from five to seven tons and required four to six horses to haul it. This of course depended on the condition of the road. Sometimes the mills had to be moved great distances. I know of one instance where a complete mill was moved nearly fifty miles with horses over rough gravel roads and required two long days to move it. Sometimes when moved long distances, they were loaded on flat cars and moved by train to the nearest station. This also required a lot of work, as the mill had to be loaded and unloaded twice, and this had to all be done by man power, and all mill machinery is very heavy.

The mill was usually set up handy the logging camp on a side hill close to a brook or pond. Posts were driven or dug into the ground. In older days, it was sometimes a cribwork of logs, and the boiler and engine sat on a foundation of logs embedded in the ground. The boiler room and some of the rest of the mill had a rough wall around them and was all covered with a roof. The boiler was made of very heavy iron about three-eighths inch thick, about four to five feet in diameter, and approximately 18 to 20 feet long. It sat on four iron wheels, and the front end was higher than the back; this helped to increase the draft. The back section was the fire box; this was encased inside the boiler and was of the same heavy iron with a water space all around it. It had a door to put in the wood and another door below it for a draft. The next section contained approximately three inch tubes running from the fire box to the front of the boiler to carry the smoke and fire to the smoke box on the front. It was in these tubes where the greatest amount of heat was, to turn the water into steam. This section was full of water except for a space at the top for steam. On top of the boiler was a big iron cylinder called the dome; this was also for the steam. The boiler was all tied together inside with stay bolts; all was fastened together with rivets and was made very tight without the use of electric weld. The smoke box on the front had a large door that could be lifted to clean the tubes. The smoke stack sat on top of the smoke box. It was made of iron about two feet in diameter and around 30 feet high, and it usually had a spark arrester on the top. There was a four-inch pipe from the dome on the boiler to the engine to carry the steam to run it and another pipe back from the engine to the smoke stack to carry the exhaust steam. This also helped to increase the draft. Sometimes when the engine was working hard, it would lift the hot ashes clear from the first box to the top of the smoke stack. When a mill was running, the steam pressure was around 125 pounds per square inch. To attain this pressure, a very hot fire had to be kept going in the fire box.

There was a water pipe from the boiler to the brook, and the water was drawn in and then forced into the boiler under steam pressure with an injector. There was a water glass on the side of the boiler to tell when the water reached the proper level to be shut off. There was also a steam gauge to tell what the pressure was and a steam whistle to signal the starting and stopping of the mill. When the boiler was set up, it had to be filled with water the first time by carrying water in pails from the brook and dumping it in a manhole on top of the boiler. This would take four to five men half a day; it was hard work. The steam engine was made of very heavy castings and had very few working parts. Some of the older ones were upright, but most of them were horizontal in design and consisted of a cylinder, piston, piston rod, valve rod, valve assembly, throttle, lubricator, crosshead, crankshaft, connecting rod, flywheel, and governor.

All mounted on a heavy base, the flywheel was around four feet in diameter with approximately a 14-inch face



to drive the main belt to sawhusk and edger. There was a smaller pulley along side of it to drive the trimmer and other equipment, as all belts were flat. The throttle was for starting and stopping the engine and mill. The governor was driven by a two-inch flat belt from the crankshaft; it was so designed that, if the belt broke or came off, it would shut the engine down to an idling speed. If there was no governor, the engine would reach such a tremendous speed that everything would fly to pieces. The lubricator was fastened to the steam pipe and was called a "sight feed lubricator" because you could regulate the flow of oil going into the steam by a valve by watching it dripping in a glass. This lubricated the inside of the engine through the steam. It was a special type of oil, black in colour; no other type of oil could be used as it would ruin the inside of the engine. All the other moving parts were oiled by oil cups with regular mill oil.

A steam engine had two power strokes to one turn of the crankshaft; the valve part would open and the steam would push the piston forward in the cylinder to the end of its stroke. Then the other part would open, and the steam would push the piston back again, at the same time exhausting the steam from the forward stroke. There was a packing gland to keep the steam from leaking around the piston rod. If a steam engine was on dead centre, it would not start until the flywheel was turned by hand to move it off centre.

The engines used were mostly Oxfords, Robbs, and Leonards, but the ones that were mostly used for portable mills were Oxfords and were made in Oxford, Cumberland County, Nova Scotia.

Most of them were classed in sizes of 10x12 and 12x12. Of course, there were some smaller and some larger than these; the 10x12 rated around 60 h.p., and 12x12 around 80 h.p., and ran at the speed of 250 to 280 r.p.m.

A steam engine, if taken care of, would run for years with very few repairs. They ran very quiet; it was a real pleasure to hear one run, and they caused no pollution. They required only wood, water, heat, and a little oil to keep them running.



Amos Woodworth Steam Mill 1882—the first on the Shubenacadie River

It required 12 or 13 men to operate a sawmill. Some mills had a slab and edging conveyor chain to carry the slabs and edgings to the fire as all the slabs' edgings were burnt, except what was used in the boiler for fuel. Some mills would have a lathe machine to cut the slabs and edgings into lathes. There was a good demand for lathes at that time; a lathe was four feet long, 1 ½ inches wide, and nearly 3/8 of an inch thick. They were used in plastered walls of houses. Some mills did not have these; then the slabs and edgings were carried by two men and piled on the fire. Another man wheeled out the sawdust with a wheel barrow. The sawn lumber was carried away from the mill by one or two men and piled in neat piles.

The sawyer was the most important man in the mill. He ran the head saw and carriage and sawed the logs into the proper thickness. The head saw, sometimes called "the big saw," was four feet in diameter and ran at approximately 750 r.p.m. It required a great skill and a lot of practice to be a good sawyer; he set the working pace, and everyone had to work accordingly.

The next was the fireman, who kept up steam in the boiler with slabs and deal ends that were cut by the trimmer man who trimmed the lumber. The fireman had to get up at around 5:00 a.m. to get the fire going to have steam up to working pressure by 7:00 a.m. He started and stopped the mill, kept the engine in good running order, and kept a good hot fire going in the boiler to keep up steam. With nothing but green slabs, this required a lot of work and skill. In the evening after supper, he had to sometimes clean the tubes, fill the boiler with water to the proper level, and last thing, fill the fire box with wood, close the draught, and lift the front door of the smoke box to keep the water in the boiler as hot as possible through the night so that he could quickly get up steam in the morning. This was called "banking a boiler." He was generally through work between 8:00 p.m. and 9:00 p.m., which meant he worked about 14 hours a day.

The mill would start at 7:00 a.m. with a short stop at quarter time (9:30 a.m.) to oil the machinery and file the saw, then start again and work until 12:00 noon, one hour for dinner and to again oil the machinery and file, then started at 1:00 p.m., ran until quarter time (3:30 p.m.) when they would again oil and file if needed, then run again until six o'clock. The men did any repairs after supper; the only time the mill stopped during the week was for a rainy day or if something broke in the mill. It did not stop for a snow storm unless it became too severe. Oil lanterns were used for light when they were required.

A good cutting mill with lots of power could cut around 20,000 board feet (b.f.) of lumber a day. This again depended on how good the logs were and how fast the sawyer worked.

A Sawyer received around \$5.00 a day, the Edger-man \$3.00, the Tally-man \$3.00, Fireman \$3.00, and all the

rest of the crew from \$1.00 to \$2.00 a day, plus food and lodging. If the mill did not run, the men did not receive any wages, except the Fireman who generally received straight time as he had to keep the fire going in the boiler at all times.

A mill operator normally received \$5.00 a thousand for sawing; therefore, a mill cutting 20,000 b.f. a day would receive \$100.00 a day. Out of this amount, the mill operator would have to pay the men, buy belt lacings, oil, files, saw bits, and sometimes belts and saws and any other repairs, build a bunkhouse, build and maintain a cookhouse with supplies, pay a cook, and set up his mill and dismantle it when the cut was finished. We often wonder how a mill operator made any money, but most of them did fairly well. Mill operators usually had the same mill crew for each cut as each man knew his job well, and they all worked together as a team.



Edward and Austin's Mill Crew, 1914

If the mill was shut down for the summer, most of the men would find work at some other chore, quite often on farms. If anyone had an accident and was not able to work, they received compensation pay and their doctor bills paid. If they just took sick, they did not receive any pay and had to pay their own doctor bills. There was no free medical care in those days. There was no unemployment insurance. That, in my opinion, has sometimes been misused, which is not good for the economy of the country.

There were also what were called Spring Cuts. This consisted of a group of farmers cutting their own logs in the winter and hauling them to a central location, near a brook, with their own horses and sleds and hiring someone who had a mill to set up his mill and saw out the cut. The farmers would then sell their lumber to some lumber buyer, saving out what they needed for repairs around the farm. These cuts were generally not too large. There were also larger lumbering operations when a mill would be more or less set stationary for a few years.

In the winter time, if one would go to the top of a high range of hills, he could see the smoke from portable mills all over the countryside. In most of the logging operations, the timber was cut with care and enough of the small trees left to grow another crop in about 40 years. Even the topsoil was not taken off the roads. Logging today with modern machinery leaves nothing standing, the woods full of dozed roads wide enough for a highway, and the rest of it cut up with skidder tracks, which allows for erosion—not a very pleasant outlook for the next generation.

The Woods Crew and Mill Crew usually had separate cookhouses and bunkhouses. The cookhouse and sleeping quarters were generally separated from each other, but on occasions they were all in one building, with a wall dividing them and, in older times, were made of round logs. In the twenties, they were constructed with rough boards and 2x4s. First, there were round poles laid on the ground and two layers of boards nailed on them for a floor; then the walls were erected and a roof put on, and then the whole building was covered with tar paper. There was no finish done to the inside.



The Cookhouse generally had two windows on each side and a door in each end, a small room for the cook to sleep in, a large cookstove that used wood, a sink, some shelves, and one or two long tables and benches made of rough boards. The table was covered with oilcloth so that the cook could keep it clean. The cook generally carried all the water from the brook and sometimes cut up the wood for the cookstove. The wood was stored in a shed near the cookhouse door, and the meat, which was purchased by the quarter, was stored in the same shed. The dishes were either made of tin or enamel; there were no refrigerators, and the lights were kerosene oil lamps.

The cook got up around 4:00 a.m. in the morning in order to have breakfast ready at 6:00 a.m. The breakfast usually consisted of hot biscuits, baked beans, bread and molasses, sometimes butter, and tea. There would also sometimes be porridge and hash. Dinner was at 12:00 noon; it usually consisted of boiled or roast beef, fried pork or steak,

with turnips, sauerkraut, soup, pie or pudding, rice, and tea. Supper was at 6:00 p.m. and was usually hash made from the leftovers of meat and potatoes and onions, baked beans, gingerbread, bread and molasses, prunes, cheese, and tea. When milk was used, it was always canned milk. Some cookhouses had milk and butter, and some had not. There



Bob Gass Mill, Barr Settlement, ca. 1903

was always fish on Friday, usually dried codfish. Very few cooks would allow lunches between meals or at bedtime and usually did not allow talking at the table. In most cases, the food was well-cooked and wholesome, and when one worked ten hours a day at hard labour, it was well appreciated.

A cook worked approximately 13 or 14 hours a day and mostly seven days a week, as there was always someone at the camp on Sunday. They received \$60 or \$70 a month, straight time. There were some excellent cooks in those days and they did not have any of the modern equipment that the cooks use today.

The bunkhouse was built the same way as the cookhouse, except there was generally only one door and two windows. There was a row of double-tier bunks along each side made of 2x4 rough boards with a 12-inch plank along the front of the lower bunk to sit on. Mattresses were made with four feed-bags, with the sides cut out, then sewn together and filled with straw, with four or five grey woolen blankets for bed clothes. There was a large barrel stove in the centre with a flat place on the top so that a bucket of water could be put on to warm for washing; it burned green wood. Beside the door would be a bench with a wash basin to wash in. The water was carried from the brook in pails. Oil lanterns and lamps were used for light, and everyone had to be in bed by nine o'clock and the lights out; no one was allowed to talk after that time. Some camps would get very cold by morning, and the water would freeze in the pails. There was very little amusement in the evenings, sometimes a game of cards, but this was rare. The toilet, if there was one, was made of rough boards and poles and was quite a little distance from the camp.

After the logs were made into lumber, the lumber was hauled to the nearest railway station with horses and sleds. In those days, the snow was not plowed from the roads in the wintertime, and the lumber hauling was quite often done by farmers with their horses and sleds. They spent long hours making a trip; with a good team, they could haul from 1500 to 2000 b.f. of lumber at a load. Again, this all depended on the size of the team and how many steep hills were on the road. These farmers would receive from \$3.00 to \$3.50 a thousand feet for loading the lumber by hand, hauling and unloading by hand at the railway station. One winter, there were around 42 double teams on the road most every day hauling lumber to the station at Shubenacadie, Hants Co., and that was only one station. After the lumber was unloaded, it was tallied and loaded into box cars by hand by men who worked at this work all the time and lived in the community.

At this time, 1924, lumbering and farming more or less went together. There were small farms all over the country, and in the wintertime, a lot of the farmers would take or send their horses to the lumber woods to haul or yard logs, or haul lumber, sometimes travelling great distances, and spend the winter there. At these times, only their wives and children were left at home to do the work on the farm until they returned in the spring. Other farmers would spend the winter cutting logs on their own land or going to work in nearby mills or woods.

It was a great help to the people living along the roads where lumber was hauled in the winter, as the roads were always kept open and the snow tramped down hard because, after a big snow storm, everyone who had a team of horses would have to break a road through the snow, and when the snow was too deep, they had to shovel by hand

as the road always had to be made passable for a horse and sleigh so the mail could get through, and also if a doctor was needed. There was an overseer in the community appointed by the County to see that this work was done. He did not receive any pay, nor did the people who did the work, yet everyone was satisfied and willing to do their part.

Now the day of the small lumbering operations, as well as the small farms is over, and with them went the grist mill, blacksmith shop, and the tannery. As I said before, they are past history; a way of life is gone that was the foundation of our country. Although there was not much money involved in these operations, there was no scarcity of the necessities of life. Everyone appreciated what they received and worked hard for it; most of them did not complain. They did not receive any subsidies or money grants from the government to cause them worries and problems at a later date.

Although wages were low, it did not cost very much to buy food and clothing or tools. Horses cost from \$100 to \$200, but a lot of people raised their own. A Model-T Ford car cost around \$500 new, a set of harness for two horses approximately \$50, a cross-cut saw \$5.00, a double-bitted axe \$2.00, horse blankets \$2.00, lumberman's rubbers \$2.00, larrigans \$2.00, 100 pounds of flour \$2.00, 100 pounds of feed oats \$2.00. Sugar was five cents a pound, tea thirty-five cents a pound, beef by the side \$5.00 to \$10.00 per hundred pounds, and everything else priced accordingly. A lot of the stores had different prices—some were higher and some were lower.

Ties for the Railroad

Railway ties were sawn from hemlock logs and were classed as No. 1 and No. 2. The No. 1 was seven inches thick and nine inches wide, and the No. 2 was six inches thick and eight inches wide. They were also sometimes sawed six and seven inches thick and the two other sides left round with just the bark taken off.

There were also a lot of railway ties made by hand by farmers on their own land. The method was to fall a hemlock tree the right size, lay a 6- or 7-inch pattern on top of the log and mark the bark with a Scriber. A man would then stand on top of the log and score the sides with an axe into the mark, then take a broad axe and hew the sides flat. This was quite an art, as the sides had to be very smooth with no score marks left to show. When this was completed, the top of the tree was cut off. The bark was then taken off the other sides, and then they were yarded with a horse to the roadside or to wherever they were to be loaded. They were then cut into 8-foot lengths.

There was a good demand for railway ties, and the price landed at the railway siding was around 45 and 55 cents apiece. This sometimes varied from one year to another.

It takes 24 railway ties to make 1008 b.f. of lumber, that is the 7x9 size, and at 55 cents apiece, would mean approximately \$13.30 per thousand b.f. for them.

Conclusion

Thus, I have related to you a short history of lumbering in the early days of this century, as it was at that time. There are some things that I possibly could have explained in more detail, and there are possibly some things that I have forgotten over the years, but this will give a true overall picture of it all. It was a rugged, hard life to lead, but a lot of older people, of which I am one, who worked at this type of work, will relate with pride about the happy times they spent in the lumber woods, in what is sometime called the good old days.

I do not wish to glorify the good old days; they had their drawbacks and problems, nor will I condemn them. History speaks for itself. Some will criticize them; they say wages were small, no money, no amusement, very few cars, poor roads, no free medical care, no unemployment insurance, no pensions, too much hard work, and a lot of other things. Perhaps this is so, but on the other hand, most of the people then had something more precious than all: It was a will to work for a living, a love and respect for one another, a respect of other people's property, a respect of Sunday, a love and respect for their elderly parents. They kept them in their homes and took care of them, and above all, a desire to make a success in life without the help of others, therefore living a life of pride and independence.

With the riotous living, greed, crime, and above all, lack of production and inflation in the country today, are we getting a false impression of advancement in our society? Or is the country slowly dying?

Let us pause for a few moments and think it over.

NOTE: Photographs were not part of the original text; they are part of the EHHS collection and are added to provide visual context.

Addendum

A Lumberman's Terms of Agreement with Landowner Regarding Cutting Logs on the Owner's Property

In the article "The History of Lumbering in Nova Scotia..." listed in our ehhs.ca/newsletter articles, it was mentioned that lumber operations cut trees on properties not owned by the mill owners. I was reminded of a property deed I found in the Registry of Deeds between the Thompson brothers, Walter and Stewart, who owned the farm I grew up on in Nine Mile River, and Austin Kerr, a lumberman from Milford, signed in November 1933. The terms of the Agreement, as it is named on the deed, involved multiple properties in that area and pertained to the cutting of timber on those properties. The following are segments from the deed:

"The vendors ... grant, bargain, sell and assign to the purchasers all the softwood trees and timber above six inches in diameter measuring one foot from the ground now standing, growing, or being in and upon" the properties named in the deed.

The vendors agreed "To hold the said trees and timber and every part thereof to the purchaser to and for his sole and only use, provided, however, that the purchaser remove the same within five years from the date hereof. After which date, all trees or timber not removed shall revert to and become the property of the vendors.... [T]he purchaser, his servants, agents, and workmen shall at all times within five years from the date hereof have full and free liberty of entry and right of way through, over and upon such part of the said lands as the said softwood trees may be growing upon for the purpose of felling, cutting down, and carrying away the said trees and timber in such manner as he or they shall think fit, and with full liberty to bring horses, oxen, or other animals, wagons, sleighs or other vehicles" onto the land for the purposes named here.

"And the purchaser is to have the right to cut down softwood trees measuring less than six inches in diameter one foot from the ground for the purpose of making roadways and skidways for the purpose of reasonably being able to carry on lumber operations."

The lumbermen were also required to "do as little injury or damage as possible, ... and repair all fences upon the said lands" that were damaged in the tree-felling process. Following the five-year deadline date, the operation was to cease and all equipment removed from the properties.

This did not sell the properties, merely provide access, or lease, to the lumberman for the felling of the timber. It defined what the timber consisted of and how large it had to be to be felled. It set deadlines and expectations for how the lumber operation was to be carried out. This example is an indication of how those involved in the lumber industry were expected to deal with the landowners whose timber they were accessing.

by Patricia Whidden

