

CHAPTER IX

LIFE IN A LUMBER TOWN

From the stories already told it would seem that life was all work but if these hardy forefathers of ours worked hard, they also played hard. In 1880 there were 13 saloons in Montague, the Old French Trading Post on the river was one of the river drivers favorite haunts. After Dalton's Mill was started (nearby at the Mouth of Silver Creek) Charles Johnson built a building at the site of the trading post, which served as eating house, saloon and store. The place enjoyed a large patronage. It was right on the banks of the river and very convenient to the river drivers. It was only a scant half-mile from Dalton's Mill, three miles from Carleton's Mill and four miles from Brown's Mill. There were considerable settlements at these places, the census of 1860 giving 40 at Carleton's and 65 at Brown's. The Indians who were quite numerous in the area, made it their chief rendezvous for whiskey, being able to travel right to it in their canoes. It was also at the junction of two main supply roads, one crossing the river on a bridge a few yards south, the other passing right in front of the buildings to up-river camps.

No better situation could be imagined and money poured in a golden stream. Johnson sold out to Johannes Gustavus who built an addition to the eating house. An old time river driver tells of seeing as many as 300 Indians gathered at the trading post during the regime of Gustavus, camping there and having a hilarious time as long as their money lasted. The river drivers called the place the Snubbing Post instead of the Trading Post.

A more sedate type of recreation was also available for the family.

The celebration of "The Fourth" on White Lake in 1863 was the principal event of the year. The festivities included a boat ride to the "Head" followed by a ball at Caine's Hotel in the evening. Now the early steamer was wonderfully made; a side wheeler of rather imposing appearance, and so nicely balanced that a slight inequality in the burden was sufficient to put one of the wheels out of the water. Therefore, a lady of considerable avoirdupois was generally chosen candlestick, her duty to balance the boat, her weight making it possible to utilize both wheels at the same time.

On this particular Fourth, everybody from Duck Lake to Mc Cullom's Settlement, was invited to a boat ride and picnic at "The Head", on a scow called the Monitor, fitted with a boiler and engine in the middle, and owned and manned by Ferry and

Dowling. Ed. Burrows manipulated the heavy plank which served as a rudder. About eight o'clock the crowd began to gather. There was no hurry, no bustle. Everyone was sure to come and the boat waited until the entire population, children included was aboard.

Then she began to crawl up the lake. Stops were made at Rathbone's, Luscomb's, Pierce's, and at the old water mill, the rest of our unsightly docks being yet unbuilt where fair green banks and waving woodland then came gracefully down to the water's edge.

Arrived at "The Head" the party proceeded to a spot beyond the grist mill on the North Hill in Montague where they found reinforcements from miles around. After many friendly greetings had been interchanged, the program was given. Rev. Mr. Griffin led in prayer. George Dowling was master of ceremonies; Theodore Depew read the Declaration of Independence and Ed Ferry gave the oration. This is said to be the very day that Noah Ferry was buried at Gettysburg. The next thing was dinner. Enough tables were arranged in a circle to accommodate all the guests and the baskets were opened. Such eatables! Chicken pie, fried chicken, chicken baked, "riz" biscuit, and green currant pie. In fact, the very cream of our mothers' baking was spread upon those tables. The waiters passed along inside the circle to see that everyone's wants were supplied.

The ride home was a fit ending for a perfect day. The party fell into little groups, discussing the day's pleasures and the coming ball, interrupted only by a sudden "You'r afire! as a spark from the boiler stack burned its way through the voluminous fold of ladies' skirts or padded broadcloth of gentlemen's shoulders. Most of the party went on to White River (the Mouth) for the ball. As the low scow neared the dock, everyone's feet were lifted until the wave backing from the shore could surge over the deck and draw off again.

The sun was dropping into Lake Michigan when the party returned home and everyone hurried away to don his evening clothes that he might trip the light fantastic to the music of S. J. B. Watson's fiddle, until morn's gray light came stealing to the open windows telling that the glorious Fourth was over and announcing the coming of the work-a-day Fifth.

A character of our area in the lumbering days was Lame Bob a woods cook, so called because he wore an ill fitting peg leg. Bob was not a lusty brawling individual known for strength and pugnacity. He was primarily an alcoholic confidence man, who achieved fame for ability to hornswoggle drinks.

In a kindlier era he might have been successful in a dozen

vocations for his ingenuity and resourcefulness were amazing. But like many others he yielded to an environment consisting largely of temples to John Barleycorn with saw dust on the floor. One time when Lame Bob's funds were gone he obtained a five gallon jug pumped into it three gallons of water and hobbled into the drug store of L. G. Ripley (now Lipka's Drug Store) with a demand for two gallons of grain alcohol. "Just cleaned up the stock of the other fellow up the street", he explained. "Horses at camp have collar galls need lots of antiseptic."

As Ripley tendered the filled jug, Bob asked for credit, when it was refused the cook put on an act that would have done honor to Hollywood. "I am surprised by your inhumanity to one of man's noblest friends", he declared in aggrieved tones. "I shall never enter your store again. Kindly return the alcohol to your barrel sir."

Ripley poured two gallons of the watered mixture back into the original container, allowing Bob to swing down the street with a recreational beverage of high potency. Ripley never tumbled to Bob's trick.

Lame Bob would visit saloons and with strangers around he would fall on the floor in a mock seizure, thrashing, moaning, rolling back his eyes and panting, saying "I am a victim of Norwegian leaping fever and whiskey is the only thing that will relieve it." He kept his thirst well taken care of, for a change he would bring in a snake he would hunt for, stagger into a bar with the snake, whiskey he pleaded, "This critter nailed me five times before I killed it."

One time when pulling his snake act a western logger pulled out a bowie knife two feet long rolled up the pants of Bob's good leg and prepared to slash the fake wounds to drain the venom. One time they cured him of his Norwegian leaping fever by thrusting him a whiskey flask filled with cold tea fortified by turpentine, Croton oil and assafedita.

Lame Bob was not a very good cook so he was on the go and he took up a companion by the name of Carr who ran a dive of flimsy pine boards at the Clare-Gladwin County line a ghost town known as Meredity. When Bob and Carr got in trouble with Clare County officials they skidded their place across the road into Gladwin County and vice-versa.

Carr was frozen to death in a woodshed behind his emporium. His reputation was so black that no pastor would officiate at his funeral. Someone borrowed a Bible and a Swede lumberjack intoned the service.

Lame Bob despite his years of companionship with Carr did not wait to attend the funeral. He took off into the wild leafy yonder

CARPENTER CHEV. & OLDS
Glenn & Jeanne Carpenter
Jack, Jim & Bill

CHALMERS MARINA
Eunice & Chalmers Fradenburg

with Carr's last two bottles of red-eye, fearful that some of the mourners might sprint to the supply with greater speed.

Thus ended the trail of our peg-leg cook.

In the developing years of the lumbering trade the young people of the Community had many opportunities to enjoy the life of the frontier. The following article written by one of our early settlers children known to us only as G. T. W. relates some early experiences in the great wilderness.

In the early sixties, while yet a young lad, my parents moved to White Lake and located near what is called Carleton Creek, than a dense wilderness. I was a child of nature, loving the woods and delighting in a rod and line. Then it was with straw hat and bare feet, with my pocket full of bait, I would steal away in the early morning light to White River and catch my basket full of fish, and return home in time to have mother cook my beauties for breakfast. The river then abounded with fish of all kinds, from the tiny minnow to the mammoth muskellunge.

The greatest of all sport was fishing by torchlight, and well I remember my delight when invited by the Fogg boys to go with them on such an expedition. My boyish eyes bulged out with astonishment as awe stricken I sat in the canoe and saw the stick of pitch pine lighted and placed in the prow of the boat to blind the fish. My, what a catch! There were black bass, pike, pickerel and bullheads, but in time this got to be a common thing. Speaking of muskellunge reminds me of an incident that occurred in after years. Coming home one day shortly after bringing my wife to Whitehall, I found the doors locked and the curtains down. Calling my wife by name, I was surprised to have the door cautiously opened and to be told to come in quick, when the door was again quickly locked. "What is the matter?" I exclaimed. "Why are you shut in this warm day?" Pale as a ghost, she whispered, "Indians, The town is full of them. Two great big Indians just went by with the largest fish I ever saw. They had a pole through its head and the ends of the pole on their shoulders and then it dragged on the ground. It must have been a young whale." I told her it was a muskellunge, and when I got to the bottom of the matter, two Indians and a squaw were all she had seen that day. How I laughed at her, but they were the first Indians the poor woman had ever seen.

In later years, the streams had been planted by the State with speckled trout and other varieties of fish. A law was passed that they should not be molested for a period of three years. Game wardens were also appointed to see that the law was enforced. Among the first appointed were: Dr. Kenyon, Messrs. Whitman, Brock and Haverkate. I was called upon at one time by Mr. Brock

Wayne, Gloria, Pam, Todd, Paul, Roger,
John & Jim Gillan

DAHL'S FARM SERVICE
Kenneth, Elaine, Martin, Tim,
Mark & Kristine Dahl

to go with him up the river in search of law breakers. As we were skulking along in the brush watching the river, a man jumped and ran, leaving his trout on the river bank. He was too quick for us, and when we turned laughing for home, I slyly picked up the trout and slipped them in Brock's pocket. When we got to Montague, I accused him of taking them and told him if he threw them away I would complain of him. He said if I did, he would murder me "by gum I will."

In the early days, the woods were full of wild game of all kinds, the black bear, deer, fox, wild cat and lynx. The wolf, too, often made night hideous as they howled around the settler's cabin. It was no uncommon thing to see the deer browsing in sight of your door, or even come to the house to eat potato parings thrown out in the yard. I have killed many deer myself but could never bring myself to shoot one while eating so near our door. Frequently we would go out and shoot a deer in the morning in order to have venison for breakfast, as that was the only fresh meat we had. I have killed as many as five deer in one day.

The bear was common in those days and harmless if let alone. A stranger came one day and wished me to show him some land he thought of purchasing. He stood looking at the timber when I pointed back, he turned to look. Instantly his hair began to rise on his head, for there stood a black bear raised on his haunches. He soon dropped down and ambled away in the woods. Our land-looker said, "Let us go home. I think I will look somewhere else." I guess he did for I never saw him again. The wild pigeons were also plentiful, and catching and shipping them was at one time a prosperous business in which many were engaged, myself among the number. They had their nestings in the swamps around White Lake and vicinity. Pigeon Hill on the shore of Lake Michigan received its name from the fact that the birds in flying over would be but a few feet from the ground and people were accustomed to go there and kill them in great numbers with clubs and poles. I have often shipped as high as ten crates a day, a crate containing from four to five dozen birds. To catch them beds were made in the vicinity of the feeding grounds, strewing them with wheat. A net was then set with spring poles at each end, and a stool pigeon to decoy them was set on the bed. The net was then sprung over them. I have frequently made as high as \$25.00 in one day.

The bull frog that makes night hideous with his croaking, was also another source of making money. They were caught with hook and line, and crated the same as pigeons. We realized from 75 cents to \$1.50 a dozen. I have made as high as \$10.00 a day at this business. Much money was also made in trapping on White River which once literally swarmed with muskrat, mink and otter.

A good muskrat skin would bring from 15 to 40¢; a mink from \$1.00 to \$5.00, and an otter from \$6.00 to \$18.00. I have caught otter that measured six feet in length. A good trapper has been known to clear from \$10.00 to \$15.00 in one night, and made as high as \$800 in one season.

By the 1880's lumbering reached its peak in the Montague Area. The twin towns at the head of the lake were booming. In 1880 the population of Montague was about 2400, a big town for those days. The Mills were running at full capacity, the beautiful White Pine lumber and cedar shingles they produced, were pouring in a steady stream out across Lake Michigan in a great fleet of Schooners their lofty white sails making bellowing clouds against the blue waters.

Both towns had regular railroad service from Holland on the South, to Pentwater to the North.

The woods echoed to the noisy puffing of small logging railroads built to replace the horse and ox teams of the past.

Schools and Churches were operating efficiently, social organizations were formed.

Montague and Whitehall both had banks and Opera House, Hotels, Wooden Sidewalks, Fire Departments, Livery Stables and stores. In Montague the White Lake and West Oceana Agricultural Society's. Forty acre Fair Grounds located at the south-west corner of Hancock and Whitbeck offered Horse Racing on a half mile clay track. Life was good.