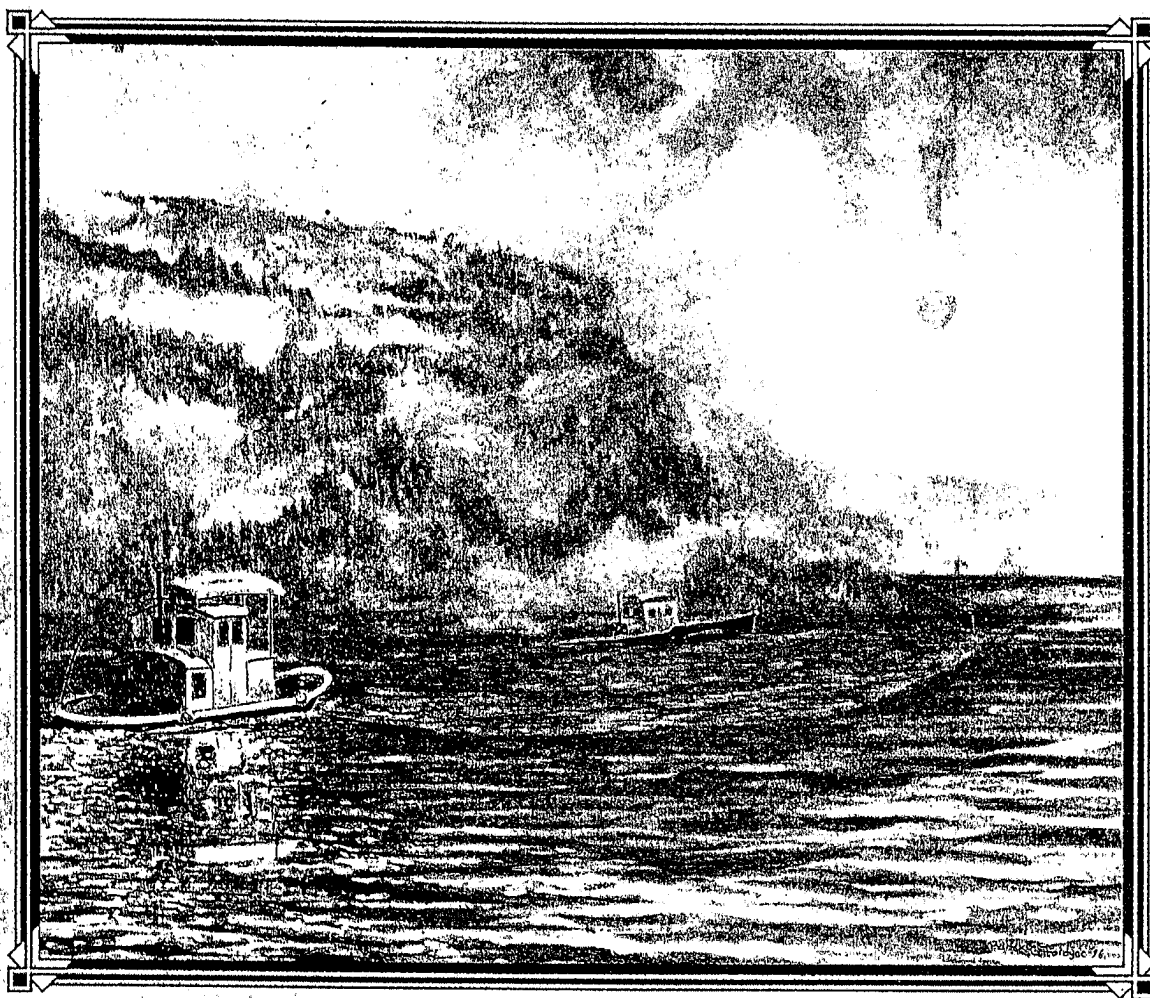


The Wildest Rivers — the Oldest Hills

Tales of the Gatineau and Pontiac



VENETIA CRAWFORD

AND

GUNDA LAMBTON

With Illustrations by Gunda Lambton

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

A C. I. P. CAMP ON THE UPPER GATINEAU

William McTiernan of Bryson helped prepare one of the camps for the Canadian International Paper Company, north of Maniwaki, in the early 1930s.

The wages were \$1 a day, if you were a log marker. In the winter the wages were \$46 a month. I caught the train bound for Maniwaki... That night I looked up Dawson, as he was the clerk in the head office of the company in Maniwaki. I slept in the staff house with him that night, put on my working clothes and left my suit with him. The next morning I was up at six o'clock, had breakfast in the restaurant and joined the gang of the men gathering around the main office. There were three or four cattle trucks standing there, getting loaded with men. Pete Lyons was calling out the names. All of a sudden mine was shouted out. I climbed into the cattle truck packed with men, who had to stand up the whole ninety miles of rough, bull-dozed roads.

We all got out at a place called Notakim Depot on the Wapusk River (this is not far from Bark Lake, now in Parc La Vérendrye. The men were there to prepare a camp for future logging, which was usually done a year ahead of time). Only the cookery and one sleep camp were up. That evening at supper time we were as hungry as wolves. Before we went to bed that night we had to finish off our bunks (i. e. construct them and cover them with balsam boughs for mattresses).

Joe Rail was the foreman for the construction of the depot. After he got the other men to work, he said to me: "Hey, Mac, go to the stable and you will see a big team of branded Western horses. Harness them. You are going to skid the timber in for the depot. Follow that road. There are men in the bush cutting and peeling the timber." The creek was close to the building site drive. The horses drew the timber through the creek to clean the timber. So I skidded away half the summer.

One day Joe called me over: "I need a corner man on this barn. Did you ever handle an axe?"

I answered: "Yes, I was almost born with one in my hands."

Joe said: "Here is an axe and handle. Go and hang and grind your axe."

(To hang an axe meant putting the hand-made axe handle into the metal part in such a way as to get maximum efficiency.)

This was right up my alley as my father had taught me how to do that job. Old Dave McTiernan had taught me all the tricks of the bush trade. I brought the axe back to the boss and showed him the axe. Joe said: "That's the best hung axe on this job. So climb up and take that corner as most of the men are greenhorns. I see whoever taught you made a good job."

I told him that my father was a bush man all his life. He had worked for Gillies for over fifty years.

After the barn was built, he put me on the office, stable and more sleep camps. The buildings were all built with the black spruce logs standing up top to butt with a plate... The roof had three pure line timbers from one end to the other, and one across the middle to hold the walls together. The rafters were made of round spruce and the floor and roof were sheathed with rough lumber (milled boards) as there was a sawmill at another depot at Bark Lake.

The camps, made of black spruce logs placed up and down, were built on sandy soil. Oh, the sand flies, the black flies and the deer flies.

After the building was over, Joe Rail sent me with men by the names of Joe Smith and Bill Scullin on the improvements – that is, to build dams, cut the alders and blast the stones out of the Wapusk River to get it fit for spring drive. I became a powder monkey. I can thank James and Grant Carswell (two Bryson men) for teaching me how to use dynamite fuses and caps and how to prepare a blast under water, as I had worked with them in their lime kiln.

The boss asked me a few questions and said: "The job is yours." He sent me a helper, Aurèle Campeau from Montreal, to carry the dynamite and I carried the fuses and caps in a pack sack. Aurèle was not able to speak English and after two months I had learned enough French to get along and he had learned to speak English. He was a very fine man.

When we worked on the improvements, we worked rain or shine and slept in tents until Christmas time. You can imagine how cold it was. We did not work on Sunday but spent all day boiling the lice out of our underwear and getting them dry.

Johnny McCaffrey and I topped a load of logs and went ninety miles to Maniwaki. When we got there, I was nearly frozen. That was when I had my first drink of beer and rye, but not my first smoke as I had been smoking around Bryson when I was sixteen years old.

(During) a week or so around Maniwaki... we went to the shows, stayed in hotels, ate in restaurants and we found that our money was used up fast. John and I caught an empty truck going back to the Pensive Depot. We ate dinner there around two o'clock and drove to the Notakim Depot at around eight o'clock as we had a bottle of rye to play with on the road.

We slept there that night and the next morning we went to the office. They wanted me at a jobbers' camp for \$46 per month cutting these long black spruce. Alex Sumnard, the jobber, sent my chum John McCaffrey on the main road to work. He teamed me up with a six foot Indian. We were supposed to make 75 logs a day. We used to cut 100 logs. We banked 50 logs each day. When it was too stormy, we made a brush shack and talked and ate all day.

We did this work with a Swede saw. The stump had to be cut one foot from the ground. I was short so that job suited me fine. I used to fell for my tall Indian chum. I had been raised with Indians in my childhood and I liked them. One day I broke two Swede saw blades as the wind was blowing hard. Alex Sumnard had words with me and I came home to Bryson in March, full of lice.

I worked in the bush and drove logs and worked as a handy man for two winters. I drove on the Schyan (St. Joachim) and Muskrat rivers and then came home and said to myself: "No more bush work for me. That is for the birds." That was when I decided to become a carpenter.

In 1937, I met a Russian German, who took a liking to me. He could speak seven languages. He was a professional carpenter. I worked with him for two years around Bryson. We built two houses in Bryson and did work for a lot of farmers in the area....

I read the Equity every week about the Brysons and how great they were at Fort Coulonge with all the stone houses and the churches they built.

I, William McTiernan, do not agree with the praise the Honorable George Bryson gets, as he was the member of parliament in Ottawa. The Government allowed him to hire men and set up lumber camps and cut the virgin pine and become a double millionaire. All the members of Pontiac did the same — filled their pockets.⁷

William McTiernan was not alone in his definite likes and dislikes. Many shantymen distrusted the big lumber merchants, particularly those who, like the Wrights and Brysons, added the political advantages of a seat in the legislature (in Quebec or, later, Ottawa) to their other powers. They were also witness to great waste when cutting prime timbers: only flawless logs were taken, those with the right length and circumference. The rest were left to rot or were used for building cribs. Strangely enough, neither Ruggles Wright nor the hard-headed Scots — the Gilmours, MacLarens or Gillies — were as heartily disliked by Irish shantymen as the Irish lumber merchant John Egan. The shantymen and farmers had one weapon: the vote. But they found that this was often manipulated by the powerful companies they opposed. Shantymen in particular could lose their jobs if they did not vote for their employers. To counteract the wealth that bought votes, they used their special gift of wit and imagination to sway voters. At the time of the 1854 elections in Ottawa County they created a ballad:

JOHN EGAN

*A good stick in a trusty hand, a merry heart and true,
John Egan's men shall understand what Gatineau boys can do.
And have they said the where and when? And will John Egan try?
Then fifteen hundred Gatineau men will know the reason why.
And will they buy the farmer bold? The flunkeys will they try?
Then fifteen hundred boys from Hull will know the reason why.
Out spoke our leader brave and bold. A gallant man is he,
Though Aylmer town is Egan's hold, we'll make John Egan flee.
All parties will go hand in hand, and there shall be no stay,
Go side by side from strand to strand and who shall bid us nay?
And will they stuff him down our throats, and will the flunkeys try?
Then twice five hundred Eardley boys will know the reason why.
And when we come unto the polls, a pleasant sight to view,
Come forth! Come forth! ye cursed fools, we're better men than you
John Egan he keeps watch and ward, John Egan he may try,
But all the brave Lochaber boys will know the reason why!
Old Ruggles he may skin his slaves, old Ruggles he may try,
But all the men of Templeton will know the reason why!
John Egan he may think it fine, John Egan he may try
To leave in chains the brave O'Brien, who fought for liberty;
But all the boys from Erin's sod will fight him till they die
Or all the men of Buckingham shall know the reason why!
John Egan he may make canals, John Egan he may try,
But all the gallant Nation lads will know the reason why !
John Egan he is rich and fat, John Egan he may try,
John Egan he may fancy that he can the farmers buy,
But our brave lads though poor in purse will make his flunkeys fly,
Or twice ten hundred farmer boys will know the reason why!
And will the nobles hunt us down? And will John Egan try?
Then all the men that Ottawa has will know the reason why!¹⁸*

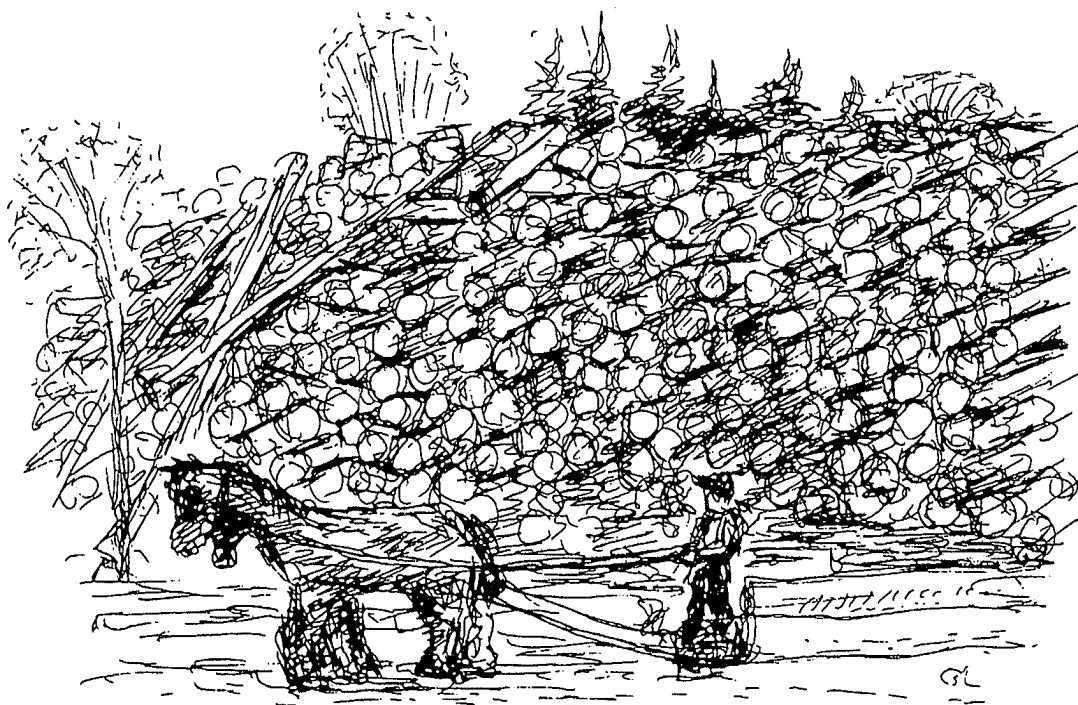
This ballad represents a vast area between Eardley in Pontiac county to the west, and Lochaber and the Nation river to the east. O'Brien, left in chains, in this song is the symbol of Irish independence, which, according to the farmers and loggers who sang it, was betrayed by John Egan. In spite of their confident efforts Egan became a member of the Legislative Assembly for Ottawa County. That they did not consider him a good representative is expressed in some verses of a second ballad, composed when Egan died, three years later, in 1857:

*Then lay down the County and the "dough"
Hang up the broad axe and the hoe
There's no more votes for poor old John,*

*He's gone where the bad members go,
Uncle John he had fingers but he had no toes,
And he had no eyes for to see,
But he had a great nose for all the Pine trees,
But he'll have to let the Pine trees be.⁹*

These songs were sung and written more than a hundred years before William McTiernan made similar remarks about the Brysons.

There were a few resourceful young farmers who by-passed the large companies and the pressure by these on shanty-men to vote for politicians who would secure them profitable limits, pressures described in S. Wyman MacKechnie's *What Men They Were*.² Archie and Willie MacKechnie got enough supplies and men together to run their own small camp north of Otter Lake, using an old shanty and stable. They kept careful records, so that we know they cut 2087 logs between October 25th 1872 and March 8th 1873. They made \$1,737 from which they paid ten or twelve men a total of \$444.64. Supplies, including feed for two teams came to \$546.65. The men in this camp were attracted by better pay and better working conditions than in the regular camps. The partners themselves, working with their own teams, made \$2.93 per day. Their detailed records show that each team consumed 21 lbs 12 oz. of hay and 36 lbs 12 oz. of oats per day. At the end of the season they divided a profit of no more than \$147.10.¹⁰



CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE LIFE OF A FIRE RANGER

FROM WILLIAM MCTIERNAN

The work of the fire rangers was of utmost importance to the logging companies, for their cutting areas were at times threatened by sudden forest fires (caused by dry weather and lightning) which had to be quickly controlled. David McTiernan, William's father, was such a fire ranger, and William was brought up in the northern bush where his father worked.

In 1915 David McTiernan married Margaret Hanna and:

together they went to Grand Lake Victoria, for their first fire ranging trip. They went in an eighteen foot canoe up the Ottawa River to Fort Coulonge, up the Coulonge River to Grand Lake Victoria, 200 miles. In the canoe they carried all their food, tent, blankets, utensils, grease, lard, baking powder, first aid kit, medicine in case of sickness, fishing lines, rifle and shot-gun.

They baked the bread, pork and potatoes in the sand.

They were working for the Ottawa River Forest Protection Association Ltd. The wardens wore badges and green shirts with O. R. F. P. A. L. in red letters. (César Paul, mentioned earlier, was another such fire ranger.)

Some of the places where there were rapids and where there were chutes, everything had to be portaged for perhaps 5 or 6 miles. Everything was carried in pack sacks. After they left the river, they travelled by lakes which was much easier. Some of the lakes were 50 miles long. When a storm got up, they had to go on shore as the swells were 5 - 6 feet high. They would wait under the canoe. Sometimes they would put up the tent. The black flies, deer flies and sand flies were terrible. They used pine tar, bear oil and camphor mixed together as an insect repellent (their hands and faces would look black until they washed it off).

They had to travel to Grand Lake Victoria which was the height of land. From there the rivers run down in two directions. This is the source of both the Coulonge and the Gatineau Rivers. There was a camp and a store house there. This was their home for the summer. In the cottage there was a stove, table and rough floor and coal oil lamp. There were no

telephones there until years later. There were bunks but you had to make your own mattresses out of balsam brush. Pillows were made of flour bags filled with beaver hay.

You were not always alone, as there were 60-70 men working up there. They each had their own beats that were so many miles square to take care of. They had to cut trails, make canoe landings and build dams to keep the water high enough for the canoes to pass through so they would not hit stumps and rocks. They had to build towers or look-outs to spot forest fires as the lightning sometimes caused bad fires that could travel at a speed of 60 miles per hour. When a forest fire started, it could burn thousands of acres of forest. It takes as many as 500 men with shovels, axes, cross-cut saws, fire pumps and miles of hose to control a fire. So fire ranging is quite exciting and dangerous as you have to run rapids with the canoes. You could easily drown if the canoe hit a rock at 30-40 miles per hour and the canoe would be broken to bits in minutes.

The return trip (from the camp) was much faster as the creeks and rivers run down hill. Often the canoe travels at a speed of 30-40 knots per hour. My mother and father worked at fire ranging for three years. In the year of 1917 my mother, who was 39 at the time, got pregnant, while she was in the forest. Dad was 54 years old. This was 200 miles from her doctor, Dr. Hurdman in Bryson. So 200 miles from home, they packed up their gear. Now there were three lives to look after instead of two. So old Dave McTiernan and his wife, Madge, set out for home in the late fall. They ran as many of the rapids as they dared (in Madge's pregnant state) and portaged the more dangerous chutes. Eventually, they reached the Ottawa River where it was clear sailing and arrived home safely in Bryson.

I, William James McTiernan, was born where Mosie Blais used to live. With a lot of labour pains and the assistance of Dr. Hurdman I was born on the floor on Wednesday at 8 o'clock in the morning of March 26th 1917.

When I was six months old, they went by horse and wagon up the Black River to the Hope Depot. My mother was cook. Father was chore boy and there was a gang of men to cook for all the time. Jack Lynch was agent for J. R. Booth. Mother and Dad worked for one year at the Hope Depot. Then they were transferred to the Moose Creek Depot.

After working for the Gillies Brothers on the Crow River for two years, David McTiernan became a fire ranger again, this time for the E. B. Eddy Company:

This was a much easier job. They were their own bosses.... trapped beaver and all fur bearing animals.

Once a year, Dad and Mother made a 7 day trip to see his mother (in Bryson) at Christmas. It was 7 days and all of 7 days (from day light

until 8 o'clock at night and 40-50 degrees below zero) back in those days. The stopping places on the way home were the Frazer Crow, the Crow Bridge, the John Bull, Leo Klukie's, Fred's Way, Burke's Place, Osborne Depot, Vadneau's Hotel in Otter Lake, O'Connor's Hotel in Campbell's Bay where Dad always stopped to have a drink or two and sometimes got drunk. After his drunk with a big head Dad reached the R. Lepine Hotel in Bryson. There he would let Mother and me off. He went to put in the horses, take off the harnesses and feed and water them. After that he would go to the hotel and have a few shots of whisky to make his head smaller or bigger, one or the other. His mother was as cross as a meat axe so she gave him hell when he came in. Father and Mother did this every year until I was nine years old.

From the Mason Depot we were sent by train to Big Lake Dumont by the E. B. Eddy Company....

In the spring of 1927, my father and mother bought a house from Billy Gillies. They paid \$2200 spot cash. I went to school for two years.¹¹

William McTiernan related that during his school years he would sometimes go to skate at Campbell's Bay (from Bryson, where his parents were taking care of a large old house known as the Dezouche house).

There was a horse-bus that would take us there. It consisted of a box built on a pair of sloops and a team of horses to draw the sleigh. In the spring we travelled on the (school)bus. It was a box built on an old Buick car.... The bus travelled at about fifteen to twenty miles an hour and it had a lot of stops to make, picking up the girls and boys along the way.¹²

