THE SHIRETOWN CONSERVER

The Dover Foxcroft Historical Society Newsletter

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Recollections

by William G. Glover, Sr.

The old timers were good with their tools. They made sure saws and axes were sharp. Thus they wasted little motion and effort.

Each tool had its use — the double bitted axe for notching, felling and limbing trees; the pole axe for limbing, cutting brush, splitting and its butt for driving wedges; the crosscut saw as a two-man, two-handled saw for felling large trees and cutting up saw logs; the buck saw was for cutting up smaller wood (limbs, etc.) into four-foot lengths or less. Each saw had a special set or angle for the teeth which was achieved by the use of a file. Some were for hardwood (birch, beech, oak and maple); others for soft woods (pine, fir, spruce and hemlock). Each worked best in the type of wood the saw teeth were set for.

Some of the old timers were artists with each. I remember cutting pine logs in the 1930s with Uncle George and John Perham. Uncle George was one who wasted neither time nor motion. Once I questioned why we were going to fell a large pine in a certain direction. His answer was always logical and showed previous thought. The direction he indicated would cause the least damage to standing small trees. Another direction would bring the valuable trunk down across a frozen hummock or rock which could shatter the frozen pine trunk.

He would step up to the tree with his double-bitted axe and cut his notch on the side he wanted it to fall; then two men went to work with the crosscut saw from opposite sides of the tree. After sawing part way into the tree trunk, a wedge was driven into the saw cut to prevent the tree from tipping back, pinching the saw. Uncle George would stand back and survey the line and amount of holding wood on each side of the cut. When sawing resumed, you might have to saw more to one side than the other to get the proper fall.

As the trunk began to sway from the weight of the top, one man unscrewed his handle and removed it from the saw so the other man could draw it out of the cut and get back away from the falling tree. Many times the trunk would kick back or sideways as the tree landed on the ground. Usually the man removing his handle from the saw would strike the wedge several times with the pole of an axe to drive the wedge and precipitate the fall of the tree. These woodsmen seldom lodged a tree on others or got a bad fall.

I have seen Uncle George so sure of his ability that he drove a stake in the ground declaring he would drive it further with the trunk of a 75-foot pine. He not only said he could, but I've seen him do it several times.

He was one of the last of the breed of men who went into the labor camps and spent the whole winter cutting logs, driving teams, hauling the logs to the streams for the spring river drive, or doing other jobs in camp to make life as comfortable as possible for the crew, including cooks, blacksmiths and others. Each had his job to make the work run smoothly.

I never spent a winter in such a camp, but have experienced much of the life during school vacations while growing up.

As an artist with tools, few could beat the team of brothers Charlie and Frankie Bennett. They were not considered too bright and lived with a sister, Agnes, in Dover-Foxcroft. They lived in that era when nearly everyone burned wood in furnaces and stoves for heat.

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Recollections —

Thus nearly every household had 10 to 15 cords of wood delivered in four-foot lengths for the following winter's supply of dry wood. Charlie and Frankie would arrive at daylight and work all day sawing and splitting wood for $1.50 per cord. When they arrived, one would be carrying a saw horse and buck saw; the other an axe, wedge and maul. With one sawing and the other splitting, they would work up to ten cords a day. That is grueling work but they were hardened to it. They never lacked work and were always self-supporting even in the worst of the Great Depression. They also spent part of each evening filing their saws and honing axes to have them sharp for the next day's work.

There are probably hundreds of other examples of the skills of woodsmen before the advent of chainsaws, skidders, loaders, heavy trucks and tree harvesters, but these are a few I have seen.

Dad claimed to have worked with an old timer who proved he could work all day in sub-zero weather in just socks, moccasins, long underwear and mittens. He couldn't have taken any long coffee beaks or stopped to rest very long.

Dad also told the story of the Badger family in Bowerbank who were woods workers. The son had his axe slip and chopped into his foot. When the old man got the boy's boot and sock off, two of his toes fell out. The old man's comment to his son was, "For God's sake, Leander, did you have to strike twice?"

That didn't take skill, but an example of skill was shown by Ivory Higgins who worked with Dad and me cutting firewood. The heavy butt sticks of four-foot wood had to be split for handling and burning. This was most easily done when the tree was fresh cut with the sap in the wood. This also allowed the wood to dry or season much faster. In order to split a large diameter stick required scoring the length of it with an axe, then setting splitting wedges at intervals along the stick. The wedges had to be driven by a maul and split the log.

After years of working on the railroad as a section hand, Ivory had developed skill, eye and rhythm, swinging the maul that was amazing to see. He would set three wedges and hit all three in rotation with a rotating swing. Most men would swing from either right to left whichever was most natural. Ivory swung both ways so he lost no momentum from hitting one wedge to the next. This came from years of driving spikes into railroad ties to fasten down the rails.

The first time I tried it, I struck the wedge too long, hit it with the handle of the maul and broke it. Father wasn't too happy about that. It meant no more splitting that day and another handle to make and hang on the sledge.

I still have in the garage a couple of pieces of ash we cut in the winter of 1930 for making handles. We made, shaped and hung all our own handles. I'll bet it would be a sorry effort if I tried to shape one today. It might be better than nothing, but it wouldn't be pretty.

Another wood we used to cut and shape for special objects was hornbeam. It is extremely tough and was used for pole yokes, whiffletrees and peavey handles. Sometimes it was used for sled stakes on the sled bodies.

Bill reminded me of the time Wendell Brown was trying to remove the broken handle from the eye of an axe at his camp. He was using the old-time method of rubbing it with lard, then heating it in the cook stove oven. Heat caused the wood to shrink and lard greased it so the broken piece could be-forced out allowing a new one to be inserted. Bill asked Wendell why he used the lard just as Wendell's nephew came in through the door. His remark was, "Everyone knows that lard is shortening." That procedure and remark has stuck with Bill for years.

A great deal of the success of splitting wood was dependent upon two things; one was a sharp but blunt axe, and the second was striking accurately in the same line across the stick to get a split down the grain of the wood. I never developed that accuracy, so years later as I try to split wood, my Dad's comment always comes back to me. "Bill, if you would only strike twice in the same place, you would save energy and split more wood."

I don't think I would have made the grade as a woodsman in the old days. I probably would have wound up as a lumber camp cook instead. ☆

More about the logging camps in the next Shiretown Conserver

Bits and Pieces

On Aug. 9, 1607, years before the Pilgrims set foot in the New World, colonists who had arrived at the ill-fated Popham Colony on "The Gift of God" and the "Mary and John" in Phippsburg, Maine, celebrated a day for "gyvinge God thanks for our happy metinge & saffe aryval into the country." Little did they realize the harsh winter that they were soon to endure. ☆

In 1822, Samuel Greeley, Esq., originally from Gilmantown, N.H., set apart the land now known as Monument Square for a public park. ☆

"Tech Ed" got a start in 1831, when Foxcroft Academy formed a committee to explore the expediency of having a machine shop connected with the school. It was never built, but the action anticipated instruction in manual training, then a comparatively new idea among American educators. ☆

In 1842-1843, lumbermen noted that from November to April, up to 15 feet of snow fell. Millerites predicted the end of the world would come in April. ☆

In 1842, the first Debating Society was established at Foxcroft Academy — "Resolved: that the old temperance society has done more towards advancing the temperance reformation than the Washingtonian Society, now in operation." ☆

One of the earliest houses in Dover was picked up and moved to its present location. In 1843, Elder Flavel Bartlett, a merchant, purchased a lot at the corner of Pleasant and Harvey streets and put on it what was for many years known as "The Bartlett House." This building had been at East Dover where Mr. Bartlett previously lived. It was taken down and moved to its new site and rebuilt. One hundred and fifty-six years later, it stills serves as an apartment house. ☆

Ivory W. Douglass had a confectionery store in the basement of the "Flatiron Building" in 1860; he later carried groceries. (A "sweet memory" for our museum! — Madelyn Betts) ☆

July 4, 1874 — B.C. Lowell has just received a new coffee mill of a size sufficient to grind coffee for the whole town. He will grind it free of expense, the only condition being that you buy your coffee of him. The machine is worth looking at. – from *The Piscataquis Observer* ☆

Jan. 4, 1883 — "Davis & Henderson's new woolen mill at East Dover started a few weeks ago, making 50 yards of cloth a day." – from *The Piscataquis Observer* ☆

1891 — There is a telephone service between Dover and Foxcroft and Sangerville and Guilford. ☆

The Opera Block was subscribed to the tune of $20,000 in 1891. The plan called for four stories, two on Main Street, one facing Monument Square, and one on Lincoln Street. The second floor was to have a 30 foot by 40 foot Society Hall and balcony, with stage and dressing rooms. The building was to be built of brick and granite. ☆

1892 — On March 10, lights were turned on in Dover. A large incandescent arc light illuminated Merrick Square. The Court House got its lights the previous week. ☆

Photographs were first printed in *The Piscataquis Observer* on Nov. 25, 1897, when an engraving of Foxcroft Academy appeared. ☆

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The Millerites in Maine

Excerpts from Sprague's Journal of Maine History, Vol. X, No. 1, 1922

The early Millerites in Maine were a God-fearing, devout and peaceful group. None could doubt their sincerity or the purity of their lives. They were respected as good citizens and kind neighbors. They met with violent opposition, and their leaders were sometimes arrested for vagrancy and similar charges. This they simply called persecution, which they expected if not hoped for. They were often jeered, rebuffed and made the butt of ridicule which served only to strengthen their faith. The Master had foretold them of prosecutors and scoffers, and they welcomed and prayed for them.

Under the leadership of William Miller, a native of Pittsfield, Mass., the Millerites established a date in April, 1843 as the second advent of Christ and the end of the world.

Writing in 1921 to Miss Clara Endicott Sears of Harvard, Mass., Dover-Foxcroft's John Francis Sprague said, "When a small boy, I have heard people state that Father Miller visited Maine in 1843 and preached here some with his illustrated charts, explaining what signs has already been fulfilled and figures to prove that the end of this world would come on the date fixed by him. (When the day came and went, and the world did not end, the Millerites recalculated, proclaiming Oct. 22, 1844 as the correct date, according to *The Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11th edition, 1911.)

"In speaking of James Stuart Holmes, the first lawyer of the county, I quote from a letter regarding him that I previously received from the late Joseph D. Brown, as follows: 'I well remember a remarkable scene in the year 1843, in which (Holmes) was an active participant. The Adventists or followers of William Miller were numerous in the neighboring town of Atkinson. Their preaching of the second coming of Christ was deemed a heresy by leading citizens and members of other churches. Some of these citizens who opposed the Millerites went to Dover and instituted legal proceedings against Israel Damon and several others who were preachers and leaders in the Miller faith, under the vagrant act. In the old church on the hill they were arraigned before Moses Scott, a justice of the peace.

"Without pecuniary compensation, Mr. Holmes volunteered his services for the defense. For four days, the courtroom was crowded with people. During the whole time, there was a succession of praying, singing of hymns, plaintive and exhilarating as only the old-style Millerites could sing, shouting, jeers, groans and applause, but above all these occasional distracting sounds could be heard Mr. Holmes' eloquent argument for religious freedom and toleration, and the right of every person to worship God according to the dictates of his own conscience, under his own vine and fig tree. At the close of the trial, the prisoners were promptly discharged.

Then for a year or so before the hoped-for Day, which never came, some of the Advent families which I knew, literally obeyed the command to sell their worldly goods and give alms to the poor about them. Hence, the passing of the Day found them in destitute circumstances."

Sprague cited his own experience. "I was six years old and remember it well, for my father was an enthusiastic Millerite or Second Adventist as they had then begun to call themselves. My mother, although a member of the Congregational church, was also a believer in the Advent doctrine."

Miller died in 1849, but his death did not discourage his followers, who engaged in studying the Old Testament prophecies and making mathematical calculations with renewed energy. Soon a new date was announced. "When the time predicted for the Day of Judgement passed uneventfully in 1854, the the leaders decided that the exact time of the end of the world was one of the mysteries of religion and of the Bible which the finite mind could not fathom by any principle of mathematics. The passing of this did not however weaken their faith or deter them from continuing to preach the second coming of Christ. The exact time of this event has simply passed into the realm of Divine mystery."

Millerites declined to vote or take part in town or state affairs, yet they were loyal citizens and paid taxes. They were opposed to human slavery and to war, and like the Quakers were recognized by the government as non-resistants. Today they would be called pacifists.

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MESSAGE FROM MARY

Dear Members,

It was a great summer and many things have been accomplished at the historical society's Observer Building museum. Besides being open on Sundays during the summer months, we've received many additional artifacts for the museum -- two in particular. One is a uniform used by the boy's band of Dover-Foxcroft many years ago and the other is a drum used by one of the members of the band.

We have Bick's barbershop all in place and the barber pole functioning along side the display. The first two rooms have been carpeted and track lighting has been mounted in the ceiling to better illuminate the artifacts on display there.

Winter is almost here and we have contracted a local builder to provide us with wooden storm windows to keep out the cold and to stay within the rules of the Register of Historic Places. The building is a showplace in town and has hosted Senator Olympia Snowe when she toured Dover-Foxcroft this summer. Watching the museum come to life and listening to the positive comments of visitors from near and far is encouraging and exciting to us.

As we move forward, we would enjoy and encourage comments from the membership and beg that you pay a visit to the museum whenever possible. We are proud of what we have accomplished and would like to show it off to all interested parties. Please give us a call at home, (207) 564-0820, or work, (207) 564-2784, and we'll be more than happy to open the doors for you. Until then, have a happy holiday season and we'll see you soon.

Mary I. Annis, President

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