

Wood, Snakes and Wild Cats

Albert Perkins, an old resident of Sombra Township (lot 16, Concession 13) told the following story in the Weekly Sun, Toronto in 1913.

I spent the best part of my life working in the heavily timbered forests of Sombra. The land here is rather level and being composed principally of black loam is therefore exceedingly rich. The timber on such land generally attains immense proportions and certainly did in Sombra. For many years I worked for a man named Dawson and his business was to prepare and ship square timber, mostly oak to England. I hewed one stick of timber which was 42 inches square and 52 feet long. This was the largest I ever had anything to do with. Before my time there was a stick that was five feet square and 60 feet long. The stick was found to be too big for removal from the forest. No engineering contrivance then known was strong enough to carry it to the water and it has therefore for more than 50 years lain in the Sombra woods slowly but surely wearing its strength away. I have seen it hundreds of times and it looks like a great fort reaching up about as high as a man's head. A shot from an old time cannon would no more than blister it or perhaps knock a splinter off.

We also cut timber in Enniskillen, Camden and Dawn Townships and brought it down the Sydenham River to Wilkesport. Here it was made up into rafts and all chained together. Some of these rafts covered an acre. Tugs moved them down the river to the boats which carried the timber eastward.

In the spring of the year there were thousands of big, black snakes in the water. They appeared quite harmless and would frequently crawl upon our slow moving rafts.

One time, more than forty years ago, the waste oil from Petrolia, Oil City and Oil Springs came quietly down the river covering the surface of the water. This soon put an end to the snakes and thousands of their twisted bodies floated with the current towards the lakes.

All kinds of animals were found in the woods but I, being a timber worker, had not much time for hunting. The thick timber and big elm trees were ideal hunting and hiding grounds for the panther, lynx, and wild cats and their screams were continually heard. A daring hunter and expert hunter named Neal had a pack of hounds and in season when the fur was prime he went on the trail of these animals and made considerable money out of their fur. He would get the hounds upon the tracks of the animals and in this way tree them. The shooting of panthers was very dangerous as they had a fashion of dropping down on their assailant

Sometimes when I went hunting wild turkeys and was much pleased if I could bring one home at night. When evening drew near they would fly up among the thick foliage of the timber.

Before I commenced my job cutting timber I worked for a farmer whose name was Huff. The first day I pulled peas and went barefoot all the time. As I worked all alone I could hear a hissing every once in a while but paid no attention to it. The next day Mr. Huff came to help the pea pulling and when he heard the hissing he jumped back quickly saying, "Hello, here is a rattler". We got our courage up and dug the rattler out of the loose ground and as I held its head down with a scythe, Mr. Huff took his knife and cut the skin around the rattler's neck, gave it a jerk and the skin was off. The snake had eleven rattlers and was about four feet long.

Later on in one day I killed 22 rattlers all of these were from three to four feet long.