

Life with the Indians . . .

Early Days Near Menahga . . .

The Menahga Messenger February 3, 1949

By Jacob Lalli

When a very young man, I came to Minnesota, and settled near the place where I still live. Our only neighbors were the Indians, except for a few white men who lived some distance away.

John Maunu, another early settler like myself, lived in the same neighborhood as I did. One day Mr. Maunu had been hunting and got lost. The night was dark and cold. He came to an Indian village and tried to go quietly, so as not to arouse the Indians, but when crossing a river near the village, the ice gave way. The group of 86 Indians owned 6 ferocious wolf dogs. The dogs heard the man and came after him. Their barking brought the Indians to see what was wrong. They saw Mr. Maunu and brought him to their tent in spite of his protests. They took his clothes and wrapped him in blankets which they had received from the government.

In the center of the wigwam was a fire surrounded by stones. They commenced to broil meat as meat was the only food they had to offer Mr. Maunu, but he would not touch a bite, for he was afraid the Indians would fry him next.

Early the next morning Mr. Maunu tried to escape from the Indians, but was brought back again by two men who caught him. Our house was a mile from the Indian village. Later the leader, Gray Wolf, and another Indian brought Maunu, who was terribly frightened by them, to my house. I felt I should reward them in some way, so I gave them bread and butter, it being the only food in store. The Indians had never eaten butter before, and instead of eating it with bread, they ate it as it was.

All my relations with the Indians were friendly, and they proved to be more friends than some white men.

The only proof of the Indian village left anymore

is the ring of stones which were around the fire in the wigwams, which can still be found by Matt Koski's.

* * *

We were never troubled by the Indians stealing any of our property. Once when we left for New York Mills to stay for several days, we nailed the doors and windows shut. The Indians came and told us that they would leave everything as it was. A week later, on returning, we notice that the Indians had gone on their daily hunting trips and a patch of snow showed that they had not come near the house at all during our absence.

One spring day when the river ice had already melted, I started to town for some supplies. On the way I passed an Indian wigwam with two Indians standing nearby. They motioned for me to come in. I had a bottle of whiskey and some tobacco with me. I offered it to them and they drank the bottle empty. I noticed some rat meat, nicely broiled, on the table. I could not talk their language, but I pointed at it, and they motioned to me to eat it. I did, and enjoyed my first rat meal very much. It was still quite cold and one of the Indians was barefooted, but it didn't bother him a bit when he went into the woods, fleet as a deer, to gather fire wood.

Sivert Karjala, Sr. and I lived on the west shore of a small lake north of here and the Indians lived on the other side. I asked Karjala to go visit the Indians with me, because there was better fishing on the other side of the lake. Mr. Karjala would not come to the tent, because he was scared of the Indians. They came to tease him, so that he would not be scared of them, and Mr. Karjala soon did give in and followed them to the tent. They gave us food, which I ate, but Karjala would not eat, because it was Indian food. An interesting character was an Indian "rubbing

doctor." He was very good at rubbing, and all the Indians praised him. This old doctor did not like white men. When we were there, in curiosity we watched him because he was so much different from the rest. He was much annoyed by us watching him and became very angry. The younger Indians tried to calm him and also to explain to us that he did not like strangers.

A surprising method to please the children when they were cross was to get some snow into the wigwam for them to play in. Nothing pleased them quite so much as to play with snow.

West of here lived an Indian named Gimay. He was a cattle raiser. There was also a Finnish man who went to buy some cattle from him. This was close to the time when the big Indian dances were going on, which would last for many weeks.

Gimay's squaw left him and went to the dance. When this white man came there, Gimay asked him to find him a Finn wife. The man promised and wrote a certain old maid, who promised to come. Gimay went after his new wife and brought her to his place.

A week later the Indian's old squaw came back from the dance. Gimay was bewildered. He asked the Finn's advice on whether he should let his new wife go or kill the old one. Of course, the Finn told him not to kill his squaw but instead tell her what had happened. When the squaw heard the news, she said she would go away for good if Gimay would give her two of his best cows.

This story was obtained a few years ago by Mr. Leonard Powers, from Mr. Jacob Lalli, living in Section 6, Blueberry township. Mr. Powers was historically minded and gave some of his time for work in that line, but has passed away from our midst.

Ray Etter and David Jacobson.

The Menahga Messenger February 24, 1949

Contributed by Mrs. Wm. Grangruth

About early settlers – in Runeberg township, six miles west of Menahga, about 1886 when Mrs. Grangruth got married and settled down with her husband, and after the first clearing had been done and about 2-1/2 acres of field had been broken up, this breaking had a crop of wheat growing on it.

This first crop was cut with a cradle. She also relates that strong men used to take three cuts in the grain with the cradle; that was sufficient to make a good-sized sheave, or bundle. The bundles were hand bound with grain rope at that time.

Later her husband procured a reaper, after the fields became bigger. After that her husband had to cut all the neighbor's grain.

She also told about the first threshing machine that came on their place. This machine came from somewhere around Sebek, and the grain separator was run by thread power. This thread power was run by a horse, that was boxed up and tied by the halter rope to the upper end of the thread power, and as the horse walked up, the track ran down, thereby applying power for the separator.

Mrs. Grangruth told that a good horse could thresh out 12 bushels of grain, and a poor horse could thresh only 6 bushels. Then it was time to change to a fresh horse.

The next thresher was run by horse power; that is where several horses or even oxen work a sweep and transmit power.

After that came the steam engine. At one time they had the steam thresher on their farm for about three weeks, because the injector on the engine did not work, and finally when the men got

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it to work a little, it leaked so badly that it kept one ox team on the run to haul water for the engine on a short haul.

Mrs. Wm. Grangruth also relates that in the early days there was some Indian trouble at Ponsford and she can remember when the Cavalry from Ft. Snelling traveled over the old government trail, past their place to Ponsford to restore order. They dragged one small cannon behind them, over the old trail.

Old gentleman Ed Dickerson still posses one of the special cutters that was used to cut these iron wires from the bundles at the time they were threshed.

Tame hay, or upland hay, was almost unknown in the early days, and if the river bottom hay ran out before spring, you had to fall back on the straw, but as luck would have it, all merchants had on hand green goggles for the stock.

The "Ole" Lumbering Days

Many days have gone by since the time of the heavy timber cutting and the river drives in this section. The people are pretty well in the third and fourth generation from the time that this part of the country was settled and the heavy timber cutting occurred.

Notes by the writer: The writer better explain these early implements used in harvesting grain, because they are unfamiliar to the present generation.

The Oshborne, the Buck Eye, the Watler Wood, and the Marsh Harvester were everyday talk years ago. I understand that the Marsh Harvester was the first machine that came out with the self-binding attachment, which could be attached to the harvester.

A "cradle" is a scythe with 4 wooden pegs to hold the grain. About 3 cuts will make enough for a bundle, ready to bind by hand with grain rope.

A "reaper" had a grain wheel and a platform, the rakes dropped the grain to the ground, a proper amount for a bundle.

A "harvester" was on a similar order, except that the two people that tied the bundles rode on the machine.

A "self-binder" finally became the true binder, that bound the bundles, but with iron wire.

Sometimes the cattle would swallow one of these wires from the straw and then you had to call the veterinarian or a magician to save the critter.

Therefore, some of the old terms and phrases so often used in those days are becoming almost a lost art. Here are a few of them: The lumber jack; river pig; handy man; walking boss; swamper; four horse teamster; top loader; road monkey; go-devil; landing; cross haul; donkey engine; steam hauler; fog horn; head works; vaanigan; boom; boom stick; boom chair; par-buckle; swamp hook; cant hook; slip hook; grap hook; pike pole; pievie; swing dingle; and the jammer.

And let's not forget the "muligan" and "flap jacks," the "pork and beans," and the noise in the bunk shack. But those days are gone long ago, when the sawyer shouted "tim-ber" and the bull cook shouted "Daylight in the swamp." Ray Etter and David Jacobson.

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