

Continued from page 10
softwood and so the rail-
road, with its connection
to far-away markets was
doubly important.

FROM LOGGING TOWN TO GHOST TOWN

The early twentieth
century was a time well
before the era of resource
management and renew-
able forest practices. The
attitude was basic: get in
there, cut the trees, and
get out. With the expan-

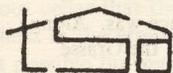


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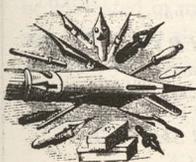
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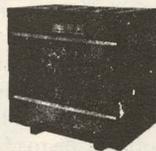
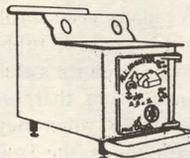


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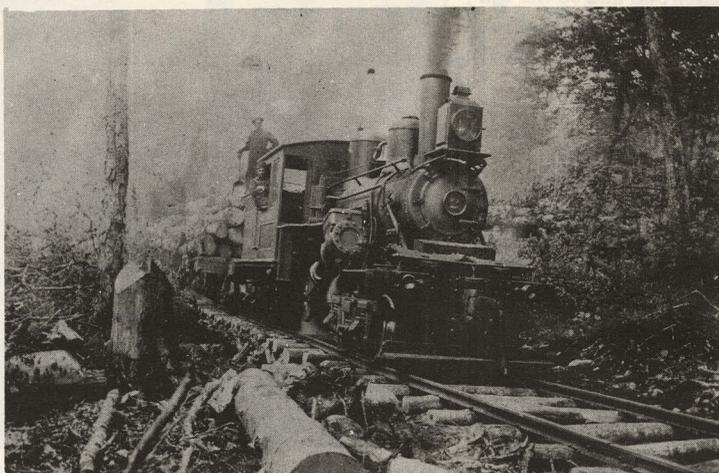
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sive forests of virgin growth, it is no wonder this attitude prevailed. With the trees on its land cut, the New Bridge Lumber Company closed its mill, moved the saw and other heavy machinery to the next job, and left the buildings to rot. The career lumbermen moved on. They went where their work took them. The closing of one large mill meant little to the economy of the region or the now booming logging industry. Other large companies were opening mills in South Colton, Cranberry Lake, Conifer and other North Country towns.



Homer Moore and his fireman, Slim, shown here with a trainload of logs

The abandoned buildings of the Village of New Bridge stood for many years until finally old age caused them to cave in to rubble. Except for one old hermit who lived for a time in the remains of the company store, there were no residents left. In the 1920's, when they used to work on the road with horses, the Town of Clare Highway Department kept the horses at one of the buildings.

Trees are still one of the North Country's most plentiful crops, but methods of logging have changed. Nowadays, both hardwood and softwood are cut with a chainsaw, dragged out by skidder, and hauled to the sawmill by truck. Even if the original forest still stood, there would

be no need for this town that once was. Along the banks of the south branch of the Grasse River in the early twentieth century, a resource and a technology came together to form a short-lived settlement.

[Author's Note: This article is in no way complete. I am interested in talking with any persons who have memories of New Bridge and the logging going on at the time of its operation in the woods around DeGrasse. Any factual corrections readers might wish to make are welcome. Special thanks to Howard Moore for supplying the photographs that accompany this article and also to the Center for the Study of North Country Folklife without whom this would never have come to be.]



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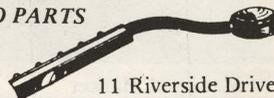
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NEW BRIDGE, N.Y. tale of a logging town

by A. Casline



A LOGGING TRADITION

In the late 1800's and early 1900's the North Country bustled with the activities of big logging companies, as well as the operations of numerous small "jobbers." Much of the timber was virgin, of a size and quality almost unknown today, and thousands of local people took to "the big woods" to help in the job of harvesting it.

Some worked as sawyers, felling trees with two-man crosscut saws. Others were teamsters, using a strong team of work horses to haul a log along a skidway or to pull a double header loaded sled over iced roads to the sawmill. The logging camps needed blacksmiths, scalers, saw sharpeners and barn managers, as well as cooks and chore boys. There were crew bosses who directed their men as they worked on a particular task and camp bosses who had responsibility for many crews and for seeing that food was on the table when the men came in to eat.

The logging was done differently, depending primarily on the type of tree being harvested, on the terrain being logged, and on the size of the company doing the harvesting. The hard-

wood log was carried by horse-drawn sled, sluiceway, Lind tractor, and railway. The softwood was floated down the rivers. There are many colorful stories and songs about the river men, their spectacular drives and massive log jams.

The whole era of the lumber camp and lumberjack, which began almost with the first settlement of our region, is rich and storied and is an important part of our North Country heritage. One of the tales involves a town nowadays found only as a name on a map. Trees were felled, the land cleared and on the stump-filled landscape a new town was built. Called New Bridge, it was the first logging town built in the woods above DeGrasse. Evidence of its existence has almost faded from view. Looking off the road in passing you might think nothing was there but second growth forest. Even the memories of most present day residents of the town of Clare don't quite reach. But there are a few who remember New Bridge and can tell its story.

NEW BRIDGE IN THE TOWN OF CLARE

The Village of New Bridge was located in the Town of Clare in St. Lawrence County. Historians have traced settlement patterns up the tributaries of the St. Lawrence River and

with very few exceptions a saw mill was the first commercial building in a town.

The earliest sawmills were water driven, but by the time logging operations had reached the northern foothills of the Adirondacks in the beginning of the twentieth century, steam had replaced the weight of water as the force to turn a saw blade. The band mill built in New Bridge was steam powered. Its boiler was fed with scrap wood and sawdust. The engine of the company's logging train was also fired with scrap wood.

Howard Moore, a lifetime resident of the Town of Pierrepont, remembers the once thriving logging town and especially his brother, Homer's, part in making it work. As engineer of the New Bridge logging train, Homer was once able to treat his brother and dad to a ride.

"We rode back into the lumber woods with them," recalls Howard. "They had this old loader. They skidded logs to the loader with horses, and then they picked them up with this old steam loader. Loaded them on the train—five or six car loads of them—drove them down and unloaded them into a mill pond. They rolled them off into the pond to wash and clean them up. Then they went up the conveyor into the mill where they sawed them up."

Unlike the rivers, which ran north, railroads linked St. Lawrence County with the populous south. Many train car loads of lumber were shipped out of the region to markets in Boston and New York City.

Lumber from the New Bridge sawmill left the town a whole trainload at a time. During the band mill's period of operation, two or three carloads of lumber a day were produced. "When they got enough for a trainload, they'd run it up to Newton Falls," Howard Moore recalls. "That hooked up with the New York Central up there—the main railroad."

Howard doesn't remember how his brother ended up as engineer of a steam locomotive, but he wasn't very old when he started—under twenty. "He took off when he was sixteen years old, run the river drives, drove the river some. Then he worked at Uncle John's sawmill at East Pitcairn." Howard doesn't think he ever went to

school. "He just took over—He never studied or anything. He was just mechanically inclined that way."

IN THE WOODS ABOVE DEGRASSE

Willis Kittle, of the Macomb area of St. Lawrence County, began working at New Bridge on February 1, 1907. It was his first job in the woods, but he went with an experienced hand, an old logger named Isaac Simmons. They were partners, one on each end of a crosscut saw. "I knew what it was in a way," he says now. "We cut our firewood—a little different species trees and different size, cause for firewood we'd cut down small ones, too—but you had a general idea of what it was."

To get to New Bridge, Willis rode the railroad out of Gouverneur to Fine and from there he walked to DeGrasse. It wasn't unusual to walk such a distance then, or "to go by hand," as Willis Kittle puts it. DeGrasse was quite a hamlet at that time, and it was there that Isaac and Willis made arrangements to join the work force at one of the logging camps serving the New Bridge Mills.

Roads in the town of Clare were "just a place they cut between the trees," according to Willis, but still they felt themselves lucky to catch a ride in with the tote wagon. Some of the old hands at logging stayed on all winter, but there was a lot of changing going on. The tote team would go out after supplies—groceries for the cook, grain for the horses, hay, etc. The men would ride the tote wagons in and out. Some men rode out and didn't come back. The work was hard.

"When we were cutting logs in there, of course we'd get our board. So much a month and 'found'—that was your board. Say thirty dollars a month and found. We'd get about five dollars a week and we cut so many pieces for a day's work. If you'd make two or three extra ones then you'd get a little extra—sometimes you'd have an extra dollar a week for cutting more than the required number."

Willis Kittle remembers having to cut ninety pieces a day. You worked "from the time you could see until it got so dark you couldn't see. Daylight to dark—there was no eight hours



about it.” Cutting and skidding trees with horses was winter time work and “most of the time you had to keep working to stay warm.” They didn’t start fires or keep a thermos of hot coffee handy. Having a good partner was extremely important.

“The main part of the logs [softwood] were put on the river and floated down in the spring,” Willis remembers. “They’d drag them out there to the banking ground—that’s what they called it—that’s where they had roads in the woods. They had road back teams and skidded out to this road. Then they were hauled with sleighs down to the river to the banking grounds. They were rolled out there, piled—big piles.”

In the spring, at high water, these logs would be floated down the south branch of the Grasse River to the New Bridge Mill. They didn’t float the logs that far—only three to

four miles. There was a boom across the river to catch the logs. Hardwood does not float so for that the railroad was used.

THE BAND MILL

Ken Giffin, St. Lawrence County Forester and resident of the town of Clare, was helpful in putting the New Bridge operation in perspective. “I think they were probably the first of the larger loggers to come in. At the time they were the biggest there was. Emporium came in after that, but they didn’t get their railroad into here until the twenties.”

Of course there were mills all over the area in those days and some of them were steam-powered, but they were small. The New Bridge Mill was big and had the power to cut large quantities of hardwood in addition to the softwood many of the local mills could handle. It

was the first band saw mill in the area according to Howard Moore.

During its operation the Mill employed ten to twelve people. In 1910, the last summer of its operation, Willis Kittle worked there. It was "hotter than the dickens," he remembers. "In the woods you couldn't get a breeze." The village of New Bridge was in a valley, still surrounded by forest, and got almost no wind. Somedays there would be a little breeze along the river, but that was all.

The Mill had one large band saw and many small saws that made lathe. The lathe was later used in homes when plastering walls. Although the band saw cut quantities of hardwood, a majority of the lumber was still made out of the easier to cut soft wood. "Part of it went into inch boards, all manner of dimensions—two by four, two by six, two and eight, two by ten, two by twelve, some four by four—a lot of four by fours, depending on the specie. If you were running into some hemlock there might be a lot of four by fours. Hemlock was generally more two inch stuff and your pine was mostly on inch. One and one quarter inch was quite common, too."

Some of the milling practices were different from today. All of the big thick butt slabs were saved. "They'd get a four foot length off a tree that flared out at the bottom. They'd get a good thick one, especially hemlock, that was all going in a pile to make lathe out of."

The use of a railroad into the lumber woods and the introduction of the large and more powerful band saw at the New Bridge Mill foretold the future of logging in the northern foothills. Using a method developed elsewhere for logging large hardwood trees, the workers at New Bridge would change the railroad tracks every summer to reach new stands of trees. In this way they completed the logging of an entire forest tract. The railroad was used to transport trees a distance that would be unprofitable and perhaps unthinkable by horse alone.

The hardwood trees were standing and waiting. "They had no method of handling hardwood and getting any distance," Ken Giffin said explaining why no one cut hardwood trees for so many years. He also added that they didn't have a hardwood market in the area. Local people doing building would be using

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