

Sixty Years of Logging

By Cecil Winegarner (b. 1902 – d. 1991)

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Foreword

This history of White Elk Township has been written to leave an account so those coming after may realize some of the hardships the first settlers encountered while endeavoring to carve a home out of a wilderness.

I was born at Salem, Illinois on October 7, 1902 in a log house on land known as "Fulton" land. My brother, Donald, was born on "Fulton" land in a two-story log house, using black walnut logs. His birth date was April 17, 1905. My mother, Nona Fulton, was a great granddaughter of Robert Fulton, inventor of the steamboat. The "Fulton" land referred to was a tract of land three miles square granted the Fulton family by the government for services rendered in the War of 1812.

The Winegarner family settled at Columbus, Ohio before the War of 1776, and at one time owned the land on which the City of Columbus was built. The Winegarner Department Store is still doing business there. The Bayton, Wharton and Morgan Company of Lancaster, Pennsylvania transported supplies by row boat down the Ohio River to Fort Kaskaskia in Illinois located where the Ohio and the Mississippi rivers joined. The company was under contract with the British Government to supply the army stationed there, in order to keep the French on the west bank of the Mississippi at St. Louis. Their work force required 1600 men and supplies were taken down the river and furs transported on the return trip. My grandfather's aunt was married to George Morgan.

The British Government gave the Company a Land Grant consisting of 150 miles long and 50 miles wide in Southern Illinois at the close of their contract. George Morgan settled on a tract of land and lived there until his death. My brother and I now own the farm.

My father, William Winegarner, moved to Springfield, Illinois in 1910 and worked as a cattle feeder until the spring of 1914 when we moved to Lockhart, Minnesota and farmed in the Red River Valley.

The fall of 1918 saw our family headed for Aitkin County and 60 years of logging.

- Cecil Winegarner
March 1977

The Land

Land, if it be free or at a price, has been the desire of man ever since Adam and his wife, Eve, were placed in the Garden of Eden. It was also the desire of the men and women who settled Township Fifty, Range Twenty-seven, later to be known as "White Elk Township."

Much of the land was "homestead" land, ranging in size from 80 to 160 acres; mostly of the latter. Section 16 and 36 were designated school trust land and sold on a forty-year contract at 15% down, balance any time up to 40 years at 4% interest. The appraised price of the timber was cash at day of sale. No one person could buy more than 320 acres. The remaining land was owned largely by railroads as land grants for the construction of railroads.

The high ground, or land of mineral soil, was heavily covered with white and Norway pine, balsam fir and white birch; on a number of locations basswood, red and white oak was in good supply. The swamp land, which included about 50 % of the land area, was covered with spruce trees. The spruce was located on bog or moss soil where the mineral soil was not too far below the surface; the deeper the vegetable soil the less the spruce stand. Much of the spruce swamp did not thaw out in the summer; therefore the spruce could not grow leaving stunted trees.

The homesteaders were required to clear and "crop" so much land each year in order to improve upon the land. Most of the time it was almost impossible to meet the requirements, since most of the crops were planted between large stumps. Root crops did well, as did all garden vegetables. Corn was difficult to grow, as the sun and warm weather was lacking. If corn was planted, it was "flint squaw corn" and when ripe a pig must have good teeth to crack the kernel.

The creeks and rivers that formed the only drainage of this land a great deal of the time were flanked on either side by grass meadows ranging in width from a few rods up to one-quarter mile. Great stands of blue joint grass grew on the meadows and from this the lumber companies and homesteaders cut the winter's supply of hay.

The hay harvesting was done with a grass scythe and was driven by "man" power. It required a strong man to stand an eight-hour day. The grass stood thick on the ground and was often over a head high. After two or three days of curing, the hay was piled in large shocks using an ordinary pitchfork. After all of the hay required for the winter had been cut and shocked, it would be placed in small, round stacks, containing about a sled load ranging in size from one-half to one ton stacks. The stacking was carried out by the use of two spruce poles, approximately ten feet long and three inches in diameter. To prepare the poles in advance, they were selected with care for straightness, hand peeled and smoothed to perfection. On one end the poles were sharpened to a point and on the other end a hand hold was carved. With the use of these poles, two men could stack about five tons per day. The man using the hand hold end of the poles would insert the two poles under the shock of hay, the poles being about two feet apart, and then turn his back to the shock. The man using the pointed end of the poles would face the shock and both men would then grasp the end of the poles, raise the hay off the ground and carry the shock to the stack. Many times the entire haying season was accomplished with the men

walking in six inches of water. The stacks were usually stacking on old logs; in that way a very small amount of hay was lost.

Several logging companies did use a mowing machine to harvest the larger meadows, but bog shoes were required on the horses so that they would be able to navigate on the wet and spongy ground. (Bog shoes for horses resembled bear paw snow shoes used by men. One day on bog shoes usually produced a gentle horse.) I have also seen horses that would walk a log on soft ground.

The grain used by the logging camp and homesteaders was shipped in by rail in 80 lb. sacks, then by tote team from the town to camp. Some men drove tote teams with loads up to 40 miles.

Lakes, Rivers and Watersheds

Cass and Crow Wing counties join at a point opposite Section 21 of White Elk Township, Aitkin County. Wolf Island, located in Section 16 of White Elk Township, forms a dividing barrier for water north of that point and from Lake Edna. The water leaves Lake Edna by an underground river and surfaces in Section 21 by way of a number of large springs. The springs are located on Government Lot One and then the water enters an open stream before crossing the Cass County line, where it later crosses the Crow Wing County line and enters Little Pine Lake.

In the spring of the year and during periods of heavy rainfall, the water cannot be forced through the springs, therefore forcing the excess water to flow over the barrier and eventually find its way into Lake Esquagahma by way of the North Creek. The water from this area played a large role in the log drives each spring. The water flowing into Little Pine Lake was used by Weyerhaeuser Co., while water entering Esquagahma Lake was used for log drives by the Bovey-DeLaittre Company. The Aitkin County line formed a dividing line for their timber holdings. (I will write more about this in another chapter.)

Lemay and Mackville Townships are traversed on the south by the Moose River and Big Willow River on the north. Both of these rivers were used in large log drives. The shores of the lakes were covered with beautiful pine, birch, basswood, spruce and cedar.

In 1916, White Elk Lake was a beautiful lake with pine and spruce around the entire lake down to the water's edge, which was also true of the island in the lake.

The summer of 1916, a dredge ditch was dug to the lake and the water level dropped about four feet. The lake then became a wild rice bed.

Bain Township Homesteads and Settlers

Our immigrant car arrived in Bain on March 16, 1917 in a blinding blizzard that lasted for two days. My mother and brother arrived on the 2:15 p.m. passenger train. The railroad car with the livestock and personal belongings came on the local freight at 4:00 p.m. We stayed at the local hotel, owned by Wm. Bain family. When the storm was over, the snow was four feet on the level. A four horse team and sleigh was required to move our household goods five miles to the Chas. Dixon homestead. My father had

rented the Dixon farm until we could get settled on our land. The Chas. Dixon family lived in Aitkin at that time.

The Dixon homestead was located in Bain Township, as also was the Wilmar Bain homestead, the Shabanow and the Gard place, along with the Moquistion and the Shrugrows. Also nearby were the Gene Ratcliff camp and the Allen Ranch, used by many as a stopping place for loggers on the way to and from the logging camps and as far north as Grand Rapids – as the ranch was locate on the old Aitkin-to-Grand Rapids trail.

The Wm. Bain homestead was located near the Allen Ranch. The town of Bain was built on the Bain land after the Soo Railroad was built in 1909.

The Town of Bain, in 1917, consisted of a few houses, a number of temporary homes (about sixty in all) and perhaps 150 souls – adults and children included. There were two stores, one owned by Pete Waldeck and the other owned by Megarry Brothers. I understand that each store did a one-hundred thousand dollar business each year. I have seen timber piled 16 to 20 feet high a mile long and 7 to 10 tears deep along the railroad track. On some days, as many as 200 loads of timber would be scaled and unloaded in Bain. Each sleigh was two or four horse loads.

The road from Aitkin to Grand Rapids was known as the “tote road” until a road was built, beginning at Aitkin and extending north to Hill City and Grand Rapids. The building of the road in Bain Township was in progress during the summer of 1916. In building the road, the swamps were covered with dirt by the use of s small railroad track laid on cross ties. A dump car, holding about ½ yard of dirt, was loaded by hand with a No. two shovel from a nearby hill. Then the men would push the loaded car out on the swamp, dumping the dirt, and returning the car for another load. This road was known as the “Elwell Road” or No. 35. It was on this road that the Greyhound Lines was started, operating from Hibbing to Minneapolis. The building of the road to White Elk Township from Bain started the fall of 1916, but was not completed until years later. We were required to build our own road from the homestead to the public road, which was about one mile.

White Elk Township Homesteads and Settlers

The Bovey-De Laittre logging camps were located in Section 45 of White Elk Township and two miles west and north was a camp operated by Jack McCullagh, who was logging for Bovey-De Laittre.

The Winegarner homestead was located 1 ½ miles north of Jack’s Camp. Nettie Porter homesteaded in Section 28 about 1902 and later married Steve Yoemans. The Yoemans’ were our nearest neighbor for over 15 years.

Southwest of the De Laittre camp a family by the name of Worsley had a homestead. Mr. Aldrichs homesteaded west of White Elk Lake. He was a Union soldier and he used one of the last team of oxen to haul logs to Bain. It was on his land that the last virgin white pine was cut was he was a very old man.

Mr. John Walders' homestead was located south of White Elk Lake. The main logging road from the west to Bain crossed his land. I have seen his timber piled head high for over a mile long on both sides of the road ready to be hauled to Bain.

The first school was built on the northwest side of White Elk Lake and the William Ward homestead was just east of the Walders' place. The island in White Elk Lake was once homesteaded by a family from Wisconsin and Mr. Asa Pratt.

The Winegarner homestead was located in Section 21. The Steve Yoeman's family lived a mile south. North of our homestead were a number of families: first the Chas. Hanson's, Henry Olds, George and Frank Olds, Hakes, Bert Gibson, Tildons, George and Carl Violets, Jim Violets, the Aldrichs, H. G. Ward, Joe Moquistion, Walter Grulke, Charles Ward, Wallace Ward, Harve Ward, John Kile family, and Fred Clayton. There were also a number of families living in Section 26 near the Bovey-De Laittre Camp. They were employed making barrel hoops from white ash trees that grew nearby. A number of families built a place to live for the winter where work was to be had, and then moved on when spring came.

The Timber

As I have spent sixty years of my life logging, this will take me back to the spring of 1917 when I loaded my first car or pulpwood into a railroad boxcar. Although a large part of the pine timber had been cut before that date, the entire area contained pine, with some excellent groves on the land the logging company could not buy. Many individuals have been led to believe the logging company cut everything in front of them; this is not true. Survey lines were run and if the timber or land and timber could not be obtained, it was not cut. After the large company had removed the pine from their land holdings, smaller logging companies then moved in, building camps. Some camps were for the cutting of railroad ties; some camps for the cutting of pulpwood. Many of the settlers and homesteaders opened up camps using ten or fifteen men. They would log pine logs, pulpwood, railroad ties, cedar fence posts and telephone poles.

Wolf Island is located in Section 16 of White Elk Township. It is located on the south half of the southeast quarter and is about 60 acres of open swamp. When I cut this timber, the winter of 1918-19, it cut 200 cords of spruce pulpwood and forty-five thousand feet of white pine. There were less than 20 trees and each tree cut five logs, with the first log of each tree scaling 1080 feet. On this 20 acres, I also cut over 1000 tamarack and cedar railroad ties and a large number of cedar posts. There was also a very large amount of white birch; most of the trees were 24 and 30 inches at the stump. This white birch was not cut and it was lost when a fire burned over the island in the fall of 1932. The spruce on the island was white, about 24 inches on the stump and cut nine one-hundred inch sticks per tree.

Information I have at hand (from Bovey-De Laittre Company), the pine timber (of which our homestead was a part of) cut over 50,000,000 feet. This timber was cut between 1900 and 1910.

In the fall of 1916, William Winegarner purchased Lot 2, Section 21, 50-27 (White Elk Township) at the rate of \$14.00 per acre. A road to the land did not exist, so when the parties selling showed him the land

he believed he was viewing the land for sale. Later he found that he had never seen the land he purchased.

In November 1916, my father started a log house, the weather turned very cold and it was necessary for him to discontinue work on the house. He planned to finish the house in the spring, but a forest fire burned the house.

In the fall of 1917, we erected a log barn with a large hay mow and shingled it with cedar shakes. I split the shakes out of cedar logs using a fro and maul, while father did the shingling. We also erected an eight-by-eighteen foot log building to live in while we were in the process of building our house. This log building was later used as a chicken house.

A house to replace the one that burned was started in the summer of 1918. The logs were all ready for a log rolling when the forest fire of October 12 burned the towns of Bain, Cloquet and Mooselake, and many other towns, including Lawler. However, the fire did not extend far enough west and our buildings on the homestead were spared. The log rolling took place the first part of November and we were able to finish the house and move the furniture in the day before Christmas.

The winters were spent logging and summer the clearing of land for crops. We also purchased more land in Section 16 and later on land in Cass County and Crow Wing County, until our land holdings were over three thousand acres. This land was covered with a good stand of timber. We also purchased standing timber from state, county and private parties in our logging operations.

In the fall of 1920, the building of the road from Crosby to Emily was underway and was finished the summer of 1921. William LaPlant was one of the contractors and also a man from Little Falls had the contract to build the bridge over the Little Pine River. I worked building the bridge until it was finished. I then worked for Mr. LaPlant in dirt work as scraper man for awhile. The log drive on the Little Pine River was underway and the drive foreman, Elmer Fletcher, needed a cook, so I took over the job as cook. The log drive in 1921 was the last drive ever to go down the river. (Read the chapter on River Pigs.)

The winter of 1921, we logged in Section 16. I remember I cut and hewed 500 tamarack railroad ties that winter. The trees produced six ties per tree or forty-eight feet of timber.

The spring of 1923, I bought a 1920 Ford truck to haul the timber we had on hand due to the lack of snow that winter. By 1923, the swing to trucks had started but the teams still did seventy-five percent of the timber work. In a few years they gave way to the trucks.

I had decided to become a preacher, so the fall of 1923 I enrolled at the Wesleyan Methodist College in Miltonvale, Kansas, and I attended again the fall of 1924. I continued to log each summer.

The fall of 1921, a teacher by the name of Edith Fossen came to teach the South White Elk School, or District 97. We were married the fall of 1924; she going with me to Miltonvale that winter and enrolling in the music department. The fall of 1974 we observed our Golden Wedding (50 years) at the Calvary Baptist Church, Aitkin, Minnesota, with 175 guests, our daughter, Dorothy, and two grandchildren in attendance.

My father, William Winegarner, passed away in 1934 at the age of 56 and my mother, Nona, passed away in 1970 at the age of 89. They are buried at Lake Emily Cemetery, as also are our infant son and two daughters.

The big demand for forest products started in 1943, with World War II in progress and the timber growing scarcer each year. I spent over ten years logging in Township 49-27. Since timber on the stump was difficult to buy, I turned to logging on land I owned in Township 49-26 and also buying timber from private, state and county land. Before 1943, the logging was mostly pine logs, spruce and balsam pulp, railroad ties and cedar posts and poles. With the war in progress, much crating was needed and poplar lumber was in demand and poplar pulp was used for a cheaper grade of paper.

Thirty thousand cords of aspen pulpwood was shipped to Millwood, Washington and used in the construction of the atomic bombs dropped on Japan. Much of this wood was shipped out of Aitkin.

During the winter of 1977, I delivered 225 cords of pulpwood to Blandin Paper Company at Grand Rapids and 20 M feet of pine logs. This ends sixty years of logging.

River Pigs

It came about this way. In the fall of 1916, my father purchased a tract of land in White Elk Township, Aitkin County, Minnesota. This tract of land was once owned by the Weyerhaeuser Logging Company. Today it is known as "the Winegarner Homestead." It was located a good four and on-half miles from any wagon road, so during the spring and summer of 1917 we chopped a road to our home-to-be and a log barn was erected before snow fall. The log house was added the fall of 1918 and we moved into the house the day before Christmas.

Our home was located about two miles northeast of Pine Lake and was the lake head of the Little Pine River. The Little Pine joined the Big Pine River and the Big Pine emptied into the Mississippi River East of Brainerd, Minnesota.

The cutting of the white pine started about 1900 and was completed by 1910. However, small amounts of logs, spruce pulpwood and railroad ties continued to go down the river each spring. Millions of feet of logs were driven on this river from 1900 to 1921, when the last log drive was completed. It consisted of some two thousand logs and four thousand cords of spruce pulpwood for the Northwest Paper Company mills at Brainerd.

The Little Pine River flowed through Duck Lake, Lake Mary and Lake Emily before it joined the Big Pine River. It was necessary to boom and raft the logs across each of the lakes to the river outlet. This required many days work on each lake.

The work force consisted of Elmer Fletcher, the drive foreman, sixteen men to work the river and a cook on the wanagon. I worked as that cook.

We were generally referred to as “river pigs” and I think we deserved the name. We dressed in two suits of woolen underwear, three to six pairs of wool socks, heavy caulked shoes, wool plaid shirts and a pair of heavy wool pants.

The log drive started the last of March and lasted until the end of June. The water was ice cold in March and hard to slide into in the morning and by June it is warm. The skin on the men’s body was usually very sore. This is understandable, because the men slept on the river bank in the same clothes they wore all day.

The breakfast was served at 2:00 a.m. and the evening meal was at 10:00 p.m., with three other meals in between. The men were soggy wet all of the time, day and night. A great deal of the time bacon and eggs were cooked and the lard used in cooking was always saved in a gallon pail and placed on the table. The first thing a river pig would do in the morning would be to open his pants, take handful of salty grease and rub the grease on his legs and body to take care of the chafed skin for the day. We served tea and coffee at each meal. The unused tea and tea leaves were also used by the men as a body rub at night.

There is also one item I must not forget – that is the mosquitoes by day and by night. It was also my duty as cook to keep a smudge (a smoke fire) going to keep the mosquitoes away at meal time and the early night.

It was our job to deliver the log drive as far as the Mississippi River and at that point it was taken over by Tommy Long and his crew and delivered to the mill.

I was 18 years old at the time. It was at that time I met an old timber cruiser from Duluth and he asked me to accompany him and three other men on a timber cruising trip south of Hudson Bay in Canada. Since that time I have become acquainted with most of the men in the timber industry, including the State Forest Service.

Those days are past and gone forever, but should not be forgotten, since it was lumber from those log drives that the homes and farms of our prairies were built.

The Fire of 1918

My father, mother, brother and myself had landed in Bain by immigrant train on March 16, 1917. On October 12, 1918, father and I were at our homestead in White Elk Township working on our house. My mother and brother were at the Dixon place in Bain Township. At noon, while we were at lunch, the smoke of the fire at Bain loomed on the horizon. My father thought we should return home and we started at once by team and wagon, a distance of about six miles. My brother started for Bain at noon to get the mail. My mother saw the smoke and called for him to return, as she thought someone was stirring up the peat fires again. Little did she realize what would follow for the next four hours and continue for days to come.

We were called on the fire line the next morning. It was November 2 when we left for home, as it had started to rain. The National Guard took over and gave us our orders. They also failed to provide our food. We sat on the ground and watched them eat, then returned to the fire line.

Grandpa and Grandma Aldrich lived near the fire line. They had about 500 lbs. of flour on hand. If Grandpa could dip enough water out of the well, 25 ft. deep, Grandma would bake bread and pass it out to those who were hungry. Cecil Booker also told me their flock of chickens went the "same road." Lige Kile, now of Melrose, Minnesota, and I were together on the fire line from start to finish.

The passenger train eastbound, pulled out of Bain ahead of the fire. The freight train had just pulled up to the depot. Mr. Bovey, the agent, sent a wire that the depot was afire and also the town. The passenger train backed up to Bain, picked up two box cars and a caboose. The people were all taken to safety. The two Clark sisters failed to make the train, and spent the night in the water under the bridge of the dredge ditch. The freight train crew cut the locomotive free and left for Federal Dam and the balance of the train burned, consisting of one car of oats, one immigrant car with a team of horses on board, a car of local freight and 28 cars of coal. It was not until May 1919 that the tracks could be cleared due to the burning coal. The trains used the pass tracks. The Megarry Brothers and Vance Sherrell each built a new store and temporary home were built. By snowfall, it was "business as usual."

The story goes. The sheriff of Aitkin County in 1918 was Ike Bookenogen. After the fire, he boarded the night train for Lawler. When he arrived there he found that the town had burned. It was night and cold and the only thing at hand was a stack of rough boxes and caskets. Ike raised the lid on one and crawled in to sleep. About daylight he heard footsteps and so he raised the lid to see who it was. It turned out to be a Home Guard. One look and he took off and Ike was the only one present again!

White Elk Schools

I have been told that the first school in White Elk Township was conducted in a log room which was added on to the north side of Mr. Aldrich's house, located west of White Elk Lake. The Cord family lived there that winter and Mrs. Cord was the teacher. Mr. Cord was a Presbyterian Minister and was away from home a great deal of the time, travelling from camp to camp holding services.

Later, a frame schoolhouse was built about on-half mile north. The first teacher was Mary Bain. About 1916, a frame schoolhouse was built in the north part of the Township; also a frame schoolhouse was built in south White Elk Township. Velma Mackanitch taught the first term in the south White Elk school. The following terms were taught by Louise Cornish, Mrs. Singleton, Bessie Condon, Minnie Cord, Edith Fossen (Winegarner), Miss Harrington, Velma Mackanitch, Edith Winegarner and Mr. Johnson.

Later, the school was closed and the building was moved to Little Pine Township.

The Social Life and Church

The families settling the north land were usually miles apart. On a given Saturday afternoon, the neighbors would start arriving at a settler's house with their families and prepared food to last until

Monday morning. A dance would be underway Saturday night. Then on Sunday afternoon, the preacher would arrive and church services would be held. The balance of the time would be spent visiting and guests would depart for home on Monday morning. (I would want the reader to understand that a "tote" road was the only road from one settler to the next and it was not advisable to use to road at night.)

When the school houses were built in the township, Sunday School was conducted each Sunday in the summer and church services every other Sunday. Rev. Reeves lived at Emily and he also conducted services at Bain, White Elk and Little Pine. Rev. C. C. Cutton was very active in church work in Bain.