

## **A Bit of History of Olaf Hanson's Logging Camps**

By Herman Hanson<sup>1</sup>

My dad came over here, from Sweden, in 1891. There were about 60 to 65 persons (several families), who all came in a group to this country<sup>2</sup>. They elected my dad to be the "leader" of the group as he had a good education and knew a few English words besides. They had a rough voyage over, especially on the North Sea. A lot of them were seasick. It took several days to cross the ocean. They came up the St. Lawrence River to Montreal, Canada. They had to get new tickets there and the station agent asked whether they wanted to continue on by rail, or by steamship. My dad knew what 'steamship' meant, and said they all were "sick of steamships" and would go by rail. (I suppose they could have gone by ship through the Great Lakes to Duluth. I don't know by what route they finished the trip by rail.)

Most of them came to Aitkin County. Some went to places where they had a relative, or two. My dad's brother John, and two sisters, Mrs. Bessie Swedberg and Mrs. Sue Sweetman, were in Aitkin then. They had come over in 1887, and I suppose that is why my dad settled here too.

They had some rough going that first year. My dad did carpenter work, and worked in the lumber camps, etc. After a few years he got a job as timber cruiser (finding timber and timber land for the big lumber company). I remember the big compass he had to run the section lines, and the maps and plats he was to explore to find timber; mostly pine, both white and Norway pine. One timber company he worked for was Bovey & DeLaittre Lumber Company. He would leave home Monday morning with a packsack full of "grub", blanket, mosquito netting, axe, coffee pail, matches, etc., and spend the whole week in the woods checking section number 'so & so'. He had a notebook to keep track of the best 40s and 80s, or quarter sections. He would estimate the amount of timber there and the big lumber company then would buy the stumpage and log it off. He would come home the following Saturday afternoon or evening, and leave on Monday again. (Lots of hiking!) After he did that work for two or three years, he thought: "here's some real good timber stumpage – I've got a few dollars now so why don't I buy the stumpage myself and log it off myself". That he did, and so got started with his logging camps.

Through the years he had camps on Moose River, Big Willow River, Little Hill River, Prairie River, and Savanna River; the latter two are east and northeast of Sandy Lake. The other rivers are north of Aitkin, in the vicinity of Swatara, Hill City, Bain, Palisade, etc. I was in the camp on Prairie River during the 2-week Christmas vacation from school in 1901.

One year he had as many as 5 camps. There were from 20 to 30 men to a camp. I spent Christmas vacation a couple more times in one of the camps. One time I came home full of lice. Boy, did my mother get out the fine comb and go over me, and I took baths with

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<sup>1</sup> Herman Hanson was one of 5 children of Olaf Hanson. The others were: Martha, Anna, Jennie, and Adeline. Martha Hanson married Frank Erickson, and their children were Romelle (married Royce Peterson), Dorothy (married Boyd Hakes), and Richard.

<sup>2</sup> From Klovsko, Sweden

the tar soap they used to have those days. All the camps didn't have lice though. That was one thing they were pretty fussy about. A new man wanting a job, and was suspect, would have to boil all his clothes and get dowsed with lice powder.

The camps were built in two sections; one was the cook house and the other was the bunk house, with space between (roofed over) for supplies for the cook. Each camp had a camp boss. There also was a log barn for the horses.

The men's wages were not very high those days, averaging \$30 to \$40 a month, with board. I think the teamsters were the highest paid.

My dad had a logging camp near Baudette (after he moved there). It was on Rapid River, S.E. of Baudette, a tributary of Rainy River – years 1913 – 1914. He also had a camp in Canada, north across the Rainy River from Baudette, about 5 or 6 miles. This was for the winters of 1915-16 and 1916-17. He had a sawmill there the summer of 1917 and sawed the winter cut of logs and sold the lumber.

That was the last of the logging days.