

### Cutting wood for winter



By Mary Cook

Father started early in the fall, working well into winter, cutting trees in the bush. He would trim them of branches as much as he could and then saw them into long logs. The brothers couldn't count on play time on Saturdays when Father was getting the wood ready for the long winter ahead...every able hand was put to work.

Then the logs were put on the big flat-bottomed sleigh, and the horses, with the snow up to their bellies, hauled the long logs into the barn-yard where they lay in a heap until it was our turn to have the sawing machine brought to our farm.

This was a special day, and one which I anticipated eagerly. Usually my sister Audrey took the day off school, and I was certainly allowed to stay home as well, although I contributed little to the massive work day ahead.

The night before, Mother would have made enough pies to fill the bake table, and fresh home-made loaves of bread numbered over a dozen. The old pine table would be set, the pies moved to the porcelain pull-out on the cupboard, and the bake table set to take care of the overflow of men who would come in for their noon meal.

That day, Father would rise long before dawn, get the Findlay Oval blazing in the kitchen, and head for the barns to do up the chores. The brothers would be rooted out of bed, grumbling all the way, so that the milking was done, the barns got cleaned out, and the animals fed, all before the light of day. Mother and Audrey too would be already busy in the kitchen. After a hurried breakfast, the noon meal of the day was started. A haunch of beef, big enough to feed half of Renfrew County, would be in the oven before anything else was done. Huge pots of peeled potatoes, another pot of turnips, and still another of carrots and parsnips would be placed on the stove so that all would be ready for the onslaught of men who would come in to eat their noon meal in a few hours.

Just as the sun was breaking over the West hill, the men started to arrive. They came from off the Northcote Side road, and the Barr Line...all neighbours...all there to give a helping hand to the once-a-year job of getting the wood ready for the long

winter ahead. Soon the barn-yard, was fully dotted with men, covered from head to toe with only their eyes showing under their heavy fur hats and scarves wrapped around their faces.

And then it would arrive. Pulled by a team of horses on a big flat sleigh, the sawing machine came into the barn-yard, circled the pile of wood and the driver, a neighbour, decided which was the best spot to come to rest. The team was unhitched, and taken into the barn, and before long, after a few niceties of the day between the men, there was a glorious roar as the sawing machine sprang alive, and the big belt, which to me looked like the figure eight lying on its side, was going at a great clip on the side of the motor.

I took up my position in the kitchen window, first removing the geranium plants so that I could get a better view, and there I would spend the morning, watching and marvelling at how these neighbours could attack that huge pile of logs, and we would end up with enough cut wood to take us through the winter.

They never stopped. And they had plenty of practice, working their way from farm to farm, offering help to their neighbours. They worked in pairs, feeding the logs onto the saw platform, and then the cut logs, reduced to a size that would fit nicely into the fire box of the Findlay Oval would be tossed onto a pile. This pile grew to an unbelievable height, and then they would start another pile.

And I knew that for days ahead, the brothers work would be cut out for them. Because all those pieces of fire wood had to be moved. Most of it would be piled in neat rows in the wood-shed and summer kitchen, and the rest in long rows against the house.

And the men worked on. And then it was time to break for dinner. (Dinner on the farm was always at noon...supper at night, and lunch was what we had before we went to bed).

They came into the kitchen, shedding their coats into a pile on the floor by the back door, and washing up in the three wash basins Mother had placed on the bench.

Within minutes, the long pine table and the bake table were full. Audrey and Mother piled the food into big bowls, put a platter of sliced beef at the end of each table, and always there were bowls of cabbage salad and home-made pickles to augment the meal. Sliced bread filled about four plates, and I always marveled at how the plates emptied in minutes. It was Audrey's job to see that the bowls were kept full, the bread plates piled, and the jug of hot gravy always at the ready.

The whole pie plate was put right on the table. There was always raisin, apple, and lemon. There were no small plates for the pie, the men simply dug out what they

wanted and slapped it on their empty dinner plates. Often one or two had a taste of everything. I lamented to Mother that there wouldn't even be a piece left for our supper. "That's what it's there for, Mary. For the workers," she said in response to my concern.

The bulk of the wood cutting was done by noon hour. Just odds and ends to be cleaned up and then the men, like they had come, left one by one. I left my post in the kitchen window. Mother and Audrey were washing dishes on one end of the kitchen table. There wasn't enough food left over to feed Sport, our old Collie dog. But the job was done for another year. And one day soon, Father too would be gone for the day...to another neighbour to give a helping hand... following the horse-drawn sawing machine from farm to farm along the Northcote Side road.

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