NEW BRUNSWICK HISTORY

Marshall Nason the author of the "Once Upon a Time in Fredericton Junction" articles was born in 1887 and died in 1963. He was the son of Wesley and Hattie (Smith) Nason. His recollections of growing up, on a farm with an apple orchard, present a vivid picture of the life of farmer's children at the end of the nineteenth century.

(Marshall, Hattie, Mehetable, Thomas, Thomas A., Jonathan, Samuel, Isaac,

Nason Chronicles

HAYING SEASON

About the twelfth of July, there was a speeding up of the tempo of life on the farm. Haying-time was about to begin. I well recall my father watching for the unmistakable sign -- the third blossom on the timothy meant it was time to cut hay. Scythes were ground, the long knives of the mowing machine were sharpened, and as a boy I had to sit, endlessly it seemed to me, and turn the wheel of the grindstone. Anyone who has not had to sit and turn that rigid handle for half an hour or more neither realizes how distasteful a task it was nor does he know how great was the relief when told, "That will do for this time." It was the equivalent of an escape from prison.

The fields surrounding the house were the first to fall before the mowers. I welcomed this event for it enlarged my freedom; I was no longer afraid to trample the grass.

There were a great many apple trees in these fields and the mowing machine had to leave spindle-shaped areas of uncut grass around each tree or line of trees. Here it was necessary to use the hand-scythe. The work was usually pleasant for often we moved in the cool shade, and the earliest apples hung invitingly within our reach.

The other areas where the hand-scythe had to be used were frequently not so pleasant. In certain places the ground was too soft to carry the mowing machine and the horses, which drew it. Here the grass was usually of a coarse variety and mowing by hand was very heavy work; similar to that of mowing small bushes. On the other hand, some kinds of marsh grass mowed easily because of the succulence of their stems. Fence corners presented a different type of problem. Usually there was not much grass in these corners. But nevertheless we had to mow it. The forest crowded hard upon us, and if the fence corners were not cleared out there would soon be a row of trees and bushes pressing out the cleared fields. Often, however, these fence corners held prizes. Sometimes through the grass, ripe blueberries peered up at us. Or, raspberry bushes laden with deep-red berries rewarded our otherwise fruitless mowing. Occasionally, heavily laden blueberry vines festooned the fences and nearby bushes. The beautiful clusters of large, shiny blackberries were luscious by haying time but the long sharp thorns slowed down any hasty approach.

The act of mowing was a constant challenge to a boy. To begin with, he was not trusted with a scythe until he was thought to have the strength, skill, and common sense needed in the use of one. The uninitiated

could temporarily ruin a scythe in a few minutes by not keeping a lookout for stones, rocks, wires, and other items that could turn its fine edge into a saw or a wire. For a boy to be able to swing a scythe meant his approaching admittance into the estate of manhood. Merely to mow, however, did not satisfy us. We strove to be artists. A swath with a ragged margin, or high irregular stubble showed that we were still only apprentices and had much to do to become master craftsmen just as our fathers before us had done. My father, in particular, could swath what might have been stamped out by a precision instrument.

Then, too, there was the matter of sharpening or "whetting" of a scythe, which had to be done many times in a forenoon's mowing. The boy watched the seemingly nonchalant way in which his father or some veteran hired man rhythmically and with lightening-like strokes drew the whetstone back and forth along the blade; first, on one side, then on the other and tried to imitate them. Sometimes his efforts at nonchalance resulted in a severe wound.

While we were using the hand scythe, the mowing machine was flattening the recently tall waving grass. The driver had to be careful to avoid stones and hard, resistant bodies lest he injure himself or the machine. Occasionally, the impact of the machine upon a root or rock would throw the driver off his seat. Fortunately, the laws of physics tended to throw him off on the side away for the cutter bar; otherwise, fatal accidents might have occurred more often.

After the hay was cut, it was allowed to lie exposed to the sun until such time as it was dry or partially cured. Then, the raking machine came into action. The late afternoon saw many long windrows of hay ready to be made into the cone-shaped piles known as haycocks. At this, I soon became proficient as a result of lots of opportunity to practice. My parents had decided that I should be educated; so, they said in effect, "You are to leave the farm, so you do not need to learn to handle horses. Here are walking jobs for you." And so, I met pleasant implements such as the fork, the scythe, and the axe. The best I can say for the situation is that at least I kept my feet on the ground.

Thus, whenever there was hay to be rolled into haycocks, I was the one who was called upon to do it. The challenge was made up of several distinct parts, each unit of which was more easily handled. Often my older brothers have remarked on how "pitchable" my haycocks were. They were also cleaner lined and unsquatty.

In certain places, the grass was rank; as a result, each windrow produced many more haycocks than elsewhere. This provided an opportunity to count and admire the number of haycocks that could be put up in an hour. It may even be that there existed a small amount of skimping on the amount of hay in each haycock so the number might be more impressive.

Later on, as I grew taller and stronger, I too began to pitch hay onto the load. This part of the work was distasteful to me. From each forkful, chaff and dust settled back upon the pitcher, adhering lovingly to his perspiring face, neck and hands and even crawling, and itching down his back. But, it had to be done. In this activity, however, one did have an opportunity to discover and make public one's strength. To be able to take a large part of a haycock on the fork at one time and heave it onto a high load gave me great satisfaction.

NEW BRUNSWICK HISTORY

After the hay was cut and put up in the form of haycocks, it was allowed to stand in the field overnight or for a longer period of time, so that the curing process could go on. And if my father felt that it had been sufficiently "made," it was often necessary to "spread" the hay. This involved tearing down the haycocks and spreading the hay around. Great care taken to move all of it from the place where the cone's base had rested on the ground for this area is usually damp. After the drying had gone on for several days, the hay was again made into haycocks. All of these chores came under the heading of drudgery. For one thing, I think I felt that I was undoing something already completed. And then, in rebuilding the haycock, I was simply doing today what I had done yesterday or the day before.

When the hay was finally cured the hauling began. This was more interesting for it called for more action. It is true that I did not enjoy following up the wagon with the hand rake to retrieve the hay that the pitchers could not get with their forks. But I did like to see the load being built higher and higher -- for height appeals to any boy.

EARLY ROADS IN FREDERICTON JUNCTION, NEW BRUNSWICK

Roads were built and maintained in a manner characteristic, I presume, of many regions sixty (make that eighty) years ago. There were no powerful road construction machines such as the ones seen today. Instead, every property owner was supposed to do so much roadwork or pay so much tax every year. The farmer who took his team and sons was paid nominal rates, so much for his team and so much for himself and each of his sons. Some time about April or May, therefore, we put in two or three days doing roadwork. I took part. For a while, I found the work fairly heavy. I used to enjoy my associations. The fact, too that it lasted for only a few days every spring gave the work a touch of novelty. It was something of a relief from the routine of spring farm work.

FENCING

Fencing was another feature of settlement in the Maritime Provinces. Living for years on the prairies of Western Canada, which were largely unfenced, served to accentuate the contrast of which, as a boy, I was unaware. Every spring, we had to spend days going over the fences. Bed-pieces were rotted, cross-pieces were split, fence rails were broken and, on rare occasions, the whole fence was thrown down. All of these had to be taken care of. Since it was early spring, the ground was damp and repairing fences was anything but clean work. Muddy bed-pieces and mossy, slimy rails were not pleasant to handle. Hundreds of rods of fence had to be put in shape again, and when the work was done, I was glad. It held no lure for me.

The "worm" or "snake" fence was the most common type. Usually, it was built of cedar rails, frequently split. Miles and miles of this characteristic fence laced the countryside. The lasting nature of cedar giving it an air of permanence that was not altogether satisfactory. The ends of the rails of two consecutive fence panels were notched and then fitted alternately one upon the other. Since the rails were not fastened together, they could be pushed off and some animals were sagacious enough to do just that. I suppose it was the ease in which these fences could be thrown up in a country abounding in lumber that made it so familiar a feature.

The Institution of the fence carried with it a philosophy that has never been explored.

An obvious purpose was to shut out animals and, to a certain extent, people. It gave protection to the enclosed area and whatever it contained. The so-called "Line Fence" separated the land of adjacent farmers. Thus, this fence served in the main to keep them in accord. It was a barrier making for a settled, peaceful countryside. In a few cases, it became a bone of contention and blows, lawsuits, and even murder resulted. I think, however, it served another purpose not so obvious. In many instances, it was a kind of frontier against the invading forest. It was a line of defense for the farmers, constantly warning him that he must not permit the woods to pass it year after year. At this line he pressed back the host of invading small trees.

THE RAILROAD

My home community was a junction of the Canadian Pacific Railway by which it was influenced for both good and bad. One, on the favorable side of the balance, was the greatly increased financial income. Many young men entered its service for the money. On the other hand, it made for a greater amount of rowdiness than would have been found in a purely agricultural community. As boys, we were impressed most by the fatal and near-fatal accidents that were much more common then than they are now; accidents that happened to members of families living in or near our small town.

Since the main line of the Canadian Pacific Railway ran through our farm, trains became very intimate things to us. We spoke familiarly of the Montreal Train, the Boston Train, the Fredericton Train, and the "Flying Yankee." But, we were more intimate than that; we came to know the engines that pulled these trains and their numbers. We memorized them and eagerly watched for engine bearing new numbers. When a train passed, we shouted to one another, "There goes old 159." I think engines came almost to possess individualities for us. And, when one disappeared, we felt as if we had lost a friend. So interested was I in engine numbers that for a time I set down every one I saw.

COAL MINING IN BLISSVILLE

Gladstone area of New Brunswick

Documentary evidence concerning coal mining in the Blissville-Gladstone area is scanty, consisting only of articles in the *Royal Gazette* issues of August 29, September 5 and October 31, 1894; one stock certificate which has survived, and an article in *Rural Edition,* June, 1976. Lottie Nason who at the time evidently had access to the books of The Old Oromocto Coal Mining Company wrote this article. These books can no longer be found and are believed to have burned in the Nason House on Gore Road when that dwelling was totally destroyed by fire October, 1976.

Those who undertook the first explorations are long gone, and their story must be pieced together from the above records and the recollections of some of our older citizens as to what they were told by the preceding generations and the evidences they have seen as to the operations carried on in the search for coal.

South of the settled part of Gore Road and to the west of it lies a region of heaths. Out of these flow several small streams well known to trout fisherman. Of these, Mundy Brook and Scribner Brook in Blissville Parish and, father north, Gullison Brook in Gladstone were the focal points for the would-be miners.

NEW BRUNSWICK HISTORY

The first geologist to make a survey of what is now New Brunswick was a native of Nova Scotia, Dr. Abrahma Gesner. His survey spanned the years 1839-1843, and part of the territory he covered was the above-mentioned heath region. In Dr. Gesner's opinion, the geological features of this region pointed to the likelihood that coal might well be found there. However, even if those who first became interested in developing a coal industry knew of Dr. Gesner's survey, it is doubtful that they were as much influenced by it as they were by the evidence of their own eyes.

On Mundy Brook, at a certain place, lumps of coal could be readily seen in the bed of the stream and investigation showed a thin vein of coal in the banks. Over the years, the running water had worn through the vein long before it had reached the bed over which the brook was then flowing.

Two separate attempts were made to find coal in marketable quantity and quality. The first was made by The Oromocto Coal Mining Company, a private company. The second was a Provincial Government project. Separated in time by approximately a quarter of a century, the scenes of operation overlapped to some extent so it is difficult to separate their on site workings.

The *Royal Gazette* of August 29, 1894, carried a notice of intention to apply for the issue of a grant of Letters Patent under the New Brunswick Joint Stock Companies Act of 1893 for the incorporation of the applicants and any other persons who might become shareholders in the Company under the name "The Oromocto Coal Mining Company.

The objectives of the company were stated and covered all activities relating to the finding, mining, leasing or buying or selling land, holding land and property, or selling same. It may be noted that the word "coal" was not mentioned, "minerals," being more inclusive, was the term used.

The Company's chief place of business was to be at Fredericton Junction, and the capital stock was to be $40,000 divided into 4000 shares at $10 each. At the time of application $10,500 had already been subscribed.

There followed a list of the names, addresses and callings of the five applicants of which the first three were to be provisional directors.

*Parker A. Nason of the Parish of Gladstone in the County of Sunbury, Trader and Farmer.
*Edward Moore of the City of Fredericton, in the County of York, Gentleman
*Luke E. M. DeWitt of Blissville in the County of Sunbury, Farmer
*Daniel DeWitt of Blissville aforesaid Farmer
*Wesley D. Nason of Gladstone a foresaid, Farmer

Dated at Fredericton Junction the 27th day of August 1894.

This notice was again published on Sept 5, 1894 and on Oct. 31, 1894, there appeared in the *Royal Gazette* a "Notice of Granting of Letters Patent" as applied for previously.

FISHING IN N.B.

In a country of brooks, lakes and rivers, fishing was so much a part of our life that it might well be said of us boys that we were born with fishing poles in our hands. Two brooks flowed through our farm and I cannot remember my introduction to the art of Isaac Walton. I am sure that it began

with a bent pin on a string (which by implication spells "No Fish"). Later, we improved our equipment but it was never very adequate. We never used a casting rod and fly. Armed with a can of earthworms, we betook ourselves to the bank of a brook or a stream, taking time on the way to cut a fishing rod, and what a rod it was! To offer our equipment to a sportsman would have been a little short of an insult. In defense of our meager tackle, it must not be forgotten, however, that it was the only kind used in landing many a fine fish. In all our fishing, there were no such evidences as marked the definite fisherman. We took no pleasure in playing a trout, large or small, until after an hour or so of the most strenuous, needless exertion on both our part and his we finally gaffed him and pulled him into a boat with an eight-ounce rod. I admit that there were evidences of atavistic, elemental urges in us boys that impelled us to fish but we did not become sadistic about it. When we got a bite or strike, we pulled straight up and, if the fish were large, we pulled hard in a effort to land it as quickly as possible.

A fish on the bank was worth many in the brook. The first that we as youngsters tried to catch was a smallish, non-edible one, locally called "Chub." Many the hour we spent dangling a hook with a worm on it before the nose of this undesirable specimen. More than once in our enthusiasm, we forgot to go home in order to do some work our father wanted us to do; and more than once our mother stood between us and a sound thrashing. It is almost uncanny the way time passes when little fish are nibbling at the hooks of small boys. The fact that we dared the wrath of our father, of whom we stood in almost deadly fear, only reveals all the more clearly the strength of our desire to fish.

Sixty years ago, the trout brooks that were near the settlements were already becoming depleted. The chief reason was the nearness of the United States from which large numbers of sportsmen came. The number was probably increased because of the fact that my young men and women had moved to the "States" which promised greater economic rewards. With their trips home, they combined fishing and a visit to the old home. The number of Canadian born in such cities as Boston sixty years ago was proportionately very large. Sometimes, too, Americans leased a whole lake -- a practice not always viewed favorably by the natives who were thereby deprived of ready access to a supply of food. This source was all the more important to them because of the general sterility of the soil of the Appalachian region. When we grew older, we became interested in river fishing. We caught larger fish such as perch, pickerel and pike. We used larger hooks, stronger lines, longer, heavier poles and frogs instead of earthworms for bait. In my boyhood, the pike we caught were excellent specimens; nearly all of them ranged from 15 to 18 inches in length. The largest one I remember seeing was 22 inches long but a few years earlier our Baptist minister had caught one 32 inches in length. He seemed to be a fisher of fish as well as of men, for in my time no other person caught one as large in the nearby rivers.

The characteristic way of cooking fish in our home was by frying. After they were cleaned they were rolled in corn meal and fried in butter. The odor was tempting and the taste even more so.

LIQUOR, CARDS & TOBACCO

In illness, brandy was sometimes used in the making of eggnog. Sweetened brandy was

given occasionally to "bring out" the measles. A few of the hired men used liquor in their possession; it was not kept in the house -- the haymow was a more acceptable hiding place.

So opposed were people to gambling in all its forms that cards were rarely allowed in the homes. While my mother never said, "no," she was not one of those who believed that cards and the devil were inseparables; she simply did not like to have them around. A touch of humor is added to the picture when it is kept in mind that those same principles applied to the games under prohibition. Whether the picture on the card was Jack of Spades or John Milton made all the difference in the world to the Puritan, it was the association of hearts, clubs, spades and diamonds with gambling that caused the Puritan to recoil from cards. Men played cards in boxcars or in rooms over stores with blinds drawn, and the stakes were often considerable. Since these gamblers did not carry guns, there were no lives lost, but money in large amounts was squandered and in a few cases men lost most of their property.

Some used tobacco heavily. At the same time that I took the pledge against liquor, I, as well as many other boys, took one against the use of tobacco. The taking of the pledge undoubtedly kept some of us from experimenting with tobacco at an early age, but a more effective deterrent was that it was not cultivated in our region.

School teachers and ministers of the dissenting churches smoked on pain of public disapproval and possible discharge. A few to them smoked in the privacy of their rooms but it would not have been well for them in many localities if they had appeared in school or church with the odor of tobacco clinging to their clothing. A small number were bold enough to brave public sentiment, but, of all my boyhood teachers, I recall only one who smoked openly. When as a teacher years later, I went to Western Canada and found many teachers smoking openly, I became aware that the "East was East and West was West.

DOWN ON THE FARM

On our farm the raising of hogs centered largely in an old two-story house, the lower story containing the hog-pens while upper usually housed a flock of hens. It was rather unique structure for such a purpose. It was a hog house with a history. Many years before, it had been the dwelling house of one of the prominent early families of the community and had been built between 1825-1850. Its architecture and weathered look placed it among the oldest buildings in the area, and it still contained many of its original features: a fireplace from which a large rock chimney carried the smoke through the roof, a pantry with shelves then used for hen's nests, a narrow, steep stairway, a mantle over the fireplace -- these were to be found in this old building when I was a boy. It had the double walls where hens frequently hid their nests. Many a time did I crawl between the foundation walls in my search for eggs and time and again discovered nests hidden away by some secretive "biddy." Needless to say, I treated these eggs with great respect until I determined their ripeness -- which I usually did by hurling one against the stone wall, always keeping a safe distance, for the explosive possibilities of an overripe egg are great.

In the spring, the litters of pigs were born. Their arrival was an anxious time for the farmer, for their mother could easily kill the young pigs in her awkwardness or her excitability. In deed in some cases that I

recall, the mother promptly ate her young or would have done so if she had not been prevented. After the litters were safely launched, we boys were allowed to see them. But for sometime, we had to enter the hog house very quietly lest we excite the mother and cause her to roll upon or trample some of her off springs.

There is a loveable nature to hogs that does not appear to people who only meet them piecemeal at the meat counter or on the table. To watch a mother pig stretched out at full length with her young banked at dinner and to hear her soft, reassuring grunts every few seconds is almost human in its equal. She is a model of motherly patience as she endures the squirming of a nuzzling family, members of which every so often would lose their hold and squeal their protestations. Hogs, too like to be petted, especially if the petting takes the form of scratching.

As the days passed, the bodies of the young pigs became rounded and their bristles silky and sleek. Finally the day came when the neighbors came one by one with a sack to buy the young pigs. The next thing was catching the wiener pigs. The mother gruntingly objected, but after much running around the pen and much squealing in a high treble the pigs were captured.

Hogs show some interesting characteristics. I have seen them in the yard suddenly give an explosive "woof" and break into a mad run. For a short time, they seemed to be possessed of an evil spirit after which they as suddenly subsided and became again their normal, hoggish selves. It was commonly said in New Brunswick that these antics were forerunners of high winds. It may be, however, that their actions revealed their kinship to the swine of the Gadarenes that "ran violently down the steep into the sea." If so, we boys must have been the source of evil for while we watched the hogs stopped running. It might safely be assumed that the evil spirits and returned to their former dwelling places.

Some hogs seemed to have been possessed of their own particular demons. I recall one which my older brother had dubbed "Uncle" Dudley." It was almost impossible to keep him in the pen or yard. He was marked either by great possibilities for evil or he was possessed of a high degree of intelligence, for after we had secured him, as we thought, against further acts of violence, and had busied ourselves at some other piece of work. We often awakened suddenly to the fact that Uncle Dudley was shoulder-high in a field of oats or raising Cain in my mother's vegetable garden.

Feeding the hogs was one of the routine chores. The refuse from the kitchen, skim milk, sour milk, buttermilk and more, was called "Swill." This heavy smelling pail had to be carried to the hog pen some hundred yards or more from the house. While the boys largely performed this task, the time had been when the women did such work. One day, so the story goes, my grandmother and my father "had words" about some matter relating to the feeding of the hogs, and my grandmother reminded him rather bitterly that she had been wearing out her shoe leather feeding his hogs. She failed to realize that my father was his mother's son and, with a finality that settled the problem once and for all, he informed her that she had worn out her last shoe-leather feeding his hogs

Fattening began in October. They would be fed boiled potatoes, bran or mash and swill; all they could eat so they would lay down and gain weight. Every grunt of satisfaction meant nearer came the day of doom.