

A year ago last month the Saskatchewan river here was the lowest it has been for all time due to the new dam built at ~~Saw~~ Squaw rapids two hundred miles up river.

Our local paper had pictures of old wrecks of boats that sunk many years ago with a little story about the boat, captian, etc.

they asked me to give them a story about some of Dads old boats it just so happened that Moose Lake in turn was very low, Dads old boat the S.S. Dispatch boiler and fram work was a long way out of the water, the boys are taking down a dragline next spring to try and salvage the engines and boiler etc without to much damage.

SS DISPATCH TO BE RAISED NEXT MAY

The Dispatch sunk one cold and stormy night at Moose Lake in October, 1906. Rev. Joseph Reader had the first screw steamboat in The Pas district -- the "Glad Tidings", which was a very small boat to have a steam boiler and engine in her. The tube boiler can be seen today in the yard of Phil Reader, grandchild of Rev. Joseph Reader. Today the crown sheet of the Dispatch boiler is showing one foot above the ice, as well as parts of her two donkey steam engines in her bow. Her steel capstan, which was run from a link chain from the donkey engines, is not showing. It could have been pushed off by drifting ice in one of the 60 years it has waited for someone to beach her.

Dad brought rope and wooden snatch blocks along with Jim McNichel from Winnipegosis by dog team; home made capstans were made and many Indians worked, trying to raise the Dispatch -- ropes broke, blocks snapped and "burned". Moose Lake would not give up the old girl. I was six years old when Dad took Eric and I on a trip down the river then up the Head River, cruising timber for His Honor T. A. Burrows. Bennie Dixon was the engineer. Why I remember this trip -- I burnt my arm on a steam pipe, also fell off the cordwood pile onto the engine room floor, nearly breaking my neck -- cordwood was piled to the roof on either side of the boiler. Bennie washed out the boiler while we waited two days for Dad, Mr. Ames, Noah Umpherville, Four Persons and Moselle Captain to return. They portaged their bark canoes inland to the timber country in the centre of my present muskrat ranch.

I was fortunate to have a long visit with Joe St. Godard two weeks before he drowned at Wabowden, a couple years ago. Joe was the last man living that worked on the Dispatch, bringing her from Lake Winnipeg to Cedar Lake to gather sturgeon. Moisee Sayces was the captain along with Moselle Captain. Four Persons (nee - Moosoom) was fireman. Jack Bacon - engineer, Joe St. Godard and Henry Ross instructed the handling of the track ropes, which were lined up to many Indians hauling on the shore. There are quite a few rapids before you reach Cedar Lake. Another thing I remember about the SS Dispatch, I always liked to be in the engine room when Bennie or Dad would start up a cold engine. They would open the cylinder pet cocks for a little while, making lots of noise and steam. There was a danger of water entering the cylinders, which could cause a cracked or blown-out cylinder head. The normal steam pressure allowed by steamboat inspectors and stipulated in the Certificate of Inspection, ranged from 160 pounds to 225 pounds, depending upon the type of boiler, age and condition of same. Any engineer who was worth his keep, would carry whatever pressure was required to keep his boat on schedule. This applied to all the stern-wheelers running from Grand Rapids to Edmonton. My Dad would not hire an engineer, if he was afraid of steam. Jack Bacon told me how at one rapids, the Dispatch was just hanging on the brink or last wave of one of the rapids. Jack was short of water only a quarter of an inch showing in the water glass. He ran up on deck to shout at Big Moisee the captain, "I have to turn the injector on -- I am low on water". Moisee shouts back, "Never mind, don't spare it". They found out later that Dad had crawled over the top of the boiler and screwed the safety valve down tight; this gave them considerable boost climbing the last rapids into Cedar Lake.

The Dispatch made two trips a week around Cedar Lake, gathering sturgeon from the Indian camps. All the fishermen lived in birch bark tents. I flew Henry Ross in from Moose Lake to the hospital three or four years ago. Henry was one of Dad's faithful men on the Dispatch. I asked Henry how many sturgeon they would gather up per trip and he said 300 every trip, twice a week. I said how come always 300 and he said that was all the Dispatch would hold in her front hatch.

Dad had two teams of horses with wagons hauling scale fish and sturgeon over High Portage from Cedar Lake to the top end of Lake Winnipegosis. The Dispatch kept a strict schedule, calling at all the camps, including two sturgeon camps up the Summerberry River, one above Frog Point at the mouth of Old Channel (George Asmus made caviar here), another camp at the Forks on Head River, bottom end of my rat ranch. Willie Buck, who lives at Moose Lake, tells of helping his grandfather, Sammery Buck, lift his sturgeon net in the Head River at first ice time, catching fifty sturgeon in one day, then pulling their net out. They used sturgeon for weasel, mink and fox bait for their traps. George Asmus' boys live at Cranberry. Caviar was packed in stubby, wooden, ten-gallon kegs. Raspberry Jam also came in seven-pound wooden pails. These small pails were good to carry caviar in as part of your grub box. Captain Coffee paid the same price for caviar as for sturgeon -- ten cents per pound. Today, Russian caviar in Winnipeg is Six dollars and Fifty cents a pound. Bert Steele and Bill Clemmie were fish buyers across High Portage.

Two steamboats I remember are The Lotty S with Captain Billie Mapes and Bob Gibson as engineer and The SS Manito, whose engineer was Mr. Dangerfield. I think Sid Coffee was captain. The SS John Bull freighted sturgeon from Cumberland to High Portage -- Billie Hutton as engineer, Teddie Stevenson as captain -- one summer Barney Anderson was captain.

The Dispatch hull is filled with mud, however if this can be removed, there is a chance the whole boat can be beached. What ribs are showing appear to be solid. Next summer is the last year before the Grand Rapids Dam floods all Moose Lake and Cedar Lake country.

Henry Langlois, who fished sturgeon with pond nets on Cedar Lake, lives in The Pas. He will tell you the SS Dispatch hauled more sturgeon in one summer than Manitoba has produced this past ten years.

Four Persons was baptized along with three other Indians around the turn of the century. His christian name was John Miles. The minister just added the name, Gilbert, to old Ground Hog's name, making it Gilbert "Weanesk". However, in the deal, Mr. Weanesk had to throw away one of his two wives, now that he was baptized and became a Christian. This did not interfere in any way or prevent Weanesk feeding Mother fish, meat and duck all summer while Dad was fishing and freighting on Cedar Lake.

Dad had many boats and to name a few off hand -- SS Lafleur -- stern wheeler, Lenore L, King Fisher, Shamrock, Avis, Port Nelson, Isobell and a few others. Some were smashed up on a bad shoreline, some burnt and some just disappeared.

On the river bank opposite Moose Creek, you can see several low mounds a few inches high covered with moss. These were cordwood piles Dad had cut in 1904. He let contracts for so many cords of wood, cut and split, in many places -- The Pas, Moose Lake, Cedar Lake, etc. -- 75¢ per cord. John Steersman, Jimmie Beardy, Joseph Abraham, Weanesk and others were reliable cordwood cutters. The above named families have completely disappeared from the country. We have no more such names at Moose Lake.

Of all the boats Dad owned, he spoke most fondly of the Dispatch. If we cannot raise her completely next spring, we will at least put her boiler and engines on the bank for posterity.

Thomas Lamb