

NEW ENGLAND LOGGING in the 1900s

By Stanley Arthur Phelps

From 1900 till 1920 when I was first introduced to it logging did not change much in New England. In fact there were no radical changes till the 1940's. In other words, logging meant a lot of hard work and only rugged men could stand the work in the woods from daylight till dark swinging an axe or pulling a crosscut saw or rolling huge logs that could crush a man in a second. There is no comparison with the logs they handled with what we see in N.E. today. Most logs were 30 feet long and 3 or 4 foot on the butt log. A lot of those logs were too large to go thru a modern debarker. It took 3 or 4 men with long handled cant hooks to roll them over on level going so usually they were dragged to a slope where they could be rolled down hill. Logs were skidded in the woods by horses or oxen or mules to a rail head or a river for transportation to the mills which used water power or steam. Some steam mills were moved into the woods and eventually caused huge forest fires from flying sparks especially in the White Mts. of New Hampshire. A lot of the forest was set back for years by these fires and some never recovered. Mt. Monadnock was at one time covered with large pine trees but fire burned it over with so much heat that even the soil was pulverized and washed away so there has been nothing but bare rock ever since for about one fourth of the way down from the top. Whenever man finds an abundance of something in his greed to get rich by producing as fast as possible he ends up wasting a big part of the supply and does not even think of saving anything until the supply begins to dwindle and then it is too late. In the nature of trees taking long periods growth of up to 1 or 2 hundred years in some cases it is easy to see that we can easily kill off all the log size trees and then have to wait for years for them to grow back.

This happened in N.H. when the first settlers came here and the trees were just in the way so they were cut down and burned to clear land for farming. Now we are complaining because farmers in the rain forests are doing the same thing. In the 1800's so much forest land had been cleared in N.H. that wood had to be brought in from New York in some of the southern sections for heat.

The first I can remember about logging was on Fox Hill farm about 1919 or 1920 when Grandpa Messer used to go by the house with what looked to me like huge loads of logs with a sled when there was snow and with a low wheeled log wagon which was just the bare bunks over the axles with just a reach holding them in the middle so the front wheels could turn real sharp.

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The next thing I learned about logging was the hard part when we moved to Huckle Hill farm about 1921 or 22. Father had to build a barn as there were only small sheds and a hen house there. He got an old barn for tearing it down which made all the frame work but in the horse barn he needed planks for the stable and round edge boards for the hay loft above. There was a large elm tree out by the brook in the pasture so one morning he and I went out to cut it down. This of course was done with an axe and crosscut saw. Elm is not the softest wood to cut and bending over pulling the handle of a cross cut saw is not the easiest job for a teenager but it is a good way to learn what logging is all about. Father said pull on the handle but don't push just hold it steady and let me pull. Sounds easy but it seems to me it was at least an hour before we got that tree down. Every ten minutes or so I remember he would stop and let me straighten up and stretch. That felt good but then I had to bend down and start over which was not easy. What a relief when we got that big tree down and could stand up cutting it into log lengths. Then there was the job of loading it. This was in the fall so there was no snow but the two of us could not roll it up the skids to get it on the wagon so Father put a small log on the wagon and tied it to the wheels on the further side from the log. He put a chain around the log on the wagon and hitched the team to the other end and the big log rolled right on the wagon and stopped when it got to the log already on the wagon. This was my introduction to logging in the early 1900's.

Most of the logging in those days was done in the winter with sleds that were low down and easier to roll logs on till we got two or three layers on then we would have to build a skid way and drop the logs on from a higher level. With big loads of logs on wagons sometimes the horses could not hold them back on the hills so we had an iron shoe which was chained to the frame and the wheel drove on to it and stopped so it acted like a brake doing down the hill. On the sleds we had a runner chain which had an iron piece something like a horseshoe on the front which hooked over the front of the runner. The chain was let back under the runner and the other end brought up and hitched to the hook on front so it acted like a brake all the way down. Some places I drew were so steep I had to use two runner chains and still would work up pretty good speed at the bottom as the horses could not hold back much on snow even with sharp caulks on their shoes.

From Huckle Hill farm after graduation I went to work for the Barber Bros IGA on South Street in Bernardston. This was in 1928 when I was 17. A law was passed that all fire wood had to be measured by a wood surveyor before being sold. Loads

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of wood would stop in front of the store and one of the Barber brothers would have to go out and measure the load so when I was the only one in the store there was no one to measure loads so old Irving Barber, their father, who was quite a politician got me elected surveyor which is the only public office I ever held. We charged 25 cents for measuring a load which also meant figuring the price of the load as very few came out to exact cords. We also had to go to woodlots and measure piles of wood but I didn't get to do that as I was in the store six days a week. During the depression in the 30's I got laid off and bought a small store from Henry Deane which I operated a couple years but could not make enough to live on so my brother, Frank, took over and I went back on Huckle Hill working for Harold Streeter who owned our old place. I was paid \$50 a month with rent, milk and firewood. I only mention this to show that handling wood has changed some since I was a boy as I drew wood from the woodlot with an old Buick 2 seater. By cutting out the back seat I made a truck out of it and bought a pulley to go on the near wheel for power to saw the wood. I was there during the big hurricane that leveled trees all over the place. That all had to be cleaned up with cross cuts and axes.

I remember one big rock maple across from the house that did not blow down but had some damage so Harold decided to have us cut it down. It was so big that when we got to the middle the saw was not long enough so we had to take one handle off which made it slower cutting but we finally got it down. We sawed it in two up where the saw could reach but then we had the big butt log left so I got some black powder and made three holes with an auger spaced evenly down the log. I put in the black powder, cut three fuses of three different lengths so I could light them one at a time. Then I hammered up some old bricks and tamped it onto the powder then I wadded up pieces of paper and tamped that down. Then I lit the fuses and the log split right down the middle. Which actually surprised me being so large with knots all over it.

I took a job with Bill Koch on Sheldegren Farm at the edge of Deerfield, Greenfield and Shelburne in 1939. Modern equipment started showing up in the 40's as the war got underway and more production was needed especially in farming as help was short. Bill's son, Harry, was manager of the place and he had been to Amherst College so he was all for modern methods. We had a Ferguson tractor with a saw attachment on the rear so we could drive in the woods and saw the wood right there. They bought a farm in Conway and had a stand of pine there to cut for lumber so we bought a circular saw that could be pushed around on wheels and turned to cut

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trees down or upright to buck them up. This was much faster than hand work but not good for problem trees as a wedge could not be used.

In 1947 I left Sheldegren and moved to Walpole NH to a large farm on River Road owned by Henry Anger. We used a lot of wood for fuel so we bought a chain saw but it did not have a good cutting chain as it was one of the first ones built and cut very slow compared to the modern ones.

I didn't do any more with logging equipment till I went to work for R.N. Johnson who handled the John Deere line of farm and logging equipment, also the Homelight power saws which at that time were considered the best in the business. Also he had crawler tractors with winch and sliding boom that could be set to lift logs on a scoot or wagon behind. Then the last of my working there in the sixties John Deere came out with a knuckle boom loader that would fit on a truck or the back of a tractor, like a backhoe and could pick up logs or wood with a grapple and swing it around to wherever you wanted. About this time also they came out with a log skidder which was similar to a tractor but had four wheels all the same size with power to each one and it could swing in the middle to make sharp turns. It could clear 3 foot stumps and rocks so it was really capable of working in the roughest woodlots. With special chains on four wheels they were almost unstoppable but I have seen grades so steep they had to hitch the cable to something solid and with the winch and wheels all working they could get to the logs. With 100 foot of cable they don't have to get too close. They can be tipped over too which can be quite embarrassing in the woods. One young fellow I was drawing for tipped one over turning around a large boulder in a real rocky lot. The hitch caught on the rock and flipped the skidder. This was in Antrim and he had to get Johnson to send a man with a skidder to pull him back on the wheels. Quite expensive. One thing I have always remembered an old logger telling me was never to hurry. If you have to hurry he said you are doing something wrong and a lot of the accidents I have seen in the woods were caused by someone not taking the time to do a thing the right way or studying what could go wrong.

With all this modern technology in the logging business and 90% of NH in forest land, when I left Johnsons to go for myself I decided to go into the logging business as Tom Johnson, Jack's oldest boy, had started a mill in Henniker NH and needed a truck with a loader to haul logs for him.

We bought an International single axle chassis from my son in law, Hack Haskell, who worked for Bailey Ford. It had been a beer delivery truck with a van type body which had been removed so it was already to put a loader and bunks on. I took it to a junk yard in Concord and got some six by six angle irons and then took it to Livingston's garage in Hillsborough where I welded up the bunks. They had the rear axle off an old truck there and built it onto the rear of the International for a drag

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axle or dolly as they called it. This could be pinned up when not loaded and dropped down with pressure on the springs when loaded. We had iron pipes for stakes about 4 feet up that dropped into holes at the ends of the bunks. We put wooden stakes into these pipes to make it about 12 feet high. We were now in business and as Tom was making pallets most of the logs were small hardwood but when he got large logs we would put them separate till he had a load to send to a big mill.

I would take loads of veneer logs to a Bradford VT mill and also to Hancock Vt. Later when Dennis was with me he took logs clear to Newport Vt. by the Canadian border.

Tom picked up most of his logs from small wood lots where the farmers would save logs big enough for Tom while they were cutting wood or if they were cutting pine logs they would save the hard wood for Tom so I was sent to a lot of places that would only have one load. The farmer would say "Oh, its a good place to get in. I've been driving my pickup in every day". But a lot of the time when I got a load on I was stuck and not many had tractors large enough to pull me out. So I had to learn lots of ways of getting out.

Usually a truck will break down way back in the woods so I carried a tool box in the cab at all times. Also short hoses and couplings for the loader. Also I carried a flashlight, a shovel, an axe, a short-handled cant hook and a wrecking bar as well as a 20 ton jack to let pressure off my dolly springs, if I got stuck, to put more pressure on the drive wheels.

Late one winter afternoon I was coming out of a small village above Concord where they were getting out logs with horses. There was one bad spot up a hill and around a curve on the wood road and I had quite a time getting up but finally made it to the town road. It was getting dark but it was all good going the rest of the way to the main highway but as I turned on to the main road and flipped the switch to shift the two speed rear end to high speed it stuck and would not go either way. This was when I was glad to have a flash light. So I got down under the truck and took the plate off the front of the differential and turned the shift down to low gear and drove to Henniker that way. High gear would have been faster but I was afraid T might not make some of the hills. When I got to Tom's mill I still had to drive to Walpole. One of the nights when Elsie wondered where I was but by this time she had learned not to go looking for me as I always got home sometime.

I soon found that chains don't amount to too much in the mud as they will just dig a hole deeper unless there is lots of small brush and sticks to put under the wheels. If there were trees to hitch a chain to I could sometimes pull myself out with my loader. Usually this called for someone to drive the truck at the same time. Sometimes on a slippery side hill the upper wheels would slip so I would take some

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logs on the loader and hang them out on the high side to get weight on the upper wheels and get out that way. Sometimes I would throw most of the logs as far in front of the truck as I could and then drive out of the mud hole and load back up again. I got stuck in the middle of January in a spring-like place in zero weather and two skidders hitched on could not pull me out.

Sometimes I would just have to unload, jack up the truck and throw sticks, stones and bark under the wheels. This was usually quicker than going to find someone to pull me out and less expensive as I could always work a little later to make up for the time. Winter was the best time to draw logs as the mud was frozen up and the bugs were too but subzero weather is sometimes hard to get machines to run. My International started quite well but Tom had a diesel powered fork lift that was about the hardest machine to start in cold weather that I have ever seen. When the temperature was any where near zero I would get over to Henniker and hitch my truck on the loader and we would go down to the main road and sometimes tow it a mile before we got it started. Sometimes in the winter logging would slow down so Tom would send me delivering pulpwood to Lawrence, MA or even lumber to Rhode Island. Elsie thought she would go with me once to East Harwich, RL, I think it was. So we left Henniker early around 4 or 5 o'clock and made pretty good time except once when I had to change a spark plug. I had one flat tire but had a spare so put that on. The trouble came when I had another flat and had to stop and get it fixed. I think we got back to Henniker before dark but then had to drive to Walpole so it made quite a long day and I don't think Elsie went on any more trips.

I drew a lot of logs on Pitcher Mountain in Stoddard in the winter as the farm help worked in the woods only in the winter getting out logs and wood. Some of the roads were just wheel tracks in the snow and going up quite a steep hill one afternoon I was keeping as much speed as I could so made a quick shift but must have turned the wheel just a bit to the right and the wheel caught the crust enough to yank me into a 4 foot ditch and tipped me over onto a bank. I was 2 o'clock in the afternoon and I had to walk about a mile back in the woods and get the skidder operator to pull the logs out of the truck and pull the truck right side up. I only broke 2 wood stakes so replaced them and loaded back up. That was just another night when I was late home.

While working for Tom a lot of new roads were being built; I 89 from Concord, 101 thru Nashua and new roads in Bradford and Weare so we had lots of logs. If we could not get the logs out fast enough the road crews would burn or bury them. The conservationist don't mind if trees are cut for the roads, it's just logging they are against, which is kind of strange thinking as logging is replaced by trees but roads kill the trees and the land.

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According to law each load of logs has to have at least 3 chains over the load so we bought 100 foot of the best grade and cut it into 3 equal lengths. Also about half way up the load we had two cross chains to keep the stakes from spreading. Drawing short pulp we had two extra stakes on the rear bunk and a chain across them. The limit in height was thirteen feet and any logs more than 4 feet beyond the rear bunk had to have a red flag attached.

The cops were always stopping logging trucks to check for height and weight. I was stopped 3 times one week but never had to pay a fine in all the years I drove a ten wheeler.

I was drawing for Tom from a small farmer in Deerfield, NH who got his logs out with a Farmall H tractor. One Monday I went to Tom's and he said I would not have to draw any more from him as he was killed over the weekend. A log he was skidding caught on something and the tractor reared over backward and fell on him. In all the years I was drawing logs this was the only fatality on any of our jobs.

The most dangerous part of the job for truckers was pulling the chains off the logs when sometimes a loose log on top would roll off and crush the driver unless he was back far enough from the truck. The closest I came to getting hit was a pulp log that slid off and came down close enough to brush my hands as I pulled the chain. Two feet closer would probably have killed me so I was a little more careful after that.

The motor gave out on the old truck after about a year so we put in a new one. Then the frame broke on the right side by the loader so we had to fishplate that and I was always replacing springs or adding new leaves. In other words we were loading it a little heavier than it was built for but I drew two years for Tom and then moved it home and drew another year at home before getting a V6 GMC ten wheeler and putting my loader on it. I also put my four steel bunks on it and added a wooden bunk in back as this truck was longer than the International. It had two transmissions, 4 and 3, so it had much better range of speeds for the hills.

Dennis had moved up from Texas with his family and got a job at St. Johnsbury Trucking but helped me nights and Sundays. He left them and went driving trailer trucks for Savage Trucking in Chester but cold weather was too much for his wife, Dora, so she packed the three kids in the car one day and went home to Texas for good. Dennis decided to go in with me so we went into partnership and he kept the trucks operating. This was a big thing in the success of the enterprise as it kept the cost down on repairs and a lot of trouble was prevented before it happened. He put new gearing in the rear end of the International to give it more power on the hills and used that without a loader as I could load it with mine. He took the long trips with veneer for mills in Vermont and lobster trap stock up to Maine as well as birch logs up near Portland Maine to a tinker toy mill.

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My loader broke off near the top of the A frame so I went up to Lancaster, NH and had a new one put on. This was heavier and longer so I could reach out further to pick up logs. This with power to both rear axles made a lot of difference in my ^^ trucking operations.

Gasoline was 32 cents a gallon when I started trucking but in the seventies all the big shots decided we were running out of oil and the price kept going up so we had to keep raising the price of moving logs to stay in business. By the last of the seventies the price had gone up from \$7 to \$15 per M but we still had all the business we could handle.

We were drawing logs for Blanchflower Lumber in Alstead at this time and Don told us about a big Chevrolet 10 wheeler for sale cheap in his hometown in Mass so Dennis went down and bought that. He rigged it up with bunks but no loader so I would load him up. He could carry big loads legally because he did not have the loader for weight. We put on such long loads that it would rear up on steep hills so I would go ahead till we were out of the woods and I could hitch a chain to his front bumper and pull him down again.

Log cabins got to be quite popular about this time and the mills would mark each log and ship the whole cabin to wherever the person wanted to set it up so we got a lot of business from this.

We sold the International to Ernie Johnson in Lempster and he put a cattle body on it for his girl to move her horses around so that old truck did all the manufacturers intended and more besides. We had a chance to buy a 420 John Deere crawler tractor that was broken down and the owner owed 3 or 4 hundred dollars on it but couldn't afford to get it fixed. We brought it home and Dennis put a new piston in it and put in a few new links in the drive chain as they had been running them backwards. I still have the crawler today and did a little logging for Douglas this winter. It had a log boom that could be run out to load a scoot or trailer and a Braden winch. We picked up a two wheel arch to hitch behind so it is most as good as a skidder but a lot slower. However, it hardly leaves a track in the woods so I could do jobs for old ladies that didn't want the land tore up.

Dennis finally got a brand new Prentis loader for his truck so he could take separate jobs. He also bought a second hand skidder. Dennis enjoys doing things with machines more than the drudgery of doing the same thing over and over. I was glad to have him repair the machines so I could keep on moving the logs. I had slipped on some wet logs and injured my left shoulder so shifting two transmissions got to be a little difficult. Also the rear one always had trouble of one sort or another so I traded with Ernie Johnson for a V8 GMC that he bought new in 1973 and only ran about 12,000 miles when he hurt his back and decided to sell it. This truck had a

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13-speed transmission so I could shift it easily. This truck could really move logs and Dennis has it in running shape today at his place in Sutton. (1991)

At the age of sixty seven I decided to retire and make it easier to make out income tax and draw social security. Dennis decided to move over to Tom's mill and live in a cabin over there. I kept drawing around Walpole but I cut back on my operations. Also it was getting hard for me to work under my truck greasing it and changing starters and changing tires. So I tried hiring some of this work done but it cost so much and half the time it was poor work so I ended up doing it myself anyway.

Before Dennis left we took on a few logging jobs with the crawler and that made quite a change and more fun than trucking. I never hired any help as that would mean paying their taxes and other paper work like insurance. I was drawing in Vermont for Guy Bemis one winter and I got to the landing and they were taking the chopper to the hospital with his left arm just hanging by the skin. The man that hired him didn't have insurance that he was legally required to carry so they tried to make Guy pay as he was hiring the work done but he had a good lawyer and got out of it. I had to go up to Montpelier with him to testify. Anybody that hires help now-a-days has got to be pretty well insured because even if its their own fault they will sue you anyway.

When I was drawing steady I worked as much as possible for mills as they paid every week and had landings and woods roads that a truck could get in and out of. When drawing loads here and there it is harder to collect but if they have more than one load they will pay so you will get the next one. One trucker said it's the last load that's hard to collect for.

Dennis and I always made out our own income tax returns but when I was retired and not working much I still had to pay estimated and figure in my social security at the end of the year and over 70 etc. So I hired H & R Block to make it out one year. I hadn't paid any tax for years but that year I had to pay a small amount and pay them \$90 for making it out so I never hired them again. Even if I had made a mistake myself it never cost more than \$50 penalty. The last two years I had Elsie's niece's husband, George, make it out and he got me money back. It is now April 1993 so we have only seven more years to go till the new century and we can write 2000 on everything. I don't know what changes we will have in the logging business but as long as people want the products of lumber and paper, loggers will keep cutting the trees. It is just like the drug business, if people stop using it there will be no money in supplying the product. I saw the other day where they estimate it takes 50,000 trees to put out one edition of the New York Sunday Times. Just think of all the trees the environmentalists could save by not reading the Sunday paper. I don't buy any newspaper daily or Sunday so that should qualify me as a good environmentalist.

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Also I don't ski where hundreds of acres of trees are cut to clear the mountain for skiers. I am also against cutting hundreds of acres of trees each year to make new roads so people can drive 100 miles an hour. When people could only drive 60 miles an hour as I remember the country got along just as well. The big differences being not so many people were killed every year. Since the invention of the automobile more people have been killed by them than by guns but no one tries to stop the sale of cars but try to pass laws to stop the sale of guns.

The older I get and have time to study some of these causes and movements of a minority of the American people I am struck by the stupidity shown. They don't take time to study history or get the facts before they start fighting the very people who are getting out the products they are using. I know these are minority groups because most of the people in America have to work for a living and don't have time to go around the country screaming and yelling at people like themselves who are working to get the materials to make their homes, furniture and newspapers.

Out west they are trying to get the cattle off government land and save it for the campers, hikers and sightseers. If that is all the American people want the land for why did they take it from the Indians? That is what they were doing when they owned the land and the white men killed them and stole the land in the first place.

While I was logging in Walpole and vicinity there were a lot of sawmills. There were 6 mills in Walpole. There were 23 within 10 miles. There were 30 within 20 miles, besides several small portable mills run by one or two men.

[A list of the mills is on the following pages]

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MILLS

1. Feliy Damaziack	Walpole
2. C. Welch	Walpole
3. Kingsbury	Walpole
4. Bog Conley	Walpole
5. Paul Galloway - one man saw	-
6. Perry	Christian Hollow
7. Don Blanchflower	Alstead
8. Pratt Mill	Alstead
9. Lester Phillips	Alstead
10. George Woodel	Alstead
11. Kmiec Mill	Alstead
12. Lawrence Pelton	Langdon
13. Bacom Mill	Langdon
14. Wright Mill	Langdon
15. Ralph Balla	Acworth
16. Weldon Sawyer	Walpole
17. Peachblow Farm	Charlestown
18. Mill at Valley Farm	Walpole
19. -	Lovers Lane Road
20. Ayot's Mill	Marlow
21. Onalla Mill	Lempster
22. Pine Tree Mill	Lempster
23. Wilcox Mill	Newport
24. Elemendorf Pulp	Claremont
25. Davis & Symonds	Claremont
26. D. Beaudriau	Westmoreland
27. Doug Wilkes	Westmoreland
28. Burks Mill	Westmoreland
29. H. Goodnough	Westmoreland
30. Cote Mill	Chesterfield
31. Wright Log Cabin	Chesterfield
32. Marlborough Mill	
33. Allard Bros.	Brattleboro
34. Cersosimo	Brattleboro
35. Birch Mill	Brattleboro

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MILLS
(CONTINUED)

36. Smead	Vernon
37. Lane Hardwood	Vernon
38. Putney Basket	-
39. Waterman Hardwood	Putney
40. Knight	Athens
41. Tenneys	Athens
42. -	Athens
43. Furgat	Westminster
44. Hardwood	Bellows Falls
45. Fournier	Chester
46. Harriman	Antrim
47. T. Johnson	Henniker
48. Goulds	Henniker
49. Foote Shingle	Marlow
50. Patnode	Henniker
51. Barlow	Weare
52. -	Milford