

Subj: **Peter Yancey**
Date: 11/7/2010 5:32:17 P.M. Eastern Standard Time
From: shabbypoyye@gmail.com
To: ButterflyLady100@aol.com

Utica Journal, Tuesday Morning, March 23, 1904

The Death of Peter Yancey, the Oldest Resident, Town of Croghan

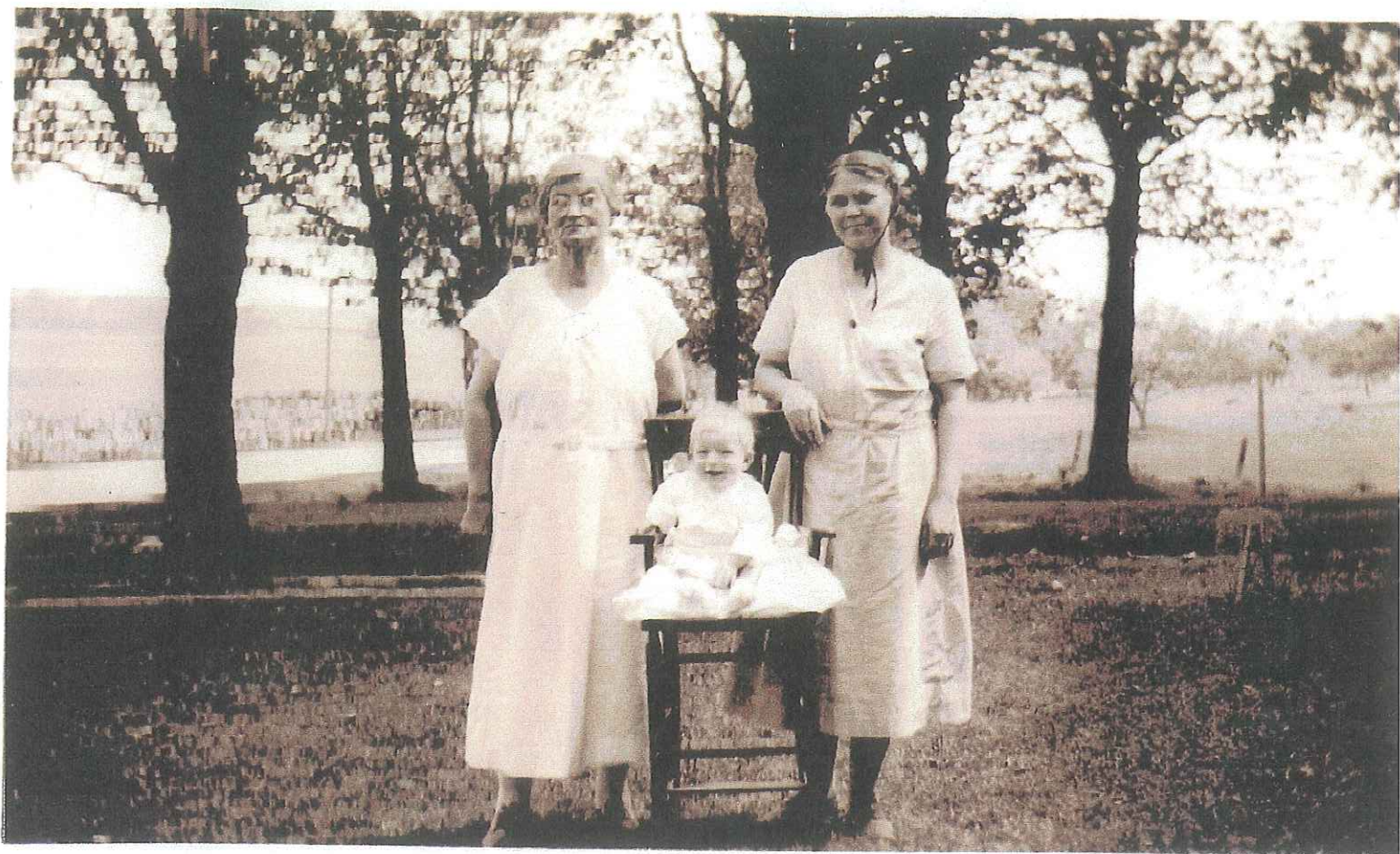
Lowville. March 21.—Peter Yancey died at (?) o'clock yesterday morning, at his home in Belfort, in the town of Croghan, at the age of (?) years. At the time of his death. Mr. Yancey was the oldest resident of Belfort. He emigrated from Lorraine, France to the Town of Croghan when that town was a dense wilderness, and with the assistance of his family he felled the trees, built a log cabin and cleared his land. Mr. Yancey accumulated considerable property, having about (?) acres of land and one of—the biggest sugar orchards in the town of Croghan. about 1000 trees. He leaves surviving seven sons and three daughters. Andrew Yancey, John Yancey. Benjamin Yancey and Daniel Yancey of Belfort. Peter Yancey of Watertown. Joseph Yancey of Minnesota and. Mark Yancey of Wolcott. Ind. and Mrs. Christopher Martin and Mr. John Ulrich of Croghan and Mrs. Joseph Yoder of Forest. Ill. The funeral services will be held Wednesday morning 11 o'clock at the new **Anabaptist Church in New Bremen.** Rev. Alphius Virkler officiating. The internment will be made at the new Anabaptist cemetery.



Picture was taken in 1897 at the Theodore Reyn homestead on Slight Road in North Huron, N.Y. On the front carriage seat is Theodore Reyn with the stovepipe hat on. Mary Reyn is sitting beside him holding baby Pearl who was born on 08/28/1897. We don't know for sure but they might be dressed up for Pearl's baptism.

In the back seat is Louise (the larger girl), Christian (the little boy wearing a cap), and Leona (the small girl). Holding the horse's rein is Theodore, Jr. We don't know the rest of the people in the picture.

Information provided by Joan M. Reyn Davis on 3/27/2011.



Grand
+
great
grand
Lena Reyn Yancey , Milton Zehr , Pearl Belle Reyn Zehr

Golden Wedding Anniversary of Michael B. and Catherine (Martin) Zehr

Taken October 1911

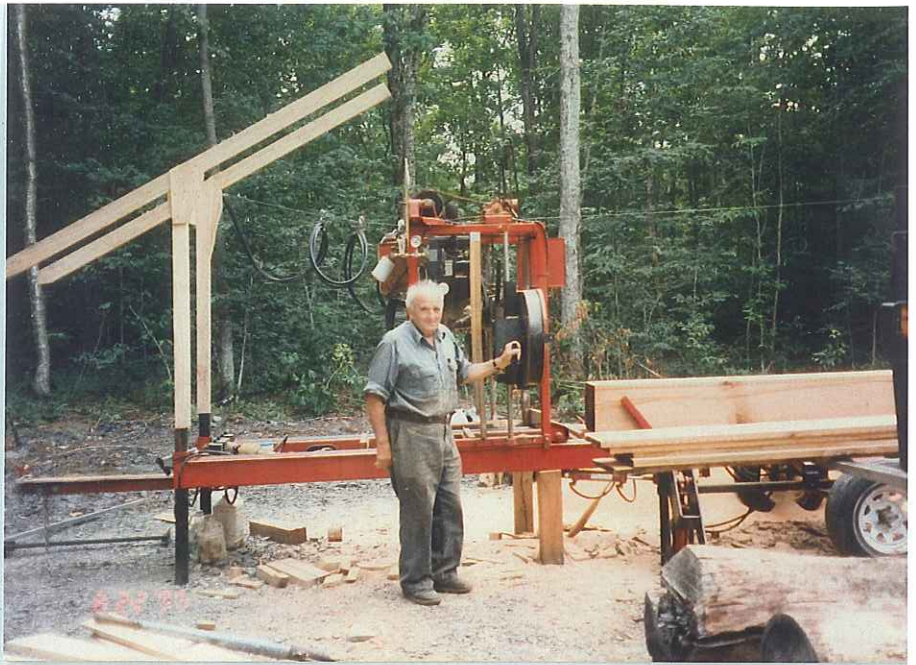
Back: Peter Zehr, John Z. Lehman, Menno R. Zehr, Samuel H. Lehman (grandsons), Joseph M. Zehr, Christina Zehr (Mrs. Michael), Kate Zehr (Mrs. John),
Lona Yousey (Mrs. Joe), Joseph Yousey, Bert & Anna (Zehr) Thomason holding Hubert, Mabel & Ben Lehman (siblings) Next Row:



Harold Chaffee, Simon Lehman, John Zehr, Christian Lehman holding Mary with wife Mary, Zehr Grandparents, Martha (Zehr) Chaffee, Katherine Lehman (Mrs. Simon)
Next Row: Grandchildren: Daniel Zehr (John) Michael, Erwin & Ellen Lehman (Chris)
Front: Grandchildren: Vernon Zehr (Michael), Norman, Bill, Catherine, Adah Lehman (Chris), Nina Lehman (Simon), Ernest Zehr (John)



DAVIS, JOSEPH & JOAN





Last Time Down the Tote Road

Photos by Richard Claus

For more than 50 years Joe Yancey and Mike Virkler have carried deer hunters into the remote Adirondacks. This past season they made their last trip.

by Michael Stickney

OVER the course of time all things have a way of coming to an end. Even in the Adirondacks, where time often seems to stand still, old traditions become history. The old-timers leave us, taking with them their wisdom acquired over the years before anyone has the chance to ask them to share their experiences. Many times no one is there to listen. It is so much better to hear how things were from those who were there. Live words are better absorbed by soul and mind than are written ones. Old hunting stories in particular lose something in print. I say this because I was lucky enough to have spent some time with two old-timers who have done things a little differently every year when hunting season rolled around, and listened to the stories they had to tell. Their names are Joe Yancey and Mike Virkler. Both are from northern Lewis County on the western edge of the Adirondack Mountains. Joe lives near Croghan right next to the old farm house where he was raised. Mike lives with his wife Hilda in Castorland but spends a great deal of

time with her at their camp on Buck Lake.

What makes these men unique today was once common in many areas of the Adirondacks. They use a team of horses and a wagon to carry deer hunters and their gear back into wilderness regions for a weekend or a week at a time, then return to carry the hunters out with their deer. This all began for Joe in 1927 when as a young man in his teens, he carried a party's gear into Jakes Pond in northern Herkimer County.

His clients were two World War I army veterans still serving on active duty at Fort Ontario in Oswego, Howard H. Ford from Indiana and Mont R. Kieth from Prince Edward Island. Joe explained, "The two men had such a good time and loved the area so much, they returned to the same place every year until the 1950's when age finally prevented them from making the trip."

"Every hunting trip the two soldiers took lasted a month," Mike told me. "Part of their military duty was to go out once a year for wilderness survival training, so this was when they would do it." Joe went on to say, "I would take them in on October 15 and bring them out November 15. We got to be good friends over the years. I've got pictures of them here somewhere." After searching through sev-

eral envelopes full of photographs, Joe handed me some old snapshots. "That's them at camp on one of their trips, and this one shows where I stopped to rest and feed the horses on the way." I asked if that was about half way, "Almost," he said. "Anyway, it was the easy half; from there it was uphill."

Since then Joe with his team of horses has toted on every road in the area along with other teamsters he named like Leon Keck, Roy Bush, Rube Lyndaker, Roy Farney and Lawrence Kempnich. But now he and his horses are the last team on any of those roads. Joe's brother-in-law Mike Virkler began going with him in the 1950's, "Just to make sure things ran smoothly."

In the earlier years, according to Joe, trips back into the woods were primarily to established camps, many 18 to 20 miles one way and requiring two days' travel. Back then Joe would get \$15 for a one day trip and \$45 for a two-day trip. Now he only does one-day totes for \$35. Joe said they would leave his farm at five o'clock in the morning with a party's gear and travel eight miles to Berggrens, known earlier as Ulrich's sawmill, before starting up into the woods. Sometimes he would meet a hunting party at the old sawmill and take the gear in from there.

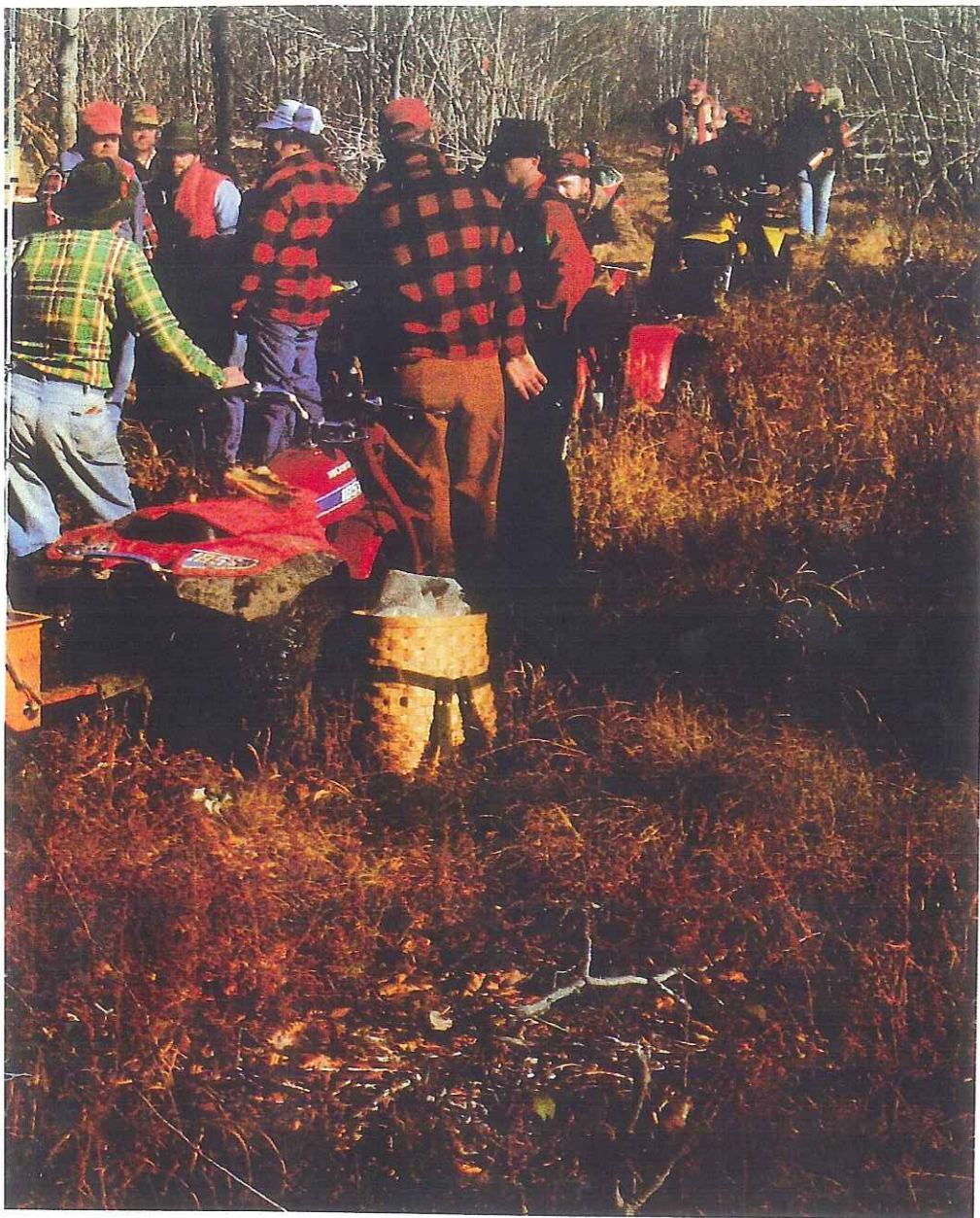
After World War II he trucked his



Deer hunters on their way in cross paths with hunters returning.

A good trip/Almost everyone got his deer.





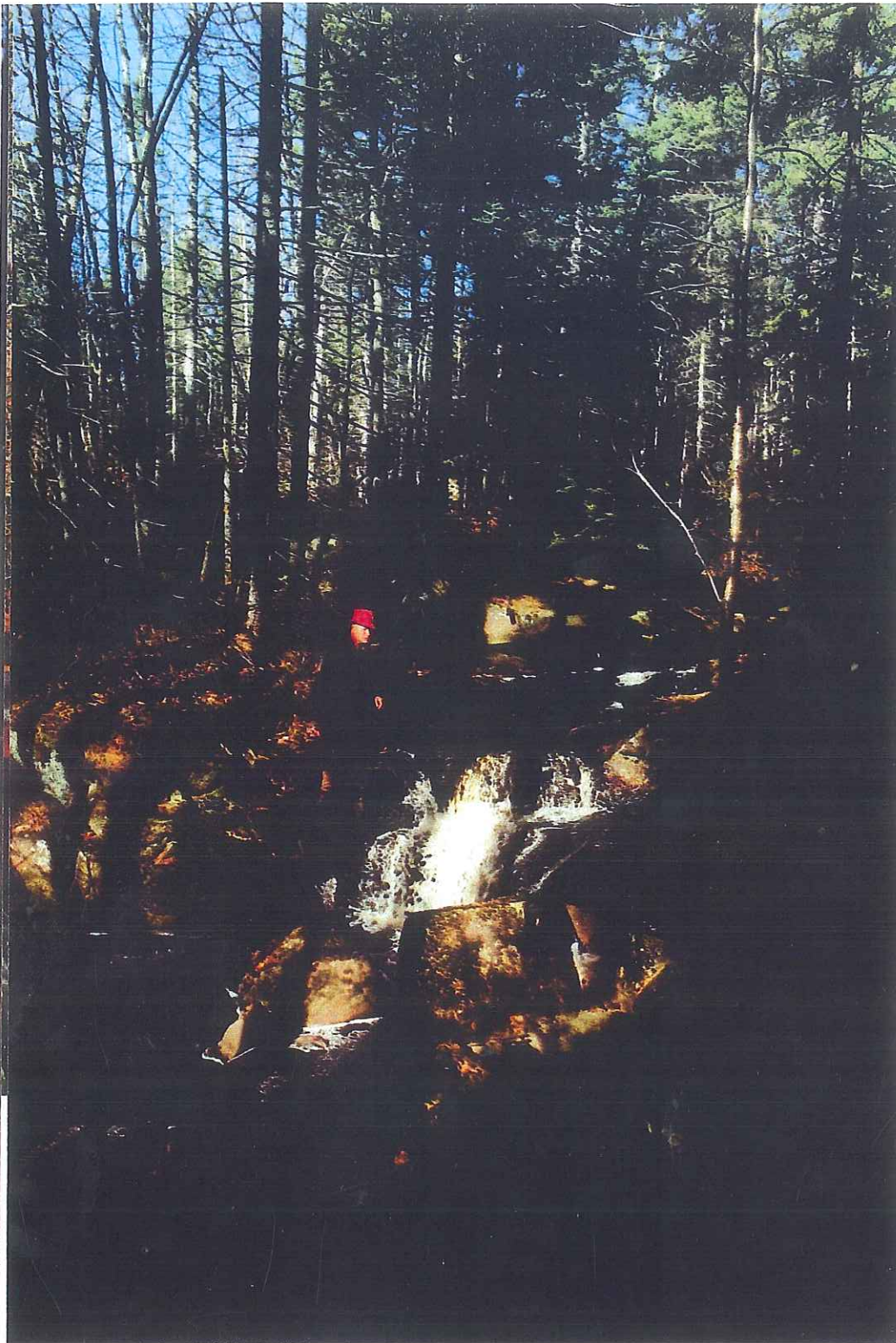
Hunting parties look forward to this trip all year.



horses to Berggrens, "It saved a lot of wear and tear on the horses and cut an hour and a half off each end of the trip."

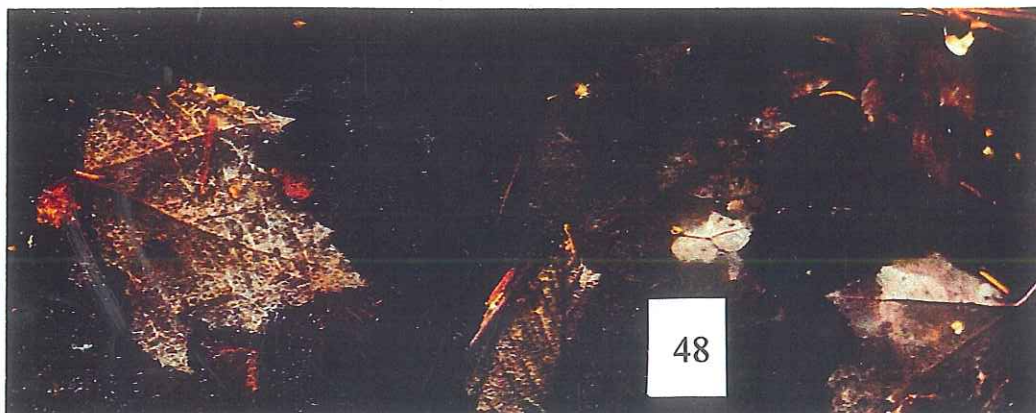
On the shorter trips Joe would tote the hunters' gear in and arrive at the campsite in early afternoon, unload the gear, then turn around and head back. When he got home after dark he still had to take care of the horses and do his chores before turning in. On the long trips he would go in one day, spend the night and come out the next. Someone always did his chores when he could not get back. "I always had to be there either to take a party in or bring them out. These boys planned this all year, so if I wasn't on time they'd be pretty mad."

When Joe first started, the wagons had wooden wheels with steel tires. This arrangement, combined with the ruggedness of the terrain, was rough on the driver and the horses as well as the equipment. There were places along the way where Joe had to unhitch his team and get them over some rocks to where they had good footing, then use a log chain to pull the wagon up, hitch up again and continue on. The trips got somewhat more comfortable if not a little easier when he put his first set of automobile wheels on the wagons. They were steel wheels with hard rubber tires that tracked better through the snow, absorbed some of the shock of the jolting ride and were not susceptible to the problems of the wooden wheels. Snow would accumulate or "ball up" on the steel tires. They raised havoc with the tote roads, leaving deep ruts making travel even more difficult and, of course, there were always broken spokes to contend with. You had to be prepared for anything in this line of work. "I always carry an axe, a log chain and a lot of wire for emergency repairs," Joe told me. There have been times when he had to cut down a tree to make temporary replacements for broken spokes or fashion a log to replace a broken evener, part of the wagon that helped the horses to pull the load evenly. The loads he carried contributed to the strain on the equipment. Eight hundred pounds was the normal load, with 1,200 pounds the most the team could pull. Despite this, if the horses were going well, they could make two miles an hour. Joe preferred to hitch his team himself. With a serious tone of voice, Joe said, "If someone else is working with you, they will be talking and



Mike Virkler pauses for a moment by this small waterfall. The trip in and out can be rugged.

Late fall with its hard frosts is the best time for deer hunting.



there's a chance something will be overlooked. You don't want to start up the team and have the wagon stay where it is. I don't like to take chances. I do it myself. That way I know everything is done right."

Sitting around a table at Joe's house, Joe and Mike showed me pictures of the people, places and horse teams of bygone totes and hunting trips. I sat listening to the men as they told of places they had carried to. Names like Deep Cuts, Desert Swamp, Greggs Pond, Sand Pond and Tide Lake reminded me of places my father and other men had spoken of, similar places I had hunted at a younger time in life in another part of the mountains.

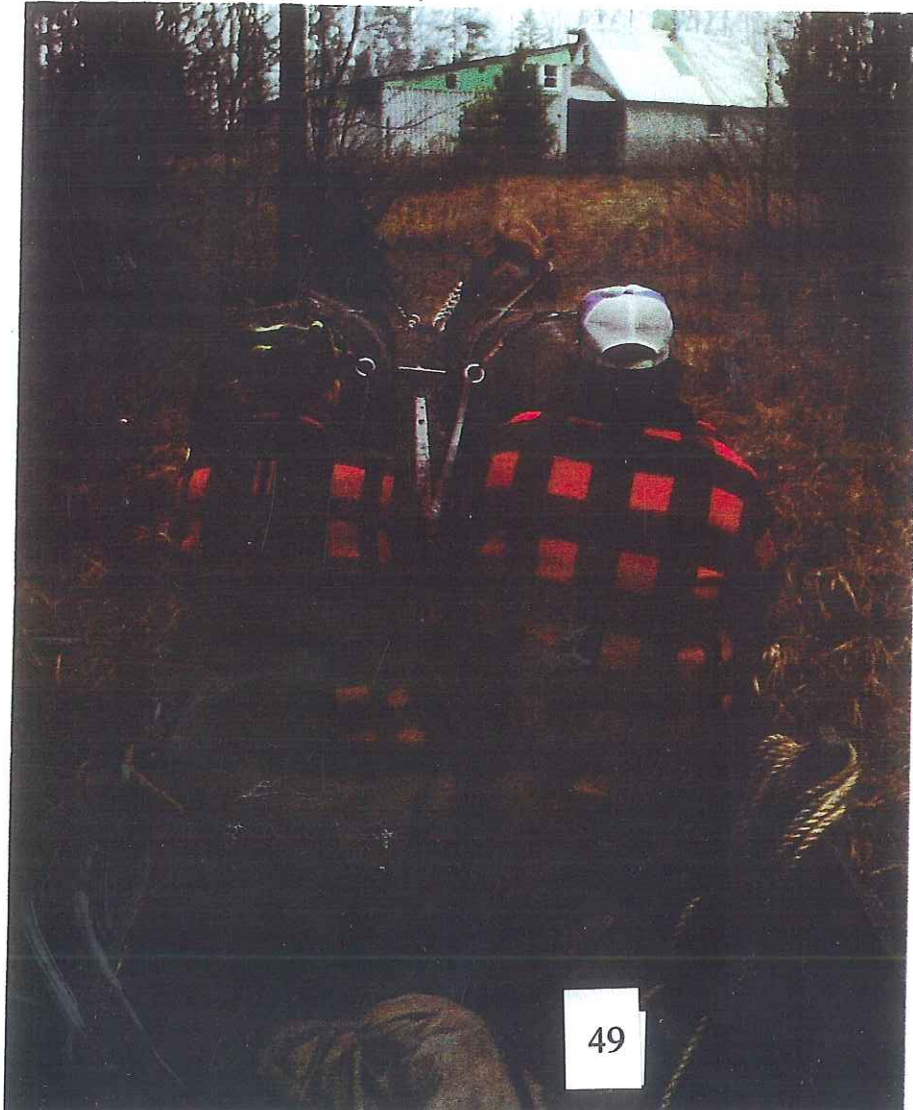
Mike continued with even more places. Ulrich Swamp, Strifes Burnt Camp, Whiskey Rock, Crooked Lake, Cowboy Beaver Meadow and Burnt Falls were all places Joe had been to with his teams. There were stories of how places got their names. "Brush Hill got named when they were logging. In the winter it got so slippery the horses could not get any traction. There was no sand to throw down so they used brush. And Silver Mine got its name years back when some people thought there was silver around there, but none was ever found." Mike smiled, "You know I'd hate to see people get the idea there was silver around and rush up here looking for it."

Both spoke fondly of the men whose gear they toted back into the woods over rocks and corduroy roads year after year. Joe told about Irish Jack Cahill and his bunch made up of nine, sometimes 10 men. "I'd take them in to the Middle Branch of the Oswegatchie with supplies for a week including two gallons of grain alcohol that they would cut with water. You see this was during Prohibition. Sometimes going in, a couple of the boys would get into it and holler for me to stop when they wanted a drink. Irish Jack liked me a lot and seeing this told me they'd had enough before they got foolish and to pretend I didn't hear them, otherwise we'd never make it in. So that's what I did, but it was not like that all the time. They were good hunters, they hunted hard. When I'd go back in to pick them up, if there were nine men in camp I'd usually have nine bucks to bring out, if there were 10 men it was 10 bucks, and when we got out of the woods, they would all chip in a dollar for me. That was a lot



Joe Yancey poses with a good friend.


Mike and Joe head for home—the last trip.



back then.” Not every group was that good, lucky or however you wish to call it. There were good years and lean years. “The 1950’s and 1960’s were the best and surely my busiest years. Some years I’d need help and have to work two teams of horses,” Joe recalled.

A few things have changed over the years. The great lumber camps have gone and the old hunting camps have given way to wall tents except where hunting clubs lease property from private lumber and paper companies. Recalls Joe, “In the old days no one rode the wagon unless he was a teamster, or had a broken leg or had a heart attack. The hunters walked in all the way and did the same coming out and some of them still do it that way.” There were two occasions when Joe brought heart attack victims out but never anyone with broken bones. Nowadays some of the hunters use three wheelers and snowmobiles to save time and effort. “I think some of them spend more time fighting the machines, tipping over and getting them unstuck than if they were walking,” Joe mused, “but they’re pretty good fellas. There’s been a few bad ones over the years but they didn’t stay around long.”

Joe is as fond of his horses as he is of the friends he and Mike have made over the years. He spoke of Jesse and Mike, his first team, and a big team of black horses named Dan and Cub. He showed me pictures of them and his favorite horse of all, Queen. They’re all gone and Sandy and Punkin, the team he has now, probably won’t pull again, but Joe and Mike plan to do some packing in this fall for the last time so there will be another team. “We’ll probably make two trips this fall,” the old teamster said, “then that’ll be it. We’ll be taking the Deep Cuts bunch in and a party from Fulton that’s been coming here for 30 years back into Jakes Pond.”

They’ll do things the way they have been doing them since 1927 for one last time. Then the creaking of wheels and the plodding of hooves on the tote roads will fade from the woods, and another part of Adirondack tradition will become history. 

Michael Stickney works as a senior fish and wildlife technician at DEC’s big game unit in Delmar. A native Adirondacker who originally hails from Malone, Mr. Stickney now lives in Berne.