

Early Steamboats Brought Extra Income

Gerald Nadeau, Transcript

“Most of those steamboats were put on there for a money making business. And they charged people for freight and passengers both. The freight came from Pembroke, because the railroad only came as far as Chalk River. It didn't pass Chalk River. The steamboat had a crew of sometimes up to six and eight people. Some had a cook. There was deck hands which was generally four. There was a pilot which knew the [Ottawa] River, and a Captain. And there was always a couple of extras that were kept to fill in different jobs.

So they were steam and they had boilers and they used wood. And the wood was bought from the farm people and bush workers who lived along the River. But you had to have a wharf to put your wood on, or else share your wharf with your neighbour. And this was where the trouble always started with selecting the land along the River. Some people liked to get their sons side by side, so that they could share the same wharf. Because the wharf was then your job. If you could put wood on the wharf you got cash money for it, so anybody that was fortunate enough to have a wharf location would be like today having a gas station on a busy corner.

The deck hands wheeled the wood in and they wheeled it in on wheelbarrows, and came down the ramp and dumped it into the hull, and they could take a quarter cord in today's measurement of wood on a wheelbarrow. And then dump it down the hole in the hull that was cut to put the wood in, and then the boiler man had access to that wood from below deck. And one of the most disgraceful things that could ever happen to a deck hand was that he couldn't handle his load when he got down to the hole in the deck and the wheelbarrow would go down into the hull and he'd be cursed forever for that.”