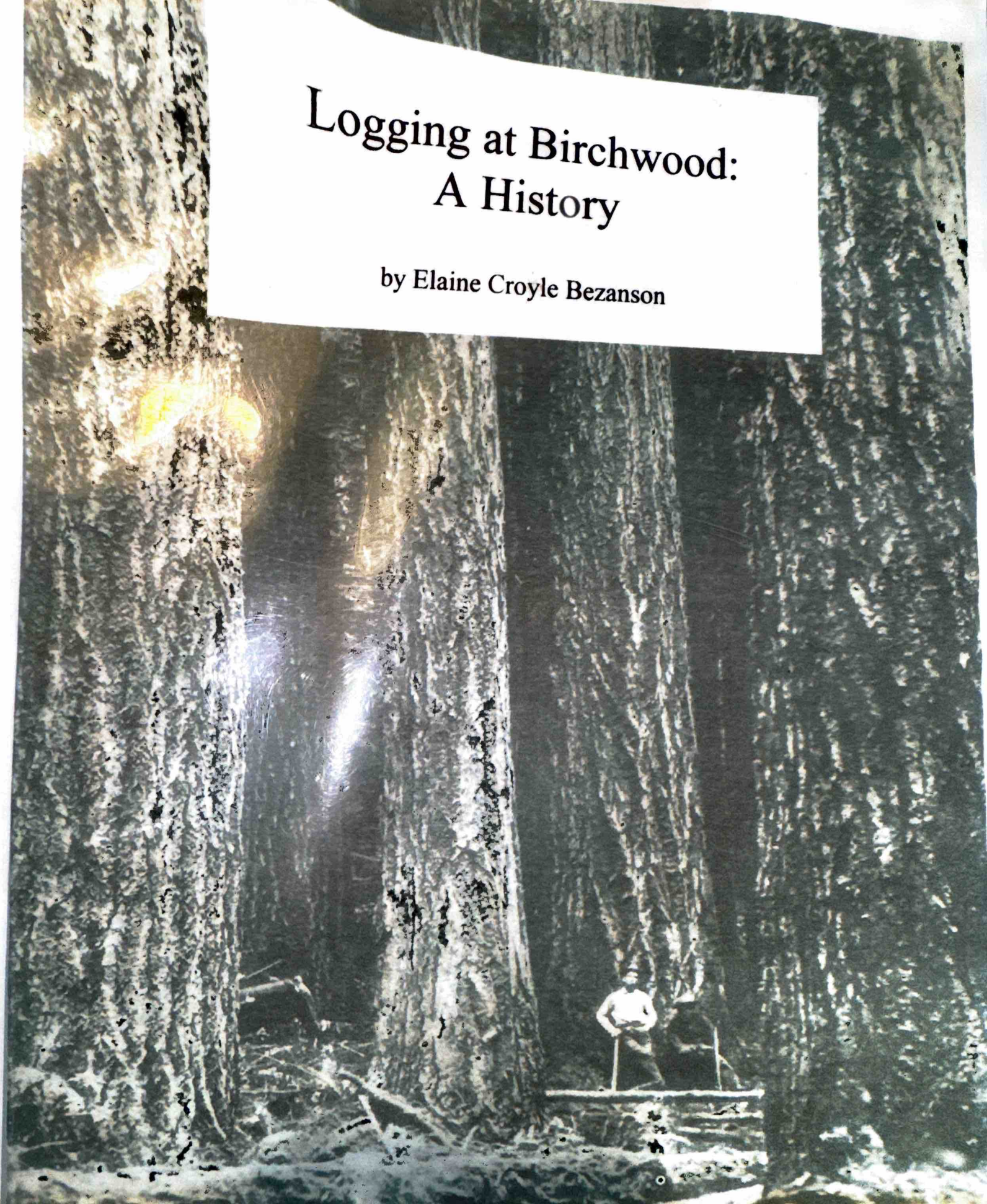
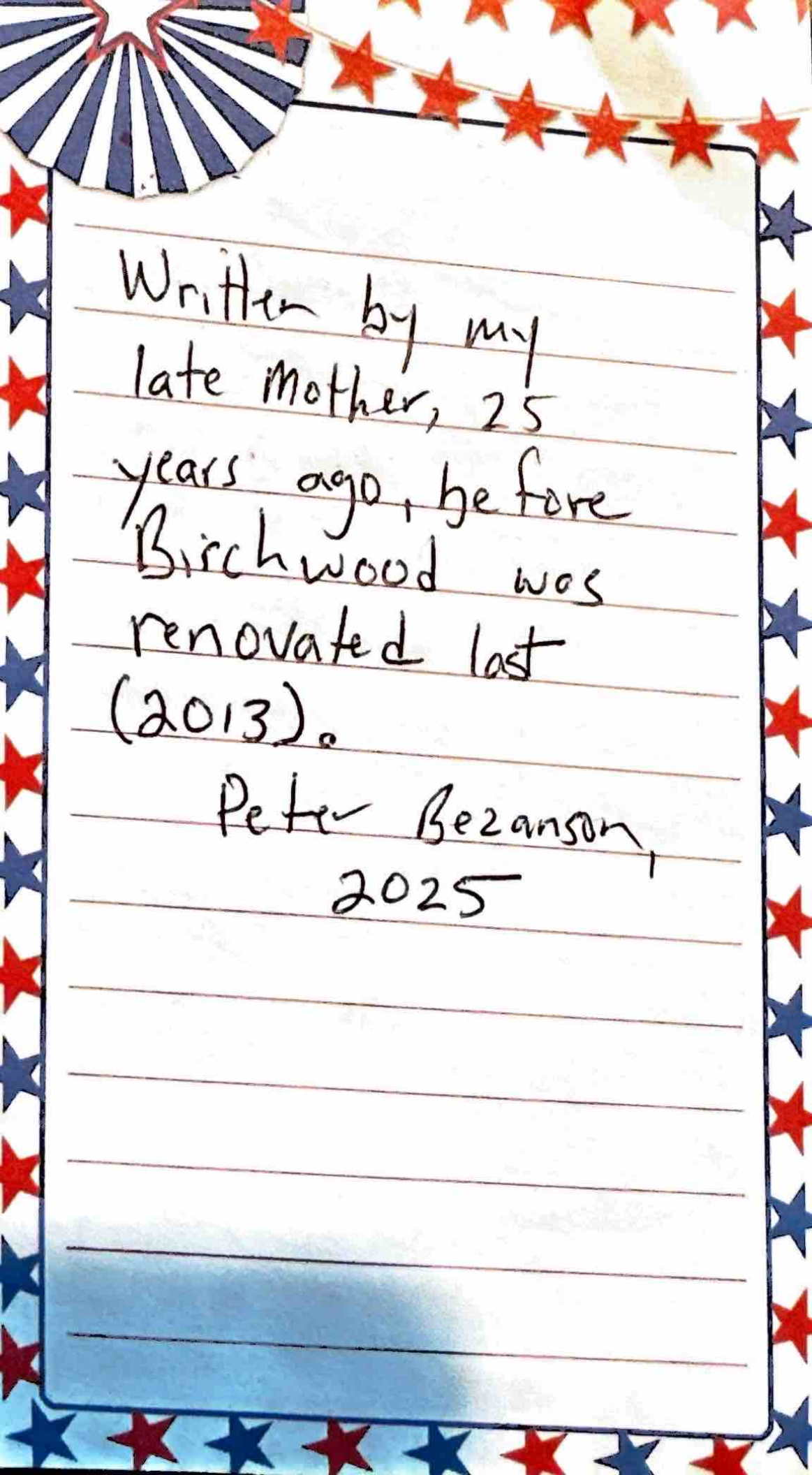


Logging at Birchwood: A History

by Elaine Croyle Bezanson





Written by my
late mother, 25
years ago, before
Birchwood was
renovated last
(2013).

Peter Bezanson,
2025

Every summer for more than thirty five years, Randy and I have traveled to Birchwood Lodge in northwestern Wisconsin to escape the searing heat, the dripping humidity, the free-flying pollen of Iowa summers. For Randy, the trip eight hours due north is more than a physical renewal: it is a spiritual journey, a rejuvenation of the psyche. Passed down from great aunt Lillian Bing Haas to Randy's mother Larrayne Bing Bezanson, was not only a parcel of land and a few old buildings, but the genetic ability to understand the healing nature of the forest, in general, and of Birchwood Lodge, in particular. The committee is still out as to whether it can be learned or whether, indeed, it must flow through the DNA.

I have been a reluctant learner. Some have referred to me as the weakest link in a chain of family for whom Birchwood is God-

given land, nirvana, the Elysian Fields of the living. Despite their skepticism, I have been constantly on an intellectual journey to make Birchwood Lodge a part of my soul. First I learned about the birds, their proper names, their habits, and to recognize their songs. Then I searched out and purchased all the books I could find on loons. Out of necessity, I became an expert on bats and bat guano. Then I began



to spend my summers writing a novel about small town Wisconsin – locals vs. summer folks, mother-in-law vs. daughter-in-law. But what piqued my interest in the history of Birchwood as a logging camp was the almost mystical lore and stories passed down in Randy's family from one generation to the next. My first instinct was to debunk the myths, to search for the truth, to prove that, in fact, Birchwood Lodge could *not* have been a logging camp. In the end, after years of

research, I am now a believer, not so much in the actual facts as they pertain to Birchwood, but in the healing powers of the possibilities.

Our yearly ritual travel to the north is a eight hour journey, first through the rolling hills of northeastern Iowa, then bluffs along the Mississippi, and finally Highway 27 which, from Osseo to Ojibwa, is as straight as the trunk of a Norway pine. The towns along the way are familiar – Beaches Corners, Victory, Galesville, Ettrick, Caddot, Ladysmith – for their parks, their historical markers, and their bathrooms.

We drive north where eons ago the tongues of glaciers carved out niches and basins, north where ages ago the floes deposited icy, clear water and eroded rocks to pristine sandy beaches, north to where the Loretta road, our final 40-mile stretch to Birchwood Lodge, cuts through the forest to Clam Lake, where a hundred and fifty years ago white pine grew six feet in diameter, where a hundred and twenty five years ago, those trees were chopped down by axes, where 80 years ago the last gasp of timber fell to the chain saw.

But in 2003 our summer haven called Birchwood is surrounded by trees, standing in the middle of the Chequamegon National Forest. The forest, once decimated, has grown again and is now considered a natural resource to be managed.



There are stands of paper birch, Norway pine, sugar maple and thickets of aspen. Birchwood is a testament to natural reforestation. It is a rare tree, though, that is more than two feet in diameter.

I've been going north with Randy's family since I was 18. And for those 35 years, while Larrayne was living, she harped on the preservation of trees, especially her favorite, the paper birch. They are white-trunked trees to which curls of bark cling. Historically birch bark was molded into canoes by the native Americans; today you will see birch bark candles, birch bark chairs, birch bark tables.

Larrayne adored the stands of birch on Wisconsin byways, the way the sun light dappled through the leaves and reflected off the

white bark. Another of her favorite stretch of trees is on an old logging road where the sun is eclipsed and no birch is able to grow. It is spooky for its darkness, as if we've left the world and been dropped in an alien land. Norway and white pine stand so tall you can't see the tops and their canopy is so thick you can't see the sky above. Underneath a few hardy plants poke through the thick brown mat of pine needles. The sight makes you shiver. You can nearly hear Larrayne's low and reverent voice saying as she always did, "This is the forest primeval." Quoting Longfellow was fitting. Larrayne was an English teacher.

We all knew what she meant: that we had, at that moment, glimpsed what the first loggers had viewed before they axed their way through the trees. The unspoiled forest. No one uttered a word. It was a moment of solemn reflection, meditation and thanks for the trees.

In 1937 Randy's great aunt, Lillian Bing Haas, and great uncle, Carl Haas, purchased 80 acres – the land we now own – for \$1500. By then, most all of northern Wisconsin had been logged at least once.

The logging operations in Wisconsin began as early as 1809 when the first sawmill was operating just south of Green Bay. It continued with a more concerted effort during the next 20 years, but considering the sheer numbers of trees available, logging at that time was only a minor activity. Logging on a large scale required a specialized work force and adequate capital, both of which were lacking in Wisconsin in those early years.

Federal law was a larger problem. Northern Wisconsin, at that time, was populated mainly by the Chippewa (Ojibwa) Indians, a nomadic tribe who traveled in small family groups. Their main endeavor was fur trade. By law, white men were banned from logging on Indian lands without special permission. When the monetary potential of the Wisconsin forests was recognized and the need for lumber on the prairies increased, folks began to demand access to Indian lands.¹

In the mid-1830s, the government began to negotiate a series of treaties with the native peoples which would later deprive them of their lands in Wisconsin except for a few square miles of reservation area. By 1836, settlers and speculators had bought nearly 900,000 acres of land. Investors in Wisconsin timberland included Daniel

¹ Fries, Robert, Empire in Pine: The Story of Lumbering in Wisconsin 1830-1900 (Ellison Bay, Wisconsin: William Caxton Ltd, 1951) at page 8.

Webster and Ralph Waldo Emerson. When Wisconsin became a state in 1848, its forests covered 16,900,000 acres.²

With the change in Federal law, Wisconsin lands were available for mass logging operations; the difficulty was in attracting skilled labor to travel west from previously logged areas such as New York. Ads touting the availability of land, high wages, and the prosperity of the territory were placed in New England papers. And if the loggers came, they faced an entire forest of huge trees, most of which were six feet in diameter. Last summer we found one remaining tree similar in size to trees the 19th century loggers saw.



Despite the variety of trees in northern Wisconsin before the logging operations began, white pine was the most prized tree to log, not maple, not oak. I had always assumed the latter for its hardness and durability. But in fact, white pine was preferred for its softness, its strength, yet its lightness. The main attribute of white pine not true of hardwoods was its buoyancy. White pine floats, a perfect characteristic of early logging trees since the way they were transported to the sawmills was down the rivers and streams of Wisconsin.

By the mid 1800s, the banks of a few rivers and streams were sites for lumbering operations. The main rivers for early lumbering were the Wisconsin, the Chippewa, the Black, and the St. Croix, all the rivers that flowed directly into the Mississippi.³

The peak of logging in Wisconsin was between 1880 and 1890. Even when the large companies moved to the west coast in the mid 1890s, there was still much timber remaining in Wisconsin and in the Midwest.

Areas like Birchwood, for example, were not logged until the turn of the century or later because of the difficulty of getting in to cut and getting the lumber out. It wasn't until the advent of spurs of

² Fries 10.

³ Twining, Charles E., Downriver: Orrin H. Ingram and the Empire Lumber Company (State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1975) 33.

narrow gauge railroad track that more remote areas were logged.

Birchwood is no ordinary spot. I knew that even at eighteen, when the Bezansons asked me to travel with them to their summer *cottage*, not cabin. Cabin, I knew. My dad had built a cabin, a rough hewn place on a river with no electricity, no running water, no heat. But cottage? No one else I knew had a cottage. During the eight-hour trip I conjured up pictures of cottages in my mind. Some looked like gingerbread houses; others resembled five-star resorts. When we finally arrived at Birchwood, I was disappointed in what I saw. It was not the Ritz. It was no more than a glorified logging camp! Yet it sits near Dells Lake, a stream-fed, icy lake whose water is so clear you can see the bass and sunfish glide around stems of lily pads.

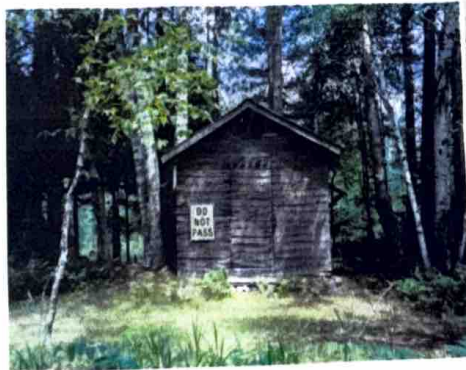
There are six old buildings on the property which are over 100 years old, antiques by Midwestern standards, as well as a few new ones, including two new outdoor privies. It is, of course, the old ones that conjure up visions of loggers.

The former ice house, in weathered gray wood, is an example of how all the buildings looked before Lil had most of them painted red, a tradition that continues, reminiscent of the red flannel shirts

that loggers wore.

Methods of keeping foods cold were labor intensive.

In the winter blocks of ice were chopped from the frozen lake. Horses or oxen then dragged them to the ice house to deposit the blocks in a deep hole with thicknesses of sawdust insulation layered between



and around the ice chunks. With luck and cooperative weather, the ice would remain frozen until summer for ice boxes like the one on our Birchwood back porch.



Thirty years ago, when Randy's folks bought Birchwood from Lil, the ice house was in a state of disrepair. Rodents roamed free. Randy's mom wouldn't hear of letting it fall to rack and ruin; instead, she hired a carpenter and made a playhouse for her grandchildren. If you look closely, you can see their initials above the door: JPJMJ – Jeff, Jason, Peter, Melissa, Joy.

Another primitive building on the property is the log woodshed, now used as storage for rakes and hoses, and a home for chipmunks.



In the old days wood was kept dry here and was accessible to the main cabin for use in the fireplace for heat and in the stove for cooking. In front of the woodshed, you can see the old p u m p , underneath

which is the new-fangled electric pump. In the summers the well cover holds at least 10 geraniums in clay pots. Larrayne saw everything as a potential resting place for flower pots filled with colorful blooms.

Across the yard from the wood shed is the former chicken coop, now used as a workshop complete with electric drill press, band saw, and jig saw. There are a plethora of little drawers, homes for every size of screw, bolt, washer, hook, that anyone could desire. Even in this day and age of equal rights, the men still hide out in the workshop.



There's a garage, big enough to shelter two cars and all the lawn mowing equipment needed for an expanse of grass. Displayed on the outside are the relics collected over the years by ambitious grandchildren using a metal detector or purchased in antique shops by Randy's mom. Some are examples of the old tools used by loggers.



This small and cozy cabin below has been Grandma and Grandpa Bezanson's hideaway since the late 1960s. On the right, a screened-in porch was enclosed; and a bathroom and closet were added in the back. There are two small bedrooms, a living room, and a front porch with a working fireplace. Formerly this cabin was home



to Mildred and Randy Reynolds, caretakers for the Dells Pulp and Paper Company who loaned them a house in which to raise their three boys for the

duration of their employment. They had no heat, no running water, no electricity, no indoor plumbing. What a perk. Mildred and Randy were also the caretakers for Larrayne and Pete in the 60s and 70s. Their accommodations at that time were much better – a plot of land



Living Room - bridge and poker table



Dining Table

across Highway M on which the Reynolds installed a house trailer.

The most imposing building is the main cabin, a long, narrow, two-story building, constructed of hemlock board and batten outside, painted red like most of the buildings since the 1930s. The roof,



Main cabin - bedroom wing



Main cabin - kitchen and porch

steeply pitched to counteract a winter's hefty dose of snow, is newly shingled in green. On the side is a screened porch. And in the back facing the lake is another screened porch. The porches were modern additions.

Inside, you will note the primitive features of what once served as a small logging camp, but was later used as a place for the heads of the Dells Pulp and Paper Company to entertain their clients and friends. You walk into the main room. To the right was a fireplace which has since

been removed to allow for more room in the living room. The long dining room table and chairs were originally in the cabin when Aunt Lil bought it. Each chair has a hat shelf. The walls and ceilings of all the rooms are made of a cardboard-like material trimmed with wood. There is no insulation.

The most used part of the cabin is the large screened-in porch facing the lake. It is elevated enough so that the views of the lake and the dock are delightful, so that as young mothers, Judy and I could sit on the porch and watch the kids build sand castles. It is the place for cocktails. When Lil was still alive, we'd have cocktail hour every day at five o'clock, part and parcel of the spiritual, mystical life of

Birchwood. Sometimes, though, we'd catch Lil sipping her scotch and water earlier than five. "Lil," someone would say, "it's only four o'clock" or 3:30 or whatever. Her response, blue eyes flashing, was always: "It's five o'clock somewhere in the world, and I'm ready for my snifter." The screened-in porch is where we've taken naps and played games, where read together and built Lincoln log villages, where we've solved problems and even created some.

To the left of the entrance is the kitchen which still holds the



old cookstove and an old oak table, now used as counter. For years Grandma heated up the kitchen every morning by building a wood fire. But now the stove has deteriorated to the point of being unsafe as a source of heat.



To the right of the entrance is the bedroom wing. Off the living room is a long hallway with doors to 3 small bedrooms with the original antique iron twin beds, a larger master bedroom with an antique brass bed, and one bathroom. Originally there were probably

seven bedrooms in the same space, and the bathrooms were outside. We still maintain one outside privy for use when conditions are crowded or when the electricity crashes (an all too often occurrence in the middle of nowhere. The water pump is electric.) Above each bedroom door is a hole, covered now, which used to serve as a means of heating. A pipe snaked out from the kitchen the fireplace, through the living room, and down the hall with branches into each bedroom.



As you walk in the front door there is a staircase to your left, looking like a staircase to nowhere since it ends in a heavy trap door.



During the logging days, however, the staircase was most certainly open to the huge attic room complete with dormers. It served as the bunk room for the

loggers. More recently, though, the attic has had new boarders. Bats. The reason for the trap door.

What sort of men could live in the middle of no where, in the icy temperatures of Wisconsin winters, with no modern conveniences? Perhaps your only knowledge of loggers (and you would have plenty of company) is from the legends of Paul Bunyan and his blue ox Babe, stories that were passed from logging camp to logging camp. Paul Bunyan was a loggers' logger, seven-feet tall with a seven-foot stride and so strong that no man could oppose him.

His ability to get drunk was proverbial. And then there was Babe, his ox, measuring seven feet from the tip of one horn to the tip of the other.⁴

Or perhaps your only knowledge of loggers is not of the men themselves, but of what they cart off and what they leave behind. Even today we see truck loads of white paper birch speeding down the highways of Wisconsin or we drive through an area of "slash" where unscrupulous logging companies had the motto "cut out and get out" without a thought of replanting or even cleaning up the unsightly mess of limbs and unusable felled trees – the slash –



⁴James P. Leary, ed., Wisconsin Folklore (University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 139-148.

they left behind. It still happens today.

We also think of the greed of the lumber barons, quick to clear-cut huge areas, but we forget that back when the country was newly settled, trees seemed to be an endless resource and, in fact, an impediment to farming. We forget that people demanded wood for building and later for paper. As Charles Twining, a Wisconsin historian says, "In years to come much would be written about the destruction of the great forest; and perhaps too much would be forgotten about the processes involved, and the cheap lumber produced, and where it went, and what it did for an aggressive, westward-expanding America."⁵

Loggers were the hardest of the hardy, subjecting themselves to almost intolerable conditions of below zero weather, snow, and long days of intense physical labor. Robert Wells in his book Daylight in the Swamp says, describing loggers, "The cutting made a few men rich. It turned tens of thousands of others into unwashed examples of Darwin's theory that only the fittest survive. They were a tough and agile breed, willing to work hard under miserable conditions, content with enough pay to finance a brief springtime fling."⁶

In order to get a glimpse of their lives, we need to form an image of how they lived and what they did for their paltry salary. As far as logging camps go, Birchwood was most certainly a high-end logging camp. The early ones were much more primitive.

How do we know about the early logging camps? Believe it or not, in the late 1880s missionaries from the YMCA were sent to Wisconsin logging camps. Charles C. Hamilton was one of those missionaries. He kept a journal of his experiences during the three months he spent evangelizing in the woods of Wisconsin. He was 21. He writes on Day 4: "Mr. T. asked me to promise that when I first saw the lumber camp, I wouldn't get scared and go home."⁷

Here is Charles Hamilton's description of one of the lumber camps he visit in 1893: "It may be well to describe a lumber camp for the benefit of those who have never seen one. Looking at the exterior we see a low barn-like building about 25' x40', the walls

⁵ Twining 290.

⁶ Wells, Robert W., Daylight in the Swamp (Madison, Wisconsin: Northword, 1984) 16.

⁷ Mary Hamilton Burns, ed., The North Woods Journal of Charles C. Hamilton An Englishman in Wisconsin's Lumber Camps 1892-1893 (Rudolph, Wisconsin: River City Memoirs, 1992) 34.



we see a low barn-like building about 25' x40', the walls made of pine logs the crevices being filled with mud. Rough boards and tar paper form the roof. Such a room is generally lighted by one small window. The interior is fitted up with sleeping bunks which are built all around the room. In the center is a large stove which keeps the room at least forty degrees too warm. Cords and wires are stretched across the room to serve as clotheslines which are continually loaded down with socks and shirts and when I tell you that each man wears from three to four pairs of socks, with as many undershirts, and all of them have to be dried every night, you will have at least a faint idea of the interior of a camp. Just imagine the great heat from the stove, the steam arising from the drying garments and the smoke from fifty tobacco pipes



which almost obscures the light of the two or three lanterns hanging in the room. . . This is the kind of place where we held our meetings and very often we could only see about one-third

of our audience on account of the shirts, socks, and tobacco smoke, . . . but the message was always gladly received.”⁸

The first logging camps, ones built between 1840 and 1870, usually consisted of only one room three or four logs high with floors made of rough timber. The men slept and ate in the same room. There were no windows. Light was provided by kerosene lamps and lanterns, and there was one fire place in the middle of the room for heat and cooking. After 1870 there were at least two buildings – one for eating and one for sleeping with a storage area called a “dingle” between the two. Other buildings included a horse barn, a blacksmith shop to shoe the horses as well as to make some of the tools used in logging, and the store or wanigan.

The loggers slept in bunks with no springs – just boards covered by hemlock boughs or straw with one blanket over and one



under. If you wanted a pillow, you would use your wool shirt or your coat. In the early primitive camps there were always two men to a bunk. By 1924 men no longer shared bunks and some camps even had mattresses.

Loggers worked at least 12 hours a day (except Sundays) until 1882 when they went on strike and got a ten-hour day. In every camp, there was a hustler who set the pace. These hustlers were admired and emulated because of the incredible work ethic of the times. Too much

⁸The North Woods Journal 198.

snow or lack of snow were impediments to work, but cold was not, so thermometers were banned. It did no good for loggers to know that it was 30 below zero since they had to work anyway.

Salt pork was the basic meat in their diet in 1870 because it could be kept, no matter what the temperature. Also they consumed in great quantity beans flavored with molasses and simmered overnight in the fireplace.

They had biscuits and tea. There was very little coffee until after 1880. Most camps had their own cow. They ate at a long table, using tin plates and cups. With



so many men in a small space, it was an unwritten law that there was no talking at the table.

The loggers days in the woods required incredible stamina and hard work. Here is how one lumberman, Thomas Pederson, described his experience. "The first days, the backbreaking work made me so stiff and sore that I could barely walk when night came. That,



however, soon wore off. Our foreman was a peppery little Frenchman. . . He would rouse us very early in the morning and it was into the cook shanty for breakfast. Then when we were back in the sleeping

shanty, he would throw the door open and yell, 'Daylight in the swamp!' That was the signal for us to file out of the shanty, collect our tools and march out to the choppings."⁹

Once in the woods, it was the job of the sawyers to first notch

⁹Wells 13.

the tree trunk with an axe in order to control how the tree fell and then to chop down the trees. In the first wave of logging, they used an axe and lots of muscle power. Years later a cross-cut saw was invented which required two sawyers, one at each end, preferably a left handed sawyer and a right-handed one working as a team. After felling the tree, the sawyers would "buck it up" or cut it into suitable lengths for hauling, usually 16 feet long.

Needless to mention, there were dangers in felling trees. The notch that was axed to determine how the tree would fall could cause a crack in the tree. If the crack was not stopped the upper part of the tree would just drop down with little warning, perhaps killing an unsuspecting logger. Also as the tree fell, it could get deflected by other trees and land differently from their plan or the tree could get hung up on other trees on its way down. This tree was called a widow maker because it was apt to fall when least expected, thus likely to kill one of the loggers.

In the loggers' woods, the swampers followed the sawyers. They limbed the branches from the felled tree and cut away brush and small trees that might stand in the way of getting the logs to the tote road.

Next were the skidders. In the early days skidders used a team

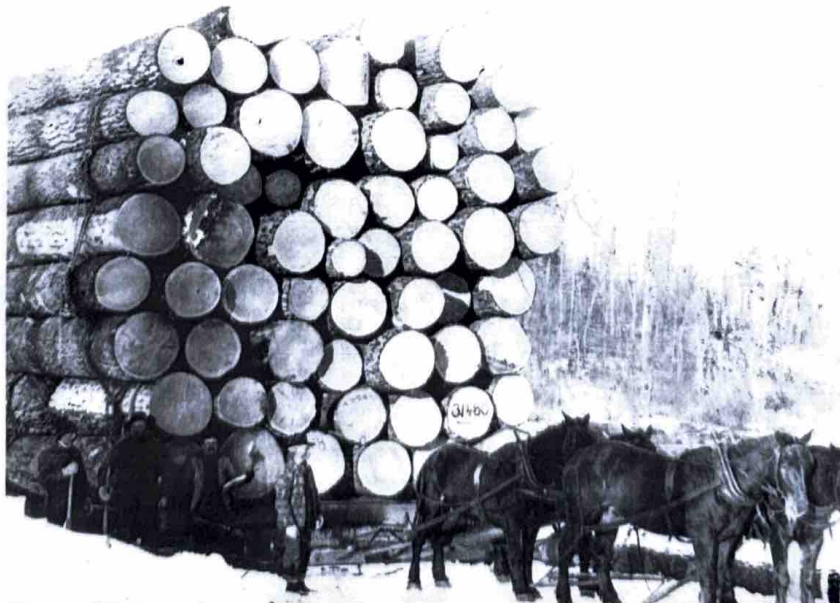
of oxen to haul the logs out of the woods either one by one on the ice or in a load on a small sled. Later skidders used horses (Percherons or Clydesdales) to haul the logs from the woods out to the tote road.



Next the logs were rolled up on a jammer on a large sled. This is called decking. The logs were bound together with chains so



that they couldn't easily fall loose. The top loader stood on the top of the pile to guide where the next log would go -- this was one of the most dangerous jobs in the woods. Once loaded, the teamsters would drive the logs to the river.



Until a system of narrow gauge railroads were built in northern Wisconsin, options for transporting logs to sawmills were limited to the rivers and streams. The lumber was cut in the winter

and driven to the rivers on sleighs, then stacked on rollways. In Spring when the ice melted, the log drivers would roll or drag



the logs into the river and ride them down stream to a sawmill. They hoped to avoid log jams; they hoped to avoid death. Both were common on log drives.

Log driving has been memorialized in Wisconsin, just thirty

miles from Birchwood. Each year Hayward, Wisconsin, hosts the Annual Lumberjack World Championships. Competitions began among loggers as early as the 1880s as a logrolling championship. By 1929 there was a women's competition as well. And



today there are at least 12 events besides logrolling including the standing chop, Jack



Huge logjam

and Jill (using a cross-cut saw); hotsaw (don't blink or you'll miss it) and speed climb. Two hundred competitors from as far away as Australia participate in the annual festivities in Hayward. It attracts some 12,000 spectators.

Rich and Betty Snyder are long-time family friends who have lived in the Clam Lake area for more than 60 years. Their enthusiasm for the history of logging in northern Wisconsin is contagious and their collection of logging memorabilia is notorious, both of which they shared with Randy and me. To find their treasures, they traveled down the Chippewa River searching for old logging camps and armed with a shovel and a metal detector.

Besides axe heads and dinner bells, their collection includes many logging brands. The letters



or pictures on each brand refers to a specific logging company which Rich has researched. All the brands were registered in Chippewa Falls so that there would be no duplications. For example, the 8E in the photo is a brand of the Chippewa Logging Company in 1883. The brands were made of cast steel. A sledgehammer handle was inserted into the hole and the logger would swing the tool and mark each log, before they were sent down the river. After the drive, an accounting of logs was made by using the brands.

Understandably some logs were lost during the drives. In the 1990s a business venture sprang forward called the Superior Water-Logged Lumber Company. It was discovered that logs on the bottom of Lake Superior could be used to build extraordinarily resonant cellos and violins. The future seemed bright since there was a lot of lumber at the bottom of all rivers and streams in Wisconsin and in other logged areas. We even bought some stock for \$3.50/share. Just as our excitement over the project reached the heights, the company itself ran into problems, one of which was: Who owns the logs under the water? The Native Americans claimed ownership as did the state of Wisconsin since it owns the waterways. When our stock reached three cents a share we decided to sell and not to look backward. The company in Ashland, Wisconsin, is still in operation and 40 others are listed on the Internet as companies whose business is reclaimed lumber. Perhaps we were a bit over-anxious in disposing of our stock.

Reading the abstract of the Birchwood property we noted that the lands (and trees) first came into the hands of a lumberman named Weyerhaeuser in 1885. In addition some parts of the land were owned by a railroad company in 1899. Since Birchwood was not near a river nor even a stream, since it was and is located in the middle of nowhere, it was unlikely to have been logged until after the turn of the century when narrow gauge railroad tracks were laid down to more easily extract the lumber from the woods.

By the turn of the century many of the large lumber companies had already moved west because the easily accessible lumber in Wisconsin had been removed from the northern forest. The smaller pulp and paper companies began to buy up the land. The Birchwood property and trees changed hands several times among several small lumber concerns until it all eventually ended up in the hands of the Dells Pulp and Paper Company of Eau Claire, Wisconsin, between 1906 and 1909. Presumably they logged the land then and we know that they built the buildings during this time.

In 1934 the land and buildings around Birchwood and the land across the lake was given by the Dells Pulp and Paper Company to P.M. Beach, a lawyer, in exchange for his legal services. At the same time the land was designated a Recreation District.

In 1937, Lil and Carl Haas purchased the land that is now Birchwood for \$1500.

After Uncle Carl died in 1941, Lil continued to travel to Birchwood from Minneapolis until the year her car ended up in the ditch and she didn't remember how it happened. Thirty years after

purchasing Birchwood, she sold the 80-acre lake front property to Larrayne, her niece, for \$27,500. The property across the lake was sold by the Beaches to a Girl Scout Camp. We could hear the girls holler as they dove into the icy water; we watched them learn to canoe and fish. Soon the mosquitos got the better of the Girl Scouts and the property was sold again to Mr. Lewis whose wife owned the Johnson Wax Company. The cabins, tennis court, and other buildings were torn down and the land was designated for tax purposes as a wild life refuge. A few years ago the Lewis children, grown now, inherited the place across the lake – their first act was to build a cabin; their second was to hold a skeet shooting party. We were worried about the desecration of the mystical nature of our Birchwood.

When Aunt Lil and the Beaches owned the land, there was a written agreement that no motor boats would be allowed on the lake. Legally the restriction didn't pass down to subsequent owners. Again we worried that the roar of midnight jet skiers which had raised the hackles of lake property owners all over the north woods, would disturb our spiritual peace. So far, the only new-fangled invention to hit Dells Lake is an electric motor at the Lewis' – no sound, no pollution yet it clarifies that we have reached the end of an era.

On our property today the trees have grown tall – Norway pine, paper birch and what the natives call popple - a type of aspen that is not in good favor. You hear the buzz of the chain saw; you hear the grumble and high-pitched whine of logging trucks; you see the loads of white paper birch trees stacked high on the double-bottom trucks headed for sawmills. You know that somewhere they cut a swath through the woods and left an unsightly mess of branches and small trees. You know that it will take years for trees to grow and that the most predominant trees to grow are the popple, a shallow-rooted tree that is good for little, too soft to burn in the fireplace and very unsteady in storms. You'd think we'd be safe from clear-cutting, slash-leaving loggers since Birchwood is in the middle of the Chequamegon National Forest. Not true. The Federal Government is making money from logging, and the most efficient way to make money is to cut out and get out. Although there are laws that logging operations must clean up and replant, the Federal Government doesn't always monitor their activities with the diligence that we would like.

We gaze through the tall Norway pines at the crystal clear lake

outside our window; we listen to the flute-like songs of the warblers and to the plaintive cries of the loons and we hope that somehow our



little corner of paradise, our own personal logging camp is protected from the heavy-handed chain saw, we hope that the time will never come when our children have no choice but to sell it to loggers.

Despite my lack of the "proper Bing/Bezanson genes" I have learned to enjoy the solitude that is Birchwood Lodge. Randy and I even built our own Birchwood in 1981. I rarely intellectualize

Birchwood nowadays or question its spiritual affect on the gene pool. I have come to accept my mystical existence each summer among the biological heirs where myths and stories are as tall as Paul Bunyan.

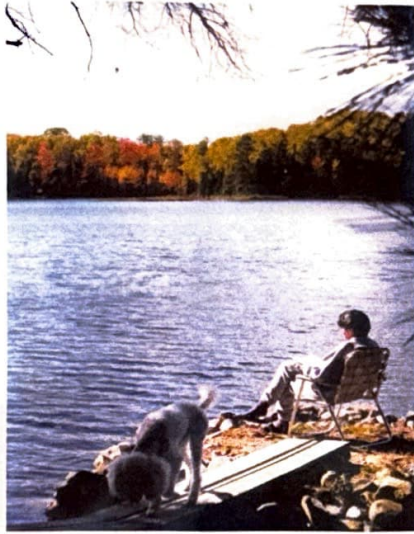


I can put aside everything because, Yeats spoke my words:

The Lake Isle of Innisfree

by William Butler Yeats

I WILL arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,
And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made;



Nine bean rows will I have there,
a hive for the honey bee,
And live alone in the bee-loud
glade.

And I shall have some peace
there, for peace comes dropping
slow,
Dropping from the veils of the
morning to where the cricket
sings;
There midnight's all a glimmer,
and noon a purple glow,
And evening full of the linnet's
wings.

I will arise and go now, for always night and day
I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore;
While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements gray,
I hear it in the deep heart's core.

