

YOU CAN JUDGE A CARETAKER BY CHECKING HIS WOODSHED

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The Adirondacks were unique from the rest of the country in many respects. One of these was the large number of full-time caretakers required to maintain the extensive summer homes in the area.

Adirondack caretakers themselves were a unique lot as compared to caretakers in other areas of the country. The one area that sets them apart was they also acted as guides for their employers.

The guiding consisted of many different facets. It could be no more than an outing for the day or it could consist of an extended trek through the woods fishing or hunting for a week or more.

In the early days, many caretakers spent their entire working life with one family. An atmosphere of mutual trust and respect characterized most of these relationships. Where this was lacking in either employer or employee, the relationship was short lived.

A good caretaker looked upon the camp as his own and spent his employer's money the same way. They took great care and pride in the buildings and grounds. One old timer pointed out to me that you could always tell a good caretaker by looking at his woodshed.

Many a caretaker had a real influence on the younger members of his employer's family. A graphic illustration of this was told to me by an acquaintance.

The gentleman is a retired college professor in his 70s. We were on the subject of character and integrity – or the lack thereof – when he related the following incident.

As a very young man he was passing the evening with some of the guides and woodsmen in his father's employ playing a game of cards. There came a long pause in the game and the next player was prompted to make his play. "I will," he replied, "when my partner stops looking at the other player's hands." He, being the partner and guilty, was not only embarrassed, but learned a lifelong lesson in honesty.

Locals still recall one particularly crusty old caretaker who not only looked upon the camp as his own, but ruled it the same way.

A grown teenaged son of the man's employer was staying in camp deer hunting. He was picked up on the road one night with all his gear heading for town. He had with much fanfare and no attempt at disguise, been loudly flatulent at the dinner table. He had been sent packing and you can bet, never complained to his father.

Unlike many of the early famous guides, most caretakers went through life unheralded and unsung by all but the people they served.

I have had the privilege of knowing some of the local caretakers, who in my opinion fit the outline above. Among them I would like to pay tribute to Frank Ritz, Bill Brock, Bob Goodsell, Ray Sanderson and Jay Barker. I add John Callen to that list at this point, because John is the only one of the group still living.

Time and circumstance permitting, I hope to be able to add more to the subject of caretakers. To make a long story short, they are deserving of much more recognition.