

MORLEY WATSON KNEW HIS TRADE AND LEFT HIS MARK ON THE AREA

2/27/96

Every area has its craftsmen, be they carpenters, masons, electricians, mechanics or others. Old Forge is no exception and when I first arrived here, I soon learned who many of them were.

Some I never did have the pleasure of knowing, but many others I came to know and admire.

Among the carpenters, three stand out in my memory. They are Morley Watson, Jimmy Rivett and Fred Fredette. I knew both Morley and Jimmy, but never met Mr. Fredette.

John Hurlbut Jr., or "Dutch" as he is better known, first made me aware of Fred Fredette. One evening over coffee he told me that most of the professional men had subtle ways of labeling their work.

Examining the screws holding the plate over the lockset and the hinges on the doors, we discovered all the slots in the screw-heads bisected the corners at 45-degrees. A Fred Fredette trademark.

Morley Watson and his wife, Alice, were neighbors of ours for eight years and dear friends of our family. Morley enjoyed a reputation as one of the finest workmen in the area.

One of his last jobs was building the fire observer's cabin on Stillwater Mountain. I remember him talking about the wear and tear on his car from traveling the Big Moose and Stillwater Roads to and from work.

Charley Stevens and Morley were good friends and hunting and fishing buddies. They also trapped beaver and otter to supplement their incomes. Morley was also known as a good shot in an area that spawned a good many others. Charley told me it was a pleasure to drive deer with Morley on watch: it was meat in the pot. I hunted a deer and rabbits with him on a few occasions and he enjoyed hearing my little rabbit dog, Fanny, put them around the alders.

I built a small addition on my house and was having a real problem with cutting out the jack rafters. Morley came to my rescue. I have a six-foot homemade level made by Morley that I am very proud to own.

Morley's father, John, a spry man in his 90s, was also our neighbor. We called him Grampa and I enjoyed a visit with him whenever I had an opportunity.

Grampa was a constant source of worry for Morley as he refused to believe he should no longer climb around on his roof. He used to shudder seeing Grandpa up on the porch roof shoveling snow.

Grampa was the originator of one of my favorite expressions. It is a good one to end this discourse with. Neil Barker introduced the phrase to me and I as curious to learn where he picked it up. Here is the story as he told it to me:

It seems John Watson and another man were working on a high, steep roof where toe plates were needed to maintain their footing. Suddenly the plates tore out and both men found themselves sliding down off the roof. They dug and clawed their way trying to stave off the inevitable as they neared the eaves. As they went over the edge, Grampa uttered those famous words:

“Now comes the nip.”