

RILEY PARSONS STANDS TALL AMONG ADIRONDACK ORIGINALS

1/16/96

Riley Parsons was one of the most interesting characters I have ever known. The Parsons name is well known throughout the Adirondacks; it was Riley's father who built the Adirondack guide boat that bears his name.

Riley married Phyllis Trottier in 1928 in Inlet, where her parents operated a restaurant. At the time he worked at the Old Forge fish hatchery.

Riley, or Rip as he was known locally, was an electrician and moved to Raquette Lake to practice his craft at Kamp Kill Kare. Their son, Rick, was four years old at the time. The family remained there until Rip retired, around 1975, and moved back to Old Forge. It was shortly thereafter that I came to know the Parsons.

After years of isolation at Kill Kare, the Parsons wanted to see more of community life. The apartment they chose was ideal; it was over the Forge Pharmacy.

In his chair overlooking the Busy Corner, with his CB scanner at his side, Rip was able to immerse himself in community life. He had no wish to play an active part, but was always ready with humorous insights that often compared the past and the present.

Frequent letters to the local paper illustrated this and I was always disappointed when the latest edition did not have one of his missives.

He not only gained local notoriety, but also attracted a following outside of the area. A big city reporter told him she could make him famous. Rip summed it up this way, "Some skirt says she can make me famous. Hell, I am already famous."

It was only a step to the Maple Diner where Rip could be found most afternoons. It was - and still is - a hub where the latest local and national issues are cussed and discussed.

If one word had to be found to describe Rip, it would be "independent." He was the type that wrote, "I write where I damn please" in the blank space on the 1040 form where it says, "Do Not Write in This Space." No amount of money or entreaty could induce Rip to enter into any activity unless it personally appealed to him.

Rip assisted me many times with electrical repairs from CB radios and telephones to electric fences. I discovered there was only one way to repay his kindness. He loved

bullheads, codfish, and apple pie.

I supplied him with 26 bullheads once. The next day I asked how they were and he said, "Good. Phyllis ate four and I had the rest." My good wife supplied the pie and I bought the codfish. Phyllis had told me Rip loved creamed codfish, but refused to buy it because of the cost.

Bill Weedmark told me of a unique way Rip drained water from his radio room on the second floor after a bad leak in the roof: Rip ushered Phyllis and Rick out of the house and shot down through both floors to the cellar with his 30-30.

It took a great deal to impress Rip. One evening while casting about on his short-wave radio he got a holler from a member of Admiral Byrd's Arctic Expedition. The voice wanted to know if Rip was impressed to be talking with someone from the expedition. Rip told him, "No more so than visiting with someone from Thendara." When the guy asked Rip where Thendara was he said it was about a mile or so down the road. The guy immediately hung up. I doubt that it bothered Rip.

R.I.P. Riley and Phyllis.