

REBA JONES RECALLS A BUSY, POPULATED MOOSE RIVER AREA

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Last week's narrative ended with Reba Jones's grandfather's hotel operation. You may recall it was just down river from McKeever on the Moose River Road.

His name was Frank Smith and he was an accomplished outdoorsman and guide as well as being a successful businessman.

His outdoor pursuit took him to Maine and points north for moose and caribou, as well as to Florida for tarpon fishing. His trophies were displayed proudly in his establishment.

Brother Sam Smith was a successful proprietor of a well-known hotel in Old Forge. The respective hotels were named Moose Head Inn and Moose Head Hotel – a situation that caused a quandary for both clients and owners with fouled up reservations.

Shortly after the bridge was built at McKeever, the road was pioneered through to Old Forge. Grandpa Smith hitched the team to the three-seater buckboard and took the family for a Sunday drive. They were treated to ice cream at Given's Drug Store and bounced their way back home; one of the first trips over the new road.

As I interview the older residents of the area and travel the back country, one truth is becoming more apparent – there was much more human intrusion and activity at the turn of the century than there is today. Many of the state's wilderness areas were at one time beehives of activity.

A trip last weekend to the upper reaches of the West Canada Creek area was a good example. If you knew what to look for, remains of old tote roads, holding dams and logging camps evidence is quite uniform.

The railroad was the basis for much of the human activity that ceased along with the abandonment of rail service. Several stations were left idle and the people who once operated them faded away along with the railroad.

Brandreth Station is one of the most graphic examples of a bygone era that will never be repeated. Once the home of a thriving sawmill operation with all the amenities necessary to sustain several families, all that remains today are the foundations and they are quickly being obliterated by the advancing forest.

We are fortunate here in the northeast in that our elements band together to heal manmade or natural scars or intrusions. If you would like to prove it, drive or walk the section of Old Route. 28 from the Mountain View Motel to Adirondack Tall Timber Log Homes. Abandoned in the early 60s, Mother Nature has quickly laid her claim to one of man's most permanent improvements. As my great-grandfather used to say, "Nothing keeps in the Lord's barn."

Reba Jones gives a description of the upper end of the Moose River Road that belies the impression one perceives as you drive it today. There were several subsistence farms and many more signs of human habitation than are visible today.

She recalled a cluster of homes and a sawmill about halfway between McKeever and Moose River. It was called Harwood Mills and she thought it was operated by an early ancestor of the local Farmer family.

To make a long story short a lot of water has gone over the dam and past McKeever in Reba's 95 years. It makes you wonder if the telephone company made the right decision years ago in not hiring her because her health was poor.