

**KEN RIVETTE: QUINTESSENTIAL EARLY RESIDENT OF OLD  
FORGE  
05/30/00**

I had a nice visit with Ken Rivette, long time respected Old Forge resident, last week. Born in 1903, Ken at 97 is an inspiration to a relative youngster like myself in my early 70s. He still maintains an excellent sense of humor and outlook on life. Succinct in analyzing his situation, he expressed regrets that his memory is not what it once was and he is not able to walk like he used to. Otherwise he feels fine.

My lasting impression of Ken is as the quintessential early Old Forge resident. It is an impression that extends to the whole family when you consider his other siblings. There were the two girls, Frances Kennedy and Edna Burnett, and the brothers Joe, Jimmy, Dan and Floyd. I think most or all were well known to most locals, and I trust they would concur with my impression.

Whenever one carries on a discourse very long with an elder such as Ken (or myself, for that matter), the talk usually ends up comparing the days with the present. Ken explained his philosophy very simply without elaborating or comparing, either: "When I worked we worked at our jobs 24 hours a day. It was our life and we never thought of it in any other way."

It was a policy he adhered to for the 50-odd years he worked for the Old Forge Hardware. It was a job he started on a temporary basis at the behest of Max Parker. Max was working at the hardware for his Uncle Moses Cohen, owner and founder. Ken was there for only a short time when Mr. Cohen convinced him to work for him full time.

Like many young men of his generation, he worked at several endeavors before finally settling on steam fitting and plumbing which became his forte.

Interestingly enough, it was not his years with the Hardware that evoked his most vivid memories and brought his classic sense of humor to the surface. As he reminisced I was treated to a whole new perspective of early life in the area presented in a graphic and humorous fashion.

The way he saw it, early growth was spurred and sustained. The lack of roads and motorized vehicles and the poor condition of the roads there were, left dependable transportation to the railroad and horse. His affinity for horses led him to his first meaningful job at an early age.

Old Forge supported two thriving livery stables that rented horses, delivered passengers

and sold feeds and fuels. They also delivered freight and other goods to the surrounding area. There was Dolan's, operating from the Forest House and Woodruff's, which was located where the present school athletic field is now.

Two teamsters at Woodruff's rewarded his fascination and skill with horses by coaching him in the finer points of the profession. They were Arch Gilbert and Jim Mussel.

Ken justified their support by winning over the stable's most recalcitrant employee. Flossie was a vicious mare that bit and kicked everyone within reach except Ken. She kissed him, did his bidding and went after anyone she thought bore him any ill will. As a result, he found himself as a preteen, a full-fledged teamster delivering goods in the area.

He remembered when the "bushes touched both sides of the road" on the North Shore Road, and the South Shore Road only went as far as Little Moose Lake. Your wagon or sleigh was loaded the night before; you started before daylight and arrived in Eagle Bay by noon. If you had a return load, you might arrive back in the Forge as late as 7 or 8 p.m.

Jim Mussel was a character I had never heard about before, but a man who impressed Ken a great deal. Mussel was a renowned poacher and barroom brawler whom everyone gave a wide berth to. His squatters camp on Nicks Lake Road remained untouched for years after his departure from the area, a testament to his threat to seek retribution on anyone removing same.

I had only a casual acquaintance with Ken, but we did have one interaction with each other. It was on a forest fire in the 60s on the southwest end of Sugarloaf Mountain, east of a small puddle I believe the locals called Pine Pond (or Lake). We were relaying water up the mountain from the pond and Ken manned a relay pump. The pay was short, the hours long and I was hot and dry. Quite a lot of beer found its way up the mountain as a reward for hard work, a situation that did not go unnoticed by Mrs. Rivette. When he announced his intention to go back up the next day she voiced a sentiment shared by a considerable number of other area wives: "What? There was enough beer up there yesterday to put the fire out!"

We all had a good laugh over that one.