

J O H N M A C F I E



Office-based tour guide logging history one easily

takes readers back into digestible column at a time

When Parry Sound hosted its annual winter carnivals, John Macfie always seemed a natural to play the part of that rough and wild mascot Seguin Sam.

And why not? He invented this endearing axe-touting rough-around-the-edges maverick whose character seemed curiously akin to John's own. With his often outrageous on-stage style, dry-witted humour, mischievous antics and flirty teasing with the lovely Seguin Sarah dance hall girls, John's alter ego Seguin Sam was sure to stir things up at any winter carnival event.

"When 1967 was coming up as Canada's centennial, communities were encouraged to have a blast," John recalls. "A recreation committee was appointed in Parry Sound and I was on it."

Just in time for having a blast that first winter carnival in 1967, he invented and sketched an artistic caricature he called Parry Hoot. This stuck until a contest was held three or four years later, and Parry Sound's lumberjack mascot was officially renamed Seguin Sam.

"The character was a lumberjack who arrived on the Parry Sound river drive determined to have a good time," John says. "It was historically correct because in the pine logging days, the boom days, when there were three huge saw mills grinding out lumber down here on the waterfront, the logs were being herded down from the interior by people like him, in a 30 to 40 man crew. The legends grew, of course. Most of the lumberjacks were quiet, home-loving people that would never allow a drink of liquor to pass their lips, but the ones that stood out were the ones who whooped it up and got put in jail."

Seguin Sam symbolized those colourful characters of the pine logging era which slowly began in this district in 1850 and peaked between 1870 and 1920, when Parry Sound became sawdust city.



Seguin Sam assumed a busy social whirl that first winter carnival, becoming a familiar presence on floats in parades and at various community events. Wearing the lumberjack costume of a red plaid flannel shirt, worn mackinaw, oversized sturdy work boots and floppy pioneer hat – as authentic as he could invent based on his research – John embraced the role with gusto.

It was this deep affinity for the pioneers and loggers who shaped the Parry Sound district that prompted John to interview the area's real Seguin Sams over the years. Although few were as colourful as John's alter ego, they were characters nonetheless, all with enlightening lumberjack stories and anecdotes which would one day fill hundreds of bi-weekly *North Star* newspaper columns and 11 local history books.

John's fascination for the real life Seguin Sams began on the Macfie family farm in Dunchurch.

"I was a logger since I was old enough to pick up one end of a cross cut saw," he recalls. "My dad logged every winter, so as soon as we were old enough, we learned. Teaching someone to cross cut saw is very hard work. Once you get good at it, the rhythm is just like walking, but teaching someone on the other end of a cross cut saw is difficult. You're doing most of the work and they're pushing when they should be pulling. My father used to complain, that being the oldest, he had to break his three brothers in on the cross cut saw, and then his five sons, in the next generation. So he spent his lifetime breaking people in on the cross cut saw. He logged heavily in the winter."

During his youth, John remembers developing a strong boyhood distaste for farm chores and demanding expectations for cutting and stacking wood.

"Which made the second world war – when it came along – seem very attractive," he says. "It did to all the boys in the country who'd never been anywhere. This was a chance for adventure."

So at 17-and-a-half, he joined the Air Force and was called just after he turned 18. His service, however, fell short of the adventure he'd anticipated and when he had not been called into action overseas, young John returned home at age 20, disillusioned and aimless, to "drift around trying his hand at various things."

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