



John Macfie photo

John Macfie, left, and Elijah Baxter, at the Baxter family winter camp on the Albany River in the James Bay lowlands, in December 1951. John was travelling the Baxter trapline investigating a rare pocket of marten.

"When the war ended there was a huge vacuum. Industry hadn't had a chance to gear up and it was hard to get a job. A lot of people used their veteran's credits to go to university," he says, remembering vividly, his visit to the University of Toronto.

He considered studying geology there, but found the grim granite-faced towering buildings at the university campus "forbidding" – so much in contrast and far removed from the bush country of the Parry Sound District where John felt in his element.

He picked up a job in meteorology for a while, working as a technician plotting weather maps. Although he learned to type, a skill which would later prove invaluable when he began writing, the job itself quickly became intolerably boring.

"It was a watershed moment when I left that job," he recalls. "I told my brother that I wanted to get out where it really mattered whether it was raining."

At 22, John was ready to return to the family farm and spend a full winter logging with his father.

"When I was drifting around, wondering what the heck I was going to do with the rest of my life, dad said I could log with him during the coming winter."

It turned out to be the winter when John finally became proficient with a cross cut saw, and when Mel McEwen, from a neighbouring farm, would come by to scale their logs for the Department of Lands and

Forests (which later became the Ministry of Natural Resources). John was quite intrigued with Mel's job, so in the spring of 1949, he decided to apply for any chance openings with the Department.

Not only did he get a job, but in the process, met his wife Joan, who was a Lands and Forests employee at the time. John's long career with the Department of Lands and Forests, began with a position with the wildlife branch, scaling logs in the winter and fighting forest fires in the summer.

Later, he accepted a posting with the department at Sioux Lookout working on trapline management in the Hudson Bay watershed. Here, the former meteorology technician found himself at last where weather really mattered.

The fellow who loved his time in the bush, was getting plenty of it with the Department of Lands and Forest.

"Travel in the far north at that time was by snowshoe and dog team instead of snowmobile, because the snowmobile had not yet been invented," he explains. "And dog teams go at a dog's pace."

His travels in the muskeg and on the Hudson Bay coast, afforded opportunities to observe what others interested in natural resources might not see. So he began writing about these experiences for a Lands and Forests in-house magazine called *Sylva*. Outsiders also subscribed to it and one day in 1956, he got a letter from the editor of a publication called *The Beaver*, who to John's delight, offered him his first chance to write for money. In return, John wrote about native life on the trapline and stories similar to those he later published in his 1990 book, *Hudson Bay Watershed*.

After Sioux Lookout, he moved further south to Gogama where he had been promoted to fish and wildlife supervisor, and then from 1960 to 1981, he completed his career as a fish and wildlife supervisor in the Parry Sound District. Although this was a man-

agement position in Parry Sound, it wasn't uncommon to find John out in the bush, at all hours, dedicated to his mandate.

"It was my job to see that people didn't spear pickerel during spawning season and I took my job very seriously," he says, adding. "I suppose the people who would notice the most would be a poacher I came upon in the dark."

In 1981, he retired – at least from the MNR.

Like many in retirement, he chose to combine his hobby with his passion. He'd always had an inexplicable penchant for writing and had acquired a fascination with the daily lives of the area pioneers and loggers early in his Dunchurch upbringing.

Along with other wet-behind-the-ears lads, John remembers working on road crews with the old timers, listening to them "yarning away", bragging about the glory days of the lumber camps and river drives.

"I would start to jot things down," he says. "At first it was just the funny stuff, jokes, but then I got into the whole milieu of logging."

In later years, as he worked in the bush, John was frequently reminded of their stories, so when he returned to Parry Sound in 1960, he seized the opportunity to go back to tape record some of these oldtimers as they talked about their experiences.

Conversations of more than 75 area loggers were painstakingly documented in countless books of transcriptions, before the advent of personal computers.

"And then, when I exhausted that subject, I started branching into life on the farm and early life and times in general" he says. "Some were first generation here. Some of them went way back to 1870. So it was a bridge back into the beginning of time in Parry Sound."

These latter interviews led to the publishing of *Tales from Another Time*, accounts of the pioneer days and the not-so-pioneer days – community life and how