

Tape Recording of CARL McALLISTER done December 7, 1968.

In 1904 HUGH FRASER McALLISTER and his brother ROBERT McALLISTER decided to sell all their holdings in Ethel, Ontario and move with their families to Cockburn Island on Lake Huron. Hugh McAllister and family owned a general store, flour mill and a grain elevator, which were all sold. Robert McAllister had a farm which he sold.

There were 10 children in the Hugh F. McAllister family and 10 children in the Robert McAllister family.

The families, all their belongings and four horses were loaded onto the train to Owen Sound, where they caught the boat to Cockburn Island.

H.F. and Robert McAllister decided to make the big move to Cockburn after getting the Government timber license to log on the island, and take over the mill, general store and several houses.

After living in Ethel, the move and the new life on Cockburn Island was a great change for both families. Neither H.F. or Robert had run a saw mill or logged before.

Two men that had been running the mill when the families arrived, were hired and helped the McAllisters get started. A tug was purchased to tow booms of logs to the mill and to help with the loading of railway ties onto ships. The tug was a big steam tug that drew 8 feet of water and ran on wood as fuel. The wood was usually slab wood from the mill which was piled on deck. On longer hauls a few tons of coal were also carried in case of running out of wood. Carl ran the tug boat and did all boom towing to mill.

Howard McAllister and cousin Russ McAllister worked in store and mill office. Russ would also help Carl locate and set up logging camps on the island. Cockburn Island was 12 miles across and for two winters they had 12 camps working on the island.

There were a few farmers on the island and the McAllisters gave them work and also bought timber from them.

When winter came and before the ice on Lake Huron was strong enough to travel on, there was a five week period when there was no mail or contact with outside world. This was when a lot of the timber was cut and piled on landings or on the beach around the island. The timber was mostly pine, hemlock and cedar.

The larger cedar logs went to the mill for shingles and the smaller logs were cut into fence posts. The men were paid three cents for a cedar fence post.

The smaller pine and hemlock logs were hand hewn with a broad axe into railway ties. For each hand hewn railroad tie the men were paid ten cents.

The loggers who cut ties would carry a one man saw, an axe and a broad axe. One of the best loggers was a man who weighed no more than 125 pounds, could cut and hew ties at 10 cents apiece and make up to 5 dollars a day. Some of the other men would make only a quarter of this.

In the winter time horses hauled logs on sleds to the mill when it was close enough.

The teams of horses would haul the logs to the mill from up to five miles away. Some places there were no roads fit to travel on so horses were used to drag logs to the nearest shore, deck them in piles so they could be rolled into water when the ice melted in spring. The tug boat was then used to tow the booms of logs around the island to the mill.

Carl always ran the tug boat and on longer hauls would have a man with him to help. His helper was an indian from the reserve on the island, the son of Chief Takima. He would fire the boilers. On the long hauls Carl and the indian boy would take four hour shifts at the wheel.

When pulling booms the tug could not move over one mile an hour. If the tug went faster the outer boom logs would ride over the inner logs and they would be lost. Carl would go out to get a boom of logs, sometimes not too far from home, and take a week to get back. (He could have gone to shore and walked home at any time in 2 or 3 hours). If a storm came up they would take the tug into a sheltered bay. ( If there was one). When hauling booms they were never more than 12 miles from mill.

Lake Huron could get very rough and there were also very strong currents in either channel around Cockburn Island. If they were towing through one of these channels when the water was rough and the current was against them, the tug would sometimes stay in one place for an hour, and up to four hours without moving. The current would finally shift and the tug would move ahead. It was in times like this that they were glad they had coal as well as wood on board for fuel to keep steam up.

A lot of times on trips like this Carl and his helper's clothes would be soaking wet from the spray. On one trip Carl got the tow rope wrapped around the propeller shaft which was deep under water as the tug drew 8 feet. They moved all the wood and everything on board to the front of the boat to raise the back as high out of the water as possible. They then put the row boat into the water and worked from it to untangle the tow rope.

The railroad ties that the men cut in the bush were hauled out and piled on the shore near the mill in preparation for shipping, most of them being sold to the U.S.A. The ships that came to pick up the ties were too big to come close to shore, so would have to anchor off shore.

The McAllisters made a large raft out of cedar logs and mounted a steam boiler and engine on it, with an elevator which had a toothed conveyor chain. On the water there was a trough leading to the elevator and as the ties were brought in, the chain would convey the ties up onto the boat. As the raft had to be anchored beside the ship in deep water the problem was to get the ties out to the raft without them getting away. The ties were dumped into the water a few at a time and one inch ropes, hundreds of feet long were used. Someone ( nearly always Carl as he was usually the only one that would do it) would stand in the water up to the waist and fasten the ties together with half hitches.

When the first tie was secured to the rope they would move eight feet down the rope and put a half hitch on the next tie, and on and on at eight foot intervals, until all the ties were joined together. The tug would then pull the string of ties out to the loading elevator on the raft along side the ship.

Carl standing in the water, roping the ties together, would be nearly chilled to death by the time the ship was loaded. (Being chilled in the water so much was probably why Carl suffered with cramps in his legs the rest of his life).

If a storm came up while the loading operation was going on, everything would come to a stop until the weather improved.

The McAllisters would get all their supplies for the winter brought in by boat late in the fall. One winter the boat bringing all their winter supplies was caught in a bad storm and was sunk. Everything was lost. This put the families in dire straights as it was getting close to freeze up. They were able to make one trip with their tug to Gore Bay on the north shore before the lake froze. After the lake was frozen over and the ice was strong enough, they started hauling supplies with teams of horses.

The nearest town was Thessalon, 25 miles across the ice. A trip was to go over to Thessalon one day, load up the sleighs for morning, then bring them down onto ice at the edge of the lake and leave them there over night. Before they left the sleighs for the night, wood strips were put under front runners. If they didn't do this the steel runners would freeze so hard to the ice, the sleighs couldn't be moved in the morning. As long as the front runners had the wood under them the back ones could be twisted loose when they started out.

Carl made all the trips across the ice, with someone else driving the other team and sleigh. Each sleigh was loaded with three tons, coming back from Thessalon. There was always two cracks in the ice between the north shore at Thessalon and Cockburn Island. Sometimes the edges of the cracks would be close together and they could go over them with no trouble. Sometimes the cracks would be a pressure ridge and the ice would have to be chopped to get the sleighs over. An hour or so later these same cracks would open up and have 4 to 8 feet of open water.

On the trips that they came to these open cracks, Carl would walk up to half a mile either way along the edge. He would be looking for a jog in the crack where the opening would be narrower and this is where he would jump the teams hitched to the sleighs.

Except for one time, Carl was the only one who jumped the freight teams over the open cracks. He would drive the team away from the crack for a fair distance then turn them around and get them running, and as they got closer, he would have them galloping as hard as they could go, then jump the crack. When the horses got across they would be tired and ready to stand, so Carl would leave them and do the same thing with the next team.

The horses would always jump for Carl, but if there was any mistake of letting the horses hesitate at the ice crack, the weight of the load would push them in. One of Carl's drivers told Carl that he could take the team he was driving across but at the last moment he got frightened and said "Whoa". The horses got across but the load hit their heels and slid back into the water.

Carl made a ice boat one winter. He had only seen pictures of them, so started out by using the runners off one of the log sleighs. The ice sleigh he made was about twelve feet across at the front runners with a plank between. A mast was set into the centre of the plank and third runner was mounted at the back for steering. Between the mast and the back runner a seat was mounted. Carl sharpened all the runners so the sleigh would not slip sideways with the wind.

One night after the store closed at ten o'clock, Carl took the sleigh down onto the ice. He waited till everyone went to bed and about midnight a wonderful wind came up. He went to the house and woke brother Howard up and told him to get his fur coat on and come for a ride on the lake. They went out on the lake three or four miles and then tacked back. They did this three or four times that night. Carl thought they would be doing up to 60 miles per hour at times.

All the boys thought the ice boat was a wonderful thing and wanted to try it out themselves. Russ and Howard decided to cross the lake to Thessalon and take Charlie Monk along for the ride. The three started of and got along fine till they got away out on the lake and came to an open crack in the ice and the ice boat went into water and sank. They managed to get off in time so they did not get wet. A strong wind had started as they began to walk home and was so much against them they went off course and got lost. They missed Cockburn Island and crossed Detour Channel, which was three miles wide. Howard was so cold he was getting sleepy. The other two had a time keeping him moving and were worried he was going to freeze altogether. The three ended up on the shore of Detour Island and Russ had his feet frozen by this time. They were able to get a fire going and got warmed up a bit. All night they took turns with one sleeping and two staying awake.

When morning came they started walking along the shore, not knowing where they were. After a while they came on an Indian's shack. They told the Indian living here that they were from Cockburn Island and would like to be taken across the ice to Cockburn. He refused to go. The boys offered him more money. Finally he agreed to go, on the condition that they stand on the far shore, and watch him till he got safely back home again. If he got into trouble they had to come and help. He said "If you no do that, I no take you". By this time the weather had cleared and was still very cold. They could see Cockburn Island three miles away across the channel.

The Indian took Howard, Russ and Adam Monk back to the Cockburn shore with a horse and sleigh then told them to watch till he got safely back. If he got into trouble he would wave a red handkerchief. They watched till he got to his shore then walked to the Indian village on Cockburn and got horses to take them another 7 miles to home.

They were a sick bunch of boys when they got home.

Uncle Robert McAllister wanted to go across the ice to Thessalon and take Howard with him. They took Carl's best driving horses for the trip and Carl thought he had explained enough to them of how to cross ice cracks.

Robert decided it would be a better idea to take along a barn door for crossing the ice cracks, so they put one on the sleigh when they started out. They eventually did come a big crack away out on the lake that was too wide, so they put the door down over the open water. They took the horses back a ways, turned and galloped to the open crack thinking the horses would jump the door with no trouble. When the runners hit the edge of the door, the door shot forward under the horses and they lost their footing and slid backwards into the water. The sleigh partially floated with the two horses hitched to it. Both horses drowned. One lived for 15 minutes and the other lasted for half an hour before it gave up.

Carl had taken horses over ice cracks dozens of times without trouble but he did have a team go into the mill pond one spring. A mill pond was kept free of ice in late winter for logs to be floated onto the conveyer. Towards spring the ice would get weak near the edge of the pond. The team was working near the edge when the ice collapsed and the horses went into the water. Carl ran and got a long rope and got a loop around one horses neck and choked it.

A horse will swim very deep in the water, but if you choke it with a rope it will float high and also start to struggle bringing the front feet up high. Two men on the rope can pull the horse to the edge of the ice and when the horse is struggling and throwing its front feet up, get the feet over the edge of the ice. At this time, two men pulling and with the horses help, the horse can be brought up onto the ice.

They got the first horse out and Carl told one the boys to take the rope off and bring it to him so he could rope the second horse. Instead the boy cut the rope and left the noose on the horse's neck. Carl looked around and the first horse was gasping and laying on its back with its four feet in the air. Carl ran and got the noose off quickly and had to put a new loop on the rope to get the second horse. They got the second horse out without any trouble and put blankets on both horses. Carl had the boys walk them for hours as it was very cold weather. After the walking and a good rub down, both horses came out in good shape.

The second winter the McAllister families were on Cockburn Island, Carl got dogs that would pull sleighs so they could get around in the snow. One of the jobs that Carl used the dogs and sleighs for was scaling timber out in the bush. Russ and Carl did all the scaling in the winter as the mill was shut down at that time of year.

Four dogs were used to pull the sleigh when they were timber scaling. One man sat on the sleigh under robes and the other ran behind. The sleigh had four inch wide runners, so when the man behind got tired or the sleigh got going too fast he could jump on the runner with one foot and ride. Traveling in this manner they were able to cover a lot of the island in a short time.

When Carl and Russ were not using the dogs the younger McAllisters used them to go to school during the winter. The children drove the dogs singly. The school was about a mile from home. Most of the other children in the village also used dogs and sleighs to go to school in the winter months.

The children all came home for lunch at noon. The school bell could be heard in the village, so Carl and anyone else that was in the store would run outside as soon as they heard it ring and look toward the school. Forty rods away was a turn in the road. The sleigh dogs would be so keen to get home, they would come around the corner so fast, three out of four sleighs would upset, with kids in the snow bank, and dogs away home.

The McAllisters supplied the men and their families who worked in logging camps and mill with meat. It took about thirty head of beef a year. Some were bought from local farmers but the majority were raised by the McAllisters. Most of the cattle were Shorthorns and were slaughtered as mature beef dressing up to one thousand pounds. The cattle were mostly slaughtered in the winter and cut into quarters. The quarters were frozen and placed in an insulated meat room packed in snow. The meat kept very well this way.

There was an Indian village on Cockburn Island, about seven miles from the mill. The former owners of the mill would have nothing to do with the Indians but this changed when the McAllisters came. Not long after they moved to Cockburn, Carl got acquainted with the Indian Chief Peter Takima who Carl said was a very nice fellow. Peter Takima was given a job right away in the mill and his son worked on the tug with Carl, firing the boilers. A lot of the other Indians were given jobs making ties and other jobs around the mill.

The Indians bought all their supplies at the McAllister store. In the summer the Indian women that came to shop would sit out in front of the store on the walkway. One of them would think of something that she wanted and would get up and come into the store, buy it and go out again. All the other women would look at her purchase. Then someone else would get up and go into the store and do the same thing. They would never spend all their money at one time but make it last all afternoon.

There were a lot of nice things about the life on Cockburn Island, but there were also a lot worrisome and sad times for the Mothers and families.

Lawrence McAllister was killed in the mill about 7 o'clock on the morning of August 5, 1906. He was oiling the machines when his jacket caught in one of the fast moving drive belts. He was whipped over a large pulley and horribly mangled. Lawrence was buried in the cemetery on Cockburn Island.

The mill was completely burnt in 1907.

A fire was burning a piece away from the mill when a strong wind came up and a spark got into the dust in the mill yard. There was a good water system for the mill with fire hydrants around the mill yard, supplied by an engine and pump on the lake edge, but they were unable to stop the fire once it got going.

The mill was open at both ends with a lot of sawdust up on beams and timbers. The main part of the mill was built 15 feet above the ground with the engines, pulleys and drive belts down below. The wind soon spread the fire from the lumber yard into the open mill and there was no way the men could stop it.

The McAllisters ordered a new mill to replace the one they had just lost and before it was delivered, Millers from Melbourn Bay came up and wanted to buy the McAllister's timber licences.

It was decided that the order for the new mill be cancelled and the timber licences sold and the families would all move to B.C. The McAllisters packed and caught the last boat before freeze up in November 1907.

They loaded all their furniture, effects and 4 horses onto the boat to Sault Ste. Marie, situated on the narrows between Lake Huron and Lake Superior. Here they changed over to the C.P.R. Railway.

An old engineer that had worked in the mill wanted to come out west with the families. Robert and Hugh agreed to take him out west if he would look after the horses on the railway car. The stock car that he rode in with the horses took 16 days to get to New Westminster.

Hugh McAllister with Howard, Russ and Lill stayed on Cockburn Island for the winter to clean up their business and keep the store open for a while.

Robert and Jane McAllister, Wilhelmina McAllister came out on the train with the rest of their two families, Mary, Mina, Bill, Elliot, Beth, Jack, Bert and Carl, Eva, Mayme, Tom, Grace, Allen, Anne, Ruth and George. The weather was cold when they left Ontario so when the girls got off the train in their fur coats and went up town in New Westminster, every one thought a new theatrical group had come to town.

Robert McAllister took the families to the Windsor Hotel as soon as they got to New Westminster and booked rooms and meals there. Uncle Robert soon got tired of having all the kids running around the hotel, so he went out the second day they were in town and bought a little house on Ash Street. The next day he sent them all to school.

Carl also went all over the city looking for another house for the H.F. McAllisters. He went into the house at 815 - 4th. Avenue which was still under construction and liked it. It was being built by a Mr. Sands who was a preacher. He agreed to finish the inside and dig part of the basement out. Carl bought the house and as soon as the box car arrived in New Westminster, after 16 days traveling with the four horses, the furniture and all their things the H.F. McAllisters moved in.

During the time they were all living in the Rob McAllister house on Ash Street the kids slept on the floor, in the bathtub and anywhere else they could. Eva remembers four girls sleeping in a row on the floor and the floors being terribly hard. They had very few things till the box car came from Ontario.

They bought a good Jersey cow after H.F. McA. came out in the spring. The cow died not long after from swallowing a hat pin. The day before the cow died, H.F. McA. phoned Carl in Vancouver and asked if he could come home early as the cow was sick. When Carl got home he looked at the cow and couldn't tell what was wrong with it as it wasn't running a temperature, so Carl phoned the veterinarian. The vet checked the cow over and said there was nothing wrong with it. Carl phoned the Vet again in the morning before going to work and the Vet said he would check the cow again. He brought a government Vet with him and they both said there was nothing wrong with the cow.

When Carl came home that night the cow had another spell. The cow would be lying down then jump to its feet, stick its tongue out, bellow, then cough, then she would appear fine again. In one of her spells she finally dropped dead.

Carl had Uncle Jack Elliot and Uncle Rob go to where they had taken the dead cow to watch when they cut her open to see what was wrong. They found a 5 inch hat pin had gone through her lungs into the heart.

Carl's first job when he came to New Westminster was with Williamson and Murdof and the next was with Spencers.

H.F. McAllister bought some land in the Delta two or three years after they came to B.C. in 1907. He told Carl he would give him half the land if he would break it.

Robert McAllister bought a stand of big timber on Scott Road soon after coming to B.C. There was an old mill on the property that hadn't been run for a while, and it was situated about 5 miles out on Scott Road and about one and a half miles before Trunk Road which ran down to Ladner.

Bill and Carl went out to the mill site and started to cut down trees in preparation for getting the mill running. Skid roads had to be fixed up before the mill could start. They bought two teams of horses and Carl hired a man for a while who had two mules. Carl bought the mules and he soon found out that they could work better than any horses that he had ever owned.

This type of logging with large trees was very different from the logging on Cockburn Island. One morning Carl and Bill went out with an 8 foot saw and took three hours to cut the first tree down.

