

Six Months at Hard Labour. by John H. Hughes.

"Six months at hard labour." a sentence of chilling words for any man. But to be given a day of 14 years!!! but I accepted it with ~~calm~~, ~~perhaps~~ ~~with~~ excited anticipation. My crime; loss of interest in school.

School had become a bore, lessons had become rote exercises. My ^{real} classroom had become the L.P. Fisher library, ^{the foundry, mill saw mills, grove, pumping station, round house} I could read ~~half~~ the ~~right~~ ~~books~~ at the old kitchen table at home by kerosene lamp. The favorite position was kneeling on a chair with elbows on the table. Ma would complain about burnt up wicks for as the oil ran out the wick would be gradually turned up to finish a chapter. The old lamp was also a good hand warmer after the fires had gone out.

There ~~was~~ no such a thing as a drop-out then, this term came into use only recently, so I just quit school. I was quite a husky lad ~~for my age~~ and could handle any two boys my own age.

So if I didn't want to go to school my parents said I should go to work.

My father was going in to cook for Harry & Bill Rogers at their lumber camp back of Scofield siding on the CNR they were cutting for Flumming & Gilson mill at Welch

Siding and I was to be a cookie. On the first of Oct

Pa had gone on ahead to Juniper to gather up supplies and I followed in a couple of days. The CPR took me from Woodstock to Bristol where the stage ran into Juniper with a stop at Glassville for lunch. In the summer the stage was buckboard with leather curtains and in winter a sled with seats hauled by a ~~team~~ pair of lively horses. But I went in with the buckboard. The road was muddy, rutted & rough all the way. The driver was ^{wild looking} a character with long mustaches. Every so often he would belt out a song so loud I am sure you would know the stage was coming long before it ever came into sight.

When I arrived in Juniper my father was not there so I went to the boarding house and had supper. The only thing I remember of this meal was the bread was sour.

After supper the men all gathered in the big room off the dining room and sat on benches around the camp stove. ~~Gradually~~ This was in the old boarding house.

They were just building the new one. Gradually the men drifted off to bed and there was only a couple or so left, one asked if I had a place to sleep & I told him not yet. He said I ~~should~~ better not sleep up in the bunk room as it was crowding so I decided to stay where I was. I recall vividly trying to sleep

on a four ~~ft~~ by 1 ft bench and how I shivered when the fire in the old camp stove went out. I was glad when the men began to come in and the fire was made up.

My father showed up, I guess he had not really expected me to arrive and had been at a small bunk house with some friends.

The sleds were loaded up with supplies and we started on the tote road. "Sleds in October" yes there was at least a foot on the ground. It was a rough ride in but we made it in fair time. The camp site was there but no camp so the men got busy and put up a frame and roof. This was to be a board & tar-paper building. There was no time that day to put on the sides but a long upper & lower bench was built on one side, board tables ^{& benches} set on the remaining space & the cook stove at one end. The advance crew was about 15 men to get the camp ^{built &} ready for the main crew of 80 men to come in later. So things were very busy for the next week or so. The cook shack was board & tarpaper with a small addition on one end for the boss & clerk. The main bunk house of logs with benches along each side & a large camp stove in the centre with a hatch above & under the large vent or later sky-light. ^(the only window) Washing facilities was at the end near the door and consisted of two wash basins & two roller towels & a pork barrel for ^{cold} water. Shaving if any was done on Sunday.

with water heated on the camp stove.*

The house for the horses was made of logs. There was another small ^{board} storeroom shack for the teamsters & saw filer. The teamsters slept in a separate shack as they had to get up before the other men to feed the horses.

- ① More supplies came in along with the main crew. The cook house crew was the cook, second cook, lull cook & cookie (me)

The first day the main crew came in (about 80 men) it was found someone made a mistake and had not sent in any forks so I was appointed to walk into Welsh siding about 10 miles for a supply of forks. I was given a loaded rifle as there was danger of bob cats but I made the trip without incident.

* I remember one time I had borrowing the wash tub from the cook house on a Sunny Sunday and taking a bath out doors.

② Each man was supplied with 2 gray wool blankets. There was no mattress, you were given a supply of hay, then you put one blanket over the hay & covered yourself with the other, you rolled up your coat for a pillow. I remember one old timer brought his own pillow. Old men were called "Uncle". Work ~~was~~ for the crew was 6 days a week from dark to dark. The cook house crew worked 7 days.

We were up at 5 AM. The second cook was up at 4.30 to start the cook stove. Breakfast was at 6 AM. While the men were eating the noon lunch was made up & placed in a long wooden box with rope handles. This lunch

was usually raised biscuits, baked beans, white or molasses
 cake, ^{cookies} roast pork or beef. jam and of course tea & the
 boiling pail, plates cups knives & forks & spoons. By noon
 all this would be frozen & would have to be thawed on
 the same fire as the tea was being made. The chickadees
 always new when it was time to heat the kettle

Food was the most basic. Breakfast, Beans, oatmeal porridge,
 bread, fried potatoes, pork chops.

Dinner as in the lunch box.

Supper was the big meal, Boiled potatoes, fresh bread,
 roast beef & pork, ^{baked} beans, sometimes pork chops or fried
 steak. Apple or raisin pie, molasses or corn syrup. & Tea.
 The canned milk had a flavor of its own (St. Charles)
 it was good. It was the only ^{liquid} ^{portion} ^{that} had to be kept
 from freezing. it was kept in the clerks annex. Such things
 as apples were the evaporated kind.

As the fires in the cook house would go out at night
 my father devised a method of making raised bread over
 night; A flour barrel had a row of holes bored around
 the bottom & another row about $\frac{3}{4}$ way up, ^{lighted} a lantern
 was placed in the bottom then the bread pan with the
 dough was placed on the top & then all covered with
 a blanket & coats. so in the morning the dough would
 be ready for the oven.

Meat was brought in it was ~~the~~ sides & was hung outside
 where it froze solid. It was cut up in junkies ~~just~~ as needed
 using an old cross cut saw. This the chickadees enjoyed
 for there was lots of ~~saw~~ saw dust (meat dust)

In the fall they had brought in two small pigs to
 take care the garbage. They became pets of mine

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Their original home was the manure pile at the rear of the hovel but as the manure pile grew the pigs were able to climb over the fence & have full run of the camp. In the afternoons while my father had a nap I would go for a walk down the foot road with my pets following behind talking to each other they would return with me to camp. It was a sad day in the spring when they decided it was time for their demise. That day I took a long walk alone.

One day before the pigs were able to get over the fence I took a walk on Snowshoes thru the woods expecting to circle to my right and come back to the road above the camp, but my circle was too great and I circled around the end of the road, fortunately one tends to unconsciously circle in the woods. so I continued to circle and came back to the road, thinking I had to turn right on the road to reach the camp, not realizing I was on the opposite side I walked until the road stopped. I thought I was on the other side of the camp & if I turned around I should come out at Seaford Siding so I walked & walked until I came to some buildings I did not recognize but to my amusement it was the South side of the camp. I did not tell my father of my experience

Amusements were few, a few card games, no gambling. Some one would have a mouth organ & someone would do a soft shoe step dance. There would be someone who with much coaxing would sing some "Come all you" songs of which the last line was never sung but just recited as if to say "now leave me alone" But coaxing would always seem to be part of the act.

Some would whittle axe handles or fancy ornaments such as chains & fans. I can still make a fan if I have some green cedar. →

The job of a cookee was quite varied during the day but each day was the same and as can be imagined washing dishes was the most appreciated. Dishes were tin cup & plates & tinware, forks & spoons. The breakfast tables would be set the night before. Usually there were help with the supper dishes. To dry the cutlery they were first scalded then put in a beaver bag & two men would shake them until they were dry. We had a couple of Indian boys from Woodstock & they would help with the dishes and entertain us while doing so with Indian songs.

After the breakfast dishes were done. Water had to be carried to fill the barrels in the bunkhouse, teamster's shack & cook house. There was a brook about 100 yards away. You don't fill 4 barrels in a short time.

→ Some of the older men would have their
bibles which they would quietly read and
perhaps try to get some of the younger men to
stop swearing.

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Then came the stone wood. The logs were twitched in in 16 ft. lengths. The Bullcook and I would then crosscut them up in stone lengths. The old fellow would say put some grease on your moccasins meaning he was pulling me as well as the saw. The green hardwood was not too bad to saw, but they would haul in a dried pine for kindling and as the cross cut was set for hardwood it was really rugged when the pine began to warp & bind the saw.

The bullcook also looked after the bunkhouse & stable. and I don't recall that he ever carried any water.

The teamsters slept in their own shack as they had to be up early to get their horses ready for the day. They would vie with each other to see who could haul the biggest loads & be the first one home at night.

There was a crew who iced the roads & provided an extra team on some of the steep hills. Icing was done by hauling water in a square wood tank that had ^{usually with a handle or a counterweighted pole} been filled at a ~~derock~~ ^{derock} & there was a hole on each side over the track with a wooden plug, as the horses moved the hob sleds with the tank along, the plugs would be pulled & the water would fall into the track where it would freeze and make a good slippery road. On the down grades straw would be placed to cause friction to keep the sleds from moving too fast & some times a chain was run under the runners to help hold the sleds.

On some hills they would have old timers, they called them Chick-a-dee as they removed the horse manure from the ^{sled} tracks.

If the crew got down on the ^{saw} cook or the ^{saw} filer there wasn't much to do but get a new cook or filer. It happened some new Diston Saws were being used & they were especially made for hard wood being quite thin & narrow & were not set for a wide cut as you would for soft wood. But the crew was not satisfied and even after an expert from the saw makers filed saws which satisfied the crew & he (the expert) could see nothing wrong with the way they were being filed it took several changes of filers before the winter was over.

I guess Christmas leave of absence ~~was~~ not so new as my father arranged for me to go home for Xmas and I guess he thought I had enough of the hard work. So I picked up an order for my wages & went into Juniper & picked up my \$37.50 This was my full 3 month wage as I had no deductions for socks, milk, axes or tobacco. Then took the stage and out to Bristol & home on the C.P.R. with Mum, Mary, Walter & Urb. (Colin was then in Russell House).

After Xmas, I decided it was time to return to the woods. So back on the C.P.R. to Perth Jct. changed & up the Telique to Plaster Rock where I stayed over night in an unheated room in a hotel with complete toilet facilities in the comode. Next morning I took the CNR to Scofield where I jumped off up to my hips in snow as there was no station there. I walked back in to camp & surprised my father who

Never thought I would return. I remember the look of disappointment on the face of the young fellow who was replacing me.

How many incidents I recall at different times make me wonder it was only six months. We slept in a corner of the cook shack, my father ——— in the lower bunk & I am the second cook in the upper. One morning my father said something terrible was going to happen as he had heard knocking in the night. I don't know whether I told him that I had knocked on the roof over the bunk to see if I could stop my sleeping partner from snoring. X————→

Outdoor toilet facilities were the most primitive, a pole between two trees & a pile of pine cones or birch bark.

Not much mail moved in or out as very few of the men could read or write although we had a clerk with a good education (Huskie) most camps had a clerk with very little education so between the illiterate? men and the clerk you can readily see how ^{am I?} there are so many words of spelling the same name in rural parts of our country.

Oh yes I almost forgot one of my duties was to fill & trim the oil lamps & wash the chimneys. The teamsters washed their own lantern chimneys.

The rich hearty food was a little too much for me at one time & I developed two boils on my left fore

* One night we were all awakened by a loud noise outside & no one wanted to go outside to investigate, but finally my father and one other lit the lantern & went outside & here were the two pigs, ^{dropping away} ~~with~~ a side of beef they had taken from the dingle.