

William Holmes and Son Logging Company: Their legacy to our history

By Judy Carlsen

Large farms along the Menominee River were established in the 1860s to provide food and fodder for the hearty lumberjacks employed to provide pine logs for the Marinette-Menominee lumber mills. In the Faithorn area, at a location called Pembina, the Hamilton-Merryman Company, the Kirby-Carpenter Company, the Ludington, Wells, and Van Schaick Company and the Fence River Lumber Company operated thriving agricultural establishments. Upriver several miles, at the junction of the Menominee and Sturgeon Rivers, the Menominee River Lumber Company operated the historic property known as the New York Farm. Here supplies for the isolated logging camps were produced, stored and distributed. Here the oxen and horses were pastured during the off-season, and some single employees found summer employment.

Into the last half-century these farms were still in operation as family-owned dairy farms, and even now, in 2018, some original houses and farm buildings survive. The Holmes Logging Company Farm was located the furthest north. Situated just west of the Sturgeon River on the old Foster City Road, (now replaced by County Road 569 to the east of the river,) this farm supplied the multiple logging camps of William A. Holmes and Son, who in association with Isaac Stephenson ran operations as far north as Michigamme.

William A Holmes was born in New Brunswick in 1820. He immigrated to Maine at an early age, moving to Menominee in 1856, one of many experienced lumbermen that "followed the pine." He lived in Menominee, active in civil organizations and city government there. He and his sons were associated together in all avenues of the timber trade for many decades. Their company built and operated the logging railroad that ran through Miscauno Island and eventually became the Wisconsin-Michigan Railroad.

The Holmes farm was the site of a half-way house or stage coach stop that was built for the convenience of land lookers and miners doing business from Menominee into the northern reaches of the Menominee Range. This was in the boom days when there was a steady stream of traffic moving back and forth over this rough, dusty road. The log structure was primitive, only one room with fireplace, but was a welcome sight to the weary traveler, a shelter from inclement weather and protection from wolves and other predators.

The Holmes log cabin was taken apart, log-by-log, many years ago by Jake Menghini who recognized it as an important part of our history. He reassembled the structure on his Chestnut Street property to house his growing collection of local memorabilia. For decades he willingly explained these artifacts to Norway students and visitors before donating the building and collections to the City of Norway when he passed away in 1996.

Lately, the author of this little history has become aware of a link between our original Jake Menghini log cabin and Tom King, one of our important local Native American characters. According to Herbert Larson, Sr. of Iron County, author of *Bewabic Country*, and a Holmes descendent, Tom King was a long-time employee of William Holmes, a trusted associate that shared many experiences on the trail and "riding the river" with his employer. It's quite possible Tom helped build the cabin and he almost certainly spent time at the Holmes Farm and at the half-way house.

Once the Jake Menghini Museum has the funds to move this historic log cabin to the Odill property on U.S. 2, it will be exciting to relay the story of the Holmes Logging Company and of Tom King, the native Chief of the Badwater Band of Ojibwe.

Perhaps you or your family would like the honor of funding this community project, or part of it. If so, call the museum at 906-563-5586, or e-mail us at museum@norwaymi.com.

