

George Cobb tapes

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(Tall) Tom Taylor, Curve Lake, recorded by George Cobb, June 12 1966

I am a cousin of short Tom Taylor. My father was just a hunter, hunting and trapping up around Pigeon Lake. Grassy Point was where we used to camp years ago. We used to camp there all winter and never had time to go to school in the winter time, just a little time in the summer. Then we would go back in the fall and camp again in the winter.

We lived in a wigwam of cedar bark, teepee-like, and we had a fire there in the middle. We put 2 logs on each side, and we had the fire in the middle. The smoke goes up through the roof of the camp. There was a hole where the sticks join at the top. You just have to watch if the sparks goes up, you see, as soon as the sparks touch the bark then it would burn. You would have to be ready there to put it out. We did not lose any (wigwams). We happened to see the spark (in time) and had water ready. We threw the water up and put the fire out.

There must have been at least 20 poles in the teepee. It was a great big camp. The whole crew (family) went up, the ones that weren't married. The ones that were married stayed home. Six or eight of us went up.

We used to have lots of visitors from here (Curve Lake) to fish in the winter time, through the ice. Cliff's grandfather (Whetung) used to come up there with a team to get the fish in sleigh loads. I suppose he took them to Peterborough and sold them there. He had a store there. I only remember he used to come and get fish over there. He'd bring the groceries and trade them for fish. We got mink, beaver, otter, coon, muskrat, whatever there was to sell, we sold the skins of them. We ate the muskrat meat and the beaver but not the others except rabbit. I don't eat beaver myself (now) but we used to eat it. We did not eat the otter.

You know, it puts me in mind of an Indian, the beaver. When they are working together they seem to talk to each other, when they are working, building dams, cutting trees down, you could hear them talk to themselves, like.

And then when the beaver is going to fell the tree all the fellows runs away. Only one stays there to let the tree down himself. So everybody is safe when the tree comes down. They are all at it to cut the tree down.

There were times you could sell the fish them days, but the white man got so jealous of the Indian, that the white man took the fishing rights away from them (the Indians). And now, today, an Indian can't go out and catch even a frog. The game warden is right there at the tail of his boat, watching him. I don't believe you could even have a licence. There is open season, July and August, I guess, and they only allow you 10 frogs a day. How could a Christian live and sell those frogs, if he want to sell them.

We took our wives to the camps. They made baskets, sell them to the farmers. I don't have any (baskets) now. There is just the odd one that makes them. There were no doctors then. We used herbs and stuff like that. They used to make cough syrup out of cedar brush and prickly ash and slippery elm. They boiled them together. Not a syrup, a tea, like. The China man says the ginseng is a great medicine for them. They use skunks gall and ginseng together. It's good medicine. They never tell me what it was for. They (the Indians) still collect ginseng round here. They sell it to the fur buyers and the fur buyers sells it to somebody else. They collect quite a bit. There is not too much of it about. It is getting pretty scarce. I worked through Warsaw the time they put the hydro through there. The big high towers, I worked on that, cutting the brush. We started way back past Warsaw and then we moved to Jackson's Park, and we moved from there to Bethany, and then to Sarnia. When we finished there we moved back to Iniskillen. When we finished there we moved to Pontypool, and then back to Millbrook. This was about 1940. Then we moved to the other side of Ottawa. I worked for the Hydro for over a year. I was a kind of a boss there. I didn't have to work. I just looked after the men, told them what to do.

Then, when I finished there or wherever I worked, I worked at Clifford's (Whetung). I go and work there. I don't have to go and look for a job. When I first started in 1908, I am still going over there to help.

In the winter camps, we used snowshoes sometimes, if the snow is too deep. We bought them from the other Indians who made them. They used to make dugout canoes, but not in my time. But I used to see them, the old ones. I don't know where any are now.

I never heard of the old days from my grandfather. He never tell us nothing. He never tell us what they were doing years ago. I never learnt any old stories. Time night comes, they would put us to bed.

My great grandfather, he was an old man. He was 110 when he died. He was just like a kid. We used to have a pup. He would lay down on the floor and the pup would smother him (play with him). He was just like a kid.

No, I don't know any old stories, and I never saw any rock paintings around the country.

I know one mound, like the serpent mound. I know where there is one near here. I am not going to tell a white man where it is. He would go and dig up the grave. You see, a white man, he goes over and dug up Indian graves, and there is nothing said about it, but if I go up to any white man's grave and dig that up, they'd hang me for it. But a white man can do just as he likes with an Indian grave. (I told him they had permission from the band to dig at the Serpent Mounds). Now, they shouldn't do that at all neither. Now, if we get up a council and ask Peterborough County (council) if we can go and dig up a white man's grave, do you think he'd let us? No sir, they wouldn't.

I know just where this mound is. It is an old old one, you can hardly notice it now, the mounds they build. It is not like a snake. It is just round. My grandfather used to tell us, "this here mound, that's where the Indians used to lay to watch the enemies. So if they attack, they are there ready for them (the Mohawks)."

I don't remember if they had any battles here. I guess that must have been 150 years ago, maybe longer than that.

Well, anyway, the French and the English, when they discovered this country, this Indian country, they chased the Indians away and killed them and now the white man owns it all and the Indian hasn't got nothing. Just a little bit of land what he's got, and the white man is still going to crowd him out of that little village.

Pretty soon there won't be no Indian. These children playing around here, if I go and talk Indian to them, they won't understand. They don't understand it. They talk English all the time. They might understand an odd word. They talk English before they go to school. As soon as they are able to talk, they talk English. In another 100 years there won't be no Indians around, I don't think. They might have the name "Indian," but that's all.

Other guys may know more about the old days, this Herb Irons, he used to be around with his grandfather all the time, fishing and trapping.

In the winter camps the women did mostly baskets, but the odd one would do the bead work. We sold the furs in Peterborough. Cliff's grandfather used to buy them and he'd take them in. He used to buy everything. Muskrat used to be around 10 cents. Beaver and otter used to be a pretty good price. I don't remember. Otters were scarce and they are scarce yet. Beaver is coming back again. There are a few around in the village now.

We played the same games when we were children as they do now. I am 81.

I was on the river drives near the Lake of Bays, north of the [ ] at Dorset. There were a lot of little ponds and every little pond had a dam there. They would run the logs down one day and the next day they would open this dam and run them to this other pond (on the water that was stored up in the first pond). So when the logs had gone down, they shut the dam to save the water for the next time. Then they would run their logs right down to the lake of bays. There is one slide there a mile and a quarter long made out of boards, and the water goes on top of this here slide making a trough, right into the lake. The other one is 3/4 mile long. The first one, it was too rough so the logs couldn't follow the crick, so they made this slide.

I forget the name of the lake back there. They dumped their logs on the ice and we took them out to the lake (from these ponds). In the ponds we only used punts. When the last logs come, we'd clean up the pond and shoot the logs down to the next pond, then clean that. Then we'd get down to the last one. The logs were all loose. You can run all over with them logs. When the logs got to the lake, then they made a boom so the logs would not roam around. Then as soon as we'd finished we all came home.

I worked at this for about 3 months (at a time). I did not work on the river very long, 2 or 3 springs, I think. I was more of a dry land man. After that I worked here and there, working for farmers across the lake.

About 60 or 70 years ago they got the bricks for the church. They got the loads of bricks. They put [a thick layer] of straw between them and they put another layer of bricks on top of the straw and another layer, until they had a load. The straw was so the bricks don't break. The road was rough them days.

Then they would bring them across the lake here with a scow. They got the bricks in Peterborough (probably at Curtis Brickyard on the Warsaw road). Across the water was the only way to go to Peterborough, the passenger boat, the Ogemah, used to go by here. She was a side wheeler and came down from Bobcaygeon. She called in here (Curve Lake) in the morning, if there was a passenger going to Peterborough, take them to Bridgenorth. He comes back and goes right down to Burleigh. He's there for dinner, comes back again to Buckhorn, and goes to Bridgenorth again, and if anyone comes home, he dumps them here. Then goes back to Bobcaygeon. That's quite a long trip. He did that every day. They got a stage from Bridgenorth in to Peterborough. But the old Ogemah wouldn't be bothered bringing the bricks to dump them here. She was a great big boat. She didn't have no scow. There was a tugboat, the Lady of the Lake. it belonged to Kelly's Lumber Mill at Bridgenorth. He got his lumber from back of Buckhorn and Deer Bay, Squaw River. The lumber mill has been torn down now. Kelly has still got a big barn there yet where he used to keep his horses. It is further up towards the post office than Blewett's. You see it as you go up the causeway to Bridgenorth but the paint has faded away now. I don't remember that there was ever a sweat house or steam bath in the village.

(He showed me what appeared to be driftwood, finished and polished and mounted on a stand). This is pine root. I cut off the rough stuff first, the mossy stuff. Then I clean it up, sandpaper it, and shellac it.

This small one I picked up coming home from British Columbia. At the last place we camped, I was cleaning up the camp site and I looked around that morning and I picked up that one then, and I brought it home, clean it all up. It is an ordinary hardwood root. It was 2 years ago this spring that I was out in British Columbia, in May. We were just out for a trip. We were gone about 3 weeks. See, I give this to that little boy there, that is going in grade one. I gave it to him to give to his teacher, give away present, like. He won't take it till the last day school. This (indicating the base) is British Columbia cedar. I got it off of Clifford (Whetung). It is the thickness of the floor in the new

showroom. It's 3 inches, I guess, must be a good 2 1/2 inches anyway.