

**“Barney Brindle: A Deep River Pioneer” *North Renfrew Times* 1978/11/29**



**Barney Brindle**

**KORWA  
Bourns photo**

by Mary Fehrenbach

How different life was on the shores of the Ottawa River some 75 years ago.

There was no atomic energy plant, no hydro dam, no highway 17, and almost no inhabitants. There was just the big river and a land full of tall trees from which a handful of hearty settlers eked out a living.

Joseph Bernard Brindle, better known as Barney, was one of those pioneers who came to Deep River when it was still wilderness and learned how to survive in an untamed land.

Born in Petawawa in 1897, Barney is the son of an Irish father, Robert Brindle, and a half-Indian, half-French mother, Catherine Marois.

His mother he cannot recall as she died (probably in childbirth) when Barney was a very young lad. Barney

remembers his father only slightly since he was a prospector and away from home much of the time.

After Barney's mother died, he was placed with the Fischers, an Indian family of the Algonquin tribe. From them he learned their language, their customs and the skills that kept him alive.

They excelled at canoe-building, deer-hunting and fishing. Semi-nomadic, they moved from place to place "looking for the birches", from which they built canoes.

It was by canoe that Barney first came to Deep River, probably around 1902. A small group paddled up the Ottawa River from Petawawa "after the military started building their camp."

Barney can't remember how old he was when that trek took place except that he was "still darn good and young."

He does recall that this area was inhabited by about six families, mostly Indian, who lived in log cabins or log houses. There was also commerce on the river and some stop-overs for traffic on the Pembroke-Mattawa Road.

As a young lad, Barney can remember walking to an old store in a log house on the Wylie Road and lugging a 95-pound sack of flour all the way home.

Before he reached the ripe age of 12, Barney lived in Petawawa, Deep River, Pembroke and Golden Lake, mostly with the Fischers. During this time, he managed to learn to read and write. He spent some time in a school on the Wylie Road and sometime in Pembroke.

But Barney doesn't remember his school days with much fondness. He was not Indian enough to be accepted by them, yet he

could speak only the Indian language. He recalls being tormented by his peers "until I beat them up and they left me alone."

### Lumberjacking Days

When Barney was 12 years old, in 1909, he joined a lumber company and from then until 1940 he spent most of his winters in lumber camps.

Barney will tell you without batting an eye that he was one of the best lumberjacks in the country. "I did jobs with an axe that nobody else could do." Young, strongly-built, hard-working and conditioned to living in the wilderness - Barney had all the prerequisites for a top-notch lumberjack.

But there's one incident that sticks out in Barney's mind when his health and strength failed him. While working in a lumber camp in Northern Ontario, in the fall of 1919, he was struck by the Spanish influenza. Barney recalls being "a very sick boy," not being able to get warm and eating epsom salts by the handful.

Although he tried to go out and cut wood, he just didn't have the strength and finally his buddies loaded him onto the train for Sudbury. Once he reached Sudbury, he still had to walk to St Joseph's hospital. When he got there, he was so sick and tired, he threw himself on the floor and told them "I'm not talking to nobody till I get a place to lay down." They complied, Barney was given a bed and one week later he was better. During that week he remembers "a steady stream of stretchers with dead bodies going past my bed", most of them victims of the flu. Barney's one-week sojourn in hospital cost him \$13.

In 1923, at the age of 26, Barney married a "Deep River girl" Mary Jane Adams (Lucas) daughter of Annie Jane and Benjamin Lucas at the little Catholic Church located close to the present church on Highway 17."

Mary Jane is the mother of Barney's two children, Martin and Mabel (Mrs Cyril Walker).

Mabel remembers that as a child life was "tranquil and happy, although we knew plenty of death." Her own mother died in child-birth while Mabel was still a very young girl.

After a few years, Barney sought and received a dispensation from the Church to marry his first wife's sister, Teresa Adams (Lucas). She too died with child after a marriage of four years. Although his children spent a good deal of time living with their blind grandmother Annie Jane Lucas, Barney did build his own house and he also helped his brother-in-law Dave Adams (Lucas) build his house. The log house preserved on Deep River's waterfront today is that which Dave Adams built in 1931.

By 1940, there were eight houses that comprised the early village of Deep River. These stretched from Cockcroft School to the tennis court. **A History of Deep River** tells us that "Barney Brindle built the

northern-most home of the colony."

### **Crossing Bad Ice**

The incident of Barney's young manhood that he most vividly remembers took place in 1926 when he crossed the Ottawa River on "bad ice". He even recalls the date, April 8.

Barney and his brother-in-law Dave Adams, crossed the river on the ice early in the morning to fetch iron wood for axe handles. It was a beautiful warm spring day, but unfortunately for the two lads, the combination of the warm sun and a heavy, mild, west wind caused the ice on the river to break up.

And so Barney and his friend had to return over what they called "bad ice". They went most of the way on their knees, falling into the water every few feet, climbing out and hanging on, and continuing for what seemed an eternity until finally they reached Deep River and home.

Barney is quite confident nobody but he would have lived to recount this little episode. "Anyone else would have panicked and drowned and there's people still wondering today how I'm alive."

It was tough surviving in this area in the 20's and 30's, particularly once the depression set in. Barney worked at any job he could get and he tried practically everything. He was a lumberjack, a guide, a game warden, a fire-ranger, a construction worker, and even a barber. Mabel remembers that her father always had work of some sort or another.

When work began on Highway 17 in this area, men like Barney were eager for a job. He remembers getting 12 days of work per month on the highway "cause I had two kids".

Around 1939, at the age of 42, Barney quit lumberjacking and from then until he retired, he worked on construction. As a construction worker, he went all over the country - Labrador, Quebec, Newfoundland - but he was back in this area to work on the hydro dam at Des Joachims.

On December 31, 1949, Barney married for a third time and from then until his wife died in 1976, his home base was Windsor, Ontario.

In 1976, Barney came back home o Deep River to live in the Senior Citizens apartment Building at 55 Poplar Avenue. At the age of 81, he doesn't get around much anymore but he still manages to keep himself and his apartment as neat as a pin.

Barney attributes his longevity to "never being mad" and "being always happy". "And I've always been involved in things," he adds. "I've played ball, cribbage, pool, bowling -- I was in every darn thing you can think of. Mind you, I've done a wee bit of fighting in my time too, in hotels mostly."

He's not doing much fighting these days and he's not visiting the hotels too often either. Actually his major excursion of the week is to mass. Every Sunday morning you can find Barney at Our Lady of Good Counsel Church, right up in the front pew.