Mighty Trappers

A collection of Ontario trappers that made an impact in their respective communities and/or Ontario as a whole.

WE WELCOME STORIES AND PHOTOS.
Updated – August 2017
List of Mighty Trappers

LISTED IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER

- Arkwright, Paul, Fenelon Falls
- Beck, Bob, Searchmount
- Bice, Ralph, Haliburton
- Conibear, Frank, Ontario
- Froats, Hubert, Cornwall
- Kenopic, Leo, Renfrew
- Leblanc, Yvon, Dunvegan
- Lefebvre, Albert, Williamstown
- MacRae, Angus, Maxville
- Meek, Elmer, Williamstown
- Sawyer, Benjamin (Jim), Maple Lake
- Sawyer, James, Powassan

STORIES & POEMS
found at the end
Paul Arkwright

Year of birth –

The man from Fenelon Falls

PROVIDED: March 2017
• Began trapping at age 12

• Trapped muskrats with his dad 60 years ago and lucky if they got $1/rat

• Bought his first bicycle with trapping money
• Trapping a family tradition

• Active member of Minden District Fur Harvesters

• Passionate about trapping and is a great spokesman of the trade

• Has an apprentice, Wyatt Watson, who is learning the trade from a master.
Every year the Minden District Fur Harvesters put on a fur show for locals to join them and learn about the trade.

April 11, 2014
Walking the trapline

By Matthew Desrosiers
Editor

Paul Arkwright trapped his first animal, a mink, when he was 12 years old.

“My dad couldn’t skin a mink because they have a little scent on it, and if you want to clear a room, you hit the scent and they’ll be gone,” he said.

So he took it to his neighbour who skinned it for him.

“I didn’t know anything about how you skin stuff,”

That mink netted Arkwright $18 from the local buyer.

“That was big money for that time,” he said.

Aarkin, now 78 years old, said he used to trap muskrats with his dad. If he received $1 per rat, they did well.

“I bought my first bicycle out of mink trapping,” he said. “[Trapping is] more or less a family tradition.”

These days, trapping isn’t as popular as it used to be in Haliburton County, but the Minden District Fur Harvesters, of which Arkwright is a member, are keeping the tradition going.

“It’s still good,” he said. “Maybe not as good as it was back in the 30s when you had to trap to make a living. There wasn’t that much industry around, so you went out and trapped.”

It used to be there were no quotas for beaver, nor were there any zones for trapping. Now, the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) have set up zones and specific areas, called traplines. Trappers bid for rights to certain lines, which can also be passed down in the family.

“If you have a good line, you can get 30-40 beaver off it,” Arkwright said. “Then with your fisher, martins, coyotes and wolves, you could possibly work four days a week if you had time. A lot of us guys around here, we do it to make a bit of money on the side, but you’re working too.”

Most trapping is done in the winter, though some people trap nuisance animals like skunks, raccoons, and red squirrels.

“The fur is no good on a beaver in the summertime,” he said. “You’re just destroying a fur-bearing animal.”

Each trapper with rights to a line receives a beaver quota from the MNR.

“The beaver drives your line,” Arkwright said. “The reason why the MNR wants you to take the beaver is so they can keep the population down and they don’t become a nuisance.”

Trappers must achieve at least 75 per cent of their quota each season to maintain the rights to their trapline.

Once the furs are harvested and prepared by the trapper, they are usually sent to North Bay to be graded. Most trappers around the county sell their furs through the auction house in North Bay as well, while others will send to Toronto. It all depends on who will offer the best prices.

Like any market, it’s demand that determines what’s going to sell. Arkwright said this year, the trappers were advised to trap fisher, martins, muskrats and coyote. They were told otter and beaver wouldn’t sell.

“We target what they want,” he said.

Despite the public backlash fur-wearers receive, real fur is still in demand, he said.

“When I go shopping in Peterborough, Ottawa and Gravenhurst, I go into the stores looking at fur coats,” said Arkwright. “You didn’t see that 10 years ago, but it’s coming back slowly and gradually.”

Some of the biggest fur buyers include Greece, Finland, China, and Russia.

“Fur trapping is still part of the culture up here,” said Arkwright. “The council in Minden, we have 66 trappers that belong to it.”

Aarkin is working with an apprentice, 13-year-old Wyatt Watson. Once Watson turns 16 he’ll be free to trap alone.

To combat the stigma attached to it, Arkwright and the council host a local fur exhibition every year in January. The community is invited to come out and learn about trapping, see how fur is harvested from an animal and prepared for grading.

The Fur Harvesters also put out information billboards and displays in cities like Toronto and Ottawa.

“It’s to show people that the trapper is not all bad,” he said. “At one time, everybody had fur to put around their necks. People are afraid to go out in public, but more people are coming out all the time.”

For more information on fur trapping in the Highlands, visit mindendistrictfurharvesters.com.

A story that appeared in The Highlander newspaper showcasing Paul and the Council.

Published February 2015
Richmond
Bob Beck
1886 - 1974
An unusual Searchmount trapper
Lived off the land in Searchmount (near Sault Ste. Marie) year round in a trappers cabin

Decorated veteran of WW1 - stood at 5ft 4” tall.

Called a “loner” but enjoyed company when they called.

A great cook of sourdough bread and pemmican & loved to make moonshine out of potatoes

Trapped for a living and did odd jobs

Never married

In 1974, he left a legacy of $180,000 for scholarships to East Elgin Secondary School (near London, ON) where he was born & raised
An Algonquin Park Wilderness Legend

Ralph Bice
1900 – 1997

Provided: March 2017
A man with a quick wit!

- His life was full - A writer, sportsman, philosopher, lay preacher, mayor and raconteur.
- Ralph Bice was born in a log cabin in 1900. His father was an early park ranger and trapper of Algonquin Park.
- Lived for 86 years in Kearney, Ontario with wife and six children.
- Died at age 97 in Burk’s Falls
• His name is synonymous with Algonquin Park whose family has lumbered, fished and trapped since the 1870s.

• Spent most of his life in Algonquin Park.

• Was a guide in the park since 1917 – thought he had gone to heaven!

• Known as “the Old Man of Algonquin Park” and “King Trapper”.

• Retired in 1990 at age 90.

He has a lake named after him in the park!
His trapping cabins in Round Lake
Algonquin Park
He was president of the OTA from 1954 to 1960.

He was the first recipient of the Lloyd Cook Memorial Award presented by the Fur Institute of Canada.

In 1997, at the Annual Convention of the Fur Harvesters Auction, he became the first inductee into the Trappers' Hall of Fame.
In 1985 when he became a member of the Order of Canada, Ralph Bice did not allow the occasion to cramp his wit and he told fellow recipient The Right Honourable Pierre Elliot Trudeau that he (Trudeau) was the "Luckiest fellow in this room". When Trudeau asked why, he said "Because there is only one trapper in this room and you are sitting next to him."
Some of the books he wrote.

In his twilight years and surrounded by the collectibles and the tools of a veteran outdoorsman, Ralph reflects on a long and rewarding life.
Frank Ralph Conibear

1896-1988

The inventor of the Conibear Trap!
We’ll call him one of ours!

- Born in England and immigrated to **Ontario** at age 3 with family
- Lived in Orville, Ontario until age 15 when family moved to North West Territories
- Learned to trap there & supported his family
• In the 1940s, the Association for the Protection of Fur Bearing Animals (APFBA) was formed in BC; Miss Clara Van Steenwyck became vice-president.
• Their main focus was to fund the development of a humane animal trap.
• Van Steenwyck, an animal welfare activist who knew nothing about trapping but was keenly interested in finding a substitute for the leghold trap, heard about Frank Conibear’s work and decided to back his next attempt.
• She provided $800 for a patent and also to have more prototypes built.
He was unhappy with the results of using a leg hold trap. He wanted to create an alternative that would kill the animal instantly.

In the spring of 1929, he took an idea for a new type of trap to Edmonton, Alberta, where he paid a mechanic to make prototypes from tempered steel.

With funding from APFBA and help from Eric Collier, a BC trapper, the Conibear trap was revamped into what we use today.

The Conibear trap was invented in 1957 by Frank Conibear.

He sold his patent to Animal Trap Company of America in 1958 which was then mass produced and sold to trappers across North America.

“I have a dream – a dream that someday my trap will become the SPCA of the forest.”
Manufactured by Victor as the Conibear in the late 1950's.

- Original trap of 1950s
- Today’s trap

Frank's name is now in the Canadian Dictionary for the invention of a humane trap.
A man with many titles

- He was a trapper for thirty years
- He was also a forest ranger
- In 1917, he was drafted in WW1 so he could instruct the army how to travel by sled and use snowshoes and survival technique. He was sent to Quebec.
Almost completely deaf, he suffered Scarlet Fever as a child.

He moved family to Victoria, BC and began writing in earnest.

He sold one of his books “The Wise One” to Walt Disney about 1964. They later made an hour long show. It was a story of a black beaver and his life.
ARTIFACTS

Frank Conibear

they collect the artifacts to study the past.
out of the bone fragment, chipped stone and delicate
cedar weave is written a history long forgotten.

in all this where is the truth?
what is the history?
maybe history should not be the question,
for history is written
not passed on in a story at the bighouse,
or in a lesson to the young.

yet while the archeologist’s artifact
and the historian’s document
remain important,
too often, the record shows the history
from the historian’s own living eye.

the truth is perhaps
in the elders who remember,
who are living and looking to the young.
what can be comes from
the spirit of the past,
the wisdom of the elder,
and the new strength of the young.

the history is alive,
not to be found in an old site, but
present in the people.

and when the record changes to tell
a more accurate “history”
or our people, then the true
spirit of our past, present and future
can be given,
and in return valued.
Raoul Denonville

1893 – 1970

A River Valley Mystery

PROVIDED: March 2017
A woman pretending to be a man

- Lived the life of a man but was really a woman … the reason is a mystery
- Was a lumberman and trapper
- Came to River Valley from Quebec
- Lived a very humble & meager life
- Spoke only French, was quiet & kept to her/himself
- Died with this secret
It will continue to be a mystery!

- Story and photos provided by Wayne LeBelle, reporter for the Nugget Sturgeon Bureau published April 1, 1971
Hubert Froats

1937 – 2015

A Passionate Trapper

PROVIDED: March 2017
• Born and raised in Winchester, ON
• Was an instructor for the OFMF (then the Ontario Trappers Association)
• Was a fur grader for Fur Harvester back in the day.
• His home was a drop off point for locals shipping fur
• An avid trapper who loved telling stories
• Ate what was trapped & cooked wild game for special occasions
• Passionate about the outdoors, loved to trap, hunt, & fish with his wife Darlene of 57 years.
A man with a big heart

- Farmer in Apple Hill, ON & lived in Stormont County.
- A mechanic by trade
- Trapped on many private lands for farmers dealing with nuisance beaver
- A real family man, father of five children
- He had fur coats and hats made for all his children who wore them with pride and are now passed down the generations.
- He had raccoon hats made for all his grandchildren.

Hubert’s workshop with oldest Granddaughter Christine
Being outdoors was a family affair!
La famille Giroux

..., Maurice & Alcide
Maurice Giroux - Canadian Champion and Winner of the Beaver Skinning Contest 1965
Alcide Giroux
STORY TO FOLLOW AFTER THIS RENDEZVOUS
Leo Kenopic

Year of birth -
Renfrew’s Outdoorsman

PROVIDED: March 2017
Life long resident of Ottawa Valley (Renfrew)
Farmed all his life
At age 12 began trapping on his and neighbouring farms
Had a registered trap line until health failed
“Trapping is hard work but I loved it!” he stated
Passing down his knowledge and passion to great nephew Ethan Kenopic
Leo is in centre photo in 2009, was awarded the Hilbert Enright Memorial Award from the Renfrew Fish & Game Club for being the oldest successful hunter bagging a 132lb doe.
Yvon Leblanc

1941 – still kicking!

Founding member of Glengarry Trappers council
Trapping the beaver

- Trapping for 40 years in Dunvegan, St. Isidore and South Nation River watershed.

- Mostly beaver, muskrat and fox as nuisance animals and for management purposes.

- Angus McRae taught him method to use for beaver drowning sets. A great method ensuring beavers were caught/drowned and no one stole the traps.

- A barber by trade – he remembers in 1972 getting $8-9/muskrat while he was paid $1.25/haircut.

- Had to give up trapping due to heart health issues.
Albert Lefebvre

1953 & still kicking

A history buff

PROVIDED: April 2017
• Began trapping in 1970s.

• Loves traps and everything to do with trapping.

• An avid collector for over 20 years (traps, vintage, fur trade items).

• Created a **Vintage Trap Fair** five years ago where 20+ people participate. Held first Saturday in June at Williamstown Fairgrounds.

• Collector of many Canadian instant kill traps & pieces.

• Claim to fame: has several early Frank Conibear traps
Angus MacRae

A Glengarry Trapper’s Life
1921 – 2008

"Whit's fur ye'll no go past ye."
Gaelic for ‘whatever is meant to happen to you, will happen to you"!

PROVIDED: March 2017
Born and raised in Glengarry County, Angus MacRae was proud of his Scottish heritage. Coming from a farming background, Angus had a passion for the outdoors and a love of the land.

His father, a farmer and trapper, taught Angus at a young age the inner workings of being a good land steward. Like many boys, Angus earned extra money by trapping locally.

He recounted earning $1.50 for a muskrat skin while his dad earned $1.25 for a veal calf.
During the depression, Angus financially helped the family farm by trapping and did so for all of his adult life.

While trapping in Kenyon, Roxborough and Finch townships, McRae was contacted by the provincial government and was made the first official trapping instructor.

Angus was an avid trapper and was always one to showcase the trade and share stories with anyone who stopped to listen.

Angus was also involved in tanning and taxidermy work.
Recognizing Angus as an important local legend, Ronna Mogelon made a short film about his life as a trapper in Glengarry which can be viewed at the museum.

Angus’ cabin was built in 1880 and was a two story log house measuring 20ft by 24ft aptly named “Coil Righ” – pronounced “coil-yur-ee” gaelic for King’s Bush. It’s humble beginnings were that of a home for a family of five and then moved to the McRae property to be used as a trapper’s cabin in 1979.
Angus’ trappers cabin was donated and moved in 2005 from Maxville to the Glengarry Pioneer Museum in Dunvegan along with his much loved traps and memorabilia. The collection of more then 1,500 items showcased his 70+ years of trapping.

It was officially opened August 17, 2008.
David Elmer Meek

1909 – 2005

A Glengarry man with a keen sense of smell!

PROVIDED: March 2017 – by daughter Dorothy Meek
A descendent of the United Empire Loyalists

Lived in Glengarry County his whole life raising his family.

An avid trapper – made his living in the trapping industry and farmed.

Instrumental in establishing the Glengarry Trappers Council.

Owned and operated a trapping store (Glenbrook) from 1972-1987 where supplies (traps, lures and such) were sold across Canada & United States.

Made his own lures. Came up with fancy, smelly recipes that worked!

Post office complained many times about parcels he was shipping caused by the smells they emitted.
Was an extremely knowledgeable and successful wolf trapper thanks to his lures and years spent in the bush. The Ontario government would pay him to trap wolves in the Calabogie area as well as other locations in Ontario.

Highly respected in the trapping industry.
• Made ash backpacks which were highly sought after.

• Held “Trapping Days” where seminars were offered including Hudson Bay representatives. This was open to trappers from across the continent.

• Was involved in trapping well into his 80s until his health declined.

• Died at age 95.
A great story which appeared in Cornwall Standard Freeholder about Elmer’s Lures

Published March 1978
Benjamin (Jim) Sawyer

1873 – 1960
Maple Lake
• Also know as “Long Ben”
• Could not read or write
• An active member of his community
• Reeve of Stanhope Township from 1911-1930, 1939-1938 & 1948-1950
• He spent three terms as county warden
• Brought telephone to Haliburton County
• Very generous man
• Ben was a Master of the Orange Lodge (#1406) along with Charles Taylor, N. Linton, H. Taylor and E. Sawyer between the years of 1907 and 1926.

Jim Sawyer (standing) with cousin
• A real rebel
• Followed family tradition of trapping in Algonquin Park
• Was arrested by Park Rangers for trapping & hunting violations
• Raised family in small community of Maple Lake (now gone)
• He built & operated Maple Lake Lodge during the Great Depression; a lake in the southern portion of Haliburton County, Ontario
Ode to Long Ben

The beaver ponds will know him no more.  
The lakes are hushed and still.  
Only the wind for a requiem  
Echoes down the hill.  
His guns and traps are gathering rust,  
Time, his paddle mars,  
For Long Ben has crossed the last portage  
Where his deeds are writ in the stars.

A tribute written by Nila Reynolds.
James Sawyer

1838 - 1930
Powassan
Spent 30 years as a ranger at Algonquin Park
Lake named after him in the Park
Was famous for his trapping and keen knowledge as a woodman
Covered many rivers and lakes in the Park
Father to Benjamin (Jim) Sawyer – another avid trapper in this collection
Sources of information

- Paul Arkwright
  - Provided by Paul himself
- Bob Beck
  - Provided in story by Ralph Bice & website records
- Ralph Bice
  - Provided & from Algonquin Park history
- Frank Conibear
  - Story provided from newspaper article
  - Websites (museum, book lists)
- Raoul Denonville
  - Provided from newspaper story Nugget Sturgeon
- Hubert Froats
  - Provided by Jordan Brunet & family
- Leo Kenopic
  - Provided by Willis Deline
- Yvon Leblanc
  - Provided by himself
- Albert Lefebvre
  - Provided by himself
- Angus MacRae
  - Taken from Dunvegan Museum records
- Elmer Meek
  - Provided by Albert Lefebvre
- Benjamin (Jim) Sawyer
  - Taken from Paul Arkwright and newspaper clippings
- James Sawyer –
  - Taken from newspaper clippings provided and Ancestry.ca
Trapping
Poems & Stories
A Trapper's Story

By: Art MacPherson
It’s a lonely life up here in the north
Where the wolves and grizzlies roam
Where the nights are black as charcoal
And a small log cabin’s my home.

But I love this way of living
It’s the only life that I know
Me and the lynx and the arctic fox
Competing for life on the snow.

One is the prey, I think that’s them
And the hunt, is my only thirst
I’ll hand their pelts on a stretcher soon
But I’ll have to catch them first.
I’ve come to know their habits
And most of the time win the game
But they’ve learned my tricks a bit also
And they even know my name.

Some call me another mad trapper
But that doesn’t freak me out
This way of life I have chosen
Is the best one, beyond a doubt.

The frost at night surrounds my cabin
‘til the door it freezes shut
Inside we’re as cozy as bugs in a rug
Me and my long-haired mutt.
The bustling world that lives out there
A thousand miles away
Can have that life they think so fair
In their misery and dismay.

I sometimes ask who’s the trapped
The fur-bearing beasts or me
‘cause I just can’t leave this home in the wild
A slave to it I must be.

For I cherish that cold in my nostrils
And sounds that no human has made
The howls and growls of predators
Echoing through mountain glade.
The storms and shows of nature
Aurora and lightning displays
Icicles dripping and northern ice ripping
Down rivers, in awesome arrays.

Then that quiet that cannot be measured
By even the best human ear
A leaf hits the ground and its own little sound
Is registered so lour and clear.

What makes me stay here, a hermit of sorts
In a world unlike any other?
No kin or friends to converse with
Parents nor sister or brother
A secret I’ll spill, please do guard it
And never to others impart
Up here I must pine, as I check my trap line
A man with a sad, broken heart.

The love of my life, my young darling wife
Was taken from me in her prime
Her death sentences me to this lifestyle you see
With no further regard for time.

No other will ever that feeling replace,
Or her beauty outdo in my eyes
So I’ll check one more trap, and snowshoe some more
‘Neath the star-speckled northern skies.
Saturday, May 19, 1888 - Page 5

Last fall two local trappers, McMillan and Golden, left Edmonton, N.W.T. for the Athabasca and Pembina Rivers. They lost their provisions, severe weather made hunting impossible. They boiled their furs and ate them and waited for death. Golden died April 20. Ice soon began to move and McMillan drifted down in his canoe, reaching Athabasca Landing in a most pitiable condition.
Muskrat Trapping

Poem by Raymond Farrell

Widower, Father of 2, Grandfather of 3, Doctor
Perth, Ontario
Written in 2015

SOURCE: https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/muskrat-trapping/
I remember hearing
How my grandfather
Would take to trapping muskrats
Something to do in the winter

He'd earn a few dollars
But the hides
Weren't worth much
For all the skinning
And preparation required

But to top it all off
He usually came down with pneumonia
Spending more on medication and doctor bills
Than he made on the muskrats
Finally, my grandmother
Put her foot down
Come one winter
When he went to look for his traps

They were long gone
Because she'd sold them
And that was the end
Of the muskrat trapping.
Limericks

Always good for a laugh!
There once was a man named *P’ti Loup*
Who set traps up on Manitou
Said he with a grin
While swallowing a gin
Caught the beaver who ate my snowshoe!

There lived a trapper named Chester
Whose bad reputation in Dorchester
Was due to this fact:
The muskrats that he trapped
Outsmarted their brainless molester!
A big beaver built a large dam
In a pond where he ate and he swam
He got caught in a trap
With a big sounding snap
That’s the end of that pond’s logjam.

Glengarry’s Elmer Meek made trap lures
That smelled worse than any pig manures
When he shipped it all out
The post mistress would shout
“That stuff ain’t no appetizing epicures.”
A big burly trapper named Monk
Lived his life in a one room bunk
With hair & beard flapping
You could hear him snapping
“Who let in that gosh-dang skunk!”

The life of a trapper is hard
Just look at all their hands; all scarred
In the cold, sleet and rain
Setting traps for little gain
Is what makes them truly diehard.
Created by

Carmen Cotnoir & Sue DeRochie
with input from the OFMF Heritage Committee & members at large.

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