

# McArthur Falls before the Power House

By *Marcel Pitre* - c1942

McArthur Falls, like the many water falls on the Winnipeg River, was a place of appealing, unspoiled beauty. A place where one could clear one's mind while gazing at a mighty river's surging waters. The calm, visually smooth appearance ahead of the drop, did not suggest the turbulence that was to follow as it rushed forward to thunder to a lower level. It will collapse on the rocks and boulders below to form a white foamy highway, bordered by high walls of a green forest. The river will smooth itself out again before challenging its next adventure. Yet, while being saturated in chaos and roar, one found tranquility, a place where the woes of the day could be cleared away...into those irrepressible currents.



McArthur Falls, the enchanting always-changing Silver Falls, and beautiful Pine Falls were all included in a short distance of twenty miles or so. These were the cascades that I had the pleasure of viewing in their natural state. The tailraces of the power plants cannot match the natural magnificence of what has been lost. Taken as a whole when thinking of waterfalls, progress does not manifest itself as a tangibly desirable thing. It does not have that visually pleasing element where you can observe, wonder and search your mind for the day's woes, to be deposited, yes - deposited into those very same waters and be swept aside.

The stop at McArthur Falls was highway accessible on the way to Pine Falls, about six miles north of Lac du Bonnet. Original owner, Art Rosenberg, carried on a business for the tourist trade, keeping a small store as well as a few small cabins. He may have had boats to rent as fishing was one of the main attractions. I remember the old gas pumps that necessitated hand pumping the amount of fuel wanted to a high glass tank, then draining it by gravity to your car. There was room

at the back of a rustic store that may have been used for sleeping or dining, very small. A big old yellow building stood back away in the trees where the Rosenbergs lived prior to selling to Bud Craig and his father. The new owners, subsequently, erected a home to accommodate their needs.

There was a treed passage to the Falls; it was not wide enough for cars, thus providing an attractive, pleasing walk for pedestrians. Bud Craig kept a boat above the Falls to ferry people to their cabins along the river, Lac du Bonnet lake, or to the islands. The Eaton Company maintained a summer place close by; they too had used this method to reach their properties. A number of families lived in the adjacent areas that were later flooded. Two of these come to mind. The Eggilstons, a grain exchange businessman's summer home, and the Crosiers.

The Falls, by Blue Berry Rock, was a place of excitement within a distance accessible to most with cars, or even those with bicycles. A place where people from the Lac Du Bonnet area would congregate at times. People of all ages gathered for picnics, fishing, or just to meditate, explore and wonder at this marvel of nature. Young lovers knew the place well (they too came to explore and wonder at the marvels of nature). I remember we called McArthur Falls simply "The Falls". A majestic granite out-cropping with an abundance of blueberries on its very top, was another magical place. Blue Berry Rock is situated just across the road from where the Falls had been. The two together became the reason for a trip organized by our school teacher, for our class. We were to be all ready, complete with our lunch and assorted fishing gear at the school, Sunday noon.

My family's finances dictated that there would be no ride for me unless I could somehow buy, borrow or steal a bicycle by the appointed time. The first and last options were out of the question, though I gave considerable serious thought to the last. Who would I talk to for the middle option? It happened that a neighbour, Mike, had purchased a new two-wheeler some time before. His farming parents and he lived about a mile from my home. Sunday morning was the time to venture out to make that request. It had rained that night and walking across that one mile of grain up to my waist had me as wet as any fish in the "Falls". The unequivocally abrupt answer when I got there was ...No. And as I turned from the firmly closed door I could see the object of my desire parked against a shed. Thoughts careened in my mind of how to have that bicycle follow me without being observed. Maybe a quick visit later? But how do I effect some distraction? These thoughts desperately darted about. The return trip home was a bit wetter, tears flowed.

During a change of clothes and a walk to church I became resigned to my fate. I would not be going. The Lord must have watched me, heard my wailing lament and had pity, for as I arrived at my destination another friend, Wilf, wheeled up and agreed to my request immediately. My prayers flashed from desperate appeals to a fervent thanksgiving, complete with a contrite contrition and a sincere promise that I would never, never ever consider stealing again, no matter the reason, not even another ride with my classmates.

The day was a bright one. Blue Berry Rock's abundance made up for the lunch that I did not pack. Neither my teacher nor my classmates knew naught of what had transpired and we all happily expressed the notion of another ride at a later date. I pondered seriously, could I sustain another period of agony to find the necessary wheels...without remembering the sincere promise I

had made that morning, after a fervent thanksgiving, complete with a contrite contrition. A second school class ride did not materialize...all was well!

In 1952 Manitoba Hydro, continuing its program of progress, started the sizable operation at McArthur Falls. Construction implicated the region around the Falls, regards to flooding. Many acres of land would have to go under water in order to build this new power plant. Unfortunately the little tourist business at the Falls was slated to be expropriated and any further upgrading there was shelved forever. Bud and Donna Craig would be the last owners of a superb recreational area close to a thriving community with unlimited access to thousands of permanent dwellers, summer cottages and day or weekly tourists. The owners lost a business but the community lost a great place to visit and enjoy.

The land around the store and houses had to be cleared of all buildings and trees. It is ironic that the persons most immediately affected, the Craig's, would be the ones hired to make these changes. The end result was a berm or dyke extending from Great Falls towards Lac du Bonnet. It would encompass the Falls property within its embrace and as the waters rose, the place of my youth's first long bicycle trip with my classmates, washed away...was no more. Progress is not a bad thing in my mind; we need it to survive, to generate our potential. Although it does not destroy our memories, it does prevent our children from enjoying and seeing the beauty that was...*Mrp*