

SAWMILL FORUM

CASEY
CREAMER

SAW
DOCTOR



While You Wait

When I first started hammering saws for a living, it was quite apparent that the trade of saw hammering was supposed to be a big secret. The reason for this stupid and absurd secrecy was mostly about job security. Of course there were some who might have worried that a little bit of knowledge in the wrong hands can be dangerous, but the real fear seemed to be that if someone saw what you were doing, they might be able to do the same thing and therefore put you out of work.

Since there were a couple of saw doctors from the Midwest who recognized the need for proper saw repair techniques and were willing to let their secrets out by teaching me and several other people, I thought it was my duty to never take part in keeping this trade a secret. As many of you know, (especially the successful saw doctors who started their training through me) I have at least lived up to my commitment of secrecy busting.

In keeping with this theme, early on in my career as a budding saw doctor I made the conscious choice to allow customers to wait with their saws while they were being serviced and watch the entire process unfold.

One issue was that it saved them a trip as long as they were willing to make an appointment in advance. The customers seemed to like the idea of saving a trip as many of them had to travel a considerable distance to get to my shop. But many of them seemed to be genuinely intrigued by the thought of possibly getting to see this mysterious black art being performed right in front of their very own eyes.

Once they got their chance to watch the process, most of them quickly discovered that there wasn't anything so mysterious about it and any perceived artistry was in fact replaced by science and physics. Right from the start I thought that it would help a lot of customers to gain an appreciation and basic understanding of what was being done to their saws to enable them to better understand what they were doing to their saws during the sawing process.

After all, most sawmillers are naturally mechanically inclined and therefore curious about any mechanical process. Of course while waiting with their saws they also got the opportunity to ask me all sorts of questions about saws and sawmill operations. Of course, when you ask any two saw doctors a question and you will get at least three opinions.

In my years of hammering saws while customers waited and watched, the conversation wasn't just limited to sawmill topics. Through the years my customers and I have had many discussions that could have saved the world by solving all of our problems including economic, political and even moral issues when we were in the mood.

I will say there were times when a few sawmillers would make a customer waiting appointment, show up on time, and then instead of hanging around to watch me go through my paces, they would go tour the area wineries or hike the gorge in Watkins Glen or just tour the area for a while. I was never insulted by this behavior but I have to admit I was at times surprised that any sawmiller would give up the opportunity to watch this mostly unknown process and talk saws with the so-called expert. In some cases they had done that before, so now they could easily justify local sightseeing. And of course many of them brought spouses who didn't want to wait in the truck, and didn't have any need to watch the process. Some wives went off on their own while others dragged their husbands along.

Don't get me wrong. I am not saying that I was the first saw doctor to let customers watch, but I think I was the first one in the region to actually encourage it. I know that some of the old timers would let certain customers watch if they really played their cards right. For example I actually got to watch the great (and now deceased) George Lorimar from Norwich, New York. He was delightfully cantankerous and pretty much refused to teach anyone, but if you talked to him in a certain way, you could talk your way into a spot on the observation deck.

I would say that in his day he was possibly the best hammerman in the region. And in fact he kept right on hammering

saws well into his nineties. He also kept track of every saw he ever did in little spiral notebooks. He had quite a collection of them. I often wonder what ever happened to George Lorimar's notebooks. I hope someone got them and is preserving them in some fashion as an important part of the history of saw hammering. I believe he worked as a pattern maker for Ireland Mills when they were in Green or Norwich (I can't remember which one) before he started hammering saws. I assume he was mostly self taught because he had a few elements in his routine that nobody else was doing at the time.

That includes the use of a test arbor. He would run what he thought might be a finished saw up to speed as a final check. In that process he checked two different things. He would check the tension not only by looking for a tension wobble when up to speed, but he would also briefly jam a broomstick handle into the guideline at the front of the saw to see exactly how the back of the saw would react while at speed. The other thing he would do was to turn the saw by hand to check to see if there was any extra wobble in the saw that would indicate a leveling problem. If there was a problem, instead of taking the saw back to the bench, he had a hand held anvil that hung on a chain from the ceiling. He would grab a hold of that anvil with his



left hand and hold it on one side of the saw. Then he would swing his hammer while the saw was in the vertical position to remove any lumps and bumps that might cause the saw to have a leveling wobble. Quite a genius for his time.

Questions about sawmills and their operation should be sent to Forum, The Northern Logger, P.O. Box 69, Old Forge, NY 13420, FAX #315-369-3736.

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