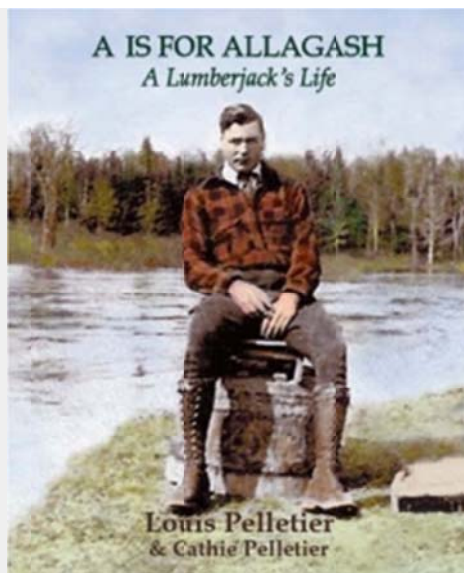


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A is For Allagash: A Lumberjack's Life

Louis Pelletier and Cathie Pelletier

Northern Maine Books, 2010

I've long been an admirer of Cathie Pelletier's Mattagash novels. In *The Funeral Makers*, *Once Upon a Time on the Banks*, and *The Weight of Winter*, she creates a fictional territory as rich as Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County. She knows and loves the Mattagash country and its people; they're so far north that the Acadian and Scottish influence is greater than that of the Yankees of southern New England. She is also capable of having sport with them; she is funny, wicked funny.

So I was intrigued to learn that another view of that life and those people had been published, this time in the words of her father, Louis Pelletier. Cathie's name is on the book, not as the author but as the interviewer and compiler of the tales. The book is *A is for Allagash*, the place name proudly in title, not thinly disguised as in the daughter's novels.

Louis, now at age 90, tells stories of a world long gone, a world without indoor plumbing, electricity, telephone, or even a bridge across the river. His father operated a ferry across the Allagash for 37 summers; in winter of course, they'd walk or drive across the ice. Louis describes with remarkable clarity and a certain wistfulness a world where moonlit ice skating (on homemade skates, mind you) and fiddle music were the entertainments. He tells of horses, crosscut saws, log drives, and boat building. In the section on yarn, which is primarily about the hand-made socks, mittens, and even long johns they wore, he writes:

*That winter we went to visit
Grammie Thibodeau we were in*

a horse and sleigh. I remember seeing Grammie at the spinning wheel, spinning yarn. We spent that night with her and when we left to come home the next day, it was so cold that my father broke alders and bushes and made a cab for the sleigh. Then he put blankets over that. And he put rocks in the oven to get warm and then put them in the sleigh. Those rocks were our heaters back then. I don't remember who was with us for kids other than me and Maynard. We were all coming back home to Allagash. Just over nine miles. Imagine that.

A is for Allagash is in alphabet book format, which may confuse you as it did me. It's not a learning tool for preschoolers, though it would be a delight for grandparents to read to youngsters. It will find an audience among anyone interested in revisiting the days of lumberjacks and lumber barons. And if it finds its way into the hands of young adult readers, they will be amazed at the simplicity of a world that is only two generations gone. Beautifully produced with art work by Lulu Pelletier and colorized period photographs, there's much to enjoy in this book from the patriarch of the Pelletier clan.

Stephen Long