

## "Harvesting Deer"

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Two generations ago, Duluth Township's landscape included more cultivable fields and well-used pastures. Today it has begun to grow back to forest. Its citizens were mostly poor farmers who may or may not have a job in town. They had a few chickens, cows, a pig or two, and a garden. A lot of them were Finns and Swedes who came from rural places in the old country. Most of them had a deer rifle or a .22 caliber rifle. The pioneers were used to living off the land; snowshoe hares and partridges were also desirable to add to the menu.

The habitat wasn't bad for deer — lots of open space and brushy areas into which they could disappear. They provided a temptation that few of our predecessors could resist as a means of supplementing their larder. There was a hunting season in the Fall, but most town residents regarded that as a dangerous time to be out in the woods.

In all of our families, meat was a carefully rationed treat. During the Depression, there was no money available, even though meat prices were low. In the summer and early fall, venison was coveted, regardless of whether it was legal or not.

On a quiet summer evening, it wasn't unusual for a shot to ring out from somewhere out in the woods. In my family, poaching deer was a way that relatives living with their families who came to the Duluth area to look for a job were able to contribute to the menu. Game wardens in the Township always had a challenging job trying to catch the culprit.

Uncle Arvi was a typical example, although by no means the only one. He was a deadly marksman, and typically went out in the woods with a .22 caliber single-shot Remington. When he came back with a deer, we asked him, "how did you kill it, Uncle Arvi?" He would always say, "I shot it in the eye."

The .22 was the preferred weapon because it didn't make as much noise as our 30-30, and ammunition was cheaper.

When a deer was downed, the excitement started. It was dressed in the woods and then brought home to be cut up. Few people had refrigerators, so the meat had to be processed right away. Nothing was wasted. The venison was cut from the bones, cooked and canned in one-quart Mason jars in a pressure cooker. The whole family took part. Evidence such as the hide had to be concealed quickly in case the game warden came visiting. The deer liver was always eaten on the day it was killed.

The meat, once canned, became a valued source of protein all through the year. We had no telephone, so if company unexpectedly arrived on a weekend, the main course at dinner would be canned venison accompanied by pickled beets. When we visited someone elsewhere, the process was reversed. Finns up on the Iron Range acted exactly the same.

Once in a while, someone would have a close shave with the game warden. Emil Vostgry, a Town of Duluth Council member, once said he hid a deer's head by pouring milk over it in a bucket when the warden came to call. I cannot swear to the authenticity of his story. And, of course, there were those who preferred to do their work at night, shining a bright light into fields close to the road to pick up the reflection of their deer's eyes. The rest of the process was the same. It was riskier because the game wardens would be out looking for deer shiners.

That's how it was done a half-century or more ago. It no doubt still goes on, but now the game warden can look into residents' freezers if he has a warrant!