

The Tales Behind Some of Bradford County's Best Bucks

By Roger Kingsley

On a December morning in 1932, a 46-year-old Leroy Township farmer named Harry Rockwell, stuffed an apple in his overcoat and with a deer rifle cradled in his arm, headed for the side of the mountain. A tall, slender man, Harry planned to spend the day in the woods hoping to bag a buck—the only legal deer for the 1932 hunting season. Later that day, Harry returned home with a beautiful buck whose antlers many years later—scoring 160-5/8 NT—ranks as the fourteenth largest non-typical ever recorded in the County.

Harry Rockwell was born in 1886 and passed away in August of 1973. He and his wife Helen were parents to three sons and five daughters. I once sat down with Betty Rockwell—the only surviving sibling at the time—to learn more about her father and the record book buck he killed. She clearly remembered that day over 70 years ago when her father and one of her brothers arrived home with the big deer and hung it in a maple tree in the yard. “Passersby would stop and marvel at the beautiful deer,” she said. According to Betty, her father had watched the buck for some time, but waited until it stepped into an opening before making the killing shot. Her brother—hunting nearby—heard the shot and knew it was his Dad. The two men dragged the big deer down the side of the mountain toward home.

A taxidermist in Canton mounted the antlers and cape and it hung in the Rockwell homestead for many years. As that generation passed on, so did the non-typical. Fortunately it stayed in the family even though it left the County. The mounted deer now hangs in the home of Harry Rockwell's Great Grandson, Chad Roush in Rancho Santa Margarita, California. Chad feels very honored to have his Great Grandfather's deer and takes great pride in displaying and preserving it.

As coincidental as it may seem, Harry Rockwell's non-typical wasn't the only record book buck killed in 1932. That same year, several miles to the northwest on the Mountain of Armenia Township, a man named Vince Walcheski killed the fifth largest typical buck with a firearm ever recorded in the County. Walcheski—a tall, lean, muscular farmer—was 25-years-old at the time. He had planned on doing some fall plowing, but stormy weather made the fields too wet so he decided to go hunting. Besides, word had spread around the area that a huge buck roamed the mountain, and Walcheski had the fever to hunt him.

The day's worth of hunting proved uneventful until Walcheski—soaked from the rain—was on his way home. Stopping for a moment to casually check his back trail, he spotted the big buck following his own tracks. Without hesitation, Walcheski shouldered his Model 1873 Winchester and downed the massive buck with one shot. After admiring the animal, Walcheski left for home and later returned with a horse to drag the big buck out. Several people who came to see the great buck claimed they had seen him the previous year with a larger rack. Even so, when the antlers were officially measured many years later, they racked up an incredible 166-7/8 Boone & Crockett points.

William Beardslee, formerly of Columbia Cross Roads, told me this story of a buck he killed on the side of Mt. Pisgah on the first day of the 1954 season. "It was bitter cold, 2:00 in the afternoon, and I was half froze. All of a sudden I heard deer coming my way as they broke the thick crust on the snow. A big doe appeared, stopped and looked back. Moments later another doe joined her. Then I saw him and his massive rack. He joined the two does about seventy yards from me and instantly looked my way. I wasn't sure whether he saw me or winded me and for that matter I rushed my first shot. He took off running with absolutely no sign of a hit, but stopped beside a hemlock tree within easy range. Overwhelmed by the excitement of wanting that buck, I absent-mindedly ejected the remaining live rounds from my 300 Savage rifle. Somehow I managed to calm down, reload and make a killing shot." That buck has twelve points, a twenty-two inch inside spread, and scored 151-3/8."

During the 1950 hunting season a farmer on the Leona road north of East Troy shot a 13-pointer that scored 143-4/8. Clyde Mattocks was the hunter and the buck he killed had eight points on one side and five on the other with nearly 22 inches between the beams. Eleven years later, his son Jim was participating in a drive on the fourth day of that 1961 hunting season.

It was 7:30 in the morning and Jim was on watch when he heard dogs barking at a nearby home. Unbeknownst to Jim, a huge non-typical had crossed the road beside the house, which riled the dogs. Jim was busy concentrating on the drivers moving toward him when he happened to turn around and see the big buck standing a short distance away. Armed with a Model 70 Winchester in 308 caliber, Jim's first shot was a good hit, but the powerful deer stayed on his feet forcing Jim to fire again as he fled. This time the buck went down for good. Word of Jim Mattocks killing a huge non-typical buck spread like wildfire and people from all over traveled to see it. At one point there were 22 vehicles parked along the road by the barn, driven by folks itching to catch a glimpse of the 205-pound hog fat buck.

You won't find the name Jim Mattocks listed in the Bradford County Record Book for taking that big buck. That's because Jim's second shot at the running deer shattered the skull plate connecting the two antlers. That unfortunately disqualifies it from receiving an official B&C score, for the obvious reason of determining the proper credit for the inside spread. Anyone familiar with scoring antlers would have to admit that Jim's big non-typical would easily exceed the Record Book minimum. Despite the fact that it can't be entered, it certainly enters my list as being one of Bradford County's all-time best bucks taken.

Bradford County's Barclay Mountain has produced several record book bucks over the years, which comes as no surprise. Its vast territory, abandoned overgrown homesteads and remote areas are vital ingredients needed for a buck to reach that ripe old age. A man named Earl Lee shot such a buck in 1952 near White Rock Swamp while hunting out of a camp near Franklindale. Mistakenly listed in the early record books under a friend's name (Tom Drislane) that big-antlered buck has twelve points and scored 157-2/8.

Every once in a while when hunters reminisce about deer hunting days gone by, someone makes the comment that those bucks were taken back in the "good old days". But what about the buck that Scott Norton of Troy killed during the 2019 season that scored 174-4/8 typical? And the whooper non-typical that Chris Radney of Canton killed in 2017 that scored 180-3/8? And what about Paul Emerson's Athens Township 2020 archery kill at 164-5/8? I could go on and on. Gee, I'd say the "good old days" of deer hunting are right now!