

The Forgotten Son: Ansil Dailey

by Scot H. Dahms



You may not know the man known as Ansil Dailey, who was destined to take over E.J. Dailey's Trap Supply business. This preordained destiny would come to a crashing halt on the side of a road in DeKalb, New York.

Ansil Dailey

Born on April 27, 1915, Ansil was the first-born child of E.J. and his wife, Maude. The next born was Doris, ten years later and then Beverly, another three. With his daughters not wanting the business, E.J. was forced to look outside his bloodline for continuation of his namesake

he had built over so many years of trial and error.

Ansil had the opportunity to learn from the best in the trapping business in E.J. and did. Along with helping his father, Ansil was a television repairman and musician who played the piano and accor-

dion. He was quite popular among the "society dance set" in upstate New York. A musical interest ran in the family as E.J. played the fiddle and was "pretty good."

On December 22, 1948, Ansil married Anita Godfrey of Ogdensburg in the Methodist parsonage.

Unfortunately, the marriage was terminated by divorce several years before Ansil's death. They had a daughter, Sandra Joan Dailey, who was 16 when Ansil died.

Ansil died at 4:30 pm on Sunday, August 22, 1965 at the age of 55. He died of a heart attack while

picking blackberries on the Cunningham-Rennsalaer Falls Road in the town of DeKalb. He had learned about his heart condition three months before his death. Dr. Alexander Dodds of Edwards, St. Lawrence County Coroner, pronounced Ansil dead at the scene. He was buried in the Flackville Cemetery.

With Ansil's unexpected passing, E.J. had to find someone else to take over the business. This fell to Vaughn Tingley from Coudersport, Pennsylvania. E.J. and Tingley

trapped mainly fox together in the 1940s. Tingley had experience trapping around Island Falls, Maine in both wilderness and semi-wilderness area. He had a knack of catching furs in what E.J. thought were poor sets.

Toward the end of E.J.'s life, Tingley took over the wholesale business while E.J. continued with the retail. After E.J.'s passing, Tingley took over both and sold all Dailley's products. Tingley used E.J.'s last catalog as a guide and made

changes to it as needed. Tingley also took over the Question Box Editor duties in *Fur Fish Game*.

Ansil was not mentioned in many of E.J.'s trapping articles. In the 1940s, there were a few articles about E.J. and Ansil's escapades. They also included some of E.J.'s trapping partners; Frenchy Madill, Gene Rheume, and Jimmie Cox. The following are those escapades, mainly focusing on trapping mink, muskrat, and beaver.

During the 1940-1941 season, E.J. had been trapping mink and did so until March 12. After that, E.J. and Ansil went to Indian Creek Swamp and had everything ready to trap muskrats by March 15. Then they traveled back to the Raquette River camp to trap beaver with Madill. After the beaver season closed on April 1, E.J. and Ansil returned to the swamp.

E.J. procured the exclusive right to trap muskrats on several hundred acres of the swamp, including the Lower Lake, by paying the owner an amount less than the annual taxes. Before the beaver season, they transported the 10-x12-foot tent and equipment on toboggan, except for the boat and canoe which were dragged over the snow. Equipment included a sheet iron stove with oven, two folding cots with bed rolls, 400 traps, 100 stretchers and other essentials. The tent was set up close to the main marsh, and their muskrat traps were cached near the tent.

E.J. and Ansil arrived at camp in the late afternoon. Ansil warmed up the sheet iron stove and mixed the griddle cake batter. E.J. grabbed some traps, put on his hip boots and went to the marsh. It still was covered with ice, but holes had started to thaw through. He saw two muskrats dive into such a hole. E.J. placed two #1 Blake and Lamb Sure Hold traps at the hole. Several pushups had thawed open and traps were placed in each. At

a creek that flowed into the marsh, E.J. found muskrat feed beds in the open water and each got a trap. E.J. set out 30 traps.

When E.J. returned to the tent, a warm rain started. He had just sat down when he heard a trap go off followed by a splash. E.J. went to the hole thawed in the ice and found he had caught a muskrat. He reset the trap and had just sat down to eat when he heard the same sound again. This time Ansil went down to the hole and took the

The branch was too rotten to hold his weight and fell on top of him. He crawled out soaked to the skin and covered with moss and dead marsh vegetation. E.J. kept setting traps because he did not want to take the time to go back to camp and get dry clothes.

The rain continued into the night and, the next morning, they found that over half of the marsh ice was gone. The two used the boat and caught many muskrats in their traps. After checking traps,

E.J. and Ansil were out at first light the following day and found that they were catching a muskrat in about every other trap. The boat sagged under the weight until the water was about to the top edge of the sides.

muskrat out of the trap. This continued until they fell asleep.

When E.J. and Ansil awoke, the rain was still beating on the tent. They removed 16 muskrats from the sets already out. E.J. followed the marsh around to the left, crossed over the lake and worked into the willow swamps. Ansil followed the marsh around to the right and worked in the alder swamps opposite E.J.

The ice was now rotten and dangerous. There was 5 feet of water under the ice and as much mud, so they could not set any pushups. E.J. broke through and grabbed for a dead ash as he went down.

they set out another 150. Because of the large number of traps out, they flagged their sets using strips of white cloth tied to a bush or stick near each set. Seven muskrats were taken out of the freshly set traps on the way back to the tent.

E.J. and Ansil were out at first light the following day and found that they were catching a muskrat in about every other trap. The boat sagged under the weight until the water was about to the top edge of the sides. They had caught 48 and stopped to skin.

E.J. and Ansil were catching muskrats so fast, that they decreased the amount of area

being trapped. The ice was out along the edges of the marsh, so they started using the canoe.

Colder weather arrived and their catch declined. The mating season was over and the females were looking for dens to raise the young. They finished trapping a few days before the season officially closed on April 20. They had caught 486 muskrats which brought over \$1,000.

On March 1, 1942, E.J., Ansil and Madill picked up traps from Indian Creek Swamp. They loaded food and equipment into the pickup truck and headed for E.J.'s Raquette River camp. Their focus was beaver and muskrat.

The truck got to within a mile of camp but the 3 feet of snow hampered any further progression. They strapped on their snowshoes and, within an hour, had wood burning in the cabin stove. The outside temperature was about zero degrees.

Their plans were to have E.J. and Ansil operate the line at the Raquette River and Madill operate a line in his territory including Dead Creek and the Rock Ponds. The night before beaver season opened, the temperature warmed.

At the first pond visited, numerous beaver had been out feeding. At the second pond, the ice was still solid, so under-ice sets were used utilizing #40 Blake & Lamb traps. The third pond had open water and they found a partially eaten poplar limb pulled into some bushes. A #4 was placed there. Otter tracks were everywhere, but were not in season, so some beaver sets were not made to reduce the chance of catching one.

Madill was back at camp when E.J. and Ansil returned. Bean soup was made along with coffee. Madill had gotten out six under-ice sets.

It turned cold that night and the open water sets froze. One beaver was caught at the second pond. An additional set was made in the third pond in a beaver canal where a #4 was placed.

The plan for the next day was to check the traps and head for the Oswegatchie River camp to check on the muskrat trapping. They were up and away before daybreak, Madill snowshoed to the car after checking his line. He drove it 35 miles to where E.J. and Ansil snowshoed out the other way to meet him.

A feed bed set and the canal set both caught beavers. The beavers were skinned and they hurried out to meet Madill who had also caught a beaver.

There were some beaver on the Cedar Lake outlet which was a few miles from the Oswegatchie River camp. They arrived before dark, so they set traps at a couple of fresh feeding places. Arriving at the camp, Madill, who was the chef, made some griddle cakes that were eagerly eaten.

The next day, the three visited the Cedar Lake outlet to find the first trap sprung with nothing in it and the second held a beaver. The next few days were warmer and the beaver line kept them busy.

E.J. and Ansil traveled into Bog Swamp which was not far from the Oswegatchie camp. They carried the canoe for a half mile to the swamp. The swamp produced many muskrats a day for a time.

Another line was started on Marsh Brook. This was the opposite direction from camp. Between the two areas, they did well for about a week. Then they pulled the entire line and moved to the camp in Indian Creek Swamp. The catch averaged about the same as it did in Bog Swamp.

In March 1945, Ansil and Frenchy visited E.J. from where they were trapping near the end of beaver season. They said they had better water conditions and caught eight beaver the first morning. They had caught their limit, so they devoted their time to trapping muskrats.

A few days after the close of the beaver season, the annual beaver sale was held at Hosmer's Hotel in

Star Lake. E.J. said it was a success with trappers coming from miles around to sell their catch and swap stories. Several hundred trappers attended. The largest beaver at the sale was 86 inches. It was caught by Ansil and Frenchy. E.J. and Cox sold their beaver for over \$1,000. The dealers were paying \$1 per inch.

In the fall of 1948, E.J. trapped exclusively for mink because the fur prices on long furs were very low. In December, E.J. moved from trapping mink by himself from his Raquette River camp to trapping mink with Ansil along the St. Lawrence River. Most of the mink sets were made in washed out root systems in the river bank. Mink sets were also made in a large swamp along the river. E.J. and Ansil traveled further downstream to the edge of one of the big marshes.

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There was a little spring stream running into the marsh. Six traps were set along the stream.

The two headed for a small swamp that joined the marsh. Two mink sets were made by an overturned tree. At the edge of the swamp, some spring water seeped in and created open spots in the ice along the shore. There were muskrat feed beds in the open spot and Ansil set a trap at each one.

A rock pile found at the edge of the swamp had mink tracks leading from a hole. A trap was placed in the entrance.

The next morning, some of the caught muskrats had been taken by foxes. They waded right into the water to get the muskrats.

E.J. waded in the water and made sets for the foxes. He placed a piece of sod between where the muskrats had been taken and where the fox had stepped into the water. Traps were set on top of the sods where a fox would step to get a captured muskrat. Three sod sets were made and, the next day, two foxes were caught. E.J. and Ansil did not have any more problems with fox taking their muskrats.

They did some under-ice trapping for muskrats by using a #4 beaver trap with a slice of apple attached to the pan. The trap was set on the bottom of the marsh in spots where they thought muskrats would be feeding. The sets did very well, catching all muskrats by the head as they dove to the bottom

to retrieve the bait. The mink market remained high and E.J. was worried it would drop, so they sold their mink every few days.

In February 1949, Ansil trapped beavers with a new partner named Gene Rheaume. Ansil and Rheaume trapped on the Cranberry Lake side of the mountains. They had considerable open water, used an aluminum boat with an outboard motor and took their limit before E.J. and Cox did.

E.J. and Cox moved to the St. Lawrence River valley and trapped muskrats out of E.J.'s house. They scouted the upper Little River but were disappointed by the lack of muskrat sign.

The next day, traps were set in local swamps and marshes that E.J. had trapped many times before. Several dozen sets were made. Those traps were left out for two weeks then were pulled. Ansil and Cox went back to the mountains to trap muskrat while E.J. tended the local line.

Ansil and Cox came back and helped E.J. run his line one morning. All three went to Bog Creek which was usually good for 100 muskrats. They used a boat and made muskrat sets left and right about as fast as they could pass out traps. Most sets were on fresh feed beds. When finished setting, they found three rats had already been caught.

It is interesting to think about E.J.'s legacy and how it would have changed if Ansil had lived to take over the business. Would we talk in reverence not only about E.J. but also about Ansil?

In 1973, E.J. was asked if he planned to retire. E.J.'s response is below.

The way I figure it, there's a time to come and a time to go. I enjoy my work and I can trap as I want to. I get a kick out of talking to the boys when they come here on Sun-

days to sell their furs. I don't owe anybody a dime and I can do as I dang well please. Can you imagine me changing anything?

Although beyond his control, I bet E.J. would change one thing, the unexpected passing of his son.

Scot Dahms is a trapping historian from Wilmington, Ohio.