THE GATINEAU PARK
CHRONICLE
Fall 2009
canadascapital.gc.ca
NCC CCN
Canada

Introduction

The National Capital Commission (NCC), in collaboration with the Friends of Gatineau Park, presents the second issue of *The Gatineau Park Chronicle*, a periodical aimed at increasing awareness of the park's history and cultural heritage. The first issue, published in 2007, focused on the circumstances surrounding the creation of Gatineau Park. In this issue, the authors paint a picture of the park's industrial past.

For centuries, the Gatineau Hills were part of the Algonquin lands, and these people drew from the land what they needed to survive. During the French regime, the region's fur-bearing animals were the focus for trappers, coureurs de bois and merchants. The 19th century saw the area open up to colonization, and the population grew rapidly. The region was explored, drilled and exploited for the riches it contained, and entrepreneurs made use of its forests, water power and even its underground resources.

In bygone days, Gatineau Park was part of the scene of Canada's industrial revolution. Today, it has become the Capital's conservation park.

Gatineau Hills Forest Industry
1800 to 1938 | Myth or Reality?

by Denis Messier

The Axe Before the Plow

It is a well-known fact that, for more than 150 years, economic development in Canada's Capital Region was based primarily on the harvesting of trees. Local place names are a constant reminder of this industry's importance to the region's history. Names such as Wright (Philemon, Alonzo, Tiberius and others), Maclaren, Bronson, Sparks, Eddy, Booth, Edwards, Leamy, McMillan, Egan, Low, Hamilton, Hurdman, Cross and Papineau remind us of the entrepreneurs who profited the most from this activity. Other names, much fewer in number — such as *draveurs*, *portageurs*, Joe-Montferrand and *allumettières*, Martineau and Ryan — recall the tens of thousands of anonymous workers and small manufacturers from far and wide who worked in the logging camps, on the timber rafts, in the sawmills or the various manufacturing plants established on both sides of the Ottawa River.

From the beginning of the colony in 1800, the wood from the surrounding forests was used first to build houses and other infrastructure required for the pioneers' settlement. Wood was also essential for making tools and furniture, heating and cooking. However, the amounts harvested for these uses barely made a dent in the region's abundant forest resources. Entrepreneurs soon considered exporting lumber to reap additional profits.

It was in 1806 that Philemon Wright, the leader of the first group of Ottawa Valley settlers, began efforts to find markets for the wood harvested in the region. This was the year that the first timber raft floated down the approximately 500 kilometres of rivers from Wright's settlement to the export port of Québec. It was the beginning of an adventure that would produce colossal fortunes — but also unimaginable misery — and, somewhere between these two extremes, it also provided a livelihood for an entire population.

GATINEAU VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Five men and a tractor, 1920

A Market for Wood

The great abundance of this natural resource does not adequately explain the fervour with which this industry was pursued and the important role it would have in the country's development. In addition to the shortage of productive farmland, which forced settlers to diversify their activities, factors beyond the colony's borders drove this push for lumber. American independence and, above all, the Napoleonic wars that raged across Europe in the early 19th century — as well as the blockade imposed against Great Britain, which cut it off from its Baltic markets — prompted England to draw on the resources of its North American colonies. The oaks, red pines, eastern white pines and great spruces of the Ottawa Valley were cut, squared and shipped to the British Isles to build the ships of the Royal Navy, the very navy that would help to defeat Napoleon and establish the power of the British Empire for more than a century.

From the mid-19th century onward, and particularly after 1854, the year that the Reciprocity Treaty between Great Britain and the United States was signed, our neighbours to the south represented an increasingly important market for Canadian timber. This period also marked the start of the decline in exports of squared timber — squaring timber was an extremely wasteful process that left an enormous quantity of unused wood debris in the forest. The era of sawn timber began when the government of the united Province of Canada made efforts to regulate and earn some revenue from this industry.

Rapid urbanization in the United States fed voraciously on Canada's forests. The population of Chicago, for example, increased from 400 inhabitants in 1833 to nearly 300,000 in 1870 — a mushroom city, built entirely of wood! When some 18,000 buildings burned in Chicago's great fire of 1871, it is most likely that wood from tens of thousands of Ottawa Valley trees went up in smoke. New York, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Cleveland and Detroit also grew at a similarly fast pace.

The Forests and the Trees

It is well established where the trees were going, but where did they come from? According to a number of historians who have studied the history of the region and the Ottawa Valley lumber industry, while the two sides of the river were exploited equally, the Wrights and other

JOCELYN MARTINEAU

Lumber pile at Paul Dufour's sawmill, Sainte-Cécile-de-Masham, ca. 1930

entrepreneurs had, at first, concentrated on the forests on the shores of the Rideau River and the banks of the Ottawa River on the Upper Canada (Ontario) side, before turning to the north shore.

It appears that, except in Hull, it was not until the late 1820s, when construction began on the Rideau Canal, that the forest industry really began on the north side of the Ottawa River. This activity had started a little earlier, further east, in the Petite Nation and Hawkesbury regions. Beginning around 1830, the Gatineau Valley became the scene of intense logging activity. The Wright family benefited from its ideal location in Wright's Town to take control of the valley's immense wealth. For more than 10 years, the Wrights, allied with George Hamilton of Hawkesbury, exercised a near monopoly over the entire Gatineau Valley. In less than five years, logging activities extended as far as Maniwaki, which also illustrates that the 19th century processes for cutting and transporting wood kept the industry confined to the areas along major waterways. The further the operations were away from these rivers, the less profitable the business became.

Harvesting the Hills?

Asa Meech was the first colonist to settle in the area now known as Gatineau Park. Like many of his contemporaries, he came from the United States. In 1821, when he began clearing his lot, it was mainly for farming. Around him, in the hills, the population grew very slowly. Only a few dozen farmers settled around Meech, Kingsmere and Mousseau (Harrington) lakes, attempting to scratch enough from the rocky soil to feed their families. The names of these settlers were Dunlop, Murphy, Mulvihill, Daly, Healey, Carroll, Lacharité, Sheehan, Jeff, Mousseau, Harrington, Lauriault and Barnes. Among them were Americans, a number of Irish immigrants fleeing the impoverished conditions of their country and a few French Canadians, driven from the St. Lawrence Valley by overpopulation of the land.

But what about the lumber industry in the hills that today form Gatineau Park? Were trees from these hills on the timber raft of 1806? Had this area ever seen any logging? It appears that the very nature of the industry, the geomorphology of the region, and the wood-cutting and transportation methods of the era provide as many possible answers as the very few official documents themselves.

Because the limits of timber concessions were ill defined, and often practically ignored by developers, it is difficult to verify whether or not the Gatineau Hills were part of the lumber industry. However, the cutting and transportation methods used in the 19th century kept logging teams within a relatively narrow strip of land which, under ideal circumstances, never exceeded 10 kilometres and generally remained less than five kilometres from a waterway. It should be remembered that cutting took place during the winter and that the felled, trimmed and squared trees were often nearly eight metres long and almost a metre in diameter. These logs were then mounted on sleds and hauled closer to the waterways by teams of horses over roads that had previously been watered and frozen to facilitate the movement of sleds. The steep slope of the hills presented challenges and certain dangers for the workers. Since forest resources were in abundant supply along the Gatineau River and its tributaries, entrepreneurs preferred to avoid venturing into the higher hills, and concentrated the work of the loggers on the more productive adjoining lands. In what is now Gatineau Park, because of proximity to the water, only the areas around the Meech Creek Valley and the shores of La Pêche Lake and the La Pêche River were exploited, according to this model.

While the great logging industry appeared to come to a halt at the foot of the hills, this does not mean that the forests covering the hills were free from cutting. Many pioneers and small entrepreneurs also profited from these nearby resources, but on a cottage industry scale and substantially later in the process. To understand the difficulty of this activity, one needs only to imagine the settlers at work, alone or accompanied by their sons when they were old enough, equipped with a basic axe or two-handed saw, struggling through the deep snow. They had to reach the trees they had selected, cut them down, trim them and hoist them onto a sled, or attach a chain to them and pull them to the closest waterway or directly to the sawmill. It is not surprising to hear the saying that, on the farms, before the invention of the chainsaw in 1933 and its widespread use after the Second World War, the forests grew more quickly than the time it took to cut them down. However, despite the amount of hard work involved, most of the great evergreen trees that were accessible had been harvested by the end of the century.

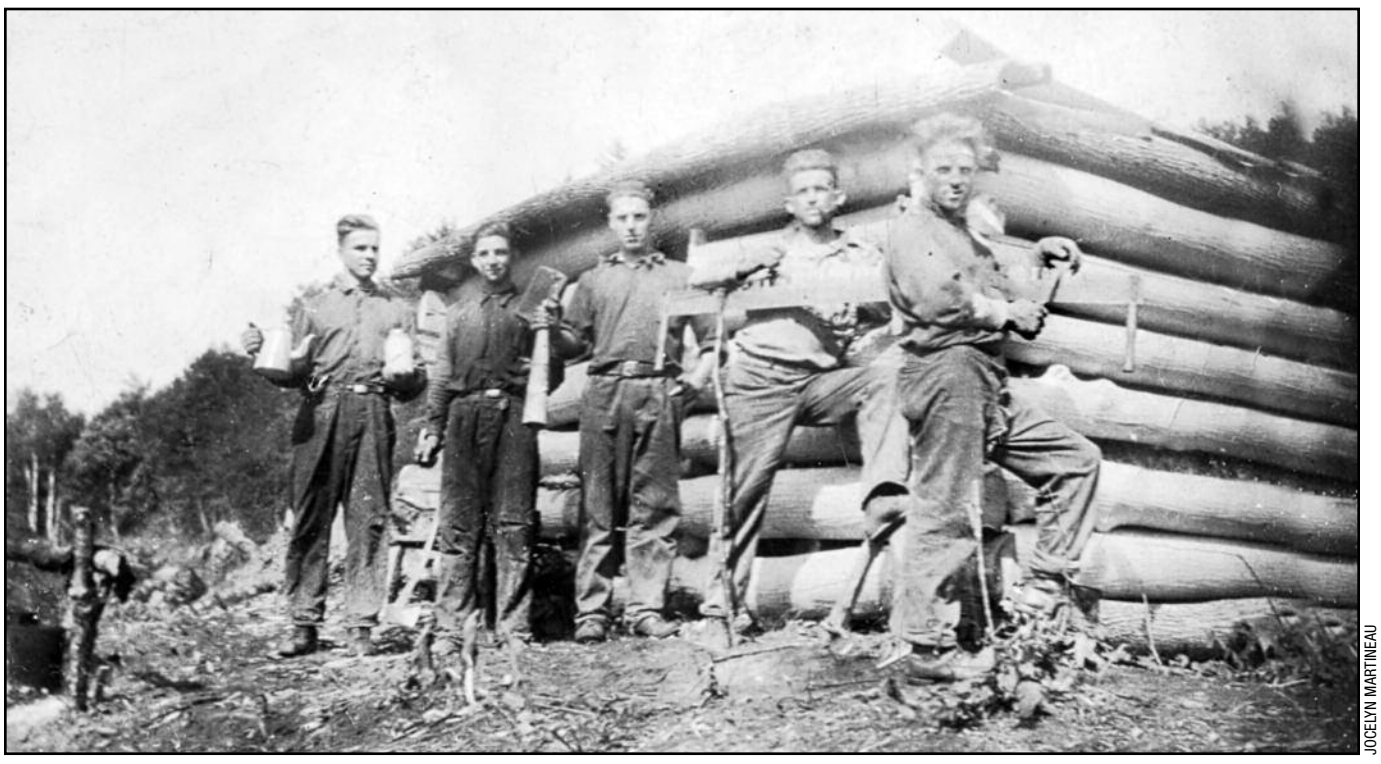
A few decades later, according to the interim report of a 1935 study ordered by the Federal District Commission (predecessor of the National Capital Commission), and conducted by the Forestry Service of the federal Department of the Interior, much of the area located between Chemin de la Montagne, Chemin de la Mine and the northwestern part of Meech Lake had been exploited during the 19th century. Most of the great eastern white pines, red pines and oaks had been felled. To support their observations, the report's authors stated, for example, that most of the ski trails used by the Ottawa Ski Club since the early 1920s were former logging roads, some of which had been put back in service, to the great displeasure of the club's members.

At that time, it was the deciduous forests — maple, oak, birch, beech and ash — that were selected for sale on the market in Hull and Ottawa as firewood. The Great Depression, which lasted for more than six years, increased the demand for this fuel — much less costly than coal and oil, which those who were unemployed could no longer afford.

And yet, in 1935, even considering the felling of trees for firewood, as well as the clearing that took place to develop roads, establish farms, and build houses and other infrastructure, and including the area occupied by lakes, still nearly 80 percent of the Gatineau Hills territory was covered with trees. Although the report pointed out that logging activity was intensifying in the hills — as was dramatically witnessed by the cottagers established around the lakes since the end of the 19th century — it was evident that forests still covered the greater part of the area studied. It seems that the alarm — raised very early on, very loudly and in very high places by the most influential cottagers — signalled the fast-approaching end of this industry in the hills and hastened the decision in 1938 to create Gatineau Park.

Of Mills and Men

Apart from the landscape itself, the lumber industry left few visible traces in Gatineau Park. Nor is there much evidence of the sawmills that were erected on the periphery of what is now Gatineau Park. Most were constructed without a plan and there were few photographs of these structures.



JOCELYN MARTINEAU

The Dufour family, Sainte-Cécile-de-Masham

The first known sawmill was built by the Brigham-Chamberlain family, close relatives of the Wrights, on Chelsea Creek, in the late 1820s. Like the flour mill beside it, the sawmill was driven by water power from the creek. The mill had one, or perhaps two, saws and remained in operation until the 1870s. The sawmill, which

supplied the local market, procured its wood from the first settlers who made their home at the foot of the hills between the lakes and the river. It probably served to produce the lumber used to build the first houses in the villages of Chelsea and Old Chelsea. Today, only the barn remains on the original site. The farmhouse, thought to be the oldest building in Chelsea, has been moved and currently stands close to what was once one of the region's first farms, which is now the location of the Gatineau Park Visitor Centre.

Twenty-five kilometres further north, the Maclaren sawmill of Wakefield is also a well-known example of the use of water power to process rough timber into lumber. This sawmill also supplied a local market and employed only a few workers on a seasonal basis.

GATINEAU VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Legros sawmill, 1975

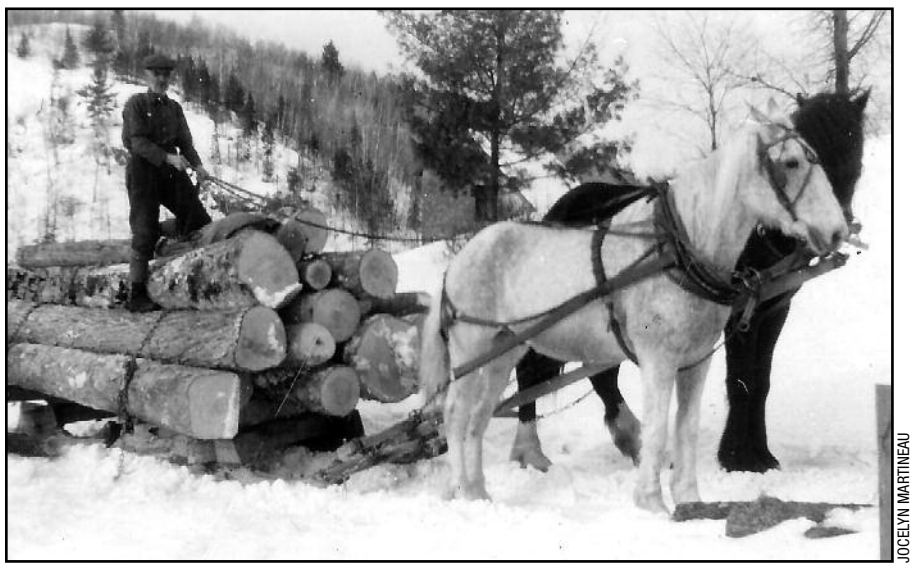
It appears that the first sawmills in the Gatineau Valley were built to saw the huge logs harvested during the early period of logging in the valley. Once the supply of these trees dwindled, the sawmills rapidly became unprofitable, unable to withstand competition from the gigantic modern facilities run by entrepreneurs such as Gilmour, Booth or Leamy, which operated hundreds of saws and annually produced thousands of kilometres of boards or planks.

A few other sawmills were built in the early 20th century. Once again, there is very little written evidence of these facilities. A sawmill was built at Mousseau Lake by William Cameron Edwards, an important industrialist who started his career in Thurso, before making his fortune in Ottawa in the lumber and finance business. The sawmill was in operation until a massive forest fire around 1915 destroyed a large part of the Edwards property. His nephew, Lieutenant Colonel Cameron Macpherson Edwards, who inherited his uncle's properties in 1921, had the sawmill torn down and built a summer residence which, in 1950, became the official summer residence of Canada's prime minister.

recalls that sawn timber was floated to Meech Lake, some as far as what is now O'Brien Beach. The wood was retrieved from there in the springtime and loaded onto wagons for transport to the Chelsea station, where it was then shipped by train.

The journal also mentions a mill owned by Freeman Cross. A member of a large family that had been established in the Gatineau Valley since the 19th century, Freeman Cross was a pioneer in the use of electrical energy in Canada. In the early years of the 20th century, Cross built a dam on Meech Creek to feed a power station that ran a sawmill and a toy factory at Farm Point in the Meech Creek Valley. Cross also used the creek to float logs harvested around Meech Lake down to his Farm Point sawmill.

Further to the northwest, near the village of Sainte-Cécile-de-Masham, at the edge of what is now the Philippe Lake sector of Gatineau Park, the Dufour family operated a sawmill and a grain mill on the La Pêche River which, in the early 20th century, provided work for dozens of members of this family and other villagers. This sawmill, like that of the



JOCELYN MARTINEAU

Trefflé Ménard and Pierre Mayer's horses, Sainte-Cécile-de-Masham

In Volume 27 of *Up the Gatineau!*, the historical journal of the Gatineau Valley Historical Society, Chelsea resident Ed Ryan recalls that, in the 1930s, his father used a sawmill powered by a steam engine to cut logs into lumber on his Kingsmere property. Another sawmill also operated at Mousseau Lake. Ryan

Legros family established further downriver, was supplied by timber cut in the Philippe Lake sector, and its products were sold on the local market.

These sawmills are just a few examples among those that existed during this period. A number of other sawmills were in operation in the territory or on the periphery of the current park. Like those mentioned here, most operated on water power, but some used oil, steam, coal or even electrical power.

A Charcoal-Making Machine

In 1939, at the same time that Gatineau Park was starting to take shape, and as the approach of the Second World War began to alleviate the effects of the Depression, logging operations increased, and new industrial facilities were established in the Gatineau Hills.

It was during this era that a charcoal kiln was built on a forest road that ran along Mousseau Lake toward Philippe Lake, by Thomas Gosselin, an entrepreneur from Masham, and owner of the land. The kiln, which was manufactured in the city of Québec, measured approximately four metres high by two metres in diameter and weighed some 1,100 kilograms. It was made of cast iron and the interior was composed of an oven and a short chimney. The kiln used scrap wood from a steam-powered sawmill, located nearby. The Federal District Commission acquired this land in 1948 and included it as part of Gatineau Park. The sawmill was demolished in 1949. The kiln, which still stands on trail 50 in Gatineau Park, is now one of the very few remnants of the logging industry from the park's past.

From Cutting Trees to Preserving Forest

The creation of Gatineau Park in 1938 did not put an abrupt end to wood cutting in the area. A number of farmers continued to harvest wood until the end of the Second World War. The actual creation of the park was truly an industry in itself. In addition, the first budgets committed to establish the park were allocated as part of a job creation program and measures intended to alleviate the situation caused by the Depression. The construction of the parkway network, parking lots, picnic areas and campgrounds also required the cutting of thousands of trees and provided work for many of the region's loggers. More recently, the construction of the access road to the Mackenzie King Estate and the opening of Boulevard des Allumettières in the park have also meant the felling of thousands of trees. However, in contrast with past events, this tree cutting has been offset by the planting of at least twice the number of trees that were felled.

MICHEL DALLAIRE

Charcoal kiln, trail no. 50, Gatineau Park

Gatineau Park was created from several hundred parcels of land acquired by the Federal District Commission and the National Capital Commission over a period of more than 70 years. Before becoming the Capital's conservation park, the area experienced close to 150 years of more or less intensive use, exploitation and human occupation. Although big industry ignored the area to a certain extent, the former landowners put forth enormous effort and considerable ingenuity to draw a profit from the forest resources that surrounded them and to compensate for the poor agricultural potential of the Gatineau Hills. Perhaps this article will help to preserve the memory of their contribution to the region's development.

The Old Fox Farm in Gatineau Park

by Carol Martin

JEAN DORATY JOHNS COLLECTION

Pair of foxes, Avion Fur Farm

A trail extending Pine Road from its junction at the Cross Loop Road into Gatineau Park leads to the "Old Fox Farm Road," as some long-time residents still call it. Hikers and skiers will find no signage with its name, but a branch off trail 50 leads to the acreage that Colonel Cameron Macpherson Edwards selected in the 1930s for a fox farm. This secluded area in what is now part of Gatineau Park was an ideal setting for this enterprise.

Fur had been a staple of the earliest trade between Europe and North America and, throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, trappers exploited the Canadian wilderness for a wide variety of animal pelts. Some trapper-farmers who caught animals in warm weather kept them alive until winter, when their fur was prime. The next step was "fur-farming," a new industry begun around 1890, breeding and raising some of the smaller fur-bearing animals.

In the mid-1930s, Harvey Doraty left his law firm in Saskatoon and moved to Ottawa with the intention of opening a legal office. However, he met Colonel Edwards, of an influential old Ottawa family, and decided on a different line of business. Both men had previously raised silver foxes, and Edwards wanted to go into fox farming on a larger scale. The result was a partnership, with Edwards providing financial backing and Doraty agreeing to be the manager.

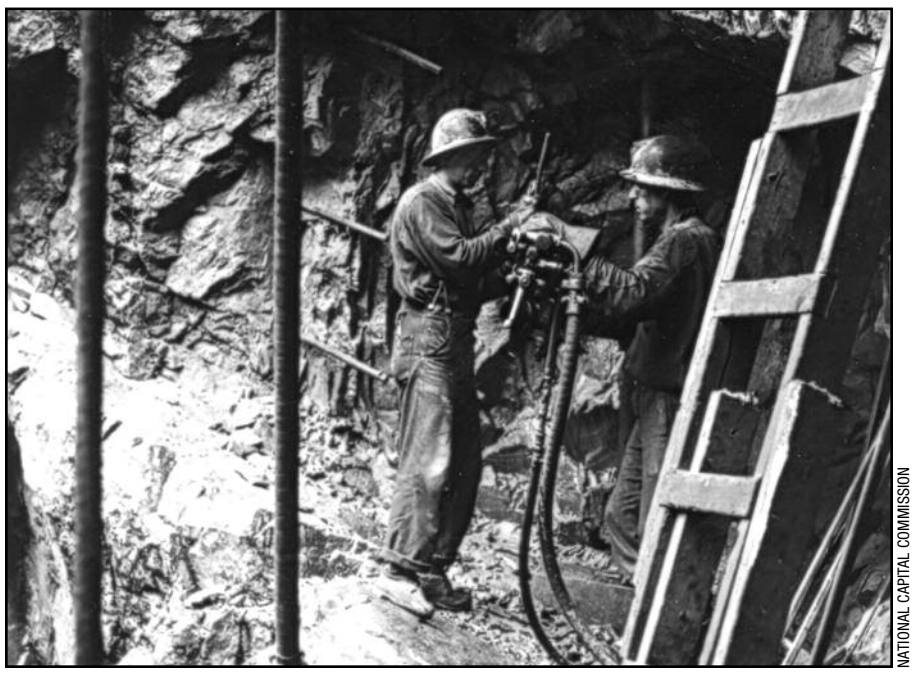
Edwards had a property near Harrington Lake (Lac Mousseau), with an old homestead building on it, which seemed ideal for this venture. An isolated, rural site is ideal for a fox farm, for several reasons. During the breeding season and just after the pups are born, foxes tend to be exceedingly sensitive to strange sights, noises and smells, so a quiet location is preferred. The animals also have a pungent odour, which any near neighbours would likely find unpleasant. Foxes are omnivorous, but require a large proportion of meat in their diet, and farmers in a rural location are potential suppliers of waste meat.

The Avion Fur Farm on the Edwards property took its name from the town of Avion, near Vimy, where Colonel Edwards saw action as commanding officer of the 38th Battalion of the Canadian Expeditionary Force in the First World War. Harvey Doraty, with the assistance of Bob O'Neil, a carpenter from Chelsea, renovated and enlarged the old house, added a workshop, and installed rows of kennels for the foxes. In April 1937, Harvey married Jean Parker, who recalled that, following the ceremony, she changed into her "going-away outfit" of jacket, ski pants and gum-rubber boots, after which the couple walked in rain and mud through the bush to the ranch. They lived on the property, raising a family of three children, while they managed the fox farm. Later, they added a second house to provide housing for a family who worked for them.

Over the next 15 years, the Avion Fur Farm took prizes at the fox shows in Québec City, sold breeding stock to ranchers from Nova Scotia to Alberta, and sold their best pelts to Holt, Renfrew and Company. The rest of the pelts went to the Canadian National Silver Fox Breeders Association in Summerside, Prince Edward Island, to be sold at auction. On one occasion, they received $2,400 for a breeding pair of foxes.

Sales had continued all during the Second World War, but then fashions began to change, and long-haired furs were no longer in demand. Some breeders went into raising mink, and the Doratys made a start in that direction. However, the creation of Gatineau Park changed their plans. The Colonel sold the property to the federal government, and the Doratys knew that any future plans for fur farming would have to end within 10 years. They decided to leave, and disposed of the stock and equipment in 1952. For Christmas that year, their last on the farm, Jean received a fox fur boa, her only fur memento of that period in their lives. They left the property early in 1953, and moved to Stittsville, Ontario. Harvey had not qualified to practise law in Ontario, but made use of his legal expertise as a notary public, as well as working as an insurance adjuster for an Ottawa firm. Jean taught school for a short time, and then worked on the annual *Canada Year Book* for Statistics Canada.

In 1985, members of the Doraty family revisited the site of their fur farm, and found a road running though what had been their backyard, although their spruce hedge and the maple bush remained. Few traces are left of the old fox farm, as tall pines have overgrown much of the area that was once cleared, and the old road is now closed off as part of the access to the prime minister of Canada's summer residence. This specialized industry, which took advantage of the quiet and secluded environment of Gatineau Park, has gone, leaving little trace of its former existence within the park.



NATIONAL CAPITAL COMMISSION

The Moss Mine, during the Second World War

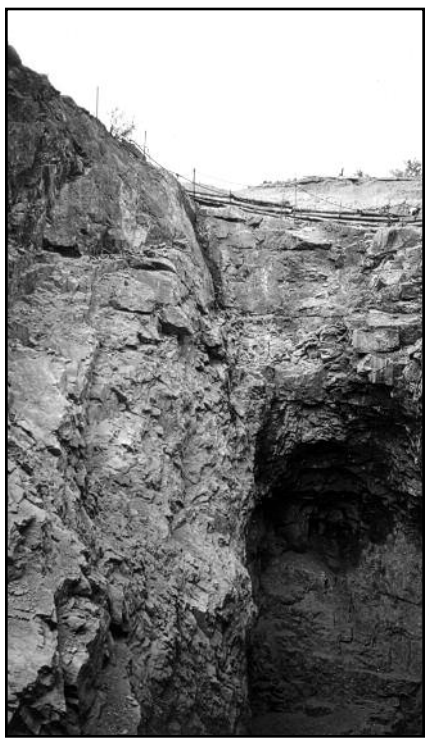
The Mines of Gatineau Park

by Dr. Shawn Graham

The same geology that makes Gatineau Park a stunning panorama, from the Eardley Escarpment to the rolling landscape of the Meech Creek Valley, also made the area attractive to miners in the 19th and early 20th centuries. There is a certain romance in mines named "Eva" or "Pink," and their ruins and tailings can be spotted underneath the dense underbrush which has, for the most part, reclaimed them. The names recall some of the earliest landowners and entrepreneurs: Forsythe, Baldwin, Lawless, Pink, Morris, Headley, Eva, Fortin-Gravelle, Laurentide, Wallingford, Cliff, Fleury, Chaput-Payne and McCloskey.

The most commonly mined mineral was mica. In the 19th century, mica was valuable for its use as a heatproof window material and, later, as an electrical insulator. Mica mined in the park was transported to Hull, where it was cut and processed. However, only a few of the more than 14 known mines in the park were actually exploited on what can be considered an industrial scale. Many were little more than surface scratchings by farmers looking to create another source of income. The Fleury mine, opened in 1898 by M.C. Brown of Cantley, was one of the larger mica operations. Twenty tons (18 metric tons) of mica were removed from two pits over 30 feet (9 metres) deep; one crystal of mica was removed from this mine that reportedly weighed more than 500 pounds (about 227 kilograms).

Today, the most easily accessed mica mine in the area is the Pink Lake Mica Mine. This mine was first prospected by the Kent Brothers of Kingston in 1903. By 1904, the mine was producing mica, which was being shipped along the Rideau Canal to Kingston, where it was cut and readied for market. This mine consists mostly of surface cuts, most of which were opened (using steam-powered machinery) by 1905. By the mid-1910s, the mine had closed down, only to be reopened by the Pink's Lake Mining Company at the end of 1945. This company even ran a tunnel from



NATIONAL CAPITAL COMMISSION

The Moss Mine, during the Second World War

the edge of the lake to the earlier surface pits, but this was the last gasp for the mine. It was closed by 1946, all the equipment was removed, and now only a keen eye can spot the earlier diggings.

In terms of economic value, the more important and longest-lived mines in the park were the iron mines in the Pink Lake sector, and the Moss Mine in the Onslow/La Pêche Lake area.

The Iron of Gatineau Park

The discovery of iron in the Gatineau Hills is connected with the first surveys and settlement of the area. In 1801, John MacTaggart, who was surveying the area for Philemon Wright, noticed the needle in his compass swinging wildly about as he traversed a certain portion of lot 11 range 7, in what was later known as West Hull Township. The reason, of course, was that the high iron content in the rock was interfering with the Earth's magnetic field. MacTaggart and Wright were not able to exploit this discovery until 1826, when they formed the Hull Mining Company, and dispatched a colonist to occupy the lot. This was little more than a claim-staking exercise, and the mining that did take place was small scale at that time. Tiberius Wright sold the rights to this Hull Iron Mine to Forsyth and Company of Pennsylvania in 1854 (thus renaming the mine as the Forsyth Mine). The ore was of such quality that the company exhibited a ton of ore from this mine at the 1855 Paris International Exposition. Production increased dramatically. Between 1854 and 1860, about 15,000 tons (13,600 metric tons) were shipped, and 13 men worked at the mine. Ore was taken out of the hillside (near where the modern hydroelectric pylons cross through the park from Hull to Aylmer) to the little village of Ironside, where it was loaded onto barges for the journey along the Rideau Canal to Kingston. In Kingston, the ore was transshipped onto lakers, which transported it to Cleveland and the iron mills.

A fire in 1870 destroyed the village of Ironside and the infrastructure there for preprocessing the ore. At this time, Alanson Baldwin purchased the mine, as well as some neighbouring properties which also had promise for iron mining. The Baldwin mine produced roughly 3,000 tons (2,721 metric tons) of ore during the 1870s. Various legal difficulties beset Baldwin, and the ownership of the various mines in the area (the Forsyth, the Baldwin, and the Lawless) passed through a succession of hands over the next 50 years. Production continued, intermittently, during that time too, but never again at the same pace or with the same economic impact as during those 20 years in the mid-19th century.

The Moss Mine: Biggest in the World!

In the far western corner of Gatineau Park, there are several mine pits, underground tunnels, building foundations and crumbling structures standing as silent witnesses to an important episode of our industrial heritage. Nearly 100 years ago, this area of North Onslow Township was the epicentre for one of the biggest mines of its type in the world. Well over 100 men worked and toiled in the pits of the Wood Molybdenite Mine, with their families living above the underground shafts. At the time, the mining camp was one of the largest towns west of Aylmer. There were over 40 buildings, and more than 300 people living at the mine site during the First World War, the mine's greatest period of prosperity.

Molybdenite comes from the Greek word meaning "lead." Indeed, the first owner of the land thought that he had found lead while target shooting at cans on an outcrop of rock behind the family farm. The odd stray bullet would chip flakes off the rock. Examining these chips, the owner noticed a bluish coloured metal. A nearby mine on the Ontario side of the Ottawa River was mining lead, so he thought he might have found a lead deposit. The chips were sent to the Dominion government for testing, and were found to contain 15 percent molybdenum disulfide (MoS_2). The men from the Galetta mine tried to stake a claim, but discovered that the farmer had the mineral rights. Negotiations ensued, and soon a new company was formed. Henry Wood of Denver, Colorado, a pioneer in developing economical ways of extracting molybdenum from ore (achieving 80 percent efficiency), was brought in to develop this mine site. It was soon producing at full capacity. Molybdenite has a high melting temperature, so it was used in alloys with steel to strengthen armaments. The miners processed 150 tons (136 metric tons) of ore daily. Over the lifetime of the mine, nearly 250,000 tons (226,795 metric tons) of ore were milled, 1,000,000 pounds (453,600 kilograms) of concentrates were created, and 25,000 tons (22,680 metric tons) of waste rock were mined. All of this was transported by horse power to the PPJ Railroad, several kilometres to the south.

The value of molybdenum during the First World War was over $2,000/ton, and the mine earned back the cost of opening it within the first few months. With the worldwide depression following the end of the war, the price for the commodity dropped, and the mine closed. The mine changed hands — and names — several times over the next 20 years. It was reopened with a skeleton staff during the boom times of the 1920s, but closed with the onset of the Great Depression. The Second World War saw a resumption of production at nearly the same level of intensity as during the previous war. However, once the United States joined the war effort in 1942, cheaper sources of molybdenum could be exploited via open-pit mining, and the mine in Onslow closed down.

The mine was never known officially as the "Moss Mine," but perhaps the origin of that name comes from the procession of crates of mineral, drawn by horses down the long road to the train station, each one with the chemical formula "MoS_2" written on it. Even as recently as the 1960s, there still stood some structures on the site but, after the mine was closed, most of the buildings were sold and dismantled (much of modern Quyon's building stock has its origins in the mine buildings), the equipment was shipped away, and the forest was allowed to reclaim the site. The ruins stand in mute testimony to the men who worked in the deeps, making their own contributions to the Allied war effort with every swing of the hammer.

NATIONAL CAPITAL COMMISSION

The Moss Mine, during the Second World War

Moonshine and the Moss Mine

The Second World War touched everyone — in countless ways. On the home front, a daily reminder was the need for rationing. Ration books contained coupons for a variety of daily goods. One of these was alcohol; it was not unheard-of for teetotallers to sell their alcohol coupons on the black market, or trade them for other goods. Some workers at the mine had other ways of meeting this demand for alcohol.

Every mine needed a chemist to test the ore and, during the war, some enterprising workers drew the chemist into a scheme to distill alcohol in a secure room in the laboratory. They coloured the alcohol with tea and flavoured it with essences that could be had from the ration books. The alcohol was strictly for the coterie's private consumption, as there would be enormous trouble with the police if the alcohol was sold. Nevertheless, word got around and soon "the Provincials" were in the area, asking if any bootleggers were about. They visited the mine, and were directed to speak to a man who "knew a thing or two" about life in the area. He in turn directed them to an old man, whom they questioned as follows.

"Who is making the moonshine around here?" they asked.
"What's it worth t'ye?" said he.
"Ten dollars." (A good sum in those days!)
"Give it t'me and I'll tell ye alright,"
said the old man.
They gave him the money, and the
old man said,
"God makes the moon shine, and
I'll give ye a tip: He makes the sun
shine too!"

(Story recounted by Edward Mulligan in the Shawville Equity, December 10, 1986.)

NATIONAL CAPITAL COMMISSION

The Wakefield Mill

The Wakefield Mill

by Fabian Mugny

Who wouldn't be impressed by the sight of this stately building of stone, wood and brick on the shore of the La Pêche River near the beautiful village of Wakefield? Situated at the northeastern end of Gatineau Park, this building is the last remaining vestige of the large industrial complex formerly located at this site. It all began around 1838 with the construction of a gristmill by William Fairbairn, followed by the expansion of the site with the addition of other industrial buildings erected by the Maclarens.

William Fairbairn was born in Scotland in 1790. His father sent him to Manchester to learn the trade of millwright. He married, left for Canada in 1817 and finally settled in the newly established village of Wakefield in 1834. In 1838, he sent a petition to the Governor of Lower Canada and Upper Canada seeking permission to erect a gristmill on the La Pêche River at a strategic point situated near the confluence of the La Pêche and Gatineau rivers, at the site of a 10-metre falls. The three-and-a-half-storey stone structure was built in the Georgian style. The mill may have begun operating in 1838. The mill was not a large-scale business operation; its purpose was to produce flour for the local market. In 1844, William Fairbairn sold the mill to fellow Scots, brothers James and John Maclaren, for 300 pounds.

According to the 1851 census, the mill had three employees at that time, including a head miller. The 1861 census reveals that the Maclaren brothers were operating an oat mill, which was likely part of the flour mill. Two employees oversaw the operation of the oat mill, and one additional employee worked at the flour mill. As of 1861, the Maclarens further expanded their business activities with the construction of a woollen mill and a brick-making plant. John Maclaren lived in Wakefield and managed the village business, James Maclaren and Company. Upon the death of James Maclaren in 1892, his son Alexander took over the management of the company's industrial buildings in Wakefield.

On June 25, 1877, a fire destroyed the flour and woollen mills. Both buildings were rebuilt. Between 1897 and 1908, the mill was enlarged, and rollers replaced the old millstones. At the time, the mill had four separators and six sets of double rollers. The tool shed, as well as the shed housing the control equipment, now adjoined the flour mill. This mill was able to produce fine, white flour of better quality. During the same period, a generator coupled with turbines produced electricity to light the various buildings and even the Maclarens' general store in the village a few dozen metres below.

A second fire ravaged the industrial site in 1910, this time destroying all the buildings, warehouses and sheds, as well as the employee housing. Only the flour mill was rebuilt and enlarged, doubling its production capacity. This building can still be admired today: it has been converted into a four-star hotel and spa, serving visitors to Gatineau Park.

Alexander Maclaren died in 1939, and the mill was sold a few years later to J. P. Henderson. He converted part of the mill into apartments. In the 1950s, Henderson rented the building to brothers Kenneth and Ernest Young, who began producing feed. Finally, in 1962, the National Capital Commission bought the mill and allowed the Young brothers to work there until their retirement in 1980.

The Sawmill

At its peak of development, the Wakefield industrial complex included a sawmill in addition to the gristmill and woollen mill. Little information is available concerning its history, its activities or its demise.

After brothers James and John Maclaren purchased the gristmill from William Fairbairn in 1844, they built a sawmill on the left bank of the La Pêche River, facing the gristmill. The building was situated either next to it or just above the dam on the river. The exact date when the sawmill was built is unknown, sometime between the late 1840s and early 1850s. It is even possible that the sawmill was once destroyed by a fire which occurred a few years after its construction. An 1897 fire insurance policy indicates that the building had one-and-a-half storeys at that time. As they had done when purchasing the mill, the Maclaren brothers borrowed the necessary funds from their father, David Maclaren.

According to the 1861 census, two employees worked at the sawmill. With income from the sawmill, John and James were able to expand their activities and, after 1861, built a woollen mill and a brick kiln. James Maclaren was particularly interested in the lumber industry, as he was involved in purchasing wood to supply the Wakefield sawmill. It is most likely that the Maclaren sawmill in Wakefield remained a small business meeting local demand. In the 1850s, James Maclaren relied on other, much larger sawmills to meet the increasing demand of the larger markets for construction lumber.

By 1908, that is, before the terrible fire of 1910 that would reduce the various buildings of the industrial complex to cinders, the sawmill was no longer on the Wakefield insurance policy. The building therefore disappeared sometime between 1897 and 1908. This sawmill operation represented only a tiny source of income within the Maclaren company's commercial empire.

The Woollen Mill

The woollen mill was built between the late 1850s and early 1860s. Expanding their business by establishing this new industry seemed the next logical step for brothers James and John Maclaren, who had already owned the gristmill in the little community of Wakefield since 1844.

In 1877, the woollen mill was destroyed by fire, but was later rebuilt. This business produced bolts of fabric used for making suits and blankets. Residents of the region could purchase the fabric in the Maclarens' general store in Wakefield, or place an order to have suits made by the tailor employed at the store.

Each of the activities at the woollen mill occupied a different floor of the building: weaving, on the ground floor; wool carding equipment, on the first floor and spinning, on the second. At the turn of the 20th century, the dye house was connected directly to the spinning mill. Water power drove the various looms and spinning machines. Around 1907, electricity began to be used for lighting the building. At that time, the mill employed approximately 25 people, mainly women.

During a second fire, on May 18, 1910, all of the buildings that made up the industrial complex were destroyed. The fire began in the spinning mill, and was likely started by a match or perhaps a nail falling into the batting machine, which operated at 5,000 revolutions per minute. The fire spread very rapidly because of the oil-saturated wool, first inside the building and then throughout the entire Maclaren industrial complex, destroying the gristmill, sheds and warehouses, along with the employee housing located a few metres below the spinning mill along the La Pêche River. The total amount of damages was estimated at $50,000 to $60,000.

The spinning mill was never rebuilt, putting 30 people, mainly female workers, out of work. It is not hard to imagine the consequences of the loss of so many jobs for a small village such as Wakefield.

Modern Industry on the Shores of Meech Lake

by Denis Messier

Whether you walk, cycle, snowshoe or ski, exploring Gatineau Park is an experience that never fails to thrust the visitor deep into a peaceful, thought-provoking natural panorama. On occasion, at a bend in the trail, visitors may stumble upon a building, object or facility that piques their curiosity because of its unusual shape or seemingly strange location.

This is true of the Carbide Willson ruins. Located on Meech Creek, only metres from "Little Meech Lake" at the source of the creek, these ruins bear witness to the industrial past of the Gatineau Hills. They are what remain of the dreams of one of Canada's most energetic and prolific early 20th century inventors and industrialists, Thomas Leopold Willson.

WILLIAM JAMES TOPLEY

Carbide Willson's acid condenser tower, dam, footbridge and generating station, July 13, 1917

Farm Boy to Industrial Baron

Thomas L. Willson was born in 1860 at his father's farm in Princeton, Ontario. It was in Hamilton, an important steel town, that he attended secondary school and apprenticed with a local blacksmith. At a very early age, he demonstrated an uncommon scientific ingenuity and curiosity that prompted him to develop a host of industrial processes, for which he obtained more than 70 patents in Canada and the United States.

However, Willson is most famous for his discovery of a process to produce calcium carbide through carbon electrolysis. In 1895, when he was only 35 years old, Willson helped found a company that later became the multinational corporation Union Carbide.

Changing Water Into Light

One of the chief calcium carbide applications that Thomas Willson succeeded in developing involved the affordable production of acetylene, a gas that, when burned, emits an extremely bright light, and that, at the time, was highly prized for domestic and industrial lighting, prior to a massive shift to electricity. To produce this gas, Willson simply brought calcium carbide pellets into contact with water. Cities, trains, factories and even waterways were soon lit with acetylene produced by this process.

A Prominent Ottawa Citizen Moves to the Gatineau Hills

In 1901, it was a prosperous Thomas Willson who moved into a house on Metcalfe Street in Ottawa — close to the seat of federal political power, and at the heart of a major industrial and financial centre, not far from Chaudières Falls, a powerful and inexhaustible supply of hydroelectric energy. Soon thereafter, he built a calcium carbide plant on Victoria Island to supply the central Canadian market.

In 1905, like many prominent citizens in the Capital, Thomas Willson looked to the Gatineau Hills. He purchased a 400-acre estate on the southeast shore of Meech Lake, where he built his summer residence in 1907.

The Willson House is located on a promontory overlooking Meech Lake. It is built in the Queen Anne Revival style, a style of architecture that was common in Britain in the late 19th century. Situated on the highest point of the cliff on the lake, the house is constructed of materials native to the region, the pink granite and timber having come from the site itself. The house's rustic appearance blends perfectly with its environment.

The two-and-a-half-storey house has 11 bedrooms and seven fireplaces with four chimneys. It is surrounded by several outbuildings — including a garage, employee quarters, a chapel and an aircraft hangar — built on an estate of more than 180 hectares of rolling, wooded landscape. The property is accessed through a massive gate of wrought iron and cut pink granite, leading to a broad winding laneway, lined with electric lampposts, also made of cut stone.

The Industrial Revolution Comes to the Gatineau Hills

Thomas Willson's scientific interests were not confined to calcium carbide and acetylene production. He was also passionate about hydroelectricity, the emerging pulp and paper industry, improving the telephone, and automobiles. In fact, he was the first Ottawa resident to own a car. He built factories from St. Catharines, Ontario, to Shawinigan, Quebec. He travelled to the Saguenay, where he recognized the region's vast hydroelectric potential. He purchased immense forest properties, to which he hoped to attract hydroelectric and pulp and paper companies.

In 1905, he built a highly sophisticated laboratory in the basement of his Metcalfe Street residence in Ottawa. There, he conducted a multitude of experiments prior to focusing on the development of superphosphate-based chemical fertilizer. Despite its sophistication, the Metcalfe Street laboratory did not allow him to produce sufficient volumes of the fertilizer to demonstrate the profitability of this enterprise. He therefore turned to his Meech Lake property to provide facilities suited to his projects.

In 1911, Willson erected a dam and experimental electrical station at the source of Meech Creek. His project seriously angered waterfront cottagers, who saw water levels rise nearly two metres and some of their buildings disappear beneath the surface of the water. Willson's popularity declined sharply; however, the grumblings failed to deter the inventor from his projects. The electrical station provided enough power to supply an impressive phosphoric acid condenser, the first of its kind in the world.

These facilities, still in the experimental stage, required huge capital investment, funds that Willson also needed badly for his projects in the Saguenay. Nevertheless, he opted to put everything into phosphate production, mortgaging all of his assets. Unable to repay his debts, Willson was plunged into bankruptcy, losing all of his properties along with the rights to all of his patents. He spent the last two years of his life striving to rebuild a business in Newfoundland. Thomas Willson died in New York in 1915 after suffering a heart attack.

A Unique Role for the Manor

A few years after Thomas Willson's death, the property was sold to Archibald J. Freiman, a prosperous Ottawa businessman. Born in Lithuania, Freiman ran a large department store on Rideau Street in Ottawa. He lived in the former Willson home from 1923 until just before the Second World War, in 1938.

From 1938 to 1979, the house was owned by the family of Joseph Gilhouly, an Ottawa dentist. In 1979, the National Capital Commission acquired the property and integrated it into Gatineau Park. The building was unoccupied for awhile, then renovated and converted into a government conference centre. It was leased to Public Works and Government Services Canada, which has managed the house since then. The house is now a site for government meetings and conferences for small groups of up to 30 people.

In April 1987, Willson House was the scene of one of the most famous federal–provincial conferences in Canadian history. It was in this house that the famous "Meech Lake Accord" was negotiated, marking a significant point in the constitutional history of Canada.

If Thomas Willson had decided to settle in Ottawa to be closer to the seat of political power, he most certainly never imagined that it would one day come to his own house in the heart of the Gatineau Hills.

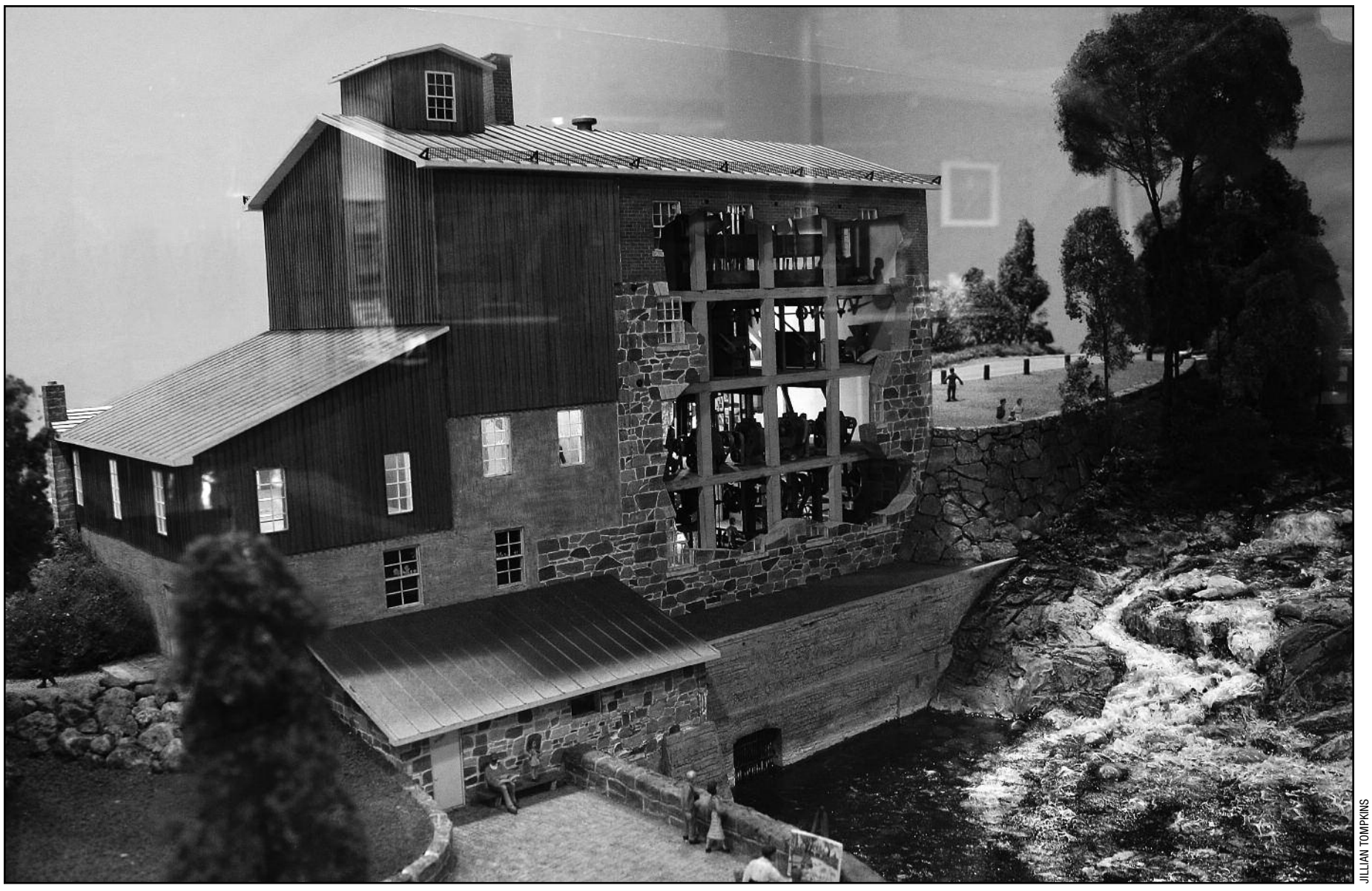
Willson's Legacy

Today, the Willson estate is protected by the Federal Heritage Buildings Review Office, which has evaluated the estate's buildings as "classified" — the highest level of heritage recognition. This recognition is justified by the quality of architecture, the historical integrity of the buildings and the national significance of Thomas Leopold Willson.

By contrast, the Meech Lake industrial facilities are in ruin, a reflection of Thomas "Carbide" Willson's shattered dreams. However, what remains speaks eloquently of a dramatic period of economic development that brought Canada into the western industrial revolution. The Gatineau Hills played a part in this revolution, as home to Thomas "Carbide" Willson, an inventor and industrialist whose efforts and energy helped to lay the groundwork for the industrial core of the Canadian economy.

The Wakefield Mill: Interpreting the Industrial History of Gatineau Park

by Denis Messier



JILLIAN TOMPKINS

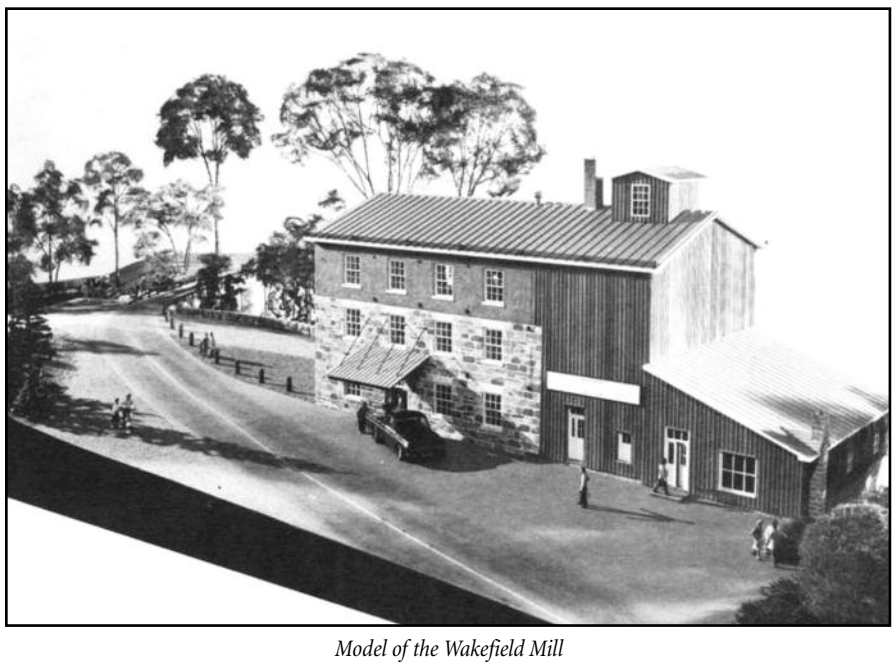
Model of the Wakefield Mill, as restored in 2008

For more than a century, the Wakefield Mill remained in the hands of the Maclaren family, who used it mainly to produce flour. However, by the start of the Second World War, the mill was sold and partially dismantled. It later changed hands several times.

In the early 1960s, the National Capital Commission (NCC), which had begun an extensive program to protect the heritage of Canada's Capital Region, purchased the Wakefield Mill to rescue it from demolition and maintain its vocation. The NCC continued to lease the mill to brothers Kenneth and Ernest Young, who, since 1950, had been operating a small manufacturing plant that produced animal feed. The mill ceased operations when the Youngs retired in 1980.

At that time, the NCC decided to restore a portion of the building, and convert it into an interpretation centre about the industrial history of this part of the Gatineau Valley. In partnership with the Gatineau Valley Historical Society, the mill helped to recount nearly 150 years of history in the region. The NCC even managed to reinstate the building's vocation as a gristmill, much to the delight of its visitors.

Since a considerable portion of the machinery and equipment had been dismantled, a model was commissioned to demonstrate how the mill operated. The NCC called upon one of its employees, Keith Rideout, an extremely talented architectural technician, who built the model of the Wakefield Mill that, for nearly 10 years, fascinated students and visitors taking part in the interpretive activities.



KEITH RIDEOUT

Model of the Wakefield Mill

The mill interpretation program concluded in 1990. Both the building and the model remained in limbo for several years. A decade later, the venerable building found a new vocation, when the NCC entered a public–private partnership to rehabilitate the Wakefield gristmill. The building underwent a major transformation. The structure that had witnessed more than a century and a half of the industrial history of the Gatineau Hills and Gatineau Valley stepped firmly into the age of leisure. The mill became an inn, which very quickly gained an enviable reputation among high-quality accommodations facilities.

The model remained in storage and gradually deteriorated. However, in 2008, in cooperation with the Friends of Gatineau Park and the operators of the Wakefield Mill Inn and Spa, a fundraising campaign was organized to help the NCC finance the restoration of the model. Once again, the NCC called upon Keith Rideout, the same employee who had built the mill model nearly 30 years before. Rideout performed the delicate process of cleaning, repairing and rebuilding the reproductions of the landscape design around the building model. The water supply mechanism — which had so well illustrated how the mill operated on water power — was removed, since the moisture it produced had caused the model to deteriorate. After several months of detailed work, the model was returned to Gatineau Park, renewed, resized and adapted to the needs of various types of users. For many years to come, it will reflect a page of history of the Gatineau Hills and Gatineau Valley.

For more information about Gatineau Park, visit ***canadascapital.gc.ca***.

W91-3/2-2009E-PDF 978-1-100-13972-2