



Published by the Forest History Association of British Columbia

No. 64 Victoria, British Columbia November 2001

FHABC AGM REPORT

The FHABC's 2001 AGM was held on June 16th at the Echo Centre in Port Alberni. The main items of business over the past year have concerned sales of the Tom Wright biography, ongoing work on the Fred Mulholland biography and oral history initiatives underway thanks to the efforts of Gerry Burch, Stan Chester and others. The City of Vancouver Archives has agreed to be a repository for our oral history material. We will be working with archivists on a needs analysis regarding the collection and archiving of forest history material.

The FHABC has a tape recorder, a supply of blank tapes and the means to duplicate and archive both tapes and transcripts. If you are willing to volunteer and carry out oral history interviews please contact Stan Chester. The Powell River Forestry Museum Society is interviewing the men who worked on their steam donkey, which is currently undergoing restoration.

Recycled paper



Following the business meeting, FHABC members toured the McLean Mill National Historic Site, a few kilometres out of town. Those who visited the McLean Mill for our 1989 AGM could not help but be impressed by the immense amount of work that has gone into restoring the mill to operation, as well as the Alberni Pacific Railway, a tourist railroad that operates between downtown Port Alberni and the McLean Mill. The current train consists of steam engine No.7, a 1929 Baldwin 2-8-2T logging locomotive that worked on Vancouver Island until 1969 and three passenger cars, converted Canadian National Railway transfer cabooses.

The current Executive of the FHABC are

Geoff Bate
2278 Cooperidge Drive
Central Saanich BC V8M 1N2
gbate@telus.net

John Parminter, Newsletter Editor
3 – 130 Niagara Street
Victoria BC V8V 1E9
jvparminter@telus.net

George Brandak
5551 Clearwater Drive
Richmond BC V7C 3B4
gbrandak@interchange.ubc.ca

Clay Perry
402 - 623 West 14th Avenue
Vancouver BC V5Z 1P7

Stan Chester, President
5686 Keith Road
West Vancouver BC V7W 2N5
2schester@home.com

John Revel
183 McLean Drive
Prince George BC V2M 4R5

Allan Klenman
407 - 3260 Quadra Street
Victoria BC V8X 1G2

Jack Robinson
192 Knollwood Drive
Kamloops BC V2C 4M6

Michael Meagher
666 Jones Terrace
Victoria BC V8Z 2L7
mmeagher@pfc.forestry.ca

Ralph Schmidt
979 Ridgeway Street
Victoria BC V8X 3C2

Edo Nyland, Treasurer
8793 Forest Park Drive
Sidney B C V8L 4E8
edonon@islandnet.com

Members are encouraged to contact any member of the Executive regarding the FHABC's aims and objectives, activities and potential projects.



FOREST HISTORY SOCIETY BOARD MEETING, OCTOBER 2001

The Forest History Society, headquartered in Durham, North Carolina, chose Victoria as the location for their fall 2001 board meeting. A number of FHABC members are on the FHS Board of Directors (Mike Apsey, Lorne Hammond and Peter Murphy) and this has enabled a degree of communication and cooperation between the two organizations over the years.

The FHS was gracious enough to include the local FHABC Executive members, and others involved in B.C.'s forest history, in parts of their fall board meeting. The Apseys hosted all to a reception during which we got to know each other and talked about our experiences and interests in forest history.

A field trip was held on Friday, October 12th, beginning with a pancake breakfast at the Canadian Forestry Service's Pacific Forestry Centre. Yvan Hardy, the Assistant Deputy Minister for the Canadian Forest Service and an FHS Board member, spoke to the group. Then Steve Taylor, an employee at the Pacific Forestry Centre, outlined the history of the CFS and current initiatives related to documenting and describing their corporate history.

This was followed by an impromptu visit to the B.C. Forest Service's office and seed orchard at Cobble Hill – a result of the tour bus overheating and thus the unscheduled interlude – where we heard about that organization's involvement in local fire protection planning and operations. Then we went to the B.C. Forest Discovery Centre at Duncan for a tour of the grounds and the museum.

Lunch was hosted by the B.C. Forest Service at the Cowichan Lake Research Station. The station manager, Don Carson, retired Research Branch director Ralph Schmidt and current employee John Parminter gave brief presentations about the history of the station and the Research Branch, as well as the current work done at the station and by the branch. A tour of some of the greenhouses followed, plus a short walk to an area of old-growth forest on the edge of the station grounds. Following our return to Victoria, we were treated to an excellent reception and dinner at the Royal B.C. Museum, held in the natural history and first nations exhibit areas.

On Sunday, October 14th a ceremony was held at Ladysmith to celebrate their tree planting project, upgrades to the historical arboretum and to unveil a memorial plaque to the late Robert Wood, a native son and prominent B.C. forester. The ceremonies were attended by approximately 35 people and hosted by the Town of Ladysmith Green Streets Committee and the Tree Canada Foundation.

Both the FHABC and FHS Executive and Board members feel that this meeting went a long way towards strengthening the links between our organizations and we look forward to a productive and fruitful interaction in the future on projects of mutual interest.



VOLUNTEERS RESTORE CABIN

FHABC member Jim McWilliams and a volunteer group restored the Diamond Lagoon cabin at Murtle Lake in Wells Gray Provincial Park during the summer. The members of the volunteer group included Jim and Barb McWilliams, Jeff McWilliams (son), Tony Stea (son-in-law), Rob and Anne-Shirley Goodell and Philip Anderson from Mahood Lake.

Seven years ago, while canoeing on Murtle Lake with the Goodells, Jim and Barb McWilliams came up with the idea of re-roofing the Diamond Lagoon cabin. The cabin was in need of work to help restore and protect it and the family wanted to do something in memory of Jim's father, Harold C. McWilliams.

The Murtle Lake area was one of Harold's favourite places and the family thought it would be a great location for the memorial project. Harold McWilliams was both Director of Parks and Deputy Minister of the Department of Recreation and Conservation from 1957 to 1971. Prior to that time he was the first head of the Reforestation Division of the B.C. Forest Service, created in 1946. On August 6, 2001 the McWilliams set out for Diamond Lagoon where they spent three workdays restoring and re-roofing the cabin.

The cabin was originally built in 1937 by Howard and Charlie Mobley for the Seattle Rod and Gun Club and is located at a campsite on the west arm of Murtle Lake. This heritage cabin is often utilized by canoeists as a bad weather shelter. The volunteer group not only re-roofed the cabin, they also cleaned out the inside and repaired the bunk beds. They built and stained two picnic tables for the site and dug out the base logs, replacing one of the logs which had rotted over the years.

The McWilliams family supplied all the material used in the project and Park Rangers and volunteers helped with transportation of the material. BC Parks also provided the memorial plaque which is mounted above the door of the cabin:

The building improvements are in the memory of
Harold McWilliams, RPF
Director & Deputy Minister of Parks 1957 - 1971
From his family, August 2001

Adapted from an article by Nicole Smith, Thompson River District, in the October 2001 issue of the BC Parks Newsletter "Visions," which can be viewed at:

http://wlapwww.gov.bc.ca/bcparks/whatsnew/visions/vis0110/vis_oct01.pdf



S.M. SIMPSON LTD.
by Sharron J. Simpson

Stanley Merriam Simpson (or S.M. as he was familiarly known) arrived in Kelowna July 17, 1913, nine years to the month after leaving his family in Chatsworth, Ontario. Upon the sudden death of their father in 1896, the three oldest Simpson children, including Stanley, left school to help support their mother and the four younger family members. Likely having completed grade eight, Stan began work as a carpenter's apprentice at the Merriam Brothers Manufacturing plant in Chatsworth. The small company was owned by Stan's cousins and was where he learned to make the screen doors, storm windows, and ladders that became his stock-in-trade when he first set up shop in Kelowna.

After three years of working in the small shop, Stan felt the world had more to offer and moved on to Toronto, where he worked during the day and took night school carpentry courses at Central Technical School. Two years later, not seeing a future for himself in the city, Stan joined the rush to populate the prairies. In 1906 he joined his brother Vern to homestead a tree-covered quarter section of land near Prince Albert, Saskatchewan. The only remaining traces of Stan's life during this time can be found on the pages of a little black book, which recorded his monthly expenditures and the dates he lived on his homestead. The little book also recorded the hours and the amounts he was paid when he worked as a carpenter in Prince Albert, the nearby communities of Aberdeen and Spading, and eventually Lethbridge and Medicine Hat. Stan and Vern likely worked together, with Vern tending the crops and clearing the land with his team of oxen, while Stan earned the cash needed to buy seed and make improvements to the land.

Stan's homestead was registered by proxy in August 1912, as by this time he had found his way to Penticton. The next year he decided Kelowna had better business prospects so Stan joined his new partner, Oswald C. Etter, to set up The Kelowna Manufacturing Company in the lane behind the Water Street fire hall. Shortly thereafter, they became known as Etter and Simpson, and while business initially went well, the valley-wide slowdown that came with the onset of World War I resulted in pretty meagre profits for the partnership.

As legend would have it, by the end of 1915 Oswald and Stan realized there was not enough business to support them both, so the decision of who would stay and who should move on was made with the flip of a coin. Stan Simpson lost the toss. However Mr. Etter, being a married man with obligations, decided the prospects for the future didn't look too secure so he and his wife returned to Penticton where he became a homebuilder of considerable repute.

The company, now known as S.M. Simpson, carried on, and by 1918 the local economy had improved enough for Stan to expand his operation into bigger premises on Abbott Street, where an earlier fire had made the Kelowna Canning Company building unsuitable for canning but adequate for Stan's needs. This location is presently a motel on the corner of Abbott Street and Lawrence Avenue. The new sash and door plant was a corrugated metal building which remained at this location until 1948.

By 1923, Stan saw opportunity in the rapidly expanding fruit industry and set up a small box factory at the Abbott Street location in addition to the sash and door plant, which would remain the cornerstone of his business for many years. Two years later, the need for a guaranteed wood supply resulted in Stan forming a partnership with Fred Munson in a portable mill at Ellison. By 1927, in an era before logging trucks and passable roads, all the suitable wood around the first mill had been cut, so Stan struck out on his own and set up his next sawmill in Winfield, behind the old Hiram Walker plant. Two years later Stan moved again, this time to Hydraulic Creek above East Kelowna. Most of the trees cut at these various locations were pine and were rough sawn on site in 11" widths by 1" thick - the size required for the ends and sides of apple boxes.

The need for various-sized boxes was growing rapidly as increasing varieties of fruits and vegetables, in addition to original apples, were being shipped from the valley. Strawberries, peaches, cantaloupe, grapes, onions, lettuce, pears, asparagus, cherries, cabbage and crabapples all required boxes of different shapes and sizes. In 1930, Stan purchased the Manhattan Beach property as his first permanent mill location and within the following three years a sawmill, veneer plant and box factory were all in operation. The site had originally been intended for a cannery but only a wharf had been built before the war intervened, and the project abandoned.

The box factory made *shook* – the collective term for the sides, ends, tops and bottoms of the boxes – that were shipped up and down the valley. A unitizing machine made the tops and bottoms of the boxes, with a double shift producing about 120,000 units a day, or about 10,000,000 a year. Tintops were small veneer containers held together by a band of tin around the top and were used for soft fruit. Experienced women could product 2,000 baskets a day and in 1935, 1,500,000 of the veneer baskets were produced. Concord grapes were sold to markets in oval wooden baskets, with the machine operator turning out about 1,000 baskets a day, or about 75,000 for the season. Simpson's box factory also supplied tops and bottoms to other box makers who did not have the equipment necessary to assemble them.

Logs cut by independent contractors were stored in about a dozen booming grounds from Okanagan Centre to Peachland, with the mill's first tug, the *Klatawa*, purchased from Len Hayman in 1932. The second, a cedar-hulled tug named the *Manhattan*, was built by A.J. (Art) Jones, the local boat builder, in 1938. The third tug was the steel-hulled *Stanley M* which was transported, in two pieces, on the Kettle Valley Railway from New Westminster to Penticton. It went into service in 1948 and is still used today.

With the Manhattan mill site fully involved in the war effort, Stan Simpson bought the Kelowna Sawmill Ltd. from David Lloyd-Jones in 1942. Unfortunately, a major fire wiped out the new purchase the following year and rather than rebuild, operations were consolidated at the Manhattan Beach location. The land occupied by the sawmill, in excess of 11 acres, was sold to the city for the nominal cost of cleaning up the site after the fire. The condition of the sale was that it be used for the "pleasure and enjoyment of the citizens ... and that no commercial or industrial activity be allowed on the site." This is the present Kelowna civic centre, including City Hall, the Memorial Arena, the Centennial Museum, the provincial government building and yacht club.

As with many early sawmills, fires were an ongoing problem for Stan. In 1937, a fire at the Manhattan location wiped out the retail shop as well as the machine and blacksmith shops. Two years later, another fire, which was apparently set intentionally, destroyed the sawmill and veneer plant. According to Stan's son, Horace (H.B.): "the only benefit of a fire was that the operation could be rebuilt to state-of-the-art standards," which this time included a sprinkler system throughout.

During the war years, the Teamsters Union and an early version of the International Woodworkers of America (I.W.A.) established themselves at the Manhattan operation. This was a somewhat tumultuous period for the labour movement in B.C. and it took some time and a few contentious strikes before the union and company developed a less combative working relationship.

By 1947, a new building at the corner of Doyle Avenue and Ellis Street housed an expanded retail centre known as the Kelowna Sawmill Ltd. (KSM), the administrative offices of S.M. Simpson Ltd. and the newly-established forestry division.

The early 1950s saw the fruit industry shift away from wooden boxes to cardboard containers, known in the sawmill business as the "corrugated invasion." This, coupled with a hundred-day strike in 1953, resulted in significant job losses in the veneer plant and box factory, leaving the sawmill as the primary income source for the company. Then as now, lumber markets were known for their cyclical profitability, so a search was undertaken to find other products for the company to manufacture.

By 1957, S&K Plywood Ltd. was up and running, introducing a new spruce plywood to the market. The building, which covers about two acres, was constructed by an in-house crew which had to drive 1800 pilings 16' to 18' into the boggy soil. The company started production before Canadian Standards Association (CSA) approval was received, a requirement of the Central Mortgage and Housing Corp. (CMHC) for material used in house construction. Over 30 railcar loads of plywood had accumulated before the approval came. At that point, each panel had to be individually stamped "CSA/CMHC Approved" before it could be sent to market.

Two significant developments emerged as a result of the new plywood plant. The first was that additional peeler logs were needed beyond what could be obtained locally, so McLean Sawmills in Malakwa, Lumby Timber Company, Trautman and Garraway Sawmill and Peachland Lumber and Box, both in Peachland, were acquired to supply logs to the plywood plant.

The second development was the return of the company to the fruit container business, with the development of the bulk fruit bin. The company worked with the Summerland Research Station to design the bin, and after several modifications a patent was issued in the early 1960s for the now-internationally-recognized orchard container. By 1962, S.M Simpson Ltd. was shipping eight large carloads of pulp chips a day to Crown Zellerbach, Vancouver. By this time, logs delivered to the mill had significantly diminished in size and therefore chips were produced for the pulp market to maximize utilization.

Stan Simpson continued to provide leadership to the industry as a founding member of the Interior Lumber Manufacturers Association (ILMA) and guide his company until he retired after a serious stroke, in 1955. Two years later, the City of Kelowna made him Freeman of the City in "appreciation of the services he rendered to the advancement of our city." Upon his death in 1959, a trust fund was created which has paid for improvements on Knox Mountain, including the road to the summit, picnic sites and pavilions. A very substantial residue of that trust remains for use by the city today.

In 1955, Horace Simpson assumed the presidency of the company, which he ran until, in one of the regular consolidations that frequently re-organized the industry, the company was sold to Crown Zellerbach in 1965. Subsequent sales were to Fletcher Challenge/Crown Forest in 1983 and Riverside Forest Products, the present owner, in 1993.

Stan Simpson's one-man operation grew to become the largest employer in the area during the 52 years of its existence. As was the case with so many entrepreneurs in the early days, Stan's life was his work, and he possessed the vision, determination and willingness to take the risks that lead to the creation of a company that continues to thrive today. His vision extended beyond his sawmill to his adopted community where his legacy also continues to enhance the city of Kelowna.

Sharron Simpson is S.M. Simpson's granddaughter, and is currently writing a book about Stanley M. Simpson, the sawmills and his legacy to the community. She also teaches "Memories into Memoirs" life writing classes in Kelowna. She can be reached at 1850 Abbott Street, Kelowna, B.C. V1Y 1B5. E-mail: sharron_simpson@telus.net



This newsletter is the official organ of the Forest History Association of British Columbia. It is distributed at no charge to members of the association, libraries, archives and museums. Items on forest history topics, descriptions of current projects, requests for information, book reviews, letters, comments and suggestions are welcomed.

Please submit newsletter material and send changes of address to the Editor: John Parminter, # 3 – 130 Niagara Street, Victoria, BC V8V 1E9. Phone (250) 384-5642 home or (250) 356-6810 office. E-mail: jvparminter@telus.net

Membership in the association is \$10 yearly, or \$45 for five years. Please send dues to the Treasurer: Edo Nyland, 8793 Forest Park Drive, Sidney, BC V8L 4E8. Phone (250) 656-9276. E-mail: edonon@islandnet.com

The President: Stan Chester, can be reached at 5686 Keith Road, West Vancouver, BC V7W 2N5. Phone (604) 921-9880. E-mail: 2schester@home.com