Issue No 112. December 2021. **ISSN 2563-0229 (Print) ISSN 2563-0237 (Online)**

British Columbia FOREST HISTORY NEWSLETTER

Newsletter seeking editor! Please get in touch to guest edit our March issue. Or, if you would like to assume the position on a more permanent basis. info@fhabc.org

Fundraising. Please help the Forest History Association of BC raise funds to digitize forest industry oral-histories on cassette tapes, presently stored at UBC Rare Books and Special Collections. These oral history interviews were undertaken twenty years ago by the now 98-year-old FHABC-member Gerry Burch. Once digitized, we edit these long interviews down to shorter "best-of" tracks to enjoy them in online "listening parties" with our members. Our first such event was held on Sept 26th, with a recording of retired Forester Bruce Devitt. To find out more, follow us on Facebook or become a member of the FHABC. With your help, we hope to raise $1000 to digitize 40 more tapes. Thank you for your tax-deductible support, and we hope to see you at the next listening party!

Donations: https://www.canadahelps.org/en/charities/forest-history-association-of-british-columbia/

If you are interested in volunteering time instead of money please JOIN US!

Issue Index:

Shingle Milling in BC in the 1920s[1]

Allen Hopwood

A wooden shingle is a thin, wedge-shaped piece of wood laid with others in a series of overlapping rows as a covering for roofs and the sides of buildings. (A shingle is sawn from a wood block, whereas a shake is split.) Old-growth western red cedar is ideal for making shingles (light weight, adequate strength, straight grain, durable, dimensionally stable). A cedar shingle is about 2.22 cm thick and 40.6, 45.7 or 61.0 cm long, with a width varying with the size of block being cut. There are several grades, depending on knot size/content, width, imperfections, grain, portion of the tree used, etc.

Machinery for sawing shingles has been around since before 1825. The standard procedure since at least 1900 has been: a log is cut into rounds of the appropriate length which are then split into triangular bolts which in turn are fed into the carriage of a sawing machine. The carriage pushes the bolt past a saw which slices off shingles at an angle to achieve taper. The sawing machine operator places the bolts on the carriage, picks up the shingles as they come off the saw, and "joints" them (removes waste wood and squares the sides on a second saw). The operator tosses the finished singles into separate chutes according to grade. At the foot of each chute, a packer bundles the shingles for shipment.

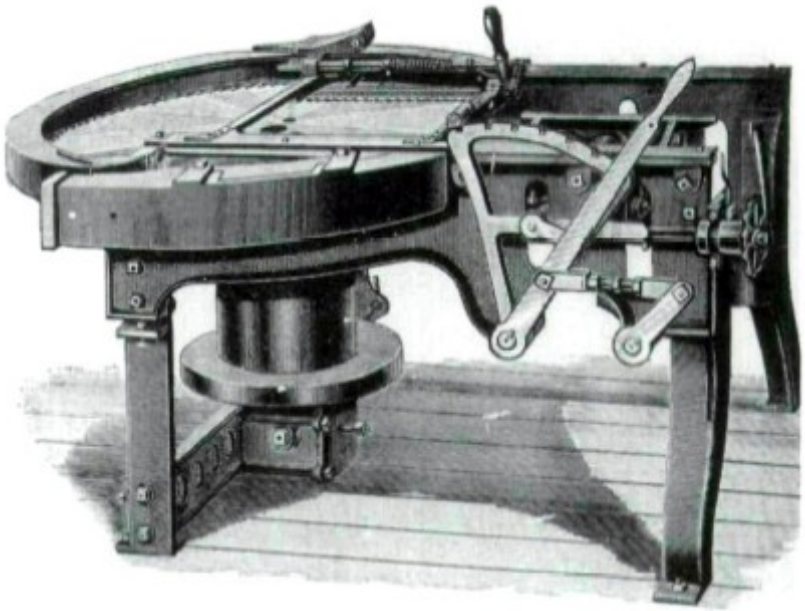

Figure 1: Horizontal shingle machine manufactured by the Canadian Locomotive Co. of Kingston, Ontario. Source: Canadian Lumberman, 18 Dec 1898, p 21.

In the 1920s, shingle sawyers (also called "weavers") were typically hard-working (10-hour shifts) and hard-drinking. They got paid more than loggers but had almost equally dangerous working conditions. The mills were dark and damp. The sawing machines were designed for production, not safety, and the sawyer's hand worked close to the blades which ran very fast. So shingle sawyers could be identified by their missing fingers. Shingle sawyers (like rock drillers) had to bunk together because they usually had continual deep coughs (and difficulty breathing). Long-term exposure to cedar dust can cause allergic reaction and/or decreased lung capacity (and sometimes lung disease). Sawyers

[1] This article owes much to Robert Griffin's 1981 "The Shingle Sawing Machine in British Columbia 1901 to 1925," in *Material Culture Review* 13 (June). https://journals.lib.unb.ca/index.php/MCR/article/view/17070.

were said to have "cedar asthma" and it is reported that "for many this led to a slow and agonizing death."

Originally, shingle machines sawed horizontally. The illustration on the previous page shows a horizontal shingle machine manufactured by the Canadian Locomotive Co. of Kingston, Ontario. This machine was based upon an American (F.J. Drake) design, with a rated capacity of 25,000-50,000 shingles per day.

The introduction of an upright sawing machine (invented in BC) was "an event of significance to British Columbia's industrial development." The upright machine produced higher quality shingles even though it produced fewer shingles per shift.

Even the most basic, least expensive horizontal machine could out-produce an upright machine. A typical 1922 upright machine could produce 36,000 shingles per 10-hour shift. A hand-fed horizontal machine could produce, on average, 50,000 shingles/shift, while the most advanced horizontal machine (a ten-block carriage) was capable of 175,000 shingles/shift.

The availability of the upright machines allowed BC mills to compete with long-established American mills which continued to use horizontal machines. Despite tariffs and generally higher production costs, BC's high-quality shingles allowed penetration of the major Eastern US markets. By 1929, BC sold 90% of its shingle output to the US Eastern Seaboard.

By 1900, there was a wide variety of upright machines available; the most common was the Dunbar machine made in New Brunswick. But two transplanted Americans (machinist Henry Schaake and shingle worker Frank Johnson) improved on the Dunbar design and by 1902 Schaake's New Westminster shop was producing the much more reliable and faster Johnson-Schaake machine. Soon there was competition, particularly from Letson & Burpee of Vancouver who developed their own design which was very different from the Dunbar or Johnson-Schaake machines.

Schaake and Letson & Burpee continued to redesign the machines they produced through 1913. In 1909, Schaake advertised a Johnson Iron Frame Shingle Machine weighing 1,275 kg, occupying a floor space of 2.1 x 2.4 m at a cost of $425 (without saw).

Competition also came from the U.S. In 1905, Sumner Iron Works of Bellingham, Washington produced a modified, improved Schaake-Johnson machine. Several American branch plants were set up in BC.

After selling his company to Heaps Engineering in 1910 or 1911, Schaake re-established his business in 1915 and produced a new and better shingle machine, the Acme. The Acme went into full production after WW1. Heaps came up with the Cedar King at the end of WW1. The Cedar King was said to be in a "class by itself."

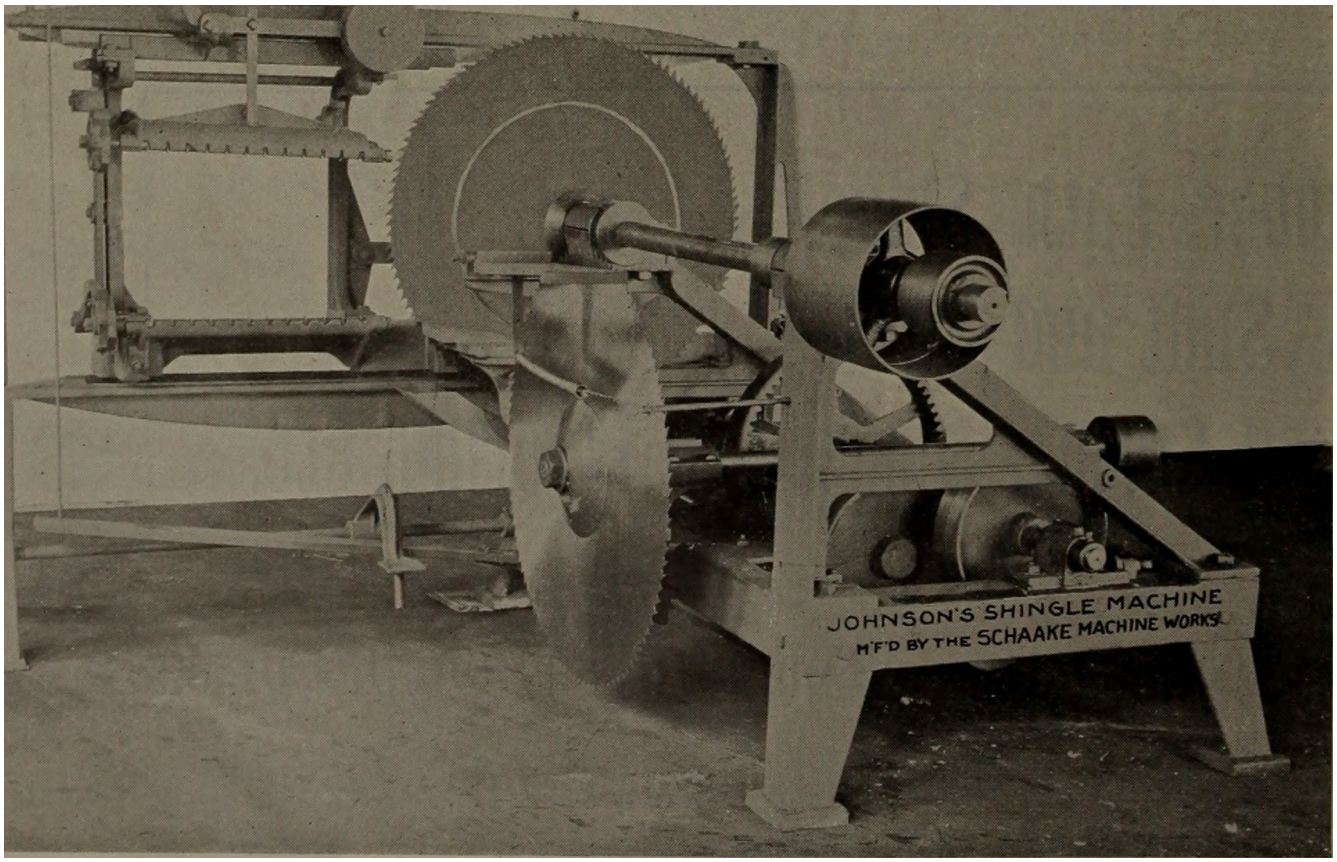

Figure 2: An upright shingle machine produced by The Schaake Machine Works, New Westminster BC. Source: Canadian Forest Industries 1901-1902, pg 907.

Another New Westminster shop, Webb & Gifford, entered the field of shingle machine manufacturers in 1915, but their first effort proved too light. It wasn't until 1919 that they produced a competitive model called the Ideal which introduced special rollers for the carriage and a ratchet for precise feeding of the shingle blocks. Webb & Gifford also supplied these two innovations for conversion of other makers' machines.

The BC shingle industry grew from producing 725 million shingles in 1909 to nearly 2.5 billion in 1919. This came about because of BC's vast stands of top-quality western redcedar trees and the government's 1901 ban on the export of cedar logs (and logs of all species in 1906 and 1912).[2] In 1920, 2.135 billion redcedar shingles were sawn in BC; they sold for $11.187 million or 5.15 cents each. (This value is a Federal Government estimate; the BC Government estimated the value at $12.081 million.) The BC Government reported 109 shingle mills operating in 1920.

[2] But the embargo on log exports was much loosened starting in 1914 due to the threat of US tariffs and lobbying by BC's larger forestry companies, many of them American-owned with mills in the US. From 1920 to 1922 about 10% of all timber cut from private and Crown lands was exported. By 1918, log exports had become "an accepted aspect of the provincial economy" and have remained so.

2021 Association Annual-General-Meeting results.

The FHABC annual general meeting was held on the weekend of Sept 25/26. Outgoing newsletter editor Dave Florence, and director Claire Williams vacated their chairs. The re-elected board consists of Richard Dominy (President, acting treasurer), Eric Andersen (vice president), Dave Lang (secretary), and four directors at large, being Sarah Giesbrecht, Mike Meagher, Ira Sutherland and Richard Olak. This leaves several director seats vacant. If you would like to join the board, please do get in touch!

On the Saturday, Ira Sutherland presented on "Social-ecological change in the British Columbia forestry system" and on Sunday we hosted our first oral-history listening-party. Dave Lang had edited a wonderful 20-minute version of a 2001 interview that Gerry Burch had undertaken with Bruce Devitt. Both the now 98-year-old Burch and 89-year-old Devitt were present and available for discussion. The event attracted attendees from British Columbia, Ontario and Quebec.

Please join us for our next "listening party" in January, for a May 1998 interview with former Truck Loggers Aassociation personality Viv Williams. Please watch your inbox for details as they become available.

"At Sea" in the "Seedling"

Michael Meagher

The B.C. Forest Service Annual Report for 1957, Page 35, " ***Reconnaissance Survey Work"*** section stated:

> *"A three-man crew operating from an outboard cruiser made a reconnaissance of 16,170 acres of cut-over timber land in the Sechelt Public Working Circle and 13,790 acres in the Harrison Lake drainage. Only 2,720 acres of the 29,960 acres examined were deemed to be plantable. Restocking has taken place on 11,050 acres, and the balance of 16, 190 acres is unplantable because of heavy debris and (or) brush. Three areas – one at Cultus Lake and two in the Cowichan Valley – were intensively examined and mapped. Of the 5,855 acres covered, 2,128 were found in need if planting. Much of this will be planted in the spring of 1958."*

In the summer of 1957 I was assigned the job of conducting regeneration surveys on Crown Lands in the Jervis Inlet and Sechelt Inlets, plus the Harrison Lake drainage. This was after having spent two months at the B. C. Forest Service's Mesachie Lake Research Station preparing to select potential "Seed Production Areas" in second-growth stands of Douglas-fir, and after my UBC Graduate friend, Bruce Devitt, and I had climbed the Cowichan Valley sites. My "Mainland" crew comprised Neil Marshall, a regular BCFS employee in charge of planting or snag-falling crews and Ernie – a teenager selected by Alf Bamford, 2-ic of the Reforestation Division.

We assembled at the BCFS's Marine Depot near the mouth of the Fraser River, where Neil had been introduced to our boat: ***"The Seedling***" a – double-outboard motored "cruising" craft containing two beds along the hull and a cot under the roof. Maps and belongings checked and secured, we "up-anchor"(ed) and set the compass for Sechelt, where we would contact the Sechelt Ranger Station, enjoy a good dinner, and anchor for the night. The winds were light and the waves small, allowing a relaxed cruise and nearly reaching the Sechelt vicinity when a motor died. No problem! Portable gas tank at work …… when the other motor died! leaving NO gas tank #2 employed among slightly-higher waves. Task completed and peace restored – with a note to turn off one tank BEFORE it cut out, THEN repeat for motor #2. One other lesson learned earlier: Neil could not read a marine map! Happily, I had been exposed to such maps and their symbols of underwater dangers with depth markings during past summers, so could provide the cautions needed. Also: how to read tide tables. Madeira Park – the Sechelt Ranger Station's location – was reached in late afternoon, introductions done and boat lashed securely, we dined in comfort and bedded down – our cot-riding student less comfortable than Neil and I.

Figure 3: "Scenes Up Jervis Inlet." Photo by William Olsen Banfield, ca 1936, some 21 years before the Meagher reconnaissance. Courtesy of City of Vancouver Archives, CVA 289-005.357.

After breakfast in a local **"Morning Specials"** restaurant and then reviewing our destination's route and any cautions re tricky currents with the Ranger staff, we left for a logging camp in Jervis Inlet. There definitely were some *"tricky currents*" en route, but we reached our destination, situated at the mouth of Brittain River, by late afternoon – still in time for dinner in the logging camps. I told Neil to cut the motor so that we could cruise in to a stop without the risk of colliding with any of the boats and planes at the dock. "**Too early!"** due to the stronger outflow than I had estimated, propelling us

backward! I yelled at Ernie to use the pike pole to stop our drift. Some confusion; command repeated; confusion continued! Finally, he swung the pole and made a connection –through the fabric wrapping of a company float-plane's wing! I repeated my apology a few times before reaching the office, where the only person in view calmed me with "***No problem.***"

Off to the logged lands the next morning, with Neil and Ernie as one crew and I as a single. They had a ride to the east side of the river, while I was to examine lands on the west side, then cross the stream and contact them by day's end. All well until I reached the limit of logged land on my side and scanned the bank for the best crossing site. "Best" did not really apply: only a few low banks with shallow bars in sight, but deeper along both the close and the far-side bank. However, there was one place where I could use a suspended tree's stem to put me close to the far bank. Socks off and boots on, I inched my way ahead cautiously and safely – until I calculated the risk in the deeper water beyond the stem's reach as too high for me. Back to the west shore and a timid sidestep routine across. NB: NO Safety Committees those days! LOTS of faith in one's own judgment, or the Gods' supervision, was your "safety plan."

Figure 4: "Skookumchuck of Egmont." Western Canada Airways Photo, 1930. Courtesy of City of Vancouver Archives, CVA 374-193.

More such days ahead before we decamped for the cruise to Sechelt Inlet and more reliance on the "Safety plan." We reached the entrance to the Inlet at the "***Skookumchuck"-*** a narrow and well-known site of boiling/bubbling/swirling water caused by the irregular bottom and the high in/out tidal flow four times a day, that we had to traverse to reach our destination: Sechelt Inlet. All seemingly calm, we proceeded straight at the opening – while noticing a few fishing boats idling to the side of our route. A puzzle – until Their logic was soon apparent: the water was in full "*boiling/bubbling/swirling*" mode. Made "***At Sea"*** status had nearly been "***In Sea."*** [Note to self #2: ***CHECK tidal schedule before making important decisions!***] We circled back and found room near the fish boats to lick our obvious wounds, during which time we saw a smallish ex-American military? ship – maybe a frigate -- repeating our mistake, with the same expected adjustment appearing soon after. After (happily) following the fishing boats via the still-boiling/bubbling water – but reduced -- we proceeded to our destination: a small logging camp in Narrows Inlet. All quiet -- until we approached the dock, and a delegation of animals: dogs, cats, ducks, goats and a horse trotting down the dock to welcome us, apparently not trusting that the camp guardian fellow who appeared would do it right. Dressed in the usual "hosting" apparel of "experienced" fedora, stag work pants, flannel shirt and suspenders, plus heavy boots, he greeted us while tying us to the dock. Just about then we realized that he was a "**she"!** – a bit of news that the Forest Service Ranger forgot – or did he? Later I learned that she and sister were of a notable, but rugged, family from Norway who were sustained by hand logging on their holdings, by collection of logs freed by frequent storms, also by hunting, fishing and maintaining idled logging camps. [See "**The Cougar Sisters"** in FHABC Newsletter # 75]. After we had examined all Inlets in our jobs list, we returned to the Sechelt Ranger Station and paid our respects, then followed by our return to the Marine Station before a weekend's break and preparing for our next destination: Harrison Hot Springs.

I travelled to the "Springs" in a BCFS pickup and reported to the BCFS Ranger Station at the foot of the Lake. Our maps consulted and useful info gained from the Station's staff, I waited for Neil and Ernie's arrival. Hours later and still no sign of The Seedling until, nearing dusk, it rounded the corner from the Harrison River and cruised to the Ranger Station. Not much map reading required for that trip, but it was fishing season, creating several small boat jams en route. A further delay was due to the chronically-silty Fraser River, complicating navigation – before the variable number, sizes and locations of bars to be avoided – or sometimes visited by fishermen crews to pull **or** push The Seedling free.

"Hungry" hardly characterized the crew's condition. Happily, the village offered several choices of menu that tamed their tummies. Up anchor and away to the north the following day and inspections of cut-over sites were launched. Most of the eastern shores offered no roads for easy access, requiring Neil to remain off-shore while Ernie and I enjoyed regular upward/downward hikes all day. Reaching the Big Silver River at the foot of Mount Breakenridge we were able to eat in a CanFor logging camp. The "usual" hospitality of such camps was based on silence in the dining room so that no interference with obtaining that last piece of the daily pie offering could develop, then a quick exit to the bunkhouse. To my surprise, I met a young UBC Forestry student, Maurice Tuomala, who was a cousin of Ray Savola(einen), my UBC Classmate. Ray's Finnish origins were well utilized in learning the facts in logging camps in northern Vancouver Island and northern Johnstone Strait. NB: From a

"log 'em all!" creed in our UBC logging course, Ray had since visited relatives in Finland who owned their own woodlots and had adjusted his motto, when I met him several years later, to: "***save the soil!"***.

Figure 5: Mount Breakenridge and Harrison Lake, BC. Source: Copyright image by Wayne Weber (flikr).

Our on/off boat, hill climb/descents, and back on the **"Seedling"** and our "***onward"*** voyages routine propelled us to the top of Harrison Lake at Port Douglas, B.C. – the last, and a very important station, during the Fraser River Gold rush to bypass the many Canyons' steep grades, waterfalls and risks of falling rock. Our destination was another logging camp nearby with a difference: it was the site of an active *First Nation* Reserve, that of the Xa'xtsa (or Douglas First Nation). Again, we ate in the loggers' cookhouse, but bunked in our floating home. Regular "crummy" rides were the local taxi to our sites for inspection and chance to chat with the driver, but not usually with the crew. One common feature of life in the location was evening movies – usually of the "Spaghetti western" mode. It served both communities well due to the chance to cheer for either the cowboys or the "*Indians*"! Equality grew via small steps, but in 1957 we saw NO "Natives" among the logging crew. Cruising the west shore offered a local special benefit: several volcanic springs served as welcome bath sites after a long day of climbing/descending slopes that grew hotter all day. When (finally!) all west-shore sites available only via boat had been examined, we shifted to examining inland sites, permitting Neil to participate fully, putting his "watery" legs to work in the Chehalis River Valley, and our keen eyes on his discomfort. September reached meant that Neil deposited **"The Seedling"** at the marine Depot then rode the bus back to Harrison Lake, while Ernie returned to Victoria and school.

Figure 6: Port Douglas. Image Credit: Matt Bossons

My "*Mainland summer"* program continued when Graham Hart, a new immigrant from southern England with experience in plant nurseries and small-scale Forestry via the British Forestry Commission who had arrived during May, and learned regeneration surveying steps – LOTS OF STEPS -- in the Cowichan Lake and other Vancouver Island areas -- became my compassman.

While Graham and Bruce Devitt were based in Mesachie Lake's Experiment Station Bruce received an invitation from Rod Pringle, our UBC Class President, then based in Nanaimo, to visit him "For a cuppa." Enroute, Graham suggested they bring a bottle of some spirit as a gesture of thanks. Into the Lake Cowichan liquor store to survey the list of offers. NB: No access by the public beyond the counter in those times – and asking the clerk, who was large and bulky and showing "white knuckles" as a sure indication of a past life as a faller, for a "*bottle of Dubonnet*." The reaction was "*A WHAT?*" Graham repeated his request, prompting this reply: "*Ah, you mean DUBBINIT*". "*We use that to water-proof our boots.*" Mission accomplished when Graham said "*God stone the crows!*" One culture, but two languages met.

Graham's short stature and good nature were welcome, then his "Mainland" time with Neil and me made a great difference to his waistband – to the extent that his wife and family hardly recognized him when he greeted them at Vancouver's Airport that fall. His next few years were spent at the Green Timbers Nursery and Research Station to assist the Director, Tom Wells, with nursery trials and administration before forming his own company of selling fertilizer and weed-control materials to private companies.

The Mainland mountains' glacial history was easy to see, with abrupt differences in soil type, depth, and dominant tree species, especially when small sandbars would be crossed at approximately 1000 feet elevation on our trip to the cut-over sites above. Our "*Hotel"* was a BCFS cookhouse, parked off the road to the US border, for a snag-falling crew dropping dead trees and broken stems after a long-since fire and incomplete cleanup assignment. One too-graphic lesson I learned when our truck "flamed out" while I was backing down a narrow dirt road to turn around: STALLED ENGINES ON AUTOMATICS DO NOT RETAIN BRAKING POWER! Luckily, soft banks can suffice. When back in Victoria I raised this quandary with a mechanic in the Motor Pool, who asked ***"Did I forget to tell you?"*** We remained compatible for years due, in part, to the difference in our physiques -- in his favour.

Another lesson learned during that summer concerned the effects of climate on successful natural regeneration species' balance: more western hemlock and red cedar than Douglas-fir in the Sechelt areas than in the Harrison/Chilliwack drainage – likely due to their warmer summers that generated more fires leaving larger openings to more-regular seed fall. That observation came only too soon when the summer of 1958 arrived early and hot, resulting in a bad fire season. The 1958 BC Forest Service's Annual Report for Forest Protection (Page 60) noted:

> *"A mild winter with little or no snow, at the lower levels preceded the 1958 fire season, (which) began in earnest in early May, as an area of high pressure dominated first the Southern and later, the Northern half of the Province. July was a month of record drought. At Victoria, it was necessary to go back to 1889 to find another rainless July."*

Sadly, those fires included some of the Harrison lands surveyed only one year prior, sending me and my crew back in 1961 to survey many of the same sites -- in another heat spell! Our trailer was parked along the road to Harrison Hot Springs that provided some shade during the highest heat period. Our day began at 5 am to dine in a restaurant in the "village", then off to beat the mid-day heat by starting work at 6 am – on the west-facing slopes to avoid as much sun as possible -- then ending on the opposite slopes before a refreshing dip in Harrison Lake. One addition to our crew was Anton ("Ton") Hamilton, a recent arrival from The Nederlands who had run in the 1948 Olympic Games, but was out of shape for climbing hot slopes in the steep valley south of the Fraser River down farther to the Skagit River Valley. Again, our crew's trailer was parked in as shady a site as we could find beside a stream and near a small restaurant, but it was not able to subtract all the previous day's heat, resulting in very fitful sleeps. After all the crew suffered for a few days in that debilitating stress I rang Alf Bamford in the Victoria office and asked if we might leave that area and relocate to a more-favourable location. Even though Alf had experienced similar work in the Harrison drainage in 1939 – from which he emerged to learn that Canada was at war: No such luck. Couldn't "*win 'em all!"*

Ton's work ethic and dedication to forestry earned him a position as Manager of the BCFS' new Nursery near Skimikin in the Shuswap area, while Neil's record of quiet achievement and practical adjustments to established routines resulted in him rising to manage the Duncan/Koksilah Nursery complex.

These summers after graduation from UBC, including more "hilly" lessons, fit me for acceptance in 1961 to a Master Degree program in forest soils and plant nutrition in the University of Toronto, from which my career took some unplanned, but interesting, turns, ending back in BC six years later, to begin studies for a post-graduate degree in forest genetics.

The Sopron Saga: "Hungarian Forestry Freedom Fighters" at UBC.

Bruce Devitt

Those of us of a "certain age" will remember the January 1957 arrival in BC of the Hungarian Forestry School from Sopron (after their flight from the 1956 Russian invasion of Hungary, the previous autumn). Unfortunately 1957 also experienced a serious recession, which exacerbated by typical Canadian political squabbling over who was going to fund their continuing education program, left many feeling misled and unwanted.

It was therefore a surprise when their Dean, Dr. Kalman Roller, published "The Sopron Chronicle" in1986, that described their memories of the arrival and challenges. He wrote that their time at UBC in the late 1950s "turned out more successfully and we were happy with our lives after all."

Mike Meagher and Bruce Devitt, UBC Forestry 1957 graduates and Forest Club reps were part of the UBC welcoming committee one snowy January day out in an Abbotsford air hanger. The Soproners, faculty and students, had just arrived by train after a lengthy journey across Canada. Mike, 1957 Club Secretary, also represented the class 25 years later at their 25 Year celebrations.

These early connections prompted both of us, now as FHABC members, to get the Sopron story collected, published and archived to complete their life story and contribution. Their arrival was timely for forestry in BC and they played a big role.

The story of their early recollections and reflections in Hungary and in Canada during their careers and family experiences afterwards should not be lost.

We have recently found that there is a Sopron newsletter, *Kapocs,* edited by Laszlo Retfalvi, that has already been collecting such stories. We are glad to announce that these newsletters and some other material will be archived at UBC. This will soon be described and made available to researchers. The FHABC newsletter also has some past material (Antal Kozak and Joseph Bako issue 82 May 2007, media release issue 83 August 2007). However, we feel that the FHABC newsletter could use more Sopron coverage, especially from non-Sopron foresters who may have been associates.

So, good readers, if you or your contacts have any connection to this story, please start collaborating on future Newsletter submissions, so that they might not be forgotten!

Look for issue #113 in March 2022 (ideas deadline Feb 15).


FOREST HISTORY
FHA
ASSOCIATION
BRITISH COLUMBIA