





OUR ROOTS IN LOGGING

Our

future in forestry

BY MARGARET SCOTT

PHOTOS COURTESY WESTWIND FOREST STEWARDSHIP INC.

As we welcome summer and the beauty of our district's forests in full display following Canada's 150th year, it seems an appropriate time to look back at the history of logging in the Parry Sound area and how forestry has changed throughout.

"We got a considerably late start," explains John Macfie, a local historian and retired employee of the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources.

Parry Sound
Lumber Co., 1900.
(Parry Sound Public Library)



Chopping down a pine, Foley Township, 1887. (D.F. Macdonald/Parry Sound Public Library)

Below: The Conger Lumber Co. sawmill on Bob's Point in Parry Sound, as it appeared in 1909. (Parry Sound Public Library)

It was only after areas in eastern and southern Ontario had been cut – starting with Ottawa in 1804 – that logging began in the West Parry Sound District. The markets for wood were east of the district, especially overseas in Great Britain for square timber or round timber for ships' masts. Pine logs were all sent down river and unfortunately for the Parry Sound area, the rivers flowed west.

In 1857, however, William M. Gibson was given cutting rights to a 50-square-mile tract, built a water mill along the Seguin River, and began harvesting pine. By this time, there was an expansion of homesteading in the United States and logging was occurring in Michigan to build houses. As this pine supply began to dwindle, there was American interest



in wood from this side of Lake Huron and Georgian Bay. By the 1860s, pine logging was in high gear after the Beatty family took over the Gibsons' mill and built one that was bigger and better.

Until the introduction of the crosscut saw around 1880, all cutting was done with axes. This took place from late September or October until December or January. The logs could then be hauled out of the forest with horse and sleigh before spring breakup. During the warmer months of the year, pine logs were floated to Georgian Bay for local mills or to be corralled and towed to mills farther away.

"It finally ended in the 1920s," Macfie says of the local pine logging days. "The last big unharvested stands of pine were up in the north end of the district



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Top left: Don and John Macfie felling a yellow birch at Eagle Creek, Hagerman Twp, Dec. 1950". (Photo by John Macfie) Above: Breaking a log jam on the Pickerel River, Al Cameron and Oliver Dixon using "peaveys" to loosen the "key log." (Photo by George Knight) Top right: "HJW. 2151 Parry Sound. Peter Co. Harris Camp Oct. 1910." (From the Public Archives of Canada) Below: Logging White Pine in Foley Township, circa. 1880. (D.F. Macdonald/Parry Sound Public Library) Opposite: Saw logs begin the long journey to a sawmill; probably a tributary of the Pickerel River, circa 1910-14. (Photo by George Knight)



Hemlock was starting to be harvested towards the end of the 1800s; the bark was utilized for tanning leather and the wood was also used for lower quality lumber.

in the Pickerel River and French River watersheds."

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Before the 20th century, hardwoods could not be transported as they typically did not float. By the turn of the century, however, railways were penetrating the Parry Sound District. Hardwoods could finally be harvested and brought to mills such as Otter Lake and Ardbeg which had been erected along the railway.

This second wave of logging started around 1910 and by 1950, the best hardwoods had been cleared out.

Prior to 1950, there was little control exerted on harvesting operations. Around this time, diameter limit cutting became the main harvesting system used. This meant that trees had to be a minimum size before they were removed and as a result the largest and best trees were harvested.





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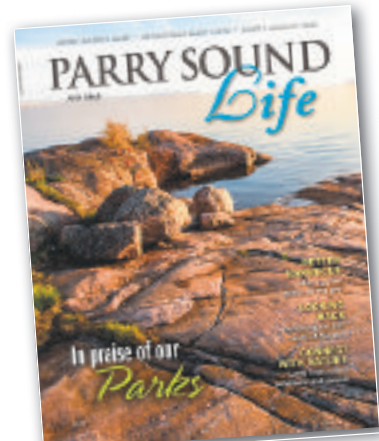
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Above: Tree markers play a vital role in the delivery of modern forest management. Top right: Planting trees to supplement natural regeneration is a common treatment to renew pine in the French-Severn Forest. Bottom right: Species at risk like the Blanding's turtle receive protection under the forest management plan. (Photos courtesy Westwind Forest Stewardship Inc.)



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Although important to our history and development as a country, this historic clearing of pine, hemlock, and hardwood has led to a changed and degraded forest. This has necessitated the focus on long-term sustainability and forest improvement that is seen in forest management today.

In the past 40 years, tree marking has become the main control of harvesting and follows detailed prescriptions approved by professional foresters. Certified tree markers consider tree quality, wildlife habitat, and spacing before marking trees to be left or to be cut. Today, when selecting trees to harvest, the approach is 'worst first.' Tree markers select the lowest quality or diseased trees to be harvested first so that forest quality will improve over time.

Tree markers also ensure that wildlife habitat is protected. Cavity trees must be regularly retained in each stand. If special habitat features such as heronries or

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Today's pine harvesting in the Parry Sound area is done in stages so that new regeneration has the appropriate amount of light and space. Notice the buffer on the stream.
(Photo courtesy Westwind Forest Stewardship Inc.)



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Blanding's turtle nesting sites are present, harvesting and/or timing restrictions are enforced in the area around that feature. These 'areas of concern' are also placed around other forest values such as cottaging lakes or indigenous cultural values.

Forest managers also plant, prepare sites, and tend areas to ensure forests are regenerated. These steps are also necessary for the continuation of our pine forests.

Another benefit of modern forestry is the inclusion of detailed forest management plans. These plans include the involvement of indigenous communities and consultation with the public.

Planning and modelling are done to ensure that forest activities are socially, environmentally, and economically sustainable. This includes determining the allowable cut and ensuring that only a sustainable amount of wood is taken from the forest.

Westwind Forest Stewardship Inc. took over forest management for the Parry Sound and Muskoka region from the Crown in 1997 and is currently creating the forest management plan for 2019-2029.

As Canada has evolved and changed, so, too, has the management of forests and harvesting trees. Managing forests for wildlife, quality, social values, and long-term sustainability will help to ensure that future generations will still enjoy our forests in another 150 years. And we 'wood' not have it any other way.

Margaret Scott is a forester intern for Westwind Forest Stewardship Inc., a not-for-profit forest management company that manages the Crown land in the Muskoka, Almaguin and Parry Sound areas.