

The History of Steam Saw-Mills in St. John--By J. Fraser Gregory

Reprint of a Paper Read Some Months Ago Before the Natural History Society—Conditions are Rapidly Changing in this Business

The following historical sketch of steam saw mills in St. John is an extract from a paper read before the Natural History Society, by J. Fraser Gregory, during last spring:



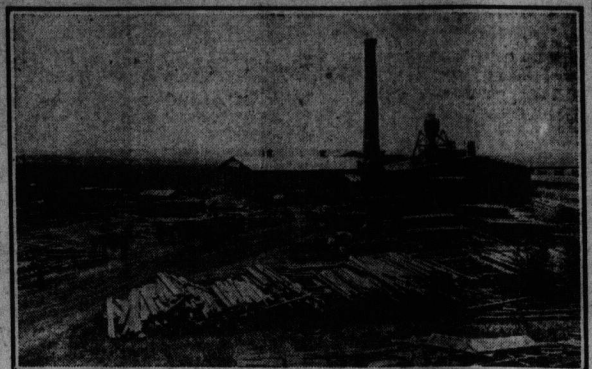
J. FRASER GREGORY

Smith, who was in command of the troops at St. John. Previous to this time there were tide mills. One was at the Carleton mill pond where the winter port docks are now, the water being held in the mill pond when the tide needed to be utilized, in the turning of the mill wheel. Another was at Cunamel's Point, now the site of the pulp mill. To operate this mill a channel was cut through the point 300 feet long 60 feet wide and 25 feet deep. This channel was cut by the Mill Canal Company, Moses H. Pezart, secretary. It was started in July, 1836,

A mill at Union Point, later Cusheod Mill, Union Point. Westmore Mill, Westhead Eddy. Clarke's Mill, Carleton. Calter Mill, Carleton. Adams Mill, Carleton. Robertson Mill, Carleton.

The equipment of these mills was entirely different from the modern mill of today. The boilers were what are called shell boilers, sometimes as long as 40 feet and 3 to 3 1/2 feet in diameter without tubes. They were fired underneath only like a pot, at the front end with wood and half about, with peevies. If they were cut in two it was done with cross-cut saws. The single saw was one saw working up and down with about a four foot stroke. The logs were rolled on a long frame that moved on rollers set in the floor past the saw, the log being set to get the required thickness, with crowbars at either end and doctored in desired position by sharp bolts driven into the end. On this machine, at the time I am talking about, were cut the largest logs. The feed was what was called the hitch feed, every time the saw went down by a cogged wheel and ratchet, the carriage was hitched forward about an inch. The saw never struck over 200 clips to the minute.

Then they had the live gang, a ponderous structure moving a sash up and down, carrying eight or ten saws. The logs were rolled on two carriages running on a track; sharp teeth in the jaws of the 'ut carriage held the log in place and it was shoved into the gang. Great weight rollers held it in position on spiked feed rollers underneath. When the logs were thrown two or three high, the first cut took off an edging and straightened one side; then they were turned over and set to the desired width and the second edging taken off. Very few laths were made, and the refuse from the mills was burned. Everybody burned wood. Mills were built of edgings and refuse, particularly in Carleton, and considerable was burned at the mills. There was no economy of labor in the mills in those days; every operation



Victor Wood Works Ltd., Amherst

cargo of shooks shipped from St. John was in 1834. Until two years ago, when the section authorizing it was repealed by the United States Congress, logs cut in the State of Maine could be manufactured in St. John and shipped into the American market free of duty, provided the logs were cut by an American citizen, manufactured by an American citizen in an American-owned mill. This meant the coming to St. John in the sixties and seventies of Americans who established milling industries here and the manufacturing of large quantities of logs, cut in the State of Maine, St. John. Today some of the mills are owned by sons of these gentlemen.

The mills cutting logs today in St. John are fewer in number than they were in the past, and will not increase. The distance the lumber has

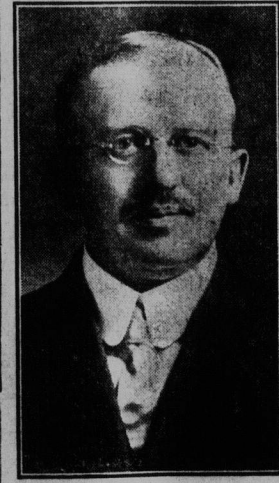


Haley Bros. & Co., St. John

to be driven, the increasing difficulties in the driving, and the high cost of labor go a long way to offset our modern equipment and the splendid shipping facilities, and I feel quite safe in saying that there is little probability of any sawmill being rebuilt in St. John that is destroyed by fire. Most likely it would be rebuilt on the line of railway closest to the timber limits.

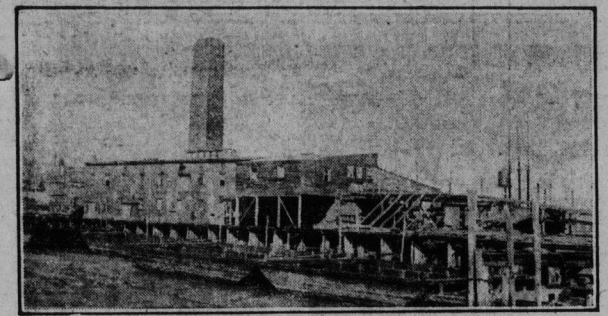
Our sawmills today are equipped with economical tubular boilers that one man can fire automatically where six or eight men were required. We have hand saws and stock gangs taking only one-half the saw kerf the old gangs did; patent edgers that take care of the lumber as fast as it can be put in; endless haul-ups that feed the logs into the mill in a steady stream, kicked right or left by machinery as required; jump-up saws in beds that will cut a log in two in a jiffy; steam caters to roll the logs on the saw carriage; transfer chains for moving the lumber and edgings; automatic machines for cutting up the edgings; re-saws, lath machines, the many other small machines for manufacturing the wood that formerly went to waste. Nothing is now burned under the boilers but sawdust, and no wood is wasted that is sound. In the modern mill it is not a question of brute strength, but slight and expertness in the performing the various operations.

The milling season in St. John is properly about eight months—from the 1st of April to the 1st of December—earlier or later, you have frost to contend with. Sometimes mills under take to run in the winter time. Such mills, to do so successfully, must have a southern exposure, and be situated where the warm salt water eddies about their slips. The logs must also be piled in floating piles about 8 feet deep, so that the butt of the logs are below water, where the frost does not



J. A. MARVEN.

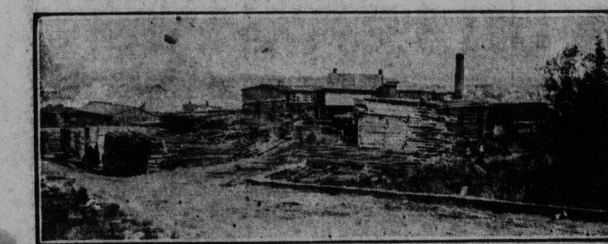
Mr. J. A. Marven, of Moncton has during the past six or eight years established a business of which anyone would have reason to feel proud. His White Lily brand of biscuits has become known throughout the Maritime Provinces and Eastern Canada and the manner in which these goods are being placed on the market is making the older houses sit up and take notice.



Hilyard's Mill.

and finished in the spring of 1837. The same company operated the mill. These tide mills only cut logs for local consumption. The first mention of spruce dealers being shipped was in the year 1832, the year the first steam mill started, and they were shipped by schooner Amelia to Cork. They were cut by hand. Very little sawn lumber was shipped after this until the fifties when the Crimean closed the Baltic to Great Britain. In the late fifties and sixties there were a great many steam mills built and the export of sawn lumber increased very fast. At the same time shipbuilding was at its height and St. John was most prosperous and grew very rapidly, the lumber from the mills being shipped in home built vessels to all parts of the world. At that time St.

This gang had the same pitch feed as the single saw. A few of these gangs are still in use, but they now use a continuous friction feed and the saws are hung with an over-hang. The edger was a single circular saw past which a long table was hauled by hand; on it the cuts from the logs were thrown two or three high. The first cut took off an edging and straightened one side; then they were turned over and set to the desired width and the second edging taken off. Very few laths were made, and the refuse from the mills was burned. Everybody burned wood. Mills were built of edgings and refuse, particularly in Carleton, and considerable was burned at the mills. There was no economy of labor in the mills in those days; every operation



Murray & Gregory's Mill

John was the fourth largest ship-owning port of the world. Some of the mills in operation at this period were: Kirk & Warrel, at the Long Wharf. Briggs Mill, where the Hilyard Mill now stands. Anderson Mill, near Rolling Mills. Petree Mill, Straight Shore. Flewelling Mill, Straight Shore, below Warner's. Shives Mill, Straight Shore, below Warner's. Brown Mill, where Murray & Gregory's Mill now stands. Two Mills (Rankine) where Indian-town Mill is. Rivers Mill, below Boar's Head. Millidge's Mill, at Millidgeville. Drury Mill, at Drury Cove. Jewett Mill, at Millidgeville. James Vernon Mill, Grand Bay. Also one at South Bay. Holt Mill, at Randolph. Lingley Mills, below Pleasant Point. Barnhill Mill, below Pleasant Point. Rivers Mill, below Pleasant Point. Hunter Mill, where now Miller & Woodman.

Involved the hardest work and heavy lifting. About 1868, Robert Thomson, who was then a young clerk in his father's office, was sent to Cuba to look into the possibility of manufacturing sugar boxes for the planters. The Cushings had been making them in a small way for a few years. The result of this visit was ten to twelve years of the greatest milling activity St. John has ever seen. Every mill put in box machinery and commenced making sugar shooks about October, and kept at it night and day until April, when they would go back to their regular deal sawing. These box shooks were made from the coarse pine logs that previously were not considered worth cutting. They did not have to be dry, as the sugar was sold gross weight, box included, and the wetter the box was the better. Trade with the West Indies was at its height and a large fleet of schooners was employed in the trade. By 1880 this business had practically come to an end, as the planters commenced putting their sugar into bags. The last

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