

Hammonds Plains Historical Society

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Upcoming General Meetings:

March 26th – A Full History of Hammonds Plains from Beginnings to Present

May 28^h – History of St. Nicholas Cemetery

Both Meetings at Cornerstone Wesleyan Church

Our Lumbering Heritage

(This newsletter gives a detailed account of the importance of the forests to the history of Hammonds Plains)



While new residents may have a hard time thinking of Hammonds Plains as a community being depended on the forestry industry, a look back at the historical development of the area shows the significance of the surrounding woodlands and associated saw mills, in forming the foundation of the present day community. Here's a look back at our lumbering heritage.

The forests around Hammonds Plains played a central role in the lives of the early settlers. For centuries, the Mi' Kmaq used the forests in the area to aid in daily living. With the founding of Halifax, official land grants started being given out throughout the mainland to support the incoming immigrants. The Hammonds Plains Land Grants was one such grant, being issued in 1786. The grants were for the most part given out to prominent Halifax business folks. They soon discovered a rich supply of first

Become a HPHS Member:

You can become a member of the Hammonds Plains Historical Society by filling out a registration form and e-mailing it to Dave Haverstock (haverstockdave@gmail.com) or mailing to 1541 Hammonds Plains Road, Hammonds Plains, Nova Scotia B4B 1P6.

Annual fee is \$10.

Registration forms are available during one of our general meetings or by copying from our web site.

generation timber on their lands and many used the land to have trees cut, sold and transferred to the Halifax market. By the early 1800's, many of the original Hammonds Plains grants had been deforested, but with few settlers on them. Consequently, many of the granted land was either sold or taken back by the government. After 1800, most of the lots were bought by folks of European descent, who were interested in establishing a permanent settlement. Many of these new settlers bought with them lumbering related skills and knowledge. In addition, in 1816, the lands that became known as Upper Hammonds Plains, were granted to American refugees, known as the 'Chesapeake Blacks'. A significant number of these settlers bought with them coopering skills, which they had learned in the US.

The first saw mills in the area were built as early as the 1770's, in the Paper Mill Lake area of Bedford. Christian Schmidt built a mill along the Nine Mile river (located near Paper Mill Lake) in 1805. By 1819, Anthony Holland had established a mill to produce logs to be made into paper, to support his newly established newspaper, The Acadian Recorder. The first mill within the Hammonds Plains boundary areas was built in 1816-18 by John English, on Mason's Pond (across from Hammonds Plains PharmaCare).

In 1823, Jacob Shaffer, who was living in the Paper Mill Lake area, led a group of partners in purchasing 950 acres of land around Pockwock Lake. They established a saw mill at the foot of Pockwock Lake, launching a foothold in the area for lumbering. This mill by the 1830's was taken over by one of the partners, John Wright, and moved first to Pockwock Falls and later to Wright's Lake. The Wright Family ran the same mill until the 1960's, on the lake named for their family. During the 1820's and 30's, several mills were established on the lakes in the Kemptown/Pockwock area (area encompassing Pockwock Lake, Wright's Lake, Big and Little Indian Lakes and Rafter Lake).

In 1838, Jacob Shaffer sold off his remaining lumbering interests to the Hays Family (Wesley Hays and later sons, Norman and Johnathan). The Hays family established a modern mill at the foot of Pockwock Lake, on the river that ran between Big and Little Pockwock Lakes. This mill was a large mill, with up to 50 employees, and had an associated cooper shop on Bedford Basin. The mill was sold to the Moran and Haverstock families in 1888, who ran it until the 1970's, as two separate mills.

During the mid to late 1800's, numerous saw mills were constructed on the water ways in the Hammonds Plains area. During this time at least 5 mills were operating in the Kemptown area, 4 mills in Upper Hammonds Plains, up to 6 mills in Lower Hammonds Plains, along with a couple on Cox's Lake in Yankeetown. The 1851 Census lists 7 mills in the Hammonds Plains area, but many others were built in the years following the census. Families such as Anderson, Eisenhower, Haverstock, Melvin, Moran, Romans, Schmidt, Smith, Thomson, Whiley and Wright were well known in the community as millwright experts and provided leadership in the industry during this era. Family knowledge was passed down from one generation to the next.

The second half of the 1800's saw almost the whole community being involved in the lumber trade in one form or the other. The area was rich with second generation timber growth, had lots of water ways for generating power and had an experienced and knowledgeable labour force. The smell of sawdust was a common aroma that pervaded throughout the community. During this time, mills begin to create secondary wood products such as barrels, staves, house planks and wooden boxes. Cooper shops began appearing in the community and wooded barrels became a popular by-product, with hundreds of thousands being made in Hammonds Plains and shipped to a variety of markets. It was a common sight to see horse drawn wagons hauling barrels on the Hammonds Plains road during this time.

During the early years, all the mills were built on waterways. The reason for this was because they needed running water to power the mill. A wooden waterwheel was built to attach to a series of pulleys that connected a series of saws that would cut the logs, as they entered the mills. A flume was built to channel the water to the water wheel with a series of controls (such as gates) to regulate the flow of water. The type of water wheel that were used depended on the position of the mill to the water source. In Hammonds Plains, mills had a variety of waterwheel designs. The early years produced lumber that were sawed by vertical saws only (ones that moved up and down), some of the mills had multi saws that could cut several pieces of lumber at one time.

In the second half of the 19th century, with the introduction of circular saws and the use of turbine (cast iron) waterwheels to create power, mills became much more productive and were able to produce increased amount of lumber, over shorter periods of time. The introduction of steam engines for power, allowed mills to be built away from water and several mills popped up along the main road during the late 1800's. The large Hay's mill on Pockwock Lake even had its own generator, which produced power for the mill operation.

By the turn of the 20th century, the lumbering industry was at its peak in the Hammonds Plains area. As many as 18 mills were present in the area, along with over 30 cooper shops and 10 wooden box factories. Loads of product travelled the Pockwock and Hammonds Plains Roads daily. The larger mills had lumber camps in the woods, where hired lumber hands spent the winter months cutting trees and hauling them to the edge of a local lake. The lumber camps usually had a cook and the hired hands would stay at the camp much of the winter months. A team of horses or oxen also spent the winter at the lumber camps.

Working in the mills brought dangers that the workers had to be constantly aware of. Incidents of workers cutting hands on the saws were noted through the years. The mills themselves were major fire hazards. A small spark from a saw could burn a mill down in an instance. In fact, several of the mills in the Hammonds Plains area were burnt to the ground during the late 1800's and early 1900's. Some were rebuilt, but others stopped operations after the fires.

During the early 1900's, almost the whole village had family members that were employed in the local lumbering industry. In fact, there were more jobs in the industry than the communities of Upper and Lower Hammonds Plains, Pockwock, Yankeetown and Kemptown could provide. The community supported this shortage of labour by taking in 'borders', who worked in the mills while living with local residents. By the 1920's, mills were located on almost every lake in the community. Mills run by steam engines also became came into existence in the community (one example is seen below – note the steam stack in picture 1).

The lumber trade insulated the area from the great depression of the 1930's. Even though, there was a reduced demand for lumber, barrels and boxes during the depression, the mills were still able to produce a standard of living that allowed the Hammonds Plains area withstand the depression, without the devastation that many communities in North America faced. In 1932, electricity flowed in to the community for the first time and several of the mills soon turned to this new power source to run the operations. Also, in the 1930's the first mills in the area started to switch from horses to trucks to haul their products to the local markets. The Thomson Family were the first to own a truck and they quite regularly rented it out to others businesses in the community.



Eisenhauer Steam Mill on First Lake



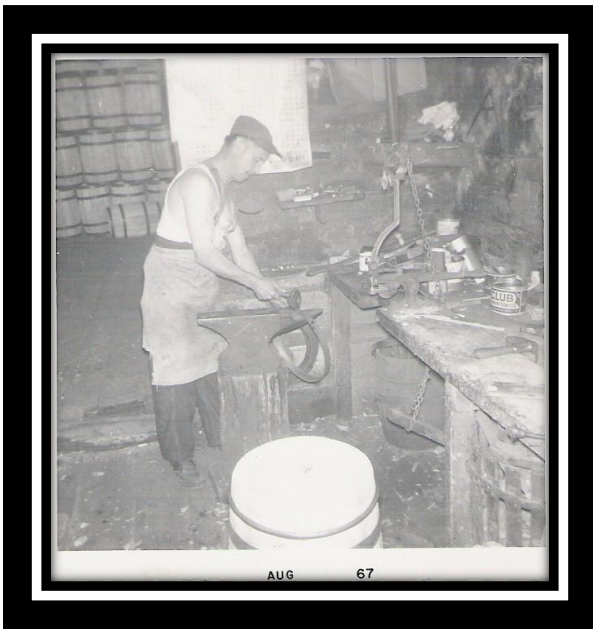
Uncle Sid's Mill on Mason's Pond – 1940's

In 1939, with the outbreak of World War 11, the demand for lumber and wooden boxes to support the war effort gave a big push to the lumber mills in Hammonds Plains. Despite shortages of items such as gasoline, rubber and industrial machinery and the fact that the area lost many young laborers to the armed forces, the economy was doing very well with the mills operating at full capacity.

While the war years served as an economic boom for Hammonds Plains, by the end of the war, a changing world was starting to have a profound effect on the forest trade in Hammonds Plains. A move toward plastics and a declining fishing industry was leading to a declining market. After the war, the face of the community started to change, with increased use of cars allowing for more mobility and enticing folks to work outside the community. The labor force in the lumbering industry was shrinking and soon the local mills had to depend on imported workers to keep their mills in operation. With decrease demand for limber products, mills started closing down. Many of the local mills closed their operations during the 1950's and early 1960's. By the end of the 1960's only a hand full of mills were still operating (Whiley Mill in Upper Hammonds Plains, Haverstock Brothers & Son on Pockwock Lake and W. G. Haverstock & Sons in Hammonds Plains).

In the early 1970's, the city of Halifax had decided to use Pockwock Lake as their water supply. Consequentially, the city expropriated the lake and lands around the lake. That meant that the Haverstock Mill at the foot of the lake, along with the timber lands surrounding the lake were deemed not serviceable for industry any longer. The long history of lumbering on Pockwock Lake had come to the end.

During the 1970's, wooden boxes, barrels and pallets were still made in Hammonds Plains but the writing was on the wall for the death of the industry. The last cooper shop operating in the Hammonds Plains area (W. G. Haverstock & Sons) closed during the late 1970's while the last daily saw mill and box shop (Whiley's Mill) closed during the 1990's. To-day the sound of saws and the smell of sawdust in Hammonds Plains is nothing but a distant memory.



'Bub' Rafuse applying his trade as a cooper in H P - 1967



Wright's Mill – on Wright Lake (After it had ceased operations)



Whiley's Mil in Upper Hammonds Plains - Last Daily Mill in Community