

Martin family receives forestry legacy award

By Sarah Sobanski

The Bancroft Area Forest Industry Association is celebrating 2017 by honouring one of the oldest forest industry families in the area.

President of BAFIA Larry McTaggart presented Barry Martin, former vice president of G.W. Martin Company, with the association's Forestry Legacy Award just after the New Year. The award recognizes the history of forestry in Bancroft and surrounding area.

"BAFIA is looking at recognizing the history of forestry in the Bancroft area and in particular the family run forestry operations that are prevalent in our area. We don't have [those] big corporate companies. We've got family run businesses like the Freymonds, like the Martins, like the McRaes ? that's what our forest industry is built on," said McTaggart.

The association has recognized prominent forest industry families from the area in the past including the Freymond family of Freymond Lumber LTD in Bancroft and the McRae family of the McRae Lumber Company in Whitney.

McTaggart suggested it is important to the association to show their appreciation for the founding families of lumber in the area. He said they have seen the community through good times and bad.

"They've been with us thick or thin pulling people through world wars, the Depression, through the recession. They didn't have shareholders who decided we're not making enough money so close it down. They kept going for more than financial reasons. They recognized their importance to the community," explained McTaggart. "Our job is to educate the public and our members with the importance of forestry and to recognize when people have done good work."

According to the Baptiste Lake Association, G.W. Martin Company started as the Martin Mill under Whitney Martin ? rebuilt after he purchased Hughes Mill and it was destroyed by a fire in 1930.

Whitney's son Grenville bought the mill and it became the G.W. Martin Company in Harcourt growing to become the largest producer of hardwood in Canada. The company employed 1,300 people and brought in around \$100 million yearly in revenue at its peak.

McTaggart said the industry remains in Bancroft and surrounding area because its founding fathers had sustainable forestry plans. He said many of the family companies are moving on to fourth generations in their families.

"Just to let them know that we appreciate the work that they, their parents, their grandparents and their great-grandparents have done keeping forestry growing in Bancroft," said McTaggart.

He added, "They're still going. Except for the Martin group with the death of Grenville Martin resulted in it being closed down." Grenville Martin died in a plane crash in Brampton October 1984.

The idea to recognize the Martin legacy came after the Martins had a family reunion last year.

"We waited until they had prepared the history that they wanted presented as history for the award," said McTaggart. "As long as we can look out the window and still see trees standing we know there is still forest opportunities to be had in Bancroft area. If we do them wisely there will continue to be forest opportunities for future generations."

Barry Martin prepared the following history of Martin Lumber:

Whitney Martin was born in Howick Township, near Listowel in 1903. His grandfather, James Martin, emigrated from Monaghan County in Ireland in 1825. He carved out a farm on the outskirts of today's Port Hope and ironically enough, logged timber in the winters in the ?frontier lands of Peterborough.? His stone house still stands today.

Whitney was the youngest child of a family of eight; son of Samuel and Caroline Martin. He was 13 when his father died. He moved with his mother to Toronto.

Whitney Martin came to Baptiste Lake in 1921, after completing business school in Toronto, to work for his brother-in-law Owen Bailey, manager of the Jennings and Bailey Lumber Company. This company had two sawmill operations on Baptiste Lake ? one on the point at the end of today's Martin Road, and the other at the site known as Hughes Siding, now occupied by Baptiste Lake Marina.

Both mills were served by the Irondale, Bancroft and Ottawa Railway, and had loading sidings at both places to ship all of the lumber and ties.

After moving to Baptiste Lake he met and married Nellie Martyn, a registered nurse from Toronto in 1935. They had four children ? Grenville, Noel, Barry and Karan.

In 1923, Bailey bought Jennings and formed the Bailey Martin Lumber Company. In 1927, Whitney and his brother, Garf, bought out Bailey, and formed the Martin Brothers Lumber Company. Whitney purchased his brother's shares in 1937, and was the sole

owner of Martin Brothers Lumber Company thereafter.

The company continued to operate sawmills in Baptiste, Maynooth, Madawaska, Benoir Lake (Harcourt), and Boulter. The workforce swelled in the wintertime to 200 men at times. They cut and hauled the timber to the mills, or to ?landings? in order to float the logs to the mill in the spring and summer.

Whitney also started the Bancroft Lumber and Planing Mill Co. Ltd. in 1949, which was later purchased by Jack Brown.

Whitney's son Grenville, became a licensed hardwood lumber scaler at 17. He worked for the company grading lumber. Around age 18, he bought a tractor trailer (unheard of in the Bancroft area at the time) to start hauling lumber by truck, to the southern Ontario markets, rather than shipping by rail.

In 1956, Whitney closed the last mill at Baptiste, and sold the summer operating Benoir Lake mill to his son, Grenville in 1958. The decision was made primarily because the quality of timber had diminished in the region. It was getting expensive to haul the logs down the lake, but also because the labour force was certified to join a union the same year.

At this location, with several imaginative innovations, Grenville initiated several firsts in the lumber industry in central Ontario such as winter sawing (by thawing the logs), chipping the wood waste to ship to paper plants, double cut band sawing to minimum waste, electrifying the sawmills, mechanical debarking, automating the whole lumber cutting process, and introducing tree length hauling from the woods to the mills, to name a few.

His brother Barry Martin joined him in 1965, and became vice president.

The G.W. Martin Lumber Company continued to grow extensively, with lumber mills, veneer and pallet plants, and logging operations, throughout Ontario.

Before Grenville's untimely death in 1984 at the age of 48, this company was the largest hardwood lumber producer in eastern Canada (nine mills ? 150 million board feet per annum, in Harcourt, Sault Ste. Marie, Searchmont, Mattawa, Eganville, Alban, Parry Sound and Huntsville). It was also the producer of very significant volumes of hardwood veneers (four plants ? 360 million square feet per annum, in Rutherglen, Sault Ste. Marie, North Bay and Tweed), and hardwood flooring (one plant in Huntsville) and wood pallets (three plants in Tweed, Bracebridge and Belleville). All of these operations were run from the head office, on Elephant Lake Road, near Harcourt.

Grenville's four children ? Kimberly, Katherine, Kelly and Kenton continued on ? two actively ? with the corporation until 1989. Kenton remains in the wood industry operating a hardwood flooring plant in Etobicoke.