



CHISHOLM'S MILLS — It began more than a century ago when logs, a river and a family all converged in an a relatively isolated part of Hastings County.

But that was in 1857.

Today, 161 years later, the story of Chisholm's Mills isn't finished. It's growing, just like the family at its centre.

More than 100 people arrived at a corner lot east of Roslin to see the unveiling of a new plaque created by the Hastings County Historical Society.

“Most of the towns in this area grew up around mills,” society president Richard Hughes told the crowd.

“The villages have grown up and the mills have disappeared.”

Chisholm Lumber “is simply an amazing exception,” he said.

Family genealogist Shirley Chisholm Sutherland said the saga began in 18th-Century Scotland at a time when clan chiefs were forcing tenants from their lands to make room for sheep farming – a time known as the Highland Clearances.

Alexander Chisholm was the first of three brothers to leave. He settled in 1773 near what's now Albany, N.Y. but soon fled the American Revolution, writing he was “finding it inconvenient to live in the country” during a war with the British.

He went to Quebec, defending in 1775 that future city – then under British control – against General Benedict Arnold’s invading American rebels, Sutherland said. He received a governor’s commendation for his gallantry.

His brother, Archibald, fought with Fraser’s Highlanders in the American south.

Both became United Empire Loyalists and, for their war service, received 200-acre lots on the first and second concessions of Thurlow Township; the lots were among those sold to the Crown by Mohawks, said Sutherland.

The brothers moved there in 1784 and were among the first Europeans there, Sutherland said. Third brother John joined them in Thurlow in 1786; homes he and his son, Alexander, built in the 1700s still stand in what’s now Belleville at 153 and 317 Dundas St. W.

John and Elizabeth (Gilbert) Chisholm’s son, William Fraser Chisholm, bought an existing mill on the current mill site in 1857.

Sutherland said the mill’s founder isn’t known but it was either miller Stephen Shipman or Richard Arnold – son of Benedict Arnold – and it was built by 1851. It was later known as Shipman’s Mills.

“In the mid-1800s that river was jammed full of logs,” said the historical society’s Richard Hughes. “There was up to 100,000 per year that made it down that river.”

White pines were separated from the rest, joined into rafts, and floated to the Bay of Quinte, St. Lawrence River, Montreal and Quebec City before being shipped to Great Britain to build warships.

“The Royal Navy sailed on masts made from white pines from this area.”

Sutherland said her ancestors continued to pass the ever-expanding business on to their descendants. Both genders worked there. Sutherland said there were many women bookkeepers but her great-grandmother, Minnie, scaled and measured logs in the early 1900s.

There have been “many devastating fires,” she said, recalling her father’s frequent question: “Does anyone smell smoke?” The last fire was in 2004. Today Chisholm Lumber is the parent company of five businesses ranging from design-build work to sustainable forestry.

Fifth-generation mill operator Doug Chisholm said the family has researched family businesses and “most don’t make it past the third” generation.

“We embrace change,” he said, mentioning a common phrase. “If you’re going to do it like Dad did it, you won’t be around very long.”

The company now employs about 40 people, most of whom aren’t family. The sixth generation’s Peter Chisholm, Patrick Cassidy and Jordan Chisholm are now in charge. The seventh generation is providing summer students.

The plaque recognition “is a time for us to reflect on our own history, which we don’t do very often,” Peter said.

“You look back and appreciate what previous generations had to do,” said Cassidy.

Tyendinaga Township Reeve Rick Phillips thanked both historical society volunteers and the Chisholm descendants.

“Without them much of our history would be lost,” he said.

Phillips said the Chisholms and their descendants “have contributed so much” to the area and its people. He said his relatives had worked there and, during hard winters, the family was among those to sell logs to the company to help make ends meet.

The reeve said the Chisholms are not only the operators of a “valued” business but “our friends and family.”

The plaque will stand on the east side of Shannonville Road across from the mill’s store.

The Chisholm plaque is one of seven to be unveiled by the society this year. The next is in Bancroft at the historic downtown hotel July 14. Visit [hastingshistory.ca](http://hastingshistory.ca) or call 613-962-1110 for details.

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