



A note from Sherry Stewart

Dear Readers,

I do hope that you are enjoying Howard McMillan's family history as much as I am. In the months to come I will continue to seek out more of our remaining Bridge Lake area pioneers and bring you their stories. If you have any suggestions or know of someone you would like to read about, please contact me at 250-397-2436.

In last month's column, we heard the first part of the McMillan family's history here in the Cariboo. We started with Robert and Oma's arrival in 1926 and left off with their permanent move to the Okanagan in 1942. Here we pick up the story with the older boys establishing a sawmill at the Rose Place on the southern shoreline of Horse Lake.

Son of a woodcutter [The McMillans, Part 2]

By Howard McMillan,

Photos courtesy of the McMillan family

In the spring of 1944, a semi-permanent sawmill was built on the shores of Horse Lake. After harvesting most of the logs close to home, the McMillan brothers obtained timber rights on the north side of the lake. Logs were snaked down to the water and boomed across to the mill, with the first small booms actually pulled across by rowboat! Soon thereafter, a small boat motor was obtained, allowing larger booms to be brought across the water.

A couple of years later the mill was relocated to the west end of Horse Lake, just above what many still call Skaday's Bridge. Around this time my Uncle Jim

returned from a stint in the Navy and my dad, now a young man of nineteen, moved back from the Okanagan. In 1948, both of them formally started their long careers as 'woodcutters', establishing the early nucleus of what would later become McMillan Contractors, with the purchase of a D4 Caterpillar from their older brothers.

Jim and Glenn began with various land-clearing jobs, before going logging in mid-1949 for Rudy and Slim Jens, who at that time operated a sawmill on Canim Lake (presumably prompting



Howard McMillan, at Hathaway Lake in 1957

them to call their eventually-larger enterprise the Canim Lake Sawmills). In the early 1950s the two youngest of the McMillan brothers logged for the Jens' at both Rock Point and Roserim Bay on the lake and gained valuable experience, used later to operate their own portable sawmill in numerous locations around what is now referred to as the Interlakes area.

Now working full time with this portable sawmill (pulled by a cat from one location to another, "following the trees") my dad, as mentioned in Part 1, married my mom, Irma Malm in 1953. True pioneers, my parents lived year-round in a variety of "tar-paper" shacks—selected for their proximity to the mill, rather than their comforts—for most of the Fifties. Born in 1955, one of my earliest childhood memories (likely at age two) is of standing beside what seemed like a huge truck, while my dad shoveled sawdust from the mill



McMillan's would move this portable sawmill to a new site every 6 to 12 months, nail up the sign (see photo on next page), and start cutting lumber. When they had harvested all the logs they wanted in that area, they would take down the sign, drag the mill to the next site, and nail up the sign there.

into what was likely just a pickup, for the cook-stove in one of these cabins. It was only after the arrival of my brother in 1957 (undoubtedly with the strong urging of my mom) that a permanent home in Lone Butte was acquired. Jim, his wife Sheila, and their older children soon established a permanent home next door on what we often jokingly called the 'wrong' side of the tracks in 'the Butte'. Of note, these homes and the large shop across the road are situated mere yards from the very train stop my grandparents, Robert and Oma McMillan, arrived at in 1926.

With a desire to stick closer to their expanding families and the growing shift to truck-logging, Jim and Glenn began the planning and development of a permanent sawmill on the railroad near Lone Butte in the early Sixties. This process included the actualization of my Uncle Jim's vision for a state-of-the-art, high-recovery mill, built to maximize the volume of lumber produced from a given log.

While eventually successful in achieving previously unheard of efficiencies for sawmills anywhere in the world, this revolutionary approach initially compounded the brothers' challenges in acquiring the needed financing for the construction of the mill. The still-young entrepreneurs persevered, however, and by the end of the decade they had their world-class mill and its corresponding logging operations running smoothly. This success soon attracted the attention of an expansion-minded David Ainsworth who, through his company Ainsworth Lumber, acquired McMillan Contractors Ltd. in 1978.

This sale allowed my dad to fulfill his long-held aspiration to retire by age fifty. It also gave my Uncle Jim more time to pursue his passion for the design and

construction of modern, high-efficiency sawmills, most notably making a significant contribution to the development of the Lytton Lumber Mill.

This change also accelerated a now established trend for the McMillan family, as even more of us drifted away from the area. In gathering much appreciated historical information for this story from Jim and Sheila, we realized that Jim, MaryAnn Shaw-MacLaren—Mary [McMillan] and Kenneth Higgins' daughter—and I are the only direct descendants of Robert and Oma McMillan currently residing in the South Cariboo.

Finally coming to my senses, I returned (after a twenty-five year absence) to this beautiful area in December of 2004.



Jim and Pat Reed, long time Bridge Lake residents, at a McMillan temporary sawmill site



McMillan lumber yard before its sale to Ainsworth Lumber in 1978

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