

Braeside: Village on river influenced by mill

by Judy Barker

The Ottawa River plays a vitally important role in the history and the present way of life of the village of Braeside.

Driving into Braeside on the river road from Arnprior, one is very conscious of the influence of the Gillies Lumber Mill. Lumbering is the reason for the existence of Braeside, and the industry here dates back to the middle of the last century.

The mill site was purchased by Gillies Brothers on February 22, 1873, but the original mill was destroyed by fire in 1919. Within two years it had been replaced by a mill of brick and concrete which was better able to withstand the danger of fire.

"Brae" is a Scottish word meaning "hill", and most of the houses in the village have sloping yards, and some have glorious views of the Ottawa River and its pine-clad islands. On the right of the steep hill up into the village is the administrative office of Gillies Bros, now owned by Consolidated Bathurst.

It was built around 1919, and extensively renovated inside and out in 1957. Gillies is one of the largest employers in the area, with some 300 people

working at the mill, and about 25 at the office.

One of the oldest buildings in the village, presently owned by Mr and Mrs William Shaw, was built by the Osborne family over a hundred years ago, and subsequently sold to the Gillies family.

Striking in its architectural style, and reminiscent of an elaborate Swiss chalet, it is set back from the main street amongst tall pines. A new owner will take over this lovely house in November.

Another landmark in Braeside is the "Gillies summer house" which is actually more of a mansion than a summer retreat. Built in 1919, it belonged to the Gillies family until 1974 when it was sold to Mr and Mrs David Croskery, who have made a superb job of renovating it to its former grand style.

Founded by W J MacDonald, the village owed its growth to the purchase of the mill site by the Gillies Bros and its subsequent successful development of the lumbering industry to its present production level of 50 million board feet per year.

In 1900 Braeside became a police village and was in-

corporated as a village in 1921. The administration of village business is carried out by a reeve and four councillors.

The present reeve, Mr Richard Robbins, and his council, are faced with a threat to the continued existence of Braeside as an autonomous village under the county restructuring plan. At a meeting to discuss this proposal, village feeling ran against any change in the present status of Braeside. Residents felt that any benefits would be outweighed by the loss of self-administration, and the possibility of higher taxes.

The village, with a population of 550, is expanding in both directions. On the west side, new houses overlook the Ottawa River, and see the changing seasons reflected in the trees and water. The view is equally beautiful in the summer and winter. A major expansion is taking place on the Arnprior side of Braeside with the opening of two-acre lots in the Dochart estates. This should lure quite a few Arnprior residents to make the move to Braeside, attracted by more space and lower taxes.