

STOKES BAY AREA MILLS
By Helene Scott

In the early days of the Bruce Peninsula when timber was the main cash crop of settlers and mill owners, there were many such mills in and around Stokes Bay, a small hamlet on the shore of Lake Huron.

One of the first mills to operate at Stokes Bay was built by the Cluff family at the mouth of the river, near where the former Harvey Kirk family home now stands. While living there, the Cluff family experienced a great tragedy when their son was drowned from a small sailboat in the Bay. (This is thought to be the only drowning incident in Stokes Bay's history.)

In dates varying from 1878 to 1892, the first mill built on Tamrack Island, near Stokes Bay, was built by two men named Bible and Chisholm. This company built the dock and the bridge that connects Tamrack Island with the mainland, and also the tramroad which ran from Tamrack Island to Mud Lake, or Duncan's Lake as it was once called, on the other side of Burley's Corners, now Clarke's Corners. A Mr. and Mrs. Duncan lived there in the very early days, and this is why it was known by their name at that time.

As a great time-saver and work-saver, the tramroad was built, and a wooden railroad track was laid. Alas, for the best laid schemes of millmen, the engine was too heavy, and the wooden rails spread out like matchsticks when the big engine tooted and set out. A person who was working there at the time, the late Murdock Martin, said the tracks were rounded and the engine wheels flanged, and when the engine started, it immediately jumped the tracks. There ended the Peninsula's one and only railroad!

The next tenants of the Tamrack Mill were the Lion's Head Lumber Company. Other names mentioned in connection with this mill were Malcolm Ferguson, Jake Wolfley and a Mr. Deering.

In 1899 the Tamrack Mill was bought by the Knechtel Company of Hanover, who were in the furniture manufacturing business. This company was hoping to find a plentiful supply of hardwood on the Peninsula, and rebuilt the mill and put it in operation under the management of Henry Klienscroth until 1911. By this time all the suitable timber had been cut, and many mills were forced to close down, as did the Tamrack mill.

In 1913 Tamrack Island was sold to a group of sportsmen, who formed a hunting and shooting club. This club is still in operation and is known as the Tamrack Island Club. The boarding house (much modified) and the mill building are still intact and used by club members as dining hall and sleeping quarters.

Another early mill at Stokes Bay was built by the Cranstons. The site of this mill was where the Bob Goldens built their home in 1894. Cranston also built several dams across the "Big River"

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