

FROM OUR COMMUNITY'S PAST

Barber's Mill was one of original industries

The following story about the Barber's Paper Mill in Georgetown - the third mill built in Upper Canada - first appeared in the Pulp and Paper Magazine in 1913. It was written by W.A. Craick -

"There had arrived in Crooks Hollow shortly after the paper mill was built, a family consisting of a father, four sons and a daughter, which was destined to plan an important part in the history of the Canadian paper industry. These were the Barbers. The father was a stonemason by trade: the sons were hardy Irish boys. They had emigrated to Canada from Ireland in 1822 and after Niagara, had come to Crooks Hollow to obtain employment in the mills.

"William and Robert, the oldest and the youngest of the sons worked in the woolen mill; James, the second son, became interested in the paper mill while Joseph, the third son, took up the mill right's

trade. They remained at Crooks Hollow for thirteen years, when the brothers decided that it would be just as well for them to set up in business for themselves.

"In casting about for a suitable place to start operation, they hit upon Georgetown, then a tiny village containing about three houses. There was good waterpower available however, and that decided them. In the year of the rebellion they moved all their families and belongings in ox-carts to their new location.

"A custom and one set carding mill was erected on the west branch of the Credit, near what is now the centre of the town of Georgetown, and for six years the brothers ran this primitive industry before the next development took place.

"This was the removal of Robert Barber and his brother-in-law, Benjamin Franklin, to Streetsville, where the pair put up a second woolen mill. Both

mills were jointly owned by the family and both prospered. Ultimately in 1852 a new and much larger factory was built in Streetsville, into which the machinery of both plants was put and the Georgetown mill was closed down.

"Then followed the beginning of the paper industry in Georgetown. A Scotchman by the name of David Forbes had gone West as far as Galt and had there attempted to start a mill but had become discouraged owing to the long distance it was necessary to haul his product to market.

"At the time the Grand Trunk Railway was building westward and construction was approaching Georgetown. Here on the Credit River, right beside the route of the railway, seemed a better place to locate and he rented him both the power and premises.

"Soon after the mill was started the brothers began to manufacture newsprint, making an all rag product, which

they sold extensively to weekly newspaper publishers and to the Toronto Daily Leader. They also made use of straw, especially pea straw, for wrapping papers and until the time that wood began to be employed instead, were large consumers of straw.

"In this connection an exciting incident occurred in 1861. Some new boilers were installed to boil the straw and early one morning soon after they were put in, they all blew up, killing one man and injuring others.

"Forbes, however, did not stick at his venture and almost before he had got started the brothers found themselves saddled with a paper mill.

"The first Barber mill, built in 1853, is still standing and is now known as No. 1 Machine Room. It is a solid stone structure, 40 by 70 feet and is the building in the right hand foreground in the picture. It contained originally a 36-inch cylinder paper machine on

which the first paper mill made in the mill was manufactured.

"Meanwhile, a second building had been erected in 1858, into which a 48-cylinder machine was put. It is probably of this machine that the story is told of James Barber, the brother who was in charge of the papermaking end of the business, that he came to the mill one morning and was told that the new machine was running 100 feet a minute. This was so astonishing that it was almost incredible and he would not believe the performance until he had personally timed it with his watch.

"In 1869 the partnership which had existed without the slightest friction among the brothers and their brother-in-law was dissolved. It is said of this partnership that for 39 years they carried on all their activities together without a settlement among the partners owning almost everything in common.

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Curwood is a company that relies on the resources of its people to make it a success. Part of the team from left: Dave Wolfenden, Gary Gabet, Doreen Merrill, Patty Heldeman, Dennis McLay, Tracey Charles, Brian Reed and Cary Darsan.

CURWOOD PACKAGING (CANADA) LIMITED

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