

The History of the Copeland Forest Resources Management Area

(Editor's note: this document was written around 1980 by a Ministry of Natural Resources employee and is part of a much larger document describing the many features of the Copeland. It was completed for the Ministry after the Province's purchase of the Forest in 1978. Also on the Copeland Forest Friends (CFFA) website is the original submission to the MNR, written by Irene Golas, from which the following document is a shortened version of the Golas document.)

The 1760 hectare tract of land now known as the Copeland Forest Resources Management Area was once the site of a thriving timber industry in the 1800's. However, as we approach the year 2000, this area of hills, swamps, and plains of mixed forests is destined for change and its future use will have to suit the needs of a more modern population. Over the last 200 years, this land proved itself unsuitable for agriculture. After being purchased from the Indians, the property was harvested extensively by lumbermen and in 1978 was bought back by the Crown. The Copeland Forest Resources Management Area is now being developed as a multiple use park and resource management area under the Ministry of Natural Resources.

In 1800, the Copeland Forest was a wilderness area used for hunting, fishing and fur trading activities by the Ojibway Indians. Apart from hunting, most of the land was too low and wet for human settlement. No Indian village sites have been found in the forest.

After the County of Simcoe was formed in 1842, the British government purchased lands around Penetanguishene and south of it from the Copeland Forest to Kempenfeldt Bay. These purchases were to support a military and naval base at Penetanguishene and to open up a more direct and safer fur trading route from York (Toronto) to Lake Huron. It was not until 1820 when the majority of Medonte township was surveyed by Samuel Wilmot, that settlement in the township started. In the 1830's large scale settlement of North Simcoe began as the older settlements along Lake Ontario, were filled and settlers searched northward along the Penetanguishene Road built by Dr. William "Tiger" Dunlop in 1814. This slow migration north was hindered by the Holland Marsh but encouraged by the location of the only grist mill north of Lake Simcoe at Midhurst.

The early settlement pattern was dense linear settlement along the Penetanguishene Road from Barrie to Penetanguishene as early settlers purchased elongated lots on both sides of the road. From 1819 to 1821, families such as the Bruces, Craigs, Johnstons, Langs, McLeans, Richardsons, and Williams had boosted Medonte's population to fifteen! Land was being sold at this time for four shillings per acre. After 1832, settlement in Medonte township increased substantially as Wesley Ritchie was appointed resident agent to place newcomers, the majority of which were poorer than the native farmers who had come earlier to the southern parts of the County. Among these were a large percentage of Irish Roman Catholics settling mostly along the third and fourth concession (Frawleys, Husseys, Fitzgeralds, Shanahans, Fitzgibbons, McNamaras and O'Connors), and highland Scots settling on the second and third concessions (Ingrams, Greenlaws, Gantons, Pooyntons, McLeods, Yates, Johnstons). Half of these families owned the property at the Copeland Forest site.

These early settlers produced a sparse agricultural settlement; the first and second concessions were too low and swampy to be farmed. The lighter pine—covered soils of the forest, though easy to clear and cultivate, lacked the necessary nutrients to support more than a few years. Starting in the 1830 's, farms were abandoned as the Highland Scots from the Oro Sand Hills (along the southern part of the forest) moved to Nottawasaga Township in search of better land. A great number of lots were sold for back taxes, an indication of the financial plight of the farmers.

Pioneer life at the Copeland site was similar to the rest of Upper Canada. Most families arrived with little money, goods or equipment. Small sections of land were cleared by sheer muscle power (trees felled, logs hewn and crops cultivated by hand). Shelters were built and subsistence root crops were planted. Although the forests provided the early settlers with wood, potash, sugar, food and animal fodder; they were dark and mysterious places to the settlers coming from the relatively tame agricultural areas of the British Isles. Settlers pooled their labour to systematically push back the forest for more cleared land; pine for construction purposes and the large hardwoods were either burned or sold for firewood. The timber resource was seemingly inexhaustible.

Between 1850. and 1867, the amount of cultivated land rose from 8% to 28% of the total area, with subsistence root crops accounting for 50% of the agricultural production along with less important cash crops of wheat and oats. Cattle were used as draft animals and as a source of meat, while sheep were raised for homespun yarn. In 1867 the average farm in the Copeland Forest had seventeen sheep, ten cows, eight hogs and three horses, with a total value of \$414 .00. Roads were not more than rough tracks hacked through the forest. A regular stage line from Holland Landing to Penetanguishene was initiated in 1847 and this led to improved road conditions and wheeled transportation in the Copeland Forest area in the early 1850's. The Ingram Road began as a farm trail for the Ingram and Greenlaw families and eventually became a main road from the Penetanguishene Road to the eighth concession. Local supply centres developed at Hillsdale in the mid—1840 's and expanded by 1870 into several services . Available at Hillsdale were two stores, a tavern, and lumber, shingle, flour. and wool mills. At Craighurst there were three stores, two hotels, some trade shops, a wool mill and a sawmill.

The failure of agriculture and the resulting lack of demand for land resulted in lumbering becoming an important industry in the district. Large tracts of land such as the Copeland Forest and the Orr Lake Forest were ideal for the lumbering industry as they were well treed with pine, cedar and hardwoods. Medonte township was close to the urban centres of southern Ontario and the Great Lakes waterway system. This system facilitated the export of forest products to markets in the United States and Great Britain.

The early stages of the forest industry (1830 to 1853) were related to the pioneer land clearing activities. Many small water-powered sawmills were built for local use and larger mills were located at Hillsdale (MacBeth's mill east of the Penetanguishene Road), Craighurst, Coldwater and Eady. A second stage of more intense logging starting from the mid-1890's was encouraged by the completion of the Northern Railroad to Allandale in 1853; the Penetanguishene Road acted as a feeder line to this outlet. As well, the Reciprocity Treaty of 1854 opened the American market for Canadian lumber and steam power made possible the mass production of sawed lumber. By the early 1860's there were 24 mills in Medonte and Matchedash townships. During this time the forest industry in Copeland experienced a chaotic period of growth. Plots of land, lumber mills and

timber rights were bought and sold by many individuals. Thomas Casey and Patrick Needham had a three-year timber agreement on concession four and John Knight built the "Elsie Mill" in 1885 on concession five. During the 1880's Robert Parker of Hillsdale formed the Medonte Lumber Company. He purchased many properties in the Copeland Forest and built a mill on Concession five. William Cook of St. Catharines moved to Hillsdale in 1900 and built a small mill on the west end of Rumbles Road, just north of the Copeland Forest. This mill burned in 1902 and Cook subsequently sold most of his property to William and Jasper Martin.

Jasper Martin, a former school teacher, bought parts the Copeland Forest between 1900 and 1906. Mr. Martin built his home and farm on the west half of lot fifty-five on concession one and operated a shingle and planing mill in Hillsdale. When the C.P.R. built a railway line through the Copeland Forest, the brothers took advantage of this and in 1907 they built a sawmill and company town on lot six, concession three. The town and mill called Martinville was still intact in 1978 and could be seen from the highway 400 extension as you looked south to the Medonte Ski hills.

A spur line, of which evidence still exists, was constructed through the mill yard for easy loading of timber. Farming was started in the clear-cut areas and a shingle mill was added to the operation several years later.

The purchase of the Martin brothers marked the beginning of the last stage of the lumbering industry in the Copeland Forest. The best trees were gone but the forest was able to support logging for another seventy-eight years. A school was built on the site for the Martinville workers. During World War I and the recession which followed, the mills at Martinville were left idle and fell into a state of disrepair. Jasper Martin Sr, retired in 1914 and conveyed his property to his sons William and Jasper Jr. The sons were by now wealthy individuals and the operations at Martinville were secondary to their interests in motorcars, golf and tennis .

At this time, Charles Copeland wanted to expand his Elmvale operation and in 1922 he bought the two Martinville mills and 4,082 acres of land for \$50,000. Charles Copeland and his sons (Watson, Lloyd and Arthur) were shrewd, hard working businessmen, who profitably revived Martinville and watched it survive even during the depression years. Charles Copeland died in 1934 and his sons, under Watson's leadership, operated the mills. When Watson died in 1963, Charles' grandsons, Tom (Watson's son) and John (Lloyd 's son) returned to assist in the family business. Arthur Copeland died in 1964 and Lloyd retired due to ill health in 1967, leaving John as the sole owner of the Copeland Milling Company.

By 1922, the days of the lumber jack were numbered; the trusty pole axe was replaced by the more efficient cross-cut saw. Two men with a six foot saw could cut an average of one hundred pine logs a day. Cut logs were skidded onto logging roads (over 75 miles of logging were built in the Copeland Forest) using a horse drawn tong and chain device and the logs were loaded onto sleighs and taken to the mill yard immediately. The Martinville mill was one of the largest steam-fed mills in the country. It was equipped with an eight foot. single cut circular saw capable of cutting 10,000 board feet of hardwood lumber a day (twice that much when cutting softwood lumber). At the time it was destroyed by fire in 1959, it was producing 800,00 board feet of timber per year. The shingle mill was closed in 1952 and a diesel mill replaced the smaller, slower steam mill in 1959. Gradually highways replaced the railway as the most economical means of shipping lumber; the railway spur line was last used in 1960. When highway 400 was extended from Crown Hill to Coldwater in 1959, Ingram

Road was relegated to the role of a logging road. Now Ingram Road has been restored as the main entrance to the Copeland Forest Resources Area as the current concession three connection to highway 400 will soon be eliminated.

Lumbering activities in the Copeland Forest ceased with the fire May 7, 1975 which destroyed the diesel mill. Since 1922 only the best trees were cut, and dead and diseased trees were removed to support healthy forest growth. Reforestation of clear-cut areas started in 1930 and continued until the 1970's (extensive reforestation occurred in 1930 and 1953). Three years after the 1975 fire, 4,400 acres of the 5,400 acre tract were sold by John Copeland to the provincial government. Since then, buildings on the property have been removed and the forest maintained, but no major changes will occur until a master plan is approved in 1982.

The preliminary version of the Copeland Forest Resources Management Area Master Plan is due for release in the spring of 1982. In this plan, the property inside the area boundaries will see considerable changes as it becomes a multiple use land resource. The Ministry of Natural Resources has outlined the area's objectives to be the protection of the ecosystem, recreation, education and the production and harvesting of the natural resources. The idea of multiple use planning is necessary because management costs are increasing beyond society's willingness to pay for single use resources.

In order to provide for multiple use activities, many of the neglected reforestation sites will experience selective pruning and cutting leading to the improvement of the forest resources on the site. To improve the forest products, the Ministry of Natural Resources will continue planting open land, thinning existing stands of trees, and encourage desirable natural regeneration. Existing trails and old logging roads will be improved. Airbourne thermographic (heat sensing) equipment will be used to survey existing springs, streams, and ponds leading to protection of an abundant supply of top quality water to support fisheries and wildlife resources and to improve the water related recreational activities. To facilitate the use by Simcoe County school groups, the meadow area in the forest has been improved with picnic tables, piped in fresh water and vault toilets to encourage day use and overnight camping by school groups. Some of the resources management improvement work is being done by the Junior Forest Ranger Program.

As use of this area increases, the Ministry of Natural Resources hopes that passive (interpretive nature trail signs describing the resources) and active (field trips) educational programs will play an important role in future land use activities. The ultimate development of this Forest as an Outdoor Educational site could easily rival existing outdoor educational school sites across the province. The variety, quality and quantity of resources developed to it's full potential could realize a separate-dormitory/ school with a full cross-discipline curriculum developed solely for the use of the Copeland site.