

## 5.2 A History of Mattawa

Mattawa Heritage Designation Committee

The word Mattawa comes from Matonawang, meaning the meeting of the waters.<sup>1</sup> Mattawa is located at the crossroads of a vast water highway that opened up the country. Mattawa was at the centre of the routes taken by Aboriginal Peoples, European explorers, missionaries, fur traders, loggers, miners, and settlers wishing to access central, western and northern Canada.

### **The Mattawa Area under New France**

When early French explorers like Champlain and Lasalle moved up the Ottawa River and into the interior of the continent via the Mattawa River, they thought they would find a way to the Pacific and on to China. Many of the early French explorers who traveled through the Mattawa area were accompanied by Recollet and Jesuit priests who came to convert the Algonquin, Nipissing and Huron peoples to Christianity. The Jesuits established a major mission at Sault-Saint-Marie among Huron peoples, and accessed Huronia via Mattawa. The waterway also served as a communication link between Huronia and Jesuit missions on the St. Lawrence River.

The French soon became involved in fur trading. The earliest fur trading post near our area was established by the French in 1679 on an island where the Montreal and Matabitchuan Rivers flow into Lake Temiskaming. In the late 1600s, the post was moved across the river and Fort Temiskaming was established near Ville Marie, Quebec. Since the fur trade in New France was based in Montreal, Ottawa River navigation routes through the Mattawa area were of strategic importance in the movement of trade goods inland and furs down to Montreal.

### **The Development of the Mattawa Area Under British and Canadian Administration**

After the fall of New France, two fur trade companies, the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Company were in fierce competition. The North West Company was based in Montreal. Every spring, flotillas of huge voyageur canoes came through Mattawa. These canoes were loaded with all the trade goods necessary to service their trading posts all across Canada. These canoes would come up from Montreal to Mattawa and follow the Mattawa River. After a series of portages they would cross the watershed into Lake Nipissing. From there, they would journey down the French River into Georgian Bay and on to the west.

In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, Philemon Wright, the founder of Hull, was the first to make a large raft of squared timber and float it to Quebec City for shipment to England. So quickly did this demand for timber develop that logs were being cut as far north as Lake Temiskaming by 1832. By the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, many Ottawa Valley men spent their winters working in the forests of eastern and northern Ontario and western and northern Quebec.

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<sup>1</sup> As mentioned in Chapter 2.3: Algonquin History in the Ottawa River Watershed, the origin of the word Mattawa is not entirely clear.

Famous lumber barons associated with the Upper Ottawa area include: The Gillies Brothers, The Mackeys, The Mclarens, The McLaughlin Brothers, The Hurdmans, The Calvert Brothers, Alex Lumsden, J .B. Klock, E. B. Eddy, and of course the king of the lumber barons J .R. Booth.

As this industry developed, Mattawa became an important place. The Hudson's Bay post and other businesses that developed began supplying the shanties with everything they needed, including oats, feed for the horses, flour, salt pork, and molasses. Axes, saws, building materials, and tools were shipped into the bush from Mattawa.

The high point of the logging season for Mattawa was the spring log drive. All the logs harvested from the Mattawa River watershed floated through Mattawa. Even more logs came from Lake Temiskaming and the upper reaches of the Ottawa River. These had to pass through the rapids at Mattawa in order to move on to the sawmills at the lower end of the river. The men who had been in the bush for months arrived in Mattawa with their winter's wages looking for a little R&R before returning home for the summer.

As the logging industry expanded, Mattawa developed from a trading post to a village, and in 1892, became an incorporated town. The logging industry led to the development of many other communities in the area. In the 1850s, several people settled along the Long Sault Rapids. A small sawmill, known as Lumsden Mill, was built at the mouth of Gordon creek. In 1918, the Kipawa Fibre Co., a subsidiary of the Riordan Pulp and Paper Co. opened a pulp mill on the Lumsden mill site. The Riordan Pulp and Paper Co. then built the town site of what today is the town of Temiskaming. Other communities that developed in the Upper Ottawa River area because of the log drive, shanties or sawmills on the river include Deux-Rivières, Bissett Creek (Rocher Capitaine), Stonecliffe (Rockcliff), Mackey, and Des Joachims, which loggers referred to as Swisha.

Figure 5.3 Historic Mattawa



Source: Ottawa River Heritage Legacy Landmark Network

Although the spring log drive is a thing of the past on the Ottawa River, this area is still very much associated with the wood products industry. Tembec is the major employer in Temiskaming and Mattawa. Columbia Forest Products operates a veneer mill at Rutherglen. There are many logging companies that continue cutting operations for the companies that have timber permits in our area.

In 1881 the Canada Central Railway (later part of the CPR) reached Mattawa. In 1884, the Colonization Society of Temiskaming was established to attract French Canadian settlers to develop farms on the rich soil of the little clay belt in the Quebec townships of Guigues and Duhamel. In 1893, C.C. Farr published a pamphlet outlining how Crown Land could be purchased in the Bucke and Dymond townships on the Ontario side of the same clay belt. The most efficient way to get to this farmland was to come to Mattawa by train and continue to Lake Temiskaming via a series of steamboats and tramways known as the "Moccasin Express Line". This was replaced by a CPR spur line by 1894. Once on Lake Temiskaming a steamboat would take you to the nearest landing to your farmland.

Mattawa became the gateway to the development of this farmland. Everything these pioneer settlers needed was shipped in from Mattawa. Any contact with the outside world came via Mattawa, since the mail for these northern settlements was brought in by the Mattawa postmaster. As the 20th century dawned, Mattawa was the regional centre for the growing Upper Ottawa Valley.

In 1903 Fred Larose found silver near Cobalt. This led to a major silver rush in the area. Prospectors outfitted in Mattawa moved north to make their fortune. Mattawa merchants Noah and Henry Timmins, along with their lawyer Dave Dunlap, purchased Fred Larose's share of his new mine for a few thousand dollars. They went on to become multi-millionaires. Their wealth continued to grow with the purchase of Benny Hollinger's gold claims in the town that came to be known as Timmins, and the gold and copper mine at Noranda, Quebec. People from the Mattawa area made a major contribution to the silver and gold rushes in northeastern Ontario and northwestern Quebec.

In the last several decades, there has been a gradual population decline in most of the small communities along the Upper Ottawa River. There are many factors that account for this. The construction of the hydro dam at Des Joachims flooded out or drastically changed the communities of Mackey, Stonecliffe, Bissett Creek and Deux-Rivières. The disappearance of the log drive meant that these communities lost their initial purpose. These communities also saw job losses from the closure of the MNR offices at Stonecliffe and the sawmill at Deux-Rivières.

The town of Mattawa and the village of Rolphton were negatively affected by the automation of the Ontario Hydro Dams in their communities. The entire region felt the effects of the withdrawal of passenger service on the main line of the CPR and the closure of the CNR rail line through Algonquin Park.

Temiskaming and Mattawa have also been hurt by job losses in the forest products industry. The major forest employers in the area are: Tembec with its sawmill and pulp and paper mill in Temiskaming, and its saw mill in Mattawa; Columbia Forest Products -Veneer mill in Rutherglen; and Commonwealth Plywood - saw mill at Des Joachims. There are also many forest contractors (Jobbers), ranging from family businesses to fair-sized operations, who harvest the forest on sustainable forest licenses.