



Ruskin Mills

By Fred Braches

The name Ruskin Mills was given to the place at the mouth of the Stave River by the members of the Canadian Co-operative Society (CCS). The society was established in 1893, but it was not until 1896 that they started their colony and their work in Ruskin, probably inspired by the Ruskin Co-operatives in Tennessee. John Ruskin, after whom Ruskin is named, was an English author and critic who encouraged co-operatives.

In 1896, the Canadian Co-operative Society started lumbering and sawmilling at the Stave River. The number of children of the families attached to the co-operative warranted the establishment of a school at the mouth of the Stave River and in close proximity to the mill and their homes. The new school opened on 1 April 1897 with an enrolment of 30. The government records refer to the new school as “Stave River” until about 1910, when it starts to be listed as “Ruskin.”

According to a newspaper report of May 1897, the CCS had 54 members, 35 of whom lived and worked at or around the mills. The same report lists, in addition to a “well-equipped sawmill...with machinery to turn out all kinds of lumber,” a boiler house, shingle

mill, dry kiln, boarding house, general store, public school, smithy shop, shoemaker’s shop, barns, and homes for the members. A post office was added on New Year’s Day the following year. An instant community was created overnight with amenities equal to those of Whonnock and with employment right in their midst. In 1898, Henderson’s directory acknowledged the birth of a new community called Ruskin by giving it a separate entry. The year before, the residents had been listed as belonging to Whonnock.

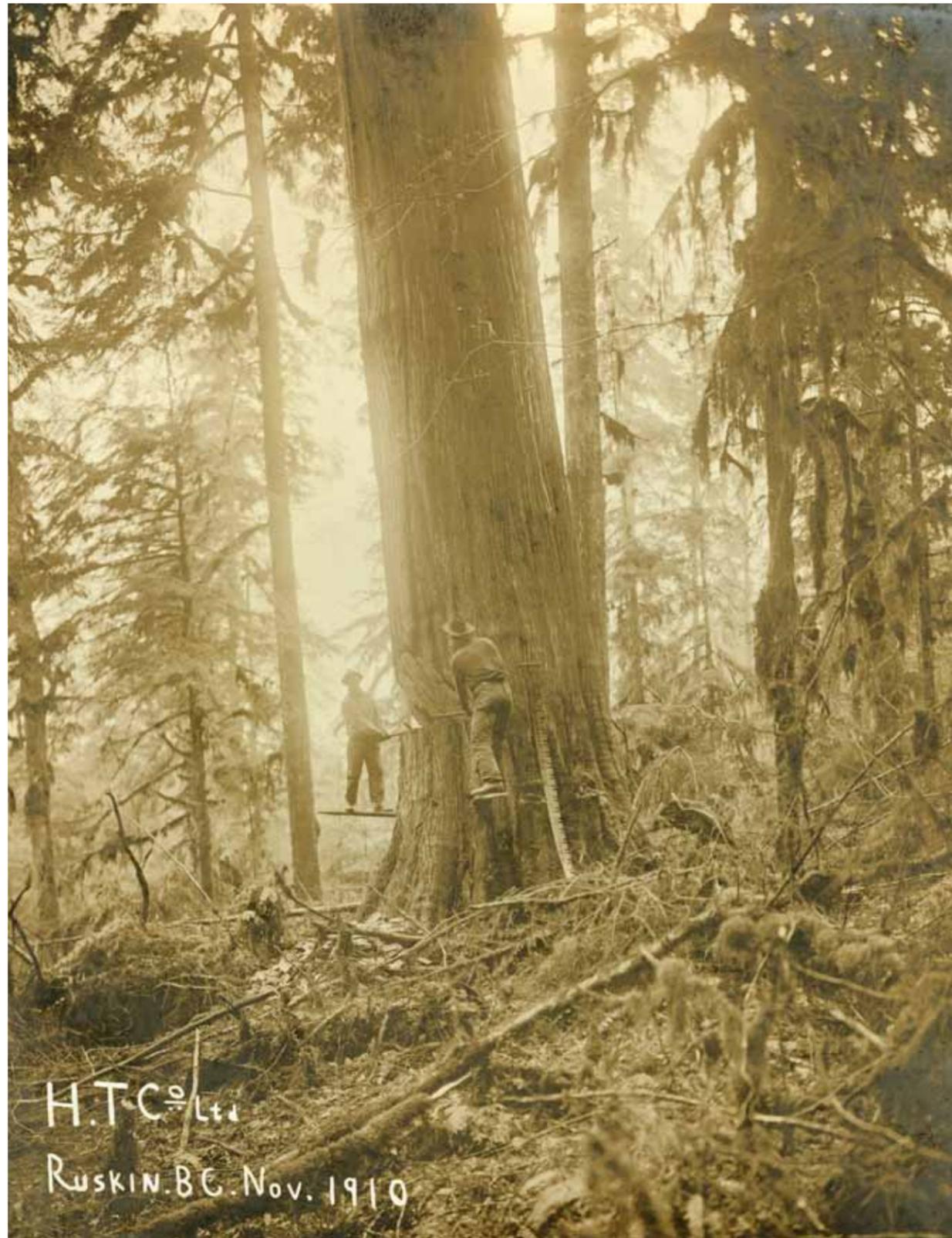
The co-operative seemed to flourish, but an exceptionally rainless summer in 1898 dried the Stave River up and logs could not be moved to the plant. The CCS lacked the money to survive the crisis and it folded in 1898. It surrendered its assets to E. H. Heaps & Company in the spring of 1899. Some of the members continued working in Ruskin and other members moved away. Many later became active in British Columbia’s labour movement.

Opposite

The Edward H. Heaps & Company building was constructed in 1902 and operated as a store, mill office, restaurant and hotel until the company went into receivership in 1918.

The confluence of the Stave and Fraser Rivers showing the huge Heaps logging operation. The photo was taken from the east side of the Stave River. A spar tree with a side boom is in the process of dumping the contents of four rail cars into the Fraser River or unloading the logs onto a conveyor to be taken directly into the mill.





Heisler locomotive at the Heaps Timber Company logging operation in Ruskin. In the cab: Carl Deforest, fireman (window), and John Kusha, oiler and helper (door). Standing in front, left to right: Peter Jorgensen, engineer; Bert Perry, brakeman; H. Friar, log bucker; and an unidentified man.

Shay locomotive at the Heaps Timber Company logging operation in Ruskin circa 1910.

Opposite

Two loggers stand on springboards and chop a notch into a forest giant. Their 10-foot saw is propped up on the side of the tree.

