



Horse logging at the Webber Mill. Sometimes the cedar logs were so large that the loggers drilled them and then used dynamite to split them in two equal halves prior to hauling them off to the mill.

The Webber Mill

IN 1920 WILLIAM C. WEBBER, William T. Holtby, and John B. Martyn started up a fair-sized logging and lumbering operation to the north of Webster's Corners that was called the Webber Mill.

In 1887 Bill Webber, the principal in the mill, had come with his parents and eleven siblings to Hammond, where his parents farmed a 160-acre fruit ranch. Upon leaving school, the young Webber had gone to work as a sawyer at the Hammond Cedar mill.

Bill Holtby, a relative newcomer to the district, had been born in 1868 in Rawdon, Quebec, and had married one of the Daykin daughters in 1908. He was the company's machinist.

The third partner and mill manager, J.B. Martyn, had already established himself in Port Haney before getting involved with the Webber Mill. Eventually Webber and Holtby became disgruntled with Martyn as they felt their associate was spending too much time

in municipal politics and not attending to the business. Webber and Holtby gave themselves substantial raises and asked Martyn to leave the company [see story page 128].

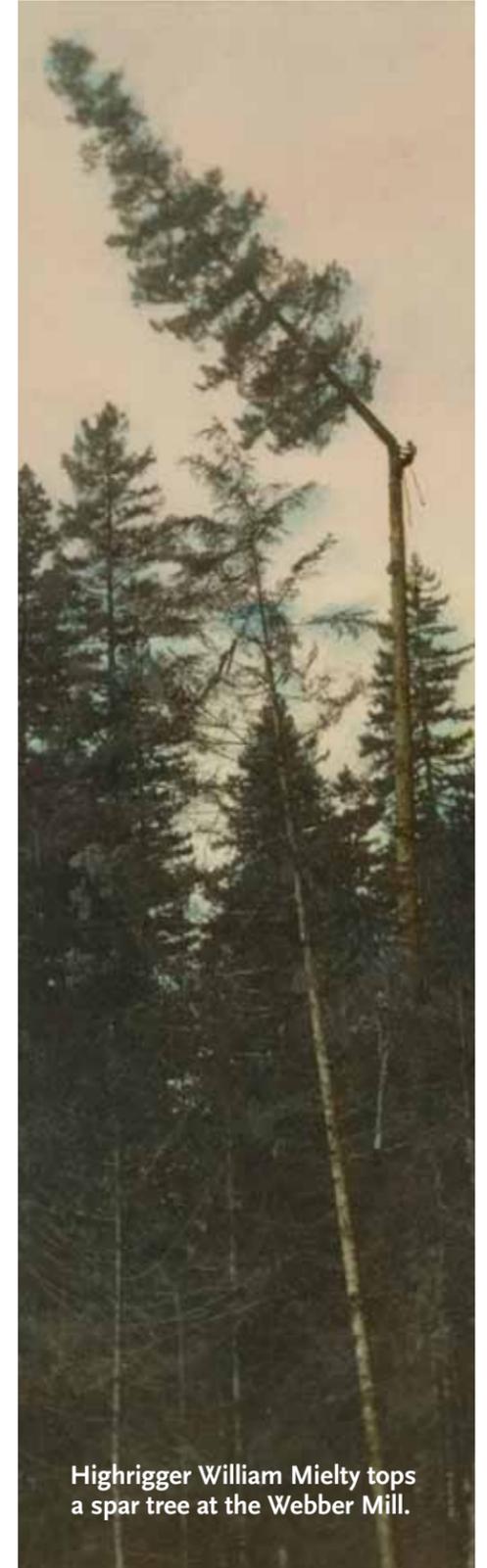
The twenties heralded the era of mills around Webster's Corners and disgruntled qualified loggers could quit one mill in the morning and be happily employed in another nearby mill in the afternoon.

The Webber Mill was not exempt from tragic accidents. On June 14th, 1920, shortly after the enterprise became operational, John Puska, one of the original Finnish settlers into the Webster's Corners area, went to work on a Sunday morning to do some maintenance work for an early start Monday morning. Someone came into the mill and, unaware that John was oiling one of the larger machines, turned on the saws. The start-up entangled Puska in a belt, and he was thrown to the ceiling of the building and killed. He left a wife with seven young children.

Another fatal accident occurred in 1924 involving one of the Commercial Logging trucks. Wilma Widdess, the daughter of the local jeweler, along with two other young teenagers, climbed up on the truck to hitch a ride down Dewdney Trunk Road from the Lillooet School to Haney. A sudden jarring of the truck threw the three girls off and Miss Widdess had the back wheels of the truck pass over her chest.

For three years the mill flourished, as there were excellent stands of Western Red Cedar around the mill's location and directly to the north at the base of Iron Mountain. Bad luck again struck during the winter of 1923, when the mill caught fire and burned to the ground.

The mill soon reinvented itself with new organizers and new money. Webber's former boss, Doan M. Hartnell, the principal in Hammond Cedar, along with Frank Armstrong of Haney and Frank Hanna and Frank Beban, both of Nanaimo, joined in a new operation known as the Commercial Lumber Company. Under the new management, the enterprise did well for a number of years and at the peak of operation employed 80 men. There were about 50 men logging and building roads and another 30 working in the mill. For hauling logs, the company initially used horses but then switched over to Model T-Ford trucks. The logging methods were similar to the Abernethy & Loughheed Logging Company in that spar trees and steam donkeys were used to haul logs to plank roads, which were covered with cables during the winter months for safer travel by the trucks.



Highrigger William Mielty tops a spar tree at the Webber Mill.



In 1927 Commercial Lumber bought the first six-wheeler truck in British Columbia. As some of the logs were so large that the Hammond Cedar mill couldn't handle them, the logs were dumped in the Fraser River at Hammond and towed to a mill in Seattle. The mill burned again in 1930 and the ownership reverted back to Webber and Hartnell, and the name changed to the Webber Lumber Company. This third mill cut road planks for Hartnell's logging operations at Rainy River on Vancouver Island, and logging continued until 1939.

William Webber and Walter Miely stand beside a Gottfredson logging truck with Herbert Smith in the driver's seat. Wooden ties are nailed across the back of the cab, and a tin roof has been added for protection against shifting loads and inclement weather. Cables were nailed to the road to increase traction. In the winter the road was sanded every morning for added traction.

Opposite

Steam donkey assists in the positioning of a large log on a rubber-tired Gottfredson truck in 1928.



The Webber Mill with water tower and the Golden Ears in the background.



The Kanaka Creek wooden bridge on Dewdney Trunk Road just east of Webster's Corners.



Finished lumber being loaded on a truck at the Webber Mill with Mount Crickmer in the background.

James M. Webster

JAMES MURRAY WEBSTER was born at Old Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire, Scotland, on 21 April, 1833, and left home for higher education in Glasgow. He apparently didn't like the Glasgow school, so he ran away and boarded a ship that was outward bound. But his first attempt at reaching the New World was ill-fated: on the way down to the Irish Sea he managed to break a leg, so the ship pulled into the Cove of Cork and left James in a hospital to recover from his injuries. Later he caught a ship for Canada.

At first he lived in Eugenia (near Owen Sound), Ontario, where he got married and raised a large family. He arrived in Maple Ridge around 1888 and built a homestead at Dewdney Trunk Road and 16th Road, fronting on 25th Avenue (256th Street). At first he and his family split cedar boards and built a house and barn near 16th Road. They also cleared some land. The family

later cleared the northeast corner of Dewdney Trunk Road and 25th Avenue, split some boards, and put up a house. He later became postmaster and ran a post office that was located in a tiny six-foot square room in his home. Mail came three times a week. At first there was no one around except for a few homesteaders, but then several sawmills began operating in the district.

Mr. Webster was a great story teller and told any listeners of the good old days when bear grease was a cure for all pains and fresh summer cow manure was used as a poultice for cuts or infections! He never lost faith in his home-found cures. When not busy in his office, he would stand out on the crossroads and make a mental note of everything that moved. A good Scotsman, he had a fondness for the poet Robbie Burns.

Webster died on 12 December 1923.