

# New details emerge on construction of 'the Chemical'

By Jenn Watt

**E**ngineering specifications of the buildings that comprised the Donald chemical plant and details about who was responsible for the construction have emerged giving the Haliburton Highlands Museum a more complete picture of what was once a major employer in the Highlands.

A full article in *Engineering News*, a journal based in New York, printed Jan. 28, 1909, was discovered by Koshlong Lake cottager Dennis Choptiany during one of his Internet searches on local history.

He ordered the article online and, after reading it for his own research, donated it to the museum.

"It's part of our history. It's our heritage. I don't think people realize the importance of the Donald Wood Plant to the county," he said.

Choptiany read an article in the *Echo* earlier this summer that described the efforts to restore the former distribution centre of the Donald plant and turn it into the Eco-Innovation Centre.

Co-ordinator Leora Berman put a call out to the public looking for blueprints of the distribution centre to aid in the restoration of the building.

Haliburton Highlands Museum curator Stephen Hill said the *Engineering News* piece provides diagrams and dimensions of the former structures he's never seen before and a thorough description of the water tower that was formerly on the site.

"The engineering specs and the description of the engineering, that was all new to us," said Hill.

"You get enough of that contemporary...

Chemical Company, which eventually purchased it outright," reads the *Haliburton County Echo and Minden Recorder* in an article about the plant from July 5, 1978.

"At the peak of its productivity, the Donald Wood Products plant (later the Standard Chemical) turned 12,000 cords of prime maple per year into wood alcohol, acetate and charcoal. It was a hot, smoky hell inside the plant, the air laden with grey gases and stifling with the heat of burning coal," the article says.

The plant closed in 1937 due to high transportation costs for wood, but was reopened a few years later during the Second World War. When the war ended, the plant closed entirely and the parts were removed and sold off.

Hill said many area cottages built at that time have bricks from the Donald plant used in their chimneys.

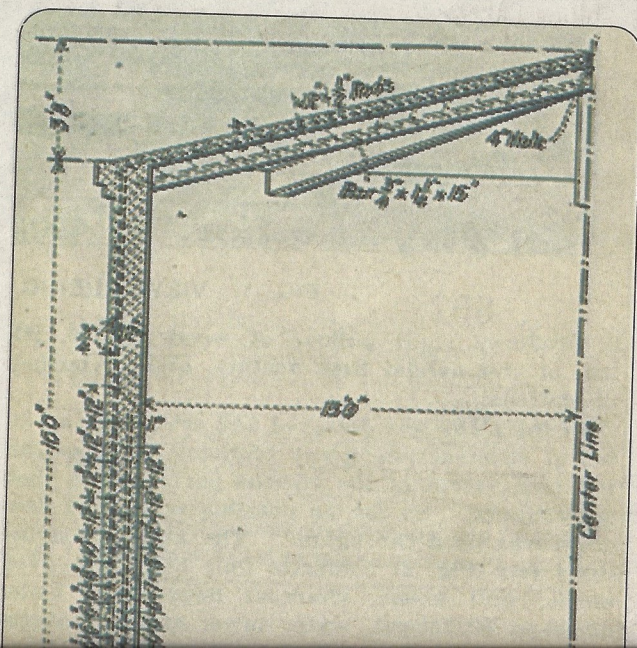
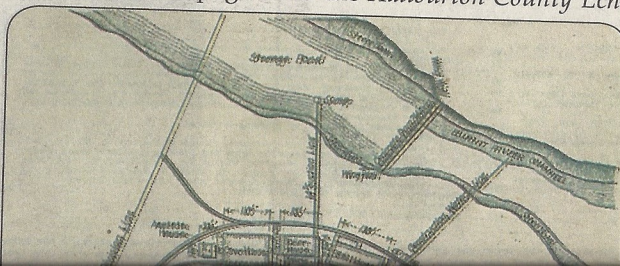
"At that time, few cottages had electric conveniences, so wood stoves were used for heating and cooking," he wrote in a note to the *Echo*.

The classified page from the *Haliburton County Echo*

dated Aug. 28, 1952 shows "good, clean used brick" for sale. "1,300 red, 900 white. \$60 takes all" says the ad placed by C.M. Emmerson.

The *Engineering News* article also changes the com

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before and a thorough description of the water tower that was formerly on the site.

"The engineering specs and the description of the engineering, that was all new to us," said Hill.

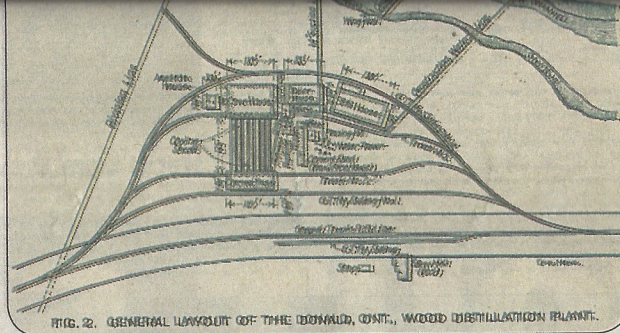
"You get enough of that contemporary documentation coming to light, which has been buried for 100 years, starting to surface; I think we're on a roll now. Somewhere the answers are going to come to fruition. We might never find the blueprints, but this [article] is the next best thing," he said.

The article was printed just after the plant was completed – oven house, still house, charcoal house and boiler house, 50,000 gallon water tower and concrete dam over the Burnt River.

What is now called the distribution centre in 1909 seems to have been called the charcoal house.

Originally constructed in 1908 by the Donald Wood Products Company, the plant eventually became a key employer in the Highlands with 60 men working inside and nearly 300 men in the bush harvesting wood.

"In 1914, the plant was leased by the Standard



Drawing of the Donald Standard Chemical plant from Engineering News published in 1909.

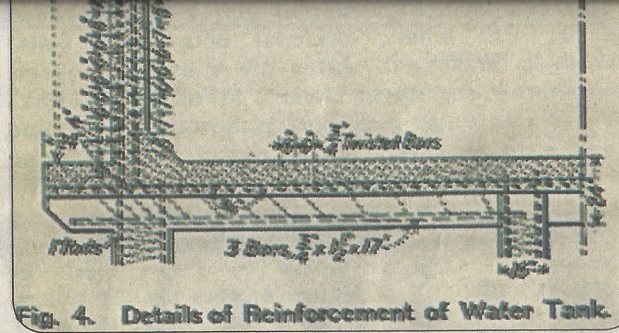


Fig. 4. Details of Reinforcement of Water Tank.

A detail from an Engineering News story in 1909 about the Donald Chemical plant.

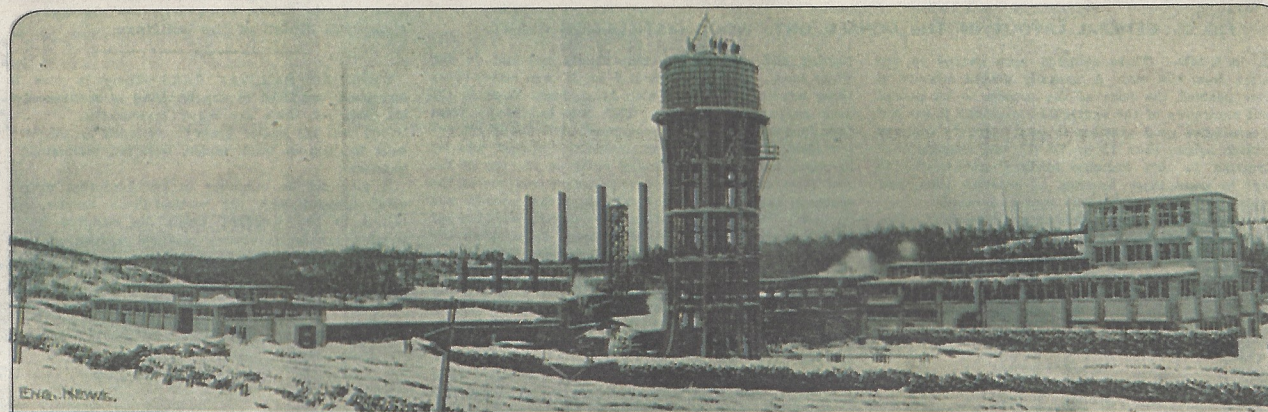



FIG. 1. VIEW DURING CONSTRUCTION OF PLANT OF THE WOOD PRODUCTS CO., DONALD, ONT.

A view of the Donald plant, 1909. The article was obtained by Dennis Choptiany and donated to the Haliburton Highlands Museum this summer.

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*Toffemire*  
PHOTOGRAPHY

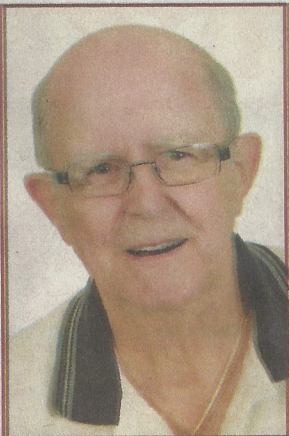
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# Preserving the plant

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mon perception that Westinghouse built the plant. According to this new document, it was William H. Oliver, J.M. Wilson and Pitt & Co. of Niagara Falls, responsible for construction.

Choptiany hopes that the effort to rejuvenate the distribution centre will increase knowledge about the history of "the Chemical" and generate a few more important documents like the one he found.

A cottager for 35 years, he said he always wondered about the skeletal structures that remain alongside Koshlong Lake Road in Donald, but it wasn't until relatively recently that he learned more about them.

"It was always a curiosity. It was much more visible when we first started coming up to the lake. Now the underbrush

has blocked the skeletons of the buildings. We always wondered: what was it?" he said.

Choptiany joined his lake association and volunteered to work on the lake plan, documenting history of the area back to the First Nations people. It was during that research process that he found out more about those remains.

Any new information about Donald and Standard Chemical are a delight for Hill, who hopes the buildings will be preserved.

"I don't want somebody to demolish it as an eyesore and I don't want people to turn their back on it," he said.

"Anything of Donald I feel should be preserved because that was the only other major settlement in Dysart Township and it was a fairly good employer in its day."



## Have an opinion?

Send a letter the Editor at  
jenn@haliburtonpress.com



# 2014 Kinmount Fair



### Friday, August 29 (Open 7 a.m.)

Children's Day - Free admission to all pre-school & elementary school children

Midway - World's Finest Shows

Pay 1 Price, Ride All Day Friday - \$28.00

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Poultry Show in Poultry Barn

Fair Ambassador Pageant - 2 p.m. in the Pioneer Tea Garden

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Dance in the Arena, 9 p.m. MONTANA SKY