

Ed Lentz shines a light on South Algonquin's lumber heritage



By Mike Riley

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The South Algonquin Business Alliance brought attention to a project being done by local seasonal resident Ed Lentz in their Nov. 5 newsletter. He would like to expand the beach at Tom and Mick Murray Park and will be adding historical signage. While expanding the beach proposition was turned down by the South Algonquin Township council at their Nov. 3 meeting, Lentz hopes to have the storyboards completed and installed at the park by the summer of 2022.

Angela Pollak, the secretary with SABA, informed recipients of the SABA newsletter on Nov. 5 that Lentz was spearheading this project, which she called very exciting, at Tom and Mick Murray Park in Madawaska. Eventually, storyboards will be installed highlighting the history of Murray Bros Lumber Company in the area and to expand the beach at the park, which is on Bark Lake. While the cost of these signs was expected to be approximately \$4,000, she said that Lentz had gotten plenty of support from both the recreation committee and from local businesses. According to the newsletter, SABA will be sending a letter of support to South Algonquin Township council, and they intend to feature the park as they build their new My South Algonquin website and app.

Bryan Martin, the CAO/clerk-treasurer, confirms that this project has been discussed with the recreation committee, but has not had much discussion at council yet.

"No requests have been made for any financial support or otherwise of council," he says.

However, at the Nov. 3 council meeting, council briefly discussed this and decided to decline looking into expanding the beach area at Tom and Mick Murray Park due to the ongoing Algonquin land claim negotiations and the difficulties that such a move would present at this time.

Lentz confirms that he is working with the recreation committee in Madawaska to make these storyboards a reality. He says that Tom and Mick Murray Park was made by the first council of South Algonquin Township, and was officially opened in 2000.

?[It was done] through the efforts of the then sub-committee of the parks and recreation committee for Murchison and Lyell recreation of South Algonquin Township. I was chair of that committee, and with the help of the councillor for Lyell, Lucien LaCombe, we were able to make this happen with the help of the people and the businesses and governments,? he says.

Lentz recalls that at the time, they were not able to do justice to the early pioneers and the founders of the Murray Bros. Lumber Company that still plays a large role in the lives of local residents.

?So, I volunteered to do storyboards for this park, as was done for the J.R. Booth memorial park in Madawaska. The local recreation committee and local councillors agreed to find funding if I got support from Murray Bros. Lumber Company, which I have done,? he says.

Lentz says that he has researched many of the families in the area and was assisted by Bert Wasmund's research of the Wasmund and Budarick families, Hazel Jessup's notes on the early settlers and that he also got a lot of information from Mark Wormke, who has a Facebook group called Renfrew County Germans and Wends. His mother Pearl Ward also wrote down invaluable information and he also read a book called ?A Wee Bit of Wicklow? and researched online the surveying of the area and the building of the settlement roads to entice settlers as the Peterson Road connected the Opeongo Road in Radcliffe Township in Renfrew County, which he says was the route many second-generation settlers would use to settle in Lyell Township.

?I have also posted some stories on the Facebook group Growing up in Madawaska, and friends have added to the information. My father, Reverend Arthur B. Lentz, always had a story to tell and if he and my Uncle Clifford were together, one would always try to outdo the other. I know my dad usually started his sermons with a story. I only wish I had taped some of those times,? he says.

Lentz says he envisions about five storyboards, made of metal, with an attractive user-friendly design to attract residents and tourists to read them. He is currently looking for a company to make up the signs, and he hopes to have them ready to be installed by next summer.

Liam Murray works in an HR and sales capacity at Murray Bros. Lumber company, and he says that he is Ted Murray's son, the second fourth generation Murray working at the company (along with Gaelen Murray). He says that Lentz had discussed with them the plan to create storyboards covering the history of settlement and progress in the area.

?It's people like Ed who are involved in the community that make them go, and we should all be thankful for the work he has put into this project. We feel this project is meaningful because it is important for people living and recreating in this area to know its history. To know one's family history is to instill personal identity and self-worth,? he says.

Murray says that Murray Bros. Lumber is happy to provide some of the building materials that will be required to complete the storyboards, and will do so when they are given the word by Lentz. He also reveals that Lentz was given permission to use content from a book Ted Murray wrote in 2002 called The Sawdust Gene, published in the year that Murray Bros. celebrated its 100-year anniversary.

Murray feels that the people of Lyell Township are of tough stock and that it would have been quite difficult clearing the land and making a go of it. He says that the people that persist in the area today have traits that are almost a necessity to prosper in the area, like being hard working, honest, community oriented and having a passion and reliance for the natural world. He opines that they surely had these traits passed down from their ancestors.

?I would also like to ensure that the storyboards acknowledge the history, continued presence and the importance of not only the first settlers of Lyell Township, but the Algonquin peoples who have a much longer history on the land. Murray Bros. and this area, would not be where it is today without the help and support of this community. Murray Bros. can speak to the impact of employees

at the mill and local logging contractors that continue to help us provide products our customers have come to need and love. Members of the Whitney and area Algonquins community have and continue to be important to the history, culture, economic and social fabric of the area. The stories and culture of these peoples should continue to be told and celebrated in a sensitive and meaningful way, including through these storyboards," he says.

Lentz himself has deep roots in the community, and says that his great grandfather was very lucky that his parents, Nicholas and Margaret Brown lived in Wicklow Township. In the 1880s, Lentz's great grandfather Urban Brown was working in the Cross Lake (now Lyell Lake) area of Lyell Township for MacLaughlin Lumber Company squaring pine timbers and hauling them out to the Old North Road, which was a war road from Maynooth to the Egan Estate on the Madawaska River.

"He had seen some land that he felt would be a great farm and he built shelter for his team of horses. He married Sarah Anne Livingstone and was staying with his parents in Pleasant Valley, and then in 1896 he built his log home and moved to Cross Lake when my grandmother was born. Many of Urban's in-laws would follow his trail called the Cross Lake Road but did not stay. But many of his children would marry and stay," he says.

Lentz says that he has done a huge amount of research into the history of the area, and what he was mostly impressed with was the early settlers who came into the area and despite hardships, made Lyell Township home. He says that in his research, it was interesting that while some people stuck it out and made a home for themselves even through the adversity, some gave up and moved on.

"They had to maintain the road along their property as well as have log dwellings built that were at least 20 feet by 18 feet. They had to take possession within one month and have, within four years, 12 acres of land cultivated to get the free land and grant," he says. "I also discovered that Lyell was named after Charles Lyell, a Scottish geologist who demonstrated the power of known natural causes in explaining Earth's history."