

## **Looking back at Mille Roches' mill**

**by Ian Bowering**

Before the digging of the St. Lawrence Seaway, Cornwall and area had two paper mills - Howard Smith (Domtar) in town, and Provincial Paper Ltd., in old Mille Roches, just west of Cornwall.

With plants in Thorold, Georgetown and Port Arthur, the firm no longer locally owned, decided to close in 1952 due to the continuing uncertainty over development of the riverfront, and its age as the oldest of the four.

Throwing 200 people out of work, the effect on the communities of Mille Roches and Moulinette was devastating according to a reporter for the Ottawa "Citizen".

Profiting from the 1898 enlargement of the Cornwall Canal, Cornwall contractor M.P. Davis organized a group of local investors to finance the Cornwall Paper Manufacturing Company at the foot of Shiek's Island Dam, near Mille Roches, to make use of his local power plant, in 1903.

Including such worthies as S. Greenwood, General Manager of the Canada Colored Cotton Mills, Colonel R.R. McLennan, and Roderick Pitts, the company boasted that for construction all records were broken with work starting in April of 1904 and finished in November. The first sheet of paper was produced within seven months from the start of the project.

In 1906 it was written that "The buildings are of stone and all on one flat, conducing to extreme economy in manufacturing. The machine is 120 inches wide, made in England, and of the very latest design...The range of good includes high grade book, litho, writing, envelope, bond and ledger papers and the product is from 10 to 12 tons per day."

"The machinery is all driven by individual electric motors, with the exception of the paper-making machine, which is run by a steam engine." John Harkness writes that "Unfortunately" this pre World War I "Company met the same fate as most of the others organized in Cornwall at this time and went into bankruptcy."

Harkness continues "The liquidators were successful in finding purchasers from Kalamazoo Michigan, in the persons of I.H. Weldon, S.F. Duncan, and Charles F. Buss, the latter an expert paper manufacturer."

Reorganized and renamed the St. Lawrence Paper Mills Ltd., the firm opened again in 1909. Within a year a second paper machine was added bringing the mill's capacity to 40,000 tons.

Growing rapidly acquiring other mills across Ontario, the local plant employed 100 under the direction of Neil F. Moore by the early '40s. Innovating several new technical processes and leading the way for more liberal labor relations the Paper Mill was responsible for Mille Roches' relative prosperity throughout the first half of the 20th century.