

HISTORY OF THE HOLTYRE COMMUNITY

CHAPTER ONE -- PIONEER SETTLEMENT

The village of Holtyre is located in the southeast corner of the Township of Hislop, District of Cochrane. It is now connected by a five mile paved road with Ramore, a station on the Number 11 highway and through it; it is fifteen miles to the nearest town, Matheson or thirty-six mile to larger one of Kirkland Lake and fifty-seven miles to Timmins.

Before the advent of gold mining, the village of Holtyre did not exist. The adjoining area was a pioneer agricultural settlement, opened by people, the majority of whom were from the south, coming to Northern Ontario just before the First World War and settling in the Township of Playfair, around the Ramore railroad station.

The Holtyre area, located as it is, the clay belt, on a plateau between the Black and Pike Rivers, looked attractive to many of the new settlers and they soon began to overflow beyond Ramore, across the Black River into the south east corner of Hislop Township.

It is interesting to note that access to the area was by a different route than today's since up to 1916, there was only one bridge across the Black River, located on the Playfair-Hislop township line, at lot #4. This bridge was known as the Newlove Bridge since Fred Newlove had a homestead on the Playfair side of the bridge.

By the summer of 1916, six families had started homesteads across the Black River into the southeast corner of Hislop Township and the north east corner of Playfair. The families were:

- Elzaar Drouin (grandfather of Roger Drouin, now working at the Ross Mine)
- Phillipe Voyer, whose son, Arthur farmed there until the early forties
- A German settler, name lost
- Euclide and Edouard Pion, whose residence was across the road from J. Serafin present home
- Mr Pepin and family who settled on what is today's Armand Ross farm
- Mr Clement and family who held the land known presently as the Joe Veillette farm

Apparently little land was cleared then, but to willing and strong arms, the surrounding forest provided both firewood and cash income from pulpwood.

In early July 1916, disaster struck though what is now known as the Matheson forest fire. Fourteen people, comprising three of the above families were burned to death. They were:

- Mr. and Mrs. Euclid Pion and children
- Mr Edouard Pion, bachelor brother of the above
- Mrs Clement and children (Mr Clement had gone to pick blueberries at Mobbs Lake, the present airport. He was unable to go back home on account of the fire and when he eventually did, found some bodies and went to Ramore for help)
- Mrs Albert Pepin and two daughters (Mr Pepin was working in Iroquois Falls a the time)

According to Mr Lucien Champagne, a party comprising of Mr Clement, Jos Champagne, with members of the Champagne family and some Robillard families from Ramore went to the scene. They buried the victims in a common grave, on the south end of the Pepin farm, near the creek (near the present Armand Ross barn). In the meantime, rescue trains were passing through. The

army was helping with this task. When told of the victims, the officials advised them to bring them out for the next morning train. There were twelve coffins needed and these would be supplied as well as free transportation. Another party was organized, comprising of Rosario Lahaie, Rosario Champagne, Felix Robillard, Gedeon Fortin, Jos Champagne, Antonio Champagne, all of Ramore. They went with two wagons and horses to perform the painful task, fording the river between Concession five and six. The men rolled the bodies into blankets; placing identification as best they could and took them to Ramore. They were placed in coffins and put on the train to be sent for burial in Montreal, Thetford Mines and Three Rivers.

As a sequel to the fire, the only bridge across the Black River was burned. The story is told that Fred Newlove while loading his hay, saw the fire coming and wishing to save some of his cattle unhitched his wagon on the middle of the bridge thinking it to be safe over the river. Of course, sparks from the fire set the hay on fire and the bridge burned and collapsed.

During the 1916-1917 winter, the government through the Northern Development Company built a new bridge at a new location being at the Concession Five and Six, between numbers Five and Six of Playfair Township.

In the meantime, the other settlers, who had escaped the fire fell some tall trees at the site of the burned bridge and built temporary planking which served as access from July 1916 to the spring of 1917, when it became weakened by a spring flood. Shortly after the new bridge was completed and this is the bridge that still exists today, below the old Ramore cemetery.

In 1917, with the high land between the Black and Pike Rivers, already cleared by the fire, many more settlers came to the area. These included Omar Provencher, Octave Camirand, Jos Camirand, Ernest Camirand, Arhur St. Onge, Emile Gagnon, Phillipe Voyer. Mr and Mrs Omar Provencher, parents of William arrived in April 1917 from Three Rivers and moved their furniture over the temporary bridge built by the survivors of the fire.

The peak of the settlement was reached possibly, in 1924-25 when families were established almost continuously between Ramore and today's Holtyre, and beyond as far as the Pike River. Going north on the road between Lots three and four; there were also families on both sides of the road, almost to the Pike.

To serve the influx of settlers, the government in about 1921, constructed the present Ramore - Holtyre road, as far as Lot No three. This is commonly known as the St. Onge Corner, now occupied by the present school principal, George Lecuyer.

Bridges

This also includes the building of the first bridge over the Black River as the site of the present bridge. In 1938 or 1939, to handle heavier loads for the Ross Mine, a second bridge was built about 200 feet upstream, right on the Concession Line which necessitated the cutting of a much shorter but steeper hill. In 1954, this second bridge was damaged by a heavily loaded transport, requiring the erection of a Bailey bridge over the timber bridge. In 1957, the present modern bridge was completed at the site of No 1 bridge and from it, one can still see the remains of the piers of No 2 bridge.

In 1923, a road was built between Lots Three and Four as far north as concession four, to what became known as Edgar Vincent corner. In 1925 or 1926, the road east between Concession One and Two, was extended one and three quarter miles further to the Guibord Township to Joseph

new townsite, with the winner getting a free lot. The winning name was Holtyre, from the Hollinger and McIntyre who like in Timmins had adjoining claims in the area. The Hollinger claims became the Ross Mine while the McIntyre claims became the Kelrowe, the Kelwren and now the Kelore Mine. Ted Pion's secretary, a well-known lady that a few of you may remember, won the contest.

2. Mr Pion appointed himself President of the Hislop Land Company, and opened his first office in an obsolete bus obtained from Kirkland Lake. Numerous deals and promotions were done from this old bus, until Mr Pion's permanent office building and garage was completed, after which the old bus was taken out to the pasture to rot. This is the old bus you must have seen many times in a field about 300 feet east of No. 11 highway, just ½ mile north of the Ramore cemetery, until a year or two ago, when the old rusty carcass collapsed under the weight of its age.
3. When Mr Pion began to sell lots, his subdivision had been fully approved by the Department of Municipal Affairs, under the existing regulations at the time, which did not include today's very wise provision that no subdivision is permissible until arrangements are made for water and sewer facilities. As Holtyre was then in an Unorganized Territory, the result was that the new townsite did not get these facilities until 1951, 5 years after the incorporation with Black River in 1946.

It is interesting to note that had the Ross Mine been discovered lately instead of 30 years ago, that there would be no Holtyre, and that our employees would be commuting from the nearest established communities with complete services, likely Ramore and also possibly Matheson to a smaller extent. This would have made for a stronger community in our area, instead of the two smaller ones we now have.

Of course we should not overlook that the main factor that made our earlier employees build homes in the new Holtyre townsite, was the wish to be as close as possible to their work, since the road from the mine to Ramore was closed from December till the middle of April. And the only way left to travel was by horse and sleigh, or by dog team. 1941 was the first year the Holtyre Ramore road was kept open throughout the winter, and for the first few years this was done by the Ross Mine men and snowplough until such time the Department of Highways took it over, a few years later.

CHAPTER TWO – HISTORY OF THE ROSS MINE

The Ross Mine is located on the former homestead of Edouard Ross, who arrived here in 1918 with his father Alfred to settle on the N 1/2 Lot 1, concession I of Hislop, on what is known today as the Armand Ross farm. His wife and son Antonio followed him in 1919. Antonio Ross, who was 7 years old, still has a vivid recollection of his arrival. He recalls travelling by wagon from Ramore to his grandfather's farm, when they hit a violent thunderstorm and lightning on the stretch of trail over some rock outcrops, on the south side of the creek near the township line. (between Hislop and Playfair Townships). As mentioned previously under the Pioneer chapter, the only access then was still by the original wagon trail. .

Mrs. Ed Ross died in 1921, and Mr Ross remarried in 1922 to Grace Pion, sister of Theodore Pion, who later founded the village of Holtyre, by subdividing his own homestead directly south of the Ross Mine into what is known today as Plan M-21.

In 1919, Edouard Ross acquired the N1/2 Lot 1 Concession 2 (now the Ross Mine), and built a small log cabin on it (a daughter Laurence was born there). The cabin stood some 200 feet south of the creek and about 200 feet west of the Township line (close to the present baseball field backstop). This building was taken down late in 1935 after having been occupied last by one of the Ross mine first hoistman, William Barnaby.

Edouard Ross did not work steadily on his farm, and lived mostly on relief in Kirkland Lake, but returned in the summer of 1930 with Antonio or Tony then 17 years old, to clear more land so as to retain ownership of his homestead. Some 20 acres were cleared, that is the whole area between the creek to the north and west and up to the south and east boundaries.

During that summer, Antonio recalls going with his father across the creek to near the north boundary of the homestead, where they found a small white quartz vein standing on the edge of a six foot high rock cliff. They broke off pieces of quartz with an axe, and noticed some sparkling minerals, which his father thought could be silver, as he had heard about the Cobalt mines.

Edouard Ross had no knowledge of minerals and sent these pieces of vein material for assaying, and was told they had certain values in gold. This location is positively identified today as being a four inch wide North-South quartz vein still showing within the fence, just east of No. one vein open pit at about 75 feet south of the mill office.

In 1931, Edouard Ross contacted Frank Tremblay, a Kirkland Lake prospector and for the following couple of years, financed by a third partner Baptiste David of Marseilles France, they did some trenching and blasting to expose the showings. They were helped by Edouard's brother J. Baptiste Ross and by young Antonio Ross.

Mr. Baptiste David was the only one of the 3 partners with any capital having made his money while a cook in the early days of the Lakeshore Mines and having accepted shares in lieu of cash for wages. He built the David block on Garnet Road in Kirkland Lake.

On October 30th 1933, the three partners signed an option to P.J. Brennan of Montreal for \$150,000. Later on, Brennan sold the option to Hollinger Consolidated Gold Mines Ltd for \$225,000. The three original partners received \$50,000 each, whereas Brennan share was the extra \$75,000.

Hollinger Exploration Company moved in the area in December 11, 1933 under the direction of Field Engineer WP Murdoch and foreman George Gibson, (a nephew of Thomas H. Gibson a long time Ontario Deputy Minister of Mines). The Company manager was AF Brigham a well known former Hollinger Mine manager, who resided in Montreal since retiring from active mining explorations.

From December 1933 to July 1934, 24 surface drill holes were drilled plus some rock trenching and sampling. The Ross mine still has the records of the names and salaries of the first December 1933 two men crew and they are as follows:

No.	Name	Occupation	Rate/day	Remarks
1	Oscar Haggquist	blacksmith	\$5.00	well known Timmins prospector
2	S. Gloster	drill runner	\$4.80	unknown
3	Albert Champagne	compressorman	\$4.80	Mrs. A Jacques Ramore 1 st husband
4	Jim Jordan	compressorman	\$5.44	later master foreman Y.D. mine Malartic
5	Geroge Gibson	foreman	\$5.00	retired from Hollinger in 1961
6	Arthur St. Onge	carpenter	\$4.00	local farmer - now retired
7	Eddie Camirand	carpenter	\$4.00	now garage man in Ramore - Esso
8	Omer Lalancette	trencher	\$3.00	now in business - Three Rivers
9	J. Baptiste Ross	trencher	\$3.00	brother of Ed Ross
10	Henri Hetu	trencher	\$3.00	still deckman at Ross Mine
11	Lucien Lalancette	trencher	\$3.00	local farmer - died in 1960 or so
12	Nelson Camirand	trencher	\$3.00	local resident yet
13	Napoleon Ross	trencher	\$3.00	retired from Ross Mine in 1964
14	Hermas Larose	trencher	\$3.00	Ed. Ross brother in law
15	L.P. Rainville	trencher	\$3.00	local settler in 1933
16	Leo Chartrand	trencher	\$3.00	farmer Leo Chartrand's son
17	Adelard Richard	trencher	\$3.00	Mrs. H. Byberg's brother
18	Armand Ross	teamster	\$5.50	Still living in Holtyre
19	Joseph Gagnon	teamster	\$5.50	former Holtyre resident
20	Ovide St Onge	teamster	\$5.50	son of Arthur St Onge
21	Lucien Provencher	teamster	\$5.50	W. Provencher's brother and was killed underground Feb 9 th 1949

In a letter address to the Hollinger President, Mr N.A Timmins on May 16th 1934, Mr Brigham speaks "of very favorable drilling results to date" and the likeliness of sinking a shaft if drilling continues favorable. In a July 4th 1934 letter, Mr Brigham recommends that sinking be started immediately and suggests that bulk mill test be done and flow sheet studied for eventual drilling.

Then, the Hollinger Mines proper took over the Hollinger Exploration Company and on July 17th 1934 sent Jean J. Caty to take charge of operations and get organized for shaft sinking and mine development. He was driven from Timmins to Hislop township by the late Art Young, Hollinger Mine Superintendent, who left his car at the end of the passable clay road on the Hislop-Guibord township line, at about 200 feet beyond the late Joe Veillette farmhouse, (now renovated as the Roger Drouin home). From there they had to walk 1.5 miles to the mine site). Of course there was no Holtyre then.

Caty carried two pack sacks and his ^{EIDER} ~~older~~ down, while Young carried a transit and tripod to be used in locating a shaft site from a sketch map by WP Murdoch showing the drilling results, and the possibility of outlining two ore bodies, now known as No. 1 and No. 2 veins. They walked up the clay wagon road up to Richard's farmhouse, turned left by the Ed Ross log cabin, and then took a foot trail across the open field, now the baseball ground. They reached the creek at exactly the site of the present dam (at the back of today's curling rink).

A steam boiler and pump was set up there to supply water for the diamond drills. A tall young man greeted both Caty and Young there and told them that there was no use to go any further, as they were not hiring men that day. Caty recalls with pleasure that he got his job anyway and is still at the Ross Mine ~~10~~ (35) years later. His official greeter at the creek did no lose his job and is well known to us as Antonio or Tony Ross, the mine discoverer's son and is now a mill shift boss after being employed over 30 years at the Ross Mine.

There was not much to be seen on that first day - two tents for cookery and office, both located near today's manager's lawn and one thousand feet away near the south end of the open pit, there

were two portable air compressors and a small tool shed. The only noise to be heard was the roar of a diamond drill in the bush, plus the occasional moaning of cows or cackling of hens from the adjacent farms.

The first job was the building of an access road from the Hislop-Guibord township line up to the shaft site. The first section of this road is still visible skirting the baseball ground, and across the creek at today's beaver dam. This road was used only for about two years until Holtyre was founded and a connection was made with the new village main street.

Then a cookery and bunkhouse were added plus temporary a hoist room and blacksmith shop. Shortly after, shaft sinking was started and completed to the 150 feet level by the end of November. After some ore development on this first level, sinking was resumed in April 1935 and shaft deepened to the 300 feet and 450 feet levels with later development working appreciable ore results.

In late summer 1935, a decision was made to build a small 80 tons per day mill which was started on December 26th 1935. The mill capacity had been increased many times, since we are now milling 460 tons per day.

The first residence built was the manager's house put up in 1936, the second one the mill superintendent built in 1937. More houses and the recreation hall and curling club were added between 1939 and 1942.

Payroll has varied from 42 men in the fall of 1934, to a high of 184 in 1941. A low of 72 men was reached during the war, and it was a struggle then to keep the mine operating. This was achieved by reducing mill tonnage and using every available ton of already broken ore.

After the war a high of 137 men was reached, but when the price of gold dropped to \$38.50 per ounce in 1946 to \$34.09 in 1954 continuance of operations became possible only through increased mechanization and smaller payroll helped greatly by the Federal government subsidy which began in 1948.

Since 1956, the work force has been stabilized at 100-110 men, with an increased productivity in tons milled per men. It is interesting to note that notwithstanding all these payroll variations, the Ross Mine in its 28 (31) year's life has never yet laid off any permanent employee.

This may be a good place here to recall some of the first employees. Our first cook was A. Groulx from Timmins, replaced by Delphhis Nadeau of Cobalt and later by Mrs Marie Crepeau. Our first blacksmiths and steel sharpeners were L. Lalonde from Timmins, Ralph D. Totten from New Liskeard and Fred Fortin from Cobalt. The first mine captain was George Jones from the Hollinger, followed by Ralph Rickey. Amongst our first hoistman we have to think of L. Patriquin of Timmins, Jouhn Martinson of Bourkes and Howard Peters a venerable hoistman who hoisted all his life, retiring after 16 years at the Ross Mine following 22 years of hoisting at the Nipissing mine of Cobalt. (R.B Murdoch hired in Sept 1935 and quit in Sept 1964).

Our first master mechanic was Bob Speer of Iroquois Falls, and our first surface foreman was John Anderson of Kelso, a former Ontario Department of Highways road foreman who build the Ferguson highway from Ramore to Matheson in 1933-34, and for his reward lost his job when the Hepburn government got in. We also remember George Ayers of Monteith, our first carpenter, and our first surveyor John Walton and clerk Murray Stewart.