

TOWNSHIP OF THE NORTH SHORE

HISTORICAL SKETCH

Given the geographic location adjacent to the North Channel of Lake Huron, close proximity to Lake Lauzon, and encompassing the estuary of the Serpent River, there is ample evidence this area attracted the early aboriginals. Champlain's map of 1632 has a notation indicating Spragge as the site where aboriginals met annually to gather and dry blueberries & raspberries. Artifacts have been discovered in the gravel ridges forming the receding shorelines of Lake Huron in Algoma Mills. These artifacts indicate the early presence of aboriginals and voyageurs in the region, since the North Channel formed part of Canada's first freeway known as the *Route of the Voyageurs*.

Algoma Mills

In 1860, Alfred Lauzon built the first mill directly on top of Lauzon Creek, just above where it enters Lake Huron. He also built a wharf, a tramway, six dwellings for him and his men, a dam and a log slide, all on un-surveyed land. Although he was anxious to get his permit, he was unsuccessful.

In 1870, Alfred Gunn, a childhood friend to John A. MacDonald, bought the six hundred acre property and buildings from the Crown for \$40.00. The Hillborn Lumber Company subsequently ran the mill until it was sold to the Canadian Pacific Railway in 1881, along with its timber limits, for a proposed terminus.

Construction of a rail line to Sudbury began by October, 1883, construction was also underway on the foundation of an elaborate 300-room hotel. By January of 1884, work on the foundation, terminal buildings, engine house and yard were abandoned. (Ruins of the hotel foundation remain today along Vivian Boulevard.)

Algoma Mills became the CPR's major coal delivery port for the Algoma District from 1905 to 1910. Coal barges were towed to Algoma Mills where cranes were used to load gondola rail cars for shipment to North Bay, Sudbury, Sault Ste. Marie, Cartier and Mactier, Ontario. Every navigational season, 200,000 tons of coal moved across the dock at Algoma Mills.



From 1906-1918, John Harrison and Sons Lumber Company operated a mill at the other end of Lauzon Creek, on Lake Lauzon, producing cedar tie plugs for sale to the CPR. Harrison also milled hemlock bark for Keenan Brothers of Owen Sound, to be sold to tanneries in the U.S.

In 1927, the CPR station closed and Algoma Mills became predominately a resort community.

Spragge

From 1867, Walsh and Lovey were cutting timber on the Serpent River watershed. They built an unregistered mill and docks just east of the mouth of the Serpent River, at the first falls. By 1872, this operation was abandoned and the owner's insolvent.

In 1881, Captain Robert Dollar built a warehouse at the mouth of the Serpent River, to store supplies for his lumber camps, located thirty miles up the river.

Early commercial activities involving the plentiful supplies of white pine resulted in a major sawmill being constructed in Cook's Mills, now called Spragge, in 1882. Built by *Cook's Brothers Lumber Company*, the mill operated until 1906 when it was sold to *Waldie Brothers Lumber Company* who in turn sold it to *McFadden and Malloy* in 1913. Over time a small village with a school, hotel, barbershop, general store was created, and by 1926 the community had a population of about 300 people. Sawmill activity was terminated in Spragge in the early 1930's following a disastrous fire, which eliminated the mill, lumber inventory, docks and most of the town.



Spragge's devastating loss was renewed when Karl Gunterman made the discovery of uranium in Long Township in 1953. By the persistence of Franc Joubin and Joe Hirshorn, the opening of *Pronto Mine* in 1955 created the Elliot Lake uranium boom with *Pronto Mine* becoming the first producing mine. Service stations, motels, car dealerships, trucking firms and heavy equipment service depots servicing the expanding population and the mines were established, almost overnight. Given the terrain, most of this was located along Highway 17 forming strip development with little depth. Coinciding with the uranium discoveries in the Elliot Lake area, the first major copper discovery in Algoma, after Bruce Mines, was at Spragge in 1953 resulting in the development of *Pater Mine* by *Rio Algom Limited*.

Carmeuse Lime Limited and *Lafarge Canada Inc.*, formerly *Reiss Lime Co. of Canada Ltd.*, was established in Long Township during the 1970's to serve a resurgent uranium industry. With a dock accessible by Great Lake freighters, *Carmeuse* receives shipments of limestone, coal, and coke to make lime for the mining industry. The company has expanded to include storage for sulphuric acid for redistribution and is a major trans-shipment point for road salt that is distributed throughout Northern Ontario. *Lafarge Canada Inc.* produces a slag cement product used for backfilling in area mines.

During the 1980's, the population and, as a direct result, the service industries diminished appreciably in step with the declining uranium industry. During this time market prices for ore were lower than the production costs, and as a result contracts were lost. With depleting ore reserves, closure of the mines was inevitable and the impact on the area from 1991-1996 was drastic, with the local economy being hit hard. Despite this setback the area continues to thrive in its own way.

Serpent River

Although the Village of Serpent River is a relatively new entity, the Ojibwe group known in 1848 as the Serpent's Band, had been travelling the Serpent River for hundreds of years, fishing, hunting, gathering, trapping and harvesting furs.

In 1870, the Indian Department was selling timber cut from the Serpent River reserve.

What was once part of two farms owned by Joe Whelan and Annie Green in the early 1900's, the population ballooned from 29 in 1951 to 768 in 1961. This was due to Elliot Lake's uranium boom. Three grocery stores, Jenkies, the Wheel Inn and the Handi Spot sprang up. Other businesses, including three gas stations, restaurants like Ray's, Harry's and the Curb/Olympic, the Frosty Freeze and Joe's Greenhouse all thrived. The Atomic Drive-in and the Mayflower Hotel were very popular all along the North Shore and an excellent Lion's Club opened in the 1980's. Community members built a baseball facility, and skating rink.

With the closure of the uranium mines, the population of Serpent River declined