

CHAPTER V

FIRST YEARS OF LUMBERING

For Donald Fraser, the first four years in the colony were spent meeting the necessities of the moment and turning his hand to whatever promoted his own immediate welfare and that of his family and his neighbors.

Times were hard, those first few years, and he, Alex Matheson and other of the settlers, in order to obtain additional cash with which to feed their families, the first winter, worked on the new narrow guage New Brunswick Railway which was being constructed up the St. John River. This was the Gibson Branch, from St. Mary's (Devon) to Newburgh Junction. Wages were 90 cents for a 12 hour day. In view of the later success of Donald Fraser in building up, what by 1916 was to be known as one of Canada's largest lumber concerns, it is interesting to note in passing, that this portion of the railway was a project of another famed early lumberman, "Boss" Gibson, who built the town of Marysville and who, in the early 80's switched his interest in lumber to cotton, a decision which ultimately resulted in the building of one of Canada's great industries, today known as Canadian Canada Cottons, Limited.

Fundamentally, Donald Fraser was not a farmer. His entire background for three generations in Scotland, had been lumbering. His farming efforts in relation to the free land grant he had taken in the Colony were a necessary part of the establishment of a new life in a new land, - a means to an end. He had brought all of his equipment including tools to make a complete circular saw, from Scotland, with the idea of getting into the lumber business in New Brunswick. Working with a neighbor in what was then known as a sawpit mill, he had whipsawed enough lumber for their two houses. This was slow work, producing only about 500 board feet of rough lumber in a twelve hour day. However, it served its purpose

in the early days in the colony. Next, using the experience gained at his father's mill in Scotland, Donald Fraser worked as a millright in the summer of 1875 for Hale & Stäckney at Grafton. He, and others from the colony who worked there boarded that summer in Grafton and Donald Fraser used to walk home to be with his family on Sundays. The mill closed down when the river froze, and the following summer, 1876, Donald Fraser sawed by the thousand for Hale and Stickney, moving his family to Grafton. That fall, deciding to go into business for himself, he went to Fredericton, obtained credit from Hodge for supplies (his "grub-stake") and cut all winter on the Canadian side of Mars Hill. He then leased the waterpower mill at nearby River de Chute.

By the Spring of 1877, this sawmill proposition looked so good to Donald Fraser that he decided to purchase it from Joe Porter, another progressive and successful colonist. This simple beginning was the nucleus of the Fraser success for it was at River de Chute that he laid the foundation for what, by 1916 was conceded to be the largest lumbering business and milling business carried on under one management in the Maritime Province, as well as one of Canada's largest lumber concerns.

Before recounting the years which followed that first venture with the River de Chute mill in 1877, with their hardships, opportunities, set-backs and many phases of progress, it is well to consider what preparation and background Donald Fraser had for his chosen life work. Donald Fraser's paternal grandfather, for whom he was named, had spent his seventy-seven years of life in Aberdeen, Scotland, engaged in the timber business. Archibald Fraser, Donald's father, succeeded to his father's occupation, and like him, also spent his entire life in Aberdeen carrying on the business. Then Donald Fraser completed his studies at Mechanics' Institute in Aberdeen, and went into business with his father. On the death of the latter, he,

and one of his brothers under the firm name of A & D Fraser, continued their father's business for five years. At that time, the partnership dissolved when Donald Fraser was offered the opportunity to go to Sweden in the interest of the lumber firm whose mill, as previously accounted, had burned. Whereupon, Donald Fraser made his important decision to join the Kincardine colony and go to Canada instead.

At this time, with the dissolving of the A & D Fraser partnership between Donald and his brother Archibald - the latter went to Australia, another brother, James, to New Zealand, both to continue in the lumber business. With the traditional background in mind, it is easy to see what forces and interests carried Donald Fraser on in his career of building a lumber business, step by step, from the first River de Chute mill, through subsequent successful ventures. In addition, another noteworthy factor is that while struggling to gain a business foothold, Donald Fraser continued to work side by side with his men, thus earning their loyalty and respect. In addition to attending to the executive planning, he also engaged in all of the clerical work for his growing operations.

At this time, too, when he operated the River de Chute sawmill, he also owned and operated a ferry from River de Chute to Kilburn, which was in active use. In 1878, the year following his first purchase, he expanded his holdings by purchasing the Muniac Mills, a short distance from the colony on the St. John River. These consisted of a small sawmill and a grist mill for grinding buckwheat and oatmeal. They were operated by water power and proved to be a paying proposition from the start. Soon the logs on farmers lots in the locality with which the Muniac Mills were being operated, became scarce, and Mr. Fraser obtained a permit from the New Brunswick Railway, which had been granted extensive timberlands for constructing

the railway up the River St John. This cutting permit was for lands bordering on the Odell River, a tributary of the Tobique which enters the St. John River about ten miles above Kilburn. Here he continued to carry on his logging operations off and on as well as on the Mamazekel River, also a Tobique River tributary, near its headwaters,

There are two facets of unusual interest to this first transaction with the New Brunswick Railway by Donald Fraser, lumberman. Looking backward to the then not-long-distant past, when Donald Fraser had worked as a laborer on the railway for 90 cents a day, with other colonists, - it serves as a gauge of his remarkable genius for progress. And in the light of tremendous purchases later to take place from this same railway, such as the acquisition of 133 square miles of timberland in 1941 and 981 square miles in 1943 . . . his outstanding and consistent progress becomes all the more impressive.

Donald Fraser's next expansion at the Muniac Mills is a matter of particular interest not only to those in the colony but to far distance places, for it was at this mill that he installed the first Dunbar Clapboard and Single Machine, invented by another colonist who had come over on the Castalia, Alexander Dunbar. An innovation of the times that expanded the production to a point where Fraser clapboards and shingles began to go forward to the lumber markets in the New England States, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, and later, to export markets, - the installation of these machines was to mark the first step in a life time policy of being well up in front on the newest equipment available at all times. . . a policy Fraser Companies have continued to follow through the succeeding years.

And now a word about the inventor of the Dunbar Clapboard and Single Machines,

Alexander Dunbar, whose name, in his time, was to become a symbol of outstanding inventions, whose daughter was to marry into the Fraser family, and whose sons were to carry on his own foundry, after his death, as well as to participate actively in the growth of Fraser interests, by working for the company in the early days, as well as today. Friend and neighbor of Donald Fraser, with the same traditional background, both in Scotland and in New Brunswick, having arrived with his family on the Castalia, with the Fraser's and other Scotch colonists, he came from a family endowed with unusual engineering ability. It was his brother William, for instance, who planned and built the waterworks at Johannesburg, Africa, and one of his sons, today, who is outstanding for his engineering inventions.

Shortly after his arrival in <sup>the colony</sup> he moved his family to Woodstock to become superintendent of the waterworks being constructed there, as well as engineer and superintendent of the electric<sup>e//</sup> plant which he operated until 1891. In that year, in connection with the late James Hayden, under the name of Hayden & Dunbar he established the foundry and machine shop which was to become so successful. Later this firm became Alexander Dunbar and Sons, carrying on a large machinist and foundry business, manufacturing steam engines, castings, planers, etc. Today the foundry still operates ~~today~~ under the management of his two remaining sons, Alexander, Jr, now retired, Harry and a grandson.

Up until the time of the invention of the Clapboard and Shingle Machines, which revolutionized the production of them, in their day, the shingles had been laboriously cut by hand, and the clapboards sawed with a saw. In talking to Harry Dunbar, in Woodstock last summer, he mentioned the fact that his father had built the first Clapboard Machine in an old church in Woodstock, it being the only place large enough to accommodate the machine while it was in the process of being developed and built.

By 1902 the Dunbar foundry had grown to a point where it employed eight to twelve men, and had built up a trade extending into every part of the Dominion. It is interesting to note, too, that Alexander Dunbar was a pioneer in the development of mechanized equipment for use in logging and lumbering in the woods, his Steam Log Hauler having been one of the earliest development of its kind. This Log Hauler also participated in far flung activities, even being sent to Alaska in 1894 during the gold rush. During their lifetimes, Alexander Dunbar and Donald Fraser were close associates and friends, and at the time of the latter's death, an informal picture which appeared along with the newspaper account of Donald Fraser's passing, showed ~~to~~<sup>the</sup> two men together as they must have been so many times through the years, talking of their hopes and interests in the development of new methods and new phases of their closely interwoven careers.

Just as the initial installation and use of the Dunbar inventions in his business operations illustrated Donald Fraser's interest in pioneering new machines and methods, he was one of the very early to engage in a business policy that has become so universally accepted through the succeeding years, - that of employee participation in business. Perhaps there is no better way to illustrate this policy of progress than to quote from two men who mentioned it during the past summer. The first was Alex Maclean, of Klaster Rock who explained how, in the early days, Donald Fraser paid his men seven percent on the money they left in the business. The men drew only the wages needed for living expenses, leaving the rest in the company. This not only contributed toward the necessary working capital of the early company, but it built financial security for the employees, many of whom were able to accumulate a considerable amount during the years, in this way.

Another man who mentioned this policy was an early associate of Donald Fraser,



Walter Jackson, who had been head of the Fredericton Boom Company until it dissolved in the early 1920's. Mr. Jackson was speaking of the loyalty and respect of the men for Donald Fraser, and he illustrated his point by saying that the latter had had the men leave their wages in to cover operating expenses, which they gladly did, and although times were very hard, during those early days of the development of his lumbering business, the loyalty of his men helped keep things going. As a result of this factor, Donald Fraser was able to progress, step by step, until by just before 1900 the Aberdeen mill, named for his birthplace in Scotland, was built in Fredericton at the cost of ~~██████████~~ \$10,000.

And finally, speaking of early policies, and ways of doing business, - again and again one is impressed with the simplicity and informality of the times, when a man's word was as good as his bond and his personal integrity was all the collateral required. Mr. John Neill, in talking of the early days with Donald Fraser grandson of the founder, and the writer, last summer in Fredericton, told of an incident that well illustrates this point. The Neills, whose hardware business has been carried on continuously for more than a hundred years by the family, were big suppliers for operators needing supplies for their activities on the St. John when lumbering was at its height, in those early days. At that time, Donald Fraser was building up his early sawmill and woods operations and he had been dealing with another supplier. When the latter failed Donald Fraser at a very important time, the Scotsman simply turned on his heel without a word, entered Neill's store and bought himself a pocket knife, by this small transaction indicating that from then on, he was a Neill customer. Big and lasting business relationships were established as simply as that in those early days.

## THE FRASER STORY

CHAPTER VIEARLY GROWTH

Just ten years after Donald Fraser and his family arrived in the Colony from Sctoland, the family pattern, which is the one on which so many of the early and great industrial success stories were built, began to repeat itself .. his sons started work with him, just as he and his brothers had worked for their father who, before them had worked for their grandfather in the lumbering operations in Aberdeen, Scotland. Similarly, at River de Chute, both Donald, and the older son, and Archie, two years his junior, had been working for their father after school and on Saturdays, sawing shingles and doing other work around the mills.

Their mother, too, was very much a part of the family corporation, running a boarding house for the men on the drives and in the mill, and seeing to their welfare, generally. Her contribution to the growth and success of her husband's business cannot be over estimated. She had been, from the first, a kind and beloved member of the colony, neighborly, helpful and always personally concerned where there was illness or trouble of any kind. Her grandson, Donald, recalls of having heard his father speak of the days she left their home on snowshoes to travel often to some distant point, to lend a hand where help was needed. This same interest she gave to the men who worked for Donald Fraser, and lived at the boarding house they ran. In talking to Alex Maclean this past summer, now retired from his work at Fraser's and living at Plaster Rock, he spoke of the great kindness and generosity of this woman who was a real pioneer in every sense of the word, and who ironically enough, was not to live to share in the success to which she contributed so greatly.



At the ages of 18 and 20 respectively, the two sons were in charge of their own lumber camps for their father on the Odell River, and from then on continued to take on increased responsibility and contribute materially to the success of the business.

To return, for a moment, to the first drive on River de Chute - Alex Maclean was telling about it last summer at Plaster Rock. This drive consisted of getting 400 logs six miles down river to the mill. It was an event of tremendous excitement to him, and he told of how he prepared for it, dressing with special care even to his "long legged cowhide boots with ears to pull them on by". When the time came for the drive, however, it developed that Alex's part was not to be as exciting as he had hoped. "Archie gave me money to buy eggs, and instructed me to take care of the lunch and the coats," he recalled. In spite of his disappointment, however, it was still thrilling to young Alex to be in on the drive, even in this rather mundane capacity.


"The men stayed all night in camp," Alex explained, "breakfast was eaten at an early hour by candlelight and Archie passed around a plate of two-inch square pieces that looked like cake." It developed they were squares of fat pork, standard fare in early camps. Alex recalls that he shoved his in his pocket to grease his boots with. A short time after the drive, he was given his chance to work on a saw. His brother, Bob, was top sawyer. Alex explains that he didn't know much about the work but got considerable help from his more experienced brother. "We worked like Yankees to get the work out," he said. He also remembers having used the Dunbar rotary saw and describes it as the best rotary saw with which he had ever had anything to do.

Concerning the young Fraser boys, Archie, in particular, loved the river drives. Shortly after he was 14, his father was starting the Spring drive and Archie wanted to quit school and go. His father talked it over with the school inspector, who happened to be in River de Chute at the time, ... his advice was, "If he wants to go, let him go." So the blacksmith made Archie a small sized peavey and Archie went on the drive with the men, keeping up with the best of them.

Another Spring, Archie Fraser and Bob Maclean, Alex's brother, drove for the colorful early lumberman, Bob Connors. Connors, born in Nova Scotia and educated in Ireland, was legendary for his contradictory nature. Six miles above Fort Kent, Maine, at Glazier's depot camp in 1882, he built a Victorian house for himself, and a town of small attractive houses for his employees, including a general store, tiny hotel and church. Reputed to have a temper to match his flaming red hair and beard; that he had a softer side is evidenced by tales of how he employed men who had outlived their youthful usefulness on the rugged river drives and in the woods, to work around his town and his property, landscaping and doing other jobs more suited to their years.

This first drive in which Archie Fraser took part, at the age of fourteen, was the beginning of a lifelong love of the drive, which he retained all through the years long after he became a principal and executive of his father's companies, finally succeeding his father as President, upon the death of the latter. This Spring drive, too, marked another turning point in Archie's life, for it marked the end of his somewhat brief education in the grade school of the colony, except for later sessions at night school in Fredericton, by which time he and his brother, Donald, Jr., whose River de Chute schooling was supplemented by school in nearby Andover, became partners of their father in 1894.

Like most of those great pioneers, who began their careers with little capital other than a strong constitution, determined will, eminently keen and practical mind, and an unlimited capacity for hard work, the industrial success of Donald Fraser was built step-by-step through his vision and alertness and the courage to move ahead as the opportunity presented itself. With the River de Chute and Muniac Mills established and proving successful, in 1892 Donald Fraser admitted his two sons into partnership, establishing the firm of Donald Fraser & Sons. That year, they acquired a mill site on Government Lane in Fredericton, and two years later in 1894, construction was started on the sawmill, which was to be known as the Aberdeen Mill - named for the birthplace of the founder.

For the operation of this mill, logs were cut on the Odell River, a tributary of the Tobique. They were driven to the mouth of the Tobique; there, formed into rafts, and were floated down the St. John to the Aberdeen mill. The navigation of these rafts required the skill of the famed "river rats", those men of the early lumbering days who, today, are legendary as stories of their Spring drives lend color to rugged tales of woods, camp and stream. The logs were "bark marked" with the Fraser marks "F  F" and "XFX" for accurate identification when they were sorted at the Douglas Boom, operated at Spring Hill, from among the logs driven down the St. John from other tributaries, by other operators. This cooperative rafting and sorting of the logs could be the basis of a story of its own ... since there were many interesting angles to it; none the least of which was the fact that the marks were put on in the woods to avoid piracy, so prevalent in the early days. Unmarked logs which turned up at the boom, where cooperative division of cost was prorated among the participating companies, were sold at public auction and the proceeds divided among the cooperating companies.

The Aberdeen mill, for the use of which the Odell-Tobique-St. John driven logs were destined, was a wonderfully well planned mill with one of the outstanding innovations of its time. The mill was supplied with electricity from its own dynamo, so that it could be run with both a night and day shift ... doubling production to care for the demand for deals sawed there and shipped for export trade to England, South America and other foreign ports. The night and day shifts, in the Aberdeen mill, numbered from one hundred and twenty-five to one hundred and thirty men, and manufactured about fifteen million feet of lumber per year into deals, clapboards, shingles, laths, etc., which were sold in the New England market as well as being shipped to foreign countries. This mill was reputed to have cost \$10,000., a tremendous investment at that time, and was equipped with gang and rotary saws, edgers, several planing mills, two clapboard machines, two lath mills, two shingle mills, and a variety of the latest make of box shoo machinery. The mill and machinery, together, were valued at about \$30,000. The mill yards, as well as the mill, were lighted throughout by the independent electric plant which also furnished light for the boarding houses and the nearby residence of Mr. Fraser, as well as other residences in the immediate vicinity.

The year 1894 marked another event in the Fraser story which was to grow in importance from the outset ... for it was that year that young William Matheson, then 27 years old, and a son of one of the Kincardine colonists, Alex Matheson, joined Donald Fraser and Sons as Accountant, a position from which he was to advance, over the years, to important executive positions in the companies, as well as contributing greatly in many other ways to the success of the Fraser interests.

His qualifications were well known to Donald Fraser, since he and his brother, Tom Matheson, were sons of his good friend, Alex Matheson, another of the original colonists to come over on the Castalia from Scotland. They had been brought up in the colony with his own sons, Donald Jr. and Archie. William was the same age as Donald Jr. Tom was the youngest of the four. Although William had had even less education than Archie, who had left school at 14, his early education having terminated at Grade 4 in the schools in Kincardine, his appreciation for good schooling and the value of education led him to continue his self education to a point which later prepared him for a course in business college in Fredericton. That he was a natural student, is evidenced by incidents recalled by everyone who knew him. He had a remarkable, almost photographic, memory and an ability to quote whole passages from books he had read.

At the age of 17, he worked in the law office of Hugh Matheson in Woodstock, until the latter's death, after which he worked for Donald Fraser, in various capacities, until 1888. Then, wanting to try his luck elsewhere, he went West and worked in the lumber business in Northwest Ontario, and later in Minnesota. In 1893, Donald Fraser wrote William Matheson, inquiring if he would come back East to serve as accountant for the fast growing interests. In 1894, William Matheson returned and became the Accountant for Donald Fraser & Sons. From that date on, <sup>he</sup> continued to become a strong factor in the success of the Fraser activities.

At the time William Matheson joined Fraser's, his younger brother Tom had been working for Frasers for four years; first for Archibald Fraser, when he was camp boss for his father on the Odell River in 1890. Tom's first job away from his home in the Kincardine colony, was at the age of 15 when he had gone to work for a logging jobber named McGraw, near Portage Lake in Aroostook County, Maine.

The following summer, he worked for the Tobique River Valley Railway Company, which reached Plaster Rock that year. The next winter, he cut squared hardwood timber from his father's lot in Kincardine. It was the next fall, in October that he commenced work for young Archie Fraser, who was then camp boss for his father, Donald Fraser. Tom started swamping logging roads, shortly after which he was promoted to sled tender. By the following spring he had progressed sufficiently so that when Archie Fraser went home for a holiday he left Tom in charge of sluicing operations on the drive. On Archie's return, he was made time-keeper of the drive. Tom recalls many interesting things about this early work...among others,- he tells of having used birch bark when calculating time on the wangan. When the drive was over, he worked during the summer as time-keeper at River de Chute for Donald Fraser, then again in the fall of 1891 went to the woods with Archie Fraser and continued to alternate between woods and mill work until 1900. But more of his activities later.

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On August 5th, 1896, the Reporter and Fredericton Advocate carried the sad notice of the death of Ann Reith Fraser, wife of Donald Fraser. She was fifty years of age and was survived by her husband and two sons. It was the lifelong regret of Donald Fraser, as the years brought him the many good things to make life easier and pleasanter, that his wife, who had been such a real helpmate and inspiration during the early difficult years, could not have lived to have shared in his later success.