

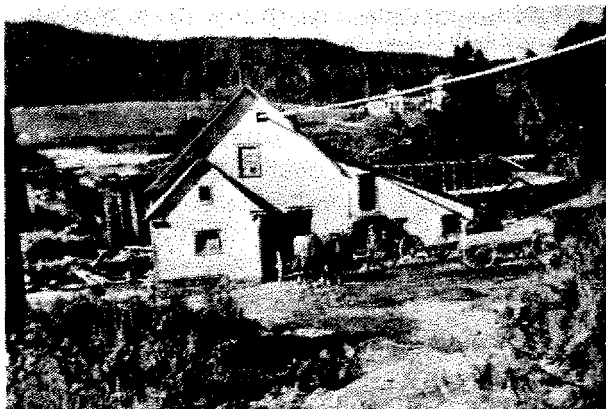
The Morneault Mill

By Lucie Morneault

In the past, the Madawaska region counted many cattle raisers and farmers. Most lived in Saint Basile, Saint Jacques, Saint Joseph, and Moulin Morneault, where there was a mill. The first mill carded wool and ground wheat.

The hamlet of the Morneault mill is located by the "Roquoise" River (now known as the Iroquois River). In the first years of the 19th century, a man named Pierre Plourde and other settlers from the Quebec province came to establish themselves for the purpose of farming and raising cattle. It was Pierre Plourde, around 1814, who built the first mill on a site near the small "Roquoise". The mill was activated by the river current. A gristmill was built to make flour out of the wheat and buckwheat grown by local inhabitants. Later, machines were added to card wool.

Towards the end of his life, Pierre Plourde bequeathed his mill to his son, Jules.



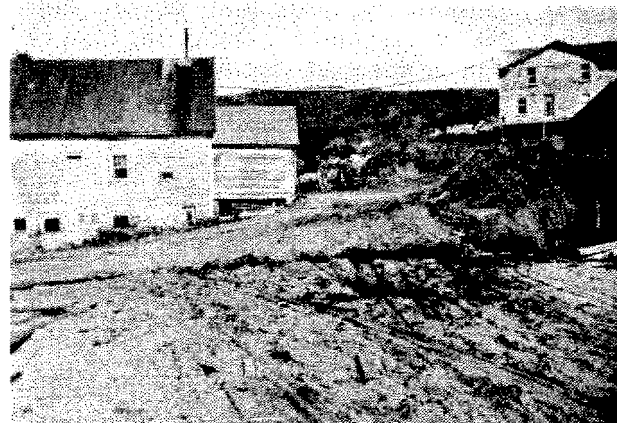
Finding the miller's tasks too demanding for himself and his spouse, Jules sold his mill. In those days, millers had to lodge and feed the mill workers and the men who came to grind their wheat.

David Rousseau, brother-in-law of the Plourde family, acquired the mill and its outbuildings in exchange for a lot situated in Saint Joseph. So the Plourdes became farmers. David, having no heir of his own, left his property to his godson, Charles Morneault.

The Morneault family handed down the mill from father to son until just recently. The mill had been useful to so many people, that its

name came to identify the locality where it was built. Today, there is no mill in Moulin Morneault. However, the residents of the locality have kept the memory for having worked there during their youth. That is the case for my uncle, Adolphe Morneault, who wanted to share his memories. He is the person who told me about the mill and its activities.

As was the case for most buildings in those days, the mill was built of wood; its framework was of timber squared with an axe. The beams were then joined by mortise and tenon and held in place by wooden pegs. The exterior was covered with shingles split with a "fro" and made smooth with a plane. Nails were fabricated at the local forge. The building had three floors including the basement.



A paddle wheel, propelled by water from the Iroquois River, activated the mill. Most of the pieces of equipment for grinding were made on the site by local artisans. The wooden pulleys and gears were made of maple, hardened with boiling porpoise oil. That oil not only had a permanent lubricating effect on the wood, but also made the gear longer lasting. The grindstones were one foot (30 cm.) thick and six feet (1, 8 m.) in diameter. One stone was fixed and the other was movable. Grains were ground by the friction of the two stones. Depending on the kind of grain, the grindstones had to be adjusted at varying distances to each other. The harder the grain, the closer the stones had to be placed. The harder grains took longer to grind than the softer ones. Hence, for wheat the yield per hour was five or six bushels ; for buckwheat it was six or seven bushels and for barley, a dozen bushels. Other equipment, such as the separator and the sieve were used to separate flour from other parts of the grain.

Generally, men would bring the grain to be ground between the months of August and December. People then had a good supply of flour for the winter months. Flour had to be stored with care in a dry place. Buckwheat flour was used for making "poyes" (buckwheat pancakes) while wheat or barley flours were good for baking pastries and bread.

There were also machines to card wool in the mill. The best wool was used to make clothes. This was the wool found on the sheep's body. The wool from the legs was of lesser quality and was used to stuff mattresses or cushions.

Usually, with one visit to the mill, people would card forty to fifty pounds of wool. The carded wool was rolled into spindles, with strands of wool that were one inch (2.5 cm.) in diameter and a few feet (1 m.) long. The wool strands in the spindle were wound in the same direction. What has happened, since, to the mill and to the other similar installations?

The Morneault mill has ceased to be. Over the years, it was replaced by a sawmill which also vanished. Since the Second World War, ways have changed. Buckwheat flour is seldom used nowadays and "poyes" (buckwheat pancakes) which were a staple of meals in the past have become a rarity now made for sentimentality and remembrance, not to be forgotten. Locally produced wheat flour has been replaced by white flour that is pre-sifted, vitaminized, sterilized, etc... Flour-millers from large industrial cities have replaced the millers of the Morneault mill. Farmers have abandoned the production of buckwheat and wheat, if not the whole farming business. Many have preferred taking jobs in factories. With a moderate effort, they can provide for their families. In towns and for less hard work than they knew as farmers, they can gain three times more money. What remains of the good old days are memories embellished by thirty years of progress.