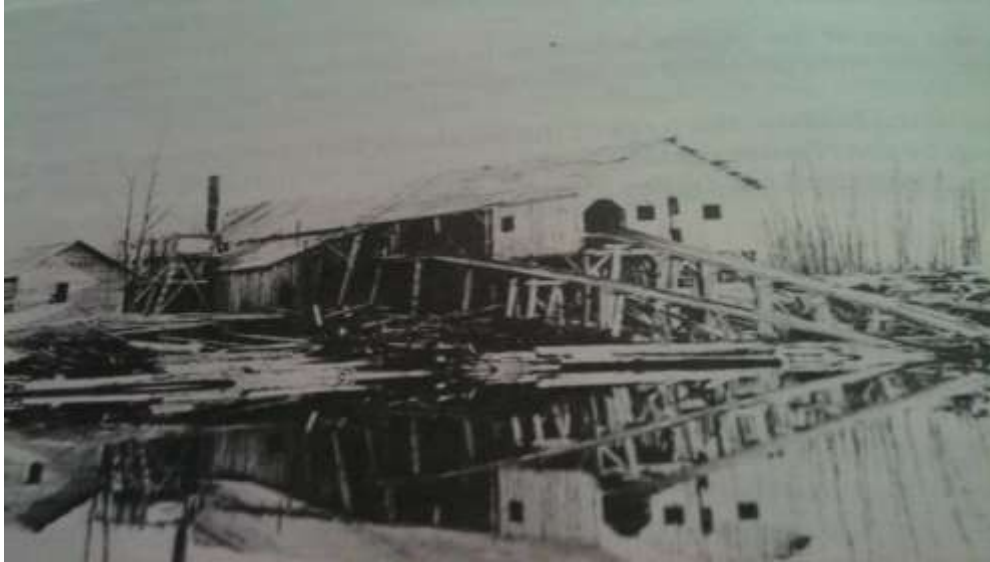


Cumming's Mill and The Kangaroo



In the 1890s, the area around Gull Lake was attractive to settlers, largely due to the area's rich fertile soil and abundant forests. The former is still a significant factor in the local economy, but the current landscape does not suggest that forestry was ever a viable enterprise. However, in the late 1890s there was a growing demand for lumber, and there was an adequate supply in the Gull Lake area. For homesteads and later for local towns such as Lacombe and Bentley, lumber was often supplied from mills at Gull Lake. One such mill, the Cummings Mill, was built by Thomas Cumming from Michigan, formerly from Ireland, near what is now Birch Bay. There is a sign on Highway 771 marking this site.

In order to have access to the growing Lacombe market from this location, The logs were skidded across ice in winter and towed by a small sailboat in summer. In 1899, the water level in Gull Lake rose so high that the saws in the mill were under water. As a result Mr. Cummings moved his mill operation to the southeast end of the Lake. The sail boat was converted to steam power and got a name, the “Kangaroo”.

While the Kangaroo continued to haul lumber across Gull Lake, it was also used as a pleasure craft with a capacity of 40 passengers. It made many moonlight cruises with dancing on the deck. It has been said that if a young man took a girl on one of these cruises, it was an indication that his intentions were serious and an engagement was imminent.

By 1906, most of the local forest had been cleared and the mill was moved again, this time to a site west of Gull Lake. The Kangaroo, however continued to cruise the Lake until 1915. That year, it drifted during a storm and was abandoned on a beach. Ultimately, it was broken up and the remains salvaged.

As an interesting aside, in 1900, Mr. Cummings built a covered multi-purpose rink in Lacombe, presumably with Gull Lake lumber. This rink, used for ice hockey, curling and skating was the first such facility between Edmonton and Calgary.

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