

Mining in BurgessWood

BurgessWood, a community on the northwest shore of Otty Lake, was once the site of active apatite and mica mines. The following is excerpted, with permission, from “[BurgessWood: Evolution of a Community](#),” published by the BurgessWood Property Owners’ Association in 2011.

By the year of Confederation, 1867, Perth was a well-established town. But the north shore of Otty Lake likely remained at least partly virgin forest, old-growth trees towering above the land. Native people continued to camp sometimes around the lake, where they hunted and fished for bass, perch, and pike. Logging had begun on nearby land owned by Perth businessmen, and small-scale mining activities were starting up.

That same year, twenty-year-old Isaac Kenyon arrived at Otty Lake from Manchester, England. Isaac’s father, Hartley Kenyon, owned shares in the mining operations in North Burgess (now Tay Valley) township near Otty Lake. Isaac arrived to look into the prospects for his father’s investment. Isaac Kenyon found work as an analyst for the mining company, operating a geological laboratory. He boarded just down the road from the mine with the William Watts family on what is now the Norris property on Otty Lake Sideroad.

The mining operation where young Isaac Kenyon worked extracted two minerals: apatite, a type of phosphate used in making fertilizer; and mica, used in a variety of industrial applications, such as electrical insulation and insulating glass for oven doors. These two minerals tend to be found together, along with others such as feldspar and quartzite.

The first recorded commercial shipment of apatite in Canada came from North Burgess township. Over the years between the 1860s and 1920s, a series of operators leased or owned the mineral rights on Lots 4, 5, and 6 of Concession 8 in North Burgess, in and around present-day BurgessWood.

The mines were of the open pit type—narrow trenches that were normally shallow but could occasionally run as deep as 100 feet. The mineral output was usually destined for export to either

Germany or Great Britain. The product was transported by scow from a bay on the north shore of Otty Lake, now called Apatite Bay. From there it travelled to the lake's south shore, then by wagon or sleigh to Rideau Ferry, whence it was shipped to Montreal via the Rideau Canal.

Of the various operators, the Anglo-Canadian Phosphate Company maintained the largest operation, employing about 20 miners on average. Eventually mica would overtake apatite as the area's main product.

In 1901, Senator Peter McLaren acquired the mining property lying within present-day BurgessWood. The property had been idle for 10 years after the Anglo-Canadian Phosphate Company abandoned it, because of a drop in market prices. Senator McLaren resumed mining for mica and apatite.

Peter McLaren's son, William, and William's wife, Anna Gemmell McLaren, moved there after their marriage in 1910 to assume responsibility for operating the mines. Many pits had originally been opened for extracting apatite, but the main pit, a narrow open-cut trench 75 feet deep and only 10 feet wide, was now being worked for mica.

The mining property included a large frame boarding house with bunks and a communal dining room for the miners. There were also stables for the horses used in the mining work, and a culling shed for trimming the mica by hand into commercially usable sheets. The culling shed was located on what is now 1031 McLaren Road. The place was deserted every winter until the miners came back to work in the spring.

Just to the west of the miners' boarding house, the McLarens built a simple white frame home and named it Forest Lodge. Eventually the McLarens added another log dwelling to the property now identified as 1049 McLaren Road. Embedded in a hillside was a stone storehouse used to keep food and possibly dynamite for the mining operations. Nearby were a stone drinking trough for horses, a well, and a pump. These latter artifacts, as well as the storehouse, can still be seen at present-day 1062 McLaren Road.

The mining operations came to an end in 1923, as the market for its product petered out.

While current-day volunteers were blazing hiking trails in the area, they discovered remnants of the mica operations left behind by miners nearly a century ago. Alongside a long deep trench, they found remains of barrels and buckets, with wooden staves and rusted iron rings partially intact. There was also a piece of iron driven into a tree, part of a winch system for raising buckets of mica out of the pit. These evocative artifacts of another era can still be seen on the trail.

As well, an ore wagon was found on the old McLaren property in present-day BurgessWood, near the couple's two houses and the miners' bunkhouse. As the developer of BurgessWood, Dr. Grover Lightford donated the wagon to the Silver Queen mine at Murphy's Point Provincial Park, and members of the BurgessWood maintenance committee volunteered to restore it.