



HARMAC TRADESMEN IN CHARGE of changing beast into beauty were: (center photo, left to right), carpenters Vern Nielsen and Harry Sam, painter John Adams and welder John Vandermeer. Pictured at left are float designer and art teacher Norm Boulet and Woodlands Secondary School art student Jackie Blain, working on the paper mache fire pot. Some of the other students assigned to the Harmac float project were: (lower centre photo, left to right)

Crystal Levesque, Jennifer Perkins, Chris Bremner, and Charolette Perry, putting together the Scotsman figure. (right photo) shows Tarina Webster and Andre Bock working on the tourist-with-binoculars paper mache figure. The bottom photo is of the prize winning Harmac float.

From logging crummy to winning beauty

It was far from being a classy parade, but the Harmac float was the class of the show.

The Harmac entry, with a huge MB logo turning full circle over a float full of paper mache characters, won first prize for commercial entries in the Nanaimo Empire Day parade Sunday, May 20.

While the heritage theme of this year's parade was carried out in some floats, none came close to equalling Harmac's depiction of what was important in Nanaimo's past.

The float was designed by Nanaimo commercial artist Norm Boulet and built on the chassis of an old logging crummy by a team of Harmac tradesmen. The paper mache figures, ranging from a Scottish Hudson Bay fur trader to a bathtub racer, were constructed from Harmac pulp by Woodlands Secondary School art students, under Boulet's direction.

It did rain on this parade — in several ways. Real rain came in squalls, enough to scatter parade watchers on occasion. However, the bunching of floats, cars and marching bands, separated by large gaps of nothing happening, was not caused by the inclement weather.

The Harmac float was a particular victim of the parade being stopped frequently at the intersection of Terminal and Commercial to let island highway traffic proceed on Terminal Ave.

Placing the first prize winner as the last attraction of the parade, behind a group of slow-moving candy tossers, working from an auto dealer's line up

of vehicles, was bad judgement. Forced to stop at the intersection, for highway traffic, the Harmac float and the candy tossers soon fell far behind, leaving a gap that some parade watchers mistakenly thought was the end of

the festivities. Many left their places along the parade route and missed seeing the Harmac float.

Harmac float builders were: Jack Adams, John Vandermeer, Harry Sam, and Vern Nielsen. Jim Allen

drove the float. "Managers" of the float during the parade were: Dave Ingram, Norm Boulet, Linard Morley and Dick Redmond.

It is planned to enter the Harmac float in other parades this summer.



Harmac retirees

Remembering things past

They spoke of the early years at Harmac. We listened to their tales and saw the sparkle in their eyes as they peeled back the years with fondness and laughter. But we were not hearing old men reminiscing. We heard youthful, bright-eyed comrades, some still shaking off the dust of war. We sensed the impatience of those post-war years and the pent-up ambition to get what war denied them. A new car. A boat. A better home. The chance for the good life that comes from a good job.

Recently, THE CONVEYOR invited nine Harmac retirees and the still-working Bob Thomson to take part in a couple of old-fashioned bull sessions. Those with the longest memories were Thomson, Abe Ferrero, and Charlie Samarin; all hired in time for the pulp mill's startup, June 1950. Then came Bob Shelley, a month after startup, followed by Arne Roine and Arnold Spence who went to work in 1952. Bob Dawes and Harry Stevens started at Harmac in 1955. Pat Elford (1965) and John Stuffco (1973) rounded out the group.

The aim was to record the memories of some old-timers still alive, and to capture the essence of those early years. *Both sessions became joyful occasions as old friends began remembering when. They soon forgot a microphone was in the room. Sometimes the flow of words couldn't keep up, as their minds leaped from memory to memory, as recollections ricocheted around the room. They recalled some of the characters they worked with and they spoke of their craft and the conditions of the time.*



ABE FERRERO

Not many men have a 40-year-old shirt and if they did, most couldn't button it up. The retired steam plant superintendent was measured for this shirt, along with all the other pulp mill employees working at startup of Harmac, June 10, 1950.

Injured by flying fish

One retiree recalls a boom man getting clobbered by a codfish.

Pat Elford tells the story of how this particular boom man got injured walking the stiff leg from the outside boom shack.

"An eagle was flying over and dropped the fish on the guy's head and gave him a nasty gash," Elford says.

"We had to take him to the first aid station," he continues. "So, when they were sewing him up, it was suggested that maybe boom men should be wearing hard hats after all."

Four buried in hog fuel

It was the Sunday before Thanksgiving, 1952. Four Harmac workers became buried under tons of hog fuel.

Old timers recalled the incident, but it takes retiree Norm Barrass to vividly remember the details.

He was one of the four.

The original hog fuel storage building, which eventually proved worthless for the type of fuel being used at Harmac, would cause fuel to pile up and someone would have to be sent in to shovel out the excess.

Two youthful yard crew workers, Norm Barrass and "Gunner" Bell, were the chosen shovellers of that day.

"We started about 40 feet up digging a five-foot trench along the south side of the building," Barrass remembers.

"We were down about two-thirds of the way by quitting time," he says. About that time, Tommy Wright, in charge of steam plant maintenance, and Jack Efford, assistant to steam plant superintendent Merv Plante, came along to check on the progress of clearing away the hog fuel.

"We had just started to pick up our tools and ladders when the whole side came down, Barrass says. "I went face down, not able to move, but I could breathe. I could hear someone—I don't know who—moaning. I was getting hotter and hotter. It seemed like forever."

Unknown to Barrass, Bell had got himself out and was able to get Wright unburied. Then Bell ran out and met the shift foreman and a electrician nearby and the three of them dug out Barrass.

"They got me to a sitting position and I said 'I'm alright. Get Efford out,' who was still buried," Barrass recalls.

It took them several minutes to free the now unconscious Efford. "We gave him artificial respiration—that's all we knew in those days—but he came around okay."

Barrass is the only member of that 1952 incident still living.



THIS GROUP OF RETIREES had much to say about "the good ol' days at Harmac" during a taped bull session. They told tales, talked of Harmac characters, and reminisced about mill happenings, including the struggle to switch unions in 1966. Left to right: John Stuffco, Arne Roine, Pat Elford, Bob Shelley, and Bob Dawes.

Union switch

It was eventful times

The first group of retirees had much to say about the fight to switch their allegiance from an international union to a Canadian union in 1966. Obviously, it was a dramatic, sometimes traumatic, experience in their lives and not easily forgotten.

They spoke of the conflict that pitted brother against brother; friend against friend. They recall it as a gigantic struggle to capture the minds of men.

The May 13, 1966 lead front-page story of the Nanaimo Daily Free Press had this to say, in part: "Last night, more than 500 Harmac pulp mill workers voted over-whelmingly to break away from the International Brotherhood of Pulp, Sulphite and Paper Mill Workers and apply for certification as Local No. 8 of the Pulp and Papermakers of Canada."

Some recollections of that historical meeting, as recalled by the retirees:

"The meeting started as an international meeting and their representatives had their say... When the meeting was closed, everyone went outside and then walked back in and started a meeting as a Canadian union. That was the start—right then."

"Tonelli (president of the international, from New York City.) addressed the workers as 'you people from British of Columbia' and someone piped up and asked him if he thought he was in South America instead of North America."

The Daily Free Press quoted Tonelli as saying at a press conference "We are a responsible union. But we have to resort at times to doing things the primitive way."

As the retirees remember Tonelli: "He had a gang of men with him (at meeting). Who they were, I don't know."

"They were all big boys." "As it turned out, after we left (switched unions), the president went to jail because he was Mafia affiliated."

According to newspaper accounts of the time, much of the struggle to change unions was with the Labour Relations Board, which seemed to be reluctant to certify the Canadian union. To emphasize their cause to the LRB and provincial government, Local 8 officers organized a rally to be held at the legislative Buildings in Victoria. It was Aug. 12, 1966.

"The certification had been refused

for numerous reasons, no matter how much majority we had, we were getting turned down. As a last resort we went to Victoria to find out why we weren't getting our certification."

"Not everyone was in favour of switching. The executive (of Local 695, international union) were staunch supporters. They hung on to the bitter end, but when the crunch came they had to do what the law says."

"There were a lot of fence sitters. I know 'em. They waited to the last."

"Some even paid dues to both unions."

The LRB turned down Local 8's bid for certification on Oct. 12, 1966. The Canadian union responded with a concentrated publicity campaign and numerous demonstrations to back up the union's avowed "fight to the finish", as written in the Oct. 13, edition of the Nanaimo Daily Free Press.

Local 8 finally won certification in 1967.



Harmac's only 40-year man

Machine room supervisor Bob Thomson (right) was presented the first 40-year pin by Harmac general manager Roger Killin, as part of the Open House ceremonies, Sat., June 9, 1990.

Thomson is the only active employee who was working when Harmac began operations June 10, 1950. At that time Thomson was a machine tender on machine #1, the only pulp line. He became supervisor in 1963 shortly after #3 machine was installed.

MUGS ON PAGE 6: (Left to right) Top Row: Dave Ingram, Leroy Edes, Al Smith, Kerry Russel, Lyle Burns. Bottom Row: Al Brett, Al Gauder, Mel Jacobson, Jim McMurtrie, Pranab Ghose, Kelly Rankin.

Harmac's impact enormous

What you could buy for a dime in 1950 would cost you a loonie today.

The \$19 million H.R. MacMillan spent to start up Harmac in 1950 seems insignificant compared to the \$700 million it would take to replace the present-day pulp mill.

But H.R.'s expenditures on goods and services and the million-dollar payroll of 1950 made much more of an impact on the local economy than the \$108 million in wages, taxes and purchases that Harmac pours into the community today.

In 1950 Nanaimo and the district was dying, barely hanging on, caught in the death throes of the coal industry. The city's tax base was badly eroded, unemployment was high, and commerce was down. If ever a miracle was needed, it was at that time.

Then along came H.R. He didn't walk on water; he just cruised by and found the perfect spot on Northumberland Channel to build a pulp mill. The mayor, the city council, and the board of trade fell all over themselves praising the coming of Harmac. The newspapers of the day were full of glowing tributes to the blessings bestowed by H.R. MacMillan. Nary a word of dissent or dismay, only hallelujah!

Of course, it wasn't too long before the impact of the pulp mill was felt in the noses of Nanaimo-ites. This caused anguished yelps and cries from citizens, duly reported and commented on by the local newspaper. However, no official was ever quoted as wanting to remove the source of the "smell of money".

In fact, Nanaimo city fathers began casting covetous eyes toward that huge money machine sitting in the Cedar district. In their vision, the boondocks was not the place for the area's largest employer, paying rural taxes and over-funding the little Cedar school. They wanted more impact for Nanaimo.

They got it. The city gerrymandered its borders to take in Duke Point and the Harmac complex. It wasn't too long before Harmac was paying 21 percent of the school district's taxes. Today, Harmac pays more than \$3 million in city and school taxes.

At the moment, the Harmac complex has about 1350 employees earning yearly wages of some \$75 million. But the impact on the community by the pulp and sawmills is much more than that. According to Harmac accountants Dwight Brett and Paul Feser, about 5000 "spin off" jobs in small businesses in the district have been made possible by Harmac's existence.

The impact of Harmac on the social and cultural aspects of the community has been enormous, almost from day one. Larry Harris, chief designer and early mill manager of Harmac was instrumental in building the Nanaimo Golf Club, one of the finest courses in British Columbia. Harmac has sponsored just about every community endeavour from sports to the arts — from Little League baseball to theatrical productions such as "The Dunsmuirs", highlight of the 1990 Nanaimo Festival of the Arts.



MUGS OF YESTERYEAR

The occasion of the 7.5 millionth tonne of pulp produced at Harmac caused a group to get together for picture taking. Anyone you recognize? And, surely, you recognize the individuals pictured below who still work at Harmac. If not, their names are listed on another page.



Thunderbird changes stride

MacMillan Bloedel took "a giant stride" in building No. 4 Woodroom, according to the Nanaimo Daily Free Press, Sept. 13, 1976. (see reprint).

Now known as Thunderbird Division of Northumberland Mills, the sawmill has changed its stride considerably to cut more added-value products and less dimension lumber.

Since the sawmill was built 14 years ago, the market for commodity-type lumber has changed considerably. Thunderbird can no longer compete in the dimension lumber market because logs from coastal trees are much more costly than logs cut for B.C. Interior sawmills.

The key to Thunderbird's future is to increase the production of value-added products, particularly for the export market.

"We are emphasising value rather than volume," Employee Relations Supervisor Iain Donaldson says.

While Thunderbird is still largely producing dimension lumber, the mill has been sawing custom lumber for Morocco, Algeria, Belgium, Australia and, more recently, a small order for Japan.

Over the years the combination of technological change and cutting a slightly larger log, has increased production about 50 mbfm per shift.

Production manager John Gentry can see a bright future for producing value-added products at Thunderbird "if capital is spent to upgrade (facilities)."

Harmac woodroom handles small logs

MacMillan Bloedel has taken "a giant stride" in improving utilization of the forest resource with the completion of a \$10-million woodroom designed to handle small logs at its Harmac pulp mill in Nanaimo, production manager Bob Wilson said today.

He said more than five years of planning went into the new No. 4 Woodroom at Harmac, which came on stream earlier this year and is expected to reach full annual production capacity of 130 million board feet of dimension lumber by November.

"We're very proud of No. 4 Woodroom," said Mr. Wilson. "A substantial proportion of the basic design was developed by our own people and we think we've come up with one of the best small log operations on the west coast."

He said the woodroom extracts lumber from what the industry calls "pee-wee logs." Previously these smaller logs were consumed in the large conventional sawmills or routed straight into the pulp mill for chipping.

MORE EFFICIENT

The new facility will result in much more efficient conversion of this raw material, said Mr. Wilson. Now the Harmac plant is handling a steadily-diminishing number of raw logs and a steadily-increasing quantity of sawmill wastes and residues in its pulping process.

No. 4 Woodroom is set up to handle logs ranging from six to 12 inches in diameter at the top of 24 inches in diameter at the butt.

"It doesn't make any difference to the pulp mill if it gets its raw material in the form of logs or as sawmill waste," said Mr. Wilson. "But in terms of utilizing the forest resource to best advantage, it makes more sense to extract the dimension lumber from the log first and use the residue from this process in the pulp mill."

The production manager said the need to build small log-handling facilities has become increasingly obvious in recent years. The average size of the logs coming into the manufacturing plants from the woods is steadily decreasing as the company strives

towards maximum utilization of the trees it harvests.

SOME FROM THINNING

In addition, MB will increasingly find itself handling smaller diameter trees from commercial thinnings of planted areas, which allows the remaining trees to grow bigger faster. And eventually the company will be harvesting full stands of maturing second growth timber rather than the overmature timber that is now available.

No. 4 Woodroom has some remarkable innovations in the field of sawmill development, many of which are oriented in the direction of operating crew safety and pollution control, in addition to efficient log handling and maximizing production, said Mr. Wilson.

Logs arrive at the new woodroom in waterborne bundles. Rather than breaking open the bundles in the plant's log pond, the bundles are hoisted out of the water and broken open on the woodroom's log deck. This minimizes the amount of log debris, sinkers and deadheads in the water, he said.

FOUR CUTS AT ONCE

The woodroom is equipped with a six-foot quad-band mill for the initial breakdown of the log. This allows the log to be cut four times in a single pass through the quad-band saws. In a conventional carriage-type mill, the log is mounted on a carriage that takes it through the saw more than once to obtain the required cuts.

Mr. Wilson said a major factor in the decision to build No. 4 Woodroom at Harmac was its close proximity to the pulp mill. All of the woodroom's waste material moves to the pulp mill by conveyor, eliminating hog fuel and chip transportation costs.

The new woodroom is housed in a wooden structure rather than a steel-framed building in an effort to minimize noise levels and vibrations. Wherever possible, equipment operators work in soundproofed booths. The adjacent planer mill has also been soundproofed heavily, he said.