



Hansons' Sawmill

Very little of substance is known about sawmill owners Henry H. Hanson and his brother John. The men, who were born in Sweden, came to Alberta from Butte, Montana in 1906 after incorporating a company called Waterton Oil, Land and Power Company in that state. Their plan was to cut timber at the head of Upper Waterton Lake in Montana on newly acquired leases there and turn it into lumber at a saw mill in Alberta.¹

The company name was symbolic of extremely high hopes for its business prospects as the company owned neither oil leases, land nor power capabilities. What it did have was a starting capital of \$100,000 raised by the sale of shares, a permit to cut the Montana timber² and a land lease from the Hudson Bay Company near the present day Maskinonge on which to build a mill. The mill site was adjacent to Kootenai Lakes Forest Reserve which would later become part of Waterton Lakes National Park.

Known as Waterton Mills, the operation got off to a good start: by the spring of 1907, having hired 45 men and spent \$20,000 on equipment and buildings, the Hansons' company began cutting timber and sawing lumber.³



Hansons' sawmill was located outside the park near the Maskinonge. (Glenbow Archives NA-4603-1)

Henry was a machinist by trade⁴ but his brother's occupation is not known. It soon became apparent that the timber/lumber business was not their forte. The boat they had planned to use to tow the logs down the lake lacked the necessary power. So they found a Cardston carpenter named P. G. Peterson to build a large low-draft steam powered paddle-wheel boat to do the job.⁵ It was an expense they had not counted on.

By the end of November, the company was advertising flooring, siding and shiplap⁶ and John Hanson optimistically told *The Lethbridge Herald* he expected to have a million feet of logs at the mill for the winter's cutting and a new Lethbridge mill would be running full time the following August.⁷

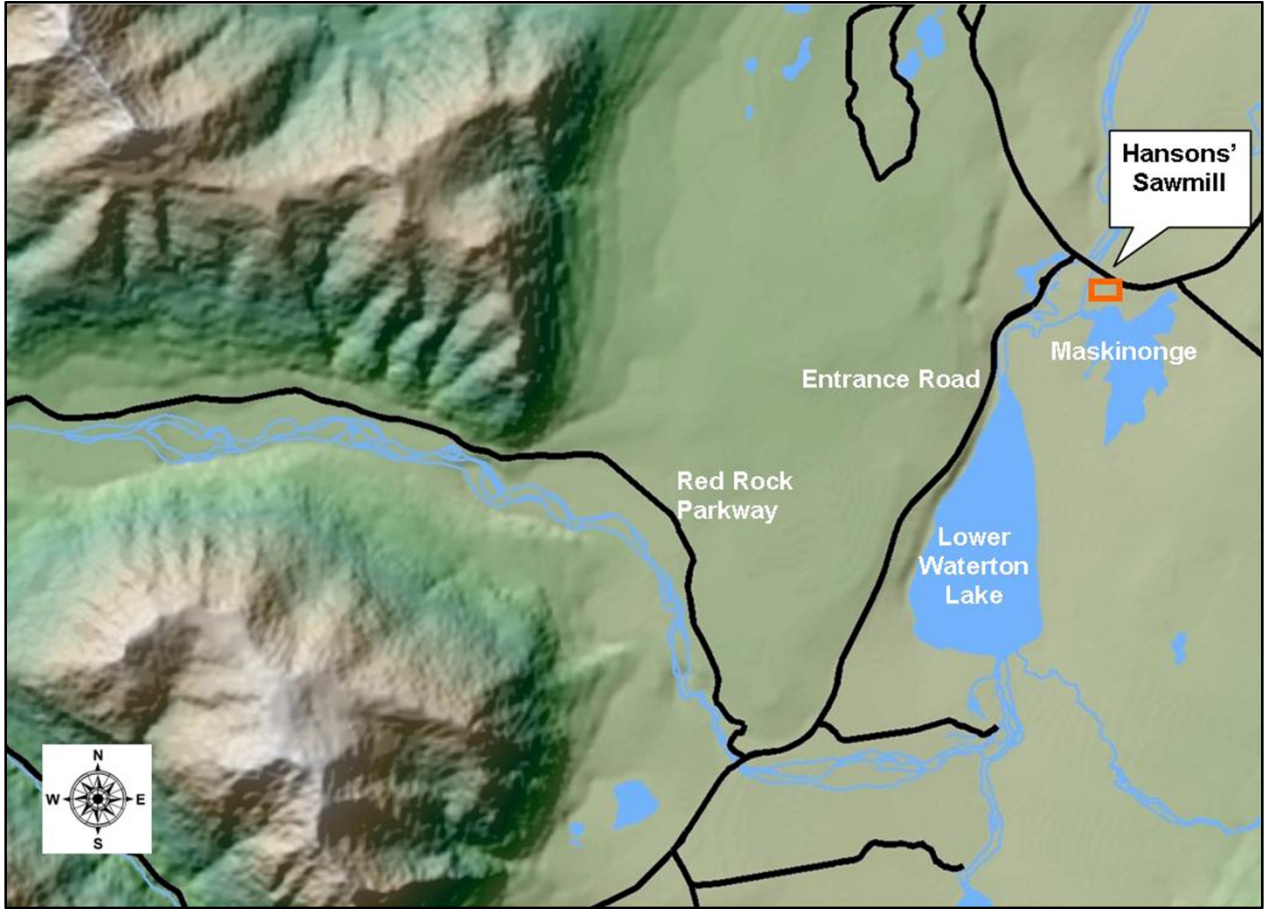
In March, 1908 it was announced that James E. Fogg of Idaho had purchased the company's logs and would cut the lumber at the lake and raft it to Lethbridge by way of the rivers. Fogg noted that to make the method pay, they would have to raft at least five million feet down the river at a time.⁸ Shortly afterward, the newspaper reported that Fogg, himself the owner of seven mills in Idaho and Wyoming, and his two brothers would run the business in the future. "The Waterton Oil, Land and Power Company are

to be congratulated in securing such men to make their logs into lumber,” *The Lethbridge Herald* noted.

Soon the Fogg Brothers were busy sawing the winter’s cut at the Waterton Mills location. But all their experience and expertise was no assistance in guessing what was to come: the worst flood the region had ever seen which hit, as do nearly all of Waterton’s major floods, in June. The log booms were broken up and logs were scattered down the river. At the mill site the water had inundated the cutting area damaging the machinery.⁹

There was more unforeseen bad news on the horizon as well. Within the year, Hudson Bay Company, which leased the mill land to the Hansons’ company, had begun discussions with the Department of the Interior to sell the land for the enlargement of the park.¹⁰ And to the south in Montana, the land on which the Hansons held the timber permits was designated Glacier National Park in 1910 voiding their right to log.

The mill and chattel were put up for public auction on May 31, 1910.¹¹ The dream of fortune and expansion had literally gone down the drain. John Hanson returned to Butte to deal with the shareholders. Henry Hanson stayed on at Waterton Mills where he was appointed post master in 1908 until he was forced by park authorities to move in 1916. He settled north of the park in the Twin Butte area, where he raised his family, and pursued other opportunities in Glacier National Park¹² until his death in 1925.¹³



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- ¹ Leo Stutz, "The Gertrude and Waterton Mills," *Alberta History*, vol. 32, number 2, Spring, 1984, 19. WLNP Archives Box 130, Item 24.
- ² Leo Stutz, "The Gertrude and Waterton Mills," 19.
- ³ Leo Stutz, "The Gertrude and Waterton Mills," 20.
- ⁴ Census of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta, 1916, District: Macleod; S. District No. 39, Enumeration District 1, page 6. Available at <http://www.ancestry.ca>.
- ⁵ "Launching the Gertrude," *Alberta Star*, July 26, 1907, no page number. WLNP Archives, Box 130, Item 24.
- ⁶ Advertisement, *Alberta Star*, Nov. 30, 1907. WLNP Archives, Box 130, Item 24.
- ⁷ Untitled item, *Lethbridge Herald*, Nov. 14, 1907.
- ⁸ "Rafting Lumber to Lethbridge," *Lethbridge Herald*, March 27, 1908, front page.
- ⁹ Leo Stutz, "The Gertrude and Waterton Mills," 20.
- ¹⁰ Leo Stutz, "The Gertrude and Waterton Mills," 20.
- ¹¹ Mortgage Sale, *Lethbridge Herald*, May 27, 1910. WLNP Archives, Box 130, Item 24.
- ¹² Chris Morrison, *Steady As She Goes: Waterton's Legacy of Commercial Boats*, (Lethbridge: Goathaunt Publishing, 2015), 6-8.
- ¹³ "Cancer Claims Henry Hanson," *Lethbridge Herald*, Dec. 9, 1925. WLNP Archives, Box 130, Item 24.