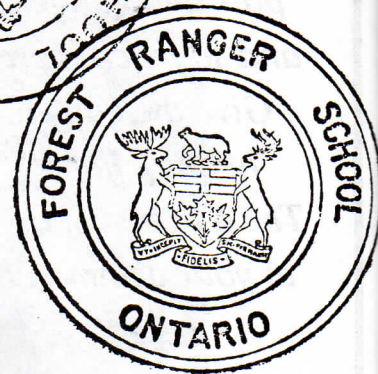
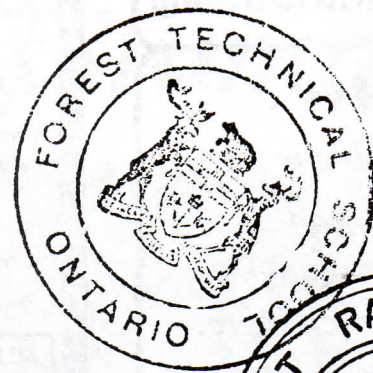


50 years of education, training and tradition



by Carol Moffatt

When the first 50 students of the newly formed Forest Ranger School turned up at the new Highway 35 campus in the fall of 1945, they had to pick their way around building materials, workers and machinery to attend classes—some of which were held in tents.

This was a radical change

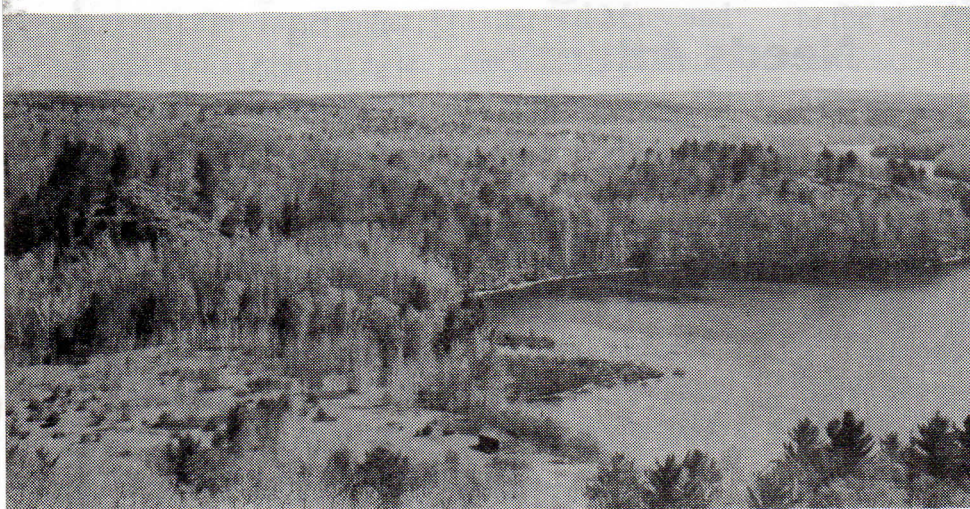
from the Department of Lands and Forests rugged training site at Sherwood Forest on the pristine shores of Boshkung Lake. It was not a very regal beginning for what was to eventually become one of the most prestigious forestry schools in Canada and, by 1971, what we still know today as the Leslie M. Frost Natural Resources Centre.

This year marks the fiftieth

anniversary of the Forestry School/Frost Centre and current manager Bob Stewart is proud to be involved in this summer's events. "We're celebrating for a bunch of reasons. The school itself has existed for 50 years and for a natural resources centre that's quite an achievement. We're highlighting all the good things we've done here," he said.

A series of celebrations are planned throughout the summer to mark the anniversary, including a reunion, an open house, an art exhibit, continuing youth education programs and two workshops designed to update educators on the changing world of technology and environmental education.

The kick-off of the anniversary celebrations was marked by a ribbon-cutting by Deputy Minister of Natural Resources Ron Vrancart in April at the Ontario Science Centre in Toronto.



The view of St. Nora Lake before construction of the Forestry School. Note the Chief Ranger's log cabin in the foreground.

“We’re very proud to be the caretakers of the heritage,” says Stewart. The site at St. Nora Lake is steeped in tradition and rich in a heritage about which most people know very little. The history of the site’s unique program holds a place of honour in the annals of both Canadian and Haliburton County history.

Before the cottagers came in the 20s and 30s, before the smooth, rolling highways were even a dream, and before the term ecosystem was a household word, there was a dedicated group of

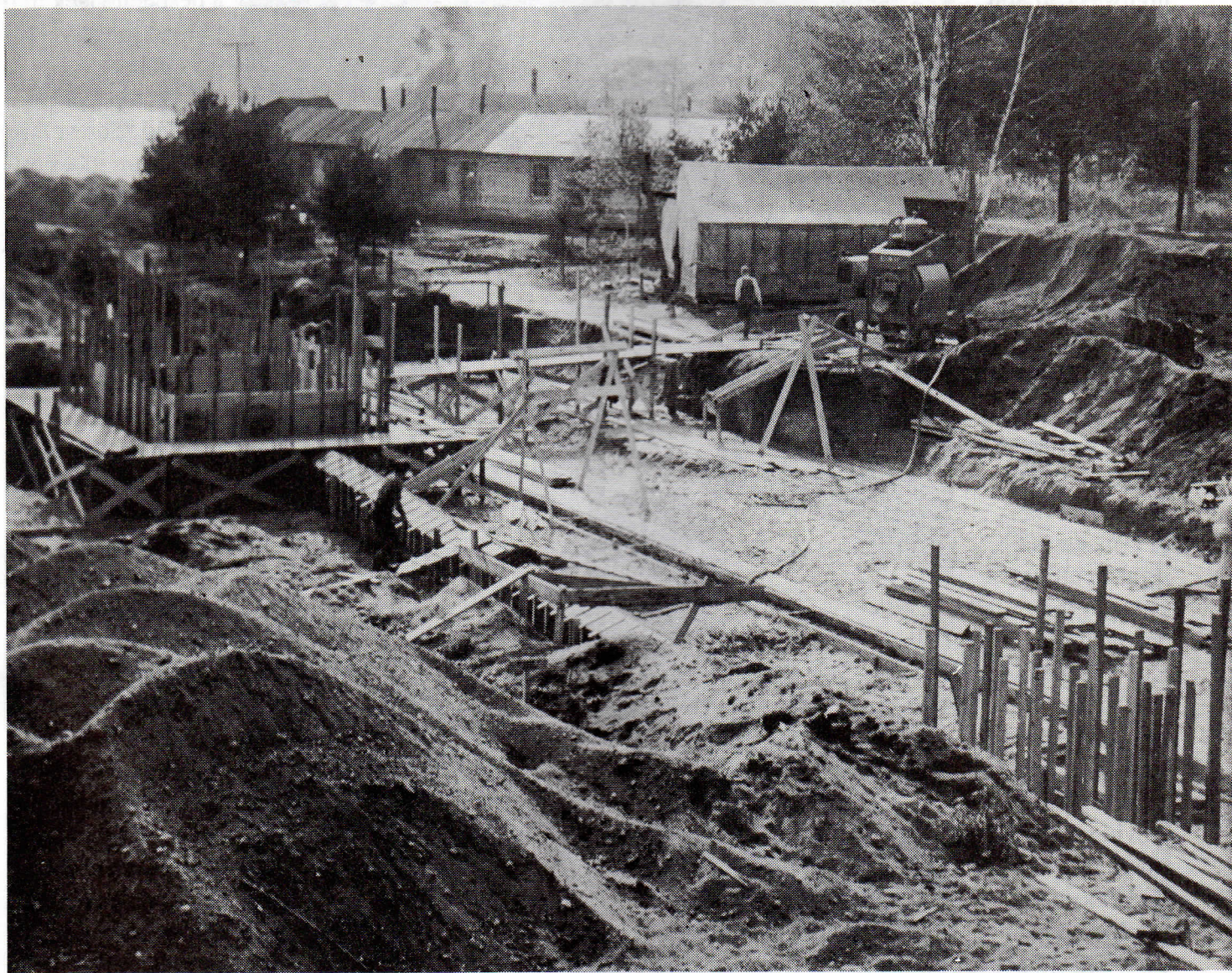
individuals who recognized there was a need to monitor and protect our natural resources.

It all began in 1906 with a Royal Commission on the creation of a forestry school. The report stated “...there is no doubt that a great deal of work in forestry can be done in this province by the University of Toronto provided it receives the co-operation and encouragement of the government ... (and) we recommend that the closest co-operation compatible with the end sought, should exist between

the university authority and the Department of Lands.”

Using Crown timber land as a base for practical study, the University of Toronto established the Faculty of Forestry in 1907. The formal outdoor study portion of the program was taken at a variety of Ontario locales, until a boys’ camp on Boshkung Lake was finally chosen in the 1940s, but the camp was only used once over the next two years.

However, the story of the Frost Centre really began back in 1921. The Department of Lands



Construction was well underway when this shot of The Department of Lands and Forests Ranger School was taken in October 1946. (Photo by D.E. Ness for the Department.)

and Forests (now the Ministry of Natural Resources) sent an aerial reconnaissance crew over the crusty old Bobcaygeon Road and recommended a site on the shores of St. Nora Lake for the new Chief Ranger station.

The original Chief Ranger's log cabin remains where it was built, on the southerly edge of the Frost Centre's lakeside property. Prior to the Depression-era construction project which connected Minden and Huntsville via highways 35 and 60, the closest settlement to the Ranger Station was Pine Springs. Today that community is little more than a collection of houses on a curve in the road at the north end of Kushog Lake.

A University Forest was established in 1940. The Royal Bank of Canada assigned cutting rights to the university for 5,000 acres on the west side of St. Nora Lake. The land was given to the school to provide a place where forestry students could obtain hands-on experience. With this study site secure, experi-

ments and observations could be carried out over longer periods of time. Coincidentally, the donated land was across the road from the new ranger's headquarters.

The Department of Lands and Forests donated another adjacent 6,000 acres and the resulting site became the basis of Frost Centre property today.

A new purpose emerged for the property in the tangle of post-

war employment. An interesting series of needs coincided all at once, leaving little choice but to amalgamate the two neighbours north of Pine Springs.

The Lands and Forests Department was looking for ways to offer continuing education for rangers and department personnel. At the same time thousands of demobilized soldiers were without work and tens of thousands of acres of bush land were being lost to wildfires because of a desperate lack of trained forestry personnel.

In a paper entitled "Forest Fire Protection in a Post-War Rehabilitation" presented to the Canadian Society of Forest Engineers in 1942, author Peter McEwan suggested that not only could demobilized soldiers meet the need for forestry workers, but that the program should lead to the creation of a permanent training facility for forest rangers.

McEwan—who had been on the 1921 reconnaissance flights for the ranger station site—was assigned the job of determining the location and agenda of this new facility. A mutual interest in the



Students at the Forest Ranger School use a stereoscope to interpret the information contained in aerial photographs.

development of such an agency led the University of Toronto and the Department of Lands and Forests to decide to build the school within the university forest.

In June of 1944 the agreement was signed. It called for the government to be responsible for the buildings, the hiring of a year-round ranger, a superintendent and the selection of the students. The university would use the school for graduate and undergraduate courses, equip the

educational facilities and manage the buildings and the forests. It was no surprise when the St. Nora site was chosen. At the time of the agreement, the ranger's log cabin, a dock, a garage and a wooden fire tower were the only buildings on site. But that quickly changed.

An Order-in-Council on November 27th, 1945 officially recognized the opening of the institution, despite the fact that some classes had been held since September.

That's why today's manager, Bob Stewart, has chosen November 27 as the day to officially mark the 50th anniversary. During this summer season, a number of events have been planned to lead up to the celebration. "We had to pick a date so we picked that one. It's very confusing with so much going on and so many significant dates," he said.

Between 1945 and 1966 a variety of buildings were assembled or built on the site: the workshop, dormitories, kitchen,



The Forestry School, as it appeared in its early days. (Photo by R. Muckleston of the Department of Lands and Forests.)

garage, infirmary, greenhouses, boathouse, sawmill, even staff houses that were originally used at a prisoner-of-war camp in northern Ontario.

The mandate of the facility changed along with its physical alterations. What began as a continuing education school for rangers became an avenue for post-war employment training and eventually gave way to younger applicants until it became a post-secondary educational option. For adult rangers seeking upgrading in the school's early days, the only requirements were being male, at least 40 years of age, an employee of the Department of Lands and Forests with a minimum grade eight education. There were no tuition fees and it cost \$2 a day for room and board.

Despite changes in the school's mandate over the decades, the core material never changed, except where technological advances made a difference. The basic courses still covered fish and wildlife, dendrology (the study of trees), drafting, mathematics, surveying, road location, silviculture (care of forests), and flora and fauna.

By the early 50s the entrance requirement was grade eight and by the 60s it was raised to grade ten. In 1955, tuition was \$25 a term, room and board had increased to \$15 a week and, as an indication of changing times, a \$5 damage deposit was required from all students.

In 1961, the school, by this time known as the Ontario Forest Ranger School, officially became the source for all forestry job applicants. Despite the existence

of other forestry schools in Alberta, New Brunswick and Quebec, the facility north of Minden was known as the foremost forestry school in Canada.

Students and graduates cleaned up, measured and monitored their own forest and then moved off across the province and the country to establish guardianship of other forests. Graduates from this school were quick to learn that their educational experience was recognized as one of the best in the country.

Policy changes broadened the application criteria, and allowed anyone with a high school education or equivalent to apply. Tuition fees were established and about 300 people applied to become technicians, rangers or conservation officers.

One of the biggest changes came in 1964 when the school was included under the Technical and Vocational Schools Act, allowing applicants to apply for government student loans.

The name was changed to the Ontario Forestry Technical School in 1966 and, two years later, the school's training curriculum was taken over by Sir Sandford Fleming College. This stage in the facility's development put an end to its monopoly on forestry workers, and, at the same time, ended an era of glory years.

That same year, the agreement between the University of Toronto and the Department of Lands and Forests was terminated, and by 1969 the university gave up the Crown lease on the forest. The government could neither afford nor justify the whole operation without the

university's involvement so the facility was handed over to the Ministry of Education.

The school's curriculum reverted to offering short-term courses for department employees, just as in its original days. The school was also used for outdoor education courses and, at one time in the early 1970s, was even briefly considered as a possible location for a farm-type facility for Corrections Canada.

But it was the outdoor education programming that caught the attention of former Ontario Premier Leslie Frost. A former MPP for Victoria-Haliburton, Frost was well-acquainted with the area and served as a member of an Algonquin Park Advisory Committee in 1971. As a member of the committee he recognized the potential service the school could provide for the province. Stanhope resident George Hamilton, the Frost Centre's first director, recalls the changing years.

"The old forestry school was in limbo. Mr. Frost suggested the province have a demonstration centre for resource management in Ontario and the school was up for grabs," said Hamilton of the transition. In a letter to the Minister of Lands, Frost explained that the committee had noted that, "...the forestry school and former university forest form an unusual combination of facilities. The location, history and use now provide both opportunities and challenges. The (Lands and Forests) people felt they would be losing a real opportunity if we didn't use the area. Those of us in government felt the school could easily be used," says Hamilton,

who was working with the Department of Lands and Forests in Toronto at the time.

It was unanimously adopted that, "...the Department of Lands and Forests develop, administer and utilize these facilities for research in, and demonstration of, resource management, recreation and public education," explained the letter.

In 1974 Premier Bill Davis named the new resource and education centre in honour of Leslie Frost and George Hamilton requested a transfer to Dorset to head up the new centre where, Hamilton says, the staff was naturally apprehensive about its future. "There was an excellent staff, but they were being terribly under-utilized at the time. They had no interpretive staff," he said.

His first job was to recruit people with a variety of skills to operate the centre under the new mandate. Advertisements were placed and qualified personnel were found both from inside and outside the ranks of the Ministry of Natural Resources. He started gathering his team in February, and was expected to have the place up and running by April 1.

"We were in business by April first and then it took another six months to get things into full swing. The staff came from all over the province to work here. The interpretive field is very specialized, you know," he said.

Of the Frost Centre's current role and the changes that took it there, Hamilton says he feels the whole concept of government has changed the face of the idea behind the centre. "The Lands and Forests people were people-

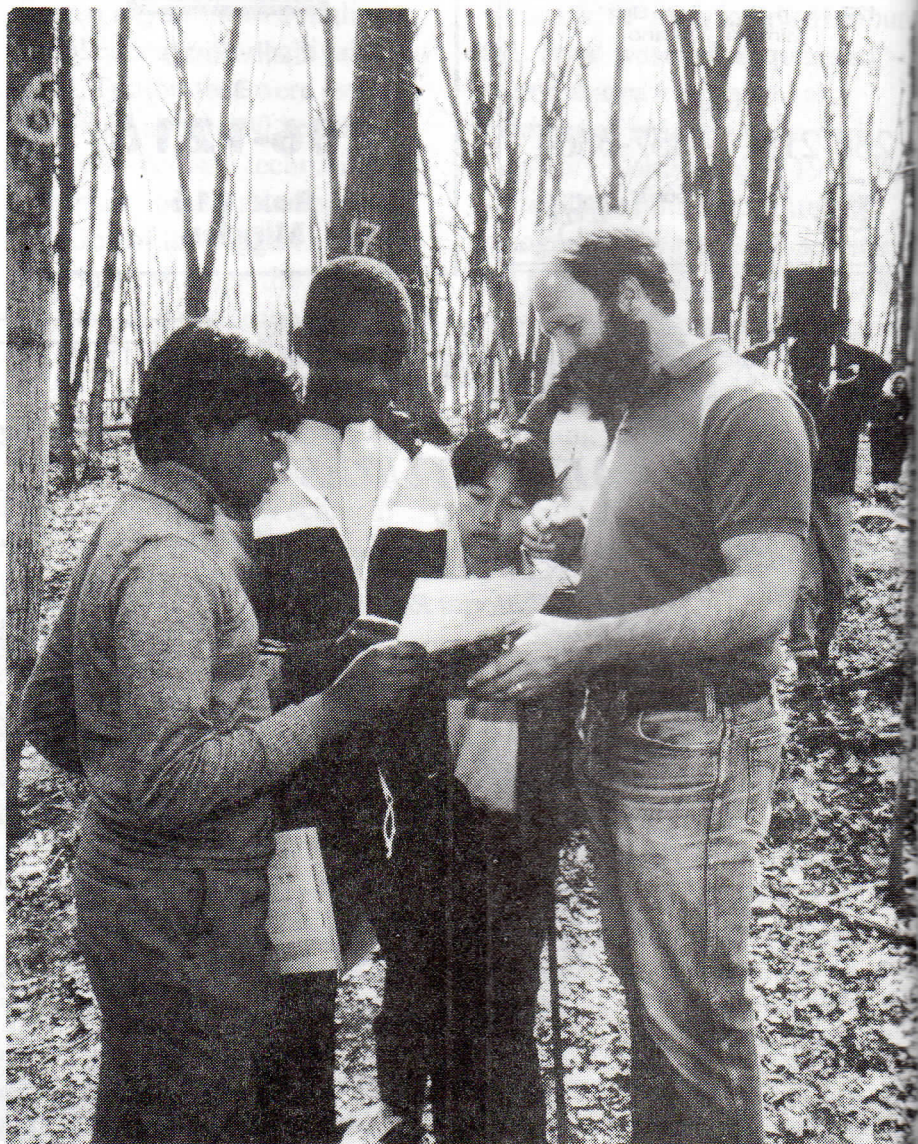
oriented. We were a do-things sort of place, and we did things for people. The government is so large now...I'm just an old fashioned employee, I guess," he says, his voice trailing off.

The Frost Centre today is part of the MNR Integrated Resource and Education and Training system that provides a wide range of programs for school groups, special interest groups and educators. Courses include such topics as The How's and Why's of Acid Rain; Winter Bird Study; Understanding Hunt-

ing; Crown Land Recreation; and Managing a Woodlot.

School group programs run the gamut from management of forests or wildlife and fisheries to a variety of teacher-led programs like orienteering, survival games, tree identification, shoreline explorations and geomorphology, to name a few.

The site also remains the principal training location for professional and technical personnel and, of course, still offers a variety of public recreation facilities and equipment for



The subjects may be the same today as they were 50 years ago, but the age range of the participants is much broader.

summer, winter and year-round use, including hiking trails, canoe routes and the very popular cross-country ski trail system.

"Student groups are our most numerous clients today. We have ten thousand user days a year," says manager Bob Stewart, explaining that a user day equals one day's stay and three meals.

The Youth Education Program offers 30 program choices that include practices and procedures of ecosystems management and related issues that are designed to foster in young people a better understanding of the importance of natural resources.

The Centre's second largest client base comes from within the Ministry of Natural Resources itself: training and re-training technicians, conservation officers and other employees. Advanced computer technology has recently resulted in the complete renovation of two rooms in the centre which will be used exclusively for computer-related work, including the Geographic Information System (GIS).

The GIS training workshop, called ACCESS, is designed for educators to bring state of the art ecosystems technology into their classrooms. Among other things, the GIS allows for the digitized layering of resources utilizing a computer. The new technology makes such visual aids as trans-



The Frost Centre is still used by MNR personnel for training purposes, just as it was years ago. (Photo by W. D. Marshall Department of Lands and Forests.)

parency-on-an-overhead system obsolete.

GIS users can look at any mapped natural resource by itself or, with the flick of a computer switch, add other resources, layer upon layer. "(This program) is just one big transparency in the sky," says Stewart with a smile as he conducts an impromptu tour of the new technology.

The conference rooms attract educational professionals for seminars year round. These educators account for the Centre's third largest clientele base. One example of such conferences is an Aboriginal Awareness Workshop in September that is intended to explain the legal and cultural issues of today's native

community.

"The First Nations are very important when it comes to managing our natural resources. This workshop is designed to explain how the First Nations people view the world, to promote understanding, learn about constitutional and legal parameters and to dispel the controversy and misconceptions people have about First Nations," said Stewart.

The Centre also has a long-standing relationship with Nipissing University for Bachelor of Education programming.

The Frost Centre is a wonderful juxtaposition of past and future; a high-tech eco-systems management computer

room stands next door to one lined with antique forest fire fighting equipment; a newly renovated reception area of earthy, relaxed hues gives way to 1970s style classrooms full of display cases of mounted examples of local wildlife. Different doorways lead to different eras. But like many other agencies, government cutbacks, downsizing and even down-loading are an ever-increasing threat to the Centre's existence. For Stewart, the upcoming celebrations are proof of the ministry's devotion to its work.

"The MNR is taking the opportunity to say that even in difficult times we're showing our commitment to education and

training in sustainable resource development. We, as a government, are taking the time to celebrate," he says.

In the meantime, school buses, children's faces filled with awe and wonder pressing against the windows, continue to arrive at the pillar flanked front door; a group of conservation officers grunt and shout their way through a self-defence exercise in the gymnasium; and the foyer bulle-

tin board is fluttering with notices about upcoming groups, workshops and seminars that will bring thousands of visitors to these classrooms and hallways.

Plans are being laid for a summer agenda that will pay tribute to an impressive past: a past that witnessed the bucksaw give way to the power saw to what today they call "the beast"; the evolution of bush phones with a single wire, graduate to satellite

transmitters at every dam. "I look at (the changes) with remorse," says Hamilton, "but it had to happen. It's hard to accept the changes, but they're inevitable."

The technology may have changed since the days of the forestry school, and the terminology may be a tad more tongue-twisting, but the importance of the work has remained just as crucial as Peter McEwan said it would back in 1942.

A summer of celebration

The Frost Centre's summer agenda is already taking shape. Here is a review of what is happening. Call the Frost Centre at 1-705-766-2451 for more information.

July 29-30 - The Reunion. With the public and over 1800 graduates of the school and centre welcome to attend, this day promises to be a busy one! A BBQ lunch will take place around noon on Saturday the 29th. The speaker for the day was not confirmed at press time. The official opening and welcome will take place at 2 p.m. Tickets for the BBQ will be limited to about 500 and will be handed out on a first come--first served basis. All are welcome, but please give consideration to graduates and former staff members. Any graduates or former staff interested in receiving an information package about the reunion agenda and requirements, can write to the Leslie M. Frost Centre at RR#2, Minden, Ontario, K0M 2K0 or call 705-766-2451.



August 12 - Open House and Plaque Unveiling. The Centre hosts a public open house at which visitors can see and tour the many facets of the facility. A display entitled "Resource Management - It's Science" will be available for viewing. This exhibit was on display at the Ontario Science Centre for a week in April when Deputy Minister of Natural Resources Ron Vrancart officially opened the Centre's 50th Anniversary celebrations. A plaque honouring Mr. Peter McEwan and his contributions to the school and centre will be unveiled.

August 19-24 - "Natural Inspirations" Art Exhibit. In partnership with the Haliburton Highlands Guild of Fine Arts, this week-long show features the work of local artists and artisans. Opening ceremonies will take place on Saturday the 19th at 1 p.m. Show times will be 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. daily.