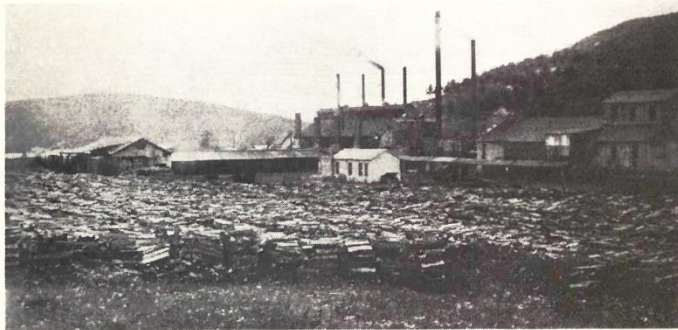


## The Standard Chemical plant

It's hard to imagine that on the side of this peaceful street tucked between Lac Mercier, Lac Moore and Mont Plaisant there once stood a chemical products



Canadian wood distillation plant, 48-cord capacity, showing wood supply

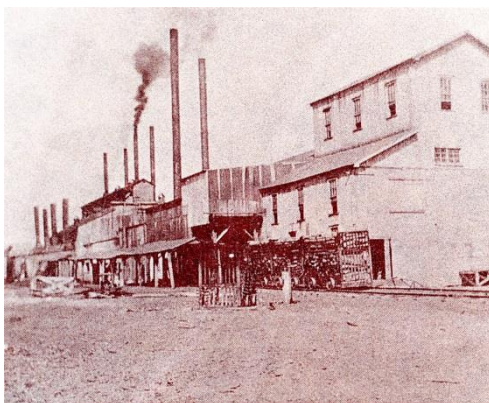
Close to 4,500 cords of wood, the equivalent of a year's supply for the plant, were piled in the factory yard. A four-foot (1.22 m) cord of logs measured 8 feet (2.43 m) in length by 4 feet (1.22 m) in height.

Source: Department of the Interior, Canada. *Distillation of hardwoods in Canada*, par John S. Bates (1922).

settlers, to which were added a few vacationers in summer. But for the industrialists, the site was ideal. The raw material—hardwood—seemed inexhaustible, the labour force was captive and, thanks to the train, it took only a few hours to transport the liquids and solids produced on-site to the refinery in Montréal.

plant with tall chimneys that belched black smoke day and night. It's a little known episode in the history of Mont-Tremblant. All that remains today is the name of the place—the rue de la Vieille-Usine (the street of the old factory)—and some scraps of memory in the minds of the old folks.

When the A.D. Gall Petroleum and Chemical Company set up shop on the shores of Lac Mercier in about 1906, the wild, isolated location had only a handful of



The Lac-Mercier plant ran day and night.

Source: Photo from *Mont-Tremblant d'hier à aujourd'hui*, published by the Chambre de commerce de Mont-Tremblant in 1990.

Four years later, the plant passed into the hands of the Laurentian Chemical Company, which later became a subsidiary of the Standard Chemical Company, a multinational based in Toronto and listed on the London Stock Exchange. In addition to the industrial buildings, which extended over a huge acreage, the company owned the village general store, a hotel where it billeted some of its workers, sawmills, and immense forests in the neighbouring townships. Lac Mercier became a small “company village” whose residents owed their survival to the presence of the plant.

Production was based on the pyrolysis of wood. In each of the plant's eight steel

ovens, six cords of dry hardwood (maple, beech or birch) were heated at high temperatures. At the end of twenty-four hours, the woody material had been transformed into charcoal and the gases and vapours, condensed and treated in a variety of ways, became acetate of lime and raw wood alcohol, as well as by-products such as tar. During the Great War (1914-1918), most of the acetate of lime produced in Québec factories was transformed into acetone and exported to England,

*Table 3—Crude Hardwood Distillation Plants*

Name	Location	Capacity
		Cords per day
Standard Chemical Co. Ltd.	Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario	112
Standard Chemical Co. Ltd.	Longford Mills, Ontario	84
Standard Chemical Co. Ltd.	South River, Ontario	72
Standard Chemical Co. Ltd.	Thornbury, Ontario	48
Standard Chemical Co. Ltd. (Wood Products Co. Ltd.)	Donald, Ont.	48
Standard Chemical Co. Ltd. (Canada Chemical Co. Ltd.)	Parry Sound, Ontario	48
Standard Chemical Co. Ltd.	Cookshire, Quebec	48
Standard Chemical Co. Ltd.	Fasset, Quebec	48
Standard Chemical Co. Ltd. (Laurentian Chemical Co. Ltd.)	Lac Mercier, Quebec	48
Standard Chemical Co. Ltd. (Weedon Chemical Co. Ltd.)	Weedon, Quebec	24
Dominion Wood & Lumber Co. Ltd.	Trout Creek, Ontario	20
Hodgeson Bros. Chemical Co. Ltd.	Lindsay, Ontario	20
		620

where it was used to make cordite, a smokeless explosive.

*List of establishments operated by the company in 1922.*

*Source: Department of the Interior, Canada. Distillation of hardwoods in Canada, par John S. Bates (1922).*

Extreme heat, danger of explosion, suffocating fumes, risk of burns and poisoning: the working conditions of employees were rough and their salary laughable (\$9 per week for 60 hours of work, according to the 1911 census). The workers at Laurentian Chemical were resigned to it, however: as “hewers of wood and drawers of water”, they had never known anything but misery, privation, and exhausting toil. At the beginning of the 1920s, the plant employed 35 to 40 men, not counting the dozens of lumberjacks who cut the 48 cords of wood needed for each day’s production.



*It's not impossible that the filaments of cordite in this cartridge, found on an old battlefield of the Somme, in France, were made from acetone from Québec.*

The industry, however, passed through a crisis brought about by European competition and the appearance of new, synthetic products. Towards 1926, the Lac-Mercier factory closed its doors. For a short time there were rumours that it would reopen, but the unused factory buildings were soon nothing more than a playground for children, who amused themselves by throwing pieces of charcoal they found on the ground onto the tin roofs of the buildings.

*Source: World War One Battlefields website [www.ww1battlefields.co.uk]*

Research and writing: Danielle Soucy