

Bishops Mills Cheese Factory Proposal: History, Canoe Launch, & Biodiversity

Fred Schueler – February 2025

Summary: *The Bishops Mills Cheese Factory is now owned by the municipality, and could be operated as a municipal park with further signage about its history, a canoe launch site, and restoration of native and assisted-migration biodiversity.*

The Cheese Factory was on the downstream side of Mill St, below the Bishops' mills, between the tailrace from the dam and the stream. This was along the bedrock riffle in Middle Creek (=topo maps' 'North Kemptville Creek') which provided the incentive for the construction of the milldam, and which would have been a portage during low-water seasons for indigenous canoe traffic, since the creek ceases to flow in droughty summers.

"Tragedy struck the village at 6 a.m. the morning of August 12, 1924. Stanley Watts was cheese-maker at the time. The boiler used to process the cheese was accidentally allowed to boil dry, and the pressure caused an explosion that was heard for miles in all directions. Watts was fatally injured, and a cheese inspector and young boy were also killed. The building was levelled and the remains of the boiler were found in the next field." - <https://www.bishopsmills.ca/past>

The Cheese Factory was rebuilt, and continued to make cheese until 1946, and to be a milk depot until 1949. The abandoned building burned in the 1990s. It was in 1995 that we began to forage for *Hypsizygus ulmarius* "[Knothole Oyster Mushrooms](#)," on the Manitoba Maples that had grown up in the nutrient-rich surroundings of the factory, and Ashes began to grow up as a forest around the site. Now the Manitoba Maples are fading as the nutrient levels subside (1.75kg of mushrooms in 1995, but none since a few in 2019), the Ashes are dying from the attentions of the Emerald Ash Borer (along with some second-generation Elms succumbing to Dutch Elm Disease), and invasive Cathartic Buckthorn is both an under-storey and a carpet of seedlings.

Here's my proposal from a June 2021 consultation with RVCA about the site, for invasive/native plant management at the site. Being a proposal by me, it doesn't involve any expenditure of money - just felling trees for the firewood, recreational buckthorn-slashing, and planting the native species as they come to hand...

*"...the main invasive that needs to be removed is the Buckthorns, *Rhamnus cathartica* and *Rh. frangula* (=Frangula alnus), and the need to take down the Emerald-bored Ashes which have come in over the past 40 years to replace the Manitoba Maples. I'm glad [Tom Graham] pointed out the Sugar Maple [yester]day - Sugar Maples will expand their canopies as Ashes are taken out. I planted a few Basswood seeds from Barnes Island last year, but don't know how they've done - if you [Tom] have got lots of Basswood seedlings they could be planted. We could get seeds from the Bishops Mills Rock Elm, and some canker-resistant Butternuts from RVCA. The creek-edge species I've thought of is [Sycamore](#), and other trees that could do well in a creekside environment would include Swamp White Oak, Hackberry, the Bishops Mills Red Maple, Blue Beech (the 'other Ironwood'), and Slippery Elm. There's no reason why we shouldn't pack as many native tree species as possible into a wild-like grove, using the space made available by removing invasives and dying Ashes, and then there are native shrubs like Leatherwood, and all the various wildflowers. The Goldenrods on the mound are native, but they could*

be enhanced by other tall native wildflowers. Getting and keeping the Buckthorns out will require vigilance, but it could be an educational kind of vigilance, and once the big ones are felled and kept from sprouting by whichever method, the new seedlings can just be pulled. If there's an infusion of money, this process could be speeded up by the use of shrubs and sapling-size trees from Ferguson. It will be a different kind of operation from the usual plant-trees-in-a-field project, to transform an existing forest, largely of invasive and dying species, into a diverse stand of native species, with the challenges of putting in park infrastructure at the same time."

"A first step could be to fell all the big Buckthorn and seriously killed-back Ashes, as RVCA did so spectacularly at the Baxter conservation area, and then we could recruit chain-sawers to buck up the logs, and then have a haul-away firewood event to raise money for the project (both Tom & Jeanne and Aleta & I have trailers which could be used for some of the removal). We'd want to leave a modest number of snags and coarse woody debris [as wildlife habitat](#).

"This removal of trees would leave lots of branches, which it could be a community-association activity to convert into [brush piles](#), or to piles which could be burned once there's good snow cover (Fireweed could be planted on a burn site, or Allegheny-vine around brush piles).

"It was really neat that the discussion of no net addition of fill to the flood plain triggered the idea of putting in a vernal pool. Such a pool would be very interesting from a research point of view, because in some years it would be isolated and in other years it would be flooded over, with the potential introduction of fish and other species from the stream, which would expose the Amphibia and invertebrates there to radically different conditions in different years. Once a destination is determined for the fill from a vernal pool [e.g. covering over broken glass & metal on the site of the building], the pool could be created by hand digging and the fill deployed with wheelbarrows, so this could be a doughnut-fueled community event, and there'd be no need for an excavator."

Since then, a plaque with the history of the explosion, composed by Tom Graham, was dedicated on 21 May 2022. In December 2023 Tom & I cleared a path through the site down to standing water near the downstream end of the millrace, as part of a suggestion to the **Municipal Waterfront Access Strategy** that there be upstream canoe/kayak launches here and at Limerick Road, Mussell Road, & Beach Road. On 13 September 2024 habitat gardener Kathy-Ann Laman and I planted a Sycamore sapling from Ferguson on the shore near the canoe-launch site, and on 28 September Clay Shearer planted a few Swamp White Oak seedlings (a streamside species he's recently discovered as native to eastern Ontario) in the woods. There are a fair number of Red & Sugar Maples and Basswood, as well as Poplars and Aspen, and this spring I plan to locate and measure all of the native trees on the site.

It would be nice to have community involvement in the planning, invasives control, and naturalization of the Cheese Factory as a park.