

The Wiseman Saw Log Mill

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From 1918 to 1949, four brothers—Gordon, George, Ernest, and Alison Wiseman—ran a successful **saw log mill** on the banks of Shoal Harbour. They established their operation on the lower north side of the harbor, choosing the site for its flat land, a small cove for booming logs, and easy access to the new Bonavista Branch railway line. The advent of the steam engine meant they were no longer dependent on the river for power. As the business expanded, they even successfully lobbied for their own railway siding.

The Wiseman operation employed ten men, including the four brothers and four hired hands, along with three horses. With this crew, they averaged 30,000 to 40,000 four-foot logs per season. The men would work in the woods for six days before returning to Shoal Harbour for a day to see their families and get new supplies. They even had hay for the horses imported by train from St. John's, as baled hay was more convenient to transport over long distances than loose local hay.

The logging was done mainly in the areas of **Shoal Harbour Pond, Long Lou Pond, Little Prairie Pond, and Dark Hole Pond**. Logs were normally cut during the winter and stockpiled near a stream or pond that flowed into Shoal Harbour Pond. In the springtime, high water flows allowed the logs to be driven down to the mouth of the Shoal Harbour River to the mill. With different families involved in wood harvesting, logs would normally be marked for identification. The Wisemans, however, were exempt, as the first family to log in these relatively faraway areas.

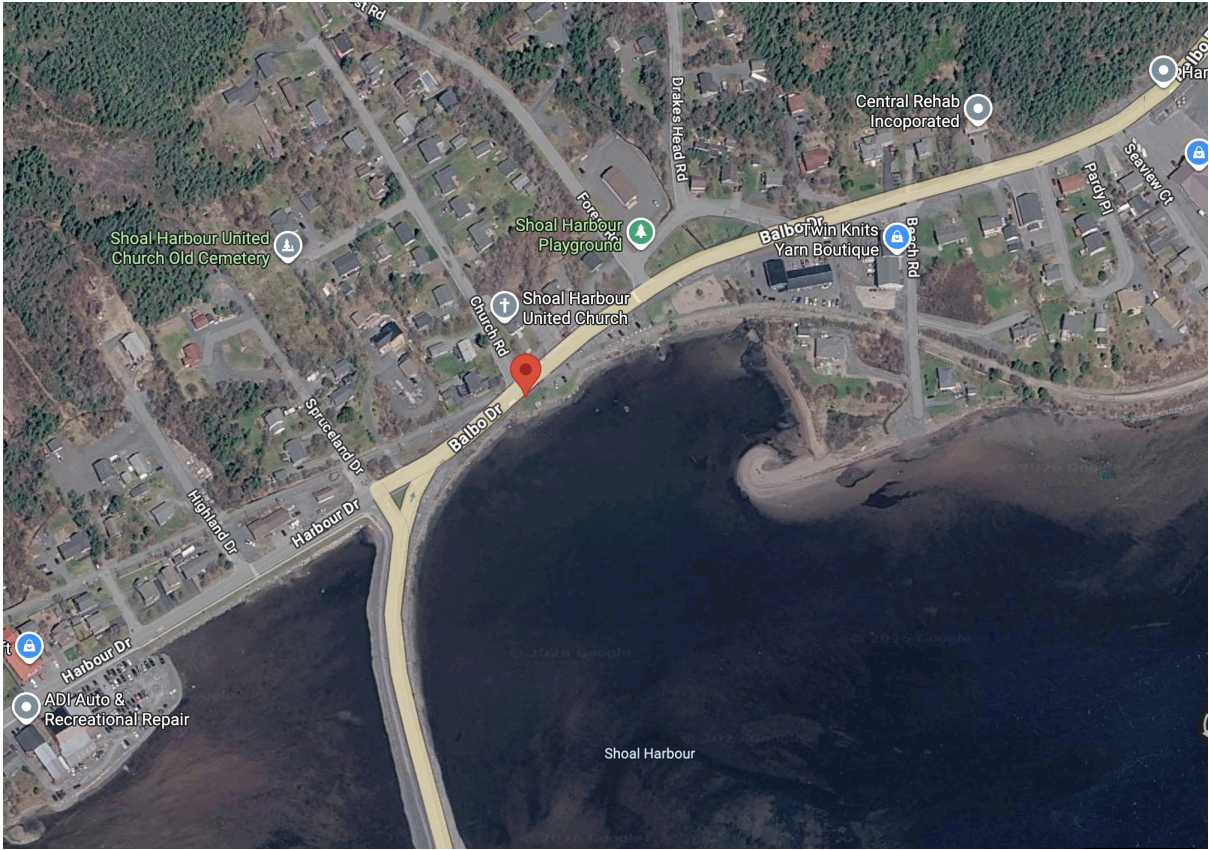
The mill's primary product was lumber for making boxes, which were shipped by rail to St. John's. During the **Great Depression**, the business became a reliable supplier, selling an average of 44,000 boxes to major companies like Harvey & Co., Purity Biscuits Ltd., and The Newfoundland Butter Co.

The Wiseman operation was moderately successful throughout the 1930s. The mill was powered by a steam engine from 1918 to 1940, initially using a used one. In 1940, it was converted to run on gasoline, which it did until 1949. The original steam engine is now a historical display near the Shoal Harbour viewing deck.

In 1946, the mill became a key lumber supplier for the **Clareville Shipyard**, providing wood for the construction of the wooden vessels known as the "**Splinter Fleet**." The mill's last recorded shipment was a final order of butter boxes for Purity Factories in St. John's, valued at \$90.00.

By 1940, the business faced serious trouble: they could no longer get enough wood. The area around Shoal Harbour Pond was becoming logged out, forcing the Wisemans to cut timber at a considerable distance from the river. Using horses, they could only transport two loads of logs per day, which wasn't enough to keep the mill running. To save the business, a large capital investment was needed for more horses and equipment, but money was not available.





Clarenville's Backcountry

