Norfolk County in southwestern Ontario is living testimony to two of the first Canadian foresters that practised all the aspects of their profession, beginning more than a hundred years ago. Dr. Edmund J. Zavitz started the St. Williams Forestry Station in 1908 and Dr. James H. White, the first forestry graduate of a Canadian university (University of Toronto) initiated extensive tree planting trials near Turkey Point about the same time. Their work guided reforestation in southern Ontario for generations, with results now evident in every County. Provincially, as Chief Provincial Forester, Zavitz initiated greatly improved forest fire control methods and White led many original provincial forest resources surveys.

Few of today’s practising foresters would have met these men. The Canadian Institute of Forestry honoured White in 1946 for his work with a commemorative plaque and cairn in the Turkey Point Forest, which was renamed the J. H. White Forest.

At the 100th anniversary celebration of the St. Williams Nursery, keynote speaker Ken Armson noted that the plaque for Dr. White had become oblivious through the development of a provincial park at the original location and also that there was no memorial for Dr. Zavitz, even though Zavitz has often been called “The Father of Reforestation in Ontario”. Members of the local Port Rowan/South Walsingham Heritage Association and the Southern Ontario Section of the CIF/IFC accepted Ken’s challenge to find a way to honour both pioneers. A small committee was formed to pursue the project.

A new, more prominent location at Turkey Point has been selected for Dr. White’s original plaque. A site has also been selected on the “Picnic Grounds” of the former St. Williams Forestry Station where a new memorial will be installed for Dr. Zavitz, naming the current “Nursery Tract” of the St. Williams Conservation Reserve “The Dr. Edmund J. Zavitz Forest”. It will be close to the grave of Colonel Arthur Pratt, M.P.P., one of the other founders of the Station. The cost of the project is estimated to be approximately $10 000. To date, members of the CIF/IFC’s Southern Ontario Section have donated $1,000; another $1000 has come from the CIF/IFC’s FACT fund. A private donation of $1000 has also been made. If all goes as planned, the official unveiling of the memorials will be August 14, 2011 during the “Forest Fest” to be held at the former Forestry Station, now named “The St. Williams Nursery and Ecology Centre”.

Members of the Canadian forestry community, forest-related businesses and the general public are invited to participate in this program by making donations to the “Memorial Fund” c/o Port Rowan South Walsingham Heritage Association, PO Box 193, Port Rowan, ON, N0E 1M0. For further details, please contact Dolf Wynia, chair of the fundraising committee at 519 875 3350 or wynia@kwic.com. Time is of the essence as, unfortunately, almost every week there are fewer foresters that will remember these pioneers. A list of contributors will be displayed in the Forest Interpretive Centre at the Nursery, which some will remember as the “Museum” and which is now operated by the Heritage Association.

Dolf Wynia (L) and Paul Smith, President of the Port Rowan/South Walsingham Heritage Association in front of the St. Williams Forest Interpretive Centre with the salvaged plaque re-naming the Turkey Point Forest the J. H. White Forest in 1949.