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Best paper award surprises student

Winning research attempts to find age of historic building

By **BEVERLEY WARE**
South Shore Bureau

BRIDGEWATER — He thought of the presentation as a practice session, but Nigel Selig walked out of the room the first-ever undergraduate to win an award that has always gone to doctoral or master's students.

The 22-year-old graduate of Parkview Education Centre, just outside Bridgewater, has received the award for the best student paper at the 31st annual Atlantic Geoscience Conference in Saint John, N.B.

Mr. Selig, in his final year of geography studies at Mount Allison University in Sackville,

N.B., received the award for his archeological work determining the age of a local museum.

"It was unexpected, that's for sure," Mr. Selig said recently. He had never presented a paper before academics before but said the conference was good practice before speaking to the national association of geographers in Ontario in June.

After the session, he walked away with a plaque, a little extra cash and a striking addition to his resume.

"Nigel did an exceptional job," his professor, Colin LaRoque, said in a news release. "He represented the university very well, and this special

recognition is well deserved." But Mr. Selig stresses the award was the result of teamwork.

He was one of four students and two professors asked to determine when the Campbell Carriage Factory in Sackville was built.

They used a process called dendroarcheology, which is the science of using tree rings to determine the age of wood. They did the work out of the new lab at Mount A.

Carriages, tools, agricultural equipment and caskets were made in the factory between 1855 and 1949, and it was a tannery before that.

But Mr. Selig said no one knew exactly how old the building is.

Carbon dating can only tell when a building was built within about 60 years.

"Our science is pretty exact," Mr. Selig said. "We can get it right down to the exact year and, actually, the season of the year."

A scanning electron microscope told them the factory was made of red spruce, but there are no existing trees that old for comparison. However, there is a church nearby also made of red spruce, and records show exactly when it was built.

The team compared the wood of the two and created a graph that showed how much the trees grew each year, based on the ring width. With a few graphs and comparisons he was able to find a match "and lock it into time."

"The science itself is quite simple. It's simply pattern matching."

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There are two growing seasons, spring and fall, and each leaves slightly different characteristics. So not only was Mr. Selig able to say the trees were cut in 1844, but he could also say they were felled in the fall.

Mr. Selig, who grew up in Fancy Lake, just outside

Bridgewater, said he had planned either to teach geography or get into urban planning. This award, and the research that can now be done at the new lab, may draw him in a slightly different direction.

His minor is history, so he sees a natural connection between the two worlds.

"I think the science is very

interesting, especially in the Maritimes," he said. That's because without old trees to compare samples, he must do historical research of an area.

Mr. Selig said his plans may now include ongoing research and a master's in geography.

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