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**STORY OF OLD
LUMBERING DAYS**

Over Four Billion Feet of Lumber
Floated Down Black River In
Old Lumbering Days

The story below was taken from the La-Crosse Tribune. It cannot help but be of interest to our readers who are acquainted with the old lumbering days and even those who are not.

The La Crosse Tribune carries a story that Black river, one of Wisconsin's small streams and which drains about 6.8 per cent of the state, floated 4,664,799,560 feet of logs and lumber to the saw mills and lumber yards at Onalaska and La Crosse during the 30-year period from the end of the Civil war to the decline of the logging industry in 1897.

The lumbering business on the Black river reached its peak in 1881, when 250,609,720 feet of logs and lumber came down. Other peaky years when the total footage exceeded the two hundred million feet mark, were 1880, 1883, 1884, and 1890. These figures are given by Ellis B. Usher, in his History of Wisconsin.

A fine dissertation on "The Lumbering Industry of the Black River" is contained in a thesis written by Richard L. Canuteson at the University, in which he deals with the physical geography of the Black river region, the historical development of the lumber industry and along the river and lumbering mechanics.

First Lumberman

There is some controversy as to the first lumberman on the Black River. A Frenchman named Rolette is supposed to have built a mill near the site of Black River Falls, on Town Creek, in 1819. This mill is said to have been burned by the Indians and the whites driven off. There must have been some sort of an establishment there, for timbers have been found on the location deeply buried in the ground.

Another authority gives Col John Shaw, Green Bay, credit for being the first to establish a saw mill at Black River Falls. This was also destroyed in 1819, and Colonel Shaw then rafted his logs down to Prairie du Chien.

There is little to record concerning the Black River region between 1819 and 1839. Thomas P. Burnett applied to the War Department in 1833 for permission to build a sawmill on the river. The request was referred to General Clark, at St. Louis, who denied it.

The Indian title to the Black river country was extinguished by a treaty on November 1, 1837, in which the Winnebago tribe ceded all its territory on the east side of the river and also certain interests on the west bank. They were to remove to their western reserve within eight months, but did not actually leave until about 1840.

In the early summer of 1839, an expedition was organized at Prairie du Chien headed by Jacob Spaulding, for the purpose of settling the Black river country. This party went up to La Crosse by steamer, and thence by keelboat to the Falls, where they be-

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gan to get out materials for a sawmill, built at the mouth of Town Creek. This mill was put into operation in the spring of 1840, and work was begun on another and larger mill on the main river at the Falls, completed the following year. Indians made an attempt to drive them off, but Spaulding succeeded by a ruse in driving them off without a clash.

Mormons Arrive

In 1841, a band of Mormons from Nauvoo, Illinois, appeared at the Falls and jumped a claim belonging to Spaulding. He drove them off by arming his employees. They returned the following spring and bought his property for \$20,000, payable mostly in lumber. They finished up the mill at the Falls and spent about two years getting out lumber and rafting it down the river for use in the construction of the temple at Nauvoo, according to Mr. Canuteson's thesis.

After the death of Joseph Smith in 1844, they left the country, turning the property back to Spaulding. They burned their houses, stole some flatboats, and attempted to escape without settling with creditors in La Crosse, but were finally overtaken and forced to settle.

During the time that these Mormons were logging on the river they were furnished with provisions by Nathan Myrick, who had a trading post at La Crosse. He took in payment for these provisions, logs which he rafted to St. Louis, and these lografts were the first to be taken out of the Black River country by permanent settlers.

From that time on arrivals at the Falls were fairly numerous, and most of them entered the logging business. By the close of 1844 there were eight sawmills in operation on the river. All but one used the old fashioned up and down saw, driven by a "flutter wheel."

In June, 1845, James and Henry

O'Neill and E. L. Brockway, and Samuel and William Ferguson moved up the river and settled at the site of Neillsville. There they built a log cabin on the bank of O'Neill Creek and later a sawmill with a capacity of 3,000 feet of lumber per day. This lumber was rafted down to Burlington, Ia., where O'Neill started a lumber yard.

"Crowd" in 1845

By 1845 there were from 175 to 200 men on the river, Jacob Spaulding, Jonathan Nichols, Andrew Shepard, John Valentine, Joseph Clancy, Hiram Yeatman, Isaac Van Nestrad, and James Graham were the only ones who had families. These people were scattered all up and down the river, with little settlements at Black River Falls, North Bend, Nichols Mill, Shepard's Mill, Perry's Creek, and other places.

From then until 1849 the population increased quite rapidly and in the later years there were between 500 and 600 persons on the river.

At this time all the wants of the Black River region were supplied from Prairie du Chien. Goods were brought up the river from La Crosse in keel boats in summer and by sleigh in winter. The keel boats used were from 75 to 85 feet long and of from 8 to 9 feet beam. They had a carrying capacity of from ten to fifteen tons.

During the winter, sleigh parties of from four to fifteen sleighs went to Dubuque or Galena for supplies, under guidance of a pilot who knew the river and could tell when and where the ice was likely to be unsafe. The trip was made in stages, one day to La Crosse, one to Prairie du Chien, and one to Dubuque, a week being taken up by the return trip. These trips were undertaken once or twice during the winter. Mail for the Black River country was distributed from Prairie du Chien, a hundred miles

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away. Whoever went there brought back the mail for the whole region. In 1845, arrangements were made for mail service from La Crosse and in 1850 a mail route to the Falls from Prairie du Chien was established.

The first wagon road to the Falls followed an old Indian trail from Black River Falls to Douglas' Mill (now Melrose), across Fleming's Creek near its mouth, and across Halfway Creek near Midway, then crossing the La Crosse river near Minnesota Junction (now Medary), and thence along the bluffs to La Crosse.

Falls Was Headquarters

Black River Falls was the headquarters for the lumbermen and loggers when they came out of the woods in the spring, ready to celebrate their release by spending their wages. A common practice was for thirty or forty of them to hitch themselves by a logging cable to a breaking plow and "plow Main street" from curb to curb, then transfer the "team" to a harrow and smooth the street down in better shape than before, Mr. Canuteson relates. On one occasion they plowed the street as usual, then broke into a feed store, and proceeded to sow the street to oats.

Card playing and dancing were the chief amusements of these early pioneers. There were a half dozen good fiddlers among the settlers. Frequently dances were held on successive nights in different settlements, the loggers and the settlers attending almost in a body. The "Shanghai House," a boarding house built by Jacob Spaulding, is said to have been dedicated by a dance lasting for fifty hours without interruption.

In the early days, the labor element in the lumber camps was largely recruited from the ranks of the settlers. Norwegians and Swedes who settled in a new country were most likely to spend their winters in the pineries. Such work served as a source of ready money, always a scarce article among the settlers. The labor was also sup-

plemented by French-Canadians. Later when the large lumber companies arose, the foreman or superintendent picked up their crews to a large extent in the lumberjack hangouts of certain cities in which the men congregated.

La Crosse in the boom times of 1871 was a city of about 5,000 persons and furnished most of the men for the Black River pineries. The neighboring farms and villages also added their quota. A dollar a day and board was a very usual wage for ordinary labor. It rose higher in case of the foreman, and wages in the mills were also higher.

Camps Centralized

The logging camps were naturally located as centrally as possible. The buildings were of logs, usually roofed with shakes, and plastered with mortar or mud. The usual set of buildings consisted of a store and office, cook and eating shanty, one or more bunkhouses, the stables, blacksmith shop, and a storehouse. The store or "wangan," as it was called by the lumberjacks, carried supplies of such articles as were necessary. The blacksmith shop was an obvious necessity, for horses needed frequent reshoeing, sleighs must be made and repaired, and tongs, peavies and cant hooks must be kept in repair.

Logging did not go further back than a mile from the stream bank, as a rule. The cutting and hauling generally began around Christmas or New Years day, though occasionally in a heavy winter, the work began earlier. After the logs were felled and trimmed by the swampers, and cut into the usual lengths of 12 feet by the sawyers, they were hauled or horses were hitched.

These skidways were merely two parallel logs at right angles to the stream bed, and were sometimes built 50 and even a hundred feet back into the woods, in such cases, the logs were rolled a good share of the way on the

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skidways, and if the distance was greater they were skidded or "snaked" to the skidways. Larger logs were handled one at a time with a tool similar to a huge ice tong, to which the horses were hitched.

Logs were sometimes piled in any way on the skidways and sometimes decked in tiers to be hurtled into the rivers and creeks in the spring after the ice was cleared. Often the logs were piled directly on the ice to be carried downstream when the spring break-up occurred. They then were floated to the booms of private mills above that point on the river.

Keep Logs Moving

It became the task of the loggers then to keep the logs moving in the river and to prevent them from being stranded on the bank or in sloughs. If a log caught on a snag or a rock, a jam soon formed, which must be got rid of by picking out the key log or even by use of dynamite.

Often there would be jams at several points at once. A jam in the Black and Pepple rivers was broken by the use of much powder on one occasion, and 20,000,000 feet of logs passed Black River Falls in one night. This was in April, 1876.

Another typical big jam formed above Black River Falls in May, 1871, extending for five or six miles up river and containing 50,000,000 feet of logs. It required four days of effort to break it. Another such jam containing 50,000,000 feet of logs, resisted the efforts of from 50 to 80 men for days early in April, 1875.

The king of jams was reported in the spring of 1893, when there was a jam nearly 10 miles long reaching from near the mouth of the Black river to Gale's Ferry, containing more than 100,000,000 feet of logs.

In addition to watching the logs to prevent jams, loggers had to "sack in" or roll in logs which were crowded out on the banks of the river. This "sacking in" was done under contracts let by the Black River Im-

plement Company at its annual meeting. Contracts were let by section to the lowest bidder, bids for one year ranging from 55 to 75 cents per thousand feet.

Sort at Onalaska

At the Onalaska booms, the logs were sorted according to the mark which the scalers had placed on them in the camps. The importance and value of this "sacking in" business may be learned from the figures of the six "sacking in" contractors for 1888 when 30,048,890 feet of stranded logs were reclaimed.

Put in by	No. of feet
H. A. Bright, Black River Falls	12,244,580
Island Mill Lumber Co., Onalaska	4,196,000
Collins & Berg, Onalaska	2,221,300
John Dwyer, Neillsville	3,450,000
M. Stitzer, Burr Oak	1,330,000
F. D. Lindsay, Neillsville	6,800,000
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	30,048,890

The cost of "sacking in" was in the neighborhood of \$19,500 and the value of the logs thus reclaimed was estimated at approximately \$300,000.

Because of the eccentricities of the Black River, need for its improvement was early seen, with the result that the Black River Booming and Log Driving Association was formed. The early mill owners constructed booms at their mills which held up the drives. Attempts on the part of the loggers to cut the booms ended in feuds and sometimes in bloodshed.

Such an instance was that of William Hodge, a young logger from the Saco River, Maine, who was shot on May 18, 1865, when Hodge attempted to cut a boom belonging to James Perry, Black River Falls, which had held up his drive. Hodge died from his wounds two weeks later.

Conflicts of this nature led to plans for legal regulation of the river. This was opposed violently by millmen of the upper river. In 1864, the Black River Implement Company was organized and chartered and a considerable amount of work was done by this

company in improving the river.

Improve River

Snags were removed, locks built, and facilities provided for landing of the logs for a distance of 20 miles up river. Storage dams were built, one or two on the East Fork, one above Neilsville, and one six miles below Neilsville. A driving master was appointed each year, and a timber inspector employed. Police committees were appointed to ferret out and prosecute theft of logs.

Plans were made in 1824 for a timbered channel to be maintained between Onalaska bridge and the mouth of Black river at La Crosse. In the same year, a resolution was passed pledging the loggers to reduce the amount of logs put on the Mississippi season by 50 per cent. Another resolution was passed the following week by the Lumbermen's convention at Saginaw, Michigan.

The Black River Log Driving Association which had led a somewhat precarious existence through being overshadowed by the more vigorous Improvement Company, died out in February, 1880, to the Floating Dam Company. The latter company was engaged in log-driving. Ten years later, the Improvement Company in turn bought out the Floating Dam

company's rights, dams and franchise and thereby attained control of the rafting and boating business.

The lumber industry began to decline about 1895. Within another ten years it had about passed away. The hotel and boarding houses on the river had closed or were used as hunting clubs for sportsmen.

Ten's Spring Up

Towns that had sprung up to supply loggers with shelter and clothing gradually found themselves stranded. Laid off at the head of the series of rapids and sloughs through which the Black River made its way to the Mississippi, is now but a tiny cluster of better houses and a railway station. New American, and North Hotel are typical stately little inland towns.

Of the great sawmills which once lined on French Island, few traces remain to the casual glance. A few fringe mills struggled on for a few years, subsisting on the "deadheads" pulled in from the swamps and dug up from the bottoms of the river, but they, too, have gone the way of the rest of the great logging industry on the Black River. Up around the headwaters of the Black River are great areas of timber land which attract the attention of the logging industry. The logging industry.