

MENOMINEE RANGE MEMORIES 8: EARLY LOGGING ON THE MENOMINEE AND STURGEON RIVERS

By William J. Cummings, Menominee Range Historical Foundation Historian



Maude Gee (standing) and Jamie Gee, Jeffie Whitehead and John Bush posed for the photographer on a huge log jam near either the Upper or Lower Quinnesec Falls of the Menominee River on April 23, 1899. An item in the April 14, 1892 edition of Iron Mountain's *The Iron Range*, noted: *SCORES of people have visited Quinnesec falls the past week to see the immense log jam there, which extended from the Hydraulic works to within a short distance of the railroad bridge. A force of men were employed blasting the ice and breaking the jam, and succeeded in starting the logs last Tuesday. It is estimated that there were 6,000,000 feet in the jam. [Dr. John Newkirk]*

The late Putnam W. Robbins (1902-2001), an Iron Mountain native, began his career in forestry at his father's logging camp. He graduated from Michigan Agricultural College (M.A.C. – now Michigan State University) with a degree in forestry. He was the superintendent of Michigan State College's Dunbar Forest Experiment Station on the St. Mary's River south of Sault Ste. Marie following

graduation, and returned to M.S.C. in 1936 as an assistant professor, managing the Michigan Clark-McNary Forest Nursery. He became an associate professor in 1943.

The following information is excerpted from Robbins' article "Lumbering in the Iron Mountain Area" which appeared in *Born From Iron: Iron Mountain, Michigan 1879-1979* on pages 69-76:

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"In 1866-67 following his return from serving in the Civil War, James Lyon, son of Alanson Lyon, was employed in a timber cruising party who [*sic – which*] hauled their boat and equipment from Marquette to Lake Michigamme and spent the summer cruising timber lands adjacent to the Michigamme and upper Menominee Rivers. This crew met only Indians until they reached the area near the present Iron Mountain.

"Logging operations progressed rapidly up the Menominee after 1867 and George F. Seibert reported in his *Journal of George Frederick Seibert, 1879*, that the cut-over timber lands were badly burned over all the 24 miles north of Menominee when he walked the area on May 4, 1879. Even at this early date when Iron Mountain was being born Mr. Stephenson had a logging camp on the Brule River, and told Mr. Seibert during their visit at the 'Relay House' that his men could not drive logs because of the low water.

"The pine in the Iron Mountain area was well cut-over by 1879 by the Stephensons, Fowlers, Hosmers, Wells, Kirby-Carpenter Co., Van Schank [*sic – Schiak*] Co., White-Friant Co., John Finan, Thomas Farrell, J.F. Underwood and by jobbers logging for sawmills at Menominee. Thus most of the best pine timber had been harvested before the mining boom in Iron Mountain started in the 1880's.

"The first sawmills in Iron Mountain were the small mills operated by the Chapin and the Pewabic Mines to produce the timbers, pillars, cribbing and construction lumber needed by the mines.

"The Simmons [*Simon's*] Sawmill[,] located just west of the Menominee River bridge in the present Aurora area, was the largest mill near Iron Mountain. In 1902 Henry Mellis had a lumber yard on Cedar

Avenue and operated a small mill below the hill of the present Aurora Free School.

"The 'White Pine Barons' in their logging left all the sugar maple, yellow birch and basswood, as these hardwoods could not be floated the long distances to the mills at Menominee.

"The Wright Brothers, with stores in Marinette, Amberg and Iron Mountain, supplied food, clothing, hay and grain, etc. to the large and small logging operations. They also carried on their own logging and were the only company who tried driving hardwood logs. They logged fifty thousand board feet of number one yellow birch logs, stripped off the bark and left the logs decked on the river bank to dry for one season. The following spring the log decks were broken out and started down the Menominee. According to Billie Perry, a 'whitewater' man on the drive, they had plenty of logs the first 20 miles, but before they reached Menominee had not enough to bother counting. Many of these birch logs may still be on the bottom of the river.

"When the Northwestern and Milwaukee Railroads established their lines through and north of Iron Mountain, logging the hardwoods became feasible, and from then on, train loads of maple, birch, basswood and other hardwoods, as well as cedar telephone poles, ties, mine lagging, posts and pulpwood[,] were a common sight traveling through Iron Mountain, [*sic*] before the Von Platen Mill was established. At this time the logs were loaded and bound to steel bunks on the flat cars, fastened with corner chains and binders in the same manner as logs were fastened to sleighs. Shortly before World War I, the chain cars were outlawed and hardwood stakes required for all flat cars hauling logs. This was a big mistake as the loggers consumed the young five and six-inch maple trees for

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car stakes, which[,] if they had been left[,] would be supplying saw logs today.

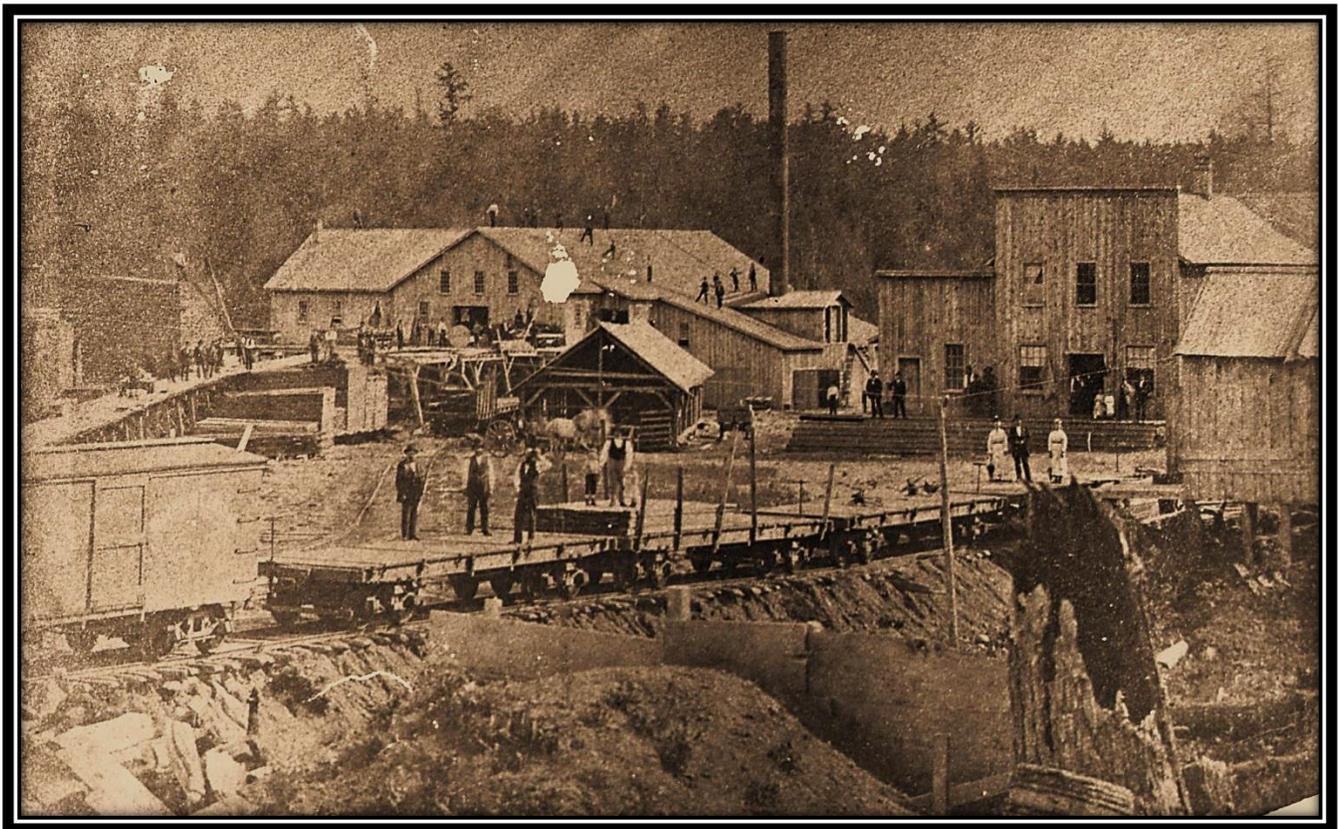
“Log marks were not used as extensively in the Upper Peninsula as in the southern Michigan pineries, [sic] because most U.P. rivers were one county streams or dominated by one big company.

“In 1875 log marks were necessary in sorting the 111,056,280 feet of logs handled by the Menominee Boom Company. During its life time, the boom passed over 10 billion eight hundred million board feet of timber; a good portion of this from Wisconsin and Michigan passed Iron Mountain as it was driven down the Menominee River.

“The period from 1880 to 1911 had many loggers operating with their

headquarters in Iron Mountain. An incomplete list includes: the Wright Brothers; Ader and Gray, who logged in the Randville and Sturgeon River area where they built a narrow gauge railroad to haul out the logs; Andrew Bjorkman, of East ‘A’ Street[,] who operated camps and had many jobbers working for him.

“Bjorkman in 1920-21 made the last log drive on the Michigamme and Menominee Rivers. A boom holding his logs on the Michigamme, to be loaded out on the Milwaukee Railroad where it crossed the river, broke and the logs had to be driven down to the Twin Falls Dam, where they were loaded out on a railroad spur line serving the dam.



This photograph, dating from the 1880's, possibly shows of the Chapin Mine's sawmill, which was located on the south portion of the east side of what is now the Chapin Pit. *[Menominee Range Historical Museum Photo]*

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"J.O. Blixt and Engbloom in 1908-09 logged the remaining virgin pine north of the Spread Eagle Chain of Lakes. Blixt

continued logging in Dickinson and Iron Counties, [sic] after Mr. Engbloom joined Von Platen as their log scaler.

COMPANY NAME	NICK-NAME	SIDE MARK	END MARK	CATCH-MARK
N. Ludington Co.	Isaac			10
H. Witbeck Co.	Carney			
Sawyer-Goodman Co.	Sawyer			K
Kirby-Carpenter Co.	Sam		KS	
Menominee River Lumber Co.	Jessie			0
Ludington, Wells & Van Schaick Co.	Bob		X	
Girard Lumber Co.	Wells			0

MILL COMPANIES LOG MARKS

The above chart appears on page 55 of *Logs on the Menominee: The History of the Menominee River Boom Company* by Fred C. Burke, published in Marinette, Wisconsin, in 1946. The chart shows a few of the nicknames, side marks, end marks and catch marks used in logging on the Menominee River. [Dickinson County Library]

"Albert Robbins, in 1892-93 logged 300 acres of hardwoods in the present Aurora area and had the logs sawed at the Simmons [Simon's] mill. From 1915 to 1922 he logged at Robbins' Spur on the Milwaukee Railroad between Crystal Falls and Iron River.

"John Flanagan and Newkirk with offices in Iron Mountain logged in areas served by the Milwaukee Road. Warren Flanagan, of East 'D' Street, logged in the Merriman

Creek area, and had pine logging camps on Pine Creek in 1910-1912.

"The Butler Brothers, of South Stephenson Avenue, logged in the Merriman and other Dickinson and Iron County areas.

"Hoose and Person logged during the early part of this period, but concentrated on excavation and road work in later years.

"Edward Parmelee owned a coal and wood business on West 'A' Street and in later years logged in the Floodwood area.

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“Mitchell Dykes did contract log driving on the Fence and Michagamme [*sic* – *Michigamme*] Rivers, as well as logging on the Fence River.

“Calvi and Gage[,] with offices at Calvi’s saloon on Stephenson Avenue, did logging in Wisconsin.

“There were many more small-logging jobbers in the Iron Mountain area who

utilized their one or two teams of horses to get logs out during the winter.

“The only ‘steam hauler’ in the area, (a small Shay engine equipped with caterpillar track drive and sleigh runners in front) which pulled 10 or more sleigh loads of logs on ice roads, was owned and used by the Morgan Lumber [*& Cedar*] Company sawmill at Foster City.



The Morgan Lumber & Cedar Company’s steam log hauler was captured on this postcard view by Ernest Robert Burkardt near Foster City in about 1915. Note the engineer at the wheel and another man standing on the front sled of the hauler. The message reads in part: *My what a big engine it is. They have ice roads and haul 18 or 20 loads a trip and three trips a day. You can see all the logs that is in one of those pictures. They have a lot on bank of river.* [William J. Cummings]

“Patrick Flanagan operated a good-sized sawmill at Sagola and the O’Callaghan Brothers of Norway had a mill

at the mouth of the Sturgeon River. Jenkins and Sons (Sam, Clifton and Fred)

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had a small mill at 800 Margaret Street, Iron Mountain.

“Log decks and rollways with pine logs piled high as houses occupied the entire area of the Menominee River bank on the Wisconsin side from the bridge west to the base of the big hill in present Aurora until about 1908. Most of the pine logs at this site came in on the ‘Dunbar Narrow Gauge’ railroad. The grade of this railroad may still be seen where it passes up the ravine back of the Florence County Co’op [*sic* – *Co-Op*] Store in Aurora.”

In Judge Eleazer S. Ingall’s *Centennial History of Menominee County 1776-1876*, Chapter VIII deals with early farms. A number of them were connected with logging companies. Logging camps were located far from settlements, especially in the early years, making it difficult to transport food and supplies needed for daily operations in the camps. Food for the lumberjacks and feed for the horses were raised on these logging company farms and transported to the camps when they were operating in the fall, winter and spring. Teams of horses often spent the summer months grazing in the pastures on these farms.

The following information, reprinted from Chapter VIII of *Centennial History of Menominee County 1776-1876*, includes information regarding many of the logging companies on the chart showing log marks:

FARMS.

“As before stated, the first farms opened here were at Wausaukee Bend and at Chappieu’s Rapids by the late John G. Kittson. The whole county is covered with dense forests of pine, hemlock, beech, basswood, maple and other trees indigenous to a northern climate, with swamps covered with white cedar and tamarack trees. All of the beech and maple lands and cedar swamps when cleared

become good farming lands, the cedar swamps when drained being the best.

“For many years after the settlement was formed in the county it was thought that farming could not be made profitable, and the main business carried on was fur trading, lumbering and fishing. About 1855, several German families, among whom was William Hackerman, Henry Bade, Sr., Frederic and Henry Sieman; afterward Xavier Algeyer and others, came and took up and began to clear farms at what has since been known as the Birch Creek settlement, about seven miles from Menominee. They settled upon beech and maple lands, and now have large farms. The great fire of 1871 swept through the settlement, destroying everything in its course and many lives, but nothing daunted, the survivors commenced again the next spring fencing their fields, and now have good buildings and larger clearings. The railroad runs through the settlement.

“In 1858, Thomas Caldwell commenced clearing a farm on the Little Cedar River, a branch of the Menominee, twenty miles above the mouth, and cleared about forty acres.

“A year or two before that, Jesse L. Hamilton commenced clearing a farm at the mouth of the Little Cedar, on the bank of the Menominee, at the foot of the Grand Rapids. He cleared a large farm which Patrick Devine and his son bought and lived on until the present year.

“In 1866, the Hamilton & Merryman Company commenced clearing a farm fifty-six miles up the river with a view of supplying their logging camps, and thus save the expense of transporting hay and root crops. Their principal crop has been hay, oats, potatoes and other roots. The company now has 120 acres cleared. The value of the crop raised last year on the farm is \$1,800. Adjoining the Hamilton &

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Merryman Company's farm the Kirby-Carpenter Company has a farm with 230 acres cleared; the value of the products of this farm for 1875 was \$4,600. The crops were hay, potatoes, turnips, cabbage and a small amount of winter wheat as an experiment. Thomas Murray has charge of the farm. About one mile from these farms the H. Witbeck Company has a farm which was commenced in 1868, and now has 200 acres cleared. The crop last year was 140 tons of hay, worth on the farm \$20 per ton; 1,500 bushels potatoes, worth 25 cents a bushel. The oat crop was cut for hay.

"Adjoining this farm the Ludington, Wells & Van Schaick Company has a farm with 100 acres cleared; the value of the crops for last year was \$1,586. This company has two other farms, one at the Relay House, twenty-five miles from Menominee Village, with 120 acres cleared; value of crops, 1875, \$1,210, and one at Pike River, on the Wisconsin side, with forty acres cleared. At the mouth of the Sturgeon River, the Menominee River Lumber Company has a farm. The clearing on this farm was commenced in 1866; there are now 100 acres cleared. The crops raised are principally hay, oats and potatoes. The estimated value of the crops at the farm for 1875 was \$5,000.

"All crops on these farms have a greater value than they would have in the village of Menominee, for they save transportation of their products a great distance. The farms are also used as stopping places for the men and teams going to and returning from the logging camps in the winter. The Kirby-Carpenter Company has also three other farms between Menominee Village and the farm mentioned. One, called the nine-mile farm, has ninety-five acres cleared; the total value of the product of 1875 is \$2,325. One at the mouth of the Pike River, in Wisconsin, has eighteen acres cleared;

total value of product of 1875, \$1,170. Also one at the Grand Rapids with forty acres cleared; total value of products of 1875, \$885. Some of the crops suffered from grasshoppers last year, which reduced the yield to less than average.

"H. Witbeck Company has one other farm.

"The N. Ludington Company has a farm situated on the Menominee, near Pembina Creek. This is a large farm, but we have not the statistics.

"William Holmes and George Henderson have opened a farm on the Sturgeon River, in Township 40 north, Range 28 west, which is the farthest in the interior of any farm yet cleared.

"Since the building of the railroad, many farms have begun to be cleared along it and also in other parts of the county, but space forbids that we should make particular mention of them here. The principal products of the farms are hay, oats and potatoes, but other grains and roots will grow and mature well. In time, the county will be a great dairy and sheep-raising district. All the cultivated grasses grow well, and the soil and climate are particularly adapted to growing root crops."