

NORTHERN MINNESOTA LUMBERING, 1870-1930s

Lumbering, like other nineteenth-century industries, was based on one of the state's abundant natural resources--the extensive pine forests located north and east of the Mississippi River. Begun in the east-central part of the state, the "St. Croix triangle," in the mid-1830s, the lumbering industry expanded northward and westward. The greatest activity outside the St. Croix triangle area took place after 1870 as capital investment increased, markets expanded, and logging and lumbering equipment became more advanced. By the turn of the century, Minnesota was the third largest lumber producing state in the nation; three of the four largest sawmills in the country were located in Minnesota; and Minneapolis had become the leading lumber market of the world.

Between 1870 and 1890, logging occurred primarily in the vicinity of major rivers and their tributaries. Logs would be cut during the winter and floated to downstream mills the following spring. The Mississippi, St. Louis, Big Fork, and Rainy rivers were the major transportation arteries. The development of railroads, however, was the single most important factor in the industry's rapid growth after 1870. Railroads pushing out onto the Great Plains created a rapidly expanding market for Minnesota lumber. Rail construction in northern Minnesota also opened previously inaccessible timberland to logging activity, reduced the lumbermen's dependence upon risky water transportation, and permitted the location of sawmills closer to the timber supply. In addition to the common carriers, large logging/lumber companies built railroads beginning in the late 1880s. By 1910, the logging railroad had become the primary method of log transportation.

Minnesota's lumber industry peaked at the turn of the century. Lumber production gradually fell off for a decade before declining sharply through the 1920s. With the closing of the last major sawmills in the early 1930s, a significant and colorful era in Minnesota history had come to an end.

As the lumber industry declined, several lumber companies established plants to utilize the state's abundant supply of "inferior trees." By the mid-1920s, the wood conversion industries (primarily paper manufacturing) had surpassed the lumber industry in value of product.

Agricultural settlement of the region proceeded slowly prior to 1890 as land seekers were drawn to the western plains. But the closing of the rich prairie lands combined with a growing awareness of the need to develop a new economic base for the region triggered an agricultural land boom in northern Minnesota. Lumber companies, railroads, chambers of commerce, land colonization companies, real estate companies, the State Bureau of Immigration, and other private and public agencies expended considerable energy to encourage settlement of the cutover.

Farming the cutover, however, proved to be an unsuccessful experiment in most cases. The poor soil, an unfavorable climate, and the high cost of bringing cutover land under cultivation made profitable farming operations unlikely. But as long as the lumber industry provided local markets for agricultural products and seasonal employment, agricultural settlement continued. The lumber industry's rapid decline in the 1920s, combined with a national farm-sector depression, caused widespread hardships that resulted in abandonment of many farms during the 1920s and 1930s.

Even before the end of the "boom era" in northern Minnesota lumbering, efforts at conservation had begun. The establishment of Itasca State Park (1891), the Minnesota State Forestry Board (1899), and the Chippewa and Superior National Forests early in the 20th century testified to state and federal conservation interests. Generally speaking, conservation during this period focused on achieving the wisest use of forest resources over a longer period of time than usually employed by "get rich quick" lumbermen. Fire control was another primary concern.

PROPERTY TYPES ASSOCIATED WITH NORTHERN MINNESOTA LUMBERING

Camps

- logging
- farm and headquarters

Transportation

- river
- railroad

Sawmills

Related industries

- paper company offices

Markets and market exchanges

Townsite properties

- logging/lumber industry
- commercial
- government
- schools and libraries

Properties associated with cutover agriculture

Properties associated with conservation

EXAMPLES OF PROPERTIES ASSOCIATED WITH NORTHERN MINNESOTA
LUMBERING THAT ARE ON THE NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

Schroeder Lumber Company Bunkhouse (c. 1900), Cook Co.

Winnibigoshish Lake Dam (1899-1900), Itasca Co.

Soo Line Depot, (c. 1910), Remer, Cass Co.

Cloquet-Northern Office Building, (1919), Cloquet, Carlton Co.

Lumber Exchange Building, (1885-90), Minneapolis, Hennepin Co.

Doboszanski Homestead (1894+), Pine Co.

Itasca State Park, (1891), Clearwater Co.

Northern Minnesota Lumbering 1970-1930s

SHPO Bibliography -- General

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1985 Historic Context Assessment: Northern Minnesota
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Hall, Stephen P. and David A. Walker

1976 Duluth-Superior Harbor Cultural Resources Study.

Holum, Liz

1988 Lumbering Context Assessment.

Kappler, Todd

1986 A Study to Find Out the Condition of Major Sawmill
Sites in Northern Minnesota.

Zellie, Carole

1987 Upper Minnesota River Headwaters Reservoirs Damsites
Cultural Resources Investigation. U.S. Army Corps of
Engineers.

The following sources are housed in the SHPO inventory files:

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Johnson, O.L.

1969 Summary Listing of Historic Sites, Aitkin County.

Haidet, Mark E.

1981 Historic Resources of Aitkin County. Multiple Resource
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Becker County

Koop, Michael

1987 Becker County Historic Sites Survey, 1987.

Beltrami County

Hightower, Barbara and Jeffrey A. Hess

1986 Beltrami County Historical Properties Survey, 1986.

Carlton County

Holum, Liz
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Clearwater County

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Hubbard County

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Kanabec County

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Lake County

Holum, Liz
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Mille Lacs County

Roberts, Norene A.
1985 National Register Survey of Mille Lacs County Report.

Morrison County

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Gray, James and Marjorie Barton
1985 Building From the Past. Fergus Falls Heritage
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Pine County

Haidet, Mark E.

1980 Hisotric Resources of Pine County. Multiple Resource Area Nomination.

St. Louis County

Aguar, Charles E.

1971 Exploring St. Louis County's Historic Sites. The St. Louis County Historical Society.

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1984 Final Report: Southern St. Louis County.

Koop, Michael

1989 Rural Finnish Log Buildings of St. Louis County, Minnesota.

Roberts, Joseph and Norene Roberts

1988 Final Report on the Summer 1987 National Register Reconnaissance Survey of Northern St. Louis County, Minnesota.

Sommer, Barbara

1980 Historic Resources Inventory of the Fond du Lac Reservation Carlton and St. Louis Counties, Minnesota.

Sommer, Lawrence J.

1982 Preliminary Evaluation of Historic Preservation Potential, Central Park Area, Duluth, Minnesota.

Sommer, Lawrence J.

1982 Preliminary Evaluation of Historic Preservation, Duluth's Western CBD Area.

Sommer, Lawrence J.

1984 Duluth Historic Resources Survey: Final Report. The St. Louis County Historical Society.

Todd County

Roberts, Norene A.

1985 National Register Survey of Todd County Report.

Wadena County

Koop, Michael

1987 Wadena County Hisatoric Sites Survey, 1987.

GOALS AND PRIORITIES WORKSHEET

Date: 5/31/90

HISTORIC CONTEXT:

Northern Minnesota Lumbering

PROPERTY TYPE (if applicable):

Various

Ranking key:

- A = High priority
0 - 2 years
- B = Medium priority
3 - 5 years
- C = Low priority

IDENTIFICATION

EVALUATION

REGISTRATION:

Time-table for
Completion

Priority
Ranking

* Evaluate Finnish log buildings in St. Louis County within this context; develop MPDF and nominate eligible properties	done -- FY88-89	
* Reassess accuracy of Todd Kapler's report and develop MPDF for sawmill sites		A
* Evaluate Oberholtzer cabin for NR eligibility	FY91 or 92	A
* Integrate inventory from Chippewa and Superior National Forests into SHPO inventory	in-house	A
* Develop MPDF for logging camp sites with some survey included in project		A
* Integrate DNR inventory of conservation related properties into SHPO inventory	in-house	B
* Assess SHPO inventory and assign historic context and property types to forms		C
* Evaluate Lake Superior shipping industry within/ this context in completion of LCMR historic shipwrecks project	FY90-93	A

TREATMENT:

* Work with MHS publications to publish photos from Finnish log buildings survey	in-house	A
* Publish brochure featuring NR properties associated with context and coordinate with Forest History Center		B
* Record Shingle Mill in Itasca County		