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# **SAWMILL TOWNS: Work, Community Life, and Industrial Development in the Pineywoods of Louisiana and the New South**



**JAMES P. BARNETT AND EVERETT W. LUECK**

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**SAWMILL TOWNS:**  
**Work, Community Life, and Industrial**  
**Development in the Pineywoods of**  
**Louisiana and the New South**

**James P. Barnett and Everett W. Lueck**

# ABSTRACT

Lumbering of massive areas of old-growth forests provided a means to stabilize the economy of the South devastated by the Civil War. During the early 20th century, thousands of sawmill towns were created to meet the needs of the lumber industry and to provide employment for logging and mill workers. Primarily Whites and Blacks, but also other races and ethnic groups, came into sawmill towns and a new industrial society began to be developed. These sawmill towns provided employment in logging and milling crews, housing, medical care, education through the 7th grade, churches, and a commissary where food and other supplies to support the family could be purchased. Although life was hard, housing segregated, and a town's existence limited by the time needed to cut the available timber, workers lived and worked together, developing skills and building confidence that could be applied in other industrial positions. As difficult and short-lived as many of them were, sawmill towns were largely responsible for moving rural southern families from an agrarian to an industrial society. This document tells of how life in these sawmill towns changed the society and culture of the South.

**Keywords:** Forest products, industrialization, longleaf pine, lumbering practices, timber workers.

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# PREFACE

FOLLOWING THE END OF THE CIVIL WAR IN 1865, THE ECONOMY of the United States was in shambles and suffering from major war debt. The situation in the South was especially bad: most of the fighting had occurred on southern soil. Much of the South's agrarian economy had been seriously affected. Little industrialization had occurred in the South, particularly in the more western areas, so there was a desperate need for employment opportunities.

To address this problem, Congress voted to make millions of acres containing virgin timber in five States in the western part of the South available for homesteading (Lanza 1990). After this approach failed, in 1876 Congress opened about 40 million acres of federally owned land—much of which was still covered in virgin forests—for sale at a minimum price of \$1.25 per acre (Gates 1940). While some of the resulting large purchases were by lumbermen from the North planning to relocate their mills, most of these large sales were to speculators planning to hold the land and sell later when the stumpage value increased.

Lumbering soon became the economic driver for growing the South's economy. For example, between 1880 and 1910, the population of Louisiana increased about 80 percent, and wage earners in the lumber-related industries increased fortyfold. Though little of the valuable timberland had been acquired by the residents of the region, residents and governments did benefit from millions of dollars that were invested in lumber manufacturing facilities and infrastructure built to move logs to mills and lumber to markets. While the best paying jobs seldom went to local workers since the out-of-state mill owners usually brought their skilled craftsmen and supervisory personnel with them to build and operate their new facilities (Carter and Barnett 2017), lumbering provided employment for people regardless of race. "Even though the hours of work were long, and the wages were small when compared to the profits made...having a job in order to feed and clothe a family was the important thing" (Brister 1968).

Indeed, it was transformative. Lumbering prepared them to move into the mainstream of an industrial society.

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# INTRODUCTION

DURING THE MID- TO LATE 19TH CENTURY, THE OLD-GROWTH FORESTS OF the Northeast and Midwest were nearly exhausted of their best timber. Lumbermen began to realize that they would have to find other areas of timber if they were to supply the lumber needed for America's westward expansion. To further complicate the situation, the U.S. economy was reeling from the effects of the Civil War. The South was particularly decimated because the war was fought primarily on its soil, much of its infrastructure was destroyed, and the Black population especially needed employment opportunities after being freed from slavery.

Congress sought a means to promote the economy and relieve the suffering of people, especially in the war-torn regions of the South. Recognizing that the Federal Government had 46 million acres of public domain lands in five Southern States—Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Louisiana, and Mississippi—Congress passed the Southern Homestead Act of 1866 with the hope of providing a pathway to land ownership and improving the economy of the region (Gates 1979, Lanza 1990). This law enabled freed Blacks and Whites loyal to the Union to apply for up to 80 acres of land to homestead in these States. However, implementation of the Southern Homestead Act was beset with problems, even after the restrictions against former Confederates were lifted in 1867 (Gates 1940). The greatest problem was that most of the available land was ill-suited for row-crop agriculture as the best agricultural land had been removed from the public domain by colonial land grants and nearly 100 years of land sales and grants to States and individuals.

In 1876, the Southern Homestead Act was repealed, and the Federal land was offered for sale to disappointing auction results (Carter and Barnett 2017). In 1880, the remaining 40+ million acres of public land were opened for sale at a minimum price of \$1.25 per acre. Much of this land was covered with heavy stands of old-growth longleaf pine (*Pinus palustris*), and land speculators or their agents from across the country flocked to the Western Gulf States where most of the best virgin forests remained. In Louisiana, where 44 percent of all large sales (5,000 acres or more) occurred, buyers from the North outnumbered buyers from the South by nearly five to one (Carter and Barnett 2017). The timberland was sold, and lumbermen immediately began

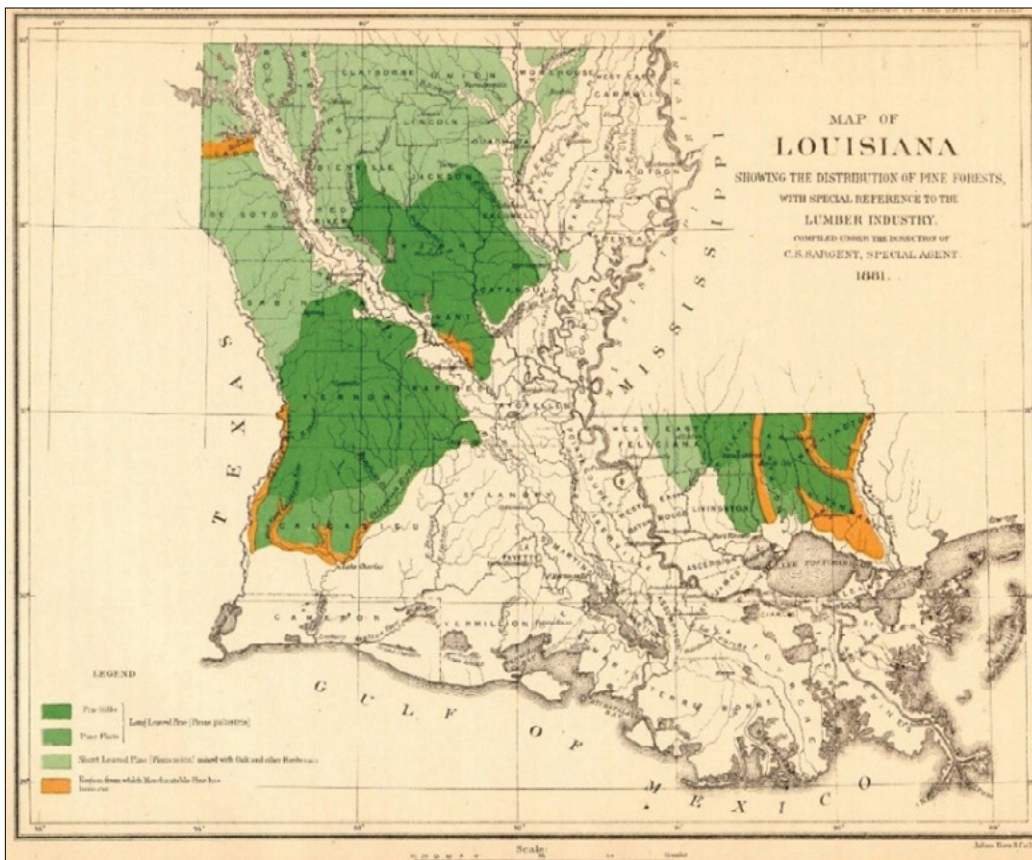
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 The tremendous development of lumber mills in the South between 1880 to 1920 resulted in what has been described as the "golden age of lumbering."  
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to establish sawmills to meet the Nation's demand for wood. Lumber from southern forests was shipped to support westward expansion and build growing American cities, whose expanding urban populations sought both grand Victorian mansions and modest bungalow homes.

The tremendous development of lumber mills in the South between 1880 to 1920 resulted in what has been described as the “golden age of lumbering” (Caldwell 1975) that helped drive the South's economy for decades. For example, nearly 65 percent of the population of Mississippi at one time depended upon the lumber industry. Throughout the South, the numbers of men employed by the lumber companies were so great that anything affecting their welfare touched either directly or indirectly the whole population (Hickman 1962). With some of the finest pines in the South, Louisiana especially benefited from this golden age. The vast virgin pine forests of the State's upland regions southwest and north of the Red River and in the Florida Parishes (parishes east of the Mississippi River) were mainly longleaf pine, often in pure, relatively dense stands (Mohr 1897).

Map of Louisiana by U.S. Department of the Interior (1883) illustrating the status of forested pine land in the State.



# HOW FORESTS HELPED TRANSFORM THE AGRARIAN SOUTH

**A naval stores operation in northern Florida in the 1920s. One worker is emptying a bucket of gum resin collected from the cups attached below the worked faces on the trees. Another is loading a barrel of resinous material on a wagon to take to the distillery. A woods rider is there to assure that procedures are followed.**

THE SOUTH'S LUMBERMEN FOUND THEMSELVES IN A MOST fortunate situation. Apparently limitless forests of some of the world's finest timber were at hand, and the demand for forest products was tremendous. The forests themselves were a logger's dream—clear and open—promising the cheapest and most rapid of logging operations. Weather rarely impeded cutting, and the flow of logs from forest to mill was limited only by the capacity of men and machines (Stokes 1957).

Before lumbering helped move the South from an agrarian to an industrial society, southern pine forests had long been exploited by the “naval stores” industry. Indeed, the first major



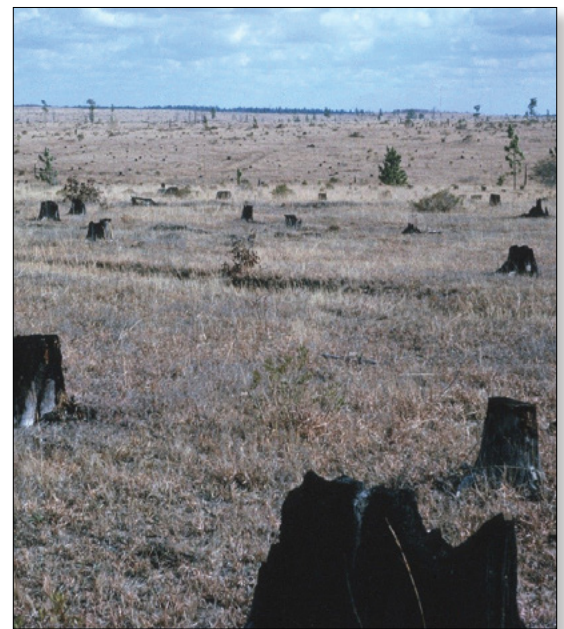
forest-based export products from America were obtained from the resinous tree gum of pines, which was distilled into products used to protect England's fleet of wooden ships. Prior to the Civil War, the naval stores industry flourished by using slaves to provide the tremendous amounts of manual labor required. These workers, mostly Black, were typically housed in makeshift camps located in the forest and had little contact with surrounding communities (Johnson and McDaniel 2006). After the Civil War, naval stores operations largely depended upon forced or coerced labor—typically either convicts leased to these companies or workers who had difficulty in paying off what they owed their employers (Outland 2004).

The practice of gum extraction—frequently called “turpentine” because one of the major products from this process was turpentine—proved to be very destructive to longleaf pine, the species favored for its heavy resin production. Over time, techniques for collecting gum in naval stores operations improved. In the early 1900s, a method of using a clay or metal cup attached below the face was developed that was more efficient and less damaging than the “box” that had previously been cut into the base of the tree (Ward 1949). The process was still very labor intensive: cuts to every tree to stimulate a fresh flow of gum were made almost weekly throughout the summer.

By the early 1800s, the longleaf forests of North Carolina were largely depleted by naval stores operations and the industry moved into South Carolina and then Georgia, Florida, and Alabama (Outland 2004). While some operations, including Louisiana's Great Southern Lumber Company and the Gulf Lumber Company, turpentine some of their forested areas before the pines were cut, gum naval stores operations were never a significant industry in the Western Gulf region. Turpentine was too labor intensive, and the value of longleaf lumber had increased dramatically, favoring lumbering over the more damaging practices of naval stores extraction. Turpentine also fell into disfavor because of how it conflicted with the development of “scientific” forestry. For instance, annual burning of the forest to facilitate turpentine operations limited natural regeneration by longleaf pine which, even though adapted to fire, can be killed by fire at the wrong time of year.

There came, however, a significant role for a different approach to naval stores extraction in the Western Gulf region. Following the aggressive harvesting practices used in this region,

**This vast stumpscape resulted from the aggressive harvesting of longleaf pine forests. The resinous nature of the stumps made an obstacle for the use of the land for almost any purpose. Woods naval stores provided a good solution. It became the basis for another harvest from the land as well as allowing other uses of the site.**



landscapes of highly resinous pine stumps remained from the cutover old growth. This resinous heartwood provided for a new industry—collecting, chipping, and distilling the stumps into numerous naval stores products (Barnett 2019).

Wood naval stores operations produced chemicals much more efficiently than turpentine, hastening the decline of the gum naval stores industry. The wood naval stores industry also did not rely on intensive amounts of labor but rather on heavy mechanization and a small number of well-trained technicians. Wood naval stores operations not only provided some income to the landowner after the timber was harvested, but it also removed the resinous stumps from the land that were nearly impervious to natural decay or fire. This made the land useful for other purposes (Barnett 2006), and thus fit the move toward a more industrial-based economy.

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Though important, wood naval stores activity was eventually dwarfed by lumbering, which became the most important industry in the pineywoods of the South.

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Though important, wood naval stores activity was eventually dwarfed by lumbering, which became the most important industry in the pineywoods of the South, capturing “...the full scope of economic change in the New South, its limitations as well as its impact” (Ayers 1992). Wright (1986) believed that scholars have largely ignored the role of the rural-based southern timber industry because it was of an extractive and therefore transient nature in most areas, and consequently made no lasting contribution to local development. But, in a significant portion of the South, timber operations were—despite their mobility—the largest and most influential businesses for half a century (Outland 2004). According to Fickle (1980), the development of the southern lumber industry “...represents one phase, and an extremely important one, of the development of a major national industry.” Probably unappreciated by economists is the extent of the lumbering effort: thousands of sawmills were located across the South. According to one Federal report, across the South there were at least 7,300 mills cutting pine in 1907 (Steuart and others 1908). In Louisiana alone, 1,300 sawmills operated in the first quarter of the 20th century (Barnett and Carter 2017).

How did lumbering leave such a significant and lasting influence on the culture and economy of the South and move it into an industrial society? Understanding the development and application of the technology in the sawmill towns across the South—and the people who used it—is key. The pervasiveness of lumbering and milling during this period cannot be understated.

# THE CHANGING WORK ENVIRONMENT OF THE NEW SOUTH

THE TURN OF THE 20th CENTURY MARKS A BROAD, SYMBOLIC boundary between the old and the new eras in the history of the United States. Before 1900, the Nation was in an age of westward expansion and agricultural settlement, which transitioned into an era of industrial pioneering and transcontinental railroad development. By 1910, lumbering was America's largest manufacturing industry in terms of employment, with 700,000 workers (Smith 1986).

Regionally, the "New South" label was applied for this new period, and lumbering was becoming the most important industry in the rural South. Some historians maintain that both the natural and human resources of the South were deliberately exploited by outsiders, including northern capitalists, who owned most of the sawmills and timber (Hyman 2018). There are documented accounts of Black woods workers in Mississippi and White mill families in Texas who existed in squalor and peonage, forever in

The sawmill of the Great Southern Lumber Company in Bogalusa, LA, was the largest in the world in the early 20th century. The town was designed to continue to function after the mill closed. (Photo from Louisiana State University Archives)



debt to their employers (Fickle 1999, Smith 1986). Most owners of big mills only used the best quality timber, and they paid low wages for long days of hard work. Employees in the natural resource industries—lumbering, farming, and mining—were paid less than their manufacturing counterparts in the industries of the North. But ordinary workers in many other industries were also poorly paid and unable to buy many of the world's goods. The waste of wood and the harshness of life resulted more from the economics of lumber and the times in general than from the animus of most mill owners. Lumbering was feast or famine and competitive, even when it came to workers.

Lumbermen needed large numbers of workers to drive their operations and hired them regardless of race. When multiplied by the number of operations—in Louisiana and Texas alone, over 2,000 sawmills were established in the early 20th century—the logistical challenges of the industry were enormous. After all, even a moderate-sized mill required 300 to 400 workers, but many mills were larger and required thousands. Between the workers, their families, and supporting businesses, the population of a mill town would typically be several thousand individuals.

**The Great Southern (BELOW) and Gulf (NEXT PAGE) Lumber Companies were massive operations and were the largest sawmills in the world during the early 20th century.**

As examples, two of the largest sawmills in the world were constructed in Louisiana in the early 1900s: the Great Southern Lumber Company in Bogalusa and the Gulf Lumber Company at Fullerton. Each could cut nearly 1 million board feet of lumber



per day when in full operation, requiring the cutting and hauling of timber from about 60 acres for each mill every day (Barnett and Carter 2017). These mills, and most others, were located near their timber supply to minimize logging expenses and usually required considerable investments. Large investments in timberland required development of lumbering technology that could optimize financial returns. Both mills also required the latest in logging and milling technology and the development of a town to provide for their employees' needs for housing, schools, churches, and medical care.

It was not just the work environment that changed. The people who cut the virgin pine were in a state of transition out of the pioneer era of homesteading and subsistence farming. These were rugged men with little or no formal schooling, knowledgeable in the literature of the Bible and the mechanics of one-mule farming, content to accept hard work at minimum wages (Thomas 1986). The workforce was made up of rural uneducated Whites, newly arrived immigrants, Blacks (some of which had been freed slaves), and others who had been accustomed to little (Smith 2007). They became interested in more stable employment and became assimilated into sawmill life. Many found their life's work in sawmills, while others used them as a stopping place along the road to somewhere else, maybe to something better.

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The Great Southern Company and Gulf Lumber Company mills required the development of a town to provide for their employees' needs for housing, schools, churches, and medical care.  
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There have been many attempts to describe the working and living conditions in typical sawmill towns during the early 20th century. Lives in these towns were less than perfect. Maxwell and Baker (1983) observed conditions in an early sawmill:

*It devoured men, father and son; it ate up the forest; it transformed the countryside into a desert of sawdust dunes; it destroyed the tranquility of rural life; and finally, more often than not, it destroyed itself—by fire. Sawmill work offered long hours, low pay, little chance of advancement, an uncertain future, and, by the law of averages, a good chance of at least one serious injury.*

By 1927, more than 200,000 southern men considered lumber manufacturing their primary occupation, and two-thirds of these men were Black (Allen 1961). Whatever their origins, people began to see that sawmill work—for all its drawbacks—was better than trying to exist with hardscrabble lives in the forests or farms of this period. Most rural folk lived more by running “rooter hogs and woods cattle” on the surrounding free range than they did on farming cotton and corn. According to Sitton and Conrad (1998), they:

*...built log houses, covered them with hand-split boards, and chinked and daubed them with red clay. They built stick-and-daub chimneys. Fireplaces were for heating and cooking, and for light at night.... They cleared only as much land as they could work with one horse hooked to a Georgia stock or Kelly turning plow, enough land for a little cotton, a little corn—for a patch of sweet potatoes and black-eyed peas. Their cattle grazed on open range. So did the razorback hogs. There was elbowroom to spare. They had no wish to obliterate the wilderness.*

Coming from lives of abuse and forced servitude, the condition of Black families who migrated to the sawmill towns was even more desperate.

Hence, thousands of Whites and Blacks attracted by stable wages poured into the hastily constructed lumber towns. At first, they came for seasonal jobs to supplement their farm income. The promise of a \$1.50 cash wage for a working day of 11 hours proved irresistible, and the number of wage earners





increased by 202 percent in Louisiana and by 89 percent in Texas during the first decade of the 20th century (Green 1973). As Brister (1968) commented: “Even though the hours of work were long, and the wages were small when compared to the profits made...having a job in order to feed and clothe a family was the important thing.”

The industrial capitalism in the southern pine region challenged all the workers’ agrarian traditions, and the new order demanded conformity to rigorous and alien standards of time, work discipline, and social behavior. Families had to adapt to regular hours of work; men had to accept the tedium of routine, specialized tasks; and everyone had to learn the pitfalls as well as the pleasures of being in a cash-fueled economy with regular paydays (Smith 1986). While most farm families usually adjusted to work and life with a lumber company, they soon faced new challenges. For example, many sawmill operations soon depleted the timber needed to sustain lumber production, and the approach of the sawmill owners to address this concern affected the morale of the town’s workers.

**A typical pineywoods home in the early 20th century with a picket fence to protect its yard from roaming hogs and other animals. (Photo from The History Center’s online collections [[www.thehistorycenteronline.com](http://www.thehistorycenteronline.com)])**

# LOGGING AND MILLING TECHNOLOGY

THE SAWMILL ENVIRONMENT WAS INDUSTRIAL RATHER THAN agricultural, driven by the critical need to provide a consistent supply of timber to support a profitable operation. The woods-based part of the effort consisted of two separate phases. One phase, of course, was felling the trees and cutting the logs into the needed lengths. This was done by men called “flatheads” who felled and limbed the trees. The other critical phase was transporting the logs, which included skidding the logs to be loaded onto trains (or later trucks) and then hauling them to the mills.

## Tree Harvesting and Skidding

TREES WERE SELECTED, FELLED, SCALED, AND CUT TO transportable size by timber crews using cross-cut saws and axes. In addition to cutting tasks, forest workers transported logs, worked on roads, and set miles of ties for rail tracks. Crews of up to 40 to 60 men were supervised by a woods boss, known as the

Black woods workers unloading ties to extend railroad track into a new area of old-growth pines. (Photo from The History Center's online collections [www.thehistorycenteronline.com])



“bull of the woods.” This was the only phase of the lumbering operation which had not received some significant mechanization into the early 20th century. Conditions were grueling, with workers putting in 10-hour days on back-breaking tasks in the forests, often many miles from the mill.

Experienced loggers were experts at their trade, being able to notch, saw, and fell a tree with precision. Sitton and Conrad (1998) provide a vivid description of the work of tree fellers:

*...flatheads quickly moved into action. Each team carried an ax to “bed,” or notch, the tree trunk before felling, a six-foot Simon crosscut saw, a bottle of kerosene with a rag in the top (the kerosene to be used to lubricate the saw and reduce resin buildup), and steel wedges to drive behind the saw as it cut through the trunk. The lead flathead in each team swiftly picked out a tree and calculated where he wished it to fall based on the tree’s lean, the configuration of the branches at its top, the direction of the wind, and the planned sequence for felling nearby trees. Then bedded—V-notched—the trunk in the direction of the fall, and he and his partner bent over their saw. The flatheads were the champion athletes of the woods crew, and their rate of work set the speed for everyone else. The fellers were physically awesome men, most of them blacks.*

Journalist Max Bentley followed the flatheads and described their experiences (Sitton and Conrad 1998):

*Single file we started off, away from the cut-over land.... From a veritable no-man’s-land we eagerly turned our faces to the deep woods crowding out to meet us.... Ahead of us yet untouched, the great trees gave us welcome. Waving and rustling, nodding, and bending, they seemed to be beckoning us on. Any forest is always beautiful, and the pine forest is the most beautiful of all, but to catch the real majesty of big trees one should see them against the contrast of fallen trees—a background of destruction.*

Although the effectiveness of steam-powered skidders was initially praised, conservationists soon began to express concern about the condition the forest land left following their use. Once



Tree fellers, called flatheads, posing by a huge pine tree. Their task was a difficult one, and they faced long days of hard work. (Photo from The History Center’s online collections [[www.thehistorycenteronline.com](http://www.thehistorycenteronline.com)]).



**A Great Southern Lumber Company Clyde skidder with employees needed to operate the skidder and man the cables that pulled logs to the rail track for loading on log cars. These skidders could pull logs from 40 acres at one setting on the track. (Photo from Louisiana State University Archives**

felled, massive train-based skidders could pull logs from nearly 1,000 feet from four directions to the track. This equipment required a large team of men to operate it, and the work was dangerous. This kind of skidding operation destroyed the unmerchantable trees and left sites unable to be regenerated naturally. The soil, too, was furrowed and damaged for future use. Some companies stopped using them so that natural reforestation could occur, and, in some States, laws were passed to limit their use. But most of the laws were passed after the damage had been done.

The use of mules to drag the cut logs to the loading site was more widely employed in mountainous areas but was also favored by many smaller operations in the Coastal Plain (Chambers 1931). Men who drove the mules were called mule skimmers. Uncanny partnerships formed between the skimmer and his animals; mules learned to respond to oral commands like *gee* and *haw* for right and left, respectively. Mule skimmers claimed that mules were smarter, or perhaps less high-strung, than horses, and they were also more tolerant of injury. The mules intuitively adjusted to the use of the high-wheel cart or when logs were skidded with choker setters fastened to tongs.



Walker (1991) recalls:

*The melodious song of skinner could be heard, along with the crack of his whip, for miles as he alternately cursed and praised his team. The whip, like the song, was never stilled. Yet the thong seldom touched the animal's hide, the beast was not pained, for the whip was tipped with soft cotton rope. Toward day's end, one heard the song of the mule skinner. The crack of this whip coupled with the groans of his animals as the evening hush fell over the forest gave the air of the fading light an unforgettably eerie sound.*

In the lower South, good mule skimmers were almost always Black men. It seemed the mules and mule skimmers loved each other, understood each other, and respected each other. The pride of the man was shown in the care of his animals.

As railroad logging shifted to the use of trucks in the 1950s, the need for animals in the woods continued. Skimmers used the mules to skid logs to the loading site and cross-haul the logs up and onto truck trailers. Whether skidded by steam engines or pulled by animals to the landing, rail-mounted log loaders lifted and placed the logs onto rail cars for transport to the sawmill.

**TOP:** Mules being used to skid logs to the loading site using a high-wheel cart. These began to replace the huge steam-powered rail skidders and caused less damage to the remaining trees and soil. (Photo from The History Center's online collections [[www.thehistorycenteronline.com](http://www.thehistorycenteronline.com)])

**BOTTOM:** Mule skinner with his team of mules skidding logs with tongs attached to the log. Skidding with mules was the most common method in hilly or mountainous areas.



Log train of the Southern Pine Lumber Company of eastern Texas on the way to the sawmill at Lufkin. (Photo from The History Center's online collections [[www.thehistorycenteronline.com](http://www.thehistorycenteronline.com)])

## Rail Transportation

IT WAS THE WIDESPREAD INTRODUCTION OF RAILROADS THAT made the South's golden age of lumbering possible. Railroads allowed for the building of the large sawmills that dominated the industry by the early 1900s, and by opening great areas of previously inaccessible timberland to lumber companies, provided the means to supply these increasingly voracious mills. They also proved to be a large distributor of lumber to distant markets.

By 1905, most sawmills cutting more than 25,000 board feet per day developed their own railroads. These rail lines, often using moveable dummy or tram lines, ran steel rails for up to 30 or more miles into the virgin forests. The steam-powered technologies of classic tramway logging—skidders, loaders, locomotives, and mill engines—had reached a great efficiency, powered by the combustion of the forest itself.

Railways provided mill owners additional options. For example, in 1913, Caleb T. (C.T.) and Stamps Crowell purchased a tract of timberland in central Louisiana that was too large to process at their mill at Long Leaf. The Crowells and Alexander

B. (A.B.) Spencer then formed the Meridian Lumber Company to build a mill and town (also named Meridian) to process this timber. In the early 1920s, Stamps Crowell put together a different large block of timberland along the west extension of the Red River and Gulf Railroad and established the logging camp of Sieper to harvest this timber. The logs were shipped over the Red River and Gulf Railroad to Meridian for processing, passing directly behind the Long Leaf mill on their way to Meridian. The mill at Meridian had the potential to produce 150,000 board feet of lumber per day.

Civil engineers, right-of-way crews, steel gangs, and logging crews dumped 20 flatcars of logs at a time, twice a day, into a mill's pond (Sitton and Conrad 1998). These ponds were vital to the mill's operation, often covering several acres and holding up to 4 million board feet of logs. The water provided ease of loading and unloading, reduced blue-stain fungus infection, preserved the logs from bark beetle attacks, and washed dirt and soil off the logs, thus reducing wear on the saws. From the pond, the logs were moved onto a conveyor chain and hauled to the mill log deck. If no pond was available, rail tracks were placed as a siding as close to the saws as possible.

**Great Southern Lumber Company workers moving logs from rail cars and dumping them into the mill pond. (Photo from Louisiana State University Archives)**

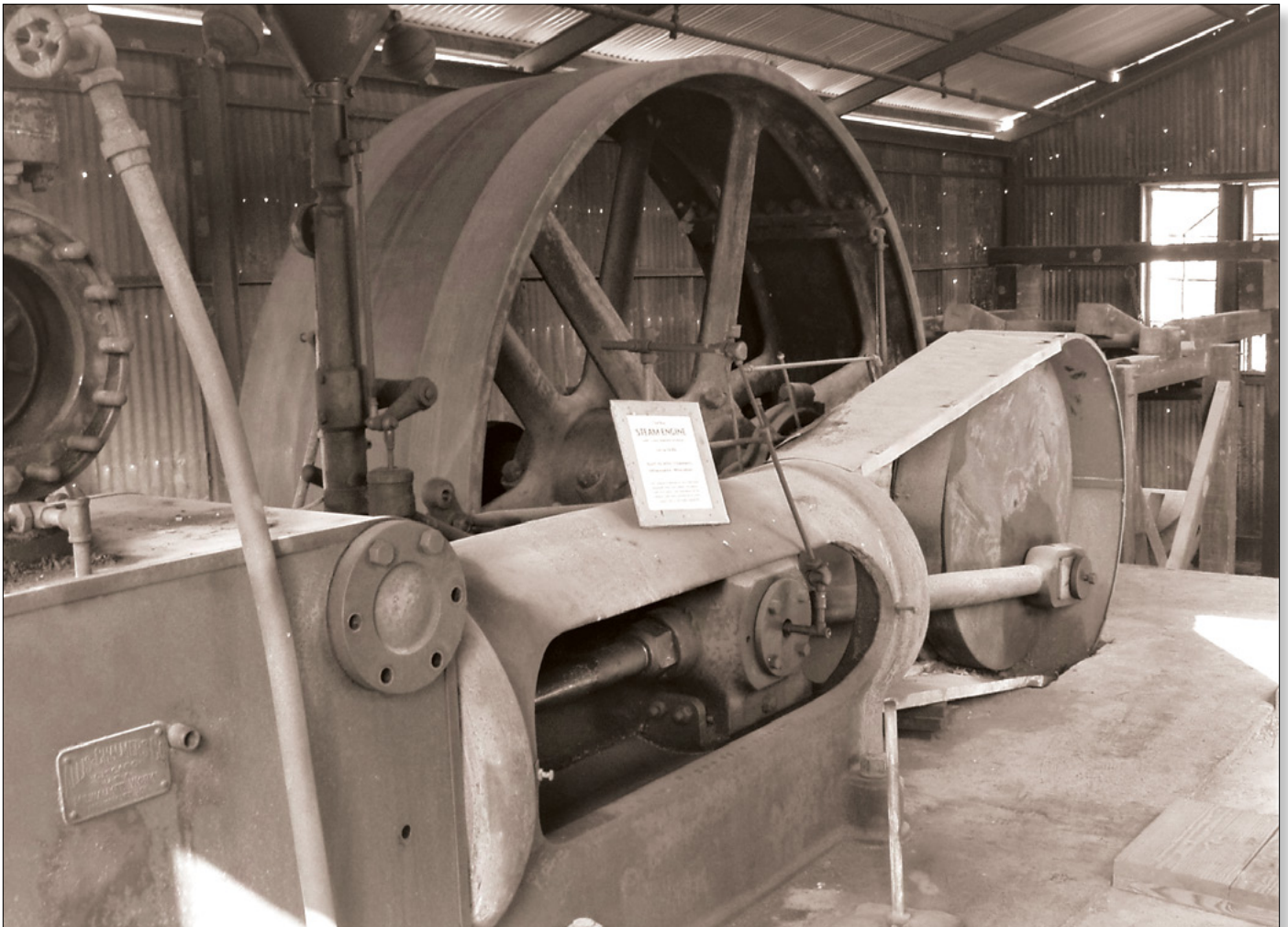


## Mill Operations

BEFORE THE CIVIL WAR, 60- AND 70-INCH CIRCULAR SAWS WERE the early standard, capable of making short work of the largest logs. During the 1880s, steam log-carriage machinery appeared, along with the first single-cutting band saws—continuous blades rotating on 8- or 9-foot wheels. A decade later, the band saws had become double-cutting, toothed on both edges, slicing a log from alternate ends on each swift to-and-fro of the steam carriage. The new saws were powered by Corliss steam engines of several hundred horsepower that turned massive flywheels up to 20 feet in diameter, which in turn ran belts to energize the saws and other machinery (Sitton and Conrad 1998).

Corliss steam engines were used to power sawmill plants. (Photo from Southern Forest Heritage Museum archives)

By the turn of the 20th century, most sawmills used similar technology and had the same hazardous working environments.





A typical large sawmill was a complex of two- or three-story buildings divided according to each step of the lumber-making operation. The saw machinery was usually located on the second floor, and the saw filer, who kept the saws sharpened, was on the third floor. On the second floor, the scaler measured and sized the log, using the cutoff saw to section the long timber into efficient cutting lengths. Moved via a steam-powered log kicker, logs were then sent to band saws, where the sawyer cut the log into boards. Once trimmed, the lumber was transported into the yard to dry and cure before it was finally sent to the planer mill for final processing.

Behind the noise and seeming chaos of an operating sawmill, a massive teamwork of men and machines was required. According to the editor of a 1902 issue of *American Lumberman* (Sitton and Conrad 1998):

*A plant in full operation is a scene of apparently endless confusion. Men dart here and there; the creak of whirring belts and pulleys is lost in the sharper cry of the cutting machinery; conversation has been reduced to a sign manual. On closer inspection, however, it is found that the seeming confusion is in reality the working out of systematic order. Every man has a duty to perform and the work of most of the employees keeps them confined to narrow limits. The work of each man is separate and distinct, and yet the different parts are so closely related and are interdependent to such an extent that it is impossible for one or more to shirk their tasks without interfering with the work of others, and in this way they are closely bound together, one dependent upon the other for the prompt fulfillment of each duty as it comes to hand.*

Mills operated under the constant threat of destruction by fire. Smith (2007) reported that all was “Camelot” at Meridian, LA, until the sawmill burned in April of 1928. With the total loss of the Meridian mill, the employees at Meridian were preparing to suffer the same fate as other lumber workers after a mill fire. The family mill owners had other ideas, as many of the Meridian workers had moved there from Long Leaf and were long-time employees. A decision to merge Meridian workers with those at a different company mill in Alco would eventually lead to an episode of labor strife, another concern of lumbermen.



Typically, on the third floor of the mill was the area for the saw filer to use for sharpening the band saws. The filer was one of the highest paid employees of the mill. His effectiveness was essential in maintaining the productivity of the sawmill. (Photo from The History Center’s online collections [www.thehistorycenteronline.com])



The mill carriage moves back and forth to carry logs to the band saw to be cut into lumber. A worker rides the carriage to move the log into position for cutting. The sawyer sitting near the large saw signals the settings that will determine the size of boards to be cut. (Photo from The History Center’s online collections [www.thehistorycenteronline.com])



Meridian Lumber Company locomotive #303 transporting logs to the sawmills located at Alco and Long Leaf, LA. Note the tender is loaded with lighter pine to fuel the engine's boiler.

## Labor Relations

THE LOGGERS AND THE SAWMILL WORKERS OF THE TIME LIVED in a subsistence economy and a company-oriented world. Most workers' circles of experience were restricted to other lumber companies and the thin, poor farms of the surrounding area, where life was difficult and prospects were even less promising than those of the mills. Most workers were content to "get along" and rise slowly in the hierarchy of lesser managerial positions, and to trust that the company would help them if they were laid up by injury or illness. Through all their labors, a strong, professional pride in their work was evident, a kind of exultation that they were part of a demanding and dangerous industry. The great majority of workers liked their jobs. They were loggers and sawmill men by choice, and they would not willingly exchange their life for any other (Maxwell and Baker 1983).

However, mill worker life was not easy and not everything went smoothly. The repetitive nature of the jobs caused worker frustration, and most timber workers in the South were drastically underpaid when the profits of the mill owners were considered. In many mills, the owners maximized their profits on the backs of the workers and set up difficult working and living conditions. Sitton and Conrad (1998) noted, "Where the men were reasonably

satisfied, labor trouble didn't happen. The main trouble was in those mills whose owners were absent and had superintendents looking after them and wanted their profits maximized."

By the early 1900s, the harsh working conditions—described as “feudal” in some company towns (Creel 1915)—led to worker unrest. For example, Federal agents investigated serious worker abuses by companies such as the Kirby Lumber Company, which owned 14 mill towns in eastern Texas, and reported “as all the inhabitants are economically and territorially dependent upon the corporation, every vital activity in the community can be dominated by it” (Sitton and Conrad 1998). Attempts to correct this imbalance began with efforts to unionize workers in the southern sawmills in eastern Texas and western Louisiana during 1910 to 1913 (Maroney 2010). It was in this area along the Sabine River where sawmill workers typically received the lowest wages in the region for their work.

Unions grew out of discontent on the part of sawmill workers and poor farmers—sharecroppers and tenant farmers—who worked in the mills on a seasonal basis. Because many sawmill workers were recent farm migrants, they retained agrarian work habits longer than most new industrial workers and unconsciously drew upon these older ways to resist industrial discipline. Low pay and limited (if any) other benefits, long hours, dangerous working conditions, and poor housing and other complaints typical of company towns dominated the workers' everyday lives. How employees were paid varied by company and time of the century. Early in the 20th century, sawmill workers were typically paid in scrip or tokens. These could be redeemed at full value in the company commissary but were discounted 10 to 20 percent if used in town or city stores beyond the company's control. Eventually, this practice was outlawed, and paying employees in cash became widely accepted by companies.

Labor conditions further degraded with the rapid depletion of the yellow pine stands after 1900. Worker reactions to sudden and sometimes unannounced pay cuts and irregular paydays led to sporadic work stoppages in the Texas-Louisiana pine region from 1902 to 1907, but these early labor efforts suffered from a lack of effective leadership. Labor disruptions led to the 1906 formation of the Southern Lumber Operators' Association (SLOA), whose primary concern was to prevent organized labor from gaining any foothold in the area's lumber mills (Green 1973). After 1907, company actions continued to result in worker frustration and occasional resistance. By the winter of 1910, sawmill workers



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 at their mills.  
 •••••

responded to a call to address employer regimentation of their lives in what one historian described as “a radical, collective response to industrial capitalism” (Maroney 2010).

The first local of the Brotherhood of Timber Workers (BTW) was organized at Carson, LA, in December 1910; others in eastern Texas and western Louisiana soon followed. Delegates from these locals met in Alexandria, LA, in June 1911 and formally established the union. The BTW’s constitution espoused moderation, listed employer abuses, and stated willingness to meet with employers to discuss employee concerns at any time. In addition, the constitution welcomed Black members and women (though few women worked in the mills, mostly in peripheral jobs) as well as those performing any sawmill job. The document also demanded union recognition, a just consideration of workers’ grievances, and a living wage.

In response, the SLOA characterized the BTW as “socialistic” and “anarchistic” and imposed a lockout of “infected” mills with the purpose of destroying the union (Green 1973). However, C.B. Sweet, of the Long-Bell Lumber Company mills, declared his workers to be “loyal” and threatened to ignore the lockout. This lack of solidarity among operators resulted in a meeting in which the SLOA agreed to impose “yellow dog” contracts on existing and new employees to determine their status. These contracts required employees to sign documents stating that they were not and would not become members of the BTW. Non-signers were dismissed and blacklisted. “Infected” mills would close indefinitely on August 7, 1911.

The union’s influence, however, continued to grow, and the SLOA suffered another severe setback when Sam Park of the American Lumber Company at Merryville, LA, broke ranks by signing a contract with the BTW, thereby keeping his mill open. Subsequently, an intensified anti-union campaign by the SLOA which featured the use of lockouts, strikebreakers protected by detectives from Burns and Pinkerton security agencies, and labor spies throughout the remainder of 1911 failed to break the Brotherhood.

In addition to support from Black workers, the BTW depended upon resistance from farmers and townspeople. Local communities often supported efforts to establish unions at their mills. For instance, merchants and leaders of Merryville supported the creation of a union to partially offset the overbearing company owners and managers (Green 1973). The timber workers were able to resist corporate power so long as they enjoyed

substantial community support. When the corporations polarized their company towns by coercing merchants, professionals, and other union allies, the strikers were isolated and easily defeated.

Gradually, however, the cumulative effects of the lockouts and blacklists, followed by a hard winter in 1911–1912, began to take their toll. The BTW’s effectiveness was over by the spring of 1913, although a few holdouts remained until early 1916 (Maroney 2010). The SLOA had effectively destroyed the laborers’ efforts to establish unions in southern sawmills. Another attempt to organize in other southern sawmills emerged but failed several years later (Hyman 2012), and a decade after that an effort to organize at the Great Southern Lumber Company in Bogalusa followed a serious work dispute when southern White union members took up arms and laid down their lives to defend fellow Black union members (Rutkow 2012). It is noteworthy that in efforts to unionize sawmill workers, Black, White, and women employees supported each other’s causes and joined the same union (Green 1973). Although mill towns were segregated, the workers had learned to live and work together in a unified spirit.

Ultimately frustrated in their efforts, workers in many of the more feudal mill towns confronted the dissatisfaction in the only way they could—by “voting with their feet” for operations a few miles down the railroad. A survey in 1923 of 10 eastern Texas mills reported astonishing rates of worker mobility—an average monthly turnover of 16.8 percent for Anglo-Americans, 13.5 percent for African Americans, and 14.1 percent for Mexicans (Sitton and Conrad 1998).

Not all workers wanted to organize. As noted in the efforts to unionize mill workers in the western Louisiana and eastern Texas region, the large Long-Bell Lumber Company with four mills and the smaller American Lumber Company mill both had workers that were not interested in joining unions. This does not mean that there weren’t labor problems in many sawmills.

The last company-built sawmill town in Louisiana, Alco, presents an example of the labor discontent from management decisions. After several moves following cutting out of timber near Pineville and Glenmora, the Alexandria Lumber Company built a new mill in 1921 on the Red River and Gulf Railroad east of Kurthwood. The mill at Alco was very modern for its time and capable of cutting 150,000 board feet per day. The Alexandria Lumber Company operation was run by group of lumbermen (Stamps Crowell, W.D. Wadley, J.K. Wadley, and C.T. Crowell), who purchased the Ed Rand Lumber Company in Pineville, LA,



In efforts to unionize sawmill workers, Black, White, and women employees supported each other’s causes and joined the same union.



This is one of a few known photos of a portion of the Alco, LA, sawmill complex taken in the late 1930s. The mill closed in 1945.



in 1906 using an insurance settlement they received following the great San Francisco earthquake that destroyed the Empire Redwood Company mill at Gualala, CA, owned by C.T. Crowell and the Wadley brothers.

By 1928, the Alco mill had processed about 75 percent of its timber in the Alco area. When the Crowell family's Meridian mill burned, that company's timber was actually closer to the Alco mill, so the Crowells decided to purchase the Wadley interests in the Alexandria Lumber Company and merge these mills' personnel at Alco, with the Meridian employees having seniority over the Alco employees. Moving the employees from Meridian to Alco was not a pleasant task. The move was gradual so the Alco workers would have time to find other employment. Obviously, the Alco workers did not welcome the newcomers with open arms, and some Meridian workers chose not to move. It took months before conditions improved and new friendships began to develop.

Because of some Black worker complaints after being released from employment when Meridian workers were transferred to Alco (Lueck 2018), the U.S. Bureau of Labor sent an agent to investigate worker relations at the sawmill. While his report documented all worker wages, living quarters and working conditions, treatment of Black workers by the company officials and foremen, prices paid at the commissary, and frequency of worker payment, the investigator reported no complaints from the Black workers (U.S. Bureau of Labor 1936). In fact, there was praise for the company. All indicated they were paid a fair wage, were treated well by the company, living conditions



were good, and the management did not tolerate abuse of Black workers. The investigator was also impressed with the significant numbers of Black-owned automobiles. When the mill at Alco shut down in 1945, some of the mill workers who originally worked at Meridian were transferred back to Long Leaf where they continued to be employed.

It is unfair to characterize all mill owners as abusive of their employees, or to say workers of large mills were treated differently from those of smaller ones. Competition for labor during most of this period deterred most lumbermen from subjecting workers to intolerable living conditions. Although the mill owner was as much like an overlord as the feudal baron of old, there is little evidence to indicate that lumbermen ever greatly abused the enormous power that was theirs in sawmill towns. The lumberman did not want servile workers, for he depended upon them for a livelihood (Hickman 1962).

So perhaps it is not surprising that, despite the inequities of sawmill life endured by the workers, veteran employees usually had high praise for the mill owners, indicating the owners' regard for personal relationships with their employees and their

**Machine shops operated in all sawmills to maintain their mill and railroad equipment. In these shops, men were trained to operate the latest in mechanical wood- and metal-working equipment. (Photo from The History Center's online collections [www.thehistorycenteronline.com])**

families. The entrepreneurs created an industry, provided jobs, built homes, and organized a stable society where none had existed. In comparison with rural villages and the red clay and sandy soil farms in the pineywoods, the standards of wages, hours of work, housing, and opportunities for advancement were more favorable in company towns. In some towns, mill owners worked hard to forge deep bonds between the company and its workers. For example, during the Great Depression, the Southern Pine Lumber Company in Diboll, TX, was forced to sell about 100,000 acres for less than \$3.00 an acre to keep its sawmill operating. Many Diboll employees repaid the loyalty the company had shown them by lending the company small sums of money they had managed to save.

### Cut-Out and Get-Out Practices

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The rapidity with which lumbering had entered Louisiana and Texas was matched by the speed of its departure.

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A BIG MILL TYPICALLY HAD ENOUGH TIMBER TO OPERATE ABOUT 20 years, which was the general expectation for the length of time it took to recoup its construction cost and ensure a profit to the owners. After 20 years, the mill was paid for, the machinery was worn out, the timber was all cut, and everybody got out—hence the term “cut out and get out” (Smith 1986). Unfortunately, loyalty to their workers was often a low priority for many timber operations. For these lumbermen, the question was not whether to cut out and get out, but only how fast to run the sawmill through the available old-growth timber.

The rapidity with which lumbering had entered Louisiana and Texas was matched by the speed of its departure. The logging railroads were taken up, the mills dismantled, and the towns deserted. For example, the Gulf Lumber Company mill was closed and scrapped as soon as all the timber was harvested, and then Fullerton ceased to exist. Along one railroad line in western Louisiana, 23 sawmills, each cutting more than 100,000 board feet per day, went out of existence within 5 years (Stokes 1954). Reflecting on the status of lumbering, Forbes (1923) concluded:

*No wonder the hotel is empty, the bank closed, the stores out of business: for on the other side of the railroad, down by the wide pond that held beautiful, fine-grained logs of longleaf pine, the big sawmill that for twenty-years had been the pulsing heart of this town was already sagging on its foundation, its boilers dead, its deck stripped of all removable machinery. Within the town,*

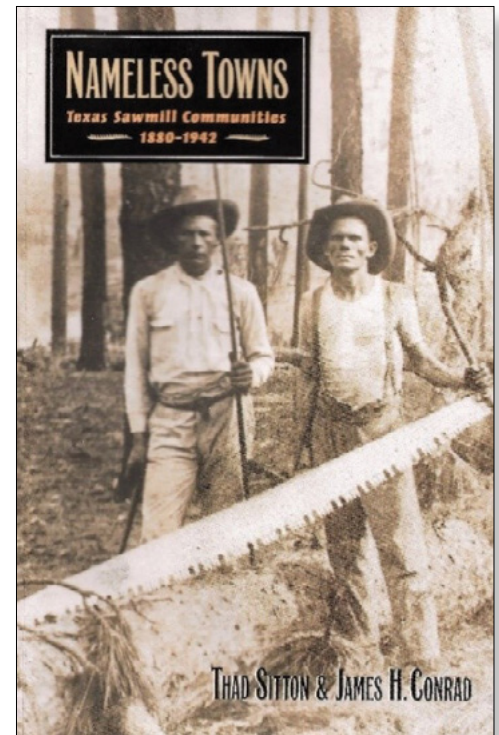


*grass was beginning to grow in middle of every street, and broken window lights bespoke deserted houses. In county and county across the South the pinewoods have passed away. Their villages are Nameless Towns, their monuments huge piles of saw dust, their epitaph: The mill cut out.*

Most companies saw no alternative to this approach. Lumbermen saw little value in the land and dismissed the potential of future forests because the pines they were harvesting were 150 to 250 years old. How could growing more trees be considered economical? Even if lumbermen considered the prospects of growing more trees in 40 or 50 years, there was no assurance that they would live to see the trees turned into profit. Furthermore, in most Southern States, the tax liability was the same after the trees were harvested as it was before, so much of the cutover land was abandoned after clearing to avoid paying taxes.

For years, companies had tried to sell their cutover land for agricultural purposes, but farmers quickly learned that pine lands were generally unsuited for growing crops. When the Southern Pine Association cosponsored a “Cut-Over Land Conference of the South” in New Orleans in 1917, it was estimated that southern lumber companies owned 76 million acres of cutover timberland. At this conference, held to discuss the problem of cutover lands, the possibility of reforestation was scarcely considered, so unattractive and economically infeasible did it seem (Barnett and Carter 2017).

Not every lumberman shared that image. Several years earlier, Henry Hardtner of Louisiana’s Urania Lumber Company began promoting the reforestation of cutover land and growing another crop of trees. Many lumbermen called him a fool, but in 1920 the manager of the Great Southern Lumber Company at Bogalusa accepted Hardtner’s ideas and began a nursery to grow pine seedlings to plant on their cutover land (Barnett and Carter 2017). Slowly, reforestation practices began to be accepted by other lumber companies. The companies that survived the 1920s did so by either having large acreages of timberland, practicing conservative harvesting operations, or seeing the potential of growing another crop of trees by protecting natural pine regeneration. They faced, however, another major dilemma in the early 1930s: the Great Depression.



The cover of the Sitton and Conrad (1998) book, *Nameless Towns: Texas Sawmill Communities, 1880–1942*.

## Influence of the Great Depression

THE GREAT DEPRESSION CAUSED A LACK OF MARKETS FOR production that seriously impacted lumber companies. Many owners faced with declining lumber prices and exhausted resources simply closed their mills and abandoned their land. Southern Pine Lumber Company founder Tom Temple's son, Arthur Temple, Sr., had to deal with the effects of the Depression. His son, Arthur, Jr., recounted an example of a problem faced by the company (Sitton and Conrad 1998):

*We had a terrible time, and the people that worked for us had a terrible time during the Depression. Dad never slept. For two or three years he almost didn't sleep at all because he was worried sick about the debt that had been created by a two-million-dollar expansion. Dad's entire role was to pay off that debt. At one point, the Southern Pine's bankers held a key meeting to determine if they would seize control of the company for the missing payments...and the matter hung on a fine edge until one bank official sarcastically asked the others, 'do any of you know how to run a sawmill'? Obviously, none of them did, and by that narrow margin Southern Pine survived the Depression.*

Tom Temple, president of the Southern Pine Lumber Company located at Diboll, TX, in his company's office. (Photo from The History Center's online collections [[www.thehistorycenteronline.com](http://www.thehistorycenteronline.com)])



While genuine concern for employee welfare motivated company actions in the Depression years, lumbermen also realized that if they wanted to keep their companies open, they needed to keep their skilled workers. Looking back, one owner commented: “It was rough back in those days...but the company was really good to employees. We wanted them to stay, because we knew what sawmill hands were back in those days, and those we had were already trained.... The company did all it could to hold their people together” (Sitton and Conrad 1998). So, these companies aided their workers in various ways, from providing housing without charge to clearing land for vegetable gardens to providing free medical care and even offering company credit. Many operated on a reduced schedule—maybe 2 or 3 days a week. For example, at one mill, “They had a man who saw who had the most children, and that man got the most money. They just tried to keep the people alive.” At another (Sitton and Conrad 1998):

*They tried to give everybody one workday a week, so they'd have a little money. People raised most of what they ate. They had ragged and patched clothes, but everybody else did too; so, it didn't make any difference. There was a saying of Bob Wier, who was one of the owners of a mill. During the Depression, the saying was, In God we trust and Bob we must. Bob and Tom [his co-owner] took care of everybody.*

Companies who survived the Depression and had significant timber resources available to them were in a good position for the booming economy during and after World War II, with concurrent improvements in employee working and economic conditions as well.

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# LIFE IN LOGGING CAMPS AND SAWMILL TOWNS

LIVING CONDITIONS IN MOST EARLY LOGGING CAMPS AND MILL TOWNS were very austere. When men came to sawmill towns in the late 1800s or the early 1900s, they came desperate for work, so they accepted the often primitive living conditions of mill towns. They needed employment and the companies provided opportunities for them. The underlying principle might be fairly stated as, “the company does as it wishes, employees must accept circumstances or move on.” Within a few years, conditions generally improved, although camp communities and sawmill towns varied by the style of the owner and manager. Workers and their families moved into mill towns with standard hours of work, consistent paydays, supporting school and church organizations, medical care, and a commissary available where food and other materials could be purchased. This town structure began to bring the families, regardless of race, into a new society. These families learned of the educational value of schools for their children and the benefit of moral support from fellow church members.



Temporary camps and makeshift towns were built because it was cheaper and more efficient to build them than to transport workers back and forth from the mill town every night.



## Temporary Camps and Makeshift Towns

WHEN THE TREES TO BE CUT WERE A SIGNIFICANT DISTANCE from the mill, forests were dotted with temporary camps and makeshift towns for the workers in the woods. These front camps were built because it was cheaper and more efficient to build them than to transport the workers back and forth from the mill town every night. These camps, often constructed along rail trams, served as staging areas for workers who were cutting trees or where railroad ties were collected and shipped. Boxcars and tents typically served as housing for these forest workers. Depending upon the size of these camps and their distance from the mill, commissary facilities may have been provided (Darling and Bragg 2008).

In his book *Sawmill*, Smith (1986) documents interviews of workers in sawmill communities in the Ouachita Mountains of Arkansas. In one interview, Gertie Barnett describes the

experience of living in a movable sawmill shack. While their husbands were working, she said of herself and a neighbor lady on moving day:

*...we would move our furniture out in the yard, and me and her would tear down these houses. As we tore down the houses, we would mark what was the siding and what was the roof and everything...front and back and all, and they knew just exactly how to put it up.... The men came and loaded the house material on log wagons, set the furniture on top, tied it down, and moved all to the next sawmill set where late that afternoon they put up the houses...then they would move our furniture into the houses and be there that night...they could just throw it up right quick.*

One winter Barnett boarded some of the sawmill workers, feeding them at her table and making beds for them in their bunkhouse.

Portable one-room sawmill shacks being loaded on rail log cars for movement to a different sawmill camp site. If the mill did not have a steam-powered loader, the building would have been taken apart for moving and reassembled at the new site. (Photo from The History Center's online collections [[www.thehistorycenteronline.com](http://www.thehistorycenteronline.com)])



Each man paid her 75 cents a day for three meals and a bed. “That was the coldest winter I ever went through in a camp house,” she said.

*The green lumber of the house had shrunk so much that a dropped table knife could slip through one of the cracks in the floor. I could spill water on that floor, and it would freeze...be ice. To keep the place warm, we acquired a wood heating stove. That little King heater, you put pine knots in that thing, and it would get to dancing. Oh, it just danced....*



New workers fresh from tenant shacks in farming country tended to see nothing wrong with the towns’ unpainted board-and-batten houses, dirt streets, and simple amenities.



Not all woods camps were this austere, especially when compared to the unpleasant living conditions in many of the turpentine camps of the Southeast. The camps developed for the Gulf Lumber Company were more worker friendly. The housing for the operation was described in 1908 (Block 1996):

*...about 129 neat, new cottages were erected and nicely arranged for the operatives. A good commissary and meat market were also built. A pretentious church and schoolhouse, size 38 by 80 feet, was built and furnished for the colored people, and a public school has been granted by the parish board of education. In front of the commissary is a beautiful little depot on the Gulf and Sabine Railroad, where all trains stop. A building has been erected for a cold drink and ice cream stand for the benefit of the many colored people who are on the place....*

## Organized Towns

FEW TOWNS EVER EXISTED IN LOUISIANA AND THE MIDSOUTH with a greater singleness of function than those devoted to lumbering (Stokes 1954). Company towns varied in how well they were planned and how elaborate and well they were kept. What mill towns looked like also depended upon the eyes of their beholders. New workers fresh from tenant shacks in farming country tended to see nothing wrong with the towns’ unpainted board-and-batten houses, dirt streets, and simple amenities. To townspeople’s eyes, however, sawmill towns often seemed rough, primitive, and shabby places, eternally steeped in palls of their

own wood smoke, with hogs, cattle, chickens, and other domestic animals wandering around (Sitton and Conrad 1998).

But most sawmill towns were not “shanty-towns,” as lumber companies attempted to advance their good reputation and make them attractive. They were organized for a single function and consisted of a large mill plant, usually a mill pond, a company-owned commercial district, residential districts segregated by race, company housing of only a few types but in great numbers, and a railroad system linking the town to the forests (Stokes 1957). In many cases, the facilities and conveniences enjoyed by the inhabitants were superior to anything seen in the older local communities. For instance, Diboll, TX, was described as an up-

**The Crowell Lumber Company sawmill town at Long Leaf, LA, in the early 1950s. The commissary, offices, and administrative residences are on the bottom left. Surrounding the mill complex are the residential areas. (Photo from Southern Forest Heritage Museum archives)**



to-date lumber town in the early 20th century, with about 1,500 inhabitants, including 400 men working in the mill and 200 in two camps in the woods. It had a three-teacher school with 125 students, a brass band, a company baseball team, and a library built to house a gift of 5,000 volumes donated by the president of the lumber company (Allen 1961). Schools, medical care, the privilege of buying at the company commissary, electric lights and running water, and other advantages made life comparatively pleasant (Stokes 1954), although this was not always the case. Sitton and Conrad (1998) described working and living conditions in two sawmill towns in eastern Texas: the John H. Kirby mill town of Browndell and the Alexander Gilmer mill town of Remlig. Some remember Remlig as a “model community of white bungalows and swimming pools, where the manager of the commissary store walked out into the countryside every Sunday with a bag of groceries to give away to the poor, returning with a collection of wild plants to beautify his town,” but, “Conversely, former residents of nearby Browndell recalled it as a poorly constructed, badly maintained establishment of unpainted shacks and rough talking sawmill men.”

Residents in many of the towns worked to beautify their communities, including planting trees for shade and developing flower beds for rose gardens. The extent of these efforts was

Lumber stacked for drying prior to being milled for sale. A portion of the sawmill town is visible through the fog. (Photo from The History Center’s online collections [[www.thehistorycentronline.com](http://www.thehistorycentronline.com)])





significantly influenced by the mill owner, particularly if he and his family lived in the town. Larger companies even developed parks and recreational facilities such as swimming pools and tennis courts.

Other amenities followed. Professional people were hired in each town and charged with the task of keeping the labor force healthy, secure, and reasonably content. Doctors, teachers, ministers, barbers, and clerks were all at hand to serve the men who served the mills. The lumber company was responsible for the presence of all these people and automatically assumed the direction of many of their affairs. Babies were born in company hospitals, housewives bought their groceries at a company store, and families lived in houses built and owned by the company.

Usually in the center of the town was a small post office, a barber shop, and the doctor's office, which served as the town's drug dispensary. The doctor did much to keep the settlement functioning smoothly. He was paid a regular salary by the company, augmented by the fees collected from his patients. Such fees were small, typically \$1.50 per month per family or \$1.00 for a single employee. The doctor was on call for accidents in the mill, for illness for all workers and their families, and if the cases were very serious, such as a major accident, he arranged the transfer of patients to a hospital in a nearby town. The company covered the expenses, and the doctor would determine if an employee was unable to work and provide needed medication. The doctor lived in a comfortable, well-furnished house and might have an office in the home, although sometimes there was a separate structure that would serve as an office, clinic, and small hospital.

Perhaps most critical to the life of the mill town community was a commissary, a department store usually owned and operated by the company to provide workers with essential goods and services. The company store usually stood in the literal and figurative center of town: typically placed opposite the company offices, the commissary was the commercial heart of the community. The commissary was both a means of worker control as well as a significant profit center for the company. Its commissary usually had a distinctive appearance: a large two-story frame building with a false front that made it look even taller. In the front was a long, covered porch across the entire width of the building. Inside, the first floor was devoted to merchandise and an office, and the second floor was typically used for storage. Sometimes, the commissary building housed the barber and doctor.



Usually in the center of the town was a small post office, a barber shop, and the doctor's office, which served as the town's drug dispensary. The doctor did much to keep the settlement functioning smoothly.



Commissaries were superior to anything ordinarily found in the older towns of the area. Since mill workers and their families usually bought all their goods from the commissary, it carried nearly everything, easily shipped in by rail, and anything not in stock could be ordered. Without leaving the building, one might buy a pound of bacon, a box of shotgun shells, a gallon of kerosene, a rocking chair, and a pair of overalls. The frequent comment of visitors was one of surprise that such a large and varied stock could be found in such an isolated place.

For mill families without transportation, commissary wagon crews delivered groceries and animal food all day Saturday. Saturday was *the* big day at the commissaries when people shopped for the week, socialized, and took their time. "All the people would come with their wagons and go around behind the store where they had a blackjack thicket. They'd unhook their teams and stick a branch of leaves in their harness so it would keep the flies off them. They'd hang around the stores, and at about 4 PM, they'd get their week's supplies of groceries and go back home" (Sitton and Conrad 1998).

Interior of a commissary building showing the wide variety of stock carried for the mill workers and their families. (Photo from The History Center's online collections [www.thehistorycenteronline.com])

Separate schools with teachers for White and Black children were provided. Although relatively primitive, education was



important to all mill workers, and support for elementary schools was typically equivalent to that provided in nearby public schools, both in the curriculum and number of teachers provided (Smith 2007). Company-built school buildings, like most houses, were usually a simple structure. The furnishings—benches, desks, and chairs—were often homemade, and the blackboards were crude. Students attended typically through the 7th grade; for higher grades, the students had to attend neighboring high schools, and usually some provision for transportation to those schools was arranged. The teachers—one to four depending on the number of students—were paid by the company. A single teacher might hold classes for 25 or more students of ages 6 through 14. “Some of the children, now elderly, remember it as a good educational system: 6-year-olds learned by overhearing the lessons taught to the 12-year-olds” (Walker 1991). Both parents and students gathered at the school for programs including recitations by the students, spelling bees, and refreshments. The school building also served as a community center and meeting hall for discussions and questions of public interest, as well as a place of social gatherings (especially for smaller towns).



ABOVE: An abandoned Episcopal church in a sawmill town in eastern Texas. (Photo from The History Center's online collections [[www.thehistorycenteronline.com](http://www.thehistorycenteronline.com)]).

BELOW: A company school developed for the children of Black workers of an eastern Texas town. The building also served as a meeting place for community events. (Photo from The History Center's online collections [[www.thehistorycenteronline.com](http://www.thehistorycenteronline.com)]).



Mill owners, who encouraged church attendance, frequently contributed to the visiting ministers and sometimes built elaborate churches. The company usually built a union church as soon as the mill was completed. The Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians took turns holding services once a month. Frequently, the Baptists held Sunday School every Sunday morning and the Methodists every Sunday afternoon. Although everyone was welcome to attend, mostly women and children attended church services, especially Sunday School. In larger mills, churches of more than one denomination were provided for each race, but in smaller towns, some denominations sometimes had to find alternative places to worship. As an example, in Alco, LA, the company built a Baptist church, but the Methodists met in the town's school building.

The schools for students at Long Leaf, LA, served many purposes. Here, one serves as a voting location for Black families. (Courtesy photo from the Connie Chenevert Family Collection)

The churches not only met the spiritual needs of the town inhabitants, they also brought the community together by hosting events supporting the children and youth and by welcoming and engaging newcomers who came into the town.



## Worker Housing

UNLIKE THE MORE EPHEMERAL HOUSING IN THE LOGGING camps, homes in sawmill towns were more conventional and better constructed. Company houses were usually built of the best lumber available (and many are still in use today). An employee's house was typically box-shaped, with a single floor, three or four rooms with rather high ceilings, and front and rear porches. It was built of 12-inch box siding, had a metal or shingle roof, and stood about 2 feet above ground level. Company officials typically had more elaborate residences with more numerous rooms.

Stokes (1957) studied the type of house construction in 20 mill towns in central and southwestern Louisiana. The dwellings built by lumber companies were remarkable in their uniformity, and sometimes entire quarters were made up of largely identical houses, with four plans being particularly popular: pyramidal, bungalow, shotgun, and a log-pen derivative. Why certain floorplans were chosen is less obvious, but uniformity in style was in large part due to these homes being erected before most of the population arrived.

Pyramidal houses with roofs sloping upward at the same angle from all four sides toward a central point or short ridge were almost universal in Louisiana and have become known as "sawmill houses." Another common style, the bungalow, was two rooms wide and two or more rooms deep, with gables facing front and rear. Bungalows were cheaper to construct than pyramidal houses and lent themselves to considerable modification. The inexpensive and movable shotgun house had gables facing front and rear and was one room wide and two (or more) rooms deep. The log cabins of the early pineywoods settlers served as patterns for houses built in some company towns. These log pen-style dwellings had sideward-facing gables and were one or two rooms wide. An extension was usually built in the rear, often in the form of a lean-to.

Regardless of style, houses of the early period were seldom painted but were usually kept neat and in good repair. With most homes came some garden plots, where the families grew vegetables and raised small flocks of chickens for eggs and meat; wooden picket fences controlled the roaming of chickens and provided some privacy. Some families kept cows in common pastures. The houses were heated by wood-burning cook stoves in the kitchens and pot-bellied stoves in the living rooms. With their picket-fenced, bare-dirt yards and standard board-and-batten



Recent photos of a pyramidal roof-style sawmill town house in Elizabeth (TOP) and log pen-style houses (BOTTOM) in Litcher, LA. Many of the early 20th century sawmill houses are still in use today, some left in place and others moved to different locations (Fricker [N.d.]).



Some aspects of life at Long Leaf, LA. (Courtesy photo from the Connie Chenevert Family Collection)

construction, most company houses in mill towns approximated the “country rent-house standard” of the time, though they sometimes provided amenities that went beyond that: water faucets instead of well buckets, electric lights instead of kerosene lamps (Sitton and Conrad 1998), wood for heating and cooking, and areas to do the weekly washing of clothes. Hence, home life in company towns was comparatively comfortable.

While many aspects were similar, each company town had its own unique attributes. For instance, the residential section of Alco was laid out in blocks of alternating size lots with two houses on one block and three on the next block. Each lot was about an acre in size, large enough so each family could have a garden. Ice came in on the train once a week and was delivered to each home that had an “ice box.” The Alco commissary was well stocked, and a solicitor went to each house in the town every morning so the family could order the groceries needed for the meals that day (Robertson 2017). These were promptly delivered in time for preparation of dinner and supper, which was particularly important if the family did not have an ice box to keep meat and other perishables fresh.

Services such as water and power were often limited when houses were first constructed, but access improved over time. For example, when Long Leaf, LA, was built in the late 1800s, electricity and water were not provided to the houses. The company added electricity to homes in Long Leaf first because it was generated by the mill’s power plant. Water originally came from hand-dug wells, with each well typically serving a cluster of four houses. When Alco was built in 1921, water, electricity, and other amenities were provided to each new house (Robertson 2017), but indoor toilets were not: somewhere within the lot would be a privy for use by the family.

## Race and Society in Southern Mill Towns

SAWMILL TOWNS, AS PRIMITIVE SOME OF THEM WERE, GRADUALLY began to change the culture of the South. Notably, lumbering and sawmill employment helped bring people of different races and nationalities together in an industrial setting. Lumbermen needed a large source of labor, so most southern sawmill towns had racially mixed workforces. In many sawmills, most workers were African American. In Texas mills, Mexican employees were also a portion of the workforce. However, the opportunities for

finding employment and developing new skills in construction, mill work, and the railroad industry varied. Typically, Anglo-Americans dominated management and skilled blue-collar jobs at the mill and logging camps, though many others worked as day laborers. If present, Mexican and Irish nationals were assigned to work laying or repairing main-line rail track. Italians often worked as day laborers stacking lumber in the yard. African Americans labored in many lower-paying jobs in the woods and mill, some requiring a high level of skill, endurance, and nerve.

Following assignment to a position, an occupational caste system of great complexity was superimposed upon an underlying system of racial segregation to create an intricate social order. The strangeness of this complicated system is described by Miriam Havard Tatum in her memoir, *River Road* (Sitton and Conrad 1998):

*Watching the men leave the caboose in the early winter evenings for the office, commissary and their homes is a scene not forgotten for the many years since; slickers shining in the drizzling rain, boots sloshing through the puddles, and spurs of mule skinnners beating a rhythm with the whips flung over their shoulders. And that curious parting at the caboose door—the colored man to his quarters, the foreigner to his home down the tracks, and the white men to their separate streets, determined by the sawmill caste; the soft collar woods foreman to his isolated house, usually apart from the white-collar office workers and mill and planer mill foreman. Next to the boardwalk street where the office workers and local doctor lived, there was an unnamed street where lived the barber, the carpenter boss, the planer mill boss, the sawyer, and the store manager. In the streets next to this were homes where the teamsters, grade workers, and slip gang lived. Farther out were Sweet Gum Valley and Pumpkin Hill where the log cutters and the rest of the woods gang lived.*

African-American and Mexican workers moved into supervisory positions to a small extent, but this varied significantly by company. It is interesting to note that during the description of

the workforce desired by the Wier Long Leaf Lumber Company in eastern Texas, race seemed not to be an issue (Sitton and Conrad 1998):

*The Wier brothers, who founded the mill, had strong feelings about labor efficiency. They said that they were going to hire men and pay them more than anybody else, but they must be efficient. And they were because the mill was built efficiently, and the people were supervised efficiently. ...before we got the mill going, there was talk about how it was to be set up. We won't hire losers, and no drunks, because we're going to get a certain number of these anyway. We're going to hire high-class men, good moral men, men that you can induce to do something better. That will be the whole idea of this operation—so we can be proud to be a part of it.*

.....  
 With more stable employment and better conditions than agrarian servitude, Black families and communities began to move into southern sawmill towns.  
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With more stable employment and better conditions than agrarian servitude, Black families and communities began to move into southern sawmill towns. This began to transform town culture and cater to more age- and gender-diverse working-class communities. For instance, in rejecting their previous strategy of attracting single men for seasonal employment, the Great Southern Lumber Company began to support Blacks' attempts to build families and communities in the towns that surrounded its mills. As a pioneer in the shift towards both forest conservation and stabilized production, Great Southern Lumber Company also boasted that Blacks attended three schools and "churches of every denomination" in Bogalusa (Jones 2010). Company officials praised Black parents for sending their children to school, not only to "be taught to read and write, but to be clean, honest, respectful and better citizens for the communities in which they live" (Jones 2010).

Race relations in early sawmill towns were generally better than they were several decades later. During this early period, just having a job and being treated fairly was important. Black employees were essential to the operation of the sawmills, so they were generally well treated. Unfortunately, most other aspects of life sawmill towns in the Jim Crow South did not change and much of life remained segregated. With few exceptions, the people of different races rode to the woods together, worked together, and returned home together, but they did not eat, live, learn, or pray together. For example, housing

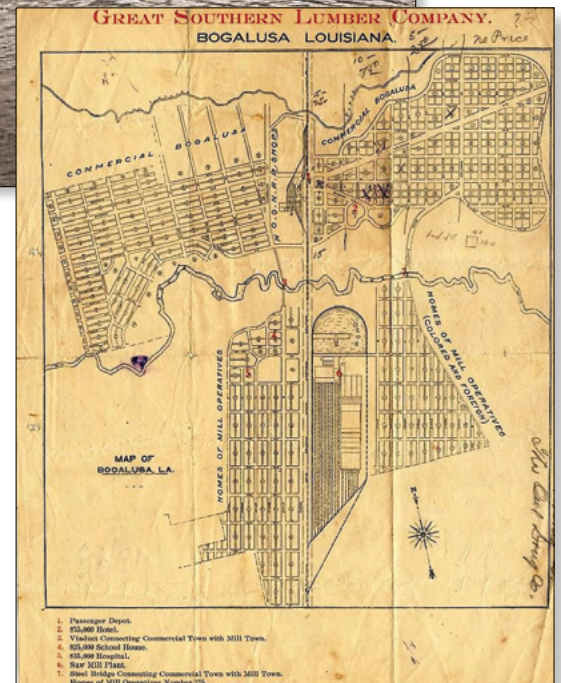




conditions were not equal. Residential districts in sawmill towns were segregated: typically those closer to the business area were occupied by Whites, and quarters for Blacks were nearer the mill. Houses in the Black neighborhoods were typically smaller—usually two or three rooms—and more often of the shotgun or log-pen style.

The Crowell & Spencer Lumber Company town of Long Leaf followed the segregated layout of most mill towns of the early 20th century, with houses for White families larger than those for Black ones. Interestingly, if a larger home was needed by a Black family in Long Leaf, the company would provide lumber for the occupant to add additional rooms. Only if another electrical light-drop (light bulb hanging from the ceiling) was added did the rental charge increase (Triplett 2018). This treatment left a favorable impression on many of these workers, including a man whose family worked at the Crowell & Spencer mill over two generations and who was quoted as saying, “I knew nothing about racism until I left the town of Long Leaf” (Triplett 2018).

There were numerous other examples of compassionate treatment of Black workers by management of some companies. For instance, when a new manager at the Alexandria Lumber



TOP: Sawmill workers moving logs to a position in a mill pond so they can be conveyed into the mill for sawing. (Photo from Crowell Family Collection, Southern Forest Heritage Museum)

BOTTOM: A map shows the layout for the town of Bogalusa, LA, with distribution of residential areas surrounding the mill complex (from Goodyear 1950).

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The migration of Blacks from the rural South to northern cities in the early 20th century has long been recognized, as they searched for better jobs and more political freedom.

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Company began to replace Black workers with White ones during the Great Depression, he was fired, and the Black workers were rehired (U.S. Bureau of Labor 1936). Another example was shown by Southern Pine Lumber Company's founder Tom Temple. Although Temple would poke into every nook and cranny of the operation in the quest of greater efficiency, he always shook hands with the Black employees when he walked around the plant (Sitton and Conrad 1998). There was mutual respect, and Temple's approach to race made a difference. When the first Black man in Diboll obtained an automobile, some people cautioned him not to drive it around town or park it downtown "because some white people were going to tear up the car and beat him up, too, for driving around his new car." He told them not to worry, saying, "Now, I got this car from Mr. Temple—Mr. Temple bought this car for me and told me to ride around wherever I wanted to in it. There is not anybody going to bother it." Nor did they (Sitton and Conrad 1998).

The migration of Blacks from the rural South to northern cities in the early 20th century has long been recognized, as they searched for better jobs and more political freedom. In the North, Black migrants faced more economic than political discrimination as they piled into neglected and overcrowded sections like Harlem to find chronic unemployment, poverty, and deep social division (Mohl 1985). Often unrecognized but worthy of note is the *westward* migration of Black timber workers from the South. The premium timber of northern Arizona and other parts of the West meant higher financial returns for the lumber companies and higher wages for the workers. Not surprisingly, then, between 1920 and 1960, many Black loggers and sawmill workers migrated from farms and sawmills in the South to new mill towns and logging camps being constructed across the Southwestern and Northwestern United States. These workers came from a pool of Black timber workers whose numbers rose from 83,000 in 1910 to 180,000 in 1950 (Smith 1986).

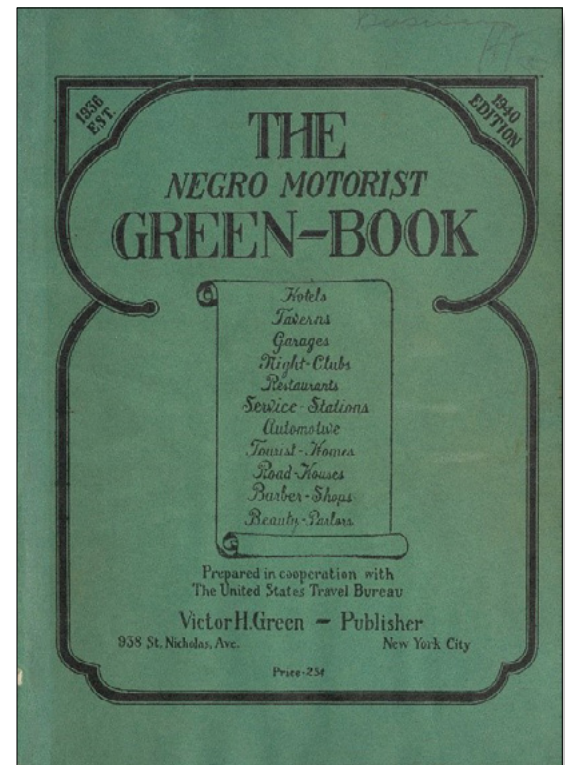
Black timber workers were sought out and accepted because of their expertise. For example, the Long-Bell Lumber Company, which had closed its sawmill operations at DeRidder and Longville, LA, in the late 1920s, moved to California, established new mills, and actively recruited experienced Black lumbermen and mill workers from Louisiana and other areas of the South. Black workers also sought employment in the West because of mills in the South closing. By moving, these workers found opportunities for good-paying jobs, and their families were

further assimilated into the newly developing industrial society (Langford 2010). Amos Marsh, who traveled from Jackson Parish, LA, to McNary, AZ, in 1932 is an example. Marsh worked as a timber cutter in McNary until 1939, when he and his family moved to sawmill jobs in Kyburz, CA, and then Maxville, OR (Marsh 2015). Marsh favored work in sawmill towns because of schools provided for the children and opportunities for women through domestic and commercial work.

Young Black men traveled west and gained important experience in the lumber industry that would serve them for the rest of their lives. By moving west, they achieved their goals and, in the process, demonstrated the resilience of the Black community. Communication lines and community support systems were critical in accommodating and navigating these life changes, and family connections were an important aspect of this migration. Reid (2016) tells of Katherine Hickman and her sister, whose husbands were serving in World War II, selling their family cows, hogs, and other property to follow their father, who had moved to Flagstaff, AZ, a few months earlier. He had worked at the closed Crowell Lumber Company mill at Alco, LA. Hickman's father contacted his wife's three brothers, who had moved to Arizona to work in the lumber industry in the 1920s. These family connections provided him a place to stay while he found work in one of the mills. Katherine's and her sister's husbands, both skilled lumbermen, would relocate to Flagstaff after the war.

It was the power of communication and relationship networks among families and friends that met the challenges of segregation and discrimination encountered by families moving across the country for opportunities in the West. Beginning in 1936, *The Negro Motorist Green-Book*, commonly called the "Green Book," became available to enable Black travelers to find lodgings, businesses, and gas stations that would serve them along the road (Townsend 2016). It was little known outside the Black community. Migrating Blacks gradually became able to buy automobiles but faced a variety of dangers and inconveniences along the road, from refusal of food and lodging to arbitrary arrest. The "Green Book" provided a guide to services and places relatively friendly to Black families.

Some have estimated that up to 50 percent of southern lumber workers left during these decades (Allen 1961). This migration began to affect the workers who remained in sawmill jobs in the South. More than ever, companies had to compete for workers, and to do this, they provided more benefits to their workers.



The "Green Book" provided information to Black travelers on relatively friendly places to stop for food and lodging (Townsend 2016).

## Other Cultural Aspects of Mill Towns

SOME ASPECTS OF FAMILY LIFE STRAYED ACROSS THESE segregated norms—for example, children of different races played together, and families often associated with each other in numerous company-wide events. Mill town children grew up using their industry surroundings as a playscape (Sitton and Conrad 1998):

*They walked the rails, visited the depot to meet passenger trains, clambered about on the elevated dolly-ways after quitting time, rode the big draft horses in the corral, tobogganed down sawdust piles, chased each other leaping from stack to stack of lumber air-drying in the yard, walked logs floating in the millpond, stole handcars from the shop and pumped them about on the rails, went in moonlit courting walks down the railroad tracks and across the lumberyards, and otherwise enjoyed the mill town and its environs. For children and adults alike, the millpond did double duty as a center of recreational life, which included fishing, swimming, frog-gigging, and even dancing. The Trinity County Lumber Company in Groveton built a large board “dance pavilion” in the middle of its millpond, and this became the scene of many torch-lit romantic affairs.*



Almost all sawmill towns had baseball teams, both Black and White. They frequently played teams from other companies. This is a team from Southern Pine Lumber Company. (Photo from The History Center’s online collections [[www.thehistorycenteronline.com](http://www.thehistorycenteronline.com)])

By far the most popular recreation among the men was hunting and fishing. Not only did these activities cost relatively little, but they brought additional and tasty food to the family table. The amount of drinking and gambling varied greatly from town to town and was generally discouraged (however, it always occurred). In Alco, baseball and basketball courts were provided to different races, and children could swim, fish, and camp out along the Comrade Creek that ran nearby. Mill towns also offered many fascinations to people from the surrounding countryside. The towns provided movie theaters and baseball teams, and they attracted minstrel shows, medicine shows, circuses, and political speakers.

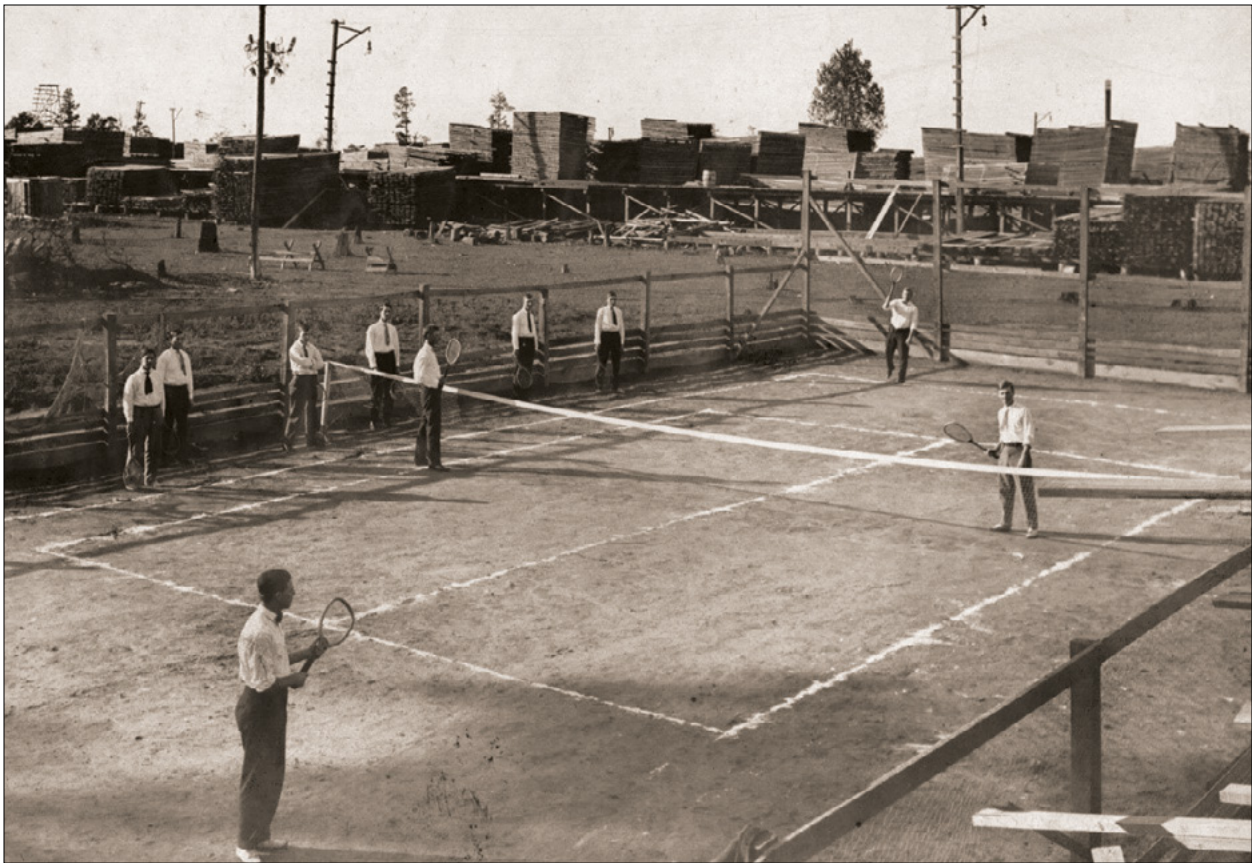
Most mills provided three holidays for their employees and their families. June 19—“Juneteenth” or Emancipation Day—was a holiday for Black workers (and a holiday for Whites, too, for without Blacks the mill could not operate). Usually, a steer and hog were given to be barbecued, and some other activity such as a

baseball game or singing event would be held. On July 4, another holiday was held, this time for the White workers. A barbecue was again provided, and some other activities scheduled for enjoyment of the workers and their families. But it was Christmas when the mill owners made a significant effort to reach out to their employees, giving a turkey or ham to each family and bags of fruit, nuts, and candy to the workers and their children. Christmas parties were held, and there were Christmas programs at the schools and churches.

The music of sawmill towns influenced the surrounding communities. Workers had the ability to adapt songs to meet the conditions of each job: sawmill songs were frequently punctuated by the whine of huge circular saws, while songs in logging operations were pitched to carry long distances through the forests.

The music and dance performed in mill towns provided a venue through which Blacks participated in the creation of modern American culture and contributed to the distinctive image of the 1920s as the Jazz Age. Jones (2010) believes that the

**Tennis courts were installed in many sawmill towns to provide a recreational opportunity. Note these men wore ties so they must have had clerical responsibilities. (Photo from The History Center's online collections [www.thehistorycenteronline.com])**



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The music and dance performed in mill towns provided a venue through which Blacks participated in the creation of modern American culture and contributed to the distinctive image of the 1920s as the Jazz Age.

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country or Delta blues music that became popular in the early 1930s was in many ways derivative of the piano style developed by musicians who traveled among the sawmill towns and industrial work camps of the Gulf Coast in the 1910s and 1920s.

This music would also shape the character of the mainstream American popular music for many years to come (Jones 2010). The growth of Black jazz bands became the center of cultural activity in sawmill towns. As an example, the Black YMCA began organizing Saturday night swing dances at Bogalusa's Colored Athletic Park. The company bought musical instruments and provided financial support for a musical group of young men. The Rhythm Aces, a Black swing band, dominated Bogalusa's music scene in the 1930s. The band traveled regularly between Jackson, MS, Mobile, AL, and New Orleans and Baton Rouge, LA. The Rhythm Aces rode the wave of popularity for swing music that swept through the South and the Nation (Jones 2010).

## Cemeteries

THERE HAVE BEEN MANY EFFORTS TO LOCATE AND DOCUMENT cemeteries where sawmill town workers were buried, often with limited success (e.g., McManus 2019). At some mills, White employees may have been buried in established community cemeteries. Blacks, however, would have been buried near the mill site. Black cemeteries of the time usually were decorated to give a glimpse of the spiritual force which had been the source of hope and inspiration for the family (Vlach 1990), but many if not most of these locations are now lost. All too often, when a mill closed or moved, the cemeteries were left untended and quickly became overgrown. Many graves had markers of wood that rapidly decayed in the southern climate. Even untended markers of stone, concrete, or metal crumbled or rusted away in a few decades. In some cemeteries, grave markers have been removed, stolen, or vandalized, and numerous cemeteries have been lost to agricultural plowing or later timber harvesting activities.

## Contrary Views on the Quality of Life

MOST COMPANY LOGGERS WERE PLEASED TO HAVE EMPLOYMENT. Even though their hours were long, the work was exhausting and dangerous, the pay (by any contemporary standard) was low, and their fringe benefits were minimal, on the job they were hard working, cheerful, and competent. They were also wasteful and

at times careless, but they were purposeful in their goal to supply logs to the mills—to swamp them with logs, if possible. The loggers cut down the great pine forests with no thought of the future or themselves. If they could exceed their quotas, they were content (Maxwell and Baker 1983).

A sawmill town's primary purpose was to supply the mill with logs and convert those logs into lumber. All the facilities, human and mechanical, were concentrated in the towns for this purpose: large and efficient mills of high capacity, skilled administrators and technicians, and a large labor force. This unity of function contributed to the development of self-contained and effective settlements but was also responsible for their virtual extinction (Stokes 1957). Some historians have judged harshly the effects of companies' policies on employees and the environment. Clark (1984) wrote:

*They came to reflect the hard ends of an industry that seemed destined for oblivion and left more than 150 million acres of forest land an economic shambles with a sea of stumps as grim monuments to the demise of a precious natural resource, and their shabby sawmill-camp shanty homes melted into the ground along with the sawdust and slab piles.*

Many sawmill people would have been offended by Clark's words. They recognized the ephemeral nature of mill towns: their demise had happened hundreds of times across the South and was simply one of the realities of the time. Likewise, interviews with many Black families who lived and worked in these sawmill towns also provided views contrary to Clark. Looking back, these individuals usually made positive statements about their life in sawmill towns, realizing the gains made in family structure, acceptance of their abilities, and training needed for industrial employment. And through the process, they helped move the South from an agrarian into an industrial society.

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## CASE STUDIES

TO ILLUSTRATE THE INFLUENCE OF LUMBERING COMMUNITIES ON family development and economic and cultural change, the case studies below present family life in two sawmill towns originating in central Louisiana. Cady Lumber Company of McNary and the Crowell & Spencer Lumber Company of Long Leaf used similar lumbering technology and drew their workers from the same small geographic area. However, the Cady and Crowell & Spencer companies had two vastly different outcomes based on management choices. The Cady Lumber Company, in less than 2 decades, cut out their available timber and moved their entire operation (including workers) out West, providing one approach to management. The 75 years of operation of the Crowell & Spencer Lumber Company and their town of Long Leaf provide an excellent opportunity to understand the functioning of families in Louisiana sawmill towns as they transitioned from an agrarian to an industrial society without moving.

### The Cady Lumber Company

The commissary building for the newly created Cady Lumber Corporation of McNary, AZ. It became the focus of family life in the town, providing goods to the workers. (Photo from the Northern Arizona University Cline Library Archives)

THE CADY LUMBER COMPANY WAS CHARTERED IN 1913. IN ITS heyday, the town of McNary, LA, had a population of nearly 3,000 residents with a church, school, post office, hospital, swimming pool, and a large theater. But the company had only enough old-growth timber to last about 10 years, forcing the owners to consider other options. In the early 1920s, after





realizing their timber would soon be cut out, William Cady and his business partner, James McNary, decided to relocate their large company in the West. They found the mill town they sought in Cooley, AZ, on the Apache Indian Reservation. McNary and Cady purchased the defunct Apache Lumber Company for \$1.5 million in a deal that included all of Apache's timber holdings and its milling operations in Cooley and Flagstaff (Lewis 2012). Cady Lumber then spent \$3.5 million to install an all-electric plant with three band saws.

On February 7, 1924, the last log in the McNary plant was cut. Three days later, 800 people, including employees and family members, boarded special trains with their baggage and equipment and moved west to their new home. When McNary was asked why the company moved its employees, he responded, "Cady could not visualize a lumber operation without the employment of labor and decided to import 500 experienced and faithful employees to Arizona" (Chanin 1990). They were moving from the heat and humidity of Louisiana to a town at 7,300 feet above sea level. To say that there would be some adjustment required to get used to the new surroundings was an understatement.

One employee who made the trip commented, "It was quite an adventure. It took us about three days to make the trip...we were well equipped, dining cars and everything. The people had lots of baggage with them, household goods, you know, and even their chickens."

The company received permission from the Federal Government to rename Cooley as McNary, which was described by all as a beautiful town. Though living conditions in McNary were better than surrounding towns, it was nevertheless a company town: the company controlled all utilities, hospital, and schools, and owned the housing and only store in town (Lewis 2012).

Of the 500 employees who moved, almost all were Black. This was quite a transition: according to the 1920 Federal census, there were only 8,005 Blacks in the entire State of Arizona (populated at that time by 334,162 persons). Starting with the Cady Lumber Company crews that moved to McNary in 1924, there began a movement of Black timber workers to northern Arizona communities, attracted by the availability of better paying jobs. In need of more labor, logging companies regularly sent buses into the South to recruit lumber workers. For example, Flagstaff Mayor Coral Evan's grandfather came to Arizona on a school bus



Folks are beginning to gather in McNary, LA, for the departure of the mill workers on February 10, 1924 (TOP). Trains are being loaded with 800 people, including employees and their family members, and their belongings for their move to Arizona (BOTTOM). (Photos from the South Rapides Chronicle newspaper)



A view of a portion of the Cady Lumber Corporation town at McNary, AZ. It was at an elevation of 7,300 feet and received heavy snows in the winter—a challenge for the emigrants from Louisiana. (Photo from Northern Arizona University Cline Library Archives)

from Louisiana (Cowan 2017), arriving in McNary in the late 1920s for a higher paying job at the sawmill.

One report indicates that most of the employees who moved from the South stayed at least 7 years. Some eventually returned to Louisiana, probably because of the cold climate in McNary, but others moved on to other positions in the West (Coen 2014). While some Black workers left, they were replaced by others coming from Louisiana and Texas who had heard about the good jobs and a degree of racial tolerance unheard of in the Jim Crow era of the South. Indeed, while James McNary recorded in his autobiography that there was a good deal of indignation in some quarters in Arizona over the “importation” of the Black employees and their families, the threatened violence never materialized (Lewis 2012). Some workers commented, “although there was still a lot of discrimination, it was not the strict racial segregation that was enforced by Jim Crow laws and practices where we came from.” The company also employed Native Americans and old homesteading Spanish and Anglo-American families in the area. African Americans and Mexicans were accepted, but the system limited them to only certain areas, and they clustered in neighborhoods on the outside of the city centers.

According to McNary, each ethnic group constituted a quarter of the workforce. One employee who helped build the town noted (Cowan 2017):

*The town grew with a Negro quarters and a Spanish-American quarters, each of which had its own elementary school, church, and café. There also was*

*a gathering of shacks which gradually developed into a nearby Navajo town. On the hill, was the Apache Hotel, commissary, lumber mill office, bank, post office, garage, theater, hospital, and finally a clinic that made up the town.*

The town became known for its diversity and relatively composed race relations. Regardless of race, Dr. Arnold Dysterheft did much to improve the medical care for the town of McNary and the surrounding communities (Baeza 2016).

Gloria Hunt, who grew up in Minnesota, visited her eldest sister Viola who was a nurse in McNary, AZ. Viola had passed through McNary on a trip with several other nurses. One of them had known the company doctors, Dr. Dysterheft and Dr. Herbst, who were also from Minnesota. Gloria said, “They offered all of the nurses a job. [Viola] took it. She was a nurse at the McNary hospital” (Baeza 2016). Gloria decided to stay in McNary and married a civil engineer who was working there.

African Americans lived in the “Negro Quarter,” Hispanic people in the “Spanish Quarter,” and Navajo and Apache families in their own communities. Each “quarter” had its own elementary school, café, and church. Although the elementary schools were segregated, “it was just an understanding—that’s the way things were. My friends and I didn’t let it bother us that we could only swim in the outdoor pool the day before it was refilled, and we sat where we wanted in the theater though we were supposed to only sit in the balcony. We played ball in the streets like all our classmates” (Cowan 2017). All the children attended the company’s McNary High School, and the integration of McNary High School was gradually followed by schools in other towns.

Students of different races received comparable educational opportunities and were typically involved in the same athletic teams and musical groups. One resident commented that there was no entertainment except what they made themselves. “We never fought. I don’t remember any of us fighting. We made games out of nothing,” said Julian Castillo, who was born and raised in McNary and whose mother worked in the sawmill (Baeza 2005). Although the students went to school together, they had to go home for lunch. After college, Castillo returned to McNary as a teacher. “We used to say McNary School was a ‘little United Nations.’” The boys called kindergarten “baby class.” Most of Castillo’s friends did not speak English until they began to go to school, and then they spoke “Spanglish.” It was a big day



**Dr. Arnold Dysterheft developed excellent hospital facilities and medical care for the company employees. At the time of this photo, he is in his office and near retirement (Chanin 1990).**



**McNary High School’s multiracial championship flag football team during 1968. (Photo from White Mountain Independent)**

when he got out of “baby class” and entered the first grade. He loved sports and became the quarterback of the multiracial and legendary McNary “Green Devils” football team. “My last year we beat everybody, then lost our last game to Cottonwood” (Baeza 2005).

Formation of Black neighborhoods offered support for others migrating to the area. These Black communities had contacts who could help newcomers find work, secure housing, and move more easily into the new society. These neighborhoods could provide readily available services where Blacks could go out and have a drink, get a haircut, buy a sandwich, and socialize with friends. Their churches organized ice cream socials, chili dinners and picnics, dances, and charity dinners. Everyone knew each other and there was a kind of communal parenting where children could expect to be disciplined from any parent in the neighborhood. One parent, looking back, said, “I wish my kids could have grown up in that Black culture. Now we don’t have that hub.... We don’t have that central point for us to congregate and we need it. I would like to have it back” (Cowan 2017). Though these Black neighborhoods were small, families and individuals could become more easily assimilated into a larger society than in their previous southern experience.

Even though McNary was a community divided into segregated districts, there was a surprising closeness among its residents. Old-timers never got over their enchantment with the town. In Baeza (2016), Gloria Hunt described McNary as:

*...such lovely place! Everyone was working; everyone had a job to do. I got a job at the post office at a dollar an hour. We had a second-class post office. The mill paid in cash, and the money came in on the post office truck. Benton Snoddy carried the payroll to the company office with deputies to “protect” him. He used to laugh because the deputies were so sociable, they’d stop and talk to everybody along the way and leave him holding the money bags.*

In addition to the McNary sawmill, the Cady Lumber Company owned sawmill facilities in Flagstaff. In 1935, James McNary bought the mill from William Cady and renamed the company Southwest Lumber Mills, which in 1960 became Southwest Forest Industries. The company had also acquired the Apache Railway, built in 1917 as a common-carrier logging and passenger line

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Formation of Black neighborhoods offered support for others migrating to the area. These Black communities had contacts who could help newcomers find work, secure housing, and move more easily into the new society.

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by Flagstaff rancher and lumberman Thomas Pollack (who also developed the Apache Logging Company; Matheny 1975). This railway ran in the White Mountain area from Holbrook to the lumber camp at Colley Flat, near the present-day communities of Pinetop and Lakeside. The cost of building the line was enormous, and by the time Pollack finished, he had spent so much money and his ranching operation was doing so poorly that he was forced to sell the Apache Railway and the Apache Logging Company in 1924 to William Cady, who continued to operate it as the Apache Railway (Brundige-Baker 2015). At peak operation, the Apache Railway had 140 miles of track, but it ceased its logging support in the 1960s when the lumber mill transitioned to trucks for log hauling. In 1976, the White Mountain Apache Tribe terminated the railroad's operation on tribal lands and service to McNary ended (Brundige-Baker 2015).

Over the years, ownership of the railroad changed several times and has gone through bankruptcy. Worrell (2015) reported that the local and State officials have managed to obtain support to keep the railroad functioning and that “the historic Apache Railway is a key piece of infrastructure that is vital for supporting economic development in Navajo County and its continued operation will attract industry and opportunity to the region.”

**Workers of the Apache Railway evaluating the wreckage of a logging train operating in the White Mountains. (Photo from Northern Arizona University Cline Library Archives)**



Unfortunately, McNary eventually suffered the same fate as so many other sawmill towns. The mill burned in 1979, and its operation was moved to the Flagstaff mill. The population of the town of McNary on the Apache Indian Reservation has declined to about 500 residents.

## **The Crowell & Spencer Lumber Company**

THE CROWELL & SPENCER LUMBER COMPANY WAS CREATED by Mississippi native Caleb T. (C.T.) Crowell and his partner Alexander B. Spencer in 1892 (Smith 2007). Spencer built the mill and the town of Long Leaf, which was established in 1893 to support the approximately 300 workers needed to carry out Crowell's logging and milling operations. In 1894, C.T. Crowell returned to Los Angeles where he had business interests and sent his son, James Stamps Crowell, to Long Leaf to learn and eventually manage the sawmill operation there. Stamps was joined 4 years later by his younger brother, Robert Draughon (R.D.), who at age 17 began working as a common laborer at the mill (Smith 2007).

Located in excellent timberlands in southern Rapides Parish near Barber Creek and Spring Creek, it has also been said that the availability of Black laborers from previous agricultural work also helped with the selection of the mill and townsite location (Lueck 2018). Spencer managed the mill until 1902, although he retained an interest in many Crowell operations until his death in January 1941. At that time, the Crowell family purchased his interests from the Spencer estate and merged all the lumber operations into the Crowell Long Leaf Lumber Company. It is noteworthy that the organizer of the company, C.T. Crowell, left the operation of this mill to his young sons and eventually his grandsons. Stamps remained a bachelor, but his brother Draughon was married and had three sons: Robert Draughon, Jr., Allen Caleb, and Richard Lee Crowell, each of whom played a major role in the management of the company.

The Crowell & Spencer Lumber Company mill was designed to cut 100,000 board feet per day, but it usually operated at about 60,000 board feet. In 1905, the Crowell family created the common carrier Red River and Gulf Railroad to provide a means for transporting logs to the mill and lumber to markets. Construction of the rail track was done primarily by experienced Mexican men who were contracted from a labor company in Texas. A request for labor in 1918 specified that men with



families were preferred, including a desire for a supervisor who could speak English. Housing for these crews was provided at Long Leaf.

This railway operation allowed the Crowell & Spencer Lumber Company to purchase additional timberland and expand their operations, with some timber at considerable distance from Long Leaf. With the addition of mills at locations known as Meridian and Alco, rail service extended to about 75 miles. In addition to movement of logs and lumber, the Red River and Gulf provided freight and passenger service to other users (Lueck 2015). Daily freight and passenger services were maintained between Long Leaf and the other towns with connections to major common carrier railroad systems.

In addition to the Red River and Gulf rail lines, the Crowell family operations ran Crowell & Spencer, Meridian, and Alexandria Lumber (Alco) log trains both on logging trams and on their common carrier line (Lueck 2015). On the logging railroad trams, the engineer and engine crew were frequently Black employees, but on the common carrier passenger trains the engine crews were required to be White employees to meet national railroad union specifications.

The Crowell & Spencer Lumber Company was unusual because it continued in operation throughout the Great Depression and World War II. The Crowell family operated their



**TOP:** Crowell & Spencer engine #400 with numerous log cars on the way to the Long Leaf, LA, mill. Note that the train engineer is a Black employee. (Stamps Crowell Photo, Crowell Family Collection, Southern Forest Heritage Museum)

**BOTTOM:** The rear of the sawmill at Long Leaf, LA, during World War II. The huge timbers being moved to rail cars are most likely being shipped under contract to the Navy for the development of port facilities.

A Red River and Gulf passenger train. Note that the engine crew is White, whereas the logging train engine crews were frequently Black employees. This engine, #104, was sold after World War II and pulled passengers at Stone Mountain, GA, until being put on display at the Southeastern Railway Museum in Duluth, GA (Lueck 2019). (Photo from Southern Forest Heritage Museum archives)



A Red River and Gulf Railroad train is passing a machine gun platoon during the Army's 1940 Louisiana Maneuvers. (Photo from Louisiana State University Archives)

company conservatively, purchased additional timberland, and had access to virgin longleaf pine stands much later than most companies. In 1941, the Crowell family bought the Spencer partnership and the name was changed to Crowell Lumber Company.

The Crowell Lumber Company was heavily involved in the war effort. Having considerable old-growth longleaf pine available, a contract with the Higgins Boat Company allowed it to provide the unique keel timbers needed for the Higgins landing craft. The Crowell Lumber Company also supplied timbers under government contracts to develop port and shore military facilities and lumber for the construction of Camp Claiborne. Camp Claiborne trained the Army's Forestry Engineer Battalions that were charged with developing timber resources to support troop activities (Barnett and others 2015). Allen Crowell and the lumber company assisted in training these troops, and Crowell later led a forestry battalion supporting the U.S. military in France.

Although the company benefited financially from the war effort, other influences were negative. The construction of nearby Camp Claiborne required large numbers of workers who were paid \$1.00 per hour if the individual could use a hammer. The company raised its wages but could not compete with the government pay rates (Smith 2007). The workers were reminded that the work at Camp Claiborne was temporary and that if they took a position there, they would lose their benefits at Long Leaf, including mill housing, medical care, and water and electrical



services. Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that the company maintained a capable workforce during the war.

As it gradually prepared for war, the U.S. Army sought to obtain the Red River and Gulf Railroad in 1940. In addition to connecting the newly created Camps Claiborne and Polk in western Louisiana, the Army wanted to train engineers, firemen, and brakemen to operate railroads under wartime conditions (for example, getting accustomed to aerial bombardment, artillery attacks, the demolition and repair of tracks, and other simulated railroad disruptions [Smith 2007]).

The Crowell Lumber Company declined to sell the railroad because it would have made transport of logs to the mills and supply of timbers under military contracts difficult. Instead, the Army built its own railroad, the Claiborne and Polk Military Railroad, largely using existing abandoned logging company rights-of-way and tracks.

After the war, business for the Red River and Gulf Railroad declined as the virgin timber was cut out and other business was insufficient to continue its operation. The charter for the line was surrendered on March 26, 1954, with the last train to run on March 31. Movement of logs to the remaining mill at Long Leaf was done by trucks. The company also upgraded the mill to electrical power in the mid-1950s.

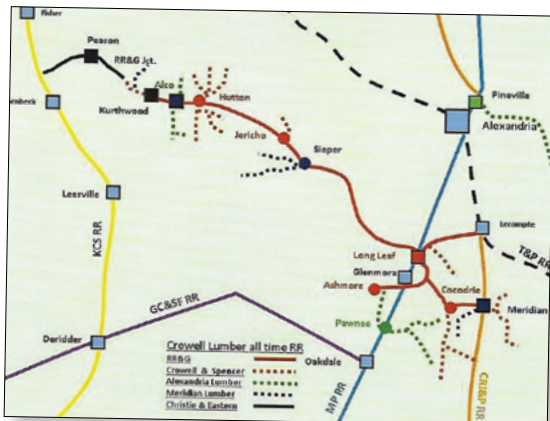
All new workers began their training on the green chain—where lumber leaves the sawmill and is graded and sorted by size (Lueck 2018). It was here where workers were evaluated

**The Crowell Lumber Company mill at Long Leaf, LA, after its conversion to self-generating electrical power in the mid-1950s. (Photo from Southern Forest Heritage Museum archives)**



TOP: This map shows the extent of the Red River and Gulf rail line and the logging trams (dotted lines) that moved logs from woods operations to the sawmill towns at Long Leaf, Meridian, and Alco, LA. As harvests were complete at some locations, those portions of the track were abandoned and removed (Lueck 2015).

BOTTOM: Artistic letterhead for company stationery that was typical for sawmill companies of the early 20th century. The purpose was to create a good first impression for their businesses. (Photo from Southern Forest Heritage Museum archives)

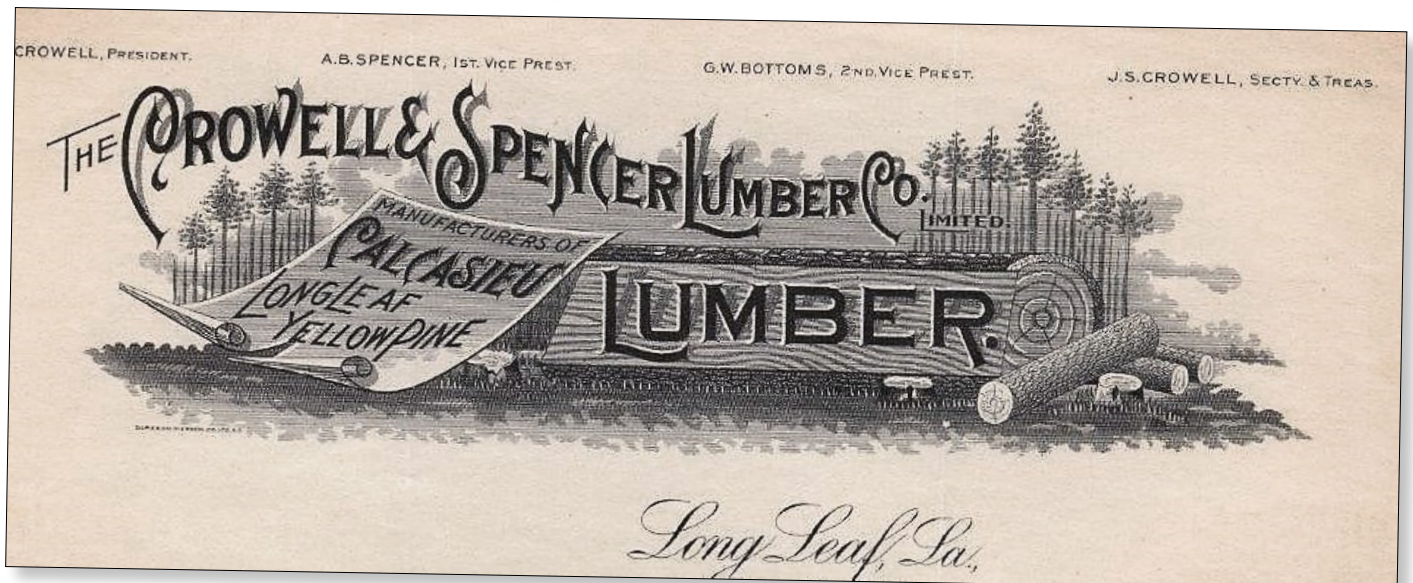


and moved to other jobs throughout the organization based on their capability, generally regardless of race. Given that about two-thirds of the workers were Black and were depended on to successfully operate the mill, good race relations were important.

Over the years, the Crowell family who managed the mill had good relationships with their workers. Indeed, there was a concerted effort to build a sense of community between the owners and the workers. In interviews with family members of employees who worked at Long Leaf, only positive things were said about life in Long Leaf. For example, if a worker was injured and unable to work, he did not have to pay rent for the period he was incapacitated. R.D. Crowell would put \$5.00 in his hat and go through the neighborhood to collect funds or foodstuffs needed to support the family. A “chit” (a voucher) for a can of food could be put in the hat if no funds were available (Lueck 2018).

Long Leaf was a community of about 2,500 people with about 175 company houses available for rent to employees. Rental costs on houses were inexpensive even before the Depression. After the Depression, rent for the larger houses was only \$12.50 per month (Smith 2007) and included water and electrical services. When the mill at Alco was closed in 1945, three-room Black and four-room White family houses were moved to Long Leaf by train for use there.

Long Leaf also had a commissary, a post office (still in operation today), schools and churches (one or more for Black and White families), a barbershop, a gas station, a telephone office, a



railway station and depot, tennis courts, a hotel, and a doctor's office. Relatively speaking, the quality of medical care provided to the Crowell company mill towns was quite good. Health care cost married employees \$0.57 and single workers \$0.34 per week (Smith 2007), which covered the entire family. In 1900, C.T. Crowell, apparently from his contacts in Los Angeles, hired Albert Soiland as a physician for Long Leaf. Soiland left after the sawmill burned shortly after his hiring but would later rise to international fame for developing radiation therapy for cancer (Livingston 2018).

James W. Welch, Sr. served for 22 years with distinction as a respected and beloved physician and surgeon at Long Leaf. Uniquely qualified, Welch had a medical degree from Tulane University and a master's degree in pharmacy. He was paid about \$300 per month by the company, and his clientele included not only the mill workers and their families but also those needing medical care in surrounding communities. Over his years of medical practice in Long Leaf, he is reported to have delivered over 2,000 babies. Weeks (1980) described Welch's effort during the 1918 flu pandemic, which hit the area hard: "...he worked far beyond his regular duties, to the point of exhaustion, trying frantically to save as many lives as possible." Welch also prominently served in the Long Leaf Baptist Church as deacon and treasurer. He was elected to serve 18 years on the Rapides Parish School Board—13 of those years as vice president. His legacy on the school board was his deep concern for teachers. He was "...an admired and trusted leader, mainly because everything he did was for the benefit of the other person" (Smith 2007). Medical care at Meridian and Alco was primarily provided by Dr. E.E. Archibald, who was also trained at Tulane (Smith 2007).

When not in school, boys played baseball and flag football throughout the summer and fall at Long Leaf and entertained themselves by running the logs in the mill pond. Their goal was to run across the pond on the floating logs without falling into the water—a dangerous challenge because the logs could submerge. To encourage safer forms of recreation, the company also provided some other options for their workers. For example, local creeks were well suited for both fishing and swimming. The company established an area for swimming in Barber Creek with a bath house and canoes available for town residents. As a girl, Catherine Terrell visited the company swimming area with sandwiches and bottles of "pop" to be enjoyed on the creek bank,



The hotel at Long Leaf, LA, was established to provide housing for visiting businessmen. The man on the balcony with coat and tie is A.B. Spencer. (Photo from Southern Forest Heritage Museum archives)

recalling "...that those days of communal swimming remain with me as one of the most joyous periods of my life" (Smith 2007).

Another recreation area was Shady Nook on Spring Creek, just outside of Long Leaf. Developed for swimming, it also had small houses for those who might want to stay a few days for a vacation. A pavilion was developed to be used as a skating rink and occasionally for dancing. T.C. Smith, a college professor and internationally recognized biblical scholar who lived in all three Crowell company towns as a youngster, concluded that these recreation areas "...furnished an escape from the drudgery of sawmill life, and during the Depression helped people find some sort of enjoyment in life" while noting that they were considered by some as "den[s] of iniquity" (Smith 2007).

Religion was encouraged and supported by the Crowell family in its towns. Today, Long Leaf still has one predominantly

**View of the log pond and planer mill taken from the Long Leaf, LA, sawmill. Shavings from the planer mill were blown to the sawmill via the long duct work to help fuel the mill. (Photo from Southern Forest Heritage Museum archives)**



White church (Long Leaf Baptist) and two predominantly Black churches (Mount Zion Missionary Baptist and Magnolia Baptist) from company days, although local membership has declined through the years so that regular services are now only held at the Long Leaf Baptist Church.

Sawmill operations at Long Leaf continued until 1969 when the mill was closed. Although the mill had been upgraded several times before its closing, it had become inefficient and could not compete with more modern facilities. Although the mill is now closed, another generation of the Crowell family continues to manage their forest land resources, and their legacy continues in another way. In 1994, 25 years after the sawmill ceased operation, the Crowell family agreed to donate the 60-acre sawmill complex to the Southern Forest Heritage Museum and Research Center (now on the National Register of Historic Places). In addition to the mill facilities, there are three steam-powered locomotives, rail log skidding and loading equipment, and three residential structures at the site. The largest of these, the six-room superintendent's residence, now serves as the museum's administrative building.



The Long Leaf Baptist Church (TOP) and the Mount Zion Missionary Baptist Church (BOTTOM) still serve the communities of Long Leaf, LA. (Photos from Southern Forest Heritage Museum archives)



The Southern Forest Heritage Museum and Research Center incorporates the 60-acre former Crowell Lumber Company sawmill complex with steam-powered locomotives, skidders, loaders, and mill equipment. (Photo from Southern Forest Heritage Museum archives)

## CLOSING REMARKS

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While the aggressive harvest of timber during the first half of the 20th century devastated the South's forests, it had a major positive effect on the development of the South's economy and culture.

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Although lumbering has played a major role in the economic history of the South from the beginning of settlement to the present, it has failed to attract the attention of historians until recent years. Most of the records of lumber and naval stores companies have remained in the possession of firms or heirs of the owners of enterprises no longer in operation. Even now, only some of these historical documents have been donated to libraries and made available for study. What emerges is an industrialization that has been described by historian C. Vann Woodward (1971) as fueled principally by northern investment capital interested in profiting from the South's abundant timber resources. Most of these investors had little interest in sponsoring local manufacturing plants that would ultimately compete on their own, and an extractive, raw material-dominated economy resulted.

The ramifications of the lumber industry on the development of family life and societal structure in the South during the early 20th century have not been fully appreciated. While the aggressive harvest of timber during the first half of the 20th century devastated the South's forests, it had a major positive effect on the development of the South's economy and culture. The lumber industry changed the way of life for the entire region. The movement from the small farms and villages to the populated centers which grew up wherever sawmills were created altered attitudes, habits, and customs which had been characteristic of a pioneer society. Smith (2007) described the transformation:

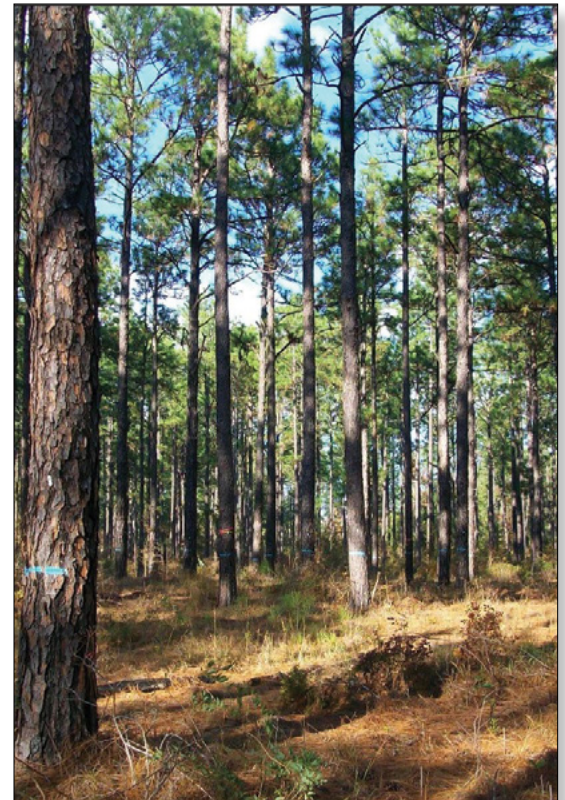
*...the new century brought about the dethronement of cotton's regal status, and sawmills took the crown away and wore it for years to come. No longer did the poor whites and blacks depend upon tenant farming for plantation owners, but they had access to jobs of all sorts. ...the old culture disappeared with the wind, and a new culture, more democratic in nature, arose like a new phoenix springing from the ashes of the old.*

Lumbering helped bring the South's workers into the mainstream of America's economy and society.

Although most of the sawmill towns did not last, the workers had benefits of which they had never been accustomed—stable pay and training which served them well and provided for their movement into the industrial age. Their new life in this industrializing society conferred the benefits of improved health standards, educational opportunities, living conditions, and greater opportunities to develop individual skills in trades. The South's lumber industry became a major influence in setting the pattern of employer-employee relationships, in determining standards of industrial work, and in shaping the attitudes toward workers and the environment in which they and their families existed (Allen 1961). Race relations in these early sawmill towns also resist simple characterization. The need for labor was so great that Black workers were treated about as well as the White ones, and there was an integration of the workforce throughout mill operations that required respect for each other's performance. But segregation remained, with Black workers typically given more physically demanding logging (rather than mill) jobs and separate, smaller houses, amongst the other indignities of the Jim Crow South.

Many viewed the South's original deforestation with alarm and dismay, noting the impacts of such resource destruction on past civilizations (Mahmood and others 2014). Would this be the case in the South? The feared long-term adverse effect of this lumbering was avoided by two factors: the determination of foresters to develop and apply techniques to regenerate these forests (Barnett and Carter 2017) and the resilient nature of these forests themselves. Although longleaf pine was difficult to regenerate, other highly productive pine species—loblolly (*Pinus taeda*) and slash (*Pinus elliottii*)—filled this gap and replaced much of the old-growth longleaf pine (Carter and others 2015). Within a few decades of the end of the "Big Cut," southern pine forests again occupied much of the original forested land.

Restoration and management of the South's forests in the second half of the 20th century was a remarkable accomplishment. Indeed, much of what appears as mature forest in the Southern States today is barely 40 to 50 years old and is the fourth generation of trees following the harvest during the early 20th century. The rate of regrowth of these forests has been amazing. While timber operations in these new forests are now highly mechanized, this tremendous forest resource does, however, continue to help drive the South's economy.



A stand of longleaf pines planted in the mid-1930s and now mature—an example of the new forests that have been established across the South.

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