

BOOM BAY LANDING

WISCONSIN Magazine OF HISTORY SUMMER, 1953

THE BAY BOOM AT OSHKOSH

"At the turn of the century there were loggers on all of the branches of Wisconsin's Wolf River. They all put their logs into the river—millions of white pine logs—to be floated to the sawmills at Oshkosh and Fond du Lac. But as the logs of the "lumber barons" floated down the Wolf they got all mixed up. At first the loggers followed their timber into Lake Poygan, then sorted the logs as best they could for towing to the mills. After a year or two, a group of lumbermen organized the Bay Boom Company, a nonprofit outfit, to sort each man's logs from those of the others. The Bay Boom loggers placed a boom across the river, which held the logs coming down, and guided them into a long "cut." At the end of the cut they built a race a mile long. At intervals of 60 feet there were gaps wide enough to permit a log to go through. There were 50 or 60 of these gaps, each ringed by boomsticks. Each lumberman had his gap and his own men to run his logs into his boom. At the end of the race, also enclosed with boomsticks, was the bull-pen for unmarked and stray logs. When a pocket of logs had gathered they were sluiced into the cut* by expert rivermen. Each logger had his own log mark, which was registered and spelled his title to his timber. The rivermen at the cut were equipped with spike boots, pike poles, and usually a red bandanna handkerchief and a black felt hat. When a log floated with the mark down, they rolled it and cut the proper mark on the top side to make identification easier when it reached the race. A fleet of tugboats brought the logs in rafts from the boom to the Oshkosh sawmills. There usually were about 100,000 feet of logs in a raft, and the tugboats towed several at one time. The tugboat would run out to the end of its towing line and drop its "grawser." The crew would then reel in the rope on the windlass. When the logs were reeled in, the crew moved the boat ahead and repeated the process. In spite of the best efforts of the rivermen, some logs passed the gap where they belonged and there was no way to bring them back. These logs, and others which had no marks on them, drifted into the bull-pen at the end of the race. They were scaled by bonded men and sold at auction. Each owner received credit for those of his logs in the bull-pen. The value of the unmarked logs was credited to the Bay Boom Company to help pay expenses. When the rafting was finished, and the records showed how many logs each man had, somebody had to figure out the "pro-rate" or what each logger owed for bringing the logs down the Wolf and for rafting them at Bay Boom. Often sixty loggers had logs to be sorted at the boom. Some of them had 1,000,000 feet of logs, others put 5,000,000 feet in the river. Some had a crew of twenty men working to keep the drive moving, while others sent but ten men. Loggers had to be paid for equipment lost or broken in the common effort. The distance each logger's men accompanied the drive had to be considered. When the figures were compiled, each logger paid what he owed. Among the men who cut the logs, ran the sawmills, and operated the woodworking factories were William Campbell and his sons, and Meade and Ripley, who made shingles. Leander Choate and Seymour Hollister built a

furniture factory. Dan Libbey financed the lumbermen, and Tom Daley, lumberman and banker, was known from coast to coast. There were Mat Bray, Steve and Bill Radford, O. J. Peck, J. L. Clark, Carlton Foster, M. V. Jones, Hank Weed, and James Gould. Philetus Sawyer's first mill later was sold to the Paine Lumber Company. Henry Sherry, Orville Beech, Deacon Conley, John Laabs, Richard and John Morgan, Robert McMillen, C. W. Davis, Robert Brand, and the Buckstaffs had their roles in the city's enterprises. E. L. Paine and his sons, John Washburn, William Hume, George W. Pratt, John Fraker, and many others, all had important shares in the valley's big industry."

*locals continue to refer to 'the cut' today

