

A Thumbnail Sketch of Logging Activities around the Manitowish Waters Area

by Michael Dunn

The era of logging where present day Manitowish ^{Waters} is located occurred over a span of about twenty five years from the late 1880s till 1912. It involved all of the lakes of the Manitowish Chain and represented three phases.

It began with the white pine timber stands, as demand for the valuable white pine lumber forced lumbermen to log farther and farther up the Chippewa and Flambeau rivers. The pine was ^{not} only ideal for lumber but the logs were also self transporting, not requiring railroads to get them to the mill. For white pine was buoyant enough to be floated down the two rivers to sawmills in the area of Chippewa Falls and Eau Claire.

Investors managed to get a bill passed in the state legislature that authorized a dam on the upper Flambeau that would make log driving possible from as far away as the Manitowish Chain. The spot they chose was a riffle in the Manitowish River where the river flowed out of Rest Lake, and during 1887-88 began lugging supplies in from the nearest railroads (in Price County). They then began to build a dam of wooden beams and rock cribs and with gates or sluices which could be opened to allow streams of water and logs to spurt out and begin their long drive down to the mills. During winter the pond behind the dam could fill up while lumberjacks inland could stack their newly cut logs along the shores, which reached farther inland as the waters rose.

Then in spring they would release periodic surges of water and logs till they were all gone. Each charge of water helped propel the logs down stream, and crews of men would follow to corral errant logs or break up clusters. A wanigan followed too, the eating shack for the men.

The company behind all this was the Chippewa Lumber and Boom Co. affiliated with ^{the} lumber empire of Frederick Weyerhaeuser. Logging would have begun after the dam was complete and a pond began to impound logs, probably by 1890.

Other companies also logged upstream and used the river. Each company had a trademark or brand that would be hammered into its logs, and downstream near the mills logs were captured and sorted out by owner. CL&B had its immense sawmill complex at Chippewa Falls.

A little improvised wooden steamboat, a sidewheeler, was built behind the dam to round up the logs and collect the logs near the dam to feed the huge CL&B complex downstream.

... .. level was about twenty five.

During some of the same period another distinctive logging operation that relied on the lake chain was operated for a lumber company that had its sawmill at Lac du Flambeau. The federal government was responsible for Indian reservations and had discovered that illicit loggers were poaching timber from the reservation (and sending it downstream via the Bear River.) So it gave an exclusive license or concession to a new firm established just to be a responsible party in the reservation forests. It was the Flambeau Lumber company, owned by Justus S. Stearns and Fred S. Herrick.

In 1893 the Milwaukee, Lake Shore & Western Railway (predecessor of the Chicago & North Western) was built through the area and built a short branch from its mainline down to the lakeshore (where the modern Indian Bowl was built later). The partners built their sawmill there. That spur would make possible their delivering sawlogs to the mill and shipping out their lumber. To make their operation more productive

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they logged not just the reservation but they also acquired off-reservation lands or timber rights. They logged with railroads and built woods branches in several directions from Flambeau proper. Their holdings extended into the present day Manitowish Waters area. One of the most interesting operations of theirs was a railroad right into this area. It was built right across Powell Marsh from the C&NW mainline across the marsh to the shore of Little Star Lake. The present day dike in the DNR refuge is the original right of way. It reached the narrows where Powell Road barely separates Little Star Lake and the Stepping Stones. The company built a loading facility, a steam hoist right there, to allow logs to be loaded onto railroad cars from either side of the narrows, and it built a small camp there for the workers and installed a few sidetracks and a turntable. Since the cars of logs traveled over the C&NW mainline part of the way to Flambeau they had to be cars legal in common carrier service, and so these cars were conventional flatcars with all safety appliances. C&NW engines were used.

One of the obscure branches in the woods was an extension of the line to the loading works. It reached the Manitowish River near Sturgeon Lake, and the airport is built over part of its route.

All of this had become history before the concession expired and the mill closed in 1913. The two owners went to new careers, one in Kentucky, one in Idaho and Washington state near Spokane. The other officers acquired a sawmill at Fulton, Alabama--with its own 'real' railroad.

So this phase of logging around the chain had spanned from 1893 to 1913, or at least the company's existence did.

The 1887 authorization passed by the state legislature named Charles H. Henry, a prominent figure in the northern Wisconsin log and lumber industry--there is a lake near Springstead named for him: Cap Henry Lake. He did not exercise the authorization himself, however. Instead he assigned it to the Weyerhaeuser-affiliated Chippewa Lumber and Boom Company. CL&B Co. owned the sawmill at Chippewa Falls that was the destination of many of the logs from the chain of lakes behind-- and even beyond-- the Rest Lake Dam. It owned much of the land that would be stripped of its self-transporting white pine logs. One expert pegged its holdings at 4200 acres.

CL&B had a subordinate that built the dam proper, and the charter of that company also permitted it to charge tolls on logs using its operations on the river. Any logging organization of the time had an identifying mark or brand and loggers' lumberjacks or employees marked each log with its brand with a hammer bearing its identification mark. Thus when the logs of any company arrived near the sawmill they were gathered into a sorting works to be separated according to their owners.

Logging here would have begun around 1890 with the dramatic spring surges of the logs but they were contemporaneous with the Flambeay Lumber Co.'s rail loading that had also depended on the chain's lakes to float its logs to a hoist where they could be loaded onto railroad cars. But CL&B's drives were beginning to taper down by 1897 and ended in 1904 or 1905. It continued to saw at the Chippewa Falls mill with logs from other tributaries but it closed the huge mill down in 1911. This left its owners with two problems--what to do with an unwanted dam and hundreds of acres from which it cut only the cherished white pine and on which stands of hardwoods remained undisturbed.

Again the chain, and especially Rest Lake in particular, would solve the problem of the unwanted acreage.

The dam it managed to spin off to a new company, the Chippewa & Flambeau Improvement Company.

And it found a taker for its land in the young Yawkey-Bissell Lumber Company which had begun to saw lumber at a mill in Arbor Vitae. Its predecessor had a complex at Hazelhurst, dating back farther.

What made the third phase of logging on the chain followed. It was made possible by construction of a new branch railroad line by the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul, a common carrier of both passengers and freight. Its main line from Chicago and Milwaukee led to Minocqua and Woodruff, but from there a minor branch line extended farther to Star Lake and Boulder Junction and west to Papoose Junction, where the passenger and common carrier freight ended at a three pronged wye track a mile west of the site of modernday North Lakeland Elementary School. A wye is an arrangement of tracks so that a branch extends at a right angle from a main line, and gentle curves from either direction form the connection to the branch.

One leg of the straight track ran from Boulder Junction to the wye. The second leg was the stub up to Buswell. The third leg continued straight west, but it was operated like a private line for the benefit of logging camps and the Yawkey Bissell's private log loading tracks right on the lake shore almost directly across Rest Lake ^{from} where the logging era had begun with the dam. This third logging era would complete the chain's logging history.

From 1905 until fire destroyed the sawmill at Buswell, along with the company village, a mixed train with a passenger car at the end of

would
 a string of freight cars [^] turn onto the middle leg of the wye and either back or run forward to the village. Its general store was the farthest place on the St. Paul where a passenger could ride a train or buy a ticket. This quaint ritual lasted from 1905 till around 1910 when a savage fire wiped out the village and the mill (but spared its timberlands where the lumber company continued logging on its private rail lines for a few more years. (The village had been almost within walking distance of Island Lake).

Yawkwy Bissell bought CL&B's unwanted lands and logged them via the tracks that formed the western leg of the wye all the way to a cove known as Rileys Hoist. The logs that Y-B harvested were towed in brails to the cove for transfer onto freight cars, making this the third wave of logging that involved the chain.

Since the St. Paul also served the mills at Hazelhurst and Arbor Vitae, the logs could move ³⁶ seamlessly to the mill on St. Paul interchange-legal freight cars behind road locomotives. The facilities at Rileys Hoist were very simple. A boom made of floating logs contained the collected logs that had been floated to the site and two simple tracks hugged the shore. Logging technology had progressed so much that a permanent installation was not necessary: a self propelled steam-powered derrick would waddle down the tracks and cables from the tip of its A-framed boom could swing logs from the water onto waiting freight cars. When at work the body and boom could be raised up on legs and a string of empty cars were spotted beyond it. With a second cable it inched the cars underneath itself, one at a time, and the A-frame's cables would swing logs from the lake onto the waiting empty car just ahead of it, and the next car would shove it ahead till each car had been winched ahead and a new string stretched forward for a train to pull away.

After this was accomplished, the "engineer" in the loader's cab

lowered it down onto its own trucks that had been hiding beneath it and the machine could waddle back down toward home--or another job.

Yawkey-Bissell closed its mills by 1912 and sold its land to the Conservation Department for a dollar and a quarter per acre. The Cathedral pines and pretty road along the very shore of Trout Lake are part of the legacy here. On some of its land the department also leased building lots but when the long leases expired it would not renew the ones it had leased along Rest Lake, bringing the hardship and ill-will that some people remember.

Present-day Manitowish Waters is at the center of an irregularly shaped ring of sawmills, their mill villages and the logging railroads that each one spread out in little networks. Beginning with Starlake the mills included Winegar, Buswell, Winchester, Emerson, Lac du Flambeau, Arbor vitae and Hazelhurst. (Emerson, in Price County, was landlocked with no railroad service at all; Springstead is near its former site.)

Manitowish Waters and the chain are unique in never sharing in that kind of logging history

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