ONE OF THE strangest and most heroic of American dramas revolved about the great logging and lumbering industries of the Great Lakes states. It would be difficult to find any other industry which contained the elements of the dramatic in more intense and extreme moods. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the logging and lumbering activities of the Mississippi River's Minnesota and Wisconsin tributaries ranked with the most extensive in the world.

Not only were large sawmills converting logs into lumber in practically every city and town in the forest area, but numerous mills of great capacity were operating along the Mississippi hundreds of miles below the forest region. Among the important lumber producing centers in Minnesota were Hastings, Red Wing, and Winona. Iowa had well over two dozen mills, some of the largest of which were located at Dubuque, Lyons, and Clinton. After its modernization in the 1880's, the mill of W. J. Young and Company of Clinton, with a sawing capacity of four hundred and fifty thousand board feet of lumber in eight hours, was said to be the largest in the world. In Illinois, there were mills among other places at Moline and Rock Island, where Frederick Weyerhaeuser and F. C. A. Denkmann purchased a sawmill for three thousand dollars in 1860. Nor was Missouri to be outdone, for St. Louis had five lumber mills, and others were scattered along the Mississippi.²

² Paul W. Gates, The Wisconsin Pine Lands of Cornell University, 136 (Ithaca, New York, 1943); William H. C. Folsom, "History of Lumbering in the St. Croix Valley," in Minnesota Historical Collections, 9:318; Walter A. Blair, A Raft Pilot's Log, 37, 256–258 (Cleveland, 1930); Frederick Merk, Economic History of Wisconsin during the Civil War Decade, 1:91 (Madison, 1916); Wisconsin Lumberman (Milwaukee) 2: 322, 3:356 (February, 1874, January, 1875); Marinette and Peshtigo Eagle, January 22, 1876; Marinette Eagle, April 26, 1890. Most of the newspaper and magazine files used in the preparation of this paper are in the library of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin.
The raw materials, saw logs, were bulky and contained much waste, necessitating exceptionally low transportation costs. For logs the mills were dependent upon the pineries of the upper Mississippi, the St. Croix, the Chippewa, and the Black River valleys of Minnesota and Wisconsin. The heaviest contributor was the Chippewa River country. The sawmill operators of the Chippewa pineries, however, were bitterly opposed to the activities of the down-river men, as the operators on the Mississippi were called. Wisconsin millmen objected to having the state's "magnificent pine" manufactured into lumber and other products at "foreign points," seriously injuring the local milling interests by depleting the forests, and taking wealth and employment out of the state.\(^2\)

The Mississippi millowners had no adequate place on the Chippewa where they could gather their logs, raft them, and send them down the river to their mills. A number of lumbermen made plans to divert their logs on the Chippewa River into Beef Slough, a second channel of the stream which left the main river at Round Hill, about three miles below Durand. From this point the slough followed the bluffs for some twelve miles before it entered the Mississippi River about twelve miles below the regular Chippewa channel and some distance above Alma. The slough was almost completely obstructed, even for the floating of logs, although approximately a fourth of the Chippewa River waters flowed through the passage. The down-river lumber interests planned to clean out Beef Slough and place a sheer boom in the Chippewa at its entrance for the purpose of diverting logs into the reservoir. There the logs were to be sorted and gathered into rafts. At the lower end of the slough a jamb boom was to be placed to prevent the rafts from drifting off down the Mississippi. To accomplish their objective, a concern was organized in April, 1867, known as the Beef Slough Manufacturing, Booming, Log-driving and Transportation Company, with a capital stock of a hundred thousand dollars. The men from the Chippewa Valley objected strenuously to any interference with the natural channel of the Chippewa River on the grounds that too much

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The junction of the Chippewa River and Beef Slough, with the Sheer Boom Open

water flowed through the slough as it was, and improving it would divert more, causing interference with steamboat navigation and with the floating of the huge rafts by means of which the lumber sawed in the mills of the Chippewa pineries was transported to the markets down the Mississippi River.²

As early as 1866 the down-river millowners applied unsuccessfully to the Wisconsin legislature for a charter which would enable them to operate a boom at Beef Slough. Despite the active opposition of the Chippewa Valley lumbermen, however, who circulated petitions

asking the legislature to preserve the Chippewa for floating lumber rafts, for steamers, for building and maintaining dams, and for the best general interests of the entire valley, the Beef Slough boom company finally obtained a charter in 1870. But the costs had been so great that the company was practically bankrupt. The charter granted the company the power to catch, sort, raft, and scale all logs coming down to the slough. The logs were turned into the slough by a long, heavy, sheer boom placed diagonally across the river.

*Wisconsin, Private and Local Laws, 1866, p. 369; 1870, p. 754; Free Press, September 5, 1867, January 16, 1868; Mississippi Valley Lumberman, vol. 14, no. 6, p. 4, 5. The Wisconsin legislature granted the Chippewa Valley lumbermen authority to construct piers, dams, and booms at Beef Slough, and to use it for logging purposes.
Considerable improvements of Beef Slough were necessary before logs could be rafted and sent to the sawmills located on the Mississippi.\(^5\)

In the early years of lumber production on the Mississippi River it was the custom of the mill operators to purchase most of their logs from independent loggers of the Black and St. Croix River pineries. But these sources proved to be inadequate, occasionally causing serious embarrassment to the mills. The owners of the Rock Island mill which Weyerhaeuser and Denkmann purchased in 1860 had been forced to close it in 1858 because a logger failed to fulfill the terms of his contract. Realizing that it was essential for the future welfare of their business to assure themselves of abundant log supplies, Frederick Weyerhaeuser began in the early 1860's to invest in timber lands in the Chippewa Valley. He realized that the forests were not inexhaustible, and that large timber holdings were necessary to assure long life to his sawmill. In addition to guaranteeing a reliable source of logs, ownership of timber meant additional profits.\(^6\)

But ownership of timber lands did not assure the Mississippi sawmill owners of logs delivered at the mills, which was after all the chief purpose of purchasing pine. There were serious difficulties involved in driving and sorting the logs of the various Chippewa River mill companies. By 1870 many sawmills were located on the Chippewa between Chippewa Falls and Eau Claire. When logs from a hundred or more camps were put into the streams in the spring, they became inextricably intermixed. The river was so filled that

\(^5\) Blair, *Raft Pilot’s Log*, 47; John M. Holley, *Waterways and Lumber Interests in Western Wisconsin*, 212 (Madison, 1907); *Wisconsin Lumberman*, 3:399 (February, 1875); Robert K. Boyd, “Up and Down the Chippewa River,” in *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, 14:256–259 (March, 1931). Boyd contends that the sheer boom was used from New Brunswick to Puget Sound. There was some disagreement as to who invented the fin or sheer boom. Norton credits “one Randall” with the invention, stating that in a suit for royalties for its use, the plaintiff, the Eau Claire Lumber Company, to whom the boom had been assigned, obtained a judgment for “quite a sum of money.” Norton, *Mississippi River Logging Company*, 40.

logs destined for the lower mills could not get through. As they came down the river the Chippewa millowners attempted to search out and separate logs bearing their marks by closing the booms and stopping the drive. The confusion and delay caused serious friction among local millmen and loggers as well as among the down-river men. In an effort to settle the difficulties various devices were tried. For example, each mill threw a sheer boom across the stream as the mass of logs came through, stocked their private booms without regard to log marks, and then opened the boom for the mills below. The logs in the private booms were then scaled, the marks noted, and an account kept of the quantity and quality of logs which each mill had taken. At the end of the year, the millowners were to attempt to adjust their accounts. Since the system was not a success, it was abandoned. Thereafter each millowner again stopped all logs to select those bearing his marks. The operators on the Mississippi River complained that the Chippewa Valley millmen were monopolizing the river. Either some solution would have to be worked out or the lower millmen would be obliged to dispose of their investments.

The Beef Slough boom company operated the works for a short time, but its management was inefficient and it was either unwilling or unable to make needed improvements. Weyerhaeuser and Denkmann leased the boom, but proposed that a company be formed to purchase the properties. As a result the Mississippi River Logging Company was organized at Chicago in December, 1870, by a group of Mississippi millmen, who decided annually to drive sufficient logs into Beef Slough to furnish their mills. The company, which had its home office at Clinton, Iowa, issued stock worth a million dollars, and practically all the millmen on the river subscribed for it. The amount of stock assigned to each member was based on the amount of logs, in millions of feet, that he was likely to require annually. Weyerhaeuser, the prime mover of the enterprise, was a member of the company's first executive committee, and he was its president from 1872 until it was dissolved in 1909. The founding

\*Telegram, February 12, 1921; Fortune, 11:173; American Lumbermen, 102.
of the Mississippi River Logging Company marked the real begin­ning of the great Weyerhaeuser lumbering empire.  

The new company undertook to purchase pine lands, conduct logging operations for its members, and distribute the logs among them according to schedules. Logs were purchased for the company on the bank and at the boom. They were sorted, scaled, and rafted at the works of the company at Beef Slough, and later at West Newton on the Minnesota bank of the Mississippi. Most of the purchasing both of pine lands and logs was done by Weyerhaeuser, who was an expert timber appraiser. Stumpage, or standing timber, was purchased in amounts that varied all the way from homesteads to tracts of more than a hundred thousand acres. The latter were obtained from the Cornell University Wisconsin timber grant.

During the first years of its existence the Mississippi River Log­ging Company could hardly be considered successful. The Chippewa Falls and Eau Claire lumbermen continued to be hostile toward it, blaming the Mississippi River concern for the rapid depletion of timber, and for interference with navigation and with local sawing activities on the Chippewa. The company's output for the first year was discouraging and was a heavy drain on its capital; of thirty-five million feet of logs put into the Chippewa, only between ten and twelve million had gone through the Beef Slough boom. The Chippewa interests continued to hold up the general drive in order to take out their own logs. After another year's trial, which was hardly more successful than the first, the company decided that it would put in so many logs during the coming winter that the Chippewa millmen could not detain them all without interfering seriously with their own operations. The number of feet of logs handled increased steadily from approximately twelve million feet in 1871 to a hundred and thirty-three million in 1874. Eventually the choking of the Chippewa River with the Mississippi River Logging Com­pany's logs caused local mills to approach the company for some

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8 Fortune, 11:173; Norton, Mississippi River Logging Company, 34, 88; Blair, Raft Pilot's Log, 33; Gates, Wisconsin Pine Lands, 132; Telegram, February 12, 1921; American Lumbermen, 103; Wisconsin Lumberman, 3:399 (February, 1875).

working basis to eliminate the difficulties. An agreement was finally worked out which provided that all logs going into the Chippewa and its tributaries were to be divided between the Chippewa River lumbermen and those of the Mississippi River Logging Company on a percentage basis. To accomplish this, it was necessary to appraise the logs at the streams before the spring drive began.\textsuperscript{10}

Not until after the flood of 1880, however, when the Chippewa Logging Company was organized, did harmony prevail on the Chippewa. New clouds were gathering to disturb relations among the Eau Claire millowners, the Chippewa Lumber and Boom Company, which owned the great mill at Chippewa Falls, and the down-river operators. In 1879 the Chippewa Falls lumbermen decided to hold up the entire log supply of the Chippewa River, all of which passed by their mill at the great falls, ostensibly in order to take out their own logs,—which amounted to approximately eight per cent of the total,—and then to charge toll on logs of other companies for the use of the booming works. The addition to the cost of logs made it appear inevitable that the lower millmen would find it necessary to obtain control of the big Chippewa Falls property.\textsuperscript{11}

Before the Chippewa Lumber and Boom Company could obtain from the Wisconsin legislature authority to build its sorting works, one of the most disastrous floods ever to visit the Chippewa Valley occurred in the spring of 1880. The waters swept down the river in the midst of the sawing season, destroying all bridges, dams, and booms, and scattering the logs over the countryside for a distance of approximately a hundred and twenty-five miles. The dam at the Chippewa Dells also went out, and with it went the logs of the Eau Claire millmen. As a result, the sawmills were obliged to discontinue operations. Many of the escaped logs were held in Beef Slough, but many others went down to the mouth of the Chippewa River and out into the Mississippi.\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{10} Norton, \textit{Mississippi River Logging Company}, 14-17, 29-31, 36-38, 48; \textit{Wisconsin Lumberman}, 3:399 (February, 1875); \textit{Fortune}, 11:173; \textit{American Lumbermen}, 106.
\textsuperscript{12} Norton, \textit{Mississippi River Logging Company}, 51; Marshall, \textit{Autobiography}, 1:277.
To close their mills in midsummer would place a heavy strain on the Eau Claire lumbermen's finances. They therefore approached the Mississippi River Logging Company with an offer to exchange logs which had escaped down the river for the Mississippi concern's logs that were still up-river. Many of the logs which had been carried downstream were picked up by the lower millowners. To act as mediator between the hostile groups, R. D. Marshall of Chippewa Falls, the regular legal representative of the Chippewa Lumber and Boom Company and of the Mississippi logging company, was selected. Most of the sawmill owners attended a meeting in the office of Chauncy Lamb's lumber company at Clinton, Iowa. The first problem settled related to retrieving logs which had been washed up onto the banks. The cost of the work was estimated to be approximately two hundred thousand dollars. O. H. Ingram of Eau Claire was placed in charge of making the necessary arrangements with landowners.¹³

A more vital matter next undertaken was largely guided by Weyerhaeuser. This involved the working out of an exchange system of logs for the balance of the season of 1880 so that the Chippewa Valley lumbermen could continue their sawing. All operators of the valley entered into the agreement with the exception of the Chippewa Lumber and Boom Company, which did not wish to prejudice its plans for the separation of logs. By the terms agreed upon, the Chippewa Valley men scaled the Mississippi River Lumber Company's logs taken into their booms upstream, and gave in exchange logs carried downstream by the flood. The down-river men, however, received twice as many feet of logs as were retained in the Chippewa River booms, though, on a foot for foot basis, they paid for the excess at the market price of logs at Beef Slough. A permanent log exchange system was also worked out which made for much greater harmony in logging on the Chippewa thereafter, and the Mississippi sawmill owners were then able to obtain logs with far greater certainty than previously.¹⁴

There still remained, however, an important hindrance to the free flow of logs from the pineries, and that was the sorting boom of the Chippewa Lumber and Boom Company, which was authorized by the legislature in 1881. The franchise provided that to cover costs of handling logs the company could levy a toll of fifteen cents on each thousand board feet of logs and timber that passed through its works. Members of the Mississippi River Logging Company had been interested in purchasing the huge Chippewa property for some time, and Weyerhaeuser favored the arrangement, but there were considerations by both parties which prevented its consummation. The prospect of a toll on all its logs, however, made the Mississippi River Logging Company more amenable, and financial difficulties made the Chippewa sawmill firm more agreeable. A bargain was finally concluded in September, 1881, whereby the plant and a hundred thousand acres of pine were sold for $1,275,000 to the Mississippi River Logging Company and six of the sawmill firms which had their principal plants at Eau Claire. Seventy per cent of the stock was assigned to the former, and thirty to the latter. In each case the division was based on the average annual log cuts of the mills of each group. The stock division was arranged largely by Weyerhaeuser and Ingram.

The final step in consolidating the interests of the valley sawmill firms and those of the Mississippi River Logging Company was the organization of the Chippewa Logging Company of Chippewa Falls in 1881. This company became known to the white pine interests of the Northwest as the “pool.” It purchased timber lands and saw logs, carried on logging operations, and delivered logs for its members. During the twenty years of its existence it bought approximately two hundred and twenty-five thousand acres of timber lands, most of them from Cornell University, and delivered to its members over ten billion feet of logs. For a number of years in the 1880’s the company drove an annual average of a billion feet of logs down the Chippewa; the maximum reached was one and a half

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billion feet. Although the ration of logs for the Eau Claire millmen was changed several times, it was finally fixed at thirty per cent of the total, while seventy per cent went to the Mississippi River Logging Company members. Since the Eau Claire sawmill owners had not in general been heavy purchasers of pine, they now benefited from the timber secured by the pool.\footnote{Norton, \textit{Mississippi River Logging Company}, 30, 56–69; Marshall, \textit{Autobiography}, 1:290, 341; Telegram, July 25, 1916, February 12, 1921; \textit{American Lumbermen}, 104; Gates, \textit{Wisconsin Pine Lands}, 119, 132, 234.}

There were, in addition to the members of the Mississippi River and the Chippewa logging companies, independent loggers and millowners on the Mississippi, all of whose logs were handled by one or both of these concerns. A charge of seventy-five cents per thousand feet was made for handling logs, and those not connected with the companies usually received the same treatment as members.\footnote{Norton, \textit{Mississippi River Logging Company}, 70.}

When the Mississippi River Logging Company took over the Beef Slough boom in 1871, the boom and works were in need of repairs. Extensive improvements were made, thousands of piles were driven, many cribs and booms were placed, and pockets and chutes were arranged to handle the large number of logs coming through for sorting, storing, and rafting. By the summer of 1875, the expenditures amounted to three hundred thousand dollars and the capacity of the boom was two hundred million feet.\footnote{Norton, \textit{Mississippi River Logging Company}, 37; Blair, \textit{Raft Pilot’s Log}, 48; \textit{Wisconsin Lumberman}, 3:399 (February, 1875); \textit{Congressional Record}, 1880, p. 4483. Congress granted the Mississippi River Logging Company the right to place sheer booms in the Mississippi River.}

During the first year of work at Beef Slough in 1867, under the old Beef Slough company, there were rafted twelve million board feet of logs. This increased to twenty-six million feet for 1869, but for 1870 the figure dropped to approximately ten million feet. Under the management of the Mississippi River Logging Company the output rapidly increased. One of the biggest years was 1884, when six hundred and seventy-four million feet were boomed. Seventy-five steamboats were required to deliver the rafts prepared for the lower mills. In July, 1888, as many as eleven million feet of logs were rafted in a
single day. This was in sharp contrast to the St. Croix daily output, which was four million feet. To handle the work during busy seasons required from twelve to eighteen hundred men.²⁰

Careful organization was required to carry out all the operations. The portions of the Chippewa River and its tributaries within the jurisdiction of the Chippewa Logging Company were divided into sections; an experienced man was in charge of each, and one man directed the entire drive. William ("Billy") Smith, a former Michigan driver, was stream foreman, supervising all driving operations. Many of the men and all the bosses at Beef Slough were Scotch Canadians, former lumberjacks from Canada.²¹

As the log output of Beef Slough increased, storage space became scarce, and it was necessary for millowners to remove their rafts as soon as they were made up. The Mississippi River Logging Company finally decided that owners who were slow in coming for their logs should have their rafts dropped out of the slough and into the Mississippi at their own risk.²²

By 1889 working space at Beef Slough had become inadequate. The Mississippi River Logging Company, therefore, selected the West Newton Slough on the Minnesota side of the river, six miles below the mouth of Beef Slough, for storing rafts. Some improvements were necessary, such as clearing away obstacles, putting in cribs, driving piles, and the like. The entrance to Beef Slough was gradually closing up as vast quantities of sand accumulated below Round Hill. In periods of low water, logs were carried on down the Chippewa River instead of through the slough. In an effort to remove the sand and keep the entrance open, large sand pumps were employed. When these efforts failed, the company decided to use the storing ground at West Newton for rafting purposes as well. To carry on the work at the new location, its members organized the Minnesota Boom Company.²³

Much work was needed on the Mississippi River between the mouth of the Chippewa and West Newton. To prevent loss of logs in the Mississippi, piles were driven and cribs and hanging booms were placed. The cost of handling logs at the West Newton boom was less than at the old slough. For years between three and five hundred million feet of logs passed through West Newton annually, and a thousand men were needed to handle them. The peak was reached in 1892, when six hundred and thirty-two million board feet were rafted at the new boom.24

After that record, the business steadily declined until 1904, the last full season of activity at West Newton. The equipment and buildings were sold in that year, and in 1906 the pile drivers were disposed of. The piling, which had been pulled a year earlier, was added to the booms and logs assembled in the final clean-up, making a raft of thirty million feet. It was taken to a Winona mill by one of Weyerhaeuser's boats. Nothing now remains at either Beef Slough or West Newton to indicate their past importance in the great logging industry on the Mississippi.25

24 Norton, *Mississippi River Logging Company*, 77-79, 82; Blair, *Raft Pilot's Log*, 53. In the summer of 1890, Beef Slough was again used for sorting work and logs went through faster than ever, according to the *Mississippi Valley Lumberman*, vol. 18, no. 1, p. 1 (July 4, 1890), and seven million logs a day were rafted either at Beef Slough or West Newton.

25 Blair, *Raft Pilot's Log*, 33, 53, 292; Norton, *Mississippi River Logging Company*, 81, 87. According to the latter writer, booms in Michigan and other lumbering centers in the United States have handled greater quantities of logs than either Beef Slough or West Newton, but the booms at those places were "considered as among the most noted and successful."