

# THE White Pine ERA

**A**ccording to one lumberman who lived through Michigan's lumbering era, "there is no other tree in all the world which has so much romance . . . as the white pine." He was correct.

It was the white pine that made Michigan the nation's leading lumber-producing state from 1860 until 1910. The state's biggest white pines were called cork pine. These trees were 300 years old and grew to stand 200 feet tall. Today, a few remaining cork pine trees are at Hartwick Pines State Park near Grayling and at Estivant Pines Nature Sanctuary near Copper Harbor.




During Michigan's lumbering era, thousands of men, called shanty boys, cut down the dense forests that covered the state. Other men, called lumber barons, made great fortunes by operating companies that cut the trees.



Carolyn Damstra



Michigan in 1850

- pines 
- hardwoods 
- major rivers 

Logs were transported to sawmills, cut into boards, and shipped all across the Midwest.

White pine was easy to move because it floated. Loggers floated the logs to sawmills in towns at the mouths of the state's rivers. Two of Michigan's greatest sawmill cities were Muskegon at the mouth of the Muskegon River and Saginaw on the Saginaw River. In 1873 more than 1,600 Michigan sawmills cut millions of logs into boards.

In the late 1870s loggers

Photos State Archives of Michigan



began using railroads to transport logs. This allowed them to cut more than just the biggest trees. It also sped up the cutting of the state's forests. Most of Michigan's best pine forests had been cut by the early years of the twentieth century.

The areas where the forests once stood were

**Shanty boys used sleighs and horses (above) to move pine logs until the late 1870s when they started using railroads (below).**

called cutover lands. Cutover lands created problems like fires and erosion. During the 1930s, the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) planted tens of millions of seedlings on the cutover lands.

Today about half the state is forested and commercial forestry is still practiced. 🌲



# HOW TO... Log a Forest

**I**t is 1873 and you are the owner of the Ajax Logging Company. Your shanty boys have just logged over a stretch of forest. What's next?

First, you send men called timber cruisers to look for a new stand of pine. They discover 40 acres near the Muskegon River that contain cork pine. Your company purchases the land from the government.

The next task is to establish a temporary logging camp on the site. The camp includes a bunkhouse, a stable, a blacksmith shop, and a cookhouse. The bunkhouse is home to shanty boys who work six days a week. They are paid about \$25 a month. Pay is received at the end of the logging season that begins in the fall and ends in the spring.

A shanty boy's typical day begins before dawn.



Photos State Archives of Michigan

**In the spring, river hogs ride the logs to the sawmills.**

After a hearty breakfast, the men head into the forest. Using double-edged axes and crosscut saws, the shanty boys fell the biggest trees. Next, they hack off the branches and cut the trees into shorter logs.

Men called teamsters use horse-drawn sleighs to place the logs on the banks of the frozen Muskegon River. Water is sprinkled on the snow-covered roads. This makes them icy. The logs are stacked along the riverbanks.

In the spring, the logs are dumped into the melting river. Men who ride the

mass of logs, called river hogs, ride them to the sawmill in Muskegon. As the logs arrive at the mouth of the river, men called boomers sort out the Ajax Logging Company logs. These logs are floated to the company sawmill where a circular saw cuts them into boards. The boards are stacked to dry before being shipped by boat to Chicago.

After the timber is cut, the Ajax Logging Company will move on to another parcel of land that the timber cruisers have already discovered. 🌲

# Whose LOG

**LOG MARKS** were like western cattle brands. These brands were used to show ownership. Brands for cut logs were used in America beginning in the late 1600s.

In Michigan, log marks were introduced in the early 1840s. They were placed on the ends of logs by a hammer that carried the company's mark or logo. These logs were then floated down the state's rivers to sawmills. When the logs reached the sawmills the log marks allowed the logs to be sorted by company.

Log marks varied greatly. Some carried the initials of a company's owner or owners. Others were more complex. Combinations of letters, numbers, shapes, and even simple illustrations were used to mark logs all across Michigan.

Nobody knows how many log marks existed. One study identified more than 3,500 marks. This study claimed this number

**The MHM on the recreated marking hammer above stands for "Michigan Historical Museum." If you look closely, you can see original log marks on this log end, which is housed at the museum.**

Artifacts Michigan Historical Museum



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**John W. Karwick**  
(Cheboygan County)

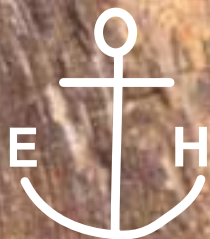


**Samuel W. Odell**  
(Newaygo County)



**T. B. Wilcox**  
(Muskegon County)

# LOG is this?



**Edward Hall**  
(Tittabawassee Boom  
Company)

represented “only a fraction of those that were used” by Michigan loggers.

The “marker” (also called the hammer man) marked the logs after they had been cut and stacked. He used a hammer that contained the mark on one end. Sometimes, he used a long bar (like a chisel) that carried the company mark. 🌲

## MAKING YOUR Mark

**What kind of log mark would you have for your logging company?**

Design your mark on the log at left.

The mark below was designed by Mick Schwerin, a fourth-grader at Gates Elementary.

(Mick’s Logging Company)

