PRE-EMINENCE OF MINNEAPOLIS AS A LUMBER CENTER

Something of the History of the Lumber Industry in This City, Its Present Condition and Its Prospects for the Future

By Charles B. Cheney.

Minneapolis has been, is now, and always will be a great lumber center.

Sawmills have clustered about St. Anthony Falls ever since there was any Minneapolis, and in fact, they were humming years before. There was a sawmill in old St. Anthony before there was a house, and lumber from the first mill built the original village on the east bank of the river. Since that day the city and the lumber industry have grown together. As a lumber-producing point the city has reached its maximum, but those who prophesy a future decline of the industry here are not familiar with the situation. As a distributing center for the northwest, Minneapolis is in no danger of losing prestige. Both wholesale and retail interests have gravitated here as to their natural meeting point, and here they will remain.

In the Lead for Twenty Years.

For twenty years Minneapolis has been the world's greatest lumber center. The combination of mills and wholesale interests has maintained it in that position, and tho several manufacturing companies have wound up their existence here, the Lumber Exchange shelters a larger number of lumbermen today than ever in its history. New concerns are appearing every week, and everything attests the prosperity of the industry.

From the small beginnings of antebellum days to the vast proportions of today it is a far cry, but from the first white settlement here the city has been marked by nature as a natural lumber market. The great pine forests of the upper Mississippi find this their outlet. In the earliest times logs were cut and floated in the streams to the mill, and half a century of invention has discovered no cheaper and more effective method. Logs cut on the banks of the Mississippi and its tributaries were easily driven to Minneapolis, but not so easily handled in their plunge over the falls and down the rapid course below. Minneapolis was in those days the nearest practical sawing point to the market, which then lay down the river. The arrival of the railroads gave the city distributing outlets in every direction, and while it made mills possible above and below, the superior facilities here have always attracted the largest producing factors.

Beginnings of Industry.

The first mill at the falls was a crude affair built in 1821 by soldiers, to supply lumber for Fort Snelling. It was soon abandoned. The lumber industry in Minnesota actually began on the St. Croix, with a mill at Marine in 1839, and one at Stillwater in 1843. It was in 1847, the year of St. Anthony's founding, that Ard Godfrey built a small mill at the east end of the dam which spanned the east channel over to Hennepin island. He built it for Franklin Steele, taking an interest himself. The mill had two circular saws, and was capable of sawing 15,000 feet of lumber in a day. From its product were built the early houses of St. Anthony, which grew so fast that more mills were started along this dam, running by waterpower.

The First Mill.

The first mill on the West Side was built by Ard Godfrey at the mouth of Minnehaha creek, where the boat landing now is, in 1853, but it did not thrive. The first paying mill on the West Side was built in 1856 by Pomeroy, Bates & Co., near the mouth of Bassett's creek, and ran at a lively rate until 1859, when it burned down and was not rebuilt because waterpower was so much cheaper. The pioneer sawmill men actually spanned the river with a dam in 1858, a short distance above the falls, and put in sawmills along the dam. The largest, called the Pioneer mill, was at the west bank. The mills and dam all burned in 1870, but another dam was built 300 feet nearer the falls, and more mills built. Those mills were primitive in machinery and methods, of course, compared with the monsters of today, but they answered the purpose of the time.

The first big steam power mill was built by J. Dean & Co., in 1866, at the foot of First avenue N, where the Wisconsin Central freighthouse now stands. It was called the Pacific mill, and was run by the first owners till 1876, when it was sold to Camp & Walker. Meanwhile, other steam power mills had been started along both banks, and the industry began to take on the look it has today. Most of the companies manufacturing here today are comparatively recent arrivals in the field, but mills have been running on most of the sites for decades, passing into different hands from time to time.

Oldest Organization.

Since the very early days of lumbering on the upper river, the work of driving the logs in the Mississippi and some of the tributary streams has been handled economically by a single organization, owned by the manufacturers. This organization is far older than any of the present manufacturing companies. The Mississippi & Rum River Boom company was formed in 1856 by the consolidation of two concerns, and has been running ever since. It now makes a common drive of logs from Brainerd to Minneapolis, turns them in the local booms to the different mills, and follows the logs destined for mills down the river to the boom at St. Paul, where they are made up into rafts.

Custom sawing has been a feature of the trade here since early years, and this is the first year that all mills have been operated by their owners with their own logs. Until this season large wholesale concerns have bought logs and hired the sawing done at custom mills, but the practice has been falling into disuse gradually on account of the high price of logs, which made it impracticable for companies not owning their own stumpage to engage in manufacturing. Last spring the Diamond mill, which had done custom sawing for twenty years, burned down, and will not be rebuilt, and the Plymouth mill has been dismantled. The number of companies actually in the manufacturing business here is the smallest in many years, but the total product has not decreased greatly in volume, and the advancing value of lumber has kept the money value of the product equal to the biggest years of the business.

Present-Day Manufacturers.

Seven companies are now manufacturing pine lumber in Minneapolis. They are the C. A. Smith Lumber company, the Bovey-DeLaittre Lumber company, the Itasca Lumber company, the Northland Pine company, the Carpenter-Lamb Lumber company, the Shevlin-Carpenter Lumber company, and B. F. Nelson & Son's company. All of them are comparatively recent in their organization, tho some of the mills have a longer history.

The C. A. Smith Lumber company, which now has the largest producing mill, dates from 1878, but at that time was a retail concern. It later went into manufacturing on the east bank of the river, but it was not until 1893 that the present fine modern mill was erected at Camden Place. It has a full complement of machinery for reducing the waste products, including a box factory and the factory of the Northwestern Compo Board company.

Minneapolis a Great Center of Manufacturers and Dealers in Lumber

Sawmills in operation in Minneapolis	7
Lumber wholesalers and jobbers	91
Line yard (retail) companies with offices here	57
Local retail yards	10
Sash and door companies	17
Other factories using lumber as chief raw material	30
Total concerns in lumber trade	212

The Bovey-DeLaittre Lumber company, which has the mill at Washington and Thirty-ninth avenue N, is the successor of Eastman, Bovey & Co., which built a mill at the falls, on the West Side, in 1870. Later they bought the Butler mill, on the east bank, and when this mill burned, they erected the present plant and began manufacturing there in 1886.

The Carpenter-Lamb Lumber company, whose plant looks across the river from the East Side at the mills just mentioned, had its inception in the Adams-Horr company, sash and door jobbers, which later became Carpenter Brothers & Co., and turned the jobbing business over to the Curtis & Yale company in 1892, building the mill and beginning the manufacture of lumber in 1893. In 1898 the copartnership was changed to the incorporation, as the Carpenter-Lamb Lumber company.

The Itasca Lumber company is an old corporation, existing for a number of years as a timber holding and logging company, but has only had the mill since 1902. The mill was originally built in 1887 by the De Soto Lumber company at Twenty-eighth avenue N and Washington, to saw logs for the Itasca Lumber company, but after two years the H. C. Akeley Lumber company was organized and took the mill. The Itasca Lumber company furnished the logs as before, and the plant ran in this way until 1902, when Mr. Akeley retired from business, and the H. C. Akeley Lumber company was bought out by the Itasca Lumber company, now in complete charge of the business.

The Nelson mills, now operated by B. F. Nelson Sons & Co. with the Nelson-Tuthill Lumber company as the selling corporation, are near the old district and of older origin. One was built in 1869 by Captain John Rollins, and in 1880 the firm of Nelson & Tenney was organized. It bought the Rollins mill and rebuilt it, and in 1885, as the Nelson-Tenney Lumber company, built the companion mill near by. The Nelson-Tuthill Lumber company was organized in 1898 to take charge of the lumber stocks and sales, and in 1902 B. F. Nelson Sons & Co. took over the mill property.

The mill of the Northland Pine company at Thirty-second avenue N and Washington, was first built by the Northern Mill company, and sold by them in 1893 to the Backus-Brooks Lumber company. The mill was burned to the ground in the disastrous year of 1894, but immediately rebuilt, and operated by the Backus-Brooks Lumber company until the close of last season. It was sold last winter to the Northland Pine company, which is now operating the mill. This corporation has been engaged in logging for a number of years, but has never before manufactured. It is backed by the Weyerhaeuser & Denkmann, Musser & Laird interests, and has timber resources that are likely to keep it going after all the other local mills have ceased operations.

The Shevlin-Carpenter Lumber company dates from 1892, but the mill it operates was built by the same interests in the winter of 1886-87. In May, 1886, the Hall & Ducey Lumber company was formed by Stephen A. Hall, P. A. Ducey of Detroit, Mich.; Thomas H. Shevlin and Hovey C. Clarke. The Hall & Shevlin Lumber company was formed in the fall of the same year for the purpose of building a mill on the site formerly occupied by the Goodnow mill at Fourth avenue N and the river, which burned down in 1886. This company was composed of S. A. Hall, Thomas H. Shevlin and Hovey C. Clarke. During the first year the logs of the Hall & Ducey Lumber company were sawed at the old Camp & Walker mill, occupying the site now used for coach tracks just north of the Union depot. That winter the new mill was built, and the first-named company handled the timber and the lumber after it came from the mill, the Hall & Shevlin Lumber company doing the sawing. In 1892 the two companies were merged as the Shevlin-Carpenter Lumber company, E. L. Carpenter having purchased a portion of the Hall interests. Since that time both timber interests and manufacturing have been handled by the well-known company.

The Minneapolis saw mills alone have a working force of 2,500 men during the sawing season, which generally lasts from the middle of April to the early part of November. The average wage of employes is close to $3 a day, and on that basis the total yearly pay roll of the mill is figured at $1,365,000.

Vast Volume of Product.

A street-car ride up the river will give any one some idea of the vastness of the Minneapolis lumber industry, but the piles of lumber awaiting shipment at any one time are only a small part of the year's production, for millions of feet are being shipped out every week, winter and summer. Large manufacturing establishments in other cities take it by the train load, but the bulk of it goes to retail lumber yards in the northwest and central west, to supply the building demands of the people. Last year Minneapolis shipped 350,816,000 feet of lumber. The product of the local mills during the sawing season of 1904 was 386,911,000 feet.

To give some conception of the figures, it may help to say that the local lumber product of 1904 would lay a board walk three feet wide the entire circumference of the earth.

The production of lumber in the past thirty-five years at Minneapolis has mounted to the dizzy total of 11,134,513,451 feet. If it was desired to make that boardwalk around the world into a commodious promenade, that amount of lumber would give it a width of eighty-four feet. The following table shows the production of lumber each year at Minneapolis since 1870, when the industry first began to take on modern proportions:

Production for Thirty-five Years.

Year—	Feet Cut.	Year—	Feet Cut.
1870	118,233,113	1889	275,855,648
1871	117,557,028	1890	343,573,782
1872	167,918,814	1891	447,713,252
1873	189,909,782	1892	488,724,624
1874	191,305,679	1893	409,000,000
1875	156,665,000	1894	491,256,000
1876	200,371,377	1895	479,102,000
1877	129,076,000	1896	307,179,000
1878	130,274,076	1897	460,348,272
1879	149,745,547	1898	469,701,000
1880	195,452,182	1899	594,373,000
1881	234,254,071	1900	501,522,000
1882	314,363,168	1901	578,113,000
1883	272,793,222	1902	465,224,000
1884	300,724,373	1903	432,144,000
1885	313,998,166	1904	386,911,000
1886	262,636,019		
1887	220,822,974	Total, 35	
1888	337,663,301	years.	11,134,513,451

As the volume of production has decreased, the value per thousand has steadily increased since the days of the depression in 1894-96. The average wholesale value of the Minneapolis mill product for last year is estimated by leading lumbermen at $17.25, taking the average of the different mills,, which gives a total value for the 1904 cut of $6,674,214. The value of the lath and shingles turned out would increase this to $6,888,336, wholesale price. This year, while the production will fall somewhat behind last season on account of the long interruption to the sawing season due to high water, the prices are higher than last year, and the money value of the product is likely to exceed last year.

Statistics kept by the Chamber of Commerce for the past twenty-seven years show graphically the development of the lumber industry, not only as a manufacturing, but as a receiving and distributing point. The total receipts and shipments of lumber by feet since 1878 are given in the following table:

Movement of Product.

Year—	Receipts. Feet.	Shipments. Feet.
1878	18,510,000	172,090,000
1879	29,480,000	149,720,000
1880	20,400,000	167,840,000
1881	44,755,000	122,540,000
1882	49,680,000	186,739,000
1883	37,695,000	163,082,000
1884	67,970,000	164,620,000
1885	61,619,000	139,450,000
1886	51,210,000	93,830,000
1887	64,830,000	138,492,000
1888	59,294,000	246,498,000
1889	85,385,000	268,680,000
1890	117,510,000	300,495,000
1891	95,825,000	353,945,000
1892	129,675,000	397,875,000
1893	103,335,000	372,330,000
1894	101,205,000	324,946,000
1895	81,150,000	364,635,000
1896	68,020,000	277,980,000
1897	92,130,000	287,985,000
1898	87,150,000	345,600,000
1899	95,145,000	492,975,000
1900	85,380,000	398,970,000
1901	118,650,000	465,405,000
1902	170,150,000	387,750,000
1903	155,168,000	390,976,000
1904	148,048,000	350,816,000
Total	1,229,269,000	7,524,324,000

Invasion of Other Woods.

White pine is still king of all lumber in the northwest, but it is no longer able to supply the entire demands of the territory within reach of the mills. For a decade the yellow pine mills of the southern states have been pushing their sales northward into former white pine territory. The once despised hemlock of Wisconsin has come largely into use and has displaced pine for some purposes. The vast resources of the Pacific coast states are being exploited now at a rate which makes it necessary to seek wider markets, and immense quantities of fir and cedar are consumed in the northwest, especially wast of the Missouri river. The production of the coast mills is now enormous, and in ten years the lumber shipments have increased tenfold, and shingle shipments threefold. Comparative figures of the rail shipments from Pacific coast mills give an idea of the leaps and bounds by which the industry has developed there.

	Lumber, Feet.	Shingles.
1894	64,245,000	1,756,000,000
1904	658,290,000	5,759,640,000

The lumber shipments last year filled 43,872 cars, and the shingle shipments 36,069 cars. A large part of this shipment went east, much of it thru Minnesota Transfer to points beyond here and even east of Chicago. Even Minneapolis last year received 37,616,000 feet over the Great Northern and 45,136,000 feet over the Northern Pacific, of which the bulk came from the coast. Large amounts also came from the western pine mills of Montana, Idaho and eastern Washington, which are finding a good market in the Dakotas.

Distributing Center for All.

Minneapolis is the center of distribution for all these products in the northwest and the central west. The wholesale trade here is growing each year, and has reached enormous proportions. Large jobbing firms have headquarters here and forces of traveling men out.

MINNEAPOLIS SAWMILL PRODUCT, 1904

	Amount Ft.	Value.
Lumber	386,911,000	$6,674,214
Lath	53,552,000	174,044
Shingles	32,063,000	40,078
Total value		$6,888,336
Sawmill employees, number		2,500
Annual payroll, locally		$1,365,000

The Pacific coast mills have salesoffices here, and there is a host of commission men who act as connecting links between small mills and retail dealers. The competition is so keen that Minneapolis is recognized as the cheapest market, and the large retailers have taken advantage of that fact by establishing headquarters here and buying on the ground. No less than fifty-seven outside retail or "line yard" companies, according to the lumbermen's credit book, have offices in this city, while ninety-one separate concerns or individuals are dealing in lumber and its products by wholesale or on commission. The heads of these concerns, with their army of employees, populate one downtown office building almost entirely, and they are no mean factor in the city's population and wealth.

In years to come, when Minneapolis will become of less importance as a lumber-producing point, the wholesale trade will gain in importance. The lumber now sold by local mills will be brought from elsewhere, and still distributed from Minneapolis. The importance of Minneapolis as a lumber city will never wane.