

RAFTING ON THE MISSISSIPPI*

PROLOGUE TO PROSPERITY

For sheer magnitude the rafting industry is without a parallel in early Upper Mississippi Valley transportation history.¹ It dominated the traffic of the Father of Waters for almost three generations. It gave rise to a picturesque, half-horse, half-alligator type of river man, who challenged the imagination of Mark Twain and provided settlers of the Upper Mississippi with their closest approximation to Mike Fink — King of Ohio-Lower Mississippi keelboatmen. It accelerated the mushroom growth of such towns as Dubuque, Clinton, Davenport, Muscatine, Burlington, Fort Madison and Keokuk. It provided much of the lumber which transformed Iowa from a log cabin and sod house frontier state into a land of comfortable frame dwellings. It fixed the establishment of wood-working industries that remain nationally known to this day. It enhanced the wealth of the mighty lumber barons of the days of "Come and Get It," men who in turn left behind them such monuments to their memories as the Stout Institute at Menomonie, Wisconsin, the Carnegie-Stout Free Library at Dubuque, the Denkmann Library at Augustana College in Rock Island, and the P. M. Musser Library at Muscatine. The eyes of many pioneer Iowans will kindle as they call to memory those raucous, vibrant days when raftsmen ruled the winding reaches of the Upper Mississippi from the Falls of St. Anthony to bustling St. Louis.

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¹ In addition to valuable material found in the publications of the Minnesota Historical Society and the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, two books on rafting are available to the scholar: Walter A. Blair, *A Raft Pilot's Log* (Cleveland, 1930), and Charles E. Russell, *A-Rafting on the Mississipp'* (New York, 1928).

The magnitude of the rafting industry is attested by the immense runs of logs and lumber brought down the great tributaries of the Mississippi from Wisconsin and Minnesota. In his valuable book entitled *A Raft Pilot's Log*, Captain Walter A. Blair, long a resident of Davenport, Iowa, has compiled the following figures on the output of logs from different streams into the Mississippi.²

Output of Logs

From the Saint Croix river and lake	12,444,281,720 feet
From the Mississippi above the Falls	1,709,062,520 "
From the Chippewa river.....	25,365,875,930 "
From the Black river.....	5,170,000,000 "
From the Wisconsin river.....	2,285,000,000 "
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Grand total rafted down the Mississippi.....	46,974,220,170 "
Value at \$15.00 per thousand feet, \$704,613,300,000	

The significance of these astronomical figures can best be understood by comparing them with the lead trade of the Upper Mississippi. Between 1823 and 1848 fully 236,000 tons of lead valued at about \$15,000,000 was transported down the Mississippi to St. Louis. By converting the 46,974,220,170 board feet into tons we find that approximately 72,418,589 tons of lumber, or 306 times the amount of mineral extracted during the lead period, found its way down the Mississippi. Measured in terms of value, the lumber for the entire logging period was worth about 47 times as much as the lead.³

² Walter A. Blair, *A Raft Pilot's Log*, pp. 289-291.

³ William J. Petersen, "The Lead Traffic on the Upper Mississippi, 1823-1848," in *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 17:72-97 (June, 1930). See also Petersen's *Steamboating on the Upper Mississippi* (Iowa City, 1937). The 46,974,220,170 board feet are reduced to tons by dividing that figure by 12 to secure the number of cubic feet (3,914,518,347); multiplying the number of cubic feet by 37 pounds, the average weight of white pine fresh cut per cubic foot; and dividing this sum (144,837,178,837 pounds) by 2000 pounds to secure the approximate tons of lumber (72,418,589 tons). The relative relation of the rafting period is gained by dividing the 236,000 tons of lead into the 72,418,589 tons of lumber, which gives 306 times as many tons. The writer is indebted to Dean Walter Loehwing of the Graduate College of the University of Iowa for data on fresh cut white pine which ranges from 33.88 to 40.08 pounds per cubic foot. The author used the figure 37 as the average weight of white pine.

It should be pointed out, however, that some 611,000 tons of lead were extracted from the Upper Mississippi between 1821 and 1904. The following table summarizes the lead production of this region.⁴

<i>Decade</i>	<i>Tons</i>	<i>Decade</i>	<i>Tons</i>
1821-1830.....	23,244	1861-1870.....	84,000
1831-1840.....	55,718	1871-1880.....	49,000
1841-1850.....	215,979	1881-1904.....	24,000
1851-1860.....	161,334		
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Total.....	456,275	Total.....	157,700
GRAND TOTAL.....611,700 tons			

From these figures it will be seen that more than a third of the lead was produced during the Fabulous Forties while almost three-fourths of it was extracted before the outbreak of the Civil War. Since steamboats transported over 95% of the lead prior to the arrival of the railroad at the Mississippi in 1855, and since they continued to compete, but on a declining scale, during the 1860's, it is probably fair to say that the pre-Civil War production represents the amount of lead carried by steamboat while that mined between 1861 and 1904 represents the lead that found its way to market by rail. In any event the rafting industry comprises a tonnage 118 times as great as the entire lead production from 1821 to 1904 or about 158 times as great as that mined and shipped down the Mississippi prior to the Civil War.⁵

⁴ Bernard H. Schockel, "Settlement and Development of Jo Daviess County" in Bulletin 26, *Illinois State Geological Survey*, pp. 195-96.

⁵ A good deal of statistical data for the period prior to the Civil War is contained in *Hunt's Merchants' Magazine*, 40:244, 41:126, 42:330-32, 44:703 (Feb., July, 1859, Mar., 1860, June, 1861). The relative importance of the various lead mining towns as shipping centers in 1860 is indicated in the last mentioned reference.

<i>From</i>	<i>Pigs</i>	<i>Pounds</i>
Galena	147,837	18,348,590
Dubuque	55,327	3,872,890
Warren	49,050	3,433,500
Apple River	29,626	2,073,820
Potosi (est.)	20,000	1,400,000
Council Hill	14,203	994,210
Scales Mound	13,024	911,680
Dunleith	10,298	720,860
Cassville	9,965	691,550
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	349,330	24,453,100

The story of rafting on the Upper Mississippi divides itself into two periods — the floating raft period which extends from the 1830's to 1865, and the raftboat period which began with the introduction of these unique craft as a means for speeding log and lumber rafts downstream. A period of transition between 1864 and 1869 might well be noted, for it was during these six years that the first efforts to tow rafts downstream took place. With the construction of the *J. W. Van Sant* (1) in 1869 the raftboat period was fairly launched. Let us first trace the highlights of the floating raft period.

IN THE LAND OF PAUL BUNYAN

The earliest rafts were floated down the Mississippi to the pioneers in the Black Hawk Purchase. As early as 1833 a lumber raft reached Dubuque from above, where pioneer loggers had been carrying on "sporadic operations" on various streams since about 1810.⁶ This lumber was brought from a sawmill on the Chippewa River owned by James, Ezekiel, and William Lockwood. It was William Lockwood who piloted the first floating raft that ever landed at Dubuque. So great was the need for lumber in the metropolis of the Black Hawk Purchase that the entire raft was "purchased, delivered, and in many instances prepared for building purposes" before nightfall. Small wonder that men should turn to the Northern pineries.

Fabulous fortunes were made by many who ventured to stake their claims in the land of Paul Bunyan. Among the trail-blazers in this embryonic lumber industry were such figures as Daniel Whitney on the Wisconsin River, Colonel John Shaw on the Black River, Constant Andrews, Hardin Perkins, James Lockwood, and Joseph Rolette in the Chippewa Valley, and Franklin Steele, William H. C. Folsom, William Holcombe, and William S. Hungerford on the St. Croix River. The large profits derived from the lumber industry of western New York led many Eastern speculators to invest in Wisconsin timberland, the names of Daniel Webster,

The receipts of lead by river at St. Louis for the three preceding years indicate that steamboats still carried a goodly share of the lead downstream for no lead was brought by railroad during this same period. The figures are:

	1857	1858	1859
Lead (pigs)	162,555	228,020	157,265

⁶ *The History of Dubuque County, Iowa* (Chicago, 1880), 353.

Edward Everett, Caleb Cushing, and Ralph Waldo Emerson looming large among the venturers in such Wisconsin real estate.⁷

An impelling factor in the development of the lumber industry in Wisconsin Territory was the high cost of pine brought down the Ohio and up the Mississippi by steamboat. Of hardwood there was a great plenty in the Black Hawk Purchase; in 1839 F. H. Stone and Jack Richman bought 60,000 feet of hardwood lumber that had been sawed on the Maquoketa and rafted down the Mississippi to Muscatine. It was composed of black walnut, oak, and linn; the walnut, one pioneer asserted, being excellent for the "coffins" that must be made because of the prevailing sickness in Muscatine. According to J. P. Walton: "Stone worked one day and had the ague the next, when Richman, who had it, but on alternate days, took his place, which was a great accommodation to their business."⁸

Unfortunately such hardwood was difficult to fashion and unpopular with pioneer carpenters who preferred to work with softwood. In 1837, Wm. R. Smith, a pioneer of Wisconsin, noted the absence of pine timber.

There is no pine timber in the country, except very high up the Wisconsin river, above Fort Winnebago, and up the St. Croix river, and the other tributaries of the upper Mississippi. Pine lumber is worth six dollars per hundred at Prairie du Chien, Cassville, and Galena, in Illinois; these towns may be called the chief shipping ports of this part of Wisconsin territory. Pine lumber is brought down the Ohio river from the tributaries of the Allegheny above Pittsburg, as far up as the New York state line, and taken up the Mississippi by way of St. Louis; and instances have occurred of houses having been built together at Pittsburgh, and at Cincinnati, and shipped in parts around to the territory, and placed on the ground cheaper than they could have been by procuring the lumber from the Wisconsin river of the upper Mississippi.⁹

⁷ Robert F. Fries, "The Founding of the Lumber Industry in Wisconsin" in *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, 26:27-29 (September, 1942); William H. C. Folsom, "History of Lumbering in the St. Croix Valley, With Biographic Sketches" and Daniel Stanchfield, "History of Pioneer Lumbering on the Upper Mississippi and Its Tributaries, With Biographic Sketches" in *Minnesota Historical Collections*, 9:291-324, 325-362.

⁸ J. P. Walton, "Unwritten History of Bloomington in Early Days" in *Annals of Iowa* (Second Series), 1:55-56 (April, 1882).

⁹ Wm. R. Smith, *Observations on the Wisconsin Territory; Chiefly on that Part Called the "Wisconsin Land District,"* pp. 7, 8.

Lieutenant Albert M. Lea presents an optimistic and less accurate view in his

In contrast to Wm. R. Smith, both Albert Miller Lea and John Plumbe, Jr., were so carried away by their ecstasy over the prospects of the Black Hawk Purchase that they were unable to properly evaluate the lumber resources of the region. In his *Sketches of Iowa and Wisconsin*, John Plumbe, Jr., endeavored to corroborate his own views of "the finest domains that nature ever offered to man" by presenting the "interesting testimony of many other eye witnesses." Almost every one of these witnesses made some comment on the timber resources of the region. Thus, the editor of the *New Orleans Bee* declared Wisconsin Territory was divided with prairies and woodland so that a "sufficient quantity of timber" was afforded for every purpose. He did not fail to point out, however, that the region north of the Wisconsin River was "nearly covered with a dense forest of white pine, and is abundantly supplied with water privileges by which this valuable timber may be prepared for transportation or home consumption, with the utmost ease and cheapness." In 1838 the testimony of two Canadian delegates of the "Mississippi Emigration Company" praised the "immense forests of the best pine, and other good timber for sawing purposes; with every facility for water power, and transportation down the Mississippi, by which means the whole country along the banks will soon be supplied at reasonable rates: considerable capital is already engaged in the lumber trade, and several rafts have been sent down the Mississippi and broken up and sold at Davenport, Burlington, and other towns: all sorts of lumber for building are at present, exceedingly scarce and dear in the Territory, arising principally from the want of saw-mills; but this difficulty will be soon overcome as there are plenty of mill-sites in the country, but it will never be as cheap and as conveniently obtained as in Canada."¹⁰

The difficulty and cost of securing lumber on the Iowa frontier was

Notes on The Wisconsin Territory, Particularly with Reference to The Iowa District, or Black Hawk Purchase (Philadelphia, 1836), 11-12. Reprinted by the State Historical Society of Iowa at Iowa City in 1935. After describing the tree-studded rivers, Lea asserted: "These woods also afford the timber necessary for building houses, fences, and boats. Though probably three-fourths of the District is without trees . . . No part of the District is probably more than three miles from good timber; and hence it is scarcely any where necessary to build beyond the limits of the woods to be convenient to farming land."

¹⁰ John Plumbe, Jr., *Sketches of Iowa and Wisconsin, Taken During a Residence of Three Years in Those Territories* (St. Louis, 1839). A copy of this rare and valuable book is preserved in the Library of the State Historical Society of Iowa. It was reprinted by the State Historical Society of Iowa at Iowa City in 1948. See reprint pp. 6, 32-34.

apparent to all pioneers. In 1833 Francis Gehon, a delegate to the first Constitutional Convention from Dubuque, occupied a frame house constructed in Galena and set up in Dubuque. In 1836 the lumber for the first territorial capitol at Belmont was brought by steamboat via the Allegheny, Ohio, and Mississippi rivers to Galena, whence it was transported overland by ox team. In that same year Reverend Alfred Brunson, a sturdy Methodist missionary, dismantled his two-story home in Meadville, Pennsylvania, and shipped it by steamboat to Prairie du Chien. In 1838 a Burlington lumber dealer advertised 30,000 feet of white lumber from the Allegheny River in New York State.¹¹

As early as 1837 a Dubuque editor, appalled at the high cost of Pennsylvania lumber on the Upper Mississippi, raised the question of tapping some less remote timber area. It was estimated that the supply of white pine lumber in Maine, New York, and Pennsylvania, would last only fifteen years and the editor naturally looked northward whence a few rafts of lumber had already come. Up to 1837, however, the Indians had owned virtually all of the timberland in Wisconsin and Minnesota but in that year Governor Henry Dodge negotiated a treaty whereby the Chippewa Indians ceded their rights to much of the timberland at the headwaters of the St. Croix, Chippewa, and Wisconsin rivers. Better times seemed certain for many Iowa towns along the Upper Mississippi.¹²

The opening of the rafting season in 1838 was awaited with anxiety and keen anticipation by various Mississippi River towns. On March 31, 1838, the *Iowa News* declared: "The prospects of our town are brightening since the opening of spring. So soon as lumber can be brought down the river, building will commence. By fall lumber will be brought down the Wisconsin from mills built since the Chippewa Treaty, in the extensive pinery, when buildings may be constructed much easier and cheaper than heretofore." Four months later, on July 21st, the same editor chronicled the arrival of a raft of white pine which had been floated to Dubuque from a point 300 miles up the Wisconsin River. Although the timber in this raft was inferior the editor learned a first-rate quality could be procured far-

¹¹ *The History of Dubuque County, Iowa* (Chicago, 1880), 353, 385; Robert F. Fries, "The Founding of the Lumber Industry in Wisconsin," *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, 26:26; *Iowa Territorial Gazette and Burlington Advertiser*, July 21, 1838.

¹² *Iowa News* (Dubuque), June 10, 1837. News about Henry Dodge and the Chippewa negotiations was carried in the *Iowa News* on July 15, 22, August 5, 12, September 2, 1837.

ther up. Because of the exorbitant lumber prices prevailing in Dubuque, it was hoped that more of this valuable building material would be brought in to compete against Pennsylvania lumber.

The same effect was noted at Fort Madison where the arrival of a raft of more than 100,000 feet of pine plank resulted in the lumber being offered at 100 per cent less than the previous price demanded. The Fort Madison *Patriot* felt the price would be "still lower" as the mills increased on the Chippewa, a fact which would eventually be of "great convenience" to Fort Madison citizens.¹³

From the very beginning a goodly amount of Iowa capital was invested in Wisconsin timber. In the spring of 1838 John Plumbe, Jr. advertised for enterprising men of small capital who were prepared to invest their money in sawmills to prepare "lumber of every description suited to the several markets on the Mississippi river." Plumbe described himself as a proprietor of the "heaviest timbered Pine Land" on the Chippewa River in the Carver Claim.¹⁴

Numerous difficulties were encountered in floating rafts downstream. W. H. C. Folsom, for more than fifty years a resident of the Upper Mississippi Valley, recalls the trials and tribulations of John Boyce when he rafted the first logs out of the St. Croix in the spring of 1839.

Boyce rafted his logs with poles and ropes made of basswood strings. The high water swept them away. He gathered from the broken rafts enough for one raft, made it strong as possible, and continued the descent. The raft struck the first island and went to pieces. Boyce saved the canoe and a part of the provisions. Boyce was by this time in a furious rage at his want of success, but tried a third time to make a raft. The crew, tired and hungry, refused to work. A new contract was made and written on a slate, there being no paper. The logs were left in the river.

Some of them floated down and were sold to companies located on the St. Croix. Boyce lost all his labor and investment and left the country in disgust. His men got little for their work. The contractor who supplied provisions and clothing to the lumberjacks and raftsmen was never compensated for his goods.¹⁵

¹³ Fort Madison *Patriot*, July 11, 1838.

¹⁴ *Iowa News*, April 14, 1838. Many men who invested their capital in Wisconsin timber or in sawmills came from the Iowa country.

¹⁵ W. H. C. Folsom, *Fifty Years in the Northwest* (St. Paul, Minn., 1888), 97-98.

Gradually a system was evolved whereby the floating rafts were lashed quite firmly together. Most of these original rafts, it should be observed, were lumber rather than log rafts because sawmills had been established at various points on the Wisconsin, Black, Chippewa, and St. Croix rivers. As the years passed, however, more and more Mississippi River towns developed their own sawmills and a tug of war ensued as to whether the season's cut should be sawed at its source or be shipped downstream in log rafts to Dubuque, Clinton, Davenport, Muscatine, Burlington, Fort Madison, Keokuk, and points below. The latter system ultimately won and thereafter fewer lumber rafts floated downstream; but log rafts were generally loaded with laths and shingles.¹⁶

Simon A. Sherman, a pioneer of the Wisconsin River valley, has left an account of the work needed to make up one of those early Mississippi lumber rafts:

The raft was made by taking three planks and boring two-inch auger holes about one foot from each end and another in the middle. Into these holes grubs were inserted. These grubs were small trees about two inches in diameter, dug up with a portion of the roots, and cut off about three feet above and made to fit the holes, with a head upon the lower end. After the grubs are fitted into the plank, three boards (the same as the grub planks) were put upon the grubs crosswise. Then the raft-building commenced, the lumber being put on crosswise alternately, until sixteen courses were laid. Then binding planks were fastened on to the grubs, and witched or drawn tight together with an instrument called a witch, and then wedged fast. This formed what was known as a crib, and contained about 4,000 feet of lumber.

Six or seven of these cribs were put together, one in front of the other, and fastened by coupling planks. A head-, and a tail-block were put on and very strongly fastened, to which were attached oars, each made of a plank sixteen feet long and about eighteen inches wide, about two and one-fourth inches thick at one end, and three-fourths of an inch at the other. This oar was fastened into an oar-stem, which was from thirty-six to forty feet long. This made an oar from fifty to fifty-six feet in length, that was used to guide the raft.

Six or seven cribs fastened in this wise were known as a "rap-

¹⁶ Agnes M. Larson, *History of the White Pine Industry in Minnesota* (Minneapolis, 1949, 86-104. See also W. H. C. Folsom, "History of Lumbering in the St. Croix Valley," *Minnesota Historical Society Collections*, 9:317.

ids piece," because in this condition they can be run over rapids and through swift water. Two or more of them make what is called a "Wisconsin raft," and several of those rafts comprise a "fleet of lumber."¹⁷

Something of the danger and difficulty of bringing these smaller rafts to the Mississippi is revealed in a letter by one who had just made the perilous descent through the Dells of the Wisconsin.

I have scarcely recovered my equanimity, to say nothing of my equilibrium. Four miles, coasting down a hill of the river, hemmed in by perpendicular walls of rock two hundred feet high, the seething, yelling waters occasionally boiling over you in its excess of rage; where but a slight turn of your pilot's wrist would dash your raft headlong into a thousand fragments, yourself of no consequence when cribs of lumber and bolts of shingles are but brittle toys . . . We had but 130,000 feet of lumber under us, to be sure; but where you notice that eddy, circled by foam, but a few days ago, the largest raft of the season struck the rock there hidden, and was torn to pieces, shattered and splintered. Had one corner of our raft struck, the outside tier of cribs would have separated, the main body swung around, then broken in the middle, and subdivisions gone on, piling into each other like a set of wild cats; and had the poor, meek, trembling specimens of humanity aboard, lost their foothold, or failed to gain the main part of the raft, as the flanking bodies broke away, human clay and lumber splinters, would have formed a part of the debris of the river bottoms below. Why, when the river was lower, that black spot fifteen minutes back, that we passed so easily, caused in one hour the destruction of lumber enough to improve the Wisconsin from its mouth to its headwaters. The van of a fleet of seven large rafts struck and stuck at the impediment; the rest, raft after raft, following in quick succession, with a momentum terrifying to conceive, dashing, crushing, and hurling the cribs in every direction, and strewing acres of the bottom with the remains. This pass is "The Dells." It is a euphonious name associated in my mind with all that is quiet and soothing — "dingle, dell, and dale;" — but ah, when shooting through them, how my heart ached that the association was not a physical reality!¹⁸

¹⁷ Simon A. Sherman, "Lumber Rafting on the Wisconsin River" in *Proceedings of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin for 1910*, 171-173.

¹⁸ *Chicago Tribune*, June 1, 1854. The letter was dated May 26, 1854, and signed by "H."

It was not merely the Dells of the Wisconsin that presented its hazards to the floating raftsmen — danger lurked at a dozen other points — the Big Bull Falls at Waucon and the Little Bull Falls near the mouth of the Big Eau Pleine were treacherous. At Stevens Point dam, at Conant Rapids, Grand Rapids, and Whitney Rapids, and at Clinton's dam and the Kilbourn dam, raftsmen rode the wild Wisconsin with cold death ever present. C. C. Lincoln thought the Mosinee or Little Bull Rapids the most dangerous on the river. Here the Wisconsin narrowed to a scant thirty feet and plunged down a gulf thirty feet deep, with solid rock walls on either side. According to Lincoln:

The rapids, about half a mile long, are a seething mass of foam and waves. When the rapids piece entered this place, a line was stretched the whole length of the raft, called the "sucker line," which each man seized — for quite often the raft dove ten to twenty rods at a time, and all that could be seen of the men above the water was their heads, and sometimes not even these were in sight.¹⁹

It took courage, strength, and skill to guide a fleet of these small Wisconsin rafts downstream. Once the rapids and dams were passed the rafts would drift slowly along in the current. When a raft hung on a sandbar as it frequently did, the men jumped overboard with huge poles (called handspikes) and pried the raft loose. "Each of us had to get into the water," Lincoln recalls. "There was no hanging back; if one did not jump right in, he was pushed in. Sometimes the rafts moved off before a man could catch on, and he would be in water up to his neck. Men worked that way for days, with no way to dry their clothes. I remember that we were in sight of Portage, handspiking for several days before we were able to pass the town."

A cook shanty was set up on one of the rafts comprising a Wisconsin fleet and the food brought to the men on the other rafts by means of a skiff. The raftsmen rarely had a chance to visit the cook shanty. The food was very good considering the crude manner in which it was served.

¹⁹ Ceylon C. Lincoln, "Personal Experiences of a Wisconsin River Raftsman" in *Proceedings of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin for 1910*, pp. 181-189. Lincoln was born in Naperville, Illinois, in 1850, and moved to Wisconsin when a small boy. He was employed as a printer on the *Waushara Argus* at Wautoma when he made his trip down the Wisconsin on a raft in 1868.

Each night the rafts were tied up at the bank; the tailsman, jumping ashore, would catch the rope that was thrown to him and making it fast to a tree while the bowsman secured it on the raft itself. It took good rope and careful snubbing to check the downward progress of a raft in the current. Usually the raftsmen lay over near some village where they could purchase whiskey for a night's spree. Not infrequently shingles or some other portions of the cargo was traded for a poor brand of firewater. Then, drunk and quarrelsome, they often terrorized the inhabitants of the community before returning to their rough beds on the raft.²⁰

When the fleet finally reached the Mississippi there was general rejoicing for the hard work was largely over. "The nine Wisconsin rafts," Ceylon Lincoln recalls, "were coupled into one large Mississippi raft, with the cook shanty in the middle, and a long table where the men could be seated at meals. Our Mississippi raft consisted of three Wisconsin rafts abreast and three deep, making a raft 144 feet wide and 380 long. There were nine bow- and the same number of rail-oars, and we generally ran night and day." Mark Twain recalls clambering aboard one of these floating rafts as it drifted past Hannibal in the dead of night. His accounts of those half-horse, half-alligator braggarts — the man called "Bob" and the other dubbed the "Child of Calamity" — are classics in the lore of Old Man River.²¹

By 1850 countless numbers of rafts were floating down the Mississippi from the Wisconsin, the Black, the Chippewa, and the St. Croix rivers. Even the Mississippi above the Falls of St. Anthony was resounding to the sound of the lumberjack's axe. On May 27, 1851, the *Minnesota Democrat* recorded the first raft of sawed lumber ever to come down the Mississippi from any point above the Falls. It had been floated 110 miles downstream from Little Falls. By 1857 much sawed lumber from the St. Anthony Mills was being shipped by the steamboat *Equator* and barge to the towns on the Minnesota River. Later this section of the Mississippi contributed quantities of timber to the Iowa lumber yards but for a score of

²⁰ Some excellent photographs of the life of a raftsman on the Wisconsin may be found in the *News-Views* pictorial section of the *Chicago Daily News* for August 15, 1942. The pictures were taken by Henry H. Bennett in the 1870's.

²¹ Ceylon C. Lincoln, "Personal Experiences of a Wisconsin River Raftsman" in *Proceedings of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin for 1910*, pp. 187-188; Samuel Clemens, *Life on the Mississippi*, pp. 42-49.

years following 1850 the floating raft hailed from the St. Croix, the Chippewa, the Black, and the Wisconsin.²²

Immense quantities of lumber were needed in Iowa, particularly in the period from 1854 to 1856 inclusive, when as many people came into the State as had arrived in the previous twenty years. In Dubuque, for example, 333 buildings were erected in 1854, 471 in 1855, and 502 in 1856. The same tremendous expansion was duplicated in other towns along the Mississippi and in hundreds of communities inland. The rafting and lumber industry changed the face of eastern Iowa in the period from 1855 to 1860 from the log cabin frontier to a land of comfortable frame dwellings. The Panic of 1857 laid a withering hand on building construction and the firing on Fort Sumter called a halt to this era of unparalleled expansion.²³

The Civil War proved a blight on many industries, including the rafting trade of the Upper Mississippi. Not only had many raftsmen entered the service but the lumber industries along the river were also paralyzed as construction of homes and buildings ceased for the duration. The southern market was completely eliminated and what little lumber remained on hand zoomed to fabulous figures.

With the return of peace hordes of men hurried to the Wisconsin pineries to raft lumber downstream. On May 31, 1865, the *Dubuque Weekly Herald* noted that a "large quantity of lumber" was being floated down all the tributaries of the Mississippi, that river being "covered for miles" with rafts of logs and lumber. The accumulation of three years was being forwarded to market, and there was every indication that high prices were over. A heavy decline had already been noted in Chicago and St. Louis markets and Dubuque dealers were talking of being able to get the best lumber at \$12 per thousand. "The first rafts down were the lucky ones," the editor explained, "there being sufficient now on the way to glut the market. Thus we are to have our feast in the lumber market after the too protracted famine."

The opening of the rafting season in 1865 found lumber passing Dubuque from the Wisconsin, the Black, the Chippewa, the St. Croix, and even the Mississippi above the Falls of St. Anthony. While much of this

²² *The Daily Pioneer & Democrat* (St. Paul), June 5, 1857.

²³ John A. T. Hull, *Iowa Historical and Comparative Census: 1836-1880*, p. xlv; W. A. Adams, *Dubuque City Directory, 1856-1857*, p. 35; W. A. Adams, *Directory of the City of Dubuque, 1857-1858*, p. 13.

was sold before St. Louis was reached, at least one raft containing 800,000 feet was headed for distant Memphis. During the week ending May 22nd there were only a few arrivals but by the 29th a rising river increased the receipts of lumber, forcing the price downward. Prices stiffened the following week as the Mississippi declined and the prospects of a drought and low water threatened.

Rafts continued to stop at Dubuque, the local editor chronicling not only the name of the pilot-owner but also the river from whence he came, the amount of lumber in his raft, and the firm to whom he sold it in Dubuque. Thus, on June 5th Pilot Reed arrived with 400,000 feet from the Wisconsin which he sold to Clark & Scott. Pilot Edwards arrived from the same stream with 200,000 feet while Pilot "Ed" Huhan tied up at the Dubuque levee with a raft of Wisconsin logs. Both of these cargoes were sold to the firm of Waples & Lambert. From the Chippewa came Ingraham & Kennedy to sell 170,000 feet of lumber to Peterson & Robb. Pearce and Natwig had 700,000 feet of Wisconsin River lumber for sale while Bradford was awaiting a purchaser with 650,000 feet of pine floated down from Minneapolis. A number of flats, after trying to effect sales in Dubuque, continued downstream toward higher lumber markets.²⁴

The vast extent of the rafting industry was noted by editors from St. Paul to St. Louis. Their anxiety over the stage of the water was always reflected in editorial and local columns, for low water meant little lumber and high prices. This was particularly true of those towns below the Rock Island Rapids. Situated at the foot of the Des Moines Rapids, Keokuk occupied a particularly unhappy spot in 1855. In June of that year a gentleman from the Upper Mississippi told the editor of the *Dubuque Tribune* that raftsmen could walk ten miles on the saw logs stranded in the Wisconsin River awaiting a rise in the water. The *Keokuk Gate City* compared their plight to that facing loggers above the Falls of St. Anthony. Up to May 15th no logs had been brought down that stream to the mills at St. Anthony because of the extreme low water. Even the diminutive steamboat *Gov. Ramsey* had been unable to make a trip up the river that spring.²⁵

The same situation existed on the Black River where the LaCrosse

²⁴ *Dubuque Weekly Herald*, May 9, 17, 24, 31, June 7, 1865.

²⁵ *Keokuk Gate City*, June 29, 1855.

*Democrat*²⁶ declared 100,000,000 feet of logs lay high and dry. The Keokuk *Gate City* believed all the Mississippi River towns would suffer from the lumber shortage at the very moment Iowa was receiving its heaviest increase in population. Many people, it was predicted, would be forced to wait until next season before sufficient lumber would be on hand to take care of the demand. A few days later prospects brightened as the Mississippi rose at Keokuk to twenty-eight inches on the Des Moines Rapids. At Davenport the *Courier*²⁷ of July 7th declared: "Rafts of Lumber and Logs are beginning to pass over the rapids. The river is now rising, and we hope ere long to have an abundance of lumber for building purposes, as well as water to insure uninterrupted navigation."

Unfortunately the Mississippi did not respond at once but the *Galena Advertiser*²⁸ of July 10th declared lumbermen were still hopeful. A few days later a St. Paul newspaper noted that the St. Croix River was rising rapidly and that 9,000,000 feet would soon arrive at Stillwater. The Rum River above the Falls of St. Anthony had already furnished the Minneapolis mills with a quantity of logs. However, the usual June rise was postponed to late July in 1855 when the Mississippi was in a fine boating stage with about 40 inches or more on the rapids at Keokuk. The *Gate City* kept its readers in constant touch with the situation all along the river. "Lumber is coming down in abundance, and our builders are going ahead actively." A short time later nearly four feet was reported on the rapids and over eight feet in the channel below. Lumber was coming down in abundance and several large rafts had stopped at Keokuk. No logs had put in for the sawmills, however, and building operations were still delayed. The Mississippi once more dropped and by mid-September it was reported as "dismally low" with only twenty-three inches on the rapids. By October 1st all the rivers above St. Paul were brim full and the *Gate City* hailed the news that "any quantity of lumber" was on its way down.²⁹

Because of the width and length of their rafts, pilots found the river particularly difficult to navigate during times of low water. In 1863 the *Dubuque Herald* described this phenomena by remarking: "The bottom of the river is rising as usual and becoming more visible daily; some people

²⁶ Quoted in the Keokuk *Gate City*, July 10, 1855.

²⁷ Quoted in the Keokuk *Gate City*, July 13, 1855.

²⁸ Quoted in the Keokuk *Gate City*, July 21, 1855.

²⁹ Keokuk *Gate City*, July 29, August 3, September 17, 24, October 1, 1855.

call it low water." Despite the low water Pilot Jack Parker skillfully steered a lumber raft containing one million feet of lumber from Stillwater to St. Louis. Another raft pilot, Thomas McLean of Dubuque, received \$1,050 on May 6, 1863, for piloting a raft of lumber from the foot of Lake Pepin to St. Louis in less than three weeks.³⁰

During the fall of 1864 the Mississippi was at the lowest point on record; the water was so scarce that it was said its use was forbidden even to soften whisky. On August 27, 1864, the Dubuque *Herald* declared the sandbars were covered with weeds and grass. "The up-river papers say that boats have frequently to blow the whistle to drive cattle out of the channel to allow them to pass. The oldest inhabitant, always reliable, does not remember a season when the water was so low." On September 15th the same editor asserted: "The river is no better than formerly. She is confined to her bed, and won't be up for some time."

Although low water caused many anxious comments in the press it was roaring floods that gained the headlines. Probably no other industry was more greatly affected by floods than the rafting trade. On April 17, 1866, the St. Paul *Press* described the breaking of an immense ice gorge above the Falls of St. Anthony as "fearfully grand."

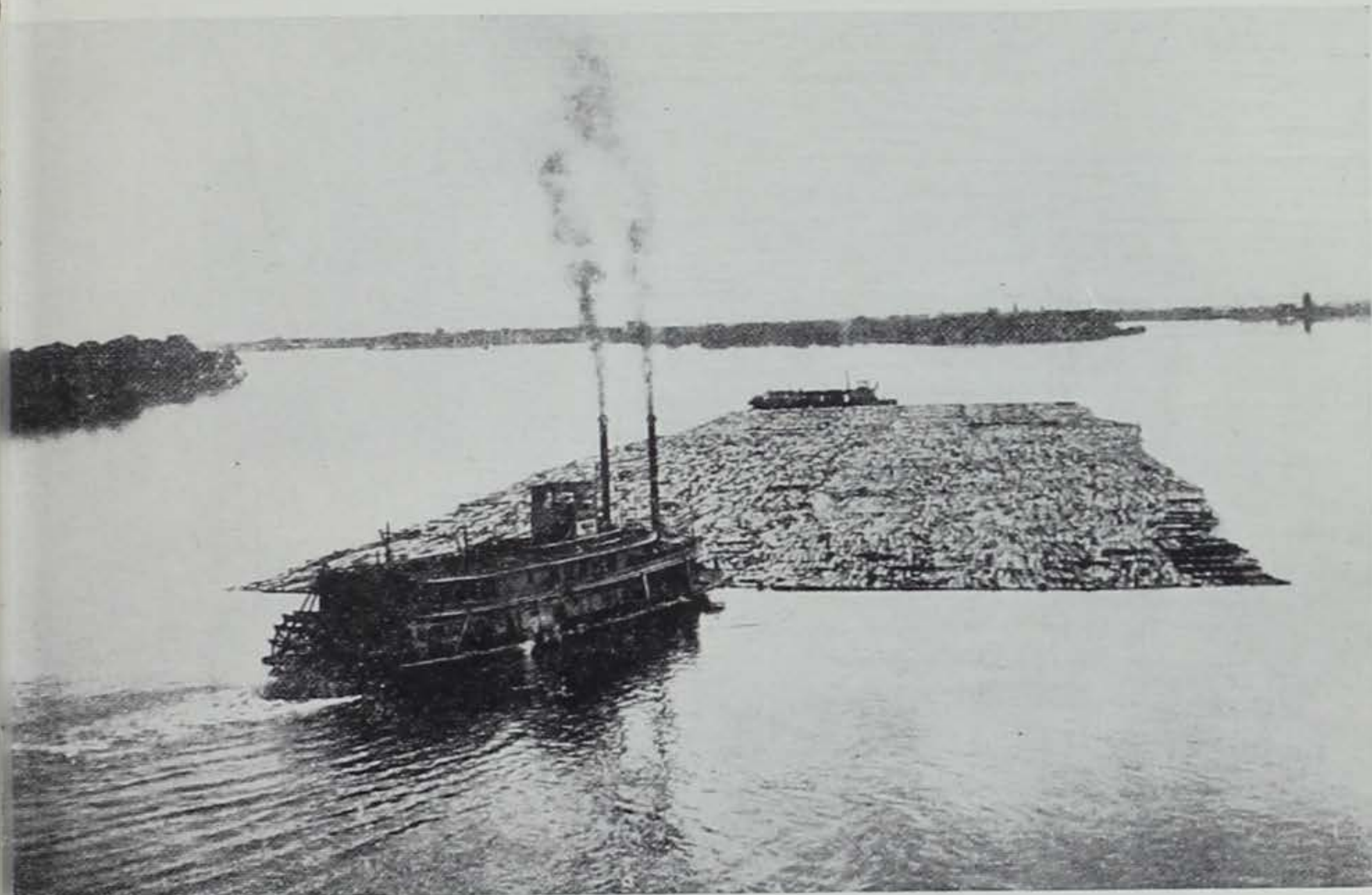
Twelve boom piers between the suspension bridge and the falls were destroyed, causing a loss of about \$6,000. A lumber sluice on the Minnesota side of the river was also carried away, involving a loss of \$4,000. A portion of the upper bridge was also taken down. About \$700,000 worth of logs were floated off.

Since lumber yards were located along the Mississippi they usually suffered greatly from such floods. The flood of 1866 caused the greatest losses in the Dubuque lumber yards, not because the lumber was lost but because it was so "sadly mixed" it would take no small amount of labor to sort it out. "A large amount of wood has been lost — but will probably be found before it reaches New Orleans. Owners who saw that their wood was bound to go, offered it to any who would haul it away, for a dollar a cord." At Clinton the sawmills had to suspend operations because of high water; some Clinton streets were actually navigable by light-draught steamboats.³¹

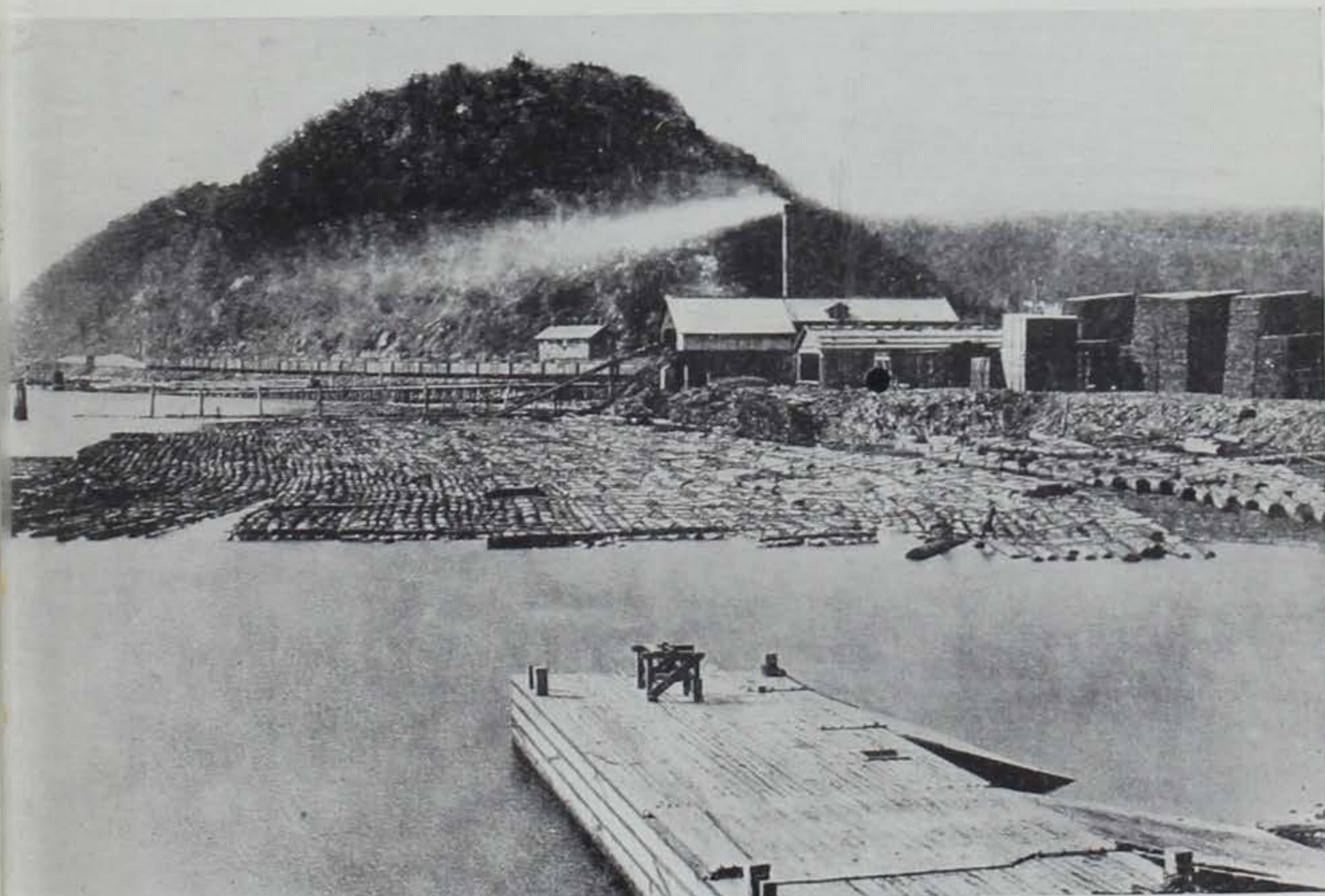
While low water and floods won the more lurid comments it was the

³⁰ Franklin T. Oldt, *History of Dubuque County, Iowa* (Chicago, 1911), p. 226.

³¹ Clinton *Herald*, May 5, 1866.



A raftboat with her bowboat headed downstream in 1898.
The raft shown was average in size. Many were larger and carried shingles, laths, and lumber.



Log rafts tied up at the Fleming sawmill at Marquette.

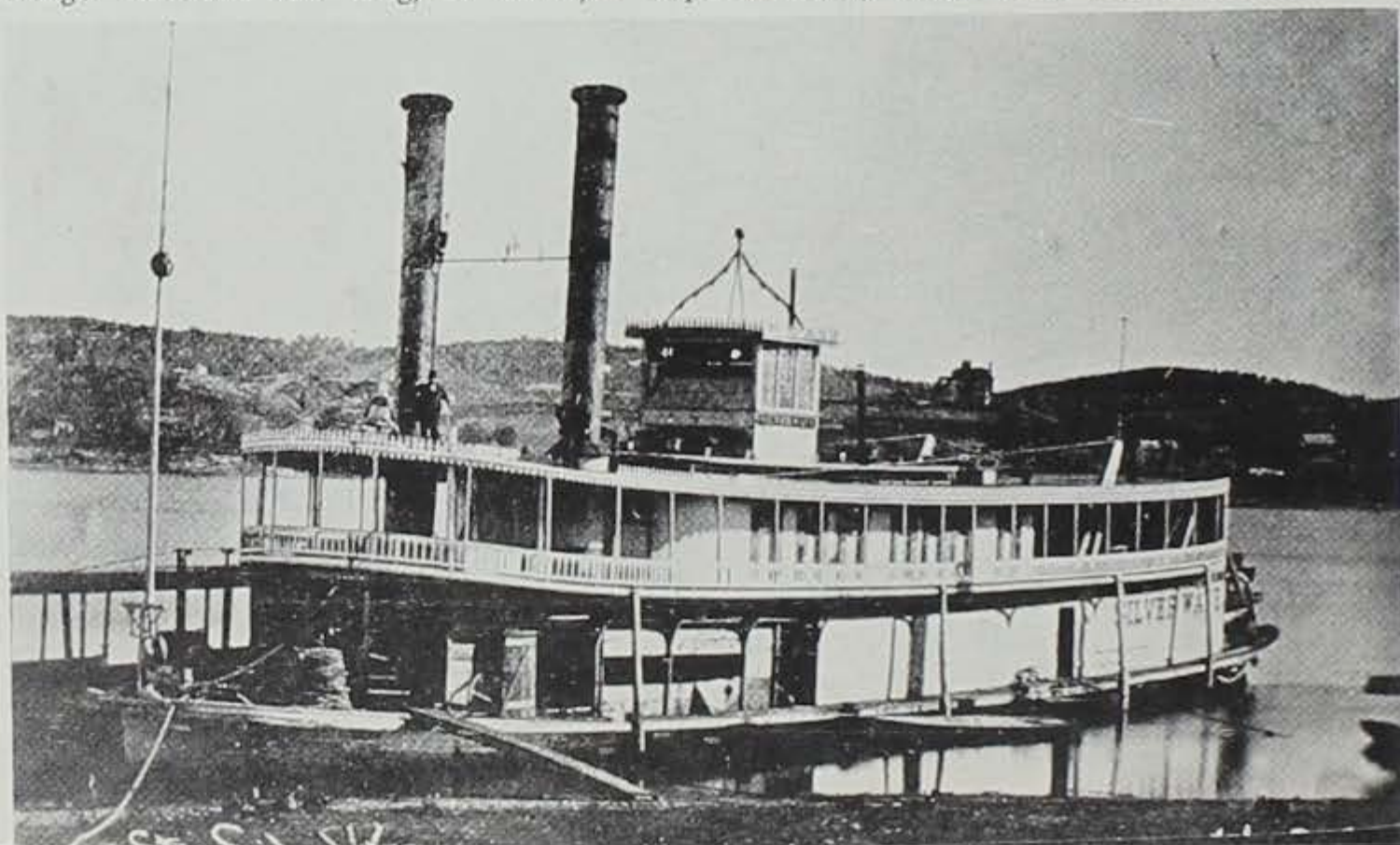


Charlotte Boeckeler — Built at New Albany, Indiana, 1881; 140' long, 29' beam, 4' depth, measured 143.48 tons.

Stillwater — Built at Le Claire in 1872; 125' long, 24' beam, 3' depth, 146.45 tons. Owned by Durant, Hanford and Wheeler. Acquired by Weyerhaeuser & Denckmann about 1880. Dismantled at Rock Island in 1891.



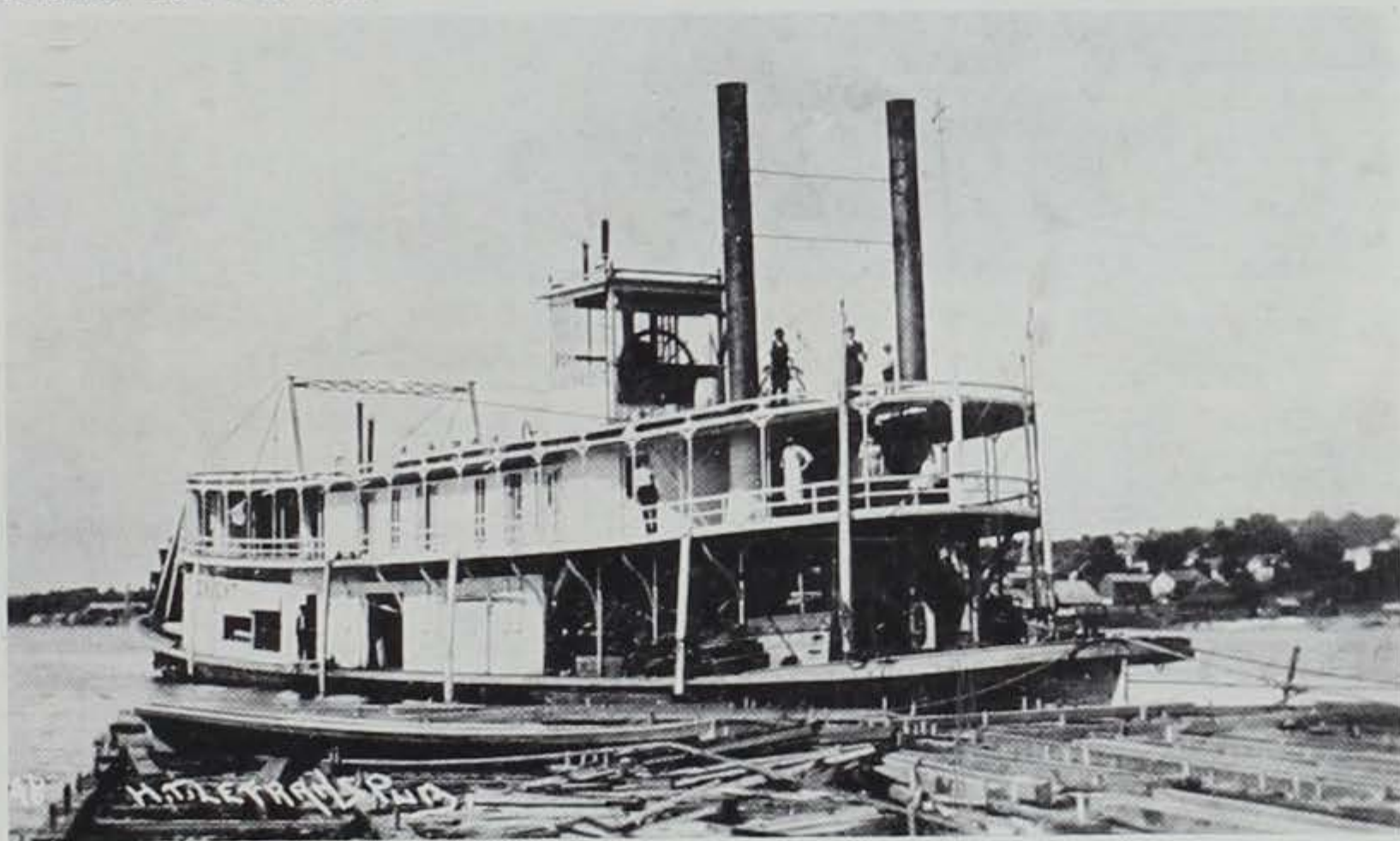
Silver Wave — Built at Le Claire as *D. A. McDonald* in 1872. Renamed *Silver Wave* about 1876 after explosion above McGregor and wreck on Keokuk bridge. She was 120' long, 24' beam, 4' depth of hold, 168.38 tons. Dismantled in 1889.





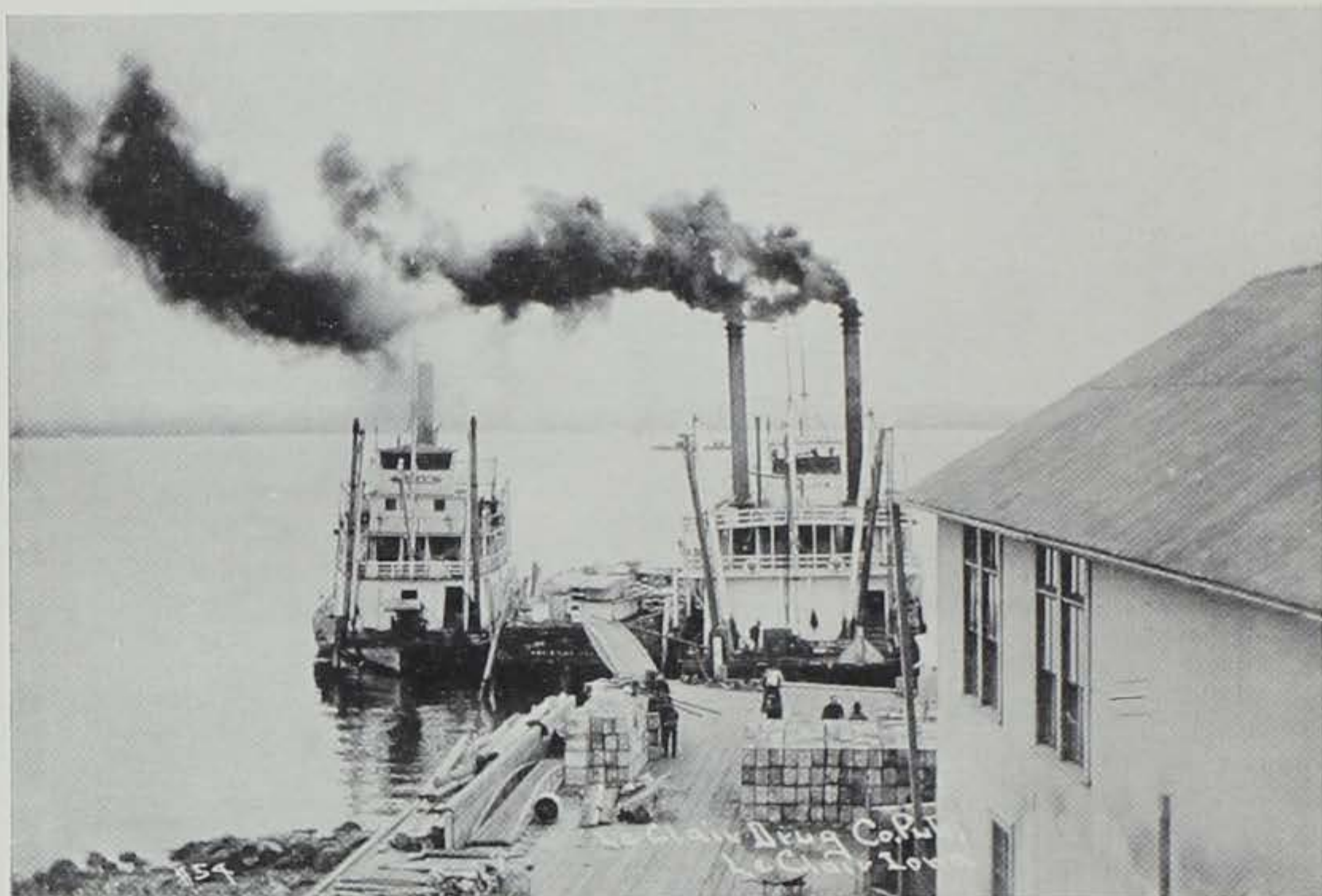
The *North Star* was used only a short time as a raftboat when she began service with the Burlington railroad as a towboat in 1911.

The *Glenmont* and her raft tow. She was originally the 284-ton *Ida Fulton* — built at Cincinnati in 1864. Rebuilt at Dubuque in 1885 and renamed the *Glenmont*: 128' long, 24'6" beam, 4'6" depth of hold, and measured 92.16 tons. Rebuilt at Dubuque in 1906 and renamed the *North Star*.

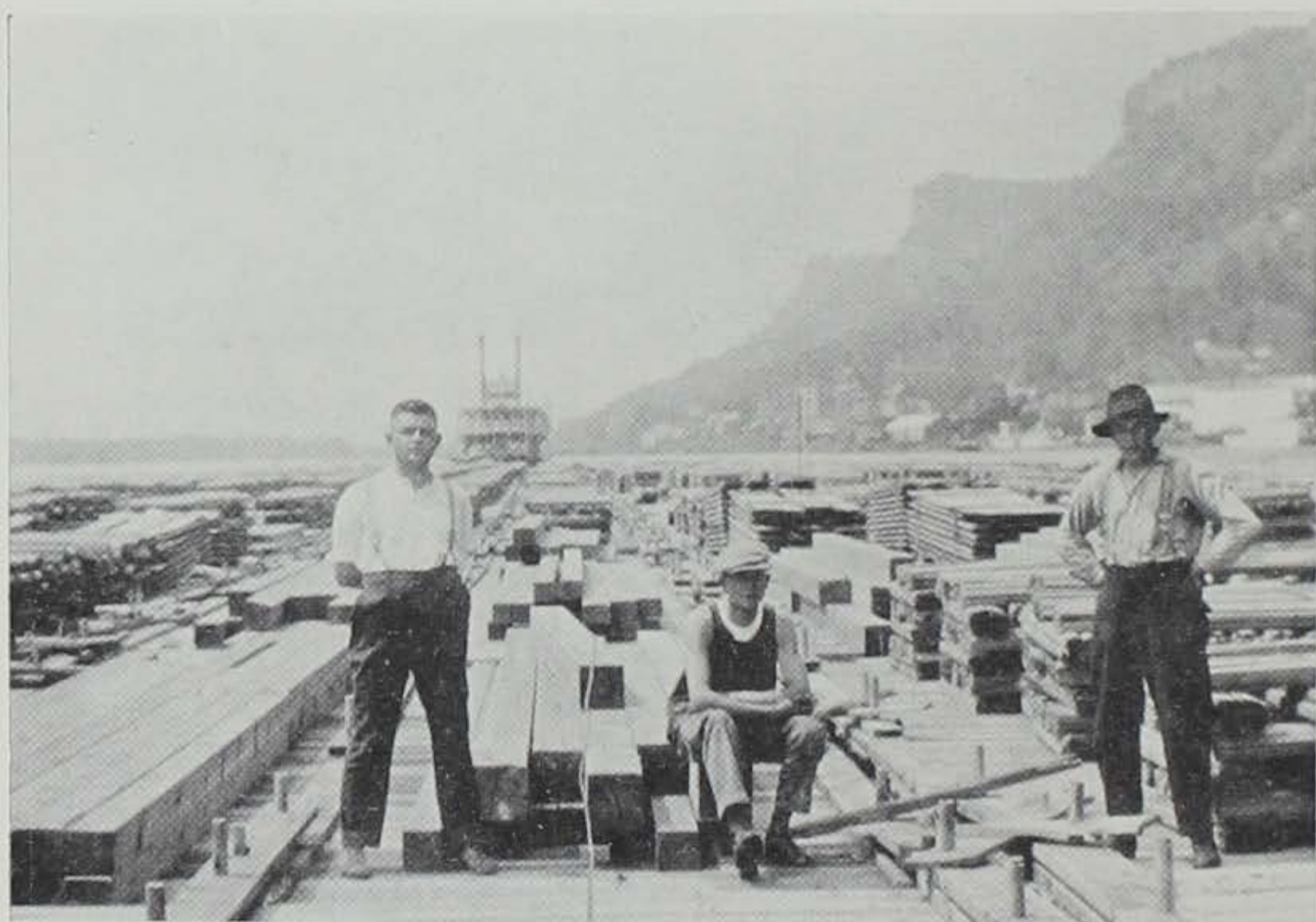


The 71-ton *Silas Wright* was built at Eau Claire, Wisconsin, in 1866. She ran as a packet on the Chippewa, and as a Mississippi raftboat and bowboat — 1870-1892 — when she was wrecked on the Upper Rapids.





The *Utah* and an unidentified raftboat awaiting a tow before heading downstream.



A record tow of logs and lumber headed downstream. Such loads could only be carried during a good stage of water.

everyday humdrum incidents that portray the normal activity of the rafting trade. The very magnitude of that trade was the subject of frequent comment in the press. This was particularly true in the years following the close of the Civil War. On June 16, 1866, the *Clinton Herald* announced that twenty-four rafts had arrived during the week, five of which were owned at Clinton. The strong winds had detained a number of rafts north of the Clinton bridge. Four large sawmills were in operation day and night and it was believed that Clinton did the "largest lumbering business of any point on the Mississippi River north of St. Louis." The population of the town stood at 3700 and was increasing at the rate of 100 per month. The value of the lumber manufactures stood at \$1,000,000.³²

At Dubuque in 1867 a local editor called attention to the "immense quantity" of lumber seen coming down the Mississippi, fourteen rafts being visible from the levee on the previous day. These rafts were all working their way past Dubuque to one of the many markets below. Any one of them, the editor concluded, would "build a good sized hen coop and have enough left for a hog pen."³³

In May of 1869 a Davenport editor reported large numbers of logs and lumber rafts and prophesied that within a week the river would be lined with them. It was predicted that lumber would soon be \$2 per thousand cheaper than in 1868. An immense raft of logs was tied up in front of Schrickler & Mueller's mill while other rafts seemed to be stopping at Davenport "either to sell or for some other purpose." Both the river and wind were favorable for navigation. "In this grand, high stage of water," the editor pointed out, "boats, flats, and rafts float proudly and securely over many places that would bid defiance in other portions of the year."³⁴

The opening of the rafting season frequently found most lumber dealers stripped of their supplies and charging fancy prices. The first raft owner to arrive usually demanded higher prices although local dealers frequently refused to buy, knowing that a deluge of lumber would soon be available.

In the spring of 1866 a 400,000-foot raft arrived at Dubuque from the mill of C. Whitmore & Co. on the Yellow River. "The owner has set no

³² The statistics were compiled by Dr. Wood of the *Chicago Journal of Commerce*. While unable to vouch for their accuracy, the Clinton editor presumed they were correct. On July 7, 1866, the *Clinton Herald* proudly announced that W. J. Young and Company would erect the "largest" sawmill on the Mississippi in 1867.

³³ Dubuque *Herald*, May 23, 1867.

³⁴ Davenport *Gazette*, May 12, 1869.

price upon it," the editor declared, "but it is generally conceded that he will refuse anything below \$20.00, which is more than buyers are willing to pay with the prospects of lower prices before the supply is entirely exhausted." A month later the same editor declared there never was such a season for rafts. "They have been passing here for the last two weeks in fleets," he observed. "The eye seldom reaches the river without seeing it dotted with lumber floating toward higher prices. Last Wednesday eleven of them went down, some of them containing over one million feet. The receipts of lumber in Chicago are also heavy, and present prices can hardly be maintained much longer. There will be a drop before long that will make some of the heavy purchasers 'wince.'"³⁵

The first raft of the season usually called for special comment. In 1869 M. C. Kincannon ran the first log raft down the Wisconsin River to Dubuque, reaching that port on April 7th. He made the run from Muscoda to Dubuque in five days, averaging about twenty miles per day for the trip. Pilot Kincannon had the honor of inaugurating the Dubuque rafting season in 1868, arriving on March 24th. His raft in 1869 was small, containing only 40,000 feet of basswood, white walnut, and maple logs. He sold his raft to Herancourt & Woodward, Dubuque cabinet manufacturers for \$15 per thousand.³⁶

The first raft of the season in 1870 passed Dubuque on April 7th. It contained about 400,000 feet of lumber and was destined for Hannibal, Missouri. The fleet was piloted by W. Simmons who brought it from Boscobel on the Wisconsin River, where it had wintered. It was made up originally at Grand Rapids.³⁷

The historian can glean from musty newspaper files the names of scores of men who engaged in early rafting. In the spring of 1866 a Stillwater paper noted seven large rafts towed through Lake St. Croix by the steamboats *Adventure* and *Minnesota*. Six of them belonged to David Cover, who had engaged E. W. Durant, William Dorr, Charles Rhodes, Samuel

³⁵ Dubuque *Herald*, April 26, May 25, 1866.

³⁶ Dubuque *Herald*, April 11, 1869.

³⁷ Dubuque *Herald*, April 8, 1870. In 1870 fully 50,000,000 feet of Wisconsin and Minnesota pine lumber valued at \$7,500,000 were sold by fifteen Dubuque lumber yards. See *Centennial Gazeteer and Directory of Dubuque County, Iowa* (Dubuque, 1876), p. 17.

Register, J. H. Hanford, and Jo Perro as pilots. The remaining raft belonged to Hershey, Staples, & Hall, in charge of D. C. Hanks.³⁸

With scores of pilots and hundreds of men engaged in the rafting trade, it is not surprising that both should leave an indelible impression in the minds of their contemporaries. Newspapers not only recorded the arrival of rafts at their home port but they also chronicled the extent of the fleets floating down the river. An exceptionally large raft, a fast trip, the wreck of a raft in a storm, the cost of transporting a raft downstream, the wages of the crew and the profits of the pilot-owner, these and similar items may be found tucked away in some contemporary newspaper.

Fights and brawls were common among those reckless, two-fisted, hard-drinking crews who plied their cumbersome sweeps as their huge rafts drifted lazily southward in the hot summer sun. "A number of raftsmen," a Dubuque editor declared, "engaged in a free fight on the levee Friday evening, caused by too free potations of whiskey. During the melee, one brave fellow who flourished a huge knife, had his nose broken and several teeth knocked out, by an unarmed combatant, who used only nature's weapons — clenched fists — backed up by true courage."³⁹

Many notable Americans have recorded their impressions of those colorful days. "I remember," Mark Twain records, "the annual procession of mighty rafts that used to glide by Hannibal when I was a boy, — an acre or so of white, sweet-smelling boards in each raft, a crew of two dozen men or more, three or four wigwams scattered about the raft's vast level space for storm-quarters, — and I remember the rude ways and the tremendous talk of their big crews, the ex-keelboatmen and their admiringly patterning successors; for we used to swim out a quarter or third of a mile and get on these rafts and have a ride."⁴⁰

Another eye-witness, Charles Edward Russell, who was born at Davenport in 1860, witnessed as a lad the transition from those floating raft days to the era of the raftboat. In his book, *A-Rafting on the Mississip'*, Russell recalls that when a raft tied up in front of his grandfather's home at Le-Claire he would go down to the shore to watch the raftsmen and listen to their singing. "Next to dancing, and ahead of quarreling, singing was their choice for joy. They had a wide repertoire, too; all of it, with one excep-

³⁸ Stillwater *Messenger*, quoted in the Dubuque *Herald*, May 25, 1866.

³⁹ Dubuque *Herald*, September 19, 1869.

⁴⁰ Samuel Clemens, *Life on the Mississippi*, p. 64.

tion, their own, I think, for I have never met with it since. It appears that the edge of the general criticism of raftsmen was softened with an admission that they sang well."

One of their favorite songs was "Raftsman Jim," which purported to tell of the adventures of one of the most gallant of raftsmen. According to Russell, the air was repeated after each stanza, when everybody danced, ending with four slapping steps sounding in unison and the roaring of the refrain:⁴¹

Dandy, handy Raftsman Jim!

One of the verses ran:

"So her pop sez 'Nay,' And he lopes away,
And bobs right back the very next day;
And he shuts one eye, and looks very sly,
She gives her pop the sweet bye-bye.

Chorus

"There aint no cub as neat as him,
Dan-dy, han-dy Rafts-man Jim!"

The life of a raftsman, be he pilot or a humble member of the crew, was filled with excitement as well as hard work. Few sections of the American frontier have developed sturdier and more self-reliant men. "Rafting is a wild, adventurous life, with all the additional excitement about it of speculation," a writer declared in 1854. "Sometimes a pilot clears in one trip over \$200; at other times, he barely pays expenses. But, even with the risks he has to run, calculating from all the experience of the past, — not a just criterion, as facilities now are greater than ever — his profits are large, and industry and frugality would soon enrich him. I know three or four pilots who, in four years, without a cent to start with, have cleared the snug sum of from \$4,000 to \$7,000 each. But these are rare instances, the jolly raftsman having all the Jack Tar's hatred of the possession of money. There are pilots about the Dells who get a good living by rafting only through the four miles of Rapids. Their customary price is a dollar a trip, and as a trip can be performed in less than an hour, a steady run of business would give them a handsome income." A fine stage of water had made it possible to float down all the lumber that had

⁴¹ Charles E. Russell, *A-Rafting on the Mississipp*, pp. 10, 210, 211.

been cut at the very sources of the river. The raftsmen were all jolly with money "jingling" in their pockets and prospects of a good season ahead.

The prospects of rich returns caused many raftsmen to invest a portion of their savings in the lumber industry. Some invested in timber land, others in sawmills, while still others in the supplies and material to float (and later tow) rafts downstream. The diversity of opportunity was noted by more than one visitor.

Some of them own timbered lands, and work up their logs at mills they have erected for themselves, or those rented from others; then, building their fleet, leaving a man to attend saw mill, they join their rafts, and, acting as their own pilots, market their lumber in St. Louis, or points north, pocketing all the profits, from the growing timber to levee sales.

Others buy the lumber at mill prices, and run their own risk rafting; while others raft by the thousand, or the day. Lumber above the Dells is worth \$12, that will bring \$22 in St. Louis. Prices for rafting vary from \$4 to \$6 per M., according to the state of the river. Trips are made sometimes in a fortnight, and even less; and from that up to two months or more. . . . Rafting has become so systematic a business, that but little profit accrues to the lumberman who does not go above the Dells, or into the Pineries. Below that point the raftsmen pocket the difference, although large fleets, requiring heavy capital, would yield a handsome return. At Portage, lumber is worth \$12, but the scarcity of mills keeps it at that figure. Timber owners pay \$3 per M. for sawing; where they operate the mills themselves, but half that sum.⁴²

Many Iowa and Upper Mississippi steamboatmen found employment in the Northern pineries during the winter and then helped to float the log or lumber rafts downstream. The more intelligent and ambitious of these early "floaters" later developed into "raft pilots," men who had learned the river and had amassed sufficient capital to contract with lumber companies to hire a crew and pilot a raft downstream for so much a trip, a month, or a season. Sometimes, indeed, these expert pilots could contract to run rafts of logs or lumber for so much per thousand feet. In that case, the tendency was to tow extremely large rafts, especially if the stage of the water permitted. That raftsman who could successfully and speedily

⁴² *Chicago Tribune*, June 1, 1854.

pilot six or seven acres of logs to a mill was in great demand by lumber mills and frequently commanded premium wages for himself and crew.

A pilot-contractor, according to Captain Walter Blair, "hired and paid his own crew, besides furnishing the necessary kit of ropes (called lines) to hold the logs together, making the raft strong and stiff, and also to check and hold it when landing. Some tools were required; besides axes, crank augurs, pike poles, snatch poles, pikes, and peavies. A prudent pilot would also provide a supply of plugs, lockdowns, and brail-rigging, for repair work. Last of all, he must have two safe, easy-rowing skiffs. These things had to be good or trouble was sure to follow. A pilot or company that was known to be niggardly or indifferent about the kit, often had to take men who couldn't get work elsewhere."⁴³

Newspapers were not slow to praise the skill of various raft pilots. On May 6, 1863, a Dubuque river man named Thomas McLean received \$1,050 for piloting a raft from the foot of Lake Pepin to St. Louis in less than three weeks. Again, during extreme low water, Pilot Jack Parker was commended for his skill in taking a raft containing one million feet of lumber from Stillwater to St. Louis. In 1867, Daniel McLean, one of the best and most skillful raftsmen, was awarded a \$100 prize for beating two other rafts in a race from Lake Pepin to Dubuque. A man who could bring the largest raft downstream in the shortest time could name his own salary and was held in high regard.⁴⁴

Companies vied with each other to secure the services of expert raftsmen. During Civil War days the floating raft pilots of the Knapp-Stout Company of Dubuque were reputed to bring down some of the largest rafts on the Mississippi. A study of the size of floating rafts arriving at Dubuque during the year 1865 reveals that most of them ranged from 200,000 to 800,000 board feet with the average size running close to 500,000. Although Knapp-Stout received small rafts, too, their pilots were inclined to bring down floating rafts that contained a million or more feet of lumber. During the last week in August, for example, the entire week's receipts at Dubuque was made up of a mammoth Knapp-Stout raft. Two months later the same company received a 1,000,000-foot raft. Of the

⁴³ Walter A. Blair, *A Raft Pilot's Log*, pp. 25, 26.

⁴⁴ F. T. Oldt, *History of Dubuque County*, pp. 226, 231.

hundreds of rafts that floated past Dubuque that year less than a dozen, perhaps, contained a million or more feet of lumber.⁴⁵

As the years passed, and the first experiments with raftboats were being carried out, the Knapp-Stout fleet continued to contain immense quantities of logs and lumber. Thus, in June of 1869, nine rafts with an average of over 1,000,000 feet of lumber had reached the Knapp-Stout yards in the Key City of Iowa. The last of these rafts, for example, contained 224 cribs, each of which was 16 feet by 32 feet and was piled 16 boards deep. The entire raft was 545 feet long by 224 feet wide and covered an area of about three acres! In addition to the 1,835,000 feet of lumber contained in this floating forest, the raft carried 77,000 shingles, 6,000 pickets, and 610,000 laths. The whole fleet was pushed down to Dubuque by the *Annie Girdon* at a small cost, Clerk C. A. Clark setting the expense at \$490.76, or a fraction over 37 cents a thousand feet.⁴⁶

Of the thousands of men who engaged in rafting during the floating raft period the majority were a carefree boisterous lot who left an indelible impression on their contemporaries even though their own lives were not marked by success. "Before the advent of the raft boats," one writer observes, "the old picturesque floating rafts, manned by the red-shirted steersman and roustabouts were familiar sights on the upper river. These figures have long since passed away, but in their day the raftsmen held the center of the stage in river affairs. Their arrival in the river towns was the signal for bedlam to break loose, and the stories of the wild orgies of these rough characters of the early days cause a shiver to pass over the present-day listener."⁴⁷

Although lurid accounts have been passed down about the tough raftsmen, the *Lyons City Advocate* of June 18, 1859, carried the following incident from the columns of the *Jackson County Banner* (Bellevue) indicating that these ruffians sometimes met their match:

WOMAN'S GRIT — Fifty Men Driven By Two Women

By the arrival of a gentleman from up the river we are put in possession of the following facts, and are assured that the narra-

⁴⁵ Dubuque *Weekly Herald*, August 30, October 25, 1865. Analysis was made of the size of several hundred rafts recorded as passing Dubuque between May and November.

⁴⁶ Dubuque *Herald*, June 15, 1869.

⁴⁷ Dubuque *Telegraph Herald*, July 29, 1908.

tive is strictly true. Mr. Mead, who owns a dam and a mill at the Forks of Black River, is now absent from home and had left in charge his wife and an adopted daughter, Ellen. The drivers of the logging firm of Whitcomb, Morse & Morgan, about fifty in number, came down and found some logs in Mead's dam with the mark of their company upon them; whereupon they set to with their axes to cut the dam away. Mrs. Mead, hearing the row, hastened out, followed by Ellen, each with a rifle, one loaded with heavy buckshot and the other with balls, and taking a favorable position, they cocked their pieces, pointed them at the men and told them not to strike another blow, or some of them would be dead men! The choppers incontinently left. Mrs. Mead then agreed to compensate them for all the logs that might be in the dam belonging to them.

Subsequently the drivers seized a young man in the employ of Mr. Mead, whom they charged with stealing some provisions belonging to the drivers. Ellen again sallied out, rifle in hand, and told them not to hurt a hair of his head, and they didn't. They let the boy go. The men very suddenly discovered that they got into a bad row of stumps, and Mrs. Mead and daughter were left masters of the field. Here's woman's grit for you — fifty men driven by two women! Can revolutionary history show a more brilliant exploit!

Although the general run of raftsmen probably came from almost every state in the Union, many hailed from the various Upper Mississippi river towns. Pilots especially were generally residents of one of the many towns huddled along the banks of the Mississippi between St. Louis and St. Paul. The three Buisson brothers — Joseph, Cyprian, and Henry — were from Wabasha, Minnesota. Joseph began his river career on a floating raft in 1861 when he was only fifteen years old. He began piloting at nineteen, handling such craft as the *Clyde*, the *L. W. Borden*, the *Gardie Eastman*, and finally the *C. W. Cowles*, a fine raftboat owned by the Fleming Brothers of McGregor. Subsequently Joe Buisson acquired the *C. W. Cowles* and ran log rafts to the Hershey mill at Muscatine. When the flush days of rafting ended Joe operated the *C. W. Cowles* as a regular packet between La Crosse and Dubuque. His brother Cyprian distinguished himself for twenty years as master and pilot of the powerful raftboat *B. Hershey*, running logs from Beef Slough, West Newton, and Stillwater, to the Hershey Lumber Company at Muscatine. His record of twenty years on the same raftboat eclipsed that of any other man associated with the dy-

namic story of rafting on the Upper Mississippi in the last half of the Nineteenth Century.⁴⁸

High among the notable raftsmen hailing from Illinois stood Stephen B. Hanks, the nephew of Nancy Hanks, the mother of Abraham Lincoln. Hanks settled on the Mississippi at Albany in 1836 when he was a lad of fifteen. Five years later he headed north into the St. Croix Valley pineries where for the next ten years he was engaged in cutting logs and rafting them down the Mississippi to St. Louis. Becoming a pilot for the Minnesota Packet Company, he quit this line in 1868 to serve as master and pilot for the Diamond Jo Line on the *Ida Fulton*. In 1874 he returned to the rafting trade and never forsook it. After spending three seasons on the *Bro. Jonathan*, he was engaged by C. Lamb and Sons of Clinton as captain and pilot of the *Hartford* at \$1,600 per season. Most of his fifteen years with this company were spent on the *Artemus Lamb*. A powerful, strongly built man, Stephen B. Hanks neither smoked, nor drank, nor gambled. He died in 1917 at the age of ninety-six.⁴⁹

While there were many other notable Illinois raftsmen, such as Colonel E. W. Durant of Albany, and affluent owners like Fred Weyerhaeuser and F. C. A. Denkmann of Rock Island, the Hawkeye State furnished its share of representative men. A galaxy of colorful personalities — the Knapp-Stout Company of Dubuque, the David Joyce interests of Lyons, W. J. Young and Company and C. Lamb and Sons of Clinton, Lindsay and Phelps of Davenport, the Mussers and Hersheys of Muscatine, the Atlees of Fort Madison and the Tabers of Keokuk — loom large in the Iowa lumbermen's Hall of Fame. A good list of sawmills and sawmill owners between Stillwater and St. Louis is compiled in Captain Walter A. Blair's *A Raft Pilot's Log*. Those in Iowa include:

Lansing, Iowa

Lansing Lumber Company, John Robson of Winona, principal owner and manager.

McGregor, Iowa

W. and J. Fleming mill, C. W. Cowles, Manager.

Guttenburg, Iowa

Zimmerman and Ives mill.

⁴⁸ Walter A. Blair, *A Raft Pilot's Log*, pp. 230-238.

⁴⁹ *Burlington Post*, December 20, 1913.

Dubuque, Iowa

Knapp, Stout and Company's mill.
Ingram, Kennedy and Day, later Standard Lumber Company.
M. H. Moore's mill.

Bellevue, Iowa

Dorchester and Huey's mill.

Lyons, Iowa

Gardiner, Batcheler and Welles mill No. I.
Gardiner, Batcheler and Welles mill No. II.
Lyons Lumber Company mill.
David Joyce's mill.

Clinton, Iowa

Clinton Lumber Company.
W. J. Young and Company, The Upper mill.
C. Lamb and Sons, The Stone mill.
C. Lamb and Sons, The Brick mill.
W. J. Young and Company, The Big mill.
C. Lamb and Sons, Riverside mill.
C. Lamb and Sons, Riverside mill, lower.

Camanche, Iowa

W. R. Anthony, successor to Anthony and McCloskey.

Le Claire, Iowa

J. W. Strobeen, the old Van Sant and Zebley mill.

Davenport, Iowa

Lindsay and Phelps mill, erected in 1864.
L. C. Dessaint mill, built in 1868, later owned by Price and Hornby;
later, in 1874, by Cable Lumber Company.
Renwick mill, built in 1854, operated by Renwick and Son, and ultimately by Weyerhaeuser and Denkmann.
Strong Burnett mill, built in 1849, eventually known as the Mueller Lumber Company, still a going business in 1930.
Mr. Howard built a mill in 1849; ultimately operated by the Davenport Lumber Company until 1891, at which time it was closed.

Muscatine, Iowa

The Muscatine Lumber Company mill, burned in 1886.
Hershey Lumber Company mill, started in 1852.

The Musser Lumber Company mill, built in 1870.

The Burdick mill later became the South Muscatine Lumber Company.

Burlington, Iowa

The Harmar Manufacturing Company mill.

The Burlington Lumber Company mill.

Fort Madison, Iowa

S. and J. C. Atlee mill. Still in operation in 1930.

Keokuk, Iowa

The Taber Lumber Company built a new mill when the old one burned.

These men owned or employed many raftboats and their names appeared on many a sturdy little rafter. Since their chief contribution lay in the conversion of logs into lumber they do not fall into the same category as those Iowans who were engaged in rafting logs and lumber downstream. At least a few of these men should be singled out whose careers date back into the era of the floating raft, for in their lives is mirrored the story of the rafting industry itself.⁵⁰

Those floating raft pilots whose activities date back prior to 1870 saw the lumber production of Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota grow in value from 1/20 of the total United States production in 1850 to 1/7 in 1860, to 1/4 in 1870. But, despite this tremendous growth, the acme of production had not yet been reached. In 1870, for example, Minnesota produced more lumber than Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota Territory combined in 1850. Despite this increase—the valuation of lumber production in Wisconsin and Minnesota in 1900 was five times that of their combined production in 1870. The floating raftsmen of the Hawkeye State were accordingly just laying the ground work for the great days that lay ahead.⁵¹

Captain Jerry M. Turner was a typical Iowa raftsman of the floating era. In 1853, at the age of sixteen, Turner shipped aboard the packet *City Belle*. Four years later he became a floating raft pilot, making \$375 for five trips during the season of 1857. His first experience on a raftboat was aboard the *Johnny Schmoker*. He subsequently bought and captained

⁵⁰ Both Walter A. Blair and Charles E. Russell discuss some of the representative raftsmen in their books. See Blair, *op. cit.*, pp. 255-264.

⁵¹ U. S. Census Bulletins, Census of Manufactures, Bulletin 77, pp. 71-80.

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From Anawalt's Annual Directory of the City of Burlington (1874).

the *W. H. Clark* but sold this craft in 1859 and became a salaried master-pilot aboard the *Silas Wright* for eight seasons. Captain Turner later saw service on the *Golden Gate*, the *Clyde*, and the *Pauline*. He closed his two-score years on the Upper Mississippi in 1893 when he sold the *Pauline* and bought a button factory in Lansing. Captain Turner has been described as a "close manager" and a "skillful, cautious pilot" who made good time and delivered his rafts in good condition without breaking them up or going aground.⁵²

Another noted Mississippi raftsmen was Captain E. J. Lancaster of Le Claire. Captain Lancaster started his career on a floating raft shortly after his return from the Civil War. He proved himself a safe pilot and intelligent master aboard such boats as the *J. G. Chapman*, the *Mountain Belle*, the *Stillwater*, and the *Eclipse*. Between 1885 and 1904 Captain Lancaster ran all the rafts downstream for Lindsay and Phelps and the Cable Lumber Company of Davenport. When these two sawmills closed in 1904 he operated the *Eclipse* as a packet for several seasons between Davenport and Clinton. In 1928 his admiring employers prepared a testimonial in appreciation of Captain Lancaster's long and faithful service for the Lindsay and Phelps Company. A quarter century had not dimmed the esteem for this sterling and skillful pilot whose career extended back into the floating raft period.⁵³

The floating raft period was an important era in Mississippi transportation history. During this period the lumber and sawmill industries in Iowa and adjoining states were being firmly entrenched, the population of the Upper Mississippi Valley was increasing rapidly, railroads were extending westward to the Missouri and beyond, and the demand for lumber reached enormous proportions. A speedier method was needed to bring logs from the Upper Mississippi to the hungry sawmills of the Hawkeye State. American ingenuity did not fail to meet this challenge — the raftboat, the Clinton Nigger, and the bowboat were quickly forthcoming. And it was largely the inventive genius of Iowa river men that brought about these significant changes.

The impact of the floating raft period is reflected in early Iowa news-

⁵² Captain J. M. Turner, "Rafting on the Mississippi" in *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, 23:163-176, 313-327, 430-438; 24:56-65.

⁵³ Walter A. Blair, *A Raft Pilot's Log*, pp. 222, 224.

papers that were published between McGregor and Keokuk. Lumber yards and wood-working establishments fairly hummed with activity once the lumber rafts arrived at their back door. Little wonder that seven cities of the first class should spring up along the Mississippi.

The colorful days of rafting have not been forgotten in song and story. In 1927 F. X. Ralphe of Hastings, Minnesota, found the following compilation of old Upper Mississippi boats and sent it to the *Burlington Post* for publication. It was quickly recognized by old rivermen as a once popular ballad of nomenclature that had almost been forgotten with the passing of the good old days. It ran as follows:

The *Fred Weyerhaeuser* and the *Frontenac*,
The *F. C. A. Denckmann* and the *Bella Mac*,
The *Menomonee* and *Louisville*,
The *R. J. Wheeler* and *Jessie Bill*,
The *Robert Semple* and the *Golden Gate*,
The *C. J. Caffrey* and the *Sucker State*.

The *Charlotte Boeckeler* and the *Silver Wave*,
The *John H. Douglas* and *J. K. Graves*,
The *Isaac Staples* and the *Helen Mar*,
The *Henrietta* and the *North Star*,
The *David Bronson* and *Nettie Durant*,
The *Kit Carson* and *J. W. Van Sant*.

The *Chancey Lamb* and the *Evansville*,
The *Blue Lodge* and the *Minnie Will*,
The *Saturn* and the *Satellite*,
The *Le Claire Belle* and the *Silas Wright*,
The *Artemus Lamb* and the *Pauline*,
The *Douglas Boardman* and *Kate Keen*.

The *Isaac Staples* and the *Mark Bradley*,
The *J. G. Chapman* and the *Julia Hadley*,
The *Mollie Whitmore* and *C. K. Peck*,
The *Robert Dodds* and *Borealis Rex*,
The *Pete Kerns* and the *Wild Boy*,
The *Lilly Turner* and the *St. Croix*.

The *A. J. Jenks* and *Bart Linehan*,
The *C. W. Cowles* and *Brother Jonathan*,
The *Pete Wilson* and *Annie Girdon*,
The *Inverness* and the *L. W. Barden*,
The *Nellie Thomas* and the *Enterprise*,
The *Park Painter* and *Hiram Price*.

The *Dan Hines* and the *City of Winona*,
The *Helene Schulenburg* and *Natrona*,
The *Flying Eagle* and the *Moline*,
The *E. Rutledge* and *Josephine*,
The *Taber* and the *Irene D.*,
The *D. A. McDonald* and *Jessie B.*

The *Gardie Eastman* and the *Verne Swain*,
The *James Malbon* and the *L. W. Crane*,
The *Sam Atlee* and *William White*,
The *Lumberman* and the *Penn Wright*,
The *Stillwater* and the *Volunteer*,
The *James Fisk Jr.* and the *Reindeer*.

The *Thistle* and the *Mountain Belle*,
The *Little Eagle* and the *Gazelle*,
The *Mollie Mobler* and the *James Means*,
The *Silver Crescent* and the *Muscatine*,
The *Jim Watson* and the *Last Chance*,
The *Kate Waters* and the *Ed. Durant*,
The *Dan Thayer* and the *Flora Clark*,
The *Robert Ross* and the *J. G. Park*.

The *Eclipse* and *J. W. Mills*,
The *J. S. Keator* and the *J. J. Hill*,
The *Lady Grace* and the *Abner Gile*,
The *Johnny Schmoker* and the *George Lysle*,
The *Lafayette Lamb* and the *Clyde*,
The *B. Hershey* and the *Time and Tide*.

The significance of the rafting era is attested by the fact that over ninety per cent of the 112 vessels mentioned were raftboats. A few of these

diminutive craft are portrayed within the pages of this brief history of rafting on the Upper Mississippi. Their colorful story provides a thrilling saga in Iowa and Upper Mississippi Valley history.

WILLIAM J. PETERSEN

