

The Power of Nostalgia

AN EXPLORATION OF WISCONSIN'S ROMANTICIZED LOGGING INDUSTRY

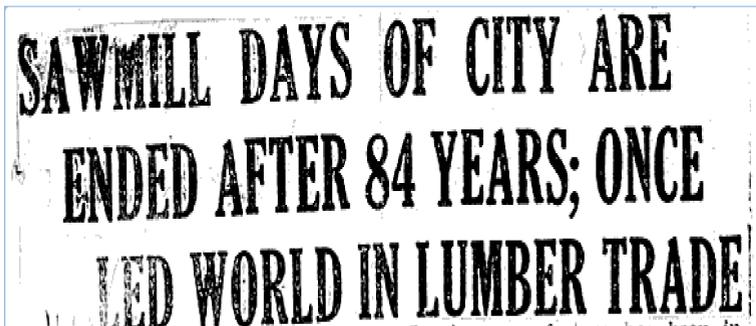
Kaitlyn Dehnke | History Department : Dr. Patricia Turner : Dr. Teresa Sanislo

The Power of **AND**

University of Wisconsin
Eau Claire

INTRODUCTION

The years between the 1830s and 1920s are vital years in the history of Wisconsin and its extensive logging industry. The logging industry shaped Wisconsin's history, geographical makeup, and reputation globally. Yet most of those in the logging industry held dangerous jobs with poor pay and working conditions. The bigger historical themes of The American Frontier and changing expectations of masculinity during the Great Depression give context as to why there is a romanticized interpretation of Wisconsin's logging industry. The goal of this research is to examine how The American Frontier and the redefinition of masculinity during the Great Depression shaped the interpretation of Wisconsin's logging era. This research will be analyzing the aftermath of the logging era, the 1930s and 1940s, when the media and institutions started to interpret Wisconsin's logging era in their work. Finally, this research will also show how the historical interpretation and imagery of Wisconsin's logging industry has changed from the 1930s and 1940s to the present day. The study enriches our understanding of how nostalgia over its logging era continues to shape Wisconsin's cultural identity.



Headline from the Eau Claire Daily Telegram on March 17, 1930
courtesy of the Wisconsin Historical Society

BACKGROUND

Wisconsin's logging industry got its start almost two decades prior to the territory becoming an official state. During the early 1830s small amounts of logging took place in some of the townships within Wisconsin. Yet it wasn't until 1836, after the Menominee Nation had to give up their land, that the logging industry really took off in Wisconsin. Over fifty percent of the territory that would later make up Wisconsin, was covered in forestry. Along with ample forestry, the territory of Wisconsin also had many strong rivers within the state that could be used for mass transportation of logs to sawmills. From the start Wisconsin was geographically advantaged to have a thriving logging industry.



Loggers posing with large white pine 1890s
courtesy of the Paul Bunyan Logging Camp Museum

METHODOLOGY AND PRIMARY SOURCES

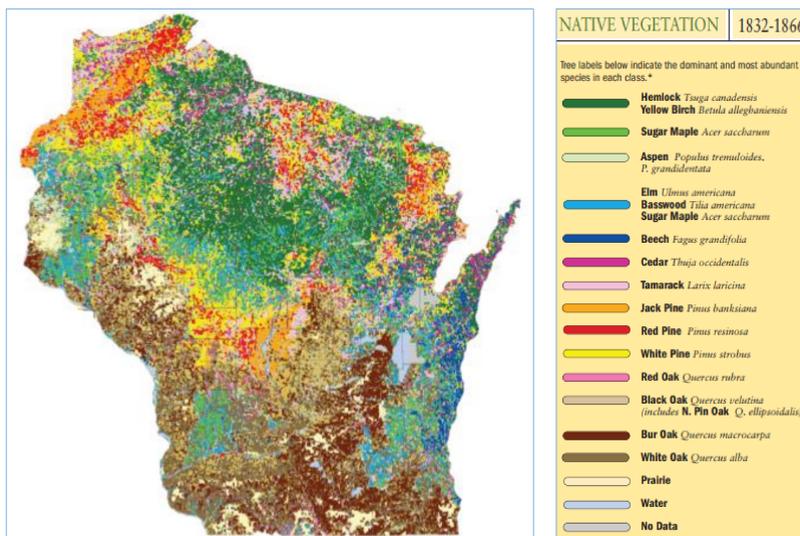
In order to show how Wisconsin's logging industry was romanticized in the 1930s and 1940s, the goal of this research was to analyze newspaper articles and books published during these decades. The goal of this research was to address first how each respective aspect of the logging industry is romanticized. Second, it addresses why and what influenced the respective aspect to be romanticized. This research explores how the romanticized imagery of logging in the 1930s differs from current historical interpretations. Once the research had been concluded all the information was compiled into a capstone paper. Using this methodology and organization will allow the start of addressing how and why Wisconsin's logging era was romanticized during the 1930s and 1940s.

Doc Squirt Writes Of Old-Time Lumberjacks

Headline from the Inter-County Leader on February 3, 1942
courtesy of the Wisconsin Historical Society

THE AMERICAN FRONTIER

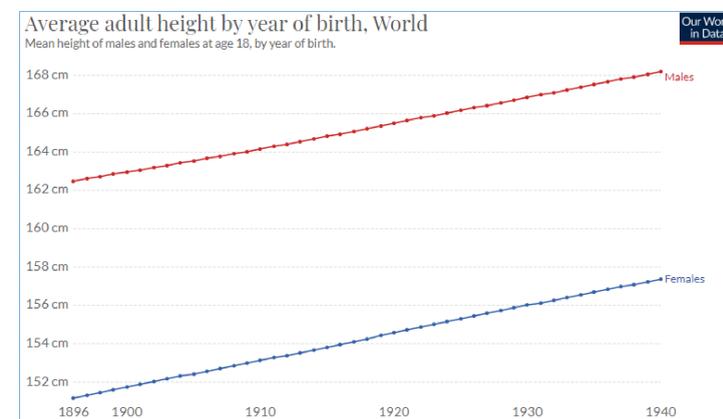
The first historical theme that will be analyzed for influencing the interpretation of Wisconsin's logging industry is that of the American Frontier. The American Frontier was famously defined and explained by Fredrick Jackson Turner. Within Turner's work he defined what and where the American Frontier was. The industries of farming, the fur trade, mining, and logging all played a role in Americas push to obtain land and prosperity to the West. While the idea of where the American Frontier was located and how successful the industries were changed over time, each held their own impact locally, nationwide, and globally. Since logging historically was an aspect of the American Frontier, it is not immune to the different ideology and bias that came with it.



Map showing tree coverage in Wisconsin during the 1800s
courtesy of the DNR

CHANGING MASCULINITY

Masculinity is another factor that plays a role in how logging in Wisconsin was interpreted by the public during the 1930-40s. Masculinity in the twentieth century was being challenged in new ways. During the roaring twenties, more aspects of life were opened to women. Gender roles and masculinity were already changing and being challenged in the 1920s but by 1929 a major shift is seen. Men during the Great Depression were losing their titles as breadwinners in the home, thus creating an emasculated image of the 1930s man. Writers addressing the logging industry in the 1930s were writing of a time prior to the change in gender roles and emasculation, glorifying the loggers for the tough work they did as men. One example of loggers being glorified was in how most reporters and authors noted that most loggers were six feet tall, yet such a claim does not match the historical data globally for average height in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.



Data showing average height from 1896 to the 1940s
courtesy of Our World in Data

CONCLUSION

The interpretation and imagery of Wisconsin's logging industry was romanticized for multiple reasons and factors. The American Frontier and the ideologies it created played a large role in the romanticizing of the logging era. Equally responsible for the romanticizing is changing ideologies and definitions of masculinity. These themes affected the interpretation of Wisconsin's logging industry throughout Wisconsin. Through the case study it's clear to see that Sawdust City, now known as Eau Claire, is a perfect example and embodiment of these romanticized ideologies. Through defining how Wisconsin's logging industry is romanticized with this research, and hopefully with future research on this topic, it helps to correct the historical inaccuracies seen with the interpretation that was created by the public in the 1930s and 1940s.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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