

HSS 101

Questions:

- (1) Why is the Sault a good location for a pulp wood industry?
- (2) Why has the Mission been the center of an extensive cutting industry?
- (3) Describe the type of work done by lumberjacks from Wawa in the 1920's.
- (4) Why were the lumberjacks willing to work so hard?
- (5) How did the logs get from the Magpie River to the Sault?

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## Pulp Cutting And The Mission

By D. E. Pugh

Around the turn of the century, a discovery was made that white water for hydro-electricity, black spruce for pulp and rushing rivers for transportation provided the ideal ingredients for successful paper manufacturing. With the entrepreneurial genius of Francis Clergue, hydro-electricity from St. Mary's rapids, American money, Great Lakes transportation and Algoma's vast coniferous forests, Sault Ste. Marie became home of the Sault Ste. Marie (later Abitibi) Pulp and Paper Company in 1896. Geographical factors encouraged pulp cutting at Michipicoten River. The twin rivers, Michipicoten and Magpie, penetrating deeply into Superior's wooded hinterland, provided pulpwood transportation, while the Mission's sheltered Lake Superior harbour was ideal for collecting logs in booms for towing to the Sault. With a convenient labour force in the Mission, the sleepy village had become a bustling pulp cutting depot by the 1920's.

Released from the defunct Helen Mine and region's declining gold mines, two to three hundred men by the 1920's freighted supplies, guided prospectors, farmed and cut fire wood during the summer months. As autumn hews tinted the landscape, these men said farewell to their families and travelled by long, flat bottomed 12 oared pointer boats to selected pulp cutting regions, operated by such contractors as the Mission's Cliff Miller. Shanty homes were constructed 20 by 35 feet in size, with dirt floor, double tiered bunks, and pole and sod insulated roofs. These homes quickly became fetid skunks nest of bed bugs and lice with a prevailing odour of unwashed bodies, drying socks and wood smoke. Rising at the cold crack of dawn for the monotonous daily meal of Chicago Chicken (pork) and beans, washed down by scalding tea, the lumberjacks laboured until dusk constructing hauling roads, dams and timber slides.

As snow whitened the landscape, cross cut saws rasped, and horse teams panted while crews fell, hauled, decked and loaded logs for transportation to the rivers. Competition was keen. 250 logs per man per day was expected. Extra logs per man accumulated in his bank to be extracted during bad days. A Christmas prize of a pound of tobacco provided incentive to accumulate the largest bank. Lumberjacks drove themselves relentlessly to accumulate banks of 2,000 to 3,000 logs to win this prize.

Lumberjacks were versatile. Spring breakup in early May turned land lubbers into river men, skilfully riding the treacherously rolling logs downstream, and breaking jams with long peaveys.

At Michipicoten Mission the number of logs, held by a heavily chained log boom, increased in size. Finally a powerful tug boomed the vast collection to Sault Ste. Marie. There a chipping and digesting process transferred tree trunks into chemical pulp, while a rolling and drying process created newsprint for sale on world markets.

It is fascinating to speculate that yesteryear's Michipicoten logs may still be surviving as yellowish New York Times newsprint in some university library!—a legacy of Michipicoten's early and profitable industry.