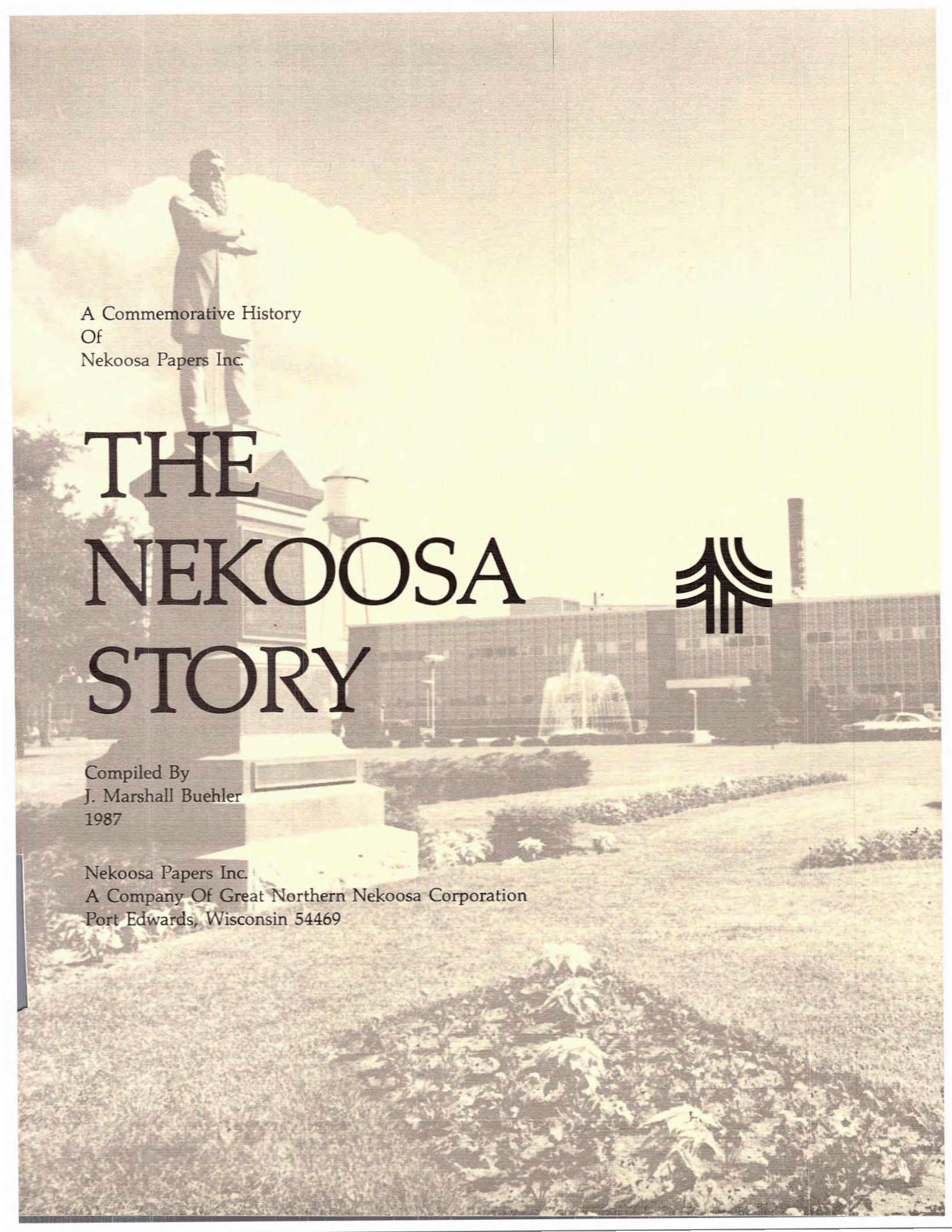
THE NEKOOSA STORY



A Commemorative History
Of
Nekoosa Papers Inc.

THE NEKOOSA STORY

Compiled By
J. Marshall Buehler
1987

Nekoosa Papers Inc.
A Company Of Great Northern Nekoosa Corporation
Port Edwards, Wisconsin 54469

Preface

Corporate anniversaries come and go. Some of these events commemorate a much longer history than Nekoosa Papers Incorporated can boast of. Because of their remoteness, we tend to ignore or overlook them. That is, until it gets closer to home. And what could be closer to home or more dear to our hearts than our own company, Nekoosa Papers Inc.

Our reason for celebrating an anniversary or birthday is threefold. The year 1987 marks ONE HUNDRED FIFTY years since entering the lumber business; ONE HUNDRED years of pulp/paper making and FIFTY years since entering into the fine, writing paper field by the introduction of Nekoosa watermarked papers. And as the text of this monograph will bear out, it was the entrance into the fine paper field that really gave us the impetus to grow to the prominence we have reached today.

In recognition of these three milestones, Nekoosa management has deemed it fitting to have this historical manuscript prepared.

Without the assistance of many people, this book would not be possible. But one person should be singled out for special recognition. That person is John E. Alexander, a former President of Nekoosa Papers Inc. It was Alexander who collected historical documents and then fostered the idea of an archives department wherein records, photos, documents, and artifacts would be preserved for future generations. It is from these collections that the bulk of the material for this book has been obtained. There are others who are responsible in some way or another for making this book a reality. They include Nekoosa President, James Crump, Nekoosa's Sales Management group, the Nekoosa Stenographic Department, the Public Relations Department, and the Publisher, Fey Publishing Company. Finally, I acknowledge the efforts of my co-worker, Mrs. Sandra Gross, who was my capable grammarian throughout this project.

Perhaps not in keeping with good literary style, the author has not provided a bibliography of references nor footnotes. However, all of the material contained herein is from the documents and printed matter on file in the Nekoosa Papers Archives Department, located in the Administration Building in Port Edwards. Should any statements made in this text need referencing, the original source can be found in these collections.

Finally, this book is divided into four parts or time spans:

I. The Lumber Era (1831-1887)
II. From Lumber To Newsprint (1887-1918)
III. Wrapping Papers And Specialty Sheets (1918-1937)
IV. The Switch To Fine Papers (1937-1987)

Each of these parts is subdivided into chapters that deal with some important part of our history which falls within that period. As you read these pages and observe the pictures, I think you will be amazed, just as I am, how a small sawmill in the northern, virgin wilderness of Wisconsin could grow into one of the world's largest producers of fine papers. Truly this is an example of phenomenal success brought about through the combined efforts of management, labor, and customers, all working together under the free enterprise system.

J. Marshall Buehler

Notice!
The reader should be made aware that this is a historical presentation. As such, the illustrations included are of a historical nature and do not represent any operations at Nekoosa Papers today.

Part One THE LUMBER ERA (1831-1887)
Chapter One: Daylight Enters the Forest

"Timber," as it was called by the lumberman; trees to you and me. Not just any trees, but pine trees—virgin pine trees! So many of them that the northern half of the state would be referred to as the Wisconsin Pinery.

And running through this pinery were water courses. Rivers that flowed from the north to the south and smaller freshets that flowed east and west. Water on which a log could be floated to a sawmill, water that could be used to move lumber to a marketplace; but most important, water that could be dammed and harnessed for power to operate a saw. Thus, timber could be converted to lumber and delivered to a market.

The preceding paragraphs serve as a very brief geography of Northern Wisconsin in the early 1800's. It doesn't sound like much, trees and water; but it was all that was needed to start an economic boom in a portion of Wisconsin which, up to that period, knew nothing of economics other than the bartering of some blankets or cloth for a few beaver pelts.

Daniel Whitney of Green Bay recognized the potential of these two natural resources; and consequently in 1829, built a sawmill, the first on the Wisconsin River, at a point about thirty miles south of the present city of Nekoosa. It was a small operation and really was not a sawmill in the strict sense of the term. Rather, it split shingles from a bolt of wood—hardly a sawmill. And really, it is not definitely ascertained if the mill was located on the Wisconsin River or the Yellow River, which has its confluence with the Wisconsin River at that point.

But it doesn't really matter where the mill was, or when it was built, since it only operated a very short time; in fact, only long enough to produce some 200,000 shingles before the product was confiscated by Major Twiggs, commandant of the United States army fort at Portage (Fort Winnebago). Twiggs alleged that Whitney did not have permission from the army, which had control of the Indian lands, to cut timber thereon. The operation was closed and the shingles taken to Fort Winnebago to be used for roofing the fort's buildings.

Whitney, temporarily discouraged but undaunted, moved upstream to a point on the Wisconsin River referred to as Pointe Basse (low point), meaning end of the rapids; the place where the river flattened out. At this point, Whitney would start a move that would let daylight into the forest. As trees were cut, sunlight fell upon ground that had not been exposed to the direct sun's rays for a hundred years or more. The year was 1831. This time Whitney had permission from the war department; and built a dam across the Wisconsin River, at a point off the end of the island, located just north of the present highway bridge at Nekoosa. The site was appropriately named Whitney's Rapids.

Pine lumber and shingles were the lifeblood of the new settlement, which sprang up just below the hill, at a site across the river from the present city of Nekoosa. This was Point Basse.

Wakely's Tavern was located about one mile from the site of the Nekoosa mill. It was situated at the end of a series of rapids in the Wisconsin River, and became a resting stop for raftsmen before another trip over the rapids. Nekoosa Papers Incorporated donated the property in 1986, to the Wakely Foundation. The Foundation's goal is to restore the historical landmark.

Point Basse was a small settlement, maybe half a dozen homes, a general store, a ferry boat, and Bob Wakely's Tavern, an overnight stop on the New Lisbon-Plover stagecoach line. It is said of this establishment that it was preferred over the Centralia hostelries, since Wakely always had on hand a supply of "Goodhues Best" and "Devil's Eye Water." As a result, a good time was always had by all.

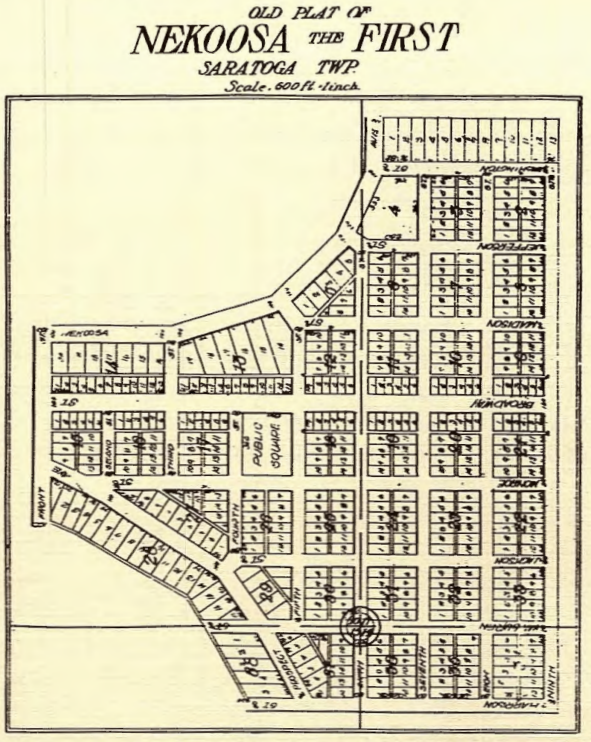
In 1836 a treaty was made with the Menominee Indians, making available a strip of land three miles wide on each side of the Wisconsin River, beginning at Point Basse and extending northward 40 miles to the vicinity of Wausau. The lumbermen had access to a new and vast supply of virgin timber, thanks to this "Three Mile Strip" treaty.

In 1848 Indian title to the balance of the land was extinguished, and the supply of timber was greatly augmented. A large portion of this land eventually was to become the property of Nekoosa Papers Inc., and its immediate predecessors.

Lumber was cut and piled on the ice just below the mill. The entire pile was then bound together using wedges, wooden pins, and tie boards. Thus, a lumber raft was built. In the spring of the year, when the ice went out, about four men would board the raft and set up housekeeping. A small bunkhouse was erected on the top of the raft, while meals were cooked and eaten on the "deck." At night the raft was tied to the river bank. Once the raft reached the Mississippi, it was kept moving day and night. From Pointe Basse to St. Louis was a slow, rather easy trip; the only danger spot being the scenic narrows of the Wisconsin Dells and the ever shifting sandbars of the lower Wisconsin.

In 1854, Moses M. Strong, a Mineral Point lawyer, purchased one-half interest in the Pointe Basse sawmill. Three years later, he purchased the other half interest from Mr. Whitney. Mr. Strong in turn sold the sawmill, timberlands and power rights to a newly formed organization, the Nekoosa Lumber Company, so named after the Indian word for "swift running water." This new lumber company was capitalized for half a million dollars, of which $300,000 was to be raised immediately; the funds to be used to purchase Whitney's water power rights, forest lands, and to construct a dam across the river.

A village plan, complete with town square, was plotted on the east side of the river, ironically on the opposite bank of the river from where the future city of Nekoosa would develop.



Nekoosa Lumber Company's plan for the city of Nekoosa. This plot was to be located on the east bank of the Wisconsin River. However, the city was never developed, since the Nekoosa Lumber Company never materialized. It was thirty years later when the present city of Nekoosa was plotted and this time on the west bank of the river.

Shortly after the dam was built (1860 or 1861), and before a new sawmill could be built, high water washed out a section of the dam. Soon thereafter the company became bankrupt, and nothing more was done with the valuable water power rights until 1893. For the following three decades, the settlement of Pointe Basse became stagnant. Settlers moved to nearby Frenchtown or Centralia. A few began to till the soil, while others began to trap for fur or raise a few cranberries.

After the failure of the Nekoosa Lumber Company, the property reverted back to Moses Strong, who refused to sell the power rights for $10,000 and held onto them for thirty years. The only interest received on his investment was a few barrels of cranberries raised on the marshes, located on the property of

the Nekoosa Lumber Company, in what is now the city of Nekoosa. Today these same water rights are owned by Nekoosa Papers Inc., and are valued in excess of a million dollars.

In 1887 George and Frank Wood, sons of Joseph Wood, after whom Wood County was named, purchased the assets of the defunct Nekoosa Lumber Company from Mr. Strong at a price of $4,500. A year later the property and rights were sold to Thomas E. Nash for $8,000. Mr. Nash, in turn, transferred them to the newly created Nekoosa Paper Company in 1893 for $50,000 worth of capital stock in that organization, a very good return on his original investment.

The settlement of Pointe Basse finally moved closer to the new mill area, where it grew until it was incorporated into the city of Nekoosa in 1907.

The lower ferry operated across the Wisconsin River at Wakely's Tavern. In later years, a second ferry would be installed at the present site of the City of Nekoosa, and referred to as the upper ferry. In periods of low river flow, it was possible to ford the Wisconsin River at this site.

Thus, the seed was planted. And just as the giant timber grew from a tiny seed, so would a giant corporation grow from this humble beginning at Nekoosa, Wisconsin.

The Nekoosa Lumber Company dam that was never completed. Remains of this timber dam are submerged under the backwater from the present Nekoosa dam. This photo was taken during a drawdown of the river when repairs were being made to the present dam. Being completely submerged under water, the wood does not succumb to rot. Thus these timbers that are well over a hundred years old will perhaps remain for another century.

Chapter Two: They Named the Town in Honor of Edwards

The motivation that gave Pointe Basse its start in 1831 repeated itself in 1837 at a point three miles upstream. The very early records are somewhat sketchy as to just who did what and when; but there is documentary reference indicating that Messrs. Grignon and Merrill were partners in a sawmill operation at a place that became known as Frenchtown, later named Port Edwards. The same mill fell under the partnership of Merrill and Whitney (same Whitney as in Pointe Basse operations) sometime in 1836. Next, Merrill bought out Whitney's interest in the operation and then, in turn, transferred the business to a partnership of Edwards and Clinton. This brings the sequence of events up to 1840.

The mill that was changing hands as frequently as a football during a bowl game, was a single saw operation located about a thousand feet north of the present Port Edwards paper mill. The physical plant consisted of most likely an unheated, wooden building; three or four foot high dam constructed of brush, timber, and native stone; and a water turbine or perhaps even an old water wheel driving a single rotary saw. But all of these assets were not as valuable to the lumbermen as were the water power rights and the government permit to cut timber on the land made available by the "Three Mile Strip" treaty previously mentioned.

It was these proprietary assets that Edwards and Clinton took over in 1840. In fact, there is some question as to whether Grignon and Merrill really did build an operating lumber mill. Some sources make note of Whitney being the motivating force behind the building of a producing mill located at the end of Main Street in Port Edwards. However, due to an undeveloped north woods economy, the lack of good transportation and the limited capacity of the mill, very little lumber was sawed at Frenchtown between 1836 and 1840. Whatever lumber was cut was probably used locally. At any rate, the wheels of progress did not begin to turn in the Port Edwards area until 1840, the year in which John Edwards, Sr., bought out Merrill's sawmill, timber rights, and water power rights.

The senior Edwards was engaged in several business activities, including lead mining, lumbering, land speculation, and retail merchandising. He administered these ventures from Hazel Green, Wisconsin. Being a man of financial means, he was able to invest in a lucrative venture when the opportunity presented itself. Just such an opportunity was the lumber mill at Frenchtown. But he needed a person to oversee the mill; a man knowledgeable of the forests and familiar with sawing operations. He found such a person in Henry Clinton, whom he took in as a partner, placing him as manager of the Frenchtown mill and supporting operations. The partnership business was known as Edwards and Clinton Co.

A settlement soon developed around the nucleus of the Edwards and Clinton sawmill. Since its inhabitants were mostly of French descent, the village was appropriately named Frenchtown, a name which prevailed unil 1869 when it was changed to Port Edwards in honor of John Edwards, Jr. Perhaps it should have been called Port Merrill, or Grignon's Rapids, or Whitneyville. There already was a Clintonville, so they named the village in honor of Edwards.

In 1855, again in 1858, and once more in 1859, Clinton found himself financially obligated to the business. Unable to make payments, he transferred portions of his equity in the partnership to Edwards. In each case, Clinton signed over to Edwards portions of his land holdings in Wood, Marathon, and Adams Counties in Wisconsin. Finally in 1862 an agreement was reached between these two, whereby Edwards took over management of the business operations, while Clinton was banished to operate the farm and lumber camp on Mill Creek in northern Wood County.

Clinton was murdered a few years later, reportedly by an irate saloon keeper in Centralia; and Edwards

John Edwards, Jr. (standing on the steps) built this home in 1872. It was across the street from the office of the John Edwards & Company mill. In subsequent years, the home was enlarged and remodeled into a spacious mansion, surrounded by four village blocks of landscaping. It was demolished in 1958 when the John E. Alexander YMCA Community Center was built on the site.

gained full control of the Wisconsin operations. He renamed the business John Edwards & Company. Active management had been turned over to his son, John Junior, who remained in active management until 1890, when he was elected to the Wisconsin legislature. He died while serving in this capacity.

The senior Edwards died in 1871 and his estate, including the Wisconsin River lumber business, fell into the hands of seven heirs. With the financial help of T. B. Scott in 1873, John Edwards, Jr., was able to purchase the Wisconsin interests from the other members of the family. Once more it became a partnership to be known as Edwards and Scott Lumber Co.

It is interesting to note that the company was not only a vendor of wood products such as pine lumber, lath, pickets, and shingles, but also a supplier of dry goods, groceries, and provisions.

A good description of Frenchtown in 1861 has been preserved through the years. The settlement was reported to be small, consisting of a store, a blacksmith shop, a school, two boarding houses, and a number of white homes. John Edwards, Jr., in an effort to keep a neat, clean village, sold white paint to the property owners at a very attractive price. This encouraged the home owners to keep their buildings well painted even though they were all uniformly white. As a result, the village was nicknamed the White City. Large refuse burners burned day and night, disposing of bark and sawdust.

Perhaps a little insight into the lumber business conditions in the era following the Civil War would be of interest. In 1872, John Edwards & Co. cut ten and a half million board feet of timber at the Mill Creek camp near Arpin, Wisconsin. This was floated down Mill Creek to the Wisconsin River and then downriver to Frenchtown; a roundabout way, but certain-

ly the least expensive way. Another account journal of Edwards indicates that he sold 697,057 board feet of lumber at a price of $13.00 a thousand, or a total of $9,061.78. He indicated his cost as $2,136.20, or a profit of $6,925.58! Slabs (the bark and curved sides of a log) sold for fifty cents a cord as firewood; while sawdust brought in $2.25 for two wagon loads, no doubt from a local icehouse. What appears to be quite expensive, at least to this writer, is the price of horses. Edwards bought four of them on one occasion for $500, or $125 each. About this same time, Edwards indicates in his personal diary that he hired a Mr. Benedict at a rate of twenty dollars a month!

At some point in time between 1840 and 1878, the site of the Edwards mill was moved from its location at the end of Market Street to the site of the present paper mill in Port Edwards. Up to 1878, Edwards conducted his business from his original mill on this site. However, in 1878 an expansion program resulted in the dismantling of the old mill and replacing it with a more modern facility. The old double rotary saws (two circular saws operating side by side) were replaced with new gang saws (several blades operating simultaneously as a group).

In 1885, with financial assistance from W. E. Southwell of Milwaukee, Edwards was able to purchase the Scott interests in the mill.

In 1890, upon election to the state legislature, John Edwards, Jr., invited a young banker to join him in operating John Edwards & Company. This was Lewis M. Alexander, who later became Edwards' son-in-law. That same year, John Edwards, Jr., and L. M. Alexander reorganized the lumber business, renaming it John Edwards Manufacturing Company, the immediate predecessor of the Port Edwards paper mill.

The lumber mill of John Edwards and Company was located on the same site occupied by the present Port Edwards mill. The railroad tracks in the foreground were not common carrier tracks but only an intramill system used for transporting lumber from the mill to the drying yards. The bell in the tower was used for announcing the beginning and ending of the work day as well as a general fire alarm.

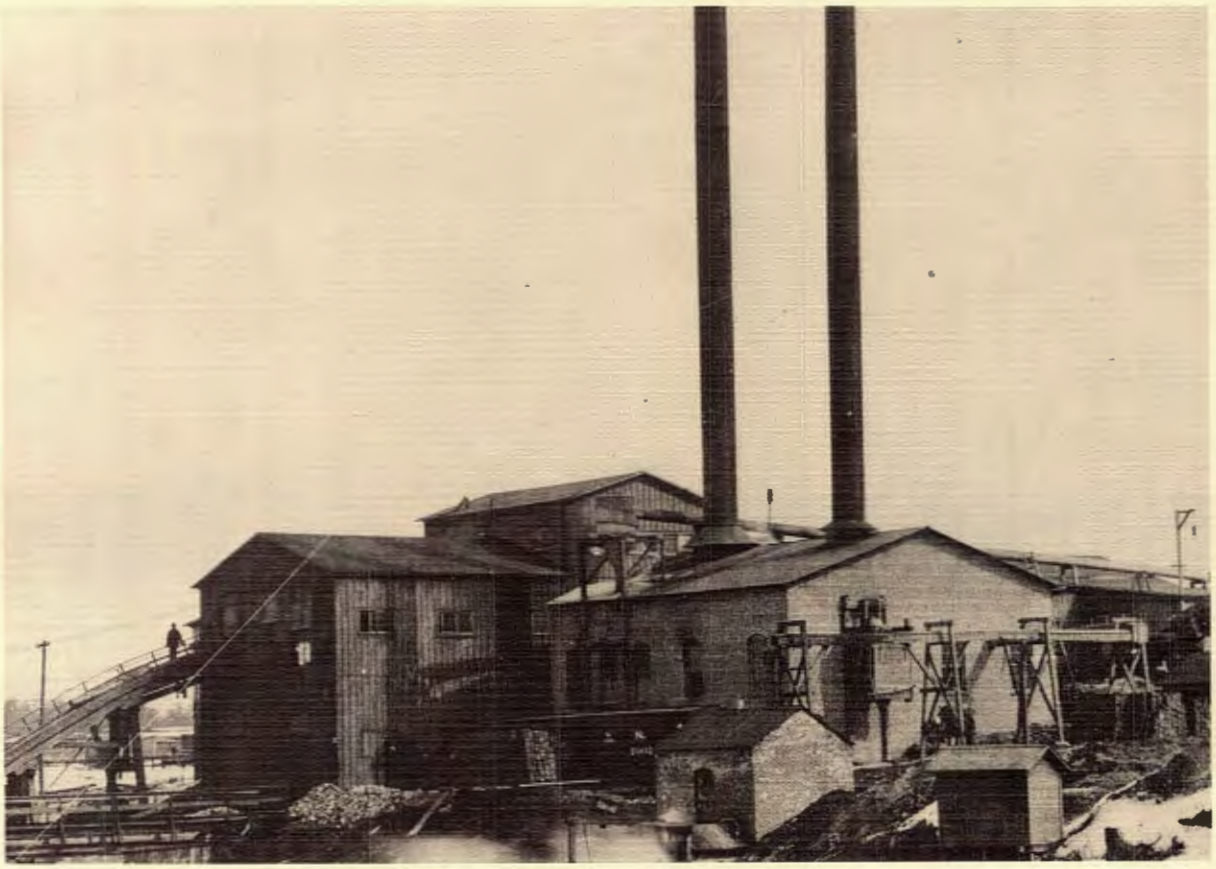
Chapter Three: Peerless, Kidney Wine and Lice Powder

The lumbering background of Nekoosa Papers Inc., includes a third operation, this one located in northern Wisconsin. Since it was one of the companies merged into Nekoosa Edwards, it is only fitting to give a brief resume of its history.

Water and timber—the water being the Chippewa River in this case, and the timber being on lands in northern Wisconsin in the area of Glidden, Wisconsin. Much of this timber-covered land was acquired from the Wisconsin Central Railroad, which in turn had obtained it under a Federal Land Grant, a program which awarded land to a railroad that would build tracks into virgin areas.

In 1901, Thomas Nash, for a sum of $23,867.00, purchased several thousand acres of these lands. Two provisions stipulated by the seller were that Nash agree to build a lumber mill in the Glidden area and secondly, that all lumber be shipped via the Wisconsin Central Railroad. The latter clause was no great problem as the Wisconsin Central was the most logical railroad to ship on, since it was the only railroad in the immediate area.

The Nash Lumber Company sawmill at Shanagolden, Wisconsin. The mill became part of Nekoosa Edwards Paper Company in 1908 and burned shortly thereafter. The remains of the brick walls of the boilerhouse still exist, just across the Chippewa River from what was downtown Shanagolden.



The vault or strong box lies in the rubble of the old foundation of the Nash Lumber Company's office building. This photo was taken in 1966. A recent visit to the same spot failed to produce the strong box. It perhaps rests in some antique shop.

The sawmill was built by D. J. Murray Manufacturing Company of Wausau, Wisconsin, which was considered to be one of the best builders of sawmills in the Midwest. And so it was that the village of Shanagolden was born some five or six miles southwest of Glidden. The nucleus of the village was the Nash Lumber Company, located on the Chippewa River, which flowed along the south edge of the community. But one big difference existed between this mill and other mills we read of in previous chapters. This mill was steam engine powered, rather than water powered. Hardwood was sawed at the mill while the softwood, mostly hemlock, was shipped to the Nekoosa Paper Company to be used as pulpwood. In 1908 the name was changed to Shanagolden Lumber Company.

The Shanagolden holdings included the sawmill at Shanagolden and 34,000 acres of timberland in that area. In order that the outlying timber could be made available, the Shanagolden Lumber Company operated a private railroad. An agreement had been made with the Wisconsin Central Railroad whereby the lumber company was to furnish the graded right-

The main street of Shanagolden, Wisconsin, about 1910. The buildings on the left were the office, store and boarding house operated by the Nash Company. Several of the homes in this picture were moved to Glidden, Wisconsin, a distance of seven miles, where they are still occupied today.

A Lombard steam hauler builds up a head of steam prior to hauling a train of empty sleighs into the woods. The crane, popularly called a jammer, has transferred the logs from the sleighs to the rail cars at Shanagolden, Wisconsin.

of-way and the cross ties, while the Wisconsin Central would furnish the steel rails. The main line ran from Glidden to Shanagolden, a distance of eight miles. Several branch lines into the woods made up the balance of the thirty miles of trackage operated. The line was operated by the lumber company. However, a portion of all shipping charges paid to the Central were turned back to the lumber company to apply on the Wisconsin Central's purchase of the line. Thus the Central eventually became owner of the Glidden and Southwestern Railroad.

An amusing story is told about the locomotive that the Glidden and Southwestern Railroad owned. It seems that the locomotive, which had been purchased second-hand from a Colorado railroad, was sent to the Wisconsin Central's shops at Fond du Lac for boiler repairs. While there, some engineer admiring the beauty and tonal quality of the brass bell, removed it for his own Wisconsin Central locomotive. Thus when the Glidden and Southwestern received its locomotive back, it was minus a bell. It

Not only is the only locomotive of the Glidden and Southwestern Railroad out of service but the main line is also fouled up. The derailment was caused by a soft roadbed in the marsh area between Shanagolden and Glidden, Wisconsin.

is reported that the Central offered the Glidden and Southwestern any bell on any locomotive on the

Wisconsin system, but the original bell was never returned.

As many as four logging camps were operated by the Shanagolden Company, perhaps not all at the same time. The camps were connected to the mill via a spiderweb of some thirty miles of rails, plus numerous tote roads on which steam tractors operated in winter, while thirty horses skidded logs out of the woods in summer.

Logging camps are a "men only" tradition which has been described by many authors. A cursory glimpse of life in a lumber camp could be obtained from a supply inventory of Camp 3 of the the Nash Company. The 1907 multipage inventory lists, among other items, the following commodities:

170 pairs of blankets
1 dinner horn
72 pairs of mittens
11 pairs of drawers
28 pounds of plug tobacco
42½ pounds of Peerless tobacco
6 bottles of kidney wine
5 boxes of lice powder

To support the Nash operation, the company operated a boarding house with annex, ice house, office, store, warehouse, barn, railroad "roundhouse," and blacksmith shop. Several of the homes in the community were built by and owned by Nash and rented to employees. Log loaders (jammers), locomotives, railroad cars, sleighs, "rut cutters," icing sleighs, a steam tractor, and even a gasoline rail car complimented the Shanagolden sawmill.

In 1908, this northern operation became a part of Nekoosa Edwards Paper Company. Then in 1909, the lumber mill at Shanagolden caught fire and was completely demolished. Inasmuch as the select hard-

A McGiffert log loader working on the Nash property in Northern Wisconsin, somewhere along the rail line of the Glidden and Southwestern Railroad. The logs were destined for the sawmill at Shanagolden. The railcar carries the name of the Nash Lumber Company. Cars were loaded by pushing them underneath the loader toward the front of the derrick. After loading, the full cars were picked up by the logging train.

wood had already been cut and only limited pulpwood remained, Nekoosa did not resume operations, but hired the Mellen Lumber Company to complete the cutting operations on their land. The Glidden and Southwestern Railroad eventually became the property of the Wisconsin Central Railroad, which in turn became a part of the Soo Line, and was abandoned sometime prior to 1925.

Mellen Lumber Company, under contract to Nekoosa Edwards Paper Company, agreed to cut the timber, selling the hardwood to a woodworking plant in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, and shipping the softwood (pine and hemlock) to the pulp mills at Port Edwards and Nekoosa. The Mellen Company did the cutting and paid Nekoosa Edwards a stumpage fee of $2.00 a thousand board feet. The contract was to terminate when the timber ran out.

But along about 1920, things were not going well for Mellen Lumber Company. The company was heavily indebted to eight banks and two private lenders. An attempt to make a profit from "swamp timber" was tried; the less desirable species being used for broom handles, railroad ties, mine timbers, lath and shingles. Bark was even sold to leather tanneries. Other hardships befell the operation. In 1920, fifteen horses died. Coal was up to thirteen dollars a ton, and "so poor in quality that the engine won't run on it"!

By 1922, losses were over $140,000, and Mellen wanted to cancel the contract with Nekoosa. Furthermore, fire, which was the plague of the woods, was threatening the cutting areas. The president of Mellen wrote to the president of Nekoosa:

> *"All crews are out fighting fires. The trestle on the Heagearl branch of the railroad is burned out. The cutters have to keep out of the slashings over near Foster Junction, as fire started there will put us out of business."*

And so the Shanagolden operation came to a close. The village of Shanagolden had a population of about three hundred at one time; today it would be difficult to get a mass meeting of thirty together. Many of the homes were loaded onto railroad cars and hauled to Glidden, where some still remain. Finally, the railroad itself was removed.

Now enter a new subsidiary operation. Nekoosa Papers organized the Shanagolden Investment Company with an office in downtown Glidden. The purpose of this new company was to sell to prospective farmers, the cut-over timberlands, complete with stumps. Land agents did their best, especially to immigrants, who were not told of the stumps, the rocks and the nothern Wisconsin winters.

Although some farming got started, it wasn't until the depression years of the early 1930's that Nekoosa Edwards finally disposed of the land. About 1932, the U. S. Forest Service became interested in land acquisition, and Nekoosa Edwards found it favorable to come to an agreement with the U. S. Government. As a result, 23,000 acres of cut-over land were transferred to the National Forest System to settle a $56,506 outstanding tax claim against Nekoosa Edwards Paper Company.

Shanagolden of today has less than six homes, plus a community hall; lots of stone foundations and this one remaining hydrant which marked the intersection of two of the village's streets. No longer supplying water, the hydrant only serves as a reminder of this ghost town which flourished and then died.

And Shanagolden today? A few homes are left around the village community center building. Two partial brick walls of the mill still stand, resembling a building hit by an earthquake. The foundations of the office, store and boarding houses are still there; and one lone hydrant stands in a field, a rusting monument marking an almost forgotten street corner.

Chapter Four: Dynamite it Bigger

At some point in this volume, a chapter should be included emphasizing the importance of the Wisconsin River to our company's growth. After all, it was the river that gave cause to the lumber industry to be established here. Likewise, it was the river that brought the paper industry following in the footsteps of the sawmills.

The Wisconsin River, longest of the streams within the state's boundaries, has the temperament of an Irishman. It is wild, forceful, and powerful when aroused by spring thaws or heavy rains; yet it is peaceful, tranquil, and passive at low flow. It alternately displays these moods, often with no other warning than the unpredictable conditions of weather. Since man has never been able to control the weather, pioneer lumbermen turned their efforts toward controlling the river. Their goal was to more evenly divide the periods of ferocity with the intervals of quiescence. This was done as early as the 1850's when sawmill operator Henry Clinton obtained a permit to build four dams on the Wisconsin River in the vicinity of Wisconsin Rapids, so as to more effectively run logs and lumber down the river. The resulting dams were called "wing dams," and their purpose was to direct the river flow toward the center of the stream, or toward a certain channel. The building of dams, for the specific purpose of regulating the volume of flow, was begun in the latter half of the 1800's. By law, these dams had to provide for the passage of logs and lumber being trafficked on the river. These passages were called chutes or sluices. What one person might consider as being an ideal situation for his operation might not be to the best advantage of another. Consider the problems surrounding lumber rafting. A book should be written just on this exciting subject alone; and the Nekoosa Archives has some firsthand documents that would provide background material. However, it is not the scope of this work to present a detailed history of lumber rafting.

Consider, if you would, a pile of lumber four feet high, sixteen feet wide, and one hundred-twelve feet long. Imagine trying to steer this raft by wielding a rudder that has been fabricated from a pine tree thirty-five feet long, fourteen inches in diameter at one end, and tapering to five inches at the "small" end. Picture the river in one of its savage moods, conjured up by spring floods. Ahead of you is a dam barricading your progress downstream. There is "slide" or "chute" just barely wide enough to permit your raft to pass through. It's no wonder that daily entries, like the following, found their way into John Edwards' diary.

Gus Giese, former Nekoosa Papers employee, remembered the rafting days of his youth and spent several hours of his retirement building this minature replica of a Wisconsin River lumber raft. The raft is now the property of the Nekoosa Papers Archives collection. Giese had the honor of running the last raft down the river in 1887.

"Farrish's raft 'saddlebagged' my dam today."

What this means is that the pilot was unable to guide his raft lengthwise through the chute. Rather, the pilot was in trouble as his raft was approaching the dam floating sideways. Upon hitting the rock foundation of the dam, it buckled and broke into pieces.

Another entry from the same source reads:

"Farrish dynamited my dam today."

Evidently feeling the dam's chute was too narrow, or not passing enough water, Farrish instructed his crew to use dynamite to enlarge the opening. Acts such as this did not promote good harmony between rival lumbermen!

Here are some more interesting documentations

taken from various sources.

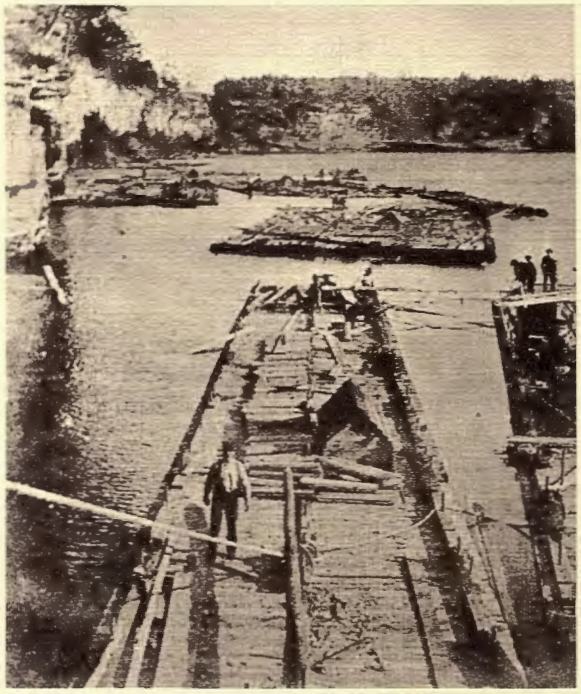
"Your (Edwards') logs wrecked my (Neeves) dam today. If you are man enough, you will come up here to discuss putting it back the way it was."

"One man killed today and one injured. They were dynamiting at the dam and one lit his pipe. The dynamite went off prematurely, killing one and badly injuring the other."

"Two men drowned today at the dam. Their raft went over the dam sideways, and they were washed off the raft."

"Edwards' dam unsafe for rafting." (Newspaper article.)

"My dam is safe but pilots have to be experienced. I will insure for twenty-five cents a raft, all going over my dam if certain pilots are used." (Newspaper advertisement.)



Lumber rafts congregate at Kilbourn Town (Wisconsin Dells), prior to going through the narrows of the Dells. The raft in the foreground is being separated into what is called a rapids piece. In the background are rafts that have come down the river from Port Edwards, Grand Rapids and other points further north on the Wisconsin River.

But the river not only had its cataclysmic traits; it also had its dormant side, as shown by these quotes.

"All hands spiked (pried) all day getting raft off sand."

"No time was lost. River dropping two inches every twenty-four hours, and that means a lot on the lower river."

"Stuck on island—one day lost."

And then there were the problems of floating logs from the upper river cutting areas down to the mills. Boom companies were formed, whose purpose it was to disperse the logs down river, taking the best advantage of the river flow. Imagine a pile of logs choking the river for a distance of two miles. The boom company was supposed to avoid this, but obviously did not live up to their purpose.

It wasn't only lumbering that depended upon the river. Paper mills that followed in the footsteps of sawmills required hydro power also. In 1898, L. M. Alexander, President of John Edwards Manufacturing Co., cited the need for water regulations, stating that he did not have enough water for operating the mills. He accused the dams up river, some of them owned by the boom companies, of holding back the water and even suggested that the dam at Minocqua, Wisconsin, be removed. It is interesting to note that on June 9, 1898, the Minocqua dam was blown up. Tom Nash, President of Nekoosa Paper Co., instructed his representative there to "find the culprit. It should be easy to find out who bought dynamite around there recently."

All of the foregoing are interesting and even humorous incidents; nevertheless, they all posed serious problems to the river users. And so it was that L. M. Alexander and other interested persons made an attempt at controlling the river flow. The dam owners and mill operators formed the Wisconsin River Hydraulic Association on February 28, 1895. The association made an attempt at controlling the two hundred and fifty foot fall of water that existed in the river's course over a distance of slightly over a hundred miles. An interesting capitalization structure made it possible for each water user on the river to subscribe to a number of shares of stock in direct

The dam at Nekoosa, Wisconsin, is quite typical of the dams that existed at each of several lumber mills along the river. They were of timber and rock construction. The concrete structures with steel gates that we associate with river control today replaced these older dams in later years. The present Nekoosa mill dam is built on the foundations of the one illustrated here.

proportion to the feet of water controlled by his dam.

However, the Hydraulic Corporation fell short of its intended goal; perhaps because it lacked the support and authority of the state legislature. At any rate, the problems were not solved as indicated by the following reports of the John Edwards Manufacturing Co.:

> *"Mill down because of grinders and machinery on line shaft not operating due to high water with no head and flooding in the basement."*
>
> *"Number five and six machines down. One and a half inches of water in grinder room and machine room basement."*

And the opposite conditions:

> *"Grinders shut down at midnight to conserve water."*

Perhaps somewhat improved, control of the river was still not at its best. Regulation, that would only come from a system of dams and reservoirs, which could impound the spring high water and release it during the dry seasons, was needed. The federal government had done this on some rivers. Here in Wisconsin, a group of water power users took it upon themselves to not only regulate, but also improve the Wisconsin River's moods.

In 1906 Alexander and Nash, both presidents of predecessor Nekoosa Edwards' companies, along with others, founded the Wisconsin Valley Improvement Company. Twenty-five water power users subscribed to their proportionate allotment of stock. Nekoosa Edwards Paper Company was the largest investor, since three of its parent companies controlled eleven percent of the river's developed power. Nash and Alexander were both directors of the new company, which was chartered by the state of Wisconsin in 1907.

And what has it accomplished? Well, rafting and log drives are things of the past. There is no commercial traffic on the river other than a few sightseeing boats at Wisconsin Dells. Yet the Wisconsin River is the hardest working river in the country. Mills no longer shut down for the annual spring floods or late summer droughts. An excerpt from a pamphlet distributed by the Wisconsin Valley Improvement Company best summarizes the accomplishments.

"Through the support of its member companies, the river plant owners, the program has now developed into a complex, effective system of 21 storage reservoirs."

As rivers go, there are many far larger—carrying a vastly greater volume of water. There are many more publicized—but when it comes to work—to production of energy in relation to size—to doing the greatest good for the greatest number of people, the Wisconsin River heads them all.

The Wisconsin River is an active demonstration of the development of a river valley by ***tax-paying, self-supporting private industry.*** *It illustrates how at twenty-six dams on the river, hydro-electric plants are busy 24 hours a day producing electricity for industry and the people of the State. Twenty-one additional reservoir dams of the Wisconsin Valley Improvement Company store the water runoff in wet seasons and release it during dry periods. This materially reduces flood damage and makes the river more useful all year. This system of reservoir dams and power dams not only controls floods and produces water power, but creates a series of lakes, thus adding lake facilities to the advantages of the River."*

As late as 1920, the river was still being used for logging as illustrated in this photo of the mill pond at Port Edwards. The view is from the water tower at the mill and shows pulpwood in storage on the river. A boom, secured by three stone cribs monitors the flow of wood to the mill.