

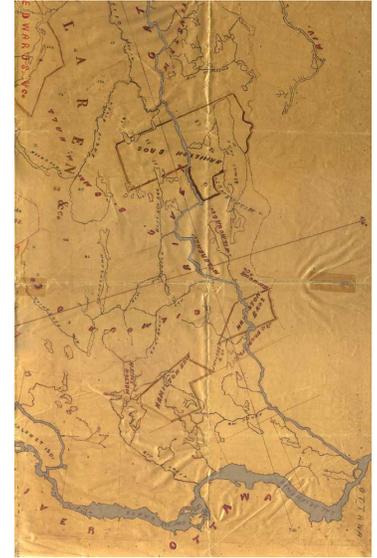
CHELSEA LOG DRIVE

A Brief History

Quick Facts

The lumber Industry in the Gatineau Valley

- In 1800, Philemon Wright (1760-1839) settled in what would become Hull. From the time he floated the first logs down the Ottawa River, logging shaped the life and landscape of that valley, as well as that of the Gatineau Valley.
- In Europe, the blockade issued by Napoleon in 1806 prevented England from receiving supplies of Baltic timber. England had no choice but look to its North American colony to find the timber it needed to build the ships of the Royal Navy.



Gatineau River Timber Limits (ca. 1890)
Courtesy of Gatineau Valley Historical Society



- The lumber merchants sent their bush rangers up the valley to find groves of pine and a nearby site for a shanty to house men hired to cut down trees and haul the sawlogs to skidways in the bush. Later they would haul the logs to the banks of the closest creek, lake, or river, to be floated downstream to the mills at Ottawa in the spring.

- In the 1850s, demand for square timber collapsed, but fortunately for the lumber merchants and the settlers of the region, there was a growing demand for sawn lumber to feed the booming American market.
- Logs were carried down the Gatineau river to the mills at Ottawa where they were cut into planks for shipment to buyers.



Gilmour and Company in Chelsea, Quebec (ca 1880)
Courtesy of Gatineau Valley Historical Society

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- Each spring, after wood had been cut and piled along streams and riverbanks, the log drivers would eagerly await the thaw. They would push the logs into the water and follow them with pointer boats, helping the log booms make their way down the Gatineau River toward the sawmills.
- Pointer boats were used from the early 19th century until the construction of the dams in the 1920s.



Rivermen in their pointer boats around Kirk's Ferry c. 1920
Courtesy of Gatineau Valley Historical Society



Cascades, Chelsea c.1910
Courtesy of Gatineau Valley Historical Society



Gatineau River c.1920
Courtesy of Gatineau Valley Historical Society

- Following the damming of the Gatineau River in 1926, the river was too slow and the log booms had to be towed along by tugboats. When logs jammed or needed extra help to move along, the drivers would balance on the floating logs and use long pike-poles to pull or hook the logs to keep them moving down the river.

Interesting...

Malak Karsh was the Canadian photographer who took this photo for the old dollar bill. His brother Yousef, was also a photographer, and took the photo of the Queen on the reverse side. Malak Karsh is buried at the MacLaren



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Shanty Life

- The logging industry employed the vast majority of its workers during the winter. A lot of these men were local farmers and their sons, supplementing their summer incomes.
- They left for the woods at the end of September, and did not come home before springtime, often leaving their wives to care for their farms and children, alone for the winter.



Inside a shanty in Lapeche, Quebec c.1900
Courtesy of GVHS

- The men lived in shanties, which were self-sufficient communities of between 30 to 120 men, under the supervision of a foreman and a shanty clerk. Each shanty had its own cook. Besides the log houses where the men slept, there was usually a store, a cellar, and a blacksmith shop at the site of each logging camp.
- In summer, the timber cruiser went into the forest within his employer's landholdings to locate timber to cut during the coming winter. He travelled on foot and by canoe, portaging between rivers and lakes. He visited the farms that supplied the shanties in order to estimate their yields, particularly the feed for the animals used in the woods in winter.

According to Charles MacNamara in his diary, the consumption of one man for one day in 1900-1901 was:

Raisins: 0.03 pounds

Syrup: 0.06 pounds

Butter: 0.08 pounds

Apples: 0.06 pounds

Peas: 0.01 pounds

Tea: 0.05 pounds

Flour: 1.24 pounds

Potatoes: 1.14 pounds

Pork and Bacon: 1.04 pounds

Beef: 0.89 pounds

Beans: 0.24 pounds

Sugar: 0.23 pounds