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Timber Related Source Materials about Mississippi's Piney Woods: An Archival Survey of the McCain Library and Archives at the University of Southern Mississippi

Reagan Grimsley

Few natural resources impacted the lives of Mississippians to the degree which timber has. In particular, the southeastern and south central regions of the state received the label "piney woods" because the dominant features of the region consisted of longleaf, shortleaf, loblolly, and slash pines. Early Mississippians might have labeled other regions of the state according to the soil content, but the towering conifers which proliferated from the Gulf Coast northward to Jackson, and westward to near Natchez, seemed the main economic resource by which to label the area.¹ The purpose of this article is to detail briefly why timber has been a major factor in the development of the region, and more important, how a survey of related archival materials, specifically materials at the McCain Archives at the University of Southern Mississippi, can be of benefit to researchers in several disciplines, including forestry, history, environmental studies, biology, and anthropology. A secondary, but nonetheless important objective of the work is to provide a reference resource for librarians which can be used as an introduction to the primary archival sources on Mississippi's piney woods housed at the McCain Library and Archives.

Man's use of timber, in particular the pine, influenced the economic, cultural, and environmental development of an entire region. Although all settlers in southern Mississippi made use of timber in various ways, including fuel and construction materials for personal dwellings, other more economically feasible uses of the natural resources began to develop in the early 1800's. The production of naval stores, including pitch pine and turpentine, became a major use of the pine during the nineteenth century. The construction of sawmills also began in the early 1800's, and by the end of the century, the pine represented the major economic resource in South Mississippi. The previously untapped virgin forests of the area lured large corporate investors to the region.² Numerous small towns erupted, many in previously unpopulated areas.³ New technologies, such as the bandsaw, increased the capacity of the sawmills, making the large mill the standard of the day. The timber could not

¹Nollie Wade Hickman, *Mississippi Harvest: Lumbering in the Longleaf Pine Belt, 1840-1915* (Oxford: University of Mississippi Press, 1962), 1-14. The first chapter of the work is a detailed description of South Mississippi. Other useful sources for a insight into the background of the region include E. N. Lowe, *Forest Conditions in Mississippi*, U.S. Forest Service in conjunction with the Mississippi Geological Survey, Bull. No. 11 (Jackson, 1913), 38-39, 97-99; also Charles Mohr, *Timber Pines in the Southern United States*, U.S. Bureau of Forestry, Bull. No. 13 (Washington, 1896), 30-31, 42-43.

²Hickman, *Mississippi Harvest*, 1-90.

³For a good overview of blossoming timber towns between 1880 and 1930, see the following: Annie Louise d'Olive, "Reminiscences of Ten Mile: A South Mississippi Sawmill Town," *Journal of Mississippi History* 39 (1977), 173-184; John P. Switzer, "Handsboro: A South Mississippi Town, 1840-1920," M.A. Thesis, University of Southern Mississippi, 1985.

last forever; by 1930 many areas of the piney woods were devoid of the once plentiful longleaf pine. Since the practice of reforestation had not yet taken root in the South, the lack of, instead of proliferation of the pine, distinguished the landscape for many years to come.⁴

As early as 1920, a new era of timber use in Mississippi began. Concerned over the vast amount of unproductive land, the Forest Service became more active in the region after 1920. Based in nearby New Orleans and established in 1921, the Southern Forest Experiment Station had the stated purpose of "ascertaining the best methods of growing timber crops and for promoting full use of the forest lands in the southern United States for the production of timber and other forest crops."⁵ In 1933, the United States Forest Service also established the Harrison Experimental Forest, located in Saucier, Mississippi, with the assigned purpose of studying all southern pines, and methods of regrowth.⁶ The federal government was not alone in forming support agencies to study the depletion of the pine; state officials also saw a need for intervention. In 1926 the State Forestry Commission came to life with the "avowed purpose of providing for reforestation in Mississippi."⁷ By the late 1940's the efforts at reforestation began to pay dividends; the harvest of second growth pine forests again brought economic opportunity to a number of South Mississippians. Although not on the scale of the previous decades, corporate firms such as Georgia Pacific, Masonite, and International Paper established sizable mills in the region, and, through the efforts of conservation and regrowth, the forest lands of South Mississippi became once more an important and salable resource in the region.

With such a rich and varied scholarly background, various disciplines have studied the timber industry in Mississippi during the twentieth century. Historians reflect on the economic and sometimes, cultural impact of timber on society. Students of forestry, and to a limited extent, biology, offer theses on just how timber affects both humans and the environment of Mississippi, and to a greater extent, the Gulf South. To a much more limited extent, anthropologists and environmental pathologists study either the pine, the industry it spawned, or how timber-related industries impact the people of the region. Scholars have made no attempt, however, to document and list the pertinent archival holdings which are central to a study of the industry.⁸

A survey of archival sources can be very constructive for researchers in all fields who study the environment, and can enable the librarian or archivist to ascertain pertinent holdings of value to a particular researcher. During the past ten to fifteen years, the donation of several

⁴Hamlin L. Williston, *Southern Pine Management Primer* (New York: Vantage Press, 1985), 1-2.

⁵Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, *Tenth Annual Report and Program of the Southern Forest Experiment Station* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1930), 3.

⁶United States Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Southern Research Station, *Southern Institute of Forest Genetics: Technical Advisory Visit*, (Gulfport, MS: Southern Institute of Forest Genetics, 1997), 9.

⁷Mississippi Forestry Commission, *First Biennial Report of the Mississippi Forestry Commission* (Jackson: Mississippi State Forestry Commission, 1927), 1-2.

⁸Nollie Hickman, in *Mississippi Harvest*, did provide a short bibliographical essay of sources, but this list is hopelessly outdated, and refers to mainly historical sources.

archival collections has shed new light on the industry as a whole. Recent scholarship, including the ongoing work of historian Gilbert Hoffman⁹, has rejuvenated interest in the field. A compilation of primary archival materials at the University of Southern Mississippi could provide a solid, usable resource which would become a very helpful tool for future researchers.

The largest archive in the state south of Jackson, the University of Southern Mississippi's McCain Archives are located on the main campus in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. The venue, in the center of the Piney Woods, is appropriate for the study of the timber industry in the region. At the present time, the archives actively pursues archival material related to lumber and logging in Mississippi. Although not covered in the scope of the study, the university's Oral History Program also documents the history of timber in the Pine Belt.

Contained in the McCain Archives are several useful collections of primary source material on the timber industry. These collections include several photograph collections of lumber companies, manuscript collections, and various railroad collections which closely relate to the operation of the timber industry in South Mississippi. At present, all of the listed collections are open to the researcher.

The Batson Family Deeds consist of approximately ten land deeds, dated 1841-1908, of property owned by the Batson family. Batson, an independent surveyor and timberman, owned large tracts of land in Harrison County. Since the land deeds cover a large period of time, the content could be of use to researchers interested in a variety of topics.¹⁰

The Goodyear Yellow Pine Photographs portray not only the lumber company and mill of the same name, but several also contain images of the older Rosa Lumber Company, which became a part of the Goodyear Yellow Pine Company in 1917. All of the forty-five images in the collection, most of which are black and white photographs, are of facilities either at the Goodyear Yellow Pine Mill, built in 1918, or the Rosa Lumber Mill. The dates covered by the photographs are 1915-1920.¹¹

One of the most thorough holdings of the University of Southern Mississippi is the Gilbert Hoffman Collection. Hoffman, a retired engineer turned historian, is the author of *Dummy Lines Through the Longleaf: A History of Sawmills and Logging in Southwest Mississippi*, published in 1992. The collection includes research materials which Hoffman used in completing the volume, as well as a number of photographs, negatives, and drawings of railroads and locomotives of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Although most of the photographic images are from Mississippi, the researcher should note that several come from other southern states. Several detailed maps of early railroads, including the Mississippi

⁹Gilbert Hoffman, *Dummy Lines Through the Longleaf: A History of Sawmills and Logging Railroads of Southwest Mississippi*, (Oxford: Center for the Study of Southern Culture, University of Mississippi, 1992). The most current work by the author is *Steam Whistles in the Piney Woods: A History of the Sawmills and Logging Railroad of Forrest and Lamar Counties* (Hattiesburg: Longleaf Press, 1998). Mr. Hoffman is currently producing volume two of *Steam Whistles*.

¹⁰Finding aid, Batson Family Deeds, McCain Library and Archives, The University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, Mississippi.

¹¹Finding aid, Goodyear Yellow Pine Company Records, McCain Library and Archives, The University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, Mississippi. Also contents of the collection.

Central, are included in the collection, and can be utilized to reconstruct the rail routes which linked not only the towns of the piney woods, but also outside markets.¹²

The Ingram-Day Lumber Company Photographs represent another smaller collection which could be invaluable to the researcher attempting to locate period photos of the lumber boom. The Ingram-Day Lumber Company, once located in Lyman, Mississippi, is the scene of several of the twenty-nine black and white photographs which comprise the collection. The other photographs, taken in south Alabama from 1906-1921, depict examples of the types of pine harvested for the mills of the Ingram-Day Company.¹³

The Major-Sowers Photograph Collection illustrates the strength of the University of Southern Mississippi's images of the timber industry. Major and Sowers owned two different mills, one in Epley, Mississippi, between Sumrall and Hattiesburg, and the other, the Tallahala, located in Perry County. The twenty photographic images, all in black and white, depict scenes at the two main mills, and date between 1908 and 1929, the start and end of the operation of the Major-Sowers Lumber Company. In addition to an aerial view of the Tallahala location, several images include locomotives and equipment used in logging operations during the early twentieth century.¹⁴

Dr. Gilbert Hoffman rescued the J.J. Newman Lumber Company Records from an unused baggage car. The records include ledger accounts from the J.J. Newman Lumber Company, which operated in Hattiesburg, Mississippi from 1894 to 1943. The thirteen volumes include a variety of information, from accounts payable to cash journals. Although the journals do not cover every year of operation, the researcher can, however, get a view of business operations of an extensive timber operation at the turn of the century.¹⁵

A very small collection, the Weston Lumber Company Photographs consist of two oversized black and white images of the Weston Lumber Company Mill. The dates of the photographs are unknown, but are likely to fall between 1920 and 1924. The researcher seeking photographic or architectural information on mill operation in south Mississippi should not overlook the images.¹⁶

Although not photos of lumber mills or operations, the Association of American Railroads Collection at the University of Southern Mississippi can also provide the researcher with a plethora of information on the timber industry in the region. Consisting of records and background on several different South Mississippi lines, the extensive collections cover the Gulf, Mobile, and Ohio Railroad, the Mississippi Central Railroad, and the Illinois Central Railroad from roughly 1850-1966. The breadth and depth of the collections are extraordinary,

¹²Contents of the collection, Gilbert Hoffman Papers, Gilbert Hoffman Collection, McCain Library and Archives, The University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, MS.

¹³Finding aid, Ingram-Day Lumber Company Photographs, McCain Library and Archives, University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, Mississippi.

¹⁴Finding aid, Major-Sowers Saw Mill Photographs, McCain Library and Archives, The University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, Mississippi.

¹⁵Contents of the collection, finding aid, J.J. Newman Lumber Company Records, McCain Library and Archives, The University of Southern Mississippi.

¹⁶Contents of the collection, finding aid, Weston Lumber Company Photographs, McCain Library and Archives, The University of Southern Mississippi.

and since most railroads, such as the Mississippi Central, a subsidiary of the J.J. Newman Lumber Company, were either owned or constructed in part by lumber interests, the collection can be an excellent source of factual information. Freight records, accounting logs, train schedules, and managerial memos are just a sample of the diverse information included in the collection. Since rail was the main method of transportation for much of the finished timber products, the researcher can use the railroad collections to reconstruct the hustle and bustle associated with rail and sawmill during the period.¹⁷

Recently processed and now open to researchers, the records of the United States Forest Service, Harrison Experimental Forest Station offer a wealth of information on both the timber industry, and reforestation efforts in the state. The station, founded in 1933 and located in Saucier, Mississippi, serves as a test area for pathology and genetics research of all southern pines. Photographs comprise the majority of the collection, with over two thousand images which span the period from 1921 until 1996. Forest pathology, lumber mills, hurricane damage, and Forest Service Annual Field days comprise the majority of the photographs, which are both color and black and white. Several aerial views of the station and surrounding Harrison County could also be invaluable to the researcher.

In addition to numerous photographs, the Harrison Experimental Forest Collection includes over one hundred slides of two different formats. Regular slides comprise the majority of images in the slide collection, but numerous three by five lantern slides are also found in the collection. The images are of lumber research, and span the period between 1930 and 1970.

Another particular strength of the collection is the maps and blueprints that accompany the Harrison materials. Numerous maps of the state's forests, dating to the early 1930's, as well as thorough maps of the station, are included. Several maps of the smaller McNeill Experimental Forest in McNeill Mississippi are also housed in the collection. Several manuscripts, booklets, and pamphlets detailing the history and formation of the station constitute important portions of the collection.¹⁸

In conclusion, succeeding generations of Mississippians utilized the forest resources of South Mississippi through different methods. The timber which now rises above the homes, businesses, and farms of the region, however, has also been greatly changed by the presence, and influence, of the residents who call the Piney Woods home. Only through further research, with accurate and factual sources, can the interaction between man and environment be fully understood. Future research, however, depends on a reliable research tool. By offering an archival bibliography of timber related resources, future researchers, and the librarians who assist them, can be better prepared for the task which lies ahead.

¹⁷Finding aid, contents of the collection. Railroad Collections, McCain Library and Archives, The University of Southern Mississippi. A detailed finding aid is located in the reference section of the Brooks Reading Room on the third floor. Since the collection is rather voluminous, researchers should refer to the finding aid for specific information.

¹⁸Reagan L. Grimsley, "The Study of Genetics or a Window to Culture: The Preservation of a Special Collection," term paper, August 1998. In possession of the author. See also finding aid, United States Forest Service, Harrison Experimental Forest Station Records, McCain Library and Archives, The University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, Mississippi. The author was responsible for the processing of the collection and the preparation of the finding aid.