

# Back in the day, Washburn's sawmills could really cut it

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In the late summer of 1889 the editor of the Washburn News toured Washburn's three sawmills on the harbor shore and published the following descriptions of the mills in the newspaper:

• **S.G. Cook & Co., located directly down from 8th Avenue West:**

The first point of interest visited was the planing mill. This is entirely a new institution having been erected this year and but recently put in operation. It consists of three first-class planers one lathe and one re-saw, and its capacity is 125,000 feet per day.

A refuse burner is being built for this mill and everything put in to facilitate rapid and perfect work. A tramway extends the entire distance from the sawmill to the planing mill, and a switch from the Omaha tracks is being put in to the latter mill so that lumber can be loaded onto the cars in the easiest possible manner.

By these means 125,000 feet can be shipped by rail per day. We next visited the sawmill, the pride of all who labor there. It is indeed a daisy. The mill consists of one circular and one gang and in a run of 21 hours turns out 175,000 feet of lumber as regular as the days come and go.

The workings of this mill cannot fail to interest the most casual observer. The logs are brought up from the bay, trimmed on the circular and cut on the same or transferred to the gang saw and converted into lumber of the desired dimensions.

The slabs, or "waste" as it is generally called, are sorted and converted either into lath or shingles. The lath mill turns out 75,000 laths per day and the shingle mill in the neighborhood of 15,000 slab shingles per day. The machinery is run by a 20-by-30 steam engine of 225-horsepower and the steam is furnished by seven boilers, but two more will soon be added.

The system of fire protection in the mills and yards are almost perfect. A four-inch pipe runs all over the yard and is connected with each tramway, besides being put in throughout the mills.

The hose and other necessary appliances are ready for service at any time and the water is supplied by an 8-by-10 Wolverine pump and a 5-by-6 Knowles pump. With these it is next to an impossibility for the flames to get beyond the control of the crew. This company owns and operates its own blacksmith shop, which is complete in every respect. A machine shop will soon be put in at the planing mill.

As stated, the mill is run night and day, two crews being employed, each working 10½ hours. This mill has made a remarkable record, in that it has run every day — except Sundays and the Fourth of July — from the 20th of April until the 15th day of July without having to stop for a breakage or anything else.

The sawmill and yards are lighted by the famous Edison incandescent electric light, 140 of the lights being used. The electric-light engine was formerly used in the Lumbermen's Exchange at Minneapolis and is considered one of the best in the Northwest. The entire crew in the employ of S.G. Cook & Co. numbers about 187 men who (combined) draw monthly about \$7,500. They are "paid off" the 5th and 20th of each month in cash and their pay is as sure as their work.

• **A.A. Bigelow & Company, located about 200 feet west of the S.G. Cook Mill:**

This sawmill, the largest plant of its kind on the bay, was erected during the winter of 1886-87. It contains two circulars and two gangs and has turned out as high as 307,000 board feet of lumber in one day of 11 hours. This remarkable run was made Tuesday of last week and what makes the record much more interesting is that four men took all this lumber from the gangs, five men put it all through the edgers, and 10 men did the piling and did it well too. The motive power of the mill consists of two batteries of seven boilers each and two high-pressure engines one 30 inches by 36 inches and the other 18 by 24.

A machine and blacksmith shop being among the requirements of sawmill plants, first-class institutions of this kind are here found, ready to repair any breakage at a moment's notice.

Besides this mammoth sawmill, this company



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# Washburn's old sawmills were a cut above

FROM PAGE 4

owns and operates a shingle mill which was erected early this spring and which turns out about 130,000 shingles per day.

A lath mill with a capacity of 45,000 laths per day is also operated. The lumber manufactured at this mill is nearly all shipped by water to Chicago, the company requiring for this work the services of two steam barges and four "tow barges." The following boats owned by the company are engaged in this work almost exclusively: Steamer Robert Holland and consorts Sherwood and Stephenson and the Steamer White & Friant and consorts Fanny Neil and Parana.

The former fleet takes about 2,000,000 feet every other week and the latter about 1,700,000 every two weeks. The firm is the owner of large tracts of standing pine in this vicinity and carries on its own logging operations which it pursues the year 'round. They own and operate a narrow gauge (three-foot) railway to facilitate this work and employ a large number of men in the woods.

The narrow-gauge railway, known as the Washburn & Northwestern R.R., is nine miles in length and is operated by two locomotives, one 16-

ton Porter and one 24-ton Brooks, both being kept busy all the time. The mills, yards and docks are lighted by electricity when required, the U.S. Incandescent light being used. The Bigelow mill is the largest in this section and the present season will cut about 40,000,000 feet of merchantable lumber.

**• C. C. Thompson & Co., located directly down from 6th Avenue West.**

This plant is generally considered the "oldest" in Washburn, but with the entire remodeling and rebuilding it has had during the past winter and spring it might properly be termed the "newest" mill in town.

The sawmill consists of one circular, one large 60-inch Wilkins' gang and one band saw of the famous Wilkins make. Two edgers, two slashers and one trimmer besides other minor machines may be found in full operation here.

The capacity of this mill since it has been rebuilt is about 250,000 feet in a run of 21 hours. Although starting very late in the season, the total cut will reach fully 23,000,000 feet. A shingle mill turning out 150,000 shingles per day and a lath mill cutting 40,000 laths are run in connection with the sawmill but are only operated during the day while

the mill proper is run day and night.

This plant is doing good work since starting on the season's run and the quality of the stock turned out is said to be as good as any, if not the best on the bay. About one-half of the logs cut here are from Sand Rivers, the balance being from Pike's Bay, Buffalo Bay, Cranberry River, Onion River and Bad River.

The machinery is run by two engines, each 16 by 24, the power being supplied by seven boilers, five of which were put in this spring. They are 10-flue steel boilers built by D.J. Seyler at Ashland. The gang, however, is run by a separate engine, which furnishes direct power from beneath the machine.

The planing mill owned by this company consists of five first-class machines, suitable for all classes of work and is in charge of Jno. Solburg.

A new dock and tramway begun this season is just being completed and another one will be begun before long, which when completed will give dock capacity for piling about 10,000,000 feet of lumber.

The company also has a yard capacity for 5,000,000 feet more. Nearly all of the stock manufactured at this mill is shipped by water to Chicago, the company having a number of boats chartered for its trade.

Among the other improvements made here or about to be made, not the least important is the system of fire protection

soon to be put in. Piles are already being driven for a large tank, which will be 30 feet higher than the mill, holding 600 barrels of water.

Two-inch iron pipes will be extended throughout the mills and yards and by some ingenious invention it is said that the moment heat touches any of the pipes the entire system is put in operation and the whole plant thus protected. This, when completed, will reduce the insurance one-half, so effective does it do its work.