

To Otter Tail's Ghost City

OTTER TAIL
CITY

Lumbering Center of Otter Tail City Once Boasted Seven Hotels.

Battle Lake, Minn., Dec. 26.—Lumbering, as well as gold and silver mining, was responsible for a ghost town. Otter Tail City near here, once a flourishing lumbering center and the county seat of Otter Tail county, now is a ghost town with only a lone two-story frame building, standing to remind visitors of the time when Otter Tail City was a busy center.

In the early eighties millions of feet of logs were cut in Becker and Otter Tail counties along the banks of the Otter Tail, Toad and Pelican rivers.

Two old-timers, F. J. A. Larson and E. A. Pelton, remember the old logging days when Clark and McClure owned 50 million feet of standing timber in the two counties and was the leading lumbering firm with a large saw mill two miles east of Perham.

Once Had 7 Hotels.

Andrew McCree was the manager of the Clark and McClure interests, the veteran loggers' reminiscences revealed. The firm built a large lumbermen's hotel on the Otter Tail river east of Perham. Its lumber camps were along the shores of Big and Little Pine lakes, Rush lake and the lakes in the Toad river string.

Otter Tail City, on the east shore of Otter Tail lake, was the headquarters of the lumbering interests of this region in the eighties. Larson recalled there once were seven hotels in the town that catered to lumber men. Otter Tail City had a population of 1,500 in the eighties. There was the usual complement of stores, saloons, hotels and other business places that made up a lumbering town. The lone remaining building was a hotel called the St. Paul House.

County Seat in 1871.

The town was the county seat as early as 1871.

Pelton was a driving contractor in charge of the last big log drive in this section, which began April 28, 1884, and reached its destination at Fort Garry, now Winnipeg, Man., July 24, after 88 days. The estimated distance covered was 1,760 miles, and the drive passed through 22 lakes.

In many cases it was necessary for the loggers to construct dams at the lake outlets to store the water for the rush.

Some of these old dams still remain in the upper Otter Tail basin and have been used in recent years by municipal water conservation units.

36 Miles of Rapids.

When the released flood waters rushed down the river the drive foreman was kept busy keeping the logs moving so they would reach the next lake before the waters subsided. A delay from this cause on that last drive cost Pelton more than \$1,000, he said.

The drive reached Rush lake May 28 and five days later passed through Otter Tail lake. The last lake in the Otter Tail chain was passed June 6. Twelve days were required to reach Fergus Falls. The rapids there caused delay and the Pelican river was not reached until June 19. In those days there

were 36 miles of rapids above Fergus Falls and 20 miles of rapids below the city.

The drive reached Breckenridge June 26 and Fort Abercrombie three days later. July 3 found the loggers at Fargo, and July 10 the drive was at Grand Forks. Sixteen days later the last log was run into the boom at Winnipeg. Pelton recalled he made a profit of \$10,873.79 on the trip.

Contractor Got \$30,000.

Wages paid the men ran from \$75 to \$250 a month. The contractor received \$3.50 per thousand feet, a total of \$30,105.97. His expenses were \$19,322.79. These are Pelton's book figures. Other receipts and expenditures resulted in the net profit recorded.

Good food was provided on the drive by an experienced woods cook. There were three river foremen and each had his own boat, 53 feet long and 11 feet wide. On these the men ate and slept.

The lumberjacks were rough and ready and eager for a good time. They caused considerable commotion in the towns visited and often there were broken heads and black eyes when the drive was resumed after a few hours' recess.

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