

Log Rafts
Todd Lindahl
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The timber industry in northeastern Minnesota began to increase dramatically in the 1880's. As a result of this several large sawmills became established in Duluth and Superior to satisfy the increasing demand for lumber. The easiest and cheapest transportation method was to raft the timber down Lake Superior to the mills. Generally speaking the logging operations could only be effectively carried out within two to three miles inland from the lakeshore. Therefore the earliest logging along the north shore was in this narrow strip. The logs were hauled by sleigh during the winter months to a suitable log landing on the shore and stored there. The following summer, when the weather was good, they would be rolled into the lake and gathered into a log boom. A towing tug would then tow the raft to Duluth or Superior delivering them at the sawmill.

By the early 1880's there were various rafting operations all the way up the shore as far as the Gooseberry River. Scott & Holsten had a large landing at Clifton for rafting in the 1890's. Peyton, Kimball, & Barber Lumber Company, who owned a large mill in Superior, Wisconsin, had landings at French River, Sucker River, and at Lakewood. Duncan-Brewer Lumber established landings at the Sucker River as well. The Lesure Lumber Company conducted one of the largest rafting operations out of Duluth Township. They built an extensive sleigh road from their landing at the mouth of French River into Normanna Township. The company was so concerned about the safety of descending the hills that they hired only men who were sworn to be teetotalers. E. L. Bradley, another Duluth sawmill owner, rafted logs from the Sucker River during this same period.

Log rafting had its drawbacks however. Obviously weather was a huge factor and a sudden storm could scatter the entire log raft over a huge area. At times the rafts had to wait outside of the Superior ship entry for boats to clear the harbor. As time went on, the congestion became greater and the waiting grew longer. Because the booms were wide, they at times destroyed docks along the interior of the harbor. On one unfortunate occasion the passenger steamer Mary Martini became entangled in a log boom and tipped over on its side scaring the passengers thoroughly.

Another drawback was that the booms could not negotiate the Superior entry if a wind was blowing out of the southwest. Rafts coming from up the north shore would stop just west of Stony Point and then drift back with the wind until they rested against the shoreline. There they waited until the wind direction changed before continuing on. The last log raft to enter the Duluth harbor was in 1903. By then most of the logging companies had turned to railroads to transport their logs.

Log rafting continued on Lake Superior in other locations for a long time afterward with logs going mostly to sawmills in Michigan and Wisconsin. As far as the western end of the lake and Stony Point, it was for the most part finished. The era of the logging railroad had arrived.