

# Timber Heritage Preserved in County

*Editor's note:* Charles Stoddard, a resident of Minong is currently chairman of the Northwest Environmental Council, and is a former director of the United States Bureau of Land Management. He notes that while the forest preserves are not intended as recreation areas they have a scientific and historical significance.

By Charles H. Stoddard

Northern Wisconsin's greatest attraction to early landlookers and pioneer explorers who followed them was its magnificent stands of timber. Mile after mile of huge white pines - some in solid stands, some overtopping the hardwood and hemlock forests below them. Washburn County held its share and was in fact entirely covered with heavy timber growth.

"Green gold" it was called by the enterprising pioneer lumbermen who came out from New England to seek and make their fortunes. During the period from the close of the Civil War to about 1910 an estimated 85 billion board feet of lumber was sawed out of Wisconsin white and Norway pine forests. Much of Washburn County's timber lay within sleigh hauling distance of the Namekagon, Totogatic and their tributaries where it was decked for spring log drives down to Stillwater and other river towns. Hardwoods - mostly sugar maple, yellow birch, basswood and oaks and some ash - were logged along with hemlock where it occurred.

## Trees To Dollars

It is constantly amazing to me what a thorough cutting job the loggers were able to accomplish with hand and horse labor without benefit of chain saws, skidders and clam hoists. They spared nothing that would convert trees into dollars. The great fortunes of the Weyerhaeusers and other empire builders testify to that modest fact. An America without a titled nobility created its own corporate lords out of pine

forests belonging to all the people.

Unchecked fires followed logging - often started by settlers to clear cropland for farming - and swept thousands of acres of cut-over land, destroying seed sources for a new forest. Fortunately aspen (popple) seeds which travelled great distances reclothed much of the burned over stump land. Evidence of the once great pine forests may be found in huge old stumps scattered through the second growth and in two patches of old growth timber preserved by the Department of Natural Resources as Scientific - Natural Areas.

## Timber Preserve

These two tracts - one of white and Norway pine in the Town of Brooklyn and another of Northern Hardwood - Hemlock timber in the Town of Frog Creek still stand as lonely reminders of our once great forest. These two tracts were part of a very large grant by the federal government to the state for a School Trust Fund. Probably because of inac-

cessibility, rigorous forestry requirements and a stiff appraised stumpage price by the State Board of Land Commissioners, these tracts remained uncut - or nearly so - throughout the logging era. I say nearly so because the edges were invaded by earlier loggers whose respect for property lines was often quite "flexible." So flexible that the Brooklyn virgin pine stand occupies only seven acres of the total 120-acre area of State Land Commission land. And many of these big trees were blown down in the July 4, 1977 windstorm. For years the pines supported a large heron rookery - now abandoned.

The Frog Creek timber stand runs heavily to hemlock and yellow birch to one portion, to sugar maple and basswood in another, and on its western side includes a sizeable patch of virgin white cedar. High above the hemlock - hardwoods are a few huge white pines - typical of the several millions of acres of this forest type. In 1956 the Frog Creek stands was lightly select-

ively cut - carefully marked by DNR forester Jack Trust - so carefully that the original character of the stand appeared undisturbed except for a few scattered stumps.

## Scientific Reserve

During this 1970 campaign for the Governorship Patrick Lucey committed himself to the preservation of Wisconsin's remnant natural areas for scientific preservation. Shortly after his election I urged him to follow up on his campaign promise through a memorandum suggesting the acquisition of these two tracts by the DNR. Governor Lucey agreed that they deserved full investigation. DNR's Cliff Germaine, ecologist for the Scientific Areas Preservation Council, was assigned to the task of evaluation and determination if their qualifications met the Council's standards. His reports recommended that both be included in the State's system of Natural and Scientific Areas.

The studies by DNR's Germaine revealed a number of interesting fact about these "islands" of big timber standing far above a surrounding "sea" of second growth. The Washburn County Pines, as the Brooklyn timber stand is now called, contains four distinct features:

It is the only true remnant of old growth white and red pine forest left in upper Washburn County;

Its trees are of maximum size for these species;

It provided a safe place for blue herons to nest because of the height of the trees;

It represents the last undisturbed white and red pine climax ecosystem in the County.

For these reasons it was decided to preserve this tract as No. 103 in the State's Scientific Area System and Governor Lucey approved the purchase in April of 1973.

The Frog Creek hemlock stand was found to have a number of interesting aspects also worthy of inclusion:

The only virgin hemlock tract on the very western edge of the natural range of eastern hemlock;

One of the last stands of old growth white cedar in the State; Contains a variety of small plants found only in undisturbed forests;

Provides winter deer yard in an area surrounded by deciduous trees;

Contains some very large specimens of white pine rarely found elsewhere.

This tract of 160 acres was approved by Governor Lucey for inclusion in the Scientific Area System on June 23, 1977 as No. 140 - just prior to his leaving office.

Although time and natural forces will take their toll of these area, they will continue to stand as reminders of northern Wisconsin's forest grandeur for many generations to come.

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