



Photo courtesy of the Winston County Historical Society

Milford Curtis and crew logging on the Winston/Walker county line in the 1930s.

# Loads of Logging History

By *Tilda Mims*

Education Specialist, Alabama Forestry Commission, Northwest Region

**V**ast stands of old-growth forests in North America were an unprecedented resource to the first settlers from Europe, Africa and Asia, where many of the forests had been cut for centuries. American pioneers cleared forests for crop land, pastures and settlements. As early as 1607, settlers began exporting lumber to England, and lumber exports exceeded domestic demand for much of the Colonial Period.

However, the heaviness of timber and dependence on brute strength and animals for harvesting prevented large-scale

lumbering until the mechanical advances of the Industrial Revolution. In the early 1800s, logging was still a laborious, slow and dangerous profession. Crosscut saws and axes felled trees while oxen, mules and donkeys dragged them out of the woods. Logs were floated or driven downriver to sawmills or loaded onto a wagon or rail car.

Steam powered equipment replaced animal power as man searched for ways to make logging a little easier. Steam “donkeys” pulled logs off mountains and steam locomotives hauled them to mills. Meanwhile, steam engines freed

sawmills from their dependence on flowing water, and allowed them to operate year-round.

Lumber demand soared in the United States in the 19th century as railroads expanded into the Northeast and the West. During this time, loggers lived in camps throughout the year. They labored all day, endured extreme weather and worked under life-threatening conditions. The harshness of the occupation and the hardiness of the men were captured in American folklore with legendary characters such as Paul Bunion and his giant blue ox, Babe. *(Continued on page 12)*

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The economic boom following World War II fueled lumber demand, especially for suburban homes. In the mid-1950's, the big push in harvesting was finding new and easier ways to load wood. There were all sorts of ideas, most of which involved booms, cables, clamps, winches, overhead hoists and tractors or trucks - anything to help the logger load wood or help the mill unload wood.

The big breakthrough in loading was the introduction of hydraulics, and ultimately the knuckleboom loader. Leo Heikkinen of Wisconsin produced the true forerunner to the modern knuckleboom in

1956. It gave loggers speed and sorting possibilities never dreamed of before and paved the way for more landing advancements, particularly delimiters. Designed primarily for handling pulpwood, it turned out to be the finest log loader in the country and had a price tag in the neighborhood of \$3,000.

Although logging equipment and logging practices have changed significantly in the past 100 years, our fascination with the hardiness of the men and women who made their living in the logging woods prevails.

The accompanying period photos capture moments in Alabama's rich forest history. 📷

## Sources:

- Timber Harvesting Magazine, May 1995
- Encarta Online Deluxe, 2001
- Roots of Motive Power Museum
- Sierra Logging Museum

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*Editor's Note: More historical photos will follow in upcoming issues of **Alabama's TREASURED Forests**.*



Shown here in the early 1940s: Elijah Lee (seated center with saw blade), grandfather of retired AFC Limestone County Manager Larry Lee; Henry Hubert Lee (bottom left corner) Larry's father; Ersie Lee (standing in the rear) and Elbert Lee (seated behind Elijah), Larry's uncles.



Photo courtesy of Images of America: Lamar County by Barbara Woolbright Carruth, Arcadia Publishing, May 2001.

Redden Thompson's sawmill located behind Oak Hill Church in Lamar County, early 1900s.

Jack Woolbright of Lamar County in 1924. At age 18, he had already been logging six years with his mule team and wagon. The log on the wagon is over five feet in diameter and 12 feet long.



Photo courtesy of Images of America: Lamar County by Barbara Woolbright Carruth, Arcadia Publishing, May 2001.

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Clyde King (second from left) and his brother Claude (second from right) of King Brothers Logging pose with a cypress in the Buttahatchee River bottom near Sulligent in the early 1940s. They had to weld two 6 1/2-foot crosscut saws together to fell the tree.