

# YELLOW PINES

THE LIFE AND DEATH

OF

A LUMBER TOWN

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In 1840 a pioneer on his way from Georgia to Texas was suddenly attacked by Indians, and his cattle were stampeded. Deciding not to chance another encounter with the Indians, he continued his trip to Texas and left the cattle behind. A few weeks later, he returned to collect his herd. When at last he found them, he observed that they were in excellent condition, and thoughtfully considering this, he settled in this area instead of Texas. The area he chose is about ten miles south of the present site of Minden in Webster Parish. This settler was among the first of many to come into the area which was near what, in later years, was to be named Yellow Pine. Located two miles from Lake Bistineau, this area lay in the path of the great virgin pine forest that stretched across the Southern United States from the Atlantic Ocean to Texas. The yellow pine trees are longleaf and obtain a maximum height of 120 feet.

The name Yellow Pine was given to this settlement by H.C. Walter. Originally from Kentucky, Walter and his wife migrated to this area and settled around 1890. He built the first house and dug the first water well at this site of Yellow Pine.

In 1891, a sawmill company bought up tracts of land at Yellow Pine and set up their mill, operating under the name of Lake Bistineau Lumber Company, LTD. The company bought a right-of-way for a railroad line to Sibley, five miles to the north, so they could get their milled products to the tracks of the Vicksburg, Shreveport and Pacific Railway which passed through Sibley. Most of the right-of-way was bought for a consideration of one dollar cash paid to the property owner and an agreement that the property owner and his immediate family were to be provided transportation by the line. The line was named Sibley, Lake Bistineau and Southern Railway.

In 1893, fifty-eight and one half tons of steel rails were brought to build a spur line to Noles Landing on Lake Bistineau. This short road allowed the mill to ship products and receive supplies by steamboat from New Orleans via the Mississippi River, Red River, Bayou Dorcheat and Lake Bistineau.

Despite this advantage in transportation in August 1895, the Lake Bistineau Lumber Company failed to meet payment on its mortgage, and the property was seized by the Webster Parish Sheriff and sold at public auction. C.A. Andrews of Sherman, Texas bought the mill and its holdings and after operating it for a short interval, sold it to a lumbering concern from Arkansas. The Arkansas buyers changed the name of the mill to Dauchite Lumber Company. This company, however, was also destined for failure, and in 1898 the mill, property, railroad, and all equipment were sold

to Long-Bell Lumber Company of Kansas City , Missouri. Long-Bell owned a large chain of sawmills, four or five in the State of Louisiana and operated under the management of R.A. Long, president of the company. The name of the mill at Yellow Pine was changed to Globe Lumber Company, a subsidiary of Long-Bell Lumber Company. In later years, Long-Bell Lumber Company was to become a subsidiary of International Paper Company. But, alas the operation of this newly acquired mill was short lived, for in 1900 the mill in its entirety burned to the ground, and for a time controversy prevailed among the papers about whether to rebuild the mill or to sell the property and move to a new location. Finally, they decided to rebuild, and what a rebuilding it was!

Under the supervision of J.W. Martin, superintendent and general manager of the company, the rebuilding was accomplished in a grand manner. Only the most modern equipment was installed. All new buildings were built from the best materials available. The company office building, which measured sixty feet wide, was encircled by a porch that was twelve feet wide. As one entered, he could readily see that the wide hallway with its fourteen foot ceiling was constructed of only the best quality curly pine lumber. Six large offices occupied the rest of the building. Adjacent to the rear of the office building a large vault was built, constructed solidly of brick and steel, it held the large amounts of money required to meet the company's weekly payroll which in the early years was met with gold coin. This vault stands today much the same as when it was built.

In addition to the new mill was the construction of 154 housing units to be provided for mill employees. There were 61 dwellings for whites and 73 for colored. The mill's general manager and most of the superintendents had their own homes built of course, in a more elegant fashion. Also, a company hotel was built providing accommodations for over 150 people at a rate of only a dollar a day. Other accommodations for mill employees or visitors to Yellow Pine were available at a boarding house. This establishment could accommodate as many as 60 people. Both places were managed by Mrs. B.E. Perritt.

In 1900 the population of Yellow Pine was 700, but, by 1910 this number had increased to over 2,000. As the population had grown, so had the need for more food and supplies. A commissary had been in operation during the entire existence of the mill, but now it had to expand to meet these new demands. It was stocked with everything imaginable, with new shipments of supplies arriving daily over the V.S. & P. Railroad. Besides the store, the commissary building also housed a two-room butcher shop, a stockroom for salt, and an ice house.

As in all thriving communities, a school and a church were soon added to the settlement. The school, with an enrollment that eventually totaled over 120 pupils, contained the first eight grades. The first teacher was Herbert Heflin. Other teachers

included Mr. Roberts Oster, Judge Roberts of Shreveport, and Mr. and Mrs. Charles Beuford Griffis, the latter couple serving during the final years of the school. The original school house was a church. When it burned the company rented until another building was constructed. The new building housing the school consisted of two rooms on the ground floor for the school and an upstairs area used as a lodge hall by the men of the community. The church was organized as a Union Church. This meant that in Yellow Pine, the Presbyterians, Baptists, Methodists and Christians occupied the building one Sunday each month. On fifth Sundays, no services were held.

Two important social functions of the community were sponsored by the ladies union at the Union Church. A very popular event during the appropriate season was an ice cream supper on a given Saturday night after pay day. Tables were set up under the large trees between the commissary and office. The ice cream was made by the families of the community, and some was even brought in by train from Shreveport in large wooden containers. The other outstanding occasion was the Valentine Day Supper.

In order to keep the mill's employees in good health, the company required the service of one full time doctor, three of whom were Dr. W.S. Lawrence, Dr. W.R. Buffington and Dr. J.E. Crawford. The doctor's office was located near the post office. Located on the mill grounds were three large ponds, two were used for washing logs before they were received in the mill for sawing. The other pond, called the "Store Pond", was situated behind the commissary and was filled by water pumped in from Brushy Creek three miles away. The main source of drinking water was steam processed by the mill and stored in a large wooden water tank, the tallest structure in the community.

The two ponds used in the washing operation had holding capacity of over one million board feet logs. After being washed in the ponds, the logs were fed by chain conveyers into the mill to be cut by one of the three huge band saws in operation. These large saws had a cutting capacity of about 165,000 board feet a day. This rough lumber, after sawing, was sent to be processed by the large planing mill and then on to the dry kilns. The kiln sheds were over 500 feet long and approximately 100 feet wide. After drying, the lumber was stacked for later shipment.

The company produced its own electricity and supplied it to some of the employees houses, the mill and the company buildings. They built their own telephone system for communication and installed plumbing in some of their facilities. With all of these modern conveniences, it is no wonder that people working in the logging camps did all they could to get promoted to work at the Yellow Pine Mill.

When Globe Lumber Company was rebuilt after the fire in 1900, the tracks for the Sibley, Lake Bistineau and Southern Railway were extended southward a few miles south of Hall Summitt, Red River

Parish. This completed a total of fifty five miles of track for the railroad, twenty of which were spur lines. Over these tracks were hauled the much needed supplies and equipment to the logging camps operated by the company.

Of course, the primary objective of the railroad in the earliest days was to haul the logs to the Mill and there return the milled products to various shipping points. The log train ran twice daily with a pull of thirty loaded cars each trip. In 1918, the railway became the Sibley, Lake Bistineau, and Southern Railway, Ltd., and it began regularly scheduled trains which carried passengers as well as freight over its lines. The main office for the railroad company was moved to Ringgold, Louisiana, Beinville Parish, in 1920, and remained there until the last train ran in 1942. The depot in Ringgold, one of the last reminders of the line, was recently raised. For most of the time after the railroad ceased operation in 1942, the old depot served as a hotel or cafe. The tracks were taken up in June, 1942, and sold along with the engine and other equipment. Most of the land right-of-way was sold back to the original owners.

Ed Huggins, a contemporary resident of Ringgold, Louisiana, was the last conductor for the railroad company. Of his years on the line he says:

"Well, it was a rough road, and we were forever pulling out from under us. We had a lot of wrecks, one I remember real well. It was the largest trestle on the line, and we got right in the middle and it broke in. Later we found out we were 18,000 pounds over weight. I guess we were lucky no one got hurt."

The train, locally called "The Doodle," followed a regularly scheduled morning route from Ringgold to Hall Summitt and back to Ringgold. The afternoon schedule was from Ringgold to Yellow Pine, to Sibley and back the same route to Ringgold. The fare from Ringgold to Sibley was eighty cents. Other stops on the line were Whiskey Junction and Davis Switch. Stops out of Ringgold included Gidden, Madden Spur and Lesche Crossing. The railroad played an important role in transportation for the country people of the area. To visit friends and relatives was a favorite reason for using the train, second only to doing the Saturday's shopping.

The logging camps of Globe Lumber Company were located at intervals between Ringgold, Louisiana in Natchitoches Parish. Over 250 men were employed at the seven logging camps, one mule camp; and one oxen camp. The crews lived in what was called "White Line" cars which were nothing more than railroad boxcars set back off the tracks. These cars measured eleven feet by twenty-six feet and were moved from camp to camp. A few of the woodsmen hid their families with them at the camps, and for these, two cars were usually put side by side and used as one dwelling.

The logging was done by wagons pulled by teams of oxen or mules. The company owned 72 oxen and 68 mules, valued at \$20 to \$50 each. The wagons were of tremendous size and were carried along on large iron rimmed wheels that were four feet to fourteen feet tall.

From 1898, when Long Bell Lumber Company bought the mill and established Globe Lumber Company, to 1913, over 63,000 acres of timber were logged. But 1913, the great virgin forest of the area had been cut over and a new mill site had to be selected. The mill's operation was shifted to the State of Texas and Washington, and it's employees were compelled to move with the mill or seek work elsewhere. Over a period of years, the land was bought by H.C. Walter. Behind them the company left many stacks of lumber to be sold under the direction of Mr. Walter. However, this was not all the company had left. There was also the desolate ruin of what had been the longleaf pine forest, and since no reforestation program had been planned, none was enacted. In 1930, Dr. Luther Longino on a visit to Yellow Pine described conditions in these words:

"Her fair forests have been cut down, the mill is gone, most of the residences and the hotel have been torn down and removed, and the busy worker gone into new fields."

The railroad, which had become a company of its own remained behind and gave great service to the area for many years.

The commissary was kept open for a few years and operated by the Brackin Brothers, but, as the people moved away to find new jobs, it also was forced to close.

Today the site of Yellow Pine is shown only on the most detailed maps, and there is good reason, for now there are less than fifty people around the old site. The old Union church still stands as a reminder of the past with few modern improvements. However, it is no longer multi denominational. Each year a reunion is held at the church, and many people who moved with the mill in 1913 come from as far as Oregon and Washington, to attend. Others come who are descendants of those who moved. These reunions always result in substantial donations being made to maintain and keep the building in good repair.

The brick foundations that supported the company buildings are now only obstacles to grazing cattle. The concrete foundations of mill equipment and the old vault, though the roof has fallen in, still stand and will for many years. Surrounded by growth of young trees and heavy grass, these remnants are fast becoming hidden by nature.

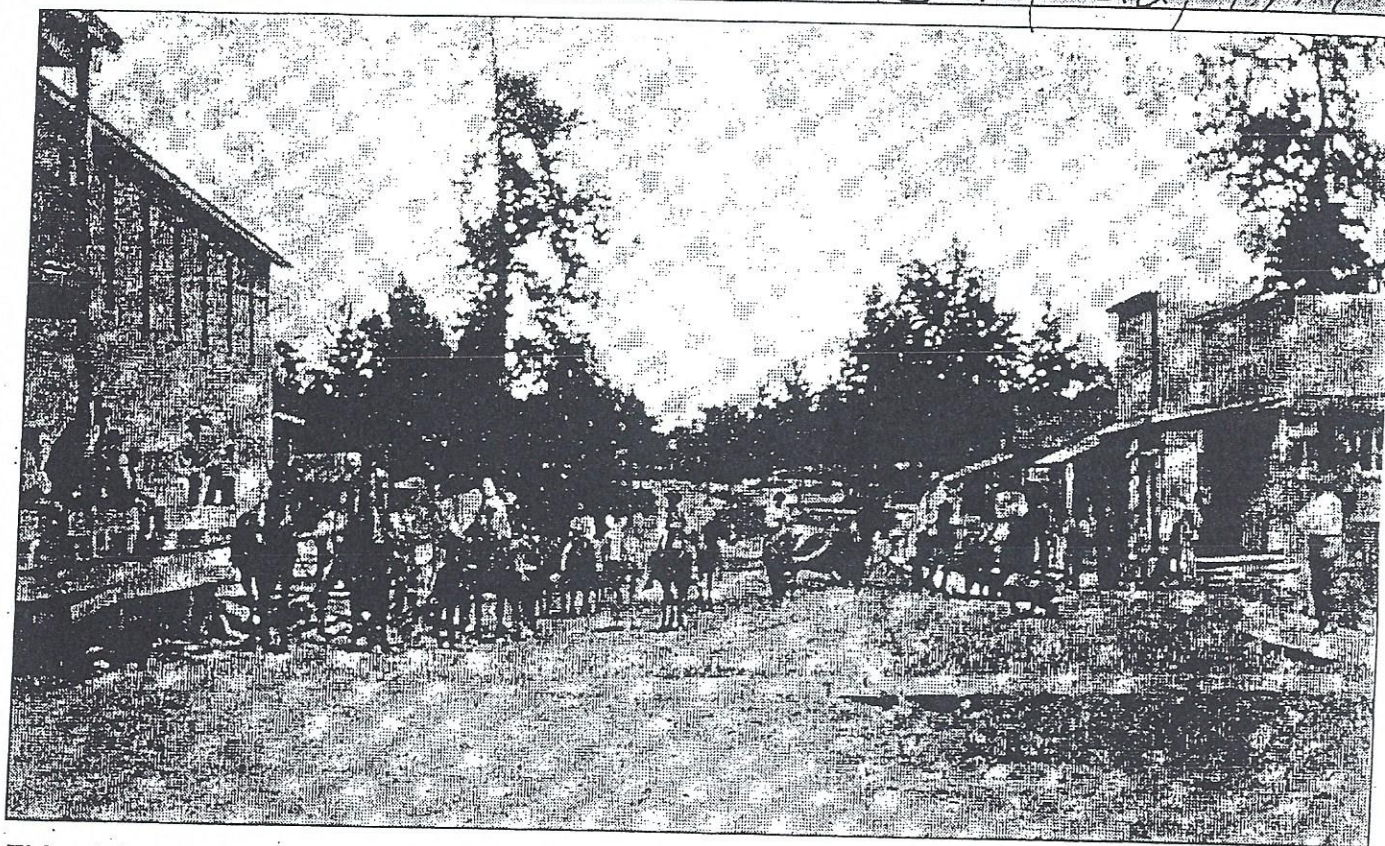
The ponds provide excellent fishing now for Mrs. Marguerite Braswel of Minden, Louisiana, daughter of H.C. Walter whose weekend cottage is the only building located where the mill operations

stood. A few yards from the cottage can still be found, remains of the old sawdust stack and occasionally a piece of rusty metal or logging chain.

The older people of the surrounding country still tell stories of the greatness of the mill's work, the splendor of its company buildings, and the wages it provided the men. Newcomers listen to these long told stories, disguise their mild belief, and believe only in the twinkle that returns to the eyes of the old timer telling the story.

## Webster's Past in Photos

July 22, 1997



This picture post card shows the sawmill town of Yellow Pine, La., sometime around the turn of the century. The card was contributed by Grace T. Watson of Minden, who notes that while Yellow Pine was once a thriving community, the only remnant left is Yellow Pine Christian Church. Note the boardwalk and the pig in the street. Horses provided transportation. The Minden Press-Herald invites readers to submit photographs taken at least 50 years ago for "Webster's Past in Photos." The newspaper welcomes photographs of Webster Parish landmarks, businesses and churches, street scenes, public or noteworthy events. Provide dates and complete identification of people and circumstances when possible. No pictures of individuals or family portraits, please. Some submissions may be rejected due to poor photo quality.