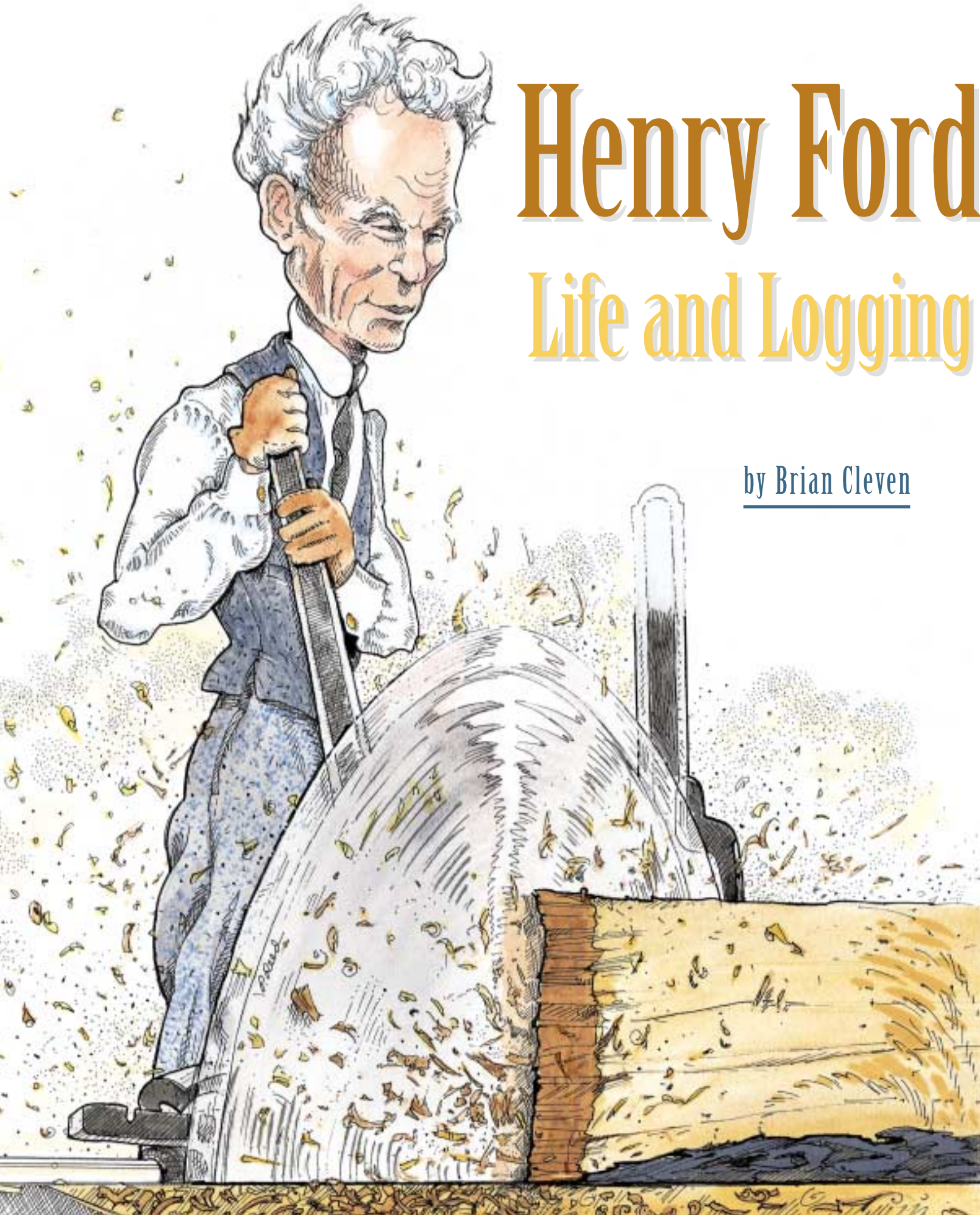


Henry Ford

Life and Logging

by Brian Clevon



's "Tasty Little Town"

in PEQUAMING

Shortly after World War I, the nation's demand for logs and lumber far exceeded the supply. By this time, the Ford Motor Company was producing over one million cars a year. Besides the 250 board feet of lumber used for each automobile, wood was needed for shipping containers, railroad ties, boxcars, storage bins, wood paving blocks, boxing, pallets and pattern work. This translated to more than 200 million feet of lumber annually. Believing that lumber dealers took advantage of his company's need for high quality hardwood by price gouging, Henry Ford acquired his own lumber sources, which led him to Baraga County where he acquired the milling community of Pequaming and founded Alberta.

Ford started his quest for lumber by sending Edward Kingsford in search of large tracts of forest in the Upper Peninsula. Kingsford first suggested the company purchase a 140,000-acre tract, but Ford rejected this as insufficient. In 1920 the company purchased 313,000 acres from the Michigan Iron and Land Company for \$2.5 million. Ford then built his principal forest products plant south of Iron Mountain, primarily because of the town's ready labor force.

The first land purchase, consisting of railroad grants, had been divided into a checkerboard of alternate, odd-numbered sections. For the sake of efficiency, Henry Ford wanted a solid block of ownership. Therefore, negotiations continued with the lumber companies who owned the alternate sections. Stems & Culver Lumber Company sold its holdings in the L'Anse area to Ford on January 1, 1923; Charles Hebard & Sons Lumber

Company of Pequaming sold its holdings in September.

Pequaming was the first large-scale lumbering and milling operation in the Lake Superior region—boasting over a twenty-year period an annual production average of thirty million feet of lumber. Charles Hebard, an immigrant English-man and a successful timber speculator in the East, founded the sawmill and community in 1878. He located it on the Pequaming Peninsula, nine miles north of L'Anse, on the eastern shore of Keweenaw Bay. He acquired the site specifically for its deep, protected harbor and its access to timber.

With a population of 174 people in 1880, Pequaming grew quickly, peaking at 800 people in 1897. To compete for labor with the established mines in the region, Hebard provided an attractive town with services. He laid out his village along the contours of the land, featuring amenities such as parks, bath houses, a post office, churches, schools, a hotel, an IOOF Hall and a clubhouse. His efforts attracted a stable workforce that included third-generation Americans and Canadians, along with Norwegians, Brits and Finns. An 1883 observer reported that Hebard had "developed a magnificent business. By good taste and proper regard for comfort and pleasure, they have built up a tasty little town. The second-growth timber has been spared, and all the natural advantages made available to beautify and improve their grounds, till they have succeeded in producing a hamlet about their mills that rivals the attractions of many of the watering places of the West." Hebard's company eventually built and rented about one hundred homes for its workers.

When Henry Ford acquired Pequaming he gave the small community a complete facelift. Ford ordered that all houses be painted and that the fences separating houses and lining the streets be removed.

Ford also buy the town of six hundred residents and the sawmill.

On September 8, 1923, Ford announced the purchase of the oldest lumber company in the Lake Superior region for \$2,850,000. The deal included the double band sawmill, the lath and shingle mills, 40,000 acres of land, thirty million feet of manufac-

tured lumber sitting on Pequaming's docks, three million feet of logs ready to be cut into lumber, the town of Pequaming, its railroad, and towing and water equipment. With the purchase, Ford's lands in L'Anse Township totaled 175,000 acres, which left the Ford Motor Company paying about 75 percent of the township's property taxes.

Henry Ford expected a diligent work force and when the Ford Motor Company acquired Pequaming there was an immediate change in the regimen of the workers' lives. Ford's manager in L'Anse declared, "Your vacation is over, boys." The sawmill was closed for a general overhaul and all the structures were repaired and painted. Every worker received new medical examinations for which they were charged five dollars, shift work and time clocks were introduced and children were no longer allowed to work in the lumberyard. Employees now received five dollars for an eight-hour day instead of the previous \$3.50 for a longer day. After sixty days, a worker received a raise to six dollars.

The company worked on all the houses, reroofing most, making repairs where needed and repainting the interiors—a much-needed task. Ford raised the rent from one dollar a year to \$12 to \$16 a month depending on the size of the house. Residents did not seem to mind since their salaries easily covered the increase.

Henry Ford reserved Daniel Hebard's lodge for his personal use. The white, two-story lodge, named the Bungalow, offered eight bedrooms, a large living room, a dining room, a downstairs office, a fireplace and seven bathrooms. With its seven columns, it was reminiscent of a colonial mansion, complete with a caretaker's residence, a formal garden and a tennis court.



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As with most company towns, Hebard's company built and owned all of the buildings, including the commercial business places. His sawmill was basic in appearance; a two-story structure built close to the lake. Machinery to drive the saws was located on the first floor. Cutting took place on the second floor, using the leading technology of the time. A bull chain pulled logs up from the mill pond and fed them into two circular saws that cut a slab off each side. The resulting block, called a cant, went to the gang saws, which consisted of a large number of short, upright saws set about an inch apart moving rapidly up and down in a heavy frame. In one operation a large number of boards were cut from the cant.

The mill had the reputation for turning out the "finest lumber cut from Michigan pineries." For this reason, its main products, 25 million board feet of white pine and 7 million lath boards cut annually, commanded a higher market price. In addition, a shingle mill cut 7 to 25 million shingles annually. The company also cut rail ties and sold hemlock bark to tanneries. This full range of wood products allowed Hebard to meet the demands and ride out the fluctuations of the commercial market.

During 1923 the Ford Motor Company held secret negotiations with Daniel and Charles Hebard, who had inherited the company when their father passed away in 1904. The brothers hoped to sell the company before starting the sawmill for the 1923 season. This would ease the transition and allow Ford to avoid many of the complications that arose in taking over the L'Anse operation. Initially, Ford wanted to purchase only the lumber company's 40,000 acres of timberland, but the Hebard—careful to insure Pequaming's future—insisted

The sawmill reopened on September 24, while repair work continued on the plant. A week later, a night shift was added. The mill's production saw an increase for two reasons: the refurbishment of the equipment meant it was less prone to breakdown and the sawyers no longer cut for grade. Instead of turning a log to get the greatest amount of top grade lumber, it was cut for the most board feet. Consequently, it took less time to cut each log and made the work easier.

By the beginning of October, the Ford Motor Company pursued Daniel Hebard's suggestion to connect the Ford and Hebard railroads. By the end of February the first trains ran between L'Anse and Pequaming allowing each plant to specialize in hardwood and hemlock, respectively. This simplified processing the wood in the yards, saving time and money.

In April 1924 Henry Ford traveled north to inspect his new acquisitions at L'Anse and Pequaming. He complimented General Manager Herman Hartt on the cleanliness and efficiency of the two plants under his management. Plant managers went to extremes to have a plant properly cleaned before his arrival. The mill might shut down while it was cleaned and painted. Workers even painted in the rain if the manager miscalculated the time needed to prepare. Work was not limited to the mill. Crews also painted any home that needed it and spruced up the grounds.

Pequaming's townspeople respected Henry and Clara Ford, who often spent two or three days at a time in town. When he arrived, he walked the streets talking to the people that he met, sitting on the porch of the general store greeting people as they passed by and stopping in the schools to chat with the children. Nearly every time Ford came to town, he threw a party at the Bungalow for the children. Entertainment revolved around the old-time dances he enjoyed so much.

Ford, who loved machines, developed a special interest in Pequaming's sawmill with its lightweight carriage that allowed it to run fast. Ford appreciated the old style of the mill's setup, such as its use of line shafts, pulleys and leather belts. He was also a practical man who relished the mill's efficiency. When Ford walked into the sawmill, he talked to the men about their work and machines. He loved to listen to the mill in operation, especially the steam engines. If one did not sound right, he sent it to Detroit for repair. If something was wrong with the valves, he grabbed a wrench, and worked on them until they were fixed. Regardless of how he was dressed, Ford crawled under a machine to locate the manufacturer's tag.

Within two weeks of Ford's 1924 visit, Pequaming became a fenceless town. Many residents kept cows, chickens and

pigs in their yards. Ford ordered all the animals out for hygienic reasons. He assured the people that with their increased earnings they could now afford to buy meat, eggs, and milk. Alfred Johnson remembered, "It was going to be a city. It was no longer going to be a lumber town."

The regular sawmill is said to have changed little, but photos suggest otherwise. The company removed the lath and shingle mills, altering the mill's eastern exterior, dismantled the old burner that resembled a silo and adding a new powerhouse on the mill's west side. The power was provided by a 1,000-horsepower triple expansion marine engine retrieved from a World War I Liberty boat. It replaced a 200-horsepower one-cylinder engine that had operated at Pequaming for forty-five years. While the exterior was different, the interior layout remained little changed.

Most of the mill's lumber was loaded on Ford boats for shipment to plants in Dearborn, Michigan; Edgewater, New Jersey; and Chester, Pennsylvania. These shipments consisted mainly of crating lumber. The wood sent to Edgewater was used for overseas shipments. The better grades of lumber went by train to Iron Mountain for use in the automotive manufacturing plants.

Plummeting car sales in the early 1930s decreased the need for lumber. It was during the Great Depression that Henry Ford showed the greatest interest in Pequaming. At one point when he heard that Pequaming had been idled, he demanded that Iron Mountain or L'Anse be closed and Pequaming remain open. As employee Oscar Olsen recalled, "They were shut down there at Iron Mountain, I remember, for months when Pequaming was running a double shift. It was full-time, twenty-four hours a day, and L'Anse was the same."

By 1933 the company's need for wood dropped so much that Pequaming's sawmill sat silent most of the time. To assist people in need, Henry Ford created work and helped people support themselves by developing a cooperative farm east of town. Ford's Pequaming store aided needy employees by making price adjustments on foodstuffs and donating shoes and other items of clothing for them and their families.

During one visit that included giving a picnic for the town's children, Ford promised to open a vocational school in the Bungalow. Soon a manual arts class was being held in the Bungalow's living room. Henry Ford made education at Pequaming a showcase for his theories about self-reliance, the American folk heritage and education. The teaching methods and curriculum placed emphasis on "learning through doing."

In September 1935 Henry Ford proudly opened four one-room elementary and intermediate schools built around a central commons and play field. Recitation benches, study desks and a big box stove provided reminders of a quaint and picturesque past. Modern amenities included indirect lighting, a phonograph, a loudspeaker system and a radio, allowing formal academic subjects to be infused with the contemporary interests of the day. The school had a total enrollment of one hundred students, and each building accommodated two classes, from kindergarten through the seventh grade.

Until 1937 the older students traveled to L'Anse to attend high school. Then the company tore down the boardinghouse and built a high school in its place. Placed near the sawmill, it overlooked Lake Superior. The school contained home economics food and clothing labs (each fitted with the latest home

appliances) and a library. It was the first school in the state to have fluorescent lights. An annex contained the commercial department with its typing and business training room, the chemistry lab with a small photography darkroom, the school superintendent's office and living quarters for single teachers. Other integral parts of the school were the woodworking and machine shops and a drafting room located in the mill.

The school, which catered to grades eight to twelve, had a yearly enrollment of one hundred students. Not all the students were from Pequaming; thirteen came from Alberta and another fifteen to twenty arrived from the nearby farming community of Aura. Accredited by the University of Michigan, the school system was unique in the state.

Only one class of freshmen completed all four years before the schools closed with the mill. Several decisions led to the

Henry's Hardwood Enterprise

Henry Ford is the sole reason for Alberta's existence. Driving south on US 41 south of L'Anse in 1935, Henry Ford and his party stopped on the banks of Plumbago Creek. Gazing about him, he determined there should be a plant there. Within a couple of days, a bulldozer began the work of clearing the new mill and town site.

Ford picked the site feeling it would be a good location for a lake. It proved to be an excellent choice for several reasons. The twenty-acre lake, created by damming the Plumbago Creek, provided a water reservoir for use in the sawmill's boiler. It was in a vast expanse of hardwood forest and close to Ford's operations in L'Anse and Pequaming. The only drawback was the poor soil for agriculture. This was important because original plans called for each resident to log a sixty-acre parcel and farm a two-acre plot. The idea was for workers to log in the winter and mill their lumber and farm in the summer. With everyone involved in logging, the town would support the residents of the sixty additional homes that were planned. By the time the village opened in 1937, the company turned to outside jobbers to provide the logs and the mill became a year-round operation. By 1938, any attempts at farming stopped because of poor, rocky soil and deer, who ate what crops could be grown.

Housing separated Alberta from typical company towns. Rather than cookie-cutter type houses where each one is the same, Alberta's twelve houses were all architecturally different from each another, varying in layouts and square footage. Lacking stores, churches, a post office, a bank and doctors, Alberta was not the self-contained village intended by Ford.

Even so, the town became widely known as a model forest



State Archives of Michigan

Although Alberta never grew as large as Pequaming, it did have a state-of-the-art sawmill (above) and a dozen large patterned company houses (right).

community, not for its housing but for the practice of forest management it promoted. To maintain a continuous, steady supply of logs and regular employment, jobbers cut on a selective basis from a six-square-mile area of hardwood forest designated by Ford for Alberta's exclusive use.

Selective cutting thins the forest by cutting trees near full maturity, leaving the smaller trees. A properly thinned forest will actually grow faster than under normal conditions. By the time the jobbers cut the timber in the last areas of the six-square-mile area, a second growth was ready to cut in the areas first logged, thus insuring the community a continuing supply of logs. While other loggers

mill's closing. The earliest was specialization. When the company's need for softwoods diminished, it was harder to justify the expense of keeping the mill open.

In 1935 the company switched to trucks and pulled up its railroad tracks to Pequaming. It also chose to incorporate "just in time" shipping in its logging operations, which created problems for maintaining proper forest roads. World War II diverted Ford's ships so all lumber was trucked to L'Anse and then by rail to its destination. But shortages of truck tires and increased shipping costs created additional problems. On October 9, 1942, the Ford Motor Company decided the operations at Pequaming would be discontinued. The mill finished sawing logs on October 28. On November 23, the children were transferred to schools at L'Anse.

No longer in charge of company policy, Henry Ford had

not approved the closing. He was so depressed when he visited Pequaming the following summer, the aging auto tycoon refused to look in the empty schools. Most of the families had left or were leaving Pequaming. They were not asked to leave, but there was no work and they were—in many cases—offered jobs with Ford in L'Anse. The company felt some continued responsibility to the employees, but little to the community. In a short time, most of the buildings were boarded and locked. Seemingly overnight this small community became a ghost town. ■

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employed selective cutting, nowhere else was it so successfully publicized.

Alberta's sawmill opened September 1, 1936. Henry Ford even stipulated both the type and size of the machinery for this modern showcase of sawmill technology. A crew of twenty-two to twenty-five men ran the mill and kept it in spotless condition. Small in comparison to Ford's other milling concerns, the mill was operated by shifts of twelve-man crews. It had a capacity of 14,000 board feet of hardwood or 20,000 board feet of softwood. Ford's three other Upper Peninsula mills cut twenty to twenty-five times as much in the same period of time.

The first lumber cut from the mill was used to build Alberta's twelve homes. Based on designs of the L. F. Garlinghouse Company of Topeka, Kansas, each house was on a 90-by-150-foot lot, varying in size from 1,054 to 1,951 square feet, but averaging 1,400 square feet. For the children's education, Ford built two Colonial Revival-style school buildings. Each had ventilation, coal furnaces and indirect lighting. Kindergartners through fourth graders met in the primary school and fifth through eighth graders met in the middle school. Older students traveled by bus to high school in Pequaming. As in his other schools, classes were not limited to academic study. Courses included weaving and home economics; a machine shop taught living skills.

Alberta was never completed. Plans included a store, a post office, a church, sixty additional houses, a road around the lake with plans to develop a park along it, even a ski hill and toboggan slides on the hills surrounding the village. Although Henry Ford never finished his vision, visitors flocked to the tiny hamlet. In August 1938 more than three thousand people registered in the new reception building. For the visitor's enjoyment the sawmill grounds included displays of old logging equipment. Visitors seemed drawn to this quaint village with its white clapboard buildings. For travelers coming from the south, the village made a striking impression after passing miles of virtual wilderness, leaving a lasting impression and providing some of the best publicity in the region for the automaker.

Even Alberta with its continuing supply of lumber would not survive for long. Following World War II, Ford's lumber production for use by the company and for sale to commercial markets rose appreciably, reaching a postwar peak of 98 million board feet. But because of labor contracts and other extras, Ford's costs were 23 percent higher than for competitive mills. As a result its mills had a high break-even point, requiring an annual volume of 18.6 million board feet per mill for Ford, compared to an estimated 7.2 million board feet for competitors.

The remaining timber stands could not support this scale of operation for long. In 1951 the Ford Motor Company sold the Iron Mountain operation, extending Alberta's life a short time. The L'Anse and Alberta mills operated until June 30, 1954. On November 30, 1954, the lumber community of Alberta, its well-equipped sawmill and over 1,700 acres of adjacent timberland were donated to the Michigan College of Mining and Technology (present-day Michigan Technological University) for use in research in methods of timber management and utilization and to serve as a laboratory to train students in the field of forestry. ■

—Brian Clevin



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