

# Logging in Central PA

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Throughout its history, Pennsylvania has been a leader of the national logging industry.

The earliest US lumber industry began in Maine by the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. By the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, the heart of lumbering had moved south to New York, and eventually move south again, by the dawn of the Civil War, to Pennsylvania and remained in Pennsylvania for over a century.

Pennsylvania had emerged as the prime candidate for the center of the logging industry for several reasons, the first being in its very name. Pennsylvania was rich in lumber, with many of its vast forests still remaining untouched. Secondly, white pine and hemlock, both in high demand in the time period, could be found in abundance throughout Pennsylvania. Thirdly, Pennsylvania's proximity to the coast and its ease of access to major industrial cities through the Susquehanna, Allegheny, and Delaware rivers contributed greatly to its dominance of the lumber industry. Baltimore would emerge as a ship-constructing center largely due to the steady flood of lumber floating down the Susquehanna.

Before the time of the railroad, lumber was primarily transported via rafts down rivers to sawmills or industrial centers. This led to the emergence of Williamsport as the center of the early Pennsylvania logging industry, Williamsport becoming so influential, that for a time in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, it had the highest per capita number of millionaires in the United States. The school mascot, the Millionaires, speaks of their glorious history.

White pine was in the highest demand between 1840-1880 and thus dominated this trade. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, however, the age of rails had dawned, making the necessity of rafting obsolete, and in turn, ending the dominance of Williamsport in logging.

The heart of Pennsylvania lumber then moved south to an emerging rail center, Lewisburg. Lumber was shipped in from all over the central part of the state, processed, and sent out to major industrial centers such as Philadelphia and Baltimore again via rail. By this time, hemlock had stolen the spotlight and was in the highest demand. The previously small hemlock trade in areas such as West Buffalo now boomed, which contributed further to Lewisburg's importance in logging.

Eventually, the age of the Pennsylvania lumber industry declined as trade with the west became easier. Michigan, along with states such as Minnesota and Wisconsin arose as the new lumber capital due to its large, flat forest area which made logging much easier.

Despite the rise of the west in lumber, Pennsylvania has never fully gone away in the American lumber industry. Local lumber companies can be found in nearly every county of central Pennsylvania. Evidence still remains, from large plantings of trees in neat orders along mountainsides, to abandoned sawmills along rivers, to the remote logging camps scattered within the vast Pennsylvania forests that tell of the rich history of Pennsylvania lumber.



In the 1850s-1880s, rafters managed thousands of logs that were floated down the river each spring when the water level was high.



Clear-cutting the forest in the west end of Union County in the early 1900s.