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THE CALCASIEU PINE DISTRICT OF LOUISIANA

By George B. Hartman, '17

Of all the tottering thrones of to-day none is more shaky than that of King "Pinus palustris", who is ruling in the last decade of greatness of one of the world's grandest kingdoms. The history of that kingdom is the story of the climax and decline of the great forests of southern long leaf yellow pine. It has not been many years since those magnificent southern forests stood silent and intact. Now it will not be long before the noise and bustle of the last big logging operation will die away, leaving behind destruction and desolation, except for a few scattered tracts of virgin timber and scant reproduction.

One of the most important regions of the long leaf pine belt is known as the Calcasieu district, which lies between the Red River of the South and the Sabine River, in the southwest portion of Louisiana. It is in this district that some of the heaviest stands of long-leaf timber are found and from here come the best and strongest grades of this species of pine. It is of this particular district that this article deals.

The Calcasieu district consists of a comparatively small area mostly included in the Louisiana parishes of Calcasieu, Rapides, Beauregard, Vernon, Allen, Jefferson Davis, Acadia, and Evangeline. It is bounded roughly on the north by the short-leaf belt, on the east by the Red River, on the west by the Sabine River and on the south by the treeless savannas of the Gulf coastal plain. Roughly estimated this area covers about 2,668,000 acres according to figures given by Charles Mohr. Of this area there is very little that has not been the scene of logging operations within the past twenty-five years.

Almost the entire district has a climate influenced by the Gulf of Mexico. The intense heat of summer is modified by almost continual breezes off the Gulf, while the cold winters of regions farther north are a rarity due to the self-same Gulf breezes. One of the great peculiarities in climate is the changeable weather, and any one who attempts to predict the weather is asked whether he be a newcomer or just from Arkansas. Oftentimes on a warm winter day the wind will whip about to the north and inside of an hour it will be almost freezing cold; or it may turn warm almost miraculously from a very low temperature. Likewise the sunniest day may turn to one of rain in a few minutes and make one think he is Noah the Second. All in all, though, it is a very agreeable climate to live in as there are few freezes and few intolerably hot days.
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The Calcasieu district is poorly drained, as the elevation is very low, and as far as from one hundred to one hundred twenty-five miles inland. Consequently many of the pineries are on low flats, oftentimes soggy and covered with water. Add to this a very retentive and rather impervious clay sub-soil and you can picture the difficulties of the logger in a rainy season. There are, however, large areas which rise above these flat lands, made up of a light sandy soil. On these low ridges are found some of the biggest and finest stands of long-leaf pine.

Unlike its neighbor, the short-leaf pine, *Pinus palustris* is found in pure stands, unmixed except along river and creek bottoms where some hardwoods and loblolly pine creep in. Because of these pure stands the long-leaf has grown straight, tall, and without limbs for nearly two-thirds of its height. The crown is open, elongated, and irregular in shape. The average height of trees in the Calcasieu district is about one hundred ten feet, while the diameter breast high averages about twenty inches. These do not, of course, make logs to compare in size with the giants of the West Coast, yet there is a very great amount of valuable timber in each tree.

Serious forest fires are never known, fires such as have wiped out whole towns in the north and northwest, and the writer has never noticed any evidence of a fire getting into the crowns at all. This may be partially answered by the fact that the forests in this section are open and that there is scarcely any undergrowth to transmit fires from ground to crown. There is, however, one type of fire which does a world of harm, and that is the grass fire. Nearly all the natives in this section own some cattle and hogs, and they religiously believe that the old dead grass must be burned off before the new growth can make any headway. Hence most any day during the fall and winter a grass fire may be seen burning fiercely and being carried rapidly by the wind. These grass fires, of course, play havoc with the youngest reproduction, leaving it thrown and scorched and oftentimes dead. Of course, after a few years the young trees become somewhat fire resistant, but invariably acre upon acre of new growth is killed by these fires. It is now against the law to start a grass fire in Louisiana, but it is easy to simulate an accident.

Perhaps the damage by the razor-back is over estimated, but the cattle which range over this entire region do a great deal of injury to the young struggling reproduction.

From seedling up to maturity the long-leaf pine is subject to insect attacks from insects to every order of the In-
sectae. As a seedling a caterpillar feeds upon the tender leaves and each period of development seems to give some insect a bitng chance. In the older trees the bark-beetle and timber-beetle are the chief agents of dstruction.

Of the fungus diseases, that known as red heart is most destructive to live trees. It apparently attacks most frequently superannuated trees. When the limbs fall off, leaving a small punk hole, there generally develops a large shelf fungus of the genus Polyporous. The heart wood of such trees is reddish, brittle, soft and full of small channels lined with the white mycelium of this fungus. Sticks of timber in this condition are considered defective. Other fungi attack the trees but do not do such noticeable damage.

It goes without saying that at present the chief industry of this region is milling, but there are many minor industries creeping in and utilizing to the limit the forest resources not used by the mills. This region presents the easiest logging of any in the United States or Canada. Because of the mild winters and open woods logging is carried on the year round. At first the mills logged only the country close in to the mill sites with most of the logging being done by ox teams. As the region was cut out the logging fronts became farther removed and now oftentimes the logs are hauled from twenty to sixty miles to the mill, with skidders and loaders doing the work of oxen.

Out on the logging fronts regular towns or so-called camps are maintained where all the woods' laborers live. These camps are so situated that they can be used for several years, having churches, schools, stores and homes, yes, and lodges, for the negro without his half dozen lodges is like a fish out of water. In fact they are the original "jiners". Most all the common labor is colored, with the more responsible jobs held by white men. The negroes make good hands, for they are not lazy, do not belong to industrial organizations and as a whole are obedient. Very little labor trouble is ever experienced. Practically the only time a black boy falters is on the 19th of June which is Emancipation Day, and during a real cold spell when one soon learns that they are far from being Eskimos.

The logs, once felled and bucked, are skidded to spurs where they are loaded on the log cars. These spur tracks are rough and uneven and generally Shay locomotives are used to haul the logs over the spurs to the main line. Here the trains are made to go to the mill. The main line roads are very good, being oftentimes used to haul freight and passengers. Rod engines are used on these main lines and pull
from fifteen to thirty cars of logs to the train. Some of the main line engines are oil burners and do very efficient service. Very few logs are stream driven because of the lack of streams suitable for this purpose. One company at Orange, Texas, gets logs in west Louisiana, rail hauling to the Sabine River, and then rafting them down stream to the mill.

Once at the mill the logs are unloaded into the ever-present mill pond and are ready to go up the chain to the saws. The mills throughout this section, while large, are not the monstrous log eaters of the West. The labor here, as in the woods, is largely colored with all the foremen and heads white men. The mills all conform to the grading rules of the Southern Pine Association, and the quality of this timber and lumber is too well known in northern and eastern markets to need any comment. The lumber is carefully graded and stacked in the yard for seasoning or put through the kilns in preparation for the planing mill which loads out the lumber for market. The timbers of this region are famous for their durable qualities and strength. From the saws these timbers with a large percent of heart wood, go to the timber dock, to be sized if necessary, or to be loaded directly on cars. One needs but to see the big fine timbers on a mill dock to wonder where we will be when the source is gone and the big mills cut out.

Perhaps the next most important industry of this region is the production of material to be creosoted. The value of creosoted products is rapidly being noticed, and many realize that it is a matter of common sense and dollars to have their wood products preserved with creosote. There are several creosoting plants located in the Calcasieu district or close to its borders. The most centrally located plant as far as this one particular region goes, is that of the Shreveport Creosoting Company at De Ridder, Louisiana, which treats exclusively for the Long-Bell Lumber Company. The same company operates another plant at Shreveport, Louisiana, also doing work for Long-Bell. There are other plants at various points in this section of Louisiana and Texas.

Many of the large buyers of timbers in this country, and Mexico as well, are having their purchases treated with from twelve to twenty pounds of creosote oil per cubic foot. This is especially true of the firms that are laying the many miles of gravel roads now under construction. Also, the owners of wharves along the Gulf Coast are putting in creosoted timbers and piling to combat the marine borers.

Railroads and road builders the country over are in the market for piling both treated and untreated, according to the nature of the work done. If the construction job is tem-
porary or underground, then untreated piles will do, but if permanent work is being done nothing but creosoted piles should be used. The specifications vary, according to the use of the piles. Most of the roads are using a 1-inch butt piling treated with twelve pounds of creosote per cubic foot. For heavier work a 14-inch butt or even 16 or 17-inch butt are called for. It is generally understood that long-leaf pine should average six annual rings to the inch, or it may have less if there are equal amounts of spring and summer wood in the rings. The bark, both outer and inner, must be carefully peeled in order to insure penetration of the creosote oil. Most of this piling is brought out of the woods by farmers living nearby who must do something on the side to keep friend wolf from the cabin door. Generally they receive a certain price per foot loaded on cars for shipment into the creosoting plant. This price includes felling, bucking, peeling, hauling and loading.

In the plant yard the piling is either placed on high dry ramps for air seasoning or if on rush orders it is placed on iron cars to be run at once into the retort of the creosote plant. Here it is given a steam bath, at a high temperature and a low temperature, followed by a vacuum which puts the wood in shape to receive the prescribed amount of oil. Most piling buyers now have their material inspected as it is treated, which makes a very satisfactory arrangement to both customer and dealer.

Telephone poles and fence posts are treated in much the same manner as piling, except that the requirements are more rigid because the appearance of a pole or post must be good due to its conspicuous position. All poles must be straight, perfectly peeled to admit the oil, with knots trimmed and chiseled to present a smooth appearance. In addition, many companies have their poles notched and bored to receive cross arms before treatment, thus making considerable exacting work at the plant.

Cross ties make up a very large percent of the material which is to be creosoted, thus putting the sap wood in condition to resist decay and making a long-lasting tie.

Still a third industry which makes employment for thousands of negroes in this section is the naval stores industry. Naval stores companies usually lease the turpentine rights from the lumber companies and go into the woods a couple of years ahead of the loggers to get the turpentine and other products from the rich resin of the yellow pine. It is safe to say that when the trees are being chipped the first year that in two years the woods will be logged. It is the practice in
the region to chip for two years only and then move on. All over the turpentine woods or orchards can be seen small negro settlements where the laborers live who do the chipping, dipping and other work incidental to turpentining. Somewhere centrally located to serve several orchards is the still where the crude resin is distilled and the spirits of turpentine separated from the rosin. The grades of these products are numerous and the story of turpentining would make a good sized story in itself. From the stills the turpentine is hauled away in tank cars over a logging road, the rosin in them put in barrels for shipment. One enterprising firm has designed and built a plant to chop, grind, and distill even the stumps which are left after the logging operation. The yellow pine stumps are exceedingly rich in turpentine and give up large amounts of naval stores products.

There are other smaller industries such as paper making and the distillation of pine, making charcoal and pine tar and its products, which use considerable amounts of this wood and employ large numbers of people.

For years these wonderful stands of long-leaf pine in the Calcasieu district have given employment to thousands of persons, have given to the world the best and finest of timbers and lumber, and have produced piling, poles, ties and naval stores for a nation. Truly the sing of the saw is the death knell of these kings of the forests, and the day is not far distant when we can sing no longer as the poet who sang:

“This is the forest primeval. The murmuring pines and the hemlocks,
Bearded with moss, and in garments green, indistinct in the twilight
Stand like Druids of old, with voices sad and prophetic.”