



History - Log floating

Wood was transported by floating logs down the river. They were pulled out of the forest by horses and brought to the closest river or creek. The logs floated down these watercourses to a lake where they were grouped in log booms that were towed by boats. This is how the wood made its way to the mills in Southern Quebec and Ontario. Starting in 1917, log floating operations were destined only for the pulp mill in Témiscaming. The last log floating operations occurred in Témiscamingue at the end of the 1970s. The work done by drivers was difficult and dangerous. The following description of this occupation is provided in a book entitled "*Notes historiques sur le Témiscamingue*, p. 65" written by Augustin Chénier, a historian from Témiscamingue.

"For a driver, the log floating period was by far the toughest and most perilous period of his hard life : spending full days balancing on rolling logs, jumping into ice cold water in the spring to move cumbersome logs, cover long distances along shorelines intermingled with creeks, stand up to his knees in gummy mud or stumbling over a deadman while the long pike pole dangled, find himself in the middle of raging rapids, release floats that were stopped by an invisible obstacle, risk being swept away with the logs in the tailspin of a swirl, spend all day wet up to his waist with the perspective of starting over the next day in the same humid clothing doing the same work under the same perilous conditions – such was the daily life of our drivers for two, three or more months."



The Alexandra was one of the steamboats built to tow tree trunks.



Jack Cobb and Isidore Romain log driving in 1942

Noteworthy dates

1887 – Log floating operations for all the lumber companies were carried out by the Upper Ottawa Improvement Company (I.C.O), a non-profit company. From that time until 1895, the company was responsible for floating all the square timber cut in Témiscamingue to Pembroke, Hull and Ottawa while the lumber companies delivered round wood. Until 1904, ICO awarded the log floating contract on the Ottawa River section to Alex Lumsden who also established a log floating system on Lake Témiscamingue. In September 1888, he acquired the Opemican site and its buildings and transformed the site into an operation center for log floating on Lake Témiscamingue. He developed a wood depot in the bay, a log floating camp and a maintenance and warehousing centre for his boats. In June 1904, ICO purchased the Opemican and La Gap facilities. It was then that the company took over all log floating operations on Lake Témiscamingue. Philemon Wright, one of the first lumbermen in the Lower Ottawa region, introduced the log boom, a new technique to make log floating easier. It was a raft or cage made of scantling that moved with the aid of a sail or oars. Several rafts were assembled to form a train of rafts. When a train of rafts came to a waterfall, the men would undo the train and the unattached pieces of wood would pass over the obstacle. The rafts would then be reassembled at the bottom of the waterfall.

1924 – Establishment of Boom Camp at the mouth of the Greater Ottawa River fronting on Lake Simard, beyond Esturgeon Rapid (2 miles from Lake Simard and 5 miles from Esturgeon Rapid).

1929 – The T.E. Draper boat was built and launched at Baie Gillies for the purpose of towing logs on Lake Des-Quinze. It continued to operate for the CIP until the company left the region in 1972. It was built by John Inglis Company from Collingwood, Ontario. The tugboat was shipped in pieces by railway right to Laverlochère, then a team of horses transported it to Baie Gillies. It measured 61 feet long (18.6 metres) and 17 feet wide (5.2 metres) and the upper works were 40 feet long (12.2 metres) and 15 feet high (5.6 metres). It weighed 100 tonnes (90.7 metric tonnes), had a draught that measured 9 feet (2.7 metres) and was powered by a Fairbanks 285 hp motor.

1930 – The engineer would drive the engine according to the captain's advice using these simple codes: 1 bell sound to start, 2 bell sounds for the reverse gear, 3 bell sounds to slow down and 4 bell sounds for full speed ahead.

In the beginning, the crew was composed of 7 men: the captain, the assistant-captain, the cook, two equipment engineers and two dockhands. They worked six hour shifts on a rotational basis.

The boat was named after Thomas Edward Draper, founder of the Kipawa Woods Division and Superintendent of the Kipawa Division (1918-1939). The T.E. Draper sailed from Boom Camp to Angliers at first and then after the arrival of the J.A.H. Henderson, it went from Grassy-Narrow to Angliers. Occasionally, it would go out to help the J.A.H. Henderson at Boom Camp, especially during bad weather. After the construction of Grassy-Narrow (1940),



the boat's mast was removed to allow it to go under the bridge.

The T.E. Draper would rarely go to Angliers. Its itinerary ended in the Red Pine or Marianne Point (5.5 miles before Angliers). Starting in 1955, it would go to Angliers to be docked or repaired.

1931 – The J.A.H. Henderson provided towage service on Lake Simard and was removed in 1950 to be replaced by the Expanse.

The T.E. Draper and the J.A.H. Henderson both worked in the Grassy-Narrow area where they would exchange their log booms.

1938 – The hub of log floating operations was transferred from Baie Gillies to Angliers and CIP created the Lake Expanse Booming and Driving Company and literally obtained exclusive log floating rights on Lake Des-Quinze and Lake Simard.

1940 – The construction of a bridge at Grassy-Narrow propelled the CIP to establish a drive camp there with 15 men. The log drivers were supported by small 20 hp tugboats and later by 40 hp tugboats to pass the logs under the bridge. The camp included a dormitory, a departmental building and a kitchen.

Construction of Grassy-Narrow

A large reservoir serviced the T.E. Draper and the J.A.H. Henderson.

The T.E. Draper transported large tanks in barges from Angliers to Grassy-Narrow.

Starting in 1940, more than 100 log booms were towed to Angliers every year at a rate of 6 to 10 per week.

1955 – The Riordon Depot was sold to the lumber company Paradis et Fils as its only use since 1938 was to store tugboats in the winter.

The closure of the Riordon Depot resulted in the construction of a ramp in Angliers to remove the large tugboats from the water for maintenance. The Kipawa Woods Division activities reached a peak at the beginning of the 1960s.

1972 – The T.E. Draper ceased its operations and was stored for good at Angliers.

1976 – End of log floating operations in Témiscamingue.