

# Pioneer lumberman's dream brought A.A. Dwight to Otsego County

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site of Imlay City which he desired to lumber.

"I also improved the South Branch of Mill Creek by making a log channel from the outlet of Dwight Lake, (so called), some two and a half miles northwest of Capac, to the main stream below, shortening the haul on many millions of timber, saving a distance of three or four miles. The fitting of Belle River for log driving purposes gave the Imlay pineries more prominence and resulted in the sale of 2,800 acres to Henry Benson, a saw mill proprietor of Detroit, who lumbered the tract and took the logs to his mill. This sale amounted to \$42,000.

"I was engaged in the management of the Imlay tract for ten years, from 1857 to 1867, during which time I cut and removed from four to eight millions feet per year, some of which was sold in the log and other manufactured into lumber, at mills at Port Huron and Marine City, manufacturing absorbing the lion's share. The lands after removal of the timber were sold to German settlers who made most excellent farms out of them, and the whole tract was disposed of with satisfactory results.

"About 1860 I undertook an exploration of the vast timber lands in the interior from Thunder Bay and the head waters of the AuSable River, with a view to purchase and sell, or to manufacture as might be desirable. This region was as yet practically unexplored, but the projected extension of the Michigan Central railroad led me to believe in its future development. After some years of research I, in 1866, formed a partnership with Edward Smith of Forester, Michigan, and James B. Kelley of Albany, New York, under the name of Smith, Kelley & Dwight for the prosecution of a general pine land and lumber business, and was mainly instrumental in bringing to the ownership of this company over 32,000 acres of choice pine timber lands on the head waters of the AuSable, in the vicinity of Otsego Lake.

"OTSEGO COUNTY was not yet organized, in fact, there was not a white settler living within its borders; there was no railroad and no wagon road; geographically, the county was situated in the interior, some 40 miles easterly from Lake Michigan, and was penetrated by the head waters of the AuSable River, while its altitude was some 1,100 feet above the waters of Lake Huron. It was enriched by a luxuriant growth of massive pine timber, considerably intermixed with hardwoods, and if accessible, presented an attractive field for the explorer and pine land buyer.

"A temporary survey of Otsego Lake and of the streams flowing out of it, which were the real source of the AuSable, developed the fact that an extensive pioneer work must be undertaken by some one before these valuable timber lands could be made available, and the pioneer work fell upon my shoulders. Having no competitors to combat, I succeeded in obtaining the passage by the legislature of an Act (No. 432, approved April 3d, 1869), for the establishment of a State road from Torch Lake to Otsego Lake, a distance of thirty-five miles through a dense forest, with an appropriation of highway taxes for four consecutive years, upon every alternate section of land in Otsego County.

"This, aided by individual subscription, afforded the means for constructing a highway, which became the only practicable route for transporting material from Traverse Bay to Otsego Lake, and the only means by which the new settlers who soon began to seek homes and employment in this rich neighborhood found ingress and egress.

"The splendid pine timber on AuSable heights (so termed) was by many estimated at 500,000,000 feet or more, with no natural outlet save by the waters of the north branch of the AuSable River, which explorers pronounced too broad, too shallow and too rapid a



GAYLORD, looking west from the courthouse in 1907.

stream to be available for log driving. A competent engineer, however, made a careful survey of the branch from town 30 North to its confluence with the main stream, a distance of thirty miles or more, revealing the surprising fact that the fall in that distance was more than 300 feet with more than twenty beaver dams and gravel beds to obstruct the channel, rendering dubious the project of creating a successful driving stream.

"Nevertheless resort was had to the legislature, and by dint of great personal effort, the passage of Act No. 149 (Session laws, 1869) was secured under which a corporation was formed to make this branch a driving stream, Smith, Kelley & Dwight being the only parties who interested themselves or who had the nerve, foresight and essential means combined with faith, to undertake the enterprise, they subscribing the stock and undertaking the work. A large amount of money was expended in clearing the channel of the beaver dams, gravel beds and timber obstructions, widening and deepening the stream where necessary, and in the construction of seven substantial dams for flooding purposes, by which means slack water navigation was established for a distance of over thirty miles, thus opening the stream to capacity for floating all the timber which would naturally seek this channel for an outlet. Before this time a canoe with one man in it could hardly force a passage through any part of the branch.

"At the session of the legislature in 1875 the same pioneer force procured the passage of an Act for the organizing of the County of Otsego (Act 32) and began to assert itself in the new county. Farms were cleared up, highways constructed, and the firm erected a saw mill at Otsego Lake, with a capacity for cutting 16,000,000 feet of lumber and 5,000,000 shingles annually, which found outlet by the Michigan Central railroad, which by this time (1873) had reached the young village of Otsego Lake.

THE CONSTRUCTION of the Grand Rapids and Indiana railroad and the extension of the Mackinaw

division of the Michigan Central railroad began to stir the public mind and call attention to the more northerly portion of the State from about 1870, and with their completion to various points during ensuing years a great impetus was imparted to lumber operations in this portion of the peninsular through the facilities afforded for the transportation of men and material from the Saginaw Valley on the east and Grand Rapids on the west, which formed the base of supplies for Gladwin, Ogemaw, Roscommon, Crawford, Otsego, Montmorency and Cheboygan counties via the Michigan Central, and Montcalm, Mecosta, Osceola, Wexford, Missaukee, Kalkaska, Charlevoix and Emmet counties via the Grand Rapids and Indiana road, thus reaching the sources of all the great log driving streams of the lower peninsular, viz., the Tittabawassee and its many tributaries, the Rifle, AuGres, AuSable and Thunder Bay rivers emerging into Lake Huron, and the Muskegon and Manistee rivers with their many branches, emptying into Lake Michigan, with the Cheboygan and Pigeon rivers flowing northward to the Straits of Mackinaw, opening to utilization vast tracts of timber, which until this time, had been considered too remote from an economical standpoint, to be available for lumbering operations.

"Through the courtesy of Henry Russel, Esq., of the legal department of the Michigan Central railroad, I am enabled to give the dates at which the Mackinaw division was opened for traffic, viz., to Wenona, (West Bay City) December 6th, 1867; Standish, July, 1871; Wells, December, 1871; Otsego Lake, May, 1873; Gaylord, July, 1873; Mackinaw City, 1881. During these years the Grand Rapids and Indiana road was making rapid strides toward completion, and opened for traffic to the Straits during the year 1882."

Mr. Dwight retired from active business and has since resided in Detroit, full of years, with a record of usefulness to his fellowmen, honored by all who have known him, and calmly awaits the summons to a land of higher activities, and greater honor.