In the second half of the nineteenth century, sawmills located in the middle and lower districts of the Mississippi Valley did not have adequate forest resources near them. They were dependent upon the northern pineries located on the rivers St. Croix, Chippewa, Black, Wisconsin, and their tributaries. The downriver firms could buy logs from independent logging contractors, but in order to make certain of their supply, some of the larger companies invested in pinelands and stumpage themselves. The purchaser of stumpage had the right to cut timber, but did not retain the land. Companies with timberlands at their disposal either expanded operations and sent men into the woods, or contracted to have their timber cut by independent loggers.

This article describes problems of absentee land ownership and the business techniques of pineland management and contract logging experienced by one of the largest sawmill firms on the Mississippi, W. J. Young & Company of Clinton, Iowa. Established in 1858, the capital of the firm totaled a little over $1,000,000 in 1882, including the value of over 60,000 acres of pinelands located mostly in the vicinity of the Chippewa and Flambeau rivers.

W. J. Young obtained the pinelands through his association with John McGraw of Ithaca, New York. Already a wealthy lumberman and timber owner, McGraw bought out Young's earlier partners, but left the management of the firm in the Clinton lumberman's hands. On becoming Young's partner, McGraw agreed to sell him approximately 31,000 acres of pinelands at $9 an acre, and to contribute a like amount of forested area to the firm as an equal partner. After McGraw's death, Young purchased his partner's

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2 Ibid., p. 1086. W. J. Young & Co. Pineland Register, not paginated.

3 W. J. Young to John Dean, Minneapolis, Minn., Mar. 24, 1880, LPB 57, p. 104. To D. A. Park, Minneapolis, Minn., Mar. 15, 1880, LPB 57, p. 101. Note: Unless otherwise stated, manuscript sources are from the W. J. Young & Co. special collection at the University of Iowa, and Young wrote his correspondence at Clinton. The notes designate the particular record, letter-press-book (LPB), or box where information is found.

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interest for $7,000,000 and the pinelands were among the assets which continued under his direction.\textsuperscript{4}

The task of looking after the pinelands was so extensive that Young had to hire an agent to manage that end of the business. Daniel Page Simons was originally from Dryden, New York, had served in the Union army over three years, and thereafter had become a timber cruiser (a person who located lands and estimated their value) and agent for large land holders.\textsuperscript{5} Simons had charge of the W. J. Young & Company pinelands beginning November 1, 1876.\textsuperscript{6} He arranged for the payment of taxes, guarded against trespass, and handled financial affairs with logging contractors for a salary of $100 per month.\textsuperscript{7}

The Clinton firm did not engage in logging operations itself, but Simons made contracts with independent loggers to cut the company’s timber. Simons’ contracts usually stated that the logger agreed to cut, haul, bank, and prepare rollways or landings by the stream for all marketable pine timber on lands which were accurately described according to township, range, and section. All of a season’s operations should take place prior to the first day of May. Logs were to be cut into lengths as directed by Young from time to time, and if he so required, the logger had to cut one fourth of the whole amount into logs 26 feet, 6 inches to 40 feet, 6 inches. Contracts specified a minimum diameter for the small end of logs, usually 12 inches in the 1870’s. Logs were to be ready for driving in the spring, plainly marked, and all of the operations done in a “good and workmanlike manner.”\textsuperscript{8}

Young agreed to pay a higher price per thousand (M) feet for long logs than for shorter ones. Long logs were 26 feet or more in length. Payments were made only upon the certificate of a scaler, or person who estimated the number of board feet in logs by measuring them with a scale rule calibrated to allow for the tapering of the trunks. The logs, straight and sound, were to be scaled

\textsuperscript{4} \textit{McGraw–Fiske Testimony}, v. 3, pp. 1073, 1396.
\textsuperscript{5} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 1505.
\textsuperscript{6} W. J. Young to D. P. Simons, Eau Claire, Wis., June 5, 1878, W. J. Young & Co. papers, microfilm collection, Main Library, University of Iowa.
\textsuperscript{7} See Simons’ financial statements, Box 162.
\textsuperscript{8} Contract between W. J. Young & Co., and Elias Moses, Minneapolis, Minn., Nov. 9, 1876, Box 91-A. Contact with W. F. Price, Black River, Wis., Nov. 20, 1877, Box 162; and with Philander A. Viles, Eau Claire, Wis., Nov. 13, 1877, Box 162.
by Scribner's rule, which tended to read a smaller number of board feet in logs of large diameters than did the Doyle scale.9

Young paid the wages of the scaler and boarded him without charge. Contractors received $1 per thousand feet on the tenth day of each month for logs banked the previous month; followed by $.50 per thousand feet on a designated day in April, and another $.50 per thousand feet when the landings were broken and the logs fully ready for the spring drive. The balance was due in two equal payments, on the tenth day of the following September and October.10

A logger contracted to carry out his operations for a stipulated sum per thousand feet. One of the most important variables in determining logging prices was the location of the timber in relation to the stream—the closer the distance, the easier the job, and the lower the price. If a logger underestimated his expenses he would sustain a loss. Young was not disposed to adjust his payments to cover such a deficit. In 1880 he refused to do so, saying that it would encourage others to make similar claims, and that the practice might tend to destroy the force of contracts.11

Of the clauses in the contracts, Young considered the most important to be the ones stating that logs should not be shorter than 12 feet, 4 inches; that as many long logs be cut as practical; and that the ends of the logs be "butted" or crosscut square. He wanted the logs trimmed smooth in the woods where it could be done cheaper than in the mill, and he would not have to run the risk of breaking machinery on immense limbs. Having said this, Young allowed Simons to add to the contracts whatever provisions he thought desirable.12

Young instructed Simons to make contracts with the "best" and "safest" loggers, because "good men are worth a premium." By safe loggers, Young meant responsible persons who did good work.13 The Clinton lumberman did his part by arranging for each logging camp to receive copies of the Northwestern News, a temperance publication.14

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9 Both rules were originally used by loggers in the northeastern states. The State of Minnesota made the Scribner rule the standard in 1854, and Wisconsin adopted it in 1877. According to the Northwestern Lumberman trade journal (Aug. 21, 1886, p. 3), the Doyle scale eventually replaced the Scribner rule, and beginning in 1872, Scribner's Lumber and Log Book actually contained the Doyle scale. See also: Robert F. Fries, Empire in Pine, the Story of Lumbering in Wisconsin 1830-1900 (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1951), p. 38; and William G. Rector, Log Transportation in the Lake States Lumber Industry 1840-1918 (Glendale: Arthur H. Clark Co., 1953), pp. 81-82.

10 Contracts in Box 162 as cited in note 8.
11 W. J. Young to D. P. Simons, Eau Claire, Wis., July 24, 1880, LPB 57, p. 195.
12 W. J. Young to D. P. Simons, Eau Claire, Wis., Sept. 29, 1880, LPB 57, p. 246.
13 To C. G. Bradley, Osceola, Wis., Jan. 8, 1884, LPB 5, p. 150.
14 W. J. Young to D. P. Simons, Eau Claire, Wis., Mar. 1, 1879, LPB 57, p. 16.
15 W. J. Young to E. W. Brady, Davenport, Ia., June 22, 1883, LPB 57, p. 283.
Young insisted that Simons receive a monthly report from the scalers of each of the several logging camps which might be operating simultaneously in different areas. The contractors and scalers were not supposed to receive their pay until the reports were complete, identifying the location of the camps by township, range, and section; and containing a record of the number of logs cut in various lengths; and the amount of board feet.

From the reports, the company compiled surprisingly intricate statistics that represented the prospective stock down to the last log and its length. This information was useful because the company took orders for future delivery based on the prospective supply of logs. In the case of long timbers, moreover, the firm took orders based on the prospective supply of logs of each specific length. Before accepting an order calling for a large number of timbers for a railway bridge, for example, the company wanted to be sure of its supply of long logs.

The cutting of logs into various lengths was not a haphazard undertaking, but was carefully planned. After trees were felled in the woods, the “buckers” sawed the logs into the proper lengths, which could be a few inches longer than the lumber to be sawed at the mill. It was not however, permissible to saw logs a few inches too short. Logs were always cut into sizes from which lumber could be sawed into even lengths of 12, 14, 16, 18, 20, 22, or more feet. Odd lengths of lumber were seldom sawed, and only by special order. In order to saw lumber 19 feet in length, for example, it was necessary to use a log meant for boards 20 feet long.

Young gave considerable attention to figuring out the amount of the various lengths of logs needed to match the demand of the market. He frequently suggested to the independent dealers and loggers the lengths that they should provide for the Clinton trade. He once stated that 16 feet was the best average length, but the situation was changeable each year depending upon supplies on hand. In 1863, for example, he called for more 12 and 14 foot lengths, and suggested that out of every million feet, a good proportion would be one-sixth in 12 foot lengths, one-sixth in 14 foot lengths; and that 32 foot lengths would be very convenient for long timber.

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16 W. J. Young to D. P. Simons, Eau Claire, Wis., Mar. 1, 1879, LPB 57, p. 16.
17 George W. Forrest, Clinton, Ia., to D. P. Simons, Eau Claire, Wis., Feb. 6, 1882, LPB 57, p. 574.
19 George W. Forrest, Clinton, Ia., to D. P. Simons, Eau Claire, Wis., Feb. 8, 1887, LPB 57, p. 321.
With estimates of the lengths of logs needed for the coming season, Young could apportion work to loggers according to a systematic plan. Young estimated the lengths of logs he needed for 1877 by averaging the amount of each length sawed at his mills during April and October, 1876. April was an early sawing month of low productivity; October was a late season time of large production. To obtain an average monthly figure for each length, Young added the amount sawed in April and October and divided by two. Then he multiplied by 12 to record the amount for a year. The total amount of the cut would vary, however, from year to year, and the important thing was the proportion of each length to be sawed. Therefore, Young figured the percentage of each length, and the proportion of each he would need, based on his estimate of the next year's total cut. The total cut for the year varied with Young's view of the lumber market, and his estimate of the number of feet of logs needed. Other factors, however, could enter into the decision to cut timber on specific tracts of land. A contract for stumpage could contain a time limit for the felling of trees, and a provision that Young would in the meantime pay the taxes. Moreover, logging operations were planned so that no small areas were left uncut; it was too expensive to send a logging force into an area a second time for an insignificant amount of timber.\(^{20}\)

During the season of 1876–1877, Young's contracts for operations in the woods called for more than double the amount of board feet cut any previous year. The \textit{Chippewa Herald} reported that Young's logging contract with Elias Moses of Minneapolis was probably the largest of its kind ever made in the West. Out of a tract estimated to contain 250,000,000 feet of timber, Mr. Moses expected to cut 20,000,000 feet the first winter; and thereafter 20,000,000 to 50,000,000 feet per year. The contract covered only the delivery of the logs to the banks, and not the driving.\(^{21}\) Moses fell short of his goal for the season of 1876–1877, but his loggers did cut, haul, and bank 67,033 logs which totaled 15,079,060 feet. Allowing $2.50 for logs under 26 feet in length, and $3 for longer ones, Young paid Moses $39,099.63 in seven payments on and between February 7, and October 10, 1877.\(^{22}\)

Taxes and assessments were persistent problems, particularly for absentee land owners, because local assessors might try to discriminate against them. These matters were complicated, however, and at times complaints by land owners lacked substance. Nevertheless, as an agent for absentee land owners, D. P. Simons spent

\(^{20}\) W. J. Young to D. P. Simons, Eau Claire, Wis., Nov. 11, 1881, LPB 57, p. 512.

\(^{21}\) The \textit{Chippewa Herald} as quoted in the \textit{Clinton Age}, Dec. 8, 1876.

\(^{22}\) W. J. Young to J. M. Williams, Minneapolis, Minn., Sept. 8, 1877, LPB 52, p. 651; and Oct. 11, 1877, LPB 53, p. 24.
much of his time traveling around Wisconsin townships, examining local taxation procedures, and seeking refunds or adjustments of taxes on lands that he held to be unfairly assessed. Simons stressed that lands had to be properly assessed as the only way to avoid something “like confiscation more than legal taxation.” Simons explained in 1884 that town officers tended to levy a particularly high tax on the lands of non-residents, but that he had obtained a reduction of about $5,000 on lands already cut.23

Taxes were higher than ever in 1884, Simons said, but not over one and one-half per cent of the actual value of the land. The company reduced the valuation of some lands by removing pine, but Simons believed that tax officers tended to increase the rate on what remained. The only solution was to keep a close watch on the officials, who changed frequently, and necessitated “continued and constant care to get them half right.”24 Sometimes Simons claimed that he encountered outright corruption and he cooperated with other large interests in seeking tax reductions.25

The management of pinelands involved numerous negotiations of right-of-way. Young authorized Simons, for example, to allow other parties to build a dam on his land providing they paid for all timber used in construction and for any flood damage to other trees. Also, free of charge, W. J. Young & Company could use the dam to store water and increase the probability of successful drives.26

Simons guarded against trespass on the part of loggers who might encroach on his employer’s lands, and he watched for stealing on a small scale. In 1884 Simons caught a man who had cut several choice trees and hauled them to sell to a railroad for bridge timber. The agent believed that this arrest would help discourage such happenings.27

Once Simons was himself caught in the middle of a trespass dispute between two of his employers. Simons was negligent and allowed Young’s loggers to cross over a boundary and cut over 2,000 acres that belonged to Henry W. Sage. Sage sent another agent, Mr. Emery, to accompany Simons and survey the loss, and the lands that Young offered in exchange.28 Simons accepted Emery’s judgment of the lands, but Young became considerably

23 D. P. Simons, Eau Claire, Wis., to W. J. Young & Co., July 19, 1884, Box 173.
24 D. P. Simons, Eau Claire, Wis., to W. J. Young & Co., Jan. 28, 1884, Box 162.
26 W. J. Young to D. P. Simons, Eau Claire, Wis., Jan. 27, 1883, LFB 57, p. 831; and Mar. 3, 1883, LFB 57, 857.
27 D. P. Simons, Eau Claire, Wis., to W. J. Young, Sept. 1, 1884, Box 162.
28 D. P. Simons, Eau Claire, Wis., to W. J. Young, Apr. 24, 1878, W. J. Young & Co. Papers, Microfilm Collection, University of Iowa.
irked when the number of board feet that actually materialized in logs and lumber from Sage’s land failed to approach the estimate.\(^{29}\) The Clinton millman complained to Simons, “... you were in Mr. Emery’s [sic] hands, as clay in the hands of the potter, and to our humiliation we find ourselves adrift without a pilot compass or rudder.”\(^{30}\)

Young suspected that Sage had written Simons about the matter, and he requested that any such letters be sent to him to be laid before Douglass Boardman, a mutual acquaintance of everyone involved, and a sort of adviser-arbiter in the dispute.\(^{31}\) Young, who suspected that Sage might exercise undue influence with Simons, wrote to Boardman that the agent had showed “great weakness, and I am afraid a sprinkling of negligence—an unpardonable ignorance in treating this matter of land exchange. Emery has clearly outgeneraled him, and H. W. Sage is a good prompter.”\(^{32}\)

Without the backing of Simons, Young was humiliated. Since many of the logs had turned out to be of poor quality, the Clinton lumberman honestly felt that Sage asked too many acres in exchange. Young decided to settle on Sage’s terms, but he wrote to Boardman that he might have some sworn experts examine the lands all over again and publish the results, along with all the correspondence in the matter, as a “precedent for lumbermen.” As for Sage, Young commented, “He has tried to insult me in this whole matter, but he may realize that there is a God in Israel yet. I have no desire to retaile on Sage but he must do right or I will tell him he has done wrong.”\(^{33}\) A month later the parties settled the matter and Young wrote, “Mr. S. is a curious man, but no doubt thinks he is all right, a good many kind traits but hard in a trade.”\(^{34}\)

Owners of large tracts of pine who held their lands for a considerable length of time could make immense profits through the appreciation of stumpage values. On November 1, 1890, W. J. Young & Company sold 41,251.26 acres to the Mississippi River Logging Company. The contract stipulated that the logging company should not cut more than 30,000,000 board feet of timber in any one year.

\(^{29}\) W. J. Young to Douglass Boardman, Ithaca, N. Y., Apr. 20, 1878, W. J. Young & Co., Papers, Microfilm Collection, University of Iowa.

\(^{30}\) W. J. Young to D. F. Simons, Eau Claire, Wis., June 5, 1878, W. J. Young Papers, Microfilm Collection, University of Iowa.

\(^{31}\) Ibid.

\(^{32}\) W. J. Young to Douglass Boardman, Ithaca, N. Y., June 5, 1878, W. J. Young & Co. Papers, Microfilm Collection, University of Iowa.

\(^{33}\) Ibid.

\(^{34}\) W. J. Young to Douglass Boardman, Ithaca, N. Y., July 6, 1878, W. J. Young & Co. Papers, Microfilm Collection, University of Iowa. Interestingly enough, Young thereafter had an agreeable relationship with Sage, who loaned him large sums of money personally, and arranged for him to borrow other funds from Cornell University.
until it finished paying for the land, and meantime should pay the taxes. W. J. Young & Company reserved the right to profit from one-tenth of all minerals that might be discovered. The Clinton firm received $694,887.50, or approximately $16 per acre for land valued at approximately $9 an acre in 1875.

Profits awaited the owners of pinelands whether the timber be cut or held for speculation. Surprisingly systematic procedures could increase those profits, particularly if the absentee land owner found a loyal, talented agent to stand guard and handle the administrative details for a salary of $100 per month.

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88 Ledger F, 1890–91, p. 53. See also: Mississippi River Logging Co. papers, Box 1, 1871–93, in the Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul.