"I'm not very good at remembering historic dates or names either," Henry Victor Desimval, Superior's oldest living, native-born pioneer said, "but I can tell you some stories about the early lumber days."

And to a willing listener, the white-haired man of 81, will pour out tales of Superior's rough, by-gone lumber era.

"See my hair," he points out. "It's white, which isn't so strange now, but let me tell you the story----

"I was 13 years old. It was the spring of 1875. My dad left for the Black Hills. There was a gold rush and he got caught in it. He left his team of horses home and I took them up to the Amnicon to take my first job in a lumber camp. A fellow by the name of Joe hired me. On April 25, 1875, he took me across the Amnicon and then left me in the woods while he went to look for the camp.

I will never forget that first night I spent alone in the woods. It started to get dark and the wolves began to howl, and the horses snorted with fright. I was scared plenty, but at least I knew enough to kindle a fire. The first wolf came out of the thicket and by the time I had the fire blazing there were 25 big grey timber wolves sitting on their haunches in a semi-circle about 50 feet from me. I had plenty of time to count them. They sat there howling until dawn.

I never really knew what happened that night until two months later. I came back to Superior and went to Nigger Smith's for a hair-cut. 'Look at this, Vic,' he said and showed me a bunch of hair he'd cut off.

'My God,' I said. 'Is it all white?' That was the first I knew that my hair had turned white from that scare. They wouldn't tell me up at the lumber camp. It never did get back its red color after that.'

Thus initiated into the lumber business, Mr. Desimval spent the next two

months hauling cedar tèlegraph poles from the Amnicon camp for the St. Paul and Duluth railroad. He hauled the logs to the river, where the "river hogs" took over and drove them to the lake. There, the logs were put into a boom and a tug pulled them to Duluth. The next part of Desimval's job was to drive his team to Duluth and pick up the logs from the shore and load them on flat cars for the Dt. Paul and Duluth railroad, (now the Northern Pacific). The poles were shipped to Dakota. "I got $65 a month and board which was big wages in those days," the former lumberman remembers.

"Any excitement in the early lumber business? Oh, yes, there was plenty of excitement." Desimval obviously got a kick out of telling this story.

"There were a couple of fellows, Black and Miller from Duluth, who made their living by stealing logs. They worked at night. They'd find out where a boom was tied and they'd open the boom and let the logs drift out in the bay. Then they'd go around collecting the lost logs and sell them to some little sawmill. No big firm would do business with them. Just after I had heard about these fellows, I was under contract to deliver a raft of cedar to Rice's Point to sell to the city for paving blocks. I took a gun with me and slept that night at a boarding house in sight of my boom on Rice's Point. A little before midnight I got up and hid behind a box car on a St. Paul and Duluth sidetrack. Sure enough, about 2 a.m. a couple of fellows in a little boat rowed up to my boom. One fellow untied the chain. 'Come ashore boys, or you're a dead horse,' I shouted. I recognized Black. He was a big fellow. He didn't want to listen to me and told Miller to get in the boat.

'I'm gonna shoot,' I said. And by golly, if they hadn't come ashore, I'd a shot him as sure as there's a world. I wasn't monkeying with those fellows. They did come ashore and I marched them to the police, while one of the fellows

working with me put the boom together. The fellows each got 60 days and they didn't bother me after that."

When he was 28 years old, in 1890, Vic owned a lumber camp of his own at Oliver. He sold most of his logs to Peyton-Kimball and Barber sawmill on Connor's Point, floating his booms down the St. Louis river. He sold pine and tamarack piling to the West Superior dry dock in Howard's pocket. The panic of 1891 came and business for everyone in Superior was tough. Another set back, as far as Desimval was concerned came in 1896, when a case of scarlet fever put him on his 'death bed'.

"I see it so well," Vic reminisces, "I was sick in bed at home and I woke up. There in the room was Doc Govereau and everybody I knew in uppertown (Central Park) waiting for me to die. 'Hold on,' I told them, 'I'm not ready to die yet.'"

Vic recovered from his illness, but never regained sufficient strength to return to the lumber business.

Mr. Desimval has faint memories of his school career, short-lived as it was. "Only went through the third grade," he said. "I.W. Gates was my teacher. I had kind of a hard time at school because I could only talk French and Indian and Mr. Gates could only speak English. John Bertrand, a classmate, was my interpreter."

"Oh, yes, there were lost of Indians around those days. They came up in the summer, Chippewas, all of them, and set up wigwams in upper town. They'd fish and hunt and the governemtn helped them along. But the real Indian settlement was in Middle Town---Squaw town----we called it. They lived the year-round there in old shacks.

When I was about nine years old, my dad, Victor Desimval, and I moved the little one-room, upper-town school (now Linchln school) from its present site

to the corner of East Fifth Street and Sixth Avenue East to be used for a Swedish church. That was in 1871. They built a larger lumber school house where the Lincoln stood and hired two teachers. Mr. Gates took the upper grades and Mrs. Brown was the primary teacher. I went to school off and on from the time I was six till I was twelve. Altbgether, it was about three years."

In later years, the older Mr. Desimval's knowledge of the Superior channel was an important factor in the winning of one of the most famous lawsuits in the history of Superior. In 1918 the testimony of Victor Desimval prevented the channel of the St. Louis river from being changed, thus putting a section of Wisconsin land into Minnesota. The McDougall Shipyards wished to make the change. The land in Gary was quite rough and the shipyards had little room to expand as the St. Louis channel cut right in front of them, cutting the shipyards off from the level land of Clough Island, which lay in Wisconsin. They tried to change the channel to go around the other side of Clough Island, in the Pokegama River which forked from the St. Louis. The new channel could be made by dredging an extension of the channel of the Pokegama and letting the Duluth shipyards expand into Clough Island. No one in Superior knew where the true channel lay and with with Hannitch trial drawing to a close, Desimval sent for his father, who possessed the diagrams of the channel which he had used in the days he ran a sawmill in Milford, Minnesota, on the St. Louis river. Boats came through the channel continually to his sawmill and loaded lumber there.

The older Mr. Desimval presented the maps as evidence in court and Judge D.E. Roberts decided against Hannitch and to this day the channel remains in its original position.

Vic also recalls of his father that he was one of the first supervisors of upper-town serving between 1871 and 1874. At that time three supervisors took

the place of mayor in Superior. At the time Desimval served, Uzella Gouge was supervisor from middle-town and James Bardon from lower-town (East End). Vic's father was chariman of the county board in 1874-5, but resigned his position to go to North Dakota.

Many times, Vic recalls the storm of 1890 and laughs to scorn the 'poor imitations of storms' we have now-days.

"It was so bad," he said, "that it took two days for my men and me to get to Superior from Oliver. We broke camp April 25. I had my whole crew, 50 men, and three teams. The men had to shovel all the way from Oliver to the Peyton-Kimball and Barber sawmill, so we could get through.

"Long John Murphy, the attorney, told me that after that storm, in 1890, he stepped out of his upstairs window and slid down to the ditch shoveled out for the street car in order to get to work. An that wasn't much exaggeration either."

Born in a little room over Avery's tinshop on Bay Street and Nettleton Avenue, November 21, 1862, in what was then known as lower town, Mr. Desimval lives in the same vicinity today,---in the Euclid apartments in East End.

As proof that lumbering gets into a person's blood, Desimval, after being away from the business for over half a century, still goes down to the bay each day in the summer, takes out his small, leaky, rowboat, and ventures out into any weather, looking for logs. His biggest thrill in recent years came three summers ago when he towed a white pine log to shore bearing the brand "K". That was the brand Desimval used to mark his logs with in his lumber camp days.

Written by Miss Lorraine Schak
granddaughter of Henry V.
Desimval.