Sawmills and Mill Towns of the LaNana Bayou, Nacogdoches County, Texas, 1834 to 1910

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Sawdust Empire: The Texas Lumber Industry, 1830-1840, by historians Robert S. Maxwell of Stephen F. Austin State University and Robert D. Baker of Texas A&M University, initiated a new academic effort in revealing the East Texas material and social culture and its logging, tram roading, and milling industries. Regional forest and mill historians such as W.T. Block and Thad Sitton are patiently sifting the archives of universities, forgotten lumber companies, and county courthouses, interviewing participants wherever possible, and combing the lumber journals and newspapers of the era. More than 4,000 sawmill sites, many with company-provided mill towns, have been operated by more than 10,000 lumber companies in East Texas since 1830. After 1877, these companies operated more than 300 steam logging tram road operations over thousands of miles of rails to harvest and transport the “green gold” of the sawtimber to the mills.

With the expansion of the main trunkline railroads into the virgin pineries, the lumber industry dominated the Texas commercial world from 1880 to 1918 and has been prominent ever since. In the South, Texas led all Southern states in total yellow pine cut from 1869 to 1903. From 1903 to 1930, it ranked fourth. In 1907, it was estimated that Texas ranked third among all states in lumber production. In the decade from 1907 to 1916, Texas averaged the manufacture of 1.75 billion board feet per year. As a result, an overwhelming number of communities and county transportation networks in the Texas piney woods evolved directly from the material structure of the Texas lumber culture.

Nacogdoches County, located in central East Texas, entered the booming Texas world of lumber when the first railroad, the Houston East & West Texas, crossed the Angelina River near Spradley Ferry in 1880. The coming of the Houston East & West Texas to Nacogdoches brought great economic opportunity to the community and its citizens. Personal feelings delayed the completion of the rails into the city for two years. A Mr. Davidson, according to W. Frank Summers, refused to let the tracks be built across his pasture. The railroad finally secured an order of the court and the track was built. When the first locomotive came puffing across the pasture, Davidson laid down on the tracks in front of the engine and “was physically removed by the conductor and trainmen who then put him back after the train had passed.” The Texas & New Orleans, a subsidiary of Southern Pacific, crossed the Angelina River in 1900 into Nacogdoches County, about three miles to the east of the Houston East & West Texas, without incident.

The tracks of the two railroads formed the narrowing arms of an irregularly-shaped triangle with Nacogdoches at the apex and the Angelina

Melvin C. Johnson formerly worked for the Texas Forestry Museum in Lufkin, Texas. He resides in Layton, Utah.
River as the base. In this region is the LaNana Bayou, flanked west and east by LaNana Creek and Dorr Creek, rich in thousands of acres of Southern yellow pine and creeks, streams, and bayous flowing south to the Angelina River. Of more than thirty mill towns established in the county from 1880 to 1910, some rivaling in size the county seat of Nacogdoches,9 the first were built along the tributaries of the LaNana Bayou. Beside the Houston East & West Texas were found Lola, LaNana Mills, Decoy, Lingo, Press, and Long Leaf, while Poe, Lacyville, Keith’s Spur, La Cerda Station, Vim, Tubbe’s Mill, Clevenger’s Mill, and Royal either were established or moved to the tracks of the Texas & New Orleans. None survive today; all are ghost towns, and little in terms of physical artifacts remain. In 1900, hundreds had come, along with their families, to the mill towns of the Bayou to work on the railroads, logging crews, tram roads, and in the mills.

A small water-powered sawmill manufactured lumber and milled corn in the LaNana Bayou before the founding of the Republic of Texas. In 1834, Peter Ellis Bean, joined by Frost Thorn, moved their sawmill and grist mill from Carrizo Creek, east of Nacogdoches, to the Bayou. Civil suits for recovery of money instituted by Bean against Colonel Jose de las Piedras noted that the mill made lumber, scantling, boards, planks, and other building materials. Local entrepreneurs Haden Edwards and James Carter bought the Bean-Thorn mill situated on a league and fifty acres of land in June 1836, two months after the Battle of San Jacinto. The purchase price was $1,600.10

The area between LaNana Creek to the west and Dorr Creek to the east became a traditional lumber, grist, and cotton milling site from the 1840s to the 1880s. In 1853, with the transfer of the former Carter-Edwards mill from Frederick Voigt to William J.M. Towson, the term “LaNana Mills” first appears in county history.11 The probate record of Charles Smith, filed in September 1882, notes that the firm of Blake & Muckelroy sold the mills to Charles Smith and a Mr. Hardeman. The latter two moved it east to Dorr Creek and the Marion Road. Bennett Blake and William Clark bought the deteriorating machinery and 191 acres from Hardeman and Smith for $116.12

The company town of LaNana Mills began to take shape in 1890. W. Vestal Carroway bought the remaining equipment of the mills and moved it back to its traditional location to the west. He added steam machinery to the grist-mill and cotton-gin operations as well as new sawmill equipment, and began supplying ties and timbers to the Houston East & West Texas. County records noted that Carroway’s operation included steam engines and boilers, seven wagons, sixty oxen, and twenty “cabins” for tenant housing. The little community became the home of several hundred lumber workers and their families. In 1893, the mill was sawing 20,000 board feet of lumber daily. In October 1893, W.V. Carroway leased his LaNana Lumber Company for twenty years to Petrie Lumber Company. The lease included the entire plant located on LaNana Bayou about eight miles southeast of Nacogdoches. The company town included the larger community of LaNana Mills. It had a school, in which a joint church also met, and company-owned commissaries provided dry goods and canned goods. Carroway’s LaNana Mills Company
was reorganized as the LaNana Lumber Company and the community was renamed Lola (a name that lasted only a few years) to distinguish it from the mills. The community expanded to include more than thirty cabins and fifteen houses, sheds, the sawmill plant, and tram roads. Because the mill had burned down previously, Petrie Lumber contracted to rebuild the sawmill so that it could produce 30,000 feet of lumber daily.\(^\text{13}\)

Other sawmill companies were drawn to the LaNana milling community from 1890 to 1906, including the Bermea Land & Lumber Company,\(^\text{14}\) the Blakely & Simpson operation that produced beading and flooring,\(^\text{15}\) and the major plant of William G. Harrington.\(^\text{16}\) A prominent mill man from Nacogdoches County, Robert Howard Lee, owned and managed two sawmills located to the south of LaNana Mills, the Garma mill (also known as Garner’s Switch) next to the tracks of the Houston East & West Texas, and a second mill at Long Leaf, located about two and a miles to the east of the tracks. Lee’s mills were supported by a planer at the Long Leaf mill. Logging was done with a tram road, sixteen logging cars, two log wagons, and twelve oxen.\(^\text{17}\)

By 1900, the end was drawing near for the community of LaNana Mills. The mill and entire company town was dismantled and moved to Clawson, in Angelina County. The Daily Sentinel reported that E.B. Cushing, general manager of the Houston East & West Texas, and a Judge Feagan appraised the value of the bankrupt LaNana Lumber Company in January 1900 at $3,283.00. The tram network of iron rails was moved to Clawson via Nacogdoches, where it was weighed before being sent south. Another Nacogdoches newspaper noted in April that “The big saw mill and all of the houses will soon be gone from LaNana. There are 45 to 50 houses still to come down.” Dr. A.M. Hooper of LaNana Mills closed the deal with Colonel B.S. Wettermark later that month.\(^\text{18}\) The post office closed in the summer of 1901.\(^\text{19}\)

LaNana Mills celebrated a brief revival when the community was renamed Decoy the following year, and the post office was reopened. A Mexican-American community of families moved in to work in the logging crews supplying other sawmills in the area. Disaster soon struck; Dr. A. M. Hooper of LaNana reported a dozen cases of small pox at and near the residence of Eusebio Micheli. Jackson Parrott ran a stave operation in the summer and fall of 1903, cutting timber in the Angelina River bottom. He reported he was putting every team to work that showed up. Owners of mule teams were paid $4.00 to $6.00 a day for hauling staves.\(^\text{20}\)

William G. Harrington, in 1904, erected a major plant almost three times the size of the Carroway mill near the site of the old Bermea Land and Lumber mill, which had closed eight years earlier. With a daily manufacturing capacity of 40,000 board feet, the new mill, according to the Beaumont Journal, was “considered the largest and the best mill in the county.” Harrington logged his pineries with a tram road, transporting the sawtimber to his mill, where it was cut and shipped to Nacogdoches to his planer in the old Davidson pasture near the site of an abandoned R.H. Lee sawmill. Harrington appeared in the January 1905 issue of the Lumbermen’s Credit Association’s reference book with a
rating as a “slow pay[er].” The following month, the American Lumberman reported that Harrington had “sold out his lumber business at Nacogdoches” and would “move to Dallas.” He sold his planing mill to W. T. Wilson in the spring of 1905. The post office closed again at LaNana Mills, and the community died forever.

A final note about W.V. Carroway, the one-time owner of LaNana Mills, should be included. After abandoning the mills, he settled first in Belton and then went to Dumas in the panhandle of Texas, where he worked for the J.I. Campbell Lumber Company. The Weekly Sentinel noted his death on June 11, 1902. Sarah Inez Carroway, his wife, in April 1902, fortified Vestal’s heart tonic with strychnine. She pleaded guilty, was convicted, and received a sentence of life in prison.

Joe Clevenger was a rival of Carroway and other Nacogdoches County sawmillers such as George Cavin, A.J. Caricker, A.B. Martindale, William Fleming Daniel, and J.H. Summers. Clevenger built three mill communities in the county, all of which have become ghost towns. Clevenger, although a stockmen and ginner, had been transacting timber business since 1888 and continued to do so for another twenty-four years. He was a man of reputation. He, too, would be involved with the springs of murder.

At the time of Carroway’s death, the mill towns of Clevenger’s Mill and Vim to the east of LaNana Mills were busy. Joe P. Clevenger built his first sawmill in 1897. Located west of Nacogdoches at a site to the north of Durst Road and east of Moral Bayou, the logging crews cut out the timber within two years. Clevenger sold his plant to the Galloway & Wright Lumber Company, which ran a large planing mill on what is now Old Tyler Road in Nacogdoches, and set up a small mill to the east of Nacogdoches. There, too, he cut down all the standing timber and moved on to what the newspaper called “tall timber.” In February 1901, Clevenger sold his lumber at his mill yard to C.C. Galloway and dismantled his machinery for a move to the LaNana Bayou along the tracks of the new Texas & New Orleans. Early the next month, the citizens of Nacogdoches turned out to watch the large mill equipment pass through town to its final home on Dorr Creek.

The fact that Clevenger had landed a large contract to provide the Texas & New Orleans with crossties impressed on him the fact that he could make more money by having easy access to the railroad, which he had not been able to do at his earlier sites. A rail switch had been constructed before the move, and a station was planned along with the establishment of a post office and a commissary. James Heath of Timpson erected the sawmill. Frank Danson was the commissary’s first manager and mill bookkeeper, and John M. Green, a former bartender at the Hollow Log Saloon, and M.P. Hale succeeded Danson in the positions of commissary manager and postmaster.

Clevenger’s Mill was located just north of Dorr Creek Road and just east from where the bridge crosses the creek. During the next few years, Clevenger expanded the milling capacity of the plant. B.M. Hickman, the manager, directed operations that consisted of the tram road, a 100-horsepower steam
engine, the sawmill, the planing mill, and dry kilns. G.A. Dyer, the mill manager, assisted by mill engineer B.J. Sisson, turned timber into 25,000 board feet of lumber daily in 1903. Eventually the mill cut 75,000 feet per day. Because of the demand for lumber, Clevenger supplemented his steam-powered kilns for drying the lumber with the far more dangerous Arkansas smoke kilns, which used an open fire, with a watchman, to dry squarely stacked lumber piles. Clevenger began logging at nearby Royal much as he had before, with mules and men, placing an ad for teamsters to haul logs at the logging front. G.L. Watts served as the woods boss, a position sometimes known as "the bull of the woods." The teamsters earned $1.50 per day if they worked a week.28

Some of Clevenger's timberland was located more than a mile to the west of the mill. So he maximized his logging effort by building his own tram road to the timber. Before he was through, Clevenger’s tram line stretched more than three miles, and over it ran a geared locomotive pulling fifteen logging cars. Engineer Cal Hawks could not make the small locomotive move more than fifteen miles per hour, but the geared construction of the transmission permitted its tractive power to be controlled and increased so that the train could follow sharp curves through the forest. Logging cars were towed to the mill dock skidway where timber was rolled down into the log pond for storage.29

Clevenger's Mill had a sizable company town for its day, consisting of the company store, invariably known as the commissary, forty tenant houses, a school house, church, and post office. The establishment of the post office was a major event for the folks in the area as well as for mill-town residents. Until the establishment of the post office, people had to travel several miles to pick up their mail. Clevenger's Mill had received its post office in 1902 at the same time as Decoy, formerly LaNana, located a few miles west over on the line of the Houston East & West Texas, and Mahl, north of the county seat. Whites and blacks were segregated in housing as well as all social and cultural activities. Each race had its own buildings for education and religious activities. The mill provided medical services, first from a Dr. Barham, then later a Dr. Castlebarry.30

Clevenger's Mill attracted attention beyond the county. The Southern Industrial and Lumber Review noted in 1904 "the busy little mill of Joe P. Clevenger" with a daily capacity of 50,000 feet of lumber. Timber holdings were located on both sides of the railroad, but Clevenger at first cut only to the west. His sixty men remained busy even though the market was not as strong as it had been the previous year. Timber holdings were expected to last for at least five years. Since the area was surrounded with good livestock pasture and farming areas, the trade journal predicted that the community would survive after the timber had been cut out.31

The citizens of Clevenger's Mill had their problems, as do all communities. The Weekly Sentinel noted that Kid Finley, described as a "little yellow negro," came to Clevenger's Mill with a woman of his race and found
work. Several days later Finley and the woman quarreled, and Finley shot her in the foot and left the area hurriedly. The woman was not injured seriously. A suspicious homicide at the Mill involved an African American named Pat, who died from a gunshot to the head. The newspaper continued, "The killing was either accidental or suicide, as the fatal shot was fired from a 44 pistol in the hands of the victim. The report of a pistol was heard, and upon investigation the negro was found dead with the pistol in his hand. It will never be known whether the negro's death was a suicide or an accident." On another occasion, Clevenger was angered at some hooliganism having to do with the school house. "Joe Clevenger," noted the paper, "came up from the mill this morning and says there is no excitement there at present, but ... He is indignant over the cowardly acts of some miscreants who shot the Palestine [sic] school house into a honey comb Saturday night."

Joe Clevenger also was involved with killing. George W. Clevenger, his brother, was killed as an innocent bystander during a Nacogdoches street brawl near the present-day city offices. Dick Crain and Frank Roquemore, who had a long-standing feud, shot it out with shotguns near Slay Brothers saloon and Oggs' livery stable. Crain was wounded in the mouth and in one arm. Five buck shot struck George W. Clevenger while he was crossing the street. He bled to death on the sidewalk. Later that fall Joe Clevenger was charged with the murder of one of the men he believed was responsible for his brother's death. Although he was indicted for murder, the state dismissed the case, according to a newspaper report, "on the ground that there was not sufficient evidence to convict."

The prediction of the Southern Industrial and Lumber Review that Clevenger's Mill would survive as a community proved false. The mill burned in 1910 at a time when the timber was almost cut out, a fact some suspicious souls may have linked to the fire. Clevenger did not rebuild the mill. Clevenger instead left sawmilling forever. By the following year, Clevenger renewed a lease with Claude Linthicum for almost 2,000 acres west of the tracks on which Linthicum was running livestock.

The sawmill community of Vim, located a mile from Clevenger's Mill, was the creation of T.W. Jeanes and several of his relatives. The Jeanes (sometimes spelled "Jeans" in various county records and journals) were a kin-group of sawmilling families with a history of operating lumber plants in the counties of Nacogdoches, Angelina, San Augustine, and Sabine. T.W. Jeanes had farmed and operated a steam sawmill on 1,000 acres located on Pelost Creek, about two and a half miles west of Chireno, since 1896. He decided in 1899 to capitalize on the arrival of the Texas & New Orleans in Nacogdoches County. Once the railroad crossed the Angelina River, the virgin pineries of the eastern portion of the LaNana Bayou offered good opportunities for the bold timber entrepreneur. Jeanes sold his land and moved the sawmill and its machinery more than a dozen miles southwest to the tracks of the new railroad to land belonging to a family named Dorman. His equipment included a 30-horsepower boiler that ran a 25-horsepower, 10-inch by 14-inch, steam engine.
Two years of hard work followed. By 1902, Tom and Will Jeanes, along with Joe Burnaman, had begun to build a new and larger sawmill nearby on the Marion Ferry’s road. They also built a mill town for their workers. The Jeanes appropriately named their new community Vim, from the term “Vim and Vinegar.” Vim was a typical East Texas mill town. Family oriented, the town had a commissary, about twenty-five tenant houses rented to the workers, and segregated schools for black and white students. Like all East Texas mill towns, Vim had its share of events: Constable Doc Watson arrested Lee Mullens at the mill for assault to murder; Joe Allen trapped himself in the mill belting and suffered severe injury; and Andy Lewis, an African American, reported a newspaper, “badly mashed” his hand “while loading crossties on a car. A heavy tie fell on his hand[,] crushing the bones and injuring the member so that amputation may be necessary.”

Vim also had a particularly gruesome incident. The Nacogdoches newspaper reported “a sensational find” by Tom Jeanes during the late winter of 1902. While he was walking through the woods near the Dorman home and examining the timber, Jeanes noticed a buzzard flying out of a hollow stump. Believing he would find the scavenger’s lair, Jeanes looked in the stump and “to his horror … discovered instead of a nest of eggs a baby skeleton … .” It was a terrible, ghastly mystery never solved.

Toward the end of 1902, business improved for the Jeanes when they contracted with the Turner-Nabors Lumber Company of Beaumont, a major planing mill company, to supply the entire sawmill cut of Jeanes Mill to Turner-Nabors. Although neither the Jeanes nor their workers realized it, the end of Vim was near; within a year Turner-Nabors owned the mill. The Jeanes Brothers had to install a dry kiln as part of their contract requirements, had trouble financing the cost with George W. Collier, and were unable to complete the deal. They had to sell the mill to Turner-Nabors later that month.

Located along the tracks of the Texas & New Orleans, to which it was connected with approximately 500 feet of spur and sidings, the plant included the sawmill with equipment such as a cut off saw, an edger, three 56-inch saws and a 24-foot Henderson trimmer; a planing mill; a log hauler rig and car; a slab car; and all belting, shafting, and pulleys for operating the mills. The operation was powered by a 45-horsepower boiler that ran two steam engines, one 12-inch by 15-inch and the second 10-inch by 16-inch, indicating the sawmill could manufacture at least 20,000 board feet daily. Logging equipment included two mules, forty oxen, and six wagons.

Hard times soon came to the folks of Vim. Southern Industrial and Lumber Review, in June 1904, noted that the Turner-Nabers plant in Nacogdoches County had been closed for some time and was in the hands of a receiver. The owners managed to recover control and dismantled the mill, moving it to Beaumont, where it continued operating until at least 1910. Once the sawmill and its machinery departed, Vim faded away, its folk moving to other nearby mill towns at Clevenger, Tubbe, Press, and Lacyville. No ruins of Vim remain today.
The history of LaNana Mills, Vim, and Clevenger’s Mill is the history of the other mill towns of the Bayou. When the timber was gone, the mills and their towns no longer had a reason to exist. The last of the company towns, Lacyville, closed in 1948. The tram road rails were pulled up or left to rust in the rain, and the mill workers and their families moved away to other places in search of work. The Texas & New Orleans eventually stopped running trains over the Angelina River north to Nacogdoches. The whistle has not announced the end of another day at these old mill towns in almost fifty years. Where once the shrieks shrilled from Shay and Bell-Porter locomotives announcing another in-bound logging train, one now hears only the cry of the egret floating on the evening wind.

NOTES

1Robert S. Maxwell and Robert D. Baker, *Sawdust Empire: The Texas Lumber Industry, 1830-1840* (College Station, 1983). This book, based on the records of major lumber companies and many oral interviews with leading prominent personalities in the field, has been the starting point for a rich field of spatial-temporal history.

2Block’s three-volume series, published by a grant from The Pinney Woods Foundation of Lufkin, Texas, is a county-by-county narrative history of the East Texas sawmill world. See W.T. Block, *East Texas Mill Towns & Ghost Towns* 3 volumes (Lufkin, 1994 to 1996).

3Sitton details the East Texas river-bottom material and social culture of timbermen, loggers, fishermen, trappers, hunters, and stockmen. See Thad Sitton, *Backwoodsmen: Stockmen and Hunters along a Big Thicket River Valley* (Norman and London, 1995).

4The Texas Forestry Museum of Lufkin, Texas, maintains a continuing, computer-generated East Texas Sawmill Data Base Project, an exciting effort involving the historical deconstruction of the East Texas sawmill period. The Project has received state and national awards. Notes from these data bases will be cited from the ETSMDB.


8Nacogdoches *The Daily Sentinel* reported on January 18, 1900, that the tracks had reached Tubbe’s Mill, about nine miles southeast of Nacogdoches.

9See “Atttoyac River Lumber Company,” Mayotown, ETSMDB.


15The Nacogdoches *News*, October 16, 1884.

Nacogdoches County Deed of Trust, Vol. 2: November 17, 1894, p. 13. R.H. Lee owned sawmills at Lola/LaNana, Nacogdoches, Fitzie Hill, and Garrison in Nacogdoches County from 1890 to 1908. See R.H. Lee entries at these sites in ETSMDB.

Nacogdoches The Daily Sentinel, January 22, 1902, February 26, 1902, August 5, 1903, and September 2, 1903.


Nacogdoches The Weekly Sentinel, June 11, 1902.


Nacogdoches The Daily Sentinel, April 26, 1900.

Nacogdoches The Weekly Sentinel, March 29, 1900 and April 26, 1900; Nacogdoches The Weekly Sentinel, February 27, 1901 and March 6, 1901; Nacogdoches County Deed Records, Vol. 54: September 19, 1904, p. 96, and Vol. 58: January 11, 1905, p. 62.

Nacogdoches The Weekly Sentinel, February 27, 1901; March 20, 1901; January 1, 1902.

Nacogdoches The Weekly Sentinel, May 10, 1900.


Nacogdoches The Weekly Sentinel, June 27, 1901: January 22, 1902; April 15, 1903.


Nacogdoches The Weekly Sentinel, March 5, 1902.

Nacogdoches The Weekly Sentinel, December 17, 1902

Nacogdoches The Weekly Sentinel, May 14, 1902.

Nacogdoches The Weekly Sentinel, September 10, 1902; October 1, 1902; October 22, 1902, p. 4.


See entries under "Jeans" and "Jeanes" in the ETSMDB.


Nacogdoches The Weekly Sentinel, March 12, 1902; November 12, 1902; April 29, 1903.

Nacogdoches The Weekly Sentinel, March 19, 1902.


Nacogdoches County Deed of Trust, Vol. 4: August 14, 1903.


"Turner-Nabers Lumber Company," ETSMDB.

"Tilford-Hunt Lumber Company," ETSMDB.