

## The Rise and Fall of the Albany Lumber District

Edward T. Howe

“A pretty big bundle of sticks, Sir,” sententiously remarked my hack-driver as he landed me shivering from head to foot, in the middle of the Albany lumber district yesterday morning.

“Our State Institutions XVI: The Albany Lumber Trade,” *New York Times*, January 15, 1872, 5.

The above observation was uttered by an awed visitor when the Albany Lumber District was in its heyday as a major wholesale distribution center in the United States. From about 1830 to 1890, Albany ranked first or second in the nation as an intermediary between the lumber mills and various retail customers – a significant achievement that may largely have gone unheralded. Accordingly, this essay will focus on the rise of Albany to its prominence in this endeavor, from its roots in the colonial era and early nationhood, through three periods of growth and subsequent decline in the late nineteenth century, and its eventual demise in the twentieth century.

After Henry Hudson reached the headwaters of his eponymous river in 1609 on a voyage sponsored by the Netherlands, the Dutch first attempted to settle the area in 1614-15 with fur traders by erecting Fort Nassau on Castle Island just south of present-day Albany. After its abandonment in 1618 due to flooding, the Dutch West India Company persuaded French Protestants, the Walloons, to establish a new fur-trading colony on the nearby mainland that became Fort Orange in 1624. Citing the huge expense of this effort, the Dutch West India decided against further settlement in 1629. However, Kiliaen Van Rensselaer, a diamond merchant, obtained a patroonship from the company and proceeded to purchase vast quantities of land from the natives on both sides of the Hudson River. Fort Orange (officially Beverwijck in

1652) was renamed Albany in 1664 with the English takeover of the colonial province of New Netherland, but the Van Rensselaers were allowed to keep their patroonship of Rensselaerswyck.<sup>1</sup>

Lumbering activities began right away in the early Dutch settlements with the felling of trees for forts, fuel, implements, and dwellings and the need to clear land for crops. Before sawmills were constructed, an axe and a wedge (usually a piece of metal or wood) were the only means available for creating boards and shingles.<sup>2</sup> Kiliaen Van Rensselaer – who never left Holland – immediately recognized the necessity for sawmills by signing a contract in 1631 with some Scandinavians for one to be built near Fort Orange. A letter written by Van Rensselaer to Pieter Cornelisz Van Munnickendam confirmed the operation of a sawmill in 1638. Other sawmills proliferated in the Albany area including one leased in 1654 to Barent Pietersz Coeymans (for whom the town of Coeymans in Albany County was named) and Teunis Van Spitsberger.<sup>3</sup> As the number of sawmills multiplied in other parts of the Hudson Valley, lumber sales were confined to local markets.

When the English took over in 1664, the inhabitants of Albany were still mainly focused on trading with Native Americans for beaver and other pelts, but the economy soon underwent diversification. By the end of the seventeenth century, and well into the eighteenth, its economic activities centered on “commercial” (merchants engaged in domestic and foreign trade), “production” (crafts), and “service” (preparing food, providing shelter, and transporting people and goods) activities. While exports of furs continued, sloops (i.e., single-masted river cargo vessels) now carried more profitable goods southward on the Hudson River, chiefly lumber and grains. Meanwhile, Albany in 1686 had become a chartered city with about 500 people, but with further growth in its diversifying economy would reach about 2,000 residents around 1750.<sup>4</sup>

The emergence of the waterfront area in the northern part of the city meant that by 1750 there were a number of different craftsmen in the area. They included those who made kegs, crates, and boxes used to ship various agricultural and manufactured goods and those who made boats, ropes, and sails. Other occupations included ship chandlers – dealers in supplies and equipment for the growing number of water-borne vessels and wheelrights – specialists in making or repairing wheels for wagons and carriages.<sup>5</sup> As before, the rivercraft were either headed southward to other ports on the Hudson, New York City, and elsewhere with their goods and passengers or returning with imported and domestic manufactures and people headed for Albany and/or inland destinations.

Recognizing that its expanding port required an upgrade in its docking facilities, the City of Albany financed large docks and a seawall in 1765 to ensure that it remained a major center of commerce.<sup>6</sup> In a section of North Albany near the waterfront, a storage area for white pine and hardwood logs that came from northern forests was forming at this time. A part of this section of the city, owned by the Van Rensselaers, would eventually become the “lumber district” in the nineteenth century.

After the Revolutionary War, a swelling of migration of mainly New Englanders began to move westward into central and western New York and Pennsylvania. Their main objective was to cultivate the rich farmlands they had bought from land speculators. Eventually, parts of these lands would supply the growing demand for lumber in the nineteenth century. Meanwhile, the colonial era was coming to an end as New York joined with other states to ratify the U.S. Constitution in 1789. Soon, a prosperous Albany would become the state capital in 1797.

In the late eighteenth century and the first two decades of the nineteenth, many towns and incorporated villages were created in upstate New York. Not all towns had an incorporated

village, but a town could have one or more of such an entity. An incorporated village, created through the initiation of its inhabitants and not the state, was generally situated in a strategic part of a town—generally near a waterway or at a crossroads. It not only provided governmental services that a town government would or could not provide, but also a place to bring surplus forest and farm products for processing. These processed goods would then be shipped—usually by water—to more distant eastern markets. However, the cost of transporting these bulky commodities by wagon over poorly constructed rural roads to the mills and then, if needed, to other land destinations, was much higher than using watercraft over the same frictionless distance. In addition, wagons or carts transported smaller amounts of goods than boats.

Along with a rising clamor of the populace for lower transport costs was a fear that there would be a siphoning of the interior trade of the state southward on the Susquehanna River to Philadelphia or Baltimore or through the linkage of the Allegheny, Ohio, and Mississippi rivers to New Orleans. To prevent this and to create a profitable two-way trade route between the Great Lakes and the Hudson River, the New York State government financed the building of the east-west Erie Canal in 1817.<sup>7</sup> Although a section from the Genesee River to Albany was opened in 1823, the entire project was not completed until 1825. The artificial waterway had a depth of four feet, a width of twenty-eight feet on the bottom, and a width of forty feet on its surface so that “all the lumber produced in the country, and required for market, may be transported upon it”, along with other bulky commodities.<sup>8</sup> Toll collectors were stationed along its length and received a variety of charges for various goods and people that were hauled by boats drawn by mules and horses.

Construction also started on the Champlain Canal in 1817. It ran northward from Waterford (Saratoga County) to Whitehall (Washington County) over a distance of forty-six

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miles, with a link to the Erie Canal at West Troy (now Watervliet). The main objective was to keep the vast lumber and iron resources of northern New York from being diverted to Montreal. This, the first feeder canal to the Erie, was completed in 1823.<sup>9</sup>

Shortly before the start of construction of the Erie Canal, *Spafford's Gazetteer* pointed out the advantages that would accrue to Albany from this undertaking. Albany, with a population of almost 12,000 residents in 1813, was “situated on one of the finest rivers in the world, with an uninterrupted sloop navigation, in the center of an intensive and fertile country, with a great variety of manufactories, and 356 vessels in all kinds of trade, and seems destined to become one of the greatest inland Towns in America”—a view that proved prescient.<sup>10</sup>

Still, nestled among various crafts, shops, and commercial establishments, Albany had, according to the first edition of *The Albany Directory* in 1813, but one lumber merchant in the city, Aaron Hand. Ten years later there were only four dealers: Salem Dutcher, Aaron Hand, Uriah Marvin, and John Quackenbush.<sup>11</sup>

In anticipation of the completion of the Erie Canal, the canal commissioners approved a plan in February of 1823 to construct a basin in Albany where the Erie Canal terminated. The rationale was that “it would enable transshipments to be made between canal and river crafts, without the cost and delay of storage.” In the following May, an elongated pier “had been staked out” by the state engineers to enclose the basin.<sup>12</sup> The “Long Pier”—440 feet long, 80 feet wide, and 20 feet high—was finally completed in May of 1825.<sup>13</sup> Private wharves and slips were also located near the pier.

The opening of the Erie Canal brought an immediate and dramatic drop in freight rates that continued over several decades, helped by the fitful widening and deepening of the canal from 1836 to 1862. Between 1830 and 1860 the annual average ton-mile charge for all goods

from Buffalo to Albany on the canal fell from 2.50 to 1.07 cents and from Albany to Buffalo from 5.51 cents to 0.66 cents.<sup>14</sup>

With the opening of the Champlain Canal in 1823, lumber began to arrive at Albany from the southern Adirondacks and the partially-constructed Erie Canal. Over succeeding decades, various feeder canals in central and western New York would augment Erie Canal lumber shipments. In particular, the earliest of these feeder canals were the Oswego (1828), Cayuga-Seneca (1828), and the Chemung (1833).<sup>15</sup> They ran in a north-south direction and helped to unify rural areas with the rest of the state. As in the pre-canal era, the shipments primarily consisted of white pine—a softwood—known for its durability in building materials and other uses (e.g., a stave, the narrow strip of wood for the side of a cask). After the boats arrived at the Albany pier, the lumber was transferred to sloops and other watercraft for the journey down the Hudson River.<sup>16</sup>

In 1828 there were still only six lumber dealers in Albany. The four previously-mentioned firms were now joined by F. I. Barnard and Giles Sanford. Four years later, however, there were twenty-five lumber merchants as shipments of lumber accelerated.<sup>17</sup>

The *Annual Report of the Canal Commissioners of the State of New York* began publishing data on shipments of boards and scantlings (small pieces of lumber) arriving at West Troy in 1824 from both the Erie and Champlain canals, but by 1828 it focused on arrivals at Albany from both canals. Other items—staves, timber, shingles, and wood cords—also arrived over time, but are omitted from this essay due to space limitations. In 1828 Albany received 36,802,944 feet of boards and scantlings, but by 1834 the amount of lumber received had risen to 62,103,000 feet, a gain of 68.7 percent.<sup>18</sup>

After 1833, and for many years thereafter, the canal commissioners published annual data on the quantity of boards and scantlings arriving at “tide water” on the Hudson River (i.e., Albany, West Troy, and Waterford) from the Erie and Champlain Canals, but not separated for each destination.<sup>19</sup> However, George R. Howell and Jonathan Tenney provided data on annual arrivals of lumber at Albany from 1850 to 1861, but no data from 1833 to 1849. From 216,791,890 feet of boards and scantlings in 1850, the amount rose to 393,726,073 feet in 1853, a gain of 81.6 percent—an initial high mark and only a few years after the lumber district started functioning.<sup>20</sup>

Meanwhile, nationally, lumber production had risen from an estimated 300,000,000 board feet in 1799 to about 1.6 billion board feet by 1839, but the quantity produced in each state was not published for this period. From 1839 to 1859, the value of lumber produced decennially became known for each state, but the quantity still was not provided. Nevertheless, the data shows that New York State had become a major producer. The leading states in 1839 were: New York, at \$3,891,302, Maine (\$1,808,693), and Pennsylvania (\$1,150,220). By 1859 New York was no longer the top state. Pennsylvania now ranked first at \$10,743,752, followed by New York (\$9,710,945), and Michigan (\$7,040,190), with Ohio and Wisconsin gaining rapidly since 1849. In 1839 New York accounted for 30.1 percent of the total value of lumber production in the nation, but only 10.4 percent by 1859.<sup>21</sup> Beginning in 1869, when the quantity of lumber for each state was initiated, the data would show that the growth of lumber production would continue to be centered in the Midwest throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century, with Michigan and Wisconsin as the major producers.

By the turn of the nineteenth century, Bangor, Maine was both a major locale of lumber production and transshipment port in the state for white pine lumber. Located on the Penobscot

River, thirty miles from the Atlantic Ocean, it shipped a million board feet of lumber by 1816 and 30 million by 1830.<sup>22</sup>

After 1832, with the accelerated arrival of lumber from the Erie and Champlain Canals, Albany eclipsed Bangor as the largest wholesale lumber market in the nation. It would retain that position for the next quarter of a century.

The continued growth of the lumber business in Albany throughout the 1830s and 1840s resulted in an outgrowth of the facilities along the pier. This prompted the lumber dealers to negotiate leases north of the pier on land owned and used for vegetable gardens by the Van Rensselaer family. The original leases, starting around 1850, specified that the Van Rensselaer family would build the slips and the dealers would pay a yearly rental that would soon total about \$7,000. However, sometime over the next twenty years the lease terms changed. The dealers agreed to construct their own slips, retaining the amount of the rental payment and interest until it equaled the construction cost, after which the Van Rensselaers gained title to the slips and a yearly rental payment. The yearly rental payment, on average about eighteen percent of the cost of the slips, was expected to pay for itself in about eight years. In 1870 the Van Rensselaers reportedly received an annual total rental of more than \$80,000 from the dealers.<sup>23</sup>

The Albany Lumber District thus began operating around 1850 and eventually encompassed over 100 acres of land. Located between the Erie Canal and the Hudson River, the district started at North Ferry Street at its southernmost point and extended about a mile and a half northward. At the southern end it had a width of 500 feet and 1,150 feet across at its uppermost end. Thirty-one slips were in operation in 1870, with the largest being 1,000 feet long. The construction of several of these could cost up to \$25,000 apiece.<sup>24</sup>

When the Albany lumber market reached the end of its first growth phase in 1853, forty-five lumber dealers were in business. Twelve of those merchants were located on North Ferry Street, while thirteen of them were still selling lumber at the pier, which continued to be favored by many dealers.<sup>25</sup>

Albany was not the only lumber wholesale market that grew after 1845. The opening of the Illinois and Michigan Canal in 1848, helping to connect the Great Lakes with the Mississippi River, allowed Chicago to develop a huge lumber district along the South Branch of the Chicago River.<sup>26</sup> Albany received 311,571,161 feet of boards and scantling and Chicago 220,336,783 in 1854, but the next year Chicago became the largest wholesale lumber market in the U.S. by receiving 306,503,467 feet of lumber compared to 245,921,652 feet for Albany.<sup>27</sup> Other notable transshipment centers for lumber also emerged after 1850 in New York (i.e., Buffalo, Oswego and Tonawanda) and in Burlington, Vermont. Only Buffalo would become a wholesale distribution market sometime after 1860. Nevertheless, Albany and Chicago ranked first and second, respectively until 1890. Chicago still remained the national leader in that year with 1,969,689,000 feet in lumber receipts, but Tonawanda had replaced Albany as the second largest market with 718,650,814 feet of lumber receipts. Albany, meanwhile, received only 406,000,000 feet.<sup>28</sup>

While the growth of the lumber industry was occurring between 1832 and 1880 in Albany, the rest of the economy was shifting away somewhat from small craft shops toward manufacturing enterprises that often depended on the Erie Canal for raw materials. Beginning in the 1830s, cast iron stove foundries, breweries, and boot and shoe producers emerged and would become larger and more prominent by 1860. Other notable businesses that operated in this period were brickyards, furniture makers, printers, and a variety of commercial and small

manufacturing enterprises. Albany had over 800 manufacturing enterprises in 1880, about double that of 1860.<sup>29</sup>

Although New York State was a leading producer and consumer of white pine lumber, the supply in the 1850s—especially with the depletion of sources in the Adirondacks—failed to meet the increasing demand attributable to urbanization and manufacturing needs, especially from New York City, northern New Jersey, ports along the Hudson River, and some foreign destinations. In order to meet these varying needs, larger shipments to Albany started coming from the southwestern counties of Allegany and Chemung, southern Ontario, and Saginaw and Port Huron in Michigan.<sup>30</sup>

After reaching a peak of 393,726,073 feet of boards and scantlings received in 1853, a decline set in—accentuated during the Civil War of 1861-65. However, growth resumed again after the war until 1872, when a second peak of 438,000,000 feet of lumber reached Albany. Following the downturn caused by the severe Panic of 1873-1879, the district entered another growth phase with a third, and final, peak in lumber receipts of 477,000,000 feet occurring in 1884.<sup>31</sup> Despite the cyclicity, the period from 1872 to 1884 appears to be the heyday of the lumber district.

The large increases in boards and scantling that arrived in the Albany lumber district after 1850 – and other wholesale centers – ultimately resulted from: improvements in log driving, using an entire river or stream to move huge volumes of logs over great distances; the usage of booms to sort out logs that were marked for a particular mill; and significant increases in output in the mills made possible through technical advances in sawing lumber, especially the use of steam power and newer types of saws, and improvements in planing machines.<sup>32</sup>

The necessity of bringing larger lumber shipments from greater distances led to major changes in lumber wholesaling. When lumber shipments arrived in Albany between 1825 and 1850, the lumber dealers initially dealt with the captain of a sloop who bought a cargo of seventy or eighty thousand feet of lumber that he would sell in ports along the Hudson River to various buyers. Twenty years later, a merchant dealt with the captain of a large vessel that could handle 600,000 feet or more of lumber, but was now only an agent paid to ensure the lumber was received by a buyer, who often came from New York City.<sup>33</sup> In addition, as the markets for lumber began widening after the Civil War and into the late nineteenth century, some of the Albany wholesalers devised new marketing strategies that included purchasing notices in trade journals, such as *The New York Lumber Trade Journal*, and sending price lists to retailers in order to maintain and enhance profits as the wholesalers tried to cope with nationwide changes.<sup>34</sup>

When the lumber district was starting to emerge around 1850 in North Ferry Street, four firms were in business: William H. Bloomingdale; Higbie, Hammonds; Giles Sanford; and Wilson and Mead.<sup>35</sup> As the number of lumber wholesalers quickly proliferated, the type of lumber sold began to vary. Many firms continued to specialize in white pine, others sold both softwood and hardwood lumber, and a few dealt only in hardwoods. Among the more prominent firms was White & Company. It was one of the largest lumber firms in the U.S. and often led the Albany dealers in sales. It controlled large mills in Canada and handled the entire output of fourteen mills overall, specializing in white pine. This strategy enabled the firm to ensure access to lumber and to reduce production costs. Other notable firms included: Salisbury & Company, dealers in several softwoods such as white pine, spruce, and hemlock; Joshua Rathbun & Company, which dealt only in hardwood lumber—oak, black walnut and cherry; and H. W. Sage & Company, which owned the largest mills in Michigan, and sold both white pine and hardwood

lumber. In addition to the wholesalers, H. Q. Hawley & Sons and S. & G. Rork operated extensive planing and sawing businesses for making doors, sashes, blinds, and other products.<sup>36</sup>

By 1872, when the second peak of lumber arrivals occurred, the number of wholesalers in the lumber district had reached an all-time high of fifty-two. Thirty-seven firms were located within the district and fifteen were nearby. The significant increase in boards and scantlings arriving in Albany between 1853 and 1872—and arrivals at other wholesale centers—were reflective of the importance of the lumber industry to the national economy. Between 1850 and 1870 the lumber industry was the second largest manufacturing industry in the U.S., measured by the percentage of the total value of manufacturing output—about 5 percent of the total.<sup>37</sup>

However, by 1880 the lumber industry, according to this measurement, had fallen to fourth place and by 1890 had declined further in the ranking to fifth place. Although flour and grist mills remained the largest industry over the entire period of 1850 to 1890, other more highly-valued industries were overtaking the lumber industry in national importance (e.g., iron and steel) in the late nineteenth century as the Second Industrial Revolution proceeded. Meanwhile, somewhat analogously, the number of lumber dealers in Albany declined after 1872, for different reasons, to thirty-three by 1890 or by 35.8 percent.<sup>38</sup>

For most of its existence in the nineteenth century, the Albany lumber district was an especially busy place. A variety of employees helped in the conduct of business. Canal boat workers—employed by their owners—unloaded and sorted the lumber into piles on the docks in the slips. Meanwhile, hundreds of laborers—mainly of Irish descent after 1845—were employed by the dealers in their yards to load lumber from the docks onto the barges by the river. At its initial peak in 1872, fifteen hundred men, excluding clerks, were employed on the docks by the dealers and \$600,000 was paid annually to the employees.<sup>39</sup>

Other occupations in the lumber district included: lumber inspectors—Albany had one of the earliest systems in the nation—who measured and graded the quality of lumber; tally boys, who worked with the inspectors and wrote down the amount of feet of the graded lumber; and office assistants.

Working in the lumber district had many advantages. Telegraph and later, sometime after 1885, telephone lines greatly enhanced communication within and without the district. A horse-drawn trolley car operated until 1921, along a road parallel to the Hudson River that made it easier for the dealers to reach their offices. Ubiquitous hydrants significantly lessened any fire damage. Facilities were also available for dining, purchasing various items, and worship.<sup>40</sup>

Finally, realizing the collective need to promote business activity and internal cohesion, the lumber merchants organized the Board of Lumber Dealers in 1863. Its purposes were to: “inculcate just and equitable principles in trade; to establish and maintain uniformity in commercial usages; to acquire, preserve, and disseminate valuable business information; and to adjust controversies and misunderstandings between persons engaged in business.” If these procedures failed, an arbitration committee of the board was set up to hear a voluntary submission by aggrieved parties. A Supreme Court (a lower court in New York State) then rendered a final judgment on any award the board made, except in cases involving claims to real estate titles.<sup>41</sup>

After reaching its third peak in arrivals of boards and scantling in 1884, the lumber district steadily declined over the next several decades as a major wholesale lumber center. By 1891 the amount of lumber arriving at Albany amounted to 366,000,000 feet and probably was less than 200,000,000 around 1905.<sup>42</sup> Unfortunately, neither the Canal Commission nor another

reputable source have since reported the amount of boards and scantling that arrived annually after 1891.

The reasons for the decrease in lumber arrivals at Albany after 1884 resulted from several trends. The continuing expansion of national and regional rail networks and their interconnectedness in the last quarter of the nineteenth century encouraged a growing practice of direct shipment of lumber from the mills in the Midwest to their retail customers, thus eliminating the wholesale middleman. Some firms, especially those who owned mills in the Midwest and Canada, even established agents in large cities to facilitate direct shipments. New York City jobbers (wholesalers) also bypassed Albany by having year-round rail shipments that obviated the need to expensively store large amounts of lumber for winter customers at their sites, given that the Hudson River was not navigable in winter.<sup>43</sup> Unfortunately, the lumber district did not respond to the competition of cheaper rail service until 1906 because many of the dealers argued that belching locomotives would spawn fires.<sup>44</sup> Tracks were subsequently laid in the district with a connection to railroads entering Albany, but a significant loss of business had already occurred. Further, although there was an upsurge in spruce lumber production from the Adirondack region after 1860, particularly in the Glens Falls area, it began to decline after 1880.<sup>45</sup> Not even the abolition of canal tolls in 1882 could stem the decline.<sup>46</sup> Finally, the continuing marketing efforts of the dealers ultimately proved to be fruitless.

More broadly, the rising competition of the railroads in the late nineteenth century for lumber shipments and other goods led New York State officials to counteract this threat by undertaking further overhauls of the entire canal system (a previous upgrade had occurred between 1836 and 1862). Following an abortive effort to enlarge the canal system in 1895, still another huge construction project began in 1905 and ended with the opening of the New York

State Barge Canal System in 1918, of which the Erie Canal was one division. This new waterway relied heavily on the use of controlled rivers and, to a lesser extent, on other water routes. Large barges were self-propelled or pulled and pushed by tugboats to haul bulk products. These barges could be built to handle 3,000 tons of goods, compared to a 30-ton freight limit on the original Erie Canal.<sup>47</sup>

The opening of the Barge Canal also meant that there was no need for the old Erie Canal, with its relatively narrow width and shallow depth, at various places along its entire length. Given that the state was willing to sell its abandoned canal property, the City of Albany sought the right to acquire its portion of the available land through the state legislature. After winning legislative approval in 1921, Governor Nathan Miller signed the measure into law.<sup>48</sup> Four years later, the Albany Common Council authorized the expenditure of funds to buy the abandoned Erie Canal.<sup>49</sup> However, the city did not fill in and grade the canal that would become Erie Boulevard until 1936.<sup>50</sup>

The opening of the barge canal, however, did not result in the closing of the lumber district. Shipments of lumber continued arriving at the Hudson River docks for off-loading near the old slips. Yet the trend in declining receipts continued over the next several years as arrivals increasingly came and went by rail. Finally, “eastbound lumber shipments via the East division of the canal system ceased” in 1929.<sup>51</sup> In an ironic twist, westbound shipments of Pacific Coast lumber from Albany to upstate cities were prevalent after 1900. The lumber continued to arrive from New York City after the Panama Canal opened in 1914.<sup>52</sup> The opening of the Port of Albany – Rensselaer, officially dedicated in 1932, failed to revive eastbound shipments from the lumber district.

The number of wholesalers in the lumber district concomitantly declined in line with the decrease in arrivals of boards and scantling after 1884. Twelve dealers remained in operation in or near the area when the Barge Canal opened in 1918, but only seven of these firms were still in the district. They included: William E. Beebe, F. F. Crannell Lumber Company, Easton Cypress Company, Loren H. Elmendorph, Hughson & Company, A. S. Kibber & Son, and L. Thomson Company. The five firms nearby were: Blakeslee Lumber Company, C. T. Hubbell & Company, Hunter Dexter, Ramsdill & Company, and John Robinson & Company.<sup>53</sup> By then the district was mainly serving local retail and wholesale buyers.

Slowly but surely these firms also disappeared. The last two dealers were: A.S. Kibbee & Son, whose roots were traceable to 1857, and F. F. Crannell, which started in 1849. Kibbee stopped doing business in the district in 1940. Crannell maintained its office at North Ferry Street until 1963, when the last vestige of the lumber district passed into history.<sup>54</sup>

The land once owned by the Van Rensselaer family in the lumber district was eventually sold by its descendants, but it has remained an industrial area. It currently includes various commercial and warehouse properties, vacant structures, and two governmental buildings.

Albany, from its colonial roots, was a natural shipping port for lumber with its advantageous location at the junction of the Mohawk and Hudson rivers. This transshipment activity accelerated with the building, growth, and enlargement of the Erie Canal. By 1850 when the lumber district was beginning, Albany already had become the largest lumber wholesaling operation in the United States. However, the emergence of Chicago and the construction of a national railroad network in the late nineteenth century – that enticed mill owners to ship directly to customers on a year-round basis – undermined its national importance. Although the abandonment of the Erie Canal did not result in its closure in the early twentieth century, it

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eventually withered away as a local wholesaler and retailer. Nevertheless, throughout its nineteenth century existence, especially in the 1870s and 1880s of its heyday, it was easy for a visitor to see “a pretty big bundle of sticks.”

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#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Cuyler Reynolds, *Albany Chronicles* (Albany, NY: J.B. Lyon Company, Printers, 1906), 7, 17, 19, 24, 46.

<sup>2</sup> William F. Fox, *History of the Lumber Industry in the State of New York* (Harrison, NY: Harbor Hill Books, 1976), 8.

<sup>3</sup> Muriel Schumacher, *Manufacturing and Industry in Rensselaerswyck During the Patroonships of Kiliaen Van Rensselaer* (New York: Albany County Historical Record, 1943), 2-4.

<sup>4</sup> Stefan Bielinski, “A Middling Sort: Artisans and Tradesmen in Colonial Albany,” *New York History*, vol. 73, no. 3 (July 1992), 261-269.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 285.

<sup>6</sup> Stefan Bielinski, “From Outpost to Entrepot: The Birth of Urban Albany, 1686-1776” in *Visions of New York State: The Historical Paintings of L. F. Tantillo* (Wappinger’s Falls, NY: The Shawangunk Press, 1996), 28.

<sup>7</sup> John H. Thompson, ed., *Geography of New York State* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1966). 157-159.

<sup>8</sup> Noble E. Witford, *History of the Canal System of the State of New York Together With Brief Histories of the Canals of the United States and Canada* (Albany, NY: Brandow Printing Company, 1906), 77, 113, 123.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 411, 416.

<sup>10</sup> Horatio Gates Spafford, *A Gazetteer of the State of New York* (Albany, NY: H.C. Southwick, 1813), 117-118.

<sup>11</sup> *The Albany Directory* (Albany, NY: Websters and Skinners, 1813); *Klinck’s Albany City Directory* (Albany, NY: E. and E. Hosford, 1823).

<sup>12</sup> J. Munsell, *The Annals of Albany*, vol. VIII (Albany, NY: J. Munsell, 1857), 88, 91.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>14</sup> George Rogers Taylor, *The Transportation Revolution, 1815-1860*, vol. 4 of the *Economic History of the United States* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1951), 138.

<sup>15</sup> Peter Eisenstadt and Laura-Eve Moss, eds., *The Encyclopedia of New York State* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2005), 257.

<sup>16</sup> John E. Defebaugh, *History of the Lumber Industry of America*, vol. 2 (Chicago: The American Lumberman, 1907), 410.

<sup>17</sup> *The Albany Directory for the years 1828-29* (Albany, NY: Webster & Wood, 1828; Child's Albany City Directory (Albany, NY: Printed by Edmund B. Child, 1832).

<sup>18</sup> Joel Munsell, *The Annals of Albany*, vol. X (Albany, NY: Munsell & Rowland, Printers, 1859), 385.

<sup>19</sup> *Annual Report of the Canal Commissioners of the State of New York For 1856*. In Assembly Document 100 (Albany, NY: Charles Benthuisen, 1856), 304-05.

<sup>20</sup> George R. Howell and Jonathan Tenney, *History of the County of Albany, N.Y., From 1609 to 1886* (New York: W.W. Munsell & Co., Publishers, 1886), 614.

<sup>21</sup> Henry B. Steer, *Lumber Production in the United States, 1799-1946* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1948), 10, 11.

<sup>22</sup> Jeremy S. Wilson, "Nineteenth Century Lumber Surveys for Bangor, Maine: Implications for Pre-European Settlement Forest Characteristics in Northern and Eastern Maine," *Journal of Forestry* (July/August 1975) 219.

<sup>23</sup> *The Albany Lumber Trade, Its History and Extent* (Albany, NY: The Argus Company, Printers, 1872), 10, 11, 14.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>25</sup> *Munsell's Albany Directory and City Register* (Albany, NY: J. Munsell, 1853).

<sup>26</sup> Theodore J. Karamanski, "Lumber," in *The Electronic Encyclopedia of Chicago*, 2005 ed. <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/767.html> (accessed on 11/13/2015).

<sup>27</sup> "Statistics of Trade and Commerce," *Hunt's Merchant's Magazine and Commercial Review*, XL, no. II, February 1859, 229.

<sup>28</sup> George W. Hotchkiss, *History of the Lumber and Forest Industry of the Northwest* (Chicago: George W. Hotchkiss & Co., 1898), 354, 685; Defebaugh, 418.

<sup>29</sup> Brian Greenberg, *Worker and Community Response to Industrialization in a Nineteenth-Century American City, Albany, New York, 1850-1884* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1985), 16, 17.

<sup>30</sup> Michael Williams, *Americans and Their Forests: A Historical Geography* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 178.

<sup>31</sup> Howell and Tenney, 615.

<sup>32</sup> Williams, 167-170, 175.

<sup>33</sup> *The Albany Lumber Trade*, 13.

<sup>34</sup> Fred W. Kollmeyer, "Lumber Distribution and Marketing in the United States," *Journal of Forest History* 27, no. 2 (1983): 86.

<sup>35</sup> *Hoffman's Albany Directory and City Register, 1849-50* (Albany, NY: L. G. Hoffman, 1849).

<sup>36</sup> *The Albany Lumber Trade*, 17, 18, 24, 32, 38, 40.

<sup>37</sup> Williams, 5.

<sup>38</sup> *The Albany Directory for the Year 1872* (Albany, NY: Sampson, Davenport & Company, 1872); *The Albany Directory for the Year 1890* (Albany, NY: Sampson & Murdock Company, 1890).

<sup>39</sup> Defebaugh, 408, 414.

<sup>40</sup> *The Albany Lumber Trade*, 15, 16.

<sup>41</sup> Howell and Tenney, 613-614.

<sup>42</sup> Defebaugh, 411, 418.

<sup>43</sup> Williams, 182.

<sup>44</sup> Defebaugh, 416.

<sup>45</sup> Barbara McMartin, *The Great Forest of the Adirondacks* (Utica, NY: North Country Books, 1994), 48, 49.

<sup>46</sup> Whitford, 837.

<sup>47</sup> Michele A. McFee, *A Long Haul, The Story of the New York State Barge Canal* (Fleischmanns, NY: Purple Mountain Press, 1998), 17.

<sup>48</sup> “Measures to Permit Closing of Canal Signed by (Governor) Miller,” *Albany Evening Journal*, May 12, 1921, 12.

<sup>49</sup> Proceedings of the Albany Common Council, September 21, 1925, 451.

<sup>50</sup> “Highlights of Mayor Thacher’s Annual Message to the Albany Common Council,” *Albany Times Union*, January 5, 1937, 17.

<sup>51</sup> State of New York, Department of Public Works, *Annual Report of the Superintendent For The Year 1929* (Albany, NY: J.B. Lyon Company Printers, 1930), 23.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>53</sup> *The Albany Directory for the Year 1918* (Albany, NY: Sampon & Murdock Company, 1918).

<sup>54</sup> *Polk’s Albany City Directory for the Year 1940* (Boston: R. L. Polk & Company Publishers, 1940); *Polk’s Albany City Directory for the Year 1963* (Boston, R. L. Polk & Company Publishers, 1963).