

MUSSER © LUMBER © CO.

BUSINESS ESTABLISHED
1855.

OFFICERS.

PETER MUSSER,
President

R. MUSSER,
Vice-President

P. M. MUSSER,
Sec'y and Treas.

CHAS. R. FOX,
Yard Supt.



OFFICE.

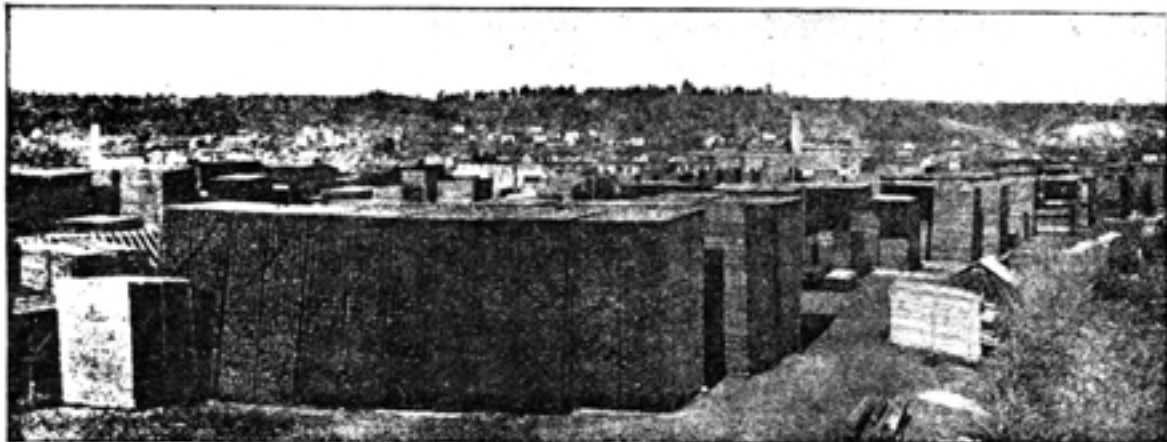
SAW-MILLS BUILT
1870-1.
CAPACITY.

50,000,000
Feet of Lumber.

15,000,000
Shingles.

10,000,000
Lath.

100,000
Pickets, per Year



LUMBER YARD OF THE MUSSER LUMBER CO.



SAW MILL AND PLANING MILL

RECOLLECTIONS OF THE MUSSER LUMBER COMPANY

By J. P. Walton

In 1870 the lumber firm of Musser & Company was organized, consisting of Richard Musser, Peter Musser, Peter M. Musser, Charles R. Fox and John Musser, of Pennsylvania, father of Peter M. Musser. The company was formed for the purpose of building their present saw mill, which was completed in 1871, and commenced sawing lumber. In 1873 Richard Musser sold his interest in the business to P. M. Musser. The firm was then known as P. M. Musser & Co. Three years later Richard Musser renewed his connection with the company and the firm name was again Musser & Co. In 1877 the company rebuilt the mill and enlarged it to near double its capacity. We recollect taking the old iron chimney down and having it spliced out to nearly 100 feet high, and putting it up again.

In 1881 the business had increased to such an extent both in the mill and lumber interest that it became necessary to incorporate under the name of Musser Lumber Co. Their mill was again enlarged, the old iron smoke stack taken down and the present brick chimney put up. In 1882 they put up a planing mill and moved the planing ma-



A consumer,
like the one
called "Mus-
ser's hades"
(*Harper's Week-
ly*, June 29,
1889, p. 516).

chinery from the saw mill. At this planing mill they built a tall brick chimney on a large stone foundation. In order to get the chimney where they wanted it they put it on the corner of the stone foundation. The result was it soon began to settle unevenly and the chimney soon got some three feet out of plumb, it looked like the "leaning tower of Pisa." Of course we were called on to straighten it up, which we did with good success.

When the mill was first built its capacity was about 11,000,000 feet annually; after its improvements and enlargements it could cut 50,000,000 feet. The mill stands on the upper end of Muscatine Island where the ground originally overflowed fully four feet deep, it was protected by a levee. In the spring of 1870 a break occurred where the mill now stands; it was filled up and the mill built over the break. There was not more than two or three houses within a half mile of the mill at that time. Now the land is laid out in city lots and is quite well settled all around largely by mill operators or hands working in the mills. This low ground has been largely filled by offal from the mill. It became so expensive to get this offal hauled away from the mill that a consumer was built at cost of \$7,000, to burn it in, which paid for itself in two years. This consumer is a high iron cylinder or cone, lined with firebrick. The spare saw dust, bark and planing mill shavings are conveyed or blown into it and burned with a fire that does not go out from spring to fall. This consumer is often called Musser's hades.

The Mussers in the start put in a system of water works with mains and hydrants, reaching all over their thirty-five acres of ground. Later they have connected their mains with the Kaiser mill water mains on the south, and on the north with the Muscatine Sash and Door Co., and the Hershey saw mill water mains. The four mills each being well equipped with pumps, makes the best system of fire protection in the city.

The Mussers were the first to introduce the electric light in place of the old head-light used when working during the short days in the autumn. They have their yards and mill well supplied with "Dutch Clocks" for the benefit of their watchmen. Their yard is well supplied with railroad tracks and overhead truckways for hauling out lumber. They have no dry house, they believe in carrying a larger stock of lumber and drying it by air. Muscatine Island is a superior place for drying. They saw nothing but pine lumber from logs cut in the northern pineries.

The Mussers are interested in the Chippewa Logging & Boom Co. and in the Mississippi River Logging Co. They were among its incorporators and are heavy stockholders, hence their ability to secure logs when the outside mills are short. The logs are towed down the river from booms at the mouth of Chippewa river by steam tow boats. The Mussers for several years owned their own boats. Recently they have sold to Cpt. S. R. Van Zant and he does the towing for them.

When the Mussers first started in the lumber business with Mr. Hoch the amount of money handled in a year for the purchase of lumber, for work and expenses amounted to some \$100,000. The present annual business of the company amounts to over \$750,000.

When Hoch & Musser first started the lumber was sawed in the pineries and floated down in rafts on the river. Lumber sold at from seven to nine dollars a thousand feet; it was all sawed plump one inch thick and was usually warranted one-third clear, one-third second clear and the remainder was common with little sheathing. The retail price for clear was from \$20 to \$25 per M., with common about \$10 to \$15.

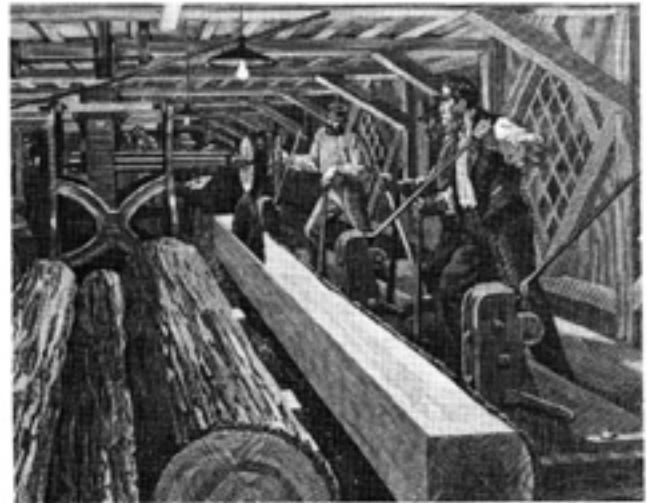
From: J. P. Walton, *Pioneer Papers* (Muscatine, 1899), pp. 200-202.

THE LOCAL PRESS COMMENTS ON THE OPENING OF OUR MILL IN 1871

R. Musser & Co.'s New Saw Mill

Saturday afternoon, on a tour of inspection, we jogged down to Musser's new mill, which we found in full operation, with the usual deafening noise and uproar indicative of a full-fledged, first-class saw mill. Although the addition of other machinery and conveniences will yet be made, the mill is now a superior one in every respect and turns out lumber of the best quality with astonishing rapidity. It has four boilers, manufactured by Baker & Purcell, of this city, 20 ft. long and 42 inches in diameter, each having two 15-inch flues. They are conclusive evidences of the ability of Muscatine to produce as fine specimens of workmanship as the most inveterate stickler to eastern manufactories could well desire.

The engine, constructed by Williams & White, of Moline, has a 20-inch cylinder and a 30-inch flue; its estimated power is 80 horse, which may be increased to 150. Connected with this is a cold and hot-water pump for the use of the boilers. This can, however, be very conveniently made to serve another purpose. By hose being attached, the pump can be converted into a fire-engine and be made to drench the entire building in case of fire. The saws now in use — which, however, are but a part of the number to be put in operation — consist of a double rotary, a single rotary, a gang edger, and a proportionate number of slab saws, shingle saws, etc. These saws, when they get down to their work in real earnest, will turn out from



A rotary saw in operation (*Harper's Weekly*, June 29, 1889, p. 516).

50,000 to 55,000 feet of lumber per day. A novel feature of the mill is a number of box chutes for slabs and saw-dust, beneath which carts are driven and loaded with the rubbish, which is then deposited in the low ground around the mill. Besides dispensing with those immense heaps of refuse which usually barricade the approaches to saw mills, this arrangement serves a beneficent purpose in filling up the low ground behind, and making a sort of bulwark for, the Island levee. From the west end of the mill, and turning gradually to the right, a trestle, about 500 feet long and from 16 to 18 feet high, has been constructed for conveying lumber on cars from the mill to a switch running to the main railroad track. Four of these cars are now in operation, and two others are in prospect. By means of a slide 150 feet in length the lumber is transferred from the trestle to a

platform at its base, whence it is loaded into cars standing on a track parallel to the platform. This lumber is mainly shipped to R. Musser & Co.'s yard at Iowa City. On the opposite side of the trestle, the lumber not intended for immediate shipment is, so to speak, piled down; that is, instead of the old way of laboriously hoisting lumber while piling it, it is lowered from the trestle to a place below, and the work is thus facilitated and rendered comparatively easy.

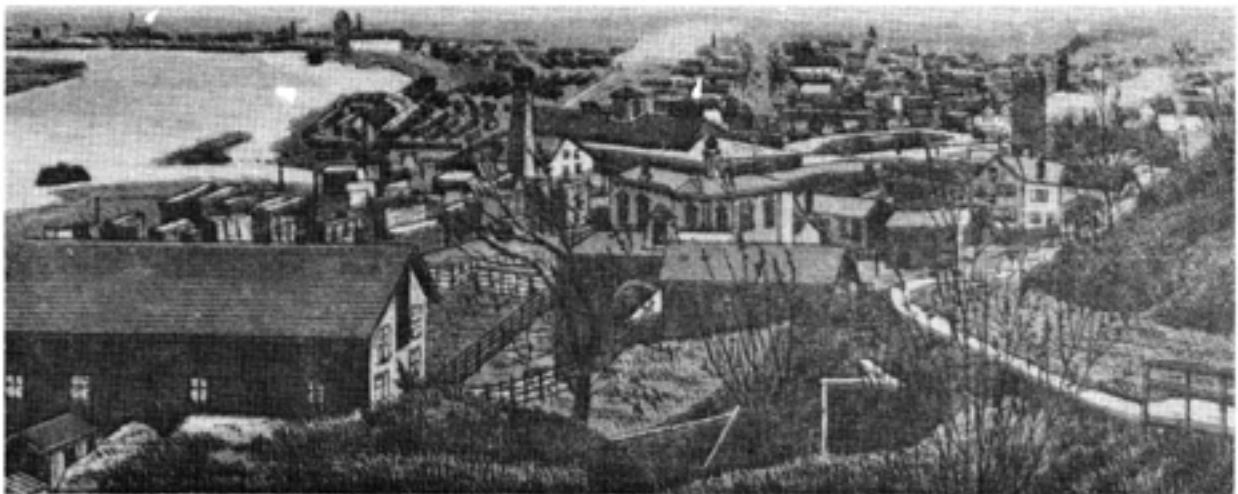
This saw mill, though now of the first order in respect to machinery and general conveniences, has not yet its full complement of lath and shingle saws, a number of which are yet to be added. When this addition is made the facilities of the mill for doing all kinds of work in its line will be unsurpassed. A planing mill in connection with this enterprise is also in contemplation. It will

be situated at the east end of the building, and will be quite an addition to the general facilities.

An important feature of this mill is the fact that it is not hampered for lack of ground room. Its lumber piles may increase to an indefinite number and its trestles ramify in every direction, and it is probable that a branch or two will be attached to the main trestle.

The proprietors of the mill have reason to be proud of their new enterprise. Besides being a credit to them and to Muscatine, it will prove of great benefit to our city as an addition to her manufacturing interests, and as an augmentation of her commercial importance. Its business thus far has more than met the expectations of its proprietors, and the mill has been run to its utmost capacity to supply the demand for lumber and other building material.

Muscatine Weekly Journal, June 30, 1871.



The Musser Lumber Company (*Souvenir of Muscatine, Iowa, 1891*, R. A. Holmes, Publisher).

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Price Laboratory School
University of Northern Iowa
Cedar Falls, Iowa

This project was made possible by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

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