



Carrier Lumber & Manufacturing Company log train on the company-owned Sardis & Delta Railroad near Sardis, Mississippi. The Heisler locomotive was one of the three major types of geared locomotives used widely in the Mississippi woods. The high firebox made the Heisler a favorite of Mississippi Delta hardwood loggers because it could wade through frequent flood waters that covered the tracks. *Photo from Dr. Gilbert H. Hoffman. Courtesy, Collection of Tony Howe-Gilbert Hoffman-David Price.*

[Larger view](#)



Eastman, Gardiner & Company crew and log loader in the woods northwest of Laurel, Mississippi, in the 1890s. The Barnhart loader was a popular type and operated on rails on top of skeleton log cars, moving from car to car as the loading progressed. *Photo from the Lauren Rogers Museum of Art, Laurel, Mississippi.*

[Larger view](#)



Gilchrist-Fordney Company was one of the "Big Four" sawmill companies that made Laurel, Mississippi, the

FEATURE STORY

Growth of the Lumber Industry,
(1840 to 1930)

By Tony Howe

Mississippi’s abundant virgin forest had long been a natural resource for American Indians. And to the early 19th-century settlers from Europe and America’s east coast, the softwoods and hardwoods provided material for building homes, furniture, farm implements, and tools. Even so, settlers considered the millions of acres of forests as little more than obstacles to be removed in order to start developing farms.

The few people who lived in South Mississippi’s pineland before 1840, for example, made their living by hunting and trapping, and later by raising cattle and hogs. By the 1840s, a few small mills for sawing logs had been built along the Mississippi Gulf Coast. The sawmills were located near the mouths of major rivers and streams at locations such as Pearlinton and Logtown along the Pearl River, Moss Point on the Escatawpa and Pascagoula rivers, and Handsboro on the banks of Bayou Bernard near present-day Gulfport.

River rafting

These early mills depended on water transportation to ship logs to the mills. Loggers cut trees along the banks of streams. They then tied the logs together to form rafts that were then floated downstream to sawmills at the mouths of coastal rivers.

Then several important developments in the late 1800s made possible the growth of the lumber industry in the state. By the 1850s, Mississippi sawmills began to replace less efficient reciprocal saws, which cut up and down, with the circular saw. Dry kilns, developed in the 1870s and 1880s, made it possible for mills to process long-leaf yellow pine for ever-expanding markets. In addition, the increased use of the crosscut saw replaced the more labor-intensive method of cutting trees by ax. Furthermore, with the exhaustion of timber supplies in the North and