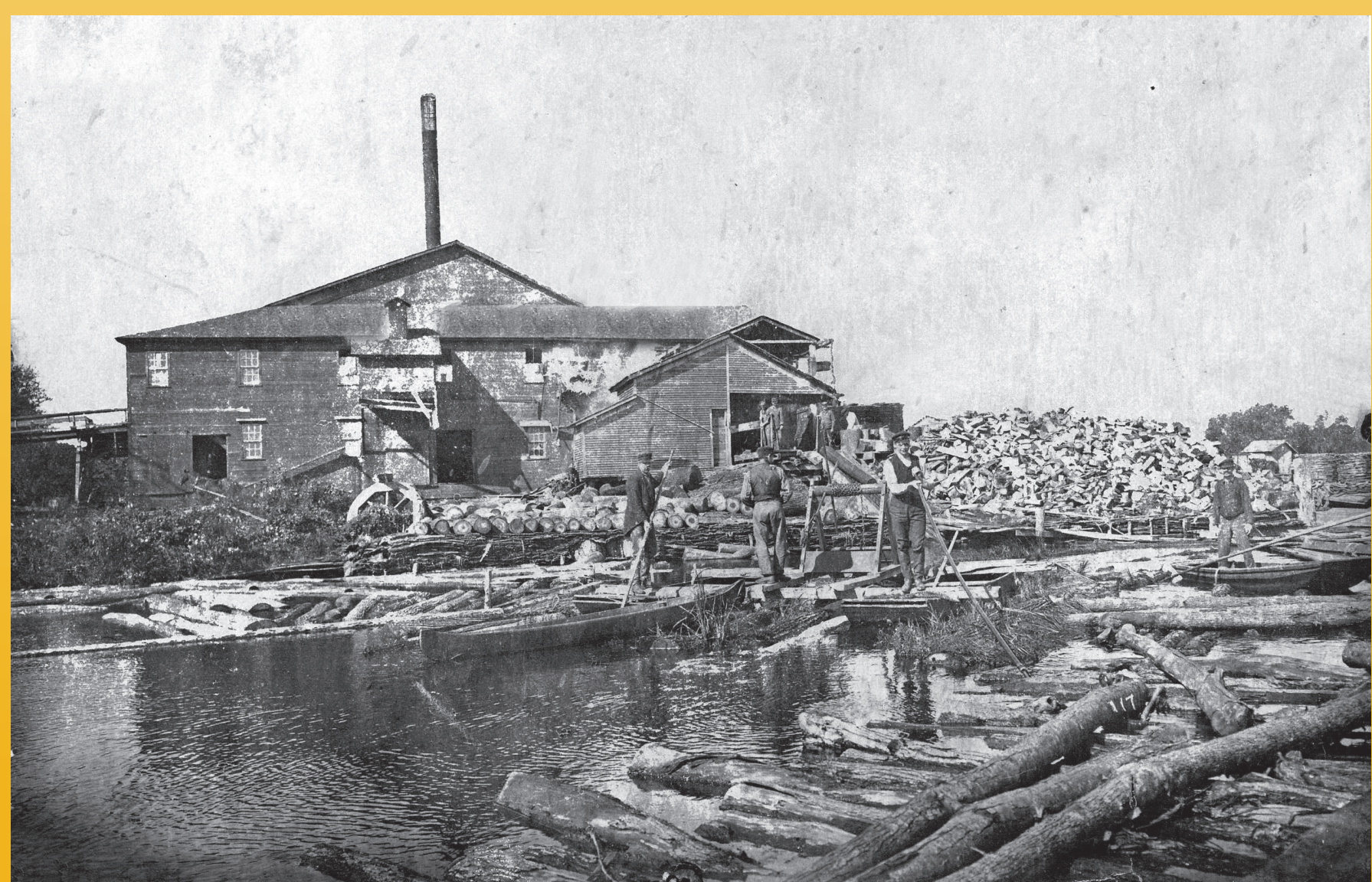


The industrial waterfront of Douglas shown in Joseph Warner's bird's-eye-view print from 1907

The inlet of water along the southern shore of the Kalamazoo River where you are standing has been known as Wade's Bayou since the 1860s. A bayou is a slow-moving section of a river, where water pools into a marshy wetland. Jonathan Wade, a former sawmill owner from nearby Singapore, purchased land here in 1851 and built a sawmill on the bayou's edge.

In 1855, Wade sold the mill to William Dutcher. This settlement grew into the village of Douglas as Dutcher modified the mill to serve new needs over time. The mill cut lumber, ground grain, milled shingles, and cut lath for construction.

The bayou was also home to other industries. In 1902 a swing bridge, near where the Blue Star Highway crosses the river today, opened to let large steamships dock in Douglas. Near the foot of the bridge, the Douglas Basket Factory operated from 1872 until 1927.



Douglas Basket Factory workers hauling in logs afloat in the bayou



George Ricker cutting bayou ice with a hand saw for the Morgan Ice Company, visible in the background



Steamer Charles McVea departing the Douglas Basket Factory

A tannery stood on Tannery Creek at the south end of Wade's Bayou until 1880.

Ice used to cool iceboxes before the invention of modern refrigeration was harvested in winter. Workers used large saws to cut blocks out of the surface, and long picks to move the blocks up conveyor belts into ice houses. Sawdust from the nearby mills was used to insulate the ice, allowing it to last well into the summer months.

Wade's Bayou has largely recovered from its industrial past. Today, it is a recreation spot, used for kayaking, boating, and fishing.



Mill building at the base of Center Street on Wade's Bayou