



Douglas factory workers with splints and baskets, circa 1907

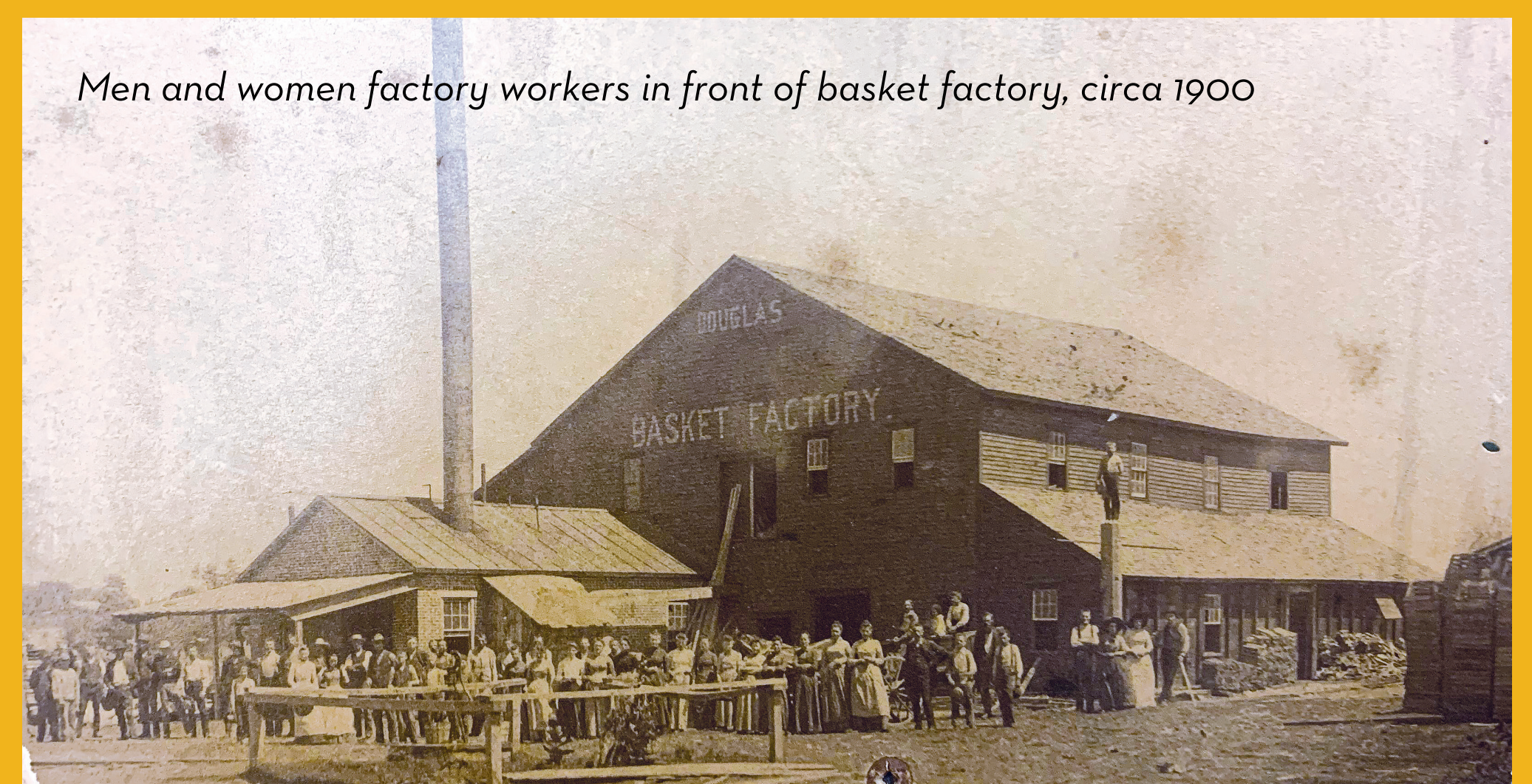
DOUGLAS

BASKET FACTORY

The Douglas Basket Factory once stood along the river at the end of the Blue Star Highway bridge in Douglas. The factory operated from 1872-1927, manufacturing crates, boxes, and baskets for use in the booming fruit industry.

A prominent feature of the local economy, the factory employed 100-300 workers, depending on the needs of the fruit crop that season. Both men and women worked at the factory including members of the local Indigenous population.

In the early years of the factory, timber was harvested from nearby forests along the Kalamazoo River. After forests were depleted in this area, trees were cut as far away as Allegan and floated down the river to Douglas. Workers steamed the logs and cut them into thin sections called veneer splints. Special machines in the factory bent and shaped the veneer splints to form each basket. Originally, hoops and nails held the baskets together, until a wire-sewing process was invented.

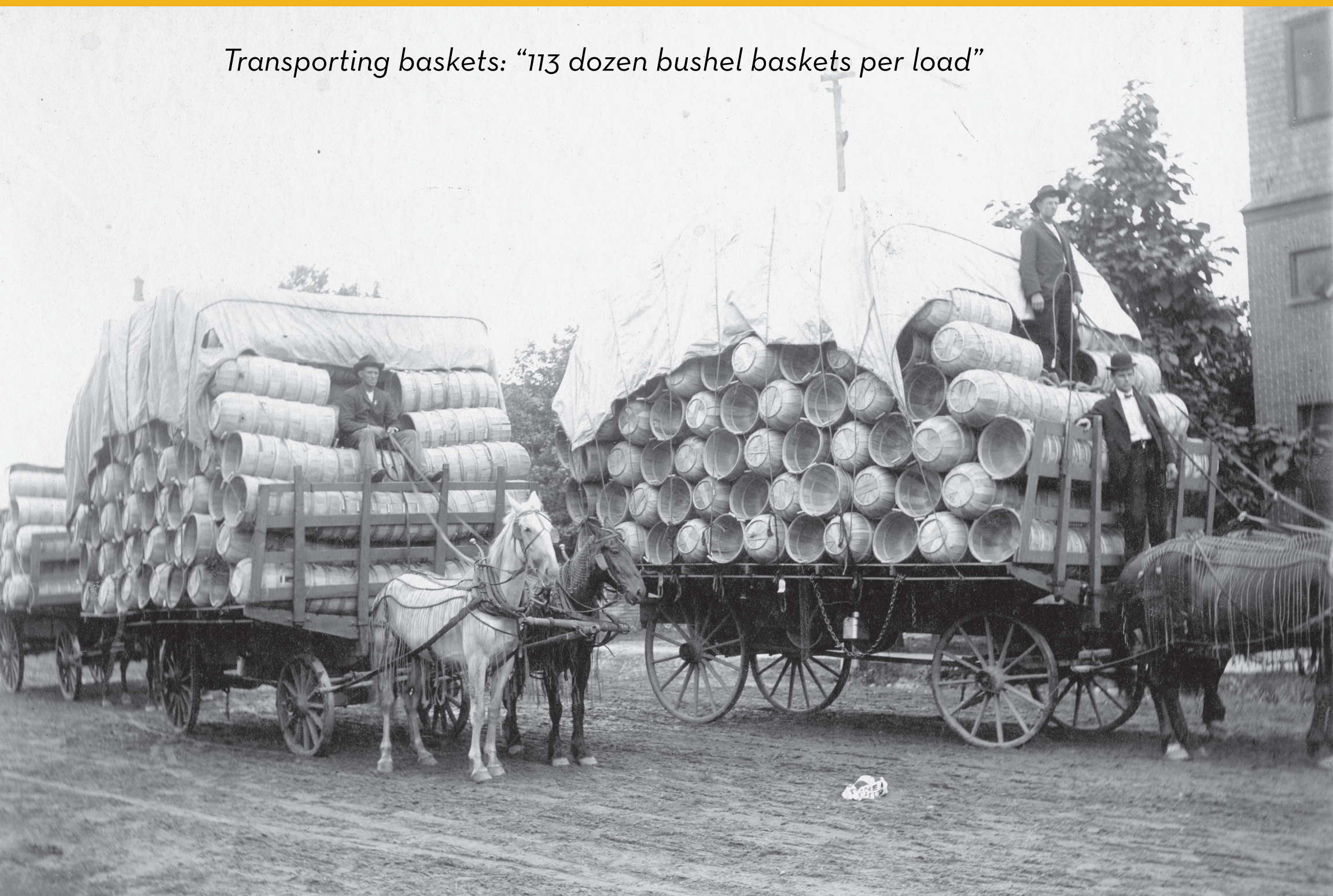


Men and women factory workers in front of basket factory, circa 1900



Douglas basket factory workers, circa 1907

Transporting baskets: "113 dozen bushel baskets per load"



On April 6, 1927, fire destroyed the Douglas Basket Factory shortly before the start of the new season. Surplus baskets from the year prior filled the warehouses and contributed to the immensity of the blaze. It is said that the fire burned so brightly it attracted automobile traffic from miles away, and that birds overhead circled the blaze. The cause of the fire is unknown, and the factory was never rebuilt. Today, a marina and residential neighborhood occupy the site.

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