

**A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CADY LUMBER COMPANY,
McNARY, LA 1911-1924**



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Cover photo:

The cover photo is of the Cady Lumber Company commissary. Note that in 1913 the McNary Lumber Company mill was added to the mill site. Each mill had a capability of producing 300,000 board feet of lumber per day. The commissary was expanded to accommodate the increased numbers of workers.

Photo credits:

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Abstract:

Thousands of sawmill towns were created across the South in the early 20th century to harvest the virgin pine forests of the South in an effort to stimulate the economy following the Civil War era. The Cady Lumber Company at McNary was one of these. Its history was like many others that were built to obtain a large financial return. The mill facility was massive and could cut about 300,000 board feet of lumber per day. The size of the mill was then doubled, and it became one of the largest sawmills in the country. Problems arose when available timberland became scarce and competitively sought. When lack of timber forced closure of the mill, an inventive solution was sought. The remarkable answer was to move the mill and its employees to a site in the Arizona mountains. This publication provides some of the background of those who led the effort and their accomplishment.

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PREFACE

In the late 19th century, steam-powered logging and milling equipment had developed to the extent that the old-growth forests of the South became a prime resource for the lumbering industry. To stimulate the economy, vast acreages of this timberland were sold by the government for prices as low as \$1.25 per acre. With a great demand for lumber for the expanding MidWest, lumbering became the economic driver of the rural South—the period became known as the “golden age of lumbering.”

Thousands of sawmill towns were created across the South to harvest the virgin forests—over 1,300 were developed in the early 20th century in Louisiana alone. Lumbering provided employment for people regardless of race and provided facilities to support their employees. In addition to housing, mills provided a commissary, schools for both White and Black students, churches, and medical care.

The margins of profit were so great that an investor could purchase a block of forestland, build an appropriate size mill operate it for about 20 years when the timber would be harvested, the mill equipment worn out, the mill closed, and the town would disappear. In the process, the investor would have made a fortune, employment would be provided for his workers, and the economy would grow. The mills provided employment for the rural southerners. As Brister (1968) noted, “even though the hours of work were long, and the wages were small when compared to the profits made... having a job in order to feed and clothe a family was the important thing.” Indeed, it was transformative. Lumbering prepared them to move into the mainstream of an industrial society (Barnett and Lueck 2020).

It is in this context that the Cady Lumber Company was formed, and the town of McNary was developed. However, in 1911 when W.M. Cady and his associates established their mill, available timberland was becoming scarce and competitively sought. When lack of timber forced closure of the mill, an inventive solution was sought, and the remarkable answer was to move the mill and its employees to a site in the Arizona mountains. The implications of this move have been studied for over a century. This publication provides some of the background of those who led the effort and their accomplishment.

BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CADY LUMBER COMPANY, McNARY, LA 1911-1924

Everett W. Lueck

William M. Cady was born in 1873 in Crowley, LA. Little is known about him, except that by 1910 he was in the banking and lumber business in New Orleans, and had been associated with both the H.F. Cady Lumber Co. of LeCompte and Alexandria, LA and the Rapides Lumber Co. of Woodworth, LA.

By 1911, he had become associated with Mr. Branch Smith of Glenmora, who operated a small sawmill west of Glenmora, and together, they made acquaintance and a partnership with James G. McNary, an El Paso, TX banker. In May 1911, together with several other partners, they incorporated the Cady Lumber Co. in Rapides Parish, LA and commenced construction of a large yellow pine mill at the new town of McNary, located 22 miles south of Alexandria on the St. Louis, Iron Mountain and Southern Railroad between the sawmill towns of Long Leaf and Glenmora, LA.

Mr. Smith, along with several local minority partners managed the construction of the mill, the town, and the logging and milling efforts. Mr. Cady managed the banking and business end of things and Mr. McNary, through his political connections in Washington DC, managed any governmental issues as well as helping to raise additional capital as needed. The mill that they constructed was capable of cutting 300,000 board feet per day, which would have made it the third largest lumber mill in Louisiana at the time, and one of the 10 largest in the south.

THE MILLS AND TIMBER RESOURCE

Although the company started with roughly 10,000 acres of pine, the acreage was scattered in and among acreage owned by Rapides Lumber, Crowell & Spencer, and others. Mr. Smith also served as the timber buyer for the company.

By 1913, the group decided to expand the McNary operation and purchased an additional 18,000 acres of pine timber followed by another 10,000 acres giving them roughly 40,000 acres of timber. To facilitate the cutting of this timber, a new company, the McNary Lumber Co., was formed in January 1913. The McNary company built a second 300,000 board foot mill about one mile from the existing mill and by doing so, created the single largest shipping point for timber between Alexandria and Lake Charles.



This made the mill complex at McNary the second largest lumber operation in the entire south, second only to the 1,000,000-board foot mill of the Great Southern Lumber Co. of Bogalusa, LA. Since the two mills did not share a common power plant, they were never recognized as such,

and most sources recognize the Gulf Lumber Co. at Fullerton (500,000 BF 1907-1933) as #2 and the Peavy-Wilson Lumber Co at Peason (400,000 BF 1917-1934) as #3 with each of the McNary mills being tied for #4. However, if one wanted to be picky, the Fullerton operation was actually two 250,000 BF mills connected to a single steam plant.

Cady, Smith, and McNary were also always trying to purchase additional timber, and they were often in competition with other lumber companies for the same timber. One of their fiercest competitors was the Crowell & Spencer Lumber Co. located just north of McNary, at Long Leaf. The two companies first sparred over timber in 1912, when Crowell & Spencer won out and purchased the Calcasieu Pine Timber Co with land south and east of Glenmora in Evangeline and Allen Parishes. They would sort of meet again four years later.

RAILROAD EQUIPMENT AND ACCESS PROBLEMS

It is known that the Cady railroad operation had at least 6 locomotives, although some sources give it as many as 10, records and references can only be found for 6. Cady also formed a common carrier railroad, which originally ran into the woods north and west of McNary and was used to connect the various woods operation together. This railroad, the Glenmora and Western, also served to allow Cady to physically move its finished lumber from the McNary mills to the Iron Mountain railroad connection and thus obtain the origination fee and part of the rate for shipping the cars of lumber.



Cady's demand for empty cars for loading often exceeded 40 to 50 cars per day or as many as 300 cars per week and production from the mills was often cut back due to the lack of cars to move the output. There are numerous letters in the files of correspondence between Cady and the Iron Mountain Railroad over car supply between 1913 and 1920. The car supply issue was so

frustrating that Cady, with the help of others, contrived a way to obtain both empty cars and move loads by a rather interesting if not entirely legal method between 1913 and 1917. The Red River and Gulf Railroad (RR&G) owned by Crowell & Spencer connected Lecompte, LA with the Louisiana Sawmill Company Mill, located on the southwest side of Glenmora, at Bolton. The Louisiana Sawmill tram railroad then went west across the Iron Mountain to connect with and use portions of the Cady lumber tram to access its timber to the northwest. The method thus used was that the RR&G would solicit empty cars from its railroad connections in Lecompte, the Texas & Pacific, the Rock Island, and the Texas & New Orleans. Those cars would then be delivered to the Louisiana Sawmill Co tram at Bolton and moved at night over their tram road to the mills at McNary. The loads from the McNary mills would follow a reverse route to get to the RR&G where they again became legal common carrier loads. How the car accounting and rate making on all that skullduggery is not known but the mills kept running.

The story of how Cady finally solved the car crisis is also tied up in why the Louisiana operation ultimately ended in 1924, instead of still being there today.

ATTEMPTS AT TIMBER PROCUREMENT

In 1916, the heirs of Jay Gould, facing bankruptcy from the cost overruns associated with the construction of the Western Pacific RR, and George Gould's attempt to build a truly transcontinental system under Gould control were forced to begin attempts to sell two large tracts of hitherto unlogged timber in western Louisiana. These tracts were left over from the land grants given to the New Orleans and Pacific RR, which were purchased by Jay Gould to finance the construction of what became the Texas and Pacific RR. The first of these tracts was owned by a Gould corporation called the Southland Lumber Co. Southland owned 165,000 acres of land and timber in Vernon, Natchitoches, and Sabine parishes.

At the same time, Cady and Smith, realizing at the rate that they were cutting and processing timber might have no more than a 7-to-8-year life for their mills, went looking for more timber. Cady and McNary (who was then an Assistant Secretary of the Treasury) soon found themselves in negotiations with Frank Jay Gould on behalf of the family. They thought that they had an agreement and went to New York to close the deal. According to James McNary, when they got there, Frank Gould told them that they had gotten an offer of \$1 per acre more from Fredrick Weyerhaeuser, and that he would sell to the Weyerhaeuser if Cady chose not to match the offer. Despite McNary's protestations, Cady stormed out and the deal fell through. Forty-two years of timber escaped Cady on that day.

As it turned out, Weyerhaeuser was playing both ends against the middle with Frank Gould. While he was negotiating with Gould, he was working on a similar timber purchase in Mississippi, which he eventually closed for less money and then backed out on Frank Gould.

The consequence of this was that within days of Weyerhaeuser pulling the plug on Gould for the Southland Timber, C.T. Crowell, using his banking connections in California and with his son-in-law, J.K. Wadley, arrived in New York and made the deal with Frank Gould. While the Crowell and Wadley families could not manage the purchase by themselves, by creating a

consortium with the Kurth interests of East Texas, and the Peavy interests of Texarkana to finance the deal it was made to happen.

The very next year, another stand of Gould lands adjacent to the Southland Timber, known as the Gould Timber, was put up by the family for sale. As Cady was not welcome in New York, this timber was ultimately sold to a group of investors operating under the umbrella of the Missouri Lumber and Mining Co. of West Eminence, MO.

The Southland deal closed in January, 1917, and the Gould deal closed in 1918 and from that point forward, Cady and McNary, facing the fact that their timber would cut out by the end of 1923, went looking for ways to maximize the income from the existing properties and try to sell what they could before leaving Louisiana.

CLOSURE OF THE MILLS

The first thing that they did was to realize that if the Crowell & Spencer group was going to log the Southland Timber, they would have to have rail access, and the Cady tram way was already more than half way from either Glenmora or Long Leaf to the location of the timber. By the end of February 1917, the Red River and Gulf (the Crowell common carrier RR) had surveyed a railroad from Long Leaf Jct. (north of Long Leaf) to Hornbeck, passing through all the lands retained by Crowell & Spencer, Alexandria Lumber (Crowell & Wadley) and Vernon Parish Lumber (Kurth interests). Cady and McNary immediately went to Stamps Crowell and offered to sell the westernmost 15 miles of the Cady tramway to the RR&G to give it a head start, and to cash out on a railroad line that they would soon not need. Crowell & Spencer immediately purchased the railroad for \$103,000 giving Cady the right to run their logging trains over it for as long as necessary (which turned out to be 1921). It would be two years, however, before the RR&G would run trains over the line, but after 1919 it became an integral part of the railroad through 1945.

At the same time, Cady, McNary and Smith, still conscious of the problem of car supply, worked out an agreement to extend the northern branch of the Glenmora and Western to intersect the RR&G line from Long Leaf to Lecompte at the place where the spur to the Cady gravel pits switched off. They also insisted that Cady gravel would now be able to run its own trains to Lecompte, instead of depending on the RR&G to move its cars. In one stroke, the problem of car supply, origination fees, and rates was solved. Cady simply paid the RR&G a flat per car fee to move its traffic over the RR&G.

While all of this was going on, the Missouri company was completing its negotiations. Ever mindful that the assets at McNary would be worthless in a few years, Cady offered to sell one of the two mills, log cars, locomotives and a ½ interest in the tram road to the Missouri company. Had this deal gone through, it would have extended Cady operations at McNary, LA until 1930, and would have done the same for the Missouri company. The Missouri company decided to send 50% of its logs to the Louisiana Long Leaf Lumber Co. at Fisher, which it already owned, and purchased the previously mentioned Louisiana Sawmill Co. plant southeast of Glenmora, to manage the rest, once again frustrating Cady.

From that point forward, with the urging of James McNary, W. M. Cady spent a great deal of time looking for somewhere else to go and for more ways to sustain operations at McNary, LA.

One of those ideas was to grow potatoes on the cut over timberlands northeast of Glenmora. Not much about this operation other than what is in the Glenmora paper, but Potato Farm road still is on the maps northwest of McNary.

WEST TO ARIZONA.

In 1923, McNary and Cady decided on purchasing a lumber company at Cooley, AZ in the White Mountains, and closed the deal in November, just before the McNary plant cut out early in 1924. The Cooley plant had never been a financial success because of the acute labor shortage in that area, which both men recognized as a major issue. Mr. Cady, who lived in McNary (the house still exists and is being restored) was, despite some of his flaws, a very considerate person, and close to many of his employees. Thus, he suggested to James McNary, and convinced him that they should offer the chance to all their employees to come to Cooley, which they would rename McNary, AZ. (For the record, this gave James McNary three towns named for him, in Louisiana, Texas and Arizona). Most of the employees accepted Cady on his offer and decided to migrate to Arizona. It is doubtful that any of them were prepared though for winter in the White Mountains, coming from central Louisiana.

On February 15, 1924, the first special train carrying mostly Black laborers left McNary, LA headed for McNary, AZ. These workers were to start construction of the dwellings and buildings needed to house the great migration to follow. During the next several weeks and months, materials and supplies followed the same route to Arizona, as the town and mill sites were denuded of anything that would be needed. In April, the entire town of McNary, LA was sold to L. Leo Judice, of Lafayette, LA. On April 25, the second special left McNary with the remainder of the Black employees and their household effects including their automobiles. The special was 23 cars long and was probably the first and only time that these people ever travelled in Pullman sleeping cars. Just like a military train, a kitchen was set up in a baggage car, but meals were then served in real dining cars. Household animals were apparently transported by stock cars in regular freight trains.

With the sale of the town, and dispatch of the labor force to Arizona, all that remained was for Mr. Cady to dispose of the remainder of his Louisiana assets and debts.

DISPOSAL OF LOUISIANA ASSETS

First, he settled a \$500,000 debt to Mr. Smith by deeding him all the 40,000 acres of land owned by Cady and McNary Lumber companies.

Second, he sold Cady Gravel Co, and the pits outside of Forest Hill to the major aggregate supplier, Gifford-Hill Corp. There was only one problem with the sale, and the effects of this problem would resound all the way through World War II. Cady sold the Forest Hill pits with the promise of installing a gravel washer. But he was broke. He owed Branch Smith \$500,000 and Mr. McNary was not going to loan him money to get him out of his personal problems.

However, like the good banker that he was, Mr. Cady also saw a way out of his problems through an alternative source of cash. His third problem would be the solution to the second problem. Cady and McNary both owned minority interests in the A.J. Higgins Lumber and Export Co of southeastern Louisiana. However, together they controlled the company and Cady had McNary's proxy. He was also the treasurer of the company. Higgins Lumber Co. and the D.V. Johnson Co. (a Higgins partner also) loaned Cady the money for the gravel washer and its installation, and then Cady left for Arizona. Shortly, Higgins could not meet his payroll, as not only was there no money in the bank, but there was also not even a bank account for Higgins Lumber Co. at the Cady bank. Higgins Lumber Co. was out of business. It owned a gravel washer in the middle of the Gifford-Hill pits but had no way to get to it. Higgins won an injunction claiming ownership of the gravel washer but did not win access to it in the pit, and of course it was not worth nearly what it had cost anyway.



INFLUENCE ON ANDREW J. HIGGINS' FUTURE

So, the final act of W.M. Cady in Louisiana was to force Andrew Jackson Higgins to fall back on the only other thing that he knew how to do, which was to build boats. Thus, he built boats for people who lived in the swamps and along the shores of the Gulf Coast. And when the oil fields were found in the swamps, he built boats for the oil field workers. The oil field boats became known as the "Eureka" boat, and an almost identical version of that boat became the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps first landing craft, the LCP. The 25,000 descendants of the LCP (several variations of the landing craft) became the "Higgins Boats" of World War II, without which the allies never could have won the war.

McNARY TODAY

Today, all that remains in McNary, LA of the Cady Lumber Co, and its 11 years are 10 or 11 of the company houses, including Mr. Cady's house at 10 E. Cady Avenue. Several of the remaining houses have been kept up and are now active family homes in their 113th year. All but one of these houses are located East of the Railroad tracks. Currently, the village of McNary has a population of about 200, much less than the about 3,000 who lived there when the mills operated.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

In the era of the “golden age of lumbering” there are many interesting stories of how sawmills and their supporting towns were developed. None is more fascinating than the one about McNary, LA. When their timber resource was depleted, the owners took the bold step to move their mill, town, and employees to the mountains of Arizona. This began the movement of sawmill workers to the West for better jobs as their southern employment ended.

KNOWN INFORMATION ABOUT CADY SAWMILL LOCOMOTIVES AND LOGGING EQUIPMENT

Engines

- #1, 2-6-0 Porter #5001, 1911
- #2 2 truck, 20-ton Heisler #1230, purchased used
- #3 unknown, probably a used 2-6-0
- #4 2-6-0 Porter #5338, 1913
- #5 2-6-0 Porter # 5474, 1913
- #6 Unknown, but mentioned several times



Logging Equipment

McGiffert Loader #1035 Built by Clyde Iron Works, 1913 for McNary Lumber
McGiffert Loader #1036 Built by Clyde Iron Works, 1913 for McNary Lumber

Clyde Skidder #226, Built by Clyde Iron Works, 1913 for McNary Lumber
Clyde Skidder #227, Built by Clyde Iron Works, 1913 for McNary Lumber
Clyde Skidder #272, Built by Clyde Iron Works, 1915 for Cady Lumber

McGiffert Loader #1036 was sold to Alexandria Lumber Co. at Alco, La in 1923, and finally, would up be scrapped by Crowell Long Leaf Lumber at Long Leaf, LA 1954.

One of the Skidders, probably #272, followed the same path as loader #1036, passing through the hands of Alexandria Lumber, to Meridian Lumber and finally to Crowell Longleaf and was scrapped at Long Leaf in 1954.

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