

IMPORTANCE OF OUR FORESTS

More than any other material, wood has contributed to the social, cultural and industrial establishment and expansion of the average community in the United States. Wood has been nearly as essential for life as food itself. Much of our national and local wealth may be credited directly to the vast industrial enterprises which are engaged in the utilization of our forests and their conversion into wooden articles.

In early days, the rapid expansion of agriculture and industry, predicated upon lavish use of wood, insured the permanence of the Colonies. Of wood the home was built, the furniture fashioned, and the implements of work modeled. In those days metals were scarce. Brick and stone construction was slow and expensive. Cement was unknown. On the other hand, wood was available everywhere, its supply unlimited, and its cost moderate.

The era of industrial expansion, which started shortly after the Civil War, created new material demands. The general application of steam power to industry demanded metals. Railroad building and operation required iron. The budding electrical industries demanded copper. Urban growth demanded skyscrapers. Ocean transportation outgrew the sailing vessel. The motor vehicle replaced the wagon and carriage.

Technical advances in processes and lowering of relative manufacturing costs made these modernizing steps possible. But in spite of greater use of metals and other materials, old established uses of wood grew tremendously, and new uses, as much a part of the modernizing process as the use of metals, swelled to greater proportions the total quantity of wood used by the Nation.

In 1869, for instance, the United States used but slightly more than twelve billion feet of lumber. Practically all was supplied from New England, the Middle Atlantic and the South Atlantic Coast States. The industrial development which took place in the older communities, and the industrial and agricultural growth which occurred in the Middle West created tremendous demands for lumber during the last half of the nineteenth century. Between 1869 and 1907 our lumber production and consumption increased nearly a billion feet per year.