



Identity and the Beaver Island Lumber Company

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Introduction

The environment of Beaver Island, Michigan supported **logging**. The transition from fishing to logging as a primary occupation with the **Beaver Island Lumber Company** (1903-1915) was the original study subject.

However, I discovered that there was more of an incorporation of logging into the preexisting pattern of doing multiple job to survive. The **identity** of an islander was one who is adaptable and resourceful, and the lumber company helped enforce that identity.

Figure 1: Indian Schedule page from 1910 census of St. James, Beaver Island

Methods

The project was part of a field course, "Historical Archaeology of Irish America." The excavation site was a homestead not directly impacted by logging, so I used:

- **oral histories** collected in the town of St. James from individuals whose families were involved in logging or interacted with the Native Americans
- **print sources:** books (*Journal of Beaver Island History*, *The Elders Speak*) and maps
- **academic papers** dealing with theme of logging in Great Lakes area
- **interviewing historians.**

The sources offered an overall concept of identity related to the time the BILC operated. The sources helped make sense of the census data (Figure 1), which showed if what individuals identified as their occupation (thus reflecting identity) changed with the arrival of the lumber company. The census from 1880, 1900, 1910, and 1920 offered sense of the demographic before, during, and after the BILC. I tracked Native American populations to see if they identified with the company in occupation or if their movement patterns were influenced by the company (Figure 2).

Results

I did not see a distinct shift in identity related to lumbering. Most who were not fishers or farmers were listed as "laborer." The map shows some Native Americans were involved in logging, but, in the census, few identified specifically with it.

Many full time loggers were not from the established island population. **Natives and locals incorporated logging into seasonal occupations.** Doing more than one thing to survive reflects the **identity as an islander more-so than identity tied to specific occupation.**



Figure 1: Logging on Beaver Island

Discussion

Difficulties in answering the research questions mainly came from the difficulty of tracking down information. There is not a lot of Native information, so I cannot be sure if Native American increase in numbers in the census during the BILC time is actually related to logging. I also was not able to talk to any Native American descendants, so the information I have on them is from the census, scholars, and descendants of their neighbors on the island.

For further research, it would be interesting to conduct individual case studies to give further merit to the broad conclusion. I also would like to talk to Native American descendants directly and explore further overlap with Native and Irish communities on the Island (Figure 3)

Figure 3: Native American couple performing traditional Irish dance

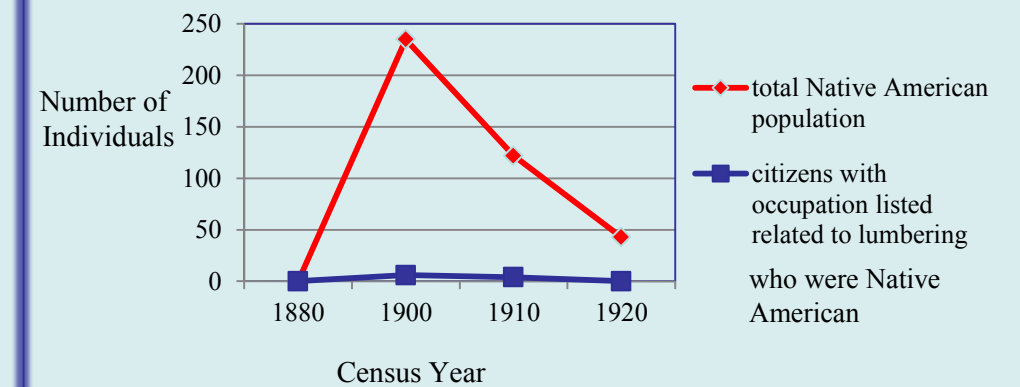


Conclusion

The census records did not support that people changed what they saw as their primary occupation (and thus their identity) with the arrival of the BILC. The island as a whole was changed by increased income, more connections to the mainland, more infrastructure, and more diversity.

The **homogeneity of the overall Irish identity on the island decreased**, in the sense that more people who identified with logging arrived with the advent of the BILC and that the physical environment of the island changed, but **the BILC did not cause the individual identities of the already-established islanders to change.** The broad category of "laborer" was often listed, which may support the theme of identity as a resourceful islander who does various jobs to survive. The identity of the islander predominated.

Figure 2: Native Population v. Logging Occupation



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