

## Crabb Gas Engine Company

The sawmill at Gilbertson Conservation Area was built by Crabb Gas Engine Co. Crabb Gas Engine Company was organized in 1910 by Isiah E. Crabb and J.W. Dwyer.

Crabb engines were built in 3, 5, and 10 horsepower sizes: with the 10 HP model consisting of two 5 horsepower units coupled together. The Crabb plant was moved from West Union to Independence, Iowa in October 1918. Engine production ended at that time. At Independence, custom machine work continued, and in addition, the firm rebuilt large tractor engines for customers from all over the United States, Canada, and South America.

By the late Twenties however, this trade had diminished considerably, and so it was necessary to find new fields of endeavor. Sometime during the Twenties, Crabb began building sawmills. Although he had an active hand in the development of a planetary gear arrangement used as a feed mechanism on the mill, this, along with several other inventions, was not patented.



Sawmills and general machine work continued until Mr. Crabb sold the business and retired in 1952. At Mr. Crabb's insistence, the name was changed by the new owners who called the firm The Independence Machine Company.

Source: Buchanan County, Iowa Historic Society; Crabb Gas Engine Co.  
<https://www.buchanancountyhistory.com/news.php?newsid=53>



### Special Thanks to:

**Steve Woods & Carol Katsumes** – Donation of tin roof to make project possible

**Mark Sedlmayr** – Assistance in construction of building

**Dale Kittleson** – Designing and assistance in construction of building

### More information:

More information can be found at these locations:

Silos and Smokestack's location "The Sawmill Museum" in Clinton, Iowa. Website: <http://www.thesawmillmuseum.org/exhibits.html>

Iowa State Extension; Forestry Extension; Timber Management  
Website: [https://www.extension.iastate.edu/forestry/timber\\_management/timber.html](https://www.extension.iastate.edu/forestry/timber_management/timber.html)

Fayette County Conservation on Facebook:  
<https://www.facebook.com/fayettedcountyconservation/>

Wildrose Timberworks on Facebook:  
<https://www.facebook.com/Wild-Rose-Timberworks-343138078628/>



January, 2019

# Timber Industry in Northeast Iowa



### **Fayette County Conservation Board**

18673 Lane Road  
Fayette, Iowa 52142  
563-422-5146  
563-425-3613

[www.fayettedcountyconservation.org](http://www.fayettedcountyconservation.org)



# History of the Timber Industry in Iowa

## Iowa's Woods

Iowa's 2.1 million acres of woodlands, representing 5.7% of the total land area, is a most valuable resource for the state. Its value includes the beauty of the woodlands, the habitat for wildlife, site protection for hilly landscapes, and a significant contribution to the Iowa economy through forestland production of veneer and saw logs, primary manufacturing of those logs into lumber and secondary processing into finished product.



Iowa's woodlands are almost all privately owned, with the majority still owned by farmers as part of the farm operation. Public ownership including the major state forests (Shimek, Yellow River, Stephens and Loess Hills), state parks and the county park system consist of approximately 8% of the forest land area. National ownership of woodlands in Iowa is almost non-existent; the state does not have a National Forest and federal ownership consists of National Monuments and Wildlife areas.

Iowa's forests are mostly deciduous or hardwood trees; the only significant softwoods or conifers native to the state are red cedar, white pine and balsam fir in northeast Iowa. The remainder of Iowa woodlands are hardwood forest with great species diversity. In the lumber industry, hardwoods refer to deciduous broad leaf trees such as oaks, walnut, basswood and cottonwood and softwoods refers to conifer or evergreen species. The designation "hardwood" or "softwood" has nothing to do with the hardness of the wood. Iowa's climate and soils contribute to some of the best hardwoods in the world, including black walnut, white and red oak, white ash and black cherry. The value and demand for these species is well recognized.

Iowa also produces many other species of hardwoods which are used for wood products but less recognized because of their relative scarcity. Other hardwoods marketed in Iowa are basswood, sugar and silver maple, river birch, hickories, black and green ash, honey locust, Kentucky coffee tree, butternut, red mulberry, sycamore, cottonwood, aspens, willows, boxelder and other oak species. These trees are used for furniture, crafts, cabinets, novelties, carvings, pallets, cooperage, etc.

Forest crops are long term investments; many of the species harvested today in Iowa are 80 to 120 years of age before they have reached harvest size. Most trees will have some lumber volume and value as they approach 16 inches in diameter, but will attain much greater volume and value as they get larger.



Landowners usually sell trees as stumpage or standing trees, and the value per board foot for walnut may range from as little as \$.15 to as much as \$15 per board foot. Value for other species ranges from \$.10 to \$3.00 per board foot. Value is affected by species, quality of the trees, ease of logging, size of the timber sale and limitations or restrictions placed on the timber sale.

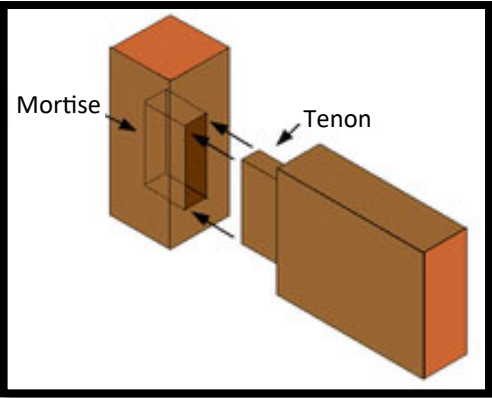
When woodland owners make the decision market or sell their timber, they should utilize a forester to assist in the process and solicit competitive bids from loggers. Iowa has more than 200 bonded timber buyers and loggers. Timber buyers inspect and submit bids for the trees for sale. If they are selected, they should enter into a contract agreement with the landowner, outlining the agreement on both sides, including what is to be harvested and limitations on the logger. In most cases, the landowner is paid shortly after signing a contract or at least before any harvesting is done. The logger is responsible for harvesting the standing trees and is usually allowed 12 to 18 months to complete the harvest. Loggers often avoid harvesting in the late spring and summer to minimize degradation of the cut trees. Logging during the cooler months results in less degradation of quality in the logs during the time period from cutting the tree until it is processed by the veneer or sawmill.

Source: ISU Forestry Extension; Timber Management  
[https://www.extension.iastate.edu/forestry/timber\\_management/timber.html](https://www.extension.iastate.edu/forestry/timber_management/timber.html)

# The Sawmill at Gilbertson Conservation Area

Although currently this sawmill is not in operation, it is still a valuable resource for education purposes. The building around the saw had fallen down in dismay. In 2017 Fayette County Conservation as well as several volunteers and donors reconstructed the building surrounding the saw.

The reconstruction was designed by Dale Kittleson from Decorah, Iowa who is actually a relative to the Gilbertson brothers. He and his business partners own Wildrose Timberworks in Decorah. Dale and his partners make mortis and tenon buildings which date back several thousands of years. Mortis and tenon buildings are constructed to fit together almost like a giant puzzle, as shown in the photo above.



This sawmill was placed here and used primarily by Millard and Hildor Gilbertson. Millard lived in what is now the park ranger house and Hildor lived at the farmstead just west of the sawmill location.

This very sawmill has helped build several of the houses, sheds, and barns in the surrounding area. In fact, most of the buildings on these two farmsteads were built with lumber that was cut at this sawmill site.