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Ford Sawmill Restoration Collection

MS-1023

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English
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Michigan Technological University Archives and Copper Country
Historical Collections

1400 Townsend Drive
Houghton 49931

copper@mtu.edu

URL: <http://www.lib.mtu.edu/mtuarchives/>

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Summary Information

Repository:	Michigan Technological University Archives and Copper Country Historical Collections
Creator:	Albee, Stephen, 1938-2020
Title:	Ford sawmill restoration collection
ID:	MS-1023
Date [inclusive]:	1997-1998
Physical Description:	0.23 cubic feet 1 manuscript box
Language of the Material:	English .
Mixed Materials [box]:	1
Abstract:	Collection, 1997-1998, documenting the restoration and rededication of the Ford sawmill in Alberta, Michigan.

Preferred Citation

MS-1023, Ford Sawmill Restoration Collection, Michigan Technological University Archives and Copper Country Historical Collections, Houghton, Michigan.

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Biographical Note

Stephen Ives Albee was born to Russell and Jane Albee in Oshkosh, Wisconsin on July 6, 1938. Albee graduated from Oshkosh High School in 1956 and enlisted with the U.S. Army after graduation. He served four years in Europe and married his wife, Judith (Eckstein), in 1963 upon returning home to the U.S. He graduated from UW-Oshkosh in 1964 and earned a graduate degree in Urban Planning from UW-Milwaukee. Albee worked as an urban planner in Wisconsin prior to his position with the Western Upper Peninsula Planning and Development Region. Among his contributions, Albee played an important role in the planning and establishment of the Keweenaw National Historical Park and the restoration, rededication,

and interpretation of the Alberta Sawmill, now the Ford Center, in Alberta, Michigan. Albee died in October 2020.

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Historical Note

The mill at Alberta was developed by the Ford Motor Company in the 1930's, during Ford's expansion of its lumbering operations in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. Ford operated several mills and wood product fabrication facilities in the UP, including operations at Munising, Big Bay, Pequaming, Sidnaw, and a large, multi-purpose complex in Iron Mountain/Kingsford. Alberta, however, was designed by Ford to serve not only as a lumber milling site, but also as an experiment in community building. Ford's experience with village industries – developing manufacturing facilities in smaller towns or rural areas – dated to 1918 with the creation of small factories along river sites in southeastern lower Michigan. Ford's plan for Alberta included a community of homes and schools to be built at the mill site, with each worker logging a sixty-acre company parcel and farming a two-acre farm plot. The idea was to provide double security for workers by conducting winter logging operations and summer milling and farming activities. Ultimately, Ford's plans never came to fruition at Alberta. Although the mill started operation on September 1, 1936, the company soon turned to outside jobbers to provide logs to what eventually became a year-round operation. The soil proved difficult to farm, and deer ate what few crops could be grown. With its well-constructed company housing and schools, Alberta continued as a good example of a small company mill town. But lacking any stores, churches, post office, bank, or doctor, it never became the self-contained village Ford intended. Ford continued intermittent production at the site until June 30, 1954. The mill, housing, schools, and over 1700 acres of adjacent timberland were bequeathed to the Michigan College of Mining and Technology on November 30, 1954, the gift of property having passed through the Ford Motor Company Fund. The site was renamed the Ford Forestry Center and currently operates as an experimental research station, educational laboratory, and learning center for the School of Forestry and Wood Products at Michigan Technological University. On March 17, 1997, the Ford Motor Company fund made a contribution of \$100,000 toward the rehabilitation and restoration of the mill as an interpretive center for the general public. Shortly thereafter, a committee consisting of MTU administrators, faculty and staff, as well as retired Ford employees and local community sponsors, was organized to carry out the funded restoration project, prepare interpretive exhibits, and establish operating procedures for the site.

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Scope and Contents

Collection, 1997-1998, documenting the restoration and rededication of the Ford sawmill in Alberta, Michigan. The collection includes scripts for the proposed interpretive exhibit, video, and brochure; reports from the Michigan Technological University School of Forestry, Advisory Committee correspondence, and research-based reports and thesis on the history of the Alberta sawmill. Also included in the collection are newspaper clippings on the history of the sawmill, its restoration, and rededication in 1998.

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Administrative Information

Publication Statement

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Controlled Access Headings

- Committees

- Historic sites -- Conservation and restoration -- Michigan -- L'Anse
- Sawmills -- Michigan -- Alberta
- Correspondence
- Newspapers
- Reports

Collection Inventory

Title/Description	Instances	
Alberta interpretation exhibit, video, and brochure, 1997	box 1	folder 1
Ford sawmill restoration interim report, School of Forestry and Wood Products, October 1997	box 1	folder 2
Ford Sawmill Advisory Committee correspondence, 1997-1998	box 1	folder 3
Ford Center analysis report, business policy class, Summer 1998	box 1	folder 4
Pequaming and Alberta: Henry Ford's model towns, thesis, Brian E. Clevon, 1997	box 1	folder 5
Newspaper clippings, 1997-1998	box 1	folder 6