

## THE STORY OF THE PENNSYLVANIA LUMBER MUSEUM



*Our mission: The Pennsylvania Lumber Museum serves its diverse community by actively working to preserve and share the history of Pennsylvania's forests, inspiring our audience to become better stewards of Pennsylvania's forest resources and heritage. The Pennsylvania Lumber Museum is administered by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission and is actively supported by the Pennsylvania Lumber Museum Associates, a non-profit community-based organization.*

The concept of a 'Pennsylvania lumber museum' started in the early 1960s with the Penn-York Lumberman's Club, an organization comprised of individual lumber industry professionals, businesses, and trade organizations (still an active organization today). At that time, the club sponsored a major event in the nearby town of Galeton, PA, known as the *Woodsmen's Carnival*. The carnival brought together lumberjacks, craftsmen, vendors, businesses, and demonstrators for a weekend-long celebration of the lumber industry. The popular event attracted thousands of repeat annual visitors. It also brought awareness of the state's rich lumbering heritage to a national audience. Its popularity planted a seed of interest among citizens and government officials for a new "heritage" museum that would present this rich history to residents and visitors in the Commonwealth. Working together with the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC), the PYL Club began to develop ideas and gather support for what would become the Pennsylvania Lumber Museum. They also started devoting a portion of the proceeds of their Woodsmen's Carnival event to purchase and restore artifacts and exhibit materials that would later be showcased in the new museum.

Groundbreaking for the Pennsylvania Lumber Museum began in the late 1960s. Legislative budget battles in 1970 eliminated its funding, and the museum was forced to temporarily close its doors after a public dedication ceremony. The official grand opening took place in 1972. The first phase of construction created the visitors center and associated exhibits. Subsequent developments in the 1970s added the lumber camp, sawmill, mill pond, Shay locomotive and engine house, and picnic pavilion. The chestnut CCC cabin and Barnhart log loader exhibits were added to the site in the 1990s. The Brookville switch engine and tannery exhibit were completed in 2004; the birch still in 2012, the Webber cabin in 2018, and the Eastern Loggers model railroad exhibit in 2022.

The Penn-York Lumberman's Club continues to actively support the museum. You can find out more about this organization at: <http://www.pennyork.org>. The *Woodsmen Show*, an annual tradition for more than 60 years, continues to delight thousands of visitors each year. It takes place at Cherry Springs State Park near Galeton, Pennsylvania, and is sponsored by the Galeton Rotary Club. It attracts top lumberjack competitors from all over the world. Information about this event can be found at <http://www.woodsmenshow.com>.

### **PA Lumber Museum Visitor Center Renovation Project: 2012-2015**

The latest major project completed at the museum was a renovation and expansion of the visitor center that added 7,000 square feet of new space, nearly doubling the size of the previous building. The project was designed by Larson Design Group of Williamsport, PA. The prime contractors responsible for construction were Caldwell, Heckles & Egan Inc., Lancaster (general contractor); Silvertip Inc., Lewisburg

(HVAC); W.C. Eshenaur & Son Inc., Harrisburg (plumbing); and A&MP Electric, Guys Mills (electrical). The exhibit project involved numerous staff, volunteers, and local partners working with Hilferty Museum Planning and Exhibit Design of Athens, Ohio, and Studio Displays of Pineville, North Carolina.

The new core exhibit, “Challenges and Choices in Pennsylvania’s Forests,” explores the growth of Pennsylvania’s lumber industry, the devastation and revival of the state’s forests, and the current public and private efforts to maintain a “working forest.” The artifact-rich exhibit includes a significant section on the Civilian Conservation Corps, highlighting its impact on the state parks and forests of Pennsylvania and the personal stories of men whose lives were changed by their enrollment in the program. “Challenge Silhouettes” represent multiple perspectives from the past and present, inviting visitors to consider their own role in the ongoing story of PA’s forests.

Low-tech interactive exhibits define unfamiliar terms and concepts and simulate activities such as guiding a log raft downriver, chopping a notch in a tree with an ax, and cutting down a tree using a crosscut saw. Visitors are also asked to share their thoughts on ways to sustain healthy forests that balance economic, recreational, and environmental needs. The exhibit uses historic and contemporary images to create a sense of immersion in the forest and to humanize the story of the lumber industry, the rise of professional forestry, and the involvement of government agencies in forest management. “See It Here” and “Go See It” labels connect exhibit content to other interpretive venues on-site at the Lumber Museum, and to several state parks and public sites in proximity to the museum.

The new visitor center has been incredibly well-received since the grand re-opening in May 2015. Attendance increased by 50 percent in the year following the opening, with over 15,000 total visitors coming to enjoy the new exhibits and amenities. With the addition of the 2,100 square-foot program room, the Lumber Museum has become an important civic and social hub in the local community, playing host to organizational meetings, educational seminars and familial gatherings like weddings, baby showers and reunions. The quality of the beautiful and engaging new exhibits has been acknowledged by the presentation of numerous awards from the Pennsylvania Federation of Museums and the American Association for State and Local History.

### **Outdoor Exhibits and Events**

Multiple, expansive outdoor exhibits are located throughout the 15-acre museum campus. These include a re-created early 20<sup>th</sup> century lumber camp, the museum’s popular 70-ton Shay geared-locomotive, and the only restored Model 10 Barnhart log loader in the nation. A rustic log cabin built by the Civilian Conservation Corps in 1936 showcases the talents and craftsmanship of these dedicated citizens. Other exhibits include a steam-powered sawmill which is operated three-times a year, a 1945 Brookville switch engine used at a tannery in Elk County, a birch still, the cabin of DCNR forester and outdoor advocate Bob Webber, and a Sustainable Forestry Trail that loops through forty acres of forest in the valley surrounding Commissioner Run.

The museum’s BARK PEELERS’ FESTIVAL, held annually on the first full weekend in July, treats thousands of visitors to lively special events, contests, and demonstrations- all celebrating Pennsylvania’s lumbering heritage. Unique food and craft vendors provide guests with ample shopping and culinary opportunities. There is live music throughout the weekend, crafts and games at the “Kids Korner,”

demonstrations of the steam-powered circular sawmill and birch still, blacksmithing, chainsaw carving, and door prizes. Visitors are encouraged to compete in the greased pole, log rolling, crosscut saw, and birling competitions to earn the title “Grand Champion Bark Peeler” and the associated cash prizes.

The Pennsylvania Lumber Museum is open year-round, but days/hours of operation change seasonally. Summer hours (April through November) are: Wednesday through Sunday, 9 AM to 5 PM. Winter hours (December through March) are: Friday-Saturday-Sunday, 10 AM to 4 PM. Group tours can be scheduled on days when the museum is not open to the public with advanced notice. In addition to the Bark Peelers’ Festival, the museum hosts a variety of special events and programs throughout the year including an Antique Show and sawmill demonstration in April and October, a Youth & Family Field Day in June, history camp in August, and holiday themed events in October and December. A reoccurring series of educational programs and speakers typically takes place during the 3rd weekend of each month.

The museum’s gift shop is operated by the Pennsylvania Lumber Museum Associates, and all proceeds are used to support the mission and programming of the museum. Inventory in the shop is predominately made of wood and features numerous souvenir items and unique hand-made gifts and natural products crafted by local juried artisans associated with the PA Wilds, PA Route 6 and Potter County artisan groups. Some of the best-selling items in the store are the Smokey Bear patches and pins, hand-made wooden toys, Lumber Museum clothing, and history books and other media relative to the subject material presented in the museum exhibits.

