



A TRIP THROUGH A SAWMILL

The lumber industry has not changed that much since the 1800s. Sawmills are much safer and use the latest technology. But they still take a log and turn it into boards.

Before a log arrives at the sawmill, a forester is sent out to buy trees. Loggers cut down the trees that the forester marked. They are cut into smaller lengths, usually 8 feet to 16 feet long. The logs are then trucked to the sawmill. At the sawmill, the logs are placed in the log yard. A machine called a clam picks up a bunch of the logs and moves them to a chain that brings the logs into the mill. A clam works much like your hand when you pick up a bunch of pencils. The chains move the logs to the de-barker, a machine that looks like a big metal tunnel with teeth, which cuts the bark off the tree. Each log goes through a metal detector. Many logs have bullets and nails in them. These must be separated from the clean logs.

The next stop is the Scragg saw that cuts off the left and right sides of the log; this saw makes both sides flat. The log continues down the conveyor to the gang saw. It is called a gang saw because it has many saws (usually ten or more). The log is cut into many boards, all at the same time. The boards are sorted for quality and size. Many boards must be sent to the edger, which cuts off the two edges of the boards to make them square or to make them a different size.

The lumber is moved to the trim saw. The person who operates the trim saw determines the quality of each board. High-quality lumber will be used to make furniture and hardwood floors. Other lumber is used for the construction of homes and to build pallets.

After the wood is sorted, the trim saw cuts it to the proper length, usually 6 to 12 feet long. Finally, a computer measures the length and thickness of each piece of wood and puts it into a bay with the same size number. The boards are then stacked and ready to be sold.

Some parts of working in a sawmill are the same as they have always been. Workers still work in un-air conditioned and unheated buildings and wood dust is everywhere. However, technology and safety issues have changed. Workers must wear safety glasses, ear plugs, steel-toed boots, and a hard hat. Also, all saw blades are placed behind bulletproof glass to protect the workers from flying wood.

You have many things in your home made from wood, from your house and deck to the furniture you sit on. They all started out as trees that made a trip through the sawmill.