

Virgin Timber on Peninsula Not to be Sold

Seven Heirs Standing Guard Over Striking Primeval Forest in Door County

Bailey's Harbor, Wis.

Three miles from this little summer resort town on the Door county peninsula stands one of the finest and least known white pine forests in Wisconsin.

The 270 acre primeval tract is owned by the seven heirs of Thomas Toft, quarryman and logger who died in 1919. Toft bought the tract in 1875 and because of his background? of forestry acquired in his native Denmark, he refused to put the saw to a single one of his trees.

All of the descendants feel the same way about the tract. They have guarded those big white pines zealously with the result that, today; they own a piece of property that is a startling thing to come on in an area long ago denuded of its big trees.

Daughter Is Custodian

Miss Emma Toft, daughter of Thomas, is presently the custodian, living in the summertime in the old home which her father built and acting as hostess to a chosen few "summer people" who go to the area to study the trees and the wild flowers which grow there in profusion.

Access to the Toft tract is guarded by a locked gate. It is not the intention of Miss Toft to let the public trample without restriction through the forest: however, she occasionally takes parties on guided tours through the towering trees. Many wild flower fanciers regard the Toft tract as one of the better places of its kind in the state.

The Toft story began in 1870 when Thomas Toft moved to Baileys Harbor from Michigan. He had been a logger. A Michigan company opened up a limestone quarry on that tract and Toft worked it. The limestone was shipped across Lake Michigan to build harbor structures.

When the quarry was worked out Toft bought the property and worked a tiny farm. No tree was used, except down timber and dead standing boles, for firewood and some building. Today, thousands of 200 year old white pines, reaching to more than 100 feet in height, shoot straight up from a forest floor many parts of which never get direct sunlight.



A bit of primeval forest, one of Wisconsin's least known and best preserved, is the Toft tract of 270 acres three miles from Baileys Harbor on the shore of Lake Michigan. Miss Emma Toft (above), one of seven heirs to the forest and at present its custodian, says that the big pines will never be cut while the heirs live.

"The Fighting 40"

The tract has never been cruised with the intention of determining the board feet of lumber in it. Miss Toft smiles at the very suggestion of that as she says quietly: "It will never be cut—not while I live" But even an amateur Woodsman can see at a glance that here stands thousands of dollars of green gold. Miss Toft's affection for those giant pines is a spiritual thing. Holding the tract in its primeval state was not easy. There were law suits, long ones and expensive ones. To this day one 40 acres of the area is known to the family as "the fighting 40" because an effort was made to take it from the family for the purpose of cutting timber. The Tofts won that suit in the state supreme court. Those who have wondered what all of north Wisconsin looked like before the big stuff was cut can find out by a trip through the Toft forest. White cedar, some hemlock, white birch and maples are there by the thousands and the area is a sanctuary for deer, rabbits and other game. A pair of eagles has nested on one of the Toft rampikes for many years.

A Rare Experience

A trip through the woods with Miss Toft is an experience for a city man. She takes off down the forest paths like a deer, striding over deadfalls and snaking through brush. No sissy is Miss Emma Toft. On the day the reporter and photographer visited her, she wanted to help carry the heavy camera equipment!

Violets, Arctic primrose, little dwarf iris and the rare moccasin flowers spring up from the dark floor of the Toft pinery. Botanist Albert Fuller of the Milwaukee public museum often goes there to study plants found hardly anywhere else in Wisconsin.

The future of this tract is up to the Tofts. The seven living heirs, says Miss Toft, "would as soon cut off an arm" as sell it for its lumber value. But one wonders, looking at it, what may happen years hence when the Tofts are not around to guard their treasure. And there is only one answer to that: Somehow the state of Wisconsin would have to acquire it, and preserve it forever.

