

Chapter 3

Pensacola and Norwegian Ships and Shipping

The history of the lumber milling industry in Pensacola began as early as 1763 during the British Period (1763–1781) in West Florida (Phillips, 1998:149). Later, during the Second Spanish Period (1783–1821), six water-powered mills operated in what was described as “the thriving local lumber industry” (Phillips, 1998:151). By the 1840s, steam began to be utilized for power, allowing the mills to move away from waterpower sources and closer to the shipping lanes. The exploitation of lumber resources exploded, and by 1875 Pensacola had developed as the state’s primary lumbering center because of its deep-water port and numerous streams and rivers in the region (Drobney, 1997:26). Pensacola was rebuilding after the Civil War and the lumber industry and associated maritime expansion revived the town. Lumber shipped from Pensacola had a value of over \$50 million. Pensacola grew from approximately 3000 residents in 1870 to over 13,000 by 1882 (Keuchel, 1974:382). The town supported 16 major wharves in a three-mile strip between Bayou Texar and Bayou Chico. The increased production and growth drew an increased number of vessels into the harbor. Most vessels entered port in ballast, ready to take on cargo at one of the 16 wharves. Vessels also routinely loaded timber while floating in the bay. These ships were equipped with a hatch at or near the water line, which was opened up for timber to be placed inside. Once the timber was lashed to the beams through a system of eyebolts in the hold, the hole in the hull was patched upwards as the timber was loaded (Figure 3.1).

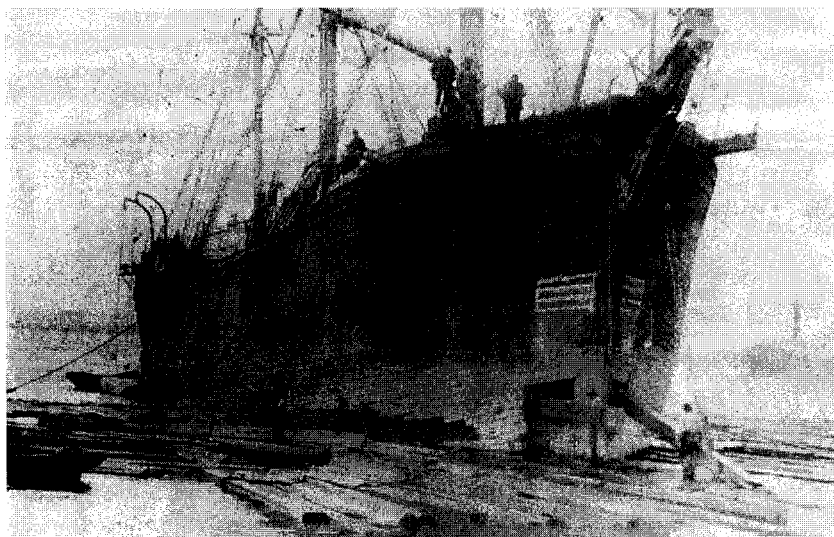


Figure 3.1. Vessel loading timber through bow ports (Photograph courtesy of The Pensacola Historical Society).

Vessels coming to Pensacola ranged in size from coastal schooners to large full-rigged ships like *Catharine*. Schooners were large enough to carry approximately 100,000 square feet of lumber and were suitable for the coastal trade in and around the Gulf of Mexico. The larger ships were needed for ports outside of the West Indies though, and barques, brigs, and ships usually handled this trade. These larger ships commonly carried over 500,000 square feet of timber in their holds and became common in the bay. Pensacola soon became an international port. H.E. Baldwin noted in 1884, “We had to pick our way among over a hundred vessels from foreign ports. There were schooners, brigs, barques, and ships from Russia, Denmark, Germany, England, France, Spain, Norway, Italy, and Australia. The principal business of these vessels is carrying lumber...” (Baldwin, 1884).

3.1. NORWEGIAN EMIGRATION AND PENSACOLA

Norwegians began arriving in Pensacola by 1870 and came to dominate the pitch pine or lumber trade (Gjerset, 1933:247). Between

150 to 200 Norwegian ships were employed in the Pensacola trade, and it was not uncommon to have 60 to 100 Norwegian vessels in port at once. Pensacola businessman Charles Bliss noted, "It was likely to hear the Scandinavian language spoken on the streets as English" (1897). These new immigrants were welcomed into a thriving cosmopolitan Pensacola.

Norwegian emigration in the 19th century was driven by the same factors that drove the rest of Europe: economic, religious, social, and political. Between 1825–1930, approximately 900,000 Norwegians immigrated to the United States (Bærham, 1997:4). "America Fever" gripped Norwegians and Europeans in an economic world movement to the United States in search of a better life. "The percentage of the Norwegian population to emigrate was second only to Ireland's" (Schultz, 1994:4).

Prior to 1870, Norwegian emigration was rural to rural, peasants and farmers moving from rural Norway to America's upper midwest into Illinois, Wisconsin, Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Iowa (Bærham, 1997:23). After 1870, emigration shifted to an urban wave out of cities like Oslo (Kristiania), Bergen, and Trondheim (Lovoll, 1988:152). More professionals and middle-class industrial workers, as well as sailors and seamen, contributed to this shift. By 1895, 7849 Norwegian sailors had become naturalized American citizens and an estimated 1000 sailors were deserting annually (Tangeraas, 1982:143). These "maritime sojourners," or transient sailors, moved in and out of ports, often establishing ties and eventually settling down in the ports of their choice (Mauk, 1997:14). Immigrant communities quickly grew up around major ports like New York, Chicago, New Orleans, and Pensacola.

In 1900, Pensacola was a town of 17,747 citizens, of which, 1370 were foreign born, approximately 8 percent of the population (McGovern, 1976:7; Escambia County Census, 1901). Because of its international port, Pensacola was "exposed to a variety of mores, religions, and ideas" (McGovern, 1976:7). Pensacola could "counteract the typical pressures in a southern community of conformity and intolerance" (McGovern, 1976:7). Immigrants in Florida usually aroused tension and distrust and were often expected to conform to the same social and economic standards as blacks (Pozzetta, 1974:172). Pensacola's immigrant communities, however, were usually not treated with disrespect or derision and contributed greatly to its rise as an international

city. Nevertheless, the immigrant communities tended to cluster together in neighborhoods and “compact geographical areas” (Watson, 1992:17).

3.2. PENSACOLA’S “LITTLE NORWAY”

In Pensacola, “Little Norway” extended from A to G streets south of Main Street near the Perdido Wharf (Figure 3.2) (McGovern, 1976:6). This area, encompassing less than one square mile, was home to most of Escambia County’s 220 Norwegian residents (Escambia County Census, 1901). Norwegians also resided in Warrington, Kupfrian’s Park, Brent’s Mill, Beulah, Roberts, Muscogee, Gonzalez, Cantonment, Cottage Hill, Molino, and Bluff Springs. Like most urban neighborhoods, “Little Norway” had its own grocery stores, bars, and boarding houses. Johansen’s Grocery was on the corner of E and Pine, McLaughlin’s Grocery and Bar sat opposite Johansen’s on E and Pine, while Sims Boarding House was located at the foot of C Street (Hommeland, 1999). The neighborhood was also serviced by Pensacola’s trolley line (also known as the dummy line), with a stop on the corner of D Street and Pine. Pensacola’s Norwegian immigrants, like most immigrants, were not interested in making an ethnic statement through their houses and commercial buildings; they wanted the same kinds of homes sought by Americans and often purchased plans for building (Watson, 1992:17). What set immigrants apart, though, were their “cultural ephemera” or intangibles—ethnic cooking, languages, and religion (Watson, 1992:17).

3.3. THE NORWEGIAN SEAMAN’S CHURCH

The ethnic or nationality parish is defined by the common ethnic background of its congregation rather than by geographical boundaries. “Each ethnic group had its own churches and social institutions that acted as community focal points” (Watson, 1992:18). Norwegian seamen often spent several years away from their homes, and ships in Pensacola usually waited for several months to load cargo. The Norwegian Seamen’s Missionary Society, founded in Bergen, Norway, decided to place a Seamen’s Church (Lutheran) in Pensacola to serve the needs of its sailors and eventually the entire Norwegian community.

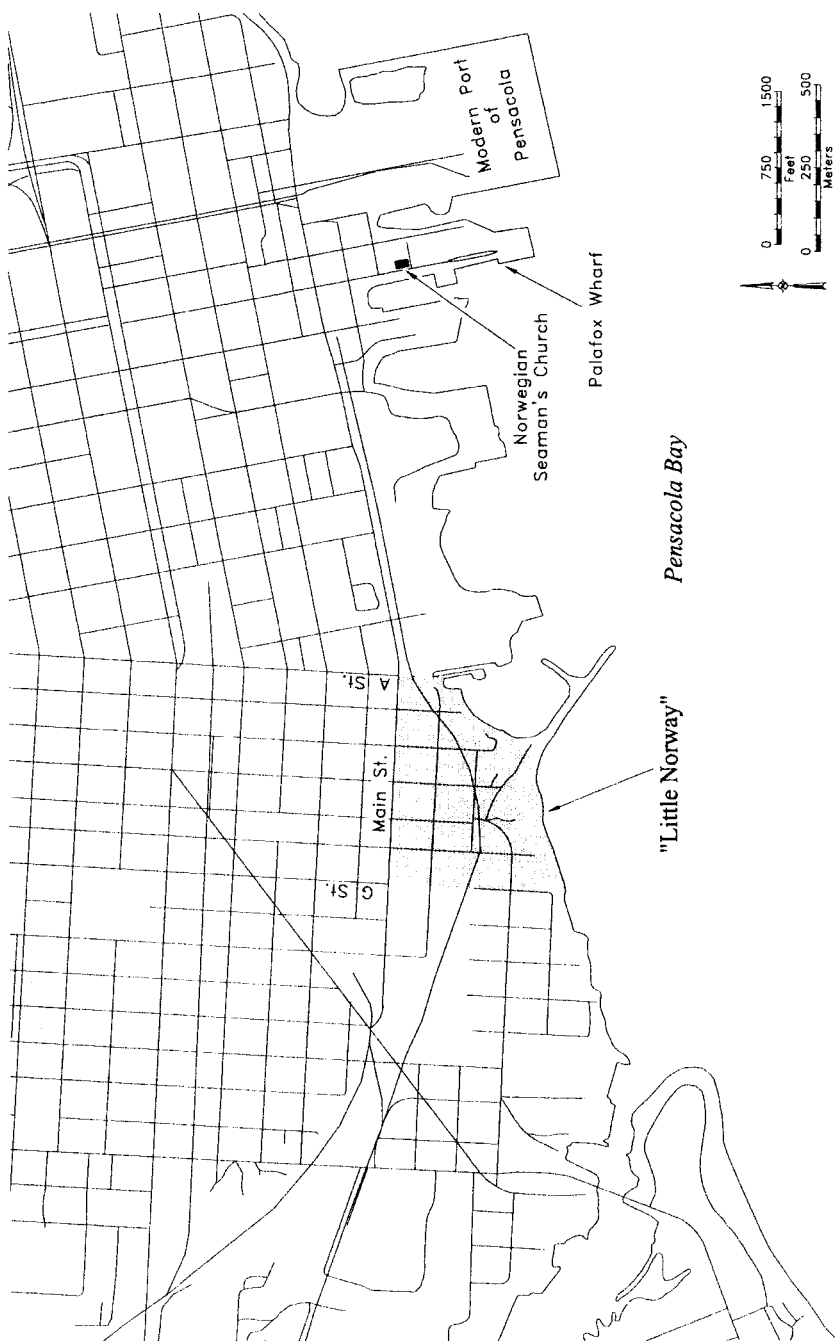


Figure 3.2. Pensacola's "Little Norway" (Courtesy of the University of West Florida Archaeology Institute).

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