

By: Brian Sheridan

HEAD: The Lumber Baron: A Chippewa Valley film

Sub: Eau Claire production company begins filming movie about Chippewa Valley lumber industry

After spending decades living in the area and writing historical plays and musicals, one Fall Creek writer is looking to bring the history of the Chippewa Valley to the big screen.

Karen Hurd, writer for the Scene and Hurd production company, will be filming a full-length feature film called "The Lumber Baron," a historical fiction film about the lumber industry in the Chippewa Valley. It will include many notable landmarks around the valley and will start filming Monday, July 17.

"We're going to make Chippewa Valley history come alive," Hurd said.

The story takes place in 1910 in the Chippewa Valley and revolves around a lumber baron family. After his father dies unexpectedly at a party, Daniel Rimsdale returns home from medical school in Madison to run the family lumber business.

The family quickly learns the business is in shambles and has been poorly managed over the years. Rimsdale is the only one capable of running the business out of all the children and is not sure he can do it. Along the way, a so-called family friend, Silas Lynch, looks to undermine the business who is on the hunt for the Rimsdale mansion and a possible treasure looming inside.

Hurd said the story is filled with intrigue, mystery and excitement all along the way. People watching the movie will see areas in Eau Claire like the Paul Bunyan Lumber Camp Museum and the Schlegelmilch House, as well as the Cook-Rutledge Mansion in Chippewa Falls and an amish sawmill in New Auburn.

Hurd has lived in the area for 21 years and has written a myriad of plays and musicals for her production company in Eau Claire. However, she said the theater industry is declining and she is planning on leaving the industry all together for her new pursuit in becoming a film production company.

She has created two short films as a practice run before diving into a two-hour long movie. Scene and Hurd wrapped up their last play ever "Jesus: Son of God" on April 14.

When looking at the film industry, she said there isn't much about lumberjacks beyond a few small parts. But after living in an area with a deep, rich history of lumbering, she knew this was the direction she needed to go for her first full-length film.

As far as production value goes, it's as professional as it gets. The film has hired professional actors from all across the country to take part in the film, with 77 actors total. Barry Anderson, a director out of Minneapolis, will be directing the film and has helped cast a number of the major roles for "The Lumber Baron" as well as helped find critical crew members.

The production company held local auditions for many of the extra roles on set for party and funeral scenes in the film. A few Chippewa Valley natives will be playing some of the major roles in the film, including Sheridyn Trotter from Menominee playing Priscilla Lynch, Henry Sollberger from Eau Claire playing the son of a lumber baron and Sara Edwards from Eau Claire playing a leading child.

Hurd said they have also gone the extra length of making sure everything in the movie is as authentic as possible. They will be filming inside a couple private mansions in the area that were built around 1910 as well as looking into the smallest of details such as a typewriter from that era to type up bills.

"I can't think of one piece of this film that won't be authentic," she said. "We got everything."

The film in total has a \$120,000 budget, which Ruth Voetmann, Scene and Hurd's production manager, said falls under the "ultra low" budget category. However, she said now is the best time as any to "take the plunge" and see where the film industry will take them.

With their rich costumes and scenic design, she said the film will be like stepping back in time in the Chippewa Valley.

"I think this will be really cool as a person in the Chippewa Valley watching this film," Voetmann said. "The neatest part is seeing locations you pass every day and recognizing different locations."

Filming will start July 17 and she said they plan to be filming through Aug. 11. They will then continue filming for one scene in the winter to get footage of lumberjacks chopping down trees. Voetmann said they're hoping to have the entire film ready by this time next year.

Hurd said the film will bring the history of the area alive in an accurate fashion. She hopes people will have pride in the film and, much like the last line, "to the lumber business of the Chippewa Valley."