

NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

EARLY LOGGING METHODS

Commercial lumbering in the Lake Superior country became a regular yearly business during the late sixties, and continued all through the seventies, eighties, and nineties. We did not realize it at the time, but the white pine in the lake region was the clearest and most perfect timber that has ever been harvested in the United States. It is practically all cut now, although another crop is actually growing, and in thirty or forty years—in protected areas—it will be fit to cut again.

Some reminiscences of early logging operations might now be interesting. Timber adjacent to navigable streams, which could be “driven” to the sawmill during the spring and high water, was cut first. Later logs normally were transported by rail and were rarely “driven.” The quantity and quality of the timber on a given piece of land were estimated by an experienced “timber cruiser.” His general method was to find out the number and the size of all the trees on a “forty.” Enough adjoining timber was logically necessary to allow one or more seasons’ cut, utilizing the same main roads and camp.

In early times, a million feet during a winter was considered a fair operation for a camp. On the Nemadji River the various camps drove over twenty-five million feet every season for many years. The cruiser usually spotted out a main hauling road through the tract to be lumbered. He was the logical man to do this, because he had already been over the ground in making his first timber estimate. The camp would be located in the most convenient central spot.

I have in mind a camp that called for five cutting crews

of three men each, two sawyers, and one "undercutter," who was foreman of the little gang. It was he who picked out the sound trees and who cut a notch about elbow high with his ax into perhaps a fourth of the thickness of the tree. His undercut also determined the best way for felling the tree and hauling it out. The sawyers completed the cut. As the tree began to fall, they would give the warning cry of "t-i-m-b-e-r!" While two men were sawing, the undercutter had picked out another tree and undercut it. When the first tree was down, the axman measured it into lengths usually of sixteen, fourteen, and twelve feet. In the early wasteful times, the last log had to measure about twelve inches in diameter at the top. Now any kind of wood that will make a two-by-four is taken. The axman cut the limbs off of the first tree while the men were sawing the second. They then sawed the first into logs at the points shown by the length notches. All the sawyers had to do was saw, but they always tried to "chase" the axman. This automatic hurry-up procedure was repeated during the day.

A crew of three men would cut from a hundred to even as high as two hundred logs in a day, depending upon the size of the timber. At night a record was turned in to the camp foreman. Each crew was credited with the day's cut on a bulletin board made of a hewn block of wood. Rivalry among the cutting crews was often stimulated by the free distribution of "Peerless tobacco" or "snoose" to members of the crew with the best record.

An experienced axman did the "swamping" or cutting of a small road, so that logs could be hauled out to the main loading and hauling road and "skidway." These short hauls were generally made by oxen. They could wallow in snow or bad ground better than horses. The logs were then ready for the longer haul with horse teams to the stream or "rollway." A "road monkey" looked

after the upkeep of the main roads and the skidway. The usual sled load was about ten thousand feet. The greatest was something over twenty thousand feet. The "top loader," who placed logs on the sleighs, had to be a man of quick and accurate judgment.

A camp always had a "handy man," whose duty it was to make any and all kinds of repairs and also, generally, to sharpen the crosscut saws for the crews. Very frequently, however, saw filing was done by one of the sawyers, because there was quite a knack in preparing the saws to "set, cut and rake" to the best advantage.

The camp was, of course, presided over by a seasoned foreman—"his Nibs." Most foremen were chosen for their ability to handle men sensibly and justly as well as for knowing how best to "log." It was essential also to have a competent cook and "cookee." The latter, aside from his culinary, sleeping-camp, and other duties, took the hot noonday lunch to the crews in the woods. The poor chap never had a chance to rest. He provided the sleeping camp with firewood, drinking and washing water, and lights. Lard oil and kerosene lamps and lanterns were most often used.

Big box wood-burning stoves, or, later, stoves of the barrel type, provided heat and drying facilities for footgear. The aroma in an old-style sleeping camp can hardly be described; yet everybody kept well and happy. The men were up at five and they went to bed between eight and nine. Saturday nights were given over to cards, feats of strength, boxing, elbow pulling, or any kind of amusement. There was rarely anything but the kindest feeling among the men. Sunday was devoted to rest, washing, mending, and the like. On Sunday nights lights were out at nine as usual. Now many camps have steam heat, hot and cold water, bathrooms, and electric lights—in fact they are almost modern hotels. The early day woodsman stayed upriver

from November till May; the modern lumberjack rarely remains more than a month.

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A MAYER ITEM

A four-page leaflet that may be of interest to readers of the *Minnesota Diary* of Frank B. Mayer, which was published by the Minnesota Historical Society in 1932 under the title *With Pen and Pencil on the Frontier in 1851*, has come to light recently. It is a printed memorial addressed "To the Honorable the General Assembly of the State of Minnesota" on February 11, 1871, and signed by Mayer. In it he presents his qualifications as an artist and asks for an appropriation of ten thousand dollars for a painting of the treaty of Traverse des Sioux, which he attended.

Mayer proposed to paint a canvas about twelve by six feet in size on which all the figures introduced would be "painted from drawings made from life and on the spot during the Treaty." He pointed out "that it is only the artist who has actually participated in the events which your Memorialist's sketches represent who can adequately realize them," and that he "secured many costumes" used on the occasion of the treaty which he has preserved "as the means of giving additional reality to his work."

The artist's efforts to obtain from the Minnesota legislature funds for a painting of the treaty of Traverse des Sioux continued without success for more than two decades. They are described in the introduction to his published *Diary* (p. 16-19). There the memorial that Mayer had printed in 1871 is mentioned, though the leaflet itself was not available when the account was written. This interesting little item has now been filed with the Mayer Papers in the possession of the Minnesota Historical Society.

B.L.H.



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