Old Boy, Did You Get Enough of Pie?

A SOCIAL HISTORY OF FOOD IN LOGGING CAMPS

BY JOSEPH R. CONLIN

"We never got very far away from thinking about grub in the old Chippeway camps," logger Louie Blanchard remembered, and small wonder. Ten or twelve hours' labor deep in the woods every day for five months offered few diversions other than meals. And it burned a lot of energy. It was not only the incredible exertion of old-time, muscle-power logging. There were also the caloric demands of the bitter winter cold in New England and the Lake states and, in the Pacific Northwest, the steeping forest rains that are physiologically almost as exacting. For a society that feels compelled to run around in sweat-suits in order to shed a few pounds, it may be difficult to imagine a "lifestyle" in which vast fueling was essential to survival. But the old lumberjacks bolted three, four, and, on some river drives, five enormous meals per day. And they used them. One can leaf through as many stacks of old photographs as a proud archivist can trot out without seeing a potbelly. Indeed, a common superstition among loggers was that when they saw a fat man in the woods it was time to blow the whistle. There would be three accidents in quick succession.

Loggers always ate plenty of food. Before the turn of the century, they began to eat very well, too, of a variety of fresh, wholesome, and well-prepared foods. As an occupational group, they and the millhands in the industry were probably the best-fed workers in the country.

This calls for an explanation. The "timber beast" and the "sawdust savage" are not typically remembered for their lives of comfort. Wages were not good, well into the twentieth century. Employment was unsteady; job security did not exist. Bunkhouse conditions appalled the roughest of outsiders. (Sled drivers delivering supplies to the camps often preferred to sleep in the snow). Lumberjacks were despised and feared by much of conventional society. During the years of the First World War and just afterwards, employer-employee relations in the industry were among the worst in the country. The Industrial Workers of the World—the Wobblies—the union of last resort, won thousands of adherents among woodsmen of the Northwest. In no other industry did the federal government, through the military, find it necessary to intervene so directly. Yet, while much of the working class of the time was marginally nourished, loggers ate extremely well. Why?
This article attempts the explanation. It is inferential in parts. If food is third only to air and water as a basis of life, the historian of the subject is soon reminded that it is also a highly unhistoriographical thing. Unlike the terms of treaties or strike settlements or even residence data, records of “food gone by” are always fragmentary, even when, as in lumbering, the provision of it was an intrinsic part of the operation.

**What the Loggers Ate**

In Maine, where American commercial logging was born, living conditions were brutish. “Comforts for the drivers didn’t mean much to the employers,” wrote Marsh Underwood in his 1938 book *The Log of a Logger*. The men cowered by night in rude shanties, the warming fire in the center of the hut doubling as cookstove and oven. The first lumberjacks ate standing or off their laps from the “deacon seat.” They hired a boy to feed them, or they did their own cooking, taking turns, and it did not much matter. Escoffier himself could not have done much with “the great trinity” of beans, pork, and bread that was served thrice daily. A youth or a hamhanded sawyer could not do much harm.

There were other items in the Maine larders: pickled beef, baled codfish, sourdough biscuits, flapjacks, molasses, and tea “strong enough to float an ax,” according to historian Stewart H. Holbrook. But everything was nonperishable. Except for occasional venison, no fresh meat nor vegetables, fruit, or eggs appear in the records.

The problem was supply. As with the sailor’s life, with which the logger’s is often compared, the paramount fact of nineteenth-century logging was its isolation. Only so much could reasonably be ported into the deep woods by bateau against the current or by sled after the seasonal freeze, and these were necessarily the staples. As for the monotony of the diet, the norms of the period must be kept in mind. Although New England farmers of the nineteenth century were generally enjoying various preserves and the like during the winter months, their own dependence on bread, salt meat, and molasses must not be underestimated. “The men were satisfied mainly, perhaps,” a Vermont boy cook thought, “because the time did not afford a higher standard by which they might measure the shortcomings of their lot.” In any event, there is no record of food shortage in even the most primitive operations. The loggers’ insistence on “plenty” as a condition of labor—perhaps biological need for what one remembered as “twenty pounds of food apiece”—dates from the beginning.

The first logging ventures in Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota followed closely on New England patterns. As back east, the menu was rude and monotonous. By 1870, “all the common and substantial articles of food and drink” of the country were being served in the Lake states logging camps, and good, varied diets appeared in the Pacific Northwest about the same time. Historian A. R. M. Lower dates the “revolution in camp diet” in Upper Canada at about 1880. By way of contrast, only the “good” camps in Maine seem to have been doing much more than beans, pork, and biscuits, even after 1890. Any number of Yankee loggers who trekked from New England to the Lake states commented on the superiority of the “cuisine” out west. Another historian says that real improvement in New England came only after the passage of progressive legislation in 1910. There was, simply, not the same intense competition for labor in the older region.

Improvement took five forms: (1) the introduction of fresh meats, vegetables, fruits, and even eggs, butter, and milk—in abundance and as a matter of course; (2) variety—no more same-thing-every-meal-every-day; (3) baking—often with extraordinary skill; (4) professional, specialized cooks to handle the job; and (5) distinctly separate, sit-down dining halls—the famous “cookhouses”—with tableware and table service.

Perhaps because there was now something worth noting, scores of menus survive in newspapers, travelers’ accounts, reminiscences, account books, and company communications. They are impressive. Pancakes and beans were ubiquitous. But in addition, in the final third of the nineteenth century, company commissaries were ordering forty and sixty items a month from wholesale grocers and farmers. A broad selection of camps ranging from Washington, Oregon, and California to the Lake states and, by the 1900s, to New England, regularly served all of the following foods, almost all of them at each individual location.
Consumption and Nutrition

"Powder Box Pete" could eat three T-bone steaks or seven pork chops. Anna M. Lind, a former cookhouse worker, saw "hungry fallers come into the dining room, sit down at their place at the table, and empty an entire platter of steak onto their plate." "A working logger such as Dad," Sam Churchill recalled from his boyhood in Clatsop County, Oregon, "could usually handle around nine thousand calories a day of hearty foods including ample servings of pie, cake, cookies, homemade breads and other delicacies." This incredible figure recurs in the recollections of Alfaretta Cooley, a nutritionist, who calculated that the Wisconsin loggers she waited on as a girl wolfed down about that much daily as a matter of course. A federal investigator in the early 1920s was more conservative. He estimated that logging work burned about 5 to 6 thousand calories a day (merely twice an adequate contemporary regimen). That is probably a minimum.

Although only a few sets of figures lend themselves to reliable analysis, the consumption of food was patently monstrous. Between 1875 and 1878, the Sierra Flume and Lumber Company of California (later part of Diamond Match) annually supplied a work force of 1,200 with, in part, 75 tons of beef, 75 of flour, 10 of beans, 20 of potatoes, 5 of butter, and 5 of dried fruit. In West Virginia in 1907, forty-five men stowed away in one week: a tub of lard, a sack of turnips, a sack of onions, a box of yeast, a case of cream, a barrel of sweet potatoes, 7 sacks of Irish potatoes, a case each of pears and peaches, 2 cases of eggs, a case of toma-

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toes, a barrel of apples, 112 pounds of cabbage, a case of corn, 22 pounds of cakes, 10 pounds of tea, 12 cases of strawberries, 2 barrels of flour, 15 cans of baking powder, and 300 pounds of beef.

In 1918 Dan Kelliher cooked for a hundred men at Scott Bog in New Hampshire and daily shovelled out 75 to 100 pounds of beef, a bushel of cookies, 3 bushels of potatoes, 30 pies (apple, mince, cherry, raisin, lemon, and—of course!—prune; another New England cook, Joe Buckshot, summed it up when he said, “For me, I’ll take the prune. It makes even better apple pie than the peach.”), 21 pound cans of condensed milk, 2 gallons of tinned tomatoes, 3 gallons of apples, 16-20 double loaves of bread, and 200 doughnuts. He used 10 yeast cakes a day, 40 pounds of sausage, 25 pounds of liver, 2 gallons of molasses, cabbages in fall and turnips in winter, and tea, coffee, oatmeal, and beans.

In 1887 the operations of Isaac Staples in Minnesota went through 18,000 pounds of beef, 104 barrels of pork, 200 barrels of flour, 9,000 pounds of sugar, 1,100 pounds of tea, 1,700 pounds of dried apples, 1,500 pounds of currants, and 1,400 pounds of turkey and chicken.

A series of camps working about a thousand men around 1900 consumed half a ton of fresh meat daily, 200 pounds of smoked meat, a ton of fresh fruit and vegetables, 900 pounds of flour, 600 pounds of sugar, 190 pounds of butter, 2,880 eggs, plus unspecified gallons of coffee, tea, and milk. For the somewhat dyspeptic record, this rounds off to 7,610 calories per iron-bellied logger.

They needed every one. According to the British physiologists, J.V.G.A. Durnin and R. Passmore, “There is probably no harder physical work than lumbering in the forest, particularly in winter.” Based on research among woodsmen in eight European countries and Japan, they calculate that chopping a tree at a moderate rate of 35 strokes per minute burns 10 calories per minute. (At 50 strokes per minute—contest speed—usage rises to an astounding 19.3 calories.) Bucking burns 8.6 calories per minute (lending scientific corroboration to Anna Linds observation that the fellers and buckers were the biggest eaters); trimming, 8.4; and barking, 8.0.

There are no data, unfortunately; on river driving, but “carrying logs” and “dragging logs” burn 12.1 calories per minute. For reference purposes, this compares to 6.1 calories per minute drilling coal, 4.0 laying bricks, 2.0-2.9 at general housework, 2.3 working on an automobile assembly line, and 1.4 sitting at a desk writing an article on an electric typewriter.

It may be surmised that loggers did not work at full tilt for every minute of their ten-hour day (the exertion of which, for fellers, would account for 6,000 calories). But they did not loaf much either, and experiments have shown that body metabolism does not slow down immediately after violent activity has ceased but may continue at a high rate for many hours (a phenomenon that is normally experienced in the continuing euphoria of the athlete whose actual activity is done). Loggers working in the winter, moreover, burned considerable calories merely to maintain their body temperature. Heavy clothing and footwear impose a resistance to movement that increases energy use by 2-5 percent. In a word, the estimates that some men consumed 9,000 calories per day are by no means distorted by memory or exaggeration.

Complaints about the quantity of food served in the camps do not exist. Meals were “gargantuan” in Minnesota. “Cooks wasn’t stingy” in Wisconsin. “They never counted out anything one by one...There was always plenty of grub.” “Plenty of everything is the only thing we go by,” a Washington lumberman responded to a questionnaire. Even James Rowan, the able and militant leader of the Wobbly lumberjacks of the Pacific Northwest, who had few good words for the policies of lumber companies, stated in 1919 that food was “fairly substantial and plentiful as was necessary to enable the men to endure the long hours and hard work.” If it is a grudging testimonial, it is all the more persuasive for its author and the bitterness of labor relations in the industry at the time Rowan wrote it. “There has seldom been any complaint about the quantity of food served in a logging camp,” wrote a government investigator reporting on that conflict; “serving dishes are kept supplied until everyone has finished.”

The Wobbly’s Lumber Workers Industrial Union No. 500, founded in Spokane in March 1917, did include a plank on food among its general demands: “Wholesome food in porcelain dishes, no overcrowding; sufficient help to keep kitchen clean and sanitary.” But, in fact, for almost two generations previous, food and cookhouses seem to have figured significantly in labor disputes only on a few occasions when the men demanded that Chinese kitchen staff be fired.
The great Wobbly strike of 1917 technically began with a walkout over bad food at the Humbird Lumber Company camp at Sandpoint, Idaho, on June 15. But the big strike was in fact already in the works, scheduled for July 1. The IWW moved the date up only because of the emotional impact of the Humbird protest. As the great conflict progressed (and was settled), the issues were hours (the eight-hour day), wages, sanitation (principally lousy bedding), and employment agencies, the notoriously corrupt “job sharks.”

It is the rare old-timer today who does not fully credit the IWW with revolutionizing bunkhouse conditions in the logging industry. But few mention food as, indeed, the Wobs did not. It was not an issue because, long before the turn of the century, loggers quite “unorganized” had resolved the matter in their favor, and where there were lapses, after that time, the men retained extrarunionist measures of resolving them.

The Quality of Food

Contemporary accounts and latter-day reminiscences are monotonous in their praise of cookhouse meals, typically comparing them with restaurant food. An Ottawa River song goes:

Now the board at the Caldwell,
The truth to tell,
Could not be surpassed
In the Russell Hotel.

“I tell you,” said Sam Churchill, “there wasn’t a Portland or Astoria hotel that could match the Western Cooperage cookhouse on Sunday.” Pope & Talbot’s cookhouse at Port Gamble was, likewise, “better than any Seattle hotel.” A booster pamphlet published in Eureka in 1904 touted the Humboldt County cookhouses: “The very best of food is furnished, and in great variety. In fact, visitors have often remarked, after partaking of the hospitality of the camps, that they had been better fed than at many first-class hotels.”

The Manary Logging Company’s “Cafeteria” at Toledo, Oregon, was reputed as “making good as a comfortable and high-class place to eat and has become very popular with the travelling public passing through...in addition to the employees of the operation.”

Of course, the men who ate at cookhouses did not frequent elegant hostleries when off the job, and that is a large part of the point. They were “casuals” who were little regarded by conventional society. They earned between $3.20 and $4.25 a day in 1923 (in the Northwest), half that much before the strike of 1917. This was only a little more than half the average remuneration of “lower-skilled” workmen countrywide. C.R. Howd described the quality of their food as “usually about the same as that served in the better class of workingmen’s homes,” and another modest evaluation had it as “slightly better than the average home.” But even if these are accurate assessments (and the preponderance of evidence indicates that they understated it), most camp workers were not among “the better class of workmen” by virtue of income, skill, or status. In the important matter of food, however, they were practically privileged. Why so?

They had made it so. Requiring large quantities of food merely in order to work, the loggers insisted on every improvement made possible during the last third of the nineteenth century, and without delay. When fresh meat could be carted into the woods, they got it. If a farmer with a dairy...
herd was within range, there was fresh milk on the table. There would be no "pick and choose" by the commissary when a commodity was available, when provision of it was possible, and when loggers were eating it. It is interesting to compare the loggers' attitude toward food and their indifference to the weather, lice, filth, and even, relatively, to wages. Weather was a constant. No one could do anything about it. Until 1917, when the Wobblies showed that it was possible to provide louse-free bedding and baths in the woods, the men regarded their tiny companions fatalistically, too. As for wages, when they did not themselves seem controlled by some remote, unalterable force, they were less important than food. Wisconsin lumber yard manager J.B. Randall showed this as early as 1864 when, in Wisconsin, he reported to his boss, Orrin H. Ingram, that labor was short and his men asking $4 per day. He did not take this seriously, he said, but in order to settle things down, he had to "give them plenty of treats." Emil Engstrom, a logger with no love for his employers ("in reality we were oppressed, we were in chains"), recalled of British Columbia in 1914 that "the small fly-by-night logging camps were paying up to five dollars a day, but that was too much for me; I'd rather work for a dollar less in a real camp" where the food was good. A logger "would work in the mud, rain, summer heat and dust," an Oregon account reads, "risk life and limb a dozen times a day, do without company showers, sleep in drafty bunkhouses, all with a minimum of grumbling, but start cutting back on the quality and quantity of cookhouse meals and he would quit immediately and spread bad words about that camp's food wherever he went." Louie Blanchard said, "Yes sir, we lived good in the pineries as long as the sleighs got through with the grub and the cook stayed on his hind legs and fed us all we could eat. Good grub was about all we had to look forward to all winter long." "Not a word about the bone-freezing Wisconsin weather nor the months without a bath.

Good and varied food became a condition of labor because competition for workers proved at an early date that food quality was something an employer could control. Just which lumberman it was who first lured timberbeasts from his competitor's camp with the aroma of a better pie is long lost in the woods. But food is what counted, as many accounts demonstrate. "The camp that served the best meals got the best men. It was as simple as that." "A camp was rated primarily by the quality of food served. It went without saying that quantity was always there." Writing of the Lake states loggers, J.C. Ryan said the same: "Nothing caused so much grumbling as did poor food or a poor cook." The loggers literally told time by the meals. In bunkhouse tales, things always happened "just before first lunch" or "just after supper."

With pressures of their own with which to contend, employers were quick to succumb. Serving good food was "good business." "It was an urgent matter that we hire good cooks," noted an Oregon lumberman, "because if the food didn't suit the loggers, they would quit and move to a camp with better chow. It didn't pay to buy low quality food for the same reason so we bought the best available." Some employers were graceful, like A.J. Pope of Pope & Talbot, who wrote in 1859, "We have some valuable men here and if we can make them contented by laying out a few hundred dollars I think it a good investment." Others were positively annoyed (although they, too, went along): "In former days we got along with less high-toned notions among the men," one foreman wrote to his boss. "Now they want accommodations equal to that of a first class hotel."

A camp manager in the Northwest echoed management's problem. "Through this part of the country," he asserted, "a large expense has been added to feeding the men from the fact of each camp vying with every other to see who can feed the men the best, thinking by so doing they will be better able to retain their men." Along the same lines, Paul Hosmer, author of the memoir Now We're Loggin', wrote that as the camps moved to more isolated, less attractive locations, "the company offered something different in the way of victuals to get the pick of the men." Food preoccupied the operators as intensely as it did the men. "Anything at all" won't do the for the choppers at this camp," a Seattle journalist reported. "They know what good living is, or they think they do."

Responding to a survey, an executie from the same region sounded as if he were advertising for workers: "The workingmen of today demand the very best that money will buy regardless of cost. We set a regular table as all logging camps do, so everybody can help himself to anything he wants." Another less graciously complained that "these men are the type that expect the best without reason," and Howd reported to the federal government that the men would change jobs in search of mere variety. They always found the same kind of food in the end, he claimed, "but prepared and served differently." A University of Washington researcher of the 1920s concluded: "Some companies believe that they
must give the food the men want in order to hold them...Sometimes a company will spend more on food and make up the loss by paying the men less.”

The competition could take a piquant turn. In 1923, A.E. Hillier of the Phoenix Logging Company turned down a request for a bacon slicer for one of the company's cookhouses. Hillier cited the cost and added, “You will, of course, understand that if we placed it in one camp the other one would want a duplicate of it or they would think that they were slighted, and it would undoubtedly run us into complications that we had better avoid.” A delicate matter, the labor relations of the table! In the 1950s a cook in Southwestern Oregon noted that “leftovers is a dirty word in a logging camp...I wouldn’t dare try to feed any to the men.” She sent the leftovers to the bosses' lunchroom.

Supply and Vertical Integration

Providing plenty, wholesome, fresh, and varied food depended first of all on improvement in the mechanics of supply. Almost by definition, commercial logging develops in an area before agriculture (and is a stimulus of it). So, it was not until there were enough good road connections to the isolated camps (and eventually railroads) that fresh meat, eggs, milk, butter, and vegetables could be incorporated into loggers' diets. Only then could frequent deliveries of perishable commodities be made. Historian Agnes Larson made the case that the Minnesota white pine industry was retarded by the remoteness of the state's forests; even flour had to be bought in Iowa, Wisconsin, Illinois, and as far away as St. Louis. In 1853 crews on the Rum River had to be sent down simply because they could not be properly fed. In such a strait, fresh food was out of the question. Even as late as 1914, an operator who was very sensitive to the “food factor” was unable to provide fresh meat because of the isolation of his camp in Idaho, and he worried about what the dearth might mean.

The national integration of transportation and technological progress in food processing also played a role. The improvement of the loggers' diet was only one facet (if a particularly dramatic one) of the general “democratization” of diet in the nineteenth century described by Daniel Boorstin. Canning and new packaging techniques meant loggers could have previously seasonal and perishable foods, and, as has been seen, what they could have, they got. A Redwood Country journalist commented in 1889, “We have seen more trouble over a keg of poor butter, that by mischance had strayed into camp, than occurred during a whole season over wages.” But it was by then a mishap that the American consumer culture was ready to resolve. In 1874 the latter was farming 7,000 acres in Wisconsin and grinding 60,000 bushels of wheat annually at its own gristmill. By the turn of the century, large camp farms dotted Minnesota like the state's lakes, with gigantic operations at Blackduck, Parley, Island Lake, and Cloquet.

The Whitney Company ran farms in Tillamook County, Oregon, and Pope & Talbot at Squamish Harbor, Washington. Well aware of the provisioning problem by 1902, the Lamb Lumber Company Ranch at Hoquiam, Washington, was under construction while the timber was still being felled around the site. Photographs in the Georgia-Pacific Archives show a huge, model barn already completed, with logging operations still in progress in the yard.

In California the Hammond Lumber Company's famous cookhouse at Samoa was practically self-sufficient. The company operated its own vegetable gardens, ranches, hog farms, slaughterhouses, and dairies. Only items such as canned goods (and refuse disposal) were contracted outside the corporation. Diamond Match planted odd acres of its Barber Plant in Chico with hay, grain, and alfalfa for stock, and, beginning in 1913, it supplied prunes for workers in its Sierra operations.

Cooks and Cookhouses

There is no question, and there never was to anyone concerned, that the key to quality in the lumberjack's diet was the camp cook. The first physical change in the structure of the deep woods logging camp was the separation of the cooking and dining facility from the sleeping quarters. The only real division of labor in the camps, outside of the logging function itself, was the replacement of cooking-by-turns with a professional cook and, soon enough, a coterie of "cookees" (assistant cooks) and "flunkeys" (waiters and general dining room helpers). As a figure in logging folklore, the cook is bigger than Paul Bunyan, who never put in an
appearance in New England, while the fabled cook certainly did. Few documents relating to logging camps do not repeat piously that, “the cook was the most important man in camp next to the foreman.” Another common observation was that “a boss usually stepped softly around his cook.”

The cook was almost always a man in the early days. Later, married couples were hired in both New England and the Lake states. Female head cooks were common in the Redwood Country after the turn of the century. In Maine, cooks were higher. Before 1900, cooks in the Lake states camps were receiving $70 a month, second only to the foreman’s $100. In West Virginia in 1909, a cook made $3 per day compared to $2 for teamsters and fillers and $2.50 for the blacksmith. About 1920 in forty camps of the Northwest, cooks’ pay ranged between $125 and $200 per month, averaging $150.

The cook’s status likewise reflected his peculiar value to company and men. Walter St. George of the West Branch camp at Butte Meadows, California, always dressed impeccably in sparkling apron and chef’s starched hat. When he invited the boss to his home for Thanksgiving dinner, the boss went. Others flexed their muscles by virtue of extraordinary eccentricity and even colossal unpleasantness. If they were good cooks, it was tolerated. “What’s the use of having a nice fella if you get raw biscuits?” derisively asked one former camp hand. If alcohol was unwelcome in isolated logging camps for obvious reasons, the cook’s nips at lemon extract were not only winked at, they and his remarkably large orders for that irregular cocktail became a coveted part of logging lore. The cook had nearly absolute control of his cookhouse and crew; the men maintained a remarkable decorum at meals at his behest.

Individuals developed reputations that their employers trumpeted when advertising for workers. “A camp’s ability to attract and hold men,” wrote George Kephart in a 1970 Forest History article, “rested primarily..on the cook’s reputation...” During the 1920s the Camp and Mill News, a chatty industry journal of the “one big family” mold, ran page after page of items about cooks changing jobs, cutting off their fingers, opening restaurants, and dropping dead.

Phil Burns has quit at Twin Rivers and is now cooking at Cherry Valley’s Camp 3.

H.E. McKinzie, who has been cooking at the Delvan Camp of the Bloedel-Donovan Lumber Mills, is now standing over the hot stove at Darrington for the Washington Spar Co.

John Gustafson, the expert camp cook, has returned to the Pacific States Camp 25 after a vacation in the city.

G.B. McKee, the classy baker, is now doing night duty at the Page Lumber Company at Eagle Gorge.

H.C. Reetz has accepted a position at Campbell Logging Co., Woodenville, Wash.

The Pacific Lumber Company in California named a way station for one of its cooks, and others were memorialized in song:

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Our cook’s name’s Jack Dunnigan,
The best in the woods.
His beans they are great,
And his bread it is good.
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In New England, Tom Brackett had a comparable reputation. During the three years when I often hired woodsmen for the Van Dykes,” Charles Hadley remembered, “I couldn’t make a better pitch than to tell prospects Tom Brackett was cooking.” With wages more or less uniform in a district, the cook was trump. Once, a crew on Vermont’s Nulhegan River threatened to quit unless Hadley fired the cook. He did and, while recruiting a successor, was delighted discover Brackett in Berlin “getting his teeth fixed” (that is, on a tear). Virtually shanghaing the helpless chef de cuisine back to the office, Hadley was chided by his boss for troubling with a drunk. Hadley identified his sotted companion as Tom Brackett and it was all right: “Nothing was too good for a cook of Tom’s high reputation.”

Joe Bully (Joe Boulay), a cook for Connecticut Valley Lumber, was another prince of the woods despite his peculiar failing, an appalling appearance. “Joe was always so dirty and greasy that you couldn’t hand on to him with a pair of sharp ice-tongs,” said one who knew him. The dirty cuss put out food that was palatable, as long as you didn’t see him. I have seen his cookroom floor so dirty that the spaces between the half-hewn poles were filled with cooking refuse. It was as much as your life was worth to try to walk on it without called boots.” But crews threatened to leave when a sanitation-conscious boss tried to fire him.

Conversely, bad cooks have “made more short-stayers than have bad foremen.” A more-than-twice-told tale of the Maine woods has a bateau rowing weekly downriver, spying smoke on the shore, and calling, “Whose wangan?” “Mickey Dunroes,” came the reply. “Head boat,” the first man shouted sadly, and the boat moved on.

Foremen fretted constantly about culinary staff. In 1873, one in Wisconsin wrote sarcastically to the head office that it did not pay “to have the kind of man to come up here to learn to cook,” as the company had apparently sent. He was in danger of losing his crew, the foreman wrote, because the cook “fails very much...I will mention a few things. In making gravy for potatoes he would season it with all kinds of essence. No man could eat it and he tried to make mince pies. He made them all out of meat. They made good meat pies if every one liked them dry. This is a specimen of his fixing up every thing.”

Loggers never put up long with this sort of thing. If they did not walk off, they put the unsuccessful cook on notice that it was time for him to leave by nailing some of his hotcakes to his door. Anna Lind remembers a cook at a camp who was treated more gently. He was merely hurt that the loggers used his biscuits to throw at chipmunks. M.B. (“Pug”) Huntley of Lane County, Oregon, on the other hand, was threatened with dunking on a river drive unless he improved. “The new camp cook is a man of mystery to the crew for a few days, at least,” wrote one analyst. “His ability in the performance of his tasks is a subject of no little conjecture and speculation. If you could listen to the crew talk
on these occasions you might imagine they were all pupils of Epicurus. A cook in Oregon allegedly was fired when a logger caught him wiping his nose with his apron. The cook may have had status, but he had to earn it.

William K. Dyche, who ran a tie operation on the Tongue River of Wyoming in 1906, pointed out that he took great pains in hiring men. He always avoided the “job sharks,” the employment agencies that “would send out any kind of man whether he could do the work wanted of him or not.” To obtain good cooks, Dyche went all the way to a Spokane loggers’ supply merchant, who, like him, needed the goodwill of men in the industry. As the industry stabilized at the end of the century, the big companies were inclined to keep their prized cooks over the long term and assigned hiring of new ones to a special commissary department.

What was expected of a camp cook? He or she need not be what contemporary society calls “gourmet,” although, in a case like Tom Brackett, he might be just that. In fact, according to one source, “Loggers are the most conservative of men when it comes to food. They simply do not care for exotic adventures in eating or new taste sensations. They appreciate good cooking; they can tell in a second if their beans are properly seasoned and the roast beef just rare enough. But try an unfamiliar flavor on them and they immediately become antagonistic.” Irma Lee Emmerson told of an extraordinary cook named Lucien at a camp near Coos Bay, Oregon. The loggers complained incessantly of his experiments with crepes suzette and celery Victor—but his chocolate soufflé they thought was “swell pudding.”

Basically the camp cook was a chef, the executive coordinator of a large and complex food service operation. Cookhouses might feed as many as 500 men three or four times a day. (Most, of course, were much smaller). There was a crew of cookees and flunkeys (who waited on up to 40 loggers each) to supervise, as well as the “bull cooks,” men or boys who cut firewood and generally maintained the premises. The cook arranged the hauling of the noonday meal to those men who were working too deep in the woods to walk back (over a mile from the cookhouse meant dining in the field), or, by the 1920s or 1930s, the preparation of box lunches. And, most important of all, he needed to manage an unruly gang of lumberjacks when they were eating.

The Silence Rule

Out of this tricky requirement emerged the curious and universal loggers’ custom of silence at meals or, more precisely, the rule against talking at meals. It was one of the laws “everyone lived by,” Louie Blanchard remembered, “even if they had never been passed by the state legislature...When you was eating, no talking was allowed, except to say ‘Pass the meat’ or ‘Shoot the beans’ when the things didn’t come around fast enough. If we’d ever had any stylish visitors, they would of thought a logging camp crew the most polite people who ever broke bread together. Seeing all this politeness, they might of thought it was the Last Supper.”

Any number of explanations of the custom have been ventured. One claims that it was company policy so that the men would not dawdle at meals when they should be chopping. But, considering the problems with maintaining a stable crew and the pains companies otherwise took with food matters in order to solve them, it is unlikely that such a discipline originated at the head office. More likely, it was the cook who insisted on “all business” at mealtime. (It is impossible to imagine a silence rule in the shanties before there were real cooks and separate cookhouses). It has been suggested that he did not want to be aggravated by complaining, but he had an even better reason: the cook’s day was necessarily several hours longer than that of the loggers. He wanted his patrons in and out of the cookhouse quickly in order to get dishes done and preparations for the next feed under way. It might also be kept in mind considering this custom that, in the nineteenth century, with the exception of a tiny mannered aristocracy, Americans generally did not regard mealtime as an occasion of conviviality. It was a constant source of irritation and amazement to European travelers that Americans “ate and ran.” Mealtime was for fueling. Dawdling was pretentious in the land of utilitarianism. The loggers had plenty of precedent.

After women gained employment in cookhouses, the last thing a cook needed was flirtation, on his time, between the men and the young female flunkeys. Anna Lind recalls that “hanky-panky” was not extremely common anyway. But the Hammond Lumber Company refused to hire married...
women in their kitchens and as flunkeys, presumably in order to avoid disruptive liaisons. Finally, the obvious needs at least to be suggested; the men themselves, out of simple fascination and exhaustion, wanted to be at nothing but eating when at the cookhouse. As a Quebecois shrugged, "Quand on parle, on mange pas."

In any event, there was no tarrying. Anna Lind insists that the loggers "could lay away a big meal in eight minutes or less," and others say ten, twelve, and fifteen. In Humboldt County, California, journalist J.C. Ryan remembers having "seen a crew of 200 men file in and out of a cook camp in 25 minutes," presumably bolting 3,000 calories in the interim. This is reliably documented by the mill schedules. At Pope & Talbot's mill at Port Gamble, Washington, the whistle sounded at 5:20 a.m. to wake the hands. A second whistle at 5:40 signalled the opening of the cookhouse door where, photographs reveal, a line had already formed. The machinery was turned on at 6:00!

**Pastry**

As for the food, the cook was, curiously, prized less as a cook than as a baker. Cooks were "about on a par" in the meat department, according to George Kephart. Hence the "staples by which the ability of the cook was judged" were baked beans, cake, cookies, doughnuts, bread, hot rolls, and biscuits. "Loggers love pie," Anna Lind recalled, and she is echoed by every logging camp menu after the "revolution" of the mid-nineteenth century. "All those pie-eating, pancake-consuming men!" exclaimed another former flunkey in introducing her loggers. A bitter ex-employee of Pope & Talbot complained of every aspect of working for the company, including the cookhouse, "except for," he allowed, "the mince pies." At the same company in 1885, when workers at Port Gamble demanded that their Chinese cooks be replaced with Caucasians, Cyrus Walker told the Chinese to hang around. When the white cooks arrived, he told them to make a hundred pies. They could not and Walker sneered, "And you call yourselves cooks." They lasted a week. In the Lake states, the isolated lumberjacks paid no attention to Christmas except in that work was optional and pay therefore a bonus and, second, "The cook did have an extra-special dinner that day, more pies and cakes and good things like that," one logger recalled. When an ameliorist writer in the 4L Bulletin offered nine "new recipes" toward improving camp food, all were pastries.

Pastry was what counted. It was the one comestible commemo-rated in a verse from "Anstruther Camp," a song out of Buckthorn, Ontario, about 1900:

> Then at length the cook calls, 'Supper boys! We crowd in to our seats—
> It is a sight for all sore eyes to see those brave boys eat.
> And then the supper it being over, we talk of the days gone by,
> And Jack will say to Jim, 'old boy, did you get enough of pie?'

When a fancy new hotel opened in Seattle, its pastry chef was hired out of a logging camp.

This sweet (or starch) tooth makes sense in terms of the extraordinary energy demanded by logging work. Carbohydrates, especially the sugars, are digested almost immediately. If proteins and fats were required to withstand the rigors of the life over the long haul, it was carbohydrates that raised the body temperature immediately on a freezing morning and brought more or less instant relief from weariness when the day was over. The diet analized nutritionally above included a boggling 1,200 grams of carbohydrates, worth something over 4,200 immediately usable calories in itself, at least half the day's total.

It is telling that loggers' food was not served in courses. Everything came out at the same time. "The pie is on the table to be eaten," one reporter wrote, "and if so inclined they begin with pie, and if soup strikes their fancy later on they end with soup." The same account stated that loggers were given to binges, calling for a time for "nothing but the plainest food," but when "a sweet wave strikes the dining room, the enormous quantities of pies, puddings, cakes and sweet sauces are consumed." There is a great deal more to human tastes in food than physiology, but this account rings clearly of a group of men working off every calorie they consumed and then some (the "sweet wave"), and later "catching up" on the proteins and fats needed for rebuilding. When management hired a hideously greasy cook off the upper Kennebec in Maine, a group of Finnish loggers protested. "We need the grease!" they said.

**Milltown Cookhouses**

The cookhouse and its traditions of good food in plenty were transported almost intact from the camps to the sawmill towns despite the fact they were not so essential there. That is, the millworkers were not isolated. In the towns there were plenty of private eateries and retailers where, like factory workers elsewhere, the millworkers might easily have provided for themselves. Mining and smelter towns, for example, otherwise very much like milltowns in social structure, were far less likely to have maintained cookhouses. But in places like Coos Bay, Samoa, Port Gamble, Port Talbot, Tacoma, and elsewhere, the "all-you-can-eat" cookhouse continued to flourish until the era of the Second World War.

The cookhouse survived in part due to the lumberjacks' commitment to the "company town" principle. They wanted the fullest possible control of their work force, and that entailed obligations as well as advantages. There was the same goal of a stable working force that held in the camps, which purpose a well-reputed cookhouse still served. A substantial proportion of the work force was still homeless and wireless (about one-third of the workers at the Puget Mill Company in the 1880s were classified as transients; probably more were bachelors) and needed accommodation. Moreover, the quality of food served by a company had gone beyond being a mere element of the competition for labor to become a tradition on the basis of which companies built their newly discovered sense of civic responsibility. While the Fourth of July celebration at Port Gamble was largely a family affair, the cookhouses chipped in with baked hams, suckling pigs, and bread. There would be similar cook-
house-catered celebrations for special occasions such as Pope & Talbot's launching of the Tyee, the most powerful tugboat in the United States, at Port Ludlow in 1884. The Samoa Cookhouse served as relief headquarters when a navy cruiser ran aground on Humboldt Bar in 1917. The civic tradition also included free meals for retirees at Port Gamble and probably at other cookhouses in the sawmill towns.

Finally, many millworkers, at least at first, came out of the woods and the camp tradition. Unlike the hard-rock miners became mill and smelter workers, with their highly individualistic "prospector" tradition, loggers looked back to an inheritance that was somewhat "collectivist," at least in matters of bed and board. Western miners had been entrepreneurs before they became workers; loggers were employees in highly rationalized operations from the beginning.

One significant change in the transplantation of cookhouses from camp to town was that, in the milltowns, a fee was charged for meals. (Pay in the woods was usually wages plus bed and board). But these were not large, especially considering the high standard of the food. In the Redwood Country in the 1920s, an ordinary millworker made about $3.50 per day and paid 60 cents for three meals. A faller in the woods paid $1 for the same, but out of daily wages of $5.20. In Washington, pay was less but the cost of meals also dropped, to between 35 cents and 50 cents per day. Industry workers paid 15-20 percent of income for their food, less than the government calculated as a reasonable allotment of income.

Because of the spottiness of the records, and the fact that most companies attempted to provide as much as possible of the cookhouse provisions from within the corporate structure, it is difficult to determine whether or not the food services ran at a profit. Diamond Match claimed that its cookhouse operations around Stirling City, California, lost an average of just under $3,000 a year. Half of the respondents to a survey of companies in Washington in 1921 claimed they lost money on their cookhouses, one claiming a $600 monthly deficit. The same data, however, showed an average cookhouse fee of 49 cents and an average company cost for three meals of 46 cents. Probably, the cookhouse was the arena for eternal cost-jockeying. Paul Hosmer of Brooks-Scanlon summed it up nicely when he wrote that the company's interest was in just shading a 40 cent fee, while the workers' was to be served meals costing 42 1/2 cents. The final word on the question, however, must be the silence of the IWW. Even when most powerful among millworkers of the Northwest, the union complained little if at all about cookhouse fees.

The End of a Lovely Meal

Over the last quarter of a century, historians of labor have moved decisively away from an institutional approach to their subject; that is, away from seeing the history of the working class exclusively in terms of trade unions and institutional interactions among unions, businesses, and government. At least since the publication of E.P. Thompson's Making of the English Working Class in 1964, they have placed greater emphasis on aspects of working-class culture and modes of working-class action, which predated the union movement and continued to function independently of it.

This essay provides a humble example of this sort of action. Loggers never were especially good union men. While thousands in the Pacific Northwest threw in with the IWW (a very uninstitutional labor union) for a time, even the Wobblies never secured a permanent organization in the woods. Nor did any other union, until lumbering was transformed into an industry on modern lines by mechanization and forestry. Those early lumberjacks who were not aspiring lumbermen themselves—never likely trade unionists—were casual, footloose, ornery, and antisocial lumpen who paid little heed to social conventions of any kind, let alone institutional means of action.

But they could and did act collectively, nowhere more significantly than at their mealtimes. Weather was inevitable. So seemed sleeping conditions (until the Wobblies). Even wages seemed to be decreed by distant, barely comprehensibly forces. But the meal on the table was an intimate, eminently concrete reality, obviously a variable. Camps contending for a limited, mercurial work force could and did offer comestible inducements. By responding to this competition, the loggers continually pushed the stakes higher so that "good food," far better than a casual laborer could dream about in other kinds of work (harvesting, construction, mining, fisheries, and so on), became a tradition in the industry. So firmly rooted was it by the 1920s that employers themselves took pride in their dining halls.

In 1921, Jessie Rothgeb Mueller, a University of Washington dietician, made a time-honored academic play for some consultancy money. "At the present time there seems to be a gap between the university and the business world," she wrote. Professional buyers might be of use to the lumber industry. Among her proposals were "substitutes for expensive foods" and "standardization of food. This will eliminate the continual moving on the part of the men. Camps, at present, are competing with one another for men by serving better food." She also proposed money-saving cafeteria-style service, in which the men would pay for what they took. Although Professor Mueller told the Home Economics Association that one lumberman had offered a camp for experimental purposes, there is no evidence that her proposals were put into practice during that era.

Indeed, workers would have emptied the pilot project cookhouse in short order. Good food and plenty of it was the sine qua non of work in the industry. As for standing in a line, waiting to point to the 9,000 calories' worth of items the logger elected to eat that day...Professor Mueller was out of touch.

What ended the world of the cookhouse was the transformation of the lumber industry by, above all, the internal combustion engine. Gargantuan meals were no longer necessary when trees were felled and logs bucked by chainsaw, and removed from the woods by the throw of a switch or the twirling of a hydraulically assisted steering wheel. Studies of energy use by Durnin and Passmore indicate that sawing with a power saw burns about half the calories that hand sawing does. Driving a truck or other machine costs 1.3 to 2.6 calories per minute as opposed to 12.1 calories wrestling logs about manually. The logger's need for food fuel, like that...
of the general population, declined steadily and drastically. If there are no potbellies in the old logging photos trotted out by archivists, there are plenty peeking out from under Pendleton shirts in the illustrations of the contemporary trade journals. No data are available, but it would not come as a surprise to discover that forest industry workers jog as frantically and frequently and as far as the national mean. If they do, they are doing it in towns connected by fast highways that lead to interstate freeways and anywhere in the country to which they care to drive. The internal combustion engine not only revolutionized the transportation of logs from woods to mill, it nearly eliminated the isolated logging camp and the provincial milltown. When it was possible to live elsewhere than in a camp (which, even with cordon bleu cookery, was socially limited), loggers moved to towns, where, in the way of towns, they married and made families. With the necessary triumph of forestry and tree farming, moreover, they stayed in the same place. They ate at home, and the unmarried casuals disappeared or, at least, declined sufficiently in numbers that the cookhouse was no longer necessary. The Union Lumber Company's cookhouse in Mendocino County, build in 1885, closed in January 1951. "Fewer jobs were taken by single fellows from outside the area," recalled milltown veteran Ralph W. Andrews. The Samoa Cookhouse, opened in 1892, is today operated by Louisiana-Pacific Corporation as a restaurant and museum. It is billed as the "last surviving cookhouse in the West," and tourists can join locals for bountiful meals, "lumber camp style," seven days a week.

The passing of hundreds of small cookhouses in the woods was not much noticed. But it is reassuring to discover that the healthy traditions of yore are not entirely dead. Where camps survive in the United States, as in Alaska or at Weyerhaeuser's Camp 14 in eastern Oregon, the table still awes visitors. As recently as 1978, there was a flare-up at a camp in British Columbia when workers complained that there was too little shrimp in the shrimp salad.

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