



The Buildings in the Woods

by J. C. Ryan

From the very beginning of logging in the United States, camps of some sort were used to house the men and animals who did the work in the industry. In New England, there were small camps, usually only several small buildings occupied more or less by family groups who did the logging. However, by the time logging had spread to inland Maine along the rivers where no settlers had taken up land, regular camps to house and feed the men had to be constructed long distances from settlements. This is where real logging camps got their start, and the pattern was set as camps and lumbering moved west.

In the early days, camps were smaller than the latter-day camps. The average camp had from 75 to 100 men, with a 100-man camp considered large. The average camp had the following buildings: a kitchen with an attached root cellar, one large or two small bunkhouses, one barn, one blacksmith shop, one filer shack, and possibly an office for the foreman, scaler, clerk, and others.

All buildings were built of logs, usually tree-length white pine, about 60 to 80 feet long. Bunkhouses were, on the average, about five logs high. The logs were "chinked" with wood and plastered with mud or caulked with moss to make them tight. Rafters and beams were also of logs, but the roofs were usually of boards covered with tar paper. In some remote areas where lumber was hard to transport to the camp sites, sometimes the roofs were made of balsam poles with tar paper and hay on top. There would be one or two windows in the gable ends, which also were of boards, and one or two "skylights" in the roof. These skylights could be opened from the inside with a notched pole that held the skylight as far open as desired.

Bunkhouses had a front and back door, with a good path from the back door to the outhouse. In a large camp there would be two outhouses—one in back of each bunkhouse. There were usually two rows of bunks, one on each side of the bunkhouse, with a bench known as a "deacon seat" run-

Washington-state loggers outside a bunkhouse on their day off. All photos accompanying this article are from the Forest History Society archives.

ning along the front of the bunks. Boards were usually used in constructing bunks, although in the very early days some bunks were made of poles. Some lumberjacks preferred poles to boards as they claimed they had more spring in them.

In places where the transportation of lumber was a problem, men sometimes were crowded into one bunkhouse and bunks were constructed so the men slept with their feet out towards the center of the building. Bunks of this kind were known as "muzzle loaders" and were shunned by lumberjacks if possible. Quite often they were at camps of small jobbers or contractors.

At one side of the bunkhouse near the front door, a sink was made of boards for the men to use to wash up. There were, as a rule, several wash



Exploits River Lumber and Pulp Co. camp photo, Botwoodville, Newfoundland, not dated.

basins and a couple of roller towels and a looking glass above the sink. Kitchens were usually a little longer than the bunkhouses, with several windows in the end where the cooking was done and several extra skylights above the stoves and work area. Construction of the kitchens was also of logs with pole rafters and board roofs. A root cellar usually was attached to one side of the kitchen, with a door entering directly from the kitchen work area. The root cellar had about two feet of dirt over the log roof, and all food and supplies to be protected from freezing were kept there.

A dish-up table usually separated the eating area from the cooking area, and large wooden racks above the stoves held pans and other utensils. Two large barrels of hot water, heated from water-fronts in the ranges, stood beside the stoves. Dining tables usually ran the length of the eating area with the men sitting on benches.

Barns were also of tree-length logs, as a rule, standing end to end with a shed-type open area between the barns for keeping the horses' hay and oats. Stalls and mangers in the barns were usually made from small poles. Pegs were inserted in the stall separators for hanging harnesses. Floors were, as a rule, made from larger balsam poles flattened on one side with an adz. A wire ran the length of the barn behind the horses for the teamsters to hang their lanterns, and a bunch of snaps on the wire let the lanterns be moved

back and forth as necessary. Some barns had windows in the gables and a skylight or two, but all barns had a vent through the roof that could be opened to let the steam out when the horses came in warm.

Blacksmith shops, offices, and filer shacks also were made of logs in the early days. Blacksmith shops had floors similar to the barns, and the log walls had wooden pegs driven in to make racks for holding tools and supplies. Filing shacks usually had a number of windows to provide as much light as possible for the saw filers.

Some small jobbers or contractors made camp buildings out of upright, smaller logs, but this type of construction was found more in the tie and pulp industry rather than in the logging camps.

As transportation became better, camps became larger, and by 1915 most camps were of lumber with tar paper on both roof and sides. Most of the larger camps had 200 men and as many as three or four bunkhouses. These bunkhouses were not so crowded, and most of the company camps had washrooms built onto the backs of the bunkhouses for the men to wash up and also do their laundry if they wished. Others had a separate building set up in which the men could wash their clothes.

By 1920 spring bunks and mattresses appeared in most of the larger camps, and while some men preferred them to the board bunks, lots of the

older jacks still liked the board bunks as they could change the hay in their bunks any time they wished, and they claimed the mattresses got dirty and held bedbugs.

It was in the fall of 1922 that I saw my first lumber camp with electric lights. That was Camp 30, of the Northern Lumber Company, in section 26-55-15. In the winter of 1922-23 I visited over 70 camps of the Combined Cloquet Companies and their jobbers, and Camp 30 was the only one with electric lights. But the electric lights were so successful and popular, within a year all their big camps had them.

There were great differences among camp foremen and jobbers as to the type of camps they would build. Some took great pride in having a set of camp buildings that were a joy to live in—while others put up just the worst camps possible to get by with. An old lumberjack hearing who was foreman at a camp knew just what to expect in living quarters.

I can recall arriving at a jobber's camp one evening at just about dark and on asking the way to the office having the most dilapidated building of the camp pointed out to me. When I opened the office door I fell over a set of whippletrees lying on the floor, knocked a horse collar from a peg and fell to the floor with the collar over my head. I found the whole camp in about the same shape. But at another jobber's camp just two miles away, I was afraid to step on the floor it was so clean.

It was jobbers of the former type who gave the logging industry a bad name as far as living conditions were concerned, but as a whole the industry did its best in trying to make its men as comfortable as possible with what they had to do with. ▲

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