

### Turn of the Century Lumber Camps

The time was over a hundred years ago, before the Internet, before televisions and video games, even before radios. It was a time of widespread immigration and westward travel. Railroads were being laid everywhere. – Industry was booming. Cities were growing up faster than architects and contractors could build. Lumber was in high demand.

Lumber camps were the most common form of logging in the 1800s and early 1900s. A company would build a mill, hire mill workers (called millwrights) and lumberjacks, and set up a community (called camps) for the employees. At these camps, there were women and men brought in to keep house, cook and take care of the mill workers and lumberjacks.

#### Glossary

*crosscut saw* – a long saw for 2 people, making cutting time quicker and reaching higher trees easier.

*grease monkey* – a lumber company employee whose job was to grease-down the skid-row logs so that the big logs would roll more smoothly.

*lumberjack* – a person, usually male, who cuts timber down for lumbermills.

*lumber camp* – a community set up for millwrights and lumberjacks as well as the company that employs them.

*millwright* – a lumber mill employee who cut and shape logs into building timbers.

*skid-row* – small trees laid in a row on the ground so that pulling big logs is easier; the big logs slide across the rollers created by the smaller trees.

*springboard* – a small platform used to elevate lumberjacks for higher cuts on thicker trees.

Lumberjacks and mill workers had a rough life, with back-breaking, laborious work from sunrise to sunset and even later in some cases. The majority of cutting and milling of timber was done in the winter, as the ground was frozen over with ice, making the logs controllable for transport. In summer, the work

### A Day in the Life of a Lumberjack or Millwright

5 am – wake up and get ready

5:30 am – eat breakfast made by camp cook

6 am – walk to mill or set up to cut down trees

6:15 am – begin work

11 am – 1 to 2 hour break for lunch (and nap if time allows)

6 or 7 p.m. – work ends; head for camp

½ hour after work-end – supper made by camp cook

8 p.m. – ½ hour free time before bed.

8:30 p.m. – bedtime

was additionally difficult, so extra hands were necessary to grease the skid-row logs for easier rolling. Oxen and draft-horse teams were used to transport this lumber over skid-row.

Free time was sparse in a lumber camp, but the workers did enjoy some moments away from the job. Generally, the employees were only given Sundays off for worship, but sometimes the company would grant weekend and holiday passes to keep morale up in camp. Entertainment came in many forms: swimming in the river during summers, telling ghost stories around campfires, dancing, drinking and frolicking in the nearest town, and finding comfort in the arms of loved ones. Company wagons would also drop male workers in town to visit the saloons, while the female workers found solace in crafts and the company of those who stayed behind.

The tools of the trade were fairly crude. As steam engines were still moderately new to the scene of industry, they were few and far between. Workers had to use sheer strength and skill to work the timber. Saws and axes were generally the tools of lumberjacks. Crosscut saws were used by two men for quicker cutting; standard hand saws were used by the lone lumberjack on smaller trees. Axes were traditional tools for the small trees, as many could be cut down with few swings. A millwright's trade tools were more extensive. They utilized various complicated planing tools for shaping logs into building lumber.

