

[Save the Peavies]

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SAVE THE PEAIVIES

Sure, I worked for old Van Dyke, God rest his soul in pieces! Perhaps I shouldn't have said that. What I mean is that I hope he's in the blackest part of hell, rolling iron logs with a red hot peavey. And nothing to eat but beans and codfish either!

"Sure, I worked on the drives from Connecticut Lake to Mr. [Tom?]. But I generally stopped at Turner's Falls. And don't call us log drivers. We're river men. And [ya?] should have ought to have heard the gang [cheer?] when old Van dyke slipped, and we all seen he was a goner!

Yes, I'd go up in the fall and spend the winter in the woods. We'd cut the logs and pile them on the bank of a little stream somewheres, if it [wasn't?] [weren't?] handy to get them to the river. We had to mark each one with the company mark, kind of a brand, I guess, out in the end of each log. And they were piled in such a way that when the [freshot?] came in the spring, we could yank out a couple of props, and the whole caboodle of logs would go rolling into the water.

We'd send a small gang on ahead - maybe a couple of boats - to break up the jams, and keep the drive going. Then the bunch of us would come with the horses. And last would come another small gang with maybe a team or two, to haul in the logs the farmers had stole offen us.

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And I guess maybe the gang changed the marking on a log once in a while, if they thought it would pay.

“The idea was for the first bunch to ride the [freshot?]. And not let the drive get held up. Of course, the water would take the logs over meadows, and when the river went down, we'd have to haul them out with 2 horses. But we knew where it was liable to happen, so we'd have a man at the right place to keep them in the current. And sometimes two, or three. And sometimes we'd string a boom - hitch logs end to end. And hitch the ends to trees, maybe - so the boom would steer the logs for us. For the quicker we got the drive through, the cheaper it was for old Van Dyke. He didn't have so big a payroll. And that old devil was everywhere. Last part of it he had a car and chauffeur, so's he didn't have to drive, but could keep his mind on [swearing?].

“Such sleep as we get, we get on the ground. And then be waked up by a kick from Van Dyke's boot, if he caught you at it. Guess, he never slept at all. And to save time in cooking, the cook of the first gang would bury beans in bean posts in holes dug in the sand and filled with hot coals, so that the next bunch didn't need to waste any time.

“I got sick of being wet and cold all the time, so I got a job cooking. Van Dyke told me that if I'd run alone I could stand on a log.

And what the L was I cold for? That work would keep me warm. But I told him I thought I could save him money on the grub. So I get the job.

“We used to but our supplies from little stores in the towns along the river that stood in with Van Dyke. And they used to give me a little book with what I'd bought written in it. I bought anything they had that I thought the boys would like. But I make the storekeeper write in beans so much, and codfish so much. But nothing else. I let the storekeeper charge up a pound or so extra for doing this.

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“One day Van Dyke came running. He'd seen some egg shells in the ashes of one of my campfires up river. 'show me your books!' He yelled.

I showed 'em. He couldn't read much. But he knew beans and codfish when 3 he seen it. He looked surprised. But he said, 'that's the stuff, [Nop?], beans and codfish is good enough for peasoups. (1) Sock it to 'em!”

But after that I buried my egg shells.

“He said codfish helped a man to swim. And that beans was better than dynamite for blowing up a jam. What he meant was he liked them because they was cheap. And that men had to be well fed on something or they couldn't do their work.

“One time, in the French King Rapids, the logs jammed. And when a couple of the gang went out to hunt the key log, the jam broke. The men ran for it, but it was no use, both got knocked into the water. Of course, we ran out on the logs to help. But old Van Dyke yelled , “[Never?] mind the men, Save the peavies?” That was him. Never mind the men, he could get more. But the peavies - the [hooks?] on a wooden handle, that we rolled logs with, you know - was property. And property cost money.

[“?]Yes, a peavy is like a [cnathook?], except a peavy has a spike [on?] the end.

“So maybe we didn't cheer that day at Turner's Falls, when Van Dyke has his chauffeur back his touring car to the edge of that cliff that overlooks the Falls, so's he could stank up in back and wave his arms and swear at us. I was standing on a boom out in the middle of the river, pushing logs that was branded for down the river so's they'd go over the Falls, and steering those we wanted inside the boom, and keeping one eye on Van Dyke, like everyone else. Guess the Falls was making too much noise to suit him, and he wanted to get nearer so's we wouldn't miss anything he was saying. He waved the chauffeur to back more. The chauffeur acted scared and only backed a couple of feet, and stopped so's Van Dyke almost lost his balance - he was standing in back, He turned around and (1) [?] -

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French Canadians 4 said something to the chauffeur then stood watching him fumbling with the handles. The man was badly rattled, I guess, with Van Dyke right there on his neck almost. The car coughed once or twice, and then shot back over the cliff. And, my, didn't we cheer! 'Never mind the man, save his matches!' yelled somebody. And we all cheered again.

We were awful sorry for the chauffeur, though. We'd forgotten all about him. And both of 'em were killed deader'n the codfish old Van Dyke used to make us eat.

When you asked me about Van Dyke, I thought I hated him. And was glad he was gone. But now I've been talking about him, I'm not so sure.

I was only a kid then. But I see now that old Van Dyke was up against the railroads. He had to do things on the cheap in order to save his job and ours. Sure, he was hard. But maybe we weren't so soft ourselves. People in the Turner's Falls stores didn't like us walking on their hardwood floors in our caulked boots - shoes with spikes in the bottom to keep us from slipping off the logs. We chipped little pieces out of the varnish every step we took. And when they kicked, maybe we didn't take them places apart! Ever see a man who's had the small pox? Face all pitted? Well, if he was a river man, maybe he had small pox, and maybe he didn't. Maybe some boys tramped on his face with caulked boots.

If they weren't any ladies around, I could show you where they tromped on me, when I put salt instead of sugar in their coffee by mistake.

Believe me, I'm tattooed!

"One thing old Van Dyke seemed to like. That was to hear us sing. Not that we ever sang much. But sometimes when the old river was rolling the logs along nice. And we'd finished our grub in the evening, we'd strike up a song. And old Van Dyke never butted in.

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“No, I can't remember the songs. Wish I could. I mind a verse of one though. It had lots of verses and some of them weren't exactly pretty. But the one I like went this way - ‘Oh, some ye lousy rivermen Come on and gather round! We'll sing a song of French King Rock, Where the bunch of us was drowned!’