

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Hour: \_\_\_\_\_

## Life in a Lumber Camp

### Background Information

Below are two primary source documents related to the lumber era in Wisconsin: a humorous letter written by an unknown youth, originally printed in The Chippewa Herald; and a popular folk song, "The Shantyman's Life." Both documents offer a varied assortment of "lumberjack lingo," the vernacular terminology that loggers seemed to specialize in inventing.

We know very little about the author of "He Didn't Like It," which appeared in the Chippewa Herald in April 1882. The newspaper editor's introduction says that the letter was written by a young man whose father was a minister in Madison--perhaps helping to explain author's distaste for the less-than-genteel lifestyle in the camps. The author had apparently spent one season in "the pinery." We can also infer that he was working in the watershed of the Chippewa River, a region with the richest stands of white pine in North America.

"The Shantyman's Life" is an example of a widely popular early-American song that was revised in Wisconsin's lumber camps. Occupational songs such as this one chronicled both mundane and extraordinary aspects of life in a lumber camp. These were not rhythmic work songs but were sung around lumber camps for entertainment in the evening and on weekends. There were many variations in this song's lyrics. Emery De Noyer, a resident of Rhineland, contributed this version to the Wisconsin Folk Music Recording Project in 1941. Disabled as a child, De Noyer joined a logging operation in northern Wisconsin at age twelve, working as a camp entertainer. De Noyer's sound recording is part of the Wisconsin Folk Music Recording Project, sponsored in the early 1940s by the University of Wisconsin and the Library of Congress. The complete set of these important recordings is preserved at the Mills Music Library at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

### Document 1: The Chippewa Herald, 1882

He Didn't Like It. -A son of a Madison clergyman concluded that he had stayed around home enough, and went to one of the logging camps up river. His experience there will make the old woods' veterans "smile out loud."

Here is the letter he wrote home to his brother:

I have just written to pa, and will try and write you a short letter, although I am about half asleep, I was glad to get your letter, and glad to hear that you are doing so well. All I can say is stick to it. I have had one of the hardest jobs in the woods so far, but think I will change off to-morrow and go at something else. I have been working on the landing. We have to get up at about 2:30, get breakfast at three, and then walk four miles to work and take a cold dinner with us, and get back to the shanty all the way from seven to nine o'clock. So you see we have pretty long days in the woods. Two suppers in one night; that is more than you can get in a civilized community. And then after supper we roll into our soft, downy couch of lousy blankets, and lay and listen to the mocking bird, with music by the entire band, and snoring in seven different languages, mostly imported--professional snorers from Germany and Norway, warranted never to miss a note, and to keep in any climate, and while the beautiful odor of wet socks and foot rags is heard in the near distance, and finally fall sleep to slow music, only to be awakened in a few minutes by the melodious voice of the cook, singing, "roll out your dead bodies, daylight in the swamp," etc. Then we get up and go to our beautiful and sumptuous repast of fricasseed pork and beans on the half shell, with a basin of reduced ice water, flavored with copperas, and called, by the low and uneducated, "tea." Such is life in the woods, but as for me, give

me six months, twice a year for two years, in Waupun, or some other place of enjoyment. Well, Ralph, I hope you will learn some useful trade or usefulness, that will keep you from ever having to go to the woods. If I get out this time I will stay out, and don't forget to recollect to remember it.

## **Document 2: The Shantyman's Life**

All you jolly fellows, come listen to my song;  
It's all about the pinery boys and how they got along.  
They're the jolliest lot of fellows, so merrily and fine,  
They will spend the pleasant winter months in cutting down the pine.

Some would leave their friends and homes, and others they love dear,  
And into the lonesome pine woods their pathway they do steer.  
Into the lonesome pine woods all winter to remain,  
A'waiting for the springtime to return again.

Springtime comes, oh, glad will be its day!  
Some return to home and friends, while others go astray.  
The sawyers and the choppers, they lay their timber low.  
The swampers and the teamsters they haul it to and fro.  
Next comes the loaders before the break of day.  
Load up your sleighs, five thousand feet to the river, haste away.  
Noon time rolls around, our foremen loudly screams,  
"Lay down your tools, me boys, and we'll haste to pork and beans."  
We arrive at the shanty, the splashing then begins,  
The banging of the water pails, the rattling of the tins.  
In the middle of the splashing, our cook for dinner does cry.  
We all arise and go, for we hate to lose our pie.

Dinner being over, we into our shanty go.  
We all fill up our pipes and smoke 'til everything looks blue.  
"It's time for the wood, me boys," our foreman he does say.  
We all gather up our hats and caps, to the woods we haste away.

We all go with a welcome heart and a well contented mind  
For the winter winds blow cold among the waving pines.  
The ringing of saws and axes until the sun goes down.  
"Lay down your tools, me boys, for the shanties we are bound."

We arrive at the shanties with cold and wet feet,  
Take off our overboots and packs, the supper we must eat.  
Supper being ready, we all arise and go  
For it ain't the style of lumberjack to lose his hash, you know.  
At three o'clock in the morning, our bold cook loudly shouts,  
"Roll out, roll out, you teamsters, it time that you are out."  
The teamsters they get up in a fright and manful wail:  
"Where is my boots? Oh, where's my pack? My rubbers have gone astray.  
"They other men they then get up, their packs they cannot find  
And they lay it to the teamsters, and they curse them 'til they're blind.

Springtime comes, Oh, glad will be the day!  
Lay down your tools, me boys, and we'll haste to break away.

The floating ice is over, and business now destroyed.  
And all the able-bodied men are wanted on the Pelican drive.

With jam-pikes and peaveys those able men do go  
Up all those wild and dreary streams to risk their lives you know.  
On cold and frosty mornings they shiver with the cold,  
So much ice upon their jam-pikes, they scarcely them can hold.

Now whenever you hear those verses, believe them to be true.  
For if you doubt one word of them, just ask Bob Munson's crew.  
It was in Bob Munson's shanties where they were sung with glee  
And the ending of my song is signed with C, D, F, and G.

**Vocab: Pt. 1** Based on what you read, what do you think the following words mean?

choppers-

“daylight in the swamp”

jam-pike

loaders

peavey-

pinery-

sawyers-

shanty-

shantyman-

swampers-

teamsters-

**Vocab: Pt. 2** Write down the correct meaning of the following terms based off of class discussion.

choppers-

“daylight in the swamp”-

jam-pike-

loaders-

peavey-

pinery-

sawyers-

shanty-

shantyman-

swampers-

teamsters-

**Questions** Answer the following questions using specific examples from the texts.

1. Compare and contrast the account published in the Chippewa Herald with the lyrics for "The Shantyman's Life."
2. Consider the authors' sentiments about life in a lumber camp. What do they say?
3. Does one document contain any substantive information about life in the lumber camps that supports the other? Explain.
4. What topics do both documents discuss?
5. Evaluate both documents as historical sources. What are their strengths and weaknesses?
6. How do the lyrics from "The Shantyman's Life" explain the process of harvesting logs in the pinery?
7. Do you need more information to use these documents productively? Why?