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# The Lumbercamp Song Tradition in Newfoundland

JOHN ASHTON

SINCE THE FIRST days of settlement, the forest has been an important element in the social, economic and cultural development of Newfoundland. As well as providing settlers with food, fuel and shelter, the woods yielded materials essential to the prosecution of the fishery in all its phases. In later years commercial exploitation of the forest resource produced one of the first nonmarine based industrial activities in the province and provided regular infusions of cash into an economy that was dominated by semisubsistence exploitation of a variety of seasonally-based fishing, hunting and crop-producing activities. The forest industry was responsible for the establishment and growth of several of Newfoundland's larger communities, such as Corner Brook, Grand Falls, Deer Lake, Millertown and Bishop's Falls.

Folklorists have emphasized the maritime element in Newfoundland society and culture. Not surprisingly, they have turned for ethnographic data to studies of the lifestyles and beliefs of fishermen and their families in small outport communities scattered around the coast (Faris; Firestone). Such communities have gone on to serve as laboratories for folklore fieldwork of all kinds, and the resulting collections and analyses have naturally dwelt upon the place of the sea in local cultural tradition. Works such as Elisabeth Greenleaf's *Ballads and Sea Songs of Newfoundland*, Shannon Ryan's and Larry Small's *Haulin' Rope & Gaff* and Kenneth Peacock's *Songs of the Newfoundland Outports* bear witness to this tendency in folksong scholarship. The discipline of folklore has paid little attention to the position in local culture of the woods and the activities that took place in them.

Large-scale exploitation of the forests in Newfoundland coincided with the completion of the transisland railway at the end of the nineteenth century. Short-lived and ill-fated attempts to harvest the white pine for commercial lumber production were followed by the establishment of a pulp and paper industry based upon the activities of the Anglo-Newfoundland Development Corporation in Grand Falls (AND) and the Corner Brook operations of Bowater Newfoundland Limited (Hicks; Inder; Warr). During the 1930s forest products replaced fish as Newfoundland's most valuable trading commodity. By the late 1950s the two companies were harvesting almost a million cords of wood a year and providing mainly seasonal employment for a workforce of about 15,000 men (Hiller 31a, Dunfield 10).

The system of woods work established to supply the industry in the early years of this century endured in all its essential features until the late 1950s. The forest was harvested by the clear-cutting method of pulpwood logging, whereby all softwood trees were removed from large cutting areas that had been previously surveyed. Each year, during the fall and early winter, the wood was felled and cut into four-foot lengths by means of the single-handed bucksaw. In midwinter, the pulp logs were transported by horse-drawn sled from the "yards" or cutting areas to the nearest navigable river or pond. The spring of the year brought with it the drive, the process by which the logs were conveyed by water from the woods to the pulp mill, rail depot or seaport, depending upon the location of the woodlands being harvested.

Almost every stage of this process was executed manually; hence thousands of men were required to reap the pulpwood harvest each year. The few towns that grew up in the central and western areas as a direct result of the opening up of the forests could meet only a small proportion of the industry's manpower requirements. Accordingly, most of the loggers in the province were recruited from the outports, the small fishing settlements which dot the coastline of the island along its entire circumference. The majority of them were seasonal workers, fishing during the summer months and working in the lumberwoods during the fall. Those who were fortunate enough to be retained for the winter haul-off and the spring drive could obtain year-round employment by combining their fishing and lumbering activities.

The lumberjack has been celebrated throughout North America, in folk and popular culture, as a colourful individual who worked and played hard, loved to swear, drink and fight, possessed boundless energy and great

physical strength and had a love of and talent for music and song. The romantic appeal of the lumbering profession has, over the years, stimulated the publication of a variety of books aimed at the general public. These works have made frequent reference to the singing, music and dancing that went on in lumbercamps all over the continent (Holbrook; MacKay; Pike). Songs could be heard wherever the loggers worked; they went with the occupation.

The lumbercamps have also provided fertile ground for the specialized research of American and mainland Canadian folklorists, particularly those primarily engaged in folksong scholarship. Important song collections have been gathered from the best known lumbering regions on the continent, Northern Ontario and Quebec (Fowke), the Maritime Provinces (Manny), Michigan (Beck, "Lumberjack Ballads," *Lore of the Lumbercamps*), Maine (Eckstorm; Gray) and the Adirondacks (Bethke). They include songs that were clearly part of a general North American occupational tradition as well as pieces that were purely local in reference and circulation. Some of these works describe the singing and the situations in which it occurred. Collectively, they suggest that in those parts of North America where widespread logging activity took place, one could reasonably expect to find a tradition of singing in the lumbercamps and a body of songs created for performance in those contexts.

The island of Newfoundland has probably been subjected to a more extensive program of folksong collecting than any other part of the North American continent. The work of foreign and native-born scholars, musicians, teachers and students has resulted in the publication of numerous collections of folksongs from Newfoundland, as well as books, essays and articles on the regional song tradition in both scholarly and commercial format. Strangely, singing and song-making associated with the lumbering industry have gone largely unnoticed in this literature. References to these phenomena amount to little more than recognition of their existence, and most of the logging songs that appear in printed collections originated outside of Newfoundland. The author of the best known survey of the indigenous folksongs suggested that "The size of Newfoundland's large pulp and paper industry is certainly not reflected in the number of lumbering songs in the native collection" (Peacock, *Native Songs of Newfoundland* 230).

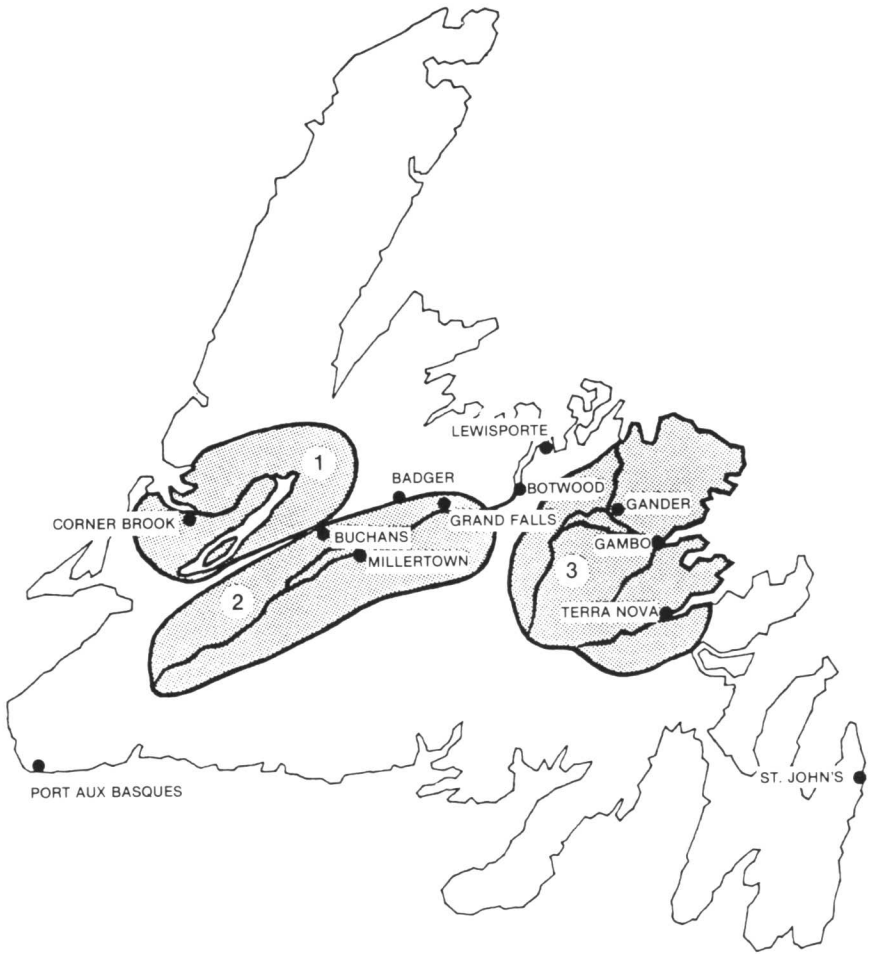
This pronouncement is indicative of the anomalous situation that has prevailed in Newfoundland with respect to folksongs associated with the lumbering industry. That industry has flourished since the turn of the cen-

ture in a province whose rich and varied folksong tradition has been scrutinized by many scholars. At the same time, hardly any material relating to lumbering has appeared in published collections of folksongs from Newfoundland. The four largest printed miscellanies contain over eight hundred songs in several versions, and yet of this total only two percent make any reference to the lumberwoods. Most of these were imported to Newfoundland from mainland Canada or the United States (Greenleaf; Karpeles; Leach; Peacock, *Songs of the Newfoundland Outports*). A survey of all Newfoundland folksongs that appeared in printed form between 1842 and 1974 only serves to reinforce this impression of imbalance in the portrayal of the regional folksong repertory (Mercer).

Rather than attribute these scholarly trends to the scarcity of lumbering songs or to the notion that singing and song-making were not an element in the occupational life of Newfoundland woodsmen, we might look for a partial explanation in the persuasions and activities of the major figures in local folksong scholarship. To take one example, the English folksong collector Maud Karpeles was clearly not interested in collecting lumbering ballads, which she probably would not have regarded as folksongs anyway. She deliberately coaxed her informants away from singing native materials and towards providing renditions of the songs that she was looking for, principally Newfoundland variants of traditional ballads from the British Isles. It is quite clear from both her remarks in *Folksongs from Newfoundland* and the field notes that she recorded while on the island that she rejected much of the material that she heard as unworthy of inclusion.<sup>1</sup> We do not know, in fact, whether or not she encountered any lumbering songs during the course of her research.

MacEdward Leach's collection resulted from his fieldwork in Labrador, an area of the province which until recently had no lumbering industry to speak of (Defebaugh). While Greenleaf and Peacock both admitted a few lumbering songs into their collections, we know from comparing songs that they collected from the same people that neither of them recorded the entire repertoires of many of their informants. Furthermore, the work of all the best known folksong collectors was understandably restricted in geographic scope. None of them spent extensive periods of time conducting research in the main lumbering regions of Newfoundland, namely, the Humber and Exploits valleys and the Gander-Gambo-Terra Nova district of the north-east (see fig. 1). The desire of these collectors to visit as many communities as possible meant that their visits to individual outports were of brief duration. Lumbering songs tend to be highly allusive and not to migrate exten-

Fig. 1



PRINCIPAL LOGGING DISTRICTS

1. HUMBER VALLEY
2. EXPLOITS VALLEY
3. GANDER - GAMBO - TERRA NOVA DISTRICT

sively. Consequently they are most likely to be found as a result of intensive fieldwork in one area.

Peacock worked with several singers who had experience in the lumberwoods of the province, and he was aware of the central position occupied by the woods camps in Newfoundland's folksong tradition.<sup>2</sup> He simply did not explore this topic thoroughly in his published work. Ten lumbering ballads are, however, included in *Songs of the Newfoundland Outports* (744-64) and two in *The Native Songs of Newfoundland* (231-4). Historically, the publications of most folksong researchers in Newfoundland have been lacking in contextual information. Their work has been motivated by what Alan Dundes has called "the devolutionary premise in folklore scholarship." A belief in the imminent and unavoidable disappearance of folklore in all but the most remote and backward communities has encouraged fieldwork whose principal goal has been that of cultural retrieval. The collections of professionals and amateurs alike have been little more than song compilations, so much so that of the works published up to 1974, as Paul Mercer has said,

the Leach collection is the only Newfoundland folksong volume which satisfies the scholarly standards of the folklorist, including proper attention to the people who sang the songs (18).

More recent folksong scholarship has been characterized by an increasing bent towards contextual analysis, and there has been some specific interest in occupational folksongs. As yet, however, there has been no systematic attempt to investigate lumbercamp songs and lumbercamp singing as distinct traditional phenomena. Fieldwork in western and northeastern Newfoundland and an examination of the Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Archive (MUNFLA) indicate that from the turn of the century until the early 1960s the lumbercamps provided a unique and important context for folksong performances of all kinds, served as a crucial channel for the transmission of folksongs throughout the island and stimulated the creation of a substantial body of occupational folksongs indigenous to Newfoundland.

As was the case in lumberwoods tradition throughout North America, song performances in the Newfoundland logging industry took place in the workmen's living quarters during their leisure hours. It was a bunkhouse singing tradition conditioned by the restricted surroundings in which it took place, rather than a worksong tradition in which singing was used by the worker to assist him in his appointed tasks. While men working in the

woods might sing to themselves to pass the time, as they would in any occupation, there were few song performances associated with logging itself. For one thing, most of the work of the pulpwood forests employed single workers or small teams of men. It did not require the type of coordination which was the chief objective of the shantymen on maritime sailing vessels. Furthermore, with the possible exception of the teamster,<sup>3</sup> most Newfoundland woods workers were discouraged from singing on the job by the physical demands of the industry.

In the brief period of relaxation enjoyed by the Newfoundland lumberjack at the end of his working day, music and song were among many forms of diversion available to him. In most cases, singing took place alongside, and often in competition with, a variety of other recreational pursuits. The following account was provided by Frank Blake of Victoria Cove, Notre Dame Bay.

If I was over in one corner o' the bunkhouse singing there'd be perhaps two or three fellows sitting on my bunk and two or three more on the next one and so many more up in the top bunk. You'd sort of be surrounded, y'know, 'cause they didn't want to miss a word so to speak, eh? So you'd usually have your cluster. . . . Sometimes there might be a card game going on up the other end o' the bunkhouse . . . and perhaps a couple o' people would be up there watching the card game. But every now and then you'd get a "Well done," or a clap from them as well. . . . So it didn't always happen the same, it varied, y'know. Sometimes you just sung a song and you mightn't have nobody on your bunk. You'd be just there yourself and sing the song and everybody'd be listening in the bunkhouse. . . . A few people might read, card games, playing cards. Of course there was always somebody like, some fellows liked playing tricks on other fellows, y'know (MUNFLA 85-087, 23).

The type of singing thus depicted took place routinely in logging camps throughout Newfoundland for over fifty years and became an important factor in the dynamics of social interaction in the lumberwoods. The camps varied considerably in size and population, but those run by the larger private contractors and the AND in central Newfoundland were large-scale operations. Many of the island's lumbercamps housed from sixty or seventy up to one hundred and fifty men, in not one but three or four separate bunkhouses. An entire camp complex, complete with cookhouse, forepeak,<sup>4</sup> sawfiler's shack and stables for thirty or forty horses could resemble a small town.

For young men leaving their outport homes to spend a winter in the squalor and isolation of the lumberwoods, the prospect of not just working



but eating and sleeping with and tolerating a large group of workmates, most of whom would be total strangers, was a daunting one. The outlook was not quite so bleak for anyone with an interest in or talent for music. A singer or musician had no trouble making friends in the lumberwoods, and the bunkhouse music sessions at night and the give-and-take that accompanied them provided performers and audience alike, not just with recreation, but also with a way of getting to know each other better. They brought to the loggers' working relationship an added dimension, gave them something else to share. When Jabez Preston left his home in Trinity, Bonavista Bay, to go and work in the forests, his immediate concern, he recalled, was to seek out the singers and musicians:

Goin' in lumbercamps, that was the first thing when you got there. You want to know who could sing or who could dance or who could play the guitar or who could play the accordion or who could play the mouth organ, somethin', y'know. That was the first thing you'd find out (MUNFLA 85-087,14).

Social networks in the lumbercamps were, of course, based upon a number of different criteria. Men from the same or neighbouring communities or those who shared the same religious background, leisure interests or even family ties would spend time in each other's company. Singing emerged as one of the focal points around which the men organized a great deal of their social activity. Men would go from one bunkhouse to another in search of entertainment and companionship. The presence in a camp of a good singer would encourage men to visit his bunkhouse to hear the singing.

While concerts were occasionally organized in logging camps, singing sessions were rarely scheduled in any formal sense but neither were they entirely spontaneous. They resulted, typically, from a coaxing process, such as that depicted by William White of Cull's Harbour, Bonavista Bay:

If there was a good singer among the group, usually he'd draw a big crowd there. Other fellows'd come in from the bunkhouse and if they knew he was a good singer too, they'd keep on at him until they'd get him to start singing and he may end up singing four or five songs before he's finished (MUNFLA 85-087, 21).

This type of almost ritualistic persuasion was common in both lumbercamp and other contexts and has been discussed in some detail by New England folklorist Edward D. (Sandy) Ives (*Lawrence Doyle* 230, *Joe Scott* 38). He

suggests that it was important that singers, once performing, be given the attention appropriate to their status within the group. The singers' initial refusal to perform when asked, no matter how insincere, could help secure that attention once they started. In Newfoundland, with a number of recreational pursuits available in the lumbercamps, it was necessary to ensure that singing did not interfere too much with storytelling, reading, card-playing and other pleasures. Accordingly, coaxing played an important role, serving to regulate the extent to which singing or other activities were allowed to dominate an evening's proceedings.

Singing was itself a cumulative thing. Songs would beget songs both from the initial performer and from other singers in the company. While a gifted singer, especially one with an extensive repertoire, might dominate on any given evening, in general it seems that turn by turn performances were more common. Solo, unaccompanied delivery was the norm, and in this respect bunkhouse singing was similar to that which took place in a variety of contexts in the loggers' home communities. Bill White described a typical performance in the following terms:

Somebody'd start off and sing a song and then you'd ask someone else to sing. After a little while you'd find out who could sing a song and who couldn't, y'know, and you'd ask them to sing a song. He'd start in and sing one and then another fellow'd sing one. Probably there'd be twenty in the bunkhouse before the night was gone sing a song . . . nothing special about it, just sing any kind of a song (MUNFLA 85-087, 21).

As the singing of traditional folksongs at home disappeared in favour of parlour singing around the organ or piano, occupational contexts, such as the bunkhouses of logging camps in various parts of North America, continued as venues for old-time songs and singing with a distinctive style and repertory. In Newfoundland, where the community concert and kitchen "time" endured and helped maintain the older song tradition, folksinging in the lumbercamps was not so different. Stylistically, it conformed to the traditional local pattern outlined by Neil V. Rosenberg in *The Encyclopedia of Music in Canada*:

Newfoundland folksinging is unaccompanied and is characterized by a straightforward undramatic solo performance with little dynamic variation from stanza to stanza. Personal styles may include vibrato (generally only on lingering notes) and melismatic ornamentation. Tone production usually is clear rather than raspy but may be relaxed or tense depending upon whether the upper or lower portions of the singer's natural range are used. Often the final

words of a song are spoken. Emphasis within the tradition is upon words rather than tune (or 'air') (337).

Perhaps the biggest difference between singing in a bunkhouse and singing in other contexts was the fact that the singer was required to sing in a variety of physical circumstances (sometimes even from the prone position) to audiences of varying size, and frequently with a host of other activities going on around him. In short, lumbercamp singing demanded of the performer a high degree of flexibility. This was noted by lumberman Frank Blake.

If you were in your kitchen you wouldn't have to sing very loud for everybody to hear. If you were at a community concert years ago where . . . there was no sound system set up . . . you'd have to sing pretty loud for people in the back to hear you. And of course if you were singing in a small bunkhouse sleeping twenty-four men you could be somewhere in between the two, y'know. But other than that, well I suppose if you were singing in a concert too you'd be standing up when you were singing but if you were in your kitchen or in your bunkhouse, you'd usually be sitting down on your bunk, eh? 'Course, it's harder to sing when you're sitting and harder still if you're lying down. . . . If you were in your bunk ready to go to sleep . . . and everybody lying in bunk and somebody said, "Now one little song now before you goes to sleep," . . . of course you'd sing it lying down and you'd work twice as hard as if you were sitting up. . . . You'd sing, you'd try to sing loud enough for your audience to hear you, y'know. If . . . you were over in one corner with just three or four guys you could sing low but if people in the other end o' the bunkhouse wanted to hear too, you'd sing louder. But other than that I don't know any, any special way that lumberjacks used to sing (MUNFLA 85-087, 23).

The repertoire of songs circulating in the Newfoundland lumberwoods was an extensive one, and this should come as no surprise for what we know of woods camp singing elsewhere suggests that this was a feature of logging tradition throughout North America. Samuel Button, another former logger from Bonavista Bay, explained it in the following manner:

Several songs they used to sing in the camps was like, "Hard, Hard Times," "Squid Jigging Ground" and "The Badger Drive". . . . There would be a variety of songs, y'know, it's all accordin' to what some fellows would know, y'know. Like another one . . . given to me by Mr. Hunt was called "The Cobbler." Now apparently this one came all the way from Ireland. . . . Some songs, y'know, that were made up locally would be sung and there was others that was handed down traditionally, y'know. Because a lot o' the songs, no one knew where they came from and of course the wording had changed over the years, too (MUNFLA 85-087, 8).

Sam, like some other lumberjack singers, showed a surprising feel for the pedigree of his songs, and his summary above is, I think, quite representative of their variety. While it is difficult to portray the lumbercamp repertoire with any precision, and while that repertoire was undergoing constant change, it can be said with confidence that in common with western folk music as a whole the woods tradition in Newfoundland was dominated by the narrative folksong or ballad rather than by lyrical forms.

This was clearly a repertoire in which Anglo-Irish balladry was predominant. Lyrical songs of various kinds were included, as was a great deal of material from general North American tradition, including the occupational songs of lumbering itself. In addition, there were indigenous songs from Newfoundland, including pieces that were known throughout the province as well as songs that were highly localized in their circulation and frame of reference. Historically, the English and Scottish popular ballads or "Child" ballads have enjoyed considerable popularity throughout Newfoundland and have maintained an important position within the regional song tradition until recent years (Quigley). These ancient songs were sometimes performed in the lumbercamps but it is unlikely that they ever formed a prominent element within the repertoire. Of far greater significance were nineteenth century broadside ballads imported from the British Isles, and American, Canadian and local pieces modelled upon them. It should be no surprise that in the all-male environment that pervaded the logging industry, when there was singing obscene songs were likely to be heard; but it is doubtful that they ever challenged the supremacy of the ballads just alluded to.

Stage and popular songs were well-known in the woods, and the electronic media helped to make such material popular. Radio sets had appeared in many bunkhouses in the 1940s and 50s, and singers learned songs as well from phonograph records available in their home communities. The pages of the popular printed media were also a source of material. Of particular importance in this respect were the song books distributed by the Gerald S. Doyle Co. Ltd., and the "Old Favourites" column of the weekly newspaper *The Family Herald*, which enjoyed a large circulation across the island.

As far as one can tell, in the lumbercamps songs were rarely circulated in printed form. Most of the material was learned through the time-honoured process of word of mouth transmission, and woods repertoire was continually expanded by songs brought in each season from the loggers' communities. The chain also operated in reverse, with songs picked up by

singers in the woods being performed at community concerts and especially at the informal house visits that took place during the Christmas season and at other special times of the year. In this way the logging camps provided an important context for the exchange of songs and served as a major channel for the re-dissemination of material within the regional song tradition as a whole. As a part of this process, the practice of occasionally committing the words of a song to paper was really no more than a logical extension of the oral tradition. As one logger stated:

Somebody'd come there and sing a new one you never heard before . . . if 'twas a song that I wanted real bad and I was sure I wouldn't get it, he'd write it down for me if he could write, y'know, and if he couldn't he'd just word it out and I'd write it down myself, y'see. . . . Not very many I had to write down. I just learned most of 'em from memory, y'know (MUNFLA 85-087, 24).

As elsewhere, lumbermen in Newfoundland sang and made up songs about their own occupation. While from a numerical standpoint these occupational songs were by no means dominant in the repertoire, they are nevertheless highly significant. They meant a lot to the men and they are important to the student of lumbercamp singing, for it is in them that we can most clearly see the relationship between the song tradition itself and the occupational context by which it was conditioned.

A number of logging songs that appeared in the Newfoundland lumberwoods were, as indicated earlier, migratory pieces which originated in Canada or the United States and clearly belong to a wider North American occupational tradition. They appear in major published folksong collections from other parts of the continent, especially the Northeast. Among these imported songs, we can discern two thematically distinct groups, both of which project different elements of the American lumberman's self-image. The first comprises those pieces that document the logger's daily work routine, songs such as "Hurling Down the Pine" and "The Logger's Alphabet." The second group includes disaster ballads like "Peter Emberley" and "Young Monroe," which proclaim the ever-present danger of death in the woods.

Songs from both of these groups may have entered Newfoundland via one or more of several possible routes: through the nineteenth-century shipping trade between the province and the New England states, or on board the fishing vessels from Newfoundland, the Maritimes and the northeastern U.S. that plied the common waters of the Eastern seaboard. Woodsmen themselves must have played a part in the transmission of the songs. Not

only had some Newfoundlanders worked in the woods of Maine and New Brunswick before the expansion of the industry on their own island, but also the local pulp and paper companies imported large numbers of mainlanders to serve as camp foremen, scalers,<sup>5</sup> or in other specialized jobs during the early years of their operations.

More numerous than these migratory occupational folksongs were the pieces composed in the lumberwoods of Newfoundland. A few of them ("The Badger Drive" and "The Twin Lakes" are good examples) gained widespread recognition. Most, however, tended to remain firmly in local circulation and in the hands of a relatively small number of singers. Some of these indigenous songs are documentary in nature. They present accounts of noteworthy events that took place in the woods: for example, a forest fire or a fire in one of the lumbercamps that burned a bunkhouse. "The Forester's Song" documents the departure of Newfoundland lumberjacks to serve in Britain with the Newfoundland Overseas Forestry Unit in World War II:

There came a call from o'er the sea for lumbermen to go,  
To cross the briny ocean, to test the German foe.  
Our wives and our sweethearts they did mourn as they stood on the pier,  
Lamenting for the ones they loved and they shed many a tear  
(MUNFLA 68-16, c. 492).

Other songs of this type recall horse races, practical jokes and the International Woodworkers of America (IWA) strike of 1959. Consistent with North American occupational tradition in general and with the tradition of industrial protest songs in particular, several songs related to the IWA strike are parodic in nature (Narváez), as in this example:

This old man Landon Ladd  
He drove Joey Smallwood mad.  
With a knick-knack paddy whack,  
Give the dog a bone,  
Joey's driving the loggers home.<sup>6</sup>

Despite the foregoing examples, by far the greatest number of pieces composed in the Newfoundland lumberwoods belong to what can be termed the "winter-work" family of logging songs. These are hybrids of ballad and lyrical form and deal with the most commonplace features of logging. Similar songs can be found all across North America. They describe both the working conditions of the lumbercamps and the lives of the individuals who participated in their everyday affairs. Frequently they make use of the

so-called "moniker" form commonly found in occupational folksongs; that is, they include a series of names of members of the work crew with brief and often humorous remarks about each one. In more extreme examples of this style of composition, the pieces seem to have been written with no other purpose in mind than to provide some kind of permanent record of the make-up of a work crew, or of a group of buddies within the crew. Often they articulate matters of concern to the lumbermen themselves: for example, the quality of their food, the price being paid for wood and anything else which impinged upon their day to day contentment and the ultimate success of their season's work.

In the Newfoundland lumbering industry the problem of low pay was exacerbated by the sparseness and poor quality of the timber encountered by loggers in many parts of the province. Nothing was likely to upset a chopper more than having his sense of fair play offended by being frequently assigned to a "bad chance," an area of woodland where the timber was poor or inaccessible. A number of Newfoundland lumbering songs dwell upon this theme, including "Gerry Ryan," recorded from Bill White, who was in the camp at Bishop's Falls when the piece was composed:

GERRY RYAN

Come all ye young men that goes subbing,<sup>7</sup>  
 And listen awhile to my rhyme,  
 Concerning two months I had subbing,  
 With a foreman, well known Gerry Ryan.

We first met the man on the journey,  
 Who promised us timber in store.  
 That's if we'd come up when he'd open,  
 And stay till the chop would be o'er.

We quickly complied with his wishes,  
 And joined him at old Bishop's Falls,  
 Being eager for work and employment,  
 Not thinking the wages too small.

We boarded the truck at the depot,  
 Our baggage went back in the rear,  
 But little we thought as we bounded along,  
 On the hardships we'd suffer up there.

We passed by pine camps and still waters,  
 Being laughing and joking the while,  
 And then with a bound, he brought her around,  
 And said, "Now you're up thirty miles."

Next morning we armed with equipment,  
A bucksaw, an axe and a rod,  
When to our surprise, what we saw with our eyes,  
Were a bunch of scrub spruce on a bog.

It's hard for a man to earn money,  
When nothing but scrub can be found,  
And if you refuses a bad chance,  
On scale-day you're sure to go down.

I find no complaint with the foreman,  
I think he is honest and fair.  
It is not his fault for like cattle we're bought,  
And is yoked to a bucksaw up here.

So when you sit down with your sweethearts,  
Your wife and your little ones small,  
Just think of the chap that composed those few lines,  
One day in the bunkhouse last fall.

And when you're asleep on your pillow,  
No matter asleep or awake,  
In nightmare or dreams you will always remember,  
The hardships of Paradise Lake  
(MUNFLA 85-087, 22).

A version of "Gerry Ryan" was published by Peacock in 1963 (*Native Songs of Newfoundland* 231-2).

As has been pointed out, the dominant position of the fishery in the Newfoundland economy and the lack of any substantial population in the interior ensured that a great deal of work in the forest industry was conducted on a part-time and seasonal basis. There were very few full-time loggers in Newfoundland until the major structural and organizational changes in the 1960s fundamentally transformed the work force and residential patterns within the forest industry (Peters). This aspect of lumbering is nowhere more clearly portrayed than in the indigenous folksongs that stemmed from the occupational tradition. Collectively, the winter-work songs which we are now considering comprise a chronicle of the working lives of outport men, who left their homes each fall and winter on the trek to the woods to supplement their other income. Much attention is devoted in the song corpus to the journey in and out of the logging camps. The annual migration of outport men to and from the woods, over varying distances and types of terrain and using a variety of means of transportation, was in many respects the most memorable aspect of the loggers' work experience. A considerable number of the Newfoundland winter-work songs dwell almost exclusively



upon this journey.

“The Gambo Way” was composed by Stanley Pinsent of Musgrave Harbour in northeastern Newfoundland. Although it is a song about lumbering, or more specifically about the journey to the lumberwoods, it also has to do with fishing, sailing and navigation. The song tells of the year the composer and his friends went to the woods in the springtime to find work for a few weeks prior to the summer fishery. They left Musgrave Harbour to join the train destined for Millertown, a depot for logging operations in central Newfoundland. Finding their preferred westerly route by boat through Notre Dame Bay to the train station at Lewisporte blocked by heavy spring ice, they were forced to take a longer journey to the east and south and steam into Bonavista Bay to take the train at Gambo (see fig. 2). They went “The Gambo Way.”

#### THE GAMBO WAY

The springtime it is coming, it is coming very soon,  
When fishermen are busy all fitting up their rooms,  
Fitting up their motor boats and engines putting in,  
Preparing for the codfish that is coming in the spring.

Now for the fishery I'm not having much to say,  
It was some time in April we said we'd go away.  
We got a job with skipper Ches all waiting for the call,  
He was supervisor on the road that was going through Noel Paul.

Now by the ice conditions in going Lewisporte way,  
Our time it was a limited all on the sixth of May.  
We went to see the skipper and those words to Ben did say,  
“You'd better try Jim Tippet and we'll go the Gambo way.”

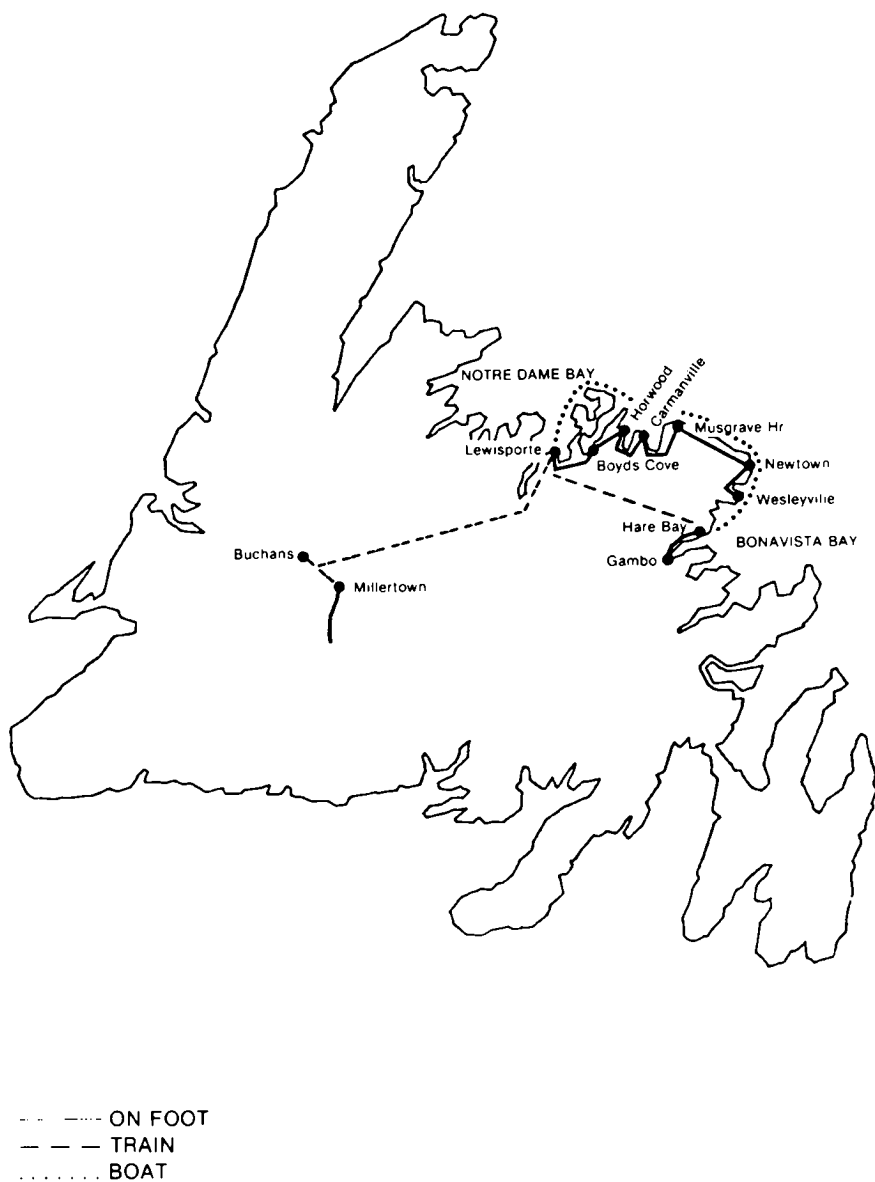
We'll go the Gambo way, we'll go the Gambo way,  
You'd better try Jim Tippet and we'll go the Gambo way.

We had a jolly crew of men as you may understand,  
There was Charlie Chaulk and Joseph Coles, the worst was in the gang.  
For when you're in their company all things goes very good,  
They're sure to go down under and eat up all the food.

I'm a little forward in my song, there's something else I'll say,  
We called into Fair Islands, took a pilot for Hare Bay.  
The old Coaker gave no trouble, she hurled us up that day,  
But the best of all some of the boys threw Gordon's cup away.

At four o'clock next morning, we joined the speedy train.  
We said goodbye to Gambo and welcomed Notre Dame.  
We're trusting to the AND although the pay is low,

Fig. 2



But we hope they will do better as the years do come and go.

We came the Gambo way, we came the Gambo way,  
And now we don't feel sorry because we came the Gambo way  
(MUNFLA 85-087, 9).

In many ways, "The Gambo Way" is typical of the lumbercamp tradition. It is about work and the men who did it, and exhibits traces of the moniker style in singling out five men in particular. In its references to fishing and the sea and in its focus upon the journey into the woods, "The Gambo Way," like lumbering songs from all across the province, gives us a realistic picture of the place of the logging industry in the occupational life of Newfoundland.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>These field notes and related materials are housed in the Memorial University of Newfoundland Folklore and Language Archive (MUNFLA). They are catalogued as accession number 87-3. Other references to MUNFLA materials appear in the text.

<sup>2</sup>Personal correspondence.

<sup>3</sup>The teamster drove the horse and sled teams which conveyed the pulpwood from the forest to the banks of a pond or stream during the winter haul-off.

<sup>4</sup>The forepeak was a small shack which served as living quarters for the camp foreman and visiting company officials.

<sup>5</sup>Scalers were employed by the companies to estimate the number of cords in the logs cut by the men.

<sup>6</sup>This parody of the well-known children's rhyme was noted in a rather surprising location, the March 26th, 1966, issue of *The Muse*, the Memorial University students' newspaper.

<sup>7</sup>"Subbing" means working for a sub-contractor.

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