

# Folklorists documented songs of the northwoods

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Much has been written about logging in the Northwoods: the economic impact of the lumber industry, the hard life of the daily routine in the lumber camps, log drives along major rivers, and the network of railroads that led to an expansion of areas available to the timber industry. The lumberjacks worked hard during the day but relaxed in the bunkhouse at night after a tiring and often dangerous day of work. They would sit around, perhaps light a pipe, and tell stories and sing songs.

Some songs and stories were documented by folklorists traveling with notebooks and pencils. In later decades, with technological advances, the songs of the lumber camps developed a sound track. In the 1930s and 1940s a new generation of folklorists set out with microphones, reel to reel tape recorders and huge battery packs to record the sounds of the logging camps.

Unlike sailors or men laying railroad track, lumberjacks did not use the rhythms of the music to keep time while doing chores. They sang in the evening as a way of relaxing. Lumberjacks came from many different ethnic backgrounds, including French-Canadians, Canadians from the Maritimes, and New Englanders. But an Irish influence was obvious in most of their songs.

A good singer in camp was highly valued. One example was Emery DeNoyer of Rhinelander who was recorded by folklorist Helen Stratman-Thomas in the 1940s. He had lost an eye and an arm in a hunting accident when he was 14 but earned his keep by leading the loggers in song in the evening. His father, a logger, took him to the camps to entertain the men during evenings. He learned many of the songs while a young boy and was constantly adding new songs to his

repertoire.

DeNoyer displayed his musical talents in places other than logging camps. In 1948 an ad in the Rhinelander Daily News promoted a teen dance with music by the "Hodag Hepcats featuring singer Emery DeNoyer".

Helen Stratman-Thomas described one of her song collecting trips, undertaken in 1940 with Robert Draves, a UW music student who was the sound recording technician.

"We drove on to Antigo, and from there to Bryant at the suggestion of Earl S. Holman to see Dan Grant, who was well known in the community for his lumberjack ballads. Mr. Grant wasn't in the mood for singing that day, but said he would sing if we returned the next day. When we arrived the following morning at the appointed time, Mr. Grant had gone to town and his wife was not very definite about when he might come back. 'Maybe some time along towards evening' she said. We were ready to wait until evening if necessary. However it wasn't long before Mr. Grant appeared, ready to sing. We started for the house with the recording machine, but he stopped us, saying, 'I'll go into the house and get my guitar and then we can go out to the barn and record the songs. The women folk are tired of hearing the same old songs.'"

Perhaps he was self-conscious

about some texts. Many of the songs were too bawdy to be recorded, printed or publicized at the time. The text of some have since come to light but are not appropriate for a family newspaper like the Antigo Daily Journal.

One important documentarian of Northwoods folklore grew up in Antigo and went to Antigo High School, graduating in 1925. He ended up going to the University of Wisconsin. His musical talents were good enough to be offered an opportunity to play French horn in the New York Philharmonic. But he chose science instead, becoming a world-wide authority on mites. Still, his love of music never left and neither did his interest in the people he had met while growing up in Antigo.

In high school Asher Treat had a good friend and classmate, Paul Jacobs, who died suddenly. Treat offered condolences to the family and visited them in their Bryant home. The Jacobses were "Kentucks," a group of settlers who had moved to the area around the beginning of the 20th century and brought their folk traditions with them.

Many Kentucky families bought land from lumber companies which had already harvested the trees, leaving nothing but stump-studded, brush-choked land. Most came because of (false) promises of better economic opportunities. Still, they

were able to farm and scratch out a hardscrabble existence, all the while keeping their folk traditions. By 1905 when the migration had slowed there were about 200 extended families of "Kentucks" in Forest and Langlade Counties. They remained isolated from their neighbors and also from outside influences conveyed by radio, which often led to cultural assimilation. Some musicologists feel that, while folk songs continued to evolve in Kentucky throughout the 20th century, the songs of Wisconsin's "Kentucks" remained truer to the original versions brought over from the British Isles.

Asher Treat visited the Jacobs family many times and became fascinated by their musical traditions. In the early 1930s he read Cecil Sharp's book English Folk Songs from Southern Appalachia and recognized the similarities to the songs he had heard the Jacobs family sing. He would visit them whenever he returned to Antigo. Now he began to write down the text and melody of the songs he heard. Years later, in 1939, by which time he was establishing his scientific career, he went back to his notes and published an article in the *Journal of American Folklore* about the music he heard

See Our History Page 12



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Our History



Ollie Jacobs and her daughter Pearl Jacobs Borusky are shown outside their Bryant home. Their Kentuck songs were documented by Asher Treat and later recorded. Photo is courtesy of James P. Leary.



Asher Treat was from Antigo and documented many of the Kentuck songs in the 1930s. Photo is courtesy of James P. Leary.

Continued

## Our History

and the traditions of Wisconsin's "Kentucks."

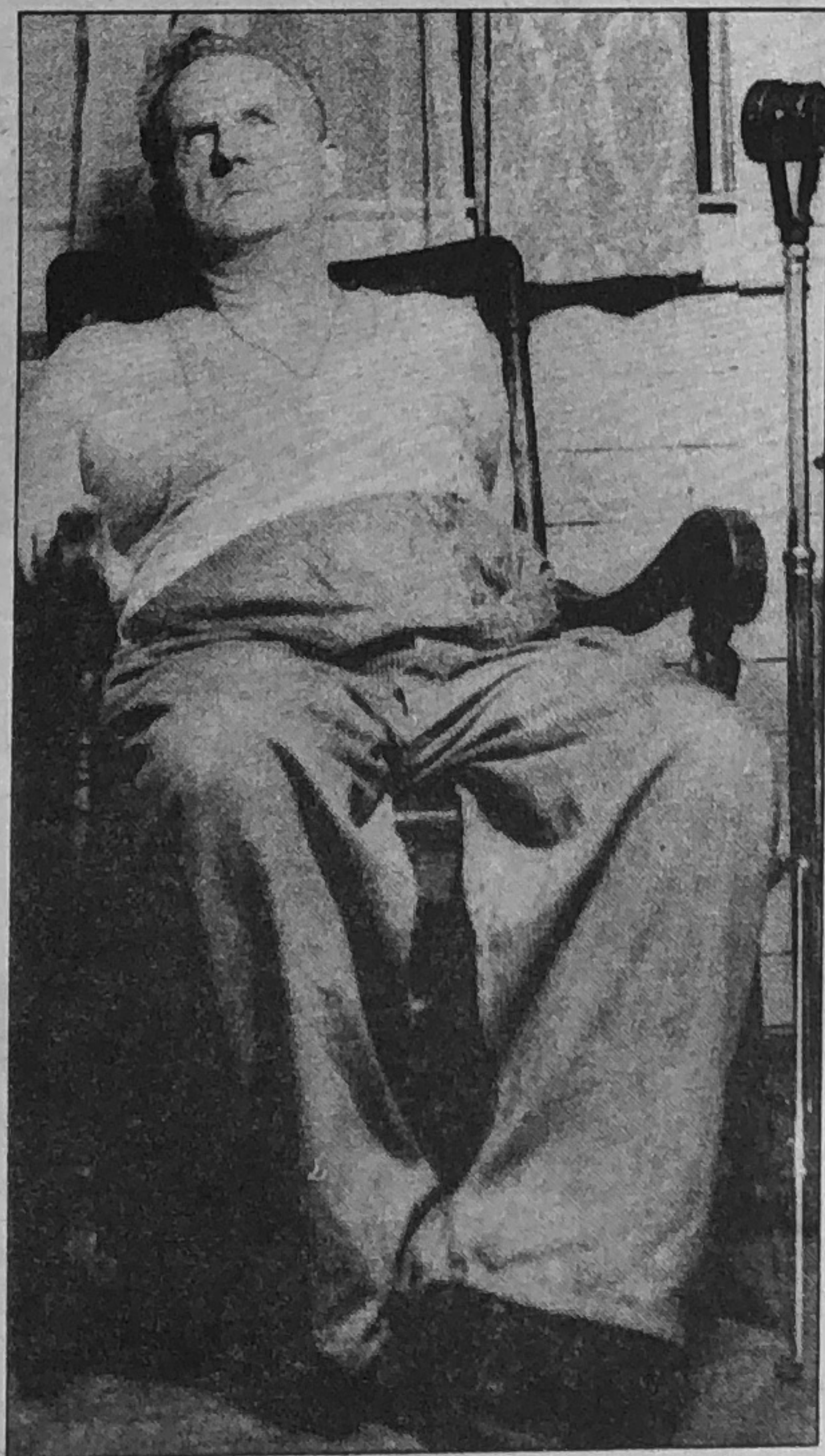
He described his visits to the family: "The farm house there was of logs covered with tar paper. There was a single large room, with a loft above which served as a bedroom for those of the family who still lived at home, with a small alcove at one end where Mrs. Jacobs slept. The large room was the kitchen, dining room, and general family headquarters. ... I would sit on a chair between the wood box and the stove, as far out of the way of cooking operations as good hearing would permit. Five or six people might be busy about the room, mixing biscuits, making gravy, or frying chicken. There was plenty of conversation, and the work of taking dictation was not always easy, but it seemed better not to wait for more favorable circumstances."

Mrs. Ollie Jacobs would sing a song in its entirety then repeat a short segment. While Treat wrote it down, she would go about her house work and conversation and then return with another segment. When the song was completed Treat would sing it back to the household who discussed whether it was correct or suggest modifications. Pearl Jacobs eventually wrote out the words in advance to save some time. Treat described their musicianship as untrained but very good with respect to pitch and rhythm. They sang without any self-consciousness or effort, without vibrato and at an even volume without accenting strong beats or dramatizing the text.

In 1940 when the folklorist Helen Stratman-Thomas returned to the Jacobs family with a tape recorder she recorded Pearl Jacobs Borusky, Ollie Jacobs' daughter. The songs were identical to what Treat had documented from Ollie Jacobs years earlier. This attests to the accuracy

of Treat's documentation and to the consistency of the folk traditions in the Jacobs family.

Songs recorded by the folklorists in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s have recently been made available to a wide audience and show what a rich and varied cultural tradition made up life in the Northwoods. Much of the information for this story and photographs come from *Folksongs of Another America: Field Recordings from the Upper Midwest 1937-1946* by James P. Leary. The book is well researched and contains many photographs and 3 CDs sung by a variety of Midwesterners.



Emery DeNoyer lost an eye and an arm when he was 14. He found employment in lumber camps as a singer. He is shown here while being recorded. Photo is courtesy of James P. Leary.

Continued

## Koss

would buy more of the asset class that's lower than desired, possibly using some of the proceeds of the asset class that is now larger than you intended.

Another reason for periodic portfolio review: your circumstances change over time, and your asset allocation will need to reflect those changes. For example, as you get closer to retirement, you might decide to increase your allocation to less volatile investments, or those that can provide a steady stream of income.

If it sounds like you've heard some of this before, it's because you

probably have. These principals have generally held true ever since the first stocks were bought and sold in New York City in 1801. However, we investors have a poor record of adhering to them. According to the Boston research firm Dalbar, the stock market (S&P 500) has averaged 8.19 percent per year since 1996. During that very same time, the average stock market investor's return was 2.11 percent per year.

If you're questioning your commitment to stock market investing these days, I hope this gives you a lift. Remember, the stock market returned 8.19 percent per year since 1996. You have no chance of matching that return if you're not in it!

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## Hessedal

found on the American Heart Association website: [www.heart.org](http://www.heart.org)

### Watermelon and Tomato Salad

#### Ingredients

- 2 large tomatoes, rinsed and cut into 6 slices each
- 2 tablespoons white balsamic vinegar (or substitute apple cider vinegar)
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 tablespoon fresh basil, rinsed, dried, and chopped (or 1 teaspoon dried)
- 4 cups diced watermelon, with seeds removed (about half a small melon, rinsed)
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon ground black pepper

#### Directions

1. Arrange three tomato slices on each of four salad plates.
2. Combine vinegar, oil, and basil in a bowl, and mix well.
3. Add watermelon, and gently toss to coat evenly.
4. Spoon watermelon over the

tomatoes.

5. Top with salt and pepper, and serve.

Yield: 4 servings

Serving Size: 3 tomato slices, 1 cup watermelon

Calories 96

Total Fat 4 g

Saturated Fat 1 g

Cholesterol 0 mg

Sodium 127 mg

Total Fiber 2 g

Protein 2 g

Carbohydrates 16 g

Potassium 390 mg

Recipe source: *Keep the Beat™*  
Recipes: *Deliciously Healthy Family Meals from the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute*  
website [www.nhlbi.nih.gov](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov)

Continued

## Trash

weighed down to ensure stability.

- Test positioning of cans and carts to ensure they're secured and not easily toppled. Placing cans or carts up against your house or in a confined space helps reduce leverage that can work in favor of determined animals.



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