

Lane County Historian



River drive crew assembling with personal gear in final preparations before the start of a log drive.

—Lane County Pioneer Museum

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C. K. Spaulding's 1904 log drive. Logs were floated about 150 miles from up the McKenzie River down the Willamette to Oregon City.

—Lane County Pioneer Museum

River Driving in Lane County

By Glenn Mason

Introduction: This article should have been written at least ten years ago. In a search through Lane County for men still living who drove logs down the McKenzie and Willamette rivers, the author found only two, George McCornack who drove the McKenzie and Mohawk, and Henry Mathews, a Willamette River driver. Another man whom the author had the pleasure of meeting was Coambe Bolden who worked on Walters' Long Tom River log drive. The same story was heard everywhere, "Oh, you should've talked to old . . . , he was an old-time river driver 'round these parts. Course, he's dead now." This sad reply makes it obvious that we should do all we can to preserve the past through those still living who have experienced many of the events in our area's history.

The oral history of first-hand accounts of experiences is an urgent and never-ending project. Inexpensive tape-recorders are now available and the cost is slight for the rewards of an interesting tape session with an old-timer who can relate the history of an event or area in Lane County because he had been a part of it. The Lane County Pioneer Museum is actively supporting an oral history program for the collection of information about our local past. For further information on how anyone can help in this local oral history program, please contact the museum, 740 West 13th Avenue, Eugene, Oregon 97402.

The author is indebted to many who helped to contribute to this manuscript; oral interviews with George McCornack and Hallie Hills Huntington, daughter of early Willamette River contractor and driver Jasper Hills; an interview with Sid Stiers of Lowell, whose relatives drove the Willamette, recorded by Ron Finne during his research for his recent movie on old-time logging, "Natural Timber Country," provided new insights.

For those of us, two or three generations removed from the river-driving era, photographs are our only means to visualize what it might have been like to observe or participate in a log drive. Again, our gratitude to the people who gave or made available their old photographs to the Lane County Pioneer Museum. Also, private collections of Louis Folley, Ron Abrams and Hallie Huntington have been used to document this story.

Not all the statements in the story have been footnoted. As the author found similar references or descriptions of the same event such as the duties of the river drive crew, it was felt no footnote was necessary. If anyone is interested in further documentation, read H. J. Cox's *Random Lengths* (Eugene, Oregon, 1949) which has several sections on local river driving, or listen to tape recordings of the first and second-hand river driving accounts on file at the Lane County Pioneer Museum.

If there are errors in the descriptions or the various accounts in the story, the author takes full responsibility; this story is not intended to be a definitive work on local log driving but the author's own interpretation of the period of river driving in Lane County. It is just a beginning for history is an on-going process of gathering facts from the past. It is hoped that other old-time river drivers or their relatives, will come forward and contribute their knowledge and share their old photographs so that together we can piece together the exciting era of "River Driving in Lane County."

* * * * *

With logging trucks zipping along the back roads and freeways, it is hard to visualize that only 70 years ago the rivers of Lane County were the principal means of getting logs to the sawmills.

Water has been used for transportation as long as man has been on earth. Historically, as wood came to be used for construction it became necessary to cut and saw trees into more manageable sizes. Because timber was not always available at the building site, the means of transporting logs become a problem. The answer in many instances was that old standby, natural water power. The first recorded log drive is the Bible's reference to cutting the cedars of Lebanon for King Solomon's temple.¹

The use of rivers for transporting logs in Lane County dates from the very beginnings of permanent white settlement. While some pioneers staked out Donation Land Claims in areas where timber was easily accessible for building needs, others chose land in the near treeless valley where good timber was not readily available. In order to take advantage of this situation, the enterprising Hilyard Shaw, in the early 1850's, developed a natural slough which ran through the northeast section of present-day Eugene into a millrace which gave power to several manufacturing plants, including a sawmill. With only cottonwood, alder, and poplar growing along the banks of the Willamette near Eugene, Shaw had to go several miles upriver to cut 500 good sawlogs which he floated down into his millrace.

Information on log driving is lacking for the next twenty years, but by the 1870's, river driving was a common practice on the McKenzie and Willamette rivers. The Laird brothers were making big drives from Fall Creek to the Eugene City Mill. Capt. N. L. Packard (Eugene Skinner's widow's husband), Ed Packard and W. Packard had contracts in 1871, 1872, and 1873 to drive "Sugar pine" logs some fifty miles down the Willamette to a Springfield mill. J. L. Brumley's mill, situated on the McKenzie River seven or eight miles north of Eugene, received logs via the river as early as 1875. About that same period George Larison was sending logs down the Willamette to B. J. Pengra's mill at Springfield.²

In 1888 promoter George Melvin Miller noted:

" . . . that many streams (in Lane County) afford excellent facilities for floating or rafting . . . timber to the mills or manufacturers below. In fact, many million feet are thus rafted down annually, even to the cities many miles below us."³

At some time or other most of the streams in Lane County have played a part in a logging operation. Rivers and streams have often been dammed for log storage ponds. Poles, shingle bolts, and railroad ties have been floated, often with the assistance of a series of flood dams, down many of the local streams. Some rivers even had large full scale log drives. However, when the old timers speak of THE DRIVES, they are referring to those on the McKenzie and Willamette rivers and their tributaries during the height of river activity, 1890-1910. During those twenty years thousands upon thousands of logs were carried by the waters of those two drainages to mills at Mabel, Marcola, Wendling, Coburg, Springfield, Eugene and points north.

This is not to slight in the least the drives or river drivers on the other rivers in Lane County. In 1905 the Walters Lumber Company of Elmira had a drive from the riffle on Noti down the Long Tom River. W. C. Walters celebrated the securing of the 2,000,000 feet of logs at his Elmira mill by treating the log drive crew to an oyster supper.⁴

The Siuslaw River has always had the reputation as one of the best streams for running logs in Oregon, as it required little or no driving. J. U. Sutherland of Florence noted in 1901 that "The water at a logging stage, being very strong and swift, carries, as a rule, 80-90% (of the

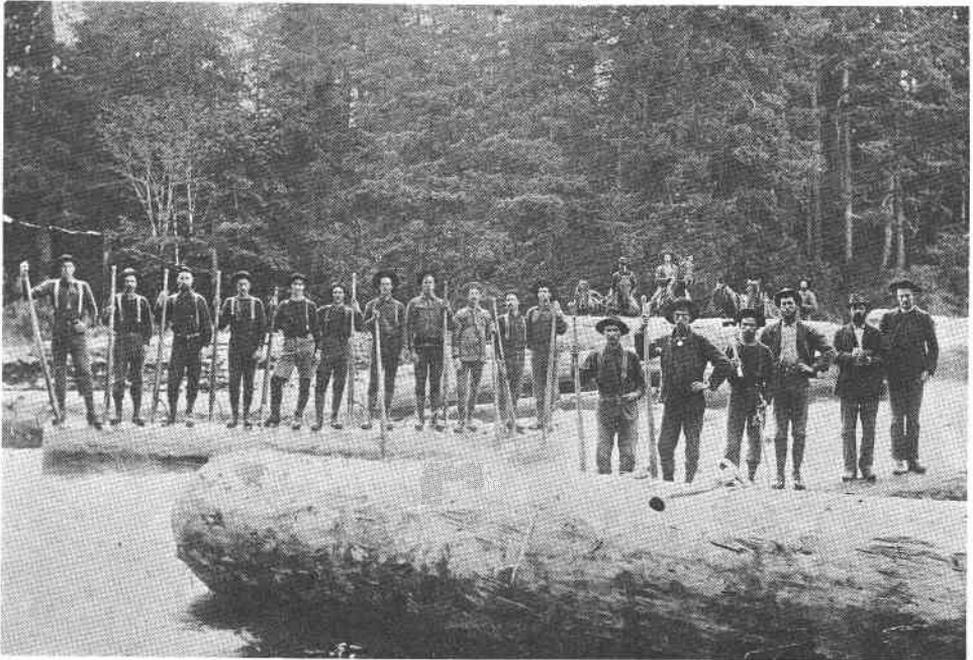
logs) down to the booms without any assistance.”⁵ River drive crews on the Siuslaw were divided into two groups, one on each side of the river, and rolled the few stranded logs along the edge back into deep water.

However good the Siuslaw was for driving logs, it is the McKenzie-Mohawk and Willamette, at the turn of the century, with their white water, exposed bedrock and shallow stretches with menacing gravel bars that stimulate the nostalgic reminiscences of one of the most exciting periods of Lane County's logging history.

The usual practice around the turn of the century was for the lumber companies to contract out to individuals for their supply of logs. Contractors would buy their own stumpage from between 25c to 50c per thousand feet, and hire their own crews to cut the trees and drive the logs to the contracting mills. Upon delivery the contractor received somewhere between \$3 and \$4 per thousand feet. Out of that had to be paid the crew's wages and all the needed logging equipment and supplies used throughout the entire operation.

Some of the well known contractors in the late 1890's and the early 1900's along the McKenzie were Tom Gilliam and Jack Doyle who drove logs to a spot near Armitage Park where the logs were diverted into a narrow, shallow millrace to supply J. C. Goodale's (after 1900, Booth-Kelly's) mill at Coburg. The Montgomery brothers contracted all up and down the McKenzie-Mohawk Rivers for several local lumber companies.

Equally well known on the Willamette were contract loggers Jasper B. "Jap" Hills and his brothers who drove for A. A. Skeels & Co. of Springfield and later for the Springfield Lumber Company and Booth-Kelly Lumber Company's new mill in the same town. The Eugene Lumber Company, with their mill located on the bank of the Willamette on the north side of Skinner Butte, frequently let contracts to Charlie Williams and Ben Gully. Besides the Hills brothers, R. C. Edwards of Lowell also had contracts for getting logs down the Willamette for Booth-Kelly.⁶



Jap Hills' crew takes a break during a Willamette River drive for the Booth-Kelly mill in Springfield ca. 1905. Hills is standing third from right.

—Hallie Huntington Collection, Lane County Pioneer Museum

It frequently happened that more than one contractor would begin a drive at the same time to be delivered to the same mill. To avoid confusion on joint drives, each contractor and lumber company had their own registered log brands which would be stamped on the end of each log by means of a heavy branding hammer. As the logs were secured at the mill following a drive, the scalers for the lumber company and the contractor (who each scaled to ensure a fair scale) would keep track of how many feet each contractor had delivered to the mill by recording the scale of each contractor's branded logs.⁷

In 1898 Booth-Kelly Lumber Company bought out the Jones Lumber Company at Prune Hill, northeast of Cottage Grove, and within four years was Lane

County's largest lumber manufacturer. The purchase of Goodale's mill at Coburg and the additions of two new mills, one at Wendling and the other at Springfield, soon created a large demand for sawlogs. In the beginning Booth-Kelly relied on contractors for their log supply, but as their capital and size grew it became more economical to buy, cut and deliver their own logs with their own money and crews. By 1910 the local papers, referring to logs being delivered to the various mills, spoke of the "Booth-Kelly drive" rather than the contractor.

The C. K. Spaulding Company of Newberg and Oregon City was another outfit capable of handling their own log drive crews. Old-timers still remember Spaulding's crews and teams passing through Eugene in 1903 and 1904 on their way up the McKenzie to begin their 200 mile drive to Newberg.

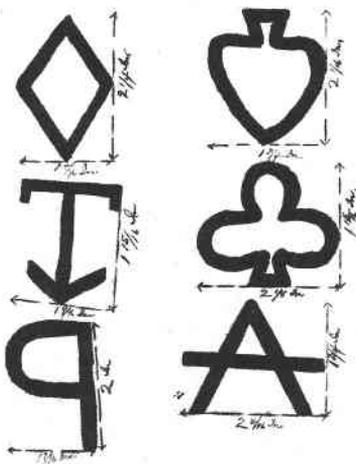
Although several small companies were having drives to their mills along the Mohawk and the Eugene Lumber Company was receiving logs from up the Willamette at the same time, the peak of the log drive era coincided with the growth of the Booth-Kelly Lumber Company. In 1906 the Coburg mill put out 100,000 feet in a 24-hour day.⁸ As the Springfield mill grew, so did its production, and the company proudly announced its record cut on November 27, 1909, of 172,000 feet in a 10-hour shift.⁹

Whereas, in 1901 each log drive was averaging about 2,000,000 feet, between 1906 and 1910 accounts of drives from 10 to 20,000,000 feet were common.

In the early days when the timber was being logged right near the main rivers it was only necessary to haul the logs a short distance to the river bank by teams of oxen or horses, or, later by steam donkeys. When the mills downriver needed more logs it was an easy matter to roll as many as were needed into the river's current. As the timber supply became exhausted along the main McKenzie and Willamette rivers, the logging moved up the smaller tributaries. The drainages of the Mohawk provided new sources of logs for the mill at Coburg as well as supplying mills along the way: the Wendling mill on Mill Creek, the Sunset Lumber Company at Mabel on the upper Mohawk, etc. The Springfield demand was fulfilled by logs from the streams which emptied into Fall Creek, Little Fall Creek, Winberry, and the North Fork of the Middle Fork of the Willamette.

When logging was done in these small-

Log stamp of Booth-Kelly Lumber Co. filed for record June 27, 1909, E. O. Lusk, County Clerk. FOR ALL MEN BY THESE PRESENTS: That the Booth-Kelly Lumber Co. corporation, do hereby adopt the following log brands as shown by these diagrams to wit.



Booth-Kelly Lumber Co.
Log Brands.



Log brands of all contractors who floated logs in rivers of Lane County were registered in the County Clerk's office.

er streams it was often necessary to construct a series of splash or flood dams if the normal water flow was not enough to float the huge fir logs downstream. The upper dam would hold back the water and when conditions were right for a log drive to commence, the water would be released, flooding the logs from one dam to the next until the logs reached the main river. Floating boom timbers, tied together and fastened to a thick steel cable which was attached to each bank of the main river, caught the logs coming from upriver and diverted them into millponds, river storage, or the millraces at Springfield, Eugene, or Coburg where they would be stored until ready to be sawed.

Traditionally, Spring was the log driving season. The logging crews would have had all winter to fall, buck and drag the logs to the river's edge or into a storage pool made by throwing up a temporary dam. Logs were usually, at least partially, peeled in the woods so they would slide easier along the river's shallow spots and gravel bars once the drive was started. Rain was a hazard to the winter logging, and often valuable time had to be spent

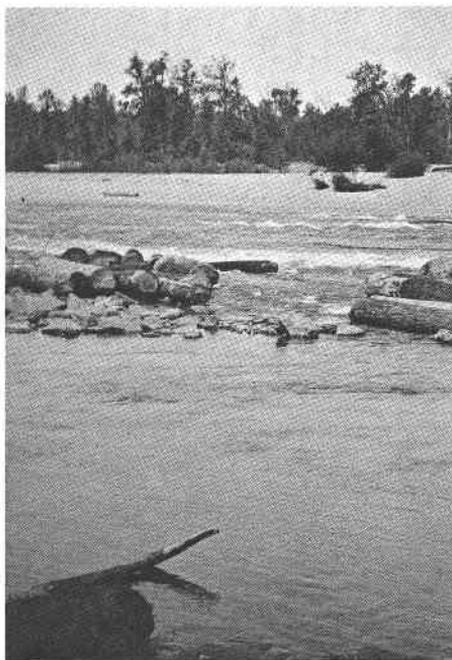
recovering logs that had already been secured for the Spring drive. Among many similar entries recorded by J. B. Hill's wife in her diary during the Winter of 1907-08 was one for December 21, 1907: "Just rained huge all day and the dam (on Winberry Creek) went out and just took things before it . . . logs filled road near Huck's till could not go through with rig . . ."10

The drives started when it appeared the water level would stay high and level from the melting snow in the mountains. The river drivers always feared a late rain which would suddenly raise the river level. Logs might then go over the restraining dams and the booms which were holding them back or they might become stranded high and dry along the river banks when the water receded. When this happened it usually meant a financial loss for both the contractor and the lumber company. Late rains in 1873 washed away many of the Laird brothers' 3,600 logs which were intended for the Eugene Mill Company, an estimated \$6,000 loss.11 Once past the mill site it was almost impossible to recover the logs intended for the mill.



Splash dams provided extra water to float logs down normally shallow creeks and streams.

—Lane County Pioneer Museum



Receding high water often left logs stranded along the river.

—Lane County Pioneer Museum

With increased production, drives began to coincide not so much with the seasons but with the mills' demands. The Booth-Kelly Springfield mill, built in 1902, was running day and night by 1907 and cutting 150,000 feet per ten-hour shift. To meet that demand logs were constantly coming down the Middle Fork of the Willamette, Big and Little Fall Creeks and Lost Creek to fill up the mill's storage pond which had a capacity of 25,000,000 feet of logs. To meet the Booth-Kelly Coburg mill's production that same year it was reported that there was a log drive in the river most of the time. "During six months of the year the supply for this mill is brought down the Mohawk river a distance of 30 miles, and the remaining six months supply comes down the McKenzie a distance of about 40 miles."¹²

By 1900 Fall drives were not at all uncommon and even Summer drives were attempted. However, beginning a drive in the Fall was the same as in the Spring. There was the dread of a sudden rise from unexpected rain. Lack of sufficient water to float logs was the possible curse of a Summer drive. In 1903 Booth-Kelly was compelled to abandon their drive on Fall Creek for several weeks on account of low water.¹³

The length of time for a drive from the start of the drive until the logs were secured on the mill's race or pond depended on the distance the logs had to travel and on the unpredictable conditions during the drive. Drives from 40-50 miles up the Willamette to Booth-Kelly's Springfield mill were common in the peak log driving years before 1910. 10,000,000 feet of logs might move three or four miles per dawn to dusk working day. Log drivers worked from "can to can't," from when there was enough light to see in the morning until it was too dark to work in the evening. Sometimes if the water was low the drive would not move more than a mile a day. A crew might spend three or four days just trying to move stranded logs across a gravel bar.

In answer to the question "How many men were used on a river drive?", the usual stock reply is "As many as were needed to get the job done." Driving crews on the Willamette and McKenzie seemed to fluctuate between eight and thirty men. If there were two roller gangs, with six men in each gang, there might be six teams, six teamsters, three trippers, three doggers, three men to haul camp equipment and cook, and an-

other teamster to haul supplies for the camp as it moved downriver with the drive. With the addition of the walking boss and the river boss in the Booth-Kelly drives, the crew would total thirty men.¹⁴

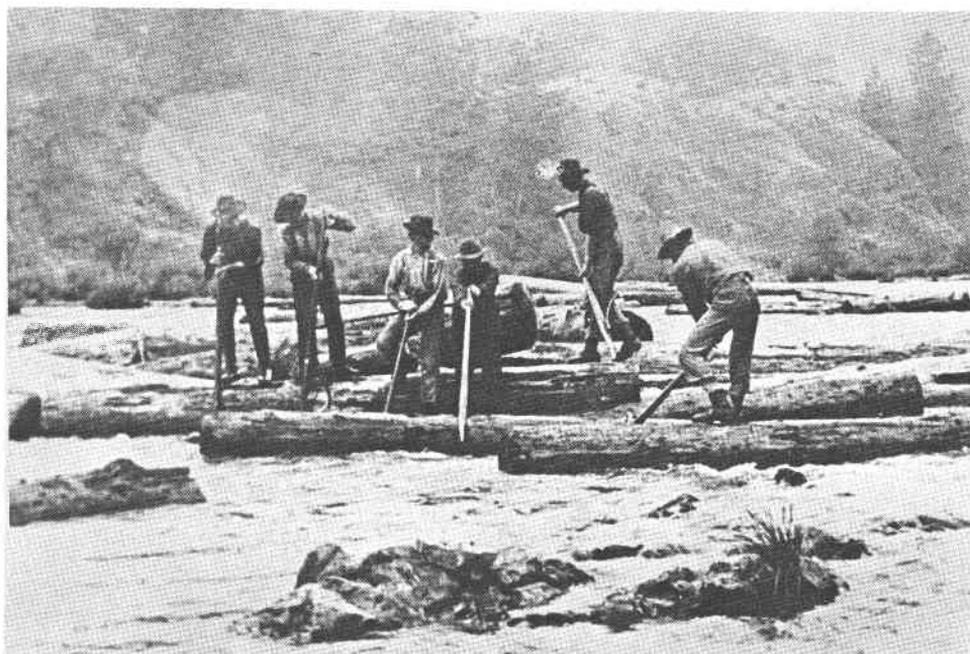
As a rule, the large number of men needed in floating the logs down the shallow smaller streams, would be reduced once the drive was in the deeper, faster flowing main rivers. As the logs floating down the Mohawk reached the boom stretched across its mouth at the confluence with the McKenzie River, only eight to ten men and a couple of teams would be needed to complete the four or five mile drive to Coburg.¹⁵

In a Booth-Kelly drive the river boss was the supreme authority. It was his responsibility to see that the logs reached the mill and were properly scaled prior to payment of the logging contract. Since Booth-Kelly had drives on both the Willamette and McKenzie, the river boss had a walking boss in charge of each river. Lon "Bunker" Hill, river boss for Booth-Kelly shortly after the turn of the century, had a native Lane County boy, Dick Whitlow, as his walking boss on the Willamette, Mike Cosgrove, a Canadian from the river drives of the North Woods, served in the same capacity on the McKenzie.¹⁶ On smaller drives the logging contractors, like J. B. Hills, Chas. Williams, and Jack Doyle, would be in charge of their own drives.

Men employed as rollers on the river drives were responsible for "putting the high air in the water." As logs came floating down the rivers they would often "bar out," get stranded high and dry on gravel bars. It was necessary then for the roller gangs to roll the logs toward deep water with long handled tools, with a stout, sharp spike and a hook near the spike end, called peavies. Rollers, each equipped with the lever-like peavy, would join together to move a several ton log into the current.

Well trained horse teams and their teamsters were an important part of every river drive crew. Logs that were not easily rolled into the current by means of the peavy were pulled off the gravel bars and shallow stretches of the rivers by teams.

Doggers, men equipped with iron mauls, would drive an iron dog, a bent spike which would hold firmly when power was applied but which could be loosened by a quick blow, into a barred log. The dogs were attached to one end



Roller crews, working with peavies, were responsible for maneuvering "barred" logs back into deep water.

—Lane County Pioneer Museum

of a logging chain and a two horse team hitched to the other. The teamster, who rode the near, or left, horse (so his right hand which handled the reins would be in the center of the team) would then urge his team into deeper water.

The tripper, who was responsible for knocking loose the log once a log was floating free, would ride an individual log as it was being pulled by the team to deeper water. Balanced on top of the log, the tripper, at the crucial second when the log swung into the swifter, deeper current, would release the dog by hitting it hard with a blow from his peavy, jump from the log into armpit-deep water, wade out and mount the next approaching log, repeating the performance. The dog tripper had to be "catty" on his feet because sometimes he would have to stick with a released log, riding it on through the rapids ahead.

To become a good teamster it was necessary to be good with horses and to have made a few drives. Trippers were good candidates for becoming teamsters because they knew where the logs must go into the current and just when they should be released.

In preparation for a log drive, teams were reshod with river-calk shoes, iron horse shoes with sharp-pointed pieces of metal projecting downward on the front and rear ends, to give the horses surer footing on slippery river bed-rock and gravel bottoms. Marion Wallace, a Jasper area blacksmith, was known along the Willamette for his skill in outfitting river driving teams and many teamsters would make special trips to have Wallace make shoes for their teams.¹⁷

The teams were greatly respected by the river drivers and were treated accordingly. With a twinkle in his eye, old-time McKenzie-Mohawk driver, George McCornack, in reply to the question as to whether a river drive horse could be used in front of a plow, affectionately quipped, "Oh, yes. He'd make a wonderful plow horse, 'cause he'd have sense enough that he'd slow down when he was tired."¹⁸

If at all possible the river crews preferred not to use horses in the swift white water stretches of the rivers because of the increased danger of injury to the teams. Also, if a team was being used to break a jam, the teamster made sure his team was pulling from the side so as not to be in the way if the logs suddenly broke free.

Even with the precautions taken, horses did receive injuries. "Mud fever," from

being in the water all the time, was a common ailment of river drive horses. Their legs and bellies would get caked and scaly and the hair in those areas would fall off. Surprisingly, the horse teams didn't get many injuries from logs, but many drive horses became crippled from being stepped on by their teammates with the sharp shoes as they struggled with the rolling footing of the swift water and at the same time leaned hard into their collars to pull a heavy log into floating water.

A good experienced horse would often reach out with his hoof with each step when pulling a log into the river looking for deep water. Occasionally though, a serious accident would occur. Two two-horse teams, belonging to Charles Wallace and Mr. Matheney, drowned on a Booth-Kelly McKenzie River drive in 1905 when the teams stepped into a deep hole.¹⁹



Two horse teams were used to pull logs back into the deeper, faster flowing river current. The logging chain hitched to the team was fastened to the log by an iron "dog."

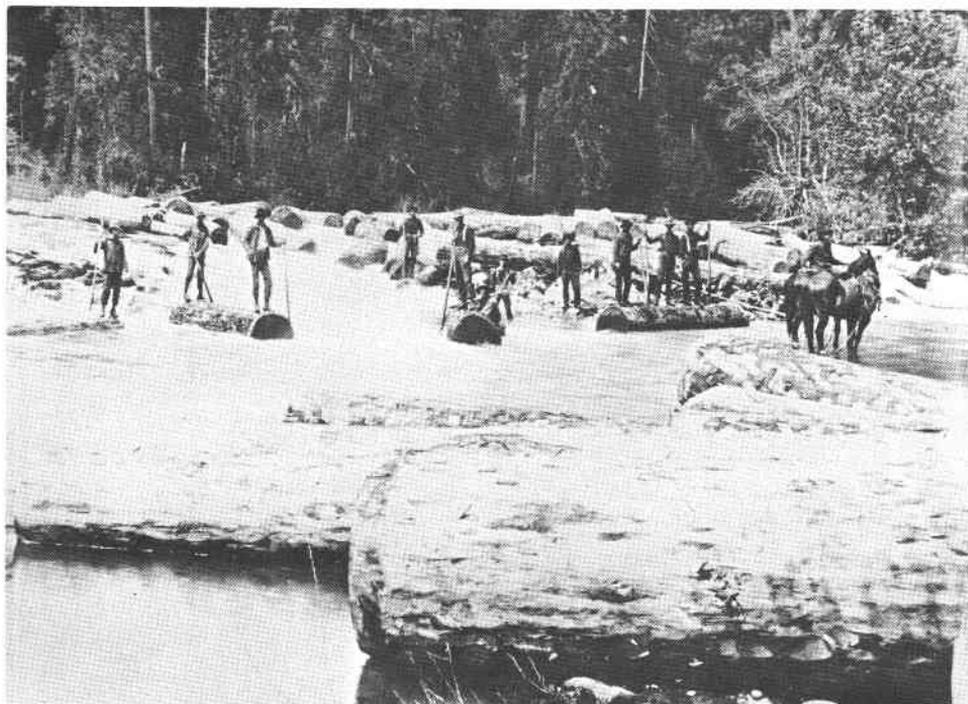
—Lane County Pioneer Museum



1898 drive on the Mohawk
—Lane County Pioneer Museum



Action photo of a log drive on the McKenzie River in 1909, shows a team with the teamster on the "near" horse, pulling a log into deeper water. The tripper, riding the log, is ready to release the "dog" sending the log on its way down river. Waist deep in the cold water, a "dogger" is swinging his maul to drive a "dog" into another log. —Lane County Pioneer Museum



If at all possible, the driver crew preferred not to use horses in the swift white water stretches of the rivers because of the increased danger of injuries to the teams.

—Louis Polley Collection, Lane County Pioneer Museum

While preparations were underway for a log drive, the camp louse was busy assembling dishes, pots and pans, food stuffs and all the other items needed by the head cook to feed the crew during a river drive. The camp louse was also responsible for getting food for both men and animals once the drive was in progress. Usually a team from the river would be hitched to a wagon and the camp louse would purchase whatever was needed from small stores along the river, like J. W. Shumate's at Walterville, or from nearby farmers. The latter was especially true in regards to buying hay and grain for the horses.

Another important man in the camp crew besides the head cook and the camp louse was the flunky, responsible

for helping the cook crew and looking out for the boats. These boats, shaped like long skinny rowboats, carried most everything from men to food sometime during a drive. As each gravel bar was cleared of stranded logs, the crew would continue downriver. Full of the crew's blankets and personal gear, food and cooking gear, the boats would bring up the rear. The camp crew would tear down the previous night's camp, catch up with the crew for the noon meal, and continue downstream ahead of the river drivers to make camp at a spot where the crew was likely to finish up at the end of the day. Similar boats also carried the mauls, dogs, logging chains and other extra equipment needed by the drivers during the day.



Boats carried everything from men to food during a river drive—even the camp stove.

—Louis Polley Collection, Lane County Pioneer Museum



Noon lunch was served on a gravel bar during a McKenzie River drive in 1896.

—Louis Polley Collection, Lane County Pioneer Museum



Most log drives coming down the Willamette hung up on the Jacoby Rocks near Jasper, due to exposed bedrock and gravel bars. —Hallie Huntington Collection, Lane County Pioneer Museum

As the logs came tumbling downriver, many of them would lodge on gravel bars or in shallow water or hang up against obstructions like protruding rocks or windfall “uproots.” The fast moving logs would pile up from the rear causing a log jam. Some of the bad spots on the McKenzie were the gravel bars at Deadmond’s Ferry, Curry Rocks, the white water at Martin’s Rapids, and the break above Hayden Bridge. One bad spot the drivers always dreaded on the Willamette River was the Jacoby Rocks just past Jasper Park. Most log drives hung up there because of the exposed bedrock. Crews usually figured on spending two or three days at Jacoby Rocks because the pressure from the swift water coming downriver would make the jam hard to break. The downriver log had to be broken loose first because it was the one causing the whole jam consisting of perhaps several hundred thousand feet of logs.

The drive crew was usually spaced out with three or four men in a jam crew at the head of the drive, several men scattered along the middle rolling barred logs back into the current, and a crew bringing up the rear. The rear crew was responsible for seeing that every log which had hung up from the beginning of the drive found its way to the mill.

When a drive was moving easily, most of the noise was from the roller crews kidding one another. “But, when a jam pulled . . . there was quite a lot of squealing and cracking and popping . . . tearing brush down on the banks.”²⁰

The river boss on a Booth-Kelly drive

had the ultimate responsibility of untangling a jam. However, when logs began to pile up, if at all possible, the closest river driver would usually “jump right on it.” No one enjoyed breaking up a jam, but it was accepted by the river men as “all in the game.”

If a jam could not be broken by the rollers with their peavies or horse teams pulling from the river’s edge on lines which were attached to the log in the river, it was sometimes necessary to use a little powder, dynamite, and “shoot” it loose. With an experienced eye the designated expert powder monkey would determine the key log which held all the others from floating downstream, then would carefully place a few sticks of dynamite in the appropriate places and blow the jam free. River driver George McCornack recalls, “That always tickled me, to see a jam break and float free.”²¹

Much has been made of the extreme danger of the river driver’s job. Pushing, prying and pulling a several ton log into the middle of fast flowing, ice cold river was certainly no easy way to make a living, but in those days the whole logging operation was dangerous. Percentage-wise there were probably more accidents per man among the Timber Beasts who worked in the woods than the River Rats who drove the rivers. Turn-of-the-century newspapers are full of accounts of injuries in the brush: cuts from axes, bumps and bruises from falling limbs, and broken bones from runaway logs. Today, insurance agents will show statistics that logging is still one of the most dangerous occupations.

Even though the accident rate on the experienced crew was comparatively light, the log drives in Lane County did leave their toll. Norm Dereche walked into J. B. Hills' logging camp up the Willamette in 1906 bragging how he was an experienced river driver from the North Woods. When the drive for Springfield reached Black Canyon, Dereche was warned that it would be best if that particularly bad spot on the river be handled by the local drivers who were experienced with the treacherous white water. Scoffing at the suggestion, Dereche disregarded the advice and was last seen riding a log down the rapid river. His body was recovered a week or so later many miles downriver.²² Several other river driving deaths and injuries have been recorded on the local streams.

Working on the rear of a drive tended to be more dangerous than working on a jam. The rear, where rollers and teams were prying and pulling logs off gravel bars into the swift main current, presented the more constant threat of injury. However, if a driver fell into a jam when it was breaking up, he was in bad trouble.

"LIFE CRUSHED OUT BY LOGS . . .

Reposing upon the cooling board at the Day and Henderson undertaking establishment is the body of Charles Lippie . . . (who) was engaged upon a drive consigned to the Booth-Kelly Company. The logs reached a point in the McKenzie river above the mouth of the Mohawk when a small jam hung several logs up against the bank. With the other drivers Lippie was engaged in releasing the logs and from the location of his injuries the unfortunate man must have been in front of the jam and leaning forward for when the logs were released he was unable to escape out of harm's way and his head and jaws were frightfully crushed. Death must have been instantaneous."²³

The driver did not get as wet on the jams as he did on the rear. He would jump from log to log on a jam but was constantly up to his armpits in the rear trying to get the barred logs back into the current. A log with a large diameter might hang up on the bottom even though it was sitting in three or four feet of water. When this happened the roller crew waded out with their peavies to try to roll the log into deeper water which would float the log downstream. After tripping the dogs free from the



River drivers had to be "catty" on their feet to ride logs through Hellgate to Black Canyon on the Willamette. —Lane County Pioneer Museum

logs pulled into the current by the teams, the tripper would jump from the log into the cold fast water and wade ashore to repeat the same chore all day long.

If a river driver accidentally fell into the water and went clear under over his head, he was in for a ribbing by the rest of the crew. "They'd kid you then, if you fell in . . . went clear under. If you got out, they'd always kid you about hunting fish tracks."²⁴ Humor played an important part in river driving as it does in any dangerous job. The constant bantering and jokes played back and forth between the members of the crew tended to relieve the tension of the dangerous situation. A driver could not afford to have a crew member upon whose actions his own life might depend in a foul sudden mood. Laughter and pranks kept the men loose. The teamster, except for finding snakes, rocks or debris of any sort in his bedroll at night, held the upper hand during the working days as far as pranks were concerned.

"And the teamster could give his tripper a bath most anytime he wanted to . . . I know I had one teamster . . . that, oh, once a week, he'd say, 'Well, you haven't had your bath yet this week.' He'd hook onto a little log . . . and drag it right straight into the current, and when it came loose from the gravel bar behind . . . it'd give a quick flip . . . and then, maybe, you'd get your bath."²⁵



A large log which hung up on the river needed two teams plus assistance from the roller crew to be pulled back into the river current.
—Louis Polley Collection, Lane County Pioneer Museum



A river crew on the Mohawk above Mabel in 1908. George McCornack, far left, is wearing the river driver's traditional garb, boots, staggd pants with suspenders and woolen underwear.
—Louis Polley Collection, Lane County Pioneer Museum

If You Will Write Us



We will send you a catalogue of some shoes we make, that the men who handle your logs in streams and swamps will find exactly satisfactory.

Our long experience in building this class of footwear enables us to make them so that they fully meet the extra hard wear requirements.

AMAZON RIVER SHOE

Rindge, Kalmbach, Logie & Co., Ltd.
CHAS. H. BATES, MGR.

High-heeled, high topped boots, illustrated in a 1901 advertisement, preferred by river drivers.
—Lane County Pioneer Museum

Knowing that he was going to be wet for the duration of the drive, the River Rat dressed accordingly. Heavy fleecelined woolen underwear was worn to keep him as warm as possible in the rivers, swollen during the Spring with melting snow. Double Eagle Brand was a favorite, and the river driver usually made his color choice between blue and red. Each crew member also had an ample supply of long woolen socks for wear on a drive. At night, socks would be stretched out near the campfire in a futile attempt to get them dry before morning.

Staggd pants, cut off just above the calf and held up with suspenders and an old battered soft wide-brimmed hat completed the river driver's working wardrobe.

High boots, which were reinforced to protect the ankles and fully calked with

little spikes which screwed into the heel and sole to prevent slipping on wet logs and the riverbed, were very important. Most of the drivers wore French Heel Cutters, calk boots with a heel higher than the ordinary. The boots were better to wade with because the heels put a man an inch or two higher in the water. The boots laced up to a 14-16 inch top. One of the river driver's first chores after buying a new pair of boots was to bore a small hole clear through each boot near the toe. This would enable the water to squirt out when he walked.²⁶

Romanticists say that all River Rats were a special breed—men who would do nothing else but work on river drives. There were men, Booth-Kelly had a group of professional log drivers, who scoffed at "slave labor in the brush" and who ". . . drifted in and . . . drifted out. They'd come here awhile, then they'd go up into Idaho and drive up there awhile, and maybe they'd get tired of that and come back here where the logs were bigger."²⁷

However, many of the men who drove the rivers in Lane County tended to be the same men who worked in the woods when it wasn't time for a drive. The crews of the early contractors were usually capable of both driving and logging. Local families like the Edens, Hills, Mathews, and many others provided the men for many Willamette and McKenzie-Mohawk river drives. Others, like the Abrams boys, Cliff and Faye, were raised outside the county but settled here. Unlike many of the sparsely settled timbered areas of the Northwest, Lane County had many families already living next to the stands of fir along the rivers and so was better able to meet the demands of labor without much help from the traditional "tramp logger" who roamed from camp to camp. Also, because their families were here, the local boys, after completing a drive, went back into the woods to work until needed for the next drive.

In 1908 a top faller in the woods might have earned from \$2.75 to \$3.00 a day but had to pay board. A river driver earned as much as \$3.00 a day plus free board while on the drive. McCornack, referring to the fact that river drivers got more money per day than his counterpart in the woods, recalls, ". . . it wasn't more dangerous than the woods, he got more money because he was wet all the time . . . never got his feet dry until the drive was ended."²⁸

There were few hard feelings over wages between the loggers and the men who left the woods to work on the drives, because, once back in the woods again, the drivers would get paid the going rate for the job they were performing.

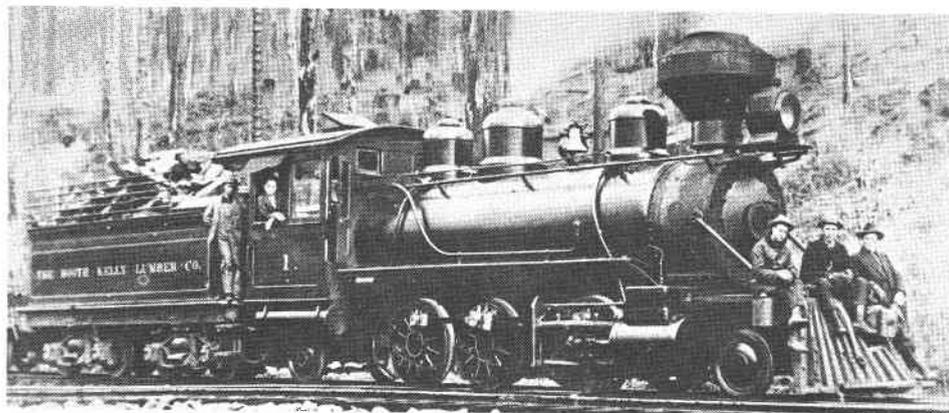
River drivers were of all ages, with the exception of old men. The older men had trouble with their knees getting "stoved up" from the jumping, twisting and straining required of the drive crews. There was a scattering of young men but most were in their late 20's and early 30's.

At the end of the first decade of the century the river drives began to slack off in number. A few years later nothing was left except memories. On July 8, 1912, the Booth-Kelly Lumber Company completed their last drive down the McKenzie.²⁹ Within three years the mill in Coburg was shut down.

In 1910 the Eugene Water Board put in a city power canal on the McKenzie River, eighteen miles east of Eugene. That same year Booth-Kelly filed, to no avail, an appeal against the City of Eugene claiming that the power canal interfered with the lumber company's ". . . prior right of using said streams for conveying logs on said stream to their mill at Coburg."³⁰ Booth-Kelly charged that the McKenzie River water level below the headgate of the canal was reduced so much that logs could not be driven on down to the Coburg millrace.

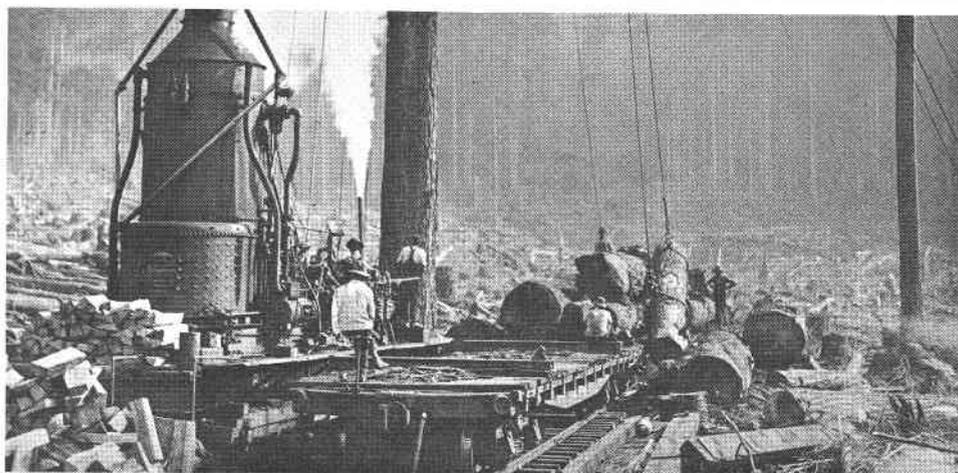
Opposition to river driving began to come to a head in Oregon and Washington around 1910. Farmers claimed that the river crews moved horses and equipment from bar to bar across their property and were responsible for tearing down their fences and trampling crops. Sometimes, a farmer would demand compensation. If the demand was not too far out of reason the walking boss of the drive would usually pay the claim. Farmers who owned land along streams that were splash dammed to float logs also complained that the flooding cut away their river bank soil. A Supreme Court decision regarding the use of splash dams in Coos County ruled ". . . against the loggers making splash dams unless the consent of all owners of abutting property (was) secured."³¹

Other opposition to river driving came from those who suggested that any river that was navigable should not be blocked up with logs. Some opposed the use of dynamite in the streams for breaking jams. Others argued that splash dams hindered fish swimming upstream to spawn.



Booth-Kelly was using locomotives in the woods as early as 1901.

—Douglas County Museum Collection, Lane County Pioneer Museum



Log transportation became more economical after railroad spurs were built in the woods where the logs were being cut.

—Lane County Pioneer Museum

River driving might have survived all these problems and controversies had it not been for two other factors: the inaccessibility of timber near driving streams and the increased use of logging railroads. These two developments were largely responsible for the final passing of the river drive era in Lane County. As the timber supply became exhausted along the rivers and streams in Lane County it was no longer economical to use water for transporting logs; the answer for long distance hauling seemed to be the railroad. Booth-Kelly's mills at Wendling and Springfield began to be supplied with logs from their railroad extensions off Southern Pacific lines, even during the peak

years of river driving. As early as 1901, if necessary, Booth-Kelly could have supplied its Springfield plant with some logs as far away as up the Mohawk.³² The same issue of the Eugene "Morning Register" that recorded the 1912 drive into Coburg mentioned the Southern Pacific Branch spur up Fall Creek which was hauling out logs for the Springfield mill.³³ By 1909 the Eugene Lumber Company was forsaking the Willamette River drives for logs which were being cut up the Mohawk and delivered by rail to their Eugene mill.³⁴

For those few who had been river drivers on Lane County's rivers and streams, the beginning of the new logging railroad era meant a period of re-

adjustment. "When a drive quit, an awful lot of those river drivers went to where they were still driving . . . Of course, the natives here, they stayed here and pegged it out right here. 'Ine fellers like the Saunders boys, and the Edens, and . . .'"³⁵

River driving is a lost art. Only a handful of River Rats are living locally who remember their participation in the roaring river drive era—when they were some of the chosen few: river drivers, looked up to and admired. The feeling which the remaining few have toward those days, 70 years ago, might best be summarized by George McCornack, who, in response to his wife's comment that he was too young to drive logs when he first moved up on the Mohawk in 1903, proudly asserted, "Yeh, but if I'd been old enough, I would've!"³⁶

FOOTNOTES

1. **Holy Bible**, I Kings 5: 8-9.
2. **State Journal** (Eugene City, Oregon), 1870-1876, *passim*.
3. Miller, G. M., "The Timber," **Lane County, Oregon, Resources, Topography, Climate . . .**, Eugene City Board of Trade, Register Steam Print, Eugene City, Oregon, 1888, p. 26-7.
4. **Eugene Morning Register** (Eugene, Oregon), March 30, 1905; April 6, 1905.
5. **Columbia River & Oregon Timberman**, Vol. 2, No. 8 (June, 1901), p. 12. Hereafter, this publication will be called **Timberman**.
6. *Ibid.*, *passim*.
7. Lane County, Oregon, **Brand Books No. 1 & 2**. Books are located in the archives at the Lane County Pioneer Museum.
8. **Timberman**, Vol. 7, No. 3 (Jan., 1906), p. 22.
9. *Ibid.*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (Dec., 1909), p. 32C.
10. Hills, J. B., logging journal, 1905-1907. The journal, with Mrs. Hills' diary in the back is in the possession of Hallie Hills Huntington, Eugene, daughter of J. B. Hills.
11. **State Journal** (Eugene City, Oregon), June 21, 1873.
12. **Morning Register—Industrial Edition, 1907** (Eugene, Oregon), March 15, 1907, p. 23.
13. **Timberman**, Vol. 4, No. 9 (July, 1903), p. 31.
14. As explained in the Introduction, the documentation for such items as the number of men on a drive and their specific duties varied little from each source, so I accepted the infor-

mation as common knowledge and did not quote any one source.

15. McCornack, George A., taped interview by Glenn Mason, 3-13-73. McCornack drove logs on the Mohawk and McKenzie rivers ca. 1908. Hereafter this reference will be cited as McCornack interview.
16. McCornack interview.
17. **Lane County Historical Society News**, April, 1970, p. 3.
18. McCornack interview.
19. **Eugene Morning Register** (Eugene, Oregon), Aug. 11, 1905.
20. McCornack interview.
21. *Ibid.*
22. Hills, J. B., logging journal, June, 1906. Huntington, Hallie Hills, interview by Glenn Mason, Taped 4-17-73.
23. **Eugene Morning Register** (Eugene, Oregon), March 18, 1905.
24. McCornack interview.
25. *Ibid.*
26. *Ibid.*
27. *Ibid.*
28. *Ibid.*
29. **Eugene Morning Register** (Eugene, Oregon), July 9, 1912.
30. *Ibid.*, April 18, 1912.
31. **Timberman**, Vol. 11, No. 5 (March, 1910), p. 37.
32. *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, No. 11 (Sept., 1901), p. 7.
33. **Eugene Morning Register** (Eugene, Oregon), July 9, 1912.
34. **Timberman**, Vol. 11, No. 2 (Dec., 1909), p. 32C.
35. McCornack interview.
36. *Ibid.*

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J. B. Hills' Willamette River crew pose for posterity.

—Hollie Huntington Collection, Lane County Pioneer Museum

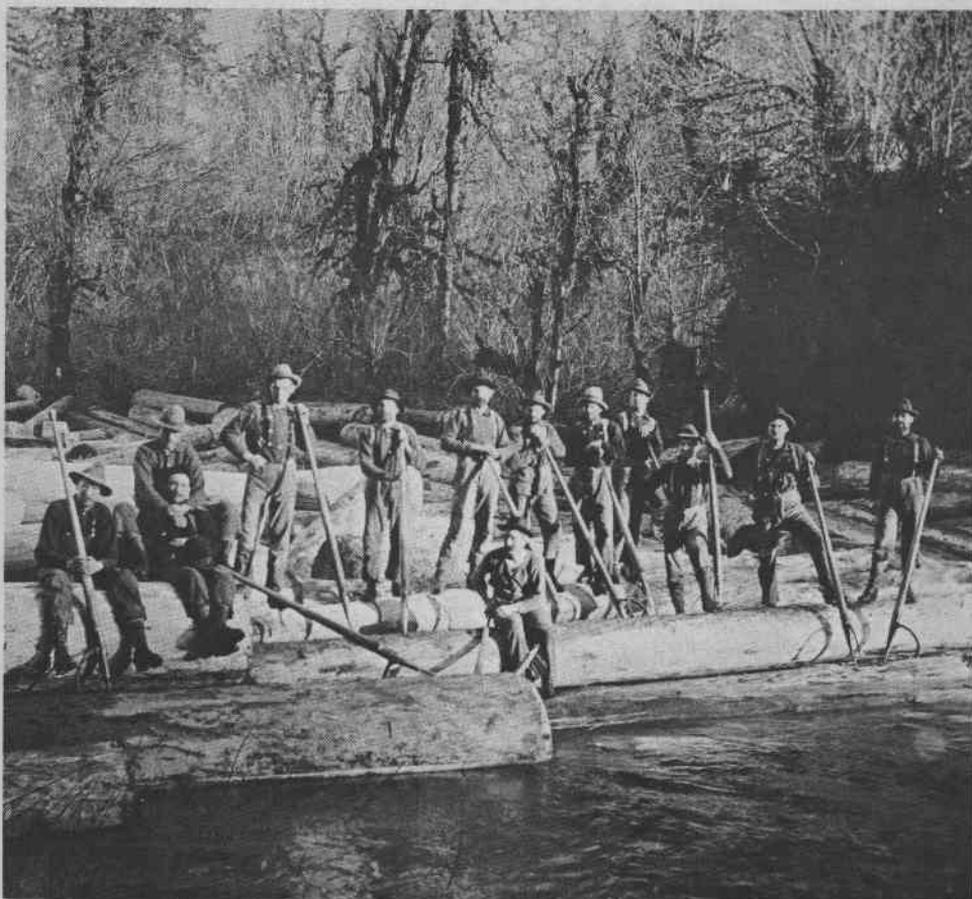


"There was no spectators (on a drive) . . . They came on the bank from surrounding country."

—Ron Finne Collection, Lane County Pioneer Museum

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Booth-Kelly river drivers pose for photographer H. H. Ross on McKenzie River drive ca. 1901.