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A Day Amongst the Pines

by Henry Cumings

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The time is February 10th, 1857. It is a clear cold morning, the mercury marking 10° below zero. The snow lay three feet deep in the woods; but the roads were well trodden so that old Zeke ambled off at a lively pace, notwithstanding the load of five sturdy men with their saws, axes, dinner pails, etc., all loaded into a pung sleigh. Our destination was the pine woods just above the old saw mill, then known as the Lovejoy mill. The

gang this day was composed of Elder Orville Dyer, brother Simeon Childs, Francis Bradford, John Cumings and myself.

Arrived on the scene and the old horse picketed and given a generous bundle of hay, a tree was selected and four axes were ringing out their sturdy strokes on the frosty air. Four men could work easily on one of those large trees, two on each side, standing facing each other, one chopping right handed, the other left. After a half hour or so steady work the old monarch of the forest would begin to settle a little, after a few more strokes would come a snap and a groan and with a tremendous snap and a crash that could be heard for miles, the great tree that had been growing for two or three centuries or more

would come to the ground, crushing any smaller trees in its course and burying itself deeply in the soft bed of snow.



John Cumings and unknown companion working wood

Brother Simeon and perhaps one of the others would attack another tree, while the rest of us quickly trimmed off the few limbs, marked off the proper length for logs, usually sixteen feet, and the saws would begin to play. Once well started, Brother Simeon, who was a noted axman, would fall the trees as fast as the rest of us could saw them into logs. The trees, being from 125 to 160

feet tall, made from seven to nine logs each. When it came to dinner time we made a cheerful fire, using the dry limbs and the bark from some dead tree, and warmed up our meat and bread, having a pleasant picnic. . . .

At the time of which I am writing the old growth pine had been cut off and only a few small lots were still left, most of which was owned by the Shakers, all of which is now gone. I do not know of a single tree anywhere in the Mascoma valley where once there were thousands of these trees. . . .

The timber of the old growth pine was very valuable in many ways. This was especially so for its great durability and because it could be had in what is known as "perfectly clear" form, wide boards free from knots and other imperfections. It

was easy to work and but little liable to warp or shrink. . . .

Previous to the coming of the railroad, in 1847, there was only a local market for this valuable timber. So common was this timber that it was used very freely for building purposes. All the Shaker buildings erected before 1845 are largely of old growth pine. The outside boards, the floors, the clapboards and shingles and all outside and inside finish, doors and windows were of this timber. But the railroad changed everything. Many of the best trees were sold and taken off for masts, bringing \$100 apiece or more. Caleb Dyer also got a large order for long timber to be used in the railroad bridges over the Connecticut and Passumpsic rivers at White River Junction. To get out this long timber the saw mill...was built where the Shaker grist mill now stands. . . .

To close this sketch I will give the dimensions of a great tree that I had cut on the lot near Henry Wilson's place, in 1877. This tree measured five feet in diameter at the stump. It was 155 feet tall. When it fell it broke off 75 feet from the butt, and was three feet in diameter at that place. The butt log only twelve feet long sawed out 1200 feet board measure. The second log, fourteen feet long, also sawed 1200 feet. The whole tree measured a little over 3000 feet. It was slightly ring rotten, but as we worked it into pails and tubs there was but little loss on that account. It made a good many clear boards wide enough to make whole bottoms for 22 and 24 inch tubs.

