

ADIRONDACK WOODS BECAME HOME TO EAST EUROPEAN LUMBERJACKS

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Most of the early lumberjacks were gone by the time I came to the Old Forge area. I did, however, come to know and admire two of them.

Both came here in the early 1900s from Eastern Europe. Both men were bachelors and had no family in this country. They were hard workers and hard drinkers, as well as men of their word.

George Goulish was from Russia and was working on Neil Barker's preserve crew for the Adirondack League Club when I first knew him.

A woodsman from the old school, he knew how to use and care for the crosscut saw and the double-bit axe. His axe was sharp and he guarded its use by other members of the trail crew. Finding it left unattended one day, the boys imbedded it in a limb and left it buried in the trail where George was sure to find it. Although the axe wasn't dulled, George did not appreciate the joke.

George demonstrated that experience often times is better than technical training. He was cutting up a black cherry tree for firewood when the League Club forester happened by. George was being lectured about cutting valuable timber crop species for firewood when he pointed out that the tree was a cull. "Sure," the forester replied, "but you didn't know that before you cut it down." George tapped his head with a finger, looked the forester in the eye and said, "I know the tree."

He was a good worker and he knew it. Barker fired the whole crew for leaving a broken down dozer in the middle of the road, but George refused to be fired. "I no quit," he told Neil. He wasn't fired either.

The other logger was a native of Estonia named August Mayer, or Gus. I first met Gus Tavern (now The Old Mill). He spoke with a heavy accent and although hard to understand, I loved to visit with him.

A merchant seaman, he crossed the Atlantic eight times before settling here and working in the woods.

He told of the size and variety of fish in the Baltic Sea, emphasizing their size (like all good fishermen) with his out-stretched arms. I naturally queried him about the hunting in Estonia.

Big game was plentiful but regulations were strict and transgressors punished harshly. People in the village would conceal guns under their clothing and slip off to hunt on the way home from church.

Two famous poaches, according to Gus, were finally caught by the gamekeeper. Their weapons were confiscated out on the spot. A straight strong stick was passed through both coat sleeves across their shoulders and tied to their wrists. Like scarecrows they were sent packing back to the village.

Not so bad really, until you learn that they were made to expose themselves before the sticks were put in place. The sentence was concluded with the further admonishment: "Next time I shoot you."

Both George and Gus are buried in the Woodsmen's Section of Riverview Cemetery in Old Forge. A collection was taken up at the Deerhead to put a headstone on Gus grave.

The lumberjacks worked hard and their pleasures were few compared to many of us here today. The fact that they believed this was the greatest place on earth in spite of it serves to point out how very hard life must have been from whence they came.