



Ballads and Songs of the Shanty-Boy

Franz Lee Rickaby, W. K. McNeil

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Franz Rickaby was that rare individual who combined the earthiness of the vagabond with the talent of the musician and the training and patience of the academician. Rickaby, who came from a musical family, dropped out of high school and roamed the countryside for four years, working as a baker, farm laborer, band leader, and printer. After resuming his schooling, he eventually gained admittance to Harvard College, where he earned a Master's Degree. It was after he landed a teaching job at the University of North Dakota in Grand Forks that Rickaby cultivated his interest in ballads and in the traditions of the dying lumber camp industry around Grand Forks. He soon became a very skilled collector of lumberjack songs and ballads, accumulating 225 in all, of which 55 appear in this work complete with melody lines. In addition to the songs themselves, which include songs of the sea and the battlefield as well as those dealing with logging, Rickaby's notes, writes W.K. McNeil, "were consistently informative, readable, and up-to-date as of 1925." A sampling of the song titles serves to give a flavor of the book and the life of the lumbermen: "Jack Haggerty's Flat River Girl," "The Shanty-Man's Life," "The Fatal Oak," "The Hanging Limb," "Fair Charlotte," "The Persian's Crew," and "The Dying Soldier." Though Franz Rickaby, who died in 1925 at the age of 36, did not live to see his book published, he produced a work of folklore that is as useful today as it was nearly seventy years ago.

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