

The Woodsman MARRS

The true account of the woodsman MARRS is based upon the reminiscences of my great uncle Stephen (Bub) Howard. Bub was a great story teller, one of the last of a dying breed, in view of our modern forms of 'entertainment'. Bub's brother Charlie (Pop) Howard was the farmer who took pity on the old man (and later on Postun as well) and hired him on. The incident concerning the whore in the lumber camp bears some explaining. The words MARRS used were; 'Well, one weekend we took him to the bush, and I.... We.... They killed him!' His 'Yes, you see, he'd have been dead now, anyway' is a reminder of the curious ethical code of the man who'd spent too long outside. I dedicate this song to Bub's memory.

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G C Emin D
Uncle Pop had found old MARRS squattin' on his farm. In a
G D C D
cardboard, tin and canvas shack, the old man meant no harm Pop
Emin D C Amin D
asked if all he had to eat was that loaf of day-old bread I was
G Amin D G
thinkin' how nice a ba-loney slice would go, the old man said

Chorus

G C G D
With work so scarce, for hours on end, he'd sit and hone that blade
Emin G D G
An axe to stay, that Hudson Bay made for a dy-ing trade

*The chord suggestions here are those of the Bulletin Song Editor.

Chorus:

With work so scarce, for hours on end,
He'd sit and hone that blade
An axe to stay, that Hudson Bay
Made for a dying trade.

He'd come up north from Michigan, when the lumber camp shut down
On a railway freight, that was always late, to that Manitoba town
He could find no work in Rivers, cause he had those damn cross eyes
A shaggy beard, a too-wide nose, and a head that's oversize.

It would scare you just to look at him, five feet tall and wide
He could fall a tree to drive a stake, but he'd spent too long outside
Pop hired him on to clear his bluffs, and haul the wood to town
He could cut, and trim, and pile four cords, before the sun went down.

The wood would fall like matchsticks, and with one swing of that axe
He'd drop a tree that sized your knee, and stop you in your tracks
When Pop would show him some new bluff, old MARRS would stop and stare
About forty cords, Oh yes, Charlie, a lot of pleasure there.

He talked of days in the lumber camp, there was just the one whore there
And some mean man had married her, morale had reached despair
So one weekend we took him to the bush, and killed him...I...we...they...
This is 1909 and him sixty then, ...he'd be dead now anyway.

And then there was old Postun, Pop thought he ought to feed
MARRS said 'You fire that old man, I'll cut all the wood you need.'
The two old men were jealous mad, their language always rough
They'd break for lunch, but eat apart, at the two ends of the bluff.

One day Postun's arm got broke, for years the bones stayed bent
Old MARRS had fell a tree on him, he claimed an accident
But it's 'When I'm fallin' timber, stay in one damn place!
He started runnin' round, the fool, how could I know the space?'

Now MARRS had gone to Rivers to get drunk, as was his way
A neighbour 'loaned', and broke, his axe, the new handle used his pay
But 'Any man', said MARRS, 'who'd fit that handle to that blade
A man like that's far better dead, his face was sad, and grayed.

I'll have to go to Brandon for the handle that I need
I won't find one in Rivers; I'll have to shave'r 'till she bleeds
He shaved it down, to a balanced crown, and fit it to the blade
But later said it was never right, the old one should have stayed.

It's getting cold, I think I'll go to jail, now winter's here
But I never liked that Brandon jail, I'll try Portage jail this year
It's warm inside and, at the least, you get enough to eat
Your trees are down and, 'till the spring, the snows will have us beat.'