

Gandy Dancers' Songs

Track workers replaced worn out cross-ties, smoothed rough areas in the track, and straightened bends or kinks in the track. This was called lining the track.

A team of 16 or more strong men with 30 lb. steel bars stood on both sides of the track and dug small holes under the rail for leverage. In order to move the heavy rail, every man had to heave at the same time. The foreman signaled the direction to move the track and the caller sang a short song called a ditty to help the men get in synch with one another.

The following ditties are from the Buckingham Lining Bar Gang in Virginia (www.arts.state.va.us/Tour2004/buckingham.htm):

Way down yonder on my knees
I thought I heard a chicken sneeze
Way down yonder
On my knees
Oh, yeah

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Cap'n, Cap'n he's so mean  
Won't give me time to eat my beans  
Cap'n, Cap'n  
He's so mean  
He won't give me time to eat my beans

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Hey, boys he's alright
Cap'n, Cap'n can't you see
Lining this track is killing me
Cap'n, Cap'n can't you see
Lining this track is killing me