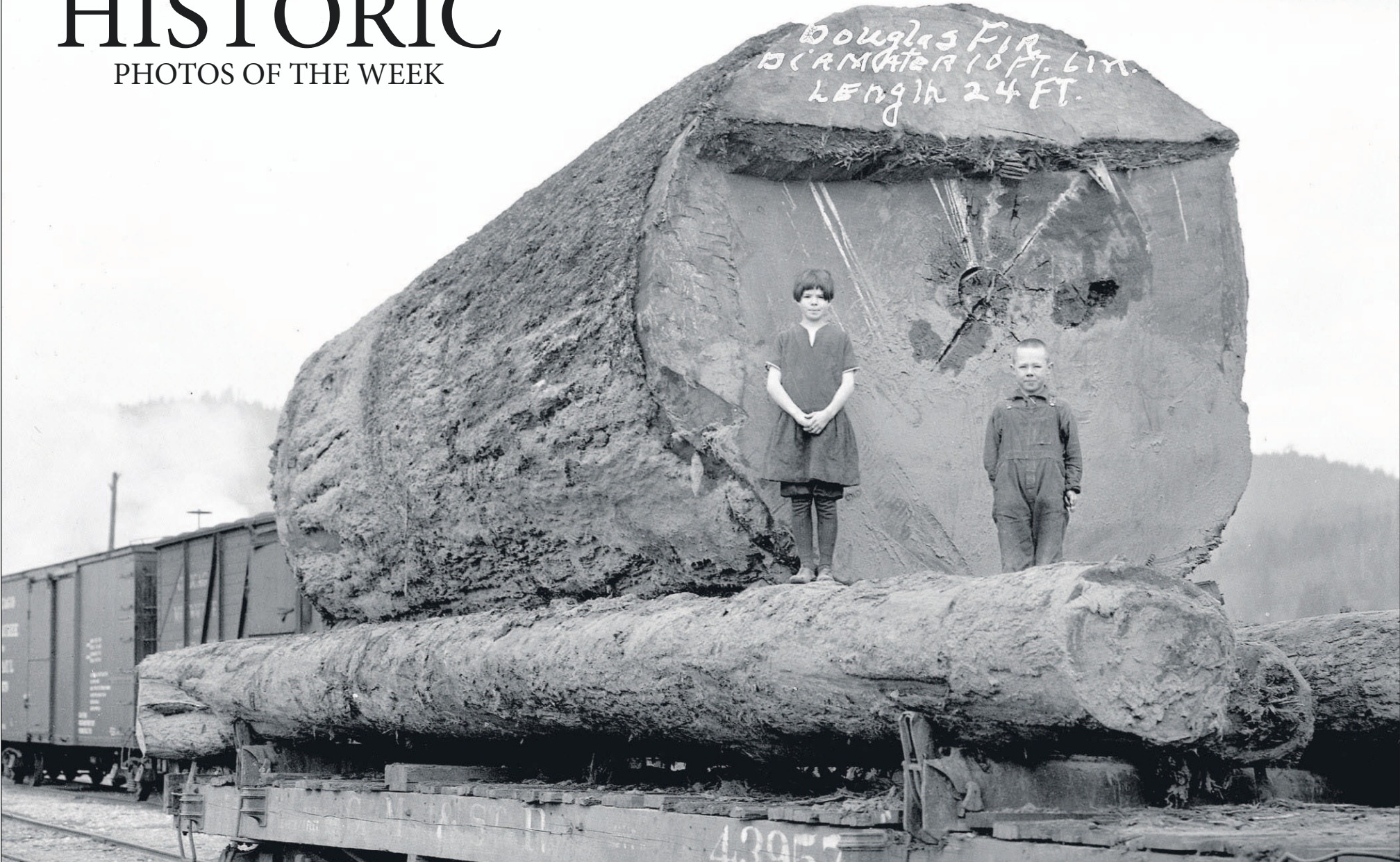


HISTORIC

PHOTOS OF THE WEEK



Tom Mattson collection

Douglas fir are the foundation of Pacific County’s vast timber plantations in the 21st century, but were here long before white settlers arrived. The soils and climate of the coast are among the best on the planet for some tree species, producing amazing forests and individual trees. This Douglas fir harvested somewhere in the vicinity of Raymond, Wash., in the mid-20th century was 10 feet thick near its base, dwarfing the boy and girl standing with it on a railcar.

LIFE AMONG THE GIANTS

Photo collection recalls the glory days in the Pacific County woods

EO Media Group

PACIFIC COUNTY, Wash. — The Willapa Hills have been growing giant trees and strong people for as long as anybody knows. Growing conditions are ideal for cedar, fir, spruce, hemlock and other species.

Far from being passive in this environment, Native Americans actively managed forests, harvesting different woods for everything from canoes to spoons, clothing to medicine. They kept some areas entirely clear of trees to preserve village sites or enhance sight lines along rivers and shorelines.

But it took white settlers to really make much impact on forests on the massive scale found here. There’s a perception that the truly gargantuan trees that we celebrate today were largely gone by a century ago, but Weyerhaeuser and other companies were still finding plenty of tall, old timber in the remote hills and valleys of Pacific County well into the 20th century.

These photos provide a glimpse into what difficult and dangerous conditions were faced by loggers in these primeval woods. There were good, tough men who loved the outdoors, the woods and the camaraderie of their jobs. These were decades when it was possible for a man with a high school education to make a good wage in local forests, enough to raise a family and secure a comfortable retirement.

Urban Northwesterners and even some rural residents are sometimes judgmental about decisions to cut down trees that may have survived in these hills for hundreds and hundreds of years. Certainly many 21st century people wish more of the original old woods had been allowed to survive intact. But we can admire both the trees and the brave individuals who broke their backs — sometimes literally — to make a living in the wilderness.

This photo collection

Tom Mattson is a generous and passionate preserver of area history, a key contributor to the Facebook page “You Know You Grew Up in Raymond When ...” It is thanks to his efforts that these and thousands of other wonderful images will be preserved for future generations.

“His efforts to scan, preserve and freely share local photographic history has been ongoing for decades,” documentary maker Keith Cox says.

It is through the efforts of people like Tom Mattson that we are still able to see something of what life was like in the vibrant towns and forests of Pacific County half a century and longer ago.



Tom Mattson collection

Enormous original-growth western red cedars like this one — often with gnarled crowns from centuries of lightning strikes — were sentinels throughout the forests of the Willapa Hills. With comparatively little economic value until cedar shake roofing became fashionable, they sometimes were left standing relatively long into the era of industrial-scale logging. Here, a Weyerhaeuser crew tackles the difficult task of felling such a huge tree.



Tom Mattson collection

An early photographer was stretching credibility by calling this a “highway,” but this image is a good representation of the kind of forest that once carpeted Pacific County, Wash.

Even the hometown crowd in Raymond, Wash., appears amazed by the size of a Weyerhaeuser log hauled through downtown during a summer parade, perhaps in the 1950s.

Tom Mattson collection



An old-style log truck with 1951 license plates carries a single log harvested in the Willapa Hills of Pacific County, Wash.

Tom Mattson collection

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