

# LOGGING

Gig Harbor and Vicinity, 1880s – 1950s



HARBOR HISTORY MUSEUM

## GUIDING QUESTIONS:

- What was the work?
- Who did the work and how did they do it?
- What technology did they use?
- How were the logs transported?
- What do you notice about the people?
- What do you notice about the land and water?

**→ *And how did these change over time?***



## c. 1888

“Shacktown” of Gig Harbor Lumber Co. This was the housing for the sawmill workers. The shacks and boardwalk are elevated to avoid the stumps and mud of the cleared hillside. A.B. “Biz” Burnham seated at center.

Frank Hall, James Parker, and Edward Prentice, originally from Albert Lea, Minnesota, incorporated the Gig Harbor Lumber Company in 1888. They set up their sawmill on the west side of the bay, where Rosedale St. intersects Harborview today. Part of the mill complex sat on land, and part over the water on pilings. Logs went in the east side of the mill and lumber came out the west side onto the wharf, ready to be shipped around the world.

To supply logs for the mill, the Gig Harbor Logging Company was created in 1889. They purchased and expanded a railroad in Mason County that dumped logs in North Bay and brought timber in from the greater Puget Sound area.

In 1890 the company cut 19 million board feet, but by 1891 the lumber company was overwhelmed by its debt and sold under foreclosure to the Washington National Bank. The bank did not reopen the mill.



# 1888 – 1891

Gig Harbor Lumber Company on  
the west side from the Young's  
Landing area on the east side.



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# 1890

GH mill docks with sailing ships loading lumber. Schooner *Vine* on the right.

The Gig Harbor Lumber Co. used the *Vine* to ship its first load of lumber. The *Vine* was the second large ship built in the harbor, after the company's steam ship, the *Albert Lea*.

On the *Vine's* first voyage it brought 300,000 feet of Douglas Fir lumber to San Francisco. Later, other ships took the company's cargo around the world.



# 1893

Prentice Shingle Mill crew. Mr. Prentice 4<sup>th</sup> from right, A.B. "Biz" Burnham 3<sup>rd</sup> from right on front bench.

Edward Prentice traded his stake in the Gig Harbor Lumber Co. for the company's shingle mill in 1890. It burned to the ground in 1896 and was not reopened.



c. 1896

Two men on springboards and two men on the ground. From left: Henry Reed, Fred Creviston, William Creviston, and Harry Creviston. Creviston Logging Co., Herron.

Loggers stood on springboards to be able to saw the tree above its flared base. The wooden springboards had steel tips bolted to them that were shoved into a notch carved out of the side of the tree. Caulked boots (boots with spikes on the bottom) helped the loggers not slip off the springboard.



## Before 1910

Old Skid Road at Warren.

Logs were skidded downhill to be collected and transported. Horses and oxen were the original sources power to do this work.





## 1905 – 1910

Loading cars with a steam donkey on the pole railroad in Rosedale. Bert Blake logging operation.

A steam donkey replaced actual donkeys or horses for hauling logs from the forest to the water. Steam donkeys are large winches powered by steam engines. The winch could hold up to a mile of cable. Multiple steam donkeys could be used to cover longer distances.

(Gig Harbor's Donkey Creek is named for the steam donkey that operated there).



## 1905 – 1910

Bert Blake's logging crew at his log dump, believed to be just south of Purdy.

The small steam donkey belching smoke was used to draw rail cars out onto the pier for unloading, as Blake's logging railroad did not use a locomotive. Other steam donkeys pulled rail cars loaded with logs out of the woods, and empty cars back into the woods.

Bert Blake is seated on the right-side wooden rail. His full name was Harlin Burdine Blake.



## 1905 – 1910

The pole road at Rosedale. Bert Blake logging operation.

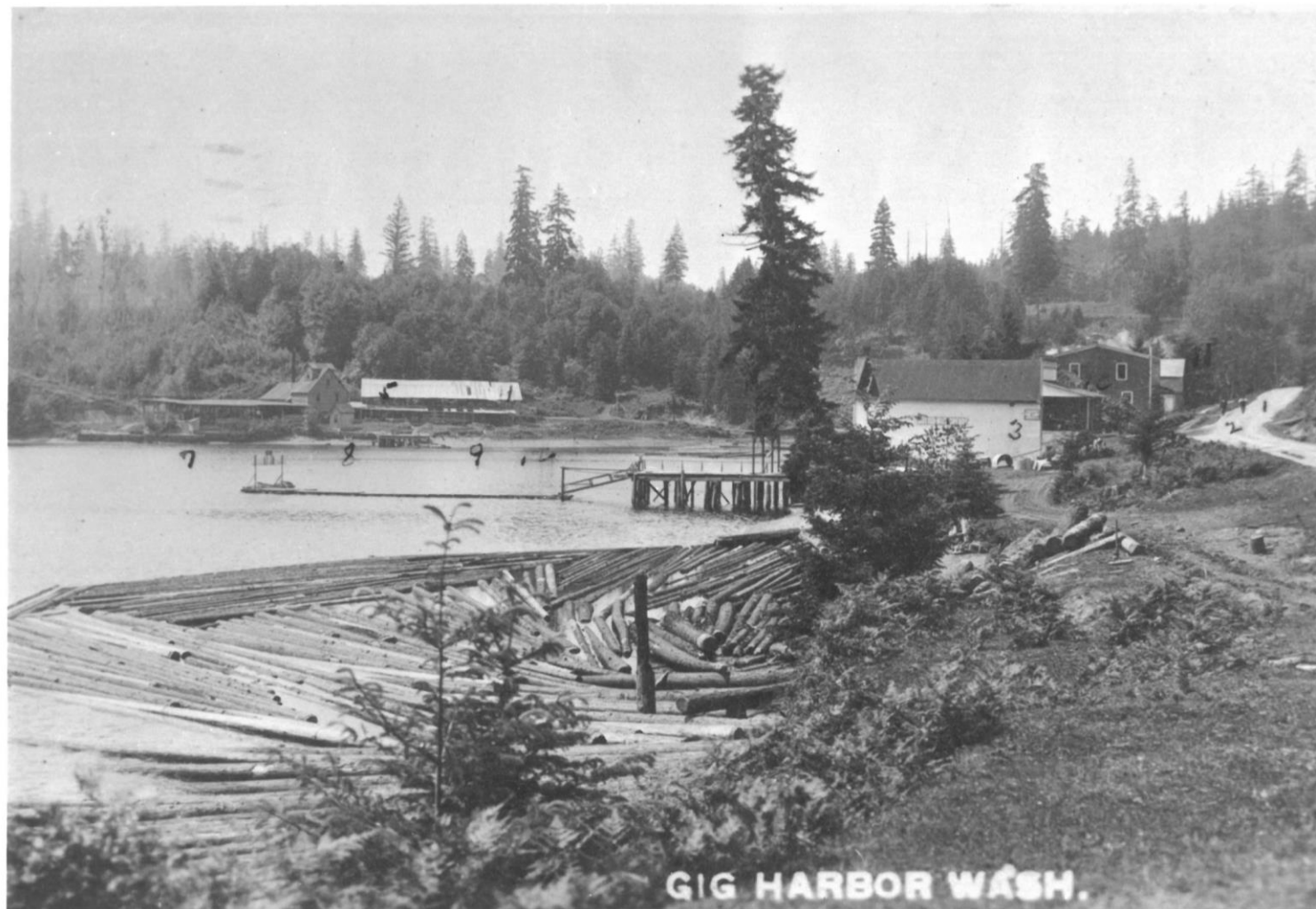
A pole road was similar to a railroad, but made of peeled wooden poles. They were connected end to end and laid on the ground without ties. The railcars had wheels that straddled the poles. Horses, locomotives, or steam donkeys would then pull the car loaded with logs to a log dump.



# 1910

Log boom and log dump at the head of the bay.

At the left is the Gig Harbor Clay Co. The white building on the right is the Kendall store and hall with its dock and float. Behind the store is the Bayview Hall. Behind the Hall is the Skarponi home.



# 1910

Logging on Lincoln School site. L-R:  
Tony Novak, Spiro Babich, unknown,  
Mali Jerry.

Tony Novak was the son of John and Josephine Novak. John immigrated from what is now Croatia, and Josephine was the daughter of an Irish sailor and a woman of the Puyallup Tribe.

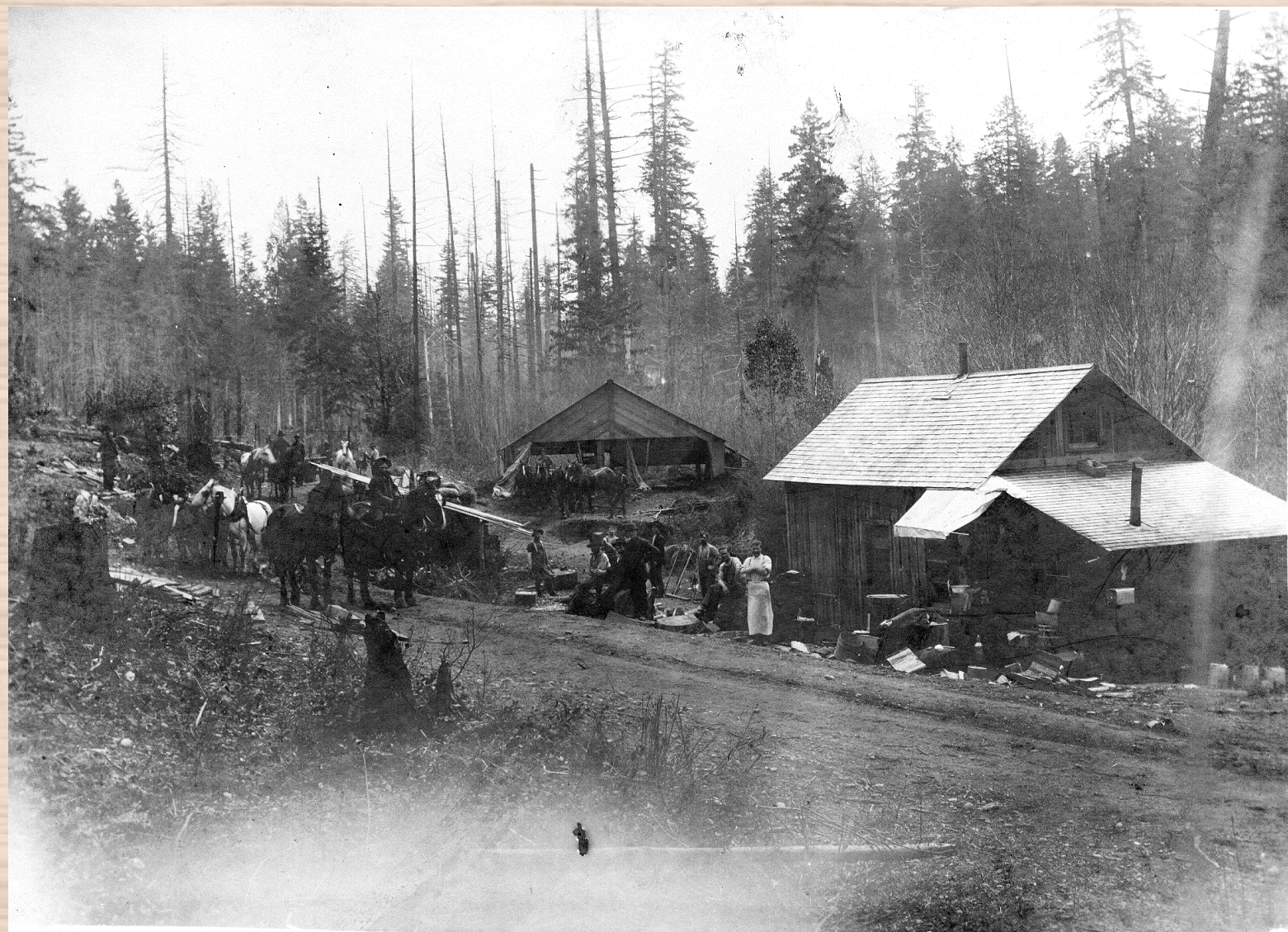
The Novaks had platted the town site on the west side of Gig Harbor in 1888. They named it Millville because the Gig Harbor Lumber Co. was under construction in the area.



c. 1910

Horse logging camp. The building on right is probably the cook house with the logging barn in the background.

Written on the back: "Fred McIntyre worked here around 1910 between Gig Harbor and Purdy."



# 1909 – 1910

Gig Harbor Timber Co. railroad tracks along the waterfront farms.

The logging railroad tracks go down to the log dump pier in the bay.

Photograph by Byron Aldrich, Jr.



## 1909 – 1911

Gig Harbor Timber Co. facility in East Gig Harbor. They had the only logging railroad to haul timber to the harbor. The other logging companies used animals or steam donkeys for hauling and dumping.

There are logs in the bay in the foreground of the image and the log dump pier is visible in the background. The locomotive moved the flat cars full of logs onto the pier, positioning them under the gin poles. The gin poles facilitated the unloading of the logs from the flat cars into the bay. The logs were then towed to a sawmill by a tugboat.

Photograph by Byron Aldrich, Jr.

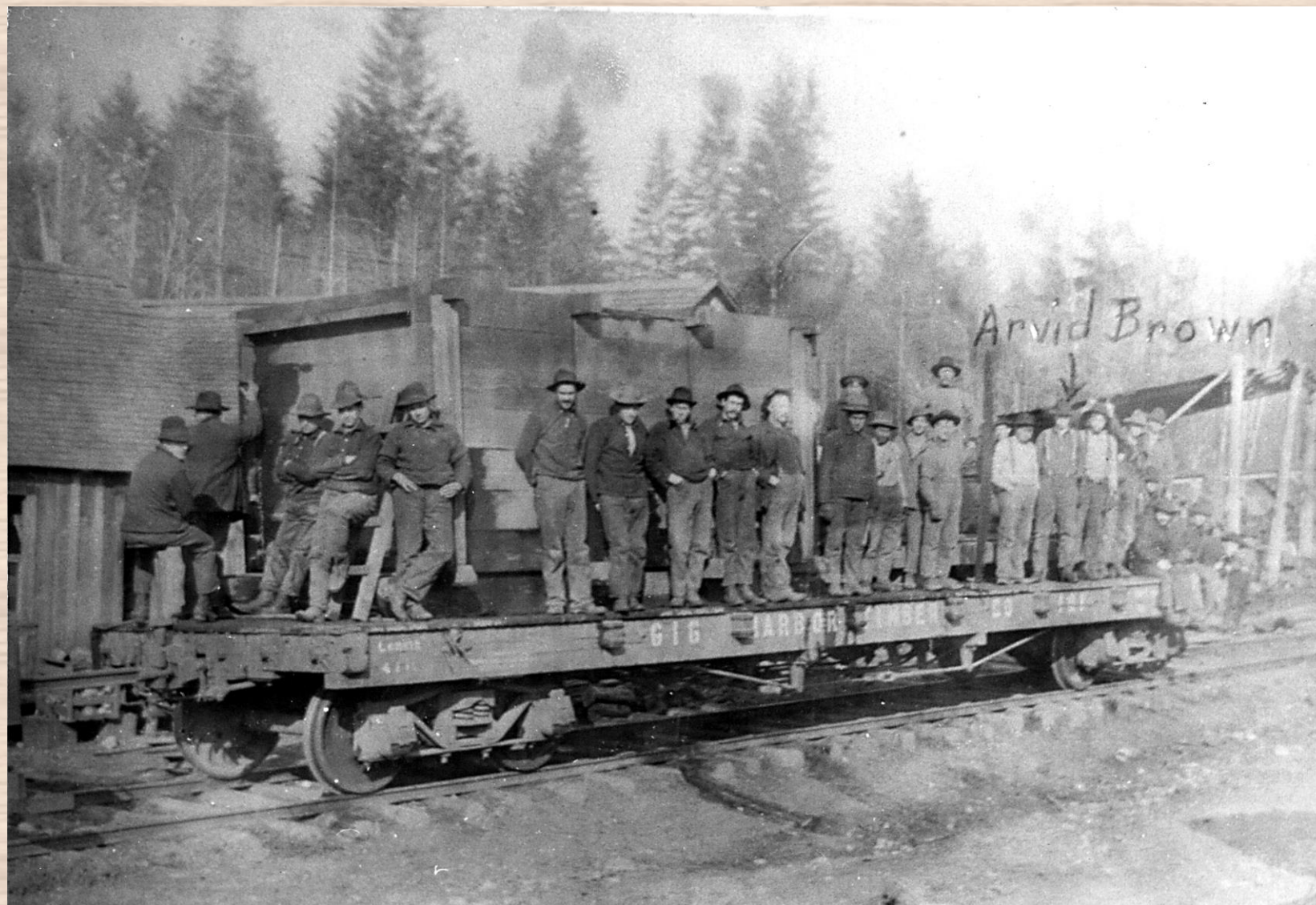




## 1909 – 1911

Logging crew on flatbed at Gig Harbor Timber Co. The rails ran along the northeast shore of Gig Harbor Bay and up Crescent Valley.

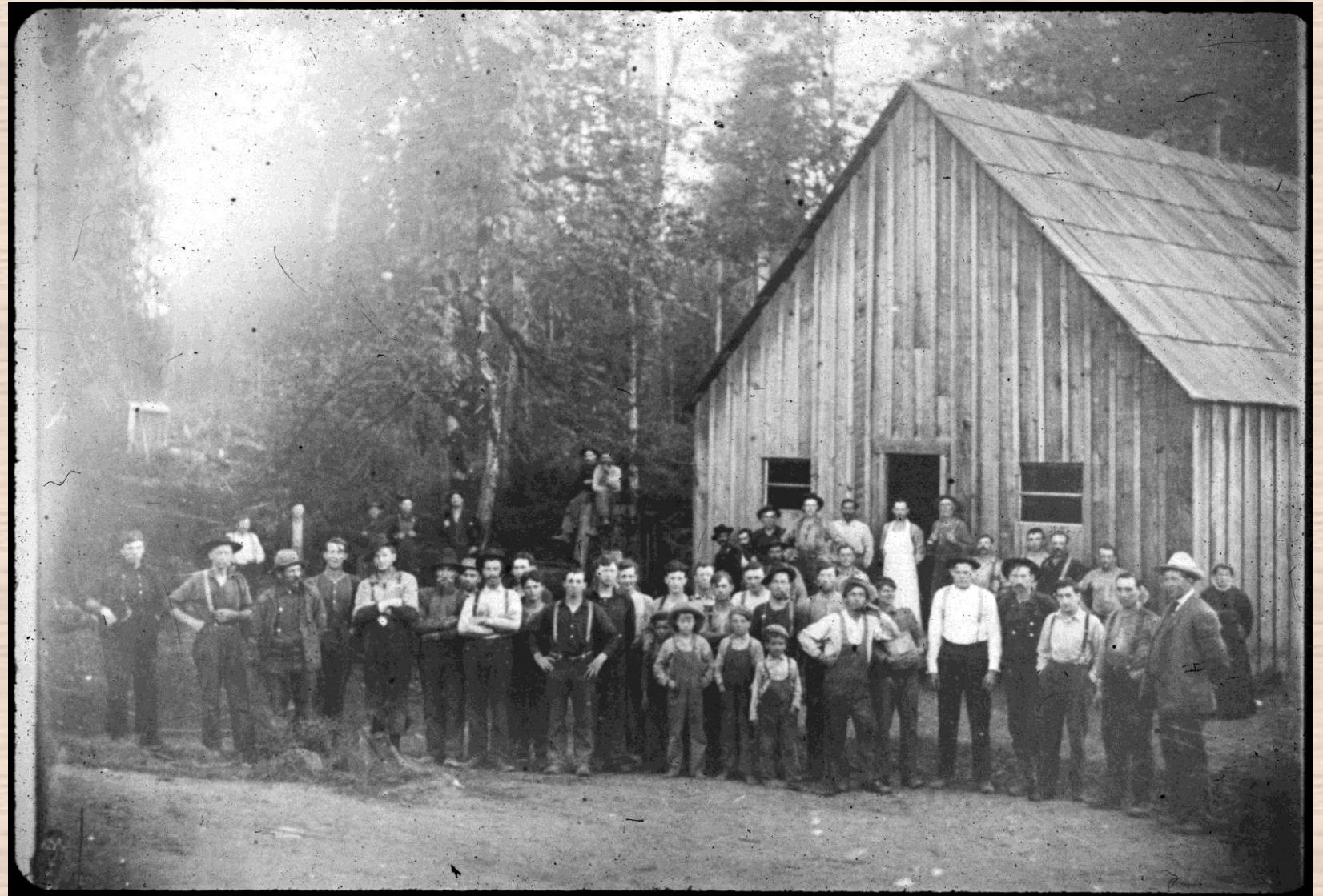
Loggers generally worked ten-hour days, six days a week, in any weather. Depending on their job in the camp, workers earned from \$.66 to \$3.50 per day.



## 1903 – 1913

Rainier Logging dining hall near Minter.

Thomas Wilson and William Hulbert founded the company in 1903. They built a log dump pier in Minter Lagoon with a connecting railroad. Theirs was the biggest logging operation on the Gig Harbor/Key peninsulas.



## 1906 – 1921

Rainier Logging Co. landing, where yarded logs are loaded, in Minter-Elgin.

John Goldman, third from left, was the engineer who operated the steam donkey. The barrels hold the water to make steam and the cut wood fires the boilers.



1906 – 1921

Logging crew standing on logs set  
over a ravine. Rainier Logging Co.



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## 1906 – 1921

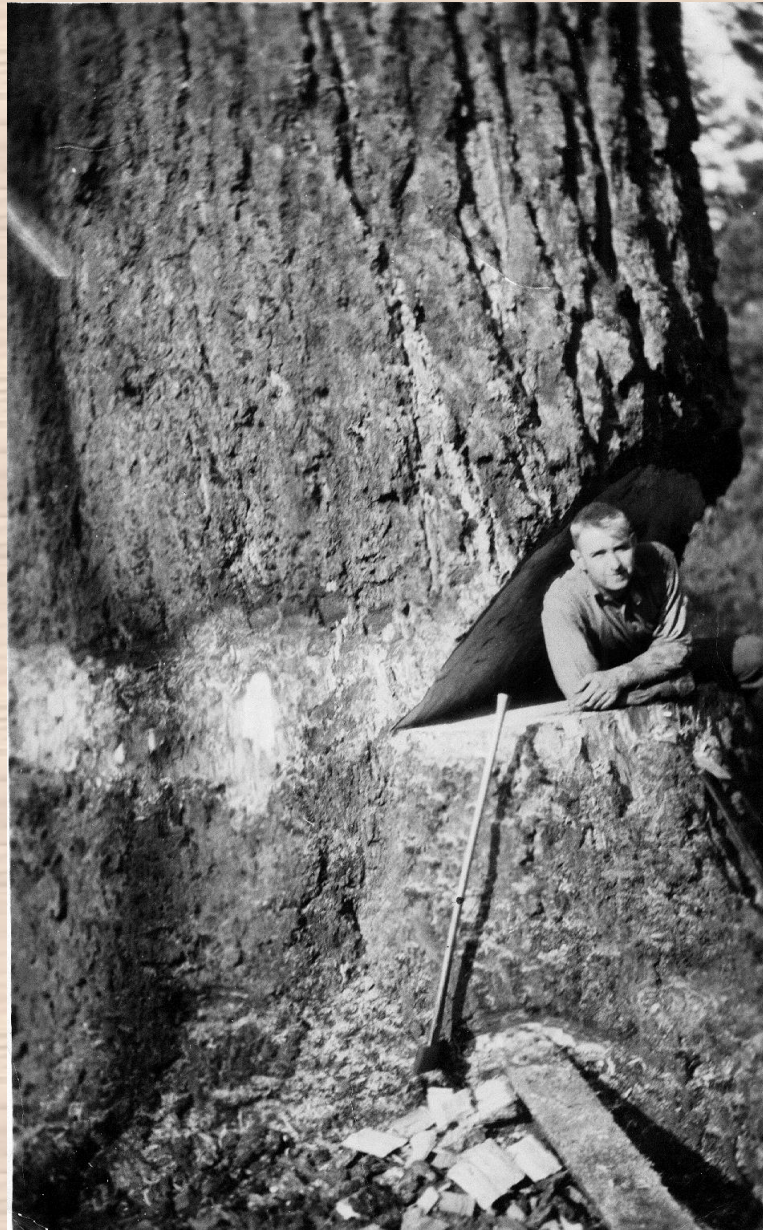
Logging crew on Shay  
Locomotive No. 1657 of the  
Rainier Logging Co.

Rainier Logging Co. closed in  
1922, as the trees to cut down  
were now too far from the  
Minter log dump. Thomas  
Wilson then created the Cispus  
Logging Company with two  
partners and hauled the logs to  
Port Orchard.



c. 1915

Adolph Sehmel in the wedge cut of  
a tree to be logged.



# 1916

Karl and Adolph Sehmel logging with horses in Rosedale.

The man on the left is holding a peavey. A peavey is lever that has a pivoting hooked arm and metal spike at one end. Lumbermen use them to move logs.

Karl and Adolph's parents had immigrated from Germany in the late 1800s. Sehmel Homestead Park in Gig Harbor is the site of the family's original land.



1916

Karl and Adolph Sehmel with  
donkey engine at Rosedale.



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# 1919

Jennie Smith McDonough sitting on a log with a drag saw.

A drag saw cuts the logs into lengths for transport. The saw cuts by a back-and-forth motion. They could be powered by foot pedals, steam, or later gasoline. The drag saw in logging was replaced by the chainsaw in the 1940s.



## 1915 – 1930

Men sitting by the Kimball Brothers mess hall.

The Kimball Brothers Logging Co. was based in Gig Harbor and took contracts to cut timber all over the area, even down to Shelton.



1915 – 1930

Four men showing crosscut saws,  
axes and springboard. Kimball  
Brothers Logging Co.



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## 1915 – 1930

Kimball Brothers logging operation with steam donkey above the Burnham property in north Gig Harbor.

Several Kimball family members pictured.



# 1926

Early Mack logging truck near Shelton. Owned by Charlie Kimball.



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# 1917

Austin Sawmill at Donkey Creek. Charles O. Austin operated the mill 1909 – 1946.

Austin had come to Tacoma in 1889 with his parents. In 1909 he leased the land on the west side of Gig Harbor from John and Josephine Novak and built a mill. The flat tideland was convenient for floating logs up to the mill. Austin bought logs from local contractors, from boomed logs towed from around Puget Sound, and his own logging camp. Its capacity was about 15,000 board feet a day, less than the sawmills of the late 1800s. The mill employed anywhere from two to thirty workers, depending on the work to be done. They made moldings, fruit boxes, dock timbers, shingles, custom milling, and more. Austin was killed in an accident at the mill in 1946.



## 1909 – 1930s

North shore businesses with Austin Mill.

C.O. Austin's house on right, mill office in lean-to on side of house.



PHS

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## Mid – 1920s

Stiff-leg crane at Uhlman Landing at the mouth of Wollochet Bay moving lumber to barges.





2/18/1949

Logging truck on Clay Hill.

Photographer: Frank Shaw



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# 10/30/1949

Galbraith Mill (formerly Austin) and Peninsula Light building.

John Galbraith had bought the mill after Austin's death. He owned several other businesses in Gig Harbor. The mill closed in the 1950s.

This is the current site of the Harbor History Museum.



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## 1940 – 1960

View of Gig Harbor from Peacock Hill.

Logs are stored temporarily in floating rafts until taken to area sawmills. Pilings in the water enable the loggers to manage the logs.



4/1/1952

Galbraith Mill (formerly Austin)  
with the trash burner blowing  
steam or smoke.

Photograph by Frank Shaw



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# 10/7/1956

Gig Harbor from the Galbraith  
(formerly Austin) Mill site.

The harbor was often used by independent loggers to store their log rafts for months, so not all the log rafts in the harbor at this time were from active logging operations.

The city of Gig Harbor eventually banned log rafts in the harbor in the late 1950s. They blocked the pleasure boat docks and many people thought they made the harbor look less picturesque.

Photograph by Frank Shaw



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- What do you notice about the people?
- What do you notice about the land and water?

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