Pacific Northwest “Logging Camp Life” 1850-1940
A Collection of Annotated Bibliographies


A first-person account of life in the booming lumber town of Tacoma, WA in the late 1800’s through the early 1900’s. The local historian, Thomas Emerson Ripley takes his readers through an exciting and photo-filled narrative of the Northwest logger’s experience. This book is an excellent source but it lacks citations and would require further research to confirm facts or glean more information on specific events. However, it is published by the Washington State Historical Society along with American West Publishing so the facts are most likely confirmed.


Grisdale features photographs and maps from Simpson Camp Country, which was located in Mason County. The focus of the book is primarily on the Grisdale camp which survived for 40 years, longer than any other known camp. This book provides an abundance of photography which allows for a very clear understanding of what the camps probably were like to live in, focusing on the families and leisure time of the loggers as well. Photos are supported by text and extensive citations.


This is the story of Sam Churchill, an Oregon native and second generation logger in the Pacific Northwest. This book chronicles his life in the logging camps, including his marriage to wife, Caroline and eventual decision to leave logging to pursue other ventures. This is an interesting source, but keep in mind that this is only one man’s experience so other sources would be beneficial.

Challender, Leroy N. Logging the Great Forests of the Northwest. Vaughn: Canada, 2002

Challender writes about the early days of logging in the Pacific Northwest from a romantic historian’s standpoint. He includes photographs as well as personal stories and memoirs from early loggers. His passion comes from his own personal experience as a logger in the mid-1900’s. Great information, and easy to read, but he could include more citations.
This was a pamphlet issued by the Secretary of War. The pamphlet laid out guidelines for adequate living conditions within a logging camp in the Pacific Northwest. The motivation behind issuing these guidelines was to create an ideal environment so that tools for World War II could be made more adequately and readily.


This is Engstrom’s first-person account of his life as a logger coming from California to Seattle, spanning 1903-1920’s. He covers all facets of camp-life, from daily meals to IWW strikes and forest fires. This book is very well written and interesting.


*Down the Hill* is a gem of a book. Stier has a degree in forestry from the UW and worked with the St. Paul & Tacoma Lumber Co. He combines his extensive personal experience as well as that of three generations of loggers and their families to create this lovely chronicle of early logging life in the Pacific Northwest. His book includes poetry, songs, photographs, and an extensive reference section. My favorite inclusion however is a “glossary of wood terms” (163-177). The glossary covers just about every logging term in existence (I would imagine) and includes such terms as “Powder monkey: Man who handles dynamite” (172), to a “Snag: Dead tree or stub left standing after logging” (173). This book is probably the most valuable source I have found.


This is a children’s book with 25 illustrations done by Kurelek himself. Kurelek offers a fairly realistic albeit lightened version of logging camp life. He includes more text on the leisure and relaxation time than the grueling and deadly work and does not provide any references, but this is an interesting source nonetheless and a refreshing change of pace from the typical narratives of logging camp life.

Andrews, Ralph W. *This Was Logging!* Seattle: Superior Publishing Co, 1954

*This Was Logging* is a collection of photographs from the Darius Kinsey Collection chronicling timber work in the South Sound lumber camps, covering the years 1888-1940. Andrews presents the collection of photographs in such a way that the reader can clearly process the way that logging changed as technology improved. The best example of the change in technology was the switch from livestock and horsepower to locomotive transport.

This book follows Andrew’s previous, _This Was Logging_, and follows a similar chronological presentation, but includes photographs and information about camps in Oregon, California and British Columbia as well as Washington rather than just focusing on the Puget Sound region. It contains excellent photographs and a good deal of explanatory text.


“The rain fell steadily, day and night, not borne on the wind but sheeting down gently without ceasing out of a gray sky “like a dirty galvanized bucket turned upside down” as Wilmer Hutchins wrote in a letter to his father” (Andrews, 21) This description of the weather is typical of the experience of the early northwest logger. Andrews deviates from his previous photo books to include more extensive stories and texts in _Timber!_ A fascinating account of the logger’s experience both in picture and print, Andrews masterfully captures the tone of the Northwest logger and presents it to the reader in an engaging manner. This book is one of 15 that Andrews wrote over a period of 15 years beginning in 1954 with _This Was Logging!_ In my opinion, he improved with every book.


<http://www.lib.washington.edu/specialcoll/exhibits/kinsey/camplife.html>

The Clark Kinsey collection in the University of Washington’s online library is an excellent resource for Pacific Northwest logging information. The database includes biographical information about Clark Kinsey, a notable photographer and some of his photographs as well as historical information about the logging industry in the late 1800’s through the early 1900’s. Clark and his brother Darius provided an incredible wealth of photographic documentation of the Pacific Northwest’s Logging Industry and are responsible for the majority of the photographs found in Ralph Andrew’s books.


The logging section of the _Great Hall of Washington History_ features actual tools used for logging along with a re-creation of a logging scene. There is interesting and informative electronic guide that, when prompted plays common songs and gives descriptions of the types of food loggers ate while in the camps. It was here that I first learned that loggers typically worked 12 hour days six days a week, making anywhere from $35/month to $90/month depending on the level of danger that the job posed. The exhibit is pretty informative but not very large so I would not advise going out of your way to make this trip.
“Housewives struggled with local grocers who carried nothing fresh: no fresh fruit or vegetables, and only cold cuts in the meat case.” (Carlson, 107) This book offers a fresh female perspective of life in the company town. Carlson does not focus solely on the woman’s experience, but does bring it into view in a pertinent and appropriate manner. She also discusses the struggles involved with living in camps that were often 40 miles or more outside of any town, such as being able to send or receive mail, getting fresh groceries as mentioned above as well as having the materials and means to educate your children. This source was received from a book preview site so it is not a complete source, but would be easy to retrieve in full. The preview provides at least one-half of the book as well as Carlson’s complete list of references, and bibliography.


Sensel gives a quick, fun, anecdotal description of the role of “flunkies” or cooks in the kitchen. Great source for anyone interested in the specifics of calorie intake or types of food consumed in a company town.


Online collection of over 2000 of Clark Kinsey’s incredible photographs of loggers and company towns, spanning the late 1800’s through the early 1900’s.


This online collection features 131 of Darius Kinsey’s photographs of logging scenes. I was surprised to see color photographs from the 1920’s.


This website features detailed territory maps beginning in the years spanning 1570-1800, when the first Europeans began exploring and mapping the Pacific Northwest coastline all the way through 1941 with the completion of the Grand Coulee Dam. This source does not explicitly reference the logging camps but it does provide a clear picture of what the territories and landscape of the Pacific Northwest was in a relevant time period.
Torger Birkeland, “Echoes of Puget Sound: Forty Years of Logging and Steamboating”

This article is about a 15 year old immigrant boy who, at such a young age was already a “full-fledged logger” The article is similar to many of the other source materials provided in content but it is different in that it is a first-hand informative piece specific to the immigrant experience. This article is definitely worth reading.


This JSTOR source provides a review of four different films relevant to logging. *Steam whistles, Sawdust and Salt Air: Operations of the Pacific Spruce Corporation* is the only film relevant to the Northwest, but a video representative of logging in the era is definitely a valuable source given that film was not a strong medium of the era. Anyone who is not a JSTOR member or college student with access to Summit would have to pay for this source.