



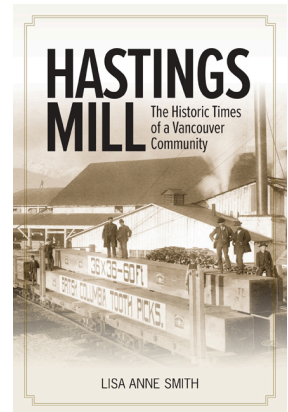
News and Announcements

Summer Socials: Join us July 6th, 2025 9:00am - 11:30am for **Forest History Walking Tour of Vancouver's Gastown & Railtown**. Please register at <https://fhabc.org/2025/06/05/july-6th-2025-vancouver-downtown-eastside-forest-history-walking-tour-2025-900-1130-am/>

Book Club: Join us **September 7th, 2025 from 6:00pm - 8:00pm** for our next book club. We will be reading [*HASTINGS MILL: The Historic Times of a Vancouver Community*](#) by Lisa Anne Smith. Lisa, the author, will also be joining us for our July 6th walking tour! Register:

<https://zoom.us/meeting/register/cEqSH4sbSVal8DD5vRbMzq>

Issue Index: Peter Pearse Oral History - Photos Wanted, p2; Preserving Forest History Information Has Many Potential Values, p2; A Visit to Chemainus Sawmill Office Archives, p5; A Book Review: Aaron Williams, *THE LAST LOGGING SHOW: A Forestry Family at the End of an Era*, p10.



Peter Pearse Oral History - Photos Wanted

Hello Members,

The FHABC is working on additional recordings for our Oral History initiative, <https://fhabc.org/oral-history/>. Currently, we are editing Gerry Burch's January 2000 interview with Dr. Peter Pearse. Our goal is to create a visual montage to accompany this oral history recording.

We are asking all members if you have any photographs of Dr. Peter Pearse that you please reach out to info@fhabc.org. We are hoping member driven personalized photos and experiences will add to the impressive impact Dr. Peter Pearse had and create a video product that many will watch.

With thanks,
FHABC

Preserving Forest History Information Has Many Potential Values

Author: Eric Andersen

Old forestry records can be at risk in this digital age. Why are they important? Well, as artifacts they provide a window into past methods (e.g., surveying and mapping) and policies, and local development history. They can provide clues to assist in today's forest management as well as orientation and a landscape management record for First Nation caretakers and new forest tenure owners.

This past February a message came to the **Forest History Association of BC** (FHABC) from **Interfor Coastal Woodlands** Campbell River office: *"We're in the process of culling some old files. We've found some documents we think might be of interest to your organization."*

We quickly decided this offer deserved investigation and a visit. We'd been to Campbell River before, working with UBC Rare Books and Special Collections to assist in conserving and then finding a home for a large collection of maps and records of Western Forest Products and its several predecessor companies.

(See "Significant Archival Donation from WFP"
<https://fhabc.org/newsletter-archive/2016/98.pdf>)

The Interfor donation consisted of three boxes of carefully maintained files of maps and related reports and correspondence. Some were labelled: “DO NOT DESTROY. HISTORIC VALUE.”



Figure 1: Sample files from the Interfor Coast Woodlands collection. Photo credit Eric Andersen.

Historic value, indeed! The collection included timber cruise reports from as far back as the late 1880s. The areas covered included the Sunshine Coast, Hisnit Inlet in Nootka Sound and, mostly, the central coast areas surrounding Bella Coola and Ocean Falls – former tenures and operating areas of Pacific Mills (Crown Zellerbach) and predecessor companies.

The many timber cruise reports in the collection include work by well-known surveyors and foresters of the past, such as W.S. Jemmett, Frank Swannell, E.A. Cleveland, and Clark & Lyford.

At the beginning of the last century, the B.C. government was convinced to encourage the development of a coastal pulp and paper industry. From 1901, renewable pulp leases were granted with very favourable rental and royalty rates. In the Interfor collection are several dozen pulp lease cruise reports from this period of speculative excitement in coastal timberlands.

Many were produced in 1904 and 1906 for the Bella Coola Development Co. and Bella Coola Pulp and Paper Co., respectively, which had been organized by Puget Sound interests who had staked leases on approximately 80,000 acres in South Bentinck Arm, Dean Channel, Burke Channel and Cousins Inlet. Eventually, these leases provided the foundation for pulp and paper projects and the sawmill in Ocean Falls.

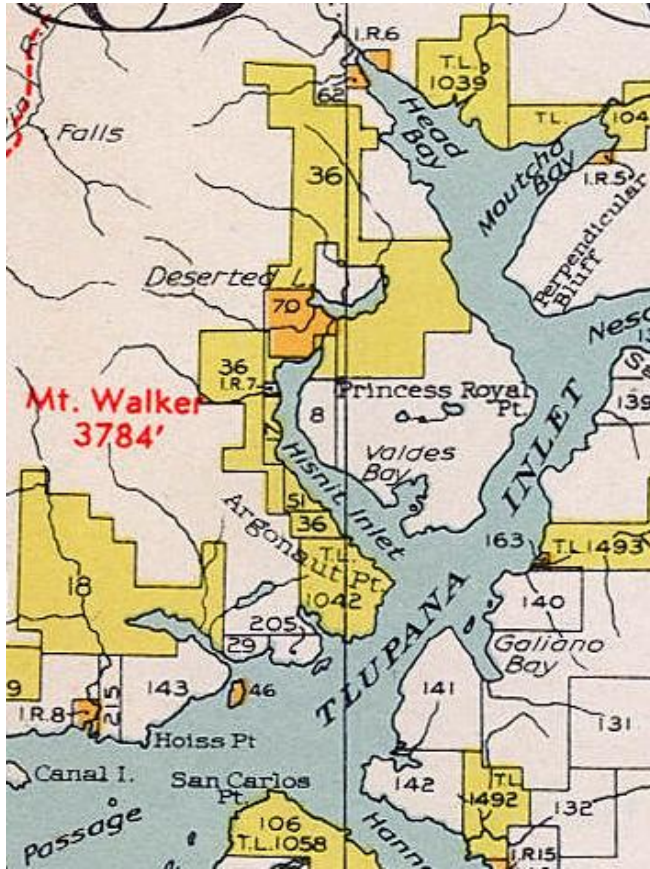


Figure 2 (Left): The preserved collection covers old Timber Licenses featured here Hisnit Inlet, Nootka Sound in a 1948 map.

In an article for the FHABC newsletter back in 2005, “Forest History Meets Ecology: Understanding the Present from the Past”, researcher and UBC instructor in forest ecology **Audrey Pearson** emphasized the importance of preserving old forest maps and records.

“Knowing the forest history is the key to understanding the current ecological patterns. ... Many of our most productive forests, which are the most structurally diverse, were the first to be extensively logged, especially the riparian forests. But they are written off for biodiversity because they are not ‘pristine’ old growth. However, in many

cases, these forests may have more structural diversity and so more biodiversity value than we think, especially on rich sites with good growth.

The key is understanding old logging practices and their influences on forest structure. ... The only way to determine original forest composition is from forest cover maps that pre-date logging, plus the original cruise records. We have the potential to document original forest and stream conditions in many areas, including prior to global warming. This opportunity may become more valuable than we now realize.

Forest history information has many potential values to ecology. It’s just a matter of putting together all the clues.”¹

In his book, UP-COAST: FORESTS AND INDUSTRY ON BRITISH COLUMBIA’S NORTH COAST, 1870-2005, historian **Richard A. Rajala** in discussing the 1913 McKenna-McBride Commission hearings cites two Nuxalk Nation voices concerning access to local timber resources:

¹ Pearson, Audrey. “Forest History Meets Ecology: Understanding the Present from the Past” <http://www.fhabc.org/newsletter-archive/2005/77.pdf>

“All up and down the salt water there are posts saying that this land belongs to the white men who have bought it from the Government,” declared a Bella Coola man. “If I now take any sticks of timber from these places the white men will come along and say ‘leave that alone, it belongs to me.’” The chief of the Kimsquit band asserted that aboriginal people had few opportunities to log. “Most of the land is owned by white men who have bought it for speculation and there is no logging done on it now.”²

Many of the areas represented in the collection of maps and reports donated from Campbell River are today part of forest tenures held and managed by First Nations – who are keenly interested in these records.

So, there are good reasons to preserve old forest maps. Thanks, **Ralph Friedrich** and staff at Interfor Coastal Woodlands for your care and donation of a valuable archive!

Are you aware of any British Columbia forest-related collections in need of an archival home? Please get in touch! info@fhabc.org

A Visit to the Chemainus Sawmill Office Archives

Author: Eric Andersen

The Forest History Association was recently invited to have a look at archival records and collections preserved at the **Western Forest Products Chemainus Sawmill** office building basement.

We were keen to take up this offer. Among our core FHABC objectives are “to cooperate with individuals and organizations in the collection, cataloguing, storage and preservation of forest history records” and “to stimulate interest by individuals and groups in the collection and use of such information.”

Is there a community in B.C. with a longer history of local sawmilling activity than Chemainus? The first mill was built here in 1862. The current mill operated by WFP is the fifth mill on the same Horseshoe Bay site. So, 153 years of very nearly continuous sawmill operations!

WFP staff at the Chemainus mill are very proud of this history. Previous mill owners have also been proud custodians. In 1993, local MacMillan Bloedel staff invited a Royal BC Museum team for a visit, resulting in very large Chemainus Sawmill collections

² Rajala, Richard A. UP-COAST: FOREST AND INDUSTRY ON BRITISH COLUMBIA'S NORTH COAST, 1870-2005 (Royal B.C. Museum, 2006). Pg. 42

being permanently conserved at BC Archives facilities.

<https://search-bcarchives.royalbcmuseum.bc.ca/chemainus-sawmill-fonds>

However, some interesting and valuable collections are still to be found at the Chemainus Sawmill offices today – in large part relating to the mill’s relationship with the community.

Much of the onsite collections relate to key dates, milestones and celebrations for the sawmill and community. For example: 100 years of sawmilling 1862-1962; the 1925 Victoria Lumber & Manufacturing Co. rebuild of the mill; the 1983-84 MacMillan Bloedel rebuilding of the mill; the VL&M Co. 50-year Jubilee celebrations held in 1939; the 1967 dedication by H.R. MacMillan of an installed replica of the water wheel which powered the original mill.



Figure 1: An 1899 depiction of the VL&M Co mill proudly displayed in the Western Forest Products Chemainus offices.

The World War II period is represented with a number of interesting documents. We learn that 225 Chemainus mill employees served overseas in the Armed Forces during the war. From 1942 through to the end of the war, Victoria Lumber & Manufacturing Co. mill management published a **Chemainus Contact** newsletter: *“The primary objects of the ‘Contact’ were to keep Chemainus and VL&M personnel [“Boys and Girls”] apprised of each other’s doings, and to enable them to contact each other if they happened to be in the same area.”*

The oldest original record in the collection is a little 1924 Canadian Bank of Commerce account book – showing seemingly small balance figures. A 1939 write-up mentions that *“We have been using the Canadian Bank of Commerce and its predecessors in B.C. for fifty years as the repository for such funds as we have from time to time possessed. ... a rather unique record in this western country for continuous business association.”*

Another artifact of very old vintage is a framed panorama photo, likely from the 1920s, of the mill and vicinity taken from the waters of Horseshoe Bay – apparently not found in other archival collections.



Figure 2: A quite rare large format panorama photo print dating from the post 1925 rebuild of the VL&M Co mill.

In addition to the WWII *Chemainus Contact*, there are within the collections mill employee newsletters (*The Mill Whistle*) and copies of various MacMillan Bloedel company newsletters – 1950s through 1970s.

Among the highlights in the Chemainus Sawmill collections:

Interesting tidbits about mill history – such as that there were 650 employees in 1958; and *“One of the biggest sticks remembered at Chemainus was a 28” x 28” x 137 feet toothpick which was loaded on the full-rigged ship DUNDEE OF DUNDEE in February 1900 for London, England.”*

From a special **1939 50-year edition Christmas Annual**: *“To get the background from which sprang the idea of celebrating the Victoria Lumber & Manufacturing company’s Golden Jubilee, one must know that the history of the Lumber Industry on the West Coast of North America has shown a very high mortality rate in the individual operations. Within the comparatively small radius of fifty miles of Chemainus one can readily recall many names that are no longer heard in the roll-call of operating*

companies, such as Moodyville, Barnet, Hastings, Brunette, Heaps, Rat Portage, Vancouver Eastern, Nanaimo, Canadian Puget Sound. ... Probably other operations exist that have been carried on for fifty years or more, but very, very few have continued under the identity of a single company."

A full account of the 1939 "largest parade that Chemainus had ever seen. ... It can be said in all modesty that Chemainus and the Victoria Lumber Company and the Company employees really 'went to town' and produced a gala two days that far exceeded anything attempted here before."



LOG SAWING CONTEST ON THE BEACH

Figure 3: Logger sports celebrations as part of the 1939 Christmas Annual VL&M Co community jubilee celebrations.

The 1939 speech of Timber Queen ("Regina Sylvia") Margaret Craig is worth citing: *"Loyal Subjects and Citizens of Chemainus:- ...We cannot be insensible to the fact the 'Timber' has been largely responsible not only for the development and prosperity of Chemainus, but also for the success of British Columbia; and with this thought in mind We do honour today to those pioneers who, fifty years ago, laid the foundation of our community by the inauguration of the Lumbering Industry upon our shores. Our community, although comparatively small in size, is known far and wide for the products*

of our forests and mills; these products have reached the far-flung corners of our Glorious Empire and the innermost recesses of the civilised world. May our community, dear subjects, continue to enjoy this prosperity for many years to come. ... May all of you be spared in health to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of Our Reign at the end of another Fifty Years."

Of course, the Chemainus mill and community have indeed celebrated yet another fifty years, and more since.

A "Statement of Reasons" accompanying a 1944 "**Application For Increase in Wage Rates**" to the Regional War Labour Board spells out this rationale: *"The approved range for male store clerks at the company store in Chemainus, B.C. is \$146.12 to \$168.12, while the approved rates for female clerks is \$70.00 to \$88.23. ... During wartime women clerks are in the majority and are more or less doing a man's job. ... Due to the shortage of men the female clerks have not only taken on additional heavy work but also considerable responsibility."*

To be expected, there are documents and memorabilia in the WFP office collections commemorating popular local stories connected to (Robert Swanson's) "Chemainus Whistle" and the famous sawmill office door through which J.A. Humbird and H.R. MacMillan passed – preserved in the Chemainus Museum and celebrated in the unique downtown Chemainus street murals.



Figure 4: H.R. MacMillan photographed on the occasion of his dedicating the newly installed replica sawmill water wheel in 1967.

Vintage photos of the sawmill, its various incarnations and personalities are displayed with pride in the WFP Chemainus offices. The Chemainus Valley Museum Society (www.chemainusvalleymuseum.ca) and local Chemainus Royal Canadian Legion Branch 191 will have shared interest in this history and its preservation for future generations.

Thanks for the visit, WFP Chemainus!

The FHABC is willing and, with the help of our provincial contact network, able to offer information and advice which may be useful for evaluation and conservation of forest history materials in your company office collections, also. Don't hesitate to get in touch!

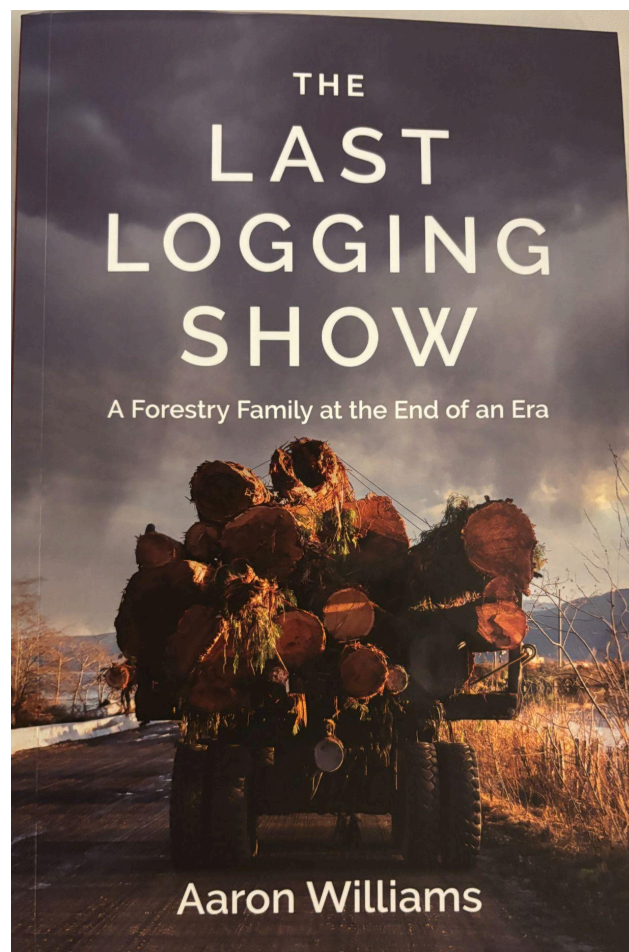
Book Review: Aaron Williams, *THE LAST LOGGING SHOW: A Forestry Family at the End of an Era.*

Author: Katherine Spencer

On the ferry from Vancouver to Nanaimo one of my favorite things to do is see the new BC reads, this is where I purchased Aaron Williams, *THE LAST LOGGING SHOW: A Forestry Family at the End of an Era.*

The comradery that is built through field forestry work is undeniable. What I grew to appreciate through this book was just how much the industry has changed across the generations. The nature of the work, the physicality of it, and that the need to do that work as a team has greatly changed over the last century. The author astutely connects to a younger generation and is able to express why this change is not supporting generational families in the business.

Figure 1 (Right): Cover of Aaron Williams THE LAST LOGGING SHOW: A Forestry Family at the End of an Era.



STORIES: The Newsletter needs your reminiscences/anecdotes and is always thirsty for more forestry-related tales. Whether they are prose or poetry, all contributions are welcome. Most importantly, these stories can be as varied as the profession itself. Note that there is one requirement. Please ensure that your submissions are typed, not hand-written. This will save me much time and frustration in trying to decipher an author's handwriting. Thanks.

If you have an idea for Issue #122, please reach out to us at info@fhabc.org



This issue was guest edited by Peter Marshall and Eric Andersen.

Page layout by Kat Spencer.

Tell others to become members of FHABC!

You are invited to join the Forest History Association of British Columbia. Formed in 1982, the association's interests cover a wide spectrum – from the history of people and machines to the evolution of forest resources management and the associated social and political aspects. Members represent a variety of professions and come from all corners of the province and elsewhere in North America.

Membership is \$20.00 annually, or three years for \$50.00. Memberships are on a calendar year basis – January to December. Membership includes a subscription to our electronic newsletter** as well as the opportunity to attend virtual talks and the association's annual general meeting. This usually involves a field trip in addition to the conduct of the association's business.

<https://fhabc.org/membership/>