

Per Wilhelm Wiklund – An Oregon logger’s journey through life

Background...

Some of the largest forested areas in the United States are located west of the Cascade mountains in Oregon and Washington, and the most northern part of the California coastal range.

The low elevation forests of western Oregon have a checkered history involving railroads, corruption and even the Supreme Court since settlers moved west. The history of these forests reflects how the west was settled. One of the biggest obstacles to westward expansion was transportation. Moving goods and encouraging people to move thousands of miles across a rugged, wild landscape was certainly a challenge – without the advantage of cars and airplanes that we have today.

The most valued trees in the area are the Douglas Fir, reaching a height of 200-300 ft and a diameter of 8-10 ft feet, and the California Redwood trees growing along the coastal areas, all of them giants in the forest.

These trees produced large planks for building ships, bridges and other objects where strong and hard wood was required.

If you were able to cut and transport the wood, there were significant business opportunities to be had.



Forest land in Oregon



Oregon Cut Timber



Early transportation by mule



Later transportation by train



Timber Cutting

Who wants to be a logger...

Tall Timber Calls

There's a wild call from the mountain
Lone wolf calls at a moon beam
The urgent calls of a pine squirrel
And the chilling cougar's scream.

I've thrilled to the cry of the loon
And the cooing of the dove
The piercing scream of an eagle
And the poets song of love.

I've heard the cry of the falcon
And the hoot-owl's mournful call
A pack of hungry coyotes
And a tiny baby's squall.

Heard the loggers call timber
And the squawking of the crow
There's one call that gets my attention
Mother nature calls...I go.

Lon Minkler's *Uncut, Uncensored, Logger Poetry*

One logger heard the call...

William Wicklund was born Per Wilhelm Wiklund on February 25, 1887 in the Parish of Hammerdal, province of Jämtland, Sweden. His parents were Elisabeth Davina Röst and Nils Olov Viklund. He eventually ended up in Tromsø, Norway, where a Norwegian family took him under their wing. In fact, they entered his name in their family Bible as a member of the Marenborg family. Eventually, he decided to go to North America, and arrived in Quebec, Canada on July 5, 1922. The exact date he entered the United States is unknown; he and two friends hid in a boxcar on a train headed for Idaho. He worked in Idaho as a logger, in Tacoma at a lumber mill, and eventually returned to logging. He worked in Washington and Oregon as a *timber faller* for many years.



Timber Fallers

“Willie”, as he was called, worked at various logging camps all over the northwest from the famous Ryderwood logging camp in Washington state, Buster Creek and David Creek camps in Oregon, and a railroad company as a “gandy dancer” laying rails in Doyle, California.



Willie early 1920s

We know this from return addresses from more than 100 letters Willie wrote to Gertrude Pearson (Gurtie, his future wife) on North Montana Avenue starting in 1925 and ending in 1930.

While working in a Northwest logging camp, “Willie” was told about the Square Deal Café in Portland that was owned by a nice Swedish woman who cooked good old country food. The Square Deal was located on the West Side at NW 4th and Couch. The friend also told him that he should meet his cute little girlfriend who was the woman’s daughter. The minute he met her, Willie was hooked. He often talked about spending so much time at the café drinking coffee just so he would have a chance to visit with her. What he did not realize was that she was not his friend’s girlfriend, but it did not take long for him to figure that out. In later years, Willie told everyone he fell in love with her the minute he set eyes on her. She was 15 and he was 28.



Gertrude in front of Square Deal Cafe

The Square Deal was quite popular with all of the Swedish loggers who came to town and the Swedish men working on the Burnside Bridge. Gertrude was a favorite with all of the young Swedish men, and they treated her like a younger sister. She worked seven days a week but still found time to go dancing two or three times a week and her friends were quite willing to be her partner. She was a very good dancer and loved nothing better than having the chance to attend a dance, at the Swedish Linnea Hall among others.



Popular Cafe

Gertrude Pearson was born in Alamagardo, New Mexico on May 16, 1910. When she was 18 months old the family moved to Portland, Oregon. Her father was Charles A. Pearson (Karl Axel Persson), born in Dömle, Ullerude, Parish of Kil, Province of Värmland, March 9, 1873. Charles emigrated to the U.S. April 1893. Her mother was Sara Victoria Danielson, born February 2, 1886 in Vallåsen, Ramsele in Ångermanland. Charles and Victoria were married in Cloquet, Minnesota on November 29, 1905. Victoria entered the United States in June 1904.

The Logging Camps...

There were no homes out in the woods and traveling long distances every day to get to work was impossible. The logging company built these logging camps conveniently located along a railroad track for easy transport of logs out and people and supply into the camp.



Walport Logging Camp, Oregon

The logging company built camp houses, maintained them and provided a commissary for essential foodstuff.

The logging trains provided transportation to a spot near the logging area and the men had to walk the rest of the way, carrying their crosscut saws (also called Swede saws), axes and other tools used to fell trees.



Loggers in front of cabin

Being a logger was not child's play, it was a very dangerous line of work with a trail of very many mangled bodies left behind. On top of the physical risks from the work, they had to deal with very temperamental weather conditions in the woods.

In Detroit, Oregon, a report was given of an accident involving one of the trains. An engine was derailed, cars were damaged, logs were lost, and almost as an afterthought, noted something to the effect that besides the equipment damage "a man was killed".



Here are some selected examples of **Lumberjack Lingo**

Willie 2nd from the right at East Side logging in Keasey, Oregon

High-ball: to be in a hurry, sometimes without respect for safety

Running saw: cutting timber, also referred to as "working on the saw"

Skid road: rough path over which logs are dragged to the landing (from which the "skid row derived")

White finger: numbness of the hands due to long-term use of chain saws

Widow maker: loose limb or top hanging in a tree that can be dislodged by wind or the force of a falling tree; the impact of a limb that is only an inch or two in diameter can cause serious injury and death

Chokers: cables attached to logs

Adapted from Deadfall (Mountain Press)

Logging team with their "Donkey" which was a steam driven system to retrieve logs with chokers from cutting areas to landings for transport.



Conclusion...

Many love letters came out of the woods to Gertrude at the Square Deal Café in west Portland during the period 1925—1930. The letters also indicate that everything was very tight even if you are ready to get married; “I don’t think I will come and see you sweetheart, before we get married. If I take a trip in before that time it will cost some money, and you know how it is, honey. We need every cent we can get hold of when we get married”.

Willie and Gertrude were married December 8, 1928 at the Polish Hall which is still in use on Interstate Avenue. The sign in the front says Polish Library Association and it is next to the Catholic Church which was no doubt founded by Polish immigrants.

When Gertrude joined the Vasa Nobel Lodge in Portland, their meetings were at the Polish Hall.

Little Willie was born on June 25, 1930 and was named Norman William Wicklund. Daughter Joyce Ann was born on February 23, 1933.

Willie was back working in the woods in 1936. They rented a house at Fishhawk Falls, and Willie worked at Tidewater Logging Co. The family moved to Aloha around 1938, and Joyce and Norman remember their father still working in the woods. He eventually become a longshoreman during the 1940’s and retired as a longshoreman.

They celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary at the home of their daughter and son-in-law in 1978, with many of the people who had been at their wedding in attendance. Of course, both Joyce and Norman were there with their children.

Willie died on October 15, 1980 followed by Gertrude on May 15, 1999.

Before she died, Gertrude told Joyce that she always knew how much she was loved. Norman and Joyce knew that too, but after reading his letters to her, it reinforced what they already felt. Willie never wanted to be away from her, and when she got mad at him, he always felt bad.

Mother told Joyce as she was dying to not worry about her. She had a long, happy life, and was ready to go. She and Daddy were going fishing!

Story written by Leif Rosqvist, the editor of New Sweden Heritage Society and SRIO newsletters. The story is based on more than 100 letters written by Willie to Gertrude from various logging camps in the northwest during the period 1925 to 1930.

References:

Ernst Skarstedt: “Oregon och dess svenska befolkning”
History of Oregon BLM — Oregon’s Heritage Forests
Alger Sullivan—The logging camps

Interesting reading:

SRIO book: Swedish Oregon, available at www.swedishrootsinoregon.org
Rachelle E. (Shelly) Voie: Entering Ryderwood: Family Logging Camp at the End of the Road
“Gandy dancer”: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gandy_dancer



Gertrude Pearson & William
Wicklund - 12/8/1928