

**TREE RINGS: HUMAN/TREE PORTRAITURE
FROM THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY**

...time is a tree (this life one leaf)
but love is the sky and i am for you
just so long and long enough
-- E.E. Cummings



Big Tree. Crescent City. ~Jones~

The photographs in this book are from the Gerald W. Williams Collection housed at The Special Collections and Archives Research Center and W.S. Merwin has graciously allowed his work to be reprinted here with any profits going towards the protection of trees.

I have included all I could find by way of notes and information about the photographs. I was unable to view the backs of many of these artifacts as they were set into scrapbooks. To the best of my knowledge, all photographs were taken in Oregon, Washington and California from the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth.

I received support for this research from the Resident Scholar Program at the Oregon State University Libraries in 2014. A digital version of this book will be available at my site. Printed books will be available for the cost of printing (and shipping) plus three dollars which will be given to help maintain the Three Giants Park in Portland, Oregon.

Edited and assembled by Melody Owen . 2014-2018

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Photographer on Tillamook plank road. (N.H. Road. Ford...) 1911

Contents:

Early twentieth century photography selected
from the Gerald W. Williams Collection
Special Collections & Archives Research Center
Oregon State University Libraries
Page 1 - 60

Introduction from the editor
Page 6

The Last One . W.S. Merwin
Page 15 - 20

Exerpt from *Vertigo* screenplay
Alec Coppel and Samuel Taylor
Page 30 - 31

The Story of Three Giants Park
Arthur Bradford
Page 56 - 57

The title *Tree Rings* has two reference points. First, it evokes dendrochronology, the study of the rings inside a tree's trunk. It also references humans who protect trees by literally wrapping their arms around them, or by locking themselves together with bike locks, or by standing in a ring around the tree with their hands clasped. For example, the inspiring Chipko movement in India and people from communities around the world who fight to stop excessive logging. Many people have fought to protect remaining old growth as part of groups like Earth First and on their own, like Julia "Butterfly" Hill who lived for 738 days in the branches of a 1,500 year old redwood tree to prevent it being cut by loggers.

By presenting this collection of humans standing next to trees, I hope to draw attention to the concept that we are an integral part of the natural community. Humans are inclined to move about in nature as if we are separate from it, as if we are visiting, or landlords, but we are part of nature. It is the stuff we are made of. I researched the archives to locate human subjects posing purely to demonstrate awe, tenderness or appreciation. These people tend to touch the trees, to look or to climb up into them, to lean against them, showing by their small human frames, how very large the trees in the photograph are. I call this genre human/tree portraiture. It is an indication and evocation of our innate and all too often ignored connection with and attraction to nature.

Trees absorb carbon and reflect changing climates through their dendrochronology. Every year, a tree puts on a layer of new growth underneath its bark. Scientists can read the climatic conditions of the tree's environment through the relative size of the rings and marks by fire and other stresses. Trees tell our mutual histories with their rings; the layers and variations in the spaces between. In *Vertigo*, Kim Novak touches the rings of a cut tree in the Redwood Forest and murmurs, "Here I was born and here I died. It was only a moment for you. You took no notice." Hitchcock is using Novak's statement as a plot device to convince James Stewart that she is possessed, but indeed it evokes a sense of time and memory beyond what we can imagine. It references the extraordinary age of these old growth trees that were often seedlings before our great grandmothers were born, before America was colonized, so long ago that entire ecosystems have evolved for centuries in their high branches.

Some of the photographs depict logging activities in the forests along the west coast of the United States. These were taken during the gold rush style exploitation of old growth that occurred at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth, a time when a great and wasteful slaughter took place in the West. Thousand of acres of old growth forest were cut in a mad rush. Nancy Langston lays out the history of human impact on the ecology of the Pacific Northwest.

"Old-growth forests faced the most dramatic losses: probably less than a tenth of the pre-settlement old-growth forests remained by the 1990s. Surviving old growth had become extremely fragmented.... When the forest service had first arrived, those mature forests had stretched for hundreds of thousands of acres... In 1906, one report stated that an open, old-growth ponderosa-larch forest covered 800,000 acres south of the Strawberry Mountains. Fewer than 8,000 of the same acres remained in 1993 – less than 1 percent of what was present before the Forest Service began management." (Langston, p422)

Logging photographs are the most commonly referenced photographs from this era showing humans posing next to trees. For this reason, I thought it was important to include this style of portraiture but also to juxtapose it with the poem titled *The Last One* by W.S Merwin, which speaks to the consequences of greed and unsustainable exploitation of natural resources. These were working people. They thought that the bounty of the new world was endless. There was no real notion of sustainability at the time, though there were already people trying to protect them, like the group of Quakers depicted in the 1952 movie *The Big Trees*. Even though the loggers may simply be displaying pride in their feats of strength and ingenuity at toppling such large trees - much like hunting and fishing photographs in which the human stands, smiling, next to their quarry - there is also an apparent sense of awe. People still pose next to trees. We like to be near them.

The photographs and postcards in this presentation were selected from the Gerald W. Williams Collection at the Special Collections and Archives Research Center at Oregon State University. Williams was formerly National Historian for the U.S. Forest Service.

~ Melody Owen





The Animal Tree . California Redwood Park









Redwood highway . 1932



Redwood highway . 809 Paterson



"The Chandelier Tree" at Underwood Park
on Redwood Highway. 79 cart-ray





California Redwoods - ER Freeman Photo



The Last One

W.S. Merwin

Well they'd made up their minds to be everywhere because why not.
Everywhere was theirs because they thought so.
They with two leaves they whom the birds despise.
In the middle of stones they made up their minds.
They started to cut.

Well they cut everything because why not.
Everything was theirs because they thought so.
It fell into its shadows and they took both away.
Some to have some for burning.



243. Oregon Timber - Grown near Seaside, Ore.

Well cutting everything they came to the water.
They came to the end of the day there was one left standing.
They would cut it tomorrow they went away.
The night gathered in the last branches.
The shadow of the night gathered in the shadow on the water.
The night and the shadow put on the same head.
And it said Now.

Well in the morning they cut the last one.
Like the others the last one fell into its shadow.
It fell into its shadow on the water.
They took it away and its shadow stayed on the water.

Well they shrugged they started trying to get the shadow away.
They cut right to the ground the shadow stayed whole.
They lay boards on top of it the shadow came out on top.
They shone lights on it the shadow got blacker and clearer.
They exploded the water the shadow rocked.

They built a huge fire on the roots.
They sent up black smoke between the shadow and the sun.
The new shadow flowed without changing the old one.

They shrugged they went away to get stones.

They came back the shadow was growing.
They started setting up stones it was growing.
They looked the other way it went on growing.
They decided they would make a stone of it.
They took stones to the water they poured them into the shadow.
They poured them in they poured them in the stones vanished.



548 Twenty-six foot saw used for cutting Calif. Redwood tree.



The shadow was not filled it went on growing.
That was one day.

The next day was just the same it went on growing.
They did all the same things it was just the same.
They decided to take its water from under it.
They took away water they took it away the water went down.
The shadow stayed where it was before.
It went on growing it grew onto the land.
They started to scrape the shadow with machines.
When it touched the machines it stayed on them.
They started to beat the shadow with sticks.
When it touched the sticks it stayed on them.
They started to beat the shadow with hands.
When it touched the hands it stayed on them.
That was another day.



Well the next day they started about the same it went on growing.
They pushed lights into the shadow.
Where the shadow got onto them they went out.
They began to stomp on the edge it got their feet.
And when it got their feet they fell down.
It got into eyes the eyes went blind.
The ones that fell down it grew over and they vanished.
The ones that went blind and walked into it vanished,
The ones that could see and stood still
It swallowed their shadows.
Then it swallowed them too and they vanished.
Well the others ran.

The ones that were left went far away to live if it would let them.
They went as far as they could.
The lucky ones with their shadows.

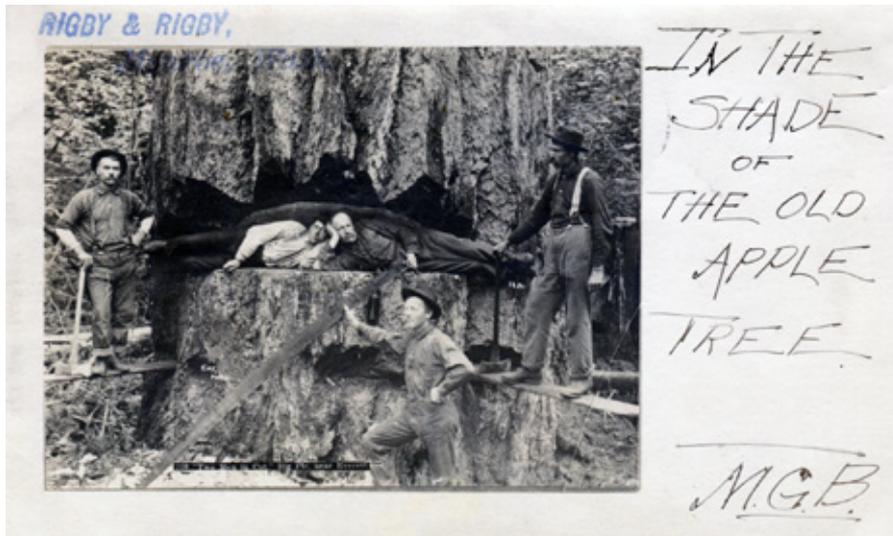




Spruce Div. Raymond, Wash. - Riving - Splitting a Spruce Log
C.K. Kinsey Seattle Kellogg



Logging operations in SW Washington 1923



Undercut of a 12 ft Washington Douglas Fir Tree -600- Sorrensen Photo pub by Ellis
 In the Shade of the old Apple Tree -M.G.B. Rigby & Rigby



(Novo) felling big timber Coos Co Ore. Oregon Coast Highway



Men sitting in giant spruce tree near Seaside, Oregon



Logging crew sitting on a felled cedar log . 1915



Spruce Division soldiers on stump . 1918





Western Red Cedar Stump near Demming, Wa. March 1925
photo by Leslie R. Corbett



Tree rings. Yosemite Nat'l Park. California

Excerpt from the screenplay of Alfred Hitchcock's "Vertigo".

By Alec Coppel and Samuel Taylor
Draft 9-12-1957

EXT. THE REDWOODS - (DAY)

Madeleine and Scottie near the massive trunk of a tree. Beyond them, the small stream, bridged by a wide flattened redwood log.

MADELEINE

How old?

SCOTTIE

Oh... some, two thousand years, or more.

MADELEINE

The oldest living things?

Scottie nods and watches her, wondering, as she looks about thoughtfully.

SCOTTIE

You've never been here before.

She shakes her head, lost in thought as she lets her gaze wander among the trees.

SCOTTIE

What are you thinking?

MADELEINE

(Searching)

Of all the people who have been born... and have died... while the trees went on living.

SCOTTIE

(Agreeing)

Their true name is Sequoia
Sempervirens: always green, everliving.

MADELEINE

(Flatly)

I don't like them.

SCOTTIE

Why?

MADELEINE

(Simply)

Knowing I have to die...

We watch them move away in the distance, disappear behind a tree, then come into view again, and now there comes into view the cross-section of a redwood tree that is on exhibit, with certain of its rings marked to show what it has lived through, and they approach it.

SCOTTIE

Would you like a drink of water?

MADELEINE

No, thank you.

Scottie moves to the small upright drinking fountain as Madeleine approaches the tree section and stands before it and studies it. Scottie gets a drink of water, then comes up behind Madeleine and stands, and she is seemingly unaware of his presence. Their backs are to the CAMERA. INSERT OF RINGS on the tree, marked with dates, beginning, near the center with the date 909 A.D. and ending with 1930 - tree cut down.

EXT. RED WOODS - (DAY) - CLOSE SHOT

We see the two profiles: Madeleine staring at the tree, Scottie staring at Madeleine. She raises one gloved hand and almost idly begins to trace a finger up along the white line that is marked: 1776 DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE. And as the hand moves a little to the left, Madeleine begins to speak, almost vacantly, oblivious of all but this piece of tree, and herself.

MADELEINE

Somewhere in here I was born... and here I died and it was only a moment for you... you took no notice...

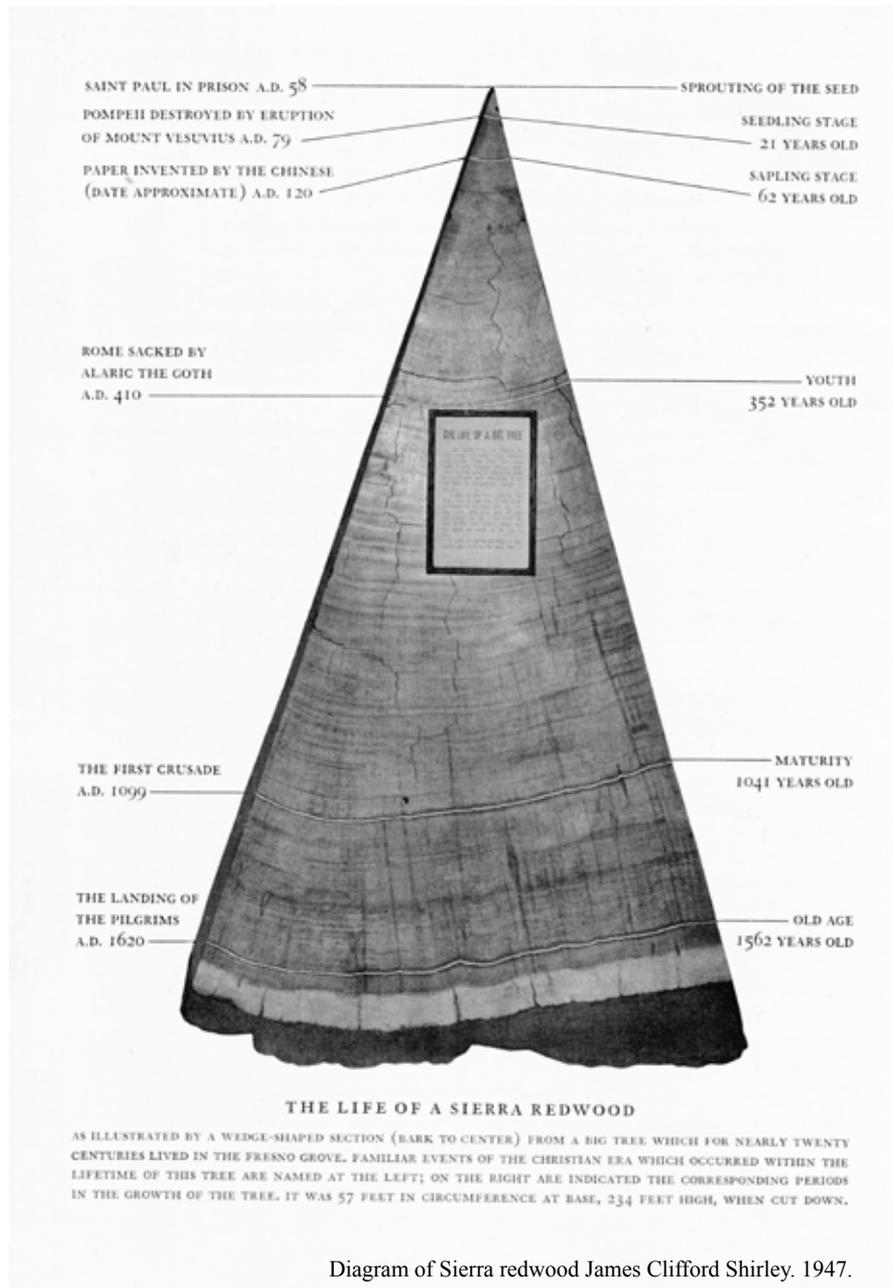
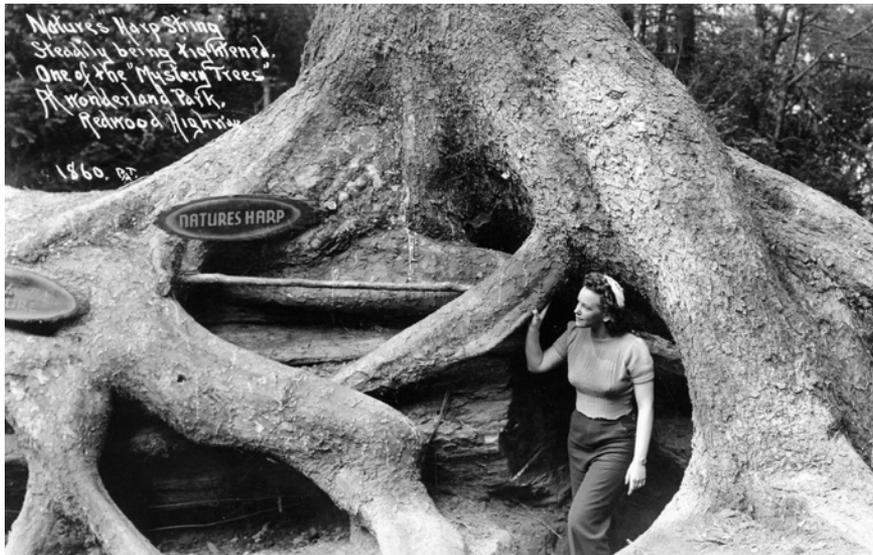


Diagram of Sierra redwood James Clifford Shirley. 1947.



At Richardson Grove State Park. 1,250 years old, 95,000 board feet. 1940 circa
Redwood slab, 2,100 years old, Richardson Grove.



Octopus Tree, Lee's Giant Redwood Park. 1932 circa
Nature's "Harp String" steadily being tightened. One of the "mystery trees" at Wonderland Park,
Redwood Highway . 1940 circa

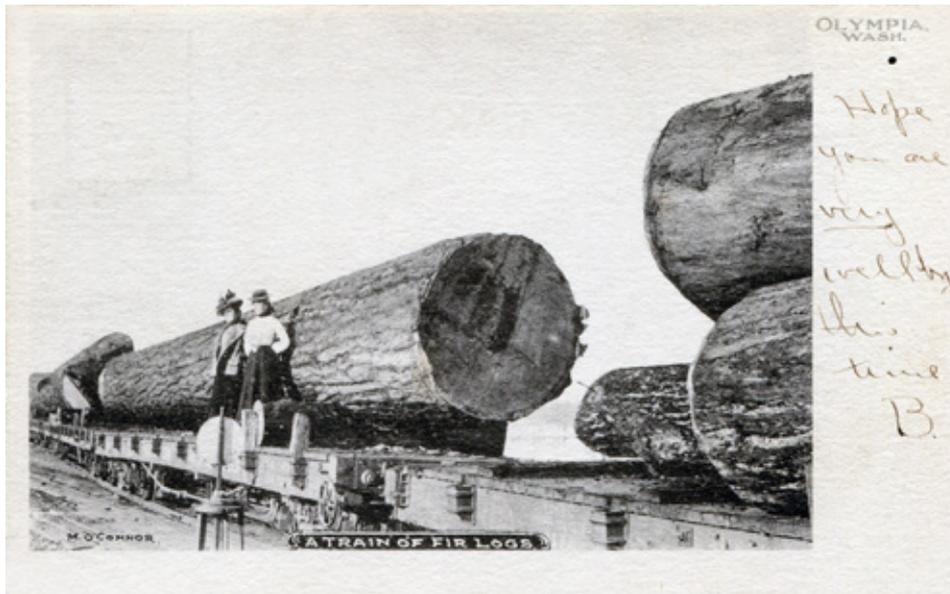
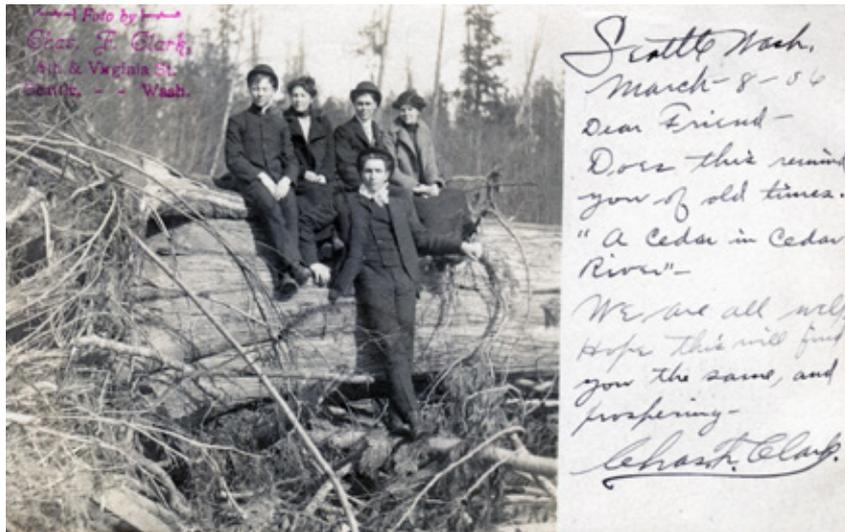


Foto by Chas F. Clark, 8th & Virginia St. Seattle, Wash. 1906
M. O'Connor . A train of fir logs . Olympia Washington



A Del Norte Redwood . 1932



Man with outstretched arms next to a giant tree . 1915



542. A home inside a California giant Redwood tree.

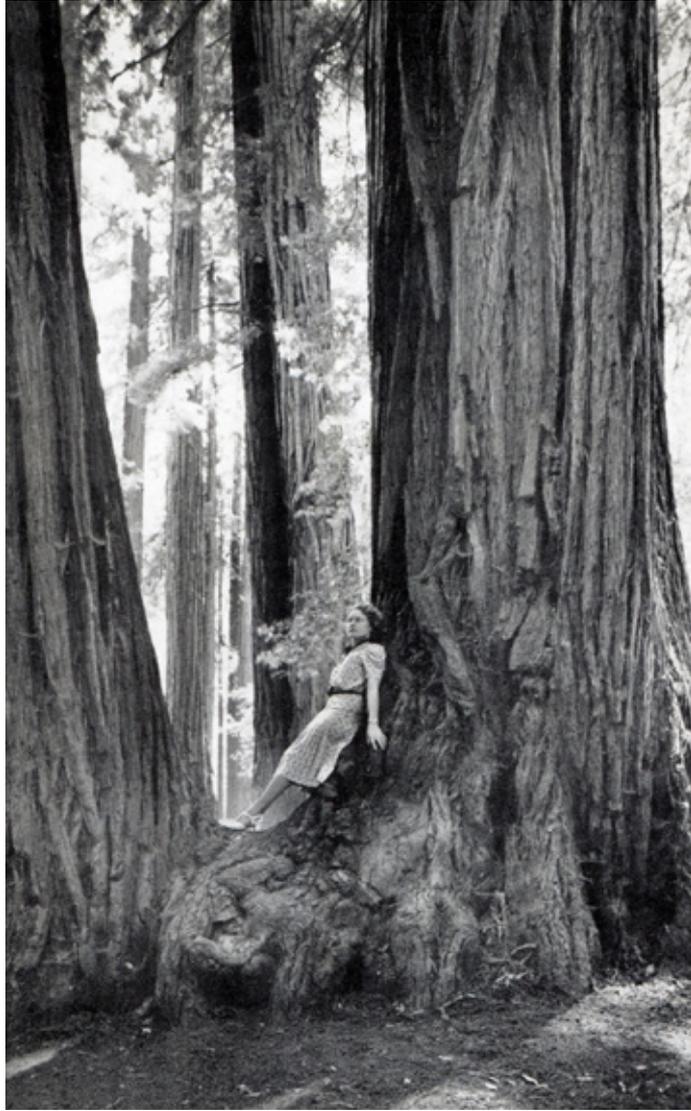


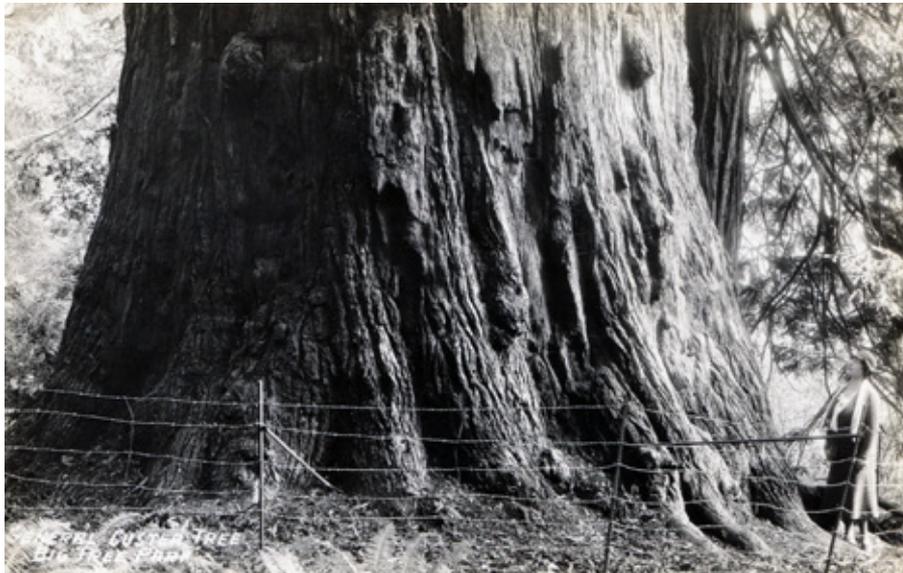
A home inside a California giant Redwood tree.
12' x 18' x 6' Big Tree - 4 doors, Ukiah, Cal



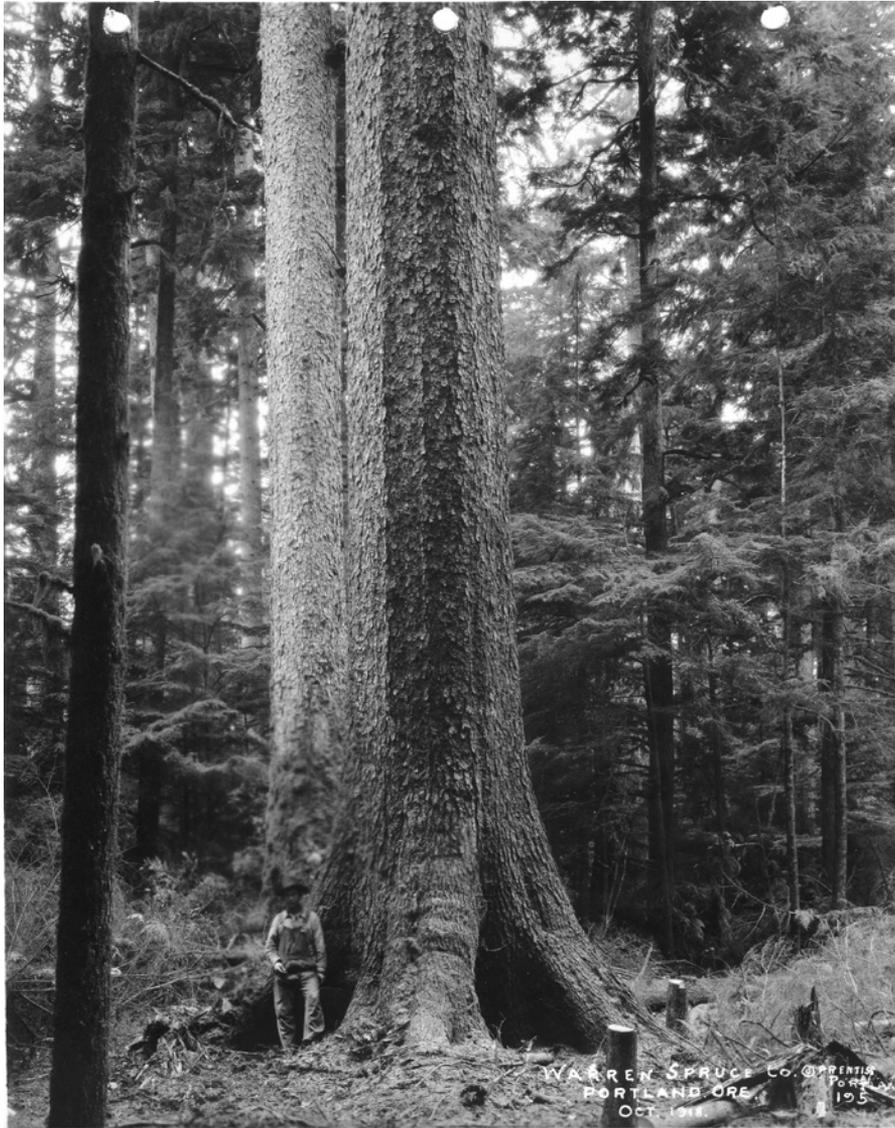
A "dog on" big Redwood. 96 1/2 Ft. in circumference.
It's a a Bendore photo ~ on the Redwood Highway ~







General Custer Tree. Big Tree Park



Warren Spruce Co. Portland, Or Oct 1918. - Prentiss. Portland, Ore.



Largest known Myrtle Tree in the world. 97 ft Spread. Coos Co, Ore. 1932 circa

E-29. Myrtle trees near Crescent City, Calif.



A 20 ft Cedar - Western Washington photo pub by Ellis

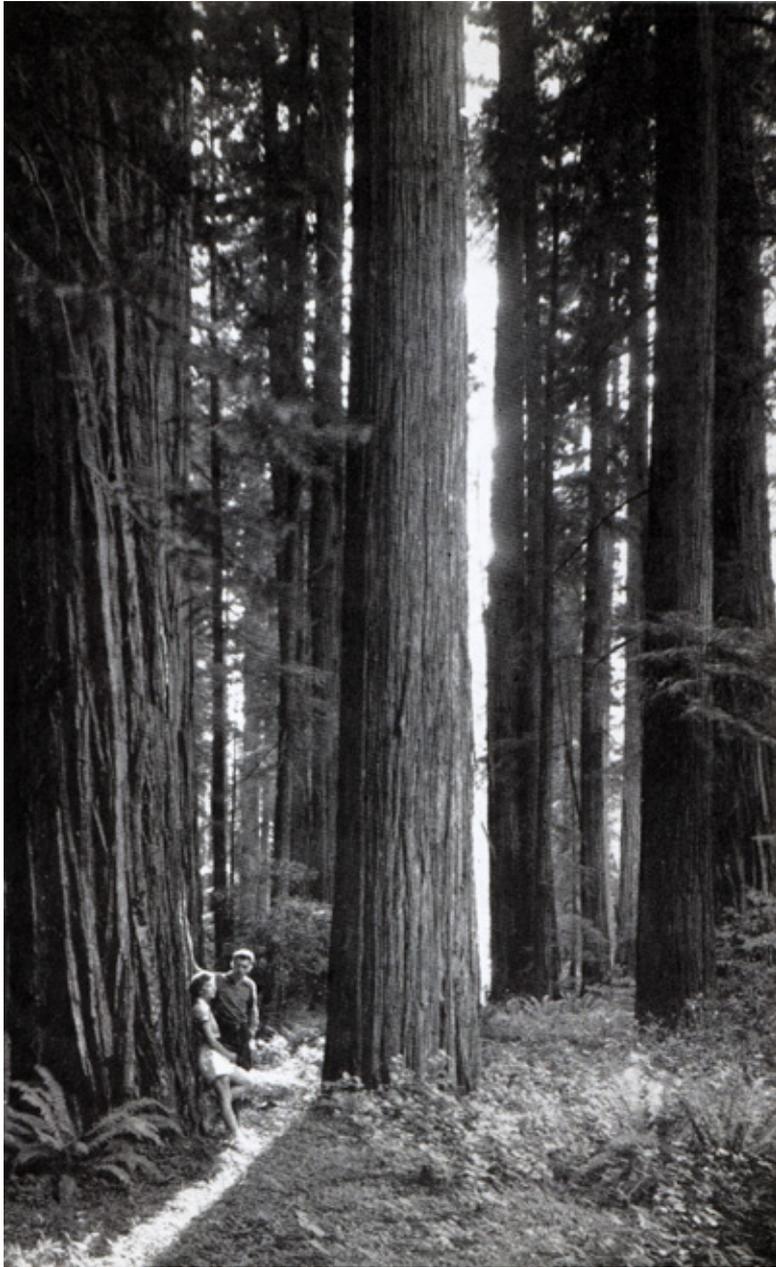




Oregon (Ponderosa?) pine, Klamath County, Oregon . 1915



The Fallen Giant. Redwood Highway. 884 Patterson
Gigantic Spruce Tree Oregon "Oregon Spruce will win the war."
photo by Weister Co. Portland, Or.







"Cathedral Group." Redwood Park. Calif



The Fallen Monarch, Mariposa Big Tree Grove, California, the largest trees in the world.



U. S. CAVALRY AND FALLEN MONARCH
MARIPOSA BIG TREE GROVE, CALIFORNIA.

The Fallen Monarch, Mariposa Big Tree Grove, California, the largest trees in the world.
U.S. Cavalry and Fallen Monarch, Mariposa, Big Tree Grove, California



Dancing on the stump. Washington.
2100 Leisure Hour in a Western Logging Camp. 1910



Del Norte Wonder Stump of Eternal Redwood. Still sound after 5000 years upon the ground.

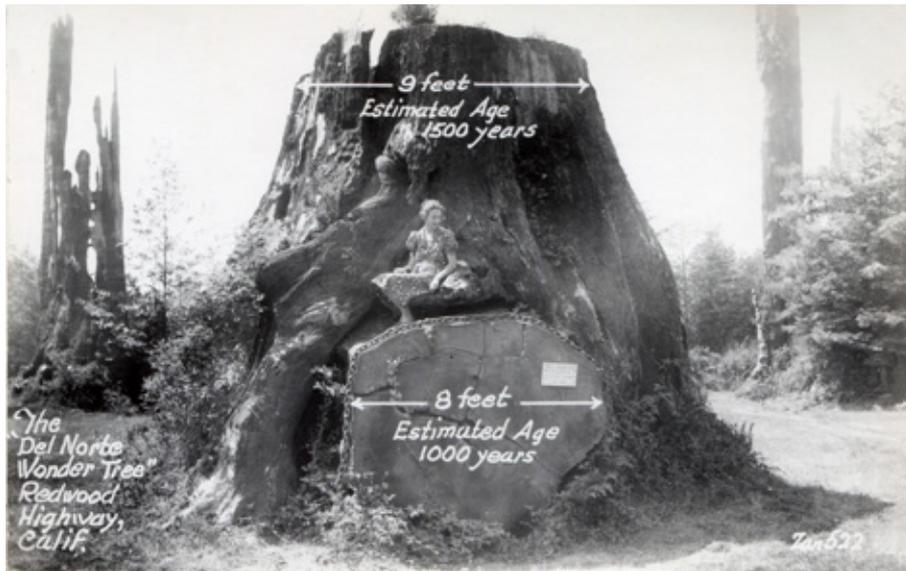
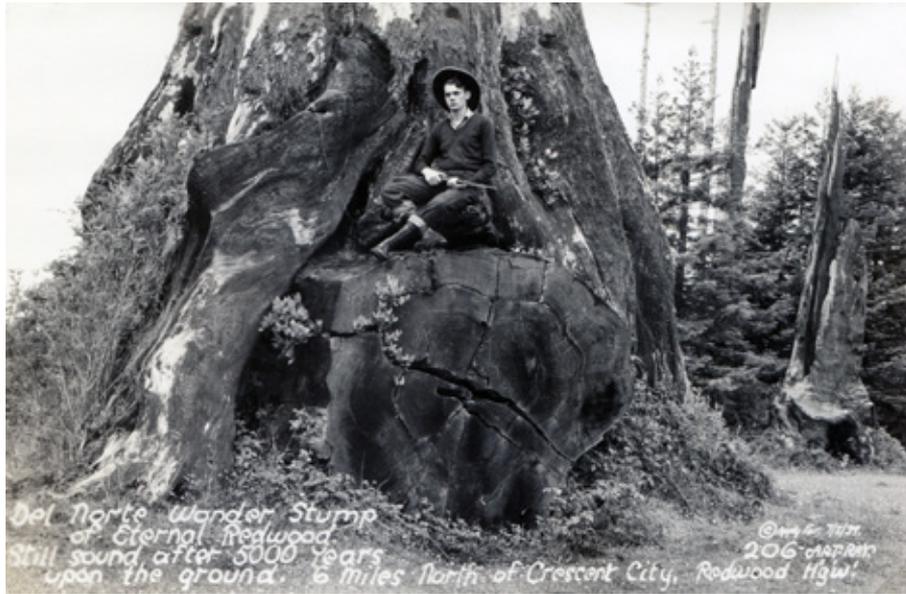
6 miles north of Crescent City. Redwood Highway. Art-Ray 7/7/39

Del Norte Wonder. Stump 11 ft. Dia. Formwd of 3 trees grown together. 550 years old.

Growing over fallen tree. Both redwood. Torgerson Ranch near Crescent City, Cal.

The "Del Norte Wonder Tree" Redwood Highway, Calif.

9 feet. Estimated age 1500 years. 8 feet. Estimated age 1000 years.



Three Giants Park

Like a lot of American cities in 2015, Portland, Oregon found itself in the middle of a real estate boom. Eager developers bought up smaller houses, razed them, clear-cut the properties, and placed the largest allowable dwellings on the land. This resulted in tidy profits for them, but left no room for the big beautiful trees for which Portland had become known. In our neighborhood, a set of three giant sequoias towered above all the others. They were planted by a young girl over a hundred years before, a present from her uncle on her 12th birthday. Nearly 180 feet tall, they stood on an empty lot, beside a modest home in the southeast part of town. Imagine our shock when a developer easily obtained permits to cut down all three giant sequoias in order to make room for one large house.

The neighborhood offered to buy back the land above cost. The land use committee submitted proposals under which two houses might be built on the same property without cutting down the giant trees. These solutions were rejected and one morning chainsaw crews came rumbling up the street. Neighbors and citizens from all over Portland rushed to stand under the trees and prevent their destruction that day. The police arrived and threatened arrest, but nobody left the property. In fact, more people arrived, along with the news media. The next day a small tent village set up camp under the trees and a fellow named Lorax Dave climbed high into their branches vowing not to come down until they were saved. A standoff ensued which lasted four days. Media attention grew and families from all over came to show support for Lorax Dave and the “Ewok Village” around the trees. They brought supplies and home baked goods. On the fifth day a SWAT team arrived and evicted everyone except Lorax Dave. They couldn’t reach him. As TV cameras rolled and tension grew, the mayor of the city called the developer downtown to broker a deal. He dropped his asking price and finally conceded to conditions under which the property could be sold to a non-profit coalition known as “Save The Giants”. The land is now a public park where everyone can enjoy the presence of these these giants. We have events there twice a year during which we gather to celebrate the trees. Giant sequoias, as you likely know, can live to be thousands of years old. It is our hope that many generations from now, they will still gather under these trees and remember the efforts put forth to save them.

Arthur Bradford, President, “Save The Giants”



Neighborhood kids at Three Giants Park



Photographs selected from the Gerald W. Williams Collection
Special Collections & Archives Research Center . Oregon State University Libraries

Langston, Nancy. 1995. *Forest Dreams, Forest Nightmares: The Paradox of Old Growth in the Inland West*. Weyerhaeuser Environmental Book. Seattle: University of Washington Press.

W.S. Merwin. 1967. [The Last One] from *The Lice*. Macmillan
and *The Second Four Books of Poems* (Copper Canyon Press, 1992)

Exerpt from *Vertigo* screenplay. 1957. Alec Coppel and Samuel Taylor.

Exerpt from E.E. Cummings, [as freedom is a breakfastfood]
Complete Poems 1904-1962, edited by George J. Firmage.

Exerpt from Giorgio Agamben. 2004. *The Open*. Stanford.

Diagram of Sierra redwood James Clifford Shirley. 1947.
The Redwoods of Coast and Sierra. University of California Press.



Natures work in Western Washington Forest.
- P. Wischmeyer, Seattle, Wa.



There does not exist a forest as an objectively fixed environment: There exists a forest-for-the-park-ranger, a forest-for-the-hunter, a forest-for-the-botanist, a forest-for-the-wayfarer, a forest-for-the-nature-lover, a forest-for-the-carpenter, and finally a fable forest in which Little Red Riding Hood loses her way.

~ Giorgio Agamben

This oak tree and me, we're made of the same stuff.

~ Carl Sagan