LOGGING ON THE EAST BRANCH:
The Story of Coombs Lumber Company
ROOTS BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETINGS

The Roots Board of Directors conducts a regular schedule of meetings each year. Meetings will be held on the second Thursday of odd-numbered months. Meetings are scheduled to begin at 6:00 PM. Meetings for 2008 are: September 11, November 13.

Members and volunteers are welcome to attend these meetings. Meeting sites can be determined by contacting President Chris Baldo (days) at 707-459-4549.

ROOTS OF MOTIVE POWER, INC.

This journal is the official publication of Roots of Motive Power, Inc., an organization dedicated to the preservation and restoration of logging and railroad equipment representative of California’s North Coast Region, 1850s to the present. Membership is $35.00 Annually; regular members vote for officers and directors who decide the general policy and direction of the organization. Roots of Motive Power displays and demonstrations are located near the Mendocino County Museum, at 420 East Commercial St., Willits, CA. Newsletter deadlines for contributors: February 15 for the April issue; June 15 for the August issue; October 15 for the December issue.

Mailing Address is
Roots of Motive Power, Inc.
PO Box 1540
Willits, CA 95490-1540

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NEWSLETTER EDITOR

Jack Wade
PO Box 1149
Willits, CA 95490-1149
707-459-9036
jbwade@pacific.net
FROM THE PRESIDENT’S DESK

For those of us making a living in the timber industry and interested in the history of the timber industry in Mendocino County, we endure almost daily reminders of the industry’s decline. Far too often, we grieve the death of another of the icons of the industry, such as the recent passing of Rogan Combs. Sawmills have closed, productive land converted to asphalt, houses or some form of tax-supported “protection.” All this can lead to serious levels of depression when I dwell on the transformation of the industry.

Occasionally, amid the gloom, I find something positively amusing that brings a chuckle to my normally resigned persona. My business is located adjacent to the site of the old Sage Land and Lumber Company sawmill at the west end of Franklin Avenue in Willits. Willits Redwood Products (WRP), Harwood Products, and Harrah Lumber Company all came and went from the site, to be replaced for the most part by the Willits garbage transfer station. The last major remnant of the old sawmill was the redwood deadman on the corner of Blosser Lane and Franklin Avenue that supported the guidelines for the 142 foot highpole. Two highpoles and a donkey rigged with a Tyler system moved logs in and out of a huge log-deck. The deadman was a four-foot diameter redwood log placed vertically in the ground, at least 20 feet deep. The portion that extended above ground was beautifully wrapped with 2-inch diameter cable, neatly fastened with multiple rows of railroad spikes. It was a front page story in the Willits News in September, 1951, when Willits Redwood Products raised the “world record” highpole to replace the 137 foot highpole that burned in the August, 1951 log deck fire. The tree was personally selected by WRP’s forester, Ed Burton; 32 inches in diameter at 143 feet and containing 14,000 board feet of lumber. The tree was felled by two WRP fallers, Emile Ikola and Neil Lewis. I had long thought the site should have been a City of Willits Mini-Park, a monument to an industry and an era.

The highpole comes to Willits with Neil Lewis at the wheel, Gartzke on the cab, Jack Gamble amidships, and Herb Beldon bringing up the rear.

Photo provided by Chris Baldo

Photo provided by Chris Baldo

For two weeks, while puttering about our sawmill on a forklift, I watched with great amusement as an overmatched crew from the garbage company wrestled with the removal of the deadman. They finally removed the railroad spikes that held the wraps of cable. Then a series of machines from small to large arrived to tug, jar, twist, pull, lift and every combination thereof to remove the deadman. This was an utter failure, the deadman was there to stay. Thoroughly beaten, some employees were then sent out with chainsaws to whittle the deadman down to ground level. Sparks flew from hitting imbedded metal, and it was a multi-day project just to get the deadman down to an acceptable height for the risk management department.

Loggers and sawmillers in the County have always been a stubborn breed, and there was something about the tenacity of that deadman to hang on against an un-knowing and un-caring adversary that strengthened my resolve to fight the battle another day.

I look forward to seeing everyone at the Roots Festival on September 6-7, and once again gorging myself at the Appreciation BBQ.

Chris Baldo, President

A special thanks to Gordon Waganet for lending me a copy of Willits Redwood Products’ newsletter entitled Burner Smoke, for September 21, 1951
In the northern reaches of Mendocino County, the lazy bends of the South fork of the Eel River separate the cool, fog-loving redwood forests to the west from the often sweltering Douglas-Fir hardwood forests to the east. Joining the South Fork of the Eel river at Benbow is the rugged East Branch of the South fork, which drains the east flank of Red Mountain and the western slope of Bell Springs Ridge nearly to Cummings. Isolated from the Northwestern Pacific Railroad which traversed the canyon of the main stem of the Eel river, the area’s abundant resources were too remote to be tapped by the existing lumber producers in either Mendocino or Humboldt counties. Andersonia Lumber Company’s ill-fated sawmill and railroad to its ocean port at Bear Harbor died with the death of Ned Anderson. It remained for a stalwart generation of lumbermen in the post World War II to enter these woods. Among those unique men were a third-generation California lumbermen, Malcolm Goddard Coombs, and his son, Roger Malcolm Coombs. With their family roots in the Maine woods and later the dog-hole port at Little River on the Mendocino coast, the Coombs family possessed a unique combination of brawling strength, intellect, duty to community, and above all, a rugged individualism. While old homesteads dotted the area, it was the Coombs family that pioneered the timber industry in the area and began logging on the East Branch.

With the BMWs lining the parking lot, errant golf balls clanging off trees on the golf course, and guests sipping late morning lattes on the front porch overlooking the Pacific Ocean, Silas B. Coombs’s home at today’s Little River Inn bears silent witness to another era. Word of Henry Mieggs’ exploits with his sawmill at Big River in Mendocino County reached the logging woods in the State of Maine in the early 1850s. With riches awaiting, Silas Coombs, his younger brother Richard, and Ruel Stickney left their home in Lincoln, Maine and sailed for California via Panama in 1856. In their trek across the Isthmus of Panama, the three narrowly survived an uprising by Panamanian natives that killed 26 of their fellow passengers, and the three arrived in San Francisco with only the clothes they were wearing. After a short stint in the gold mines at Tuolumne, Silas and Ruel spent the next seven years working in the woods at Albion, supplying logs for the sawmill at the mouth of the river. With the earnings from their logging enterprise, Stickney and Coombs each purchased property near Little River. In 1864, a partnership of Silas Coombs, Ruel Stickney and Tapping Reeves was formed to build a sawmill at Little River. With the purchase by the group of the Buckhorn Mill a mile and a half to the south, the harbor at Little River became a busy lumber shipping port. Reeves sold his interest in the mill to Coombs and Stickney in 1871. In 1873, wishing to retire, Ruel Stickney sold his interest in the mill to his son-in-law, Charlie Perkins. The mill flourished until the economic collapse of 1893, when the mill was closed and never reopened.

With the closure of the sawmill and the death of Silas B. Coombs in 1894, on of his two sons, Willard Boyd Coombs continued to manage the family holdings at Little River. In addition to managing the company's general store, Will also operated a series of railroad tie camps as well as a dairy at Albion. The high demand for railroad ties and other redwood split products kept the little port at Little River busy. Marrying Emma Barton in 1900, the couple had three children, Claire in 1901, Willard in 1905 and Malcolm in 1911. Mal was born in San Francisco, and he and his mother returned to Little river on the family’s lumber schooner, Sea Foam. There was a big storm when they arrived at Little River, and Emma and Mal spent several days in the relative protection of the deep ocean aboard the Sea Foam before they could safely reach port. William (Willard?) sold the general store to James A. Barton in 1915, and the family moved to Albion.

Malcolm G. Coombs grew up working on the family dairy at Albion, and was soon delivering milk in the Town of Albion. Malcolm had fond memories of taking milk out to the lumber schooners tied up to the wharf at Albion and having the Chinese cooks giving him great big cookies. In 1924, the family
moved inland, first to Geyserville, and later to Healdsburg. Malcolm was the valedictorian of his high school class, being recognized for both his scholastic and athletic abilities. In Healdsburg, he met his future wife, Melba Feldmeyer, and they were high-school sweethearts. Melba was born in 1909 in Asti, near the Italian Swiss Colony winery.

After graduating from Healdsburg High School, Mal attended U.C. Berkeley and graduated with a degree in business in 1932. While large of stature, Mal also possessed remarkable athletic ability. At Berkeley, he lettered in football all 4 years, and was the National Intercollegiate Heavyweight Wrestling Champion. After a stint at Santa Rosa Junior College, Mal’s sweetheart, Melba, joined him at Berkeley. Mal and
Melba ran off to Nevada to get married, Melba changing into her wedding dress in a gas station restroom. Mal attended the trials for the 1932 Olympics in Madison Square Garden in New York, and surely would have made the Olympic team, but was felled by illness and was unable to compete in the final matches.

A star athlete in nearly every sport, Mal Coombs (front row, far left) played baseball for Healdsburg High School.

Mal Coombs (back row, center) was the National Collegiate Wrestling Champion while attending U.C. Berkeley in 1932.

Mal graduated from Berkeley in the midst of the Great Depression, and felt fortunate to get his first job working at a gravel plant near Healdsburg. He began earning a reputation as a skilled manager, and worked in a variety of government sponsored work projects at the Geysers and in Sonoma county. In 1935, Mal was supervising construction of several wing dams on the mouth of the Klamath River in extreme northwest corner of California. The couple lived in the largely Native-American village of Requa. The Coombs first child, dirk was born in January, 1935, but lived only three weeks. Their second son, Rogan, was born in December, 1935, in Healdsburg, at the home of his grandmother, Emma Barton Coombs. The Indian families at Requa made Melba a papoose for Rogan, and she would travel up and down the Klamath in a canoe with Rogan tucked safely inside.

After their stint on the Klamath, the couple moved to New Mexico, where they lived for about a year. Mal was supervising a road construction project in the mountains near Espanola (NE of Santa Fe).
In 1935, Mal supervised the construction of wing dams at the mouth of the Klamath River near the village of Requa.

*Photo courtesy of Coombs Family collection*

Melba and Mal are not sure who is cuter, a young Rogan or the pet fox. Melba, Mal and Rogan lived at the Native-American village at Requa on the Klamath river while building the wing dams.

*Photo courtesy of Coombs Family collection*

The Coombs third son, Dennis, was born in 1938. The young family lived in a variety of locations in central California where Mal worked as a Park Ranger; Sharpes Park, Memorial Park and Flood Park. The Coombs moved from Menlo Park to Redway in 1945, near the end of World War II. Mal never entered military service, in part because his brother, Willard (Bart), had been taken prisoner by the Japanese in the fall if the Philippines. Bart survived the Bataan Death March, but tragically died when his unmarked Japanese Freighter carrying the prisoners of war was bombed and sunk by American forces.

After many years of managing businesses for other people, by 1948, Mal was ready to enter business for himself. He purchased his first timberland property in May, 1948 at Confusion Hill and began a logging operation. Realizing that the value was in the lumber, and not the logs, Mal started in the sawmill business with a portable sawmill. This mill was less than affectionately known as “Mal’s Mobile Misery
Machine,” but Mal continued to operate the portable mill even after he constructed his new sawmill. Recognizing the limitations of the portable mill, Mal purchased a future mill site at Piercy, and from 1949-1950, built a sawmill. Rogan learned to drive truck, and hauled sawmill equipment from Willits to Piercy for the project. The mill featured a double-circle saw headrig with a 16’ air-shotgun carriage, a combination insert-tooth edger with a battery of gang saws and four sifting saws, a Saginaw sash gang, and a trim saw.

April, 1953 photo of the Coombs Lumber Company sawmill at Piercy. The sawmill is on the left, and the old planermill on the right.

While Coombs Lumber Company cut a little redwood in the early years, they eventually developed a nitch sawing clear Douglas Fir 2 x 4s. As markets changed, the mill also produced 2 x 6, 4 x 4, 4 x 6, and cross-arms for power poles. The mill primarily cut old-growth Douglas Fir logs from the Coombs timberland. When the mill first opened, a mill pond was used for unloading logs. Later, an A-frame was installed next to the office for unloading trucks, and Michigan and Pettibone rubber tired loaders were used to move the
logs. At the height of production, the mill produced 120 M board feet/day. Many of the logs coming off the Coombs ownership were 6-8 feet in diameter. When these large logs were sliced into flitches on the headrig for edger gang or sash gang, lumber flowed out of the sawmill like water.

(Left) Tom Dimmick also operated a redwood sawmill just north of Piercy across the Eel river on the old Andersonia Lumber Company mill site.

Photo courtesy of Coombs Family collection

Left - A used diesel yarder arrives at Coombs Lumber Company on a Louie Schaafsma LJ Mack truck to be used to unload log trucks under the A-frame.

Below - The diesel yarder at Coombs Lumber Company along with a rigging sled the diesel yarder was eventually converted to electricity to unload trucks.

Photos courtesy of Schaafsma collection
The lumber then moved to a planer, where it was surfaced, graded, and often precision trimmed to stud lengths. When a new planer facility was built nearer the sawmill, a transfer belt was installed between the sawmill and the planer, and the majority product of the sawmill was fed directly onto the planer infeed. This bypassed the old process of pulling lumber into units on the green chain of the sawmill and then moving the units into a breakdown hoist at the planer.

The old growth fir timber was big on the Coombs Red Mountain property, and clear boards flowed like water on the green chain.

Mal continued to buy and sell smaller timberland parcels as they were harvested, but he built and maintained a relatively contiguous ownership in the Red Mountain area between the South Fork of the Eel river and the East Branch of the South Fork of the Eel. This tree farm eventually totaled over 12,000 acres, and continues to be managed today as Coombs Tree Farms, Inc. Mal once remarked that he operated Coombs Lumber Company for twenty years and never had to purchase an outside log. Mal pioneered the road system into the Red Mountain area, and built the existing road that is now the main Bureau of Land Management access road to the Bureau’s adjacent properties on Red Mountain.

Mal’s son, Rogan, grew up in the world of logging and sawmills, and had a natural affinity for the logging woods. Somewhat of a free spirit, he headed to Oregon State University to study forestry, but was expelled during his sophomore year for some sort of fraternity mischief. It seems that some of the fraternity members blew up another fraternity member’s car. Ragan returned to Piercy to work for his father operating the logging crew. The Coombs formed a separate company, East Branch Logging Company for their logging endeavors. This was the accounting concept of the day, and Mal had his various enterprises separated into a number of companies; Log Gap Timber Company for the timberland, East Branch logging company for logging, Coombs Lumber Company for the sawmill, and Piercy Manufacturing Company for the planer mill. Rogan used International TD-24 and TD-18 tractors. Most of the trucking for the Coombs logging operations was done by Louie Schaafsma of Redway. Another gyppo logger, Harry Slagle, had a second
logging operation on the Red Mountain property. Later, Mal wanted Rogan to learn more about the sawmill operation. Logging operations were turned over to Charlie Campbell, and a few other loggers, such as John Bradley, and Rogan earnestly began learning the many details of sawmilling. Amongst other skills,

Above - Hollywood decided that one of the old homesteads on Red Mountain was the perfect setting to film the movie *Gun Glory*, starring Stewart Granger. Here, Mal discusses the finer points of gun slinging with Granger. *Photo courtesy of Coombs Family collection*

Left - a skid of logs heads to the landing on Red mountain.

Right - a young Rogan Coombs as he heads off to forestry school at Oregon State University in Corvallis.

*Photos courtesy of Coombs Family collection*
Above; Rogan Coombs snakes a fir log to the truck with his Ramey self-loader.
Above-right; Rogan Coombs lifts a fir log onto the truck with the self-loader.
Right; A different sight on the Coombs tree farm; a Redwood Construction truck loads under a shovel.

*Photos courtesy of Coombs Family collection*

Coombs Lumber Company lumber and logs at the Louie Schaafsma’s shop.

*Photo courtesy of Schaafsma collection.*
he became an experienced saw filer. While nearly all of the log trucking was done by gyppo trucking, Coombs Lumber Company did operate two lumber trucks which hauled a portion of the production, a Peterbilt conventional and a Peterbilt cabover. Rogan built up a Peterbilt short logger with a Raney self-loader for the occasional load.

Right & below left; Coombs Lumber Company’s first lumber truck was this late 1950s model Peterbilt.

Photos courtesy of Coombs Family collection

Louie Schaafsma was another Redway legend. He was born in Springfield, South Dakota, in January, 1921, moving to Washington state when he was seven. He was driving log truck near Sedro-Wooley, Washington in his late teens. Louis and John Van Meter logged for a short time near Redding, California during the war, before the pair came to Garberville in 1945. Louie continued to work for John for 10 months, before Louie purchased an old “Superpowered” White log truck with a gasoline engine and went into business for himself. Louie was an accomplished high-climber, rigging poles in the woods for loading logs and poles for sawmill highlines for decking logs. It was while rigging some blocks on a pole that Louie was blinded in one eye by a piece of wire rope. Eventually, Louie traded in his old White truck for a new Mack log truck. The Louie’s Trucking fleet grew to 22 trucks, mostly log trucks with some lumber trucks. Louie always favored Mack trucks, and his fleet had a combination of LJ, LT, and B model Mack trucks and the odd International

(continued page 16)
Top; Louie Schaafsma’s first truck driving job was at Sedro-Wooley, WA.
Above-left; After working for John Van Meter, Louie Schaafsma purchased this splendid “Superpowered” White logging truck with a gas engine, pictured with a nice red-wood log in front of the Garberville theater.
Above-right; Another photo of the Superpower White delivering a log to the sawmill.
Left; Louie Schaafsma was a talented high climber, shown here rigging the high pole for the West Coast Lumber Company in Redway. He was later to lose the sight in one eye in a high-climbing accident.

Photos courtesy of Schaafsma collection
or Freightliner. Louie did nearly all of the Coombs Lumber Company log trucking, and hauled much of the lumber. Other mills in the area also kept Louie busy, Axel Erickson’s mill at Briceland, Dick Mar and Don Cummins’ M & C Lumber company at Whitethorn, the West coast Lumber Company mill in Redway, and the Dimmick mills at Piercy. Louie entered the sawmill dismantling, scrap iron and copper business in 1968, which he continued along with his son, John, for 40 years until he passed away in January, 2008.

As Market conditions in the lumber business changed, Mal was always willing to adapt. In the mid 1960s with troubles on the horizon for his Douglas Fir lumber business, Mal embarked on a hardwood parquet floor project. After considerable research on past attempts to utilize the locally abundant tan oak, pepperwood and madrone resource, Mal decided that the small piece size required, the relative ease of installation, and the natural beauty of the woods were an ideal match for parquet flooring. He purchased a German parquet flooring machine, installed dry kilns at the Piercy site, and began production. While the many homes in the Redway area with Coombs parquet floor bear witness to the beauty and functionality of the product, Mal found himself competing with the new rage in flooring products. Hardwood floors were becoming passé in the American housing market; wall to wall polyester carpet was the new rage. Unable to economically market his product, Mal shut down the flooring plant in 1967, and shut down the Coombs Lumber Company sawmill completely in 1968. (continued page 18)

Left - Steam donkey operating the highline at the West Coast mill in Redway.
all Photos courtesy of Schaafsma collection

Above; Louie’s brother, Dick, stands by a Louie’s Trucking mid-1950s model LT Mack with a load of redwood logs. Right; After his high climbing accident, Louie wore dark glasses for many years. Here he measures a log on his first log truck, the “superpowered” White.
Top: The Coombs Lumber Company parquet flooring factory at Piercy used a German parquet machine to produce flooring. Next: Mal Coombs stands by units of hardwood lumber drying for the project. Above: Inside the parquet factory, Don Dickerson (L) and Jim Schaalma (R). Right: Parquet flooring ready for installation, Charlie Driskoll, operator.

*Photos courtesy Bart Coombs*
Above; Garberville always seemed to be the setting for the “big log.” A respectable Douglas Fir log rests on a Louie’s Trucking late-40s model LJ Mack in front of the Garberville Motors service station.

Right; When national Geographic did a story about the California redwoods, they wanted a photo of Louie Schaafsma’s LJ Mack in Richardson’s Grove State Park. The magazine shut down the highway to stage this photo. Photos courtesy of Schaafsma collection

The natural strength of tan oak had convinced Mal that the wood was ideal for baseball bats. He made several models, including a laminated version, but the bats tended to shatter upon contact with a baseball, and that project was abandoned. He did manufacture some tan oak 12 x 12s which he sold to the military for missile skids, gun stock blanks, and a variety of other unique products. Mal’s wooden hitching posts can still be found on the streets of Old Town Eureka.

Never ones to be inactive, Mal and Melba embarked on a series of ambitious projects after the closure of the sawmill. Melba had the idea that they should raise buffalo on the Red Mountain property. The two traveled to Wyoming and purchased a dozen buffalo cows and a couple of bulls. The herd eventually grew to about 50 in number, and were at first content with their Red Mountain home. Not to be constrained by normal cattle fences, the buffalo soon wandered east across Bell Springs Road to Island Mountain on the main Eel river. The herd’s constant wandering and total disdain for fences caused Mal and Melba to abandon the buffalo project and sell the herd.
Right; Melba Coombs stands amidst her herd of buffalo on the Red Mountain tree farm in June, 1970.

Below; The buffalo herd did well on Red Mountain, but ran afoul of the law with their disdain for fences.

*Photos courtesy of Coombs Family collection*

In the early 1970s, Mal became interested in building small fishing boats, mostly for his own pleasure. His first attempts were with plywood, but after taking out the bottom of his boat on a rock, he switched to aluminum. This led to the creation of his new business, Nor-Coaster Dory. Mal and his fabricator, Bly Young, made over 200 Nor-Coaster aluminum boats from 1971-1977, from ocean salmon models, many of which went to Shelter Cove, river boats, many of which went to fishermen on the Sacramento river, and a few air boats destined for Alaska. Louie Schaafsma financed his Alaska hunting trip each year by hauling two of the air boats to Alaska and selling them on arrival. The abrasive glacial till in the Alaskan rivers
tended to destroy conventional propellers and jet boats, plus the above water propulsion allowed the boats to travel in extremely shallow water.

Retaining ownership in his extensive timberland properties, Mal wholeheartedly embraced the Tree Farm concept forming both the Coombs Humboldt Tree Farms and the Coombs Mendocino Tree Farms. Mal maintained management control of the tree farms until the late 1970s, when management responsibilities were transferred to his son Rogan. Mal also used his financial resources to establish his other son, Dennis, in the lumber and real estate business in Fresno, California.

In addition to his various businesses, Mal was also active in the community. He was the Board Chairman and trustee for the Southern Humboldt Unified School District. His personal and financial assistance to the athletic program at the Miranda High School (South Fork) resulted in having the football field dedicated to him. Local businessmen still talk of the effectiveness of Mal’s fundraising campaigns for local athletics, and their utter-defenseless feeling when Mal walked through the door soliciting donations. Mal was also a past-president of the Garberville-Redway Chamber of Commerce, past-president of the local Rotary Club, an active member of the West Coast Lumber Inspection Bureau. He served both on the advisory board for the Richmond Forest Products Lab, as well as the advisory board for Humboldt State University. For eight years he served on the California Water Commission with Ronald Regan as Governor, and on the Eel River Water Council. He was Director of the Humboldt Bay Harbor Commission when he passed away in 1981, followed by Melba in 2001. The Highway 101 bridge south of Benbow and a ballpark in Shelter Cove were posthumously dedicated to Mal Coombs for his many contributions to the community.

With the closure of the Coombs Lumber Company sawmill, Rogan, his wife Marilyn, and his three children, Judith, Bart and Mac moved to Newport Beach in southern California. Rogan went to work

Photos courtesy of Coombs Family collection.
Rogan, and he returned to Humboldt County after a year to work as a log buyer for Fred Holmes at the Morrison-Jackson sawmill at Myers Flat. Fred Holmes’ Morrison-Jackson operation was purchased by Georgia Pacific, and Rogan began a short stint working in a similar position for a large corporation. Again, corporate life at GP was not a good fit for Rogan, and he returned to Piercy to embark on more independent endeavors.

Above: The dedication of the Mal Coombs memorial Bridge at Benbow in July, 1983.

Left: Rogan Coombs and his wife, Marilyn, and their three children, Judy, Bart and Mac in April, 1966.

*Photos courtesy of Coombs Family collection*

While living at the Myers Flat hotel, Rogan had become acquainted with a local logger and timber faller, Carl Richardson. From 1973 to 1977, the two formed a partnership investing in timber properties. The pair located and evaluated prospective properties, harvested the available timber, and marketed the land
to allow for the next purchase. When Mal needed Rogan to take a more active role in the management of Coombs Tree Farms, Carl and Rogan split up their partnership, but remained fast friends. In the late 1970s,

Rogan started a firewood processing plant at the old mill site at Piercy that was capable of processing 20 cords of firewood per day. Some of the Red Mountain ownership had a major component of tan oak, and the firewood operation was intended to provide an economical means to convert the stands to conifer species. After operating the plant for a few seasons, the firewood operation proved to be uneconomical and was shut down.

From 1980 on, Rogan devoted his main energy to the management of the family tree farm. He hired a local forester, Rich Munoz, first as a consultant and later as an employee, to develop a sustained yield management program. Rich continued to work for Coombs Tree Farms for nearly 30 years, eventually taking over complete management responsibility for the company. With the involvement of Rich Munoz in the management of the Coombs Tree Farm business, Rogan had more time available to spend with his first love, logging history. Back in his college
days in the 1950s, Rogan would spend days exploring the last of the steam railroad logging camps on the west coast. Rogan’s engaging personality and the pre-litigious times had him riding in locomotive cabs from Vancouver Island, to the Olympic peninsula, to Tuolumne. He visited Deep River in Washington state along the Columbia River in the late 1950s to see a forlorn 2-4-4-2 logging Mallet lying on her side, with

Rogan Coombs’ laugh was infectious, and created an enormous number of friends in the timber industry and beyond.

Rogan took each of his endeavors with a unique enthusiasm. Rogan enjoyed railroads, and joined the motorcar hobby, traveling thousands of miles in the Pacific NW in his speeder. Here, he pauses on the Port of Tillamook RR between Banks and Wheeler.
which he would have a later association. Rogan was a true student of logging history, devouring every available bit of literature, exploring remnant examples of the early industry, and financially supporting a variety of causes and projects. Rogan’s dream was to build a logging camp version of Disneyland, and explored several possible sites from Jordon Creek near Scotia, to Arnold, north of Willits. He employed theme park consultants to build business plans and analyze numbers. It all allowed Rogan to dream of log flume rides, steam donkeys moving logs, steam trains carrying happy parents and children, steam engines running sawmills and shinglemills, logging camps with cookhouses, bunkhouses, blacksmiths, all structured to educate the public about the noble life of his ancestors and thousands of others that worked in the logging woods.

Above; The debut of a new piece of equipment was never to be missed. Rogan joins the Roots crew for the inaugural run of the Washington Iron Works #3404 Simplex yader. L/R, Ken Smith, Ed Vikart, Bob Hinerman, Rogan Coombs. Right; Warren Hokinson (L) and Rogan Coombs discuss the fine points of the Murray Brothers Machine Works pile driving engine during a Roots steam up. 
Photos courtesy of Coombs Family collection

Besides his dreams, Rogan sank his teeth into some very real projects. One of the first was working to save the two locomotives from Andersonia Lumber Company that languished in a little engine house at Moody for decades. In the late 1980s, he purchased the 2-4-4-2 Mallet, the Skookum, that he had seen earlier at Deep River, Washington, from the estate of Charlie Morrow. Though he was never able to begin restoration, Rogan did move the dismantled engine from Snoqualmie, Washington, To Mineral, Washington, helping to ensure its preservation. Living on the Mendocino /Humboldt County line, Rogan was active in both the Northern Counties Logging Interpretive Association in eureka, and Roots of Motive Power in Willits. The full list of projects that he supported is now lost forever with his passing on May 4, 2008. Rogan never kept track, nor wanted anyone else to keep track of his contributions and generosity. He only wanted to heat the whistle blow once again.
Above; In later years, Rogan was inseparable from his companion, Yuki McCarthy.

Right; Rogan and his son, Bart, with the Willamette 11 x 13 Humboldt Yarde under steam at a Roots steam up in 1987.

*Photos courtesy of Coombs Family collection.*
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Phil Butterfield  Charlie Campbell  Carl Richardson
Fred Green  Harold Snodgrass  Levi Humphrey
THE ROGAN COOMBS GALLERY

For over 25 years, Rogan Coombs was a major supporter of Roots of Motive Power projects and activities. Rogan was a financial contributor and a donor of unique artifacts, but above all, he contributed an infectious enthusiasm for logging history and life in general that touched all of us. The following photographs represent a partial list of projects in which Rogan lent a hand. He also donated endless books, tools and smaller artifacts to the Roots Collection.

Hammond Lumber Company Clyde Tracklayer restored for the NCLIA, currently on loan to Roots of Motive Power.

Left; Rogan standing in front of the Clyde Tracklayer after it has been mounted on a 16-wheel moving car in Willits. The Tracklayer had been burned in a forest fire and rusted almost beyond recognition before Rogan began restoration. Photo courtesy of Coombs Family collection

The steam engine which provides the power for the Clyde Tracklayer is being prepared for installation on the machine. Chris Baldo photo

The Clyde Tracklayer is a huge piece of equipment, as can be seen in this photo. Reconstruction of the artifact is not complete at this point. Chris Baldo photo
Redding Iron Works big wheels. Rogan paid the complete expense for the wheels to be restored by Hanson Wheel and Wagon Shop, Letcher, South Dakota, and donated to Roots of Motive Power. Rogan also paid the expenses of Nolan Darnell and his team of shires for several visits.

Nolan Darnell’s shires and the big wheels are about to move a redwood log at the 2007 Redwood Region Logging Conference in Eureka.

A close-up of the incredible woodwork on the Redding Iron Works Big Wheels.
Long Bell Lumber Company Speeder and riding car, restored by Rogan Coombs and donated to Roots of Motive Power. (Left)

Coombs Lumber Company Ross Straddle Buggy, donated to Roots of Motive Power. (Right)

Long Bell was a very important lumber company in California, Oregon and Washington, as well as in the southern U.S. This Northwestern speeder and matching riding car were used to move logging crews from camp to the woods at the Long Bell operation at Grande Rounde, Oregon.

Above: Rogan discusses the fine points of the Ross Straddle Buggy. The machine operated for many years at Coombs Lumber Company at Piercy. Mal Coombs had purchased the straddle buggy second-hand from Union Lumber company in Fort Bragg. Rogan restored the straddle buggy at a shop he rented from Pacific Lumber company in Scotia.

Left: The Ross Straddle Buggy on display at a Roots function.

Chris Baldo photos
After purchasing the Bluestone Mining and Smelting Heisler from Rogan, Chris Baldo completed restoring the engine. Here, the Bluestone Mining and Smelting #1 operates under steam at a Roots event.

*Chris Baldo photo*

The Bluestone Mining and Smelting Heisler #1 with a full consist at a recent Roots steam up. Now that the Roots Loop Track is complete, many visitors have enjoyed rides around the loop in the caboose.

*Jack Wade photo*
Deep River Logging #7, A 2-4-4-2 Mallet; purchased from Charlie Morrow estate and later sold to Chris Baldo. The locomotive is presently undergoing restoration in Oregon.

The “Skookum.” Deep River Logging #7 working the Deep River log dump in May, 1953.

Al Farrow photo

The Skookum rolled over in February, 1955 and lay in this unceremonious position until 1960 until she was recovered in pieces with great difficulty by Charles Morrow. This is how Rogan first saw the Skookum.

Al Farrow photo
PALCO Gibson Speeder, donated by Rogan to Roots of Motive Power.

Above left: The PALCO Gibson Speeder as it arrived at the roots facility.
Above; The PALCO Gibson Speeder #3 is one of the jewels of the Roots collection. While sporting a fresh coat of paint, the inside is untouched, complete with caulk boot marks, from the days that it carried loggers from camp to the woods.
Left; The Gibson, shown with the Simpson diesel, is an active member of Roots. Chris Baldo photos

PALCO Trainmaster’s Building, restored by Rogan Coombs and donated to Roots of Motive Power.

With the closure of the Pacific Lumber Company railroad in the early 1980s, the Trainmaster’s office was headed for the scrap heap. Rogan rescued the building and paid a team of carpenters to complete the restoration. The office now sits beside the track at the Roots facility for the admiration of visitors.

Jack Wade photo
Disconnect trucks from Mendocino Lumber company’s Little North Fork Camp, Big River. Restored for the Mendocino County Museum, Willits.

Roots Member Ken Smith surveys the MLCO disconnect trucks at Little North fork Camp on Big River. The camp was abandoned in the Great Depression and never reopened.

*Chris Baldo photo*

The Raymond FF-400 loads a redwood log on the MLCO disconnect trucks after their restoration by Rogan Coombs. Rogan took the parts to his shop in Piercy for the rebuild.

*Chris Baldo photo*
The Raymond FF-400 demonstrates the loading and movement of logs from the woods to a loading landing. The disconnect trucks, in this demonstration are hauled by the Willamette yarder, not seen on the right.

*Jack Wade photo*

After purchasing the Skookum from the Morrow estate, Rogan moved the locomotive to Mineral, Washington. Here Rogan (far left) helps guide the low-pressure running gear down on a waiting low bed trailer at Snoqualmie, Washington.

*Photo courtesy of Coombs Family collection*
LIBRARY REPORT
BY BRUCE EVANS, LIBRARIAN

We have some exciting news to report. Information on our 2,000 cataloged items has previously been available only by coming into the library and perusing the card catalog or computer database. But now, thanks to the efforts of Webmaster Chuck Crayne, you can view the library’s catalog from the comfort of your own home - providing you have computer access and a spreadsheet program. If you got to the Roots website <rootsofmotivepower.com> and use the “RR History Project” or “Schedules” pull-down, it will get you to “Research Material” or “Roots Library.” There you will find a link to “MS Excel 5.0” which is the catalog listing. Once you download and open the file, you can sort it by any of the headings: Title, Sub-Title, Author, Publisher, Call Number, Category, or Number of Pages. This is a great big step towards getting Roots recognized by the rest of the world. Having this information al resource available to the general public can go a long way toward helping others preserve our industrial history.

Meanwhile, Gloria Kouris and Bobbie Yokum continue to work on catalog cards and keeping books properly shelved. This job gets more difficult as we run out of room on the shelves. We’re now starting to use the bottom row of shelves (essentially on the floor) which we’ve been trying to avoid as they are a little hard to get to. This situation would be resolved if federal grant funding - for which Museum director Herb Pruett has applied - comes through in the next year. We could also create more room for a few more book-cases if we were to replace the very nice 13 foot cant table with a shorter table.

Ruth Rockefeller still made it into the Library a couple of times each month through April to work on special projects, often sorting materials. Of late, she has worked on root’s collection of photographs and older issues of Pacific News (a monthly rail publication). But unfortunately, her strength is beginning to fail her and she finds it difficult to get around. We miss her in the library, but save a seat for her when she’s able to return.

Assistant Librarian Margery Hoppner now has the Library open every Wednesday, which is a great boon for the Museum and visitors. When not occupied giving tours of the Engine House, she has been cataloging our large collection of Western Railroaders.

Library staff joined with Museum staff and Roots members earlier this year to put on Roots Steam Operation and Safety class, Railroad Operation and Safety Class, and Education Day. events saw 12 students each for the classes and 257 visitors for Education Day.

Donations to the library have slowed down - it gives us a chance to breathe and catch up. Recent arrivals include a pair of documents on Fleck Pumps and Sumner-Willamette Diesel Engines from Chris Baldo; a manual on lead-acid batteries from James Maddock; a pair of locomotive brake manuals from Shane Grupp, and some wonderful photos from John Taubeneck. John’s photos are of particular interest as they are of several pieces of equipment in operation at Simpson Timber company in Shelton, Washington. These include locomotive 600, the sixteen-wheel moving car, the broom car and ballast car number 6.

We love to have visitors at the library, and welcome anyone to come in and spend some time going through our extensive collections. There is fascinating reading, whether its general interest or specific research in which you are interested. It’s a comfortable and quiet place where you can get away from the hustle and bustle, and get lost in a good book.
In the last *Highline*, we told the story of California Western’s Baldwin No. 53, which resides in the Roots collection. Since that report, much work has been done, and we review that work here to keep you informed of the progress in getting No. 53 running again.

When we left, the batteries had been removed and the battery boxes cleaned. The boxes were then sealed with an asphaltic material to prevent rust and corrosion. During this time the batteries were moved to the Engine House where they were put on charge in two sets of four batteries. This was done since the batteries are eight volts each, and the battery charger is designed to handle that voltage. One of the batteries had dead cells due to the caps being left off, but we luckily found a backup battery stored in Willits and moved it to Roots. After considerable coaxing, we finally had 64 volts between the eight batteries.

On March 16th we moved the batteries from the Engine House and re-installed them in No. 53. This process also included cutting redwood spacers to hold the batteries in position, cleaning and connecting cables, and installing the heavy steel side covers. When we got finished, we were able to take a reading across the battery switch and see power there for the first time in many years.

Jerry Moore (with assistance from Alan Spivak and Wes Brubacher) put in several days wiring an auxiliary lube oil pump that John Bradley had installed when he operated the locomotive back in the 1990s. This pump permits lubrication of the engine parts prior to starting it. After draining the bottom of the crankcase to see if there was any water or sludge, and finding none, on April 6th the pump was turned on and oil was found to be flowing at the top of the engine.

Other work that has been completed is the servicing and installation of the control air gauge, and draining and refilling the air compressor. This proved to be a messy and difficult process as the drain is in an awkward place, and the crankcase was filled with a filthy muck about the consistency of syrup.

The next major goal is to get the fuel pump operating. This is necessary in order to bleed the fuel lines and injectors of any air in the system. According to the book, the pump should activate when the control switch is thrown. Not so for our locomotive. For some reason, the 64 volts at the control switch isn’t
getting to the pump, so we chase the wiring from both ends trying to find out where the connection is not being made. This is more complicated than one might think; the wires disappear into bundles of wires which makes it nearly impossible to know where a particular wire comes out. Most of the wires are identified at each end, but when there are as many as a dozen or more of those “ends” it gets very confusing as to where your wire went.

But we persevere. With any luck, by the time you read this, the fuel pump will be running, and we’ll be on to the next tasks - prepping the fuel system, cleaning the main generator commutator and brushes, and getting ready to see if the engine will turn over.

NEW ACQUISITIONS

BABCOCK BELL COLLECTION
By Chris Baldo

One of Willits’ best known landmarks, the Babcock Bell Collection on East Mendocino Avenue is now part of the Roots of Motive Power collection. With the pending sale of Dr. Babcock’s former residence, the family wished the bell collection to stay together in Willits, and provide enjoyment to the public as it has for decades. Included in the collection are several locomotive bells, as well as the old Willits Fire Bell that signaled local volunteers when there was a fire in town.

Most of the collection was removed from the Babcock property on a Saturday, April 12th work party. Removing the large bells and wooden structure without damaging the manicured gardens around the house was a challenge. Adjacent power lines and vegetation prevented the use of power equipment, so each bell was carefully lowered by hand onto a cart and rolled outside the yard on a plywood “corduroy” road.
Roots and the Mendocino County Museum are currently developing plans for displaying the bells indoors in the Engine House of the Redwood Empire Railroad History Project. Many thanks to Cindy Taylor and the other members of the Babcock family for making this donation possible. The large Northwestern Pacific Railroad locomotive bell was installed in the Engine House for the public to wring for the July 4th Frontier Days festivities.

THREE NEW RAILCARS
BY MIKE MEYER, TRAINMASTER

In early May, Wes Brubacher received an Email about some surplus railroad equipment at California State Railroad Museum (CSRM) He contacted Kyle Wyatt at CRSM for a list of railroad equipment that they were going to dispose of. He found that three U.S. Army flat cars were available, so he contacted CRSM about the three flat cars, and was told by Kyle Wyatt that he did not know if the cars were immediately available or if CRSM would keep them for a time in order to move rail and equipment at the museum, but would keep us informed.

At this point, Wes was leaving the area for a couple of weeks, so Chris Baldo contacted me to check this out. I called Ellen Halteman, director of Collections at CRSM about the three cars. She said that we should look at the cars and gave me at contact, Al Di Paolo at the museum. An appointment was made for mid-May to view the three cars, so Jim Bruggere and I went to Sacramento for a look at the cars - they were just what we needed.

Two weeks later, a Roots crew of Keith Rongey, Shane Grupp and Mike Meyer, accompanied by two lowboy trucks from McFarland Trucking in Ukiah and one from Rushway Trucking in Newcastle arrived at CRSM to transfer the cars to Roots. Al Di Paolo and his crew did a professional job of loading the cars onto the trucks. Hats off to Al and his crew. I would also like to thank Ellen Halteman for making the paperwork run smoothly.

Photos - Top left; Leaving CSRM for Willits.  Top right; Preparing to unload a car at the Roots facility.  Bottom left; The car is gently placed on the rails at Roots.  Bottom right; All three cars are now at Roots.  

Photos by Mike Meyer
On June 20th thru June 22nd of this year, roots of Motive Power was invited to participate in a tractor show at the Dan Best Ranch in Woodland, California, where over 400 tractors were on display. Artifacts entered by Roots included our Best Steam Tractor, the Buffalo-Springfield Steam Roller and the Cat 60. Chris Baldo, Troy James, Mike Meyer, Keith Rongey and others from Roots helped with the event.

If you like tractors, this was the place to be. It was hot and dirty, and everyone had a smile on their face. Due to the extreme heat, water bottles were the hot item of the day, as everyone probably went through one or two gallons each day.

Included in the show were three Best Steam Tractors, over 60 Cat 60s, but only one Steam Roller.