

Nature's monuments *Landmark trees of Sandpoint*

By Hannah Combs
Reader Contributor

In 1910, a passenger moving to Sandpoint by way of the rail may, upon glancing out the window, have seen a pennant waving gently in the breeze to welcome them to town. The 120-foot-tall pole was not graced with a flag, though, but with needles.

At the turn of the century, most of the trees in the Sandpoint area had been cut down to make way for the growing population of residents. The timber was used first to build houses, saloons and farms, and eventually churches and schools. By 1910, all that remained were the scrawniest of the original trees and a smattering of new plantings in people's yards.

However, in photos of Sandpoint from around 1905-1910, a single sliver of bark and needle stabs defiantly into the air, floating high above the surrounding structures and landscaping. The tree looks at first glance like a larch, but in a photo taken during winter, it still bears its needles. It could possibly be a grand fir, though in the fuzzy photos of the time, it's hard to tell.

According to Bonner County Historical Society researcher Dan Evans, "If you extended Fir Street and Second Avenue to where they would intersect, the tree would be in that general area." That is, close to where the Healing Garden resides today.

Before the Humbird Mill built Milltown houses in the vicinity, it was an undeveloped area. The tree may even have been partially submerged at high water. For many years, the beanpole was not worth the effort of the timbermen, and so it remained, a sentinel watching over Sandpoint.

A blurry photo from 1894 shows the soaring tree surrounded by a denser forest, with a few others challenging it for the

height record. By the mid-1920s, no sign of it remains, though whether it fell down or was cut remains a mystery.

Trees are preserved for a number of reasons — their age and beauty, but also their crucial role in preserving fragile habitats. Pockets of ancient trees can still be found deep in the forests of Bonner County. When trees were preserved in populated areas, though, human sentimentality was sometimes the driving force.

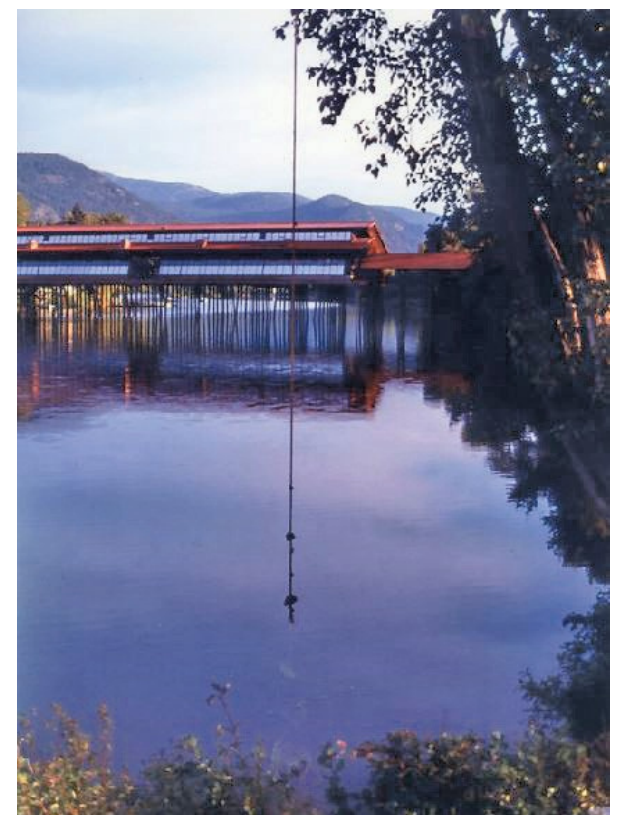
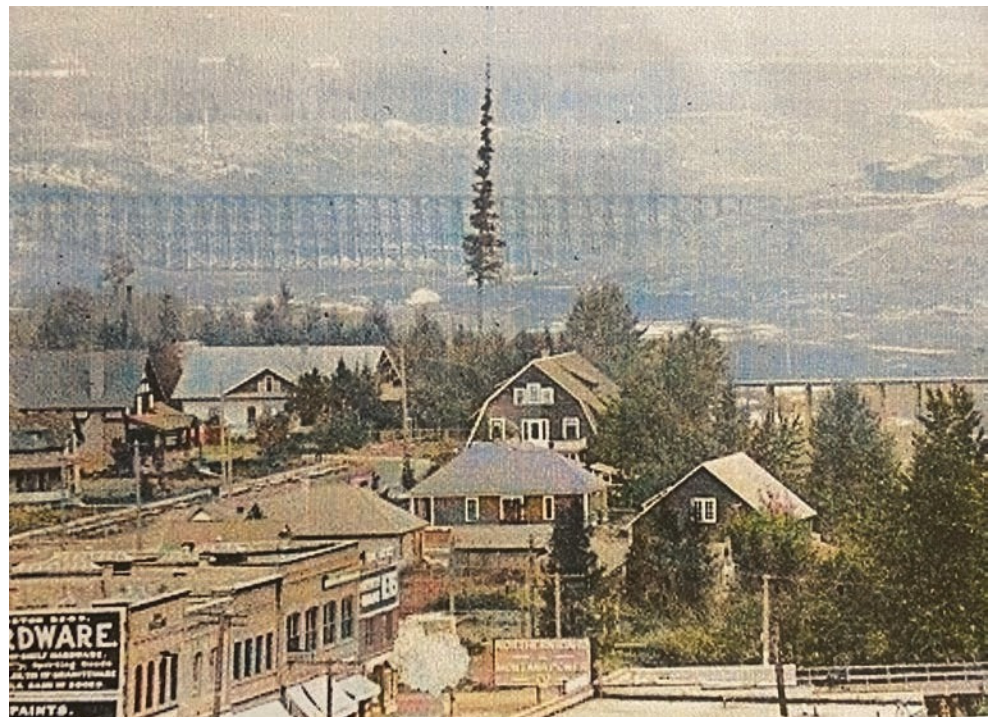
Such was the case with one small larch tree growing in the heart of downtown. An article in the *Pend Oreille Review* on June 6, 1906 laments, "the tamarack tree which has stood in the road at the intersection of Main and First streets was cut down Saturday, much to the regret of the old timers. The landmark has been allowed to stand as a matter of sentiment, but there was a feeling that it might some day be the cause of a bad runaway mixup."

Photos from the time show the little tree, hardly 20 feet tall, standing proudly in the article from 2004: "People who middle of First Avenue, with the tracks from visit Sandpoint on vacation often years of traffic veering around it. Perhaps stand on the Bridge Street bridge the original street planners thought it would and watch as kids swing on a rope serve in lieu of a lane divider. Perhaps it and drop into the chilly waters of stood as the original Sandpoint Christmas the creek. They walk away feeling tree. All we can do now is wonder, as no that they have been privileged other records remain. But from the deeply to glimpse a moment of Norman felt newspaper fragments we have, we know Rockwell's Americana."

It was a beloved little tree. Trees have always astounded Perhaps no tree in recent memory was us and played a special role in our more loved than the rope swing tree over communities and our lives. The Sand Creek. During construction of the trees we have preserved have given Highway 95 byway, all of the trees on the east side of Sand Creek were cut down, for more than 100 years. As the including a large black cottonwood that town grows and changes, favorite leaned out over the creek, inviting intrep-trees come and go. The trees planted youth to hang a rope swing from in ed today may become the beloved its branches. A guide to Sandpoint's tree landmarks of the future. species, published by the city of Sand-In an eloquent letter to the point's Tree Committee in 2009, calls the mayor published in 1995, titled, cottonwood an "outstanding" specimen that "Neighborhoods are more than served "at least two generations of children land," longtime local Dan Shook — and some brave adults" who plunged wrote about all of the moments from its rope into the water below. that make up our home. Nestled in In the mid-2000s, when the byway his words, he wrote, "It's trees that project was in the planning and early construction stages, many residents opposed grass that won't grow under a rope swing."

the project because of how significantly it would change the character of the town. Numerous editorials were submitted to the local papers reminiscing about the beauty of Sand Creek before the project began. They show the deep nostalgia and regret that the tree and its removal evoked.

Perhaps *Bonner County Daily Bee* local trees. It can be picked up at the City then-Staff Writer Carolyn Lobsinger best of Sandpoint at 1123 Lake St. or the Bonner captured the nostalgia tied to the tree in an *County History Museum* at 611 S Ella Ave.



Top: A photo of the tall fir tree in 1905 looking north from First Avenue. Photo courtesy of BCHS.

Bottom: The rope swing over Sand Creek, looking north toward the Cedar St. Bridge, before the tree was cut down. Photo taken by and donated to BCHS by Erik Daarstad.

