

WESTERN PACIFIC'S SKELETON LOGGING FLATS & HUTCHINSON LUMBER COMPANY

PART TWO..by Kent Stephens

Part One can be found in Issue No. 23.....

By 1926 Hutchinson Lumber Co. was in financial trouble and went into receivership after defaulting on its bond issue payments. Hutchinson's Oroville properties (mill, logging railroad, logging operations, and timberland) were sold at a foreclosure sale in April 1927 and reorganized as Feather River Pine Mills, Inc. Six months later in late October the Oroville mill and 50,000,000 board feet of lumber were destroyed by fire. The mill fire was the beginning of an eleven year hiatus for the lumber company. The company's geared locomotives and a portion of the log car fleet were stored at Camp One several miles above the town of Feather Falls.

In 1940 FRPM completed a new sawmill at Feather Fall, building the new mill within the company's timber holdings rather than at Oroville on the site of the former mill. This change circumvented freight charges on the waste portion of the logs.

At the same time the lumber company incorporated Feather River Railway Co., a wholly owned subsidiary, to operate most of the logging railroad as a common carrier. This permitted the railroad to share in through rates on the lumber from the Feather Falls mill. One crew operated the lumber train between Feather Falls and the interchange with the WP. A second crew was on the log train running between Feather Falls and Camp 18, the main logging camp, ten miles southeast of Feather Falls. The Feather River Railway's track extended to Ward, just one-half mile out of Camp 18.

FRPM sold Shays #2 and #3 to their railroad subsidiary, keeping ownership of #1, #4, and #5. It was intended that the two 90-ton Shays would operate between Feather Falls and Bidwell Bar, as this line had six miles of 5½ percent compensated grade from Craig to Onyett. The lighter 70 ton Shay #1 and Willamette #5 worked the easier grades hauling logs on the 10 mile line from Camp 18 to the sawmill at Feather Falls. Actually #1 saw very little service after 1940 and spent most her remaining years of company service next to the sawmill's boiler plant as a stationary boiler to boost the steam supply. No. 5 worked the line to Camp 18 with backup form #2 or

3 as needed. Saddletanker #4 switched the lumber loading dock for a few years, then was stored out of service.

FRPM used a fleet of 70 plus log cars on the line to Camp 18, sufficient for the reduced production and shorter haul. (The Feather Falls mill had about one-half the cutting capacity of the Oroville sawmill--175,000 to 200,000 board feet daily instead of 375,000 board feet per daily shift. This was due to a change in philosophy on the part of the owners, placing the operation on a sustained yield basis.) Most of the log cars were PC&F skeletons from the original 1922 fleet and were lettered for FRPM.

Camp One, Hutchinson's original logging camp two miles southeast of Feather Falls on the line to Camp 18, became the railroad camp in 1940. Camp One had both an enginehouse and car shop.

Along with other lumber companies, FRPM started buying logging trucks in the early 1940's. The first trucks came in 1942, hauling logs to landings on the railroad. In 1948 the company bought a fleet of large off-highway trucks to haul directly to the sawmill and abandoned the logging railroad. No. 5 was kept as a spare but saw only limited service. The railroad was torn up back to Camp One and most of the cars were scrapped.

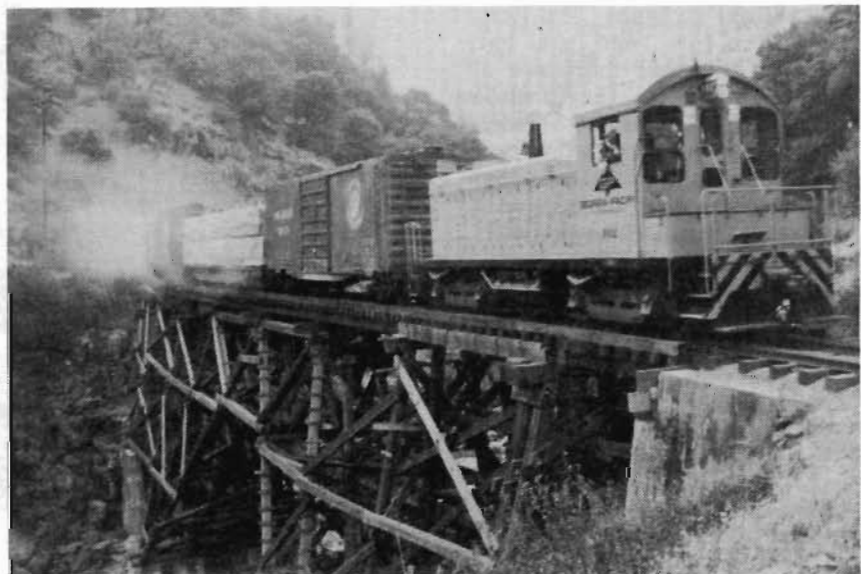
Feather River Pine Mills and

the Feather River Railway were sold to the Georgia-Pacific Corp. in July 1955. A.H. Land and Dr. O.O. Cooper, the principal owners of FRPM, had both passed away several years earlier; the families took the opportunity to sell out for over \$5 million.

Nos. 4 and 5 were sold for scrap in 1957. In 1958 the railroad's officials decided they had been hasty to scrap the Willamette when it needed repairs and bought Rayonier, Inc. #91, a 3 truck Pacific Coast Shay, but the engine was in such poor mechanical condition that it never went into service. After being stripped for usable parts, it sat rusting away on a siding in Feather Falls.

No. 1 was donated to the City of Oroville in August 1960. The Shay joined WP #164 on display in Hewlett Park.

The railroad was dieselized in October 1961 when Georgia-Pacific transferred EMD SW-900 #102 from their Samoa plant near Eureka, where it had become surplus. (The change was ordered by G-P's headquarter office without consulting the local office.) Shays #2 and #3 were kept as spares. During the next few months #3 was back in service for weeks at a time as #102 sat idle in Feather Falls. Dieselization proved to be a mixed blessing for the railroad; #102 was cheaper to operate but its 120 ton weight on four axles was tearing the rail-



Feather River Ry. #102 crosses South Fork trestle Unit lettered for Georgia-Pacific, the date is Nov. 1964 Nick Ellena Photo

road's light track to pieces. The diesel also derailed a number of times, especially on curves. The railroad finally got its track in shape during the summer months of 1962 so #102 could operate on a regular basis as long as the road bed was dry. For the next several years, one of the Shays would work a few weeks at a time during winter rains, continuing until the roadbed dried.

No. 102 continued to damage the railroad's track over the next four years, a worry to local company officials. In July 1965 they finally received the lighter diesel they had pleaded for then Oregon, Pacific & Eastern Alco S-1 #101 was transferred from Cottage Grove to replace #102. The EMD was moved to the Ashley, Drew & Southern in Arkansas, another G-P short line.

A more significant event in 1961 for the future of the railroad than dieselization was the start of construction work on Oroville Dam. Once the dam was completed, Lake Oroville would flood a portion of WP's mainline and the first six miles of Feather River Railway. The State Water Code required that the State Department of Water Resources (DWR) relocate the affected railroad lines. The State paid for relocating WP's mainline (\$40 million for the 22 mile line), but DWR refused to relocate the Feather River Railway. DWR claimed that it was a "waste of taxpayers' money" to spend 9 million for the 13 mile relocated line for a railroad that it said was worth \$25,000. (The railroad's assessed valuation for taxes.) Georgia-Pacific contended that the railroad was essential for the marketing of more than \$4 million worth of lumber products annually. The State's refusal to build the line touched off a four year legal battle between G-P and the State of California that was a tangle of law suits, counter-suits, court actions up to the State Supreme Court and ICC decisions. In Dec 1965 a compromise was reached that killed the Feather River Railway as a railroad in the usual sense, but allowed the railroad to continue operating as a truck line. The State paid G-P over \$1 million for the ownership of the first six miles of track and bought three Kenworth diesel rigs for the railroad. The Kenworth trucks were lettered for the railroad and were restricted to a certain route to a reload in Oroville. Essentially the Feather River Railway continued in operation as a unique "rubber-tired railroad." The railroad was required to cease operating over its rail line by Oct 1, 1966. By Sept

that year the trucks were hauling to Oroville and the railroad was being dismantled.

All of Feather River Railway's locomotives owned by the railroad in its last decade of operation are in existence today except #91. No. 1 is on display in Oroville; No. 2 is owned by the State Division of Beaches and Parks and is Sierra Railway #2 at Jamestown; No. 3 was donated to Pacific Southwest Railway Museum Assoc. at San Diego; Plymouth #A is OP&E #14½ at Cottage Grove. Both diesels are in service. No. 102 is still working on the AD&N in Arkansas. No. 101 has travelled more, going to the Fordyce & Princeton RR (a G-P short line) as their #1 in 1967 and has recently been sold to the Cadiz Railroad in Kentucky where the Alco is #10.

Georgia-Pacific had claimed during the fight with the State that the Feather Falls mill couldn't remain competitive without a railroad. Only four years after the rail line was dismantled G-P announced in 1970 they would build a new mill in Oroville to replace the Feather Falls sawmill. The primary reason for the move, according to G-P, was the loss of the railroad. The new plant was built next to Highway 70 in south Oroville, just west of the original site of Hutchinson's mill. It is now owned by Louisiana Pacific Corp, following the break-up of G-P into two separate corps.

The author is indebted to John Ryczkowski for assistance with this

article. Most of the material is from a manuscript by the author for a forthcoming book on the railroads of the Feather River Region.....

NON-PAID AD

A new magazine "LOCOMOTIVE & RAILWAY PRESERVATION" was started one year ago. It's first year of publication showed it to be a quality magazine. I would recommend a subscription to anyone who is interested in reading about preservation efforts. Subscription rates are \$16 for one year (6 issues). LGRP, P.O. Box 5, Huntington, VT 05462.

Moviework????

One of the other western railroad museums makes their facilities and equipment available to movie companies for film work. In a recent newsletter they stated if they had an F unit they could get more work.

We have F units but no work! Do any of our members have contacts with film locating companies? We have equipment; box cars with roof walks, refrigerator cars with ice hatches, various types of diesel locomotives, some passenger cars and a steam engine. Any work we can get using our equipment would be a good source of revenue for us.



Feather River Ry. Shay No. 2 makes its final revenue run on March 29, 1966 at Berry Creek on the old WP mainline. Kent Stephens