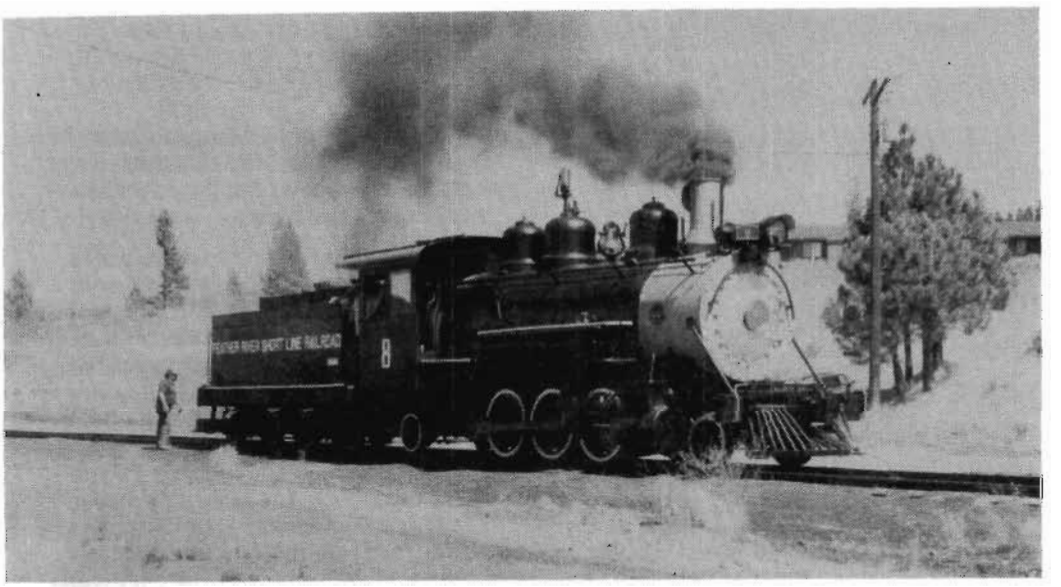
HAPPY BIRTHDAY NO. 8

by Norm Holmes

The honor of being the oldest piece of equipment at the Portola Railroad Museum goes to Feather River Short Lines's No. 8. This prime example of Baldwin's line of logging locomotives celebrated her 80th birthday this month, having been built in Philadelphia, PA in November, 1907.

Railroads were used in California logging as early as 1854, with custom designed locomotives built to the special needs of the operator. Geared locomotives (Shay, Heisler, and Climax) first appeared in the west in 1889. The geared locomotives were best suited for the primitive track and steep grades, sometimes as much as 10%, found on most logging lines. The disadvantage of geared locomotives was their slow speed.

Baldwin was building engines for the logging industry as far back as 1884, and, as was the norm for the time, each locomotive was custom designed for the job. In 1894, Baldwin designed a "standard" engine for the logging industry. The locomotive would be capable of a faster track speed and still be able to operate over rough, poorly-engineered track. The 2-6-6 wheel arrangement was selected which gave the locomotive flexibility in running both forward and backward (using the leading and trailing wheels as guides). A powerful boiler with a large firebox was used which allowed the use of green wood slabs for fuel.



The first engine of this type was sold to McCloud River Railroad in 1898. Since wood would be used for fuel, a deep narrow firebox was placed down between the frame rails. The entire cab rode low on the back head (as in No. 8). This design proved sound and thus a standardized 2-6-2 logging locomotive was born. Over the next thirty years more than sixty locomotives of this type were built. Buyers still had options such as driver diameter, but basically the 2-6-2 was standardized.

Steam engine builders seldom built demonstrator locomotives, however for the Lewis & Clark Exposition in Portland in 1905, Baldwin built a 2-6-2 logging locomotive, named it Sequoia, and lettered it for Baldwin Locomotive Works. It was later sold to Dolbeer & Carson Lumber Co. The Sequioa name has become associated with logging locomotives of this type.

Of the 64 Baldwin 2-6-2's built between 1898 and 1928, a dozen or so survive today. A few are still in operation in railroad museums and tourist lines, a tribute to Baldwin's engineering ability.

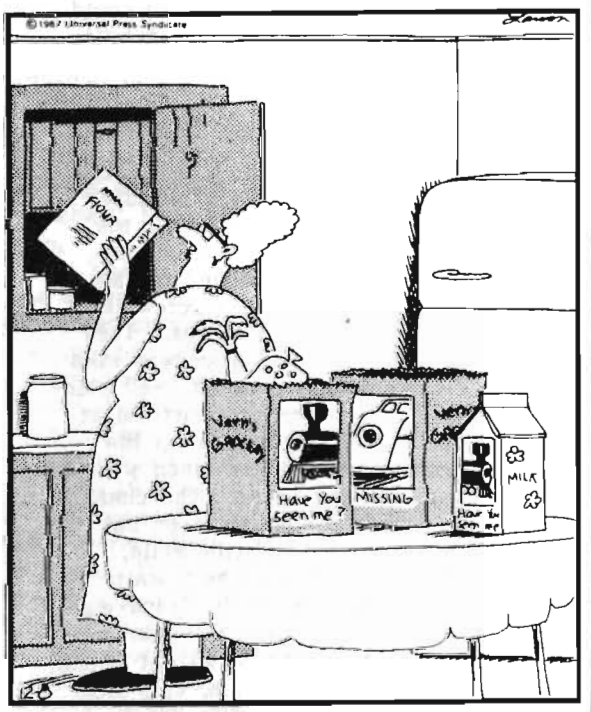
Feather River Short Line's No. 8 was constructed for Sierra Nevada Wood & Lumber Co. for service at Hobart Mills. For 30 years No. 8 hauled forest products six and one-half miles to the SP interchange at Truckee. Originally built to burn wood, she was converted to oil while at Hobart Mills. When the mill closed in 1938, No. 8 was sold to the Clover Valley Lumber Co., just over the hill at Loyalton. Her work assignment for the next 20 years was to be the woods switcher in the Clover Valley area north of Beckwourth.

Clover Valley Lumber Co. was bought by Feather River Lumber Co. in 1956, but No. 8 was never lettered for the new owner. It was at this time that the logging railroad was abandoned and all equipment was scheduled to be scrapped. Two locomotives escaped the scrappers torch; No. 4 and No. 8. No. 4, a Baldwin 2-6-6-2 tank engine was sold to Tahoe Timber Co., at Verdi, Nevada and subsequently donated to Pacific Locomotive Association, moved to Richmond, Ca. and restored to operating condition. In March, 1958 No. 8 was donated to a small group of railroad enthusiasts who formed the Feather River Short Line. The locomotive was moved under its own power over the WP to Quincy Jct., and then on to the Quincy Railroad to Quincy. A former WP caboose, a WW I Army Ordinance Dept. fire control car and two log cars were also donated to the group.

No. 8 was operated over the Quincy Railroad for several years, then in June, 1963 she was placed on display in the Plumas County fairgrounds at Quincy along with the caboose and Army car. In this location the FRSL equipment slowly deteriorated due to weather and vandalism.

After the FRRS was formed and a lease for the site of the Portola Museum was signed, the FRSL was invited to relocate the equipment from Quincy to Portola. No. 8 followed the caboose and Army car, arriving on June 13, 1984. For the next three years members of FRSL and FRRS worked to restore the locomotive to operating condition. Suprisingly, the 21 years of inactivity and exposure had not seriously damaged the locomotive,

The Far Side/by Gary Larson



Runaway trains

however a great deal of work was needed to clean old paint and grime, to replace wooded cab parts and to fabricate a new boiler jacket.

On April 25, 1987 No. 8 again moved under its own power. Retired WP engineer Jim Boynton was the last person to run No. 8 under steam on May 19. 1962 and was the first person to run the locomotive almost 25 years later. Since April restoration work has continued and the locomotive has run on several occasions during the summer. No. 8 is in our diesel shop building, perhaps the first time she has been under a roof for any length of time. The locomotive will be steamed up and operated on special occasions. With care we can look to many more years of operation for this octogenarian.

OLD WP ARTICLES

For your enjoyment I am going to reprint several very old articles on the Western Pacific writen in 1944, 45,46, 47, and 54 in RAILROAD MAGAZINE by WP dispatcher, Peter Josserand.....

Mountain Dispatcher

Putting Western Pacific Traffic Through the Rugged Feather River Canyon Is No Job for the Flatland Delayer

By PETER JOSSERAND
Western Pacific Dispatcher

Railroad Magazine
April 1944

A FAINT clicking sound, followed by the words, "Dispatcher, Oroville," broke into a train order I had just begun to issue. The scene was a Western Pacific dispatchers' room and the man on the other end of the wire was undoubtedly Jones, our somewhat excitable operator at Oroville, Calif.

Thinking that he wished to sign up a 31 order I had put out for second 78, I replied, "Dispatcher." His next words tumbled out like a waterfall in Feather River Canyon:

"First 78 was by here at 11:37 p.m!"

I answered calmly: "Yes, that's right."

"But First 78 was by here at 11:37 p.m.!" he repeated, almost screaming.

"Sure, Oroville. The sheet shows that. Has Second 78 shown up yet?"

"No," broke in the op at Oroville yard, who was listening. "He's still here—I'm looking right at his markers."

"Then what was that went by here when the main was here?" said Jones.

"Has an eastbound train passed you since midnight?" I inquired quickly.

"Some train went by here through the siding while the main was here taking ice and water," he stammered. "They asked me what I had on the board; and I asked them who they were, and they said, 'First 78'; so I gave them a clearance and they left. I didn't notice that First 78 was by here before midnight. I—

"Break!" I stopped the op, reaching for the Berry Creek selector key and twisting it violently.

Something froze up inside me as I realized what had happened. The man at Oroville yard was not sitting there looking at Second 78's markers, for they were by Oroville—and without the restricting order which changed their meeting point with Extra 252 West from Berry Creek to Bidwell, creating a lap of authority.

There wasn't one chance in a thousand of catching Extra 252 West at Berry Creek, for he was already due by there; and even if he wasn't actually by, the operator would not be in the office, for I had sent him up to the east switch to keep Extra 252 West from heading in. Those two Mallets would hit on the one-percent grade, just about halfway between Berry Creek and Bloomer—there are no block signals on that crooked track. They wouldn't have a chance.

BEFORE going further, let me tell you something of the district I work.

Had it been daylight so that I could have seen Feather River Canyon as I came through on my way to Sacramento, where I had a job waiting as dispatcher on the Western Pacific, I would have enjoyed the scenery. It's a beautiful country, wild and bold. But had I glimpsed the landscape beforehand, I might not have screwed up my courage to tackle "The Mountain," or Third Subdivision, which extends 118 miles between Oroville yard and Portola.

This mileage will probably bring a smile to the lips of flatland dispatchers, for it is a relatively short district. However, if my attempt to paint a word-picture of operating conditions on this stretch of railroad is successful, perhaps the smile will fade. Having worked districts hundreds of miles longer, with comparative ease, I have spent much time trying to analyze the reasons for this piece of track being the toughest and most aggravating stretch I have known.

Of course, it is not always so. Some days The Mountain behaves like Santa Claus. But more often it goes on a rampage, when nothing is right—not just in one section, but from end to end. And it switches from one state to the other without warning. The subdivision extends through territory so rugged that only here and there you can reach the right-of-way in any manner except by train or motor-car traveling on the rails. A highway runs through the canyon, but you can't get onto the track from the highway, even afoot, except at scattered points. Men who handle trains in Feather River Canyon are a tough lot—hardy, like pioneers. They have to be if they stay there. Scarcely a veteran in the canyon but can show you the scars of wrecks—pile-ups which they would not have survived except for a "sixth sense" which elevates them above the run-of-the-mill train and engine men. They are a breed that thrives on long hours, hardship and danger.

I had worked this district several months before I ever saw it, and even then I came back with a mild case of jitters. Beginning at Oroville yard, the grade is somewhat less than one percent up to Bloomer. From there it climbs to Portola, never more than one percent compensated for curvature, and rarely so much as a fraction of a degree less. There are no humps. A boxcar turned loose at Portola would roll all the way to Oroville yard if it took the curves—and there is precious little tangent track. Spots where two trains could see each other in time to stop without hitting are practically non-existent—because of the curves and tunnels, of which there are thirty-three, ranging up to more than a mile in length—and with no block signals, the DS knows his work must be right, or they bump.

One interesting feature is "the loop" between Spring Garden and Massack. The engineers, determined to hold the grade to one percent, came to a spot where this was impossible; so they remedied the situation by constructing a circular piece of track which, without exceeding one percent, gains sufficient elevation to do the job, the track crossing over itself.

An engine is given what tonnage she can handle on the one percent, eliminating helper districts and greatly simplifying operating procedure. You might think of it as "allee same flatland district," but don't be deceived.