IN THIS ISSUE: Albion and Sherwood Branches - Arden Scott’s Recollections
Tiny locomotives pulling cars loaded with giant redwood logs over 35% rail through mammoth forests which excluded sunlight: 3% grades, tall trestles, sharp curves; the odor of a sawmill, combining the pungent aroma of fresh-sawn wood and burning sawdust; schooners loading finished lumber—the picture of a typical Pacific Coast logging operation? Not quite—it was orphan trackage of a busy railroad.

The Northwestern Pacific Railroad's Albion Branch, inherited from the Santa Fe when Santa Fe and Southern Pacific incorporated the NWP in 1907, was to be a link in a route from San Francisco Bay to the rich timber country stretching from north of the Golden Gate to Portland.

When it ceased operating in 1930, it had never reached the lofty goals set for it by its owners and had served only as a logging line. Now, it is virtually forgotten.

In its early years, its several owners had envisioned the logging road as part of a line between Albion and Booneville, between Albion and Healdsburg, between "the northern part of Mendocino County and the Bay of San Francisco" or even between Pt. Richmond and Portland, Oregon.

The only track ever laid on the branch extended from...
Albion Wharf to Christine, just 25.65 miles, and for all of its existence only logs and lumber and local passengers moved over its rails en route to mills and to the harbor.

**EARLY YEARS NEAR ALBION**

California was still under Mexican rule when, on March 3, 1849, Governor Manuel Micheltorena granted 10,250 acres of timber to Captain William A. Richardson in a coastal area which Richardson named Albion, doubtless in honor of both his English heritage and the name New Albion which Sir Francis Drake had given northern California during his explorations in 1579. In 1852, Richardson contracted with George and Gebhard Heggenmeyer and a Mr. Scharf to build a water-powered sawmill at the mouth of the Albion River. Two years later Alexander Macpherson, Alexander Grant Dallas and Donald Davidson bought the mill and the timber and erected a steam sawmill. In 1864, Henry Wetherbee joined Macpherson in forming Macpherson & Wetherbee to operate the Albion mill and also a mill on the Noyo River.

The town of Albion, built around the mill, became the port from which lumber was shipped by small sailing schooners the 117 nautical miles to San Francisco, a city which often was destroyed by fire and required plenty of lumber for rebuilding.

San Francisco wasn't alone in having fires: the Albion Mill burned in 1867, but was soon rebuilt with increased capacity. The new mill lasted until 1879, when it again burned, along with part of the town. The mill was quickly rebuilt and resumed its task of processing local logs. That same year the firm of Macpherson & Wetherbee was dissolved and Wetherbee and Miles Standish took over the mill and timber land.

As the supply of nearby logs dwindled, it became necessary to haul timber farther and the four-yoke oxen teams which had been used from the earliest years were inadequate for the job. Thus, in 1881, Mill Superintendent N. E. Hoak oversaw the construction of a 1/2-mile-long, 40-inch-gauge road from the Albion River up a timbered gulch. Two-horse teams provided the motive power for the log cars.

By 1885, railroad building in the area was begun in earnest by Mill Superintendent James Brett, with sixty men at work grading and placing ties and 35-pound rail on a standard gauge railroad up the Albion River from Tidewater Gulch (Brett) to Heake's Place. The summer of 1885 saw the arrival of the first steam locomotive, a 2-4-2T No. 1, named Albion. The engine made its first trip on August 1.

**THE ALBION RIVER RAILROAD**

On September 24, 1885, the Albion River Railroad Company was incorporated. Previous historical accounts claim the company was formed to operate the standard gauge railroad; however, according to the official corporate history of the Northwestern Pacific, the Albion River Railroad Company constructed nothing and operated nothing. Its only accomplishment was to obtain right of way, which it did through condemnation in a suit against one William Heeser, which was settled in the company's favor on December 6, 1886.

Lumber was transported from the Albion Mill at the mouth of the Albion River in small schooners; larger ships had to be loaded from lighters because they couldn't navigate the shallow waters leading to the mill. The lumber company solved this problem in 1889 by constructing a long wharf at the mouth of the river to permit direct loading of larger ships.

On May 26, 1891, Miles Standish, Henry B. Hickey, George C. Wilcox, F. W. Crosby and W. E. Reed incorporated the Albion Lumber Company, with an authorized capital stock of $300,000. On June 9, this company purchased the Wetherbee property for $37,500, "including lands, saw mills, cattle, horses, mules, railroads and the tug Maggie," which had been built that year. The railroad now extended to Keene's Summit, 11.61 miles, with some grading from Keene's Summit toward Wendling and some grading of an extension toward Albion.

In the next nine years, the company suffered three major disasters: on June 13, 1893, three men died when a logging train hit a bull; on April 14, 1898, the railroad was severely damaged by an earthquake; and, on September 29, 1900, the mill burned once again but was once again rebuilt.
On April 1, 1902, Robert H. Swayne purchased the Albion River Railroad from the Albion Lumber Company and on May 8 incorporated the Albion & Southeastern Railroad with an authorized capital stock of $1,000,000 and the goal of extending the railroad to Boonville.

On May 31 of that year, Swayne incorporated the Albion River Steamship Company and had the steam schooner *Pomo* built at Fairhaven.

The A&SE completed the construction begun by the Albion Lumber Company of the line from Tidewater on the Albion River to Albion, 3.0 miles, and constructed a branch line from South Fork (later Clearbrook Junction) to Clearbrook, 1.0 miles.

**SANTA FE ENTERS THE PICTURE**

Southern Pacific and the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe were competing fiercely to reach Eureka—and beyond—to tap the vast lumber resources of northern California. Thus, on March 29, 1903, the AT&SF incorporated the Fort Bragg and Southeastern Railroad Company to build from Pt. Bragg to Healdsburg and connect with their proposed line from Point Richmond on the south and their San Francisco and Northwestern Railway in Humboldt County on the north; eventually, the line was to reach Portland. By deed of sale dated January 17, 1905, the A&SE conveyed its railroad and property to the FB&SE for $399,000. Between the date of sale and June 30, 1906, the FB&SE built 8.27 miles of railroad from Keene's Summit to Wendling, including a switchback on a 3% grade between Keene's Summit and Dunn.

The railroad and the lumber companies were purchasing new and used locomotives; in 1902, the Albion Lumber Company bought an 1878 Baldwin 0-4-0T in 1906, three locomotives arrived: for the Albion Lumber Company, a 2T Shay No. 123 (later No. 2), Lima 1906; and for the FB&SE No. 1, a Porter 2-4-2T (1888) and No. 2, a Hinkley 0-6-0 (1880). All were wood burners, as was the 2T Shay (Lima 1907) which Searns Lumber purchased in 1907 and numbered 1. In 1908, the Albion Lumber Company augmented its locomotive fleet with No. 5, a new Baldwin 2-6-2T.

On August 28, 1906, the Albion River Steamship Company's steam schooner *Celia*, which the company had purchased in 1904, was wrecked at Point Joe. To replace it, the company bought the steam schooner *Pasadena*, which had been built in San Francisco in 1887.

**THE NWP TAKES OVER**

With the incorporation of the Northwestern Pacific on January 8, 1907, the Santa Fe's FB&SE became a part of the NWP and was designated as the Albion Branch. The NWP changed the name of South Fork on the branch to Clearbrook Junction to avoid confusion with the NWP's main line station of South Fork. Power on the branch consisted of FB&SE's No. 1, later renumbered NWP 1 and then NWP 225; and FB&SE's No. 2, later renumbered NWP 226.

Southern Pacific, needing timber for construction of the Southern Pacific of Mexico, purchased the Albion Lumber Company for $1 million on August 31, 1907. The deal included the Steamer *Pasadena*, the railroad and rolling stock, the mill, 20,622 acres of timber land and an estimated 374,500 board feet of timber. Epes Randolph was appointed president. On November 7, the company began extending the Clearbrook Branch for the lumber company.

Stearns Lumber Company, which had built a mill at Wendling and was later absorbed by the Albion Lumber Company, entered into an agreement with the Northwestern Pacific on May 17, 1907 whereby the NWP agreed to haul "all products of such mills now constructed or hereafter be constructed as soon as its railroad is built to such points, to San Francisco, it being the intention hereof that when by extensions of railroad the products of the lumber company can be sent wholly by rail to San Francisco or to the navigable waters of the Bay, this contract shall be at an end." Thus the agreement called for rail handling to Albion for furtherance by sea, but left open the possibility of the branch's eventually connecting with the NWP's main line.

Track construction continued during 1908, with the NWP and Stearns Lumber Company entering into an agreement to extend the track south from Wendling to Mill Creek, 3.5 miles. Stearns had operating rights on the track, known as the Floodgate Extension. By April, 1.5 miles to Floodgate Creek had been completed and Stearns built a logging railroad on the creek to connect with the NWP. During April 1909, more than 100 men and 80 mule teams labored building from Floodgate to Christine and, when their work was completed on June 13, the Albion Branch had reached its southernmost point. Although dreams of connecting the branch to the main line continued for years, Christine remained the end of the line until cessation of service in 1930.

The NWP, famous for its picnic trains in Marin and Sonoma County, operated such trains on the Albion Branch, 1, the first being an excursion from Albion to Wendling on May 17, 1908; Engine No. 1 hauled the train and picnickers paid $1 for the round trip.

Mill towns on California's coast were usually isolated, with little entertainment to occupy loggers and railroad men in their off-duty hours. Often, the only diversion was female and often the female was someone else's wife or girlfriend. Reporting on the June 16, 1908 incident in which Section Boss J. L. Reed shot Engineer Jack Keener to death at the Southside Hotel, the Mendocino *Beacon* opined that Reed was justified in so doing; "there was a woman involved."

**THE BRANCH PROSPERS**

Aside from local passenger traffic and the picnic trains, the Albion Branch depended for its survival on the lumber companies it served. By 1910, the Albion Lumber Company and the branch were prospering: ALC was operating four miles of logging railroad up the North Fork of the Albion from Clearbrook to Camp 10 and two miles from Camp 5 (Skibo) to Marsh Creek; there were
200 men working in the woods and 150 in the mill at Albion. With ALC and other mills feeding the branch, traffic was heavy.

The line had no tunnels but did feature plenty of bridges, trestles and culverts crossing the Albion and Navarro Rivers and countless smaller waterways. Four Howe Truss bridges spanned a total of 317 feet with the longest being one hundred feet long; there was also an "A" Truss 35 feet long. Trestles were even more impressive: the longest was at Brett and ran to 601 feet, while the highest rose 70 feet above Floodgate Creek. Total length of trestles on the line was 2,341 feet.

There was a switchback at Keene's Summit on a 3% grade and sharp curves typical of a logging railroad.

In January of 1912, NWP No. 202 arrived by boat to replace NWP No. 226, which was scrapped. No. 202 was converted from oil fuel to wood then, in 1923, back to oil. It received a new tender in 1918 and spent the rest of its years on the Albion Branch.

The treacherous coastal waters claimed another victim on December 31, 1913, when the Steamer Pomo foundered off Pt. Reyes and put the Albion River Steamship Company out of business for good.

**LOGGING LINES INTO THE WOODS**

During the early part of the century, several logging lines were built to connect with the branch; often the lumber company which built them had operating rights over the NWP. To meet the SPdeMex's continued demand for large amounts of ties and bridge timbers, on

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Pages from FR&SE conductor's book show two days' activities on the railroad. **TOP,** March 1, 1907 record indicates an eleven-hour day, including being "off track in Mill 11 coming back." **BOTTOM,** March 15, 1907 sheets show a short but busy day which featured derailed log skidder, wrecked water tank, broken axle and leaking flues.
TOP: Albion River Railroad No. 1, a 2-4-2T, as it appeared in 1894. Two of the men are identified: A. W. Beadle at cab door and Fred Linderman standing on ground.

RIGHT: An example of clear cutting along the Albion Branch. There are three donkey engines with wood fuel supplies and skid roads. Both photos, Allen Tacy collection, NWPRRHS Archives.
May 15, 1920, the Albion Lumber Company bought 40,035 acres of land and timber rights along the NWP from the Pacific Coast Redwood Company for $2.5 million. Three months later, it bought the Navarro Lumber Company for $247,750, including the railroad and the company town. ALC said the purchases were necessary because it was approaching the end of its timber reserves and the SPdeMex required more ties and timber for extending the railroad from Guymas to Guadalajara than the Albion mill could produce. There had been plans to put on a night shift at Albion, but the company found it more expedient to purchase the Navarro mill.

The Albion Branch appeared in NWP's employee timetables only as part of the large map on the back page, with a dotted line indicating the never-built extension to Healdsburg. Most NWP employees hardly knew the branch existed.

THE ALBION RAILROAD

The Northwestern Pacific's Board of Directors was keenly aware that the Albion Branch was more of a lumber company's logging railroad than it was part of a common carrier. Thus, at their December 10, 1920 meeting the directors unanimously adopted a motion calling for the branch and the rolling stock to be leased to the Albion Lumber Company for ten years at $22,000 per year. The directors reasoned that the branch was entirely disconnected from the rest of the NWP and could be more economically operated by the lumber company which originated 98% of its traffic. The California Railroad Commission agreed with the directors, adding in its decision "the line is entirely disconnected from the rest of the railroad...and it is difficult to maintain a separate organization for operation of the branch line."

Before executing the lease, the NWP inventoried the branch, finding the equipment and buildings shown in the sidebar on page 15.

The railroad became known as "The Albion Railroad" and maintained common carrier service with unscheduled trains, except for one daily scheduled round trip between Albion and Navarro. Operations were directed by a trainmaster who reported to the mill's general manager.

The NWP left engines No. 202 and No. 225 on the branch; Albion Lumber Company had five locomotives of its own and did not use No. 225 during the lease period. Passenger traffic was very small; the one combi-

Track and depot at Albion show effects of years of neglect in these photos taken some time after service ceased on the branch. Editor's collection.
nation coach on the line soon became surplus and in 1925, in one of the most unusual trades in NWP's history, was hauled to Tiburon on the Pasadena and traded for a flat car and a 2480-gallon steel tank.

To save money and to comply with the California Railroad Commission's requirement for a daily except-Sunday round trip for passengers and freight, ALC equipped its forest engineer's Ford truck with railroad wheels and hauled passengers and freight on the schedule of the former steam train, leaving Albion at 7:30 a.m., running to Navarro and arriving back at Albion at 11:30 a.m. The company called this their "official" trip; after it was completed, the Ford was placed at the disposal of the master mechanic, the woods superintendent and the general manager for additional trips as required. Because of breakdowns of machinery operating in the woods, the company often had to send a locomotive with the needed parts to the location of the breakdown; using the Ford eliminated that expense.

The original vehicle soon proved too small for the job and, in February 1923 the company purchased a larger Model T from Larsen's Garage in Albion for $718 and equipped it with a Marlin-Parry freight and jitney body. It was numbered NWP 7. Operating costs for the truck were $4 for a round trip, compared with $45 for a steam train.

During the time it leased the branch, the Albion Lumber Company made only three significant changes: it modified No. 202 to burn oil, constructed a 1,616-foot passing track at Keene's Summit in 1922 and erected a new telephone line between Albion and Navarro in August of 1924. According to a report made by the NWP after abandonment in 1930, ALC performed no maintenance on the buildings on the line.

Over the years there was plenty of talk about connecting the orphan with the main line, either at Healdsburg, Cummiskey or Ukiah. A 1922 survey of a proposed line from Low Gap on the Albion Railroad to a point two miles north of Ukiah on the NWP involved a 2,300-foot tunnel, 26 bridges and trestles totaling 3,570 feet, a switchback, extensive rock work in Ackerman Canyon and 4-1/2% grades. Cost of the 15.5-mile extension was $868,000, which helps explain why it was never built.

THE END NEARS

In 1925, the lumber company abandoned its operations on the Clearbrook Branch and later removed its rail beyond the one mile of track owned by the NWP.

ALC had been operating the Pasadena to San Francisco, where lumber destined to the SPdMex had to be transloaded into rail cars. In 1925, ALC received ICC permission to operate the vessel to ports south of San Francisco and to the west coast of Mexico. Shortly thereafter, SP completed its Mexican railroad and Albion Lumber Company's major customer was gone. Coupled with a general decline in the lumber business, the completion of SPdMex meant the Albion mills could no longer support themselves. Engine 202 had just returned from an overhaul at SP's Sacramento Shops but was no longer needed.

On September 30, 1927, the company closed its Navarro mill and on May 28, 1928 it shut down the Albion operation.

Last operations on the Albion Branch were in 1929. The Pasadena was sold in March for $2,500 and, on May 30, 1929, the lumber company ceased paying its $22,000 a year on the lease. There was little business remaining: for the year ending October 31, 1929, cost of operating the railroad was $7,391.76 while revenue totaled $58.48 ($20.54 from freight and $37.94 from passengers).

In late 1929, Albion Lumber Company applied to the California Railroad Commission to cease operations. The company posted notices of its intent at all stations and at the post offices of Albion and Navarro, but no one appeared to object to the discontinuance at the public hearing conducted at Albion by Examiner Williams of the Commission. In his decision approving abandonment, Williams noted that "the line's business was the transportation of logs from the forests to Albion Lumber Company mills at Navarro and Albion and the transportation of the products of the mills to Albion, there to be delivered to water carriers. Since November 1929 the plants of the lumber company have been practically out of operation," he noted, "the timber cutting has been suspended and the company has now reached a period of non-activity. The railroad is no longer necessary to or useful for its operations."

According to Charles F. Flinn, general manager of the Albion Lumber Company and manager of railroad operations, "this company...will contribute no business of a railroad character in the near future. There is no other shipper using this common carrier service."

The Commission's order, effective twenty days after it was issued on December 27, 1929, permitted discontinuance of operations but did not authorize the NWP to remove the tracks.
The railroad ceased operating on January 16, 1930 and the lumber company's property was transferred to the Southern Pacific Land Company.

THE LAST GASP

The last gasp for the Albion Branch came in late 1930, when Andrew F. Mahoney and John Philbrick leased the wharf and rolling stock with the intention of producing split products; they made just one shipment and shut down.

The track and trestles remained in place but were seriously damaged by a forest fire in 1931. In a letter to President E. H. Maggard, NWP Superintendent M. L. Gillogly indicated "the damage lies between Flynn Creek and Keene's Summit—94 ties burned and a 4-beat trestle 60 feet long and 10 feet high destroyed. From County Road to Keene's Summit 913 ties burned, plus 10-foot log trestle, crib at end of first switchback, cattle guards, etc., total damage $2,380.25. Also destroyed at Keene's Summit were five outfit cabooses and boxcars and 11 flat cars. Four flatcars were damaged."

The track on the Albion Branch quietly rusted away until 1937, when Hyman-Michaels Company purchased the railroad for scrapping. Included were engines 202 and 225, 78 flatcars, one caboose, one work car, bridges and rails. From the SP Land Company, H-M bought engines 1 to 5, 106 logging trucks, 4 flat cars, 3 tank cars, 1 steam shovel, 10 steam logging machines, 8 donkey engines and 60 tons of 35-pound rail.

Engines 2 and 4 were steamed up and used to dismantle the line. By December 10, 1937, the railroad was gone.

Thus finished with hardly any notice a railroad which began and ended as a logging line, but which once was eyed by Santa Fe, Southern Pacific and Northwestern Pacific as a link in a heavy-traffic main line.

Marin County Historical Museum
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The Museum reflects the history of Marin in changing exhibits of early railroad photographs and memorabilia, the dairy industry, the military, schools, transportation and various historical themes. Of particular interest are scale models of two narrow-gauge engines and of the ferry SAUSALITO. New members welcome; annual dues $15. Phone (415) 639-8538.

Inventory of Line, 1920

(From original NWPRR inventory document.)

Locomotives:
#202, 2 side tanks plus tender "for wood and water." Value, $8,000.
#225, "saddle tank wood burner, BP 125#." Value, $1,000.

Buildings:

Albion
Freight house and station 59x12, yellow; 2 small offices, 1 for logging superintendent and 1 for train dispatcher.
Oil house 14x20.
Store house 15x40.
Blacksmith shop 14x14.
New roundhouse, 42x120, 2 engine pits (completed 5-18) owned jointly by NW and ALCo. "This building houses 4 locomotives, Ford Truck, and one Sheffield No. 40 motor car owned by logging company and one owned by railroad company."
Tool house, 12x16.
Clearbrook Junction
Telephone booth 4x4.
Dunn
Cabin 7x10.
Keene Summit
Tool house 12x16
Section house 12x27.
Bunk house 10x16
Bunk house 10x12.
Christine
Shed 6x10.
"Trestles on the line at this time, all wooden, aggregate about a mile."
"Also on hand one pile driver at Albion, at Danville; 1 single engine, single drum with Gipsy Spool. Manufactured by Murray Bros., SF. Fully equipped with gauges, valves and blow off complete and ready to go into operation. Fuel, wood."

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