

COVID TIMES aka "Spot News"

WESTERN VANCOUVER ISLAND INDUSTRIAL HERITAGE SOCIETY

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Have you RENEWED your
MEMBERSHIP?

Issue 77



February 2021



"HAYES" TRUCKS' at 99 YEARS P. 6

74 YEARS OLD

"R.B. McLean Lumber Co."
1947 "Hayes" log truck.

This was the first truck to be restored by members of the Industrial Heritage Society. Restoration was completed in time for "EXPO '86".

48 YEARS OLD **"Onion Lake Logging Company"** 1973 "Hayes HD" rock truck.

This is the most recently restored vehicle in the Industrial Heritage Centre. It was donated by Garry Westbrook and restored by I.H.S. volunteers in 2018-19.



Photo: D. Hooper

“ONCE A GREAT SAWMILL” - A Look back at the Somass Sawmill

Port Alberni has been a Sawmill and Logging town since the very beginning of European Settlement in 1860. The first Sawmill in the Alberni Valley was the “Anderson Mill” – a steam-powered mill built where “Harbour Quay” now is. The Mill cut lumber and ‘spars’ for Victoria and the export market. It closed down after four years, when they ran out of accessible timber. They did not have the technology to maintain a reliable supply of logs.

Over the next 160 years, there would be approximately 45 sawmill operations in the Valley – mostly small or short-lived ones and a few very large mills that survived the “boom and bust” cycle of the world lumber markets. This is the story of one of the Big Ones.

“Bloedel, Stewart & Welch” arrived in the Valley after the First World War, at the same time that the CPR extended rail access to Sproat and Great Central Lakes. Julius Bloedel had logging operations and a big sawmill in Bellingham, Washington State. Teaming up with Stewart and Welch – Canadian railway construction contractors – Bloedel set about acquiring timberlands in BC, including around Great Central Lake. He was the dominant partner in the sawmill that opened there in 1926 and BS&W operated logging camps along the Lake to supply the mill with logs. The lumber was shipped out by rail.



The log supply problem that had hampered the Anderson Mill had been solved, through the development of ‘Steam Donkeys’ and steam logging railroads.

In 1927, Bloedel purchased a huge tract of timber around Franklin River, south of Alberni. Problem: it was not practical nor economic to transport the logs from Franklin River to the Great Central Lake Mill. The solution was to build a new Sawmill on the Harbour – the logs could be towed direct from the Log Dump to the Mill; no extra handling necessary. As well, the lumber would go straight from the Mill onto the wharf, for shipping or onto railcars for transportation to Canadian customers.

The economic Crash in 1929 caused a collapse in the lumber industry, which depended on the export market. Desperate foreign governments, including the USA, raised Tariff barriers, further blocking Canadian lumber exports. Mills shut down; some mills went bankrupt. “BS&W” lost money in 1931; the local “R.B. McLean Lumber Co.” never turned a wheel that year. There was no question of opening a new Sawmill, anywhere.

Recovery began in late 1933, when the U.K. government established a kind of ‘Duty-Free’ trading group that included Britain, the British colonies and Commonwealth countries, like Canada and Australia. They called it “Imperial Preference”.

“Imperial Preference” had an immediate effect on Port Alberni mills. In 1934, exports to Britain, Australia and South Africa jumped immediately and doubled between 1935-36.

This change is what prompted ‘BS&W’ to build the new Port Alberni sawmill in 1934 and to begin logging the timber at Franklin River. Given that so many mills had shut down since 1929, Bloedel scooped up second-hand saws, motors, chains, power boilers and other late-model sawmill equipment and was able to set up a modern mill, for a ‘song’.

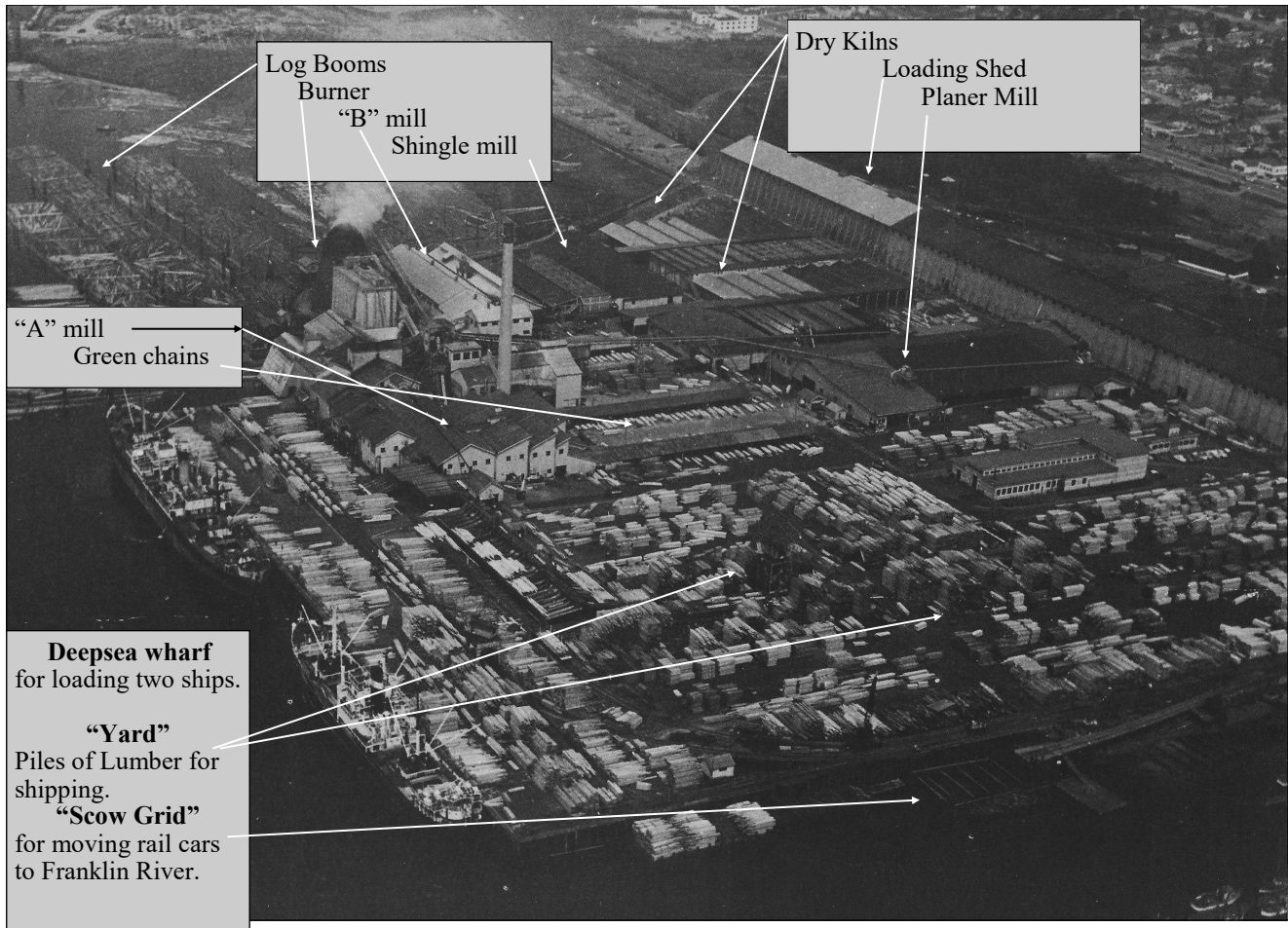
The Sawmill opened in March, 1935 with 200 employees. It was considered a ‘medium-sized’ mill. With many electric motors powering the machinery, electricity was generated on-site by two steam turbogenerators burning ‘hog fuel’ – ground-up wood waste. This was innovative at that time.

A Shingle Mill was added in 1937, to take advantage of the cedar stands at Franklin River, and also the first Dry Kilns. More were added in the Forties. The "Dry Storage" (Loading) Shed – the largest and most visible building to the townsfolk, was built beside the railyard in 1939.

The War Years were Boom years at the "Somass". Construction for the War effort in Canada absorbed much of the mill's production. More than 5000 buildings went up for military use in Canada, including 335 aircraft hangars and drill halls. In Port Alberni, there was the Army Camp for 2500 men, with barracks, Drill Hall, Dining Hall, etc. There was the airfield at Tofino, the Seaplane base at Ucluelet, major air bases at Comox and Pat Bay (Victoria), as well as smaller military installations elsewhere on the Island. The construction of one big Army camp in Nova Scotia, to house the thousands of soldiers being sent over to Europe through Halifax, took 850 railcars of lumber!

A big expansion to the Mill took place in 1951-52, in preparation for the closing of the Great Central Lake Sawmill. Production capacity was added – a second 'head-rig' to the "A" mill and the new, small-log "B" Mill was built, with Swedish "gang-saws".

Mill Site in the Boom times—1950s



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"SPOT NEWS"
 —is published thrice yearly and is one benefit of membership in the I.H.S.... and you are supporting the preservation of industrial heritage on Vancouver Island. Send queries or material to: D. Hooper. E-mail: dshooper@telus.net

Somass Mill story (cont'd.)

1951-52 was also when the amalgamation of "BS&W" with the "H.R. Macmillan Export Company" took place, to form the largest forestry company in BC. This is when the Sawmill got the new name of "Somass Division". Those were the 'Glory Days' for the Somass Mill, with more than 1200 employees, working around the clock. Upgrades took place in the Sixties and Seventies, to keep pace with change but, technological change exerted constant pressure. For example, an Automatic Lumber sorter and packaging line were installed and the Power House shut down in the mid-1960s, after "BC Hydro" brought Peace River and Columbia River electricity to Vancouver Island.

The Recession of the early 1980s led to the rapid decline of the old Forest industry. 'Cost-cutting' was the order of the day – older, high-cost plants shut down or down-sized drastically—the Shingle Mill was closed in 1981. Employment dropped noticeably, with most manual labour jobs eliminated through automation. With Seniority provisions guiding the layoffs, most young employees were laid off.

Franklin River logging camp, once the largest in Canada, was closed down. The "Plywoods" shut down. Forestry companies scrambled to find the means to survive in the "new world".

The last significant investment made at the Somass Mill was in the late 1980s, when "Macmillan-Bloedel" opened the "Hival" Specialty Cedar mill. "B" Mill was closed down; one head-rig of "A" Mill, as well. The old Shingle Mill buildings were razed to make room for the new mill. The South end of the Loading Shed was demolished, to make room for the "Millworks" finger-joint line. The "Hival" Mill kept the business viable into the early Twenty-first Century but, by then, "M&B" was no more.

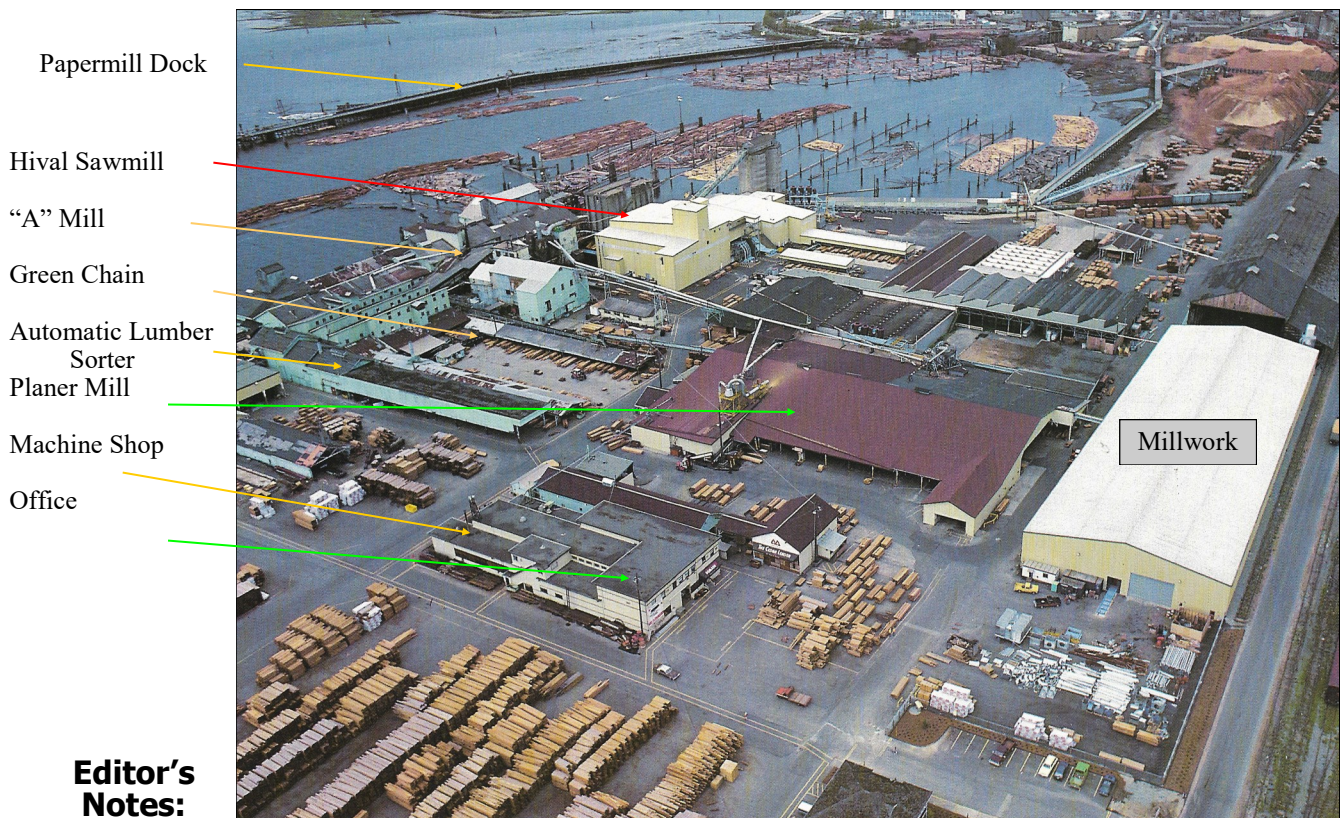
The 1990's brought continued change and down-sizing. The Era of the big, integrated forest product companies ended. The end of the "Old Growth" era, a smaller 'working forest base' – due to pressure from environmentalists and conservation, Government action... and inaction..., international competition and globalization – all these exerted unprecedented pressures on the industry.

The dissolution and disappearance of "Macmillan-Bloedel" from the BC scene, (sold to "Weyerhaeuser" in 1999) emphasized this sea change. Wood Processing facilities were divorced from "Timberland Management", which was often divorced from Logging and Hauling operations. A new business model came into being.

"Coulson Manufacturing" purchased the "Millworks" finger-jointer operation, then closed some years later. "Western Forest Products" bought the Somass operation in 2004. Activity at the Mill site gradually declined, until final closure was announced in 2017. The only activity on site now are the Dry kilns, drying lumber from the "Alberni Pacific" Sawmill.

What does the future hold for the site of a once-great enterprise in the heart of the City of Port Alberni?

"Somass Division" 1989 - new "Hival" Sawmill, Millworks and Specialty Plant



Editor's Notes:

Information for this article is from Donald McKay's book, "Empire of Wood", from Jan Peterson's "Twin Cities" and from the pamphlet issued by "MB" in 1989, to commemorate the opening of the Hival sawmill, Millwork and Specialty plant. Photos are from the pamphlet. "Thank you's " go to Ken Rutherford and to Jan Jansma for their input and advice. There will be a 'sequel'.

"Have you Renewed your Membership?"

Readers will note that several pages of the Newsletter have been sponsored by local businesses and individuals. Please let them know that we appreciate their support for local history, and support them in turn.

During the last year, we were able to continue to work on some projects, thanks to funding from a "Community Gaming Grant" from the Government of British Columbia.

In spite of "Covid 19" restrictions, I.H.S. volunteers managed to get a lot of work done in 2020. At the Industrial Heritage Centre, volunteers put in more than 2300 hours of work. At the APR Roundhouse, volunteers put in more than 4600 hours, especially thanks to the Boilermakers, who donated more than 3000 hours on the "No. 7" Boiler job alone. I.H.S. members spent several hundred hours on various jobs at the McLean Mill, including clean-up at the Old-time Logging site, the Log Dump and at the Barn.

If you want a copy of Sandy Macham's book on logging railroads that supplied the Chemainus Sawmill, contact the Editor. @ \$40 (+ Postage, if you want it mailed).

'HAYES' TRUCKS at 99 YEARS

Partners Douglas Hayes and W. Anderson began manufacturing trucks in Vancouver in 1922. They successfully rode the economic boom of the 'Roaring Twenties', opening a new plant in the False Creek industrial area in 1928.

In the early years, as well as the increasingly heavy trucks for the new "Truck Logging" sector, "Hayes" built busses, fire trucks, vans and highway tractors. That was a "Hayes" feature—they built what their customers wanted. "Lowest Price" and "Mass Production" was not in their vocabulary.

Due to their reputation for robust and reliable vehicles, they survived the Great Depression and prospered in the post-Second World War years, when Trucks replaced the Steam trains moving logs to the Mills. Forestry giant, H.R. Macmillan, invested in "Hayes" to encourage the production of the bigger "HD" and "HDX" models. He needed trucks with the capacity to move logs in the same quantities as the steam railroads.

After the Second War, there were several companies manufacturing heavy trucks in BC: "Kenworth", "Freightliner", "Western Star", "Pacific" ... and "Hayes". The last two were B.C.-owned.

After five successful decades, "Hayes" was shut down in still-controversial circumstances, in 1975. "Pacific" shut down in 1991.

"Hayes" & the Alberni Valley

The Forest Industry dominated the economic life of the Alberni Valley in the Twentieth Century and "Hayes" trucks played a large role, particularly after the Second War—hauling, road-building, lowbedding. "Hayes" even had a Sales Agency in town.

"Hayes" in the 21st Century

Forty-six years after the closure, the "Hayes" name still ignites loyalty and passion. Several Port Albernians, including Steve Drybrough, Vic Laughlin, Jim Falconer, John Casanave and Ross Stevens, own and have restored old "Hayes".

The I.H.S. & Alberni Valley Museum have 10 "Hayes" on display in the "Industrial Collection" at their Restoration Shop & Museum (I.H.C.)

In 2012, Jim and Steve organized a "Hayes & Friends" Show in honour of the 90th Anniversary and the Industrial Heritage Society likes to feature "Hayes" trucks at their Annual Show.

Plans are under way for the Big Anniversary — 100 Years - in 2022. Stay tuned!



1932 "Hayes-Anderson"

Port Alberni's

John Casanave only began building his "Challenger" off-highway trucks after the demise of "Hayes" and "Pacific". His designs expanded on their features and innovations, making him the "last man standing" of B.C. truck builders.



"Hayes" in the Industrial Collection

1961 "Hayes Clipper" - Cab-over engine



TED MAURICE—"40 years in the woods with a Dull Axe"

Ted Maurice spent his life working in the forests of Vancouver Island, starting at the age of sixteen in a "Pole Yard" in Parksville. After working for some "Gyppo" outfits near Coombs, he went to "Northwest Bay", one of H.R. Macmillan's Camps.

That is where he started to learn the Loading trade, beginning as a "Second Loader" in the 'landing' at the foot of the Spar Tree, then moving to "Head Loader", directing the operation from the roof of the Logging Truck. He did not get to load logs at NW Bay—"You had to have a pretty long grey beard before you got to run a machine at that Camp!"; he said.

The Editor asked him to share some stories, so he did...

"TALES FROM THE LOADING POT"

"I see in the local rag that they have finally torn down the old "Arrowview Hotel. Brings back a memory...

I came over to Alberni in early March, 1954. I had been working at Northwest Bay, but we had been snowed out in November and they were still full of snow and I needed to make some money, because I had gotten engaged at Christmas. In those days, "MB" had a big office at the foot of Third Avenue hill and that is where I went to apply for a job. I had been hoping to go to Franklin River, Camp "B" but they needed a Head Loader at Camp "A" so that is where I went. That meant staying in town and riding the crummy so, I found Room & Board in a house at 11th or 12th and Bute St., with a family named Hemmingson. (In 1954, there was a new road linking Camp "A" to town but the road to Camp "B" did not open till the following year. You had to take a "Speeder" from Camp "A" to reach Camp "B".

I would catch the crummy at 10th and Bute every morning with an old Swede named Helmer Soderlund and we would swing down through town, picking up a couple more guys and then stop at the 'Arrowview, where three more young single guys were living.

After about a month, along comes Easter—four day weekend. Tuesday morning, we stopped at the "Arrowview" - nobody waiting on the sidewalk. After a few seconds, there was a loud "Bang" on the roof of the crummy and then, a few more loud bangs—the silly buggers were throwing beer bottles down from their third-story window!

The crummy drove away and carried on out to the woods. Wednesday morning, we got one of the three, badly hung-over; Thursday, we got two and Friday, we finally got all three of them. I expected Barney Bordeleau, the Foreman, to fire some or all of them for being AWOL, but he didn't. He just seemed to join in the general "Haw-haw"

about
what a party it must have been."



TED

"Arrowview Hotel" - Preparing for Demolition



Photos: D. Hooper

Helmer Soderlund & other Characters

Helmer was an expert Axeman who started work at Franklin River, even before the logging began. He was a "Tie Hacker" - an expert with a 'broad axe' who would hew ties out of small logs, flattening them on two sides so that the rails could be laid on them. With no sawmill nearby, the ties were hand-hewn, then bucked into 8-foot lengths with a crosscut saw. It was hard work but, Helmer was a young man in the 1930s. As it took about 2000 ties per mile of track, he had lots of work! He did this job for about ten years. By the time that Ted met him, he had moved to town but still went to work at Camp "A", by crummy.

"The Soderlunds must have been living close by, because Helmer and I caught the crummy together at 10th and Bute. He was falling at Camp "A" at the time. One early morning, we were standing there, and I cracked a loud fart. Helmer said, "Yew better be careful—the City passed a noiss Bylaw, yew know". The crummy driver was Bill Treleaven. Both Boyko brothers were there, too, so that's how long I have known Al. - (*Local Logger Sports Legend and MC.*)

When I went to the building at Third & Dunbar to apply for a job, they asked what I had been doing at Northwest Bay and I said I had been Head loading. I was asked to take a seat for a few minutes, then called back up to the counter and they offered me the Head loading job at Camp "A". I imagine the delay was so they could phone NWB and verify my story.

Ted learned log-loading at Camp A from Dick Pollack, who broke him in on a "Northwest" shovel. Dick had caught wind of a job as Grade Foreman and figured it would be good if he could say that he had a replacement all trained to take his place.

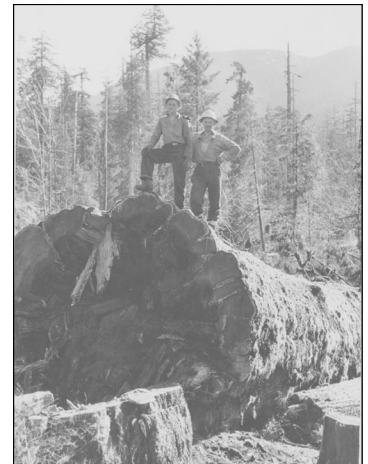
Later that year, in the winter, they moved the whole works to Camp B. On Sunday night, we had to drive to the Beach camp—"Camp A" - and catch the Speeder to Camp B. I think I was the last guy on and I got a seat beside the door... only there was no door! I happened to sit beside Einar Erickson, who I had known for several years so, we had a good visit.

When they moved the outfit to Camp B, we went right down to the "Truck Show", which was several miles past the "end of steel" at Siding 13. It was in the Nitinat Valley and the timber was just about unbelievable. It would have made Cathedral Grove look pretty feeble.

That caused something of a problem. Plywood was the big deal in those days and all the big stuff was bucked into "Peeler lengths"—18', 27' and very few 34'. The loads that we were putting on the trucks were being transferred directly onto the "skeleton cars" at Siding 13 and a skeleton car bunks a 32-footer and it cannot be shortened. It was as much as your life was worth to waste a "bunk log" (logs to make up the base of the car-load). On one big "Cat" setting, they had to bring the fallers back, to go all around the outside of the 'setting', falling saplings and anything they could find, to make bunk logs!

Lots of fun... That was a long time ago..... 65 years. As far as I know, Al (Boyko) and

I are the only ones left."



Sven Josefson & Pete on top of a 14' Spruce in the Nitinat Valley.

Photo from the late Pete Huysmans

Another Memory – Franklin River Camp B, 1955

Monday morning, I was walking across the yard, heading for the speeder that would take me down to the Truck Show, where I had been working ever since the outfit moved up to Camp B. As I walked past Jack Bell, the General Foreman, he said, "Oy—come here—I've got another job for you today. You go with this guy."

"This Guy" was Bill Premarukov, the Head Rigger. Franklin River at that time was the biggest logging camp on the whole Pacific Coast and I was seriously impressed with the kind of knowledge and ability it would take to hold down a job like that. Jack introduced us and then he said to me, "Ole had to go back to Norway—his Mother is sick, so you will be running the "rig-up Goat" (a gas 'donkey') for two or three weeks."

So, I followed Bill over to the smaller speeder that the Bull Gang used. They were completely independent of the rest of the operation so, they had their own transportation. When we got out to the job, there was the "Goat", sitting on top of a 'bull car', which is a heavy rail-car with a smooth steel deck, used to move heavy machinery and so forth. The Bull car was on a spur facing a fully-rigged Skidder tree and that is what we were going to do that day—unrig that tree, drop it, and gather up all the rigging, which would be loaded onto the Bull car, in front of the sled.

The winch on the Goat was an "Empire", probably old before I was born—originally powered by steam but now, by a "Chrysler" Industrial, which sat where the boiler used to be. I noticed right away that everything on the whole machine and the sled was in really good shape—all tidled up and clean. A nice snug "house" on the back of the sled, heavy planks for running boards on both sides of the winch—Number One all around. That old "Empire" turned out to be about the quietest winch I ever ran.

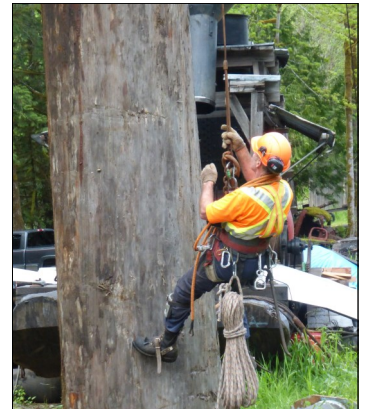
I checked the engine for water and oil, started it up, fiddled with the transmission to figure out what gear would give the right speed, and made sure that the 'pass line', which was going to take Bill up the tree and let all the blocks and rigging down, was properly fastened to the drum, which of course, it was.

By this time, Bill had his belt and spurs on and was standing down on the ground beside the car. He said, "Okay? You got her figured out?" I said, "Yeah, I guess so." He walked over to the base of the tree, wrapped the pass chain around his butt and said, "Meat in the hook—going up."

I have always thought that took quite a bit of guts, because as far as I know, he had never laid eyes on me before that morning and, here he was, literally putting his life into my hands. He turned out to be as nice a guy as you could ever find—cool and calm—never raised his voice, and yet the work got done."

About ten years ago, Ted came out of retirement to run the "Loading Pot" for the "J.J. Logging" Crew that does Old-time logging demonstrations out at the McLean Mill. Being that Ted is the Senior Active member of the Industrial Heritage Society, he had the Seniority for the job! He also takes part in other activities at the Industrial Heritage Centre.

The last Franklin River Speeder
An upcoming Restoration Project.
Photos: D. Hooper



"Meat in the hook"
Aaron Thom, High Rigger,
is being hoisted up the Spar
at the Mclean Mill, on the
'pass line.'



'WHAT'S HAPPENING in these "Covid" Times?"

"Covid" restrictions tightened up in December and there has been little indoor activity at I.H.S. sites. The Industrial Heritage Centre remains "Closed to the Public".

In early December, the Boilermakers were finishing up insulation work on the "No. 7" boiler job; gauges, controls and other 'plumbing' were being re-installed in the cab when work was halted. The massive Boiler restoration project, which began in September 2018, is ALMOST complete.

A crew of volunteers has been working at cleaning up around the Roundhouse site. Artifacts have re-emerged from blackberry thickets and 'scrap' is being sorted from treasures. Another Crew has been working on the Barn roof at the McLean Mill.



Fastening Cladding over the Insulation on the "No. 7".

(below) **Rollie Hurst & John Land** in the Cab, working on the 'backhead'.



At the APR Roundhouse (left) **Barry Dobrensky** cuts the end off a steel box, to make a more usable Scrap Bin. **Daniel Ennis** is observing.

(below left) **Pete Geddes** (foreground) and **Barry** had been repairing and levelling the roadway beside the Roundhouse. Barry has also been using his excavator to lift some of the heavier items that need to be moved. *Photos: D. Hooper*



The "Bullmoose" was used to fish this rail truck out of the blackberries.

SAW DISPLAY in the Industrial Heritage Centre Alan Boyko donated a very old and well-used Crosscut saw to the new display that is taking shape in the I.H.C. He found it under a burnt log at the site of Bobby Debeau's Hotel in the China Creek headwaters, where there was a lot of mining activity in the 1890s. "Thank you, Al."

