

CHAPTER 4.3

NORTH BEND AND KETTLE CREEK RAILROAD



The mill pond for Howard and Perley was huge. A train of twenty four cars could be unloaded at one time. In this picture, which looks south, the first and last two cars have been emptied. At the rear can be seen the pond dam and a bark stack.

The morning accommodation train from Williamsport and all points east slows for the village of North Bend. Suddenly the coach door flies open, followed by a bellowing cry, "Change for Gleason, Italee, Greenlick, Oleona Junction, Cross Fork, Big Trestle, and Lebo." Several wood hicks and a drummer (travelling salesman) rise, gather their possessions, and prepare to alight. Some may call the five hour ride from Harrisburg slow and dirty, but it was pure luxury compared to their next train. Across the cinder platform a stage will take the passengers to Gleason, one mile away, from where the connecting train departs.

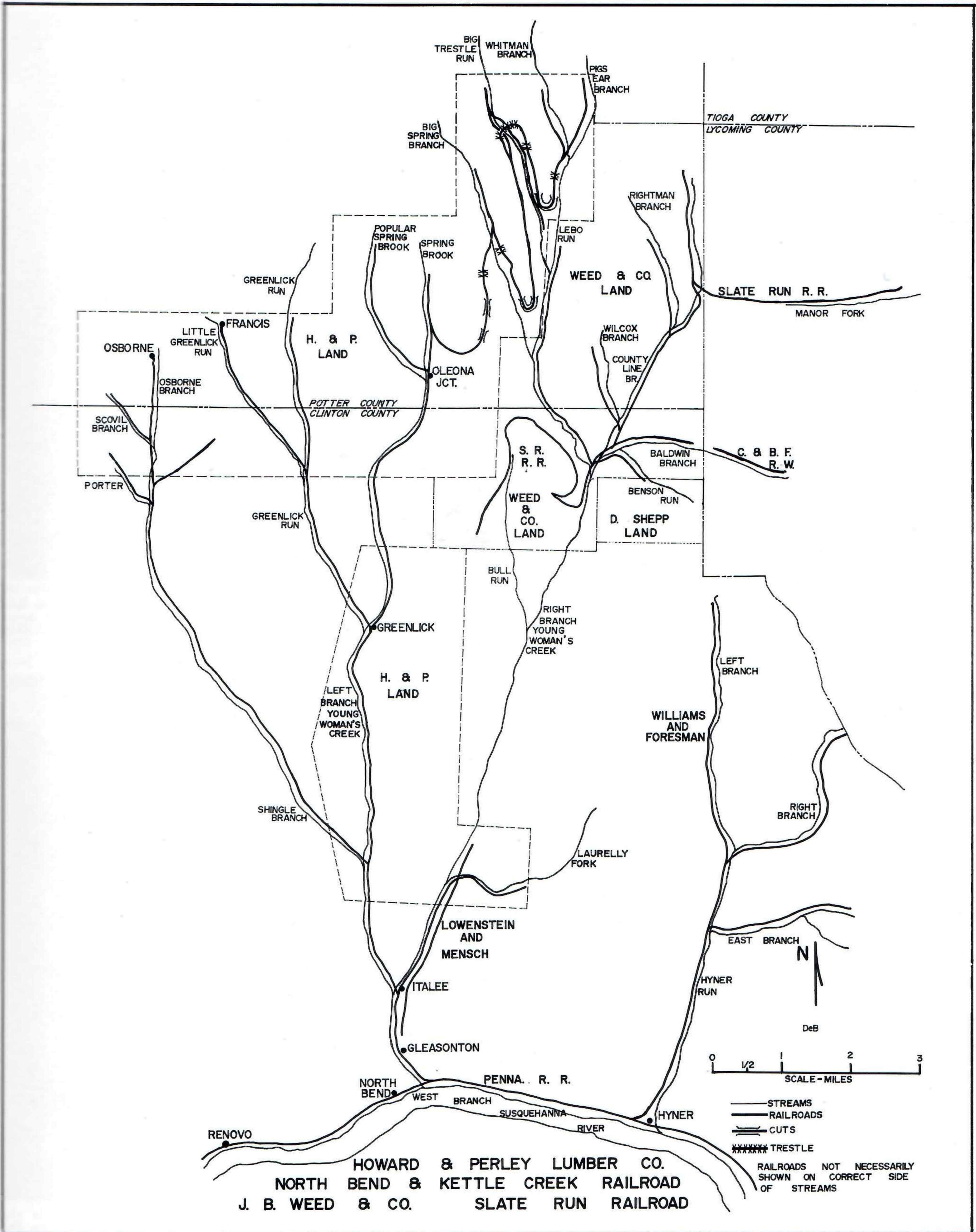
Arriving at Gleason a few minutes later, the passengers view a single decrepit combination car, sadly in need of paint, pulled by a "stem winder" locomotive. The new arrivals join several others who have come down from Renovo and now await transportation to the woods or the booming town of Cross Fork. Inside the baggage compartment a few sacks of mail and a few express packages have been thrown.

A slight jerk, a creak, and several groans from the

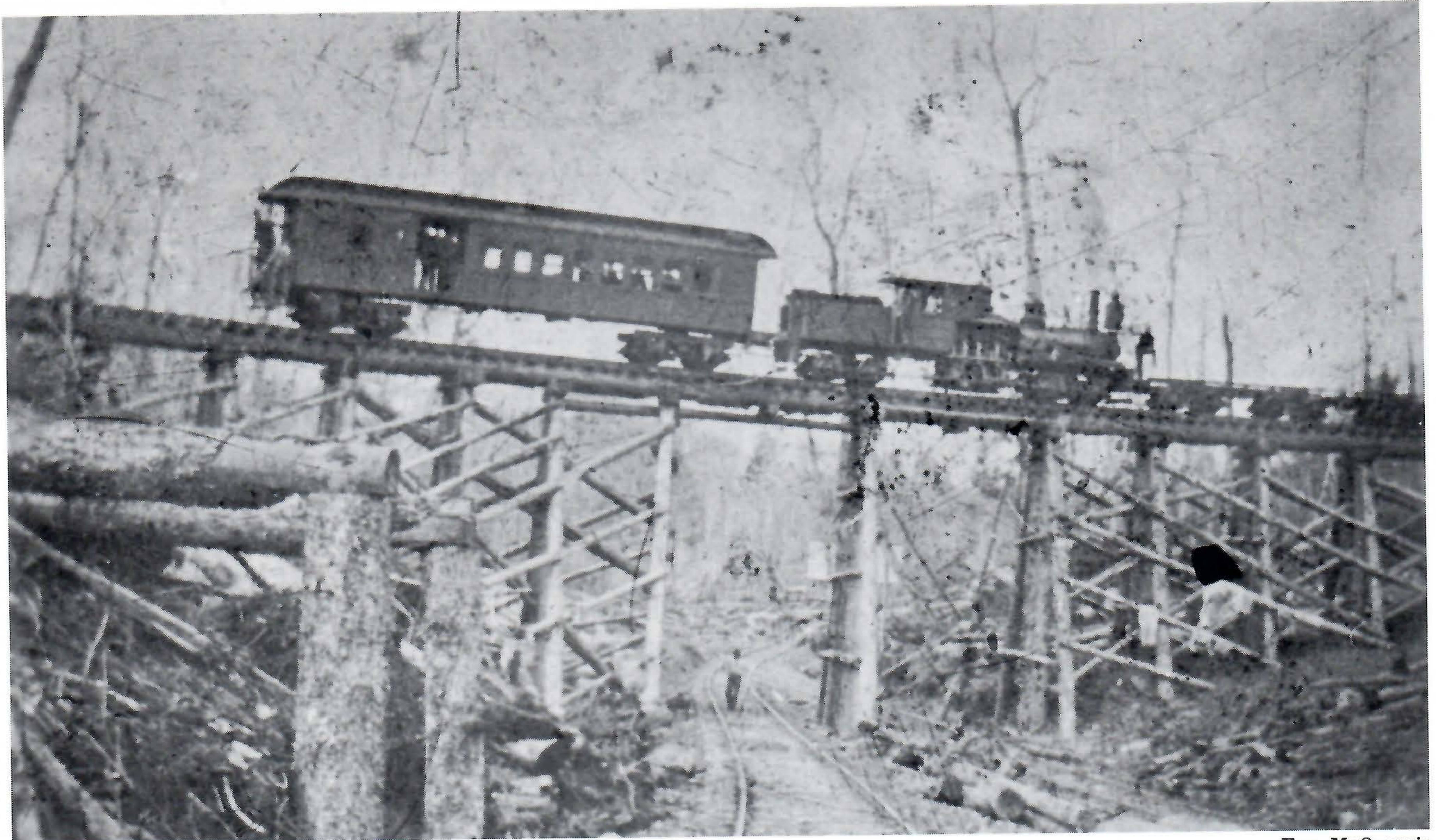
old car signal the departure of the train. The North Bend and Kettle Creek Railroad, being a well built logging railroad, allows fast time to be made by the passenger train; fast that is for a logging railroad: twenty miles in one hundred minutes (twelve miles an hour). Slow you think? Hardly! To make the running time the Shay had to run close to twenty mph. Special gears were required on the locomotive as normal gearing didn't allow a speed much greater than twelve to fourteen mph. On its trip to Lebo Run the speed was slowed by the need to climb over three mountains.

The North Bend and Kettle Creek Railroad belonged to the Howard and Perley Lumber Company of Gleason. Not only was the railroad somewhat unusual for a lumber company, but other differences made this operation unique from most others in Pennsylvania.

The genesis of the company dates to January 12, 1889 when William Howard and Allen Perley of Williamsport purchased about 16,000 acres from another Williamsport firm, White, Lentz, and White. Both operated mills in the city.



The N. B. & K. C. R. R. appeared on many maps, but was often inaccurately located. The names of the "stations" were either junctions of streams or lumber camps, and were named after the stream or camp owner.



Eve McQuarrie

The passenger train, headed by No. 2, crosses the trestle over Big Trestle Run. The track in the foreground switched off the main line to the left and behind the photographer. It ran up Big Trestle Run. Just beyond the bridge a switch leads under the right hand opening of the trestle, and the track follows Big Trestle a mile or so to several log landings. The run, which is little more than a trickle of water, is buried under the logs.



Big Trestle, October 1971. This photograph was taken at the exact same location, but with a wider angle lens. At the right is the embankment leading to the former trestle. The little valley is open with few trees. The beaver cut down small trees to dam up the run years ago, and then deer kept young trees from maturing.

NORTH BEND & KETTLE CREEK RAILROAD.										
WILLIAM HOWARD, President, Williamsport, Pa.					A. P. PERLEY, Treasurer, Williamsport, Pa.					
ROBT. C. LIPPINCOTT, Vice-Prest., 501 Girard Bldg, Philadelphia, Pa.					R. F. BLACKWELL, Aud. & G. P. A., Gleasonton, Pa.					
I. W. GLEASON, Sec'y, Gleasonton, Pa.					F. A. BLACKWELL, Gen. Mgr., Gleasonton, Pa.					
6	4	No. 2	Mls	February 25, 1901.	No. 5	1.	3		
				LEAVE					ARRIVE	
			0	North Bend ¹	4 25 P M	A M				
4 20	9 20	"	1.0	Gleasonton	4 10 "	8 45				
4 22	9 22	"	1.2	Howardville	4 03 "	8 43				
4 25	9 25	"	2.1	Italee	4 05 "	8 40				
P M	9 33	"	4.3	Shingle Branch	3 57 "	A M				
	P M 9 41	"	8.0	Greenlick	3 50 "	A M				
	12 45	9 55	12.0	Oleona Junction	3 38 "	10 35				
	2 55	10 05	14.0	Slarr	3 28 "	10 25				
	3 00	10 10	15.0	Summit	3 25 "	10 20				
	P M 11 35	A M 23.0		Cross Forks	1 40 P M	A M				
		12 45	A M 12.0	Oleona Junction	2 40 P M					
		10 55	" 13.5	Lebo Junction	2 30 P M					
		11 10	A M 16.0	Big Spring	12 15 Noon					
				ARRIVE					LEAVE	

† Daily, except Sunday.

Eastern time.

Connection.—1 With Philadelphia & Erie Division Penna. R.R.

This 1901 Official Guide timetable reveals that the train required a speed of twenty miles per hour over part of the route. Whether No. 2 actually ran that fast is no longer known, but its special gears did allow it to run faster than the usual twelve to fourteen m.p.h. The daily operation started at the shops at Italee. The train first ran down to the Pennsylvania Railroad depot, then headed to Oleona Junction and on up the branch toward Cross Fork, returned to the Junction and went over to Big Spring. It then retraced its steps going back up the branch to get Cross Fork passengers.

The timber was located on both sides of the Potter-Clinton County line. All of it was on headwaters of small streams, none of which had a dependable supply of water. The success of J. B. Weed and Company with their nearby logging railroad probably influenced Howard and Perley to use a railroad. To reach the timber would require tram roads up Shingle Branch and Osborn Run, Greenlick Run, Left Hand Branch of Young Womans Creek, and then crossing a mountain to Big Spring Branch and another mountain to Lebo Run.

Three months after the timber purchase, Howard and Perley contracted with Oliver W. Wolf, a jobber from Jersey Shore. His task included building a railroad, cutting the timber, peeling the bark, delivering the bark to the tannery, and banking the logs adjacent to Young Womans Creek at Gleasonton. From here they would be driven down the Susquehanna to Williamsport each spring.

Newspapers and court house records conflict as to whether Wolf built his railroad along Young Womans Creek as far as Greenlick and up Shingle Branch or whether he stayed out of Shingle Branch. At any rate, he built twelve miles of railroad and bought a thirty ton Shay locomotive and twenty six cars to haul logs and bark.

When the new locomotive arrived at North Bend in October, 1889, a problem arose. How to get it to Gleasonton? There was no railroad, and the locomotive was too heavy to carry. The solution was to fix up the wagon road, lay a section of track, run the engine over it, pick up the track, and relay it ahead of the locomotive. After several days work, the locomotive reached its destination.

The railroad was quickly placed in operation. Bark was brought to the tannery, and logs were banked nearby. But, dissatisfaction arose with Wolf, and he was forced to quit his contract and sell his railroad to Howard, Perley, and Gleason. Frank Blackwell replaced him.

For the next year operations continued unchanged. The logs were banked, driven down the Susquehanna, and sawed at the Williamsport mill; that is, until September, 1891 when the mill burned down. The decision was made to leave Williamsport. A mill would be built at the scene of the logging — Gleasonton. William Howard's decision was influenced by his brother's success at Emporium. C. B. Howard had erected his Emporium mill several years earlier rather than drive logs to Williamsport.

The Cameron County Press reported on the new mill in their issue of February 4, 1892. The mill was then under construction one mile north of North Bend. Plans called for it to cut 60-120,000 feet daily and to employ sixty to eighty men.

The new mill had a tremendous log pond, similar to those used at Williamsport, and far too large to keep free from freezing in the winter. The location of the mill, pond, and lumber yard was reversed from normal. Instead of having the pond on the creek above the mill, it was below it. The lumber yard was located north of the mill. Coming down from the woods, the log trains passed the finished lumber and mill before reaching the pond. South of the pond was the tannery and bark stacks.

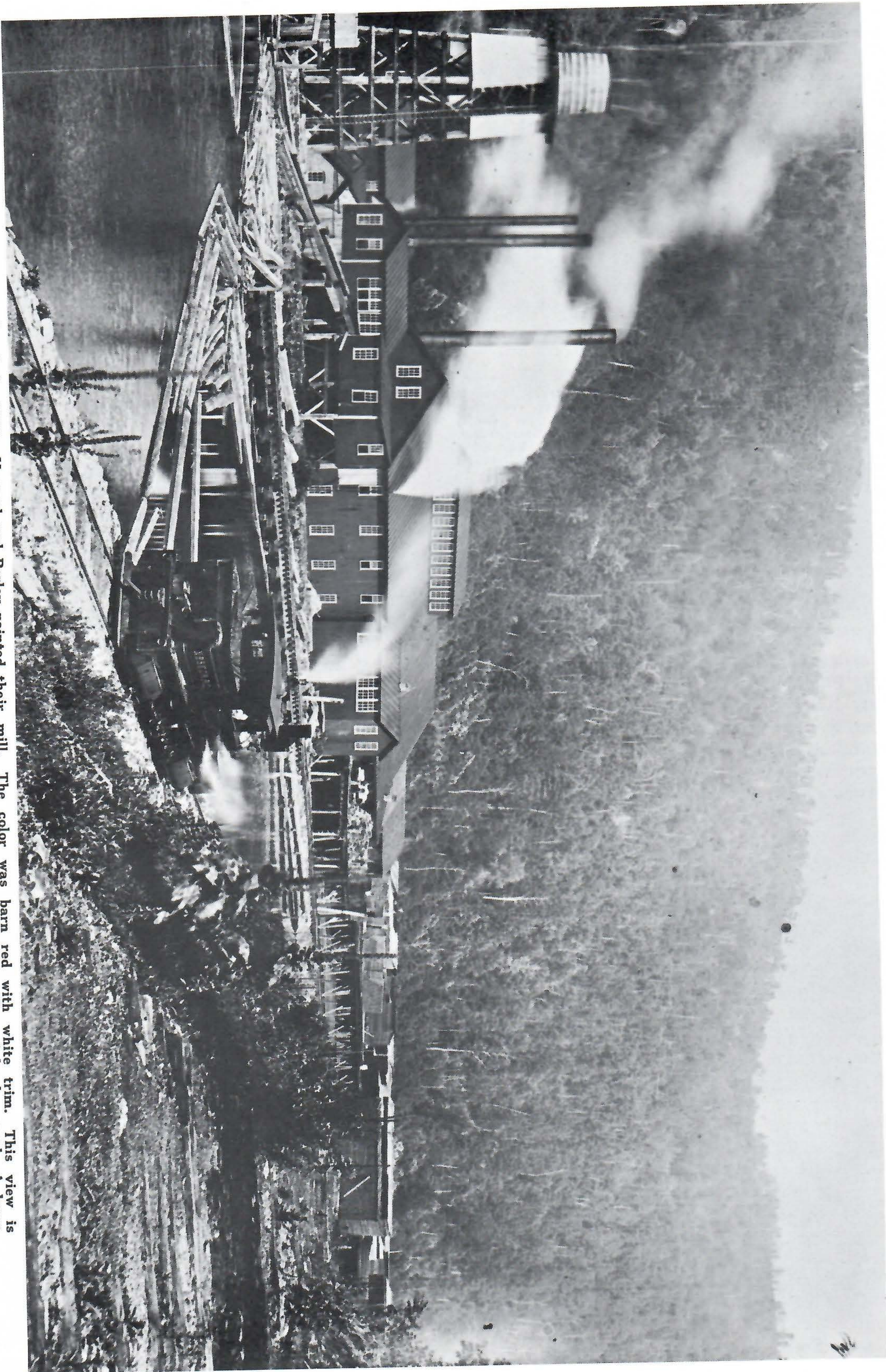
In keeping with Williamsport practice, Howard and Perley planned to operate their mill only from March to November. Few railroad mills closed in winter, this being an exception.

The eight month annual operation created a minor employment problem. Skilled local labor could not be retained, and would drift away. However, there were many from the former Williamsport mill willing to come up to Gleasonton and live in the boarding houses. As a result, during the life of the mill, most of the labor force came from Williamsport. Old photos show that it included several Negroes, a rarity in Pennsylvania saw mills.

There was little change during the 1890s. The only occurrence of note was the incorporation of the logging railroad on April 24, 1893 when it was given its name, North Bend and Kettle Creek R. R. The owners and officers were the same as for the other operations: William Howard was president, Irving W. Gleason, secretary, and Allen P. Perley, treasurer. Directors included these three men plus Charles and James Gleason and Frank Blackwell. The prestigious Poors Financial Manual also reported I. A. English as "Master Car Painter." As the twenty six freight cars were lettered, his job was to paint, "N. B. & K. C. R. R." on them. Why this merited inclusion in Poors is unknown, nor are his other duties known.

The mid nineties are clearly remembered by Albert Benschaw of Gleasonton. Now in his nineties, Mr. Benschaw worked on the mill pond for Howard and Perley in 1895 and 1896. He remembered that the mill hands all came from Williamsport, but that the train crews were local people. The Williamsporters lived at the two hotels and boarding houses at Gleasonton and by the mill.

Because neither Howard nor Perley were residents at Gleasonton, a series of different contractors were hired to run the mill. John Miller was the first. During the two years Mr. Benschaw was employed, Joe Pieanou was



Unlike most saw mills of the 1890s, Howard and Perley painted their mill. The color was barn red with white trim. This view is looking north. The locomotive is No. 2; the year is 1895. Today there is little evidence of the pond, mill, and lumber yard. A large, level field identifies the location.

in charge. He ran it four or five years. Chris Sewald ran it later. Frank Blackwell was in charge of the railroad and purchased all the locomotives. He was also the timber jobber for the life of the mill. William Howard's son, Sam, worked in the office, and during the final years was placed in charge.

Mr. Benshaw recalled that the highest cut was 241,000 feet in ten hours. This is about double the normal rating as mentioned in the Third Annual Report of the Department of Agriculture. This report, published in 1897, is believed accurate with its brief summary of the operation:

"F. A. Blackwell runs two trains of twenty cars to the mill daily. Each car contains 3,000 feet. In addition, four cars of hemlock pulp (tops of trees too small for the mill) are shipped daily to the paper mill at Lock Haven. The mill cuts 123,000 feet daily, one shift, but has a capacity of 220,000 if operated two shifts. It is fifty feet by one hundred thirty feet long. Fifty eight men work in the mill, and sixteen men work in the yard piling lumber and loading cars. 93% of the lumber is hemlock and 7% is hardwood. There is a band saw, a circular saw, an edger, slasher, and trimmer."

Mr. Benshaw also thought they had a gang saw. The accuracy of his memory is supported by a May 17, 1895 Renovo newspaper article that stated that the mill cut 197,537 feet in ten hours the previous Friday using a band, a circular, and a gang saw. Most logs went to the band saw, but the largest ones went to the circular saw.

With different men each year working in the mill and coming from Williamsport, their names have unfortunately long since been forgotten. The crews of the trains, being largely local people, are remembered. Don Kline was an engineeer. Jack Welch was a brakeman, but was killed while making a coupling by a long log on the car he didn't notice. Mr. Benshaw also knew of one other fatality. The man's name was Myers, and he slipped and fell between moving cars. He was the son-in-law of Wash Norris with whom Benshaw worked.

Other men on the trains included Sam Welch and Lee Rankin, who each ran a log loader, and Luther McQuarrie, who at first ran a locomotive and later was a loaderman. Milford Koons was a loaderman. Jimmy Quick and Jim Newberry were brakemen and tongmen. Tommy Fye was conductor of the passenger train, and Sam Ramsey had one of the log trains.

Two other former employees are also still alive. Charlie Hemmersly worked in the lath mill, which used the slashings from the trimmer, and John Poletto worked on the section gang laying track.

Mr. Poletto gave a good description of the life of the track gangs that built the railroads. It was all pick and shovel work. No labor saving devices were available to dig the deep cuts and build up the embankments. He was only a boy of ten when he started in 1898 carrying water to the section men. At the time they were in the Lebo country. "As a water boy I carried water to the men. I couldn't get it out of the creek; I had to get it from a spring. Sometimes the spring was close by, but sometimes it might be a quarter mile away. Sometimes it was up on the side of the mountain, and I had

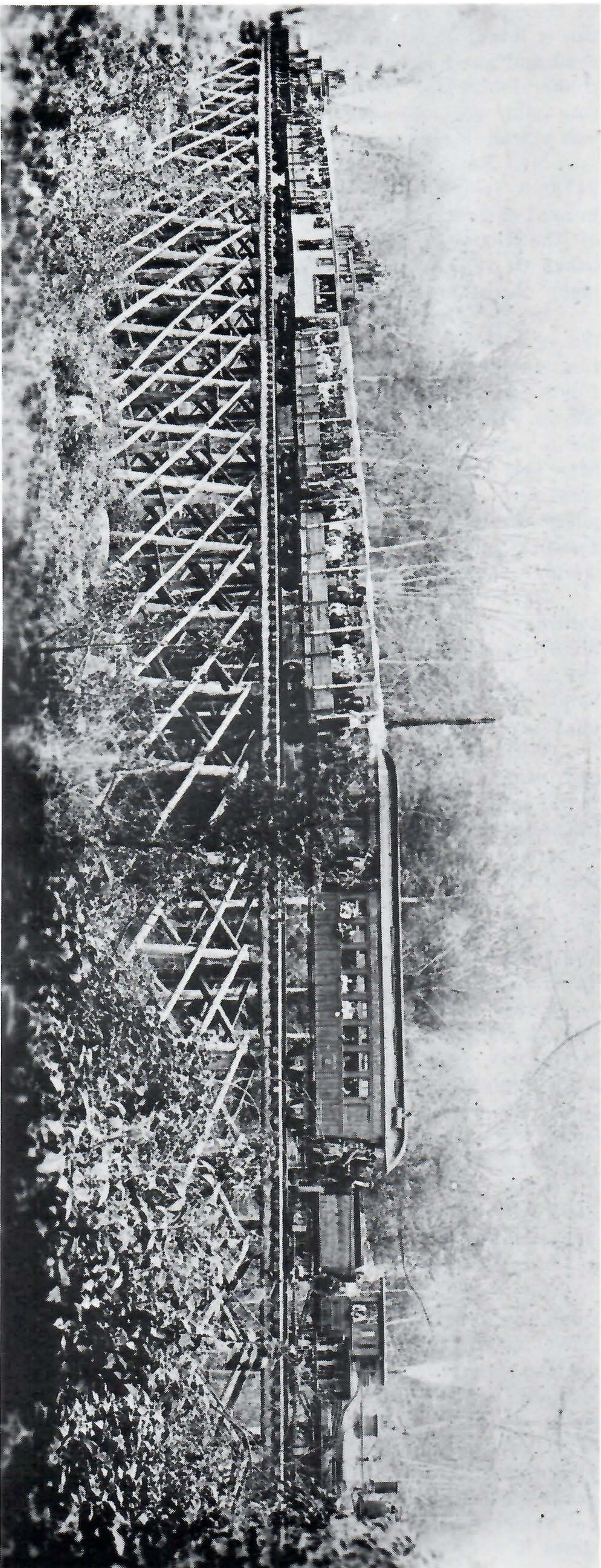
to climb up to it. Other times the railroad was up on the side of the mountain, and the spring was below. In hot weather the men would be hollering to me all the time to get more water. There were about thirty men. I was the only boy, and I lived with them at the camp. I was paid 50¢ a day, but they charged me 25¢ for board. During the winter when we couldn't work on the track, the gang cut paperwood and peeled bark. I worked the same hours as all the men, and it wasn't eight hours in those days."

"Anthony Greico had the railroad contract, and I worked for him. Up in the Black Forest, where I first worked, the hemlock was so thick that you thought it was getting dark early when you walked thru it even though the sun was shining, and it was the middle of the day. You walked on nothing but hemlock needles. After we finished up there, we went over to Greenlick and laid track on both branches there. We finished in 1902."

"The only big excitement we had was during the big fire. It started in the Big Spring area. My gang was told to get on the passenger train and go over to it. Frank Head was the locomotive engineer and Joe Ruggles was the conductor. Ruggles later worked for the Good-years until he was killed at Wharton in an accident. George Jackson was the brakeman. He, too, was killed. He swung around a bark car to go up to the engine while the train was moving. His head hit a bark chute, and he fell under the wheels. I was the only person in the crew who could speak English, and so I told them what we were to do. We got our picks and shovels and took the train over to Big Springs where Russ Blackwell was. (He was the son of Frank Blackwell). He told me to tell Dominic to build a trench so they could make a back fire. He wanted to save the picnic ground there. We had a dance hall there where each year we had a picnic. We saved the dance hall, but our camp was burned up."

"We had to make a temporary camp for us to live. Greico decided to make camp buildings that could be moved. Blackwell had made a portable camp for his train crew that stayed up in the woods. Each camp building was about ten feet wide and twenty feet long. Each corner of the building had an anchor so that the log loader could lift it up and put it on a freight car for moving. Then the building would be moved two or three miles to another location. We used these buildings when making the new railroad tracks up on Greenlick and Little Greenlick. The train crew had four of them. One was for the cook, another for supplies, and two for the engine and train crew. When we built ours, we had eight or ten."

Neither Howard nor Perley maintained an office at the mill, but they made occasional visits. Those at North Bend who knew Howard do not remember him particularly favorably. Perley owned a large cottage at the mouth of Greenlick which he used as a retreat for hunting and fishing. On many Fridays, Mr. Benshaw remembered, the afternoon train from Williamsport had a special car on the end for Allen Perley and friends. The car was uncoupled, and one of the logging engines took it up to

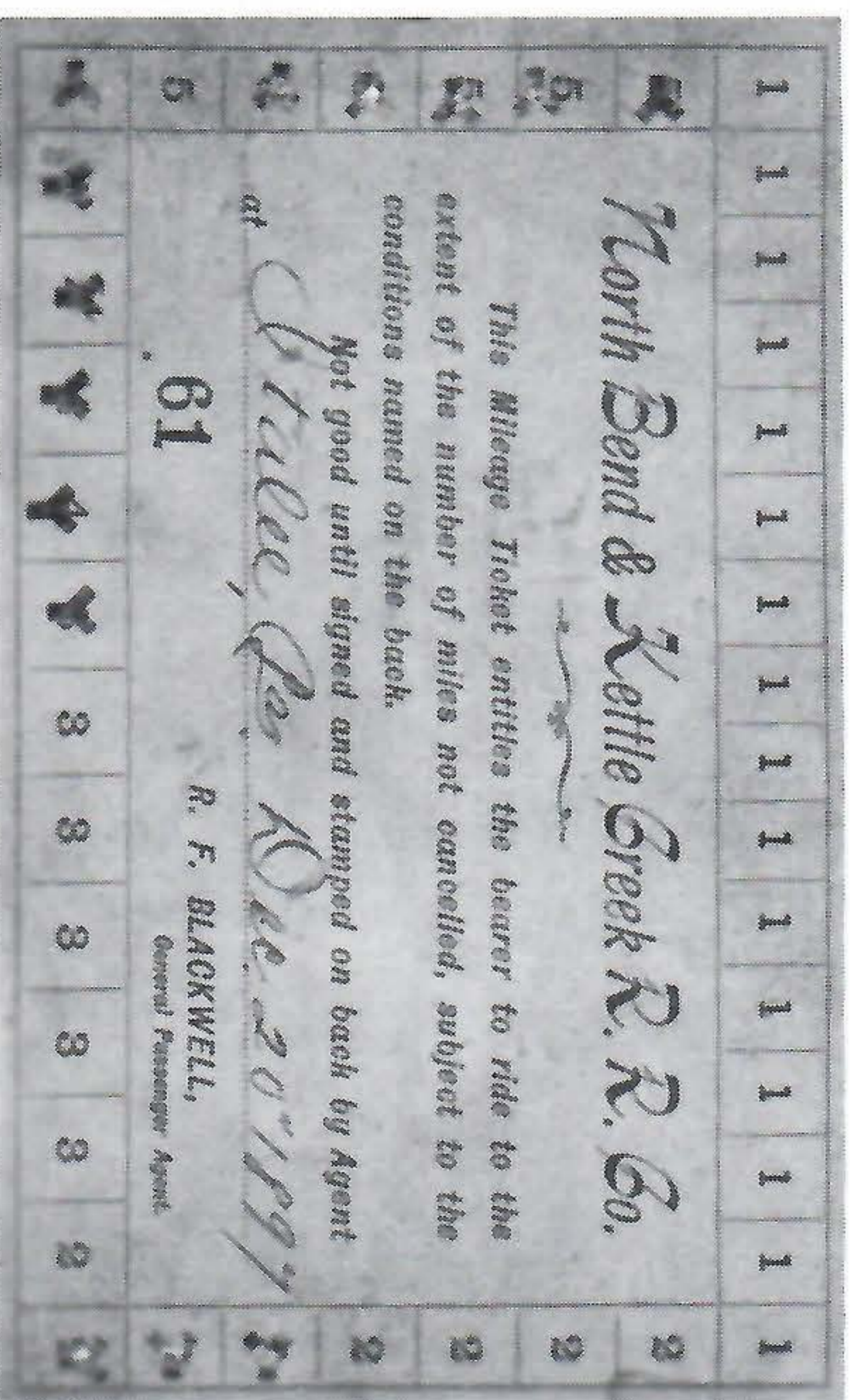


George Baker

Almost all available equipment was placed in service to handle two picnic trains needed for the 1898 outing to Big Spring Grove. Three flat cars have had sides, benches, and canopies installed. The excursion cost 10¢, and people from Renovo, North Bend, and Gleasonton took it each year. This picture was taken just before the train reached Big Spring one of the longest of the railroad's five trestles. The locations of the bents are still clearly defined in the ground today, seventy years after the trestle was removed. The locomotive at the head of the train is No. 1.



Incorporated logging railroads often issued passes to enable the owners to exchange their passes with other railroads on which they might want to travel. It is pretty certain that John Pott, district passenger agent for the Milwaukee Railroad, never wanted to travel over the N. B. & K. C.; but Blackwell wanted to travel to Idaho, and the Milwaukee could take him from Chicago to St. Paul.



Instead of trip tickets, the railroad issued mileage cards from which the conductor punched the appropriate number of miles. R. F. Blackwell was the son of Frank Blackwell. His duties as general passenger agent might have consumed an hour or two of his time each year — seeing that they didn't run out of tickets and sending the Renovo newspaper a timetable schedule.

Eve McQuarrie

his cottage for the weekend.

For the townspeople, the high spot of each summer was the big picnic train that ran up to the picnic ground at Big Spring. The first picnic may have been run on July 3, 1897; at least, that is the first mention of it found in the newspapers. The Renovo Record reported three hundred people went on the picnic to the grove. A dance pavillion had been set up and two bands, the Puritan Band of North Bend and the Citizens Band of Renovo, entertained. In the afternoon the train continued over toward Big Trestle Run to give a view of the countryside from the mountain top.

The following year, the picnic was more successful. Two trains were needed to carry more than four hundred persons.

Either in 1896 but more likely in 1897, Blackwell extended his railroad into the Black Forest. The area, still recalled by that name, had poorly defined limits. Generally it covered the area drained by Lebo Run, Big Spring Branch, and County Line Branch in Potter County and the very northeastern edge of Clinton County.

The extension into the Black Forest required the railroad to switchback over the hill from the headwaters of the Left Hand Branch of Young Womans Creek into Big Spring, which is a feeder stream for the Right Hand Branch of Young Womans Creek. At the top of the hill, a long, deep cut was made and then a shorter cut before the line descended to Big Spring. A second switchback here reversed the train. The route was well engineered and required only a three per cent grade.

The greater distance to haul logs from the Black Forest required a third locomotive. A large three truck Shay was purchased to work on the mountain. Engine No. 2, with its special gearing, handled the passenger train. For a brief time Blackwell tried using an old Pennsylvania Railroad passenger engine, but the mountain grade and light logging track was too much for the engine, and it was sent back.

From Big Spring, a further extension of the railroad toward Lebo country posed a problem. Howard and Perley did not own the land where Big Spring Run and Big Trestle Run flowed into Lebo Run. J. B. Weed and Company of Slate Run owned it. Although the N. B. & K. C. R. R. was incorporated and so could condemn land to secure a right of way, this was not done.



The cupola of the caboose is barely visible in this picture. Canvas covers the open sides of the car. In fair weather the curtains were removed, and there were benches for crew members and wood hicks to sit.

Possibly it was because the Slate Run Railroad was already located on the only readily suitable ground in the narrow valley, or possibly it was merely because Blackwell wanted to stay on their own land. At any rate, the railroad did a "bear went over the mountain and over the mountain and over the mountain" routine. The first took it to Big Spring. After crossing that run, the railroad reversed direction, climbed the side of the hill, passed thru another cut, and dropped down to Big Trestle Run. It crossed Big Trestle Run on a trestle, climbed the side of another hill, curved thru a long, twenty foot deep cut, and descended to Lebo Run. From here spur tracks ran north and south to reach the timber.

All totalled, log trains coming out of Lebo had to cross three mountains on three percent grades, and in so doing ran thru four major cuts and crossed five trestles. The track into Lebo was completed in 1897. Had they been able to build up the Right Hand Branch to Lebo, they would have saved eight miles and avoided all the cuts, hills, and trestles.

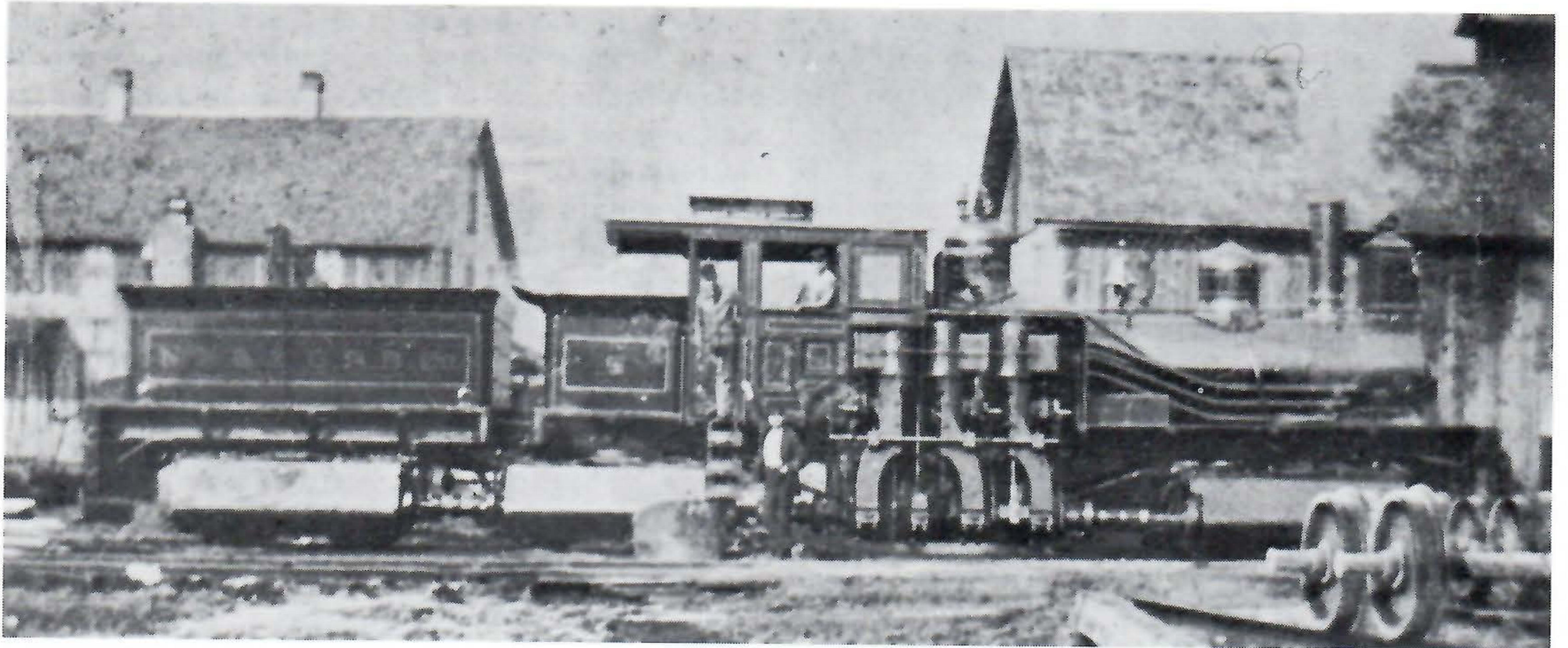
The daily load of forty cars of logs, the seasonal business of bark and pulpwood, and the passenger train on a twenty mile railroad was too much for three locomotives. Two additional three truck Shays were purchased in 1898.

Completion of the track to Lebo Run signalled the inauguration of passenger service to that point on March 29, 1897. Trains left Gleasonton at 5 and 11 in the morning and left Lebo at 7:05 a.m. and 1:15 p.m. On July 5th service was increased to three round trips by adding a late afternoon run. The forty miles round trip was made in three hours, an average speed of thirteen miles an hour.

Three round trips were operated only that year. By 1899 it was reduced to one trip to Lebo and a second run that went to Oleona Junction. From here the train proceeded up a logging branch to its end where a connection was made with a stage for Cross Fork. By 1901 the Lebo Run timber had been cut, and the railroad had been pulled up back to Big Spring. A single daily passenger train made the run which included the branch toward Cross Fork and the main line to Big Spring. The best timber was now gone. In 1899 a three mile line was built along the Right Hand Branch and into Laurelly Fork. Next year the railroad built five miles up Greenlick Run, and another three miles spur up Little Greenlick.

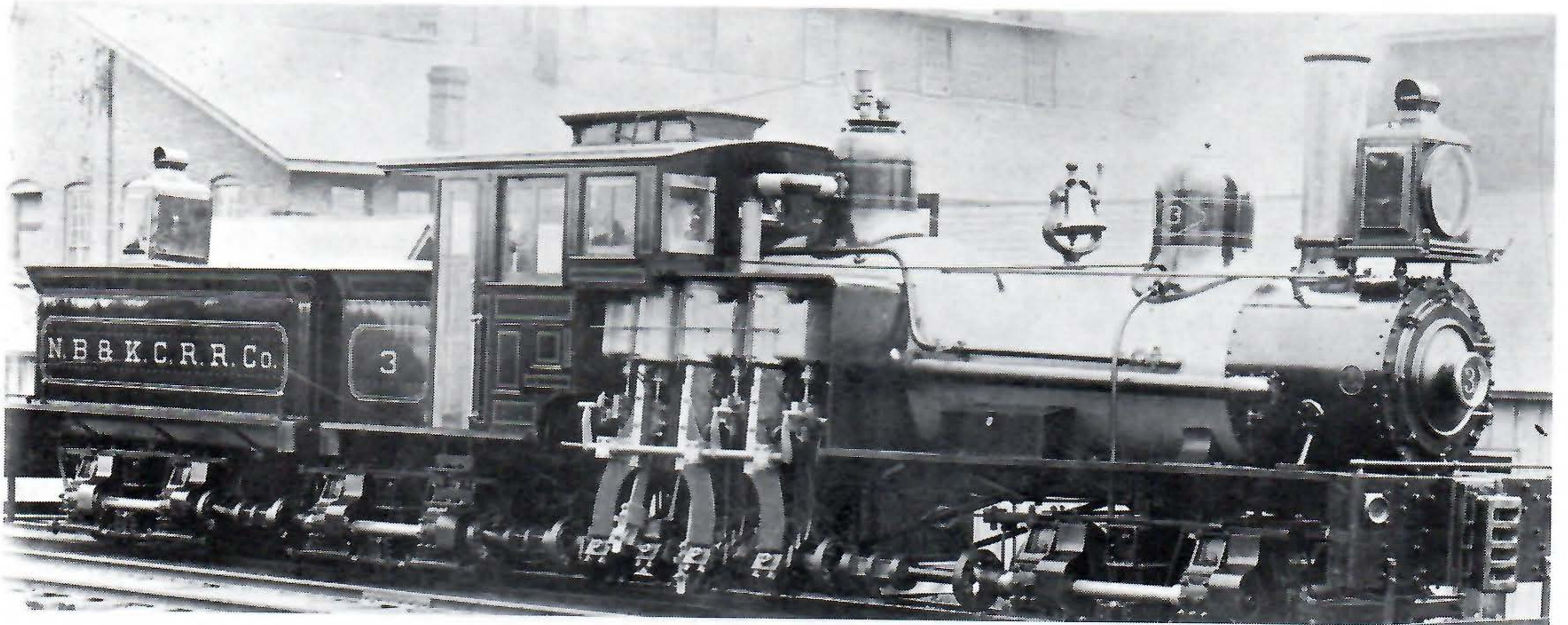
Until 1901 a stage connected the Pennsylvania trains at North Bend with the logging railroad's train at Gleasonton. The interchange of the two roads was about a half mile east of the North Bend depot, and the Pennsylvania prohibited the N. B. & K. C. running over their main line. In August, 1901 they relented, and for the next year the geared locomotive ran in and out of North Bend over the Pennsy's track,

Lumbering, however, was rapidly drawing to a close. On August 24, 1902 the mill closed for the remainder of the year. The Renovo newspaper reported that both the passenger and the freight trains would be suspended on that date. Only some odds and ends remained. The following year the mill opened April 2nd, later than usual,



Eve McQuarrie

Shay No. 5 was purchased second hand. The locomotive is an early three truck Shay as evidenced by the three steam pipes running alongside the boiler, but from whom the locomotive was purchased is unknown. Charlie Hemmerly remembered a Shay being bought from the St. Marys and Southwestern Railroad at St. Marys, and a snap shot photo found at North Bend shows the locomotive, but it is not the No. 5. What happened to the St. Marys' engine is unknown. It is not believed to have been used; at least not very long. No. 5 is remembered as being heavier than the other locomotives. It was kept in the Lebo country to pull the loaded log trains up and over the mountains. However, this photograph was made at the Italee shop.



With the extension of the railroad over the mountain into Big Spring, it was no longer possible for two little Shays to handle the forty cars of logs. No. 3 was added early in 1897, and was soon followed by two additional locomotives, No. 4, bought new, and No. 5, bought second hand. This builders photo was taken at Lima, Ohio.



After Howard and Perley completed their use of the railroad, the New York and Pennsylvania Company purchased it to bring out paperwood. They purchased a former New York elevated locomotive to bring out the carloads of wood which was shipped in box cars. Superintendent Oscar Knapp is in the center, and engineer Allen Keller is at the right.



Any hiker along the route of the old railroad can't help but be impressed by the deep and long cuts which were used to keep grades on the railroad to about 3%. This is the deepest of four cuts. On topographic maps it is part of the Hartman Trail at the top of the hill between the Left Branch of Young Womans Creek and Big Spring. The cut is a maximum of thirty feet deep on the right hand side and extends close to two hundred yards. As with the other cuts, it was made entirely by pick, shovel, and wheel barrow with a little black powder for breaking up the rocks. Today, seventy years after the track was removed, it would take only a few hours for a bulldozer to clean fallen rocks and dirt so that a track could be relaid. To give some idea of the relative size, Charles Morton looks at the rock outcropping. With the aid of his Jeep we traveled throughout the area that Howard and Perley logged, and hiked many miles along the old roadbed to reach the sites of the trestles and cuts that were located between Oleona Junction and Lebo Run.

but soon closed for most of the summer. Late in August it reopened and ran until November.

Whether the mill reopened in 1904 is questionable. The Renovo newspapers for that year were not preserved. Most of the railroad was torn up, but about twelve miles of it were sold to the New York and Pennsylvania Company to bring out paper wood for their Lock Haven mill. According to several persons, the railroad operated only two years. Oscar Knapp was in charge. Allen G. Keller ran the dinky locomotive, and Harry Sapp was his fireman and brakeman.

Long before the mill closing, Howard and Perley were seeking new timber. Perley became interested in Cambria County. He hired Bill Webb, who had worked for Blackwell, to oversee part of the operation. William Howard turned his interests to Northern Idaho, and with Frank Blackwell made plans to lumber in the Coeur d'Alene mountains.

The William Howard Land and Lumber Company was incorporated January 4, 1901 by Howard, Perley,

Blackwell, Irving Gleason, and several Idaho persons. Howard, however, never lived to see it develop. He died only two months later on March 5th. Perley lost interest in Idaho, but Blackwell believed the future lay there. With operations almost concluded at Gleason, he moved to Idaho in 1902, and became highly successful. In 1906 the holdings of Blackwell and the William Howard Land and Lumber Company totalled 100,000 acres. Without cutting a log, Blackwell sold it to the Monarch Timber Company; the Howard Company never owned or operated a mill.

Blackwell continued his Idaho work. In 1909 he formed the Blackwell Lumber Company and later the Panhandle Lumber Company. He was the principal force behind the organization and building of two railroads, the Coeur d'Alene and Spokane Railroad and the Idaho and Washington Northern Railroad. He was still active at the time of his death in 1922 at the age of seventy. The story of his Idaho work is told in "White Pine: King of Many Waters", by C. C. Strong and C. S. Webb.