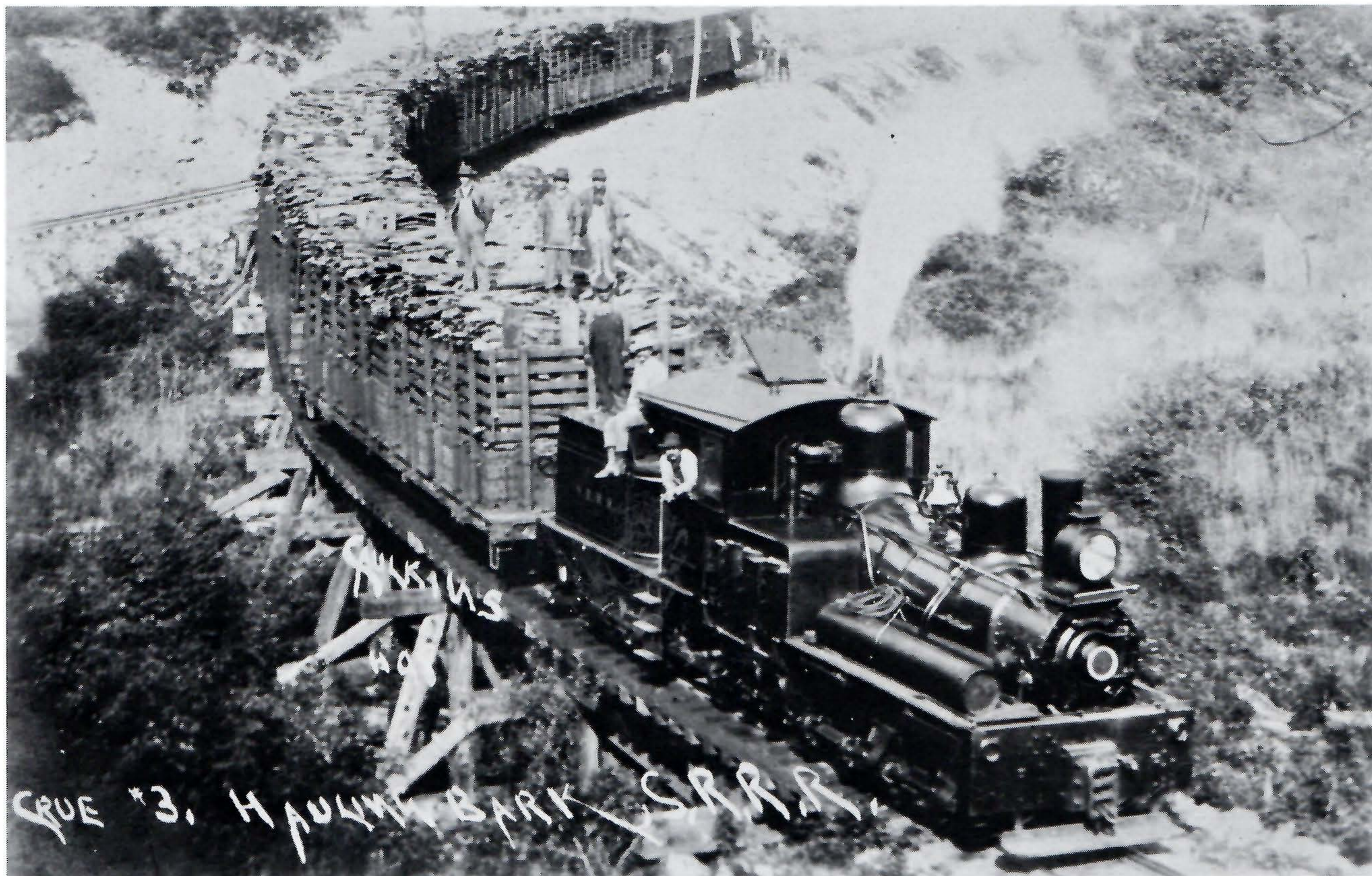


CHAPTER 4.6

SLATE RUN - J. B. WEED AND COMPANY



Marshall Welch

No. 3 brings six cars of hemlock bark over a small trestle. On the rear is the coach used for carrying passengers.

Slate Run — birthplace of a new era of lumbering on the Susquehanna watershed. Logs will be brought down to Pine Creek by rail, but will go no further. No Williamsport mill will ever see them; a mill will be built on Pine Creek. The owners of the timber, the tannery firm of James B. Weed and Company of Binghamton, N. Y., will cut their own logs. Again, this will break tradition — a tannery company sawing their own logs into lumber.

In 1881 Weed purchased about nine thousand acres of very inaccessible timber along the eastern boundary of Stewartstown Township in Potter County. Later an adjacent four thousand acres in the northeast corner of Clinton County would be added. The timber was in the Black Forest, which had one of the densest growths of hemlock in Pennsylvania. No sunlight filtered thru the trees; no underbrush grew below.

Several years passed while the owners pondered on how they would get their bark. In 1881 log railroads were scarce and not well proven. There was little or no information on standards of construction, costs, mainten-

ance, and so on. However, it was eight miles from the edge of the tract to the nearest railroad. No other alternative seemed feasible, and so in 1884 a decision was made to build a railroad. A saw mill site at Slate Run was also purchased, and in 1885 the route of the railroad was located. The shortest route appeared to be the best: build up Slate Run to Manor Fork Run and then along it over the mountain and down into County Line Branch, a distance of eight miles. It would be the first, full fledged logging railroad east of Elk County. Mensch and Lowenstein's steam railroad at Gleasonton a decade earlier was hardly more than a horse tram.

The mill was located between the New York Central Railroad tracks and Pine Creek across from the mouth of Slate Run. In later years the smallness of the site proved a real problem. To the north was the railroad bridge and mill pond; to the south were homes. After the first mill burned, the second mill was much larger. Lumber storage became inadequate.

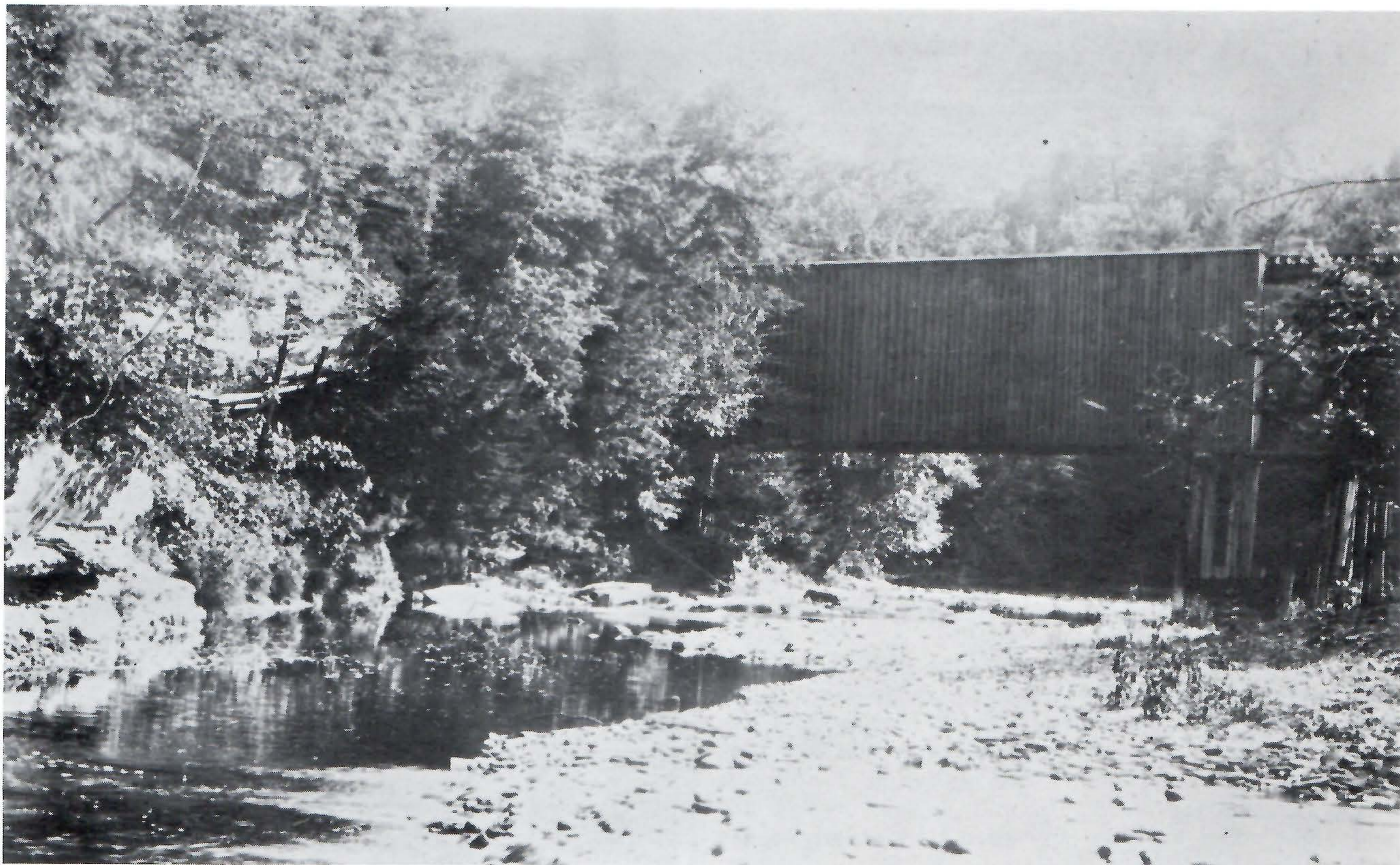
A 36" gauge railroad was selected, probably to reduce track costs. Narrow gauge railroads were popular



The Slate Run mill. The covered bridge carried the Slate Run Railroad over Pine Creek. The road bridge at the left is still in use. The three tracks of the New York Central are now one, and the lumber mill yard is now an overgrown field. The bridge was one of three logging railroad covered bridges in Pennsylvania. The others were at Cammal and Hillsgrove, Sullivan County on the Susquehanna and Eagles Mere R. R.



The south end of Slate Run. Several of the homes facing towards the railroad track remain, but the others are gone. Highway 414 now cuts thru town about midway between the railroad and the large barn.



Frank Carlton

The first bridge over Slate Run, approximately a half mile above the mill. The railroad track runs on top of the truss bridge which has had its sides inclosed.

at the time for local railroads then being built throughout the United States. The first locomotive, a twenty five ton Shay, No. 147, arrived in April, 1886. It was only the fourth Shay locomotive purchased for a Pennsylvania logging railroad.

Leaving the village, the railroad crossed Pine Creek thru a long covered bridge and ran along the side of the hill to the north of Slate Run for about a half mile. Here, it crossed to the south side on a high bridge. Another mile and a half further along, the railroad crossed again, this time on a high trestle. Along Manor Fork the grade was particularly steep: seven to eight percent for almost two miles. Fortunately, only empty cars were taken up.

The original mill reportedly could cut sixty thousand feet a day. The single locomotive and crew worked long days, everyday to bring about twenty five cars of logs out of County Line Branch and down Manor Fork where extreme caution was necessary because of the steepness of the grade. Two round trips totalling about fifty miles were needed. During bark season, a second crew took the engine out at night to bring in the bark.

At the same time that trains were bringing logs down Slate Run, other lumbermen were splashing logs out of Slate Run and Manor Fork. These logs, belonging to the Pennsylvania Joint Land and Lumber Company, went to Williamsport. Today we wonder if there may have been some friendly (?) rivalry between the rail-

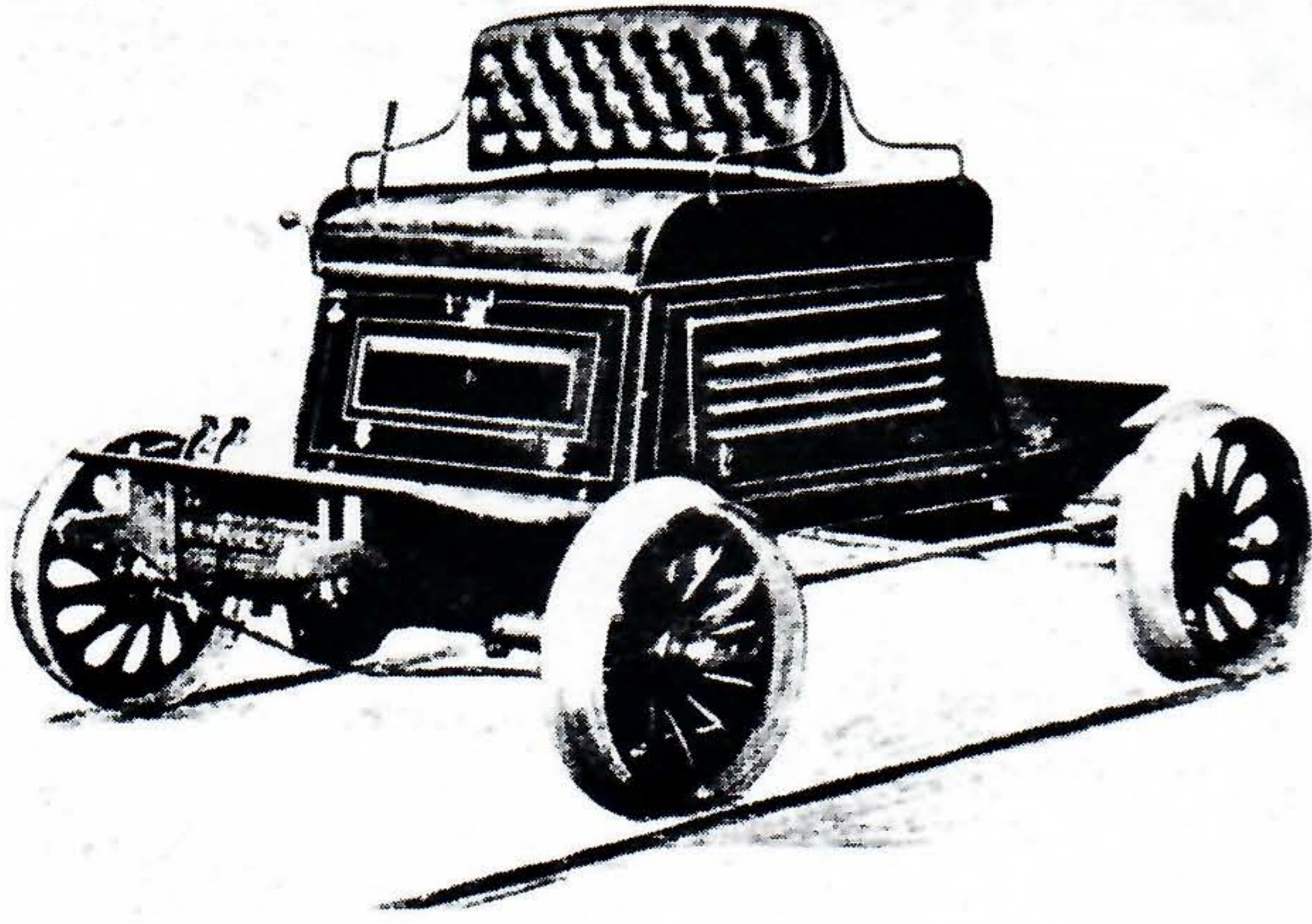
road men and the wood hicks working their logs down the runs?

By 1890 County Line Branch had been cut and the railroad was growing longer and longer. A second locomotive was needed. Another Shay, ten tons heavier, was purchased. By this time the railroad owned fifty six cars. The railroad line in the Black Forest came down County Line Branch into Young Womans Creek. From this stream it ran up Wilcox Run, followed Baldwin Branch as far as the Lycoming County line, and went up Lebo Run as far as the timber of Howard and Perley Lumber Company of North Bend. Proceeding west from the mouth of Lebo Run it ascended the mountain above Bull Run. A forestry road now uses the route, which included a switchback. Weed owned the land in the headwaters of Bull Run.

The Slate Run Railroad was incorporated to run to North Bend, and some Poors Manuals list it reaching there, but it never came closer than Bull Run.

In January, 1893 the saw mill burned. Only heroic efforts prevented gusty winds from burning down the entire town, as burning embers scattered throughout the village.

The new mill was completed in June. A band saw combined with a big gang saw increased the capacity to 100,000 feet daily. The year round average, when operating only during the day, was 80,000 feet, thereby



Marshall Welch

In 1904 Oldsmobile came out with an inspection rail car. One of these cars was used on the Slate Run Railroad to transport general superintendent H. P. Welch and woods superintendent Frank Hammond to and from the Black Forest.

making it one of the fifteen or so largest mills in Pennsylvania.

With the exception of a small hub factory, the saw mill was the only significant industry in Slate Run. Basically, it was a one industry town. Today only one person is known to be living who worked at the mill. His name is Keith Hammond, and his father, Frank, was woods foreman for years. The mill, he said, worked day and night when business was good, but otherwise ran only during the day.

Mr. Hammond worked at the mill as a log scaler. Working with him was Charlie Gumper, who later went on the train and was killed in an accident. Charlie Halford is remembered as being the mill foreman. He related a number of interesting sidelights worthy of inclusion:

"My father had an early automobile on which he put flanged wheels and ran over the narrow gauge. The doctor in town, W. E. Delaney, had a three wheeled bicycle with flanged wheels which he pumped to go out to the woods to reach injured wood hicks.

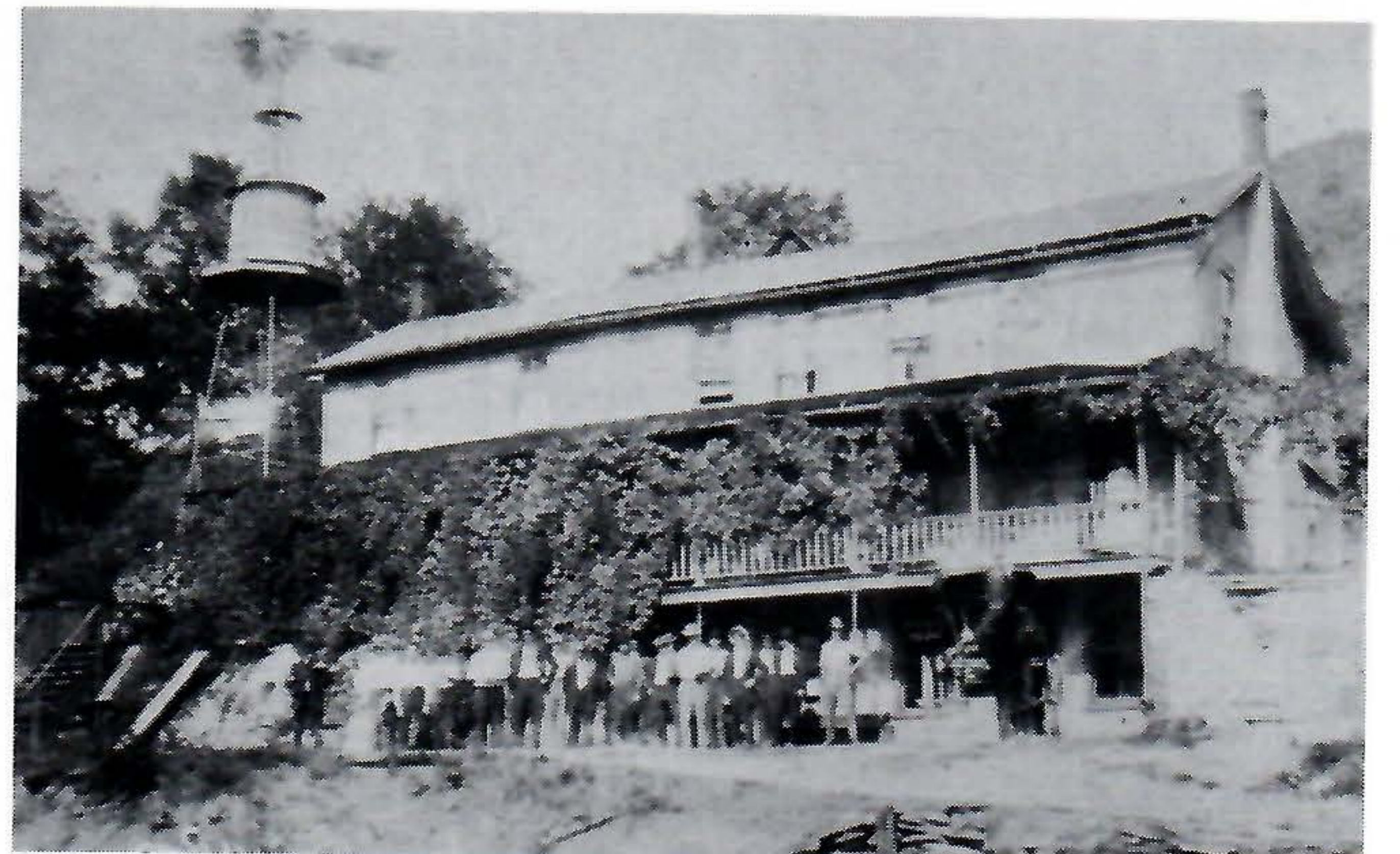
"The Weeds had a big house at Slate Run, but Mr. Weed only came down once or twice a year. His son, Lew, used to come often.

"I can remember the train having several runaways. Then they started to put the engine at the rear of the train coming down the mountain. If the train started to run away, they would uncouple the cars and let them go. The engine could be stopped, and so it would not be damaged.

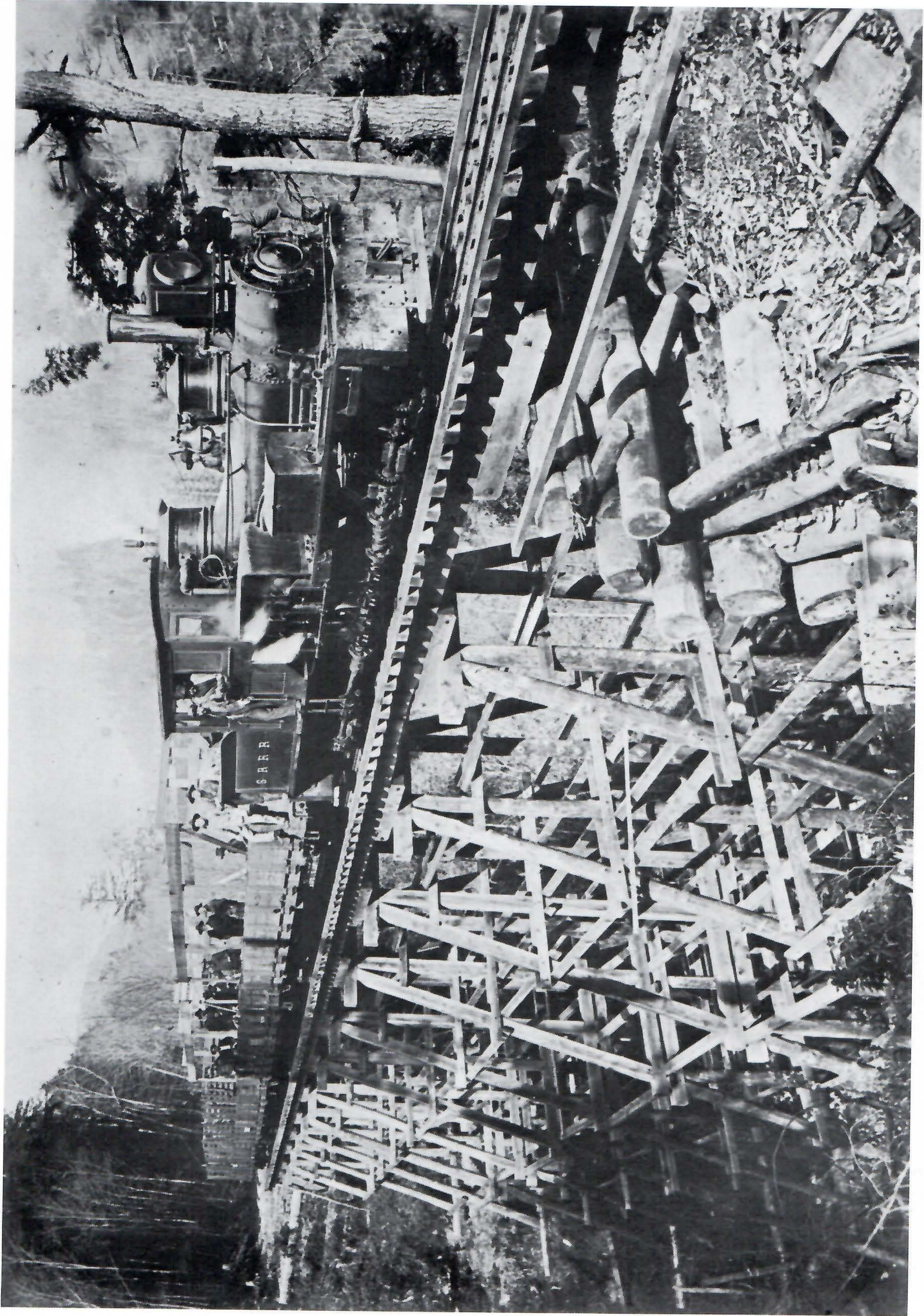
The practice of the locomotive being on the up side of a loaded log train was unique to the Slate Run Railroad. No other log railroad is known to have operated this way although possibly there may have been a few. On one occasion, about four miles up Slate Run, the coupler broke on a log car near the locomotive. Several wood hicks working on the hillside down a mile or two near a sharp curve were treated to the grandest spectacle of their lives in the ensuing pile up of log cars and logs. In the words of an eye witness, James Clark, "you should have seen the stuff fly — logs, cars, and bark."



The Slate Run Railroad used a McGiffert log loader. By using the loader and side stakes, the narrow gauge freight cars held as much or more than standard gauge cars without stakes. The use of stakes was not common in Pennsylvania. Neither was the use of a McGiffert log loader. Only one other is known in the state, and this may be the same one, second owner. Watson Lands and Lumber Company at Mayburg, Forest County used one in the nineties.



Cohick's Hotel, one of three in town. A windmill-driven pump and a water tank gave the hotel running water.



The first trestle over Slate Run was more than sixty feet high. No. 1 pauses with four standard gauge cars.



Welch's camp, a collection of shacks and buildings at an unknown location, was a typical larger camp.

Harry Carson



The supply train arrives at camp. In the gondola are sacks of potatoes and flour and meat. The camp is unknown; the locomotive No. 2.

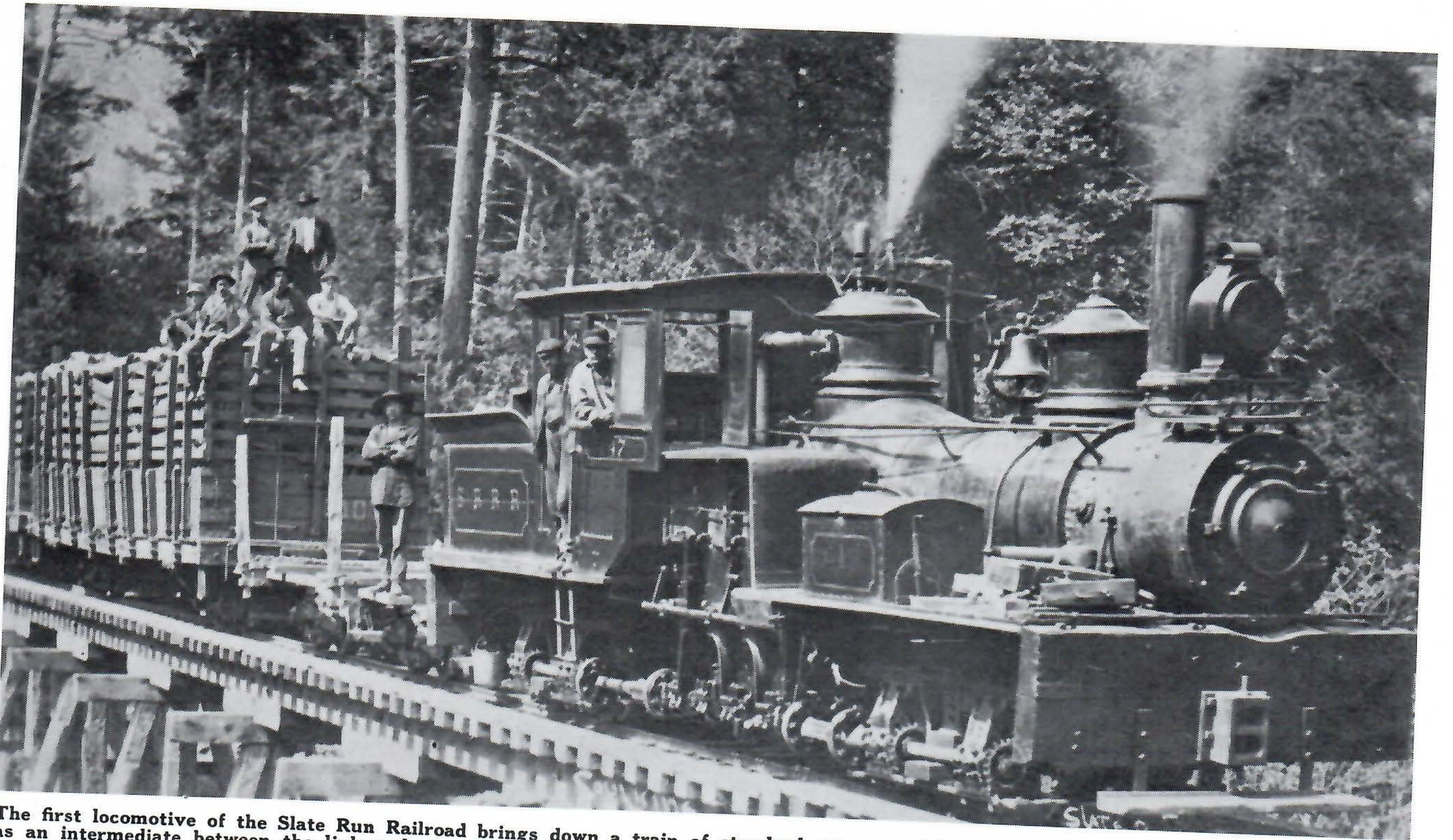
James A. Zerfing



Ready for dinner. Note the cheese cloth above the tables to catch dirt sifting down from upstairs. The room behind with the rocking chair is the lobby, used for lounging after dinner. Harry Carson



The shop crew maintained the railroad equipment and ran the switch engine that changed the cars of bark from standard to narrow gauge and back again. James Carleton
 Front row, left to right: Ike Bull, foreman; John Tomb, shop hand; Harry Halford, engineer of No. 51; Video Vadero, hostler; Paul Stevens; Fred Wessell; and George Reibe, blacksmith. Back row: Ralph Kilborne; unknown; George Carleton; Mel Dyer (boy); C. H. Stevens; Billy Graham; unknown.



The first locomotive of the Slate Run Railroad brings down a train of standard gauge gondola cars of bark. A narrow gauge log car acts as an intermediate between the link and pin coupler of No. 1 and the knuckle coupler on the gondolas. Pat Iddings is the engineer and Emery Tomb is at the rear of the tender.

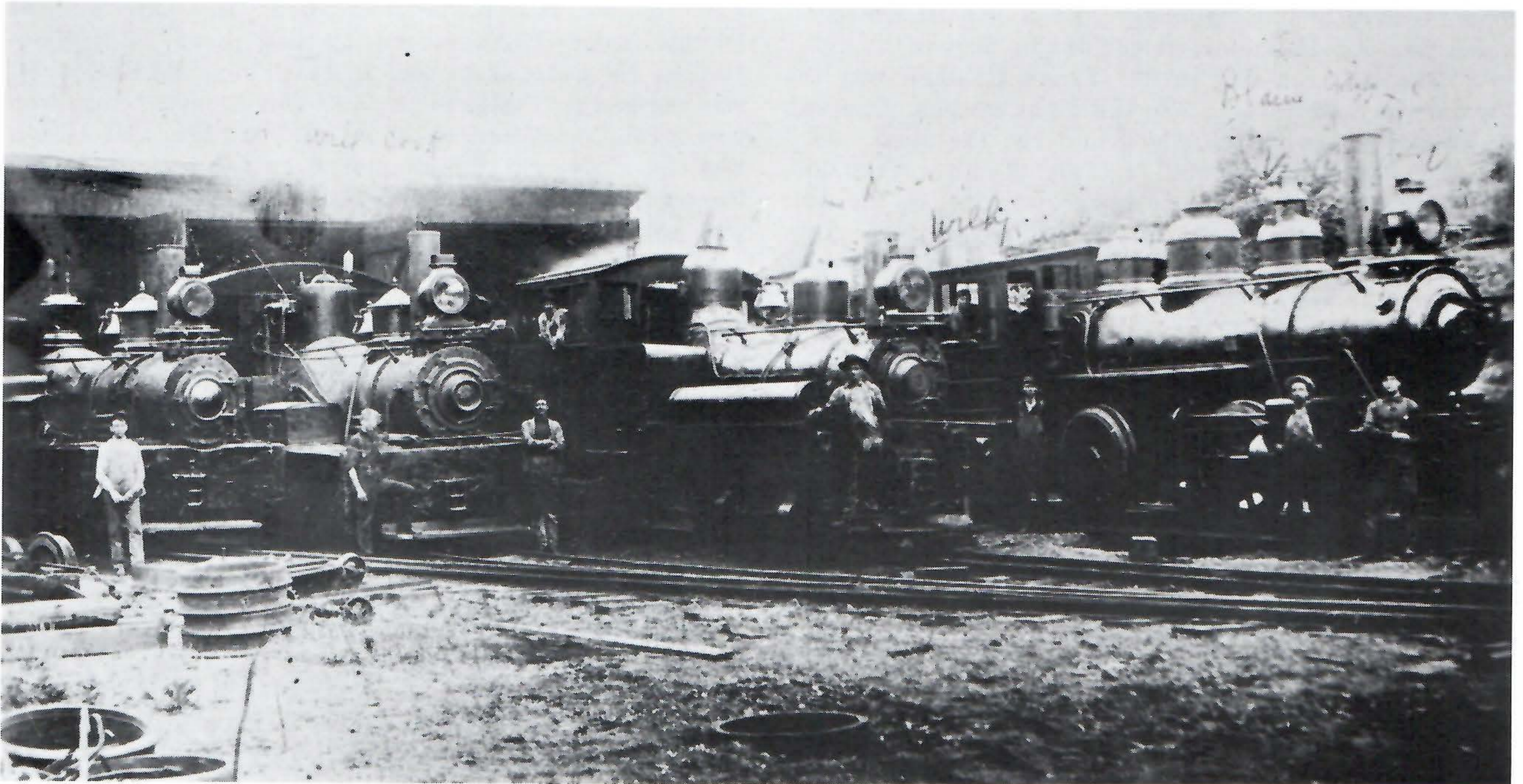


Locomotive No. 2 weighed ten tons more than No. 1, and is shown at the engine house. From right to left are: Charley Russell, engineer; George Hawk, brakeman; unknown; unknown; "Roaring Jack" Reese, fireman in the cab; Jim Riff, Ben French, and Charley Gumper, all car shop employees. George Tomb



James Carlton

Now converted to standard gauge and with air brakes and knuckle couplers, No. 3 switches the bark and lumber cars at the south end of the mill. No. 3 was no longer needed in the woods because lumbering was being done on the headwaters of Slate Run which was much closer to the mill than the Black Forest. No. 51 was returned to the New York Central and No. 3, bought in 1904, was converted for use as the mill switcher.



The four stall engine house sees all four engines, in numerical order, side by side. An 0-4-0 switch engine is rarely thought of as being a large engine, but in comparison with the twenty five and thirty five ton Shays, the switcher dwarfs them. The track on which No. 51 stands had three rails for both gauges of engines. Note that the steam dome of No. 2 has been changed from earlier photos.

| SLATE RUN RAILROAD. | |
|--|--|
| E. C. RODMAN, Superintendent, Slate Run, Pa. | |
| Leave Slate Run ¹ for Minor Forks (4 miles); Summit (6 miles); Maynes (8 miles); Black Forrest (9 miles); Robinson (11 miles); West End (17 miles) 6 00, 7 00 a.m., 12 05 noon. Returning, leave West End 8 35 a.m., 2 40, 9 35 p.m., arriving at Slate Run 4 30, 11 15 a.m., 5 15 p.m. | |
| STANDARD—Eastern time. November, 1890. | |
| CONNECTION.— ¹ With Fall Brook Ry. | |

George Hart
The August, 1895 Official Railway Guide was still listing this 1890 train schedule. Whether trains ran anywhere close to the schedule is anyone's guess. Note the overnight service from the west end: leave at 9:35 p.m. and arrive at Slate Run at 4:30 a.m.

Actually, however, there were few runaways which resulted in wrecks during the twenty five years that the railroad operated.

Another person who remembers the lumber days is George Tomb, a farmer at Slate Run all his life. He added the names of a few employees and recalled No. 51, the New York Central switch engine which the Weed people ran. "Blaine Crotchly was the engineer on it. They used it to switch the loaded cars of lumber and to change the wheels under the bark cars from standard to narrow gauge and back. Bill Yardley was the yard foreman, and later Ernie Wolverton was. My cousin, Bill "Smokey" Tomb was a fireman for Reece, the engineer. Frank McConnell was the last sawyer. Before him Bill Calhoon was a sawyer. He later worked for the Good-years at Galeton as did my cousin."

Further insight into Slate Run was given by James Carleton, whose father, Charles, was a night watchman: "My father was hired to night watch because of robberies at the company store of the payroll and goods. Even though people lived above the store, it had been broken into several times. While he was there, he discovered an attempted robbery and a fire in excelsior, which was put out before it got out of control.

"The mill ran two shifts. Frank Callihan was the day sawyer, and a Tomb was the night sawyer. One day they made a bet to see who could cut the most. As I recall, Callihan cut 75,000 feet and Tomb cut 90,000.

"Other men, who I remember working in the mill were Tom Lette, Earl Perkins, and Sam Sweigert. Tom Delaney pulled the logs out of the pond onto the jack slip. The car repair shop had Charlie and Paul Stevens and Steve Tomb. Paul Stevens was also a switchman on the No. 51 with Mel Dyer. When they weren't switching, they worked in the shop."

Herman P. Welch was general superintendent at Slate Run for a number of years. His son, Marshall, grew up there, collected many photographs, and narrated his experiences, a portion of which follows:

"My father replaced William E. Rollins as superintendent, and P. S. McClure was my father's timekeeper. We stayed at Slate Run until about 1909 when father went with the Central Pennsylvania Lumber Company. The company office and the store were in the same building. A. H. Harris was the wood's superintendent, and his assistant was Al Brackman. Steve McInroy was the bookkeeper, and a man named Bell managed the store.

"The saw mill had a fifty six bladed gang saw which could cut fifty six one inch boards at a time. The gang



Marshall Welch
Out of the log slide and into a tree went this errant log.

saw had a vertical steam engine that ran a crank shaft which operated the saw up and down. It cut very slowly. Each of the saw blades was about 42" long and fit in the frame which moved up and down. Ed Westcott ran the gang, and I used to watch him. Ed McConnell was the sawyer. Also in the mill was Emery Tomb, who was a deaf mute and setter on the carriage. Joe Hilton was the millwright, Ed Clayton fired the boilers, Shorty Garreau operated the planing mill, and Ernie Wolverton was yard boss.



A relic of the lumber era is the Slate Run post office. The little six by eight foot office, situated in the corner of Wolf's general store, sees only a few letters each day for the sixteen box holders.



Nelson Caulkins
 Loading logs without a loader. This is an exceptionally good picture of the method of hand loading logs. After rolling logs like these all day up onto cars, the wood hick was ready for dinner and bed.



Marshall Welch
 A load of bark is weighed before being moved to the railroad. Some bark was weighed in the woods, some was weighed on railroad track scales, and probably some wasn't weighed, but was measured. Contracts were to deliver a specific number of cords, not tons.



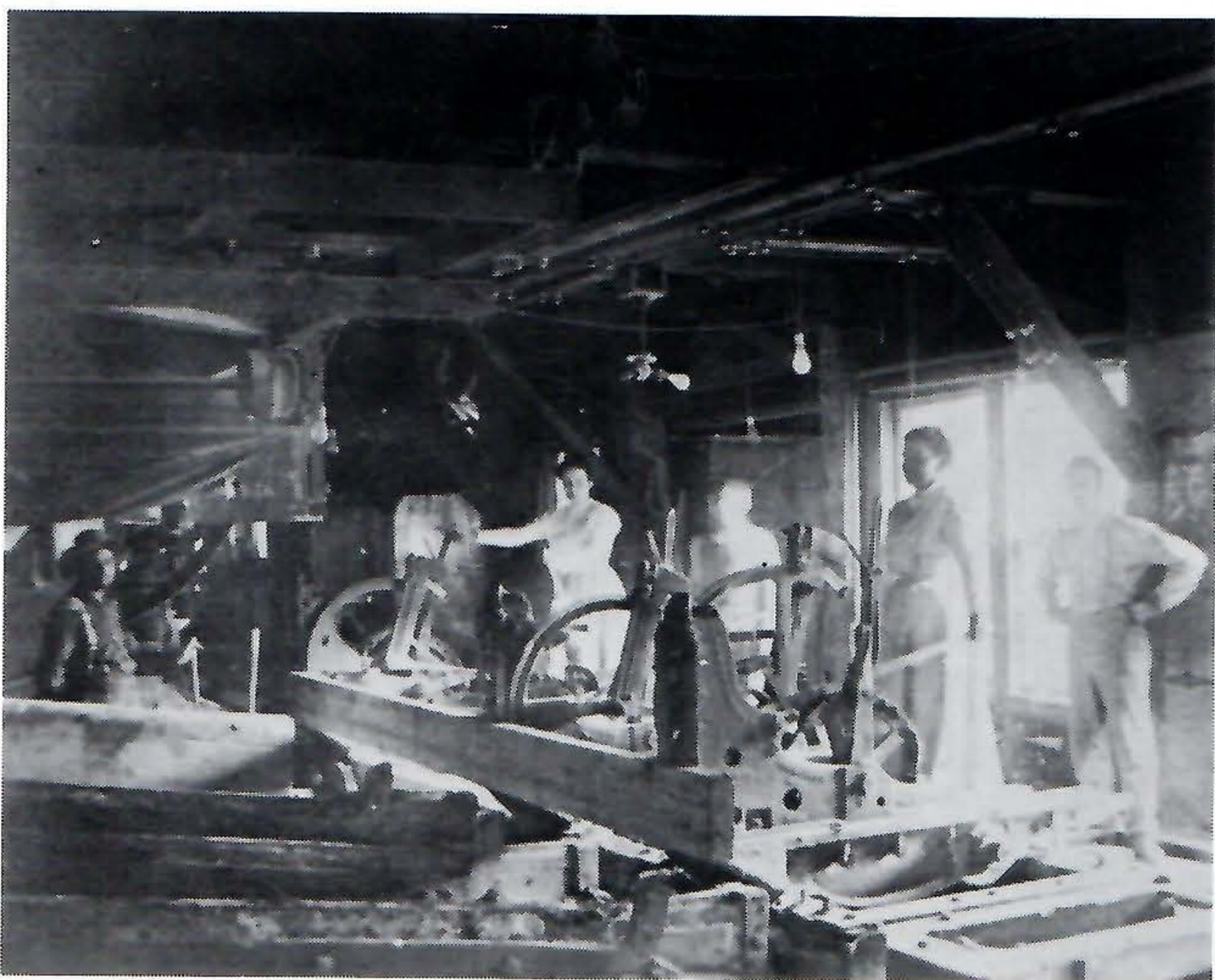
River Pollution! Slab wood waits for high water to wash it down stream. A dam, barely visible, funnelled water thru a flume adjacent to the mill to carry the wood away from the chute. At the right are bundles of lath wood. Back at the mill, beside the slab wood chute, can be seen a gondola freight car being loaded with lath. Marshall Welch



The mill pond was adjacent to Pine Creek. The log train came down Slate Run, circled part way around the face of the mountain, plunged into the covered bridge, and stopped on the other side where the logs were unloaded, two cars at a time. The locomotive is No. 2. The covered bridge had two piers in the creek, and was the longest railroad covered bridge in the state at that time.



No. 2 brings twelve cars of logs down Slate Run. Trains of twenty or more cars were not unusual where there were no hills to climb. The only identified person is Jack Herritt, alongside the boiler.



James Carlton
The final cut of the last log has just been made. The log was cut by Mrs. Allie Harris, wife of the superintendent, and Mrs. Charles Carleton. Frank McConnell, sawyer, stands at the left. Behind the ladies are George McConnell and Jim Hawk, who until the last log, had been the dogger and setter.

"The slab wood was not burned. Rather it was dumped into Pine Creek. They built a dam across the creek and a sluice way to wash the wood partly down stream out of the way, and then the spring floods would carry it all away. Later a law was passed that prevented them from doing that. Then the trimmings were cut into twelve inch lengths and shipped to New York for stove wood. We never had a kindling wood factory here, but we did have a lath mill.

"I wish I had a photograph of the rig they used to change the wheels under the bark cars. They took the standard gauge cars into the woods by changing to narrow gauge trucks. To make this change they had a unique system. They had a frame which ran on an inclined track. As you pulled the frame, it moved up. Between the frame were narrow and standard gauge tracks. The freight car was pushed into the frame. Then the frame was moved up the incline. This separated the car from its trucks. The trucks were removed, and the other gauge trucks put under. Then the frame was moved back down the incline, and the freight car eased down onto its new wheels.

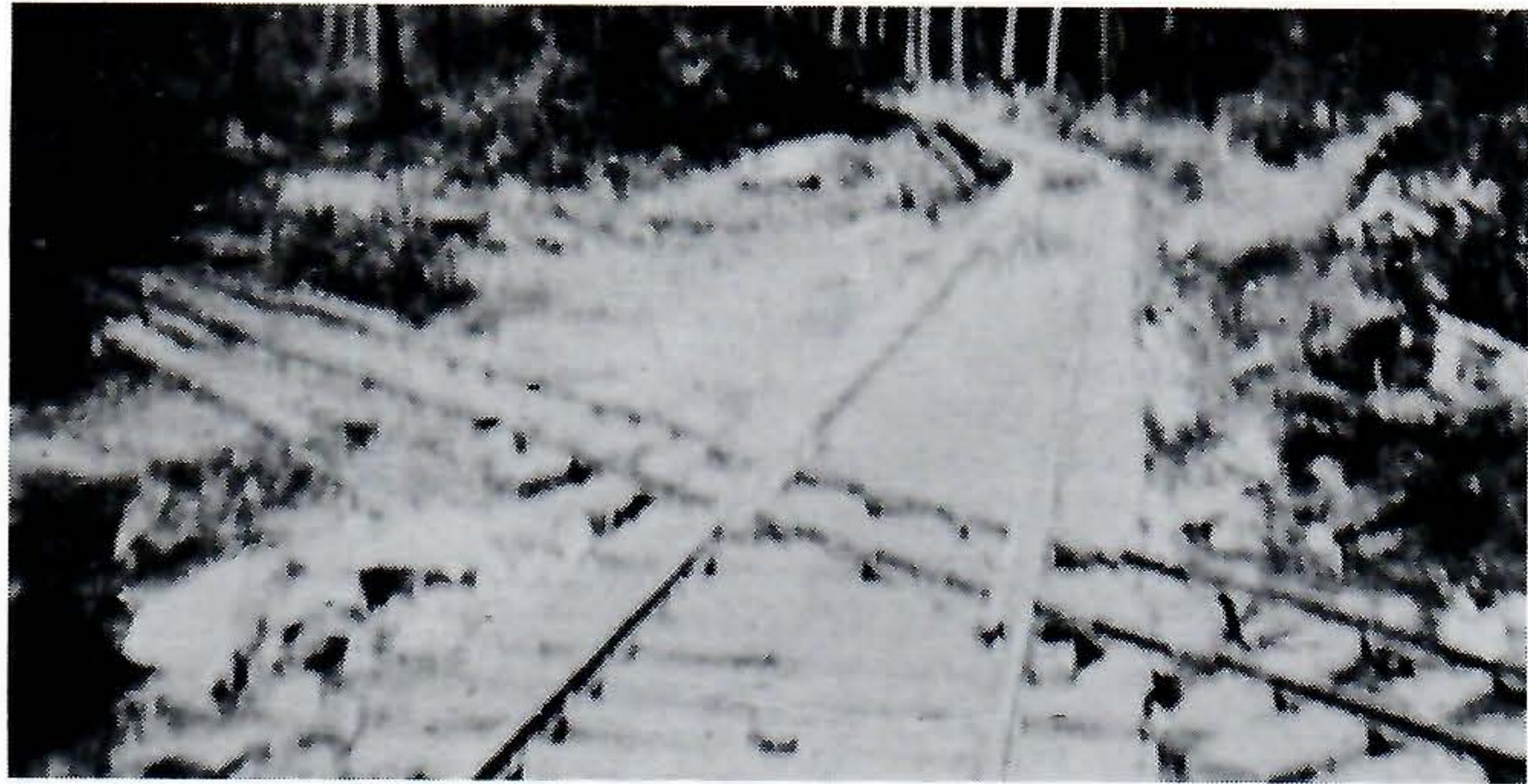
"The log cars at Slate Run used stakes instead of

chains. Removing the stakes was tricky, but I never remember anyone ever getting hurt. Two men would work on two adjacent cars. They would first partially cut thru the stake at the coupled end of the cars. Then they would move to the far ends, and cut those stakes off. The logs would start to move and break off the partially cut stakes. New stakes had to be made for each trip.

"Of all the men at Slate Run, the blacksmith I probably liked the most. I think that his name was George Reibe. He was a very heavy set man and a ventriloquist. Whenever I went into the shop, he would throw his voice into a closet to make me believe there was a man in there. He used to make hoops and other things for us to play with."

While Mr. Welch was growing up at Slate Run, the Weeds were cutting in Tioga and Lycoming Counties. In addition to the Clinton and Potter County lands, Weed owned above five square miles on Slate Run and Manor Fork north toward the Tioga County line. This had been purchased in 1893. Only one warrant, No. 2644, was purchased in Tioga County. However, in August, 1900 and December, 1903 Weed made contracts with the Pennsylvania Joint Land and Lumber Company to log their lands along Slate Run in Tioga County. Somewhere between two and four thousand acres were involved.

The Slate Run Railroad was extended into Tioga



Robert McCullough

The narrow gauge Slate Run Railroad crosses the C. & B. F. track. This crossing was located where the present road up Manor Fork and route 44 join. The Slate Run road bed to the left is now a dirt road that drops down to County Line Branch stream. Only one or two other places in Pennsylvania did two logging railroads cross each other. One was in Union County where the White Deer and Loganton R. R. and the Lewisburg and Buffalo Valley R. R. crossed.

County and up as far as Francis Branch and other small tributaries. In this area the last lumbering was done. While in progress, Weed sold his Clinton, Potter and Lycoming County lands to the Commonwealth in 1907 and 1908.

When the contract with Pennsylvania Joint Land and Lumber was completed, the mill closed. The last log went thru on July 28, 1910. The railroad was promptly torn up, and the mill torn down. Today, the mill area is a brush filled field.



Slate Run today. Three homes face the railroad track. My son, Tommy, stands on the no longer used flagstone sidewalk that connected the homes to a no longer existent store and the depot. Here is a reminder of yesterday when the railroad was the main thoroughfare, and people built their homes facing the track. Across the track to the left was the mill's lumber yard.