

EARLY DAYS OF THE BOULDER CREEK BRANCH

written for the News by J. H. Aram: Veteran Station agent of the Southern Pacific.

The closing of the Boulder Creek Southern Pacific station brings back to me memories of long ago. I having been located at Boulder Creek as agent for 32 years leaving there in 1924 for Mountain View, where I remained for five years (1929) when I was retired for pension. I am now living in Santa Cruz. It is without question that the Boulder Creek branch for the miles and cost of operation was one of the best paying pieces of road ever operated. You will be surprised, no doubt, to learn that at one time the tonnage from Boulder Creek was fourth in the state, for local products.

TWO CREWS

This tonnage was handled by two train crews. During the day "Daisy" Hallenback was the conductor; the other was what was known as the 'night freight' it leaving Boulder Creek about 6 p.m. and working all night getting the loads over the hill to San Jose and bringing back empties for use the next day. This crew, however, was not called unless there were more than forty cars in sight for their nights work which was only occasioned when there were heavy rains that interierred with the teaming, as there were then thousands of cords of wood. Thousands of feet of lumber, thousands of rail road ties, shingles oyster poles, shingle and stave bolts and other forest products, piled in the Boulder Creek yard that kept things going during the rainy season.

HORSES AND MULES

In this connection about 250 horses and mules came into the yard each day, the teams being from two horses for a small wagon, which was rare, to seven or eight with two wagons. These teams with their bells rather livened up things, as you could hear them nearly every hour of twenty four, going and coming. With the straightening out of the roads for the automobile, you have probably noticed the crooked raods of long ago and wondered how a team of six horses and two wagons could get around them; but they did and it seldom any of them went over the grade.

NO EASY TASK

The train crews of Boulder Creek branch required men of good judgement to handle the large teams, with link and pin couplings and hand brakes, (air brakes and automatic couplings were unknown at that time on freight equipment) over a line that had numerous hills and valleys, to prevent the trains from breaking in two and then running together again, causing disaster. There were very few accidents of this kind and I can only recall four at this time. These, however, piled the cars rather high in a short space but luckily no one was killed.

UP FROM THE RANKS

Men who "graduated" from the Boulder Creek line were always classed as the best; and those I can recall at this time and still in the harness have proved this. These men have all made good and are: W. I. Clauette, Slug Merrill, W. H. Hutson, J. D. Francis, J. E. Poutious, Charlie Glass, Fred Reynolds, Billy Jones, R. C. Goldbeck, W. H. Thompson, Walter Skelton, and J. W. Tennant, engineers; Frank Garmon, general yard master; Bert Kent, train master; Jack Harton and Bud Illiff, engine foreman; A. H. Askley, George Hickey, brakeman; Frank Stearns, conductor; E. Lorenzon, John Quin, Frank Radiger, engineers; William Gannon, conductor.

ONE OF THE BEST

Nick Sinnott, warden of Felton big trees, was also one of our best men in the engine service. There are others who did

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good work on the branch. but I do not know their whereabouts now. The largest train ever taken out of Boulder Creek was only July 29, 1899 and was made up as follows: Engine No. 13 consisting of 73 loads and caboose; this went up a 105 grade in places. Crew: M. M. Crowl, engineer; and Fred Reynolds, fireman; Frank Bruntage, conductor; of Partinsky--W. I. Clouette, George Ely, brakeman; They took this train to Felton with out an accident and the next took a train of 53 cars of rail road ties to Santa Cruz to be loaded on a steamer. On this trip, however, they broke in two at Rincon, but by good judgment brought the hind end, consisting of 40 cars, to a stop on the Powder Mill Hill. During the time of heaviest shipment there were seven saw mills, two shingle mills and numerous tie and wood camps that furnished material for this business and Boulder Creek was rather a lively town with its twenty-two saloons.

The station force consisted of myself and two or three men and we were kept busy at times keeping everything straight. Roy H. Davis, station agent at Watsonville; Bob Eolson, agent at Gilroy; Will Crickton agent at Atascadero; L. A. Fuller, telegrapher, San Jose; R. R. Miles, dispatcher, Sacramento were among those who helped me, and they kept up their reputation as good men.

Tom Alzine, now a lumber-man of Santa Cruz, was with me two or three years; also Jim Maddocks of the Santa Cruz Lumber Company, helped me several times during a rush. His brother Nick now of San Luis Obispo was with me for two or three years.

SOME STUNTS

Numerous "stunts" were pulled by train crews in order to do the work, that at the present time would hardly pass the book of rules on the scrutiny of the present train-master, such as making a drop of 34 or 40 cars of railroad ties from Chestnut Avenue to the old railroad wharf, the line at that time running where Washington street extension is, or dropping down the hill from Glenwood to Felton with the trains to of 40 or 50 empty flat cars cut into three or four pieces, the head ends doing the hill work as they came down, and the conductor alone on the hind end with 25 or 30 cars under full control. Derailments were few, and unless it was rather serious the "accident" report was an unknown document. A well known superintendent made the remark a few years ago. Give me a Boulder Creek narrow gauge crew if you want the work done speedily and correctly.

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