

BILLY HOLCOMB CHAPTER 1069
THE SOCIETY OF VITUSCAN MISSIONARIES

PRESENTS ITS ANNUAL
SUMMER HIGH COUNTRY EVENT
AUGUST 18, 19, 20, 2023

OR, IN THE RECKONING OF OUR ORDER CLAMPYEAR 6028

BEING AN OFF-ROAD EXPEDITION TO THE
HILLS OF HEMET

HELD UNDER THE AEGIS, AND DURING
THE REIGN, OF MARK GERMAN,
HEAD ABBOT XI

ARTICLE COMPILED AND WRITTEN BY
DR. MICHAEL “DOC” JOHNSON, XNGH, HEAD ABBOT II
A HISTORY OF LOGGING AND LUMBERING IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA’S
SAN BERNARDINO AND SAN JACINTO RANGES

A HISTORY OF LOGGING AND LUMBERING IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA'S SAN BERNARDINO AND SAN JACINTO RANGES

by

Mike "Doc" Johnson-- XNGH, HA II, Vituscan Historian

THE SAN BERNARDINOS

Previous Vituscan Missionary histories have dealt with mining (most notably the Holcomb Valley boom of the 1860s) and cattle ranching in the San Bernardino Mountains. While obviously important both historically and economically, they were not the only major commercial enterprises to take place here. Of equal importance was the logging and timber industry, which flourished here from the 1850s until well into the 20th century. This article addresses this aspect of the history of the San Bernardino Range.

The first European to traverse the area of Cajon Pass and the San Bernardino Valley was the military *Comandante* of Spanish Alta California, Pedro Fages, who in 1772 led a small contingent of soldiers through the area in pursuit of army deserters. Four years later he was followed by Father Francisco Garces, who was traveling from the lower Colorado River to Mission San Gabriel. Garces left a detailed account of his travels which was translated into English in 1900. There is no further record of Spaniards in the area for the next three decades.

In 1806, Father Jose Zalvidea re-entered the region, scouting for sites for ranchos to support the chain of missions already in existence, but nothing came of the expedition. In 1819 Lieutenant Gabriel Moraga and 35 Spanish *soldados* retraced Zalvidea's route in the opposite direction. He was chasing a group of Mojave Indians to punish them for crimes committed near Mission San Buenaventura, today's Ventura. All these explorations added to the geographical knowledge of the San Bernardino Mountain region, but there were no settlements at that time.

Shortly after Lieutenant Moraga's *entrada*, Father Zalvidea established San Bernardino Rancho as an adjunct to Mission San Gabriel. Its purpose, as always with Spanish settlements of the time, was to Christianize the local Indians and instruct them in farming and stock raising. The rancho was located where the city of Loma Linda now stands. At least two structures were erected, and although there is no mention in the historical record, it may reasonably be surmised that they obtained the necessary timber from nearby Mill Creek. Although speculative, this might be considered the first non-Native harvesting of timber from the San Bernardino Mountains. At the same time, an irrigation ditch, or *zanja*, was dug from the mouth of Mill Creek, a tributary of the Santa Ana River, to the new rancho.

In the ensuing years other mission ranchos were established in the San Bernardino Valley: Agua Caliente, named for what would later be Arrowhead Hot Springs; Yucaipa; and San Gorgonio. These establishments would certainly have required lumber for building, and Mill Creek again is the most likely source. "Lumbering" at this time meant felling trees and transporting them in two-wheeled, ox-drawn *carretas* to the building site, where they were shaped by hand tools into beams and timbers. Since buildings of the day mostly constructed of adobe, relatively small amounts of lumber were needed.

In 1847, soldiers of the Mexican War Mormon Battalion were serving in the San Bernardino Valley. History records that one Juan Ramirez, with Indian laborers and an escort of ten soldiers, traveled to Mill Creek and felled two large trees, which were hauled to Los Angeles by carreta. There they were fashioned into a 150-foot flagpole for Fort Moore, the main U.S. Army post in the region.

THE MORMON ERA BEGINS

The establishment of San Bernardino by Mormon settlers in 1851 began a new era for the lumber industry. Fearing attacks from hostile Indians, the Mormons constructed a log stockade which enclosed houses within its walls. The logs were obtained locally from trees growing along creeks and near springs. As the settlement began to expand, however, it became evident that timber would be needed in much greater quantities, and the settlers began to cast their eyes to the seemingly unlimited forests in the mountains to the north and east.

At this time there was only one small sawmill in the entire region, the Vignes-Sexton Mill near the mouth of Mill Creek. It had been constructed by Jean Vignes in 1841-1842, but was soon destroyed by a flood. It was rebuilt in early 1852 by Daniel Sexton, but its exact location is unknown. It apparently did a thriving business, and supplied lumber to customers at least as far away as Los Angeles, where Vignes lived. At some later date it was purchased by Isaac Williams, owner of the Chino Rancho, and was then called the Chino Mill.

With the demand for lumber growing exponentially, it was inevitable that more mill capacity would be needed. In 1853 three Mormons from San Bernardino began construction of a water-powered sawmill upstream from the Vignes-Sexton operation. By the end of the year the aptly named Mormon Mill was delivering sawn lumber to San Bernardino. It is thought to have been located on the south side of Mill Creek a short distance downstream from today's Forest Home, and trees to feed the mill were felled as far away as modern-day Forest Falls. Both mills supplied boards for the San Bernardino Valley for a decade before apparently being put out of business by the great flood of 1862. This marked the end of logging and lumbering in Mill Creek Canyon.

The Vignes-Sexton and Mormon Mills had managed to keep up with demand for a time, but all the while the Mormons had their eyes on the extensive forests to the north, easily visible from their stockaded village. Plans were made to utilize this timber, but first a road had to be built into the mountains. The most likely access was through Hot Springs (now Waterman) Canyon, and a route was duly surveyed in April of 1852. The Mormon leaders voted to build the road and decided that it would be free to the public, not a toll road.

Practically every able-bodied man in San Bernardino headed for the mountains to work on the road. It was estimated that 1,000 man-days of labor were required to complete the twelve-mile route in the astoundingly short span of only two weeks. The upper mile and a half, which were extremely steep, gave access to Seely and Huston Flats, near today's Crestline. On the steep sections, ordinary wagon brakes were useless, and heavily-laden lumber wagons routinely dragged large logs behind them to slow their descent.

In a very short time a sawmill was established in Hot Springs Canyon to turn the logs into boards. It is believed to be the work of Charles Crisman, who hauled the steam engine to power it from the Salt Spring Mine on the Old Spanish Trail near southern Death Valley. The Mormon-owned mine had been abandoned after the miners were killed by Indians. The small steam mill was in operation by July of 1852. By any standards, it was a remarkable feat to survey a road into the mountains, build it, begin felling trees, and establish a sawmill turning out sawn lumber in the span of just a few months.

Early the next year, Crisman and his son bought a second, more powerful steam engine and hauled it to the crest of the mountains between modern-day Crestline and Lake Gregory. Here they built the first steam-powered sawmill on the mountain, and by the summer of 1853 it was turning out lumber that was hauled laboriously down to the valley below.

In response to huge demand, brothers David and Wellington Seely set up a second mountaintop sawmill that same summer. The location is still known as Seely Flat. It was powered by water taken from Seely Creek and conducted through a wooden flume and "penstock." The flow was then directed onto an undershot water wheel (meaning the water was applied to the wheel at the bottom, as opposed to an overshot wheel which had water applied at the top) about ten feet in diameter. Production began in fall or winter of 1853, but was hindered by the freezing of the creek, and the first load of lumber from the Seely Mill did not reach San Bernardino until April of 1854.

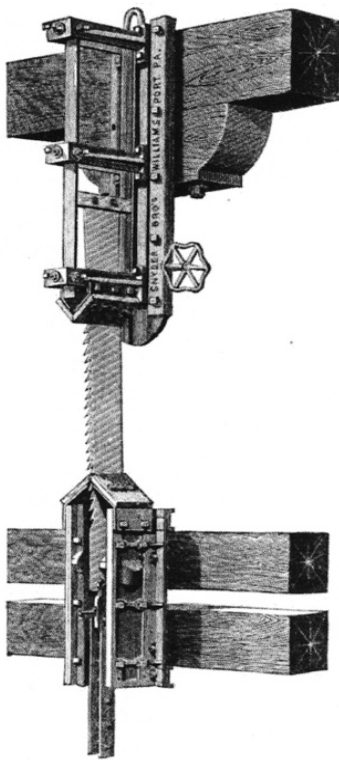
In 1853 the Seely and Crisman mills were the only ones operating in the San Bernardinos, but more were in the works. An official survey conducted by the San Bernardino County Surveyor in the summer and fall of that year recorded eleven claims, each filed for the legal limit of 160 acres, on potential lumbering sites. By the end of 1854 there were six sawmills in operation in the high country.

Mark Davids and Henry Boyle had a small mill on the edge of Seely Flat, and Andrew Cox ran a small water-powered operation on Shingle Creek, a tributary of Seely Creek. The Salamander Mill operated a short distance southeast of Huston Flat, so named because the linkage between the steam engine and the saw was thought to resemble a crawling lizard. The Salamander was a large operation boasting a number of shops and buildings, and was sometimes called the Taylor and Crosby Mill for the two men who ran it.

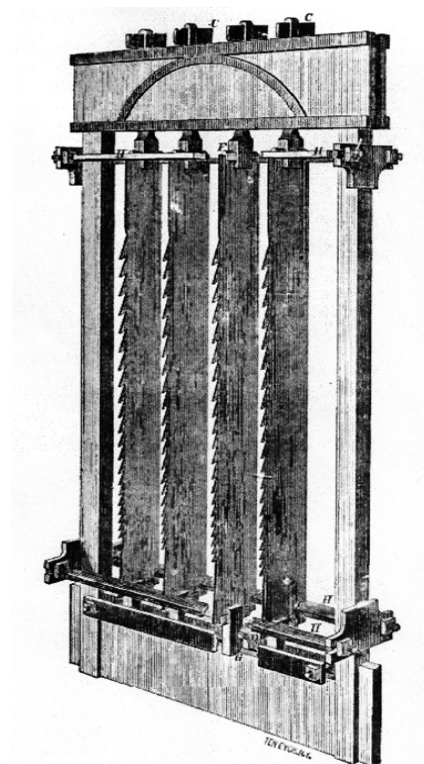
The most productive of all was the Crisman Mill, which was continually growing and expanding. This was largely because it was steam-driven, which gave it a huge advantage over water-powered mills that had to rely on unpredictable stream flows. Late in 1854 legendary Mormon soldier, trailblazer, and settler Jefferson Hunt acquired a one-half interest in the Crisman operation. He promptly bought a damaged British steamship at auction in San Pedro, salvaged the machinery, and had the engine and boiler hauled up the mountain. The makeover doubled the mill's output.

In 1855, seeing the potential, the Seely brothers converted their water-powered operation to steam. Meanwhile, the Salamander Mill was destroyed by fire in late 1854, but was soon rebuilt and back in operation in 1856. In 1854-1856, the heyday of Mormon lumbering, the mills operated from spring to fall, and from dawn to dusk. The sawmills at this time were of the “muley” or “mulay” saw type, which consisted of a vertical blade (or blades) that moved in an up-and-down reciprocal motion. Those with multiple blades were known as “gang saws,” and could saw an entire log into boards in just one pass. Circular saw blades, more familiar to the modern reader, were not in use at the time.

Once the logs were cut into lumber, a new problem presented itself: how to efficiently get the boards down the mountain to impatient customers. Teams of six or eight oxen inched the loads down the steep upper section of the road, with wagon brakes locked and a large log tied to the back of the wagon to slow the



Muley saw



Gang saw

descent. One short section of the road is said to have had a whopping 41 percent grade! [To provide some context, the railroad grade through Cajon Pass is on the order of 3 percent.] Accidents were frequent, and many board feet of lumber were spilled down the sides of the canyon. Some oxen were killed, but evidently no teamsters. Mexican loggers tried to transport lumber in their rough, two-wheeled carretas, but the attempt was soon given up as impractical.

In San Bernardino the Mormon settlers, no longer in fear of Indian attacks, began to expand outward from their stockade. Wood was needed for homes, commercial buildings, barns, and fences in San Bernardino, as well as in Los Angeles, which was undergoing a growth spurt of its own. Customers there bought

all the lumber the Mormon mills could supply. In 1856, to facilitate this traffic, Mormon work parties under Jefferson Hunt built a road, closely paralleling modern Baseline Street, to meet the road from Cajon Pass just east of Cucamonga, thereby shortening the distance to Los Angeles by several miles.

This prosperous era came to a screeching halt in 1857. In September of that year, Mormon leader Brigham Young, in response to President Buchanan sending the US Army to Utah as a result of ongoing disputes between the two governments, called the faithful home to Salt Lake City. The returnees were expected to help slow the march of the army into Utah. Some sources state that Young had already written the colony off as a failure in April, feeling that settlers had fallen into discord and moral decay. Most, but not all, of the Mormons returned to their spiritual homeland.

Mill owners, as well as ordinary citizens, scrambled to sell their property and belongings in preparation for the journey. Goods and property were sold at fire-sale prices, as a speedy return to Salt Lake City was of the essence. The only exception to this trend was the Seely Mill. Wellington Seely returned to Utah, but his brother David remained and operated the sawmill for several more seasons. The Mormon era was over, but lumbering in the San Bernardinoos was far from dead.

NEW TECHNOLOGY COMES TO THE FORE

A great technological leap forward occurred in 1862 when the Huston's Mountain Steam Mill introduced the use of a circular saw blade. The huge blade spun at high speed, driven by a driveshaft direct from the steam engine. Still later, circular saw mills added a second blade, one oriented vertically and a second horizontally, above and perpendicular to the vertical blade. This allowed the log to be sawed from two sides at once, making the process faster and more efficient. Such a mill could process much more lumber more cheaply than the old muley saws, and also allowed the sawing of the very largest logs in the forest. By the 1870s most of the operations had converted to circular saw blades.

With all this increased output, hauling the logs to market once again became a problem. The Mormon logging road down Waterman Canyon had washed out in several places and generally fallen into disrepair. In 1858 the San Bernardino Pine Mountain Turnpike Company was formed to put the road back into shape, which it did by early 1859. It charged a toll to cover expenses, and was the first of several toll roads built into the mountains to move lumber to market. Unfortunately, it did nothing to lessen the extreme grades at the top of the mountain, and mishaps with heavily-laden wagons continued. Another ongoing problem was fire, always an issue with steam engines and boilers being operated in heavily wooded country. As an example, the Salamander Mill burned in 1855, was rebuilt, and burned again in 1859.

The discovery of gold in Holcomb Valley caused a need for lumber there. Boards for cabins, mining structures, mills, etc. were produced locally, mainly with hand-held whip saws and axes. Within a year a shingle-making machine was imported to provide roofing material. By the end of 1861, Francis Mellus had added an attachment to his steam-driven stamp mill to saw boards used in the construction of Belleville and Clapboard Town.

A major, although temporary, setback was the epic flooding of 1862. As noted previously, it destroyed the two sawmills in Mill Creek, and the Seely Mill was so badly damaged that it was abandoned. The Mormon logging road was ravaged, as were the communities in the San Bernardino Valley. The tiny settlement of Agua Mansa was completely washed away.

LOGGING EXPANDS AND FAMOUS NAMES EMERGE

In the 1860s, timbering began to expand eastward toward Little Bear Valley, site of today's Lake Arrowhead. This era marked the rise of several operators whose names would become famous in the annals of logging and lumbering in the San Bernardinos. Most notable among them were Francis Talmadge, Augustus "Gus" Knight, William La Praix, and Daniel Huston.

Francis Talmadge was the first in a long line of Talmadges that were instrumental in the development of lumbering and cattle ranching in the mountains. In 1861 he was working hauling lumber for others. In 1862 he helped build the first sawmill in Little Bear Valley, and three years later helped build another near modern-day Blue Jay. In 1867 he filed on 320 acres of timber on the west side of Little Bear Valley and built his own mill. For several years he supplied customers in Temecula and Los Angeles, as well as the San Bernardino Valley.

In 1867 Gus Knight and his partner, Dr. Dudley Dickey, bought a steam-powered circular sawmill in San Francisco and installed it on a site near Seely Flat. In a short while, the mill was producing 5,000 to 8,000 board feet of lumber a day. [A board foot is defined as the amount of lumber in a board twelve inches wide by twelve inches long by one inch thick, or its equivalent]. Their mill employed about fifteen full-time workers and boasted "two large saws for cutting and a small one for edging." Twelve loads of lumber from the mill were sent down the mountain each week. In 1869 Knight sold his share and built a shingle mill on the Santa Ana River, but it never prospered. He then gave up the lumber business and turned to raising cattle in Big Bear Valley.

William Stewart La Praix was a French Canadian who eventually became a miner in Holcomb Valley. In 1868 he was employed as head sawyer at the Knight and Dickey Mill, and a year later purchased it from Beverly Boren, who had in turn bought it from Knight and Dickey. In 1870 he moved the machinery eight miles to Little Bear Valley and called his new operation the Excelsior Mill. By the middle of the decade he was sawing 500,000 board feet each summer, making it the biggest operation in the mountains. Uniquely, in the winter, when most of the mills shut down, he sawed ice from frozen ponds in the vicinity and stored it for use during the summer, selling it for three cents a pound. He was very successful, but in 1887 he died from injuries suffered when he fell into his own mill machinery. Upon his passing his nephew, James Fleming, inherited the operation.

Daniel Huston operated the rebuilt Salamander Mill near today's Lake Gregory. In 1864 he was cutting and hauling lumber to help build Los Angeles's water distribution system. A year later he moved his operation a few miles to the east, and in 1867 rebuilt his mill with two circular saws and a new steam engine. He

called it Huston's Clipper Mill, and in 1874 he sold out to Van Slyke and Somers. A year later he was savagely mauled by a grizzly bear. He recovered, but his lumbering days were over.

Jonathan James, who had run a sawmill near Huston Flats in the late 1850s, moved to Little Bear Valley in 1865. Here, near modern Blue Jay, he ran the first circular mill in the region. When he was elected to the state legislature he sold out to Caley, Richardson, and Roper. Upon his return from Sacramento in 1869, he and Dr. Dickey joined forces to build the first sawmill in Grass Valley, a previously untouched area a short distance west of Little Bear Valley. Six months later they sold their Grass Valley Mill to Ruben Anderson and Barnaby Carter.

For a time, the Anderson-Carter operation was in friendly competition with Huston's Clipper Mill as the biggest producer in the San Bernardino. It set the mountain record for the most board feet sawed in one day: 26,521. The rivalry ended when the mill burned down in 1870. Anderson and Carter sold out to the Tyler brothers, Joseph and Charles, at the end of the year.

The Tylers enlarged the mill and installed a new steam engine powering both circular and muley saws. The circular saw cut regular timber, while the muley saw split the largest logs into more-manageable sections. The mill was in full operation by 1872, producing 6,000 board feet per day.

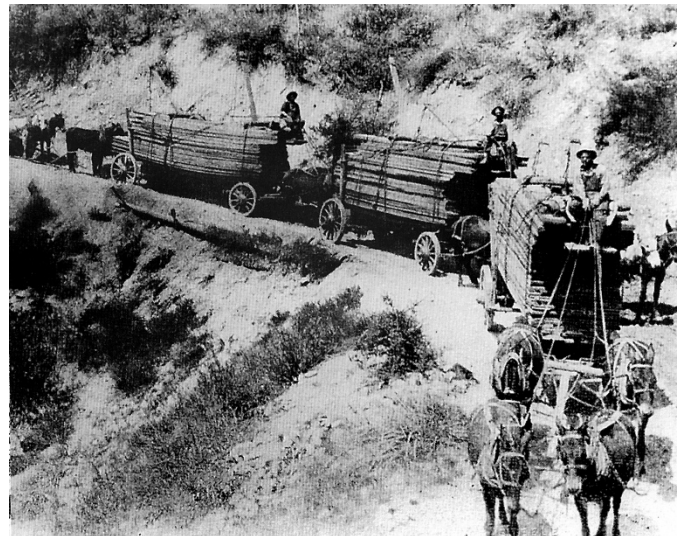
THE TRANSPORTATION BOTTLENECK PERSISTS

With more and more mills working ever more efficiently, the problem of transporting cut lumber to market grew larger. The bottleneck was the old, undependable road through Waterman Canyon.

Its upper terminus, through which all the lumber had to funnel, was six miles west of the most productive logging areas near Little Bear Valley, now under the waters of Lake Arrowhead. There was another road, built by Nathan Swarthout in 1867-1868, up Bailey and Sawpit Canyons at the western end of the San Bernardino.

It was constructed to replace a crude road built by Mexican rancheros in the 1840s, but it was even farther away from the mountain sawmills.

In 1869, to remedy this defect, the Mountain Turnpike Company was incorporated, headed by three experienced mountain lumbermen: Dr. Dudley Dickey, Daniel Huston, and Beverly Boren. They surveyed and constructed the Twin and City Creek Turnpike, more familiarly known as the Daley Canyon Toll Road. It began in Del Rosa, ascended the mountains between the west fork of City Creek and Strawberry Creek, then crossed the mountain crest and descended to near where Blue Jay stands today. Now there was a road right in the heart of prime logging country.



Construction began in the spring of 1870 and was completed by the end of June. The work was done by mule-drawn scrapers, black powder, and men wielding axes. On the 4th of July there was a big celebration, held at the upper end of the new turnpike, free to the public and complete with a barbeque, speeches, and a dance.

The new road boosted the lumber industry in the mountains, but even with greatly increased production and better access to markets, the San Bernardinos could no longer meet the growing demand, and by 1870 much of the lumber to supply Los Angeles was being imported from Oregon and northern California. The city of San Bernardino was also booming, and the market snapped up all the lumber that the mountains could produce.

Yet another lumber road, the Devil Canyon Toll Road, was opened in 1879. It was begun by William Van Slyke and Ernst Somers and completed by Mormon pioneer Sheldon Stoddard. It ascended Devil Canyon, where a huge pumping plant on the California Aqueduct now stands, then descended the reverse slope to Sawpit Canyon. It served Van Slyke and Somers' Jobs Peak Mill and the La Praix-Tyler brothers' Cedar Flats Mill.

The construction of the Southern Pacific Railroad through San Geronimo Pass in 1875-1876 created new demand for lumber for railroad ties, as well as cordwood for locomotive boilers. In addition to boards, the mountain sawmills also produced shingles, as well as posts and timbers for booming mines at Calico and elsewhere in the desert. As the nascent citrus industry in the San Bernardino Valley began to grow, so did demand for boards to make shipping crates for the fruit.

In the 1880s the mill owners got together and signed an agreement to set standard prices for lumber and eliminate cutthroat competition among themselves: \$27 per thousand board feet for common lumber and \$35 per thousand feet for clear boards (no knots or imperfections). In 1881 it was estimated that the San Bernardino Mountains produced 4 million board feet of lumber, almost all of it sold as quickly as it could be hauled down the mountain. By 1883 this figure had grown to 6 million board feet.

In 1883 a narrow-gauge railroad was proposed to more efficiently move the cut lumber to market. It was to run from San Bernardino up Waterman Canyon, and thence eastward to Little Bear Valley. In the event, only the first two miles were completed before the idea was abandoned.

Five years later, John Hook and John Suverkrup built a mill near Deep Creek to harvest the previously untouched timber growing there. It had a large circular saw capable of cutting 20,000 board feet per day. The lumber was shipped down the Daley Canyon Road to a new lumberyard they established in San Bernardino. The Suverkrup operation lasted into the early 21st century, although by that point the lumber was no longer being harvested in the San Bernardinos.

THE CITRUS INDUSTRY GROWS AND LAKE ARROWHEAD IS FORMED

As the southern California citrus industry continued to expand, so did the demand for crates and boxes for the fruit. In 1890 William Van Slyke, Melville Archibald, and O. T. Dyer established a box mill near today's Lake Gregory. The Enterprise Box Mill, later renamed the Riverside Box and Tray Company, turned out 20,000 feet of lumber a day, the bulk of which was used to make citrus boxes. It was the largest such operation in the mountains, and operated for several years.

In 1891 the Arrowhead Reservoir Company was formed to build Lake Arrowhead. Most of the remaining timber in the region, as well as the logged-over areas, was acquired by the company. Since lumber was still needed for construction, the previous owners were encouraged to continue their operations on lands that would now be leased to them. They stayed busy for several years, but by the turn of the century only a handful remained, mostly working on clearing out trees in preparation for filling the reservoir.

As these historic lumbering operations began to disappear, new ones were born in the Running Springs area, then known as Hunsaker Flats. They would eventually coalesce into the biggest lumbering operation in the San Bernardino. It began when two brothers from Michigan, C. D. and J. E. Danaher, purchased 26,000 acres (about 40 square miles!) of timberland on the east fork of City Creek. Later that year they formed the Highland Lumber Company, which purchased even more land in 1891.

Rights-of-way were then obtained to build a road to haul out the lumber. The Danahers were eager to begin operations, and felt that the road was taking too long to build, so they abandoned plans for a route with easy grades and rushed the completion of the road with a series of steep switchbacks to the crest. They immediately began hauling heavy equipment and machinery to the mill site, near Long Point and what would soon become the town of Fredalba. The Long Point Sawmill boasted band saws that were capable of cutting 60,000 feet of lumber a day, and was in operation by September of 1891.

The boards from the first cutting were used to enclose the mill machinery and protect it from the mountain weather. The second cutting was used to build a bridge over City Creek, and the third run to build a company town for more than a hundred employees. With these tasks completed, lumber was hauled down the mountain to build the Molino Box Mill near the AT&SF Railroad tracks in Highland.

By 1892 the sawmill was producing 35,000 feet a day, most of which went to their box mill. The hastily-constructed haul road was smoothed out and re-graded, and was opened to the public as the City Creek Toll Road. It must have been terrifying for uphill-bound travelers to meet head-on with heavily-laden, skidding lumber wagons on the narrow track.

Despite these auspicious beginnings, the company soon fell on hard times. Apparently even the profits from sawing 35,000 feet of lumber a day was not enough to pay for building the mill, bridge, and box plant and making interest payments on loans. The company was poorly financed, and the country was in the midst of the nationwide economic depression of 1892-1893. They tried to

reorganize, but the Long Point Mill, despite boasting state-of-the-art machinery, ceased operations in 1892, and the short-lived Highland Lumber Company ceased to exist.

The sawmill lay idle for seven years, although the box mill continued to operate for most of that time. In 1899 the Highland Company sold out to the Brookings Lumber Company, also from Michigan. The Brookings Company was a family-run operation, and was well financed by English investors. There was plenty of money available, and the family went right to work creating the biggest logging and lumbering operation in the history of the San Bernardino Mountains.

THE BROOKINGS COMPANY COMES TO THE FORE

The company leased additional timberland, eventually controlling eight sections of tree-covered forest. [A section=640 acres=1 square mile.] The Long Point Mill was refurbished and brought up to date with the most modern equipment. It became known as the Brookings Fredalba Mill, which employed over a hundred men who lived in a company town constructed for them. The box mill was also redone, and the City Creek Toll Road was improved, although it still remained very steep in its upper reaches. The mill was working full blast by the summer of 1899, and by the end of the year a staggering three million feet of lumber had been sawed and transported down the mountain.

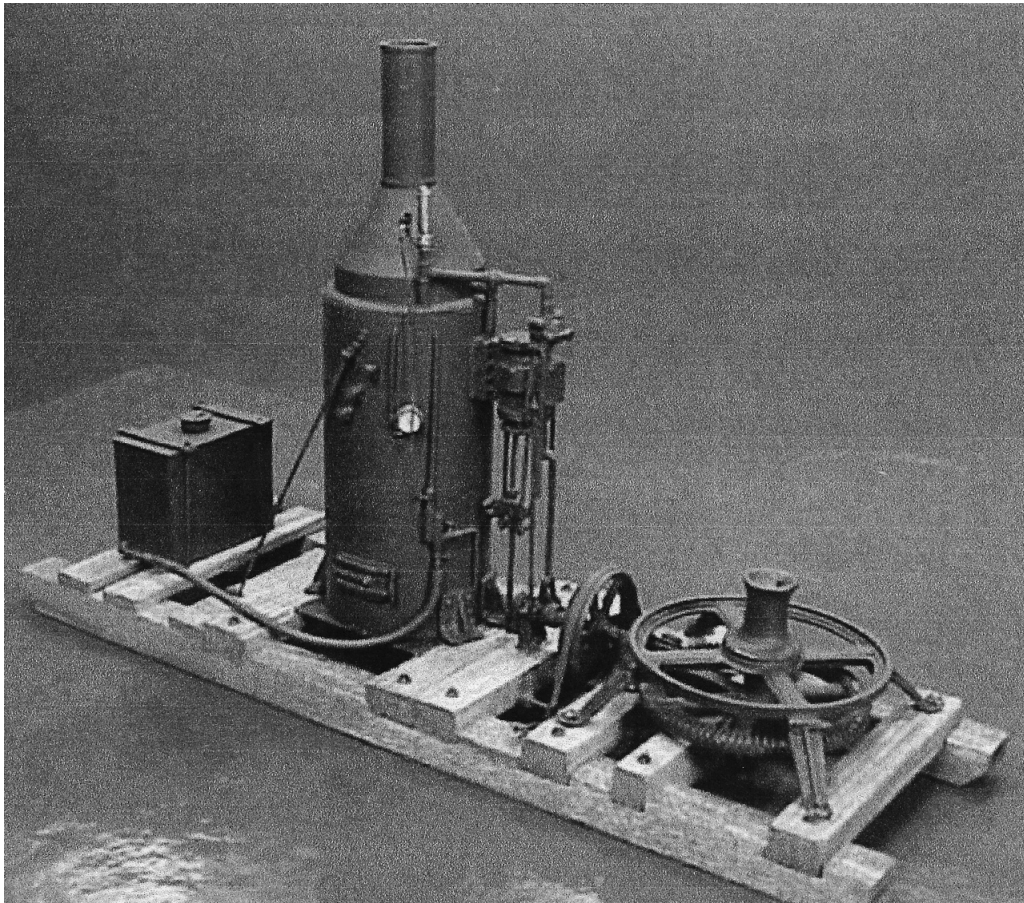
In the beginning the lumber was hauled in the traditional way, on ox-drawn wagons. In 1900, in order to increase efficiency, construction of a narrow-gauge logging railroad was begun, and was completed by 1901. The line had two branches, one running west and one to the north and east. In 1904 the line was extended west four miles to Heap's Ranch. Clearly, this was a major logging enterprise.

The rolling stock consisted of two small gear-driven Shay locomotives and twenty flatcars. One of the locomotives was equipped with extra-strong brakes for the steep run between Hunsaker Flats and Fredalba. The gear-driven locomotives were very powerful and could easily negotiate the steep grades, although they only had a top speed of about four miles an hour. They could each pull a train of six to eight flatcars, each loaded with six large logs. In 1904 a larger, 27-ton locomotive was added to the fleet. It was painstakingly hauled up the steep grade in pieces by six wagons, each drawn by a ten-mule team.

Timber was generally cut on slopes above the rail line, then dragged, or "snaked," down the slope to the waiting flatcars by a Dolbeer "donkey engine." The donkey engine was a portable steam engine, mounted on wooden skids, which could winch itself to the desired location, then snake logs and load them onto the flatcars by means of a heavy steel cable.

At track's end the loads were rolled off the flatcars, down the hillside, and into a purpose-built millpond. The dunking removed dirt, rocks, and debris, and the wet logs were then pulled up a ramp by cables into the mill, where they were sawed into boards with a twelve-inch bandsaw. More cables then dragged the cut lumber into a storage yard. There it was stacked and loaded onto horse-drawn wagons. The steep descent was scary, and there were many incidents of spilled

lumber and injured men and horses, but only one life was lost. About 60 percent of the lumber went to the Molino box mill, which employed around fifty men, with the excess going to the company's retail lumber yard in San Bernardino.



Scale model of steam-powered Dolbeer donkey engine

1901 to 1911 marked the heyday of the Brookings operation. In 1904 the daily average output was 50,000 board feet, with a one-day record of 70,000. The 200-man workforce often put in 11-hour days, causing some grumbling among workers, but to improve morale the company threw in perks such as parties and picnics. They instituted a 4th of July "Fun Day" including fireworks, lunch, games and contests including a tug-of-war between the mill workers and the loggers, and a dance followed by a midnight supper. It proved very popular, and became an annual event.

There was labor trouble, however, with the teamsters hauling the lumber. When the company cut their pay, most of them quit. Lumber piled up for several weeks, creating quite a backlog. The problem was solved by locating and hiring new workers willing to work for the reduced wages. There was never a union to deal with the workers' grievances.

With large amounts of logs, lumber, sawdust, etc., laying around, fire was a major concern, as it always was at any mountain sawmill. The Brookings Company suffered five of them. In 1900 sparks from a furnace started a blaze that burned

4,000,000 board feet of lumber, and in 1903 another fire destroyed \$75,000 feet of lumber and burned 3,500 acres of nearby forest. The biggest conflagration was in 1906, caused by sawdust in the mill's engine room igniting and being fanned into flames by the wind. Employees fought the blaze with water from the mill pond, but when this was exhausted the flames destroyed the mill and 3,750,000 feet of lumber. The total loss was estimated at \$110,000, only \$71,000 of which was covered by insurance.

Despite this setback, the mill was rebuilt and back in operation by the summer of 1907. In 1908 another fire broke out on nearby Mt. Harrison, for a time threatening the town of Fredalba. Catastrophe was averted by the efforts of Brookings Company employees, aided by a fortuitous shift in the wind. The final fire affecting the operation was in 1909, when the Molino box mill burned to the ground. It was immediately rebuilt and quickly put back in operation.

END OF THE GLORY DAYS

After a highly profitable decade-long run, production significantly decreased in 1911, and in 1912 stopped completely. Most of the easily available timber had already been harvested, and what remained was increasingly difficult to access and therefore less profitable. Even more importantly, public opinion against clear-cutting lumber operations was growing, and forest fires as a result of sawmill operations added weight to the opposition. There was increased lobbying for the government to regulate the mountain sawmills. The San Bernardino Forest Reserve, forerunner of the San Bernardino National Forest, had been established in 1893, and was transferred to the conservation-minded Forest Service in 1905. This brought increasing regulation and oversight of timberlands and watersheds, much to the displeasure of loggers and mill operators.

In the face of these changing conditions, the Brookings Company looked northward and obtained new timberland on the Oregon coast, just north of the California border. They shifted their operations there, and built a company town that became the city of Brookings, Oregon. The Fredalba mill was dismantled in 1912, and most of the machinery was shipped to Oregon. The logging railroad was removed the following year, and San Bernardino County took over the right-of-way for a public road, which became part of the Rim of the World Highway in 1916. The box factory closed in 1914, but the timber holdings in the mountains were not sold until 1923. Part of the acreage was purchased to establish the town of Running Springs. With the demise of the Brookings operation, lumbering in the San Bernardinios was reduced to a minor industry, closely regulated by the Forest Service.

Henry Guernsey continued to operate a mill near Lake Arrowhead, mostly salvaging burnt and downed timber near the reservoir site, before leaving the mountains for good in 1920. Arthur Gregory, Redlands orange packer and namesake of Lake Gregory, bought large tracts of logged-over timberland and stripped them clean. This lumber went to make boxes and crates to ship his oranges.

In 1916 the San Bernardino Lumber and Box Company built two mills in the Crestline area. John Dexter built a small mill near Pine Crest, later moved to Twin Peaks. It supplied lumber for booming mountain communities from Crestline to Lake Arrowhead, and operated until 1956. Several other mills were built to supply lumber for burgeoning development around Big Bear Lake, the longest-lived of which operated near Fawnskin from 1924 into the 1950s. There were also mills in Holcomb Valley and near the Lucky Baldwin Mine, but all of these operations were small in comparison to Brookings and their predecessors. Although the glory days are long gone, lumbering in the mountains continues up to the present day, albeit at a very reduced rate, mostly small-scale operations concerned with salvaging burnt, diseased, or aged trees.



Shay logging locomotive at Fredalba, 1904

PARALLEL DEVELOPMENTS IN THE SAN JACINTOS

With forests similar to those in the San Bernardinos, it is to be expected that there would be a history of logging and lumbering in the San Jacintos as well, and in fact the industry here was a major economic engine for three decades. However, because the San Jacintos were farther removed from early settlement by the Spanish and the Mormons, the logging boom here started later and was less extensive than in the San Bernardinos.

COLONEL HALL'S EMPIRE

First to make his mark on the San Jacintos was Colonel Milton Sanders Hall. In 1875 he held the contract to grade the Southern Pacific Railroad's roadbed from Spadra (now Pomona) through the San Gorgonio Pass to Indio, then called Indian Wells. He was also tasked with providing 300,000 railroad ties, as well as firewood to fuel the locomotives' boilers.

Even as his graders were at work in San Timoteo Canyon in the summer of 1875, Hall was scouting the San Jacintos for suitable timber, which he located on the range's northwestern slopes. As the reader is now aware, the first step in any lumbering operation is to build a road to access the timber. To this end, Hall and several others formed the San Jacinto Wagon Road Company, which was backed financially by the Temple and Workman Bank in Los Angeles.

E. Y. Buchanan, construction superintendent for the Los Angeles and Independence Railroad, was hired to oversee the building of the steep road, which was full of switchbacks and hairpin curves. It ran from Hall City, near modern-day Cabazon, over the mountain crest to the millsite near today's Lake Fulmor. Although officially the San Jacinto Wagon Road, it was commonly known as Hall's Grade. The fourteen-mile route was made as a toll road in order to subsidize some of the construction costs, but it is doubtful if there were many customers, given that heavily-laden lumber wagons skidding perilously downhill were ever-present.

While road construction was underway, Colonel Hall was already cutting timber. He set up his first portable sawmill near Vista Grande, but very quickly relocated to Hall Canyon. It was a small, water-powered operation. The nearby forest of ponderosa and sugar pines was described as "the best yet seen in California, some measuring 250 feet in height and others not branching for a distance of 100 feet from the ground." He soon purchased two boilers and a steam engine for a second mill, as well as machinery for a shingle and lath mill.

Hall had big plans. He had visions of not only providing all the ties and fuel that the Southern Pacific could use, but also supplying lumber for all of southern California. He announced that he would sell his sugar pine lumber for \$15 a foot, half the going rate for boards from the San Bernardino.

As soon as the San Jacinto Wagon Road was completed, teamsters began laboriously hauling the heavy machinery for the mill up Hall's Grade to Hall's Camp, located on Hall Creek. The entrepreneur's name seemed to be on everything! Trees were being harvested faster than the two sawmills could cut them into boards. By December of 1875, 400,000 feet of timber had been harvested.

As always, the hardest part of the operation was getting the lumber to market, in this case to Hall City. Using a familiar system, eight-horse wagons were skidded downhill with brakes locked and a drag log tied on behind. On the return trip the wagons were carried food and supplies for the small community that sprang up at Hall's Camp. At the other end of the road was Hall City, near modern-day Cabazon. It boasted a population of more than a hundred people, with a hotel and rooming house, saloons, restaurant, blacksmith shop, dance hall, etc.—all the accoutrements of a bustling boom town. For a short while it was the social center for the entire San Geronio Pass region.

Despite these apparently auspicious beginnings, however, all was not well with Colonel Hall's empire. Los Angeles had fallen on hard economic times, which resulted in a run on the Temple and Workman Bank, immediately cutting off Hall from his working capital. Loggers and mill workers walked off the job when paychecks were not forthcoming. Logging ceased while Hall

scrambled to arrange new financing, but he was unsuccessful. When Temple and Workman failed completely in early 1876, Hall's lumbering operation was dealt a death blow. It is said that he lost at least \$100,000 of his own money, and most of his workers never did get paid.

Hall managed to find enough cash to dismantle one of his mills and move it to the foot of the steep north face of Mt. San Jacinto, where it was reassembled to process logs skidded down a steep ramp. In practice, however, the skidway was so steep that the logs either jumped the track or broke into splinters as they smashed their way down the mountain. The mill was moved once again, this time across San Geronimo Pass to Banning's Water Canyon.

The remaining mill at Hall's Camp, the logging road, and all associated assets were taken over by the bank's receivers and sold in May of 1876 for pennies on the dollar to three Sacramento businessmen: Bartholomew, Moore, and Gilbert. A new steam sawmill was freighted up to Hall's Camp, and by September was in operation producing 250,000 railroad ties for the Southern Pacific. In an attempt to expedite movement of the lumber down the mountain, a fourteen-mile flume to float the boards to Cabazon was begun, but only four miles of it were actually constructed.

For a short while, the mills ran at full capacity to fulfill their contracts to the railroad, but lumbering soon ceased. The rails had moved eastward to Yuma and into Arizona, and ties were no longer needed. The financial situation further deteriorated, and the operation came to a halt. In February of 1879 the new steam sawmill was dismantled and the machinery was hauled to the La Prais mill in the San Bernardino Mountains.

The remaining water-powered mill, which had apparently been abandoned, was taken over by a man known only as Mr. Fuller in 1878 or 1879. It is thought, without any definite proof, that he may have previously operated one of Colonel Hall's mills. He moved the machinery over the crest and one canyon to the east. He is commemorated today by the place names Fuller Ridge and Fuller Mill Creek. The Fuller Mill went through a series of owners and operators. Sometime in the 1880s a crude lumber road was constructed from the mill to the San Jacinto Valley, and the mill operated at least until 1895.

At the same time that Hall's Mill in use there was timber cutting in Strawberry Valley, a few miles to the southeast. Exactly who was the first to do so is not known. There was a water-powered mill there at least by 1877, possibly run by two men known as Bradley and Stafford. By the end of the decade lumbering was taking place on a large scale in Strawberry Valley, marking the beginning of the heyday of lumbering in the San Jacintos, 1879 to 1906. Three names are tied closely to this era: Amasa Saunders, Anton Scherman, and George Hannahs.

THE SAUNDERS-SCHERMAN-HANNAHS ERA

Amasa Saunders was first and foremost a lumberman, although he also had interests in mining ventures and citrus growing. In 1880 he purchased a sawmill, probably the one established by Bradley and Stafford. It was powered by an overshot water wheel, fed by the waters of Strawberry Creek, which turned a large circular saw. He wanted to increase his production, so in 1884 or 1885 switched to steam power. Heavy wagons drawn by teams of ten oxen hauled the pine and cedar boards down the mountain to San Jacinto. Some of the cedar lumber was shipped as far away as Chicago, where it was used to construct moth-resistant cedar chests and closet linings.

Saunders ran his mountain sawmill for at least six years, and in 1886 built a large home in San Jacinto. He was also a partner in a large dairy ranch in Baja California, where he lived for several years. After his sojourn in Mexico he returned to San Jacinto, where he died in 1902.

Next on the scene was Anton Scherman, born in Germany in 1845, where he worked as a machinist and engineer. He came to the United States in 1863, and from Chicago traveled to Idaho, where he worked as engineer in a quartz mill for two years before coming to California in 1866. He worked in mines and sawmills in Calaveras County, then as a machinist and as an engineer in a distillery in San Francisco, before prospecting for a short time in Arizona.

By the time he came to southern California in 1872 he was a highly skilled and experienced machinist, engineer, and sawmill operator. He became a partner with John Metcalf in the Prairie Flats Sawmill in the San Bernardino. When Metcalf was killed by a disgruntled employee, Scherman built his own mill near modern-day Twin Peaks, where he sawed lumber until 1879. When rich silver deposits were discovered at Calico, Scherman followed the boom and built the first quartz mill there, which he subsequently sold to John Daggett, who would later become California's lieutenant governor.

Just when Scherman came to the San Jacintos is unknown, perhaps in 1879, perhaps a few years later. He set up a mill a mile upstream from Saunders' Mill in what is now Fern Valley. He dismantled his sawmill in the San Bernardino Mountains and hauled the machinery to Strawberry Valley, an evolution that took three months. The steam-powered mill was soon cutting 25,000 feet a day and shipping it down the mountain to San Jacinto. During 23 years of lumbering, Scherman moved his mill at least seven times. He opened a retail lumber yard in San Jacinto in 1888, running it himself until he sold it to Martin Meier in 1892. Some of the lumber went to the San Jacinto Box Company, incorporated in 1899, which produced thousands of boxes and crates for the booming citrus industry.

Around 1889 George B. Hannahs emerged at Scherman's main competitor. He was born in Michigan in 1856, and was the son of a state senator. He became a successful businessman in Chicago, moved to California around 1887, and managed a box factory in Coronado for a short time. In 1889, through connections with a family friend, he became a partner in the Strawberry Valley Lumber Company.

Six years later Hannahs, in partnership with San Jacinto businessmen Homer Daggett and Fred Hards, formed the Native Lumber Company. Hannahs was named manager, and was always the driving force behind the business. By 1896 the company's mill on Dutch Flat, a short distance from Scherman's Mill, was operating at full capacity, making boards for orange crates.

By this time, Strawberry Valley was becoming an important mountain tourist resort, and felling trees was an unwelcome intrusion. In the face of growing criticism, President Grover Cleveland established the San Jacinto Forest Reserve, making the harvesting of trees on public land illegal. It was some time before the government had the means to effectively police this policy, and anyway, much of the timber being logged in Strawberry Valley was on private land and therefore not subject to the ruling. Although public outrage against wholesale harvesting of the mountain forests was growing, lumbering proceeded unabated. Hannahs continued operating his Dutch Flat Mill, while Scherman moved his mill back over the ridge to Fern Valley, only about a mile from the mountain resorts. Right around the turn of the 20th century, Scherman obtained a Dolbeer donkey engine to expedite his operations.

THE END COMES INTO SIGHT

In the first of a series of catastrophes that would shake up lumbering in the San Jacintos, the Native Lumber Company mill burned to the ground in 1901. Hannahs rebuilt, although on a smaller scale, but in 1907 sold off most of his timber holdings to Arthur Gregory, a Redlands fruit packer and namesake of Lake Gregory. He planned to build a mill and box factory, but this never came to pass. He may have been preoccupied with developing the Crestline area in the San Bernardino.

In 1902 Scherman left the business in the hands of his three sons and returned to his native Germany. The brothers moved the operation first to Johnston Flat, near Keen Camp, then to Hurkey Creek. In 1906, however, just like Hannah's sawmill, the Scherman Mill was destroyed by fire. Anton Scherman returned from Germany in 1908, but never again worked in the lumber industry. He purchased a paper mill in Los Angeles, and died there in 1910 as a result of a fall from the mill machinery.

After the death of Myron Onstott in 1908, William Tripp purchased Onstott's ranch and set up a sawmill near Hurkey Creek, using machinery salvaged from the Scherman mill. He harvested timber from just east of Keen Camp to the edge of Garner Valley for a decade, from 1908 to 1918. The finished lumber was hauled down the Keen Camp Road to Hemet.

The final important logging and lumbering operation in the San Jacintos was in Dark Canyon, about eight miles northwest of Idyllwild on a branch of the north fork of the San Jacinto River. In 1908 the San Jacinto Lumber and Box Company was incorporated. The company built a sawmill in Dark Canyon and a box factory in San Jacinto. By 1912 the mill was running full blast, with most of the lumber going to the box factory. Excess lumber was sold to outside interests.

Fire, the mountain lumberman's natural enemy, struck once again in 1914. The Dark Canyon sawmill was completely destroyed, along with over 4,000 acres of forest and 500,000 feet of sawed lumber. To add insult to injury, the Forest Service sued the mill operator, Hiram Roach, for \$4,775 in damages for National Forest timber destroyed. Roach rebuilt, but suffered another setback when he lost a leg after falling into the saw while repairing machinery. He survived, and was back at work six weeks later with a wooden leg. In 1922 the rebuilt Dark Canyon Mill was leased to the San Bernardino Lumber and Box Company to supply their box mill.

In the 1920s the Idyllwild Lumber Company ran a small sawmill in Idyllwild to supply lumber for the growing mountain community. After World War II there was another building boom, and for a short while anyone with a chain saw was haphazardly cutting down trees wherever they could be found. Forest Service regulations today prevent such excesses, but for a while it looked as if the local forest would be totally destroyed.

Selective timber cutting has taken place in recent times, usually clean-up operations after a forest fire. Just as in the neighboring San Bernardino Range, the heyday of large-scale logging and lumbering has vanished forever, but the rich history of the logging industry, for good or evil, still remains.



Shay geared locomotive, ca. 1906

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Robinson, John W., The San Bernardinos. Big Santa Anita Historical Society, Arcadia, CA, 1989.

Robinson, John W. and Bruce D. Risher, The San Jacintos. Big Santa Anita Historical Society, Arcadia CA, 1993.

LaFuze, Pauliena B., Saga of the San Bernardinos. San Bernardino County Museum Association, 1971.

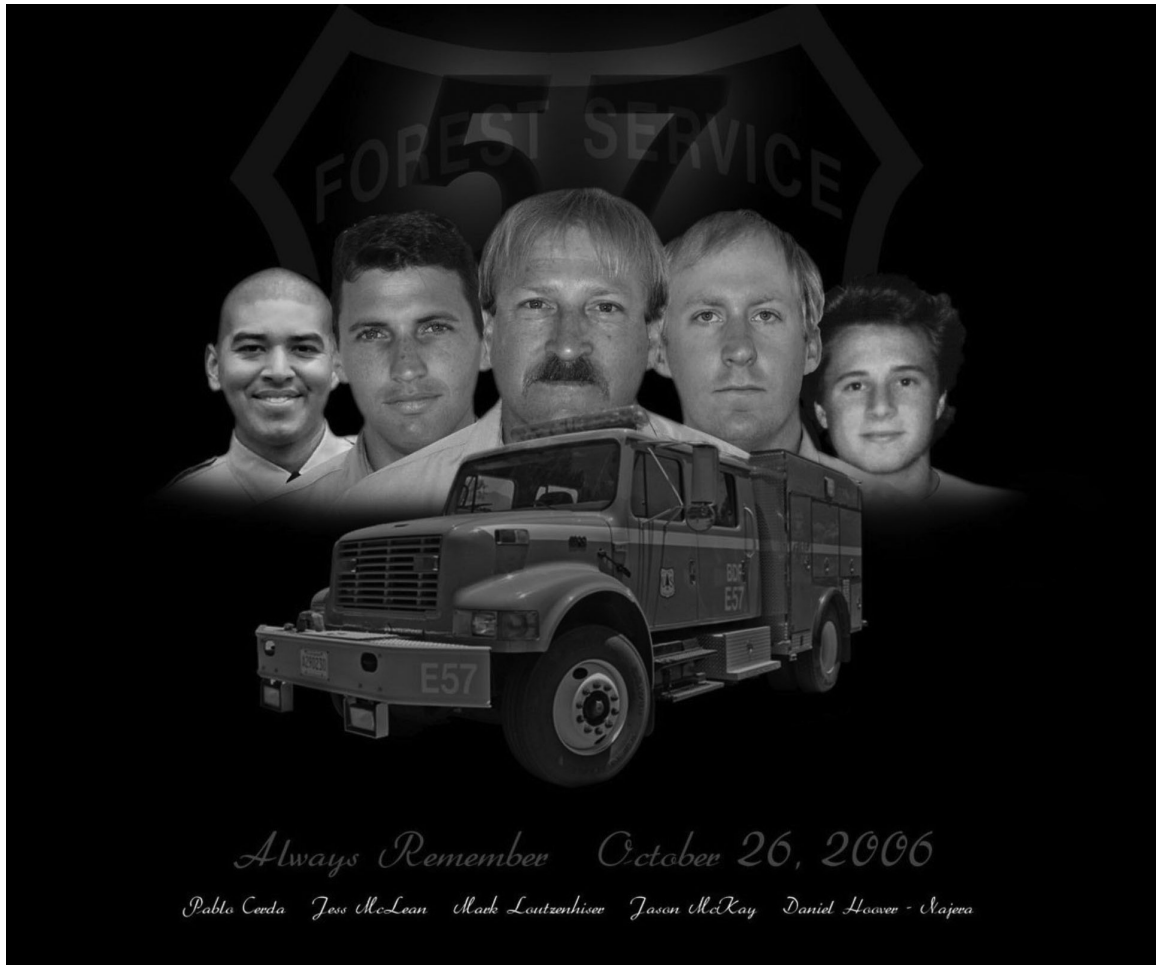
All these books are highly recommended for anyone who wishes to do further reading on the subject.

I have made no attempt to list all the various websites consulted, most of which made only minor contributions to the article.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks to Head Abbot Mark German for his continuing efforts to provide a scenic, historic, and fun event for the assembled Vituscan Missionaries, and for allowing me to contribute by writing this article.

As always, thanks to Clampublisher Tim "Clearcut" Connacher for turning a collection of facts, files, and photos into an attractive and informative keepsake.



SAN BERNARDINO NATIONAL FOREST

ALANDALE - ENGINE 57

Shortly after 1 am on October 26, 2006, while Santa Ana winds were coming to life, serial arsonist Raymond Lee Oyler lit a fire near the foothills southwest of Cabazon. The fire quickly climbed the hills, heading towards Highway 243. Around 4 am, San Bernardino National Forest Engine 57 from the Alandale Station, manned by Captain Mark Loutzenhiser, Engineer Jess McLean, and firefighters Jason McKay, Pablo Cerda and Daniel Hoover-Najera, was assigned to do evacuations and structure protection in the Twin Pines area.

Engine 57 eventually arrived at an octagonal house built on three acres of land at a point where two canyons intersect. The crew set up a portable pump and hose at a pool on the property and laid more hose from the pump on the fire engine.

Shortly after 7 am, the fire made a horrific run up the canyon directly at the crew. Flames were now reaching 90 feet in height and the intensity of the flames pushed the smoke column 3 ½ miles into the sky. The crew was enveloped in flames with temperatures later estimated at 1,600 degrees Fahrenheit. McLean and McKay died next to the fire engine with no chance to run. Hoover-Najera ran down from the house on the west approximately 50 yards before the heat from the fire overtook him. Loutzenhiser and Cerda only made it a short distance from the pool to the driveway before collapsing.

Fire crews were unable to contact Engine 57 after the fire passed and went to investigate. The Fire Captain on Engine 51 saw Cerda first, motionless, with 90% of his body charred. He reported on the radio, "They're dead, I think they are all dead." Cerda was able to raise his arm. His eyes were open, but he was unable to speak because his airway was charred. Loutzenhiser was found near Cerda with 100% of his body covered in burns, and friends from other engine companies began CPR. Loutzenhiser and Cerda were flown to Arrowhead Regional Medical Center in Colton. Family notifications began.

Loutzenhiser died not long after arriving at the hospital. Cerda was taken off of life support on October 31 after doctors had removed over 77% of his charred skin during two operations. The family did not want him to go through another operation. He died around 5 pm.

The Esperanza Fire consumed 40,200 acres, 34 homes and 20 outbuildings. 12 people were injured. Investigators, using every resource available including security cameras, DNA and other scientific methods, were able to identify Oyler as the Esperanza arsonist and connect him with 23 other fires he started.

Oyler was convicted of 5 counts of murder, 20 counts of arson, and 17 counts of using an arson device. He was sentenced to death, and is still on death row.





Major portion of this history is from a Riverside Press Enterprise article

Mark German

Head Abbot XI

Ex-San Bernardino National Forest Engine 22

Cleveland National Forest Engine 21

Cleveland National Forest El Cariso Hotshots