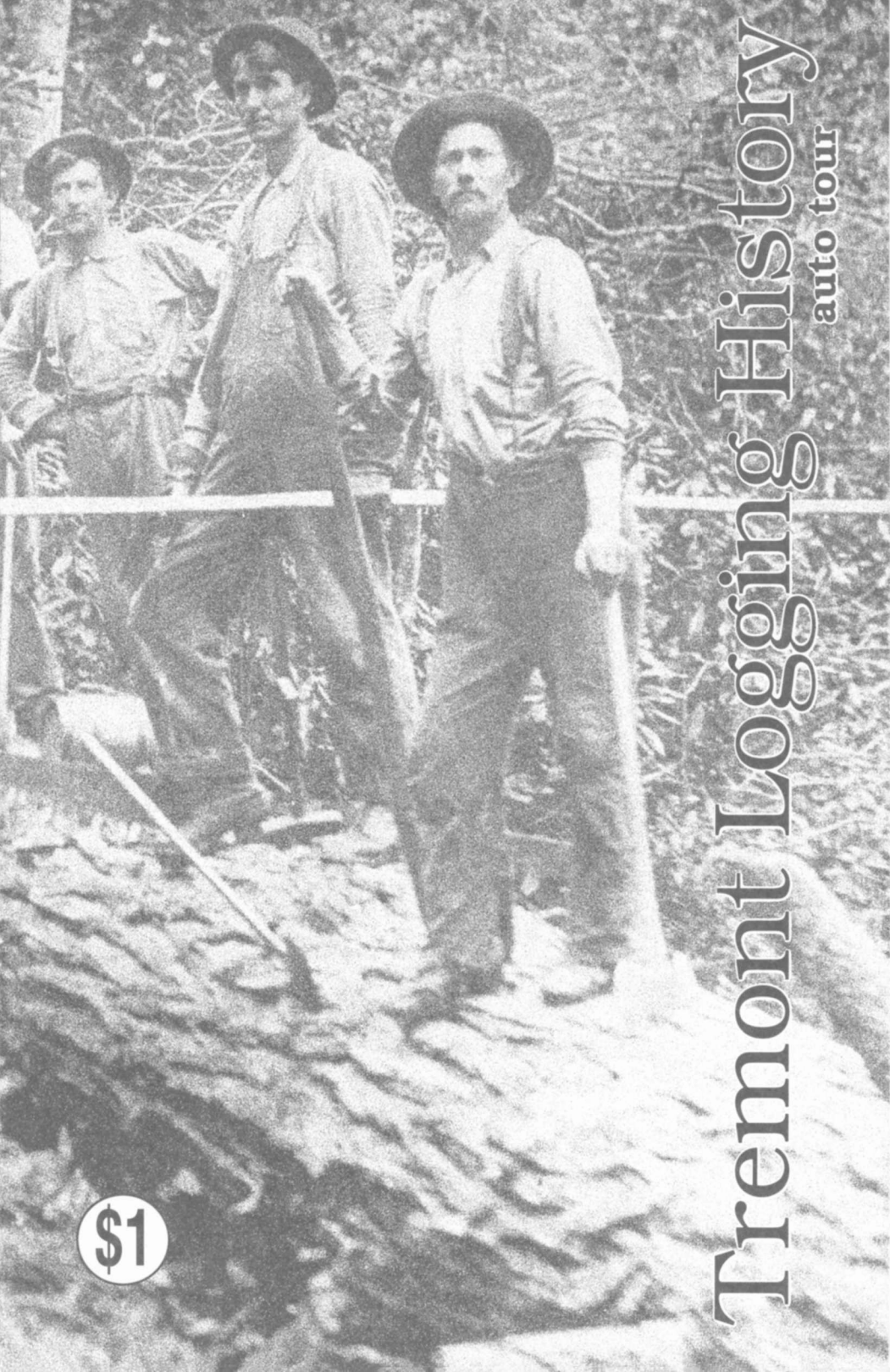




Tremont Logging History

auto tour

\$1



Steam-powered loader

As you travel through Great Smoky Mountains National Park today, it's difficult to imagine that 70 years ago two-thirds of what is now the National Park was logged. The mountains boomed with hundreds of loggers cutting trees and massive steam engines rushing logs to the sawmill at Townsend.

Follow the numbered posts on this three mile self-guiding auto tour to relive the bustling logging days of the Middle Prong of the Litter River, 1926-1939. As one logger said, "It was some show."

Not much logging was done in the Smokies before the turn of the century. Trees that were cut by pioneers were used by local people for local needs: cabins, wagons, furniture, tools, and fuel.

However, by 1900 the sprawling forests from Maine to Minnesota and

southward into Pennsylvania and Ohio were gradually used up and the northern-based logging companies began looking to the Southern Appalachians for more timber.

In 1901, Little River Lumber Company began buying land up the many tributaries of Little River in what is now Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Two years later the company built a bandmill at Tuckaleechee and changed the name of the community to Townsend after the company's owner, W.B. Townsend.

For the next three decades Little River Lumber Company set to work sawing, skidding, and hauling away one of the greatest virgin deciduous forests on earth. Railroad logging had begun in the Great Smokies.

1 railroad logging

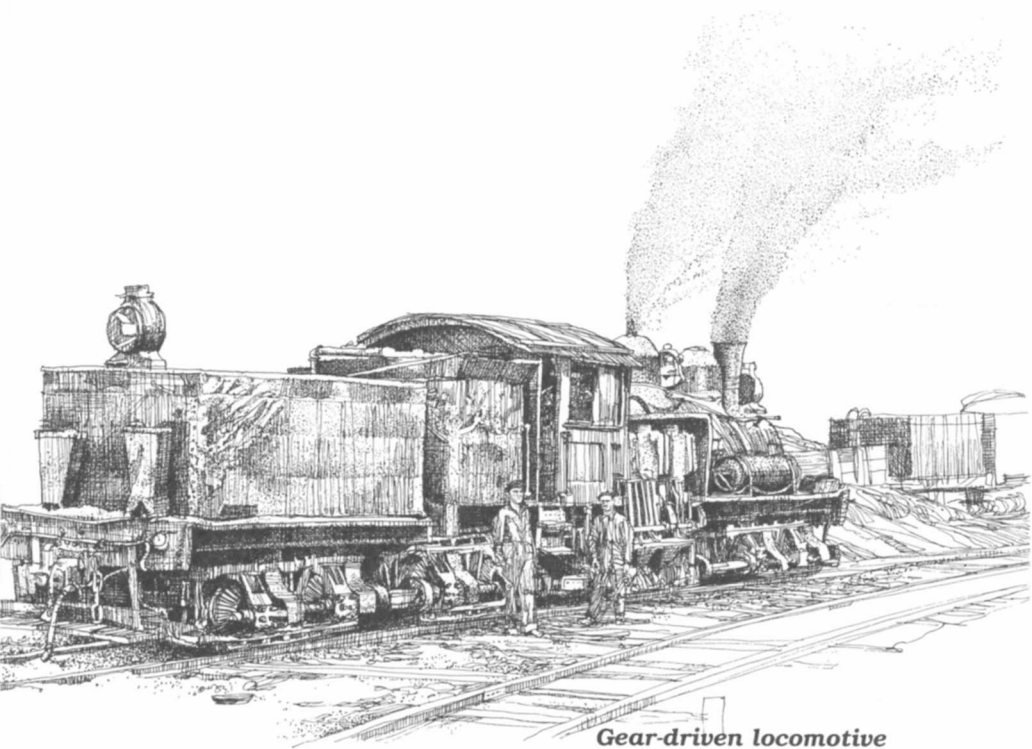
This road now follows the original railroad that pushed up the Middle Prong of the Little River. Steam-powered skidders snaked logs from the mountainsides and steam loaders piled railroad cars high for the trip to the sawmill at Townsend. In 1926, as logging

operations were finishing up at Elkmont, men and equipment were moved to the Middle Prong of Little River and Tremont became the "boom" town.

The name of the stream on your right is Stillhouse Branch, a name which suggests there were other ways besides logging to make a living in these mountains.



Rod-driven steam locomotive



Gear-driven locomotive

switching railcars

2 This area was known as “Wildcat.” Loaded flatcars were brought down from the mountains by the gear-driven Shay steam locomotives. Only gear-driven engines could handle the steep grades above this point. (You can see a gear-driven engine at the Little River Lumber Company Museum in Townsend.)

The cars were pulled onto sidings in the flat to your right, awaiting arrival of the conventional rod or piston driven engines from Townsend. The train from Townsend brought back empty cars to be picked up and returned to the mountains by the geared engines.

Engines did not actually pull the flatcars, but rather pushed the empty cars uphill and backed down with the loaded cars. This arrangement helped

prevent runaway railcars. At least two engines were needed to handle the heavily loaded 15-20 car trains.

Special equipment on the engines applied a layer of sand to the rails to give added traction, and brakemen set and released the brakes individually on each car. Runaways still happened. There are any number of stories of runaway trains such as the one that killed Daddy Bryson on Jakes Creek above Elkmont and the two engine wreck on Marks Creek above Tremont.

Steam engines used large quantities of water which had to be replenished frequently. The small stream on your right filled the water tank which met that need.

3 team logging

As important as mechanized logging was, the Little River Company still used team logging to harvest special stands of timber. Team logging was the old-fashioned method of using draft animals to haul logs out of the woods. Johnny Ownby contracted with the Company to log sections where there were only a few big trees. He used horses to snake logs to a landing near the railroad where they could be hauled to the mill at Townsend. To make it easier for the horses, pole roads were constructed by partially burying small logs across the road every few feet.

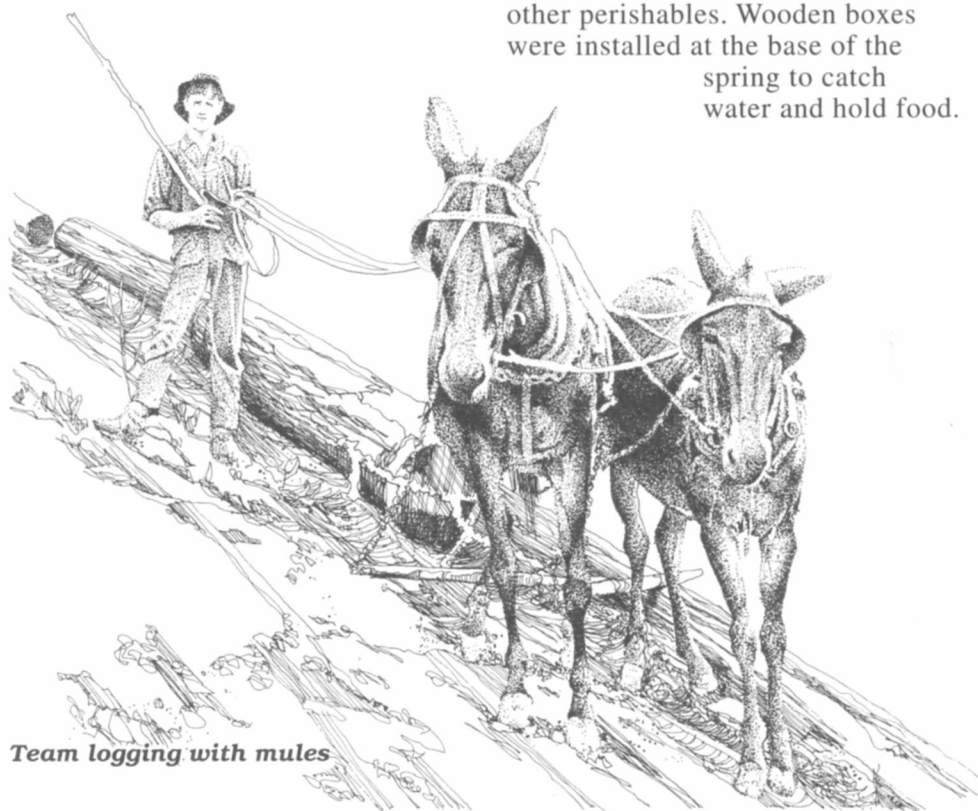
One of these pole roads ended on top of the embankment to your right. From there, logs were

rolled down the slope toward you where steam-powered loaders piled them on flatcars for the trip to Townsend.

In areas where it was even too steep for horses, logs would have to be “ballhooter” to the bottom of a ravine. A “ballhooter” would simply roll the sawlog off the mountain by using a “peavey” or “canthook,” stout-handled tools with metal points or hooks at the tip. With luck, the log would go all the way to the bottom on the first try. If it lodged against a stump, a lot of prying, pushing, and grunting got it going again.

4 nature's refrigerator

This spring was used by railroad employees and their families for cooling butter, milk, eggs, and other perishables. Wooden boxes were installed at the base of the spring to catch water and hold food.



Team logging with mules

5

the clyde skidder

Seventy years ago this would have been a very dangerous place to stand. This is the site where the great hissing and smoking machine called Skidder Number Five once stood. It is said that Number Five used over a mile of overhead cable, more than any other skidder operated in the Smokies.

Skidders moved on rails and performed the vital link of dragging logs from the woods to the railroads. While most skidders dragged logs along the ground, Little River Lumber Company had special machines designed because of the Smokies' unusually rough terrain. Clyde Iron Works came up with an "overhead" model to solve the problem, a system which hauled logs in the air something like a ski lift.

Overhead cables ran from the skidder to a big tree or stump on the mountainside as far as a mile away. Through a system of signals, bellboys in the woods would communicate to the skidder operator when to haul the logs into trackside. Steam-powered loaders then piled them on flatcars for the trip to the mill.



Clyde Skidder Number Five

6

the people

You have now arrived in the small community of Turkey Flats. All through this flat area were scattered permanent and portable houses. Four permanent houses were located just across the river and were reached by a swinging bridge. The company even operated a store in an old railroad coach nearby.

The Little River operation required huge amounts of manpower and people with a wide variety of skills. There were sawyers and saw filers, clerks and engineers, cooks, doctors, cable riggers, lumber stackers, firemen, bellboys, blacksmiths, and dozens of other specialists.

You have already passed by many of the homesites of people who worked for the Company. Some were permanent houses built on site, but many were pre-fabricated portable houses referred to as "car shacks."

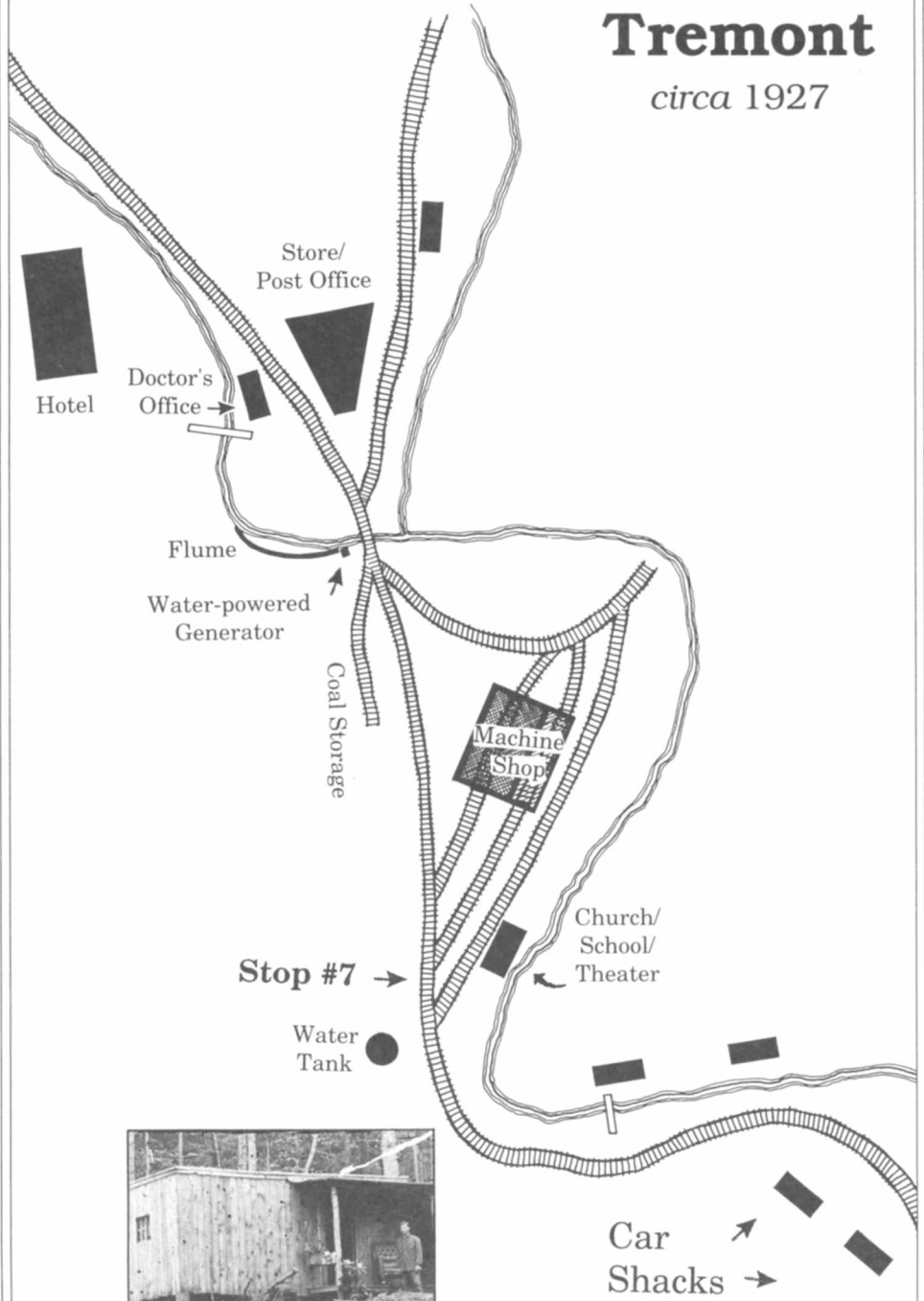
Car shacks were about 12' x 12' and could easily be lifted on and off flat cars by a loader. As logging operations moved, car shacks could be picked up and moved to the new site and set off along the track. Usually several shacks were joined together to form a house or bunkhouse. More shacks could be added if the family was large or the crew was increased. They were owned by the Company and rent was \$1 per car shack per month.

Men worked ten hours a day, six days a week, hitting the woods early and getting home late. Depending on the job, most workers earned between 20 cents and 30 cents per hour. Gardening and housework were left to the women and children.

Education, recreation, religion, clothing, and staple foods were available at the company town of Tremont just up the road.

Tremont

circa 1927



7

tremont - a company town

You are entering Tremont (once known as Tarpaper Camp) one of three company towns built by Little River Lumber Company to provide services to their workers. Other towns were Elkmont and Townsend. Refer to the map for approximate location of major buildings.

First, on the right, over the bank on the flat, was a multipurpose building used as a school, church, and movie theater. It was often referred to as the "house of education, salvation, and damnation." School consisted of the first eight grades taught by two teachers. If students wanted to go to high school, they had to make the trip to Townsend or another nearby community.

At one time, students outgrew the school and additional car shacks were brought in to create a second school. The ball field adjacent to the school provided spirited competition and recreation.

On the left, before the bridge, was the coal storage area where the coal tenders on the engines were filled every night by the night fireman. Water was obtained from the water tank just down the road. Steam had to be kept up all night on the engines so they would be ready to roll first thing the next morning.

As you start across the bridge, look to the left. You will see the concrete foundation that supported a water-powered generator or "dynamo." The dynamo ran day and night supplying electric current to the school, machine shop, store,

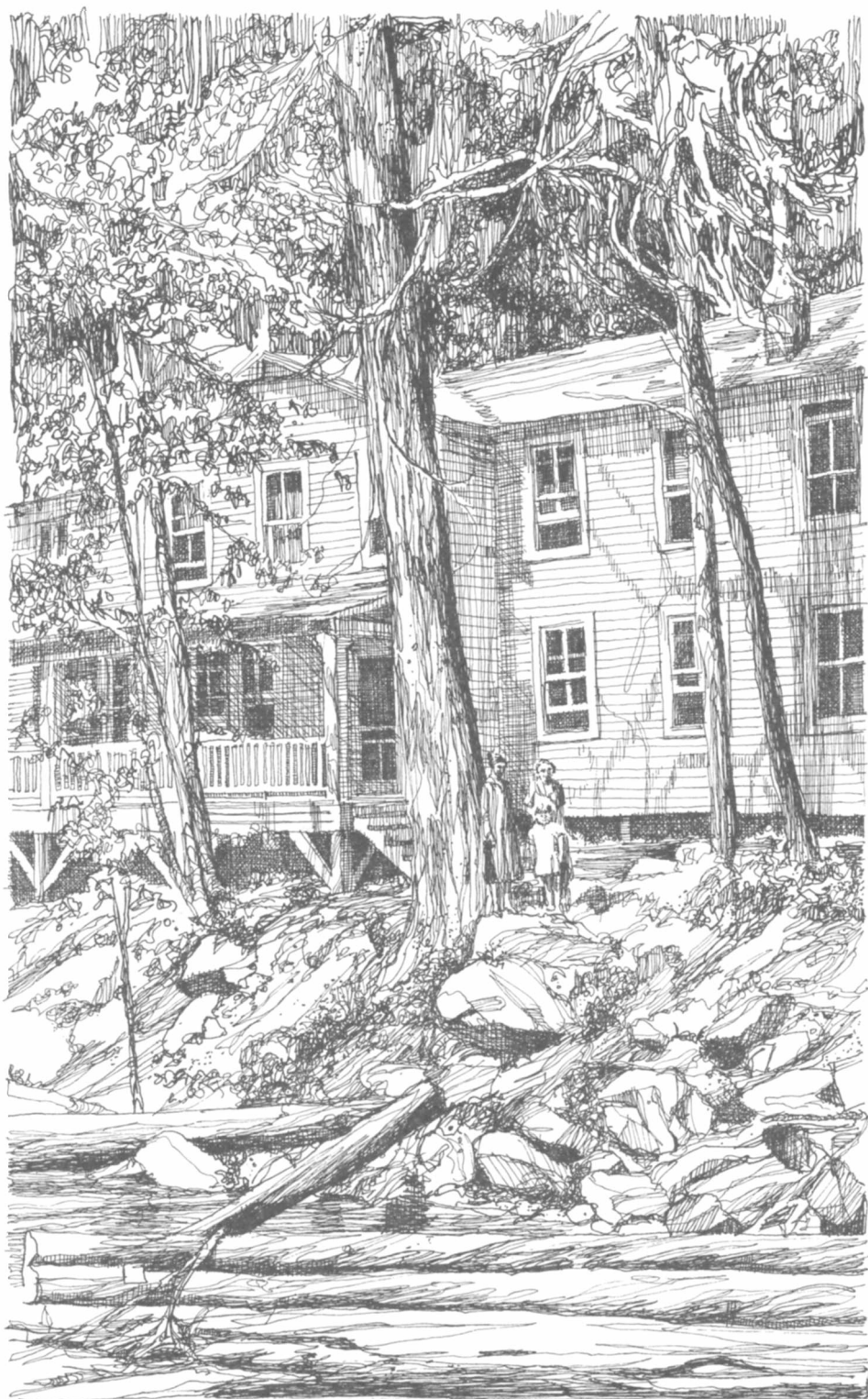
hotel, doctor's office, and several homes.

Across the bridge the tracks forked. The left hand fork went up the Lynn Camp Prong of Little River and the right hand fork followed the river's Thunderhead Prong. Both of these areas were extensively logged. Another temporary camp, called Stringtown, was located up Lynn Camp Prong. The portable "car shacks" sat end to end very close to the railroad tracks, hence the name Stringtown.

In the fork of the tracks was the company store and post office. It provided clothing, staple foods, hardware, hay, and feed to the workers, their families, and livestock. Very little cash changed hands, as employees used company scrip, nicknamed "dugaloo" or "doogaloo." When the purchases were made, the scrip, which was metal coinage, was exchanged for merchandise.

To the left of the store and across the stream was the Tremont Hotel. This two story structure contained about 22 rooms and served company employees. In later years it was promoted as a resort for outsiders.

The company even provided health care for \$1.70 per month per employee. Dr. Bruce Montgomery held office hours in a two-room car shack located between the store and the river. Can you find any evidence of the coal that was stacked there to heat the various buildings?



The Tremont Hotel

the end of an era

Life in the logging towns and camps made for a community that was at once loose-knit and close-knit. Loose-knit in that people moved around constantly according to where their skills were needed at the moment. And close-knit in that everyone worked for the same company, shared common experiences, and were often related to one another by blood or marriage.

Many who look back on it today remember those days fondly. Little River Lumber Company is recalled as a benevolent, paternal outfit that tried to look after its people and tried to insure a measure of fairness and comfort in their daily lives.

The effect of logging on the mountains was a different story. Clear cutting became standard operating procedure (as it was elsewhere) and that resulted in disaster for the forest. Only the main tree trunks were taken; the limbs and crowns were left behind to dry in the sun and wind. Sparks from steam boilers ignited this litter, which set whole mountainsides on fire for weeks or months. Heavy rains following the fires scoured the land into barefaced rocky cliffs and gullies.

With the creation of Great Smoky Mountains National Park in 1934, Little River Lumber Company sold out and shut down its operations here. The total amount of timber cut by the company has never been computed accurately, and probably could not be. A fair estimate, though, would exceed one billion board feet over three decades, enough wood to build 100,000 modern three bedroom homes. The last load came out of the woods in December, 1938 and the

mill in Townsend sawed its last log on July 5, 1939.

The Tremont of today looks nothing like the Tremont of yore. The logging days were exciting ones, with the ring of the axe and hiss of steam. But the time had come to permit nature to heal the land, allow it to recover and be used for gentler purposes.



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