

# THE OLDTIMER

THE MAGAZINE OF SOUTHERN OREGON HISTORY

CALIFORNIA & OREGON COAST -  
SHORT LINE -



“Jovial, kindly, witty, friendly, learned, patriotic, Christian, scholarly” — these words were used to describe the late Dr. Arthur Samuel Taylor on the eve of his retirement in March 1963. A very dear friend to all who knew him, he will long be remembered by the thousands of students whose lives he influenced during his 37 years as Social Science Chairman at Southern Oregon College.

His work as an author and research historian was recognized nationally. The following article is the last unit written by Dr. Taylor.



## PASSING OF THE SHORT LINE RAILROAD

— By DR. ARTHUR S. TAYLOR

Historians have traditionally deplored the anecdotal style since the time of Herodotus. The “aside” or parenthetical observation as it is sometimes called, has long been in disfavor by both dramatists and historians. Nevertheless, an introduction to a treatment of the short line California and Oregon Coast Railroad would seem to justify both practices, nefarious though they may be.

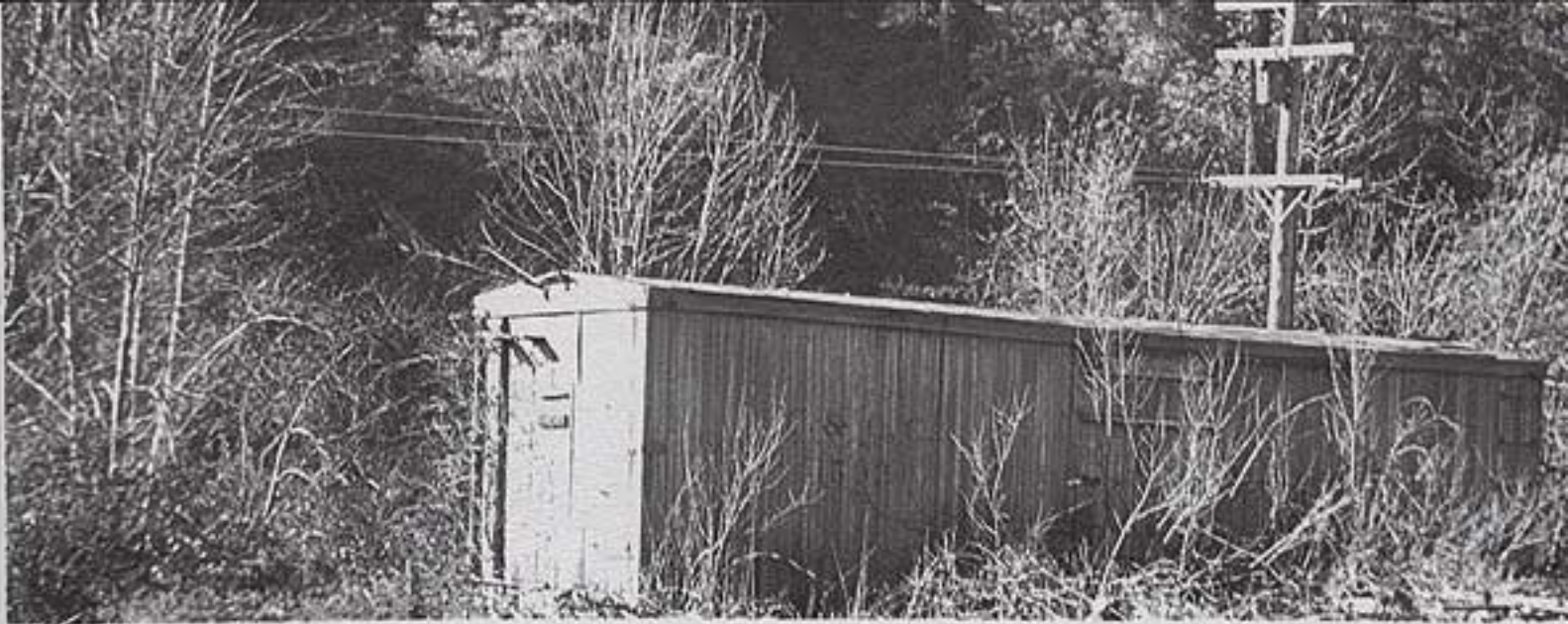
The summer of 1926 was hot, dry and dusty in Ashland, so after the summer session of Southern Oregon Normal School (College now) my family decided to spend some days at the beach in Crescent City, California. We travelled down to the coast via Grants Pass. I well remember the trip. The usual incidents happened. The children got carsick as we rounded the 128 curves on Oregon Mountain. My wife and her mother commented at times on my masterful handling of our Model T Ford. We crossed Smith River numerous times, picnicked, admired the Redwoods. Actually it was a pretty routine trip except for one thing, and that really excited my curiosity.

In the neighborhood of Wonder (isn't that a marvelous place name?) we came upon some rusty rails and a yellow-painted box-car. The thing intrigued me. How did a box-car get out there miles away from the main line of the Southern Pacific?

Actually I was looking at an artifact or historical remainder of an interesting episode in American economic history, the expansion of railroad construction westward after the Civil War and its most common manifestation, the building of the Short Line. Incidentally, may I say that the box car stood in its place for years surrounded by (greedy) blackberry vines.

In the west there were literally hundreds of Short Line railroads planned. Quite a number were actually built and operated for a time. Some grew into railroad systems, witness the **Oregon Short Line**, which became a part of the Union Pacific. Now nearly all have disappeared, absorbed by the greater railroad companies.

Why were so many Short Lines built? Sometimes the people of a community would want access to a



The old freight car of the C & OC which stood between Wonder and Wilderville until it was destroyed by fire in the 1950's.

main line road that would open up better markets. Sometimes it was felt that the Short Line would compete successfully with the larger companies. Sometimes the Short Line was built with the idea of selling out to another railroad. And sometimes it represented a promoter's dream. Note the names of the early railroads out of Chicago, many of them extending only as far as the Mississippi River, that included the name **Pacific**.

This issue of **The Oldtimer** is devoted to the history of one of our own Southern Oregon and Northern Cali-

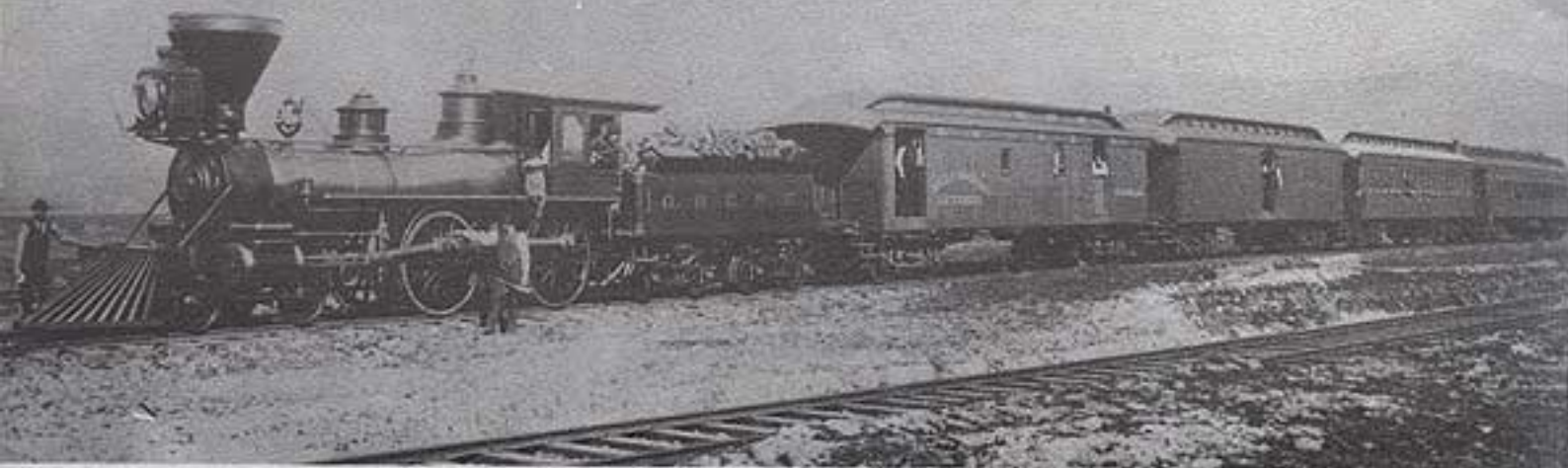
fornia Short Lines. I remember well what Uncle Jimmie Powers of Coos County used to say about his Short Line Railroad that ran from Marshfield to the village of Powers via Coquille and Myrtle Point.

"Well", Uncle Jimmie would say, "my railroad isn't as long as Jim Hill's but it's just as wide."

The California and Oregon Coast wasn't very long in distance or time, but it does deserve adequate historical treatment. The Josephine County Historical Society is making a justified effort in commemorating this early project.



View of Grants Pass, looking east along G Street (then called Front Street) when the railroad had been completed from Roseburg. The first train (from Portland) reached Grants Pass on Christmas Eve 1883.



## A SHORT LINE THAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN -- The California and Oregon Coast Railroad

— By JACK SUTTON

Completion of the Portland-San Francisco main line brought the first through train (above) into the Rogue River Valley in 1887. To reach the Grants Pass rail center, lumber and ore were at that time hauled from Williams and the Illinois Valley by mule teams or steam tractors. Interest in a short line railroad to improve delivery conditions from these comparatively remote areas spread throughout Southern Oregon at the turn of the century.

If the California and Oregon Coast Railroad had succeeded in building its line from Grants Pass to Crescent City, it could have been the key link in the "Winnemucca-to-the-Sea" route finally completed almost a half century later.

A 1916 booklet printed by Northern California's Del Norte County and the Board of Trustees at Crescent City, carried this statement: ". . . a railroad can be constructed in an easterly direction to connect with the Western Pacific at Winnemucca, Nevada." Success of the entire plan hinged upon the joining of the rails which extended 12 miles inland from Crescent City and 16 miles west out of Grants Pass.

Unreasonably high freight rates for fruit shipped out of both Grants Pass and Medford to the markets of New York and London were the

prime targets of those favoring building the short line.

O. S. Blanchard of Grants Pass stated it was estimated that a savings of 39 <sup>7</sup>/<sub>10</sub> cents per box of apples could be made by shipping the fruit of the Rogue Valley by way of Crescent City. With the production of that year alone, he estimated the transportation costs could have been cut 7 million dollars.

The report pointed out that the highest point on the proposed C & O C Railroad was 2300 feet at the summit of a divide between the headwaters of Smith River and Elk Creek. Here, a half mile long tunnel and two short ones would reduce the maximum roadbed height to 400 feet above sea level.

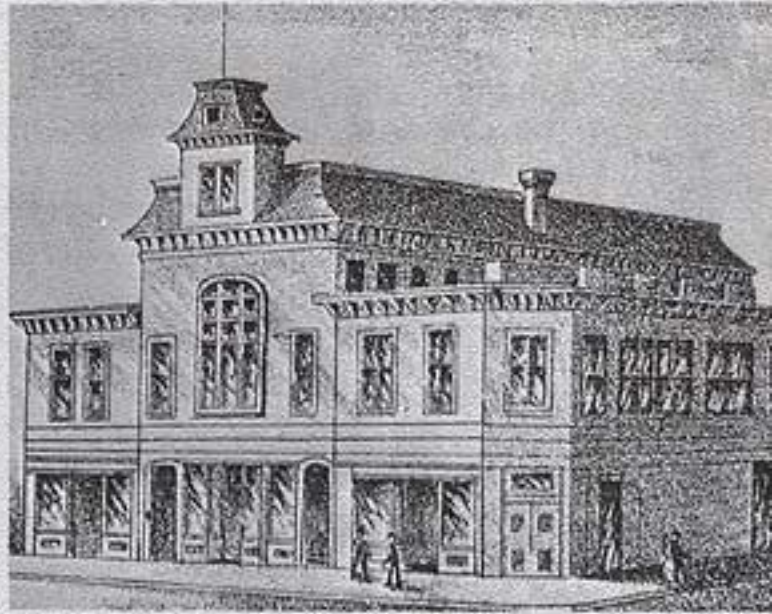
The first railroad survey was made in the summer of 1902 by Colonel T. Waln-Morgan Draper for his "California Oregon Coast Railroad." With two other San Francisco financiers, Col. Draper proposed a plan to haul ore on a railroad from the Illinois Valley to Crescent City. From this harbor the ore would be carried by ship to smelters in Tacoma, Washington and Selby, California.

Between 1902 and 1911 three different routes were considered. One by way of Illinois Valley, another by Williams, while the third planned to follow the Rogue River to the coast.



The turn of the century in Grants Pass (above) ushered in a decade and a half of feverish promotion for the short line to the coast, but it was not until 1911 that a truly united effort was staged.

In this year, an enthusiastic crowd met at the Grants Pass Opera House (right and below), exuberantly over-subscribing to the building of a line to be called the Grants Pass and Rogue River Railroad. The amount of money sought had been \$60,000 but before the meeting ended the total had exceeded this figure by \$10,000.





Since the early 1850's freight consigned to or from the valleys of Northern California and Southern Oregon had been hauled by mule team wagons over the Coast Mountain Range to the sea port of Crescent City (above).

With the completion of the Ore-

gon and California Railroad, most shipments consigned for shipboard delivery were sent either to Portland or San Francisco. In an effort to regain importance as a major shipping port, Crescent City entered seriously into the effort to build a short line to the interior of Southern Oregon.



The total length of the Grants Pass to Crescent City short line was expected to be 91 miles. The 12 miles of road built in Del Norte County

included the span over the Smith River (above) which was used as early as the mid 1890's to haul logs (below) to the Crescent City sawmills.

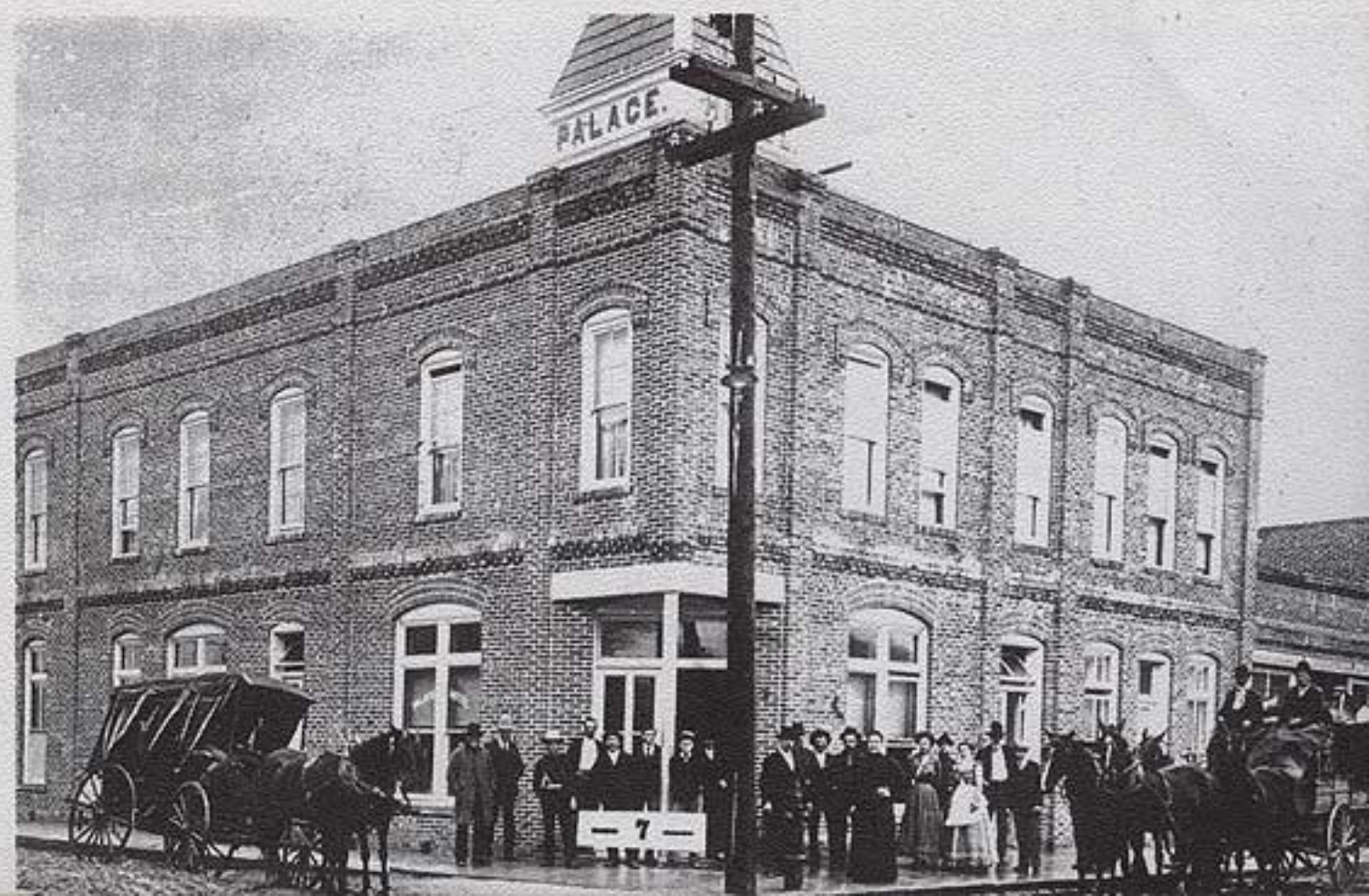




On March 2, 1911, the railroad from Grants Pass was started. Stores and schools closed to allow everyone in Grants Pass to attend the driving of the first spike. With the Commercial Club's band providing appropriate stirring music, a great many speeches were made. To close the ceremony, a silver spike was driven into the first tie, with each dignitary present taking his or her turn at striking a few blows. (above)

During the course of the celebration it was announced that a Mr. Steward of Spokane had been so impressed with the proposed railroad that he had come to Grants Pass to build a new modern hotel on 6th and K streets.

It was anticipated that rail coast travel would soon replace the Williams and Crescent City stage coaches which used the Palace Hotel (below) at 5th and G streets as a transfer point.



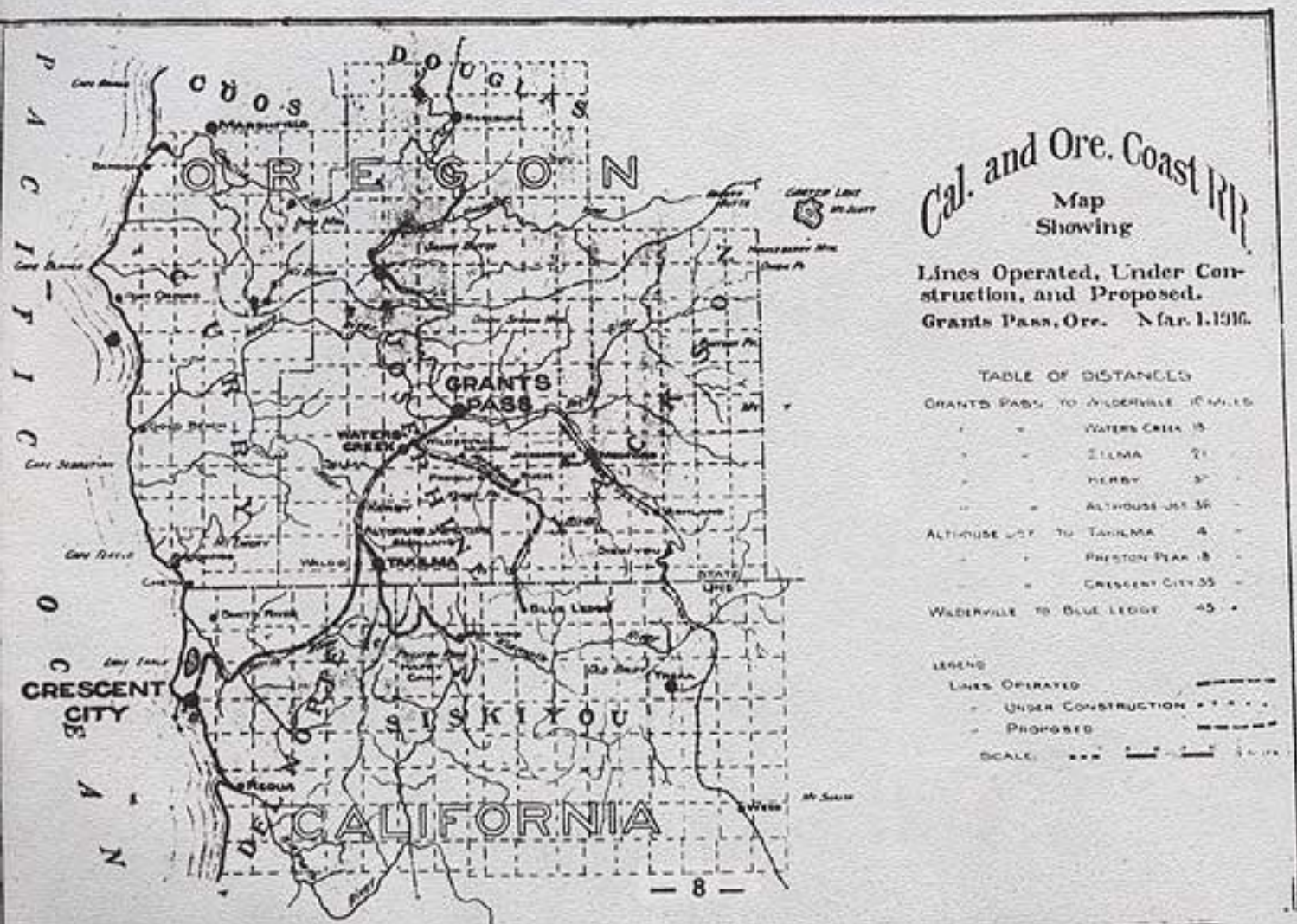


This first Grants Pass effort carried the rails across the Rogue River. On April 21, 1911, the 60 ton engine "One Spot" crossed the bridge to the south bank (above-left). The 1 mile long railroad ended a short distance beyond at the county road leading to Medford.

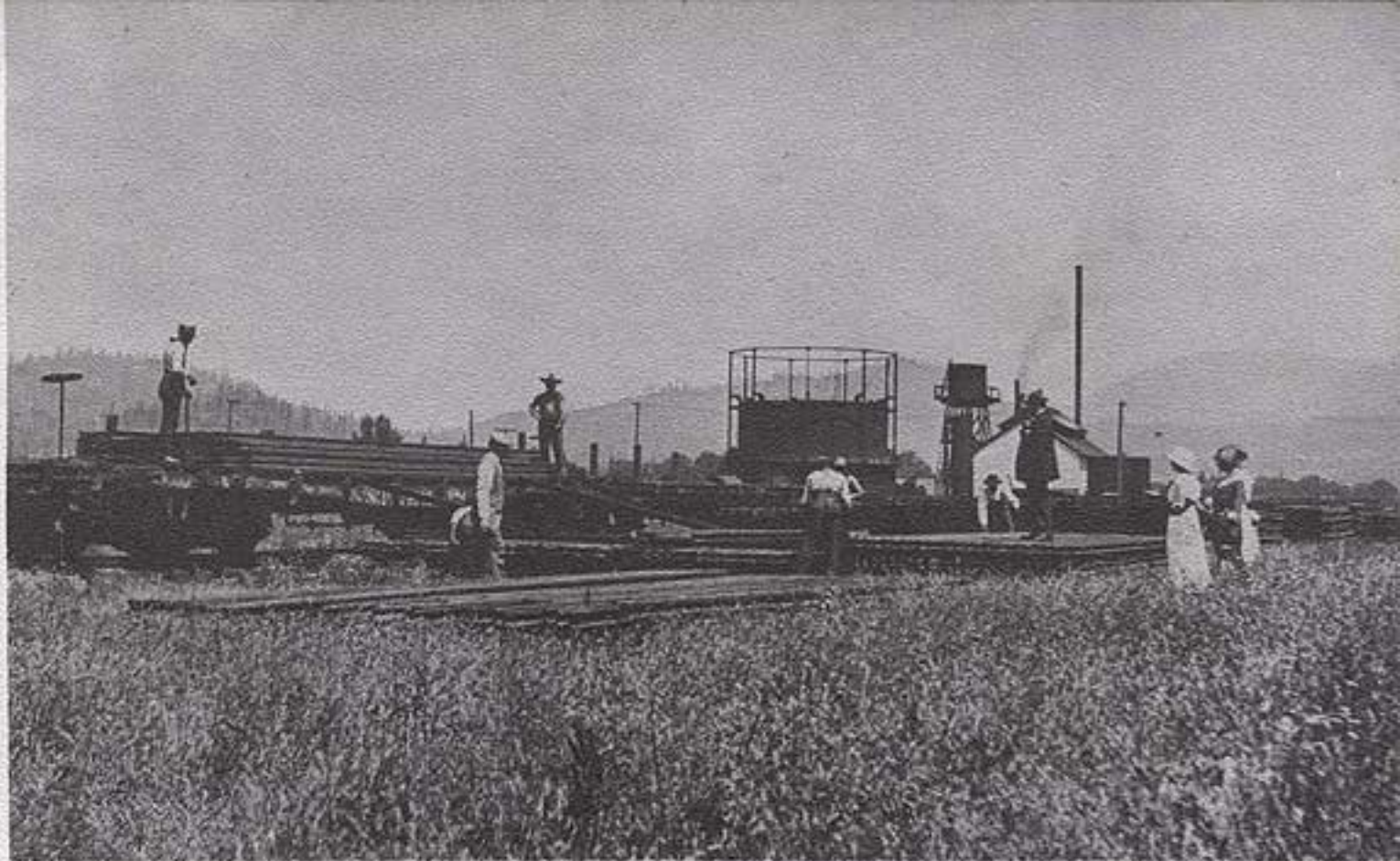
Failure of the Pacific Western Railroad, holding company for the short line, halted further progress until late 1912. At this time Dr. J. F.

Reddy (right above) of Medford, encouraged Grants Pass voters to pass a \$200,000 municipal bond issue to resume construction of the road toward the coast.

Work began once again in January, 1913, and a 16-mile right-of-way to Hayes Hill was acquired. Survey parties struck out to establish the specific route (below) the California and Oregon Coast Railroad would follow to Crescent City.



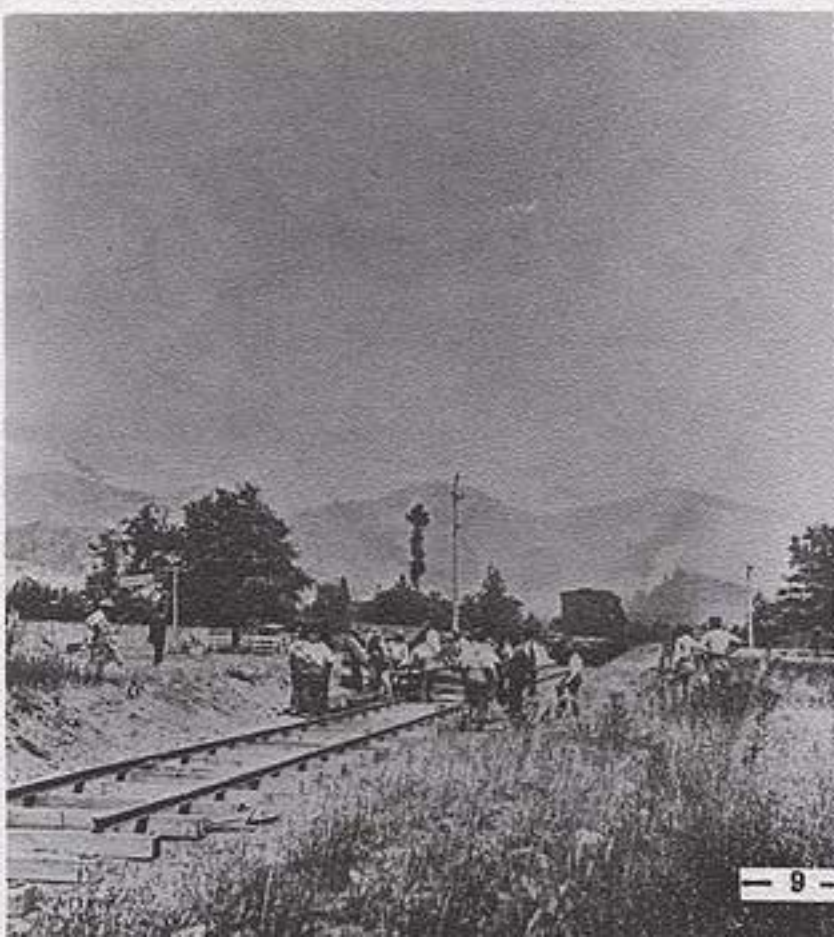


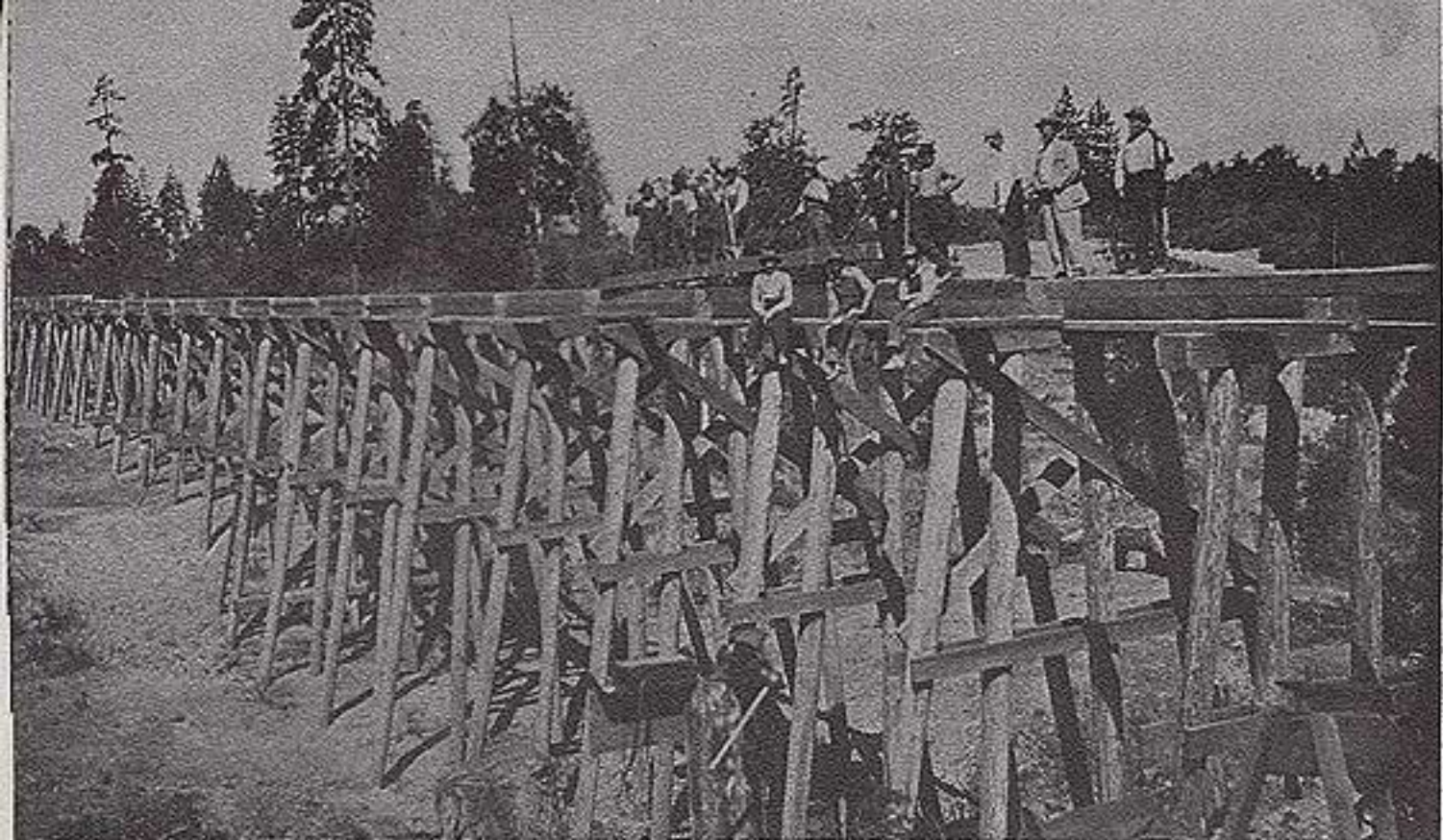


Ten miles of second hand steel rails (above) originally rolled in 1882, were purchased at a price of \$33, per ton F.O.B., Grants Pass. The wood burning locomotive, "One Spot", was reconditioned while the newspapers happily announced that "its vibrant

whistle will soon rip holes in the atmosphere".

Tracks were laid (left-below) on a 100 foot wide right-of-way which was graded through the present South Grants Pass to the Allen Creek crossing (right-below).

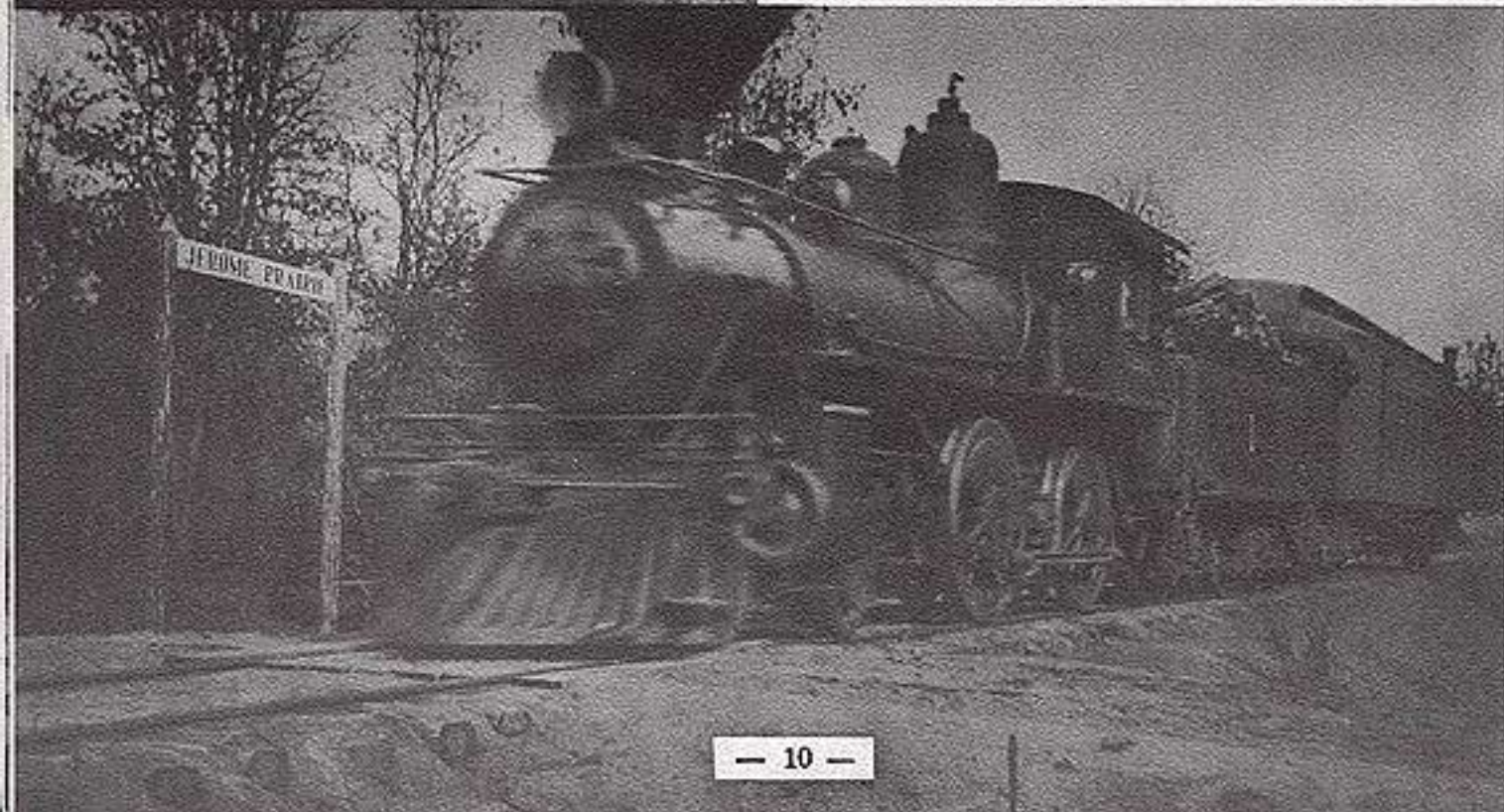




At Allen Creek (above) a construction camp consisting of a cook tent, a ten horse team stable and five bunk tents were set up and labeled "Camp Number One."

Up to fifty teams were used to grade the roadbed (left) leading to the Applegate River.

Since Wilderville had been designated as the first station out of Grants Pass, Jerome Prairie (below) rated only the classification of a "whistle stop".





The dense stands of timber on or near the right-of-way were more than adequate to provide all of the pilings needed for wooden bridges and trestles. Since concrete culverts were more expensive than the manpower costs to fell, trim and debark the trees, most crossings on the short line were constructed from these harvested forests.





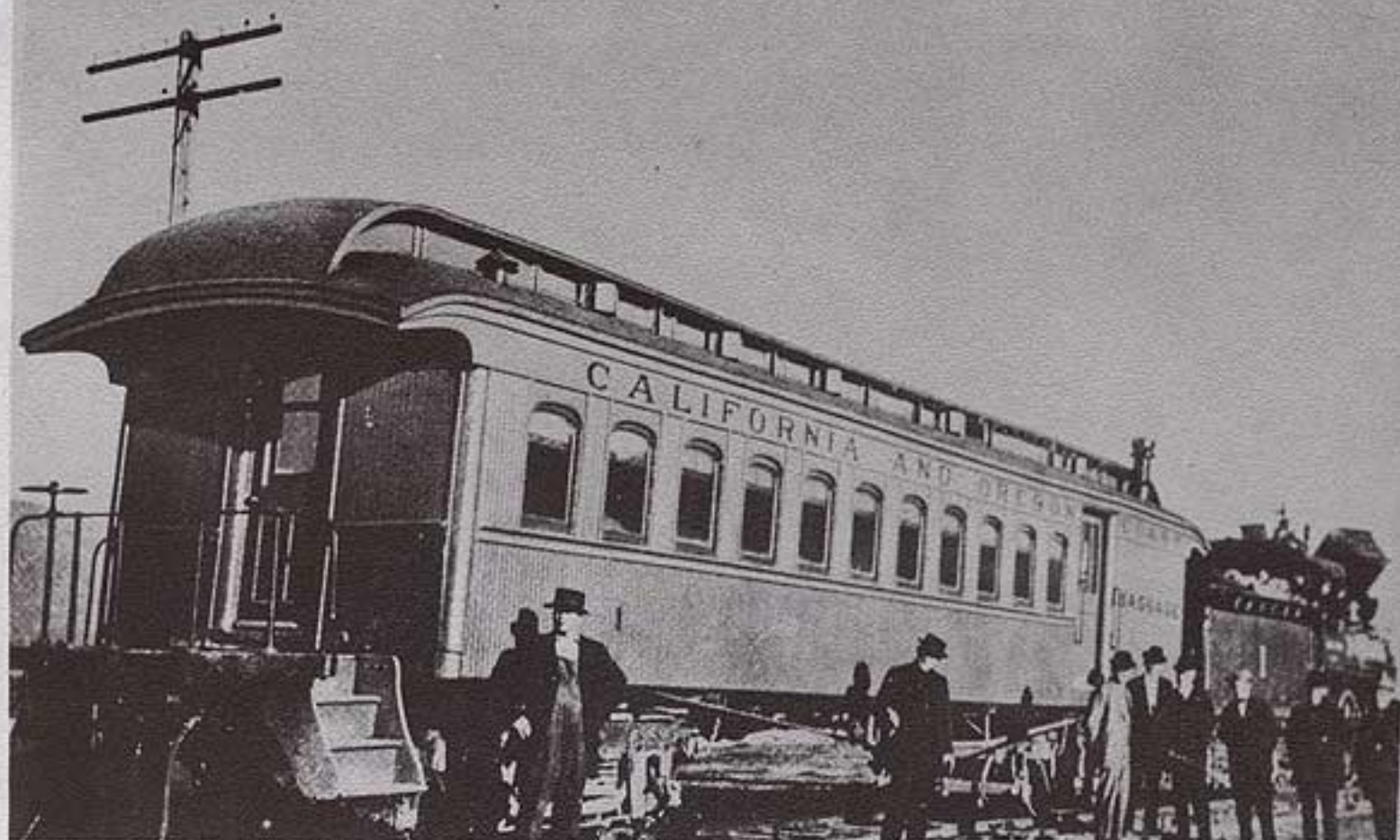
In cleaning the right-of-way, (above) small trees and salvagable limbs were cut to handling size and stacked nearby for later use as locomotive fuel.

To celebrate the opening of the

line to Wilderville Station (left-below), a gala picnic excursion was planned for Labor Day, 1914.

Number 1 ticket (right-below), auctioned off to the highest bidder during the Labor Day weekend, was sold for \$115.

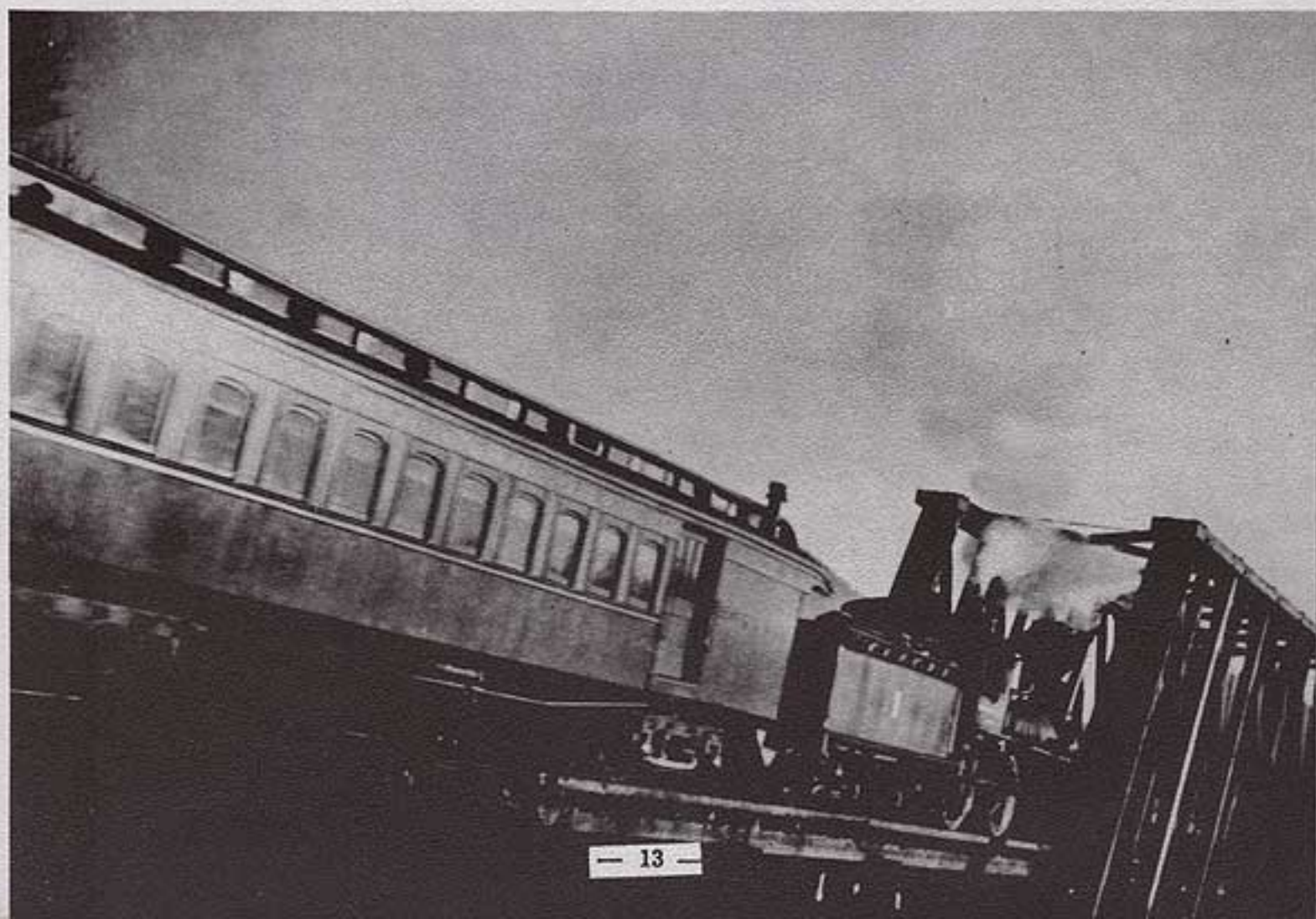




Southern Pacific coaches were rented for the day and at 9:00 A.M. One Spot's crew (above) "fired up" for the big occasion.

Puffing proudly, the little engine and her bulging cars moved briskly

out across the Rogue River (below). In less than an hour she had discharged her load of passengers and was ready to speed back (in reverse) to Grants Pass for the second group of prepaid fares.

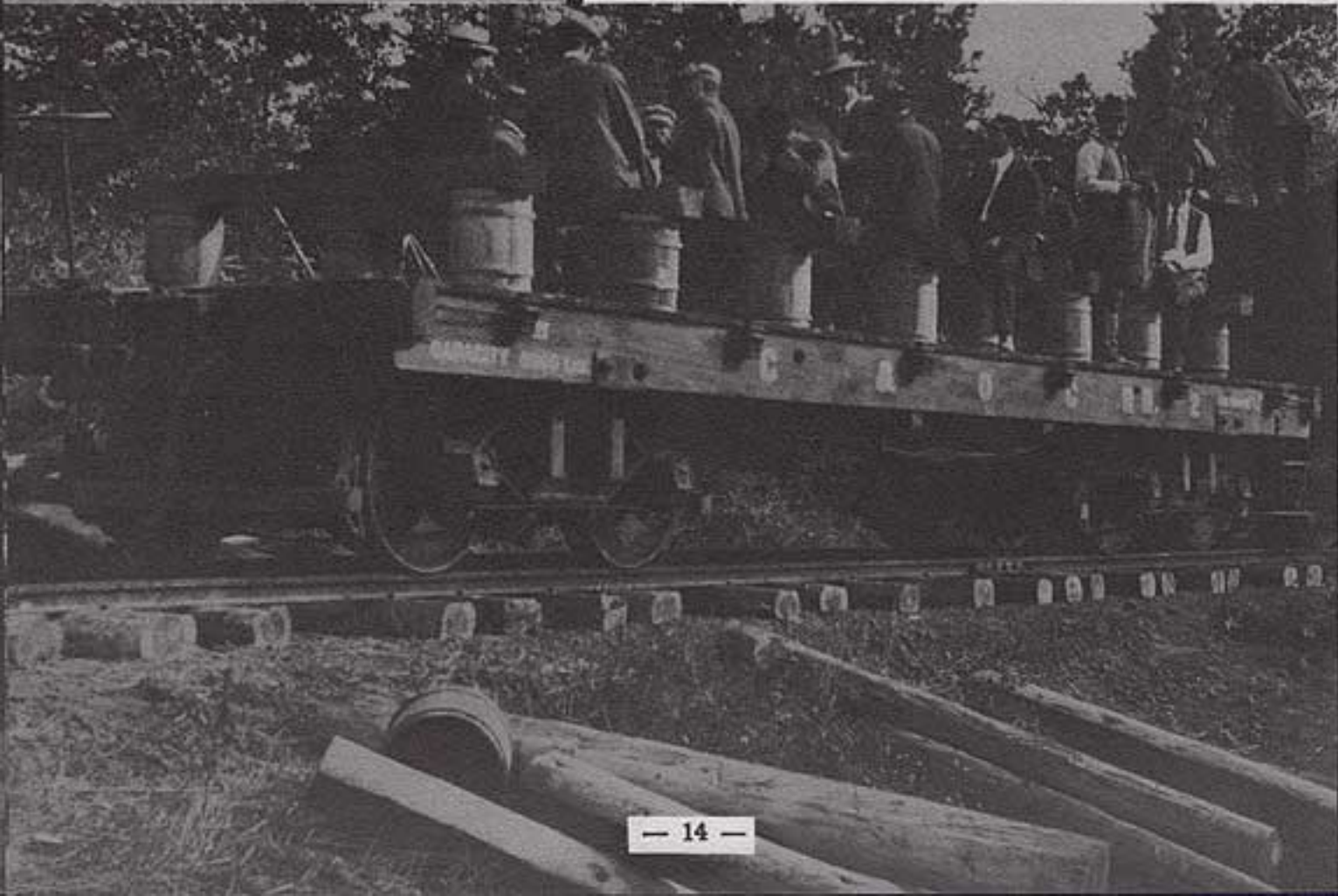


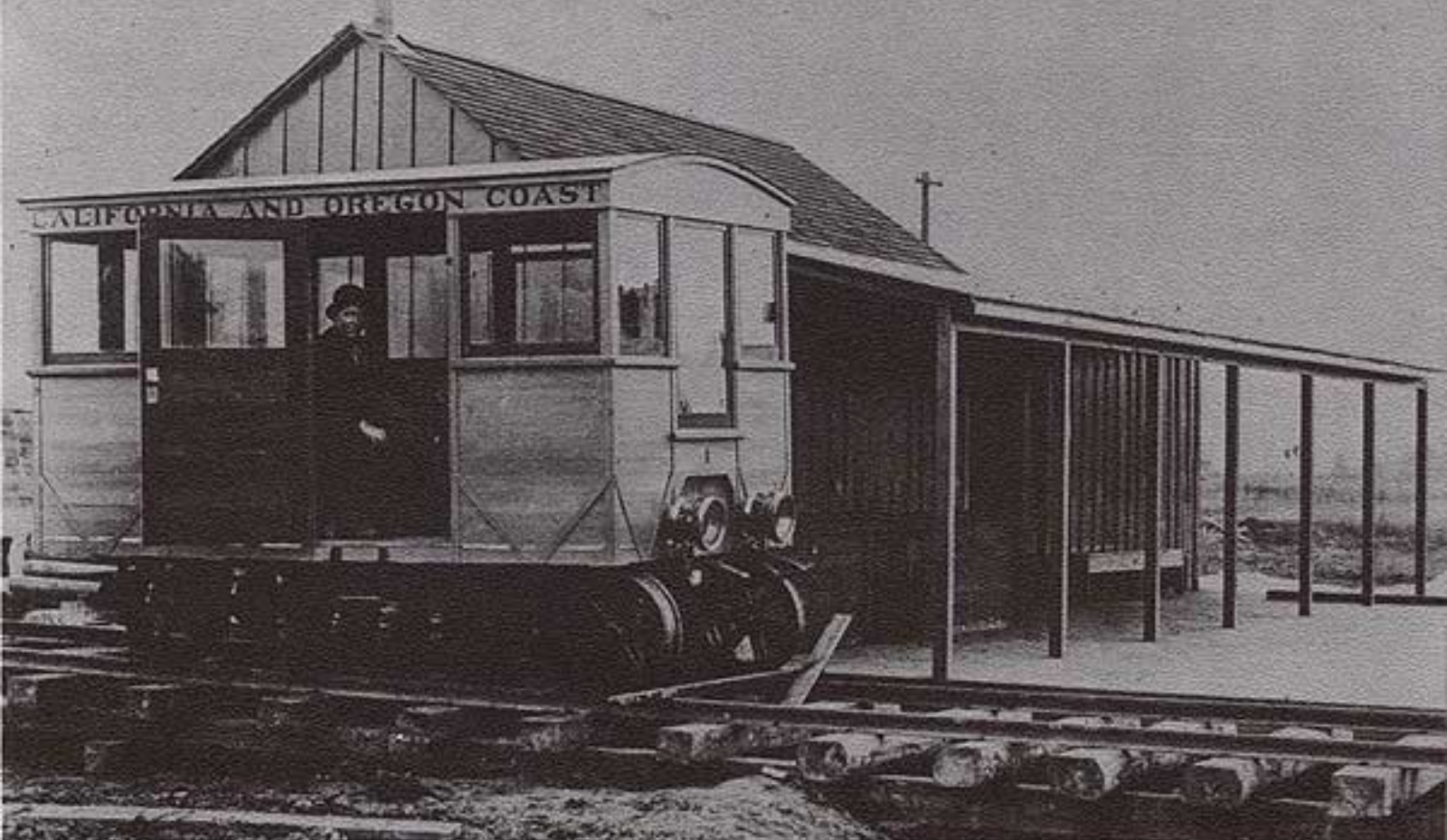


Those who drove automobiles to the Wilderville celebration (above) were "fined" fifty cents (the price of a round trip fare). Among those to "contribute" was Grants Pass Police Chief George Lewis.

Throughout the day, gallons of homemade ice cream were consumed and couples danced to the strains of fiddle music on the platform (left).

On July 4th of the next year, another outing took place, but less elaborate accommodations were provided (below).





After the Labor Day celebration, a small gasoline powered passenger car (above) was placed in service between Wilderville and Grants Pass. The little coach, like all C and O C rolling stock, was painted yellow, and the local newspapers promptly dubbed it the "Yellow Streak". As the years wore on, however, these same journals revealed a slight lack of confidence in the vehicle and began to refer to it as the "Yellow Peril".

In July 1915 the railroad was sold to the Twohy Brothers, subject to the

condition that the line was to be extended to Waldo within 3½ years. An extension of this time limitation was to be granted if the country entered World War I.

The following year, under the new owners, the line was extended to Waters Creek. Here another celebration took place in the form of an automobile caravan (left-below) touring out to the new railhead.

The only troubles to mar the success of the event were the customary motor failures and an uncommon number of flat tires (right-below).



# CALIFORNIA & OREGON COAST RAILROAD CO.



**ROBERT H. TWOHY, President,**  
**JAMES P. TWOHY, Vice-President,**  
**E. B. MILLER, Vice-President,**  
**JOHN HAMPSHIRE, Secretary-Treasurer,**  
**PRESTON DELANO, General Manager,**  
**GEO. W. BOSCHKE, Chief Engineer.**

Trains marked † run daily, except Sunday.

STANDARD—Pacific time.

Connection.—At Grants Pass—With Southern Pacific Co.

Grants Pass, Ore.

No. 1	Mis	December 1, 1916.	No. 2
10:00 A M	0	lve. Grants Pass..arr.	2:00 P M
10:05	2	Allen Creek.....	1:47
10:10	4	band Creek.....	1:48
10:15	5	Simmons.....	1:59
10:24	7	Jerome Prairie.....	1:51
10:28	8	Arden Craig.....	1:27
10:40	10	Wilderville.....	1:20
10:44	11	Prairie Creek.....	1:11
10:50	13	Wender.....	1:06
11:00 A M	15	arr. Waters Creek.lve.	11:00 P M

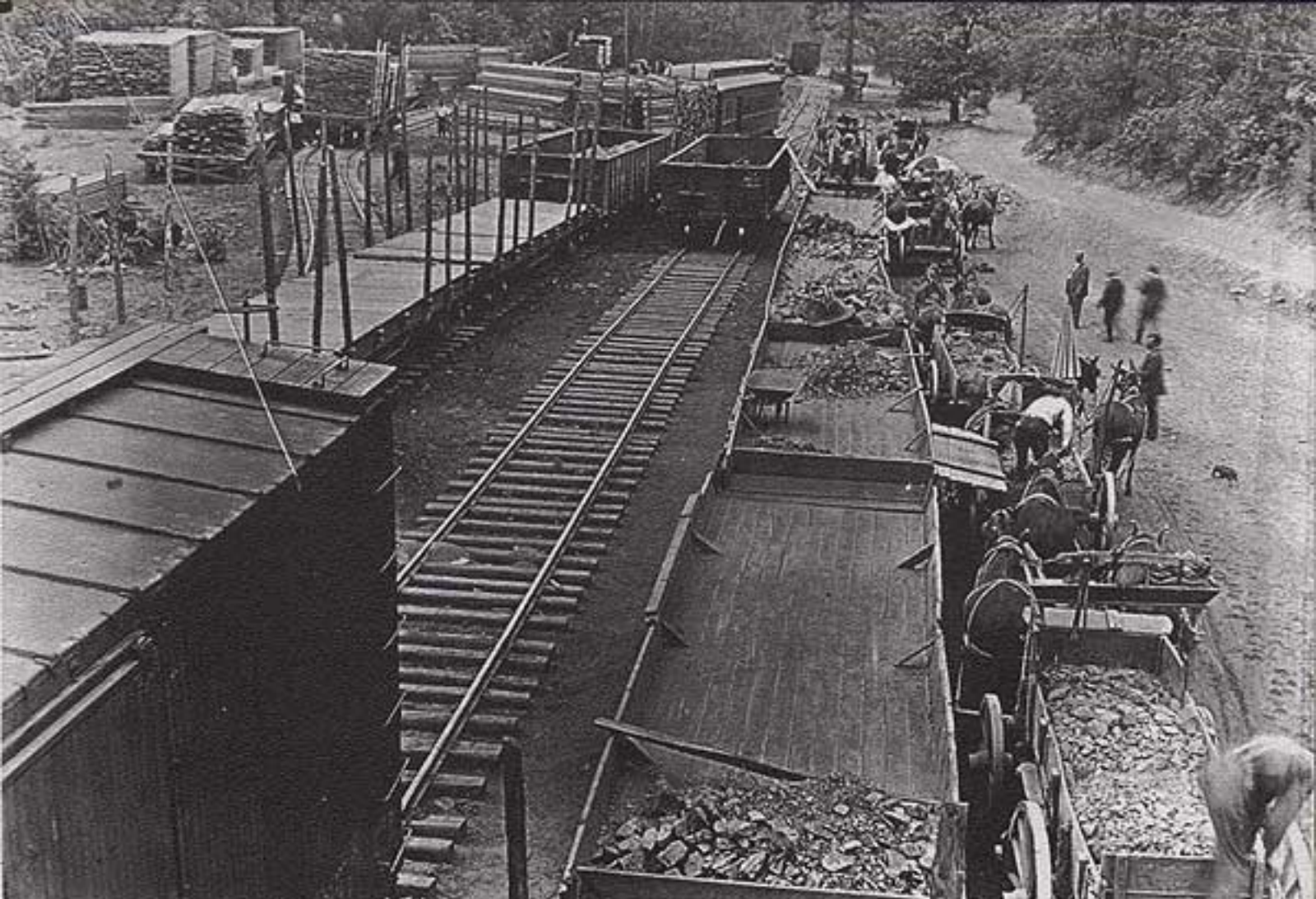


Enthusiasm for the short line to the sea reached its highest peak when the tentative route details were released with current timetables (above).

Ore from the Queen of Bronze Mine at Takilma, previously hauled to Grants Pass by teamsters (left) now joined the shipments of logs (below) loaded at Waters Creek.







One observer reported: "Waters Creek presents a busy scene. Cars stand on the track awaiting delivery of ore by teams (above) from the Takilma smelter (right) while a large steam caterpillar tractor (left-below) hauls trailers of lumber in to be loaded on flat cars".

The visitors who were so impressed by this show of activity would have been disillusioned if viewing the same scene a few weeks later (right-below).



# The California and Oregon Coast Railroad Company

Effective April 15, 1916, Automobiles will be operated between Waters Creek and Illinois Valley points, connecting with following trains:

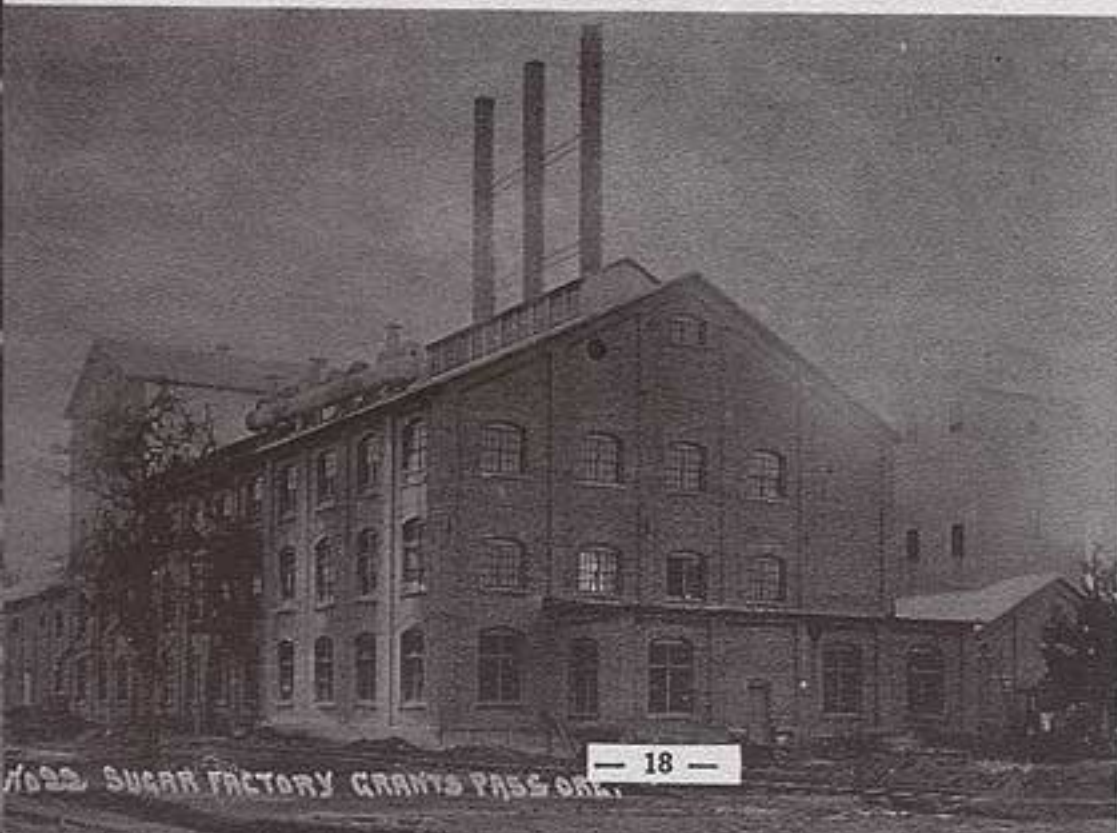
- No. 1 Leaves Grants Pass at 7:00 A. M.  
Arrives Waters Creek at 8:00 A. M.
- No. 2 Leaves Waters Creek at 5:00 P. M.  
Arrives Grants Pass at 6:00 P. M.

To stimulate passenger travel, ads (above) were posted to advise Illinois Valley residents of an automobile "feeder line" service for its patrons.

In 1916, the Utah Beet Sugar Co. had completed a refinery (left-below) at present South Grants Pass. To encourage further expansion of this and related agriculture ventures which would supplement shipping revenue, an excursion tour of the plant was planned.

Free tickets (right-below) were distributed to 600 farmers and their wives for the occasion.

On November 11, 1916, the visitors were shown the factory, taken on a trip to Waters Creek and treated to an elaborate outdoor supper. Many expressed interest in the new industry, but the agricultural boom dissolved when the sugar refinery owners announced a year later that the plant was to be dismantled.



SUGAR BEET EXCURSION

ADULT  
TICKET

FROM

TO  
GRANTS PASS  
AND RETURN

VIA

SOUTHERN PACIFIC

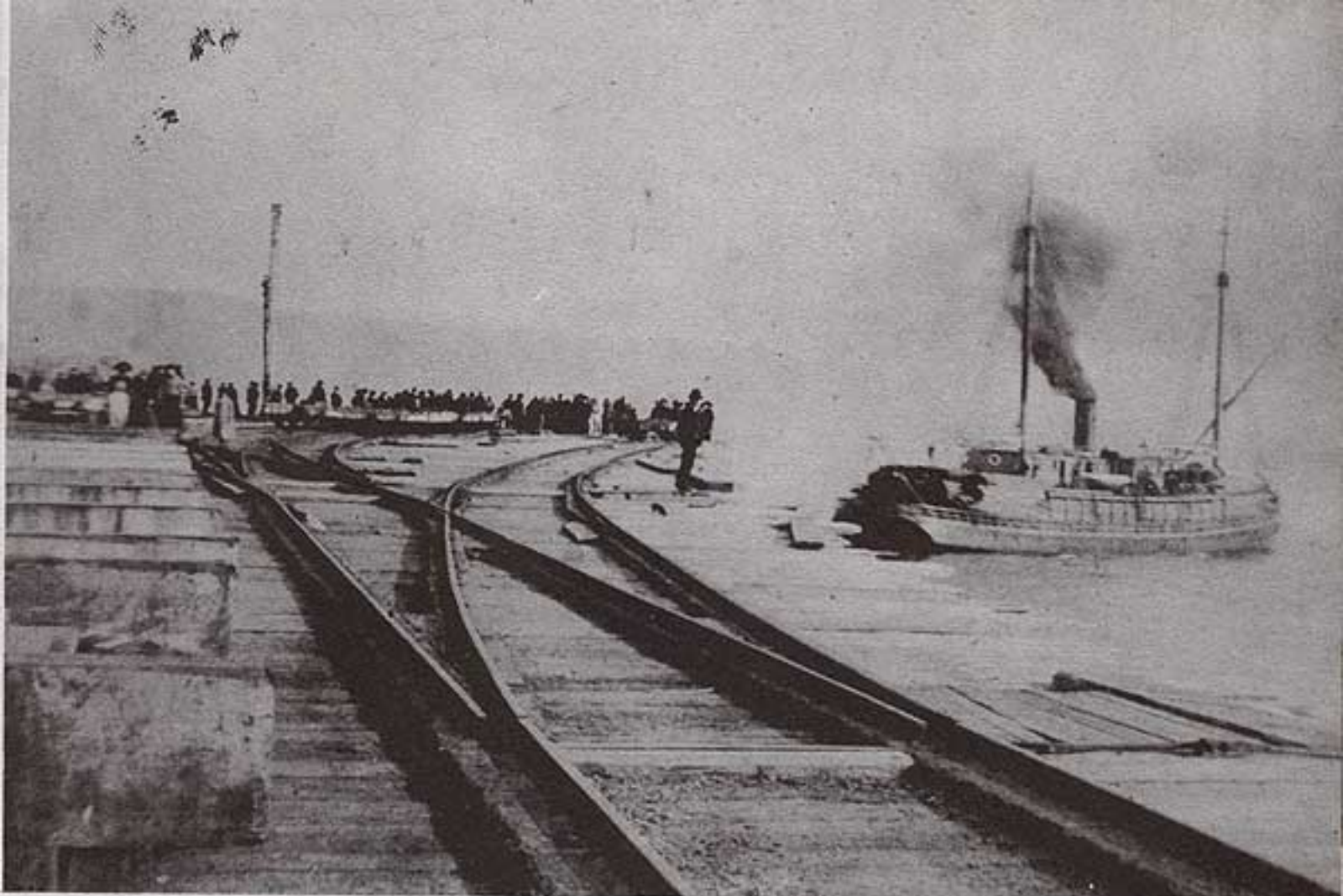
SPECIAL TRAIN

7:00 A. M., Saturday, November 11, 1916

Please present this ticket to Conductor on Sugar Beet Special, and receive ticket good for return trip.

VALID WHEN COUNTERSIGNED BY C.H. DENNEY

*C.H. Denney*



At Crescent City the rails extended out on the wharf (above) for ship-board loading.

Though its locomotives (right) continued daily operations to the Smith River crossing, hope for linking the interior with the coast began to fade by 1917.

Crescent City folks soon discovered that the rails along the coast provided a pleasant scenic trip (left-below), while the fairly smooth road bed of the C and O C afforded Josephine County residents a nice Sunday walk (right-below).



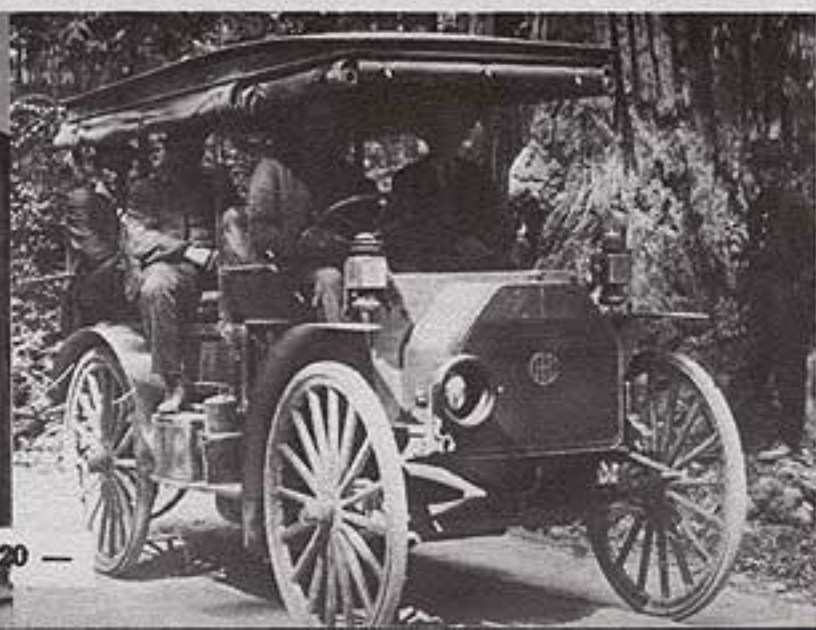
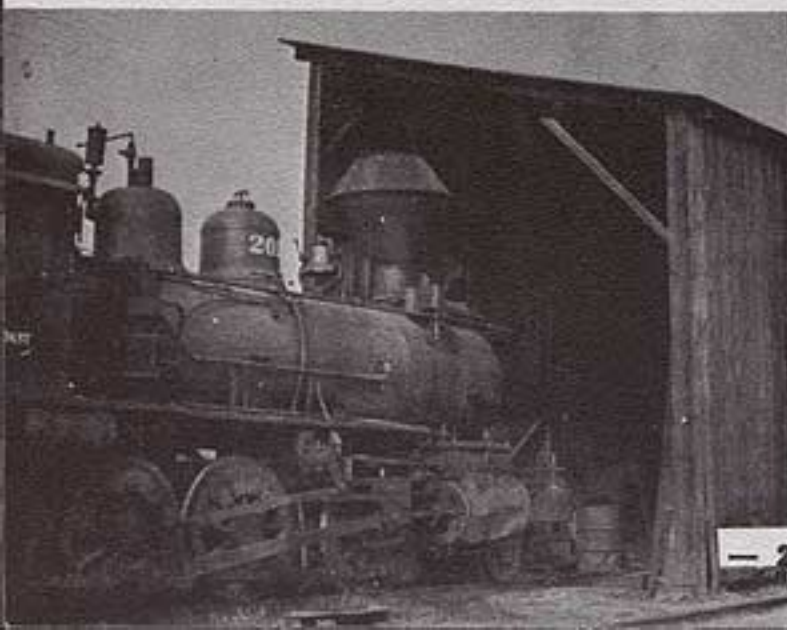


Through 1917 the building plans of the C and OC were developed only on paper. By the end of the year the train sallied forth across the Rogue River (above) on its Waters Creek run only three times a week. The remainder of the time old "One Spot" was usually in the Grants Pass shed (below-left).

To add to the dismal outlook of the line's future, the wagon road between Grants Pass was improved to accomodate automobile stages (right-

below). These stages, the forerunners of today's luxurious land cruisers, would compare favorably with a two-day session on a high speed vibrating massage machine.

The end of the twenty year dream came in 1922. Failure of the Twohy Brothers to complete the line to Waldo within the time extensions allowed, returned the legal ownership of the C and O C to the city of Grants Pass.





A few more years were added to the life of the short line in 1923, when the Beaver Portland Cement Company laid a four mile spur track from the Applegate crossing to the foot of Marble Mountain.

A tiny engine (above-left) hauled limestone from the quarry on top of the mountain to the crusher. The crushed rock was then dumped into tram cars for the ride down the hill to the tippel (above-right) where the waiting railroad cars were loaded.

The few accidents (left-below) suf-

fered by the C and O C throughout its many years took place during the cement company's operation of the line.

After 1924 the rails to Waters Creek were no longer used and all passenger traffic discontinued. Revenue from passenger travel during this last year had netted a mere total of \$24.00.

The locomotive (right-below) destined to be the last used on the short line was added in 1941, by the Ideal Cement Company (successor to Beaver Portland Cement).





Through the 1930's the little railroad limped along, sometimes showing a net profit, but usually with its year-end ledger in the red.

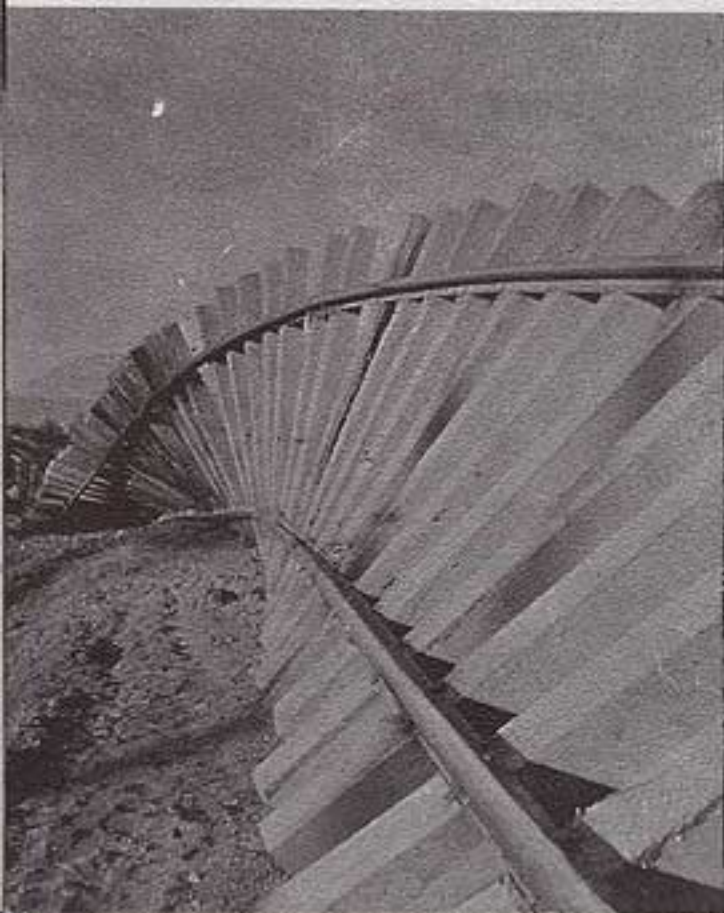
Little money was available to keep the line in running order, and many delays were caused by rotting ties and bridge timbers.

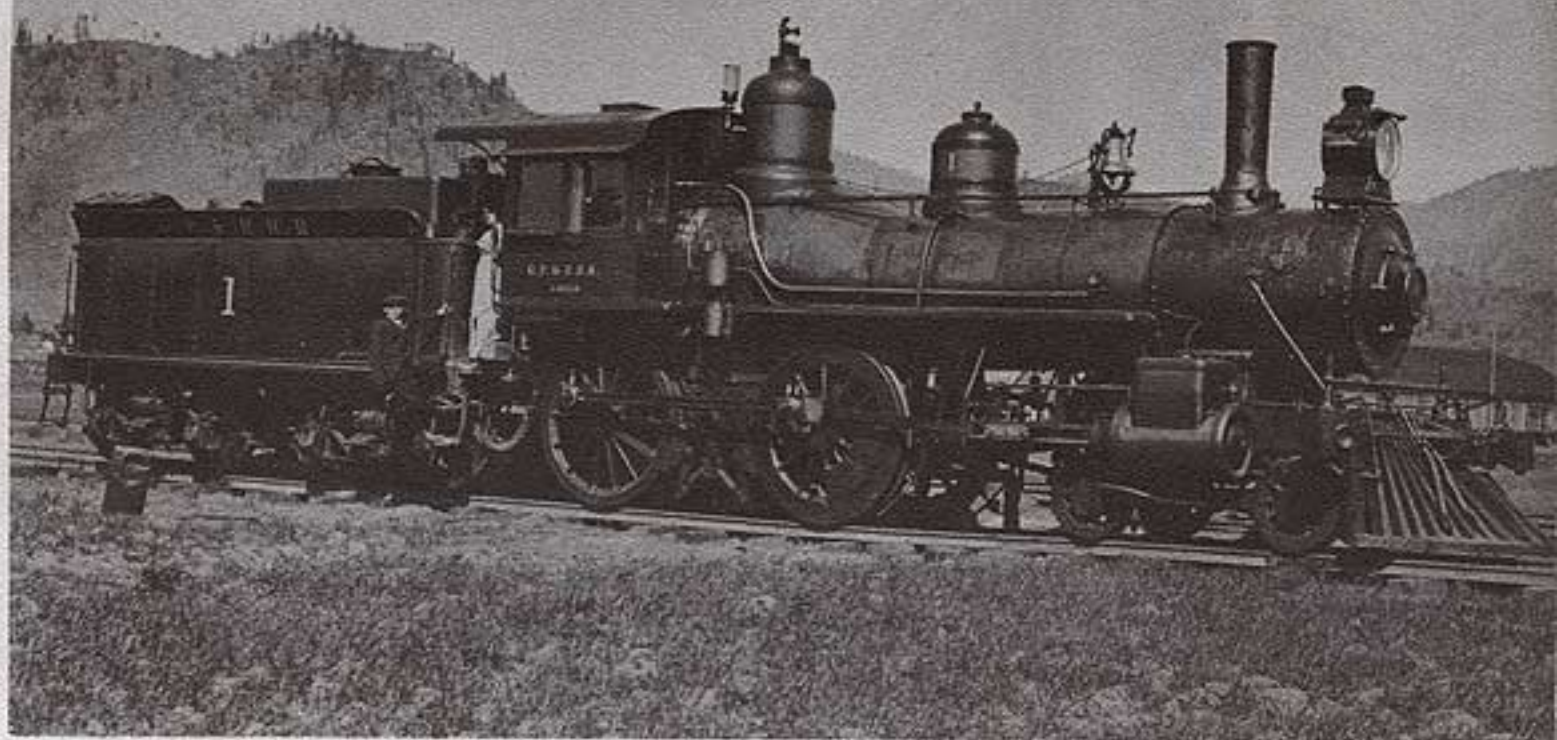
During the winter months the Rogue bridge was in constant danger of being damaged (above and below-left) by high water or the huge logs which rushed downstream with every flood.

Some doubt concerning the bridge's safety, even on calm days,

was evidenced by the fact that the train was stopped on the bridge approach until two of the crew had walked across. The engineer then cracked the throttle and hopped off. The train rolled across at about 3 miles an hour to the waiting crew who boarded her and applied the brakes, allowing the engineer to cross the bridge and catch up with his charge.

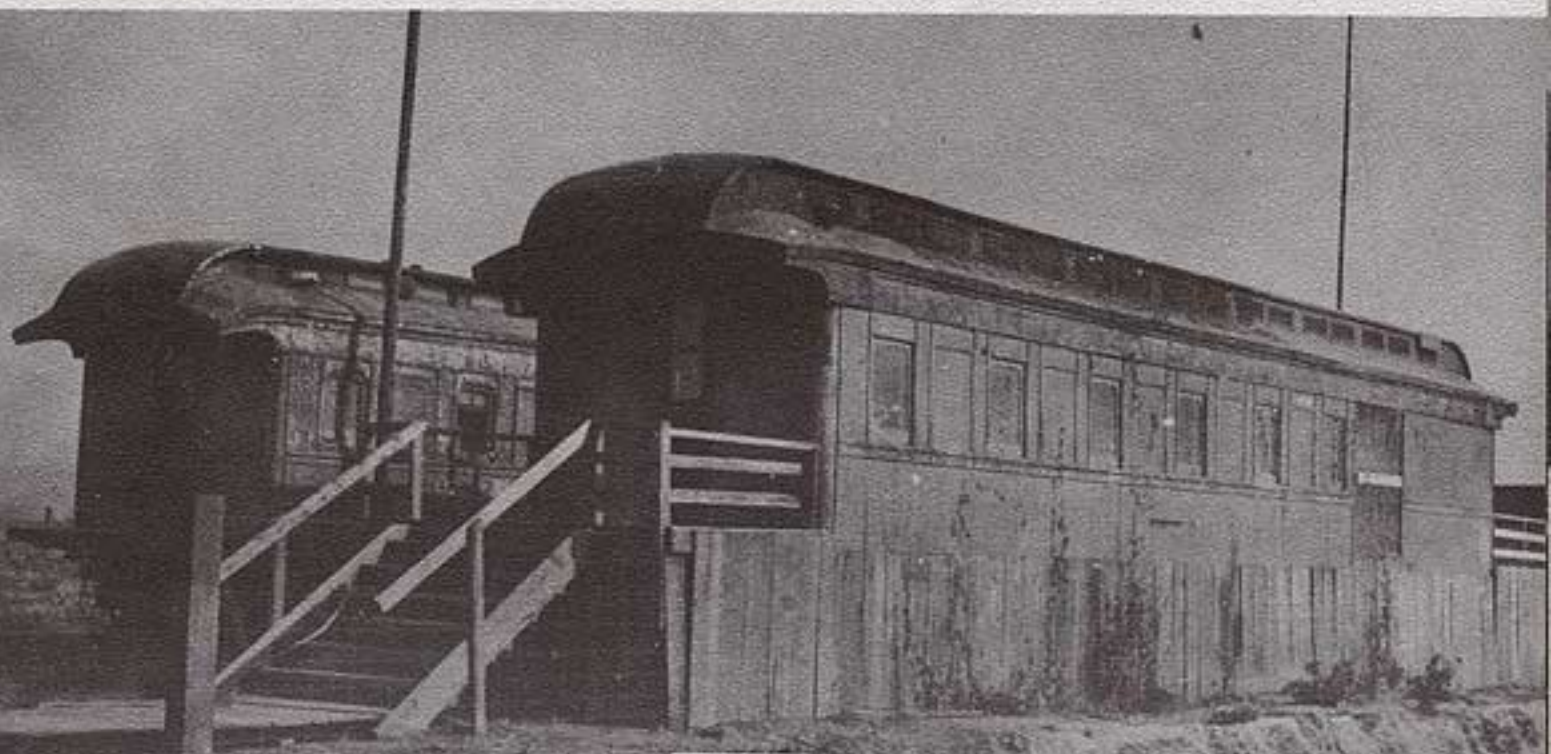
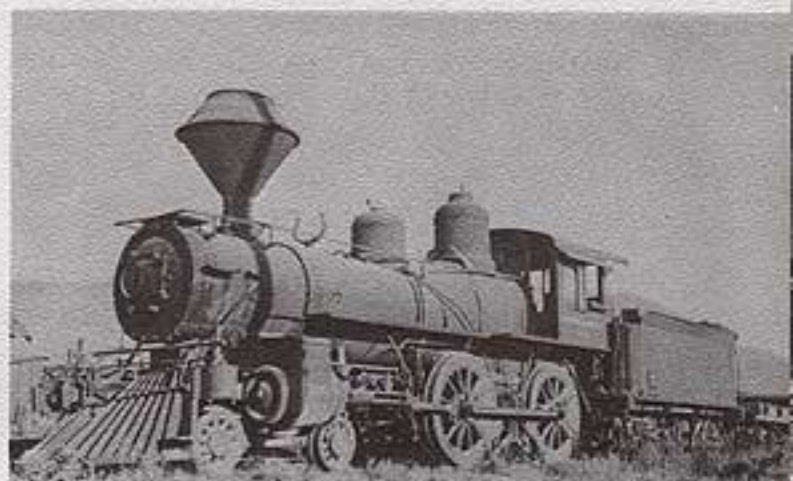
On one occasion during this decade an unhappy horse considerably altered train schedules by slipping between the ties on the Rogue River bridge (below-right).

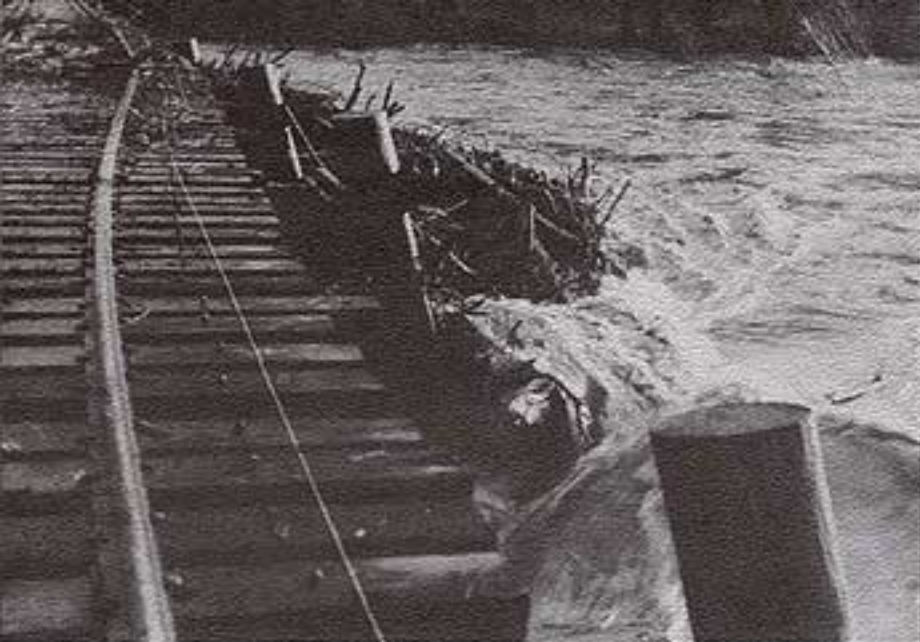




A final desperate attempt to link Crescent City and Grants Pass was made with a Reconstruction Finance loan application for 5½ million dollars. The original request, entered in 1933, dragged through 5 years of negotiations. When the effort died in 1938 the required sum had been scaled down to 3½ million.

The demand for scrap iron at the beginning of World War II took old "One Spot" (above and right) from the Grants Pass scene, and the former passenger cars (below) became housing for the railroad's crew.



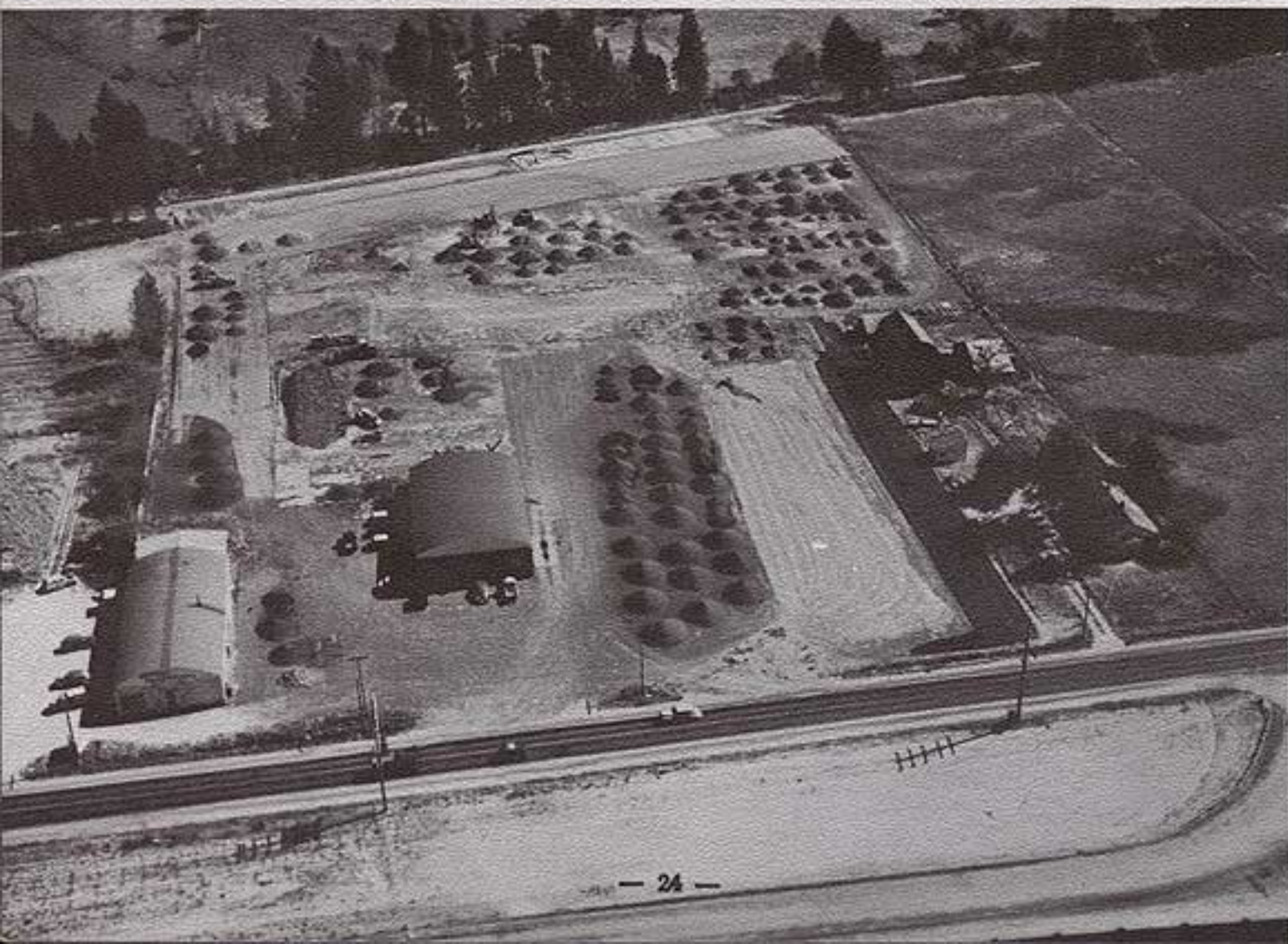


Each year the runoff of flood waters on the Applegate brought tons of debris to jam the crossing (above-left), often sweeping away sections of the bridge before dynamite could be used to break the jam (above-right).

In 1950 the bridge was washed away for the last time. Trucks began to haul the rock from Marble Mountain to the Ideal Cement plant at Gold Hill. The rails from the tippie to the Applegate crossing were removed and sold to an Arkansas railroad.

The C and O C was not quite ready to give up, however, and through most of the Josephine County chrome ore boom of the early 1950's, a shuttle service operated between the Redwood Highway Chrome Depot (below) and the Southern Pacific main line in Grants Pass.

Customers of the line on the south side of the Rogue River were limited to about three local companies and the chrome dump.







With the Christmas Day flood of 1955, the Rogue River bridge was washed away (above).

After final abandonment proceedings had been approved by the Interstate Commerce Commission in February 1956, the remaining sections of the bridge were removed (right).

The story had come to a close with 72 miles still separating the tracks of the Crescent City railroad beyond the Smith River (below-left) and the weed covered right-of-way of the C and O C (below-right).



Grants Pass now owned a narrow strip of land, 14½ miles long on which lay rotting ties and surface bent rails.

The rails were sold at auction to a representative from India. Today they stand halfway around the world from Grants Pass, serving as telephone and power poles. Seventy-five years old at the time of their sale, they brought \$39.50 per ton, or \$6.50 per ton more than their original cost in 1913.

The C and O C had so completely worn out every locomotive it operated that each had to be sold for scrap. The Ideal Cement engine was no exception and was towed away to San Francisco to be junked.

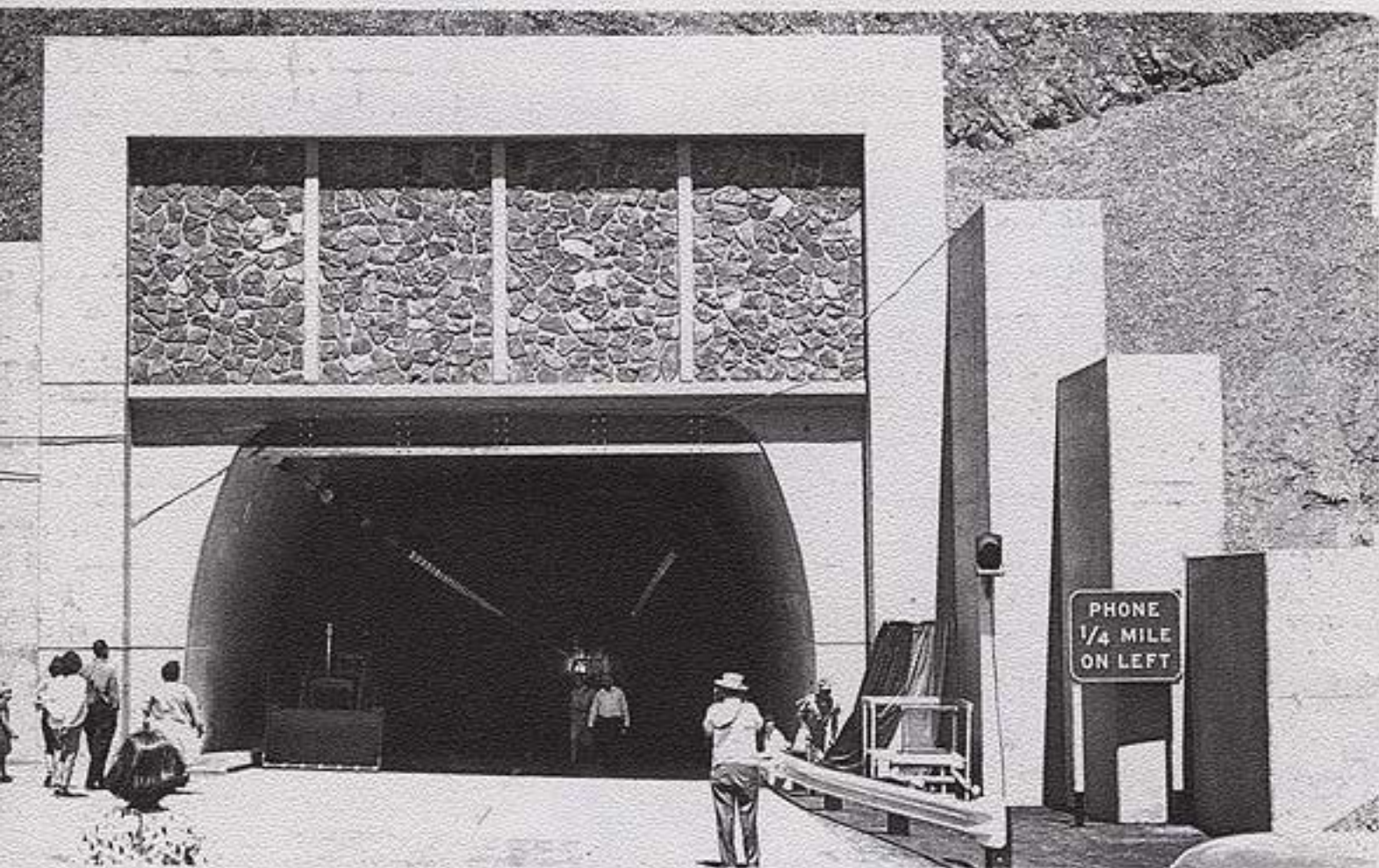
Much of the old right of way became a portion of a new highway to Crescent City to add another link in the long sought "Winnemucca-to-the-Sea" route which began a half century before.

This all-weather, direct route

from the vast inland empire to the Pacific Ocean now links the states of Nevada, Oregon and California. As America's newest East-West highway it has been called the first major transcontinental trail opened to the Pacific Coast since the days of Kit Carson.

The dream of a way through the Coast Mountain barrier to link the Crescent City Harbor with the fertile valleys of Oregon, became a reality with the completion of the Randolph Collier Tunnel in 1963.

And so, with just a touch of regret we come to the end of our story about "the railroad that might have been". Though the more sophisticated members of our atomic age society might find nostalgia somewhat unfashionable, there are those among us who, if we listen carefully, can still faintly hear old 103's whistle echoing across the valley on a cool morning's breeze.



Not only because of his efforts with regard to the Oregon Mountain tunnel, but because of his long years of tireless work for California's freeway system, the California Assembly and Senate adopted a joint resolution in 1961, naming the above project "The Randolph Collier Tunnel". This link in the Winnemucca-To-The-Sea Highway was opened on July 20, 1963.