



One of the big lorries

One of the "big lorries" described in this instalment of "When Lumber Was King" is pictured here. These rails ran for miles through the big McLachlin piling yard. In the background one of the big McLachlin mills may be seen.

— Photo courtesy of P. Hall

When Lumber Was King

(By T. C. Mulvihill)

The Indian bark canoe was the most adequate means of transportation ever devised by primitive man. For two centuries it threaded the intricate and raging waterways of a continent, carrying the harvest of a vast wilderness three thousand miles to our eastern seaboard.

The lorry of the early lumberman was a vital link in that long convoy or belt extending from our northern forests to lumber hungry Europe. Big lorries were of steel construction,

ten feet long and seven feet wide; with four heavy flanged wheels. A steel turntable was mounted on this frame. It revolved like a merry-go-round when empty. An iron pin locked it in place. Two rows of steel rollers, set in bearings on the turn table carried the load, two bunches of lumber.

Big lorry horses were lighter and faster than car horses. They spent the day between the rails and soon became sure footed around frogs and switches; learned to switch smartly from end to end of the lorry, or squeeze between lorry and lumber piles to reverse direction. They travelled over twenty miles daily, rain or shine.

A brakeman rode a long hardwood pole extending in the rear. The brakeman changed ends with the team. He was young, active and a sprinter, for he had to spurt ahead of a trotting team to throw switches.

A simple yet ingenious hook up was devised for lorry horses. The heavy awkward whiffle trees and pole were discarded. An evener, a seven foot hardwood piece, one inch thick and six inches wide, tapered at the ends to accommodate end irons and a hook, took the draught, at the thick centre portion a pulley was attached with a revolving chain. Heel chains from short hip-length traces were dropped over the hooks at the end of the evener and to the revolving chain in the centre. This was light and convenient for shunting, but neither horses nor teamster had any control of the load. The brakeman was in charge.

The output from two mills reached a 325 ft. long sorting table - a massive bed of wooden rollers. Here the lumber was sorted and stacked in high bunches, the width of the rollers, ready to be transferred to the piling grounds. A track fronted the table. Twelve teams

kept that table clear. It was bustling place at loading time. An expert lorry man was skilled. He could stop his team at the precise spot opposite the bunches to be loaded. The brakeman pulled the pin and swung the table. Lorry and table rollers must be in line, if not, the brakeman resorted to the crowbar to pinch the wheels and lift them up. The teamster swung off, a tableman jumped to the ground, picked up the end of a cable and hauled it over the lorry, between the two bunches to be loaded, placed a hardwood bar through a loop in the cable and held the bar on the end of the bunches. The teamster hooked his evener on the other end of the cable and the two bunches rolled into place on the lorry. A reckless teamster with fiery horses often pulled the load over the rollers onto the ground, kanting the lorry, scattering the load and blocking traffic. Grumbling tablemen then had a mess to clean up.

A steel crank on a roller shaft locked the load. The table was turned and the pin driven home; the teamster hooked on, crawled atop the high load, while the team scrambled and clawed on that plank platform to get the load moving. The brakeman trailed behind or rode the side of the load on up-grades.

Tracks switched perpendicularly from the table through two hundred acres of piling grounds on both sides of Highway 17. Two tracks crossed the highway just west of the Hydro Office into a South Yard. Another used by big car men crossed east of the bridge. A round trip was over two miles. There were twenty-five miles of track in that lumber yard.

Spring floods and winter frosts played hob with tracks. Despite a gang of trackmen, rails sprung, switches jammed, unions opened and lorries rocked, bumped and swayed, shifting loads and splitting bunches from top to bottom. A split bunch was a hazard for lorrymen and pilers.

