

# LITTLE BOY ON A LOG CHUTE AND A BIG INCLINE

BY LEE JOHNSON

I was raised on a 40-acre place four miles west of Rainier, Oregon, overlooking the Columbia river.

In about 1901 Jack Peterson's log chute was about 30 yards from our house. Near there my father worked firing a donkey boiler.

One of the first things I can remember was when my sister and I were playing in the yard. Suddenly my mother called me to get my father. As I looked up I could see the house was on fire. Although I was only 6 years old, I moved fast, but when I reached the donkey no one was there. I took off down the chute, 2,000 feet to the bottom where they were repairing it. When they heard me they looked up and saw black smoke boiling. By the time they reached the house it was about all gone. A neighbor, Agnes Burns, was there visiting my mother, but they weren't able to save much because my grandfather, who lived with us was asleep and they had a hard time to get him out.

In 1902 John Yeon bought Jack Peterson's logging equipment and started building a railroad incline through our place. The track was about 200 feet from our new house.

There were many things going on for a small boy to watch, such as bridge building, grading, track laying.

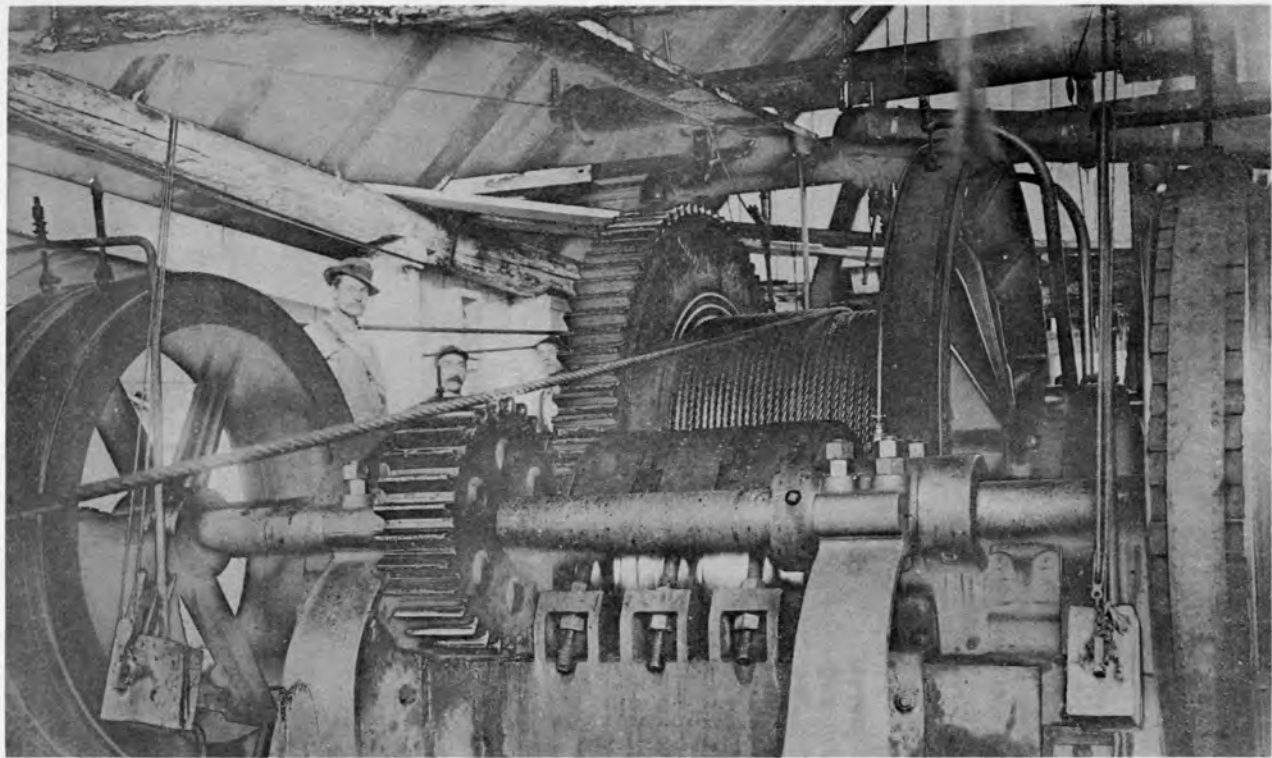
The first engine installed to let the loaded cars down didn't have enough brake power. A larger one was built by Willamette Iron & Steel company, which was a two

engine with 16x20 cylinders, with reversible gears and 10 manually operated brakes. This meant three heavier loads could be lowered down to the water. Cordwood was used to fire the two boilers. That incline is reported to be the first one built in the northwest (about 1902).

Andrew Peterson was the engineer; my father, Robert Johnson, was the fireman. Others who worked there during the time it operated were Uncle Joe David, Oscar Josephson, George Card, Ray Snider, Clarence Gore, Harry Frederickson, Blondy Frederickson, Hugh Platt, John Sharon. Later, in 1928, when I worked at Skamania, Washington, the same inclined engine was used on an incline at Murphy's Camp.

One day one load of logs jumped the rail just as the loaded cars started down. I happened to be watching from our house. When they started to pull it back on the track the cable from the first and second cars broke, letting two cars run away. There were three different grades of about 25%, 30%, and 40%. One of the loads jumped off the track after it went by our house. The lead load kept on going and when the logs left the cars at the bottom of the hill they were in the slough bank several feet. I remember seeing the ends still sticking out several years later.

When John Yeon built the incline through our place, the creek from our spring had to be moved so the overflow wouldn't run down



RAILROAD INCLINE ENGINE BUILT BY JOHN YEON AND USED IN LOGGING OPERATIONS NEAR RAINIER  
IN 1902. MEN IN PHOTO ARE ANDREW PETERSON AND ROBERT JOHNSON

the track. The new trench was close to our house, the ground was soft, and a heavy rainfall soon caused trouble. The day before Christmas, when my father was in Rainier, my mother noticed the kitchen door was hard to close, looking outside she saw cracks in the yard. When she looked at the yard back of the house she saw that the ground had dropped nearly a foot! Near the brow of the hill there were trees no more, because it was all bare; the hillside had slid off. When she saw that, she didn't lose any time getting us kids to the neighbors'.

The logging company moved a donkey engine in and moved the house back nearly 400 feet where it stands today. Mother lives on the old place with my sister and her husband, Joe Schreiber. Mother was 94 this St. Patrick's Day, 1969.

One memory of this place I often recall is when I was 10 or 11 I used to chop the small trees

down just to see them fall, which is a far cry from the conservation practices of today. My brother-in-law has been selling the timber for sawlogs the last few years.

In 1911 Portland Lumber Company bought out John Yeon's holdings. Instead of using the incline to get the logs to the water they built a railroad over the hill to Rinearson's slough about five miles from Rainier. When the railroad was finished, the incline machine and track were moved away. The concrete foundation for the engine is still there, but the sounds I used to hear are gone forever. The exhaust could be heard for miles around. Sometimes I think I can still hear that pulse generated from the back pressure in the cylinders as the loads were lowered down. I sometimes helped my father fire the boilers on that machine. Being young, I had to find the small sticks of cordwood that were more my size.