

DID YOU KNOW?

Historical notes from Big Butte Historical Society
Abstracted by Charleen Brown

With the arrival of passenger train service came the expectation of prosperity for the residents of Butte Falls. The business community flourished and P.W. Williams even began publishing a newspaper called *Butte Falls Progress*. As noted in the Butte Falls Comprehensive plan of 1982, "Early Town officials anticipated rapid growth, but it never materialized... Instead of becoming a huge sawmill center, Butte Falls became an area of timber fallers and log haulers."

In a 1977 article for the Eagle Point Independent, Anna Zander wrote, "The original proposed plan for the railroad was for a line to branch off at Butte Falls and cross the mountains to Crater Lake. Another possible line was to leave Butte Falls and continue on to Klamath Falls by way of Fish Lake." Butte Falls resident, Ernest Smith, who worked on surveying the proposed line, recalled, "The railroad was planned to be extended on to Klamath County and then on to Salt Lake City or Ogden, Utah. We were surveying from this side and they had another crew working the other side of the summit. Even though these surveys were made for it, the railroad was never built beyond Butte Falls. A kind of depression hit in 1911 and they called the whole thing off. The economy began to slip and further construction on the railroad was halted. The temporary work stoppage became permanent when World War I began to rage."

Realizing the enormous cost of completing their proposed railroad, P&E sold their holdings to a lumber company in 1920. P&E had invested over two million dollars in the railroad but, sold it for only \$200,000. Jeff Lalonde describes this purchase and the development of railroad logging in the Butte Falls area in his book, *Medford Corporation: A History of an Oregon Logging and Lumber Company*.

James Brownlee and Millard Olds entered into a cooperative management agreement which was the beginning of the railroad logging era for Butte Falls. The Brownlee - Olds cooperative venture sold to Owen-Oregon Lumber Co. in 1924. Defaulting on a bond payment in 1931, the Owen-Oregon holdings were transferred to the company that eventually became Medford Corporation. As the timber near town was out, the railroad tracks were extended further and further into the forest. The logs were brought out of the woods to Medco Pond where they were held in stacks and be reloaded onto the railroad cars and transported to the mill in Medford.

Zander wrote, "For over forty years, flatcar after flatcar of logs rolled over the tracks to Medford. But as with everything else, progress came and logging trucks began to take over the final part of the train. The last train pulled its load of logs to the valley, the mournful whistle sounded its warning, it turned back from the mountains and slowly died away—so did part of our past."

MEMBERSHIP FORM - \$5.00 per household

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

Send to: **BIG BUTTE HISTORICAL SOCIETY**
P.O. BOX 379
Butte Falls, OR 97522