

Switching with Percy and Old One Spot

The following is a story told to Maynard Atkinson by Percy Stacy, involving a switching maneuver using the BC Forest Discovery Centre's shay locomotive which is on display near the front entrance. Maynard a "Railway History Enthusiast" (his own words) has worked collaboratively on several books by Sandy Macham author of Odds, Sods and Logs, and Chemainus and its Chemainus & Its Logging Railways to name a few.

Old One Spot is the nickname given to our Bloedel, Stewart & Welch No. 1 shay locomotive built in 1911 by Lima Locomotive Works.

During the spring of 1987, I was fortunate to meet Percy Stacy of Campbell River. He had extensive knowledge from his experience in railway logging on Vancouver Island and elsewhere. We had a friendship for a few months until he moved back to Manitoba, his province of birth. I visited his apartment a number of times to talk history. He had a photo album and loved to talk about his experiences in the woods. I kept a journal to record his memories. The stories provide a unique insight into some of the ordeals faced by crews when logging by rail. Some of the stories are delightful and some are tragic and all provide a glimpse into the past.

Maynard Atkinson

Percy Stacy and his recollections:

March 5, 1987

Mr. Stacy had his steam ticket dated 26/1/26 framed on his wall. He earned the ticket when he was 24 years old. His career involved the Lamb Lumber Company at Menzies Bay (locomotive fireman), Grassy Bay (locomotive fireman), Orford Bay (fireman-climax locomotive), Knox Bay (fireman), Myrtle Point (spare), Menzies Bay (locomotive engineer for Bloedel Stewart & Welch), Harrison Lake (right after Knox Bay for P.B. Anderson and his "Green Point Logging Co."), Franklin River, Sayward, and Hooker Chemicals of North Vancouver. He retired in 1968.

Percy arrived at Menzies Bay in 1928 from Myrtle Point and remembered locomotives #1, #2, #4, #5, #7, #9, and #11 in operation at the time. #1 is the shay locomotive presently on display at the entrance to the Forest Discovery Centre, North Cowichan, B.C. The #1 was mentioned a number of times during his recollections.



B.C. Forest Museum, Duncan, B.C. Canada

Percy said he used to hate the #1 which he had to use occasionally as a back-up engine. It had steam jamb brakes and was difficult to handle when running light engine (ie. running with no cars. The train brake was air but with no trailing cars, the #1 had to rely on its steam brake). The engine brake needed careful attention under certain conditions when water could condense in the cylinder. If too much water was in the cylinder, it would limit the travel of the piston rendering the brake ineffective during an application. Percy described an incident to illustrate how the steam jamb could be problematic.

He and his crew were performing a switching maneuver on the wye near Loveland Lake inland from Menzies Bay. They were turning a "rigging-up goat", a donkey engine mounted permanently on a flat car used to rig spar trees. As the #1 backed towards the goat, Percy made a brake application to slow for the coupling. Just when he needed it most, the brake had no effect. He frantically moved the Johnson bar (reverse lever) into the forward position and reached for the throttle. At that moment, the engine hit the bull car with a terrific bang. The impact threw Percy towards the rear of the locomotive with the throttle still in hand. Now with the throttle full open, the #1 bolted forward with Percy sprawled on the floor. Moments later he managed to pick himself up from the floor with the intent to close the throttle. Remember the engine brake was still in full application. The water that had condensed in the brake cylinder bled out and the steam jamb finally took effect stopping the errant #1 in short order. The forward movement of the locomotive halted so quickly, momentum hurled Percy against the backhead (rear of the boiler). Once everything was calm after he closed the throttle, Percy managed to collect his composure and began to feel concern for the crew on the ground wondering if anyone got hurt. He peered over the rear of the locomotive expecting to see disaster only to witness the brakemen bent over slapping their knees in laughter. Both had jumped from the running boards when they realized the shay was not going to stop.

