

## Brown Lumber Company

W. W. Brown Lumber Company operated a big band sawmill in Fayette from the early 1920s. The company had a railroad running down Sipsey River to a logging camp called Brownville. Timber was hauled in by trucks from a wide surrounding territory. The mill employed 300 or 400 people and several hundred others were employed in the woods. This company started in a smaller way in Fayette in 1922.

Hell Creek Valley had many swampy places that were well timbered, but too marshy for ordinary logging methods. So the Brown Lumber Company built a narrow gauge railroad down the north side of the valley, starting at the Fayette – Vernon Highway and extending down below the Kingville – Crossville road. The locomotive was a Fordson tractor fitted with railroad wheels and about a ton of iron weight for traction. It could pull several loaded cars.

Down in the lower swamp below the Kingville to Crossville road, they used a small steam donkey engine and a winch to pull the logs out to higher, drier and firmer ground so that the log wagons could haul them to the dinky railroad. This donkey steam engine must have been fired by coal or coke as wood would have been too bulky and hard to keep supplied as it would have had to be dry or part of it, at least. I really do not recall what the fuel was. The engine had amazing power for its size. It had to be tied to two large trees by wire cables to keep stationary. The wire cable that pulled the logs was about 300 feet long and required a horse or mule to pull it out to the logs. Ordinary sized trees were cut down and the branches removed, the cable attached and the engine pulled it to higher ground where it was cut into the proper links, then hauled to the railroad. The large trees had to be cut to shorter links at the stomp on account of weight.

It was reported that four or five mules were drowned by driving them into sloughs while pulling the cable back to the logs. They only used “scrub” or physically poor animals for this – more animal cruelty! There were three or four teams to haul the logs to the railroad. They were huge horse teams, one weighed 2000 pounds and the others were almost as large. Their huge feet probably helped them to work in soft ground. They were as large as a dinner plate.

The upper end of the dinky railroad was a mile or two above Crossville where the highway to Fayette is near to Hells Creek. There the logs were unloaded in a yard and hauled to Fayette by truck. The log trucks were usually Model “T” Ford with trailer. But these trucks were not simple Fords. They were modified and equipped with extra gears for the heavy loads and the heels to be climbed. One widely used “extra” was a Rule Axle, an extra low gear in the rear axle. It actually gave the truck four forward speeds as it merely doubled the two regular speeds. Another was the addition of a gearbox from a “gear shift” car, usually a Buick. To use this gearbox, the frame of the truck had to be lengthened to accommodate the gearbox. This gave eight forward gears and tremendously increased power. Needless to say, with 27 horsepower

engine in the vehicle, it had very low speed. Some were dangerous to drive except for an expert or experienced driver because when the extra fixture was in neutral position one had no brake at all, and if the vehicle was moving fast one could not shift it into gear as this was before synchronized gears. Also, loads were limited because this was before the introduction of dual wheels.

Laddie D. Prater

Fultondale, AL

Source: Personal knowledge by Nolen and Bobbie Sanders