

# Historian offers glimpse of rail's past

By John Terrill

We're gathered here on Railway Avenue in front of the 1910 Soo Line depot in Weyerhaeuser because of the vision of a couple of Minneapolis flour mill owners and investors, who were looking for a quicker and cheaper way of sending their flour to the east coast.

W.D. Washburn and Charles Pillsbury, two of those flour mill owners, wanted a shorter route to the east coast that avoided the bottleneck of Chicago, where rail cars spend days in yards waiting to be switched into trains that were headed east.

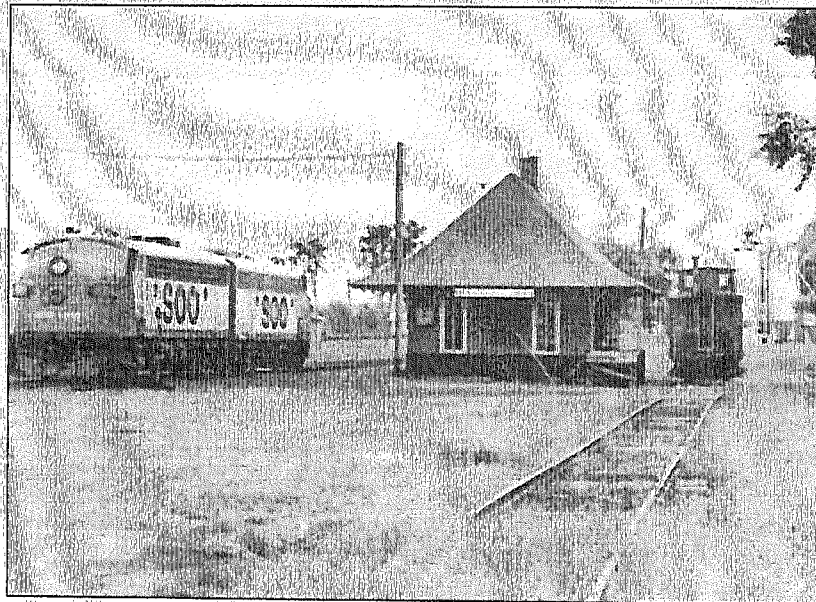
With that in mind they filed articles of incorporation for the Minneapolis, Sault Ste. Marie & Atlantic Railway in Wisconsin in October of 1883. The charter was signed by Gov. Jeremiah Rusk, for whom this county is named. Washburn was named president. Washburn Avenue in Weyerhaeuser is named for him.

Organizers of the railroad envisioned a route across largely undeveloped northern Wisconsin and upper Michigan with a destination point of Sault Ste. Marie, Mich. From there the rail cars crossed the St. Mary River and were transported by the Canadian Pacific Railway across Canada to Montreal and then down to Boston, Portland, Me., and New York via connecting railroads.

Unlike some of the land grant railroads, the Minneapolis, Sault Ste. Marie & Atlantic raised their own capital - a total of \$12 million, for the construction. Needless to say, that was a lot of money in the 1880s.

Survey work, conducted by W. W. Rich and his crew, took place in the winter of 1883-84. Considerations were given to grade, no more than 42 feet up or down per mile) and the number of bridges that would have to be built. Initially a route that passed north of Chetek then crossed the Chippewa River near Big Bend and went up the Jump River valley was looked at, but it was determined to be too far south. Instead they chose the present route that went east from Cameron through Canton and Weyerhaeuser to Bruce.

Construction of the railway started at Cameron Junction on the Omaha rail line, building west to Turtle Lake and east to Bruce. The railroad was so important to any town that the settlers of Cameron moved houses and businesses from their original location a mile north to the Minneapolis Sault Ste. Marie & Atlantic line. The 46-mile segment



**WEYERHAEUSER DEPOT** — The Soo Line depot in Weyerhaeuser is pictured during the diesel era with two F-7 freight diesels parked on the main line in front of the depot. Behind the depot on the house track is a Soo Line caboose. The Weyerhaeuser depot is being restored by volunteers and interested community members.

Jenny Clancy who was Weyerhaeuser's first school teacher. Jenny also clerked at Bob Stitt's store and finally bought it.

Jabez C. Stubbs supposedly operated Weyerhaeuser's first saloon. He later sold it to Paul Frenchick. Stubbs married Jenny Clancy in 1891 and the couple ran the store and remained in Weyerhaeuser for many years.

Other early business owners in the village were John McClellan, Owen Welch, Sidney Wright and James Clark.

The first house in Weyerhaeuser was supposedly built by a Mrs. Brown as a rooming house. Some of you may remember the house that Don and Bev Rost lived in. It was constructed of logs and later covered with clapboards. When it was torn down, as I remember, they found the date ( I believe it was 1884) carved into one of the hewed logs.

Weyerhaeuser's prominence grew in 1887, the same year that the railroad reached Sault Ste. Marie on Dec. 10. That year the Soo Line announced the village of Weyerhaeuser would become the first division point east of Minneapolis. At that point train crews were changed and locomotives were serviced. To do that an eight-stall roundhouse with turntable was built, along with a water tower, section houses for the track crew and an ice house for refrigerator cars. Extensive yards were

appropriately named as the train traveled Soo Line tracks to Sault Ste. Marie, Mich., and Canadian Pacific tracks from Sault Ste. Marie, Canada, to Montreal and then down to Boston on a connecting railroad. Trains began running between St. Paul and Boston in June of 1889. In the early years Soo Line sleeping cars were switched to the CP and traveled to Montreal and possibly Boston.

No. 7, westbound, arrived in Weyerhaeuser in the early morning hours, usually between 3:30 a.m. and 4:30 a.m. No. 8, eastbound, was a night train and arrived in Weyerhaeuser around 11 p.m.

The Atlantic Limited was the finest Soo Line train when inaugurated and offered fine accommodations as well as an excellent dining car. Since it stopped at fewer stations, it made fairly good time.

Trains 7 and 8 made their last runs in March of 1960.

Passenger trains Nos. 84 and 85, were the local trains, stopping at every station and usually carrying a refrigerated car for hauling milk and cream. Train 85 arrived in Weyerhaeuser after noon and traveled first to Cameron, and up Soo Line tracks to Rice Lake. The train backed down to the main line and resumed its trip to Dresser Junction, where it made connections to trains going to the Twin Cities and Duluth-Superior. The return train, No. 84, arrived in

to the Minneapolis Sault Ste. Marie & Atlantic line. The 46-mile segment of railroad was completed in the fall of 1884 with the first scheduled train running on Nov. 1. Trains came from Minnesota via the Omaha line to Turtle Lake, and thence easterly to Bruce.

Weyerhaeuser has the distinction of being one of seven stations on the original Soo Line. The village, named for Frederick Weyerhaeuser, was platted in 1884 as Weyerhaeuser (with the "e" in the spelling). The Soo Line used that spelling until 1958, when the "e" was dropped to conform to the misspelled post office name of Weyerhauser (without the "e"). It was changed back to the corrected spelling in 1984 when the village observed its centennial.

Trees were cut off the platted village of Weyerhaeuser in 1884 and the streets were laid out.

The railroad built a 24x64 foot depot in Weyerhaeuser. It burned to the ground in 1909 from a fire that started above the warm room. It was replaced in 1910 by the depot which stands to this day.

Weyerhaeuser and his logging operations were crucial to the village's early years. At about the same time that construction started on the Soo Line, Frederick Weyerhaeuser extended his Chippewa River & Menomonie Railway north from Big Bend and Potato Lake to connect with the new railroad just west of the Village of Weyerhaeuser. The Soo Line called that Weyerhaeuser Junction. In 1884 Weyerhaeuser operated a lumber camp managed by Jim Plunkett at that junction.

Frederick Weyerhaeuser, knowing that the fledgling Minneapolis Sault Ste. Marie & Atlantic was hard pressed for cash negotiated an agreement with the latter for construction of several logging spurs off the main line west of the Village of Weyerhaeuser. CR&M locomotives had trackage rights on the Soo Line to haul their logs to Weyerhaeuser Junction and then south of the CR&M line to Big Bend, where they were dumped into the Chippewa River and floated to Weyerhaeuser's big mill in Chippewa Falls. Weyerhaeuser operated several logging camps along the line in the winter of 1884-85, and 35 million feet of pine were hauled to Big Bend in 1885. The CR&M company office was moved to Weyerhaeuser in 1886.

Weyerhaeuser logging employees also were among the first settlers in Weyerhaeuser. Bob Stitt, who was employed by Weyerhaeuser for many years, supposedly built the first store in the village in 1884. He also served as justice of the peace, postmaster and in one reference was the "unofficial mayor of Weyerhaeuser. He also was a logging dam builder. Look at the 1888 plat book of Chippewa County and you'll find Stitt Dam on Deertail Creek between the present Tony and Glen Flora

the track crew and an ice house for refrigerator cars. Extensive yards were built, primarily for freight car storage, but also for passenger cars and a rip track and crew were added to make car repairs.

In the early years Soo Line locomotives burned wood, which was plentiful but inferior to coal. Locomotives were soon converted to burn coal to heat water in their boilers into steam. When that happened a coaling tower was added to the Weyerhaeuser yard.

Railroad employees, as well as the public, needed a place to stay and eat so the Soo Line built a hotel in Weyerhaeuser in about 1889. It was supposedly called the Hotel Taylor, according to the Soo Line Historical Society, but everyone in the village knew it as the Clark House hotel, which was managed by James Clark. He earned a reputation for being a fine host and the Clark House was one of the best hotels on the railroad in the early years. Local passenger trains 84 and 85, which carried no dining cars, stopped for lunch in Weyerhaeuser and passenger ate at the Clark House. That continued until 1922 when the hotel no longer served meals and trains 84 and 85 made their lunch stop in Bruce.

James Clark died in November of 1902. The railroad sold the hotel in 1904 and it became known as the Maple Hotel. The hotel was expanded over time, and in 1932 W.H. Sibinski, who owned it, tore down the original 1899 center portion with the porch in front, leaving the west portion, which was remodeled into a 16-room hostelry. That portion later became the Whiting Hotel, managed by Rose Whiting, and operated for several years before becoming a tavern. Anyone ride the mechanical bull that once graced the inside of the building? The east portion of the hotel was saved and Sibinski offered it as a community hall or club room.

In 1897 some pencil pusher in the Soo Line office decided that rail crews could travel 175 miles instead of 120 miles before being changed. Remember, in those days firemen shoveled coal by hand into the fire boxes of locomotives, there were no stokers. As a result, Weyerhaeuser was discontinued as a division point and it was moved to Pennington, near Prentice. Now there were only two division points between Minneapolis and Gladstone. As a result the 1887 roundhouse was torn down and the turntable removed.

By 1902 the Soo Line saw that the change was unworkable, and Weyerhaeuser again became a division point for both freight and passenger trains. A new and improved coal chute was erected at a cost of \$5,500 and an 8-stall roundhouse was built in July of 1903. In June of 1910 an arsonist was on the loose in Weyerhaeuser. Six buildings

ing to the Twin Cities and Duluth-Superior. The return train, No. 84, arrived in Weyerhaeuser at times ranging from 2 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. over the years.

An article in the Ladysmith News on May 2, 1901, reported that "The smoker on Soo Line passenger train No. 84 was half full of drunken lumberjacks, a rough and ready lot on their way to the log drive. They gave the 'newsy' a rough time, appropriating his oranges and other items he was selling." That is evidence why depots had separate men's and women's waiting rooms. You knew you were in the men's waiting room if you saw spittoons on the floor.

Trains 84 and 85 were always powered by steam locomotives, never diesel engines. They made their last run on July 5, 1954.

More information about the passenger trains that ran through Weyerhaeuser can be seen in the display boards inside the depot.

Weyerhaeuser, being the division point, saw crew changes for two eastbound and two westbound freight trains per day, plus extra trains when needed. Soo Line conductors were assigned a specific caboose, so when the conductor on a freight train from Shoreham arrived in Minneapolis, his caboose was taken off the train and switched onto a side track. The caboose of the new conductor was then switched onto the train.

The Soo Line retired its steam locomotives in 1955, although a few were kept operational and later used in excursions. The coal tower was removed in 1959 after the Minneapolis to Ladysmith rail excursion. The turntable and roundhouse tracks were removed in 1961, the same year the ice house was dismantled.

As some of you will remember the Weyerhaeuser depot was once much longer. The long freight room was removed and the remaining depot was remodeled, turning one of the waiting rooms into a small freight room.

The depot was a busy place, with the telegraph desk manned 24 hours a day in 8-hour shifts called tricks. Telegraphers bid on positions based upon their seniority. If you were a new hire it's safe to say you worked the night shift.

I have restored and donated telegraph equipment inside the depot. A telegrapher from 1900 would feel comfortable sitting at the desk and using it, so would telegraphers from succeeding decades. My inspiration for doing this was through my acquaintance with Paul Kostka, long-time telegrapher and agent at Weyerhaeuser. He knew I was interested in railroading and I remember him explaining what instruments sat on the desk and on the shelf above it, which was still labeled with the telegraph lines.

For those interested I will gladly give

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Another logging dam in that plat book is McGee dam, named for James McGee, another Weyerhaeuser employee who lived in both Weyerhaeuser and Bruce McGee's wife was Mary Clancy of Chippewa Falls, a sister of

at which docks and scum, which had happened a coaling tower was added to the Weyerhaeuser yard.

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At one time Weyerhaeuser had four passenger trains a day. Nos. 7 and 8, known as the Atlantic Limited, was

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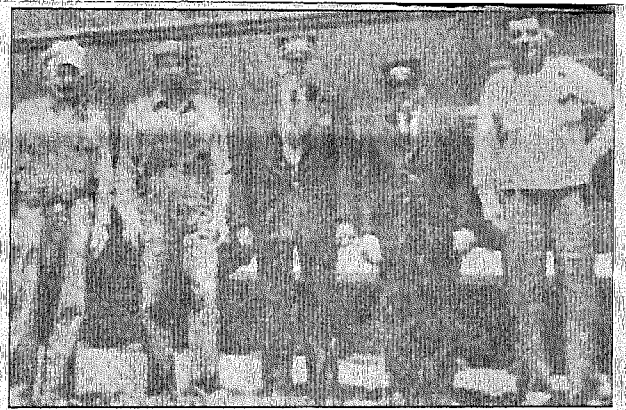
Thank you for your time and attention.

— This is the text from a presentation made by John Terrill at this year's Booster Days in Weyerhaeuser.





**OLD 2714** — The Soo Line engine that pulled trains 84 and 85 is pictured with her engine crew, Grant Avis (left), Ladysmith, the engineer, and Paul Peterson, Superior, fireman. The photo was taken in the last run made by 84 and 85. Locomotive 2714 formerly pulled passenger trains 7 and 8 before being relegated to the one-coach passenger.

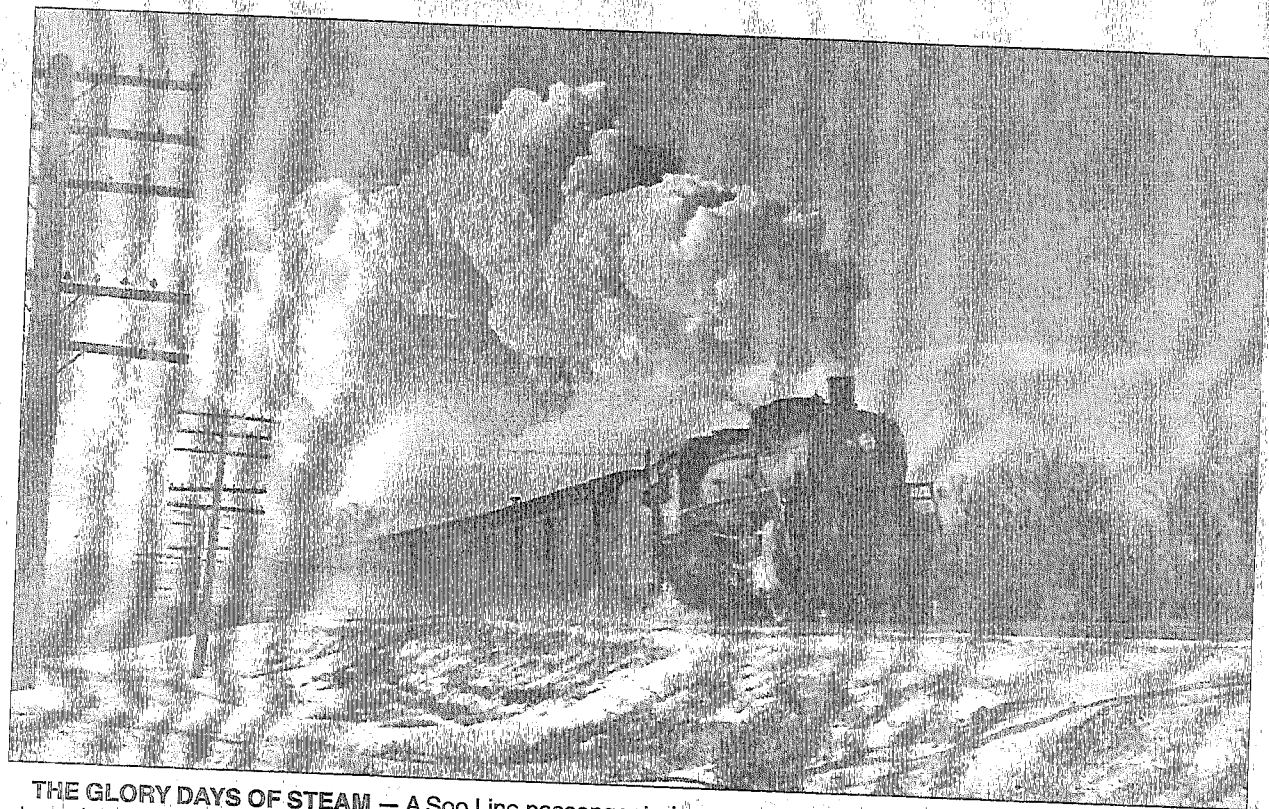


**TRAIN CREW** — The train crew are pictured on their last run including (from left) mail clerks Tom Clynch, Minneapolis, and Walter Gustafson, Glen Flora; conductor Louis Wilson, Minneapolis; brakeman Gus Sawyer, Ladysmith; and baggageman Pat Harvey, Minneapolis.



**TELEGRAPH** — Railroad historian John Terrill explains how the telegraph switchboard channels signals to the various equipment on the telegraph desk in the Weyerhaeuser Depot. Terrill acquired and restored vintage telegraph equipment for the desk.

— Carl Cooley photo/Chetek Alert



**THE GLORY DAYS OF STEAM** — A Soo Line passenger train composed of heavyweight cars is pulled by a Pacific steam locomotive. That was a familiar sight in Weyerhaeuser before the Soo Line retired its steam locomotives in 1955. Weyerhaeuser had a turntable and roundhouse where locomotives could be serviced and repaired.