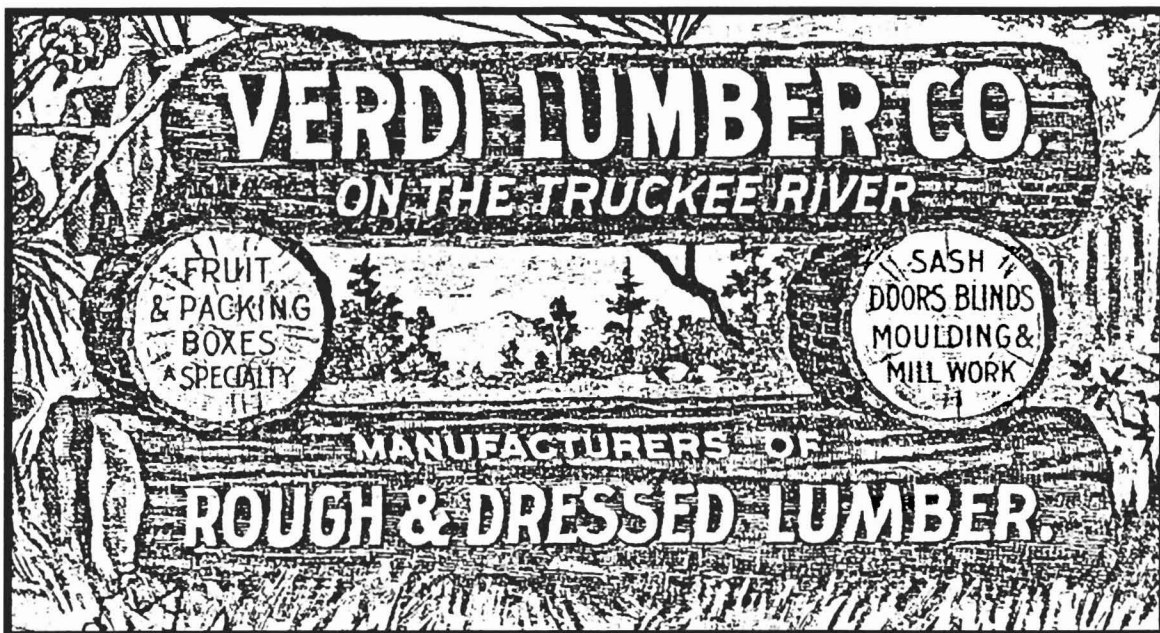


The Sociotechnical History of the Verdi Lumber Company



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Introduction

The chronology and sociotechnical development of the Verdi Lumber company, its corporate predecessors, the resources of Dog Valley and the towns of Crystal Peak and Verdi illustrate the zenith of lumber industry expression on the eastern slope of the Sierra Nevada in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Prior to Euro-American contact, the Paiute and Washoe tribes exploited the area for its abundant fresh water and game. With the opening of emigrant routes from the Utah territory in the mid-19th century and the passage of such famed migrants as the Stevens and Donner Parties, the character of the landscape began to change. The early development of migration roads from the 1840s to the 1860 sparked the construction of guest houses and bridges over the Truckee River.

After the discovery of the Comstock Lode in the 1850s, mineral prospectors began to survey the area, and the lumber industry followed immediately. These two industries formed the basis for the creation of the community of Silver Peak, which gave way to Verdi as the result of a key decision by the Central Pacific Railroad. Following this development, investors from Sacramento, Truckee and the Comstock congregated in Verdi to take advantage of some of the most extensive stands of virgin forest yet standing on the eastern slope of the Sierras in this milieu of rapid deforestation.

The town of Verdi, with the Verdi Lumber Company functioning as its central economic, technological and social pillar, retained its prominence well into the 1920s, when the familiar specter of fire and the near-total deforestation of the eastern slope of the Sierra Nevada together drained the lifeblood from this Nevada border-town. Yet, despite the retreat from prominence, Verdi continues to exist into the 21st century in the form of a few quaint architectural remnants, several residential neighborhoods, two profitable casinos and a large recreational chain store.

Gold, Railroads and Lumber

The first recorded utilization of the Verdi and Dog Valley areas along the Nevada-California border occurred in 1844 when Caleb Greenwood guided the famed Stevens party through the Truckee River gorge south of Verdi. Due to the difficulties presented by the large number of river crossings required by the Truckee River gorge route, Stevens explored Dog Valley on his return to Nevada and relocated his preferred emigrant route through that valley. This was the trail used by the noteworthy Donner party in 1846. Thus, the earliest expression of the Verdi and Dog Valley areas involved the creation of a reliable overland transcontinental migration route to California. In the years following the passage of the Stevens and Donner parties over the evolving route, other byways were created and utilized extensively by migrants both to and from California. Successive incarnations of this route include the Henness Pass Wagon Road and the Dutch Flat-Donner Lake Wagon Toll Road, which was organized in 1862 [Goodwin 1960:9], and served until the Central Pacific Railroad reached Reno and made the wagon trail obsolete in 1868. The route through Dog Valley was, however, revitalized with the advent of the widespread use of the automobile in the 20th century, when the route was improved and renamed first as the Lincoln Highway in the 1910s, and then as the Victory Highway following the First World War.

The confirmation of gold and silver discovery in the vicinity of Virginia City in 1859 was the ignition of a veritable conflagration of mineral and timber exploration and development on the eastern slope of the Sierra Nevada, a process which would rapidly and drastically alter the landscape of the region. The development of the mineral resources of the Comstock and other related enterprises in the surrounding areas created a huge demand for timber. Square-set timber

and bracing, which were required in prodigious quantities for the mines, fuel for locomotive and stationary steam engines, construction, and heating fuel were the mainstays of this formidable demand. In the period from August 1876 to August 1877 alone, the Comstock reportedly consumed 72,000,000 board feet of lumber and 320,000 cords of wood [Chung 2003:7], all cut and removed from the eastern slopes of the Sierra Nevada and the Truckee Basin.

The expansion of the Central Pacific Railroad also demanded large amounts of lumber, not only for the railroad ties necessary for the extension of existing tracks, but also for the construction of depots, section camps and other facilities necessary for the operation of the enterprise. As the terminus of the railroad pushed eastward toward its eventual coupling with the Union Pacific Railroad in 1869, the company's lumber sourcing also continually shifted to locations near the current terminus. Thus, when Comstock mining activities began to decline in the 1870s, the expansion of the Central Pacific Railroad and the demand for construction timber along its existing route were already underway. While many mining interests in the last quarter of the 19th century suffered considerably at this decline, the same could not be said of Truckee Basin lumber enterprises. Lumber interests operating near Truckee and Verdi, because they were not situated in the immediate vicinity of Virginia City, had not yet completed the denuding of their holdings and continued, for the most part, to operate well into the 20th century. The Verdi Mill Company and the Verdi Lumber Company prospered greatly throughout these mining and transportation booms despite various disasters. The latter company continued operations until the combination of fiscally unrecoverable damage from a fire in May of 1926 and the prior removal of almost all unprotected timber finally caused the company to cease operations in autumn of 1927.

The Town of Crystal Peak

Not long after Greenwood blazed the emigrant trails used by the Stevens and Donner parties, Euro-American habitation arose near the big bend in the Truckee River. A wooden toll bridge and house, popularly called O'Neil's Crossing sat adjacent to the site of Crystal Peak by 1860 [Coli 2004:16-18]. It is also possible that Felix O'Neil may have founded the crossing with his family as early as 1854. In addition, a facility that included a boarding house known as Mole's Station had been built near the Dog Valley First Summit by 1864, and the short-lived Bayer Hotel nearby, which may have only operated from 1865-1866. In conjunction with these facilities, adjacent meadowlands continued to be used as pasturage for cattle, horses and oxen, both belonging to the few local residents and to groups passing along the wagon trail.

The town of Crystal Peak was organized in the midst of the handful of prior settlers in 1864 by the Crystal Peak Company, which owned timberland and mineral rights along the Verdi ridge and several adjacent drainages. Lignite was discovered in the same year on Dog Creek, but the coal was of such a low grade that, despite the thousands of dollars expended by the company in exploration and extraction, virtually no use was found for the product. The coal was only successfully burned by a single Central Pacific locomotive engine, and the fireman who used it cursed it as "little better than green pine" [Goodwin 1960:11].

The town of Crystal Peak functioned as the social and industrial hub of its vicinity from approximately 1860 to 1869, with its most active years from 1864-1868. At its height in 1867, as the Central Pacific Railroad approached the big bend in the Truckee, Due in large part to a major influx of Chinese immigrants in 1868, Crystal Peak boasted a population of almost 1,500 people, 1,000 of whom were Chinese [Goodwin 1960:15]. Among the operating businesses in

Crystal Peak were several sawmills, including the Dog Valley sawmill owned by John P. Foulkes and the Yuba Mill. There were also a number of saloons, including the “Snug” which was also owned by Foulkes, a brewery, a large blacksmith shop, a druggist, five stores, a butcher shop, and four hotels, including the Nevada Hotel which was built in 1864.

Despite the success of Crystal Peak, the Central Pacific Railroad found the cost of the construction of the bridges necessary to reach the town unacceptable, and built the continuation of the transcontinental line to the line southeast of the Truckee River. The Central Pacific reached the site of Verdi on December 13, 1867, where it elected to commence construction of its own depot, a decision which made Crystal Peak undesirable for employment or residence within two years. Crystal Peak did not die immediately, however, and its brewery and saloons continued operation until 1875, when the brewery burned down. John Foulkes constructed a second bridge to connect his home on the west bank of the Truckee with his sawmill on the east bank. One mile south of this site, which itself was just south of Verdi, John Foulkes had established the Essex Ice Company and its ice dam. The existence of two bridges and a set of enterprises that regularly crossed them may have eased the transition between the two towns. In 1868 and 1869, most of the population of Crystal Peak moved to Verdi, disassembling and moving many of their structures, including dwellings.

Oliver Lonkey

Of all of the individuals who shaped the town of Verdi, Oliver Lonkey is clearly the most influential. Born in 1832, this French-Canadian set out for California in 1856 with his brother and a sizeable group of French-Canadian loggers. Working as a woodsman in the lumber trade,

he was able to save enough money to buy his own sawmill in Grass Valley, California. Seeking greater fortune near the booming Comstock, he relocated his mill to Franktown, Nevada in 1864, at about the same time that Foulkes and others were beginning to utilize the immense stands of Dog Valley timber using mills along Dog Creek and the Truckee River. Lonkey had an affinity for new technology, and constructed an extensive v-flume system at Franktown for the transport of logs from the timber stands to a landing, where they could be loaded and moved to his mill for processing. In 1872, when J.W. Haines filed suit against several other loggers for the use of “his” V-flume invention, Lonkey was one of several witnesses for the defense whose testimony resulted in the court decision against Haines.

Between 1864 and 1873, Lonkey was involved in a number of logging and milling operations in the Spooner Summit area. In 1873, he moved to Virginia City itself and operated an extremely lucrative lumberyard there for nine years. In 1882, keeping possession of this lumber mill, he moved briefly to Truckee to assist in the operation of a number of Truckee Basin mills in which he had purchased a stake. In December of 1882, he moved to Verdi where he and a business associate from Virginia City, E.R. Smith, assumed operation in 1883 of the Verdi Planing Mill and Box Factory, part of a network of facilities along the Lincoln Highway that also included a box factory at Boca. Lonkey was involved in various ventures in and around Verdi in the 1880s, and began his association with J.F. Condon in the context of the Verdi Planing Mill Company, where Condon served as his superintendent of operations.

The Verdi Mill Company

In 1888, Oliver Lonkey consolidated most of his interests in the Verdi area and established the Verdi Mill Company, partially in response to the destruction of the primary

facility of the Verdi Planing Mill Company by fire. He rebuilt a planing mill under the new corporate aegis, and continued to process lumber from his Banner, Shady Grove and Lindham sawmills.

From his earliest days in the Truckee Basin, Lonkey had made extensive use of steam engines in his mills while other operators were still making frequent use of water wheels, in keeping with his affinity for the use of cutting-edge technology. His 1882 planing mill, built and operated in partnership with E.R. Smith, featured a steam engine rated at 90 horsepower [Goodwin 1960:44], which was formidable among steam engines in the region in 1882. The steam was not only used to move the saws and drive other mill machinery, but was also used to assist in the drying of green lumber, to which purpose 3,000 feet of steam pipe were laid. The mill, which alone employed forty men, was also equipped with three large water tanks and a system of hoses, by which Lonkey hoped to prevent total loss in the event of a fire, for which Verdi had already developed a reputation. Despite the elaborate fire protection installed at the box factory, the assistance of Central Pacific fire trains and the frantic activity of the Verdi volunteer fire department, the planing mill nonetheless burned to the ground in a fire which took over half of the town of Verdi with it.

At this time, the board of trustees for the Verdi Mill Company demonstrated an alliance of lumbering and milling experience in the form of four persons who would determine the shape of the community of Verdi in its heyday: Oliver Lonkey, the president, J.F. Condon, the vice-president, and J.P. Foulkes and C.C. Powning. All four had extensive previous experience with lumbering, and the former three had all owned and operated both sawmills and other related enterprises in the Truckee Basin over the past two decades.

Lonkey, as previously mentioned, demonstrated a high affinity for new technologies. In the days of the Verdi Mill Company, the Doan Steam Wagon was imported by Captain J.H. Roberts, formerly a steamboat captain in the Sacramento Valley. By 1893 he had built at least

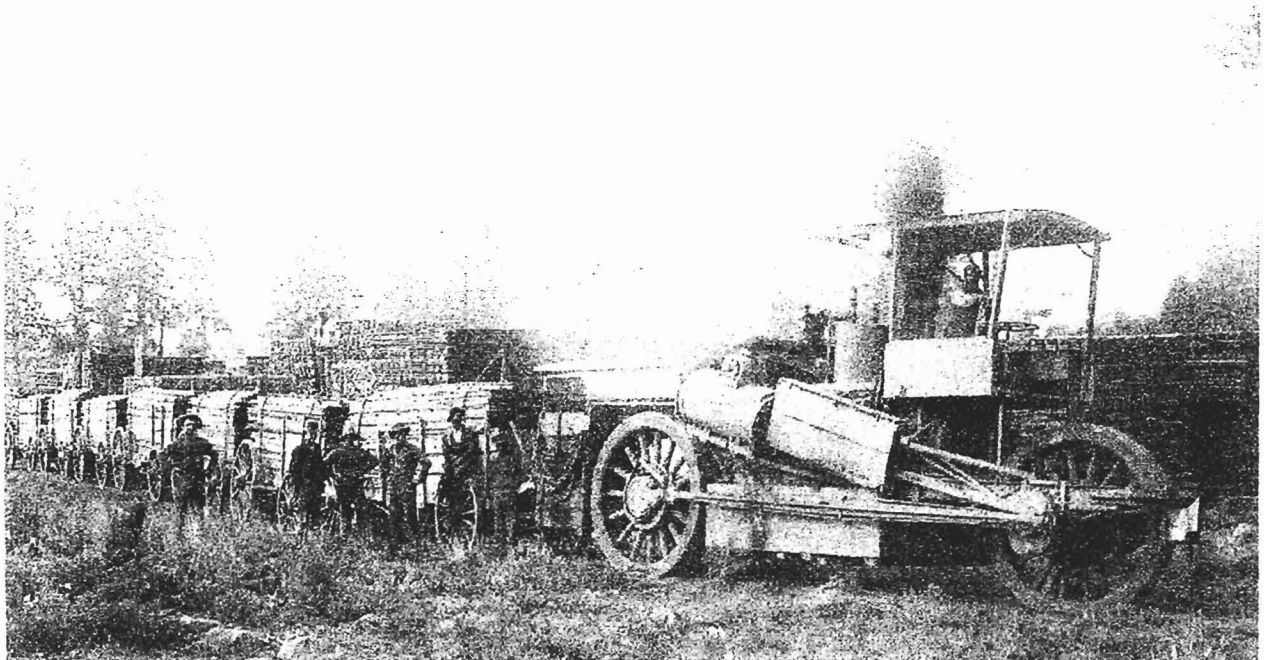


FIGURE 1: Doan Steam Wagon in early 1900s. [Photo courtesy of Verdi History Preservation Society]

five large, three-wheeled steam wagons for the conveyance of cargo in the Sacramento Valley [Figure 1], based on the design of a Mr. Doan of the Union Iron Works in Sacramento. Despite initial ridicule, the power and efficiency of the steam wagon was difficult to deny, and the Central Pacific Railroad essentially bribed Captain Roberts in the amount of \$20,000 to remove the wagons from cargo service in the Sacramento Valley. As a managerial employee of the Verdi Mill Company, Captain Roberts used his steam wagons to pull wagon trains of lumber from the timberlands in Sardine Valley and Dog Valley to the mills along Dog Creek and the

Truckee River in Verdi. This advance represented a fantastic leap in log transportation and contributed to the prosperity of the Verdi Mill Company.

John Foulkes, as the owner of the Essex Ice Company and its dam, was uniquely positioned to provide the Verdi Mill Company with water, and the company built a canal expressly for this purpose. The box factory at the north end of this canal processed lumber from many sources, as Lonkey and his company did not yet own timberland in the Verdi and Dog Valley area. This situation was about to change, and with it would change the name of the company and its board of trustees. In 1900, the Verdi Mill Company announced its plans to acquire all of the Truckee Lumber Company's timber holdings in Dog Valley, and its intention to build up to fifteen miles of railroad to reach it.

The Verdi Lumber Company under Oliver Lonkey

In July of 1900, Lonkey and his associates succeeded in obtaining the Dog Valley timberlands they sought. The construction of a railroad for the transport of lumber over the Dog Valley First Summit began in September of 1900. Because Dog Creek Canyon on the Verdi side of the summit was so steep, the construction of the grade included a loop, five switchbacks, five timber trestles, and numerous cuts and fills. The longest trestle on the line, which crossed the Truckee river, was several hundred feet long and crossed approximately forty-five feet above the surface of the river.

With the completion of the first railroad into Dog Valley in the summer of 1901 and the concurrent completion of a new band saw mill in Verdi [Figure 2], the Verdi Lumber Company

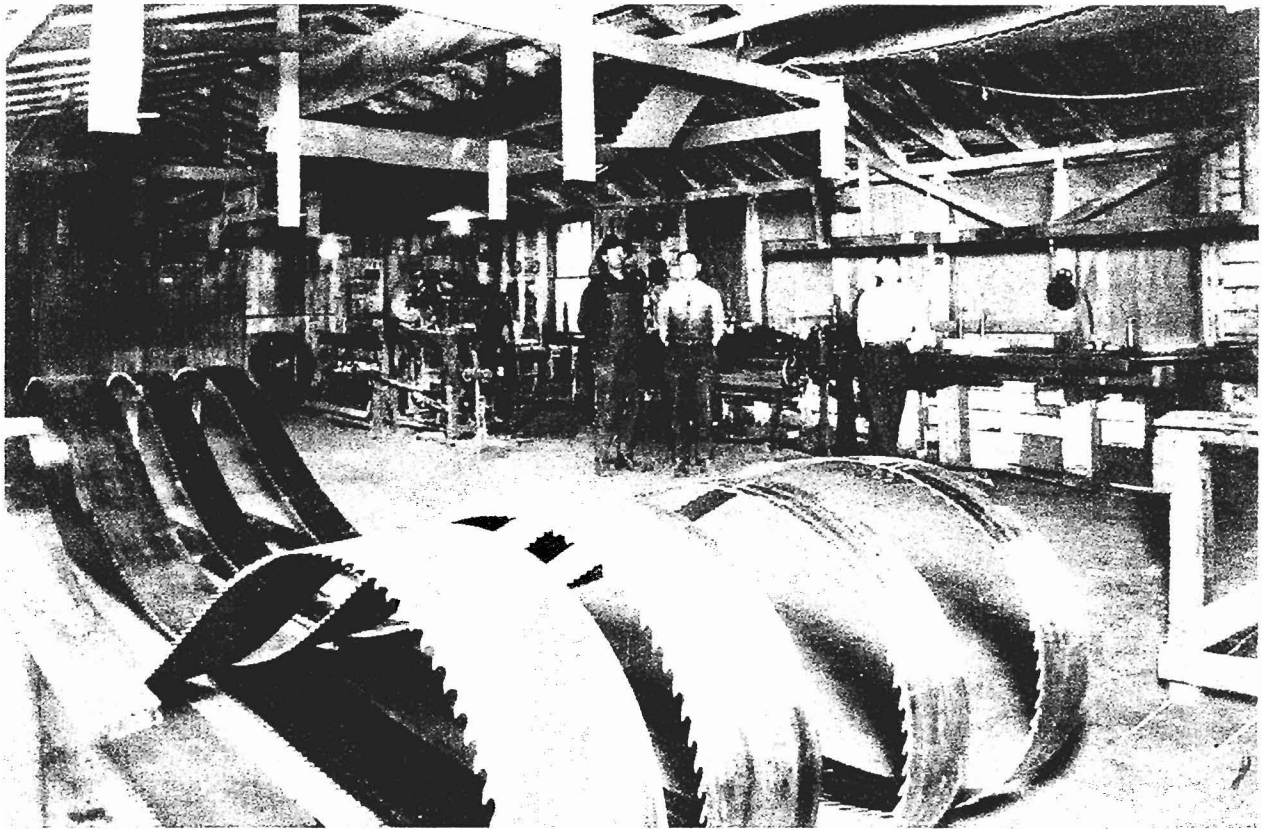


FIGURE 2: Band saws at Verdi Lumber Company sawmill in 1916. [Photo courtesy of Verdi History Preservation Society]

was set to commence full-scale lumbering and milling on its own. At last, Lonkey and his associates were able to process finished lumber without depending on the resources of other companies, completing the process from stump to railroad. This access precipitated the true prosperity of the Verdi Lumber Company, a situation which, despite repeated losses by fire, lasted until the exhaustion of available local timber stands in the early 1920s. The Verdi Lumber Company, despite the subsidence of mining activity in the region after 1880, and perhaps because of the functional completion of the transcontinental system of railroads, enjoyed unprecedented prosperity and filled orders for customers as far away as the state of Maine. In 1902, the enterprise employed at least forty men at the band saw mill, another forty-five at the planing mill and box factory which catered to the needs of California's growing fruit export

industry, and another fifty in railroad construction [Goodwin 1960:65]. This number would grow to almost four hundred over the next decade of operations.

The Verdi Mill Company and Verdi Lumber Company continually adapted to changing technological methods in logging. French-Canadian and Scandinavian loggers would use double-bit axes and cross-out saws to bring down trees. Initially, Chinese immigrants may have contributed significantly to logging labor, as they did to the efforts of the Central Pacific Railroad before its completion, but the strength of anti-immigrant, especially anti-Chinese labor movements in the 1870s and 1880s ensured that by 1900, most Chinese loggers had moved off into the Pacific Northwest to pursue other opportunities [Chung 2003:21]. In the earlier days, yarding was accomplished through the use of teams of horses or oxen that would drag the logs across open ground from the stump to a landing where they could be loaded onto wagons. The wagons would also be drawn by animal teams. Alternately, before the construction of the Dog Valley railroad, logs were also skidded to landings using V-flumes, which were greased with tallow. Teams of animals, once again, would pull or push the logs down the flumes to the landings.

The Doan Steam Wagons contributed by Captain Roberts, now a trustee of the Verdi Lumber Company, continued to haul wagon trains of timber until approximately 1910, when the Boca and Loyalton railroad was completed for the service of Truckee lumber interests, and the Verdi Lumber Company had built railroads far enough behind the Verdi Ridge to serve its own needs. Appearances by the Doan Steam Wagon were rare in Verdi after 1901 and the completion of the first leg of the Dog Valley railroad.

Lonkey and his associates continued to incorporate new technologies into their operations. The process of yarding changed greatly with the introduction of the donkey engine



FIGURE 3: Dolbeer donkey engine and Verdi Lumber Company Field Crew ca.1900. [Photo courtesy of Verdi History Preservation Society].

in 1901. The first type to be used was the Dolbeer [Figure 3], developed by John Dolbeer of Crescent City, California in 1885. The steam engine provided the force that would wind the spool, dragging felled timber to either a railroad landing or the head of a V-flume. The empty line, however, still had to be extended to the next trunk using animal power. The Dolbeer was also used to skid logs down chutes and to hoist logs onto railroad cars, gradually replacing animal teams. The use of the Dolbeer engine continued until the development of the “bull donkey” around 1911, a heavier version of the donkey engine. This new engine differed from the Dolbeer in a few critical respects: it was more powerful, it featured a second spool for the re-extension of the line after each haul, and it was far more destructive. Its extra power facilitated its use for yarding over greater distances, obviating the use of chutes and wreaking general havoc across the forest floor, felling smaller trees, tearing up undergrowth and digging furrows which

would later exacerbate erosive processes. The bull donkey was also destructive to its own form. Its spools tended to rapidly become grooved, and had to be regularly thrown out and replaced with new spools that would retain tension on the line.

With the advent of the Dog Valley railroad, the Verdi Lumber Company purchased two rod locomotives of the “Mogul” type from the Virginia & Truckee Railroad in 1901. The steep grades encountered on the sides of the Port Arthur run in 1903, however, proved too much for them, and the company acquired one geared Shay locomotive from the Lima Locomotive and Machine Company in Ohio. It also acquire three more Shay engines from the Sierra Nevada Wood and Lumber Company at Hobart Mills, California [Goodwin 1960:124]. The Shay engines were more early powerful and more maneuverable, and remained in use by the Verdi Lumber Company until its dissolution. In addition to engines, the Verdi Lumber Company is estimated

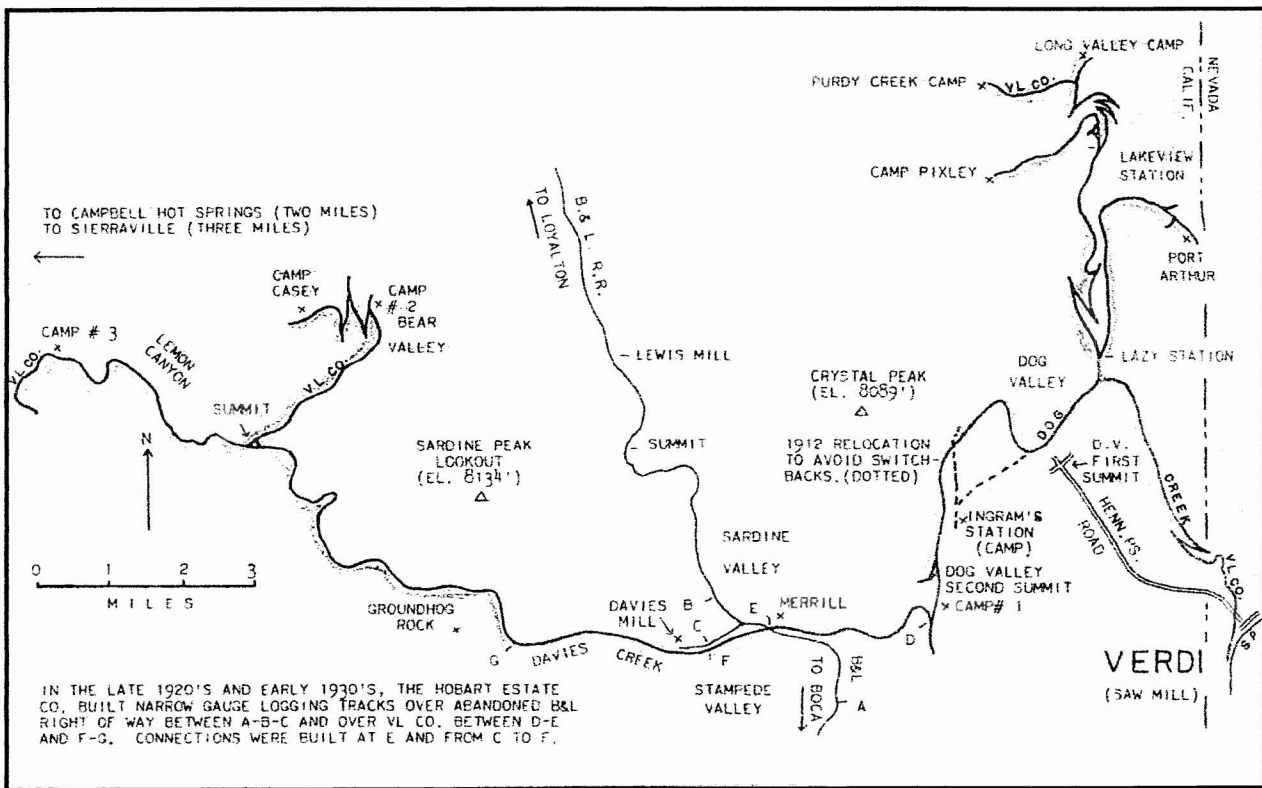


FIGURE 4: Map of Verdi Lumber Company Railroads [Myrick 1962:412]

to have owned over one hundred flat cars and one caboose, which has been preserved and can be found in Quincy, California. From the creation of the Dog Valley line in 1901 to the end of the Verdi Lumber Company in 1927, over thirty-two miles of track were laid through Dog Valley, Long Valley, Purdy Creek, Davies Creek, Bear Valley and Lemon Canyon [Figure 4].

In 1908, Lonkey and his associates formed the Verdi Coal and Oil Development Company to attempt to exploit the deposits discovered and worked by the Crystal Peak Company half a century prior, but as before, no economic benefit was gleaned from the effort.

Verdi as a Sociotechnical Complex

The impact of Lonkey, the Verdi Mill Company and the Verdi Lumber Company was not merely technological or fiscal. The social mores of the time, the ethnicities of those who participated in the ventures or lived in the town, and the changes wrought upon people socially, culturally and professionally bound these lives to economics and technology in a comprehensive sociotechnical entity that has come to be known as Verdi. Ethnically, Verdi contained a variety of ethnic groups, including Chinese, French-Canadians, Scandinavians, Anglo-Americans, Irish, Italians and Eastern Europeans. Each of these groups brought their own cultures, languages and values with them to Verdi, and were in their turn transformed by the schedules and processes not only of the technologies with which they worked, but by the guiding social hand of organizing individuals like Foulkes and Lonkey.

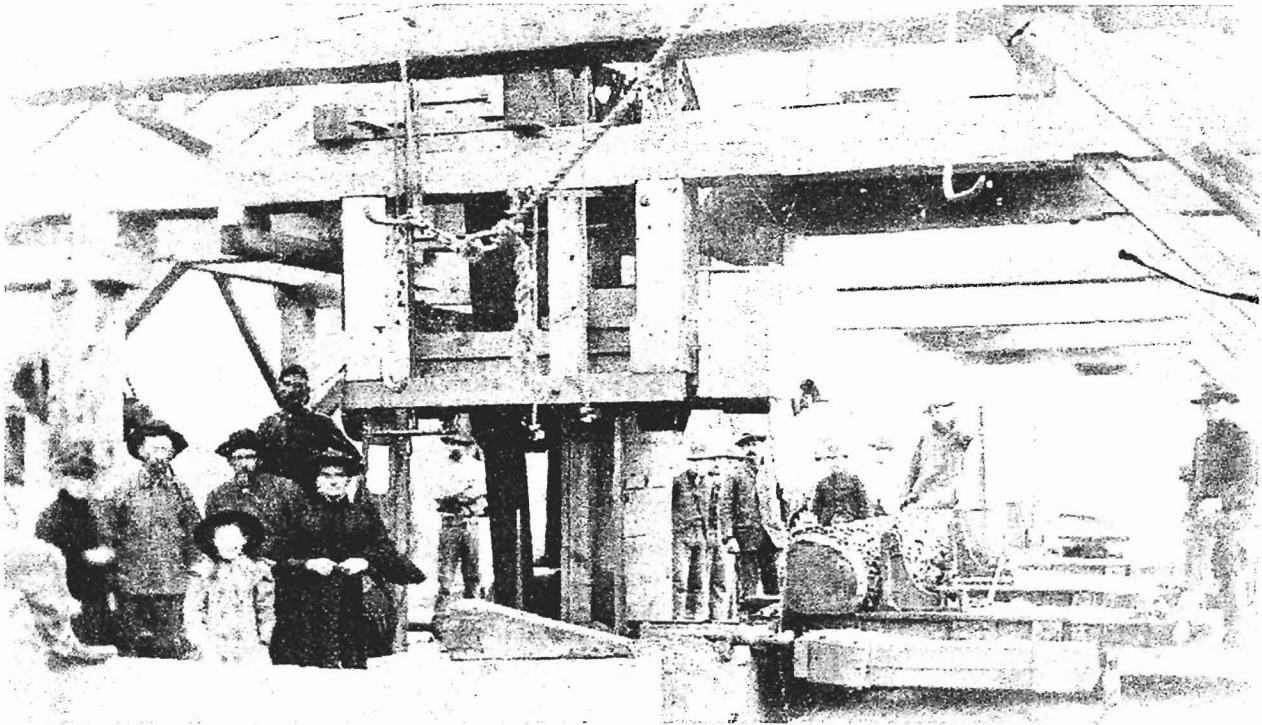
After the destruction of the first Verdi Mill Company planing mill, Lonkey rebuilt it as a town hall, thoughtfully christening it as “Lonkey Hall.” Despite the repeated fires in Verdi, which destroyed it twice, along with much of the town of Verdi, the structure was rebuilt each

time and Verdi continued to have a town hall throughout Oliver Lonkey's life. In 1902, the Verdi Lumber Company built a large two-story boarding house along the Truckee River between its sawmill and planing mill to house the large number of single men working in the mills and on the railroad. This construction was completed at company expense, and no record has been found of rent charged for accommodation of Verdi Lumber Company employees there. This is not the only symptom of corporate paternalism manifest by Lonkey and his company. In June of 1902, he instituted a practice that would continue for quarter of a century and become a defining tradition in Verdi. Nailing tables and chairs to dozens of flat cars, more than three hundred townspeople rode on the first "excursion train" or "picnic train" through Dog Creek Canyon and Dog Valley.

In addition to his expressions of corporate paternalism, Lonkey expressed his class consciousness within this industrial setting by building a stunningly beautiful Victorian mansion for himself, his wife and his brother in 1891. While there does not appear to have been any ethnic or economic segregation of housing within the town, Lonkey expressed his success and his leadership role by building this mansion, which most assuredly set him apart from most of the other residents of the town and the employees of his enterprises, who lived either in bunkhouses he had constructed for them or, if married, in Verdi residences of lesser stature.

The labor relations of this sociotechnical system are also evident in the history of Verdi. Some occupations, such as that of lumberjack and sawyer, were held in greater esteem than less skilled labor occupations, due to the high level of expertise involved both in felling trees and in running timber through mill equipment with minimal waste. Labor organization was also present, and was manifest in the anti-Chinese movement, primarily organized by the French-Canadians who accompanied Lonkey to Verdi. Little record exists of management-labor dispute or revolt

against Lonkey's brand of paternalism. By all available accounts, Oliver Lonkey was highly benevolent, generous, and responsive to the needs of his employees and the townspeople around him. The excursion trains and the construction of bunkhouses free of charge to employees stand as testimony to his generosity.



Interior of Stateline sawmill, 1892. [Photo courtesy of Verdi History Preservation Society]

It is apparent that at least one labor union, the Order of Railway Telegraphers, was present in Verdi in at least the last two decades of the 19th century. A scrapbook recovered from the Verdi Mill Company's planing mill contains materials datable to 1889-1890. While several pages are missing, those that remain are filled with poetry. Most of this poetry centers on the theme of telegraphy, or the lives of telegraphers, or uses the telegraph as an analogous expression for thoughts on technological developments and their impact on human beings in 19th century America. Another item in the scrapbook is a vivid description of a masquerade ball

organized by Oliver Lonkey's wife, apparently one of many, further extending the notion of corporate paternalism over not only the Verdi Mill Company and Verdi Lumber Company, but over the town of Verdi itself. The final item in this scrapbook is a manifesto of the Order of Railway Telegraphers, entitled "A History of Our Order". It seems unlikely that, unless the creator of the scrapbook was a member of this order at least implicitly, that this article would have been present in the scrapbook.

Al Revert and the Decline of the Verdi Lumber Company

Oliver Lonkey's health began to decline in 1904, and he began to rely increasingly on his brother Camille from within his family, and Captain Roberts and J.F. Condon, from the company. Oliver died on September 20, 1905 at the age of 75. Because the funeral was held in Reno, Camille Lonkey authorized a train to carry hundreds of mourners to the service and back. Camille assumed the presidency of the company, retained Oliver's board of directors, and continued business apace on Oliver's model until he relinquished control of the company to J.F. Condon in 1909.

A French immigrant named Al Revert was the next president of the Verdi Lumber Company. Born in La Harve, France in September of 1869, his family immigrated to the United States, and had located to Verdi by 1880. Revert worked at Banner sawmill in the Truckee basin during his late teens. As one of the few people in the area who was fluent in both French and English, he became a familiar and trusted figure to many of the French-Canadian loggers in the area, and would devote ample time to the writing of letters and arrangement of their affairs in English [Goodwin 1960:91]. He married in San Francisco in 1904, and was a partner in forming the Tonopah Lumber Company in 1906. In 1909, he negotiated the merger of the Tonopah

Lumber Company and the Verdi Lumber Company, consolidated their holdings, and assumed the Verdi Company name. He retained Condon as the president of the company and himself assumed the vice-presidency. Roberts and the other trustees departed the company.

Upon Condon's death, Revert took over the presidency of the company. At this point, in the early 1920s, the forests west of Dog Valley and Sardine Valley had been thoroughly denuded, and virtually the only stands of timber remaining were those protected by the formation of the Tahoe National Forest in 1905 [Goodwin 1960:77]. Revert made various bids for contracts on the thinning of these lands, and while he did partially succeed, it was clear that the resources for continual operation were no longer available.

A fire that destroyed the roundhouse and machine shop in July 1924, compounded the difficulties of the company. The previous roundhouse had been destroyed in 1917, also by fire. But the death stroke arrived on May 6, 1926, when a fire destroyed the central Verdi sawmill, the only company building to never have been destroyed by and rebuilt after a fire. Insurance would only pay for a fraction of the building, as the policy's limits had no doubt been strained by the repeater fire losses suffered by the company, especially between 1902 and 1924 [Goodwin 1960:99]. The fire also destroyed a new roundhouse, two locomotives, eight residences and all the nearby stacks of lumber. Revert did rebuild the sawmill, but only used a circular saw and did not install a roof or walls on the frame. Logs were brought in by contractors on trucks, as the railroad had ceased to operate for logging purposes after this third and final bout of destruction by fire. Minor work continued at this mill as the majority of its employees were set to work on the dismantling of the railroad, which was completed by the summer of 1927, when the company ended its operations permanently and dismantled its last sawmill. The era of the Verdi Lumber Company had come to an end, although the town of Verdi itself did not. The lands of the

company were under mortgage to the Bank of Nevada, and after passing through the hands of the Waltz family, were placed in receivership during the bank failures of the 1930s and ceded to the United States Forest Service in 1939 as a part of the coalescing Toiyabe National Forest.

Conclusion

Thus, it is evident that the town of Verdi bears a more complex relationship to Oliver Lonkey and his fellow Verdi Lumber Company trustees than simply a source of employees and service providers. The company, the town and the man evolved together in the milieu of the great Comstock bonanza, the knitting of the transcontinental railroad, the 20th century construction boom and the demand for lumber, which remained consistent throughout all three phenomena. Town and company grew in tandem, rapidly and successfully adapting to changing industrial processes in lumbering and machinery so well that the town still exists among the ghosts of several other towns. The citizens of Verdi, of mixed heritage, adapted to the material culture of late 19th and early 20th century America, enjoying dances, dealing with labor organization, and faithfully rebuilding their town after each successive fire demolished it. During the late 19th century, Verdi stood as the industrial center of its vicinity, while Reno functioned as the administrative center. During its heyday, Verdi was a place of brawling lumberjacks, more than ten saloons, several stores featuring a broad array of merchandise, two churches, and several hundred prospering individuals. It has had a school for most of its history, and even a couple of successful regional baseball teams. Overall, the lumber industry boom in Verdi, with its various technologies and participants, represents a vibrant sociotechnical system.

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