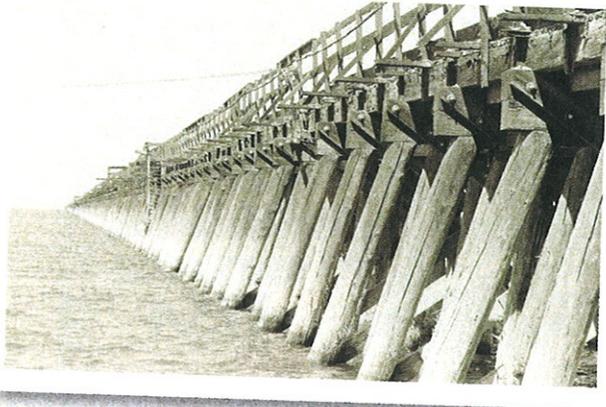


Pickled Planks

A story of wood with a past (as a pass), a present and a future

by **Connie Bastyr**



Trains hauled 38,256 fir trees from Oregon to use as pilings in this 12-mile-long trestle. The pilings, timbers and decking are finding new purpose as flooring, siding, beams and more.

Every piece of wood — whether a toothpick or a temple's timber — has a story, and reclaimed wood can claim a doubly interesting history. Today's green-inspired resourcefulness presents many opportunities to give used wood a second chance. After a past life as warehouse shelving, old-growth pine is planed and prepped to be used as flooring or cabinets. Douglas fir beams that once supported hand-raised barns now serve as posts and beams in a timber-frame house. And the list goes on (see "Reclaimed Lumber," p. 38).

One fascinating example of the resurrection of reclaimed wood involves the construction and dismantling of a 12-mile-long railroad trestle that was built across the Great Salt Lake in Utah more than 100 years ago. Its story is a tale of two sets of visionaries: the men who believed they could build a shortcut across the lake and the company that envisioned the abandoned trestle's potential rebirth.

The journey begins in 1869 at Promontory Summit in the Utah Territory, where the nation's first transcontinental railroad was completed. Surveyors had routed the connecting tracks of the Union Pacific and Central Pacific railroads through the mountains north of the Great Salt Lake for three reasons: The desert soil to the south of the lake was soft, the lake's water level was high, and the makeup of the lake floor was unknown. For nearly 35 years, freight and passenger trains navigated the treacherous climb over steep inclines, around tight curves and across deep ravines. It was a slow, costly and perilous passage.

By 1900 the water levels in the lake had receded, and the costs and challenges of the northern route between Ogden and Lucin had not. So Edward Henry Harriman, president of the Southern Pacific railroad, revisited the idea of building a causeway across the lake. With the support of William Hood, the company's chief design engineer, Harriman decided to invest in a shortcut that promised long-term savings.

In February 1902, workers began building temporary trestles for delivery of the rock-and-gravel fill that would become 13-mile sections of causeway. Over the 12-mile stretch where the lake bottom was too unstable to support loads of fill, crews constructed a permanent trestle. They drove 38,000 pilings, some as deep as 120 ft. In all, more than 30 million board feet of lumber (redwood decking and Douglas fir poles and timbers) composed the final structure.

The trestle was completed in October 1903, and the Lucin Cutoff (at a cost of \$8 million) opened in March 1904, servicing a mounting volume of passenger and freight trains for a half-century. During the 1950s, the rail company replaced the trestle portion with an extension of causeway but left the wood structure standing alongside the new section.

Then in 1993, Cannon Structures Inc. of Blackfoot, Idaho, acquired rights to salvage the wood. The company spent more than seven years harvesting the decking and above-water structure as well as most of the salt-soaked pilings. To process the wood, workers had to strip out the metal connectors and then kiln-dry, mill and resaw it. The complexity and scale of the project required custom machinery and special procedures — one factor that led the company to form a new division named Trestlewood.

Today, the timbers and planks from the Lucin Cutoff are finding new homes as flooring, beams, siding and more. The former pilings, which were preserved in salt water for nearly 100 years, bear unique blue-green markings that hint at an amazing history of growth — the growth of great trees, innovative transportation and true resourcefulness. ♦



WEB EXTRAS

For links to Trestlewood's Web site and to Utah's railroad history, as well as "Handy Facts" statistics about the Lucin Cutoff, visit

www.HandymanClub.com/FromHandy