



Investigation

Summary Report



Southern Forest Heritage Museum

Long Leaf, LA

HISTORY/INVESTIGATION

One of my favorite places to visit, the Southern Forest Heritage Museum in Long Leaf is like taking a step back in time. From its rich history, fascinating machinery on display, eerie feel and haunted tales, these massive grounds are a ghost hunter's dreams! Let me also mention that the Director of the museum is one of the sweetest ladies on earth and we have worked with her countless times on numerous projects. If you are ever fortunate enough to visit this spot, be sure to say hello to Ms. Claudia!

Long Leaf is a very small town about twenty miles south of Alexandria, receiving its name from the high-quality long leaf pine that was mass-milled here. This wood produced here would be a valuable material in World War II as it was used in constructing Higgins landing craft, due to its ability to withstand the seawater. The saw mill that sits here was literally its own community, eventually becoming the town it is today. Opening in 1892, the sawmill sits on fifty-seven acres of land that also houses the buildings that were once the commissary, post office, doctor's office, planer mill, round house, machine shop, car knocker shed and small homes where former employees lived with their families.

The mill sits alongside a railway system which enabled easy transport of cut wood to its desired locations. A smaller track was built around the property to transport employees from the mill to their homes, via a small M-4 railed passenger vehicle, nicknamed the “Doodlebug” for its odd appearance. Several of the major locomotives that ran through here daily are still on the grounds. One of these engines is the hefty Crowell and Spencer #400 which operated from around 1919 until early 1953, as it continuously hauled log trains from Hutton to Long Leaf. The other significant engine here is the Meridian Lumber Company Locomotive #202 that operated during the same time as the #400, also hauling log trains on a daily basis. With its unique shape, it is known as the last example of a cabbage-stacked, wood burning steam engine in Louisiana.

As mentioned, the mill was its own community, so it had to be completely self-contained. Connected to the railway system sits three buildings. The “Roundhouse”, machine shop and “car knockers shed” all served as areas to store and repair the locomotives as well as manufacturing their own parts. The machine shop is quite fascinating! Walking in, you are quickly sent back in time as you see massive drills, presses and lathes, all operated by large belts. I was amazed to learn that after all of these years, every single piece of machinery still worked as they had in the early 1900’s! With a flip of the switch, gigantic motors started running, turning these large leather and canvas belts, giving power to the tools. One drill had a small tank of oil connected to it that was used to lubricate the gears. This was the original oil, looking clean and fresh, from the day it was installed. A prime example of “they don’t make things like they used to!”

Another interesting piece of machinery still on the grounds is the ominous looking Clyde Rehaul Skidder. As a large tree was cut down, large hooks were fastened to the tree and with the help of an extremely powerful motor, the steel cables were reeled in along with the freshly cut pine. As one can imagine, this was a very dangerous contraption as the sudden force of the cables being pulled would often cause the hooks to dislodge from the logs, sending the heavy projectiles flying through the air at high speeds. Many a workers are said to have been killed or lost limbs because of the skidder.

The focal point of the property is the three-story sawmill that ripped the large trees into the manageable boards used for building. The building literally served as the heartbeat of the community, as everything depended on its operation. As mentioned, the mill opened in 1892 and suddenly closed on Valentine’s Day of 1969. That morning was just another day as several hundred workers came to their job. In an instant, a push of a power button stopped all equipment and the men were told to go home. This unforeseen closure is evident to this day. As one walks through the mill, chalkboards still have orders written on them and an eerie lunchbox still hangs on the wall from one of the former workers.

During its years in operation, the mill was not always the safest place to work. Not only did you have the dangers of accidental deaths and injuries one could normally associate with a saw mill, there were several intentional deaths that took place here. As the mill was the primary place to work and make a living for the time, there was quite some competitiveness amongst workers to promote. It has been reported that on several occasions, employees were pushed off of ledges in the saw mill by other staff, falling to their deaths down the deep pits. I’ve heard of working in a cut-throat and hostile environment but this is taking things a bit too far and literal!

In addition to the murders and accidental deaths due to the dangers of the skidder, there have been several other tragic events on the property. It is said that a young boy died after falling out the M-4 transport vehicle. Also, Engine #202 that is currently on display in the machine shop was once involved in a fatal head on collision with another train. The collision caused the boiler to rupture, literally melting the engineer!

This amazing place sits quietly in the backwoods of Long Leaf in much of the same condition it was in on the day it closed. Now a museum, you can tour the buildings and receive a great history lesson from many of its knowledgeable tour guides. Train rides are even given around the grounds via the “Doodlebug”!

With a minimum of five to ten deaths that have taken place here, there have been tons of haunted reports. I can only assume that the death figures are even higher than what I listed, as history was not always meticulously recorded in those days. With everything from apparitions and shadows being seen, to unknown voices being heard, we knew we had to investigate this one! Over time, we have conducted numerous investigations as well as giving back to the community by assisting the preservation society host various events at the museum. During Halloween, we have helped out with murder mystery dinners and haunted houses.

One personal experience I had during one of our investigations was in a small pump house near the machine shop. Out of nowhere, I felt someone poke me in my backside. I quickly turned around but no one was there. Although a very interesting experience, I have never lived it down as other group members continue the running joke that I was “poked in the butt in the pump house!” Yes, we can have dirty minds but you have to find a way to amuse yourself on those long boring investigations!

In another investigation, our Northern Chapter had several of their own strange experiences. While sitting next to the shed that contains Engine #106, one of our investigator's jacket sleeve was forcefully tugged by an unseen force. The tug was severe enough that it actually pulled him in the opposite direction while other investigators saw him jerk. Later in the evening, while standing near the Planer Mill, the investigators hears what sounded like footsteps on the gravel. Further examination found no one present anyone around the building! Finally, while in the engine house, our members heard one of the large shed doors forcefully open and close by itself. As before, no one could be found near the site.

Audio analysis proved to be equally rewarding as several interesting audio clips were recorded:

- Unknown Shouting
- “Turn It”
- Singing
- Indecipherable Voice

We continue working with Ms. Claudia and the rest of the great folks at the Southern Forest Heritage Museum, as well as conducting investigations there. We recommend that if you are ever in the area, you should pay them a visit, possibly to have a ghostly encounter of your own with one or more of than many spirits said to wander this time capsule of a community within a community. Just be sure you don’t get too close to any ledges inside the saw mill!