

The Steam Power Plants

The mill originally was designed with two separate steam power plants. One for the sawmill and one for the planer. The sawmill steam plant consisted of twelve 200 hp H.R.T. boilers, known as horizontal return tubular fire tube boilers. Each were 72" in diameter and 18 feet in length, with 70, 4 inch tubes. They were operated at 125lbs steam pressure. One boiler was connected to the common steam main all by itself. The other two sharing the same brick setting shared a common mud and steam drum. Then each three boilers of the other 9 was set together and shared a common mud and steam drum. They were built by the Muskegon Boiler Works, of Muskegon, Michigan.

There were two smoke stacks, one for each 6 boilers, with heights of 165' and diameter of 90". Their primary purpose was to create a good draft for the boiler furnaces. The boilers each cost \$1882.00 with installation extra. The stacks cost \$4140.00 each. This steam plant supplied the steam power that the Corliss engine needed, plus all of the various steam equipment used in the sawmill. The fuel used was wood waste from the sawmill, a good proportion being sawdust. To keep steam up whenever the mill was down the crew used slabwood collected during the operating week.

Two crews only were used, each on duty for 12 hour shifts, to cover the 24 hour operation of the power house. Each man was scheduled for a 7 day week without any time off. Many people in the steam plants got in 372 hours per 31 day month. In 1910 fireman received .23¢ an hr.

The plants two steam whistles were on the roof of the sawmill's boiler room. The main whistle had a deep tone and could be heard when conditions were good 10 miles away or more. It was a large whistle, all brass, and took a 2½ inch line to supply the steam to blow it. It cost in 1906 \$45.71, was built by a Williams Co. in Ohio.

It was used mainly to start and stop the plant, mornings, noon hour, end of shift, etc. And in the early days it was blown at 5:30 A.M. to each working day to help make sure no one was late to work at 7: A.M. How long this practice continued I'm not sure, but I have a feeling it was not too popular. Especially when they had a night shift and these people were trying to sleep.

The other smaller whistle, was a duel whistle, and was a higher pitched tone, with considerable less volume. It was an 1½ inch valve and built by Jenkins Bros. Co. It was used mainly to notify the sawmill crew that the Corliss was going to start or stop. It was called the 10 minute whistle, as this engine was given 10 minutes to get up to speed.

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The small whistle was also used any time there was a breakdown in the sawmill. It signalled the Corliss engineer to shut the engine down immediately. And on very special occasions, the whistles were blown, like New Years, end of WW1 and WW2, etc. At one time, many years ago, I had the habit of leaving notes to myself on my desk to jog my memory the following day for certain things that should be done. This particular day was Dec. 30th and on the scratch pad I had made a reference about leaving instructions the following day for that night crew to blow the whistles at midnight, which would be New Years. As it happened, the party responsible for the whistles, passed by my desk and saw my note. It was shortly after midnight on the 30th. You guessed it - he must have thought "Oh my gosh, I'm supposed to blow the whistles!" So he made a dash for the whistles cords and proceeded to wake up the whole country side. That's one time New Years was ushered in twice in the same year. In defense of the operator I'd have to say people working the night shift are not always wide awake. Needless to say the poor guy took a lot of ribbing.

The planer steam power house had 6 HRT boilers and one stack identical with the other sawmill steam plant, but there was no common connection, and they had a separate operating crew. Its fuel was entirely planer waste, an excellent fuel, and consisted mostly of dry wood shavings. This plant supplied the steam to power the 700 hp Corliss that run the planer and the original five dry kilns.

Working in these departments during the winter months was great, but during the hot summer months it was a different story. I recall one hot summer day in the mid 30's when I finished my shift at 3 pm it was 105 degrees outdoors, how nice and cool it felt! I don't see how these early day fireman consistently could stand 12 hour 7 day a week shifts.