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THE GREAT SOUTHERN LUMBER COMPANY'S TRIAL OF MILLING REDWOOD LOGS FROM CALIFORNIA AT BOGALUSA, LA

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Cover photo:
Redwood *(Sequoia sempervirens)* logs shipped from California await milling at the Great Southern Lumber Company at Bogalusa, LA. This effort was part of a plan to continue the operation of the company sawmill after the longleaf *(Pinus palustris)* forests had been harvested. The photo from the National Archives of redwood logs was taken at Bogalusa by M.R. Mattoon of the U.S. Forest Service in April 1931. It is interesting to note that these logs had not been milled into square cants before being shipped to Bogalusa—had the mill in California already been closed? They had been debarked—a significant task.

Photo credits:
Unless otherwise noted, the photographs are from the collections of the Southern Forest Heritage Museum and Research Center.

Abstract:
The Goodyear brothers, Frank H. and Charles W., had made their fortunes in an empire created in the hemlock (*Tsuga canadensis*) forests of Pennsylvania. However, lumbering was in their blood, and when opportunity came to purchase vast amounts of timberland in Louisiana and Mississippi, they could not refuse. They started one of the most impressive efforts in lumbering in the South—not just the sawmill operation, but the commitment to developing a permanent city out of a wilderness area. To keep the sawmill operational after the virgin longleaf pine had been harvested, an effort began to mill redwood logs from the California coast at Bogalusa by way of shipment through the Panama Canal. The effort did not last long due to the economic and logistical problems and the onslaught of the Great Depression. This is the story of a lumbering family dedicated to their people and the organization they created.

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THE GREAT SOUTHERN LUMBER COMPANY'S TRIAL OF MILLING REDWOOD LOGS FROM CALIFORNIA AT BOGALUSA, LA

James P. Barnett

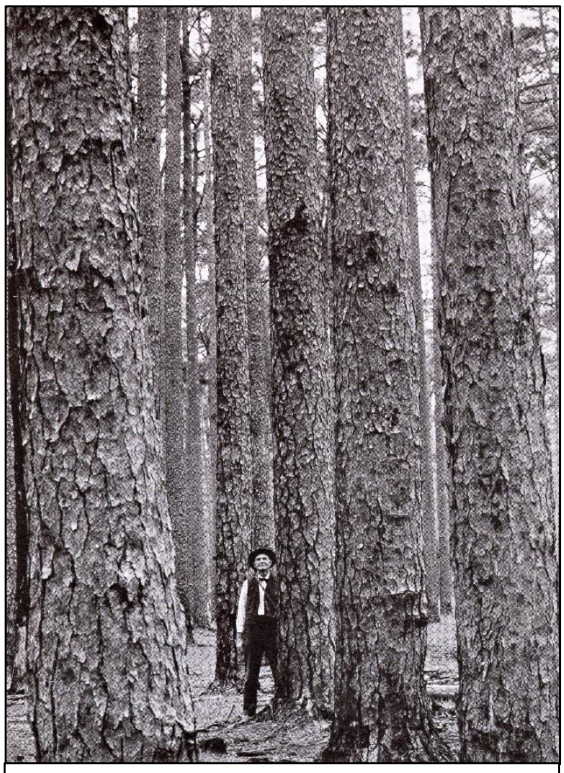
The Great Southern Lumber Company was organized in 1902 with the vision of Frank H. and Charles W. Goodyear of establishing what would become the largest sawmill in the world. They also were committed to building a sawmill town (Bogalusa) that would become a permanent city. The Goodyear brothers had become lumber barons from the harvesting of hemlock (*Tsuga canadensis*) in Pennsylvania and did not need any additional money (Taber 1971). They were prominent lumbermen with mansions on "Millionaires Row" in Buffalo, NY, and they had powerful friends such as President Grover Cleveland. They were then in their 50s but had not mellowed with age and wealth. The making of money from the production of lumber was in their blood (Goodyear 1950).


F. H. Goodyear

C. W. Goodyear

Bogalusa was the ultimate achievement of the Goodyears. It was the result of a small advertisement in the *American Lumberman* by J.D. Lacey which stated he was the agent for timber lands in the South (Taber 1971). The original intention of the Goodyears was to buy land for speculation and sell it to others who would cut the timber. Between 1902 and 1905 they reportedly bought 350,000 acres in Louisiana and Mississippi—from the northern shore of Lake Pontchartrain into Mississippi. The challenge of Louisiana became too great for Frank Goodyear to merely acquire the land: he must utilize the timber and reap the profits.

Lacey led the Goodyear brothers into the largely uninhabited area of Washington Parish, and they settled on an area adjacent to Bogue Lusa Creek which was ideal for their mill—hence, the name Bogalusa for the town they would establish. With them was William H. Sullivan who they named to build and manage the mill. They would focus on the development of the town and hired Harvey Murdock, a Long Island real estate developer to design the town—certainly rare for a sawmill town (Goodyear 1950).



A virgin stand of the Goodyears' longleaf pine with one of J.D. Lacey's timber estimators (from Goodyear 1950).

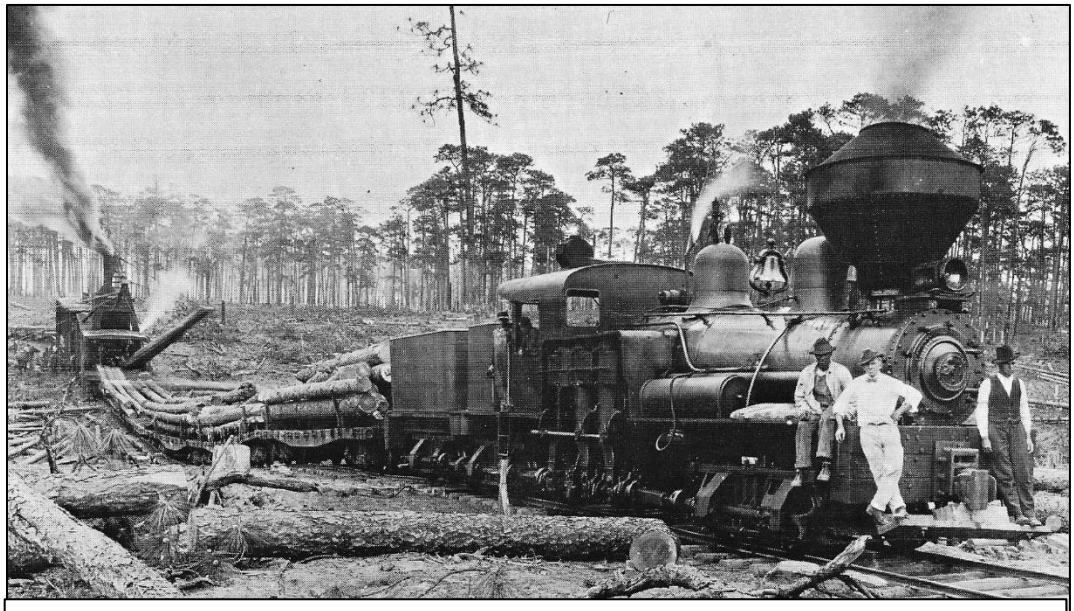
The Goodyears' selection of Sullivan was one of the best decisions they ever made. He had worked in the business and had seen what happened to sawmill towns when the forest was harvested—the town ceased to exist. He and the Goodyears developed a town with a hospital, parks, a city hall, schools, and three residential areas. Even more impressive was the addition of a YMCA, a YWCA, a nine-hole golf course, and a plush hotel and restaurant. So remarkable was this city carved out of the wilderness, that it was called the "Magic City" (Quick 1946).

Sullivan once stated: "All my life, I've built sawmills and sawmill towns. I've come into virgin forests with my men and their wives and children. I've seen them attending churches and schools I built. Then, even the biggest operations, we'd come to the end of the cut. I've seen the whole town pulled up by the roots and moved. Worse, I've seen it stand empty, another American ghost town. So, when I started building Bogalusa in 1906, I swore by the Lord that it was going to be one sawmill town that would last" (Quick 1946).

The Goodyears did not hesitate to spend funds on their creation. They built a railroad line to connect New Orleans, LA, with Jackson, MS, and provide connections for their lumber, freight, and passenger service. The mill itself was built with steel, a novelty at the time. It had the capacity to cut a million board feet of lumber per day, but the cut was usually somewhat less than that (Goodyear 1950). Paul M. Garrison, later a chief forester, described the dedication in developing their mill as: "There was, of course, all the other equipment necessary to produce 1,000,000 board feet of lumber and timber in 24 hours. Back of this were the forests, railroad, Shay and rod locomotives, log cars, Lidgerwood and Clyde skidders, and McGiffert log loaders to supply the raw material to satisfy this hungry monster. Here in Bogalusa was invested $15,000,000 in forests, houses, and sawmill and logging equipment before one thin dime was taken out" (Garrison 1953).

The size and complexity of the sawmill was striking. The mill was the focus of the town that was created to support its operation (from Louisiana State University archives).

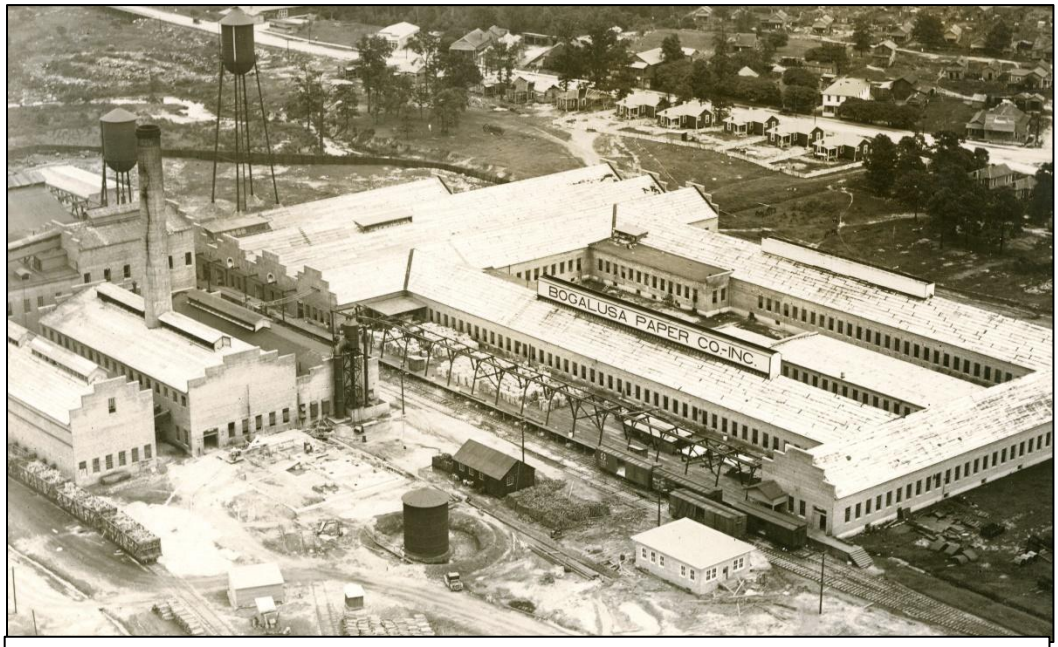
Over 60 acres of timber had to be harvested each day to feed the mill (Barnett and Carter 2017). This required an efficient timber harvesting and logging operation. The use of steam-powered skidders, log loaders, and rail transportation left little standing timber when the operation was completed.



This photo illustrates the efficiency of the logging operation and the problem created by it. The log cars are being loaded by a steam-powered log loader and no forest remains to provide for natural regeneration (from Taber 1971).

Having learned from Henry Hardtner of the Urania Lumber Company that reforestation of the pines was economically feasible, Sullivan in 1920 began a reforestation program (Barnett and Carter 2017). While Hardtner used natural regeneration, the Great Southern had few seed trees left and had to develop seedling growing and planting techniques. Although the program developed was very effective and was applied throughout the South, Sullivan learned that a 10-year period would occur before the new forests were of the size needed to support the sawmill.

The Goodyears had diversified their operation in ways to keep the town alive. The first effort in 1912 was to develop a papermill for the town. Initially, the purpose was to provide a way to use the large amount of waste material that was more than needed to provide power for the mill and town. They quickly learned that in addition to the waste wood, stems from thinning the growing new stands provided a source of raw material for paper production. The expansion of the papermill resulted in the Goodyears buying additional reforested land from other landowners to help supply their mill (DeKalb 1921). Other diversification efforts included developing tung-oil plantations.



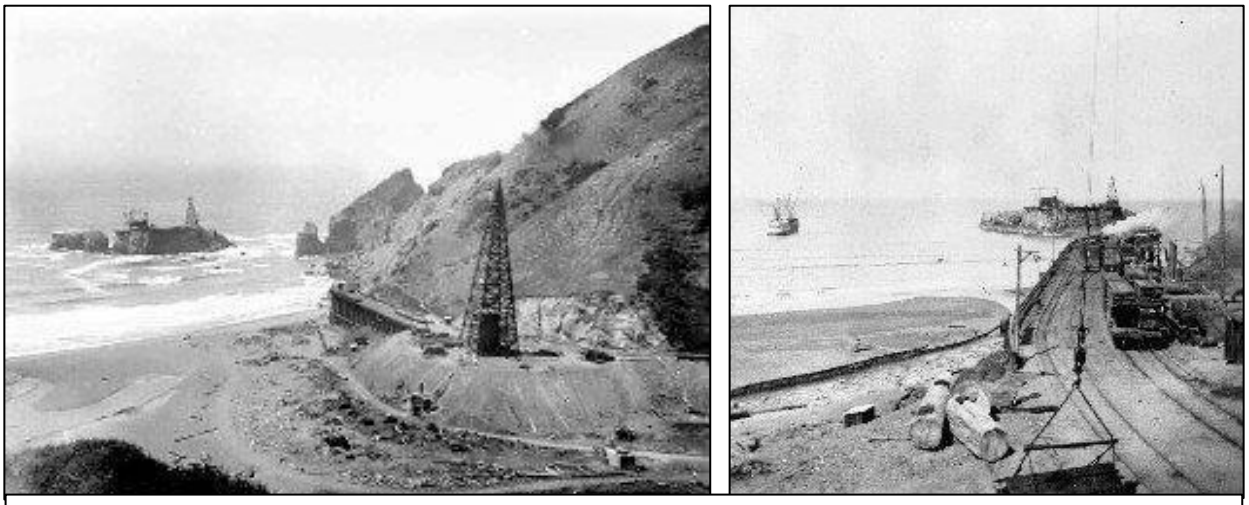
The Bogalusa Paper Company became the industry that provided for the continuation of the town of Bogalusa. As the sawmill declined in importance, the paper mill filled that gap and a papermill continues to operate in Bogalusa (from Louisiana State University Archives).

Wanting to find a way to keep the sawmill operating, other sources of timber were sought. One idea was to bring logs from Central America to the mill. On the strength of rumors that there was pine timber in Honduras and Nicaragua, Charles Goodyear II and Ted Olmstead took a trip throughout that region but found nothing worthwhile (Goodyear 1950).

In 1927, the Goodyear brothers learned of an effort began in 1925 by the Finkbine-Guild Lumber Company of Jackson, MS, to purchase redwood (*Sequoia sempervirens*) forest land in California and ship logs to their mill at D'Lo to produce and market redwood lumber in the South. Their goal was to keep their sawmill complex operational. However, the effort was doomed due to economic and logistic problems, and in two years the company was facing financial ruin.

The Great Southern Lumber Company purchased the operation from Finkbine-Guild Lumber and established the Southern Redwood Company (Mendocino Redwood Company 2021a). The rationale for this effort was explained by William Sullivan to his new redwood sales team assembled in late 1928 as "…what should we do to keep Bogalusa going? The Goodyears were willing to spend more money to accomplish this end, and we went West to look into redwood, which our neighbors were interested in but lacked the money to go into it in a big way. We had it, and today it is invested in this project in order that Bogalusa might live, in order that the Great Southern Lumber Company might continue to live and that you men could continue as a part of this organization" (Southern Lumberman 1928).

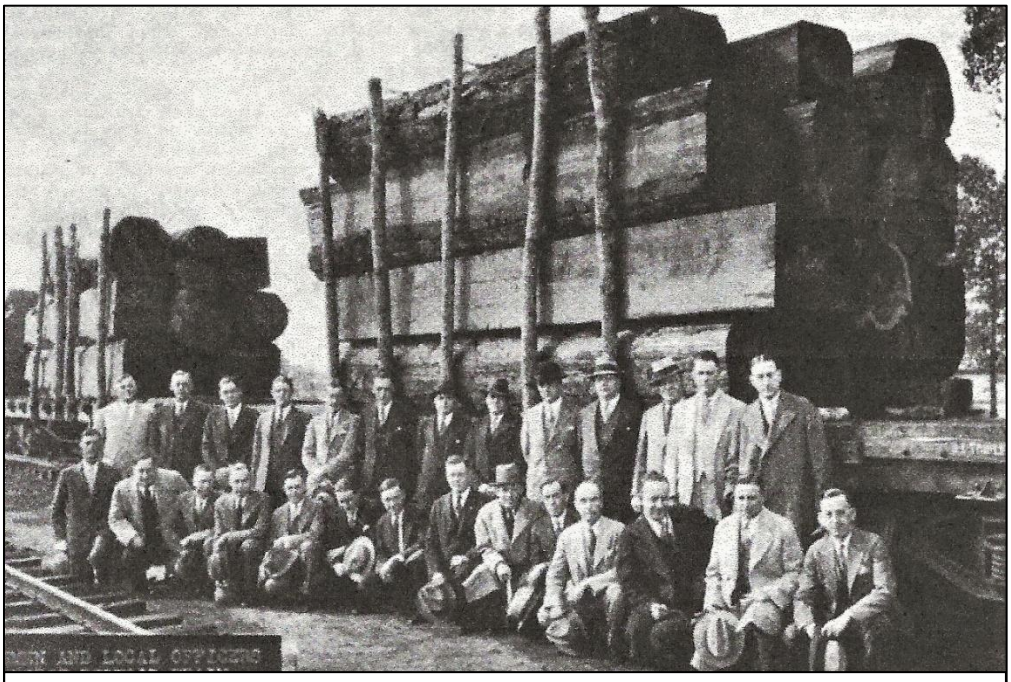
The Goodyears' Southern Redwood Company purchased the Finkbine-Guild owned forest land, sawmill, town of Rockport, and equipment. Included were new modern homes, a company store, a hotel, a barber shop, a school, and an emergency hospital with a doctor in residence. The owners had constructed a sawmill to square logs into cants for shipping, logging railroads, and loading facilities, including redwood towers and a cable system powered by a steam engine used to sling logs from train cars at the small shore inlet to an "island rock" called Pelican Island, where they were loaded onto small ships—the *Frank B. Stout*, *Bertie M. Hanlon*, *Florence Olsen*, and *Meconium* (Finkbine-Guild Lumber Company 2021).



Shipping the redwood cants required a "sling" cable system between two towers where the logs could be transferred from train cars to an island where they could be loaded on small ships for movement to San Francisco Bay. There they would be transferred to larger ships that would carry them through the Panama Canal to the Gulf Coast (from Mendocino Redwood Company 2021a).

Finkbine-Guild also had spent considerable money building a dock and loading facilities in San Francisco Bay near Sausalito. There, logs were transferred to one of the company's larger oil-burning ships: the *Abron, Dochet, Manhattan Island,* and *Dio*. Together, they were called *The Redwood Line*.

The Great Southern Lumber Company had assembled a sales force in 1928 to market redwood lumber to be milled at Bogalusa and sold throughout the South.



Great Southern Lumber Company salesmen gather at Bogalusa as the first train of redwood logs arrives for milling. Note that the logs have been cut into square cants for transport (Southern Lumberman 1928).

The Southern Redwood Company was faced with many of the logistical problems that had plagued the Finkbine-Guild operation: broken turbines, bad weather, blocked roads, broken cable lines, problems in getting supplies, labor issues, and the extra cost of handling and transporting the logs to Louisiana. Within two years, the Great Southern's venture into redwood lumbering ended due to transportation costs and the onslaught of the Great Depression (Mendocino Redwood Company 2021b). The sudden death of manager William Sullivan in January 1929 may have also contributed to this decision.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

Mill manager William H. Sullivan and the Goodyear family were committed to spend whatever funds were needed to diversify and make the company successful in establishing Bogalusa as a permanent city. They also were determined to find ways to keep the sawmill in operation. Hence,

the trial of shipping redwood logs to Bogalusa for milling into lumber that would be sold throughout the South.

Advertisement by the Great Southern Lumber Company marketing the availability of redwood lumber milled at Bogalusa for sale across the South (from the Southern Lumberman).

The Great Southern's management was paternalistic towards its employees with a genuine interest towards their health, lives, amusement, and diversions. Complete medical and surgical insurance was offered to all employees at a monthly cost of $2.50 for a family and $1.25 for a single man (Taber 1971). During the 1920s, the Goodyears pioneered an employee stock plan. Ten percent of the company's stock was allocated to employees of the company.

The sawmill continued to operate until April 1938, just a few months shy of 30 years. During the liquidation of the sawmill, the then over 400,000 acres of timber land were transferred to the Bogalusa Paper Company (Garrison 1953). But it then merged with the Gaylord Paper Company and the Goodyear family gave up control of the company, and one of the most remarkable forestry enterprises in American history ended. In the following years, the ownership of the papermill and the timberland has changed several times but remain as prime examples of sustainable forestry.

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