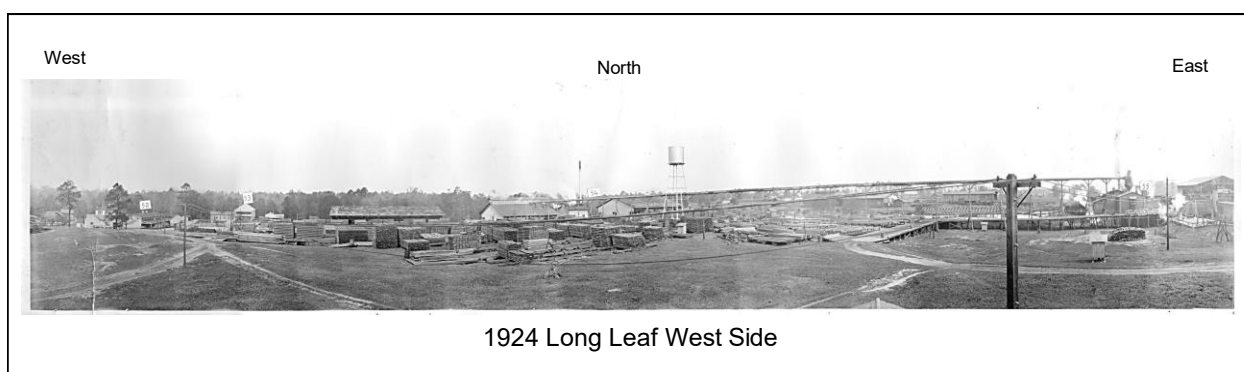




## ***SFHM RESEARCH PAPER-10***

### **A 1924 PANORAMIC VIEW OF THE CROWELL AND SPENCER LUMBER COMPANY SAWMILL AT LONG LEAF, LOUISIANA**



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**Cover photo:**

Crowell Family Collection, Southern Forest Heritage Museum and Research Center.

**Photo credits:**

Crowell Family Collection, Southern Forest Heritage Museum and Research Center.

**Abstract:**

Owners and builders of the sawmill towns of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century were proud of the achievements—they brought workers and built towns to support them into to devastated economy of the rural South. In the towns, they provided employment, schools, churches, housing, and commissaries to support their employees (Barnett and Lueck 2020). Panoramic photography provided a means to document these accomplishments. It is understood then why the Crowell owners would use the newly developed photographic technology to provide a view their sawmill complexes. The frustration with these photographs, however, is the difficulty in identifying specific buildings or pieces of equipment. Using a wide format digital scanner, this detail has been brought into focus and is presented in a series of portions of the photographs. Additionally, these have been annotated to provide a better understanding of the sawmill complex and its functioning.

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## **A 1924 PANORAMIC VIEW OF THE CROWELL AND SPENCER LUMBER COMPANY SAWMILL AT LONG LEAF, LOUISIANA**

Everett W. Lueck

In the 1920s, numerous lumber companies took advantage of panoramic photography to have photographers take what were called “yard long” photographs of their lumber mill or operation. The Crowell family had such photos taken of their complexes.

Photographs of the joint Crowell-Wadley Alexandria Lumber Company operations were published by the *American Lumberman* magazine in 1923, shortly after the mill and town of Alco were created. Probably photographs of the Meridian Lumber Company were taken as well. However, none of these seem to have survived double disasters of the Meridian Mill fire in 1928 and the Crowell office building and commissary fire at Long Leaf in 1947.

What survived and was donated to the Museum by the Crowell family is a magnificent 360-degree panoramic view of the Long Leaf mill complex. The 1924 photograph is so large that it had to be taken in two parts, one starting in the south with the Superintendents house and proceeding west. The other starting in the north and moving eastward and then to the south. As near as can be determined, a platform was built on top of a utility pole in about the center of the mill complex for the photographer to work from.

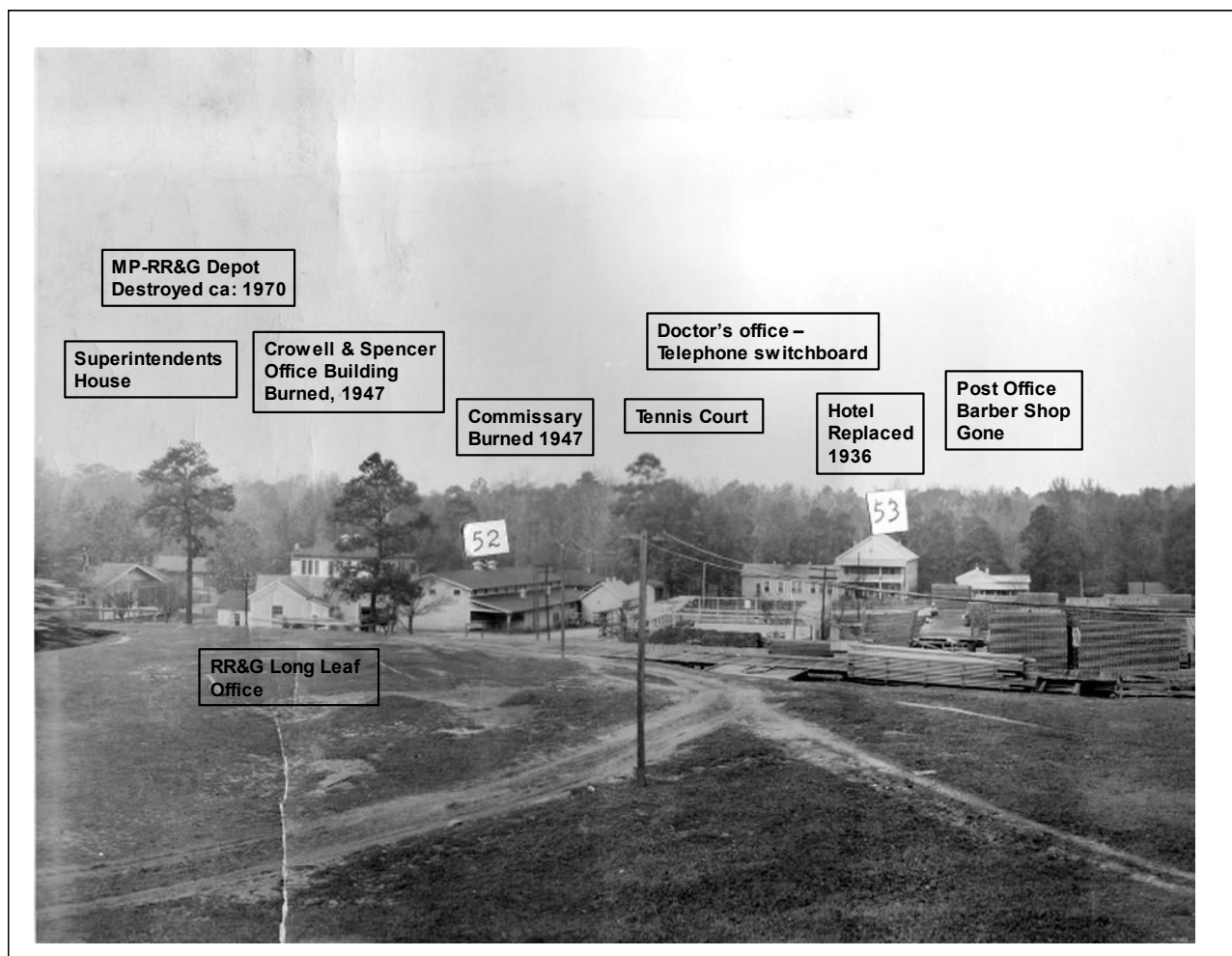
Copies of these photographs are on display in the commissary today.

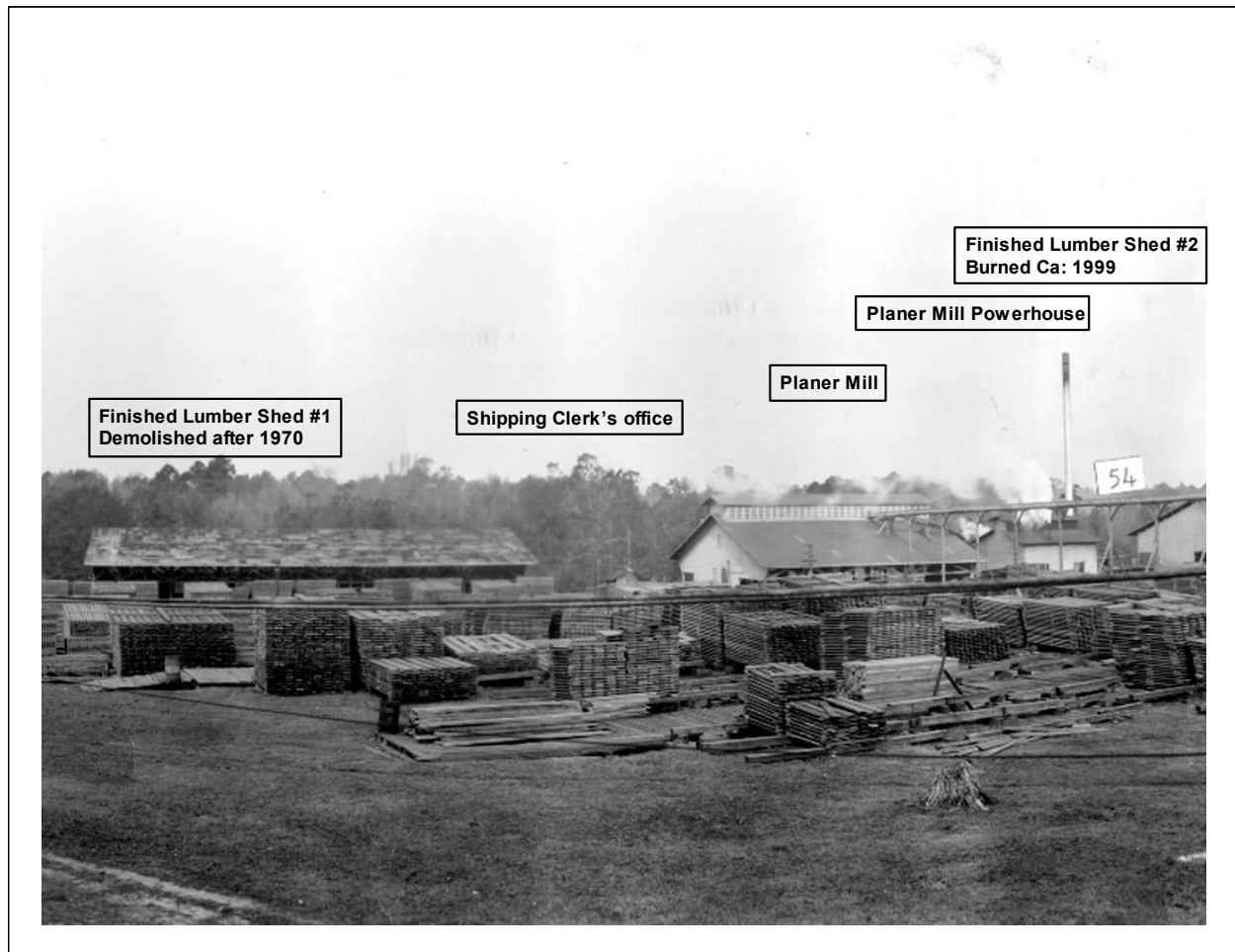
Panoramic photographs became popular because they could capture a wide span of subject matter. They were used extensively to document the 200 enrollees of Civil Conservation Corps camps of the Great Depression era (Barnett and Burns 2012). The problem with them, however, is the difficulty on focusing on individual faces or pieces of equipment. This, too, is the problem with the Crowell photographs.

A few years ago, with unlimited access to a wide format scanner, I was able to digitally scan these photographs. As a result of these scans and 15 years of research at Long Leaf, conversations with Crowell family members, former workers at Long Leaf, and other historians, we have annotated these photos to share with you.

A copy of the pair of photographs in their original condition are shown on the cover of this paper. Following are sections of the original photographs, digitally cropped and annotated as to what was there in 1924, and what happened to it over the years.

The digital panorama is so large, that it cannot be presented full size document form, so it is presented in piecemeal form so it can be better viewed, understood, and enjoyed.





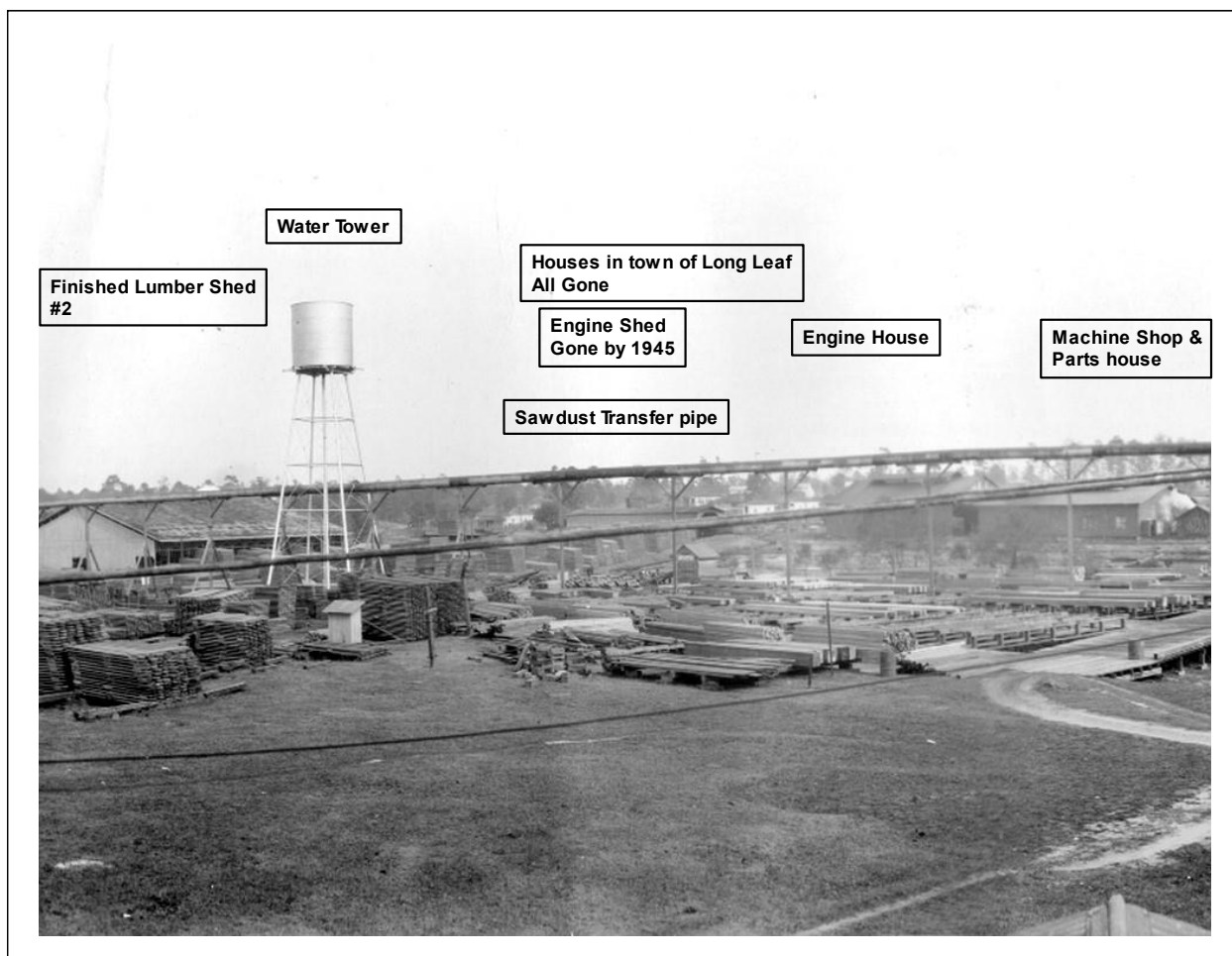
Finished Lumber Shed #1  
Demolished after 1970

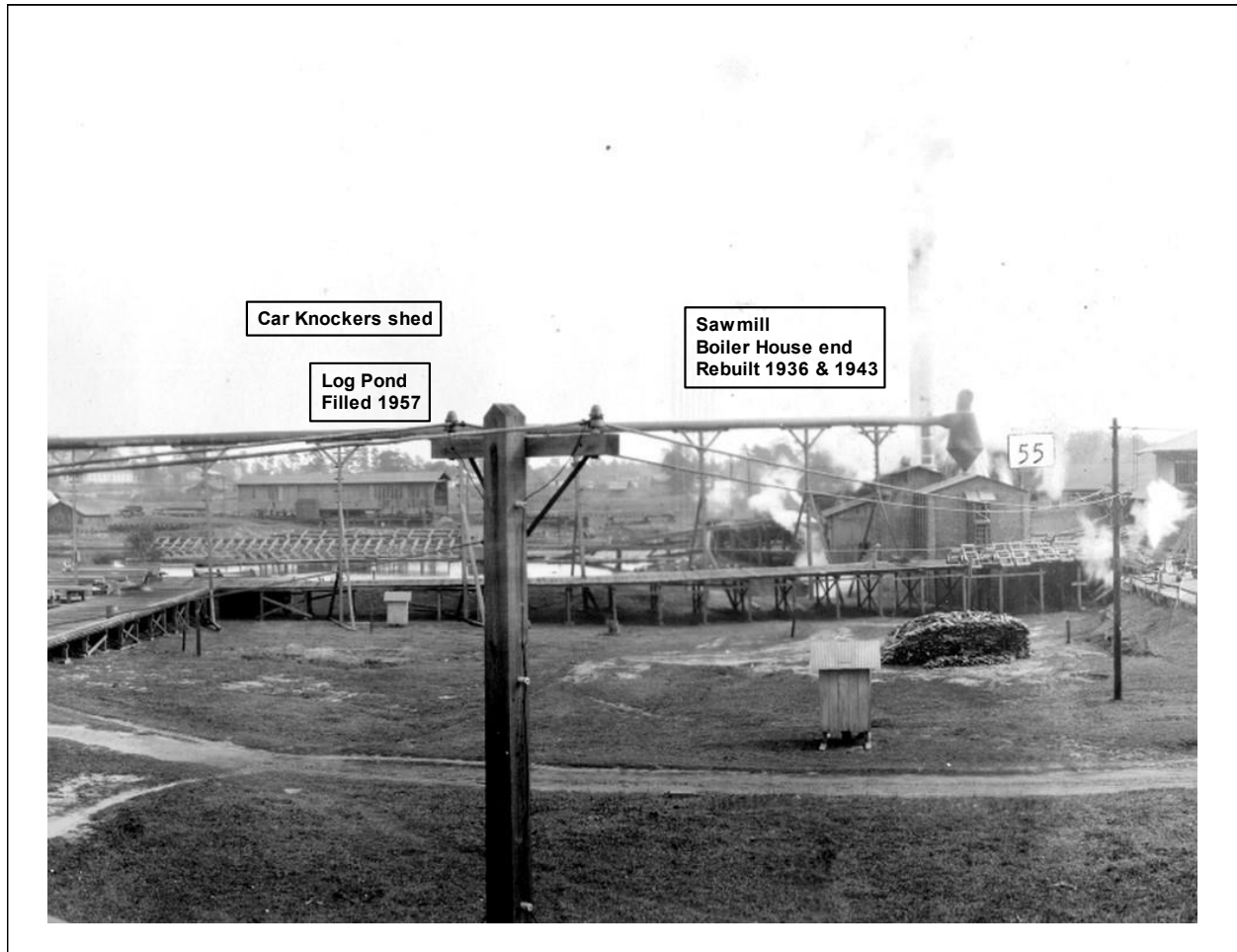
Shipping Clerk's office

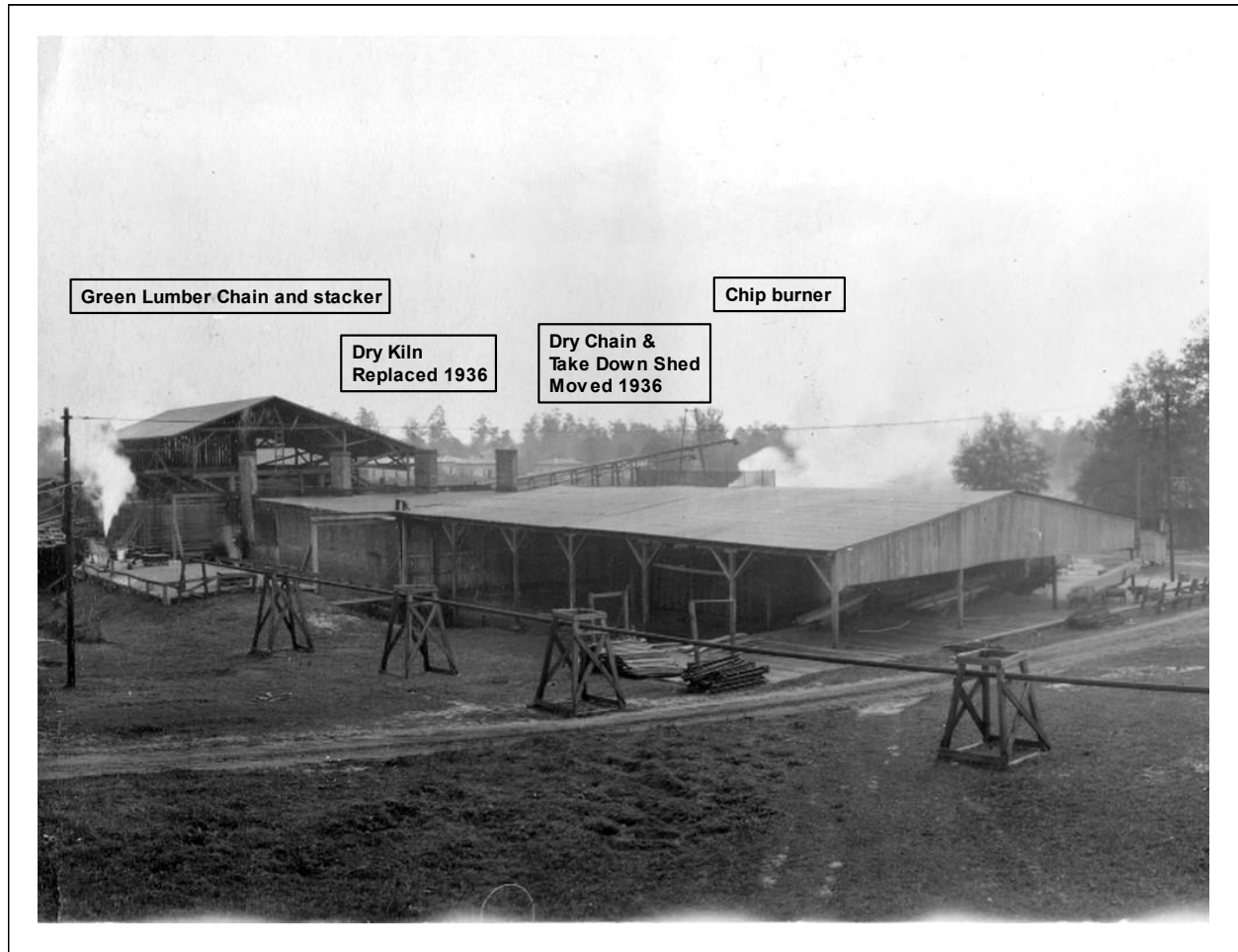
Planer Mill

Planer Mill Powerhouse

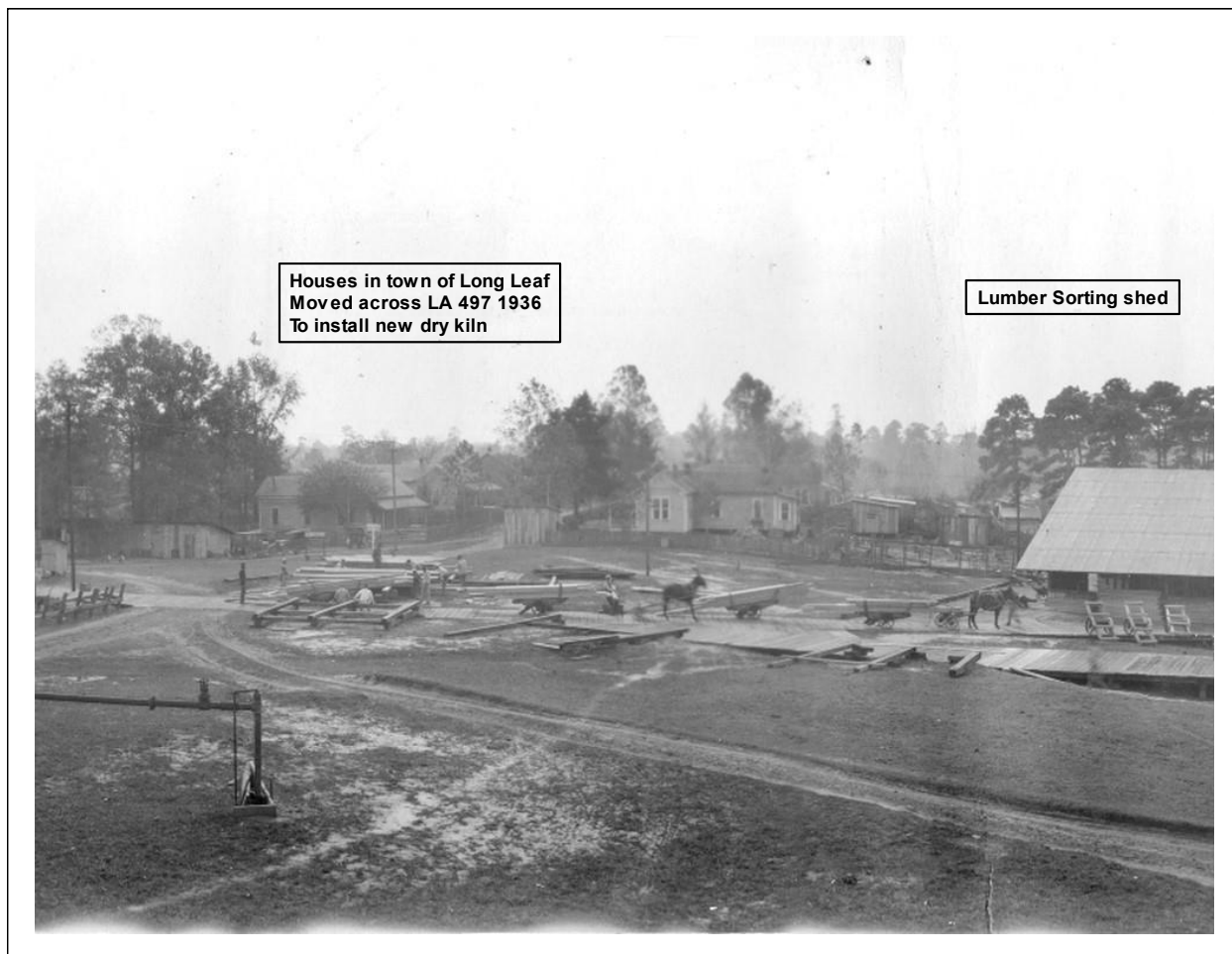
Finished Lumber Shed #2  
Burned Ca: 1999







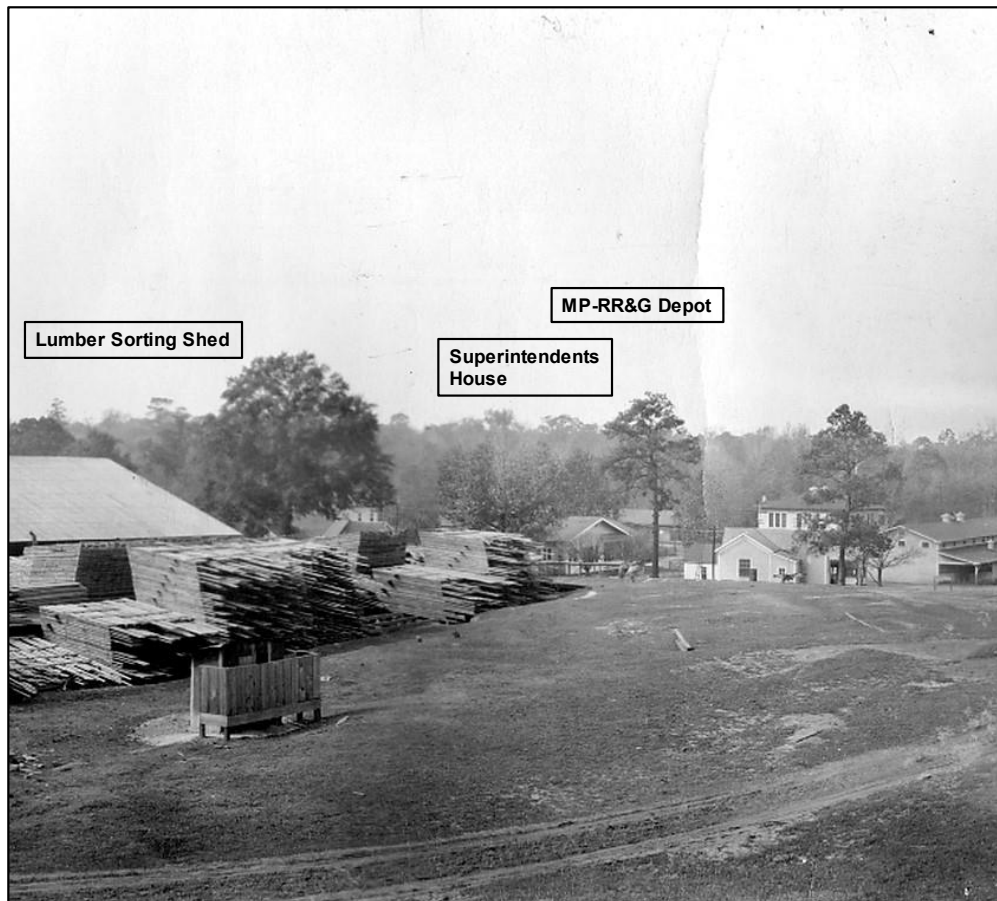




Houses in town of Long Leaf  
Moved across LA 497 1936  
To install new dry kiln

Lumber Sorting shed





## CLOSING THOUGHTS

Many thousands of sawmill towns were built in the South during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. These brought employment to both white and black employees and the mill provided all the resources to support the mill's workforce (Barnett and Lueck 2020). Although the mill towns usually lasted for only about 20 years, the timber purchased would be cut by then, the owners and builders were proud of their accomplishment. Panoramic photography provided a means to document the scale of these towns. Digitization of these photographs now allows one to better understand the resources needed for the operation of the Crowell and Spencer Lumber Company at Long Leaf.

## REFERENCES

Barnett, J.P.; Burns, A.C. 2012. The Work of the Civilian Conservation Corps: Pioneering Conservation in Louisiana. Gen. Tech. Rep. SRS-154. Asheville, NC: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Southern Research Station. 101 p.

<https://www.fs.usda.gov/treearch/pubs/40601>

Barnett, J.P.; Lueck, E.W. 2020. Sawmill towns: work, community life, and industrial development in the pineywoods of Louisiana and the New South. Gen. Tech. Rep. SRS-257. Asheville, NC: U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service, Southern Research Station. 68 p.

<https://www.fs.usda.gov/treearch/pubs/61601>

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