

Jim Baker

Retired Engineer

by Scott Buckley

A Tape Recorded Interview

April 27, May 11, 1973

Jim Baker
Sierra Railroad
by Scott Buckley

Mr. Baker was born in Oakdale in 1897. His family moved from Oakdale to Jamestown in 1898, where his father ran a saloon and later worked for the Sierra Railroad. Mr. Baker was one of six children, three boys and three girls. All of them attended Jamestown Grammar School. Both of his brothers also worked for the railroad.

In 1909 Mr. Baker started to work for the Sierra Railroad during the summers as a plumber's helper.

From June, 1912 to 1915 he worked for the Butterfield Mercantile Company of Jamestown.

In June, 1915 he went to work as a brakeman on the Hetch-Hetchy Railroad while it was being constructed. He then went to work in the Sierra shops in Jamestown and then returned to the Hetch-Hetchy until 1917 when he received his 1A classification for World War I. He then worked as a foreman for the Sierra a few months until he was finally called for service.

He received his discharge at the beginning of 1918 and went back to work in the Sierra shops for a few weeks and then became a foreman on the Angels Branch Train.

From then until his retirement in 1961, except for a brief lay-off in 1934, he has worked for the Sierra. During this time he has worked in the shops as both foreman and engineer.

He and his wife live in Jamestown, only a few blocks from the Sierra Railroad's shops and depot.

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TOPICS INTRODUCED

- Tape 1, Side 1
- Early biographical information
 - Family
 - Plumber's helper
 - Butterfield Mercantile Company
 - Fireman on Hetch-Hetchy
 - Job in Sierra Railroad shops
 - Return to Hetch-Hetchy
 - Inducted into military service, 1917
 - Job in Sierra Railroad shops
 - Fireman on Angels Branch for Swansen
 - Locomotive used on Angels Branch
 - Three cars derailed above Jamestown
 - Fireman on Tuolumne to Oakdale run
 - Ran helper engine out of Cooperstown
 - Night crier at Don Pedro
 - Back on helper engine
 - Fireman at Jamestown
 - Fireman at Oakdale
 - Fireman on Angels Branch
 - laid off
 - Back on Hetch-Hetchy
 - 1909 - Buildings and yards in Jamestown in early years
 - Fire at Neville hotel
 - Jamestown roundhouse
 - Sierra locomotives in early years
 - Sugar Pine Railroad shops in Sonora
 - Sierra locomotives
- Tape 1, Side 2
- Childhood experiences on Sierra property
 - More about Sierra steam locomotives
 - Sierra trains around 1910
 - Angels train in early days
 - Powder car explosion on Angels Branch
 - Experience with burned-out bridge
 - Near accident on Hetch-Hetchy
 - Early railroad working conditions
 - Standard Lumber Company
 - Thomas Bullock
 - Section gangs, track maintenance
 - West Side Lumber Company
 - Dutch Mine Spur
 - Atlas Branch
 - Derailement near Arnold Hill
 - Studying to become an engineer
 - First time running an engine
 - Train getting away on Grade

TOPICS INTRODUCED

- Tape 2, Side 1
- Fireman in Jamestown and Oakdale
 - Hetch-Hetchy during raising of dam
 - Sierra operations during late 1930's
 - George Wright
 - Daily passenger train
 - Al Moreno
 - Mixed train, Jamestown to Tuolumne
 - Early jobs on Sierra
 - Sierra operations after 1938
 - Job experience
 - Fireman on Angels Branch
 - Waldo Bernard
 - Bill Scott
 - Train operations 1940-1950
 - Fatal accident in Jamestown yard
 - Locomotive No. 38
 - Diesel takeover in 1955
 - Fireman on diesels
 - Operations after diesel takeover
 - Excursion trains
 - Derailment of No. 28
 - Movie trains
- Tape 2, Side 2
- Movies (continued)
 - Working in shops
 - Rebirth of steam on Sierra
 - Working in shops
 - Success of Rail Town 1897
 - Angels Branch in early years
 - Relaying track on mainline
 - Angels Branch before abandonment
 - Daily passenger train, later mixed train

PHOTO FOLLOWS

Locomotive No. 32 in front of the Jamestown Roundhouse sometime in the late 1920's or early 1930's. This locomotive was used on the Angels Branch.

Left to right: Fred Biester; Bill Tremewan; John Keagy; George Weideman; and Frank Keagy (John's brother). It has been said that John Keagy learned the machinist trade with Walter Chrysler, the automobile designer and manufacturer.

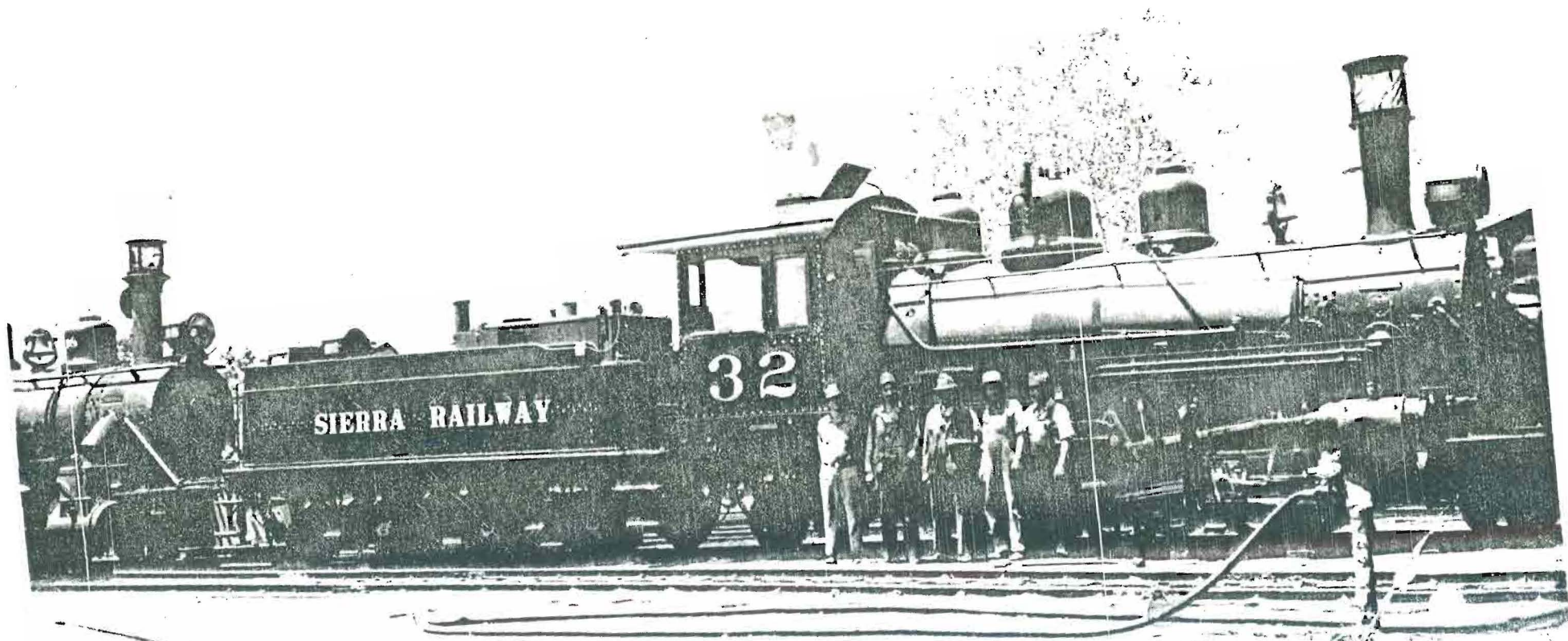




PHOTO FOLLOWS

This locomotive was originally Sierra Railway No. 30. It was the regular Angels Branch locomotive from 1922, when it was built for use on that line, until the branch line was abandoned. When Howard Terminal Ry. purchased it from the Sierra Railway in 1937, workers removed the tender and added the saddle tank that rests on the boiler. Now this locomotive is at the Castro Point Railway Museum near Richmond, California.

This photo was probably taken at Oakland.

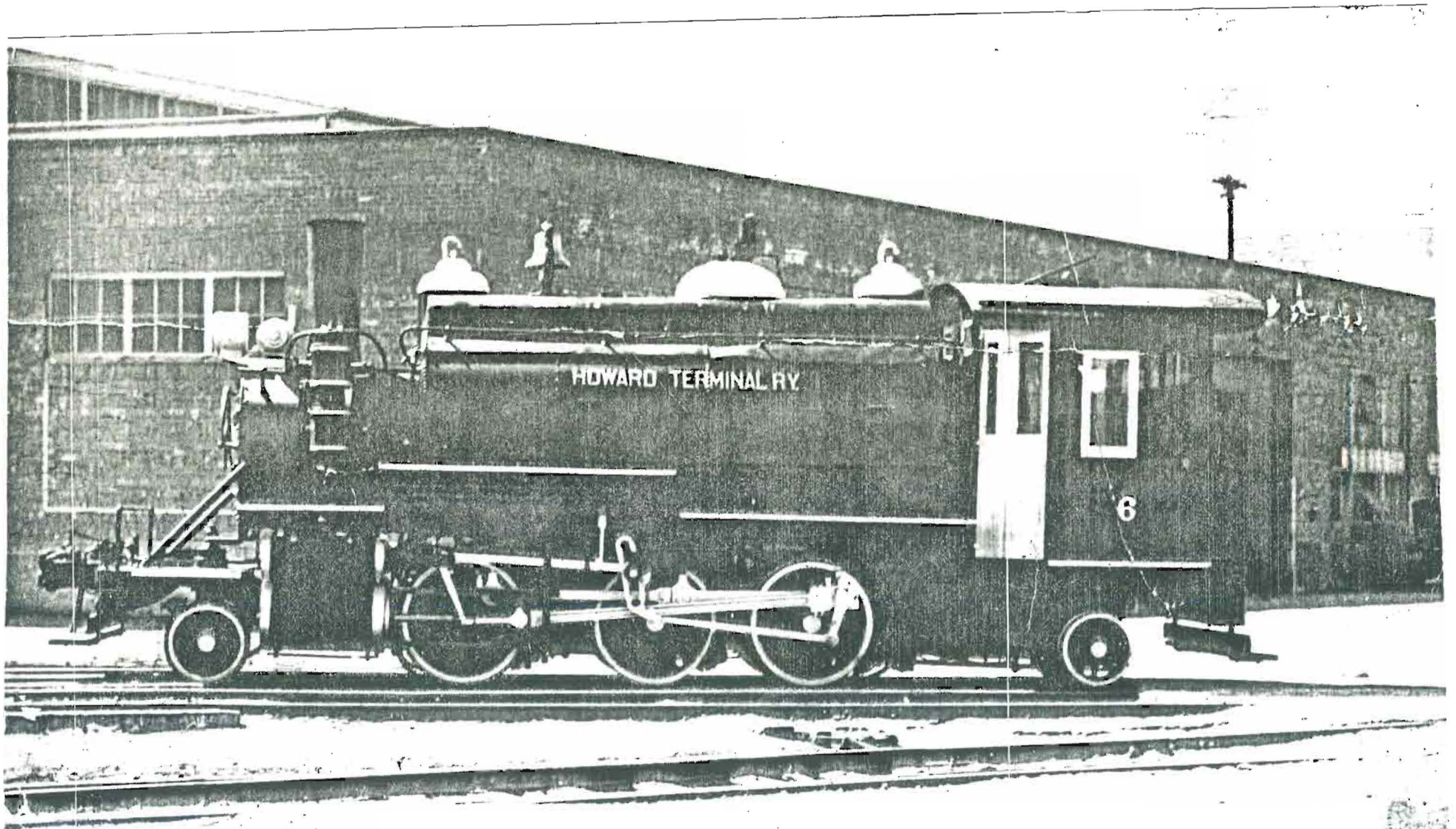


PHOTO FOLLOWS

No. 22 at Mather, December 4, 1937.
During the construction of the Hetch
Hetchy Dam, the Sierra RR ran trains
on the Hetch Hetchy tracks. Left to
right - Manuel Nobles; Jim Baker,
Engineer; More Baker, Conductor
(Jim's brother); and Al Moreno,
Brakeman.

Photo was taken by Al Rose.



PHOTO FOLLOWS

No. 18, lettered "T. & S. W. RR," for her role in the movie, "Duel in the Sun." Left to right - Elmer Benett; Jim Baker, Fireman; Gus Swansen, Engineer; and More Baker, Conductor (Jim's brother).

Photo taken during the filming of the movie at Cooperstone, December 8, 1945, by Al Rose.



PHOTO FOLLOWS

Left to right in photograph - Bill Tremeware,
Master Mechanic; Joe Ralestra; Mike
Knitchel, Boiler Maker; Harry Nichols;
Bill Garvey, Machinest; Jim Baker; and
Fred Buster, Storekeeper.

Photo taken during the 1930's.



SOURCES

Sierra Railway by Dorothy Nevill Deare

Rails in the Mother Lode by Adolf Gutherlein

Short Line Junction by Jack Wagner

Sierra Railroad, an issue of the Western Railroads Magazine. Story by Arthur Hender.
Edited by Al Race and Guy Duscomb



