



Shortly after acquiring the property, the Covell brothers brought in another brother, David W. Covell, (commonly called Will) to manage an army of men sent to establish a camp in Leavitt Township and commence harvesting and piling logs. The camp consisted of several buildings, and each building was considered a “camp” thus the local paper in Whitehall referred to it as the Leavitt Camps, although today it would be called the Leavitt Camp.

The Covell brothers also employed another army of men to commence working on the railroad leading from the river to the camp in Leavitt Township. These men had to make cuts and fills to maintain an acceptable grade established by the surveyor. Wooden ties and iron rails were placed once the grade was achieved.

The locomotive was delivered to Whitehall and mounted on a sleigh. Six teams of horses were employed to pull the locomotive through the countryside to a spot approximately 4 miles Northeast of the small town of Ferry, Michigan, where it was placed upon the narrow gauge railroad and prepared for operation. Twelve logging cars were also transported to the site via the same method. Many early settlers in the area must have marveled at the site of an 8 ton locomotive being transported through the snow covered landscape by a sleigh and horses.

The railroad was completed by April 1883, and the steam locomotive arrived at the camp to find huge piles of logs awaiting transport. The logging crew had been active during the winter months establishing the camp and harvesting logs and it was time to get them to the river.

For the next four months the locomotive was tested for its capabilities. At an average speed of 12 miles per hour the locomotive could pull a maximum of 57 tons, and with an average of 2,000 feet per car was capable of delivering 80,000 feet of logs per day, and 10 million feet annually. By the end of September 1883 nearly all of the 2.5 million feet of logs harvested up to that point from the Leavitt camp had been driven via the river to the logging boom at Whitehall.

Logging activities continued at the Leavitt Camp during the remainder of 1883 and into 1884. In March 1884 the first serious accident occurred when Charley Whalen had a foot crushed by a rolling log, resulting in the amputation above the ankle. On March 18, 1884, John Corcoran attempted to jump onto the tender of the steam locomotive but misjudged the speed and was caught up underneath. Once the locomotive was brought to a stop, Corcoran was found in the rear trucks of the fifth car, being rolled by four fully loaded cars. Terribly mangled, Corcoran died two days later from his injuries.

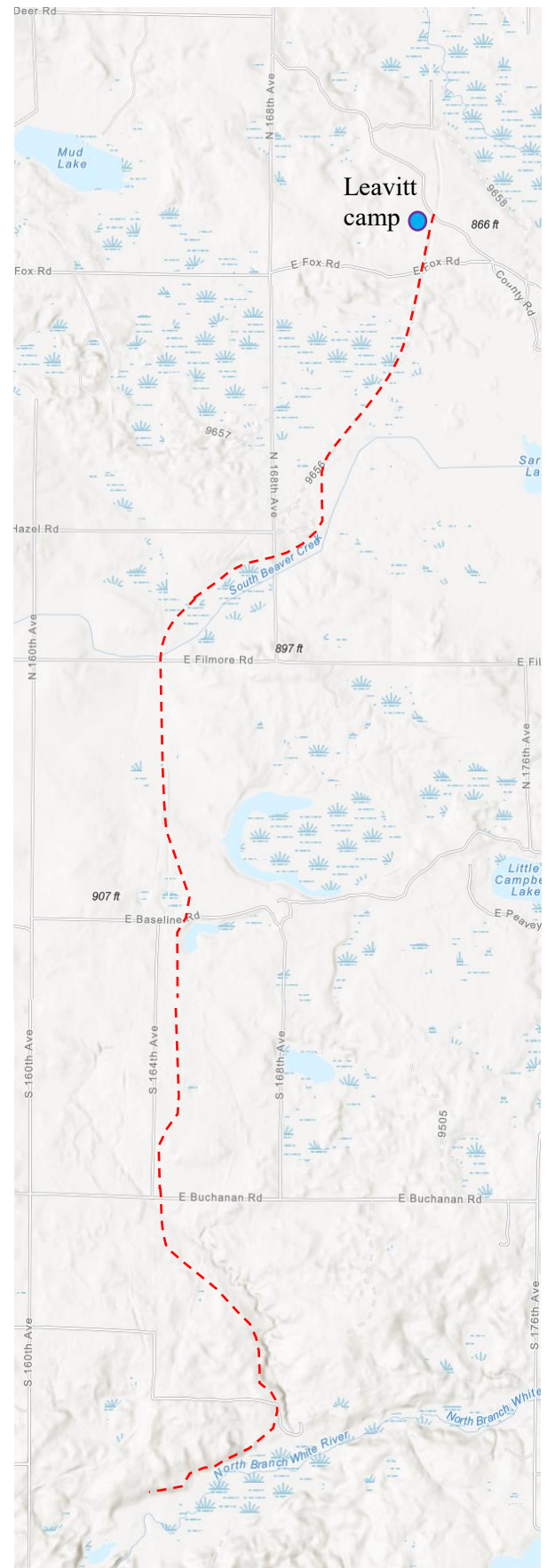


Figure 2. Leavitt Camp railroad, Leavitt and Newfield Townships, Oceana County, Michigan

The performance of the steam locomotive was greater than expected but took a toll on the railroad grade and equipment causing the camp to suspend operations for three months starting June 1884. The locomotive engineer, Adolph Shelander, and Will Covell, along with a few men, stayed at camp to complete maintenance and repairs on the grade.

Log transport operations resumed in September 1884 resulting in 50,000 feet of logs being put into the river daily, and railroad spurs being built on the Leavitt camp property. By February 1885, 5 million feet of logs had been transported to the river, and it was expected that 6 million more would be transported by June 1885. This expectation was accurate as during the month of March 1885, 1.8 million feet of logs had been cut and skidded while over 2 million had been delivered to the river. By June 1885 logging operations at the Leavitt camp had been completed and the camp was shut down.

The steam locomotive had performed much better than initially thought. When the property was acquired in September 1883, the Covell brothers speculated that it would take about 5 years to complete the logging operation, but in reality, required less than 2 years to harvest the estimated 22 million feet of logs. This was an amazing accomplishment at the time and left the Covell brothers with 1200 acres of land, camp buildings, a steam locomotive and a railroad to be addressed.

Will Covell and his wife Lucinda opted to make the camp their home and had moved themselves and their 2 children from Whitehall to the 1200 acre property. 960 acres were fenced in and farming practices commenced. On January 1, 1886, the home caught fire and they barely escaped. Shortly thereafter they decided to move back to Whitehall. Later that same month the locomotive, cars, rails and ties were transported to Whitehall for storage, and the blacksmith outfit used at camp was sold to the New Era Lumber Company.