

# Placer-Sierra Railroad Heritage Society

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## PSRHS Activities & Events...

### Editor's Comments

I have finally included a member profile in this issue. Jack Duncan is well known for his work on the Lincoln Highway and US 40 highway through the County.

This is an expanded quarterly newsletter. We will try to include some interesting history and stories in the quarterly newsletters. Members will contribute much of the information presented.

Please forward any comments, suggestions or ideas for trips or other activities to me for consideration and information.

Editor: Lyle Brown, (530) 885-6997  
<2lebrown@infostations.com>

## In this Issue...

### Monthly Meeting...

PSRHS will meet on Thursday, April, 22, 2004, at 7:00 P.M., at the Pilgrim Hall of the First Congregational Church, 710 Auburn Ravine Road, Auburn. Dave McClain will be the featured presenter.

### Membership Information

Individual Members = \$20.00

Family Membership = \$25.00

- Monthly Newsletter
- Member Activities, Presentations and Field Trips
- Display & Restoration Projects  
PSRHS, P.O. Box 1776  
Colfax, CA 95713

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## Monthly Newsletter

### **President's Corner ... April 04**

**Colfax Walking Path of History** – A just-published brochure leads people on a walking path through downtown Colfax, visiting sites of historical interest. Several of the 22 points of interest touch on the history of railroading in Colfax, thanks in part to input from PSRHS members. Some historic railroad sites still exist, such as the freight and passenger depots, while others are just memories. The brochure is available at the Chamber of Commerce railcar, City Hall, and several Colfax businesses.

While in Colfax, take a look at the recently repainted 1880's-vintage freight depot (see companion article) and stop in at Camp 20 Coffee House across the street from the freight depot to see the PSRHS photo display, "The Changing Face of Colfax and its Railroads, 1865-2004."

**Field Trip** – Jim Wood is finalizing details for a May field trip, to be tentatively held May 22, in lieu of a May meeting. Watch for final details, and make plans to join us.

**Roger Staab (530) 346-6722**  
**rsrr@ncws.com**

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### **MARCH MEETING NOTES:**

#### **Announcements-**

- Vice-President Jim Wood announced that Colfax will hold its Spring Fair on Saturday, May 1, and that the Society plans to set up a booth in front of the caboose. Members were encouraged to participate. Tony Hesch has volunteered to conduct inside tours of the caboose. The Nevada Co. Narrow Gauge group

will also set up a table with brochures, etc

- President Roger Staab updated the group on the status of acquiring rolling stock for display in downtown Colfax. Unfortunately, the 3 pieces of equipment (2 each F-7 diesel units and a "City of S.F." Pullman car) that the Society was pursuing from the Golden Gate Railway Museum will not be available after all. However, Roger expressed hope that the G.G.R.M. might someday consider displaying some of their equipment in Colfax that would tie in with the Donner Route. Roger also mentioned that the old freight depot is currently undergoing a facelift and will be painted in the same color scheme as the passenger depot. The buildings new owner has plans for retail space but will reserve 1/3 of the building for railroad related displays.
- **Program-** Previously rescheduled speaker Phil Sexton was once again unable to attend due to weather conditions in the Sierras. Instead, Roger Staab shared with the group his photo essay entitled "Colfax & It's Railroads, 1865 – 2004, consisting of numerous period photographs and maps of the Colfax railroad yards and structures. This chronological series of photos will be displayed in at least one downtown business establishment when completed.

There were 17 members and 4 guests in Attendance.

**Ron Petersen, Secretary-Treasurer**

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### ***April Meeting Topic: Portola Railroad Museum***

Dave McClain will give us a presentation of his work at the Portola Railroad Museum in restoration of their Western Pacific California Zephyr F7 locomotive. Dave has spent countless hours of work rebuilding the locomotive's diesel engines. During times when the Feather River Route was impassible, the California Zephyr train could be seen in our local area as it was diverted over the Sierra on the Donner Pass Route. Dave's talk will feature a photo show of the progress of their work on the engine and other California Zephyr passenger train photos. This is sure to be an interesting presentation.

***MEET MEMBER JACK DUNCAN:*** Jack is well known for his research and history of the old highways through the County. He has been involved in establishing recognition for the remaining sections of the Lincoln Highway, Victory Highway, US-40 and their relationship to Interstate 80.

**Jack** been interested in the highways since being trained in reading maps as a navigator in the United State Army/Air Force serving in the Pacific combat zone. Later he became mechanical engineer and analyzed facilities and equipment with aerial photographs at the Livermore Lab. When he retired to Newcastle 1981 he noticed the lack of accurate information available to the public regarding the old roads. After three years of research he published a book, "To Donner Pass from the Pacific", regarding the roads traversing the Sierra-Nevada's in the County.

**Jack's** latest effort is to compile an accurate early history of the railroad around Cape Horn above Colfax. As with the roads, he is finding many misconceptions written of places and events in this area. An important document in this research is a small booklet "The Central Pacific Railroad and the Legend Of Cape Horn" written by Elson T. Strobridge" 2001.

**Note:** The story of Chinese workers hanging in baskets at Cape Horn was first reported in the 1920's and is now acknowledged being only a legend.

(Christina Taylor for the Auburn Journal, and interview of Jack by Lyle Brown.)

### ***Colfax Freight Depot Undergoing Restoration***

Colfax-area resident Gary Todd has recently purchased the Colfax Freight Depot, located on Main St. across from the historic buildings of downtown Colfax. Extensive renovation is underway on the building's exterior. A new roof is in place, and the building is being repainted in the historic SP color scheme of colonial yellow with brown trim. Gary is also renovating the interior to accommodate retail shops and historic displays (more on the displays in a moment).

The Colfax Freight Depot has a long and significant history in Colfax. It was built in 1880, and located next to Main St. where Grass Valley St. presently crosses the tracks. At its north end was a long, narrow shed used for transferring cargo from the Nevada County Narrow Gauge (NCNG) cars to Central Pacific (CPRR) and later Southern Pacific (SP) cars. This original configuration served the narrow gauge and mainline freight until 1905, when the Freight Depot and transfer shed were moved across the tracks and north of Grass Valley St. Prior to the move, NCNG freight cars had to be shunted across the CPRR mainline tracks to reach the transfer shed. By relocating the Freight Depot and transfer shed to the east side of the mainline, NCNG trains no longer had to cross the mainline tracks for passenger or freight operations.

Shortly after the 1905 move, SP began planning for a second track across the Sierra. The Colfax area was seen as an ideal location for more extensive services for the Sierra crossing if the tracks could be realigned through town. Through the period from 1910-1920, the mainline tracks through Colfax were straightened, replacing the lazy S pattern of the original CPRR tracks, along with creation of an extensive yard area and 7-stall engine house for Colfax-based helper engines. As a result of this realignment, the Freight Depot had to be moved once more, and shortly after 1915, it was moved to its present location. This time, the narrow gauge transfer shed was not rebuilt adjacent to the Freight Depot. Instead, a transfer shed was built in the yard area beyond the present-day fruit exchange buildings.

In recognition of the Freight Depot's extensive history with Colfax railroading and freight operations, Gary is committed to combining retail operations in the building with historic displays. An

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area of the inner walls of the freight room is covered with signatures, some dating back to the 1800's, of former railroad employees who spent time in the building. Gary plans to preserve a portion of the original wall so these signatures are visible to modern-day visitors. The high ceilings will allow retail use of the lower wall, while the upper walls will display historic photos and other railroading memorabilia. And the outside loading dock will display some of the many railroad items Gary has collected, or that are being donated by locals interested in showing off Colfax's railroading history.

With Gary's efforts to bring the freight depot back into active service, actions underway to reopen the 1905 Colfax Passenger Depot, and contemporary UP and AMTRAK trains rolling through a town that has seen continuous rail service since 1865, railroading is indeed alive and well in downtown Colfax. (Roger Staab, Placer-Sierra Railroad Heritage Society)

### ***Restoration Photographs of Colfax Freight Depot:***



**Colfax Freight Depot before repainting,  
April 1, 2004**  
(Lyle Brown photo)



**Repainted Colfax Freight depot, April 8, 2004**  
(Roger Staab photo)

### ***Fruit Trains***

Another interesting part of the early 20<sup>th</sup>. Century railroad operations over Donner Summit was the trains of refrigerator cars carrying Placer County produce to the eastern markets. The farmers carried wagon and truck loads of fresh picked fruits to the fruit sheds in Rocklin, Loomis, Penryn, Newcastle, Auburn and Colfax. There the fruits, mainly plums, pears, peaches and apples were packed and cooled. The packaged fruits were then loaded on to precooled refrigerator cars, ready to be picked up by the CP or SP eastbound trains. The refrigerator cars were ice bunker cooled until early in the century when the mechanical refrigerator cars were developed. Icing stations had to be located at several locations along the route to replenish the melting ice. Roseville and Truckee were the two major ice stations on the Donner route.

(Lyle Brown)



**Cabforward with Fruit Train**  
(Ken Yeo collection)