

Placer-Sierra Railroad Heritage Society

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To:

PSRHS Activities & Events...

Editor's Comments

The May field trip to Rocklin was very interesting. The remains of the Rocklin roundhouse were viewed and then a tour of various quarry sites were visited.

Roy Ruhkala, who's family started and owned several of the 60 plus quarries in Rocklin, was a very informative and interesting guide. I am compiling a series of photos of the RR and quarry points of interest taken on this field trip.

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

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In this Issue...

Monthly Meeting...

PSRHS will meet on Thursday, June 24, 2004, at 7:00 P.M., at the Pilgrim Hall of the First Congregational Church, 710 Auburn Ravine Road, Auburn. Phil Sexton will be the guest speaker on Donner Pass RR History.

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

Placer-Sierra Railroad Heritage Society

Monthly Newsletter

President's Corner – June 04

Hobbyist or Terrorist – This same headline appeared in a recent Time magazine article. With increasing concerns about terrorist activity on or near railroads, officials are taking a careful look at anyone who is “hanging around” the tracks. Railroad enthusiasts who enjoy watching trains and taking pictures of them are finding themselves being detained and questioned about their activities. While the concerns are more pronounced around urban areas, we should anticipate that anywhere along the railroad right-of-way we may be subject to being questioned about why we are there.

Some enthusiasts report being more careful about their attire, shunning t-shirts for business-casual. Others report carrying a train spotter's guide or similar publication, and being prepared to show or hand out a card identifying their railroading interests. Perhaps your PSRHS membership card should be kept handy if you are planning to be out in the field taking pictures or merely watching the trains go by.

It is unfortunate that we are experiencing these new concerns, but they have become part of our present-day world. If you are on or near the railroad right-of-way, think safety first, anticipate possible concerns about your presence on the part of railroad officials, and keep your eyes open for any suspicious activity. And don't forget to enjoy yourself!

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

June Meeting Topic: Donner Pass Railroad History

The guest speaker for the June 2004 meeting is Mr. Phil Sexton. Phil is the director of the Big Bend Visitor Center of the Tahoe National Forest east of Cisco Grove. This is the program that Phil has been planning to present several times earlier this year but the weather delayed his presentation. Phil and his staff have recently completed a comprehensive interpretive display at the Big Bend Center documenting the history of transportation through the Donner Pass region including emigrant wagon roads, early automobile roads and highways, and railroad activity. Phil will bring some of the latest “finds” of railroad memorabilia acquired by the Forest Service that document the railroad history in the Donner Pass region. Phil has been a member of our Society since 2002.

Jim Wood

Placer-Sierra Railroad Heritage Society Meeting Minutes May 22, 2004

The Society's first field trip of the year commenced at 9.00AM at the site of the former C.P. then S.P. roundhouse located next to the mainline tracks at the intersection of Rocklin Road and Front Street in Rocklin. Vice-President Jim Wood first introduced our guide for the day, Roy Ruhkala, prominent Rocklin resident, businessman and current President of the Rocklin Historical Society. Member Ron Petersen, also Curator for the Rocklin History Museum, provided maps and photographs to supplement Roy's discussion of Rocklin's granite industry and the important role played

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by the railroad. After viewing the remnants of the roundhouse (dismantled in 1908 when the S.P. moved its operations to Roseville), the group carpooled to Rocklin's City Hall. Here it's second story observation area provides an overlook of the "Front" Quarry, one of the earliest and largest of the 60 quarries that operated in Rocklin from the 1860's to around 1915. From here, the group traveled along Pacific Street to see the location of the former quarry spur track where it left the main line to cross over Pacific Street and then branch out in several directions to serve some of the larger quarry operations to the east. Next, the entourage checked out the Ruhkala Quarries along Ruhkala Road where Roy pointed out evidence of one of the railroad spurs. A few blocks distant, a stop was made at Roy's residence where, along side of his garage, can be found the only spur rails still in existence. The next stop was at the intersection of Winding Way and So. Grove Streets, where an early photograph of the home still at that location, showing spur tracks running along side, was compared with it's quite different present day appearance. From here, we traveled a few miles over to the east side of I-80 where we walked the old grade for the spur that crossed over Secret Ravine. This was also the site of 3 additional quarries, the most famous being Copp's Quarry, where in the late teens, an S.P. locomotive slid into the quarry when the ground beneath it gave way. This completed the formal program, and after returning to the starting point to retrieve the cars left earlier, some of the participants joined Ron for a tour of the Rocklin History Museum on Rocklin Road. The day's outing concluded at approximately Noon. 14 members and quests were in attendance

Rocklin roundhouse bay



Granite foundation and wall of roundhouse



Roy Ruhkala
(Photos by L. Brown, May 22,2004)



Ron Petersen, Secretary-Treasurer

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MEET Mrs. Carson (Vi) White

Much of this information concerns Vi's late husband. Both grew up in the Oakland area but did not meet until New Years Eve, 1939

Vi's neighbors had children her age. That family's grandmother moved to Shockly Road in Auburn and Vi was sent up to visit during the summers. She used to walk the RR tracks to downtown Auburn.

Carson was an avid skier and in the 30's worked for the SP trying to develop a ski train resort at the summit. Due to lack of accommodations at that time it proved unfeasible.

After meeting at the New Years Eve party, Carson and Vi were married in 1942. During the war years Carson sailed the romantic Pacific islands, Saigon, Guam, Okinawa, and others, in a seaplane tender, with shipmate Henry Fonda. Meanwhile Vi taught young nurses at the Oak Knoll Hospital in Oakland how to swim so they could serve overseas. Both of the Whites were involved in the Red Cross organization.

After the war, Carson worked as a Port Captain for a steamship line, and also sold cars. Returning to the SP he worked in SF as the secretary for the manager of the hotel, restaurant and dining car operations.

The Whites lived at Donner Lake for 47 years where he became involved with real estate and continued to pursue his love of skiing. Together they made many trips to ski areas to find a place where a railroad ski destination could be developed. He wrote ski articles for the Auburn Journal for over 50 years. Also was the Ski Editor for the SF Examiner and was a US member of the Ski Writers Association.

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They both developed a strong interest in the history of the Donner area and the railroad over the summit as well as the NCNGRR in Grass Valley. Due to health issues they moved to Auburn where Vi continues her pursuit of the history of this region and the railroads.



MEET Dave Ballenger

Dave was born in Glendale but his family moved around quite a bit in his youth. During the summers, he visited with his grandparents who were in Auburn. He moved in with his grandparents and attended Placer High School for his Senior year. Dave is very mechanically inclined and developed an early interest in the operations of the railroads. His first steam engine ride was 1940. In the 50's he began developing his interest in the Sierra railroads. His first home in Auburn was next to the present E. V. Cane school site. For a couple of years he drove a fuel truck around the Auburn area. During the winter months he worked on Folsom Dam. In 1956 he hired on with the telephone company. The Auburn office was charged with the responsibility for the Roseville to Donner portion of the transcontinental telephone trunk line. He spent many years working to maintain this line and was often in close proximity to the SP mainline. He retired from the telephone company after 42 years, but continued working as the communication specialist for the phone systems at Sierra College for an additional 12 years.

After retiring, Dave became very interested in the NCNGRR. He spent considerable time tracing the original right-of-way. This led to reading the history of the Sierra railroads, specifically the narrow gauge. He now spends several days each week working at the NCNGRR museum in Nevada City manning the museum, restoring rolling stock and other odd jobs.