

Placer-Sierra Railroad Heritage Society



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March 2020 Newsletter

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This equipment test was spotted in the Colfax Yard in 2007. See the story on page 3.

Scheduled Events & Notices



Mar 26 **NOTE: MARCH MEETING IS CANCELED DUE TO
CORONAVIRUS PRECAUTIONS**

All Events Listed are Subject to Rescheduling

Apr 18 **Status update and BBQ at site of new SP History Center in Rocklin
– 11am-2:30pm — Pre-registration Required – see page 2**

Apr 23 **PSRHS Monthly Meeting – 7pm – Program TBA**

May 23 **(Tentative) Dedication of Track Segment, Monument and Information Kiosk
for NCNG Railroad at site of Nevada City Depot - see page 2**

May 28 **PSRHS Monthly Meeting – 7pm – Program TBA**

There will be NO PSRHS Monthly Meeting in March. Our meeting room at Auburn Airport is not available due to Coronavirus precautions. The status of the April Meeting will be announced in April's Newsletter.

February Program Recap: Retired Navy Rear Admiral **Bonnie Potter** presented a program titled **Women In Railroading**.

Rear Admiral Potter discussed the history of women in railroading by comparing the slow progress by women in obtaining other than clerical jobs with the railroads to her own rise to flag rank in the Navy. Many obstacles had to be overcome by women in both professions but progress has been made. Her talk and side stories made for a very entertaining and informative evening.

SPRHC Site Tour & BBQ

A BBQ and site tour for the new Southern Pacific Railroad History Center is scheduled for **April 18** from 11am to 2:30pm at the Rocklin site. Jim Mahon has agreed to cook for the BBQ. This is an informal gathering of community, business, and railroad history leaders to learn of plans, progress and opportunities for the creation of the Southern Pacific Railroad History Center at the site of Rocklin's historic 1867 Roundhouse.

Pre-registration is required for this event to ensure there is enough BBQ for all attendees. Follow this link to learn more about the project and BBQ:

<http://events.r20.constantcontact.com/register/event?llr=umzubg4ab&oeidk=a07egya6gcve44e642e>

Or contact Linda Wampler, Rocklin Historical Society at rocklinhistorical@gmail.com

This should be a very informative gathering, assuming outdoor gatherings will again be permitted by that time.

Spring Field Trip

The previously announced spring field trip to ride motorcars on the old Amador Central line near Ione will not happen this year due to scheduling conflicts.

In the event that large gatherings of people for organized events can once again be held by May 23, a potential group tour of the Nevada County Narrow Gauge museum is a possible outing for our members who would like to attend an interesting event on that date. The NCNG group have relaid a short section of track on the original railroad right-of-way at the Nevada City depot site. They plan to host **a dedication ceremony on May 23 for the track segment and a new monument to the NCNG railroad**. A narrow gauge rail bus will be operating on the new track section for this event. Long term plans call for laying track all the way to the NCNG museum to run trains.

In addition, a group tour of the NCNG museum would be arranged for those attending. There is the potential to see the Porter steam locomotive operate in the yard on that day. This is the same Porter that we saw on our group's field trip to the Wilmunder collection in 2017. This would be a good opportunity for our society to support a neighboring railroad historical group by our presence at the May 23 track and monument dedication. Watch for more details in the April Newsletter.

New Board Member

New PSRHS member Peter Diurni has been selected to fill the vacant board position for a 3 year term.

The 2020 slate of PSRHS board members includes:

President: Chuck Spinks
Vice President: Don Anderson
Secretary: Shirley Racine
Treasurer: Peter Hills
Peter Diurni
Dave Ferriera
Malcolm Frost
Paul Greenfield
Bill Yoder

Board committee assignments include:

Membership: Jim Wood
Web Cam: Bill Yoder
Newsletter Editor/Historian: Roger Staab
Big Day of Giving: Malcolm Frost





Passing Scene – Fire Train Testing

This photo was captured in the Colfax yard on April 5, 2007. Fire train tank cars are being tested in preparation for another Sierra fire season. We think of fire trains playing a significant role on the Donner Route when wood snow sheds were in heavy use, but fire trains still play a role in modern Sierra railroading. Watch next month's newsletter for a photo of fire trains in contemporary operation. *Photo by Roger Staab*



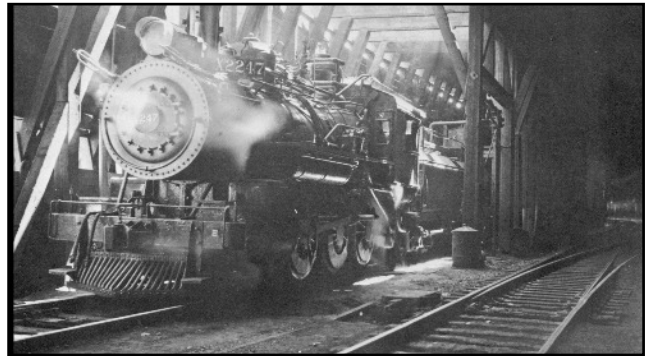
Amazon Smile Fund Raising

We are now part of the Amazon Smile fund raising campaign. We receive a donation to the society based on your purchases. Please feel free to copy and paste the link below and include it in all your emails.

<https://smile.amazon.com/ch/68-0488569>

From the Archives

March Mystery Photo (right): Where was this photo taken and what is the significance of the locomotive as equipped? *John Signor, Donner Pass*



Accidents/Other Incidents. **Robert Fowler's Railroad Adventure.** This story is only partially tied to the Donner Route, but it is too good a story to pass up. Robert Fowler was a pioneer aviator who entered a 1911 contest to fly his Wright Brothers Plane coast to coast. Starting initially in San Francisco, he made several unsuccessful attempts to cross the Sierra at Donner Summit. On the first attempt he crashed near Alta, severely damaging his plane. The Colfax gun club picked up most of the expense to repair his plane and Southern Pacific provided "help of any kind needed", including movement of Fowler's supply train. His route was near the railroad tracks, providing a handy source of support. His damaged plane was moved to Colfax where it was repaired and once again he took off for Donner Summit.

He suffered motor failure on the next attempt. On his third attempt his new motor froze. He put the plane down in a meadow, where crews from a nearby train found him alive and well and working on his motor. After two more attempts led to failure to cross the summit, he switched to a southern route and shipped his plane to Los Angeles. It was on the southern route that he experienced a railroad encounter near El Paso, chronicled in the book **The Adventures and Achievements of Robert Grant Fowler, by G.W.J. Nelson.**

"Bob was forced to land due to motor problems in the soft sandy desert. The sand was too deep to take off in. There weren't enough flat boards to build a runway over the sand. He came up with the idea of mounting the Cole flyer on top of a railroad hand car on the railroad track then rev the motor and pick up speed down the track to get airborne. His crew with the help of railroad workers, set the craft on the hand car. Bob started the motor and force propelled the hand car forward. He gradually opened the throttle. It was working. The car was picking up speed. He reached forty miles an hour. Just five miles an hour more and he would be off into the air. He was heading down hill. On the other side of the curve the sound of a locomotive whistle whiffled through the air. As he rounded the curve the locomotive came into sight. Though his motor was wide open, the locomotive was coming on fast. The engineer let out a long warning whistle blast. Bob could see them waving frantically. He knew it was now or never. He pulled the tail down and jerked the craft into the air. He passed over the locomotive within six feet of the top of the locomotive cab. A gust of hot black smoke engulfed him. Through the smoke he looked straight down the throats of the engineer and firemen *[sic]*. Their mouths were so wide open he swore to it that the engineer had tonsils and the fireman did not."

Ed note: The author did not reveal the fate of the hand car.

Membership Information

Individual Members = \$25.00/yr
Each Additional Family Member = \$5.00/yr

- Monthly Meetings (4th Thursday) and Newsletter
- Member Activities, History Pubs and Field Trips
- Display and Restoration Projects

PSRHS, P.O. Box 1776, Colfax, CA 95713
or join/renew online at www.psrhs.org

Reader comments, additional details, etc., are invited on any newsletter items or photos. Please forward comments, suggestions or information for inclusion in future issues of the newsletter to:

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