

Placer-Sierra Railroad Heritage Society



www.psrhs.org

March 2021 Newsletter

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The Colfax caboose recently received some needed repairs courtesy of PSRHS. See the article on page 3. Roger Staab Photo

Scheduled Events & Notices



Mar 25 NO PSRHS Zoom Presentation/Member meeting in March

Apr 22 PSRHS Zoom Presentation, 7PM. *Program: Bill Taylor – The Central Pacific/Southern Pacific and California Agriculture. See page 2*

As we move on from the COVID trials of 2020, we encourage you to renew your membership in PSRHS for 2021 or join PSRHS as a paid member. As conditions permit, we will be hosting monthly presentations on historic or contemporary operations along the Donner Route using Zoom or in-person meetings, offer field trips to regional sites, continue publishing our monthly newsletter articles and historic photos, and expand resources on our web site. More web cams are planned so viewers can track rail operations over the route. Thanks for your past and continued support of PSRHS and regional railroad history.



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MONTHLY MEETING

STEEL AND CREOSOTE

THERE WILL BE NO ZOOM PRESENTATION IN MARCH. We welcome your ideas for program topics that can be presented using Zoom. Contact Chuck Spinks or your newsletter editor if you have a presentation you are willing to make.

**NEXT PSRHS ZOOM PRESENTATION
APRIL 22nd. 7pm.**

Presenter: *Bill Taylor, CSRM Docent and Volunteer*
Topic: *The Central Pacific/Southern Pacific and California Agriculture:*

The railroad was instrumental in developing agriculture in California. The railroad quickly realized that "the future of the railroad was local," and so it began focusing on getting Land Grant holdings into the ownership of small-scale farmers. It then developed major programs to educate farmers in converting low-value cattle and cereal grain land uses to higher-value uses more suited to the climates and soils in California (and, of course, to provide more revenue for the railroad). The Southern Pacific partnered with the University of California and also hired its own scientists for these programs. CP/SP was also the "midwife at the birth of public irrigation" in California, having developed water supplies for both its own and public use.

Details on how to join the presentation will be provided in the April PSRHS newsletter and online at psrhs.org.

February Zoom Program Recap: PSRHS member **Paul Helman** discussed the acquisitions, consolidations, and corporate restructures that built the Southern Pacific Company from the fledgling Central Pacific in 1869 to a mighty railroad company in the early 1900's. Paul's presentation covered the conditions and decisions behind several significant events, along with the principal players who carried them out. Several of those players were descendents of the five major men who built the Central Pacific Railroad.

Thanks Paul for an excellent presentation that helped clarify that time period in local and regional history.

Last month's newsletter featured an article by Art Sommers reflecting on the days his father was a signal maintainer for Southern Pacific, living for part of that time in the old Towle depot. Elford Wall's father was signal maintainer for the adjacent Cisco region. In later years Elford sent Art a couple of articles describing his father's years as an SP signal maintainer and Elford's own experiences on the Feather River route. This month's article by Elford Wall on his father's experiences was provided by Art Sommers. While much of it takes place in other regions of the country, it provides an interesting look into this profession during the mid-1900's.

My dad was a signal maintainer on the S. P. at Coolidge Arizona when I was born in 1928. We lived in a company house. The railroad furnished everything. Coal, water, electricity, kerosene (coal oil) and ice. There was no air conditioning in those days. My dad told me, when it got extremely hot, he would hang burlap over each open window, soak the burlap with water. If there was any breeze, the burlap tended to cool the air. We were extremely lucky that my dad kept on working during the depression. His work week was reduced to four days a week for a while.

One of my earliest recollections was my dad putting his Adams motorcar on the tracks, pushing it to get it started, then running and jumping on it and then disappearing in the distance. The Adams motorcar had a single cylinder, two cycle engine, direct drive that burned a mixture of gas and oil. To regulate the speed, you simply opened the magneto switch to shut off the engine and close it to keep going. The two types of Adams motorcars were the "side load" and the "center load". The side load meant that the engine and where you sat was on one side and the tool tray on the other side. The center load meant that the engine and where you sat was in the middle and a tool tray on both sides.

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Passing Scene – Colfax Caboose Repairs

In February PSRHS members Peter Hills and Jim Wood performed some preventive maintenance on the Colfax Caboose. A leak had developed between the new roofing and the cupola, allowing water to seep down the wall inside the caboose office area. They applied caulking along the cupola and around the stovepipe where it penetrates the roof. On a future date sealant will be applied to a couple of cupola windows and struts will be installed to firmly hold the stovepipe in place. *Roger Staab photo*



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

February Mystery Photo (right): This view of the original Roseville depot is looking north from the Ogden tracks. It appears that ties are about to be or have recently been replaced. The colonnade-style depot was located within the wye where tracks head north toward Oregon. *PSRHS Collection, courtesy of Art Sommers*



March Mystery Photo (left): This should be an easy one. Where was the photo taken and what prominent features are visible? *PSRHS Collection, courtesy of Jim Wood*

Accidents/Other Incidents. *Placer Herald, 15 Oct 1904* – **CONDUCTOR AND BRAKEMAN HURT.** A wreck occurred last Wednesday morning between Clipper Gap and Applegate at about 1 a.m. Part of the second section of west bound freight train No. 219 was derailed, the caboose and several box cars going into the ditch, caused by rails spreading. Conductor Phil Campbell and brakeman Barney Kelly were quite badly hurt but no serious injuries were sustained. Dr. Peers of Colfax attended them. One of the broken cars contained nails and the other matches.

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:

roger.staab@psrhs.org



Steel and Creosote – continued from page 2

In those early years I didn't wear shoes. When the ground was hot, I would carry a board, or a cardboard, or a rag with me. So I would run a few steps, throw what ever I had in my hand on the ground, stand on it for a few moments and let my feet cool and then run a few more steps and do it again. My favorite place to swim was in a shallow irrigation ditch. The best place was where the water pipe emptied into the ditch. The water was about three feet deep there. Coolidge was surrounded with cotton fields. In and around these fields were many, many tents with immigrant families from the mid-west living in them. The depression had caused a lot of them to lose their farms.

After my mother died in 1934, I went to live with an aunt in Oakland and my dad took a small signal gang on the Shasta division. The Shasta Division covered the area between Dunsmuir CA and Crescent Lake OR. I would spend my summers on the gang with my dad. The outfit or gang cars were made up of an 1890's (rail) passenger car, a tool car, a water tank car and a flat car. There was an Adams sideload motorcar assigned to the gang. Two men lived in one end of the passenger car and my dad and I in the other end. Everyone cooked their own meals. Sunday was the only day off so my dad usually took me fishing.

One summer, in the middle thirties, new rail was being layed (*sic*) somewhere in southern Oregon. It was signal gang's job to follow in behind the steel gang and bond up all the new rail. All rail joints had to be bonded with wires to insure that electricity could flow from one rail to the next. Web bonds were used here. I don't know if railhead bonds were invented yet. Web bonds were two galvanized wires that were passed in behind the joint bars and fastened to the web of the rail with channel pins at each end of the joint bar. I would help by taking a bundle of wires and a bag of channel pins and lay two wires and four channel pins by each joint that hadn't been bonded yet.

Another time, the gang had to renew trunking. Trunking is made up of a 4x4 piece of redwood with a groove cut in it. Wires were laid in the groove and capped over with a 1x4 piece of redwood. The trunking was run underground from the signal case or battery box to the track. The trunking was brought up in between the ties so the wires could be bonded to the track. The ends of the trunking were packed with oakum and P&B to seal it off.

I don't know when Nicopress sleeves were invented but in those days to splice wires you had to twist them together. Splicing line wires at the top of a telegraph pole was a pretty tricky operation. You used two clamps with various sizes of grooves. You would clamp on with one tool and hold it in place while with the other clamp you would swing it around and around over the wire until you had a very tight twisted connection. Then you would paint the connection with an acid paste. At the bottom of the pole a solder pot was heated up over a blowtorch to melt the solder. After it was melted the molten solder and a ladle was sent up the pole. The molten solder was poured over the wire connection thus assuring a good permanent electrical connection.

If we were parked at a place where there were other kids, I would spend the day playing with them. If there were no kids around I would go with the gang out to the jobsite and spend the day with the gang. These were really enjoyable summers for me.

In 1939 dad married again and took a maintainers job at Cisco up on the Donner summit. I moved in with them in 1940. That winter the snow was 9 ft deep at Cisco and 12 ft deep up at Norden. We lived in the old depot which was right next to the tracks. In the winter you had to make sure all the storm windows and doors were closed because of the flangers and rotary plows coming by. A flanger is a special car fitted with a snow plow with tiny blades that cleaned out a groove in the flange area. When the flanger train came by at high speed the snow would hit the house with a loud bang.

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Steel and Creosote – continued from page 5

I went to school at Norden which was 12 miles from Cisco. The bus would pick me up at Cisco Grove which was down on old highway 40. Cisco Grove was about $\frac{3}{4}$ mile from Cisco. The road between Cisco and Cisco Grove was not kept open in the winter. So this meant I had to ski down to the highway every morning and ski back up the hill in the evening. Mornings, I would put my skis up behind the stove, heat up the bottom of the skis and then rub paraffin wax on to them. The paraffin lasted just long enough to get to the bus stop. Our school at Norden was on the opposite side of the tracks from the highway. From the bus stop we would walk thru the snow sheds across several tracks and out the other side to the school. The school was a converted bunk house for railroad laborers. I was in the seventh grade then.

At Cisco, my dad got his first Fairmont motorcar. It had a windshield and a top on it. It was painted S.P. orange and had red fly wheels. I thought I was looking at the Cadillac of motorcars.

We moved to Boca, about twenty miles east of Truckee in 1941. On Dec. 7, 1941 my dad and I went by motorcar to Hirschdale to pick up some groceries. When we got back, dad turned on the radio and we hear about Pearl Harbor. He said that he didn't think the war would last long because the Japs didn't have much of an army or navy. He had been in Japan in 1918. It seemed that it wasn't very long until there were guards placed at every bridge and tunnel on the railroad. After the original scare was over, the guards were removed.

In 1942, we moved to Towle, near Baxters, and in 1943 to Colfax. I went to high school in Auburn.

I often wondered why cross ties were placed at 14" centers. When walking along the tracks, you had to take short steps to step on every tie. To step on every other one, the step was too long. Oh, well. EW

