

Placer-Sierra Railroad Heritage Society



www.psrhs.org

January 2022 Newsletter

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See page 3 for a larger view of this snowy image captured by Jana Johnston during our recent December storm.

Scheduled Events & Notices



Jan **NO PSRHS MEETING IN JANUARY, see page 2.**

Feb 22 **PSRHS Monthly Meeting, 7PM – Program TBA**

As we move on from the COVID trials of 2020-21, we encourage you to renew your membership in PSRHS for 2022 or join PSRHS as a paid member. As conditions permit, we will be hosting presentations on historic or contemporary operations along the Donner Route using Zoom and/or in-person meetings, offer field trips to regional sites, publish 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.

Preserving Railroad History on the Donner Pass Route



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NO JANUARY MEETING

Due to new COVID restrictions and lack of a speaker there will be no PSRHS meeting in January. We hope to be back in February with a combined live/Zoom meeting. Peter Diurni would welcome your ideas for future speakers and programs. You can email him at petediurni@hotmail.com

November Meeting Recap: Our November potluck dinner meeting featured good food and conversation with railroad videos playing in the background. Brendan Compton's video of Rotary Plows in action capped off the evening and the attention of attendees. Thanks to all who contributed to an enjoyable evening.

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL TIME

If you have not already done so, it's time to renew your membership in PSRHS. Member dues are our primary source of revenue for PSRHS field trips, restoration projects, purchase of historic photos and publication of our monthly newsletter and other documents covering local railroad history. You can renew by check payable to PSRHS, PO Box 1776, Colfax, CA 95713, or on our secure web site <https://www.psrhs.org/> using pay pal.

Thank you for your support of PSRHS and our mission Preserving Railroad History on the Donner Pass Route.

Note: The following article titled "A Harrowing Experience" appeared in the August 1992 issue of Steam Echoes, the monthly newsletter of Sierra Mountain Railroad Club. Auburn/Roseville-based SMRC held monthly meetings from the 1960's to the 1990's. Ken Yeo was a prominent member. Many of the back issues of Steam Echoes are in the archives of Colfax Area Historical Society. This particular article addresses a subtle but important skill developed by the steam-era railroad engineer through on-the-job experience.

A HARROWING EXPERIENCE

By Jerry Lutz

"In all the years I spent as a railroad locomotive engineer making daily runs up the valley to Dunsmuir or over the mountains to Sparks, I think the biggest challenge facing any engineer, particularly new ones, was steering these giant monsters into the proper stall at the local roundhouse. You had to be very careful that you stopped exactly where the mechanic wanted you to. If you missed by so much as an inch, you would be in for a tongue lashing which invariably concluded with "park that blankety blank thing where I told you to." Now that was easier said than done because once you started up again, the Side Rods would have to make one complete revolution before the engine would come to a stop, that meant about an additional 20 or 30 feet in distance. I remember, boy do I remember, my first attempt to relocate the engine after I had stopped it short of where the mechanics wanted it. I eased the throttle forward ever so slowly, then immediately applied the brakes but nothing happened. Inexperienced as I was, I had forgotten that the locomotive would not stop, brakes or no brakes, until a complete drive shaft cycle had been made. Well, as a result the old roundhouse had a new doorway where none had been before. Yep, I smacked right into the wall and found myself almost out on Church Street. Needless to say, I learned a valuable lesson that day from this harrowing experience and never made that mistake again. I did as all experienced hogheads did and that was to back up an appropriate distance, push the throttle into forward, then immediately turn off the ignition and coast gently into the proper position demanded by the mechanics. Brakes would hopefully be applied before smashing into the roundhouse wall. I know that this may sound easy for non "rails" but believe me it took a lot of experience and timing to calculate exactly where to stop the locomotive. Each time was a new challenge. I'm kind of glad I don't have to do that anymore."





Passing Scene – Snow on the Donner Route, Lots of Snow

This image, courtesy of Jana Johnston Photography, was captured in Colfax, elevation 2421, on December 27, as the Sierra was being hit with a record-breaking snowfall. Roads including I-80 were closed for several days. Likewise the railroad had to remove tons of snow from its tracks to reopen the Donner Route and keep it open.

Crew members on this Flanger set appear to be checking out their equipment as they pause next to the AMTRAK platform in Colfax. In the background at left are downtown businesses and the Colfax Caboose. Judging from this vision of workers and equipment it was a tough day on the mountain but the special snow crews are up to the challenge and do what it takes to keep trains moving after major storms. Scanner traffic mentioned many obstacles including slides, downed trees and accumulating snow at low elevations, making for a busy few days before rail traffic could return to normal operations. Jana's photo captures the enormity of the task of keeping the line open under very adverse conditions.



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>

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From the Archives

November Mystery Photo (right): The September 2021 PSRHS newsletter included a news report on the derailment of SP's streamliner City of San Francisco at Emigrant Gap in December 1964. Eight of 17 cars left the tracks, some tipping over. Except for one apparent heart attack victim, injuries were minor, attributed in part to the train's speed of 30 mph at the time of the derailment. *Colfax Area Historical Society Collection*



January Mystery Photo (left): Where was this photo taken, what year, and why is it in this railroad society newsletter anyway?? *Colfax Historical Society Collection*

Accidents/Other Incidents. *Sacramento Union*, 25 Jan 1912 – **GIRLS WHO PREVENTED TRAIN WRECK HONORED BY RAILROAD COMPANY – Martin Sisters of Alta Rewarded in Personal Letter From Vice-President Calvin** – San Francisco, Jan. 24 – “One hundred dollars each was the reward sent today to 7-year-old Aileen Martin and her 14-year-old sister Alma, both of whom were instrumental in preventing a Southern Pacific passenger train from being wrecked by a broken rail near Alta January 13... Little Aileen, who is the daughter of the section foreman on the Alta branch, was walking along the track when she detected the rail, broken in three places. She knew that a passenger train was soon due and she ran to a telephone booth at the end of the block and called up the agent at Towle telling him to notify the train crew. He told her that the train had gone, and she started down the right of way to signal it. On the way she met her sister and the two children succeeded in having the train stopped.

Membership Information

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

- Monthly Meetings (4th Tuesday) 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 <https://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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