

Placer-Sierra Railroad Heritage Society



<https://www.psrhs.>

September 2022 Newsletter

In this issue:

NO MEETING IN SEPTEMBER. Page 2

Stan Kistler NCNG Photo Collection. Page 2

Future Programs. Page 2

**Interview with a Retired
Freight Railroad Conductor.** Pages. 2, 5 & 6

Passing Scene. Page 3

From the Archives. Page 4



*Interesting UP Freight Movement
Spotted on the Donner Route.
See page 3 for details.
Paul Greenfield Photo*

Scheduled Events & Notices



Sep 27 No PSRHS Meeting in September due to Colfax Railroad Days

Oct 25 PSRHS Monthly Meeting, 7PM – Program TBA

Please consider joining PSRHS or renewing membership for 2022
See the box at the bottom of page 4 for details. Thank you for
supporting our railroad history preservation activities.

Preserving Railroad History on the Donner Pass Route



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NO SEPTEMBER PSRHS MEETING

There will be no PSRHS meeting in September due to Colfax Railroad Days. Monthly meetings will resume October 25.

August Program Recap: Roger Staab discussed 1925's Summit Tunnel #41 and Related Norden Concrete Shed construction, marking completion of double track from Emigrant Gap to Andover. This was the final piece of SP's project to double-track its line from Sacramento to Utah. Photos from a previous Ken Yeo program on construction of the concrete sheds at Norden were augmented with information from a 1926 article from Western Railroad Construction News on Tunnel 41 and Norden construction, along with more recent photos of the Norden area.

STAN KISTLER NCNG COLLECTION

Railroad historian Stan Kistler of Grass Valley recently donated his collection of Nevada County Narrow Gauge (NCNG) Railroad photos to PSRHS. We have in turn made them available for viewing on our web site, www.psrhs.org.

The link to the NCNG RR photos can be found under the Exhibits tab on the home page. From this link a set of thumbnail images can be accessed, along with a list of descriptions for many of the images. **Have a look and enjoy the images compliments of Stan's generosity and PSRHS's commitment** to document and share railroading history and contemporary operations along the Donner Pass Route.

FUTURE PROGRAMS

HELP WANTED!!!! Programs for the October and November meetings have not yet been firmed up. Contact Chuck Spinks, Roger Staab or a board member if you have a topic or know of a presenter for those dates. We can help package your information into a format for presentation.

INTERVIEW WITH A RETIRED FREIGHT RAILROAD CONDUCTOR

In April 2004 PSRHS members Tony Hesch, Brendan Compton and Ron Petersen met with Jack O'Meara at the Colfax Caboose. From 1941 until 1968 Jack worked for Southern Pacific, with much of his time spent on the Roseville to Truckee run as a freight conductor. The purpose of the April meeting was to interview Jack about his experiences on the railroad. What follows are Tony Hesch's notes of the highlights from the conversation.

(Note: Minor editing has been done to enhance readability. Care has been taken to not change the content.)

When asked the primary duties of the conductor he answered switching as the first response followed by monitoring air pressure gauges for the train in the caboose. He described how the hand signals would be used to communicate with the engineer not having any radios or other communication devices. In addition they could use lantern signals for night operations. The conductor in the caboose could also use an emergency brake to stop the train if something developed that they could see from the back of the train.

From the vantage point of the rear of the train they could see the train as it went around corners and they would watch for hot boxes on the wheels or any other sign of problems with the freight cars. They would also have a chair in the rear of the caboose for watching the rear of the train and the track after they passed over it. They would look for signs of burning railroad ties or ties that may have been torn up or damaged from some part of the train that might be dragging along. If they saw anything such as that then they would apply the emergency brakes, stop the train and investigate.

They were equipped with spare parts and it was not uncommon for them to make trackside repairs. They would carry parts like spare knuckles for couplers, and several sets of bearings for the wheels. It was not unusual for them to perform bearing replacements and coupler repairs while on the train.

Continued on Page 5

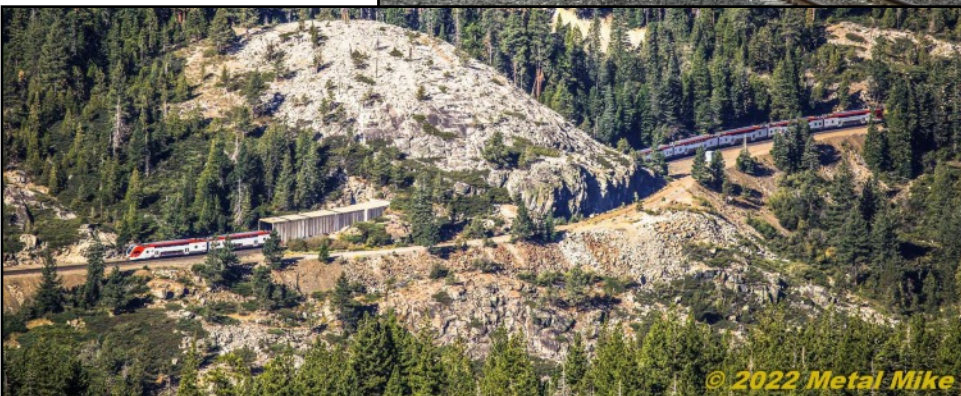




Passing Scene – CALTRAIN Trainsets on the Donner Route

PSRHS member Paul Greenfield recently captured an unusual UP freight movement on the Donner Route. He took the first two images below in August. Paul adds that UP 6762 leads two new Caltrain trainsets westbound at Rocklin, CA. These seven-car electric trainsets were built at Stadler Company in Salt Lake City. They utilize pantographs for the overhead catenary which is being installed between San Francisco and San Jose. Stadler is under contract to deliver 16 trainsets with an option for another 96 cars.

In the third image, member Mike Haire captured a rear-end view of the “freight” movement at Tunnel 37.



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

August Mystery Photo (right): Pictured is a portion of the old Nevada County Narrow Gauge (NCNG) right-of-way as it dropped down to cross the Bear River after passing under Southern Pacific's Long Ravine Bridges. This location can be accessed from Norton Grade Road east of Colfax. *Roger Staab photo.*



September Mystery Photo (left): Where was this photo taken and what features can be seen that link to local railroad (and non-railroad) history? *Roger Staab photo.*

Accidents/Other Incidents. *Sacramento Union, 2 July 1916.* **Train Explosion was Timed to Wreck the Oakland Mole.** Oakland (Cal.), July 1 – “The explosion which occurred last night in the smoking car of a Southern Pacific train at the Sixteenth street station and which injured 13 persons, was accomplished by a black powder bomb, probably with the intention of so timing the fuse that the bomb would explode in the Oakland mole and cripple the Southern Pacific’s western terminal, according to the findings late today of the official board of inquiry, which conducted the investigation. ... The failure of the supposed bomb to explode on the mole was ascribed by witnesses to the fact that the train was ahead of schedule from Ogden and waited at Sixteenth street three minutes later than usually.”

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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September 2022 Newsletter

Railroad Conductor – Continued from Page 2

(Jack) showed us what the numbers on the side of the caboose were. One was the weight of the caboose. Over each wheel and on the side of the caboose were dates that showed when the wheel bearings were last repacked and where. In our case it was at the NWP (*Northwestern Pacific*) yard and it was in 1967 and 1969 shortly before coming to Colfax. The term rubber coupling is on the side and he said that would denote that some part of the coupler or support for the coupler was made of rubber.

He pointed out the amount of slack in each coupler can be a foot or more and upon inspection of the caboose it was in fact about one foot on each end. He noted that when you think about it each car on any train starts one at a time and they never all start at the same time. Also this is called slack so at the end of a train of 40 or fifty cars the last car is like being on the end of a whip and the ride is a tough one. It was second nature for him to hold on to all the safety handles even though the caboose was not in motion. You could hear the noise from each car picking up the slack and you would know it was coming toward the caboose.

He related that the hit you get in the caboose can be hard enough to knock the doors off hinges and often did.

Journal is the term he used for the bearing box and it is located right above the wheel. It can be lifted and the bearings inspected, cleaned and replaced.

(Jack) referred to the Colfax caboose as a double seated caboose and it was nice because it had windshields. The pressure gauge on the Colfax caboose is in place and he referred to it during his conversation. The red handle next to the gauge was how they would stop the train or the emergency brake handle. They would keep their eyes on the pressure and would expect to be in the 90 lb. range. If it got down below 60 lbs they would get concerned and if it reached 50 it was time to take action.

The conductor was in charge of the train – the person responsible for the record keeping, safety, schedule and

the person who had to answer if anything went wrong. Jack said the conductor was also called the “SKIPPER”. In listening to Jack you could tell he was proud of being the skipper and of the job he had done. He described how the conductor would be responsible for throwing the switches and then returning them to their original position and now it is all done by electronics from Omaha Nebraska. He understood and repeated how the railroads needed to reduce the manpower on the trains and how the modern improvements resulted in more revenue for the railroads but it none the less diminished his love for his job.

The caboose was also the office for record keeping and a conductor could be expected to perform at least a couple of hours of paperwork a day in handling the manifests and train orders.

The term Plugging the train is what they called it when they stopped the train from the caboose. He said they would plug the train and then hold on for dear life and hope it all stayed on the tracks.

He showed us the use of the hand rails on the side of the caboose and how they were mandatory in order for the conductor to board and de-train a moving caboose. Often the cabooses would be moving 10 to 12 mph when they would board them and there are stories of guys getting off cabooses moving as fast as 20 mph. He demonstrated the footwork necessary to both board and get off a moving caboose. He used the term Catch the Caboose for the process of boarding a moving train. He shared how it was everyone’s job to keep an eye on the trains and their cars and how train station operators would come out of the station and watch each train as it went by looking for trouble and reporting it if they saw anything.

He then showed us where on the caboose the fusees were kept and showed us a fusee that he had brought along that he kept in his rear pants pocket. The one he had was a ten minute fusee or flare and he showed us how he used it and told us why it was set for ten minutes.

Continued on Page 6





Railroad Conductor – Continued from Page 5

He said all of the SP fusees were red and that he had heard that some other railroads had used some other colored fusees but he hadn't seen them on the SP.

He showed us where the fusee box would always be located and told us that a red flag was always stowed above or next to the doors. The torpedoes were also stored in the fusee boxes and he told us (*how*) they used the torpedoes. 2 meant slow down one meant to stop.

Another use of the fusees while not authorized would often be to start the coal fire in the coal stove.

He also said that under the fusee storage box would be the water barrels, one for maintenance use and the other for drinking. He also told of how one of the union benefits was the ice box and having ice available for the conductor.

We then went to the platform of the caboose where he showed us the whistle used for alerting persons to a moving train usually in and around industrial areas or where they were moving trains in a congested area.

(*The whistle was*) Most useful when backing up a train much as a back up alarm would be used today.

He commented and explained how a FRED (*Flashing Rear End Device*) works to replace a caboose and the conductor.

Another job of the conductor would be to flag auto traffic at a non controlled crossing or in congested areas.

Coal was the primary source for the stoves in the caboose.

Chains and pry bars were also carried on the caboose. Pry bars for track adjustments and repairs and for moving the cars by hand when necessary.

He talked about how the SP provided Chinese cooks along the Roseville and Truckee Routes. They were most often found at water stations and the train crew would have to pay for the food but it was hot and good.

Tony Hesch
Placer Sierra Railroad Heritage Society

