

Placer-Sierra Railroad Heritage Society



<https://www.psrhs.org>

March 2023 Newsletter

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NCNG #5 at hillside cut behind Colfax Passenger Depot, 1932. See article on page 2 about our March program and photos on page 4. D.L. Joslyn photo from Best, Nevada County Narrow Gauge

Scheduled Events & Notices



Mar 28 PSRHS Monthly Meeting, 7PM – Program - Tim O'Brien
- History of NCNG #5 and NCNG RR Museum's Expansive Progress Over the Years

Apr 25 PSRHS Monthly Meeting, 7PM – Program TBA

**May 16-21, 2023 Joint Meeting of Southern Pacific Railroad History Center,
Pacific Coast Chapter R&LHS, and the National Railway Historical Society**
– Nugget Casino Resort in Sparks, Nevada. See their web site for details
<https://www.splives.org/sprhc-rlhs-nrhs-joint-meet-may-2023>

A reminder to renew your membership for 2023 or join PSRHS if you are not already a member. See the box at the bottom of page 3 for details. Thank you for helping support our local railroad history activities.

Preserving Railroad History on the Donner Pass Route



Placer-Sierra Railroad Heritage Society

March 2023 Newsletter

PSRHS MONTHLY MEETING

TUESDAY, MAR. 28, 7PM

Auburn Veterans Memorial Hall

March Program: Tim O'Brien will discuss **The history of Nevada County Narrow Gauge Engine #5 culminating in its miraculous restoration and steam-up in Carson City.** In addition, as founding member of the Transportation Museum Division of the Nevada County Historical Society in 1983, Tim will showcase the Nevada County Narrow Gauge Railroad Museum's expansive progress over the years to include their latest restorations and coming events.

Related photos can be found on page 4. See our web site for directions to the meeting location.

February Program Recap: Clark Colahan, historian, author, and Professor of Literature at Whitman College in Walla Walla Washington provided a look inside the history of the Blue Mountain Railroad in southeastern Washington. The line was originally the Walla Walla and Columbia River Railroad, organized in 1869 to carry wheat and passengers from Walla Walla to the Columbia River steamboats. It was constructed as a low-budget 36" gauge railroad using iron strap rail nailed to wood stringers. A portion of the old railroad was purchased by the Union Pacific railroad and still exists as the short line Blue Mountain Railroad.

Our thanks to those who braved the winter weather to attend Professor Colahan's program.

WEATHER WOES FOR AMTRAK

Those of us who live in the Sierra foothills weren't surprised to learn that late February and early March were and are still challenging times for Amtrak. Low snow in late February shut down Amtrak service over Donner Pass for several days. Westbound trains were turned around at Salt Lake City and service to Colfax, Truckee and Reno was canceled.

Then the atmospheric rivers hit California dumping heavy rain at lower elevations while snow continued to pile up in the Sierra. Railroad snow-fighting efforts

continued over Donner Summit (see the photos on page 3 of snow equipment getting maintenance in Colfax before returning to do battle with Mother Nature). Amtrak tried to resume service over Donner but trains were delayed significantly on some days due to UP freight congestion. Trains.com reported on March 13 that problems were encountered near Glenwood Canyon on March 11 when a track outage delayed the westbound California Zephyr 9 hours. The eastbound Zephyr that departed Emeryville March 9 was 17 hours late into Glenwood Springs due to delays across Nevada and Utah. It finally arrived in Chicago 1 day, 5 hours, 58 minutes late. Trains.com noted the Zephyr that departed Emeryville March 10 arrived in Chicago 9 hours late but only 3 hours behind the earlier train.

To add to Amtrak's woes, a rotary plow derailed on March 12 (Sunday) near Troy, halting the eastbound Zephyr at Emigrant Gap for several hours. Amtrak Alerts stated that due to disabled snow removal equipment, the train was terminated east of Colfax, and a makeup train would operate east from SLC. Customers traveling between Colfax and SLC were to call Amtrak.

The north/south Coast Starlight has not fared much better. On March 14 UP issued an embargo order and closure notification for its line between Watsonville and San Luis Obispo due to several washouts, with no estimated time for reopening service until assessments of the line's condition are completed. This route is used by Amtrak's Coast Starlight from LA to the Bay Area. Those trains were canceled through March 17.

WEB SITE ENHANCEMENTS

Several PSRHS monthly newsletter issues feature an expanded article about a topic of interest on historic or contemporary railroad operations. A new web page has been added to our web site to provide improved visibility and access to these articles. The new web page is titled "Notes on RR History and Contemporary Ops – Appearing in PSRHS Newsletter Issues," and is located under the Local RR History tab. Scan the list of articles and if one is of particular interest, click on the date for that newsletter issue to read the article.



Passing Scene – Snow Equipment in Colfax

Receiving a call on March 10 that sections of the Colfax Amtrak platform had been removed was a tip-off that the rotary plows were in the Colfax yard or soon to be passing through. Further investigation of the yard area revealed a partial rotary set (one rotary, two locomotives) along with a complete spreader set of two spreaders and two locomotives. They appeared to be receiving minor maintenance and crew change before returning to do battle on the hill. The photos below show both sets of snow equipment on the Colfax yard track west of the depot and fruit sheds. *Photos by Roger Staab*



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/>

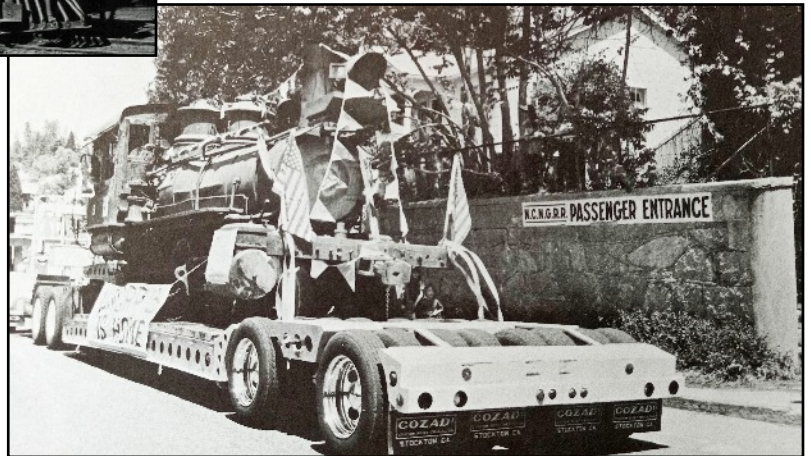
Reader comments, additional details, etc., are invited on any newsletter items or photos. Please forward comments, suggestions or information for inclusion in future issues of the newsletter to:

roger.staab@psrhs.org



From the Archives - NCNG #5 Returns To Nevada County

Our March meeting presentation by Tim O'Brien will touch on the history of NCNG #5, its workhorse years with the narrow gauge railroad between Grass Valley/Nevada City and Colfax, subsequent movie career at Universal Studios, its return to Nevada County to be restored and displayed at the NCNG RR Museum in Nevada City, and more recently its return to operational condition. The photos below show it posing near the Grass Valley Depot before it was sold to Universal Studios in Los Angeles, and its triumphant return to the Grass Valley Depot site in 1985, transported from Los Angeles on a Robinson Enterprises truck and lowboy trailer. *Upper photo by Al Phelps from the Stan Kistler/PSRHS Collection. Lower photo by Tim O'Brien.*



Accidents/Other Incidents. *Colfax Record, Jan. 21, 1921* – **“ENGINE LEAVES RAILS NEAR DUTCH FLAT – Rolls Twenty Feet – Engineer and Fireman Unhurt.** Engine No. 2301 attached to a snow flanger left the rails and rolled 20 feet down an embankment one half mile east of Dutch Flat Wednesday. Both the engineer and fireman miraculously escaped injury. They went over with the engine, but suffered no harm. The engine was running between Blue Canyon and Dutch Flat. No cause was given for the accident. The wrecker from Colfax was called to the scene. The westbound track was blocked for about 12 hours.

An extra fast freight engine which left Summit at 12:30 Wednesday afternoon also met with an accident due to a broken wheel and tore down 150 feet of snow sheds on top of which was more than 8 feet of snow.”