

Placer-Sierra Railroad Heritage Society



<https://www.psrhs.org>

June 2023 Newsletter

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*This view of the Newcastle fruit sheds will be featured along with facilities in other towns along the Donner route in our June program on the region's fruit industry and its ties to the railroad.
Photo provided by Marilyn Sommerdorf*

Scheduled Events & Notices



- Jun 27** PSRHS Monthly Meeting, 7PM – Program – Marilyn Sommerdorf – Perishable – The Story of Placer County Fruit Growing and the SP Company
- Jul 3** Celebration in Downtown Colfax with Fireworks. Caboose Open 12-7.
- Jul 15** Colfax Caboose & Museum Open 10-4 for Heritage Trail Museums Tour
- Jul 25** PSRHS Monthly Meeting, 7PM – Program – Jim Wood
– Recap of Past Field Trip to Clipper Gap
- Aug 22** PSRHS Monthly Meeting, 7PM – Program TBA
- Sept 16-17** Colfax Railroad Days

Your annual PSRHS membership helps fund purchase of historic photos, publication of railroad history documents, field trips, and other historic preservation activities.

Preserving Railroad History on the Donner Pass Route



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PSRHS MONTHLY MEETING

TUESDAY, JUNE 27, 7PM

Auburn Veterans Memorial Hall

June Program: Marilyn Sommerdorf will present **Perishable – The Story of Placer County Fruit Growing and the Southern Pacific Company.**

Agriculture, the second California gold rush, was precipitated by the railroad; however its foundations in Placer county were laid before the railroad arrived. The combination of climate, soils, available water and the care of pioneer farmers, created the beginnings of local fruit growing in the mid-1800's. Marilyn's program will focus on the fruit industry along the Transcontinental Railroad, and the role played in this story by the communities of Roseville, Rocklin, Loomis, Newcastle, Auburn and Colfax.

Prior to her retirement Marilyn Sommerdorf was a researcher and photographer at the California State Railroad Museum, working in collections, guiding, and exhibits. She combined her study of history with a keen interest in railroads, including teaching railroad history at Sacramento City College.

Our meetings are open to all who are interested. See our web site for directions to the meeting location.

May Program Recap: Roger Staab discussed the history and rehabilitation of the **Chambers Covered Railroad Bridge located in Cottage Grove Oregon.** The Howe truss covered bridge was built in 1925 to serve a logging railroad. It was recently refurbished by the City of Cottage Grove and became the centerpiece of an attractive park. Roger's program provided a look at the steps taken to rehabilitate this historic structure.

COLFAX DOWNTOWN MASTER PLAN

The City of Colfax is currently reviewing its downtown layout in hopes of improving foot and bicycle access to better connect portions of the town. A grant is paying for a consultant to gather public input and propose crosswalks, signage, etc. that will enhance the downtown area and surrounding features.

PSRHS has been participating in planning meetings and has proposed the placing of historic searchlight and semaphore signals near the passenger depot that will help attract visitors to the depot museum and the adjacent downtown area and its rich railroad history.

One major downtown change being considered is the possible relocation of the Colfax Caboose from the corner of Grass Valley and Main Streets, opening up that corner of downtown. PSRHS is supporting that move IF the caboose is placed in a prominent location in the park-like area near the passenger depot where it is visible from Grass Valley Street and downtown, thus attracting visitors to the depot area and railroad history exhibits. Such a move would also support relocating other historic rail equipment displays such as the SP motor car, wig-wag signal and telephone booth to the depot area.

There will be a booth at the **Colfax July 3 event** where you can view proposed changes and add your comments. Or visit www.mainstreetcolfax.com and leave your comments on an interactive map.

COLFAX CABOOSE OPEN JULY 3 AND HERITAGE TRAIL MUSEUMS TOUR JUL. 15

The Colfax Caboose will be open to the public July 3 from noon until 7pm during the town's independence day event. The Caboose will also be open on July 15 from 10-4 as part of Placer Heritage Trail Museums Tour. Please let your editor know if you can help staff the caboose during either or both of those events.

DONNER CROSSINGS ISSUE COMING

The Accidents/Other Incidents item on page 4 of this issue refers to a deliberate derailment and attempted robbery of a Central Pacific train near Cape Horn in 1881. Further details on that incident will be outlined in a Donner Crossings issue being prepared soon for distribution to paid PSRHS members. Watch for it.

Auburn's Street Railways feature starts on page 5.





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Outside temperatures are heating up as our region transitions from spring to summer. It's easy to forget that only a few short months ago we were experiencing unusually low snow levels. This image was captured on our Applegate webcam in late March, a reminder of how quickly weather can change in the Sierra Nevada region.



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





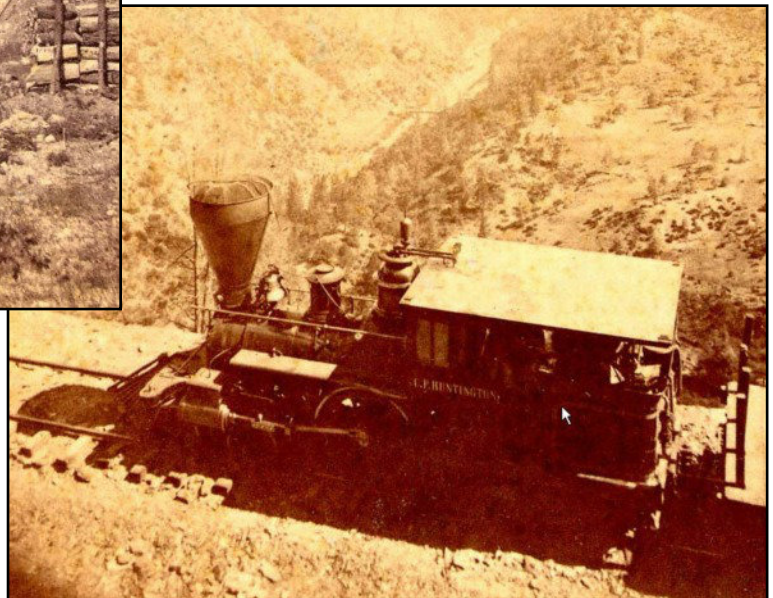
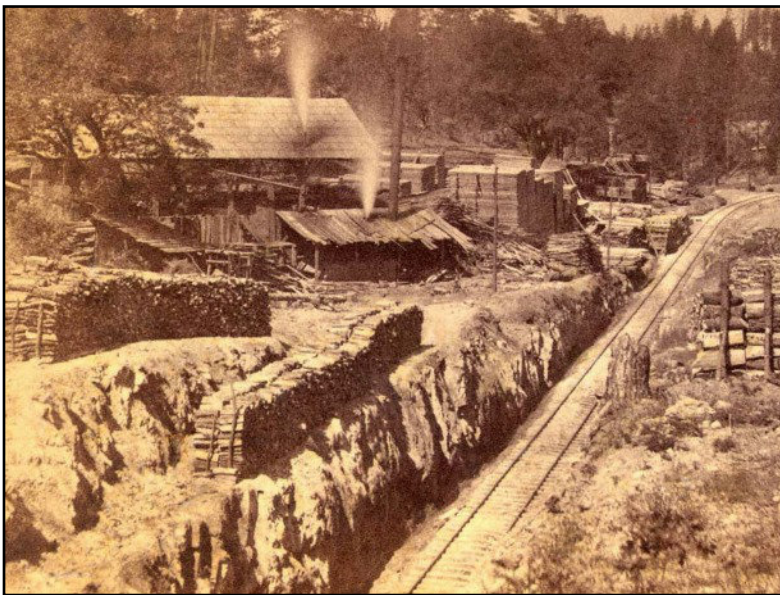
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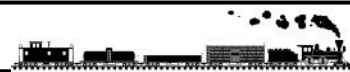
From the Archives - Cape Horn Mills & Cape Horn

The news article at the bottom of this page identifies a forced derailment and attempted robbery of a Central Pacific passenger train at Cape Horn Station (Cape Horn Mills) in August 1881. The train was derailed but the robbery was foiled. The first Alfred Hart photo below shows the relatively flat terrain at Cape Horn Mills near where the derailment took place. If the location had been a few hundred yards further west on Cape Horn proper, the steep drop-off seen in the second image would have led to greater damage and probable loss of life.

This was not the first train robbery on the Central Pacific – an earlier robbery took place in 1870 near Verdi, Nevada. However, the Cape Horn incident was the first such attack on Central Pacific trains in California. The story of the robbery attempt, the search for the robbers, and subsequent trial testimony will be detailed in a future Donner Crossings issue to be published soon. *Alfred Hart images, PSRHS collection.*



Accidents/Other Incidents. *Stockton Evening Herald* – Sept. 1, 1881. “**Attempted Train Wrecking.** Last night about a quarter to twelve o’clock some highwaymen removed a rail from the main track of the Central Pacific Railroad at Cape Horn (*Station - ed*), just above Colfax, with the purpose of wrecking the train and robbing it. The engine and several cars left the track, but it does not appear that anybody was hurt, or robbed. The railroad authorities today notified the officers throughout the State that \$1,000 reward would be paid for the arrest and conviction of each of the men implicated in the dastardly attempt. The track runs close around a cliff several hundred feet in height at Cape Horn, and a train wrecked at that point, would bring certain death to all who went over the bank.”





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AUBURN'S STREET RAILWAYS

Editors note: The January 2022 PSRHS newsletter contained an article found in Sierra Mountain Railroad Club's newsletter Steam Echoes. SMRC was a Placer County group that preceded PSRHS in covering local railroad history. Ken Yeo was a member.

The Colfax Area Historical Society archives has a collection of many issues of Steam Echoes. This month's newsletter features another article from Steam Echoes titled Auburn's Street Railways. Watch for more Steam Echoes topics in future PSRHS newsletters.

Further Note: The dates in this story likely refer to newspaper issues. I did not attempt to check the article for accuracy – rather the report is as written in Steam Echoes by May Perry with explanatory notes added by me where appropriate. rs

Auburn's Street Railways

by May W. Perry
Steam Echoes, August 1992

As early as 1874 some of the citizens were trying to have a street railway built in Auburn. **Sept. 14, 1874** a meeting was held in the Music Hall to procure estimates of cost and to make arrangements for an immediate organization.

Some of the estimates offered were letters from the Pacific Rolling Mills in San Francisco and Huntington Hopkins & Co. of Sacramento offering to supply 16 pound T rails at \$9.00 per ton.

Estimates for one mile of track were:

28 ½ tons of rail	\$2,544.50
Fish plate, Bolts and spikes	400.00
2,600 ties @ .20	520.00
Freight on Material	150.00
Grading and track laying	1,000.00
One Passenger Car	800.00
One Freight Car	200.00
Two Horses	400.00
Total	\$6,014.50

The distance from the American House to the RR Depot was only 7/8 of a mile, so the estimate for a mile of track would be ample for the necessary cost of

siding, turntable, etc. They assumed it would not cost over \$6,000. A committee was appointed to canvas the town for subscriptions.

September 26, 1874, the Committee reported that they had not had time to canvas the whole town but had \$2,400 pledged and hoped to get the full amount.

October 29, 1887 – There are rumors in the air of a proposed streetcar line between the town and the RR station. This is business and it would be money in the pockets of the hotel men if the RR was started as the expenditure of time and money in running the busses (*sic*) is considerable. The street railway is needed and would be a paying investment to its projectors.

November 5, 1887 – The Auburn Street Railway is a certainty as W.R. Arthur has applied to the Board of Supervisors for a Right of Way. The line will begin at the Post Office running thence along Main Street, thence up Commercial Street to Broad Street, thence along Broad Street to Railroad Street and thence along to a point opposite the Freeman's Hotel.

January 2, 1889 – For a year or so the Auburn people have been hoping to have a street railway. About a year ago W.R. Arthur was granted a franchise and has done his best but not much more than half the amount needed has been subscribed and no effort to get capital outside has been done. Those who are interested are determined that the road shall be built in 1889. If others do not Mr. Arthur will probably go ahead and build a road for cars to be drawn by horses.

(Editor's note: During this same time period means of producing electricity were being developed in the Auburn area that promised a new way of propelling railcars and lighting the car interior and stations along the line.)

In 1886 George Hill and Frank Bell started to put in an electric lighting system in Auburn. It was called the Bell Electric Company and some time later it became the PG&E Company.

In 1891 – A new plan for an Electric Street Railway was proposed. It was to be a sort of belt RR and started at the station, traversed, Railroad, Broad, East, Commercial and Court streets to Plaza and out Sacramento Street to High Street, then return to the station.

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Auburn's Street Railways (continued from page 5)

June 1895 – Hartley and Reynolds had a franchise to build an electric RR that called for the road to be built within one year and to be built on Main Thoroughfare from Station to Lower Auburn and to obtain electricity from Bell Electric Company. W.E. Striplin ran a bus from upper Auburn to lower Auburn. Round trip was made every 40 minutes at 10 cents per trip or 15 trips for \$1. It started at 7 AM and the last trip was at 7:50 PM. The Omnibus was a long bodied, four wheeled Public Vehicle with seats inside and sometimes on the roof. Originally the seats extended lengthwise along the sides and the entrance was at the rear.

January 1900 – More plans for the Electric Railway. On January 27th the first carload of rails for the Auburn Street Railway arrived at the Depot. They were standard gauge. It looks like business and Messrs. Wills and Bernard et al should have the good will of every resident in the community. They have paid all expenses in securing the franchise.

December 29, 1900 – Articles of Incorporation have been filed by the Auburn Electric RR Co. with a Capital stock of \$50,000 or 500 shares at a par value of \$10 each. *(the numbers here don't look right-ed)*. A.S. Moore took 100 shares, B.F. Hartley took 40 shares, J.H. Wills took 10, F.G. Flanagan took 10 and Pierre C. Moore took 40. These gentlemen formed the Board of Directors with J.H. Wills as Treasurer. Mr. Moore, the promoter says that the company is in earnest and will commence operations soon.

May 4, 1901 – There seems no doubt about the success of the Auburn Street Railway. President Moore has just purchased 35 acres on the Honn Homestead at Clipper Gap where there is a 250 foot drop and where the power house will be located. Besides power for moving the car line, the company expects to sell to outside parties desiring power. An order for ties has been placed with Towle Brothers.

From the franchise asked for, it would seem the company intends to run into the Bowman district and possibly in the direction of Lincoln and Newcastle. Electric street car lines are popular everywhere. There is a line being constructed between Grass Valley and Nevada City.

June 6, 1901 – Ground was broken and they started laying ties for the electric railway.

August 10, 1901 – The Electric Railway Co. paid the men off in full, Saturday night. Everything is running along smoothly and the track is now laid below the Court House. The line will run down Commercial Street, up Washington and if right of way can be gotten it will run up Brewery Lane to the Racetrack. Their application to extend the line thru Bowman to the Nevada County line and from the City limits of Newcastle has been granted by the Board of Supervisors.

August 24, 1901 – The Auburn Electric Co's roadbed has progressed as far as the American Hotel. They now plan to run up Chinatown Hill on Sacramento Street. The estimated cost of the total equipment for that amount of line, including power, cars, dynamos etc. is \$40,000. Yesterday they moved the tools and blacksmith shop to Bowman and will commence work on that end next Monday. Plows and scrapers will be used and work will progress rapidly. Water will be taken out near the Powder Works and the power house will be located on the Ragsdale property.

The Grass Valley and Nevada City Railway expects to be in operation by September 9, 1901.

September 18, 1901 – They plan to hold a Barbecue and big Celebration on October 5th to celebrate the completion of the laying of the tracks. Superintendent A.S. Moore states that the Railway will pay the expense of the Hall, musicians, etc. and the Barbecue will be free to all. There will be beautiful Colonial Dames to dance. In the afternoon and evening there will be dancing on the Plaza platform. (At that time they had a dance platform in sections that they kept under the Post Office when not in use. For special occasions it was taken out and put together for dancing.)

In the morning of the celebration there was much speechmaking. Postmaster H.H. Richmond called the meeting to order at the Opera House, Central Square and remarked that the two ends of town, though sometime quite unruly, were now bound together with bands of iron. He predicted the extension of the line to Grass Valley, Sacramento and Marysville.

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Auburn's Street Railways (continued from page 6)

Rev. J.P. Macaulay spoke for the Auburn clergy that he believed in the street railway and public improvement and also that he saw no reason why the population of Auburn should not double.

R.F. Burns also made a spirited address and urged the Auburnites to wake up and progress. Senator W.B. Lardner also urged them to progress, stating that not too long ago it was just a cow pasture where now they had an Opera House.

Mrs. C.H. Walsh sang a beautiful song "Town of Dundee."

Anderson Brothers made two GOLD SPIKES and Agnes Walsh and Agnes Snowden or maybe it was Frances Snowden with Cora Connors and Irene Brye assisting, drove them in front of the American Hotel.

At noon the barbecue was served around the Plaza.

With much urging Mr. A.S. Moore, the President of the railway was made to get on the platform and make his bow.

Some young people in Colonial Costumes danced a beautiful Minuet on the platform. The festivities closed with a dance at Kenison's Hall. Music was furnished by the Loomis Band.

January 18, 1902 – Still no electric cars on the tracks. They had done considerable damage to the streets as they did their track laying without any City supervision. Street Supt. Waldo had a gang of men repair the damage at the expense of the City. The City was the loser.

(The City streets were finally paved in 1924).

March 1902 – H.T. Power of the Hidden Treasure Mine, Sunny South, offered to pay the liens and buy them and the judgement against the Railway which were about \$2,500, and to remove the rails to use in his mine and leave the streets in good condition.

But the ties and rails were sold under judgment to the Judson Mfg. Co. of San Francisco.

July 12, 1902 – There was still lots of talk about Electric Railways. Israel Meyer, a promoter, from Lincoln applied for a franchise – it was a big scheme – they proposed to have or to include Butte County, through Nevada County, Yuba, Placer and Sacramento also. This proved to be just talk. No Railway.

August 13, 1904 – Mrs. Virginia J. Bell purchased the road-bed and rails of the Auburn Electric Railway with the intention of putting the line into operation as soon as she could get a franchise and install rolling stock. It is stated that the enterprise has substantial backing and the line will be continued on to Newcastle. We hope that this is so as we believe that in time it will pay.

Again, **in 1905**, there was much more talk and it was said that Mr. Gould and the Western Pacific Railroad were backing the deal. It did not develop either.

April 13, 1912 – George B. Herrington was canvassing Auburn to get the people to subscribe capital to build a street railway. Said he needed about \$30,000 for construction and equipment. He intended to run the line from above the Depot on down to Central Square along Broad Street – to Court House and on down to Plaza along Main St. or Washington St. to Nevada St., thence out to the new Depot on Nevada St and to the Odd Fellows Cemetery. He said that he could build it and have it in operation in three months.

The Nevada Street Depot was finished in April 1912 and Mr. Freeman was then running his Hotel bus to it.

In September of 1951 – (note this date) a part of an old railway tie was dug up in Central Sq. by the P.G. & E. Co.

There is a section of this railway track in the Placer County Museum in Auburn.

