

Placer-Sierra Railroad Heritage Society



<https://www.psrhs.org>

February 2024 Newsletter

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See page 4 for location and information about this photo, and page 2 for related details about our February program. Herman Darr Collection

Scheduled Events & Notices



Feb 27 PSRHS Monthly Meeting and Program, 7PM - Program – Roger Staab - How Southern Pacific and Lake Tahoe Railway Saved Lake Tahoe

Mar 26 PSRHS Monthly Meeting and Program, 7PM - Program – Peter Hills – PTC for Steam Engine Operations

Apr 23 PSRHS Monthly Meeting and Program, 7PM

Reminder: Time to renew your PSRHS membership if you have not already done so. Renew by mail or on our web site using PayPal

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



Placer-Sierra Railroad Heritage Society

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PSRHS MONTHLY MEETING FEBRUARY 27, 7PM

February Program: PSRHS historian **Roger Staab** will address **How Southern Pacific and Lake Tahoe Railway Saved Lake Tahoe**. The program, with a major research assist by **Chuck Spinks**, looks at the objectives and operation of the Bliss family's Lake Tahoe Railway, how the Tahoe Water Wars threatened to impose major impacts on Lake Tahoe and the railroad, the background role SP played in addition to broad-gauging the line, and the overall significance to Lake Tahoe tourism.

Our meetings are open to all who are interested. See our web site for updates on future meeting topics and directions to the meeting location.

January Program Recap: **Mike Lynch**, historian and former Park Superintendent for Auburn State Recreation Area, gave an interesting presentation on the history of Bowman, just east of Auburn and mostly gone now due to I-80 construction. Mike shared photos and anecdotes about the fruit orchards, businesses, homes and personalities that once defined Bowman.

JANUARY PSRHS BOARD MEETING

The PSRHS board met prior to the January 23 meeting.

Vacant Board Positions: Regarding the three expiring PSRHS board positions that were outlined in the January newsletter, Chuck Spinks has agreed to extend for another three years. Roger Staab was asked to fill one of the vacant positions. **That still leaves one board position vacant for 2024-2027.** Chuck will continue as president for 2024 and Paul Greenfield has agreed to be Secretary. If Chuck needs to be absent for future meetings Roger will fill in for him as Vice President. Malcolm Frost has agreed to assume Treasurer duties from Peter Hills before Peter moves later this year.

If you are willing to serve your club by filling the vacant board position please contact any board member.

Colfax WebCam: PSRHS is exploring the possibility of working with Southwest RailCams to install a web cam in Colfax. Board Member Paul Greenfield will lead the effort to identify a potential location with high speed internet available to support live streaming.

Colfax Caboose Historical Items: Jim Wood and Roger Staab will review items that are in the caboose and decide on which to retain for PSRHS. High value pilferable items will be moved to secure storage.

Sierra Nevada Geotourism Website: The board will look for ways to replace incorrect information about Cape Horn with PSRHS listed as contact on this website.

REGIONAL RAILCAMS

The **Roseville** railcam is now live, brought to you by Southwest RailCams. Here is the link:

<http://rsv.southwestrailcams.com/>

Southwest RailCam's main web site

<https://southwestrailcams.com/>

has links to their other regional railcams, along with links for you to donate to help defray the expenses of their railcams if you like what you see.

IN MEMORIAM: DAVE BALLENGER

We are saddened to learn of the recent passing of Dave Ballenger. Dave and Margie were active members of PSRHS for several years. Dave was also a regular volunteer at the Nevada County Narrow Gauge Railroad museum. Our sympathy to Margie and extended family for the loss of a true friend to local RR history.

A SIGNALMAN'S STORY

Ed. Note: In my other "job" helping catalog all the documents and artifacts in the Colfax Area Historical Society (CAHS) archives, I sometimes find interesting railroad-related "gems". A recent example is a letter written by Bill Fisher, a retired railroad signalman, author and Colfax resident.

See the story on page 5



Passing Scene - AMTRAK Gets an Assist from UP

If you are an AMTRAK fan, this is a scene you don't like to see. AMTRAK #6 is captured in this image departing Colfax eastbound on January 21 at 3:36pm, about 3 hours late. A UP locomotive leading a scheduled passenger train usually means AMTRAK experienced some sort of equipment problem. Fortunately the passengers should still get to see most of the scenic trip over Donner in daylight.

Photo 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 - Lake Tahoe Narrow Gauge in Truckee

Lake Tahoe Railway and Transportation #1 is waiting for Lake Tahoe-bound passengers across the SP tracks from the Truckee depot in 1914. The narrow-gauge locomotive, formerly the Glenbrook, is pulling a combination coach/baggage car and a coach car. Passengers will be taken to Tahoe Tavern on the shore of Lake Tahoe near Tahoe City or onto the adjacent pier to board steamboats bound for other ports on the lake. The rail line opened for business in 1900, was converted to standard gauge in 1926 and operated until 1943. Our February program features this railroad, its conversion to standard gauge, and outside forces that threatened to shut it down. For further history on this locomotive, see [Donner Crossings Issue #12](#), A Tale of Two Locomotives, available on our website psrhs.org.

Photo from Herman Darr collection



Accidents/Other Incidents. *Placer Herald, June 20, 1925.* "While at the (Tahoe) Tavern we learned that the deal had been consummated whereby the Southern Pacific takes over the Truckee-Tahoe narrow gauge railroad and the Linnard people the Tavern. The deal will be completed just as soon as the transfer is approved by the Interstate Commerce Commission. The railroad, a distance of fifteen miles will be broad gauged, and the railroad officials say this can be done in 40 days. The Linnard people will operate the Tavern both as a summer and winter resort.

The Bliss people are selling for the reason that it has come to a time where a large investment of new capital is necessary in order to make the railroad and the hotel pay. The Bliss interests have pioneered the way, and others around the lake are reaping the benefits of their industry, their foresight, and their public spiritedness. Lake Tahoe is destined to be one of the finest scenic mountain water resorts in the world."





A Signalman's Story - Contined from Page 2

In his 1980 letter, Bill describes an incident where security was tight for a special train movement through his area. He also told this story in his 1990 book, "30 Years Over Donner - Railroading "family style" over Southern Pacific's Donner Pass, through the eyes of a company signal maintainer." But the story in his book was a slightly different version. rs

Here is Bill Fisher's story as told in his April 30, 1980 letter responding to a friend.

"... The S P never made much of speed runs, although the Santa Fe with more straight track did with Nelly Bly and the Death Valley Scottie runs. On this route the S P today frowns on speed and has a set limit Colfax to Truckee of 35 mph including AMTRAK. On valley runs the limit is 79 mph because the ICC requires special control equipment for over 80.

"The only 'clear all signals' run I know of was during the war, and that was an interesting one, storywise. One afternoon on the Emigrant Gap job I had a call from the Supervisor – "You'll be on duty for a few hours this evening. Eat your dinner between 400 & 500 PM. At 500 P go east over your district (on the track motorcar) carefully checking all switches, switch locks, test westbound signal lighting, report in on return to Emigrant Gap office and remain there until relieved." There were often super-classified shipments during WW II, sometimes with marine guards riding the train, but this one seemed to be really special. None of us could find out what it was all about.

"I went home at 400 P to eat and Kay had just come from the local store-postoffice. I started to tell her I had to get back account of some special train but security was so tight I couldn't find out . . . "Oh, I know all about it! At the postoffice they say Madam Chiang Kai-Chek is coming through about 700 o'clock. I'm going out and wave at her!" So that was wartime security. The VIP special did go through, apparently ignoring the speed limit, but Madam Chiang didn't stick her head out. In fact, all blinds were down and doors closed."

