

# Placer-Sierra Railroad Heritage Society

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## April 2025 Newsletter

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*SP 4449 pauses in Colfax in its red, white and blue splendor in June 1975, while on its way to Chicago where it would join the American Freedom Train on its cross-country journey. See pages 2, 4 & 5 for more details. Bob DelCaarlo collection*

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## Scheduled Events & Notices



- Apr 22**     **PSRHS Monthly Meeting, 7PM – Program - Steve Bush & Craig Thomas  
- The 1975-76 American Freedom Train (Steve & Craig were crew members)**
- May 27**     **PSRHS Monthly Meeting, 7PM – Program under development**
- Jun 24**     **PSRHS Monthly Meeting, 7PM – Program under development**
- Jul 3**        **Colfax July 3 Celebration – Caboose open if enough volunteers**

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*

### PSRHS MONTHLY MEETING

APRIL 22, 7PM

AUBURN VETERANS MEMORIAL HALL

**April Program:** On Board the 1975-76 American Freedom Train. Steve Bush and Craig Thomas will relate some of their personal experiences and observations while serving as crew members for much of the 1976 tour of the American Freedom Train that celebrated our country's bicentennial. **Craig fired SP4449 for part of his tour. Steve's duties left him time to take photos of the locations they visited. His resulting slideshow is both a "travelogue" of the AFT itself, and a Coast-to-Coast look at American railroading at the time, seen through Steve's photographs.**

Craig joined the American Freedom Train as it traveled through California in late 1975. He served as engine crew member & Locomotive Fireman on the former Southern Pacific 4449 steam locomotive that powered the train. That experience was the start of a 38-year railroading career including 30+ years as a Locomotive Engineer with SP and UP.

Steve's involvement with the AFT began while the train was on exhibit in Santa Barbara in January 1976. After a series of improbable coincidences, he left with the train and stayed with it through the end of the tour a year later. He served as Assistant to the Curator, but was also involved with the train's operations. Steve retired from Amtrak in 2016 after 32 years.

Their combined "insider" observations and divergent experiences should make for an interesting program.

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.

**March Program Recap:** PSRHS Member & Videographer Brendan Compton presented a video he recorded of a 2016 panel discussion on rail operations at the Norden interlocking plant on Donner Summit. The panel of former SP workers, historians and photographers provided an insider's look at the operations in the unique Donner Summit SP facility that was Norden.

### MARCH BOARD MEETING

The PSRHS Board of Directors met prior to the March meeting. Items discussed included:

1. Colfax Depot Display
  - Ed Bernhardt donated an HO model of SP's Sunset business car to PSRHS for display at the depot museum
  - A check was cut for purchasing the model locomotives to be loaned by PSRHS to the museum for display
2. Recording of Meeting Presentations
  - Discussion of using either Zoom or YouTube to record meeting presentations for posting on our web site.
  - Further discussion needed to decide if we renew our zoom subscription
3. Newsletter Distribution Problems
  - Bill Yoder spoke about the problems he has encountered with emailing the newsletter. Appears to be a server provider problem; a system issue is causing newsletter mailings to be rejected. Bill has created a temporary workaround but will continue to seek a permanent solution for newsletter mailings.

### NEW ON OUR WEBSITE

Visitors to our web site [www.psrhs.org](http://www.psrhs.org) can find a page titled **Historic Railroad Articles/Maps/Docs** under the **Local RR History** tab. Items listed on that page are made available courtesy of PSRHS to those interested in regional rail history. They can be accessed on our web site or downloaded to peruse at your leisure. Recent additions to this page include:

- **The Central Pacific's Summit Tunnel.** Comprehensive article by Chuck Spinks on surveying and construction of the Summit Tunnels.
- **The Pacific Railroad - Unopen** -- A great first-hand account by civil engineer Robert Harris of railroad construction work underway over the Sierra above Cisco, including engineers (not Chinese) being lowered by ropes at the summit.
- **1869 Journal of Lt John Currier**, describing his trip on the newly completed and not-yet-completed Union Pacific tracks to Promontory, the ceremonial Joining of the Rails, and his ride on the first CPRR train west to Sacramento after the ceremony.

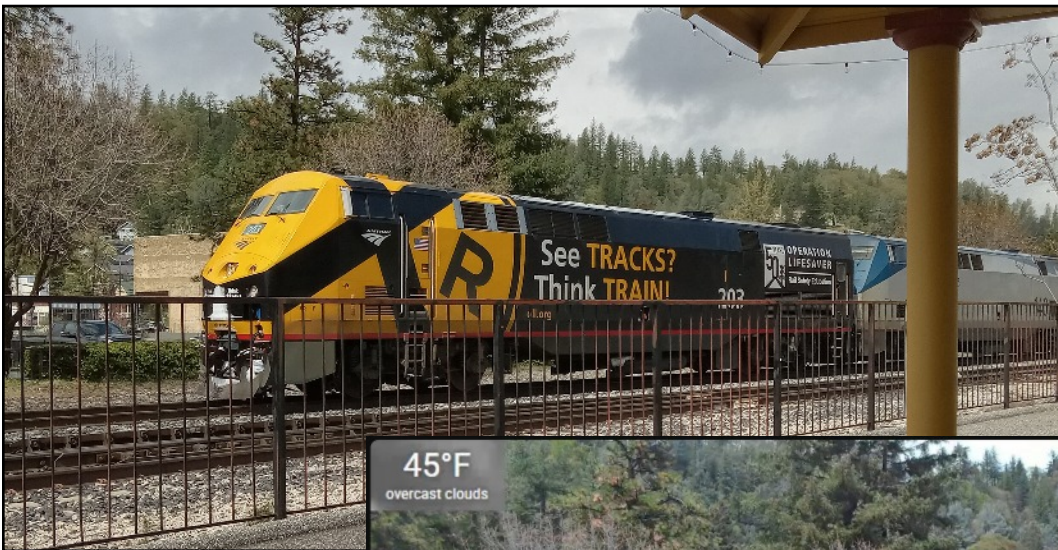




### Passing Scene - Operation Lifesaver in Colfax

Your newsletter editor was feeling pretty smug when I happened to be at the Colfax Depot on March 31 as westbound Amtrak #5 arrived, led by Amtrak #302 in its bright Operation Lifesaver paint scheme. The upper photo shows the view I had from under the depot colonnade as the train paused to discharge passengers.

A few days later Paul Greenfield sent me an image captured from the Colfax webcam of the same Amtrak #5, but viewed from the camera's location on the roof of the depot. It's a good reminder of the view offered by the web cam's location, and the ability to reach back in time up to 12 hours to capture an image that otherwise might have been missed. *Upper photo by Roger Staab, lower web cam image courtesy of Paul Greenfield.*



#### 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](mailto:roger.staab@psrhs.org)



### **From the Archives - American Freedom Train Power in Auburn & Colfax**

Our January newsletter and program featured the 1946-47 Freedom Train. This month we jump to 1975 and a visit by SP4449, sporting red, white and blue, as it traveled to Chicago to power the American Freedom Train, celebrating our nation's bicentennial. In June 1975 the 4449 did a shakedown run pulling four cars from Portland to Chicago by way of Sacramento and the Donner Route. It was on display in Sacramento for a day, and made numerous brief stops at other locations along the route, including Auburn, Colfax and Truckee. In November 1975 the American Freedom Train powered by SP 4449 would make a brief side trip on the Donner Route from Roseville to Reno, then back for stops in Sacramento, the Bay Area and San Joaquin Valley. Our April program will feature two locals who will share their on-board experiences as members of the train crew.

SP 4449 in its patriotic colors pulls a four-car test train along the Donner Route, shown here heading east from Auburn toward Chicago where it will pull the American Freedom Train on its journey across the country in 1975-76. *Ken Yeo Collection* →



← SP 4449 pauses in Colfax on its shakedown run, to the delight of railfans. It had been on display in Sacramento followed by brief stops in Roseville and Auburn. Next stop - Truckee and points east. *Bob DelCarlo Collection*



**Accidents/Other Incidents.** *The Placer Herald*, Jun. 26, 1975. ***"Nostalgia Reigns as Steam Locomotive Heads East to Join the Freedom Train."*** By Steven A. Capps. An estimated 200 people gathered at the Nevada Street Southern Pacific Depot in Auburn Monday to greet the arrival of a steam locomotive, the first in 17 years to cross the Sierra. The red, white and blue-colored locomotive will pull the Bicentennial Freedom Train, which will tour the contiguous 48 states next year as a mobile museum. It will carry such documents as the first English language Bible printed in America, Lincoln's preliminary inauguration address, a moon rock and George Washington's personal copy of the Constitution. Onlookers stood along dirt roads, cliff banks and even Interstate 80 to watch the locomotive as it chugged along the railway between Auburn and Truckee Monday morning.... The locomotive and its four cars made a brief stop in Colfax to take on water and was again greeted by an enthusiastic crowd. Flag wavers and photographers were seen along most of the track between Auburn and Truckee.... SP4449 is scheduled to travel to Ogden, Utah, where it will be displayed June 24-26. It eventually will join with the cars that will hold the Bicentennial exhibits in Chicago and begin its 17,000-mile journey, stopping in 78 American cities."



*Editor's note: In keeping with our American Freedom Train theme, the following article is reproduced from the July 1975 issue of Steam Echoes, a monthly publication of the former Auburn-based Sierra Mountain Railroad Club. The article also appeared in the August 2024 PSRHS newsletter, at that time celebrating the visit by UP's Big Boy*

### THE GREAT TRAIN RACE OF 1975

The American Freedom Train began to materialize in late June when one of the steam engines destined to pull the historic symbol of our bicentennial rolled south out of Portland, Oregon. Aboard the 4-car test train over parts of the run, were Ken Yeo, Barry Garland, Hans Moeller, and other V.I.P.'s. Howard and Mrs. Yeo rode it from Sacramento to Sparks on his birthday – what a way to celebrate! Crowds greeted the train at all stops and many of our members photographed it.

Ex-DAYLIGHT Engine 4449, brought out of retirement and rebuilt with loving care by enthusiastic steam fans, including some of our members, stepped lively on her way down from Portland. She stayed at Sacramento all day Sunday, June 22, posing for pictures in her new red-white & blue dress.

But June 23<sup>rd</sup>, Monday, was really her heyday.

On Monday the 4449 headed up over Donner Summit escorted by a wild caravan of some 200 cars, her Mars headlight winking at admirers. At every possible spot where pavement came close to Theodore Judah's route avid railfans crowded, cluttered and crammed roads, shouting, "Get out of the picture!" She sounded her chime whistle for all of them and chomped her rhythmic exhaust for the tape recorders. At Auburn and Colfax she was greeted by several hundred people. Just east of Colfax 100 cars parked on the freeway illegally as their drivers watched her cross Long Ravine Bridge. At Dutch Flat local citizens waiting in lawn chairs waved American flags. Her deep-toned whistle answered, reverberating among the hills.

All the way over the "Hill" railfans banged fenders and stumbled over rocks to film her striding past. Two railway workers from England allowed she was a "real beauty, y'know". Never in S.P. History have so many rail buffs descended on the property and disappeared in a few minutes! The Highway Patrol was flabbergasted – before they could arrest anyone, everybody was gone! Engine 4449, like a gracious lady, stepped out in her platform shoes and gave everybody a good show. Her hot cylinders even set off the hotbox detector at Magra! Everybody was happy – including the Eastman Kodak Co.

