

Placer-Sierra Railroad Heritage Society



<https://www.psrhs.org>

February 2026 Newsletter

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View of the Colfax derailment showing both tracks and Narrow Gauge Road blocked before cleanup & repairs began. See the February program description on page 2 & photo and text on page 3 for more details. *Roger Staab photo*

Scheduled Events & Notices



Feb 24 PSRHS Monthly Meeting, 7PM – Program – Photos of Cleanup and Track Repair after the December 13 derailment near Colfax (Plus a Bonus Feature)

March 4 Chuck Spinks & Paul Helman Celebrate Theodore Judah on his 200th Birthday

March 4 – Folsom 10am -2pm – Folsom Station Plaza – www.folsom.ca.us/railroad

March 7 – California State RR Museum – Special Talk starts at 11am & 1pm

Mar 24 PSRHS Monthly Meeting, 7PM – Program – UP 4014 “Big Boy” Tour Plans

Apr 28 PSRHS Monthly Meeting, 7PM – Program – UP Big Boy Visit Recap

Watch our website and newsletter for monthly program details

**** Remember to Renew Your Dues for 2026 or Become a PSRHS Member ****

Annual membership renewals pay for publishing railroad history documents, purchasing and posting historic photos, arranging field trips, & other historic preservation activities.

Preserving Railroad History on the Donner Pass Route

Placer-Sierra Railroad Heritage Society



February 2026 Newsletter

PSRHS MONTHLY MEETING

February 24, 7PM

AUBURN VETERANS MEMORIAL HALL

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

February Program: Roger Staab & Mike Haire will present a photo timeline showing UP contractors at work with their specialized equipment clearing and repairing the tracks after an eastbound UP double-stack freight train derailed just east of Colfax in the early morning hours on December 13.

As word got out about the derailment, locals and passers-by soon lined the Hwy 174 bridge that crosses the tracks enjoying the excellent views of the cleanup and repair activities to get the railroad line reopened. Roger has merged his still photos taken at four different time periods with screenshots captured from Mike Haire's video footage of the cleanup to create the photo timeline.

As an added bonus the program will include images of another railroad incident that happened at Colfax the day before the derailment.

January Program Recap: Craig MacGlashan's program "After Judah" provided a detailed look at Samuel Montague and James Strobridge, the two men who were directly in charge of the building of the western half of the transcontinental railroad after the death of Theodore Judah. Craig described the two significant deviations made by Montague from Judah's surveyed route. He also pointed out that Auburn played an important part in the work performed by these two Central Pacific employees. For example, Chinese were first added to the work force as construction reached the Auburn area.

UP Big Boy to Travel West In April

Word has begun to filter out that UP 4014 "Big Boy" will take a cross-country excursion in 2026, with a return visit to Roseville slated for April 10-11.

UP's web site reports that a daily schedule with additional stops along with a map of the route will be released closer to the tour's launch. The eastern leg of the tour, anticipated to start in late spring, is still being finalized and will be announced soon.

UP reports that there will NOT be any passenger excursions offered on the western leg of the tour.

Big Boy No. 4014, the world's largest operating steam locomotive, will be joined on its 2026 tour by two commemorative locomotives, including the railroad's newest locomotive: No. 1776 – America250. This new commemorative locomotive pays tribute to the signing of the Declaration of Independence and the founding of this nation. The locomotive will feature the emblem of the America250 Semiquincentennial Commission, the national nonpartisan organization established by Congress to lead the nation's 250th anniversary. More information about No. 1776 will be announced soon.

PSRHS will be monitoring the news releases and will post updates on our website home page: Our March and April programs will be dedicated to information on Big Boy's visit to our region. Watch for website and newsletter updates.

January PSRHS Board Meeting

The PSRHS board met prior to the January member meeting. Items discussed include the following:

1. Colfax Webcam Internet Provider - The Colfax depot museum and the visitor center are looking for faster internet service and have asked if PSRHS is interested in teaming with them. Paul mentioned that Southwest Railcams may be providing a new video camera for Colfax. Paul will determine what our upload requirements will be if a new camera is provided.

2. Bylaws Changes - the board agreed to reduce the number of board positions from 9 to 7. A quorum for board meetings will be changed to a majority of the board positions that are currently filled.

3. Membership lists - The member lists are being updated to clearly show those who have paid current-year dues, and past members who have not renewed. This will simplify mailing lists for newsletters & notices.



Passing Scene - UP's December Derailment Cleanup

The Colfax derailment happened in the early morning hours on December 13, and Track 1 was reopened to rail traffic around noon. Meanwhile crews were hard at work using specialized equipment to pull containers and damaged freight cars from the wreckage and drag them clear of the site so repairs could be made to the damaged section of Track 2. The adjacent public Narrow Gauge Road provided good access for crews and equipment but the roadway had to be accessible for local traffic while cleanup was taking place. A sequence of photos captured as cleanup progressed will be featured at our next PSRHS monthly meeting program on February 24. *Roger Staab Photo*



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

editor@psrhs.org

Membership Information

Annual Membership = \$30.00/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/>



From the Archives - Recovering Wrecked Cab-Forward

The August 2025 PSRHS newsletter featured an article from the Roseville Register about the 1912 derailment near Applegate of early passenger cab-forward locomotive SP 4208. The locomotive was on its maiden run westbound leading the Overland Limited when the accident occurred, resulting in the death of the engineer.

An accompanying article from the Winter 2025 issue of *S-P Trainline Magazine* noted that the accident led to a redesign of the passenger cab-forwards. The *Trainline* article featured photos of the accident scene including the view below of the cab-forward locomotive on its side and down the embankment.

The 1912 news article at the bottom of this page tells of the difficulty the cleanup crews encountered in retrieving the massive locomotive from the accident scene. *Photo from S-P Trainline*



Accidents/Other Incidents. *Grass Valley Morning Union, Feb. 22, 1912.* **“HERCULEAN TASK TO REMOVE MALLET. Giant Engine Is Still Over Embankment at Colfax; Wrecking Crew Hard at Work.** The wrecking crew near Colfax is facing an herculean task to extricate the derailed giant Mallet compound engine which plunged over the embankment, bearing its engineer to death, when the Southern Pacific Overland limited was wrecked several weeks ago. All day yesterday the crew worked hard, but their efforts were without avail, and the massive engine is still many feet below the track. The three inch cable used by the wrecker and fastened to the locomotive snapped when the full strain was put upon it. It is probable the engine will be cut in two parts. Engineers believe that it can then be raised to the track. It weighs 320 tons. Master Mechanic Pratt and Master Repairer Gilson of Sacramento direct the work of the wrecking crew.”





Charles Nordhoff wrote numerous articles for Harper's Monthly during the 1870's, often describing features of the State of California, now accessible by rail. The focus of this excerpt from one of his articles is his account of a trip on the new transcontinental railroad from Omaha to California.

Excerpts from **An 1872 Journey by Rail to California on the Union Pacific and Central Pacific Railroads**, by Charles Nordhoff, Harper's New Monthly Magazine

“And from the hour you leave Omaha, you will find everything new, curious, and wonderful; the plains, with their buffalo, antelope, and prairie dogs; the mountains, which, as you approach Cheyenne, lift up their glorious snow-clad summits; the deep canyons and gorges which lead from Wasatch into Ogden, and whose grim scenery will seem to you, perhaps, to form a fit entrance to Salt Lake; the indescribable loveliness and beauty of the mountain range which shelters the Mormon capital; the extended, apparently sterile, but, as long-headed men begin to think, really fertile alkali and sage-brush plain; the snow-sheds which protect the Central Pacific as you ascend the Sierra; and, on the morning of the last day of your journey, the grand and exciting rush down the Sierra from Summit to Colfax, winding around Cape Horn and half a hundred more precipitous cliffs, down which you look out of the open “observation car” as you sweep down from a height of 7000 feet to a level of 2500 in a ride of two hours and a half. A grander or more exhilarating ride than that from Summit to Colfax on the Central Pacific Railroad you can not find in the world. The scenery is various, novel, and magnificent. You sit in an open car at the end of the train, and the roar of the wind, the rush and vehement impetus of the train, the whirl around curves, past the edge of deep chasms, among forests of magnificent trees, fill you with excitement, wonder, and delight.”

“Eating stations furnish you your meals; ice is supplied along the way; laborers stand aside in the desert and on the mountains as the train sweeps by, and close up behind it to repair the track or keep it in order. There is a Chinaman and a half on every mile of the Central Pacific Railroad; and this road is not only a marvel of engineering skill and daring running through a most difficult country, and abounding in deep rock cuts, tunnels, and snow-sheds, but you will find the road-bed every where firm and solid, as though it had been laid for years, the cuts clean and clear, and on every part of the work an air of finish and precision, which show the confidence of its owners, and the thorough spirit in which it was conceived and completed and is maintained.”

