

# Placer-Sierra Railroad Heritage Society



<https://www.psrhs.org>

## May 2026 Newsletter

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The Colfax Hotel which overlooks the tracks is undergoing restoration by its new owners. See the photo and details on page 3 for updates on this long awaited project. *Roger Staab Photo*

## Scheduled Events & Notices



- May 26** PSRHS Monthly Meeting, 7PM – Program – Marilyn Sommerdorf –  
**RAILROAD DINING: A Culinary Adventure**
- June 4** PSRHS Tour of Sacramento Shops – Priority to current paid members
- Jun 23** PSRHS Monthly Meeting, 7PM – Tentative Program -  
**Recap of Sacramento Shops Tour**
- Jul 3** Colfax July 3 Celebration – Volunteers Needed to Staff the Caboose

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



May 2026 Newsletter

## PSRHS MONTHLY MEETING

May 26, 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.

**May Program: RAILROAD DINING: A Culinary Adventure**, presented by Railroad Historian **Marilyn Sommerdorf**. This program spans the years from 1868 to 1971 (when Amtrak took over most passenger trains and dining car service). Topics covered include the early years of eating in depots and restaurants. Later, the Fred Harvey Company changed the food stop from a nightmare to one of excellence. Early dining service aboard was dominated by special trains that included hotel & buffet cars usually operated by Pullman.

Dining car service, the on board crew and the support staff who worked supplying the train, were at the root of the memorable passenger experience. Stories still linger about the traveling restaurants. The atmosphere aboard created by the dining car was famous for treating passengers to a pleasant ride while dining. The interior car design was finished with elegant table settings featuring special china and menus. What passengers remember most of all was the food. Highlighting preparation and cooking, the railroads' various specialties and recipes are illustrated.

See pages 4 & 5 for related tidbits about SP dining cars.

Marilyn grew up on an 1863 family ranch near Hood on the Sacramento River, and spent most of her career with California State Parks at the California State Railroad Museum. Her work at the museum included restorations, research, photography, and exhibits. Since retiring she continues her history research and volunteering at the Railroad Museum.

## William Wauters Remembered

PSRHS member William Wauters passed away May 2 from a massive stroke. William has served on the

PSRHS Board of Directors for the past several years, contributing his historical knowledge and railroad artifacts to our PSRHS mission. He was a frequent volunteer at the Colfax Caboose for special events. William also owned an extensive collection of model railroad equipment of several gauges, and his home and barn are themselves features of historic interest.

Every year William hosted an annual start-of-summer party on the Sunday of Memorial Day weekend. His family is inviting his many friends to join them for a final party in his honor on May 24, Memorial Day Sunday from 12 noon to 5 pm at 700 Clipper Gap Rd, Auburn CA 95603. Please bring a camping chair if you need one and a potluck dish if you'd like. Carpooling is welcome as parking may be limited. Reach out to Vivian (530-320-1662) with any questions. See page 6 for more on William's other passions and interests.

## June 4 Field Trip - Sacramento Shops

The PSRHS spring field trip scheduled for June 4 will provide an exclusive inside look at the Sacramento Shops buildings and equipment owned by the California State Railroad Museum. The tour will last from 10AM to 1PM. **Some walking will be required.** More details on where and when to meet will be provided at a later date to those who sign up for the tour.

The CSRM tour host is limiting the number of tour guests to 35. Thus the event was initially offered only to PSRHS currently paid members. If any spots remain unfilled attendance may be expanded to family members residing at the same address or to non-members. **If you have not already signed up but would like to join this tour, email Jim Wood at [sierrageology@gmail.com](mailto:sierrageology@gmail.com).**

If interest exceeds 35 attendees, additional names will be placed on a waiting list in the order they are received to replace possible cancellations.

This tour promises to be a memorable experience for those who have not visited the Sacramento Shops and seen the equipment stored there, most of which has not been displayed in the main museum exhibit.



**Passing Scene - Colfax Hotel Restoration**

If you look closely at this photo you will see workers on the second level deck of the long-vacant Colfax Hotel. The new owners are intent on bringing this classic 1903 piece of history back into productive use. Plans for the building include residence units, a restaurant & bar, and overnight lodging with views of the trains, passenger depot, and historic downtown. Vintage double doors have been installed at the main entrance and interior work is underway. The history of the hotel's early days as a boarding house for railroad crews ties nicely into the plans supported by PSRHS for a Colfax Railroad Heritage Park between the hotel and the Amtrak platform. Watch for more updates on these exciting railfan projects. *Photo by Roger Staab*



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](mailto: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

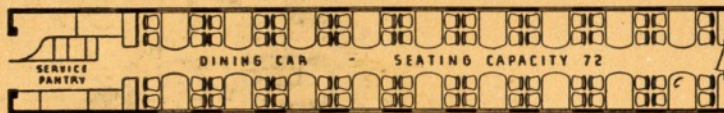
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### From the Archives - The Main Dining Car - City Of San Francisco

“It is the striking color scheme, together with furnishings of distinctive design, that makes this car so different ... so smart in appearance. For example, the chairs are a special oval-backed design finished in copper or blue. This effective color treatment is used throughout. The rich carpeting is dark blue ... Venetian blinds, mouldings and grilles are all copper colored. For contrast, the arched ceiling is light yellow. Window drapes are striped in blue, yellow and copper.

The imported Irish table linens, also, are yellow, recalling the ceiling color. Sparkling white china carries a streamline design in gold. In both dining cars, the lighting brings out the decorative beauty in addition to providing efficient illumination.” *Text and image from a 1939 brochure for the City of San Francisco.*



“Mission Dolores” identifies the Diner. This beautiful Mission, still well preserved, was founded by Franciscan Padres in 1776 and is one of the best known of California’s twenty-one Missions.

**Accidents/Other Incidents.** *The Press Tribune. Aug. 17, 1932.* **“NEW SERVICE ANNOUNCED AS RAILROAD FEATURE.** – Introducing the latest innovation in train travel – the “dietetic service” on dining cars. Originated by the Southern Pacific Company, as its most recent contribution to railroad progress, the new feature was announced today by H.A. Butler, head of the company’s dining car department.

It means, Butler pointed out, that persons requiring special diets are no longer barred from travel pleasure in the west. By simply consulting Southern Pacific’s dining car stewards they may now have their foods served according to the doctor’s orders. Virtually any diet in common use can be prepared, correctly and attractively, by the railroad’s chefs for service in drawing rooms, sections or dining cars ...”



## Thanksgiving Both Days On S.P. Diners

*The Roseville Press, Nov. 18, 1941*

Housewives, when you go to the market to purchase supplies for your Thanksgiving dinner, you may think it is quite a chore to prepare such a feast. If so, you should consider the problem confronting Harry A. Butler, superintendent of dining car service for Southern Pacific.

Butler has charge of more than 100 dining cars that operate in the seven western states, and to add to his problems he must serve not one, but two Thanksgiving dinners. That is because California, Oregon, Arizona, Utah and New Mexico will observe November 20 as Thanksgiving Day, whereas Texas and Nevada plan to eat their turkey on November 27. And so, to please everybody, Butler will serve turkey "and all the trimmings" on Southern Pacific dining cars on both days.

Following is a list of supplies Butler figures will be consumed by Southern Pacific dining car patrons on Thanksgiving Days this year: 3500 pounds of turkey, 1400 pounds of celery, 350 jars of cranberry sauce, 175 quarts of gravy, 850 pounds of mince meat, 350 pounds of fruit cake, 700 loaves of bread, 250 pounds of butter, 1750 bottles of milk, 275 pounds of mixed nuts, 700 pounds of fresh vegetables and 850 pounds of fresh fruits.



### *Announcing —*

### A REVOLUTIONARY NEW DINING CAR SERVICE

***Complete luncheons and dinners on all dining cars for 80 cents to \$1.25 and breakfasts, 50 cents to 90 cents***

When next you eat in a Southern Pacific Diner, you will enjoy a meal service unique among American railroads. "Meals Select" — they were named by Harry Butler, our new dining car manager, who originated them.

You have your choice of five entrees, priced at 80 cents, 90 cents, \$1, \$1.10 and \$1.25. The price of the entree you select includes soup, salad, meat order, vegetables, bread and butter, beverage and dessert.

The new meals will be a permanent feature of our service on all dining cars after February 15.

*Sample Menu*

**80 cents**  
**SOUP**  
*Beef Broth with Barley*  
*Consomme*

**ENTREE**  
*Grilled Salmon*  
*Lima Beans    Potatoes*

**THE SALAD BOWL**  
*Corn Bread    Assorted Bread*

**DESSERTS**  
*Green Apple Pie with Cheese*  
*Ice Cream, Cake    Rice Custard*  
*Tea    Coffee    Milk*

*The Press-Tribune, Feb. 15, 1933*





### Other Sides of William Wauters

*Most of us involved with PSRHS knew William as a railroad history enthusiast, PSRHS Board Member, and volunteer in club projects. It should be no surprise that there were multiple sides to William, as outlined in this summary of his life provided by his daughter, Vivian..*

William Michael Wauters died unexpectedly on May 2, 2026. He was a passionate lifelong activist, environmentalist, and involved community member in the Sierra Nevada Foothills, and will be dearly missed.

William was born to parents Cliff and Helen Wauters in Washington, D.C., the oldest of three children. Shortly after his birth in May 1949, the family moved to Newcastle, California. He would go on to spend most of his life in the Auburn area. His mother was an avid outdoorswoman and from her he learned to love the foothills and mountains of the region, spending his life immersed in the local ecology and history.

For the past 50 years he lived in his “paradise” in Clipper Gap, in a home he built with his wife of 32 years, Barbara. They raised their son and daughter there, as well as a rotating collection of farm animals, vegetables, fruit trees, and projects. After parting amicably, they remained committed as parents and grandparents. One of William’s greatest joys was to have his children and grandchildren visit him on his property to help harvest fruit and enjoy the home he loved so dearly.

Throughout his life William channeled his creativity and strong opinions into activism and love of beauty in the world. He has participated in multiple protest movements, including anti-Vietnam War marches and recent No Kings demonstrations; in recent weeks, he could be found waving pun-filled artistic signs at the corner of Hwy 49 and Bell Rd. The signs are a window into his love of art; his house is filled with pieces of various styles, with many painted by his partner Stephanie, who passed away in 2015. He was also a classic car and train enthusiast and collector who meticulously researched local rail history.

William spent much of his life dedicated to stewarding the Bear and American River watersheds. He was involved in multiple anti-dam campaigns, trail development projects, river clean-ups, among many other community efforts to support the long-term vitality of the rivers, lands, and their inhabitants.

William is survived by his two children, Leon and Vivian, his four granddaughters, Ella, Ruby, Phebe, and Imogen, his two siblings, Joey and Dick, as well as his companion Gayle. We invite the community to remember William in the sound of the rivers he spent his life stewarding; if you feel inspired, feel free to make a contribution to the Bear Protection And Restoration Collaborative, which you can learn more about at [bearparc.com](http://bearparc.com).

