

Placer-Sierra Railroad Heritage Society



<https://www.psrhs.org>

August 2026 Newsletter

In This Issue:

AUGUST MEETING PROGRAM	Page 2
Wm Wauters' Al Phelps Photos + Postcards	
PSRHS Board Vacancy	Page 2
Colfax Railroad Days Sept. 12-13	Page 2
Passing Scene - UP980350MW	Page 3
UP Weed Spraying Train	
From the Archives -	Page 4
Fruit Trains on the Donner Route	
PSRHS Support Appreciated by	Pp. 5-6
Colfax Heritage Museum	



This interesting train consist was spotted in Colfax earlier this month by Colfax Museum Director Ric Nepil. See page 3 for more details.

Scheduled Events & Notices



- Aug 25 PSRHS Monthly Meeting, 7PM - Program - Roger Staab**
– Selected Al Phelps RR Photos from the William Wauters Collection
- Sep 12-13 Colfax Railroad Days – Visit the Museum & PSRHS Table at the Depot**
– Family Friendly Displays & Activities ** 10am-5pm both days **
- No Monthly Meeting in September**
- Oct 27 PSRHS Monthly Meeting, 7PM - Program under development**

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

August 2026 Newsletter

PSRHS MONTHLY MEETING

August 25, 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.

August Program: The PSRHS August 25 program features railroad photos from the William Wauters collection that were taken by Auburn resident Al Phelps in the 1930's and 1940's. Al was an employee of the Southern Pacific Company and was the Station Agent in Auburn for many years. His photos are well known among followers of local railroad history. The Wauters family recently made William's collection of Al Phelps photos and photo postcards available to PSRHS for scanning and archiving. Several of the photos show historic views of regional railroad scenes that are rarely found in other collections. PSRHS historian Roger Staab will lead the presentation that features selected Al Phelps photos from the Wauters collection, along with a few of the collection's photo postcards if time permits.

July Program Recap: Our July program featured an insider's look at the restoration underway on the 1903 Colfax Hotel by current owners Leif & Wendy Lowery. After Roger Staab presented a brief look at the hotel's significance to Colfax and local railroad history, Leif and Wendy described their restoration project which aims to bring the hotel back to life as the town's centerpiece. Leif described the exterior features that aim to replicate the historic look, along with the planned interior layout including a restaurant/bar, ground floor hotel rooms, and two-story apartment rentals. Wendy discussed her vision for decorating some of the rooms in a motif reminiscent of railroad Pullman sleepers from a bygone era. The numerous questions from the audience indicated that attendees found the presentation both interesting and informative.

PSRHS Board Vacancy

A vacant position still exists on the PSRHS Board of Directors. Our board meets on the 4th Tuesday from 6-7pm prior to most monthly program meetings. Please consider serving on the board and help steer the club's future activities and programs. Contact a current board member for more information.

Colfax Railroad Days Sept. 12-13

Event hours both days 10am-5pm

Colfax Railroad Days will soon be upon us. Initial information from UP hints that they may be planning a large showing of equipment after the success they had at last-year's event. We anticipate some snow equipment, return of the interactive fire train, and a heritage locomotive.

PSRHS will have a table next to the Colfax Heritage Museum. We anticipate teaming with the museum to offer some of our surplus books for sale at this year's event. The museum is also selling railroad-themed books along with other railroad-related items.

The Colfax caboose may be opened for limited hours or possibly on an as-requested basis, depending on how many volunteers are available to staff both the caboose and the PSRHS table. Walking tours will be offered that highlight railroad changes in Colfax through the years. The PSRHS & Museum tables will showcase project plans for the Colfax Railroad Heritage Park (RHP) that will soon consolidate in one location the caboose, NCNG flat car, and other items such as the wig-wag signal, SP speeder, and concrete phone booth.

Join PSRHS for this community celebration, view the model railroad layouts, museum and Union Pacific displays, check out the progress on the Colfax Hotel restoration, and partake in the food and other family-friendly activities. **See you in Colfax Sept. 12-13!**



Passing Scene - UP Weedspraying Train

Union Pacific Puts New Weed Spraying Train in Service - *Railfan & Railroad Magazine, March 21, 2022*

“Union Pacific said its new weed spraying train will be working across its 23-state system this year. The train, which was first introduced in 2021, can cover upwards of 160 miles per day, considerably more than the 30 or so miles per day covered by the hyrail trucks it will be replacing.

“Clearing vegetation is an important part of track management,” said Antonio Buelna, director of rail management engineering. “It eliminates potential tripping hazards and helps make signage more visible for employees and communities.”

The new train features five water cars loaded with 100,000 gallons of weed killer. The self-propelled train, which looks a lot like some of UP’s other maintenance of way trains, sprays about 25 to 60 gallons per mile. This summer, the railroad plans on adding crew quarters so that the train can cover even more miles and work around the clock, killing weeds and tamping down vegetation along the right-of-way.”



*Photos captured by Ric Nepil
in Colfax Aug. 6, 2026*



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 Family 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 - Fruit Trains on the Donner Route

This Al Phelps photo shows SP 4220 Cab-Forward leading a fruit block eastbound near Penryn in 1949. Fruit blocks were given high priority on Donner Route tracks because of the perishable cargo they carried, delivering Placer and Nevada County fresh fruit to east coast markets. The fruit was loaded onto Pacific Fruit Express (PFE) cars at numerous foothill fruit packing locations including Newcastle and Colfax. Before mechanical refrigeration, the cars were filled with blocks of ice at platforms in Roseville and Colfax to keep the cargo chilled for the first leg of the long journey across the country. The advent of diesel locomotives coupled with mechanical refrigeration cars allowed fruit shipping to remain a major cargo for Southern Pacific.

Al Phelps photo, William Wauters/PSRHS Collection



Accidents/Other Incidents. *Sacramento Union*, Sept. 25, 1922. ***“Pears are Menaced by Car Shortage.*** COLFAX, Sept. 24. – Two local warehouses are filled with pears which cannot be moved, due to the shortage of refrigerator cars. No cars have been available for three days, and heavy losses to growers are expected unless the situation is promptly relieved.”



PSRHS Support Appreciated by Colfax Heritage Museum

Within our mission to preserve the railroad history of the Donner Pass Route, PSRHS has teamed with other individuals or groups to enhance history displays or programs in the area. Over the past year we have assisted the Colfax Heritage Museum located in the restored Passenger Depot in the purchase of high-quality train displays to celebrate the town's rich railroad history. In particular PSRHS purchased display-quality steam locomotive models and loaned them to the Colfax Heritage Museum for display.

Some of our PSRHS members have assisted the Colfax museum in setting up their displays. Member Barry Thompson has fabricated custom wood display shelving that is now in use showcasing the museum's brass model locomotive collection including the units on loan from PSRHS. He has also provided tongue-and-groove boards to finish a display of a vintage freight scale that used to live in the Colfax Freight Depot.

These and other PSRHS contributions have resulted in a letter of appreciation to PSRHS from the director of the Colfax Heritage Museum. The text of that letter is shown below, and a photo of the steam locomotive display can be found on the following page. Colfax Railroad Days Sept. 12-13 offers a great opportunity to visit the museum in person and check out the displays.

THANK YOU!

On behalf of everyone at the Colfax Heritage Museum, we'd like to thank the Placer Sierra Railroad Heritage Society (PSRHS) for your incredible support. Thanks to your generous donations, assistance with building displays, and loan of historic artifacts, we continue to bring to life the story of Colfax's rich railroad history for our community and visitors.

We are planning to create a dedicated PSRHS **display** in the waiting room case, along with a computer that will allow visitors to view and explore the PSRHS website.

We want to offer our sincere **apologies** for the delay **with** some of our joint projects, like the ceiling train. **Some** people **have assumed** that we have lost interest in completing the project, when in fact **it is** simply a lack of resources to implement it. We really appreciate your patience. These projects are definitely still on our radar. We've had good success raising funds **for** the projects; our main hurdle right now is simply finding the right hands to handle the specialized installation work. We're working through it and are fully committed to getting these across the finish line.

Thank you again for being such fantastic partners in keeping our local rail history alive!

Ric Nepil
Colfax Heritage Museum, Director
August 5, 2026



Colfax Heritage Museum display of steam locomotives & cars that were important in Colfax history –

Bottom to Top

Cab-Forward Locomotive with PFE refrigerated fruit cars;
Consolidation Colfax Helper Locomotive with earlier Cab-Forward;
Sierra Fire Train; Mountain Locomotive;
Pacific Locomotive with PFE refrigerated fruit cars.