

Placer-Sierra Railroad Heritage Society



<https://www.psrhs.org>

May 2024 Newsletter

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One of the tunnels added during double-tracking the Donner Route is the Applegate subway where the new Track 2 crosses under Track 1. See page 4 for more details. PSRHS collection

Scheduled Events & Notices



May 28 PSRHS Monthly Meeting, 7PM - Program - Paul Helman – Floods, Fires, Levees and Railroads: The Ever-Changing Landscape of Sacramento City – 1830s to 1870

Jun 25 PSRHS Monthly Meeting, 7PM - Program – Big Boy Tour Update Plus Paul Greenfield's Photos of Big Boy 4014 on its 2019 Run from Cheyenne to Ogden

Jul 3 Colfax July 3rd Celebration – Colfax Caboose Open

July 13 Colfax Museum Heritage Trail Tour – Museum and Caboose Open

Union Pacific Big Boy 4014 Western Tour

July 11	Whistle Stop in Oroville 2:15 - 2:45
July 12-13	Big Boy On Display in Roseville 9am - 3pm
July 14	Whistle Stop at Colfax 11:15 - 11:30
July 14	Whistle Stop at Truckee 3:30 - 4:00
July 20-21	Big Boy On Display in Ogden

Preserving Railroad History on the Donner Pass Route

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PSRHS MONTHLY MEETING MAY 28, 7PM

May Program: PSRHS member **Paul Helman** will present “**Floods, Fires, Levees and Railroads: The Ever-Changing Landscape of Sacramento City – 1830s to 1870.**”

Paul will discuss how Sacramento became a community, the part played by merchants such as Mark Hopkins and Collis Huntington, and the building of the Sacramento Valley Railroad and the Central Pacific Railroad.

Paul Helman has been a docent at the California State Railroad museum for over 20 years. Prior to starting his volunteer work at the museum he had a 32 year career with the Procter and Gamble Company serving in a number of technical management positions.

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.

April Program Recap: PSRHS founding member Jim Wood discussed Current Efforts to Establish a railroad-themed Heritage Park in Colfax.

The idea of an outdoor Railroad Park near the Colfax Passenger Depot has been talked about since the depot renovation was completed in 2007. With a new City Manager and council members showing interest in the concept, its time may finally be here. Jim discussed ideas being considered to establish outdoor displays near the depot in a park-like setting. The buzz being created by news of UP 4014 Big Boy’s July visit has heightened interest in Colfax’s rich railroad history.

APRIL PSRHS BOARD MEETING

The PSRHS board met prior to the April 23 meeting.

Removal of Railroad Items at Peter Hills’ Property: The CPRR square telegraph pole can be accessed and the pole removed. A work party will be scheduled to retrieve the pole. The Applegate web cam will be removed and retained by PSRHS.

Colfax Depot Southwest Railcams WebCam: The webcam is fully operational on hard-wired ethernet rather than wi-fi. A compensation cost is being worked out to pay for the shared internet service.

To access the web cam follow this link.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JmXz1dFsGkM>

The web cam can also be accessed on our PSRHS website under the Web Cams tab.

Colfax RR Days: Colfax City Council member Carolyn McCully will now speak at the May board meeting regarding plans for this year’s Colfax Railroad Days and the possible return of motor car rides if approved by UP.

UP’S BIG BOY TOUR UPDATE

Union Pacific Steam Club has announced the detailed schedule for UP 4014 “Big Boy” to visit California, including **whistle stops on Sunday, July 14 in Colfax, 11:15-11:30 and Truckee 3:30-4:00** as the excursion makes its way from Roseville to Ogden over the Donner Route. A link to the detailed tour schedule can be found on our web site under the “**Big Boy**” Tour tab.

PSRHS plans to have a table at the depot on July 14 to promote our activities, the planned Railroad Heritage Park, and regional railroad history in general.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

PSRHS asks for member support for staffing a table at the Big Boy **whistle stop in Colfax on July 14** as well as other July events. The Colfax caboos will be open to the public during the **City’s July 3 celebration**, and again on **July 13 for the Colfax museum Heritage Trails** event. Both of these events are an opportunity to promote PSRHS activities including support for the proposed Railroad Heritage Park and the Big Boy visit. We will **likely also open the caboos prior to Big Boy’s arrival in Colfax on July 14**. If you can help on any of these days contact the newsletter editor or any board member. Thanks in advance for your support for these PSRHS activities.

See this month’s featured article starting on page 5



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Passing Scene - UP Heritage Locomotive 1988 at Colfax

The new PSRHS/Southwest Railcams web cam on the Colfax Passenger Depot continues to provide excellent images of freight and passenger trains as they pass through Colfax. Paul Greenfield captured the image below from the web cam recorded live stream on May 8. Union Pacific (UP) heritage locomotive UP 1988 leads an eastbound manifest train. The Missouri Pacific Railroad acquired the Missouri-Kansas-Texas Railroad (nicknamed "the Katy") in 1988, and it was later absorbed into the UP system, hence the locomotive number.



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



First Train West - Journal of Capt John Currier - May 1869

Editor's note: The following article contains excerpts from FIRST TRAIN WEST, Golden Spike Centennial Edition, by Sacramento County Historical Society, Golden Notes – April 1969, which is a transcription of a journal kept by Capt. John Currier in 1869. The journal highlights his observations as he traveled from Omaha over the just-completed and not-yet-completed portions of the new transcontinental railroad on the way to Promontory and the Golden Spike. His journey then continued on the first CPRR train west from Promontory to Sacramento. Part 1 appears in this issue of the PSRHS newsletter. Additional portions of the journal including entries after departing from Promontory aboard the first westbound train on the newly completed transcontinental railroad will appear in future issues of the PSRHS newsletter. The handwritten wording is repeated as transcribed, with gaps noted where handwriting was unclear.

Brookline, Massachusetts

January, 1934

The following journal was kept by my father, Capt. John Charles Currier of the 31st Infantry, U.S.A.

My father and my mother, who was Nataline B. Smith, daughter of Waltman Smith of Manchester N.H., were on their way to California and it was their wedding journey also.

My parents had planned to go to Cal. to the Presidio at San Francisco where my father was to rejoin his regiment, but he received orders to proceed at once to Omaha, Neb. there to wait for the completion of the two great railroads which were the first to join the east and the west; so instead of sailing around Cape Horn my parents were among the comparatively few who were present at the “*joining of the ties*” of the transcontinental railroad in 1869.

Harriet Currier Hale

First Train West - Journal of Capt. John Currier, May 1869, Part 1

We pick up the story on
Friday, May 7th, 1869

Awoke 7 A.M. found we were at Evanston, not quite a hundred miles from where I left off last night. We made slow progress owing to roughness of the road which is absolutely awful. The most of this part was built in the winter while the frost was in the ground which of course in the spring must sink and become uneven. We are shaken about like corn in a gristmill. It is impossible to stand while the cars move without clinging to a seat for support. Resolving to show my skill in navigating cars, I got up to go for a glass of water. Before getting half way to the end of the car, a sudden jerk sent me headlong into a seat of a brother officer, knocking my nose and

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First Train West - Journal of Capt. John Currier, May 1869, Part 1 (continued)

his hat severely. I gave it up. We begin to see a little more green. The hills and valleys have not the dingy dried up appearance we noticed so much of along the road. There are signs of vegetation. We are approaching the region ruled by "King Brigham" (Young). We are also passing working parties of Irish and trains of cars without numbers lying idle on the side tracks. As the road approaches completion, these cars become too numerous and the force is decreased. We hear that the two companies are working in sight of each other, and each putting in their hardest to get down the rails. The Junction will be about the Middle of Utah territory. On the trains are all the paraphernalia used in constructing the road, derricks, cars made to carry powder for blasting, water tanks, boarding and lodging cars, dump cars etc.; and tools of every value and description without numbers, hoes, hammers, drills, shovels, picks, spades, saws, crow bars, tons and tons of railroad iron and millions of spikes. "They say" we will be at the "End of the track" by night; it looks doubtful. As we stop it is worth while to look at those cars and their contents. Here we see the means of rapid rail road building. Every conceivable invention for this purpose is here, and it is somewhat amazing how so many, many machines could have been used. Yet when we remember that the R. R. was built at the rate of two and three miles a day, and that the work beginning with the blasting and ending with the track layers stretched over a space of thirty miles at a time, we cease to wonder. I got from one of the overseers a few facts as to how the work went on ---

First, advance men with picks	500
Second, Drillers	1000
Third, Blasters (blasting rock)	500
Fourth, Men with crow bars	1000
Fifth, Men with shovels to clear the way	1000
Sixth, Men with shovels digging away hills	2000
Seventh, Men with cars hauling dirt	1000
Eighth, Men grading the road bed; 'Graders'	1000
Ninth, Men laying ties	500
Tenth, Track Layers	1000

In addition to them were men hauling ties, cutting ties, building bridges etc. etc. so that when all were at work, they had at one time twenty thousand men employed! An army! All these men required to be fed every day; they had a commissary and quartermaster and these had innumerable assistants. Men to see that the material was kept up to supply this vast army of workers; Men to forward iron from the depot back to Omaha; Men in New York, Chicago and other eastern cities to buy and ship it. Indeed it required a master mind to put this great enterprize through and tremendous expense. They worked day and night. But the triumph was worth working for. Sage is plenty again. We retain our sleeping car another night. We will hardly get to San Francisco before a week hence.

11:30 A.M. At Wasatch a town three months old; Nothing but a collection of shanties; this is the end of the track open to the public. From here hitherto all passengers have been taken in stages to a point on the Central Pacific. But we got the cheerful information that we will be taken on and probably not march any distance, for the rails are very near a Junction. Here is the most despicable lot of men we have seen along the line. Evil, ugly, looking devils they are. A man just told me that forty men had been killed here inside of two weeks "*and it wasn't much of a week for killing either.*" We are getting [a] little tired of our lunch baskets, so we have been out and got a breakfast in a tent but we got a nice meal, decidedly the best since leaving Omaha. Walking to the eating house

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First Train West - Journal of Capt. John Currier, May 1869, Part 1 (continued)

we had to cross a muddy ditch on a single plank. The road is fearfully rough. While waiting here the slow motion of the conductor, we saw a man knocked down and robbed not ten rods from the cars. From this point to the next station there is only a temporary track put up in a hurry while waiting to complete the permanent one which is through a deep cut and tunnel. We learn with regret that we must give up our elegant sleeping car because it can not, so the railroad men say, go "*over the Z*". The most prominent point in this town is the "*Sherman House*", a one story wooden shanty. The depot buildings and water tanks here are substantial and well built structures and I may say this of them all along the line, this being a part of their contract with our government. We see green grass here, showing far better soil. A Squad of "*Snake*" Indians come riding up on their little ponies. They do not in appearance, at least, belie their name, for they look decidedly satanic and "*snaky*". I saluted a seedy hang dog looking fellow in a butternut suit with "*Well My friend, what kind of a country is this?*" "*Umph*" he grunted. "*It's every man for himself and the devil take the last*". I thought so too, so quietly put my six shooter where it would be handy. We scramble from our Pullman car and get into "*cabboses*" (conductors cars) a great change from our recent luxurious accommodations, but "*they say*" we shall be provided for at "*Echo*" next station. We move and now we are among the Wasatch mountains. We are promised a grand treat in the way of magnificent scenery. Ten miles further at the entrance of Echo Canyon a most beautiful spot, "*indeed it is glorious, exclaim one and all!*" Immediately after leaving Wasatch, we went down a fearful descent in a zigzag manner, one hundred and fifty feet in a quarter of a mile. Then we backed, then pulled up, then backed again in the form of a letter (Z thus) reaching the bottom of the valley. We roll along and see those workmen way above us engaged upon the main track. We barely move and stop every five minutes. Our track is a mighty insecure one. The sand rattled from under us as we climbed the hill again. Cars are overturned on every side, and we were informed by a cheerful brake man that we were quite likely "*some of us*" to "*slide the track*". To those nervous ones in our party the ride was anything but pleasant; the danger is now over, however. Large parties of laborers are seen now. I can count five hundred men and one hundred fifty carts drawn by patient mules hauling dirt to grade the permanent track where it will emerge from the mountain. There are plows, scrapers & etc. The mules are well trained; they climb up and down the bank, stop at the right place and wait till their load is dumped, then take their place in the line and go back to get another. They look like ants. The place is black with laborers; they stand as near together as they can shovel. It's a funny sight to see five hundred shovels going into the air at one time. Wells Fargo's stage route is now along side us. I suppose it will stick to us or we to it, until we get to the end, half a mile farther on. Stopping in Echo Canyon; we passed through another Canyon a few minutes ago. Oh! This scenery is grand, grand! Nature seems to have swelled with giants, splitting mountains asunder and stamping on every land evidence of her most wonderful caprice. And yet again we could imagine that an unerring Providence had here in ages ago cleft the mighty barriers for the very purpose which the intelligent enterprize of the present generation has just accomplished – the Pacific Railroad! Were it not for this corridor in the mountains (these canyons) no power on earth could have cleft its way through the masses of everlasting rock. We shout for joy and our voices echo from peak to peak and crag to crag, dying in the distance. Someone fires a gun and the reverberations are terrific; the mountains seemingly angry at this intrusion upon their majestic solitude send back all manner of growls and deep toned intonations. It seems as if we had waked up some fearful monster, so long and loud are the echoes. We are all delighted –

An hour later – "*Echo City*" in the Canyon of same name: If the entrance was grand, this is sublimity. This is one of the most romantic spots on *Earth!* It is on the banks of Bear River, which comes down through an opening in the mountains. On all sides rise these natural formations of rock. Below us forty feet runs the river; on its winding

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First Train West - Journal of Capt. John Currier, May 1869, Part 1 (continued)

banks a road is built, hard and smooth and in excellent order. Away off in the distance we see fertile lands and cultivated fields; around us are buildings, nice farm buildings good enough for any man to live in. We see little fences painted white; a mill rumbles yonder. What is this! Two well dressed ladies on horse back! Yes and here are stores with goods displayed and there (is it possible?) is a "Bank", and "Temple of Fashion" staring us in the face! What is this enchanted spot among these fastnesses. The Mormons! Says somebody, and that solves the riddle. We are indeed in Brigham's domain; those are Mormon women we see and these improvements are by those singular fanatics "*Latter day Saints*". Well, we will take a walk outside. Hold on; here comes our quartermaster, Capt. Johnston, with information that by reason of the washing away of a bridge a few miles ahead, we can go no further until Monday. At first we were inclined to murmur, but when Mr. Dillon, an officer of the road, came up and offered his cars for the ladies and told us he should consider us his guests, and we looked out upon the beautiful panorama before us, we felt better. I transferred Nattie to Mr. Dillon's car (a perfect little palace) and took a stroll. This is truly a strong torch of civilization. There are half a dozen good frame houses and many others of an inferior order, tents and adobe huts. There is a street lined with stores pretty well filled with goods, two "*hotels*"; and in the bank, I am told, is stored no less than five hundred thousand dollars. It seems incredible to believe some of the people are Gentiles and there are two or three families of contractors for the R.R. Co. living here. One of the ladies came out and invited our ladies to supper. It is dark and I am granted the privilege of sitting in the elegant car where the ladies will abide till we move. It is the famous "*Lincoln Car*" built especially for the use of our ex president Lincoln in '64 and is without exception the most beautiful design I ever saw. There are seats and sofas stuffed and lined with plush & velvet; the sides of it are likewise stuffed; carpeted with Brussels ----- and window curtains of heavy "*Nep silk*", windows stained glass, and the panelling over head is [] upon a second tier of windows used for ventilation and painted the coats of arms of the several states of the union. ---- Wash stands of marble and (?long mirrors?), it is a perfect ladies' boudoir. Lt. Cluly is the lucky one who wins the privilege of staying with the ladies --- all the rest are obliged to repair to our "*caboose car*". His wife is in ecstasy while the rest of our little fraus look vexed. Col. Cogswell has decided that only one officer can remain as protector to the ladies car (which is half a mile from the main train). Our hope now is that we will arrive at Promontory Point by Monday noon which is fixed upon as the time for "*laying the last rail*." It will be worth something, at least, to say we were present when the Atlantic (and Pacific) were joined by iron bands ---- We all feel jolly; the lamps are lit in our drawing room car and it is quite cool for being still nearly six thousand feet above the sea level --- I feel inspired tonight going to sleep in such a lovely spot, surrounded as we are by these grand old hills. After a little game of enchre, retired.

Capt. John Currier's 1869 journal will be continued in next month's PSRHS newsletter.