

Placer-Sierra Railroad Heritage Society



<https://www.psrhs.org>

June 2024 Newsletter

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John Currier, May 1869, Part 2.** Pp. 5-7



This photo is a reminder of past visits by UP steam, in this case UP 844, and the crowds these visits attract. See pages 2 & 3 for more on past visits and plans for UP 4014 Big Boy's July 14 stop in Colfax. Roger Staab photo

Scheduled Events & Notices



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

July 23 PSRHS Monthly Meeting, 7PM – Special Program – Harpist Nancy Thym will play Railroad Songs against a backdrop of video-only railroad movies

Preserving Railroad History on the Donner Pass Route

Placer-Sierra Railroad Heritage Society



June 2024 Newsletter

PSRHS MONTHLY MEETING JUNE 25, 7PM

June Program: All Things Big-Boy — We will finalize plans for participating in the UP 4014 Big Boy excursion stop in Colfax on July 14. **Paul Greenfield** will then discuss the history of UP 4014, some of its design features, and show his photos of the 2019 Big Boy run from Cheyenne to Promontory for the 150th anniversary of the transcontinental railroad completion.

Paul has had an interest in railroad history since 1974. He retired after 34 years with the federal government.

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.

May Program Recap: **Paul Helman** presented **“Floods, Fires, Levees and Railroads: The Ever Changing Landscape of Sacramento City – 1830s to 1870.”** Paul discussed how Sacramento became a community, the part played by merchants such as Mark Hopkins and Collis Huntington, the building of the Sacramento Valley Railroad and the Central Pacific Railroad, and how the developing city and railroads were shaped by numerous floods.

MAY PSRHS BOARD MEETING

The PSRHS board met prior to the May 28 meeting.

Colfax Depot Southwest Railcams WebCam: The webcam continues to operate well on ethernet provided by a building tenant. The PSRHS board voted to contribute \$300 per year toward the internet service.

The web cam can be accessed on our PSRHS website under the Web Cams tab, or follow this direct link:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JmXz1dFsGkM>

Colfax RR Days: Colfax City Council member Carolyn McCully spoke to board members about her plans for this year’s Colfax Railroad Days event, and her intent to refocus the event on the history of Colfax and its connection to the Railroad. Carolyn asked if

PSRHS would provide motor car rides if she can get UP’s permission to use the spur track. She would like to include walking tours of historic railroad sites in Colfax. Carolyn also discussed City planning for the Big Boy visit and future move of the Colfax Caboose.

UP’S BIG BOY TOUR UPDATE

UP 4014 “Big Boy”’s western tour to California includes a **stop in Portola July 10, whistle stop in Oroville July 11, display in Roseville July 12-13, and 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. The return trip from Ogden to Cheyenne now includes a loop through SE Idaho. A link to the detailed tour schedule can be found on our web site under the **“Big Boy” Tour** tab.

We understand that Big Boy will arrive in Colfax on Main Track 1 and stop at the Grass Valley Street grade crossing. PSRHS plans to have a table at the caboose that weekend to promote our activities, the planned Railroad Heritage Park, and regional railroad history.

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 events on July 3rd and 13th.** The Colfax caboose 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 **also open the caboose prior to Big Boy’s arrival in Colfax on July 14.**

If you can help staff the caboose on any of these days contact the newsletter editor or any board member. PSRHS will offer a table of selected items from our collection to encourage donations toward moving the caboose to the Railroad Heritage Park. Volunteers will not need to handle money or price items. Thanks in advance for your support for these PSRHS activities.

See this month’s featured article starting on page 5



Passing Scene - UP 844 Steam in Colfax in 2012

The planned stop of UP's 4014 Big Boy in Colfax on July 14 reminds us of previous visits of UP vintage steam locomotives to our area. UP 844 made this eastbound stop by the Colfax depot in October 2012, and was greeted by a large crowd of railfans and families. We expect the crowds to be even bigger for the Big Boy stop next month as Colfax welcomes visitors and the locomotive to our historic depot and railroad town. Colfax was created by the railroad when Central Pacific first reached the new townsite in 1865 as construction progressed toward Promontory and eventual completion of the nation's first transcontinental railroad in 1869.

Colfax plans to make the July 14 Big Boy stop an all-weekend event. The Museum and Caboose will be open for visitors both Saturday and Sunday. A display will feature the Railroad Heritage Park that is proposed for the area at the left edge of this image. Saturday's opening is part of Placer County Museums Heritage Trail tour with music, while Sunday's activities include food & craft vendors and live music. *Roger Staab photo.*



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:

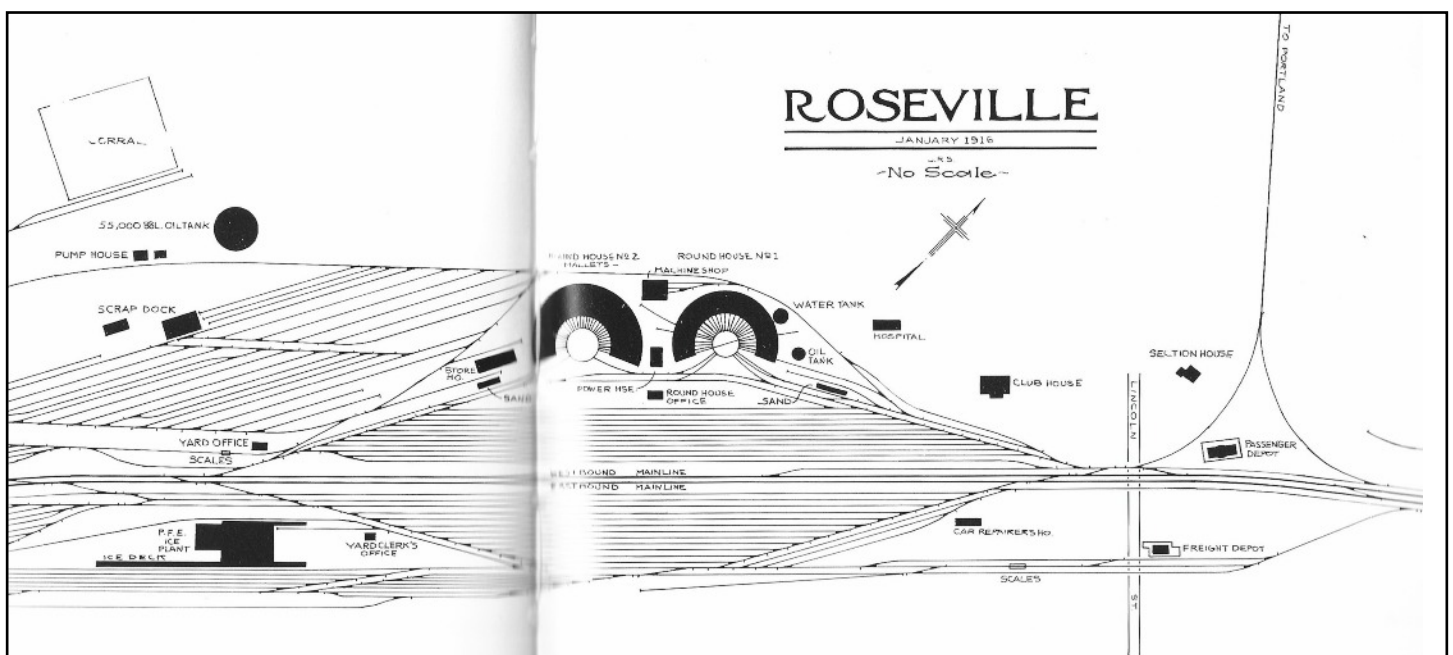
roger.staab@psrhs.org





From the Archives - Roseville Yard circa 1916

With all the attention Roseville is likely to receive in July with the visit of Union Pacific's 4014 Big Boy, we thought it appropriate to show a layout of the Roseville yard in an earlier era of steam power. This map of the Roseville yard circa 1916 is from John Signor's book, Donner Pass - Southern Pacific's Sierra Crossing. The yard was constructed in 1907 to replace the smaller Rocklin yard and roundhouse. By the mid 1910's the Roseville yard included two large roundhouses, the original one for smaller road engines and a newer one that was added for the large cab-forwards that became the workhorses for mountain service and helpers. The location of the 1907 passenger depot can be seen at the far right in the wye formed by the junction of the eastbound Ogden Route and the Northern Route to Portland. Near the bottom left is the Pacific Fruit Express icing platform used to add ice to cool early refrigerated cars for transporting fruit and other perishables. Our PSRHS collection includes a 1937 blueprint for the Roseville Yard Renewal that is similar to this image.



Accidents/Other Incidents. *Sacramento Daily Bee, Feb. 21, 1887.* **“A FRIGHTFUL ACCIDENT. The Death of a Young Brakeman at Tamarac. Two Engines and Several Cars Thrown from the Track. One Hundred Feet of Snowsheds Crashed to the Ground.** One of the several accidents that has occurred on the Central Pacific Railroad for several years took place about 10 o'clock last night at Tamarac, a station near the Summit. A special stock train was coming down the mountains, bringing a load of sheep to the valley. The train was drawn by two engines. While under a snowshed the train met with the accident, which was caused by a broken switch rail. The two engines fell against the side of the snowshed with tremendous force causing over one hundred feet of the shed, built of heavy timbers, to tumble down. The damage would not have been so extensive, had it not been for the fact that the roof of the shed was covered with ten feet of snow. Besides the engines, two carloads of sheep were badly broken up and nearly all the sheep killed. Four other cars were derailed but only slightly damaged... a brakeman was instantly killed. He was buried under an immense pile of debris...”





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. Part 1 of his journal was featured in the May PSRHS newsletter, including his observations of the Union Pacific Railroad construction from Evanston to Echo Canyon.

In this Newsletter issue, we present Part 2 of his journal including his description of railroad construction approaching Salt Lake City and the joining of the rails at Promontory. But there were obstacles yet to be overcome, including the completion of a major bridge at "Devils Gate".

In a future Newsletter Part 3 of the story told through Capt. Currier's journal will describe the culmination of his rail journey on the first CPRR train to carry passengers west from Promontory to Sacramento on the newly completed Transcontinental Railroad.

First Train West - Journal of Capt. John Currier, May 1869, Part 2

**We rejoin Capt. Currier's journal notes near Echo City on
Saturday, May 8, 1869**

Took time this morning to sleep as nobody felt like turning out early, as we all enjoyed the luxury of a nights rest with our cars standing still. About noon another train came up bringing Mr. Durant, vice President of the road, and one or two other officers. They came in a special with their fine car. Drawing up alongside of us, they came in, introduced themselves, and regretted that we were delayed. Said they would stop here with us, and insisted upon taking care of all the ladies. We dined with them and they gave us a dinner that surprised me. Beef roast and a la mode, ham, two ways, oyster pie, mutton, preserves, fresh bread, cakes and six kinds of desserts, ending with champagne and coffee. I think this is something remarkable since all these things have to be brought from Omaha and cooked in the "Kitchen car" attached to the officers car where they have every appliance for cooking and with excellent cooks. Col. Cogswell had the Band then (to) play for us and it dispensed fine music until tattoo. Nattie, being not very well, her dinner was sent to her. They try to show us every attention. The vice Prsdt. says our ladies should occupy his car until next Monday and that he will bring us up in season to see the last rail laid sure, so we feel good over it. Four or five of the officers, to wit Franklin, O. Beirne, Johnston and Burnett, went to Salt Lake City to pay the chief of Mormons a visit. It is sixty miles from here. Mr. Dillon informs me that they will certainly join the rails Monday. We are waiting for a bridge at "Devils Gate" to be completed. He gave me some statistics. At one time they had eight hundred teams hauling ties alone and five thousand men engaged in getting them out and working these teams. He says at one time they employed twenty one thousand men. Mr. Durant has paid out one hundred and twenty five thousand dollars in the last week. He had quite an adventure at Wasatch; four hundred workmen boarded his car and captured him, took him to a woods near by and held him a close prisoner until the money which had been due them for weeks and months was paid. I reckon he was some what scared. At one time it was thought our detachment [21st Infantry] would be called on to rescue him but he was afraid he might lose his life in the scrimmage so telegraphed that he would rather we were allowed to keep right on. So we [have] just escaped a pretty lively time it seems. Brigham Young built this section of the



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First Train West - Journal of Capt. John Currier, May 1869, Part 2 (continued)

road with four thousand Mormons. All the workmen were kept at work twenty two hours out of twenty four and *Sundays* included. Wages for ordinary labor 2-1/2 dollars per day, Sundays 3 dollars. I suppose since the flood no greater work when there were so many difficulties to overcome was ever pushed to so successful an issue and *so rapidly!* We are almost lost in amazement! Everything at this "City?" is high; a small bottle of ink [is] fifty cents. They don't deal in anything short of twenty five; tencent scrip is of no account here ---- cigars fifty cents each. I prefer my pipe as being a less expensive luxury. Fortunate for us that this moving hotel came up and that we met the officers of the road. This P.M. the band played again. The echoes were grand. I never heard anything so exquisite. Sometimes they sounded like distant thunder, again like the bugle of an alpine shepperd. I thought of that beautiful passage in Tennyson "Blow bugles blow; set the wild echoes flying; answer echoes answer; dying, dying, dying". This spot and our surroundings seem almost like a fairy land, like some grotto I've read of in Arabian nights, this quiet nook [sic]. Bear River rippling along way way down beneath us, the toppling ragged rocks suspended in mid air above us. Glimpses of other mountains and other valleys caught in the opening ahead, many of their peaks capped with snow. This wonderful railway bringing in the highest type of civilization, springing up as if by magic in the wilderness; the luxurious palace cars, this Mushroom town; the constant whistles of busy engines, the band of music, the "*boys in blue*" standing in line at Parade with their muskets flashing in the sun ---- all go to make up the delusion. It only needs a tall Genie to stalk into our midst to complete it. Aladin with his wonderful lamp never brought forth anything more fascinating or bewitching ---

Sunday, May 9th, 1869

Afternoon ---- We have just received orders to move on. We joyfully hail the news. We pass several trains which have come up. ---- **Evening:** we came through Weber Canyon, another of those beautiful places where the Great Architect has made his power manifest. We all join in the hymn, "My country Tis of Thee" and "Glory to God in the Highest". Every man and woman in our party seems to feel the grandeur of the scenes. Our train of soldiers is separate from the car where the ladies are (they being in Durants car) and we are very annoyed about them. We have all to cross a fearful bridge. Our engine is on the rear and is pushing us slowly up to it. ---- At the Bridge, **10 o'clock P.M.** Getting permission from Col. Coggswell, we who have wives, started afoot to reach the car where the ladies are. After walking about two miles, passing train after train of work cars, climbing over piles of rails and falling in the sand, we got here at last at the "*Devils Gate*", and a fearful place it is. A slender trestle bridge stretches from one side to the other of a yawning abyss through which a rapid current rushes like lightening, foaming and leaping up, then falling in showers of spray. It seems as if ready to tear the bridge all to pieces ---- and such a place! The rocks on each side are cut and hacked; black and gloomy they are. Frowningly they lower upon us as if to say to the bridge builders "*build your bridge if you dare and I will fall down and crush it*" [;] in this dark night with the black sides lit up by a bon fire on either end and the flickering lights of the workmen hammering away down in the bowels of the bridge seemingly holding on for dear life amid the roaring torrent! It almost makes me shudder to look! The cars were pushed down one by one and every one looked in silence as they were shoved slowly across. As soon as the car was safely over, I breathed easier and went back to our own train. In about an hour we followed and crossed safely ---- and now (12 o'clock midnight) we are in the Valley of [The] Saints. Ahead the glimmer of Great Salt Lake graces our vision. We Benedicts have passed our crisis and all is calm again.

Placer-Sierra Railroad Heritage Society



June 2024 Newsletter

First Train West - Journal of Capt. John Currier, May 1869, Part 2 (continued)

Monday, May 10th, 1869

7:00 A.M. On board the vice President's car U.P.R.R., five miles from Promontory Point, waiting for breakfast. The darkey cook in his clean white jacket is putting breakfast on the table and it looks tempting. A great many trains have come up and many passengers. We are now in sight of Salt Lake. Last night we followed along its shores for ten miles. I rode on the engine. Don't know how far back our soldier train is as we left them behind. Breakfast is ready. Passed the last range of mountains on our path until we get to the Sierras.

Promontory Point 12:30 o'clock noon ----- We have just witnessed the laying of the last rail, crowds commenced assembling at 7 o'clock. There were several thousand present. Ceremonies were opened with a prayer by a Minister from Massachusetts. A laurel wood tie beautifully polished and appropriately engraved was then brought out, and by the two highest officials of each road present was placed in position. A rail was then taken by workmen and put in its place, a spike of solid gold was then produced with a silver hammer. The officers of the "U.P." advanced from the East and those of the "C.P." from the West. A telegraph wire was attached to the spike; at a given signal one – two – three strokes or taps were made with the silver hammer. The telegraph wires were so arranged that the taps were flashed to all parts of the United States so that eager thousands in N. Y., Chicago, San Francisco, Boston, Philadelphia and other large cities at that moment knew the rail was laid and the Pacific Road complete! Truly it is worth a trip from New Hampshire to see this alone. Two beautifully decorated engines, one of each road advanced till their guards touched; the engineers climb out and broke a bottle of champagne across the space and shook hands. Nattie and myself were permitted to give a stroke upon the hammer. I drove my spike with my sword hilt. The engines then backed about two rods. Our regiment marched up, stood at parade rest while our pictures were taken. *[Editors Note – Hart photo #357 likely shows Capt. Currier's regiment lined up for the picture. Capt. Currier could be the soldier with the sword in Hart photo #358.]* Then the band played. Many distinguished men were present. We then adjourned and proceeded to the C.P. officers car where we were all treated to lunch and champagne. Thence all hands repaired to the U.P. car and got a splendid dinner. Champagne flowed like water. Much nonsense was got off but we had a jolly day. Half a dozen telegraph officers are crowded with applicants. Twenty or thirty prominent newspapers have reporters here. Everybody who is sober enough is scribbling; some are cheering, some laughing and throwing up their hats and it is a festive scene. The speeches are good and our band played pretty well until they had taken too much ardent spirit. Thus is the greatest undertaking of the 19th century accomplished. All honors to the resolute men who have "put it through". ----- **6 o'clock P.M.** The crowd has dispersed. The officials have gone back, each to his own road and we are about to start. Our cars are not so good as those we left. No more sleeping cars now. The men [soldiers] are hustled into box freight cars and we got some new passenger coaches just brought from Springfield Mass. Ours is the first train over the road and we think it something to brag of. Overland to the Pacific Ocean. What would have been thought of the men who dared to predict it ten years ago! Promontory is 1084 miles from Omaha and 690 miles from Sacramento. Thus the Unions have built 394 miles more of road than the Centrals. Congress has established that the junction shall be Ogden, fifty miles East of here which will cause C.P. to purchase the fifty miles of the U.P. ----- **12:00 midnight.** We are just off after 8 hours delay. ----- Monument 21 miles from Promontory. I can't sleep for these cars shake about. This is the North End of Salt Lake. They tell us this is the last vestige of vegetation for five hundred miles.

Capt. Currier's journal does not end here. He continues to report his observations on the three-day journey to Sacramento aboard the Central Pacific. The final installment will appear in a future newsletter.