

# Placer-Sierra Railroad Heritage Society



<https://www.psrhs.org>

## July 2024 Newsletter

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*This image of UP 4014 "Big Boy" is from the Union Pacific web site. This special newsletter issue contains updates on the coming Big Boy visit to the Donner Route in July (see pp. 2&3).*

### Scheduled Events & Notices



**July 13** Colfax Museum Heritage Trail Tour – Museum and Caboose Open 10-4

#### **Union Pacific Big Boy 4014 Western Tour**

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

**July 23** PSRHS Monthly Meeting, 7PM – Special Program – Harpist Nancy Thym will play & sing Railroad Songs against a backdrop of sound-off railroad movies

**Aug 27** PSRHS Monthly Meeting, 7PM – Program In Development

**Sep 14-15** Colfax Railroad Days

*Preserving Railroad History on the Donner Pass Route*

# Placer-Sierra Railroad Heritage Society



## July 2024 Newsletter

### PSRHS MONTHLY MEETING JULY 23, 7PM

**July Program:** Our July program promises to be a special treat. PSRHS member **Nancy Thym** will present a program of songs about railroads and those who ride the trains. She will accompany herself on a 100 year old harp built by Melville Clark of New York.

Nancy is an Auburn native who now divides her time between Auburn and Germany. While in college she received a research travel grant to attend a harp-building class in Germany where she met her husband. She has since amassed a collection of over 50 restored 18th and 19th century harps as well as reconstructions of ancient, medieval and Renaissance harps. Her concert programs combining history, storytelling, harp music and singing, have been warmly received throughout the US, Canada and Europe. Nancy has combined her passion for riding trains with her training as a folklorist and oral historian to create this program of songs about conductors, convicts and hobos.

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.

**June Program Recap: All Things Big-Boy — Paul Greenfield** led a discussion of the upcoming Western Tour of the UP Big Boy 4014 including stops in Portola, Oroville, Roseville, Colfax and Truckee, along with PSRHS plans for the whistle stop in Colfax on July 14. He then provided interesting details about the history of UP 4014 and some of its design features before closing his program with his photos of the 2019 Big Boy run from Cheyenne to Promontory for the 150th anniversary of the transcontinental railroad completion.

### UP 4014 BIG BOY TOUR UPDATE

The UP 4014 “Big Boy” 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. A link to the detailed tour schedule can be found on our web site under the “**Big Boy**” Tour tab.

Some have asked which track Big Boy will be on when traveling from Oroville to Roseville and Rocklin to Colfax. UP’s steam web site indicates the planned route from Oroville to Roseville on July 11 is via the Sacramento Sub to Sacramento, then back to Roseville. Thus the tour will likely bypass Lincoln. Departing Roseville on Sunday July 14 the planned route is on Track 2 from Rocklin through North Auburn to Bowman. The map indicates it will stay on Track 2 to Colfax but we have heard it will arrive in Colfax on Track 1. The best advice we can offer at this time is to follow the progress of Big Boy on the UP real-time tracking map:

[www.up.com/heritage/steam/track/](http://www.up.com/heritage/steam/track/)

This tracking link and information updates about the tour route and activities at Colfax can be found on our web site, [www.psrhs.org](http://www.psrhs.org), under the “Big Boy” Tour tab.

We have heard that Big Boy will arrive in Colfax on Main Track 1 and stop at the Grass Valley Street grade crossing. Some downtown streets will be closed shortly before Big Boy’s arrival, including Grass Valley Street near the railroad crossing. A street closure map will be posted on our web site. If you want to see Big Boy in person in Colfax we recommend arriving early to find parking near the depot.

### COLFAX CABOOSE & MUSEUM OPEN

PSRHS will have a table at the caboose that weekend to promote the planned Railroad Heritage Park and regional railroad history. The morning of Big Boy’s visit the caboose and museum will be open along with food & craft booths and live music near the depot.

If you can’t be in Colfax in person, you can still watch Big Boy’s arrival on the Colfax webcam brought to you by PSRHS and Pacific Southwest Railcams. 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>

*See this month’s featured article starting on page 5*





### Passing Scene - UP 3985 Steam near Gold Run in 2002

Another visit of UP steam locomotives to the Donner Route occurred in 2002 when UP 844 and UP 3985 ventured west. This image of UP 3985 was captured near Gold Run. No. 3985 was a Challenger-class 4-6-6-4 articulated locomotive. At the time of its visit it was the largest operating steam locomotive in the world, a role it held until UP 4014 Big Boy was returned to operating condition.

Challenger locomotives were workhorses on the UP system until the need for more power on eastbound runs from Ogden into the Wasatch mountains led to development of the Big Boy locomotives. No. 3985 last operated in "regular" train service in 1957. It was retired in 1962 and stored in the roundhouse in Cheyenne, Wyoming, until 1975 when it was placed on display near the Cheyenne depot. A group of Union Pacific employees volunteered their services to restore the locomotive to running condition in 1981. In 2022, Union Pacific donated Challenger No. 3985 to the non-profit Railroading Heritage of Midwest America (RRHMA). (Details from UP.com Web Site)

*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:

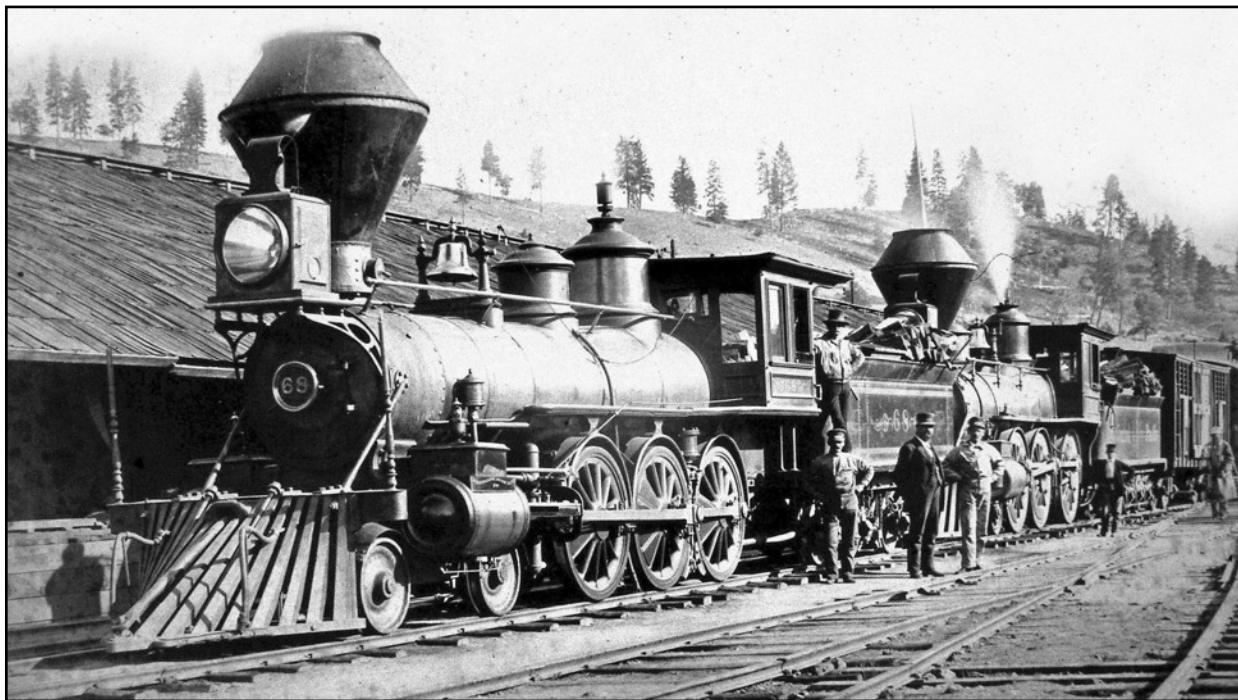
[roger.staab@psrhs.org](mailto:roger.staab@psrhs.org)





### From the Archives - Early Double-Header at Colfax

Two wood-burner 4-6-0 locomotives rest next to the original Central Pacific block-long freight shed in Colfax before continuing their westbound run, circa 1870. The lead locomotive #68, the Peoquop, was built for CP by McKay & Aldus in April 1868 and shipped by sea to the west coast. Note the ornate number painting on the tender. The locomotive was renumbered 1536 in 1891, then 2001 in 1901. As trains grew longer and passenger cars heavier in the early 1900's the 4-6-0 locomotives were gradually phased out of regular service. This locomotive was scrapped in 1933. The identifying markings on the second locomotive are not readable. The original CP wooden freight shed would gradually disappear after the new Colfax Freight Depot was carved out in 1881. Note the absence of trees on the hillsides in the background. While impressive-looking in this photo, these early locomotives would seem very tiny next to SP's later cab forwards and UP's Big-Boys. *Ken Yeo Collection, PSRHS*



**Accidents/Other Incidents.** *Sacramento Bee, Sep. 2, 1865.* **“ANOTHER LEAP FORWARD.** The editors of the Bee were invited, last night, to participate in an excursion this morning, but as stage-horses have no business at the races, we staid at home, while a train of joyful excursionists sped on their way towards the new terminus of the Pacific Railroad - Colfax - called in honor of the guest of the State, who left our Pacific shores for his Indiana home to-day on the steamer from San Francisco. The excursion train was in advance of the regular freight and passenger train, which only went as far as Clipper Gap, that place being occupied as a base of stage operations until the stables, etc., can be erected at Colfax. ... The well established reputation of the Pacific Railroad Company on former occasions of a similar character is sufficient guarantee that all enjoyed themselves. The completion of the road to a point fifty-five miles distant from this city is no trivial occurrence. The cars will begin their trips there about the 5th inst., ten days in advance of the time by which the company expected originally to have the travel to that point commence. It now remains to be seen how much they will gain on the date of their anticipated arrival at Dutch Flat ... by January 1, 1866.”



### 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, highlighting his observations of the Union Pacific Railroad construction from Evanston to Echo Canyon.*

*In the June Newsletter we presented Part 2 of his journal including his description of railroad construction obstacles yet to be overcome such as the completion of a major bridge at “Devils Gate”, before reaching Salt Lake City and the joining of the rails at Promontory.*

*This July Newsletter features Part 3 of the story as told through Capt. Currier's journal, describing 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.*

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### First Train West - Diary of Capt. John Currier - Part 3 – May 11-13, 1869

We rejoin Capt. Currier's journal notes at Humboldt Wells on the Central Pacific

Tuesday, May 11th, 1869

**P.M. At Humboldt Wells, Nevada Territory, 165 miles from Promontory.** We are making excellent time. There is a perceptible difference in the running time from that of the U.P. We go faster. Our car is a very fair for day cars. They are splendid, made after the latest pattern in Springfield, Mass. We have patent brakes, ventilation, etc. This is a “brand new” one, never used until we occupied it. They look fresh and clean, very much like the cars on the Boston and Maine running to Portland. Our friend who went to Salt Lake joined us yesterday. We came through several historic (to be) places last night such as “Red Dome Pass,” “Terrace Point”, “Desert Passage Creek”, “Loans” etc. We are getting into sage brush and sand. What an oasis is the Salt Lake Valley on this line. Leaving barren rocks and sterile soil, the traveller emerges into a land flowing with milk and honey, fertile soil and cultivated farms, [and] good houses but he flies across this valley rapidly, like lightning, and comes out again upon a still more barren woods and worthless soil. Upon this we are now and, as if anxious to get over it quick, our speed is interesting. We run thirty miles an hour with very few stops. The Centrals carry their water along with them in immense tanks for it is very difficult to obtain water here. The grading of this road is perfect; for the last 80 miles we have run as smooth as a floor. The road was built by “John Chinaman”, hundreds of whom are seen along the route. They attract much attention with their odd dress and cues dangling behind. They look strange to us. But they are faithful workmen and said to be infinitely superior to the Irish as laborers. It is growing hot and dusty; we are in the alkali and the dust sifts and blows. There is nothing grown, nothing but *miserable sage brush*; not much sleep for us tonight.



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## First Train West - Journal of Capt. John Currier, May 1869, Part 3 (continued)

Wednesday, May 12th, 1869

Passed a night of intense misery and discomfort. The dust was stifling. There was very little air and the alkali came into the car in *clouds* filling eyes, nose, mouth and ears. With all this we ran like lightning at a frightful speed. Made 200 miles last night. Some times our car, it being the rear one, would snap as if it was a whip. Several of the officers became alarmed at our speed. On, On, we rushed with not a stop. We are 324 [miles from] Sacramento. Oh this alkali and sage brush! We are sick and tired of it; beats anything on the U.P. Yet "*John*" is encamped along the road right in the sun, apparently contented and happy. The men (soldiers) amuse themselves calling each other "John Knapsack" "John Haversack" "John Canteen" etc. Got a very good breakfast here; washed a little of the alkali from my hair. Stopped merely an hour. On again. A far one glimpse of running water and green grass. All remark how well this road is built. Certainly fifty per cent better than the U.P. I should as soon live in Sahara as this desert. Even the sage grass is stunted and the sand blows round in heaps like ashes. No use trying to take notes until we stop again. The railroad men are pretty fast fellows. Our conductor is half drunk but we have a trusty engineer. We pay no attention to regular stations. Passed Elk last night, the most prominent station just now on the road as it is where passengers stop for White Pine, the celebrated mining district where so much silver is found. We whisked by without stopping.

**Wadsworth 180 miles from Sacramento.** --- The "C.P.'s" don't mean to keep us long on their road. They halt for nothing and seem impatient if we wish to stop for coffee. Somewhat different from the "U.P." This is a smart business place. We all made for the little river that runs along here and tried to get off some of the sticky dust but it burns and stings. Got an excellent dinner, including fresh brook mountain trout. Stores here are filled with goods and there was at least a dozen of Wells Fargo Stages, most of them waiting for passengers to Virginia City, Capitol of Nevada. We met here the Sacramento Express which left there early this morning. They brought late papers --- first we have seen --- and fruit such delicious fruit, strawberries, oranges, etc. All hands invested a little specie. Green backs no more (?) they are "no go" here. Everything is gold and silver. It sounds novel and pleasant to hear the rattle of coin once more, but tis anything *but* pleasant to we who get our pay in currency, for we have to change every dollar at a discount of 25 per cent. Every fellow bought a little silver to jingle in his pockets. A large and busy crowd was at the station. They are mostly miners and men who are after their fortunes. They are an eager grasping, looking set. We bid adieu here to the alkali and sand for many mile. I am informed we follow the Truckee river.

**7:30 P.M. At Truckee base of the Sierra Nevadas.** --- We have struck California and the air is glorious. From Truckee here [for] a distance of 70 miles we had a delightful run nearly all the way in sight of the river or along the base of a mountain; the air was cool, no dust, no heat. Oh it was a delightful change from the terrible ride of 24 hours preceding. Now we ride outside on a top with great comfort. Supper here and it certainly was good, fresh salmon and trout, beef steak, juicy and tender meat, broiled ham and baked potatoes, vegetables and fine cigars to smoke. We learn with regret that we have to go over the mountains tonight and thereby miss the finest scenery along the route. At any rate we can get a moon light view. At 8 o'clock we begin to ascend with two powerful engines --- 20 minutes --- We are now under the snow sheds. Just before entering I caught sight of Donner Lake quietly sleeping in the lap of the Highlands. The towering cliffs and peaks encircled about seeming like giant sentinels (*sic*) placed there by [the] Almighty to protect His Exquisite Creation against the ruder

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## First Train West - Journal of Capt. John Currier, May 1869, Part 3 (continued)

elements. The moon shining down placidly upon this beautiful lake with not a ripple on its silvery surface and so far, far below us made a wonderfully picturesque scene. Most of my travelling companions too timid to enjoy anything but sleep were soundly not sleeping but snoring. Those snow sheds are great pieces of engineering. It was only through this invention that the company could get over these mountains at all, for during the winter the road is blocked with snow --- mile after mile, mile after mile we rattle along under this wooden tunnel, the snow still six feet over our heads and dropping though in little melted showers. The timbers of which it is composed are three feet in diameter and extend eight or ten feet above the cars to give ample room for the smoke stacks. The roof is riveted, bolted and bound to resist the immense pressure of a large body of snow and the work seems as strong as granite. Lights and stations are scattered along in this tunnel, as it were, for they extend *30 miles!* Occasionally there is a break where the snow does not drift. We go up --- up past two or three stations. Swiftly through these mountain wilds we whirl all comfortable in our warm cars. The labor and expense upon these sheds is something incredible! We pass many cascades and mountain torrents which swollen by the melting snows come running down and fall splashing thousands feet beneath. In about three hours we pass the highest point which is 7000 feet above the sea and shutting off steam, commence over [sic]. *Not very gradual descents.* We skim precipices so dizzy many would not dare to look and get down nearly 6800 feet in a hundred miles. Down, down, down we go, with all our brakes set and every train hand at his post. In the night I can catch a glimpse of the sublime panorama now and then as the moon struggles out of her cloudy surroundings.

Thursday, May 13th, 1869

**At Rocklin 7 A.M.** We have been here two or three hours. This is a little one horse place but the trees are so green, the flowers so fresh, the air so invigorating we feel like shouting for joy. Got a poor breakfast but nobody seemed to mind it since we are so soon to be in San Francisco which we are all impatient to reach now. We came in from a little hunt fairly loaded down with flowers. The band played to enliven our spirits and all feel *good*. We have left the desert and come into a little paradise. California, we welcome you with your vine clad hills and delicious climate. We are only one hour from Sacramento.

**11 A.M. Sacramento.** Here we are in El Dorado a perfect little bower of loveliness. Again we are in the civilized world having spanned the continent. We are almost in sight of the Pacific Ocean. There are beautiful modern houses surrounded with fine gardens, orchards of all kinds of trees loaded with tropical fruits, children playing on the green, fountains sprouting up sparkling water, smooth turnpikes on which elegant turn carts are passing and repassing; flowers of every name, color and nature springing spontaneously from the willing earth in lavish profusion; ornamental shade trees; the air balmy as June and withal the sun shining gladly and brightly. Moving on we enter the town slowly, the scenes repeating themselves at every rod. Then we pass machine shops, factories, street cars. We see stores displaying rich stocks of goods. We pass crowds of well dressed men and women. We hear the busy hum of a large city. These bow to us; ladies wave their handkerchiefs, and all is enthusiasm. The soldiers have nearly all climbed up to the top of their cars to look on. They seem very much pleased. In fact all our spirits rise. We sing Hail Columbia and other national airs and there is general rejoicing although no one says he would have missed our trip over for a thousand dollars. It has been more like a grand picnic excursion than any thing else. Sacramento has 30,000 inhabitants, is the capitol of Cal. and a very thriving city. We find our boat ready to take us along down to San Francisco and we go aboard.