

Placer-Sierra Railroad Heritage Society



<https://www.psrhs.org>

August 2024 Newsletter

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The American Freedom Train led by SP 4449 visited Colfax in 1975, a year before the celebrated bi-centennial event. See the article on page 5 for more information on this run and comparison with the recent Big Boy visit. PSRHS Collection

Scheduled Events & Notices



Aug 27 PSRHS Monthly Meeting, 7PM – Program – Roger Staab - Home Movie clips from a family's summers at Towle circa 1930. See details on page 2.

Sep 14-15 Colfax Railroad Days (No Monthly Meeting in September). See page 2.

Oct 22 PSRHS Monthly Meeting, 7PM – Program in development

Nov 25 PSRHS Monthly Meeting, 7PM

No Meeting in December

Preserving Railroad History on the Donner Pass Route

Placer-Sierra Railroad Heritage Society



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PSRHS MONTHLY MEETING AUGUST 27, 7PM

August Program: Roger Staab will present **A Trip Back in Time to Towle circa 1930 - The Devendorf Home Movies**. Return to the now forgotten Towle Brothers company town near Alta and view summer getaways at an elegant house built among the trees by George Towle in 1886. Roger will show home movie clips of family fun in this rural paradise including views of the house and grounds, cab-forward locomotives steaming past Towle, swimming in Canyon Creek and other family activities, along with visits to a nearby railroad underpass being constructed for a realignment of Hwy 40, and railroad recovery action after a major derailment 3 miles west of Cisco near Crystal Lake. Eileen O'Hara from San Francisco recently donated digitized copies of the home movies to PSRHS on behalf of Ted Galante, the Devendorfs' great-grandson. Roger will outline how PSRHS acquired the movies and decode the link between the Devendorfs and George & Frances Towle who built the 1880's house.

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.

July Program Recap: Acclaimed harpist and PSRHS member **Nancy Thym** presented an entertaining program of songs about railroads and those who ride the trains, accompanying herself on a 100 year old harp built by Melville Clark of New York. She embellished her performance with interesting stories about the songs and the people who wrote them. She also discussed her collection of restored harps along with details on how harps are tuned for different songs and subtleties such as what floor colors to avoid when playing a harp.

UP 4014 VISITS PLACER COUNTY

Most/all of you know that UP 4014 Big Boy visited our area July 12-14. Very large crowds were on hand in Roseville to see the locomotive up close and take in displays presented by UP to accompany the engine.

You are also probably aware that the train suffered an accident and delay on the trip from Roseville to Colfax and Truckee when it hit a tree that had fallen on the tracks a short distance east of Auburn's Nevada Street station. On-site repairs got it going again after a 3 hour delay, causing UP officials to decide to cancel planned stops in Colfax and Truckee. An estimated 3000-5000 railfans were waiting at or near Colfax. As the delay lengthened the crowd dwindled somewhat, but the faithful were finally treated to a quick view of the impressive machine as it thundered through town. Nearly all still on hand felt it was worth the wait as it steamed past the cheering crowd shortly after 2pm.

Page 3 of this newsletter shows some photos captured off our Colfax webcam as Big Boy approached. A video clip of it arriving in Colfax (with sound) can be viewed at

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f3Ahf8JZp54>

COLFAX RAILROAD DAYS

Colfax will hold its annual Railroad Days celebration Sept. 14-15. Organizers of this year's event are striving for more emphasis on railroading and history, with numerous model layouts, Union Pacific equipment (we hope) and history walking tours. PSRHS plans to staff a table at or near the caboose, and assist with staffing the caboose. If enough volunteers come forward, the PSRHS table may be relocated to the passenger depot.

The event will run from 10am-5pm both days. If you can help staff either the caboose or the PSRHS table please email your time and date preferences to roger.staab@psrhs.org or swendm@icloud.com.

COLFAX WEBCAM

A reminder that the Southwest Railcams/PSRHS Colfax webcam remains available to watch train activity through Colfax. You can review up to 12 previous hours of recorded images when you view the camera. The webcam 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 on page 5



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Passing Scene - UP 4014 Big Boy Arriving in Colfax

UP #4014 Big Boy did make it to Colfax for its scheduled visit on July 14, but nearly 3 hours late and without the scheduled stop. The many faithful who waited at Colfax for its arrival were instead treated to a speedy run-by of the town as the train made up time in order to reach Sparks at a decent hour. Our Colfax web cam was primed and ready to capture the train's arrival, which can be seen in the sequence of screen shots below that were captured from the webcam recording. *Southwest Railcams/PSRHS Colfax webcam images.*



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 - Train Derailment at Crystal Lake

The newspaper article at the bottom of this page describes a serious train derailment that occurred in 1932 near Crystal Lake 3 miles west of Cisco. A mail train derailed sending one Railway Post Office (RPO) car down a steep embankment. For this particular accident, we are fortunate to have photos that show the scene after the derailment, thanks to home movies PSRHS recently acquired. The home movies further show two railroad cranes working to put a derailed car back on its wheels and track. Our August program will feature home movie scenes of this derailment site and cleanup as well as other railroad scenes and family vacation activities in and around the old company town of Towle. See page 2 for more details on the August program.



Screen shots captured from home movies provided to PSRHS by Ted Galante and Eileen O'Hara.



Accidents/Other Incidents. *The Press Tribune, Sept. 14, 1932.* **“R.R. MAIL CLERKS NARROWLY ESCAPE DEATH IN WRECK.** Five railway mail clerks were carried 1,200 feet in a twisting, plunging mail coach Monday from the Southern Pacific Company Overland Route tracks near Crystal Lake into a canyon, when seven mail and express coaches derailed. All were injured, none seriously. The derailment, first major traffic mishap in months on the Sacramento division of the Southern Pacific, occurred at 2:25 a.m., one mile west of Crystal Lake and about three miles west of Cisco. The train, No. 9, is primarily a speedy mail and express train, but carries passenger coaches at the rear. No passenger coaches derailed and no passengers or members of the train and engine crews were injured... Reports indicate that [the locomotive] struck a broken rail, further splitting it, causing the mail and express coaches behind to leave the tracks after the locomotive and tender safely passed the spot. The car in which the five mail clerks were injured was known as the “working mail car.”... It is estimated by the occupants that the car turned over fully eight or ten times in its mad descent of 1,200 feet from the railroad to almost on the Route 4 (sic) state highway ...”





The Great Train Race of 1975

Editor's note: The following article was found in a copy of the June 1975 issue of Steam Echoes, a publication of Auburn-based Sierra Mountain Railroad Club. The article was used as a teaser for the July meeting of the group and a program of photos of SP #4449 leading a trial run of the American Freedom Train over the Donner Route. The article tells the story of an event from an earlier time that generated public response similar to the recent visit of UP #4014 Big Boy to the route.

The Great Train Race of 1975 (*Steam Echoes, June 1975*) (SP #4449 Leading the American Freedom Train Trial Run)

The American Freedom Train began to materialize in late June when one of the steam engines destined to pull the historic symbol of our bi-centennial rolled south out of Portland, Oregon. Aboard the 4-car test train over parts of the run, were Ken Yeo, Barry Garland, Hans Moeller, and other V.I.P.'S. Howard and Mrs. Yeo rode it from Sacramento to Sparks on his birthday — what a way to celebrate! Crowds greeted the train at all stops and many of our members photographed it.

Ex-DAYLIGHT Engine 4449, brought out of retirement and rebuilt with loving care by enthusiastic steam fans, including some of our members, stepped lively on her way down from Portland. She stayed at Sacramento all day Sunday, June 22, posing for pictures in her new red-white & blue dress.

But June 23rd, Monday, was really her heyday!

On Monday the 4449 headed up over Donner Summit escorted by a wild caravan of some 200 cars, her Mars headlight winking at the admirers. At every possible spot where pavement came close to Theodore Judah's route avid railfans crowded, cluttered and crammed roads, shouting, "Get out of my picture!" She sounded her chime whistle for all of them and chomped her rhythmic exhaust for the tape recorders. At Auburn and Colfax she was greeted by several hundred people. Just east of Colfax 100 cars parked on the freeway illegally as their drivers watched her cross Long Ravine Bridge. At Dutch Flat local citizens waiting in lawn chairs waved American flags. Her deep-toned whistle answered, reverberating among the hills.



American Freedom Train Trial Run in Colfax, 1975
PSRHS Collection

All the way up the "Hill" railfans banged fenders and stumbled over rocks to film her striding past. Two railway workers from England allowed she was a "real beauty, y'know". Never in S.P. history have so many rail buffs descended on the property and disappeared in a few minutes! The Highway Patrol was flabbergasted — before they could arrest anyone, everybody was gone! Engine 4449, like a gracious lady, stepped out in her platform shoes and gave everybody a good show. Her hot cylinders even set off the hotbox detector at Magra! Everybody was happy — including the Eastman Kodak Co.

