

Placer-Sierra Railroad Heritage Society



<https://www.psrhs.org>

September 2024 Newsletter

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SP's diesel-powered streamliner the City of San Francisco made its debut in 1936. See the article on pages 5-6 from the March/April 1986 SP Bulletin that describes the train and its features.

Scheduled Events & Notices



Sep 14-15 Colfax Railroad Days (No Monthly Meeting in September).
– Visit the PSRHS table and tour the caboose. See page 2.

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

Nov 8-10 Northern Nevada Model Railroad Layout Tour
– For details contact Jim Petro at jpetro328@gmail.com

Nov 25 PSRHS Monthly Meeting, 7PM

No Meeting in December

Preserving Railroad History on the Donner Pass Route

Placer-Sierra Railroad Heritage Society



September 2024 Newsletter

NO MEETING IN SEPTEMBER

JOIN US AT COLFAX RAILROAD DAYS

MEETINGS RESUME IN OCTOBER

August Program Recap: Roger Staab presented **A Trip Back in Time to Towle circa 1930 - The Devendorf Home Movies**. The movies contain scenes of family vacations at the impressive home built in 1886 by George Towle, one of the Towle Brothers who developed the company town, along with railroad scenes of trains passing by the property. PSRHS obtained the movies from Ted Galante, a descendant of the Devendorf family, with an assist from Eileen O'Hara. Ted also donated a scrapbook kept by his mother Jane of her memories of time spent at Towle. The scrapbook revealed photos and family history that tell the final chapter about George and Frances Towle's house after Towle Brothers Company was sold in 1902. The movies include scenes of the underpass being built near the Towle property for realignment of old Hwy 40 in 1932, and recovery operations from a train derailment west of Cisco that also happened in 1932.

See our web site for updates on future meeting topics and directions to the meeting location.

BOARD MEMBERS REVIEW 16MM FILM FOOTAGE

Members of the PSRHS Board of Directors met on a recent Saturday to review contents of a number of vintage 16mm movies we have acquired from the Stan Kistler and Ken Yeo collections. Using an editing machine to determine the subject matter allowed us to categorize the movies into three groups:

- Home Movies/Vacations;
- Primarily Railroad but not NorCal or our area;
- Primarily Railroad in our area of interest.

We will likely dispose of movies in the first two categories and keep only those railroad movies that pertain to our region. Those that we retain will need to be viewed in more detail using a 16mm projector to determine the exact contents. Railroad photographer Al Phelps took

some of the movies. We will try to identify the originator of each movie that we retain, and digitize those movies of significant interest.

Board members are also developing inventory lists of books, documents and photos that the society has acquired over the years. Duplicate books and items that are not pertinent to our area of interest are being identified for possible sale at public events such as Colfax Railroad Days. We plan to post many of our key documents and photos on our web site, thus making them available to researchers of local railroad history.

COLFAX RAILROAD DAYS SEPT. 14-15

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 railroad history walking tours conducted by Roger Staab. Volunteers will staff a PSRHS information table next to the caboose, and open the caboose to visitors. The 45-minute history walking tours will start there at 11 and 2 on Saturday and 11 on Sunday.

One of our displays will show plans for the proposed Colfax Railroad Heritage Park to be located in the open area next to the Colfax Passenger Depot. Plans call for moving the caboose from its present location to the area near the Amtrak platform. It will be joined there by a Nevada County Narrow Gauge flat car, a speeder motor car, and other selected railroad equipment.

On an adjacent table visitors will find surplus railroad books, magazines, videos and other items that are available free to the public, compliments of PSRHS, but with donations welcome to help defray costs of moving the caboose. A donation box will be located next to the two tables for visitors to offer their contribution to help finance the move.

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

See this month's featured article on page 5





Passing Scene - Loram/GREX MOW in Colfax

This Georgetown Rail Equipment Co. GREX SPS 6500 maintenance of way (MOW) equipment was spotted in Colfax on May 3. The self-propelled unit is used to clear used ties and other debris from the right-of-way. GREX merged with Loram in 2020. The Loram web site provides this description: “With the SlotMachine® and the SPS Self-Powered Slot®, mobile work platforms, you can tackle a wide range of jobs faster and more efficiently than ever before. Quickly maneuver either machine into position and begin ditch cleaning at up to 250 tons per hour, offloading aggregate at up to 450 tons per hour, or handling any number of other materials with similar agility. Both consist of a series of short gondolas without the end bulkheads. An onboard excavator is free to move the entire length of the joined cars (up to 378 feet) while seated safely and securely on the floor. Material gets loaded the full length of the platform, so there’s no lost time switching out cars. Plus, setup and lockdown take only minutes, allowing you to make the most of limited work windows. “

*Image at right and equipment information
above from Loram web site
loram.com/maintenance-of-way/*



*Photo above and right at Colfax
by Roger Staab*



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 - New Underpass for Hwy 40

Our August program featured Devendorf family home movies taken at Towle circa 1930. Included were scenes of an underpass being constructed under the SP tracks near Towle in 1932, allowing a realigned Hwy 40 to pass under the tracks and eliminate the highway's at-grade crossing at Alta. During this same period at-grade crossings were eliminated by the tunnel at Newcastle, new underpasses at Lincoln way in Auburn and at Emigrant Gap, and rerouted road at Gold Run. The images below show temporary wood supports being removed after the earth was excavated below the tracks at Towle and new concrete abutments constructed. Steel I-beams soon spanned the gap between the abutments to support the tracks. Today a piece of old Hwy 40 still goes through this underpass, while I-80 now passes over the tracks at both Towle and Emigrant Gap.



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



Accidents/Other Incidents. *Placer Herald. Oct. 17, 1931.* “**State Highway Notes.** The Railroad Commission has received an application from the State Department of Public Works asking authority to construct an underpass at the crossing of the Victory Highway [aka Hwy 40 - ed.] and the Southern Pacific Railroad Company's tracks near Towle, Placer County. The application states that the separation of grades by an underpass structure at this point will remove through traffic from existing crossings at grade at Alta and east of Gold run and also from an existing timber overhead crossing west of Gold Run...”

Lincoln News Messenger, Dec. 3, 1931. “**Towle Underpass Gets Approval of R.R. Commission.** The Railroad Commission has authorized the construction of an underpass, separating the grade of the Victory Highway and the Ogden route of Southern Pacific Company at a point near Towle, Placer County. The authorization is issued on application of the State Department of Public Works which proposes to relocate the state highway between Gold Run and Airport [Blue Canyon - ed.], Placer County, a distance of approximately eleven and one-half miles, which will involve crossing under the Southern Pacific Company's main line track near Towle.”





Editor's Note: The following story celebrating the 50th anniversary of SP's new "City of San Francisco" passenger service appeared in the March/April 1986 issue of the Southern Pacific Bulletin.



The first "City of San Francisco," which began service on Jun 14, 1936, is shown at Colfax, Calif.

Sailing on the "City"

"To ride in it gives you the thrill of a lifetime ...," observed a reporter from the San Jose News when SP introduced its first diesel-powered train, the ultra-modern "City of San Francisco," on June 14, 1936.

Advertisements proclaimed the streamlined service might be as "fast as the wind." The lightweight, articulated 11-car diesel-electric flyer could streak across the country at speeds up to 95 miles an hour to make the 2,263-mile run in 39 hours and 45 minutes – cutting about 19 hours from the fastest times between the Pacific Coast and Chicago. SP, Union Pacific and Chicago & North Western jointly operated the service that initially made five roundtrips a month.

The "City of San Francisco" heralded a new era in rail travel over the shortest route between San Francisco and Chicago. Its 170 passengers (84 in the four Pullman sleeping cars and 86 in the two coaches) referred to their departure days as "sailing dates" as though they were embarking on a voyage.

During its 35 years of operation, the "City of San Francisco" is remembered for its fine equipment, fast schedule and two dramatic events: a tragic derailment and a bitter winter storm that stranded the train for three days.

The first "City," built by Pullman Standard Car Manufacturing Company in Chicago, cost \$1,150,000 and offered the newest and finest developments in streamlined train design. SP President Angus McDonald praised the new train before its maiden run: "This train is a spectacular example of what the railroads of America are doing in applying the latest developments in science and engineering to many phases of their operations."

Constructed of lightweight aluminum alloy, except for the two power cars which were made of special high tensile steel, the "City" weighed 530 tons – approximately half as much as a conventional

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Sailing on the COSF (cont'd)

train with the same number of cars. Articulated cars gave the streamlined train the exterior appearance of being one continuous projectile and eliminated slack-action. The air-conditioned train with indirect lighting, featured sponge rubber cushioning, instead of springs, on all seats, chairs, couches and mattresses in the berths. A stewardess, who was a registered graduate nurse, looked after the welfare of all passengers. The diner-lounge boasted a built-in radio. A coach-buffet car served special low priced meals for coach passengers.

On January 2, 1938, new equipment was introduced. The \$1.5 million new edition --- "the largest, most powerful, most beautiful and most luxurious streamliner ever built" --- was nearly a quarter of a mile long, had 17 cars, carried 222 passengers and was capable of a top speed of 110 miles per hour. It was powered by six giant engines that could generate 5400 horsepower – at the time, the most powerful diesel locomotive in the world. The engine was nicknamed the "Queen Mary."

The history of the "City of San Francisco," however, is not all superlatives. Tragedy struck on August 12, 1939, when the westbound "City of San Francisco" derailed near Harney, Nevada killing 24 people and injuring 117. The wreck was caused by malicious tampering with the track. Track spikes and angle bars connecting two rails at a joint were removed and the receiving rail of the joint was moved nearly five inches toward the center of the track, then spiked to the ties in this misplaced position. The misaligned rail had been painted and the broken joint covered with a tumbleweed to prevent the engineer from detecting it. An intensive investigation was conducted by SP Police and other agencies, including the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and a \$10,000 reward was offered. The individuals responsible were never caught and the case remains unsolved to this date.

The winter of 1952 was one of the worst in northern California's history. Snow was 210 inches deep outside the railroad's snowsheds at Norden on January 13, 1952 when the westbound "City of San Francisco" stalled 15 miles to the west in a raging blizzard. The slow-moving train stopped, trapping 196 passengers and 30 crew members. For three days railroad workers waged an around the clock battle to rescue the train. Snowplows attempted to reach the train, but were stranded. One snowplow was overturned by an avalanche and its operator killed. Although passengers huddled in blankets from the cold and dined on emergency bean rations, no one perished. Once the passengers and crew were removed, it took another three days to free the train and the stranded snowplows from the snow and ice.

"It was an inspiring demonstration of teamwork that wrote another epic chapter in the history of Southern Pacific," said SP President D.J. Russell.

The "City of San Francisco" continued operating until Amtrak took over the nation's passenger service in 1971. Then it was combined with the "California Zephyr" to become the new "San Francisco Zephyr."

