

# Placer-Sierra Railroad Heritage Society

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## February 2025 Newsletter

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*Our February program will revisit Southern Pacific Snow-fighting over Donner Pass. See pages 2 & 4 for more details. Dick Dorn Photo*

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## Scheduled Events & Notices



**Feb 25 PSRHS Monthly Meeting, 7PM – Program - Dick Dorn  
- Southern Pacific Snow Fighting on Donner Pass**

**Mar 25 PSRHS Monthly Meeting, 7PM – Program - Brendan Compton Video  
- Panel Discussion on Norden Operations**

**Apr 22 PSRHS Monthly Meeting, 7PM – Program Under Development**

Your annual PSRHS membership helps fund purchase of historic photos, publication of railroad history documents, field trips, and other historic preservation activities.

*Preserving Railroad History on the Donner Pass Route*

### PSRHS MONTHLY MEETING

**FEBRUARY 25, 7PM**  
**AUBURN VETERANS MEMORIAL HALL**

**February Program:** PSRHS member Dick Dorn presents **Southern Pacific Snow Fighting on Donner Pass**. Dick photographed SP's snow removal operations beginning in the early 1970's right through to the merger with Union Pacific in 1996. After befriending Jim Mahon in the early 1980's he was able to gain an insider's view of these operations. He was accepted as one of the crew and spent many hours riding flangers, spreaders and rotaries with camera in hand. He was never shy about slapping snowshoes on and spending hours at trackside even in the worst of blizzard conditions. His program will feature plenty of action photos of all of SP's snow removal arsenal (sample on page 4).

Dick Dorn has been photographing railroads for over 60 years. His early interests were his hometown railroad Sacramento Northern in Yuba City, the Western Pacific and Southern Pacific. He has written over 35 magazine articles featuring his photography. He co-authored two books "Diesels Over Donner" with Richard Steinheimer, and "72-82 the Final Decade of the Western Pacific". He is best known for his winter photography on Donner Pass featured in this presentation. He taught elementary school for 35 years in Yuba City, where he now lives with his dog Jungo on 10 acres.

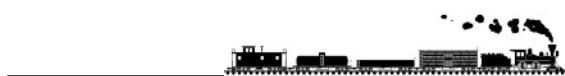
Our meetings are open to all who are interested. See our web site for updates on future meeting topics and directions to the meeting location.

**January Program Recap:** Don Anderson, Roger Staab and Chuck Spinks showcased the **1947-49 Freedom Train: Its Objectives, Whistle-Stop Tour & Regional Reaction**. They provided a detailed look at the nearly forgotten 1947-49 Freedom Train that visited all 48 states from Sept. 1947-Jan. 1949, including its objectives and features. As a bonus, Don Anderson related his personal memories and photos of the train's stop in Fresno in March 1948. Also highlighted was the train's stop in Sacramento later in March.

### JANUARY BOARD MEETING

The PSRHS Board of Directors met prior to the January meeting. Items discussed included:

1. PSRHS Future Presentations
  - February 2025 - Dick Dorn's SP Snow Fighting on Donner Pass
  - March 2025 - Brendan Compton's Norden Area Historic video with Q&A session
2. Proposed Colfax Railroad Heritage Park
  - Dick Dorn approved as PSRHS representative to the project's Board of Directors headed by Ric Nepil (Colfax Area Historical Society)
  - Nevada County Narrow Gauge Museum is providing a representative on the Board
  - A minimum of three board members is required
3. Colfax Station Fence Painting
  - Paul Greenfield proposed we consider a painting project to paint the wrought iron fencing between the Colfax Depot and RR tracks. Goal is to further our good relationship with the City of Colfax.
  - The Colfax City Manager, Ron Walker, wanted this done by UP last year but UP responded that the fence was not their responsibility
  - We will need 8-10 volunteers to knock this off in a timely manner. A nice, spring day was suggested
  - ACTION: Paul Greenfield contact Ron Walker about City paying for paint and brushes. PSRHS will perform painting if enough volunteers come forward..
4. Miscellaneous
  - Colfax Area Historical Society is working on an operating G-scale layout and train in the Colfax station museum. Jim Wood has donated a G-scale model of Colfax Local to PSRHS, who is loaning the model to CAHS for display at the museum. • ACTION: Roger Staab to coordinate with the Historical Society on the G-scale project
  - 1947-1949 American Freedom Train brochure has been added to our website - Roger
  - Chuck has several books that may fetch a good price for extra club funds



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## Passing Scene - Pennsylvania Pullman Frank Thomson in Colfax

The Pennsylvania Pullman car Frank Thomson was spotted in Colfax on July 2, 2024, an increasingly rare sight on eastbound Amtrak. Information posted on Trainorders.com indicates that the Frank Thomson was built for the account of the Pennsylvania Railroad Company by the Pullman Company (Lot 6792, Plan 4134) as part of a seven-car order. The car contains 2 drawing rooms, 1 compartment, 1 bedroom, a buffet, and an observation and lounge section. The order was built by Pullman Company 2/49 to 3/49. Facebook posts indicate the Frank Thomas was being offered for private excursions by Keystone Rail Tours in 2024 – a west coast tour in July and other tour opportunities in November. (facebook.com/KeystonePullman/) *Roger Staab photos*



### 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 - SP Snow Fighting Over Donner*

Our February program will feature Dick Dorn's photos of Southern Pacific equipment and crews in action as they fought to keep rail traffic moving during the harsh winter conditions over Donner Pass. He got up close and personal with train crews performing this ritual winter task on SP's Sierra Crossing. Dick's photo below shows SP's rotary plow SP920 in action during a heavy snow year. His program promises many more images and insights of SP's fight to keep trains moving over the Sierra in their yearly battle with the Snow King.



**Accidents/Other Incidents.** *The Roseville Press, Jan. 8, 1940.* **"RAILROAD SENDS OUT FLANGERS, ROTARY TODAY - Storm Brings Season's First Battle with High Sierra Snow.** Local crews of the Southern Pacific company yesterday began their regular winter tussle with the snows of the high Sierra - a battle that is no fun in railroading but one that brings heaps of satisfaction to farmers and winter sports devotees. Reports from the round house indicated that railroad men have been taking the dry winter and lack of snow in the higher altitudes with their fingers crossed. The fire trains after an unprecedented stay in the hills had just about been safely tucked away for the winter when the flangers were slicked up ready for service. Three of them went out yesterday. The first rotary plow of the season went out this afternoon. Orders had been to keep them warmed up ready for action and the call came shortly after noon today, indicating that the present storm is a bit more than a flurry in the higher elevations."



### Anticipated Rich Trade Vanished after Rails Met

*This article appeared in the Colfax Record Golden Spike Centennial Edition, May 8, 1969  
Information in the article was provided by Southern Pacific Company*

Visions the directors of the Pacific railroad had of a lucrative business from two immediate sources, Oriental trade and traffic connected with Nevada Mines, did not materialize. The very month the rails were joined the French opened the Suez Canal wiping out hope for Far East trade and Nevada silver mining went into a slump.

In order to gain back the Oriental trade, in 1872 the Occidental and Oriental Steamship Company was founded. It competed with the Pacific Mail, a steamship line which earlier had worked harmoniously with the transcontinental railroads, but later decided to route its traffic to the Isthmus of Panama for transshipment to the East Coast. Central Pacific's wharves were placed at the disposal of the steamship line while the ocean carrier agreed to establish monthly service. A compromise was then reached with the Pacific Mail and the two lines established service with a sailing every 15 days. (The Pacific Mail was finally purchased by Central Pacific in 1880.) Vessels sailed from San Francisco directly to Yokohama and then to Hong Kong, returning by the same route. Round trips took about three months. Three steamers were on line in each direction at all times.

The ships carried from 30 to 68 first class passengers, but far more important were the cargoes which generated three times as much revenue eastbound as westbound. In order of their importance cargoes were tea, silk, merchandise, rice, hemp, sugar and opium. Westbound, flour was the most important.

But the Big Four realized that local traffic – which produced the bulk of their business – was dependent upon people and the railroad used a variety of means to attract settlers and vacationers to California.

Early Colonization. A typical Central Pacific ad in 1875 read “Ho for California! The Laborer's Paradise! Salubrious Climate, Fertile Soil, Large Labor Returns, No Severe Winters, No Lost Time, No Blight or Insect Pests.”

The Central Pacific had promptly extended a rail line into the San Joaquin Valley in 1869. The area was practically unoccupied but the Big Four envisioned the country dotted with cities and its rich acreage cultivated by settlers who would be attracted by the railroad. Towns were platted and lots were opened for settlement. The price of land “in Southern California situated between San Francisco, Los Angeles and Fort Yuma,” according to other ads, ranged from \$1.00 to \$10.00 per acre, according to location.

Lecturers with lantern slides carried the word of the golden opportunity to countless audiences in this country and Europe. The railroad passenger department put out various booklets, “The Prune Primer, The Cotton Primer,” etc. – about the many possible crops that could be raised in the territory.

In 1888, '89, '90 and '91, Southern Pacific sent five-car trains through the Middle West with exhibits of California products and agricultural displays by California counties, these trains being known as “California on Wheels.” Joseph B. Lauck, special passenger agent who worked out the itineraries for these trips, related in 1924; “California was considered by many Easterners in those days as the wild and woolly West, and in a little town in Missouri a woman called at the train saying she had heard that the wife of a railroad representative was aboard and she wanted to see a real live woman from California.”

The exhibits of actual products told their own story and the scheme was a big factor in attracting home seekers to the Pacific Coast states.