



Roseville TRAINS

story by Lorraine Barber

Taking a morning stroll along the beautiful walkways in Roseville is one of the ways you can hear the whistles and rumbling noises of the trains getting ready to leave the railyard. A flutter fills my heart with excitement as I hear the train's whistle and the metal rails creaking. I can't help but hum the famous words from a song by Johnny Cash: "I hear the train 'a-comin', it's rolling round the bend," known as the Folsom Prison Blues. The massive locomotive pushes the railcar along the rail track to exit the Roseville railyard. Roseville's history centers around the growth of the railroad as it became the hub for three railroad companies. As the train whistles again, my feet move faster with the rhythm of the sounds from the locomotive moving onward.

Trains have influenced Roseville's beginnings since the late 1800's. The railroad arrived in Placer County in 1861, and Roseville's name was first known as Junction because of the infamous "Y." Trains would change their direction at the "Y" and travel either East or West. The city of Junction was vital for the railroad since it was a significant hub for the railroad industry. Junction was renamed Roseville, as the Central Pacific Railroad and California Central Railroad established a large roundhouse in the railyard and worksheds for laborers to repair the trains. Railroad workers bought homes near the workyard and raised their families in the community. As Roseville grew, it became a center for entertainment and commerce.

The Southern Pacific railroad originally was centralized in the nearby town of Rocklin. In 1906, Southern Pacific moved their headquarters and roundhouse to Roseville. Several families moved their entire house from Rocklin to Roseville, and this was known as the "Big Move." Workers lifted the house onto large logs and pulled the home over to a new parcel in Roseville with a tractor. Citizens in Rocklin hung a large poster with a funeral notice at the Southern Pacific Railroad roundhouse to announce the move to Roseville as their town's "death" due to the "Big Move."

The Southern Pacific Railroad roundhouse took two years to disassemble and relocate to the Roseville railyard. With three railroads in Roseville, the population began to explode from 1906 to 1910 as Rocklin grieved for years after the "Big Move." Rocklin's economic downturn recovered slowly with the growth of the quarry industry.

Men traveled from East and West to find their riches in gold. The prospects of getting rich from the Gold Rush faded when they arrived. Jobs were scarce in the West; many took any job they could get, and immigrants worked on the railroad. Men from different cultures and countries worked on the railroad together. Chinese and European workers undertook the grueling task of laying hundreds of miles of train tracks. Their back-breaking work laid the railroads to connect the East with the West. It took workers six years to lay railroad tracks to join the rails from the

East to the West, famously known as the Golden Spike.

In the West, railroad owners found the labor force limited and hired many Chinese workers. Europeans encountered the first Chinese workers when they arrived in the West. The Chinese were small in stature, strong, and healthy due to traditional cultural remedies such as boiling water for tea and herbal remedies for common ailments. Cholera and typhoid fever were common illnesses in the region due to the questionable purity of the local water resources. Drinking the water without knowing what contaminants were in the water could cause severe illness. Some workers substituted beer or whiskey for water, and the side effects of drinking alcohol as a substitute for water became a determinant. Chinese workers seldom drank whiskey or misbehaved and were self-disciplined.

Over 10,000 Chinese workers risked their lives to build the railroad. The railroad companies hired the Chinese to clear the way for the railroad in the Sierra Nevada Mountains. They hand-dug over 15 tons of granite by blasting rock and physically moving massive boulders in cliff-hanger situations. They worked nonstop into the winter in hazardous conditions. The Chinese were known to be industrious; at one time, the Chinese laborers held a strike for better wages and received additional wages but then charged a higher rent than the other workers in the company housing.

When the Chinese arrived in America, they looked different than everyone else. The Chinese men had braided long hair and their heads shaved, as was required for their cultural tradition. European settlers heckled and criticized the Chinese because of their appearance, cultural differences, and practices. European miners would spread unfounded rumors about Chinese treachery. The Chinese lived in small communities away from the main work camp to avoid racism and discrimination.

The Chinese contribution is valuable because, without the tenacity and strength of their work, the Transcontinental Railroad would have taken several more years to complete. The railroad tracks throughout our region took an army of immigrants and residents to build; Asian, Black, Hispanic, Native American, European, and "the forgotten" built the railroad and aided in establishing the city of Roseville.

Roseville officially became a city in 1909; by 1920, the railyard was the headquarters for three railroad companies. The railyard continued to expand with additional tracks and several more work buildings. The railyard was the largest yard west of the Mississippi River. The Transcontinental Railroad was established in 1920 and began exporting agricultural products from the Sacramento Valley.

As you cruise around Roseville, you may cross PFE Road; PFE is an abbreviation for the Pacific Fruit Express. In 1908, it was the world's largest Ice-Manufacturing plant. There were several two- and -three-story buildings with a large storage capacity of 11,000 tons of ice. In the early 1900s, ice blocks were in high demand to preserve perishables during railcar transport.

By 1929, the PFE could service over 250 railcars at one time. The

need for ice blocks increased, and the plant could hold 30,000 tons of ice. Workers would load up to 2,700 tons of ice on a busy day into the railcars. Refrigerated cars were called "reefers." Since they kept the fruit and vegetables cool during transport, it was vital for California's agricultural commerce. Roseville earned the nickname "Ice Capital" since 2.5 million tons of ice were processed in post-war 1946.

During the 1960's the wood railcars were replaced with "metal reefers." The new railcars were insulated and improved with new refrigeration, and ice blocks were no longer used to cool the railcars. Modern railcars with excellent refrigeration were the beginning of the end for the PFE plant. Ice production continued until 1973, when all operations ceased, and the plant was removed in 1974.

After demolishing the plant, the PFE bridge was relocated over Dry Creek near the Veterans' Memorial Hall in Royer Park. You can enjoy the historic PFE bridge as you take your morning walk across it, as it is the only memory of the PFE ice plant.

In the founding days of Roseville, the Train Depot became a popular rest stop for travelers and was known for town events, gatherings, and entertainment. You can tour the Roseville Depot building located at 201 Pacific Street, currently operated by Amtrak. The Roseville railyard has over one hundred railcars today; several railcars and locomotives are outdoors waiting for repair, and some are inside the worksheds. There is a small parking lot with a viewing area on Church Street, across from the church in old Roseville.

The train whistle is a historical message for all residents throughout the Roseville community. The sounds of the whistle and chugging of the locomotive are sweet messages of the past and remind us to appreciate those who worked hard to make a living and build a future. Roseville has always been a proud community of diversity and historical significance from the beginning of the railroads to the present day. When you start your day and hear the whistle blow, your feet suddenly move faster, and as you hum your favorite train melody, appreciate the sounds of history through the magic of Roseville's trains.

Trains to love:

- Napa Wine Train
- Shunk Train
- Snow Train
- Surfliner

Movies with trains

- Polar Express
- Throw Mama from the Train (comedy)
- Unstoppable
- Murder on the Orient Express

Books

- Girl on a Train by Paula Hawkins
- The Great Railroad Evolution by Christian Wolmar
- Water For Elephants by Sara Gruen
- 4:50 from Paddington by Agatha Christie