

COLFAX COBBLESTONES

October 2025

Issue 37.3

museum@colfaxhistory.org

colfaxhistory.org

facebook.com/groups/colfax.california.museum

(530) 346-8599

Forest Fire Menaces Sanatoria

The 1923 Forest Fire That Threatened the TB Sanatoria

Editor's note: Our last issue included the story of a 1930 fire in downtown Colfax, as reported in the Colfax Record and Sentinel. This issue includes the story of the 1923 forest fire that threatened the tuberculosis sanatoria in Colfax and the surrounding area. This report was printed in the Tea Bee magazine, Vol. 11, No. 9, October 1923, which was published by the Colfax School for the Tuberculous in Colfax, California. It was transcribed by Roger Staab.

On Sunday night, September 18, between the hours of 9:30 p.m. and 4:30 a.m., Colfax and the country adjacent to all of the allied Santoria were in immediate danger of complete destruction by a forest fire which originated in the canyon about 500 yards below Crest View San on the road to the Rising Sun mine. Through the efforts of about 200 men and many women, together with a shifting wind at daybreak, the various sanatoria were saved and the town relieved from immediate danger.

The day had been quite windy and with the approach of night its velocity increased to 35 to 40 miles per hour. This, together with the fact that the hills and canyons were very dry after the usual warm weather, made an ideal time for a fire to make an uninterrupted advance. At first the flames were carried strongly eastward and up the western slope of the big hill just back of the city. In about forty minutes' time they had reached the ridge and began slowly (thank goodness) to burn down on the hillside toward the Colfax Hospital and the town. A brisk wind from the north was sweeping this area and was the greatest factor in the checking of the flames at this point.

During this time, the main trend of the blaze turned toward Crest View San and the canyon below was truthfully and awfully a seething inferno. Tall, stately pines and large centuries old Douglas firs were but toys of grandeur as the tongues of flame enveloped them with a mighty, terrifying roar. The patients in this San were hurriedly brought to town and to the hospital. By heroic efforts the buildings were all saved and the fire swept toward Bushnell's. Patients here were accommodated at the Standard Oil San. The fire burned to the very door of the storehouse, tank-houses and the various buildings, but all were saved.

(continued on page 2)

In this issue

Forest Fire Menaces Sanatoria	1
October 11 program about Colfax at 160 years.....	3
CAHS officers	3
Museum and Archives	3
Colfax history – a partial timeline.....	4
Local businesses and organizations that support CAHS.....	7
Join the CAHS membership form.....	7



The Cottage Colony of the Colfax School for the Tuberculous, Colfax, California, 1922. The Colony was located off of Tokayana Way, Colfax. From the Bowers-Keck Collection of the CAHS.

Kathramon, a quarter of a mile distant, was next in line, together with the new home of R.G. Openshaw. At these places pine needles that lay alongside the walls of the building were burned. Even a broom that stood alongside the walls of the building was burned, yet they managed to save the buildings. Patients were moved to Colfax for temporary quarters.

While the main efforts were being concentrated at Kathramon, urgent calls from the Spring Valley Dairy were received. This canyon had now become the seat of the main blaze and it was completely burned out, yet by a miraculous shifting of the wind and by a small amount of backfiring, which was now possible, the dairy herd and all buildings were saved, though they had been surrounded entirely by the flames.

Toward the Colony the flames were driven, and were forcing their way. A determined stand was made to check them along the Dairy-Colony road, and for an hour or so it seemed as if it would be successful, but the fire was not to be checked here.

Patients at the Colony were moved to farm houses, the Standard Oil San and into town. Cottage No. 45 was burned to the ground and the fire swept up the ridge and to the very back doors of the cottages in the upper row, then circled and burned the store house and the tank houses on the hill. The home of Dr. Tucker was ablaze on three occasions, but was saved. The path of the fire lay in the canyon below the cottages too, and then finally struck off toward the far side of

Tokayano Ranch and Bear River Valley, not being brought entirely under control until Tuesday.

It was an exciting time for all, and had any of the Sans been destroyed, the patients would have saved only such belongings as could be packed in a grip, while the Colony residents could not have saved even that much. Thank heavens, we are all back in our downy beds again and curing harder than ever.

The night of the fire as she was leaving the San Miss Groak remembered that she had not brought her bottle of whiskey along. She rushed back into the building, but at this moment the lights were extinguished. Making her way to her room she rescued the bottle, only the next morning to find that she had safely brought her bottle of milk of magnesia.

Saturday, October 11 Presentation: Roger Staab

Join us for “Colfax at 160 – Celebrating Railroad Changes and Incidents That Redefined the Region.”

As a companion to the September 13-14 Colfax Railroad Days event honoring the town's now 160-year link to the transcontinental railroad, Roger Staab assembled this program that looks at railroad-related changes that have occurred at Colfax and along the Donner Route since the town was created by the railroad in 1865.

Some changes were physical such as track realignments, while others were merely cosmetic or the result of altered operations.

Saturday, October 11, 2025, 4 p.m.

Colfax Passenger Depot
99 Railroad Street, Colfax, California

There is no charge to attend
Everyone is welcome

You are invited to join us for this walk through time as we look at selected changes that were made to the Nation's first transcontinental railroad in the years after its 1869 completion.

CAHS Executive Board Officers

The following volunteers are currently serving on the Executive Board.

President: Kim Douglass

Vice President: Irene Allen

Recording Secretary: Joann Geist

Outreach Coordinator: Nancy Hagman

Treasurer: Irene Allen

Archives Director: Roger Staab

Museum Director: Ric Nepil

Colfax Cobblestones Newsletter Editor: Dirk Gifford

Membership Chair: Chris Miller

Member-at-Large: Swend Miller

Member-at-Large: Mike Dalton

Member-at-Large: Rob Sinnock

Immediate past president: Dirk Gifford

Museum and Archives

The Colfax Area Historical Society (CAHS) and the Colfax Heritage Museum (CHM) preserve the local history of Colfax, California, the surrounding area, and the railroads, by collecting stories, photographs, and artifacts about the people and buildings in this part of the Sierra foothills.

The CAHS and CHM have an Archives Room that is open to the public by appointment. The Museum and the Archives collections include physical items, such as Chinese ceramics and baskets, local WWII memorabilia, historical books and other literature, maps and pictures of the Colfax area and of many of the railroads, and the Grace Hubley Photographic Collection.

To schedule an appointment please call the Colfax Heritage Museum at (530) 346-8599.

Colfax History – a Partial Timeline

This timeline of events in Colfax's history was compiled and written by Roger Staab. It includes information about settlements, railroads, mining, schools, hotels, and local history.

1849 – Enos Mendenhall arrived at a boggy area called Alder Grove, which was an early settlement near the present-day tire shop on Canyon Way.

1849 – A group of people from Illinois renamed the area Illinoistown. The townsite was near present-day Hills Flat Lumber. It was a major supply point for area mines.

1850 – Enos Mendenhall planted fruit trees at Illinoistown. These were the earliest fruit orchards in the region.

1853 – Illinoistown post office established, with Brazil Brickell as Postmaster.

1858 – First public school.

1862 – Rising Sun Mine was initially worked.

1863 (January) – Ground broken in Sacramento for Central Pacific Railroad.

1865 – Grass Valley-Illinoistown Turnpike and Bridge at Taylor Crossing completed.

1865 (June 10) – Central Pacific tracks were completed to Clipper Gap

1865 (July 11-12) – Speaker of the House Schuyler Colfax visited Illinoistown

- Colfax traveled by train to the end-of-track at Clipper Gap.
- Then he went by stage to Illinoistown and by horseback to Donner Lake for the night.
- He returned the next day to Illinoistown and went on to Grass Valley.

1865 (Mid-July) – New townsite laid out on railroad property.

1865 (July 29) – Lots auctioned in new town of Colfax.

1865 (September 3) – Central Pacific Railroad arrived in Colfax.

- The Passenger Depot and Freight Shed were built to support further railroad construction.

- Colfax replaced Illinoistown as shipping destination for mining camps.

1868 – Masonic Temple dedicated. It was constructed of brick.

1869 (May 10) – Golden Spike ceremony.

- Transcontinental railroad completed.
- Colfax saw trains stopping on trips between California and Chicago.
- Passengers changed from Central Pacific to Union Pacific at Ogden, Utah.

Late 1860's – House on Oak St above Culver St became first Catholic Church

1869 – Company formed to operate the Rising Sun Mine. The mine was worked off and on until a 1938 accident closed it for good.

1873 – Methodist Church built.

1874 – Methodist Church burned and was later rebuilt on the same site.

1874 (April) – First major fire destroyed buildings on Main and Grass Valley streets. Only the brick buildings survived.

1875 – Jacob Neff became superintendent of Rising Sun Mine.

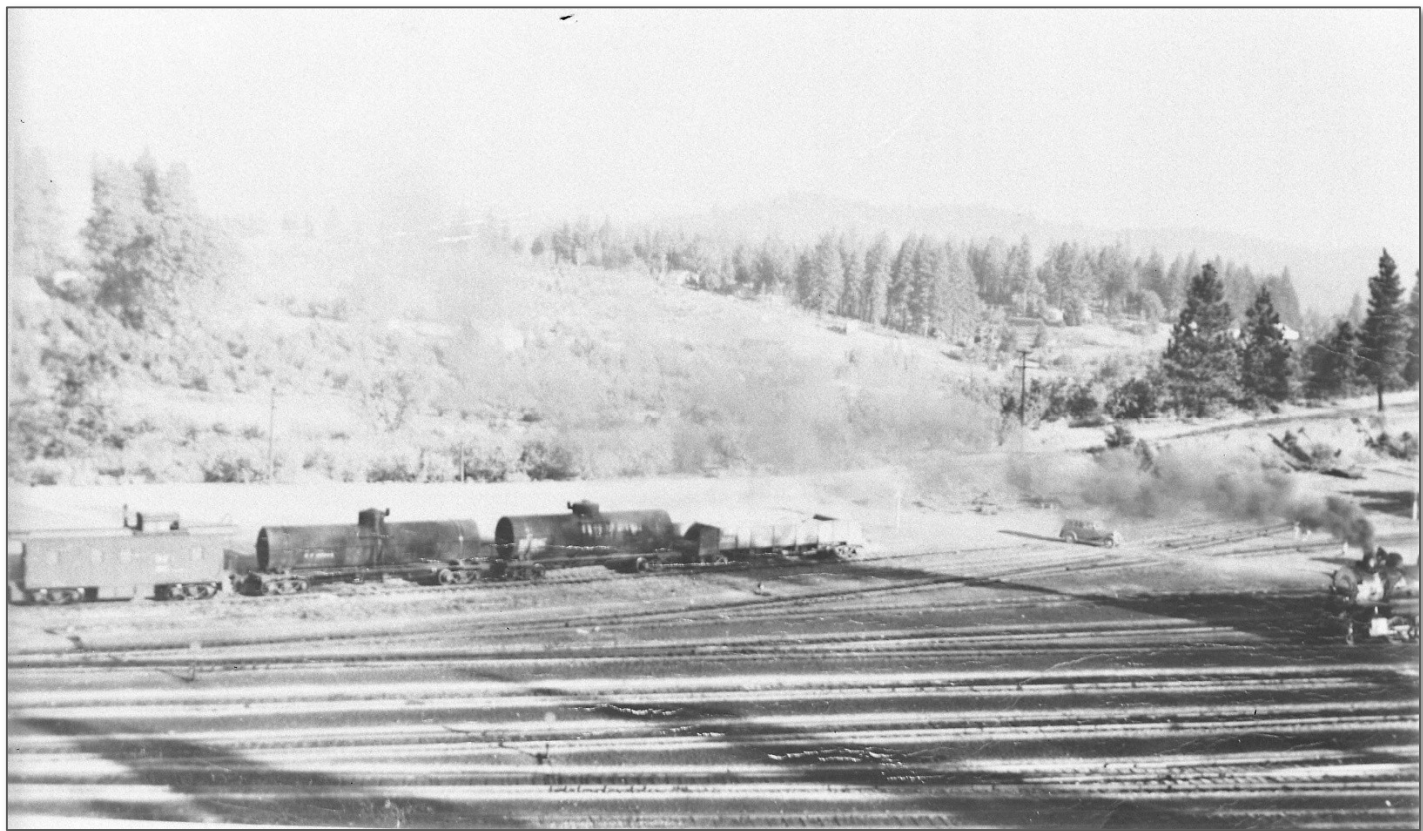
1875 – Bridge at (Ben) Taylor Crossing damaged by floods.

1876 – Colfax Post Office established. Valentine Cleveland was Postmaster.

1876 – Nevada County Narrow Gauge (NCNG) railroad was completed. It connected Colfax with Grass Valley/Nevada City.

1876 – *Colfax Enterprise* newspaper began publication. It lasted 11 months.

1879 – A fire destroyed homes and businesses on Pleasant and North Main streets. The Blue Canyon Fire Train assisted in putting out the fire.



Colfax, California railyard. 1941. From the Bowers-Keck photo collection of the CAHS.

1880 – The bridge on Ben Taylor Road at Taylor Crossing fell; it was never rebuilt.

1880 – The Jacob Neff home was built on Grass Valley and Kneeland streets. Neff became Lt Governor of California in 1898.

1880 – A new Freight Depot was built to serve CPRR and NCNG.

1881 – A Transfer Shed was built to transfer freight to/from CPRR to NCNG.

1885 – CPRR was leased under the new holding company Southern Pacific.

1889 – Third major fire in Colfax. The most damage was on Depot St.

1890 – The *Colfax Sentinel* newspaper was founded.

1893 – The first Fire Company (Rescue Hose Company) was formed in Colfax.

1894 – Colfax Victorian grammar School was built.

1903 – Gillen Hotel opened (later it was called the Marvin Hotel, then the Colfax Hotel).

1905 – CPRR depot burns. A new Southern Pacific Depot opened at its current location. The Freight Depot was moved across the tracks, north of Grass Valley St. The Grass Valley Street Crossing opened.

1906 – The Marvin Inn was built near the Gillen Hotel. It was later called the Marvin Annex when the Gillen Hotel was purchased by Marvin.

1907 – Dr. Peers opened the Colfax Hospital at Kneeland and Depot streets and soon began treating TB patients.

1907 – Nevada County Quartz Monument completed near Depot.

1908 (Nov. 26) – *Colfax Record* began publication.

1910 – Colfax incorporated as a city.

1910 – Colfax Fire Department was organized.

1910-1915 – Southern Pacific completed double track between Rocklin and Colfax.

- The Freight Depot was moved to its current location. A nine-stall Engine House was built for helper locomotives.
- Wye track completed for turning locomotives.
- Large railyard built and tracks realigned through town.

1911 – Robert Fowler’s plane was repaired in Colfax. His several attempts to cross the Sierra Mountains were unsuccessful.

1912 – Grammar School destroyed by fire.

1915 – Fruit sheds were built adjacent to Colfax Yard on railroad land.

1917 – Lincoln Highway designation was assigned to the road through Colfax.

1917 – Post Office was moved into own quarters at Main and Church streets (site of the present library).

1920 – Allen “Scoop” Thurman purchased the *Colfax Record*.

1920s – Dr. Peers was medical director for six local TB Sanatoria.

1920s – Fifty inches of snow fell on Colfax in January, damaging buildings.

1922 – Dr. Peers elected mayor of Colfax, a post he would hold until 1945.

1930 – *Colfax Record* moved to new office on Church St.

1930 – Major fire burned two businesses on Grass Valley St near Main St. Colfax-based fire train assisted in saving the business district.

1932 – Fire destroyed Lobner Building, corner of Main and Grass Valley streets.

1936 – First diesel-powered train, City of San Francisco, appeared in Colfax.

1937 – Dr. F. Lynn Smith arrived and began working with Dr Peers.

1939 – Colfax Overhead built across tracks for Hwy 40 Bypass (now Highway 174).

1939 – Marvin Inn destroyed by fire.

1942 – NCNG ceased operations; the tracks were torn up and sold as scrap iron.

1942-1945 – Major increase in rail traffic with troop trains.

1947 – First Main-line diesel-electric freight locomotives put in service.

1949 – Colfax Engine House was closed for good.

1951 – Colfax Engine House was razed.

1958 – Freeway completed past Colfax.

1964 – Freeway closed in Colfax, trapping 18 buses at Colfax Hotel. Power was out for nearly a week.

1971 – Amtrak took over passenger rail operations. Colfax was not a stop.

1976 – Amtrak stop at Colfax was resurrected

1976 – Post Office moved to present quarters on Church St.

1976 – Sorooptimists purchased Colfax Caboose and set it up as a museum.

1977 – Armed robbery at Bank of America branch.

1996 – Colfax Passenger Depot building and land deeded to City of Colfax.

2003-07 – Colfax Passenger Depot reworked by volunteers and reopened to the public as the Colfax Heritage Museum, Chamber of Commerce Visitor Center, and waiting room and rest rooms for travelers.

The Museum Also Has a Facebook Page

The Colfax Heritage Museum (CHM) now has its own Facebook page. Information about the museum will still appear in the CAHS Facebook group, but follow the CHM page for additional news, events, and information about the museum and the community. In Facebook, search for “Colfax Heritage Museum” or go to <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61576998471281>

Please support the local businesses and organizations that support CAHS

The following local businesses and organizations are members of the Colfax Area Historical Society, and we appreciate their support. We ask you to support them.

American Legion Colfax Post 192 P.O. Box 311 Colfax, CA 95713	Colfax Dental Center 120 Whitcomb Avenue Colfax, CA 95713 (530) 346-6244	Colfax Garden Club P.O. Box 1801 Colfax, CA 95713 (530) 346-6215
Colfax General Store 6 North Main St. Colfax, CA 95713 rklobner@colfaxnet.com	Colfax Lions Club P.O. Box 664 Colfax, CA 95713 facebook.com/ColfaxCALionsClub/	Grace Hubley Foundation 24820 Ben Taylor Colfax, CA 95713 gracehubleyfoundation.org
Kurtis H. Fox, M.D., Inc. 101 Grass Valley St. Colfax, CA 95713 (530) 346-2281	Sierra Business Services 520 South Auburn St, #D Colfax, CA 95713 (530) 346-2455 barbkelly@foothill.net	Sierra Mountain Internet Providing internet service to the Colfax Heritage Museum, businesses, and residences throughout the area. (530) 389-5550 • Service@MySierra.org https://sierramountaininternet.com
Sierra Vista Community Center 55 School Street Colfax, CA 95713 (530) 346-8726 svcc@colfaxnet.org	VFW Auxiliary Post 2003 P.O. Box 1213, Colfax, CA 95713 President: (530) 636-4242	

<p>To join the Colfax Area Historical Society, fill out this form and mail it with a check to:</p> <p>CAHS, PO Box 185, Colfax, CA 95713</p> <p>Your subscription will begin with the next quarterly issue.</p> <p>Name _____</p> <p>Street Address _____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>City _____ State _____ ZIP _____</p> <p>Phone _____</p> <p>Email _____</p> <p>Each issue of the <i>Colfax Cobblestones</i> newsletter will be sent as a PDF file to your email.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Check this box to also receive a printed copy in the mail.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> \$20 Individual membership (one person)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> \$25 Family membership (including children)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> \$35 Business or Non-Profit Organization membership (includes an ad in each issue of <i>Colfax Cobblestones</i>)</p>
---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------



Southern Pacific Depot, Colfax, California, 1919. The tracks to the right of the depot were for the Nevada County Narrow Gauge (NCNG) railroad, which connected Colfax with Grass Valley/Nevada City from 1876-1942. Where the NCNG tracks were is now Railroad Street. From the Bowers-Keck Collection of the CAHS.



The Colfax Area Historical Society

PO Box 185

Colfax CA 95713

Phone: (530) 346-8599

Email: museum.colfax@gmail.com

USPS mail: Mail for both the Colfax Heritage Museum and the Colfax Area Historical Society is received at PO Box 185, Colfax, CA 95713.

Museum location: The Colfax Heritage Museum is physically located at 99 Railroad St, Colfax, California, in the restored Passenger Depot.

