

CALIFORNIA STATE LIBRARY

CALIFORNIA HISTORY SECTION

RESEARCH GUIDES

RAILROADS IN CALIFORNIA



[Visit Us](#)

*California History Room
900 N Street Room 200
9:30-4 Monday-Friday*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Curious about California's transit system? Particularly its trains? Doing a research project on the building of the Transcontinental Railroad? Explore the role that iron rails, railroad barons and mass transit have played in our past via the [California History Section's](#) rich collections!

| | |
|--|----|
| Digitized Resources | 3 |
| <u>Reference Works:</u> | |
| General References | 4 |
| Transcontinental Railroad | 5 |
| Special Railroads | 6 |
| <u>Primary Sources</u> | |
| Railroad Manuscript Collections | 8 |
| Railroad Periodicals | 9 |
| Railroad Images | 10 |
| <u>Search:</u> | |
| Catalog General Research Tips | 11 |
| County-Specific Resources in our Catalog | 12 |
| On-site Research Resources | 13 |
| Other On-site Resources | 14 |
| Other Places to Look | 15 |

ENJOY YOUR RESEARCH!

DIGITIZED RESOURCES

Can't come to the library just yet? No worries! There are a number of online resources you can explore related to railroads in California!



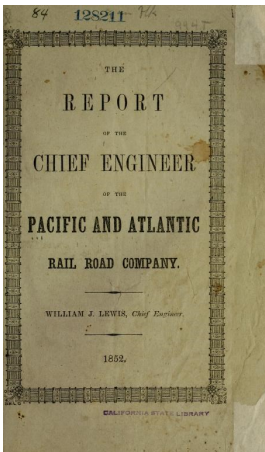
[Digitized Images](#)

We have scanned and digitized a portion of our extensive photograph collection, including images related to railroads. You can see them on Calisphere!



URL: <https://calisphere.org/institution/51/items/>

Type in Search Box: Railroad*



[Digitized Publications](#)

A few years ago we digitized some of our fragile transit publications. You can see them on Internet Archive!

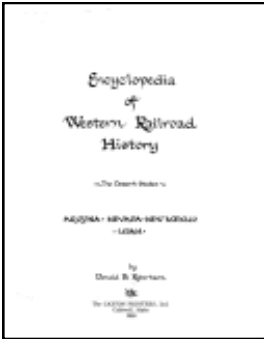


URL: <https://archive.org/>

Type in Search Box: (railroad*) AND collection:(californiastatelibrary)

GENERAL REFERENCES

Unsure about where to start? Consult a book! If you are interested in railroads, these books will give you a general idea of their history in California.

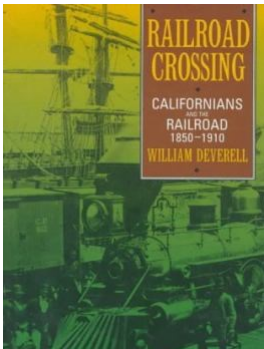


Robertson, D. (1986). [*Encyclopedia of western railroad history*](#). Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton Printers.

Written for the true railroad enthusiast, this four volume set provides statistics and basic information about almost every railroad company in the west.



URL: http://catalog.library.ca.gov/F/?func=find-c&ccl_term=SYS%3D000422656

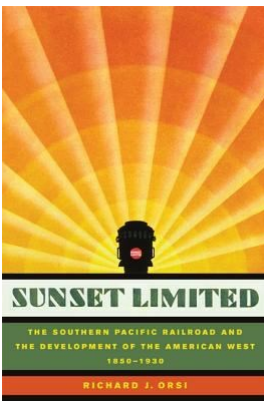


Deverell, W. (1994). [*Railroad crossing : Californians and the railroad, 1850-1910*](#). Berkeley: University of California Press.

Curious about how the railroad affected daily life in California? This social history explores the social and political repercussions of the railroads' development on people throughout the state.



URL: http://catalog.library.ca.gov/F/?func=find-c&ccl_term=SYS%3D000930783



Orsi, R. (2005). [*Sunset limited : The Southern Pacific Railroad and the development of the American West, 1850-1930*](#). Berkeley: University of California Press.

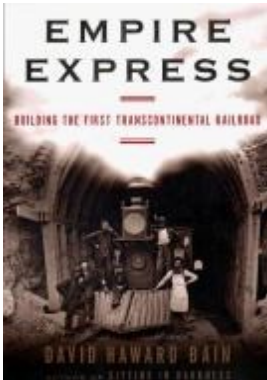
Sometimes a largely true narrative becomes so overstated that it obscures the truth. This book seeks to balance the narrative regarding the effects of Southern Pacific's railroad monopoly.



URL: http://catalog.library.ca.gov/F/?func=find-c&ccl_term=SYS%3D001248488

TRANCONTINENTAL RAILROAD

Of course California's railroad system is inextricably linked with the transcontinental railroad! For more information on the history of this historic rail connection, check these books.

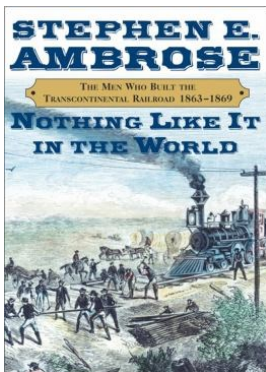


Bain, D. (1999). [*Empire express : Building the first transcontinental railroad*](#). New York: Viking.

This work not only describes the technical difficulties of constructing the transcontinental railroad, it explores it's social and political impact.



URL: http://catalog.library.ca.gov/F/?func=find-c&ccl_term=SYS%3D001072508

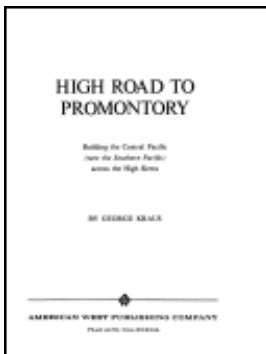


Ambrose, S. (2000). [*Nothing like it in the world : The men who built the transcontinental railroad, 1863-1869*](#). New York: Simon & Schuster.

Curious about the individuals who built the transcontinental railroad? Despite some small errors, this is a good railroad social history.



URL: http://catalog.library.ca.gov/F/?func=find-c&ccl_term=SYS%3D001099253



Kraus, G. (1969). [*High road to Promontory : Building the Central Pacific \(now the Southern Pacific\) across the High Sierra*](#). Palo Alto, Calif.: American West Pub

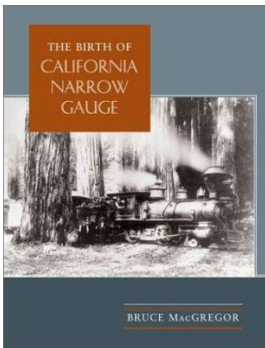
Widely regarded a seminal work on the history of the transcontinental railroad; this book details the process of building a railroad in the Sierra.



URL: http://catalog.library.ca.gov/F/?func=find-c&ccl_term=SYS%3D000989809

SPECIAL RAILROADS

Short lines, cable cars, narrow gauges and more! California's railroading history is littered with special types of trains. Check out these books for more on the history of some of them.

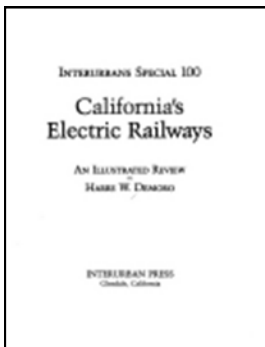


MacGregor, B. (2003). [*The birth of California narrow gauge : A regional study of the technology of Thomas and Martin Carter.*](#) Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press.

California has had a long tradition of monopoly and protests against it. Narrow gauge railroads were one such attempt. Read about their history in this comprehensive work.



URL: http://catalog.library.ca.gov/F/?func=find-c&ccl_term=SYS%3D001202610



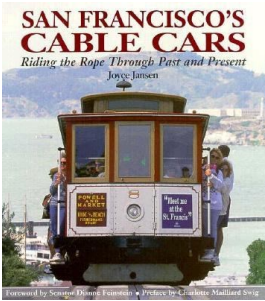
Demoro, H. (1986). [*California's electric railways : An illustrated review*](#) (Interurbans special ; 100). Glendale, Calif.: Interurban Press.

Interested in inter-urban and street railways? Check out this book for a comprehensive history of California electric rail-lines!



URL: http://catalog.library.ca.gov/F/?func=find-c&ccl_term=SYS%3D000419782

SPECIAL RAILROADS

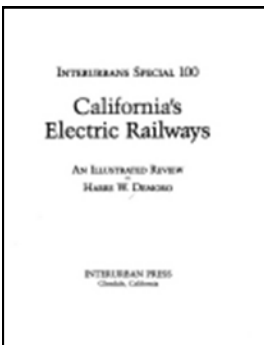


Jansen, J. (1995). [*San Francisco's cable cars : Riding the rope through past and present*](#). San Francisco, Calif.: Woodford Press.

An approachable popular history, this book gives a reasonably detailed overview of the cable car in San Francisco. A unique type of train especially suited to a unique place.



URL: http://catalog.library.ca.gov/F/?func=find-c&ccl_term=SYS%3D000991457



Duke, D. (1998). [*Incline railways of Los Angeles and Southern California*](#). San Marino, Calif.: Golden West Books.

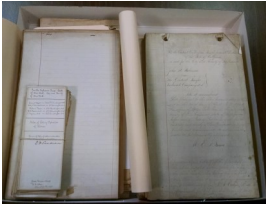
Do you want to know about Angel's Flight? Learn about this and the history of other, extremely short, extremely steep railroads in this overview of Southern California's incline railways!



URL: http://catalog.library.ca.gov/F/?func=find-c&ccl_term=SYS%3D001061590

RAILROAD MANUSCRIPT COLLECTIONS

Want to look at original documents relating to railroad business practices and surveys? We have lots of [manuscript collections](#) related to California railroads including the ones described below.

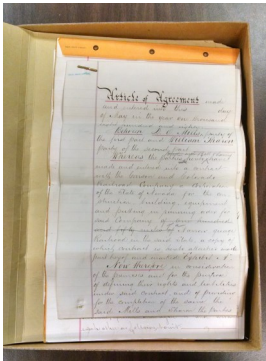


[Central Pacific Railroad lawsuit and investigation documents.](#)

A look at creative business practices during the 1880's, this three box collection documents a lawsuit related to stockholder shares in the Central Pacific and Western Pacific Railroads



URL: http://catalog.library.ca.gov/F/?func=find-c&ccl_term=SYS%3D001546448

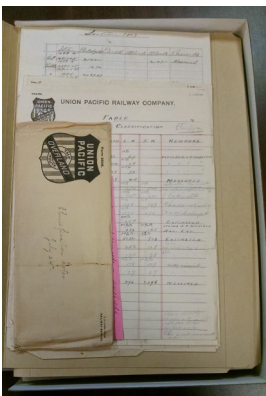


[National Bank of D. O. Mills and Company collection.](#)

These banking papers contain financial information on early railroads including Central Pacific, Southern Pacific and smaller entities from 1865-1892.



URL: http://catalog.library.ca.gov/F/?func=find-c&ccl_term=SYS%3D000555439



[Henry Maxwell McCartney Collection.](#)

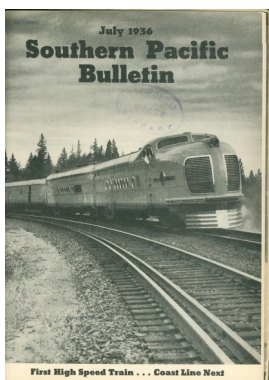
A major surveyor for the Northern, Union and Western Pacific Railroad companies, McCartney's collection contains a wide variety of business and survey details from 1880-1910.



URL: http://catalog.library.ca.gov/F/?func=find-c&ccl_term=SYS%3D000555433

RAILROAD PERIODICALS

Another great first-hand resource is trade publications. The following periodicals are just a few of the railroad [industry journals](#) we carry.

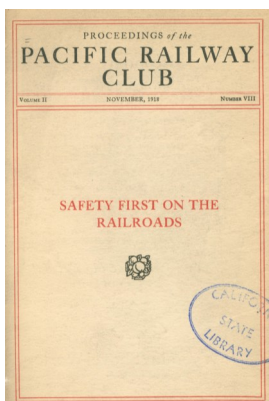


[Southern Pacific Bulletin](#)

Looking for a real-time documentation of railroad history from the past 100 years or so? Check this company newsletter, it contains human interest stories, company information and more!



URL: http://catalog.library.ca.gov/F/?func=find-c&ccl_term=SYS%3D000139360



[Proceedings of the Pacific Railway Club](#)

If you want wider industry information, you might consider checking out this publication. Written by and for industry professionals, it tracks railroad specific issues across companies.



URL: http://catalog.library.ca.gov/F/?func=find-c&ccl_term=SYS%3D000137271



[RailNews](#)

Again, an industry-wide perspective on the challenges facing railroads in the West and indeed across the United States, this periodical provides railroading coverage from the 60's forward.



URL: http://catalog.library.ca.gov/F/?func=find-c&ccl_term=SYS%3D001000154

RAILROAD IMAGES

They say a picture is worth a 1000 words and we have lots of [images of the railroads](#)! Here are some of our major railroad-related image collections.



[Alfred A Hart Collection](#)

For views of the Central Pacific Railroad's construction, Alfred Hart's images are unparalleled.



URL: <http://catalog.library.ca.gov/F/?func=find-c-0>

Type in Search Box: WSU = ((railroad* OR locomotive*)) AND WAU = (Hart)



[Carleton Watkins Collection](#)

A prominent Southern California photographer, Watkins included a number of different railroad images in his larger collection.

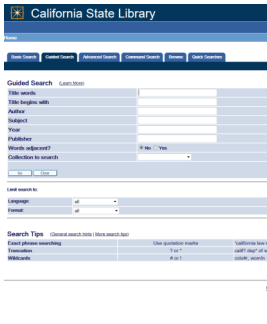


URL: <http://catalog.library.ca.gov/F/?func=find-c-0>

Type in Search Box: WSU = ((railroad* OR locomotive*)) AND WAU = (Watkins)

CATALOG GENERAL RESEARCH TIPS

While many of our materials are online, even more are only in hard-copy. You can use the following resources to learn about our books, articles, and manuscripts on railroading



The screenshot shows the California State Library Catalog search page. It features a 'Guided Search' section with fields for Title, Author, Subject, Year, Publisher, and Words adjusted. Below this is a 'Search Tips' section with a table of search tips. The table has three columns: 'Exact phrase searching', 'Use quotation marks', and 'California State Library'. The rows are 'Keywords', 'Exact phrase searching', and 'Wildcards'. The 'Keywords' row shows 'railroad' in the first column, 'railroad' in the second, and 'railroad' in the third. The 'Exact phrase searching' row shows 'railroad' in the first column, 'railroad' in the second, and 'railroad' in the third. The 'Wildcards' row shows 'railroad' in the first column, 'railroad' in the second, and 'railroad' in the third.

[Catalog](#)

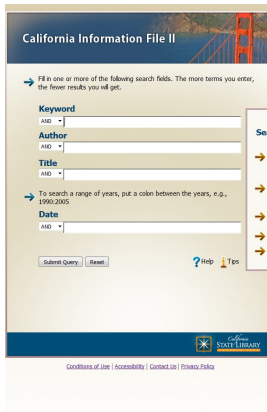
If you are looking for [images](#), [manuscripts](#), [maps](#), [books](#) and [articles](#) on railroads, one source is our [catalog](#).



URL: <http://catalog.library.ca.gov/F/?func=find-a-0>

Type in Subject Box: (railroad* OR locomotive*) NOT (Underground)

Limit: By desired material type or company



The screenshot shows the California Information File II search page. It features a search form with fields for Keyword, Author, Title, and Date. Below the form is a 'Submit Query' button. The page also includes a 'Conditions of Use' link and a 'Privacy Policy' link.

[California Information File II](#)

Sometimes the catalog doesn't provide as much detail as you might like. This is why we created the California Information File II. In this resource, you can find information about railroad pamphlets, tickets and stock certificates.



URL: http://dbs.library.ca.gov/dbtext_html/QueryCalinfo.htm

Type in Subject Box: (railroad* OR locomotive*)

For a narrower search: Add a place or company to your keyword search

COUNTY-SPECIFIC RESOURCES IN OUR CATALOG

Curious about railroading in a specific county? While these catalog links don't list all of what the California History Section has, they are a good starting point.



ON-SITE RESEARCH RESOURCES

Our collection predates computers and so do some of our access points! If you are in the library, be sure to check the following analog files for leads on more resources.



California Information File

In the library? Check the California Information File before you do anything else! This file indexes over 130 years of California railroading articles, books, and manuscript collections.



Subject Headings:

1. Railroads (Various subdivisions)
 2. Transportation: Electric
 3. Specific regions such as "Counties: Alameda: Oakland: Transportation"
 4. Prominent individuals and companies in the industry (look up by name)
-



Photographic File

Sometimes a picture is worth a 1000 words, and not all of our pictures are online. To check the rest of the collection search our picture file.



Subject Headings:

1. Railroads
 2. Transportation
-

OTHER ON-SITE RESOURCES

Despite our best efforts, some of our resources defy complete description. We suggest that you ask a librarian about any railroading information contained in the following files



Vertical Files

Our massive collection of vertical files covers a wide variety of topics including railroads. You can check them for information on organizations, companies, and even old train tickets.



Subject Headings: Check with librarians.



Postcard Files

Separate from our photo collection, our postcard collection contains a number of images related to railroads. Most are not online.



Subject Headings: Check with librarians



Map Files

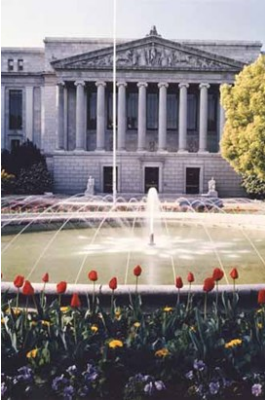
Our map collection contains a number of resources directly related to the railroads, from surveys showing railroad lands to route maps. Most are not online.



Subject Headings: Check with librarians

OTHER PLACES TO LOOK

Of course the California History Section doesn't have everything, so we suggest that in addition to looking at our collections, you contact the following organizations



Other California State Library Sections

[Government Publications Section](#)

[Witkin Law Library](#)

[Sutro Library](#)

[General Information](#)



URLs:

- <http://www.library.ca.gov/gps/index.html>
- http://www.library.ca.gov/collections/law_coll.html
- http://www.library.ca.gov/about/sutro_main.html
- http://www.library.ca.gov/collections/general_coll.html



Other Government Agencies

[California State Archives](#)

[California State Railroad Museum Library](#)

[California Public Utilities Commission](#)

Local California libraries or archives



URLs:

- <http://www.sos.ca.gov/archives/>
- <https://www.californiarailroad.museum/visit/library>
- <http://www.cpuc.ca.gov/rail/>



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