RESEARCH GUIDES

RAILROADS IN CALIFORNIA

VISIT US
California History Room
900 N Street Room 200
9:30-4 Monday-Friday
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!

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

URL: https://csl.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/search?vid=01CSL_INST:CSL&sortby=rank
Search by: Title and/or author

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: https://csl.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/search?vid=01CSL_INST:CSL&sortby=rank
Search by: Title and/or author

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: https://csl.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/search?vid=01CSL_INST:CSL&sortby=rank
Search by: Title and/or author
TRANSCONTINENTAL 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.

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

URL: https://csl.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/search?vid=01CSL_INST:CSL&sortby=rank
Search by: Title and/or author

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

URL: https://csl.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/search?vid=01CSL_INST:CSL&sortby=rank
Search by: Title and/or author

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: https://csl.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/search?vid=01CSL_INST:CSL&sortby=rank
Search by: Title and/or author
**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.

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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.


*Search by:* Title and/or author

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**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!


*Search by:* Title and/or author

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:** https://csl.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/search?vid=01CSL_INST:CSL&sortby=rank

**Search by:** Title and/or author

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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:** https://csl.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/search?vid=01CSL_INST:CSL&sortby=rank

**Search by:** Title and/or author
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:** https://csl.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/search?vid=01CSL_INST:CSL&sortby=rank

**Search by:** Title

**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:** https://csl.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/search?vid=01CSL_INST:CSL&sortby=rank

**Search by:** Title

**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:** https://csl.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/search?vid=01CSL_INST:CSL&sortby=rank

**Search by:** Title
Microfilm Collections

Curious about original papers kept in another archive? We might have the collection on microfilm! Here are some of our microfilm collections that deal with railroading history.


A microfilm copy of the business papers Huntington kept at his New York office, this collection contains correspondence between him and the rest of the big five as well as legal and financial records.

URL: https://csl.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/search?vid=01CSL_INST:CSL&sortby=rank
Search by: Title/author


Listing Southern Pacific stations all over the United States, this index records not only where each station is but what routes and railroads it served.

URL: https://csl.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/search?vid=01CSL_INST:CSL&sortby=rank
Search by: Title/author
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:** https://csl.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/search?vid=01CSL_INST:CSL&sortby=rank

**Search by:** Title

**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:** https://csl.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/search?vid=01CSL_INST:CSL&sortby=rank

**Search by:** Title

**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 1960’s forward.

**URL:** https://csl.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/search?vid=01CSL_INST:CSL&sortby=rank

**Search by:** Title
They say a picture is worth a 1000 words and we have lots of images of 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:** https://csl.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/search?vid=01CSL_INST:CSL&lang=en&sortby=rank

**Type in Advanced Search Box:**
Subject contains: ((railroad* OR locomotive*))
AND Author contains (Hart)

**Carleton Watkins Collection**

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

**URL:** https://csl.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/search?vid=01CSL_INST:CSL&lang=en&sortby=rank

**Type in Advanced Search Box:**
Subject contains: ((railroad* OR locomotive*))
AND Author contains (Watkins)
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.

**Catalog**

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

**URL:** https://csl.primo.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/search?vid=01CSL_INST:CSL&lang=en&sortby=rank

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

**Limit:** By desired material type or company

**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.
California’s railroads have had far-ranging effects on everything from politics to agriculture to music! Explore some of our resources via these catalog links.

**Type**
- Maps
- Books
- Images
- Manuscripts
- Periodicals
- Statistics

**Residents**
- Vitals
- African Americans
- Chinese Americans
- German Americans
- Irish Americans
- Italian Americans
- Japanese Americans
- Latin Americans
- Native Americans
- Women

**Subject**
- Aeronautics
- Agriculture
- Art
- Birds
- Business
- Cooking
- Education
- Environment
- Festivals
- Fiction
- Fish
- Folklore
- Geology
- Highways
- Horse Racing
- Land
- Legislature
- Migration
- Mining
- Music
- Oil
- Politics
- Shipping
- Slavery
- Religion
- Restaurants
- Taxes
- Water
- Wildlife
- Wine
- 1960’s
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.

Alameda
Amador
Butte
Calaveras
Colusa

Contra Costa
El Dorado
Fresno
Humboldt
Inyo
Kern
Kings
Los Angeles
Marin
Mariposa
Mendocino
Monterey
Napa
Orange
Placer

Plumas
Riverside
Sacramento
San Benito
San Bernardino
San Diego
San Francisco
San Joaquin
San Luis Obispo
San Mateo
Santa Barbara
Santa Clara
Santa Cruz
Shasta
Siskiyou
Solano
Sonoma
Sutter
Tehama
Tulare
Tuolumne
Ventura
Yolo
Yuba
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
3. County: City: Railroads
**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.

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**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 and timetables.

Subject Headings:
1. Subjects: Railroads
2. Companies: By Name

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**Postcard Files**

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

Subject Headings: Organized by County

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**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: Organized by County
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/government-publications/
- http://www.library.ca.gov/law/
- http://www.library.ca.gov/sutro/
- http://www.library.ca.gov/services

### Other Government Agencies

- California State Archives
- California State Parks
- California State Railroad Museum Library
- California Public Utilities Commission
- Local California libraries or archives

### URLs:

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