

# The Donner Summit

# Heirloom

History and stories of the Donner Summit Historical Society



April 1, 2019 issue #128

## Time Travel

We've covered a lot in the [Heirloom](#) over 127 issues and more than ten years. We've covered people, wagon trains, the railroad, the first bicyclist over Donner Summit, the first auto, the first motorcycle, a family riding bicycles over the summit and through snowsheds during a railroad strike, snowshed fires, Chinese, robbery, the building of Van Norden Dam, ice harvesting, megaetc\*. Those many stories maybe made some readers wish that history was not so far away - that it could be visited from time to time outside of the [Heirloom](#).

How much fun would it be to be able to actually insert yourself into history, just for the day? Go visit Early America and see what life was like. Watch Abraham Lincoln give a speech. Be present at the signing of the Declaration of Independence. You could solve mysteries like where did Amelia Earhardt end up or who was on the "grassy knoll."

Think of the fun of visiting local history. Stop by and see Baby Face Nelson in jail in Truckee (that's a story the Truckee history people tell at the jail - we just thought we'd give them some time in the [Heirloom](#)). Watch the "whole artillery of heaven" (page 7, July '16 [Heirloom](#)). Encourage the Forlorn Hope as they climbed up from Donner Lake (December, '16 and January/February, '17 [Heirlooms](#)) We have mysteries too. Where exactly was Starved Camp? (June, '18 [Heirloom](#)). What happened to the movie, "The Race" (in the book review in the February, '15 [Heirloom](#)) which would have showed Donner Summit in 1915 as Anita King raced over? Who put the sword in the stone (next page)? Where exactly was the other end of Alexi Von Schmidt's tunnel? (Whoops - that's not been in the [Heirloom](#) yet - but it will be one day - keep up your subscription).

Time traveling would be a lot of fun as long as you could come back and as long as you were not able to influence history. Imagine the paradox. You travel in history and have some small influence, which changes history, resulting in your not being born, and so you never traveled in time. You never influenced history so you were born and traveled back in time...

Enough philosophy. On to page three for the rest of the story.

\*This is a highly technical historians' term meaning many etceteras. We don't normally share terms like this with the public.

**Then & Now with Art Clark**

The Lincoln Highway was the first transcontinental highway and it went right across Donner Summit on the way from New York to San Francisco.

The picture to the right is the highway just after crossing Donner Pass. Below is the same scene today.

A fun tip is to take the Lincoln Highway from the top three miles downhill to Donner Lake. Have a car waiting down there and it's a great walk. You will pass all kinds of history: Lincoln Highway marker, wrecked cars, Dutch Flat Donner Lake Wagon Rd., Tunnel 6, Native American petroglyphs thousands of years old, old ads painted on the rocks for Lincoln Highway tourists, interesting rock formations, rock climbers, etc. You can either end at the Truckee Donner Land Trust's kiosk or continue to Donner Lake's West End Beach.

Use the brochure to the right available either on the "brochures" page of our website or at the DSHS's and other local establishments carrying local history.

The rock in the center distance has an ad painted on it. It says "Tumuk Rowed Boats - Meals - Boats" - for more on that you'll have to wait for the April, '18 [Heirloom](#) We plan ahead at the DSHS.

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# Story Locations in this Issue

Summit Canyon ads on the rocks (pg 1) China Wall pg 9 Marin Ski Club pg 18



Big Bend pg 11/12 Cascade Lakes pg 19

## One of Donner Summit's many puzzles

Here is Kathy Hess, former leader of the Donner Party Hike event trying to extract the sword from the stone on Donner Summit (April, '18 [Heirloom](#)).

It's one of the puzzles that we could solve with time travel.



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Unless otherwise noted, the photographs and other historical ephemera in The Heirloom's pages come from the Norm Saylor collection at the Donner Summit Historical Society



## The Time Travel Puzzle We Discovered?!

Regular readers will recognize the picture to the right side of page 1 as page 15 of our June, '17 [Heirloom](#). Before you say something like, "What! Don't they have enough history?!!" "They've got to run repeats?!!" "Summer Reruns?!" Its relevance will become clear shortly.

We at the DSHS don't just rest on laurels and think that when we've done a story that's the end. We're always re-analyzing and re-inspecting so we can bring the best in Donner Summit history to future [Heirlooms](#).

Our team of re-analysts was idly perusing old issues of the [Heirloom](#) when the team came across an anomaly, an anachronism, an impossibility. We'll present the case. Why did nobody see this before?

It's all very innocent initially. Look at the picture on page one or, for a close up, look at the original which is available on our website or in your carefully leather bound [Heirloom](#) collection.

The picture above left is a view of the old Lincoln Highway in Summit Canyon. The point of the June, '17 "Then & Now" article on page one here, was what the old views look like today. The pictures are of the same spot 100 years apart. We also highlighted the signs painted on the rocks which are still visible today. (See the April, '13 [Heirloom](#) for that story) The picture to the right, above, is today - or rather, 2017. If you were to look closely on the rocks in the distance in the picture on the left, you'd see "Tamrak Resort." The Tamrak people were not great artists but they did like to remind early motorists of their presence. The picture to the right, here, is in Summit Canyon today, still advertising the Tamrak Resort, which does not exist anymore, more than a hundred years later.

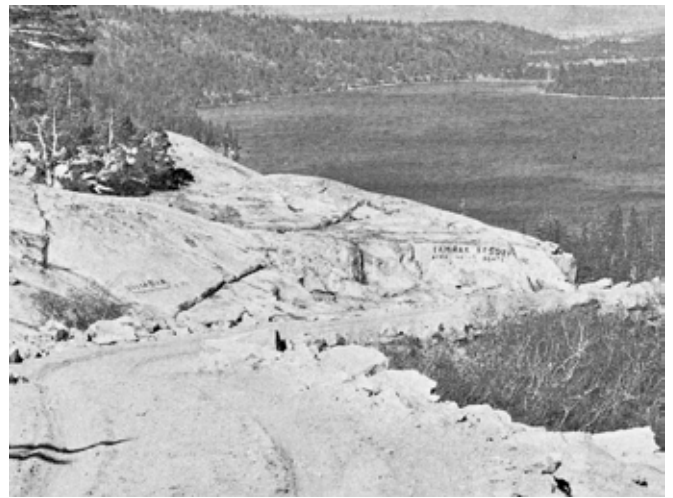
Now we have to digress for a bit. Art Clark is a member of the



DSHS's Mobile Historical Research Team. His adventures have been well-chronicled in the [Heirloom](#). He's made more than a hundred "Then & Now's" for the DSHS and the [Heirloom](#) which you can see in old issues or on our website, all of which are on our website where you can see the past "morph" into the present and back. This was one of Mr. Clark's "Then & Now's." He, Mr. Clark, does marvelous work. With the digression out of the way, we now go to the pictures here.

To the right is a closer view of the Lincoln Highway looking east from Donner Summit. The ads painted on the rocks are in the distance down the road.

You can imagine the surprise of the DSHS re-analysis team when they re-analyzed the picture here. Through the miracles of modern technology, the team enlarged the photograph and enhanced it as you can see below. No pixels were added for this investigation. The results are below.



You will note "Tamrak Resort" painted on the rock to the right. You will note, "Art Clark was here '15" on the left. We should also say that the original of the photograph below and above, sits in the Norm Saylor Collection at the DSHS and its presence there predates Mr. Clark's joining the MHRT.

Now we have to consider the ramifications of the re-analysis. There is "Art Clark" on the rock in the 1915 photograph. We also have Art Clark producing the "Then & Now" on page one in 2017. There is maybe something strange here because although he could make an image of today's view he could only use the 1915 view. He couldn't have made that - could he?

As good historians we have to analyze the historical evidence. How did the "Art Clark was here '15" get on the rock? One possibility is that the "then" picture was taken today. It wasn't. It's black and white and has been in Norm's collection for a long time. Today there is no "Tamrak Resort" on the rock on the right, the vegetation has changed a lot as has topography with the installation of the petroleum line and the fiber optic cable. There is also no Old Highway 40 above the Lincoln Highway as a picture from today would show. So, it's a hundred year old picture. How did "Art Clark was here '15" get on a hundred year old picture? Perhaps there was an Art Clark promoting himself in 1915. To that it would be nice to say that people in the old days had more taste and consideration than the people today have who have festooned the snowsheds, the underpass and even Tunnel 6 with graffiti. Archeologists, though, have even found graffiti in Pompei that's two thousand years old. People in the past were just like us. A thorough check of records finds no "Art Clarks" in the area in 1915 and one would think there would not be just one promotion. Like "Tamrak" or "Kilroy" you'd think there would be more. There aren't.

The most controversial supposition is that Art Clark today went back to 1915 to carry out his MHRT explorations with greater verisimilitude or authenticity. That theory must violate some laws of physics because the molecules making up Art's 2019 corporeal entity were being used in something else in 1915. It makes no sense that molecules or atoms could be used twice at the the same time. Where will your molecules be in 2115 since you won't be using them (presumably)?

Pending further investigation this will go into the folder marked "mysteries of Donner Summit."



# The Sesquicentennial Is Coming Pt II

Last month we ran the first part of this article about the meaning of the railroad. This month we have Part II as well as a list of events we've been planning for the start of the celebration in May and running until Labor Day, 2019.

2019 is the Sesquicentennial of the first Transcontinental Railroad. The railroad is just one of the many firsts for Donner Summit but it was important for the country as well. Part III comes in May and will talk about what 19<sup>th</sup> Century people thought about the railroad. After reading those three articles your newly acquired sesquicentennial and railroad perspective will make you so erudite you will be able to enter conversation on the matter with confidence. So stay tuned and don't let your subscriptions lapse. Take a look at our website and FaceBook pages and the list of events: talks, newspaper articles, music on China Wall, walks and hikes, historical exhibits and the Passport, Then/Now's, and the Golden Spike drink. People, organizations and businesses in Truckee and on Donner Summit will be participating.

## Age of Wonder

The 19<sup>th</sup> Century was an age of wonder too, changing lives amazingly. For centuries and millennia the average person's life had not changed. It went along at 3 or 5 miles an hour, the speed of a walking person or a horse.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century introduced the Industrial Age. There was an amazing number of inventions: clipper ships, the light bulb, electric motors, gasoline engine, iron ships, the battery, the revolver, repeating rifles, photography, the elevator, nitroglycerine and dynamite, and the machines to make those things. Labor saving devices made life easier in the home: the vacuum cleaner and the sewing machine. The cotton gin, the combine, and the reaper reduced the need for farm labor and people moved to the cities which had very different social structures from small rural communities and family farms. The frontier was disappearing. At the same time, machines made manufacturing easier and factories, instead of independent workers, began to be the primary manufactures. Interchangeable parts and division of labor made production more efficient. Sanitation and health improved. It had become accepted that germs caused disease and antiseptics could prevent infection. People were inoculated against disease. The steam engine powered factories and boats and then the railroads. Electricity brought light and motors. The telegraph and telephone made communication almost instantaneous. There were new theories of economics and sociology. Art was changing. At the end of the century America would become a world power and the richest nation on earth. There was even an airship company formed to take Argonauts to California during the Gold Rush. Some people bought tickets. Nothing seemed too outlandish. Americans could do anything. They

more than doubled the size of their country. They were conquering a continent.

God, so it seemed, was indeed smiling on the United States.

It was an age of wonder and experiment. What would come next?

During the Gold Rush a clipper ship took 3-4 months to go from New York to San Francisco. In the 1850's a wagon train traveled 10-15 miles a day and took 4-5 months to get to California from Missouri. In 1858 the stagecoach could travel 15 miles an hour and the trip from Missouri to California took 25 days.

The building of the transcontinental railroad was a wonder, going three thousand miles over and through mountains, deserts, ravines, and rivers. When it was completed in 1869 trains traveled at the incredible speed of 25 miles an hour and the trip, all the way across the country, took only 19 days!

19<sup>th</sup> Century citizens knew it was a wonder. If they had not thought about it, the idea was certainly brought to them. Certainly California's, and maybe even the whole Nation's feelings could be seen in an article, printed in a number of newspapers almost two years before the railroad's completion called, "The Mountains Overcome" celebrating reaching Donner Summit, the highest point on the road.

"The telegram which, starting from the summit of the Sierras [sic] on Saturday afternoon last, flashed across the continent to the shores of the Atlantic and underneath that ocean to Europe, announced an event which will probably seem

greater to those far away than to those nearby; to those who read of it in history than to those who witnessed it in fact. On that day the track of the Central Pacific Railroad reached the summit of its grade. ... The flag of the Union was immediately planted near the spot, fitly signifying that an event had occurred which, more than any other, assures the continued unity of this great republic. For the completion of a railroad across the Sierras [sic] removes the only obstacle which has been regarded as insuperable to a vital connection between the Atlantic and Pacific coasts. For California it means much, but it means more for the country at large and for mankind." "The people of this continent are no longer severed by mountain barriers which would make of them two nations, diverse and hostile. We may now make certain of a common national life that shall secure not only our own best interests, but the largest and noblest influence upon the nations, from whom, on either hand, we are parted by an ocean, and whose destinies we must seriously affect."

For the average person the Daily Alta California said on November 10, 1867 that when the railroad was completed in what the writer thought would be two years and a half or so, "we shall be able to whirl across the continent from the Sacramento to the Missouri in three days and a half... May I be there to ride... [we will be able to] say good -bye to our Sacramento friends in the morning and greet our New York

acquaintances next day..."

Another correspondent to The Sacramento Union wrote on April 22, 1867, the railroad "will give to our wealth and progress an impetus so great that even the most sanguine among us will find this calculation far exceeded by the reality."

That same year The Sacramento Union (December 2, 1867) enthused, "... The company have great reason to congratulate themselves upon the monument of American engineering, energy and enterprise which their road undoubtedly is. No other great public work has met with obstacles apparently more insuperable, and none has overcome its difficulties of various kinds, with more determined perseverance... in the East and in Europe they will fill the public mind with added respect for the practical genius of the American."

One visitor to Donner Summit to view the railroad's progress was succinct about its meaning, "Nothing is impossible anymore." (Daily Alta California November 10, 1867)

A Daily Alta California editorial (June 20, 1868) got into the act almost a year before the road was finished saying it was "The grandest highway created for the march of commerce and civilization around the globe."



**BUNKHOUSE AND TRUCK SHED AT DONNER SUMMIT, NEVADA COUNTY**

This picture was shared with the DSHS by Joel Windmiller, president of the California Chapter of the Lincoln Highway Association. The building on the left is now called Summit Haus and is used for Sugar Bowl employee housing. Earlier it was the Sugar Bowl Academy building, Alpine Skills Institute and Donner Spitz Lodge. The left hand building originally was the bunk house for Division of Highway workers who cleared Old 40 starting in 1932. The building on the right was for equipment but collapsed in the 1980's.

**CALENDAR OF EVENTS,  
DONNER SUMMIT-TRUCKEE TRANSCONTINENTAL RAILROAD  
SESQUICENTENNIAL CELEBRATION  
MAY-AUGUST 2019**

May 4-5, Truckee Tahoe Community Choir (<https://www.truckeechorus.org/>), Presenting Historical Review  
May 10, Ribbon Cutting Kickoff at The Truckee Train Depot, 12 Noon.  
May 10, Truckee Public Arts Commission Reception, 8924 Donner Pass Rd., Truckee Donner Recreation and Parks Community Center, Opening show of the celebration of the Railroad.  
May 11, Historical Talk, the Meaning of the Railroad. 7pm, Truckee Tahoe Airport Conference Room  
May 18, Historical Talk by Norm Saylor, businesses and History of Old Hiway 40, Donner State Park Visitors Center, 5:30PM  
May 20, Dedication of Plaque, George Wyman Foundation. First Motorcycle over Donner Summit. Also, a Memorial Motorcycle ride from the site of the Summit Hotel to the Visitors Center, Train Depot Truckee. Time to be announced and weather dependent.  
May 18 Truckee River Railroad for Kids and Adults Truckee Regional Park 11-3PM  
May 31, Music on China Wall. Truckee Tahoe High School band to have a concert on China Wall, Donner Summit. 6PM

**June 2019**

June 1, Historical Talk, Discussion of the "Firsts" that occurred over Donner Summit due to the railroad Truckee Tahoe Airport Conference Room, 7:00pm,  
June 8 Tunnel 6 Clair Tappaan Lodge on Donner Summit - 5PM (optional BBQ dinner follows at 6:15 - RSVP 426-3632 - \$15)  
June 10 Locomotive technologies Pizza on the Hill 11509 Northwoods Blvd Truckee 6 PM  
June 15, Interpretive Walk, Town of Boca site. 10:00am  
June 15, Historical Talk, Boca Brewery, Steam and Beer. Donner State Park Visitors Center. 5:30 PM  
June 22, June 22 Historical Talk, Chinese and their Importance to the Railroad. Truckee Tahoe Airport Conf Rm., 7:00pm  
June 29, Historical Talk, Snow Sheds-Fires and other Related Subjects. Truckee Tahoe Airport Conf Rm. 7:00pm  
June 29 Truckee River Railroad for Kids and Adults Truckee Regional Park 11-3PM

**July 2019**

July 4, Town of Truckee Annual Parade. Theme: Transc. RR 150th Anniversary. Starts 10:00am at the High School  
July 6 Truckee River Railroad for Kids and Adults Truckee Regional Park 11-3PM  
July 18, Historical Talk, History of the Construction of the Railroad, Tahoe Donner Giving Fund Dinner  
Tahoe Donner Lodge 12850 Northwoods Blvd. 5:30 PM  
July 20, Historical Talk, Lincoln Highway. Donner Memorial State Park, Visitors Center. 5:30 pm  
July 20 Truckee River Railroad for Kids and Adults Truckee Regional Park 11-3PM  
July 27, Historical Talk, Logging Railroads. Truckee Tahoe Airport Conference Room, 7:00pm  
July 28, Trestle Tour Drive/Walk. Meet at 9:00am at the Railroad Museum, 10075 Donner Pass Road, Truckee  
Driving/Walking Tour of old Logging Trestles.

**August 2019**

August 3 Truckee River Railroad for Kids and Adults Truckee Regional Park 11-3PM  
Aug 3, Historical Talk. Truckee Lake Tahoe Railway. Truckee Tahoe Airport Conference Room. 7:00pm  
Aug 10, Historical Walk. Jibboom Street, History of the Red-Light District. Time Pending  
Aug 10, Historical Talk, ArtTruckee, Red-Light District of Truckee, History of the Women, Time Pending  
Aug 17, Historical Talk, Vigilantism. Donner Memorial State Park, Visitors Center. 5:30pm  
August 17 Truckee River Railroad for Kids and Adults Truckee Regional Park 11-3PM  
Aug 24, Historical Talk, Henness Pass, Truckee Tahoe Airport Conference Room. 7:00pm  
Aug 31, Final Picnic, Truckee River Railroad, Regional Park Truckee, Time Pending.

**Sept. 2019**

Sept. 14 Truckee River Railroad for Kids and Adults Truckee Regional Park 11-3PM  
Sept. 28 Truckee River Railroad for Kids and Adults Truckee Regional Park 11-3PM  
Sept. 14-15 Donner Party Hike event (Mt. Judah Lodge Sugar Bowl and the State Park) [donnerpartyhike.com](http://donnerpartyhike.com)

Updated listed available on Facebook: "Donner Summit-Truckee Golden Spike Celebration" Or via: <https://www.goldspike.org/>

# New Brochure to Go with the Sesquicentennial

“The Chinamen were as steady, hardworking set of men as could be found.”

John Gillis, “Tunnels of the Pacific Railroad”, 1870

The Chinese were the real heroes of the transcontinental railroad. We thought it appropriate to add a new brochure to our collection in honor of that heroism. This article has all the content, but not the formatting of the new brochure. If you want to read more about the Chinese and the railroad take a look at our June - September, '16 [Heirlooms](#) as well as other references in our article and website picture indices.

The job of building the western portion of the transcontinental railroad and across the Sierra went to the Chinese workers who made up 80% or more of the Central Pacific's workforce.

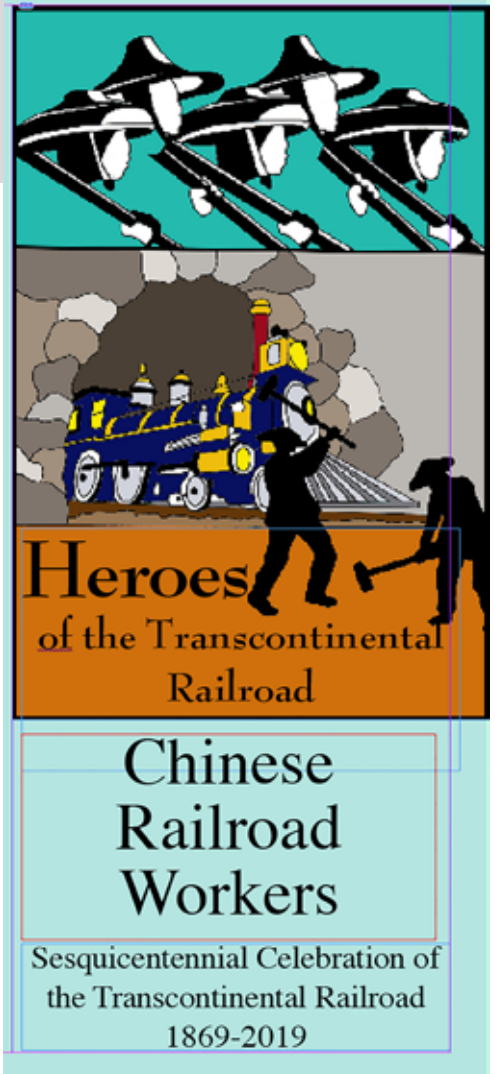
The Chinese workers were courageous. They'd left China with big hopes but uncertain futures, going to a completely alien land, America. Building the railroad they faced discomfort, danger, and death but they built the railroad which tied California to the rest of the country enabling commerce, immigration, and the development of the West. The railroad also brought the world to California as products could be imported to California and then sent to the rest of the country and vice versa.

Once construction started on the Transcontinental Railroad there was not enough labor. Whites wanted to work for themselves or for higher pay in the mines. A call for 5,000 laborers only produced a few hundred. Charles Crocker, one of the Big 4 who ran the railroad, suggested Chinese laborers. That was greeted with laughter and James Strobridge, construction superintendent, was against the idea. The Chinese were small in stature. Each rail weighed 532 lbs. and was 24 feet long. How could the Chinese ever lay those rails? Crocker countered saying, “Did they not build the Chinese wall, the biggest piece of masonry in the world?”

Chinese endured frostbite, avalanche, accident, pneumonia, explosion, rock slide, disease, and cold, continual cold in winter. The Chinese lived in un-insulated buildings and during winter they sometimes went weeks without seeing the sun as they traveled from their camps to the work through snow tunnels. The winter of 1866-67 had one of the highest snowfalls on record: 40 feet. There were a total of 44 storms that winter with one multi-day storm dropping 10 feet of snow. One avalanche took away a cabin filled with Chinese workers whose remains were not found until spring. There was so much snow the snow tunnel leading to Tunnel 6 had to be lengthened by fifty feet so the workers could still have access. The lowest temperature recorded that winter was 5.5 degrees. The summer heat of the Nevada and Utah deserts must also have been grueling.

“The drillers are all Chinamen, and most excellent hands they make, as will be seen when I state that a gang of three can drill three holes of one and a quarter inches in diameter and two and a half feet deep in twelve hours.”

Sacramento Union, April 22, 1867







Above: China Wall, constructed by Chinese railroad workers. The stones fit perfectly with no mortar.

The work was long and hard, done all by hand and black powder explosives. Rocks were moved using baskets and small carts. The work went on 10-12 hours a day six days a week. In the tunnels they worked by candle and lantern light. The air was filled with rock dust and black powder residue.

For the work, the danger and the discomfort, the Chinese earned \$28, then \$30, and finally \$35 a month, a third less than whites who also had their board covered by the railroad.

Chinese labor was supplied to the railroad by labor contractors. The Chinese worked in gangs ranging up to fifty individuals. Each gang had a Chinese foreman who organized the gang and received and distributed the pay. Money was withheld to pay the gang's cook and buy food. Although they were paid less, there was an advantage. The Chinese had much better diets and were the most civilized and healthy of the railroad workers. The white workers had boiled food, beef and potatoes monotonously.

The Chinese diets were rich and varied. They ate "Dried oysters, dried cuttle-fish, dried-fish, sweet rice crackers, dried bamboo sprouts, salted cabbage, Chinese sugar (like sorghum sugar) four kinds of dried fruits, five kinds of desiccated vegetables, vermicelli, dried sea-weed, Chinese bacon cut up into salt cutlets, dried meat of the abalone shell, pea-nut oil, dried mushrooms, tea, and rice. They also buy pork of [sic] the butcher, and on the holidays they eat poultry." (California for Travelers and Settlers, 1873.)

Foodstuffs were purchased by the railroad for resale to work gangs and supplied from mobile stores in rail cars at track end. Chinese merchants also catered to workers selling

They were a great army laying siege to Nature in her strongest citadel. The rugged mountains looked like stupendous ant-hills. They swarmed with Celestials, shoveling, wheeling, carting, drilling and blasting rocks and earth, ... from under immense basket-hats, like umbrellas... After a little experience the [Chinese] were quite as efficient and far less troublesome [than the Irish]

.Beyond the Mississippi, 1869 and the N.Y. Tribune

Without the Chinese, it would have been impossible to complete the Western portion of this great national highway.

Leland Stanford

A gang of Chinamen employed by the railroad were covered up by a snowslide and four or five died before they could be exhumed

Dutch Flat Enquirer November 25, 1866

imported goods, rice, dried fish, tea, opium, silk, and herbal medicines as well as table ware and storage vessels.

The Chinese were better off than the white workers in more than their diets. Their cooks heated water for tea which the Chinese drank instead of the local water. We can only imagine the sanitary habits of thousands of men at work on the line and the effect on local water. The cooks also heated water so the Chinese workers could bathe regularly.

After work the Chinese could bathe, change clothes, gamble, and enjoy opium or liquor.

If the work and living conditions were not bad enough, the Chinese were subject to being waylaid after leaving the railroad during time off. The Sacramento Union reported in December 15, 1866, that “the practice of robbing Chinamen is said to be a very frequent occurrence..., as scarcely a week passes without some of them being



attacked beaten, and plundered.” Other articles reported, “Two Chinamen were shot...” (12/3/66 Sacramento Union), Chinese robbed, doors kicked in, women abused, men beaten, houses burned, etc.

Just how many Chinese died during the building of the railroad is an open question argued over by railroad aficionados and historians. The problem in ascertaining the numbers is lack of record keeping and even contemporary reports cannot be relied upon. The following article gives us some idea though,

“Bones of Defunct Chinamen – The Central Pacific freight train last evening brought to the city the bones of about fifty defunct Chinamen who died from disease or were killed by accident while working on the line of the Central Pacific Railroad....”

Sacramento Union, June 30, 1871



We slept at the Lake House; and spent the next day with the surveyors among the precipitous granite ledges, and visiting Lake Angela, a lovely little mountain gem. It was like picnicking at the North Pole; for snow lined higher ravines and icicles hung from the water-tanks on the stage-road. Here during the previous winter, two laborers were engulfed by a snow-slide. Seeing it approach they stepped behind a tall rock; but it buried them fifty feet deep. In spring their bodies were found standing upright, with shovels in their hands.

Beyond the Mississippi, 1869

With the completion of the transcontinental railroad, celebrations immediately broke out. The entire country was able to participate in the driving of the Golden Spike at Promontory Point, Utah on May 10, 1869. The transcontinental railroad was finished and the dignitaries had gathered. The driving of the Golden Spike was to be the ceremonial finish. A wire had been attached to the spike maul and another wire to the Golden Spike. Each strike of the maul on the Golden Spike would send a click across the telegraph wires to the country. The nation would instantaneously know the tracks from the east and the west were joined. It was truly an age of wonder.

Governor Stanford missed the spike on his first strike but the telegraph operator dutifully clicked the key anyway. Bells rang; people rejoiced.

The railroad was done.

People had even been giddy with excitement earlier as the railroad climbed over the Sierra. As one correspondent to the Sacramento Union wrote in 1867, the railroad “will give to our wealth and progress an impetus so great that even the most sanguine among us will find this calculation far exceeded by the reality.” With the driving of the Golden Spike there could be real celebration of accomplishment and opportunity. Festivities were the order of the day. Sacramento, the starting point of the western portion of the road, and San Francisco had huge celebrations that must have been planned far in advance. There were also celebrations in Virginia City, Stockton, Petaluma, Placerville, and Vallejo.

In Sacramento there had been ads in the papers drawing people to the celebration. The Sacramento Union said on May 8, 1869 that “a victory over space, the elements, and the stupendous mountain barriers separating the East from the West, and apparently defying the genius and energy of man to surmount. Every heart was gladdened by the contemplation of the grand achievement.”

The Daily Alta California reported (May 9, 1869) “A minute ... before 10 o’clock the completion was announced of the laying of the last rail and the driving of the last spike on the Central Pacific Railroad. Immediately following the report there went up a most unearthly din, produced by all the engines owned by the Company, which were gaily decorated and arranged along the city front, with a chorus of all the stationary engines and city boats and the ringing of city bells, which continued ten minutes, during which persons of weak tympana put their fingers in their ears, and rejoiced when the chorus was over. Thousands were present who never before and never will again hear such a grand diapason. The engineers vied with one another in producing screeches and sounding notes. There was harmony and discord... All the principal streets were packed, rendering locomotion difficult. The procession commenced moving at eleven o’clock.”

The first shovel used to build the railroad was exhibited as were the first tie and a picture of the last one.

The grand parade included bands; the militia, the National Guard accompanied by artillery, firemen, machinists, blacksmiths, boilermakers, wagons with machinery; contingents of civic organizations; a boiler and attached smokestack; 29 omnibuses, carriages, and wagons of school children; politicians; a contingent of weavers; carriages, buggies, and horsemen, rail workers; wagons from the telegraph company and Wells Fargo; etc. Participants arrived in 18 trains. There was bunting, banners with stirring quotes, and flags; speeches and poems; there was music and there was prayer.

There were throngs of people, even some of the workers who’d laid the 10 miles of track in one day. The parade took hours to pass.

The San Francisco Bulletin reported Judge Nathan Bennet’s speech at the San Francisco celebration. He said this triumph of railroad construction was wholly owing to the fact that his fellow Californians were “composed of the right materials, derived from the proper origins... In the veins of our people flows the commingled blood of the four greatest nationalities of modern days. The impetuous daring and dash of the French, the philosophical spirit of the German, the unflinching solidity of the English, and the light-hearted impetuosity of the Irish, have all contributed each its appropriate share... A people deducing its origins from such races, and condensing their best traits into its national life, is capable of any achievements.” It was stirring.

There were no Chinese at all, even though they had made up the vast majority of CPRR workers who filled the cuts, bored the tunnels, leveled the hills, cut the trees, drilled the holes, blasted and moved the rock, and laid the rail and were the ones who laid the record ten miles of track in one day.

Not far in the future mobs would burn out Chinatowns and Chinese businesses along the route of the railroad and assault individual Chinese. Prejudice would be officially mandated by court decisions in California and, nationally, the Chinese Exclusionary Act would be passed just a dozen years later.

How quickly people can forget.

# Serendipity

## & the Lincoln Highway on Donner Summit

Sometimes It's Just Serendipity that brings you what's in the [Heirloom](#). This article goes back a few years to an idea we had about describing where you can walk the Lincoln Highway on Donner Summit. Spoiler: there are lots of places. We've been saving the idea while other subjects have worked their way into the [Heirloom](#). As it turns out, this [Heirloom](#) is full so where you can walk the Lincoln Highway is going to wait until next month.

Last Labor Day Rob Squires of Serene Lakes, came up to the editor of this august historical periodical and wondered about where he could access the Lincoln Highway with his 1914 Model T. He thought that would make a great picture. Naturally the editor of this august historical periodical was enthusiastic. Pretty pictures enliven [Heirlooms](#). So we made a date for summer, 2019.

Then, not a week later, the editor of this august historical periodical was showing Brent Baader around Donner Summit. Brent's company, Old Strand Video Productions, does video projects for PBS. He was gathering file footage and making plans to come back and do something extensive about Donner Summit history. Stay tuned about that. Toward the end of our tour, with many stops to film things (since Donner Summit is the most historically significant square mile in California and maybe the entire Western United States, there are a myriad of things to film), Brent suggested that an old car on the Lincoln Highway would be "just the ticket." Well, as it happened, the editor of this august [Heirloom](#) happened to know someone....

A couple of weeks later, in mid-September the Model T owner, Rob Squires, the PBS guy, Brent Baader, and the MHRT (Mobile Historical Research Team including Art Clark – see page three) got together for some shots of an old car on existing portions of the Lincoln Highway. Brent, the PBS guy, and Rob, the Model T guy, were "blown away" by the opportunities. So might you be even if you don't have an old car with which to decorate existing portions of the Lincoln Highway.

Rob Squires in his customized 1914 Model "T".

He is on a remnant of the Lincoln Highway at Big Bend.





Top left and right are in about the same location as on the previous page. I just liked the pictures.

The ones immediately above and to the right are on the Lincoln Highway where it goes along the Yuba River just west of other pictures. As you travel Old 40 leaving Big Bend, and come to our 20 Mile Museum sign for the Lincoln Highway, look across the river and you'll see this spot.



# From the DSHS Archives

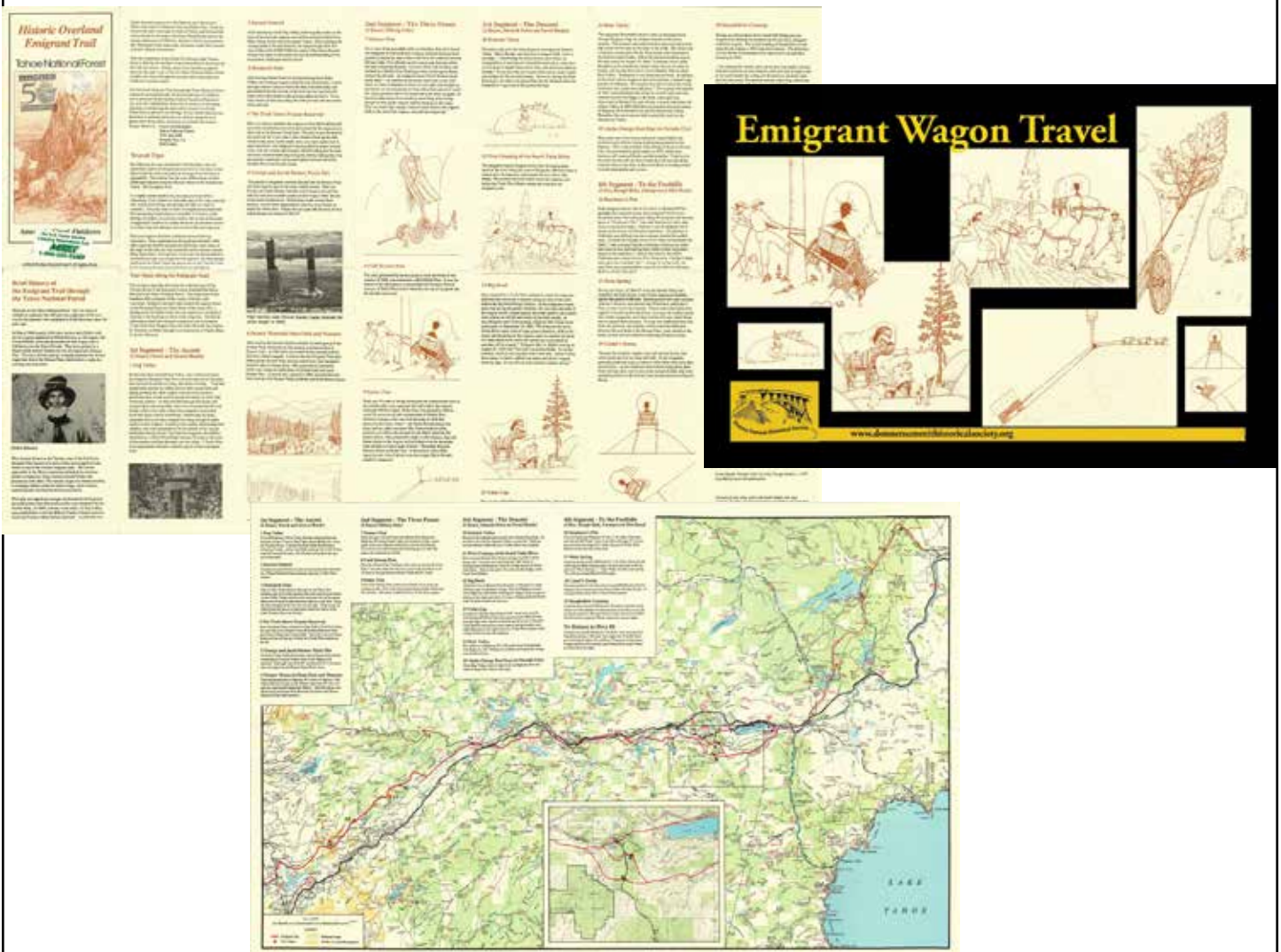
## What's in Your Closet?

We appreciate the help we get from time to time. It's a big job tracking and writing about Donner Summit history. Here is a case in point. Marshall Fey, eminent trail historian, who has written a number of times for the Heirloom (check the Heirloom article index on our website) sent us a digital copy of the 1970 USFS map and brochure here. It focuses on the emigrant experience and gives the 1970's traveler a route to follow to see remnants of the Emigrant Trail. There are also little descriptions of parts of the route.

We then took the drawings and put them on a postcard-sized picture (below, right) to use with our illustrated hikes so that people can see what travel was really like in the old days.

You may have some things lying around in your closet about Donner Summit. Feel free to share.

Meanwhile, thanks Marshall.



# From the DSHS Archives

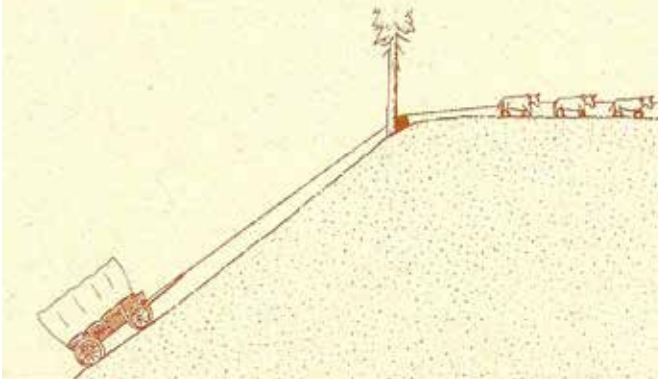
## 10 Summit Valley

The three trails over the summit passes converged in Summit Valley. Edwin Bryant, arriving here in August 1846, wrote in his diary "...Descending the rocky ravine a few miles, we emerged from it and entered a beautiful level valley, some four or five miles in length from east to west, and about two miles in breadth." It was here that the wagon trains rested, made repairs and cut hay for the onward journey. However, during the Gold Rush days, the valley was grazed bare by the livestock from the hundreds of wagon trains that passed through.



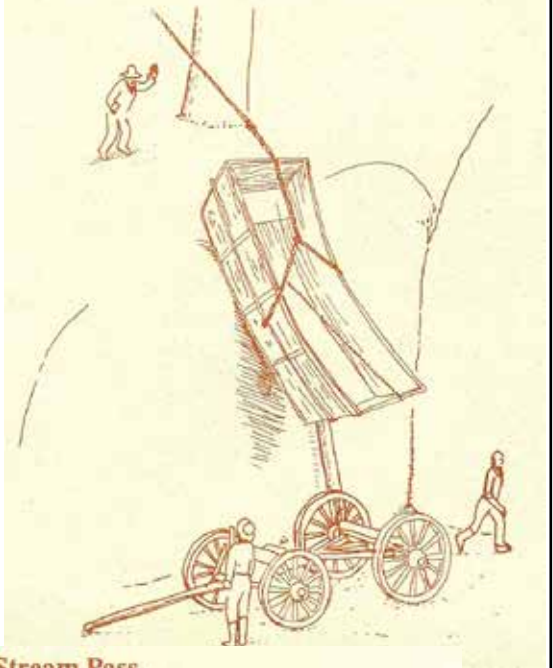
## 9 Roller Pass

Walk east 75 yards to the lip of the pass for a spectacular view of the unbelievably steep approach the trail took to the summit. Although 800 feet higher, Roller Pass was opened in 1846 to avoid the awesome granite escarpments of Donner Pass. Nicholas Carriger, who was with the party in 1846 that pioneered this route, wrote "...the Sierra Nevada being very steep and our cattle very poor, Mr. Greenwood our pilot, advised us to follow the counsel of our fellow traveller, Mr. Judson Green, who proposed to make a roller (using a log) and fasten chains to the wagons and pull them over the mountain with the help of twelve yoke of oxen". Thereafter this pass became known as Roller Pass. It shows how with a little ingenuity and a lot of desire, even the mighty Sierra Nevada could be conquered.



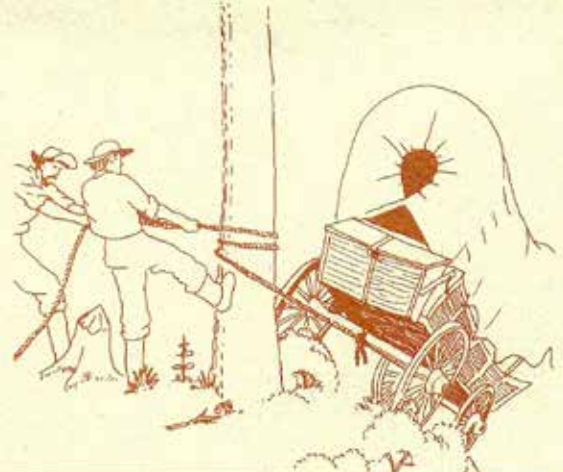
## 7 Donner Pass

For a view of the incredible cliffs and boulders that often forced the emigrants to dismantle their wagons and haul them up sheer granite escarpments, take a short walk from the trailhead towards Donner Lake. You will also see the narrow gap through which the trail crossed the Summit. It is now filled with boulders and marked by a Pacific Crest Trail sign where the Emigrant Route crosses the old pass. An emigrant named David Hudson wrote in his diary "...we hitched up our teams and made a start, and when we came to benches or rocks six and eight feet straight up and down, we would unyoke or oxen, drive them around to some low place, get them above the bench and yoke them up again. In the mean time some of us would cut some long poles strong enough to bear up the wagons and lay them up on the rocks. Then we would take enough chains to reach back to the wagons, hitch to the end of the tongues, and pull the wagons up."



## 8 Cold Stream Pass

This pass, pioneered by the last party to cross the Sierra in late summer of 1846, was sometimes called Middle Pass. It was the easiest of the three passes to ascend but had the most difficult descent. A Trails West marker identifies the top of the grade that the old trail came over.



# Book Review

## Race to Promontory Picturing the First Transcontinental Railroad

© 2018 Union Pacific 111 pages large format (10.25 x 13.25")  
Ken Burns, Glenn Willumson, and Daniel Davis

Sit down with this picture book of the building of the transcontinental railroad and settle in for an enjoyable couple of hours in a world gone by.

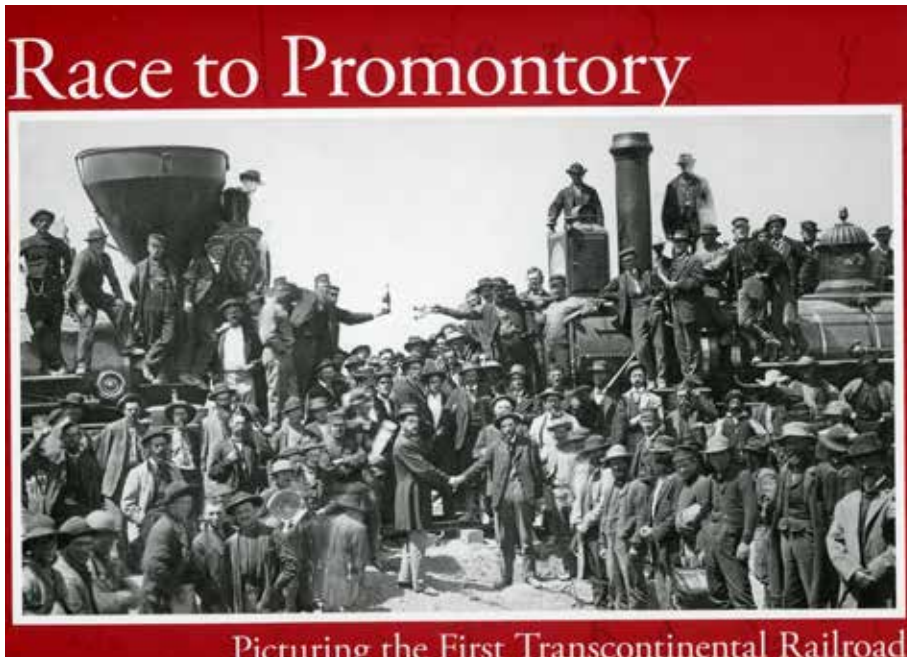
This is a large format picture book, suitable for coffee tables when it's not occupying your whole lap, was produced to celebrate the sesquicentennial of the transcontinental railroad by the Union Pacific. Many of the pictures, all from UP archives, are full page and larger in size. Generally the pictures have wonderful clarity and details, especially in the larger ones, so one does not just flip through them. You stop and look closely, picking out detail on signs, or locomotives, tools, workers, etc. You wonder about the subjects' lives. What did they think of the greatest engineering achievement of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century they were building? How did the coming of the railroad change the landscape and change America?

If you are familiar with the construction of the transcontinental railroad you've probably seen these pictures but because of the size and quality of the photographic reproductions, the book is a good addition to your library.

Most of the Central Pacific pictures are by Alfred A. Hart and those of the Union Pacific are by Andrew J. Russell. There are two short essays about Mr. Hart and Mr. Russell. Some captions give more than just the photographer's name, title and date. Others are more extensive, for example noting that there were 100 tons of track in a mile of rail along with 2500 ties and two to three tons of spikes and connecting plates.

**"Whether in the mountains or the desert, the CPRR stereographs transported the viewer into virtual reality making anything even a transcontinental railroad, seem possible." Pg 20**

The photographs are not just pictures of the railroad but also of scenery along the route such as the one on the next page, "A scenic view of Donner Lake California 1866" Alfred A. Hart #130. Here the author of the Hart essay, Glenn Willumson says, "Most of the stereographs demonstrate the ways man and machine harness sublime forces of nature – rugged mountains, arid deserts, granite cliffs and heavy snows. Within the sequence, however, the narrative of progress is interrupted by stereographs in which the railroad does not appear and the picturesque beauty of nature is the photos' primary reason." In "View on Donner Lake" (top of the next page) "a ragged branch in the lower right corner sets the foreground plane while the pristine mirrored surface of Donner Lake stretches from the foreground to the middle ground forest, jutting into the lake and, finally, to the distant hills beyond. The composition gives equal weight to the sky, in the which the puffy clouds float over the picturesque landscape."







Take a look at the UP's celebratory activities for the sesquicentennial:

<https://www.up.com/goldenspike/index.html>

Traveling exhibition about the railroad for the sesquicentennial:

<https://www.up.com/media/releases/180716-museum-exhibition.htm>

To save you the effort of looking things up, the traveling exhibition will be traveling

Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha, NE:

October 6, 2018 – January 6, 2019

Utah Museum of Fine Arts, Salt Lake City, UT:

February 1 – May 26, 2019

Crocker Art Museum, Sacramento, CA:

June 23 – September 29, 2019

It looks like [Race to Promontory](#) is the catalog for the traveling show and could be obtained at the above museums.

“Hart’s stereographs were more than simple documents of completed track; they conveyed information in a particularly dramatic fashion... the railroad and surrounding landscape leaped into a dramatic, three-dimensional tableau. Hart...create[d] drama, oftentimes of panoramic scope, making sure each composition had prominent foreground, middle ground, and background, and enhancing the transformative effect of deep space. He treated his stereographs like a stage set... The experience of viewing these stereographs left the spectator floating in space, a disembodied presence overlooking a panoramic landscape through which the CPRR made steady progress.”

Glenn Willumson



## Note:

You have noticed our monthly book reviews. You might want to do some reading of your own.

Stop in at the DSHS. Norm Sayler has a large collection of books for perusing, buying, or checking out.

You might even want to do a review for us.

# Marin Ski Club

## Marin Ski Club Starts Hut Drive

In 1950 Marin Ski Club members stood “fast in their belief that skiing will be the country’s leading winter sport in a few years” and California was developing into one of the leading skiing states in the country. That was because there were “accessible snow fields close to large populations.”

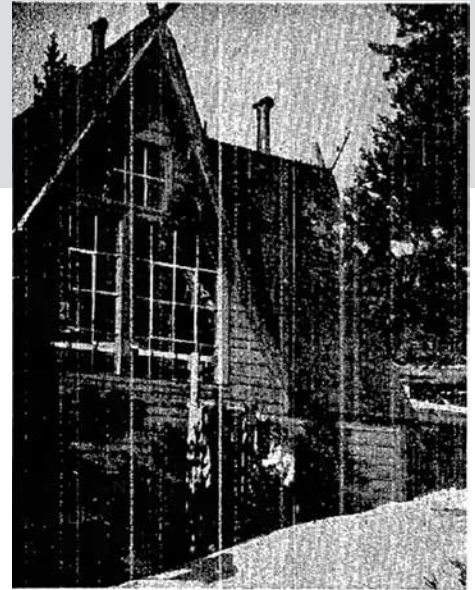
People could leave Marin County in 1950 on a Friday evening at 6:30 PM and “arrive in the winter wonderland of Donner Summit by 11:30 p.m.” Since the “winter wonderland” was so close it made sense to use it and being part of a ski club made the using easy. Making the using even easier were ski clubs. There were “perks” to ski club membership such as members recognize each other’s cars and so inexperienced people could always get help with the “Mysterious realm of chains, frozen locks, etc.”

The Marin Ski Club had by 1950, access to “large enough lodges to accommodate all their housing members [full-season users as opposed to occasional weekend users] at reasonable costs per season” never over \$20 for the whole season. Non housing members could always make reservations for \$2 per night.

According to the Daily San Rafael Independent Journal (April 18, 1950) the Marin Ski Club rented a large lodge belonging to Col. Wm. Rutherford across from the Beacon Hill Lodge. Members could just walk across the street to go skiing. Those who wished could ride the “snow-mobile from Norden... to the Sugar Bowl or jump into their cars and ride up the highway to Donner Ski Ranch...”

Col. Rutherford was willing to sell the lodge to the club for \$10,000 minus the rent already paid and was willing to take back a note for the sale. So the club was looking to raise the \$2,000 down payment. To raise the money members were asked to pay \$25, \$50, or \$100 to receive “housing memberships”. They also wanted to sell bonds.

By the time of the newspaper article members had raised about half the money and were optimistic about the rest. They also wanted to add on to the lodge since in the 1950 configuration it only slept 20.



Above, the picture that accompanied the newspaper article. Below, the Marin Ski Club today.



Readers will note that the Marin Ski Club is not across from where the Beacon Hill Lodge used to be. It is east of the junction of Donner Pass Rd. and Soda Springs Rd. and on the same side of the street as the Beacon Hill Lodge used to be.

# Odds & Ends on Donner Summit



Over the years various people have marked the route of the emigrants and the Donner Party as they traveled over Donner Summit. Look into our [Heirloom](#) article index and search for stories that have to do with marking the trail.

Here are two markers close to each other near Cascade Lakes. Take the dirt road out past Royal Gorge headquarters a few miles to Kidd Lake. Keep going around Kidd Lake up the hill to the clearing with the Royal Gorge warming hut. Three roads branch off just after the hut. The center one goes downhill. It's very rough. As you get to the outlet of Cascade Lakes you'll see the sign to the left above and nearby the one to the right above.

The one to the left is a marker for Charles Stanton a single man who was part of the Donner Party. He left the wagon train somewhere in Nevada to go ahead to Sutter's Fort for help. Charles had no connections, no family, in the Donner Party but he returned anyway with food, mules, and two

Indians. He then made two attempts to escape entrapment but failed both times. On December 15th he was part of the Forlorn Hope that left Donner Lake for California. Stanton made it as far as near this spot, according to some. In the morning the rest of the party continued on and when asked, Stanton said he'd be along shortly. He was exhausted.

Seven of the original 15 Forlorn Hope members reached California and set the rescues into action. One of the rescue parties found Charles Stanton's body sitting against a tree. Some experts think Stanton died closer to what is now Kingvale.

Here is a monument to a man who sacrificed himself for others.

The sign on the right simply marks the route of the Donner Party survivors and other emigrants on the way to California and new lives.

This is part of a series of miscellaneous history, "Odds & Ends" of Donner Summit. There are a lot of big stories on Donner Summit making it the most important historical square mile in California. All of those episodes\* left behind obvious traces. As one explores Donner Summit, though, one comes across a lot of other things related to the rich history. All of those things have stories too and we've been collecting them. Now they're making appearances in the [Heirloom](#).

If you find any "Odds & Ends" you'd like to share pass them on to the editor - see page 2

\*Native Americans; first wagon trains to California; the first transcontinental railroad, highway, air route, and telephone line, etc.

DONNER SUMMIT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

[www.donnersummithistoricalsociety.org](http://www.donnersummithistoricalsociety.org)

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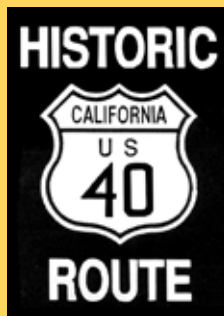
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\_\_\_\_\_



## Take the Scenic Route: Donner Summit's Old Highway 40



Pick up or download the brochure at the DSHS at <http://www.donnersummithistoricalsociety.org/pages/brochures.html>



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