



Donner Summit Historical Society

Newsletter

issue # 1 Labor Day, 2008

The purpose of the Donner Summit Historical Society is "to ... help the community learn the history of Donner Summit and the surrounding area, and to collect and display artifacts relative to the history..." (articles of incorporation, December, 2007). The historical society is a 501(c)3.

Historical Society Launches

The Donner Summit Historical Society was incorporated and achieved 501(c)3 status in the summer of 2008.

The society has launched its website at donnersummithistoricalsociety.org, opened a checking account, ordered stationery, received its first donations and began to organize, archive, and catalog Norm Saylor's extensive collection of writings, pictures, menus, brochures, match boxes, and other memorabilia, material he has collected over decades from many sources.

Historical Society Website

The Donner Summit Historical Society's website is now up: www.donnersummithistoricalsociety.org

Get on our email list so we can send you monthly digital newsletters with pictures and stories of Donner Summit history:
info@donnersummithistoricalsociety.org

Donner Summit circa 1954

This is the first of our monthly stories, illustrated with pictures, about Donner Summit history. Stories will come monthly via electronic newsletters so be sure to give us your email address and tell your friends. Our newsletters will be free, but you may feel free to contribute to the society. Our long-term goal is to build a museum on Donner Summit so everyone can enjoy our collections and Donner Summit history.

Our first story plumbs the memory of Norm Saylor, maybe the most interesting living Summit character.

Donner Summit is now a quiet little community sitting off a major California freeway. It's economy has been going downhill for decades. It wasn't always so however.

When Norm Saylor came to Soda Springs on Donner Summit in 1954, it was an entirely different Donner Summit. There were five gas stations, five bar/restaurants, three grocery stores, and 1600 rentable beds scattered among various hotels and lodges. Prior to Hiway 80, Soda Springs had a daily traffic volume of 7800 vehicles swelling to 17,000 on major weekends. There were 145 kids in the K-8 schoolhouse in Kingvale. The annual Donner Summit Community Club picnic drew more than a thousand people to Big Bend.

Since traffic moved much slower on Old 40 people stopped in Soda Springs to rest, eat, and have fun. Because there were so many people coming through, there was a vibrant community to serve them.

Norm Saylor's introduction to Soda Springs came during high school when the Van Norden dam was a popular tobogganing area. "Tobogganing was huge on the dam." busloads of kids came up to participate. One day someone said Norm should try skis. He did and later became a Class "A" racer in downhill and slalom. He loved skiing and Donner Summit.

When he arrived permanently in 1954, he went to work operating the ski lift and rope tow at Soda Springs Ski Area which was run by Milton and Helen Hogle. It was a relatively large ski area having the rope tow, chair lift and seven "T" bars. Skiing cost \$1.50 a day for the rope tow and \$2.25 for the chair lift. At the time Sugar Bowl only had two chair lifts.

Norm lived in a little room attached to the Snowflake Coffee Shop which was just across the street in the current Soda Springs ski area parking lot near the Van Norden dam. That building was torn down in 2007. Norm's accommodations were a single room with a single light bulb. He had no heat and no running water but it was "a great place to live with no money."

As Norm moved into the community he became part of it meeting everyone and saving everything. He met the Walton family which built and ran Donner Ski Ranch. Their daughter, Starr Walton Hurley, is on the historical society Board and is one of the two Olympic skiers to come from Donner Summit. Norm met the Jones family which built and ran the Soda Springs Hotel, Nyack Lodge, and Rainbow Lodge. There was also Carl Buek and his son, Dick. Dick was the "Mad Dog of Donner Summit," the other Donner Summit

Olympic racer. Edvi Aro was the first snow ranger on Donner Summit, a unique position. Snow rangers explored looking

for good ski trails and then took people skiing on them. Johnny Johansen and Bud Zoric were ski instructors on Donner Summit.

The bars and restaurants were full of people as residents and travelers patronized them. After work Norm would drop quarters into the juke boxes and dance until 2 AM. If your room was not heated that was probably one of the best alternatives. "Sometimes" Norm would drink and on "occasion my head would hurt." So when his head hurt he would sleep in the lift shack so he would not be late to work in the morning. He would also stuff snow in his hat. As the snow melted it improved his headache but it also showed how hard he was working because of the "sweat" he'd worked up.

Norm wasn't paid much to run the ski lift at Soda Springs so he worked other jobs as well. He did dishes at the Soda Springs Hotel for dinners and he cleaned toilets at the Snowflake to earn lunch and the heatless waterless room. "I don't know why....but people would lose money...." so Norm would head for the old couches in the Soda Springs Hotel at the end of weekends and poke among the cushions. That was another source of spending money.



Historical Society Needs

Participate in the historical society and help save Donner Summit history for the future:

We need

1. someone to convert 8mm movies to DVD and a device to view 8mm films
2. publicity person

editor:

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A sense of community Wall to Wall – the \$100 bill

It is hard for many to imagine the community on Donner Summit in the 1950's since today's communities are so different from those. Much of the Summit today is made up of second homeowners who are not here permanently and there are very few permanent residents. Life was different then as this little snippet illustrates

There was a tradition on Donner Summit concerning a \$100 bill that has unfortunately gone away. Two or three times a winter someone would start circulating a hundred dollar bill. He'd call for drinks "wall to wall" and place the bill on the bar. This would start at the Tourist Club in Truckee. Johnny Richards, the owner, would then take the bill to Hap Warneke's Donner Lake Lodge and again the bill was placed on the bar for drinks "wall to wall." It didn't matter whether there was one person or a hundred in the establishment. The bill bought drinks "wall to wall." Hap would then take the bill to Jack Woodard's Donner Ski Ranch Bar. From where it would make its way to Brandt Chaplin's Soda Springs Hotel, then to Elmo Moriano's Beacon Hill Lodge and then to Charlie Seco's Crest Garage and Lodge. From there it went to Fran Couillard's Donner Summit Lodge, and Kenny Hendrick's Rainbow Tavern. Kenny would then return the bill the Truckee. That was "part of living on the Summit." Imagine the sense of community there must have been.



BEACON HILL LODGE

ON HIGHWAY U. S. 40 NEAR DONNER SUMMIT
In the Heart of the Sierra Playground
Soda Springs
Garfield 6-3605

San Francisco Reservations
EXbrook 7-3983

ALL YEAR RECREATION CENTER
Skiing — Swimming — Sports

Winter Rates
(SATURDAY—SUNDAY AND HOLIDAYS)
AMERICAN PLAN

Two Meals Included: Breakfast and Dinner

	Per Day Per Person
Sleeping Bag Dorm	\$ 6.50
Dormitories: Men's, Women's	7.50
(We Furnish Linen)	
Room Without Bath	9.50
Room with Connecting Bath—2 to Room....	10.50
Room with Connecting Bath—3 to Room....	9.50
Room with Connecting Bath—Twin Beds 2 to Room	11.00
Room with Private Bath—2 to Room	12.00
Children under 10 in Room with Parents with 2 meals	6.00

WEEKLY RATES AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST
Deposit of First Day's Stay on All Reservations
Sales tax will be charged on American Plan Meals
NO REFUNDS NO PETS ALLOWED

Help the goal:

A Museum on Donner Summit
Help us achieve our long term goal: a
museum on Donner Summit:
Contribute to the Donner Summit Historical
Society, a 501(c)3 organization.

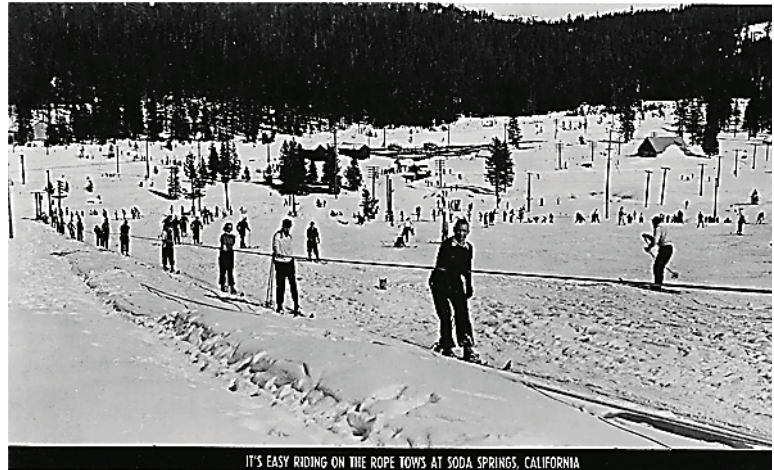
Purchase our first reprint, a copy of the Army
and Navy Club brochure circa 1935 with
pictures of the Summit and the proposed club
for Army and Navy personnel. See page 4
for details about the reproduction.



About the header on page 1. It's taken from
a panorama. Starting left to right are four historical points
of interest: Chinese Wall, the first Union Pacific tunnel,
Rainbow Bridge, and Mt. Stephens (named for the leader of
the first wagon train over the Sierra).

pictures

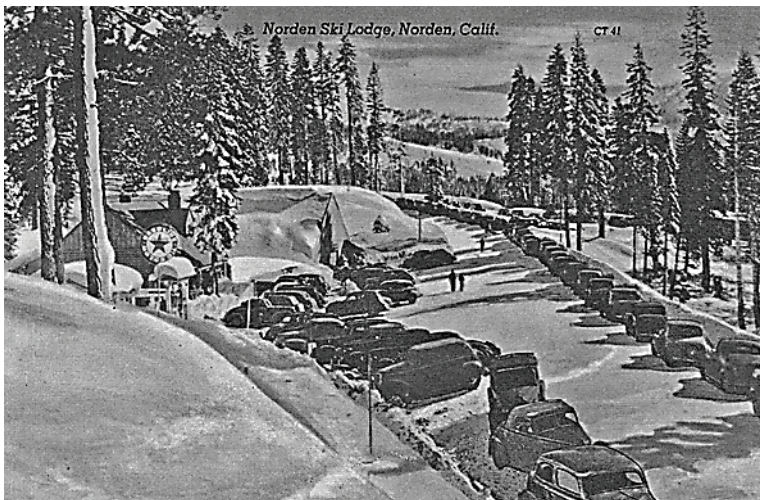
1. (page 4) Norden Ski Lodge sitting where the Norden Store and post office used to be in the gray building on the north side of Old 40 just a quarter mile down from Sugar Bowl. Note the traffic in the old days, the Texaco Star and look closely to the back right. There was the tunnel that went from Old 40 to the Norden train station. In the station was a restaurant called the Chinaman. This was the original stop for ski trains in the '30's. This was also the home of the "mole" people but that's another story.



2. (page 3) Beacon Hill Lodge prices in the 1950's. Beacon Hill Lodge used to be next to the Soda Springs Hotel which is now condominiums. Soda Springs Ski Hill used to be called Beacon Hill in the '30's.

3. (page 4) Soda Springs Ski Hill in the 1950's with the people on the rope tow when Norm Saylor worked there. Look closely to the back of the picture and see all the buildings that used to be across the street.

4. (page 3) Soda Springs "T" bar lift about 1949. The lift came from Donner Ski Ranch. The driver terminal building was cut in half and moved down to Soda Springs. The terminal building sat across Soda Springs Rd. and the lift went over the road. This continued until Soda Springs Rd. was plowed in the winters. Previously people arrived at the Ice Lakes Chalets (where Ice Lakes Lodge is now) by sleigh.



5. (page 2) Building that housed the Snowflake Lodge and later the Lee and June Forster Ski Shop. This was the decrepit building that sat in the Soda Springs parking lot across from the ski area until it was ripped down in 2007. This is also the building in which Norm Saylor had a heatless room that lacked running water in the 1950's.

Society Newsletter - Free

Free monthly digital historical society newsletters: stories and pictures. Subscribe at: info@donnersummithistoricalsociety.org

Support the historical Society

Support the historical society's goal of a museum on Donner Summit. We are selling a 1935 brochure showing a proposed Army Navy Club at Ice Lakes (today Serene Lakes). Full of pictures, it shows Serene Lakes as three lakes before the dam was built. Prints are 18X24 and suitable for display. For information go to our website www.donnersummithistoricalsociety.org where you can see a PDF advertisement.

This is just the first of our stories about Donner Summit history. There will be more – regularly but we could also use your help. If you have information, stories about chasing girls or boys on Donner Summit, if you have memorabilia, if you can help bring Donner Summit history alive, or you just want to call Norm Saylor a liar, let us know: contact the webmaster at donnersummithistoricalsociety.org.