



Donner Summit Historical Society

December, 2008 issue #4

Newsletter

Rainbow Bridge

“One of the wonders of [California] on a silvered highway to the Bay.”

Rainbow Bridge is the famous structure on Donner Summit and so a suitable icon for the historical society. You can see it at the top of this page of course, but it's also been used in commercials; been the subject of countless photographs by tourists and commercial and art photographers; and it's been used as a prop in movies like True Lies.

Before Rainbow Bridge was built the old Lincoln or Victory Highway wound steeply down Donner Summit with grades as high as 18%. With the 1920's automobiles became a popular mode of transportation. They had improved mechanically and people began vacationing with their cars sometimes pulling trailers. Trucks had also improved and become a common form of long haul transportation for goods. More vehicles were using the Lincoln Highway as well so people were thinking about improvement.



In the Lake Tahoe area, lumber had been moved by railroads but as increasing demand for lumber could not be met by the Truckee lumber mills, trucks began hauling logs to mills elsewhere. The only route was up over Donner Summit on the Lincoln Highway with its high grades.

Since autos and trucks had improved and were being used more, it became necessary to improve roads. In 1923 the State began the construction of “a wide, modern highway with easy grades and good alignment.” By 1924 the road had been completed to about a half mile east of Donner Summit. The route over the top still needed to be completed but that sat on U.S. Forest Service land. So, the U.S. Forest Service stepped in. Not only did the Forest Service own the land but they needed to facilitate the transportation of lumber out of the Truckee basin to distant mills. So, the final 3.7 miles

of road, including a bridge were built “by the United States Bureau of Public Roads with forest highway funds” which took the new “modern highway” to Soda Springs.

Rainbow Bridge on the one hand was a common design for the 1920’s. Other bridges with like designs were built at Yuba Gap, Big Sur, Redding, and Folsom. Rainbow was also unique though because

of its placement. It has a grade and a compound curve. That had never been done before. For engineers, the final construction report of 1925 says, “The alignment consists of a series of compound curves; there being a 360 foot radius curve over the arch and a 145 ft radius over each approach span.” The bridge is “as completed...240’ – 4” along the center line” and 24’ wide.

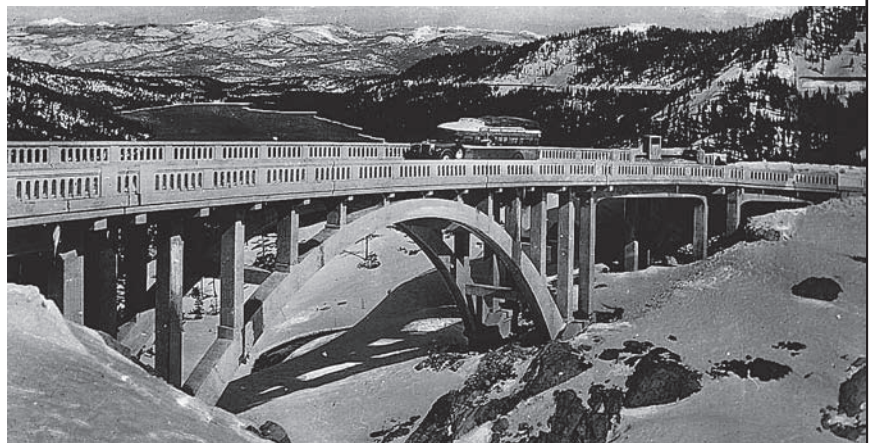
The gravel and sand that made up the concrete for the bridge was mined at Donner Lake and taken up the old road to the top. There it was taken down to the bridge construction site for mixing. Bridge construction progressed from the west to the east which was the downhill direction. That made moving freshly mixed concrete in wheelbarrows easier.

The bridge and final parts of the highway were finished in 1926 for \$450,000. The bridge itself was estimated to begin with at \$26,000. The final bridge cost \$37,304.32 partly due to design changes and additions. The final cost gave the contractor a profit of about \$1,319. At the dedication C.F. McGlashan gave a talk and a plaque was dedicated. That plaque later disappeared, was found, and now resides in the Truckee jail (so it doesn’t disappear again?) The picture at the top of this page saw the dedication ceremony in 1925.

The greatly improved Highway 40, “a giant highway engineering feat... requiring two years of constant work” could now accommodate the growing truck and auto traffic and has a maximum 7% grade now. Of course it was not “constant work” that got the job done because work stopped in winter. The bridge “eliminated for all time the terrors of the Donner

grade from the state highway system of California.” Lookout point at the east end of the bridge was constructed within the next five years.

editor:
Bill Oudegeest
1412 Hillmont
Modesto, CA
95355
209-524-9657
slpoa@
oudegeest.com



The new road was a great improvement not just in summer but also later and earlier in the season. The road could “be kept open many more weeks longer in the future than in former years.” Even

with the better grades and nice new bridge, Old 40 was closed in winters until 1931-32 when plowing started at the behest of the Auburn Ski Club.

In 1937 the State decided to concrete Old 40 from the Summit to where the intersection of Old 40/ highway 80 now is. In order to do the work, all traffic was pulled off Old 40 at the Summit and sent down the old road next to Van Norden. Traffic re-entered the highway at the small dirt road at the end of the Soda Springs Ski Hill parking a lot across from the DSL, which was called the Fox Farm in those days.



About the Graphics

About the graphics on pages 2 and 3: The pictures come from the Norm Saylor collection courtesy of the Grass Valley Video History Museum. The graphic below is also from the Norm Saylor collection and is the program from the Rededication ceremony in 1998.

Top on page 2: dedication ceremony of Rainbow Bridge 1925. Middle page 2: scaffolding for the bridge. Bottom page 2 bus on the bridge - time indeterminate. Top page 3: two old cars on the bridge 1933. Note the solid center line. It has to be before WWII because it was with WWII that the war effort required highways to be painted with dashed lines.

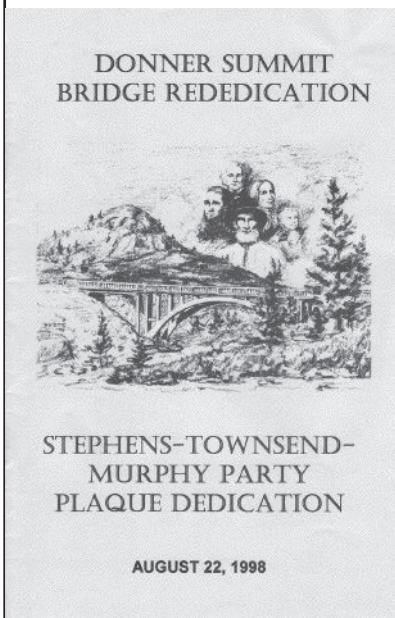
Reconstruction

Decades of heavy use in a harsh climate caused Rainbow Bridge to deteriorate. When I-80 was completed in 1964 Old 40 was given to Placer and Nevada Counties. Nevada County really didn't want it because of the maintenance and snow plowing needed.

By the early 90's Nevada County needed to solve the deterioration. Four choices were put forth:

1. tear down Rainbow Bridge and dig up the highway from ASI to the bridge. Traffic would only be allowed up from Donner Lake as far as the vista point.
2. tear down the bridge, put in a culvert, and fill what the bridge spanned with rock.
3. tear down the bridge and build a modern bridge with a different curve to facilitate modern traffic.
4. Fix the old bridge.

Many locals wanted to fix the old bridge and so an organization was started to save the bridge started by Vicki Tamietti and Norm Saylor. Then, just by happenstance, Norm Saylor saw an article in the Sacramento Bee that said that the State of California Beaches and Parks had \$500,000 available to rehabilitate and save bridges.



Norm was president of the DSPUD in those days and so he had the DSPUD general manager, Steve Beucus, write a grant to the State to save Rainbow Bridge.

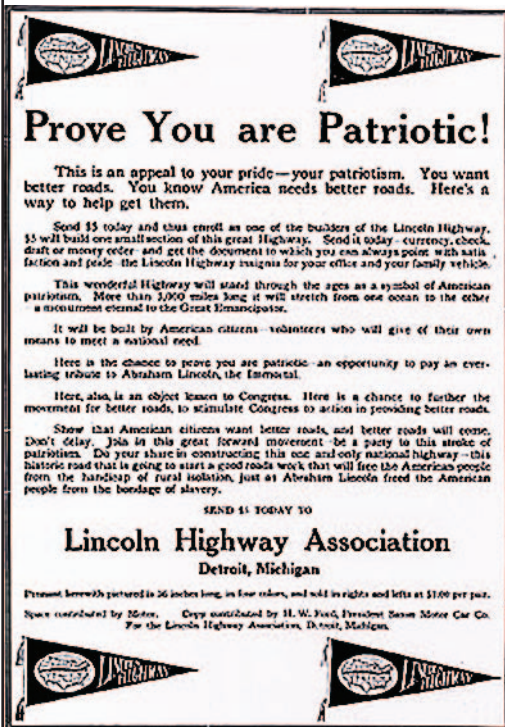
“The Donner Summit community was responsible for saving the bridge,” says Norm Saylor. The community helped with fundraisers, letter writing, and attending hearings. “People started paying attention,” said Norm.

The grant was approved and suddenly the County Board of Supervisors were very interested in saving Rainbow Bridge too. They were all for option 4. Eventually the County kicked in \$1.6 million and the bridge was finished in 1993. The replacement concrete was color matched so the rehabilitated bridge would look identical to the old. The only change was that the openings in the railings were made smaller so that people’s heads could not get stuck.

The Lincoln Highway

In 1913 it was becoming necessary for America to have a “continuous improved highway from the Atlantic to the Pacific, open to ...all...,without toll charges....” Since the nation had no monuments yet to Abraham Lincoln it was thought a good selling point for the highway would be dedicating it to “be a lasting memorial to Abraham Lincoln.” The newly formed Lincoln Highway Association focused itself on determining the route of the highway using existing roads, listing

needed connections and then working to encourage local jurisdictions and states to build the needed connecting routes. They also designed road standards for the highway. Initially 3,389 miles were laid out for America’s first highway. Much of the highway was not a highway however as you’ll see later here.



The Lincoln Highway Association concentrated “its attention upon the education of the public towards the proper expenditure of road funds.... the first step in a national system of...connecting routes.” The graphic to the left is an example of the exhortations to Americans to contribute to the new highway. It was a patriotic endeavor. The graphic at the top of page three is the cover of the prospectus that sought donations. The graphics are printed with the permission of the current Lincoln Highway Association which has interesting publications, online store, and website (www.lincolnhighwayassoc.org).

It was tough going crossing the country even with the Lincoln Highway. For example, first transcontinental Army convoy in 1919 went 3310 miles in 62 days averaging 53 miles per day. Dwight Eisenhower was on the trip and it was the memory of that trip that spurred Eisenhower to push for our present interstate highway system.

Eisenhower wrote a chapter called Through Darkest America with Truck and tank in his book At Ease: Stories I tell to Friends. It related his travels as part of a 1919 transcontinental army convoy on the Lincoln Highway.

Another example of how hard travel was, was that the improvement that would be Lincoln Highway called for a design for the highway “predicated upon an average of 15,000 passenger automobiles per 24-hr. day traveling at a speed of 35 miles per hour and 5,000 motor trucks per 24-hr. day traveling at an average speed of 10 miles per hour.

35 MPH was for the best sections. Can you imagine traveling across Nevada at less than 35 MPH? This is maybe because in 1924 of the total length, 836 miles

California speed limits circa 1923 form the Official Guide to the Lincoln Highway:

Speed must be reasonable and proper, not to exceed thirty-five miles in open country where view is unobstructed ahead for a distance of four hundred feet. Restricted to twenty miles speed within residential districts and fifteen miles at intersections....

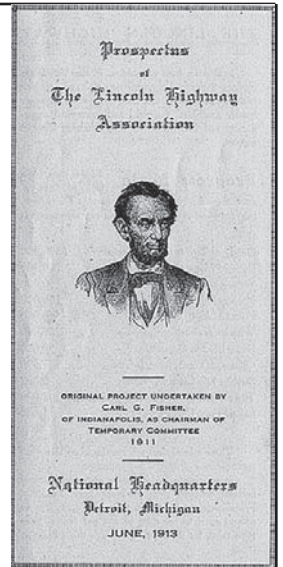
The entire expense of a car and four passengers from New York to San Francisco, a distance of 3,140 miles, via the Lincoln Highway, should not at any time exceed \$5.00 a day per passenger under normal conditions.

were paved, 1650 miles were graded gravel, leaving the rest of 3143 apparently not graded or gravel.

Rainbow Bridge was built in 1925 as an improvement to the Lincoln Highway as it crossed Donner Summit. By the time the Rainbow Bridge was being added to the Lincoln Highway, there was a network of roads and new construction linked together

as the Lincoln Highway. Traffic had increased markedly and travel was comparatively easy compared to earlier times.

In 1913 it was estimated there were only 150 transcontinental trips by cars under their own power. By 1923 the number had grown to 20-25,000 automobiles. Where it used to take 60 days, by 1923 "20 days is an easy drive for anyone."



Advice

The through trip can be made from New York to San Francisco at any time between June 1st and November 1st. The passes in the Sierras do not usually open in spring much before June 1st and are likely to be closed by snow any time after November 1st.

How good the conditions of the new highway were can be seen in advice given by the official guide: "The usual pleasure party, however, with easy driving and only nominal amount of sight-seeing at the different points, can make the trip [cross country] in twenty to thirty days with ease, driving approximately seven hours per day. This estimate means that approximately 18 miles per hour must be made during the driving time as an average."

To get an idea of what the promoters of the Lincoln Highway thought, look at these quotes from The Complete Official Road Guide of the Lincoln Highway 5th edition 1923 available from the Patrice Press.

"There are many wonderful things to see as you pass along the Lincoln Highway, some historic, some scenic; but above all, the greatest impression which will be left with you will be the immense size of this, our country – the thickly settled East, with its farms and frequent houses, the vast

rolling prairies of the Middle West, where the buffalo used to roam in countless herds, the dreary deserts, the majestic mountains, and finally sweet California, wafting to you the odor of orange blossoms and roses with the breeze as you approach the golden Gate." [The Official Guide 1924]

"New sensations and a few thrills await the dweller of the East when first he makes the transcontinental tour over the Lincoln Highway. New sensations are the spice of life and this country of ours is full of them to the lover of scenery, and many wonderful works of nature are open to him who will make just a little effort to see."

The Summit in 1923 from the Official Guide:

Summit Pop. 50 Placer County. So. Pac. Railroad, 1 general business place, express company, telegraph, Good camping and fishing. Unsurpassed scenery. Graded gravel

“An uplifting of the soul is sure to follow this contact with Nature in her majesty, and Self becomes smaller and smaller as we realize the immensity of things in traversing this country.”

Advice for travelers from the Official Guide 1924

Don't wait until your gasoline is almost gone before filling up. There might be a delay, or it might not be obtainable at the next point your figured on.

Don't allow your canteen... to be other than full of fresh water.

Page 43

Don't carry loaded firearms in the car.

Don't forget the colored goggles [sunglasses].

Don't forget the camphor ice. The dry air of the west will crack your lips and fingers without it.

Don't ford water without first wading through it.

Don't drink alkali water.

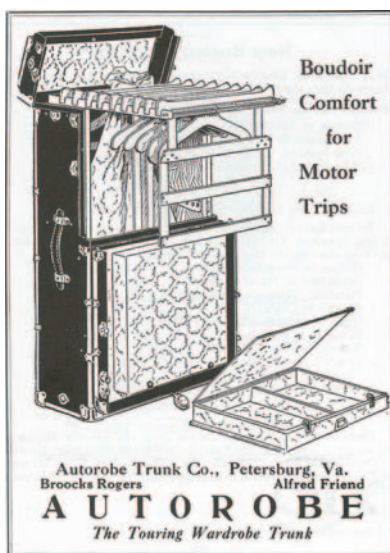
Don't wear new shoes.

“To stand upon the great desert amidst overwhelming silence, gazing with awe at the glorious, yet delicate, coloring of the sky and distant mountains in the cool of the dawning day or in the fading light of evening, is worth all of the little hardships of the tour; and then to pass through the cool forest of the Sierras, on a fine road, with great fir trees on all sides, and roaring water tumbling over rocks alongside, makes u glad that we have lived to see and feel such things.” [Page 23]

“To those who love the wide open spaces of the great West, and who enjoy exertion and the clear pure air of the western plains and the high altitudes of the Rockies and the Sierras, the trip between San Francisco and Omaha is a delightful outing.” [All quotes from The Official Guide 1924]

Advice for travelers from the Official Guide 1924

It is wise for the transcontinental motorist to take as a precept the statement that when it rains in Iowa, Nebraska or Utah and he has a dirt stretch ahead of him the thing to do is to stop and not attempt to continue the journey until the rainy spell is over, and the roads have had a day or two to dry up.



text of the full page Autorobe ad in the 1924 Official Road Guide says The Autorobe Touring Wardrobe Trunk keeps the clothing of an entire family free from wrinkling, yet it is small enough to be securely bolted to the running board of your car. or carried in the hand like a suitcase. It has 8 hangers for dresses or suits, ample shoe space, cleverly designed boxes for linen and small garments.

A marvel of compactness and convenience, it removes the last vestige of discomfort from motor travel.

Completely equipped with water proof cover and the simple bars and bolts that clamp it securely to car in half a minute.

from the running board it can be carried easily to your hotel room - to your Pullman or Steamer stateroom. Most good dealers are displaying the AUTOROBE Touring Wardrobe Trunk. If yours hasn't stocked them yet write us.

"I don't believe I have adequate words to describe the real beauty of Donner Pass. As we stood looking down I had a floating sensation...I lost all fear as I looked at one of the most beautiful blue lakes [Donner Lake] I had ever seen. Everything below us seemed suspended in shimmering light."

Thornton Round, 1914
from The Lincoln Highway California by Gregory Franzwa pg 7

May vs. Shall

Two different legislative bills gave Old Highway 40 to Placer and Nevada Counties. One bill said the State "shall" plow the roads on Old 40 at Donner Lake. The second bill said the State "may" plow the roads on the Summit. Regardless of the "may" the State plowed Old 40 on the Summit but didn't stop there. The State plowed all the parking lots and driveways as well....until one day.

On one heavy snow day the road had to have priority over the parking lots so the crews concentrated on the road. One incensed Summit homeowner stuck a shot gun into the cab of a State blower and required the driver to clear his driveway. The driver was very agreeable saying he first had to back up his machine. Once the driver had backed up, he jumped out of his cab and ran away.

The next day Assemblyman Chappie called Norm Saylor to find out, "What's going on.....!!!"

The upshot was that the "may" was then implemented on Donner Summit. Cal-Trans provided money to Nevada County for the first year and Placer County cleared Old 40 for \$80,000. That's how Serene Lakes got its two big blowers. They were purchased by Placer County from the State. After a year, the contract to clear old 40 was privatized and Norm Saylor got the job which he did for the next 25 years or so.

*Concrete Pavement
on Lincoln Highway,
Allen County,
Indiana*



When You Drive on Concrete

watch yourself relax at the wheel and settle down to mile after mile of effortless driving.

Notice how the easy, accurate response of the wheel, the instant "pick up" and the swift action of the brakes give you the feeling of perfect security.

Only Concrete provides that even, firm, unyielding surface that the tires can grip, and makes the road skid-proof and safe even in wet weather.

Roads are being built everywhere the way motorists want them.

Our Booklet R-3 tells other interesting things about Concrete roads. Write for your copy

PORTLAND CEMENT ASSOCIATION

*A National Organization to Improve and
Extend the Uses of Concrete*

The Lincoln Highway has been featured in media again and again.

On March 23, 1940, NBC Radio introduced a Saturday morning dramatic show called Lincoln Highway sponsored by Shinola Polish, which featured stories of life along the route. The show's introduction contained an error in noting the Lincoln Highway was identical to U.S. 30 and ended in Portland. Many of the era's stars including Ethel Barrymore, Joe E. Brown, Claude Rains, Burgess Meredith, and Joan Bennett made appearances on the show, which had an audience of more than 8 million before it left the air in 1942.

Interested in the Lincoln Highway?

If you are interested in the Lincoln Highway there are a number of good sources below.

The Lincoln Highway California

This book contains pictures, maps of the various California sections, how to find and explore the various parts on or near Donner Summit. Patrice Press, Tooele Utah
books@patricepress.com or their website: patricepress.com

A Complete Official Road Guide of the Lincoln Highway
5th edition 1924 The Lincoln Highway Association This is the actual road guide, in reproduction, that helped people travel the Lincoln Highway in 1924. It covers the history of the highway, how it was built, plans for the future, contains old 1924 ads and pictures, the history of cross country travel (Pony Express, wagon trains including advice for wagon train travel), 1924 facts about Lincoln Highway and cross country travel, the background and finances of the highway, building requirements, and changes being contemplated for 1924

A Complete Official Road Guide of the Lincoln Highway 1913 edition

1913 pictures, ads, travel information and some maps Lincoln Highway Association www.lincolnhighwayassoc.org

The website of the Lincoln Highway Association: www.lincolnhighwayassoc.org



Whatever Town Lies Ahead
—you'll always find Mobiloil!

VACUUM OIL COMPANY

From **The God of the Open Air**

Col. Sidney D. Waldon The Official Guide 1924

A gray ribbon of dust runs westward to the land of the setting sun,
And many's the great adventure that this winding ribbon has spun.
The pony express once followed it and the seekers after gold,
And earlier still the Indians and the buffalo of old.

It passes by many a mansion, by many a simple hut,
Through peaceful valleys and barren plains.
A ribbon of dust? Yes! but,
To me it's a wonderful Highway, straight and smooth and fair,
For it carries me out to do homage to the God of the Open Air.

permission to reprint the graphics in this issue come from the Patrice Press, Tooele, Utah patricepress.com and from the Lincoln Highway Association www.lincolnhighwayassoc.org/
The pictures come from the Norm Saylor collection and the Norm Saylor collection courtesy of Grass Valley Video History Museum

Where Is It? December



The answer to last month's "Where is it?" is below Rainbow Bridge to the right, before the road was cleared of snow at the big horseshoe. The view is looking up at the bridge. If you go back to your November issue and look closely the detail shows the three posts at parking lot at the top center. The picture was taken in 1952.



DONNER SPITZ INN, INC.



Norm Saylor

P.O. Box 9 Norden, CA 95724

530.308.9665 (C) leave no msg
530.426.3376 (Off/Fax)

Want your ad in the historical society newsletter like the gentleman to the above?
Want to send us a letter to the editor for printing? Want to comment on our
society or newsletter? Contact:

info@donnersummithistoricalsociety.org