



Donner Summit Historical Society
Newsletter

What Do You Have?



The above postcard was found by Leroy and Linda Waddle of the Palisades (and Auburn, CA) in a pile of old postcards they'd been storing. They then thoughtfully sent it off to us for our archives. You can see it on our website as well. We would guess it dates from the building of the bridge in the 1920's. Go back to our November issue and compare it to other early pictures. The point of placing it on the front page of this issue is that we need help saving Donner Summit's history. We can only save what we know about. If you have artifacts, pictures, stories, reminiscences, or other valuable things, consider letting us add them to our archives or letting us copy them.

In November we ran a story by Lois Shane about the first house in Kingvale. Last month we included a lot of pictures, courtesy of Susy Struble, of the Dartmouth Outing Club on Lake Mary. In a coming issue we'll cover Sugar Bowl's first year (2009 is the 70th anniversary) and include some of Sugar Bowl's newly acquired pictures. Shortly we'll be interviewing Bill Klein who was one of the first Sugar Bowl ski instructors and who was there that first year. We'll also interview Jimmy Schuul who has an archive of pictures and stories about Donner Summit. Our March issue saw John Kirby Miller's newly donated artifacts. This month we have reminiscences of life on Lake Mary decades ago, along with pictures, courtesy

of Pat Malberg. The Reynolds Cabin in Soda Springs will be a future feature. Then of course Norm Sayler has contributed an immense archive of materials to which he is adding daily.

You too can help preserve our history. We'll come to you for interviews and if you like, we'll return photographs after we copy them. We'd love to listen to your stories and we'd love your ideas. Use the contact information below, or use the "contacts" page on our website. This newsletter and this historical society will only be as good and interesting as the people in our "community" and of course here, the community is our readers.

To the right, early picture of Rainbow Bridge that appeared in our December issue so you can compare it to the postcard on page one.



From the San Francisco Examiner

The Year Skiers Prayed for the Snow to Stop

“In early autumn 1951, thirty inches of snow fell on the Donner Summit, and surprised skiers hurried to prepare their equipment. By Christmas, 8 feet of snow had fallen in the Sugar Bowl area....the snow never stopped.

Seven hundred and eighty-five inches fell that winter and spring. ...

Mrs. Helen Reynolds, a long-time skier who owned a house at Sugar Bowl near the Donner Summit, remembers the worst time, when eight feet of snow fell in three days the second week in January. “It was not coming down in flakes; it seemed to be pouring out of the sky, as if spilled from giants vats,” she said.

For 10 straight days, Reynolds spent much of her time shoveling snow from the roof of the 40-foot-high house to prevent it from caving in. “For the first few days I could shovel the snow so it would drop over the edge of the house. But, finally, the snow reached the top of the house, so I actually had to throw it up from the roof....At the end I calculated how much snow I shoveled, and it came to... tons.”

...She and her husband...had been skiers long before the sport became popular and Sierra ski areas arrived with minor conveniences – like chairlifts. The Reynoldses used to rise at dawn and climb for five hours with skis on their backs just for the opportunity to make one run down in the afternoon.”

editor:
Bill Oudegeest
209-606-6859
info@donnersummithistoricalsociety.com

Memories of a Lake Mary Childhood

Pat Malberg

The original three or four cabins along Lake Mary were part of the Johnny Ellis subdivision of the mid to late 1930's, which included a rudimentary rope-tow that went straight up the steep hill on the east side of the lake and crossed what is now the PCT. Some few remains of the tow structure can be seen at the top if you know where to look. One of the cabins, built in 1936-37 by the Leonard family, was bought by my parents, Frank and Anne Nast, in 1946. They had made friends with Ole and Alma Sater who owned the cabin next door and who recommended that my parents, who were their ski buddies, buy it. It cost \$8000, which was a big sum of money in those days, but my parents paid cash for it and what a great investment it turned out to be.



Just last year I met Sheldon Leonard, the son, who told me he had some of the same experiences as a youth on the lake during the ten years his family had been going there. We had used the same long railroad timbers as kids Sheldon had used. The timbers were maybe 20 feet long, as a raft – you get on one end, push a pole into the lake bed, run like the dickens to the other end of the “raft”, pull up the pole at the last second and ride! – that is, if you don't fall off in the meantime.

The cabin itself was just a shell of blackened 10 x 10 snowshed timbers piled one on top of the other, two stories worth, not much chinking between, with a little window on each of the four walls downstairs and on the two ends upstairs; the total area was about 700 square feet. The heat, such as it was, came from a pot belly stove in the middle of the room downstairs. My mother said we would not change a thing. However, over the years, my dad added a rock porch on the road side, a big dormer window upstairs on the lake side, rock and slate facing on the outside. He had been inspired by stone mason and artist Pop Hammond of Bowman, his mentor, who had built many of the stone houses you see in Cisco and even along old Highway 40. Dad also added a beautiful fireplace and converted lake side windows to big picture windows. My mother took a hand sander and little by little sanded off the black on the interior walls to reveal beautiful heart fir and pine wood, making the cabin much lighter. Big mirrors on the wall on the road side reflect the lake and seemingly expand the size of the downstairs. We installed a ship-type toilet in the bathroom (which started out being outside!) so we don't have to scoop out the bowl water when we leave in winter. The cabin is still pretty small, maybe 850 square feet now, but it always seems to stretch to fit the number of people as needed.



When we first had the cabin, it was right after the war and we had no vehicle, so we had to beg and borrow a car from friends to make it up there, but we went every weekend in the winter. Every summer,

Pictured here: Pat's house 1947

the day school vacation began for me, Mom and I hauled up to the cabin from San Francisco for the entire summer, again in borrowed transportation until we were able to buy a pickup in 1950 (still no sedans available). We always had at least two cats and a dog, so whoever gave us a ride was very tolerant. We rented out our home in the City to the announcer of the Ice Follies which came to town during the exact time of school vacation; my dad rented a small apartment downtown and commuted back and forth on weekends via Greyhound Bus. It was always a scramble to get him to the 7:21 bus on Sunday nights and Mom and I spent the interim five days putting away his tool and doing the odd jobs we could do to prepare for his next "work weekend." He never let up – and once we had the pickup, we'd gather rocks, sand and gravel from the neighborhood. There had been a lot of blasting of the granite along Old 40 so there were some beautiful rocks to be had – great for his stone masonry work. It also seemed that each fall we hurried to complete the summer's project which had required making a huge hole in some part of the cabin.



My mother was a very generous and well-loved person. She had many friends with children who loved leaving them with her when they went on vacation, or maybe just for a vacation from their children. She charged a \$1 a day, room and board, and that way I had a whole summer's worth of companions, in addition to Myrtle Sater who spent the summer next door, and a whole summer's worth of adventures. My mom did not believe in idleness – we were either out on the lake (wind blew a lot then) fishing, swimming, rafting – with a sense of freedom that is hard to imagine now – or we were gathering fire wood for the Wedgewood stove with the waterback to heat the water for our baths. That was also our only cookstove. We might also be on a hike with Mom to Lakes Flora and Azalea. She'd bring hot dogs and we'd roast them over a fire we'd build on the swimming rock. Another favorite shorter hike was to the little lake my mom and her friends called Maiden's Retreat which is now full of catfish and a fun place to visit with my grandchildren who like to feed them. My mom became friends with Marie Fitzpatrick, who lived in the little rock house on the top of the rock face above ASI –she was the weather station lady, and it was a steep climb to get up to her place. We had to use ropes to keep us from being swept off the slick rocks by the wind that always seemed to howl, especially in the winter. After a little wine during dinner with Marie, my mom would get silly and we'd start running down the rocks, almost out of control!



Pictured this page top, Pat's house in modern times with the nice rock work by Dad who is looking towards the camera at the end of the rock work in the lower picture. Mom is behind the tree. The guy straddling the rock work is a friend, Carl Ward, from the DOC (neighboring Dartmouth Outing Club - see our April issue). Next page the rock faced addition under construction. The tree in front has Pat's maiden name engraved in it with a handbrace and bit. This was done by Guatemalan friend Hector Gutierrez Bottom next page, the kids of Summer. Pat is to the right and Mom to the left. The dog's name is Knute and belongs to Joanie Brehm the girl next to Mom. Louise Picchi (Lulu) is in front of Joanie. Next to Lulu is Jon Edwards, then Billy Maier, then Dianne Picchi in back and next to Pat is Myrtle Sater who was from the cabin next door. Pictures this page from the DOC, next page from Pat Malrberg's collection.

Once, on the way to Flora, little Billy Maier (he'll be 70 this year!) who always brought along his fishing pole let the hook get loose as we were hiking along, it somehow hooked into the eyelid of another of the kids we called Lulu and my mother coaxed it out with a steady hand. Never a dull moment. Billy was also the one who refused to take a bath until my mom caught him out behind the pump house, stripped him and poured a bucket of water over him. She said his pants were so heavy from all the junk he carried in his pockets that it was a real struggle to get them back on.



Myrtle and I took swimming lessons at the pool behind Beacon Hill Lodge one summer, and for a couple of summers we also drove with Gladys Pedley, who had a cabin near the snow lab, down to Truckee each week for Girl Scouts, ballet, tap and acrobatics lessons from her in the Wyethia Club down by the river. Then Myrt and I would walk across the tracks back into town to the soda fountain in the pharmacy and have a huge milk shake each, for 25 cents. Finally, we'd catch the Greyhound bus back to the summit and walk into the cabin. Myrtle's parents were from Norway and her dad was a ski jumper (he said yoomper). He drove up from Oakland each Saturday and returned on Mondays. Alma and my mom were great friends; they'd sit and enjoy the morning sunshine on the east side of the Sater cabin, out of the bite of the west wind that often swept across the lake. The kids would get so chapped from being in the water and then drying out in the wind that each evening my mom would coat us with glycerin and rose water and have to listen to the moans that accompanied the sting, but next day we'd be out there again, getting sunburned and chapped, but having fun.

Sometimes my mom would run out of milk or bread and send me over to Van's grocery across from the Ski Ranch, via the railroad sheds and the attached barracks where the railroad workers and their families lived. There were always lots of scrawny dogs and tow-headed kids whose bare feet were blackened by the soot and smoke that covered the floors, spewed out of the passing wood and coal fired locomotives. I loved to stop and play with them, I was good friends with Ronnie Rau, but I always had to hurry back home so I wouldn't get in trouble. The Van Nordstrom's (I think that was their name) who owned the little grocery-bar-café had a son a bit younger than I and we also were friends. I think the family moved to Central America toward the beginning of the '50's, but I could be mistaken about a lot of these details.



In the fall, my mom and I would search the area for gooseberries. Sometimes we'd find enough to make a good-sized pot of jelly, and what a treat, but what a labor of love. I still collect them and the wild currents when they're available and make the delicious jelly in her honor.

Winter was a different story. The family was devoted to going up almost every weekend, no matter what the weather. Early on we had to take the bus or ride with friends. Once in the bus the road was so slick with black ice that the passengers were really frightened – the bus driver pretended to be a

tour leader and yelled “Yuba River on the right, folks, Yuba River on the right.” That relieved the tension a bit. Of course, even when we finally had the pickup, we couldn’t drive in once the snow was on the ground, so we’d have to park at the maintenance station at the “top”. The highway maintenance guys would allow us to pull in for a few minutes when we arrived, which was usually around 10PM because the road was only two lanes most of the way and it was slow going in winter. This allowed us to finalize our backpacking and put on our boots without having to face that bitter wind which always tried to sweep us off our feet, not to mention the biting snow that hammered our faces. Our stuff was in the back of the pickup, but during the winter my dad had a home-made canopy which protected the contents. Once packed (we carried heavy loads) we had to face the elements and ski sometimes



through pretty deep snow to go the 1/3 mile distance into the cabin. Once arrived, the cabin was freezing cold and Dad would quick make the fires in the stove and fireplace while Mom would look around for dead chipmunks which somehow managed to make their way down the chimney and freeze in the fur covers she had on the couches downstairs. It was a ritual. Sometimes when there was a big storm, we couldn’t get all the way to the Summit because the road would close, so we’d “camp out” at the restaurant at Baxter until the road opened – sometimes it took all night and all the folks waiting got to know each other pretty well by morning. It seemed that every Washington or Lincoln Birthday weekend we had fresh wet snowfall and had to dig the pickup out of the drifts to get onto the road – no better exercise and muscle builder than shoveling Sierra cement, and it was always very uncomfortable getting into the cab with clothes soaked and the heater requiring at least ten minutes to get up to speed while the windshield was all frosted on the inside and frozen on the outside.

Oh, yes, the big one in 1952. We were at the cabin awaiting the road opening so we could go ski in Aspen and Alta. We took a picture of me looking down at the second story of the cabin on the lake side – there was a lot of snow – and the banks of snow dwarfed our pickup that was parked next to them. We were the first ones down the grade to Donner Lake and what a thrill. It always seemed that no matter how far we went on any trip in winter, the only place we’d ever have to put on chains was over Donner Summit, and it never failed that chains were required there. Once I began skiing competitively, my parents had to drive to lots of



Pictured this page top, indoors with Dad. Note the inside "paneling" of old railroad snow tunner timbers sanded down by Mom. Bottom is the weather station on Donner Summit opposite Signal Hill (Donner Ski Ranch). Top next page is Pat with Marie Fitzpatrick who ran the station. Bottom next page, Van's store.

different ski areas -- Mammoth, Yosemite, Mt. Rose, Echo Summit -- and when I think now what they went through, I'm in awe. Roads and snow removal equipment were a lot different, but there weren't near the number of cars as now.



We had those old bindings and lace-up boots, and the single chair at Sugar Bowl was always breaking down. The weekend lines were long and the lift was really slow, so a full day's skiing, even when we didn't stop for lunch, was like about two hours with today's high speed lifts. My mom kicked us all out of the cabin early so we could ski over to the Bowl through the woods and be there when the lift opened. I always stayed after the lift closed to train with Imo, my coach, on the slalom course on the Face. We had to climb up for each run down and I often returned home through the woods by dusk or near dark. All the race courses were boot packed in those days, and the only way to get to the top of the Silver Belt for the annual race from the top of Mt. Lincoln was either to climb up

from the bottom or go across the crest of the Palisades on foot, carrying our skis on our shoulders.

One time when the lift cable jumped off the roller, we had to be taken off via a rope that the Ski Patrolman tossed up. That was a thrill! Whenever any of us took a lesson, that evening there would be a demonstration of the new technique learned using the hearth of the fireplace as a stage. Remember the Ruad (not sure about the spelling) and the Stem Christy, where you had to wind up and then drift, drift, drift and then swing around to complete the turn. My dad was a pretty wild skier in his day. We loved to watch him fly down the mountain on his old 7 foot-6 inch Rossignols, but he broke his leg a couple of times and had to slow down. The first time he broke a leg they hauled him off Mt. Disney, down to Norden via the snow cat, carried him up the train access tunnel, and then drove him off to the Truckee hospital.

Another big snowfall happened in the spring of 1958 around the Easter vacation week when I had a group of girlfriends up for the first three days followed by a group of guys from high school and college who wanted to have a few days of skiing – all had permission from their parents to stay at our cabin. Well, the girls were supposed to leave the same day the boys were to arrive and just at the intersection of the two, the road closed and my mom was responsible for feeding these 14 teen-agers, entertaining them and keeping the two groups

separated for several days until the road reopened. The cabin is fairly elastic in being able to house any number needed, but this was a bit too challenging, so she used the Dartmouth Outing Club cabin for the overflow. She required everyone to get out and do some skiing every day, despite the heavy wet snow, to work off some of that energy, and the girls still remember going outside via the upstairs balcony. The upshot was that two of the couples who met during that time eventually wed and are still happily married and good friends of each other and our family.



A high-school and college summer memory is the opportunity I had to be the wrangler for Dave Medford's string of saddle horses that he rented out to riders first at Donner Lake and later at Serene Lakes. I was allowed to ride one of the horses, named Jiggs, back to the cabin each evening and off to the corrals in morning. To get to Donner Lake, I took the old Lincoln Highway which was still in pretty good shape, and to get to Serene Lakes I followed the electric lines and near the end went through the woods which were much clearer of undergrowth than they are today. It was a great adventure and I have fond memories of the tours of riders I led around the lakes where there were only a few cabins and not many visitors. It was still pretty pristine.

Van's Store near Lake Mary on the Lincoln Highway --- to which Pat would be sent for milk.

Pat Malberg

I was born and reared in San Francisco. My parents bought the cabin when I was 4 as a means of assuaging the pain of having a son who was mentally disabled and had to be institutionalized (a common practice in those days) -- he is still alive, 16 months older than I, still at the State Hospital in Glen Ellen. That's why my parents worked so hard and didn't mind the long commute from the City to the cabin -- a way of taking their mind off their sadness.

As a result, I'm virtually an only child, so my Mom "imported" siblings, such as those in the Summer Kids photo, and later, exchange students from France and Switzerland who became part of our family. These connections endure!

I spent my 9th grade in Switzerland, accompanied by my Mom who had wanderlust, while my Dad stayed home, worked and enjoyed exchanging daily letters with her and me. I attended a "finishing" school in Gstaad, where I perfected the French we had studied the previous year in night school, and learned some German and Latin, too, along with skiing daily with the school team during the winter.

I studied in Paris for a year, after graduating from Cal Berkeley, to do an advanced degree at the University of Paris (Sorbonne) and then returned to teach French and Math in a new high school in La Canada, where I lived for three years, while also getting a Masters in French from UCLA. I took a group of high school students on a ski trip from La Canada to Mammoth, and that's where I met Don, on the slopes -- love at first sight!

We moved to Sacramento, I taught at American River for a year, and then Don was offered a job in Guinea, West Africa, francophone country, as Operations Officer with the World Health Organization's Smallpox Eradication Program. We lived there for two years, then returned to Southern California when the smog was so bad that we looked for any out -- ended up in Lincoln where Don became the general manager of my uncle's turkey farm! That lasted three years and he returned to the health field with the State Dept. of Health Services, Immunization Branch. Meantime, we had our house, three daughters, cats, dog, horses, milk cows, pigs, sheep, and goat (Guillaume) who kept me busy. When it came time for school for the girls, we decided I could teach them at home, so we opened a little private school for the neighbor children, too, and I was their marm for all their elementary years. The two oldest daughters then went to San Francisco to attend Lowell High School and live with my parents while I taught French at the Woolman School in Nevada City.

It was during these years that we became aware of the nuclear weapons buildup and danger, which led to our political involvement. I ended up running for Congress against John Doolittle and came pretty close -- but no cigar. That experience led to my starting a mediation service for Placer County which I administered for 12 years out of the house. Meanwhile, a good friend from Nigeria, professor of Criminology at CSUS, invited me to teach mediation in French to a group of lawyers and judges in Senegal and that was the first of many trips to Africa for research and teaching in the field of alternative dispute resolution.

The girls are all married, in their 30s now, they have given us five grandchildren. Don and I have devoted much of our energy over the last four years to the Donner Summit Area Association because of the cabin and our love of the Summit. We want to see it passed on to the next generations with as much of its uniqueness as possible preserved for them.



Emigrant Trail initiative

The Emigrant Trail is one of the many routes that traversed Donner Summit. Some routes are obvious like the first transcontinental railroad and the interstate. Others take a little looking to find like the Lincoln Highway and the Dutch Flat Donner Lake Wagon Rd. The Emigrant Trail requires a lot of looking. There is some original evidence like rust marks and historical markers if you know where to look. There have been attempts to delineate the entire route but some of that routing is incorrect. The Emigrant Trail is listed as a national historic trail even if we don't know its exact complete route.

Now there is an initiative on Donner Summit to lay out a trail people can use to trace the route of the Emigrant Trail from Donner Summit to Cisco Grove. This initiative comes from the Placer County Parks which has applied to the Sierra Nevada Conservancy for a planning grant of a bit over \$250,000. Thrown into the pot to make winning the grant more likely, is \$150,000 of development fee money set aside for parks.

If this trail is built it will be a memorial trail rather than a trail over the exact route. A memorial trail will prevent further destruction of the real route and any artifacts still in existence (such as rust marks on rocks). There are also physical constraints that prevent following the exact route like Roller Pass with its high grade that makes it unsuitable for a trail. The trail route will be close enough, however, for users to get a good view of and feeling for the actual route. There have been no decisions made about the trail. The Parks department is in the very beginning of collecting residents' thoughts and information. That process began in March with a meeting at the ASI on Donner Summit. About 40 people attended the DSAA (Donner Summit Area Association) sponsored event which was one in a series of community education events the association has put on.

The event was opened by Pat Malberg, president of the DSAA, and moderated by Peter Van Zandt of Sierra Watch. Speaking on the panel were: Vance Kimbrell of Placer County Parks; David Hollecker of the Oregon California Trails Association and Trails West; Carrie Smith, USFS archeologist; and John Svahm, a trail builder for the Truckee Donner Land Trust. The audience consisted of Soda Springs, Donner Summit, and Serene Lakes residents, Sugar Bowl, other USFS personnel, and various local luminaries.

Emigrant Trail Initiative Supporters:

Placer County Board of Supervisors

California State Parks

U.S. Forest Service

Sugar Bowl

Royal Gorge

Serene Lakes Homeowners' Association

Placer County Parks Commission

Placer Land Trust

Truckee Donner Land Trust

Donner Summit Historical Society

Partial Scope of the Grant

1. Identifying the original route and alternate routes
2. Identify locations and designs for water shed protection and improvement
3. Provide necessary trail easement data necessary for negotiations-willing sellers
4. Identify for protection and avoidance archeological and cultural sites
5. Identify wetlands, rare plants, tree impacts
6. Identify other sources of funding for project completion.
Identify if and where any existing rights may exist due to previous surveys
7. Organize a Trails Advisory Group that provides recommendations for:
Identify community access points and staging areas
Identify interpretative sign locations and content

This meeting/seminar was the first in opportunities for the public to provide advice and opinions about the project to Placer County. When the CEQA (California Environmental Quality Act) process starts there will be at least three more formal opportunities. Before the CEQA process starts there will be various informal planning opportunities as the specifics of the Trail are developed. Some specifics would be: the exact route and whether there will be interpretive turnouts highlighting historical spots.

Many organizations have weighed in to support the Placer County grant: DSAA, SLPOA, DSHS, Sugar Bowl,

The route will cover 17 miles from Coldstream, up Roller Pass, over Donner Summit, through Summit Valley, into Serene Lakes, out along the Kidd Lake Rd., down to Hampshire Rocks and then to Cisco.

After Mr. Kimbrell spoke, David Hollecker of the Oregon California Trails Association and Trails West spoke about the actual route and history. (For an explanation of modern trail research and why pre-1990 research is not accurate, go to the Donner Summit Historical Society's website and see the May newsletter – www.donnersummithistoricalsociety.org) Then Carrie Smith, an archeologist for the Forest Service spoke giving the group some cautions and lessons learned from other trail efforts. Finally John Svahm of the Truckee Donner Land Trust spoke about trail building. He has been involved in building the Donner Lake Rim Trail and gave some lessons in modern multi-use trail building.



Thrift Baker and Co. store along the Lincoln Highway near where the Oakland Ski Club is now, circa 1920's long before Pat's time, from the Norm Saylor collection

Next Month:

Modern Trail Research - it's way more accurate nowadays -

Oregon California Trails Association

The history of the Central Sierra Snow Lab on Donner Summit in Soda Springs.