



Donner Summit Historical Society

June, 2010 issue #22

Newsletter

Donner Summit, 1874

People in the Past Were Just Like Us

Our research staff came across the following article which described Donner Summit in 1874. Most of us were not around then so we thought it would be interesting to pass it on not only because it's history but because people in the "old days" were just like us. They came to the Summit to enjoy the same things in the same ways. This particular article is so poetic at times. The article is by Benjamin Avery and called "Summering in the Sierra," from the Overland Monthly and Out West Magazine 12:2 (February 1874) pages 175-83.

Summering in the Sierra – On the Summit Part 2

Arrived at the summit of the Sierra Nevada on the line of the railroad, there are many delightful pedestrian and horseback excursions to be made in various directions, and the finest points are fortunately the least hackneyed. At Summit Valley (which is associated with the relief of the tragically fated Donner emigrants,



We didn't have any handy Summit pictures of 1874 so we included the above picture by Alfred Hart ca mid-1860's

and is only three miles from Donner pass) there is an odious saw-mill, which has thinned out the forests; an ugly group of whitewashed houses; a ruined creek, whose water are like a tan-vat; a big sandy dam across the valley, reared in a vain attempt to make an ice-pond; a multitude of dead, blanched trees, a great, staring, repellent blank. And yet this valley is not unlovely. It's upper end, still a green meadow leads to the base of peaks 10,000 or 12,000 feet high, whose light gray summits of granite, or volcanic breccia, weather into castellated forms, rise in sharp contrast to the green woods margining at level mead. A little apart from the noisy station, the woods are beautiful, as we have described them, and the boulder-strewn [sic] earth reminds one of the pasture dotted with sheep. On the northern side rises the square butte of Mount Stanford, 2,453 feet above the valley, and 9,237 feet above the sea. It's volcanic crest is carved into curious resemblance to a ruined castle, and hence it was named, and is still popularly called, Castle Peak; but as the same title is affixed to several peaks along the range, the State Geologist has wisely given it another on the official maps. This peak can be ascended to the base of the summit crags on horseback; the remaining climb afoot, up a very steep slope of sliding debris, is arduous but short, and is repaid by a superb view, embracing at least a hundred miles of the Sierra crests., their numerous sharp peaks streaked with snow, and lying between them at intervals the many lakes of the region, including the flashing sheet of Tahoe....On one side of this characteristic peak the foot-climber stops to rest on a depression where grass and flowers grow luxuriantly, and the swarms of humming-birds hover over the floral feast, their brilliant iridescent

plumage flashing in the sun, and the movement of their wings filling the air with a bee-like drone. Above all this beauty from the bare volcanic cliffs and pinnacles that top the mountain – Eden and the desert side by side. The upper Sierra is full of contrasts and surprises. After tedious walking over rocky barren, or toilsome climbing up slippery gorges, in the very path of recent torrents, one comes suddenly on little bits of wild garden and lawn, where butterfly and bird resort, and the air is sweet with perfume. At the base of cliffs which looked forbidding at a distance, cold springs will be found, painting the ravines with freshest green; red lilies swing their bells; lupines [sic] and larkspurs call down the tint of heaven; ferns shake the delicate plumes, bright with drops of dew; and the rocks offer soft cushioned of moss... the delighted pedestrian lingers as such oases, loth [sic] to go forward...

The tourist who stops a few days at Summit Valley, will find a walk along the railroad, through the snow-sheds, peculiarly entertaining. These sheds, covering the track for thirty-five miles, are massive arched galleries of large timbers, shady and cool, blackened with the smoke of engines, sinuous, and full of strange sounds. Through the vents in the roof the interstices between the roof-boards, the sunlight falls in countless narrow bars, pallid as moonshine. Standing in a curve, the effect is precisely that of the interior of some of Gothic cloister or abbey hall, the light

streaking through narrow side-windows. The footstep awakes echoes, and the tones of the voice are full and resounding. A coming train announces itself miles away by the tinkling crepitation communicated along the rails, which gradually swells into a metallic ring, followed by a thunderous roar that shakes the ground; then the shriek of the engine-valve, and, in a flash, the engine itself bursts into view, the bars of sunlight playing across its dark front with kaleidoscopic effect. There is ample space on either side of the track for pedestrians to stand as the train rushes past, but it looks as if it must crush everything before it, and burst through the every shed. The approach of a train at night is heralded by a sound like the distant roar of surf, half an hour before the train itself arrives; and when the locomotive dashes into view, the dazzling

glare of its head-light in the black cavern, shooting like a meteor from the Plutonic abyss, is wild and awful. The warning whistle, prolonged in strange diminuendo notes that sound like groans and sighs from Inferno, is echoed far and long among the rocky crags and forests.

"...the boulder-strewn [sic] earth..." still is. This is the front of Castle Peak - very rocky and very dangerous but worth it for a picture.



above: "little bits of wild garden and lawn, where butterfly and bird resort, and the air is sweet with perfume. ... red lilies swing their bells; lupins [sic] and larkspurs call down the tint of heaven; ferns shake the delicate plumes, bright with drops of dew ...the delighted pedestrian lingers as such oases, loth [sic] to go forward..." A hundred forty years later the descriptions still fit. Pictures above taken at Castle Peak on the Basin Peak side.





Left: snowshed picture probably by Alfred A. Hart, photographer for the CPRR from the Sugar Bowl collection.

"Through the vents in the roof the interstices between the roof-boards, the sunlight falls in countless narrow bars, pallid as moonshine. Standing in a curve, the effect is precisely that of the interior of some of Gothic cloister or abbey hall, the light streaking through narrow side-windows. The footsteps awakes echoes, and the tones of the voice are full and resounding."



Vintage California fruit label featuring Donner Summit form the DSHS collection.

More from Stories That May or May Not Be True About Donner Summit

Frenchie the Dog

Bandt and Doris Chaplin owned the Soda Springs Hotel. They had bought it from the Joneses. The Chaplins had managed Rainbow Tavern prior to that. They had a dog named Frenchie.

Frenchie, the poodle, was quite a dog. He was quite smart and could open any door in the building. He could let himself out the back and he could open the refrigerator and get his own food. He'd open hotel doors and sometimes guests would find him in bed with them.

One night he opened the door out back. Frenchie the poodle, was not knowledgeable enough about trains.

Pony's Home

In the early 60's Maggie and Marvin Littenstein purchased the hotel from Dorothy and Bill Cannon. They had some nice kids and their daughter had a pony. Maggie Marvin ran the restaurant/hotel which had a good brunch. The hotel did a decent business.

The pony had a small corral out back where the tennis courts now are.

With Fall and Winter coming the question arose: what to do with the pony?

The pony moved to the basement and lived there for three winters.

The End of the Horse Drawn Sleighs

And finally, with sensitivity because this is a family newspaper, we begin with this warning for those of the squeamish persuasion.

Sugar Bowl began business in 1938 and initially it was horse drawn sleighs that brought the visitors from the Norden Train Station (just opposite and down the hill from the old Norden Store). That would have been a romanitic arrival at Sugar Bowl.

The transportation lasted only a short time however. One evening the man who was supposed to take the horses back to Soda Springs where they were stabled, decided he wanted a beer and sent the horses off on their own. They got to the railroad tracks.

The next year the horse drawn sleighs were replaced by tractor drawn sleighs.



This is a continuation from the February, '10 issue, "Milli's Story" about the Norden Store, run by her aunt and uncle Lena and Herbert Frederick, who bought the store in 1938. Milli spent winters and summers at Norden and recently has been reading her grandfather's diary and going through old boxes and albums. Milli lives in Alaska and is recently retired from the Kenai Peninsula Borough Assembly.

Chapter II

Lena and Herbert

Milli Martin

Maybe the St. Valentine's Day Massacre benefitted Donner Summit. We don't know for sure but Herb and Lena were close to the massacre's site and shortly afterwards headed for California and Donner Summit.

They loved the mountains, as their many photo albums show, and soon after arriving in California they conquered both Mt Shasta and Mt. Lassen. They visited Yosemite many times climbing everything there was to climb: Half Dome, North Dome, Glacier Point, Overhanging Rock, and Mt. Lyell. Donner Summit was also a frequent destination.

Herb and Lena were young and ambitious as well as adventurous so when Norden came on the market, they jumped at the chance and entered a new life. The store, restaurant, rented rooms and cabins were a lot of work but the couple still found the time to ski to Castle Peak, Mt. Lincoln, the Cedars, Boreal, Mt. Disney, Crows Nest, and other destinations. They also loved to go hunting and Hannes Schroll, Sugar Bowl founder, was a frequent hunting partner. Herbert's best hunting story came in 1940. His bullet went through first one buck and then a second: two with one shot. Both heads were mounted and hung in the living room at Norden.

With the onset of the war, Sugar Bowl and other lodges were closed. There were no more ski trains and with gas rationing, few people could drive up. The Norden Ski Lodge included the store, and that did well during the war years. Herbert was drafted, but his departure was delayed by a technicality. He had taken too many oaths! (See sidebar article.) On December 30, 1942, Herbert mustered in, leaving Lena and her father to tend the business. It was a difficult time for all of them.

My grandfather's ("Papa") diary said Herb was stationed in Medford Oregon, and made Private First Class before being discharged in 1943 because of his feet.

By 1944 guests started returning to ski. The Sierra Club with the Jorgensons running it, opened. The diary entries for the winter of 1945 include the first mention of Bill and Helen Klein, and Jack and Esther Marturanos. Jack headed up the Ski Patrol for many years. Bill set up a ski school, modernized ski instruction, and ran the ski shop at Sugar Bowl for a long time.

Everyone rejoiced at the end of the year. Emil Paplau (the Telemark King) played his Zither and showed pictures. I'm sure Lena, who loved to entertain and cook, cooked one of her famous ten course meals. In December, 1945, Sugar Bowl re-opened, as did all the other lodges. Gas rationing was lifted, peace came, and skiers flocked back. Everything was booked solid and the 1945-46 season was very good!

NORDEN POSTMASTER TAKES TOO MANY OATHS OF SERVICE

Otto Frederick, postmaster at the Norden Store found himself in somewhat of a predicament last week when he found he had been sworn into the army as a private while he was also under oath with the post office department.

Frederick was called to Sacramento and passed his physical examination for service in the army and was given the customary seven days leave to arrange his personal affairs before reporting to Monterey for the processing incident to assignment to a military unit.

The brief length of time, Frederick contended, would not permit him to arrange for transferring the postal duties and for a time it looked like he was caught in too many oaths. He finally arranged with the army for an extension of time and so will not leave until January 5 to take up his work as a soldier. In the meantime it is hoped to have a substitute postmaster named to prevent the closing of the Norden office.

In 1946, the old store and lodge closed for remodeling and expansion. The expansion included a hidden closet for Herb's rifle collection and a hidden safe as well as the post office addition. A new furnace and boiler provided instant hot water everywhere and for the first time the lodge could be warm all the time. Papa even got his very own room. H.E. Juvenal did the remodeling

During construction workers lived in the house and cabins in back and Lena and Herb, slept under the stars. Lena fed all the workers through out the project. The house was beautiful, with big stone steps in front, large living and dining rooms, and a veranda over the creek.

The remodeling took all summer and on October 14th it was done and Papa moved into his own room! A week later there was a big housewarming party. 130 people came drinking 24 bottles of champagne; 8 of whiskey; and one and half cases of beer, wine, and sodas. The diary says four turkeys were also consumed with all the trimmings.

The newly remodeled store carried everything: food, drink, clothes, hunting and fishing gear, and pharmaceuticals. The meats came from Reno in large slabs or ribs that Lena had to cut and saw. Eggs came 30 dozen to a box, and had to be repackaged in cartons of one dozen. That was Papa's job as was shelling and packaging walnuts. The cash register was a beautiful old sculptured model. That would play a key role in a much later event. The store carried everything! It was a true Mom and Pop store with élan! Store hours were Thursday through Tuesday 8 to 8 and closed 1 to 3. That was perfect for summer get-a-ways to Donner Lake, where Lena and Herb would swim a mile out and back and then enjoy Lena's scrumptious lunches.

Papa's diary said on January 14, 1947 the water pipes in the back house froze and had to be thawed out. That afternoon the house caught fire. "...the SP brought water and a gang and are able to save the ski room, cabins, mattresses, blankets, etc. By 7 p.m. fire under control, but Herb and Emil keep water on it over night. Insurance will cover, but not the lost income."

When Herb and the gang pulled the walls down for reconstruction, thousands of walnuts came flying out! Lena had wondered for years where the pack rats had taken them!!!!

The business grew as time went by. With the reopening of the Sugar Bowl, more houses were built, and more looked to the Norden Store for groceries. On a standard winter morning, the phone started ringing at 7:30 with homeowners calling in their orders. Then Lena and Herb would work up those orders and take them to the Magic Carpet for transport into the Sugar Bowl. Favored among homeowners were the meats fresh vegetables and ice cream from Reno.



Herb and Lena

Payday on the railroad was the "big" day. The workers would purchase what they needed for the next two weeks, and send the rest home with money orders. I still recall the horrible stench when they came into the store. Herbert explained it was from working along the railroad tracks. The passenger trains dumped the toilets onto the tracks in those days. The locals knew not to come on payday, but Lena recalled the payday a couple ladies from the Sugar Bowl wandered in. They lasted about two minutes and were never seen again!

Lena and Herb did have to hire some help. Betty Board was the most consistent and probably best help they had. Unfortunately, when Bill Klein opened his shop, Betty really liked working there and off she went.

Lena loved to cook and loved to invite special guests to her table and Herbert showed his films. Joy and laughter filled the house. If we kids were there, we were put to work with dishes, whipping cream (hand mixer only), or chopping parsley that had to be extra, extra fine and took forever!!!! Dinners started with appetizers and drinks, then homemade soup, salad, main courses, a nice glass of wine, and it was all topped off with dessert (baked Alaska was a favorite) and coffee.

After the war Lena and Herbert heard again from family in Europe and started sending packages of food and clothes. The residents of the Sugar Bowl generously responded to

their call for help giving clothes that meant so much. When Lena cut pork, she would trim most of the fat and then render, can it, and sent it to their grateful family. She always made sure to send treats and candy for the kids along with the sugar and coffee. I several hundred packages were sent during those first years after the war. A dear friend of Lena's, and recipient, gave Lena a beautiful family heirloom crystal bowl that had survived the Hamburg bombing, in gratitude.

And so the years flew by. Some winters were harder than others. Much change occurred. For example Mexican workers were deported and a railroad, desperate for workers, hired what they could, including ex cons. That created the stage for the holdup but that will have to wait for next time.

Chapter III will appear in a few months.

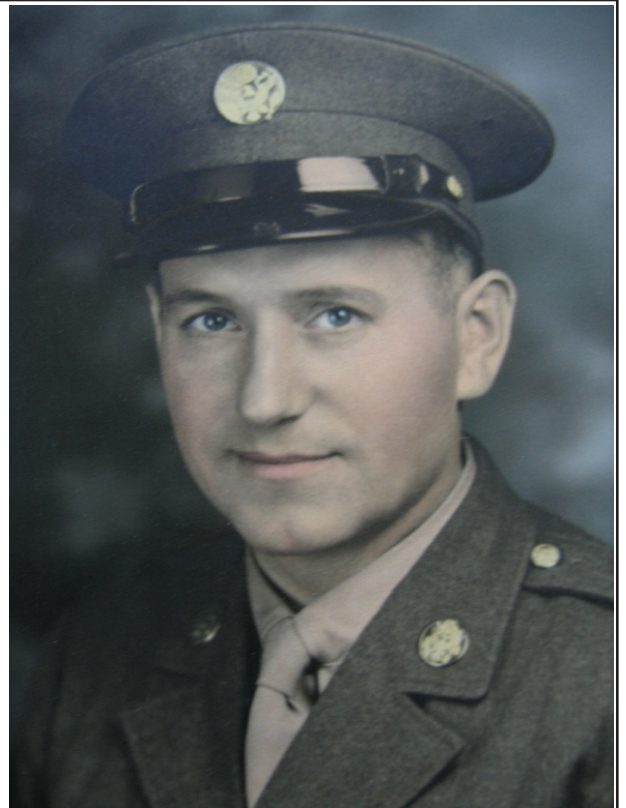
NAVY DESERTERS ARE ARRESTED ON DONNER SUMMIT

Two 17-year-old boys, who confessed to being deserters from one of the navy's big aircraft carriers, Constable N. F. Dolley said, were being held in jail here yesterday awaiting the arrival of navy officers to take them in charge.

The two boys, Robert Whittaker and Robert Schmidt, both from New York, were arrested by the military police and highway patrol earlier in the week after they are alleged to have taken a blanket from a car parked near the Norden Store. Later they went into the store's restroom where they spent the night, to be greeted the next morning by Mrs. Otto Frederick who held them pending the arrival of officers.

After questioning by Dolley at the local jail, the boys admitted having "jumped" their ship and said they were en route to San Francisco to get a job. Both were out of uniform.

—V—



Herb in his uniform

My mother

May 2010 issue of More Magazine,

Janet Leigh (formerly Jeanette Morrison) was born in Merced in 1927. Norma Shearer was visiting Sugar Bowl, where Jeanette's grandfather was the desk manager. He had a picture of Jeanette on his desk, "commented on her beauty and asked for the picture to take back to Los Angeles with her."

Soon Jeanette had a screen, a part opposite Van Johnson, and a new name, Janet Leigh. She later became a famous actress appearing in movies like Psycho and Bye Bye Birdie.

As an aside, which has nothing to do with Donner Summit history, Jeanette was a good student, sang in the choir, and twirled baton. At 14 she ran off and got married. That marriage was annulled. As a junior in college, which she entered at 15, she did it again, marrying a band leader.

This was supplied by Sue Busby, Serene Lakes.

S.P. Will Drive Tunnel Through Sierra Nevadas

Contract Said to Have Been Let for Work, Which Will
Take Over Three Years

L.A. Herald 1/18/1905

Southern Pacific Getting Ready to Cut Through the Sierra Mountains

San Francisco Call 3/1/1905

Railroad Contractors Getting Ready to Begin Task of Boring Through Sierras

San Francisco Call 5/10/1905

Having conquered the wilderness and sitting comfortably in our living rooms our focus has changed. Now we want to preserve what's left, but it was different in the old days.

Technologically the 19th century was an age of amazing change. Civilization was conquering the wilderness and bending it to man's will. There was immense wealth to be extracted and used. Innovations improved lives. The early century saw the building of canals to move goods. The steam engine enabled goods to easily move upriver and then steam engines coupled to wagons on tracks enabled the goods to move even where there were no rivers. The telegraph and then the telephone improved communication. Advances in technology improved the production of steel. Inoculation, sterilization, and better sanitation improved health. Railroads improved and then the automobile enabled people to travel freely even where there were no tracks. It must have been a wondrous time.

Newspapers were full of the exploits of man and his great discoveries and achievements. Nothing seemed to be out of reach.

One significant achievement, which overcame geography, was railroad tunnels. What was more emblematic of man's conquests than boring through solid rock. Newspapers feted the tunneling of the Alps, the Andes, and the Cascades as wondrous engineering feats. One idea proposed a tunnel up the inside of the Matterhorn in Switzerland. Although that was never built, another in Switzerland was. The 1894 Jungfraubahn which bored into the Eiger Mountain going up to the peak on the inside. There are even two stations inside the mountain and even today it is amazing.

An article in the San Francisco Call on March 9, 1905 expresses the enthusiasm: Completion of the Simplon Tunnel Under the Alps One of the World's Greatest Engineering Feats

Piercing the heart of the mighty Alps in a bee line for twelve and a quarter miles, the Simplon tunnel, the longest in the world, and the greatest underground engineering feat ever undertaken, has just been completed. The obstacles encountered have been many and stupendous. Nature has opposed with all

SOUTHERN PACIFIC WILL TUNNEL THE SIERRAS

By Associated Press. RENO, Nev., June 16.— The announcement is made that a contract for the construction of the tunnels through the Sierra Nevada mountains has been let by the Southern Pacific company, and that work on them will begin within a month. There are to be five tunnels in all and the main one will be five miles long. The first tunnel will start a short distance north of Donner Lake and the series will end at the foot of Blue canyon, on the American river. The contract calls for an expenditure of over \$25,000,000.

Los Angeles Herald, Volume 32,
Number 259, 17 June 1905 —

NO MONEY ON HAND FOR SIERRA TUNNEL

Julius Kruttschnitt Says
Railroads Cannot Proceed With
Improvements

Julius Kruttschnitt, director of maintenance and ways of the Southern Pacific, who is now in this city on his annual tour of the Harriman roads, said last night that the report that the Southern Pacific was to go ahead with the construction of a five mile tunnel through the Sierras was unfounded. "We have no new projects for construction on hand," he said. "We have not the money. A tour of the country will show that the railroads are not doing a large business. Merchants are not shipping heavily. I do not believe that the hard times are over."

San Francisco Call 3/23/08

the might of her subterranean forces the invasion of the intrepid human burrowers. Landslides have intervened to stay their advance. Heat has done its best to baffle them. Imprisoned streams, acid springs and hot springs have burst forth from the bowels of the earth... to overwhelm and destroy them.

This leads us to Donner Summit. A future article will talk about Alexy Von Schmidt's idea to take Lake Tahoe water to San Francisco under Donner Summit. Faithful readers will also remember the Sierra Hump in our September, '09 issue.

On the heels of the 1905 completion of the Simplon Tunnel in Europe came a proposal for a five mile long tunnel beginning at Donner Lake and going west, with the series of tunnels ending at Blue Canyon. This would eliminate miles of rail, curves, snow, and bad weather. It was never built however due to financing problems (see the sidebar here.) This tunnel is not to be confused with the second bore under Donner Summit which is the current railroad route and which was opened in 1925. That tunnel is only two miles long.

In the spirit of manipulating nature there was a suggestion that the tunnel transport not just trains, but water as well: "It has been suggested that the entrance of the tunnel on the east side of the summit should be started several feet below the water level of Donner lake, which then should supply a sufficient amount, of water to irrigate a million acres of land on the western side of the summit. This is not the only body of water that can be tapped at the eastern end of the tunnel. The large volume of water in the Truckee River also could be utilized for irrigation purposes. The river is the outlet of Lake Tahoe and its flow the year around is uniform. (L.A. Herald 1/18/05)

Imagine if that had been built.

SNOW DELAYS TUNNEL WORK

Southern Pacific Getting
Ready to Cut Through the
Sierra Nevada Mountains



Preservation Foundation Meets the DSHS

In April the California Preservation Foundation held its 35th annual conference in Nevada City and Grass Valley. Its theme this year was "Preserving a Sense of Place; The Sierra Nevada". The four-day conference dealt with subjects that included economic development, sustainability and preservation, and heritage tourism.

The conference included field trips to historic sites such as Truckee, Donner Summit, and Highway 40. Lee Schegg of Truckee (above left), Niel Locke of Nevada City, Norm Sayler (above right) and I were the hosts of this bus of "tourists".

The weather cooperated - that is, it wasn't snowing - although much of the Dutch Flat - Donner Lake Road and Lincoln Highway were under several feet of a previous snowfall.

The highlight of the Donner Pass section was Norm's story about Donner Summit Bridge and the 1994 preservation. The bridge was built in 1926, using Federal Forest highway funds. After 70 years of wear and tear had deteriorated it a new bridge was needed. When the locals heard that the county was going to either fill in the gully or build a different kind of bridge, Norm Sayler, Vickie Tamietti, and Steve Beucus worked to find a grant to preserve the bridge. They did get a federal grant, and the county relented and agreed to rebuild the bridge in its original design. That made the bridge a perfect example of preservation and sustainability. This beautiful landmark is still there.

The group then headed for Soda Springs and the DSHS for more stories.

Margie Powell

Save the Date
August 14, 2010

2nd Annual Summit Pioneer Recognitions

2010 will recognize:
Hannes Schroll - Sugar Bowl Founder (see our Oct./
Nov. 2009 newsletters
Dick Buek - see page 3 this issue
Auburn Ski Club - stay tuned

Stories
refreshments
displays

Interest in the Lincoln Highway? This Could Be Your Chance

The Lincoln Highway was the first transcontinental highway, put together in 1913 and it ran right over Donner Summit.

The California chapter of the Lincoln Highway Association hosts annual tours of the Lincoln Highway and one of those tours, the northern and longest, covers the Lincoln Highway from Sacramento to Verdi. The 2010 tour will be on Saturday August 28.

Wanted by DSHS:

**large size LCD monitor on which
to display photographs in the
museum.**

Contact: right

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