



Donner Summit Historical Society

March, 2010 issue #19

Newsletter

## Snake Charmer, Circus Beasts, Boa in the rafters, a Posse Circus Beasts Enjoy Brief Span of Freedom

This **does** have to do with Donner Summit history.

Some of the readers of this newsletter will remember when circuses came to town and excited children, amazed by the prospect of amazing feats, exotic animals, and cotton candy, attended. Some readers may even remember back to circus parades as the performers and animals left the train and headed for the performance venue. Preparing for this story, which will tie to Donner Summit history, our staff relived some of that in old newspaper articles.

"The street looked as if Noah's ark had been given a holiday" said the newspaper and the reporter opined that had Noah seen the parade of circus animals he'd have said his was all right but this was better. "Crowds thronged the route ...and small boys who wanted to touch the zebras to see if they were real often blocked its progress ... Brass bands, plenty of them, blared noisily....[as did] the big steam calliope...fireworks...Shetland ponies, elephants, llamas, deer and elk...the famous high jumping horse King [he had 'springs instead of hooves']," mounted policemen....."

The circus had come to town.

There were: riders, acrobats, a trick pony, bareback riders making "whirlwind rushes," an Arab gun spinner, clowns (Cheerful Jim and Happy Billy), a gymnast, dogs, camels, dromedaries and other beasts, trick bicyclists, juggling and daring stunts. There was more excitement with Roseberry the talking pony, Capt Debro and his miniature wife, a tattooed Greek, a bearded lady, a Welsh giant, some "diminutive" Shetlands, dancing elephants, trained bears, and of course, sawdust. Visitors could look forward to red lemonade and "festive peanut" as well as the exotic entertainment.

FEROCIOUS  
ANIMALS  
ARE FREE

Lions and Tigers Es-  
cape From Circus  
Train.

Monkeys Also Take to Open  
Territory Near Town  
in Placer.

Tramps, Alarmed at Appearance of  
Man-Eating Beasts, Scurry to  
Places of Safety.

Special Dispatch to The Call.

The circus "has arrived and small boy is glad" the San Francisco Call summed it up in March, 1905.

Everyone got to see the show too: "orphans will see the show... many children enjoy Norris & Rowe's circus." "Inmates of various institutions are given a treat through generosity of management - Friday afternoon was selected as the great day for the little ones of the various kindergartens, orphan asylums and deaf and dumb schools of the city and yesterday there were over 3000 children under the roof of Mechanic's pavilion...."

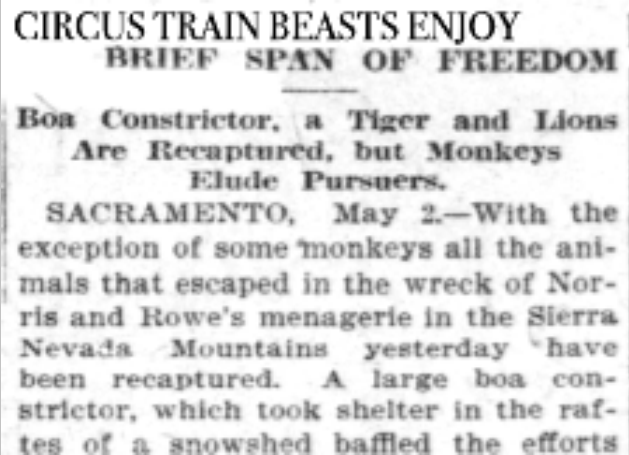
Circuses traveled from their winter headquarters to cities all across the country. One of the circuses was Norris & Rowe's which had gotten its start in 1888 as the Norris Brothers' Trained Dog Show. It grew to be a "dog and pony show" (no kidding that's what it was listed as) before transforming in to a full blown circus.

It was one of the five largest circuses in the country in 1904 having two rings, an elevated stage and requiring a twenty car train and 350 performers and crew.

It is the Norris & Rowe circus train that brings us to Donner Summit history. On May 2, 1904 the train was making its way up to Donner Summit from Truckee. It had passed the Lakeview station (in those days there were stations all along the track. Lakeview Canyon is just below Donner Summit on the east side. It's the first canyon below Donner Peak leading to Donner Lake.) At 5 AM the freight was climbing the grade when several circus wagons rolled off a flat car and "Beasts... were liberated." The train continued on its way minus the wagons and their cargo. A trainmaster, H.E. Epstein, who was presumably going home to Truckee in his "gravity car," came across a Bengal tiger "licking his chops." Epstein sped out of the way. A posse was formed to gather up the animals. The tiger was gathered without trouble. A couple of lions "meandering about in the snow for some hours, disconsolately" were also recaptured. Other circus acts were more difficult to secure.

A snake charmer had to be called in to coax a boa from the snowshed rafters and it was said that monkeys scampered about in the snowshed and branches of nearby trees for some time afterwards.

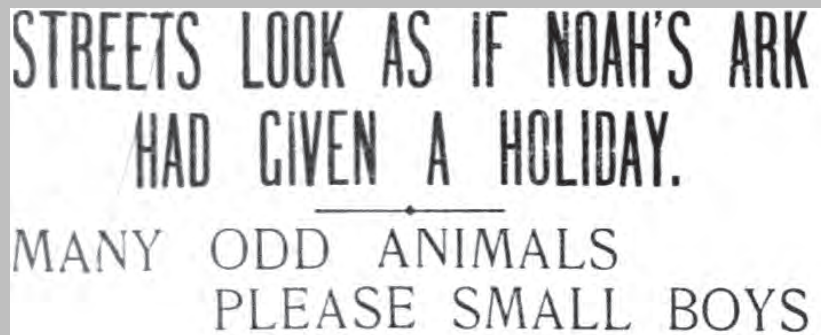
Two tramps who were walking along in the snowsheds saw what had happened and noted the monkeys in the rafters. It was the tiger, though, that sent them running down the track to the nearest station. Be careful in the snowsheds.



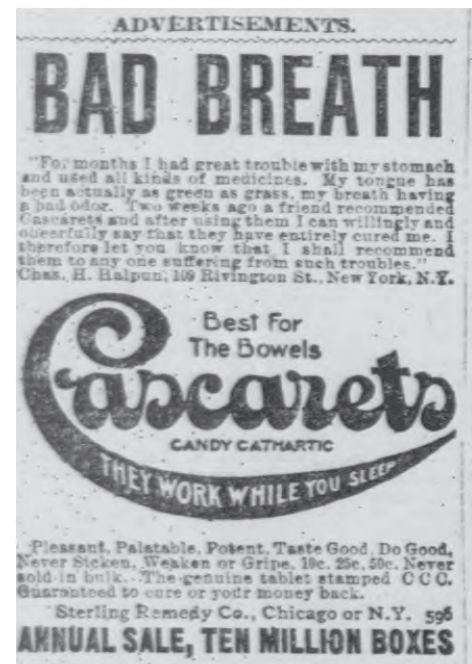
**CIRCUS TRAIN BEASTS ENJOY  
BRIEF SPAN OF FREEDOM**

**Boa Constrictor, a Tiger and Lions  
Are Recaptured, but Monkeys  
Elude Pursuers.**

SACRAMENTO, May 2.—With the exception of some monkeys all the animals that escaped in the wreck of Norris and Rowe's menagerie in the Sierra Nevada Mountains yesterday have been recaptured. A large boa constrictor, which took shelter in the rafters of a snowshed baffled the efforts



STREETS LOOK AS IF NOAH'S ARK  
HAD GIVEN A HOLIDAY.  
MANY ODD ANIMALS  
PLEASE SMALL BOYS



ADVERTISEMENTS.

**BAD BREATH**

"For months I had great trouble with my stomach and used all kinds of medicines. My tongue has been actually as green as grass, my breath having a bad odor. Two weeks ago a friend recommended Cascarets and after using them I can willingly and cheerfully say that they have entirely cured me. I therefore let you know that I shall recommend them to any one suffering from such troubles."

Chas. H. Halpun, 169 Rivington St., New York, N.Y.

Best for  
The Bowels

**Cascarets**

CANDY CATHARTIC

THEY WORK WHILE YOU SLEEP

Pleasant, Palatable, Potent, Taste Good, Do Good, Never Sickens, Weakens or Grips. 10c, 25c, 50c. Never sold in bulk. The genuine tablet stamped C.C.C. Guaranteed to cure or your money back.

Sterling Remedy Co., Chicago or N.Y. 596

**ANNUAL SALE, TEN MILLION BOXES**

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AMUSEMENTS.

MECHANICS' PAVILION 9 DAYS, STARTING SATURDAY, APRIL 2.

# NORRIS & ROWE'S

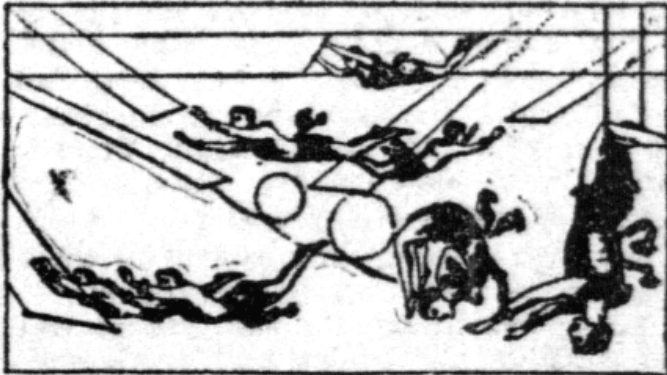
## NEW BIG SHOWS

CIRCUS, MENAGERIE MUSEUM, HIPPODROME

Just Twice Larger than Ever Before

2-RINGS ELEVATED STAGE RINGS=2

A NEW CIRCUS THROUGHOUT ARENIC ARTISTS AND ANIMAL ACTORS



Admission—Adults 25c; children 15c. Reserved seats—Adults 50c; children 25c. Box seats \$1.

### Trained Animal Show.

Norris & Rowe's trained animal show will begin a sixteen days' engagement at Mechanics' Pavilion next Saturday afternoon. Performances thereafter will be given at 2:30 and 8:15 p. m. each day. Last year the show created a sensation and now it returns vastly improved in every particular. Professor Woodruff's \$10,000 troupe of educated seallions is an important addition, while Herr Sutler's dancing baby elephant promises to be a novelty. The animal fire department has been retained and improved and Jim Robinson, the wonderful monkey jockey, has been taught new tricks. Over 100 trained Shetland ponies, 100 dogs, scores of monkeys, a trained African zebra, ant-eaters, goats, zebras and other animal actors comprise the aggregation, which is the largest in the world.

# Norris & Rowe's TRAINED ANIMAL SHOWS

A BIG THREE-RING CIRCUS.  
ELEVATED STAGE PERFORMANCE.  
TRAINED ANIMAL EXHIBITIONS.  
AERIAL ENCLAVE  
And ROYAL ROMAN RACE COURSE.  
UNDER MAMMOTH WATERPROOF TENTS.  
COR. TWELFTH AND JACKSON STS.,

## OAKLAND.

# 3 NIGHTS,

ADMISSION, 30c CHILDREN 25c.  
RESERVED SEATS, 50c EXTRA.

MATINEES DAILY, 3 P. M.,  
By NORRIS & ROWE'S  
TRAINED ANIMAL SHOWS ONLY.

ADMISSION, 25c, CHILDREN, 15c.

GRAND STREET PARADE  
10:30 A. M. MONDAY





# Marvelous Old Album Donated

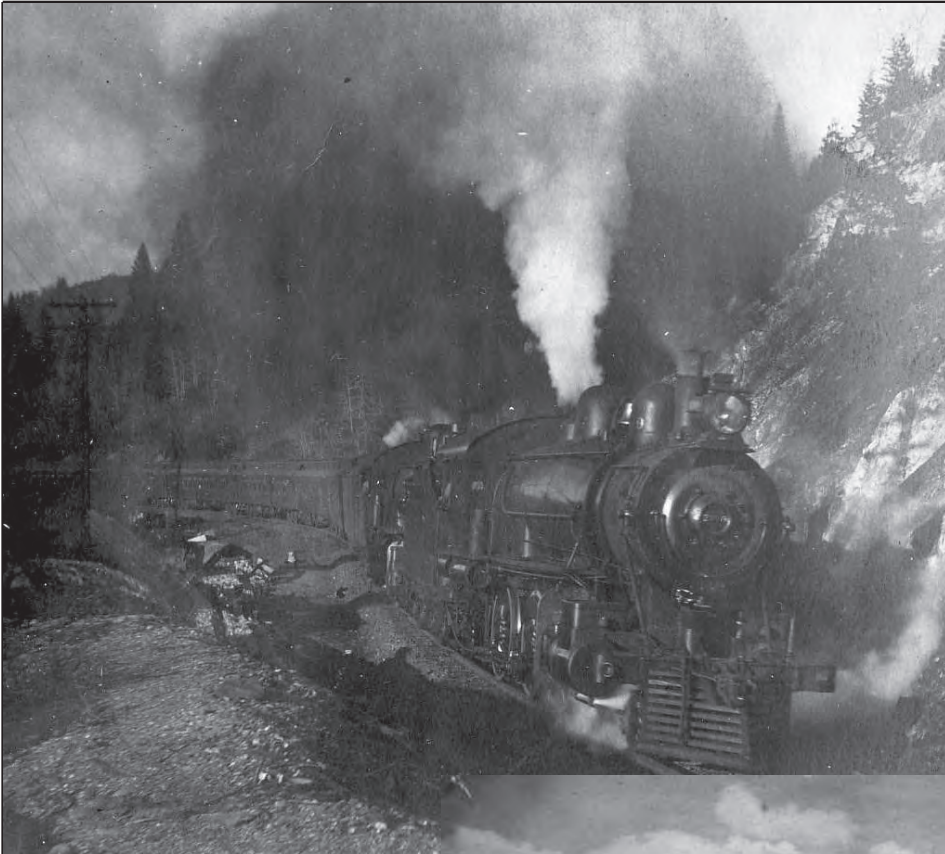
Norm Saylor was spending the day in the Donner Summit Historical Society one day when a stranger entered and began looking around. As usual Norm engaged the visitor in conversation and then the visitor left. Some days later, the man returned with a contribution to the Society, his grandfather's picture album of century old pictures in and around Donner Summit. The front of the album has the following paragraph. We've reproduced some of the photographs here and hope you enjoy them as much as we have as we've paged through the album.

"This collection of Donner Pass and vicinity photographs was left to me by my maternal grandfather, James Montgomery Bruere (1880-1952) of Oakland, California. My grandfather worked in Tonopah and Goldfield, Nevada between 1900 and 1910 and also in San Francisco for the Ford Motor Company. On April 16, 1906 he was in San Francisco for the great earthquake. He was the great-grandson of James Bruere, Captain, Colonel Lawrence's Regiment Monmouth County New Jersey Militia during he American Revolution.

"Donated to the Donner Pass Historical Society by Alan Lattanner, Truckee, California, January 17, 2010."



"Down towards Emigrant Gap - in my opinion."  
Norm Saylor



Above: Donner Lake before Rainbow Bridge which will be on the left side of the picture.

Left: Emigrant Gap 1920's.





Right: lake unknown... any ideas?

Below Hyatt Store at Emigrant Gap. Inside was a meat market run by Joe Baxter.





Above: Emigrant Gap; Right: Blue Canyon







Above: Tunnel 6 with the snowsheds leading up to it. Now the road to Sugar Bowl's Mt. Judah Lodge goes over that. Donner Peak in the background. Note the buildings on the left where Donner Ski Ranch is now. If you look closely to the right you can just make out the Summit Hotel (in the original with lots of light and a magnifying glass).







Left: Lake Angela looking towards Mt. Lincoln and Mt. Judah.



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printed at request of Clair Tappaan Lodge

## **Support the Sierra Nevada Conservancy: Reserve your license plate now!**

The Sierra Nevada Conservancy Board is developing a Sierra Nevada Conservancy License Plate following the passage of Assembly Bill 84, which creates a California specialty license plate program that the Sierra Nevada Conservancy can use to develop financial support for its activities. To see the full bill for AB84, go to [www.leginfo.ca.gov/bilinfo.html](http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/bilinfo.html)

The Sierra License Plate proceeds from which will directly fund the Sierra Nevada Conservancy's efforts to protect and restore 25 million acres of majestic landscapes of the Sierra Nevada.

In order to demonstrate a market for the Sierra Conservancy license plate, 7,500 people are needed to reserve plates, thereby ensuring the success of this new program.

To reserve your Sierra Nevada Conservancy License Plate, go to: <http://www.sierralicenseplate.org/>

# Improved Signs Coming

What Donner Summit businesses and residents have known for years was spelled out clearly in a recent issue of Sunset Magazine (Jan 2010) when a writer attempted to provide directions to Royal Gorge Cross Country Ski Resort: "...peel off I-80 on a snowy, bumpy back road that seems to lead nowhere. (Lack of signage doesn't help this matter)". That's about to change.

After forty years of meager signage, residents and visitors to Donner Summit will soon see a marked improvement in signs for Donner Pass Road/Old US 40 on three fronts. Donner Summit homeowner and lobbyist Patrick Leathers has spearheaded this effort working closely with CalTrans, the state's road department, and the DSHS has coordinated with Placer and Nevada counties on this issue over the last few months. These agencies have now committed resources to augment the signage along this 20 mile historic roadway and on nearby Interstate 80.

On Interstate 80, Leathers reports that CalTrans' District 3 Office is scheduled to post both Donner Pass Road signs and Historic US 40 signs in both directions at Soda Springs Road and i-80 sometime in spring-summer 2010.

Once off the freeway and onto Donner Pass Road/Hampshire Rocks Rd/Historic US 40, travelers will see better signage courtesy of the counties of Placer and Nevada, between Truckee and the Big Bend exits near I-80. Placer County Public Works, coordinating with District 5 Supervisor Jennifer Montgomery's office, has agreed to post two more signs near Sugar Bowl Ski Resort, one at Big Bend and one at Kingvale. The Sugar Bowl signs may go up in as early as March 2010. Two more signs will be placed after the thaw as new posts are necessary, according to Ken Grehm, Placer County Director of Public Works. For their part Nevada County is committing resources for new signs indicating both Donner Pass Road and Historic US 40 between Sugar Bowl Ski Resort and eastward down to Donner Lake. Many of the Historic US 40 signs are being generously underwritten by local Donner Summit businesses and residents. It has been proposed that underwriters will receive an identifying plaque under the historic sign they sponsor.

Road signage in the Donner Summit area has declined steadily due in part to the opening of I-80 in the early 1960s and the decommissioning of US 40 (America's first interstate), dwindling resources, and lack of communication within the three jurisdictions with sign control. Over the decades this lack of signage has coincided with a significant decline in what once was a thriving business community which once saw eight thriving gas stations in a three mile stretch between Soda Springs and Sugar Bowl. Cheryl Paduano, co-owner of the Soda Springs General Store is elated, "I feel the improved signage will really help revive many of the communities along Old Hwy 40, such as Soda Springs, that once flourished before I-80 was constructed. People, I think, are also ready for taking their time and exploring the back roads these days looking for that small town charm again!"

And maybe the next time Sunset Magazine sends a writer up this way he or she will spend more time discovering the unique history and recreational activities of Donner Summit and less time trying to figure out how to get here!

Beverly Lewis

