



Donner Summit Historical Society

September, 2010 issue #25

Newsletter

This Month Something Different

For most of our newsletter issues over the last two years (note that just above you can see we are in issue 25) we have written stories and illustrated them with pictures from a variety of sources, mostly from the Norm Saylor Collection at the Donner Summit Historical Society. Those articles, telling stories about Donner Summit, are fun and are researched just as you would expect from any high quality history outfit.

This month the research staff at the Historical Society decided to do something different. The strength of the Historical Society is in the photographic archives. So why not go through the archives, just as visitors can, and select some interesting pictures. After the staff had selected pictures, one of our Board members, Starr Walton Hurley (daughter, grand daughter and niece of Summit historical figures) came in with some good pictures from her family archives which she wanted to donate to the Historical Society. So these were added to the selections.

Starr also came in with the original hotel ledgers for the Soda Springs Hotel which was built by her grandfather. So our staff perused the entries finding some interesting ones to include here. Finally, during the Placer County Heritage Trail Tour, the Scobles of Serene Lakes, came in with the original door handles to the Soda Springs Hotel which they also wanted to donate to the Historical Society. These ended up in this issue as well. Both of those incidents are supposed to serve as examples to you who have pictures, stories and artifacts. We're collecting and will be happy to write down your stories, copy your photographs and accept donations of artifacts.

There are lots of other articles still in the computers waiting to come out and lots of stories still in Norm waiting to be shared.

We encourage you to visit the Historical Society in downtown Soda Springs at the blinking light. You can enjoy seeing things that others have donated and have fun perusing binder after binder of old Donner Summit photographs.

The picture above is our choice for interesting picture number one. It shows the Soda Springs Station which was the train station from the days when the train stopped at Soda Springs. Alas, it no longer does.



DSHS Building Story

It's fun when needs come together with vision and there is a positive result. Norm Saylor has a growing collection of photographs and historical artifacts which give him a lot of pleasure, but he wanted to share what he had. He was also taking care of his Donner Spitz snowplowing and excavating business from his home which was less than ideal.

At the same time there were a few Summit people with an interest in things historical particularly as they related to Donner Summit. Margie Powell and Norm Saylor started the ball rolling by incorporating as a 501(c)(3), the Donner Summit Historical Society.

The Society had no home though, outside of Norm's house and our first newsletters and research emanated from there. Then a building looked like it was going to become vacant in Soda Springs at a perfect corner location.

Norm jumped at the opportunity, buying the former Java Summit Sports ski shop at the blinking light which was built even earlier as the Zorich Ski Shop (See the picture right. Bud Zorich is the fellow on he left). It cost a bit and came with some deficiencies like no insulation and a crooked foundation, but to Norm it was perfect. It could host a photographic museum as well as his Donner Spitz business.

The Donner Summit Historical Society really took off with the building. Now visitors can enjoy Norm's collection and there is a central place to gather information. People wander in almost daily with stories. With the museum in place the Society has been able to accept and display numerous artifacts that people have donated. The archives are open to everyone and make research much easier. Having the building enabled the society to hit something like critical mass as ideas were incubated such as our brochure for traveling Old Highway 40 almost without freeway, or our 20 Mile Museum of interpretive signs. The building also has become a center point for the annual Summit Pioneer Awards and a central point in the community for travelers or recreation seekers asking for directions, or just "hanging out."

For the privilege of being in a "downtown" building with great exposure, the Historical Society pays rent to Norm and Norm gets to conduct his business in the back as well as his Norm's Espresso shop in the front alcove.

Naturally not content with things as they are and with an expanding collection, expanding activities, and an expanding number of visitors, the Historical Society is looking forward to acquiring a parcel on which to build a museum. Here the Society wants to combine another need, this time a community need, and build a museum/community center.



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Our success with our building started with a simple need and a vision from Norm Saylor.

Heritage Tour

August 7-8 saw the Donner Summit Historical Society become part of the Placer County Museums' Heritage Tour for the first time. The Heritage Tour had its fourth tour this year and people traveled by car and bus among the many museums in Placer County.

As people went from one museum to the other they had passports that they could get stamped, had refreshments, met interesting people, and learned about the various local histories from Rocklin to Lake Tahoe.



2nd Annual Summit Pioneer Awards

The DSHS second annual Summit Pioneer Awards presentation was held on August 14th in Soda Springs. Dick Buek, Hannes Schroll and the Auburn Ski Club were recipients. If you take a look at our last newsletter issue, you can see the stories behind the awards.



top left: Bill Clark (Auburn Ski Club manager and curator), Vic Roumage (Aub. Ski Club), Dick Hamilton (President, Auburn Ski Club), Norm Saylor, Rob Kautz (general manager Sugar Bowl), Jean Buek Leonard (Dick Buek's sister). Top right: Norm Saylor, Jean Leonard, Mitzi Hodges, Milli Martin (all the way from Alaska to visit and donate items); left: Smiley Tschopp Anderson and Starr Walton Hurley (champion Summit Skiers) in front of an old Sugar Bowl gondola; Far left: Jean Leonard.

Interesting Photographs



left: The Auburn Ski Club when it was at Cisco Grove. The club house, as you can see, was across the river from Old Highway 40 and their ski hill was above what is now the Interstate. With the coming of the freeway the club had to move and they were able to buy Boreal, which they still own and lease out today.

Below is Donner Lake in 1910 before paved roads and before cabins.

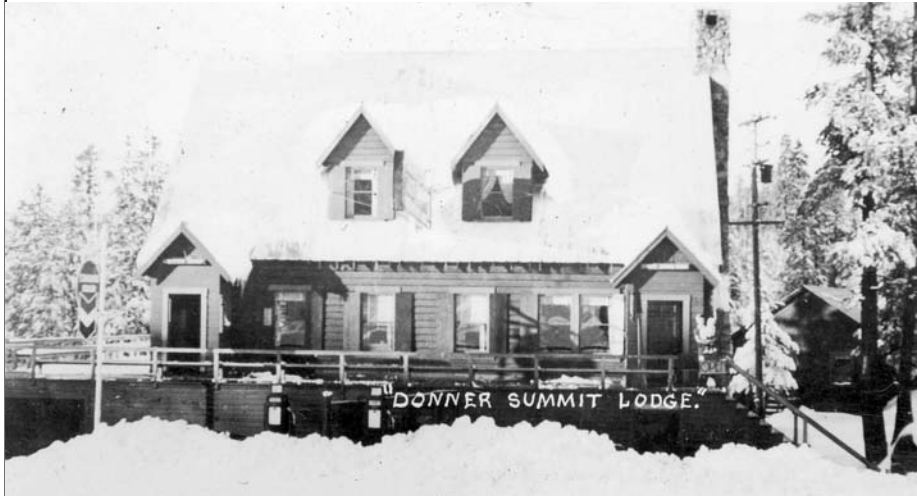


Above are two riders at Serene Lakes. This picture comes from Starr Hurley's donated pictures.

Right is Soda Springs a little distance from the bottom of the ski hill sometime in the late 1940's (the Jeep is WWII era). Note that Soda Springs Rd. is not plowed. Note all the buildings that use to be clustered between the tracks, the dam and the ski hill. Note too, the sheep corrals in the upper center. They were built by Oscar Jones, who built the Soda Springs Hotel. He was also Starr's grandfather. See more about sheep shipping later in this issue.



from the DSHS Archives



The picture to the left is a good example of the fun poking through the DSHS archives. It is a 1943 postcard from a soldier to his "dearest" in Texas. .” He was “on a “hitch hiking tour – snow all around.... a few miles from Lake Tahoe.” What happened to the soldier from Camp Kohler and his dearest? Did he survive the war? Did they marry and have kids? Or...?

Do you ever remember the Donner Summit Lodge looking like that - before additions.

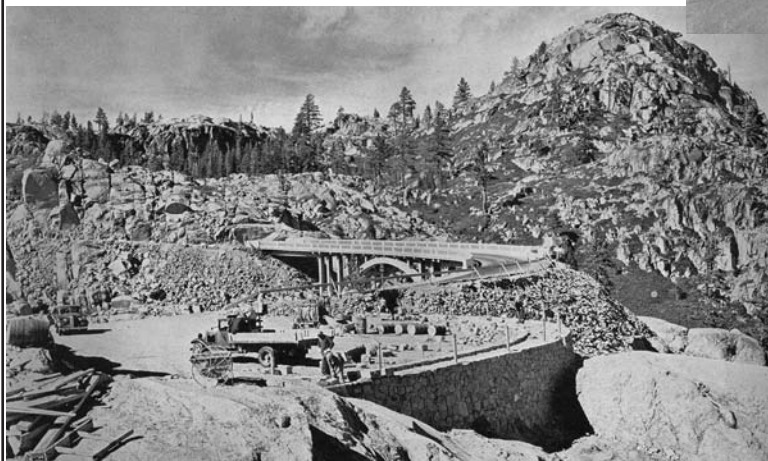
In the pictures to the right and below we have two 1937 State projects described and pictured in California Highways Magazine. That magazine and lots of others are in the DSHS archives available for perusal.

The new construction replaces a road graded by the County and “subsequently road-mixed with fuel oil by the State forces. ...with comparatively low standards of grade and alignment.

The second project, between Soda Springs and Donner Summit, is about 3.7 miles in length and passes through mountain scenery which is surpassed by few sections of the State. In addition to being a section of scenic beauty, the route is fraught with historical interest...

We of the modern age, traveling in our automobiles on hard surfaced roads which extend into every nook and cranny of the country, can hardly appreciate the transportation problems which confronted those early pioneers in their struggles to penetrate the natural barriers between them and the new frontier which they had determined to conquer.

Developed from the wagon road, which was soon pushed through the mountains and improved from time to time to serve changing types of traffic, the road across the Donner



Summit has gradually changed from a hazardous route replete with dangerous curves and steep grades to a modern mountain highway.

The new construction [along Donner Lake to the Summit], approximately 2.5 miles in length consists of bituminous plant-mixed surfacing 20 feet wide by .25 of a foot thick on a crusher run base course .5 of ea foot thick. ...Changes in the alignment and grade were made to obtain the accepted standards for mountain construction..... the cost of the project...\$132,000

Soda Springs Hotel - Donations



The Summit Hotel, which sat at the Summit, burned in 1925 leaving the Summit with no hotel. Almost all of the visitors came by train to the Summit but things were about to change. Rainbow Bridge was completed by the Forest Service in 1927 improving the route over the Summit. Oscar Jones saw that tourism would be increasing in seasons when the road was free of snow and in the winter he thought that skiing could become a major industry with a little publicity. A hotel was needed.

Oscar Jones built the Soda Springs Hotel which opened in December of 1927. In this month's newsletter we have two stories about two donations to the Historical Society that have to do with the hotel.

Door Handles

The first story is about the original door handles of the hotel. When the hotel ended its career as a hotel the fixtures were sold at auction. Barbara and Don Scoble, of Serene Lakes, thought the door handles, a Tiffany light fixture, and the plastic room key fobs would be good souvenirs. The door handles would look great on a house someday because they were "beautifully done." The handles emerged from storage last month when the Scobles donated them to the Historical Society. They never had an appropriate house.

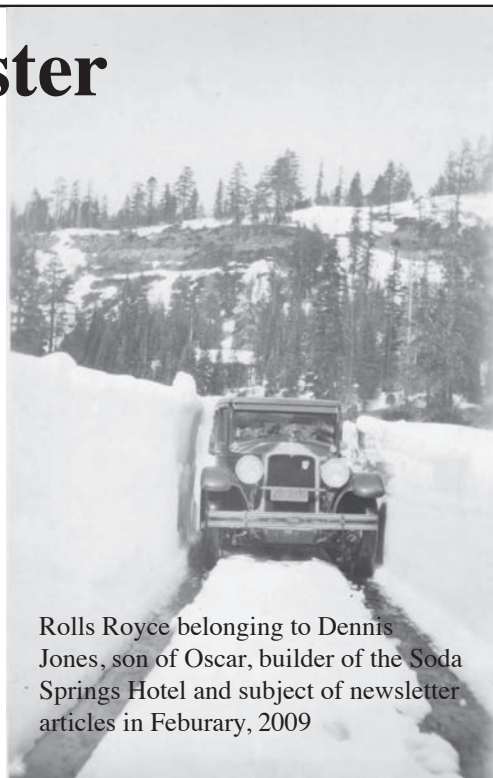
The Scobles donated the handles to the Historical Society because Don said, they are "part of the heritage of Soda Springs and the Summit and this is where they belong." Since the Tiffany lamp was not original it went to friends and the plastic fobs for the door keys, well they got thrown out.

The Scobles stayed at the Soda Springs Hotel long ago when they were college students coming to the Summit for ski trips, staying in the hotel's dormitories. They would "rendezvous with their college girlfriends," said Don, nodding at Barbara. There were of course different quarters for the different sexes.

Right, the handles being donated.
From left: Barbara and Don Scoble, Starr Walton Hurley, Jennifer Lyons (the Scoble's daughter), and Norm Saylor.



Soda Springs Hotel Register



Rolls Royce belonging to Dennis Jones, son of Oscar, builder of the Soda Springs Hotel and subject of newsletter articles in February, 2009

A simple hotel register is just a bunch of pages bound together. An old hotel register is about the stories of the people and the fancy writing is fun.

Starr Walton Hurley came into the Historical Society with the original Soda Springs Hotel registers.

Page one is the first day the hotel was open, December 10, 1927 and each entry is a story (see below).

There is a whole page of visitors from Hollywood in December, 1927 (page 9), but no one is famous enough to be recognized. Wendel Robie, Auburn Ski Club founder and modern ski pioneer is in the first register a couple of times. That winter of 1927-28 was the winter the Auburn Ski Club was founded and as Mr. Robie was looking to popularize skiing. You can imagine him up enjoying the snow, wishing the road was plowed and thinking of ways to get more people to the snow. Mr. Robie also ran the Auburn Lumber company, out of which he sold skis. He was interested in the Emigrant Trail and traced and marked it with signs. You can read more about the Auburn Ski Club in our last issue.

Another couple of entries list the Blackfords of Wheatland. The Blackfords were a sheep raising family. Their Basque shepherders would herd sheep from Wheatland to Forest Hill (15 miles south of Auburn), then up to Robinson Flat (the end of paving today), and finally to Soda Springs where the sheep would fatten over the summer. In the Fall sheep were shipped out on the railroad. Soda Springs was the second largest sheep shipping center in the country. Oscar Jones built sheep corrals in Soda Springs (see the page 4 picture) to receive the sheep prior to shipping.

That entry spurred Starr's memories. Each year when the sheep were shipped there was a big BBQ out at Ice Lakes to celebrate the end of the season.

Dr. Gordon McKay (pronounced muh key) is listed. He is one of the founders of he Palisades and 1927 is just at that time. Maybe he was exploring the lake and planning the community

Other entries list early members of the Oakland Ski Club.

HOTEL REGISTER						
Money, Jewelry and other Valuables must be placed in the Safe in the Office otherwise the Hotel will not be responsible for any loss.						
DATE	NAME	RESIDENCE	ROOM	Time of Arrival	Time of Departure	
12-10-27	Dr. G. McKay & Sweetheart					
	Mrs. Graydon					
	Mr. & Mrs. C. Stenroos	Truckee, Calif.				
	Mr. & Mrs. J. Peew	"	"			
	Miss W. P. Leonard	"	"			
	Dr. & Mrs. J. J. Phillips		"			
	Mrs. L. M. Helvey		"			
	Mr. & Mrs. G. Peew		"			
	Mr. & Mrs. Carr		"			

Then as Starr was perusing the entries again, she saw her mother's name, only a couple of months after the hotel opened. On the line above was her mother's best friend, Ella Collins. Madelyn Jones, Starr's mother, was only 13 years old when she wrote her name in the register. You can imagine her coming to see and stay in Grandpa's new hotel. Imagine Starr's feelings as she ran her fingers over her mother's childhood signature.

That brought more memories. Later, Madeline Jones was the switchboard operator at the hotel which also served the entire Summit's phone system. That made her a very well informed person especially when calls were about romance.

Starr's father, Bud Walton, worked the bar at the Soda Springs Hotel while he was courting Madeline.

The road was plowed winters in 1932 allowing more people to travel to the Summit. So the registers tell the history of the coming of auto tourism to the Summit and is fascinating reading if you know some of the names.



Standard Hotel Register

No. 80

Money, Jewelry and other Valuables must be placed in the Safe in the Office otherwise the Hotel will not be responsible

HOTEL REGISTER

DATE	NAME	RESIDENCE	ROOM	T
	Wendell T Robie	Auburn	10	
	Mrs Robie & son		12	
	K. Roy Evans	Glendale	15	
	Mrs Evans & son			
	Mrs & Mrs A. Fitzhugh	Richmond	21	
	Mr & Mrs W.W. McElfee	Fullerton Calif.	22	
	Mrs & Mrs P. Miranini	Pac Tel L.L.C.	12	

Miss Ola Verne
Mrs. Bumer
J.H. Smith
A. Gordon McKay
Mrs. R. H. Blackford
Madeline Blackford
Mr & Mrs E.P. Robie
Mr & Mrs. Fred & Lyle
Hollie Greenwood
W.A. Leonard
Mr & Mrs C.W. Calhoun
J. M. King
Chas McDevitt & son

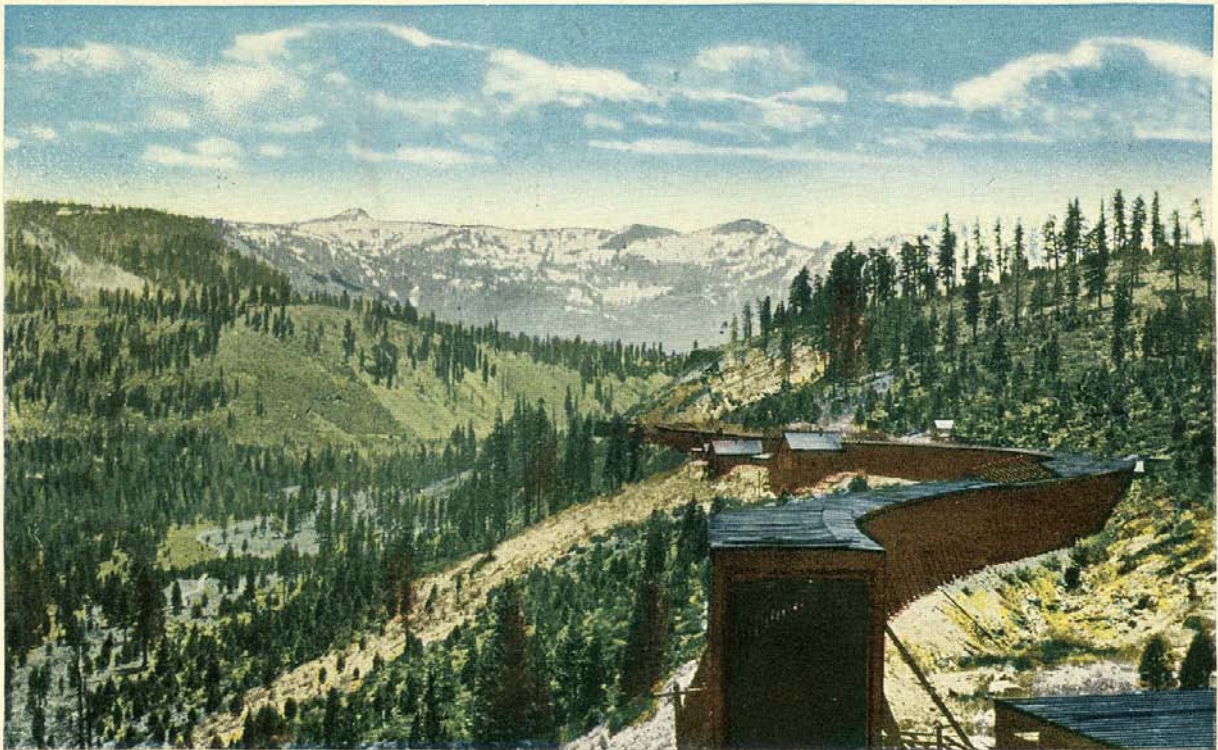
Wheatland Calif.
Auburn Cal
"
Auburn
Soda Spgs.
Blue Canyon
You Bet
Cedars

Left Over From Last Month

We've covered pretty completely the snowsheds' importance, fires, fire trains, preventative measures, but there's still one thing left. The picture, taken near Lakeview (just below the east side of Donner Summit) below is from the Norm Saylor Collection at the Historical Society. This shows snowsheds and nothing appears remarkable... until you look closely. To prevent fires from spreading unstopped through miles of snowsheds it made sense to have breaks, but if there were breaks then snowfall and avalanches could obstruct the rail traffic. The solution was to put parts of the shed on tracks paralleling the railroad tracks. In summer the tracked sheds would be slid creating a break in the sheds. When winter came the tracked sheds were slid back into place creating an unbroken line of snow protection. In the picture below you can see the break in the shed in the lower right.

Ultimately snow removal would improve and most of the sheds were removed. In those most dangerous stretches of track the wooden sheds were replaced by concrete sheds. Diesel supplanted steam and romance and heroism became memories.

<i>Duncan Cramer</i>	<i>Hollywood</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Ray Wise</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>Jimmy Boler</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Lois Moran</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Marie Prada</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>Mable Dale</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Marco Elter</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>23^v</i>
<i>Ray Porter</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>San</i>
<i>Ruth Mack</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>San</i>
<i>Marion Morris</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>San.</i>
<i>Mary Deupue</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>19</i>
<i>Lora Le Sem</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>19</i>
<i>Juanita Wittes</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Ruth Eddings</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Grace Monrad</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Eva Monrad</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Queta Van Rie</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>21</i>
<i>Yvonne Pollion</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>21</i>
<i>Hortense Petta</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Arthurs M. Moner</i>	<i>San Francisco</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>A. N. ...</i>	<i>"</i>	<i>"</i>



SNOW SHED NEAR LAKE VIEW, CAL.

HISTORIC



ROUTE 40

Remember the days when while traveling you picked up sugar cube packages, matchbook covers, ashtrays, etc. as good souvenirs?

By now you have discovered our brochure that will take you from Rocklin to Truckee on Old Highway 40 (that's the cover to the left). Here is a collection of Old Highway 40 matchbook covers from the Historical Society collection. Our staff took so many digital pictures of them that we have enough to put some in next month too. Do some of these look familiar?





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DONNER SUMMIT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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Membership 2010

I/we would like to join The Donner Summit Historical Society and share in the Summit's rich history.

DATE _____

NAME(S) _____

_____ New Membership

MAILING ADDRESS _____

_____ Renewing Membership

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

_____ Individual Membership - \$30

(Please mail this card with your check payable to DSHS to Donner Summit Historical Society, P.O. Box 1, Norden, CA 95724)

_____ Family Membership - \$50

_____ Friend Membership - \$100

_____ Sponsor - \$250

_____ Patron - \$500

_____ Benefactor - \$1000

_____ Business - \$250

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Donner Summit Historical Society is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization



Old snowmobile at the Summit Pioneer Awards presentations.