



Donner Summit Historical Society

May, 2011 issue #33

Newsletter

Summit Hotel III

In the February and April issues we covered the Summit Hotel but we're not done yet. Here we have visitors' observations and a little story.

Marianne North at the Summit Hotel, 1875

"...I started back to the 'Summit Station,' Colonel and Mrs. M going with me as far as Sacramento, where there was a fair at which he hoped to see fine horses and cattle, but was disappointed. I continued in the train, which slowly climbing its 8000 feet and landed me at midnight at the top of the pass, in the midst of the Nevada Mountains, and I settled for a week in a very comfortable railway-hotel. One could go ten miles on either side under cover of one long snow-shed, east and west... there was no



An old Cypress or Juniper Tree in the Nevada Mountains by Marianne North, 1875 Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew

looked over the bright rocks and trees and mountain-

tops, with a few small lakes here and there, like the top of some Swiss pass. The house was still well filled with San Francisco people doing "Vileggiatura." The food was excellent, popped corn and cream being the thing for breakfast. ...Half an hour's climb took me to the highest point near, from which was a most magnificent view of the Donner Lake below, and all its surrounding. Of this I made two large sketches [one is above right], taking out my luncheon and spending the whole day on those beautiful hills, among the twisted old arbor vitae, larch, and pine trees, with the little chipmunks (squirrels) for company, often not bigger than large mice. The sunshine was magnificent; I could trace the long snow-galleries and tunnels of the railway, high along the projecting spires of the mountains, into the far horizon. It was a most quiet enjoyable life... [T]hat air made on feel so happy."

My landlord drove a drag, four-in-hand, down to Lake Tahoe [sic] most days, and at the end of the week took me on there, driving down the steep descent to Lake Donner. We went along the whole length of its clear shore to Truckee, then followed the lovely clear river to its source in the great Lake Tahoe, a most lovely spot with noble forests fringing its sides. There was another capital wooden hotel there, where I could work again in peace. Behind the house were noble trees, fast yielding to the woodman's axe; huge logs were being dragged by enormous teams of oxen, all smothered in clouds of dust. They made

fine foregrounds for the noble yellow pines and cypress-trees, with their golden lichen. The M's picked me up there again, and after going round the lake in the little steamer we disembarked on the east side, and took a carriage with a driver who has been made famous by Mark Twain. We followed one long shoot of floating wood-logs for a mile or more, all tumbling over one another on the rushing water till one felt one must go too; it would be impossible to stand over it and watch the moving mass without throwing oneself in....

Back to the Summit Hotel, which I reached at four in the morning. There were rough people in the train, but they were always good and civil to me, and gave me a couple of seats to myself. The landlord's little daughter took me the next day to see her lake, a lake that no one could find unless she showed the way, she said. She had a swing there, between two trees; and I tried to paint her, for she was a rare child, very beautiful, and not more than six years old. She knew all the birds' notes, and imitated them so well that the birds answered her, and she called up all kinds of pretty echoes for my entertainment.

114?

A man named Joseph Groves, a native of England, aged 114 years, a painter by trade, was found dead in his bed May 24th at the Summit Hotel, Summit. A Coroner's jury was summoned and gave a verdict of died in a fit. The body of deceased was taken to Truckee for burial.

May 26, 1871
Sacramento Daily Union

The above was written in 1875 as reported in Recollections of a Happy Life, by Marianne North. You can see more of the painting Marianne North did during her visit to California at <http://www.kew.org/mng/gallery/north-america.html> On pages nearby you can learn more about her fascinating life.

This little story also acts as a preview since right now we are doing research on the art of Donner Summit. Many famous artists and photographers visited the Summit in the 19th century recording the same views with sketchbook, canvans and film that people do today with digital cameras. So don't let your subscription lapse.

At the Summit, 1890

The School of Design and Its Work — A Slight Accident. The Sacramento School of Design has now been at the Summit one week. In that time its progress in landscape study has exceeded

the expectations of the instructors. They testify that the scholars have applied the principles of landscape drawing taught them in the classroom very much more quickly and intelligently in the broad field of the Sierras than had been anticipated. The present week the course of study will be more difficult, their attention being given to strong light and shade and to detail, and somewhat less to color work, which, however, will be continued. It is the intention also to do more in study of distance effects. The school celebrated "The Fourth" by a pyrotechnic display in the evening after a half holiday in the afternoon. One evening last week an orchestra was secured, and by the kindness of the proprietor of the hotel the scholars enjoyed a delightful "hop." One day last week the only accident of the excursion occurred. Miss Myers, unthinkingly, sprang from a hand car near the hotel and fell between the rails, the car passing over, but not striking the young lady or another young woman who fell with her. The former sustained a sprain of an ankle and one or two bruises, but nothing at all serious. She now limps to her work, while reflecting upon the folly of jumping from a moving vehicle. Assistant Instructor Sawyer came down to the city yesterday morning and taught the Saturday class at the Art Gallery. He returned to the Summit last night. The scholar's instructors and accompanying friends are all warm in their commendation of Joseph Goulden, proprietor of the Summit Hotel, for his attention to their comfort and the excellence of his table. Mr. Goulden is also a member of the firm of Goulden & Jacobs, proprietors of the Summit Soda Springs Hotel [at the original Soda Springs 8 miles west of the current Soda Springs], which will be open for guests on the 10th inst. This hotel is situated in the midst of a perfect sportsman's paradise. It is distant from the Summit only twelve miles and is reached by stage from Summit station. A telephone line connects the two lines so that guests at the springs, while located in the midst of the forest still have the means of communication with the outer world. There are innumerable lakes and streams in the vicinity, all teeming with trout while deer and other game abound in the surrounding hills and canyons.

Sacramento Daily Union July 6, 1890

editor:
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20 Mile Museum - New Signs 2011



Hwy 40 Scenic Bypass

Donner Pass Airway Station & Beacon 26

History

The first wagon trains, the first transcontinental railroad, and the First transcontinental highway cross Donner Summit. So did the first transcontinental airway.

When airplanes were new, pilots flew by the "seat of their pants" flying only when they could see. Pilots wanted to fly all the time though, and people wanted airmail, so the Federal Government developed airways and entrepreneurs improved airplanes.

The first transcontinental airway went right overhead here.

The 1920's saw great improvement in flying. Planes began to carry radios (only receivers were required initially) and guidance devices. Radio and lighted beacons were set up to guide pilots and emergency landing strips were placed at regular intervals.

To the left above you, on top of Signal Hill (the top of Donner Ski Ranch) there is still a beacon that rotated showing pilots the summit. Below the beacon were two lights oriented east-west in the direction of the official airway. Above you to the right was airway station #15 with "SF - SL 15" painted on one side of the roof and "Donner" on the other.

Airway stations were placed at regular intervals all the way across the country along the transcontinental route. They provided up to the minute weather information, tracked traffic and provided communication.

The station on Donner Summit was commissioned in 1931. It was decommissioned in 1952 when planes moved to more advanced technology, more powerful radio beacons, and flew higher, making the beacons irrelevant.

The Donner station was not a preferred assignment due to the winter isolation of 40 foot snowfalls. Personnel had to travel miles over the snow to get to the train station so they could go to Truckee for mail or supplies. More hardy operators skied the whole way down to Truckee.

A Good Memory

"We occasionally had dinner with Marie [Fitzpatrick, pictured above in front of the station's view of Donner Lake] who was very gracious...the station... was quite cozy, which was good considering the incredible winds that hammered it. The rope line that served as a handrail was also a comfort when accessing the place. My Mom and I were sometimes a bit silly after dinner on our way down and we would start running and laughing on those rocks, grabbing the rope in time to stop us from a bad fall."

Pat Malberg, of Lake Mary

Things to do right here

Make your way up the rock and look for the old foundation. Hike up to to Lake Mary for a picnic. Follow the Pacific Crest Trail north for lakes and great views.

This sign was sponsored by Don & Pat Malberg

Top pictures courtesy the Norm Saylor Collection at the Donner Summit Historical Society
Bottom picture courtesy of Mark McLaughlin
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Here is one of this year's crop of new signs to add to the 20 Mile Museum. This sign is about the beginnings of commercial flight in this country and the ability to fly at night and during bad weather. It's also about another first for Donner Summit: the first transcontinental air route.

Norm Saylor requested the sign and Pat Malberg (Lake Mary) asked to sponsor it. As a girl living during summers at Lake Mary, Pat would go up to visit the Airway Station and its caretaker, Marie Fitzpatrick or Marie would come down to Lake Mary to visit. So the sign means something special to Pat.

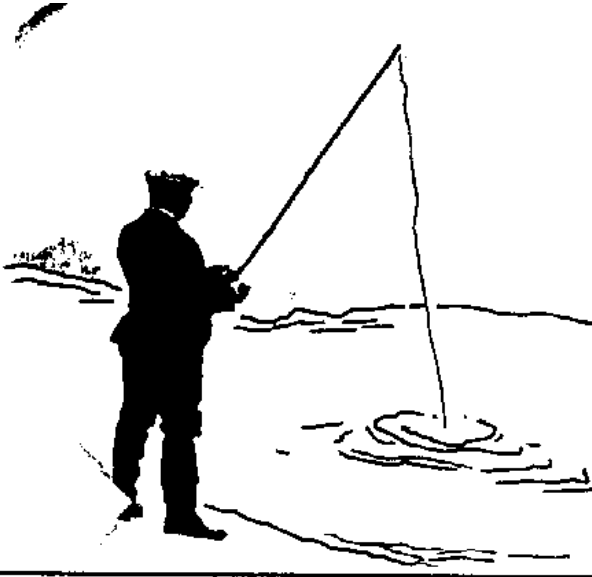
There's more to the Airway Station than what is on the sign and it will be the subject of a future article which will include more pictures.

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Primary Source Serendipity Summit Fish Stocking & Ice

It's amazing what turns up when you don't expect it. Our staff was looking for other things in old newspapers when the following item turned up



"Fish Commissioner B. B. Redding took seven or eight thousand Eastern trout from the westward bound train at Summit yesterday. A small portion of them were placed in the springs, lakes and streams around Summit Valley, and the rest were put into Prosser creek, above the ice company's dam, as had been announced. The fish were transported in a large car, and were in excellent condition."

Sacramento Daily Union March 9, 1875

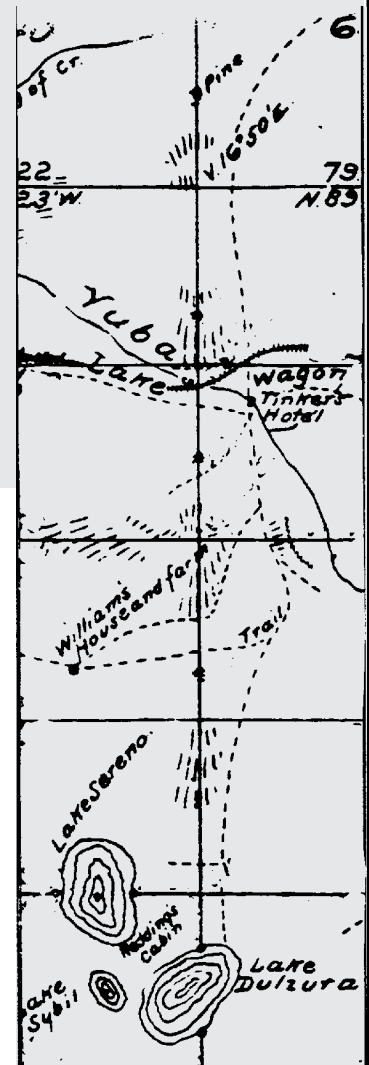
So what?

B.B. Redding was a land agent for the railroad. He was California State Printer, California Secretary of State, and many other things in California's early years. His brother, Fitzpatrick William Redding Jr., was the first settler at Serene Lakes, buying or patenting the land from the Federal Government. He built the first house there but got sick and died almost immediately. The map to the right is part of the the Government survey of 1866 and shows "Redding's Cabin." Note there were three Serene Lakes in those days, before the dam on Serena Creek joined Sybil to Sereno.

B.B. and partners kept the property after Fitzwilliam died and built an ice harvesting business in Serene Lakes that lasted only two years due to the heavy snows. The business moved to Truckee.

B.B. was also California Fish Commissioner and had written about fish farming. He claimed to have caught 200 fish in a day at the old Soda Springs on the American River where his acquaintance, Mark Hopkins, had his estate.

You can read more of the story, about the voyage of the Mary Jane, turtles, Fitzwilliam Jr., the family, ice harvesting, three ice lakes, how to make ice, and some skullduggery on the stories page of our website, <http://www.donnersummithistoricalsociety.org/pages/Stories.html> Click on "The Ice in Ice Lakes."



When Surveyed

1866

October 11th 1866

Serene Lakes 1866

from the first government survey map
source: Bureau of Land Management

Diverting Lake Tahoe Water to Soda Springs?!!

Don't you want to know more?

"Soda Springs Valley is at the head of the North Fork of the American, about ten miles west of Lake Tahoe. In natural beauty, picturesque scenery, and romantic landscapes it stands out unique and wonderful in all the features that compose it, surrounded by loft mountain peaks, with their bare, rugged granitic sides exposed, and with shaded depressions filled with snow. It is at this point where the great tunnel of seven miles in length, proposed by Colonel Von Schmidt to divert the water of Lake Tahoe into the North Fork, has its exit to the California side of the Sierra."

History of Placer County, 1882

No doubt you're going to want to read about this venture, so keep your subscription current.

This excerpt comes from the Fey book, *Emigrant Trails*, that was reviewed in the last issue in case you haven't quite decided on it yet.

Emigrant Trails - The Long road To California

An Unbelievable Trek through Truckee River Canyon - Verdi to Truckee... the hill began to grow nearer together, and the country was rough and broken that they frequently had to travel in the bed of the stream. The river was crooked that one day they crossed it ten times in traveling one mile. This almost constant traveling in the water softened the hoofs of the oxen, while the rough stone in the bed wore them down, until the cattle's feet were so sore that it became a torture for them to travel. The whole party were greatly fatigued by the incessant labor. But they dare not rest. It was near the middle of October, and a few light snows had already fallen, warning them of the imminent danger of being buried in the snow in the mountain. They pushed on, the route each day becoming more and more difficult. Each day the hill seemed to come nearer and nearer together and the stream to become more crooked. They were now compelled to travel altogether in the bed of the river, there not being room between its margin and the hill to furnish foothold to an ox. The feet of the cattle became sore that the drivers were compelled to walk beside them in the water, or they could not be urged to take another step; and, in many instances, the team had to be trebled in order to drag the wagon at all. On top of all the disheartening condition came a fall of now a foot deep, burying the grass from the reach of the cattle, and threatening them with starvation. The poor, foot sore oxen, after toiling all day, would stand and bawl for food all night, in so piteous a manner that the emigrant would forget their own misery in the pity for their cattle. But there was nothing to offer them except a few pine leaves. Still the party toiled on, hoping soon to pass the summit and reach the plain beyond... there was no thought of turning back.

Moses Schallenberger 1844

Moses Schallenberger was a member of the first wagon train to cross the Sierra with wagons. He was 17 years old and was left behind at Donner Lake for most of the winter due to illness. Schallenberger Ridge, the ridge on the south side of Donner Lake is named for him.

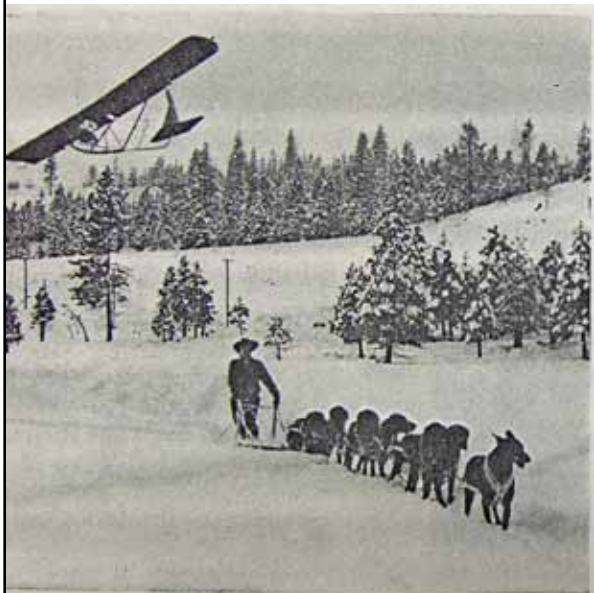
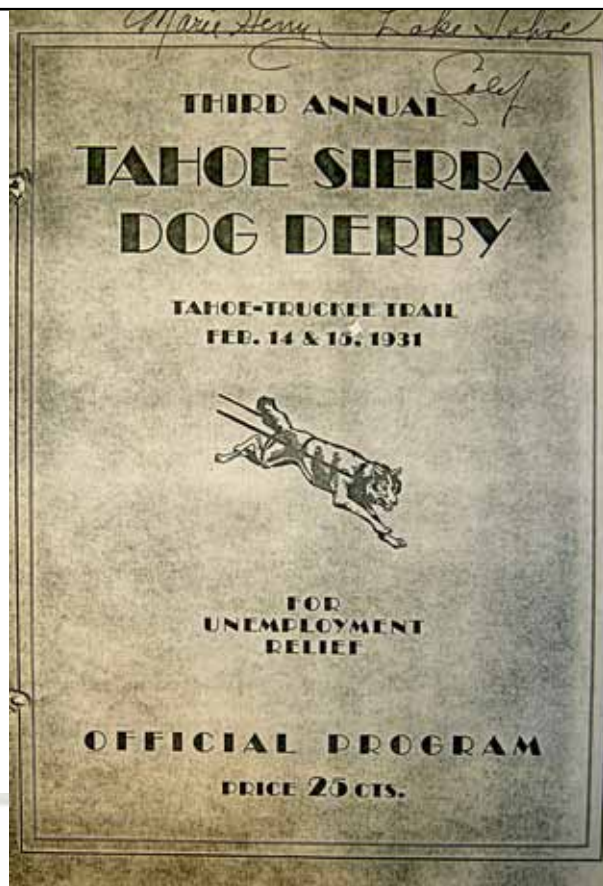
Mystery

Art Clark found these materials at the Western Ski Sport Museum at Boreal, but for those of us wanting answers he did not find the rest of the story.

What was the Sierra Dog Derby, dated 1931? How did gliders fit in? Did dogs actually get the gliders into the air or did they retrieve the gliders?

Maybe someday we'll find out.

Meanwhile you may like an article by Mark McLaughlin about Rex the Blizzar King at <http://photo51samoyeds.blogspot.com/search?q=sierra+dog+derby>



THE GLIDER

THE LATEST innovation in winter sports in the TRUCKEE-TAHOE REGION is the thrilling flight by glider. The take-off is unique in that the glider is launched by dog team. The glider is equipped with snow skids and is easily launched. A glider club has been formed at Truckee and visitors to the Truckee-Tahoe region will see gliders soaring out from the ski hills and over the vast expanse of virgin snow. *What next?*



Colfax RR Days
October 1-2, 2011
they will be hosting a train from
the Portola RR museum.
contact: www.psrhs.org



As we cast about for Donner Summit historical material all kinds of things turn up like the sled dogs and gliders on the previous page, the 114 year old on page two or finding an article about B.B. Redding on page 4.

In this case we have come across a familiar Donner Summit view in an unlikely place, the USGS. This is from the Russell collection of pioneer photographers at the USGS. At some point we'll be writing about Carlton Watkins and Alfred A Hart.

In this picture you see Donner Lake of course from the Summit. Note the wooden snowsheds on the right and the buildings near the exit from Tunnel 6. Note the absence of the Lincoln Highway on the left.

If you'd like to explore, just type into a search engine USGS + Russell collection. You will find other pioneer photographers at <http://libraryphoto.cr.usgs.gov/photo.htm>

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The Lincoln Highway CA: 1915

Here we have some pictures of the Lincoln Highway from various sources taken in the 1910's.



above, bus approaching the underpass under the railroad tracks just east of Tunnel 6.

right: at Lincoln Highway at Big Bend. If you walk along the Lincoln Highway, along the river at Big Bend, you can see bridge remnants.



Above: bus approaching the underpass under the train tracks. The underpass was completed in 1913.

Below: Maxwell Military Express approaching the underpass. Note they did graffiti in those days too.



Left: before the underpass was built travelers crossed the train tracks by going through the snowsheds. They'd stop on one side, get out and open the sliding door on the shed, listen for trains, go to the other side and open the far door, listen more for trains, then go back to the other side, restart the car, and drive through.

They would hope that no trains would come in the time between checking for trains and restarting the car. According to one Lincoln Highway guide, there were a lot of train-auto accidents at this spot. No doubt the underpass worked better.

DONNER SUMMIT HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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Membership 2011

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

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____ Individual Membership - \$30

(Please mail this card with your check payable to DSHS to Donner
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From the Old Days: Donner Summit, 1924

This is from History of Placer County, California (1924 edition) available in the 900's section of the library,

“After passing through the railroad snow-sheds, you are in the Valley of the Yuba, and for many mile there are plenty of camping places and, generally, good fishing. Cisco Camp is located on the Yuba River, and here many campers are found. There are goods and supplies aplenty, but Cisco Hotel and a good store and road are only half a mile away. The Valley of the Yuba extends easterly, and the highway follows through it, giving more camping places.

At the end of a long, easy grade, you come to Summit Station [present day Soda Springs], where much shipping of sheep and lambs takes place. Here a road turns to the south, and in about ten miles you reach Soda Springs, once a famous summer resort, with real soda springs [the old Mark Hopkins estate just beyond the Cedars]. The springs still run in all their bubbling freshness, but most of the fine buildings are gone. Several fine streams of mountain water are nearby. If the old trail to Robinson's Flat... were made into a fair road, an alternate drive to the summit would pass up the Forest Hill Divide. [Indeed, this trip up to the Summit of down from the Summit to Foresthill and then I-80 is a very interesting trip and the editing staff at the DSHS recommends it highly] Certain Sacramento people have a club house near the springs [The Cedars], which was once considered the “ne plus ultra” place for quiet literary people to hide away in. In the early eighties the writer and a party of friends visited the hotel, and while there the writer and his wife secured saddle-horses and climbed the nearby mountain, Tinker's Knob, the elevation of which is over 9000 feet. From the timber line, where the horses were left, it was a climb of about 1000 feet over sharp, broken rocks. The register of successful climbers was kept in a large inverted tin can, weighted down with stones.

One of the sources of the Yuba is widened out at the station by a long rock-and-dirt dam that impounds a large body of water, called Lake Van Norden. Three miles farther on, up an easy grade, are the Summit Hotel and the railroad pass, as an elevation of 7017 feet. ... The Summit Hotel has been in the past a fine stopping-place for tourists.” page 220 [The hotel would burn again in 1925 and would not be rebuilt. The Soda Springs Hotel would arrive in 1927]

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