

# The Donner Summit

# Heirloom



History and stories of the Donner Summit Historical Society

October, 2012 issue #50

# Issue #50!

Given that this is ISSUE #50 it means we've been in operation for more than 4 years. Four years ago we had no real idea of where we were going except that we wanted "...to offer lectures, seminars, and field trips that will help the community learn the history of Donner Summit and surrounding area, and to collect and display artifacts relative to the history, and to carry on other educational and charitable activities..."

Looking back on that quote which comes from our "Articles of Incorporation" filed with the State of California, we've done pretty well. We have a museum in "downtown" Soda Springs, we have our 20 Mile Museum, we've led hikes, produced brochures about Summit history, and we have this dandy newsletter which has gone out, with this issue, 50 TIMES!

One worry back 50 issues ago, was that the newsletters could not be too long because otherwise we'd soon run out of Summit history. Did we mention this is issue #50?

We have covered in our 50 issues, stories about skiers, Summit pioneers, famous artists, transportation, the amazing number of firsts in Donner Summit history, robbery, hotels, ski inns, personalities.... If you peruse our indices (on our website) you can see all the stories. We've also published a steady stream from Norm Saylor's incomparable collection of Summit historical photographs.

What about the worry that we'll run out of history to write about? Our staff has been working on a list of coming stories so we don't get confused. There is so much history left. Coming sooner: Auburn Ski Club, Dutch Flat Donner Lake Wagon Rd., and Soda Springs (the old one).

Then longer and intermediate term: hotels along the Dutch Flat Road, camping in 1873 on the Summit, famous artists (multiple stories), sheep on Donner Summit, Van Norden, Alfred A. Hart and Carleton Watkins on Donner Summit, the first locomotive over the summit, the first locomotive on the summit, petroglyphs and grinding rocks, and so much more. There's even a story about Alexy Von Schmidt and what he wanted to do *under* the summit.

Of course we have lots of Art Clark's "Then and Now's" and more from Marshall Fey. There are more book reviews to share and of course, lots more of Norm Saylor's historical photograph collection to which he is continually adding.

If I were you, I would not let my subscription lapse.

So much  
more to  
come  
- don't  
let your  
subscription  
lapse.

# This Time of Year - but a few years ago

For emigrants traveling to California in the mid-19th century, before the railroad and before the stage coaches, it was an immense task. They'd given up their homes, their friends, their families, and much of their property as they aimed for California, the Promised Land, the land of new opportunities. The emigrants were special people. They were adventurous and they were risk takers. The people who stayed home, to generalize, were not the risk takers.

The people who were willing to risk so much to improve their lives, brought an energy and vitality to the new state. In much the same way that America was populated by a different breed than those who stayed at home, so was California. Those emigrants brought energy, vitality, and new ideas to California.

The trip to California was perilous. There was accident, sickness, indians, thieves, unproven routes, weather events, and other unforeseen perils. If the emigrants went too slowly they risked not getting to California at all.

October was suspenseful. They were getting closer but there was the biggest obstacle still in front of them, the Sierra. They had to cross it before the snows. Imagine as they pressed along balking at each delay, each broken wagon, each stolen cow. Had the Donners not taken an extra rest, they would have missed the snows and Donner Pass would not be Donner Pass. Maybe we'd be the Stephens Pass Historical Society.

Imagine their hopes soaring as they traveled under blue autumn skies through Coldstream Canyon aiming at the Roller Pass, so much easier than Donner Pass. They were only a little more than a week from the Central Valley and it was almost all downhill from there. Imagine their joy at cresting the ridge of Roller Pass and looking down on Summit Valley.

Here is one of those emigrants' thoughts as he climbed over Roller Pass at the end of September in 1849.

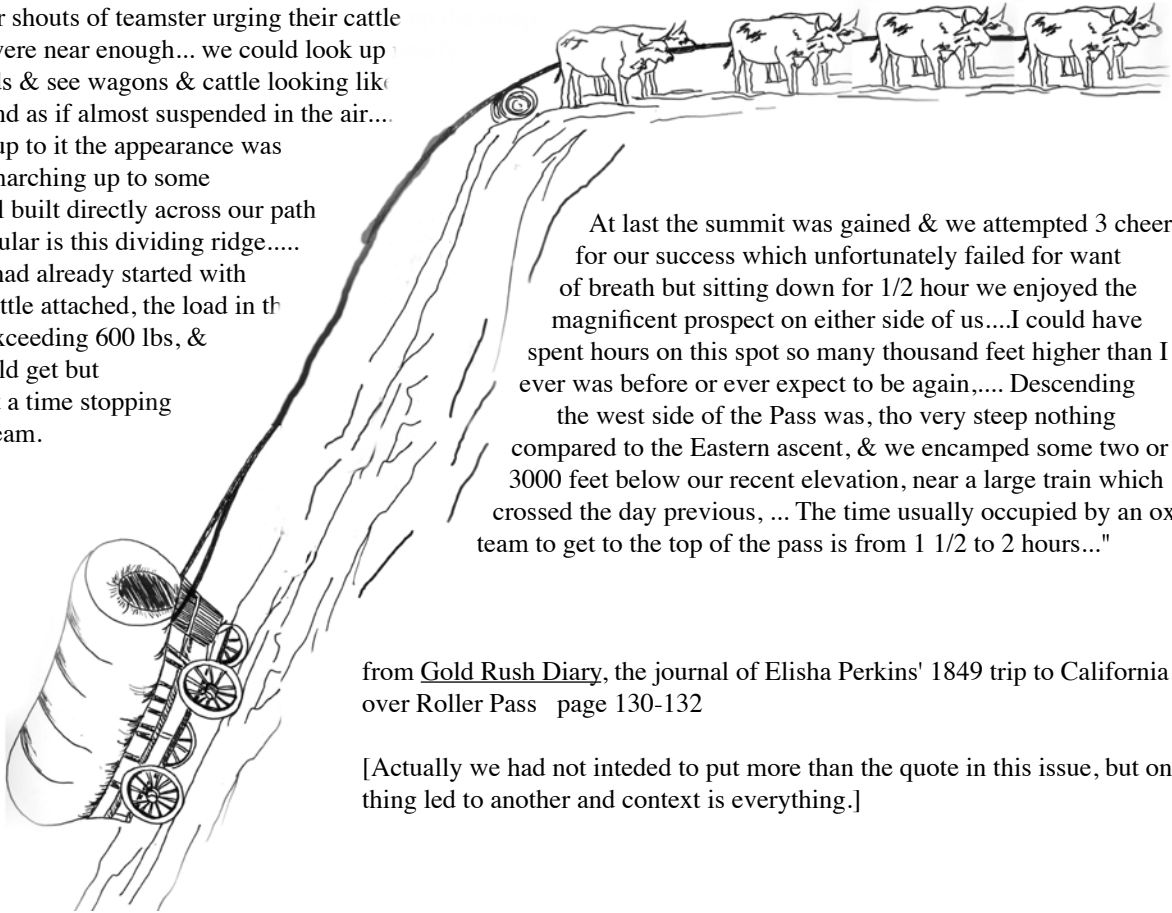
Going through Coldstream Canyon, "The journey is wild & magnificent beyond description. I was perfectly in raptures during the whole of the toilsome ascent, ...The trees exceeded anything I had ever seen... Hundreds of them were six feet in diameter & and standing so densely together that I could hardly get myself & mules through them....

Up, up, we toiled wondering every five minutes how 'the dickens' ox teams & and wagons can get over here, & it is a wonder indeed, until.... we arrived at the foot of the terrible 'Passage on the backbone.'" For half an hour before arriving



Alfred A. Hart #191 view of Summit Valley from Mt. Judah, about 1867. Today's Soda Springs ski hill has the light spot at the end of the valley. Red Mountain is in the far distance. Library of Congress

we could hear shouts of teamster urging their cattle & when we were near enough... we could look up over our heads & see wagons & cattle looking like pigmies, & and as if almost suspended in the air... As we came up to it the appearance was exactly like marching up to some immense wall built directly across our path so perpendicular is this dividing ridge..... .One wagon had already started with 13 yoke of cattle attached, the load in th wagon not exceeding 600 lbs, & and they could get but a few yard at a time stopping to rest their team.



At last the summit was gained & we attempted 3 cheers for our success which unfortunately failed for want of breath but sitting down for 1/2 hour we enjoyed the magnificent prospect on either side of us....I could have spent hours on this spot so many thousand feet higher than I ever was before or ever expect to be again,.... Descending the west side of the Pass was, tho very steep nothing compared to the Eastern ascent, & we encamped some two or 3000 feet below our recent elevation, near a large train which crossed the day previous, ... The time usually occupied by an ox team to get to the top of the pass is from 1 1/2 to 2 hours..."

from Gold Rush Diary, the journal of Elisha Perkins' 1849 trip to California over Roller Pass page 130-132

[Actually we had not inteded to put more than the quote in this issue, but one thing led to another and context is everything.]

## Coming on the Next page:

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Unless otherwise noted, the photographs and other historical ephemera in The Heirloom's pages come from the Norm Saylor collection at the Donner Summit Historical Society

# The Mystery of the Postcards

## T.C. Wohlbruck: A Legacy in Photos

No one knew about T.C. Wohlbruck and probably no one cared... "until I saw the 'four pump gas station' notation in the 1931 edition of the History of the Donner Party by C.F. McGlashan, related Norm Saylor (see the picture below).

"Four pump gas station? I knew I had that picture of the four pump gas station." That little citation started a hunt which led to another California pioneer and visionary.

Norm went off to the now DSHS archives and indeed there was the four pump gas station at Emigrant Gap. Right nearby was something else though- a picture of the Pioneer Memorial at the Donner State Park. There was distinctive white lettering on both postcards which also looked familiar and that set off a further search. The more Norm looked the more postcards began appearing with the distinctive white lettering (look at the postcards on the next page). The pictures were very good and they covered all kinds of subjects: the highway 50 area, Lincoln Highway, Reno, Highway 40, and the Lincoln Highway. The more Norm looked the more he found with the distinctive lettering. Who had taken those pictures? There were some clues. Some pictures included "TCW." Who was TCW?



T.C. Wohlbruck's rest stop, the four pump gas station, cafe and lodging at Emigrant Gap. The Lincoln Highway is on the right. This sits about where the current viewpoint on I-80 is.

Who was this guy? Norm consulted others but no one knew. The more Norm looked the more clues there were. One postcard further along in the collection was labeled T.C. Wohlbruck 251 Post St. San Francisco. Now there was a name and the search could begin in earnest.

Norm also began looking carefully at other materials. The C.F. McGlashan book was dedicated to Harriet Simpson Wohlbruck, The "founder of Pioneer Donner Park" (now the Donner State Park where the emigrant statue is). The book was published by T.C. Wohlbruck. Now Norm was "hot on the trail" and he went off to Donner State Park. "Who's T.C. Wohlbruck?" he asked. No one there had heard of any T.C. Wohlbrucks which is ironic since T.C. really started the whole thing, but that's getting ahead of ourselves.

"The Pioneer (Donner) Monument The Origin of a Statue," a booklet relating the building of the emigrant statue at the park, mentioned three Wohlbruck canteen service stations. Was there a connection between gas stations, the postcards and the monument?

Norm used to frequent postcard conventions so he asked his post card friends. No one had heard of any T.C. Wohlbruck.

Another clue about Wohlbruck was that many of the pictures in the McGlashan book were also in Norm Saylor's collection, but attributed to T.C. Wohlbruck, not McGlashan. The two, McGlashan and Wohlbruck, must have had some connection.

Norm headed for Nevada City and the Foley Museum where he met Steffanie Snyder. There was not much there but she was interested, maybe because of Norm's enthusiasm.

Steffanie said the Searls Library in Nevada City might be a good source and indeed, that's where the picture of T.C. Wohlbruck began to really take form. The Searls is a document library where everything is still cataloged in card catalogs. They did not think they had anything on Mr. Wohlbruck. But Norm remembered that the McGlashan book was also dedicated to a C.W. Chapman so he asked about C.W. The lady sent Norm into the stacks. "Be careful climbing the ladder," she said, but Norm was on the hunt and too excited to care.

High up, on the top shelf was a box. "It was pretty good sized... and it was heavy...covered with dust." Norm opened the box and there on top, "staring me in the face" was a letter addressed to the Native Sons of the Golden West from Patty Reed Lewis (yes, from the Donner Party) giving thanks for building the monument at Donner State Park in 1919.

Among other things in the box was evidence that T.C. Wohlbruck paid taxes on personal property, his buildings, at what is now the Donner Park. It was his "canteen service station 'B'".

That was the beginning of the story about the Donner Monument. Inside the box were letters back and forth concerning its building.

**Next Month:  
The rest of the story and  
a "scrapbook" of T.C.  
Wohlbruck photos.**



Photos here by T.C. Wohlbruck: top, Donner Summit circa 1920; middle, Big Bend 1920; bottom, Lincoln Highway 40 just above what is now Rainbow Lodge

# From the DSHS Archives



# From the DSHS Archives



## Now what we have here on these pages....

In the picture at the top of the previous page we have the Cisco Grove Store and gas station. It used to sit just to the west of the stone buildings that are all that is left of the less old Cisco Grove. The chimney behind the store still stands and can be found next to Old 40. All along both sides of Old 40 there are the remnants of foundations of old buildings.. The less old Cisco was owned by Jim Gould (Gould Park is just east of the overpass) and he tore everything down to save on taxes. The Auburn Ski Club had a lodge along there too with a ski area but I-80 took care of that.

The term above, "less old Cisco" is to separate this from Old Cisco which was a railroad town of some thousands of people and which sat south of the current gas station and up the hill. There is nothing of that left. The current Cisco is a collection of summer cabins along Old 40.

The next two photographs are of Donner Summit Lodge first in 1943 and then in 1946 when Colonel Rutherford owned it. He also ran the old Serene Lakes Lodge at that time, which had just been built. The first additions to DSL came in 1947 and then the restaurant end was built in the early 1970's.

The photograph above is from the King Survey of the 40th parallel (basically the route of the Transcontinental Railroad), and is of Donner Summit. The photo is dated circa 1867. You can see the Dutch Flat Donner Lake Wagon Rd. in the lower left and the snowsheds on the right with a few cabins about where the old road went across the tracks. Note the lack of trees. Donner Lake is in the distance.

The purpose of the survey was to survey public lands and natural resources.

# From the DSHS Archives

## Two Summit Stories - 1869

FROM TRUCKEE.—The *Tribune* of October 6th has these items:

J. W. Johnston, clerk at the Depot House, Cisco, last Saturday, while engaged in shooting at a mark with a revolver, in company with some friends, accidentally shot himself through the left hand, the ball passing through the palm of the hand, fortunately striking no bones. He thought all the loads had been discharged from the revolver, and had started to reload it, but one of the charges still remained, which was discharged accidentally, as above stated.

On Saturday a man by the name of Nasby, employed at Richardson's mill in Summit valley, while engaged in sawing a small strip of lumber with the edging saw, cut off the first two fingers of his right hand.

### GENERAL NOTICES.

**Pratt's Abolition Oil**—The never-failing remedy for RHEUMATISM, NEURALGIA, LAME BACK, SPRAINS, BRUISES, GOUT, HEADACHE, TOOTHACHE, EARACHE, SORE THROAT, DIPHTHERIA, COLIC, CRAMPS, DIARRHEA, and all internal and external aches and pains. Keep it in the house. It will save you many dollars in money and many pangs of pain. Price 50 cents and \$1 per bottle. For sale by all Druggists.

**Pratt's New Life** contains in a concentrated form the medicinal virtues of the best known roots, herbs and barks fresh from Nature's laboratory. PRATT'S NEW LIFE purifies the Blood, invigorates the Liver, strengthens the Stomach, heals Old Sores, eradicates all eruptions arising from impure blood; cures Constipation, Piles and Dyspepsia. Price, \$1. For sale by all Druggists.

**Pratt's Democratic Bitters**, an agreeable Tonic, Beverage and Appetizer—superior to all others. Price, \$1. For sale everywhere. s23-3m

**A Triumph.**—The Proprietors of that elegant Tonic Cordial, the famous "SPLENDID," have gained a signal triumph over all their rivals, as the "SPLENDID" is now more generally preferred to all other advertised tonics.

Sacramento Daily Union October 6, 1869

And then from the Sierra  
Sun, September 1, 1938



## Thug Killed In Raid On Small Mountain Store

### Search Continues For Pals Of Dead Robber As Store Looting Fails

Officers throughout Northern California are continuing their search for two companions of Joseph Couri, 35, Portola laborer, shot and killed by Phil Trevethick, 55, operator of the store and service station at Fox Farm during a robbery there last week.

The three men, who, police believe, were responsible for a series of similar robberies in this district recently, drove up to the store at about 3 a. m., left their motor running and crashed through the front door of the store, seizing a cash register and other merchandise, which they no doubt hoped to take to their car and escape before an alarm was sounded.

Trevethick, who occupied an adjoining room, heard the commotion and grabbed a small calibre automatic rifle and began spraying the dark room with bullets.

Sergeant C. E. McKeen said the storeman reported he saw two men dash from the door, one of them staggering as if hit by a bullet and jump into the car. He followed them to the highway firing at the machine. When he returned to the store and turned on the light, McKeen said, Trevethick saw Couri on the floor with a bullet wound through his head, evidently instantly killed.

No trace of the two companions of the dead man has been found. The search this week turned to the Tahoe district.

Trevethick called Deputy Sheriff Tom Dolley and the latter notified Sheriff Carl Tobiassen and Coroner L. R. Jefford who went to the scene to investigate with Sergeant McKeen.

Couri was identified through the license plates on the car.

In the article to the right, the Fox Farm was the name for what is now the site of the Donner Summit Lodge.



# Book Review:

## Coast to Coast by Automobile

When automobiles were new early pioneers wanted to push the new technology and see how far it would go. There were speed trials, hills climbs, and endurance runs. Sometimes there were time and endurance runs.

A natural objective for some people, and particularly automobile companies wanting to highlight their products, were transcontinental trips. These trips would test the “real merits of an automobile.” The first two tries, in 1899 and 1901, were failures as far as crossing the whole continent was concerned. In 1903 there were three tries and they were all successful. Then people began to work on breaking the records.

Coast to Coast by Automobile starts with the failed trips and ends in 1908 when the first average person took the trip, taking his family all the way across the country. Before 1908 trip, the drivers had been professionals or auto company employees. The book is loaded with pictures, newspaper and magazine quotes, cartoons, letters, and little stories. It is heavily footnoted too which shows the research and makes it easier for others to go deeper. For example, the first automobile over Donner Summit was one of the first two failed trips. Reading the original story by one of the participants, provided more detail for one of our newsletter stories.

Traveling by auto in those days was very different from today. There were few roads and no transcontinental roads. Most of the transcontinentalists followed the railroad route. They brought along a lot of things we would not think to bring when traveling by car: ropes, axes, revolvers, shovels, and block and tackle. After the first failure through the desert automobilists began carrying temporary bridges of canvas or wood or had cotton filled canvas tires to put on for traction.

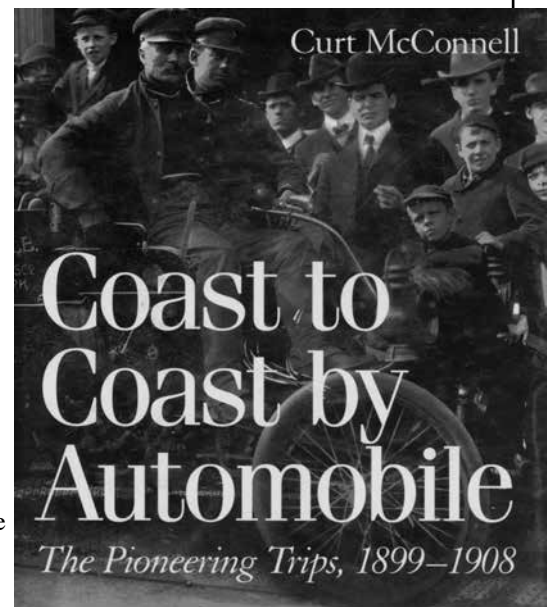
The hardships they endured in crossing the continent were amazing. Automobiles were open to the elements. When it rained, snowed and hailed, the occupants were exposed. When it was hot they roasted and when it was cold they froze. They traveled over rocky ground, through mud and streams, through sand, on the railroad ties, and over rough terrain. They had to navigate “tortuous grades”, avoid stagecoaches on narrow roads, and descend “fearfully steep hills”. They had to worry about overheated brakes, getting trapped in deep ruts and they even had to worry about highwaymen. Sometimes they would travel all day and only cover a few miles.

Automobiles broke down often, although the drivers and sponsors didn’t always acknowledge that publicly. Drivers had to make use local blacksmiths, order parts from long distances, or do the work themselves. Alexander Winton completely took apart his motor at Hobart Mills during his trip and fixed a broken axle.

One quote from Charles Shanks, part of the 1901 journey, gives a good flavor for getting stuck while automobiling in those days and for what is in the book,

Pull out block and tackle, wade around in the mud, get soaked to the skin and chilled from the effects of the deluge, make fastenings to the fence or telephone post and pull. Pull hard, dig your heels into the mud and exert every effort at command. The machine moves, your feet slip and down in the mud you go full length. Repeat the dose and continue the operation until the machine is free from the ditch and again upon the road.

Just paging through the book and looking at the photographs makes one wonder why anyone would do what these pioneers did. Why not just wait for the interstates? On the other hand, it was pioneers like this who called attention to the miserable state of the nation’s roads and so enabled the Lincoln Highway, the first transcontinental highway; the highways that came after; and finally the interstates. The text and the research make really good history reading.



# Then & Now with Art Clark

## Between Tunnels 6 & 7, 1925 and Now



The location above is familiar to anyone who has hiked along the old Lincoln Highway from the PCT trailhead on Donner Summit. You recognize the snowshed at the east end of Tunnel 6 on the left and the shed for tunnel 7 on the right.

In the old days, as can be seen in the top photograph, the snowsheds extended the whole way between the tunnels (and for forty miles more - the story of the snowsheds is coming - maybe next summer - so don't let your subscription lapse).

This spot is located where a photographer stood around 1925 taking pictures for the Lincoln Highway Association. The Association was made up of representatives from the automobile, tire, and cement industries, with the goal of planning, funding, constructing, and promoting the first transcontinental highway in North America.

Originally cars had to go through a portion of the snowshed. You can see where they exited in the top photograph right above the arrow. "Autoists" (a real term in the old days) coming along the Lincoln Highway, until the underpass was completed in 1914, had to stop, turn off their engines, open the barn door side, listen for trains, run over and open the door on the opposite side, run back and restart their cars, and then drive through the shed. Later, an underpass was built just east of here to avoid collisions with trains.

It is a fun hike to go from the PCT down to Donner Lake. On the brochures page on our website there is a PDF brochure with a map, directions and pictures, to help you out. You can also pick up the free brochures at the DSHS in "downtown" Soda Springs at the blinking light.

Photographer's location: 39° 18.928'N 120° 19.395'W And here's the Geocache: Snowsheds 1925 <http://coord.info/GC3NRFB>



# Donner Party Hike

## Truckee, CA

The Truckee Chamber of Commerce is again offering the Donner Party Hikes.

Hikers can experience the early emigrants' journey across the Sierra Nevada mountains without reliving the dangers October 13 & 14 by participants in the 20th Annual Donner Party Hike.

Participants can choose from seven different hikes on Saturday and on Sunday a walking tour. All events offer insight into emigrant history from area guides, along with invigorating recreation and beautiful scenery.

Saturday's hikes begin and end at the Mt. Judah lodge at Sugar Bowl Ski Resort located on Highway 40 on Donner Summit. Guides will lead groups of approximately 10-20 people to interpretive spots giving detailed historical information focused on emigrant and area history. In the afternoon, hikers will enjoy a hamburger lunch and a Chautauqua performance of Captain John Sutter portrayed by David Fenimore.

Hike options include a 3.5 mile one way trek in Summit Canyon, recently acquired by Truckee Donner Land Trust, previously owned property. Other hikes include a 4 mile round trip that will explore the Dutch Flat Donner Lake Wagon Road and 1913 Corridor Lincoln Highway with views of petroglyphs, old roadside billboards and the China Wall. In addition, other hikes include a 4-5 mile hike heading up Roller Pass and/or Mt. Judah; a 6 mile hike past pristine High Sierra Lakes; a strenuous 6 mile hike over Coldstream Pass, one of the most heavily traveled emigrant routes; or a 5 mile hike through old railroad tunnels and snowsheds.

Sunday offers a more relaxed walking tour departing from the Donner Camp Picnic Area, located on Highway 89 North. Activities include a walking tour where guides will detail the Donner Party's encampment, a visit to the Murphy's Cabin Site and entrance to the Donner Memorial State Park Museum offering a historical movie about the Donner Party. Participants will need to provide their own transportation to the Donner Memorial State Park.

Space is limited for all events and reservations are required. Early registration for the Saturday hikes is \$45 (\$50 after September 28, 2012) per hiker and includes a guided hike, commemorative ballcap, BBQ lunch and afternoon presentation. Sunday's walking tour is \$15 and includes the guided walk and entrance to the Emigrant Trail Museum. 2-day hike package is \$60 (\$65 after September 28, 2012). Complete hike descriptions and registration forms can be found at [www.truckee.com](http://www.truckee.com) or by contacting the Truckee Donner Chamber of Commerce at (530) 587-8808.

Sponsors of this event include: Cedar House Sport Hotel, Donner Lake Village Resort, Donner Memorial State Park, Hampton Inn and Suites Tahoe-Truckee, Inn at Truckee, Larkspur Hotel Truckee-Tahoe, Sugar Bowl Ski Resort, Town of Truckee, Truckee Donner Lodge and the U.S. Forest Service.

### DONNER SUMMIT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

[www.donnertsummithistoricalociety.org](http://www.donnertsummithistoricalociety.org)

#### Membership 2012

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

New Membership

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

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

Friend Membership - \$100  Sponsor - \$250

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