

# The Donner Summit

# Heirloom

History and stories of the Donner Summit Historical Society

August, 2013 issue #60



# Sheep on Donner Summit **Part I**

No sooner than the European American had shown up on Donner Summit than they started grazing animals. Hotels appeared along the Dutch Flat Donner Lake Wagon Rd. and some of them remained after the railroad was done. The Summit Hotel at the top of the pass and on the railroad and Dutch Flat roads began advertising, luring vacationers with the beauties of Donner Summit (see the ad here). So there was a demand for dairy products. Then families arrived with permanent railroad workers and demand increased.

One of the many commercial concerns on the summit in the late 19th century was dairies and would be until larger dairies entered the market in the Truckee area. Truckee would be called, "a dairyman's paradise" but that's another story. The dairies were not one or two cow operations. A Sacramento Daily Union article from August 5, 1871 is a report by a dairyman at Cardwell's (Summit Hotel) who took some time to climb Fremont's Peak (Castle Peak today probably). He had to cut short his visit because, " We being of the teat-pulling aristocracy and twenty cows apiece being anxiously waiting to be milked, we had to retire from this beautiful scene." That's 40 cows between him and his friend at Cardwell's at least.

"The climate is cool and pleasant... the hotel overlooks Donner Lake and is a pleasant drive from the famous Soda Springs...For Invalids no better resort than can be found in the world, as the air is always pure and invigorating."

Sacramento Daily Union  
Sept. 7. 1870

## Bring Your Sheep to the Sierra

better breeding in cooler air  
wool remains cleaner  
fewer worm problems  
healthier sheep  
more multiple births

It was not long after Summit Valley provided dairy products that the sheep men appeared on the scene and without the rancor that met their arrival in other areas of the west. Sheep continued to be grazed on Donner Summit until the 1970's, outlasting the cows by far. Soda Springs became one of the top sheep shipping centers in the U.S. because of the proximity of the pastures to the railroad. Each Fall after fattening on summit grasses the shepherders would bid adieu to their charges and head back to the Central Valley. Bob Blackford, whose family shipped sheep from Soda Springs for generations said that in the 1940's his family alone shipped 100,000 lambs a year out of Soda Springs. In 1977, when he was interviewed by the Sierra Sun, he said the number had dropped to 2,500.

Each Spring Basque shepherders, working for sheep companies, would start their flocks in the Central Valley. Over the following

# Sugar Bowl Lake Mary Evening to benefit DSHS



Sugar Bowl's Lake Mary Cabin Dinner Series will return this year with great food by Chef Alan Davis. The Lake Mary facilities sit above Lake Mary and dining is on a deck overlooking the lake. DSHS will be a beneficiary of one of the summer evenings **August 18**. Seating is from 5:30 to 9:00. Reservations are a good idea (530) 426-7002.

Besides a varied menu selection of homemade soups, salads, seafood, wild game, vegetarian dishes, pastas, wines and desserts, the DSHS will have its new Summit Valley displays on display and the new 2013 DSHS poster.



## more about Summit Valley

## from Tail of the Elephant (see page 10)

**Isaac Wistar 1849** pg 193

Thousands of feet down the chasm – but by no means at the bottom – shone an emerald valley of brightest green, surrounded with snow-fields and intersected by a lovely stream, sparkling from afar on its way through these fastnesses to the golden Sacramento... the wind roared and howled, the day was drawing to a close and nearly frozen, I hastened down. “

**Summit Valley Wm. Todd 1845** page 203

“a few miles farther we came to a fine prairie, about three miles long by three fourths of a mile broad, full of springs and excellent water, and at the lower end a fine branch, which forms the head of Juba river, and the way we danced “Juba” there, was a caution to all future emigrants.”

**Summit Valley Edwin Bryant 1846** \_page 203

“Descending the rocky ravine a few miles, we emerged from it and entered a beautiful level valley some four or five miles in length from east to west, and about two miles in breadth. A narrow, sluggish stream runs through this valley, the water of which are of considerable depth, and the banks steep and miry. A luxuriant growth of grasses, of an excellent quality, covered the entire valley with the richest verdure. Flowers were in bloom; and although late in August, the vegetation [sic] presented all the tenderness and freshness of May. This valley has been named by the emigrants “Uber Valley;”

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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

months they would work their ways up the canyons to the Summit. By the time they had reached the summit, the water had been let out of Van Norden to even the flow down the river to the power plant, and the grasses had grown. Summit Valley and the neighboring valleys welcomed the arrival of the sheep with lush grass.

Besides the scenery which no doubt made the sheep happier and the nice climate, sheepmen had many reasons for utilizing the high Sierra pastures. They brought their flocks to the Sierra because sheep bred better in cooler air, the sheep remained cleaner, there were fewer worm problems, the sheep remained healthier, and there were more multiple births.

Sheep continued coming to Summit Valley and the surrounding meadows into at least the the 1970's. Sheep were crowded out by development and more efficient means of raising sheep were developed. So the tinkling of the bells on the lead sheep that visitors and residents found romantic faded into the history of Donner Summit.

Unfortunately this newsletter is packed full so we'll continue with the sheep story next month and include the sheep underpass under highway 80, the sheepherder's shack in Summit Valley, better huts at Whiskey Creek, and a cute story about a sheep dog left behind much to the joy of a little girl. You'll just have to "stay tuned"



Above: Bob Blackford's sheep in the corrals at Soda Springs about 1942 Placer County Archives.



Today the romantic tinkle of the bells on the sheep is gone. The corrals are broken and empty. The trains just rush by without stopping and the end of season celebrations and BBQ's when the sheep embarked on the trains are no more. Beacon Hill is in the background. This spot sits 1.5 miles from Soda Springs Rd. on the dirt road that runs along Summit Valley's north side.

# Modern Memories of Summit Valley and Lake Van Norden

We have run a series of articles about Van Norden or Summit Valley following the purchase by the Land Trust in January, 2013. Over the last months we've covered the Native Americans, the general history, the valley in prose and pictures, a walk in the valley, the dam, the nearby ice company, the naming, and the sheep. There is still the Emigrant Trail and the Dutch Flat Rd. to go. This month, the Summit Valley story is a little more modern.

Once, long ago, Summit Valley was a meadow just below the source of the Yuba River. Castle Creek joined the Yuba River and in the spring, rushed down the valley past Soda Springs to merge with other forks and then with the Sacramento River. Then came the first dam in 1870 or so followed by enlarged dams in 1890 and 1916. From then until 1976 the valley was Lake Van Norden, a large lake containing at season's height, 5800 acre feet of water along the main highway across the Sierra. It was a popular recreation spot. Norm Sayler is a long-time resident and builder of the Summit and he remembers the lake as it was in modern times.

## Norm Sayler's Reminiscences

Edited from an article by Norm Sayler in the July 23, 1992 Sierra Sun

I remember moving to Soda Springs in 1954 and seeing Lake Van Norden with all its water and approximately three miles of shoreline. The lake was about 1 1/4 miles long and 1/2 mile wide. At its deepest point the lake was at least 40 feet deep. At that time many people traveling Old Highway 40 believed it to be Donner Lake. The lake I knew had campgrounds on the north side that were maintained by PG&E. They were full all summer with families, fishermen, etc.



I remember watching people fishing. One person in particular, a one-armed ski instructor Edvi Aro, would fish the upper edge of the meadow catching some excellent-eating brook and brown trout.

Because the PG&E released water all summer long, the Yuba River also provided great vacation opportunities and recreation enjoyment to fishermen and campers adding to the local economy. I specifically remember on Tuesdays the California Department of Fish and Game would come and release catchable trout in the Yuba River just below the dam.

The local children, who at that time numbered around a hundred at Donner Trail School, and vacationers would all go fishing; the whooping and hollering that would go on was heard all over town. Kids would pedal their one-speed bikes down to the lake carrying their fishing poles and pedal back home with strings of trout.

Walter Haag, manager of the Sugar Bowl Lodge, rented it to the Audubon Society in summers. The Society had many outings with people from Clair Tappaan Lodge and The Nature Friends Lodge with all walking along the shores of Lake Van Norden looking at the many species of birds. Many would wave at us and stop and talk.

Ducks, geese and all kinds of birds found the lake and the three miles of grass shoreline to their liking.

I and a number of other people used Lake Van Norden as a water skiing lake. I taught lots of people to ski there including Starr Walton and Dick Buick, Soda Spring's only Olympic skiers. I also had the opportunity to work with many handicapped people, including blind people, teaching them how to ski. The lake was available to many segments of society: bird watchers, fishermen, bikers, all sorts of people.

Those of us who water skied there also removed most of the old stumps out of the lake bottom because, as I am told, prior to the Lake Van Norden dam being built there was really no lake. The tree stumps were numerous, some as large as 4 feet in diameter. Some stumps still exist today.

As the lake would recede each fall Bob Maughan from the Norden Store would hunt arrowheads. He had a great collection on display at the store. Each year you could see the Emigrant Wagon Road as the water went down.

Also, many times during the summer evenings I watched friends paddling their canoes around the lake. They told me of many sightings of deer, coyotes, fox, sometimes even a bear.

In the fall of every year the sheep flocks of the old time sheep people like Blackford, Jones, etc. would gather their flocks at the east end of the meadow for shipment to market. This was an exciting happening for most of us. Many times Soda Springs people were invited to a lamb barbecue.

In the fall I also enjoyed bunting ducks and geese. Many a time at the Donner Summit Community Club Thanksgiving Dinner we had ducks and geese as well as the traditional turkey.

The ability of the Lake Van Norden I knew to help store water and let it go down river as needed in short water years was truly helpful.

One summer the Lake Van Norden Dam as I knew it was declared unsafe by the state Department of Dams and Safety. So they told PG&E to demolish it and in came the tractors.

What I remember was truly the mountain valley and lake that belonged to many people.

I still live here and miss Lake Van Norden.

Norm Sayler 35-year resident  
(that's 35 years in 1992! He's still here today)



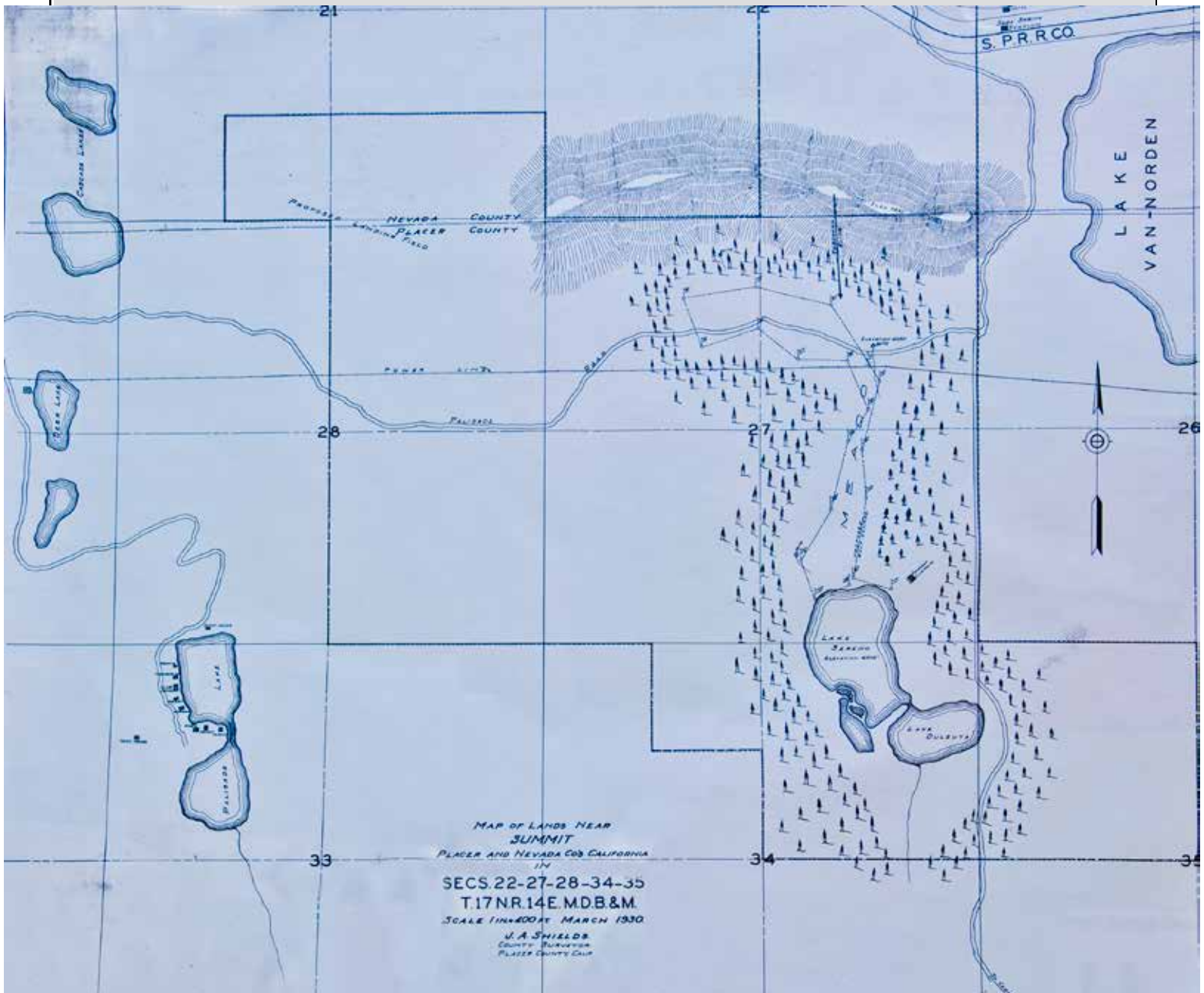
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As long as we're reminiscing, to the right are some photographs of horseback riding on Van Norden Meadow later in the season after the water had gone down the Yuba River. The top and bottom photographs come from Milli Martin of Homer, Alaska circa late 1940's. Her uncle and aunt ran the Norden Store for a long time. Look in the index on our website for Norden Store and Herb and Lena Fredericks.

The photo on the previous page is a picture of a full Lake Van Norden in the mid-fifties. Look for the little spot just above the peninsula in the lower left. That is Norm Sayler's ski jump.



# From the DSHS Archives



There have been lots of ideas for development on Donner Summit and in particular in Serene Lakes (Ice Lakes). You can read about some of those ideas in our August '09 [Heirloom](#). Here is one idea that walked into the Historical Society last summer. A gentleman wondered if we'd ever seen this map that he'd discovered in the Placer County Archives. We had not.

The map shows "Lake Sereno" (original spelling) and "Lake Dulzura" (Ice Lakes in those days) in 1930, some fifteen years before the first subdivision, Ice Lakes 1, was laid out. There's a golf course on the north side of the lakes and further along, northwest, there is an airport "landing field" plotted. There is no other information. Who was planning it? Donner Summit receives an average of 34 feet of snow annually. It is not unusual for snow to still be on the ground in late June. How much use were they expecting to get out of the golf course between snow melt in June and snowfall in November?

You can see the full size version at the Donner Summit Historical Society at the blinking light in "downtown" Soda Springs.

# A Myth Busted?

## Murder at Big Bend - 1939

This story is interesting not because it's an old newspaper article having to do with a murder on Donner Summit but because it may related to a fun story about Donner Summit. That story may turn out to be a myth which would be a shame because the myth has such romance and mystery in it and is so open to speculation.

Below is the original story, summarized quite a bit so it could become the "good story" on our Rainbow Lodge 20 Mile Museum sign. You can see the sign on our website's 20 Mile Museum page or by driving down to Rainbow Lodge to see the sign. It sits just to the right of the lodge. By the time you read this, Rainbow Lodge may have new owners. At this writing it was in escrow.

### A Good Story About Gold and Revenge:

One night a man from up the road at Hampshire Rocks or Cramptons (a lodge which sat where the freeway now crosses Old 40 at the Rainbow exit) lost \$25,000 in gold coins gambling at Rainbow Tavern (Rainbow Lodge today). He was upset. He went "home" for awhile and then came back.

The man to whom he'd lost had also left and then returned. He returned with wet legs.

The loser demanded that the game be continued. The winner refused.

The loser took out a gun and shot the winner dead.

The gold coins are still presumably in the neighborhood and with a river running for miles in either direction, there are a lot of places to look for where the winner could have gotten his legs wet.

That's a great story and people have looked for the gold. When the next door neighbor of Rainbow Lodge had a pond dug next to his house, he kept a close eye on the backhoe operator and his work. If that gold turned up on his property, he wanted it.

I always assumed there was some truth to the story even though there were no newspaper accounts of the murder. I was promised articles to validate the story and that sometimes happens so I was patient.

Then the article to the right, from the [Sierra Sun](#), June 22, 1939 turned up. You can see there are many elements in common. You may remember playing "telephone" when you were a kid and may have noticed that people embellish stories.

Are there still gold coins in the Yuba River? Were there ever any?

Established 1869

## Murder Charge Filed Following Summit Slaying

WPA Worker Kills Man As  
"Ribbing" Becomes  
"Unbearable"

INQUEST IS HELD TUES.

Prisoner Says Victim Had  
"It Coming" For  
Torment

COLFAX, June 22— Coroner Francis West made an inquest of the slaying Sunday of Edward Kading, 24, Casey, Iowa, a WPA employe, by John Osborne, 42, also a WPA worker on a Forest Service project at Big Bend, near Rainbow Tavern.

District Attorney Lowell Sparks of Placer county said Osborne had confessed and a murder charge would be lodged against him.

The shooting took place at Big Bend as the climax to a series of jokes of which Osborne had been the butt at Rainbow Tavern where both men had been drinking.

Osborne told West and Constable Winston Way of Dutch Flat that the victim "ribbed me until I couldn't stand it any longer."

He said Kading refused to retract a name which belittled Osborne's ancestry.

Osborne left the tavern and obtained his .22 rifle. Soon afterward when he encountered Kading at Big Bend he fired. The bullet entered Kading's right lung.

Osborne was taken to the county jail at Auburn where he told officers: "I am sorry I killed him, but he had it coming."

# Soda Springs, 1894

## FUN IN THE MOUNTAINS.

### Incidents of a Climb to the Top of Tinker's Knob.

#### Sacramentans Who Are Having Jolly Times—Scenes at a Fish-Bake by Moonlight.

SUMMIT SODA SPRINGS, Aug. 7.

The Soda Springs of today is not the Soda Springs of the old days. The Soda Springs today used to be called Soda Springs Station and was a stop on the transcontinental railroad line. From there visitors climbed aboard a stage and traveled the eight miles to the original Soda Springs.

The original Soda Springs was a set of buildings built by Mark Hopkins, one of the Big 4 who build the transcontinental railroad. There he also built a hotel so that his wife could have visitors. The hotel became a high society attraction for San Francisco people and later a destination resort. There people could imbibe from the soda springs, go horseback riding, hiking, and fishing (one visitor claimed to have caught 200 fish in one day from the North Fork of the American River).

Some famous people including artists, visited Soda Springs and some day we'll run an article. Meanwhile, here's a newspaper account of a visit to Soda Springs and Tinker's Knob in 1894.

**Eds. Record-Union:** Since my last letter was written we have had such a round of festivities that I feel impelled to write you once more, especially as a large proportion of the guests here are residents of Sacramento, and their friends who are not fortunate enough to be here with them will no doubt be glad to know how they are passing the time at this delightful retreat near the summit of the Sierra Nevada.

Last Sunday evening we had a musicale, under the direction of two young ladies well known in Sacramento. The programme was long, varied and extremely classical—that is, made up largely of college songs, in which all joined. Nearly all of the guests contributed in some way to the entertainment. As every number was enthusiastically encored it was quite late when the first part was finished, and the performers and audience repaired to the club house, where the concluding portion of the entertainment was given. This included an excellent story, well told, by one of the young lady guests and a short reading by one of the young gentlemen. It was then too late to formulate and pass a set of resolutions thanking the young ladies for their timely and successful efforts to amuse the guests, but they received the individual commendation of all.

Monday a party of fourteen left the Springs at 1:15 P. M. for the top of Tinker's Knob, one of the highest peaks of the Sierra Nevada range. The elevation is nearly 10,000 feet above sea level. Taking it slowly and enjoying the scenery all the way, the first nine of the party reached the top in two and a half hours. The last five required three hours to make the trip, owing to the fact that one of the ladies found it almost impossible to keep up with the rest. At last someone suggested that she take hold of the tail of the pack horse. Adopting the suggestion she found it an immense assistance, though she evidently had a dusty experience, judging from the condition in which she arrived at the summit of the Knob. The bangs around her face, which had been, presumably, short, now hung down below her ears, while her face, eyes, nose and mouth were covered with dirt. Each cheek had several paths from temple to chin which the joyous perspiration had made as it ran lightly down the dusty road. The wind, blowing a gale, made the stray locks (and indeed they were nearly all stray locks) look like the arms of a scare-crow. The other ladies of the party arrived in line shape, with but little dust, due—perhaps, to the fact that the horse had but one tail.

It is a long, hard climb, and your correspondent would advise ladies to think twice before attempting it, unless they are accustomed to climbing in high altitude—and, then, by all means, take a horse and ride.

The gentlemen of the party on arriving at the top at once proceeded to build a fire, over which we made coffee and then had lunch. You may imagine that it was a hungry party. The lunch was prepared for us by the obliging steward at the hotel, and I can assure





Tinker's Knob 8949 feet, is the peak to the right. The hike to Tinker's is a good one. You take the PCT and almost all of the walk is along the ridge tops which afford wonderful views. This view shows the article party's route from the North Fork of the American River which would be below right. Photo by George Lamson

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you we found nothing lacking.

We waited for the sun to go down and watched the shadow of Tinker's Knob as it gradually crept across to Lake Tahoe, then over the lake to the mountains beyond, where it was lost in the mist. The scene from the top of the knob is indescribably grand and picturesque, especially as seen just at sundown. Though the journey to the top is a fatiguing one if made on foot, yet one is well repaid for the journey. Looking over toward Summit Station you can see the snow sheds, and, following them with the eye, you soon see the railroad as it winds its way over toward Truckee and the little towns along the line, which are plainly visible from the top of this wonderful mountain. You cannot help feeling a sense of awe as you look down 3,500 feet below to the hotel and cottages, which look like small white dots upon the green landscape. Over to the right, and farther away, you can trace the line of the railroad, which stands out as a grand testimonial to the great men of great brains and perseverance who built it. We wended our way down the mountain by moonlight, consuming only an hour and a half, and arrived at the springs at 8:45 o'clock.

Last night we had a fish bake. A large lire served the double purpose of warming the guests and baking the fish. The latter were served on shingles and eaten with a stick. After everybody had a sufficiency of the delicious trout, cooked in this primitive manner, all joined hands and danced around the fire, singing songs and making the surrounding mountains ring with their peals of joyous laughter. You should leave the humdrum of city life for a time and come up here and see how we enjoy ourselves.

The sportsmen among the guests are still having splendid luck. Two Sacramento gentlemen caught 109 trout in one day. Rosalind.  
august 10 1894 Sacramento Daily Record Union

## **then from a few days later...**

### **Snow Slide in Summer**

Our correspondent at Summti Soda Springs, who described, a day or two ago, a trip to the top of Tinker's Knob, one of the highest peaks in the Sierra Nevada, appears to have omitted one detail. A Sacramento ten-year old who was with the party of fourteen ladies and gentlemen, in writing to his father about the trip, says: "On the way home we found a snow bank. We slide down on the seat of our ptans, and when we got up our pants were all wet."

# Book Review

## Tail of the Elephant

The Emigrant Experience on the Truckee Route of the California Trail 1844-1852 Olive Newell 1982 366 pages

A little is good but a lot can be overwhelming. Tail of the Elephant is an exhaustive compendium of emigrant quotes describing the journey from Ft. Hall to the Central Valley of California at the height of the transcontinental emigration. The trail aficionado will enjoy the many quotes but for the average reader it will get to be a bit tedious. Of course then the average reader and skim and so get a feeling for the emigration experience.

The book includes historic maps and pictures of the trail today along with the quotes and Olive Newell uses a clever idea to help the reader keep track. In the margins next to quotes are little numbered elephants that correspond to the numbered elephants on the included maps.

The introduction gives insight into Americans' character that enabled the emigration. Newell quotes Alexis de Tocqueville, "It would be difficult to describe the avidity with which the American rushes forward to secure this immense booty that fortune offers... Before him lies a boundless continent, and he urges onward..." Americans have been moving onward ever since Europeans came to America. This is a fitting introduction to a book about the immense effort of crossing the continent to California. People were driven to absorb and overcome hardship, danger, accident, and disease. Going for something new and better is in the American personality.

Before getting into the emigrant experience Newell delves into the origin of the elephant of the title and the common saying among emigrants, "seeing the elephant." It was an exotic animal and was amazing to see when it first came to America. Interestingly the first ones came to California around the Horn in 1859. "Seeing the elephant" is shorthand for facing real hardships first hand.

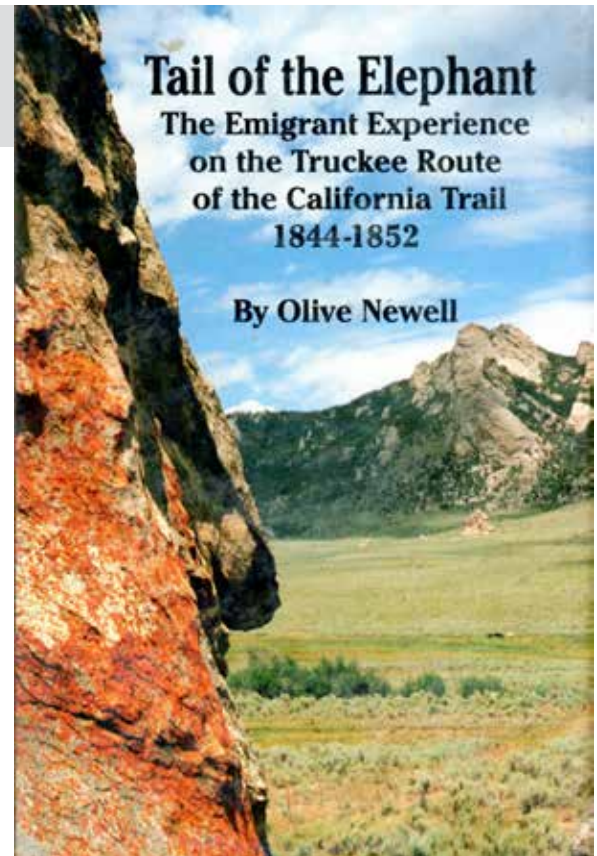
The use of quotes gives insight into the emigrant experience. Moses Schallenberger said upon parting from those going to Oregon, "The parting with the Oregon part was a sad one. During the long journey across the plains, many strong friendships had been formed." We can imagine those feelings after such close contact in less than comfortable conditions. Then he gives us an idea of emigration, "...the remainder of the route lay for most of the distance through an unknown country, through which they must find their way without map, chart, or guide, ...and ...overcome obstacles the magnitude of which none of them had any conception." They were leaping into the unknown. It must have been scary, and it must have been exhilarating.

Through the quotes we learn about the emigrants' experiences: Indian encounters, comments about the Native Americans, "boiling springs" and scalded dogs and people, runaway cattle, camp spots, rock formations, friction between emigrants and Indians, cattle theft, graves, etc.

Two foci flesh out stories. The first is about Moses Schallenberger which is told from his reminiscences (See sidebar) The second story is the Donner Party. This one is told a little differently. First the story is summarized, the Donner Party reaching Donner Lake, trying to get up Donner Pass but having to return to Donner Lake. Then it snowed for eight days leaving six feet of snow on the ground. There would be no leaving. "No living thing without wings can get about" said one. A second attempt was made to get up the pass but it failed too. So the Donner Party set up to winter. One family used Moses Schallenberger's cabin and other cabins were built. There were four rescue parties and in the end 40 died and 47 lived.

Then comes eight pages of diary entries.

We learn about what happened to the Donner Party through the horrific quotes of the rescuers and emigrants who came along over the next years., "There were a number of fragments left, but more human bones than anything else.." 1849 "There were



men, women, children. Some of them were cut up having their arms and legs cut off other their Ribs sawn from their back bones, while some had their skulls sawnd open an the brains taken out!” 1847 [sic] “Strewn around the cabins were dislocated and broken bones – skulls, (in some instances sawnd assunder with care for the purpose of extracting the brains,) – human skeletons, in short, in every variety of mutilation. A more revolting and appalling spectacle I never witnessed.” Edwin Bryant (What I Saw in California reviewed in the Heirloom April, '13) 1847

At page 172 things get interesting for those interested in Donner Summit history. There is a discussion and lots of quotes about the three routes used by emigrants to get over Donner Summit: Donner Pass, Roller Pass, and Coldstream Pass.

Interspersed with the quotes there are explanations that give details about the travel, the geography, or background. For example, one interesting fact is that at the height of the emigration during the Gold Rush in 1849, 100 emigrants per day in 20 to 25 wagons were crossing Donner Pass. We can imagine the bottlenecks that caused, and so the frustrations as wagons and families waited their turns to go up the final route over the summit one at a time.

There are quotes about reaching the summit in the evening and then having to decide whether to camp on top where it was cold and there was no water, or going down in the dark to Summit Valley, “It was night when we reached the top, and never shall I forget our descent to the place where we are now encamped0 out tedious march with pine knots blazing in the darkness and the tall majestic pines towering above our heads The scene was grand and gloomy beyond description. We cold not ride – roads too narrow and rocky – so we trudged along ....This is another picture engraven upon the tablets of memory. it was a footsore and weary crowd that reached that night our present camping place.” It wasn’t just downhill either, “the decent is precipites and rocky“ [sic] or “The grade going down on the other side was so steep that some dragged limbs of trees behind their wagons to act as a brake....” or “We reached the summit at sundown, and commenced the descent, which was very rocky, steep and dangerous – being dark made it a much more unpleasant; the thickly timbered sides of the mountains, sharp and craggy rocks steepness of the descent, and darkness of the night, rendered our situation very dangerous...”

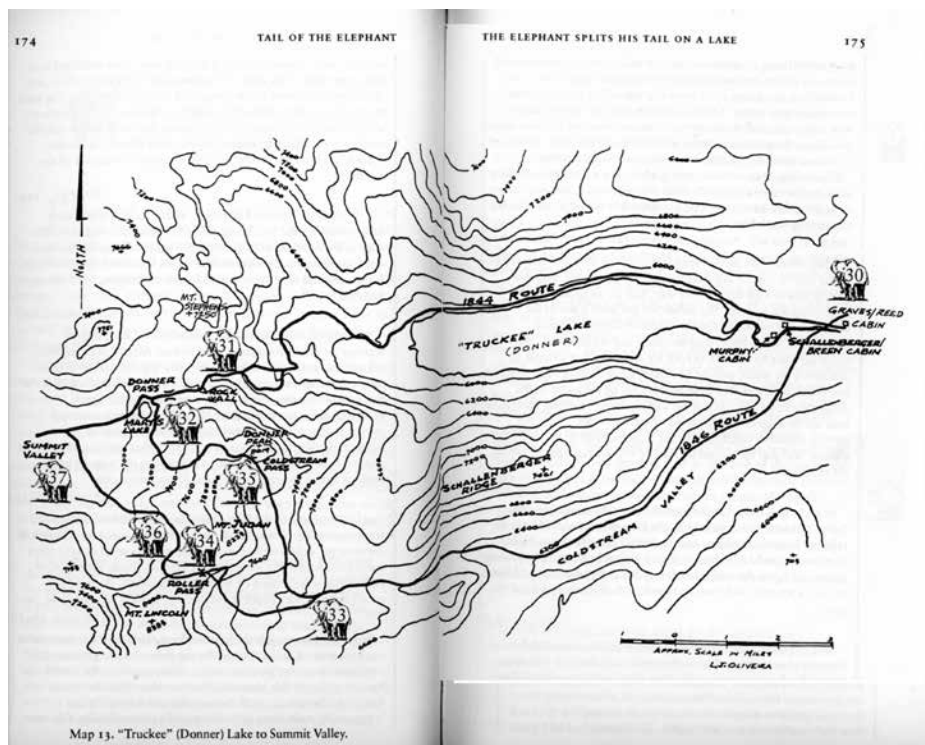
Once over the Summit the diary entries continue all the way to the Central Valley and Johnson’s Ranch. If you have read about the experiences getting over the passes you might think that upon reaching Summit Valley and its water and grass that it was all downhill from there to California. If you thought that you will be surprised to learn that some emigrants thought that even more difficult sections came later, especially getting down to the Yuba River.

Newell has scoured the sources for her quotes and has done an exhaustive job. That’s good and it’s bad. Eventually it gets tedious reading quotes and quotes and quotes and quotes. One needs only one or a couple about what needs emphasis. Additional quotes do not lend any greater understanding or emphasis and some of the quotes are rather ordinary. Look of the Elephant, a newer book reviewed in our February, 2012 Heirloom, does a much better job conveying the experience in much less space.

That book includes only the very best quotes. For example the section in that book about crossing the Nevada desert is much stronger than Newell’s. The quotes are stronger and more evocative of the experience. Still, if you want to get into the minds of the emigrants and see what they thought, this is a useful book. Perhaps reading the book in sections, interspersed by time, is a better strategy than reading straight through.

This book was published by the Nevada County Historical Society. It is out of print but it is in various libraries and available for purchase, used, on the internet.

Left is a map of the routes up Donner Summit with the elephants.



### Traveling the Truckee River:

“the day has been warm but a fine breeze has fanned us. the journey has been over a rough & very rocky road. we crossed the river 6 times. the crossings are difficult, made so by the loose rock that lay thick on the bed of the river. the valley narrows as we ascent & the road follows the narrow bottoms n the side of the stream. whilst the pass is almost a continual canyon. the county is very uninviting. high mountain chains arise on both sides of the river, and are covered with brown sterility & dark volcanic burnt rock. occasionally a white lime or chalky spot is seen on their sides as if they had been ventilation of subterraneous fire or lava.” 1849 [sic] Then, “The river was so crooked that one day they crossed it ten times in traveling a mile. This almost constant traveling in the water softened the hoofs of the oxen, while the rough stones in the bed of the river 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 dared not rest. It was near the middle of October, and a few light snows had already fallen, warning them of imminent danger of being buried in the snow in the mountains.”

Moses Schallenberger, 1844

### At Donner Pass

Stephens Party “...the emigrants unload the wagons, harnessed to them double teams, and started toward the summit. The contents of the wagons were carried in their arms. About half way up the top of the mountain a perpendicular rock ten feet in height was discovered lying across their path, and they thought they would be forced to abandon the horses and cattle, and everything but the few goods that could be carried over on their shoulders. At length, however, a narrow rift in the rock was discovered, and just sufficient width to admit the passage of one ox at a time...” Then the wagons were hoisted up using chains and “all finally landed on the other side of the barrier.”

Moses Schallenberger.

## Schallenberger Ridge - south side of Donner Lake



# Moses Schallenburger - His Story

Moses Schallenberger was a 17 year old who wintered at Donner Lake. He was a member of the first wagon train to reach California with wagons, the Stephens Party, which crossed the Sierra in 1844. The party knew it could not get all of its wagons up what would be called Donner Pass so half were left behind at Donner Lake. Moses volunteered to stay with them since they were full of goods to be sold in California. The emigrants had thought the snow would not get more than two feet deep, whatever fell would melt like it did back east, and hunting would be easy. “I had no fears of starvation... I did not suppose the snow would at any time be more than two feet deep, nor that it would be on the ground continually.”

You can imagine his surprise.

Parenthetically, Moses may have been the first to make that guess about snowfall and snow accumulation but he was not the last. Theodore Judah, who laid out the transcontinental railroad route also thought snow would not be a problem. But that's another story for another [Heirloom](#). Don't let your subscription lapse.

Moses and two companions were left with two cows “so worn out they could go no further.” They set about making a cabin 12

X 14 feet. It had no windows and although it had a doorway it had no door. It was covered with hides and brush. There was no chinking between the logs. Just as they finished three feet of snow fell. There was no hunting and the snow did not melt. Then more snow fell. The cows were killed because they could not get to food. The three men could not move except to get to firewood. They ate half the meat from the cows and the snow got deeper. They feared a horrible death by starvation and so decided to hike out to California.

“...we reached the summit of the mountain about sunset that night, ... I was scarcely able to drag on foot after the other.” They built a camp and fire and found in the morning that the fire had melted a circle 15 feet in diameter and they had dropped 15 feet below the surrounding snow. Moses had bad cramps and could clearly not get to California. His companions went on and Moses dragged himself back to Donner Lake. “I was never so tired in my life as when, just a little before dark, I came in sight of the cabin.”

Imagine the 17 year old’s feelings as his companions left, “the feeling of loneliness that came over me as the two men turned away I cannot express, thought it will never be forgotten.”

Over the following months he used traps to catch 11 coyotes which were horrible eating. He caught a fox which was delicious. He read a lot. “My life was more miserable than I can describe.” And then he was rescued. “I was standing a short distance from my cabin, I thought I could distinguish the form of a man moving towards me.... My feelings can better be imagined than described.”

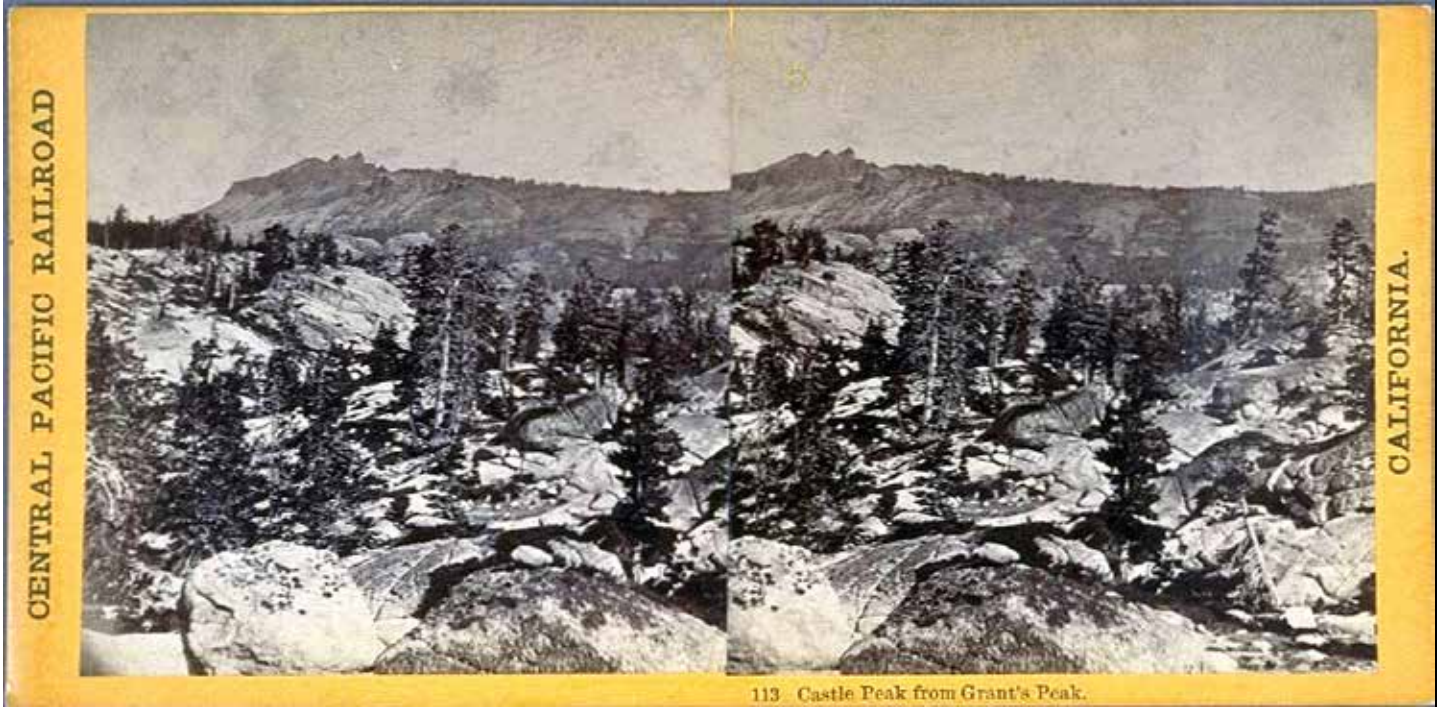


a painting of Moses Schallenberger's cabin from [Tail of the Elephant](#)

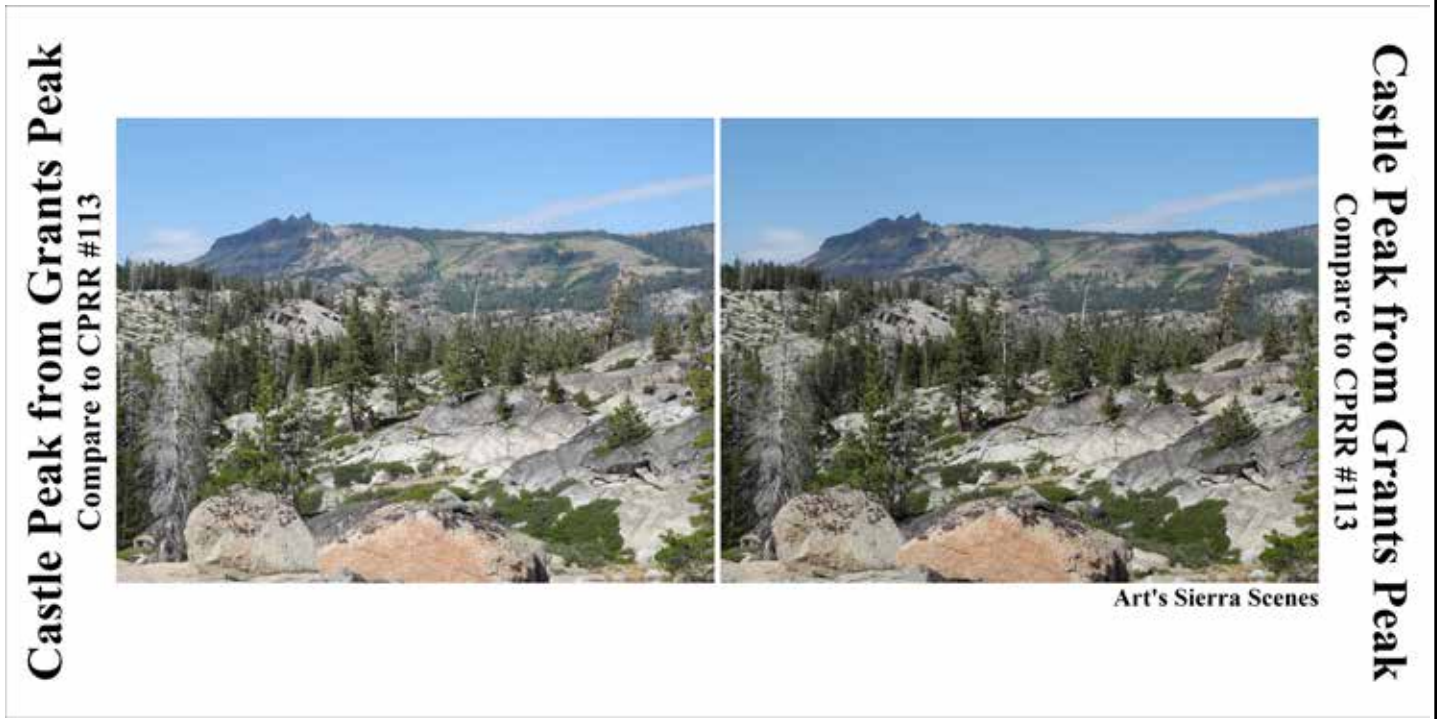


Tinker's Knob is the first peak to the right of the tree. This was taken from Donner Peak. There was a little extra space here so I removed one little snippet and substituted this space filling photograph to help illustrate the story on page 8.

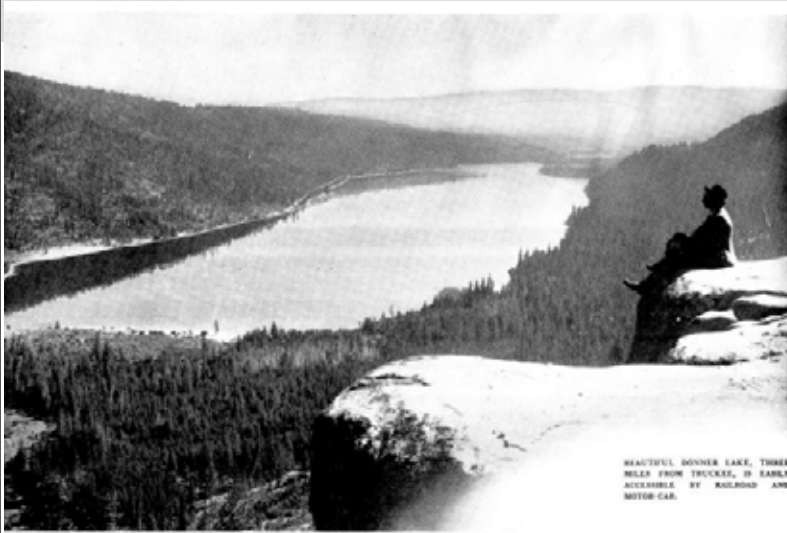
# Then & Now with Art Clark



Alfred A Hart 113 - Castle Peak from Grant's Butte (Stewart Peak) - This view of Castle is from northwest of Stewart Peak. Lake Angela is out of sight to the left. Numerous glacial erratics like the rocks in the foreground were left in place by the melting of the ice. Hart didn't seem to mind carrying the camera and all it's accessories to where it needed to be for the shot.  
Photo location 39° 19.415'N 120° 19.365'W



# Then & Now Art Clark in Person



BEAUTIFUL DONNER LAKE, THREE MILES FROM TRUCKEE, IS EARLY ACCESSIBLE BY RAILROAD AND MOTOR-CAR.

Our Then and Now's have been almost all based on photographs from the 19th century done by Alfred A. Hart, Carleton Watkins, or Lawrence & Houseworth. In some or many cases the photographs are the same since the collections were owned by the CPRR and the next photographer used them. But that's a story for another time.

In this case the basic picture, left, came from a railroad brochure in the late 19th century. That looked like a fun photograph to do but in the "Now" version, we'd put Art

Clark in place of the gentleman and so introduce Art to the readership. So that's Art in the picture to the right, not above.

Then Art discovered an Alfred A. Hart photograph of the same spot.

The hunt was on for the spot but it was not an easy hunt. It took a couple of trips and a lost camera before the right rock was found and Art could model.

The spot is a couple of miles along the old railroad route, below Tunnel 11 at N39°18.810' W120°17.986'. It's a nice walk but requires overcoming some brush. The spot is not obvious and we

wonder why Alfred A. Hart and then the Southern Pacific (successor to the CPRR) chose the spot for photographs. There are other good rocks closer to the tracks and/or the Summit roads, one of which we'll do in an upcoming issue.



Above left: Alfred A. Hart "Donner Lake, from Railroad around Crested Peak" (today's Donner Peak) taken about 1867

# Then & Now Art Clark in Person



About the same time the photos on the previous page showed up, we came across a book, California Highways: A Descriptive Record of Road Development by the State and Such Counties as Have Paved Highways. It was published in 1920 and contained the picture of the gentlemen from the Highway Department looking over the route of Highway 40. They are standing on the north side of Tunnel 8 overlooking Summit Canyon which is the route of Old 40 and its predecessors as well as the Dutch Flat Wagon Rd.

This spot is very close to the west end of tunnel 8 and easy to reach. Donner Lake is behind them and Mount Rose is on the horizon. Photo location 39° 18.962'N 120° 19.116'W



We thought it would be amusing to use Art as a model again since he did so well on the first one but this time we thought we'd test his mettle by using him more than once. Art performed flawlessly again and may have a modeling career in his future.

The map below shows the sacrifices our newsletter staff makes for the readership. We started at the PCT trailhead (left end of the blue line) and went east to the two yellow rectangles which are the photo locations.





DONNER SUMMIT HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
[www.donnersummithistoricalsociety.org](http://www.donnersummithistoricalsociety.org)

**Membership 2012**

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

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

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Renewing Membership CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

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

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Individual Membership - \$30

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Family Membership - \$50      \_\_\_\_\_ Friend Membership - \$100      \_\_\_\_\_ Sponsor - \$250

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Patron - \$500      \_\_\_\_\_ Benefactor - \$1000      \_\_\_\_\_ Business - \$250      \_\_\_\_\_ Business Sponsor - \$1000

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

If you would like monthly newsletter announcements, please write your email address below VERY neatly.

\_\_\_\_\_

# Heritage Trail 2013

August 10<sup>th</sup> & 11<sup>th</sup>

Hit the road for this year's Heritage Trail Weekend and visit any of Placer County's 19 museums from Roseville to Tahoe.

[theheritagetrail.blogspot.com](http://theheritagetrail.blogspot.com)



*History lovers,  
start your engines!*



*History lovers,  
start your engines!*

Hit the road for this year's Heritage Trail Weekend and visit any of Placer County's 19 museums from Roseville to Tahoe

August 10 & 11  
10:00 to 4:00

[theheritagetrail.blogspot.com](http://theheritagetrail.blogspot.com)

## Get information about the Heritage Trail:

[www.theheritagetrail.blogspot.com](http://www.theheritagetrail.blogspot.com)

## 2nd Annual Margie Powell Hike - Summit Valley

August 10 or 11. Meet at 9:30 at the Van Norden Dam opposite Soda Springs Ski Area. Bring a lunch, water, sunscreen, hat, and curiosity. The hike is two miles along the north side of the valley. We'll talk about the dam, the Lincoln Highway, the Dutch Flat Donner Lake Wagon Rd., Native Americans (and see mortars and metates), the wagon train passes, the sheep industry, the railroad... how will we fit it all in just the two miles and 2+ hours before lunch at the sheep pens?

# 2013 Poster

Our annual poster for 2013 celebrates the acquisition of Summit Valley by the Truckee Donner Land Trust and its opening to the public. The valley is rich in history: Native Americans occupied in summers for thousands of years, the first wagon trains to arrive in California with wagons crossed it, as did the first transcontinental railroad, first transcontinental highway, first transcontinental telephone line, and the first transcontinental air route. There are so many stories.



## 2nd Annual Margie Powell Hike - Summit Valley

see page 17

## 20 Mile Museum Grows

Sometime in May Janet Hill came in to talk to Norm in the Historical Society. She had a story about her mother who, as a 17 year old, decided to swim the length of Donner Lake.

She wanted a 20 Mile Museum sign commemorating Barbara Gordon's record breaking swim.

That was a bit different from our other signs but we thought it could make a good story. We produced the sign and Janet got permission from the Truckee Recreation Dept. to place the sign at the west end beach at Donner Lake. By the time you read this the sign should be back from manufacturing and in the ground. This year the Sierra Masters will present the first annual Barbara Gordon award to the fastest female swimmer in Mid-August.

The sign is on our website for your reading pleasure.

**History** **FIRST WOMAN TO SWIM DONNER LAKE**

Today each August hundreds of swimmers take to the 65° water of Donner Lake and swim its 2.7 mile length. Each swimmer has lots of company.

On August 19, 1935 though, it was a different story. On that day 17 year old Barbara Gordon swam the lake accompanied only by two rowboats. She became the first woman to swim the lake and set a record beating the only other two previous swimmers.

Why Barbara did it is a mystery but she set her goal the summer before, when she was only 16. In the 1930's women were just beginning to enter swimming competitions. Just 9 years earlier the first women to cross the English Channel both beat the records previously set by men. It was also a time when women were becoming famous in other areas. Amelia Earhart was setting flying records and Babe Didrikson was setting records on the athletic field. Barbara set one on Donner Lake.

For the month prior to her Donner Lake swim Barbara trained by towing a wooden rowboat the 1/3 mile length of Palisades Lake on Donner Summit at 5500' elevation. She rowed that boat back and forth the length of the lake nine times each day.

The science of swimming was fairly new in 1935. How to get the most efficiency out of different strokes was still being debated as was exactly how to do some strokes. So it must have been difficult without modern training, no goggles, and swimwear, and without others to spur her on, but Barbara did it, emerging from the water with "a smile a mile wide" after her one hour fifty minute swim. In 2013 the Sierra Nevada Masters presented the first annual Barbara Gordon Award to the fastest female swimmer.

**Things to do right here**

You may not want to swim the length of Donner Lake but there is plenty more to do here both in and around the lake and elsewhere. Rent a boat, go fishing, hike to a local peak (the view from Donner Peak back down to this spot is magnificent), hike around the lake or up Donner Pass and then down to Cisco Grove and back (a very popular and biking route), mountain bike into Colobee Canyon, or just visit the museum and Emigrant Monument at Donner State Park at the other end of the Lake.

**Girl Completes Donner Lake Swim In Record Time**

**Barbara Gordon First Woman to Swim Lake**

**HISTORIC ROUTE 40**

This sign sponsored by State H&E, The Palisades on Donner Summit. © 2013 Donner Summit Historical Society. www.donnerhistoricalsociety.org. The picture on the right side of the sign is the Truckee Donner Historical Society. The picture of Barbara Gordon, courtesy of Don Hill, Donnie's daughter.