

The Donner Summit

Heirloom

History and stories of the Donner Summit Historical Society

July, 2014 issue #71



Mark Twain on Donner Summit

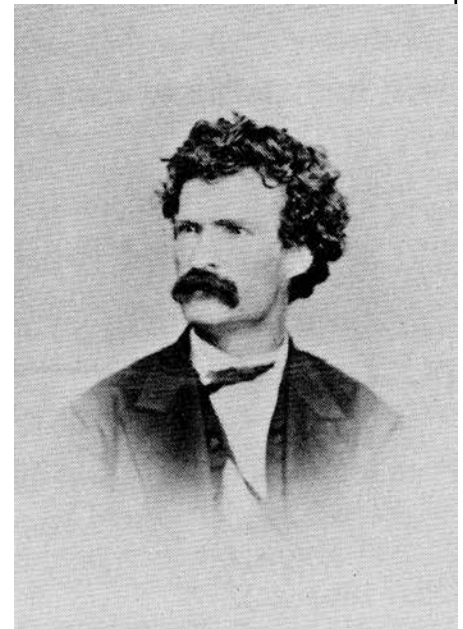
Ken Hall, former president of the Serene Lakes Property Owners' Association which is a community on Donner Summit, stopped the entire research dept. of the DSHS one day at Serene Lakes and wanted to know the truth of the story about the naming of Serene Lakes. Is it named for Mark Twain's daughters he wanted to know? He'd had some weekend company who were advocating the story. The Story is an article of faith among some residents and visitors and it would seem easily answered.

Serene Lakes Realty says on their website, "It has been said, that among the most famous visitors to Serene Lakes was the American author, Mark Twain. Enchanted by the area he was the first to give names to the twin lakes. He called them "Serena" and "Dulzura."

The [San Francisco Chronicle](#), in an article on Serene Lakes said, "Serene Lakes, a time warp of a Sierra mountain resort in the backyard of Donner Summit's Royal Gorge Ski Area,... [its lakes] supposedly named Serena and Dulzura by none other than Mark Twain." There is also old literature attempting to attract buyers to Serene Lakes before I-80 (1964) that says, "Mark Twain was the first to give names to our twin lakes. He called them 'Serena' and 'Dulzura.' We prefer 'Serene Lakes,' which tells how we feel about them." Prior to the real estate operators, Serene Lakes was called Ice Lakes for reasons that another [Heirloom](#) will explain (or which you can find on our website.

Mark Twain served very shortly in the Civil War and then headed west with his brother, Orion, who was the secretary to the governor of Nevada territory. They traveled west in the summer of 1861. Following the trip west, Mark Twain was in Nevada and traveled around California until he left for San Francisco in 1864. He hit the big time with the publication of the story about the "Jumping frog" in 1865. He went to Hawaii in 1866 and gave his first public lectures the same year. It is then that he got close to Serene Lakes and Donner Summit. Parenthetically, here is a good time to suggest [Roughing It](#), Twain's book about his Western adventures. It's full of good stories, including how he set fire to the forest on the shores of Lake Tahoe.

Twain gave a lecture in You Bet in Nevada County, California (five miles northeast of today's Chicago Park) on October 25, 1866. On the 27th he was headed for Virginia City to give another lecture and he crossed Donner Summit. The night of the 26th Twain spent in Meadow Lake which was above and north of Cisco. Upper Cisco, which today is gone and sat up the hill from the gas station on the north side of I-80, was the jumping off point for travel to Meadow Lake. Meadow Lake was a boom/bust gold

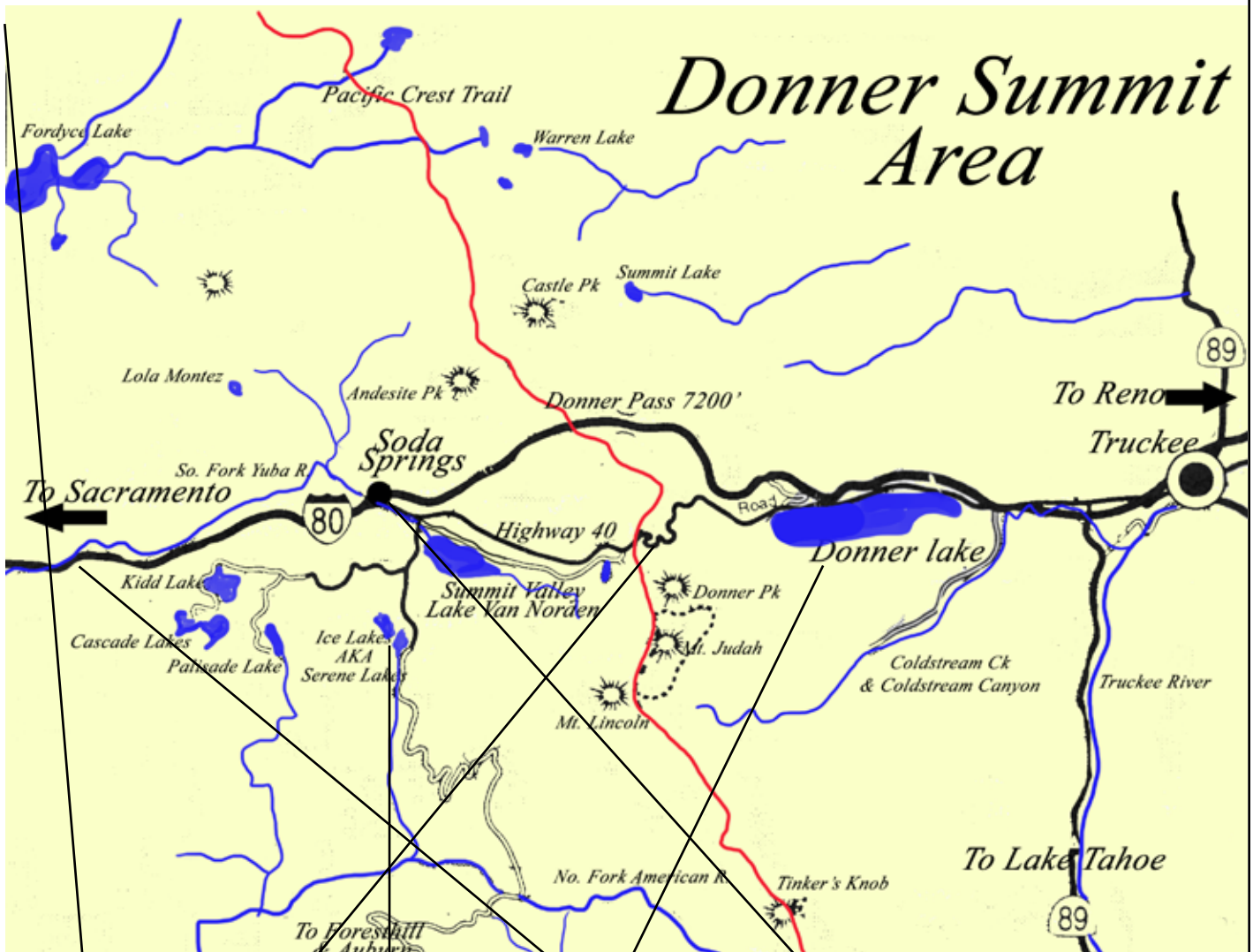


Mark Twain pictured just before crossing Donner Summit in April, 1868

**3rd Annual
Margie Powell
History Hikes**

**August 2 & 3
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Story Locations in this Issue



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Snowsheds (40 miles of RR route over Donner Summit).

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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

mining town that only lasted a couple of years (1865-1868). There is little left today but it's still an interesting visit.

Cisco would become "end of track" for the CPRR not long after Twain went through. It would remain end of track until the summit tunnels were completed in 1868. There trains would unload and wagons would be loaded to continue goods' journeys on the Dutch Flat Wagon Rd. They even unloaded locomotives and transported them, track, and the parts for railroad cards over the summit to Truckee so they could continue building while construction continued on the tunnels. But that's another story for another [Heirloom](#).

On the 26th Twain left Meadow Lake and headed down to Cisco where he sent a telegram to the editor of the [Enterprise](#) in Virginia City saying he was on his way. At Cisco he took the Pioneer Stage over the Summit headed for Virginia City.

So Mark Twain got close to Serene Lakes in 1866 Did he visit?

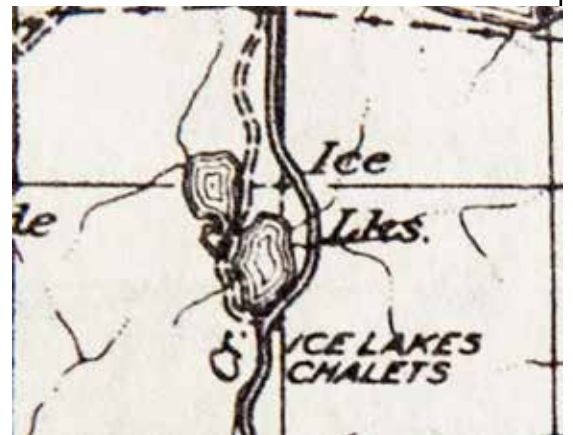
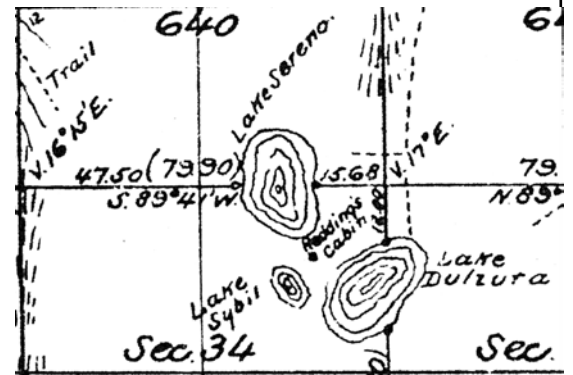
Twain left Meadow Lake early in the morning and was in Virginia City that evening. Given the state of travel in those days it is very doubtful that he'd have taken a side trip to some lakes a couple of miles off the stage route and it's doubtful that he could have convinced the stage driver to amend his route. If Twain wanted scenery it was coming soon at Donner Pass where he could look down a thousand feet to Donner Lake. A little more patience and he'd be traveling along the side of Donner Lake. Both of those are much more dramatic than Sereno (the original spelling, see the top map to the right) Lakes. He did arrive in Virginia City that evening so that would have left no time for dawdling.

It's easier to dispense with notion that Twain named the lakes for his daughters. In 1866 Twain had no children. His first child, Langdon, was born in 1872. He did not get a daughter until two years later. None of his daughters was named Serena or Dulzura. Also missing in that context is that Serene Lakes, or Sereno Lakes in those days, was three lakes. The three did not become two until the dam was built in the mid-1940's. The third lake was named Sybil. That there were three lakes is never part of the naming story. Later on Twain did get married and named his daughters Olivia (Susie), Jean, and Clara. By then though, the three Ice Lakes had been named Serena, Dulzura, and Sybil.

Still, Mark Twain was in California/Nevada in the 1860's and he traveled around. He also said he'd made many trips over the Sierra by stage (some were over the Placerville route from Carson City). Could he have visited? He did visit Lake Tahoe in 1861. It is conceivable that he visited Serene Lakes but improbable. Why would he have visited? It was way out of the way and although it's beautiful, there are other more attractive places. In [Roughing It](#) he mentions his visit to Lake Tahoe and in his letters there are mentions of Cisco and Meadow Lake. If he had named a couple of lakes and the names had stuck mightn't he have noted that in some surviving piece of writing? To check that, our research department dove into Mark Twain's letters, Notebooks & Journals, and his many newspaper articles, which have thoughtfully been compiled into many volumes. Standing in the University stacks in front of rows of Mark Twain scholarship gives one a sense of gravitas and gratification, particularly as one nods sagely from time to time, plays with the tobacco in one's pipe, and adjusts the leather elbow patches on one's cardigan. Nearby university students are impressed of course. That's another story though.

There is nothing in his letters or journals about naming the lakes, which does not necessarily mean he did not name them. In his letters though, he talked about all kinds of subjects and experiences. Given his loquaciousness one would think that he would have mentioned the naming or at least the visiting. There are also no mentions of Serena (or Sereno), Dulzura, or Sybil.

Below: maps of Serene Lakes:
Top, 1866
Center, 1947
Bottom, 1965



A next avenue of research into the veracity of the story was old maps. To that end our research staff applied itself diligently. The State Archives, the State Library, Searles Library in Nevada City, the Bancroft at U.C. Berkeley, the Geography Dept. at U.C. Berkeley (which has a large collection of old maps), and the Bureau of Land Management in Sacramento were all visited. Someone must have historical maps of the Donner Summit area before Mark Twain visited. With one of those in hand, we could see what the lakes were named. With a succession of maps we could see when the naming took place.

There are no maps. The earliest we could find was the first U.S. Government survey a small piece of which you can see on page 3 top. By then the lakes had their current names. You can see the first settler's house too, which is a good future Heirloom story. You'll have to keep up your subscription.

Finally, digitization has caught up with many old newspapers and magazines. We can now search for text. Various searches using different parameters turned up nothing relevant.

Did Mark Twain name Serene Lakes? There's no evidence he did besides what some real estate developers said. There is also no proof that he didn't either, but then proving the negative is pretty difficult.

Next Month

Not only did your DSHS research team do the research above, but the team went a step further and went out to Meadow Lake for a couple of visits. Next month: how to get to Meadow Lake, what we found there, and visit to nearby Phoenix Lake where there was also a mining community. The scenery is beautiful. We found old mines and tailings, mining equipment, building foundations, and relics. You won't want to miss it all. Aren't you glad you subscribe to the Heirloom?

CENTRAL



PACIFIC RAILROAD

OPEN TO CISCO,
93 MILES FROM SACRAMENTO,
FOR FREIGHT AND PASSENGERS.

Trains leave Sacramento daily, (Sundays excepted,) connecting at Cisco with Stages of the PIONEER STAGE COMPANY for Virginia City, Austin, and all parts of Nevada. Also, connecting with the OVERLAND MAIL STAGES for Great Salt Lake City and all parts of Utah and Montana Territories. The Stages of the PIONEER STAGE COMPANY connect at Hunter's, on Truckee River, with

HILL BEACHY'S LINE

To Ruby City and Silver City, Owyhee. Also, Boise City, Idaho City, Placerville, Centreville, and all parts of Idaho Territory.

CENTRAL PACIFIC RAILROAD,

In connection with the New Wagon Roads now open, via Humboldt River, will enable Passengers between Idaho Territory, Owyhee and California, to make the trip **IN FOUR DAYS**, being much less time than by any other route, and one-half the time formerly consumed via the Columbia River. Also, at much less risk and expense.

LELAND STANFORD, Prest. C. P. R. Co.

CHARLES CROCKER, Supt. C. P. R. Co.

SACRAMENTO, January 1, 1867.

Above: end of track at Cisco

Mark Twain on travel by horseback, 1866

San Francisco Bulletin, December 6, 1866.

To Red Dog and Back.

We visited the mining camps of Red Dog and You Bet, and returned to Nevada in the night, through a forest country cut up into innumerable roads. In our simplicity we depended on the horses to choose the route for themselves, because by many romantic books we had been taught a wild and absurd admiration for the instinct of that species of brute. The only instinct ours had was one which moved them to hunt for places where there wasn't any road, and it was unerring--it never failed them. However, our horses did not go lame. It was very singular. My experience of horses is that they never throw away a chance to go lame, and that in all respects they are well meaning and unreliable animals. I have also observed that if you refuse a high price for a favorite horse, he will go and lay down somewhere and die.

CALIFORNIA STATE TELEGRAPH COMPANY

Meadow Lake, October 26, 1866. }
Via Cisco, 27—7:50 A. M.

to J. T. Goodman, Editor Enterprise :

Our circus is coming. Sound the hewgag.

Mark Twain {Mac.}

telegram from Mark Twain to the editor Enterprise in Virginia City saying he's on the way in 1866

A hewgag is a toy instrument like a kazoo

Mark Twain at Meadow Lake, 1866

A Memento of Speculation.

We traveled by stage to Meadow Lake, over a villainous road, which usually led through beautiful picturesque mountain scenery, variegated with taverns, where they charge reasonable rates for dinners and get them up satisfactorily.

We reached the town of Meadow Lake at 9 P. M. It is built on a level plat of ground shut in by rugged mountains well clad with heavy timber. The lake itself is a handsome sheet of water a mile long and perhaps a quarter of a mile wide. Meadow Lake is the prettiest site for a town I know of; and the town already built there is the wildest exemplar of the spirit of speculation I have ever stumbled upon. Here you find Washoe recklessness and improvidence repeated: A lot of highly promising but unprospected ledges, and behold! on such guarantees as these they have built a handsome town and painted it neatly, and planned wide, long streets, and got ready for a rush of business, and then--jumped aboard the stage coaches and deserted it!....Here is a really handsome town, built of two-story frame houses--a town capable of housing 3,000 persons with ease, and how many inhabitants has it got? A hundred! You can have a house all to yourself merely by promising to take care of it. The place is perfectly citified with signs. There are the inevitable "Bank Exchanges" and Metropolitan Hotels, and wholesale hardware stores, printing, and lawyers' and doctors' offices, and restaurants and billiard saloons of a pretentious city. One man has even had the temerity to build a large, handsome dressed stone house, at great expense. A bright, new, pretty town, all melancholy and deserted, and yet showing not one sign of decay or dilapidation! I never saw the like before.

Mark Twain on Stage Travel over Donner Summit, 1866

An Aristocratic Turn-out.

The next morning we started to Virginia. The stage was small (and had a wheel of questionable stability,) and the four horses were rather small for their age, especially the wheel horse on the port side, which had been staging some 38 years, it was said. We had 14 passengers, (there was comfortable room for 9,) and baggage for 150. That is a little extravagant--but we did have the hind boot full of trunks, (and a cooking-stove,) and the forward boot full of carpet sacks and rolls of blankets, and on the roof was a stack of valises, several chairs and a few joints of stove-pipe--and I think if a menagerie had offered, we would have tried to take it along. Take notice, I am not doing our stage man any injury with these remarks, because he has hauled his line off for the winter--otherwise, I would keep silence, for I would not wantonly injure so good-natured and accommodating a fellow as he was. We crossed little depressions very gently, on account of our shaky wheel, and got out and walked, when we were not going down hill, so as to give the horses a chance. We generally walked, anyway. Occasionally we would come back and encourage the driver a little, and then go off and leave him again. I thought the team we started with was rather a hard lot, but those were circus horses compared to what we had afterwards. Every change we made was for the worse. Or rather, the worse culminated in the next to the last change. They brought out a weird-looking, bow-legged crowbait, and the boys laughed; next a thoughtful, Senator-looking skeleton, that looked as grave as a hearse and had an expression of more than earthly wisdom in his lean face; next came a prodigiously long animal, whose ridgy backbone stood out prominently all the way from his shoulders to his tail, like the croppings of a quartz ledge; and the bridge of his nose was broken and he breathed with a blubbering snort that was exquisitely annoying; and last and most notable, came a horse with only one ear that stood boldly up, and the other had been chopped off close to his head--and if ever I saw a comical looking beast, it was he. Altogether, it was the most forlorn team I have come across yet. We only had one set of harness, and it had to be let out for the long horses and taken up for the short ones. The driver cracked his whip, and we started one horse galloping, another trotting, another pacing, and the long horse with the curb-stone backbone walking with a martial stride that defied all imitation except with stilts. The boys made so much fun of the earless horse that in self-defense the driver said he bought him especially to afford passengers an entertaining topic of conversation. They thought he might well have bought the others for the same purpose, and they conferred the title on the whole team. Wherefore, whenever anything went wrong, they observed, for instance, that "The topic of conversation with the broken nose has unshipped his check-rein." However, we had a right jolly trip of it and got into Virginia at about 10 o'clock at night.

PIONEER STAGE CO.'S
GREAT EXPRESS
AND
UNITED STATES MAIL LINE
BETWEEN
San Francisco and Virginia.



Through in 24 Hours.

VIA

DUTCH FLAT & DONNER LAKE ROUTE
AND CENTRAL PACIFIC RAILROAD

TO SACRAMENTO,

AND VIA

PLACERVILLE & LAKE BIGLER ROUTE
AND PLACERVILLE SACRAMENTO

VALLEY RAILROAD

TO SACRAMENTO,

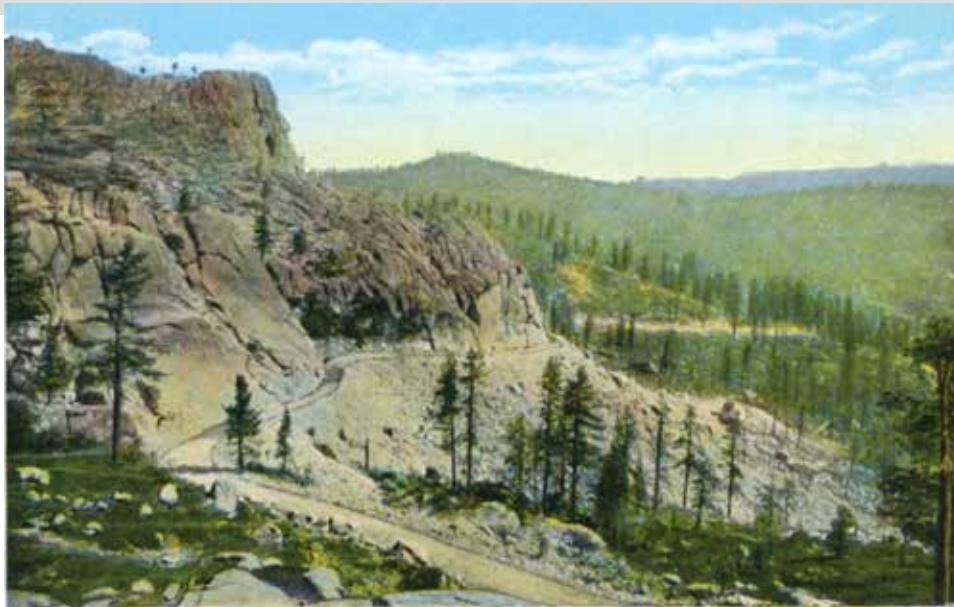
PASSENGERS LEAVING SAN FRANCISCO BY
Boat at 4 P. M. will take the Cars at Sacra-
mento, on both roads, at 6:30 A. M. for the Lake
Bigler Route, will change to Stages at Shingle
Springs. For Donner Lake Route, at Colfax Station.
Arriving in Virginia, by both Lines, in 50 hours from
San Francisco--

CROSSING THE MOUNTAINS BY DAYLIGHT.

RETURNING

Leave Virginia, via Placerville and Lake Bigler
Route, at 1 P. M. and 4 P. M., connecting at Sacra-
mento with San Francisco Boat at 2 P. M. next day.
The 1 P. M. Stage will connect with the first morning
Train at Shingle Springs, giving passengers 6 hours
to Sacramento. By the Dutch Flat and Donner
Lake Route, will leave Virginia at 4:15 P. M., con-
necting at Sacramento with San Francisco Boat at
2 P. M. next day.

From the DSHS Archives



Postcard of the "new highway", which in this case is now the Old Highway 40. This postcard must date from the 1920's, maybe just after Rainbow Bridge was completed in 1926 which did make a "new highway."

"new highway, Donner Lake to Summit, California

Right is a reproduction of an ad from the Meadow Lake Morning Star on June 6, 1866 Meadow Lake was a short lived boomtown that sat above Cisco Grove and through which Mark Twain road. See the story on page 1. Someday the Heirloom will do the story of Meadow Lake.

Heatonville, or Heaton, was the original name for today's Cisco Grove. Cisco Grove was named in 1866 for the assistant U.S. Treasurer, John J. Cisco. As ass't treasurer in New York he was instrumental in helping to finance the Union's Civil War effort. He was also, according to the N.Y. Times obituary, treasurer of the Union Pacific. He was not, as one place names source says, treasurer of the Central Pacific. Mark Hopkins, who had an estate on Donner Summit, was CPRR treasurer.

Miscellaneous Advertisements

Heatonville Hotel

At the junction of the Dutch Flat and Meadow Lake wagon Roads, Heatonville

WASH. MADDEN.....PROPRIETOR

Attention of the traveling
public is respectfully directed to the above Hotel. Furnished roomos for Families and every attentioning is paid to the comfort and accommodation of families.

People from California or Nevada going to Meadow Lake, will do well to stop here, it being much nearer than any other point on the Dutch Flat Road, and

The Only Practical Route to Meadow Lake.

A Saddle Train leaves the Hotel every morning on the arrival of the Stage going West, returning from Meadow Lake in time to connect the same day with the Stage going East.

From the DSHS Archives



Alfred A. Hart #210
Loaded Teams at Cisco. While the tunnels were being finished on the Summit in 1867-68 the railroad continued building below the summit to Truckee and eastward. "End of track" was at Cisco Grove where trains were unloaded. The materials were put on wagons to continue on the Dutch Flat Wagon Rd.

The Auburn Ski Club got its start down at Baxter but soon moved to Cisco Grove. This is their ski hill just south of the Yuba River.

The Club stayed there until I-80 displaced it and then they moved to Boreal Ridge where they are today.

Today this spot, looking from Old 40 is hidden by trees which is why our Then & Now guy, Art Clark has not done a Then & Now. The freeway now runs from left to right at the base of the ski hill. The "Cisco Snow Sled" (see the [Heirloom 12/11](#))



letter to the editor 5/30/14

Hi Bill, My wife Jean and I finally made it up together- been a year for me. My first chance to show her your 20 mile signs.

She read the Tunnel 6 display, and returned to our van and burst out: "Whoever wrote the text did a beautiful job- it pulls you right into the subject". She then enjoyed all that I showed her, and the associated walks. Well done.

Don Campbell

Book Review

Cavalry Life in Tent & Field

Mrs. Orsemus B. Boyd Introduction by Darlis A. Miller

Cavalry Life in Tent & Field

Mrs. Orsemus B. Boyd 1894 reprint 1982

Frances Boyd was an army officer's wife. She had married her army officer just after his graduation from West Point. Frances followed her husband around the west from frontier post to frontier post until he died in 1885.

Her book describes army life, the West, and Native Americans and their subjugation. Along the way he was promoted twice and she had three children. According to Mrs. Boyd her husband was treated unfairly many times and her continual defenses of him in this book get tedious.

Just one example of a passage attesting to Orsemus Boyd's good character is enough, Mr. Boyd "became unpopular for refusing to submit to many annoyances. The climax was reached when, after having fought with one cadet and come out the victor, he refused... to fight with another, a man who had criticized the language used in the heat of battle, and was consequently dubbed a coward. This, though exceedingly trying to a person of his sensitive nature, was endured with the same patience as were subsequent trials."

Interestingly, Boyd, his father and brother all enlisted in the Union Army in 1861. Orsemus became a hero, was commissioned a lieutenant and given command of a company in which his brother and father served. He was appointed to West Point in 1863.

There was a scandal and Boyd certainly was treated unfairly and accused wrongly. Evidence is alluded to and then the appendix gives the rest of the story absolving Boyd.

You may want to read this book for insight into 19th Century American West and U.S. Army life. You might want to read it if you are a fan of 19th Century flowery prose, "My husband...had been a soldier for two years in the War of the Rebellion, where he had so signalized himself by bravery that friends united in urging his father to remove the lad from the perilous surroundings of active warfare, and permit him to be educated in the profession for which he had shown such decided talent."

The reason I heard about this book was because in August, '13 the Serene Lakes Property Owners' Association brought in a speaker. Robert Chandler was a senior historian for Wells Fargo until he retired and he gave an interesting talk. At one point he mentioned a Frances Boyd and her experiences on the stage over the Sierra. I had to find that source and Dr. Chandler was agreeable. A quick search of the internet and an order to a used book store brought me [Calvary Life](#).

The Boyds were married and two days later Orsemus embarked for the West and Nevada to join a command guarding the "contemplated Pacific Railroad." Mrs. Boyd followed some months later by steamship and across the Isthmus of Panama. Imagine the shock to her, having lived in New York City all her life, traveling to California and beginning army life in rude Western posts.

Frances arrived in San Francisco with no prospect of joining her husband quickly since there was "so little hope for any comfortable habitation." She was not the waiting kind and she set off by stage, "nothing seemed more natural than that I should press on, in spite of the protestations of friends, who said that the Sierra Nevada Mountains were impassable at that



season (February), and who predicted all sorts of mishaps. Nothing daunted, I determined at least to try..." She must have been a plucky girl, aged about 20 in 1868.

Frances joined her husband at Camp Halleck in Nevada where he was part of troops guarding the route of the coming transcontinental railroad.

She followed him from camp to camp around the West for fourteen years. she endured the extreme heat, "numerous supply of vermin," "windblown grit," "omnipresent dust," desolate country, high prices, leaky roofs, tent living in winter, forced economy, interminable winters, disappointment, traveling in fear of Indian attack, and traveling in hardship with a baby. Life must have been miserable going from post to post. She also had adventures, once escaping murderers and she relates a lynching.

It wasn't all darkness however. Mrs. Boyd also learned cribbage, how to fish, made friends with neighboring ranchers, and learned about Mormons and the Indians, so that "with all its drawbacks, life in the open air then began to have many charms for me."

She saw beauty. "To mount a horse, such as can be found only in the West, perfect for the purpose, and gallop over prairies, completely losing one's self in vast and illimitable space, as silent as lonely, is to leave every petty care, and feel the contented frame of mind which can only be produced by such surroundings. In those grand wastes one is truly alone with God. Oh, I love the West..."

During a stay in New York occasioned by the need to regain her health about which she gives no details, she said, "No longing has ever equaled in intensity the one which then took possession of me – be back again in my dear Western home, surrounded by all the lonely grandeur of its lovely scenery." She was able to reconnect with old friends and family and "rave[d] about the delights of the West until friends thought me nearly crazed on the subject...I missed the quiet and freedom from that mad rush which seems an inevitable part of life in the great city..."

Orsemus died in 1885 after a short sickness while part of the campaign to catch Geronimo. An army camp was named Camp Boyd in his honor. Frances lived a long life dying in 1926 after having lived in the east and traveling extensively.

Donner Pass By Stage 1868

[punctuation in the following story is original]

Mrs. Boyd, pictured below, was only 20 years old and newly married when she went West to join her husband. From San Francisco she took the steamer to Sacramento and then the new soon-to-be transcontinental railroad to the end of track at Cisco. Tunnel 6, at the top of Donner Pass would not be finished until the end of 1868 so passengers disembarked and continued on other conveyances. From Cisco the journey for Mrs. Boyd was by sled "in the midst of a blinding snowstorm, that compelled us to envelop our heads in blankets."



Not long after, the passengers were transferred to a stage-coach for the trip over the summit.

The stage-coach was " a large vehicle with thoroughbraces (leather straps that support the coach) instead of springs, and a roomy interior that suggested comfort. Alas ! only suggested ! Possibly no greater discomfort could have been endured than my companion and self underwent that night. Those old-fashioned stage-coaches for mountain travel were intended to be well filled inside, and well packed outside. But it so happened that instead of the usual complement of passengers, one other woman and myself were all.

"A pen far more expert than mine would be required to do justice to the horrors of that night. Though we had left Cisco at noon, we did not reach Virginia City, on the other side of the mountains, until ten o'clock next morning. As long as daylight lasted we watched in amazement those wonderful mountains, which should have been called 'Rocky,' for they have enormous precipices and rock elevations at many points ; from the highest we gazed down into ravines at least fifteen hundred feet below, and shuddered again and again.

"...We peered into endless precipices, down which we momentarily expected to be launched, for the seeming recklessness of our driver and extreme narrowness of the roads made such a fate appear imminent.

“Our alarm did not permit us to duly appreciate the scenery’s magnificent grandeur ; besides, every possible effort was required to keep from being tossed about like balls. We did not expect to find ourselves alive in the morning, and passed the entire night holding on to anything that promised stability. An ordinary posture was quite impossible : we had either to brace ourselves by placing both feet against the sides of the vehicle, or seize upon every strap within reach.

“Long before morning all devices, except the extreme one of lying flat on the bottom of the coach and resigning ourselves to the inevitable, had failed. Every muscle ached with the strain that had been required to keep from being bruised by the constant bumping, and even then we had by no means escaped.

“We had supped at Donner Lake, a beautiful spot in the very heart of the mountains, made famous by the frightful sufferings of the Donner Party, which had given the lake its name, and which has been so well described... It proved an unfortunate prelude to our eventful night ; for in the midst of our own suffering we were compelled to think of what might befall us if we, like that ill-fated party, should be left to the mercy of those grand but cruel mountains, which already seemed so relentless in their embrace that although haste meant torture yet we long to see the last of them.”

Mrs. Boyd left Virginia City “gladly... knowing that soon after we should emerge from mountain roads, and on level plains be less tortured.

“We were not... quite prepared for the method that made jolting impossible... we were greatly surprised [on re-embarking on the stage after breakfast] to find our coach almost full of passengers ; but we climbed in, and for five days and nights were carried onward without the slightest change of any sort.... Whenever in the course of the succeeding five days and nights it was needful to move even our feet, we could only do so by asking our vis-à-vis to move his at the same time, as there was not one inch of space unoccupied.”

Passengers sat “bolt upright” day and night, “Vainly trying to snatch a few moments’ sleep, which the constant lurching of the stage rendered impossible...” The rest of the mid-winter stage journey was just as unpleasant; “clinging mud,” “meals...conspicuous by their absence,” breakfast at midnight, dine in the early morning, meats sodden with grease, which disguised their natural flavors so..that I often wondered what animals of the prairies were represented...” It got so bad Frances would “gladly have welcomed some mountains...”

“Sleep was out of the question, and consequently nights seemed endless.” “One night we made eight miles in fifteen hours, and the next day fifteen miles in eight hours.”

Imagine traveling across Nevada, sitting bolt upright, unable to move, night and day, for five days.

" Westward Ho! For Oregon and California!

Who wants to go to California without costing them anything? As many as eight young men, of good character, who can drive an ox team, will be accommodated by gentlemen who will leave this vicinity about the first of April. Come, boys! You can have as much land as you want without costing you anything."

--an ad placed in Springfield, Illinois on March 18, 1846

Would this ad have enticed you if had been a young man or good character in 1846?

This ad was placed to entice young men to join the Donner Party.

Rain and Snow

Tahoe Tavern Endurance Run

Passes Through Some Beautiful Country

[Special Dispatch to the [San Francisco] Call]

LAKE TAHOE TAVERN, July 24 [1911]

The two Buick pathfinder that left San Francisco Sunday morning to map out the route for the Tahoe Tavern Endurance run which is scheduled to take place the last week in August arrived at the lake late this afternoon after a varied and interesting trip from Auburn. Today's leg of the journey carried the pathfinders through a lively rainstorm that, for a time, threatened to hold them in the mountains.

Leaving Summit, the highest point on the Southern Pacific line, the pathfinders ran through a snow drift that had been banked on both sides of the road and here a genuine snowball battle was enjoyed between the members of the parties in each of the cars.

The pathfinders started from Auburn to map out the second leg of the proposed contest at 8 o'clock. A detour was taken to Aelvia Heights, about a mile from the Placer County seat, which overlooks American River canyon. This trip unfolds to motorists one of the most attractive scenic wonderlands in the state and it is the intention of the tour promoters to embody it as part of the run. From here the regular county road was selected to Colfax, Gold Run, Dutch Flat and on to Emigrant Gap, from which place the state highway to Truckee, a distance of 35 miles was chosen for the route. The Placer county roads have a few rough spots but as a whole the route is almost a perfect boulevard although there are some steep grades and sharp turns to negotiate in the climb through the higher Sierras.

The state is doing excellent work in maintaining the highway from Emigrant Gap to Truckee. At present laborers are working energetically to put the Truckee Pass road, which was washed out by the heavy storms of last winter, into shape. This portion of the road is torn up, but according to the foreman in charge, the work will be completed in about two weeks.

The pathfinders will leave tomorrow morning to map out the return leg.

The Rest of the Story

30 Cars were in the endurance run the pathfinders were scouting. They all made it without problems.

The Tahoe Tavern ran a contest each year that awarded a silver cup to the first automobile to cross the Summit to Lake Tahoe each season. Merchants were interested in the news engendered by the contest because that would start automobile tourists traveling over the Sierra for the Summer season.

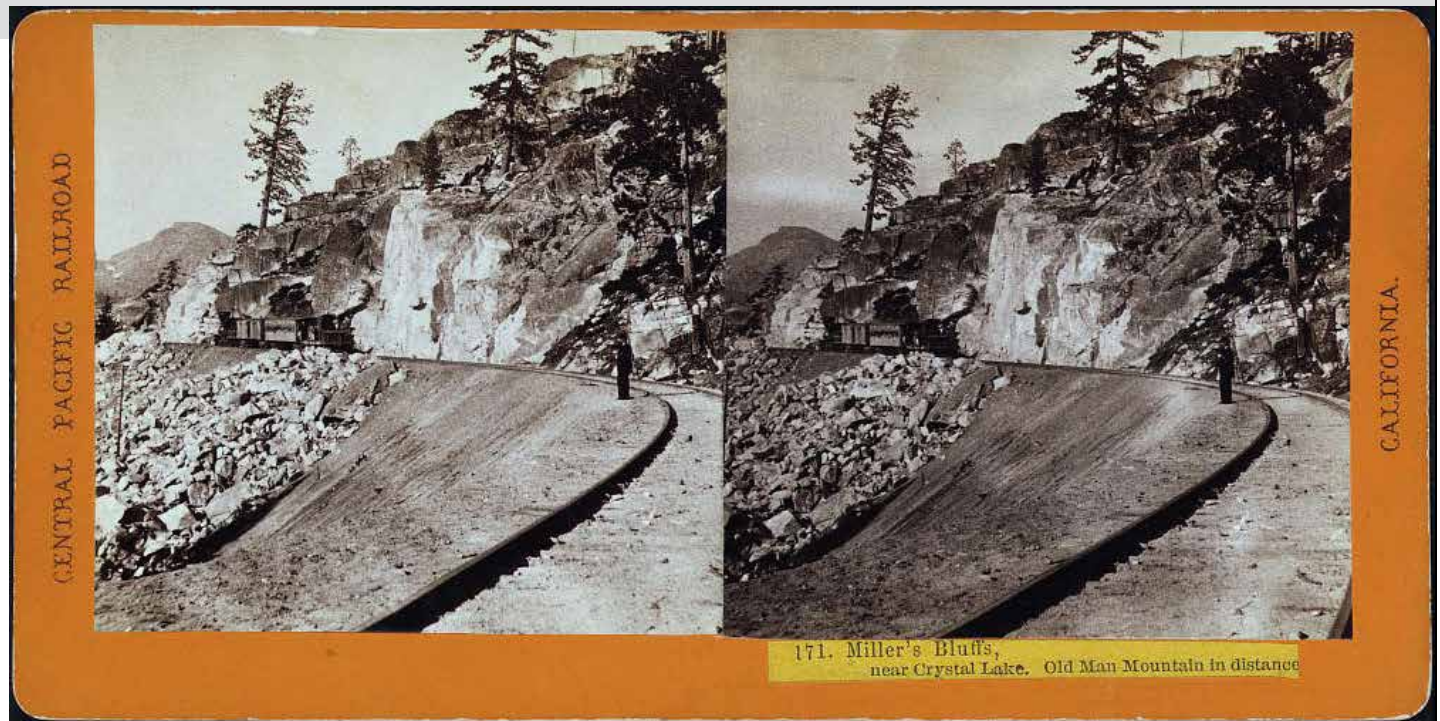
The Tahoe Tavern was located in Tahoe City just across the street from the road to Granlibakken leaves 89. It is now a condominium development.

The race was won in 1911 by Arthur Foote of Nevada City whose car you could see in our last issue parked in Summit Valley. The picture to the right is also of Foote's auto as he goes down the east side of Donner Pass. We use this postcard for field trips like the Margie Powell Hike (see page 14).

Foote won the race in June, more than a month before the pathfinders went over. The 1911 race is a story that will come later in the Heirloom.



Then & Now with Art Clark



Alfred A Hart 171 - Miller's Bluff near Crystal Lake -

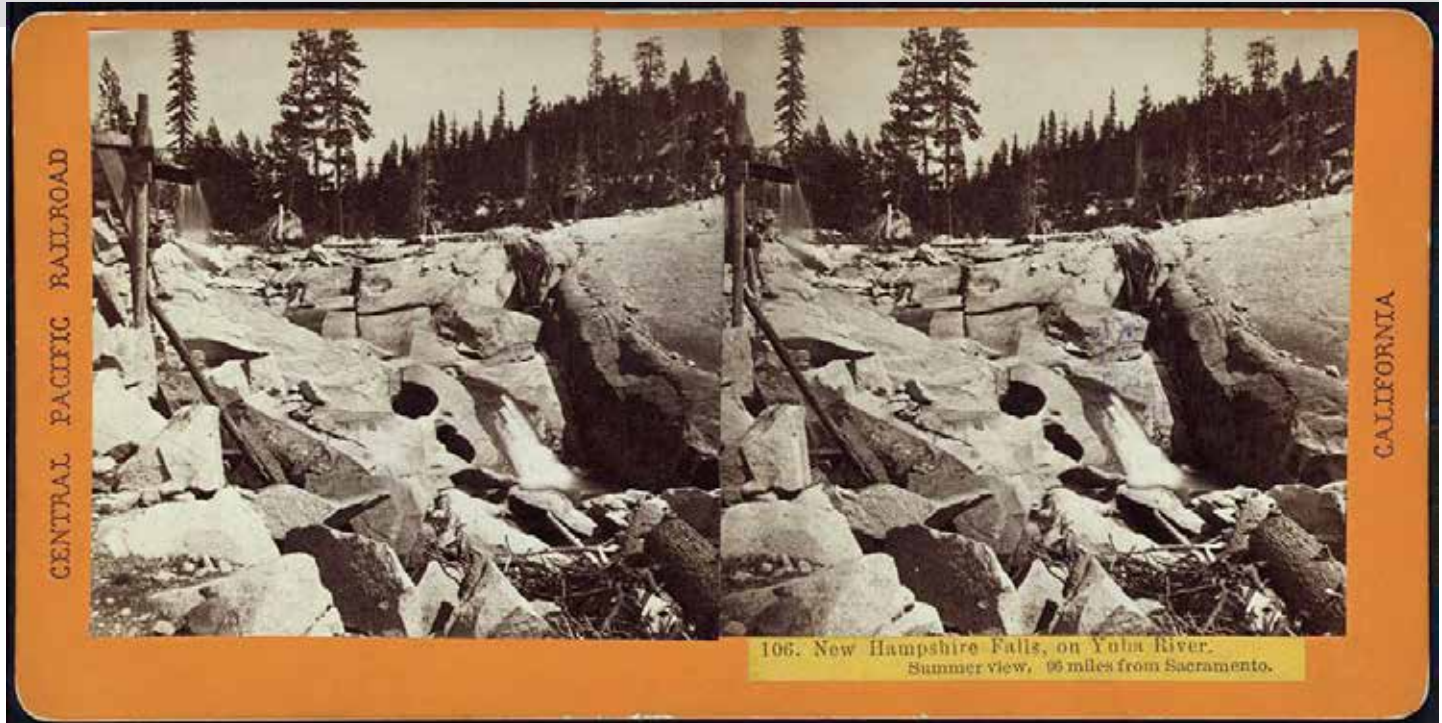
This view, just east of the I-80/Hwy 20 junction, shows both the path of the original tracks and the current tracks, laid in 1925 in a new tunnel. Old Man Mountain, bearing a resemblance to Half Dome, is blocked from view today.

The location was named for Edward H. Miller, a friend and later associate of the CPRR founders. The name didn't stick, and the bluff is unnamed today.

Photo location 39° 19.511'N 120° 35.693'W



Then & Now with Art Clark

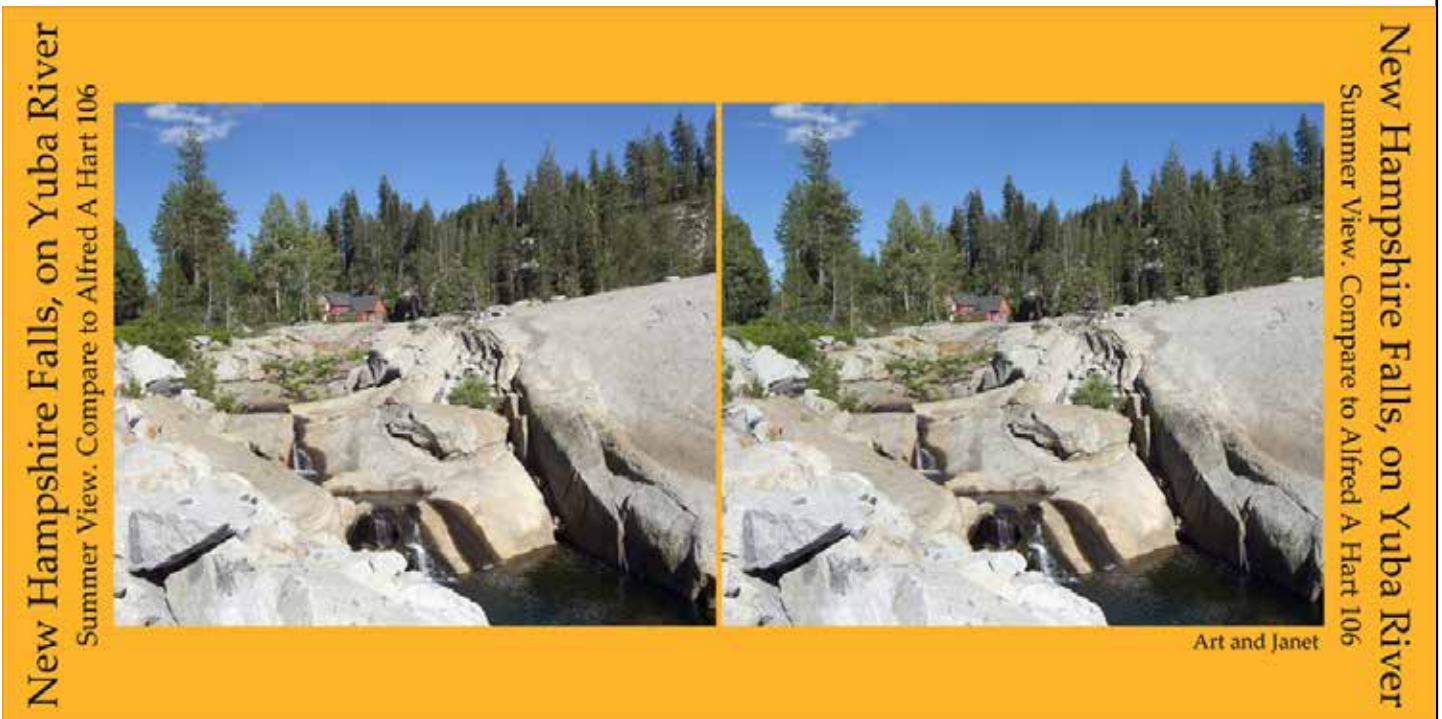


Alfred A Hart 106 - New Hampshire Falls.

The Dutch Flat road passed this scene above Big Bend on its way up to Donner Summit. The railroad was being built on the side of the mountains 300 feet higher. Today Old Highway 40 follows the same route.

Where did the name come from? Who knows?

Photo location 39° 18.644'N 120° 30.334'W



DONNER SUMMIT HISTORICAL SOCIETY
www.donnersummithistricalsociety.org

Membership

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

DATE _____

NAME(S) _____

____ New Membership

MAILING ADDRESS _____

____ Renewing Membership

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

____ Individual Membership - \$30

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

____ Family Membership - \$50

____ Friend Membership - \$100

____ Sponsor - \$250

____ Patron - \$500

____ Benefactor - \$1000

____ Business - \$250

____ 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.

Margie Powell History Hike - 2014

Margie Powell was one of the founders of the Donner Summit Historical Society. She loved the local history.

She passed away three years ago. In her memory the community began the Margie Powell History Hikes which have proved really popular.

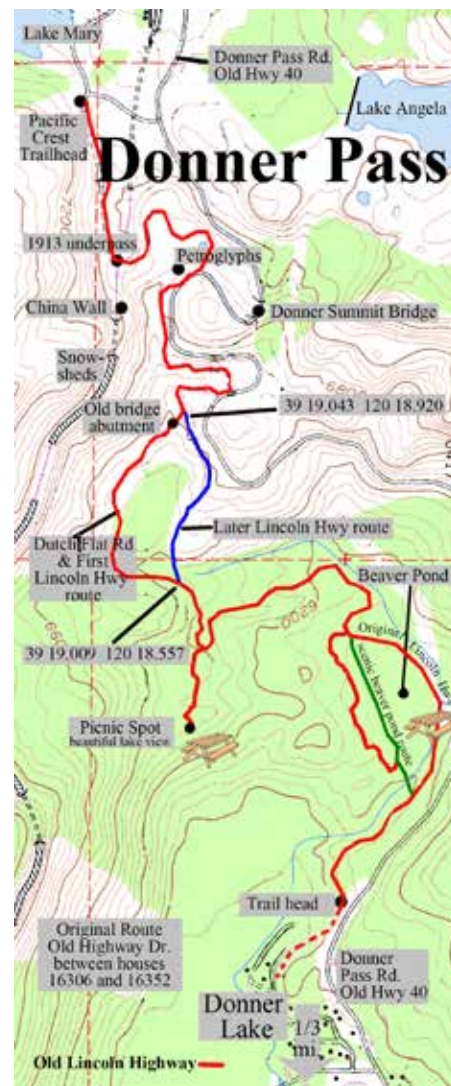
The 2014 hike will go downhill from Donner Summit to the Land Trust kiosks on Old 40. Along the way we'll tell the stories of the local history: the Emigrant Trail, the Stephens and Donner Parties, The Lincoln Highway, China Wall, 1913 underpass, Old 40, Rainbow Bridge, petroglyphs, and turkeys. We'll see old signs painted on rocks, wonderful scenery, and historic sites. We'll eat lunch at a beautiful view site.

Best of all, we'll organize a car shuttle back to the top so the most interesting and historic hike on the summit will also be the easiest and most fun.

There will be two hikes: **August 2 and August 3**. Meet at the Sugar Bowl Academy* at the top of Old 40 at 10 A.M. Download the brochure with the map to the right. It on our brochure page at the DSHS website, called Summit Canyon.

The 2015 Margie Powell Hike will be at Big Bend: Stephens Party, first white baby born in California, Emigrant Trail (rust marks on the rocks), Lincoln Highway (we'll walk pristine sections, and then end up at Rainbow Lodge, an historic old time lodge. Dates still to be decided.

*The Sugar Bowl Academy is the large white building on Old 40 right at the top. If you go east from there it is steeply downhill to Rainbow Bridge. If you go west from there the next thing to see is Donner Ski Ranch on the right.





20 Placer County museums will be open for free the weekend of August 2, 3 for the 2014 Heritage Trail. Make it a history weekend traveling to the museums on Saturday and taking the Margie Powell hike on Sunday or vice versa.

The Trail Guide is available NOW at the DSHS and at the Summit Restaurant. For more information, check out: <http://www.theheritagetrail.blogspot.com/>

Lake Mary Dinners



Sugar Bowl has again given an evening at Lake Mary to the DSHS. A portion of the proceeds will be donated to the DSHS so if you like good food, a nice location, and friendly conversation, sign up for July 18.



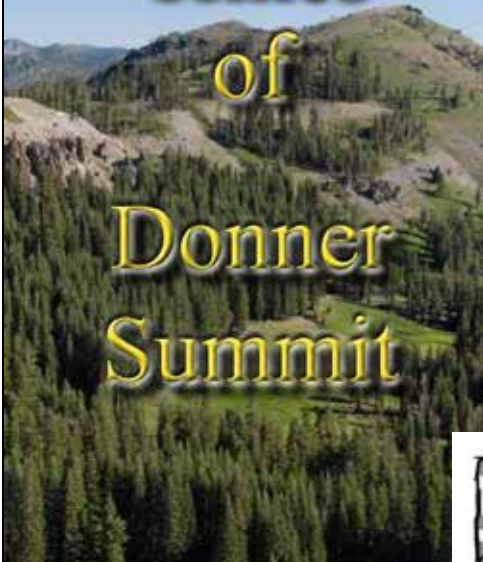
The Lake Mary facilities sit above Lake Mary and dining is on a deck overlooking the lake.

DSHS will be a beneficiary of one of the summer evenings, **July 18**. Seating is from 5:30 to 9:00. Reservations are a good idea (530) 426-7002.

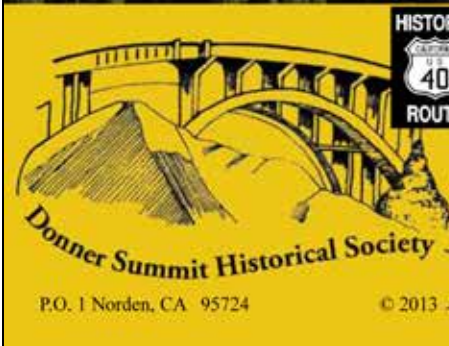
A varied menu selection of homemade soups, salads, seafood, wild game, vegetarian dishes, pastas, wines and desserts

July 18

Historic Hikes of Donner Summit



Take a hike this summer. Stop in at the DSHS, the Truckee Visitors' Center, the Auburn Visitors' Center, or the Summit Restaurant for your brochure to historical fun - complete with maps.



Check out the new menu at the Summit Restaurant, at the Soda Springs exit from I-80.

This season's menu has all the food of course but also historical articles and stories about the Donner Summit Snowsheds.



SUMMIT RESTAURANT AND BAR

Phone: 530-426-3904 <http://summitrestaurantandbar.com> email: maria_at_the_summit@yahoo.com

Established - 2001
Soda Springs, CA
Volume I Issue 3
Summer, 2014

Donner Summit Lodge Open Every Day

Summer Hours: Sat/Sun 8 A.M. - 8:30 P.M.
MTTFH Noon-8:30 P.M.
The bar is open until the crowd is gone.



Donner Summit Lodge, A Short History

Ever since the Dutch Hat Wagon Rd. was built in the early 1860's to service the building of the Transcontinental Railroad, there have been hosteries along the route over Donner Pass.

The first auto to cross Donner Pass crossed in 1901 and the first motorcycle in 1903. The first successful motorized "transcontinentalist" crossed the country using Donner Pass in 1903. With the arrival of the automobile, lodges began to spring up to service automobiles and provide relief for the "autoists".

By 1913 the first transcontinental highway, the Lincoln Highway, was in operation and auto traffic increased considerably. Small lodges and service stations were built along the route and early automobiles would have gone right past what is now Donner Summit Lodge. Once the highway was open in winter the lodges offered accommodations for snow sport enthusiasts.

Donner Summit Lodge was built in 1938 to take advantage of the growth of traffic over the, by then, year-round Highway 40. The lodge was expanded twice from the picture above, first just after World War II and then in the 1970's. Additions were made to both ends of the original lodge. The sign on the lodge above says, "Donner Summit Lodge Fine Food Ski Deemitories Cabins."

Snow - Not a Problem on Donner Summit

That's kind of what Theodore Judah said. Judah was chief engineer for the Central Pacific Railroad and laid out the route over Donner Summit. Mt. Judah is named for him (the Judah Loop is a GREAT hike - the views are spectacular).

Judah had studied the trees on the summit and noted where the moss started growing. He thought that was as high as the snow went and since the snow would not all fall at once he was sure the railroad could just push the few inches that fell at any one time, out of the way.

Donner Summit gets an average of 34 feet of snow each winter. In some years more than fifty feet fall. The first Winter they were building the tunnels, 1866, there were 44 storms and 60 feet of snow fell. The ski areas were probably very happy. Snow falls on Donner Summit in feet, not inches in a normal winter.



Not only does a lot of snow fall but the snow on Donner Summit is affectionately called "Sierra Cement." It is really heavy.

Even before the railroad was completed in 1869, the builders started building snowsheds to protect the track and eventually 40 miles of sheds were built. The sheds became an iconic symbol of Donner Summit.

In the picture above you can see the snowsheds stretching across the center of the photograph, across the face of Donner Peak.

Summit Restaurant does catering too. Call 426-3904

Keeping with tradition started in 2009 we've developed a new poster for 2014 featuring the iconic snowsheds of Donner Summit.

Until we do a series of articles on the snowsheds (which will be coming) you can pick up our new "The Snowsheds of Donner Summit" brochure available at the DSHS, The Summit Restaurant, or the visitors' center in Truckee.

You can see our other posters on our website.

The background

Our poster for 2014 celebrates the iconic snowsheds of Donner Summit.

Theodore Judah, who laid out the route of transcontinental railroad, studied the snow situation on the summit. He was sure snow would not be a problem. It would fall only a few inches at a time and never built up great depths. Judicious use of snow plows would keep the tracks clear. Judah came to his conclusion by studying the moss on the trees and the heights of stumps.

Judah was wrong. An average of 34 feet of snow falls each year on Donner Summit with some years getting as many as 60 feet. Snow falls are measure in feet not inches and the Sierra snow has earned the romantic sobriquet of "Sierra Cement" because it's heavy.

Before the railroad was completed in 1869 the company was already building snowsheds to shelter the track and trains. Eventually 40 miles of sheds were built.

Snowsheds solved one problem, snow fall, but created others. Donner Summit has some spectacular scenery. Rail passengers did not get to see it. Instead they road through the dark snowsheds subjected to the smoke from the engines. The sparks from the locomotives also caused snowshed fires that would race for miles consuming the tinder dry wood. The sheds acted as wonderful chimneys.

You can pick up our snowshed brochure at the DSHS in Soda Springs, the Summit Restaurant, or the visitors' centers in Truckee and Auburn. You can also download a copy from the link below and print it out yourself.

