

# The Donner Summit

# Heirloom



History and stories of the Donner Summit Historical Society

October, 2014 issue #74

## Meadow Lake to Phoenix Lake

### Hiking Through History

The trip to Meadow Lake from the south, in the September '14 Heirloom, did not sate the Mobile Historical Research Team's appetite for Meadow Lake. We also wanted to finish up the Then & Now for Alfred A. Hart's #179 (see page 11) that was taken at Phoenix Lake.

It was a long hike to Meadow Lake from the south and from Meadow Lake it's another 4 miles to Phoenix Lake. We thought we should go to the motor pool, requisition a vehicle and head in from the east. If you want to do that, take 89 North from Truckee and turn west on the Henness Pass Rd. Follow the signs for Meadow Lake. It's about 10 miles on dirt road after a few miles on paved road. Park at Meadow Lake and use your map to get to Phoenix Lake. See our last issue if you want to use an historical map, otherwise go to the Forest Service for their Tahoe Nat'l Forest map or a topo. The internet is also a good map source.

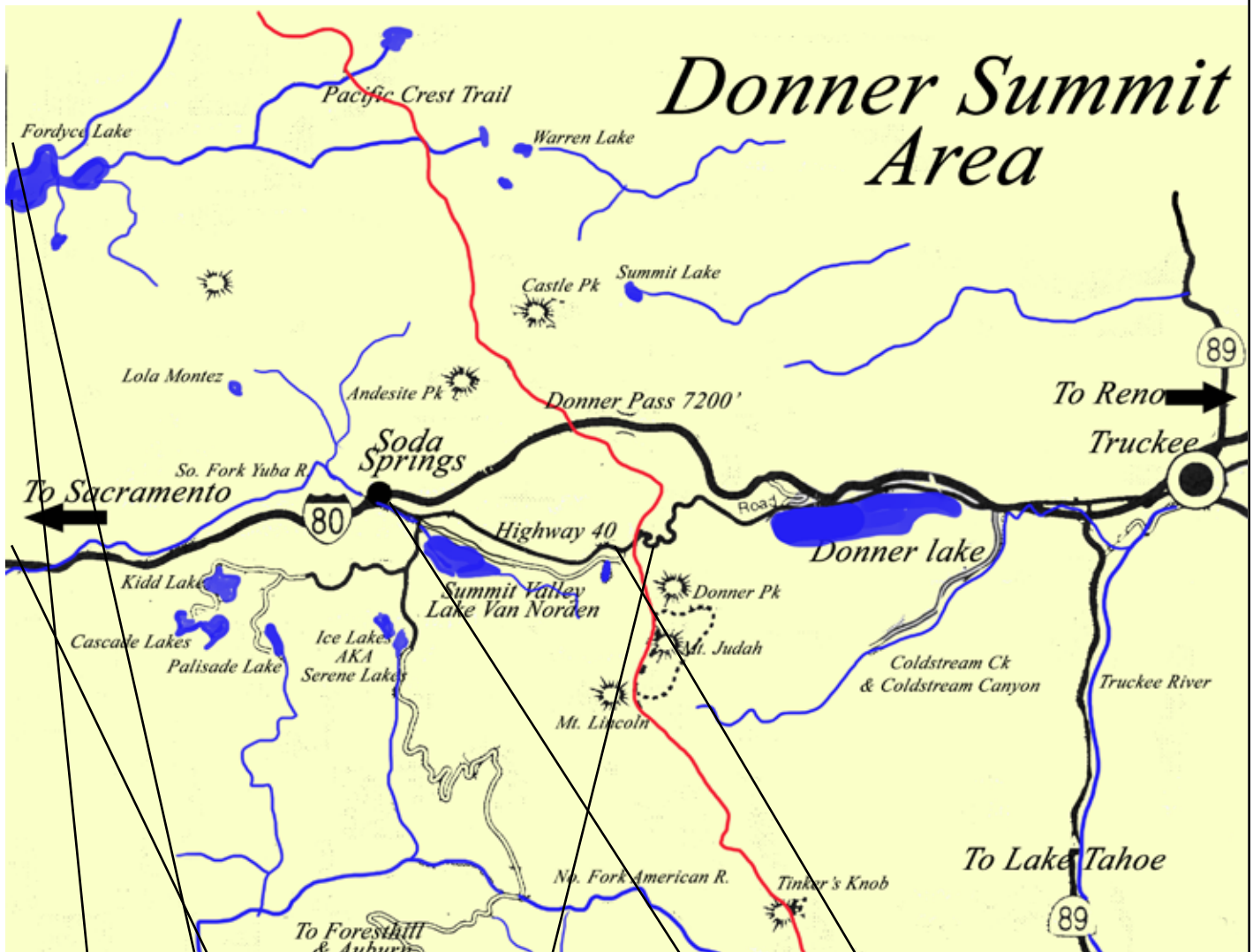
The amazing thing about the area is the proliferation of lakes, both named and unnamed. There are old mines all over the area – as you'll see. There are also a lot of dirt roads. The rock formations are really interesting. You can pick up the black rock, that the Meadow Lake miners thought were veins containing gold, as well as rock with copper. Some rocks have iron pyrite or Fool's Gold which maybe was confusing to the old time miners as you can see on page 5.

Do not make your trip when the Four Wheeler convention is in the neighborhood. We arrived just before their annual event. There were Four Wheelers, portable showers, event tents, rented chairs, trucks, etc. – everywhere at Meadow Lake. Fortunately we were heading out the other side, away from the temporary urban sprawl, for Phoenix Lake, about three miles.



Above: two views of an old boiler at Phoenix Lake.

# Story Locations in this Issue



## In This Issue

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editor:  
 Bill Oudegeest  
 209-606-6859  
 info@donnersummithistoricalsociety.org

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





The views are magnificent getting to Phoenix Lake.

We approached Phoenix Lake from the top, above, and worked our way down finding an old mine, as you can see here, right, then past one lake and on to Phoenix. On the other side of Phoenix sat a stamp mill that fell into the lake in 1867. Parts maybe from it are on the shoreline along with the stamps carefully bundled under iron and brush ready for someone to come along with a workable method of extracting gold from the ore. There are also the remains of mines up the steep area above that leads up to Old Man Mountain.

As we left we found the old road that led in to Phoenix Lake, long since made impassable for vehicles by erosion. Thoughtfully someone had placed trail ducks along the way. As we'd approached the lake we'd wondered how did anyone get in to the mines, how did they bring materials and how did they get ore out? Then we found the old boiler (page 1) and stamps on the lakeshore. Finding the old road answered the question.

Coming out of Phoenix Lake it was a long hike uphill then along dirt roads back to Meadow Lake and our vehicle but it was worth it for the views and history. If you are an aficionado of backpacking/ camping, Phoenix Lake is a worthy destination and indeed, we came across a couple doing exactly that, enjoying the solitude and the beauty.

**Above:** Phoenix Lake in the distance with a smaller unnamed lake in the foreground. That's Old Man Mtn. behind the lake. The mountain is a landmark coming east on I-80 after the Highway 20 junction). Picture taken from the tailings, the flat spot mid-picture, in the bottom picture. **Center:** Art Clark in the mine, which is about 100 yards long. Mine entrance is to the right of the tailings in the bottom picture. For safety the rest of the expedition stayed outside while Art braved the cold waters. There were still rails for mine cars on the floor of the tunnel.







Above: looking down on Phoenix Lake. The boiler on page 1 is on the far shore on the left side. Behind the lake is Old Man Mountain which also was explored for riches. There are some tunnels and artifacts on both sides of the mountain. On the other side of Old Man Mountain and across a valley is I-80 and off to the west is Lake Spaulding.

To the left is the route of the DSHS Mobile Historical Research Team starting at Meadow Lake in the upper right, then along roads and finally cross country, to Phoenix Lake. On the return trip the team found the old road that leads out of Phoenix Lake (southeast side) and followed that back to Meadow Lake.

On the next page, what the Team found on the way. Top: pipes sitting in an old mine shaft filled with water. Many of the rocks on the trip were so interesting because of their shapes, designs embedded in them, or the minerals evident. The rocks on the left side were just a few we hope were inlaid with iron pyrite and not gold because we left them behind. The rock on the right has a lot of copper (the green). The rock on the top right has interesting abstracts.

The bottom picture is the label plate on the boiler on page 1: "Golden Gate Iron Works San Francisco. Palmer Knox & Co." One wonders how the boiler and other things traveled into such rough country.

# By The Way

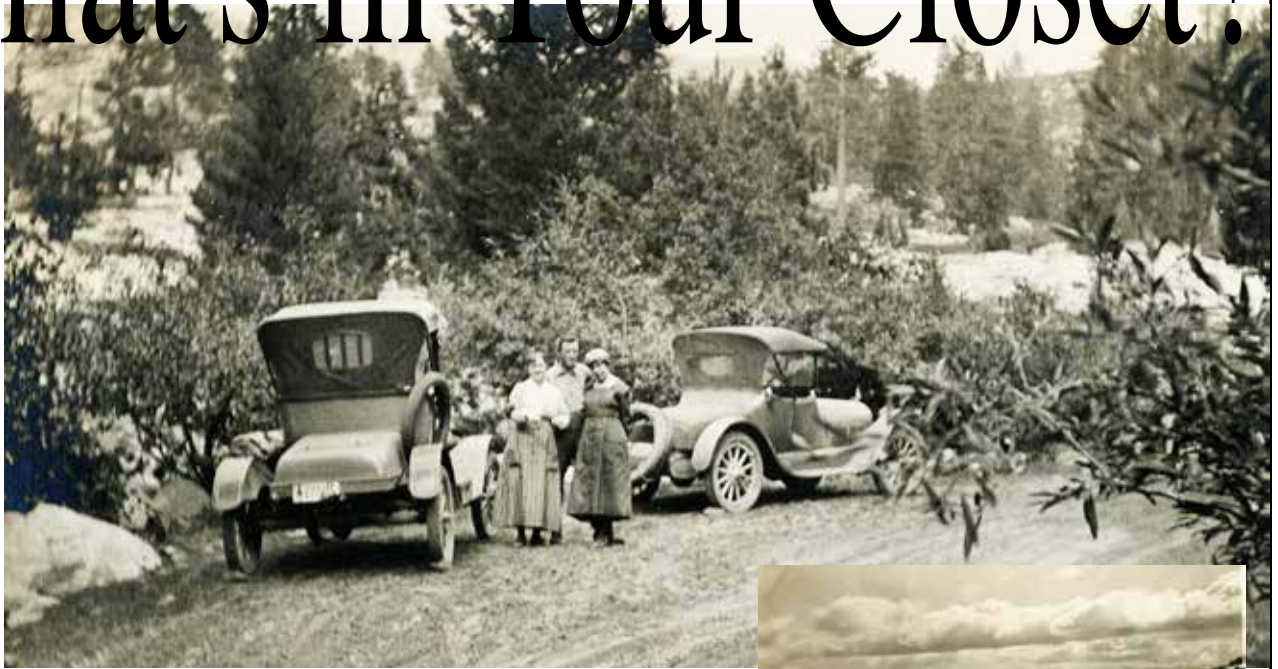
There are Native American petroglyphs at Meadow Lake; can you find them?





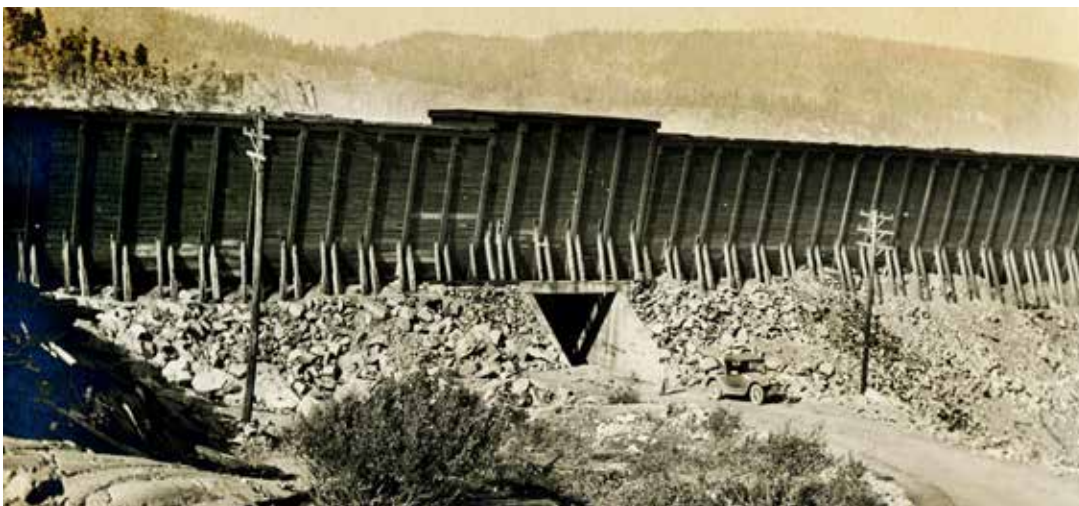


# What's in Your Closet?



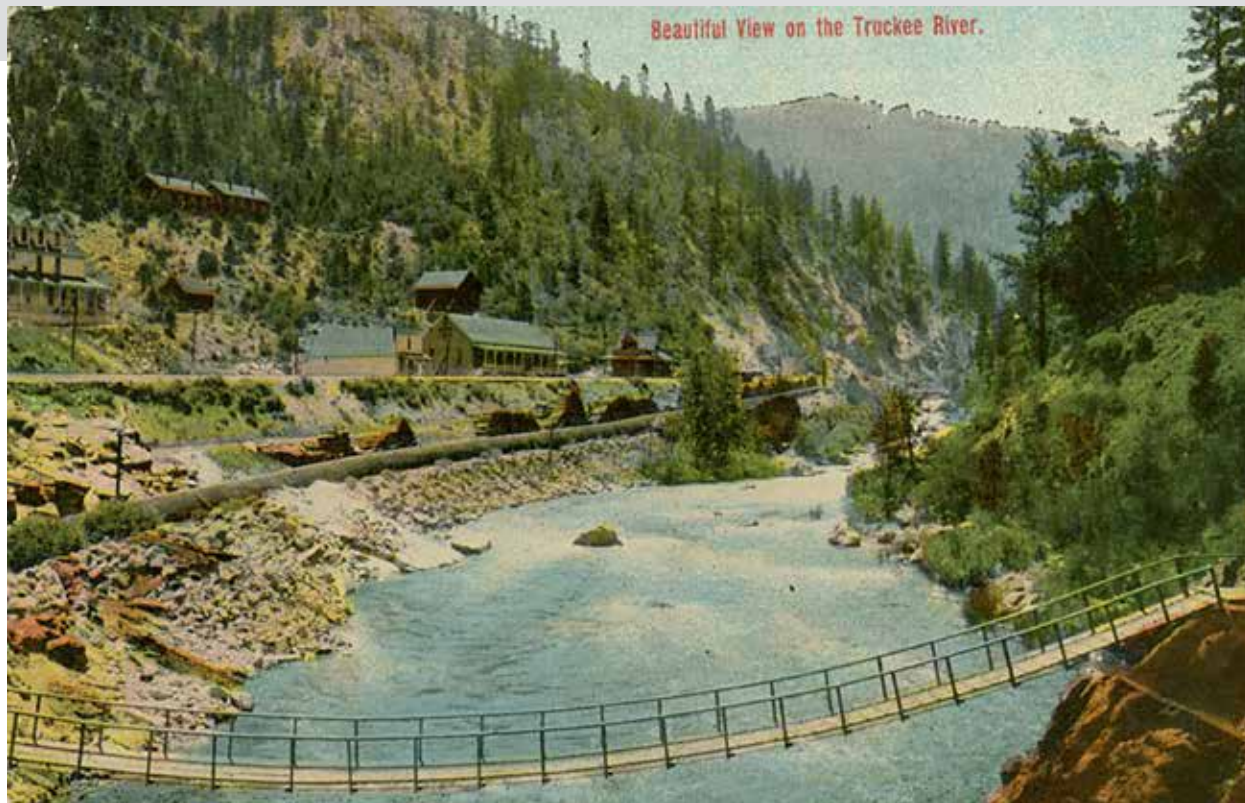
Regular readers will remember that last month on pages 1 & 2 and in our August Heirloom on page 13 we ran "What's in Your Closet." Those were donations of photographs by Hart Corbett and Bill and Diane Kirkham. This month we have some more from the Kirkham collection for your enjoyment and also to spur you to go through your closet.

Here we have, top, cars on the Lincoln Highway below Donner Summit, a view of Donner Lake titled "On the Way to California," a person on snowshoes in Summit Valley, and a view of the snowsheds atop the underpass. All date from the 1920's. We don't have any more recent donations so if you want to see this feature again, you'll have to check your closet.

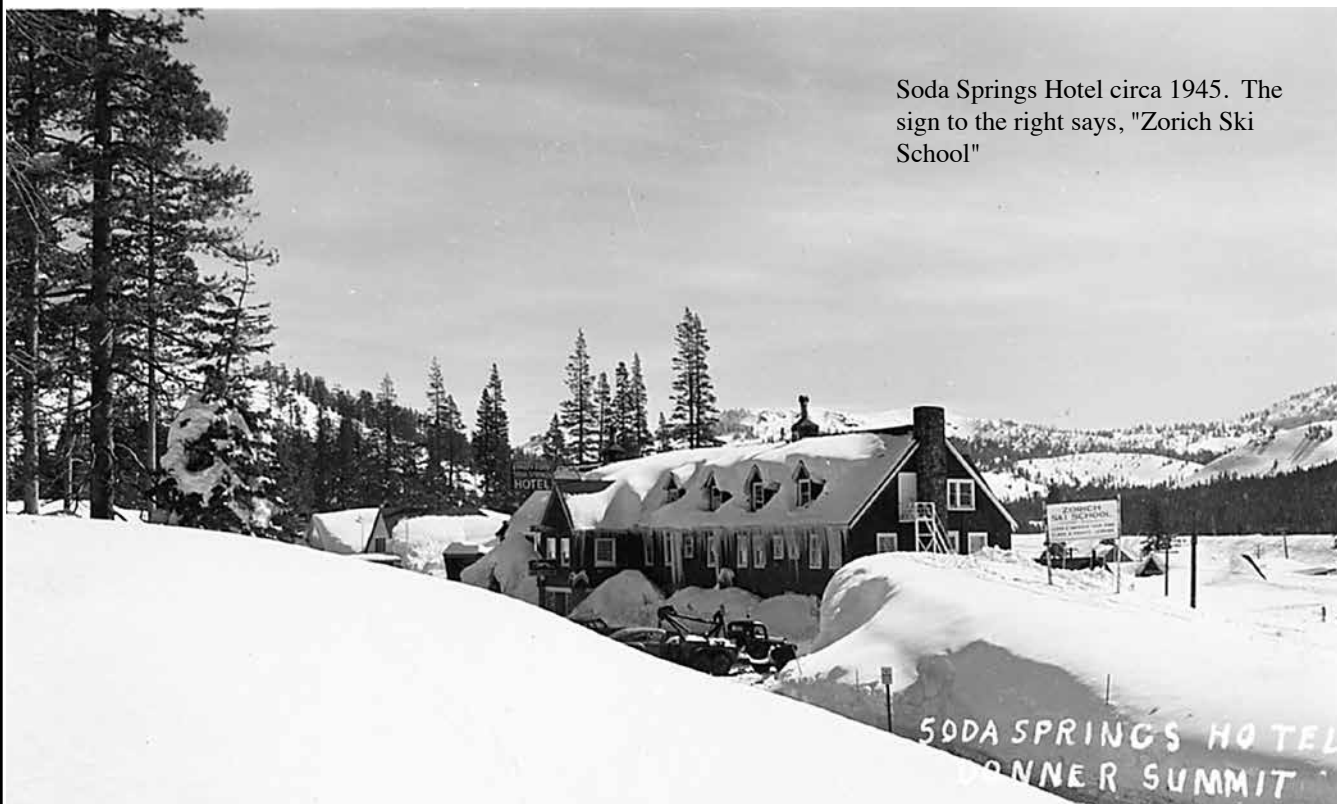




# From the DSHS Archives



Postcard: "Beautiful View on the Truckee River" with suspension bridge. Date unknown



Soda Springs Hotel circa 1945. The sign to the right says, "Zorich Ski School"



# From the DSHS Archives

80. Donner Lake from the Summit, Calif.



Above: view of Donner Lake from the Summit almost from atop Tunnel 6. Note the wooden snowsheds on the right and a good view of the old Dutch Flat road where it crossed through the snowsheds before the underpass was built. The underpass is where the dirt road curves right and disappears. Note too that Tunnel 7, the one that interrupts the snowsheds still has its original rock roof. That was removed and replaced with concrete when trains got larger. The dirt road is the Lincoln Highway.



1919 postcard "Donner Lake from the Summit, Calif."

It's addressed to Miss Nellie Harvey 244 1/2 Liberty St. Reno, Nevada

"Dear Friend,

We are stopping over a day at Truckee, so thought I would drop you a line. I think we will leave tomorrow.

We'll write you later.

Best regards to Maria and Hattie.

Your Sincerely,

Elmer



# Book Review

In 1850 John Steele crossed the country heading California and put his experiences into a book called, Across the Plains in 1850. Most of Mr. Steele's book is about the long journey but a small part is about crossing Donner Summit.

Presumably Mr. Steele and his party were some of those emerging, he writes, "from the desert" at Pyramid Lake. "Ragged, dusty, weary, and starved they come, some with wagons, others driving their worn-out teams unharnessed or unyoked, many whose teams have perished, sunburnt and weatherbeaten, with their last morsel of provisions in knapsacks on their backs, with bruised, blistered, and bleeding feet, plodding through the hot sand, their nervous sensibilities deadened by excessive toil and pain."

It was September and the party was headed up the Truckee. They had to cross and recross the Truckee "which we found quite dangerous, because of the swift current and deep water." At one point the current pressed the oxen and Steele jumped in to the water to guide the animals. He couldn't wade against the current and on either side it was "eight or ten feet deep." The rocks were slippery. His only chance was to swim for it before going over the falls. Just at the brink he caught a rope thrown by a fellow traveler. That day they forded the river six times, "each being very dangerous."

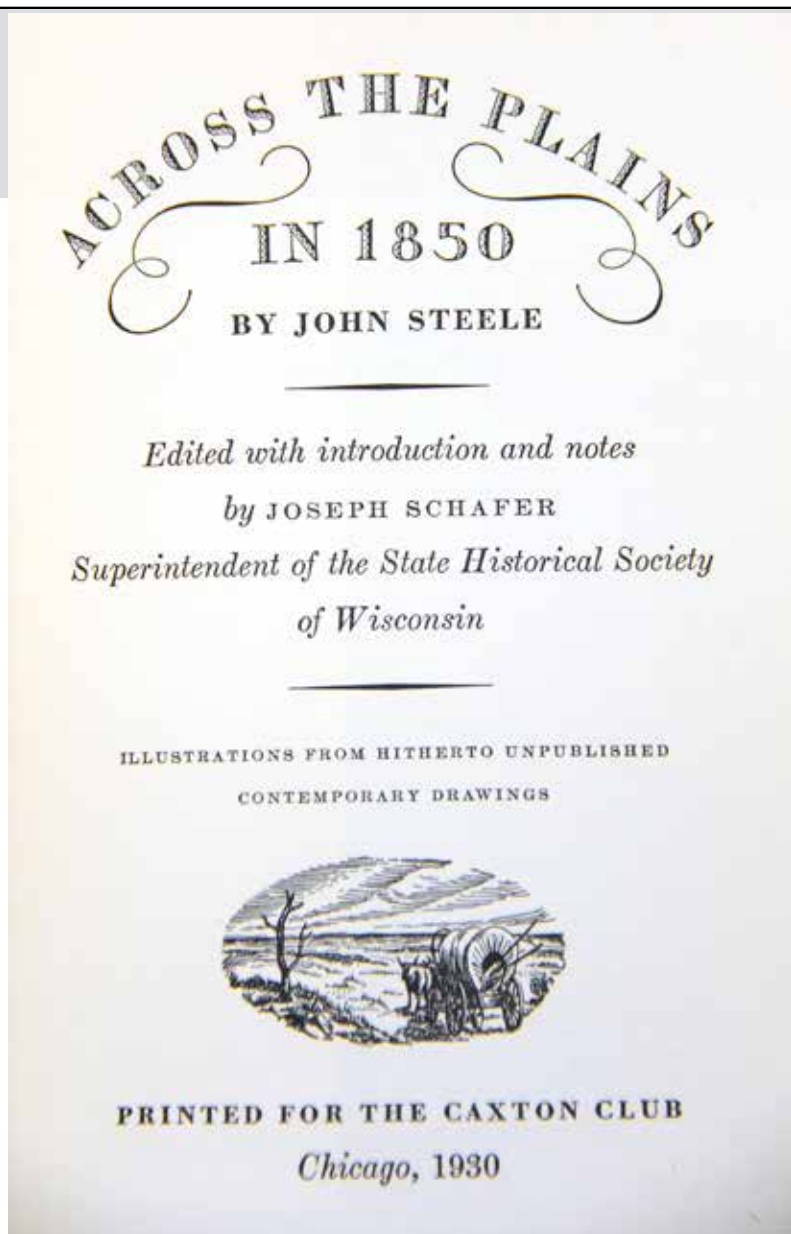
"There is now great suffering among the emigrants. Those who have but a morsel of food daily, find it necessary to divide that morsel with some one who has none. There are frequent 'trading posts,' along our road, but few have the money to pay the price of provisions, never less than three dollars a pound....Many a fine outfit [horses, oxen, wagons] has been sold for a few pounds of flour and bacon."

"...spring and summer have gone, and the cold wind again sounds the approach of winter..." One day as they traveled they came across some Californians who set up a little trading post with goods they'd carried on mules. Travelers with Steele offered to trade a large mule for flour. They were offered six pounds of flour. The travelers refused. They needed at least 25 pounds to get to the mines in California. They were refused and went off to build a fire. A little later one of the travelers tried again and was again refused by the Californians. Shortly there was a shot and the mule was dead and "ample supper was made from its flesh....and no doubt, afforded them sufficient food for the rest of the journey."

"...we neared the summit of the Sierra Nevada, whose snowy peaks rose in wild magnificence against the sky. Although the road was rough, and in some places steep, the air was cool, and we...[camped] near one of Captain Donner's old cabins..."

There they found another trading post and were able to buy some flour.

"Monday, September 16. Early this morning I visited Truckee Lake, half a mile above our camp. It is about three and a half miles long and one wide. Around the margin is a belt of tall spruce, fir and pine trees, and toward the west, in sublime grandeur, rise the granite cliffs of the Sierra Nevada. So securely is it embosomed among rocks and trees, it would seem that no breeze





could wake a ripple across its crystal surface.”

Before going on Steele visited the site of the Donner Party near the lake. “Most of the cabins had been burned, and their charred remains, and the whitened bones, half buried among the withered pine leaves, are sad memorials of the event. Also the tall stumps, some twenty feet high, showing where the trees were cut, gave an idea of the great depth of snow.”

“From our camp to the summit, over seven miles, the road was very steep; in places passing over large granite boulders. Consequently we climbed slowly, and at noon stopped at a large spring, half a mile from the highest point. After resting awhile, most of the oxen were attached to a single wagon, and with difficulty it was drawn up the precipitous ascent. This was repeated until all the wagons were on the mountain top.

“Having reached the height of the last mountain range, so we could look forward from its summit to the land of our dreams, toil and hope, we gave three long and loud cheers. Looking down the steep gorge whence we had come, we bade adieu to its dark avenues, towering cliffs, sequestered shades, bright waters and melancholy scenes. We felt a great relief in bidding farewells to the mountains, valley, and deserts of the great interior, with its adventures, romance, tragedy, sorrow, suffering and death – scenes which will linger in our minds as memorials of our journey across the plains.

“A short distance north of the pass I climbed the dizzy heights of a granite peak. The view was magnificent. Perennial snow, rock, chasm, forest, lake and stream; a veritable map of one of the wildest, grandest parts of America, spread out on every side.

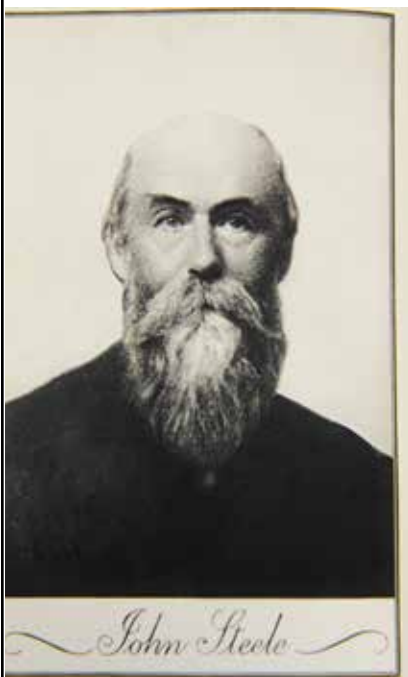
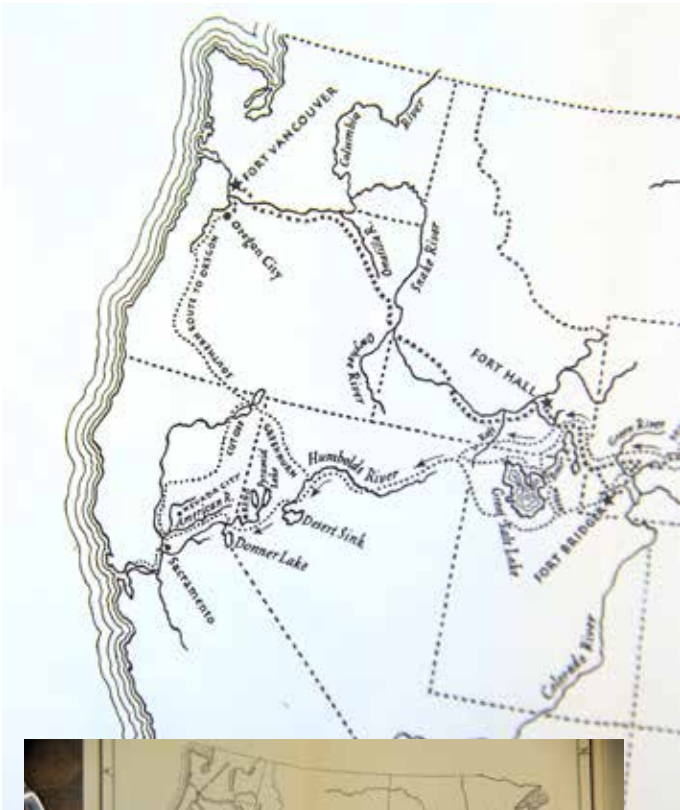
“By making a series of acute angles, our road down the precipitous western slope was quite easy; and from thence, following a mountain gorge about four miles, we came to a small valley, overgrown with grass and clover, and belted by a dense pine forest.

“Here we camped, and turning the oxen to feed in the fresh pasture, we built a large fire on the bank of a clear brook and although few could boast of anything for supper better than a scanty ration of bean soup, there arose through the tall woods, the merry laugh and almost forgotten song, and a more than usual cheerfulness pervaded the camp.”

Tuesday, September 17. Scarcely a blush mantled the eastern sky at the approach of morning, the rarefied breeze came whispering through the pines, and a white frost sparkled on the grass. The tents were folded, and the drowsy oxen and dusty wagons moved carelessly down the valley. In about two miles, turning into the deep pine wood on our left, we passed under the dense boughs that, like cloud piled upon cloud, shut out the sun.

“Our road was very rocky, and during the afternoon we passed five small lakes, clear, cold, of great depth, the banks generally perpendicular and of granite. At noon we stopped at the fifth lake to let the oxen feed.”

Left: John Steele, above maps from the book.





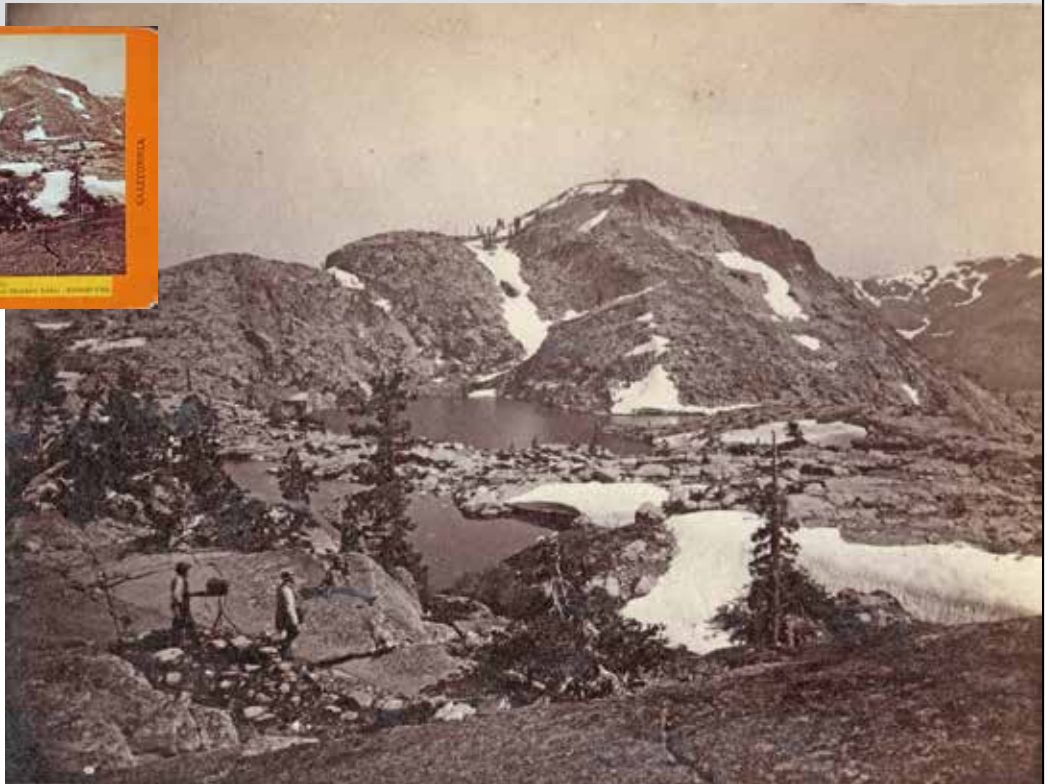
# Then & Now with Art Clark



Old Man Mountain - A A Hart 179  
 A few miles south of Meadow Lake and the boom/bust mining activity there, Old Man Mountain stands with Phoenix Lake at it's foot. When viewed from Interstate 80, it shows a profile similar to Yosemite's Half Dome [that's from the other side].

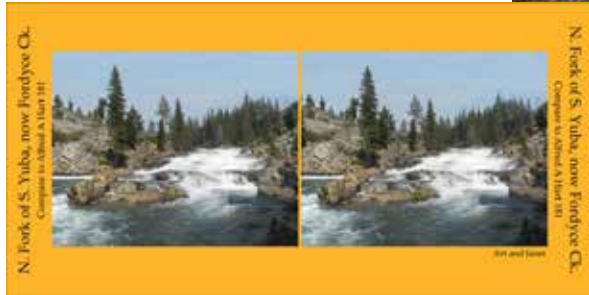
This view includes three men and a dog. One is taking a picture, one is admiring the view, while a third is seated on the rock and holds a rifle. The dog sits patiently. So, who took the picture? There must have been a fourth man using a second camera. If Hart was the fourth man, who is the other photographer? [That's Art Clark in the bottom picture, the reprise of above. How many Art Clarkes are there and what is the secret behind his magic camera?]

Photo location 39° 22.835'N 120° 31.541'W





# Then & Now with Art Clark



Alfred A Hart 181 - North Fork South Yuba

Now known as Fordyce Creek, this spot is about one-quarter mile below Fordyce Dam, built in 1873. The early photo shows an artist and his subject sitting on rocks which are now often underwater, depending on the flow released from the dam. The old photo was taken from a bridge which once crossed the creek here.

This spot is now well known among kayakers as a Class V rapids called Eraserhead, and is the first big drop after putting in at the base of Fordyce Dam. It's described as "A surging drop over barely submerged granite, with deep holes and big rooster tails."

Photo location 39° 22.653'N 120° 30.080'W





**DONNER SUMMIT HISTORICAL SOCIETY**  
[www.donnersummithistoricalociety.org](http://www.donnersummithistoricalociety.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

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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.

\_\_\_\_\_

# More From Phoenix Lake

Courtesy of Art Clark



Clockwise from top left:

boiler

stamps stored ready for stamping

wall at old mill site

junk





More pictures courtesy of Art Clark: Top panorama Red Mtn. from Old Man Mtn. above Phoenix Lake  
Panorama looking north from Old Man Mtn. above Phoenix Lake.  
Phoenix Lake looking down from Old Man Mtn.







# DONNER PARTY HIKE

OCTOBER 4 & 5, 2014



Learn secrets of the Sierras  
as you hike with local historians.

Ersikine Creative Photography



Explore scenic Donner Summit with local historians on interpretive walks and hikes. As you trace the steps of the emigrants, imagine the clip-clop of oxen and the rumble of wagons of the countless pioneers who scaled the mighty Sierra Nevada in search of a better life.

Learn about the success of the Stephens Party; the tragic events the Donner Party endured; and the importance of the transcontinental railroad. It's a day of vistas, history and camaraderie as you trace the steps of the past.

### SATURDAY HIKES

Choose from one of 5 hikes ranging from 3.5 to 6 miles with varying degree of difficulty. Explore the trails, see petroglyphs or the China Wall. Stroll through meadows or discover hidden Sierra lakes.

### SUNDAY WALKING TOUR

Learn about the grueling mishaps of the Donner Party and the archeological finds that remain. Then, it's on to Donner Memorial State Park to view the Murphy Cabin Site and Pioneer Monument.

### LODGING PACKAGES

Area lodging packages are available for participants.

### REGISTER TO SECURE YOUR SPOT IN TIME

Tour size is limited. Reserve your spot on the trail by September 26 for early savings.

For more information:  
info@donnerpartyhike.com  
donnerpartyhike.com



Produced by Just Imagine Marketing & Design



# It's a Wonderful Life

## Norm Saylor @ 80+

To the 175 or so people who gathered at the Summit Restaurant on September 27th, it was like the end scene of "It's a Wonderful Life." People had gathered to celebrate Norm Saylor's eighty years of life and sixty years as a resident of Donner Summit. Norm ran Donner Ski Ranch for 46 years, still runs his excavating business, and is president of the Donner Summit Historical Society. It was clear from the testimonials and speeches that Norm positively affected many lives positively over the decades.

He was presented with resolutions from the California State Senate and the Placer County Board of Supervisors. The first was presented by Senator Ted Gaines, who helped serve birthday cake to the crowd, and the second by Pat Malberg, Lake Mary resident. Norm even got his own 20 Mile Museum sign (the 44th by the way) making him an official historical landmark.

The resolutions attested to Norm's having been the first to open a ski area to snowboarders, free stylers, and handicapped skiers. He founded the Donner Summit Historical Society, saved the Donner Summit Bridge, helped start the local PUD and was a constant supporter of the local elementary school and various clubs. He also brought many activities such as rock crawling and races to Donner Summit. After the resolutions and 20 Mile Museum sign had been presented people got up to speak and shared their stories about Norm. They were stories of help, encouragement and guidance of others, and humor. There were dozens.

One seldom knows his effect on others or what the extent of one's personal legacy is. Norm knows now.




One thing our graphics department thought of was to commemorate our living landmark with a 20 Mile Museum sign, just like our other landmarks have been commemorated. The result is above. If you would like to look closer look at our 20 Mile Museum webpage. There you will find a version you can enlarge on your computer screen.



# Norm Saylor

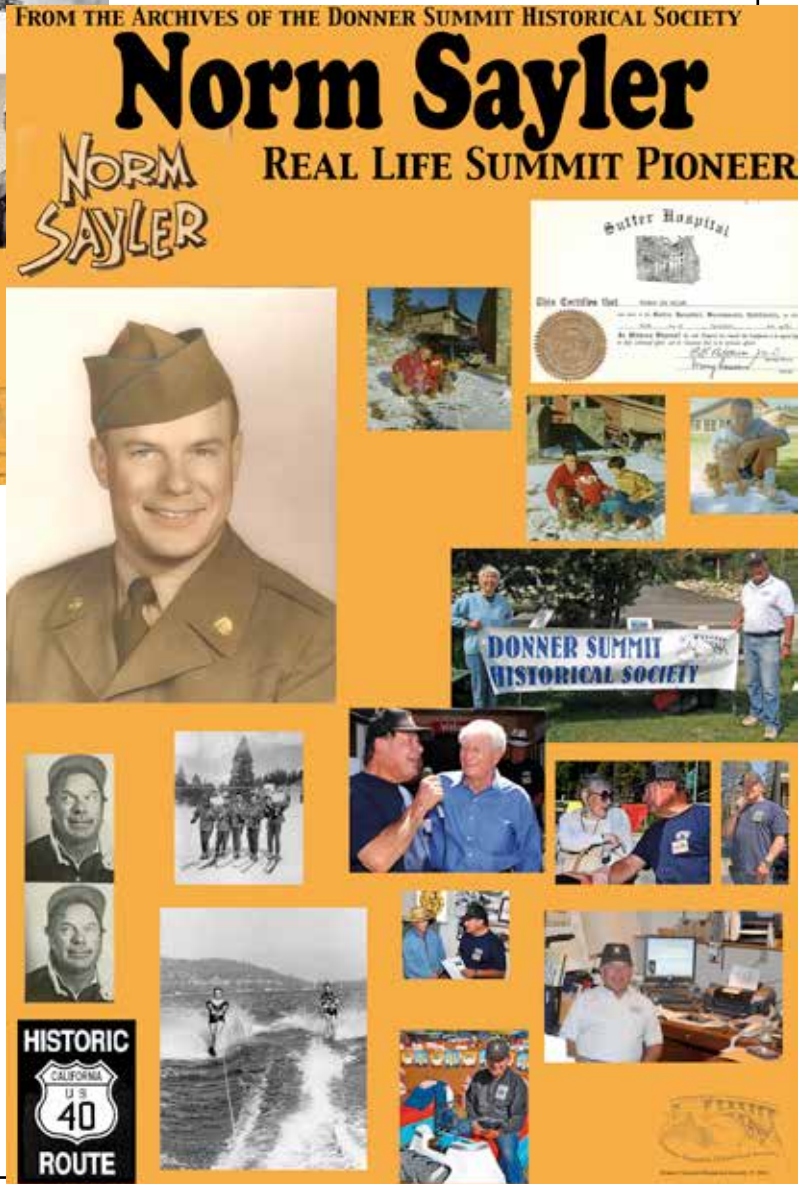
## REAL LIFE SUMMIT PIONEER



Here are two of the posters our research arm put together from pictures Norm's daughter, Mitzi, found in the family archives.

He's led an eventful life but looking at the left hand poster one can only wonder how he got to the exalted age of 80.

The posters are available for further perusal on our website on the exhibits page.



Pictured previous page from top:  
Senator Ted Gaines and Norm Saylor  
Don Bostick entertaining with a specially written song about Norm.  
Pat Malberg presenting the Placer County resolution.

Next page from top clockwise:  
Norm Saylor; Nancy Latimer in front of the "Snow Devils"; unidentified guest; Norm and Gary Robinson;  
Norm Saylor; Pat Malberg; Senator Ted Gaines and Norm.



