

The Donner Summit

Heirloom

History and stories of the Donner Summit Historical Society



January, 2015 issue #77

Bucking Snow Intense Snowplowing

Because our editorial staff likes to be prepared for any eventualities, this article was written in late October and finalized a few weeks later, before any real snowfall. Its genesis was perhaps a wish for snow to actually fall (except on our decks and driveways) to provide some drought relief. The Sierra snows are California's "reservoir," releasing water at steady manageable rates during the Spring to fill lakes and actual reservoirs. As you can see on page 6, sometimes that "reservoir" is full to the brim and at others, almost empty. Our drought has persisted for a few years now. Maybe this January and this winter will see a change and maybe this article and the chart on page 6 with the reminders under it of heavy winters, will serve as a suggestion to Mother Nature.

"If you have never before ridden behind the plow, there comes over you a sickening sense of utter helplessness."

E.W. Hadley, 1897

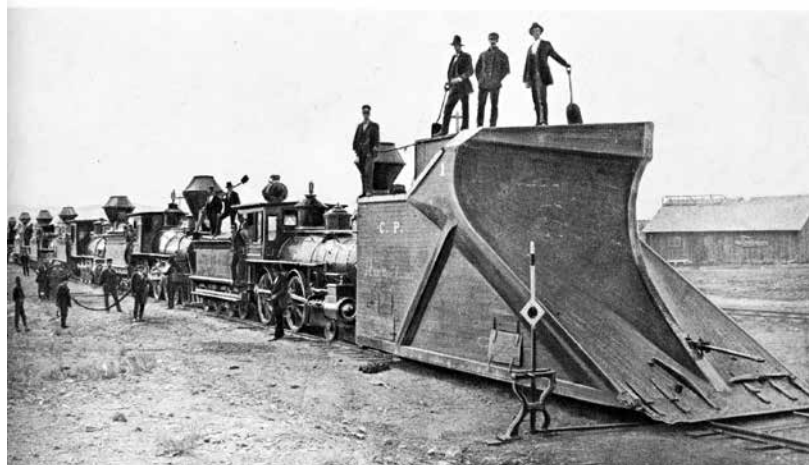
Snow is pretty – light and fluffy – fun to catch on your tongue unless you have to keep trains running before the coming of modern snow removal machinery. Still, usually they just send a train down the track with a snowplow mounted on the front and the line stays open. That works unless the snow is too heavy, falls too fast, or is, what we, in the business of keeping our decks clear, call "Sierra Cement."

When our research staff came across [Workin' on the Railroad Reminiscences from the Age of Steam](#) and saw that it was a collection of primary sources, we thought it had good possibilities for some Donner Summit material. The problem with coming across books on the Internet is that one can't check closely. The book was ordered and expectations were high in our library.

Unfortunately, even though the railroad is a big part of the Summit, the growth of America, and presented unique railroading problems, there was nothing specific

to Donner Summit or even California in the book. Apparently there are railroads all across the country. Still, there was one chapter, "Bucking Snow," that is interesting in relation to Donner Summit and our average annual 34' snowfalls.

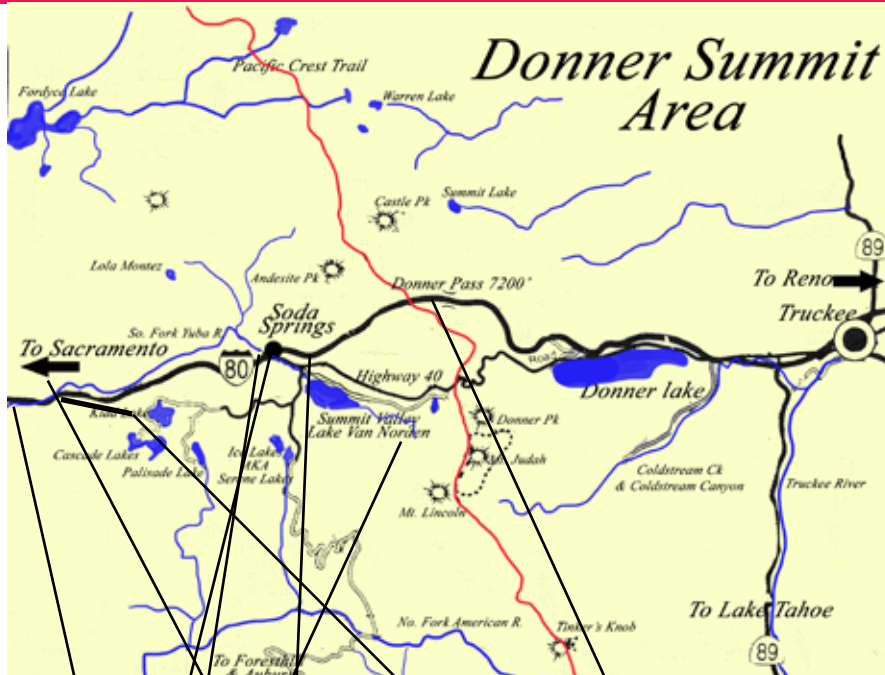
The first part of this chapter was by E.W. Hadley and originally titled "Fighting Snow on the Railroads of the Northwest" which he wrote for [Scientific American](#) in 1897 (July 10). The article was about



Bucker Plow with attendant engines in Nevada

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Story Locations in this Issue



In This Issue Auburn Ski Club pg 5 in 1930's and then, today

Central Sierra Snowlab pg 6

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Oakland Ski Club pg 10

Old Man Mountain pg 16 Rattlesnake Mtn. pg 15

Donner Summit Lodge and Summit Restaurant pg 17

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Ads From California Ski News, 1930's

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

The SAGA OF A Man-Hungry Moronic Nymphomaniac On The Emigrant Trail In 1846



by Marshall Fey



Diarist Heinrich Lienhard, was with the 1846 Hoppe Party that left Fort Bridger for the Hastings Cutoff five days before the Donner Party. Traveling in a small wagon with four other single men, he was impressed by the lurid antics of Lucinda .

Swiss Heinrich Lienhard Wrote His Descriptive Diary in German Script

The diary remained in the hands of Lienhard's descendents until the Bancroft Library acquired it in 1949. In 1961, it was translated to English and entitled, From St. Louis to Sutter's Fort, 1846. This interesting and excellent reference book was reviewed in the November, 2014 issue of the [Heirloom](#).

A Diarist writes of the unusual antics of an unusual maiden

Heinrich Lienhard was one of three most noteworthy reporters of the great western migrations of 1846. The twenty-six year old Swiss emigrant, fluent in German, left Springfield, Missouri at the same time as the ill-fated Donner family.

Lienhard was traveling in the same party as Jacob Hoppe along with his hired servant, the sex-crazed Lucinda Jane Saunders. George Stewart in his classic California Trail, An Epic With Many Heros, included several of Lucinda's more absurd episodes that had been colorfully told in the Lienhard diary. The renowned historian describing Lucinda wrote, "who turned out to be what we may consider a low-grade moron with nympho-maniac tendencies. She was a thorn in the flesh of respectabilities."

Lienhard's diary entries of Lucinda are verbatim and are as follows;

Lienhard's First Encounter With Lucinda

Another time, when I had gone for a walk upstream along the wooded edge and was returning to our camp on the opposite side of the stream, I came unexpectedly upon a lone emigrant wagon, in which there was a beautiful young woman with three children and a servant girl. The latter was a buxom fair-haired girl in her twenties. On inquiring, I learned that they were on their way to California. Then, when I asked why they had not joined the rest of the party with whom we were camping, they seemed to avoid a direct answer. The woman said that her husband, Mr. Hoppe, just happened to be away, but would return presently. They asked me whether I had a family with me, and I told them that we were just five unmarried men, of whom I was the youngest. When the husky servant girl heard this, she asked me who was doing our wash. I naturally told her that we did it ourselves, whereupon she immediately replied that she would be willing to do mine, if I would supply the soap. Her mistress, however, cut short her offer, addressing her with these words, "Lucinda, leave that be. I'll see that you have enough work to do for us, without doing the wash for other people."

**[Parenthetically,
Lienhard, his train,
and Lucinda, all
went over Roller
Pass on Donner
Summit.**

Editor]

Lucinda Makes Her First Attempt to Trap a Man

Since several of us had seen [Zins] walking arm in arm with the flirtatious laundry maid, Lucinda, we had our suspicions about him. But Zins was just as emphatic in his denial as the rest of us. A young man, Benjamin Gordon," had been selected to act as justice of the peace to tie the nuptial knot, and Miss Lucinda had also appeared in a somewhat better dress than she usually wore. We, of course, had to clear up the matter; the constant gaping at us was annoying. I turned to Ben Gordon and asked him to name or point out the man who was supposed to be united with the marriage-mad Lucinda. As we expected, he pointed to our companion Zins as the man who had asked him to unite him with Lucinda. But Zins did not budge. He tried to make it clear that he was too poor to marry and that he had just wanted to have a little fun. Thus the affair ended amidst general hilarity, and Lucinda returned to the wagon where she kept her few miserable belongings. Zins considered himself the hero of the evening.

Lucinda is thrown out of Hoppe's Wagon and Tries Once More to Get Her Man

Lucinda had left Mr. Hoppe, and the Harlan family took her in. One of their wagons was driven by a poor but handsome and good natured boy of eighteen, whose name was Alfred. This youth suddenly decided to take Lucinda for his wife. They did not

have a marriage license, but were properly married by a member of the party, who acted as justice of the peace, after which they were packed as man and wife in one and the same wagon. It is generally assumed that the "Golden Night" should be especially happy for newlyweds; therefore, it was strange that poor Alfred and Lucinda should have vexed each other so much that night that they absolutely did not want to have anything to do with each other the next morning. The reason for their quarrel and their mutual decision to break their solemn vows-though not declared before an altar, but before an ordinary emigrant wagon-was not openly discussed but was whispered round about.

Lucinda is Once Again Thrown Out of Hoppe's Wagon

The next day, the sixteenth of August, this party started up and the lead wagons had already started moving, when someone threw out a bundle of clothing from one of the last wagons. This bundle belonged to the blonde, stout young lady named Lucinda. The owner of it was probably even less welcome in the wagon than the bundle itself. This bundle was thrown out of Mr. Harlan's wagon, in which Miss Lucinda had found refuge twice before, but they got tired of her again and considered throwing out the bundle as the best means of getting rid of the man-crazy Lucinda. If the character of this notorious person hadn't been so well known, this act of Harlan's would have been considered quite heartless. Even now some of the party found it such. Mr. Hoppe had taken her with him before we reached the wilderness, but she had left him twice. Hence he was in no mood to take into one of his wagons again this girl, who was walking in the grass with her bundle, apparently in tears. There was much bandying of words, in which one party tried to pass her on to the other, until finally there seemed to be general agreement that one could hardly leave this female alone in the wilderness. So in spite of everything, Hoppe's family had to take her in again, which Mr. Hoppe did reluctantly.

A Hostile Lucinda at the Salt Lake Desert Crossing Celebration

Today most of the wagons, which had been left behind, were brought into camp. Everybody was in good spirits. Stories were told, and there was singing and dancing. The young girls again gathered together, and in their midst Miss Lucinda took her place uninvited, like a devil among angels. It was obvious that Lucinda was not welcome among them. Either she was not aware of it, or she did not want to be. The young men stood in a circle around the singing girls. Alfred, who had been Lucinda's husband for ten hours, stood next to me at my left, and like most of the others listened to the songs. Then Lucinda rose and threw a short stick of wood at him but missed him, the piece of wood grazing the hair of both of us. If it had struck Alfred in the face, it might have injured him considerably, because Lucinda was a strong, two-legged animal. This new stunt of Lucinda's was a little too much for every body. Although the girls all turned away from her and gave her disdainful looks, Lucinda didn't feel at all inclined to budge from her place.

After reaching California Lucinda Continues her Lustful Demeanor

Later I heard that as soon as Lucinda came to the first settlement in California, she immediately married a husky young fellow. Soon afterwards, he became ill and died." In the fall of 1847, when I was acting as overseer at Sutter's Fort, I happened to meet Lucinda again. She had become a widow since her dear, dear husband had died a short time before. Her greatest comfort in the

fort was when people told her she was still so young that she would surely soon get another husband, whereupon her answer was usually, "Do you think so?" The men in the fort at that time did not quite measure up to her amorous needs. With the exception of a rather dried-up Irishman by the name of Bray;" no one really paid much attention to her, and Bray himself soon seemed to entertain some doubts about his ability to fulfill satisfactorily the duties of a husband to her if she should become his wife. Because of these doubts, his first desire for marriage seemed to cool off suddenly, and he preferred to continue his bachelor life for a while longer. When Lucinda became completely convinced that there was no chance for her to make a catch in the fort, she left this region and favored with her presence the pueblo San Jose, situated not far from the south tip of the Bay of San Francisco. When she arrived there, she cast off her widowhood by marrying a sailor. According to people who knew her and saw her, she repeated this experiment three times in six weeks. It's a good thing that I don't know any more stories about Lucinda, because it has been an effort for me to tell this one.



EMIGRANT TRAILS
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Marshall Fey is an eminent Emigrant Trail historian. He has written numerous times for the Heirloom (look at our indices on our newsletter web pages). Marshall is also the author of Emigrant Trails (reviewed in the April, '11 Heirloom) a book anyone interested in the emigrant experience will want.

In last month's [Heirloom](#) we highlighted the Auburn Ski Club and its part in popularizing Winter sports. There was not room in the last issue for the essay by Wendell Robie, founder of the Club which appeared in the January 3, 1933 issue of [California Ski News](#), the Club's publication. It sounded really good to our research staff so we reprint it here.

Wendell Robie Takes to the “Mike” to Boost Winter Sports

If you live, as I do, with a wide view of the mountains and have a small boy who wanders from window to window fervently wishing for snow with every winter storm, then you can appreciate the new outlook on winter by the people of California since active participation in snow sports of which skiing is the most important and the only winter recreation activity of real importance in this state.

One of the ASC's objectives, according to [California Ski News](#) in their 3/7/33 issue was “Educating the public in the knowledge that skiing is even more zestful and health giving than those activities of the summer vacation time.... It is our hope to develop a great winter playground of national fame at Cisco, to be the rallying place for thousands who love the clean, vigorous activities of the snow season.

Californians have learned that Winter here in the Sierra Nevada Mountains is something to be desired that is friendly and welcome.

The true mountaineer enjoys skiing because it brings him nearer to his beloved mountains – and when I say mountaineer I do not mean people who necessarily live in the mountains, but anyone with a love and appreciation of them. Many like our friends in the Sierra Club live away from them, at the Bay and elsewhere., but the instinct of our race is to be Mountaineers. We want to be Hillmen, not Lowlanders and skiing has provided the most satisfaction in that desire of the American people for vigorous mountain enjoyment

...With skis we can travel among the mountains in their most beautiful moments when arrayed on the grandest scale of any season of the year. You can rejoice in the challenge of exhilarating speed through a cloud of wild flying snow, or wander quietly seeing the mountains as the Pioneers saw them and on unbroken trails to find your way.

Today skiing has almost ceased to be the means to an end. It has become an end in itself. The skier has found his ultimate satisfaction in the means of motion. With instruction and training his skill of personal control reaches the perfection of a hawk gliding across the sky.

And who can find more of value to health than in days thus spent among the high peaks in the clear bright sunshine of Alta California. In Europe skiing is regularly prescribed by physicians to many tired, run down people short on vitality. ... The next time you see long lines of traffic heading to the mountains on a winter week end, turn your car and follow,

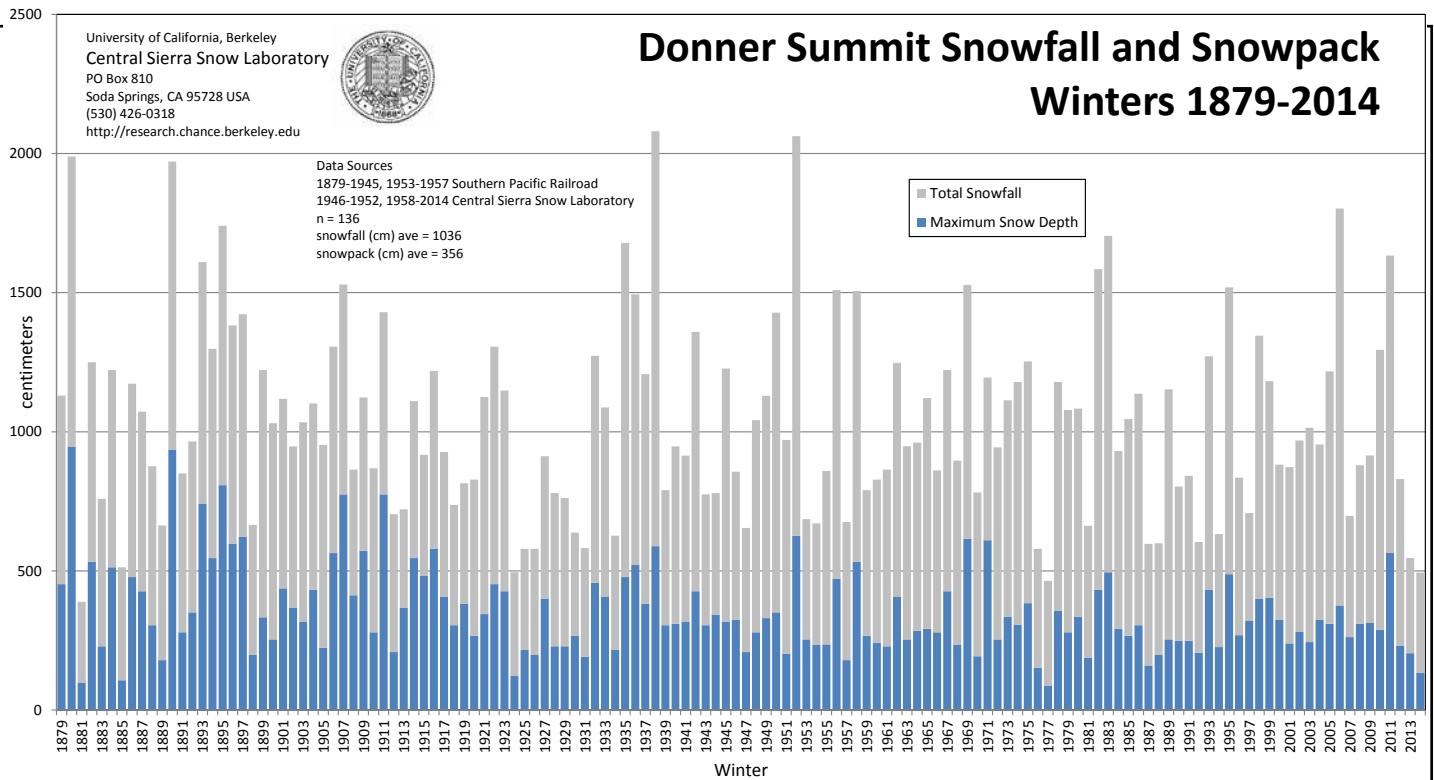
because...there...is something up there in the snow...that you too, should have.... You'll find more winter days of bright sunshine in the mountains of Northern California than in the city of Los Angeles. The deep breathing and active exercise of skiing in this bright sunshine will help you in the banishment of colds and return... an improved physical condition that will better aid you in the vigorous handling of today's living.

...Do away with the idea that skiing is difficult. It is easy and you will so keenly enjoy every experience that you will want a vacation period of one to several weeks to get more than is possible in only week end trips.

Good transportation and good newspaper support have awakened California from a winter hibernation to the value of winter sports. Good facilities are ready for you...A common enthusiasm has led to the formation of a number of ski clubs and thousands of eager Californians each week enjoy the ski programs of these clubs...

Probably no one in California was more responsible than Wendell Robie for the popularization of winter sports. He owned the Auburn Lumber Co. just below the Sierra Snowbelt.

[California Ski News](#) 1/3/33



Donner Summit's history cannot be told without mentioning snow. We get an average of 34 feet of snow a year, the highest snowfall for any residential area in the "lower 48." Courtesy of Randall Osterhuber at the Central Sierra Snow Lab in Soda Springs is the most current graph of official historical snowfall. It's a little early to know what this winter will be like but you can see from the graph above that some winters can be horrible.

Harsh Winters

In 1844 Moses Schallenberger and his friends in the Stephens, Murphy Townsend Party, the first wagon train to arrive in California with wagons, thought the Sierra was like "Back East." The snow would fall and the snow would melt. Then it would fall again. There would never be more than two feet on the ground. In his reminiscences Moses said, "I did not suppose that the snow would at any time be more than two feet deep, nor that it would be on the ground continually." [You'll get to read more about him in a future [Heirloom](#) so stay tuned and keep your subscriptions up.]

Just as Moses, and the two friends who were to stay with him at Donner Lake over the winter, finished the 12 X 14 foot cabin at the east end of Donner Lake it snowed. It snowed three feet and then it snowed some more. It kept snowing off and on all winter. The two friends left, leaving Moses alone in the snow.

In 1846 The Donners were under the same impression as the Stephens Party. They arrived late and tried to get over the Summit. They were turned back by snow. They tried to get out again but again were stopped. Half the party died by the time rescue teams made it to Donner Lake. The Emigrant Monument's base, at the State Park is 15' high. That's the height of the snowpack that winter there. When travelers came by in succeeding years, they were amazed at the height of the cut off trees - cut at snow level.

During the second and third rescue attempts of the Donner Party the relief parties came across Starved Camp somewhere in Summit Valley. According to Wm. Eddy, one of the rescuers, the exhausted and starving occupants were at the bottom of a 24' deep hole that the fire had melted through the snowpack. They had faced a days long blizzard. Eddy said, "The picture of distress was shocking indeed." [Read about "Heroism on Donner Summit" in our May, '14 [Heirloom](#). The heroism had to do with the Starved Camp.]

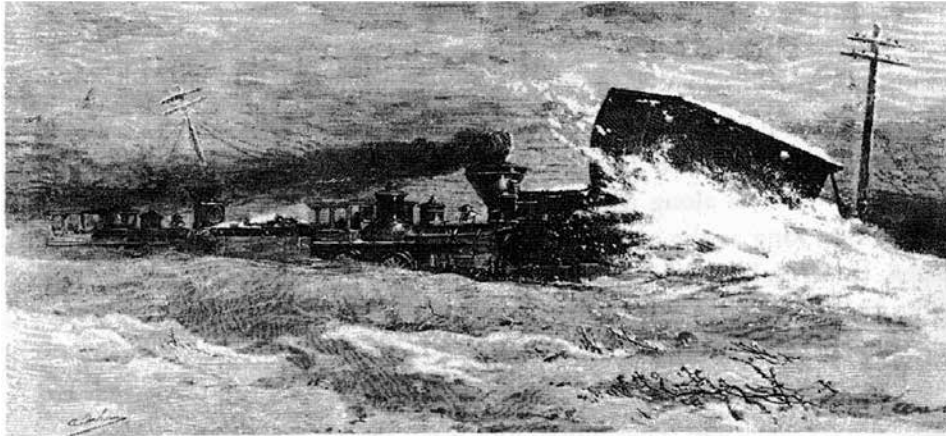
In 1865 Chinese workers were sent up to the Summit from Cisco to start Tunnel 6. They were chased away by snow. The next year, during tunnel's building there were 44 storms that dropped 60 feet of snow. The workers went from living quarters to the tunnel work faces through snow tunnels. Storerooms, blacksmiths, etc. were all in rooms carved from snow. More than a few workers were buried by snow in avalanches. One group was only uncovered, still holding their shovels, when the snow melted.

Of course it is the heavy snows of the Sierra that caused the Summit's iconic snowsheds to be built to protect the trains and tracks. The snowsheds will be the subject of February, March, and April [Heirlooms](#).

In 1952 a whole train was caught in the snows of the Sierra at Emigrant Gap. The Streamliner, "City of San Francisco" was embedded in the snow and dog teams had to come to rescue the 244 passengers who spent three days trapped (short [Heitloom](#) article in November, '08).

In 1983 storms dropped 66.5 feet and there were 30 foot drifts. Houses were buried and people could walk over the phone lines.

See page 14 for one more example.



Harper's Weekly, 1883

Bucking Snow

From page 1

bucking snow in the Northwest but applies to the Sierra as well. For more specific Sierra adventures with snow, see the next page's old newspaper articles by C.W. McGlashan, a famous Truckee area luminary, historian, author ([History of the Donner Party](#)), and newspaper publisher.

Storm, snow, freezing cold, trains stuck, telegraph lines down – the bucker plow train pulls back several miles to get

momentum, momentum to blast the snow out of the way. The whistle blows. Snow shovelers have been working at the face of the snow and atop the highest drifts. The face must be undercut so the bucker plow will not ride up on the snow and derail. The plow must hit the snow and remain on the track. The nose of the plow has to remain down. The trenches being dug into the highest drifts are to ease the job of the bucker.

The throttle is wide open “fear is swallowed up in the excitement of the mad rush” if you are an “old hand.” If you are not an “old hand” you have the “sickening sense of utter helplessness.”

“The plow rushes toward the snowdrift with a will. But the cut is deep and narrow, and the snow is hard packed. It is like running into a stone wall. The plow, moving at sixty-five miles an hour, stops with a mighty shock. Snow bursts through the cab windows and comes pouring in like an avalanche. Tons of coals in the tender surge forward, breaking the gate and sweeping against the boiler head. The cab is filled with escaping steam and falling glass. Wildly, you search for some means of escape.

“Again, the plow is dug out. The snow is shoveled out of the cab, boards nailed over the windows, and the engineer, tying a handkerchief around his forehead to stop the flow of blood from cuts made by the broken glass, sounds a retreat. But he backs the engine with a grim vow to ‘put her through this time or break a steam pipe’

“And so the fight goes on, day after day.”

Bucker Plows, pictured right at Cisco Grove, were essentially giant battering rams used to batter snow into submission. Usually the railroads won the contests. The bucker plows were developed after it was discovered that “Sierra Cement” was not easily removable in large quantities and simple snow plows simply bogged down. The first bucker plows weighed in at a lithe 13 tons. That was still not enough and the weight increased with new designs and the addition of more steel and pig iron so they eventually weighed 20 tons. Elsewhere railroads could get by with just a couple of locomotives to push the bucker plows. In the Sierra it could take ten or eleven locomotives to do the work.



Cont'd on page 8

Workin' on the Railroad Reminiscences from the Age of Steam Richard Reinhardt 1970 322 pages Top picture on page 7 comes from this book.

For more information about railroad snow clearing, see Snowplow Clearing Mountain Rails, 1966 by GM Best, which is where the sidebars here came from.

No. 63 ANNEX. The Mammoth Snow Plow - owned by the Central Pacific Railroad rests upon two four-wheeled trucks, is 28 feet long, 100 feet 6 inches wide, 13 feet 3 inches high, and weighs 41,860 lbs. It was once propelled by ten locomotives, at the rate of 60 miles an hour into a snow-drift on the Sierra Nevada Mountains, resulting----- in a big hole in the snow.

Crofuts New Overland Tourist and Pacific Coast Guide, 1879

Riding the Bucker Plow - 1874 and then again 1880

The new bucker plows were 19.5 tons (the first ones were only 12 tons) with the blade angled at 45 degrees. All of that weight on the front of up to eleven connected locomotives was supposed to provide enough momentum for the plow to blast through piles of "Sierra Cement," as locals affectionately call Donner Summit snow.

C.F. McGlashan was the editor and owner of the Truckee Republican. He thought a first hand account of riding through a snowstorm on the front of the lead engine to battle the snow during an 1874 storm would be good press. His snowplow was backed by six locomotives. Charging along at 40 miles an hour, the procession blasted into the snow. Six times the snow stopped the train.

As they moved higher toward Donner Summit the snow got lighter, producing "one of the most beautiful scenes that can be imagined. The Snow was light and loose, and, when the plow struck it, rose like spray in two perfect arcs of a circle to the height of twenty feet, and the sun shining upon it produced an effect at once grand, beautiful and indescribable."

Buckers improved. Among the improvements was the addition of a tool room just behind the plow. The platform above the room was a good spot for spectators. C.F. McGlashan, rode there for an 1880 story:

"The gale increased until it became a hurricane." The snow was so heavy there was danger the snowsheds would collapse. The sheds were trembling and tottering. A westbound express got stuck in a snow slide at Yuba Pass. Then freight train No. 6 "went crashing into ruins" of a collapsed snowshed. "500 [more] feet of snowsheds fell..." Freight train NO. 6 was extracted from the ruins and then trapped in another snowshed by snow that "drifted through the openings in the sheds." The train was "imprisoned at Cisco."

McGlashan said this was warfare – hundreds of railroad workers against the elements: "brain and muscle are arrayed against cold, darkness and avalanches, against death in a thousand forms."

A brakeman was killed. A watchman was trapped in a tunnel. "Crews of men worked all night. Drearier work or more discouraging never was assigned to human beings..." Another plow was sent to the summit backed by six engines. McGlashan joined the crew.

"A night storm on the Sierra is a grand spectacle. The fury and power of the wind, the blinding snowdust, the piercing cold, the bleak, awe-inspiring mountains, the preternatural gloom, the ghostly, ice-clad forest, the dark, shadowy gorges, and the dreadful loneliness and helplessness of the situation are calculated to awaken the sublimest emotions.

There are no headlights. Sitting in the front of the train "all in front of the plow is in profound darkness. There is no limit to the speed of a snowplow train, and when flying in the teeth of a hurricane, it is impossible to face the darting snow granules, which cut and sting the eyes like needlepoints. Up and over...come huge masses of snow which sometimes seem ready to bury one."

cont'd to page 18

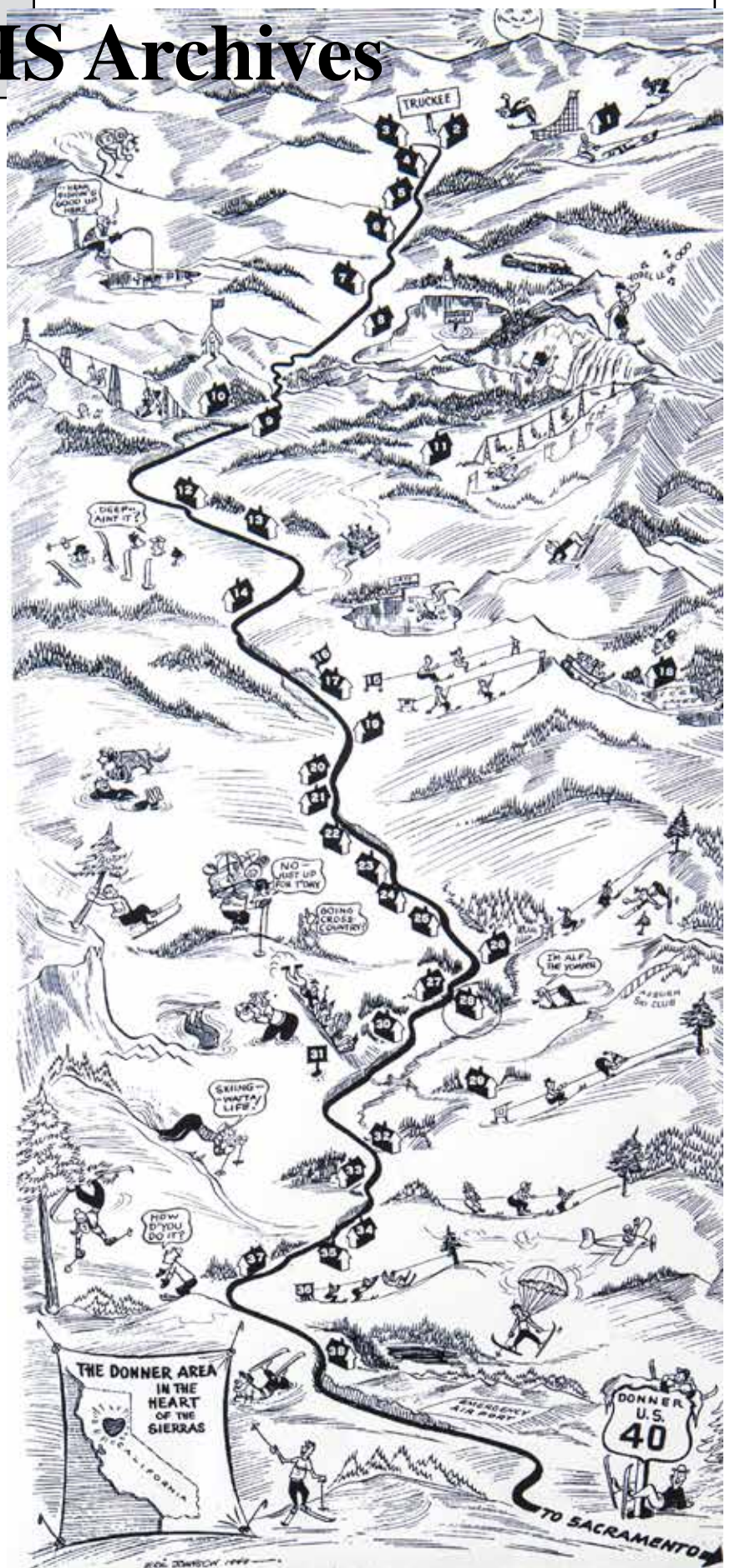
From the DSHS Archives

The Donner Area - Your Winter Playground

That was the headline on the map to the right, passed out in 1949 to acquaint tourists with the businesses on Donner Summit. Since the coming of the freeway, the local economy and the number of businesses has dropped dramatically.

Below are the businesses listed on both sides of the map. Each one had a paragraph description. Each is represented by a numbered house on the map. Use a magnifying glass to check out the cartoons (original is 14" tall).

Donner Rancho, Donner lake
Don-Lac Lodge Donner Lake
Donner Lake Lodge, Donner Lake
Donner Ski Ranch, Norden
Vanderford's Lodge, Norden
Sugar Bowl, Norden
Hannes Schroll, Norden
Kline's [sic] Ski Shop, Norden
Norden Store, Norden
Norden Lodge, Norden
Kiski Inn, Norden
Ski-Inn, Norden
Soda Springs Service Station, Soda Springs
Soda Springs Ski Corporation, Soda Springs
Buek Ski School, Soda Springs
Soda Springs Rope Tows, Soda Springs
Zorich Ski Shop, Soda Springs
Sitzski Lodge, Soda Springs
Soda Springs Hotel, Soda Springs
Ice Lakes Chalet, Serene Lakes
Beacon Hill Lodge, Soda Springs
Aro Ski School, Soda Springs
Shi-Hive Norden
Soda Springs Grocery, Soda Springs
The Crest Soda Springs
Donner Summit Lodge, Soda Springs
Pratt's Garage, Soda Springs
Marrott Enterprises, Soda Springs
Steen's Motel, Kingvale
Griff-Lou Lodge, Kingvale
Kingvale Park Garage, Kingvale
Crampton's Lodge, Rainbow
Rainbow Lodge, Rainbow
Trailsyde lodge, Big Bend
Big Bend Inn, Big Bend
Cisco Grove Lodge, Cisco Grove
Cisco Grove Store, Cisco Grove
Sierra Gift Shop, Cisco Grove
Yuba Gap Lodge and Ski Tow, Yuba Gap
Yuba Gap Lodge Emigrant Gap
Laing's Ski Tow, Emigrant Gap
Laing's Pioneer Camp, Emigrant Gap
Nyack Lodge, Emigrant Gap
Nyack General Store, Emigrant Gap
Nyack Service Station, Emigrant Gap
Lakeview Lodge, Emigrant Gap
Skyline Lodge, Emigrant Gap
Rancho Sierra Inn, Emigrant Gap
Rancho Sierra Service Station, Emigrant Gap



From the DSHS Museum Vaults

And These Are?

These clever little gizmos are from the days before high speed quads, gondolas, or other methods today for getting up the hill.

Younger readers will be surprised to learn that it was not always so easy as it is today. The first skiers had to climb the hills – actually ski up – in order to ski down. Skiing would not become very popular unless that changed and so ski entrepreneurs came up with imaginative ways for people to get up the mountains. The first “lifts” in California were re-purposed mining trams. Then ski pioneers developed various “up-skis” or “boat tows” which were sleds. One descended while one ascended. Skiers had to remove their skis and sit on thwarts in the sleds. That was inconvenient. Then came rope tows: long continuous ropes on pulleys powered by auto engines. Skiers came up to the rope, and SLOWLY closed their hands on the moving rope. As friction increased between rope and gloves, the skier started to move uphill.



Practice was needed. If one grabbed too suddenly, one was jerked right out of his skis. At the top one had to step out of the groove worn by skiers to go to the slope. That could be tricky if the rope tow was going fast, the groove was deep, or both. Those who were not well versed in rope tow procedures provided comedic relief for the others waiting in line or watching. Sometimes bored tow operators enlivened their days by speeding up or slowing down the tows to the consternation of riders.

Rope tows, properly used, did the job and they were everywhere until they were replaced by “J” Bars, “T” Bars, and chairlifts. The ropes also “did a job” on the gloves or mittens, wearing holes through.

The little gizmos here are quite clever. They are rope tow grips. The small one, left above, clamped to the ski pole and then the “C” part was moved on to the rope. As the pole was pulled back, friction increased, and the skier moved up the hill. The larger one, below, does the same thing. The skier clamps on to the rope and up she goes. These two were brought in to the DSHS by Charlie White, a real estate agent at Donner Lake.

Look closely at the belt below to see his name tag. Charlie says he used them “when I was about 8 years old in the 50’s with the rope tows at Sugar Bowl, Ski Ranch and Soda Springs. As I remember, it wasn’t really a great device, but it helped going up some of the steeper lifts.” The gizmos saved buying new mittens and gloves.

Charlie’s father was Carson White, a prolific ski writer, a founder of the Oakland Ski Club on Donner and a principal in developing the ski trains to the Summit as well a founder of the Southern Pacific Ski Club. The Oakland Ski Club, which had its start at Macy’s, began to build its lodge on Donner Summit but had to stop during the War. The lodge sits between Donner Ski Ranch and Sugar Bowl.

Another surprise to young readers is that ski slopes were not groomed in the old days and mogul really meant mogul. “Boot packing” was a necessary preparation for ski races. Competitors went up the slopes packing the snow with their boots. There were also no terrain parks but those are all stories for another time.

Rope Tow Grips

The larger grip is a 1940’s safety grip made by Bertelen Products in El Segundo, CA

The BD grip is the smaller one and was made by A&T of Seattle, WA



Book Review

Our New West

GOOGLE is doing a wonderful public service by scanning old literature (books, tracts, etc.) so that 21st Century people can access them without having to go to university libraries where access is hard. The old prose gives us history but also tells us about the people and life then. Reading a 19th Century book for example we can learn what was important to them, we can learn about their prejudices and likes and dislikes, as well as about the popular thought of educated readers. An added bonus is to read the very different 19th Century prose. As society has sped up our reading habits have changed and so, likewise, have modern authors' prose.

Sometimes, when I'm in the mood, it's fun to read the old language and so it was following the quest for more Donner Summit history and in the mood for some old prose, that I picked up this month's book, The New West by Samuel Bowles.

It came free off the Internet courtesy of Google. The book is centered on the benefits of the Pacific Railroad, the first transcontinental railroad as well as the wonders of the West. The prose was fun. For example, in talking about the temporary towns that grew up as the railroad progressed, the author describes them as "congregation[s] of scum and wickedness." They "festered" in corruption. "Hell would appear to have been raked to furnish" the temporary railroad towns. The majority of the text though, celebrates the scenery in the West, sometimes almost waxing rhapsodically drawing pictures in the reader's head: rocks "...fashioned like a fortress, or rising like Gothic cathedral..."

I was just going to skim the book for anything interesting but as I got into it I thought the whole book could bear summarizing or reviewing. Our readers could be edified. What did the coming of the railroad mean to 19th Century Americans, what changes did it bring?

This book fits in a common genre of the 19th Century of both art and popular literature. Despite the coming of the railroad which reduced travel time immensely by going at the incredible constant speed of 25 miles an hour, most people in America would not be going West. They were however, hungry for the descriptions. Much of the West had been relatively recently acquired by conquest (from the Mexican War), purchase (Louisiana, Gadsden) or agreement (Oregon and Washington). Exhibits of Western art, giving visitors views of the West were popular. There were many picture books produced with drawings of the West and there were many books describing the west. People were fascinated by the West and its possibilities even if they could only visit vicariously. The preface is almost rhapsodic as an introduction to what the reader will experience. See the sidebar on the next page.

OUR NEW WEST.

RECORDS OF TRAVEL

BETWEEN

The Mississippi River and the Pacific Ocean.

OVER THE PLAINS—OVER THE MOUNTAINS—THROUGH
THE GREAT INTERIOR BASIN—OVER THE SIERRA
NEVADAS—TO AND UP AND DOWN
THE PACIFIC COAST.

WITH

Details of the Wonderful Natural Scenery, Agriculture, Mines,
Business, Social Life, Progress, and Prospects

OF

COLORADO, WYOMING, UTAH, IDAHO, MONTANA, NEVADA,
CALIFORNIA, OREGON, WASHINGTON, AND
BRITISH COLUMBIA;

INCLUDING

A Full Description of the Pacific Railroad;

AND

Of the Life of the Mormons, Indians, and Chinese.

WITH MAP, PORTRAITS, AND TWELVE FULL PAGE ILLUSTRATIONS.

By SAMUEL BOWLES.

PUBLISHED BY SUBSCRIPTION ONLY.
HARTFORD PUBLISHING CO., HARTFORD, CONN.
J. D. DENNISON, NEW YORK.
J. A. STODDARD, CHICAGO, ILL.
E. NEBHUT, AUGUSTA, GA.
1869.

To prepare his book the author had traveled the West in 1865, before the railroad and then in 1868 when the railroad was almost completed. First he traveled by stage and then by railroad. He traveled with Speaker of the House, and later Vice-president, Schuyler Colfax both times. Colfax wrote an introduction to the book which was almost as effusive as Mr. Bowles' descriptions. Schuyler, by the way, is for whom the town of Colfax is named. It sits about forty miles west of Donner Summit on I-80.

Waxing rhapsodically again about the wonders of the West and the coming of civilization, Bowles says the reader will come away with the idea that a new society and civilization was being developed in the West, "commerce and an industry, a wealth and a power, that will rival the most enthusiastic predictions of our Atlantic States Empire, and together... will present on the North American Continent such a triumph of Man in race, in government and social development, in intellectual advancement, and in commercial supremacy, as the world never saw, - as the world never yet fairly dreamed of."

THE Pacific Railroad unlocks the mysteries of Our New West. It opens a new world of wealth, and a new world of natural beauty, to the working and the wonder of the old. The eastern half of America offers no suggestion of its western half.

The two sides of the Continent are sharp in contrasts of climate, of soil, of mountains, of resources, of productions, of everything. Nature, weary of repetitions, has, in the New West, created originally, freshly, uniquely, majestically. In her gifts, in her withholdings, she has been equally supreme, equally complete.

Nowhere are broader and higher mountains; nowhere richer valleys; nowhere climates more propitious; nowhere broods an atmosphere so pure and exhilarating; nowhere more bountiful deposits of gold and silver, quicksilver and copper, lead and iron; nowhere denser forests, larger trees; nowhere so wide plains; nowhere such majestic rivers; yet nowhere so barren deserts, so arid steppes; nowhere else that nature has planted its growths so thickly and so variously, and feeds so many appetites so richly; yet nowhere that she withholds so completely, and pains the heart and parches the tongue of man so deeply by her poverty.

from the preface - paragraph breaks added.

The book begins with a general description of the West: the Plains, the Rockies, Sierra, Pacific Northwest, that the railroad was bisecting.

In 1865 to get from the Missouri to the Mountains it took a six day stage ride. Waiting to leave the bustling Omaha Bowles had to wait for the Concord coach which was a bit late. When it came it carried frightened mother and children and the coach was bristling with arrows. It was disconcerting but Bowles and his traveling companion, the Speaker of the House, "represented the great American nation" and it would not do to be afraid, so off they went.

As they traveled the one constant feature of the landscape was the "long trains of wagons and carts" carrying on the commerce of the West: agriculture, mining and the many settlements. The wagon trains, he said, stretched from 1/4 to 1/3 mile each. The scenery was huge as was the weather, "terrible storms of thunder and lightning." The author was almost poetic in his descriptions, "...huge, rolling, ponderous masses of cloud... massing up and separating... in a more majestic and threatening style than our party had ever before seen in the heavens." (pg 3)

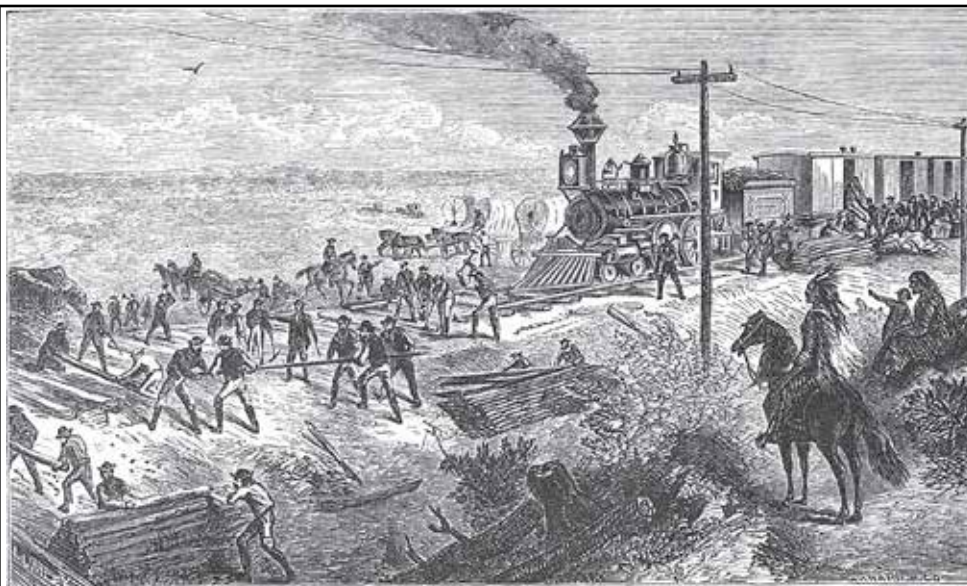
Stage travel was hard and dangerous. Horses could bolt and there was little protection against the weather. They traveled night and day stopping every 10 miles to change horses and every 40 or 50 to eat. "The days were...monotonous." The nights were cold and sleep in the "jolting stage-coach was hard and fitful..." They traveled at 8 or 10 miles an hour in a light coach. The normal coaches traveled only 4 to 6 MPH. The West was empty save the occasional stage way-house or infrequent small settlement. Houses were made of turf and mud. Barns might be partly log but were also made from prairie turf, "piled layer on layer..."

The railroad is "the key to all our New West" and so Bowles begins his description. Taking the train in 1868 the trip that took 6 days in 1865, now took 24 hours safely "in a swiftly-moving train, and in a car that was elegant drawing-room by day and luxurious bedroom at night."

The coming of the railroad was destroying as it was building a new west. It was killing off settlements and cultivation that were not on the railroad route. The rails were carrying everything; "the old roads are substantially abandoned..." The people off the railroad are "the victims, in turn, of a higher civilization..." They'd driven out the Indians and were now being driven out in turn.

Travel in the west on the railroad could "grow monotonous" since the railroad was as straight as an arrow. "Every dozen or fifteen miles is a station" made up of a shed or two, a "water-spout" and a "wood-pile." Every hundred miles was a house or division depot, with "Shops, eating-house, 'saloons' uncounted, a store or two, and a few cultivated acres, and the invariable half-a-dozen seedy, staring loafers that are a sort of fungi indigenous to America railways."

The railroad brought great improvements as well as disruption to what had been



LAYING THE TRACK OF THE PACIFIC RAILROAD.

established. New towns sprang up along the routes with thousands of inhabitants, daily papers, stores, taverns, and “all the luxuries and many comforts of civilization.” The building of the railroad was an incredible feat built with “fabulous speed.”

On reaching the Summit of the Sierra, “beautiful lakes adjoin the road, most especially Donner Lake, which strongly invite delay for the leisure enjoyment of the grand scenery...” Of course the Donner tragedy had to be remarked upon but without the lurid details found in other contemporary accounts. Here the survivors only “existed on the flesh of their companions.” Other

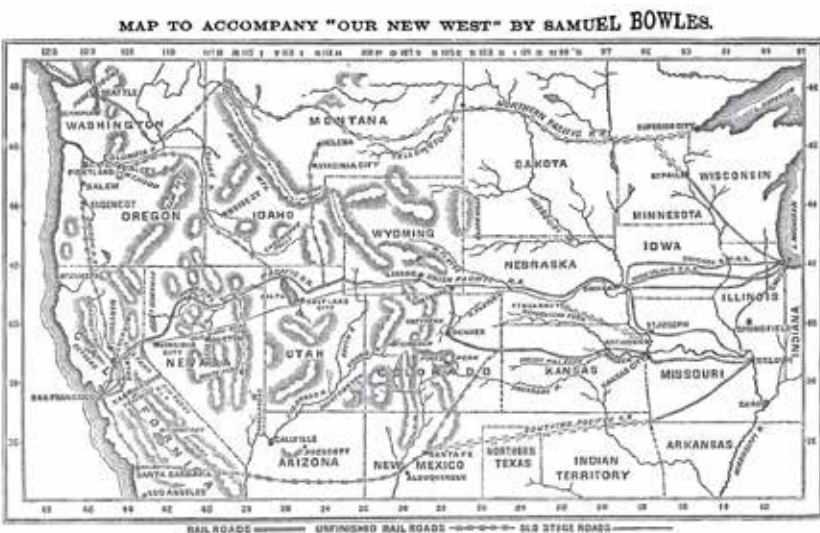
contemporaneous accounts are suitable only for Halloween (just wait for the April Heirloom).

Traveling over the Sierra one experiences the “genuine exhilaration in the scenery of California...”

The railroad was difficult and expensive to build. It made the builders rich and it provided the opportunity for new wealth and benefits for society as well. It would cause a revolution in commerce by putting America in direct touch with Asia and the Indies. That’s all obvious. Less obvious the railroad would provide “fresh impulse to civilization, and the founding of a new empire on the Pacific Coast.” It also would provide “moral and social rehabilitation.” The people had been hungering and praying for the railroad because they wanted closer contact with “home.” The author says Californians did not consider California home in 1869. Instead they all talked about going home. That tells us where the hearts of the pioneers were. The railroad was good for the whole country as well, marrying the Atlantic and the Pacific and destroying disunity (the book was written only shortly after the Civil War).

Separate chapters are devoted to Colorado, the American Alps, with descriptions about Denver and mountain camping. Bowles and Colfax did some camping and that fills a chapter. In the telling of camping Bowles hazards that mule intelligence is proof of the transmigration of souls – so “startlingly human” they are. He knew some people “who must have been mules once.”

There are descriptions of stage travel and we learn that the stage driver was the king on his route. He has “dreadful winning ways” both with horses and women. He is the “diplomat of the road”. No one has more authority and no one eats before he does.



There are descriptions of the Native Americans which expose 19th Century Americans’ prejudices, “...it is his destiny to die; he cannot continue his original pure barbaric life; he cannot mount that of civilization...all we can do is smooth and make decent the pathway to his grave.” Civilization is coming to the West and pushing the Native Americans out by killing their way of life.

Bowles is equally prejudiced against the Mormons whom he did not think were part of the “grand free movement of American life” and were stubbornly fanatical. He was sure they’d give up their ways though because the lust for many wives was less than the lust for much money which could be earned by joining America.

One might like to skim the chapters about Colorado and Utah and the travels there. It's not Donner Summit or California after all. The visits to Austin and Virginia City, Nevada were interesting as was the 1865 stage ride across Nevada.

On page 308 we get to the Sierra, "Nature's life and glory..." that sate hungry hearts and are a "golden pathway to the golden Gate..." The 1865 stage ride was a "succession of delights and surprises." "All human music was but sound and fury, signifying nothing, before such harmonies of high nature." The pines "seemed to us monsters" Unfortunately that 1865 trip was before the railroad "which has destroyed this." Traveling the Sierra was traveling through the "finest mountain scenery in the world...[rocks] like pyramids of Egypt" and scenery even surpassing the Alps.



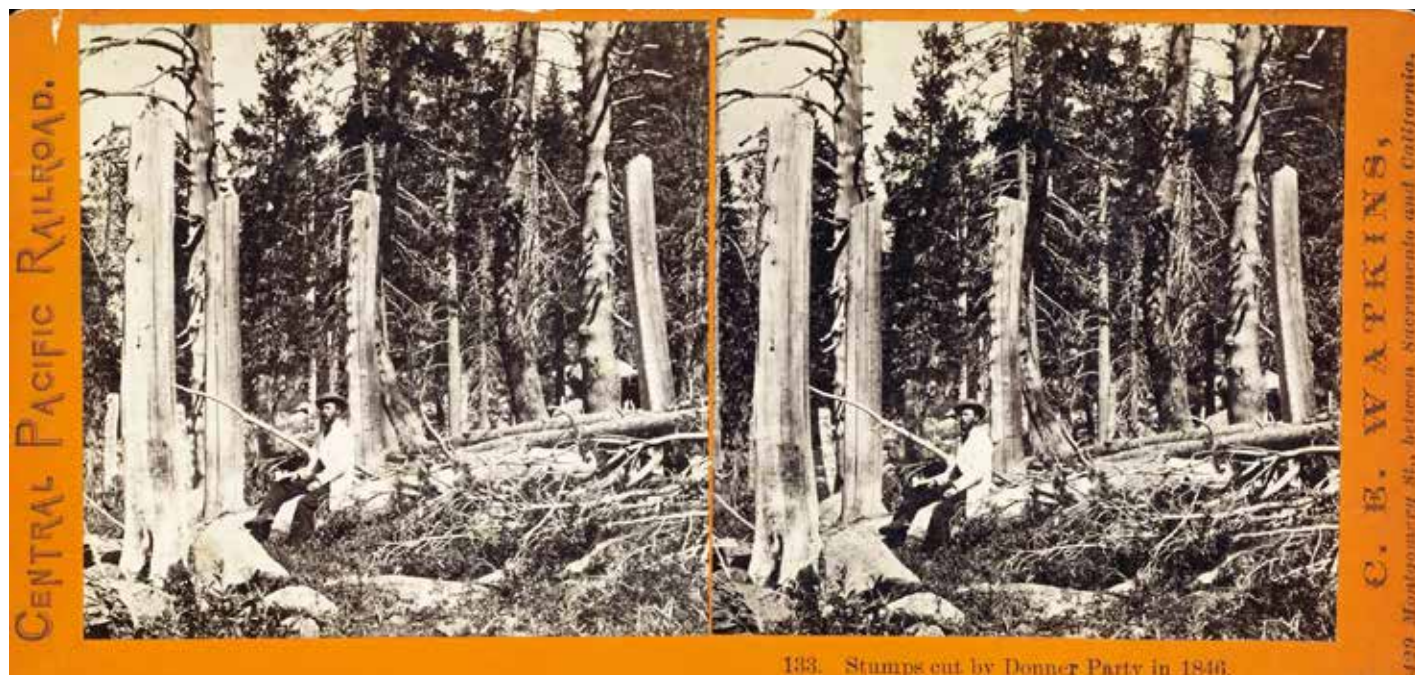
A FIRST VIEW OF POLYGAMY--A MORMON AND HIS FAMILY.

Bowles was struck, coming to California, to discover that people spoke to the same themes as people back East and that is what makes America "...the wonder of nations, the marvel of history, - the unity of its people in ideas and purpose; their quick assimilation of all emigration... This is more important than territory, resources, beauty of landscape, good climate, material development..." because the "subtle electricity" of that part of American character conquers everything.

After the Sierra come descriptions of California: the Central Valley, the Coast Range, the rest of the Sierra, San Francisco, Yo Semite [sic] the weather, the climate, the Chinese, mining, and farming.

Interestingly, so much sand was blowing around in San Francisco that streets could be blocked like drifts of snow which puts neat housekeepers in despair and made a "large market for road and clothe-brushes." Property owners had to visit their properties often to keep track of them so the sand would not obscure property lines. Given that blowing sand, there was a "looseness" about cleanliness that would shock New England housewives.

One More Example of Tough Donner Summit Winters



133. Stumps cut by Donner Party in 1846.

Here's one more example of the tough winters on Donner Summit. This Carleton Watkins (#133) photograph is titled, "Stumps Cut by the Donner Party. Summit Valley." It's supposed to show how high the snow was that winter of 1846-7. Of course the Donners weren't at Summit Valley, but presuming this is Summit Valley, you get the point - a lot of snow can fall.

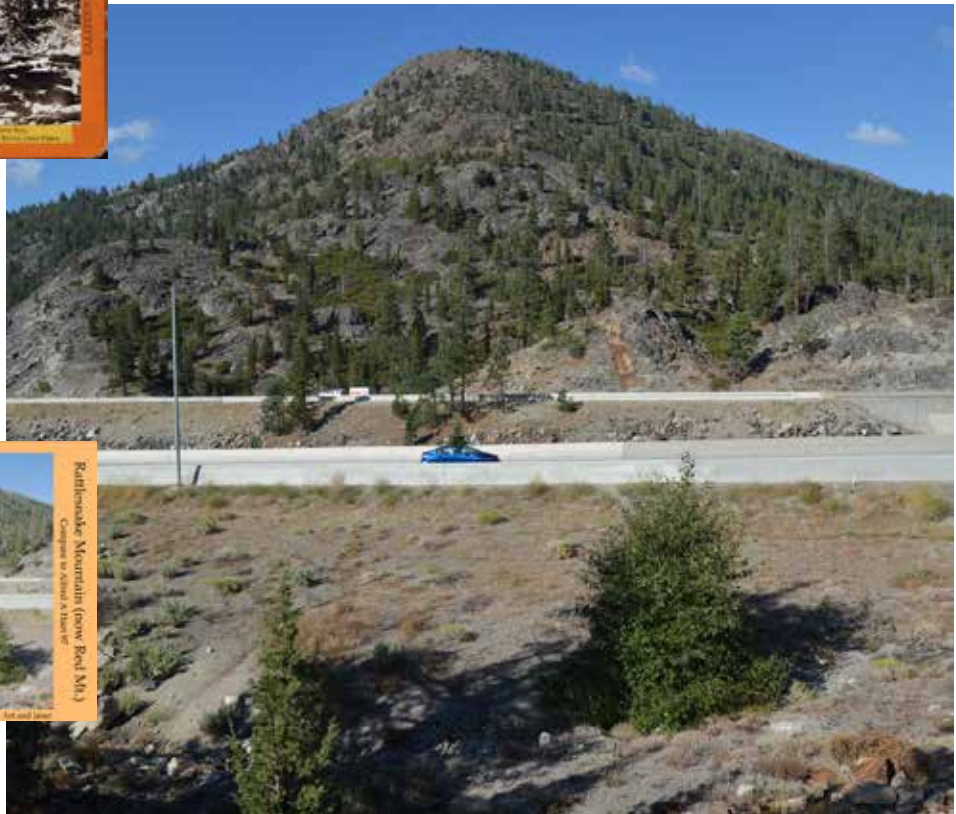
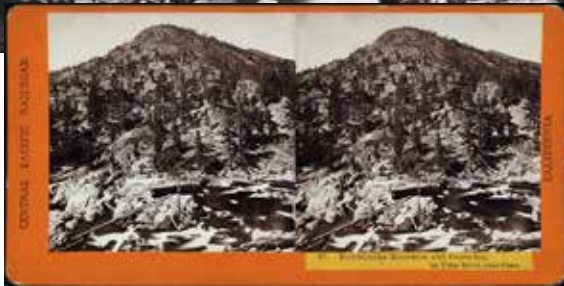
Then & Now with Art Clark



Alfred A Hart # 97 - Rattlesnake Mountain -

Now known as Red Mountain and Signal Peak. The Emigrant Trail, the Dutch Flat Wagon Road and Old Highway 40 all passed near here. There are a few remnants of each to be found, but I-80 required lots of space, so the valley was molded to make it fit. The cascades in the foreground are gone, and the river was moved to flow between the east and west-bound lanes. Hart must have really liked the cascades, and he photographed them from several viewpoints.

Photo location 39° 18.913'N 120° 33.425'W



Then & Now with Art Clark



Alfred A Hart #214
Emigrant Gap Ridge

Old Man Mountain, Red Mountain, Castle Peak in distance - This ridge divides the American River drainage from the Bear and Yuba. A lot has changed here, first by the railroad and later by Interstate 80. Underneath the highway, the railroad switches from two tracks to one, and stays that way nearly to Cisco. Trains going in opposite directions have to take turns crossing that section.

The vista point and parking area is accessed from westbound I-80, and is worth stopping for the view. T.C. Wohlbruck once ran a rest stop here with a four pump gas station, cafe and lodging. This view was later reprinted by Carleton Watkins.

Photo location 39° 17.869'N 120° 40.504'W



Summit Restaurant - New Menu



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 5

Winter, 2014-15

Donner Summit Lodge Open Every Day

Hours: Sat/Sun 8 A.M. - 8:30 P.M. MThF Noon-8:30 P.M. Tues. 4-8:30 P.M. The bar is open until the crowd is gone.



Donner Summit Lodge, A Short History

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

The first auto to cross Donner Pass crossed in 1903. The first successful motorized "transcontinentalist" crossed the country using Donner Pass, also in 1903, on a motor bicycle. 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 Dormitories Cabins."

picture above from the Norm Saylor Collection

It Wasn't Always Easy To Get To Donner Summit

Today we hop in our cars, set the temperature and cruise controls, and don't even give a thought to driving long distances. We can reach Donner Summit in just an hour and a half from Sacramento and double that from San Francisco. Our vehicles are reliable and fast. The multi-lane Interstate allows us to zip past slower drivers.

It was not always so. It took six weeks in 1867 for a donkey engine to arrive at Donner Summit from Gold Run. It had been a locomotive and was so scary that oncoming mules had to be blindfolded so they would not bolt. That's an aside though, for another menu.

Emigrant wagons coming up Donner Pass had to be disassembled to get them over the rock ledges. The trials those original emigrants went through must have made them wish they'd never heard of California. Then they discovered Roller Pass. Emigrants didn't have to take their wagons apart but they did have to attach a dozen oxen to bring each wagon, one by one, up the very steep slope.

The crossing of Donner Summit was the hardest part of the emigrants' trip across the country. As they approached the Sierra they looked with "terror at the awful site [sic]." (Win. Tustin, 1846). The Sierra looked like an "apparently impassable barrier" (Edwin Bryant, 1846 whose mule went somersaulting down the mountain!), "as steep as the roof of a house" (Joseph Hackney 1849). The Sierra "looked terrible" (David Hudson 1845). The mountains were "some immense wall built directly across our path" (Elisha Perkins 1849).



painting by Harold Von Schmidt

The railroad made it easier but traveling by train over Donner Summit meant going through 40 miles of snowsheds which kept heavy snowfall and avalanches from wiping the track and trains off the mountainsides. Going through sheds, though, meant that some of the most beautiful scenery in the world was hidden from view. In addition to the dark, train cars filled with smoke making the trip over the Summit less than pleasant.

Once there were roads one would think things got easier but as the pictures on following pages show, that was not always the case. At least drivers did not have to take apart their cars.

"the male survived none the worse for wear."

Summit Restaurant does catering too. Call 426-3904

The DSHS graphics department and its Historical Stories Harvesting Group (HSHG) have been hard at work on the new menu for the Summit Restaurant at the Donner Summit Lodge. Now it's ready for customers.

The DSHS has been doing historically-themed menus for Maria Montano, the owner, for a couple of years. Each menu focuses on a different historical theme, as well as lists lots of good food choices.

Summer '14 snowsheds and snowshed stories

Winter 13-14 The Lincoln Highway

Summer '13 Summit Valley (Native Americans, Van Norden Dam, sheep)

Winter 12-13 Extraordinary Donner Summit (coming of modern skiing, the first ski lifts, Dutch Flat Donner Lake Wagon Rd.)

The new menu focuses on the idea that it's not always been easy to get to Donner Summit including the story of the 1911 race to be the first car over Donner Summit. What an adventure: 7 days to go 23 miles.

The menus are now ready. Be the first on your block to collect all of them.

DONNER SUMMIT HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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

____ 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.

Riding the Bucker Plow from page 8

“...more power was requisite...every throttle was wide open and every engine was working under a full head of steam. The speed was something alarming...”

Momentum was lost plowing into the snow. They had to stop and back up, first to “wood up” and then to gain new momentum at the snow. Each engine was uncoupled and backed up leaving the plow. The plows could not always be backed up because snow got caught under the wheels they derailed.

There was miscommunication in deep darkness. The engineers did not know the plow had been disconnected and was still far ahead of the engines. They thought it was still attached to the front locomotive. When the engines were re-fueled they headed back “at full speed.” The crew in the bucker plow heard the approaching engines and realized a “frightful collision” would occur when the six engines struck the plow.

The men, including McGlashan, rushed for the door in the side of the bucker plow but the snow was too deep to exit. They ran for the ladder. The last railroad man barely escaped and was partly “hurled out into the snow.” McGlashan came next. “The hind end of the snowplow was shivered as if by a stroke of lightning, and the plow was dashed ahead as if it was suddenly shot from a cannon. Every engine felt the heavy shock....” McGlashan was “rolled and crumpled in all conceivable shapes... he was nevertheless as helpless as a straw in a threshing machine. Indeed, the principal thought at such a moment is a wonderful appreciation of the majestic power of a ten-wheel fifty-ton locomotive. Jammed and twisted and whirled and dragged....”

McGlashan was thrown to the side of the plow, against the snow. The “darkness of a stormy night is absolute blackness under a train of moving engines. There is not a ray of light. ...Every muscle quivers as it touches the whirling grinding wheels. One is dragged along by their very contact, yet not fast enough to escape being overtaken by the truck-wheels and drivers of the next locomotive. ...There is no thought of the past or future.” He hugged the wall of snow as the wheels of the engines “graze, graze, graze as they pass.”

The train stopped. McGlashan and the others of the snowplow crew had ended up under one of the engines.

There is no record of McGlashan riding again on a bucker plow. Had the story ended differently there would have been no History of the Donner Party.

From Snowplow Clearing Mountain Rails 1966 GM Best. The articles first appeared in The Truckee Republican.