

# The Donner Summit

# Heirloom

History and stories of the Donner Summit Historical Society



November, 2015 issue #87

## What's in Your Closet?

When it came time to put this issue of the Heirloom together the editorial staff thought it time to do an issue that was more pictures than writing. Coincidentally we'd just been given a photo album of life at Cisco in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. That seemed like a great subject to share.

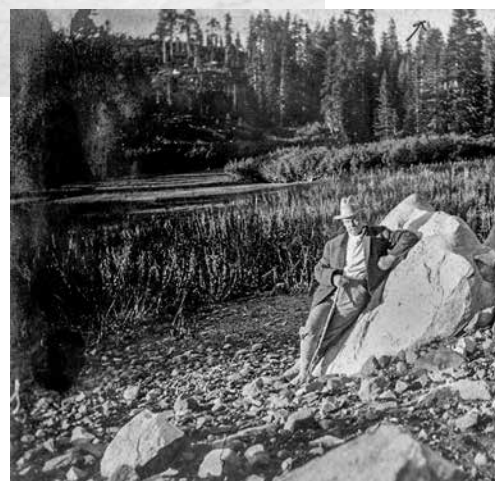
The donation came from Jim Wiggins, a real estate salesperson on Donner Summit with a beautiful house his father built in the 1940's right next to the historic Rainbow Tavern or Lodge (depending when in history one is referring to it - see our April '14 Heirloom).

That then brings up the idea that old stuff is disappearing. We at the DSHS feel we have a responsibility to save some of that stuff for future generations and disseminate the stories. So the DSHS has been doing a lot of saving and disseminating. We've been trying to encourage others to contribute to our mission and so when we were putting this together we thought to go back and see when we'd done the encouraging under the title of "What's in Your Closet?" Unfortunately our indices don't contain that title since it's a bit vague but a quick computer search turned up Heirlooms with the title in April, '15, August, '14, December, '14, February, '15, September, '14, and October, '14. That was more



than we'd thought. Each so titled article included pictures that had been in people's closets. We've also had donations of lots of actual things too. Then there was an album found at a flea market (March, '14) which did not come immediately from someone's closet.

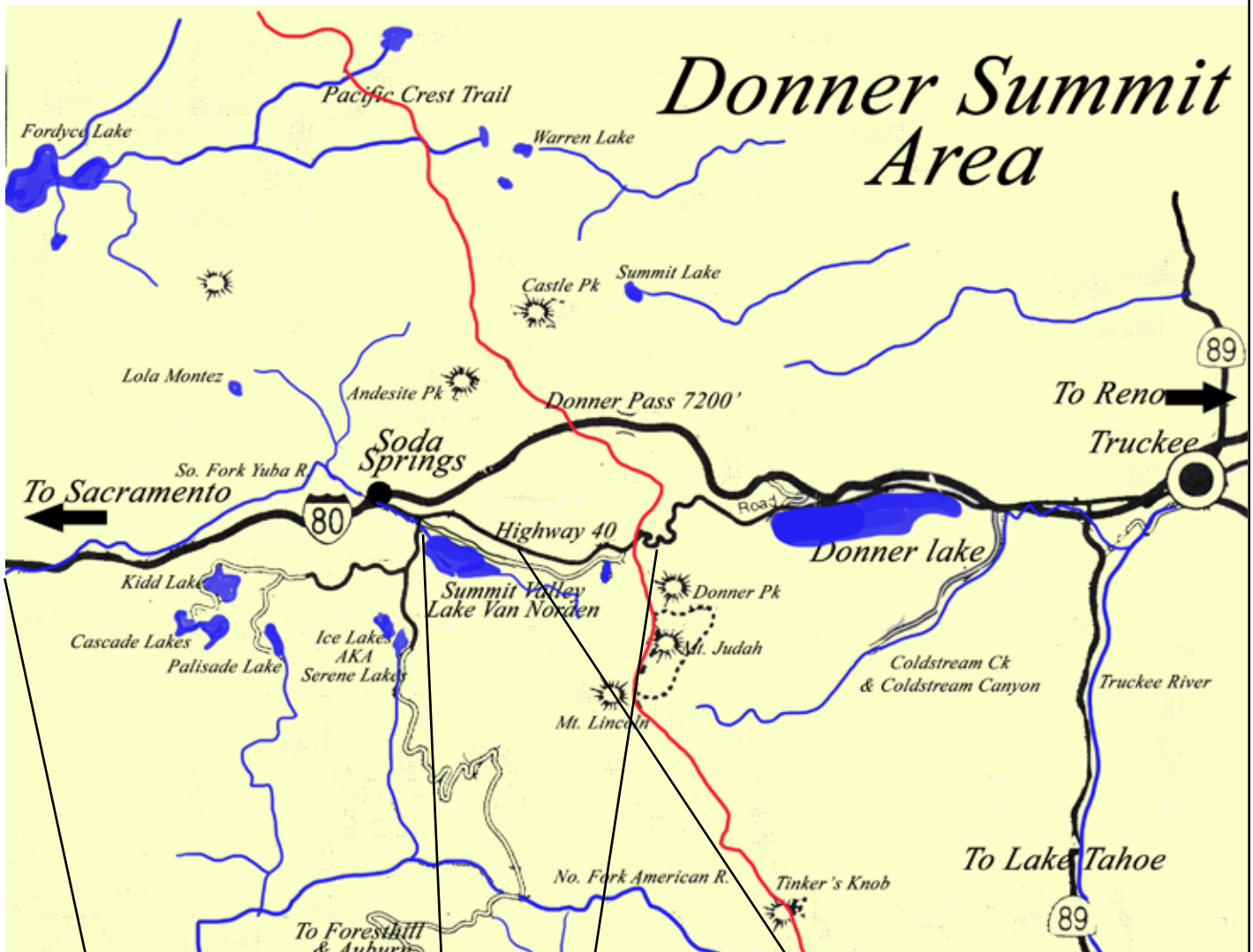
Here we encourage you again. If you have things relevant to Donner Summit history that you'd like to share, please let us know ([info@donnersummithistoricalsociety.org](mailto:info@donnersummithistoricalsociety.org)). In the case of pictures we can just make copies so you can retain your keepsakes.



Top: Cisco Hotel ca. 1910

Above: portrait of "JFW" at an unknown location, but since the album is mostly in the neighborhood of Cisco, it's a good guess the lake is too.

# Story Locations in this Issue



In This Issue

Cisco Grove pgs 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10, 11, 14    Rowton Gas Station, Soda Springs    Central Sierra Snowlab pg 16

Highway Maintenance station pg. 17

The Then and Now of Bear Valley/Emigrant Gap on page 15 is west of Donner Summit about 20 miles.

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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

# Snapshot in Time

The Wiggins family album gives us a view of Cisco Grove in the old days when it was a railroad town. The town in those days was up the hill from where the gas station now is at the Cisco Grove exit from I-80. Later the railroad modernized and the town and its railroad workers disappeared. Today there is nothing left.

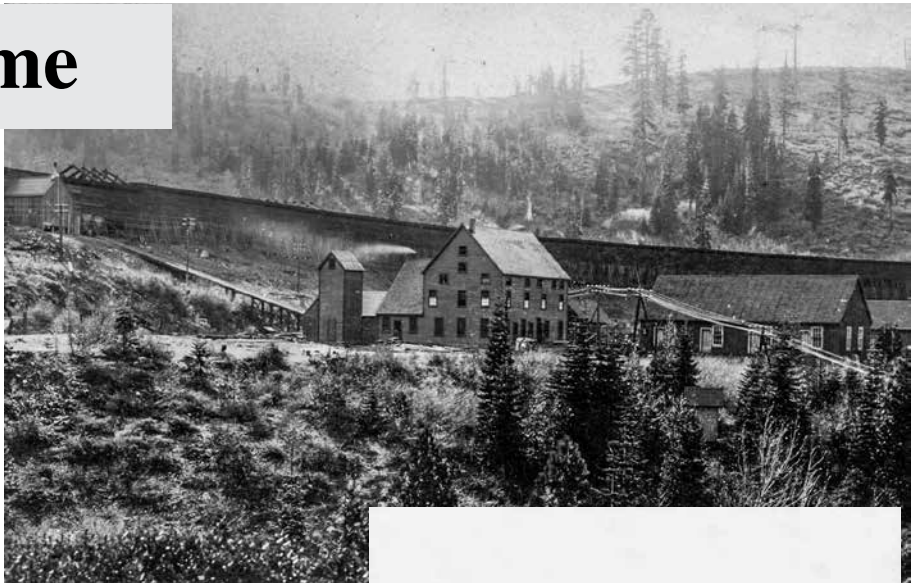
About the same time a new town arose along the highway 40, across what is now I-80. That little town catered to travelers on Highway 40 and included a store, gas station, cabins and rooms for rent, a lodge, and houses. That too has gone now leaving only a few vacation homes.

The [Heirloom](#) has published a lot of Cisco pictures over the years. Take a look at our picture index on any [Heirloom](#) page on our website. Many of the pictures have been of Cisco in the 30's and 40's. Others were of Cisco at the time of the Transcontinental Railroad's construction. The Wiggins album pictures are of Cisco between those two time periods. The dated pictures are 1913 and 1914.

The picture of Cisco from the Wiggins family album shows a typical American family town. Kids dress in costumes for a birthday party and costume contest. They play in the river. There is a dance floor and a croquet court. People are skiing. There are the buildings of Cisco and family snapshots. The album is evocative of a time gone by, of people long gone and mostly unidentifiable. Who were they? What did they do and accomplish? What did they leave behind? What contributions did they make?

The moral there is, leave carefully annotated photo albums behind for future generations.

Jim Wiggins donated the album to the DSHS.



Top: Buildings at Cisco, including the snowsheds. The location is above the current service station on I-80, south side of the freeway.



Above: Blue Canyon, 1912



Left, skiers outside the Cisco Store. Note the single poles for balance, braking, and steering.

**The television premiere of "The Donner Party" is slated for Friday, November 27 at 9pm ET on The Weather Channel.**

For more information:

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/sam-rivman/interview-with-the-makers\\_b\\_8210332.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/sam-rivman/interview-with-the-makers_b_8210332.html)



# Cisco ca. 1913

Top: Cisco dance platform.  
Top right: skier at Cisco - note the single pole.  
Below: pack train at Cisco  
Right: building below the Cisco snowsheds.



## Big Thank You

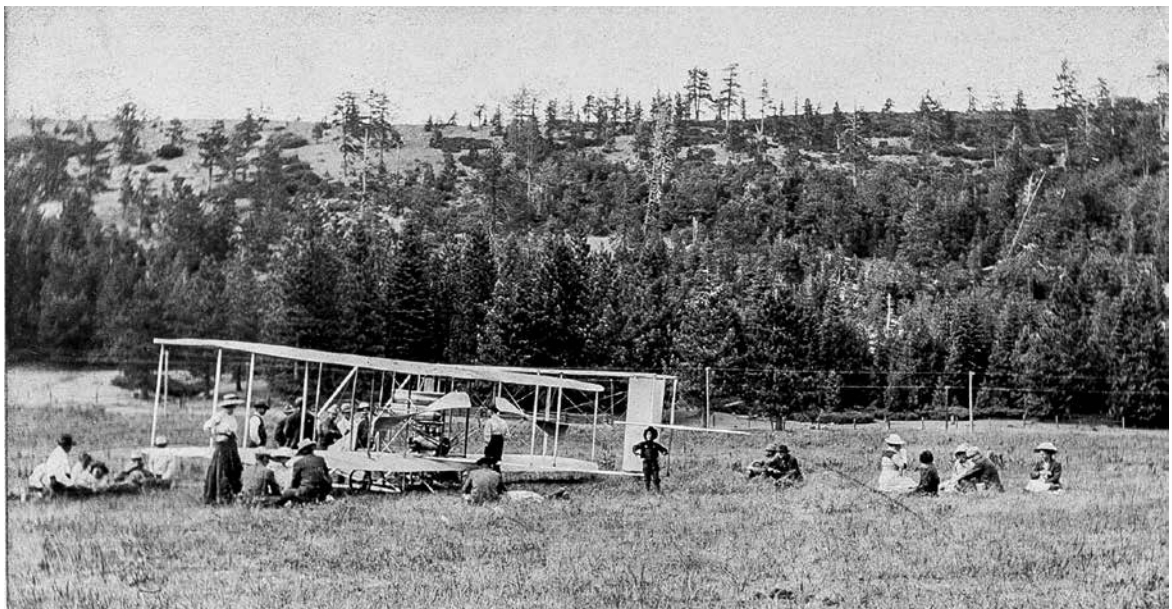
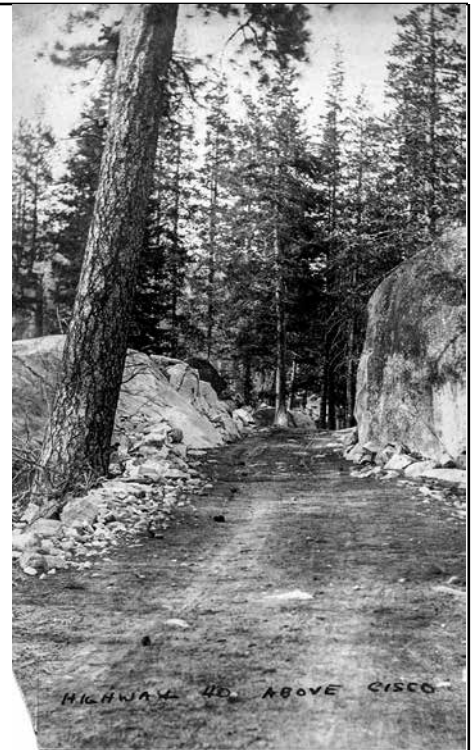
We store most of our 20 Mile Museum signs for the winter so they don't get "eaten" by snow removal machinery. Even so, each year some of the aluminum receptacles that sit in cement, below ground level, get "eaten." That's a different story though.

We've been storing our signs in the garage at the old Norden Store. The building was sold though and our storage space disappeared. Into the breach came Janet and Marshall Tuttle who own the Donner Ski Ranch. By the time you read this, our signs should be safely stored awaiting snowmelt.



Top: house at Cisco.

Right: labeled, "Highway 40 above Cisco" but it must have been labeled long after the album was put together. Given the dates of the pictures this is probably pre-Lincoln Highway (put together in 1913), see the Heirloom for 12/'08)



This picture is a bonus. Robert Fowler tried to be the first to cross the Sierra in an aeroplane. He did not make it. Here is the plane at Carpenter Flat at Emigrant Gap in 1912. One day the Heirloom will carry the interesting story but for now the information, pictures, and possible text reside in the Heirloom's editorial computers. In this case apparently one or more members of the Wiggins clan was following the flight which was well reported in newspapers.

## California's Preservation of the First Wagon Routes

There's a bonus with this issue of the Heirloom. Marshall Fey, eminent Emigrant Trail historian who lives in Reno has contributed a separate PDF about California's preservation of the first wagon routes. Be sure to download it.



Right: closeup of the right side of the above scene (slightly different picture) showing two men playing croquet on a nice croquet court.



Top: There was a birthday party at Cisco which included a costume contest. The winners are above left. Above right: two kids at Cisco at the croquet court.

# Kids at Cisco ca. 1913



General pictures of kids at Cisco about 1913. The ones to the right are in the birthday contest costumes. Most of the pictures include the kids' first names.

Right: on the road from Fordyce Lake.

Below: the Yuba River maybe



Right: "Mud Lake", unknown location today, 1914.

Below: Tuttle Lake on Donner Summit  
Below right: postcard of unknown lake.



# Fun at Cisco ca. 1913

# The Proof Is in the Album.

Here in the DSHS Heirloom offices we make every attempt to ascertain the truth of our stories or at least do such a good job of making up a story that the reader can't tell (just kidding - except maybe for our April 1<sup>st</sup> issues each year).

You will remember that we reported the turkey story in our April, '10 issue and then followed that in December, '10 with actual articles from the Reno papers proving that the incident really did happen and was not something Norm\* made up.

Here's another case of the proof coming along after Norm\* told the story. In our September, '08 Heirloom we included the accompanying story, "Good Story to go with Gas Stations." It's a good story but you never know. Then at the end of August this year Norm\* corralled the editor of this fine heirloom quality Heirloom, with a small album of photographs each date stamped, "Mar 56." Here were the pictures of the "Good Story..." and the evidence that the Heirloom prints not just quality history, but honest and true history. Parenthetically Norm\* discovered the small album in a desk where it had been hiding for decades which leads one to wonder, what else is hiding in Norm's house just waiting?

The following Fall Norm went into the Army. He's been saving the album for the decades since just for an occasion like this.

\*Norm Sayler, president of the DSHS

## Good story to go with Gas Stations:

"Hootin Scootin," Ralph Rowton, was the owner of gas station number seven, right at the corner of Soda Springs Rd. and Old 40.

Norm Sayler, as you know from our last issue [Sept. '08], worked the ski hill in Soda Springs. He was at the top using his binoculars one day and he saw a cattle truck go off the road on Old 40 about where the Snow Lab is today. The truck kept going but three cattle fell out.

Norm called Milt Hogle, Soda Springs Ski Hill owner, and told him to call "Hootin Scootin" at the Rowton Garage. Then, since there were no skiers on the hill, Norm skied down to the gas station.

"Hootin" took the tow truck up to where the cows had dropped off the truck. Two were dead and one "was still kind of hollerin'." Ralph took a .38 pistol out of his tow truck and asked the cattle truck driver, who'd returned, if he should shoot the beast. The driver agreed and the cow was soon dispatched. Then the driver asked, "Do you want the cows?"

Rowton said yes. "We picked up the first one with his tow truck" and took it to the service station where it was raised up on the old lift and hung. "Hootin" returned for the other two cows and all three were then hanging from the car lift in the gas station's garage. The next two days were spent butchering the cows in the gas station. Many people came to help and the meat was given to the community.

"Hootin' Scootin" was an old time cowboy who came from a ranch in Nevada to work on Donner Summit. [It is for him that Rowton Pk., above Serene Lakes, is named.]



Above, cattle truck damaged so the cattle could escape.

Below, cattle that didn't stray far.







Ralph Rowton's station at the corner of Old 40 and Soda Springs Rd. The Zorich Ski Shop, now the DSHS is in the background attached to the then Soda Springs Hotel.

## Soda Springs Service


THE ONLY GAS STATION ON DONNER SUMMIT

● **Open 24 Hours** ●

GASOLINE - OIL - GARAGE SPACE  
CHAIN SERVICE - TOWING SERVICE

\* \*  
Next to Soda Springs Hotel  
\* \*

**RALPH RAWTON, Proprietor**  
SODA SPRINGS 2262



The above is an actual ad with an actual misspelling.



Left top of these three: cattle truck on Old 40 along Summit Valley. Below, left, cow waiting pick up.

Above, the damaged truck.

Because we are a family heirloom quality Heirloom historical publication, suitable for passing on to your heirs, we have left out some of the other pictures from Norm's album - for obvious reasons of good taste.



# From the DSHS Archives



Last month the "Archives" section of the [Heirloom](#) had pictures of Cisco Grove when it was a community along Old Highway 40.

This month's Archives are photographs of the even older Cisco which was "end of track" while the CPRR was finishing the tunnels through the Sierra. That Cisco sat uphill from where the gas station is at the Cisco exit from I-80.

A few thousand people lived at Cisco when it was "end of track" until the Summit tunnel, Tunnel 6, was finished. At its height, 87 train car loads of materials, freight, and equipment were unloaded at Cisco, put onto wagons, and taken over the Summit on the Dutch Flat Donner Lake Wagon Rd.



Top left: depot at Cisco

Top right: Cisco Grove, 1868 (Tunnel 6 was finished at the end of 1867 and trains began running through it in 1868).

Lower left: Cisco Grove downtown, 1868

Lower right: Central Pacific Railroad Depot at Cisco.

# From the DSHS Archives



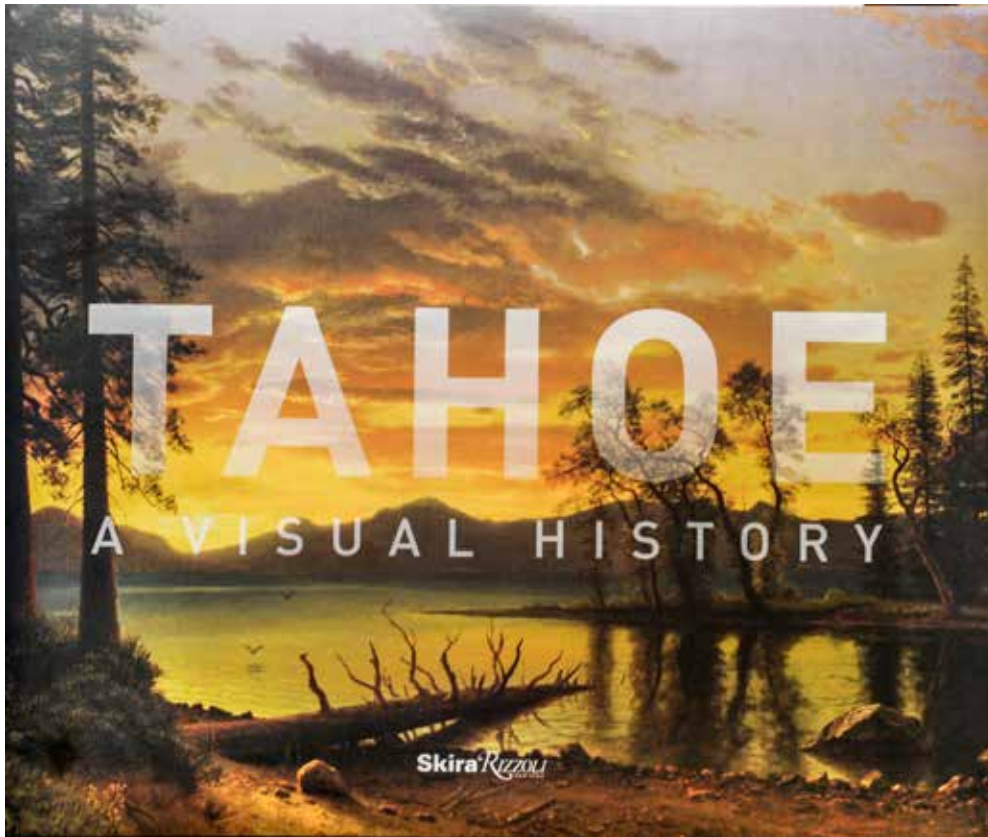
Top: stages at Cisco before the railroad took over passenger travel ca. 1868

Left above: Cisco, 1908

Left below: depot at Cisco

Above: "Upper" Cisco ca. 1868

# Book Review - Tahoe A Visual History



The exhibit is at the Nevada Art Museum in Reno through January.

You should visit this exhibition.

“This significant publication represents the first comprehensive survey of fine art and architecture related to Lake Tahoe, Donner Pass, and the surrounding area commonly referred to as the Sierra Nevada or Tahoe region....

“Art in and about a place helps define its cultural identity. Without knowledge or shared understanding of a region’s art and history, it is impossible to celebrate or critically examine its contributions to the broader culture. This publication records the art history of Lake Tahoe, Donner Pass, and the surrounding Sierra region for the first time.”

Those quotes come from the Foreword and the Preface of Tahoe A Visual History, the catalog for a show at the Nevada Art Museum in Reno until January. That’s exactly what this book does and does well. This is a magnificent book. It’s full of art reproductions, historical photographs and other historical ephemera. The format of the book, as well as the contents, lend to the magnificence. The book is almost two inches thick (460 pages), is 11” by 13”, and has high quality thick pages. Some of the art reproductions or photographs span two full pages.

The title belies the fact that although there is a lot of Lake Tahoe, there is also a surprising amount of Donner Summit and Donner Lake, and quite a bit about Native American basketry.

You probably won’t sit down with this coffee table suitable book to read straight through. The first thing you will do is page through it getting an idea of what to go back to and in which order to enjoy the visual feasts. After going back a few times, paging through, you’ll be ready for parts of the text that are of interest.

The first three chapters are: At the Edge of the Lake, Traditional Washoe Basketry: Art in Natural Fibers, and History and Art in Washoe Fancy Basket Weaving. The basketry photographs are beautiful and there’s a good story about an accomplished basket maker.

Mapping a Lake in the Sky is exactly about that as is A Brief History of Staging in the Sierras.

The chapter titled "Lake Tahoe's Golden Age:" Paintings of the Tahoe Region, 1860-1920 is the strongest chapter. It is a large collection of paintings including some of Donner Summit or Donner Lake that have been in the Heirloom. There may be more in the text about artists than you want to know but if so, you can go back to savoring pictures. Tahoe and Donner Summit are so beautiful and so many artists came to capture the beauty in the late 19th century, they must have tripped all over each other.

Then comes photography in the area, commercial and artistic print making of the area, architecture of the area, and contemporary art.



Albert Bierstadt, California Summit on the Central Pacific Railroad, 1872. An example of painting of Donner Summit-themed paintings in the book..



Above: Charles Leander Weed, Teaming up the Summit on the Dutch Flat and Donner Lake Wagon Road. An example of the historical photography in the book.

Edward Weston, Steam Shovel and Donner Lake, 1937



# Then & Now with Art Clark



## Alfred A Hart 213 - Snow Covering below Cisco

Due to the volume of snowfall and problems with avalanches in the Sierras, the railroad was forced to build snowsheds over the tracks to keep them usable in the winter. Originally, they were built of wood, but burning embers from the steam engines often started fires in them. The modern version in this shot is concrete.

Photo location 39° 18.702'N 120° 33.481'W



# Then & Now with Art Clark



## Alfred A Hart 215 - Bear Valley and Yuba Canyon, from Emigrant Gap -

The biggest change in this view is the trees. Gradually they are moving in along the borders of the valley. Very little evidence of man can be seen. Even Highway 20 is hidden from view. By contrast, if one turned around he would see busy Interstate 80 and the railroad.

Photo location N 39° 17.885'  
W120° 40.496'



# New 20 Mile Museum Sign



## Hwy 40 Scenic Bypass Central Sierra Snowlab ●

### History

California has some of the most productive farmland in the world and a population of 38 million people. California alone is one of the biggest economies in the world. Water is critical to that economy and Sierran snows are critical to that water supply. The snows serve as a frozen reservoir slowly releasing water in the spring to streams and rivers downstream. It is vital to know how much snow is in the Sierra what the water content the snow is. How much water will come from the melting snow? Reservoir managers and farmers can then plan. The Central Sierra Snow Lab was established in 1946 to gather accurate information and do snow research. The Snow Lab was built by the U.S. Weather Bureau and the Army Corps of Engineers. The U.S. Forest Service took over in 1952 and the University of California at Berkeley assumed responsibility in 1995.

Donner Summit is a perfect spot for a snow research station. Long term records of snowfall, gathered first by the railroad, go back to 1881. The maritime influence of the Pacific Ocean on Donner Summit results in an average of 34 feet of snowfall each winter - the highest snowfall of any residential area in the continental U.S. The snowpack typically lasts seven months and is deep, ranging from six to sixteen feet. The Lab is located in a large watershed that drains the terrain north of Boreal and west of Castle Peak, making it an ideal location to study runoff and streamflow. With the snow/rain line moving higher each year Donner Summit is an excellent place to gauge the effects.

### A Good Story

The Federal Snow Sampler, the tool being used just above, is an efficient way to measure snow water equivalent, and is used by hydrologists in addition to more advanced tools. The sampler is pushed into the snow to extract a core which is then weighed to determine the water content of the snow. Depth alone does not index water content. Accurate measurements help determine the extent of the snowpack and how much water to expect downstream during snowmelt. The sampler was developed by Dr. James Church, the "Father of Snow Surveying."

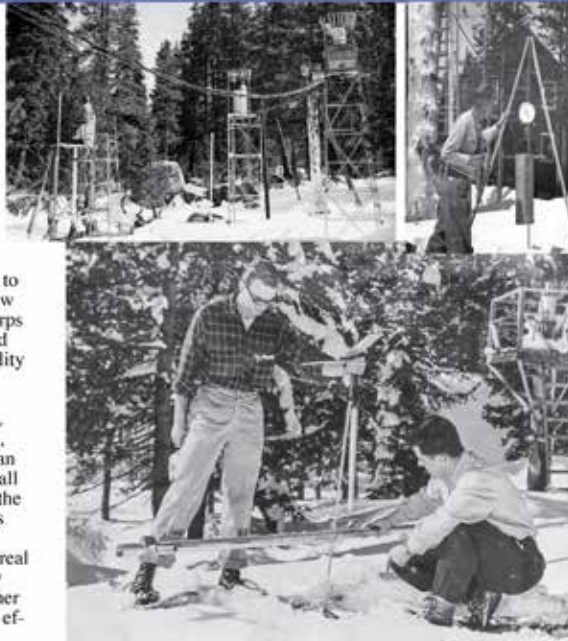
### Things to do right here

Hiking up Boreal Ridge from Clair Tappaan Lodge (just up the road) to Crater Lake offers great views of Donner Summit. Walkers will like walking in Summit Valley, seeing more 20 Mile Museum signs and Native American grinding rocks.

This sign sponsored by Joe and Julie Celenti.

pictures courtesy of the Central Sierra Snowlab and Randall Osterhuber

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Top Left: 1951 Geiger Mueller Counter\*, battery of precipitation gauges, and radioactive Cobalt 60 tender snow to right.

Top Right: "Weighing a snow core for a water holding study" at the Snow Lab, 1948.

Bottom: Federal Sampler being used at the Snow Lab.

\*The amount of water in the snow affected how much radiation was detected as the radioscopes was raised from underground. In that way a profile of the snowpack could be determined.



Norm Saylor, president of the DSHS, has wanted a sign in the 20 Mile Museum for the Central Sierra Snowlab in Soda Springs for a long time. He did some work for Joe Celenti of Colfax. Mr. Celenti offered to sponsor the Snowlab sign so the DSHS 20 Mile Museum committee got busy, did some research, talked to Randall Osterhuber who is the chief scientist at the Snowlab, gathered pictures, and talked to Gigi and Corky Heckendorn who are local real estate agents and who own the best spot for the sign's placement. The result is above. It will be ready for "planting" when the snows melt.



**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 \_\_\_\_\_

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

\_\_\_\_\_ Individual Membership - \$30

\_\_\_\_\_ 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.

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# Memories of Donner Summit Pat Malberg

## The Central Sierra Snowlab

As a child in Girl Scouts, I took part briefly in a local Truckee troop that camped out one night in the meadow near the snow lab. I remember beautiful flowers and waking to a dew-dampened sleeping bag in the morning. Gladys Pedley was our leader (as well as our dance teacher -- ballet and "acrobatics"), had a summer home on the road leading to the lab, and my next door neighbor, Myrtle Sater, and I would hitch a ride with her to the Wyethia Club next to the river in town where Gladys conducted her lessons and the troop met. Just another happy memory of life on the Summit!

## The Highway Maintenance Station on Old 40 at the top of Donner Pass.

I have read Storm by George R. Stewart [see our October Heirloom] and enjoyed the references to the Dept. of Highways maintenance station on the Summit and the crew's efforts to keep the road open that winter. That same maintenance station [pictured below] was our jumping-off point, the last shelter we had, before we skied into the cabin Friday nights, often facing a biting wind and blizzard, after the seven hour plus trip from San Francisco. On the way up, chains were required more often than not, and I admired my Dad's ruggedness in taking on that freezing cold chore. Cars and drivers in the 30's were pretty unprepared for the conditions described by Stewart! [Pat Malberg's family has owned a house at Lake Mary on Donner Summit since the 1940's. The original house was built from railroad snowshed timbers].

Do you have some memories you'd like to share?  
[info@donnersummithistoricalociety.org](mailto:info@donnersummithistoricalociety.org)

