

The Donner Summit

Heirloom



History and stories of the Donner Summit Historical Society

September, 2016 issue #97

Chinese Railroad Workers on Donner Summit - Pt IV Celebration for some

In keeping with the age of wonder that was the 19th Century (see Part I of Chinese Railroad Workers on Donner Summit in the June, '16 [Heirloom](#)), the entire country was able to participate in the driving of the Golden Spike at Promontory Point, Utah on May 10, 1869. The transcontinental railroad was finished and the dignitaries had gathered. The driving of the Golden Spike was to be the ceremonial finish. A wire had been attached to the spike maul and another wire to the Golden Spike. Each strike of the maul on the Golden Spike would send a click across the telegraph wires to the country. The nation would instantaneously know the tracks from the east and the west were joined. It was truly an age of wonder.

Governor Stanford missed the spike on his first strike but the telegraph operator dutifully clicked the key anyway. Bells rang; people rejoiced.

The railroad was done.

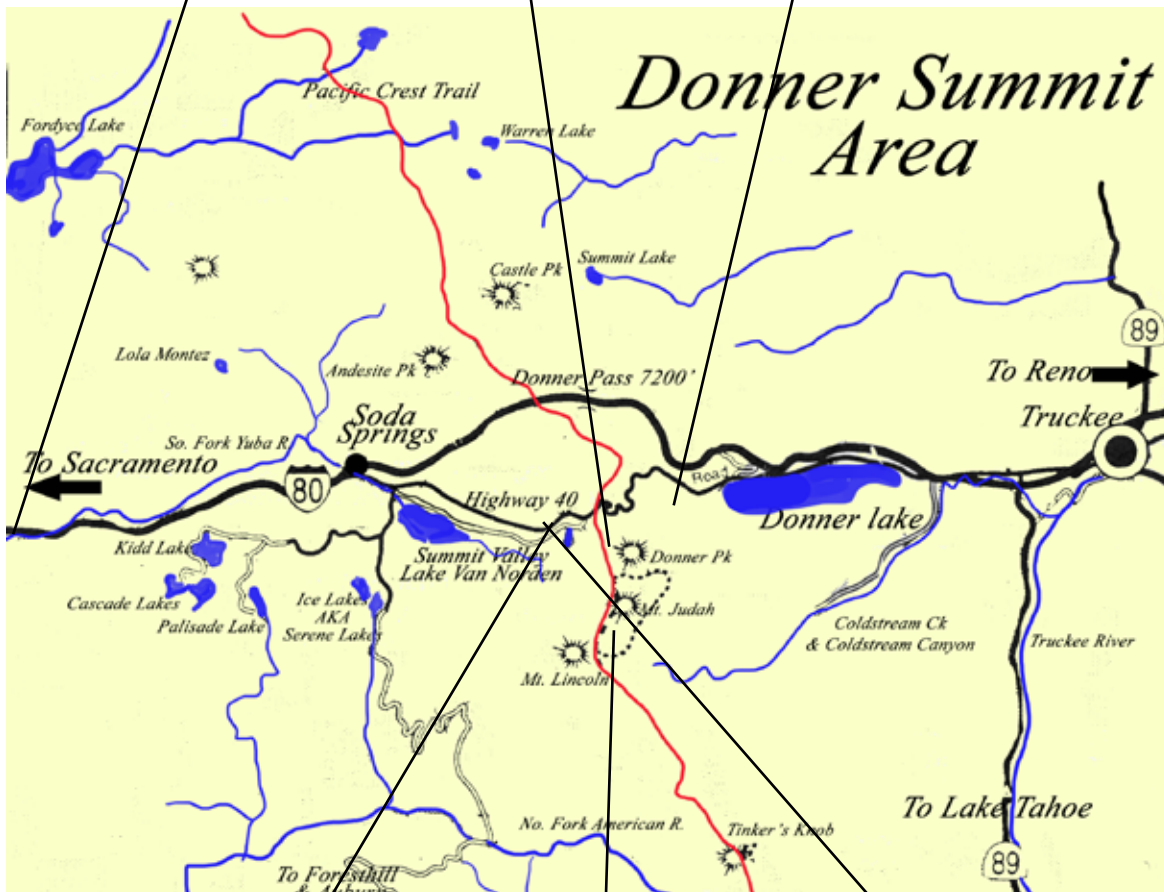
People had even been giddy with excitement earlier as the railroad climbed over the Sierra. As one correspondent to the [Sacramento Union](#) wrote in 1867, the railroad "will give to our wealth and progress an impetus so great that even the most sanguine among us will find this calculation far exceeded by the reality." With the driving of the Golden Spike there could be real celebration of accomplishment and opportunity. Festivities were the order of the day. Sacramento, the starting point of the western portion of the road, and San Francisco had huge celebrations that must have been planned far in advance. There were also celebrations in Virginia City, Stockton, Petaluma, Placerville, and Vallejo.

In Sacramento there had been ads in the papers drawing people to the celebration. The [Sacramento Union](#) said on May 8, 1869 that the completion of the railroad was "a victory over space, the elements, and the stupendous mountain barriers separating the East from the West, and apparently defying the genius and energy of man to surmount. Every heart was gladdened by the contemplation of the grand achievement."

Sacramento had a grand parade and The [Daily Alta California](#) reported, "A more favorable day could not be asked. A bright, unclouded sky, the sun tempered with refreshing air, Sacramento never saw a more favorable occasion for a public celebration. At dawn the people were moving; ...At an early hour a train arrived with firemen of Nevada Engine Company, No. 1, from Gold Hill,.... fine stalwart fellows, and well capable of battling with the destroying element anywhere.... [more firemen arrived from elsewhere]... About the same hour the boat arrived from San Francisco, bringing five bands.... Every manufacturing establishment and mercantile house is gaily decorated. ...There is a great profusion of bunting and flags.... The streets are now crowded, the people expecting the commencement of the exercises by the announcement of the driving of the last spike... Everybody is in holiday garb. The hotels are full... The scenes in the principal streets are indescribably lively. Constantly steamers, trains, cars and country vehicles are arriving, adding confusion to the throng... One thousand school children from city and country are here to participate in the fruition and the hope of their parents."

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

Proofread by Pat Malberg, Lake Mary, Donner Summit

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

TRIUMPHANT COMPLETION OF THE PACIFIC RAILROAD CELEBRATION AT SACRAMENTO

....now that the mass of our people can stop to reflect upon the Grand results which has caused such vast rejoicings over the State within the past week, we shall all begin to see and feel the full value of our State, to Our Country, and to the World, the boundless good which has been achieved for us all by the Grand, Triumphant and Gloriously successful

COMPLETION OF THE PACIFIC RAILROAD

California Farmer and Journal of Useful Sciences

May 13, 1869

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"A minute ... before 10 o'clock the completion was announced of the laying of the last rail and the driving of the last spike on the Central Pacific Railroad. Immediately following the report there went up a most unearthly din, produced by all the engines owned by the Company, which were gaily decorated and arranged along the city front, with a chorus of all the stationary engines and city boats and the ringing of city bells, which continued ten minutes, during which person of weak tympana put their fingers in their ears, and rejoiced when the chorus was over. Thousands were present who never before and never will again hear such a grand diapason. The engineers vied with one another in producing screeches and sounding notes. There was harmony and discord.... All the principal streets were packed, rending locomotion difficult. The procession commenced moving at eleven o'clock."

The parade included bands; the militia; the National Guard accompanied by artillery; firemen; machinists; blacksmiths; boilermakers; wagons with machinery; contingents of civic organizations; a boiler and attached smokestack; 29 omnibuses, carriages, and wagons of school children; private societies in parade attire; politicians; a contingent of weavers; carriages; buggies; and horsemen; rail workers; wagons from the telegraph company and Wells Fargo; etc. Participants arrived in 18 trains. There was bunting, banners with stirring quotes, and flags; speeches and poems; there was music; and there was prayer. There were throngs of people, even some of the workers who'd laid the 10 miles of track in one day. The parade took hours to pass.

The first shovel used to build the railroad was exhibited as were the first tie and a picture of the last one.

The San Francisco Bulletin reported Judge Nathan Bennet's speech at the San Francisco celebration. He said this triumph of railroad construction was wholly owing to the fact that his fellow Californians were "composed of the right materials, derived from the proper origins... In the veins of our people flows the commingled blood of the four greatest nationalities of modern days. The impetuous daring and dash of the French, the philosophical spirit of the German, the unflinching solidity of the English, and the light-hearted impetuosity of the Irish, have all contributed each its appropriate share... A people deducing its origins from such races, and condensing their best traits into its national life, is capable of any achievements." It was stirring.

There were no Chinese at all, even though they had made up the vast majority of CPRR workers and were the ones who laid the record ten miles of track in one day. Not far in the future mobs would burn out Chinatowns and Chinese businesses along the route of the railroad and assault individual Chinese. Prejudice would be officially mandated by court decisions in California and, nationally, the Chinese Exclusionary Act would be passed just a dozen years later.

How quickly people can forget.

Right, Daily Alta California May, 8, 1869t

EXCURSION
FOR THE
PACIFIC RAILROAD CELEBRATION
AT
SACRAMENTO.

THE CALIFORNIA STEAM
Navigation Company will issue Ex-
cursion Tickets on **FRIDAY**, at
\$2 50 EACH,

For the Round Trip to Sacramento and return—
good until Monday' May 10th, inclusive,
The steamer **CHRYSOPOLIS** will be detained at
Sacramento until 4 o'clock P. M., on Saturday.
my7 **B. M. HARTSHORNE, President.**

**THE SACRAMENTO CELEBRATION
A GRAND DEMONSTRATION
THE CELEBRATION AN IMMENSE
SUCCESS**

SPECIAL DISPATCH TO THE ALTA

Arrival of Firemen from Various Quarters—Five Bands from San Francisco are On Hand—Decorations of the City—Immense Throngs—Enthusiasm of the People—The last Rail Laid and the Last Spike Driven by the Central Pacific—Chorus of Steam Engines—The Procession—Etc.

Sacramento, May 8th.—A more Favorable day could not be asked. A bright, unclouded sky, the sun tempered with refreshing air, Sacramento never saw a more favorable occasion for a public celebration.....

Daily Alta California May 8, 1869 [sic]
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**THE SACRAMENTO RAILROAD
CELEBRATION**

—
Oration by Governor Haight - the
Progress of Twenty Years- A
More Splendid Civilization
Coming - Just a Century Since
the First White Settlement.
—

Daily Alta California May 10, 1869

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This was the heading for the Governor's speech.

Chinese Exclusionary Act, 1882

An Act to execute certain treaty stipulations relating to Chinese.

Whereas in the opinion of the Government of the United States the coming of Chinese laborers to this country endangers the good order of certain localities within the territory thereof: Therefore,...

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That from and after the expiration of ninety days next after the passage of this act, and until the expiration of ten years next after the passage of this act, the coming of Chinese laborers to the United States be, and the same is hereby, suspended; and during such suspension it shall not be lawful for any Chinese laborer to come, or having so come after the expiration of said ninety days to remain within the United States.

...

SEC. 14. That hereafter no State court or court of the United States shall admit Chinese to citizenship; and all laws in conflict with this act are hereby repealed.

Crossing Donner Summit - Documentary trailer.

This video is about thousands of Chinese workers' work in building the Central Pacific Railroad across the Sierra. It was distributed on Apr 20, 2016 and can be rented or purchased. Do a Google search for "Crossing Donner Summit" or use this link: <https://vimeo.com/ondemand/chineseworkers/173201850>

The original YouTube version is now "private."

Prejudice Continues

It was not just at the time of the railroad's completion that the Chinese were forgotten or ignored.

1928

In 1928 in the Southern Pacific (the Central Pacific had been absorbed) Bulletin (Vol. 16, no. 5, pg 3) said "Fifty-nine years ago a squad of eight Irishmen and a small army of Chinese coolies made a record in track laying that has never been equaled..." "Fired with enthusiasm" the team laid ten miles fifty-six feet of track in one day.

"The names of the Irish rail handlers have been passed down through the years. Their super human achievement will be remembered as long as there is railroad history." With no note of irony, because it was expected at the time, the article continued, "So, too, will that day's work of 'John Chinamen' be recalled as the most stirring even in the building of the railroad." Chinese workers weren't worthy of having their names remembered and indeed were not even considered as individuals by the railroad. More likely they were hired in groups with their names lost to history.

1969

One would think that as modern times arrived the story would have changed. But on the 100th anniversary of the completion of the railroad in 1969 a celebration was held. The Chinese Historical Society of America moved to ensure recognition of the Chinese contribution. They had two commemorative plaques made to install during the Golden Spike Ceremony at Promontory Point, Utah. The plaque dedication was not included in the official program although the Historical Society received a telegram saying that a spokesman for the "Chinee [sic] Community would be on the platform. During the ceremony, when no Chinese were allowed to speak, The Secretary of Labor, John Volpe, said, 'Who else but Americans could drill ten tunnels in mountains thirty feet deep in snow? Who else but Americans could chisel through miles of solid granite...' Who else indeed, except the Chinese who **did** do the tunneling of fifteen tunnels and **did** chisel through solid granite.

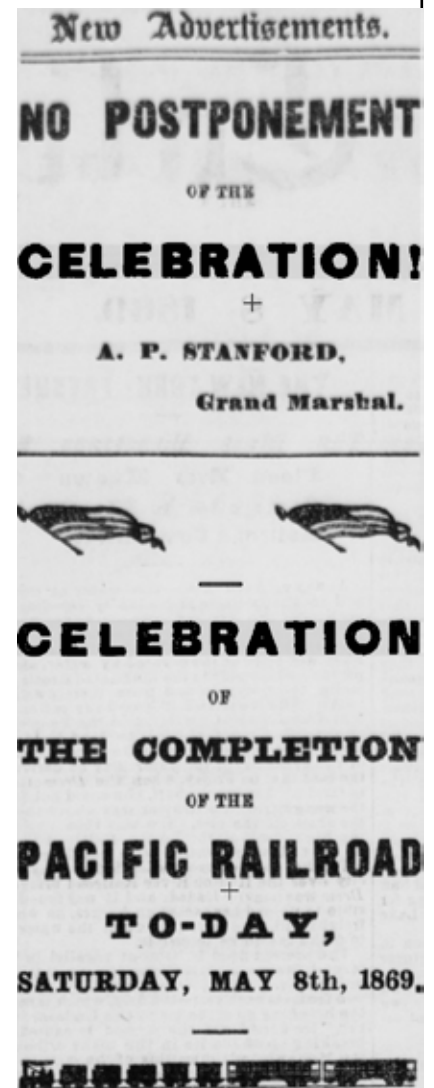
From Finding Hidden Voices of the Chinese Railroad Workers, 2016 (see the October, '16 Heirloom for a review or go to the DSHS website (<http://www.donnersummithistoricalsociety.org/pages/bookreviews/HiddenVoicesChineseRRworkers.html>).

For more information see the *Chinese Railroad Workers in North America Project* at Stanford University <http://web.stanford.edu/group/chineserailroad/cgi-bin/wordpress/>

HONORS TO JOHN CHINAMAN

Mr. Strobridge, when work was all over, invited the Chinamen who had been brought over, from Victory for the purpose, to dine in his boarding car. When they entered all the guests and officers present cheered them as the chosen representatives of the race which have greatly helped to build the road- a tribute they well deserved, and which evidently gave them much pleasure.

CPRR Discussion Group <http://discussion.cpr.net>
San Francisco Star May 15, 1869, San Francisco Newsletter May 15, 1869



Daily Alta California May 8, 1869

Don't Trust the Sources

Parental Guidance Suggested due to language unsuited to high quality family literature

One would think that if one gets an historical source that was actually written in the old days that the source could be trusted. Our DSHS historians know that's not a good idea. Just because it is old does not mean it's true.

We know that stories get changed today as stories are passed from one to another. People in the old days were just like us. They exaggerated, curried favor, made mistakes, etc. in the telling of stories. James Reed of the Donner Party notes that in the statement to the right from the Pacific Rural Press in March, 1871.

This comes up partly as a result of Ken Hall's question in our July, '16 Heirloom. He wanted to know why the Donners didn't just go back to Reno? He had read the book review, Saving the Donner Party, in our March, '16 Heirloom. We've reviewed other Donner Party books (Weathering the Storm, April, '16; History of the Donner Party, April, '15; Ordeal By Hunger, October, '15; Indifferent Stars Above, August, '16) because although the Donners were not on Donner Summit, the story is interesting, we are Donner Summit, Starved Camp was on Donner Summit somewhere, the Forlorn Hope camped out on Donner Summit, and the rescuers crossed Donner Summit. The reading of all those books and then other research turned up lots of versions of the story.

So the Donner Party is within out "sphere of influence" so to speak.

Here are two versions of the Donner Party tragedy from the same book, The Irish in California by Dr. Quigley, both "garbled" as James Reed would say.

After noting that Mary Murphy, Irish, is the for whom Marysville is named, Dr. Quigley the author, then mentions that that the organization of the Donner Party was badly done in that "a brute like Reed" was elected captain. He murdered someone named Snyder for a "slight disobedience of the rules. After this instance of barbarous cruelty, the so-called captain... was driven off... Then again, when the party ran short of food, the two Indian guides who volunteered to extricate them from their predicament, were murdered and devoured by the entire party. The survivors plundered their dead companions' property, and seemed more anxious to save it than their lives. So accustomed did the wretches become to the use of human flesh, that when relief came, they preferred the flesh of their fellow men to that of beef or mutton. There was even one named Keisburgh, who, it was suspected, murdered several of his companions to devour them. For over

The Snow-Bound, Starved Emigrants of 1846.

Statement by Mr. Reed, one of the Donner Company.

"The Donner Tragedy—A Thrilling Chapter in Our Pioneer History."

EDITORS PRESS:—An article under the above quoted title appeared in your issue of January 21st, 1871. The preface contained the following:

"The sufferings of the Donner party, who were snowed in, and detained on the mountains more than three months, in the winter of 1846-47 has been much talked about, and some garbled stories have been published; but from the very nature of the case, anything like a true history was difficult to come at." +

three months the whole party suffered from cold, and hunger, and sickness. When a death occurred, the flesh was instantly torn from the skeleton and devoured by the survivors."

Dr. Quigley must have liked the story because he included another version:

"The following is an extract from one of the newspapers of that date, 10th April, 1847. The bones of those who had died and been miserably devoured by those who survived were lying around their tents and cabins. The bodies of men, women and children, with one-half the flesh torn from them, lay on every side. A woman sat by the side of the body of her husband, who had just died, cutting out his tongue to eat it. The heart she had already cut out of his breast and broiled and ate it. The daughter was seen eating the flesh of her father, which she smoked to preserve it for future use; the mother that of her children; the children that of their parents. The emaciated, wild and ghastly appearance of the survivors added horror to the scene. Language cannot describe the awful change that a few weeks of dire suffering had wrought in the minds of the wretched beings. Those who, but one month before, would have shuddered at the thought of eating human flesh or of killing their relatives or companions to preserve their own lives, now looked upon the opportunity by these acts afforded them of escaping the most dreadful of deaths as a Providential interference on their behalf!

Calculations were coldly made, as they sat gloomily around their fires in camps, for the next meals of human flesh ! [sic] Various expedients were devised to prevent the dreadful crime of murder, but they finally resolved to kill those who had the least claims to longer existence. * * * Some sunk into the arms of death cursing God for their miserable fate, brought on by themselves, while the last whisperings of others were prayers and praise to the Almighty. After the few first days but one, the all-absorbing thought prevailed of self-preservation. The fountains of all natural affection were dried up. Even the wild Indians, having visited their camp with hostile intentions, pitied them, and instead of destroying them, as they could have easily done, divided their own scanty food with them. When the party sent to relieve them with ordinary food arrived, so barbarous had those wretches become that they preferred the putrid human meat to that of cereals and animal food sent to relieve them. The day before relief arrived one of the party took a child, four years old, to bed with him, and ate it before morning. The next day another child was devoured in the same manner."

"Some clung to their property till death, which, it is thought, many of them could have escaped, had they not clung to it with desperation."

The garbledness (historical research term) here is a caution to modern historians. Rest assured you can trust the [Heirloom](#) to bring you best the of true Donner Summit history.

April 1, 1871.]

The Snow-Bound, Starved Emigrants of 1846.

Statement by Mr. Reed, one of the Donner
Company.

*"The Donner Tragedy—A Thrilling Chapter
in Our Pioneer History."*

[Continued from page 188.]

Arrive at Capt. Sutter's.

Pacific Rural Press April 1, 1871

Visit the State Museum Archives

A lot of the reputation of our heirloom quality [Heirloom](#) is based on the large numbers of pictures used to illustrate the history of Donner Summit. For this story though, you will have to use your imagination, except for the picture here. Photographs were forbidden.

A couple of years ago the MHRT (Mobile Historical Research Team) of the DSHS made contact with the State Park archives following a tip about some early Donner Summit photographs by Charles Davis. We visited, had a tour, met with archivists and explored the photographic archives. Unfortunately our tip did not pan out (although our March, '15 [Heirloom](#) has a Charles Davis Then/Now) but we did come away with two things. One was a trove of pictures of the RR lookout Red Mountain and a story about one of the occupants. That material will be a good follow up to [Heirloom](#) stories in our July, '10 issue but you'll just have to be

patient for that. There's too much other history waiting in line to get into the [Heirloom](#). The second thing was the desire to come back to the archives and take pictures of the amazing treasure trove that is there.

Then in June of this year the State Park Archives offered a group tour. We boarded a van at the Visitors' Center at the State Park at Donner Lake and then headed for the old McClellan Air Force Base in Sacramento. There the buildings, strong enough to



withstand Soviet attack and which used to house military materiel for the entire Pacific area, have been given new lives in new endeavors.

The picture here of the front door can hardly give you an idea of what's behind the walls but one of the first things to see upon entry, besides a small set of displays, is a sign that say no photography. The sign has siblings all through the structure but still, if you are a history buff, you will like to imagine what the descriptions below evoke.

The State has a number of museums and the State Parks have a subset of those. California has a rich history. So there are a lot of things that tell the stories of California history. People have been contributing artifacts and the State Parks has been collecting artifacts that tell those stories. There is no room for all of those items to be displayed. Other State museums have the same problem and it used to be that surplus items were stored haphazardly and dangerously (to preservation) in corners everywhere. When the Federal government decommissioned McClellan the State got in line.

The nine buildings, two million square feet, now housing historical items that are not on display in various museums are huge. They are hundreds of yards long with twenty foot high ceilings and ten inch thick concrete walls. They are climate controlled and are essentially "free standing caves." The State added insulation and the result is a "superb preservation environment."

A good portion of the building space is devoted to various laboratories, workshops, and archive research rooms. There is even a locked closet that is a large freezer for protecting old nitrate films. In the facilities objects can be restored or conserved. Researchers can study objects, documents, and photographs.

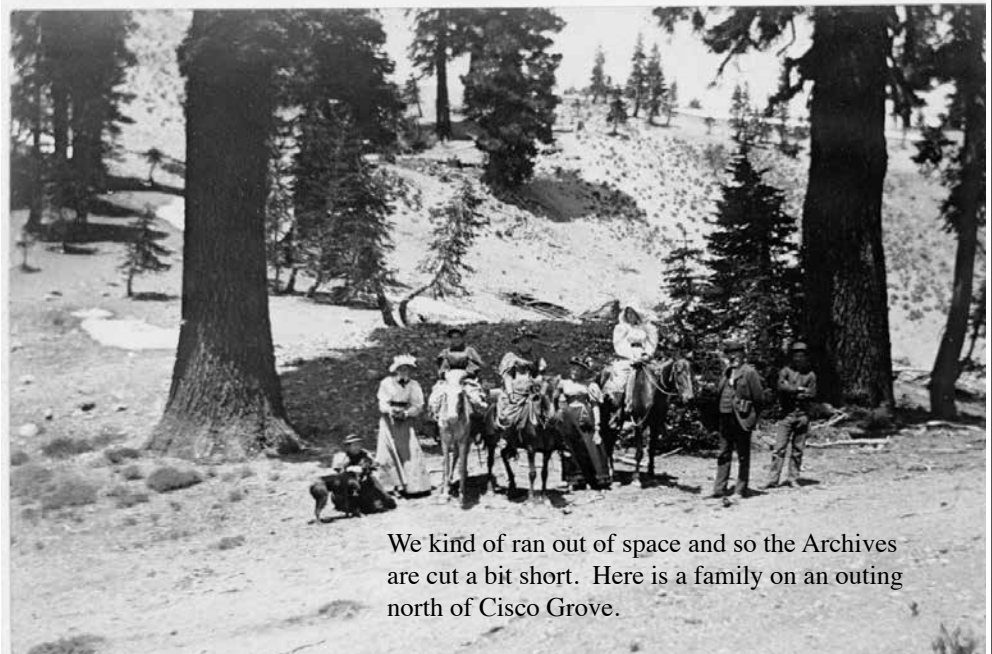
As huge as the facility is only 10% of the State Parks' collection is housed there along with material from other museums. Even that 10% adds up to 72,000 cataloged objects and 20,000 uncataloged objects (not counting 117,000 cataloged photos) and then there are areas with many more objects from other museums. There are rows and rows of old file cabinets full of State Railroad Museum documents and hundreds of Native American woven baskets from the State Indian Museum.

Most of the above came from the introduction before the tour. Then we got into the work areas. Corridors are more than a hundred yards long. All along are the laboratories and workshops. Then, at the end of one offshoot corridor, there's a door. We entered the cavern. It is huge with metal shelving structures heading up to the ceiling. Each shelf is full of historic items. Imagine shelves full of train lights, whistles and bells. There is a wedding dress of one of the Donners. There are trunks and boxes, railroad paraphernalia, models and displays. There is a dog powered treadmill. Then there are large items too: a freight wagon, the first milk carton sealing machine in California, and various pieces of machinery. There are shelves of furniture. There is a velocipede (early bicycle-like contraption). There are safes and lots of typewriters (old writing instruments). That list is only a small part of what we saw which was a small part of what's there.

It is extraordinary. But no pictures are allowed.

The facility is open to the public from 1-4 daily and open to researchers more than that. There are tours by appointment. You can reach the Statewide Museum Collection Center at 916-263-0805 or smccinfo@parks.ca.gov. You can get more general information at http://www.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=789

From the DSHS Archives



We kind of ran out of space and so the Archives are cut a bit short. Here is a family on an outing north of Cisco Grove.

From the DSHS Archives

AUTOMOBILE PARTY NARROWLY ESCAPE DEATH NEAR TRUCKEE

"A party of automobilists from Nevada City narrowly escaped death Sunday while en route from Nevada City to Lake Tahoe.

"The party which consisted of C. Christenson, Edgar Christenson and wife, Arthur Christenson, Carl Christenson, and Misses Lucille Hughes and Virginia Penrose, was descending the steep grade about a quarter mile on the other side of Donner lake [sic], when they were struck by an automobile traveling in the opposite direction.

"The machine, which was a large Oakland car, hit the Christenson auto such a heavy blow that the front axle was bent almost double and one of the tires was badly punctured. The force of that impact threw the auto to one side of the road and all that saved it from and all of its occupants from falling over the grade into the canyon hundreds of feet below was a large boulder near the roadside. One of the wheels of the machine stopped within a few inches of the edge of the canyon and for a few seconds the whole party believed that they were doomed."

The other auto, which had been driving down the middle of the road, drove off. A good samaritan stopped her car to render assistance. In the end the bent axle was removed and taken to Truckee for repair.

Truckee Republican July 16, 1914

Title formatted as in original; paragraphs added for readability

THE SUMMIT THE MOUNTAIN SIDES ROBED

With evergreens and rhododendrons crowned with snow in Summer ; the atmosphere is surcharged with health and vigor, and a foe to bronchial affections. Every inducement is offered not only to the tourist, but to all citizens of the Pacific coast to pass a week or two of rest and relaxation. To the business man it will be money ; to all, health. The Hotel is three miles from Donner Lake and two and one-half miles from Castle Peak, with its head 11,000 feet above the sea. **A LIVERY STABLE** is connected with the house, for the accommodation of guests.

The rates of fare of the Central Pacific Railroad are: From San Francisco, \$10.75 ; to return, \$3.75 ; with proportionate rates from Sacramento, Marysville, and other points.

The **SUMMIT HOTEL** is kept in the best modern style – finely furnished rooms, and its table bountifully supplied with everything of the best in its season.

JAS. CARDWELL, Proprietor

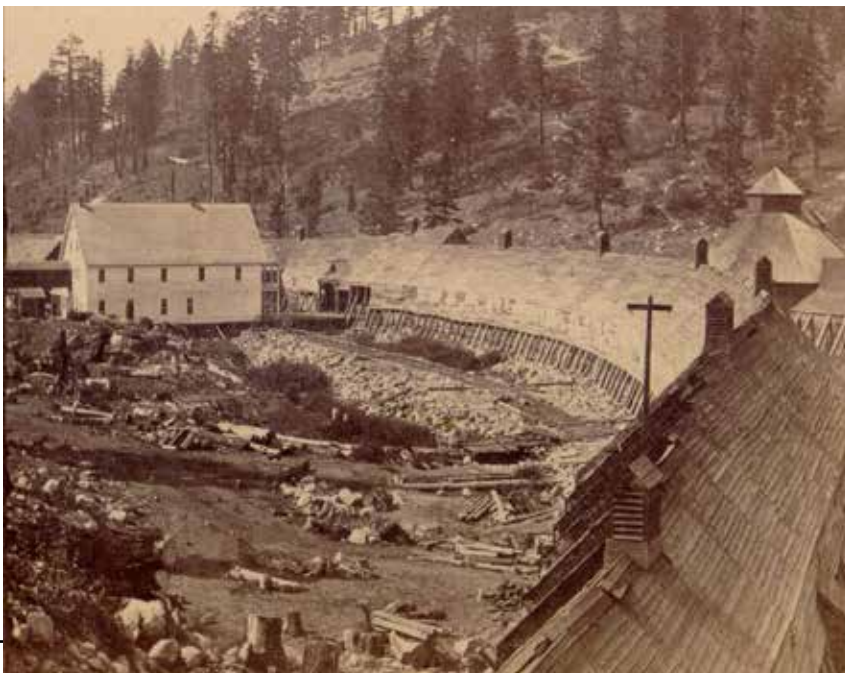
[sic] formatting, spelling and punctuation as originally done:

Sacramento Daily, July 4, 1871

The Summit Hotel had just been built the year before this ad; this was just two years after the transcontinental railroad had been finished. This version of the hotel would burn in 1892. The successor, built a few hundred yards away, was built immediately after the fire but, it too, burned in 1925.

For more on the Summit Hotel, see Art Clark Finds the Summit Hotel in the July, '13 Heirloom; and then parts I-III in the February, March, and November, '11 Heirlooms. There's also something in the March, '13 Heirloom.

Left: Summit Hotel I about 1870 before a later addition. Snowsheds are to the right. View is looking west. Tunnel 6 is behind and below the photographer.



C.E. Davis and the Em. Trail

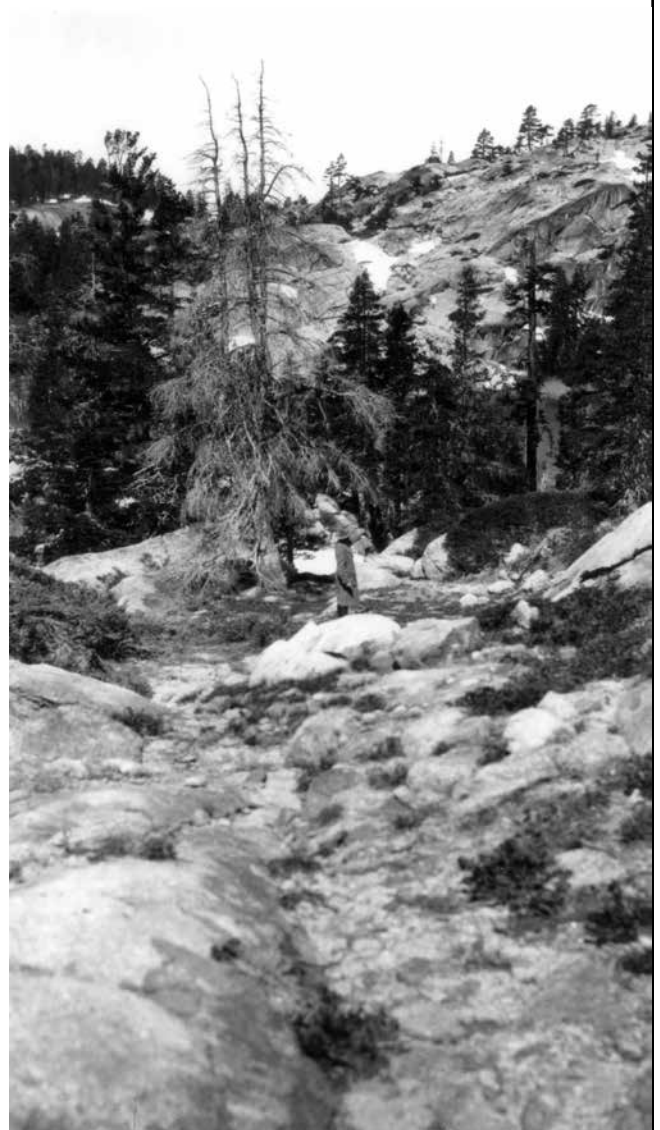
Art Clark, of our Then and Now fame, found some old copies of the [Overland Journal](#) in a thrift store. One had a picture by Charles E. Davis on the cover and several more inside. The pictures were of Donner Summit and the credits said Sutter's Fort. That set off a treasure hunt. If there were some historic Donner Summit pictures at Sutter's Fort then there might be more. There might be a gold mine. Indeed there were more photographs; but there was no gold mine.

After some hours of perusing there was nothing useful. First we were not allowed to handle originals which cut down what we could look at. Of the remainder, Mr. Davis was an amateur and made assumptions a careful historian wouldn't, took irrelevant pictures or unidentifiable pictures (e.g. a picture of a tree - where was it?) and so it was a bust.

C. E. Davis led an interesting life. He was born into a wealthy family. He started as a seaman in the Atlantic fishing fleet and worked his way to captain. He went to Alaska to look for gold during the Klondike stampede. He then became a naturalist and explorer. He traveled to Alaska, the Caribbean, Siberia, the Amazon and the American Southwest. At some point Davis became interested in the Donner Party and their trail west. The pioneers represented the indomitable spirit he admired. The result of his explorations is the Charles E. Davis Overland Trail Project, a collection of more than a thousand pictures of the emigrant trail, taken in the 1920's, from Independence Mo. to Sacramento, Ca.

We did not find any pictures useful for the DSHS archives and [Heirloom](#). There was disappointment. Then one of the helpful researchers mentioned Harry C. Peterson. He'd been the archivist at Sutter's Fort which attracted a lot of historical materials and he was the lookout on Red Mountain. Wait 'till you see those pictures! Keep up your subscription.

An example of how Davis' photographs are not useful to historians is



the one below, C.E. Davis 78, which is noted in his notebook, "Lines of trees mark where unknown parties of brave Pioneers passed up and over this great Sierra Barrier." For another example go to your carefully bound [Heirloom](#) collection (or our website), pull out March, '15 and look at the Then and Now section. You can also see two animated Then and Now's on our Then and Now web pages: C. E. Davis #78 and C. E. Davis (Northeast of Lake Angela).

Behind the Scenes @ the DSHS

Faithful readers can read the Heirloom monthly to get their “fix” of local history. They can explore the website or the museum for more. If they want field trips they can go on historic hikes (see that brochure or Walking Through Donner Summit History - available at the museum or the website) or follow the 20 Mile Museum. There’s a lot more to the DSHS though.

This article might be the first of an occasional feature about the inner workings of the DSHS.

The designers of the 20 Mile Museum are not dummies. They know there is a lot of snow on Donner Summit. An average of 34 feet falls each winter. To go with the large amounts of snow, there are fleets of snow removal machines that enable modern life to continue. Some of those machines are huge and can do a lot of damage as the occasional auto owner who has parked in the wrong spot can attest. Therefore the 20 Mile Museum signs were designed to be removed in winter and away from the snow removal behemoths (it’s good to use words like that sometimes).

Each fall the DSHS 20 Mile team removes and stores the signs at Donner Ski Ranch. Each spring, after snowmelt, the signs go back in. Some sign stands are cycled out for painting during the winter. There is some excitement as spring progresses. Soon the signs will be back in the ground and visitors will be able to enjoy them.

There can be a wrinkle though. Some snow removal machine operators are very diligent in their work, even over-enthusiastic. They want bare pavement or bare earth as the sign of a good job done. They will put their blade down to the ground and then further. If a 20 Mile Museum sign receptacle with its protective cap is in the spot where enthusiastic snow removal is being done it can become a casualty. Each spring the sign team has to wonder how many receptacles will have to be replaced.

In 2016 three receptacles needed replacing. You can see here what the signs look like in good health (next page). The receptacle for the one on the right center was scraped out of the ground and bent up. That’s the lump of concrete. One of the four at the Sugar Bowl Gondola receptacles was scraped out but was replanted after some adjustment with a special sign adjustment tool called a hammer. The one at the Soda Springs ski area also had to be replaced.

And you thought it was all fun and games at the DSHS. If you’d like to help put out or take in signs or repair ruined receptacles let us know.



Top: ruined receptacle still in its cement base.

Above, the cement and receptacle completely excavated by snow machine.

Below ruined steel cap



Happy 20 Mile Museum signs with their receptacles intact or newly replaced (the one on the left).

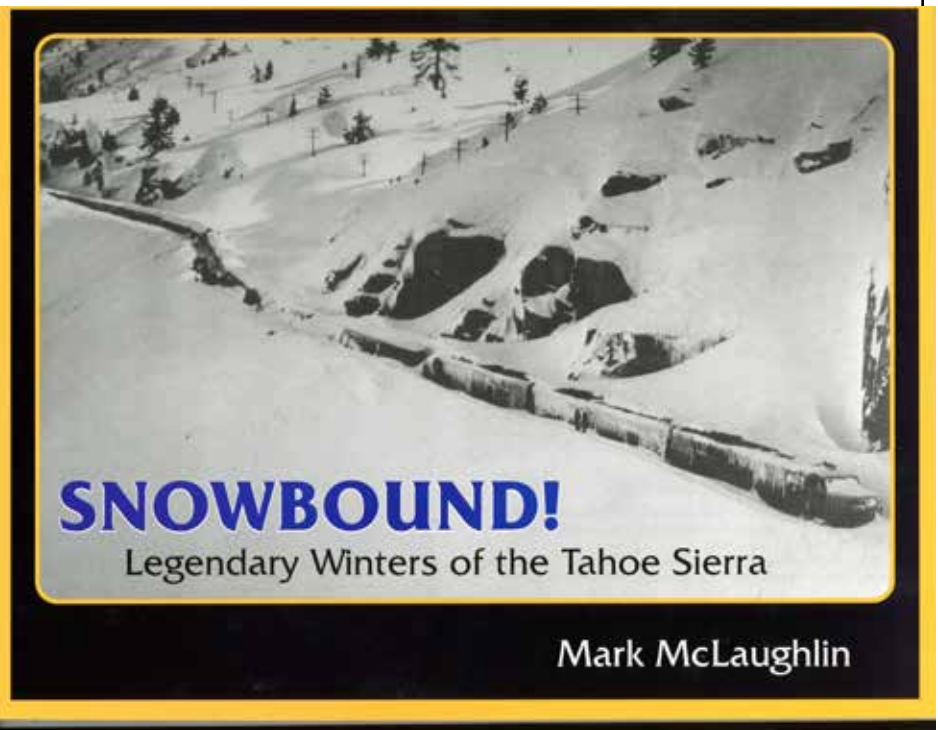


Book Review

Snowbound! Legendary Winters of the Tahoe Sierra

Mark McLaughlin 2016 148 pages.

Snowbound! is a picture book full of historical photographs along with a lot of good historical vignettes or snippets of history. It's suitable for your coffee table (8 ½ X 11 format). If you live in the Sierra you understand what Mark is talking about and if you don't you wonder, after wading through story after story and the amazing statistics, how anyone can live there.

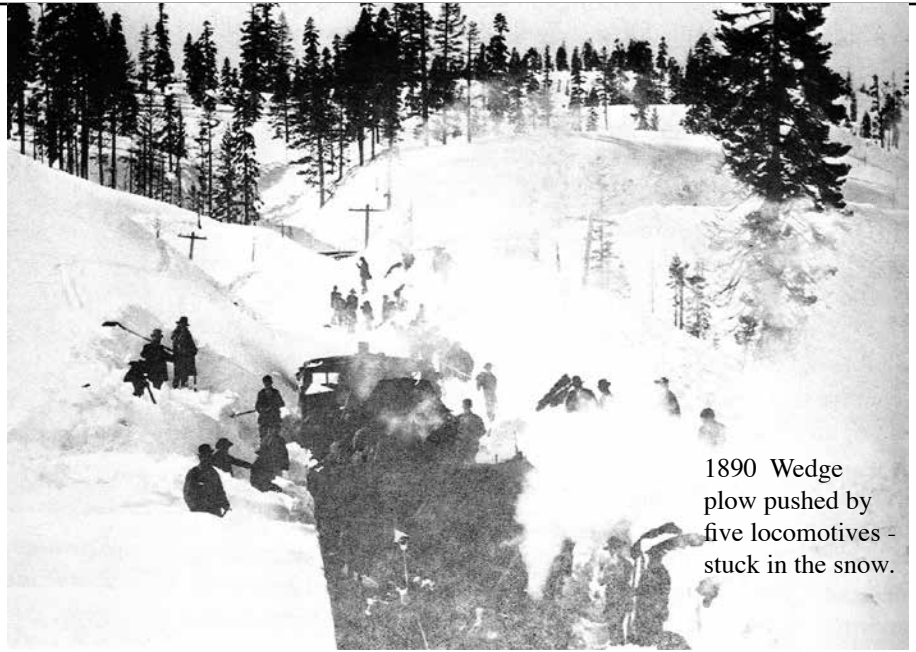


Mr. McLaughlin has done a lot of research for this book as he's done for all of his previous books. One result of the research is the many historical photographs that he's culled from various sources. Those include photographs from old newspapers as well as lots of pictures from other sources. Another result of all the research is the dozens of stories about ten selected Sierra winters. There is no flowing narrative in this book; rather it's a collection of stories that go with each of the record-breaking winters starting with "Hell on the Hill," in 1880 and going to 2011, "La Niña's Gift."

"Low pressure gets me high" is one of Mark's quotes and one can see why. Low pressure signals a storm. A "Battle for Donner Pass" begins in 1890 for example. An avalanche built up a 40 foot deep snowdrift. 12 bucker plows were pressed into service. There were 45 locomotives attached to the bucker plows. 1600 snow shovelers, mostly Chinese, were recruited to move snow. Drifts were 20 feet high. The fight raged for 40 miles. One caption (for the picture on the next page) said, "one wedge plow pushed by five engines took 36 hours to go only a few miles from Truckee until the train was abandoned by its crew, which hadn't had any food for nearly two days." One gets caught up in Mark's excitement as one amazing storm event piles on

another and one realizes why “low pressure gets me high.”

One also enjoys a lot of stories that go with the storms: learning about rotary snow plows, Nellie Bly being stopped by Sierra snow as she tried to beat Jules Verne’s Around the World in 80 Days, ski jumping in Berkeley, the coming of skiing and ski jumping, ice fishing in Donner Lake (which does not freeze anymore), the coming of the Truckee Ice Carnival, the opening of Old Highway 40 in winter, and even a 20 inch tall 5 lb. woman on her way to San Francisco.



1890 Wedge plow pushed by five locomotives - stuck in the snow.

RANK	YEAR	INCHES	FEET
1	1938	819	68-2
2	1952	812	67-7
3	1880	783	65-3
4	1890	776	64-7
5	1895	685	57-1
6	1983	671	55-9
7	1935	661	55-1
8	2011	643	53-6
9	1893	634	52-8
10	1982	624	52-0

Top ten annual snowfalls 1879-2015

1952 is remembered as one of the most brutal winters in the Tahoe Sierra. The 812 inches of snow – 67.7 feet – measured near Donner Pass that season ranks No. 2 on the Top 10 list just 7 inches shy of the all-time record set 14 years before in 1938. The 83 inches of precipitation is No. 10 wettest. The stories of human drama and heroism that winter make 1952 among the most memorable of all.

SNOWBOUND!



In the mid 1930s, Truckee resident James McIver, Jr. built a prototype snowmobile from a kit that adapted a Fordson Tractor power plant for traveling through snow. McIver’s “Snow Devil” utilized two long rotating drums with raised screw threads welded to its surface. The two rotors were chain driven to “screw” their way through the snow. McIver’s rig could only travel up to five miles per hour, but it effortlessly hauled supplies and passengers on a sled it pulled behind. (Courtesy Truckee Donner Historical Society.)

In 1934 and 1935, the Auburn Ski Club organized ski jumping tournaments on the campus of University of California — Berkeley. To prepare for the 1934 Berkeley tournament, 43,000 cubic feet of snow were packed into six Southern Pacific boxcars and then hauled down from the mountains. The extraordinary event, held at the head of Hearst Avenue, just north of the Berkeley campus, attracted more than 50,000 spectators.

Above: example of many pages full of pictures and captions that contain lots of information or little stories.

Note:

You have noticed our monthly book reviews. You might want to do some reading of your own.

Stop in at the DSHS. Norm Saylor has a large collection of books for perusing, buying, or checking out.

You might even want to do a review for us.

Then & Now with Art Clark

China Wall Under Construction



Hart 202. East portals of Tunnels No. 6 & 7, from from Tunnel No. 8.



This photo was shot by Alfred A. Hart during the construction of the tunnels near Donner Summit. At the top is visible a plume of steam from the engine used to hoist rock out of the vertical shaft in the middle of Tunnel 6 (That's the top arrow and it's more visible on the 600 DPI version). That spot is adjacent to Sugar Bowl Academy/ASI.

At the bottom the China Wall (bottom arrow) is being built between Tunnels 7 and 8. To get the photo, Hart had to haul heavy camera gear to the top of the bluff above Tunnel 8.

Photo location 39°18.926'N
120°19.106'W



Then & Now with Art Clark

This picture of the "rock lady" for want of a better name, came from an album given to the DSHS as a CD by the Truckee Donner Historical Society. The then and now photos show the dramatic change in the area over 100 years. Given how open the "Then" is we can see how emigrants could have traveled over the Emigrant Trail as it came down Coldstream Pass between Donner Pk. and Mt. Judah.



If you want to visit the spot and make your own "Now" with you standing in for the "Rock Lady" take the PCT from the trailhead and head south. At the first Judah Loop turn off turn off and head north for a quarter mile or so until you get to the spot in the "Now" below.

Photo Location: 39° 18.563'N 120° 19.258'W



Theodore Judah Recognized

Probably no one affected Donner Summit more than Theodore Judah who devised the route of the first transcontinental railroad.

In the 1930's Johnny Ellis (see the [Heirlooms](#) for April, July, and August, '09) renamed Emigrant Pk. Mt. Judah. That doesn't tell anyone who Judah was or anything beyond the name. Naturally the DSHS wanted to put out a 20 Mile Museum sign recognizing Mr. Judah. Roadblocks were in the way though. For example, for the USFS to agree to the placement on their land they wanted the DSHS to re-survey their Summit land. We didn't think that was a good idea. Then they said we couldn't because they were going to do so.

A few years ago Bill and Louise Anderson's

daughters, Jean Fournier and Jennifer Anderson Glenesk wanted to sponsor a sign in their parents' memory. The Anderson parents explored and enjoyed Donner Summit for many years from their home in Serene Lakes.

We produced a sign for Mt. Judah but since there were roadblocks the project went quiet for awhile. Then, in June, Jean contacted us again. She suggested putting the sign where there are four others at the Magic Carpet. Sugar Bowl readily agreed but that's not an ideal place especially since the view of Judah is not as good there. Then we contacted Placer County to see what hurdles there would be to placing the sign at a wide spot on Old 40 where there is a grand view of Mt. Judah. Kevin Taber of the Placer County Public Works Dept. was very helpful.

The sign went into production and was installed last month. You can find a readable copy of the sign on our website's 20 Mile Museum page or you can go take a look in person between the Magic Carpet and Donner Ski Ranch. By the time of sign production all four of the Anderson siblings had joined in the commemorative sign: Jean Anderson Fournier, Jennifer Anderson Glenesk, Matthew Anderson, and Donald Anderson.

<http://www.donnersummithistoricalsociety.org/PDFs/20milemusemsigns/MtJudah150-10x10.pdf>

Hwy 40 Scenic Bypass
Mt. Judah

"If only the Sierra might be pierced." Atlantic Monthly December, 1867

History
"Crazy Judah." Theodore Judah had some strange ideas. He wanted to build a railroad across the continent. People knew it could not be done. The grades would be too steep. Locomotives couldn't make it up the hills so the mountains, especially the Sierra, couldn't be crossed. After all, the Sierra crossing was the hardest part of the wagon train journey and wagons could go where trains couldn't. Judah also thought he could build the railroad in half of the time some "experts" knew it would take.
Not only did Judah want to build the railroad, he wanted to start the western portion in California - 3,000 miles from the needed materials and supplies. Everything would have to be shipped around Cape Horn.
San Francisco financiers laughed at him.
It took planning, wheeling and dealing, cajoling, wooing investors, breaking with conventional wisdom, multiple survey trips, and convincing Congress. Judah, as chief engineer, studied six possible routes and settled on the one over Donner Summit. It was the least difficult but it would still take 15 tunnels, carved through the Sierra granite, before the Sierra was finally pierced.
Theodore Judah never got to see the completion of his vision. He died of yellow fever in 1863, the year construction started. In 1869 the railroad was completed using the route Judah had surveyed. Travelers could cross the country at the unheard of speed of 22 miles per hour. Where the wagon trains had taken 4-5 months and stagecoaches 25 days, railroad passengers could cross the whole country in ten days.

A Good Story
Mt. Judah was called Emigrant Peak until the 1930's and stands directly ahead of this sign.
Johnny Ellis had big plans. He subdivided the land around Lake Mary, at the base of the mountain, and built three Model A powered rope tows. It cost 75¢ a day to ski. Johnny Ellis was also going to build a funicular up the mountain but WWII got in the way.
It was Johnny Ellis who re-named the peak Mt. Judah. There are still pieces of his original rope tow on the mountain. Look closely and you may find them.

Things to do right here
The obvious thing to do here is to take the marked Judah Loop trail from the PCT. It will take you to the top of Mt. Judah. The wildflowers are beautiful and the 360° view is spectacular. Take some flavored syrup and make snow cones from the snowbank below the north side of the peak. If you have time, take a side trip to the top of Donner Peak, sit on the rocks, and let your feet dangle 1,000 feet above Donner Lake.
This sign is placed in honor of Bill and Louise Anderson of Serene Lakes, by their children, Donal, Jennifer, Jean and Matthew. For over forty years, Bill and Louise, right, cherished these mountains and their rich history.

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www.donnersummithistoricalsociety.org

Fan Mail

I want to congratulate you and your staff on one of the most gorgeous newsletters I've seen! Superb job!! (I've been receiving it for several years now via email and recently I finally joined the Society as a way to say "thank you." I live in the SF Bay area which is too far away to attend meetings, etc., but I do so much enjoy your newsletter and want to support the work you do.)

Stephanie Stevens
S.F. Bay Area

Mystery Solved

TWO TRUCKS REACH AUBURN

AUBURN. Placer Co. Sept. 2. - Two trucks of the army transport convoy that were diverted to the Truckee Auburn road passed through this city today on the way to Sacramento. They stopped last night at Summit where they were met by J. A. Livingston and W. H. Wallace, representing the Auburn Chamber of Commerce.

Sacramento Union September 3, 1919

In our June, '16 [Heirloom](#) we reviewed [American Road...](#) which was the story of the Army convoy that traveled across the U.S. in 1919. One member of the group was Dwight D. Eisenhower. The convoy took the Lincoln Highway and since the Lincoln Highway went over Donner Summit and still does, we'd been thrilled to think that the first convoy went over Donner Summit. Unfortunately the convoy took the route over South Lake Tahoe to Placerville. That was too bad.

One of the little stories in the book was about two trucks that got left behind to be repaired. Did they ever make it? Little issues like that weigh on historians' minds and sometimes keep them awake at night.

Then we came across the above newspaper article. Not only did the two trucks make it to San Francisco but they went over Donner Summit. So there's a little claim to fame - some of the first army convoy across the U.S. with Dwight D. Eisenhower went over Donner Summit. Of course everyone knows that it was that trip that later convinced Eisenhower to push the Interstate Highway system into place.

Margie Powell Hike, 2016



Above, on the Pacific Crest Trail: history. Right, Nancy Oudegeest and others see the remnants of the first rope tow on Donner Summit. Below, George Lamson explaining the history of Lake Van Norden.



Photos by Tom Hallendorf

Roller Pass As You've Never Seen It Before was the title of the Margie Powell Hike for 2016.

Margie was the impetus, energy, and guiding force behind the founding of the Donner Summit Historical Society. When she passed away of ALS we started annual hikes that she, with her love of history, would have like. This year we did the hike to Roller Pass but Roller Pass was just the destination. There were lots of stories on the way:

Donner Summit beacons, weather station and transcontinental air route
Donner Summit Division of Highways Maint. Station
The Lincoln Highway
Edwin Bryant's mule
the first rope tow on Donner Summit, Johnny
 Ellis and the first subdivision
Theodore Judah and the Transc. RR.
Sierra Junipers
First locomotives over Donner Summit (they did not use tracks)
Sierra Ski Trails
Peter Wedell and marking the Emigrant Trail
Van Norden since there's a great view: Dutch Flat Rd. Emigrant Trail, etc.
Forlorn Hope and Starved Camp
Charlie Chaplin's Gold Rush movie - the Palisades as Chilcoot Pass
The source of the mighty Yuba
Coldstream Pass - the emigrant experience
Roller Pass and the emigrants in 1846
 (some people may want to experience it by going down)
The first locomotive over the summit
The transcontinental RR
Various stories like the Blue Goose.

Next year's Margie Powell Hike will probably be some version of Summit Canyon, which was our first Margie Powell Hike. It will probably include the train tunnels, so.... Summit Canyon and the transcontinental Sierra Tunnels as You've Never Seen them.t



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.



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

DONNER PARTY HIKE
OCTOBER 8 & 9, 2016



FOR MORE INFORMATION:

info@donnerpartyhike.com
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<http://donnerpartyhike.com>

Answering Readers' Queries

Here at the DSHS command center we have a dedicated staff of researchers replying to readers' queries. Here is one that may be of interest.

A Reader's Query:

Hi Bill-

I am interested in looking at petroglyphs and rock art at Donner Summit. Can you help me in specific directions to see these? My wife and I are both artists and we like looking at ancient artwork. Any assistance would be most appreciated. Thanks!

Desmond

Our Reply:

Desmond,

Thank you for your email.

First, on our website on the book review page there are reviews for two books about our rock art. You'll see them in the first column of book titles towards the bottom.

The page URL is <http://www.donnertsummithistoricalociety.org/pages/BookReviews.html>

Then regarding finding sites, there are sites all over Donner Summit but most are on private property or take some walking to get to.

The best site for access and variety though is just off Old Highway 40, Donner Pass Rd., below the Donner Summit Bridge (just below the east side of the summit). At the first turn below the bridge you will find one of our 20 Mile Museum signs for petroglyphs. Fifty yards off the road is a monument to the petroglyphs and at the spot, a bit west, you'll find them all over the rock slab. As the sun moves more will be apparent and others will get harder to see. Bring some water to sprinkle on them and that will make them more obvious.

This web page will give you a quick introduction and give some examples: <http://www.donnertsummithistoricalociety.org/pages/petroglyphs.html>

If you have more questions, please let me know.

bill oudegeest