

The Donner Summit

Heirloom



History and stories of the Donner Summit Historical Society

December, 2017 issue #112

Cisco, 1867 Wooster Returns, 1874

Last month the [Heirloom's](#) lead story was about Cisco in 1867, described by ads from Bean's 1867 [History of Nevada County](#), old pictures, and the "Reminiscences of Clarence M. Wooster" who was there that winter as a child. Clarence came back seven years later as an employee of the railroad at age 16. He ran the telegraph office.

Clarence Wooster left school early, worked at various agricultural jobs in the Central Valley. He also studied telegraphy. A railroad was being built down the Central Valley and he hired on as a "powder monkey" to take care of a rolling office. Eventually he worked that connection into other jobs: station agent, baggage handler, and ticket seller as well as telegraph operator in Auburn and Dutch Flat. He did those things in Colfax too and was also the "all round flunky for the store and Wells Fargo Express."

"Actuated wholly by financial considerations, I asked for and received the agency at Cisco." It was a "crazy move" because of the disadvantages of being so far removed from town but the fifteen extra dollars a month "overbalanced the scale." Not only was the pay greater at Cisco but living expenses were less than in Auburn and he was helping his mother and sisters.

Not only was Cisco "dreary" but the "principal job at Cisco was to kill time." Fortunately Bob Campbell, who kept the store and hotel, had a library of books Wooster could use. Wooster "batched" in a room adjoining the railroad office where he learned to make "biscuits with which you could throw a mule down."

The "Reminiscences" include some observations of Cisco.

At Red Mountain the fire lookouts were originally housed in a tent until "A wind picked it up,, and we witnessed the tent, like a balloon, slowly sink to the valley. Then a stone house was constructed,..." That stone house is still there. (See the July, '10 [Heirloom](#).)

Wooster also noted that "We were in the heart of a continuous line of snowsheds forty miles long." Those snowsheds are iconic and so need mentioning. Wooster says that originally they were made of logs with sloping log roofs built for the size of locomotives in 1868. As railroad equipment got bigger and fires destroyed snowsheds, they were replaced by larger sheds until Wooster says they were three times the size of originals. Rebuilt sheds had flat roofs and were built out of sawed timber and not

Story Locations in this Issue

DONNER SUMMIT



Cisco Grove pg 1

Tunnel 6/Summit Tunnel pg 6

Soda Springs pg 11

Coldstream Pass pg 17

Take the Scenic Route: Donner Summit's Old Highway 40

pick up a brochure to guide you from Rocklin
to Truckee w/o taking the freeway



Find us on 

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

logs.

For railroad passengers the beautiful views were obscured by the snowsheds but “flaps were let down on the scenic side of the sheds to permit what view was possible.” “During winter months of heavy snow the sheds would be completely submerged, darkness was perpetual, and the traveler would have the sensation of traveling in a tunnel. Stations were built facing the inside of the sheds. In the springtime, during the melting of the snow stacked up on the flat roof, there was two months of constant dripping in the sheds that was an abomination.”

New sheds with flat roofs were built for larger trains as time went by. A fire alarm system was added to the sheds. Track walkers had regular beats patrolling against fires. “A fire in the snowsheds is a holocaust in a minute.”

Trackwalkers, on discovering a fire, would run to an alarm box and pull a lever. Gongs at the Summit and Blue Canyon would sound announcing the box number of the pulled lever and the fire trains would speed out.

When the lookouts on Red Mountain saw a fire they would telegraph the location to the Cisco office.

The message would go to the dispatcher in Sacramento who would send out the fire trains. The fire train at the summit was the “mainstay for fire protection.” It had three tank cars that were low to the ground and the locomotive had equalizers that enabled the “little flying devil” to “make fifty-seven miles an hour [around curves] in the showsheds where the track was graded for a speed of about eighteen miles an hour.” The stretch of snowsheds was continuous for forty miles so the fire trains had to fight fires from the inside which put them at a disadvantage. The pitch-pine sheds were tinder boxes and the fires were accelerated by the drafts which were always present. Sometimes the fire trains could not back up

quickly enough as the fire approached and fire trains could be swallowed by the flames. Once the summit train was trapped that way. That problem inspired breaks in the sheds by building telescoping snowsheds. The telescoping sections would be rolled back in summer providing the necessary fire breaks.

In 1877 J.M. Graham, superintendent of track, brought the first telephone “which was to be substituted for the telegraphic system in use at the Red Mountain Observatory.” The phone was housed at Campbell’s store in Cisco and all the “inhabitants of Cisco were thrilled by hearing each other’s voices over the telephone and ran to and from the



Alfred A. Hart #183 Main St. Upper Cisco (which would be today in the forest above the gas station and below the RR tracks. About 1867

store in great excitement. That seems to have been the first telephone put into commercial service in the State of California.”

That winter of 1874 saw 10 feet of snow. Wooster and another fellow rented a cabin outside the sheds and “batched.” Every morning one or the other would have to crawl out the gable window and dig the snow away from the front door. Sometimes the snow was so high it had to be piled inside until a trench was dug to open air.

At Cisco “Bob Campbells’ store and hotel was a remodeling

of the long, hewn-log freight shed which was built when Cisco was the terminus, in 1867, to accommodate the heavy freight teaming which changed from cars to wagon at that point and time. The store was part of the lobby of the hotel. In one corner was a small bar, and in the center was a large round stove, with a footrest which encircled it and on which a dozen men could and did rest their feet simultaneously. With no matter what force the wind howled, and to what depth the blustering snow piled, the sages of Cisco were most serenely comfortable in Bob's lobby, with their feet upon the stove. Ponderous questions of the Nation were discussed and settled in heated and in sober eloquence; and Jacobs would read aloud 'Custer's Massacre.' 'Let 'er blow, 'n let 'er snow.' The store had plenty of victuals and no one could better prepare them than Mrs. Campbell.



Alfred A. Hart #184 Upper Cisco about 1867

When the snow was good and deep, Harry Hartley, the hermit of Meadow

Lake, would snowshoe to Cisco and spend a few days with us. He would saw on an old fiddle and create a noise which did have some effect in soothing the savages. ...Except for the protection which the snowsheds afforded, we were completely snowed in. A tunnel dug through the snow connected the station with the store. After freezing, this was like walking several hundred feet through an ice tunnel."

Snow got deep in winter and the store was connected to the station by a tunnel through the snow. After a big snow a "tramp in the open was most delightful. The world was completely white, except where a pine or juniper tree held its head above the snow." Everyone learned "riding the skis." Huge icicles the size of a man hung from the snowshed ceilings and could knock brakemen off the trains.

"The recollection of my carefree life at Cisco is a lasting joy."

Cisco too disappeared after the railroad consolidated operations, "Cisco soon followed in the wake of this exodus [from Meadow Lake] and total abandonment. There is not even a rock left at Cisco to indicate that there ever had been housing there for a thousand humans and several hundred mules." Today if you walk up past the gas station towards the tracks you will find only forest. On the other side of the tracks there are the remnants of the old turn table.

Wooster eventually went to the Central Valley where he helped with building the railroad there, was present for the naming of Modesto, and went into real estate development.



Lawrence and Houseworth Upper Cisco

From "Camping in the Sierra" by "Old Block" (Alonzo Delano) Sacramento Daily Union November 1, 1873

"Cisco Once Stood"

"Old Block", Alonzo Delano, a newspaper columnist and humorist, decided one day in August, 1873 to head out from Nevada City to the summit of the Sierra for an annual trip to the mountains. With him was his wife, Rosalie; Fowler, the "faithful" driver, "a good pair of horses," and a "light but strong express wagon." This is what he saw at Cisco Grove. He saw lots of other things on the way to the summit on the Dutch Flat Rd. but those are for another Heirloom.

"When the railroad was being built this was a lively town, where a thousand people found a local habitation. It had its hotels, its saloons, its livery stables and stores, and wore the air of busy life and activity. Now there was not a single soul left and not a single house standing. The inhabitants were all gone, every building a mass of ruins, crushed to earth by the weight of Winter Snows. "Why," asked Rosalie, "is Cisco unlike truth?" Because "crushed to earth" it cannot rise again. Rosalie, will you take a cigar, and meditate still more over the conglomerate mass of doors, windows, joists, scantling and crushed roofs which cumber the ground. We were now in an uninhabited country; a wild, weird view was before us. Bare granite mountains on either side of the valley with here and there a tall pine wherever it could gain a foothold, it was a picture of desolation, yet of grandeur. On



Alfred A. Hart #217 All Aboard for Virginia City at Cisco Grove about 1867

the south mountain the railroad ran midway along the granite abyss, and in looking up from the great depth below it seemed a wonder that the passage could have been blasted out so many miles in the rock. It was a continuous line of snow-sheds, for here the avalanche comes in all its destructive fury, the snow often falling to a depth of twenty feet. Huge columns of lava, black and ragged, have forced themselves through the granite, at intervals, during some awful convulsion, and the whole scene is awe-inspiring and grand. The traveler on the railroad sees little or nothing of this, the view being obstructed by snow-sheds and tunnels. It is a fit home for the grizzly bear and lion, and they are still common in this locality.

What Historians Have to Work With

Discerning readers will note that "Old Block" wrote contemporaneously about traveling past Cisco in 1873. Clarence Wooster wrote retrospectively about coming back to Cisco when he was 16 in 1874. He lived in a town that "Old Block" said was not there. How do we explain the discrepancy? Clarence could have gotten the date wrong but if it was earlier than 1874 he was younger than 16 and would he have been given the responsibility of running the telegraph office when he was younger than 16? "Old Block" was a humorist. Maybe he was "pulling our leg." He was also a journalist and maybe this was an early "fake news" item. More probably: he was on the Dutch Flat Rd. which ran below Upper Cisco but through Lower Cisco (pictures last month) and he may have confused them. I like "Old Block" though (we'll hear more about him in future Heirlooms) and so hate to undercut his reputation. He probably saw the ruined "Lower Cisco" and did not see the "Upper Cisco" where Clarence would be the next year.

150 Years Ago This Month

The 1st Train Through the Grand Summit Tunnel

It would be hard to overstate the effect of the transcontinental railroad on America and California. Nothing like it had ever been done in the world and at the time it was the most complicated engineering achievement ever done. For the Central Pacific, heading east from Sacramento, the logistics were almost incredible. Every piece of rail, every locomotive, and all the parts had to be shipped around the Horn to California. The workers were shipped from China. The railroad had to travel over the Sierra at a time when there were some who thought railroads couldn't go up hill. They had to blast 15 tunnels through solid Sierra granite, one of the hardest rocks on the planet. One of those tunnels was the longest in the world and the Chinese workers worked at it from four directions, outside in and inside out. They made progress of only inches per day.

The building of the railroad captured the public's attention and newspapers regularly reported on the progress of the line. The entire nation could listen in at the completion in 1869 because telegraph wires were attached to the sledge hammer and the spike that joined the last sections of track. As Leland Stanford would swing and make contact the circuit would be completed and the telegraph would click. Stanford missed, though, but the telegraph operator duly pressed the key and the nation heard the Union Pacific and the Central Pacific come together and join the nation with the ribbon of steel. Celebrations broke out. In San Francisco and Sacramento thousands of people participated. There were bands, poetry, speeches, and parades (see the September, '16 [Heirloom](#)).

The railroad tied California to the country and the country to California. Where it had taken months to travel across the country by wagon or weeks by stage, in 1869 the crossing could be done in less than two weeks. Where life had gone on since the beginning at 3 or 5 mph, the speed of a person or horse walking, now people hurtled along at the incredible speed of 22 or 25 mph. The passengers weren't the only beneficiaries. The railroad meant the mail went faster and so did business. Emigrants could get to California without risking their lives and almost in comfort. The railroad enabled California produce to reach the rest of the nation and so built the industry in California. Products from Asia could come into California and then cross the country. (to read more about the meaning of the railroad see the August, '12 or June, '16 [Heirlooms](#)).

The railroad was amazing. No wonder it captured people's attention. It was the technological equivalent of Manifest Destiny. It showed Americans could do anything and was a prime example of the Age of Wonder that was the 19th Century (see the June, '16 [Heirloom](#)).

It was no wonder that the [Daily Alta California](#) said the railroad was "The grandest highway created for the march of commerce and civilization around the globe." ([Daily Alta California](#) June 20, 1868)

The separate parts of the railroad were amazing too. So, when 150 years ago this month, the Grand Summit Tunnel, Tunnel 6, was completed and a train could go through it, there was celebration (17 months before the whole railroad was completed). Here are some articles from December, 1867, about the first train through the summit tunnel with passengers.

"THROUGH TO THE SUMMIT The Track on the line of the Central Pacific Railroad was finished through the tunnel to the Summit on Friday evening, and on Saturday morning a special train of one car and one locomotive, with officers of the road and representatives of the press, passed over the line and through the great tunnel, arriving at the Summit in safety. The most difficult portion of the company's labors has been overcome – the rest of the route..... is comparatively easy. The new portion of the road is in splendid condition. The summits of the mountains are covered with four to six inches of snow. ..."

[Daily Alta California](#) December 1, 1867

"The weather is exquisitely beautiful. If it continued throughout the week, the members of the Legislature and Press, and Pioneer Association of this city, will on Saturday be whirled behind a locomotive up to and through the Summit Tunnel of the Sierras.

"From the windows of the Senate Chamber those dizzy heights are seen, wrapped in a mantle of the purest white."

Daily Alta California December 4, 1867

EXCURSION

"At 4 o'clock the body returned.

"[Lieutenant Governor **MACHIN** in the chair.] An invitation from the Central Pacific Railroad Company, to go on an excursion through tunnels and across the summit of the Sierra Nevada, on Saturday next, was, on motion of Mr. **MIZNER**, accepted."

Sacramento Daily Union December 5, 1867

Big Wigs to the Summit

According to the Daily Alta California Tunnel 6 was broken through on September 2, 1867.* It took the next three months to excavate the bottom of the tunnel so that trains could go through.** On November 30, "A special train containing Leland Stanford, President E. B. Crocker, Chas. Crocker and Mark Hopkins, Directors of the Central Pacific Railway, with Senators Roberts and Belden, of Nevada county, ladies and members of the press, made the trip on Saturday... from this city to the Sierra Nevada. The locomotive ran to within 200 yards of the summit tunnel, whence the gentlemen of the party proceeded on horseback or afoot through the tunnels to a point directly east and above Donner Lake. The track will be finished by to-morrow all the way through the tunnel, and perhaps a mile beyond." (Sacramento Daily Union December 2, 1867)

That trip was for practice apparently or maybe because they just couldn't wait. Before the railroad was built three of the Big Four and Doc Strong had come to the summit to look over the proposed route down to Donner Lake. It was a thousand feet down to Donner Lake. How could a railroad route ever be devised! Collis Huntington is supposed to have said, "I'll tell you what we'll do, we will build an enormous elevator right here and run the trains up and down it."*** There must have been great satisfaction looking down at the railroad bed soon to have tracks laid on it and know their gamble was paying off and that an elevator would not be needed.

The railroad company had sent invitations to the legislature and other California bigwigs to go on an excursion to Donner Summit to see the great tunnel. The Daily Alta California reported on the expedition on December, 10:

LETTERS FROM THE CAPITAL.

The Summit.... Novel Sights and Snowballing....Conditions of the Work....Incidents by the Way....

Before the adjournment of the legislative session of 1865-6 the members accepted an invitation to take a jaunt to the upper terminus of the Central Pacific Railroad. The excursionists in due time disembarked at Colfax, fifty-four miles from the Capital. At the banquet spread in the mammoth depot of that clapboard settlement, the President stated that ere another biennial session

*please don't write in with better dates. There was apparently confusion among newspapers at the time. The Sacramento Daily Union said on August 30 the tunnel had been completed the day before, "The summit tunnel on the Central Pacific Railway was opened through from one end to the other yesterday."

**Tunnels were 19'9" tall according to John Gillis, Chief Engineer, in an 1870 paper called, "Tunnels of the Pacific Railroad".

***Empire Express, 2000 or a slightly different version in Epic of the Overland, 1924

convened, the shrill scream of the steam whistle would resound through the loftiest peaks and crags of the Sierras...

The Departure.

Before the first peep of dawn, the blowing of whistles, ringing of hotel and restaurant bells and gongs, and rattling of carriages, aroused the soundest sleepers, who quickly attired themselves for the trip, and after a hasty cup of coffee at the chophouse, wended their steps to the Front Street Depot. Through the morning mists could be seen the excursion train stretching from K street nearly to the Water Works building, a distance of nearly one thousand feet. Two powerful engines, attached to thirteen passenger cars, were puffing in the van, apparently impatient to test their strength and speed in the herculean task allotted to them. ...

On the further bank of the estuary is located the out-of-doors laundry of John Chinamen. Even at this early hour they were hard at work, wringing their customer's linen after the latest fashion of Oriental barbarian. The attention of the ladies was directed from the Anglo-Saxon workshops, to be in turn diverted by the unique and destructive Inborn of the Mongolian washermen. ...

"Our Way Across the Mountain Ho!"

Flying past the neat little village bearing the Alta-tudinous [get it? The town of Alta and the newspaper, Daily Alta California] name of the pioneer journal of California, we began the scaling of those fearful slopes that far above us culminated in jagged granite peaks, encircled with belts of snow. Up, up, still up these dizzy heights, struggled the stout engines with the immense load of human freight. The clouds rolled down these giddy steeps, dark and ominous. The air suddenly

became colder, and the mountain wind pierced through the garments unprotected by overcoats. Rain accompanied the train beyond Cisco, but soon thereafter changed to sleet— small patches of snow along the rails and great fields of snow on the mountain sides were our Summit sentinels.

The Tunnel.

... at last [passengers] discerned the mouth of the Summit tunnel. And at this moment the snow began to descend in big flakes, and faster and faster it fell, as the train shot into the very heart of the crest ridge of the Sierras. For the first time since the dawn of Creation, this grand chain of mountains was now penetrated by the railway car, carrying into its very fastnesses, and even through to the eastern slope, hundreds of residents of a rich and populous State, itself scarcely inhabited but twenty years ago. No wonder, then, that the occasion was one of enthusiastic rejoicing. No wonder that cheers,

No wonder, then, that the occasion was one of enthusiastic rejoicing. No wonder that cheers, deafening and prolonged, echoed and reechoed along that subterranean granite chamber

deafening and prolonged, echoed and reechoed along that subterranean granite chamber — cheers heard even above the screechings of the iron pilots of the train.

If ever darkness was felt in Egyptian climes it could be felt in the centre of this underground hall. Not a ray of light penetrated it from the shaft, which at this time is closed. It was so intensely dark as to be absolutely painful. In vain the eye was strained to catch a glimpse of some object to relieve the hideous blackness. On emerging from the eastern terminus the contrast was dazzling, gorgeous. Snow, pure snow, here, there, everywhere. The earth and rocks covered, the air tilled with the flying flakes and even the stunted pines clad in a snowy mantle.

On emerging from the eastern terminus the contrast was dazzling, gorgeous. Snow, pure snow, here, there, everywhere. The earth and rocks covered, the air tilled with the flying flakes and even the stunted pines clad in a snowy mantle.

On the Summit.

There was a diversity of opinion as to whether the Clerk of the Weather had placed the excursionists under obligations to him for getting up a snowstorm on the occasion of this their first visit to his favorite retreat. Here we were, shut in by the blinding snow and heavy mists from getting a view of the sublime scenery above, around and below us. Donner Lake could just be discerned at the base of the eastern slope...

Snow-Balling Frolic.

That wasn't the crowd to be cheated out of their fun, albeit clouds hung low. So no sooner had the train stopped than men and boys plunged into the snow and began pelting each other furiously. No pains were taken either to fight shy of the cars, and no pains to spare the panes, as the shattered glass can testify. There were boys there with down on their chins who had never seen snow fall before in all their lives. These were either born in California or Dixie land. Snow continued to fall during the hour passed on the summit. The weather was remarkably mild, considering the lofty altitude and the snow storm. None of the ladies

cared to join in the amusement of the hour, and the imprint of no Cinderilla [sic] gaiter was loft in the new-fallen snow. Prior to the departure of the cars, a few of the more inquisitive excursionists walked on to the two tunnels beyond, a distance of a quarter of a mile, to see Chinamen carrying the track for the Donner Lake section of the road.

The Gap.

Between the eighth tunnel and the completed section below the sunny belt on the eastern slope there remains to be laid about five miles of track. ... As you are already advised, the cars will run no further than Cisco, until spring... over the road. In this connection it may be remarked, that nearly all of the "cuts" below Cisco are already protected by sheds against snow drifts.

The Return.

The winter solstice is a fortnight off, and yet the sun had sunk behind these giant peaks before the whistle screamed the return. Before the train emerged from the tunnel a dark deed was done. Some miscreant, loving darkness better than light, stealthily pulled out the connecting link between the third and fourth cars, expecting doubtless to rob passengers in the confusion created by his dastardly deed. The forward portion of the train moved on to the mouth of the tunnel. The rear cars were left in a cloud of stifling smoke, and as none knew of the nature of the mishap, there was great consternation. At this moment one of the excursionists missed his watch. The cars readjusted, and train clear of the tunnel, search was instituted by police officers on board. Two suspicious characters, who got on to the train at Cisco, were found with no tickets on their persons. Although the stolen property was not forthcoming yet as a precautionary measure, they were put ashore at the mouth of the tunnel, and had to foot it back to Cisco, a distance of thirteen miles through a blinding snowstorm

.... At Yuba Gap, a fireman, whilst in the act of oiling the machinery, slipped and fell from the locomotive. He cleared the track, and struck a soft spot, receiving no injury. ...

... by ten o'clock that crowd of light hearted men, women and children were safely landed at the spot where they had fifteen hours previously embarked for their railway ride amongst the clouds.

From [Bean's history of Nevada County](#) 1867

Scenery on the Summit - Excelsior District Poetry

Nevada County is divided into regions. One of those regions in the old days was the Excelsior District which included Meadow Lake. At the time, 1867, Meadow Lake was a thriving town. The district was 8 miles north to south and 6 miles east to west (numbers come from Bean's). Meadow Lake was at the northern edge and the district included what is today Truckee. The following excerpt from [Bean's...](#) is one of the descriptions of Nevada County districts in 1867, Excelsior.

Excelsior District

Within the limits of the district are Donner and Crystal lakes [today southwest of I-80 at the Eagle Lakes exit]. These are on the line of the Central Pacific Railroad, and have been so often described by tourists, that no further sketch is required to attract public attention to their beauties. Some four miles distant from the line of railroad travel, and in the immediate vicinity of the beautiful lake of the meadows, the visitor can find a scene of loveliness and sublimity not surpassed on the habitable globe. Let him, on some dewy morn, climb to the top of Old Man Mountain [viewable from I-80 at Yuba Gap and southwest of Red Mtn. and above Phoenix Lake], or the heights which to the westward, overlook the pleasant village of Meadow Lake. From those rocky battlements the soul expands as it contemplates the beauty and grandeur of nature. Look well — for the picture which spreads before you has been drawn by the hand of an Almighty Artist. In one direction repose a cluster of lakes, whose clear waves mirror the fleeting, fleecy clouds of day — the star-lit firmament of night.

SPORTS

Ty Cobb, Journal Sports Editor Phone 4121

PAGE EIGHT

NOVEMBER 11, 1947

It's December - Where to go skiing in case you're ever on Donner Summit in 1947

Nevada State Journal November 4, 1947

1 sleeping cabin, capacity 22, \$2 per person, equipment rentals, Sit-ski Club, capacity 40, with sleeping bags \$1 weeknight, \$1.50 weekends, coffee shop.

AUBURN SKI CLUB: Elevation 6000 feet. A, B, C, D jumping hills, slalom, down-mountain courses. Two ski lodges open to public. Two rope tows, 1000 feet, 300-foot rise; novice, 700 feet, 100-foot rise. Ski instruction. No charge for use of grounds except during tournaments and special events. Skis for rent, light lunches. Accommodations: Resorts in vicinity, also Big Bend Inn. 12 in hotel rooms, \$5 double, 17 in dormitories, \$2 single; Crampton's Lodge, capacity 30 in rooms and cabins, \$1.50 up; others at Kingvale.

RAINBOW TAVERN: Elevation 5800 feet. Improved "J" bar lift, 1250 feet long, 350-foot rise. Instruction. Accommodations for 70 in tavern, all modern, steam heat, \$9.50 single, \$15.50 double, up; American, meals. Also at Big Bend Inn, Crampton's Lodge, see above.

SODA SPRINGS: Elevation 6750 feet. One "J" bar lift, 1,850 feet long, 730-foot rise. Three rope tows, 1,000 feet long, 300-foot rise, on Beacon Hill. Total capacity, 7,000 skiers per hour. Accommodations. Donner Summit Lodge, ½ mile below Soda Springs hotel, capacity 110 in rooms, dormitories, cabins, \$6 up, American. Ski shop, rentals, new equipment. Soda Springs Hotel—ski rentals, ski shop, capacity 100 in hotel rooms, steam heated, baths, \$6.50 up, American. Dining room, bar. Beacon Hill Lodge—ski rentals, ski shop. Instruction. Capacity 50 in rooms, \$7 up; 80 in dormitories, \$6 up, American, steam heat. Coffee shop, dancing, bar. Parking area.

ICE LAKES: 1½ miles east of Soda Springs; over-the-snow transportation provided. Rope tow. Accommodations: Ice Lakes Chalet, 50 in housekeeping cabins, \$6.50 for 2, \$9.75 for 4. Meals.

NORDEN: Elevation 7,014 feet. Area at Sierra Club. Rope tow 2,600 feet long, 600-foot rise. Also, ski shelter at Castle Peak, 4 miles Sierra Club, U. C. Ski Club located here, all private. Accommodations: Norden Store and Ski Lodge, capacity 22 in housekeeping cabins. Store, equipment sales only. Kiski Lodge, capacity 20, meals, portable ski tow, rentals, instruction.

SUGAR BOWL: Elevation 7,100 feet; 1½ miles from Norden

Station. Tractor-pulled sleighs leave on schedule from Norden Station for Lodge, fare, 40c; inquire station or Norden Store. Sugar Bowl chair lift 3,200 feet, 1,050-foot vertical rise to summit of Mt. Disney; rates, single ride 35c, day \$3.50, week \$17.50. Runs vary from two-thirds mile to 1½ mile. Two rope tows adjacent to chair-lift, each approximately 1,000 feet. Maximum depth of snow approximately 15 feet. Season, Dec. 15 to May 15. Sugar Bowl Ski School, twice daily, 2 hour sessions. Ski shop in Lodge. Skis to rent, apparel, accessories for sale. Accommodations: capacity 35 in rooms, with bath \$9 single, \$6 double; adjoining bath \$6 single, \$4.25 double; dormitories, capacity 30—men \$3, women \$3.50. Means a la carte. Chalet for one day guests, short orders, bar, fountain, lounge. Cabins for rent, rates on application.

DONNER SUMMIT: Elevation 7,135 feet. "T" bar tow, 1,650 feet long, 650-foot rise; two rope tows in tandem, 1,300 feet long, 650-foot rise; one 600 feet long, 200-foot rise; beginner's tow 550 feet long, 100-foot rise. Ski touring. New parking off highway for 200 cars. Accommodations: Vanderford's, capacity 25. \$5.50, \$6 American. Lunch counter, car, ski instruction, sales, rentals. Donner Ski Ranch (new). Private—new Viking Ski Club Quonset hut; Oakland Ski Club lodge; Dartmouth Ski Club cabin.

DONNER LAKE: Elevation 5,820 feet. Big new resort development—Donner Village.

TRUCKEE: Elevation 5,820 feet. Class A, B, C, D, jumping hills. Rope tow 1,500 feet long. Brushed-out trails for novice and expert. Ski instruction, ski equipment rentals. Accommodations: Truckee Hilltop Lodge, at sports area, capacity 25 in cabins. Gateway Motel, 42 in rooms, 25 in cabins, \$4 up. Truckee hotels, 300 in rooms, \$2 up; 70 in auto courts. Reservations through Truckee Chamber of Commerce.

TAHOE CITY: Elevation 6,230 feet. Area in rear of Tahoe Inn. 1,000-foot rope tow, 200-foot rise; toboggan runs; ski hut; light lunches. Auspices Lake Tahoe Ski Club. Accommodations: Tahoe Inn, capacity 60 in rooms, 36 in cabins, \$4 up, European. Meals, bar. Carl Bechdolt, Sr. Lake Chalet Motel, capacity 44 in cabins, \$5 up, European, Carl Bechdolt, Jr. Other accommodations in small resorts and private homes.

From the DSHS Archives



Rowton Service Station at the corner of Donner Pass Rd. (old Highway 40) and Soda Springs Rd. The building on the left no longer exists but the one on the right has most recently been a ski shop.

Virgil Jones' service station in "downtown" Soda Springs.



Soda Springs Hotel, 1930's

From the DSHS Archives

From the reverse of the picture to the right: Hannes Schroll, international ski star and holder of 90 international ski records, found the snowless lower altitudes of Northern California not exactly to his liking but grinned in anticipation when he located the largest salt hill in the country on the shores of San Francisco Bay at Newark, Calif. "It is much faster than Snow," he said. "I can hardly hold myself back."

Acme Photos Dec. 14, 1935.

This was three years before Hannes Schroll came to Donner Summit and founded Sugar Bowl. (see the October and November, '09 and December, '13 [Heirlooms](#)



Soda Springs Hotel with the Rowton Service Station in the background - see also the top picture on the previous page. About 1930.

Book Review

Snowplow

Clearing Mountain Rails

Gerald M. Best 1966 119 pages large format

If you are a railroad buff you will probably want to search out this book on the internet or borrow it from the DSHS or a library (University of Nevada, Reno; University of California, Davis; California State Library, Sacramento). There's a lot about equipment and lots of good pictures having to do with railroad snow removal, mostly on Donner Summit.

This is a short little book but the subject is so fitting to Donner Summit and snow time is upon us (for readers not in the Donner Summit area, we get an average of 34' of snow per winter).

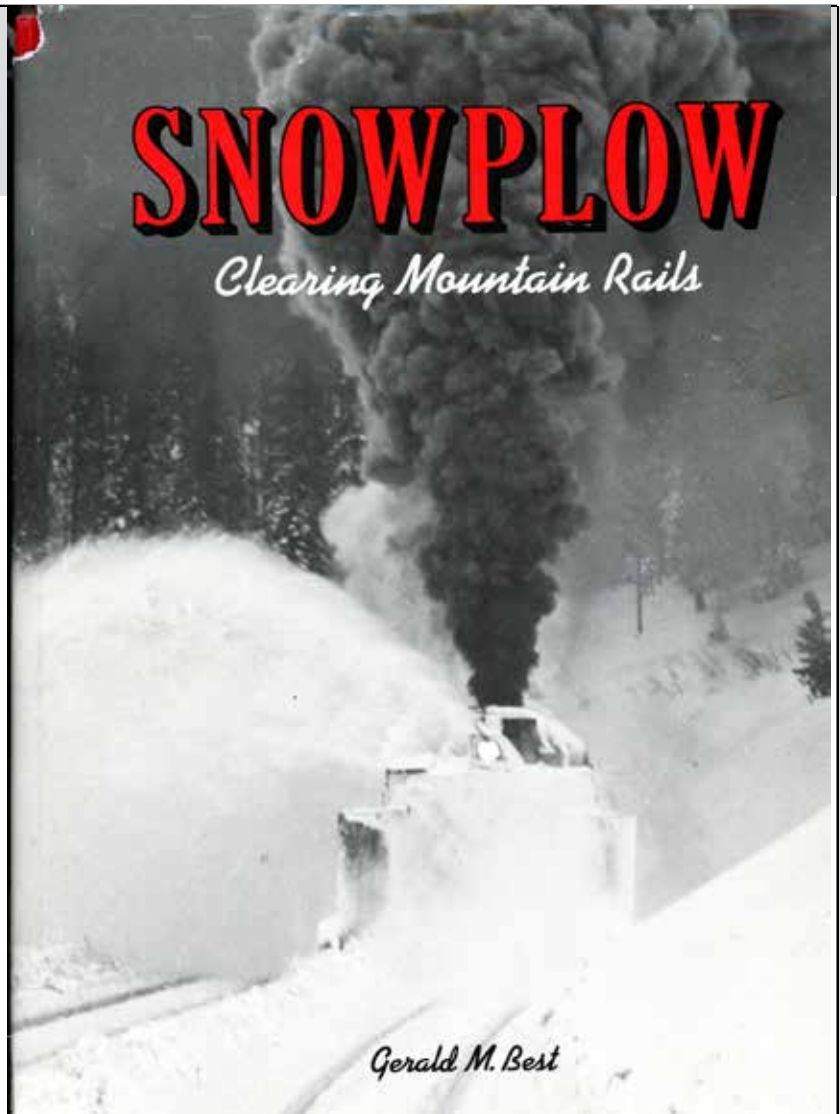
This book is about the fifty miles of the Central Pacific (now part of Union Pacific) above 5000' elevation where snow must be dealt with. The book starts with Theodore Judah's study of snow on Donner Summit (he laid out the transcontinental route over Donner Summit) that concludes, "the greatest depth of undisturbed snow is 13 feet at the summit" (see "Snow is Not a Problem on Donner Summit" in our February, '15 [Heirloom](#)). Judah thought snow could easily be dealt with by starting engines with snowplows from the summit and sending them east and west to keep the tracks clear. "No trouble need be anticipated," he said. This book is about dealing with the trouble occasioned by snow on Donner Summit and how it's been dealt with. Mr. Judah was wrong, by the way.

Snowsheds were the first solution, adopted even before the 1869 completion of the transcontinental line. Here we have the strength of the book. There are lots of pictures both by photographers and artists. By 1868 there were 23 miles of snowsheds, 13 of which were contiguous. 2,500 snow shovelers kept uncovered tracks and snowsheds clear of snow (sheds in their original configurations were shifted by heavy snows). The "A" frame early sheds (next page) soon gave way to flat roofed sheds to solve the shifting problem. Then as locomotives and railroad stock increased in size so too did the snowsheds.

Snowsheds solved one problem, mostly, keeping the line open in winter. With the completion of the railroad in 1869 tourists wanted to come and experience the grand scenery they'd only seen in pictures or heard about. The sheds cut off the views plunging travelers into darkness in smoke-filled cars. The railroad solved that partly by removing every other board in the shed walls during summer.

The next problem was snowsheds' susceptibility to frequent fire. The wood sat baking in summer sun ready to be ignited by accidents, forest fires, or sparks from locomotive smoke stacks. In the first year of operation the CPRR lost 4,000 feet of sheds in one fire and 1,200 feet in another.

"The wind which always accompanies these fires seems to select the interior of the sheds for its pathway. Through the great, hollow chimney-like building the hot, fire-laden wind howls and rushes and roars as if passing through the chimney of a blasting furnace. The flames, in great, leaping gusts are drawn through the sheds, including the sections of corrugated iron and envelop



Digging out a Bucker Plow stuck in twenty foot drifts.



hundreds of feet beyond the iron corridor in an incredibly short space of time.”

Iron sheds, telescoping sheds, fire walkers, fire trains, telegraph boxes each mile on the route, and an “observatory tower” on Red Mountain were all used to combat the fires.

From May to November lookouts were on Red Mountain and they called Summit each half hour to report on fire activity. If smoke was detected from some spot on or near the line a fire train, always kept with a full head of steam, was dispatched to investigate. In addition to the fire trains locomotives were also equipped with “steam-operated inspirators” and a hundred feet of hose so they could put out small fires. Locomotives also had sprinkler systems under their tenders that were turned on when brakes were applied to prevent sparks from starting fires.

Snowplows were a solution to huge amounts of snow and the first attempt was the Bucker Plow. The first one, which turned out to be too light, weighed 12 tons. A plow boss stood on top and signaled the lead engine’s engineer by hand signals. The engineer then used his whistle to communicate with the other engines pushing the Bucker. That first Bucker Plow was pushed by three 36 ton locomotives – at full speed. The first plow was too light. It derailed too easily so the next plows were 19 tons and pushed by six locomotives or as many as eleven.

Another strength of the book are good quotes, “In 1874... While the plow propelled by five engines... The four rear engines ran off the tracks as did also the tender of... the forward locomotive. It was storming at a fearful rate and the snow lay on the track to the depth of from two to three feet. No help could be expected from the passenger engines at Blue Canyon to pull the ditched engines on the track again, unless the snowplow could be forced through first and clear the track.” Using “super human strength” of 100 men the tender was put back on the tracks. Then the single engine’s steam was increased. “The throttle valve was thrown wide open, and the engine and the 40-ton [sic] plow in front started forward... as if propelled by gunpowder.” The engine “was under considerable headway when it struck the first drifts. On it flew with irresistible force at the rate of nearly a mile a minute, dashing the snow fifty feet in the air as if it had been the lightest spray. Around the steep curves it circled and swept with full head of steam and crowded to its utmost speed.” As the engine approached passenger trains waiting for the track to be cleared, the switch was thrown at the last minute and the plow went onto a side track. Death had awaited the “daring” men on the plow if the engine had jumped the track again and plunged to the bottom of the canyon. “The enthusiasm of the moment was so catching, that even the 75 stolid Mongolian laborers present mingled their shrill yells in the general chorus of cheers.”



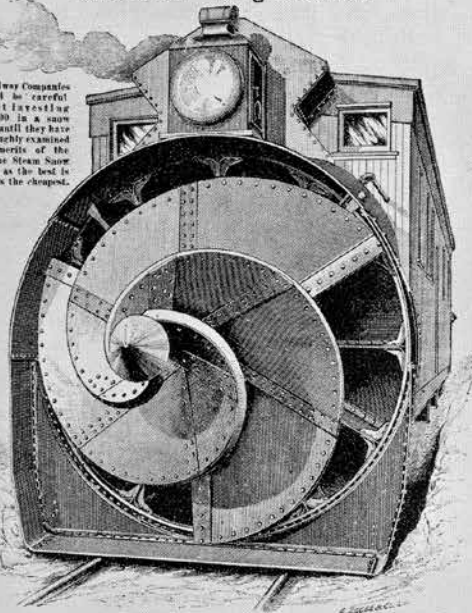
Original snowsheds

Bucker Plows and snow shovelers were not the only way to remove snow from the tracks. There were other variations of mechanized snow removal machines: steam snow shovel, a cyclone, an excavator, and rotaries of various designs. In 1889 a cyclone that weighed 85 tons was moved to the Sierra to remove snow during one storm and it “left a trail of broken

18

THE WORLD BEATER.
The Cyclone Steam Snow Plow.
 Defiance to "King Blizzard."

Railway Companies should be careful about investing \$15,000 in a snow plow until they have thoroughly examined the merits of the Cyclone Steam Snow Plow, as the best is always the cheapest.



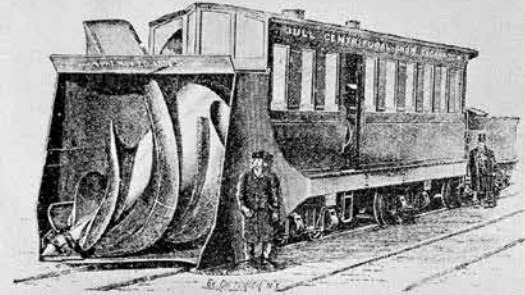
FOR FULL PARTICULARS SEE
 RAILROAD GAZETTE, April 26th and May 10th, 1889.
 RAILWAY REVIEW, May 18th.
 RAILWAY AGE, May 17th.
 NORTHWESTERN RAILROADER, May 3d and 17th.
 Address
THE CYCLONE STEAM SNOW PLOW CO.,
 E. P. CALDWELL, General Manager,
 No. 447 The Rookery, CHICAGO,
 Or Room 5, 408 Nicollet Ave., Minneapolis, Minn.

19

**JULL CENTRIFUGAL
 SNOW EXCAVATOR.**

It has done better work than any other snow machine in the market and has never broken down.

In use by the Union Pacific and Pennsylvania Railroads.



It handles the snow but once, and throws it 60 feet or more to either or both sides of the track without reversing, and meets with less resistance in excavating snow than any other device.

The Jull Excavator opened the O. R. & N. Co's Railway to traffic after it had been completely blockaded for ten days. During this blockade it did work without difficulty with two locomotives which the Rotary was unable to accomplish with four.

We refer by permission to Mr. W. H. HOLCOMB, Vice-President Union Pacific Railway, Omaha, Neb.; E. S. BOWEN, General Manager R. W. & O. R.R. Co., Oswego, N. Y.; H. STANLEY GOODWIN, General Eastern Superintendent Lehigh Valley R.R. Co., So. Bethlehem, Pa.

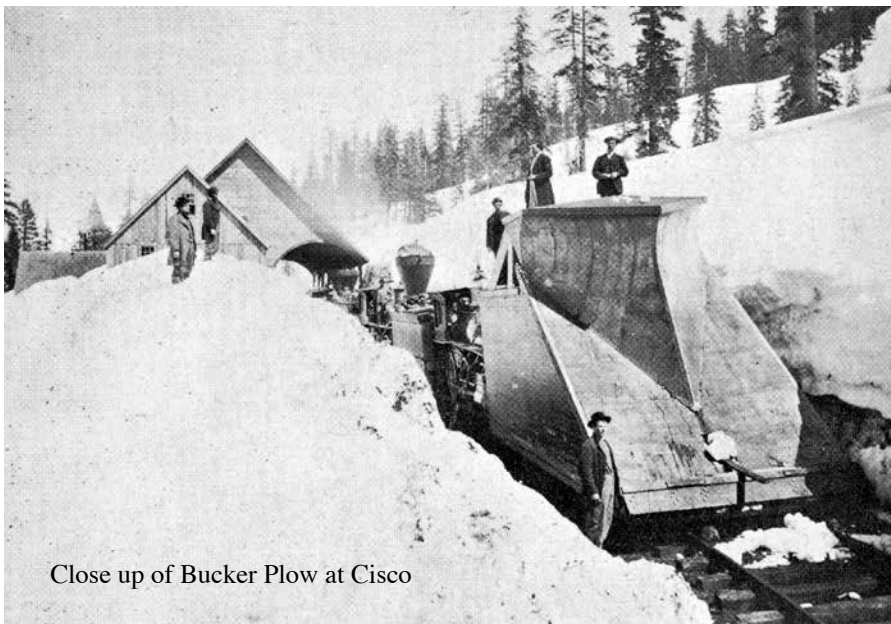
Address

JULL MANUFACTURING CO.,

371 Fulton Street, Brooklyn, N. Y.

trestles and spread rails...." It cleared snow 10-15 feet deep and threw it 100 feet "with such force as to break windows and cover small houses." There follows the history of the various attempts to build better snow removal machines. The rotaries won.

There is a chapter on examples of various big storms (the winter of 1879-80 saw 783" of snow fall – that's 65 feet) and the 1952 stranding of the City of San Francisco "One of the passengers on the streamliner recalled afterwards, 'In the middle of the night, in a howling blizzard, those men were out there singing while they shoveled snow away from the windows. It's impossible to describe how good they made us feel!'" The end of the book is a rather full appendix with instructions for operating a rotary in case you are ever in that position, pictures, diagrams, and blueprints of railroad equipment.



Close up of Bucker Plow at Cisco

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.

Last month to go with our 1867 and Cisco theme we published some ads from Bean's 1867 History of Nevada County. Here we have some more.

CENTRAL

PACIFIC RAILROAD

OPEN TO CISCO,

93 MILES FROM SACRAMENTO,

FOR FREIGHT AND PASSENGERS.

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

HILL BEACHY'S LINE

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

CENTRAL PACIFIC RAILROAD,

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

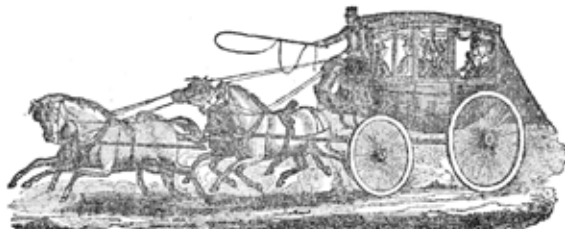
LELAND STANFORD, Prest. C. P. R. R. Co.

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

SACRAMENTO, January 1, 1867.

Carrying the United States Mails

Via Colfax, Grass Valley, Nevada City, through to North San Juan. Connecting at North San Juan with PALMER, GREEN & CO'S Line of Daily Stages to Camptonville and Downieville.



Also, with KIBBEE'S LINE to Forest City and Alleghany Town.

Passengers Traveling by this Line will find it Comfortable, and will be taken through without delay.

From Downieville to San Francisco in 24 hours.

TELEGRAPH STAGE LINE,

AGENTS:

W. H. DAVIDSON, Agent at Nevada.
J. H. MATHENY, Agent at Grass Valley.
C. J. SHAW, Agent at Colfax and Sacramento.
A. J. PUTNOK, Agent at North San Juan.

STEPHEN ZERGA,

WHOLESALE AND RETAIL DEALER IN

GROCERIES, PROVISIONS,

FINE WINES AND LIQUORS—Foreign and Domestic.

CLOTHING, BOOTS AND SHOES, CHINA GOODS, Etc.

Corner of B and Third Streets,

MEADOW LAKE, CALIFORNIA.

ADAMS & JOHNSON,

WHOLESALE AND RETAIL DEALERS IN

GROCERIES,

CLOTHING, HOSIERY, BUCK GLOVES, BOOTS AND SHOES, HATS, Crockery Ware, Cigars and Tobacco, Wines and Liquors, Case Goods, etc.

Near the corner of C and Second Streets,

MEADOW LAKE, CAL.

WASHINGTON BILLIARD SALOON.

CORNER OF B & SECOND STREETS, MEADOW LAKE.

TWO FIRST-CLASS BILLIARD TABLES.

Also—The best quality of Wines, Liquors and Cigars, constantly on hand.

A. FRIEDMAN, Proprietor.

EXCELSIOR HOTEL

—AND—

General Stage House,

CORNER OF C & SECOND STREETS, MEADOW LAKE.

The Largest, the most Convenient, and the Proprietor is determined it shall be the Leading Hotel of the Place. Give BEN a call, and you will become convinced that at the Excelsior your wants and comforts are strictly attended to.

B. F. WHITTEMORE, Proprietor.

Above: ads from Meadow Lake and below from Nevada City. For more on Meadow Lake: [Heirlooms July-Oct '14](#)

WILLIAM STONE,

No. 33 Commercial Street, Nevada City.

DEALER IN

GROCERIES AND PROVISIONS,

Wines, Liquors, Miners' Supplies, Etc., Etc.

A First-Class MEAT MARKET connected with the Establishment.

Goods Delivered within a Reasonable distance Free of Charge.

A. B. CARLEY.

C. BECKMAN.

THE OLD CORNER

BROAD AND PINE STREETS, NEVADA CITY.

THE FINEST

Wines, Liquors, Ales and Cigars.

BILLIARDS.

TWO OF THE FINEST, NEW-STYLE TABLES, IN THE MOUNTAINS

No better Managed, Provided and Attended BAR can be found than CARLEY & BECKMAN'S.

UNITED STATES BAKERY.

No. 48 Pine Street, Nevada City.

JULIUS DREYFUSS,

PROPRIETOR.

Bread, Cakes and Confectionary of Every Variety, FAMILIES AND PARTIES SUPPLIED.

WEDDING CAKE MADE TO ORDER.

Bread, etc., delivered daily in all parts of the City.

Odds & Ends on Donner Summit



Photos by George Lamson

Emigrant Markers on Coldstream Pass

The Mobile Historical Research Team (MHRT) was given a task by Kathy Slocum who has been running the Donner Party Hikes for years. Her Coldstream Valley guide would not be able to do the hike this year and something needed to be done.

One idea was to skip hiking the length of Coldstream and instead go up or down Roller and Coldstream Passes. That's not something anyone does. There could be a lot of good stories to go with that new trip.

We discovered why no one does that and why there are no trails.

A little background first. The Donner Party missed another turn off when they got to Donner Lake. By late 1846 emigrants were turning off at Donner Lake and going up Coldstream Valley to Roller Pass. The Donners missed the turn off presumably because of the snow. Roller Pass (see [Heirlooms](#) for April, '12; July, '13; November, '11; and May, '13) was hard and still is. During 1846 emigrants discovered Coldstream Pass (see the February, '12 [Heirloom](#)) and that was much less hard.

The MHRT started at Roller Pass (picture #1 - that's Art Clark, left, and Bill Oudegeest, right) thinking that going down would be easier. Then we'd head north to Coldstream Pass, over the pass and down. Roller is very steep and



dangerous. Heading north without going to the bottom of the valley is hard too because one has to fight the brush, scramble over loose rocks, and wonder if one will ever get out.

The MHRT is adventurous (see, for example, our re-enactment in the July, '15 Heirlooms - one day the adventures of the MHRT will be a best seller) but after consultation we reported to Ms Slocum that the route is not viable for most weekend hikers.

The trip was not wasted. We won't have to wonder any more and we found a number of Emigrant Trail markers.

Some are Peter Weddell markers that Mr. Weddell put up in the 1920's (see the November, '11; January, '12, and October, '16 Heirlooms) (#'s 2,3,8). Some were very old hatchet carved arrows (#'s 4,5,6). One was an old Boy Scout marker (#9). Still others were the small round markers (7 - note the arrows -and 10 - that's Art Clark)



4



6

It was a beautiful hike (#11) which you might want to try some time if you are comfortable leaving the trail.



7



11



8

Photo by Art Clark

Photo by Kathy Slocum



9



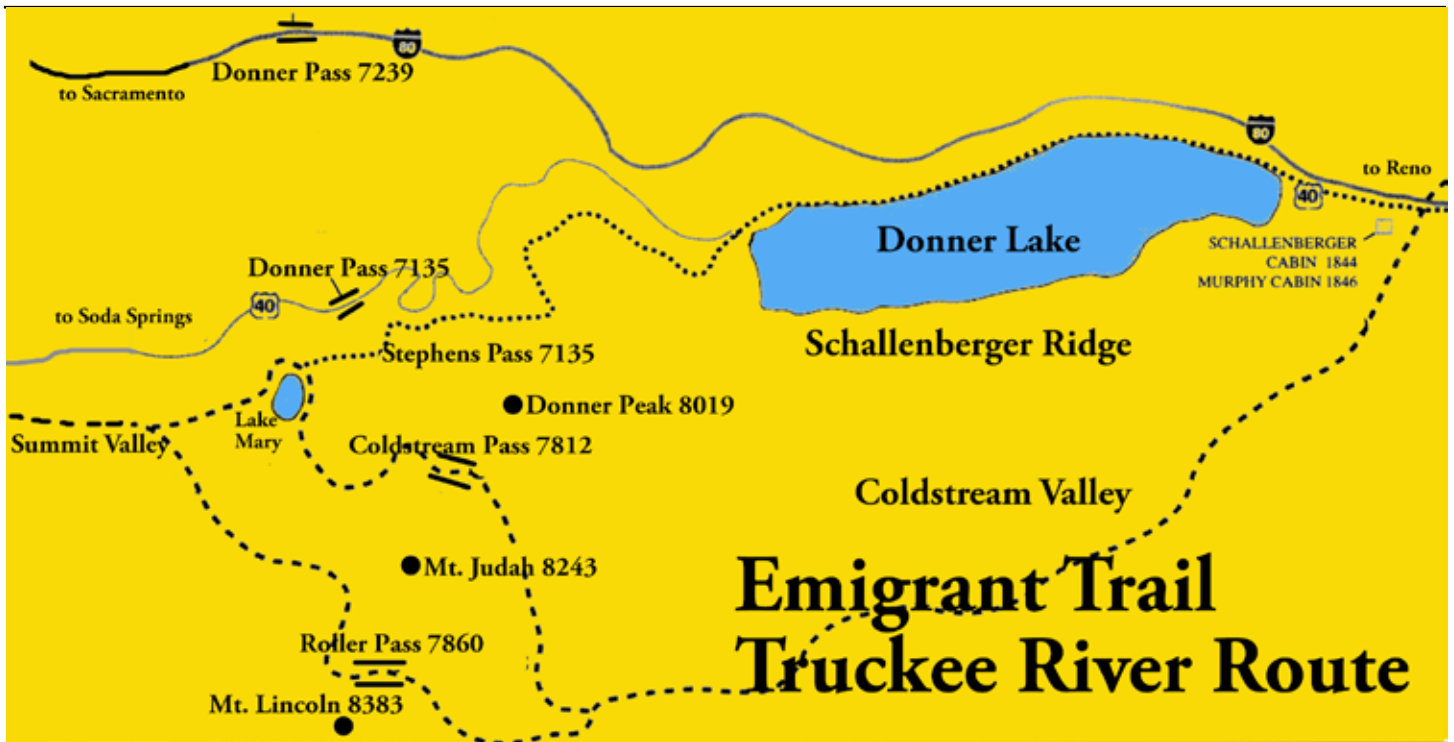
10

Photos by George Lamson



This is part of a series of miscellaneous history, "Odds & Ends" of Donner Summit. There are a lot of big stories on Donner Summit making it the most important historical square mile in California. All of those episodes* left behind obvious traces. As one explores Donner Summit, though, one comes across a lot of other things related to the rich history. All of those things have stories too and we've been collecting them. Now they're making appearances in the Heirloom.

*Native Americans; first wagon trains to California; the first transcontinental railroad, highway, air route, and telephone line, etc.



The three emigrant routes. Stephens Pass is the upper dotted line and was used in 1844 by the Stephens, Murphy, Townsend Party, in 1845, and at least by the Donner Party in 1846. Roller Pass is the lower dotted line and was used in 1846. Coldstream, the middle dotted line, was discovered in 1846. It then became the main route and served as a road until the Dutch Flat Rd. was completed in 1864 (see the May, '15 [Heirloom](#) for a story about a fellow driving over it in 1915). See the July, '13 [Heirloom](#) for a comparison of Coldstream and Roller Passes.

We should note that there is a school of thought that posits that emigrants did not use Coldstream or even Stephens Pass but rather went north of what is today old Highway 40. See the November, '11 [Heirloom](#) for that.

DONNER SUMMIT HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Donnersummithistoricalsociety.org

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

New Membership DATE _____
 Renewing Membership NAME(S) _____
 Individual Membership - \$30 MAILING ADDRESS _____
 Family Membership - \$50 CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____
 Patron - \$500 Friend Membership - \$100 Sponsor - \$250
 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.

Wow!

You will remember that in our last issue we reported that one of our 20 Mile Museum signs, right, had been stolen from along Lake Van Norden (or Summit Valley since there is no lake anymore).

The November Heirloom had barely "hit the stands" before a reader approached the DSHS with the offer to pay for a replacement. The offer came from a part time resident who did not want her name used. She said she, "saw a need and filled it." She said, in saying that her name could not be used, "that this was opportunity to point out that help has responded" to encourage others to help with what we do. "It takes a village," she said. We're glad our "village" includes our anonymous donor. Next year a new Native American 20 Mile Museum sign will grace the spot along the Lincoln Highway in Summit Valley and this one will have a tracking device.

