

# Wanted



47 signs have been deployed mostly along Old Highway 40 for some years. People stumble across them and see the history of the place, a good story, and what to do right there in each sign location. Families go on missions to track down each of the signs and take pictures.

They are fun and have added to Donner Summit.

Sometime in the fall the first sign was stolen from along the old Lincoln Highway in Van Norden Meadow - the sign guiding people to some Native American mortars.

We can only think some churlish person who did not want to share the Native American presence on Donner Summit is responsible. The editor would say more here but has been counseled about restraint in this family Heirloom.

The signs are expensive and the theft is hard on our little historical society. Our Board and Advisory Council, though, have said they want a new sign next spring after snow melt.

# Our Stolen Sign Returned



# The Donner Summit

# Heirloom



History and stories of the Donner Summit Historical Society

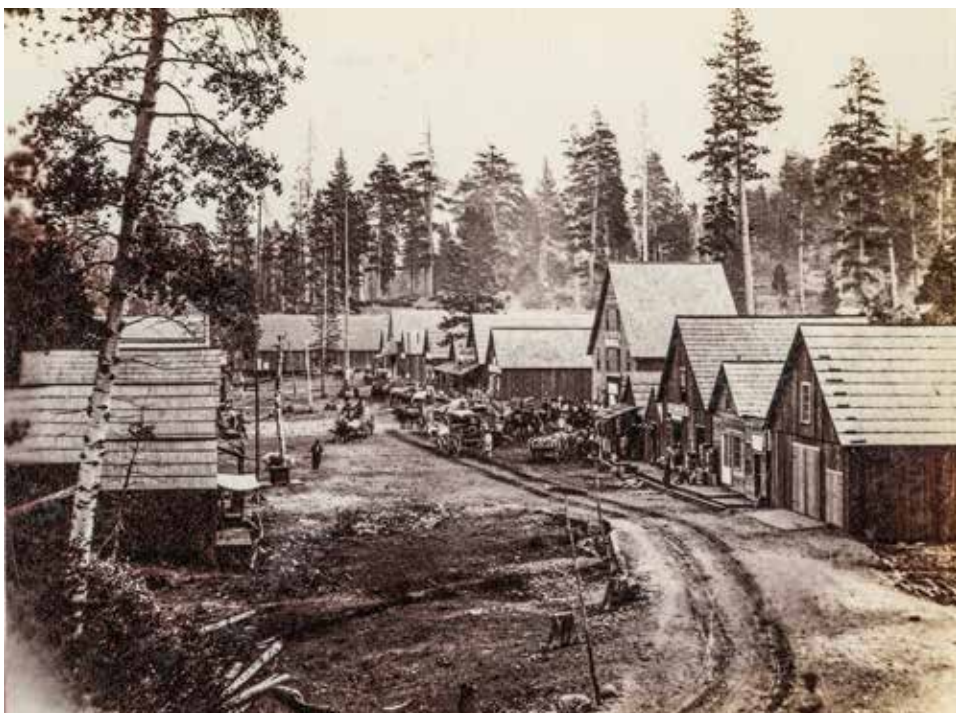
November, 2017 issue #111

## Cisco, 1867

Today, when you drive along Highway 80 past the Cisco Grove exit you see only a gas station and a restaurant. Even on Old Highway 40, which runs parallel there, you see only some second homes and if you look closely, some old foundations. There's nothing there to tell you that there were at times vibrant communities. The last time there was a lot of activity at Cisco Grove U.S. Highway 40 was the route over the Sierra and it went right through "town." The Auburn Ski Club was there as were various businesses catering to tourists. The coming of I-80 ended that and people bypassed Cisco Grove. The Auburn Ski Club moved up the hill to what is now Boreal and the commercial buildings were razed to save taxes. This story is not about that episode although it will one day be in the [Heirloom](#).

This story is about Cisco Grove, (or Cisco in those days) in 1867 and a bit beyond (because of the sources we have to work with). That's in keeping with a theme some [Heirloom](#) issues have had this year: Donner Summit in 1867, 150 years ago this year. As it happens we have some good 1867, and later, sources.

[Bean's History of Nevada County](#) was published in 1867 and it's a good source for some general history but also the ads you see here on the next few pages. (We harvested lots more for the [Heirloom](#) so keep up your subscription.) The second source is a fellow named Clarence M. Wooster who was an interesting guy. In "Meadow Lake City and a Winter at Cisco in the Sixties" Clarence gives us a view of Cisco when he was a nine year old boy in 1867. Then in "Railroading in California in the Seventies" Wooster describes living in Cisco Grove a few years later when he was sixteen. Both articles and more are



Alfred A. Hart #99 Cisco Grove

# Story Locations in this Issue

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

part of Wooster's "Reminiscences of Clarence M. Wooster" published in the journal of the California Historical Society, California History, in a couple of issues in 1939, the year he died.

Clarence Wooster was born in 1858 in Altaville near Angel's Camp where his father had a foundry. The family moved to Oakland and then near Meadow Lake (See the Heirlooms for July-October, 2014) at a place John Wooster named Osaville in 1866 (sometimes Ossaville). There he built a stamping mill that would stamp ore for mines at nearby Meadow Lake. Apparently the family lived at Meadow Lake. Clarence was only nine but he was put to work. He was small so could crawl through the openings in boilers and hold red hot rivets that sutured plate steel together. As he held the rivets someone would pound, or rivet them, with a hammer from the outside. Even though he had cotton in his ears Wooster said about the experience, "Imagine the racket!" and claimed hearing damage that affected him seventy years later. It was also really hot inside the boiler, so hot that the heat "would doubtless have evaporated the mercury in the thermometer." He also worked as cook, then chief cook, and helped bore holes in logs that would serve as water pipes.

In 1867 the railroad was stopped at Cisco Grove. The Sierra granite was the obstacle and the fifteen tunnels to get the railroad over the Sierra Crest had to bore through it. Tunnel 6 was the longest of the tunnels, and it took two years to blast out the rock. (see May, July, August, September, 2012 and February, March, and May, 2015 Heirlooms). The Chinese worked from four directions at once (from the outside in and from the inside out using a shaft bored through the center) but still only made progress of inches a day. The Union Pacific taunted the Central Pacific saying they'd get to California before the Central Pacific even got out of the Sierra. The Central Pacific thought that was even likely as they gazed longingly at the flat easy railroad construction land of Nevada that lay just ahead.

If only they could get there.

While Tunnel 6 was being constructed the end of track was at Cisco and Cisco was a busy place. At its height, 57 train car loads of supplies were unloaded at Cisco to travel on the Dutch Flat Rd. In addition there were stagecoaches, buggies, independent travelers and stock using the road. That was not all there was to Cisco. Meadow Lake, just a few miles north, was at its height in 1866 and 67. Thousands of people lived there trying to extract gold from new mines. 1867 was the end of the Meadow Lake gold bubble but there were still hopeful people there. Mark Twain took the stage east to Virginia City through Meadow Lake and Cisco in 1867 (see the August and September, '14 Heirlooms). Cisco Grove was the beginning of the road to Meadow Lake.

Wooster said Cisco was so busy, mule trains seemed to have no beginning or end and "Fifty mules in a line under one management was not uncommon. A coffin containing a corpse would go by on a mule's back, with the head of the corpse pounding audibly against the coffin in unison with the step of the mule." (We just had to include that part of the



Teams awaiting freight at Cisco

quote.)

The route of the railroad "swarmed with men" building log snowsheds. In Cisco there was a hotel and a "capacious freight house" along with a row of "small steep-roofed houses." Down by the river at "Lower Cisco" "stood a miner-fashioned town of about a thousand people." That lower town was "inspired" by Meadow Lake and "was devoted principally to the maintenance of the mule train drivers and their animals, as well as roadbuilding." "Saloon keepers were the most numerous class of businessmen."

The winter of 1866-67 came a bit early. The Wooster family escaped to Cisco Grove but was stranded by snow so they rented a cabin. Others in Meadow Lake were not so fortunate and Wooster estimated that 3,000 people wintered there that year.

Wooster says Snowshoe Thompson was also in the neighborhood that winter. He passed the family daily carrying mail from Meadow Lake to Cisco. Starting at the top of Red Mountain he would "glide along the mountainside on a consistent grade in new snow. The track would freeze and then it would "thereafter guide him as the steel rails do the locomotive." "We would watch him sail down this four-mile course at a great speed, cross the ice frozen river, throw our

mail toward the house, and glide out of sight, up and over a hill, by the momentum gathered in the three-mile descent.” Once Wooster remembered skiing with other children up alongside Thompson’s track up the grade. Then the children sat in Thompson’s track on their skis, “holding our poles at right angles, and let loose... We shot out like rockets. The skis held to the track, but the three kids went tumbling down a steep mountain side, head over heels...” A few days later, near Thompson’s trail, Thompson came along and called them over. There he delivered to the three kids a spanking they never forgot. They never intruded on his tracks again.

Food ran short so Wooster’s mother tore up a mattress to make knapsacks. The kids (Wooster had a brother and two sisters) were sent up to Meadow Lake City for supplies. At Meadow Lake people were celebrating a ski race which the children watched for awhile. Then they went looking for the town but it was buried. Only smoke rose from the snow through holes above chimneys. They had to walk down steps to the main street and through tunnels to the buildings. The kids had to make the trips weekly through the winter to Meadow Lake.

Snow buried Cisco as well. The family had to dig out light wells and a shaft to the front door. When the snow melted they could see stumps from cutting their firewood eighteen feet off the ground. With snowmelt in 1867 Meadow Lake began to empty. People just left everything behind and Meadow Lake disappeared.

The Wooster family headed back to Oakland then to Clarence’s maternal grandparents in the foothills when Clarence’s father got sick. He died soon after. Clarence worked at various agricultural jobs but by the time he was sixteen he was operating a telegraph and his mother and sisters were living with him in Auburn.

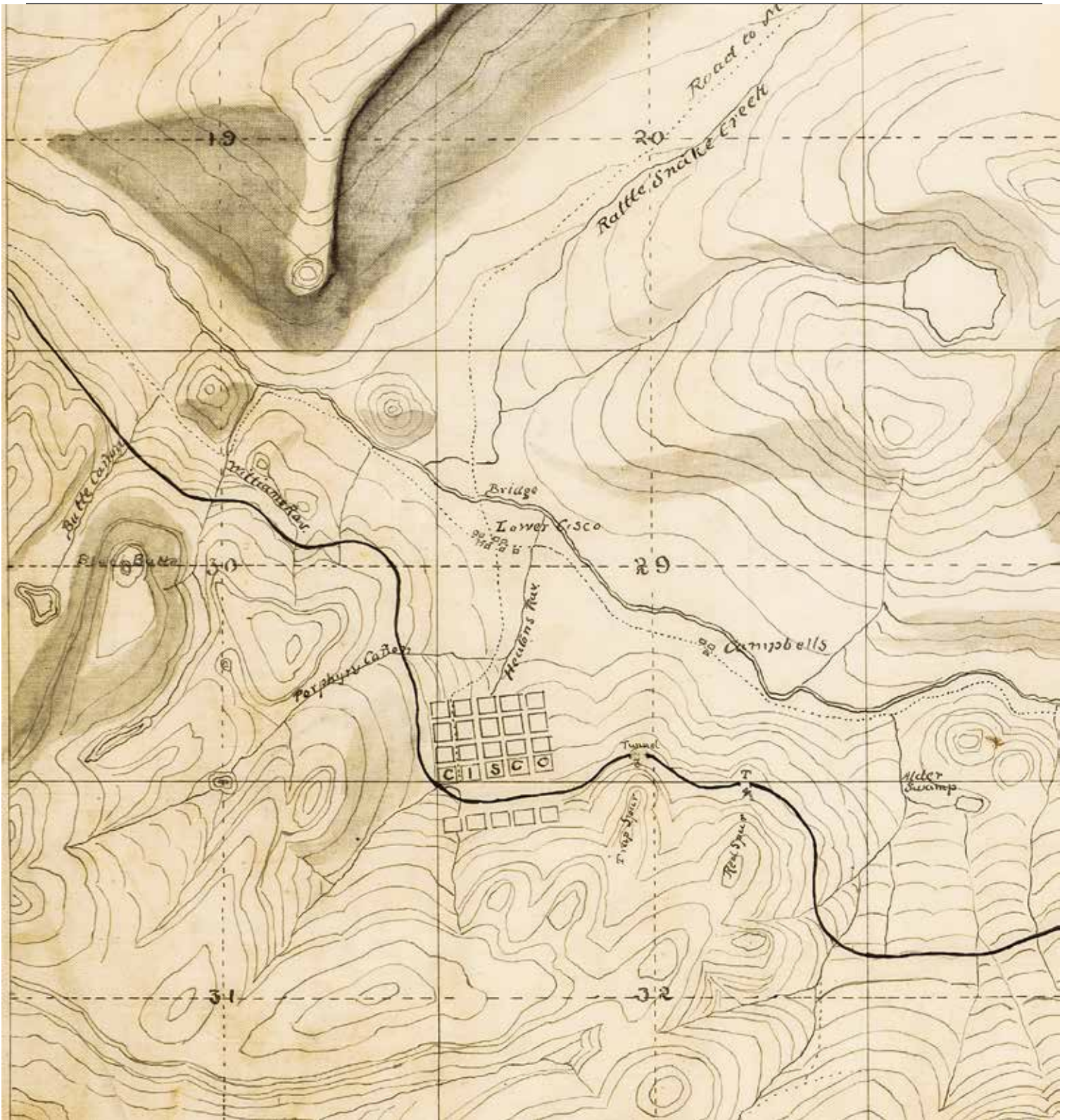
**Next Month:** Wooster returns to Cisco as a teenager.



Illustrations from Woosters' Reminiscences: "Snow-Shoe Traveling" and "Winter View Upper Cisco."



Watkins 185 Depot at Cisco. Here is a case where Watkins is using Alfred A. Hart's photographs after he became railroad photographer. The original 185 is Hart's. See the December, '16 [Heirloom for that discussion](#)



Partial map of the railroad route on Donner Summit showing Cisco in 1870. Bancroft Library.  
Upper Cisco is lower center and Lower Cisco is above that near the river.

# 1867

W. P. L. WINHAM.

W. H. CLARK.



## WINHAM & CLARK, DRUGGISTS,

DEALERS IN

DRUGS, MEDICINES, PAINTS, OILS, GLASS, VARNISHES,  
Stationery, Kerosene Lamps, etc. Also—Fancy Articles and Perfumes.  
Physicians' Prescriptions and Family Receipts carefully prepared, and  
from good materials.

2d Street, between B & C, Meadow Lake.

## DONNER LAKE HOUSE,

FOOT OF DONNER LAKE,

**E. S. DREW,**.....**Proprietor.**

Three miles East of Pollard's Station, California.

Fifty-seven miles from Virginia City, Nevada.

Seventeen miles from Meadow Lake, California.

Horses furnished for Pleasure Parties visiting any of the vallies or mountains.

Board Per Week.....\$14 | Single Meals.....75 cents.

## TINKER'S STATION,

DONNER LAKE ROAD,

**TINKER & FENTON,**.....**Proprietors.**

Nearest point for the Celebrated Soda Springs.

A Bar, with the best of Liquors, connected with the House,

Board per Week.....\$10. | Single Meals.....75 cents.

Horses and Carriages furnished to Pleasure Parties.

Twelve miles from Crystal Lake, ten miles from Cisco, and six miles from Pollard's  
Station.

## COBURN'S STATION,

DONNER LAKE ROAD,

**JOSEPH McWILLIAMS,**.....**Proprietor.**

Fifty-six miles from Virginia City,

Ten miles from Lake Tahoe,

Six miles from Pollard's Station,

Two miles from foot of Donner Lake.

Board per Week.....\$10. | Single Meals.....75 cents.

Horses furnished for Parties visiting Lake Tahoe and other places of Resort.

Tinker & Fenton was at Soda Springs Station, today's  
Soda Springs. Coburn's Station was Truckee.

## CRYSTAL LAKE HOUSE,

Crystal Lake, Nevada County, California,

**E. G. FOGG,**.....**Proprietor.**



The Proprietor would respectfully inform the Public that this House,  
having been recently rebuilt and new furnished, now affords as fine ac-  
commodations for Travelers and Pleasure Seekers as any in the mountains.

The TABLE is always supplied with the Best the Market affords.

PRICES MODERATE.

A Livery Stable in Connection with the House.

This House, being situated immediately on the Lake, also on the Central Pacific  
Rail Road, and Dutch Flat and Donner Lake wagon roads, affords an accessible  
and convenient, as well as pleasant place of resort for Pleasure Seekers.

**BOATS AND OTHER FACILITIES, HORSES AND CARRIAGES,**

Furnished to Parties.

**5,988 FEET ABOVE THE SEA.**

From Crystal Lake House to

Cisco..... 2 miles	Donner Lake..... 20 miles
Alta..... 18 miles	Nevada City..... 34 miles
Sacramento..... 90 miles	Lake Tahoe..... 38 miles
Meadow Lake.....	..... 13 miles.

The ads here come from Bean's History of Nevada County,  
1867.

Above, Crystal Lake House was at Crystal Lake which is  
today south of I-80 at the Eagle Lakes exit. There was a  
train station there. The "House" was a hotel.

Beyond the Summit. - The Central Pacific Railroad  
Company are making arrangements to haul over the snow  
3,000 tons of rails, sufficient to lay thirty miles of track from  
Cisco to the Truckee river, to be laid early in the Spring,  
there being now a large force grading the road along the  
river. When the heavy work at the summit is completed,  
this portion of the line being ready, they will be able to  
operate the road immediately to Crystal Peak, Nevada.

Sacramento Union  
February 8, 1867



# Ads

## LAKE HOUSE,

HEAD OF DONNER LAKE,

J. D. POLLARD,

PROPRIETOR.

Distance from Pollard's Station to

Sacramento.....	110 miles.	Alta.....	37 miles.
Colfax.....	54 "	Cisco.....	17 "
Meadow Lake.....	14 "	Coolbroth's.....	16 "
Crystal Lake.....	20 "	Tinker's.....	6 "
Prosser Creek.....	9 "	Nevada City.....	48 "
Lake Tahoe.....	18 "	Grass Valley.....	52 "
Virginia City.....	60 miles.		

LAKE THREE AND A HALF MILES LONG AND ONE MILE WIDE.

5,965 FEET ABOVE THE LEVEL OF THE SEA.

Bar Room, Reading Room, Billiard Tables, and Bowling Alley.

SAIL AND ROW BOATS, HORSES AND CARRIAGES TO LET.

Office of Pioneer Stage Company, and Wells, Fargo & Co's Express.

The Proprietor has no hesitation in pledging himself to spare no exertion to make this one of the most desirable places of Summer Resort on the Pacific Coast.

The reputation already attained shall be fully maintained in the future.

## 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, Pres. C. P. R. Co.

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

SACRAMENTO, January 1, 1867.

*Snow Storms at Donner Pass, California, Winter of 1866-67, during which most of the preceding work was done.*

MONTH.	NUMBER OF STORMS.		DEPTH OF SNOW.		
	1' and over	Under 1'.	Fallen during Month.	Average Depth.	Maximum Depth.
November, '66.....	3	..	4 6	1 0	1 6 Nov. 4.
December, '66.....	4	5	10 10½	5 0	9 0 Dec. 20.
January, '67.....	3	7	11 00½	8 0	10 6 Jan. 24.
February, '67.....	3	5	10 3½	10 0	12 8 Feb. 22.
March, '67.....	2	9	4 2½	12 6	14 4 Mar. 2.
April, '67.....	1	1	3 6	13 0	15 1 Apr. 13.
May, '67.....	....	1	3	8 6	11 0 May 1.
June, '67.....	....	..	....	3 0	6 0 June 1.
Sums and means ...	16	28	44 7½	7 0½	

From "Tunnels of the Pacific Railroad," John Gillis, January 5, 1870 John Gillis was the engineer who oversaw the construction of the Summit tunnels

## Summit Visit, 1867

A visitor to the summit reported on the construction of the railroad taking the train to Cisco at the speed of 20 mph including stops. At Cisco there was four inches of snow, "While at the summit the snow is eighteen inches deep." At the summit he described "The Great Bore," Tunnel 6, 1659 feet long. He complimented the work on the bridges and "Not the least wonderful... are the snow galleries. These are something new in the country." The track had been laid to within nine miles of the Summit and "about twenty miles on the other side of it..." Once the two parts were connected the railroad would have 125 miles of continuous track. Fortunately labor was not impeded by snow until it got to more than four feet deep.

The visitor then outlined what was to happen next to complete the railroad in two years and a half or so and then "we shall be able to whirl across the continent from the Sacramento to the Missouri in three days and a half.... May I be there to ride.... [we will be able to] say good -bye to our Sacramento friends in the morning and greet our New York acquaintances next day Nothing is impossible anymore."

*Daily Alta California*  
November 10, 1867

November 24, 1914

## Man Found in Cabin At Summit Looting

"Last Tuesday as Number Five was passing over the summit a passenger was found to be on the train that had not purchased a ticket and did not have the money to get one. When the train arrived at the station he was put off by the brakeman. He then hung around the Summit Hotel until about 2:30 when he started for the cabin of Tom Kerrigan, who is employed as a telegraph operator at this place. He went through all the trunks and other belongings of Kerrigan, picking out what ever he could find which he thought would be of use to him and just as he was packing up things and getting ready to leave, Kerrigan entered with a friend, and tried to take the man into custody but the only weapon to be had was a hammer, the looter pulled a gun and marched them out of the cabin. As they came out of the door, Manager Gifford of the Summit Hotel arrived on the scene with a gun and took the man into charge. An officer was notified at Blue Canyon, and immediately came up and took the man into custody leaving on No 23 for Auburn, where the man will be held on a burglary charge.

# More News from 1867

This is a great story with all kinds of lessons including why perusing old newspapers can be so satisfying and productive.

## A Rascal Killed by Chinamen

“The wild life of these mountains does not fail to bring out many of the hard characters whose doings remind us of old times. Day before yesterday, November 5th, four men, two of them unknown, and two other worthies, severally known as Johnny Kelley and Johnny-behind-the Rock robbed several Chinese on the Truckee of about \$40, and then crossed over the summit, and half a mile below Summitville they overtook a Chinamen on horseback and took him off his horse and robbed him of the animal and \$47. Next they entered a Chinese ranch near by, the inmates of which were ready for them, and proceeded to go through the Chinamen, who offered the wretches \$50 to be let alone; this offer was refused, and the ruffians threatened the lives of the Chinamen, whereupon they attacked the robbers with shovels and drove them from the house, killing John Kelly, and battering “Johnny-behind-the-Rock” so badly that he could not escape, and was captured by the Sheriff; the other two were subsequently arrested at this place and have been sent below. The body of Kelly was still lying on the snow where the Chinamen left him, the Coroner not having arrived, and nobody apparently being willing to take any trouble about the poor dead wretch.”

Daily Alta California  
November 10, 1867

That’s the Daily Alta’s version. The Sacramento Daily Union, a day earlier, had a much more interesting rendition. The Sacramento Daily said that “four men started out to the road between Cisco and the Summit to engage in the business of robbing Chinamen.” Then the fellows went to the “ranch” above, and demanded money from the Chinese there. “The Chinamen demurred.” Kelly, the dead man, was taken to Cisco and Johnny-Behind-the-Rock was taken to Cisco and then Auburn.

In Auburn it turned out that Johnny-Behind-the-Rock was actually named Brannon and that he “was recently tried in Nevada on a charge of murder, for killing a man a few months ago at Crystal Peak. He was acquitted by the jury. The man who was killed in the attempted robbery of the Chinese was a well-known Sacramento criminal, John Kelly.” He met the other three fellows at a place called Jones’ House which may have been a roadhouse. Then the men had gone to Farrell’s and “drank considerably.” When the Chinese attacked, Kelly and Brannon were too drunk to run. Even though the other two robbers had pistols they ran off.

The newspaper story then notes that two years before, Kelly and two others had been arrested for drugging and robbing a man in a saloon they had on K Street, presumably in Sacramento. At the trial Kelly turned state’s evidence and “gave an elaborate description of the various modes of drugging victims...” You could put snuff in their liquor, for example. That “soon settled them.” Kelly’s testimony sent his partners to prison and he was afterwards arrested for theft of middlings. The sack with the middlings had a hole in it so that as the middlings drained out they left a trail to Kelly’s house. He was sentenced to jail for four months. One day he pretended to be deathly sick and was taken to the hospital where a miraculous recovery ensued and he ran off.

He returned home and whipped his wife “for paying him so little attention while in jail, stole her silk dress and made his escape from the city.” He went to Nevada and stole “a draft or check, forged the name of the owner on the back, [drew] \$700 or \$800 at Gold Hill...” On the way to San Francisco he was arrested in Sacramento but got away after bribing the arresting officer. The Grand Jury still had to weigh in on that matter at the time of the story.

In San Francisco he was held until an official from Nevada came to collect him. The officer and Kelly boarded the train for Nevada. “After the train passed Colfax the prisoner asked leave to enter the watercloset in the car. The privilege was granted. He locked the door, and, although his wrists were handcuffed, climbed through the window and dropped from the car with the train under full headway and ran off.” Kelly got away. Later, back in Nevada, Kelly and a man named Frenchy were convicted of attempted robbery and went to prison for three years. An appeal to the Supreme Court freed the men and Kelly was on the way back to California when he was killed by the Chinese.

On November 16, the Sonoma Democrat reported some further news, “A noted highwayman, known as ‘Johnny Behind the Rock,’ who has been engaged in committing depredations recently on the Donner Lake route, has been killed by a Chinaman.”

# From the Special Collections

## University Nevada, Reno

In our April and May, 2017 Heirlooms Kimberly Roberts of the University of Nevada at Reno wrote about the history of Clair Tappaan. She also sent along pictures from the University's special collection. These did not make it into those two issues.



Norden Store on Highway 40 sometime around 1930 UNRS-P1992-01-7807

Right, digging out at the Sierra Club lodge, UNRS-P2006-08-180  
Below, just a fallen skier lost to history, UNRS-P2006-08-266





The Sierra Crest Ski Trail stretched across Donner Summit. See the October, '16 Heirloom. UNRS-P1992-01-7810



Castle Pk. to the right.  
UNRS-P1992-01-7817

# California Winter Sports and the 1960 VIII<sup>th</sup> Winter Olympics

Last month the book review in the Heirloom was 50 Years of Flight. Besides reading a book for its subject matter a good reason for historians is to be able to delve into the footnotes. They can provide rich resources for further investigations. Footnotes have often inspired further research. You can liken them to bread crumbs marking trails to follow.

So we were interested in the footnotes in the 50 Years... They might turn up good resources to follow or illustrate current topics awaiting Heirloom exposure. Some of the footnotes in 50 Years... mentioned an out of print book, California Winter Sports and the 1960 VIII<sup>th</sup> Winter Olympics by Jerry Carpenter. Jerry Carpenter was winter sports director of the California Chamber of Commerce. It was written in 1958 and talked about plans for the coming Squaw Valley Olympics, included lots of statistics for past Olympic events, and background for the state of winter sports in 1958. The footnotes in 50 Years... we were following were about Donner Summit history of course. We hoped we'd come up with more sources for stories or headlines for illustration.

California Winter Sports... is a thin volume of only 84 pages but Donner Summit figures in it because Donner Summit was one of the keys in the long term preparations for the Squaw Valley Olympics because of its role in the advancement of skiing. Unfortunately there is no bibliography and there are no footnotes. The sources in Jerry Carpenter's book appear to be lots of interviews with people who are acknowledged in the acknowledgment section. Some of those acknowledged are Donner Summit personalities: Dennis Jones, Roy Mikkelsen, and Sherman Chickering.

In terms of general development heading to the Olympics Mr. Carpenter talks about the various ski areas, changing ski techniques, ski organizations and personalities who helped advance things, and the history of skiing in California.

Since, like most of our book reviews, most Heirloom readers are not going to pick up California Winter Sports... we'll try to turn the history contained in it into an article. That will make this a kind of eclectic report since there are a lot of different subjects covered.

This book gives a nice history of Donner Summit in the 1930's, 40's and 50's.

## **Snowball Specials**

In order to get people to the winter venues for recreation and enhance their revenues the railroad started Snowball Specials in 1932. The Specials took people from the Bay Area and Sacramento to Donner Summit and Truckee. Round trip fares from San Francisco to Truckee were \$4.85; To Cisco Grove, \$4.25; and to Soda Springs, \$4.55. If you wanted a sleeper berth it was another \$1.60 for a lower berth and \$1.35 for an upper. There were ski shops in the baggage cars and parts of the regular cars were open for dancing to the jukeboxes. There were snacks too. Consider the difference between then and now. Today people hop in their automobiles to head to the snow on winter weekends, one family per car. Once at the snow they stay in single family houses or head back home immediately after a day of skiing. In Snowball Special days people joined the crowd and apparently "partied" their way up the mountain. Once at the snow they might stay in the Pullman cars over the weekend or go to the various ski lodges for communal weekend living sharing chores, eating common meals, and enjoying group activities: dancing, games, singing, etc. Jerry Carpenter rued their demise in 1958, "The Snowball Special are sorely missed...the fraternizing spirit was strong in the mixed groups who rode the trains. Very few who used them were ardent skiers, but they were all enthusiastic and the trips on the Specials were highly



"Ski Hut" in a Southern Pacific Snowball Special

enjoyable."

In 1937 the railroad also built a shelter in the Norden snowsheds. Later it was enlarged to include a lunch counter, rest rooms, a large lounge, a waiting room, a ski ship and baggage and ski check. A ramp was built to facilitate access from the highway above. They also built rope tows and toboggan runs.

WWII put a stop to the Specials for National security. The railroad had to be protected from sabotage and so Donner Summit was mostly closed to tourists. After the war regular train traffic was too heavy to allow special trains. Pullmans were attached to regular trains as needed but the Specials were done.



Above Auburn Ski Club ski hill at Cisco Grove. Below, their club house.

### **Auburn Ski Club**

The Auburn Ski Club is of course highlighted not only for opening Donner Summit to snow sports but for proselytizing winter sports statewide. The club was established in 1928 at Canyon Creek, just above Baxter on Highway 40 (an exit now on I-80).

People parked where the snow started and then walked or skied to Canyon Creek. That leads to a summary of how Highway 40 became open in winter. In 1930-31 the Auburn Ski Club prevailed on State Senator Bert Cassidy to help. He invited other legislators and officials to a ski demonstration and a hundred showed up in late February. They were followed by thousands of other people and the resulting traffic jam induced the legislature to appropriate money to clear highways in the winter. Clearly winter sports were popular.



Carpenter goes into the various ski areas in the state summarizing their facilities and backgrounds. Of course, "U.S. Highway 40 is one such area." He says that "Highway 40, the Donner Trail, has been and still is one of the most heavily used of our winter sports areas, not only of California, but of the whole country." Since then much larger ski areas

have taken precedence but there are still winter crowds on Donner Summit.

Skiing on Donner Summit dates back to 1913 when Lincoln Hutchinson brought some friends skiing to the old Summit Hotel "near Lake Mary at the west end of Railroad Tunnel No. 6." They formed the Sierra Ski Club [not the Sierra Club] and built the first ski lodge in California. That lodge is today Hutchinson Lodge and is part of Clair Tappaan, owned by the Sierra Club. Shortly thereafter the Nature Friends built their lodge nearby. (It burned and has been replaced). In 1934 the Sierra Club built

Clair Tappaan. Then U.C. students built the first iteration of the Cal-Lodge, the second version of which is still standing.

Rainbow Tavern was built by Herstle Jones in 1936 and it slept 65 people. There was a ski school there as well as a J-Bar 1250 feet long which rose 350 feet. In 1957 a poma lift that was longer and higher (1750' long with a rise of 410') was installed. There are still remnants on the hillside.

By 1936 there were lots of places for people to stay along Old 40: Emigrant Gap, Cisco Grove, Rainbow Tavern, and Soda Springs. In 1937 the House of Vanderford was opened by Ma Vanderford at Donner Summit across from what would later be Donner Ski Ranch. She could sleep 25 people. Today there are almost no accommodations unless one goes to Truckee. Clair Tappaan and the Sugar Bowl Lodge are exceptions.

In 1939-40 Johnny Ellis had two rope tows operating on the summit on Donner Pk. and Signal Hill (today's Donner Ski Ranch). More accommodations followed and various ski clubs built lodges: Sacramento, Stockton and McClellan, and others.

Initially there were not many lifts to move skiers but two fellows at Donner Lake, Herb and Ollie Brook, came up with an idea. They'd ferry skiers up to the summit on Old 40 and people would ski down.

Famous skiers began coming to the Auburn Ski Club for jumping competitions and the Club put on demonstrations in Berkeley and at the Treasure Island World Fair. In 1933 they built one of the first ski tows in the state. Ending that section Carpenter notes that the expansion of Highway 40 to four lanes will bisect the club's ski area and "the club must move again" to above Soda Springs "along the relocated highway..." which of course is today, Boreal Ski Area, owned by the Auburn Ski Club but run by others.

World War II shut down the summit. There was gas rationing. The military had taken a lot of young men. The transcontinental railroad was critical to the war effort and so the area was restricted.

After the war more clubs built lodges: Viking, Dartmouth and Sitski. Then Herstle Jones built Nyack Lodge at Nyack along with a rope tow and along came Rancho Sierra Inn (below Nyack) and Ski Inn at Norden, along with others at Donner Lake.

### **Soda Springs**

Soda Springs gets its own section beyond the generalities of Highway 40. Originally Carpenter says it was called Tinker Station after the Fenton and Tinker Hotel. That building sat where the parking lot for Soda Springs Ski Area now is. In 1958 that was also the site of the Snowflake Lodge. See the photo on the next page.

Oscar and Herstle Jones came to the summit in 1922 and built the Soda Springs Hotel in 1926. In 1929 the Jones brothers packed a trail to Donner Lake with horses and sleighs. Skiers could ski down to the lake and be picked up by the sleighs and brought back up.. One would think the skiers got into the sleighs for transportation but it turns out the sleighs trailed ropes the skiers held on to for the trip up the mountain.

Oscar's son, Dennis, opened a ski school at Soda Springs teaching a new parallel skiing technique. Soon other instructors appeared on Donner Summit to give people the skills to enjoy the area. Carpenter says that in 1937 Charles Van Evera put in the first rope tow at Beacon Hill. The next year three more rope tows followed as well as a J-bar in 1939 and the Sitzmark Lodge.

Donner Summit Lodge came along as an addition to the Fox Farm in 1941. In 1945 Ice Lakes Chalet opened. There a rope tow was installed in 1946. People got into Ice Lakes from the train station at Soda Springs via a station wagon with skis in front and tractor treads in the rear.

A post office arrived in 1930 at the hotel in Soda Springs. The Donner Trails Association was organized. The annual Donner Memorial Cross Country Race from Soda Springs to the Auburn Ski Club was begun and the summit helped promote Dog Derbies at Truckee. The Beacon Hill Lodge was built in 1941 by Elmo Mariano but it was not finished until after the war. It "has a heated swimming pool for winter guests" (that was in 1958 – the lodge burned in the 1970's and only the cement foundations and the swimming pool, filled with detritus, are still there).

The Snowflake Lodge, opposite Soda Springs Ski Area came along in 1949 as did large parking areas where the Soda Springs Ski Area parking lots are today. See the next page. A 2600 foot long chairlift, rising 750 feet was installed at Soda Springs.

### **Sugar Bowl**





Soda Springs Ski Area. The dam is out of the picture to the left. Snowflake Lodge is center bottom. Ski Inn is just above that.

Sugar Bowl comes next. In 1958 "It is perhaps the most famous of northern California ski resorts." Hannes Schroll (who wrote the introduction to the book) arrived in 1938 to build the resort. The original subscriptions to the corporation were \$1000. Carpenter mentions the little story about getting in to Sugar Bowl. It's across the highway and the railroad and a winter road would have been too expensive. Tracked station wagons proved impractical so they moved to sleighs drawn by horses. The horses got loose one night and got on to the railroad tracks. Sugar moved to tractor pulled sleighs (each holding 30 people) until the Magic Carpet gondola was built in 1953 (and improved in 1957). Soda Springs had been the entry point to Sugar Bowl but after 1940 when the railroad built their ski hut at the Norden station, the transfer point from the railroad was moved there. After the war Sugar Bowl moved to using weasels, that the Army had used successfully in the war, to move visitors. Sugar Bowl had the first chair lift in 1939 and it became a double up Mt. Disney in 1953.

In 1956 a double chairlift was built on Mt. Lincoln. It could move 600 skiers an hour and rose 1420 feet. Carpenter says that version extended 1 1/2 miles. Today's version is shorter but still goes to the top and can take 2600 people per hour and rises 1277 feet.

#### **The Sierra Club**

The Club was formed in 1892 to explore, preserve and enjoy the Sierra. They built their first winter lodge at Norden in 1934. Clair Tappaan is a fixture on the summit today but, interestingly, there was opposition to its building from those in the club who did not want the summit overrun by skiers. The lodge was built by volunteers on USFS land. As its popularity increased it was

doubled in size. A 2600 foot long rope tow was installed behind the club that had a vertical rise of 600 feet. People using the Cal Lodge, that came along in 1937, used the tow as well.

### **Donner Ski Ranch**

Donner Ski Ranch opened in 1945. By the 1946-47 season it had a T Bar 1650 feet long and two rope tows. Stan and Madeline Walton took over running the Ski Ranch and started a ski school. They added a P.A. system to broadcast music for skiers and to announce VIP's arriving. Gratz Powers ran the ski school in 1948-49 and Edi Arvo followed him. In 1956 a double chairlift 2500 feet long was installed that had a rise of 750 feet.

Towards the end of the book is a page, "Winter Sports Guide Supplement 1957-1958 season." It offers advice and what to expect for winter sports visitors. In terms of what to expect for prices, "...the cost Monday through Thursday at one of the best resorts, dinner and breakfast, use of ski tows and ski instruction optional- in dormitories \$27; in room with bath, double \$90.... One midweek ski special offers room and meals, two ski school sessions, unlimited use of the ski tows and lifts at \$9 per day. Hotel rooms range from \$4 up; cabins with bath \$4.50.... Dormitories ranging in price from \$1.50 per night with sleeping bag, to \$3 per night with linen furnished."

Ski tours were offered taking people to the ski areas via Greyhound bus. They would leave Friday evening and included a box lunch. Some offered a cocktail on arrival and then two nights accommodation with bath, breakfast and dinner on Saturday, free instruction on Saturday, "reasonable" equipment rental, reduced ski tow rates, dancing and other entertainment for \$23 per person.

You could expect to rent skis, binding, and poles for \$4.00. Boots were \$1.50, trousers \$2.00, jackets \$1.50. Lessons were \$3 for two hours. Four hours was \$5. Rope tows were about 15 cents per ride, \$1.25 for half a day or \$2.00 for a full day. There were also platter pulls, T Bars and J Bars. Chairlifts might be \$1.50 for a single ride or \$4-5 for all day.

If you are interested in perusing this book, come on in to the Historical Society to look at it. You can also try the Internet where there are a few copies for sale.

**Acknowledgements in California Winter Sports and the 1960 VIII<sup>th</sup> Winter Olympics**, people apparently interviewed by Jerry Carpenter for his history as identified by Norm Sayler since no descriptions are given in the book.

Dennis Jones, son of Oscar Jones. Started California Ski School at Beacon Hill and founded Beacon Hill

Roy Mikkelsen, famous ski jumper Auburn Ski Club

Max Williamson, ranger at Big Bend, owned Soda Springs ski area for a while and bought the T bar from Donner Ski Ranch.

Milt and Maggie Avila, husband Milt did ski school at Donner Ski Ranch and built the poma lift at Rainbow Maggie worked for USFS. They both did the ticketing at Soda Springs/Beacon Hill for Milt Hogle. They organized the Olympic torch run at Rainbow.

Sherman Chickering, one of the four founding families of Sugar Bowl owned an estate at the Cedars that originally belonged to Hopkins. The Chickering family still owns that land.

Walter Haug, Manager Sugar Bowl 1950's

Ted Huggins (Norm did not know him)

## **Note:**

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

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

You might even want to do a review for us.

# Odds & Ends on Donner Summit

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](#).

Here we have some really old history, a 20 million year old leaf fossil from rocks exposed in an eroded stream bed in Serene Lakes.

As the Pacific tectonic plate pushes under the North American plate the material from the Pacific Plate is recycled and melted. Eventually it becomes the granite batholith, 400 miles long, that is the Sierra Nevada range. Before the Sierra Nevada was uplifted volcanic activity spewed mud flows which trapped material that would fossilize. This fossil is part of the Mehrten Formation.

To do your own fossil hunting you will have to take a hammer to rocks that have been exposed in stream beds. You want roundish rocks that look kind of like potatoes in shape and color and are cementations of sandstone. You don't want rocks that don't look like sandstone.



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

# Smorgabobbing - The Answer

Faithful readers will remember the allusion to “Mama Gravender’s” in the article, “Snow Bunnies on the Hill” in the October, '17 Heirloom. The story was about the early history of the Alpeiner Ski Club that has a building on Donner Summit. The early club met regularly in San Francisco and among other things (which included folk dancing – see below), went “smogabobbing” at Mama Gravender’s.

We did search for “smorgabobbing” and asked the author but no answers were forthcoming.

No sooner had the Heirloom “hit the stands” than Chuck Oldenburg of Mill Valley wrote in to say, “First of all, Mama (Valborg) Gravander was a famous and long time Swedish resident of Mill Valley. My guess is that "smorgabobbing" referred to eating a smorgasbord at her house.”

Of course our research department responded immediately, thanking Chuck before diving into old newspapers. Why we did not look up “Mama Gravander” earlier we have no idea.

It turns out Mama Gravander was quite famous and was even decorated by the King of Sweden for keeping traditional skills alive. She was famous as a spinner and weaver and was often in the newspapers across the country.

The Rockland County (NY) Journal News said on December 2, 1949 that Mama Gravander had a place on Washington St. in San Francisco that was a “homey old world hideaway less well known as the school of Swedish Applied Arts. Ten years ago much of the Scandinavian colony in San Francisco would gather at “Mama’s” for smorgasbord... and a house shaking stint of folk dancing in the basement.” The October 2, 1957 Rochester Democrat and Chronicle said she introduced smorgasbord to San Francisco and was “almost as famous for her cooking as for her weaving.”

That would all seem to bear out Chuck’s initial response as well as clues in the Alpeiner story and so we can say that “smorgabobbing” was related to eating Mama’s smorgasbord at her homey place on Washington St.

Then Chuck sent along an excerpt from “The Oral History of Valborg (Mama) Gravander which included a picture. Sometimes history is a team sport.



## Let Her Fame Live Forever

Kathy Hess (now Slocum), left, has been organizing and running the Donner Party Hikes for 16 years. She's giving it up now since she got married.

Here Kathy is receiving an award for her efforts at Sugar Bowl during the afternoon presentation. The Latin says "Let there be Light" and "Her Fame Will Live Forever." Then, in English, the text congratulates Kathy.

Thanks Kathy. For the future of the Donner Party Hikes see the next page.

# Donner Party Hike, 2017

Each year the Donner Party Hike event is held on Donner Summit. Hikers choose among six different hikes: Railroad tunnels and snowsheds, Summit Canyon, Summit Valley, High Sierra Lakes, Donner Pk. and Coldstream, and Roller Pass/Mt. Judah.

The hikes are followed by music, lunch, and an afternoon presentation. That evening another history presentation is done and on Sunday some hikers sign up for a Donner Party session at the State Park and the Alder Creek site.

The 2017 event featured Richard Blair on the guitar, Mark Twain impersonator Macavoy Lane, and Norm Saylor, local history raconteur.

You might want to put 2018's event on your calendar and look for information in the [Heirloom](#) or on our website.

Right is a picture of High Sierra Lakes hikers by John Bronson and below that is the Sugar Bowl lunch crew taken by Kathy Slocum.

A vertical promotional graphic for the 2018 Donner Party Hike. At the top is a logo with a hiker silhouette and the text "DONNER PARTY HIKE". Below is a photo of hikers on a rocky ridge overlooking a lake. A white starburst contains the text "New Hikes", "New Stories", and "New History Tour". The year "2018" is prominently displayed in large white numbers. At the bottom, it says "FOR MORE INFORMATION: info@donnerpartyhike.com" and "donnerpartyhike.com".

**DONNER PARTY HIKE**

*New Hikes  
New Stories  
New History Tour*

**2018**

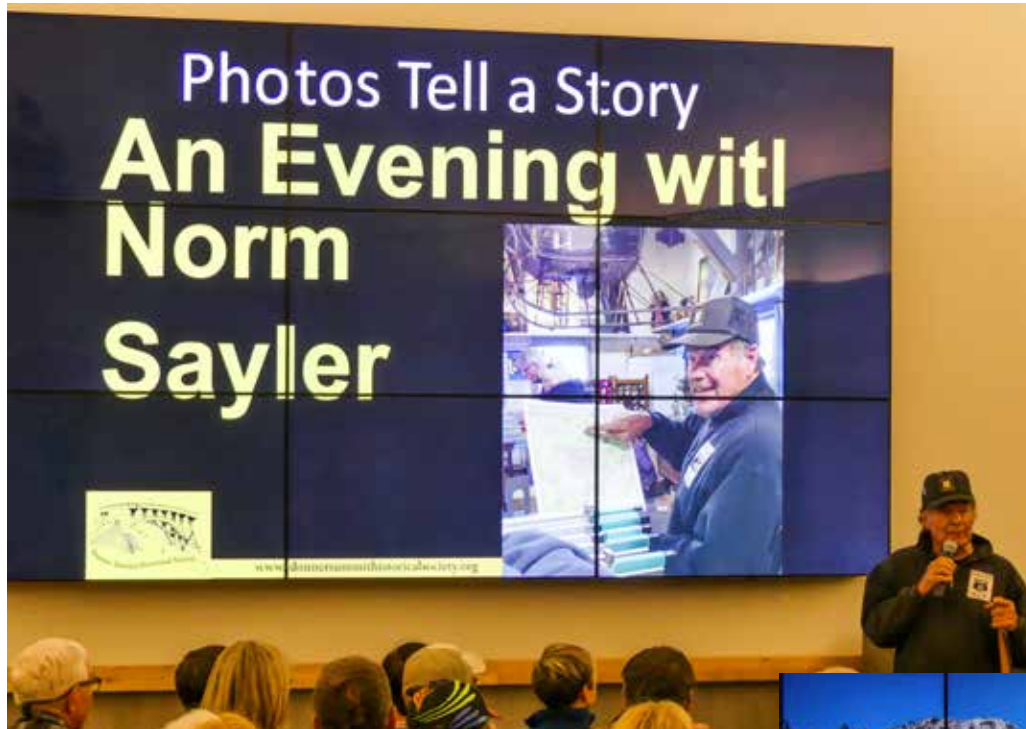
FOR MORE INFORMATION:  
info@donnerpartyhike.com  
donnerpartyhike.com

## Donner Summit Historical Society Takes Over Donner Party Hikes

The Donner Party hikes have been held for 25 years and sponsored partly by the Truckee Chamber of Commerce. For 16 years Kathy Hess (now Slocum) has been organizing and conducting the Donner Party Hike annual event (see the previous page). This year was her last year. Although she will still be involved it's been a lot of work and she just got married so her priorities have changed a bit.

The DSHS has been working with Kathy on the hikes for some years and when Kathy decided to give up the responsibilities of leadership she wondered if the DSHS would take over. People like the event and it would be a shame to let it die. Of course the DSHS said yes and then the Donner Summit Association asked to participate. So the DSHS and the DSA have taken over the Donner Party Hike event.

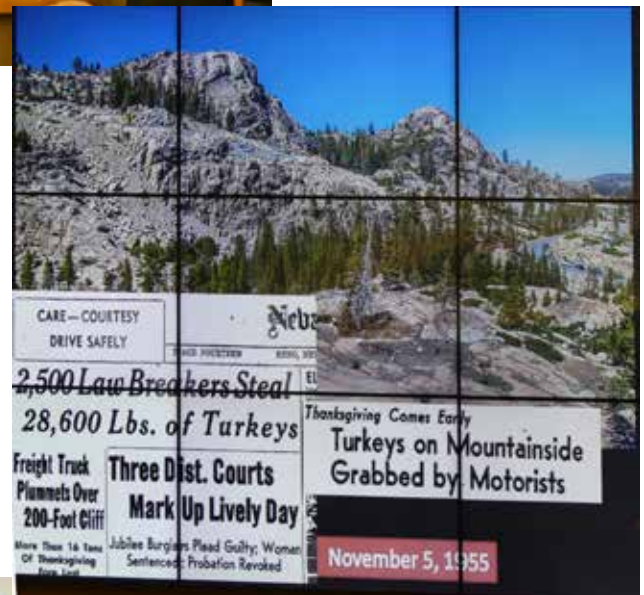
# An Evening With Norm Saylor



It was standing room only at the Donner State Park the evening after the Donner Party Hike on October 14.

Norm Saylor gave a presentation based on some of the pictures in his vast collection of historical photographs. He kept the audience enthralled and received a standing ovation at the end.

Left, Norm with an "intro" slide. Below, one of his favorite stories, about the frozen turkeys. Below, the audience



Photos by Greg Zirbel

DONNER SUMMIT HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
[Donnersummithistoricalsociety.org](http://Donnersummithistoricalsociety.org)

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