

# The Donner Summit

# Heirloom



History and stories of the Donner Summit Historical Society

May, 2017 issue #105

## A Tale of Two Signs

More Adventures of the MHRT\*

Part II (Part I was in October, '16)

One of the kind of frustrating things about the Heirloom is there is so much history waiting to be published about Donner Summit. We initially thought that this Part II would immediately follow Part I which was in the October, '16 Heirloom. Then one thing or another got in the way and here we are months later getting to Part II. We apologize for all of the history.

Part I of "Tale of Two Signs" was about the MHRT (Mobile Historical Research Team) protecting two signs, the trees on which they'd been displayed, having fallen. The signs were the "Emigrant Trail" put up by Peter Weddell in 1927 and "Sierra Crest," put up about 1940. We rescued the signs and ran them through the DSHS MX-1000 Historical Rejuvenator. You saw that (check your carefully bound Heirloom volumes or go to our website). You also saw the two displays we made in the DSHS display production workroom (also on our website: "Exhibits" page and look for "Peter Weddell" and "Sierra Crest").



Above: Emigrant Trail with signs along the route. Left: Pat Malberg and one of the Weddell signs.

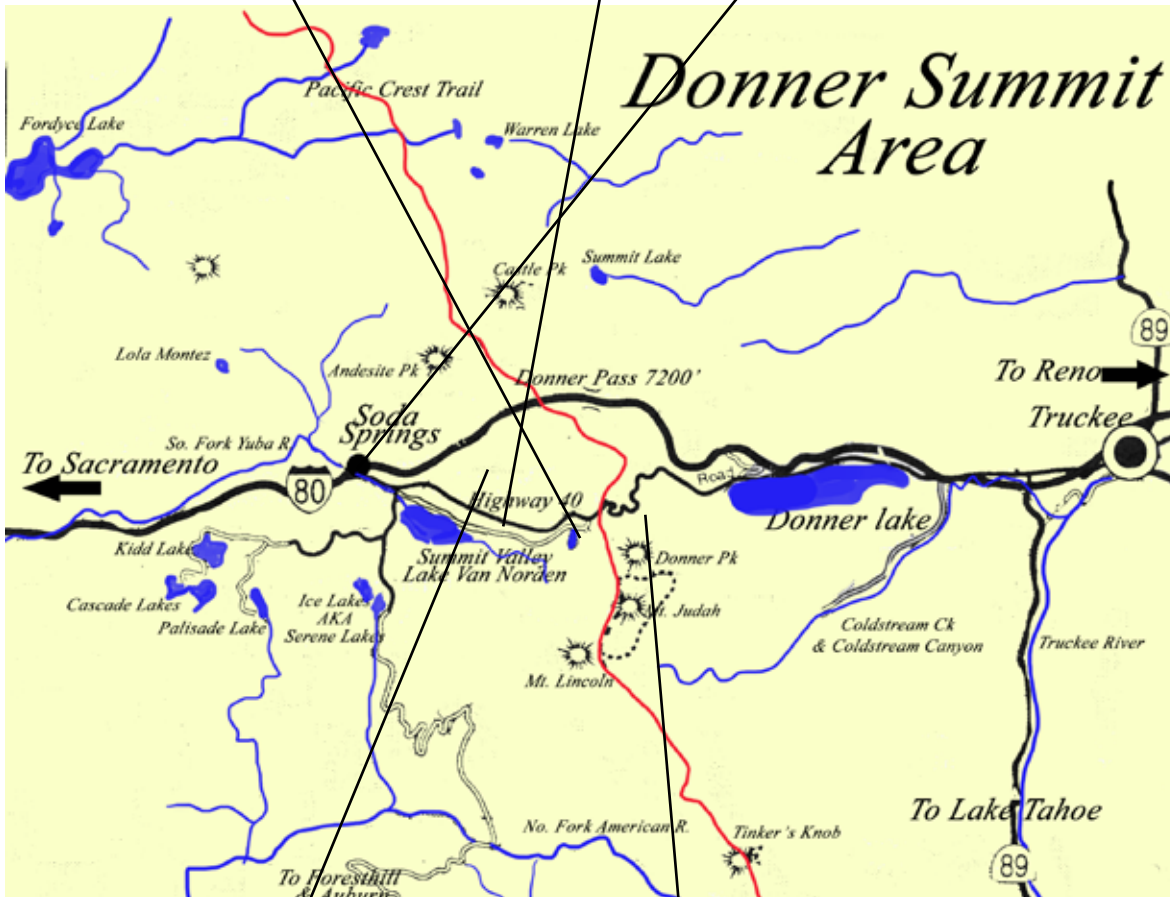
We'd been in discussion with Pat Malberg (she's been in Heirlooms: July, '12, February, '14, November, '15, and May, '09 and she proof reads each issue prior to dissemination) about signs and she mentioned that there were some Weddell and Sierra Crest signs between her Lake Mary home and Sugar Bowl. Then she suggested a visit and that was an offer no self-respecting Donner Summit historian or MHRT member could refuse.

We went up the road from Pat's house and found a clear travel way. We found

\*Mobile Historical Research Team

# Story Locations in this Issue

A Tale of Two Signs Pt II Lake Mary pg 1    Clair Tappaan pg 5    Soda Springs Hotel pg 12



Boreal Ridge/Crater Lake "Lake Flora pg 17

Lincoln Highway Summit Canyon pg 18

**In This Issue**



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

signs that Pat and her husband, Don, had found. Then we found more of each. Clearly both the Emigrant Trail and the Sierra Crest Trail went through there.

You can see some of them in this collection here.

Peter Weddell was interested in the Emigrant Trail. He researched the route and then, during the 1920's he marked the trail from Verdi to Lake Mary. If you want to read more about him: [Heirlooms](#) November, '11, January, '12, and October, '16. The Sierra Crest Trail or Sierra Skiways was a trail network for cross country skiers laid out by the Forest Service in the 1930's and '40's. To read more see the [Heirlooms](#) for December, '10 and January, '12.



Mo, a friend of Pat's, on the old Emigrant Trail near Lake Mary



Two of the Sierra Crest Trail signs still on the trees above Lake Mary, below Mt. Judah.



Great views above Lake Mary and below Mt. Judah. This is the route of the Emigrant Trail and Sierra Crest Trail.



Various Weddell signs still on the trees almost 100 years after Peter Weddell placed them.



Clair Tappaan is a classic Sierra ski lodge. Left is the main hallway constructed of huge timbers.

# The Clair Tappaan Lodge

The Sierra Club and the Growth of Backcountry Skiing at Donner Summit

## Part II

by Kimberly Roberts

Last month's [Heirloom](#) introduced Part I by recounting some serendipity that brought us a new contributor. In April Kimberly Roberts, UNR, began the history of Clair Tappaan Lodge on Donner Summit. This month we have part II, the context.

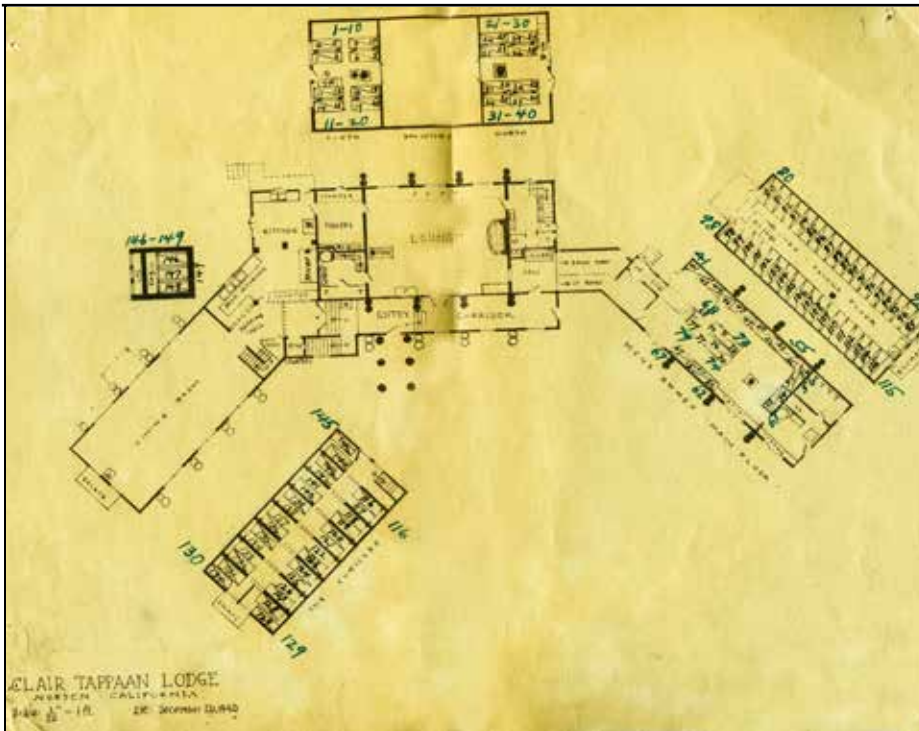
### Part II

Prior to World War II, the Sierra Club functioned mainly as a social club using landscape as a hub for recreational activity. The Clair Tappaan Lodge, built by the club up at Donner Summit in the 1930s and still owned and operated by them, was central to their vision of outdoor recreation and civic engagement. The construction and operation of this lodge parallels larger shifts within the Sierra Club and post war society as a whole, as natural resources and public lands became increasingly politicized in the new environment which emerged. Recreation and politics became more and more intertwined and the club gradually shifted from sponsoring and leading recreational activities towards engaging in land use politics, using notions of landscape to campaign for environmental causes and ultimately emerging as a major voice in the environmental movement. This shift can be traced through the changing landscape of Donner Summit.

During the Great Depression when they began their treks to Donner Summit, Sierra Club members had pooled their resources, sharing not only lodging but equipment and rides, building a community and skiing together as a group. With

the rise of commercial ski ventures at the summit, the post war landscape became increasingly commercial, much more crowded, and fostered an environment of individual skill and accomplishment. At first the club embraced its role in this new landscape: Lewis Clark wrote an article in 1947 in which he heralded a new era of winter sports development and advised club skiers to consider the broadening scope of their responsibilities. These, according to Lewis, included the social responsibilities that came with membership in the summit community. The club, always civically engaged, maintained an active role in the landscape, advising, planning, educating, and cooperating.<sup>(7)</sup> This included helping to found search and rescue teams, developing emergency aid techniques and training skiers in safety and rescue skills. This shows that the Sierra Club, in keeping with its ethics, was still participating in what they deemed the broader betterment of both landscape and society through physical activities and social participation.

However, expansion of commercial runs and overcrowding undermined these ideals. New developments at Donner Ski



Photographs of the floor plan and the trails map in this story from the private collection of George Homsey, used with permission

Floor plan of Clair Tappaan, 1940

Ranch, now covering most of Signal Hill, included new ski lifts running parallel to the Sierra Club rope tow. This impeded not only physically on the landscape they had created, but also psychically intruded on it. New highway construction created right-of-way issues and the network of back country trails was broken up, crisscrossed by the new freeway and numerous side roads in addition to private housing. Ultimately one of the overnight huts had to be relocated due to development. Crowding also forced the breakdown of the communal culture that had existed between the ski clubs. In 1946 the Sierra Club announced that they owned the water rights to the spring on the Clair Tappaan property. Previously they had shared this water with two other ski clubs but were planning further development of the existing springs exclusively for the use of the Clair Tappaan Lodge. The spring property was to be fenced with barbed wires and signs.

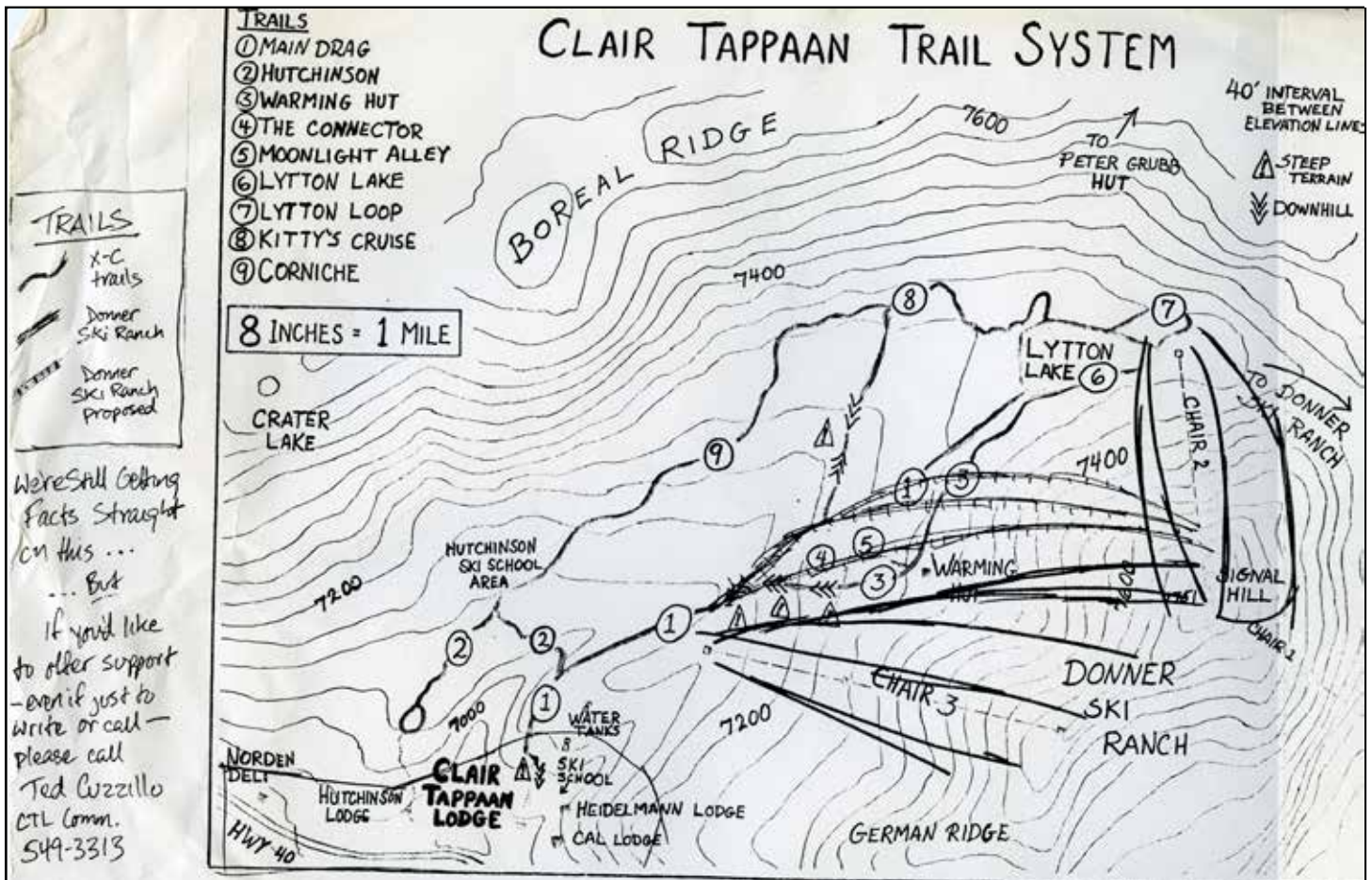
In 1949 the lodge was condemned by the state of California due to fire code violations such as unsafe stairways. Major reconstruction at the lodge was needed to get it up to code. This was coupled with an alarming financial report: the lodge was now officially operating at a loss due to competition from other commercial ventures with better ski lifts. Questions about the future of the lodge swirled in the air and the club discussed selling it altogether. This led to a time of reflection and change for the Sierra Club as they began to reevaluate their presence at Donner Summit and to question where the lodge fit into the values of the club as a whole.

It was clear to club members that they had been the vanguard of the outdoor recreation movement when they built the Clair Tappaan Lodge in 1934. Access to the back country had been notoriously difficult at that time and their work

had significantly improved this, their extensive network of ski trails and overnight cabins making impassible areas accessible. However, skiing itself had changed and the kind of backcountry ski touring the club had championed was replaced in the 1950's as downhill skiing took over the slopes. The reliance on chair lifts and groomed, hard packed runs benefited the commercial outfits at the expense of the cross country trails developed by the Sierra Club. Cross country and downhill skiing diverged into two distinctly different styles of skiing with two very different interactions with the landscape and the club found itself at a crossroads.

As they faced this changing time, they realized how much they still believed in the original vision and intent of the Clair Tappaan Lodge. They began to see that they had imbedded a value system into their wilderness ski trails that went deeper than the physical landscape itself. And with this awareness, they began to resist the commercialization that surrounded them. Members began to complain that no touring program existed anymore and that the lodge was no longer a social hub for group skiers but was almost exclusively used by people who came to downhill ski, becoming simply an overnight accommodation, a "sizable business venture with little expression of Sierra Club values." They complained that the only interest of lodge management was "insuring adequate patronage rather than sponsoring activities in keeping with the purposes of the Sierra Club."<sup>(8)</sup> One member wrote a letter to the club stating that "I believe it would be more akin to the Sierra Club's policy of protecting wilderness areas to induce touring in winter, and thereby help stem the growing commercialism in the ski areas."<sup>(9)</sup>

The lodge committee responded in 1956 with a statement that the purpose of the Sierra Club was different from the



rest of the ski areas: "it is not operated as a cheap place to go skiing; rather to introduce new members to the purposes of the club as a whole."<sup>(10)</sup> This shows the Sierra Club taking those first tentative steps towards a more political, less commercial stand, beginning to speak out against development rather than participating in it. Lewis Clark went on to denounce the current state of downhill skiing, writing that "it seems like all you read about these days is speed...the race against time... competition."<sup>(11)</sup> He continued to champion backcountry skiing, the "oft-forgotten ways of enjoying ones's self in the snow country" and his articles about skiing began to include information about the Club's "hard fought battles against 'progress'...i.e. the destruction of our vanishing wilderness."<sup>(12)</sup> Considering their own role in land development and ski run construction, this can be seen as a complete turn-around for the club. It can also be seen as a growing awareness of the differing ideologies behind different modes of landscape construction as club members contrasted their own minimalistic wilderness access trails to the higher impact of the modern downhill resort.

Increasingly the Sierra Club focused on the moral aspects of landscape they had constructed while at the same time trying to stay current and attract new skiers. They began to mold and advertise outdoor activities as a means of raising social and political awareness rather than creating a model citizen. Cross country skiing became a means to educate new members on the importance of wilderness preservation by exposing them

to the wonders of the backcountry and warning them about the imminent threat of overdevelopment. Nathan Clark later remembered that "all these real conservationists, who fought hard on the cause of conservation, it's almost unanimous that they originally joined the club for the social side—the trips and the outings and the ski trips—and didn't really think much about conservation at first. So therefore we can get good conservationists if we give them a proper exposure to the things that we're trying to conserve."<sup>(13)</sup> Development, once necessary for wilderness access, was now increasingly a threat to its very existence. According to Nathan this was because, "the developments, of course, were all for the benefit of the commercial people [who] wanted to make a killing off of what the skiers would spend—that's what it really amounted to. It was not to help the skiers, it was to get an income, which is what all these commercial things are, in the final analysis."<sup>(14)</sup> For the Sierra Club, something very different was true: recreation led first to the development of the landscape and ultimately to the need for its preservation. Participating in outdoor activities for club members now pointed the way to becoming activist citizens dedicated to an ideal of wilderness that sprung from the very landscape they constructed up at Donner Summit.

As the 1960s became more turbulent, the Sierra Club became increasingly engaged in the environmental movement, moving off of the ski slopes and into the legal system. Both Lewis

and Nathan Clark were pivotal in this shift, working their way up the club hierarchy to the office of president. Lewis served on the board of directors from 1933 to 1969, spending twenty eight years on the executive committee and held chairs in every office, including president and executive director. Nathan was a member of the board of directors for sixteen years, serving as vice-president from 1958 to 1959 and as president from 1959 to 1961. They are the only brothers to both serve as presidents of the Sierra Club and their shared love of outdoor recreation helped dictate the evolution of both the Sierra Club and the landscape of Donner Summit.

7. Lewis Clark "Winter Sports Committee: A Progress Report," Sierra Club Bulletin v. 32 no. (1947): p. 9

8. All these quotes 37:31 May 23, 1951

9. Lewis F. Clark Papers, Box 37:31 May 10, 1952 Fenkel letter

10. Lewis F. Clark Papers, Box 37:32 March 24, 1956

11. Lewis F. Clark Papers, Box 279:1 Norden Newsletter, March 6, 1958

12. Lewis F. Clark Papers, Box 279:1 Norden Newsletter, Jan , 1959

13. Nathan Clark, Oral History Transcript, 89

14. Nathan Clark, Oral History Transcript, 85



Pictures on these two pages come from a Clair Tappaan Lodge scrapbook, courtesy of Peter Lemkeul

On this page, construction by volunteers in 1934.



## SIERRA CLUB

The Sierra Club's three-day hike this week-end will be a get-acquainted camping trip to the new Sierra Club Lodge at 7000 feet elevation near the **Donner Summit**, overlooking Lake Van Norden. Leave the Bay region Friday if possible. Drive over Victory Highway (U. S. 40) via Sacramento to the Norden Store, one and one-half miles beyond Soda Springs Hotel. Continue past Norden for one-quarter of a mile, then turn left at sign into Sierra Club property.

An alternate trip will be a joint hike with the Loma Prieta Chapter. Saturday, drive via Redwood City to Five Points. Turn right at Five Points to Woodside School, Woodside, thence one and one-half miles to dam site of the Bear Gulch Water Company over road plainly marked. Bertram Gage will be leader.



Oakland Tribune August, 29, 1934

Photographs of happy Sierra Club members, 1934  
Clair Tappaan Lodge scrapbook.t



Lena Frederick, at Sierra Club's Peter Grubb Hut about 1940, courtesy of Milli Martin, Lena's niece. Collection at the DSHS



### **Primary Sources**

"Minutes of Organization Meeting of Board of Directors, May 7, 1932," Sierra Club Bulletin, v. 17, no. 3 (1932): p. 9-10.

Clark, Lewis "Winter Sports Committee: A Progress Report," Sierra Club Bulletin, v. 37 no. 3(1932): p. 139-141.

Clark, Lewis. Odo Podilla: The History of Hutchinson Lodge, 1934. Unpublished compilation, Clair Tappaan Lodge, Norden, CA. (Original manuscript in George Homsey Private Collection, San Francisco, CA)

Clark, Lewis. The History of Clair Tappaan Lodge, 1934. Unpublished compilation, Clair Tappaan Lodge, Norden, CA. (Original manuscript in George Homsey Private Collection, San Francisco, CA)

Hildebrand, Joel H. "Ski Heil!" Sierra Club Bulletin, v. 20, no. 1 (1935): p. 1-7.

Joel Hildebrand, "Sierra Club Leader and Ski Mountaineer." In Sierra Club Reminiscences I, 1900s-1960s. Oral History Transcripts, 1974. By Ann and Ray Lage; Susan Schrepfer (San Francisco: Sierra Club History Committee, 1974)

Lewis Clark, "Perdurable and Peripatetic Sierran: Club Officer and Outings Leader, 1928-1984. Sierra Club Reminiscences III, 1910s-1970s. Oral History Transcripts, 1975-1984. By Marshall Kuhn; John Schagen; Ann Lage; Robin Brooks; Anne Van Tyne; Sierra Club History Committee.; et al. (San Francisco: Sierra Club History Committee, 1985).

Lewis F. Clark papers / 1931-1988, Sierra Club Members papers, BANC MSS 71/295 c, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

Lewis and Nathan Clark Collection of Sierra Nevada Slides, Special Collections Department, University of Nevada-Reno Library, UNRS-P2006-08.

Nathan C. Clark, Sierra Club Leader, Outdoorsman & Engineer. Oral History Transcript, 1976. By Nathan C Clark; Richard Searle; Lewis F Clark; Sierra Club History Committee. (San Francisco: Sierra Club History Committee, 1977).

Bestor Robinson, "Thoughts on Conservation and the Sierra Club." In Sierra Club Reminiscences I, 1900s-1960s. Oral History Transcripts, 1974. By Ann and Ray Lage; Susan Schrepfer (San Francisco: Sierra Club History Committee, 1974)

Sierra Club Bulletin, 1923-1947. San Francisco, Calif., Sierra Club, 1893-1977

### **Secondary Sources**

Cohen, Michael P. The History of the Sierra Club, 1892-1970. (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1988)

Mergen, Bernard. Snow in America. (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997)

Nash, Roderick. Wilderness and the American Mind. Third Edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982).

Pisani, Donald J. Lost Parkland: Lumbering & Park Proposals in the Tahoe-Truckee Basin. Journal of Forest History, v. 21, no. 1 (1977), pp. 4-17

Powell, Margie. Donner Summit: a Brief History. (Grass Valley, Calif.: Cottage Hill Pub., 2003)

Putney, Clifford. Muscular Christianity: Manhood and Sports in Protestant America, 1880-1920. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001)

Robinson, Michael F. The Coldest Crucible: Arctic Exploration and American Culture. (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 2006.)

Schmitt, Peter J. Back to Nature: the Arcadian Myth in Urban America. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969).

Schrepfer, Susan R. "Establishing Administrative "Standing": The Sierra Club and the Forest Service, 1897-1956" in American

Forests: Nature, Culture, and Politics, edited by Char Miller (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1997).

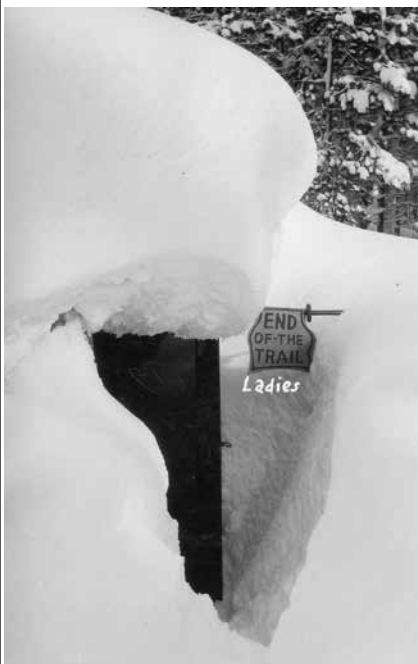
Taylor, Joseph E. Pilgrims of the Vertical: Yosemite Rock Climbers and Nature at Risk. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010).

Tuan, Yi-Fu. Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977)

Van Wormer, Heather. "A New Deal for Gender: the Landscapes of the 1930s" in Shared Spaces and Divided Places: Material Dimensions of Gender Relations and the American Historical Landscape, edited by Deborah L Rotman et al (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2003).

Williams, Gerald W. The USDA Forest Service: The First Century. (Washington, DC: USDA Forest Service, 2000)

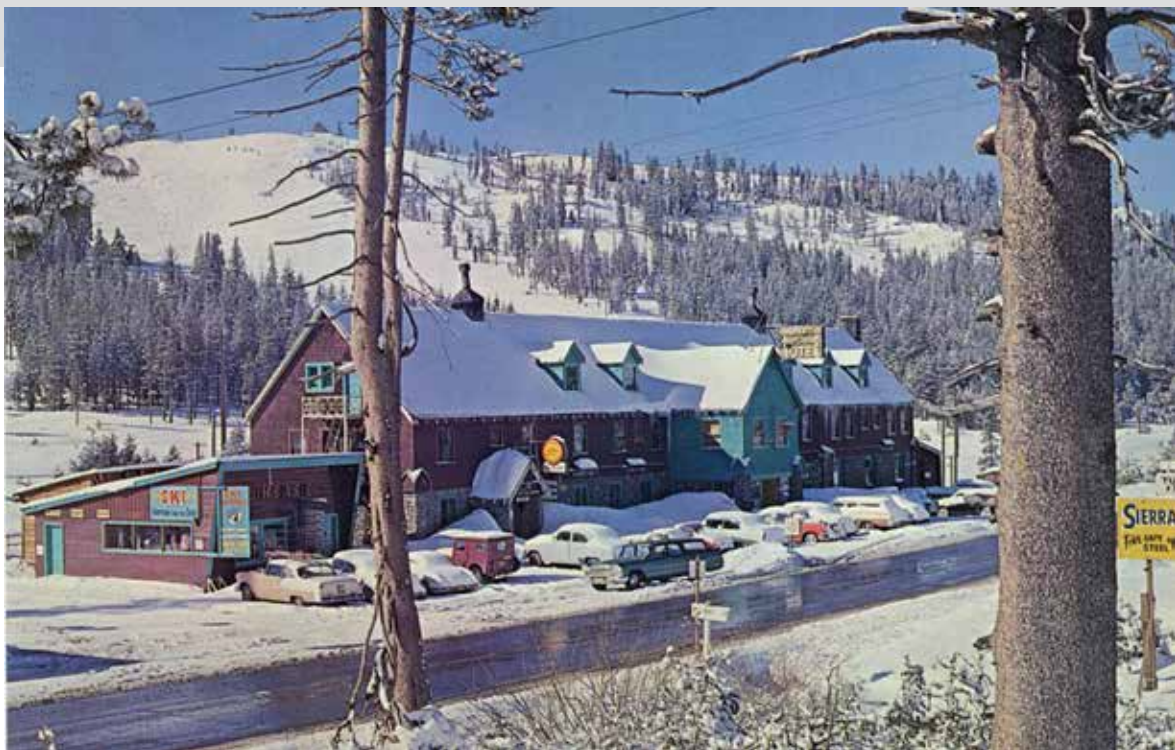
Wilson Dick. Sawdust Trails in the Truckee Basin: A History of Lumbering Operations, 1856-1936. (Nevada City, Ca: Nevada County Historical Society, 1992).



Above the front door of the Clair Tappaan Lodge ca. 1930's. Left, primitive conditions in the old days. These are from Milli Martin's collection of her aunt and uncle's (Lena and Herb Frederick who owned the Norden Store - see the October and November, '10 [Hierlooms](#)) photographs at the DSHS

Kimberly Roberts grew up in Colorado and studied literature and history at Colorado State University and used to work at the Denver branch of the National Archives and the Minnesota Historical Society. She is now a photo curator in the Special Collections Department at the University of Nevada at Reno. She has a master's degree in history, specializing in the history of photography and landscape.

# From the DSHS Archives



Soda Springs Hotel, 1950's. Note the "Sierra Lakes Club" sign on the right for selling lots at Ice or Serene Lakes two miles down the road to the left of the ski shop above.



Here is a fellow standing "in abject resignation alongside his Buick touring car at Soda Springs on the old Lincoln Highway..." The date is May 25, 1912. The picture comes from the [Saga of Lake Tahoe V II](#) and the author says that only "a sturdy team of horses and mules or an early thaw can solve" the problem.

Next month, autos over the summit.

## Save Your Ashes

Save you ashes! The Truckee Republican exhorted on May 25, 1916. The ashes could be used the following spring "in combatting snow conditions."

Collect ashes while roads are good, store them "in convenient places along the highway..." Then they could be easily distributed over the snow. "This should clear the road at least one month sooner than heretofore." Black ashes will heat up under the sun causing the snow to melt faster.

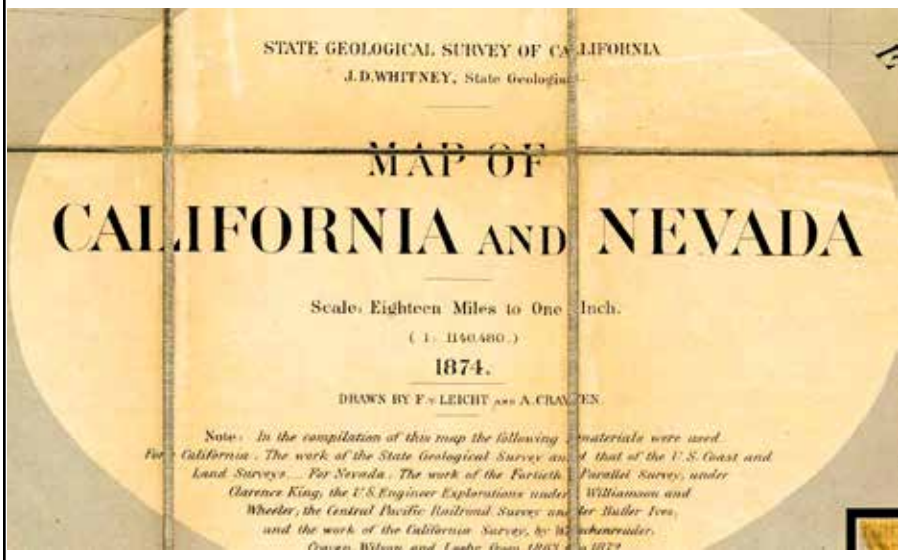
May 25, 1916 [Truckee Republican](#)

The ad above is what we in the literary business call foreshadowing. Next month we'll be covering some first autos over the summit.

# From the DSHS Archives



Actually this map piece did not come from the DSHS Archives but that's the name of the column. It came from <http://www.davidrumsey.com/> the David Rumsey Map Collection



Looking at old maps can be fun. Note here that Lake Tahoe is named Lake Bigler. Note that Ice Lakes/Serene Lakes was Sereno Lakes and there were three lakes instead of two. Under the Mt Lincoln label is "Knoxville" and "Claraville" which were short lived gold mining camps along the Truckee River just outside what is now Squaw Valley (mentioned in the Lake of the Sky 1915 review in our May, '15 [Heirloom](#)). Castle Pk. is labeled Mt. Stanford. Left of Mt. Stanford is Meadow Lake, defunct by 1874 as well as Ossaville (see our Sept. '14 [Heirloom](#) about the hike to Meadow Lake).

# Book Review

## Amateur Emigrant

Robert Louis Stevenson

1880

172 pages

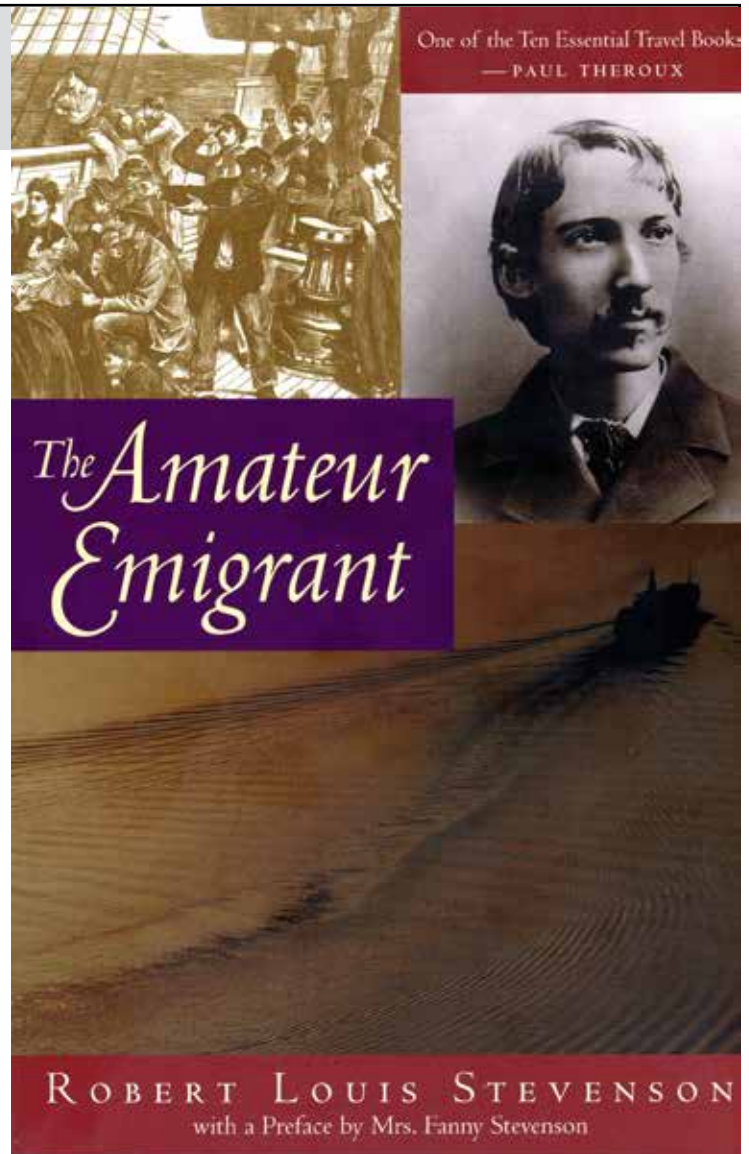
The review of this book by a literary giant is to show the erudition of the DSHS book review staff [no doubt hoping for a raise – ed.].

Sometimes as we pursue Donner Summit history it seems as if everyone was on Donner Summit at one time or another. For example, the Big 4 were on Donner Summit and that group included Leland Stanford, California governor and senator but that's an obvious one. Mark Twain was here. Albert Bierstadt was just one of many famous artists to visit. There were famous photographers and there was John C. Fremont, explorer and U.S. presidential candidate. There were lesser knowns too: the first guy to do a motorized crossing of the U.S., the first guy to cross the Sierra by motor car, and the first guy to bicycle across the U.S. Some of those are stories the Heirloom has covered and others are stories still to be covered.

Another figure to visit was Robert Louis Stevenson, famous author, who visited by train. An *Amateur Emigrant* is a short volume which has the requisite requirement for attention in our Heirloom pages because he mentioned Donner Summit. That piece is at the end so clearly he was saving the best for last.

In 1879 RLS headed for the U.S. as an “amateur emigrant” by ship. He was 29 years old and was going to California to meet his girlfriend whose divorce was just becoming final. There are two things of interest in Stevenson’s trip besides the trip and how people traveled to California in the 19th Century. One is that he went incognito, wanting to experience the life of an emigrant and to meet ordinary people. The second is that the trip, which became *Amateur Emigrant*, was not published until long after the trip. Then after Stevenson died his father bought up all the copies he could because he did not think the book reflected well on his son. It was more suited for newspaper articles. The book is available in print and also for free on the internet.

The U.S. is a nation made up of emigrants. It’s something we celebrate. It’s one aspect of what we like to think of as our unique national character. The people who left home for new lives were the most energetic, the ones most willing to question what was (not accepting the economic system, protesting religious expectations, or fighting political



repression), the ones with new ideas, the ones with drive, the ones with courage, and the ones most willing to take chances. They gave up family, friends, and homelands. They wanted something new. Compare them to the “stay-at-homes,” the people who were complacent, who did not have the energy to move, who did not want to take chances, etc. Parenthetically, the ones who left the eastern U.S. and emigrated west must have had some of the same qualities as those who emigrated to the U.S. Logically, the children of people with those admirable qualities made the United States as it is today. So we celebrate our heritage.

It is interesting to read about Robert Louis Stevenson’s experiences with those unique characters. First he describes shipboard life which is a bit more than half of the book, “Through the thin partition you can hear steerage passengers being sick, the rattle of tin dishes as they sit at meals, the varied accents as they converse, the crying of their children terrified by this new experience, or the clean flat smack of the parental hand in chastisement.” It does not sound attractive but Stevenson’s writing makes us feel it all.

RLS was one step up from steerage at his choice so he could interact with the common people. That small step up made him a gentleman though, and he did not have to provide his own bedding or dishes. His diet was a bit better than those in the lowest class but the descriptions of his food make one want to stay home too. In RLS's class the food looked like scrapings from plates, presumably of the upper class passengers.

RLS describes some passengers and then the emigrant class. "We are a company of the rejected; the drunken, the incompetent, the weak, the prodigal, all who had been unable to prevail against circumstances in the one land, were now fleeing pitifully to another; ... all had already failed." Then he says, "we were a shipful of failures, the broken men of England."

That's quite an indictment to read and is at odds with the American story.

Shipboard life was varied. The ship's motion made people sick and the air was fetid, "from all around the scarcely human noises of the sick joined into a kind of farmyard chorus." "To descend... into Steerage..., was an adventure that required some nerve. The stench was atrocious; each respiration tasted in the throat like some horrible kind of cheese..." The prose is evocative.

A fiddler played which provided relief to some of the seasick passengers. Other "lads and lasses" danced jigs, reels, and hornpipes but not more than three at a time because there was no room. People were packed "like herrings in a barrel..." Ship travel was uncomfortable and RLS relates one man singing, "O Why Left I My Hame?" which RLS said "seemed a pertinent question in the circumstances."

There was one chess board on board and one deck of cards. People played dominoes, various games, made cigarettes, told stories, and sang. RLS of course was writing. He described the passengers, stowaways, the arrogant upper class that came to sightsee in steerage, and a Russian nihilist.

Being incognito allowed RLS to talk to and study everyone. He discovered that there were lots of "gentlemen" among those who were not considered by society to be gentlemen, "Some of my fellow passengers, as I now moved among them in a relation of equality, seemed to me excellent gentlemen." His insights into his fellow passengers show that people in the old days were just like today: they hated government, disliked being subservient, and disliked war and taxes. Many people were politically blind and many preferred idleness and thinking of ways to get away with pretending industriousness. Many wanted to improve others but not themselves.

In New York RLS boarded an emigrant train heading west, "There was a babel of bewildered men, women, and children." Train travel was also uncomfortable in the 19th Century. "It was a tight jam; there was no fair way through the mingled mass of brute and living obstruction... we stood like sheep... and... the porters charged among us like so many maddened sheep-dogs;..." Travel in the small cars was hard. People were separated into cars by category. The Chinese were in one car, single men were in another, and families in were a third. Passengers shared benches and if they did not have traveling companions they were paired up with a partner, which Stevenson called "chums" to share a plank on which to sleep. They prepared their own food except when there were stops along the way. Trains could leave with no warning. Being on time was not a priority and conductors were rude and uncommunicative. The railcars were long narrow wooden boxes "with a stove and convenience, one at either end..." The benches were narrow and short.

RLS complained about the travel but also included a letter by an 11 year old from twenty years previously to put things in perspective. The child was part of a wagon train that was attacked by Indians. His family was killed and the child had a much more difficult time getting to California.

Travel was hard but RLS was enchanted by the scenery. "I stood on the platform by the hour;... I began to exult with myself upon this rise in life like a man who has come into a rich estate." "The Great Plains – rich and various, and breathed an elegance... it was a sort of paradise."

He reveled in the geographic names"... there is no part of the world where nomenclature is so rich, poetical, and humorous, and picturesque as in the United States of America." "Pekin is in the same State with Euclid, with Bellefontaine, and with Sandusky... The names of the States and Territories themselves form a chorus of sweet and most romantic vocables: Delaware, Ohio, Indiana, Florida, Dakota, Iowa, Wyoming, Minnesota, and the Carolinas; there are few poems with a nobler music for the ear: a songful, tuneful land..."

Stevenson's little observations are interesting in themselves but also provide insight into the time. He was surprised, for

## 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.

example, by his “introduction to a coloured gentleman, so different from what he expected. “Imagine a gentleman, certainly somewhat dark, but of a pleasant warm hue, speaking English with a slight and rather odd foreign accent, every inch a man of the world, and armed with manners so patronisingly superior...” About English vs. American he said, “... although two nations [England and the U.S.] use the same words and read the same books, intercourse is not conducted by the dictionary..”

By the time the train arrived in Ogden where the transfer was made to the CPRR for the final stretch to California, the cars had really begun to stink (although the Chinese car was the least offensive). They were a “whiff of pure menagerie, only a little sourer.” The CPRR was an improvement. The cars were twice as tall, larger, and airier. There was an upper berth so there was no more sleeping on the planks.

Finally it was San Francisco, “the air seemed to awaken, and began to sparkle; and suddenly... the city of San Francisco, and the bay of gold and corn, were lit from end to end with summer daylight.”

## **Robert Louis Stevenson on Donner Summit**

“When I awoke the next morning, I was puzzled for a while to know if it were day or night, for the illumination was unusual. I sat up at last, and found we were grading slowly downward through a long snowshed; and suddenly we shot into an open; and before we were swallowed into the next length of wooden tunnel, I had one glimpse of a huge pine-forested ravine upon my left, a foaming river, and a sky already coloured with the fires of dawn. I am usually very calm over displays of nature; but you will scarce believe how my heart leaped at this. It was like meeting one’s wife. I had come home again – home from unsightly deserts to the green and habitable corners of the earth. Every spire of pine along the hill-top, every trouty pool along that mountain river, was more dear to me than a blood relation. Few people have praised God more happily than I did. [He liked Donner Summit] And thenceforward, down by Blue Canon, Alta, Dutch Flat, and all the old mining camps, through a sea of mountain forests...”



# Then & Now with Art Clark

## The Railroad from Lake Flora Looking West - Edward Muybridge #698



Typically Art's Then & Now's show some scenic views of man-made changes over time. This is one Art didn't want to use because in the "now" version everything is hidden. That's exactly the point the editorial staff said. Look at the difference in the forest after Smokey Bear and modern fire suppression philosophies ruled. In the "then" photograph we can imagine wagon trains traveling among the trees. In the "now" below, we can only imagine the emigrants turning around and going home.



Eadweard Muybridge (spellings changed over time) was a famous 19th Century photographer. He was most famous for winning a bet for Leland Stanford that horses lifted all four feet off the ground when galloping. Muybridge visited Donner Summit and made a number of photographs. He called the lake just behind the photographer in the photograph above Lake Flora (named probably for his wife). Today it's Crater Lake and another Lake Flora is a few miles east.

# Following Up on the Previous Page



## Crater Lake

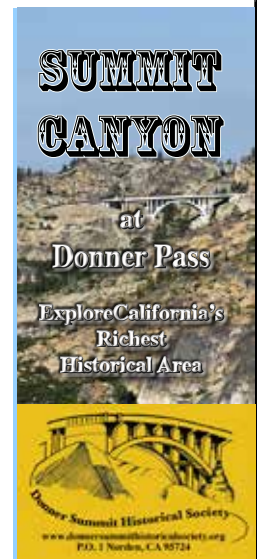
Summer is coming. A hike to Crater Lake on Boreal Ridge, accessed from Old 40, is a wonderful hike. Crater Lake (Muybridge called it Lake Flora) is above and is a unique geological puzzle.

For directions pick up our "Historic Hikes of Donner Summit" brochure (cover right) or download it from our brochures page on our website.



# 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. Last month it was drill holes in Tunnel 6. This month we've got some stonework that was part of the old Lincoln Highway in Summit Canyon. Use our Summit Canyon brochure to hike down to Donner Lake on the old Lincoln Highway.



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

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



**Membership**

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

New Membership

Renewing Membership

Individual Membership - \$30

Family Membership - \$50

Patron - \$500

Benefactor - \$1000

Business - \$250

Business Sponsor - \$1000

Donner Summit Historical Society is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

NAME(S) \_\_\_\_\_

MAILING ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

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

Friend Membership - \$100  Sponsor - \$250

If you would like monthly newsletter announcements, please write your email address below VERY neatly.

\_\_\_\_\_



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



Pick up or download the brochure

**46 interpretive signs along Old 40**  
[http://www.donnersummithistricalsociety.org/  
pages/20MileMuseum.html](http://www.donnersummithistricalsociety.org/pages/20MileMuseum.html)