

# The Donner Summit

# Heirloom

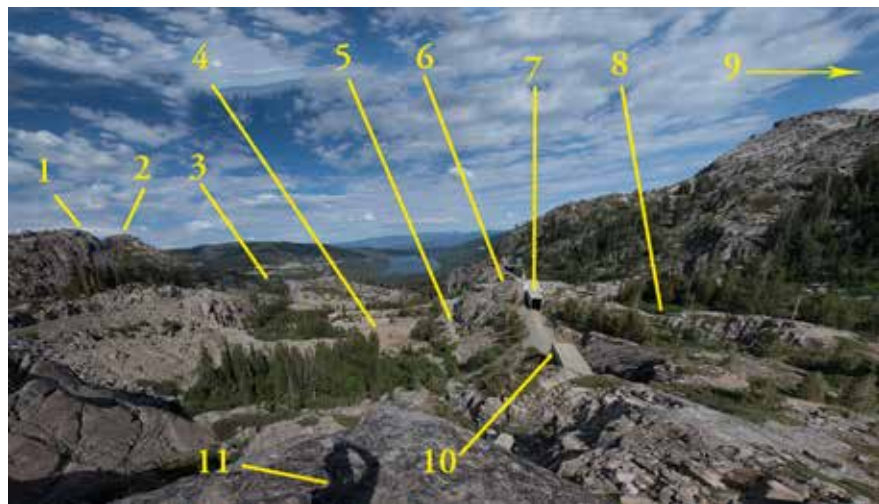


History and stories of the Donner Summit Historical Society

May, 2018 issue #117

## The Most Historically Inspiring Square Yard in the Most Historically Significant Square Mile

Donner Summit is the most historically significant square mile in California and maybe the entire Western United States. No “right thinking” person can argue with that. Native Americans crossed for thousands of years, the first wagon train to come to California with wagons came over Donner Summit followed by many more. The first transcontinental highway, railroad, telephone line, and air route also crossed Donner Summit. Feeling left out no doubt, the first transcontinental telegraph line moved from its Placerville route to Donner Summit. Then there are so many stories to go with all of those significant events. Those stories have kept the Heirloom in business for just three issues short of 10 years (Note here we’re on issue #117 and in three issues we’ll be at #120 – ten years).



After ten years most everyone of importance knows the significance of Donner Summit. Now we’re in May and summer is approaching. Our editorial staff thought the readers might like to know about the “Most Historically Inspiring Square Yard” in the “Most Historically Significant Square Mile” in California. From your perch in this square yard you can look out over the panoply of Donner Summit history. It’s inspiring.

At the top of Old Highway 40, Donner Pass Rd., park at the building in the picture on page 2. Go behind the buildings to a pathway that leads to the granite slabs just a little uphill (east) where the cell tower is. You’ll be able to find the “Most Historically Inspiring Square Yard” from there. It’s wherever you think the view is the best. Here is a spectacular spot not many



# 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





know is so spectacular. Most visitors to the immediate area are heading for the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT), the Judah Loop Trail or maybe even the trail down Summit Canyon. No one thinks to go to knoll.

There's a lot of enjoy in this "Most Historically Inspiring Square Yard." There is the view of course, but that's obvious (see what others have said on page 34). Take a look at the annotated photograph on page 1.

**1. Mt. Stephens** – named for Elisha Stephens the leader of the first wagon train to get to California with wagons. They had an ordeal climbing over Donner Summit. The women spent six weeks at Big Bend while the men went to California for help and were reduced to eating ox hides before the men returned. 17 year old Moses Schallenberger stayed alone at Donner Lake most of the winter. It's an amazing story. The book Truckee's Trail is a fictionalized account of the story and The Opening of the California Trail tells the story without the fiction. The pass would presumably have been named Stephens Pass and their success if it had not been for the "unsucess" of the Donner Party.

**2. Stewart Pk.** – named for George R. Stewart who wrote Ordeal by Hunger (Donner Party), California Trail, The Opening of the California Trail, and many other books.

**3. Donner Summit Bridge** – the 1926 bridge is the first bridge with a rising compound curve. It was built at the behest of the Forest Service to make getting logs out of the Tahoe area easier. The route of the bridge significantly decreased the maximum grades on Highway 40 enabling lumber trucks to take logs on the highway.

**4. Petroglyph site** - Native Americans left petroglyphs all over Donner Summit always in view of mountain peaks or great views and not where they camped. What they meant we don't know because the Martis left the area about 500 AD.. but they must have had great significance because granite is among the hardest rocks on the planet and incising petroglyphs in it takes much time and effort. Give it a try. Right is a bear's paw print petroglyph. This ubiquitous symbol is found at lots of sites.

Just up the granite a couple of hundred yards west are ads painted on the rocks about 1915 advertising the New Whitney Hotel to highway travelers. There are two spots, one demarked by rocks. Can you find both? (see page 5)



# What others have said about the view from the Most Historically Inspiring Square Yard in the Most Historically Significant Square Mile

"The view from the crest of the Sierra to the east, is inexpressibly comprehensive, grand and picturesque. After congratulating ourselves upon the safe achievements of our morning feat, and breathing our mules in a few minutes, we proceeded on our journey."

Edwin Bryant 1846  
What I Saw in California

"I don't believe I have adequate words to describe the real beauty of Donner Pass. As we stood looking down I had a floating sensation...I lost all fear as I looked at one of the most beautiful blue lakes [Donner Lake] I had ever seen. Everything below us seemed suspended in shimmering light."

Thornton Round, 1914  
The Good of It All

(Thornton Round's father had taken him and the rest of the family across the country and back in 1914.)

"The scenery was too grand for me to pass without notice."

Mary Ann Graves  
Forlorn Hope  
Donner Party, December, 1846

"We were as near to heaven as we could get."

Another member of the Forlorn Hope  
(according to Mary Ann Graves)

## **They also said:**

We "had achieved a victory, having today completed the great work of making the pass over the Sierra Nevadas."

Thomas Van Dorn, 1849

"You never saw a set of fellow more happy than when we reached the summit."

Wm. Todd, 1845

"Having reached the height of the last mountain range, so we could look forward from its summit to the land of our dreams, toil and hope, we gave three long and loud cheers. Looking down the steep gorge whence we had come, we bade adieu to its dark avenues, towering cliffs, sequestered shades, bright waters and melancholy scenes. We felt a great relief in bidding farewells to the mountains, valley, and deserts of the great interior, with its adventures, romance, tragedy, sorrow, suffering and death – scenes which will linger in our minds as memorials of our journey across the plains.

John Steel, 1850 in Across the Plains





Above, ad for the New Whitney Hotel in Truckee in Summit Canyon uphill from the petroglyph site. The top version is "before" and the bottom is "after" the photograph went through the DSHS MX-1000 Historical Rejuvenator.

**5. The Lincoln Highway route after 1914 coming from the underpass** - The Lincoln Highway was the first transcontinental highway and was put together mostly from existing roads. It had the first engineering standards for highways and was not done by the government.

When the route was completed, the 1914 official guide to the Lincoln Highway said it would take 19 days to cross the country traveling 10 hours per day at 18 mph. Crossing the country on the Lincoln Highway was popular: there were 150 transcontinental travelers per year in 1913 and by 1923 there were between 20 and 25,000 cars/year.

Of course driving was different in those days:

advice for motorists

- Don't wait until your gas is almost gone
- don't wear wool next to your skin
- don't allow your water can to be anything but full
- don't carry a loaded firearm
- don't allow the car to be without food
- don't forget colored goggles
- don't attempt to ford water without first wading through
- don't drive more than 15 mph – springs break
- don't carry good clothes – ship them
- don't drink alkali water
- don't wear new shoes

**6. China Wall** – built by Chinese railroad workers in 1867-68 using the detritus from the tunnels. The rocks fit together

exactly without any mortar. Get close and you can see tool marks and drill holes left by the workers 150 years ago. Compare the China Wall built by the Chinese to the wall built by white railroad workers that sits just above it and against the hillside. (See the next page)

**7. Tunnel 7** - one of 15 tunnels over the Sierra for the transcontinental railroad to get over Donner Summit. This one had its top blasted off to make room for larger trains. This also shows a remnant of the snowsheds that used to cover 40 miles of track to protect against snow. Donner Summit averages 34' of snow each winter.

**8. Route of the Dutch Flat Donner Lake Rd., the Lincoln Highway, and the route of the emigrants until 1846.** Just under the cliffs there is trail that leads from the Pacific Crest trailhead down through the 1914 underpass, under the railroad bed, across granite slabs and through forests all the way to Donner Lake. This is the route of the Dutch Flat Donner Lake Wagon Rd. built from 1862-1864 to serve as a toll road and to help with the railroad building. It later became one of the roads used to make up the Lincoln Highway. Before all that it was also the route for emigrant wagon trains in 1844, 1845 and part of 1846. In 1846 Roller Pass and then Coldstream Passes to the south were discovered. The emigrant route moved there so the emigrants would not have to take apart their wagons to get over Donner Summit anymore.



**Above, automobile on the Lincoln Highway about 1920. Can you find the location?**

**9. Off to the right is Donner Pk.** named for the Donner Party, half of which camped at the east end of Donner Lake. The actual Donners were seven miles further east at Alder Creek. This is a great hike and place for a picnic. Standing in the notch (next page) at the top you look 1,000 feet straight down to Donner Lake.

**10. The east entrance to Tunnel 6 and a concrete snowshed remnant** - Tunnel 6 is the longest of the original 15 Sierra tunnels. Inside on the walls you can find tool marks left by



1901 photograph of the notch at the top of Donner Pk. Donner Lake is below.

Chinese railroad workers. Half way along is the shaft that goes to the surface so that four faces of the tunnel could be worked at once. Even working four faces the workers only made progress of inches a day.

**11. The author's shadow** in heroic photo making stance.

Donner Lake, of course, is in the distance.

That's not all in the area. The top of Old Donner Summit has lots going for it. 90 feet or so underfoot is Tunnel 6, the longest of the transcontinental railroad's 15 original tunnels. It took two years to excavate and the central shaft, built so Chinese workers could work from the inside out as well as from the outside in, sits just west of the parking lot. Go to the other side of Donner Pass Rd. and hike around. You can find the remnants of the weather station for the first transcontinental air route, Sierra Junipers thousands of years old, the old Catfish Pond (or Maiden's Retreat), Lake Angela, Lake Flora, and Lake Azalea. On the south side are the trail through Summit Canyon to Donner Lake, the hike to Donner Pk., the hike to Roller Pass, the hike to the source of the Yuba River where the water just comes out of the mountainside, and hikes to Mt. Lincoln, the Judah Loop, and Mt. Disney. The views are great.

Those very short summaries above maybe have whetted your appetite for more. Consult our Heirloom article index. There is a link on each [Heirloom](#) page on our website and from there you can access ten years worth of [Heirlooms](#) and all the stories of the above, and more, that they contain. You

might also want to use the website to find 20 Mile Museum signs. Many of the above subjects are also subjects of those signs and each contains a story, the history, and pictures. There is also a page of Donner Summit brochures.



The lower wall is China Wall, built in 1867-68 from the insides of the tunnels. All the rock was placed manually and fits together with no mortar. Walk up close and you can see tool and drill marks of the Chinese builders.



# Flyers Cross Continent (Oakland Tribune October 12, 1919)

## Western Men Close Behind Pastor Pilot

In the article starting on page one we again highlighted the firsts for Donner Summit so we won't repeat them here. In the [Heirloom](#) Article Research Room (the HARR) we've been tracking stories that have to do with the various firsts for some years (2018 is the DSHS and [Heirloom's](#) 10th birthday). We've collected stories about the wagon trains, the railroad, the telephone line, the Lincoln Highway, etc. (ten years of [Heirlooms](#) is 120 issues and at an average of 15 pages per issue that's 1800 pages of Donner Summit history). It's not been easy but keeping the readership happy is an important goal.

Tracking stories having to do with the first transcontinental air route, though, has been problematical. Maybe it's because airplanes go fast. The wagon trains had lots of time to ponder, write in diaries, and tell stories. The newspapers wrote so much about the railroad that that one is easy. Given that it was the Lincoln Highway that crossed Donner Summit and that the Lincoln Highway Association was behind it and wanted publicity for it, there's also a lot there. Cars were novel at the beginning too and people yearned for the freedom they represented so there were lots of newspaper articles, magazine articles, and books about traveling across the country. Since the highway went over Donner Summit that included Donner Summit too.

The air route, though, was different. Airplanes were novel too. Thousands of people gathered to see air events but the ordinary public could not yearn to participate with any possibility that people actually could participate. The air pioneers were also in a rush to get where they were going and only were over Donner Summit for tiny bits of time (excepting of course the ones who crashed). There just are no stories to find having to do with the first trans-Sierra crossings by airplane or the first transcontinental air route over Donner Summit beyond what we've described. It was the first transcontinental air route though. It did go over Donner Summit. So, it should be recognized in the [Heirloom](#).

That said, we've covered the air route in the July, '11 and December, '16 [Heirlooms](#) and the 20 Mile Museum sign about it in the May, '11 [Heirloom](#) (you can also go to our website and see the sign if you don't want to see it in person on Old Highway 40, Donner Pass Rd.). There are pictures too in the May '09, April '13, June '15, October '17, June '17, and August '17 [Heirlooms](#).

We also tried to find the story of the first person to cross the summit by airplane. That first led to Robert Fowler who embarked on that adventure in 1911. He didn't make it though and ended up flying across the country by a different route later in the year. We'll cover Mr. Fowler at some point. Later in 1911 Galbraith Rogers was the first to fly across the country. He also went in 1911 but he ended up in Pasadena, so for us and this [Heirloom](#), he doesn't count. Still, his story is interesting. He'd had little training and bought a Wright airplane in an attempt to win a prize from William Randolph Hearst. If he could cross the country by airplane within thirty days he'd get \$50,000. He took 49 days making 70 stops, 15 crashes, and many hospital visits. Apparently there was not much left of his original airplane by the time of his arrival in California. Fortunately they kept making spare parts in Ohio. His total flight time during the 49 days was 82 hours. On landing in Pasadena thousands of people greeted him. A few months later he was killed when his plane crashed into the Pacific Ocean at Long Beach. He had the distinction of being the twenty-second American killed in plane crashes. Given the state of technology



Belvin Maynard, [Oakland Tribune](#) October 13, 1919

at the time it was quite a feat – crossing the country, not dying in a crash. He didn't go over Donner Summit though, so he's kind of irrelevant.

We thought we were on to something while researching for the hundredth anniversary of the Pioneer Monument at Donner Lake, which is coming up in a June 9th celebration at the State Park. Twenty-year old Allen Chapman wanted to be the first to fly over the Sierra and be part of the 1918 celebration. Dr. Chester Warren Chapman of Nevada City was the chair of the Donner Monument Committee and a driving force behind it. His son had just earned his Lieutenant's commission in the Aviation Corps. It was suggested that he fly over the Sierra as part of the celebration and he was eager for the challenge. The Army, though, had

different ideas and was not willing to assign a machine and mechanics. The publicity would have been good, might have aroused patriotism and increased recruiting, but there was no convincing the Army, even with a congressman's support. So that story is out.

# FLYING PARSON FIRST TO LAND ON WEST COAST

Aviator Crosses Continent In  
Less Than Twenty-Five  
Hours

LIEUT. KIEL FROM WEST  
ARRIVES AT MINEOLA

Twenty Seconds Only Sepa-  
rates Leading Planes  
In East

Nevada State Journal October 12, 1919

The Des Moines Tribune on October 13, 1919 said there had been previous flights across the continent but this one would "assuredly" stimulate interest in air traffic in parts of the country where there had been little interest. "This is necessary not merely nor even primarily from the military point of view, ... What is more necessary is that the United States, with its courage and inventiveness, its pioneering abilities, its unequalled industrial capacity, become immediately concerned with the whole future of flying. And just as automobile races, with their deplorable fatalities, have unquestionably served commerce a good turn, so the aerial derby may be expected to serve now."

The winners of the first crossing of the country, the first men to fly ocean to ocean, "The newest air pioneers" were a Baptist preacher, a soldier and a school teacher: 1st Lieutenant Belvin Maynard, Major Carl Spatz, and Lieutenant E.C. Kiel. We know, of course that Mr. Galbraith had preceded these fellows in "ocean to ocean" flying but newspaper hyperbole was an accepted endearing activity in the old days.

Maynard, the first place finisher, averaged about 1500 feet

Then we come to a story about airplanes which did fly over Donner Summit and set the state for the first transcontinental air route which also went over Donner Summit. 1919 was a better year for crossing Donner Summit by airplane and dozens of planes did as part of a race sponsored by the Army, the Chamber of Commerce and various flying clubs. Most planes (47) started from New York at 9:00 A.M. on October 8, 1919. Many fewer (15) started at 6:00 A.M. from San Francisco. The race was across the country and back. "The eyes of the world will be focused on the event," said the New York Times (October 8, 1919), "which in view of the distance, ranks as the greatest air race ever attempted." There were crowds to watch the send off along with officials, governors, congressmen, the Secretary of War, and senators. Many aces from the war were contestants.

Each contestant had to take one passenger and make one half hour stops at twenty-one "control stations," including Reno and Sacramento, across the country to check plane conditions.

The "endurance" race was being held to "determine the types and makes of airplanes best adapted for utility flying..." (New Castle Herald -PA. - October 13, 1919 among others). The race was "under rigid government regulation" would "mark the beginning of a new period in airplane engineering." War flying had advanced technology but now more innovation was needed for entirely different flying purposes: utility flying. "Valuable facts will be learned from the 'cross-continent' derby."

**"Maynard First Airman to Reach Goal in Race  
Across the Continent."**

Belvin W. Maynard, a Baptist preacher, flew into the hall of fame today when he sped across San Francisco bay [sic] and alighted at the Presidio."

Washington Times October 12, 1919



in altitude in his plane and about 120 MPH. The Nevada State Journal was amazed, "He had breakfast at Salduro, Utah, and lunch in San Francisco early this afternoon." "Crossing the Sierra Mountains was the worst part of our trip," Maynard said, but except for being "unusually tired and slightly deaf, neither Cline [ Sergeant M.E. Cline, his passenger] and I are a bit worse for the trip." He and his passenger had taken 24 hours, 59 minutes, and seven seconds to cross the country. It should be noted that although the rules required pilots take at least one passenger, Maynard took two. Sgt. Cline was the official passenger but Maynard also took Trixie, a seven month old German police dog. That may have been the first dog to cross the country, the Sierra, and Donner Summit by airplane – an important first to add to our list. The dog traveled part of the time with Cline and part of the time with Maynard.

Maynard had been going west to east, Spatz and Kiel east to west. Maynard, incidentally, was well experienced as a flyer. He "formerly held the world looping record of 318 consecutive loops in 69 minutes."

Thousands of people turned out in San Francisco to see the planes come in and the Nevada State Journal (October 12, 1919) said, "Thousands See Flyer Circle over Reno..." More planes were expected the next day so presumably the throngs would come out again – so interesting was the new technology. Did people also look up on Donner Summit later in the day and marvel at the planes passing overhead? The reaction has been lost to time.

Commenting after his race, Spatz said, "The first thing we would need would be a transcontinental highway [for planes] 100 feet wide. There wouldn't be any need for landing fields then. Such a road would be a safe place to land and would provide a white line across the country for flyers' guidance.

"With such a highway it would be possible in an emergency to fly a battle squadron of planes cross the Unties States in three days with a fair degree of safety..." (Oakland Tribune October 12, 1919).

That was a interesting idea, building a transcontinental highway on which planes could land when needed. It would encourage the use of airplanes for utilitarian purposes. The idea didn't go far though. By 1919 there was already a transcontinental highway, the Lincoln Highway but it wasn't used as a landing strip with any regularity. Building a highway for the planes would have been pretty expensive. Technology rapidly improved and planes were less in need of emergency landings. What the Government did do was build or lay out the transcontinental air route. All across the country large concrete arrows were set in the ground to keep pilots on track. Weather stations were set up too to pass on information to pilots. The numbers on their roofs guided pilots as did the some directions. Later beacons were installed to guide pilots across Donner Summit between the peaks. Emergency landing strips were laid out about every 30 miles. On Donner Summit there were a couple of concrete arrows, one of which is still there (see the December, '16 Heirloom). The roof of the weather station was labeled "15" and "SF-SL" for San Francisco – Salt Lake City. Pilots knew they were on track following the weather stations and knew Salt Lake was east and San Francisco, west. The nearest emergency landing strips were at Blue Canyon and Truckee.

Belvin Maynard, the winner, also had a prediction, "Within a short time a three day airplane trip between the east and west will become a matter of course, and planes will be built that will not be compelled to make forced landings." He was close to the mark.



Tampa Tribune October 8, 1919

# Winged Pioneers

“The transcontinental derby, stupendous in range and in the extent of its brilliant entry list... think what it means! There have been assembled for this great endeavor the pick of modern aircraft and the and the ick of modern airmen. All makers, all nations, all theories of design are represented.

“Its significance is practical rather than romantic... The United States government will analyze every detail of the achievement and the mishaps of the many contestants. The day of practical, utilitarian flying will be brought hat much nearer as a result of the substantial material gained through this epic test of machines and men.

“Death puts its mark on the undertaking at the outset. But no one quailed or flinched.

“An older generation of American went westward following the explorations of a fearless few, to take possession of the wilderness.

“The cross continent flyers are crowding into hours and says the perils which these other pioneers endured over months and years.

“There still is a question mark after aviation’s future. The automobile, at the ned of its first decades of use, was an interesting experiment in contrast to its present status.

“What America did with the motor car America is doing with the airplane.

“In the air derby, the spirit of the old frontier still lives with undiminished vigor.”

Parenthetically, five flyers died in the first crossing.

Richmond Item (Indiana October `11, 1919)

# From the DSHS Archives

Actually these pictures come from an album the Truckee Donner Historical Society has and shared with the Donner Summit Historical Society. The album was found by Jeannine Karnofsky who was cleaning out the attic of an old house in Truckee. We don't know who the people were or what they did. The date of the pictures appears to be about the turn of the last century.



Railroad workers on Donner Summit. To the left is the building housing the turntable which turned around helper locomotives after they'd helped trains up to the summit. Date unknown

Building between Horseshoe Bend and Tunnel 41; looking towards Squaw Valley, just below Donner Summit





# From the DSHS Archives



Three people in a canoe on Lake Angela Date unknown.

People on Donner Pk. Date unknown.

Woman and boy on granite rock. Given that it's granite, where else could it be except Donner Summit?





The family and the dogs were apparently serious about conquering Donner Pk.

Family enjoying a rest on the rocks near China Wall and above Tunnel 6.



Summit, the railroad yards on Donner Summit. The large building in the background is the Summit Hotel (the second iteration built after an 1895 fire. In the back background is Red Top which goes by "Mt. Disney" today.





Left, is a photograph from the same Truckee Donner Historical Society album. In the very center of the photograph is a woman standing on the rock in a costume of about 1910 vintage.

Below is a view today of the same site but without the lady.

Castle Peak is in the background, still there so many years later.



## Exclusive Readers' Poll

# 10 years of Heirlooms

In three months the DSHS will be 10 years old as will the Heirloom. How should we recognize the event?



# Book Review

## **The Best Land Under Heaven The Donner Party in the age of Manifest Destiny**

Michael Wallis, 2017, 453 pages

It would not seem that we need another book about the Donner Party. There are lots, going back almost to the time of the tragedy, addressing the story from different angles with different emphases. Just take a look at the book review page on our website ([donnersummithistoricalsociety.org](http://donnersummithistoricalsociety.org)) or the book review section of our Heirloom article index (on all the Heirloom pages on our website).

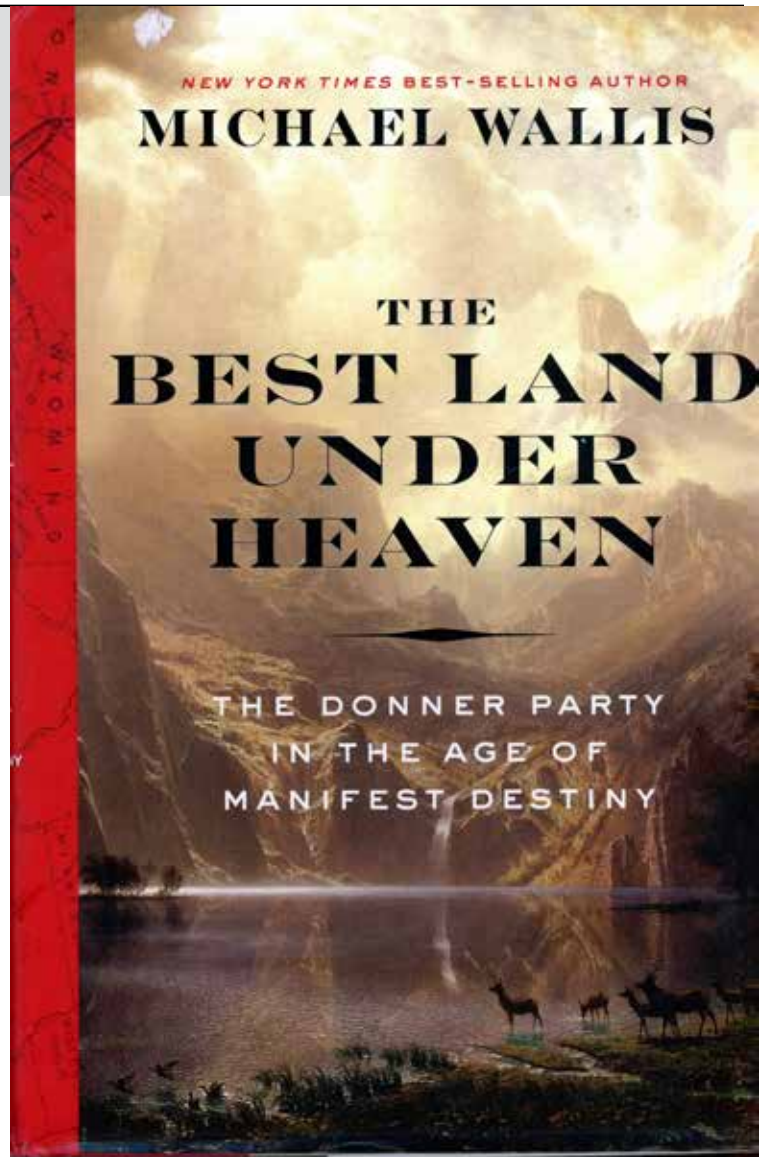
On the other hand the subtitle of this book, “The Donner Party in the Age of Manifest Destiny” sounds really erudite and who doesn’t want to appear erudite? That subtitle made me pick it up. I must also say I was primed because the author’s assistant gave us a call asking for permission to use two photographs.

Best Land Under Heaven is a serious history book by a serious historian. It’s heavily footnoted, it puts the story into the context of the time and as part of that history that made the United States today. Most other books about the Donner Party focus on the story of the journey and the tragedy. There is little or no context for those authors; it’s just a story to be told. History is much more than that.

The beginning of “Best Land...” puts the Donner Party in the context of the national philosophy of Manifest Destiny describing the incessant hunger for new land. It was God’s will that the United States expand from ocean to ocean. The Donner Party characters exemplify Manifest Destiny and the incessant hunger for land. The Donner families were serial movers, having even briefly tried Texas before embarking for California and looking for new opportunities. So it was only natural that when California appeared in the distance they’d have to go. That’s not something approached by other books on the subject.

Putting the Donner Party into that context of Manifest Destiny gives the treatment added weight so that’s one thing that separates the book from others on the same subject.

This book is also different from others on the same subject because there is a lot of extra detail. For example the backgrounds of the protagonists is very detailed and some of that background gives motivation for the move and a sense of character. For example, James Reed had numerous business ventures and was in financial difficulty when he left for California. California was a new opportunity. He could get land and erase his problems. Given that he started buying land immediately on his arrival in California means he had taken money with him and that leaves open the possibility that he had not declared all of his assets when he declared bankruptcy. The reader remembers too that Reed left the wagon train when he was expelled with nothing. His daughter brought him guns and a horse. Apparently Reed had his money with him. There are lots of other details too. Connections to Abraham Lincoln are explored. James Reed’s horse was named Glaucus. In Greek mythology Glaucus was a nobleman who fed his horses human flesh. The horses eventually turned on him and ate him alive. That’s an ironic fact given the end of the Donner Party story. During James Reed’s and William McCutcheon’s aborted rescue attempt they had gotten to



Emigrant Gap where they met Jotham Curtis and his wife. The Curtises were cooking their dog, having run out of food. Reed and McCutcheon shared their food and led the Curtises to Sutter's Fort when they had to give up their rescue attempt. Later Reed took up a lieutenantcy in the Mexican War and had to see Curtis discharged for failure to obey orders and insubordination. Then Curtis was part of the first rescue party going to rescue the Donner Party. Once he got to the wagon he'd abandoned at Emigrant Gap he would go no further. There are also details about California, such as the discussion of looting of the Californios by Americans including Reed's commanding officer, Captain Weber. Author Michael Wallis went to a lot of trouble to ferret out the many details and connections that other authors have left out of the same story.

Other Donner Party books are more cursory and focus on the journey and various stories within that larger story but without exploring other aspects.

The extra detail about the Donner Party, the trip, California, and the main characters' backgrounds is interesting. The telling of the story is on a par with other treatments of the disaster.

The sub title of the book leads one to think there is even more here but after the brief discussion of manifest destiny at the beginning and showing how the Donners and the Reeds were examples of being "foot soldiers in the vanguard for Manifest Destiny" the subject is dropped in favor of the trip across the country. Maybe there is nothing more to say which means the title is really a teaser. The author does come back to the subject very briefly at the end with an irony, "What made the Donner Party so distinctive was that this group of people had originally set out to civilize what they saw as a barbaric land. The acts of survival cannibalism refigured their story with a cruel twist – the civilizers themselves became savages." That's interesting, clever, and clearly true but hardly justifies getting my hopes for erudition up when I ordered the book. That said, while writing this I started to think about how to follow up the title.

The story is well told. The details are interesting and give better perspective. The footnotes are useful and interesting to scan. How could the story have lived up to the title better? The "Aftermath" section is only a few pages. It could have been fleshed out to show how the characters fulfilled Manifest Destiny. How did they fit into California and help build the State and the Nation? How much land did the survivors acquire? How did these "foot soldiers" implement Manifest Destiny in California?

If you have not read a book about the Donner Party this is really good. If you have and are well familiar with the tale then these 357 pages are repetitious unless you want to read along for the occasional detail Wallis has found that you did not know.

## 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.

# Have You Seen This?

The Emigrant Trail definitely went across the United States and ended up in California or Oregon. This is the [Donner Summit Heirloom](#) so we'll dispense with the Oregon Trail, even though it was important. We'll also dispense with various iterations of the California Emigrant Trail since we're pretty parochial here.

Even just considering the California Emigrant Trail over Donner Summit there are questions about where exactly it went. The predominant view is that the trail first went up Donner Pass on the south side until 1846 when Roller Pass and Coldstream Passes were discovered. There are lots of diary entries attesting to that. Placer County is building a multi-use Emigrant Trail generally following that route and it should be ready for walking, hiking, biking and equestrian travel in a few years.

There is a school of thought that says the Emigrant Trail went on the north side of Old 40 up higher than on the south side and then past Lake Angela. To see a discussion about that



possible route take a look at the October, '11 [Heirloom](#). Our Mobile Historical Research Team (MHRT) did some further investigating and the conclusion was it's just not plausible. We'll probably get to that again next month when we comment on the April 21 presentation at the Donner State Park, "Canine Search for the Donner Family Camps at Alder Creek with John Grebenkemper"

That's all a long way to get around to the title of this story, "Have You Seen This?" Marshall Fey is an eminent Emigrant Trails historian. His book, [Emigrant Trails](#) (reviewed in our April, '11 [Heirloom](#)) is wonderful. On page 107 of his book there is

the picture above right of the Trails West Emigrant marker near Lake Mary (under the arrow). The picture also includes a rock pile in the same area, left side of the picture. That marker marked the Emigrant Trail as it went past Lake Mary until revisionists removed the marker and placed it a few hundred yards east of Lake Angela. There, it was supposed to mark the Emigrant Trail on the north side of Donner Pass Rd. That marker is above left. Marshall was ruminating on the route of the Emigrant Trail and remembered his page 107 picture. Where was that spot? There is clear trail next to the rock pile. Emigrants did move rocks when traveling to improve the "road" but they didn't pile them up except to cover burials for protection from animals. Could the rock pile in the picture be a burial marker? Marshall also pulled out a picture of Peter Weddell who marked the Emigrant Trail from Verdi to Lake Mary in the 1920's (there are a number of Weddell references in the [Heirloom](#) – check out indices). There is Peter Weddell with another rock pile. Rock piles, Marshall says, are good trail evidence. That rock pile could definitely mark the Emigrant Trail - no arguing any more.

Maybe you will be out hiking around Lake Mary this summer. If you see the rock pile, let us know.





# Odds & Ends on Donner Summit



If you've traveled Old Highway 40, Donner Pass Rd. over the summit you've passed the panorama above. To the right is an old shed with a larger view to the right. You've probably wondered about it.

In 1932 the State began plowing Highway 40 in winter to give people access to winter sports and give Truckee access to winter tourists. Highway maintenance needed a dormitory which was the building to the left above. The shed was related to the equipment building which collapsed during the winter of 1982-83.

Below is an historic picture of the shed and the now gone equipment building.

The shed may have a second life coming up - besides disintegrating - stay tuned.



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.

# SAVE THE DATE

CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION AND  
RE-DEDICATION OF THE PIONEER MONUMENT

DONNER MEMORIAL STATE PARK  
SATURDAY JUNE 9, 2018

DEDICATION 11AM

FAMILY ACTIVITIES 12-4 PM

CENTENNIAL FUNDRAISING GALA 6 PM



HOSTED BY CALIFORNIA STATE PARKS &  
SIERRA STATE PARKS FOUNDATION

For more information: 530-583-9911



## Donner Party Hike, 2018

The Donner Party Hike will be held this year on September 15 & 16. You get to choose among seven different hikes on Saturday, each led by a leader armed with historical photographs and history knowledge. There will be music during lunch at the Judah Lodge at Sugar Bowl followed by an afternoon presentation on the Lincoln Highway by Jim Bonar. The hike menu will include a new hike.

In the evening at the State Park Heidi Sproat and Barbara Czerwinski of the Truckee Donner Historical Society will speak on C.F. McGlashan and the coming of winter sports to Truckee.

On Sunday there will be a walk around Donner Party sites at the State Park and Alder Creek OR a bus tour of Donner Summit.

For details see [donnerpartyhike.com](http://donnerpartyhike.com)



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

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

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Pick up or download the brochure at the DSHS at <http://www.donnersummithistoricalsociety.org/pages/brochures.html>



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**46 interpretive signs along Old 40**  
<http://www.donnersummithistoricalsociety.org/pages/20MileMuseum.html>